



Edited by
Peter Symes

This unrelated file photo shows a hyperbaric facility in a hospital used for both hyperbaric therapy of various illnesses, such as wound care, and for treating hapless divers for decompression sickness.



PETER SYMES

Lack of deco chamber in Pensacola, Florida, has local dive operators and tourism promotion authority on edge

The closest decompression chambers to the popular *Oriskany* wreck dive site and the Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail in the United States are in Mobile, Alabama, which is out of state—or in Fort Myers, more than 600mi away.

Although Visit Pensacola promotes the *Oriskany* dive site and Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail, it has not been made aware of the safety concerns over the region's lack of hyperbaric chambers to treat decompression sickness, Nicole Stacey, spokeswoman for Visit Pensacola, told *Pensacola News Journal*.

She said Visit Pensacola was not involved in any effort to try to improve

emergency treatment options for divers and would rely on the diving industry and those professionals in the area to remedy the situation.

Closest facilities

The closest hospital to Pensacola that offers hyperbaric chambers for use in dive emergency is Springhill Medical Center in Mobile, Alabama, about 60mi (100km) away. Within the state of Florida, however, the closest hospital that provides the services is in Fort Myers, more than 600 mi(1,000km) away.

Julio Garcia, director of the Hyperbaric Medicine Program at Springhill Medical Center in Mobile, Alabama, has long warned about the risk Panhandle divers face because they cannot receive timely treatment for decompression sickness, commonly known as the bends.

Divers "too expensive" to treat

Many hospitals, including some in Pensacola that actually operate hyperbaric chambers, limit their use of their facilities to outpatient wound care and other noncritical treatments stating it is too expensive to have chambers, physicians and staff available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for rare dive injuries.

Careful planning urged

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission website urges divers to carefully plan for an *Oriskany* dive.

"Due to its depth, distance from shore, and potential currents, all divers should gain appropriate training equipment, fitness and experience before diving the *Oriskany*," the website states. ■

Meanwhile, new hyperbaric facilities serving divers are opening up elsewhere

Philippines

In a bid to boost the Davao Region's position as a premier diving destination in the Philippines, a new hyperbaric chamber facility was inaugurated at the Southern Philippine Medical Center in Manila, which will treat divers and other patients who suffer decompression sickness. The facility, whose construction was started on October 2016, has two hyperbaric chamber systems. One is funded by the Philippines Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (Tieza), and the other is donated by the Office of the President through the Manila Economic and Cultural Office.

Antigua

On Antigua in the West Indies, a new hyperbaric chamber, funded by the Calvin Ayre Foundation, has been set up at the Mount St John's Medical Center. The death of a local fisherman and diver, Andy Samuel, in 2017 spurred friends of the deceased to convince the foundation's chairman, Calvin Ayre, who is also the Special Economic Envoy for the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, of the need for a hyperbaric chamber on the island to treat divers who suffer from decompression illness.

"Clearly this project is humanitarian, especially with respect to local fishers," said Ayre. "The loss of just one person can be so devastating and so unnecessary and we hope that having this new hyperbaric chamber will make decompression sickness a thing of the past."

According to the Health and Environment Minister, Molwyn Joseph, the hyperbaric chamber will not only be used for the treating divers with the bends, but also patients with diabetic sores and wounds. ■ SOURCES: ANTIGUA NEWS ROOM, MINDANAO TIMES

Buddy Dive

Your Buddies Love the summer!

Time for Summer Holidays and there is no better way than spending them on Bonaire! Diving, relaxing, with the whole family or friends; there is something to do for everyone! Quickly visit www.buddydive.com/summer to check our specials and to book.

Buddy Dive
Bonaire

Caribbean Club Bonaire
Dive, Relax & Enjoy

THE MAR Bonaire
Qualified Apartments

International reservations: +599 717 5080
Call Toll Free US/Canada 1-866-GO-BUDDY
WWW.BUDDYDIVE.COM/SUMMER

Buddy Dive closes branch on Dominica following hurricane destruction

After two years of successfully running Buddy Dive on Dominica, it will officially be closing its doors at the Fort Young Hotel. As difficult as it is, Buddy Dive has come to terms with the end of an era. "After the devastating effect of Hurricane Maria, the decision was unavoidable," CEO Martien van der Valk stated in a press release.

In the face of all that has happened over the last couple of months, Buddy Dive has been looking into the opportunities to rebuild what was lost. "The way the numbers added up and the way the future looked to us, we have come to the unavoidable decision to close down our business at the Fort Young Hotel. This is an emotional time for us and our employees, who have been such a big part of what has made Buddy Dive on Dominica successful," Van der Valk said. ■



Boracay's closure was ordered by President Duterte after he was outraged by environmental violations.

Boracay Island closed to tourists for six months for clean-up

The Philippines has announced a six-month closure of the popular tourist destination of Boracay over concerns the island's famous beaches and clear blue waters have been transformed into a "cesspool", due to sustained environmental damage.

The tourism boom that Boracay has seen over the past decade or two has brought jobs and investment but strained the island's water and rubbish disposal systems and its sewer system.

Among the problems caused by the island's long-running tourism boom is unregulated development and pipes carrying raw effluence directly into the sea. In a survey of the island's sewerage facili-

ties, the vast majority—716 of 834 residential and business properties—were found to have no discharge permit and were presumed to be draining waste water directly into the sea, according to a report by the official Philippines News Agency.

Off-limits to visitors

President Rodrigo Duterte — who has said that inadequate sewage treatment on the island of Boracay has turned

its beaches into a "cesspool", directed that it be closed to tourism starting on 26 April, his spokesman, Harry Roque, said on Wednesday. The government says the overhaul is necessary to save the tiny island, which generated over US\$1 billion last year but cannot cope under the strain of two million tourists a year. The island, whose revenue makes up 20 percent of the country's total tourism industry, will be off-limits to visitors during the clean-up.

The decision ended weeks of speculation on the fate of the popular tourist destination, after President Duterte complained about the state of the island in February. Duterte has said that Boracay must be cleaned up, but officials have given only vague indications that there is a plan to do so. The Philippines will tear down illegal structures, build a bypass to unclog traffic, convert tricycle taxis into electric vehicles and build a modern waste-to-energy plant to rescue its premier tourist island, the government said on Friday.

Outcry from residents

The closure has triggered an outcry from island residents that the Philippine government is sacrificing the local interests to keep Chinese investments and tourists coming. The island is home to around 500 tourism-related businesses, which drew in annual revenue of \$1.07bn in 2017. Boracay's Chamber

of Commerce and Industry requested Duterte to reconsider the closure, arguing that not all businesses were violators and that only those found to be polluting should be shut down.

Officials, however, also reminded the media that Boracay would be closed for a maximum of six months. Epimaco Denising, assistant secretary for the Department

of the Interior and Local Government, expressed that there was a possibility of a "soft opening" of the resort island "in three to four months."

NGOs approve

"Several environmentalists praised Duterte's actions, saying that what they want right now is to ensure the issue of sustainability is at the forefront of the discussion when it comes to environmental concerns," said Al Jazeera's Jamela Alindogan who was reporting from the capital city of Manila. ■

"...we wish to upgrade the services. We must swallow the bitter pill, and see this solution as one step backward and two steps forward. We want to continue to promote the Philippines as a beautiful destination—and want to add that our destinations are environmentally compliant."

— Ricky Alegre
Assistant Secretary
Department of Tourism

Arenui
THE BOUTIQUE LIVEBOARD

- PRISTINE CORAL REEFS ✓
- PELAGICS FROM MANTAS TO MOLA ✓
- MACRO FROM PYGMIES TO BLUE-RINGS ✓
- RAJA AMPAT ✓
- AMBON, MALUKU ✓
- KOMODO & ALOR ✓
- LUXURY CABINS ✓
- MASSAGE & SPA ✓
- 5 STAR SERVICE ✓

WWW.THEARENUI.COM