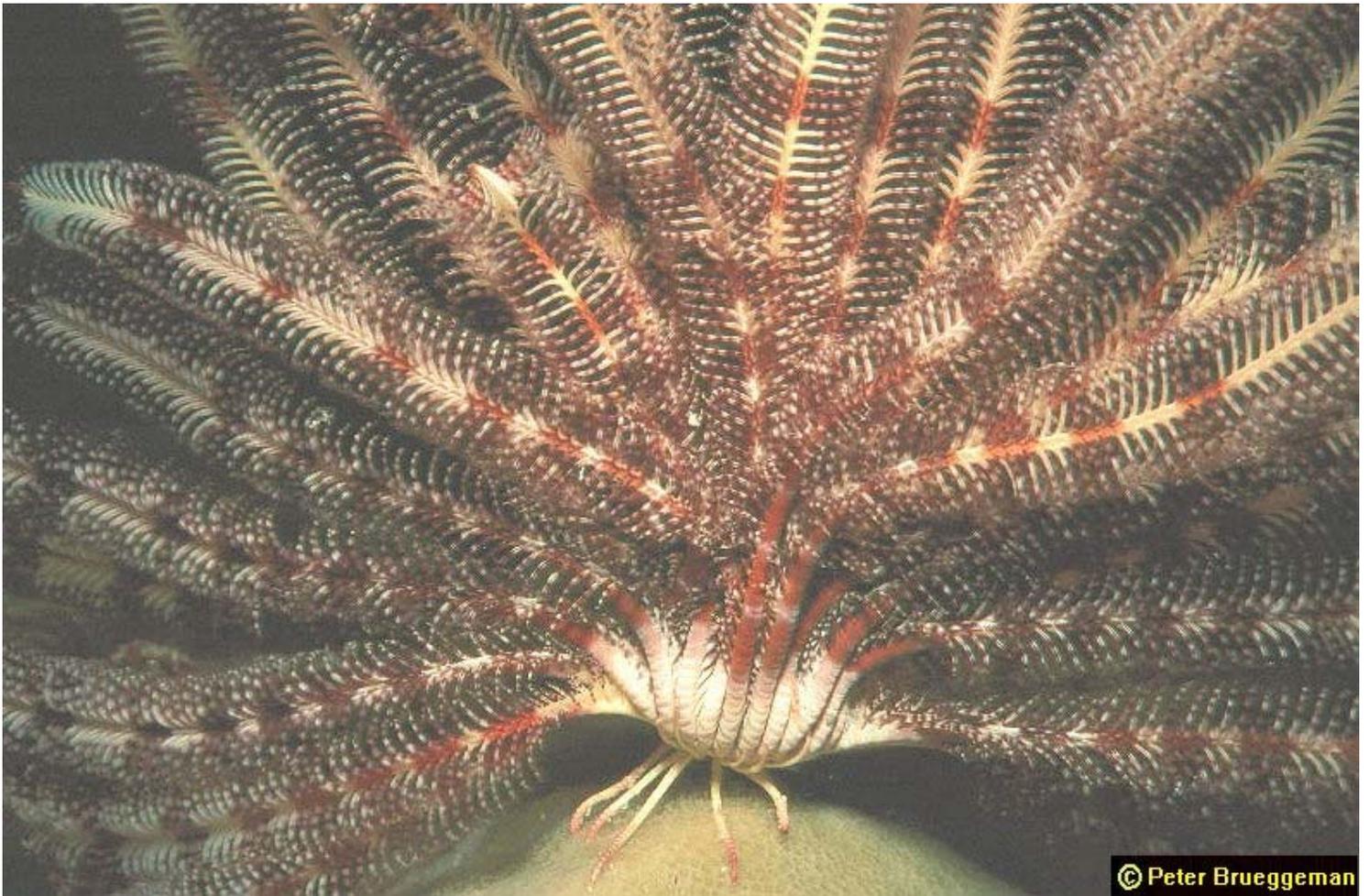


PALAU

This trip was undertaken in March 2002, accompanying Norbert Wu, a professional underwater photographer. My role was camera assistant, and I had a great time. Thanks, Norb!



Most memorable about diving in Palau is diving along its walls, which plunge down, down, down to inky blue depths. Here's a view looking straight up a wall at a diver and boats overhead. There's a lot to look at on these walls: soft corals in a variety of colors, an endless variety of fish, hard corals, crabs and shrimp, nudibranchs, etc



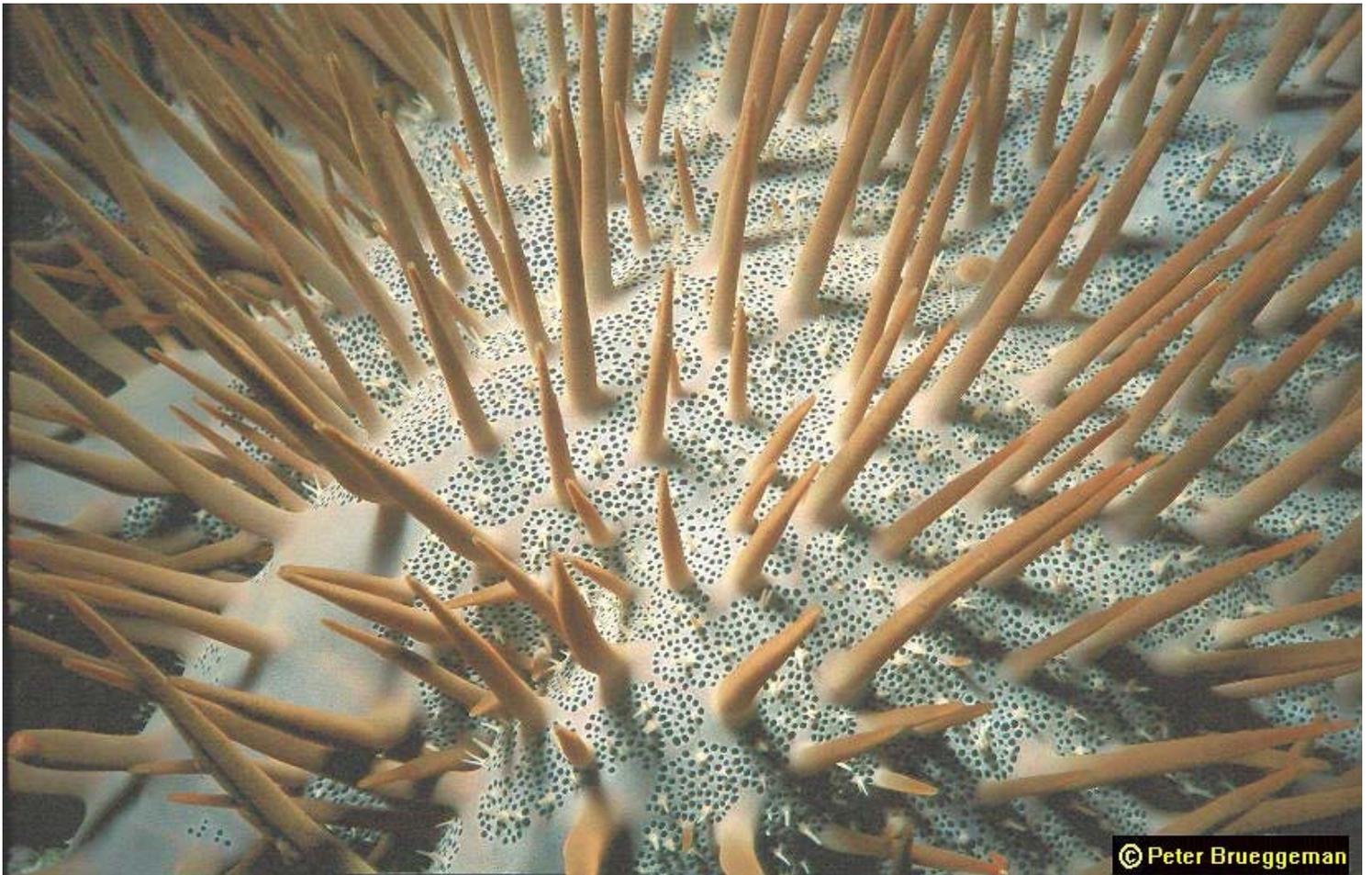
Crinoids are echinoderms, related to seastars, and are fascinating animals to inspect closely. Crinoids can walk along with their 'feet', called cirri. This crinoid was perched up high on coral in order to filter feed more effectively.

Thank you to Tova and Novat and their Ocean Hunter and Fish 'n' Fins dive operation. Ocean Hunter is a great live-aboard dive boat. Among its assets are its small complement of divers, giving you lots of attention and dive choices as well as a very different live-aboard experience.



A seastar on coral. There is a lot of color in Palau underwater. The breadth of colors was remarkable, but none more so then when I saw entire areas of pastel colored coral reefs, looking very surreal.

Thank you to Sam's Tours, a well-run efficient dive operation with friendly staff very willing to answer questions.



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Closeup of crown of thorns starfish, which eat hard coral. These spines will inflict a lot of pain, should you bump into them.



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Chambered nautilus cruising along a wall. These were captured in baited traps at night. We looked at them first thing in the morning, then released them by taking them down to deep colder water.



A small crab hanging on and hiding in plain sight on fan coral. It's a lot of fun to scout around to see what cryptic animals you can find. It's like an Easter egg hunt though I'm sure I overlook way more than I can find.

Thank you to Noah Idechong, who was a gracious host, and a fun person with whom to spend some time. Noah took the time to answer our many questions, and guided us to many interesting locations.



Here's a head shot of a slipper lobster. Slipper lobster blend in very well with their surroundings, and look like an armored vehicle as they crawl along the bottom.

Thank you to Planet Blue Sea Kayak Tours... kayaking in Palau is a must-do.



At night I would see tiger cowries out cruising, with their mantles out and over their shells.



Colorful nudibranchs or sea slugs were an occasional sighting.



A master of cryptic disguise is the crocodile fish, an ambush predator.



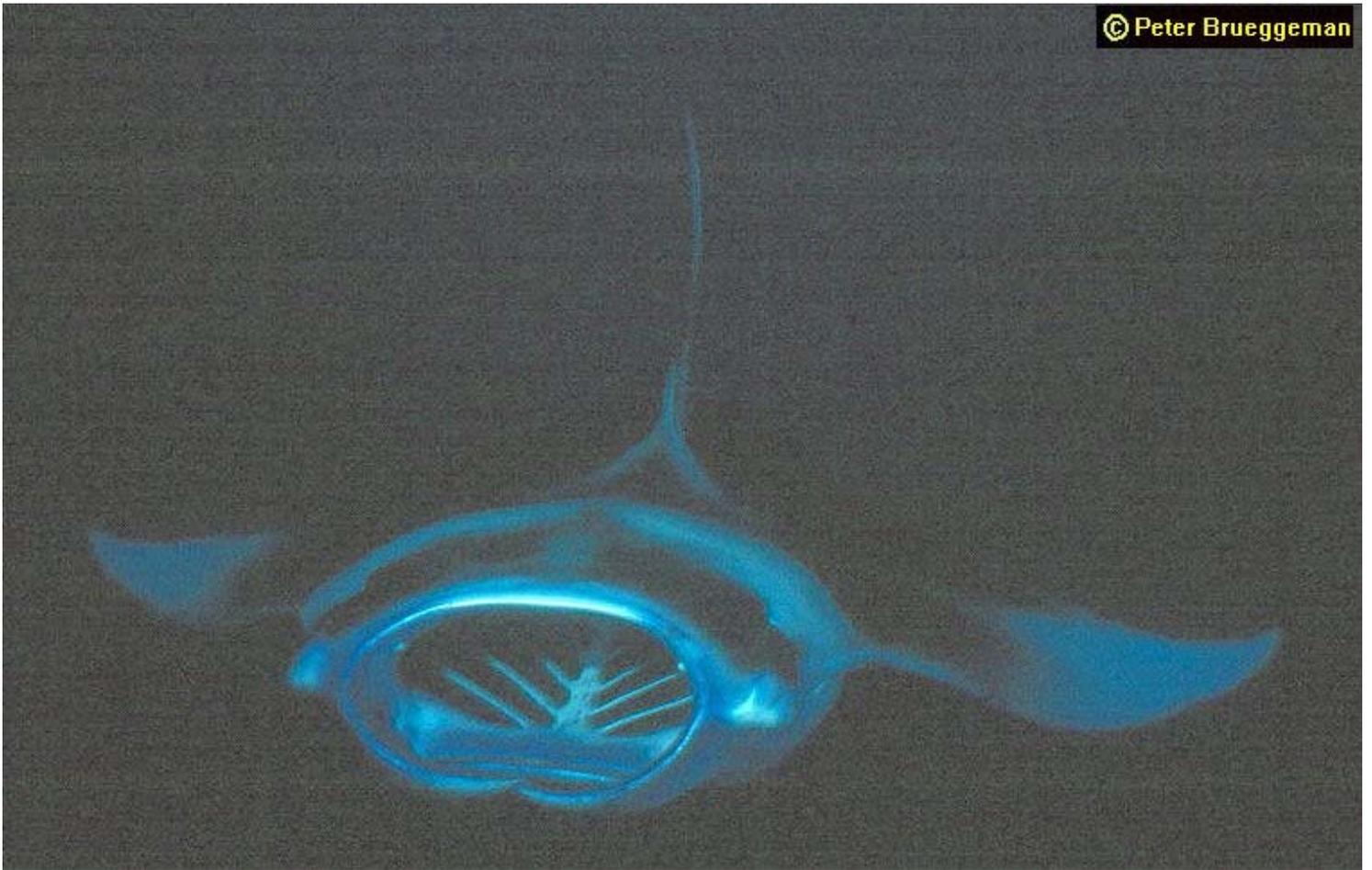
Another master of cryptic disguise is the ghost pipefish. These fish blend in well with seagrass debris in reef pockets.



Diving on a sunken WW2 Japanese ship.



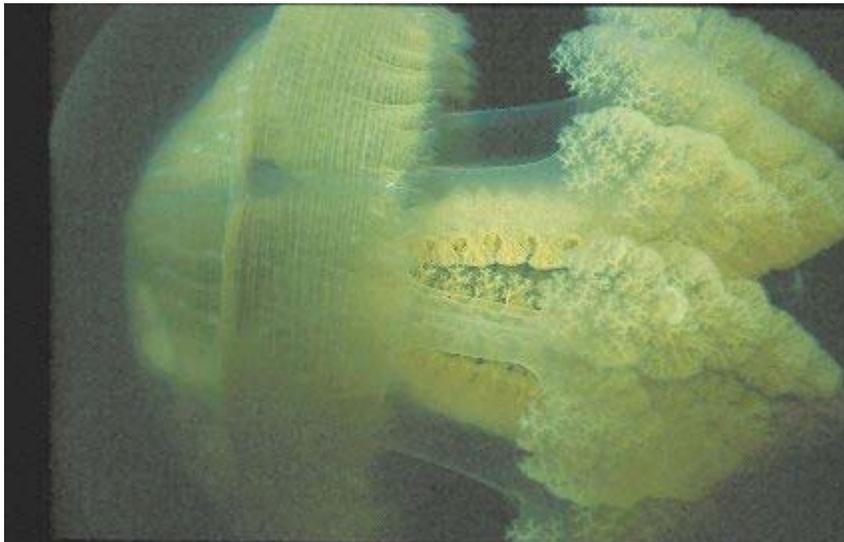
Diving with several feeding manta rays at dusk was one of my most memorable experiences in Palau. I shot several rolls of film using a 15mm lens, and enjoyed watching them feed.



The manta rays did tight loops all around me and in front of me, scooping up plankton. They didn't seem to mind my presence. I stayed still in the water, didn't stick my arms out or kick wildly around, and was rewarded by many minutes of closeup viewing.



Jellyfish Lake is famous for its Mastigias jellyfish in profusion, moving around as a fleet within several feet of the surface, farming the algae growing within their body tissues.



Here's a closer look at a jellyfish in Jellyfish Lake.

Either these jellyfish do not have stinging cells or the harpoons in their stinging cells cannot penetrate human skin; I don't know which. They bump into you just like they bump into each other. They are pretty nice fellows, once you get over your shyness at being surrounded by them.



Here I am ascending slowly up through the jellyfish, feeling grateful that they do not sting.

Jellyfish Lake is a saltwater lake, and you hike over a short steep trail to get to it. It was a lot of fun to snorkel there and spend some time with the jellyfish. They are peaceful farmers, spending their time in a quiet interior marine lake, bumping into each other and just generally hanging out.

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