

AVENTURAS

CURT BOWEN

Pinch me, I must be dreaming. Warm crystal clear water with 300-foot-plus visibility, bone white walls, cathedral sized passages and millions of beautiful cave formations ranging from fragile six inch soda straws to five-story tall pillars and flow stones. And the best part is, it's all virgin cave.

Geologically, the Yucatan peninsula is a cave diver's fantasy. When viewed from the air, no rivers, streams or lakes can be seen indicating that all the water from the local precipitation quickly soaks into the porous limestone rock and into the labyrinth of cave passages located just below the surface. The dazzling speleothem formations that crowd each cave were created during the dry periods by the infinite water droplets depositing and eroding minerals as they made their way underground.

Most divers know of Sistema Nohoch Nah Chich which currently boasts over 245,000 feet of surveyed passage and Sistema Dos Ojos also with an astonishing 200,000 feet of passage. They are rated the top two largest underwater caves in the world and still growing. These two cave systems come within 100 feet of each other, but to date no underwater connection has been discovered. But, to quote Tony DeRosa, "The adventure continues."

DeRosa and his wife Nancy own and operate Villas DeRosa/Aquatech at Aventuras Akumal which is located 30 miles south of Playa Del Carman, Mexico on the Caribbean Sea in the heart of Maya cave country. They provide first rate accommodations and Mexican cuisine, a full dive facility and knowledgeable dive guides.

Diving the Mexican Jungle

The Mexican jungle is a desolate place. The terrain is rouged and rocky. Thousands of species of plants and trees crowd every inch available making navigating impossible without a team of workers clearing a path. Luckily, much of the hard work required to gain access to the current sys-

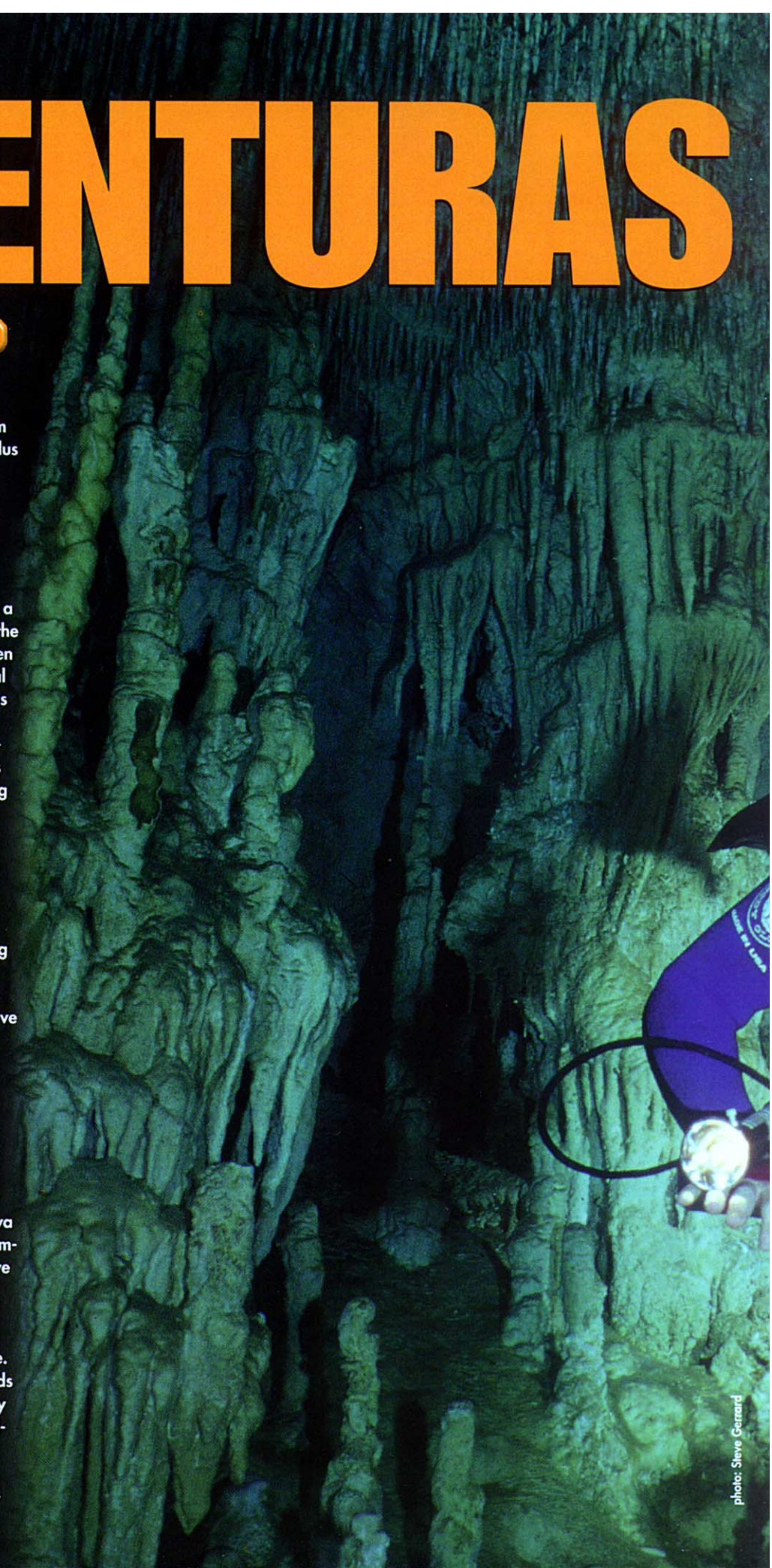


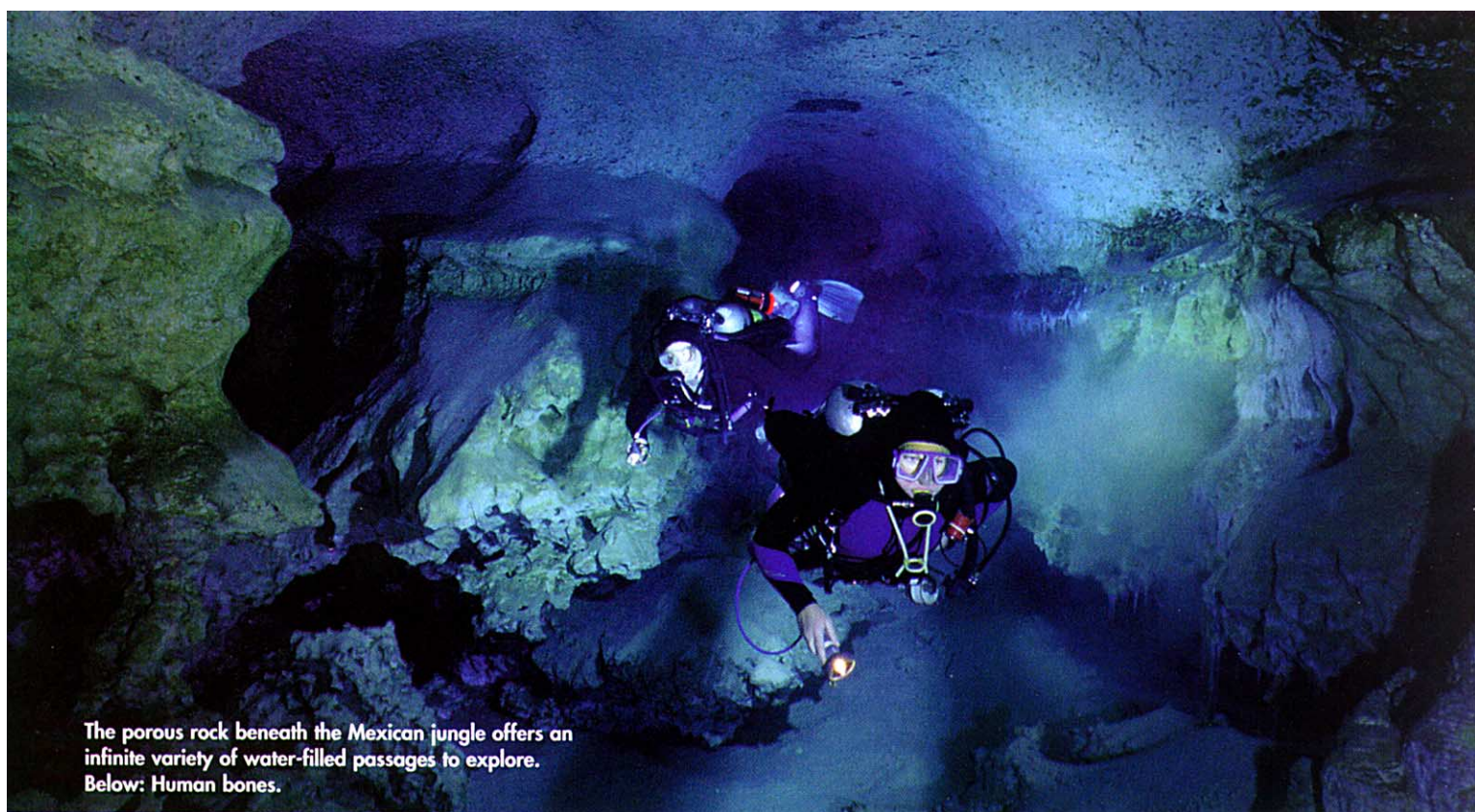
photo: Steve Gerard

AKUMAL

Searching for the Virgins



Slogging through the dense Mexican jungle is worth every bug-infested step when the caves are like this.



The porous rock beneath the Mexican jungle offers an infinite variety of water-filled passages to explore. Below: Human bones.

tems has already been completed. Most are accessible by vehicle and some even have ladders, platforms and restrooms.

If you're a hard core explorer, bring a back pack, a sharp machete, a hand-held GPS, rappelling equipment and lots of bug spray for a slow trek through the jungle. The reward could be diving in virgin caves, unseen and untouched by anyone else. Despite the miles of mapped cave passage, the jungle is hiding even more.

Of course, even if the cave you dive in has been seen before, hopefully it hasn't been touched. Villas DeRosa/Aquatech strongly preaches cave conservation and frequently reminds divers that due to the fragile state of the formations within the caves, they must follow strict rules to help preserve these systems. So throw out the north Florida pull and glide (bull in the china shop) technique. Any handling of the cave formations will cause damage. Stay on the permanent line in highly decorated areas. Even the exhausted bubbles will destroy decorations such as soda straws. Pay close attention to your buoyancy skills and streamlining.

Clothing

If you should make it to this part of Mexico, packing the proper clothes will make the trip more comfortable.

Shorts and T-shirts are acceptable for

those systems that have been commercialized. But for any treks through the jungle I would suggest long pants, hiking boots, a short sleeve shirt and a hat to block the sun. Also, if you're as allergic to poison ivy as I am, pay closer attention than I did.



Dive Equipment

Villas DeRosa/Aquatech offers both doubles (50 sets) and singles (100+) with DIN and standard yokes along with a complete assortment of open water and cave diving rental equipment. Plus they have a dedicated inventory of EANx doubles and single tanks. Cave divers should bring all their own personal equipment with the exception of cylinders. Remember you will be in the middle of a jungle. Replacement parts for broken equipment are in short supply or not available at all so have your equipment in prime working condition with

back up parts such as o-rings, light bulbs, test tubes, etc...


Airlines & Customs

Baggage is usually restricted to two, 70-pound suitcases and two small carry-ons. Customs will require a completed

passport or your original birth certificate and a driver's license. Do not change your U.S. dollars into Mexican pesos in the airport, they often do not have the best exchange rate.

Personal Photographs:

If you dive with Aquatech, Steve Gerrard, one of the pioneers in cenote diving, offers a personalized photography session with outstanding results for a small fee. (See all the photos in this article.)

Photo appointments should be scheduled prior to your arrival. 

DeepTech associate publisher Curt Bowen leads trips to dive with Villas DeRosa/Aquatech and readers can join his next trip, scheduled for November 19th - 26th, 1998. The cost is \$850.00 plus tax and includes lodging, cylinders, air fills and food. Not included is air fair, dive fees or alcohol. Call 941-751-2360 for reservations. To plan your own visit to Villas DeRosa/Aquatech call/fax: 011-987-59020 or E-mail: 105107.2445 com-puserve.com. Website:www.cenotes.com

photos: Steve Gerrard