



(The Encounters)



Attack of the 2-foot turtle

With its eagle-like jaws agape, it came at me, snarling with a crazed glint in its monochrome eye. Large hooks on its fins threatened to latch into me and a jagged shield provided impenetrable armour. This wasn't a nightmare. This was the attack of the 2-foot turtle.

TEXT AND PHOTOS ADAM BROADBENT / SCUBAZOO

MY first turtle encounter was at Barracuda Point in Sipadan. Dozens of green turtles lazing around, sprawled over coral, collapsed in barrel sponges and enjoying the pampering of willing cleaner fish. Throughout my dives at Sipadan, all my turtle encounters were with extremely diver-friendly reptilians who appeared to be in some kind of stupor. I even saw a turtle swim straight into the back of an oblivious diver. It was almost as if there was something in the water.

When I transferred to the Maldives, the encounters were similar. Hawksbill turtles were totally at ease with divers as they gorged on soft coral or munched through the reef in search of sponges. These prehistoric, endearing animals are a diver's dream... or so I thought.

While photographing for Scubazoo's latest coffee table book, *Maldives: The Underwater Kingdom*, I had the pleasure of documenting a marine turtle conservation programme at Banyan Tree resort in North Male atoll. Each day a marine biologist feeds the hatchlings in their pen in the lagoon while explaining the

programme to guests. At the same time, an adult hawksbill turtle regularly comes into the lagoon in search of potential scraps. One day the opportunity to photograph a turtle in a crystal clear shallow lagoon was too tempting so I slipped into the water and finned toward it.

So here I was, face to face with a living nightmare. I have had limited success with women, so the ferocity with which this turtle came at me was initially a fantastic compliment. Unfortunately my excitement was short lived as affectionate nibbling was not on its mind; this turtle was getting rough. I am not sure if it was its reflection in my dome port, the alluring smell of my rashguard or if I am particularly offensive to turtles, but this turtle kept coming for me. I kept shooting in a vain attempt to capture this aggressive behaviour while trying to keep any extremities out of harm's way. As the light dimmed at sunset, we parted ways with fingers, toes and flippers all thankfully intact. **AD**

