



# Launching A New Liveaboard

By **WAYNE B. BROWN**

I often get asked what goes into starting a new liveaboard destination. This can be a very, very lengthy conversation!

Think of a new liveaboard operation as a destination that is opening a hotel with a restaurant, local transportation, an airline reservation center, and a scuba operation—all rolled into one. However, before any of these pieces and parts get started, the new potential destination has to have a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to determine, within our best abilities, the long-term success of it.

## The essentials

I have a long list of new destinations and I'm always chipping away at it. There are several factors that we consider before greenlighting a new Aggressor destination. First of course is always the ability of the destination to deliver an amazing adventure for up to a week at a time. Between myself and my operations team, one of us will travel to an area that we believe may be an exciting addition to the company. While there, we plan the day-by-day adventure that our guests will participate in and then, based on this real time experience, we tweak it to make sure we can guarantee success week after week. While there, we photograph and video the local culture, tour hotels and resorts, speak with officials regarding permits and licenses, and research local talent as future staff. We verify support facilities and locally-qualified tradesmen, as well as the availability of quality food and supplies. If a destination cannot support us with qualified trades for repairs and maintenance, then we cannot deliver the expected level of adventure for which we are known.

Airlines also play a large role in our final decision. Are there multiple airlines servicing the destination? How many flights would it typically take? Are they reasonably priced? Most importantly, are they reputable and certified by most countries' aviation authorities?



## The team

Even after all this is accomplished—many times over multiple trips—the key for me to ensure that we uphold the Aggressor Adventure experience that our guests are expecting. There are times when I have a potential destination that sits for years where I have already completed all the above but have not found an owner that shares our values and visions on dedicated customer service.

Sometimes the owner comes to us and sometimes we must network until we find one. I always start with a video call and gauge their interest, enthusiasm, and ability to financially support the operation. If they pass these metrics, which is usually less than 1 in 10, I then schedule a trip to meet them, wherever they may be in the world. This one-on-one, in-person meeting is the most important step in making my final decision. I review with them numerous scenarios of things that could go wrong during an adventure and how would they step up to make it right for our customers. While it is always nice to find a potential new owner with a background in the adventure, sometimes a fresh look from someone

outside of the business offers us the chance to explore new ways to enhance and strengthen our brands.

## Behind the scenes

I then review the calendar for launching new destinations so we can stagger them allowing for each one to gain the interest and traction to be successful. The real work is just getting started!

It now becomes a six-week marathon of programming, data input, and layout design for all the different room types, sizes, and pricing. Creating the 9+ new webpages for the destination that includes maps, photos, videos, Know Before You Go, history, and an outline of the adventure is a non-stop process with approvals for design and content—at the same time keeping search engine optimization of text crawling in mind.

The most relaxing and enjoyable liveaboard vacations are born from an exhausting and complex launch process

In conjunction with this, our marketing firm creates new advertising materials that can be translated into different languages for magazines and websites around the world. Some magazines require a three-month lead time, so getting the timing right is always a delicate balance.

## Just the beginning

Of course, this is all on the Aggressor Adventures side and doesn't even get into the setup and training of the destination owner and staff by our operations department, ensuring they all understand and can follow our standard operating procedures. We detail every aspect of a liveaboard adventure down to the branded items you see onboard. Each one has also been sourced or produced to our specifications—and most often shipped to the destination, encountering customs, with duty and delays along the way.

Thankfully we are always excited about adding new adventures and look at the sometimes-exhausting process as an exciting way to bring our guests more of the world around us. [ ]

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