

Tamariu - A Fisherman's Cove

by Arnau Argemi

To talk about Tamariu is to talk about a cove of an immense calmness and cold winds in the winter and radiant sun and tourist activity in the summer. It offers anything from deep, dry-suit dives suited for experienced divers to diverse marine life and shallow reefs for new divers in a 7mm wetsuit and underwater photographers. One of the three coastal towns in Palafrugell, Tamariu, is part of the Costa Brava region in the province of Girona, northeastern Catalonia, Spain. It is located 70 miles south of the border with France, a one hour and a half drive from Barcelona, and at the end of a windy road along a cliff. The town adopts its name after the many tamarisk trees surrounding the cove's promenade. Tamariu depicts the classic Costa Brava look of rugged cliffs covered in pine trees that abruptly cascade to meet the clear, deep blue Mediterranean waters filled with gorgonian coral reefs, seagrass beds, and diverse fauna.

In the past, Tamariu was initially a simple town of fishermen. However, since the Costa Brava's tourism boom in the '80s, it has become a town of tasty seafood restaurants and affordable, small hotels.

Unexpectedly, scuba diving in Tamariu started before all the tourist commotion, when the German Günter "Stolli" Stolberg arrived on the scene. As a scuba diver, he soon fell in love with the marine life and gorgonian coral seascapes of the Costa Brava.

In 1971, he founded the first and only dive center in the town to date: "Stolli's Dive base." Stolli was an avid underwater photographer and a pioneer of new lighting techniques. During his dives, he would

Paseo de Tamariu – Seafront of Tamariu where Stolli's Dive base and many famous restaurants are located. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and dual DS51 strobes. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/16, 1/200s.

Spotting the scorpionfish – Diver spots with his torch a red scorpionfish (Scorpaena scrofa) at the entrance of its small cave during a deep dive. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and dual DS51 strobes. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/16, 1/25s.





Views through the coral – Large gorgonian coral fan giving way to a school of black damselfish dancing under an afternoon sunburst. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and dual DS51 strobes. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/16, 1/125s.

experiment with many backlighting and colored-filter photography on small critters. Undoubtedly, he excelled in wide-angle photography as well (check out his work here: <https://stollis-divebase.eu/es/historia.html>).

In just a few years, he built a scuba center from the ground up



Pushed by the current – Long-snouted seahorse found in Tamariu hiding next to a patch of seagrass getting pushed by the current in the reef that morning. Nikon D90, AF-S VR Micro-Nikkor 105mm f2.8G IF-ED inside an Ikelite housing with dual DS51 strobe. Camera settings: ISO 100, f/20, 1/10s.

that still stands today. Since Stollis's passing in 2016, Maria and Tom Pichlmaier have taken over the dive center's management. They have kept offering its photo-friendly diving experience that Stollis created. Maria continues Stollis's legacy as an underwater photographer with her



Smile at the camera – Dondice banyulensis nudibranch leaping out of a branch of seagrass towards the camera. Nikon D90, AF-S VR Micro-Nikkor 105mm f2.8G IF-ED inside an Ikelite housing with single DS51 strobe. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/18, 1/100s.

impressive capacity for spotting small critters, from camouflaging seahorses to colorful nudibranchs. If you are looking to take macro photography, do not forget to schedule a dive with her!

The dive base is located on a historic house on Tamariu's promenade, which leads to the entrance to the cove's shallow reef (5-13 meters). The dive base organizes dives all day in this reef, where many beginner divers jump in to work on their skills and certifications and where underwater photographers can

encounter seahorses camouflaged to mimic seagrass.

This dive site is characterized by the exciting contrast of Posidonia seagrass beds against desert-like sand and rock stretches. The seagrass composes a unique backdrop for wide-angle images of the schools of baby barracudas, two-banded, and cow breams that frequently visit this site year-long. The sandy bottoms hide critters that are perfect for macro and fish portrait photography. An attentive diver in these underwater



Furio Cormorants – Three cormorants sit on the rocks of Furio reef waiting for their next meal. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and dual DS51 strobes. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/13, 1/80s

deserts can spot pipefish, striped blennies, gobies (red-lipped and giant), wide-eyed flounders, lizardfish, striped mullets, combers, cardinalfish (with a mouthful of eggs), and the hard-to-find stargazers.

Divers can be lucky enough to enjoy an encounter with Mediterranean triggerfish, eagle rays, sea hares, and streaked gurnards that occasionally visit the reef for protection or food.

The cove's scenery transforms when the sun sets not only above

water, where "habaneras" start playing in the restaurants during the summer, but also underwater when during a night dive, brown and red scorpionfish come out to feed. Taking advantage of the tall seagrass beds for protection, Mediterranean hermit crabs also go out for a stroll. The skittish serpent eels can be spotted undulating over the sand in the darkness, looking for prey. So, make sure to grab your torch or your focus light for some unique nighttime action!



Jelly glow – Barrell jellyfish that showed up near the shore of Tamariu with the afternoon sun behind its body. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and dual DS51 strobes. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/16, 1/200s.

The dive base also organizes boat trips to the outer reefs in the sailboat "la Gabriela." These outings on the Gabriela are a great way to explore the other dive sites Tamariu offers. The closest reef to the cove is the rock of Montíell, a dive site characterized by a big split in the middle of a large rock where many conger eels, moray eels, and lobsters like to hide during the day. The large stone is surrounded only by sand but has extensive seagrass beds growing on it, in which observant divers can find seahorses.

The not-so-deep reef (8-24 meters) is perfect for beginner divers and underwater photographers that want to take advantage of a longer dive to nail that perfect shot.

Divers can also explore the Furio d'Aigua Xelida reef, where many nudibranchs like Mediterranean flabellinas, pilgrim hermits, dotted sea slugs, and many others hide under its choppy waters. Furio offers not only great opportunities for the classic nudibranch macro shots but also breathtaking wide-angle ones.

Gorgonian coral covers this reef's large vertical walls, which give way to sandy valleys and hidden caves. These corals typically spawn in June, giving photographers a unique opportunity for some magical macro shots. Still, these corals open up during many other months of the summer, allowing photographers to compose breathtaking images with anything from a sunburst to your dive buddy or the damselfish populating the dive site.

The more intrepid divers can jump into the Canyons of Tamariu, a famous dive site usually ranked in the top 10 dives in the Costa Brava. The three spectacular canyons of the dive site are a passage for many large subjects. The canyons are placed parallel to each other, giving rise to six walls full of gorgonian corals that harbor immense biodiversity.

Underwater photographers can face the challenge of capturing large schools of sardines moving rapidly and synchronously to avoid the attacks of hungry barracudas and mackerels. The wide-angle lens should also be ready to photograph the elegantly-swimming eagle ray, the slow-moving sunfish, or the curious bottle-nose dolphin. An undiscovered opportunity for the underwater photographer given by visiting all these outer reefs is the chance to take stunning split shots with the classic



Peeking out – Longstriped blenny peeking out of its orange coral hideout for a portrait. Nikon D90, AF-S VR Micro-Nikkor 105mm f/2.8G IF-ED inside an Ikelite housing with single DS51 strobe. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/18, 1/100s.

Costa Brava look. These shots depict the contrast of the rugged, pine-tree-covered cliffs of orange rock against the Mediterranean's deep blue waters with underwater subjects like the barrel jellyfish or the mauve stinger.

Tamariu's privileged location in the Costa Brava allows divers to visit



Swimming over a Gorgonian coral head – Wrasse fish swim over a gorgonian coral head as they flee from the group of divers that approaches. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and dual DS51 strobes. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/16, 1/25s.

many of the best dive sites in the area during their trip to Catalonia, Spain. Divers will have easy access, either by boat or by car, to many other coves in the area like Begur, Sant Feliu de Guixols or Calella de Palafrugell, where there are many more dive sites to be explored. A notable one is the



Star on a cliff – Smooth starfish hangs on to the wall of a cliff next to a lobster hideout. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and single, snooted DS51 strobe. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/11, 1/100s.

Ullastres, another reef usually ranked in the top 10 dives in the Costa Brava due to its exceptional marine life diversity.

In the cove, there are other ocean-related activities to enjoy other than diving. A few businesses rent boats, kayaks, and paddleboards for a



Fleeing school – School of sardines rapidly swims towards the camera after the attempt of a few hungry barracudas to eat some sardines as lunch. Nikon D90, AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED inside an Ikelite housing and dual DS51 strobes. Camera settings: ISO 200, f/10, 1/100s.

relaxing excursion along the coast's rocky cliffs and caves during the day. Regarding conservation events, every year in September, the town organizes a clean-up of the cove's waters, in which many volunteer divers participate to collect trash from the bottom of the reef. Moreover, eating at any of the delicious seafood restaurants on the promenade can follow any of the previously mentioned activities.

To summarize, in Tamariu, divers of all levels can enjoy dives that suit them perfectly. They can choose from a range of depths and difficulties: from deep, rocky terrains (up to 35 meters) to shallow reef dives (up to 13 meters). Underwater photographers can plan their dives according to their must-see subjects or the type of photography: from macro shots of nudibranchs or other small critters to wide-angle shots of gorgonian coral sceneries or large schools of fish. However, the activities are not limited to the water, as evidenced

by the lovely restaurants and lively bars in the town. The mixture of entertainment inside and outside the water makes Tamariu the perfect location for all divers and underwater photographers.

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