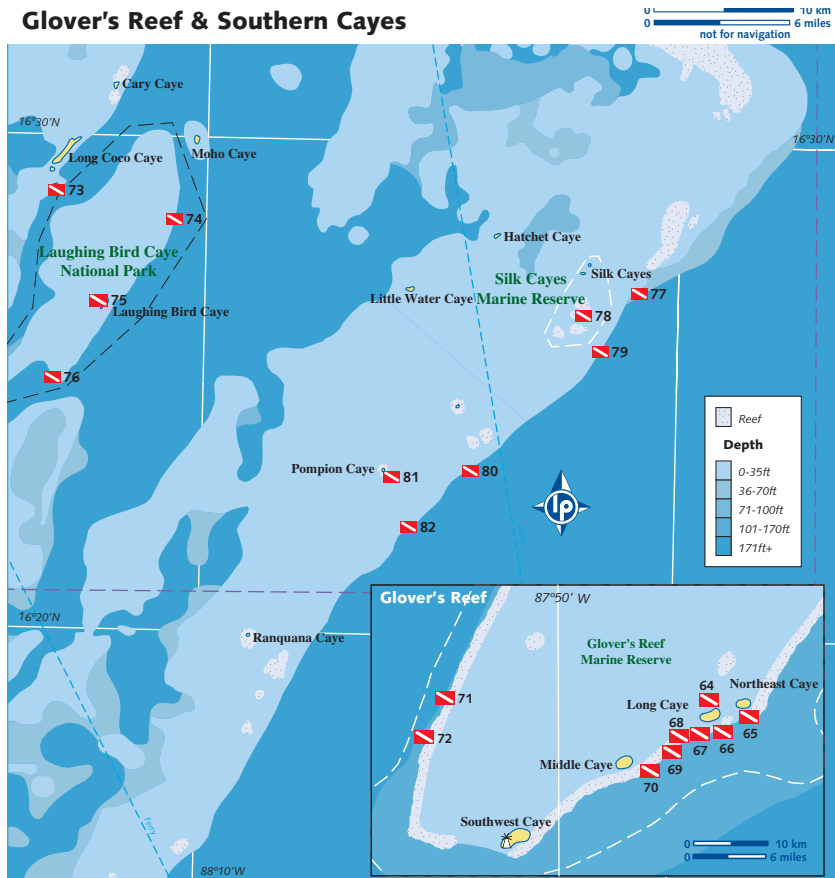


Glover's Reef & Southern Cayes



Glover's Reef & Southern Cayes



First recognized as a bird sanctuary in 1954, it has long been atop the conservation list, getting various conservation designations in 1978 before finally being declared a complete marine reserve in 1993. There is a marine research station on Middle Caye and the remains of an ancient Mayan settlement are being studied on Long Caye.

Glover's Reef Atoll was named after 17th century pirate John Glover, who used the remote islands as a base for raids against treasure-laden Spanish galleons heading to and from the Bay Islands of Honduras.

Located about an hour's dive boat ride from Hamanasi in Hopkins or the Nautical Inn in Placencia, Glover's Reef rises from abyssal depths of well over 2,000ft (700m). Oval in shape it is comprised of more than 700 patch reefs within a 100 sq mile lagoon. Just to the south is one of the Caribbean's deepest valleys, where depths reach 10,00ft (3,000m).

Dived mainly by shops in Dangriga, Hopkins and Placencia, there are also several rustic outpost resorts here for divers and fishermen. Blue waters and the chance of seeing dolphins, mantas and whale sharks keep adventurous divers coming back for more.

GLOVER'S REEF

In Southern Belize one can find the third of the atolls off Belize's coast. Of the three, Glover's Reef sees the least amount of human contact and remains largely unexplored.

First designated a National Marine Reserve and then, in 1997, a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Glover's unique environment has received more than five decades of attention.

Glover's Reef	GOOD SNORKELING			
	NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	
64 LONG CAYE LAGOON	•	•		
65 LONG CAYE CUT	•	•		
66 LONG CAYE WALL			•	
67 BEV'S GARDEN	•	•		
68 THE CRACK			•	
69 THE ABYSS			•	
70 MIDDLE CAYE WALL			•	
71 SOUTH WEST WALL			•	
72 THE PINNACLES			•	



Horse-eye jacks coming right at ya!

64 LONG CAYE LAGOON

Location: West side Long Caye
Depth: 5-30ft (1-9m)
Access: Boat or Shore
Expertise Rating: Novice



The lagoon environment is largely overlooked by most dive operations but can be a source of great diversity, with a wealth of small sea creatures and juveniles to be found. It is a simpler matter for those staying on an outer caye resort to explore these inner lagoon environments, as travelers from the mainland will likely want to experience the more breathtaking outer reef dives.

However the seagrass beds here are full of life and a dive focused on critter hunting and macro photo shooting can produce good results, especially if you're snorkeling or diving with someone who knows the local habitat.

Inside the lagoon, seagrass beds are home to tiny but beautiful purple-tip anemones: these can sting, so don't touch. Baby barracuda sharpen their hunting skills here too, prowling the edges of balls of silvery baitfish.

In the sandy areas around the docks one can find long snout seahorses hugging the dock pilings, juvenile yellow stingrays (which make a splendidly colorful photo subject), juvenile spiny lobsters under conch or coconut shells, and even slender filefish and snake eels. The rare and elusive shortnose batfish may also be found in the lagoon's protected areas.

Patch reefs in deeper areas are good for snorkeling or long scuba dives. Here sea whips may hold slender filefish, juvenile trumpfish and flamingo tongue shells, while conchs may be seen in the sand. If the wind is coming from the wrong direction, many creatures hide in less disturbed water, so this kind of exploration is more fruitful during calm periods.

65 LONG CAYE CUT

Location: West side Long Caye
Depth: 10-30ft (3-9m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Novice



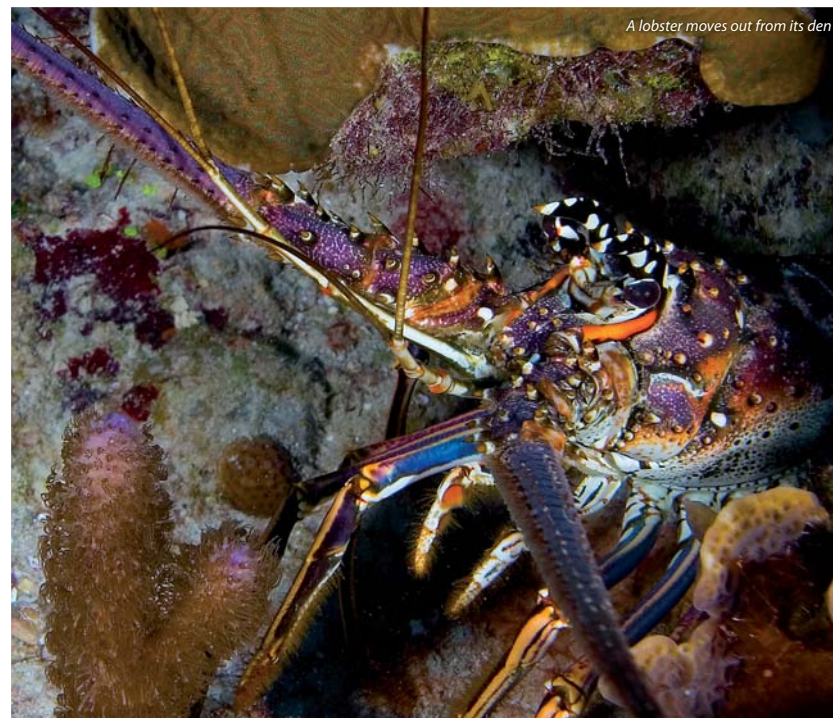
A shallow site that is sometimes snorkeled, this is a good place for novice divers to see some of Glover's marine life in an unimposing environment. It is also a good location for photographers, as there are not only adult fish but also various phases of juvenile. Incoming or outgoing currents are usually better for fish life to appear, but may make things difficult for those with only a few dives under their belts. Less experienced divers should confine themselves

to areas farther in from the cut where water movement is less pronounced.

Coral heads here shelter shoals of striped smallmouth grunts, along with many individuals and pairs of other species. Watch for moray eels, four-eye and banded butterflyfish, as well as adult and juvenile angels. Gray and French angelfish are particularly prominent.

The ubiquitous southern stingrays like this environment as well, and don't be surprised if you see a large eagle ray with its nose to the sand, looking for a meal or coasting across the shallows of the turtle grasses.

On ascent, remember that this is one of the main passes in and out of the lagoon and there can be some boat traffic. Try to come up beside the coral heads off to the side of the channel, or pop up a safety sausage so captains know you're there.



A lobster moves out from its den



66 LONG CAYE WALL

Location: Offshore east of Long Caye

Depth: 30-130ft (1-9m)

Access: Boat

Expertise Rating: Intermediate



This is one of the most stunningly beautiful sites at Glover's, with a broad sandy basin gently sloping to large coral structures containing swim-throughs and decorated passages to the outer reef. The outer reef is alive with sea fans, gorgonians and a wide variety of sponges; cleaning stations abound along the drop-off and colorful Creole wrasse line up for their turn.

The lower reaches hold garden after garden of eels swaying in the sand. Approach slowly, level with the sea floor and breathing minimally, and they may not retreat into their holes. One can then watch as they catch food particles in the gentle current as it sweeps across the plain. Look also for southern stingrays stirring up the sand and conchs.

Guides here joke that you should make sure swim-throughs have an exit before attempting to glide through these natural tunnels – good advice. There are numerous exits out to the wall and also many back up into the sand. Just swim through with care so as not to damage marine growth. Look for lurking barracuda here or a scrawled filefish blending into the corals.



Sponge and corals along the sand flats

The outer reef has many large barrel sponges that are alive with small fish and sometimes a hibernating grouper or two. Take this dive slow and easy. There is a lot to see and the white, reflective sand is great for photography.

67 BEV'S GARDEN

Location: 0.5 nautical miles (0.8km) southwest of Long Caye

Depth: 30-100ft (9-30m)

Access: Boat

Expertise Rating: Intermediate

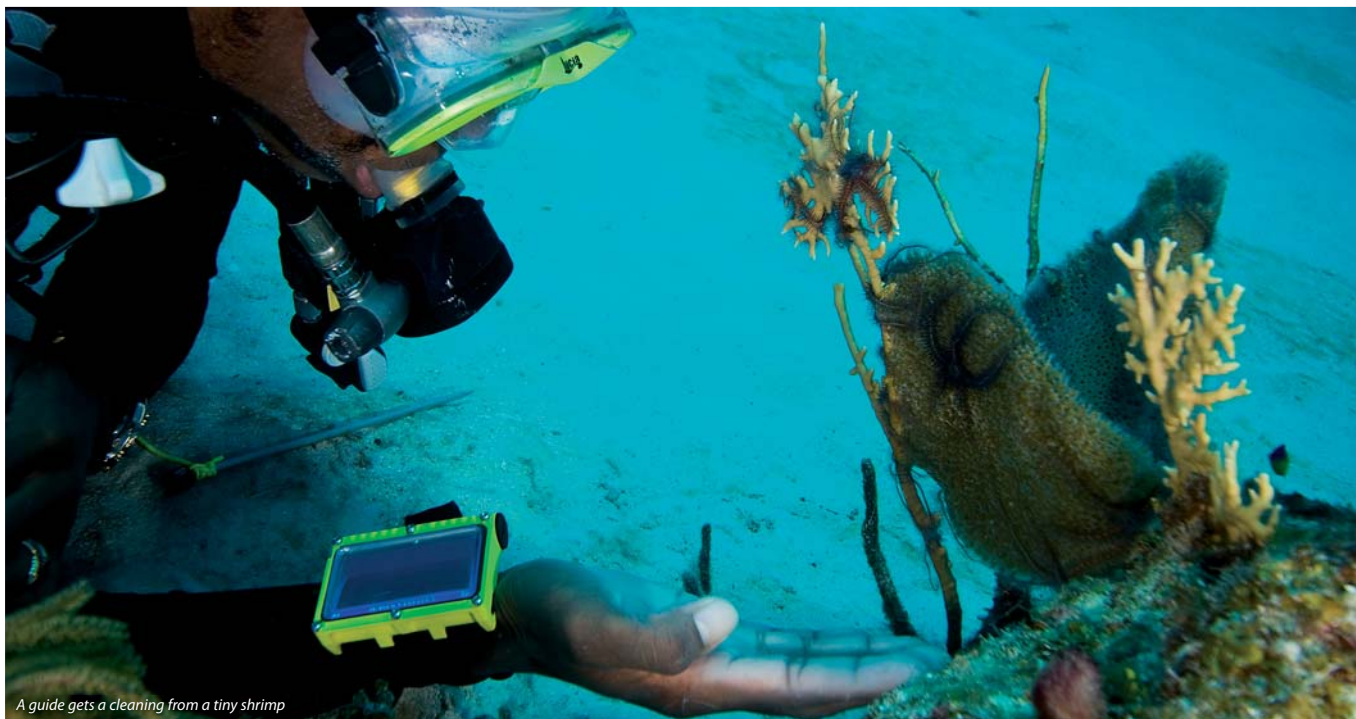


Just off Long Caye island, this is one of those special places where some good staghorn and lettuce corals can be found in healthy undersea gardens. Moorings come and go as funds and materials dictate, but the better coral is in the shallower part of the reef near the mooring pin site, where chromis and hiding juveniles can be found within its protection.

The terrain then slopes gently to the outer wall of corals. There are some great deep cuts and swim-throughs which hold lurking trumpetfish and pretty vase sponges. Swim over the wall and keep an eye out for eagle ray pairs swimming in the blue; they may swoop in for a closer look if you don't charge after them – just remain still and see if curiosity gets the best of them.

The reef on the outer wall has a fascinating feature in the form of a large ledge and undercut in the 60ft to 70ft range. Small caves full of silversides reside here, and there's the possibility of seeing three to four lobsters at one spot.

The coral gardens can be revisited after the deep part of the dive and provide plenty to see, including small flounder in the sand and sponges with banded shrimp cleaning stations inside.



A guide gets a cleaning from a tiny shrimp

68 THE CRACK

Location: 0.75 nautical miles (1.2km) southwest of Long Caye

Depth: 45-100ft (14-30m)

Access: Boat

Expertise Rating: Intermediate



This popular site is close to Long Caye and has fissures and cuts in the reeftop at about 45ft that provide plenty of shelter to small fish and bigger predators. An overhead environment cut called The Crack gives the site its name, and offers an entrance at 45ft and an exit at around 100ft (or vice versa).

Big-eyed soldierfish and clouds of silversides like the inner reef entrance area of this swim-through. The Crack

itself isn't for the claustrophobic as it's a little narrow in places and doesn't have an overhead exit. It's not totally dark but entering is done best with a dive light and a minimum of divers, so the sand doesn't get too stirred up. Look for small shrimp eyes reflected in your dive light; the presence of bright orange tube cup corals also makes the wall colorful in some spots. If you're lucky enough to enter on an overcast day when the tube corals' polyps are open, the bright yellow decorates the walls in fine fashion.

Exit at 100ft, looking out on the wall for Spanish mackerel or down toward the depths for large grouper. Make your way back up past cracks and crevices adorned with nice sponge life. Some may have dainty but deadly (to small fish) arrow blennies hovering. Your deco stop here will be done in open water.

69 THE ABYSS

Location: 1.5 nautical miles (2.4km) southwest of Long Caye

Depth: 30-130ft (9-40m)

Access: Boat

Expertise Rating: Intermediate



Not to be confused with **Abyss** off South Water Caye, The Abyss is about halfway between Long Caye and Middle Caye. (Numerous sites bear the same names in Belize – there's even an inland Blue Hole.) Here divers can see big rolling coral heads and deep channels leading out to a good wall of sponges, sea whips and gorgonians.

This dive is known for its coral variety and healthy sponge life, with tube

sponges here holding tiny blennies and peppermint shrimp. You will need a light to peer right down into them, with colors or eye reflections giving their location away.

The wall can be followed whichever way the gentle current is flowing and can be dived from deep up to about 45ft at reeftop. Look for big barrel sponge cleaning stations and tangles of orange and red rope sponges.

Up top keep an eye on the blue for pelagic fish and into the shallows for rays or slow-moving nurse sharks. Finish with an open water deco and a boat pickup, as dives here are the drift/swim variety.



A green moray

70 MIDDLE CAYE WALL

Location: East of Middle Caye
Depth: 30-100ft (9-30m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Intermediate



Dropping down to the inner reef, Medusa-like coral heads pop up from the sand. Adorned in swaying sea fans and giving yellowtails shelter, these large heads make the site interesting right from descent.

Big marine life glides in over the wall here and entire bottlenose dolphin families have been seen, with adults and babies all coming in to check out divers.

This place is famous as a Creole wrasse highway with large schools either out feeding in the blue water column, swooping in and then coursing along the rolling reef terrain past divers, or crowding cleaning stations and making the lives of bluehead wrasse hectic but fruitful. On the outer reef also look for large scrawled filefish and big tangles of blood red rope sponges.

Black durgions like to play above the inner reef here in good numbers, and schools of bigeye jacks will often let divers swim among them if calmly approached. The upper reef rises to 30-35ft and the dive can be done along its top at the end, before ascending for a safety stop. Watch the Creole wrasse in the blue while enjoying a last glimpse of this reef.

There is a receiver hanging here (and another at **South West Wall**) that looks like it might be an old mooring. It is actually part of a nurse shark-tagging program being carried out. Tagged sharks transmit information through these devices, so don't disturb them. You may find a small slender filefish camouflaged at the base of the ropes.

71 SOUTH WEST WALL

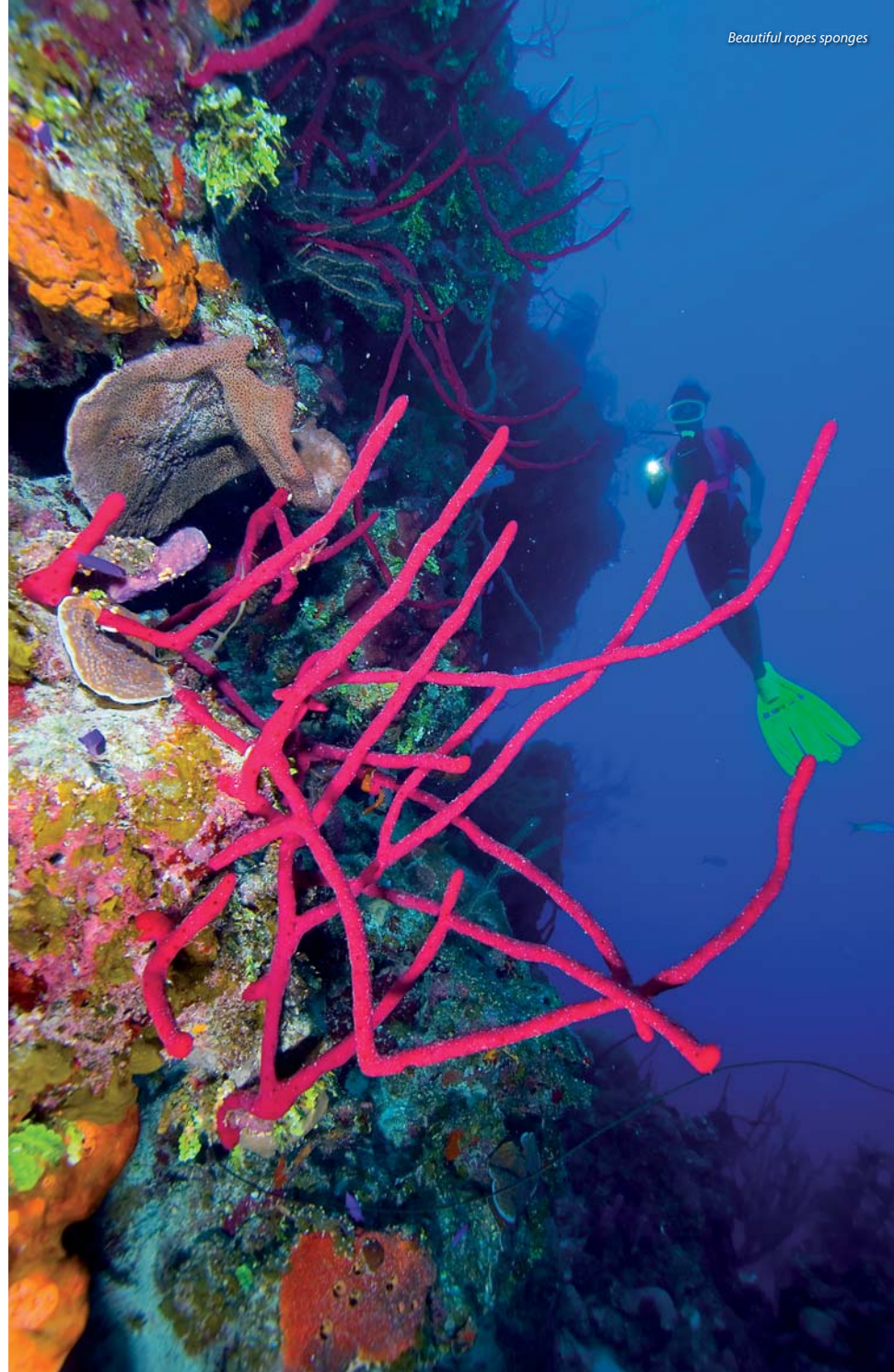
Location: 0.2 nautical miles (0.3km) south of South West Cove
Depth: 30-130ft (9-30m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Intermediate



This is one of those dives where seemingly everywhere one looks there is something happening, or an extraordinary fish appears from nowhere. Descend to the drop-off and swim along big growths of sea fans and barrel sponges. Look for fairy basslets and indigo hamlets in the safety of the habitat created by sponges and plating corals. You may also hear the call of a spotted toadfish.



A tiger grouper waits in ambush





The outer reef here can be home to sea turtles, and manta rays have also been reported along this stretch. The upper reef is just as intriguing, with scrawled filefish, trunkfish and pairs of whitespotted filefish swimming through the coral heads. Coral cover is low but dense and competitive, which means lots of places for things to hide, so take your time. Purple sea fans are thick here, as are the sea whips, whose bases make a popular rest spot for flamingo tongue shells. You'll be in the 45-50ft range now, so look out for lobsters, spotted and green morays and various species of angelfish.

The sandy areas are also good places to look for sleeping nurse sharks; they can be spotted moving along the shelves as you look toward the reef shelf. Lurking Nassau groupers and many colorful varieties of parrotfish can also be seen here.

Other dive sites south of here heading toward the tip include Manta Tunnel, Cuda Cove and Gorgonian Gallery. Each has a decent selection of corals, including black corals and gorgonians, along with a good variety of sea life similar to South West Wall. If conditions are right these can all be rewarding dives.

far side of the lagoon and find the un-buoyed sites. If coming from the mainland, discuss it with your operator, as it will also take some pre-arranging.

Divers like this place for the massive pinnacles that start right at the drop-off then rise up to 20ft before creating deep valleys. The blue abyss here is along a sheer wall richly adorned with lots of sponges, plate corals and star corals. The deep sand channels in-between hold schoolmasters hiding in the gorgonians, sea whips and big vase sponges. This wall is also reputed to be a good place to look out for manta rays, especially in the spring months.

Plenty of other pelagic type fish can be seen too, including nurse and reef sharks, Spanish mackerel, trevally jacks and barracudas. Water clarity can be exceptional when wind and surface current conditions are right.

72 THE PINNACLES

Location: 4 nautical miles (6.5km)

west of Middle Caye

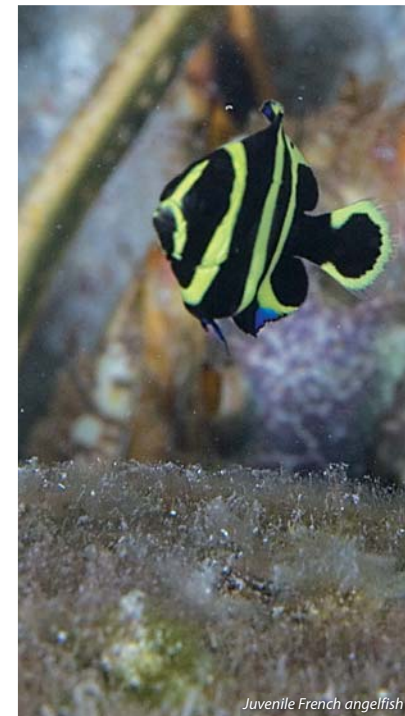
Depth: 20-130ft (9-30m)

Access: Boat

Expertise Rating: Intermediate



The Pinnacles isn't dived much as most operators prefer the east side, but if the wind is stirring things up at the preferred sites, this has a lot to offer. If you're staying on the atoll, an experienced captain is required to locate the sites and this usually has to be set up in advance, as it takes extra gasoline to get down to the



Juvenile French angelfish

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