

Shootout

Digital point-and-shoot vs. SLR cameras

TEXT & PHOTOS BY JACK & SUE DRAFAHL

One of the key questions asked during our lectures is "What underwater digital camera should I buy?" While there is no correct answer to this question, we can help make your selection easier. You first need to determine the kind of underwater images you want to take.

Surprisingly, it is harder to pick an underwater film camera than a digital camera. You generally have to own several film cameras to be able to capture different types of underwater scenes. More often than not, photographers see a huge manta ray swim by while they are on the bottom shooting macro.

Most professional photographers solved the problem with an arsenal of cameras and lenses.

Selecting your digital camera is easier as you have just two choices — point-and-shoot or SLR. There is one digital amphibious camera from Sea & Sea called AquaPix, but it operates so much like the digital point-and-shoot that we grouped it in that category. Since all digital cameras feature through-the-lens viewing, you don't have to guess at framing and focus. You just have to decide whether a point-and-shoot or digital SLR is right for you.

At first, you might assume that if you want high-quality images and the most image control, you would pick the digital SLR. This isn't necessarily true, since point-and-shoot cameras have vastly improved. They now feature up to six megapixels and can zoom

between macro and wide-angle. The viewing is done via an LCD viewer, which can be difficult to see in bright sunlight, and there is often a shutter delay.

The digital SLR camera still offers higher image resolution and versatility of lens choice. These cameras have no shutter delay, and the viewing is through the optical eyepiece. Although the housings are larger, heat doesn't build up from the internal flash firing because the flash sync is through a cable. If you have already made the investment of lenses for your film SLR camera, you might consider buying the digital version.

As new camera models appear, the line between point-and-shoot and digital SLR becomes less distinct. Both types just keep getting better and better. Technology is great, isn't it? The only way to make your buying decision is to compare the differences and see which fits your specific needs. To help you decide, we have put together the following chart with a point-by-point comparison.

One of the best ways to research information on underwater-camera systems is on the Web. Two of the best places to start are at www.wetpixel.com and www.digideep.com. Both sites offer extensive product reviews, manufacturer links, housing comparisons and many other topics related to digital-underwater photography. Be sure to tell them Jack and Sue sent you.

To keep up with the Digital Duo, check out www.jackandsuedrafaahl.com.

	Point-and-Shoot	SLR
Size	Light and compact	Heavy and bulky
Camera cost	\$200-\$900	\$900-\$2,500
Housing cost	\$200-\$1,500	\$1,200-\$4,000
Resolution	Three to six megapixels	Five to 12 megapixels
Shutter delay	Yes	None
Flash sync	Up to 1/1000 second	Up to 1/250 second
Flash connection	Fiberoptic, slave or cable	Cable
Close-ups	Built into most models	Macro lens and port
Wide-angle	Wet lens, zoom or wide port	Wide-angle lens and port
Heat buildup	High after 100 shots	Generally not a problem
Batteries	Limited bottom time and exposures	Exceeds bottom time
Buoyancy control	Easy since camera is so small	Can be difficult
Viewer	LCD viewer	Optical viewer
Viewing shallow	Difficult with LCD (hood needed)	No problem with optical
Camera models	More than 100	Fewer than two dozen
Camera life span*	One year	Two years

*This time indicates the period the camera is generally on the market before it is replaced by a newer model. A camera's actual life span will depend on its care and usage.



Las Olas Beach Resort

800-346-1329, Ext. 806
lasolas@cwpanama.net
www.lasolasresort.com



Bocas Yacht Club

011-507-757-9800 • Cell: 011-507-616-6000

bocasyachtclub@yahoo.com
www.bocasmarina.com

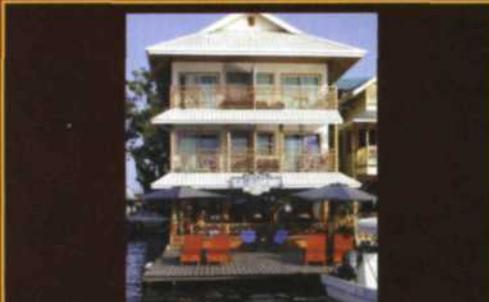
Land, Sea & Air Adventures

Watersports & more!
landseairadventures@yahoo.com
www.land-sea-air-adventures.com



Hotel Contadora

011-507-214-3719
reservas@hotelcontadora.com
www.hotelcontadora.com



El Limbo On The Sea Hotel

011-507-757-9062
ellimbo@hotmail.com
www.ellimbo.com