

[<< back to story >>](#)

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### A day at the 'Dive-In'

Touring Frenchman's Bay with Ed Monat means getting to meet sea creatures, first onscreen and then in person.

By DEIRDRE FLEMING, Staff Writer

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Edna Martin-Monat talks to Ed Monat, "Diver Ed," early this month during a trip from Bar Harbor. Monat dives with a video camera and broadcasts images from below onto a screen on his boat.

BAR HARBOR — Boat tours to view seabirds and marine life are as common along the Maine coast as sea kayaks.

These eco-tourism escapes reveal wonders like eagles off Eastport; minkes by Metinicus; seals around Seal Harbor; and puffins near Pumpkin Cove.

In Frenchman's Bay, Ed Monat's gig is a bit different.

Diver Ed, as he is known, and his crew, Captain Evil and Deckhand Dick, offer a boat tour that is seemingly similar to many other operations. The difference is that Monat's tour is experienced through a performance.

In the "Dive-In Theater," Monat's 51-foot cruise boat is a stage upon which he plays the roles of boat captain, ocean educator, cameraman, leading man and scuba star.

"I'm just a worker," Monat's wife, Edna Martin-Monat, told a boat full of children. "Diver Ed is the superhero."

Using a special, encased video camera with a powerful light, Monat dives to the ocean bottom and captures on camera the critters he finds, while broadcasting these back to a movie screen on the boat.

Monat narrates through a microphone in his special face mask as he and his camera take passengers on an underwater walking tour of a green and gold world 50 feet down.

The so-called "underwater extravaganza" is both an exploration led by a marine expert, and a sideshow presented by an able yet goofy guide.

Monat projects a little Jacques Cousteau, a bit of John Belushi, a whole lot of Robin Williams, and (for those who can remember) stuff from Saturday Night Live's "Mr. Bill Show."

Once Monat returns to the boat, the Dive-In Theater ends with face-to-face introductions between passengers and live sea cucumbers, sea stars, brittle stars, toad crabs, hermit crabs and lobsters.

All of these creatures are returned to the ocean in proper ceremonial fashion.

Passengers left dazed and dumbfounded by this unexpected show have but one theme to hold on to here.

"It's about how you look at things," Monat said, for once with a straight face.

Now, where are you going to get that along the Maine coast?

DEEP LOVE

Ed Monat grew up lobstering in Manomet, Mass., working at sea since age 12 and running his father's lobster boat at 16. But once he started scuba diving, that was it.

Monat said he had found his calling.

"I started diving when I was 16. I've been diving ever since. I have logged something like 30,000 hours underwater," Monat said.

Monat, 41, came to Maine to pursue a degree at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, but his choice had as much to do with the Atlantic as it did with the college.

In Bar Harbor, he was never far from the ocean.

As harbor master there from 1995 to 2000, Monat used fish tanks he filled with creatures from his scuba trips to educate the public on the ocean's wonders.



Photos by Jack Milton/Staff Photographer

Left: Elsa Saunders, 7, of Orono, holds a sea star on the trip with "Diver Ed." Above: Edna Martin-Monat helps Ed Monat adjust his equipment as he prepares to dive during a recent trip on Frenchman's Bay.



Edna Martin-Monat talks to Ed Monat, "Diver Ed," early this month during a trip from Bar Harbor. Monat dives with a video camera and broadcasts images from below onto a screen on his boat.



Monat shows students a sea cucumber on a recent trip. "It really looks like a big, slimy blob. But in the water, it is a really graceful and amazing thing," he says.

#### SEE AND HEAR MORE

[Dive-In Theater](#)

#### ABOUT BOAT TOURS

COASTAL BOAT TOURS along the Maine coast can be found from Kennebunkport to near Calais. Many can be found at [www.visitmaine.com/organization/search/activity/](http://www.visitmaine.com/organization/search/activity/) by searching for boat tours.

FOR A LIST of those around Mount Desert Island, go to [www.acadiamagic.com/activities.html#boats](http://www.acadiamagic.com/activities.html#boats).

TO LEARN MORE about the Dive-In Theater, go to

[www.divered.com](http://www.divered.com), or call 288-3483.

But the touch tanks didn't achieve what Monat was after: the ability to show people ocean creatures in their natural environment.

After Monat bought his tour boat eight years ago, he began revealing the hidden world below Mount Desert Island.

The educational purpose of Monat's tour is similar to the other coastal tours in Maine. It's just that the journey is different.

#### A SEA STAR IS BORN

On a recent tour with first- and second-graders from Asa Adams Elementary School in Orono, Monat turned the boat out to sea with no set destination.

The tour boat for the Dive-In Theater always takes passengers off the coast of Mount Desert Island, always around the

Porcupine islands, but never to the same spot.

"He just anchors anywhere. We don't have any sites. He likes it better not knowing," said Richard "Deckhand Dick" Sassaman.

Once the boat has reached a calm area, Martin-Monat anchors, and Monat suits up in his dry suit with the special face mask.

If the boat is carrying children, the show may well begin with sarcasm and silliness.

"There is a lot of air squeezed into this air tank," Monat explained to the grade schoolers a week ago.

"If you pop a car tire, it will scare you. If you pop an air tank, you will go through a concrete building. I am going to strap this air tank on my back now."

After a young passenger pushes the comedic diver into the bay, Monat dives some 50 feet to the bottom.

Once there, Martin-Monat lowers down his camera.

Diver Ed's journey is then broadcast back onto a movie screen on the boat.

As he finds and shows his audience the sea critters below -- various sea stars and crabs -- Monat places some in a net bag.

Martin-Monat reassures the audience the creatures are safe.

"You would think they fight in the bag. But they don't," she says.

You also would think it would be enough to show these pink, purple and red critters, but instead, Monat creates a plot around them.

#### CREATURE FEATURE

As Monat walks along the ocean bottom, showing it on camera, he is on an adventure where, at any turn, he may be bullied by sea creatures.

Monat is not frightened, for he has his loyal scuba companion, whom he introduces on camera.

Mini Ed is a 3-inch-tall, scuba-suited action figure.

The fish-sized scuba diver proves valuable when a lobster

"jumps" Monat.

Mini Ed (moved by Monat) goes in swinging, and the children on the boat cheer as they watch the small plastic scuba diver chase the creature away.

When Mini Ed faces off with a second lobster, and the jostle ends with the lobster going into the net bag, the children burst into applause.

"Two battles. That's unheard of," Monat exclaims in mock seriousness.

Meanwhile, Martin-Monat, serving as commentator on deck, is speechless.

"It is silly," Martin-Monat said. "And he does incorporate it into every show."

However, this ridiculous act is not without a message.

Monat's cartoon-like companion also exhibits great compassion, kissing the beautiful sea star and even the less-than-lovely clam.

"That was gross," Monat said.

Finally, when Monat has collected a variety of sea creatures, he brings them up to the boat, where he sheds his scuba suit -- as well as the superhero in him.

Back on deck in a T-shirt and jeans, Monat turns the spotlight on the sea creatures, which are lifted from the net bag and placed in a tub of saltwater.

One by one, Monat explains how each creature survives in the ocean. He holds and treats each animals with great respect, while asking his audience to do the same.

"All these animals are alive. You need to be very gentle. No poking, hitting or chewing of the sea creature. Promise?" Monat asks.

And as children fan out across the boat's deck gently carrying sea stars and crawling crabs, Monat's dream of connecting them to the ocean, in their hearts as well as their minds, comes to life.

"We're trying to teach about sea creatures, how they fit into the ecosystem," Monat said. "Take a sea cucumber. It really looks like a big, slimy blob. But in the water, it is a really graceful and amazing thing."

Staff Writer Deirdre Fleming can be contacted at 791-6452 or at:

dfleming@pressherald.com

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[<< back to story >>](#)