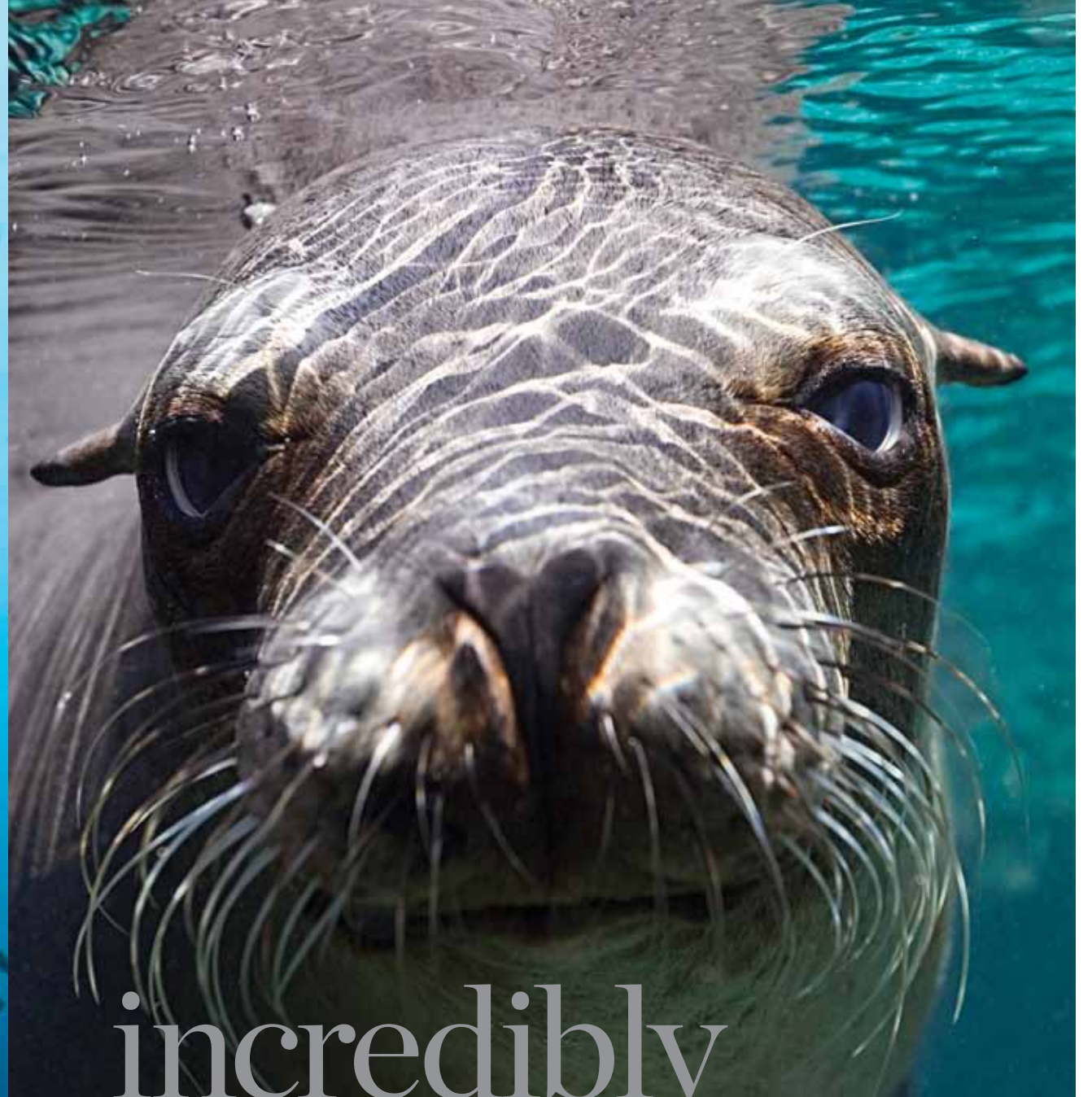


# extremely **BIG** &



BRANDON COLE (2)



# incredibly **CLOSE**

BY DAVID ESPINOSA



The Galapagos is one of those bucket-list destinations you dream about. At least I did — for more than 20 years. But the reality of the Galapagos is far more impressive than our dreams. Hammerhead sharks? The schools of these beautiful fish are a sensory overload impossible to capture in words or photographs. And yet what's

most inspiring about diving in the Galapagos is the mass of big animals — the hammerheads, sea lions, whale sharks and mola mola — that get up close and personal. (In some cases, it seems as if they crave the attention.) Big fish, close encounters — with all these reasons to go, it's time to turn this electrifying destination into reality.



Overleaf, from left: Scalloped hammerheads; Galapagos sea lion; this page: Galapagos sea lion at Cousins Rock.

# 1 Cousins Rock

You could be excused for jumping in at Cousins Rock, and thinking you'd died and gone to heaven. Massive schools of barracuda form tornadoes in the current just off the rock, which can be circumnavigated in two dives (if you're feeling particularly energetic). Moray eels swim between

bushes of black coral, and black-blotched sting-rays find cover on the sand. More important, Cousins is your introduction to Galapagos sea lions, which dive-bomb past you at reckless speeds. You could be excused for wanting to stay here the entire week. But the best is yet to come.

## LIVE IT

### → GALAPAGOS SKY

This 100-foot, 16-passenger boat features four decks, including a magnificent third deck that has four staterooms with massive windows offering panoramic views. [CONTACT galapagosky.com](http://CONTACT.galapagosky.com)

### → GALAPAGOS AGGRESSOR I & II

The longest continuous-running operator in the Galapagos (since 1993), *Galapagos Aggressor I & II* deluxe diving yachts have seven staterooms and room for 14 passengers each. [CONTACT aggressor.com](http://CONTACT.aggressor.com)

