



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

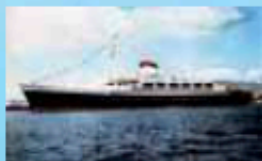
ADVENTURE

DREAM IT. PLAN IT. DO IT.

NOW OR NEVER

LAST CALL FOR DIVING'S GREATEST PRIZE?

BY BRENDAN SPIEGEL



The *Andrea Doria* shipwreck will never have its own Travel Channel special. A visitor finds no reefs thronged with colorful sea creatures, no bikini-clad sirens frolicking in warm aquamarine water. But what the *Doria* does have is mystique. Its reputation as the Mount Everest of scuba diving dates back to a foggy evening in 1956, when the

700-foot Italian luxury liner collided with another ship, killing 51 people and sending the *Doria* to the ocean floor, 250 feet beneath the notoriously turbulent waters that swirl a hundred miles off the eastern tip of Long Island. Worldwide media coverage quickly drew undersea adventurers. Those who reached the *Doria* in its early days surfaced with tales of a site that looked every bit the part of a romantic Hollywood shipwreck. The liner became a must-do for serious technical divers, even as new technology made deeper wrecks accessible—and as the *Doria* claimed the lives of 15 victims over the years. Now, with the boat breaking down and new points of entry opening up, divers are drawn by the chance to enter previously blocked compartments, and by the knowledge that each season may be the *Doria*'s last. "It's just a matter of time before she implodes," says Richie Kohler, who has dived the *Doria* 126 times and leads expeditions there. "For divers who have been waiting until they got more vacation dollars saved up, well, I'd say it's now or maybe never."

1 If natural deterioration progressed this winter as expected, the cargo holds—said to be laden with the stuff of scuba lore, like jewels and 50-year-old bottles of whiskey—may be open to divers for the first time.

2 Another never-before-seen feature that divers hope to glimpse this summer is the *Doria*'s engine room. Up until now, access has been blocked by the ship's steel hull, which is splitting.

3 When divers emerge from the *Doria*—usually out of Gimbel's Hole—they face strong, unpredictable currents capable of sweeping them miles away from their boats.

4 Scoring china from the vestiges of the first-class dining room is a major coup. But souvenir hunting can be deadly. "We'd risk our lives to find the saucer that matched a teacup," Kohler says.

