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B lue



Letter from the Editor

Lucky number seven...it's superb to see **BLUE** magazine in print and available throughout the whole of Egypt for the very first time after six successful issues online. **BLUE** magazine is Egypt's only printed magazine dedicated to diving and watersports in the Red Sea. A warm welcome to all our new print readers.

To celebrate, we have packed even more into the magazine with the help of our excellent team of contributors, who include wreck expert John Kean; compact camera aficionado Maria Munn; highly respected doctors Dr Adel Taher and Dr Anke Fabian; technical diving guru Cath Bates; experienced guide and marine biology enthusiast Chris Gooda; multi-award winning photographers Alex Mustard and Jane Morgan; plus many more. For those new to **BLUE**, all previous issues of the magazine are available free to download or read online at www.cdws.travel/blue-magazine.aspx.

In this special printed launch issue – also available this year at industry shows DIVE 2010 in the UK and DEMA in the USA – well-known underwater photographer Alex Mustard, whose image dons our front cover this month, shares the best of his Red Sea photographs. His stunning shots celebrate the wonders found underwater across the entire stretch of Egypt's Red Sea coast, see pages 24 to 35.

Available free, **BLUE** covers a whole raft of subjects for both watersports professionals resident here in Egypt as well as our many visitors. Each issue, available every two months, is packed with well-informed and interesting features by our team of writers, covering all aspects of diving in the Red Sea and the many activities in resorts available for non-divers. Sharing the latest industry news locally and nationally, we also regularly report on the important work being done throughout our active community to protect our environment.

This is very much your magazine and we are keen to have your input. If you have any interesting stories, pictures or just want to share your views, drops us a line at blue@cdws.travel. A Sevenths T-shirt is available to the writer of the best letter each issue. For budding writers among you, there's an underwater camera system up for grabs for the winner of the My Best Red Sea Dive article competition, sponsored by Cameras Underwater. Check out page 50 for details.

As an active Red Sea diver since 2001 and now a resident, I am delighted to be part of a magazine that is dedicated to this special part of the world. I've had some of my best underwater experiences here over the years, from thrilling dives with schools of hammerhead sharks, dolphins, sunfish, manta rays, whale sharks to the more chilled out encounters with macro critters such as seahorses and the plethora of wrecks peppered around these shores. And, I look forward to many more in the very near future.

So, I shall not keep you any longer from diving right into **BLUE**...we hope you enjoy.

Charlotte

Charlotte Boan

Editor, **BLUE**

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Front cover image: Alex Mustard



Letter from the Managing Director

Dear readers,

As a community, we all share the responsibility of protecting the marine environment and natural resources. CDWS appreciates the feedback and information we get from our members about violations in the industry and the reports about actions that threaten the marine environment.

We take all of these reports seriously. We look at every report of violations and misconduct in a fair and thorough way. If proven, the report is sent to the CDWS board with recommendations for penalties and actions to be taken. We have a penalty list where we are able to take action against particular violations within the diving and watersports community, including certain practises which harm the marine environment.

Action is taken. For example, CDWS suspended a snorkel guide for three months this year after he was found guilty of harassing a pufferfish. CDWS took into account the professional's apparent lack of awareness and also insisted he attend talks about the environment at the national park offices. Our work to educate workers within this industry about the environment is also part of a preventative measures CDWS is taking to tackle these problems.

It is not always possible to prove violations. However, since the CDWS was established in 2008, we have investigated 334 cases of accidents, violations, and complaints of which were 13 environmental violations. Of the 13 violations, we have had cases proven and action taken in 11 cases.

We are also grateful to those in the industry who report marine environment violations committed outside our industry. CDWS members have been nominated on a shortlist for environmental awards presented by the Egyptian Tourist Federation. These include safari boat members Eldabaran and Royal Evolution which pulled more than 11km of hooked lines that potentially would have killed many Red Sea sharks. The vessels, which operate in the southern Egyptian Red Sea also uncovered evidence that fishing vessels were using dolphin and juvenile shark meat as bait.

Owner of Sharks Bay Umbi Diving Village in Sharm el Sheikh, Umbarak Hemid Sobih, has also been shortlisted for campaigning to authorities to combat illegal fishing around Tiran Island. This resulted in the successful prosecution of people illegally fishing in the area.

If we are to continue to push to protect our precious marine environment the diving and watersports community, as stakeholders, need to work together to ensure violators are brought to justice. As divers and watersports professionals, we are the eyes and ears of the marine environment.

To report violations you can email office@cdws.travel

Happy and safe diving

Zeyad ElBassel

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Dr Adel Taher

Dr Adel Taher, 54, is one of the most respected and well-liked characters in the Egyptian diving industry. A world renowned diving medical specialist, Dr Adel runs the Hyperbaric Medical Center in Sharm el Sheikh and Dahab and also gives talks around the world. A diver since the age of nine, he has logged more than 17,500 dives, mostly in the waters around the South Sinai. He grew up surrounded by the ocean with a marine biologist as a father and knew at an early age he wanted to study diving medicine. As one of the first people to explore the underwater sites of Ras Mohammed, he remembers the days when divers reached sites by jeep or with the help of Bedouin fishermen. Dr Adel made Sharm his home in the early 1980s and opened the medical centre in 1993. Many thousands of divers have been successfully treated by him and his team. His chamber has not closed its doors once, despite being funded entirely by voluntary donations from divers and dive centres.



Alex Mustard

Alex Mustard first tried his hand at underwater photography at the age of nine. The 35-year-old has worked at improving his technique since and is now considered as one of the world's leading underwater photographers. His work has seen him win many awards, including a famous shot of Bohar snapper taken in the Red Sea's Ras Mohammed National Park which won the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition and an audience with the Queen of England. A marine biologist, Alex has always had a fascination for the Red Sea and returns each year to run courses and expand his underwater portfolio of this part of the world. Many of his Red Sea shots have featured in books and magazines, including the acclaimed *The Art of Diving and Dive the Red Sea: The Ultimate Guide*. In this special launch issue, Alex shares some of his best ever images taken in the Egyptian Red Sea, see pages 24 through to 35.





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Call for ban on dolphin captivity

The Red Sea community is calling for a complete ban on dolphin captivity in Egypt, after it was revealed four dolphins were shipped from Japan to a residential-sized swimming pool of a villa in Hurghada. When conservation group Hurghada Environmental Protection Association (HEPCA) visited the site in September and reported back on the conditions the dolphins were being held (see the Special Report), it caused outrage throughout the Red Sea community and around the world.

HEPCA, supported by a number of conservation groups, is working on relocating the dolphins to a more suitably sized pool (as BLUE went to press). As these dolphins are not native to Egypt, experts say releasing them back into the wild is not a viable option.

The dolphins are believed to have been imported from Japan, where it is common practice to capture mammals for aquaria during hunts. This cruel activity was famously exposed in the 2009 high profile film, *The Cove* (www.thecovemovie.com).

Dolphin drive hunts can take hours, and sometimes days, causing prolonged distress as the pod adults try to protect their young and themselves. Once trapped near the shore, the remaining dolphins not taken for aquaria are surrounded by nets, where they either suffocate, injure themselves in a panic to escape or are slaughtered by hunters.

Conservation groups, such as the UK-based Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS), say such hunts are being fuelled by an increased demand for dolphins in aquaria.

Egypt's Chamber of Diving and Watersports (CDWS) said it applauds and supports fully the work of HEPCA in its action in Hurghada. CDWS chairman Hesham Gabr has been in close contact with HEPCA's managing director Amr Ali and together they are working to change the situation in Egypt with regards to dolphins in captivity.

HEPCA has already successfully lobbied for the Red Sea Governor to issue a decree banning the import of wild dolphins and CDWS has begun work towards a similar agreement within the South Sinai Governorate.

Expressing his views that the tourism industry should not be supporting this trade, particularly in a country famed for encounters with such creatures in the wild, Mr Gabr has personally written to CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species) about the rules of importation and has met with the Minister of Tourism about lobbying the government to implement strict laws for dolphinariums.

'This situation in Hurghada has raised questions about who is responsible for allowing dolphinariums in Egypt,' Mr Gabr told BLUE.



'Together with HEPCA, we are in the process of looking at: how these four dolphins ended up here; what are the rules, if any, about dolphinariums; who is responsible for ensuring laws are adhered to; what can be done about this situation; and finally what can be done across Egypt. We support and appreciate the effort of HEPCA in this matter. During discussions with Amr Ali, we both agreed we need to look at the chances of succeeding in changing the law.

'It is CDWS's position that dolphins from the wild should not be allowed to be in captivity for entertainment. Dolphins should live in the wild, however, after speaking with the government a complete ban at this stage remains unlikely, as it is argued that dolphinariums are allowed in other countries around Europe and the rest of the world, including the USA.

'So as a first step, HEPCA and CDWS are together lobbying the Minister of Environment to implement strict regulations with regards to the conditions in which dolphins are allowed to be held. These include space, condition of the water and regulations about the correct human resources available to look after these creatures, such as properly qualified and suitably accredited veterinarians. It is our priority to ensure the situation in Hurghada never happens again. We are requesting the freeze on new permissions for dolphinariums until these standards are in place.'

Mr Gabr added that the two bodies are currently assessing existing rules elsewhere, such as the extremely high level of standards in place in Brazil.

This recent incident is not the first time dolphin captivity within Egypt has sparked controversy. In 2004 it was revealed that two Arctic beluga whales had been shipped to Sharm el Sheikh's Dolphinarium.

The belugas were being kept in a pool approximately 5m in diameter and in temperatures of more than 20°C. Following a mass campaign started by the diving community the belugas were to be relocated to more suitable conditions, however, died on transportation.

HEPCA has started an online petition calling for the government to put an end to dolphin captivity in Egypt. *The petition can be signed at: www.thepetitionsite.com/16/stop-dolphin-captivity-in-Egypt/*





Special report:

The truth about the Hurghada dolphins

.....
Journalist Carole Pither from French online magazine Plongeur.com was visiting Hurghada to report on the work of the CDWS when the news of the dolphin captivity broke. In a special report for BLUE, she describes how events unfolded.

When Amr Ali, managing director of HEPCA, received a telephone call informing him that four dolphins were being kept in the swimming pool of a villa in Hurghada, he thought it was a joke.

Unfortunately, his informant was telling the truth. Amr Ali set out with some of the permanent staff of the NGO and a visiting team of dolphin experts to find the villa and see what was happening. Vague attempts at hiding the animals from public view by covering the fence with canvas sheeting only made the villa more distinctive.

The animals were immediately identified as two male and two female adult *Tursiops truncatus*, bottlenose dolphins measuring between 2 and 3 metres long. The pool measured 9 square metres and was alleged to be 4m-deep – a fact that the turbidity of the water made impossible to check. The pool's filtration system was obviously unable to cope with the amount of excreta produced by four animals. One of the dolphin experts recognised signs of sunburn on one of the dolphins, and all had cloudy eyes.

The Brazilian standards for keeping dolphins in captivity are the strictest in the world. The minimum requirements for two dolphins are a pool measuring 14m in length and 6m in depth with a volume of 1600 m³. For four dolphins, the minimum volume is 2400 m³ – a long way off the 324 m³ of the Hurgada villa pool.

The employees in charge of looking after the dolphins produced documentation showing that they had been imported from Japan, but nothing specified whether they had been caught in the wild or born in captivity. Egyptian legislation requires a quarantine period of 105 days before animals can be moved, except to a larger pool. HEPCA then faced a double dilemma: the dolphins could not be set free as they are Japanese and not local, therefore considered an invasive species; if they were transported back to Japan and set free they would probably die from the trauma, if they were allowed back into the country.

It was unthinkable to leave them in such appalling conditions and after ten days of meetings and consultations, a solution was found in the form of an artificial salt lake in Sahl Hasheesh where a filtration system is being installed. HEPCA, along with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation society and Marine Connection are carrying out tests on the water in the lake and a vet is checking whether the dolphins are fit enough to be transferred.

HEPCA is hoping that public outcry will help stop dolphinaria from being built in Egypt and has launched a petition to this effect.

Another potentially embarrassing question has been asked by Hesham Gabr, chairman of CDWS in a direct letter to CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species): who gave permission for these dolphins to be imported?

No one knows how much suffering the dolphins endured on their long journey to Hurghada. Let's hope that they will never have to look at the humans who imprisoned them through the thick glass of an aquarium window.

Read Carole's report in French at www.plongeur.com.

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Shark Tales

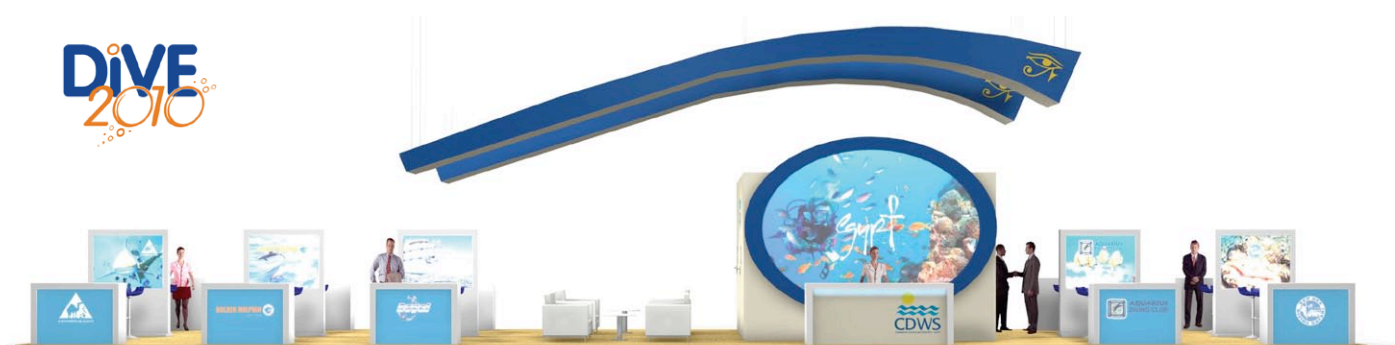
It seems 2010 is the year of good shark sightings across the Red Sea, particularly in Hurghada, where staff and guests of dive centres have reported numerous whale shark encounters. Sharks have always remained a regular feature on dives on Egypt's more remote sites; however, elasmobranch encounters have also been enjoyed regularly this summer closer to the bigger resorts, such as Sharm el Sheikh and Hurghada.

One of the most unusual sights of 2010 so far has been a close encounter with a hammerhead shark inside the Blue Hole in Dahab. In late September a group of English divers from Reef 2000, led by guide, Kamal Alsawy, were lucky to come face-to-face with the hammerhead shark on a second dive within the Blue Hole.

While the Blue Hole is famed for its depth, it is not a usual haunt for hammerheads, particularly inside the reef which is accessible only to open water through a 7m-deep saddle on the reef wall or the famous arch at a depth of between 50m and 130m.

Alsawy said the creature had come from depth and stayed around them at 10m for about a minute before cruising over the saddle area and returning to open water. 'It was amazing, really amazing,' he said. 'We were the only ones who saw it. The only shame was we were not able to get a photograph.'

So with 2009 clearly a good year for manta ray encounters and 2010 for sharks, are we putting bets on 2011 as the year of the dolphin?



CDWS at UK dive show

CDWS members will be on-hand to answer questions and promote Red Sea diving at the UK DIVE 2010 show held at the NEC in Birmingham on 30 and 31 October. The impressive new open stand, designed by UK builders Dimension Group, will have its first showing at the NEC before appearing at shows across Europe, including France, Germany and London.

Show partners for the DIVE 2010 exhibiting include: Camel Dive Club, Sea Queen Fleet, Orca Dive Club, Divers United, Ocean College, Sharks Bay, Nesima Resort and Golden Dolphin Safari World.

Visitors will be able to pick up a free copy of BLUE magazine on the CDWS stand, as well as a funky new style cotton bag.

The CDWS will be running a visitor survey on divers opinions on the Red Sea with a prize of a dive holiday to the popular Egyptian resort of Sharm el Sheikh courtesy of Thomson, Ocean College and Ocean Club Hotel.

All marketing, including the promotion of diving tourism, by CDWS is fully funded and supported by the Egyptian Tourist Authority.

www.diveshows.co.uk

New chamber opens



DECO International opened its new recompression chamber at Port Ghalib hospital at the beginning of September. The modern hospital has a team of diving medical specialists, offering 24-hour emergency care.

The new chamber, close to Marsa Alam airport, is the fifth DECO chamber to open in Egypt, with its other facilities operating in Dahab, El Gouna, Safaga and Hamata. The non-profit organisation also offers free healthcare service to all Egyptian and Bedouin locals.

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HEPCA: call for bag ban

The Hurghada Environmental Conservation Association (HEPCA) has stepped up its campaign against plastic bags by targeting one of Egypt's leading supermarket chains. Despite a ban being introduced in the Red Sea and South Sinai Governorate, supermarkets and smaller shops are still supplying plastic bags to customers.

HEPCA is calling on supermarket chain Metro to follow the ban throughout its stores. Metro, it said should lead the way in offering reusable tote bags as an alternative to plastic.

'In 2005, it is estimated that the cause of death of 70 percent of the deceased turtles in the Red Sea was ingestion of plastic. Plastic bags smother corals, entangle seabirds, and choke marine mammals, causing death at sea and on land,' HEPCA said in its statement.

'Unfortunately, one year after the passing of this decree, plastic bags are still commonly provided by reputable establishments that are known for their high standards. As being the largest supermarket chain in Egypt, Metro Market continues to provide plastic bags to its customers.'

www.hepca.com.



Freediving record

Another freediving record has fallen in the waters of the Red Sea, with freediver Jim Lawless becoming Britain's deepest 'No Limits' competitor by reaching a depth of 101m. He is the first British freediver to break the magic 100m-mark.

He set the record on Saturday 28 August in a dive which took two minutes and seven seconds. No Limits freediving is a record discipline by which the athlete is allowed to use any means to descend and ascend to the surface.

Lawless said after breaking the record: 'I have been freediving for years but decided to train for a record when my 13-year-old daughter became seriously ill earlier this year. The dive is raising money for the children's medical charity Sparks. Seeing how brave my daughter was when facing her illness was what made me decide to go for it. When I rang her with the news tonight she was speechless – which is very rare.'

The dive was overseen by two judges from the international freediving governing body AIDA with Marco Nones taking the lead and it took place at the Only One Apnea Centre in Sharm El Sheikh. Jim was coached for the event by the leading Swiss freediver Andrea Zuccari, instructor at Only One Apnea.

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Governor enjoys underwater view

Tornado Marine Fleet showed the underwater world of Ras Mohammed National Park to the Governor of South Sinai, General Mohammed Abd ELFadeel Shosha, and dignitaries on board the new cruising vessel Nautilus in early September. The guests boarded the luxurious cruise catamaran in the late afternoon, and were shown the wonders of the Red Sea in Neptune's View the underwater viewing lounge and enjoy a buffet for Iftar (breakfast meal during Ramadan).



www.nautiluscatamaran.com.

Five star rating for Anthias

Anthias Divers in Naama Bay, Sharm el Shiekh has just announced its new status as a PADI Five Star Centre. Under PADI standards a dive centre must meet 'elevated service and business standards' as well as actively promote underwater environmental awareness.



www.anthiasdivers.com.

Wedding bubbles

The Caynon dive site in Dahab was the chosen venue of the underwater marriage ceremony of divers Roxana and Stendert from Holland. The pair wanted to renew vows underwater following an official traditional service in Europe a few weeks prior to their arrival in Egypt in late September.

Nesima Resort hosted the whole ceremony after discussing what it could offer the happy couple on the CDWS stand at the Boot Show in Dusseldorf in January. All the immediate family joined them on the diving honeymoon, with the non-divers donning snorkels and masks to watch the scuba wedding from the surface.

www.nesima-resort.com.





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Eco-friendly wild dolphin trips

Following on from the call of Egypt to ban dolphin captivity, Emperor Dive Tribe El Gouna has introduced a new trip for visitors to see these magnificent mammals in their natural habitat. The centres fast boat takes snorkellers to Shaab El Erg, which is also known as Dolphin House, to swim with dolphins under the supervision of qualified guides.

The dolphin trip is one of two new Emperor Dive Tribe boat trips, which include a sunset luxury cruise on a motor sailing catamaran.

www.emperordivers.com.



Dance for Earth

Divers in Sharm el Sheikh went back to the colourful fashions of the 80s to raise more than 1,000 Euros (8,200 Egyptian Pounds) for marine charity Project AWARE. The Dance for Earth Party, held at Ultima Spiaggia Beach on 23 September, saw a fantastic array of party outfits, including lookalikes from Madonna to the whole collection of Village People.

An event created and organised by Red Sea Diving College, the party was also supported by other Sharm centres, including Camel Dive Club, Anthias Divers, Oonas Dive Club, Ocean College, Colona and Sinai Divers. The owner of Fernando's Italian Restaurant organised the beach venue and also personally donated a generous amount of money to add to the funds raised from entrance fees.

Sharm's popular resident DJ Disco Dave (AKA Dave Healey) once again gave his time to the cause by keeping everyone on the dance floor until the early hours of the morning with his 80s tunes. The night followed on from the successful 70s themed event held in April to raise money for the charity and coincide with the 40th anniversary of Earth Day.



Event organizer Vicki Jarman of Red Sea Diving College said: 'It was a stupendous night, spirits were high but more importantly it was great to see divers from all over this ever-expanding dive resort join together to show a strong sense of community spirit and a sustained passion for protecting the seas and reefs.'

Project AWARE is said it is delighted with the donation, which will go towards a series important marine conservation projects.

The Dance for Earth team is currently planning another party following the success of the last two fancy dress events. 'A theme is yet to be decided: 90s, pop and rock, schools days and easy cheesy have been some of the suggestions so far,' added Jarman. 'We're open to ideas.'



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Work permit ratio exception renewed

CDWS has successfully managed to secure a further extension to the special ratio allowance for the diving sector to obtain work permits for foreign employees. General Egyptian employment law stipulates that the number of work permits should not exceed of the ratio of one foreign worker per every ten Egyptian employees registered in the company's social insurance records. However, CDWS has once again negotiated with the Ministry of Labor to grant exemption for CDWS members from this ratio, which means three work permits for every ten Egyptian employees socially insured with a CDWS member company. This exemption has been extended for a further 12 months.



CDWS chairman Hesham Gabr personally met with the Minister of Labor in Cairo at the beginning of September to request the extension. 'This was a conditional agreement,' Mr Gabr explained. 'It has been agreed that the diving sector will make a tangible effort in training Egyptian nationals to be able to work in the industry. We are currently developing a number of plans to do this.'

For more information about work permits for CDWS member operations, email: sinai.membership@cdws.travel.

Safari boat training deadline

The Egyptian Authority for Maritime Safety has officially agreed to the CDWS request to extend the deadline for the training of crew members of coastal licensed boats. Training is a legal requirement to obtain the Egyptian Authority for Maritime Safety licenses. The deadline has now been set at 31 December 2010.

CDWS urges coastal licensed safari boats to ensure that crew members are trained and licensed by the Maritime authorities before the end of the year.

Early audits for 2011

CDWS has invited all members to apply for the early re-audit for the MoT license renewal for 2011 according to the timetable below:

Diving centres in South Sinai and Cairo:	from 15 September 2010
Diving centres in Red Sea and Alexandria:	from 1 December 2010
Watersports centres:	from 3 April 2011
Safari boats:	from 2 January 2011

'This special CDWS service will help you get the audit done early and be able to renew your CDWS membership, obtain the Technical Validity Certificate and renew the MoT license prior to its expiry date and in time without delay,' said CDWS managing director Zeyad M ELBassel.

In addition, diving centres and water sports centres may be granted a license from the MoT valid for three years if the operation fulfills the requirements.

Members are requested to apply - using the audit request form - via email, fax or letter to CDWS for the early re-audit appointment.

More information:

For operations in South Sinai Gov. and Cairo email: sinai.tec@cdws.travel

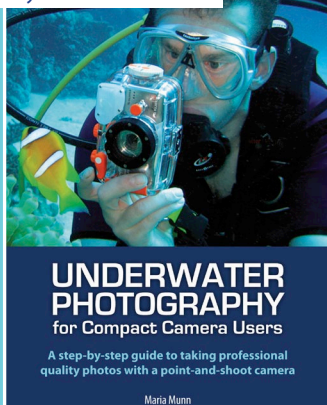
For operations in Red Sea Gov. and Alex email: redsea.tec@cdws.travel

The official application form for CDWS members to request an audit/ inspection has been updated. For a copy of this new form or for more information email Marawan Ismail on: sinai.membership@cdws.travel



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Member audit feedback

All CDWS members have been requested to complete evaluation forms following audits to gain greater feedback from operations.

CDWS managing director Zeyad M ELBassel said: 'As part of the CDWS commitment to self regulate the industry according to the highest international standards, it is important we receive feedback from our members on all aspects of our services. One of the most important areas is the operation auditing process.'

Mr ELBassel has requested that all forms should be sent directly to him by fax or email for his personal review.

'Ensuring the highest and clearest standards proves our ability to self regulate our industry as well as promote our operations and destinations within international markets,' he added. 'Your feedback is highly appreciated. It will help us in our continuous effort to improve our services.'



New iPhone app for CDWS

As part of the CDWS marketing campaign funded in full by the Egyptian Tourist Authority, a new mobile web application is being developed for the iPhone to allow consumers to search for member operations.



It will be possible for consumers to download the application for their mobile smart phone and it will provide useful information on dive sites (including maps), dive resorts and a full list of CDWS members (show on maps) with links directly to operation websites.

CDWS ID card requirement change

CDWS has announced that ID cards applications for 2011 for diving and snorkeling professionals will be accepted starting from Sunday the 1 November 2010. All those who successfully passed the exam in 2010 on the first attempt are eligible to apply.

All new applicants, with the exception of technical managers, instructor trainers and course directors, are required to successfully pass the evaluation exam first to obtain the CDWS ID card. New applicants are also required to produce an education certificate which shows a level of high school diploma or equivalent. The CDWS board said the decision to require proof of high school education was part of a commitment to ensure high standards of professionalism within the industry.

Renewal applicants who did not pass the 2010 evaluation exam from the first time are also required to successfully pass the evaluation exam for 2011 before applying for the card.

The new exam is available in Arabic, English, French, Italian, German, Russian, Spanish, Polish, Hungarian, Japanese and Korean languages.



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See www.cdws.travel for a list of legal diving operators in Egypt's Red Sea



www.cdws.travel

Image: Kimmo Hagman

Diver tracking system

The deadline for the legal requirement for all safari boats to use approved diver tracking systems in remote Red Sea sites is set to be extended to allow for more products to undergo tests. The CDWS technical team is currently testing a number of systems from manufactures including SeaSafe, Sea Marshall and Nautilus. However, problems with manufacturers meeting demand, combined with the length of the testing procedures has led the CDWS board to consider an extension of the original deadline of 1 January 2011.



'We want systems to be able to be ready to be on boats and functioning to the highest standards, so it is likely we will have to extend this deadline. Members will be informed once a new date has been set,' explained CDWS managing director Zeyad M ELBassel.

New head of CDWS Hurgada branch



CDWS board member Mr Ashraf Saleh has been appointed as the new chairman of the Hurgada branch. Mr Saleh has extensive experience in the dive and watersport industry in the Red Sea.

New training courses for 2011

CDWS is set to announce a full programme of training courses to be run throughout 2011 as part of its commitment to raise standards throughout the industry. The CDWS training team has been evaluating the various areas in which there are training gaps, and is developing a series of courses which will either be fully or part subsidised.

Employment areas being looked at include dive boat skippers, drivers, cylinder inspection and filling technicians and tourist entity management staff.

Many of the courses for non-diving staff will include life saving and first aid training and environmental awareness education. The CDWS is currently in discussion with a number of organisations, including the Royal Lifesaving Guards in the UK to develop the programmes.

The Egyptian Tourism Federation will manage the process of part or fully subsidising the training schemes.

CDWS and has already run a number of fully CDWS sponsored courses in areas, such as snorkel guide training. In 2010 CDWS member operations applied for snorkel guide training for Egyptian staff, which totalled 50 in the Red Sea governorate and 50 in South Sinai. All the candidates who successfully passed the course are now employed in the sector.



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Dive the Deep South like never before



Red Sea shines for worldwide marine environment day



Dive centres from all over the Egyptian Red Sea removed environmentally damaging waste from underwater sites and beaches as part of Project AWARE International Cleanup Day on 25 September. This included a mass clean up of Naama Jetty by volunteer centres in Sharm el Sheikh in an event supported and organised by the CDWS.

More than two tonnes of bottles, plastic and dumped tyres were lifted by volunteers from Sharm-based: Red Sea Diving College, Sinai Divers, Camel Dive Club, Sinai Scuba, Cali International, Coral Dive Club and Emperor Divers while the busy jetty was closed to boat traffic for three hours. The volunteers were also joined by 10-year-old Thomas Johnson, a PADI Junior Open Water Diver and son of the clean-up organiser, Laura Coppa, of the CDWS marketing department.

Red Sea Diving College teamed up with Sinai Divers to supply cylinders for volunteers. The 45 divers who took part collected more than three tonnes of rubbish in total.

Discarded glass bottles and old car and truck tyres made up the bulk of the collection, with the more unusual items including carpets and clothing. Representatives and divers from the South Sinai National Park also attended and took part with two of its boats on scene. Following the dives, park authorities removed all the rubbish to dispose of it responsibly.

To help raise awareness of the threat of waste in our seas, the CDWS invited journalists from all over Egypt to see the volunteers donating their time and effort to removing environmentally damaging waste from the jetty area.

CDWS managing director, Zeyad M ELBassel, who escorted the journalists, said it is hoped by raising the profile of this problem across the country it will bring marine environmental issues to the attention of political decision makers.

'As a diving community, it is our responsibility to work together to do



what we can to protect the marine environment,' he said. 'Without preserving this wonderful environment, we would have no diving and watersports industry. It's in all our interests and that's why it is important to get the message out across to as many people as possible, in particular non-divers who are not as aware.'

The journalists flew to Hurghada on the second day to join members of the diving community and conservation group HEPCA to see similar events running there (reports from HEPCA on how much was collected during this event were yet to be made available at the time BLUE went to press). On the 27 September, the delegation of reporters then attended a World Tourism Day event in Cairo. The theme of World Tourism Day was biodiversity.

The Red Sea community continues to support efforts to clean up and protect the environment and is highly active in beach and underwater clean ups, not just on International Cleanup Day.

The Hurghada and Sharm el Sheikh offices of CDWS supplied bags, gloves and scissors for collection to centres who signed up to take part in the day, with many organising individual clean ups from boats and shore throughout the entire Red Sea.

Waste, particularly plastic, is a major environmental threat to the ocean worldwide. For general information on International Cleanup Day, see the PADI Project AWARE website: <http://www.projectaware.org/forms/cleanup.php>

Other CDWS members who signed up for the clean up day included: Hurghada-based Aquarius Diving Club, Aquastars, Colona Divers, Pirates Diving Network, Dive-Point and Jasmin Dive Centre; El Gouna-based Green Gouna; Marsa Alam based Red Sea Diving Safari; Abu Soma-based Barakuda; Sharm-based Anar Dive Centre, Scuba Divers Red Sea, Colona Divers; Dahab-based Penguin Divers, Fantasea, Fish & Friends, Dahab Divers, Dive Oceans and Nesima Dive Centre; and safari boats operated by Sea Queen Fleet and blue o two.

BLUE magazine received the following reports sent in by CDWS members:



Two blue o two operated safari boats organised clean ups in the Red Sea. Eight guests on board MY Blue Melody collected from Marsa Shuna about 5 kg of rubbish, including metal, glass, fishing lines, parts of an outboard engine and a speaker. The majority of the 22 guests on MY Blue Fin collected 10kg of rubbish in total, mainly plastic and glass, from Gota Shaab in Marsa Alam.



As Founding member of HEPCA the **Jasmin Diving Sports Center** is always happy to help in special events to protect the underwater world. It collected more than 700kg during shore dives from Grand Seas Resort in Hurghada, Giftun Islands, Abu Ramada and Magawish Island. Every volunteer took part in a tombola and the winner got a voucher for a diving specialty-course of his choice.



Sea Queen Fleet launched its new ongoing initiative to clean up the Red Sea in September to coincide with the clean up day. It has started to give every diver on its safari boats a mesh garbage bag to collect rubbish from the sea. To encourage and reward guests who take part it will award a prize to the biggest garbage collector from each trip.

Anar Dive Centre in Sharm collected six bags of rubbish from the beach at Royal Paradise and underwater at Paradise Reef.



Guests and staff at **Scuba Divers Red Sea** in Sharm collected four large bags of rubbish from its house reef, including a large metal sheet.



Barrakuda Diving staff and guests collected a staggering 300kg of rubbish from Tobia Island in Abu Soma. This rubbish was then

the handed in to local snorkel business, which Barakuda claims is responsible for allowing guests to dump most of the rubbish found. The divers said there were a lot of empty glass bottles, which are worth money to recycle. Other items included plastic and clothing items.

More than just a dive centre...



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Two staff members of **Nesima Dive Center** in Dahab took time out on International Cleanup Day to personally collect rubbish from the resorts house reef. Maxim and Tianna collected mostly dumped plastic.



Ilios Diving Club, which also took part in the HEPCA-organised event, filled ten large bags with rubbish collected by staff and guests on board the Al Dau II who were diving at Gota Abu Ramada. The centre said it was less garbage than expected which was good news, but pointed out that even one piece of rubbish was still too much in our seas.



Aquarius Diving Club enlisted the help of 120 divers with 30 members of staff and six boats to ensure it would make an impact on International Cleanup Day. 'We collected an extraordinary amount of junk, litter and remnants of a boat or two,' said an Aquarius Diving Club spokesperson. 'All in all 80 bags of rubbish was cleared collectively by the 4 Aquarius centers located in Hurghada. We sent our volunteers to Gota Abu Ramada, Citadel house reef, Shaab el Erg and Shaab Saiman.'



Fantasea Divers organised a beach clean, with the assistance of other centres, businesses in Dahab as well as Dahab City's council waste disposal department. The Fantasea staff team was also joined by Coral Coast Hotel staff and guests, Fish & Friends Dive Centre, Dahab Divers, Dive Oceans, freelance instructor Mohammed Abdullah and local hairdresser Sharon Trinder. Approximately 60kgs of waste was collected along a stretch of beach in Dahab, mostly made up of cigarette butts, plastic bottles, bottle tops & plastic bags, disposed of by Dahab City Council waste disposal department.



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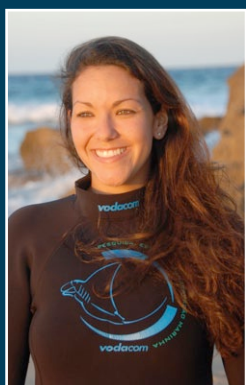


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Photo: Marine Megafauna Foundation

DECO STOP

Widely regarded as the world's leading expert on manta rays, 'Queen of Mantas' Andrea Marshall stops for a three minute chat with BLUE.



Name: Andrea Marshall

Born: 21 April 1979

Current base: manta hotspot of Tofo Beach, Southern Mozambique

Number of dives: More than 2,000 (stopped counting).

What brought you to the Red Sea?

I came here to have a look at the giant manta rays. There are not many places in the world to investigate giant mantas and I feel that the Red Sea may be an important area for them.

First time here? No, I have been diving in the Brothers Islands before, some years ago. A trip that I will always treasure, it was amazing.

What do you think of the Red Sea? It is a very dynamic place, so beautiful and unique with lots of wildlife and fabulous visibility.

Can you explain what your work involves?

I am a conservation biologist. We work to understand the threats that mantas face, uncover the biological limitations that these animals are subject to and assess the conservation status of populations on a worldwide scale.

What would you like to achieve with your work?

I am working hard just to afford these rays some protection, a reprieve from 'us'. I find this very sad. I would much rather focus on

the fun and interesting things about them. I feel they have so much to offer us and we have so much to learn from them. But being a conservation biologist is the best use of my time at the moment because unless we figure out how to protect them we have no shot at unlocking these mysteries in the future.

What's it like to be considered the world's leading manta ray expert at such a young age?

Well it is really a result of how few people are working in this field; which is sad. I do not know that I am the world expert, but I have dedicated my life to the study and protection of mantas and I hope in time there are many, many people fighting this fight with me.

What inspires you in your work?

The oceans and the animals inspire me. Without our influence they are so perfect and so balanced. I am disgusted by the state of the oceans today and I want to be part of a positive movement to change how we treat our most important resource. I live and breathe the sea, as Jaques Cousteau said, 'you protect what you love'. That is 100 per cent true. I love the sea and I have dedicated my life to studying it and protecting it. Most importantly I want to share my love and my awe of the sea with others so that they might become inspired too!

You often involve use the help of divers in your work, how can they help?

I love the idea of 'citizen science' it is a powerful research tool. Every program is different. For our work we ask people to share their images from across the world, their experiences and their observations. This has helped in such a huge way already. If people are keen to help, keep your eyes to the blue and your camera armed.

What was your first underwater experience?

I first learned to dive in Monterey, California after my twelfth birthday. I had to wait because of PADI regulations, but, on my birthday I got certified. I have always loved California diving. It is so exciting and mysterious. There is no dive like the dives in our kelp forests, they

Photo: Marine Megafauna Foundation



Photo: Andrea Marshall



are so magical and full of life. Looking back, I am also glad that I learned how to dive there in those conditions, as I believe it has made me a better diver.

What inspired you to learn to dive?

I always wanted to dive and interact with underwater animals. I mean, what more could you want as a child? However, I have to say that it was more of a who than a what, and that lady was Sylvia Earle.

Your best dive?

My best dive was in the Maldives. I was surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of mantas while filming the 'Manta Queen' and I abandoned any attempt at scientific observation or research. I just laughed and swam and played like a five year old. It was so freeing and so humbling. I have never been so blown away in 19 years of diving.

Your best career moment?

My best career moment came on the day BBC's 'Manta Queen' aired in the UK (Nov 2009) and not for the reason that people think. When I heard that 2.8 million tuned in to watch a story about mantas I felt like I opened the doors to people who might never have stopped to hear their story or learn about the future mantas might face. Hundreds and hundreds of people contacted me that night sharing their thoughts and their experiences and it was just a night

filled with such joy and hope. I really felt as a scientist that I had reached the public and I had done a tremendous service for the mantas.

What else would you like to achieve in your career?

Well I hope to afford mantas with as much protection as I can from negative human influences and create as many protected areas as possible for them. I also hope in my lifetime to inspire people to care about not just these particular creatures but the ocean itself.

If you had the chance to meet with world leaders what would you like to say to them about marine environment policy?

I think rather than say anything, I would like to have one day with them in the sea. I feel strongly that unless you experience it yourself, you cannot possibly understand the wonder of the ocean and the gravity of the situation we currently face. Two dives...two dives is all that I need.

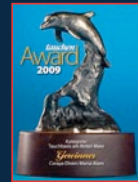
What three words best describe you?

Ambitious, hard working, and inspired.

For more information about Andrea and her work, visit her website and blog at www.marinemegafauna.org.



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Caves at St Johns

There are a number of spectacular and shallow cavern dives in the Red Sea, but I have chosen to highlight the famous caves at Umm Kharerim at St Johns in the south of Egypt. Caverns offer a unique diving experience that is completely different to the more challenging conditions typically of the offshore reefs in southern Egypt. These dives are all about staying shallow, going slow and enjoying the atmosphere and the bright Egyptian sun spears down through cracks in the ceiling into the dark caves.

The edges of the reef support shallow coral gardens and the calm conditions make these sites excellent places for fish photography. Be sure to check out the entrances of the caverns, which are a good spot to see nocturnal species such as bigeyes, soldierfish and cardinalfish.

Divers in the coral caverns of St Johns reef.

A nocturnal bigeye yawns (St Johns)



Strait Of Tiran

A male lyretail angelfish.

The Red Sea's Fab Four: Jackson, Woodhouse, Thomas and Gordon. Just mention their names and the thoughts of divers are at once transported to these classic dives in the Strait of Tiran. Their enduring appeal to both divers and snorkellers is all about location, location, location.

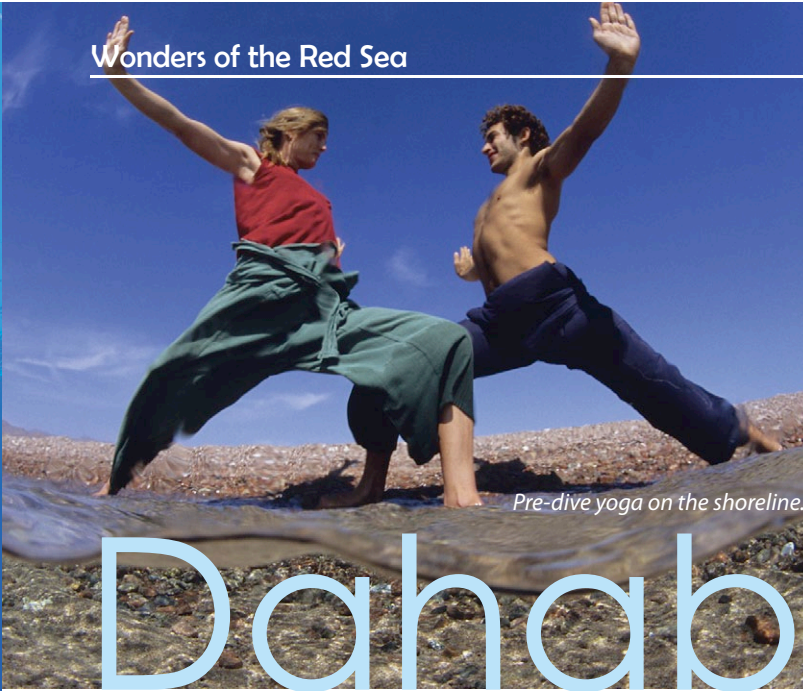
The narrow Strait of Tiran, between the Sinai coast and Tiran Island squeezes the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba, enhancing currents and sucking up nutrient rich waters from the depths. The constant food supply supercharges life leading to a particular abundance of plankton feeding species. Beautiful soft corals, impressive seafans and clouds of orange anthias pack the vertical walls, producing some of the best scenery in the Red Sea. It is also a great place to see the lyretail angelfish, which unlike the other members of its family is a plankton feeder.

But Tiran is not just about scenery. It is common to see impressive schools of fish here, hawksbill turtles are almost guaranteed and pelagics such as tuna, dolphins, and hammerhead sharks are regular sightings.



The colourful reef wall at Jackson Reef.





Pre-dive yoga on the shoreline.

Dahab

The town of Dahab, half way up the east coast of Sinai offers an alternative destination away from the lively resorts in Naama Bay and other parts of Sharm el Sheikh. The diving here is mostly from the shore and the slower pace extends underwater. Dives here are often slow bimbles, hunting for critters such as seahorses, ghost pipefish, seamoths and frogfish. Dahab is also home to the famous Blue Hole, a favourite haunt of technical divers and freedivers, although 'doing the arch' is only something for those with the appropriate training. You won't see any photos from me of what it is like down there!

The chilled pace of life in Dahab makes it a perfect destination to try yoga diving. The relaxing breathing and peaceful stretching associated with yoga have many similarities with the slower rhythm of a gentle dive. A peaceful shore dive preceded with a sun salutation and finished with a safety stop makes for a holistic scuba experience.

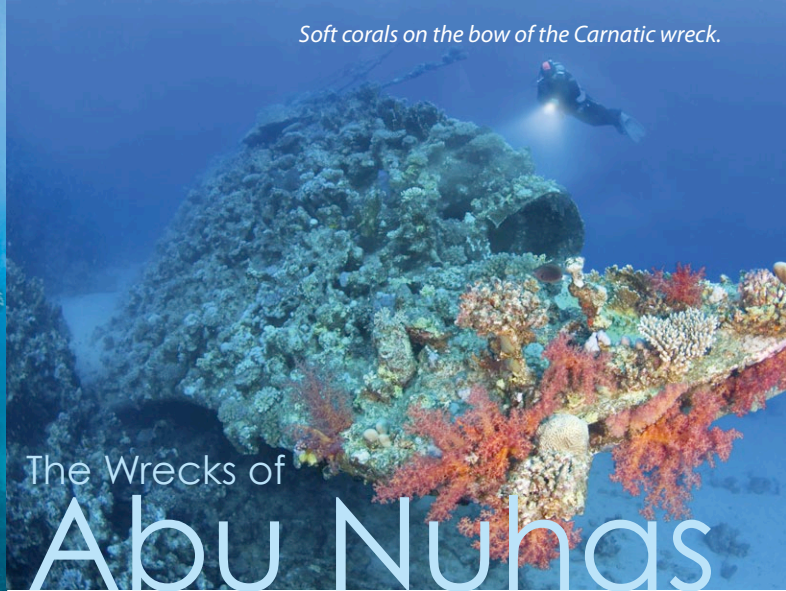


A diver enjoys a different diving experience in Dahab.

A diver photographs the stern of the Giannis D.



Soft corals on the bow of the Carnatic wreck.



The Wrecks of Abu Nuhas

The reef of Shaab Abu Nuhas juts out into the busy shipping lanes of the Strait of Gubal at the mouth of the Gulf of Suez. Over the years it has been a thorn in the side of shipping, but something of a boon for divers. For the ships it has claimed make for some of the world's best wreck dives.

The most regularly dived trio are the Giannis D, Carnatic and Chrisoula K. They are all large, impressive cargo ships, but each has a distinct character as a dive. Their size means that they can take several dives to explore thoroughly and each has a fascinating history, which adds an extra dimension to the experience.

Abu Nuhas can be visited by day boat from Hurghada and is a main feature on almost all northern itineraries for liveboards.

A diver approaches a school of snappers.

Ras Mohammed

When it is at its best, Ras Mohammed is as good as diving gets. It is my favourite dive anywhere. The true theatre of dreams is undoubtedly the signature dive of Sinai, a site that has it all, both big and small. It is a coral reef in on steroids. And Perhaps what makes its majesty all the more remarkable is that it is not remote or rarely visited. It is less than an hour's boat ride from Sharm El Sheikh.

In places the walls drop vertically to 600m and are covered in red and purple soft corals and thousands of anthias dance in the currents. There are reef fish of all kinds, but the real attractions lie out in the blue. Schools of batfish and barracuda are resident and in the summer months, large aggregations of bohar snappers and unicornfish gather here to spawn. The bohar snappers, each up to 70cm, can gather in such great numbers that if you swim into the middle of the school the world outside is obscured. You can only see walls of fish in all directions.

It is also a great location to see a fascinating behaviour called nuclear hunting. Look out for this unusually alliance of fish up on the Saddle. The catalyst is a giant moray, who quickly attracts a motley crew: bluefin trevally, Napoleon wrasse, roving groupers and lyretail groupers. As the eel slithers through the reef, the other predators surround each coral head, hoping to catch a free meal as small fish flee.



A lionfish on the reef wall.



Snorkelling with a bottlenose dolphin at sunset.



The Back Of The Boat

There are so many wonders of the Red Sea than I cannot possibly cover them all here. And often our most indelible underwater memories don't even come from dives at the most famous sites. The great thing about diving is the best encounters are often completely unexpected.

For some it can be being befriended by a curious turtle or even seeing rare nudibranch species for the first time. Often it is a lucky

encounter with a large creature, a shark or a group of dolphins making a close approach that makes for the most memorable dive of the trip.

As a photographer your favourite pictures are sometimes nothing to do with the beautiful reef you have been diving on. Sometimes it is something totally unpredictable. The only guarantee is that you need to be in the inviting waters of the Red Sea to experience it.

A young oceanic whitetip cruises beneath the boat.



One of the crew free diving



Thistlegorm Wreck

HMS Thistlegorm regularly tops the charts when divers are asked to name their favourite dive site. The combination of hulking metal and history in Sha'ab Ali always proves an irresistible attraction. Discovered by Cousteau in the 1950s, and featured in his pioneering film *The Silent World*, this dive has "world class" stamped all over it.

The Thistlegorm is a large, impressive wreck, but for most divers her attractions are mainly her cargo. As a supply ship during the Second World War, she was carrying everything from locomotives to

Wellington boots. Most famous, though, are the armoured trucks and many motorbikes in the holds. Swimming through the still water in her dark holds, exploring this museum collection illuminated with your torch is one of the great experiences in diving.

Visibility on the wreck can be variable and sometimes currents can be strong, but both during the day and night the Thistlegorm has an enduring appeal, attracting many divers every day of the year.

One of the Thistlegorm's famous motorbikes.

WATCHING THE GIRLS DIVE BY

BLUE contributor *Cath Bates* is currently the only active TDI Advanced Trimix instructor in the Middle East region. She talks to some high profile female technical divers about what inspired them to take the plunge into deeper water.

It is not over yet, but already 2010 has been an amazing year for women in technical diving. The following are just a few reasons why:

- » This year is the tenth anniversary of the Women Divers Hall of Fame: A non-profit organisation dedicated to honouring and raising awareness of outstanding women divers
- » A new book: *Women and Pressure* was published. This piece of literature celebrates females working and playing in altered barometric pressure environments and their progress in the fields of both diving and altitude
- » Female submariners will be permitted to work on UK Vanguard class submarines for the very first time in history
- » A vast number of women who have played pioneering roles in technical diving are lecturing at Eurotek, the technical diving industry's exhibition and conference in Birmingham, UK, this October
- » And, ahem... I of course have just achieved my TDI Advanced Trimix Instructor rating.

I am one of just 16 active female TDI instructors (as **BLUE** went to press) working in the Middle East today (there are 120 male) and thought this was as good a time as any to catch up with a handful of my heroines and find out which were the moments that changed their lives on their oestrogen-fuelled journeys into the unknown.



Verna Van Schaik (VVS)

On 25 October 2004 Verna van Schaik became the holder of three world records for the deepest all time, deepest cave and deepest altitude dives by a woman. The all time world record was conquered on that day with a five hour 39 minute dive to 221m at Boesmansgat cave, Northern Cape, South Africa. Verna works at technical diving facility Liquid Edge Diving in South Africa which she runs with her husband. She is also a very successful life coach and runs her own company The Exploration Academy. Her married name is Verna du Preez

Janina 'Nina' Preisner (JP)

Nina has been diving since 1991 and is a PADI and TDI instructor. Having mostly dived in the UK, she also worked as an instructor in Sharm el Sheikh for four years before returning to her legal career. Nina has dived most of the great wrecks and enjoyed the challenge of 160m dives to the stern of Ras Mohammed's Yolanda wreck, resulting in the world record for the deepest female wreck diver on open circuit scuba.



Main images: Nigel Wade



Agnes Milowka (AM)

Following a keen interest in wrecks, Agnes completed a graduate diploma in maritime archaeology at Flinders University. When tackling deep dives, the O2ptima rebreather has become her weapon of choice. These days, it is the caves, both wet and dry, that enthral her. Her exploration has taken her to the far reaches of some of the most beautiful caves in the world in Australia, the US and the Bahamas. In Australia she became one of only a handful of divers to dive to the back end of Cocklebidy Cave, the longest cave in the country. Recently she pushed through numerous sumps in order to discover in excess of 1500m of dry cave passage, in what has become the deepest cave in Australia's state of Victoria. She was also part of a National Geographic Team on a project to the Blue Holes of the Bahamas. Her other interests including underwater photography and videography.

Tooni Mahto (TM)

Most people will recognise Tooni from the BBC Oceans series. The Oceans team's scientific expeditions led them to the Arctic, Southern and Indian Oceans, the Atlantic, the Sea of Cortez, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Mahto graduated with a first class honours degree in marine biology from the University of Plymouth and a masters with Distinction in Oceanography from the University of Southampton. She is an avid conservationist and wildlife journalist, has led and scientifically coordinated expeditions and diving trips in Tanzania, Mozambique and Malawi, and is a PADI OWSI, HSE Commercial Diver, Cave diver and RIB skipper.



Who was your biggest influence in directing you into the realm of deep diving?

VVS: I started diving in 1989 at Wits Underwater Club, the same club to which current world record holder, Nuno Gomes, belonged. Watching him create teams for his journey to his cave record got me interested, even though when I first started I didn't really like diving deeper than 30m. When I finally got the experience and confidence behind me, however, I fell in love with the dark world of caves.

JP: When I went to Sharm in 2002 I met Leigh Cunningham and he was so enthusiastic about technical diving I signed up to do the TDI courses. I'd been diving since 1991 and was keen to try something new and was desperate to go deeper safely. I really enjoyed the science behind it and reading about pioneers Sheck Exley, Bret Gilliam and others. When I met Neil Black (technical instructor and wreck explorer who works for Ocean College in Sharm el Sheikh) the fun really started as we had the same diving mentality and ideas about exploring.

AM: I didn't plan to become a technical diver, it just happened. It was a natural progression to want to dive deeper. I wanted to pursue largely untouched and pristine wrecks and explore further inside extensive cave systems. I had to start playing with more advanced dive gear and mixes gasses in order to do so. I kept diving and

steadily building on my experiences and as a result I have ended up exploring the most amazing places on earth.

My first taste of cave diving came only a couple of years into my diving career. Back in 2004 a bunch of us went snorkeling over Piccaninnie Ponds, in Mt Gambier. Mt Gambier is Australia's cave country and is littered with beautiful caves and deep sinkholes. Picc is actually a large sinkhole and it eventually drops off to 125m. Up the top, however, it has a vibrant and active ecosystem, with plenty of animals like fish, eels and to my great delight, turtles. The ponds offer perfect visibility. As I snorkeled on the surface chasing some little turtle, I swam over a lip and suddenly the bottom dropped off from below me. A large shaft dropped down to 40m and there was just this darkness that beckoned. As I saw the diver ascending from the depths I thought - I want to go down there!

TM: Sadly, I have to say that the biggest influence on cave/tech diving was the idea of the challenge. I had never really been that interested in deep or technical diving, as I just fully enjoyed the experience of being in water and particularly loved diving on reefs. I had never been pushed to a new level. The challenge was presented during the filming for Oceans, when the Producers told me that Paul [Rose] was doing a cave diving course, and would I be interested in doing it as well. I do not really like enclosed spaces, particularly dark underwater ones. I had a bad experience on a school pot-holing trip where someone had freaked out in front of me and we all got stuck in the



cramped, dark tunnel. But the challenge was laid down: if Paul was doing it, I sure as hell wasn't going to miss out on the opportunity to be taught something I considered to be so far out of my field of experience! It was a huge mental challenge for me. That moment when you face the downward facing dark, narrow passageway into the underwater cave system, it gets me every time, but I felt so unutterably privileged every time I turned a corner in a cave system and was met with new sights with each sweep of the torch, and never had that sense of all over achievement and experience upon leaving a dive site. I had also been diving for many years when I did the cave diving course, and it really highlighted to me that there are always new experiences to have with diving, and I really felt like the course took me right back to being a beginner again. I felt that same sense of excitement and wonder I did on my first ever dives.

What technical achievement are you most proud of and why?

VVS: I think the dive that was the hardest was my first solo into Badgat (fresh water cave system formed out of a South African asbestos mine), in 2001. I was aiming for 145m in a decline shaft that had only been dived twice before (I was part of the first buddy team to venture in). Technically it was a challenge for a number of reasons. I had a three to four minute swim from 110m (the bottom of the main mine shaft) to reach the entrance. Then the decline itself was quite confined, with thick silt and at an angle that meant finning would reduce visibility. I had two support divers, one of whom could only get to the bottom of the shaft. That meant I was at least six minutes away from help if something went wrong and I had only the cylinders I was carrying, so gas was really limited. It took a lot of planning to ensure that I had all the risks properly identified and my gas management properly calculated. At the time doing the dive was a highly controversial decision and one that I really do not regret.

JP: Well, I think that would have to be reaching the stern of the Yolanda wreck, Red Sea, in 2007. There were many problems with the project. First, because we didn't know exactly where the wreck was (yes we had a vague idea but it wasn't as easy to find as we hoped!). Second, because trying to find a spot 160m down in the blue with currents, while wearing six to seven cylinders, isn't that easy. It would have taken too long to get there with the reef in sight, as the wreck sits quite far out. We had quite a lot of aborted dives and dives where we found nothing. However, the 'bad days' were all part of the fun too. Thankfully Chad at Ocean Tec was very supportive and generous with the gas! I owe a lot to him.

AM: Pushing out Mission Spring, a cave system in Florida, from a cave that was 153m to a cave that is now in excess of 2,743m was definitely a fantastic and mind blowing experience. At first it was hard

going. I had to battle through very low passage filled with sand and then muddy clay. There is a good 305m of wriggling – you're literally between a rock and a hard place; the restriction is unrelenting. Yet I pushed it, I persevered, I believed... and more to the point I fitted! Eventually the cave opened up a little. Then it opened up some more. I kept going back, day after day for three weeks. Each day I unceremoniously dumped reel after reel into the cave and yet it just didn't end - it was incredible. Those two weeks were among the best of my life, where I did very little other than sleep, eat, knot line and explore. It is difficult to describe the burst of energy and pure adrenaline that I was feeling at this time. Nothing can beat the moment you unwind a reel into completely new and uncharted territory. One feels pure, unadulterated joy and happiness, all peppered with a bit of a thrill.

TM: My proudest technical achievement is actually managing to undertake challenging cave dives with a full film crew. Filming underwater is notoriously riddled with problems. To get a cameraman, lighting guy, safety divers and two people talking into and out of a cave is a remarkable achievement. I'm very proud to have been a part of that - we dived in an amazing series of caves in the Bahamas, with a brilliant and hilarious cave diving film crew, led by the legend Wes Skiles (Wes sadly passed away in July this year). It was amazing to be part of their tight knit team for a few days, and watch real experts at work in a medium they are so highly skilled in.

What is your fondest memory of diving in the Red Sea?

VVS: I have only dived once in the Red Sea, way, way back in the beginning of my diving career. The thing that stood out for me at the time was how plentiful the fish were and how easy getting to the reef was. No hectic surf launches to navigate.

JP: My favourite tech dive was a drift from the back of Jackson Reef down to the southern tip of Woodhouse. Perfect current and plenty of hammerheads. Every dive is good in the Red Sea.

AM: I haven't been to the Red Sea yet, but would definitely love to go one day. I have heard amazing things about the area, so it is definitely on the list.

TM: Wow, with so many great memories of diving in the Red Sea, it is almost impossible to narrow down to one. My experience in the Red Sea took me from diving an oceanic rift in Djibouti, visiting un-dived sites in Eritrea, and seeing the absolute highlights of what Sudanese diving has to offer. I have a confession to make actually, the Oceans trip is the only time I have ever dived in the Red Sea. I would narrow my favourite dives down to two though: My first would be a night dive off a small island in Eritrea - we were diving to film fluorescent



corals, and the underwater visuals were so deeply psychedelic, it really was like seeing corals for the very first time.

My second favourite was diving with my good friend Dr Lucy Blue. She is a maritime archaeologist, and knows everything there is to know about boats through the ages. We dived the Umbria off the coast of Sudan, and it is the most beautiful wreck I have ever been on. The light streaming through the port holes was so evocative, reminding you of what she must have looked like while afloat. I wanted to dive that wreck one hundred times - sadly, there's never enough time!

What is your next project?

VVS: My next project is dusting off the kit and getting back into the water. After a decade and a half of diving I have tried to get some balance back into my life, so spending weekends diving is no longer a priority for me. I am looking to spend time on my new book and my life skills coaching, all of which use the lessons I learned diving to create lasting change in people's lives. The one thing that diving really left me with is the fact that limits are choices. The day I stopped believing in the limits the world told me were inviolate was the day I got my 146m dive (that dive gave me two more world record dives (186m and 221m).

JP: I love UK diving so I'm happy to keep exploring over here. Truk lagoon in the Central Pacific is next on my list of places to visit.

AM: I'm currently based in Australia, which is a good place to be as there are many opportunities to find new cave systems. I hope to go down south and explore some of the wilder parts of Tasmania. Tasmania has all the good stuff when it comes to cave diving; cold water, high flow, low visibility, difficult access to the water's edge and sharp rocks that have a habit of slicing through drysuits like butter. It is still very much unexplored because of the logistics and technical

difficulties involved. It should be a lot of fun!

TM: My next project looks to be a second series of Oceans, although I have no idea what it will have in store this year. It will be a UK based series, looking at the best archaeological, biological and conservation work going on around UK shores at the moment.

How can our readers get in contact with you?

VVS: verna@te-a.co.za

JP: nina@deepdives.co.uk

AM: visit my website www.AgnesMilowka.com or find me on Facebook

TM: www.toonimahto.com

Cath says: As a female technical diver I feel my qualities are patience, perseverance, the ability to multitask and a whopping great portion of women's intuition, which I trust implicitly if something doesn't feel right. But you won't get any bra burning from me or huffing and puffing about which planet the sexes are from. Similarly Agnes believes that to excel at any sport requires dedication, commitment and a single mindedness that in this case means that diving comes first, ahead of everything else. It has to be your life and the very reason for your existence. If you are pushing the boundaries, the inherent risks associated with diving increase incrementally. This is not for everyone, regardless or whether you are male or female.

So for my sisters who are hiding in the shelter of the shallow reef in awe of the bubbles coming up from below I say – listen carefully to the wise words of Verna, world record breaker and life coach, and embrace the adventure: 'You get to choose to accept the limits you are living in or challenge them and change them.'

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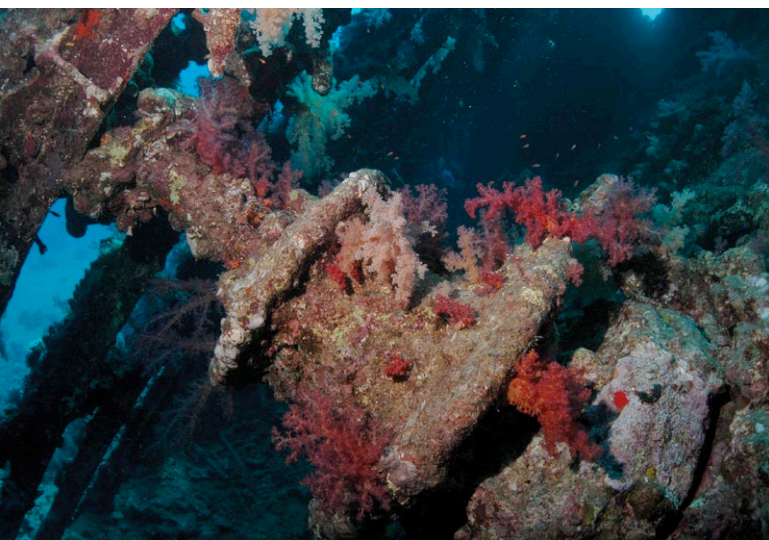
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INSIDER'S WRECK GUIDE: THE CARNATIC

Red Sea wreck aficionado, John Kean, takes us on a tour around one of the oldest sunken vessels of Abu Nuhas. Photos: Jane Morgan.



The Carnatic is one of the oldest, traceable wrecks in the Red Sea. It is also another British disaster case where a reputable shipping company sent a high profile vessel crashing into an Egyptian reef system. Like many other significant ships that have met their demise in the Northern Red Sea, the Carnatic was relatively young, at only seven-years-old. The Thistlegorm was just 18 months, the Numidia less than a year and the Dunraven also a young casualty at three years old.

The great tragedy of the Carnatic was that in the short period between its grounding and sinking there was ample time to leave the ship and save all on board. This was a situation not unlike the one made by Captain Hassan Moro, over 100 years later, when driving the



Salem Express through the poor weather approaching Safaga port. A short cut through the Hyndman Reef would shave a few hours off the journey and spare his passengers further discomfort from the pounding waves. The Salem hit a low-lying reef and sank within minutes killing hundreds.

On 12 September 1869, Captain P.B. Jones sent the Carnatic onto a low-lying reef in Abu Nuhas. Later, a decision was made, based on the skipper's opinion that the ship was stable and safe, to remain on board for another night despite the outside weather conditions. Like Hassan Moro, it was a trade off between further exposing the passengers to the elements or risking what seemed like a more comfortable alternative of staying inside in the warmth. The 210



passengers and crew remained on board despite some of them voicing their misgivings. The Carnatic, with a steel hull, was perched on hard uneven coral, which began to work away at the ship. Jones later attributed the unusually strong current as a factor in driving his ship from its proper course. Soon, physics took over and on the evening of the 14 September water began to enter the ship through the cracked hull. Captain Jones eventually called to abandon ship allowing the women and children to be first into the lifeboats. Almost immediately the ship broke in two. The crew and passengers worked bravely to assist all into the remaining crafts.

A total of 31 people lost their lives on the Carnatic that night. The Sumatra ship, another vessel belonging to the same shipping line, 'The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company', was due by at any time. To attract attention, bales of hay were set alight and the only surviving flare was fired into the night sky. They were rescued by the passing Sumatra but not before enduring a cold night stranded on the island of Shadwan to which they had rowed three miles in the flotilla of lifeboats.

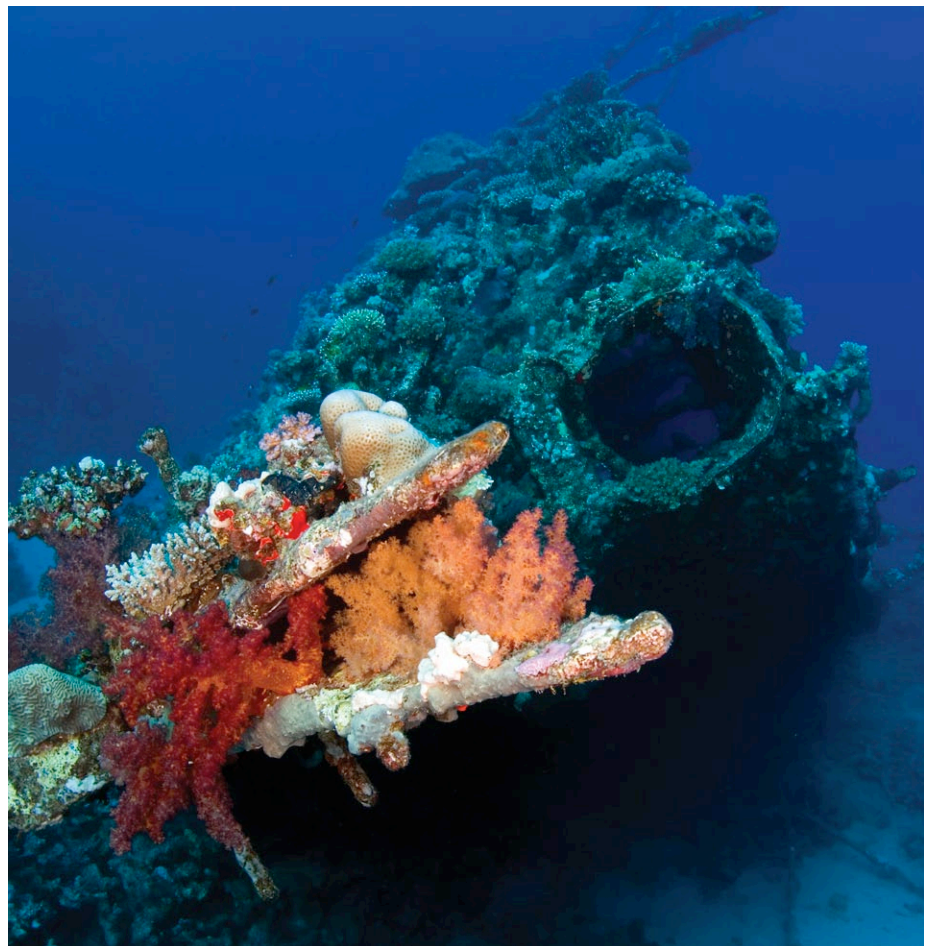
The Carnatic was launched on the 8 December 1862 and weighed 1,776 tons. It was 89m long, 9m wide and had a draft of 5.3m. Both

steam and sail, it had a regular speed of around 12 knots. Her maiden voyage was on 27 April 1863 from Southampton to Alexandria in Egypt. These were the days before the Suez Canal and it was the Numidia ship (now a wreck on Brothers Islands) that became one of the first ships to navigate the new canal. In the meantime, ships sailed via Gibraltar and transferred the passengers and cargo in Alexandria for a 200-mile overland journey to Suez where they met the ship that would continue to India. Soon the Carnatic entered service on the Suez-India route and from her first voyage round the Cape of Good Hope proved to be reliable and fast, taking only 49 days from Southampton to Ceylon.

Two months before her demise, the Carnatic hit a sand bank outside Alexandria but managed to float off in high tide. In Abu Nuhas, she now lies at a depth of 25m making diving easily accessible for reasonably experienced scuba divers. It was this relatively shallow depth that resulted in the decision to make what is believed to be the first underwater salvage operation using hard hat divers. The cargo warranted the risk and expense. The Carnatic was carrying 40,000 gold sovereigns, which today would have been valued at several million pounds Sterling. Copper ingots, cotton bales and Royal Mail

were also on board. The first diver made the grim discovery of two bodies; one found with his head wedged through a porthole in a desperate attempt to escape the sinking ship. The salvage vessel, captained by Henry Grant, removed all of the gold, which had been relocated on the ship while the Carnatic was high on the reef. Local Bedouin freedivers were chased away from the site, but were later asked to assist in recovering some of the copper ingots. Their techniques were primitive to say the least, with some divers reaching 20m with a rope tied around their waists. Nonetheless, they pulled up hundreds of copper ingots weighing over 30kg each.

The name Abu Nuhas roughly translates into 'Copper Reef' (Actually 'father of brass'). The wreck was discovered in 1984 and despite breaking in two shortly before sinking, the ship practically landed in one piece. The shallowest point is at about 17m and the deepest is on the seabed at 28m. She lies on her port side and divers can easily navigate through many rows of wooden floor beams. The stern and rudder section are in good condition and considering she has been on the seafloor for one hundred and forty years there are many fine features to this wreck. It can be reached by daily boats from Hurghada and sometimes from Sharm El Sheikh; however, to get the most out of this wreck and the nearby Giannis D a wreck safari trip is the best option.



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By John Kean

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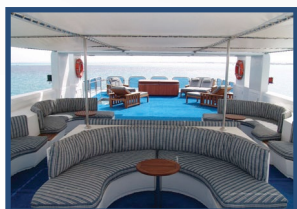
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SNORKEL SITE: MARSALA ALAM

Marsala Alam on the southern Egyptian Red Sea mainland promises some exciting snorkelling opportunities around its shore. **BLUE** looks at the areas top snorkel spots.

Photo: Rafel el Ma'ary



Samadai Reef

Also known as 'Dolphin House', this protected offshore reef is an important habitat for spinner dolphins. A 1.5 hour boat journey from Marsala Alam marina, snorkellers and divers on this horseshoe shaped reef are almost guaranteed to see these magnificent creatures in the wild. To minimise disturbance to the dolphins and their habitat, zones have been created to separate snorkellers and divers and visiting hours are restricted. Shallow protected waters here make this ideal for snorkelling.

Sha'ab Marsala Alam

Close to Samadai Reef, Sha'ab Marsala Alam is also a popular area for dolphins. This large coral reef reaches to the surface with an average maximum depth of around 8m to 12m. Other marine creatures found here include goatfish, snappers and jacks. No marine park fee is required to visit this site.

Marsala Abu Dabab

This is the region's most popular snorkelling spot, as it is famed for being home to the dugong and turtles who feed off the sea grass on this site. This semi-circular bay also plays host to a range of other life, including blue spotted rays, pufferfish and trunkfish. It lies north of Marsala Alam and ranges in depth of between 3m and 30m. However, its dugong do attract large crowds of snorkellers, so you may be fighting for space.

Sharm el Luli

This natural sandy beach and blue lagoon is an ideal place to relax on a day snorkel excursion. The corals here are extremely beautiful and provide a home to an array of Red Sea reef life.

Special thanks to Aquarius Diving Club in Marsala Alam for its help with this feature: www.aquariusredsea.com.



For a full list of legal dive and snorkelling centres operating in Marsala Alam see the CDWS website: www.cdws.travel



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Oceanic whitetip shark with pilot fish from below with boat by Elke Bojanowski.jpeg Oceanic whitetip shark with pilot fish from below with boat by Elke Bojanowski

Shark file: the secret life of the oceanic whitetip

Chris Gooda reports on the environmental studies of one of the Red Sea's most famous resident sharks.

If you encounter an oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) while diving in Egypt it will undoubtedly be the highlight of your trip. These inquisitive predators often appear as interested in humans as we are in them, giving divers a great chance of an up-close and personal experience with this open ocean hunter.

In the Egyptian Red Sea, oceanic whitetips can be regularly spotted in the vicinity of deep drop-offs; Brothers, Daedalus, Elphinstone and parts of St. Johns. Their distinctive body shape (with large, rounded first dorsal fin and wing-like pectorals) and unusual behaviour make them easily recognisable to the casual observer. This is probably the only shark that will closely approach divers during a safety stop underneath the boat.

Until 2004 these much admired, but little understood, creatures had largely escaped the eye of scientists in the Red Sea. That was when Dr. Elke Bojanowski, fresh from researching bottlenose dolphin behaviour in Eilat (Israel), became a safari guide and biologist in the Egyptian Red Sea and was immediately fascinated by these majestic creatures. Before long she had founded the longimanus-project which aimed to document the abundance, residency patterns and migration paths of these sharks.

Through her dedication and enthusiasm, Elke has singlehandedly turned a small collection of her personal photographs into a library containing more than 20,000 images from around 500 contributors and a database of many thousands of sightings of at least 500 individuals. Elke used her experience in marine mammal research to test whether the same techniques could be used to identify individuals in this shark population. Over the years she discovered

that the markings on individual sharks remain clearly identifiable and developed a systematic method for identifying sharks using a variety of anatomical features, particularly the first dorsal fin and lower tail lobe. One particular individual has been recorded at Elphinstone, Daedalus and Zabargad and has been photographed every year since the project began.

Now, in conjunction with HEPCA (Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association), the longimanus-project is planning to expand and unearth even more exciting information about this compelling species. With the aid of pop-up satellite tags, advanced statistical analysis and improved mechanisms for collecting images of the sharks, Elke hopes to uncover information on their mating and pupping grounds, migration patterns and population trends. This will allow effective conservation and sustainable management plans to be implemented to protect this alluring creature and will provide information for future projects to protect other elasmobranch species.

Elke enthusiastically encourages divers to support her work. As she explains "The Longimanus-project relies on divers for the vast majority of its data and if you have spotted (and photographed) an oceanic whitetip shark in the Egyptian Red Sea you could hold vital clues for the future of this species".

On the longimanus-project website (www.longimanus.info) you will find an online form which allows you to submit photographs and videos (along with details of where and when they were taken) for Elke to analyse. Any images submitted are used only for individual purposes and will only be used for educational and scientific reasons;



Elke delivering shark talk



Elke with Oceanic Whitetip by Igone Ugaldebere



Oceanic Face with Pilotfish
by Elke Bojanowski



Another ideal oceanic ID shot by Elke Bojanowski

full credit will be given to the photographer. Once the individual in your photographs has been identified you can discover its identification number and where else it has been spotted using the interactive database on the website.

Dive operators that regularly visit sites where oceanic whitetips are spotted can also get involved. Longimanus-project can provide memory sticks for guest images to be recorded as well as materials which explain to guests the nature of the project and how divers can get involved.

Elke explains: "As for all shark species, the oceanic whitetip is far more threatened by humans than the other way around".

Outside of the Egyptian Red Sea the oceanic whitetip is being directly targeted for human consumption as well as being a common bycatch

species in tuna and other pelagic fisheries. Along with other open-ocean fish and shark species numbers are declining worldwide, and are likely to continue doing so with demand (especially for shark fins) increasing and no large-scale protective legislation in place. On the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, oceanic whitetip Sharks worldwide were recently moved to 'vulnerable' status and in parts of the Atlantic Ocean they were even found to be critically endangered.

The longimanus-project is a unique example of how an individual can design, create and manage an independent research initiative. Thanks to Elke's tireless efforts 2010 promises to be a landmark year for Red Sea shark research, with increased resources available to her she is determined to construct a legacy of protection for this charismatic species.

Oceanic Turning away by Elke Bojanowski



General Rules for Observing Sharks

Elke insists that diving with oceanic whitetip sharks can be a completely safe as well as exciting experience, but explains that (like with any other predatory shark) certain behavioural rules should be followed to avoid potentially stressful or even dangerous situations:

- » Only enter the water if you are comfortable with the situation, and confident that you can stay calm
- » Do not enter the water if there is any sign of feeding activity around the boat
- » Be aware that you are most vulnerable on the surface, so control your buoyancy at all times
- » Avoid erratic movements
- » If you want (or need) to leave the water, do so in a calm and orderly fashion
- » Try to avoid surfacing straight above a shark swimming below you
- » To avoid oceanic whitetips coming too close for your comfort, staying next to or slowly retreating to the reef might help
- » Do not try to touch or in any way harass a shark
- » Do not be alarmed by a shark calmly circling you, just make sure to turn with it and keep it in sight
- » Stay alert and look around you from time to time to see if another shark is approaching you from behind/underneath/above; otherwise one might sneak up to you
- » Generally, sharks are more reluctant to closely approach groups of divers than single ones
- » REMEMBER: you are in the water with a wild predator, whose behaviour will never be 100 per cent predictable!



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We are asking budding writers out there to share their tales about their best ever dive in the Red Sea (see below for competition rules). The best three articles will be printed in BLUE and the overall winner will be presented with a Canon Digital Ixus 105 IS camera with a WP-DC36 40m rated housing and a 2GB memory card, all supplied by Cameras Underwater. The system is ideal for taking underwater photographs in Red Sea conditions.

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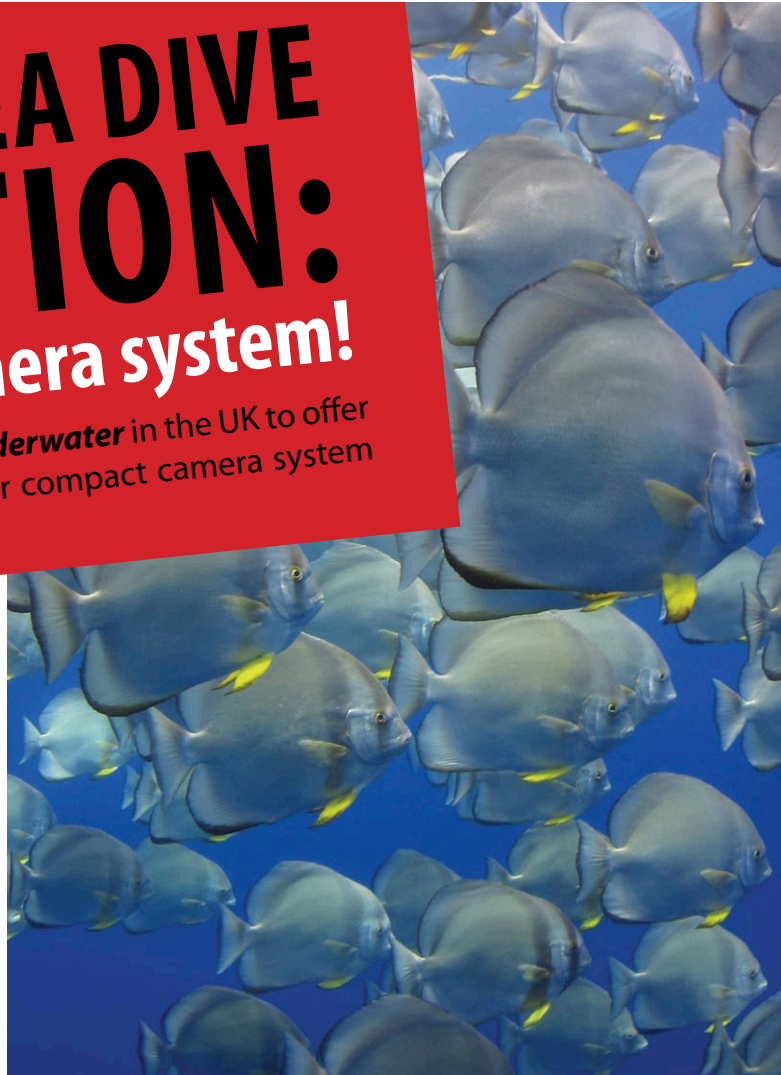
To enter My Best Red Sea Dive:



1. Email an attached Microsoft Word document with 'My Best Red Sea Dive' in the subject heading to: charlotte.boan@cdws.travel.
2. Entries must be between 400 and 600 words. Three shortlisted articles will be published in BLUE. Copy may be edited for reasons of clarity, space and magazine style.
3. The dive must be about somewhere in the Egyptian Red Sea
4. Please include details of your full name, where you are from, where you live and relevant contact information.

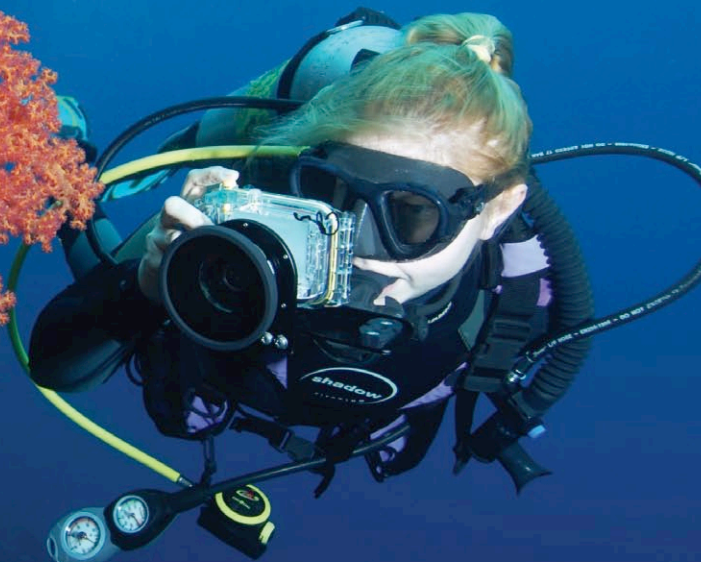
5. The competition is open to all readers of BLUE, however, excludes entries from professional diving journalists.

6. If you include photographs with your entry, only send a maximum of five images.



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Here Comes the Sun

BLUE's editor **Charlotte Boan** climbs Mount Sinai to catch the sunrise over the mountains.

As the sun began to appear, the star-scattered night sky was lifted gently away revealing all around a mountain range that swept as far as our weary walker's vision could make out. Then the morning mist dispersed, and the colours began to emerge: an incredible assortment of reds, yellows and gold. The images would not have looked out of place on planet Mars, such is the unique, space-like beauty of the mountainous Sinai desert. The singing we heard from groups of many nationalities who had made the journey as a holy pilgrimage, together with the ringing of the chapel bell – all at the summit of a mountain – was surreal. My friend and I had travelled as curious visitors to see one of nature's most spectacular settings, but the echoing prayers and hymns served as a reminder that we stood somewhere widely regarded as one of the holiest places on earth.

Mount Sinai, also known by a number of other names, including Gabal Musa (Arabic for 'Moses Mountain'), Mount Horeb and Mount Musa, is 2,585m high and is situated in Saint Katherine City. Mount Sinai, which is also the term used to refer to the collection of mountain peaks here, is named in the Bible as the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments. The peak has religious significance in Islam as the place where Mohammed's horse, Boraq, ascended to heaven. At the summit you will find both a Greek Orthodox chapel and a small Mosque, both built and used for worship. As follower of religion or not, I'd defy even the least



spiritually natured to fail to be moved by the extraordinary aura of Mount Sinai.

Sunrise trips are the most popular way to experience this incredible environment. The start of the climb is timed so that you will reach the summit for sunrise. This way you avoid the heat of the day. It's also psychologically healthier, as I'm sure it would be far too off-putting if you could actually see how far you've got to go on your climb. The night vision in the climbing hours also offers its own rewards in terms of views – the stars are spectacular, like someone has thrown thousands of light specs across the sky that feel almost close enough to touch.

We had made our own way to St Katherine's and were assigned our own guide at the check-in office – a good option for residents. Alternatively, you can book and join one of many tours that run out of Sharm el Sheikh and Dahab, from where you will be transported by coach and your guide and logistics will be organised for you. Whatever you choose to do, it is required that a guide

accompanies you. For solo adventurers there is no set guide charge, you just pay a price you feel is appropriate at the end.

Comfortable trainers donned, our journey at the foot of Mount Sinai began with our Bedouin guide, Soliman, at just after 1am. Although many torches could be seen ahead and behind us, making a snake like movement up the mountain path, it was good to have the company and reassurance of Soliman, who, I'm sure, had walked that

rocky road more times than I've visited my local supermarket. The ease with which he managed the journey, even while smoking the odd roll up cigarette, you'd be mistaken for thinking he was actually only walking to the shops. He made sure we took regular breaks, though didn't stay sitting for too long to avoid our legs stiffening up or our bodies getting too cold in the low night temperatures.

There are two paths up to the Mount Sinai summit. The most popular option is the 7km-long zig-zag gradual incline path of Siket el Bashait. By foot or by camel, the route usually takes around three hours. If you are feeling particularly fit – or, as I was, trying to keep up with someone who just a few weeks prior had run the London Marathon – you can do it in less than 2.5 hours. We felt a sense of achievement completing it in such good time. Although my triumphant feeling a few days later was clouded by a fair few aches and pains in my gluteus and calf muscles.

You can opt to take the shortest route if you don't mind climbing the 3,750 'Steps of Penitence' that run directly from St Katherine's Monastery to the peak. A task I feel only really suited to the super fit and guides such as Soliman, who seemed rather disappointed we declined to go this quick route even on our descent. He thought we were more than capable, but our knees and thighs begged to differ. The magnificent view of St Katherine's and the surrounding desert offered on the way down is worth taking time to enjoy.

You need to have an average level of fitness to walk the 'easier' path at a gentle pace. Even if you opt to go on camel, you still have to climb up 750 large boulder steps to reach the very top.

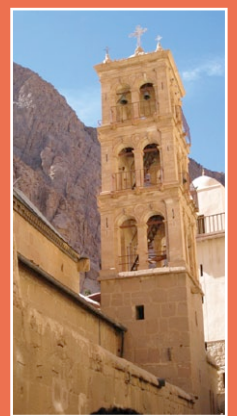
It is best not to carry anything too heavy; even one bottle of water in a backpack can feel like sack of bricks after a while. Water, snacks and hot and cold drinks are available at the small stone built cafes that pepper the path – at a slightly higher than the usual sea-level prices,

of course. Even during the summer the temperature at altitude can drop considerably at night. In late May, I had to carry two jumpers, a woolly hat and a blanket to keep the goose bumps at bay while watching the sunrise.

Our short rest and sleep for an hour or so in the last mountain café before the summit was much needed. We were then woken just before the start of sunrise to make our way up the steep steps – all 750 breath-takers – to find a good spot to watch the spectacular morning show. It was an incredible display of natural wonder that it most certainly made all that physical effort worthwhile.

St Katherine's Monastery

Most tourist excursions to Mount Sinai also include a tour around St Katherine's Monastery. Located at the foot of Mount Sinai, St Katherine's Monastery was built by order of the Emperor Justinian between 527 and 565 AD. It was constructed around what is said to have been the burning bush seen by Moses. It doesn't take too long to tour around the monastery, where tourist areas are confined to avoid disturbance for the resident monks. The gardens are well worth exploring if you have time.



For more information about Egypt by land see www.egypt.travel

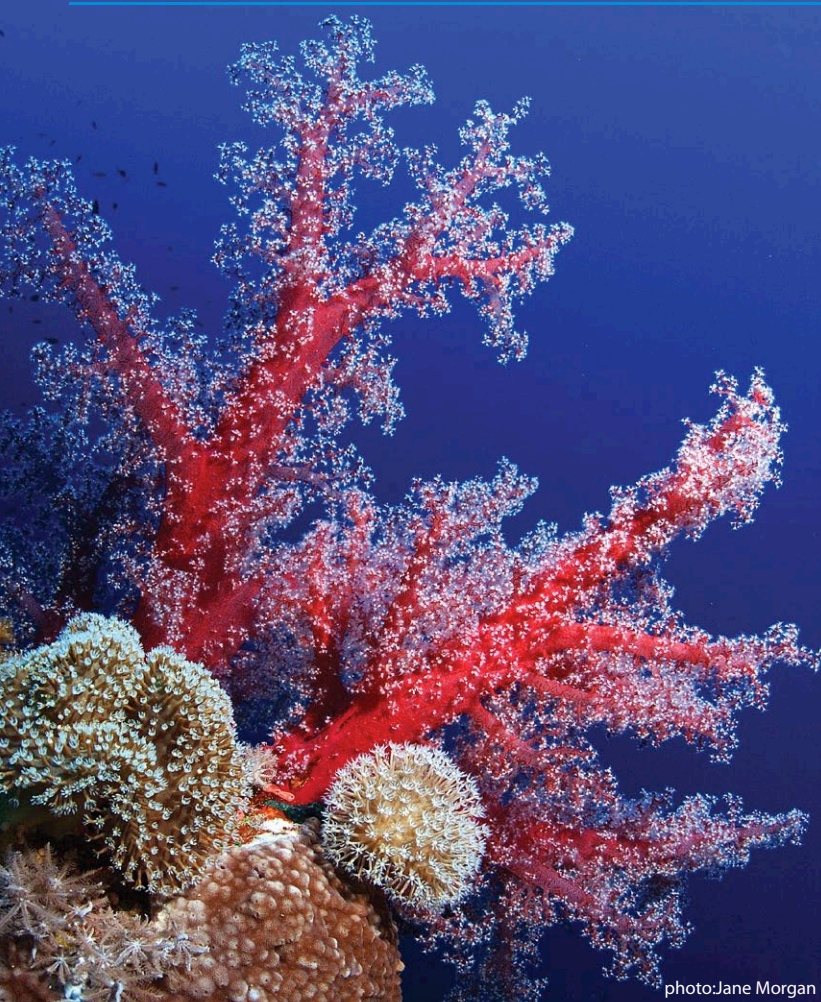


photo:Jane Morgan

Oh Brother!

The start of **BLUE's** journey to Egypt's classic dive sites begins far offshore at the incredible reef systems of the Brothers Islands.



photo: Simon Rogerson



photo:Jane Morgan

It was like the set of a Hollywood thriller. The middle of the night in open ocean. Spotlights on the deck of our boat revealed an eerie mist over the water where shark shapes cruised below. Our night arrival to the mooring added to all the drama of reaching the Brothers Islands, one of the Egyptian Red Sea's most remote and high-energy diving areas.

The unusually strong winds for summer had kept us hugging the shores of Safaga for shelter in the first part of the week on board, Emperor Superior. Hourly weather reports from the skipper had been disappointing in the days previous, but when coming up from the last dive on our second dive day we had finally heard the good news; the wind had dropped and looked good for our seven-hour ride out to open sea.

The Brothers Islands are two reef pillars that reach about 10m above the surface to around 300m below the water and are surrounded by a narrow reef. Approximately 1km apart from each other, Big Brother and Little Brother lie 67km offshore east of El Qusier and southeast of Safaga. The larger of these dusty coral islands, Big Brother Island, covers an area of 300 square metres and is famously marked out by a lighthouse, which was built by the British in 1880. If conditions are calm enough, it is possible to visit the island and climb the lighthouse and buy the visitor t-shirt.

As the only reefs of significance in the area, they act as a magnet for rich reef life and some quality pelagic action. Grey reef, hammerhead, thresher and whale sharks are often sighted, particularly off the north side of Little Brother.

The unpredictable nature and strength of water movement in such remote areas, demands a high level of diving experience and excellent safety awareness. This is why most dive operators set a minimum experience level of PADI Advanced Open Water or equivalent and more than 50 logged dives for this trip.

To really get the best out of these premier dive sites, you need to follow the guidance of someone who knows how the currents work and where you are most likely to see the best of the action, such as passing pelagic. In the hands of experienced liveaboard guides Sonia and Simon, I knew if there was a chance of experiencing the best and safest dives in the Brothers it was wise to follow their lead.

We were briefed on which areas we would head to and what movements we would make on our dive if there were any unexpected changes in current. The briefing took a little longer than usual, but such is the need to explain in detail what to do to deal with the complex network of currents that meet here.

Little Brother

Our first stop was Little Brother Island. Although the wind the previous days had hampered our chance of heading to Elphinstone and Dadaelus Reefs on our Simply The Best tour, the conditions favoured us in the Brothers by limiting the number of other dive boats moored up to two.

Conditions were set for our drop to the west side of the reef where we had a chance to take in the richness of the reef and check out the ever-so-curious and ever-so-big Napoleon wrasse that reside here. We headed to the northern plateau at 40m, the most likely area for passing pelagic. Within five minutes of finning in unusually gentle current we saw our first hammerhead, then a white tip reef shark, then another hammerhead. They were circling gracefully towards us to check us out. Hammerheads are incredible creatures. The silver gold shimmer of their skin and the elegance and ease with which they swim and coordinate themselves in the water never fails to move me. There is something special about watching one of the planets most highly evolved creatures in their natural habitat.

The north point of Little Brother is famed for shark encounters. There are resident grey reef and whitetip reef sharks in the Brothers and it is more than likely you will encounter a number of these on your dive. Oceanic visitors can include hammerheads, oceanic white tips, thresher, whale and silky sharks, as well as manta rays. To sum up, Little Brother is about sheer reef walls rich in soft coral and big fish.

On the southern edge of Little Brother you will find a vibrant areas of gorgonian fans and a few Napoleon wrasse. Starting the dive deep, from at least 35m, is the best way to enjoy the beauty of the gorgonians and search for any longnose hawkfish taking shelter in these magnificent coral structures.

We spent a full day diving Little Brother and encountered at least two sharks on each dive. Even on the southern parts of the reef you are likely to come across a grey reef shark.

Big Brother

Much of the diving highlights of Big Brother are concentrated around the wrecks of the Numidia and Aida, particular favourites for underwater photographers. If you find yourself at the mercy of unusually strong winds, swells or unfightable currents, as we had been, it may not be possible to dive these wrecks. They lie in the more exposed areas of Big Brother on the northern tip. Nevertheless, the southern plateau where the liveaboards tend to moor up is beautiful and worth exploring over more than one dive.

As well as vibrant coral cover along the sheer walls and the plateau that descends to 35m plus, the southern part of the reef is thought of as one of the best places from which to see the elusive thresher shark. The long whip tailed shark comes here to be cleaned by wrasse. However, these shy creatures are often deterred from coming too close to the noise of divers' bubbles, so you need to take a good dose of luck with you if you want a chance of seeing them.

Safety:

The Brothers Islands have featured in the dive press for the few but high profile 'lost at sea' cases, where divers have drifted on the surface for many hours and many kilometres before being located and rescued. Currents can change dramatically in as little as half an hour. Following recommendations from CDWS, a government decree was issued that will legally require all safari boats operating in remote areas such as the Brothers Islands to use an approved diver tracking system from 2011. A good enough reason in itself to take special note of the direction of guides both in and out of the water.

All divers should carry an SMB and ideally another item of surface detection. Surface currents can carry you away quickly and their unpredictability means it is difficult for skippers to pinpoint possible locations of drifting divers.

Seasickness:

Travelling that far into exposed seas can be stomach churning, particularly if the swell is high and you face a seven-hour trek. Most vessels will carry some form of non-drowsy seasickness tablets. Be prepared.

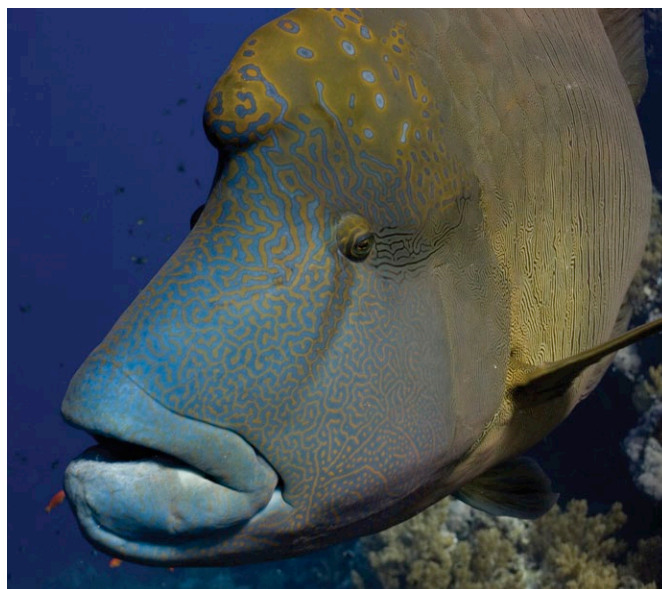
How do you get there?

Liveaboard safari trips to The Brothers leave from a variety of ports from the Red Sea mainland, such as Hurghada, Safaga and Marsa Alam. Summer is the most popular time of year for this trip as weather conditions tend to be more favourable and shark sightings most likely.

The tour:

Charlotte Boan travelled to the Brothers Islands aboard Emperor Superior on a Simply The Best liveaboard trip hosted by Emperor Divers. Special thanks to our excellent guides Simon and Sonia

For more information visit the Emperor Divers website www.emperordivers.com



THE WRECKS

» NUMIDIA

The wreck of the Numidia lies at the most northerly point of Big Brother, an area often exposed to big currents. A British cargo ship built in Glasgow, Scotland in 1901, the 145-long vessel ran headlong in to the shallow part of the reef during her journey between Liverpool to India. This happened on 6 July 1901. In the following two months the ship's cargo was removed and the wreck was pulled by gravity into deeper water to rest on the sloping reef between 10m and 80m. The wreck is a fantastic dive for both recreational and technical divers.

The wreck is blanketed in beautiful corals and acts as a magnet for a diverse collection of marine life, from lionfish to grey reef sharks. Divers can take shelter from the strong currents here by entering open sections of the wrecks, such as the starboard side areas to large corridors that lead to the bridge superstructure. The base of the huge stern mast is at 40m, the depth limit for recreational divers and a good observation point to see passing sharks. Schools of jacks, travellies and barracuda also patrol the wreck.

» AIDA

Lying just 100m away from the Numidia on the north-west point of Big Brother is the wreck of the Aida. Built in France in 1911, the 75m-long wreck was originally commissioned to be a supply vessel but later was used by the Egyptian Navy to transport troops. The Aida was bombed while at anchor during the Second World War, although returned to duty as a supply vessel once again. However, while attempting to bring cargo to the lighthouse on Big Brother Island on 15 September 1957, the Aida collided with rocks in the rough weather conditions and began to sink. A small boat was able to rescue the crew, but the vessel was carried by the storm and eventually sank on the reef. The wreck lies at a steep angle between 28m and 52m. Its depth does restrict the time spent exploring the coral encrusted structure for recreational divers, however, it is possible to descend and explore the engine room which reaches to 36m, the entrance depth to the rear cargo hold. As well as beautiful coral cover, glassfish take shelter in the engine room and there are many colourful anemones where clownfish have taken up residence. Ascending, the shallow part of the reef above the wreck is beautiful.

A real bright shark: lighting up the big stuff



Underwater compact camera guru *Maria Munn* offers some essential tips and skills for lighting up the big animals and wrecks the Red Sea is famed for.

If there is one thing that I have been reminded of while being in Egypt recently, it is that the Red Sea truly is an incredible underwater playground with a huge abundance of photographic opportunities awaiting both snorkellers and divers.

On this occasion, I was drawn to the schooling fish present at Ras Mohammed from the end of June through to September. It was something that I had always wanted to see, as well as have the chance to encounter whale sharks and manta rays which are often sighted during the summer months on the local reef sites. The chance of diving with hammerheads at Jackson Reef was also another part of my ever-expanding 'wish-list.'

Lighting big subjects requires a powerful flashgun. For some subjects, two may even be preferable. The gorgeous soft pink coral overhangs that the Red Sea is so famous for look fabulous in images when lit properly. Flashguns such as Sea and Sea's YS-01, Ikelite's DS-125, Epoque's DS-230 or INON's S-2000 will provide the perfect beam of light to provide optimum lighting for any wide-angle or fisheye lens that you may have on your camera. Using a less powerful strobe can produce harsh shadows on your subject, or even worse, highlight particles in the water resulting in back-scatter (sometimes known as the dreaded 'blizzard effect.')

To counteract this always make sure that you have the part on the outside of the housing covering the built-in flash covered.

Erich Reboucas of Acquapictures took this fabulous photograph of a manta ray in Near Garden recently. He has been taking photographs for Camel Dive Club and has been helping to capture ID shots for manta ray expert, Dr Andrea Marshall. (For more of Erich's work visit his site on Flickr at www.flickr.com/acquapictures.) If you happen to see a manta ray and have a camera to hand, try to capture a photograph showing the underside of the manta. Each one has unique markings and your help is greatly appreciated in identifying where these beautiful animals are seen.

When shooting with a flashgun and a wide-angle lens with your compact camera, always make sure that you shoot with a smaller aperture to avoid the risk of over-exposing your subject. Choose a low film speed of 400, or even higher if you are in a darker area such as inside a wreck.



photo Erich Reboucas



I often get asked where the best place is to position a strobe. I always like to place mine in the middle of the camera so that it is directly parallel to the camera's port. I find that this works particularly well in giving larger subjects a nice evenly-lit feel to them. Always remember to get close – even if you have a more powerful strobe, you still need to be within one to two feet of your subject for the rich colours to really stand out.

Always be prepared for any photographic eventuality. I was in Strait of Tiran hoping to have an encounter with a hammerhead or three, but ended up having the most wonderful encounter with a turtle at the surface at Woodhouse Reef at the end of the dive. For this kind of

shot, no flash is needed, simply set your camera to program mode, a film speed of 200, and reduce your EV to minus to capture the reflection at the surface.

Practise is the key. If you are shooting with a strobe, the best thing to do is to practise at home with the different settings. Alternatively, find a completely static subject to practise on when you first get in the water, so that when the opportunity of a lifetime passes you, you have a sterling chance of capturing it with your camera.

Special thanks to everyone at Camel Hotel and Dive Club for their assistance with this feature.



The scuba generation gap



Diving medical doctor and mother of two qualified young divers, *Dr Anke* investigates the issue of children and dive training and what parents and dive centres need to consider before letting young ones venture underwater.

It is amazing to think that every European playschool/kindergarten teacher is strictly required to study or take an apprenticeship for at least three years to learn how to appropriately work with children. However, outside of the school arena we find that training of young people isn't seen as particularly specialist. As with most sports, in diving, instructors are allowed to teach children without any training that takes into consideration the special needs, the varied logistics in regards of the equipment, the local facilities or the medical considerations for children. That is not to say they can't teach children. The number of qualified, good and capable young divers out there is testament to that. However, the specialist needs of the group still need to be looked at before any centre considers introducing this group to the underwater environment.

Recently we were shocked to hear the news of a ten-year old boy dying during a discovery dive in the German East Sea. His buddy was a 16-year-old, who himself passed away in intensive care unit a couple of days later. Surely this should act as a wake up call for the diving community.

Age

We are faced with many questions of physiological and psychological considerations when adapting dive training for children. Firstly, there is wide debate about the appropriate minimum age for diving activities. Most dive doctors worldwide and some associations do not support open water diving before the age of 11 or 12 years. In Europe, the industry, as well as some dive centres and somewhat ambitious parents, are pushing towards reducing the age limits. Children as young as six are taken into the water regardless of medical issues and guidelines. Dive doctors, myself included, are facing this reality with no real power to prevent this happening. We can only inform about the risks and give our advice. If children are going to be taken underwater anyway, the only option is to make it as safe as possible.

But what is so special about children when it comes to diving?

Physiology

Children are not just mini versions of adults. We cannot look at adults and minors in the same way when we are talking about physiological effects on the body from diving. The current PADI minimum age for diving is eight. Within this pre-pubertal phase and during subsequent puberty, the organism of the child exhibits an extremely sensitive interplay of development, growth and maturation. Any disturbances can have lifelong implications.

Children are still growing, developing and maturing in all body systems – most relevant in regards of diving are the ENT tract (ear, nose, throat), and the cardio-respiratory system (heart and lungs).

After the maturation of heart and lungs, the next vulnerable phase in development is the pubertal growth spurt, affecting the skeletal system (bones, cartilage, and growth plates). Thermoregulation, psychological aspects as well as the dentition are additional matters which are often forgotten. As the organism is still maturing, the increased ambient pressure could cause more or less severe damage to the immature organism.

Let's look at each medical consideration in turn:

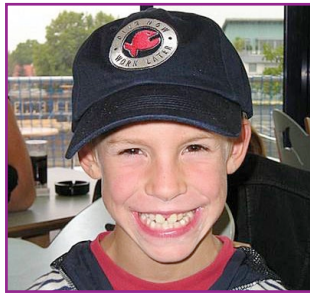
ENT-Tract (ear – nose – neck)

The specific characteristic in growing children is the different anatomical angle of the tube (horizontal course) and the often swollen pharyngeal tonsils (adenoids), which regularly cause ventilation disorders in



the tube and lead to frequent colds and middle ear problems. By the age of 14 years (on average) –the tube has matured and can be expected to function smoothly. Before that, one has to be aware of middle ear barotrauma and sinus squeeze.

The second point of dentition is frequently a forgotten. Children can often be observed holding their regulators with their hands to support the regulator's position in the mouth. This could be because a mouth piece is too big or the regulator too heavy. On the other hand, wobbly teeth could hurt while biting on the mouth piece. If a tooth is already very loose, it could fall out during the dive and could possibly be swallowed. A couple of questions about the dental status - including loose braces - can prevent such problems.



Lungs and Airways

The maturing process of the infantile lungs is a complicated process. We need to consider several aspects.

1. Differentiation of the alveoli (small lung sacks) is not completed until the age of eight or nine years (fragility, pulmonary barotraumas, lung rupture)
2. Increased oxygen demand per kilogram body-weight (oxygen supply, breathing frequency, nitrogen uptake)
3. Increased anatomical dead space for ventilation per kilogram body-weight (oxygen supply)
4. Smaller diameter of the bronchi with increased resistance in the small airways (air trapping)



Growth of the lungs (fragility, pulmonary barotraumas, lung rupture)

A minor cold or harmless infection of the upper airways is enough to considerably increase the amount of mucus – raising the already high risk of pulmonary barotraumas. The infantile bronchial system reacts more sensitively to cold stimuli. In addition, with the high respiratory rate and naturally shallower breathing in children, as well as the less distinct working breathing muscles, children are more likely to suffer from breathing exhaustion (essoufflement) and overexpansion of the lungs. We also need to consider that children have a higher tendency to breath hold and hyperventilate. The pulmonary system is generally regarded as being mature enough to dive after the age of 12.

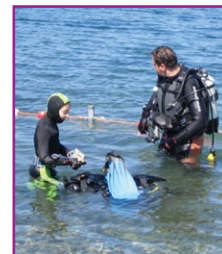
Heart and circulatory system

In children there is a higher incidence of an open foramen ovale (PFO). The PFO is natural a shortcut between the right and the left antechamber of the heart in embryos. After birth it normally closes completely, but remains open in 20-30 per cent of the adult

population. In children, we do find a much higher rate; up to 40 to 50 per cent in children below 12 . Nitrogen microbubbles can pass over from the venous to the arterial branch of the circulatory system causing severe problems such as embolisation and DCS II. A child's heart is also much smaller in relation to its body size with a higher heart rate. Thus the limits of exhaustion are reached faster.

Skeletal system

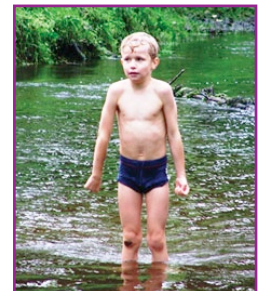
The most obvious difference between a child and an adult is the size. Children usually have smaller and less powerful statures and strength than adults. This can be an issue, especially for smaller children who may find it difficult to handle the weight of scuba equipment. Any damage of to the growing skeletal system could lead to permanent disorders in structure and function. In terms of body growth, the most critical phase occurs between in the ages of 10 to 16. The pubertal growth spurt is associated with the most significant changes in the body. During puberty the thorax grows intensively and thus increases its volume by 50 per cent. In accordance with the speed of spinal column growth and in accordance with the structural weakening of the growth plates, this phase is predisposed to ossification disturbances and bone damage.



To prevent these problems, as well as scaled down cylinders and specifically sized equipment, it is also preferable to use an easy dive-entry and exit. It may be better to don the scuba unit in the water to accommodate strength limitations. When exiting, removing the scuba unit and weight system in the water may also be a good idea. In any case, children need a hand and are not supposed to carry the heavy equipment for longer than is necessary.

Thermoregulation

The ability to regulate the body temperature is not fully developed in children. Thermoregulation is more difficult for children because of the relationship between body mass and body surface area and in general kids have less fat tissue. Thus, children tend to get cold quickly just as they can quickly overheat.



Psychological and intellectual considerations

Everybody who deals with children on a regular basis– especially parents - knows that children act spontaneously. Their performance under any kind of stress can be unpredictable. Unfortunately this kind of spontaneity has no place under water. Reactions will be never 100 per cent predictable – not even in an adult – but one has to make sure, that the child has the mental and psychological ability to understand and memorize a briefed dive plan on land and follow - as well as reproduce - the plan under water.

Decompression physiology

Very few scientific facts are known about the nitrogen saturation and desaturation in a children. Unfortunately, we will be able to evaluate more facts as more dive accidents and cases of decompression sickness in children were are being reported.

Divemedical examination and fitness to dive

The first and most important factor is: Can the child swim a distance of at least 25m? One tends to smile about this consideration, but speaking from experience, I find that one out of every ten children in my ambulance brought in for a divemedical examination, is not able to swim!



Every child has to undertake a test if he/she is fit to dive. The medical examination is basically the same as in young adults (see BLUE Issue 5: Are you fit to dive?), but should include a more detailed examination of the skeletal system and an evaluation of the psychological as well as the intellectual considerations.

Another important factor here is to find out if the child actually has a wish to scuba dive, or is it the parents or friends who are pushing them? If there is no genuine wish, one should not try to talk the child into diving.

According to a Belgian scientific study on 234 diving children, 12.4 per cent of those were claimed unfit for diving. The most frequent causes were: an abnormal EEG (brain stream), an abnormal electrocardiogram (heart stream) and lung asthma. In 28 per cent of all cases accompanying findings could be indentified appearing mainly in the ENT field. Considering those findings, a personal questionnaire might be enough to undertake a snorkeling course, however, in case of scuba-diving I would strongly recommend a thorough dive-medical examination before one lets children breathe compressed air with increased pressure.

In terms of learning: if a child is not able to concentrate throughout the course of a 30 minutes examination and is distracted easily ,it is unlikely he/she can follow the instructions of a dive instructor underwater and most importantly any emergency procedures.

Practicality

One can divide the practical aspects into three main sections.

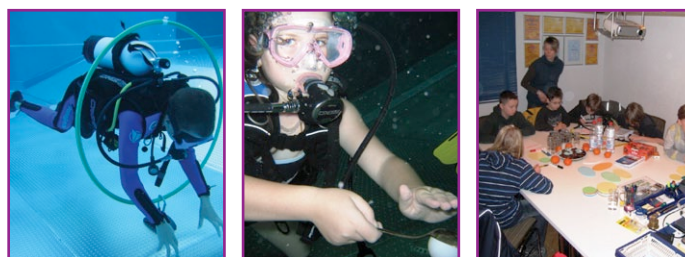
1. Considerations for the dive centre (what should a dive centre be able to provide)
2. Considerations for the parents (what questions they should ask)
3. Considerations in general

1. Considerations for the dive centre

The main aspects are: the location, the facilities, the equipment and the staff.

The best location to learn diving for young children is a confined area, such as a pool - especially for discovery diving or complete beginners. Under these protected conditions, no child can get lost; there is no distraction from the underwater surrounding such as waves or currents, thermo clines, cold, marine animals or other psychological aspects. A confined shallow, light, protected bay in warm waters is the second choice. The child can concentrate and focus on the new tasks such as managing the equipment, learning to equalize properly. Underwater he/she has the chance to focus on breathing compressed air, adjust the buoyancy and so on. Panic, mistakes or unpredicted reactions can be compensated for more easily in this controlled environment. A pool also gives more opportunity for playful tasks to make the kids more comfortable and conversant while underwater.

With this in mind, the facilities of the dive centre should include a pool or the centre should be located in a favorable geographical

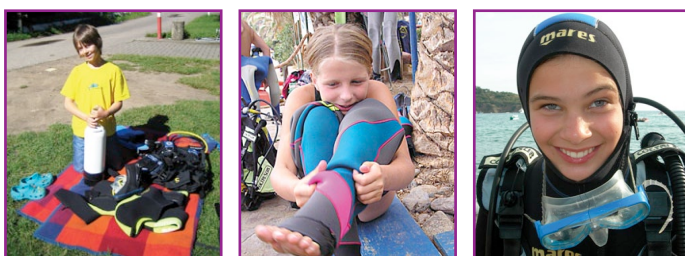


area where shore dives can be undertaken in a protected area with a smooth slope without high waves or strong surf.

The children also need a quiet area to study for their diving course. A nearby playground or other thrilling beach activities will nourish the adventurous spirit more than a textbook about diving physics. The attention of the young students can be also captured more easily by offering study material suitable for children rather than the normal manual for adults.

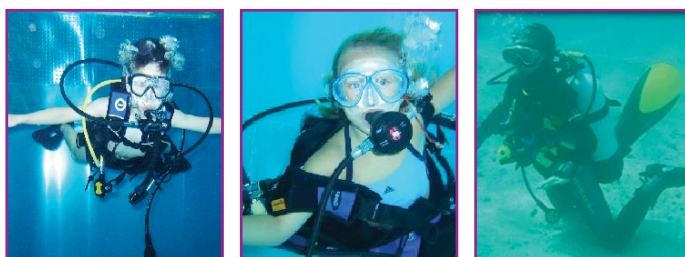
It is a MUST that the dive centre can provide the equipment which is especially designed for children.

The suit has to fit properly to guarantee a proper isolation and a hood is appropriate in water colder than 25°C to prevent hypothermia.



The size of the BC should be according to the size of the child and provide a proper fit without a chance of slipping out or having the cylinder dangling somewhere left or right on the back - making a proper swimming position almost impossible

The fins should be soft and not too big. Fins are sometimes positively buoyant and make the feet of the child drift upward. It creates a hyperlordosis of the lumbar spine which is uncomfortable and unhealthy.



The mask should fit well with soft sealing lips and should be prepared to not fog underwater.

The snorkel should not be too long or too wide to provide an easy breathing on the surface or while snorkeling without CO2 re-breathing. With regards to the cylinder, one should consider the body weights of the child. Two-litre, 5-litre cylinders up to 10-liter tanks for older youngsters are available.



2. Be prepared

We need to consider how to best deal with children and in some cases how to deal with demanding parents. This concerns the staff. We can deal best with what we are familiar with and what we are trained for. Nevertheless, are the staff in the dive centre prepared to handle the special needs for of children? Is there any educational course to train the dive instructors in the medical and practical aspects of dealing with child divers? As far as I know, there is little or nothing compulsory in terms of training. So, where could a dive instructor learn and get the information from? Most associations such as PADI, SSI or CMAS/VDST publish booklets or resource guides for instructors to get more familiar with this topic. Unfortunately, it is not a compulsory issue in the overall training to become an instructor.

Another important matter is the ratio between instructors and pupils. Children as young as eight to ten years need be watched constantly and will always need help underwater and on land as we cannot expect them to act with the same maturity as an adult. A dive instructor can't possibly handle more than two children at a time, and even this is difficult enough.

Diving with children is very costly in time. Not only with the fact that they need more study time and explanations during the lessons, but also the time-consuming effort to prepare the equipment and to get them ready for the dive. This is a financial consideration for the centre.

Dive centres need to be strict about whether or not they will take a child diving. One could possibly lose a client by refusing to take a child underwater, however, one has simply to imagine how many clients one loses if only one single accident or mistake happens with a child. The consequences are incalculable and could cause the loss of one's livelihood in the dive business. It's disappointing when one has to tell youngsters they're not ready for a scuba program. However, while children aren't naturally patient, they are accepting, particularly when they have alternatives such as snorkelling until they are ready.

3. The parents

The main aspect for parents is of course safety in all its meanings. Is it safe medically? Is my child in good and responsible hands?

Diving parents are often facing the strong wish of their children. This is particularly the case when parents dive themselves. Parents should be aware of the demands and requirements which come along with scuba diving. As a mother of two, I know as parents we can sometimes be blinded when it comes to the abilities and performance of our own children. To get a matter-of-fact opinion about the physical and psychological abilities and potential medical risks, it is advisable to have the child checked by a dive medical doctor before one allows them to participate in a dive course.

In the event one plans a vacation in a popular diving area such as the Red Sea it is a good idea to discuss this matter before departure and to give the child in a dive medical. If the wish to dive pops up spontaneously on site and no dive medical examination is available whatsoever, the parents should not be content with filling out a simple questionnaire in case there are chronic preexistent diseases (such as asthma, heart-diseases or problems in the ENT-tract). If this is the case, it is advisable to wait until a proper examination can be done. Better to be safe than sorry.

Parents should not be shy to ask about the overall logistics at the dive centre. It does not mean you are over-protective if you want to know details such as who will the teacher be, how many kids are in the group, if is there appropriate equipment, where they will learn (pool or ocean) and how deep they will dive?

Also, parents should be prepared to share and participate a little in the study tasks of the children, as they sometimes cannot manage all of this by themselves.

Centre checklist for children

Generally the manager of the dive centre has to consider a few critical questions:

1. Can we cover all the logistics and make it as safe as possible?
2. Do we have the appropriate equipment?
3. Do we have enough staff to provide a 1:2 or even 1:1 ratio even during a busy high season?
4. Can we afford to train children in regards to the expenditure of time and staff ?
5. Are the staff trained or prepared to handle children?

If these questions can be answered with 'yes' there are only a few considerations left before one can start. The staff are also well advised to ask:

1. Why do you want to dive? (authentic wish?)
2. Can you swim? (necessary precondition)
3. Do you have a dive medical examination? (medical safety)
4. Do you have wobbly teeth or a loose brace (medical precaution)
5. Do you take any medication? (medical safety)



The parents must be present on spot while signing a minor in a diving course and should understand the demands as well as the risks.

To learn scuba diving can be a base to gain self-awareness, self-confidence and discipline for a child.

While scuba-diving a child has the opportunity to be aware of his/her own limits in a positive way. The responsibility for the parents is to go along with the natural limits of their child according to his/her age. The task for dive doctors is to find the individual medical limits in each child. The task for the dive centre is to set the overall logistic limits in an appropriate way and last, but not least, it is the responsibility of the dive instructor to make sure that the child is not pushing his/her own limits underwater.

Useful Reading:

1. Children and Scuba Diving: a Resource Guide for Instructors and Parents by Professional Association of Diving Instructors and b/w Illustration & Color Plates (Paperback - 2002)
2. Lass uns tauchen, Stefanie Nagelschmid, Tauchpraxis für Kinder und Jugendliche Delius-Klasing Verlag ISBN 978-3-7688-3138-3

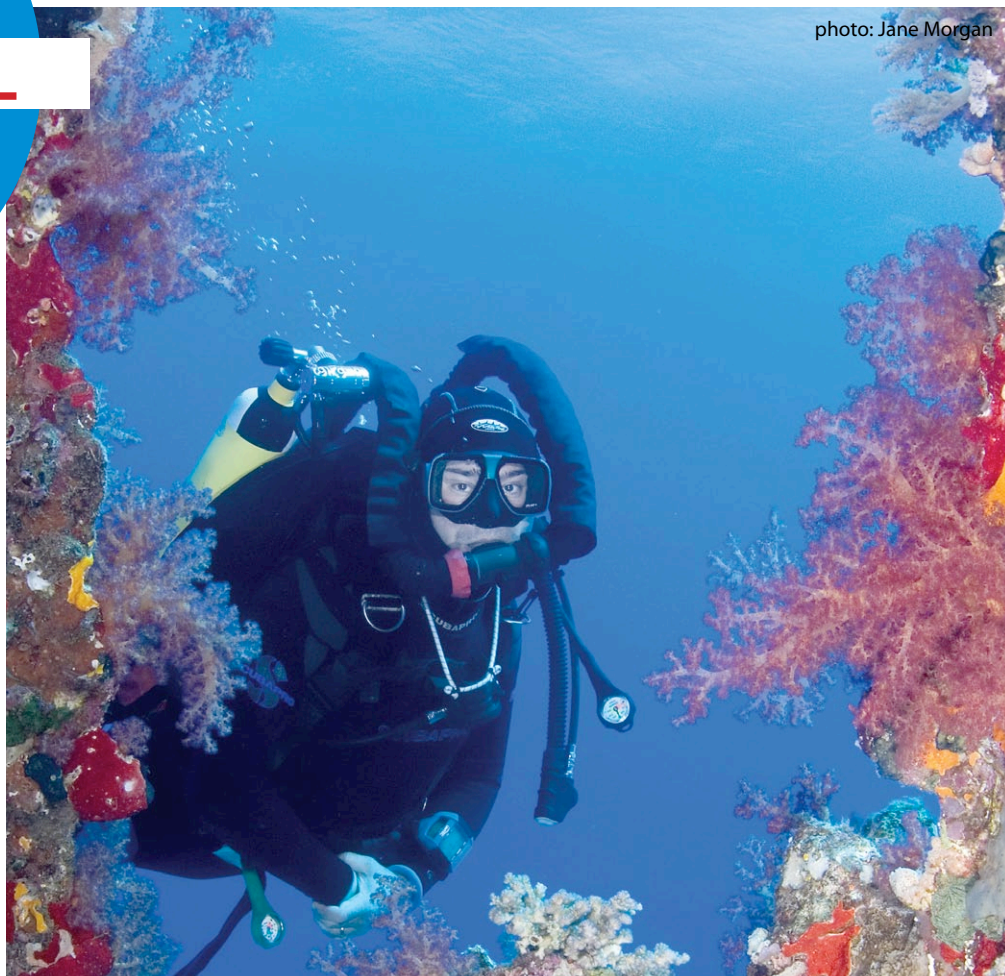
One of the Egyptian diving industry's most well-known and much loved characters and highly respected medical expert, **Dr Adel Taher**, answers your questions.

photo: Jane Morgan

ASK DR ADEL



If you have a diving medical or health question for Dr Adel, email BLUE magazine editor Charlotte Boan at charlotte.boan@cdws.travel.



Ahmed Salem, rebreather instructor based in Hurghada asks: 'What are your medical views on working while fasting for Ramadan? I'm a Rebreather Instructor, I often have to run courses during Ramadan, so what are the recommendations about this?'

Dr Adel replies:

Dear Ahmed Salem,

Your question is definitely a valid one. Ramadan has ended for 2010 but maybe the answer will help you for next year.

From the medical point of view: We always impress on all divers to be well hydrated during dives especially if they are diving in a sub tropical area with a hot, dry climate such as ours. This is particularly the case if they are in a destination marked as a 'resort' area. The reasons for that are quite obvious if you have a look at the statistical data gathered since 1993 at our facility (Sharm el Sheikh Hyperbaric Center). More than 60 per cent of diving accidents treated were associated one way or another with an element of dehydration. Dehydration leads to some degree of haemo-concentration (in simple terms thicker blood) as you are taking the fluid from the circulating volume of blood. This in turn affects the efficiency of the blood in

acting as a vehicle to transport nitrogen from the tissues to the lungs. The factors that affect dehydration mainly are; traveller's diarrhea, which divers tend not to treat for the first three days or treat wrongly, alcohol intake the night before, which is quite common in resorts and of course not drinking enough water. When fasting in winter, we gave the advice to instructors and dive masters who wanted to work and fast to try and drink one and a half liters of water mixed with electrolyte salts just before sunrise and see how they feel throughout the day. We also limited them to two dives a day. If they did not feel well, became lethargic or noticed a lack of concentration, they were told to break their fast or take a vacation during the month of Ramadan. In summer months, the situation is much worse and it would be foolish to fast and dive if you are a professional responsible for others under the water. From the religious point of view, the ultimate rule that governs this subject is the clear Islamic rule stating that: 'no harm should come to you, nor should you cause harm to others.' God is gracious and allows you to make up the days that you could not fast during Ramadan later on. Of course the other option is to work the whole year and take Ramadan as a vacation and enjoy your fasting without hurting yourself or others.



'Little Michelle' diving instructor based in Dahab asks: 'As a professional diver in Egypt and someone who is now pregnant, I would like to know what affect diving has on the foetus? Why is it so dangerous to dive while pregnant? Also what would happen if a pregnant person had to go to a chamber?'

Dr Adel replies:

Dear Little Michelle,

Congratulations on your pregnancy Michelle. As to what effect diving can have on your foetus; let me tell you that we have no clear data to date regarding humans. But we do have data regarding a series of animal experiments, which show that since the fetal circulation becomes part of the mother's circulation, small bubbles could pass from mother to foetus especially during the embryological development. This could influence the organ development and cause malformations and maybe render the foetus in a state incompatible with life. This could also lead to a spontaneous miscarriage.¹ In earlier diving days, PADI used to allow diving for the first trimester provided the dives did not exceed 10m (33ft), were in favorable conditions without over exertion and with easy entry and exit in warm waters. Following animal experiments, the recommendation changed and diving during pregnancy was strictly forbidden.

The effects of hyperbaric oxygen on the foetus are largely unknown, but hyperbaric oxygen is definitely going to reach the foetus and we know that hyperbaric oxygen affects the lenses of the eye adversely (retrolental fibroplasia) and could lead to blindness or a form of cataract.^{2,3}

References:

1. DAN explores diving and fitness issues for women", available at www.diversalernetnetwork.org/medical/articles/article.asp?articleid=9, viewed on the 15/09/2010
2. "Study's Suggestion for Oxygen Saturation Risks Blinding Neonates", available at <http://ajcc.aacnjournals.org/cgi/content/full/16/5/428-b>
3. "Understanding Retinopathy of Prematurity", available at www.lowvision.org/retinopathy_of_prematurityxx.htm

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Splashing out



Ever thought about taking part in some of the less serious watersports activities available beach side in the Red Sea, such as doughnut and flying mattress riding? **BLUE's** adventurous sub-editor, **Sarah Adjani**, reports.

Sometimes it can be just as much fun on the ocean as under it, and luckily here in the Red Sea there are loads of ways to enjoy the waves.

If you don't have the time or inclination to go for a course in one of the various watersports on offer, you can still spend a morning, afternoon or even a full day buzzing around on or even above the water.

I chose to spend a fun packed morning with Sun 'n Fun in Naama Bay. I started off with the 'tube' which resembled a large rubber doughnut. After plunging my substantial backside into the hole in the middle of the ring, I gripped tightly to the hand grips and we were off! The 'tube'



is pulled by speedboat and depending on the speed and the waves can be as sedate or as wild as you choose. My friend onboard the speedboat had obviously chosen the wild option (without telling me, of course) so I was whipped round the bay in Naama at top speed. It was certainly a refreshing way to really clear the sleep from my head and good preparation for what was to follow.

Next up was the mattress version. Named the 'flying' mattress, I believed it was a bit of a misnomer at the time, how wrong I was. Imagine lying on an inflatable bed, then having it pulled along behind a speedboat, all along clinging for dear life to the velcro straps. Sound like fun? Actually it was. I found that by changing from a prone position to kneeling upright I could have some degree of control over the direction of the mattress. Sadly my illusion of control was short lived as I soon discovered how this ride had got its name. As the speedboat executed a sharp turn, the inflatable and I were launched into the air. Hold on, I thought, I wasn't expecting to be airborne until I went parasailing! After a brief but beautiful moment of weightlessness, the mattress and I descended back down to the surface. I had had my second adrenalin rush of the day and it wasn't even 11am.

My third activity of the morning was the one I had been most nervous about. I have severe vertigo. And yes, I have tried to get over it; mountain climbing, abseiling, and so on. The only thing I have learned from these activities is that I just love the ground. So why was I intending to put myself in a harness and allow a parachute to haul me 30m up into the air? For you, dear reader, for you. Onboard one of the specially equipped boats I was helped into the harness by the crew. Legs inside and life jacket on, I stepped to the back of

the boat behind a large winch mechanism. The crew attached me to the parachute and as the boat sped up I was released into the air. Parasailing over the azure waters of the Red Sea is a great way to take in the spectacular scenery, with amazing views of the islands, reef systems and mountains on land. I can't honestly say I saw any of this my first time up. I chose to keep my eyes closed, as I was terrified. However, once the crew had pulled me back into the boat, I realised what an amazing opportunity I had missed and decided to go up again. Now I knew what to expect it was not nearly so daunting. The parachute pulled me gently up above the sea and the crew released the rope at a steady speed allowing me to ascend to around 30m. It's remarkably peaceful up there and I took the time to enjoy my bird's eye view of the world. After giving the okay sign, I was winched back in and came back to the boat. Although my legs were shaking, I have to say I really enjoyed it – although if I were to do it again I think I would try the double harness and go up with a friend.

So three activities down and all before lunch. Not bad going. I had a really amazing morning and was exhilarated for the rest of the day. There are many other activities to try; banana boats and knee boarding being just two. I would definitely recommend trying at least one of the 'on' water sports while you are in the Red Sea, the best part being that many of them are suitable for singletons or groups. Please make sure that any company you go to is a member of CDWS and that the area used for water sports is separate from that used by swimmers.

I spent my morning with Sun 'n Fun Naama Bay. Many thanks to Mohamed Badr and his excellent team. www.sunnfunsinai.com.

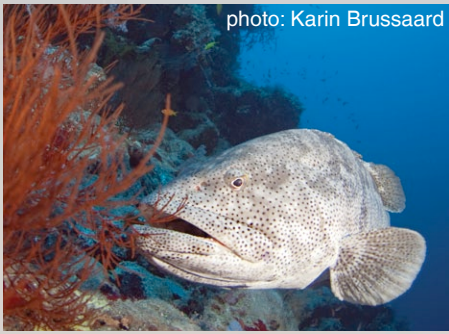


photo: Karin Brussaard



photo: Karin Brussaard

..The relatively untouched coral reefs are teeming with life thanks to the nourishing currents travelling through these waters.



photo: www.pharaohdiveclub.com

Quseir

A Red Sea diving resort dripping in history, Quseir's story dates back to around 4,000 years. Its port was an essential trading route through the Ptolemaic and Roman period, the Middle Ages and thousands of years following, until the Suez Canal opened in 1869.

Today Quseir is more commonly identified as a laidback holiday beach resort offering access to some of the south coast's best dive sites. As well as excellent shore diving on little explored reefs; it is a popular port for liveaboards heading to the Red Sea's most famous southern offshore sites.

The central part of Quseir is situated 85km south of the town of Safaga, with the nearest international airport being Marsa Alam. Transfers to the southern Egyptian Red Sea airport take around 40 minutes by road.

As is the case in many of the neighbouring resorts, the area is protected under strict environmentally friendly rules. Since 1995, the area has been operating under these rules, supported and created by local authorities, NGOs and international organisations such as USAID. Regular monitoring and upkeep of mooring buoys has helped to preserve this vibrant underwater environment that also provides a haven for nesting turtles.

Purpose built jetties have created easy access for underwater visitors. The more isolated diving areas can be reached by jeep trips organised by local dive centres. The relatively untouched coral reefs are teeming with life thanks to the nourishing currents travelling through these waters.

Some of Quseir's best dive sites include:

El Qadim: situated on the north side of the resort, is a beautiful drop off with a rich wall of gorgonians. Schooling fish and stingrays are common sightings. Amphora peppered around this site serves as a continuous reminder of its Roman shipping history.

Beit Goha: another extremely healthy and life-encrusted coral wall with depths ranging from 8m to 30m, where white tip reef sharks are often spotted hiding in its maze of tunnels and canyons. Other life frequently spotted here include snapperfish, blue-spotted stingrays, crocodilefish and grouper. Guitar sharks are also occasional visitors.

El Kaf: situated approximately 10km to the south of town and is a suitable dive site for most levels of scuba experience. Divers enter the site from shore through a canyon that leads to a sandy area and coral walls. A colourful mix of marine life can be found in and around its reef walls, caves, canyons, tunnels and coral pinnacles. Snappers, batfish and fusiliers are particular abundant here.



For destination guides on all the Red Sea resorts and a full list of diving centres and liveaboards in Egypt certified to EUF standards please visit: www.cdws.travel



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Egypt

where it all begins

