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Front cover image: Tony Baskeyfield

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Blue



Letter from the Editor

Happy New Year to all BLUE readers.

Issue 8 is packed full of articles to whet your appetite for diving and watersports adventures in 2011. From incredible dolphin encounters near Marsa Alam (pages 22 to 29), to delving into the colourful history of the Dunraven wreck (pages 36 to 39), BLUE's fantastic team of contributors cover a whole raft of Red Sea activities sure to make it to your New Year wish-list.

Looking back at 2010 in the Red Sea, what sadly stands out are the recent shark incidents in Sharm. What happened was extremely shocking to us all and thoughts go out to victims and their family. However, as educated sea users, most of us looked on in horror as the tabloid media from around the world took every opportunity to hype up the story with constant references to the 1975 movie Jaws and toothy images of great white sharks. Lots of self-labelled 'experts' were quick to offer their opinions on why the sharks were seemingly 'stalking' innocent swimmers.

Such hysterical frenzy so irresponsibly whipped up by newspapers and television as some kind of 'infotainment' nonsense leaves a long-term damaging dent in conservation efforts. The general public is less likely to back saving the lives of these magnificent creatures when they have the picture painted of them being mindless killers.

Around the world, tourists are around 15 times more likely to be killed by a falling coconut than a shark. Coconuts kill around 150 people each year – compare that to a worldwide average four to five human fatalities caused by sharks. So why don't we see front pages filled with pictures of demonic-like coconuts or calls by the masses to destroy all palm trees harbouring the killer fruit? Seems crazy put like that doesn't it? I'm no scientist, but I'd take a wild guess that these coconuts were not deliberately targeting innocent holidaymakers.

Sharks have been around since the dinosaurs; they've been swimming these seas (their habitat) millions of years longer than us. They face a much, much greater threat at the hands of humans than we do of them. Around 100 million sharks (a conservative estimate say experts) are killed by humans every year, mostly for tasteless soup. Species are being driven to extinction at a shocking rate. Surely us humans are lucky that - as the Jaws films and tabloids would have us believe - sharks don't actually think along the same simplistic lines of revenge as mindless shark hunters? Read the educated views on why these highly unusual shark attacks happened by a real expert on page 6 this issue.

As a group of people who love to encounter sharks in the wild, we have a responsibility to get the true story out there. We know we have to be cautious around any wild animal, but for the most part, divers can share positive stories. Famous wildlife documentary presenter, Sir David Attenborough, was once asked on BBC's Blue Planet why he did not talk so much about the impending threats on species. His response: 'People are not going to care about animal conservation unless they think that animals are worthwhile.' A powerful argument.

So in 2011, how about a New Year's resolution to educate people on how incredible our Red Sea environment is and why it's worth exploring and protecting?

Happy 2011 diving

Charlotte

Charlotte Boan
Editor, BLUE

www.cdws.travel



Letter from the Chairman

Dear readers,

Our community faced a serious challenge near the end of last year when one of our largest resorts, Sharm el Sheikh, was witness to one of the most unusual series of shark attacks the world has ever seen. In such a highly unusual situation CDWS had to take a series of emergency actions to help ensure the safety of CDWS members and their clients. This included working closely with shark experts and scientists to determine the best course of action.

Included in the scientists' findings were a number of reasons that caused the behavioral change in sharks in the lead up to these incidents. These included the illegal feeding of marine life by snorkellers and some dive centres. Such activities are completely banned throughout the Red Sea. However, it was clear these rules were being broken.

In order to do everything to minimise the human impact on the underwater environment which can lead to such tragic incidents, we ask all visitors and members to join together to prevent the practice of feeding anywhere in the Red Sea. Environmental violations also must be reported.

Another cause identified by scientists to the change in behaviour was the depletion of natural prey as a result of over-fishing.

In December 2008 CDWS called for and organised the first-ever conference to discuss the issues of illegal fishing, bringing together the Governor of South Sinai, the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Agriculture, Egyptian Fisheries Agency, the Deputy Minister of the Environment, the head of South Sinai Parks, Fisherman Association and the Oceanographic Institute. A second conference was then organised by HEPCA together with CDWS about the issue. Nothing changed. It's now time for them to wake up and act.

As well as raising industry standards, the CDWS faces a lot of challenges to protect and preserve the marine environment of the Red Sea, which attracts people from all over the world year-round. The CDWS continues to lobby to get authorities such as the Maritime Safety Authority, Marine Police, the Coast Guard, the Ministry of Environment and affiliate organisations to enforce and support these aims, in areas where CDWS does not have direct authority, such as safety of vessels and environmental law enforcement.

It is our responsibility together as visitors to the ocean to make sure we do not disturb or change the natural environment we all enjoy. We hope to see all of you in the Red Sea in the near future and that you join us in every effort to ensure the incredible environment we enjoy is protected for many generations to come.

Safe and happy diving

Hesham Gabr

Chairman of the Chamber of Diving and Watersports

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Tony Baskeyfield

Antibes Underwater Image Festival, held near Cannes in the South of France, is often described as the Oscars of the underwater world. In this issue's guest gallery of Red Sea images, British photographer Tony Baskeyfield, 54, shares his Antibes award-winning shot of dolphins, together with a series of other excellent images taken last year near the resort of Marsa Alam, see pages 22 to 29. Tony runs his own graphic design and photographic studio in the UK and recently designed, photographed and produced a 128-page book on whale sharks. A diver for nearly 40 years, he first came to the Red Sea in 1981 and was chased across the desert in Saudi by soldiers when he swam ashore from a small yacht. 'For us Brits, the Red Sea is a four-hour flight away and has to be one of the best dive locations in the world, with fantastic wrecks and beautiful reefs and fish.'



Maria Munn

Recognising a growing need in skills advice for people out there taking digital cameras on diving trips Maria Munn, 39, recently combined all her extensive knowledge to print her first book *Underwater Photography for Compact Camera Users*. Maria has been running courses to help people take good photographs underwater with their digital compacts for more than five years, in the UK and overseas. A popular figure in her field, she has already successfully mentored photographers who have been published in diving magazines and won awards in international competitions. In this issue she offers some essential tips and skills for those wanting to add that little something extra to their underwater images. See pages 54 to 57.



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When sharks attack

BLUE's editor, **Charlotte Boan**, interviews Dr George Burgess (right), the scientist who led the investigation into why sharks attacked five swimmers within six days in Sharm el Sheikh.

Considering the many, many millions of people who enter the sea each year, 60 attacks in the entire world on humans by sharks is, in terms of percentage at least, a drop in a global ocean of possible risks. But what happens when five attacks by sharks on humans happen within a week in one small area of sea where usually thousands of people safely swim? It is a unique and highly unusual case that has baffled the experts and one that scientist say will rank in the top ten most studied shark attack files of all time.

'These attacks happened very close together in time and space,' Dr George Burgess tells BLUE. 'It's up there with some of the most famous cases of shark attacks in the world because of its rarity. Two pelagic species, attacking swimmers they would not normally come into contact with and in multiple incidents in such a short space of time. Although it's very personal if it happens to you, no matter what the odds are. Thoughts, of course, go out to the victims and families.'

The curator of the International Shark Attack File, Dr Burgess has been described as the world's foremost chronicler of shark attacks. A marine biologist, he specialised in ichthyology (study of fish). For the last 30 years his efforts have been devoted to shark attacks.

Dr Burgess headed the team of three international shark experts invited to Sharm el Sheikh by CDWS chairman Hesham Gabr to try to make sense of what happened to cause the spate of attacks between 30 November and 5 December last year. The series of events were unprecedented, particularly in this small area of the Sinai where millions each year enjoy ocean activities safely.

'This was the most fascinating case I've ever been involved with,' Dr



Burgess explains. 'I will be studying for a long time the causal and contributing factors.'

Five snorkellers were attacked by sharks north of Naama Bay to Ras Nasrani. The first two victims, both Russian females, were attacked in short succession of each other in the afternoon of Tuesday 30 November. The following day, Wednesday 1 December, two men, one Russian, one Ukrainian were attacked in the afternoon, again in short succession of each other.

On Sunday 5 December in the early afternoon, a German woman was attacked by a shark while snorkelling. She died shortly after being rescued from severe injuries.

The world media suddenly turned its focus on Sharm el Sheikh, hyping up the events to play on people's worst fears that the 1975 blockbuster thriller Jaws had become reality.

'It's not the first time there's been Jaws-like hysteria,' says Dr Burgess. 'We have had similar situations in terms of numbers in Hong Kong, Brazil and Mexico before. When shark attacks occur, particularly more than one in a short period, it is an immediate concern. We happen to be in an area of tourism where lots of folks are going into the water.'

There was intense pressure on authorities and scientists to come up with answers. The media spotlight was firmly on the international experts, which in addition to Dr Burgess included; head of the Shark Research Institute Dr Marie Levine; and Dr Ralph Collier of the Shark Research Committee and author of Shark Attacks of the Twentieth Century.

'I've had some experience with it [media pressure],' Dr Burgess says. 'You have to juggle. Scientifically you are trying to accumulate information while cooperating with local authorities and the private sector. Then you have the media nipping at your heels. They want to know what's going on before you know and have constant updates.

You are also dealing with political entities, tourism bureaus, and hotel owners - all wanting to know answers.

'In the first days I didn't talk to the media much. As is the case here you have concerns of local press of where the victims are from. You look to try to do the best you can. There is certainly no time to put together a game plan to try to deal with this type of pressure.'

The team was kept away from the spotlight as much as possible to enable it to gather and investigate as much information as it could.

'It was like a crime investigation,' says Dr Burgess. 'It is certainly the most unique situation in the sense we could get answers in terms of species through photographs and eye witness reports. Most important is to get those people first. Scientific evidence, such as topography, water conditions, can be acquired later.'

It became very clear to the team early on that it was dealing with more than one species of pelagic sharks. Pelagic sharks are highly migratory species, which usually inhabit areas of offshore, deep open ocean and feed on large fish, such as tuna.

'I'm not very well versed here [Egypt] and there is not a great deal of information on sharks in the Red Sea. The Red Sea, however, is a reasonably well-known environment and sharks have basic patterns of behaviour, often species same places worldwide, such as short fin mako and oceanic whitetip involved in these incidents. We knew these were attacks by species well documented in other parts of the world.'

'The same oceanic white tip, we know, was involved in cases one and five. We have photographs of the animal. In case one and two there was a diver who had pictures of the animal and actually witnessed the attack. In the fifth, fatal case, pictures were taken from shore where parts of the shark are visible. The underwater shots showed the same colour pattern and a defined kink in the fin - very diagnostic. Divers subsequently to attacks saw that same shark, so we determined this was the same individual. What makes this a unique case is that there are two individuals and repeated attacks.

'In cases three and four [two males] the attacks occurred within five minutes of each other, tens of metres apart. The wounds of both victims were definitely caused by a short fin mako. We could clearly identify these before even talking to anyone. Several witnesses described the colour of the shark on the same blue colour as the water.'

The initial conclusions of the team strongly signalled that human error was at fault in changing the behaviour of the sharks.

'There were lots of contributing factors in the mix that caused this,' says Dr Burgess. 'Attracting blue water species with the sheep carcasses and the feeding.'

The team confirmed during a press conference on 12 December, seven days after the final attack there were two species involved in the incidents: one oceanic whitetip shark and one mako shark. Factors they say contributed - but were not limited to - the causes of behavioural change in sharks involved in the attacks were confirmed to be the following:

- » A major factor in this incident was the illegal dumping of sheep carcasses one month before the attacks.
- » Illegal activities of feeding marine life. Localised feeding of reef fish and/or sharks by swimmers, snorkellers and some divers
- » Depletion of natural prey in the area caused by overfishing
- » Unusually high water temperatures in Sharm el Sheikh

'Oceanic whitetips are certainly curious - humans were investigatable to them,' Dr Burgess continues. 'There were people in the water lots of people, who were not aware their actions were provocative. These

people [victims of the attacks] were not experienced swimmers and were probably splashing about on the surface.'

Ras Mohammed National Park received much criticism for its moves to try to catch the sharks responsible for the attacks. Dr Burgess says it is a rather 'simplistic' to see this as a solution.

'There was a mako caught by the Ras Mohammed National Park - this is yet to be verified as the same one who attacked the two males, he says. 'Catching sharks is sadly a normal reaction. Unfortunately most people all over the world have the same reaction when something like this happens.'

'The first reaction is revenge - a very human trait. It is rather simplistic to think you can just go out and catch this shark. I'm not a bunny hugger, I'm a scientist. But these are migratory animals. These animals do not have a memory for attacks and chances of catching them are slim to none. The sharks don't have the same moral principle for an eye for an eye.

'You can't expect an animal with a brain less than the size of a soda can to make same moral decisions as a human. It's nonsensical. These are predators and we are in their environment. As humans we were adding stimuli to the water and changing their natural behaviour.'

The best way to deal with this situation, he believes, is to prevent the illegal activity by humans - the root cause of attracting the sharks and causing the change in behaviour in the first place.

'Measures I suggested will be followed,' Dr Burgess explains. 'Lifeguards, people patrolling on boats are among these. Practice of throwing dead sheep from cargo ships will be stopped. Feeding - an activity on any that is not smart at all - well, the laws will be enforced to stop this. From a long term point of view, more biological studies of sharks are needed. There will also be an education camp to advise all tourists about what to do and not to feed fish.'

Dr Burgess was recently accused by a conservation organisation of suggesting to authorities nets were appropriate to use to separate swimmers and sharks. However, he says it was not a direct recommendation but something he was asked his opinion on.

'I can't address the specifics in the meetings with authorities,' he explains. 'But the net situation, in general terms, I can talk about. It's a complex issue. Depends on type of net. Gill nets will kill a lot of marine life and not a type I'd recommend. If you use excluder nets, these are designed to be a barrier and not designed to kill. However, if nets are chosen they need to be environmentally neutral.

'If the situation is such that [nets] can provide a level of protection for a segment of people and are non intrusive and the local community is willing to put the money in - these are extremely expensive to construct and maintain - then this might work. But, in my mind, they have to meet high standards to do this. You can't put nets over or through coral reefs. Excluder nets are only appropriate to construct in a near-shore community with sandy bays.'

Does he feel that this incident will damage the moves forward in shark conservation at a time when 100 million sharks a year are being killed and many species facing extinction at the hands of humans?

'Whenever you have a scare shark conservation goes backward and we have to recoup' he says. 'It's about education. Scientists try to get the right story out - that's the truth. If the truth about the situation is presented people will understand that we're not in a Jaws movie.'

He does, however, think it's important to point out that this is not going to be the last shark attack in the world.

'Any time we enter the sea we need to be aware they are there and this is a wildlife experience,' he says. 'There are some things out there in the wilderness that can harm humans and we need to remember that we are in their territory.'



General Assembly

CDWS chairman Hesham Gabr says the industry has to pull together to face the challenges of the future, particularly to protect the marine environment. In his opening address to members at the CDWS General Assembly meeting in Sharm el Sheikh on 19 December, Mr Gabr pointed out that the marine environment was the very core of member businesses.

The recent shark incident in the area, he said, had pushed marine environment issues to the forefront of the Government's mind, so now was the time to gather momentum to change things for the better.

'One of the causes of the recent incident pointed out by shark scientists was the problem of illegal fishing and the depletion of natural prey,' he said 'In December 2008 CDWS called for and organised the first-ever conference to discuss the issues of illegal fishing, bringing together the Governor of South Sinai, the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Agriculture, Egyptian Fisheries Agency, the Deputy Minister of the Environment, the head of South Sinai Parks, Fisherman Association and the Oceanographic Institute. A second conference was then organised by HEPCA and CDWS about the issue. The politicians did not take action. We hope now after the tragedy in Sharm, they will wake up and act.'

The chairman also expressed his 'disappointment' with the Ras

Mohammed National Park and South Sinai National Park, for its 'failure' in a number of areas, including: putting marker buoys in important dive sites; protecting dive sites in Dahab such as the Canyon and Blue Hole; dealing with illegal fishing when it was reported to them; and also its 'continuous' shark fishing against the recommendations of international shark experts following the attacks at the end of last year.

'The CDWS organised more than one meeting with the Ras Mohammed National Park about issues of Ras Katy and problems with zoning with semi-subs and divers and snorkellers,' Mr Gabr explained to delegates. 'CDWS conducted surveys and asked the National Park to mark zones. This was in November 2009 and the park has still not acted. In front of members, it looks like the CDWS isn't doing anything.'

He then explained to delegates about the plan for CDWS to pay for the marker buoy work to be done, the costs of which will be reimbursed by the Ministry of Tourism (MoT).

Before outlining work done by the CDWS in other areas, Mr Gabr expressed his surprise that so few members had taken the opportunity to go to the General Assembly meeting to discuss important issues in what he described as the appropriate forum to do so.

In cases of illegal operations continuing to reopen, Mr Gabr said



CDWS had taken steps to push for greater punishment to deter dive centres from breaking the law. These included appealing for four-month jail sentences rather than fines for those illegal dive centre owners who continue to operate without licenses.

'ISO standards were introduced end of 2009. There were a lot of illegal operations who did not meet these standards still operating at this time. This number has shrunk considerably, however, in Dahab and Hurghada there are still illegal operations working. It is the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) responsibility to shut these down. But even after fines and seals being put on the doors of premises, operations are still continuing to reopen. Steps need to be taken.

'We are not stopping there [jail sentences]. We have also talked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about foreign dive centre owners who refuse to comply with the rules and regulations of the country or pay the relevant costs. If we did the same in another country, we would be deported. Why should it be different here in Egypt?'

On a more positive outlook, Mr Gabr, together with members of the board and CDWS managing director Zeyad M ELBassel, revealed its groundbreaking move to introduce a new training system, offering fully and part subsidized courses for around 20,000 people working in the industry. These courses would cover everything from environmental awareness for all staff to management courses. The National Council for Training for Tourism approved training scheme covers four years. The project has secured 27 million Egyptian Pounds in funding from the Government to go ahead.

'CDWS does not want to receive money from MoT directly,' Mr Gabr underlined. 'CDWS has stated which courses are important and gave names of multi-providers, so it will be up to the MoT to pay these providers directly.'

The CDWS heads also outlined the work being done to improve communication and efficiency, such as an online member database and work being done to fully automate relevant paperwork. This they estimated would take around seven months to complete.

Mr ELBassel appealed to members to take advantage of the early audit system to ease applications. He also said it was important for all members to provide feedback to him through the auditor's evaluation forms.

When questioned about moves to prevent further incidents such as the shark attacks, both Mr Gabr and Mr Bassel appealed for members to report violations as they were the 'eyes and ears' of the sea. This was particularly relevant in the case of illegal feeding of marine life, they said.

'We need details, such as a picture, date, time, name of boat. Then we can ask South Sinai Governor to suspend licenses. This is our livelihood,' Mr Gabr added. 'I have also commissioned a team to produce a video for tourists on why not to feed marine life.'

Financial reports for the year, available as a document for all members, was also presented along with updates on Egyptian Tourist Authority funded campaigns run by the CDWS marketing department, including dive shows and advertising.

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ISO meeting held in Sharm

Diving industry heads from around the world, from Malaysia to Russia, flew to Sharm el Sheikh to attend the ISO and European Underwater Federation (EUF) meeting hosted by the CDWS in December 2010. The popular Red Sea resort was chosen in its last event in Austria to host 20 diving industry representatives for the three-day meeting who included: CDWS managing director Zeyad M ELBassel, Mark Caney and Jack Lavanchy of PADI, ISO working group chairman Martin Denison and EUF manager Dr Peter Jonas.

The delegates meet twice a year to revise and set standards recognised around the world, including the set of standards of which all CDWS members are legally required to meet. Egypt is one of a few countries to adopt these international standards as law within diving and watersports.

CDWS was instrumental this year in working to develop the first ever set of standards for snorkel service providers, which are scheduled to be published in late spring 2011. These will cover a number of areas, including training, guides, ratios, sites and safety. Another new standard put forward for discussion and development was in relation to gas blending.

Martin Denison, the EUF certification body auditor and chairman of ISO working group for recreational diving services who has also been instrumental in training and monitoring CDWS auditors and their process over the last two years, said: 'We have more or less completed

what we set out to do, particularly with the formation of new snorkel and gas blender standards. Every standard formulated goes through every country for comment and is discussed and changed as relevant before it is published.

'The gas blender standard is going out for comment. These focus on the knowledge, risks and responsibility of gas blenders.'

Denison said such standards were important, as even in countries where they are not legal requirements, these are still used as a benchmark for any insurance or legal investigations.



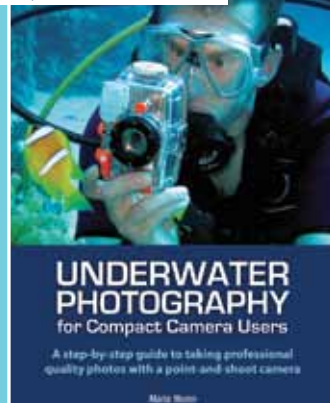
Commenting on the work of CDWS to bring international standards as a benchmark for all diving operations, Jack Lavanchy, President of PADI Europe, said: 'I think that it is very sensible that they [CDWS] have used these standards rather than try to develop their own rules. Most of the divers who come here are from Europe and adopting these standards was a very positive and constructive move. People who made these standards are from the industry.'

'Diving is a huge financial business and Sharm el Sheikh is a town built on this. You can see how much diving can bring to the development of a country.'

Director of certification of Austrian Standards and manager of the EUF, Dr Peter Jonas, described the CDWS as a good role model on how to implement these standards on a large scale. He said 'CDWS sees the benefit of working with an external body from Europe and this has turned out to be a very successful model. CDWS now provides a valuable input on how to develop these standards.'

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Bring in the buoys



CDWS has agreed to cover the costs of installing and replacing much-needed mooring buoys around the Sharm el Sheikh area, including nine new sites in Ras Mohammed National Park. The national park authorities were unable to complete its proposed project to install moorings because of its lack of funds to employ commercial divers needed.

The CDWS board agreed to use funds set aside for environmental projects to pay for the divers to install and replace up to 160 buoys to increase safety and allow for other sites to open up to diving within the Ras Mohammed National Park.

- The CDWS board has also given the go ahead for a project to begin in the Laguna in Dahab, in which areas will be clearly zone marked between windsurfers and divers/swimmers. One of the most popular places in the world for windsurfers and kitesurfers, the Dahab Laguna is unique because of its consistently good wind for these sports and its shallow conditions within a bay. This makes it particularly ideal for training.

Freediving regulation change

To meet CDWS rules and regulations, freediving centres no longer have to operate under scuba diving centre regulations only. Freediving centres are now able to be licensed as a watersports centre, providing that rules and regulations of premises are met and that the staff and manager are qualified/certified with a recognised freediving training agency.

'Freediving is a completely different entity to scuba diving and the requirements of equipment and business needs are not the same,' explained CDWS managing director Zeyad M ELBassel. 'Freediving is a growing activity that needs to be supported. Egypt is a leading base for this sport and CDWS wants to support professionals in running legitimate businesses in this field.'



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Deadline extended for diver tracking

The deadline for safari boats operating in remote Red Sea sites to install a diver tracking system has been extended to 30 June 2011. CDWS asked the Government to extend the deadline after a decree was issued to make it compulsory for all safari boats operating in the Brothers Islands and remote sites further south to have the system in place to help assist if divers drift too far in currents.

The lost divers tracking systems must be approved by CDWS and National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA). The CDWS said that until now, the manufacturers of tracking systems were unable to meet the needs of the market or meet approval.

The current situation with systems (as BLUE went to press) is as follows:

1. SeaSafe: Approved by NTRA and CDWS, however, system showed leakage problems and a new version is under development and has been tested.
2. Sea Marshall: approved by NTRA and CDWS
3. Enos: approved by CDWS and still processing its approval from NTRA
4. Nautilus: expected to be available at the Boot Show in Germany in January 2011.
5. Diver's Rescue: refused by CDWS.

Photo: Emperor Divers



Aluminium cylinder inspection

Visual inspection regulations for aluminium scuba cylinders have been updated. For full details of the new process, see the Rules and Regulations section on the CDWS website: www.cdws.travel.



Getting technical

CDWS has issued a set of rules and regulations for occasional technical diving activities conducted by clients, technical diving clubs and schools which are hosted by a recreational diving operation (safari boat or dive centre). For full information see the Rules and Regulations section on the CDWS website: www.cdws.travel.



Sticks Out

The use of stainless steel sticks, commonly used for divers to balance on coral reefs while taking underwater photographs, has been banned in the Red Sea. The sticks, known as muck, pointer or lobster tickle sticks, are seen by CDWS as potentially damaging to the marine environment.

'A CDWS investigation concluded that the use of such rods to touch corals and marine organisms in order to stabilise photographers or divers negatively impacts on the reefs, particularly if widely used,' CDWS said 'Therefore CDWS strongly forbids scuba divers and photographers from using these sticks. The penalty list for environmental violations will apply.'



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**SHARM'S
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at the starting line



Fitness challenge at Fit 'n' Fun



Sharm Rugby Club team

Sharm's Amazing Race 2

By Moira Tune

Sharm's Amazing Race 2 got off to a great start on Sunday 5 December. A total of 12 teams of four people embraced the challenge and participated in the charity event, working out cryptic clues and completing team tasks all over Sharm to raise money for Sharm and Dahab's hyperbaric chambers.

Congratulations go to the winning team Sharm's Rugby Club (another great community initiative), Red Sea Diving College, and Bitsatchmo (Multinational Force & Observers) team.

Runner's up in the final five teams go to the T2 Tigers, and Sinai Divers, with a special 'Best Effort' prize going to the Casino Royale team. A big thank you goes to all the challenge providers (Colona, Fit and Fun, Pandora's Box, Sinai Clinic, KTM, Cleopark, RSDC, Anthias Dive Centre, Maritim Golf, Soho Square, Umbi Diving Village Shark's Bay, Camel Bar, and Bus Stop), to the Pit Stops (T2, Pirates Bar – Hilton Fayrouz, Queen Vic – Soho Square, and Ulitima Spiaggia),

Radio Sharm live for the on the spot coverage and DJs, all the prize donations, to the race officials and finally to the race organizers (Moira Tune, Vicki Jarman, Carrol Flowers, Yann Vautrin, Mauro, and Bob Tune). It was a great community event raising money for our hyperbaric chamber, which throughout the years has been there to help and support us.

The first Sharm's Amazing Race was held in March and raised more than 36,000 Egyptian Pounds for the Children's Cancer Hospital in Cairo.

It all started with a conversation among friends, over a beer, after a day of diving. That's how most small ideas start and this is exactly what happened with Sharm's Amazing Race. Sharm has always been a close knit giving community. Over the years the town has expanded dramatically but it still manages to retain a community spirit. With this in mind I decided to organise a community event with the aim to have fun in conjunction with raising money for charity.

www.sharmsamazingrace.org.

Give Sharks a Chance



Sharm-based Camel Dive Club organised an event to celebrate European Shark Week in October, attended by PADI regional manager Terry Johnson who gave a presentation about sharks to divers and instructors.

Materials were supplied by Project AWARE, the Save Our Seas Foundation and The Shark Alliance whose campaign this year was to focus on Finning - to gain support to close loopholes in the weak EU finning ban. Following the presentation there was a Pub quiz including a round of questions about sharks. The winning team was The Wolf Pack and the equivalent of 160 pounds sterling was raised for The Shark Trust. The Camel Hotel, Bar and Tribe shop, donated prizes for the quiz and raffle.


As part of the campaign, the Tribe shop is stocking T-shirts with a new Camel Dive Club design in collaboration with the Shark Trust. Ten per cent of all sales will be donated to their cause.



New Adel chamber

World-renowned diving medical specialist Dr Adel Taher has announced he is to open a new hyperbaric chamber in Sharm el Sheikh that will also be able to treat non-diving related conditions. The HAUX-STARMED 2000 chamber arrived in January and has the capacity for 12 patients and facilities for all diving accidents where hyperbaric treatment is needed.

Dr Adel told BLUE that the chamber will also be opening the door to using hyperbaric oxygen for treatments for conditions other than those dive-related. It is hoped the chamber will be fully operational in March in the same location at the existing Sharm el Sheikh Hyperbaric Chamber and Medical Center.



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Whale of a tale



Guests on board a semi-submarine trip in the north Sinai resort of Taba enjoyed a close encounter with an 8m-long whale shark. According to staff of Red Sea Waterworld who happened to be on board for training that day, the whale shark was as big as the sub itself. A 2m-long grey reef shark also made an appearance for guests on the same day.
www.redseawaterworld.com



New Heights

Aquarius Dive Club has opened its new centre at Tia Heights, within the marina of Makadi Bay. All its diving boats are moored at the hotel, where the centre offers a full range of dive courses and full and half day diving. Tia Heights Hotel has its own 550m private sandy beach and boasts the largest swimming pool in the Middle East.
www.aquariusredsea.com

Emperor's new house

Emperor Hurghada has relocated to the Hilton Plaza Hotel. Close to downtown Hurghada, there is a dive shop on site and heated training pool, as well as easy and close access to dayboats and liveaboard. Free try dives are on offer to hotel guests in its heated pool.
www.emperordivers.com



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Photo By Yann Vautrin

Oonas voted world favourite



Oonas Dive Club in Sharm el Sheikh was awarded the title of Best Overseas PADI Dive Centre by UK scuba magazine Sport Diver. Readers of the magazine picked the Red Sea dive centre for its level of care and 'unique sociable atmosphere'.

Oonas said the award is great news not only for the centre, but also confirms that Sharm el Sheikh continues to be a favourite diving destination.

'A big thank you and well done to everyone at Oonas who has worked so hard to achieve this award,' said Oonas Dive Club manager Nick Browne. 'It is the combination of our great guests and great staff that makes Oonas Dive Club such a great place.'

www.oonasdiveclub.com

Show business

More than 16,000 UK divers visited the DIVE 2010 show, where CDWS exhibited its newly designed open plan Red Sea Zone for the first time. CDWS members exhibiting on the stand were on hand to answer questions and promote Red Sea diving at the central stand at the UK DIVE 2010 show held at the NEC in Birmingham on 30 and 31 October.

The impressive stand was designed by UK builders Dimension Group, with the Eye of Horus concept created by British freelance designer Philippa Bantin.

CDWS members will also be joining the Red Sea Zones at shows across Europe and Russia in 2011, including the Salon de la Plongee show in Paris, France, Boot Show in Dusseldorf, Germany, Golden Dolphin Show in Russia and the Big Scuba Show in London, UK.

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



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DESMONDO

Photos: Colona

Plastic cups are completely banned because they can often blow over-board, which means they sink directly on to the seafloor.

ONE SMALL STEP FOR MARINE-KIND

Of all the environment threats facing our oceans, many scientists have identified plastic waste as one of the greatest and most pressing issues. For this reason, dive centres such as Colona Divers in Sharm el Sheikh are making small, but positive steps on a local level.

Going green doesn't have to be costly to your business, as some dive centres in the Red Sea are showing by localised initiatives such as cutting down on plastic waste and raising awareness among clients. Colona Divers based in Sharm el Sheikh has been adopting various successful methods over the last few years aimed at drastically cutting the plastic waste of the centre and its guests.

For the last two years, plastic cups have been banned on its dayboats and guests are encouraged to refill their water bottles to reduce waste. The reasons for this move are explained well on boat briefings. Also posters explaining why the threat of plastic waste is so serious are placed throughout the dive centre.

'The system we have is that each guest is given his/her own plastic bottle of water for refilling from a large cooler on the boat. This means on average you probably only throw away around 20 small bottles a day, compared to around 60 if these were not refilled,' explains Colona Divers, Sharm el Shiekh, dive centre manager Seamus Forde. 'Our guests are really positive towards this and all know that the water used for the refill is perfectly safe to drink. The only difference is that it is from large bottles (6-litres), rather than individual bottles. We point out this is for environmental reasons, not to save money. Although, it is cost-saving for the crew.'

Plastic cups are completely banned because they can often blow over-board, which means they sink directly on to the seafloor.

Colona's clients are mostly from Scandinavian countries. Forde says they really respond positively to any moves to help the environment and often volunteer to take part in clean ups. Two to three times a year the centre organises all-day clean ups, which are well attended by staff and guests.

Other steps being made to reduce plastic waste – which many centres are adopting – is the use of permanent caps for cylinders instead of tape to indicate that they are full.



Throughout 2010 Colona organised three dedicated clean up days around areas of the Ras Mohammed National Park, including Ras Ghazlani and Marsa Bareika. One of its boats is usually sent to conduct around three dives in a designated area to pick up debris which can often blow in the water from land. The centre now works with national park authorities and CDWS to secure permissions and have marine park fees waived for volunteers.

'Scandinavians get a real buzz from projects such as this,' says Seamus. 'They probably enjoy it just as much as a local reef dive because of the sense they are doing something to really help.'

For selling of merchandise in the centre, special paper bags have been made for Colona. According to Seamus, this was costly as they had to ensure

there was biodegradable paint used for printing. 'Paper bags are pretty expensive, but we felt it was important to do this, particularly when the governors of both the South Sinai and Red Sea issued a decree banning the use of plastic bags in 2009.'

Other steps being made to reduce plastic waste – which many centres are adopting – is the use of permanent caps for cylinders instead of tape to indicate that they are full.

'I've got green caps made for all our nitrox tanks and will be getting others for the rest of our air cylinders,' Seamus adds. 'We try to do as much as we can.'

www.colona.com

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DECO STOP

A liveaboard dive guide in the Red Sea for more than 12 years, Sonia Goggel has an infectious enthusiasm for the sea and her work. The Swiss-born Columbian has traveled all over the world and loves her life in the Red Sea where she is one of the most popular guides in the diving industry. She takes time out on her winter holiday break for a three-minute chat with BLUE.



Name:

Sonia Goggel

Born:

Zurich, 7 December 1964 in Switzerland

Current base:

Liveaboard dive guide for Emperor Divers in Egyptian Red Sea

Number of dives:

around 10,000

Tell us a little bit about your life before diving.

Colombia was my home for 22 years. My grandfather emigrated there in 1930, during the recession in Europe. A lot of Swiss people moved to the USA and South America during this time. He stayed. My father went back to Switzerland to go to high school and university and that's where he met my mum. They returned when I was three-years-old. Both my brother and sister were born in South America. Although I'm a Swiss national, I see myself more as a Columbian.

Growing up in Colombia was beautiful. Beautiful people and gorgeous country. I grew up there before the really bad years, before the 90s, so life was easy going. In many ways the atmosphere is like Egypt or the Mediterranean. People have time for their families and for each other. The food is fantastic and the country is so beautiful, there is so much variety in nature. Safety was an issue, but so it is in any city large city of Europe or the US. The only really safe country I have ever lived in is Egypt, where you can go out any time of day or night and walk about, even as a female alone, and feel completely safe.

I attended a German school and university in the Columbian city of Bogota. I qualified with a BA in anthropology and minor in biology. Then I did my masters in human bone analysis and archaeological bone pathology in England. I was about to start my PhD in Switzerland when I was invited to go to dive in the Red Sea. I went and I stayed. That was in 1996.

What first brought you to the Red Sea?

My grandfather from Switzerland used to give us those postcard calendars with animal photographs as presents when we were kids. One of them had a photograph of a lionfish taken in the Red Sea. I used to stick them to the wall. It [lionfish] was an image that always stuck in my mind. So when a friend of mine invited me to join him to go diving in the Red Sea, I agreed immediately. I didn't know at the time that this decision would change my life completely.

As I was studying, I did not do many dives until 1996, when I arrived for that decisive diving holiday in Sinai with 50 dives. After a jeep diving safari along the shores of Sinai out of Dahab and Sharm, and sleeping in the desert, living among Bedouins, I came back knowing that that was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I arranged to come back a few months later to do my PADI Rescue, Divemaster and Instructor courses and to work in diving. It was not just teaching and dive guiding that attracted me, it was the whole desert-Bedouin-Arab- lifestyle experience. Needless to say, I adore Egypt and its people.

I can remember clearly the dive that changed everything for me during that holiday. Ras Nasrani [north of Naama Bay, Sharm el Sheikh] from the shore. We used to walk over the reef plate until the water was high enough to swim out to the edge of the reef. All of a sudden you could see that drop off. The deep blue with amazing Red Sea visibility, fans, colorful reef fish and clouds of anthias. That was that, I was hooked forever.

Tell us a little about your diving background.

I have loved swimming since a young age. I was always underwater. I used to put goggles on, breathe out enough to sink and stay at the bottom of the pools until I could not hold my breath any longer. I loved to freedive and then learned to scuba dive in Colombia in 1990



1997 diving and desert dreams



2010 Egypt deep south



early Sinai days 1997

on Providence Island. Our classroom was under a tree on the beach, with our instructor drawing the explanations on the sand. Awesome.

I learned to scuba dive because I did not want to have to surface after only a few minutes. I wanted to stay for hours. The TDI catch phrase became my life motto: 'We only surface because we must.'

Where have you worked as a dive guide?

I am currently a dive guide on the Emperor Divers liveaboards. I prefer to work on liveaboards. I have mostly worked in Egypt since 1997. However, I was also in the Solomons on the Bilikiki Cruises liveaboards between 1995 and 1996 and with NAIA Cruises in Fiji on it liveaboard NAIA from 1996 to 1998, until I returned to Egypt. I also spent a season in Djibouti and Sudan for Tornado Marine Fleet

What's it like to live and work on a liveaboard for so many years (nearly 13 years)?

Nothing better. I can't think of any work I would rather do. Even when on holiday visiting family and friends I miss the sea, diving, the boats I work on and my crew, as well as the divers that come to share the Red Sea with me. I have been in Madrid now for a few days visiting a friend and I miss the boat, crew and diving already.

I often get asked if having little private space or private time bothers me. It does not bother me at all. The boats I work on and the crew I work with are like my home and family.

I am extremely grateful for being able to follow my passion every day. Diving and living on a boat as a dive guide for the rest of my life is exactly what I want to do. I hope to be like the Italian dive guide Gigi, who must be now at least 70-years-old. He has been working as a dive guide in Egypt since I can remember. He is my inspiration as well as Stan Waterman, the American underwater filmmaker who I met on NAIA. Aged 85, Stan still takes out groups on NAIA, diving twice a day and giving lectures in the evening.

I also like the simplicity of life at sea, which is also the life of a nomad. Not many possessions, limitless horizons, continuous fresh air, nature's beauty wherever you look and not much in the way of civilization. Needless to say, I am not a city person. When I'm not diving, I like hiking in Nepal or New Zealand. I was an academic, but I changed that way of life for a life of contemplation and am extremely happy with my choice. I also like to give fish and invertebrate behaviour lectures when I can.

You are a popular figure in Red Sea diving; always keeping guests happy and upbeat. How do you manage it?

I have limitless enthusiasm, nourished by the guests' enthusiasm as well as the beauty that is all around me. Most importantly I love my job. There is, as I said before, nothing I would rather do than living on a liveaboard, diving and sharing my love of the sea and of its inhabitants with other diving and sea enthusiasts.

What's the best thing about your job?

The feeling of being underwater, the freedom and the smiles of my guests when they surface. You can't beat sharing the amazement of seeing an awesome nudibranch or of having a close and long encounter with a thresher shark.

And the worst thing about your job?

Catching a cold and missing dives.

What is your favourite diving area in the Red Sea and why?

Ras Mohammed, the Egyptian Marine Parks and Sudan. I am soft coral and anthias freak and I adore hammerhead and thresher sharks.

What is your favourite marine animal?

Frogfish, nudibranchs, anthias, fusiliers, hammerheads and thresher sharks. It's difficult to choose one!

What has been your best dive to date in the Red Sea?

Wow, that is a hard one as there have been so many. But probably a dive on the south plateau of Shaab Rumi, when after admiring all the purple soft corals on the tip of the south plateau, all these hammerheads came in close and personal. Any dive on the south side of the Little Brother from the Gorgonian fan forest all the way to the South Western corner is usually amazing as anything can happen there. I've seen mantas, whale, thresher, hammerhead and grey reef sharks, yellow fin tuna as well as the abundance of soft corals, fans and anthias.

What would you choose: wreck or reef?

Reef any day. Wrecks only if soft corals are growing on them.

Anything you have not seen yet that you'd love to see?

Silverado dive site in Cocos.

What would you like to do in the future?

Keep doing what I am doing now, dive guiding on liveaboards.

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

Enforce prohibition and control thereof of shark finning worldwide. Sharks are not only beautiful; they are also very old in evolutionary terms and extremely well adapted. They are absolutely essential for the balance of life in the seas. I would also say complete prohibition, without exception, of whale and dolphin murder all around the world and in general protection of the seas. There is so much pollution and the need to protect the sea from human action is limitless.

What three words best describe you?

Freedom, independence and enthusiasm.

Into the blue

Underwater photographer **Tony Baskeyfield** won first prize at the prestigious Antibes underwater image festival this year for his shot of spinner dolphins taken at Wadi Lahami in the deep south of the Egyptian Red Sea. He shares his tale of his amazing dolphin encounter and the other out of the blue experiences on his first shore-based diving trip to Marsa Alam.



In a spin at Wadi Lahami

Rising with the sun, we departed in our air-conditioned minibus at 6am. Destination: Wadi Lahami. Passing little sign of life, save a few military checkpoints en-route we arrived at a hot and barren landscape in the very southern part of the Egyptian Red Sea. Completely unspoiled, there is not even a tourist shop in sight in Wadi Lahami. Even at 8am, we could all feel the heat of the desert rising and were looking forward to a giant stride to sea.

Wadi Lahami is situated close to the Fury Shoals and there are many world-class sites within this reef system. We chose not to dive on this particular day, choosing instead to concentrate on the spinner dolphin action – armed with just snorkelling equipment and cameras. The RIB boat ride to Sataya Reef took around 30 minutes on the flat calm water. This reef system is surrounded by shallow sand at around 10m to 20m of sand keeping the dolphins close to the surface and making it easy for us to swim with them.

As soon as we got there around 9am, we could see the dolphins with their dorsal fins breaking the surface. We had the whole area to ourselves with no other boats in sight. This meant we could take our time to get in the water ahead of the first pod. It was amazing. We had a full fantastic three hours of snorkelling with them. They swam by us in formation while interacting with each other, squeaking and spinning playfully. There they were swimming, mating and playing. I estimate one pod had over 100 dolphins passing past us in groups of 30 or so. The boatman would drop us off in front of a pod. The dolphins passed us, only stopping for brief periods to look at us. Our three-hour encounter ended with a short encounter with one individual who acknowledged us with a short flick of the tail before heading off with the rest of the pod into the blue. It was the best experience with dolphins I have ever had. Luckily there were only three of us in the boat: myself and my two nephews Simon and John. This made it easy to nip back into the boat and off to the front of the pod for a wonderful series of out of the blue dolphin displays.





The cover shot

A pair of dolphins get together. While mating, a second male attempts to get in on the action and nudge the first male out of the way.



The deep south by shore

Once seen by divers as one of the most difficult corners of Egypt to access, Marsa Alam is today a flight away from many international destinations, including direct from the UK. Not only has the area opened up in terms of access, the growth of facilities onland has also expanded its appeal to divers wishing to enjoy shore-based action. The Deep South used to be the domain of liveaboard divers, but now its incredible sites are easily accessible from the shore and RIBs. The coastline of fringing reefs offers unspoilt diving with a view of timeless Wadis and Bedouin villages. With many new resorts popping up, Marsa Alam even has its own recompression chamber, so its days of being viewed as a remote diving destination have all but vanished.



I used to believe that the only way to really experience the best of the Red Sea was by liveaboard, but a wife and a four-year-old daughter forced me into revising my thoughts. I'm now of the opinion there is room for both. Yes, liveaboards offer concentrated diving offshore from sunrise to sunset. But I do tend to find being onboard for a week and never putting a foot ashore a little frustrating.

I've recently found that from the shore you really get to see rugged untamed Egypt. The fringing reefs here come right up to the shore. You can just walk in and dive a world-class site. Then, there are some sites that get passed over when you're in a liveaboard, such as Abu Dabbab. What a fantastic site this is around 15m at the deepest, brilliant for massive green turtles and Dugongs.

Red Sea Diving Safari has been operating for 21 years and runs four operations including three separate all-inclusive Diving Villages in the South of the Red Sea Coast. As well as quality diving on offer, the centre also has a good environmental friendly setup to pay attention to the protection of the outstanding coral formations of the area.

There are more than 25 inshore and offshore reefs in the Marsa Alam. Red Sea Diving Safari offers a range of shore diving packages with unlimited house reef diving, guided truck dives and guided in-range speedboat dives.



Tony Baskerfield dived with Red Sea Diving Safari and booked from the UK online through Active Adventures.



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is your colour,
dive into the
red sea.

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Image: Kimmo Hagman

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photo: Andrew Slater



POUNDS OF SILENCE: travelling to the Red Sea with your rebreather

Do excess baggage and airline handling hassles outweigh the benefits of rebreather diving with your own unit? Cath Bates explores the ups and downs of travelling with a rebreather to the Red Sea.

Closed-circuit diving has come a long way since Cousteau's Aqualung days. But airlines seem to be going back in time with their ever-decreasing luggage allowance.

Dive equipment manufacturers continue to develop lightweight regulators, buoyancy aids and fins to keep costs low for the recreational open circuit diver. But what do the closed-circuit fraternity need to endure when traveling bubble-free?

Travelling to the Red Sea with recreational diving kit is a tough enough battle with weight, for rebreather divers it's a giant headache. I went undercover and compiled this guide to getting more eggs into one basket.

Before you travel:

Call your chosen diving centre and check the following:

That it has the correct grade of sofnoime (scrubber) for your unit

That it can rent you the correct size of cylinders and has the right fitting valve for your unit (such as front or side fixed?)

That it has the facilities to fill 100 per cent oxygen (and helium if required) to 200 bar

That you know the hire cost of all of the above

Ensure that you:

Have spare cells, batteries and o-rings for your unit in case you encounter a problem.

Have been on forums like Rebreather World to ask those in the know, what you don't know yet.

Airlines:

Thomson has a standard allowance of 20kg for £10 GBP (approx 12 Euros) for a bag in the hold when you purchase an airline ticket. Hand luggage can weigh up to 5kg and that bag must be no more than 55 x 40 x 20cm in dimension. A diver will receive 5kg on top when presenting their certification card. However, your hold bag can be no more than 23kg so this entitles you to 3kg extra in that bag and 2kg more in your hand luggage.

I know a diver who was recently refused that extra 5kg because their diving licence was not issued by PADI. Not all staff at the check in desk are savvy about us deep sea homosapiens so:

a) make sure you print off the pages from the website about this extra booty



b) make sure your licence is accompanied by paperwork that states the words 'scuba diving', 'deep blue sea' or 'James Bond' somewhere in print.

Thomson's pre-booked premium seats give you 30kg (combined hand and hold) plus up to five extra items of luggage. It costs between 20 to £40 GBP (24 to 47 Euros approx) per item, per way (depending on your destination).

With British Airways 23kg is permitted for each passenger in their main bag. It allows the same standard size carry-on bag and a laptop or handbag as bonus. You must be able to lift your carry-on bag 'by yourself, unaided' into the overhead locker. There is therefore no weight restriction. BA will allow an extra bag pre booked for £32 GBP (37 Euros approx) each way.

As a BA World Traveler Plus you pay £30 GBP for a total combined weight of 32kg. The weight increases and the cost decreases with your importance until First and Business Class. Of course this grand status is not just about the copious amounts of free booze. You may also trundle three sets of 32kgs to the check in desk in your Manolo Blahniks.

Easyjet allow 20kg in the cargo hold as standard for £12 GBP (14 Euros approx) and an unstated weight in hand luggage with dimensions of 56x45x25cm. You can buy 12kg weight allowance for sporting goods in advance which gives you a total hold weight of 32kg. The sport allowance is 18.5 Euros

each way.

Easyjet will let you have 50kg if that is what you rock up to the airport with, however, it will be charged at £10 GBP (12 Euros approx) extra kilo on top of your basic 20kg. Expensive eggs in an orange basket eh?

Egypt Air did not, quote 'bat an eyelid' when one of Sharm's heroes turned up with a rebreather, booster pump and pushbike all at the same time. It seems to be a little more accustomed to the inability of their major clientele to travel light. The webpage reads a maximum allowed hold weight of between 20-30kg depending on class, with an 8kg of additional hand luggage. Don't say we didn't tell you the official line!

Others:

» Monarch allow an extra two bags with up to 26kg total for prepaid £70 GBP (82 Euros approx)

» With an Air Berlin Service Card (for 59 Euros per year) you can have 10kg extra sports equipment free per journey provided that it is in a sports bag.

» Being a Lufthansa customer with Frequent Flyer status, you can claim three sets of 32kgs

Packing:

Gear Gulper is not a nickname for the local space-cadet. It is the name given to the ginormous box your shiny new CCR arrives in. Aaron Bruce





– Sharm's premiere rebreather instructor at Werner Lau Tek – loves these big boys 'as they are sometimes too big to go on the scales, and have to go to the oversize baggage section, MOST of the time without being weighed.'

Packing the rebreather takes almost as much care and attention as assembling the unit. Aaron recommends that all electronics should go in hand luggage if possible. 'It is a life support machine you want to make sure it arrives in one piece,' he says. 'Airport security are used to seeing electronics for rebreathers and I hardly get stopped and checked now going through scanners.'

If you must take your tanks, valves must be removed with nothing blocking the opening. Dennis from InnerSpace Systems Corp. told me he has carried valves and regulator first stages in his pockets. Small counterlungs can be rolled up and also mouthpiece assembly (the loop) may fit inside the case or scrubber canister of your unit. Some models will fit standard BCs or wings, and, therefore, you can rent those at the dive centre to save space in your box.

Sofnolime or 'sorb' as it is sometimes called must be clearly labeled. It is a good idea to carry a MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet). Print out two sets of these (I found a PDF example on www.apdiving.com/downloads/datasheets/pdf/sofnolime.pdf) and attach one to the tub. John from Midlands Rebreather Divers decants the sorb he needs for a dive trip into smaller milk cartons. There is then no need to bring back redundant sorb. The bigger the canister on your unit, the more hours you will get from your sorb, but be realistic.

Aaron packs his Gear Gulper with wetsuit on the bottom to cushion the box, then the unit, with fins, mask and clothes placed around it to bulk it out. Remember to take spare cable ties in the event you are required to open the box on check in. If the box has a CE kitemark, chances are you won't be.

If your stomach contracts at the mere mention of flying your CCR baby in its nemesis – the sky – ship it ahead of the trip where possible. However, this is not possible to Sharm el Sheikh, even though the place is located on two major shipping lanes. I will never understand, but hey ho, such is the way of the world.

Units:

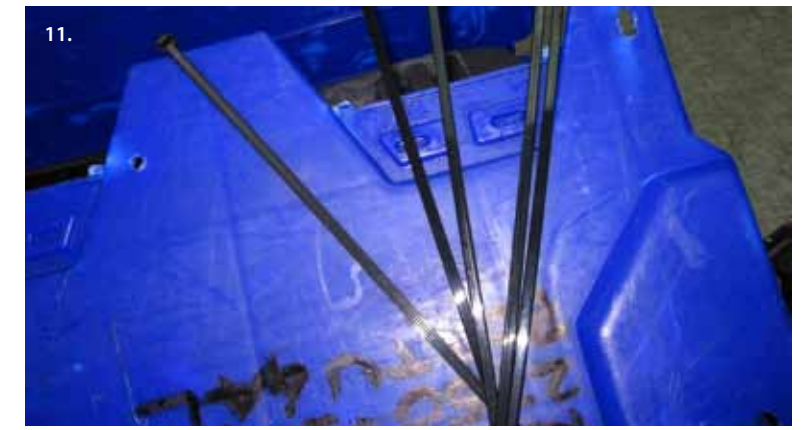
The Classic Kiss was one of the smallest and lightest rebreathers on the market until the birth of the Pelagian DCCR (Diver Controlled Closed Circuit Rebreather). This one wins hands down in the slimming stakes as the most travel-friendly, at only 9.5kg (without tanks or sorb). It can be carried/wheeled on as hand luggage. The Poseidon MKVI is even less but rated only to 40m.

InnerSpace systems recommend the COPIS (Constant Oxygen Pressure Injection System) Megalodon. It is a lower cost, manually operated unit which has been stripped down to one battery box, one handset and needs no solenoid (electro-mechanical valve). One of its newly designed canisters has been 'shaved' so that the walls are only a quarter of an inch thick. This has reduced its weight by 3-5lbs (1.3kg to 1.8kg).

Some units are much heavier than others. They may be available in steel or titanium. Kevin Gurr's Ouroboros weighs in at 30kg. An AP Inspiration CCR weighs 25.8kg in the box it is delivered in without tanks. However, Aaron doesn't think weight should be a factor when purchasing a CCR. 'People need to look at design, backmounted or over the shoulder counterlungs? Electronic or manual? Where it is made and how easy is it to get spares? Is it a new kid on the block, so basically you are diving a prototype? If it is popular more people will know of it and maybe even help you if you have a problem,' he advises.

For the more mainstream models it is possible you can purchase either a travel frame or box to reduce the weight of your unit on your diving holiday. These items house the head and scrubber canister when diving abroad. A travel box may weigh as little as 700 grams and will usually be made of lightweight material like carbon fibre or marine grade aluminum. It will replace a classic box like the yellow Ambient Pressure Inspiration. However, these are not cheap. The Alibox by Dive Design is £400 GBP (approx 470 Euros) retail.

Custom Divers Multi Functional Frame fits all Inspiration, Evolutions, Megalodons and many others. It weighs just 4.3kg. The Tek Travel Frame by Silent Diving has also received good reports on Rebreather World.



Tips:

If none of the above ideas float your boat and you are a regular paying guest, ask the diving centre if they will allow you to leave your unit on site. Of course it will be at your own risk but will save travel costs over time, which can be better spent... well, erm at the diving centre or on refreshments for the instructors within it!

You could pre-pay for that extra baggage allowance – weigh this up against the hire price of wing, backplate, tanks, sorb or a whole unit and you may be better off.

Buy two plane tickets instead of one. Twice as much luggage and twice as comfortable.

Cath Bates and BLUE magazine do not condone breaking any official airline rules that may have been suggested in this article.



A big thanks to Aaron Bruce, head of Werner Lau Tek for his help with this article www.tekdiving@wernerlau.com



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Photo: Erich Reboucas

The stories told of the Dunraven wreck are vast and colourful, including one theory it was Lawrence of Arabia's treasure ship. John Kean digs into the BBC documentary archives to find out the real story behind this popular wreck lying at the tip of the Sinai Peninsula.

Ayre Keller was a geologist: I watch him on the video being interviewed in a zodiac that appears to be bouncing along in Naama Bay in 1979. Behind him is the Whitehouse building, now a casino. He tells the BBC reporter, Jack Pizze, that he was working for an oil company lowering underwater microphones into the sea and heard some unusual soundings that may have indicated that a wreck was present. He told his friend Howard Rosenstein, who owned Red Sea Divers in Sharm el Sheikh, about the find, but blames him for later claiming that the find was his own. Howard was part of the Israeli

While the film crew was present, the Camp David peace talks were taking place and upon hearing the news of the ship wreck US Ambassador, Samuel W. Lewis, took a break to pop down to the Naama Bay jetty and be interviewed with Howard Rosenstein. Samuel also expressed on film that he had no doubt that this ship was used by Lawrence of Arabia for the transporting of gold and treasure. He then announced to Howard, with the cameras still running, that during the peace negotiations he had handed back the Sinai to the

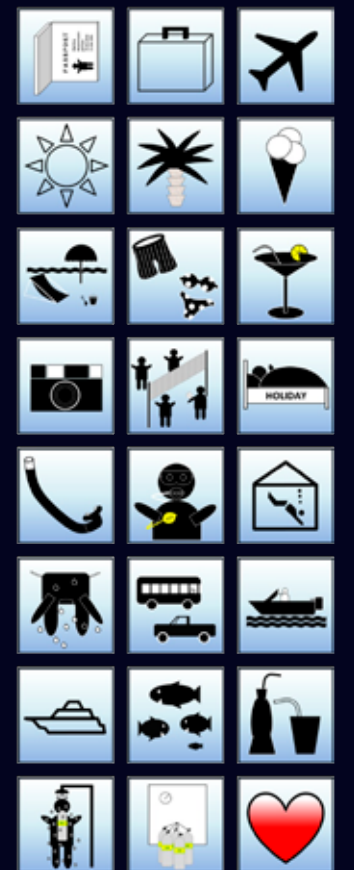


Howard and his dive team, which included the artist and author, Schlomo (he's the one who produced the early colourful Red Sea guide book with the tracing-paper inside!) returned to the site several times and continued to remove bottles, plates and other items of interest. There were many clues pointing towards the ship's identity such as the name Dunraven etched on several dinner plates. However, this revelation eventually made the task of naming the ship more complicated. Lloyds of London and other archive and record sources turned up two ships that were

On one visit to the wreck, during the filming of the documentary, the boat of a rival dive centre could be seen moored above the site. There were no clear laws about wreck ownership then, nevertheless, Howard felt a little aggrieved that the fruits of all his work might go to others. A small argument broke out and it was clear that great rivalry existed between the two clubs. Interestingly, the rival club's manager who spoke with a heavy German accent and wore a pair of aviator shades and a thin moustache and bore an uncanny resemblance to the owner of a well known, leading German dive centre found in Naama Bay today.



The specialists in Marsa Alam



www.coraya-divers.com

Photo: Erich Reboucas

A breakthrough came when Howard's divers found some unusual soda bottles with the name of the manufacturer. They read: Webb's Double Soda and Other Waters. Research found that the company existed between 1836 and 1880 therefore scuppering any belief that the ship contained Lawrence of Arabia's treasure. Also found inscribed on the chinaware were the initials G.F.B which belonged to George F. Barnes, winner of the first prize of a china design exhibition in London in 1873. Given the closure of Webb's in 1880, Howard now had a seven year window in dating the ship. Enlisting the help of a coral expert who had previously dated the coral growth to between 50 and 70-years-old, the wreck (at the time of filming in 1979) could now be dated to between 1873 and 1880 - or maximum 106 years old. They scraped away the stern area with an underwater rotating saw, driven by compressed air from a 12-litre scuba cylinder and indeed found the raised lettering, 'S-S-D-U-N-R-A-V-E-N'.

Finally, the Maritime Museum in Newcastle turned up the supporting evidence that this

Howard in Naama Bay in 1972



Naama Bay in 1979



wreck was the British SS Dunraven built in 1873 by C. Mitchell and Company Iron and Ship Builders, Newcastle-upon-Tyne for use on the route to India via the new Suez Canal.

The secret cargo of unimaginable wealth? Wool, spices, cotton and wood! It is here where the story of Howard and the BBC ends and where another begins; how did the Dunraven sink?

Being a British transport ship, such casualties were subject to a Board of Trade Inquiry, which found the Captain, Edward Richards Care, guilty of navigational negligence. In calm conditions during night time it appeared that Captain Care and the second mate had difficulty identifying a light that he thought was a lighthouse. They were approaching the Gulf of Suez area on a return trip from India. When the light mysteriously went out the second mate was left in charge and later the ship grounded on the reef. It wasn't until 5pm the next day when sufficient water had entered the damaged hull that the ship sank. The date was 25 April 1876. The crew of 25 were rescued by Egyptian boats and then transferred to homeward bound vessels. Captain Care was given a 12-month suspension of his Master's rating but allowed to continue as a first officer.

The Dunraven can easily be reached by daily boats from Sharm el Sheikh without too early a morning start. It is only an hour past

Ras Mohammed's Shark Reef. At depths between 15m and 29m it is an ideal recreational dive but occasional currents and overhead conditions make it unsuitable for beginners. Dunraven is upside down and broken in two, but still retains the outline of a large ship measuring 82m long and weighing 1,600 tons. Few details remain, however, the engine, boilers, overhead beams and decking are still good to swim around. Being against the reef, it's also a good drift dive.

During the late Seventies, Howard's divers found bones inside the wreck, which they and a doctor claimed were human. Another doctor in Sharm el Sheikh was later to confirm them as that of a pig. Given the time it took to sink and the proximity of the local Egyptian boats that rescued the crew, it is unlikely that there was any loss of life on the Dunraven.

To dive guides everywhere. Please change your briefings...the stories are getting silly now!

With special thanks to Howard Rosenstein of www.fantasea.com in Hofit, Israel for supplying photography and also to Paul 'Doozer' Close of Ocean College, Sharm for lending me his copy of the SS Dunraven documentary.

More than just a dive centre...



SNORKEL SITE: EL GOUNA

Situated 25km north of Hurgada on the mainland Egyptian Red Sea coast, El Gouna offers access to excellent diving, but also some top snorkelling spots with its sandy shallow beaches and fringing reefs.

Photo: www.elgouna.com



Abu Nugar Reef

Abu Nugar Reef is about an hour and 20 minute boat ride east of El Gouna. It is a sheltered area in all conditions as it is protected by a larger reef to the outside. There are perfect snorkelling depths of 6m to 8m, where you are likely to see a range of marine life, such as turtles, moray eels, blue spotted stingrays and dolphins.

Sha'b El Erg

Sha'b El Erg is another site accessed by boat, east of El Gouna. It takes just over an hour to reach the large, horseshoe-shaped reef here. As the reef is so large, it is usually fairly calm. On the calmest days, the north side of the reef is best, as the coral cover is extremely vibrant and you are likely to see turtles, moray eels and a wealth of fish life. But the star attractions of this area are the dolphins. Guides here say you have at least 80 per cent chance of seeing dolphins and have a good chance of encountering them up close in the water.

Special thanks to Colona Divers (www.colona.com) in El Gouna for its help with this feature.

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

Gota El Deir

Gota El Deir is the perfect choice for easy, excellent snorkelling as it is extremely shallow and protected. Ideal for children. It is just a 15 minute boat ride east from the north marina of El Gouna. The depth is around 1m, with lots of hard coral and the usual Red Sea reef life inhabitants you'd expect to see. There's also always the chance you might see a dolphin too.



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ON THE WILD SIDE

Egypt's Red Sea is a famed destination for encountering mammals in the wild, such as dolphins and even the elusive dugong. Chris Gooda has a look at the impact human encounters has on mammals and offers practical advice on how to interact with dolphins and dugong safely and responsibly.

A recent survey for the BBC found that the number one thing that viewers want to do before they die is to swim with dolphins. People often travel great distances and spend large amounts of money to realise their dream, but what does it mean for the creatures themselves and should it even be allowed at all?

Many find it a life-affirming experience spending time with marine mammals. Dolphins, dugongs and whales are undoubtedly charismatic megafauna and because dolphins are intelligent, talkative and playful, sometimes displaying seemingly human emotions it is easy to feel a virtual sense of kinship while interacting with them.

The argument against keeping dolphins in captivity is clear and compelling. As the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) stated in a recent report: 'The difference between a dolphin's existence in the wild and under the control of humans in captivity is immeasurable: Not only is the scale and complexity of its physical environment dramatically reduced, but every single aspect of its life - from the size and composition of its social grouping, to the food it eats and the hours it sleeps - is determined by humans.' There is only one remaining dolphinarium in the Egyptian Red Sea, located in Sharm El Sheikh. You can find out more about the facility and how you can join the See Red campaign in supporting it's closure at: <http://www.marineconnection.org/seeered.htm>.

So what about interactions in the wild? The Red Sea is increasingly becoming a popular destination for those seeking an interaction with marine mammals. In the southern Egyptian Red Sea, pods of spinner dolphins can be consistently seen at the crescent shaped reefs of Sha'ab Samadai and Sha'ab Sataya and dugongs can be seen at Marsa Abu Dabab, Marsa Shouna and Marsa Mubarak (Umm Oroos); in the north bottlenose dolphins are regularly spotted at reefs such as Sha'ab El Erg, Gobal Island and Fanous. Operators have been quick to capitalise on this with snorkelling trips from Hurghada, El Gouna, Marsa Alam and Hamata.

Irresponsible interactions with marine mammals in the wild can often unwittingly have a devastating impact on populations, driving them away from their home ranges and inflicting stress which can impact reproductivity, life expectancy and psychologically affect individuals.

A recent study of bottlenose dolphins living off the coast of Zanzibar conducted by a team at Newcastle University found that tourist boats '[harass] the animals, preventing them from resting, feeding and nurturing their young'. The research found that when tourist boats were present, the dolphins spent a little over a quarter of their normal time resting while the time they spent foraging and socialising almost halved. At the same time they spent more than three quarters of their time travelling, more than double the norm. The leader of the research Dr Per Berggren commented: 'Overall, the dolphins are using more energy than they are taking in because they aren't resting or feeding as much but are swimming more as they try to avoid the tourist boats.'

There are similar problems in the Egyptian Red Sea, where at unprotected reefs and bays, many RIBs can often be seen chasing marine mammals hoping to drop their guests on top of the unwitting victims. Because marine mammals need to surface to breathe they are easily followed and often snorkelers will be dropped several times

on the same retreating group.

The situation is worse for dugongs which appear to only be able to hear boat engines at close range (approximately 50m), meaning a dugong surfacing to breathe may have only six seconds to gauge speed, direction and avoid the propeller of a speeding RIB. Dugongs are also known to suffer with capture myopathy (capture stress syndrome) where an animal can die up to two weeks after being chased.

Once in the water, snorkelers will often frantically chase after the animals and, while dolphins are far superior swimmers to their human pursuers, they will often be driven away from their rest places.

In order to discover what is an appropriate way to view and interact with dolphins in the wild it is important to understand how dolphins view humans. Dolphins undoubtedly recognise that humans are physiologically more similar to them than the fish and reptiles they more commonly experience in the marine environment. Therefore they can inevitably be inquisitive and interested in us. They are also intelligent and have complex social lives, so can choose to be playful and interactive. However it is important to remember that, like humans, they aren't always in a sociable mood and are wary of strangers. How would you feel if a stranger tried to grab hold of you or chase you down a street?

Dolphins can detect a human in the water from a great distance, so your best chance to have a responsible and memorable interaction with them is to jump directly from a moored boat (entering the water in open sea to snorkel with dolphins has its own risks and is not recommended). When in the water the dolphins will know that you are there, if they are in the mood to interact then they will come to you, if not then chasing after them will only drive them away. Most dolphins in the Red Sea are relatively familiar with snorkelers and divers so try to make noise that they may not have heard before, singing often really works. This might pique their interest and encourage them to approach. If you are lucky and the dolphins do come to investigate then you need to try to keep their attention. Try swimming in tight circles, mimicking their swimming style and behaviour and skin diving. You can also try to play games with them - try dropping something small e.g. a snorkel (in water shallow enough that you can retrieve it) and you may find they bring it back to you!

Snorkelling with dugongs in large groups is generally not recommended, they can hold their breath for only 3-5 minutes and don't generally travel long distances while feeding. Snorkelling above a dugong while it feeds can restrict its access to the surface. Diving responsibly with dugongs appears to have a limited impact - generally they will ignore divers. Be sure to keep a reasonable distance (a few metres) from it and never position yourself directly in front of the animal. It goes without saying that a RIB should never be used to drop divers or snorkelers as this is stressful and potentially life-threatening to the animal, which is already under serious threat in the Red Sea (and across much of its range).

Important work has already been carried out to try to sustainably manage human interactions with marine mammals in the Red Sea. HEPCA and the National Parks Service have implemented schemes in Marsa Abu Dabab (where boats are now prohibited to protect Dugongs and other sensitive marine life) and Sha'ab Samadai (where

Photo: Elke Bojanowski



tourist numbers are limited and snorkelers and boats are restricted from accessing certain areas where the dolphins can rest and take time away from human activity). These have been relatively successful but operators and guests still need to take responsibility for their actions.

In Marsa Abu Dabab the dugong can still be swamped by more than 50 snorkelers at a time and it is a common sight to see snorkelers attempting to grab hold of or ride turtles there.

It is not possible to regulate every single location in the Egyptian Red Sea. Whether you are a guide or a guest it is your responsibility to ensure that the activities on your boat (and those around you) are not impacting the natural behaviour of the marine creatures that you have come to see. If you see a RIB being prepared to chase after a marine mammal make sure you stop it - and explain why. Then, if you are lucky, you just might get to enjoy an unforgettable experience, interacting with a marine mammal in its natural habitat.

The HEPCA Red Sea Dolphins Project

A three year research programme has recently been created to supplement the existing knowledge of Red Sea cetaceans and advance understanding of their ecology and distribution in the Southern Egyptian Red Sea. The boat-based project is carrying out a detailed marine mammal survey, both visually and acoustically through a towed hydrophone.

In time the project should provide information on the abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the Egyptian Red Sea, making it possible to map the critical habitat of key species and underline potential threats to these areas. This will then be made available to policy-makers and environmental managers, hopefully driving the development of sustainable management measures and the development of Marine Protected Areas in the Egyptian Red Sea.

References and links:

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society: www.wdcs.org

Marine Connection: www.marineconnection.org

University of Newcastle: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk>

HEPCA Red Sea Dolphins Project: <http://www.hepca.com/red-sea-dolphin-project.aspx>



Photos: Elke Bojanowski







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MY BEST RED SEA DIVE COMPETITION: win an underwater camera system!

BLUE magazine has teamed up with **Cameras Underwater** in the UK to offer one lucky reader a chance to win an underwater compact camera system worth more than 370 Euros.

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.

Canon Digital IXUS 105 IS

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For the full specifications, see the Cameras Underwater website: www.camerasunderwater.co.uk.

To enter My Best Red Sea Dive:

Photo: Maria Munn



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.



Photo: Erich Reboucas



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Photo: Erich Reboucas

JACKSON DIVE

BLUE's tour of Egypt's classic dive sites takes us to Jackson Reef in the northern Red Sea.

photo: Simon Rogerson



My buddy and I finned away from the reef into the blue water. He was an experienced Red Sea instructor and shark fanatic. This particular day we were hoping for hammerhead sharks and the current was weak enough (a rare occurrence) to allow us to explore a little way off the reef in the Strait of Tiran.

The blue can be a deceptive place. You begin to imagine shapes after just a few minutes of concentrated staring into the abyss when in search of a big animal such as a shark or manta. Anything floating in the water is hard to judge by size and will easily in your mind morph into the wide mouth of a whale shark or the commanding look of a tiger shark.

It was – we admitted to the others divers on the boat beforehand – optimistic to think we could find this particular shark on the front of the reef. Jackson Reef is not known for hammerheads on its southern side. Divers' searches here are usually to the famous bright red anemone at 28m on the reef and its vibrant coral cover. However, our positivity and sense of adventure was rewarded in just a few short minutes of swimming slightly off the beautiful coral garden area. The definite shark shape came out of the blue, literally...its sleek, silver-gold skin was shining against the sunlight 30m above. My first scalloped hammerhead shark sighting. It had taken ten years and searches around the world and suddenly there it was cutting through the water in magnificent style around 20m away from us totally oblivious to the dream it had just made come true. The encounter lasted only a minute before the shark disappeared back into the blue, but my memory was permanently etched.

Next dive was scheduled for the back of the reef, just north of the Lara wreck. Our luck continued. Eight magnificent scalloped hammerheads circled us for more than ten minutes, one swimming close enough to touch. For someone who has been obsessed with sharks since a young child and has been searching desperately to add a hammerhead to a long list of logged shark encounters, it was a particularly special diving day – all on Jackson Reef.

Jackson Reef is one of the classic sites of the Northern Egyptian Red Sea, and is the biggest and definitely the most famous of the four main reefs of the Strait of Tiran area. Described by scuba diving pioneer Jacques Cousteau as one of the most spectacular reefs he had ever seen when he discovered the area in the 1950s, its steep-sided walls are covered some of most beautiful collection of coral cover in the Sinai region. The four reefs of Jackson, Gordon, Thomas and Woodhouse, together form one huge reef system in the centre of an area of sea, which is only around 1,000m across.

This creates a bottleneck effect in the water. The complex mix of water movements, moving between deep waters of up to 1km deep to up and through these reef systems, create a wash of nutrients from which coral gardens thrive.

The narrow channel is also busy with shipping traffic moving to and from the Gulf of Aqaba and has proved over the years to be too much of a navigational challenge for some. The wreckage lying on top of the reefs, such as the remains of the Lara on Jackson Reef serve as a sobering reminder.

The four reefs were named after British cartographers. From south to north are: Gordon, next up Thomas, then Woodhouse then finally Jackson.

The most common way to dive Jackson Reef and by far the easiest and most sheltered from the mix of currents, is a mooring on the southern part of the reef. It is possible to do semi-drifts and full drifts towards the eastern side, but this is highly dependent on calm conditions on the surface for divers to be picked up safely by boats. The currents on the south western side of the reef towards Woodhouse are often referred to as the 'washing machine', and have been known in the past to carry divers far into the middle of busy shipping lanes. It is important, therefore to listen to and observe local dive guides.

If you're lucky to catch the Strait of Tiran reefs on a quiet diving day, direct your eyes to the blue when you can. Strong currents, most profuse at the edge of Jackson reef, attract an abundance of pelagic fish particularly during the summer months. Even for those who have dived these reefs for many years, it still can serve up a surprise or two. My personal best was hammerheads, of course, – I have also had many more enjoyable moments with these incredible sharks on subsequent dives since my first encounter – but I've also had a fleeting yet definite glimpse of a sunfish (mola mola) during a fantastic drift on a flat calm day. There are also many other stories of incredible encounters on Jackson Reef, including huge pods of dolphins, oceanic white tip sharks, thresher sharks and even the odd tale of a tiger shark.

In the less wind-swept and calm days of summer, boats are able to dive the north side of the reef. Although far from guaranteed, the chance to see the resident school of scalloped hammerhead sharks is well documented. Heading out into the blue should only be carried under the supervision of a suitably experienced guide and plan agreed upon beforehand.

Charlotte Boan

Egyptians are a colourful people and this is reflected in the names of the seas and deserts that make up the geography of their land. We all know the Red Sea but what about the White Desert and even the Bahr el Obiad (White Sea)? Known to most of us as the Mediterranean, this 'White Sea' occupies the length of Egypt's northern coast. While the towns and beaches of the North coast are relatively new to tourists many of history's greatest stories of love and war have taken place in this stretch of land between Gaza and Libya.

The most famous city in this region is, of course, Alexandria. Named after Alexander the Great in 331 BC, Alex was once one of the two biggest cities in the world, second only to Rome. Cleopatra and Antony had their ill-fated love story here, and centuries of Pharaohs and Romans made Alexandria their capital. Until the Revolution in 1952, Alex was a cosmopolitan city where Greeks, Armenians, French and Jews lived side-by-side. After the expulsion of the foreign residents, however, Alex suffered and the once majestic buildings slid into decline. Until the Early years of this century resembled a once beautiful city left to crumble. Fortunately a new governor decided to renovate and rebuild, beginning with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (the Library of Alexandria) which was completed in 2002. Tourists today can now enjoy a stay in the Four Seasons complex and walk along the newly refurbished promenade while enjoying the magnificent architecture of buildings ranging from the 6th to the 20th centuries. Sadly, the cosmopolitan nature of Alexandria's inhabitants has been lost to a more conservative outlook. As inviting as the sea looks, you cannot wear a bikini in public here as Alex's current population is highly conservative.

Moving west along the coast there are a number of new resorts and developments. One of the most popular with the Egyptian high society is 'Marina'. A complex comprising of privately owned villas and hotels, Marina has manmade lagoons and jetties for all kinds of watersports. Summer weekends are packed out, and at night there are clubs and bars to suit all ages. If you don't fancy hitting the sea then many of Cairo's stores have outlets here so shopping is another way to spend hot summer days (and nights).

All along the coast there are small complexes of villas and hotels, getting smaller and more secluded the further you travel. At the opposite end of the spectrum from bustling Marina, 80 km from Alexandria there are a number of villa only complexes. Usually consisting of around 20 villas with private beaches these are a great way to escape the crowds. The beaches along this stretch of coast are without exception stunning, as white sand drifts into turquoise and sapphire sea. Be warned though, the currents are strong and swimmers need to be aware of the riptides and heavy waves.

The North coast is a spot for water sports and sunbathing, there are diving opportunities (mainly centred around Alex), but this is not the main focus. That being said, snorkelers can try to find the guitar sharks that like to hide in the sea grass along the quieter stretches of coast.

The North Coast looks to be the next 'big thing' for the Egyptian tourist industry and it would be my recommendation to get up there while it's still relatively untouched.

A Town Called Alex

BLUE's sub-editor Sarah Adjani travels to the Mediterranean resort of Alexandria.

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Photo: Francesco Pipino



Photo: Francesco Pipino

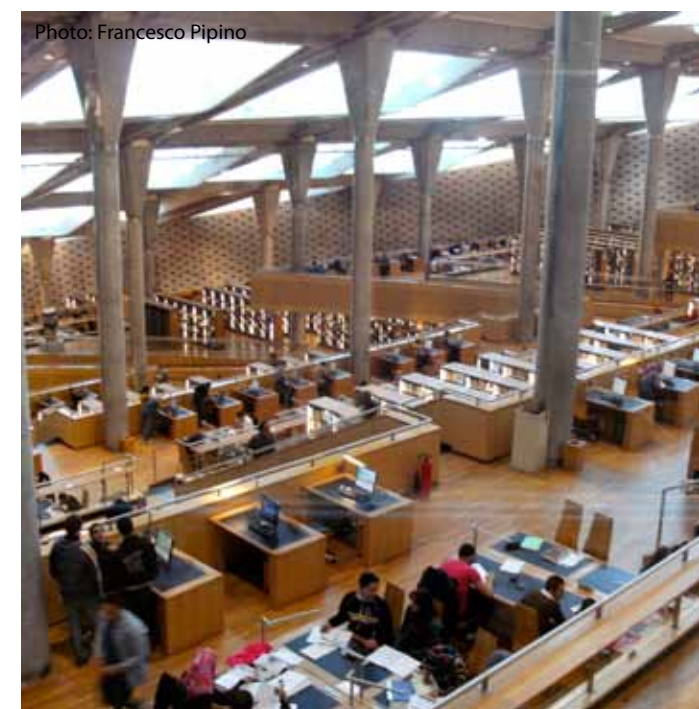


Photo: Francesco Pipino



Hamata and Berenice

..This is a remote part of the Red Sea to visit. Divers who opt to stay here swap nightlife and shopping for silence and wilderness...



photo: www.qulaan.com



photo: Karin Brussaard



photo: www.qulaan.com

The furthest south of all Egypt's Red Sea holiday destinations, Hamata and Berenice, often dubbed the 'gateway to Africa' are situated around 400km from Hurghada on the mainland. Marsa Alam, approximately 230km north of Hamata and Berenice, is the closest airport. The journey by road from the small international airport takes around three hours.

Hamata is a favoured harbour for liveaboards heading to the most remote diving sites in the area, such as the famous Daedalus, Rocky and Zabargad islands, and the outer reef systems of Fury Shoal and St John's Reef. The nearby town of Berenice is surrounded with remnants of ancient times.

This is a remote part of the Red Sea to visit. Divers who opt to stay here swap nightlife and shopping for silence and wilderness. The resorts are experiencing a steady and healthy growth in tourist development, however, so there is excellent hotel accommodation of offer as well as a raft of activities in and out of the water. Most of the coastal area, however, belongs to the Wadi el Gemal National Park, where only eco-lodges are permitted to be constructed.

Wadi el Gemal is one of the most celebrated and thriving national marine parks in Egypt and lies just to the north of Hamata and Berenice. It is well protected by a series of strict environmental laws and conservation organisations. The dive sites, once the realm of liveboard divers only, are now easily reached by day boat divers from Hamata. These include the underwater gems of Qulan Islands, Sha'ab Makhsour, Sha'ab Ossama, Sattaya and Sha'ab Claude.

Getting there: Marsa Alam is the closest airport to the resorts of Hamata and Berenice, approximately 230km north. There are a number of international flights landing here, as well as regular flights from Cairo. The journey by road from the airport takes around three hours.

Some of the blue chip dive sites in the area include:

Sattaya: sometimes referred to as the 'second Dolphin House of the south', the first being the Samadai offshore reef near Marsa Alam. Here the crescent-shaped large reef is home to a huge pod of spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*).

Sha'ab Makhsour: where the largest number of shark species in the Red Sea have been regularly spotted, this reef is high energy dive site, only for experienced divers. A large tower which plunges to extreme depth is a popular pass for pelagic life.

Sha'ab Claude: One of the better known sites in this area to divers, this reef ranges from depths of 5m to 25m and attracts a mass of marine life. Its labyrinth of coral canyons, crevices and overhangs create stunning natural light shows. Venture to a large cluster of fan and brush corals which grow out of a cave in 15m and you are likely to spot a member or two of the estimated five resident long nosed hawkfish. Frequent marine life spots on this vibrant reef include Napoleon fish, stonefish, nudibranchs, crocodilefish, and turtles among others. Schools of bannerfish, goatfish and snapper are also regularly seen here.

Topside: Ancient history and fascinating nature sum up what's available topside to visitors of this area.

History: The town of Berenice is an historian's dream. The ancient city was named by Ptolemy II after his mother and became a trading port in 275BC. A ruined Temple of Semiramis built by Trajan and Tiberius is near the modern centre and, inland, there are the remains of the emerald mines of Wadi Sakait, which were worked from the Pharaoh through to Roman times.

Nature: A fascinating landscape, where the vast desert here touches the ocean you will find mangrove swamps and palm trees lining the coast. Bird watching is among many of excursions on offer, with many species attracted to the mangrove areas. Desert trips are available by both jeep and camel and well worth joining.



Have Your Say:

This is your Red Sea watersports community magazine and we want to hear from you. Share your views with others in the industry, email: blue@cdws.travel. Letters should be no more than 200 words and may be edited for reasons of space or clarity. We will not print letters where only an email address is given. Full name and contact details must be provided (only name and location will be printed).

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The Extra Factor

Small actions can make a huge difference to underwater photographs. **Maria Munn** shares some special tips and tricks underwater photographers can use to add that something extra to images.



Abstracts

The best place to start with in underwater photography is something which is still. Even just using the camera's macro mode and the built-in flash can give wonderful results.

Abstract

Abstract shots of the corals or sponges are every beginner's dream. The only problem may be trying to decide from which direction to take a picture of them. Getting close and filling your frame with gorgeous gorgonian fans can give you a very dramatic, different picture. Using a little bit of your camera's flash will really bring these lush subjects to life.

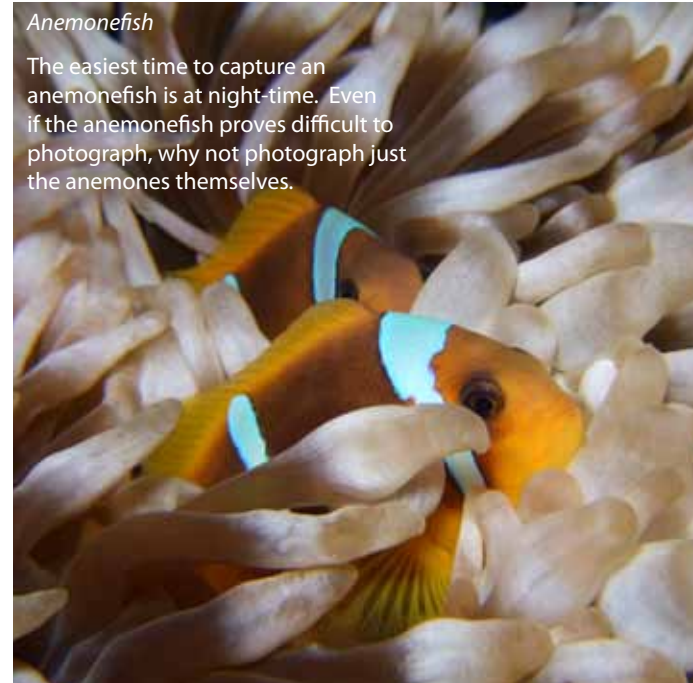
Textures, colours, abundance of corals, wrecks and extraordinary fish life, the Red Sea is a unique destination which is full of spectacular photo opportunities at every turn. But with so many choices to snap away at, sometimes it's hard know where to start in making sure you take home some wonderful shots

Here I explore a few tips and tricks with you to help give your photos the wow factor. Many more are covered in my new book, *Underwater Photography for Compact Camera Users*, so don't forget to grab a copy to help turn you into a compact camera champion.

As said many a time before, you must remember to always get as close to your subject as possible, without harming the coral or marine life around you. Perfect buoyancy is the key to any great shot, so if your skills are a little wobbly, then get in some practice with your dive school. When you are starting out in photography, always start out with a subject which doesn't move – tube sponges are a perfect well-behaved example. Practising with your settings will help you grab that passing award-winning photo when it presents itself to you!

Anemonefish

The easiest time to capture an anemonefish is at night-time. Even if the anemonefish proves difficult to photograph, why not photograph just the anemones themselves.



Bring out the clowns

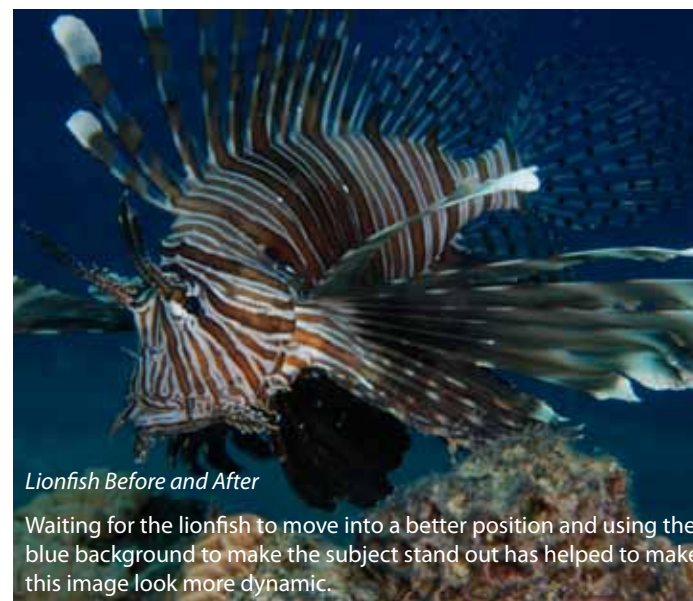
Anemone fish can be the hardest of subjects to photograph and I always prefer to shoot these at night when they are sleeping in their anemone. If you are shooting during the day, using a 'panning' action where you are moving your camera in line with the subject. Keeping your finger half-way down will go a long way to helping his head to be in focus and to have more than a fish-tail in the frame!

Head on

Shooting your subject on a diagonal can turn a rather dull photograph into a more interesting one. This is particularly true for inquisitive cornet and trumpetfish. Focusing on their head can make an interesting photograph a rather dramatic one, although a lot of patience may be required for this.

Other side

A simple turn of your camera can make a subject look so much better, for example, always shoot octopi in a portrait format so that you can fit their legs in and avoid them looking like rocks.



Lionfish Before and After

Waiting for the lionfish to move into a better position and using the blue background to make the subject stand out has helped to make this image look more dynamic.

Snells Window

Interesting shapes and effects can be achieved with a fisheye lens on the front of your compact.



Bigger picture

For those of you with wide-angle lenses, shooting on an angle while taking pictures of wrecks can really add a sense of ambience to the picture. Those who have fisheye lens can create a special effect called 'Snell's Window' (the phenomenon caused by refraction of light entering water, governed by Snell's Law.) By getting just beneath the surface on a calm day you can create an almost perfect circle.

Experimenting is truly the secret to success and a patient buddy will definitely go a long way towards helping you achieve your perfect photo. Don't forget to drop me a line at maria@oceanvisions.co.uk to let me know how you are getting on. Have fun!



Beginner finner to photo winner

The Red Sea is a popular location for underwater photography workshops with ideal conditions year-round, but not all courses are geared towards professional photographers with expensive SLR cameras. **Bertie Gregory**, a 17-year-old diver from the UK, joined a blue o two trip to the Northern Red Sea with his compact digital to see if Cameras Underwater photo experts could help turn his beginner underwater images into something special.

Before my week aboard Blue Melody I was a novice underwater photographer. I had played around with waterproof cameras snorkelling for many hours on end but I had never ventured into the world of diving photography. I had a classic and basic misunderstanding: I thought that if I was capable of taking great pictures on land, I could do the same underwater as my technical skills would be transferable.

Despite the many technical tips and tricks learnt on the trip, the most important lesson I discovered was that a person can be technically skilled with a camera, know about shutter speeds, apertures and ISOs, but if they have poor diving skills and/or lack knowledge of the marine life they are photographing, they will never take a good underwater picture. However, if you have good diving skills, a good knowledge of the marine life and a basic idea of composition, then you're well on your way to taking great underwater images.

Knowing all the technical jargon is not the main aim when underwater – good buoyancy and diving skills are what you should be aiming for before anything else. I started the trip with only 21 dives under my belt, and, although I was told my diving skills were better than most with my experience, they still weren't great. This initial lack of ability limited my underwater photography in a number of ways. Firstly, my bottom times were reduced, meaning I had less time to photograph each subject – by the time I'd spent a significant time with two or three subjects, it was time to surface. Secondly, it restricted what I could actually photograph without risking damage to the reef. Finally, my clumsy buoyancy control often scared marine life away before I was anywhere near to taking a decent picture.



Bertie Gregory

both myself and the other guests on the boat, were all returning to the surface with much better photographs.

As a group we were given regular talks between dives and in the evenings on subjects such as composition, lighting and manual white balance. As a result of my on land photography and previous snorkelling experience, in the beginning the talks just reinforced my existing knowledge. However, as the week progressed they began to cover topics that I was completely ignorant of, such as the use of external lighting and image enhancement programs such as Adobe Lightroom. Individual coaching was also readily available, it was not unusual for Duxy and Mario to be giving personal tuition at midnight over a bowl of crisps and a coke.

The tutorial team, together with the dive guides and other, more experienced guests helped to teach me more about marine life and how to approach different animals. I now understand the need

However, as with any liveaboard, the frequency of the dives meant my diving skills improved dramatically. By the end of the week I was approaching subjects slowly, hovering consistently and often exceeding an hour dive time.

At the same time, my knowledge of my Canon Ixus 980 and the speed and ease with which I could operate underwater naturally improved with practice and guidance from Paul 'Duxy' Duxfield and Mario Vitalini from Cameras Underwater in the UK. Specialising in underwater compact cameras, Cameras Underwater run trips with Red Sea liveaboard operator blue o two to offer beginners to more experienced photographers both private and group tuition. Within a short number of dives,

'Divers and batfish by Paul Duxfield



Pod of bottlenose dolphins by Bertie Gregory



Cornetfish by Bertie Gregory



to approach turtles from the side in order to allow them a route of escape if they feel threatened. I am no longer frightened of the ominous looking moray eel; learned that rocks that blink are probably stonefish and nudibranchs are not boring underwater slugs at all, but flamboyant extroverts.

The dive site itinerary was aimed for photography. Rather than rapidly touring all the reefs and wrecks the northern Red Sea had to offer, we remained on some of the highlight sites for a number of dives, such as Shark and Yolanda Reefs in the Ras Mohammed National Park. This was beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, it meant we knew where the good spots for photography were and, secondly, it gave us a chance to capture a dive site in different lighting conditions. Additionally, the actual dives themselves were fairly relaxed and geared for photography, so this meant my buddy and I could cruise the reef with no limited time restrictions or preset itinerary. However, it was handy to have a guide there as an extra pair of eyes to spot the more elusive marine life.

To introduce a competitive element, a contest was held with three different categories. This was then judged everyone on board, with prizes awarded by Cameras Underwater, to each winner and runner up. Being 17-years-old, and therefore ruthlessly competitive, this definitely spurred me on to take better photographs. I came away with the 'best wreck photo', which I was modestly pleased with, as before the week I had never even set eyes on one!

We were fortunate enough to be joined aboard by two very experienced photographers. The witty John Bantin, from DIVER magazine and photoshop guru, (our blue o two host) Drey Van Beeck. John was a fascinating wealth of underwater photographic stories, but he could be considered as having some fairly old fashioned ideas and he definitely wasn't afraid to share them with everyone. He took

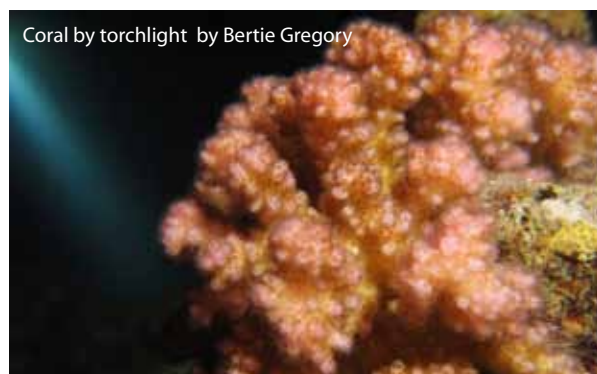
Clownfish Paul Duxfield



one look at my pathetic amount of facial hair at 6am on the first morning and commented, 'I remember when you had to be a man to hold a camera! He followed this up with, 'back when I was learning, we used a thing called film, but you wouldn't know what that is!' This comment raised an interesting point about the digital revolution. Ten years ago, had there been a photographic workshop aboard a dive vessel, the après dive discussions would have been very different to now. Ten years ago, after a dive, there would have been plenty of chat and boasting. Now there is indisputable photographic evidence behind which there is no hiding! Clearly, I take this for granted as I know no different, and we all gained huge benefit from instant review and constructive criticism, making progress much faster than if we were using film.

Consequently, reviewing my photos during and after a dive is habit, which I believe to be immensely beneficial as mistakes are instantly evident. This habit however must be carefully controlled as overuse can be a distraction from taking further photographs, as well as draining the battery of the camera. I was informed that overuse of the LCD is known as 'chimping'. I found it amusing to discover that this term is also used to describe the behaviour of young chimpanzees when they throw their excrement at each other! In contrast to me, the highly experienced Mr. Bantin steadfastly refused to review his LCD or even consider downloading his photos while on board the boat. Old habits die hard.

blue o two's Drey Van Beeck is a photoshop guru and he shared his extensive knowledge of photographic manipulation in a formal tutorial. The format was to describe a technique and then demonstrate step by step with a number of his creations. There were two very memorable examples of this teaching technique. He demonstrated how to use our images to create artwork showing how he had constructed a turtle infested chessboard in the process



You can see more of Bertie's images on his website
www.bertiegregoryphotography.com



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Marine Injuries part one

In the first of a two-part series, diving medical specialist **Dr Anke Fabian**, looks at the first aid treatment for marine bites, injuries and wounds.

Over the centuries the ocean has been subject of many myths and fantasies about dangerous and scary creatures of the deep. Although our understanding and knowledge of marine creatures and the underwater world has grown up considerably, still the fear remains among many of being hurt, bitten or even killed and eaten when venturing into the sea. Supporters of marine conservation are only too aware of how hard it is to change the fear that has been ingrained in the generation of Jaws watchers when it comes to sharks, for instance. The actual reality is that man will always pose a greater threat to the ocean, than the ocean will to man.

Exploring any wild habitat, of course, does present hazards to visitors – that's nature. We can deal best with what we know and are able to anticipate, therefore, it is well worth it for every diver to study marine

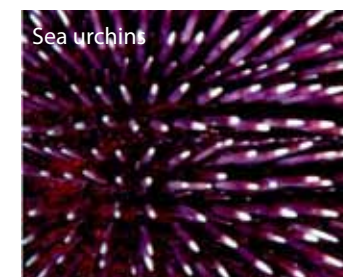
life to a certain extent and to become familiar with the behaviour of potentially hazardous situations with animals. If divers do not pay attention or understand threats, they can be faced with serious harm. While rare, some can be life threatening, depending on the kind of injury and if venom is involved, or individual reactions. Location can also be a factor, as deep water adds an extra threat of drowning.

There is marine life out there in the Red Sea that can potentially harm divers. One can classify the injuries either accordingly to their features as bites, punctures or injuries or in terms of with or without injected toxins.

Punctures with or without injected toxins (sea-urchins, stonefish, scorpionfish, rays, cone snail).

Bites with or without injected toxins (predators, trigger fish, sea snake, moray eels).

Injuries (surgeon fish, fishhook punctures, propeller injuries)



Prevention is – as always - the best therapy. Following these simple and commonsense rules can help prevent any potential problems in the first place.

- Don't harass or anger marine life
- Respect territories
- Don't feed sharks or moray eels
- Don't touch anything underwater and never reach into holes
- Stay clear from the reef, especially in a current or in surf
- Pay close attention to your buoyancy to avoid colliding with such life as fire coral or lionfish.

Don't walk barefoot on the reef. Not only can this kill coral, it can also hurt the walker.

There is a code of behavior underwater which one should try to follow as much as possible. Everyone who participates in ocean activities of any kind should know about the basic techniques and rescue procedures.

RESCUE PROCEDURES

- Your own safety comes first!
- Rescue the victim out of hazard zone
- Adjust victim in recovery position accordingly to circulatory stability
- Examine the victim thoroughly; remove suit and clothes for a proper examination
- Try to get as much information about the circumstances and kind of animal. Toxin involved?
- First AID wound care according to injury / Advanced Medical Care
- Call help if necessary or transport to the closest doctor/ hospital/intensive care unit
- CPR if necessary

Bites, punctures and wounds without injected toxins:

Basic wound care is the same whether you've been cut by a kitchen knife or bitten by a barracuda. In marine wounds, however, the risk of infection is high. In the ocean the mouths and skins of marine animals host numerous bacteria which are the leading cause of marine infections. Some wounds are complicated by broken teeth or other parts of the animal coming lose. Fortunately, not every wound gets infected. It depends on various factors such as wound location (extremities, body or head), wound type (cut, crush-wound, puncture), number of bacteria and the individual immune system.



First Aid wound care:

Wound cleaning:

- Check if there are foreign bodies in the wound by carefully pulling the edges of the skin open or pushing gently on it to feel if there is a stinging sensation. If there is an object in the wound or other embedded material try to remove it either by rinsing, using tweezers or tape.
- Rinse thoroughly. Don't delay rinsing for lack of sterile supplies. If available, use bottled water. But never scrub an open wound with ocean water, which often contains large numbers of bacteria.
- Antiseptics treatment: one common antiseptic is povidone-iodine solution. Use it in a dilution 1:10, as full-strength povidone-iodine can cause tissue damage.
- Puncture wounds: Clean and rinse puncture wounds as you would any other wound, remaining particularly alert for embedded objects. If you suspect something is inside a wound which cannot be extracted easily, see a doctor immediately. It could have a barbed hook. When pulled out with force it creates more damage to the tissue.

Controlling bleeding:

If a wound is bleeding, the loss of blood mostly seems to be much bigger than it actually is. Blood reddens the surrounding water and the amount of reddish liquid appears frighteningly high. Don't panic – think and act reasonably and calmly.

- Press a clean cloth directly against the wound until bleeding stops. If bleeding persists, or the edges of a wound are jagged or gaping, the victim likely needs stitches or taping.
- Adjust a pressure bandage, if the bleeding persists. Check that fingers or toes near any compressed wound remain pink and warm. If one has to arrest the blood circulation of a whole extremity in arterial bleeding, note the time of adjustment.

Bandages and plasters: Bandages (dressings) help control bleeding, and protect cuts from sand and dirt and sun. However, bandages can also hide early signs of infection. Check under all bandages for warmth, redness and swelling, the first signs of infection.

Advanced medical treatment: Dependent on the medical knowledge and education of the people who provide first aid, one can treat infections, pain or allergic reactions with medicaments (antibiotics, painkillers, antihistaminic tablets, cortisone) and ointments (see table right). If the bitten part of the body gets numb or cannot be moved normally see a doctor immediately.

Tetanus protection: All ocean wounds, large and small, carry the risk of tetanus (lockjaw), a deadly bacterial infection. Update your tetanus booster shot approximately every 5 years. If you aren't sure about the date of your last tetanus shot, get a booster.

Bites, punctures and wounds with injected toxins:

Injuries with injected toxins should be always considered as potential emergencies! As the amount of injected toxin is unknown one cannot foresee the reaction which also depends on the individual ability of the body to deal with the venom. The first leading symptoms are **immense pain** and mostly **panic**. Most toxins are neurotoxins which consist of proteins in combination



with tissue coagulating substances. The neurotoxins trigger **peripheral nerve deficit** (motor and sensory) or **central organic dysfunctions** with **multi organ failure** up to a **cardio-respiratory arrest**. In its nature as proteins the toxins can cause severe **allergic reactions**. The tissue coagulating substances (such as hyaluronidase) lead to vast **tissue necrosis** with secondary **infections**.

The first aid procedures are basically the same as in wounds with no toxin injected but generally need further medical treatment up to intensive care procedures depending on the kind and amount of venom, the intensity of bleeding, the individual allergic reaction and amount of pain. **A person with an intoxicated injury must see**

a doctor, even if the symptoms were only mild and the diver got off lucky and lightly. Generally, the toxins are metabolized within 45 minutes up to two hours. Acute life threatening symptoms are not likely to appear after that time, whereas late or chronic organic symptoms and allergic reactions can occur even after days, weeks or even months.

In the Red Sea **bites** with injected toxin are seldom but can occur with sea snakes, some species of moray eels. Without toxins from barracudas, trigger fish or sharks. **Punctures** with toxins are more frequent from stonefish, lionfish, or seldom from a cone shell. Surgeon fish can cause cuts.

Hazard	Frequency	Dangerous?	First Aid
Sea urchin	common	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Painful punctures• Infections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pull out large spine with tweezers or tape• Soak in vinegar• Disinfection
Scorpion fish	occasional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Painful punctures• Toxin injection• Tissue necrosis• Infections• No documented deaths in the Red Sea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rinse or scrub, search for remaining spines• Disinfection• Apply Heat• Introduce to a doctor• Advanced medical help if necessary• CPR standby• Painkillers, Antihistamines, Antibiotics
Stone fish	occasional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Painful punctures• Toxin injection• Tissue necrosis• Infections• Potentially fatal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rinse or scrub, search for remaining spines• Disinfection• Apply Heat• Introduce to a doctor immediately• CPR standby• Painkillers, Antihistamines, Antibiotics• Anti venom available
Rays	rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Painful• Slow healing wounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rinse or scrub, search for remaining stinger• Disinfection• Apply heat• Advanced medical help if necessary• Painkillers, Antihistamines, Antibiotics
Cone snail	rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Painful• Toxin injection• Potentially fatal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medical emergency!• Rinse or scrub and search for retained tooth• Disinfection• Broad pressure bandage• Position the bite side below the rest of the body• Introduce to a doctor immediately• CPR standby• Collect the snail for identification if possible but be aware not to get stung. Don't touch it!

Ocean goers and divers should carry a first aid kit:



First Aid Kit

- » Latex gloves
- » Antiseptic dilution (such as povidone-iodine 1:10), betadine creme
- » Tweezers, sticky tape
- » Gauze, plasters, elastic bandages
- » Vinegar, hot packs, cold packs
- » Antihistaminic cream
- » Nonprescription drugs like Aspirin, Panadol, Ibuprofene and Antihistamines
- » Oxygen available at the dive site

Like all regions, the Red Sea has popular home remedies and 'secret mixtures' for marine injuries, few of them scientifically tested. Although some folk cures may actually help, others may be harmful. You will hear more those myths that in the next editions part two of marine injuries: **stings**.

But, despite all these potential problems, please remember these are rare and easily preventable. Read any statistics on these type of

injuries and you will see they are few are far between. As far as shark attacks go, more people are killed by coconuts than sharks each year. So, watch out for any suspicious looking palm trees on your diving travels.

ASK DR ADEL

In association with
Red Sea Diving College
(www.redseacollege.com)



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

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



Drinking and Diving

It's hard to deny that people on holiday tend to drink alcohol when out and about in the evenings, particularly with so many bars, restaurants and nightclubs in the main Red Sea resorts. But what if you're diving while on holiday? How do you find the healthy balance between relaxing and enjoying yourself on holiday in the evenings and underwater?

First and foremost it is important to state that there is a big difference between 'feeling fine' and actually being 'fine'. One drink can actually produce a marked decline in reaction times, the visual, psychological and physical processing of tasks and a person's attention span. Furthermore, research has indicated that even after the blood alcohol level has returned to zero these abilities take time to return to normal, this has a large impact on the hung-over diver.

The diuretic effect of alcohol on the kidneys means that it becomes extremely easy to become dehydrated, creating an unacceptable risk of DCS. Drinking between dives (even one drink), is a definite no. Aside from the above factors, there is also an increase in the effect of nitrogen narcosis whilst in water.

A pilot study made in Sharm el Sheikh and published during the 2007 EUBS Conference concluded: 'Alcohol awareness among divers is not emphasized enough...and...that 6.5 per cent of diving professionals have a history of alcohol related injury.'

One must also account for the other factors that often accompany a night spent drinking. These can be anything from heavy smoking to disturbed sleep and late nights, neither of which are compatible with safe diving.

If the lure of the bar and tequila bottle is too much to resist then either save it for your last night or even take a days break in your dive trip. It is important to enjoy your holiday but it is more important to us that you remain safe.

Photo: Maria Munn



Diving weights

With obesity levels in Europe rising to as much as 20 per cent, activities such as diving do present some health challenges. While being overweight will not prevent you from diving, it does carry some extra health concerns. So what are the health concerns for those who carry more bodyweight than average?

A little bit of fat can be useful as it protects the internal organs and helps insulate against cold, what creates concern is excessive bulk and the physical and psychological stressors this creates.

First of all nitrogen just loves fat, the fatter tissues absorb a greater amount of nitrogen than other tissues, meaning that bigger divers suffer from a greater risk of decompression sickness (DCS) especially on longer or repetitive dives. The body's natural off gassing system, primarily the lungs, becomes overwhelmed with the additional gas and this may cause bubbles to enter the tissues and circulatory system.

Secondly an increase in weight will often go hand in hand with a decline in physical fitness, although divers may find their fitness adequate for general diving, it may be insufficient to handle an emergency situation. Poor fitness may result in an inability to provide rescue for either themselves or for their buddies. Poor fitness and obesity are also contributors to diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack and stroke, all of which cause dive accidents on a yearly basis.

Lastly a bulky belly can cause discomfort when diving as it may significantly restrict the movement of the diaphragm, which can make breathing deeply difficult. Inefficient breathing can mean lower oxygen levels and higher carbon dioxide which in extreme cases can cause breathlessness, confusion, panic or at worst unconsciousness. A larger wetsuit will be more buoyant as it contains more neoprene, coupled with the extra levity of fatty tissues, divers will possibly require an uncomfortable quantity of lead.

If you are concerned about your weight contact your diving doctor and get professional guidance.

Dr. Adel Taher & Dr. Ahmed Sakr

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Diving Equipments, Spare Parts & Accessories

If 'retro' is the current fashion and music buzzword, then why not go all the way and go retro with your watersports? I decided to go for it and take a course in that 80s favourite: windsurfing. Like the music of that most dubious of eras, windsurfing is undergoing somewhat of a revival. Luckily for me I didn't have to don a pair of rainbow legwarmers and use half a can of my mum's hairspray to join the windsurfing crew.

Dahab is ideal for most wind based sports and the bay there is designed with wind and kite surfing in mind. Watersports and swimmers have specifically designated areas, which is especially important for beginners like me who have little control over their board's destination.

So let's start with the beginning; you have a board and a sail and together these are your rig.

For beginners we start with quite a big board with a keel (known as a daggerboard) that acts as a stabiliser and a small sail so we don't get swept away.

The first lesson is usually around a couple of hours, of which about 30 minutes is spent on the beach to master a few moves. Most windsurfing schools will show you how to get up on the board and pull the sail up on land. The idea is simple enough; climb up on the board, position yourself with your feet around the mast and with bent knees pull on the cord attached to the sail.

In order not to have a back injury you need to use the force of your body leaning back to hoist the sail. Once the sail is up, you must reposition your feet so the forward foot is by the mast and the other is behind on the board. Easy to say when you're on dry land, but after a couple of tries in the water it becomes easy enough. Once you are in the standing position with your sail up you are in the 'safety position' as the sail should be up between your hands but with no power (wind pushing it). From this position you can practise some basic steering by tilting the mast to the left or the right and watching which way the board turns. All this is done first on and then in the water.

So for the difficult part, well for me anyway. By definition windsurfing depends on the wind and I have some issues understanding wind direction, especially in Dahab where it can be pretty gusty at the best of times. So next time I am going to focus on steering; quite important my instructor seems to think. His final words to me are 'think of where you want to go and point yourself in that direction', obviously he doesn't know me that well as forward planning is definitely not one of my strong points!



Where the wind takes me

Has windsurfing lost its cool to kitesurfing or is it making a retro fashion revival? In the first in a series of reports on learning to windsurf **Sarah Adjani** finds out first-hand why this sport is making a comeback.



Sarah Adjani is learning to windsurf with Club Mistral in Dahab: www.club-mistral.com/en/destinations/home/2/windsurfInfo



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