

A Guide to Scuba Diving

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The Ocean – Our Most Unexplored Frontier

Many people think that space is our final frontier – and that is not entirely true. While it is more difficult to get to outer space, we probably know more about the various planets and environments in space than we do about what lies beneath the surface of our oceans.

Just as in outer space, there is a whole environment, or ecosystem, under the waters that cover 75% of our planet, with 70% of our planet being ocean waters. Beneath those waters there really is an entirely new world -a world full of beauty and mystery that few humans have the opportunity to experience.

But the lucky few who do have the opportunity to experience this vast under water world are able to do so because they are scuba divers. Obviously, human beings cannot breathe underwater, so instead, they rely on a portable respiratory system that is self contained.

In fact, that is what the word Scuba means: Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus. This apparatus allows human beings to dive to depths that were once unthinkable, and to stay under the water for long periods of time, depending on how full the air tank is. Different mixtures of gasses are used in the air tank, depending on the length and depth of the planned dive.

Forages into this underwater world have become increasingly popular, especially since Scuba diving equipment makes it so easy. Now, if there is an ocean nearby, you can bet there are scuba divers, scuba lessons, and scuba diving clubs in the vicinity as well. There are even scuba diving clubs that are not located near oceans. These clubs plan trips around the world to go scuba diving

in different oceans!

When you see the beauty that lives so peacefully under the water, it isn't any wonder why scuba diving is so popular. In fact, it is a world that is so amazing and breath taking that you will want to make an under water camera part of your essential dive equipment.

While no sport suits everyone, most people who try scuba diving are hooked after their very first dive. Most people are looking forward to their next dive before they ever return home from the last dive.

In our fast paced world, scuba diving offers the ultimate in relaxation and stress relief. Imagine a world where there are no phones, no palm pilots – and no rush. You leave a world that is noisy, and enter a world where the only real noises you will hear are the bubbles from your scuba gear. In this world, you are only limited by the amount of air in your tank.

The History of Scuba Diving

As far back as recorded history goes, people have been drawn to and mystified by the ocean. Before the industrial age, however, if one wanted to explore what was beneath the surface of the ocean, one had to hold his or her breathe, and obviously, could only explore for as long as they could hold their breathe.

The ocean has always provided human beings with a source of food, and since man discovered this, he has been working on ways to better explore that underwater world. Initially, humans held their breath to either explore or gather food, but eventually, hollow reeds were used.

These reeds allowed swimmers to keep their heads under the surface, where they could view the underwater life to an extent, for an indefinite period of time. However, using hollow reeds would not allow the swimmer to submerge more than a couple of feet.

Next, divers tried to use air bags. Unfortunately, this could not work because the air that was being breathed in from the bag was being exhaled back into the bag, and then inhaled again, causing the diver to breath in carbon dioxide. Air bags were followed by diving bells in the 16th century. The bottom portion of the bell contained water, but the upper portion contained air. The diver could hold his breathe to dive, then return to the bell to rest and get air.

It wasn't until 1825 when William H. James made a huge advancement in the diving world. He designed a diving suit that was self contained and had compressed air, which was in an iron container that was to be strapped around one's waist.

In 1829, Charles and John Deane improved on this design, presenting the first air-pumped diving helmet to the world. As time marched on, divers kept improving on the older systems, and by 1865, the first diving regulator had been invented by Benoit Rouquayrol and Auguste Denayrouze.

Unfortunately, the equipment was all still so heavy that the diver did not actually dive into the ocean – he walked. By 1879 the first known rebreather was being used, and by 1905 the first rebreather that had metering valves that allowed for control of the oxygen supply was invented.

By 1926, divers were actually swimming, instead of walking on the seabed floor, and in the 1930's Guy Gilpatrick of France was swim diving with waterproof goggles. Swim fins also arrived on the scene, again in France. However in San Diego, California, the very first sport diving club, known as the Bottom Scratchers, was opened.

Research and improvements continued, and finally, around 1953, thanks to an article that appeared in the National Geographic Magazine about Jacques Cousteau, the general public in the United States became interested in scuba diving.

At this time, the breathing apparatus for scuba diving was called Aqualungs, and this gear was very expensive. Because diving suits were so rare during the war years, people often dived in their regular swimming attire and so scuba diving as we know it today was referred to as skin diving. The first wetsuit wasn't actually introduced until 1956.

Throughout the history of scuba diving in the United States and Canada,

television shows and movies, such as Titanic, have made scuba diving even more popular. It seems that every time such a movie is released, there is a surge in the sale of scuba gear and lessons, as newer generations join the ranks of those who have a love for the world that hides beneath the surface of the water. Whether you are young or old, or you want to dive for pleasure or turn scuba diving into a full time career, every time you dive, you are continuing a quest that began when man first laid eyes on the ocean. You are part of a quest to discover what secrets that beautiful and mysterious underwater world holds.

Will you discover a new breed of sea life? Will you discover a sunken pirate's ship or an old cargo ship? What type of sea life will you find? One of the best things about scuba diving is that you can never be fully sure what is waiting to be discovered beneath the surface until you actually discover it.

Even if you dive in the same area time and time again, you will see something new or different on each dive. The life within the ocean is only contained by the land that surrounds it – or that it surrounds. Other than that, there are no borders. Again, you will only be limited by the amount of air in your tank!

Diver Education

You have probably seen shows that depict scuba divers. You may have seen pictures that are taken under the water of scuba divers as well. It all looks very easy – and in a sense, it is. But there is a great deal that you must know before you can participate in your first dive.

Do not assume that the guy at the sports store or the dive shop can tell you everything you need to know when you purchase your diving equipment. You need to take scuba diving lessons and become a certified diver. This is necessary for your own safety, as well as for the safety of those who are diving with you. A lot can go wrong on a dive.

You also cannot learn everything you need to know on one Saturday afternoon. To complete the first certification course that is offered by scuba diving schools, it takes approximately 32 hours of instruction. You will definitely need open water certification if you hope to go scuba diving in the ocean.

Today, you can take a portion of your scuba diving lessons online, and then complete your training at a local dive school, where you will practice in a swimming pool. You could also complete your certification in the ocean, again through a diving school, where you will get greater hands on experience. Do not be surprised that most of your scuba diving training will take place in a classroom setting, as opposed to doing any actual diving. The diving comes later in the course, after you know the basics.

There are many things that you must consider when selecting a dive school or certification program. All dive schools are not created equally – and the quality of

the education you receive may mean the difference between life and death when you are doing open water dives.

Start by getting references for dive schools from divers that you know or meet. If you don't know any divers in person, you can easily find divers in your geographic region through the numerous online scuba diving communities, and get recommendations that way. Also, when you talk to the dive school operators, ask for references, and check those references out!

Talk to the instructors. Find out how long they have been diving, how long they have been certified, what level of certification they have, how long they have been teaching, and how many courses they have taught.

Ask about the equipment that will be used during the training. Will you be taught how to properly use the equipment that you personally own or plan to buy as well? There are several different types of equipment, all with different procedures for operation. Make sure that you will learn what you need to know.

Do not skimp on yourself. You will find that the cost of training and certification varies from one school to the next. Schools that are longer generally cost more than the schools that have shorter training periods. There is a reason for this, and for your safety and well-being, you should go with a school that has a longer training period, even though it will cost more.

Diving school is affordable, but not cheap. If the school is cheap, it's a sure bet that the equipment is probably worn or outdated, or that the instructors are not that great. Don't make the mistake of just checking out one dive school – check all of the schools in your area.

Also watch out for hidden charges. When you are first quoted a price for training, it may sound like a good deal – but after you've signed up, you may find that there are more fees that you have to pay. You may be required to purchase additional equipment or books – which they will happily sell you.

Ask about discounts as well. Many dive schools also offer certification courses. If you take your initial training through them, they may offer you a nice discount on the cost of the certification.

The important thing is to do your research. Be picky and ask questions. If the dive school or schools in question become irritated with your questions, these are not the people you want to teach you how to scuba dive anyway – because there will be questions then as well.

Just remember that this training literally means the difference between life and death on the open water. You would never put your life in the hands of a second rate doctor – don't put your life in the hands of a second rate scuba instructor either.

If you live near a YMCA, this may be the ideal place to take your scuba lessons. The YMCA usually offers the best training at the most affordable price. Don't think that you can bypass training. You will need a certification card that shows that you have diver training before you can rent scuba equipment, join commercially sponsored dives, or even take advanced training courses.

Different Types of Diving

There is more to scuba diving than meets the eye. There are different types of scuba diving. First, there are two major classifications – recreational diving and professional diving. Each classification has other classifications within it as well. Recreational diving, for instance, may include cave diving, free diving, drift diving, altitude dives, deep diving, ice diving, night diving, underwater photography or videography, or even simple snorkeling.

Different types of dives require different types of training as well. Just because you have been trained and certified in regular scuba diving does not mean that you are qualified for ice diving or other types of diving.

Some people start diving for recreational purposes and discover such a love for the sport that they begin doing it professionally. They may become instructors, or enter into one of the many professional or commercial diving fields.

Professional diving includes marine biology diving, maritime archaeology, underwater search and recovery, underwater ship repair, and wreck diving. Professional divers are often called tech divers, and they may also participate in deep diving, ice diving, night diving, and cave diving during the course of their professional diving activities.

Military diving includes combat divers as well as work divers for the armed forces. The Navy has an elite team of divers known as Frogmen. Public Safety Diving refers to police and rescue personnel who dive for the purpose of rescuing other human beings. They may also dive to recover human bodies, or to recover evidence.

Commercial diving encompasses professional divers, but also includes other breeds of divers as well. Offshore divers are used in the oil and gas industries, and they dive for the purpose of constructing, repairing, or maintaining offshore rigs and pipelines. Inland or Inshore divers often work in ship harbors to repair ports underwater, or to make repairs to ships underwater.

Some professional diving is quite dangerous. There are nuclear industry divers who literally dive in waters that are in radioactive conditions, or HAZMAT divers who dive when hazardous materials are present, such as when oil spills occur. The equipment used for different types of divers varies as well. Typically, professional divers use full face diving masks and the diving mask and the diving regulator are combined in one unit. These masks often include communication devices that make it possible for the divers to communicate with each other, or with people on the surface.

Depending on the length and depth of a dive, professional divers may have a long hose that supplies air from the surface, as opposed to a personal air tank. This hose is called an umbilical. The umbilical may also supply air for pneumatic tools. Some umbilicals provide electrical power for communication equipment or lighting equipment.

Again, the equipment that the diver uses depends a great deal on the type of diving they are doing. For instance, underwater photographers obviously need underwater cameras. Construction divers need tools that can be operated underwater. Usually these power tools are actually powered by high pressured air that is supplied by a hose from the surface.

Professional dive equipment is often very expensive, and not something that the

average recreational diver would want or need to invest in. At the same time, the equipment used by a recreational diver isn't suitable for those who are working underwater either. However, professional divers usually have a self contained air tank with them as an emergency back up – in case their air supply from the surface gets cut off for any reason.

Remember that most professional divers started diving for recreational purposes. There is a possibility that you like scuba diving so much that you seek further information about possible diving careers.

Different classifications of professional diving often require knowledge in other fields. For instance, if you want to be an underwater photography, you obviously need some photography skill. If you want to do construction underwater, you may need welding skills or other construction skills. If you want to do rescue diving, you may need first aid skills or even medical or police training.

Just think, before you know it, you may find yourself underwater working to make a movie, or shooting pictures of sea life for a magazine! If that is too tame for you, what about working underwater to raise sunken ships or to make repairs to ships? Maybe you won't turn into a professional diver at all. You might prefer to use your diving skills for pleasure, instead of for money – but the option is always there. Diving, after all, is a skill that not everyone has!

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