

# 10 THINGS to do before you give up diving!

+ EVERY WEEK AROUND THE WORLD HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE TAKE THE PLUNGE AND BEGIN A BASIC DIVE COURSE. THE REALITY IS THAT SOME WILL DROP OUT AND MANY OTHERS, AFTER WEEKS OR MONTHS, FOR A VARIETY OF PERSONAL REASONS, WILL GIVE UP DIVING.

YES, BREATHING UNDERWATER IS TOTALLY UNNATURAL AND CONFRONTS A BASIC FEAR: DROWNING. BUT DIVING IS A FUN AND ADVENTUROUS SPORT THAT'S A REAL BUZZ – AND NOT UNLIKE JUMPING OUT OF A PERFECTLY GOOD AEROPLANE UNDER AN OVERSIZED SILK HANKY!

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Part of the problem is that the unusual experience of breathing underwater begins to lose its shine. Once the reality of diving logistics hits, the novelty wears thin. Heavy gear, being wet and cold, possible sea sickness, one or two dives where nothing 'new' jumps out at you and all that clean-up after the long drive home. What's needed is to discover what diving is really all about. Not the ability to breath underwater, but the ability to use that unnatural process to discover the many secrets in our great oceans. So, before you hang up your fins, sell off all your gear and take up another sport, go through this check list. It may help you find that special experience which will put salt in your veins and put purpose in your diving.



## 1 DIVE ON A SHIPWRECK

The mystique and adventure of 'discovering' a sunken wreck is a buzz. Even a 'clean' wreck purpose-scuttled for divers, is a great experience. Some countries, such as Australia, have laws protecting shipwrecks and those with historical value are out-of-bounds to divers. But many others are accessible and diveable – some definitely only for experienced divers though – that are 100% safe in shallower waters and suitable for beginners. The *Eliza Ramsden* in Melbourne, the *Nord* in Tasmania, *Valiant* in Sydney, HMAS *Perth* in Western Australia, HMAS *Brisbane* in Queensland, the *Yongala* off

Townsville and the *Song Saigon* in Darwin are just a few. And every country in the Indo Pacific has varied safe wreck dives.

Do some research before booking your dive. Check out the wreck's history and look for photos of artefacts or special features that you can watch out for during your exploration. Some wrecks offer the only shelter to animals if there are no nearby reefs so be prepared for some concentrated marine life.

## 2 SWIM WITH A MARINE MAMMAL

Now here's a subject filled with political landmines! Current laws vary between



- ◀ Dive clubs allow you to share your passion with like minded people. They are a great way to travel as well, with clubs able to give good value in the dive travel industry.
- ▲ To some, wrecks are just 'dead boats'. To others they impart a very special buzz and are considered the ultimate adventure.
- ▶ Diving with marine mammals is one of the most amazing experiences that you can have underwater. Use an experienced licensed operator and always let the animal come to you.



- ▲ Diving for artefacts, such as bottles or as these divers are doing, for coins, may open up all sorts of new dive activities.
- ▶ A dive holiday at a remote location or from a liveboard dive boat, will take you into those locations that dreams are made of.

states, territories and countries regulating contacts with marine mammals, so its best to get among the critters with a certified or professional operator who knows the rules. In Australia and New Zealand you can swim or snorkel with dolphins, seals, sealions, do seal scuba dives and go whale watching. The latter, for a diver, is like taking a shower without water, so a trip to a country with less restrictive laws such as Tonga or Niue will let you swim with whales. Strictly speaking, even then you need a Federal permit to swim with mammals in other countries, which makes about as much sense as a New York gun license in Tasmania.

The problem with our marine mammal laws is that they don't stop idiots and only give an indication of how we should undertake mammal dives. The single most useful piece of information to take with you is that the mammal should always swim to you. There are seals, dolphins, whales and dugong in Australian waters. New Zealand has unique species, as do Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Malaysia. Some encounters are restricted by law and others are up to the dive operator to regulate. Most marine mammals view bubble-blowing as a threat so aim for snorkel-only encounters, though seals seem to love playing with exhaust bubbles and feel more at ease with a stationary scuba diver. In such situations the animal will dictate how close and how prolonged an encounter may be. Don't push it – and be patient. You may be fortunate enough to have your life changed by one encounter, or at the least have an experience that your work mates or school buddies can only dream about.

### 3 DO A BOTTLE DIVE

Finding a bottle may not be your 'thing', especially when it's empty. However, if you join a diver who is a keen artefact collector on a drift dive or bay transect, you just might get the bug. While searching you'll also find a lot of other really interesting critters. Remember, we are trying to expand your horizons so a bottle dive may quite possibly lead you into another field of exploration.

Imagine surfacing with a bottle from the First Fleet in Botany Bay, a plate from a Spanish galleon in the Philippines or a



greenstone axehead from an ancient Maori fishing expedition in New Zealand. Bottle dives have driven some divers into volunteering on underwater archaeological digs, turned them into rabid techies searching for deep wrecks, historical researchers and worse. Be warned – bottle diving can be contagious. Next time you're in a dive shop snoop around and you're sure to find a few crusty looking bottles. Starting a conversation with the shop operator may open a whole new world. Oh, and they can be worth lots of money. Lots.

### 4 DIVE AT NIGHT

When the sun goes down the day shift fish and critters retire and the night shift kicks in. Nocturnal workers emerge that day divers never see. Octopus are out and about as are eels and other nocturnal hunters. Polyps unfold, colours appear more vivid under your torch beam and all sorts of rampant activities spring into action. Your first dive at night may be intimidating until you get in the water but as your torch lights up the seabed you'll be transfixed by the amazing nocturnal variety. While the beam of your torch restricts your view of the reef, you'll find the enforced concentration of your view will reveal far more than a dive on the same reef during the day. Your first night dive may be more comfortable if you select a site that you've dived on more than one occasion during daylight – navigation will be a little easier and you'll recognise the change in animal life.

Imagine prodding the meat at your next barbecue or leaning up against the water cooler at work quietly letting drop that last



- ▲ Working with researchers may be just that, hard work, but the results are always very satisfying.
- ▼ Night diving with an experienced friend at your favourite day site will reveal all sorts of new critters. All you need are two torches and a sense of adventure.

weekend you dived one of the local reefs – at night. Feel free to elaborate and expand the adventure to invoke lots of 'ooh's' and 'aaaah's'. Even better, think of the mind and experience expanding adventure. Go buy a torch or two and book in for a night dive.

### 5 TAKE AN ENVIRONMENTAL DIVE

The purpose is to improve a dive environment and may be a trash recovery dive, a critter clean-out drive, or a research dive. Every year pro-active dive clubs organise cleanups of popular local dive sites. While some rubbish is used by critters (such as octopus adopting bottles for homes and seahorses latching onto cables), other rubbish detracts from and despoils the natural beauty of the underwater world. Some, like boat batteries, are toxic and others such as bags of rubbish, are downright yucky dumpings by those who don't appreciate the underwater world you enjoy.

A critter clean-out dive is usually conducted when a critter needs to be removed from a dive area. This may be an introduced species or a naturally occurring species that has undergone a population explosion, often as the result of pollution or other human intervention. Crown of thorns sea stars and Northern Pacific sea stars are typical critters on this list, but there are others. Joining in on a clean-out day may help you to see that you can contribute towards a clean environment and make a difference. It's educational, useful, fun and you'll meet a bunch of like-minded divers.

Research dives include working with organised groups to gather information and club activities to aid research. Recent efforts to count the grey nurse shark populations around Australia are an example. Not only will your participation give a purpose to your diving but you'll also be contributing to a much larger effort to understand our oceans. Far more valuable than any donation to a dodgy 'non profit' organisation!

The *Undersea Explorer* offers these sorts of trips year round in northern Queensland, targeting different subjects such as minke whales, tiger sharks, coral spawning, nautilus, turtles, etc. Check their ad in this magazine.

### 6 TAKE A PHOTO UNDERWATER

Yes, photography can be expensive. Especially if you get the bug.

## extending your horizons<sup>o</sup>

But there are cheap ways of recording your dive. You can buy a disposable camera in a water-resistant housing for snorkel diving (perfect for a dolphin swim), rent a camera for a single dive, a day, or a week long trip, or you can buy a cheap housing for a digital camera you already own. The purpose here is not to produce gold medal shots, just record the dive, the critters and discoveries. With a camera in hand you'll find that you're looking more carefully at the reef around you, discovering all sorts of amazing critters that you'd normally have thundered over in a marathon swim to cover as much area as possible. Diving will no longer be an event where you use dive gear and get wet – it's a search for new life forms and experiences.

You'll know when the bug hits. You'll cover 1/3 the distance, use less air, come up babbling about the 'green thingy with long whats-its' and the 'silver fish with a funny long nose'. You'll begin buying books to identify all those new discoveries or bury yourself in the boat's library during a surface interval, dreaming of new expensive camera gear. The dichards that are beyond help will begin rattling off taxonomic names. Humour them, nod wisely, then refer to every fish as a 'snapper' and watch their faces go purple!

Your dive buddy may become impatient with you as you devote an entire dive to one fish. Don't worry, they're probably a latent bottle diver and will eventually gravitate to similar like-minded divers.

### 7 INTRODUCE A FRIEND TO DIVING

Warning! This may cause you to become a dive instructor. Seeing the enthusiasm of a new diver may trigger you into a totally different direction. Some people are born teachers; they can organise their thoughts to simplify the most complex concepts and thrive on dispensing new-found knowledge. You could also volunteer to help manage large groups working through their dive course. It may mean less time in the water and more mucus-filled masks than you ever wanted, but if teaching is in your blood you may discover a whole new lifestyle.

It may be as simple as taking your family or friends for a snorkel in the shallows, pointing out some of the critters you've discovered. Don't, of course, ever take someone scuba diving who isn't already a qualified diver.

