

Underwater World

Some of our specialists are expert divers and well-qualified to offer advice for the experienced and less-so, alike. Here they choose some of their favourite dive spots.

The Mafia Islands

Having not dived in a while, I recently chose the perfect spot to begin again - the Mafia Islands in southern Tanzania. Whilst there are a wide variety of dive spots to choose from, my favourite was the Kinasi Pass. The shallows are around 10-15 metres deep and there is excellent coral cover, with the slope then dropping into a wall around 18-26 metres deep. It is an excellent drift dive on the incoming tide and barracuda are usually seen in large numbers. There are always large shoals of snappers, big ribbontail rays, large groupers, napoleon wrasse, humphead parrot fish, turtles and occasionally sharks!

Melissa Hillen: 01993 838 516

Melissa has an Open Water qualification from PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) and has dived in Thailand, Zanzibar, the Mafia Islands and Cancun.

Western Australia

One of my most memorable diving experiences was on the Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia. It was here that I had my first encounter with whale sharks, the largest of the shark family and the largest fish in the world, but unlike some of its near relatives, it is a harmless vegetarian! Thought to mainly inhabit worldwide temperate and tropical seas, the whale shark is rarely seen in shallow coastal waters. However, every year between late March and June these friendly plankton eating fish set up home on the Ningaloo Reef. Whale sharks are fascinating creatures, recognised by their exceptionally wide mouth and distinctive pattern of white spots along their back. Diving with whale sharks on the Ningaloo Reef is a unique and truly unforgettable experience that I would highly recommend.

Lucy O'Neill: 01993 838 821

Lucy has dived extensively in Australia and has an Open Water qualification from PADI.

The Galapagos Islands

I have been a keen diver since I was ten years old and spent a number of years working as a PADI Instructor. I have been lucky enough to travel to countries which offer some superb diving and one place divers always talk about is the Galapagos Islands. This is truly one of the world's ultimate dive destinations which more than lives up to its reputation. Open sea diving here is all about marine life. Visibility can be poor with strong currents and cool seas, so it is often not what people expect and it is not a place to learn to dive, but if you are relatively experienced and (most importantly) enthusiastic, the sheer abundance of large and unusual marine life will astound you. Expect to encounter manta rays, hammerhead sharks, inquisitive sealions, penguins and even flightless cormorants. Naturalist cruises focus mainly upon island based activities such as nature walks, but dives can be arranged, and this approach is ideal for those who want a taster. If you are really hooked, then seven to ten night specialist dive expeditions can take you to the remote islands of Darwin and Wolf, which offer some of the finest diving found anywhere.

Patrick Chase: 01993 838 618

Patrick is a qualified PADI Instructor and has dived in the UK, Greece, Italy, Egypt, Costa Rica, the Galapagos Islands, Kenya, the Maldives, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu and Fiji.



Moray eel amongst the corals, Maldives

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea is every adventurer's dream. It boasts truly primitive tribal culture, stunning Birds of Paradise and miles of coral reef bursting with colour and an abundance of marine life, like nothing I have seen before. Last June, I was lucky enough to spend a week in two of the country's most popular diving centres. What struck me most was the diversity of sea life and how each location offered such different types of diving. Kavieng in New Ireland is famed for undamaged Japanese World War II relics, from sunken fighter planes to massive ship wrecks all heaving with pelagics – reef sharks, eagle rays and groupers as big as myself! It's quite scary coming face to face with one of these over the bow of a sunken trawler! On the other hand, Walindi in New Britain offers pristine coral reefs with no other boats in sight and a huge variety of fish, from the tiny pygmy sea horse to the awesome Orca.

Vanessa Coleridge: 01993 838 117

Vanessa is a PADI Dive Master and has dived in Cyprus, Malta, Oman, Belize, Venezuela, Thailand, Bali, Malaysia, Borneo, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea.

Maldives

When relaxing in the warm sunshine of the tropics the best way to cool down is by diving into the clear blue Indian Ocean. Better still, is to discover what lies beneath it. Because the Maldives is a group of shallow, coral-fringed islands, most of the diving surrounds the edges of the beautiful beaches. The water is a pleasant 27 to 29°C and the visibility rarely drops below 30 metres. As you descend into the depths you instantly encounter colourful corals and diverse sea life including turtles, trigger fish, moray eels and, of course, white and black tip reef sharks, to name a few. Having personally dived throughout the world I believe that the Maldives has some of the finest diving that can be offered to any underwater naturalist.

Stephen Fisher: 01993 838 319

Stephen is a PADI Master Scuba Diving Trainer and continues to teach when time permits. He has dived extensively in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Honduras, Belize, Jamaica, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, the USA, India, the Maldives and Mauritius.



Wreck diving in Papua New Guinea



Diving with whale sharks