

Water

WORLD



If you've explored a destination on land, why not spend a few days exploring the underwater part of it. It's a whole new world. If you're not already qualified, you can choose to do an introductory course, a full PADI training course or, for the more qualified, a day or more diving and discovering some of the underwater world's most spectacular species. A number of our destination specialists are keen divers, some are qualified instructors, and here they pick out their own favourite dives sites.

Belize

As an experienced diver who has explored many places in the world, I can guarantee that you really do not get much better diving than exploring the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean, off Belize. Here the world's second longest barrier reef, at nearly 300 kilometres, is teeming with life and waiting to be explored. The coral reef rivals that of anywhere else I have been with its array of beautifully coloured soft and hard corals and abundant sea life such as turtles, moray eels, reef sharks and spotted eagle rays. If you are a beginner, then this is a superb place to learn to dive too, with a wide variety of shallow dives as well as those to explore the deep, such as the famous Blue Hole. Those looking to get away from the diving masses to immerse themselves fully in first-class diving should consider staying on one of the tiny atolls (a central lagoon surrounded by a coral reef) rather than on one of the main cayes (islands). We work closely with Turneffe Flats who operate three, four and seven night diving packages from their wonderful family run lodge on Turneffe Atoll. The diving here is both peaceful and pristine – you will barely see another boat and each and every dive is incredibly different.

For more information, please call Richard Kerr on 01993 838 624.

Damaniyyat Island, Oman

Oman rarely appears in top-10 lists of amazing dive sites; not really a surprise when one considers that, until recently, few people had even heard of the country. However, sensational diving is just one of the many attractions of this hidden gem of Arabia. I grew up in Oman, and learned to dive there. Fed by rich currents from the Indian Ocean, the waters are able to support a huge variety of marine life. Divers can regularly expect to see angelfish, moray eels and often some (very docile) black-tip reef sharks amid stunning coral formations. Also, thanks to the restrained pace of development there, dive sites are deserted and damage to reefs and the marine environment is fortunately very low. The protected marine nature reserve of the Damaniyyat Islands, where whale sharks are known to congregate in remarkably clear water, are absolutely world-class and lie 15 kilometres from the coast. Added to that, Oman has several nesting beaches for the green turtle so it is not uncommon to encounter these placid and graceful creatures over the course of a dive.

For more information, please call Harry Ring on 01993 838 428.

Mafia Archipelago, Tanzania

One of my favourite areas for diving off East Africa is the Mafia Archipelago in Tanzania. The Chole Bay boasts 48 species of coral ranging from beautiful sea fans to pink-tipped staghorn coral. The marine life itself is superb with more than 400 species of fish including colourful damselfish, butterflyfish, Napoleon wrasse and hawksbill turtles. Visibility is best from October to February, and between November and March migrating whale sharks pass through the islands, which is a real treat. The lovely thing about diving off Mafia is the diversity of the dive sites which can suit beginners right up to advanced divers.

For more information, please call Katie Fewkes on 01993 838 513.



Angelfish, Mafia Archipelago



Aerial shot of the Blue Hole, Belize



Whale shark, Ningaloo Reef



Green turtle, Daymaniyat Islands, Oman

Gili Islands, Lombok, Indonesia

The Gili Islands, off the island of Lombok, have long been renowned on the backpacker circuit for their tropical blue waters and white sand beaches. Although the islands themselves have now become saturated with accommodation options, the hundreds of dive sites around the islands are still an excellent place for new divers or those looking to fit in a bit of diving on a touring trip. Famous for the abundance of green and hawksbill turtles, the area is also home to manta ray and around full moon large schools of bumphead parrotfish appear to feast on coral spawn. Visibility is regularly in excess of 20 metres and the coral life around a depth of 20 to 30 metres is superb. The last time I visited the Gili Islands, I chartered a traditional local boat at our favourite hotel in the area, the Tugu Lombok. From here we set sail on a half day tour exploring the islands, stopping where we liked to dive or snorkel in these tranquil waters – a day trip I would certainly recommend!

For more information, please call James Pook on 01993 838 124.

Male, Maldives

My favourite dive site is a 'cleaning station' not far from Male and within easy reach of some of our resorts in the Maldives. A cleaning station is a location where fish and other marine life congregate to be cleaned of parasites by animals such as cleaner shrimp and cleaner fish. Some of these spots attract manta ray and whale sharks which are probably two of the most exciting animals to see during a dive. Having dived twice at this same location I have seen manta ray on both occasions. Clearly unafraid of my presence, the two encounters made them my most memorable dives ever and I am longing to return again soon.

For more information, please call Daniel Smith on 01993 838 311.



Manta ray, the Maldives

Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia

It is impossible to choose one particular dive site as a favourite of mine within Australia as the country is blessed with too many to mention here. However, the many dive sites that can be found around the famous and altogether infrequently visited Ningaloo Reef on the west coast of Australia has some of the finest diving to be found anywhere and can easily be ranked up there with the Indian Ocean and Caribbean. As well as experiencing a plethora of colourful marine life, at certain times of the year you can spend a relaxing afternoon with the beautiful and elegant whale sharks. Measuring between 12 and 20 metres, these gentle creatures glide within feet of you without a care in the world. As well as these gentle giants you can spend time with other giants of the sea, such as manta rays, sharks and humpback whales. If, like me, you enjoy spending time viewing the iconic creatures of the sea, then Ningaloo Reef will never disappoint.

For more information, please call Stephen Fisher on 01993 838 821.