



What You Need to Know

Scuba Diving

There's a world under the sea that no snorkeler can touch. Technically scuba divers shouldn't touch either — that's why divers are advised to leave behind only bubbles.

Lest anyone think that diving is a modern sport created by Jacques Cousteau, we want to clarify — it's actually one of the oldest known adventures.

The first writings about divers appeared around 850 BC, when Homer wrote about Greek divers searching for sea sponges 100 feet below the surface. They'd weigh themselves down with a heavy rock to reach the precious commodities. And Aristotle wrote in his *Problemata* that Alexander the Great used a diving bell to explore underwater in 332 BC.

Modern scuba diving was developed in part by Cousteau in 1942. His Aqua-Lung, or scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), allowed divers to go beneath the surface wearing air tanks that delivered

pressurized air. The sport gained mass popularity in the 1960s when the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) and the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), the two main instructional organizations, began certifying divers.



Testing the Waters

You can get certified in four days, or spread out the instruction over six weeks. Classroom time includes videos and discussion before you suit up for initial dives in a pool. Instructors test you in four or five open-water dives before you're free to dive without an instructor. Those who aren't ready to commit to certification can take a three-hour introductory resort course and dive with instructors, or try snuba, which sounds like scuba but is actually a modified method in which divers breathe through a 25-foot air line connected to a floating tank.



Where to Dive

» **Belize's Barrier Reef** — The second longest barrier reef in the world, after Australia's. 800.624.0686
travelbelize.org

» **Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles** — This south Caribbean island protects its clear waters as a marine park. 800.BONAIRE; infobonaire.com/scubadiving.html

» **Cayman Islands** — Dive close to shore off these western Caribbean islands. divecayman.ky

» **Yap** — See manta rays year-round off this island in Micronesia, in the western Pacific. 202.223.4383; visit-fsm.org/yap

» **Palau** — After diving off a few of Palau's 340 islands, take a snorkeling break at Jellyfish Lake. *Survivor* Palau viewers were awed by the stingless freshwater jellyfish swarming peacefully around the snorkeling

contestants. 680.488.2793; visit-palau.com

» **Truk Lagoon** — This Micronesia spot, also known as Chuuk, is the final resting place of more than 50 World War II ships. 691.330.4133; visit-fsm.org/chuuk



Did You Know?

1500

Year of the earliest known drawings of scuba gear, by Leonardo da Vinci, who proposed a leather suit with combined air supply and buoyancy control system.

97.5%

of the earth's water is salt water.



What to Buy



While occasional divers can rent equipment, those who dive more frequently should invest in these basics:

» **Mask:** One dive with a leaking mask will convince a new diver that this is the first thing to buy. If you wear prescription eyeglasses, consider a prescription mask, so that you won't need contact lenses under the sea.

» **Wetsuit:** Before buying a wetsuit, consider whether you'll be diving mostly in tropical climates or in cold water. Wetsuits come in different thicknesses and coverage, from "shorties" covering the trunk and

midthighs to full-bodysuits with optional hoods and boots.

» **Dive computer:** Techies love dive computers – wristwatch devices that monitor time and depth, calculating the amount of nitrogen in the body.



Scuba Links

- » National Association of Underwater Instructors: nauai.com
- » Professional Association of Diving Instructors: padi.com
- » *Scuba Diving* magazine's community forum: scubadiving.com/community



Safety

With proper training, scuba diving is a safe sport. Going through the certification process gives divers a healthy appreciation for the risks while teaching how to avoid them. Always dive with a buddy and let someone (like the dive shop staff) know where you're going. Before going in the water, buddies should test each other's gear, as well as their own.

— *Deborah Abrams Kaplan*
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