

Dahab Underwater

By Lynne Helal-Gillis

When I first arrived in Dahab in 1997, I knew nothing about diving. In fact, I had never even seen a fish underwater or breathed through a snorkel. When I decided to take a year off and go travelling, Egypt was the first country on my list of destinations. Dahab in particular had been recommended to me by friends, "Go to Dahab you'll love it," they said. 19 years later I am still here, so I guess they were right!

Jacques Cousteau's famous quote is as relevant today as when he first said it. Jacques was famous for being one of the first to explore the many great wonders of diving in the Red Sea. So, whether you are a diver already or want to learn, Dahab is a must-see spot that should be on your bucket list.

"The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever" Jacques Cousteau



Learning to dive is one of the best things in life that you can do, I can only kick myself for not doing this earlier. A friend took me for a discover scuba or 'intro' as they are known here, where I floated around and simply had to fin, while he adjusted my buoyancy at different depths. I saw my first Eagle Ray which swam like a bird underwater, and it had me hooked. I decided right then and there that I would not only become a diver, but also teach and show off the delights of this amazing world to anyone who wanted to take the plunge.

A SANCTUARY OF BUBBLES AND COLOR





Training to dive is split into 5 easy bite modules. The theory is comprehensive, as it should be, you'd expect nothing less if you were going into outer space and the feeling and equipment for diving is similar. This can now be done on your smart phone or tablet via PADI's touch e-learning system, cutting out the need to study on holiday. This leaves you just the water aspect of the course. Great care is taken to help you understand what it will feel like and to become familiar with the equipment you will be wearing; mainly the BCD (Buoyancy Control Device) and the regulator (for breathing from your compressed air tank). A wetsuit is also provided for warmth, a mask and snorkel, as well as the fins so you can glide around. Funnily enough, scuba diving is the only sport where you don't run out of breath!

Skills are shown above water and then repeated by your instructor underwater before you get a chance to try them. Skills include; how to empty your mask of water if it should flood, how to recover your regulator if it should come out of your mouth, and the all-important buoyancy skills of being neutral in the water. Neutral buoyancy is so important for the preservation of the underwater world because being able to control where you go and not getting too close to coral is the number one skill. All of the initial skills are

taught and practiced in shallow water. Some instructors teach in swimming pools, but I am not a fan of this as the whole point is to see fish and coral in the sea, not old plaster and bits floating around the bottom of a pool. All these skills are then repeated in deeper water once they have been mastered.

Finally, you are ready. You are a diver, but in a lot of ways your diving journey has just begun. There are lots of follow up advanced courses which show you the delights of different kinds of diving, such as night diving, navigation, photography, buoyancy (yes, again, it is very important and lots of fun!), drift dives, deep diving and many more.

Although diving is the main draw, I have witnessed how the amazing energy and beauty of Dahab permeates everyone. I have seen young and old people from every walk of life fall in love with Dahab. It has lured in professional jousters, professors, therapists, and people from every country imaginable including Iceland, America and Tasmania... the pull of this little town is international.

This place has a special energy which makes everyone take life at a slower pace. We often see guests arrive stressed out, faces contorted, asking for the Wi-Fi code as soon as they step off the bus then a few days later

they are seen napping next to the sea, enjoying a good book or chatting with the locals.

The locals here are probably the friendliest in the world, and I know that I am biased, but comments are often made by visitors to Dahab that when they didn't have the right money for something, the shopkeeper said "That's ok, pay me tomorrow" which they had never heard anywhere else.

My hope is that more people visit Dahab and give diving a try, or if they are already divers, that they strive to be better; a good dive is one where you had no impact at all. "Leave nothing but bubbles and take nothing but pictures" is our code. We all want this precious environment to remain intact and Dahab is taking steps to ensure that this unique environment is protected, not only from divers and snorkelers, but also from corporations and boats using the Gulf of Aqaba to transport goods.

So if you fancy trying something life changing, try a plunge in the deep blue. I did, and it changed my life.

Lynne Helal-Gillis runs Dive Urge, a boutique dive club and BnB based in Dahab. You can find more information at www.dive-urge.com or email info@dive-urge.com

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