

SCUBA DIVER PRESENTS A GUIDE TO

# EGYPT

## *The Red Sea*

WHETHER  
YOU ARE NEW  
TO **DIVING** OR A  
VETERAN, THE  
RED SEA HAS  
GOT YOU  
COVERED

## WORLD-CLASS **DIVING**

Fantastic **shipwrecks**, vibrant **coral reefs**,  
dramatic **walls**, **marine life** a-plenty –  
**EGYPT HAS IT ALL**



**BUCKET-LIST EXPERIENCES:** 12 things you must do or see when you visit Egypt

*Egypt*



# FROM THE EDITOR

The Egyptian Red Sea held a fascination for me right from the moment I first dabbled in the world of diving some 34 years ago. After taking the plunge at the age of 12 in North Wales, I voraciously devoured any literature I could find on scuba diving - and books on the Red Sea were one of my initial discoveries. I marvelled at images of the underwater museum that is the SS Thistlegorm, the vast swathes of fish shoaling off Ras Mohammed's Shark and Yolanda Reef, the magnificent sharks on the Brothers and Elphinstone, and the wreck graveyard of Abu Nuhas. I longed to explore these heavenly visions myself - and now I have, making more than 50 dive trips to Egypt over the past 20 years. However, the Red Sea holds such a strong allure that whenever I get back home, I am already longing for my next trip to the Middle East. We Europeans are extremely lucky that the Egyptian Red Sea is virtually on our doorstep. Depending on where you live, a mere three to five hour flight and you are touching down in what is undoubtedly one of the world's greatest diving Meccas.

The Red Sea is our nearest Indo-Pacific diving, and the myriad colours of corals, sponges and marine life that greet you when you finally dip your head beneath the surface will literally take your breath away. And this is before you have ventured out to any of the famed dive sites, which include some of the best walls, wrecks and drift dives on the planet. Don't let the relatively short flight fool you, this is world-class diving on a par with anywhere else on Earth, so I suggest you make the most of it and head out for some Red Sea action of your own.

Over the following pages, you will find an overview of the main diving resorts, together with some of the top dive sites that can be found in those areas, as well as information on things you must do when you are in Egypt, which will help you plan your perfect Red Sea diving excursion.

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Children enjoying a camel ride



Motorcycle inside the Thistlegorm



Snorkelling on a Red Sea reef



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL DUXFIELD, BYRON CONROY, AND PAUL AND ANNE MEDCALF



# THE 'TOP 12' BUCKET-LIST THINGS TO DO IN EGYPT

## Dive the SS Thistlegorm

The SS Thistlegorm was a British supply ship that sank in October 1941 after being bombed by German aircraft. She was chock-full of Allied military supplies, including motorbikes, Bren gun carriers, trucks, rubber boots, rifles and munitions, and is now like an underwater museum.

## Visit the Valley of the Kings

The UNESCO World Heritage Site Valley of the Kings is a place where, for a period of nearly 500 years from the 16th to 11th century BC, rock-cut tombs were excavated for the Pharaohs and powerful nobles of the time. It is one of the most-famous archaeological sites in the world.

## Ride a camel

You can't come to Egypt and not experience a camel ride. Once you are ensconced and get used to the undulating way they walk, it is a quite civilised way to cover rough terrain.

## Smoke a shisha

Another local favourite that has to be tried is shisha, also known as hookah in other parts of the world. This ornate water pipe, through which flavoured tobacco is smoked, is a staple at many Egyptian cafes and restaurants.

## Dive the Brothers

The Brother Islands lie some 60 miles offshore in the middle of the Red Sea and offer some of the most-exciting diving in Egypt. Sometimes swept by strong currents, they display prolific coral growth and boast some serious shark action.

## Visit the temples of Karnak

Karnak, near Luxor, was known as Ipet-isu – or 'most select of places' – by the ancient Egyptians, and is a city of temples built over 2,000 years ago. The great temple at the heart of Karnak is so big that St Peter's, Milan and Notre Dame Cathedrals could fit comfortably within its walls!

## Try local Egyptian food

You can't spend an entire holiday in Egypt and not sample the delicious local food. There are a multitude of dishes, but some of the best include fava beans and falafel, kushari, veal or lamb kofta kebab, Alexandrian sausages and Baladi bread.

## Explore the Deep South

Marsa Alam and beyond is your gateway to some of the best reef diving in the Egyptian Red Sea. Regions like St John's – famed for its caverns – and Fury Shoals are teeming with marine life and myriad species of soft and hard corals.

## Cruise the River Nile

To fully discover the ancient wonders of Egypt, a cruise on the River Nile is truly an unforgettable experience. Most cruises sail between the historical majesty of Luxor and Aswan, both of which are bursting at the seams with ancient wonders.

## Snorkel the reefs

Just because you are here scuba diving doesn't mean you should overlook or dismiss the many snorkelling opportunities on hand. It is a great way to spend surface intervals, or on any non-diving days. If you have any non-divers with you, use the fantastic snorkelling as a means to get them into the water.

## Barter with the shopkeepers

The store owners in the souks, markets and main streets love nothing more than a good barter. Feel free to browse their wares, but when it comes to purchasing, be ready to try your bartering skills. You'll end up with a bargain, they'll still make a profit, and everyone is happy.

## Visit St Catherine's Monastery

Saint Catherine's Monastery lies at the mouth of a gorge at the foot of Mount Sinai. This dramatic UNESCO World Heritage Site was built between 548 and 565, and the monastery is one of the oldest working Christian monasteries in the world.



# FROM REC TO TEC

**The Egyptian Red Sea is the perfect place for all those with a love of the undersea realm. Whether you are a snorkeller or a freediver, learning to dive or a hardened veteran, an open water diver or a technical explorer, the Red Sea resorts of Egypt have got you covered**

## Snorkelling

The Red Sea boasts some of the world's best snorkelling. In many places, the reefs rise right up to within inches of the surface, and the myriad colours of the corals, sponges and marine life will delight young and old. The warm waters mean that you can venture in wearing just a swimsuit with your mask, snorkel and fins, but it is a good idea to don at least a rashguard, if only to protect yourself from the sun, as well as give you a bit of thermal protection. Because you don't have to go deep to see all manner of marine life, the snorkelling is also perfect for children to get their first taste of the underwater world.

## Learning to dive

With a multitude of high-quality, professional dive centres throughout the resort areas of Hurghada and the Bays, El Quseir, Safaga, Marsa Alam and the Sinai Peninsula, you would be hard-pressed to find a better place to gain your initial scuba-diving certification. Even on the local reefs, where many beginners make their first foray into the Red Sea, divers are guaranteed to be blown away by the sheer number and colour of the corals and fish species. And there is always the chance of an unexpected encounter with a pelagic visitor like turtles, dolphins, rays or sharks, so always keep one eye out into the blue.

## Continued education

The Egyptian Red Sea is the ideal spot to continue your rise up the scuba education ranks. Imagine completing your wreck specialty on the Thistlegorm, your drift dive specialty along the front of Shark and Yolanda Reef in Ras Mohammed, your deep specialty on any one of the innumerable world-class wall dives, your underwater photography specialty in the midst of some of the most-prolific marine life on the planet...

The list goes on.

Underwater photographers love the Red Sea



Tech diver descending to a shipwreck

## MEDITERRANEAN EGYPT

Finally, for archaeology hobbyists, Alexandria has a lot of ancient history under the water. This section of the Egypt coastline, into the Mediterranean, is the most-popular destination for history-loving scuba divers - with over 7,000 Pharaonic, Greek and Roman artefacts and wrecks from Napoleonic battles, World War One and World War Two, this Egyptian city offers some of the most-interesting and unique dive sites in the North Africa.





Learning to dive in Egypt

## Scuba diving

The Egyptian Red Sea is the ideal playground for scuba divers, boasting some of the world's best shipwrecks, walls, reefs and drifts, never mind a rich Indo-Pacific array of marine life, so it is no wonder that it is often a staple on many dive centre and club trip calendars. Land-based and liveaboard trips are a fantastic way for groups of divers to get to know one another, enjoy some fabulous diving and make some amazing memories. However, the resorts are also perfect for singles, couples and families, so whatever your personal situation, you will also be guaranteed a warm welcome in Egypt.

## Freediving

Way beyond simple snorkelling, freediving is a rapidly expanding sport, and the Egyptian Red Sea has been at the core of this discipline, with the Blue Hole in Dahab, in particular, finding favour with freedivers and freediving instructors alike. Whether you are already a freediver and just looking to explore the rich reefs and spectacular shipwrecks, or wanting to qualify as a freediver, then there are many well-regarded instructors who can help you in your quest.



Freediving a Red Sea reef



Diving on a closed-circuit rebreather

## Technical diving

Whether you are an open-circuit technical diver, or have gone down the closed-circuit rebreather route, you will find a vast array of deep-water sites far beyond the scope of recreational divers just waiting to be explored. From endless walls falling away into the abyss to dramatic shipwrecks below 100m, there is plenty for all levels of technical diver, from those making their first tentative steps into this world, to those who are pushing the boundaries and going deeper for longer. Many resorts have centres that can cater for technical diving, and there are several liveaboards which are well set up for mixed gas and CCR divers.





# HURGHADA AND THE BAYS

Rapidly becoming the tourist hotspot on the Red Sea coastline of mainland Egypt, Hurghada and the Bays, as the area is commonly referred to, encompassing both the city of Hurghada and the surrounding 'bays' of El Gouna, Sahl Hasheesh, Makadi Bay and Soma Bay, which between them can offer something for all ages, all budgets and all interests, be that snorkelling, diving and watersports, or golf, relaxing and general tourism

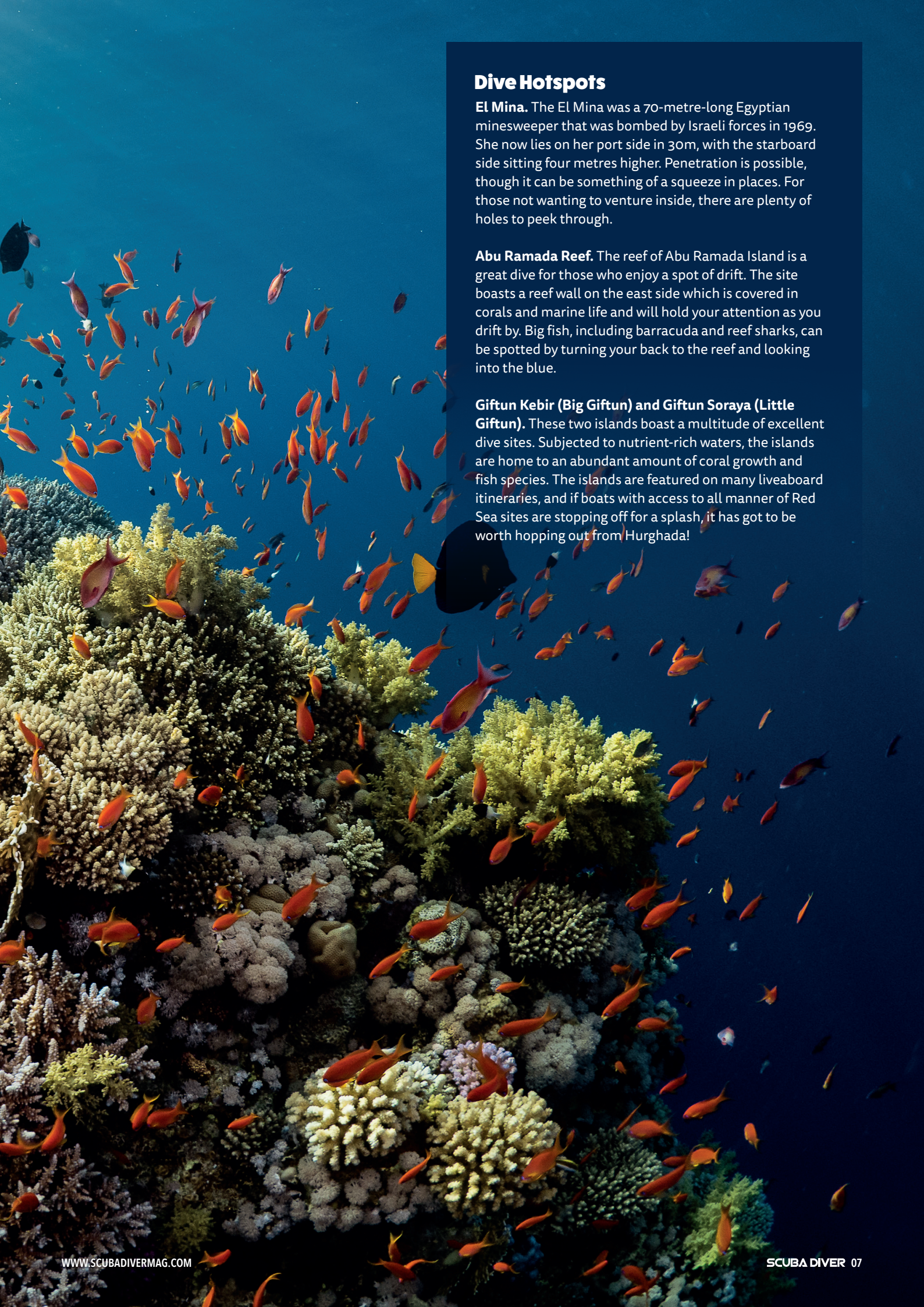
## Hurghada

Hurghada is the second largest city located on Egypt's Red Sea coast, boasting nearly 300,000 inhabitants. Compared to some of the more-ancient towns and cities along the mainland coastline, Hurghada is a more modern-day phenomenon, coming into existence in the last century and thriving ever since. The city now stretches for more than 20km along the Red Sea, though it does not venture too far inland. The city caters for both foreign and domestic tourism, with its long sandy beaches and generally calm conditions proving universally popular.

Given its size, Hurghada is the obvious choice for divers looking for a holiday that combines underwater exploration with topside entertainment. The variety of bars and restaurants will keep most people busy. The other advantage of staying in a city of such size is the choice on offer - excellent deals on both hotels and diving can be found, so it is well worth shopping around. And on the subject of shopping, don't forget to check out the other delights of the city, such as its bazaar, which can be found in the Dahar area.

Then, of course, there is the airport and the marina. Hurghada International Airport receives flights direct from the UK, meaning that if you choose this city as your dive destination, you've arrived as soon as you've landed. And the marina wouldn't look out of place on the French Riviera, with its promenade boasting a cosmopolitan blend of bars, restaurants and cafes, all flanked by the bustling marina.





## Dive Hotspots

**El Mina.** The El Mina was a 70-metre-long Egyptian minesweeper that was bombed by Israeli forces in 1969. She now lies on her port side in 30m, with the starboard side sitting four metres higher. Penetration is possible, though it can be something of a squeeze in places. For those not wanting to venture inside, there are plenty of holes to peek through.

**Abu Ramada Reef.** The reef of Abu Ramada Island is a great dive for those who enjoy a spot of drift. The site boasts a reef wall on the east side which is covered in corals and marine life and will hold your attention as you drift by. Big fish, including barracuda and reef sharks, can be spotted by turning your back to the reef and looking into the blue.

**Giftun Kebir (Big Giftun) and Giftun Soraya (Little Giftun).** These two islands boast a multitude of excellent dive sites. Subjected to nutrient-rich waters, the islands are home to an abundant amount of coral growth and fish species. The islands are featured on many liveaboard itineraries, and if boats with access to all manner of Red Sea sites are stopping off for a splash, it has got to be worth hopping out from Hurghada!



# El Gouna

Conveniently located 22km north of Hurghada, El Gouna is only a four-hour flight from Europe's major capitals via Hurghada International Airport.

Initially developed in 1990 by the Sawiris family and Orascom Hotels and Development, the tourist resort is now a bustling town boasting nearly 20 hotels, shops, bars and restaurants - all designed and targeted at visiting tourists - as well as plenty for its local inhabitants; there is even a hospital and a school! The basic layout of El Gouna is around a series of canals, crossed by small stone bridges. The town stretches from the beachfront to several hundred metres inland and really is quite a unique experience in this part of the world. The town has developed significantly since its creation and now even boasts its own Egyptian Premier League football team. El Gouna is easily accessed, making life simple for visiting divers. If you like your dive trips to be well-organised, hassle-free and full of choice (both in terms of hotels and dive centres), El Gouna is certainly worth a look.



Swarm of anthias



The stern of the Gianni D

## Dive Hotspots

**SS Carnatic.** This British-built steamship sank in 1869 having run aground on the Sha'ab Abu Nuhas Reef, near Shadwan Island. Having run the ship aground the captain gave the order for people to remain onboard, despite requests to disembark. The ship eventually split in two and sank, claiming 31 lives in the process. Both pieces of the wreck now lie on their port sides in less than 30m and are smothered in coral growth.

**Giannis D.** The Gianni D lies a short distance from the wreck of the SS Carnatic, another victim of the navigationally dangerous Sha'ab Abu Nuhas Reef. The cargo ship hit the reef and sank on 19 April 1983. She now lies in three pieces - the bow, amidships and stern - with the stern widely regarded as the most-enjoyable section. The Gianni D is very accessible, lying in approximately 24m and reaching to within 4m of the surface.

# Sahl Hasheesh

Sahl Hasheesh is one of the fastest-growing destinations on the Red Sea, and lies just 15 minutes from Hurghada International Airport. The community, which boasts a charming Arabesque-style design and a unique selection of top-class amenities, hotels and residences, is situated on a beautiful bay, offering some 12.5km of pristine sandy beaches. At the centre of Sahl Hasheesh is the beautiful Old Town commercial district, which hosts many international and locally branded shops, cafes and restaurants. It also provides a beautiful seafront promenade that has an exciting atmosphere day and night. Beyond the developed area, the resort is cradled by untouched desert and rugged mountains, which serve as a stunning backdrop to the many riches on offer from this unspoilt treasure.

## Dive Hotspots

**Abu Haschish.** Abu Haschish is the island at the centre of a wide bay close to Sahl Hasheesh. The island was once used as a drop-off point for smugglers bringing hash into the country.

A tongue of reef extends about 1km south of the island and the dive site is at its southernmost tip, where there is a shelf running between 15m-22m before you reach a drop-off benefitting from usually great visibility.

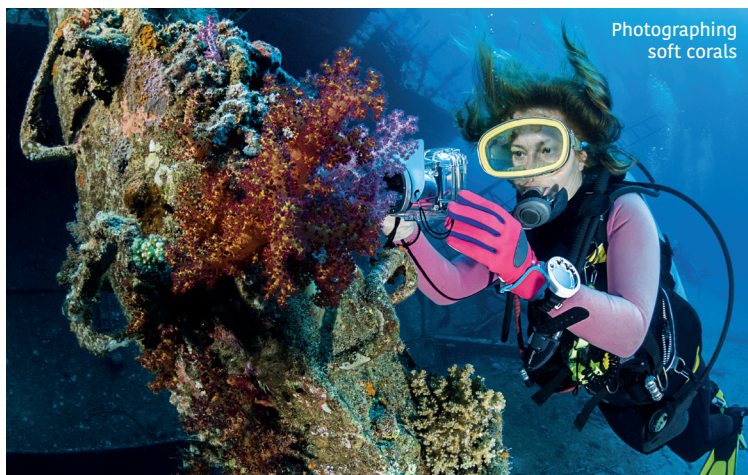
**Sunken City.** The Sunken City is one of the outstanding attractions in Sahl Hasheesh. This replica of The Temple of Horus, in Edfu, has been constructed partly underwater and partly above the surface, and it makes for a great shallow site which is also visible from the walkway leading to the dock.



# Makadi Bay

The modern beach resort of Makadi Bay is a satellite of the larger resort of Hurghada and is very quiet in comparison to its bustling neighbour. Situated along a beautiful natural bay that boasts long sandy beaches, Makadi Bay is ideal for those looking for a relaxed, hotel-based holiday. The location of Makadi Bay, off the road south between Hurghada and Safaga, means that divers staying here can take advantage of a wider choice of diving from some of the best sites in the area. Makadi Bay also offers a superb fringing house reef which stretches along the bay.

For those looking for nightlife, shopping or sightseeing, the bright lights of Hurghada are a 30-minute bus or taxi ride away. Tours are also available, including the historical sites of Luxor and Karnak, as well as boat trips, sunset cruises and jeep safaris into the desert, closer to resort. There are also state-of-the-art spas, and an amazing golf course, for those days away from the allure of the Red Sea.



Photographing soft corals

## Dive Hotspots

**Tobia Arba'a.** This site comprises a collection of seven pinnacles that rise from 12m to just shy of the surface. The shallow depth means that plenty of dive time can be enjoyed swimming around and between the pinnacles, each of which boast a veritable feast of marine life and stunning soft corals.

**Middle Reef.** This dive site boasts a dramatic drop-off often washed by strong currents, which can make for a swift drift past colourful walls, but as you come to the end of your dive – or just want to remain shallow – you can 'fly' over one of the most-pristine coral gardens in the region, marveling at the marine life on display.



The idyllic Soma Bay

## Dive Hotspots

**Abu Hashish.** This dive site, the name of which means 'Father of Grass' in Arabic, offers everything from shallow sandy seagrass lagoon dives suitable for all levels of diver to drop-offs pocketed with caves that can deliver eagle rays and other pelagic visitors for the more-experienced.

**Gota Abu Ramada.** Often known by its nickname of 'the Aquarium', Gota Abu Ramada is an oval reef, surrounded by a sandy seabed at some 13m, with a couple of pinnacles rising to within a few metres of the surface off one end. The amount of marine life is staggering, and the shallow depth promotes fantastic coral growth.

Pristine coral growth under the dive boat



# Soma Bay

Soma Bay's location is ideally situated on the eastern shores of Egypt on the Red Sea coast just 20 minutes by car from Hurghada International Airport. The resort is an ode to relaxation and recreation, a haven of upscale pampering and leisure.

The 10 sq km Soma Bay development boasts all the amenities, activities and options you would want to have on your dream Red Sea holiday. The resort is surrounded on three sides by the sea, and it boasts some of the most-beautiful sandy beaches in the Red Sea, while the mountains and desert landscapes give the location a dramatic backdrop.

Additionally, the resort boasts top of the range luxury hotels, a championship golf course, a diving and kitesurfing centre and a leading thalasso-therapy spa, which is one of the largest on the Red Sea Riviera. With Luxor only 240km away by road, same day excursions to the Valley of the Kings, Karnak and Luxor Temples and all that the ancient city has to offer are easily done by car or bus.



# Safaga

Another ancient port town that has since become a tranquil escape for tourists, Safaga is an unassuming place. Located a short distance south of Hurghada, this is a town for those who want to leave the big city lights behind for bonfires on the beach. Popular with other watersports enthusiasts, such as windsurfers and kitesurfers, Safaga is ideal for those wanting to dive in a chilled environment.

As well as its popularity with watersports lovers, the small town is also a hotspot for sunbathers. Its black-sand beaches and beautiful blue-water bay offer the perfect condition to enjoy the sunshine and whittle away the hours - ideal if your partner doesn't dive! The mineral-rich springs found in the area are also said to boast healing qualities.

At just over 45km from the international hub of Hurghada, Safaga is ideal for those wanting a relaxed atmosphere, great diving and not too much driving on arrival. The closeness of Hurghada does also mean that if the urge for a night out does arise then there's a city that offers it within reach. Most people who visit this inviting little port town, however, will find plenty of contentment in the serene atmosphere, ashy beaches and beautiful waters.

Massive coral formation



## Dive Hotspots

**Panorama Reef.** Plateaus, drop-offs, marine life... this site really does have it all. Panorama is a big chunk of a reef, boasting two plateaus at 18m on both the north and south of the site, as well as a deeper plateau at 30m. The drop-off along the side of the reef brings in all sorts of fish life - you just have to stare into the blue to see it!

**Abu Qifan.** The ultimate site for drop-off lovers, Abu Qifan is a huge lump of rock that disappears into the deep. On the north and south sides, much like Panorama, there are two plateaus at around 18m. There is also another plateau at 30m for those wanting to venture a little deeper. For those wishing to spot some big stuff, this is your spot.

Anemonefish



## Dive Hotspots

**The Rock.** The Rock is one of those sites that have to be seen to be believed. Atop two humble rock pinnacles lie literally hundreds of red-and-green anemones, all clinging and competing for space. Swarming in, above and around them are an even-greater number of clownfish. It is an astonishing site.

**The Salem Express.** While more easily accessible for those based in Safaga, the Salem Express is still a site very reachable from El Quseir. This car and passenger ferry tragically sank in 1991 with significant loss of life. The site is haunting, with the loss of life - cars, old belongings - clear to see. Lying in 30m it is a dive suitable for all experience levels, though the harrowing nature of the site may not suit all.

# El Quseir

Not many divers really know about El Quseir. It is arguably this fact that makes the place such a draw. Even the likes of Marsa Alam, which lies further south, have taken over El Quseir with regards to the sheer number of visiting divers. El Quseir remains a secret little gem that lies between the two international hubs of Hurghada and Marsa. The city itself is sizeable and historic, dating back about 5,000 years and with a population around the 50,000-mark.

The diving takes place outside the main throng, however, and there really isn't much around - a smattering of restaurants and a few hotels scattered along the coastline. But that is the beauty of the dive-centric outskirts - simplicity. This is a place you visit for diving. Eating, sleeping and diving are the three main themes of a visit to El Quseir. Evenings can be spent waterside enjoying a cold Sakara, a BBQ or a spot of music in a Bedouin tent, or sat within the clutches of your hotel watching the desert stars.

Everything feels a long way away - Hurghada, Sharm, the city from which you came - and that is a feeling to be revelled in. Located on the main highway between Hurghada and Marsa Alam does, of course, mean that, mercifully, you are not in the middle of nowhere. It also means that daytrips out to various dive sites are both quick and comfortable, a combination that makes for a great stay.

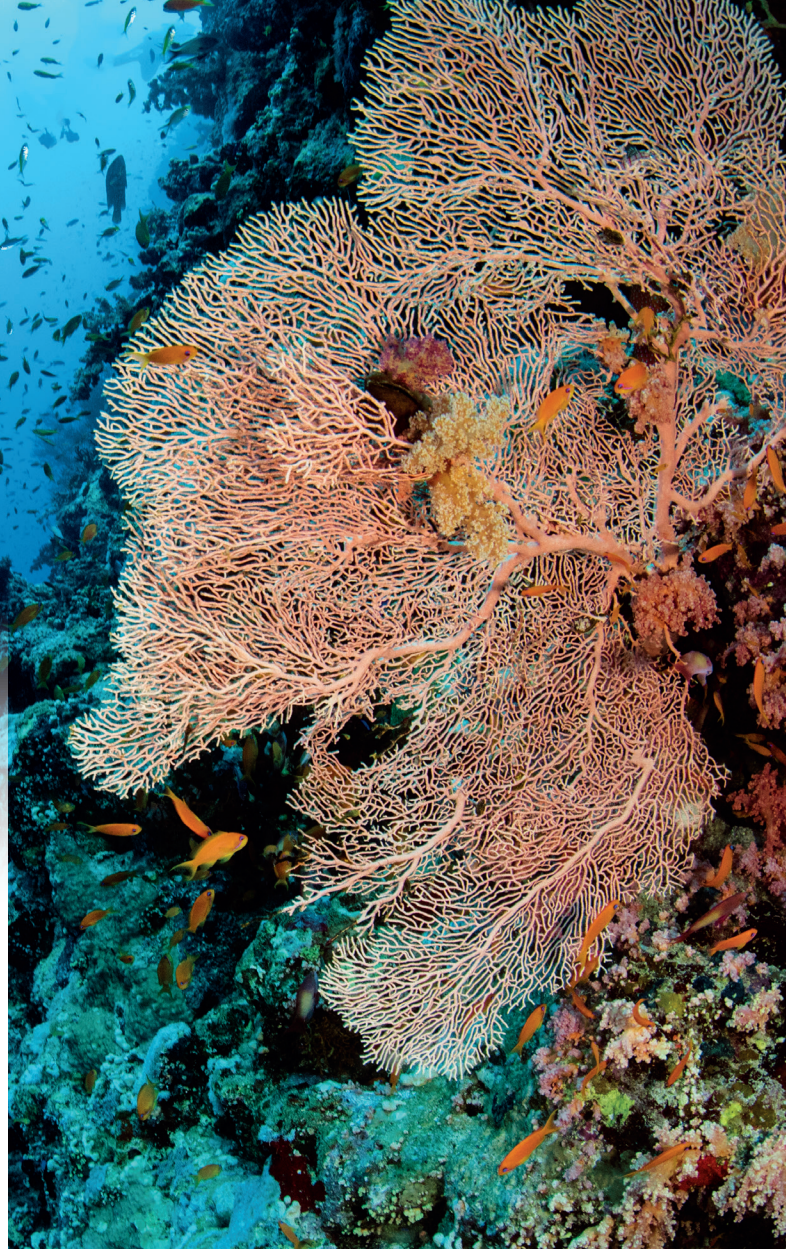


# Marsa Alam

Marsa Alam is fast becoming one of Egypt's most-talked-about diving destinations. Regarded as offering more off-the-beaten-track diving than some of the Sinai Peninsula resorts, Marsa Alam is ideal for those divers who want to do little but dive. There are a multitude of dive centres now set-up in the area, each offering a tranquil oasis in which visiting divers can base themselves, with nothing but the Red Sea on one side and desert on the other. The choice is ample and the quality excellent. While the town of Marsa Alam itself is worth checking out, most of the resorts are set up as mini-villages, where all your diving and non-diving needs are met. In-house restaurants and bars ensure visitors have somewhere to enjoy their evenings, while onsite swimming pools offer a place to off-gas. Trips out to the finest dive sites this particular stretch of coastline has offer depart from onsite dive centres or centres affiliated with hotels, making stays in Marsa Alam about as laid-back as they come. If peacefulness is your thing, Marsa Alam has what you're looking for.

The accessibility of the area improved dramatically in 2001, with the construction of Marsa Alam International Airport. The development really did put Marsa Alam 'on the map' and has contributed significantly to both its development and popularity. Numerous airlines fly direct to Marsa Alam from the UK, though flights to Hurghada and a transfer south do still remain a viable alternative.

Of course, if you fancy pushing even further south, there is always Hamata, which lies 180km south of Marsa. About two-and-a-half hours by transfer from Marsa Alam airport, the Red Sea's southern-most resort truly is the 'final frontier' when it comes to Egypt's mainland Red Sea coast.



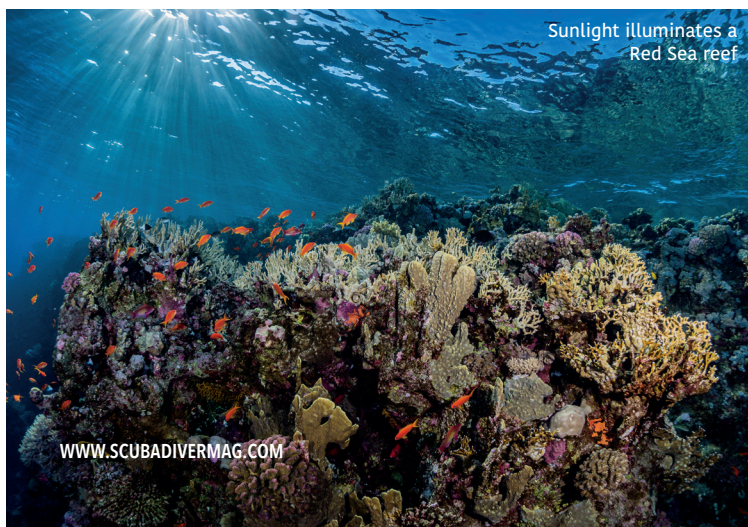
## Dive Hotspots

**Abu Dabab.** Abu Dabab is an absolute must for visitors to Marsa Alam. The sandy bay comprises of two reef walls - north and south - which shelter a sandy patch full of seagrass. Shallow and warm, large turtles venture in to graze. Some of the individuals who visit are enormous and quite happy for divers to get up close and personal. If you are lucky, you might get to see one of the local dugongs as well.

**Hamada wreck.** The wreck of the Hamada, situated at a site called Abu Guson, is a coral-clad gem. With a depth range of 5-15m, the wreck is suitable for all levels of diver.

The ship sank in 1996 on account of a navigational error, and now lies on her starboard side and in two parts. There is also a debris field, which lies between the main body of the boat and the reef.

**Marsa El Fukary.** As beautiful as this site is, courtesy of its series of 'mini-canyons' and curving walls of coral, it is a single anemone that steals the show and makes this site worth a visit. There are a great many stunning anemones out there (indeed, the Red Sea is famous for them) but this particular one is mesmerising - it is psychedelic pink!





The lighthouse  
at Daedalus

# OFFSHORE MARINE PARKS

The undoubted stars of Egypt's diving attractions are the offshore marine parks. This collection of islands and pinnacles located in the middle and deep south of the Egyptian Red Sea boast some of the most-spectacular coral growth you will ever see, with the additional bonus of world-class shipwrecks, awesome shark action and the occasional rip-roaring current to spice things up



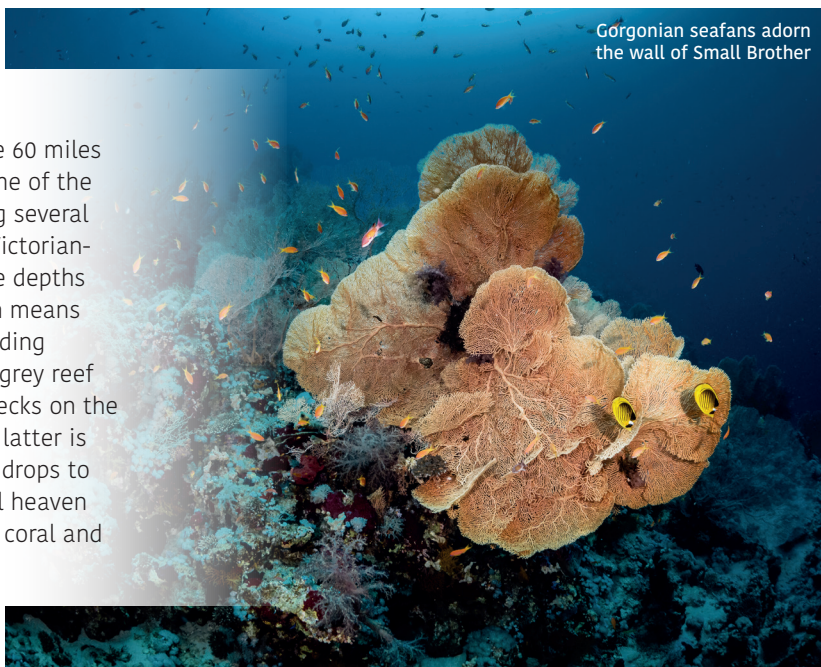
Hard coral  
formations

## Daedalus

Daedalus Reef (Abu Kizan in Arabic) is a 400-metre-long and 100-metre-wide reef situated some 90km east of Marsa Alam in the middle of the Egyptian Red Sea. The reef itself comes to just below the surface, but there is a small artificial island in the centre which holds a lighthouse that was initially constructed in 1863 and then rebuilt in 1931.

This enormous reef is renowned as a hotspot for encounters with pelagic fish, in particular shoals of hammerhead sharks off the northern tip, with the chance of thresher, oceanic whitetip and grey reef sharks as well. Turtles, barracuda, trevallies and other ocean-going predators also cruise the deep waters around Daedalus.

The sheer walls which drop into the depths are covered in a variety of hard and soft corals, so even if the 'big boys' don't put in an appearance, you are guaranteed some awesome dives looking at the reef itself and the marine life living on it.

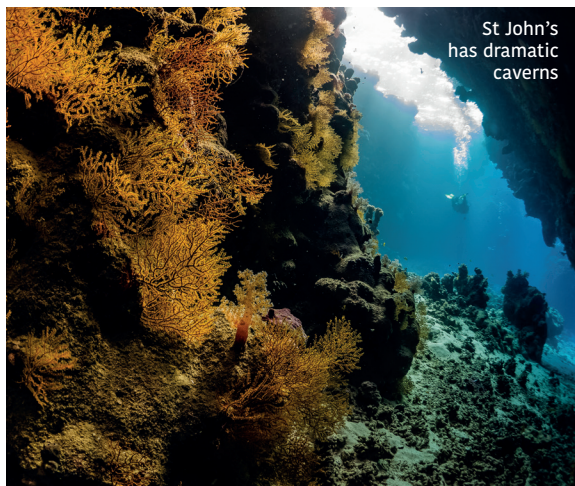


Gorgonian seafans adorn  
the wall of Small Brother

## The Brothers

The Brother Islands (El Akhawein in Arabic) lie some 60 miles offshore in the middle of the Red Sea and offer some of the most-exciting and challenging diving in Egypt. Lying several hundred metres apart, Big Brother (which boasts a Victorian-built lighthouse) and Small Brother rise up from the depths and are swept by sometimes strong currents, which means prolific coral growth and serious shark action, including oceanic whitetips, threshers and silkies, as well as grey reef and hammerheads. Plus you have two awesome wrecks on the larger island, the Aida and the bigger Numidia. The latter is impossibly clinging vertically to the north wall and drops to over 80m, well beyond recreational limits but metal heaven for technical divers. It is absolutely dripping in soft coral and sponges and makes for an unforgettable sight.





St John's  
has dramatic  
caverns

### St John's Reef

Just 20km southwest of Zabargad and Rocky Island - in an area known as the Deep South - you find St John's Reef, which is the name given to 14 square miles of diverse coral atolls and offshore reefs sitting just several kilometres north of the Sudanese border. This extensive reef system has over a dozen known dive sites, including drop-offs, coral gardens and sloping reefs, and more are being discovered all the time. Coral growth is prolific and pristine, and you can expect huge shoals of reef fish congregating on the reefs. Also look out for the impressive, metre-long bumphead parrotfish, which are typical to the St Johns area. Other 'big stuff' includes turtles, Napoleon wrasse, barracuda, trevally, tuna and various sharks, including grey reef, whitetip reef, hammerheads and silvertips.

While not necessarily considered offshore marine parks, as they are now accessible via dayboats and mini-safaris as well as full-on liveaboard trips, the below dive sites certainly sit well above other rank-and-file dive locations, and are deservedly included with the likes of the Brothers, Daedalous and Rocky Island/Zabargad on week-long excursions.

### Elphinstone Reef

Located 12km off the coastline, some 25km north of Marsa Alam, Elphinstone Reef is a spectacular dive for experienced divers. The reef is 300 metres long, and its walls drop to depths of more than 100m. The strong currents make it a perfect destination for drift diving, and the reef is covered with soft corals and sponges. Common sightings include barracuda, angelfish, grouper and morays, as well as the star attractions in the winter months - oceanic whitetip and hammerhead sharks.



Oceanic  
whitetip shark

### Rocky Island

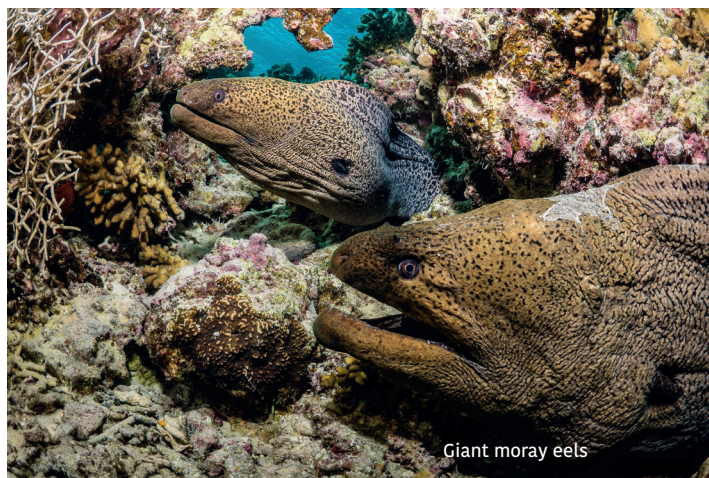
Some 150km south of Marsa Alam and lying out in the middle of the Red Sea, Rocky Island is very similar to Small Brother, in that it is a relatively small island completely surrounded by fringing reef which drops sheer into the deep, with the odd overhang and plateau thrown in for good measure. Constantly buffeted by sometimes-strong currents, Rocky Island boasts walls that are absolutely covered with some of the most-beautiful soft corals, as well as gorgonians, fans, sponges and black coral. Pelagic life seems to flock to Rocky Island, so expect to see grey reef and whitetip reef sharks patrolling the walls, and perhaps silvertips and silky sharks out in the blue, along with occasional manta rays, dolphins and even whalesharks.

### Zabargad

Close by Rocky Island, some 5km to the north, you find Zabargad, also known as St John's Island, or Topazios. This island is considered to be geologically unique, as it is uplifted mantle, which rose above sea level after the African and Asiatic continental plates converged, causing rocks in the lower crust to be uplifted. Zabargad has been extensively mined since ancient times, in particular for the gemstone peridot. In fact, it is believed to be the first discovered source of peridot, which was called topazios in ancient times, hence the Greek name for the island, Topazios.

The island, which rises to a high point of 235 metres, serves as a breeding ground for at least nine known species of birds. The most-recent discovery was that of 150 pairs of sooty falcons in October 1994.

Around Zabargad you can find stunning coral gardens in the shallows, as well as drop-offs falling into deep water. Around the north side of Zabargad you can dive on a 70-metre-long wreck that lies upside down in 24m. The whole stern section is nearly intact, complete with stairs, davits, railings and the bridge.



Giant moray eels

### Fury Shoals

Fury Shoals comprises of several reefs in the Egyptian Red Sea, south of Marsa Alam and north of Ras Banas, which have some of the most-pristine coral growth in the country. Dive sites range from shallow coral gardens to sheer drop-offs, and everything in-between, including the odd coral-covered shipwreck.

The variety of marine life on display is also spectacular, with all the usual reef fishes of the Red Sea and various species of shark, including whitetip reef, grey reef and even oceanic whitetips.

One of the most-famous dive sites in Fury Shoals is called Sha'ab Sataya, which means Dolphin Reef. A pod of spinner dolphins calls this reef home, and so if you are lucky, you are able to snorkel with them.



# Sinai Peninsula

The Sinai Peninsula represents the birthplace of tourist diving in the Egyptian Red Sea, and places like Sharm el Sheikh and Dahab are spoken of in hallowed terms, as are the legendary dive sites that can be visited from these locations

## Sharm el Sheikh

Before 1967, Sharm el Sheikh was nothing more than an occasional base of operations for local fishermen, but it has since become one of the country's most-popular resorts.

Many of the hotels, bars, restaurants and shopping centres/souks are based in the Na'ama Bay area, which is the main hive of tourist activity, but increasingly hotels have been spreading further north and south, creating additional tourist hotspots such as Shark's Bay, Nabq, White Knight's Bay and Hadaba, among others.

There is much more than just diving here, and visitors on non-diving days will find much to keep them busy, including a variety of surface watersports, quad, camel and jeep desert safaris, Bedouin evening feasts, and sightseeing trips to Mount Sinai and St Catherine's Monastery.

## Dahab

Some 80km northeast of Sharm you find the small town of Dahab (Arabic for 'gold'). Initially popular with the backpacking crowd, the arrival of international hotel chains and the establishment of other ancillary facilities has since made the town a popular destination with more-mainstream tourists, while retaining its laidback, chilled-out vibe, which sets it apart from other major diving resort areas.

Dahab itself can be divided into three major parts - Masbat, which includes the Bedouin village Asalah, in the north; Mashraba, which is more touristic and has considerably more hotels, in the middle; and in the southwest, Medina, which includes the Laguna area, famous for its excellent shallow-water windsurfing. However, the main reason people come to Dahab is for the excellent shore-diving (though boat diving and even camel diving are also available), and there are numerous sites of merit.

## Taba

Near to the border with Israel, on the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba, you find Taba, a small coastal town which has developed into a tourist resort, with a wealth of restaurants, bars and shopping areas, known as souks, as well as an array of hotels. The diving off of this area is characterised by colourful bommies smothered in soft corals and sponges, surrounded by a sandy bottom. Combine this with the fact that most of the dive sites lie in less than 18-20m and you have the perfect destination for newly qualified divers, or those wanting to complete their Open Water Diver course.

Topside, for your non-diving days, you can head off into the mountains on a quad-bike safari, partake in all manner of surface watersports, or even take a day trip over to the Lost City of Petra in Jordan.



Vibrant soft corals



Titan triggerfish

## Dive Hotspots

**The SS Thistlegorm.** The SS Thistlegorm was a British supply ship that sank in October 1941 after being bombed by German aircraft. She was less than a year old when she went down, chock-full of Allied military supplies, including motorbikes, Bren gun carriers, trucks, rubber boots, rifles and munitions, and is now like an underwater museum.

**The Blue Hole.** This infamous dive site has tempted many recreational divers to try and 'dive the arch', and unfortunately not all of them made it back alive. However, the Blue Hole itself is a great dive for recreational-level divers, and technical divers will love the dramatic swim down and through the archway.

**Angel's Net.** Home to an abundance of marine life, this site is made up of two coral gardens between 14-26m. Around the corals you will find large quantities of parrotfish, grouper, moray eels and blue triggerfish. Around the edges of the coral gardens you have a great opportunity to find turtles feeding in the sea grass.



# LAND-BASED EGYPT

**It would be remiss to travel to Egypt and only experience the Red Sea when there is so much history right on your doorstep. Why not combine your coastal holiday with a River Nile cruise, or daytrips from your diving base of operations to one of the world-famous historical sites?**

## Valley of the Kings

The UNESCO World Heritage Site Valley of the Kings is a valley on the west bank of the River Nile, opposite Luxor, where for a period of nearly 500 years from the 16th to 11th century BC, rock-cut tombs were excavated for the Pharaohs and powerful nobles of the period, including perhaps most famously, the 'boy king' Tutankhamun. It is one of the most-famous archaeological sites in the world and has to be seen firsthand to be appreciated fully.

## Karnak

The temple of Karnak, near Luxor, was known as Ipet-isu – or 'most select of places' – by the ancient Egyptians, and is a city of temples built over 2,000 years ago. This derelict remnant is still capable of overshadowing many wonders of the modern world. The Hypostyle Hall, covering an area of 5,000 sq metres and featuring 146 massive columns, is still the largest room of any religious building in the world, and the great temple at the heart of Karnak is so big that St Peter's, Milan and Notre Dame Cathedrals could fit comfortably within its walls!

## Abu-Simbel

The very small village of Abu-Simbel lies 280km south of Aswan, and only 40km north of the Sudanese border. Even though it is home to several hotels, it probably wouldn't factor as a holiday destination if it wasn't for the majestic Abu-Simbel Temples, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Dedicated to Ramses II and Nefertari, the world-famous temples will take your breath away.

## Nile cruise

To fully discover the ancient wonders of Egypt, a cruise on the River Nile is truly an unforgettable experience. Most cruises



The Sphinx



Delve into history

sail between the historical majesty of Luxor and Aswan, and within this stretch of the Nile is the world's most-intensive concentration of temples, tombs and palaces, constructed over the span of 4,000 years. This includes the temples of Abydos, Dendara, Karnak, Esna, Edfu, Kom Ombo, Philae and Abu Simbel, each conceived for their respective deities, further to the tombs in the Theban Necropolis within the Valley of the Kings across the river from Luxor.

## The Pyramids and Sphinx

The three majestic pyramids sitting on the Giza plateau outside Cairo are a world-renowned archaeological site, and the Great Pyramid of Giza is the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (and the only one to remain largely intact). Together with the Great Sphinx, this array of monuments and structures is truly awe-inspiring, and one of those places that has to be seen firsthand to really appreciate.



Archaeological wonders and the River Nile





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