

RESPECT OUR WRECKS

Honor hidden treasures,
preserve keys to the past.

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RESPONSIBLE WRECK DIVING CONSIDERATIONS

Shipwrecks offer adventure and are often included among the best dive sites in the world. Divers must be responsible when exploring these submerged sites, looking after themselves, the environment and the cultural heritage. It's important to adhere to special considerations:

- **Respect the Environment**

Low impact dive techniques are essential in preserving fragile wreck sites. It's important to fine-tune your buoyancy and streamline your equipment to avoid disturbing or damaging the artificial reef habitat during your dive. Use care to avoid touching the wreck with your hands, knees or fins. Whenever possible, use a mooring line instead of tying or anchoring on sites in a manner that may cause disturbance. Remember, many wrecks are habitats for entire ecosystems.

- **Respect the Heritage and Loss**

Wrecks of military vessels or aircraft are often the last resting place of men and women who gave their lives while serving their nation. Treat these war graves with respect and honor to commemorate the lives sacrificed for their country. Protect underwater graves as you would any burial ground or memorial.

- **Respect Others** Resist the temptation to remove anything from wreck sites. Taking souvenirs with you diminishes the uniqueness of the wreck and the enjoyment for future divers. Wrecks are irreplaceable; important archeological evidence can be lost if an object is removed. As divers, we are merely visitors to these sites. As such, we are responsible for leaving the wrecks as we found them. Take photos not souvenirs, so that wrecks remain intact for future generations.

- **Respect Your Limitations**

Wrecks have claimed the lives of inadequately prepared divers. Exploring wrecks requires experience and supplemental skill training such as the PADI Wreck Diver Specialty course. This is especially true with regard to entering intact

shipwrecks. Training for other overhead environments, such as caverns or caves, does not qualify you to enter wrecks. Know your personal limitations and dive ability. If necessary, seek additional training with a qualified instructor prior to wreck diving activities.

- **Respect the Law** Know and obey all local laws and regulations when wreck diving, such as diver access, restricted areas, fish and game laws and collecting and reporting underwater finds. In many instances, these laws exist for your safety and protection.
- **Respect Safety** Many military vessels laid to rest at sea still contain hazardous materials such as oil, firearms, heavy containers and munitions. In most cases, transporting these materials or bringing them ashore is far more dangerous than leaving them alone. For your safety and the safety of others, do not recover or interfere with dangerous materials.
- **Respect the History and Archeology** Shipwrecks hold clues to our maritime past. Therefore, it's important not to disturb these submerged historical sites. As a diver, if you find an object or wreck that may be of historical importance, leave it where it lies, mark its position and seek advice from the local government authority who looks after historical and archeological finds. For a list by country, visit www.projectaware.org.





ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE

Shipwrecks can serve as important habitats for fish and other aquatic life. Their substrate acts as an artificial reef on which entire ecosystems can thrive. Invertebrates, such as mussels, sponges, scallops and sea fans, attach themselves to the hard surface of the wreck. Since these organisms often support higher levels of the food web, fish populations often congregate and propagate in the safe haven of the structure. The abundance of life and biodiversity found on wrecks can be similar to that of the world's most pristine coral reefs.

In addition, artificial reefs can give natural reefs a much needed break by reducing diving and fishing pressures – giving them more time to recover and replenish.

Some scientists use these artificial reefs to study aquatic life and monitor changes of a wreck's ecology. It's important, as divers, to treat artificial reefs with just as much care and respect as you would a natural reef. These underwater habitats are precious to the entire aquatic environment and just as fragile.

DIVERS ARE PRIVILEGED TO HAVE ACCESS TO UNDERWATER SITES THAT ARE PART OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE OR MARITIME HISTORY. TO PRESERVE THE SITES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE INFORMED, DIVE RESPONSIBLY AND TREAT SHIPWRECKS WITH RESPECT.



CULTURAL HERITAGE

A submerged record of mankind's maritime history is left behind when ships are lost due to weather, warfare, navigational hazards and other mishap. There are many different types of heritage areas for example, wrecks, underwater cities, monuments and memorials. These unique underwater sites, like time capsules, provide a glimpse of the culture and technology at a specific time in history – offering opportunities to learn from our past successes and failures.

Each shipwreck or submerged cultural site can be a fascinating puzzle of history to unravel. Through historical material found underwater, we can explore an important part of our world's cultural inheritance. As scuba divers, we must help preserve that inheritance for future generations to learn from and enjoy. In return, we afford countless opportunities to appreciate and treasure the things left behind by earlier generations.



Interpretation of historic underwater sites can lead to a better understanding of these unique cultural resources. To ensure these valuable sites remain a part of today's history and tomorrow's as well, we must be responsible wreck divers and respect the heritage that lies beneath the surface of the water by following a diver's code of conduct.



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Project AWARE Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving underwater environments through education, advocacy and action. Join today and help make a lasting difference – www.projectaware.org.

For more information contact the Project AWARE office in your area.

Project AWARE Foundation*
(Headquarters and Americas)
Tel: +1 949 858 7657
Toll-free: 1 866 80 AWARE
Fax: +1 949 267 1221
Email: information@projectaware.org

Project AWARE Foundation*
(International)
Tel: +44 117 300 7313
Fax: +44 117 300 7270
Email: info@projectaware.org.uk

Project AWARE Foundation*
(Asia Pacific)
Tel: +61 2 9454 2890
Fax: +61 2 9454 2999
Email: info@projectaware.org.au

Project AWARE Foundation*
(Europe)
Tel: +41 52 243 32 32
Fax: +41 52 243 32 33
Email: aware@padi.ch

Project AWARE
(Japan)
Tel: +81 3 5721 1731
Fax: +81 3 5721 1735
Email: planning@padi.co.jp

www.projectaware.org

*A nonprofit tax-exempt organization

The Respect Our Wrecks education campaign was originally developed as a partnership between PADI International Ltd, BSAC, SAA and the British government as a means of educating divers about preserving our underwater cultural heritage. This initiative has been adapted for an international audience by Project AWARE Foundation.

