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Have the sun behind your diver for a silhouette.

Text and photos by Kate Jonker

By adding divers to our underwater photos, we are able to bring about a sense of exploration, highlight a focal point and provide a sense of scale to the scene, especially in wide-angle reef and shipwreck photography.

Over the years, I have learnt a number of tricks that have helped me take better photos of divers. You might want to give them a try on your next dive.

Check your buoyancy

My advice to any diver wanting to take photos—get your buoyancy right before you take your camera underwater. You cannot take photos if you are flapping around trying to stay afloat, or if you are constantly inflating and deflating your BCD. If you focus on getting your buoyancy right

before you take your camera into the water with you, your images will be so much better from the start, and the reef and your fellow divers will thank you for it.

Your model

Although it is easy to snap away at other divers underwater, your results will be disappointing and you will probably start annoying people if you are constantly firing your

strobes in their faces. To take really great photos of divers, you need to have a patient buddy who is willing to model for you, is comfortable in the water, has good trim and excellent buoyancy skills. A fellow un-

derwater photographer is ideal, as you can take turns modelling for each other.

Floaty equipment

Make sure your model's equipment is in



How to Take Really Great Photos of Divers





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It is always a good idea to ask before you take a photo (above); Clear masks give great lighting to a diver's face (right); Use another photographer as your model (top right).

trim, clipped away and not dangling. Dangling equipment—whether it is gauges, octo, torch or surface marker buoy—looks untidy and could pose a threat to the reef. Incorrectly positioned equipment, such as an octo hose over the model's shoulder (instead of tucked underneath the arm) looks unprofessional and will certainly raise a few eyebrows.

Your model's hair

Long, free-flowing hair can be hard to control underwater. The only time it can be successfully managed is if you are taking a photo of your models whilst they are swimming. All they need to do then is quickly tip their heads backwards and swim across the frame, as you take photos of them with their hair flowing beautifully behind them. For photos where your models are not swimming, get them to tie their hair back or put a hoodie or bandanna over it. This looks so much neater. Bandannas can also add a splash of colour to your photos and suit both male and female models.



Masks

Always remember to use your favourite mask "anti-fog" before getting in the water. Firstly, you need to ensure you can see clearly when taking photos. There is also nothing worse than seeing photos of divers with fogged-up masks. It is hu-

man nature to want to see the eyes, and a fogged-up mask is distracting, looks unprofessional and simply ruins the shot. Similarly, make sure your models do not have too much water lying in the bottom of their masks.



Some buddies can add a touch of humour to your photos.

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Add a diver to give a sense of scale—especially to wrecks (right);

Divers inside wrecks can give a sense of exploration (below);

Viewers will follow your model's gaze (lower right).



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Mask types

I find that for the majority of photos, a clear or transparent skirt is the better choice. This allows more light to enter the mask and highlights the face and the eyes. For more of a "tech" shot, dark-skirted masks work well, but you really have to get your lighting right in order to light up the inside of the mask and the diver's eyes correctly.

Adding colour

Get your model to wear gear with colourful details. Masks, fins, wetsuits and even BCDs with colourful inserts always help to add a splash of colour to a photo. I personally prefer these "splashes" to all be the

same colour or shade. A touch of waterproof mascara and eyeliner can also help to make the eyes pop, but it is not necessary to go overboard—try to keep make-up natural (for male divers, make-up is not compulsory).

Using a torch

A nice strong torch can be used in so many ways, especially when you are photographing a diver in a cave or wreck, or where you have a dark background and the diver is in silhouette. Have your diver use a torch to highlight certain areas, as the viewer's eyes will naturally follow the beam of light. When models are closer to you, they can



even use their torches to give a snooted effect to the image.

Camera and strobe settings

Start your dive with your preferred camera settings for wide-angle shots and adjust your camera speed to lighten or darken the water column in the background. Use your strobes to add light to your foreground and your model. Make sure the model is as close to the centre of the image as possible, especially if you are using a fish-eye lens, or the model will become distorted if too close to the edge of the frame.

If your models are farther away, you will not be able to light them up, and they will have a blue cast to their skin and hair. In this case, concentrate on lighting up the foreground and have the diver as a silhouette against the background. Have the reef,





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gorgonian or marine creature as the star of the show; light them up and have the diver's silhouette in one of the quarters of the frame.

Plan your shots in advance

To benefit the most from your limited time underwater, it helps if you both know the dive site and the kind of marine animals you expect to see. Discuss the shots you want to take in advance. I find it useful to have similar images on my iPad or smartphone, which I can show my models beforehand, so that they have an idea of what I am trying to achieve.

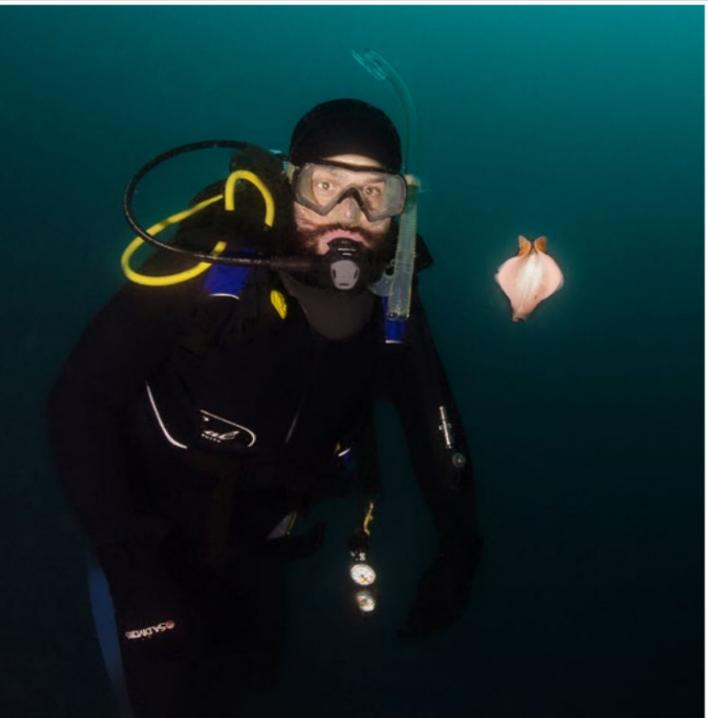
Model positioning

For close shots where your model is looking at a fish, critter, sea fan or artefact, have the model face your direction with her or his mask, but have the model's eyes looking at the point of interest (the angle should not be too great). This will enable you to light up the model's eyes with your strobes and create a point of interest, as the viewer will follow the model's gaze. For closer shots, get the model to look over your shoulder instead. Divers looking straight into the camera always tend to look cross-eyed and a little crazed.



Light up the foreground and have your diver in silhouette behind (above); Fellow photographers often make great models (top left); Divers add a sense of adventure to a photo (left).





Never allow your models to sit, stand, touch or hold onto any marine life, reefs or wrecks. Not only can they damage the reef or marine life, they could also injure themselves on stinging or sharp objects.

For wider-angle shots, models should ideally swim across the frame, parallel to your camera, preferably with their knees together and one of their legs bent in kicking motion. This is the most natural way to photograph a diver and gives you the opportunity to get really great action shots.

When I am acting as model, I

find it really useful to look at my reflection in my buddy's dome port to check whether my positioning is correct.

Bubbles

Exhaled bubbles in your model's face will ruin a shot. As divers should never hold their breath underwater, tell your models to breathe normally and take your shot once they have exhaled and the bubbles are clear of their faces and slightly above their heads. I also prefer to leave the bubbles in the image, keeping it natural rather than removing them in post-processing.

Divers exploring reefs adds a human element to the image (above); Not every photograph can be planned in advance (top left); A diver watching marine creatures can create a sense of interest (left).



If your diver is too far away to light with your strobe, use them in silhouette (left).

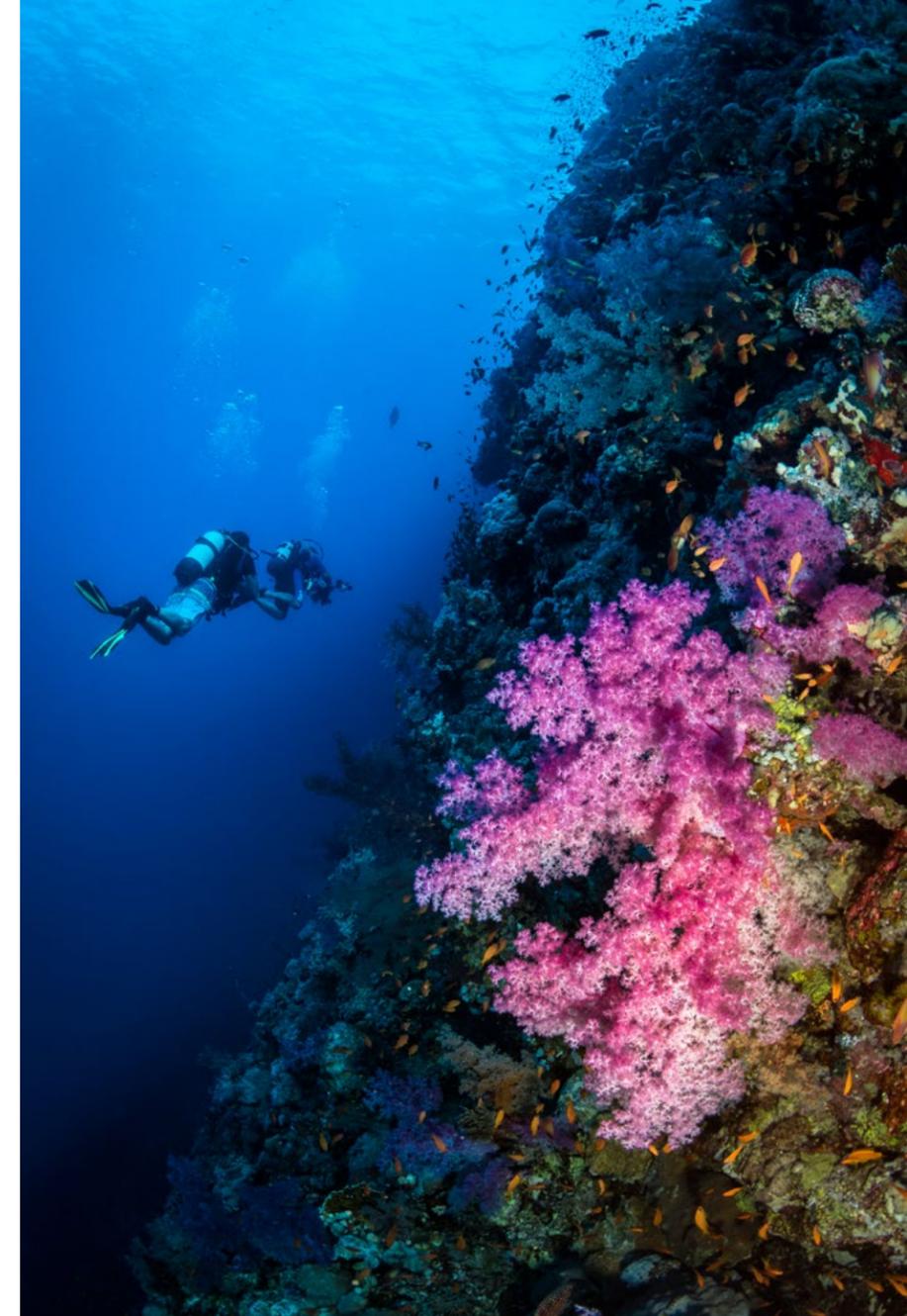
Communicating with your model

In order to get the images you want, communication is paramount, and it is therefore vital that you agree on the hand signals you will use, which could include:

- Come closer or move farther away
- Swim in this or that direction
- Go up or go down
- Hold your body horizontal or vertical
- Stop
- Face this way or face the other way
- Keep legs straight
- Bend your knee (and which knee)
- Do it again
- Torch on or off
- Look at the subject or look over my shoulder

Taking really great photos of divers underwater requires pre-planning and communication. It really is a team effort. Once your model has dived with

you a few times, she or he will start to understand what you require of them, especially if you look at and discuss the images together afterwards. Always remember, though, that it has to be enjoyable and safe for both of you and have no impact on the environment. ■



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Divers exploring wrecks adds human interest to the image (above); Have your diver look at the item of interest (right); Adding divers to big-reef images adds a sense of scale (top right).



Kate Jonker is an underwater photographer and writer based in South Africa. She teaches underwater photography courses and is a dive guide, photographer and skipper for her husband's scuba diving centre, Indigo Scuba in Gordon's Bay, Cape Town. For more information, visit: Katejonker.com.



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Edited by Peter Symes

Amhipac

Not yet spotted in the wild but about to appear on Kickstarter shortly, the Amhipac seems to be a sleek and quite compact housing for iPhones 6, 6S and 7, made from rigid polycarbonate. According to specs provided, it is only waterproof to a modest 10m, but sports a touchscreen that works underwater. This lets the user select focus, pinch to zoom, toggle photo and video modes and even use other apps on the phone. This is made possible thanks to



two layers of durable clear film, which create a low-pressure air pocket. The 100mm scratch resistant dome enables the user to take over-and-under shots. Amhipac.com

Hero6

The GoPro HERO6 Black action camera provides more processing power than the preceding model, the HERO5, while keeping to a familiar design. It is waterproof to 10m (33ft). The optimized GP1 processor brings higher frame rates in 4K, 2.7K, and 1080p HD resolutions. Where previous models maxed out at 30 fps in 4K, the HERO6 Black can muster 60 fps for rendering smooth motion or even slow motion in timelines with slower frame rates. Other processor-intensive tasks, such as image stabilization, have also been improved in the HERO6. On the back there is a 2" touchscreen LCD for quickly navigating menus. Once your settings are locked in, the classic one-button interface can take over for quickly starting and stopping recording and changing settings on-the-fly. GoPro.com



FA6000

Made from durable, injection-molded polycarbonate, the Fantasea FA6000

Housing for the Sony a6000 camera is depth-rated to 60m (200ft). The housing, being shock-resistant,

also makes it suitable for outdoor photographers who want to

capture the action of activities such as white-water paddle sports, sailing, boating, surfing, fishing, hunting, backpacking and camping. An interchangeable lens port and lens gear accessories are available, allowing for the use of a wide range of lenses. All essential camera controls and functions are accessible with clearly-labeled controls. Sonydive.com



YS-D2J

Sea&Sea has announced the updated version of the YS-D2 Strobe, with the designation YS-D2J, in which reliability has been improved. The overall specs and features are similar to the previous model. Exposure control comprises DS-TTL II, Slave TTL and 11-step manual control. The depth rating is 100m (330ft). Four AA alkaline

batteries will provide approximately 150 flashes. Two diffusers and red filters are included with the strobe as standard. The strobe is equipped with a target light (approximately 100/300 lumen). In use (target light switch in ON position), the light will be automatically turn off when the strobe fires and will automatically turn back ON after 0.5 sec. Seaandsea.jp



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