

southeast experiences



with Ken Hoppen

So you're thinking of you're next big dive holiday, but aren't sure where to go, or maybe when to go there. Heres a few ideas, with the right time of year to go!



A white-tip reef shark ventures into the shallows at Shark Reef. Beqa Adventure Divers has one of the best shark dives in the world.

January Shark Diving – Fiji
Start the year with an adrenalin rush. Shark Reef in Fiji is the world's only dedicated shark marine park, and with local duo Manasa and Rusi leading the way, you will see up to eight species of sharks on the one dive here! These two don't just lead the way, they hand feed these large fish just a short distance away. And large they are too, with bull sharks being the mainstay here, with silvertips, grey reef, tawny nurse, white-tips, black-



This sea robin is one of the unusual fish found in Jervis Bay on the sandy slopes. There are many different habitats here in a small area.

tips, lemon sharks, and the occasional tiger coming in for their share. This is one dive every shark enthusiast will eventually come to do, and when you do you will wonder why it took you so long to get there. This really is the world's best shark dive. The reason I have put this one first is that the dive guides say this is the time to be here. The bull sharks leave this site around mid Oct or so to mate, and arrive back in early January very hungry, making this the best time of the year for action. Really this dive is a must see any time you can get here! Beqa Adventure Divers run an amazing operation, and it is extremely safe. You will be gobsmacked at what happens in front of your eyes.

Beqa Adventure Divers
Lagoon Resort
PO Box 343
Pacific Harbour
Fiji Islands
Tel: (+679) 345 0911
e-mail: adventuredivers@connect.com.fj
www.fijisharks.com

February Jervis Bay – NSW
Jervis Bay is located a few hours drive south of Sydney, and is home to an amazing array of habitats in such a small area, and with it a stunning array of marine life. This is a series of sites that, being mainly inside the bay, are very sheltered, with calm water and good viz. February here seems to be the time of mating, with octopus, eastern blue devils, and rainbow herring cale all flitting about doing their thing. Look out here for sea robins on the sandy slopes, eastern shovelnose rays on the sand, with wobbegongs, angel sharks and Port Jackson sharks prolific in many areas.

Outside the bay are many great dive sites, with the Whorehouse being a personal favourite. Think Fred Flintstone's house super-sized. A huge rock has fallen from the cliffs in times way back, and landed on other rocks to form chambers and rooms, all of which are navigable. Don't forget the Docks, which are home to red Indianfish, and Double-decker Cave, which has a beautifully photogenic school of Old Wife. This is a dive area that is great all year round, but February is a personal favourite time-wise.

Ocean Trek
335 Elizabeth Drive, Vincentia, NSW, 2750
T: +61 2 4441 6232
0413759649
dive@oceantrek.com.au
www.oceantrek.com.au

March Great White's – SA
Back on the adrenalin search, there is nothing quite like a trip out to the Neptune Islands to see some great white sharks from the safety of a cage. Until you have seen one of these massive fish, you have no idea of their size, strength and aura. They are unlike any other shark I have encountered. They are at these islands all year round, and any time of the year produces good encounters. Calypso Star Charters leaves from Port Lincoln, and is now doing day trips, though for those like me I suggest a four day charter, as the day trips will only leave you wanting more! In March the water is as warm as it gets, the sharks are great, and there is even a chance of a mako on the deeper dropoff. This is a trip that you must do.

Calypso Star Charters
PO Box 2058
Port Lincoln, South Australia, 5606
T: (08) 8682 3939
www.calypsostarcharter.com.au
info@calypsostarcharter.com.au

April The Cod Hole – Qld
One of Australia's iconic dive sites, the Cod Hole has a lot to offer. Known for its large potato cod, it also has many estuary cod and an occasional Queensland grouper. These fish are friendly and in your face, a little too much for some



A turtle passes by at Challenger Bay. The waters of the Great Barrier Reef and the Coral Sea are home to an amazing variety of marine life.

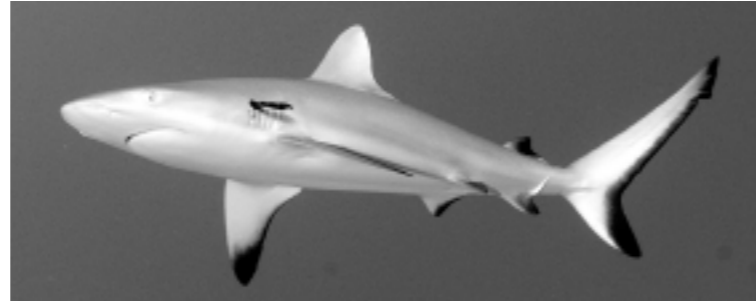
not used to encountering such large finned friends, but all will be well. They are not the only reason to dive here. The fish life is prolific, with great macro opportunities for photographers that can tear themselves away from the big stuff. The only way to dive here is with a live-aboard dive vessel, and it is worth it as the best of the GBR is in this area. Challenger Bay, Lighthouse Bommie, Pixie's Pinnacle, my personal favourite Steve's Bommie, and many more are all world class dive sites. Diving here is all year round, but the winter months are my preference for this area. (Not so hot for us southerners!)

Taka Dive Adventures
131 Lake Street, Cairns, Qld, Australia,
PO Box 6592
Ph: +61 7 40 518 722

Ovalau Watersports
Ovalau Watersports Ltd., Box 149 Levuka, Ovalau, Fiji Islands
T: (+679) 344 0166 or 344 0344
dive@owlfiji.com
www.owlfiji.com
Royal Hotel
www.royallevuka.com
Levuka Homestay
www.levukahomestay.com



A blue ribbon eel pokes its head up at Levuka, in Fiji. This amazing dive destination is still 'Off the Beaten Track'.



Large fish and clear water is the name of the game at Marion Reef. Grey reef sharks always come in for a close look at the start of a dive. Note the copepod near the gills on this one.

Fax: +61 7 40 312 739
Email: takadive@taka.com.au
www.takadive.com.au

May Levuka – Fiji
This place would have to make a list of the world's best 'little known' dive destinations. It is simply fantastic. Most dives are less than a seven minute boat drive from the wharf, which in itself is one of the best macro/muck dives I have ever done. Twenty-five minutes across the channel to Wakaya Island is a fantastic hammerhead dive, with a manta cleaning station to top it off; and the chance of pilot whales on the way over and back. Expect ghost pipefish, blue ribbon eels, clouds of anthias, barracuda, morays, pipefish, anglerfish, strange crabs, shrimp and octopus. Just to start with that, and all this to a backdrop of jungle-covered mountains. This is a dive destination that will have you coming back again and again.

amazing, with its huge school of bigeye trevally, 40+ sharks, barracuda and dogtooth tuna. All up close! Add to the mix Queensland grouper, tawny nurse sharks, yellowfin tuna, a real chance of a marlin, and some spectacular reef formations, even before you start looking for macro life, there really is a lot to see out here! The walks on the coral atolls are interesting too, with bird and crustacean life as seen in the docos. The seaplane leaves from Hamilton Island, giving you a chance to relax at this holiday destination before or after the trip.

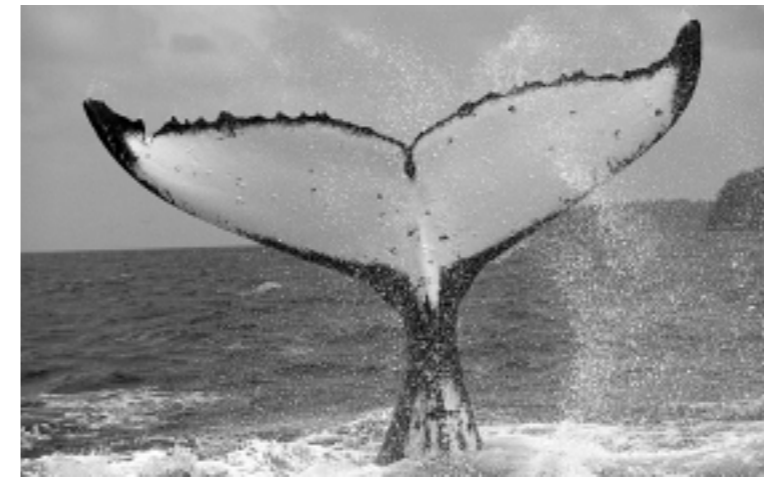
Marion Reef Dates 2009
7th - 13th June
13th - 19th June
19th - 25th June
25th June - 1st July

Dive Nomad
Freecall in Australia:
1800 300 618
Office Phone: 07 3256 8580
Calling from outside Australia:
+617 3256 8580
julianne@divenomad.com
www.divenomad.com
July



Fish Rock Cave is known for its sharks, but loggerhead turtles are usually seen in this area too!

Fish Rock Cave – NSW
If this isn't the most reliable spectacular dive on the east coast of Australia, it surely must be close to it. Not only do you have the masses of grey nurse sharks, but a host of large and small surrounding this amazing rock. Wide-banded anemonefish, black cod, Queensland grouper, kingfish, wobbegong, leatherback turtles and more;



Humpback whales in Tonga. What more is needed to say?

all just sitting there waiting for you. Then there is the cave itself, with its dark passages featuring lobsters, shrimp and all sorts of weird critters not normally seen, with the highlight being the silhouetted grey nurse at the shallow entrance, then the sight of perhaps thirty of these endangered sharks in the gutter. This is a dive you cannot get sick of. To top it off nearby Green Island is a great dive too, and if you are really, really lucky you might get to see a school of Australian cownose rays. That really is just amazing!

Fish Rock Dive Centre
Costa Rica Resort Motel
Gregory St.
South West Rocks, NSW, 2431
Ph: (02) 6566 6614
www.fishrock.com.au
dive@fishrock.com.au

August Humpback Whales – Tonga
Starting mid-July through to mid Oct, Tonga's humpback whales are just a mind-blowing experience. With an average length of about 14m or so, the first look at these massive creatures as you swim in the water with them is hard to comprehend. Just means you have to hop in again! Vava'u, a northern Tongan island group, is the place to be, and it has a variety of great restaurants, hotels and activities. Try the go-kart island tour! But it is the humpbacks that bring people here time and time again. To have these large mammals swim up to you and look at you eyeball to eyeball is beyond words. Give at least three days to these wild whales to have a good encounter, seven if you want one that will spoil you for all future marine life encounters.

Dive Vava'u
Paul Stone and Karen Varndell
Dive Vava'u
PO Box 160

Neiafu,
Vava'u, Kingdom of Tonga
Ph: +676 70492
Fax: +676 70557
www.divevavau.com
info@divevavau.com
Skype: [divevavau](https://www.skype.com/user/divevavau)

September Osprey Reef – Qld
Osprey Reef is one of the Coral Sea reefs north of Cooktown, and as such needs a live-aboard to be able to get around here. Spirit of Freedom tends to have two days out at this remote reef, diving the best sites this great dive destination has to offer. At North Horn one of the best shark feeds in Australia occurs, with grey reef, white tip and silvertips coming in to take the bait, although it is the shark dive at Around the Bend that really has me excited. A cleaning station lies on a ledge about 28m down the wall here, and visiting it are scalloped hammerhead sharks and manta rays. To top it off it has a wide variety of small fish life, square-spot anthias and pyramid butterfly fish to name just a couple, though thoughts of anything else quickly vanish when one of the big two turn up. Make sure you dive Halfway, where large bommies make a maze of passageways out from the lagoon to the open ocean. There is a lot to see out here!

Spirit of Freedom
www.spiritoffreedom.com.au
Email:info@spiritoffreedom.com.au
PO Box 1276, Cairns, Australia 4870
PH: 07 4047 9113



A saddleback anemonefish guards its eggs at Tulamben, in Bali. This is a brilliant macro destination.

October Tulamben – Bali – Indonesia
I have only recently been here, and was staggered by the diversity of life that can be found in such a small area. Every dive seemed to have a different set of creatures, from harlequin shrimp, saron shrimp and jawfish, to zebra crabs, Coleman shrimp and ghost pipefish. It really is just too much to list. To top it off it has

one of the best wreck dives in the world, the Liberty Wreck. This WWII supply ship was torpedoed and run aground, and only to be pushed into the water by a volcanic eruption from nearby Mt. Agung some twenty years later. This has resulted in an amazing wreck only twenty metres from the shore. If you are into macro life, this is the place for you. Tulamben is a small town, two and a half hours from the chaos of Legian and Kuta, and totally dependant on diving. Tulamben Wreck Divers also take tours to see the sunfish, from mid June to mid November.

Tulamben Wreck Divers
www.tulambenwreckdivers.com
info@tulambenwreckdivers.com
from Overseas (Outside) Bali:
+62 363 23400 / 363 21166
on Bali dial: 0363 23400 /0363 21166

November Kangaroo Island – SA
In November the weather in SA turns from the south, making the waters north of Kangaroo Island flat as a pancake. This starts the diving adventures in this area, and Jim Thistleton and his boat the Josephine Jean begin their daily trips from Western River to the dive sites on the north-eastern corner of this large island. Pissy Boy Cove is my favourite site here, with leafy and weedy seadragons being in the bay, along with New Zealand fur seals, Australian sea lions, bottlenose dolphin, southern eagle rays, western blue grouper, harlequinfish and more all in a small area. A virtual overview of southern water marine life in the one dive! The massive cliffs of this coastline act as a backdrop, and with the warm summer weather arriving this is a dive trip that is not hard to take. Spend some time on Kangaroo Island too, as it is one of the most scenic places in Australia.

I hope that I've given you some food for thought for your big dive holiday in 2009. Most of the above places are brilliant at all times of the year, I've just stuck them in to what I would consider good months to go. Contact them for more details about the best time for you!

If you have a trip or anything that you would like to mention, please give me a ring or a fax on the number below (hang on to it, it will ring through!) or write to me c/o PO Box 242, Chelsea, Vic., 3196.
Ken Hoppen: Tel: (03) 9773 0081 Fax: (03) 9773 0081
khphoto@primus.com.au

Kangaroo Island Diving Safaris
Jim and Josie Thistleton
RSD 451 Kingscote, Kangaroo Island 5223
T: 0427 102 387
kids@kin.net.au
www.kiddivingsafaris.com

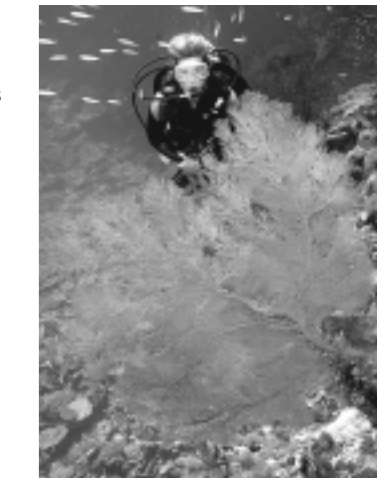
December Christmas Island – Indian Ocean
It just has to be Christmas at Christmas! This island is home to one of the most unique terrestrial habitats on the planet, with the red crab

migrations just mind-blowing. It is a chance to occur during your stay in Dec (it is dependant on local rains), and because of this the waters around the island are full of whale sharks, mantas and mobula. With the prevalent winds from the south-east for the majority of the year, the northern coastline waters are dead flat, making boating very pleasant, and whale shark spotting easy. They break the glass-line surface of the water with their fins. This is not the only time to come to CI though. In the winter months close encounters with hammerheads are common, and the size and health of the local corals has to be seen to be believed. To top it off, the shore dive from Flying Fish Cove has to be the best in Australia. Part of Western Australia, although physically closer to Indonesia, this is a place to be treasured.

Christmas Island Tourism Association (CITA)
cita@christmas.net.au
www.christmas.net.au
Christmas Island Divers
info@christmasislanddivers.com
www.christmasislanddivers.com
National Jet
www.nationaljet.com.au

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Christmas Island is a pristine divers paradise. Oh, and it has whale sharks too!