Diving Etiquette: the Diving Center

You made it right on time: got off the plane, looked forward to your travel bag with your dive equipment, and nearly cried in relief when you spotted it on the belt.

When you arrived at the hotel, you grabbed your key but didn't head to your room: you rushed to the diving center first, with your Advanced OWD certificate between your teeth. You finally found out that a wreck dive was scheduled for the following day, and booked your place.

"Can I have a look at your logbook?"

As soon as the young lady at the counter pronounced the word, an eerie silence descended over the diving centre. You felt like fainting, and got pale before a 20-year-old girl.

Yes, diving centers have a thing about logbooks, especially in paper format. They love logbook keepers, they love to flick through the pages, download them, tee-hee over awkward stamps. They desperately want to know where you dived last time. It's not about being nosey, it's just for the sake of your safety and that of your diving buddies. If you don't have a logbook, you could be requested to do a check dive.

Check dives

If the word *logbook* makes people uncomfortable, *check dive* triggers anxiety, panic, and anger. Especially if you're from southern Europe. If you're from northern Europe, you'll mutter, but you'll eventually agree.

Declaring that you have no intention of demonstrating anything to anybody isn't a good answer. Either you won't be able to take part in a guided dive nor you'll get your tank and weights if you're planning to solo dive. Replying to a young instructor "You weren't even born when I learnt to clear the mask!", won't help you achieve your goal.



Asking too much

Divers generally suspect that divemasters keep the best dive sites secret, for their own enjoyment. This is tantamount to believing that Netflix CEO shuts himself off, watching movies all alone. Divemasters could actually lie if you ask them what is their favourite dive site. If your technical skills aren't good enough, they could lie and suggest an easier dive site. They don't mean to mislead you, they're just being kind: they don't want you to feel envy. And, don't confuse Europe and Africa with the US: divemasters won't serve you tea or coffee on the dinghy and won't assemble your equipment.

Space in diving centers is governed by a counterintuitive rule

It's a universal rule: the horizontal surface available is inversely proportional to the size of the diving center. You'll soon find out that the largest diving centers, as well as boats, seem smaller than they actually are. This is because you spread all your gear everywhere. If you immediately arrange your equipment in your designated space, something amazing will happen: you'll have more room for standing and sitting. This will also increase good mood and prevent people from tripping on inevitably wet floors. Although surfaces are covered by miles of carpeting and rubber mats, they're slippery and, statistically, they're the most crowded areas, where people walk barefoot or in flip-flops.

Spreading your equipment all over is a threat to safety, however, it helps to build social relations. It seems that many marriages between divers (a union that is legally recognized in many countries) originated from grabbing accidentally someone else's equipment. However, diving for a whole week wearing fins two sizes smaller or bigger than yours could negatively affect your comfort and safety. Keep in mind that you could accidentally grab the equipment of someone you don't get along with.



Rental equipment

Rental gear is obviously used gear. You'll find new rental gear only if it's just been replaced or if a diving center has recently started up. You should treat gear like you would treat the elderly – properly and with respect. Just like people are more likely to fling cigarette butts and litter on a dirty pavement, they're more likely to mishandle worn equipment. You could selfishly feel you're allowed to do so because it doesn't belong to you. Faulty and mishandled equipment could take revenge on divers. Good manners and respect for the elderly aside, handling your equipment carefully will guarantee survival in a foreign environment. You should return it in the condition you received it. Well rinsed, if possible.

Rinsing tanks

The rinsing area of a diving center is like a china shop, it's where you should be most careful. Sea salt, sand, bacilli, and body fluids can cause malfunction and embarrassment. Remember that diving centers don't often use disinfectants for the environment's sake. Chlorine aside, if you relieved yourself in your wetsuit, don't rinse it together with masks and regulators, please! Also, don't wash your boots with BCDs and regulators: sand and precision technology aren't compatible. True, relieving yourself in a wetsuit is even recommended if you're getting really cold, but no one wants to come into contact with your pee afterward.

If you really cannot hold it

Usually, if you rent a car at the airport, you don't pee on its seats and mats. This should also apply to rental wetsuits. In your own car, or wetsuit, you can do whatever you like, but not when there is a shared rinsing tank. If you have your own wetsuit, rinse it separately. What if you relieved yourself in a rented wetsuit? I understand this is hard to confess, but you should rinse it separately and ask for some soap and

disinfectant.



Advice for the experts

If your credibility is built on your rigidity, you may miss the fact that divers just want to have fun and leave the stress behind. They won't like a dictatorial check dive, especially if you charge the price of a standard dive. Treating people at the counter as if they were algorithms is one of the most dangerous global trends.

Providing overhauled and well-maintained equipment is a good start if you want to surround yourself with smiling people and avoid grudges. It's also a simple stratagem to avoid legal action.

I've never seen cases of mononucleosis, or Ebola, attributable to regulators purging in rinse tanks like snails, but a little amount of bicarbonate (natural disinfectant) is welcome attention. Two rinsing tanks, one for fins, socks and suits, and one for BCDs, regulators and masks, are better than one. A shower with a bar of neutral soap where divers can rinse the wetsuit that "suffered the mishap", will earn your center eighteen stars.