Diving the Um El Faroud

Location: Wied iz-Zurrieq, Malta

Type of Dive: Wreck

Level: Advanced/ Experienced, wreck specialist

Maximum depth: 34 metres

Malta is well known across the globe as a prime dive destination, however no other site on the island comes close to the Um El Faroud. This 10,000 ton, 115-metre-long Libyan tanker lies just off the South-West coast, and has quickly become a divers' paradise.

The ship was built in 1969 and, whilst docked in Malta, on the night of February 3rd it was racked by a huge gas explosion. Tragically, 9 workers lost their lives, and commemorative plaques can be seen on the bridge. The Faroud stayed docked for 3 years, until it was decided in 1998 that she would be scuttled and used as a dive site. Now she lies around 200 metres from shore, in an upright position. In winter 2005, a storm split the wreck into two parts, but other than that she remains in great condition.



Briefing

Many of the dives in Malta are shore dives, and the Um El Faroud is no exception. You will start your dive in the narrow channel used by tourist boats ferrying people to and from the nearby Blue Grotto. Those not familiar with the site should use a local Dive Centre, as navigation to the wreck requires some knowledge.

You will cross the channel, keeping the reef on the right-hand side for a few minutes. After this, you will peel off, and swim straight into the blue. Stick to around 5 – 10 metres during the swim out, to conserve your air and bottom time during the 8 – 10-minute swim. Eventually, you will see a huge, ominous shadow ahead. The sheer size of the wreck will be the first thing you notice, as you begin to descend to the stern. Now is a good time to check out the propeller, which lies at 32 metres. From here you can slowly ascend to the deck, maximising your bottom time.



Safety Check

This dive requires a relatively good level of fitness. The walk to the entry point alone, in a wetsuit and carrying a steel tank, is no easy feat, and there are steep steps to navigate. There is also the swim out to wreck to consider. Another hazard is the boat traffic. The entry and exit point lie in the channel, and it's important not to cross this channel shallower than 5 metres, meaning you should have good buoyancy skills. As with any deep dive, frequently check your No Decompression Limit, and if making 2 dives on the wreck, ensure you have a long surface interval. Drink plenty of water as air temperature can soar. Consider the swim back from the wreck, and ensure you have adequate air for your return and safety stop. As with all wrecks, there is the possibility for entanglement or entrapment, so do not attempt to penetrate the wreck unless properly trained to do so.

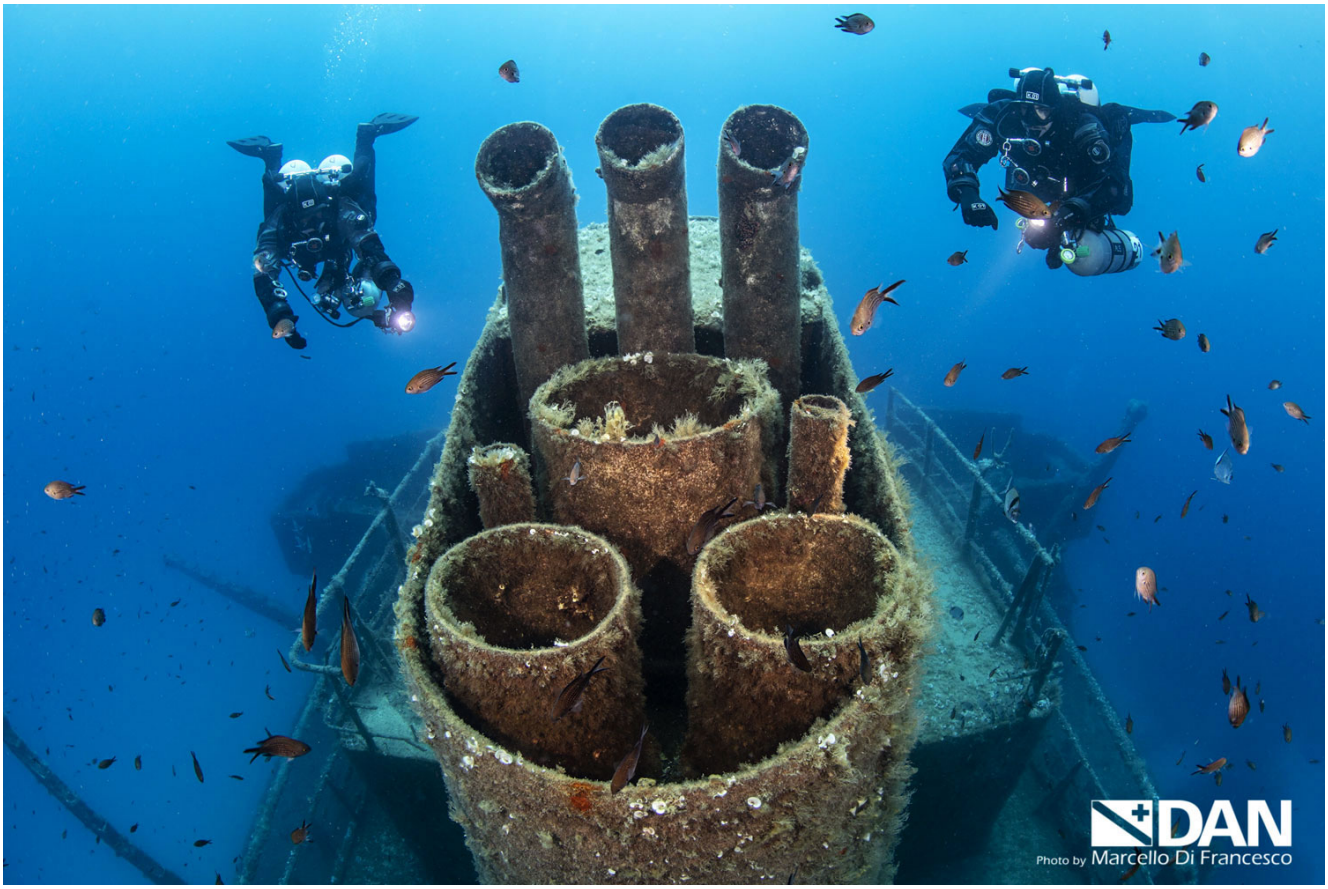
Last but not least, it is always worth checking that there is an Oxygen kit readily available. The nearest Hyperbaric Chamber is at Mater Dei hospital, near Valletta, and you can call DAN (which by the way is a Malta-based organisation) in case of emergency or if you need specialised consultancy.



Photography advice

The Um El Faroud attracts amateur and professional photographers from across the globe. The crystal-clear waters of Malta provide a great opportunity for photographers, with visibility regularly passing 30 metres. Due to the sheer size of the wreck, a wide angled lens will be useful here. As always, when taking photographs, remember to keep your wits about you and monitor your air gauge and NDL frequently.

There is plenty of life around the wreck, and in summer schools of barracuda can often be seen congregating around the top of the wreck. Check inside small cracks and pipes for Moray Eels trying to hide, and don’t forget to look for tiny Nudibranch which can be seen clinging to the fauna which has grown on the wreck. Parrot fish are nearly always present, and huge schools of fish can often be seen all around.



About the author

Demi is a PADI Instructor, travel lover and keen writer currently living in Malta. When she is not underwater, she is blogging about her experiences at aroundtheworldwithher.com.