# How I learnt to be my own dive doctor

**GETTING LOST AT SEA: NIGHT DIVE IN THE GALAPAGOS**

So we surfaced. And it was pitch black. My buddy and I were 3 miles out at sea, at night, in the Galapagos – an unfamiliar territory to us, subject to rough currents, sharks…

What happened was, I relied too much on our boat diver even though my instincts told me otherwise. We went out to dive in this reef without a dive buoy and before jumping into the sea, I asked: "How is the boat going to follow us?" The Ecuadorian boat driver reassured me he'll see our lights underwater and I trusted him. Even though I knew this was a crazy idea, I didn't question.

***"Over the years you sort of learn to never take anything for granted."***

So we went for the dive. We did about 35 minutes underwater, which is quite a decent period. And during that entire time, the boat had lost us straight away. You know, the boat was driving around in circles, speeding, seeing a light here, there… So surely enough, by the time we surfaced, we didn't see anything except darkness.

We were lost. In the distance we could make out the lights of the Galapagos but next stop would have been Antarctica with all the currents pushing and pulling beneath us.

In situations like these, you have to react straightaway. Although John, my buddy, was older and more experienced, I felt responsible for him. I was lucky I had remained calm and decided to take the lead. I immediately asked him to switch off his torch to conserve our lights and to be prepared to ditch all his equipment so we could swim as fast as we could. But even that was a no-no if you have a 5 knot current taking you out.

***"I think the choices you make before a dive are fundamental to the consequences that might arise."***

Eventually I got my photography strobe light and lifting it over my head, I drew a circle — hoping it would grab someone's attention and the guys on the boat would see us. Luckily, they picked it up. We had been lost in the water for 15 minutes, but it felt as if it were forever. In the end it was a happy ending, but living it was scary. Over the years you sort of learn to never take anything for granted.

I think the choices you make before a dive are fundamental to the consequences that might arise.

Ultimately, we weren't designed to live underwater — so we need to make sure we have all the right equipment, done all the checks, respect the elements, know what our abilities are and when to say "no, this is too much for me" and also ask the right questions.

**DON'T TAKE ANYTHING FOR GRANTED**

Basically, the more you know before your dive, the easier it is to factor in the possibility of what could go

wrong.

I always do the standard checklist as part of my preparation. I start by making sure I have the basic things: my own mask, regulator, fins and that all my dive gear is in order. Using equipment you're already comfortable with makes your underwater experience and safety so much easier!

As a precaution, I always like to make sure I'm using equipment I'm comfortable with. If you're going on a dive and trying something new, there will always be that element of surprise. So it is crucial to be wearing something you have been trying on and practicing with. Knowing what works for you also comes with experience.

Physically, it's also important to be self-aware and acknowledge when something doesn't feel right. It pays to listen to your body. Whether it's an earache, sinuses or bad stomach you need to gauge to what extent this would impact your dive and ultimately your health. It's one thing having an injured finger, but a bad leg means you probably won't be able to fin properly.

Different people do things differently, so being your own doctor is crucial to understanding how your body will react in different situations. Personally, I'm very active — I do a lot of sports, including open-water swimming, so I am very comfortable being in water and I'm in tune with my body. However, I still do a full medical check-up once a year.

Being your own doctor means understanding your physical ability and knowing your physical restrictions. It is crucial to be in tune with your body. This makes it easier for you to react if something doesn't feel right underwater.

That way, you can be conscious of your limits. For instance, if you're out diving, taking pictures, and you're carrying lots of equipment you need to be sure you can react quickly in case something goes wrong. Ultimately, it's important to feel comfortable underwater, to be aware of your limits and to dive in territory you know and are familiar with.

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Avoid getting lost and increase your chances of getting found.

As part of its mission to promote diving safety, DAN Europe is currently running an awareness campaign **to help divers reduce the risk of getting lost at sea**.

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***Read about Kurt Arrigo's advice after surviving a near-death dive experience in Gozo Island.***