Justin Carmack: a journey along his 100 dive list

Justin is a divemaster and world traveler on a mission to dive and document the top 100 dive sites in the world. We interviewed him, as part of our #WhyWeDoIt campaign, to understand why he set off on this incredible journey.

Why did you leave it all behind?

I was in University studying business and history, and I didn't really know what I was going to do. We ended up going on an international trip, and I instantly knew I just wanted to travel the world.

On that trip I got scuba certified with PADI in Mozambique. I encountered whale sharks and giant manta rays – and I instantly fell in love with the sport. I knew it was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, so I started studying how to make it a business and, after a while, it started working.

Diving completely changed my life. I was forging along the normal path, and somehow managed to alter my trajectory, and found something that makes me feel completely whole. No matter how many problems I may go through in a day, I don't care what's going on – I jump into the water and I don't think about a single one of those things. Some people do yoga, some people go meditate all day – I just go diving.

Walk us through your first dive experience.

It was the main turning point in my life. I felt at one with the ocean. I had joined a large university group, I recall us going straight to the bottom and someone was having a problem so the instructor asked me to stay put – and I loved it. They said I was a natural. So while they were trying to help these guys I was just searching around, exploring, coming across various marine life. I didn't even know how to go beyond 10 meters, but I was just hooked. That was history. It just went on from there.

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What do you feel every time you go underwater?

I've managed to turn this into a career, but that hasn't tainted my passion for the sport. I just had to find a way to turn it into a living. On land, I'm not going to climb a mountain, and I'm certainly not the most agile – I must admit I'm pretty clumsy!

But when I get in the water, I'm like a turtle, it's my world. I'm completely comfortable and can dive with the best of them. I feel like an explorer every time I dive. I have been all over the world, and I truly feel that the only real frontier left is the ocean. I can go on 100 dives in the same spot and still see something new every time, and it's amazing. It's stuff that 90% of people on earth will not see.

Was there a particular dive that spurred your passion to go along this 100 dive project?

Not really. It just naturally came together whilst I was traveling the world. My love is traveling and diving. There's no better combination really. That's how I started getting a following – after sharing crazy photos and videos around the world. I started to get feedback from people telling me – you need to go here, you need to go there! And it got me thinking… actually yes, I do! So I started to compile the 100 dive list that was recommended to me, and here I am along the journey.

Through my blog I want to show the whole world what's out there. Be it the wrecks in Egypt or marine life in the Maldives. People are naturally curious and will, hopefully, want to see it for themselves. If I manage to spark curiosity and a sense of adventure in their lives, then I feel I've managed to get my message across.

What is the most exciting thing you've seen underwater?

There isn't one single memory. Every time I head underwater I get excited. In Egypt I really get excited when I see little sea slugs, or in the Philippines, every day is exciting as the sea slugs are completely different. From blue ones to fluorescent ones. I find this all fascinating. The uglier or the weirder looking, the more I love it!

Whale sharks. They are the other thing I truly love. I've seen them in Mexico, in the Philippines – those things are crazy. They are truly majestic, and you just want to be around them.

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What have you learnt from all these experiences?

In all brutal honesty, what I've come to learn is rather sad. I travel to the most exotic places, and right on land there are a million people who do not care about the ocean. I'll step off the beaten track into the ocean, and discover a whole ecosystem that not one of these people would have seen, or even cares about.

This is one of the main reasons why I started this, to show people what there is out there. As Jacques Cousteau said: "You have to love something before you can care about it or save it".

Find that passion and make that your lifestyle, instead of putting it off for your whole life. You have to find what you love, because that will make your life a thousand times better, no matter what it is.