

Training pays back

Luca* knew how much the live-aboard dive trip meant to his friend, John*. So when John asked him to join him for the four-day adventure, he eagerly accepted.

The two friends had diving experience. Luca was a PADI Divemaster, while John was an Advanced Open Water Diver who had recently obtained rebreather certification. They never imagined their trip would end in hospital following an incident – that could have had far more tragic consequences had it not been for the training and quick thinking of their dive guide, George*.

The morning they boarded the live-aboard boat Luca was feeling tired. He had been out partying the night before. He stayed on the boat while the guide took John and another diver, Paul*, on two dives that morning. All four divers enjoyed an afternoon dive together. Then later that evening, Luca and John opted out of the planned night dive.

The following morning Luca, who was now well-rested, decided to join Paul and the guide for the morning dive. This time it was John who decided to sleep in.

That morning there was some current but it was nothing to be concerned about. Luca, Paul and their guide enjoyed themselves swimming around huge boulders and swim-throughs.

At one point Paul noticed he was low in air supply, so the guide allowed him to swim with his alternate air source. When the time arrived to end the dive, Luca – who was closer to the surface than the other two – signalled with his torch that he was heading back to the boat. All seemed normal to Paul and the guide who did not suspect Luca was having trouble breathing.

Paul and the guide proceeded with their ascent, stopping at safety stops. After a while Paul noticed Luca drop his mask. That was when they realised something was terribly wrong. Luca was no longer moving. He was floating face down on the surface. The guide started swimming up, ignoring the safety stop. Paul followed him.

When they reached the surface they turned Luca face upwards. The guide dropped his and Luca's weights and asked Paul to hold Luca's head out of the water. They needed to get the boat's attention. But the guide couldn't locate his whistle so he asked Paul to get the boat's attention while he (the guide) held Luca's head out of the water.

Foam was oozing out of Luca's mouth. The guide cleared the foam and started giving Luca mouth-to-mouth ventilation. He thought about using the resuscitation mask, but decided to leave it in his BCD pocket and concentrate on giving proper ventilation – just as he had learnt during the Rescue Diver Course.

Within about five minutes the boat arrived next to them. The guide removed Luca's BCD and the boat's crew pulled him into the boat, removed his wetsuit, placed him laying down and gave him oxygen.

Meanwhile, both the exhausted guide and Paul were also given oxygen as a precaution. By the time the guide regained his strength he found that Luca was doing well. He had been unconscious for about half an hour, during which time he had continued foaming at the mouth and coughed up liquid.

The captain had called for a speedboat to take Luca to the mainland where the ambulance was waiting to take him to hospital. John went with him. They also contacted DAN Europe before leaving the boat to tell

them what had happened and where they were heading. The DAN Europe team immediately started following the case.

When the guide and Paul visited hospital they were told that Luca's condition was most likely due to a sudden infection in his lungs. There was no need for hyperbaric therapy.

Luca told them how his breathing problems started at about 10 meters depth. He had had difficulties keeping the regulator in his mouth due to foam coming from his lungs - that was why he had signalled with his torch that he was heading to the boat.

He also told them that, when he reached the surface, he waited for them while floating on his back. Then he lost consciousness and, luckily, dropped his mask.

The guide said that when he had noticed Luca face down, it was clear what needed to be done. In this case this meant skipping the safety stop.

Luca thanked them for what they had done and everyone agreed that Rescue training really did pay off. Luca also thanked the DAN Europe team who followed his case all throughout - right until he fully recovered and left hospital after spending several days under observation in the ICU.

Review your Rescue skills from time to time. You might really need them at some point.

**This is a true story but names have been changed to protect identities.*