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UAE DIVING

Your guide to a whole new world

Our much-loved underwater guide is back, sporting a new name, site updates and 13 additional dive spots. We've added QR codes, so with a quick swipe of your mobile you can see the dive location. Divers and snorkellers can find info on the best wreck and reef dives in the region. Plus we give you details of accommodation, first aid advice, environmental news and GPS coordinates. Submerge yourself..

Diving in the UAE

The UAE offers a variety of dives from shallow sites, to drift, wreck or wall dives.

West Coast

A paradise for wreck divers, and we've discovered beautiful spots off Abu Dhabi.

Musandam

A must-do. Unspoilt, clear water, coral gardens and big pelagics.

East Coast

A colourful coral world awaits, along with some interesting wrecks.

Further Information

Places to stay, dhow charters, insurance, and first aid for stings and bites.

Snorkelling

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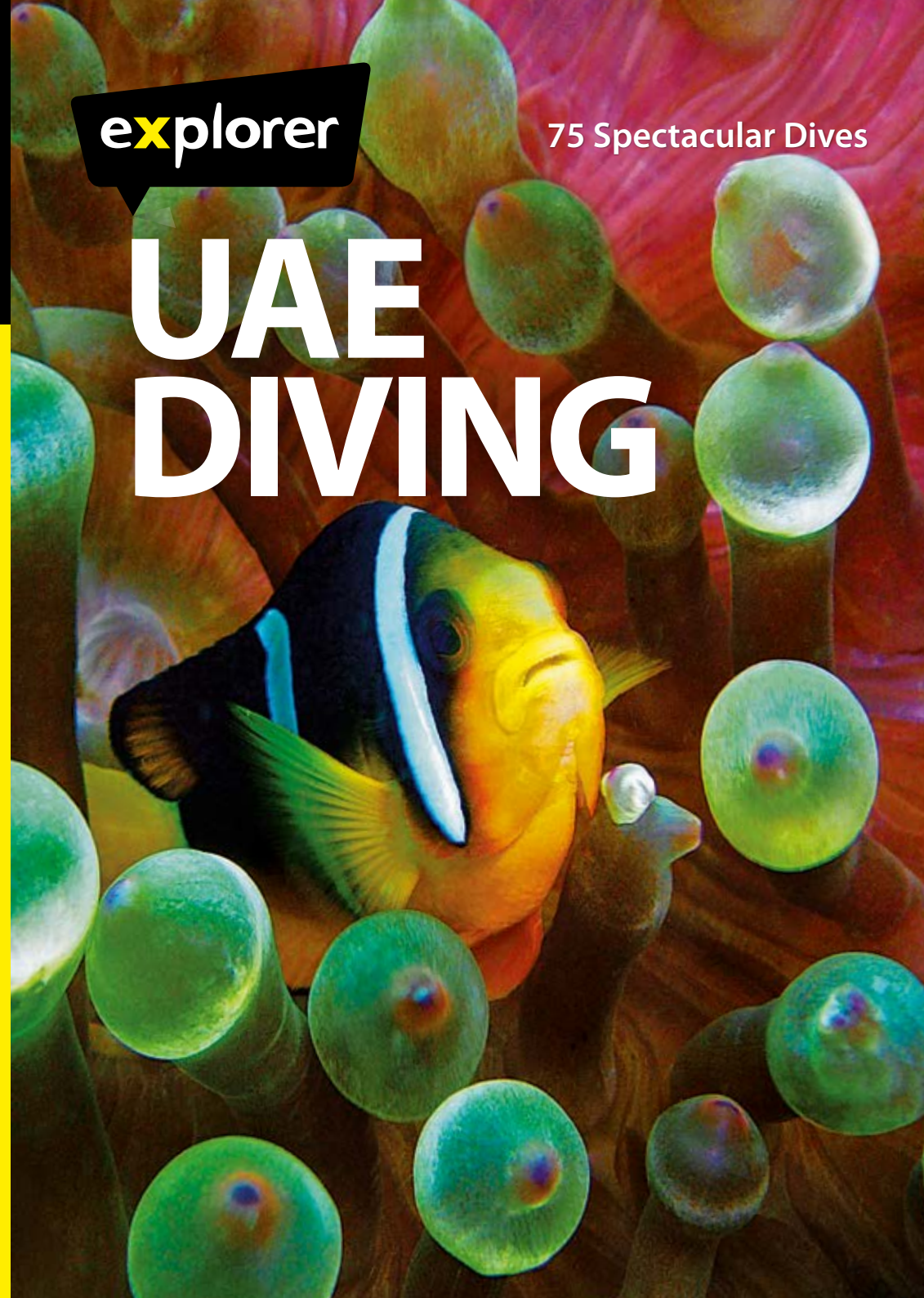
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Diving

UAE

explorer



75 Spectacular Dives

UAE DIVING

A vibrant blue tang fish with a prominent yellow-orange patch on its side is swimming towards the right. The background is a lush, green coral reef with various types of coral and sea fans. The water is clear and blue, with some smaller fish visible in the distance. The overall scene is a healthy and colorful underwater ecosystem.

WEST COAST

WEST COAST:

A WRECK DIVER'S PARADISE

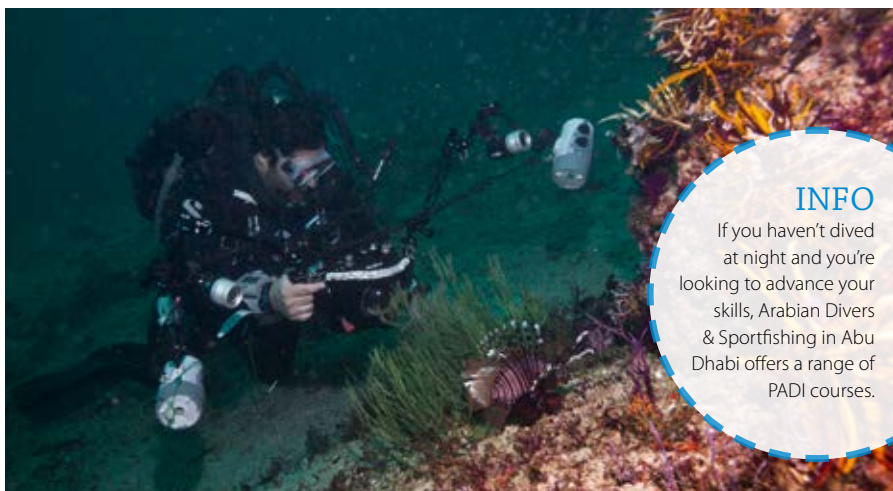
Wreck divers will revel in what the west coast has to offer, with some of the wrecks here dating back to the early 60s. All the sites can only be accessed by boat, but the trip is generally worthwhile as the wrecks attract a plethora of marine life.

At 984km long, the Arabian Gulf is a shallow extension of the Indian Ocean, and offers a sandy, almost flat, featureless seabed with a few isolated coral reefs. Its narrowest point is at the Strait of Hormuz (the northern tip of the peninsula), where

it is 56km wide. The average depth along the UAE coast is 30m, increasing to over 100m through the Strait of Hormuz.

The tidal movement is slight, with the currents only becoming stronger during spring tides and around the full moon. With a few exceptions, the currents have little effect on most of the dives. Visibility ranges between five and 15m, although there are exceptional days when it reaches 20m plus. Most of the wrecks are within a 30 minute boat journey of the shore.





INFO
 If you haven't dived at night and you're looking to advance your skills, Arabian Divers & Sportfishing in Abu Dhabi offers a range of PADI courses.

Night Diving

Night diving on the west coast is spectacular; dive with a powerful light at night to light up the colours, and be amazed. The wrecks, which appear orange and muddy brown during the day, turn into rainbows of colour at night and a whole new set of marine residents appear to feed and forage on and around them.

The wrecks offer such a small area of sanctuary for the fish that they have to hide in every available hole, crevice and corner. As a diver this means that you can get very close to a wide variety of resting fish.

At night, sites such as Nasteran are always special and memorable. With the exception of the Jasim, Lion City and MV Ludwig, we have dived all the sites covered in this book at night, even the Energy Determination, which is a real thrill full of life.

A word of caution when returning from the more distant sites, especially at night when everyone wants to get home as quickly as possible. Beware, as running into unmarked fishing nets is a very real danger. The nets can jam around the propellers, immobilising the boat. There's

also sometimes the odd piece of semi-submerged debris drifting about, which is difficult to spot, particularly at night, which is difficult to spot, particularly at night, and easily run into.

DIVER SAFETY

To ensure that your wreck dives safe and enjoyable, keep the following points in mind:

- Wear protective clothing. The wreck's surface may be covered with stinging hydrocorals and protruding pieces of jagged metal.
- Do not enter a wreck without appropriate training.
- If it's your first time on a site and you don't have a dive guide, do not enter the wreck unless a large exit point is visible on the other side.
- Be extra careful if you're diving a wreck after a storm; it may have become unstable or fragile.
- If you intend to penetrate a wreck, take along a rope or guideline that you can tie to the outside of the structure, and use to help you find your way out.
- Take a torch or flashlight.
- Once you swim inside the wreck be cautious, as wrecks tend to silt up quickly. By controlling your finning techniques you'll minimise the chance of stirring the silt up and clouding the visibility.

Explore The Arabian Gulf

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AQUA LUNG
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DIVE 1

ANCHOR BARGE

GPS

N25°30'47.6"
E55°04'35.7"



Depth: 23m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes

Distance from harbours:

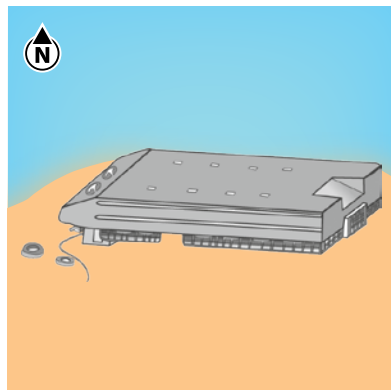
Abu Dhabi Club 70.6nm @ 032°; DIMC 25.4nm @ 350°;

Dubai Creek 18.6nm @ 319°

Distance from other dive sites:

HB6 (p.20) 0.6nm @ 059°

Neptune 6 (p.42) 0.7nm @ 055°



A site well worth exploring and a good place to watch the cuttlefish swim by.

Sunk by the White Sea Shipping Company in 1998 to form an artificial reef, the anchor barge is a large upsidedown wreck. She rests on her forward machinery cabin in 23m of water, and the roomy open area between her deck and the seabed means that there's plenty of hiding space for sea creatures.

The cabin contains anchor winches and the cargo and ballast transfer pumps, with her bulk being supported by the cabin and deck equipment. The wreck lies on a ridge of rock a metre high. Not all operators dive this wreck, due to its distance.

Diving

This is one of the few dive sites in the Gulf where the seabed has some features that are worth exploring. You should take a powerful torch to search under the hull of the barge. Make sure you look up at whatever has taken up residence on the overhead deck.

As the vessel is rectangular and slab-sided and the currents can be quite strong on this site, it can sometimes be rather difficult to anchor here.

But the reward is that, once you're in the water, there's an abundance of marine life.



Anchor Barge being sunk

Marine Life

Scallops, oysters and small clumps of black sea squirts have taken hold of the wreck, along with hydrocorals. On the surrounding sand and rocky bottom, flatworms (black with a colourful orange edging) abound in February and March.

You also have a good chance of seeing cuttlefish on this site. These amazing creatures have a neon-like line that runs around their mantle, and they can alter their colour and shape to blend in with their surroundings.



Cuttlefish

Wreck register: Unknown

Name: Pontoon 300 (formerly The Leena)

Nationality: Unknown

Year built: Unknown

Type: MV barge

Tonnage: 3,900 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 82m, B: 27m, D: 5m

Cargo: Ballast

Date sunk: April 1998

GOING ARTIFICIAL

The benefit of sinking an old vessel, or even an obsolete rig, is that it provides a habitat for hundreds of underwater species to live and feed on. This is generally a positive change, especially where the seabed is largely flat and featureless. It's no guarantee that a wreck will become a healthy and diverse reef, but the chances are that nature will snap up the opportunity.

To read an account of how a wreck is gradually transformed into a reef, turn to *A Year in the Life of Inlchape 2* on p.122.

DIVE 2

BARRACUDA BARGE

GPS

N25°27'15.6"
E55°22'41.4"



Depth: 18m | **Snorkelling:** Yes | **Night dive:** No

Distance from harbours:

Ajman Creek 4nm @ 298°

DIMC 25.1nm @ 030°

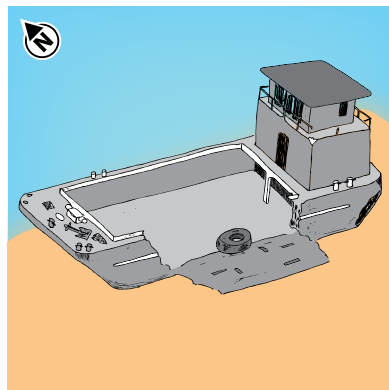
Hamriya Harbour 6.3nm @ 256°

Sharjah Creek 4.6nm @ 353°

This old barge is now home to plenty of barracuda, particularly in the cooler months.

Although the circumstances of loss aren't fully known, the fact that the vessel's engine and steering gear have been removed would suggest that a local fisherman sunk this barge to form an artificial reef. In the winter of 1997, a fisherman told Blue Planet Diving about the wreck and its location.

The barge sits upright in 18m with her bow facing 340°. The seabed is flat and featureless and there are a few bits of wreckage scattered about. Unusually, for a barge, the wheelhouse and engine room are double-storied.



Several windows and doors give divers easy access to the interior, but when you enter the small rooms be careful not to stir up the silt, which dramatically reduces the visibility.

The top of the wheelhouse is at 10m and covered in algae and shells. You'll find small shoals of surprisingly tame fish congregating around it.

The small wreck is easily circumnavigated several times in a dive. Take your time inspecting the outside hull and look for small gobies with shrimp in their sandy homes on the seabed. Then explore the

hold before you go in and out of the wheelhouse. Check out the unusual anchor still sitting on the bow.

Snorkelling

Snorkellers will enjoy this site and will see the wheelhouse easily from the surface.

Marine Life

During the winter months this wreck is surrounded by shoals of barracuda, although during the summer months they move to cooler, deeper water. Barracuda Barge is also home to the usual yellow snappers. These fish literally engulf the wreck, swimming above, around and within it, and squeezing into every available nook and cranny, no matter how small.

The cowries you'll see here are a similar



rusty-brown colour to the ones found on MV Dara, which is a result of them absorbing the iron oxide from the rusting barge. The wreck is covered in orange, red, brown and black sponges, and lots of barnacles with their feathery arms that feed on small algae and other morsels. Several types of nudibranchs inhabit this wreck, their gills pulsing as they breathe (look to see if you can find their eggs in circular patterns close by). You'll also notice a white, fern-like plant; take care as these are stinging hydroids and may give you a nasty sting or rash.

Wreck register: Not charted

Name: Original name unknown

Nationality: Unknown

Year built: Unknown

Type: MV coastal barge – single screw

Tonnage: 800 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 30m, B: 10m, D: 4m

Cargo: None

Date sunk: Unknown



Barracuda

DIVE 3 DB1/SMB

GPS

N25°16'47.5"
E55°03'44.5"

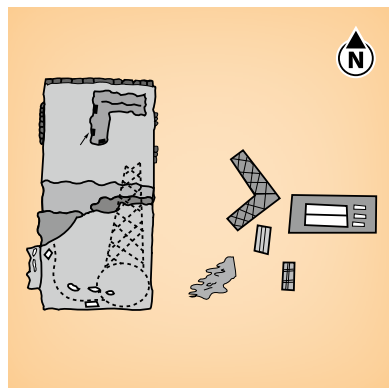


Depth: 25m

Distance from harbours:

DIMC 12nm 337°

DOSC 10.5nm @ 306°



The Derrick Barge (or DB1) was a purpose-built towing barge, completed on 8 October, 1962. She had three decks, a helicopter pad on the stern and a 1,500 tonne American crane on the bow. DB1 is also known as Sheikh Mohammed's Barge (or SMB) as he agreed to the upkeep of the marker buoy in perpetuity.

The wreck was sunk by the UAE armed forces to form an artificial reef, along with a number of other surplus vessels and wrecks that form separate dive sites in their own right. She currently lies upside down in 23m of water on a flat, sandy bottom.

Diving

Previously affected by bad visibility due to construction, we are pleased to report that dive centres are now returning to this site.

The DB1 is one of the most interesting of the wreck dives – and it's big. It takes many dives to become familiar with the area and most people only have a clear

understanding of the site when the visibility reaches 15-20m.

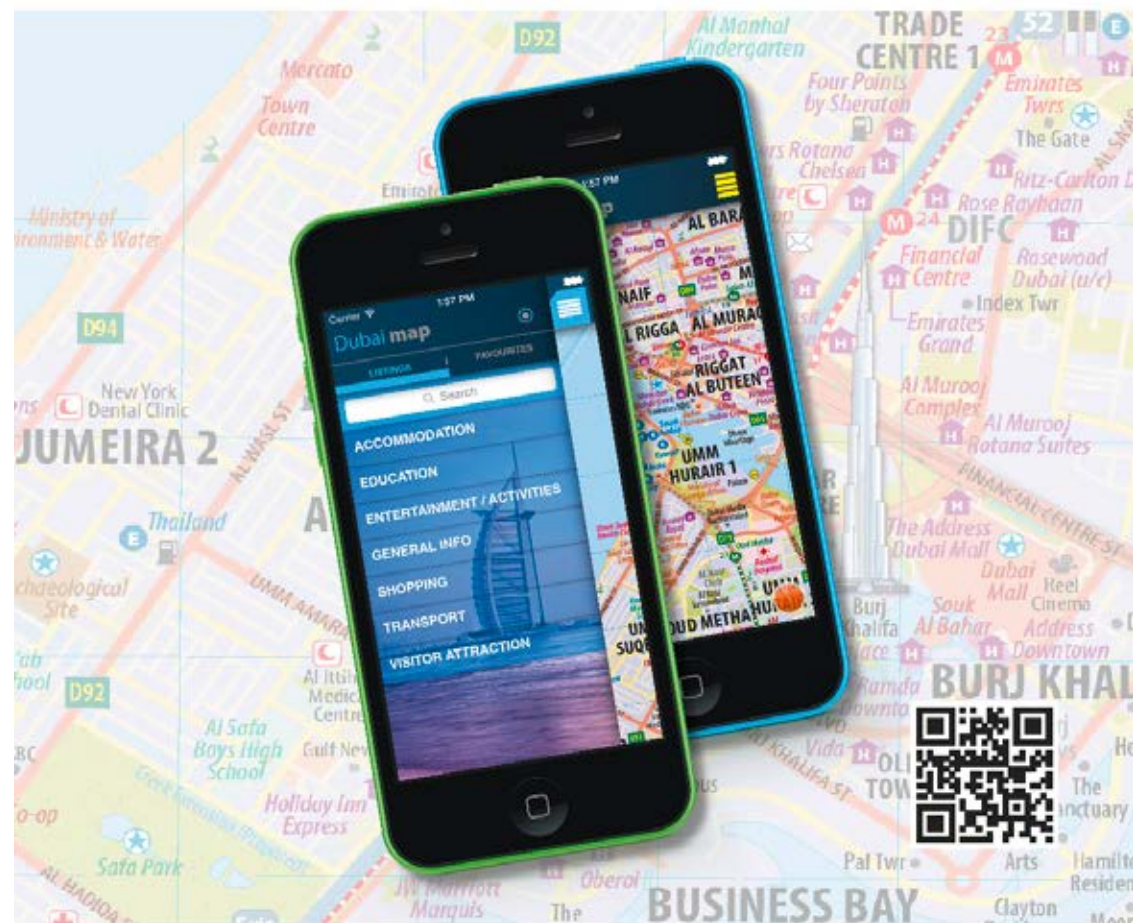
There are numerous holes in the wreck for the more adventurous to investigate. The DB1's hull is breaking up, and great care should be taken when exploring inside as parts of it are collapsing and there are many jagged edges.

Start on the seabed and then move up the sides of the wreck looking for nudibranchs, crabs and shrimps. This way you'll end your dive on the upturned hull at 16m. Leave enough air to do a safety stop on the anchor rope.



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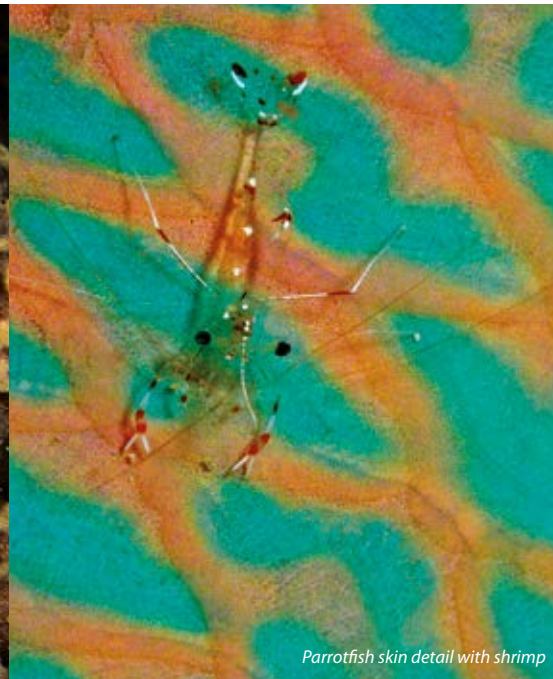
DUBAI OFFLINE MAP



UNDERWATER ABSTRACTS



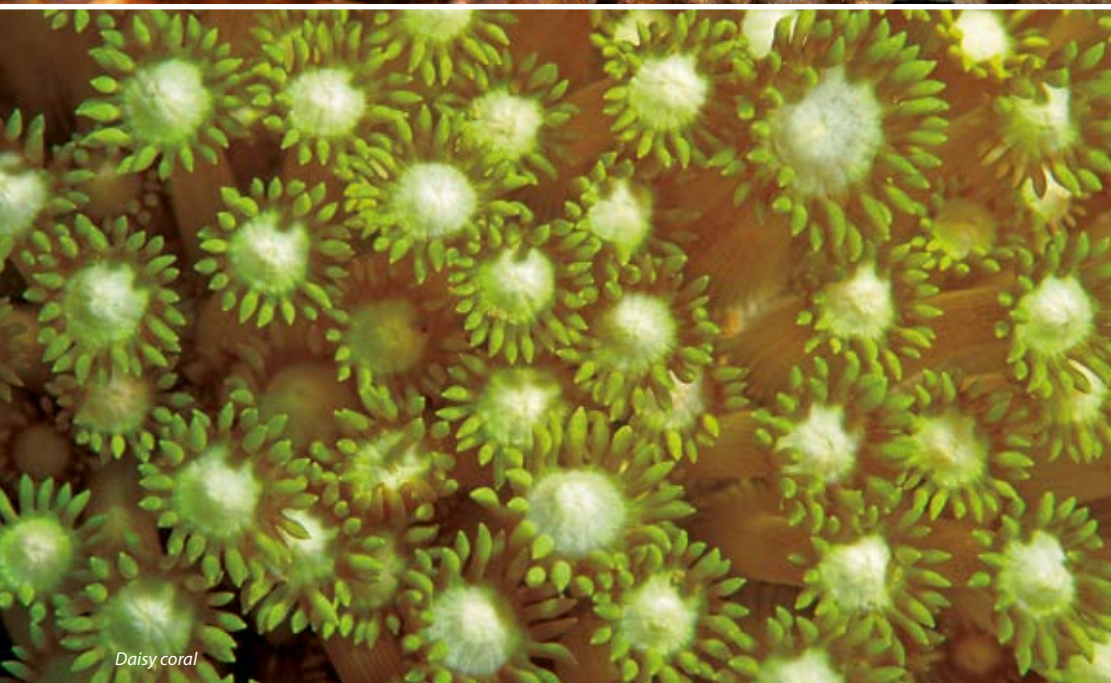
The fin detail of a scorpionfish



Parrotfish skin detail with shrimp



Toxic urchin



Daisy coral



Starfish



Pufferfish skin detail

DIVE 4

ENERGY DETERMINATION

GPS

N26°04'08.1"
E55°34'04.1"



Depth: 80m+ | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** No
Distance from harbours:

DOSC 56.7nm @ 018°

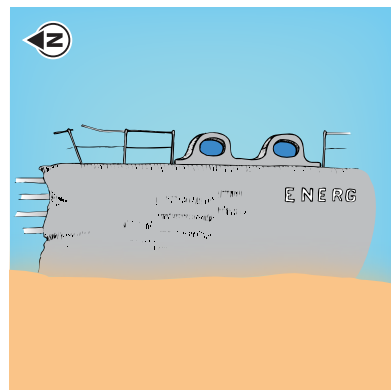
Dubai Creek 49.9nm @ 016°

Hamriya Harbour 35nm @ 004°

Sharjah Creek 42.5nm @ 013°

This wreck has an interesting story behind it and plenty of scope for exploration.

The Energy Determination sailed with ballast from Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles on 5 November, 1979. She was bound for Das Island in the Gulf, where she was due to load a cargo of crude oil. However, at 1am local time on 13 December, as the Energy Determination was passing through the Strait of Hormuz, about 64km from Ras Al Khaimah, there was an enormous explosion. A fire broke out near the number 9 starboard tank, which contained 354 tons of slops. Fire and smoke quickly spread to the engine room and living quarters.



The captain decided to abandon ship and the life rafts were deployed. Of her 38 man crew, 37 were picked up from their life rafts by an Omani naval vessel that was in the area.

Meanwhile, the fiercely blazing Energy Determination, visible over 15km away and with burning fuel oil leaking from a hole in her starboard side, began to list and settle by the stern.

Salvage tugs that had raced to the scene noted that the deck and starboard side had a hole some 13m wide from the bridge house towards the bow. The



Colourful whip corals on wreck surface

Wreck register: 10830047

Name: Energy Determination

Nationality: Liberian

Year built: Unknown

Type: VLCC (very large crude carrier)

Tonnage: 321,186 DWT, 250,000 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 350m, B: 55m, D: 22m

Cargo: Ballast

Date sunk: 15 December, 1979

salvage crews managed to get a line on board and they towed the crippled ship to a safe position clear of the shipping lanes.

At 4.30am on 15 December, Energy Determination broke in two, 27m forward of the bridge superstructure. The stern section containing the engine room, accommodation and pump room sank east of Mina Saqr at a depth of approximately 80m. The bow section was towed towards Dubai and anchored 11km off the coast for over two years, until it was

sold to South Korean shipbreakers.

She left Dubai under tow on 1 March, 1982. The insurance value of the hull and machinery was US\$58 million, making her, up until December 1988, the largest total hull loss ever underwritten by Lloyd's.

Diving

Diving the Energy Determination is not for the inexperienced or faint-hearted. Great care must be taken in the preparation and planning of this dive.



Whale shark and company



The currents can run at over five knots, so you should plan to dive in slack water in neap tides. (Tide tables are generally only available for Port Rashid and Khor Fakkan, so some calculations must be made to determine slack water.) You should plan to arrive at the site early to allow for tidal differences in the locality.

Anchoring onto the wreck can be time consuming — due to the depth and current, the line bellies out, not allowing the anchor to reach the wreck. The preferred method is to use a redundant shot line and not to anchor. For safety, an additional cylinder and regulator should be rigged on the shot line at 10m.

The vessel's stern section rests on her port side in 80-90m of water. The wreck lies on an incline, and the depth from the surface to the top of the wreck is about

25m at the forward starboard section, descending to 60m at the stern.

The accommodation deck and machinery flat (the cabin-like structure over the engine room), are more or less intact, but the bridge is canted and partially torn off. The deck and tank directly forward of the accommodation area have been ripped out, leaving a big jagged hole that has ladders running down into the darkness. This gaping hole extends forward for about 10m to where the deck and hull remain intact. The remaining 25m of deck and hull come to an abrupt end where the bow section has broken off.

Marine Life

The forward 25m section of the hull is covered in yellow, white and red soft

corals, and some lime green whip corals. Strong currents allow these corals to grow and when you swim down, their bright colours glow in the gloom.

The fish are big and tame on this site. Among other creatures, you may see large, rather frightening, but surprisingly tame marble rays, or even a whale shark. One has been photographed at close quarters on this wreck and a particularly lucky dive group were on the wreck when a whale shark party of five appeared.

THE OL' FLY & DIVE

Combining diving and flying is always a little risky, so you should stop diving at least 24 hours before flying to give your body time to rehydrate and degas.

Long flights should be avoided if possible and, if you do drink alcohol during the flight, you need to top up on even more water than usual to avoid becoming dehydrated.



DIVE 5

HAMMOUR BARGE

GPS

N25°04'40.5"
E54°46'06.5"



Depth: 15m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:

Abu Dhabi Club 39.7nm @ 031°

DIMC 20.4nm @ 266°

DOSC 25.1nm @ 255°

Jebel Ali Marina 14.9nm @ 290°

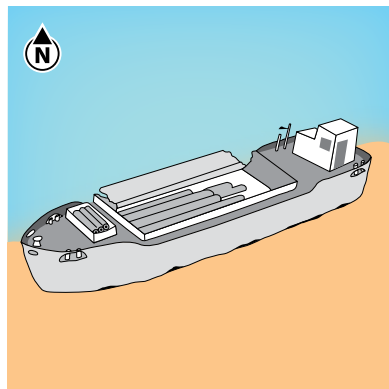
Distance from other dive site:

From MV Ludwig (p.38) 11nm @ 102°

A small, accessible wreck that has been claimed by hammour as their home.

The vessel lies upright in 12-15m of water. Her hold contains a cargo of pipes that make a perfect home for hammour – which is how the site obtained its name. The wheelhouse is intact, but all the ‘goodies’ have been removed.

It’s not known precisely when this wreck was sunk, but judging by the abundant marine growth on her, she’s been resting on the seabed for at least 25 years and is home to many fish.



Diving

This is a relatively small wreck with a few scattered pieces of debris lying on the sand nearby. Our suggested dive plan is to start at the base of the vessel and to swim around it, looking on the sand and in the debris for any interesting marine life. Then carry on to inspect the hull of the barge at the point where it rests on the seabed, as this is where many of its smaller residents hide.

The small cabin is accessible and worth exploring. Make sure you take a look inside the pipes in the hold; you will always find some of the resident hammour hiding there.

Marine Life

The wreck is not often visited by divers, which means that the fish are reasonably tame. These shallow wrecks are often home to the more brightly coloured reef fish like the orange dottyback, and their less colourful cousins, the Gulf dottyback.

Keep an eye out for the several varieties

WARNING

Before attempting to dive any wreck it’s strongly recommended that you receive adequate training to prepare you for diving in an overhead environment.

of blennies to be found here. It’s amazing how these colourful fish manage to squeeze into the tiniest of spaces, even trying to hide inside empty barnacle shells! They can be seen waiting near or inside their little holes with just the top of their head sticking out, ready to dart out of sight at the first sign of danger. Arabian angelfish can be seen all over the wreck, picking over the encrustations, and you might also spot some moon wrasse.

Wreck register: 108301272

Name: Unknown

Nationality: Unknown

Year built: Unknown

Type: Open hold barge

Tonnage: 860 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 60m, B: 10m, D: 5m

Cargo: Pipes

Date sunk: Unknown



Hammour

DIVE 6

HOPPER BARGE 6



GPS

N25°30'27.9"
E55°03'58.6"



Batfish

Depth: 23m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes

Distance from harbours:

DIMC 25.1nm @ 349°

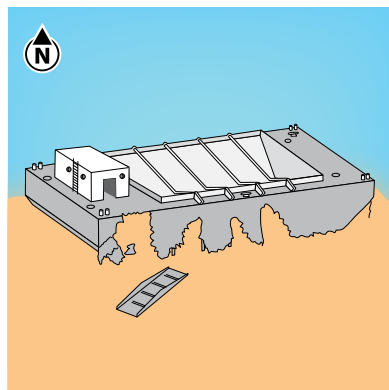
DOSC 21.5nm @ 336°

Dubai Creek 18.7nm @ 317°

Distance from other dive site:

From Neptune 6 (p.42) 0.18nm @ 223°

An easy wreck to navigate, with a number of interesting marine inhabitants to observe.



This is another of the wrecks that has been sunk by a local fisherman in close proximity to the Neptune 6's marker buoy (see p.42). Under international maritime law, wrecks that could be a hazard to shipping must have a marker buoy, known as a cardinal marker buoy, to indicate where there is clear water to passing vessels. However, the upkeep and maintenance of these buoys is costly (in excess of US\$50,000 a year), so fishermen understandably tend to sink vessels near to existing marker buoys,

rather than incur the cost of a new buoy.

The HB6 ended up here when she drifted onto the lee breakwater of Port Khalid in Sharjah during a storm on 18 February, 1982. The result was a total loss insurance claim. She was later raised, towed to her present location and sunk.

Among the sights here are the barge's drop-bottom doors, which were hydraulically operated, and the two cabins that housed the hydraulic gear on the stern. There's also a large cavity on the

starboard side, which is the result of her collision with the breakwater stabits.

Diving

This is an easy wreck for navigation as HB6 sits upright in 25m, with her bows facing south at 180°, and she's situated close to the Neptune 6. Her starboard side is beginning to break up and several large holes have exposed the drop-bottom doors. The holes in the side are well worth a visit, and best explored with a torch. Entry into the machinery cabins is also possible.

Marine Life

We once found empty *Cypraea pulchra* cowries here when exploring one of the holes under the wreck. Known locally as 'four-eyes', these beautiful shells are light pinkish brown and have two chocolate brown blotches at each extremity.

Batfish will often follow you nearly all the way to the surface on your ascent. These large fish seem unafraid of divers; the fact that they're not targeted by fishermen could explain their friendliness.



Guitar shark

Wreck register: Not known

Name: Hopper Barge 6 (HB6)

Nationality: Panamanian registered

Year built: Unknown

Type: Dump barge

Tonnage: 1,000 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 48m, B: 14m, D: 5m

Cargo: None

Year sunk: Circa 1985



Blenny

DIVE 7 JARAMAC V

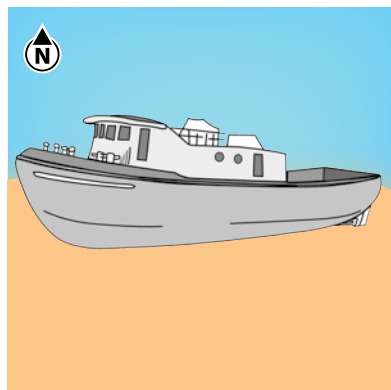


GPS

N25°16'49"
E55°03'47"



Depth: 23m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** No
Distance from harbours:
 DIMC 12nm @ 337°
 DOSC 10.4nm @ 305°
 Dubai Creek 12.7nm @ 270°



The Jaramac V forms part of the large artificial reef around the Derrick Barge (also known as DBI or Sheik Mohammed's Barge – see p.10) and is another of the sites that has now recovered from the effects of construction. She lies 200m to the northwest of DB1 but is worth a separate dive when conditions are good.

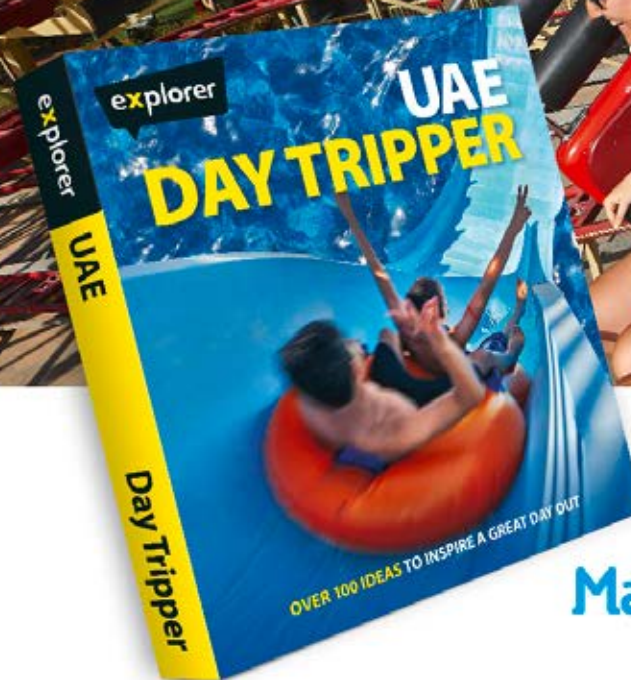
Diving

The Jaramac V sits upright on the seabed and is more or less intact. She's an easy wreck to explore and you can access the bridge, engine room and accommodation quarters without too much effort.

This small wreck is not that frequently visited, due to it previously being affected by nearby construction work. We're pleased to report that it's now thriving again, and you can even see larger marine life here. Also expect bream,

batfish, barracuda, rays, groupers, cardinal fish, snappers, fusiliers, wrasse, gobies, blennies, flounders and the occasional venomous, but shy sea snake.

Wreck register: Jaramac V
Nationality: Not known
Year Built: 1963
Type: Utility Vessel
Tonnage: 118 tonnes gross
Dimensions: Not known
Date sunk: Unknown



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LIFE UNDER THE PALMS

The UAE's offshore island-building projects have caused debate regarding the effects of their construction on marine life.

What the construction of the UAE's artificial islands (the Palms and The World) represents depends on your point of view: to some they're the pinnacle of progress, but to others they're an environmental disaster.

Marine experts – and divers – worry that the markedly poor visibility of the west coast's waters is the first sign that change is not necessarily for the better. While developers say that the islands have created underwater habitats, others worry about man playing at being Mother Nature.

The Price of Development

High sea temperatures and increased salinity levels in the late 1990s and early

2000s saw extensive coral bleaching in the region's reefs. While the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi reported in June 2006 that there were indications that Abu Dhabi's reefs are recovering, their environmentalists still caution the placing of additional anthropogenic (man-made) pressures on vulnerable reefs. Snorkelling off the beaches in Dubai shows that the coast's once clear waters are still cloudy in places, and divers and environmentalists have reported that some sites are no longer blessed with good visibility due to excess silt in the water. However, the good news is that several dive sites previously 'on hold' due to cloudy waters, have made a good recovery and are back on the diving



Developers say that the World Islands provide a new habitat for marine life

agenda (such as Jaramac V and DB1/SMB).

Nakheel, the developers of the Palms and The World, says that the disturbance was temporary and that visibility improves within days. They argue that before the islands were built, the seabed consisted mainly of undulating, featureless sand with only a few shipwrecks and the occasional outcrop of limestone to form small reefs. The islands' rocky outer walls, they say, have created approximately 100km of reef.

New Reef Growth

Nakheel says that not only have they created new reefs, but that the developments have also given rise to a variety of habitats, including intertidal zones, seagrass meadows, protected estuarine environments and rocky reefs. Its environmental team has recorded sightings of dolphins, manta rays, trevally and sharks within Palm Jumeirah's waters.

The developer also points out that, according to marine experts, Dubai's largest coral reef has grown by more than 20% since moving to a new home at The World islands in 2008, when the company spent Dhs.36 million moving 2,200 square metres of reef more than 18km underwater to save it from the effects of infrastructure development. Six years on, the coral has

expanded by more than a fifth, and now comprises 18 types of coral including new spawnings and 30 species of reef-associated fish.

As compensatory habitat, the new reefs provide more than a 10-fold increase over the area of patchy natural reef that was lost and the best corals that were on the natural reef near Palm Jebel Ali were moved, along with two other major coral translocations, before they could be impacted. According to Nakheel, these translocated corals are thriving and have seeded the surrounding areas. While some marine biologists agree that the man-made reefs have not yet surpassed the natural reefs for coral diversity, they have also concluded that the average coral coverage on areas of man-made reefs has exceeded the natural reef.

However, marine experts at Abu Dhabi's Environment Agency worry that these artificial reefs aren't a true substitute for the areas that have been destroyed. By changing the marine environment, it's also possible that they may be affecting ecosystem balance leading to unforeseen impacts such as the loss of certain species or the flourishing of a certain predator at the expense of another species.

Dive centres do operate regular trips to sites at Palm Jumeirah and The World, so divers can go and judge for themselves.



The Palm Jumeirah

DIVE 8 JASIM



GPS

N24°58'47.2"
E54°29'43.8"



Depth: 27m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:

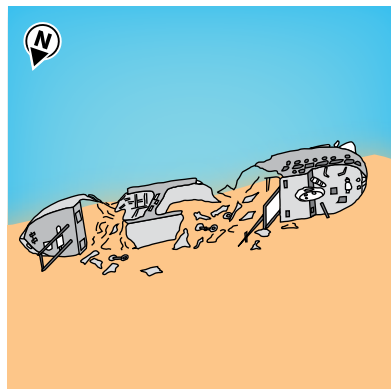
Abu Dhabi Club 28.7nm @ 012°

DIMC 36nm @ 258°

Dubai Creek 46.9nm @ 246°

Jebel Ali Marina 28.9nm @ 268°

It's easy to become completely engrossed in this interesting dive, so keep an eye on your bottom time.



Once used by the UAE armed forces for target practice, the Jasim now rests on her port side, in 26-27m of water. She's broken into three large sections. The stern section consists of the engine room and accommodation, with the large single propeller and rudder still in place. The middle cargo section is a tangled, confused collection of broken hatches, rigging, old vehicle parts and lorry wheels. And the bow section still remains more or less intact with lamp rooms and deck winches.

Diving

This site is always an interesting dive, although care must be taken as the average depth is 27m. Watch your bottom time and allow plenty of air for safety stops. The bridge and living quarters can be accessed through several hatches. The engine room is a little more difficult to enter, although access can be gained through two deck hatches aft of the accommodation area. Once inside, take care not to stir up the deep layer of silt in the engine room.



THE FOG

A foggy mask can really ruin a dive or snorkel trip. Most people have tried any number of things in diving lore, but we have two favourite tricks.

The first is to rub a little toothpaste over the lens. This will get the fine layer of film off the mask (without damaging it) and it smells pretty good too. It's also a good idea to leave a little water in the mask until you put it on as this gets the mask to the same temperature as the sea.

If that doesn't do the job, try a squeeze of Johnson's Baby Shampoo in your mask and then rinse it just before you get into the water. And if you're not too thorough in cleaning the mask off, the beauty of it is... no more tears!

Marine Life

This wreck offers the opportunity to see the usual west coast marine life, including several species of brittle stars and cowrie shells. The shells are normally nocturnal, but on this site you can usually find one or two during the day.

There are also many hydrocorals, orange sponges and sea squirts. Although this wreck was sunk 20 years ago, the marine growth is not as advanced as it is on some of the west coast's other wrecks.

Wreck register: 108301272

Name: Jasim

Nationality: Unknown

Year built: Unknown

Type: MV coastal tanker

Tonnage: 1,200 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 60m, B: 10m, D: 5m

Cargo: Ballast

Date sunk: 25 March, 1986



DIVE 9

JAZIRAT SIR BU NA'AIR

GPS

N25°13'30"
E54°13'00"



Depth: 36m | **Snorkelling:** Yes | **Night dive:** Yes

Distance from harbours:

Abu Dhabi Club 43.5nm @ 348°

DIMC 51.1nm @ 278°

Dubai Creek 58.7nm @ 266°

Jebel Ali Marina 46.3nm @ 286°

An island sanctuary for magnificent corals, turtles, rays and large pelagic fish.



Jazirat Sir Bu Na'air is an island that lies 70km off the UAE coast. Measuring just over 1km long by 0.5km wide, it's a UAE military outpost and coastguard station, but also a protected turtle breeding area. There are no restrictions on sailing or diving near the island, but it is a sensitive military base so landing is not advisable (although you do occasionally see people picnicking on the beaches).

In 2000, HH Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, issued

Administrative Order No. 3 that banned all activities considered harmful to the environment of Jazirat Sir Bu Na'air island. The six article order seeks to halt the deterioration of the island's environment, protect its marine life, and develop its natural resources. This means that fishing all species of turtle, collecting their eggs or damaging their nesting beaches along the island's coastline is strictly prohibited.

The order also bans any activities that could threaten the safety of the island's many resident and migrating bird species.

Diving

This site is characterised by coral reefs, a shelving sandy bottom and lots of drop-offs. Towards the northern end of the island there's a large area of table and staghorn coral in magnificent condition. The coral runs north to the 20m mark and then the seabed shelves down to a depth of more than 30m.

The north-eastern side has large flat rocks and coral, and there are more extensive areas of coral to the north-west. Off the southern tip of the island, the sandy bottom runs to 20m, ending with a small sea mount. At the entrance to the harbour on the south-east side, you'll find the partially submerged wreck of a barge.

Snorkelling

The island isn't just for divers – snorkellers will have a wonderful time here too. The visibility is good, and as it is one of the protected turtle breeding areas, turtles are frequently seen by snorkellers. By using a snorkel, you create less noise and fewer

bubbles than divers do, so it's easier to get a closer look at the marine life.

Concentrate on the northern coral field, which starts at 5m and runs gently into deeper water.

Marine Life

The island is rarely visited by divers or fishermen and the resulting lack of disturbance encourages prolific shoals of fish. There are numerous large pelagic fish, spotted eagle rays, barracuda and large rays.

It's a long journey to the island, but the diving and snorkelling at Jazirat Sir Bu Na'air is definitely worth the trip.

THE BIG QUEASY

There are a number of sea sickness tablets you can take – Dramamine, Stugeron and Dezinil – and you may have to try them all out (on different dives, of course) to determine which one suits you best. Some divers wear wristbands with special pressure points on the wrists, or patches that look like mini plasters. Called Scopoderm, they are worn behind the ears and can be quite effective. As with all medication, you need to take care of the possible side-effects.

There are also other ways to minimise the chance of feeling seasick. When you're getting ready for a dive try to have all your gear lined up and placed within easy reach. This will enable you to kit up quickly – the last thing you want is to be looking down for any length of time. While you're on the boat, try to keep your eyes on the horizon.

If you feel sick after surfacing, you'll feel better if you remove your gear and get back into the water (if it's not rough). Also, make sure you drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated.



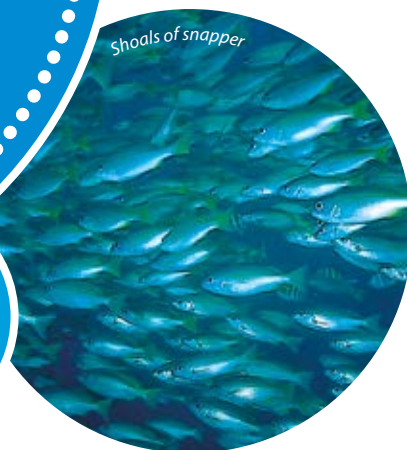
Green turtle

DIVE 10 LION CITY



GPS

N25°00'13.4"
E54°31'43.9"



Depth: 30m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:

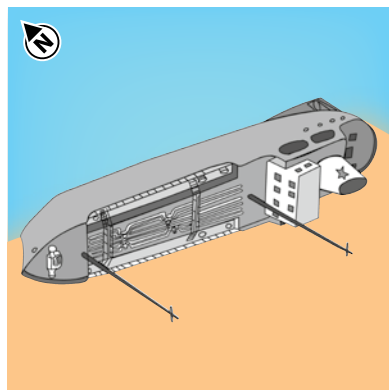
Abu Dhabi Club 30.4nm @ 014°

DIMC 33.9nm @ 259°

DOSC 38.8nm @ 253°

Jebel Ali Marina 27nm @ 270°

**An exercise in orientation
and navigation that makes a
good second dive.**



The Lion City – you can still see her name on the bow, and a star emblem on the funnel – lies on her port side in 30m of water with her bow facing 300°. Despite being used for target practice by the UAE military, the vessel is mostly intact with the funnel and some rigging lying on the sandy seabed.

The distance from the shore makes this wreck a good second dive if you've been exploring either the Jasim (see p.26) or the MV Ludwig (see p.38), which are not too far away.

Diving

The Lion City's living quarters and engine rooms are easily accessed without much difficulty. If you do want to enter and investigate the interior, remember that the wreck is lying on its side, so keep this in mind when navigating your way around. Swimming along stairways that don't go up or down and arriving in rooms on their side can be disorientating.

Look at the shape of holes in the wreck and decide which is the easiest way for you to fit through. Don't forget that with

your tank and BCD you are now deeper than you are wide. If you feel yourself becoming stuck, reverse immediately – before you really do get stuck!

On the deck, the oil transfer pipes run almost from the bridge to the bosun's storerooms forward, covering most of the available deck space. This is an interesting area to search for unusual marine life.

Marine Life

The marine growth has been slower to colonise this wreck than it has on others, but it began with the formation of some white coral patches on the deck and on the upper side of the hull. Covering large areas of the hull, these corals grow in circular patches about 100mm across. Hydrocorals, looking like mini fir trees, have given the hull a dull light brown colour. On one of the walkways across the pipes, a colony of white soft corals has taken up residence on the treads and handrails.

Shoals of yellow coloured blackspot snapper swim over and under the labyrinth of pipes on the Jasim's deck hunting for their quarry. These little

hunters are distinctively coloured and sport a black spot under the dorsal fins and longitudinal yellow pinstripes. They work equally well in packs, or on their own when they wait in the shadows for their dinner to come to them.

Wreck register: 108300171

Name: Lion City

Nationality: Unknown

Year built: Unknown

Type: MV Coastal tanker

Tonnage: 1,200 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 60m, B: 10m, D: 5m

Cargo: Ballast

Date sunk: 1 May, 1986

HEAVY METAL

The high temperatures, humidity and salinity of the Gulf means that your dive gear will take a bit more strain than in other parts of the world. It's essential that you have your cylinders visually inspected once a year, and hydro-tested every five years here.



DIVE 11 MARIAM EXPRESS



GPS

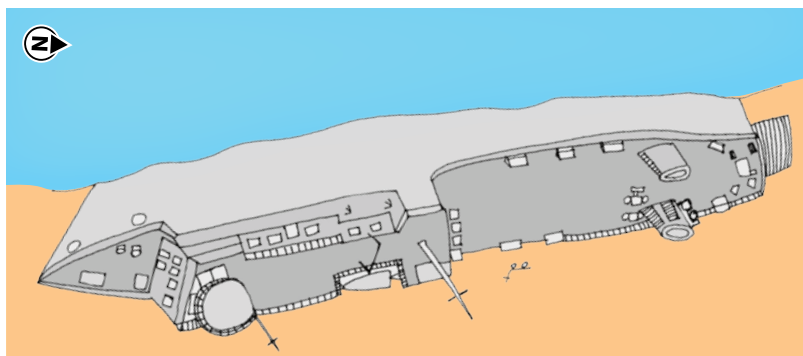
N 25°27'19.7"
E 55°06'16.0"



Barnacles and sea squirts

Depth: 21m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** No
Distance from harbours:
DIMC 21.8nm @ 355°
Dubai Creek 14.7nm @ 316°

One of the newer wrecks, she is home to unusual cargo and varied marine life.



Lloyds Casualty Register notes that the Mariam Express was overloaded when she encountered strong winds and moderate seas en-route to Iraq. She took on water and sunk rapidly. All crew were rescued.

Diving

The Mariam Express lies on her port side with the bow facing 150°. Visibility on the

site is usually remarkably good, averaging 10m, but as she gets older and more silt gathers, it could reduce.

A buoy marks the aft section of the wreck. It's recommended that you go down the anchor and make your way to the bow. Inspect the bow area, then ascend a little to explore the hold. In one hold you'll find a number of tea sets all

neatly packed in polystyrene, numerous bundles of quilt bedding, and piles of electrical games scattered about. There are even a couple of JCBs in one of the holds, along with twin tub washing machines and numerous scooters (one of which lies outside the hold).

When you're descending the anchor chain, you'll notice orange pieces of debris swaying in the current: this is the aft life raft which has been broken into three pieces, two of which are hanging on precariously. There's also plenty of debris on the seabed to pick over: rope ladders, tyres, broken crockery and so on. Don't forget to allow yourself time to inspect the masts and the deck railings. As the top of the wreck is at 8m, make the most of the dive and enjoy a last lingering look around while completing your safety stop.

Although a night dive on the Mariam would be possible, it's not recommended while there is any construction work in the area.

Marine Life

After only a few months of submersion, the Mariam Express wreck boasted a variety of fish life, which increases with time. Large barracuda hang out at the



Oysters

WARNING

As with any wreck, take care as you may cut or hurt yourself on jagged edges or protrusions. You should only try to penetrate the vessel if you're trained in wreck diving.

bow, enjoying the currents, while juvenile barracuda hide in the hold with the crockery and bedding.

The wreck is smothered with small oyster shells, and between the gaps you'll find numerous colonial ascidians or sea squirts in different colours – white, yellow, green, red or orange – as well as small anemones. The wreck also hosts the usual snappers, pennantfish and jacks. You may find a pair of resident sabretooth blennies, but their camouflage is excellent, making them difficult to spot



Crested sabretooth blenny

Wreck register: Not charted
Name: Delos Express
Nationality: Panamanian, re-registered in France
Year built: 1978
Type: Roll-on roll-off vessel
Tonnage: 3,348 tonnes gross
Dimensions: L: 94m, B: 13m, D: 8m
Cargo: Household and electrical goods, scooters
Date sunk: 2 May, 2006

DIVE 12

MV DARA

GPS

N25°34'29.0"
E55°27'58.6"



Depth: 18m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes

Distance from harbours:

DOSC 27.4nm @ 028°

Dubai Creek 20.3nm @ 025°

Hamriya Harbour 5.8nm @ 347°

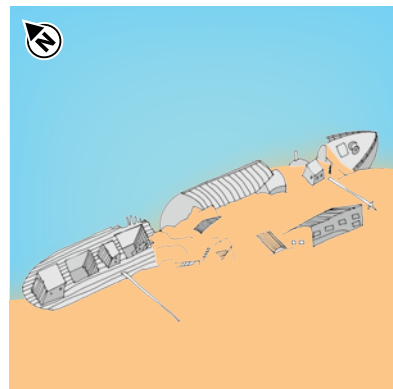
Sharjah Creek 12.5nm @ 019°

The disastrous sinking of the MV Dara has resulted in a difficult, but rewarding wreck dive.

The MV Dara was a passenger liner built in 1948 by Barclay Curle & Co. of Glasgow, UK. Fitted with a single Doxford oil engine, she was operated by the British India Steam Navigation Company.

The story of the disaster is well documented. The following information has been compiled from *Last Hours on the Dara* by PJ Abraham, *The Grey-Widow Maker* by Bernard Edward and an article by Ian Bain that first appeared in the *Khaleej Times Magazine* on 4 April, 1980.

The Dara sailed between Bombay,



Karachi, the Gulf and the ports of Basra, Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai and Muscat, carrying passengers, mail and cargo. During the early hours of 8 April, 1961, after putting to sea on 7 April to weather out a storm, a bomb planted on her by an Omani rebel exploded. It's believed that the bomb was timed to explode when the Dara berthed at Muscat, but due to the storm, her departure from Dubai had been delayed. The bomb was planted to further the cause of the Dhofar rebellion; the uprising against Sultan Said bin Taimur, the



rather erratic and isolated ruler of Oman, who was finally replaced in a bloodless coup by his son, the present Sultan.

The explosion between decks started a fire that raged for two days and caused considerable loss of life. The fire was finally extinguished, but the ship sank while under tow by Ocean Salvor, a salvage vessel. The final figure was 238 deaths; the second greatest number of fatalities recorded at sea in peacetime after the Titanic disaster.

The MV Dara is now owned by Clive Frost of Aqua Diving Services.

Diving

The Dara lies on her starboard side at 18m, broken into three sections. Every season the superstructure collapses further, limiting access to the wreck, although it is still possible to enter through the stern.

This site can be quite dangerous as the tides can be very strong and visibility poor as a result. On a neap tide, though, this is an excellent dive. Just be aware of abandoned fishing nets, and dive with a knife in case you become entangled.

Marine Life

One of the unique species of marine life that you're likely to see on this site are the cowries of the cypraea histro and arabica varieties. Their shells have absorbed the iron oxide from the rusting wreck, giving them a metallic reddish-brown colour.

The Dara also attracts many species of rays; shovelnose guitarfish, eagle rays and even feather tailed stingrays. The site is usually covered with snapper and, in the cooler months, barracuda, and it's occasionally visited by whale sharks.

Wreck register: 108300171

Name: MV Dara

Nationality: British

Year built: 1948

Type: Passenger liner

Tonnage: 5.030 tonnes

Dimensions: L: 121m, B: 17m, D: 15m

Cargo: Mail and cargo

Date sunk: 10 April, 1961



DIVE 13 MV HANNAN



GPS

N24°50'11.0"
E53°53'34.0"



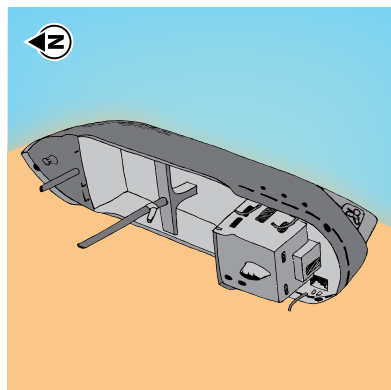
Depth: 20m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** No
Distance from harbours:
Abu Dhabi Club 33nm @ 306°
Jebel Ali Marina 62.5nm @ 260°

Practise your wreck penetration skills and hunt for warty Doris and other residents.

Given her position near the offshore rigs and platforms, it's logical to conclude that the MV Hannan sank while working in the Abu Dhabi oil fields.

Diving

The Hannan is a small coastal vessel that lies with her stern roughly pointing towards the north. Two buoys mark the site; the official cardinal wreck buoy, and a huge barrel with a large chain link that's anchored less than 3m from the stern on the starboard side.



Once you've descended, start from the seabed and go around the wreck in a clockwise direction towards the bow. You'll need to ascend a little in order to explore the hold area that's split in two by a small derrick. You can try some wreck penetration; you might be able to access the bridge and accommodation areas via a small window or via the companionway door. If you go through the door and out of the small window at the top of the wheelhouse, you'll find a small object that looks like a left-over treasure box.



Ascidians, also called sea squirts

Marine Life

As a result of the currents, you'll find large shoals of fish congregating on this wreck, including various species of jacks such as yellow striped jacks and finger jacks (also known as queenfish). The shoals share the currents with large, mean looking barracuda, some of which have unusual barred markings. The site is also home to some very big hammour that measure more than a metre in length, as well as large pufferfish and batfish.

Among the rays you'll see are bell, leopard, eagle and electric rays and guitar sharks. The rays are sometimes seen on the upper surfaces of the hull and companionways, looking for the nudibranchs that cling to the surfaces. If you join them, you may find one of the largest nudibranchs in the Gulf. Nicknamed 'warty Doris', these creatures grow to about 125mm. Although it's large, (by nudibranch standards) warty Doris is also well camouflaged and easily overlooked.

The site also has some inhabitants not seen regularly in the Gulf. There are small

translucent colonial ascidians (delicate sea squirts) and an unusual purple soft coral that's formed in clumps all over the wreck.

Safety

The currents on this site can be very strong and, as it's located well offshore, assistance may not be immediately available. You should also carry a dive knife or net cutters as this site is liberally covered with old nets.

COOL CRITTERS

Some of the most colourful members of the marine world are the nudibranchs. The name translates into 'naked gill', and they either have their gills prominently displayed on their backs, or in a tuft at the posterior end.

As they're basically naked snails, nudibranchs have developed alternative defence systems. They're usually vividly coloured to try to persuade other sea life that they won't make a good main course. Many secrete a strong scent and others feed on sea anemones and hydroids – and use their lunch's stinging cells as their own defence mechanism.

Nudibranchs make excellent photographic subjects if you're into underwater micro photography – they're brilliantly coloured and not inclined to move very fast.

Wreck register: Not charted

Name: MV Hannan

Nationality: Unknown

Year built: Unknown

Type: Coastal vessel single screw oil engine

Tonnage: 288 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 42m, B: 6.5m, D: 2.6m

Cargo: None

Date sunk: 3 August, 1986

DIVE 14 MV LUDWIG

GPS

N25°06'53.8"
E54°34'14.1"



Depth: 27m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:

Abu Dhabi Club 37.3nm @ 015°

DIMC 31.2nm @ 271°

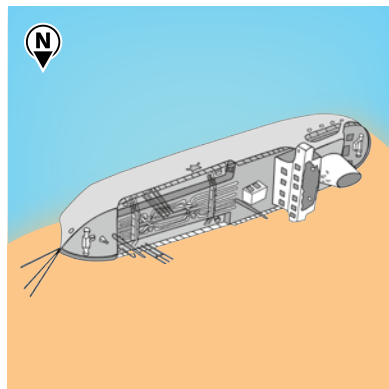
DOSC 35.3nm @ 262°

Jebel Ali Marina 26nm @ 286°

Once used as target practice, this wreck is now host to a growing marine community.

The large 1,200 tonne MV Ludwig is more or less intact and lies on her port side, with her bow pointing east at 70°, in 27m of water.

The UAE armed forces used the Ludwig for target practice and they were very accurate! The bridge received a direct hit and the explosion ripped out the internal walls and roof of the bridge. Damage can also be seen on the funnel, where shrapnel from the bridge punched holes in it. There is another projectile exit hole on the starboard side of the hull.



Diving

You can begin your exploration of the inside of the wreck via the bridge section, working your way down into the crew quarters or going through the stern hatches into the engine room.

The wreck is very similar to the Lion City (p.30), as the deck on both is a maze of oil transfer pipes and valves. You could almost be fooled into thinking you were diving the Lion City, as both ships were coastal oil tankers and both lie on their port sides. However, the MV Ludwig

is larger and has two bridges over the pipe runs, as well as a small deckhouse forward of the bridge.

Marine Life

The marine growth on the Ludwig is developing well; hydrocorals and sea squirts were among the first inhabitants. The wreck's pipes and rigging offer security to a profusion of reef fish, such as the shoals of pennantfish that glide over structures in close formation and the damselfish that dart in and out of the cover of the iron and steel.

A large resident shoal of yellow snappers seeks security inside the wreck from the hordes of barracuda that constantly circle outside, while batfish live further out.



Bannerfish

SMELLY WETSUIT CURES

Many divers have a warm-up trick that they'd rather keep quiet about. The evidence, however, lies in how their wetsuit smells . . .

Warming your suit 'the natural way' does provide a thermal boost, but it also allows bacteria to set up home in your wetsuit, and not even a good rinse can get rid of that.

There are a few products on the market that do help: the main one is called Sink The Stink, and it consists of a small capsule of deodorising liquid that's very effective at killing the bacteria and making your suit smell sweet (well, of neoprene) once again.



Shoals of yellow snapper

Wreck register: Not charted

Name: MV Ludwig

Nationality: Unknown

Year built: Unknown

Type: MV coastal tanker

Tonnage: 1,200 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 60m, B: 10m, D: 5m

Cargo: Ballast

Year sunk: 2000

DIVE 15 NASTERAN



GPS

N25°28'00.0"
E55°21'22.0"



Depth: 23m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:

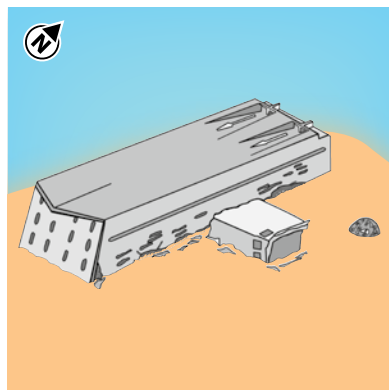
DIMC 25.2nm @ 028°

Dubai Creek 12nm @ 015°

Hamriya Harbour 7.4nm @ 262°

Sharjah Creek 5.6nm @ 341°

This site offers a good opportunity to practise your wreck diving skills... and to search for sea hares.



The Nasteran lies completely upside down in 23m of water, with her bow or landing door facing the shore at 150°. The wheelhouse lies to the east, next to the starboard side of the vessel, and both her propellers have been cut off.

Diving

Access to the accommodation and engine room is through a hole near the wheelhouse on the east side of the wreck, but note that this route is very silted.

The deck area forward of the

wheelhouse is also worth a visit, but you'll need a torch to illuminate the fish life and marine growth.

Entry into the cargo area is through the partially open landing doors. If you're lucky, you could find some surprises in here, such as the blind juvenile sharks that like to hide away in the darker areas of the vessel.

There's a lot of silt throughout the wreck, so pay attention to your finning techniques as you could easily reduce the visibility to zero. And if you're planning on

penetrating the Nasteran, it's advisable that you use a line and torch at all times.

Marine Life

If you take the time to explore the upturned hull you're likely to be rewarded with the sight of many of the smaller creatures that are often overlooked; look out for shells, shrimps, nudibranchs, small blennies and unusual creatures called sea hares.

Sea hares are members of the shell family and are called 'hares' because of their rabbit-like appearance. They have two rolled rhinophores (sensory organs)

on their head that seem to give them rabbits' ears, and two flaps, known as parapodia, to aid swimming. They are herbivorous and feed on algae and sea grasses – which means that the Nasteran's hull is a regular smorgasbord for them.



Sea hare

Wreck register: 108300201

Name: Nasteran

Nationality: Iranian registered

Year built: Unknown

Type: Landing craft

Tonnage: 652 tonnes gross

Dimensions: L: 62m, B: 10m, D: 8m

Cargo: Stones

Date sunk: 14 March, 1970



Two strombus shells courting

DIVE 16

NEPTUNE 6

GPS

N25°30'22.0"
E55°03'55.0"



Depth: 23m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes

Distance from harbours:

DIMC 25nm @ 349°

DOSC 21.5nm @ 022°

Dubai Creek 18.7nm @ 317°

Distance to other dive sites:

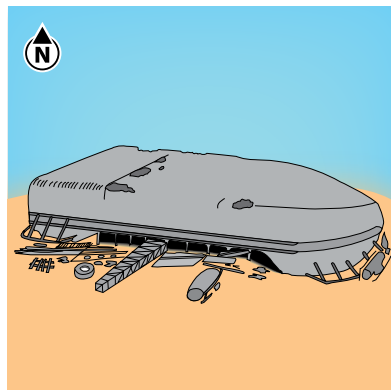
To Hopper Barge 6 (p.20) 0.18nm @ 043°

To Anchor Barge (p.6) 0.7nm @ 055°

It's a long way offshore, but this is an excellent dive with the promise of 'treasure' to be found.

The Neptune was supporting the WD Kent, a drilling rig that was cross-drilling a burning oil well during one of the worst offshore fires that the Dubai Petroleum Company's Fateh Field has seen.

The Neptune pulled off during bad weather, but dragged her anchor and ended up colliding with the WD Kent, ultimately sinking the rig. After the collision, it was decided that the Neptune would be taken to Sharjah. However, she



capsized while under tow and sank in her present position.

Diving

The vessel lies upside down in 25m of water with her bow facing 151°. There's a considerable amount of debris, including a crane boom, drilling equipment and wreckage from the deck accommodation, along her port side. There can be strong currents at this site, making exploration

quite difficult. For many years, the main entrance into the wreck was on the starboard side, a third of the way along the hull from the stern. Now that the wreck is breaking up though, access is possible on both the port and starboard sides, and you can swim all the way through.

Although this site is 18.7nm from shore, it's usually an excellent dive. There are also three other wrecks within a 1nm radius of the Neptune; the Anchor Barge (p.6, Hopper Barge 6 (p.20) and the Morafi Barge (the Morafi is of little interest though, and rarely dived).

Marine Life

The fish life tends to congregate on the Neptune's port side, although you often find stingrays if you swim out beyond the wreckage.

The crane structure is home to a colony of white soft coral, that is very beautiful when illuminated.



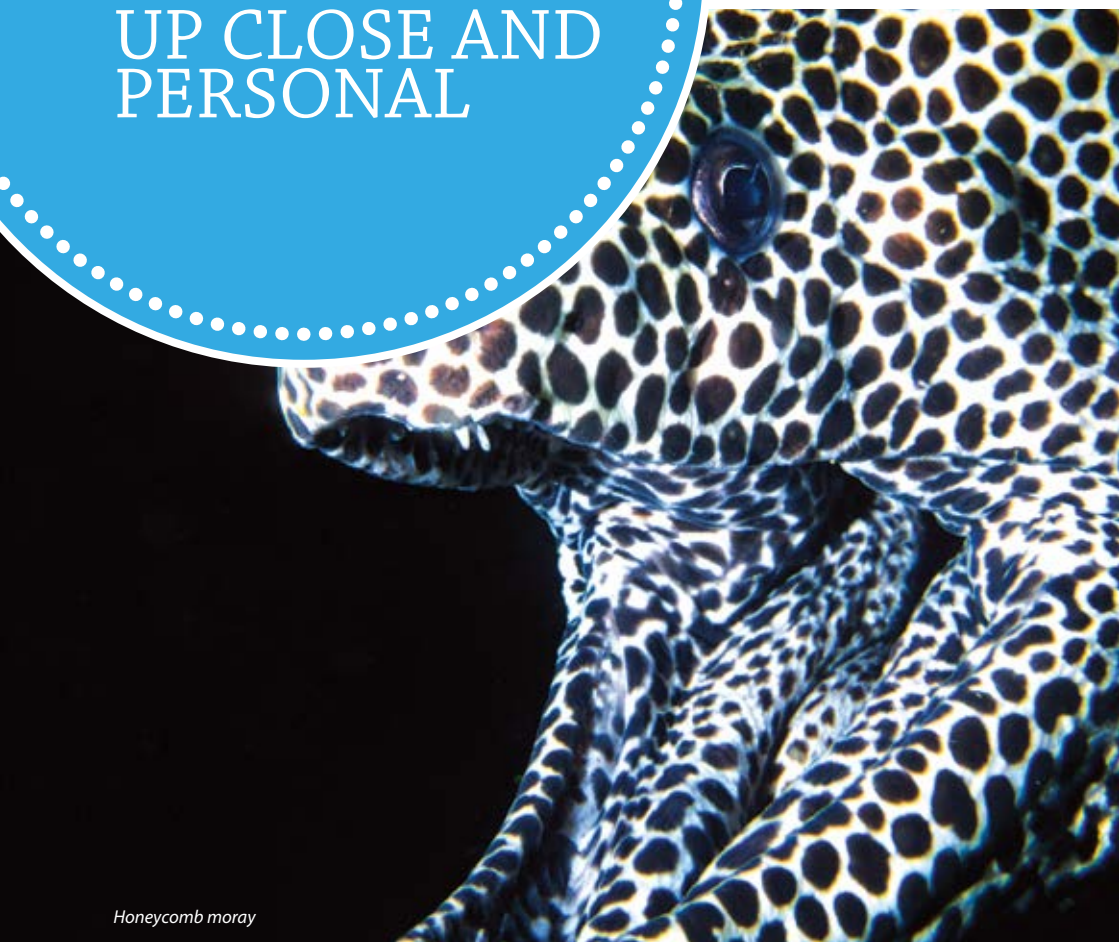
After circling the wreck, examine its surface where you'll find shrimps, blennies and octocorals (so called because they have eight feather-like tentacles or pinnates). The octocorals are tiny and come in many colours. They can live as individuals or in colonies. Some are purely soft and feathery; some have an internal skeleton composed of a type of calcareous material; and others still use another subject as a base from which to sprout. Take the time to watch their polyps pulse as they feed. The coral colonies pulsate at different speeds and the effect is quite hypnotic!



Octocoral

Wreck register: 108300055
Name: Neptune 6
Nationality: Panamanian registered
Year built: Unknown
Type: Drill rig tender barge
Tonnage: 2,300 tonnes gross
Dimensions: L: 79m, B: 15m, D: 8m
Cargo: General drilling equipment
Date sunk: 12 November, 1973

UP CLOSE AND
PERSONAL



Honeycomb moray

Tobyfish



Turtle



Frogfish



Arabian stonefish

DIVE 17 SWIFT



GPS

N25° 27'37.7"
E54° 17'41.2"



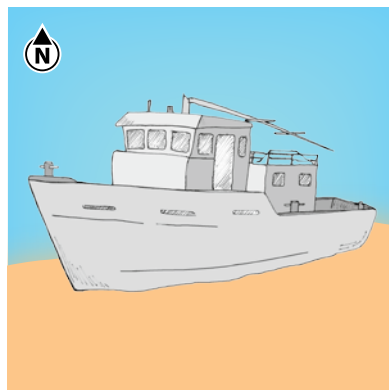
Depth: 38m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** No
Distance from harbours:

DIMC 51.1nm @ 294°

Dubai Creek 55.4nm @ 280°

DOSC 52.8nm @ 288°

A deep and seldom-dived wreck with good marine life and the odd treasure still to be seen.



Swift sank following a collision with the Brown and Root pipe-laying barge No. 207, while working in the SW Fateh Oil Field. Today the vessel sits upright and intact on the sand, and stands 15m high in 38m of water. Her location is close to the Dubai Petroleum Company (DPC) and Dubai Natural Gas Company's SW Fateh oil and gas platforms.

Diving

This site is a long way offshore and is only occasionally dived, which is probably the

reason why the fish seem almost tame. The wreck is located just 2.5nm (4.6km) away from the oil and gas platforms, so take care to keep to the south west of the oil field. DPC have strict procedures regarding access to the area. Unauthorised boats will be visited by the coast guard.

The water clarity is usually good this far out, and you can expect the visibility to be between 15 and 20m. When you descend, the first thing you're likely to see is the white soft corals that cover most of the wreck and give it an eerie glow.

There are several ways into the wreck for adventurous divers who are trained in wreck penetration. At times the wreck can be found draped in fishing nets, making access and exploration difficult. Ensure that you carry a small knife with you so that you're able to cut the nets if you get snagged in them.

Marine Life

The white soft telesto corals (octocorals) are spectacular; they look like a blanket of snow that covers large sections of the vessel. Shoals of yellow and black striped jacks and snappers circle the wreck, parting and regrouping as you swim through them.

The marine life is well established and every surface is covered in layers of barnacles, oyster shells and hard and soft corals all competing for space. There are many holes and crevices for little creatures to dart in and out of, making this a very interesting dive.



Blubberlip snapper

WHICH ONE'S MINE, AGAIN?

Ever been on a busy dive boat and unable to find your gear because everyone's looks the same? A few minutes spent writing your name and mobile number on your equipment with a special marker pen will see you getting into the water first from now on.

And if you leave something behind or someone picks it up by mistake, you may even be lucky enough to get a phone call to set up a happy reunion.



Wreck register: 108202021
(wreck no. 43707)

Name: Claudine, renamed Swift

Nationality: Bahraini

Year built: Unknown

Type: Motor tug

Tonnage: Unknown

Dimensions: L: 27.4m, B: 7.3m, D: 3.7m

Cargo: Unknown

Date sunk: 21 February, 1987

DIVE 18

TURTLE BARGE

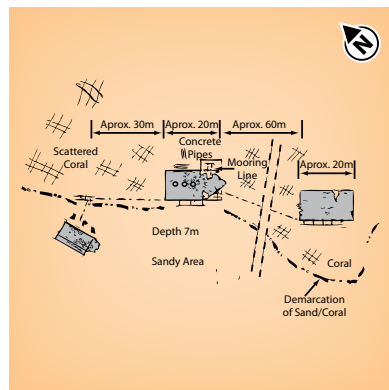
GPS

N25°26'43.2"
E55°26'57.6"



Depth: 8m | **Snorkelling:** Yes | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:
Hamriya Harbour 3.1 nm. @ 226°
Sharjah Creek 5.2 nm. @ 39°

An easy-to-access site that's home to fascinating corals, along with a friendly turtle.



This is probably a small barge that's been scattered over a large area in three parts or large pieces of wreckage, but it could even be two small wrecks. The site was discovered by Blue Planet Diving in 1999 when divers were training outside the harbour wall in Ajman. The circumstances around the loss of the wreck (or wrecks) aren't known.

Diving

The wreckage lies just five minutes outside the Ajman harbour, so access is quick and

easy and the site is excellent for night diving. As it's rather shallow it's also a good wreck site for snorkellers to explore.

The wreck is fairly flat but full of holes that provide an ideal home for all kinds of marine life. A length of rope stretches about 60m between the two main pieces of wreckage to make navigation easier. There are some large pipes alongside one of the main pieces of wreckage and various bits and pieces littered about. It's easy to become disorientated due to the various pieces of debris, but as it's a nice

shallow site you can simply surface and wait for the dive boat to collect you.

When diving here, please use the mooring buoy that Blue Planet Diving has created out of numerous bottles. This means you don't have to throw the anchor in and damage the corals.

Marine Life

As you descend the mooring buoy you'll be greeted by a lone clownfish who has made his home under the mooring line. And as the name suggests, you're also likely to encounter the friendly turtle that has taken up residence on the wreckage.

This is an attractive site with an incredibly large number of hard corals spread over the seabed and wreckage. There are colonies of different coral families growing on top of one another, competing for space and light. If you look closely, you'll see the corals are almost fluorescent, and glow with hues of orange, green, red and blue.

The west coast regulars are all here: yellow snappers, blennies, monos, hamour and barracuda. On closer inspection, you may also see nudibranchs, various types of sponges and shells – especially if you bring a torch.

This is an ideal site for students, but even well-dived instructors will find something to enjoy on this dive. If you're particularly keen to see many varieties of hard coral in a small area, this is a must.

Wreck register: Not charted
Name: Unknown
Nationality: Unknown
Year built: Unknown
Type: MV coastal barge – single screw
Tonnage: Unknown
Dimensions: Unknown
Cargo: None
Date sunk: Unknown



WARNING

Take care not to get your equipment or yourself caught on the wreckage and always wear protective clothing.

Green turtle

DIVE 19

VICTORIA STAR

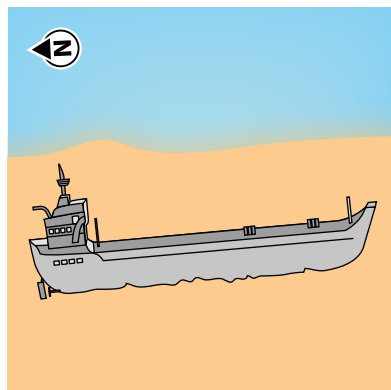
GPS

N25°24'8.30"
E 55°16'11.70"



Depth: 22m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:
DIMC 18.68nm @ 028°
DOSC 13.23nm @ 019°

As a new wreck she only has a few fish, but the site is improving very quickly, and is suitable for most levels.



Diving

There is very little on the bottom so start by swimming around at deck level on one side and then back on the other side. Drop down into the holds and check out the cargo. Most of the fish life will also be here waiting for you. Once you get to the stern, drop down to the propeller and then back up. The bridge area covers two levels with plenty still intact to explore. Initially, when the ship sank, the life rafts were still attached to their anchor points but unfortunately are no longer there.

Both external doors to the bridge have

The Victoria Star sank around August or September 2013 after being hit by another vessel. She sits almost perfectly upright in 22m of water but is in an area many vessels use to approach the harbour and so has no cardinal buoy. She was carrying a small cargo of insulated concrete blocks when she sank, and they are now scattered in the two main holds. The top of the bridge is around 12m and the deck around 16m. Dropping into the holds will take you past the 18m mark, but there is plenty to keep your attention around the bridge area.



Arabian angelfish

been removed and make for an easy swim through. There is also a narrow corridor leading to a lower deck for tech divers and those who are a little more adventurous. Plus, there are numerous doors leading to different rooms on the first level. Be careful as many of the doors and contents have yet to be removed. There are also doors leading to small storerooms on the deck level but, again, doors and content have yet to be removed so watch your fingers. There are numerous manholes on the stern and bow leading to lower areas. These are good areas for experienced wreck divers.

Victoria Star is always worth a visit. Given her location it's not often the best visibility, but that's what makes it an exciting and mysterious wreck to dive. The current can also arrive with little notice so be prepared just in case. On occasion, mainly when items are being removed, there is still the smell of diesel fuel lingering in the air at the surface. She is a good night dive but the distance to travel safely at night will add to your return travel time.

Marine Life

Given the Victoria Star has been underwater for only one year (at the time of writing), marine growth is good. There are areas of sponges, ascidians, sea squirts and barnacles from one end to the other. The fish life is mostly small schools of snapper, monocle bream and batfish found in the two holds; and the occasional hammour swimming around the bridge area. There are small crabs hiding throughout so look carefully, you never know what you'll find. The life living on this wreck is increasing all the time.

IMO register: 7111004
Name: Victoria Star
Nationality: Sierra Leone (SL)
Year built: 1972
Type: General cargo
Tonnage: Gross tonnage 1,485 kg
Dimensions: L: 80m, B: 12m, D: 10m
Cargo: Concrete blocks
Date sunk: Aug/Sept 2013

DIVE 20 ZAINAB

GPS

N25°14'55.8"
E54°51'32.4"



Depth: 29m | **Snorkelling:** No | **Night dive:** Yes
Distance from harbours:

DIMC 18.1nm @ 300°

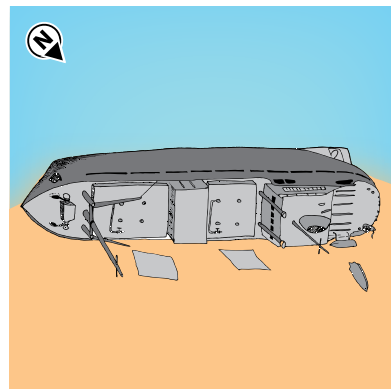
DOSC 20nm @ 281°

Dubai Creek 23.8nm @ 265°

An interesting dive not only for Zainab's illicit past, but also for her present day marine life.

The Zainab, formerly called the Seasroun Five, sailed under a Georgian flag and was involved in the illegal transportation of light fuel oil from Iraq when she went down.

She was a general cargo ship with two holds forward and the machinery, bridge and quarters aft. To conceal her illegal cargo, her holds had been converted to hold the oil. She was carrying about 1,300 tonnes of fuel oil when she was deliberately sunk by her 11 man crew to avoid being boarded by the US Navy, who



were enforcing UN sanctions on Iraq. The sinking resulted in a major oil spill on the northern Gulf coast, and caused serious concern to the local gas processing plant as she sank within a few hundred metres of their offshore gas pipelines. The story was documented by *Gulf News* throughout April 2001.

Diving

The Zainab is intact and lies on her port side, with the anchor still sitting snug on the bow. The covers of the holds are

off and lie on the sea bed at about 29m. There are various bits and pieces of debris and artefacts strewn over the seabed; you'll find an empty compass binnacle, an upside down life raft at the stern and an industrial fire extinguisher on the seabed below the propeller.

The bridge, and the engine and accommodation rooms are easily accessible. But be sure that you can see daylight at the other end, before you enter the vessel.

This is one of the deeper dive sites on this coast and, at over 70m long, it's a fairly large wreck. You should be able to explore it in one dive though. A suggested dive plan is to start at the most interesting area, which is the now vertical deck. Make your way along the wreck and past the open hatches; their doors lie haphazardly

Wreck register: Not charted
Name: Zainab, originally known as The Seasroun Five
Nationality: Georgian registered
Year built: Unknown
Type: General cargo ship
Tonnage: 1,400 tonnes gross
Dimensions: L: 70m, B: 12m, D: 5m
Cargo: Fuel oil
Date sunk: 14 April, 2001



on the seabed, looking like a discarded pack of cards. Investigate the upturned life raft when you reach the stern and, if you have enough time, take a look at the fire extinguisher that lies just beneath the propeller. Ascend slowly, exploring the bridge and decks aft. The remaining life raft is swinging from one davit. Go around the wreck and look at the propeller. Then return to the top of the wreck, at approximately 20m.

A night dive on the Zainab is possible for more experienced divers, but it's a long way offshore.

Marine Life

During the time the Zainab has been down, it has attracted a large variety of marine life. The wreck is carpeted with small oysters, and juvenile fish weave their way in and out of their shell homes. Most avoid contact with divers, but some are very inquisitive and allow you to get close to them.

You may find large rays resting on the seabed, and huge shoals of barracuda circling the wreck. You will often find large shoals of yellow snappers swimming round the various masts towards the bow, and there's usually a shoal of batfish that congregates near the bridge and wheelhouse.

ABU DHABI DIVES

Seahorse

There are many sites to dive in Abu Dhabi's waters. Here are our favourite new discoveries...

DIVE 21 AL DHABIYAH CORAL GARDEN

Depth: 10m

Al Dhabiyah Coral Garden is located approximately 30km west of Abu Dhabi. It has a sandy bottom with a variety of hard corals and is a beautiful scenic dive. Usually there are shoals of yellow snappers, along with goatfish, a curious family of batfish that follow the divers, hammour, yellow bar angel fish, bennies, sandy gobies and commensal shrimps. If you look closely you can also find some anemones with clown fish living in them.

There are plenty of juvenile fish around and, when the water temperature is around 25°C, there will be rays on the seabed, including stingrays, leopard rays, butterfly rays, torpedo rays, feather tail rays and shovelnose rays. Some divers have also seen bamboo sharks. Also, look for seahorses in the seagrass area.

Take special care to avoid damaging the hard corals and practise good buoyancy control whilst keeping fin tips up rather than downwards. Sometimes there can be a moderate current, and so all divers should carry a Delayed Surface Marker Buoy (DSMB) so you can be easily located by the dive boat.

Al Mahara Diving Center regularly dives this site. It is also the selected site for the Reef Check Coral monitoring programme run by Emirates Diving Association (EDA) and Al Mahara.

GPS

N24°23'60.00"
E54° 4'48.00"

Coral



DIVE 22 CAR CEMETERY

Depth: 14-16m

Car Cemetery is located east of Sir Bani Yas Island, only a few kilometres from the coast. There are 20-25 cars lying together in a large sandy sloping area. Look out for batfish, giant hammour, barracuda, trevallies, snappers and the Arabian angel fish, which are abundant. Blennies and dottybacks are usually hiding in crevices. Stingrays and hawksbill and green sea turtles have also been spotted on this site. As the site is close to Stewart Channel, it is important to carry a DSMB and keep a visual of the car wrecks. Nearby is the Pearl wreck.

GPS

N24°16'48.00"
E52°39'36.00"

DIVE 23 GASHA BUOY RIG

Depth: 14-19m

This rig is about 30km from the mainland, and 4.1nm north of Sir Bani Yas Island. Only a few divers have ventured here due to its isolated location. Permission must be obtained by Ruwais Petroleum Port Authority before visiting. Desert Islands Watersports Center can arrange diving trips in this area.

You can see schools of snappers, jacks, queenfish, angelfish, hawksbill turtles, stingrays, soft corals, nudibranchs, and a large school of batfish.

Sometimes moderate current and low visibility can make it hard to find. Also, be careful of abandoned fishing lines. Always make a safety stop and deploy a Surface Marker Buoy (SMB).

GPS

N24°28'48.00"
E53° 6'36.00"



DIVE 24 HOOK ISLAND

Depth: 15m

Hook Island is approximately 11km east of Sir Bani Yas Island. The dive follows a slope on the inside of a crater-shaped island.

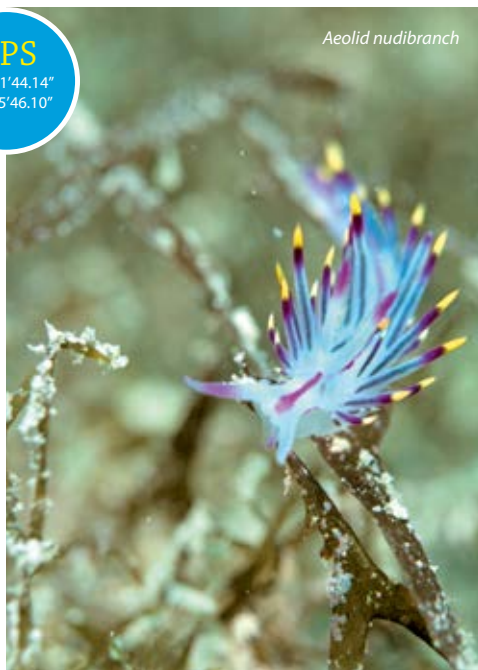
Boats should anchor north east of the slope taking care not to come in too shallow, and divers then swim to the site.

You'll see various species of hard coral including porites, acropora and favia. There are plenty of snappers, angelfish, giant hammour, two-striped breams, trevallies, butterfly fish, and also stingrays and green sea turtles have also been spotted on this site.

To arrive at the site from Sir Bani Yas Island you must cross the Stewart Channel; therefore, permission must be obtained by Ruwais Petroleum Port Authority.

GPS

N24°21'44.14"
E52°45'46.10"



DIVE 25 PEARL WRECK

Depth: 12m

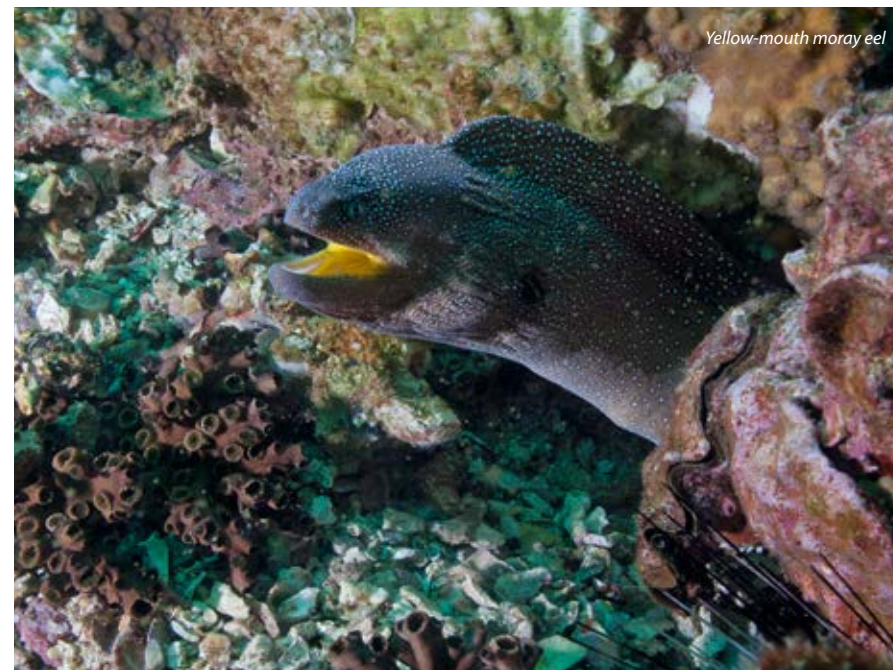
The Pearl is a small supply vessel, east of Sir Bani Yas Island, a few kilometres from the island's coast. She's sitting upright, and is about 30m in length. The roof is close enough to the surface that it's visible on a clear day and so it's easy to know where to jump in and start the dive.

The western side of the ship is home to a family of batfish that frequently joins divers on their dives. The middle section is mostly collapsed, but still interesting enough to dive.

There are a few nice features, the captain's cabin and steering wheel are mostly intact, and the hull is hollow, so sunlight plays in the darkness, giving

GPS

N24°16'48.00"
E52°39'36.00"



you a good view of the inside. This is an excellent site for budding underwater photographers.

Batfish, giant hammour, snappers and the Arabian Angel fish are abundant. You might also see blennies and dottybacks hiding in the urchins, and barracuda and trevallies frequent this site. The collapsed deck and the hull are covered in clams, scallops, sponges, thorny oysters, sea squirts and barnacles, and hermit crabs, shrimp and gobie families can be seen on the sand around the wreck. A seahorse has been sighted near the bow of wreck in the seagrass area.

There's sometimes a moderate current and low visibility. Be sure to also dive with a Delayed Surface Marker Buoy (DSMB) so your dive boat can easily locate you when you need picking up.

Nearby to the Pearl wreck is also the Car Cemetery dive site.

DIVES ON HOLD

While the developers of the offshore islands promise new dive sites, these old favourites are temporarily undiveable.

Some sites covered in earlier editions of this book, such as Rashid Wrecks and Jumeirah Artificial Reef, have been lost entirely due to construction work on the island projects. Others have been damaged, covered in silt, or lie in the path of construction shipping.

Hopefully, the sites detailed opposite will recover from the effects of nearby construction. However, the Cement Barge wreck, which we previously covered in detail, has now had its day. It's only about 10-11m deep, has a lot of silt build-up and the barge has deteriorated significantly. The wheel house has collapsed and the structure is breaking up.

To stay up-to-date on the conditions of dive sites, contact a local dive operator.

CAR BARGE & TUG

Depth: 20m
Distance from harbours:
DIMC 10.7nm @ 356°
DOSC 7.4nm @ 321°

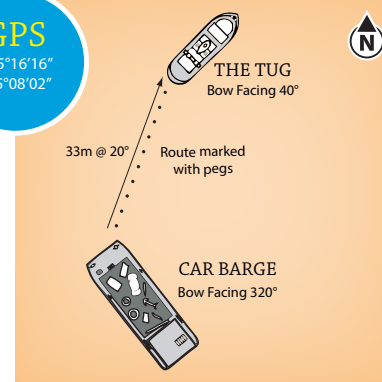
The barge, sunk in 1986, is still virtually intact and lies upright with her bow pointing north-west, at 320°. Her hold is filled with old cars, and there's a small wheelhouse and cabin on the stern. Her bow has a 33m-long row of pegs running to a tug that was used for harbour work.

Diving

If you swim into the barge's cabin the noise of your breathing will be masked and your bubbles hidden, so you'll find that any fish on the site will start to close

GPS

N25°16'16"
E55°08'02"



in. There are sections of debris to the north of the barge that the more adventurous can explore. These two wrecks made for a good day dive and an excellent site at night, but are now heavily silted. The site is recovering, but not many divers visit.

MV SARRAF THREE

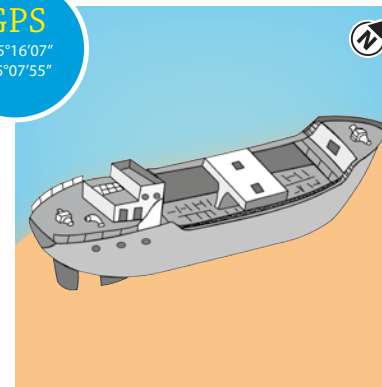
Depth: 20m
Distance from harbours:
DIMC 10.5nm @ 355°
DOSC 7.3nm @ 319°
Dubai Creek 8.8nm @ 267°

On the night of 30 April, 1981, the UAE coast was hit by a rare and fierce hailstorm. During the storm – in which golf ball-sized hailstones were recorded – the MV Sarraf was rammed by the MV Taiser while moored in Dubai. The Sarraf was raised that same year, re-floated and then abandoned in nearby Hamriya Port.

She was privately bought in August 1985 that same year, then taken out and sunk at her present location. She lies upright and virtually intact (minus her brass fittings), with her bow pointing towards the north.

GPS

N25°16'07"
E55°07'55"



Diving

Before the offshore construction work began to affect visibility and marine life, when diving on this wreck was recommended, the site featured numerous, colourful soft corals and was excellent for a night dive. It has recovered to some extent, but not many operators visit these days.