

DESTINATIONS

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA | RED SEA



RED SEA DIVING HOTSPOTS

From a coral canyon to a shipwreck with vintage cars, **Sasha Wood** takes a dip beneath the surface



SCUBA AND SNORKEL IN SHARM

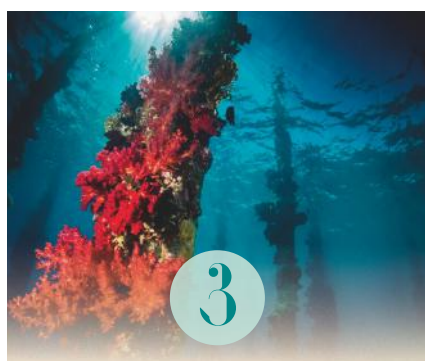
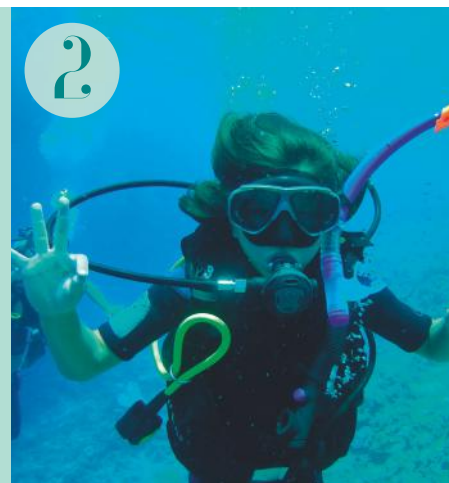
The coral shelves and deep drop-offs of Ras Mohammed National Park (*pictured*) beckon undersea explorers to the diving mecca of Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt. The contrast between the muted beige desert above the water and the technicolour scene beneath can make divers feel like they're entering another dimension. Well-equipped dive boats from Sharm's marina visit sites such as Jackfish Alley, offering the chance to glimpse bigger reef visitors such as turtles and sharks.

Book it: Seven nights' all-inclusive at the five-star Grand Hotel in Sharm costs from £708 including flights, transfers and three days' boat diving. redseaholidays.co.uk/agent

LEARN TO DIVE IN DAHAB

For clients who want to gain their Padi licence, there's no better place to learn than in the calm waters of the Red Sea. Dahab, on Egypt's Sinai coast, is a scuba haven with a more bohemian feel than glitzy Sharm. Its dedicated dive resorts are close to easy shore-dive sites such as Eel Garden and, once certified, divers can tackle the famous Blue Hole.

Book it: A seven-night Learn to Dive package at the Padi 5* Gold Palm in Dahab costs from £805 including dive certification, equipment and transfers. Return flights from £122. responsibletravel.com



HOUSE REEFS NEAR HURGHADA

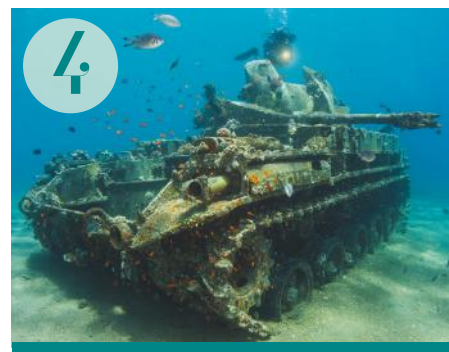
Hurghada is a popular spot for winter sun but it's also a great jumping-off point for some of the best dive spots in the Red Sea. Divers can head a little south to enjoy the plummeting coral walls of Abu Kafan, explore the house reef at Coral Garden Resort and visit renowned wreck dive sites such as Thistlegorm, a ship full of vintage cars that was sunk in 1941.

Book it: A week's half-board at Coral Garden Resort, Safaga, starts at £1,060, including flights and five days' diving. regal-diving.co.uk

SUBAQUATIC GARDENS IN AQABA

Jordan's only Red Sea resort, Aqaba has evocatively named dive sites such as Rainbow Reef and Japanese Garden. Both are ripe for exploration, but the area's most unusual sub-aquatic feature is its underwater military museum, which opened in 2019, with sunken war machines including a tank sitting on the seabed at six to 10 metres below the surface.

Book it: Seven nights in Aqaba in a three-star hotel, including direct flights, five days' diving and a day trip to Petra, is priced from £985. diversettravel.co.uk



SOUTHERN RED SEA SAFARI

Intrepid divers venturing far south are rewarded with pristine reefs such as the fabled Fury Shoals, with coral canyons teeming with fish and visited by huge pods of spinner dolphins. South of Marsa Alam, purpose-built dive villages feature excellent facilities, dive boats and stunning house reefs in gorgeous bays where guests can soak up the North African rays.

Book it: A 10-night full-board dive tour to the southern Red Sea costs from £1,295 including flights, transfers and eight days' diving. oonasdivers.com

PICTURES: Responsible Travel; Shutterstock/Richard Whitcombe, Shahrar Shabla