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## DO: Dive in

JAMES HIPKISS

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Just kick it

**GROWING PAINS:** Dreams born from sports



One small step for man.

**JAMES HIPKISS takes a dip to learn all about the underwater paradise.**

*More...* MALAYSIA is blessed with a long coastline, surrounded by tropical waters teeming with exotic ocean life, and the vast majority of Malaysians live within less than an hours travel of this briny paradise.



Meet the turtle.

And paradise it is, just stick your head under the surface of the water, mere metres from the beach of almost any of the country's pristine offshore islands, and a fascinating, enchanting underwater world exists.

How to enjoy and explore this world? Simple, go and get yourself trained and qualified by Padi (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) as an "open water diver". Sounds complicated, time consuming, strenuous, it really isn't, even I at 50 plus recently managed to do it, and it goes something like this.

First find a dive school or instructor who is Padi qualified. Padi is actually the world's largest diver training organisation; it exists in nearly every country, and Padi qualified divers are internationally recognised. There are many Padi schools and instructors in Malaysia, look for them on the

- Just kick it

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pool sessions.  
Four days later, I duly reported to the diving pool in Cheras, where Ravi had  
all the equipment ready — mask, snorkel, fins, wetsuit, BCD (buoyancy  
control device — a sort of pump up life jacked and harness), regulator (the  
connection between the air tank and your mouth), and air tank.  
All sounds very complicated, but actually not so, after you have browsed the  
book, watched the video and had the every item carefully explained to you by  
the ever patient instructor, Ravi.

All strapped into the equipment for the first time, and wow, it's so heavy and  
cumbersome. Then into the water and of course one is immediately  
weightless, and for the first time breathing underwater, it's so easy and natural  
after a couple of minutes, fantastic, freedom underwater!

Now the tuition begins, and there is around four to six hours of tuition in the  
pool, which is usually done over two days, or one day if you are in a hurry and  
a fast learner.

Really what the tuition is all about is knowing your equipment, and most  
importantly knowing how to react and exactly what to do if something goes  
wrong.

It is all about safety. Things rarely go wrong and if they do, there are  
procedures to deal with problems such as running out of air, faulty equipment  
or losing your face mask. But one has to know how to act calmly, quickly and  
correctly, should a problem occur.

Web NST

So one practices all the emergency procedures in the safety of the pool, and  
learns the other essential skill, controlling your buoyancy, hovering in the  
water, only going up or down when you want to, and at a safe, controlled  
speed.

Your instructor tests you on all these skills, and you also have tests on the

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important items in your Padi text book, five written tests for the five chapters.

Some of this is theory, and a little physics, buoyancy, compression and decompression, and learning how to use your “recreational dive planner”, a vital table of numbers and letters which tell you how deep you can dive, for how long, and how much time you need on the surface between dives. For me, this was the only slightly complicated thing to learn in the whole course, but my maths was always terrible!

Now the second part of the training, out into the open sea for four dives, one final recap written exam and I am qualified, hopefully. Ravi assures me that no one ever fails, some may take a longer time than others to learn the skills, but everyone gets through.

One can actually do the four open water dives almost anywhere and with any other Padi instructor, not just your pool instructor, you only need to take your documentation along, all signed up by your pool instructor.

That being so, I went off to Phuket for my open water dives, having already done my final written exam with Ravi in Kuala Lumpur. Under the guidance of my instructor, Yotam, from West Coast Divers, Phuket, I finished my training with four dives in two days.

I was confident with the equipment and safety aspects, so the dives were almost pure fun, just a little repetition of some of the safety procedure exercises, and learning to swim with a compass.

We dived to 18 metres, I saw leopard sharks, turtles, moray eels, and all manner of other exotic sights. Yotam even recorded the experience for me.

Back to the surface and my divers log book was duly filled in, my papers signed, stamped and posted by Yotam to the regional Padi office in Australia, who will soon be mailing me my official Padi open water diver ID card. So now, Sipadan, Perhentian, Great Barrier Reef, et al, here I come!

And the costs? Basic tuition costs around RM850 and then the extra costs of dive boat trips for the open water dives, unless the dives are taken from a beach, or off the end of a jetty. So what are you waiting for, go diving!

