

IAATO Operational Procedures for Underwater activities

(Including diving and snorkeling)

Prior to offering the activity, please ensure that diving and or snorkeling is included in your operators permit/ authorization conditions (Advance Notification and EIA).

Introduction

Underwater activities give a unique perspective on Antarctica's marine wildlife in its natural habitat and the underwater icescape. These experiences can, for example, be given through diving for those trained at an appropriate level and snorkeling. Underwater activities have formed an integral part of National Programs marine research for many years. Operators have offered experienced divers the opportunity to dive in Antarctic waters since 1998 from ships, and diving from yachts has taken place for longer than that. Snorkeling is also a common activity offered by ships and yachts and although no previous experience is required by the passengers to do this, it is included in these guidelines as similar basic level briefings and safety precautions are required for both activities.

These guidelines are for recreational diving activities. Activities that would fall outside these guidelines require separate permissions/certifications.-

Pre requisites

- A risk assessment should be undertaken; standard operating and emergency procedures are to be in place specific to the Operator's vessel and operations.
- The vessel should be staffed with a Dive master with extensive experience in polar waters and dive guides who hold professionally recognized diving qualifications, with an up to date logbook and medical fitness certificate.
- On booking divers should show their diving qualifications and cold-water diving experience (this will generally be advanced diver level with at least 20 cold water dives), appropriate insurance for diving, medical information, liability release and assumption of risk agreement.

Operation from the vessel

- The Dive master is responsible for the day-to-day management of the dive program.
- The Dive master with the EL and ship's master should make an on-site decision on the suitability of each site on case by case basis.
- Weather, sea, ice conditions, tides and current will determine which site is favorable at any specific time.
- Any diving or snorkeling activities that take place within a protected or managed area will be done in accordance with the relevant management plan provisions.

Clothing and equipment

- Divers and snorkelers should wear suitable clothing for polar waters.
- Equipment should be fit for purpose and at least 2 regulators suitable for cold water diving should be equipped for diver.
- Equipment should be regularly inspected and maintained.
- Dive computers should be used on each dive.
- Safety equipment will be carried by the dive guides as well as the safety boats.



Briefing

- The Dive master and dive guides should provide a pre-activity briefing at the start of the voyage, site specific briefings should also take place prior to entering the water at each site.
- Briefings should include:
 - Overview of operation procedures from client perspective
 - Safety practices for changes in weather conditions and ice conditions
 - Familiarization of communication strategies between the guide and clients
 - Wildlife awareness

Deployment

- A check out dive should be undertaken to allow the Dive master to assess the divers abilities and suitability for cold water diving
- Time limits are to be established for the activity.
- Boundaries are to be set to limit the range of diving or snorkeling.
- All equipment should be checked prior to entering the water.
- All dives are to be planned as no-decompression dives with a depth limit of 20m.
- The buddy system should be used; no solo diving should be undertaken.
- Extreme caution should be exercised when diving near ice, the Dive master should assess the suitability prior to diving.
- Extreme caution should be exercised when diving with marine wildlife and animal behavior should be observed through the period from the safety boat/s as well as in the water.
- Communication should be maintained between the bridge, safety boat and Dive master for the duration of the activity. The bridge officer should monitor the weather during the activity and notify the Dive master of any adverse changes. A diver recall system should be in place in the safety boat.
- All dives should be logged.
- A mandatory safety stop should be included at 5m for 3 minutes, except in distinct circumstances.
- An activity log should be kept for the duration of the activity including times of briefings, deployment and return to the vessel.