

## HOW YOU CAN HELP TO DEFEND CORAL REEFS

### THE DIVE

#### Buoyancy

- Keep checking your buoyancy. Much damage is done to the coral reefs when divers go down too fast and "crash" into the reef. The right amount of weight and good buoyancy control are essential to safe diving and environmental protection. To find out more, take a course on neutral buoyancy diving techniques.

#### While swimming

- Always maintain a distance of at least 2 meters from the sea bottom and sea walls.  
- Maintain a gentle movement with your fins: the more fragile marine organisms may be damaged even without direct contact; sometimes stirring up the water around them is enough to harm them.  
- When swimming on sandy bottoms, be careful not to stir up the sand – this could suffocate organisms.

#### What to, and what not to, hold on to

- Do not hold on to live corals. If you are swimming against the current and are having a hard time moving forward, grab on massive dead corals only: they are easy to recognize, they are colorless and look like rocks (if you are not sure, ask your dive master to point them out to you).

#### Meeting up with corals and other life forms

- Never touch corals: some may look tough but they are really very fragile and pieces break off easily even if you just touch them lightly, you could even damage the delicate polyps.  
- Do not collect corals, shells, or anything else: chances are you'll throw them away before leaving for home because they start to smell once they're out of the

water and if you should decide to take something home with you, you may get stopped at customs and have to pay a heavy fine – it is illegal to take anything collected from the reef or sea out of the country.

- Do not feed the fish: you can get close enough to take pictures but please do not give them anything to eat as this changes their behaviour and upsets the natural balance in the food chain.



DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS

- Marine animals are wary and distrustful, but also very curious: the best way to interact with them, without frightening them, is to approach them very very slowly and being careful of how you breathe: even the sound of the air bubbles often frightens them.

- If you should meet up with larger animals, remain still on the sea bottom or wall: it is probable that the larger animals are the ones that will become curious and come in for a closer look.

#### Taking pictures and videos

- Avoid being a typical amateur photographer or home video operator and be careful not to frighten the animals. Don't rush towards them; go up to them slowly, carefully aiming the camera.



BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU TAKE PICTURES: DO NOT LIE DOWN ON THE SEA FLOOR

- If you need to lean on something to snap a picture, look around until you find a rocky or sandy area or a dead coral area. Remember to always swim with your fins towards the surface and never lie down on the live coral sea floor!

- Once you've taken your pictures, don't use your fins to turn around, push off the rocks or dead corals with your hands so that you don't harm live corals with your fins.

#### At the end of the dive

- Once you are back on the surface and you are sure your boat has seen you, move away from the reef to avoid damaging the coral and so you can get back on to the boat more easily and safely.

#### ALWAYS

- Remember to take your garbage with you: trash is harmful to life. Many marine animals take plastic bags for prey and die from suffocation after they've swallowed them. If possible, collect trash you see during the dive and throw it away when you get to the surface.



TAKE YOUR TRASH WITH YOU

- Use as little water, detergent and soap as possible: the latter modify the ecosystem.

- Don't buy souvenir corals, shells, or dried fish: this only increases demand and the commerce of these animals and objects.

**BEHAVE RESPECTFULLY: OUR OCEANS' DWELLERS WILL THANK YOU FOR IT**

Illustration: Maura Marinuzzi

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*Once upon a time only a fortunate few had the opportunity of exploring the wonders of a coral reef. Times have surely changed and, thanks to quick and efficient means of travel, many now have the chance of enjoying the beauty and pleasure of diving into and exploring these fascinating ecosystems. Corals and the life forms they host are extremely delicate. So, in order to make sure that the impact and the potential harm that could be done is reduced to a minimum, please follow the instructions in this pamphlet. Let them be of value to you in making your dive even more exciting and in helping you to preserve the beauty of your diving experience for future generations. We wish you an enjoyable vacation.*

**Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna**  
**Italian Ministry of the Environment and Land and Sea Protection**  
**Ministry of Tourism of the Arab Republic of Egypt**  
**Egyptian Tourist Authority**  
**ASTOI (Association of Italian Tour Operators)**  
**PROJECT AWARE FOUNDATION**  
**SNSI (Scuba Nitrox Safety International)**  
**SSI (Scuba Schools International Italy)**  
**ULP (Underwater Life Project)**  
**EULF (Egyptian Underwater & Lifesaving Federation)**  
**TUTTOTURISMO**  
**MSG (Marine Science Group Association)**

#### BEFORE LEAVING HOME

- Choose tour operators and diving schools that honor the environment and that teach respect and safety for human life and nature: refer to associations and agencies that vouch for their affiliated members ([www.astoi.com](http://www.astoi.com), [www.projectaware.org](http://www.projectaware.org), [www.snsi.it](http://www.snsi.it), [www.ssi-italy.org](http://www.ssi-italy.org), [www.underwaterlifeproject.it](http://www.underwaterlifeproject.it), [www.msgassociation.net](http://www.msgassociation.net)).



LOOK FOR QUALIFIED TOUR OPERATORS ONLY READ UP ON THE CULTURE AND ECOLOGY OF THE PLACE YOU PLAN TO VISIT

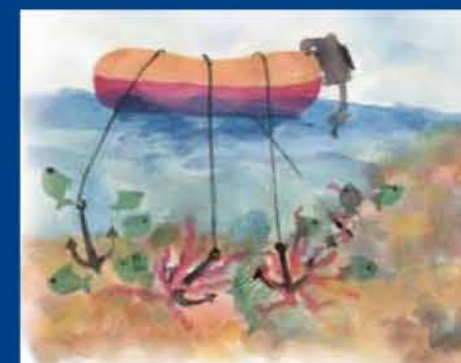
- Get informed by reading books and magazines on scuba diving and tourism: read up on geography, culture, and customs of the country you'll be visiting so you'll be more sensitive to the local population; read up on the most important ecological features of the place to heighten your awareness about the nature there.

- Be prepared to be very careful when diving in coral reefs: a single coral is the result of the long and hard construction efforts of the "polyps", very small and delicate animal organisms.

#### BEFORE DIVING

##### Boats

- Ask your tour operator, diving school, tour leader, and/or dive master which is the best boat available and rent that one: avoid boats that pollute the waters because they have engines that leak oil, diesel, or gasoline; remember that the cheapest package deal does not usually correspond to safety for you or for the environment.



DO NOT CAST ANCHORS

- Do not cast anchors – stop this destructive habit that causes harm to coral reefs by mooring the boat to buoys.

- Give your support locally to having buoys placed in diving areas: it is a custom that defends nature and supports ecological sustainability and that is not practiced nearly enough in tourist localities.

#### The Weather

- Find out about the local weather conditions, currents and underwater visibility where you are planning your dive: for your own safety, seek advice from local certified diving instructors.

- Do not go out to sea until you have become acquainted with the safety precautions specifically related to where you are planning to dive.



KEEP YOUR BELT AS LIGHT AS POSSIBLE Do not put too much weight in

your belt, extra pounds require more exertion and this increases air consumption during the dive, thus reducing safety levels and causing more harm to the environment: when they are on the sea bottom, overly weighted divers tend to fall onto the corals causing breakages.

- Attach all extra equipment (manometer, alternative air supply, torch, etc.) to clasps that keep objects close to the body: if you leave them dangling they could catch on the corals causing damage and/or breakages.

- Always begin with a check-dive to get familiar with the equipment and with the area.

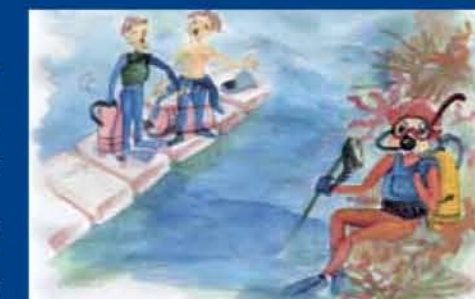


KEEP EQUIPMENT CLOSE TO YOUR BODY

#### Land Access

- If your dive starts on land, it is best to enter the water from a platform or gangway: the better hotels and diving centers provide these platforms so that tourists and divers do not step on and harm the coral reefs.

- Support this and do not enter the water directly from the shore trampling on corals but use gangways.



USE GANGWAYS WHEN ENTERING THE WATER FROM LAND

Illustration: Maura Marinuzzi

