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The life aquatic

Ever thought about exploring the underwater world with your kids? **DEBORAH DICKSON-SMITH** reveals it's easier than you might think.

Maybe you're already a diver, but like many scuba divers, have given up because it all seems too hard with young kids. But with a bit of planning it's possible to keep diving with kids in tow. And if you introduce your kids to the life aquatic early, hopefully they'll come to share your love of the underwater world.

A diving holiday needs a bit more research and preparation: there is expensive equipment involved, weather conditions to consider and a slight element of risk. But it's really not that hard and definitely worth the effort.

Learning the basics

Scuba diving, much like skiing, requires some basic training, but upon comparison diving actually poses fewer risks, so long as you pay attention to your dive computer and gauges that now do all the work for you.

Training is important, and in fact (unlike skiing) you won't be able to dive without it. But there are options. You can get qualified at a local dive centre before you go or plan to

get your qualifications while on your holiday. The first gives you more time to relax on vacation without three days of training and reading dive manuals. The second is an opportunity to learn how to dive, as a family, in warm, clear tropical water.

Another option is the Discover Scuba Diving experience, which allows you to trial a short session of instruction. This is sometimes in a swimming pool, sometimes in shallow water just off the resort beach. If you enjoy the experience, your first dive count will count towards your diving certification.

If you are qualified to dive, but you haven't in several years, invest in a refresher course which will give you more confidence.

Where to find the best family dive resorts

More and more dive resorts are starting to cater for families, from budget options such as Fiji's Captain Cook Cruises, to luxury options such as Wakatobi resort in Indonesia.



The South Pacific

Castaway Island, in Fiji's Mamanucas, has a PADI Five Star dive centre offering the full range of dive courses from introductory programs to Dive Master certification.

Also in the Mamanucas is the luxurious **VOMO Island Fiji**, which offers a 'bespoke' diving experience, meaning you can go diving with your own personal dive guide.

One of the best places to learn how to dive with the kids is **Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort Fiji** on the island of Vanua Levu. The diving here in Savusavu, with easy access to the Namena Marine Reserve, is spectacular – this is the soft coral capital of the world.

The resort also has an innovative and educational junior ocean advocacy program for kids – **School Under the Sea** – which introduces children aged six to 12 to Fiji's natural environment and cultural heritage through the eyes of the resort's marine biologists. Kids learn about the underwater environment, the creatures they may encounter and explore the realms of an alternative sustainable future.

Hideaway Island Resort & Marine Sanctuary, near Port Vila in Vanuatu, is surrounded by beautiful coral gardens and has the world's only underwater post office. The resort offers training and Discover Scuba Diving and regularly hosts school groups.

Uepi Island Resort in the Solomon Islands' Western Provinces has access to some of the world's best easy diving. Pristine coral reefs and friendly reef sharks are as close as the resort's own jetty and there's land-based activities and safe swimming in the lagoon.

Southeast Asia

Bali Hai Diving Adventures offers diving experiences on Bali's Lembongan Island, either at the family-friendly Hai Tide Resort, or as a day trip from your chosen Bali resort. Base camp for the day will be a large pontoon equipped with slides, swimming pool, kayaks and semi-submersible coral-viewing boats.

Wakatobi Dive Resort in Indonesia's Sulawesi is a purpose-built family-friendly dive resort with luxe accommodation, fine dining and, being located in the epicentre of the coral triangle, mind-blowing diving.

The luxury resort was established after an extensive search to locate the perfect location in terms of ocean topography, marine biodiversity and climate, and it's only a short hop from Bali via private charter plane. They offer the full gamut of childcare and children's



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Safety first

Before travelling, check your travel insurance to see if it covers dive-related incidents. If you're planning to dive regularly, it's worth considering dive specialist insurance from the **Divers Alert Network (DAN)**, one of the only insurance policies that will cover the costs of evacuating you to the nearest decompression chamber if the worst happens. diversalertnetwork.org

activities too, from nannies for babies and toddlers to Discover SCUBA Dives, PADI Bubble-Maker and Junior Open Water courses for the bigger kids, while certified junior divers can dive with their parents. Wakatobi Kids' Club also includes a great range of activities for five- to 12-year-olds.

The Philippines' **Atmosphere Resorts & Spa**, located in Dumaguete, is one of the country's growing number of family-friendly dive resorts, with a kids' club and easy access to the pristine coral reefs of Apo Island, one of the world's earliest marine protected areas. Kids can snorkel, do a PADI Bubblemaker dive course or join the Seal Team program. There are also kids' yoga and treatments at the spa.

B&J Diving Centre on Tioman Island in Malaysia offers the full range of kids' PADI diving options, including Bubblemaker and Seal Team courses where eight- to 10-year-olds can learn basic scuba skills and take part in specialty AquaMissions such as wreck diving, navigation, buoyancy, environmental

awareness and critter identification. They even have kid-size mouth pieces and tanks.

Scuba cruises

A cruise around the Fiji Islands on board **Captain Cook Cruises Fiji's Reef Endeavour** is also a wonderful option for ocean-loving families. You'll visit Fiji's more remote dive sites, including the world-famous Rainbow Reef on some itineraries, and kids as young as 10 can try a Discover Scuba experience.

Junior ocean lovers will also love taking part in activities led by the resident marine biologists and Captain Cook's Ocean Ambassador, who organises beach clean-ups on Fiji's more remote islands every day, taking debris back to the main island for recycling. Another more exotic dive cruise option is the **Pindito**, with a dedicated Family Cruise to Indonesia's Komodo each July. The cruise begins in Bali and ends in Flores, visiting Komodo National Park, a World Heritage Site with incredible diving. ▲



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01 Private boat outing at Wakatobi 02 Kids and turtle in Atmosphere Resort, Apo 03 In the pool with Atmosphere Bubblemaker 04 Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort Fiji © Chris McLennan 05 Getting ready for a snorkel at Wakatobi. Images 01 & 02 © Didi Lotze 06 The reefs surrounding Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort Fiji



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Asia Pacific Dive Report Card

Info For a comprehensive guide to diving in Australia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, visit diveplanit.com

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