



Atlanta Underwater Explorers

AUE Bubbles

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What To Do When Your Divemaster Is Wrong

By Travis Marshall

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“Ask yourself if the divemaster is putting you or other at risk, or if he or she is just leading differently than you would prefer.”

Have you ever noticed your divemaster breaking the rules? Divemasters and instructors make mistakes, and depending on where you're diving, they might not follow the practices you're used to. But how do you handle it?

GAUGE THE RISK

Oftentimes, divemasters have a group of divers whose experience levels vary, and how they conduct the dives might be the result of factors you're not privy to. Ask yourself if the divemaster is putting you or others at risk, or if he or she is just leading differently than you would prefer.

SAY SOMETHING

The vast majority of divemasters truly want you to have the best dive possible, so if you disagree with part of the dive plan, speak up. Chances are the divemaster will be happy to explain his or her reasons and try to accommodate your concerns as best as possible.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

If you're already in the water and the dive is going awry, your first obligation is to yourself and your dive buddy. Stay within your own personal depth, time and comfort limits, and abort the dive if necessary by making a controlled ascent and signaling the boat from the surface.

REPORT TO THE CAPTAIN

In the rare event your divemaster is blatantly – and unapologetically – wrong, report the situation to the captain. Boat captains are the ultimate authorities on board, and they should prioritize the safety of their passengers above all else. If the captain can't offer a solution, sit out the dives and find a new dive shop.

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<http://www.scubadiving.com/training/basic-skills/what-do-when-your-divemaster-wrong>

Magic in the Middle of Nowhere: The Gulf of Mexico's Flower Garden Banks

Photos by David Doubilet, Chris Parson,



Many divers think they need a plane ticket and passport to have a truly dramatic underwater experience like swimming with manta rays, encountering a whale shark or finning across a coral reef in a wild open ocean. That's probably because they haven't heard about the remote gems in our Gulf of Mexico about 100 miles off the Texas/Louisiana coastline.

The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary encompasses a triad of reefs bathed in bio-rich Gulf Stream eddies that nourish an awesome assortment of exciting marine life. The East and West Flower Garden Banks reefs are 12 miles apart with plateaus of 250 acres and 100 acres respectively. They are the northernmost coral reefs on the North American continental shelf, and host more than 20 species of corals and at least 180 species of fish.

Due in part to their distance from shore, the Flower Garden Banks are touted by scientists as one of the healthiest coral-reef systems in the Western Hemisphere. Stetson Bank, the later addition to the sanctuary, is a much-smaller siltstone-based reef set 40 miles inshore from the West Flower Garden Bank. Considering much of the surrounding ocean floor is featureless, and the closest bona fide coral reefs are 400 miles away in Mexico, the Flower Garden Banks are true oases of tropical marine life.

Imagine a lively underwater meadow filled with giant green-and brown-hued mounds and boulders wrapped in a cover of living brain-and star-coral polyps. Dozens upon dozens of these rounded coral heads can be seen in every direction as far as the eye can see – which is often 100 feet or more thanks to consistently stellar visibility. Many of the hard-coral mounds are bigger than a Smart car, and most are studded with orange and yellow sponges. Schools of chromis and creolefish hover over the formations while parrotfish, rock beauty angelfish and Spanish hogfish flit around the reef area. Other prominent species include barracuda, red spotted hawkfish and scrawled cowfish. Sand patches and trenches section off the nearly continuous spread of corals. Bottom dwellers like yellowhead jawfish, peacock flounder and tilefish hang out in the sand areas.

Magic in the Middle of Nowhere: The Gulf of Mexico's Flower Garden Banks – Cont.

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Besides an impressive array of stony corals and Caribbean tropicals, the Flower Garden Banks also attract much larger animals like manta rays, loggerhead turtles and silky sharks. You might even spot a mobula ray or a hawksbill turtle cruising around the reef. During the late-winter months and in early spring, massive squadrons of spotted eagle rays pass through the region. Whale-shark sightings occur mostly in the summer months but are sporadic. Yet on most trips it's common to see a silky, sandbar or nurse shark. And each year, two remarkable events occur. From January to early April, schools of scalloped hammerhead sharks migrate through the Gardens; seven to 10 days after the August full moon, the reef explodes in a reproduction frenzy known as mass coral spawning.

The Sanctuary's third formation, Stetson Bank, is the smallest of the trio at 36 acres, but it is a magnet for thrilling marine life such as manta rays, sandbar sharks and, on occasion, whale sharks. Stetson touts a series of siltstone pinnacles, which differ from the East and West banks; encrusted with sponges and fire coral where spiny oysters, arrow crabs, feather dusters and a wide array of invertebrates vie for space.

The Sierra Madracis coral formation near mooring buoy No. 3 is not only the largest coral formation on Stetson, it's also one of the most visually stunning and lively displays of ten-ray star coral in the entire sanctuary. Schools of crimson creolefish hover overhead while spotted morays poke their heads out from holes. It's a real beauty for the big boys passing through.

Magic in the Middle of Nowhere: The Gulf of Mexico's Flower Garden Banks – Cont.



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DAY 1: From Houston, head south to Freeport and find the M/V Fling no later than 8 p.m. to allow time for Cajun-style gumbo at On the River Restaurant, a short walk from the dock. After boarding, stake a bunk for the overnight cruise.

DAY 2: The first dive on the West Flower Garden Bank mooring is at 7 a.m. A full hot breakfast with tasty tacos awaits after surfacing. Two- and-a-half hour surface intervals offer time to read or lounge on the upper deck. After the second dive, grab a quick snooze during the 12-mile run to the East Flower Garden Bank reef. If conditions are right, nearby High Island 389 platform might be the best rig dive of your life. The late afternoon fourth dive is followed by a Texas-size dinner – beef brisket, fajitas or spaghetti. After surfacing from the night dive, enjoy a late-night treat of ice cream and warm brownies before heading to the upper deck for star-gazing.

DAY 3: Diving Stetson Bank is an entirely different experience from the East and West banks. Often described as a moonscape, it offers rocky uplifts, sponge-encrusted pinnacles and loads of fish. Lunch is served after the second dive as the boat begins the five-hour run back to port. Dock arrival is typically no later than 6 p.m.

NEED TO KNOW

When to Go: Winter season runs February through April; summer season is May through September. The calmest seas occur at end of July through mid-September.

Dive Conditions: Water temperatures vary from the mid-60s to low 70s in winter and from the low to mid-80s during the summer. Visibility ranges from 30 to 60 feet in the winter and 75 to 100-plus feet during the summer.

Operators: [Fling Charters](#) runs two- and three-day trips on the M/V Fling from Freeport, Texas. [Texas Bluewater Safaris](#), also out of Freeport, runs small groups to Stetson Bank and the Flower Garden Bank reefs.

Price tag: Two-day live-aboard trips (seven dives) start at \$570 for weekends and \$520 for weekdays. Three-day weekday live-aboard trips (11 dives) start at \$615.

More Information:

Visit the [Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary website](http://flowergarden.noaa.gov/). (<http://flowergarden.noaa.gov/>)

Published in Scuba Diving Magazine:

<http://www.scubadiving.com/travel/north-america/magic-middle-nowhere-gulf-mexicos-flower-garden-banks?.shares&src=related&con=outbrain&obref=obnetwork>

Upcoming AUE Activities

- *AUE General Meeting - Saturday 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. March 21, 2015, Atlanta Public Safety building on Pryor Street @ Garnett Street*
- *AUE General Meeting - Saturday 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. April 11, 2015, Atlanta Public Safety building on Pryor Street @ Garnett Street*
- *2015 NABS President's Meeting, April 17 -19, 23015 - Hosted by Charm City SCUBA AT Embassy Suites Baltimore Inner Harbor Baltimore, MD Contact: Dwayne Johnson @ (443) 203-8230 For more information*

Recent AUE Activities

- *TAP Into Jazz III - February 7, 2015 Nashville, TN*
- *AUE General Meeting - February 21, 2015*
- *22 Annual Crystal River Manatee Snorkel & Dive February 27, thru March 1, 2015*

Member Announcements

Latest AUE Member Update:

Youth AUE Member & Son of Marcus and Tonja Mincey Latest Certification



“My Joey is now a certified lifeguard! And his first job!”

In addition, Joey received his open water certification recently. See more comments on Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/tonja.haltonmincey?ref=pb_other



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Editor's Corner

Fellow AUE Members:

Welcome to the March 15, 2015 edition of *AUE Bubbles* newsletter. As you can see, AUE will have a full and active year of diving and social events during 2015.

We hope you continue to find future editions informative. Your suggestions, comments and story ideas are welcomed.

Completed story submissions must be received one week prior to the publishing date (Bi-monthly on the 15th of the month). The next edition will be published May 15, 2015.

Please submit your story ideas and comments to my attention via email.

Dive safely,

Alex Adams,

Publisher & Editor