

Dive Pirates

By: Steve Holbert

This is my story about adaptive scuba diving. What is adaptive scuba diving you may ask? I guess it's a nice way to say scuba diving for disabled people. In my case I'm a paraplegic completely paralyzed from the T3 level down. The Dive



I paddle along fine with webbing I slip over my fingers.

Pirates Organization is a non profit that teaches disabled people how to scuba dive. They can train and certify paraplegics, quadriplegics, amputees, just about anything they have probably trained someone and got them scuba diving. They certify you as an adaptive scuba diver and then take you on a week long scuba diving trip to the Caribbean. I went to Cayman Brac. Not only do they teach you and take you on a dive trip, they supply you with your very own scuba diving gear to keep. Everything you need to scuba dive except a tank. Which you can't take a scuba tank with you on a flight anyway. In some cases they will even train and supply the equipment for your own adaptive dive buddy. For all recreational scuba divers you are required to have a dive buddy with you at all times.(for safety reasons) For an adaptive buddy they train them with several other advanced course certifications such as rescue and life saving. Plus train them how to help the adaptive diver with whatever special assistance they may require. The Dive Pirates philosophy is that if they train you and an adaptive buddy plus supply you with your very own scuba gear that you will be able to continue scuba diving on your own any time you want to go. Once selected as a recipient Dive Pirates does ask that you help fundraise to support the trip.



Ed Shearer, my daughter Hailey & I

I was selected as a Dive Pirates recipient in 2018. My adaptive buddy and I did our training here in the Houston area and completed our open water certifications at the Blue Lagoon lake just north of Huntsville, TX. We then went to Cayman Brac that summer. I went back to Cayman Brac in 2019. Then to Cozumel Mexico in 2021 with a different adaptive diving organization. I've been back to the Blue Lagoon several times over the years. This year I was awarded a scholarship from the Bert and Anne Shearer Foundation to attend the Dive Pirates trip to Cayman Brac. Along with me there were two other US Military Veteran adaptive divers that were also able to return to the Brac thanks to the Bert & Anne Shearer Foundation. Cayman Brac is only about 2 miles wide and 12 miles long. There is only one resort on the island and the Dive Pirates group pretty much took up the whole resort. There were over 60 total scuba divers spread out between three dive boats. It's a wonderful place on such a tiny island and is completely wheelchair accessible.



Cayman Brac Beach Resort

One of the things I like best about scuba diving is a complete feeling of freedom. What I mean by that is escape from my wheelchair. I can go up down sideways do flips rolls or just drift aimlessly. In the clear blue tropical water it's easy to propel myself wherever I want to go, to look at whatever I want to look at without ever having a second thought of how to overcome some obstacle to get there. I am no longer bound to the limits of my wheelchair. I really forget that I'm paralyzed. Plus there is a lot of cool stuff to see!

For more information and to complete an application go to <https://divepirates.org>



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A turtle went cruising right past me. Below me you can see part of the Captain Kieth Tibbets ship wreck we got to dive on.

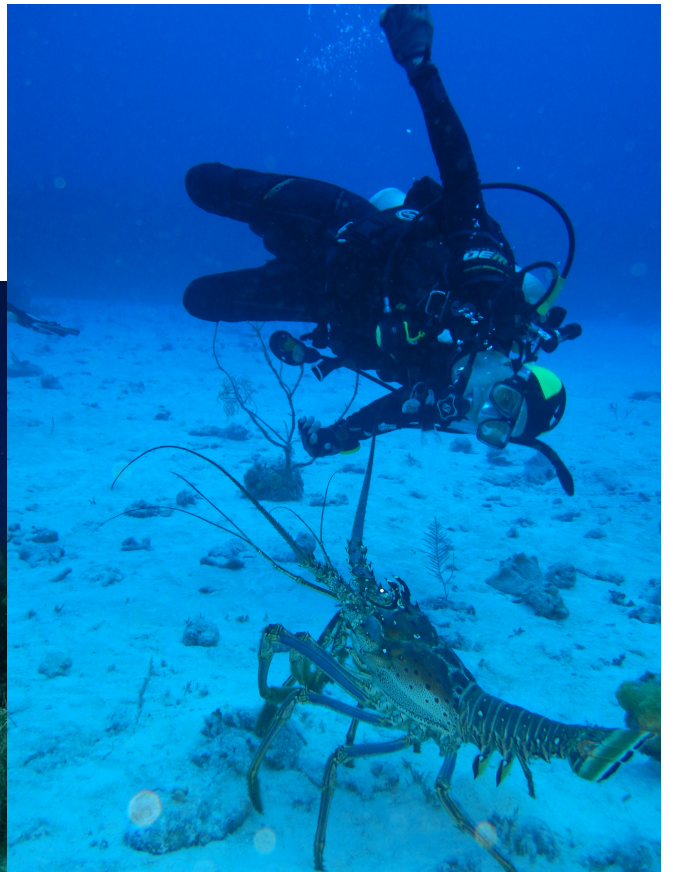


Sharing some of the techniques I use underwater with one of the other adaptive dive buddies. A great bonus of a trip like this is sharing and learning knowledge of adaptive scuba with all the other great people on the trip.



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The boat dive master getting up close and personal with the local friendly grouper.



Getting a close look at a lobster.

