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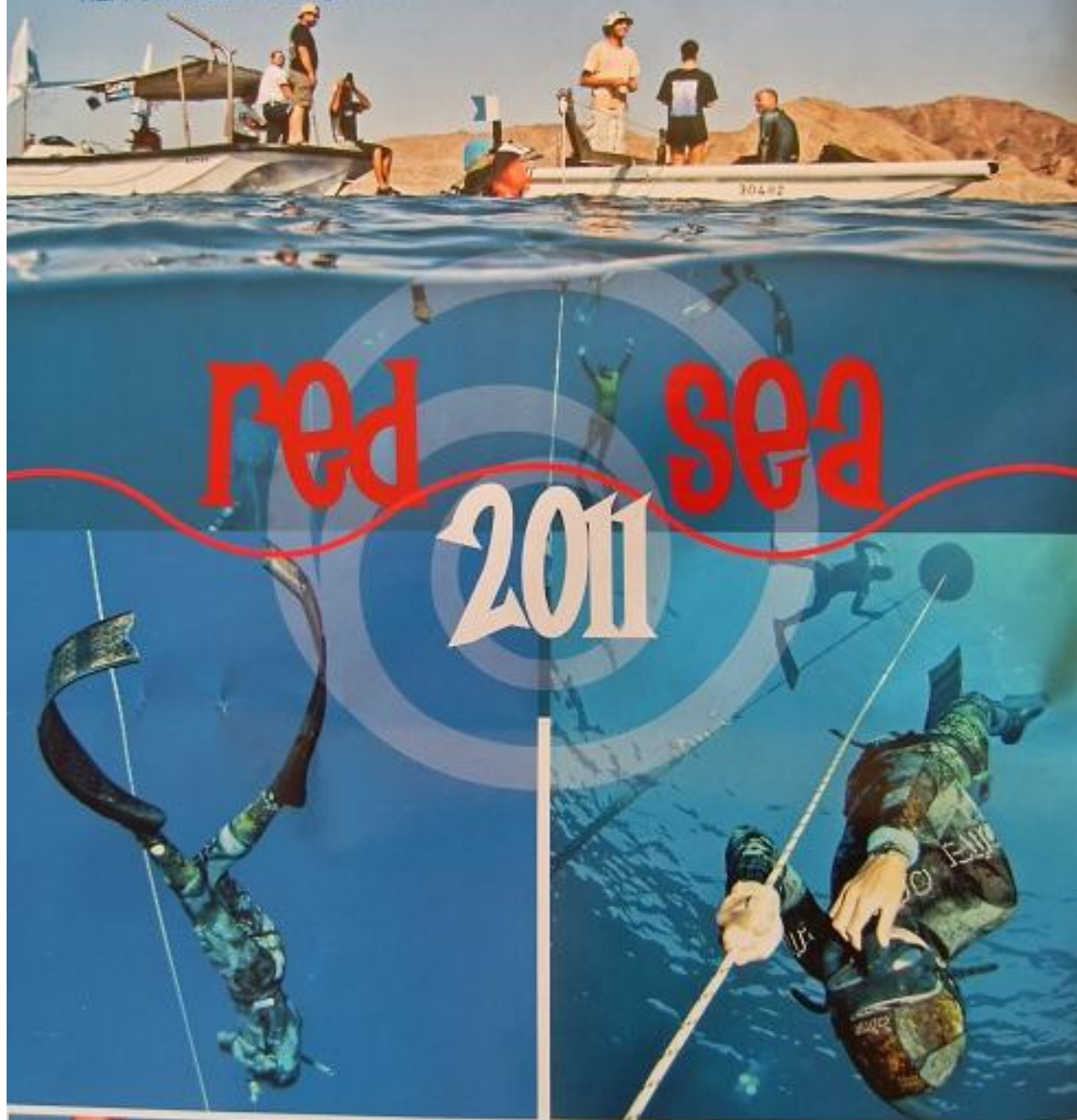


Free diving the

by Erez Beatus

Red Sea

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As a freediver my dreams were always filled with clear, blue, deep water teeming with life and color. My early freedive days were in the red sea- a deep, narrow sea that begins near Yemen and terminates in the city of Eilat in Israel.

Freediving the Red sea presents the avid freediver with the ability to train every day, all day, all year round in relatively warm water (25-28 degrees). Perhaps the best thing about the Red sea from a Freediver's perspective is the fact that it gets really deep, really fast. Swimming just 100m from shore will allow you to train in 50 plus meters of water (and in some areas- 120m and more).

Currents are predictable and so is the wind. Temperatures out of the water are very hot- over 41 degrees in the summer. As the water gets really deep it is also super clear and very rich with nutrients. Fish and coral are among the best in the world and it is common to encounter huge schools of pelagic fish, sharks, rays and the occasional whale shark.

Eilat is located on the southeast part of Israel where the red desert meets the blue ocean. It is a tourist destination that started off as a city where all the convicts and criminals were sent to in order to put them far away from society. Like Australia - they have picked the most beautiful part of the country in order to "punish" people... go figure.

Since I have moved to Australia 8 years ago my blue water dreams have become even more frequent. Even though we live on an island, Freediving in its purest form can be quite challenging. Currents, waves, bad visibility and the absence of deep water close to shore limits us from regularly training in the ocean. I have switched most of my training from ocean to pool training and leave my "serious diving" to my yearly trips to destinations such as Tonga.

Last July we flew over to Israel to train in the Red sea and to judge a national record attempt in the Variable weights discipline.

The record attempt - 100m on one breath

Alan Rivkind from Israel is one of Israel's most accomplished freediving instructor and holds most national records since I have moved to Australia in 2006. He is also one of my students and instructors.

Alan has set to be the first Israeli freediver to break the 100m goal. He has trained for a few months in the Variable weights discipline and invited myself and another international judge from Sweden to verify the record.

The event was professionally organised and executed with a large media presence, spectators and support from a few local dive shops that provided safety teams. Alan performed the dive nicely and in a shorter dive time than planned and upon surfacing- received the white card making him the first Israeli to have freedived to 100m. I was proud to be there and be part of that event.

Whale shark

One of the frequent visitors to the gulf of Eilat is the whale shark. This Plankton eater is the world's largest fish (reaching a size of 12m). We have had the privilege of freediving with one on our last trip. We were leaving the water after a great session on the line at 42m when someone spotted a fin breaking the surface around 300m off shore. Within a

minute or so we found ourselves swimming quickly towards the area where the fin was, along with other snorkelers. We have waited there for a few minutes before the shark appeared at the depths and swam towards us. Unfortunately, the large number of people in the water including scuba divers made the shark a bit edgy and after a few minutes of interaction he turned and swam away. Nevertheless - it was a great experience!

Freediving the wreck

One of the main attractions in Eilat is a sunken navy missile ship that is now a dive site. The wreck lies in 25m of water and reaches 10m at the shallowest spot. As visibility usually averages 20m+ the experience of freediving this wreck is a great one. The wreck offers plenty of swim-toughs, soft coral, schools of fish and lots of reef structure around it. On the day we dived the wreck visibility was especially good and allowed us to take some great photos. This dive is also a fantastic night dive - especially when the moon is full and there is a lot of natural light.

Training on the line

Training in the red sea is a pleasure. As most dive shops are located right on the beach we could prepare ourselves near the water. After doing our stretches and breathing exercises we would suit up and simply walk into the water. A short swim and we would find ourselves in 50m of water. Freediving has grown in Israel in the past few years and so there are marked lines at set depths (up to 60m). As long as you time the sessions to be on the right tide water movement is minimal and training is really easy.

Back in Oz

It was a bit tough returning to Australian waters after Freediving in the Red sea again, but it simply keeps us motivated to train hard in the off-season and make as many trips to clear water as we can.

Australia offers a few great freedive locations such as Rottnest Island off Perth, The Abrolhos Islands off Geraldton, the Montebello Islands, Ningaloo reef on north West WA, The barrier reef in QLD and the solitary islands in northern NSW.



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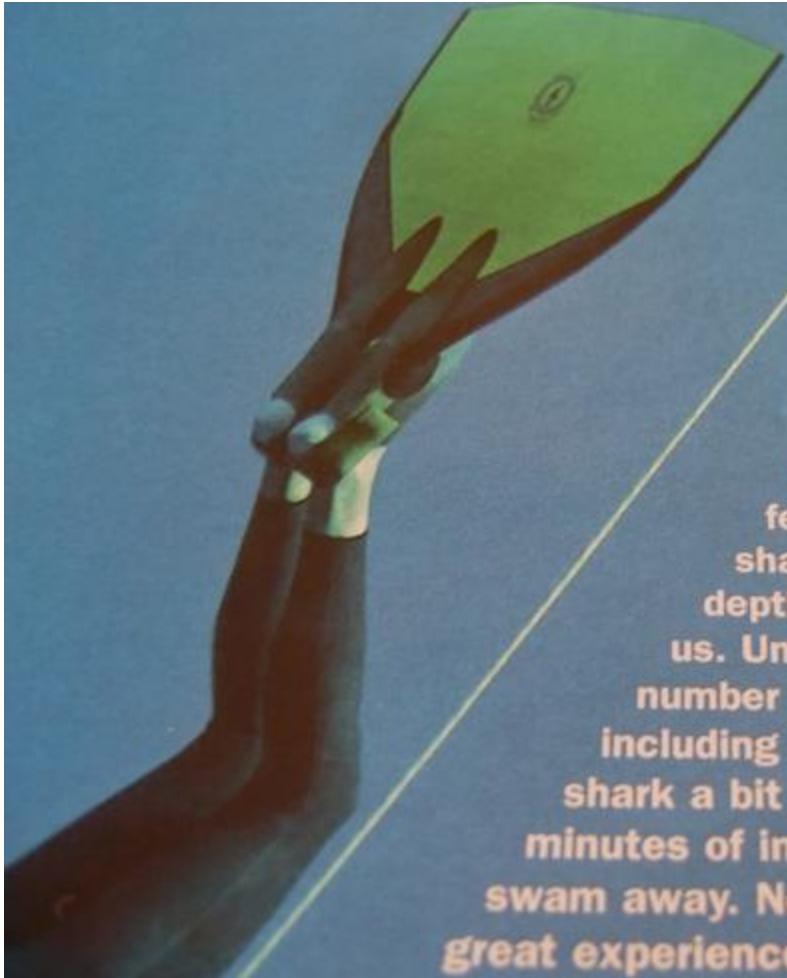
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