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Dive courses attract internationals to Cairns

Visitors from around the world are arriving in Cairns to learn to dive on the Great Barrier Reef with numbers of dive certifications returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland Chief Executive Officer Mark Olsen said the Great Barrier Reef's diverse marine life and safety record were strong drawcards for people wanting to learn to dive while on holiday.

"International visitors are back to about 60 per cent of pre-pandemic levels and a Great Barrier Reef experience is still top of the list for our key markets," he said.

"North Americans, Europeans and the United Kingdom remain our largest learn-to-dive markets, numbers are returning from Japan and India is emerging.

"Staffing was an issue six months ago, but we have been seeing more Working Holiday Makers arriving and training to be dive masters who are employed across the reef fleet."

Pro Dive Cairns General Manager Paul Lim said the dive market had returned to 80 per cent international travellers after slipping to 20 per cent last year.

"Numbers have slowly returned to pre-COVID levels and the geographic markets are similar, but the demographic is changing," he said.

"The adventure traveller is getting older and we are seeing more family groups with teenagers or young adult children travelling with their parents."

Diver's Den Training Manager and PADI Course Director Charlotte Barbosa said about 50 people a week were completing the PADI Open Water Course with Diver's Den spending two days in the pool before training on the Great Barrier Reef.

"The beginner dive course can be done in four days but we are finding people are keen to do the six-day advanced course so they can spend three nights on the Great Barrier Reef and see more of the world's largest reef," she said.

"The Great Barrier Reef is one of the safest places to learn to dive and it offers easy tropical diving with the opportunity to see The Great Eight – whales, manta rays, clownfish, turtles, potato cod, giant clams, Maori wrasse and sharks."

PADI Asia Pacific Territory Director Damian Jones said more and more divers and snorkellers were visiting the Great Barrier Reef annually, making it one of the most popular diving destinations globally.

"As the world's largest coral reef system, the Great Barrier Reef stands as a magnificent example of nature's beauty and diversity," he said.

"This year, we've seen the continued return of North American, European and Asian divers particularly from the USA, England, Germany, Japan and India underscoring the Great Barrier Reef's global appeal."

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TTNQ Contact: Liz Inglis | liz.inglis@ttnq.org.au | 0419 643 494