

An Ideas Immersion

by **Melissa Rimac**

IN the first weekend of August, Sydney's Darling Harbour bustles with gleaming boats and dive inspirations. It's an opportunity to learn about new products, environmental initiatives and dive trends, and – best of all to my mind – add at least several destinations and experiences to the dream list.

Kicking off on Friday morning and running throughout the weekend, the Australian International Dive Exhibition shares space with the Sydney International Boat Show, which draws all manner of fantasy vessels.

Making my way through avenues of gleaming boats, it was encouraging to see that diving is now being offered on charter boat packages – many of which are surprisingly affordable. It's the ultimate way to indulge in a flexible itinerary.

As I padded about barefoot on the very spacious and luxurious Sunsail vessels, I learned that this company offers an onboard dive service on cruises from Phuket – where pelagics and dramatic landforms are a prime attraction – and on Tahiti voyages, dive operator will meet the boats.

Ensnared at the Dive Show inside the exhibition hall, my eyes were immediately drawn to the destinations exhibitors, many of whom offer special deals available only at the show.

Some were iconic, for instance live-aboards visiting Rajah Ampat and Tonga – regaled for the opportunity to swim with humpback whales – along with the easily accessed reefs of southern Thailand.

But there were also surprises to be found, such as Taiwan – hardly a destination that comes to mind when you think of a dive focused holiday – where clear water and large fish are the drawcard. Learning about trips that take in swims with sperm whales has spurred many a daydream.

The Australian Indian Ocean Islands were another dreamy discovery. These untrammelled islands – accessed most easily from Perth – see relatively few visitors and reward with a crowd free dive experience that combines colourful, healthy reefs and plenty of fish.

Also featured in the show, were demonstrations of equipment and tips for maintenance.

The extensive line up of speakers included many photography experts – discussing everything from working with light to photographing giants – as well as videography. Talks about technical diving, dive gear maintenance, diver propulsion vehicles, underwater drones, marine clean up and health lectures underscored how quickly technology and research is advancing in the dive world.

Freediving was another hot topic this year. There were several presentations, including one I found particularly interesting which delved into the emotional and psychological elements that underpin freediving.


Representatives from several environmental projects reminded me that, as a counterpoint to the many threats facing our oceans, there are groups actively – and very successfully – rehabilitating their patch.

August is a relaxing and atmospheric time of year to visit Darling Harbour; spring is in the air and the temperature is perfect for exploring the historical parts of the city on foot.

I based myself in a roomy apartment at Mantra 2 Bond Street, which is a pleasant fifteen minute walk from Darling Harbour. Arriving by train from the north coast, I appreciated only having to walk a block from the station to my abode. The location is ideal; just a short walk to the historic Rocks district with its crooked lanes and layers of convict history and atmospheric bars and also close to the Botanical Garden and Circular Quay.





If there's a disadvantage to visiting Sydney for the Dive Show: I'm now driven to distraction about places I learned about and am eager to now experience.

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