# Scuba Diving & Travel

**What to consider before scuba diving:**
- Take a certified diving course before you dive.
- Consult a doctor before diving to evaluate:
  - your overall physical and psychological health and fitness with particular attention to the ears, sinuses, chest/lungs and heart
  - if any prescription medications could affect diving
  - and sign a medical diving certificate if you have a medical condition that requires a medical evaluation.
- Do not dive with a cold or if congested. Damage to the ears is the most common injury in divers.
- Be comfortable in water, learn basic swimming skills.
- Never use alcohol or recreational drugs prior to diving.
- Determine if your travel health insurance covers medical care following scuba dives.
- If scuba diving in a country where malaria is a concern, check with the International Travel Centre about antimalarial medication. Some of these medications have side effects similar to decompression sickness.
- Do not fly, drive to high elevations or mountain climb for a minimum of 18 hours after diving – preferably 24 hours if you have done multiple dives over multiple days.

**What to consider while scuba diving:**
- Have your equipment serviced before leaving for your holiday and check all gear before each dive.
- When renting equipment, bring your own mouthpiece if possible, or ensure that rented mouthpieces, masks and snorkels have been washed and disinfected with a 10% bleach solution and then with alcohol.
- Never dive alone. Team up with a buddy and stay together during the dive. Be familiar with your buddy’s health status and equipment as well as your own.
- Review hand signals, especially emergency ones. Before you dive, discuss with your buddy what to do if you become separated or if visibility becomes limited.
- Plan your dive and then dive your plan.
- Never hold your breath while scuba diving. This can lead to over inflation of the lungs and a medical emergency.
- If you start to shiver continuously, get out of the water, dry off and seek warmth.
- Only dive in conditions which are the same or better than those in which you were trained.
- The maximum depth for diving is to the level of your training. Not all divers are trained to dive to the same depth or use the same gases.
What is nitrogen narcosis?
- Nitrogen narcosis is caused by a rapid increase in the amount of dissolved nitrogen in the blood stream. It is usually associated with increased depth, activity and/or stress while at depth.
- Symptoms of confusion, disorientation and dizziness may become noticeable at depths as shallow as 70-90 feet.
- The mind numbing effects can appear suddenly and may make appropriate reactions almost impossible.
- Effects of nitrogen narcosis can be completely reversed by immediately rising to a shallower depth.

What is decompression sickness (DCS)?
- During a dive the body absorbs nitrogen, an inert gas, by storing it in body tissues. When surfacing slowly from a dive the body is able to safely release the nitrogen by exhaling.
- DCS may occur as a result of diving too long and/or at too great a depth and surfacing too quickly.
- The absorbed nitrogen comes out of solution and forms bubbles in your bloodstream and body tissues.
- The most common symptoms of DCS are unusual fatigue, numbness, tingling and difficulty breathing. More serious symptoms include paralysis, confusion, coma or death.
- Bubbles in or near joints cause joint pains for the “bends”.
- Symptoms can appear within 15 minutes to 12 hours after surfacing.
- Always follow proper training guidelines to minimize the risk of decompression sickness.
- If uncertified, dive only with a properly trained instructor, who has active teaching status (i.e. resort course).

For more information, contact a diving school in your area.