

TIPS AND TRICKS NO 5.

Take Control

Many divers venture into underwater photography armed with a point and shoot camera very early on in their diving career. Such cameras range from those with basic functions right through to those shooting in raw with full manual control of exposure settings. New divers are often too preoccupied with the challenges of diving skills to be a creative underwater photographer. Consequently most choose the easy to use auto exposure settings offered by their camera. Auto mode generally works quite well for land photography, so it should work well underwater too.



Whilst the diving skills improve with experience, often the underwater photography skills don't. Underwater photography results are very much hit and miss when shooting in auto. There will be some okay shots, several rubbish shots and the very occasional wow shot. This happens with or without using a strobe or 2.

Light underwater is very different to light above water. Underwater the light is affected by sea surface conditions, time of day, water clarity and depth to name a few. In auto mode the camera controls the image exposure. But auto exposure is designed to work with air being the medium for conveying light. Underwater light conditions are significantly different, whether or not strobes are used.

To improve underwater photography efforts and get consistently good images the key is to understand the behavior of light underwater and to shoot manually. By shooting manually you take control of your camera system, you tell it what to do and how to expose the image. Not surprisingly, it will obey.

I use 2 auto settings only for underwater photography. Auto focus and auto white balance. All other settings including strobe intensity is manual. Auto focus on both point and shoot and dSLR cameras works very well. If using strobes there is no point manually white balancing the camera. But if you are shooting natural light for some reason, it is important to manually white balance your camera.

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Expect the initial results to be poor and maybe even worse than using auto. But don't be dismayed. Make mistakes and learn from them. However tempting it is to slip that setting back into auto mode, don't. Persevere and learn how your camera deals with light and how you can control it. Very soon you will be amazed by the results.

It is also helpful to practice using manual settings when shooting on land. Whilst the light conditions will be different, it will help you to understand how the manual settings work.

Once you take control of your underwater camera system and begin understand how it works you will start to take consistently better photographs and make your friends go wow when they view your pictures.