

EXTREME SPORTS

HOLD YOUR BREATH

FREEDIVING IS THE MOST NATURAL WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE OCEAN. PROFESSIONAL DIVERS GO AS DEEP AS 100M WITH A SINGLE BREATH. CHRISTINA AND HER HUSBAND HAVE DEDICATED THEIR LIFE TO THE SPORT. IN THE INTERVIEW SHE TALKS ABOUT DANGERS, HER GREATEST EXPERIENCES AND HER BUCKET LIST.

BY MARK KUGEL



INTERVIEW: MARK KUGEL
PHOTOS: © ONE OCEAN ONE BREATH

ADVENTURE PLANET: How did you get into free diving?



CHRISTINA: I am Australian and grew up in the ocean-loving city of Sydney where the water and the beach featured prominently in my childhood and teenage years. Summer weekends revolved around the beach and swimming, so I have always had a strong connection with the water. In my early twenties I was exploring the world and traveled to the small tropical island of Koh Tao in Thailand to teach scuba diving when I saw some incredible underwater footage of freedivers swimming deep beneath the sea without equipment. It looked so free, pure and graceful that I decided that I had to give it a try. So I started freediving in 2005 when I completed my first course at the freediving school 'Apnea Total' on Koh Tao.

Eusebio, from Spain, was traveling through Southeast Asia when he noticed some divers holding their breath in a swimming pool for impressive lengths of time. He was intrigued and gave it a go himself to discover that he had

an incredible natural talent for breath-hold and a passion for freediving in the ocean. Following this he travelled to different countries including Egypt and Turkey to further his apnea experience and education before co-founding the school 'Apnea Total' in Koh Tao, Thailand in 2004.

ADVENTURE PLANET: What makes free diving more exciting for you than traditional scuba diving?

CHRISTINA: Scuba diving is a leisure activity and a way to witness the ocean. Freediving is a sport and is more interactive; it is a way to participate with the ocean and the marine life. Eusebio and I are deep ocean freedivers with Eusebio being one of the few men to have surpassed the 100 metre barrier on one breath alone, and I have dived to the depths of 82 metres on one breath. The feeling and sensations of deep freediving is sublime, exhilarating and there are sensations of great satisfaction when your training has paid off.



Deep beneath
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Freediving is as much physical as it is mental, so we never accept personal limitations or boundaries. Deep beneath the ocean is where you discover yourself and your mind, which is what empowers you to push boundaries beyond what you previously thought was impossible.

Freediving also gives you the opportunity to have more intimate interactions with marine creatures without cumbersome scuba equipment and noisy bubbles. Marine animals such as dolphins and sharks will approach you very curiously and this enables us to experience, photograph and film these encounters in close proximity.

ADVENTURE PLANET: How dangerous is it, what could possibly happen?

CHRISTINA: There are potential dangers inherent in the sport freediving when people do not follow the correct freediving safety rules and procedures. The first safety rule is to never freedive alone. The greatest danger is what is known as a 'Shallow Water Blackout', which is

essentially a blackout at the end of a freedive that typically occurs from 10 metres to the surface as a diver ascends. This danger is prevented when freediving with a safety diver who has the knowledge to rescue and recover a 'blacked-out' diver, who will then normally regain consciousness quite quickly. Of course, if you freedive alone, which is entirely against the freediving safety rules,



then a Shallow Water Blackout can essentially be fatal.

Secondly it is essential to freedive within your personal limits and knowledge in order to mitigate accidents. We always encourage people who are interested in freediving to seek out education from an experienced and established freediving centre with a high level of safety, standards and facilities.

ADVENTURE PLANET:

You made amazing pictures with reef sharks in Honduras. Why didn't the sharks attack you? Is there a trick?

CHRISTINA: We have had the opportunity to freedive with different species of sharks around the world including juvenile bull sharks, blacktip and whitetip reef sharks, leopard sharks, nurse sharks, oceanic whitetips and schooling hammerheads. The experience of freediving with the large Caribbean reef sharks of Roatan was exhilarating, but there are definitely no 'tricks' to speak of when dealing with instinctive and wild creatures.

We equip ourselves with knowledge of the species we are freediving with as well as going to these dive sites with the local experts who provide insight into any particular behaviours of the sharks in the area. You can't be foolhardy when freediving with sharks, of course you have to be game and have confidence, however you need knowledge of the behaviour of sharks to know how to interact calmly underwater with them, how to interpret aggressive signals and know if and when it is necessary to retreat to the boat.

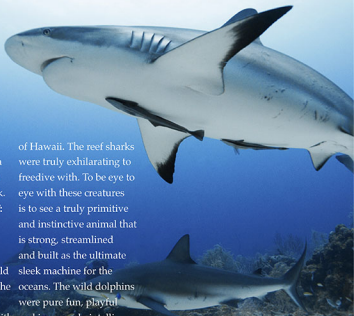
When a shark bites a human it is an **accident**, not an **attack**.

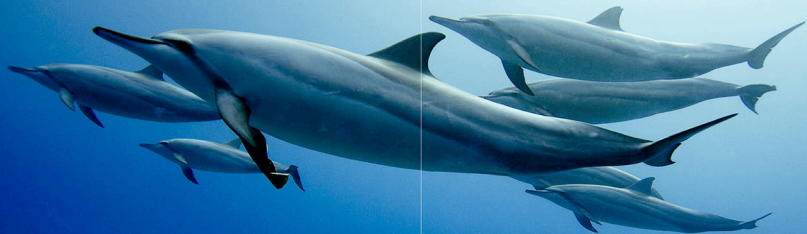
Humans are not on the menu for sharks. When a shark bites a human it is an accident, not an attack.

ADVENTURE PLANET: What was your greatest experience with underwater life so far?

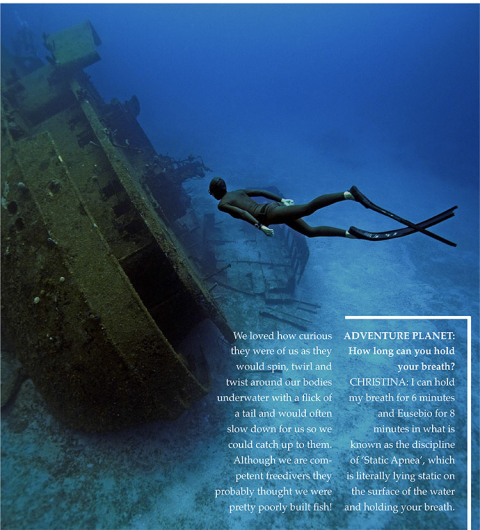
CHRISTINA: There would be two: freediving with the Caribbean reef sharks of Roatan and freediving with the wild spinner dolphins

of Hawaii. The reef sharks were truly exhilarating to freedive with. To be eye to eye with these creatures is to see a truly primitive and instinctive animal that is strong, streamlined and built as the ultimate sleek machine for the oceans. The wild dolphins were pure fun, playful and immensely intelligent to freedive with.





They would often **slow down** so we could **catch up** to them.



We loved how curious they were of us as they would spin, twirl and twist around our bodies underwater with a flick of a tail and would often slow down for us so we could catch up to them.

Although we are competent freedivers they probably thought we were pretty poorly built fish!

ADVENTURE PLANET:

How long can you hold your breath?

CHRISTINA: I can hold my breath for 6 minutes and Eusebio for 8 minutes in what is

known as the discipline of 'Static Apnea', which is literally lying static on the surface of the water and holding your breath.



Adventure: To **discover** new physical and mental worlds, to **push** the limits and **redefine** personal boundaries.



However pure static breathholds on the surface is not what freediving is about for us and is not a discipline that we train. Freediving for us is about diving in the ocean, diving deep and diving with marine creatures.

ADVENTURE PLANET: How long would I need to train to get to that level?

CHRISTINA: Everyone's progression is different in the sport of freediving.

Freediving is a personal experience and not a comparative one and you need to keep this in mind in order to progress. Eusebio has been freediving for over a decade and I for 9 years. However complete novices who come to learn at Apnea Total will be freediving to 20 metres depths in only 2 days and between 30 to 40 metres depth in only 5 days. It is amazing what the human body is capable of; it is only a matter of learning under the tuition of an experienced and skilled instructor to unlock the freediving skills that are lying dormant within all of us.

ADVENTURE PLANET: What's your favorite diving spot?

CHRISTINA: We have many for different reasons. At the moment we are constantly drawn back to the Caribbean for the varied marine life, the incredible depths and blue warm waters.

ADVENTURE PLANET: Do you have a bucket list?

CHRISTINA: Always! Our list of freediving adventures is constantly evolving the more that we travel the world. This year we will be freediving with tiger sharks and we plan also one day to freedive with great whites, hammerhead sharks and humpback whales.

ADVENTURE PLANET: What does the word adventure mean to you?

CHRISTINA: To discover new physical and mental worlds, to push the limits and redefine personal boundaries.

A full-page background image showing a diver in a black wetsuit swimming horizontally in clear blue water. Several dolphins are swimming around the diver, some in the foreground and others further away. The water is very clear, and the lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

ADVENTURE PLANET: What do you teach in your courses?

CHRISTINA: There are different levels of courses at Apnea Total, starting with the Freediver Course to the Advanced Freediver, Master Freediver, Instructor and Instructor Trainer. A novice freediver will learn about the sport of freediving, equipment, specifically designed breathing techniques, diving techniques, physiology, equalisation, relaxation, safety procedures as well as practising all they have learnt in the water with a highly experienced Instructor.

ADVENTURE PLANET: What's your next big trip?

CHRISTINA: Our next big trip is to the Caribbean for 5 months to freedive with tiger sharks,

wild spotted dolphins and to attempt new records in the sled-diving disciplines of freediving.

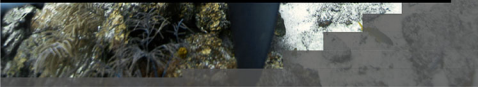
ADVENTURE PLANET: How can our readers follow you online or take free diving lessons?

CHRISTINA: Readers can follow the freediving adventures and projects of Eusebio and I on our personal website of 'One ocean One breath' – www.oneoceanonebreath.com

For those who are interested in experiencing freediving, they can learn at the freediving headquarters of 'Apnea Total' in Koh Tao, Thailand – www.apneatotal.com. Alternatively there are many Instructors and schools worldwide teaching the Apnea Total education system where people can also start their freediving education.

VIDEO

FREEDIVING WITH CARRIBEAN REEF SHARKS



ONE OCEAN ONE BREATH

One ocean One breath is a freediving collaboration between dual record holders Eusebio and Christina Saenz de Santamaria; a husband and wife duo, professional freedivers and record-holders, creative underwater photographers and filmmakers who explore the world and the oceans depths on one breath alone.

EUSEBIO originally from Bilbao in northern Spain has been involved in freediving for over a decade and is a leader in freediving education worldwide. In 2004 Eusebio co-founded Apnea Total, one of the world's largest freediving education systems. Since this time, Eusebio has educated and trained thousands of freedivers from beginner level through to the professional as well as world champion spearfishermen.

Eusebio's personal performances include being a former National Record holder for Spain in the three depth categories. He currently freedives to 100 metres in depth in the self-powered disciplines, a triple-figure barrier that very few men in the world have surpassed.

CHRISTINA originally from Sydney, Australia discovered the sport of freediving in 2005 after completing her first freediving courses at Apnea Total. Since then Christina has broken and estab-



lished new freediving records around the world and now coaches at Apnea Total. She is an 8-time National Record Holder and currently holds the Australian National Records in two depth disciplines of Constant Weight and Free Immersion to 80 metres, making her the deepest Australian female freediver in history and ranking her among the top 5 deepest women in the world for Free Immersion.

Eusebio and Christina are based on the small tropical island of Koh Tao in Thailand where they train and coach freediving; however they spend 6 months of the year travelling, freediving and exploring the world and the ocean, creating under-water photography and videos, as well as aiming for new depths and personal records in freediving.

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