



We design, manufacture and retail scuba and rebreather equipment. We have fully equipped test and certification labs, and can pressure test large items in our vacuum chambers, as well as run fully automated leak test and dive simulations down to 400m. Our EMC and EMF lab is filled with state-of-the-art equipment for testing electromagnetic compatibility and electromagnetic fields. We also have a large in-house laser for cutting and engraving on plastics and metals. www.narkedat90.com

The nine-metre-long RIB sped past the temple of Poseidon perched on Cape Sounion high above. The early morning sunshine reflecting off the tall stone pillars made the monument look even more impressive. Hopefully, the mythical Sea God was watching over us as we headed out to the wreck site, a paddle steamer lying in two pieces at a maximum depth of 50m. We passed by the final resting place of the HMHS Britannic and the SS Burdigala, the latter wreck being the main purpose of my visit, scheduled for later in the week.

Several days earlier, I had touched down in Athens, Greece, where I met up with diving friend Marinos Giourgas, who manages Aegeantec (www.aegeantec.gr), a tech-diving outfit based just outside of the capital. I first met Marinos in 2017 while diving in Malta with Techwise, and then again in 2018, when we explored a German JU-52 transport plane lying off the coast of Rhodes at a maximum depth of 75m. Marinos works closely with Athens Divers Club, a PADI five-star facility owned by IDC Staff Instructor Petros Delagrammatikas. The dive centre is also an authorized PADI Tec Rec centre, where Marinos manages the technical diving section. He offers PADI DSAT coursestraining up to full trimix, level are offered along with tech guided dives for both OC and CCR divers.

The majority of tech divers visiting Athens are lured by the main attraction, HMHS Britannic, which is a great shame, as the seabed around Piraeus harbour is absolutely loaded with historical and modern-day shipwrecks. Marinos had made plans for us to explore as many wrecks in the 50m and 60m range as possible leading up to the grand finale, ocean liner SS Burdigala, lying upright at a maximum depth of 76m. The Burdigala is normally used as a 'warm-up' dive for a Britannic expedition, but many divers have said the wreck was as good as the main act, while some say even better.

Journey time from the airport to Athen's dive club, based at Anavyssos, is about 25-35 minutes (taxi fare approximately €35 each way). The centre is open all year round for both recreational and tech diving. I had left my trip a little late in the season. Marinos recommends visiting either in May or September, when it's not too hot and not too busy with tourists. Early October was extremely quiet, with some of the restaurants already closed up for the winter.

Marinos had put together a loose package offering various standards of accommodation ranging from extreme basic to comfortable. I opted for 'basic', which even went below my own estimation of the word. The Calypso hotel had been caught in a time warp, with 1970's-style pine furnishings and bathrooms. I even found a couple of old juke boxes gathering dust in the corner of the restaurant. But on the upside, everything was functional and spotlessly clean, and the sea view made up for any feelings of discomfort. I have never had my bed sheets changed three times in a week! Prices for a double or twin room are €60 B&B even during peak season. The family owned hotel sits right next door to the beach, boat mooring and dive centre, which was a huge plus.

The major downer is there are no other restaurants or a decent-sized supermarket within walking distance, so choice is limited somewhat unless I hired a car or paid for a taxi. ▶

“ I followed Marinos over to the remains of the bow, where the sunlight streaming through the deck supports looked very dramatic and was probably the my best shot of the day ”

Burdigala OR BUST!

Stuart Philpott broke out his tech-diving equipment and headed for Athens in Greece with one mission in mind – to dive the SS Burdigala. Would Poseidon support his efforts?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STUART PHILPOTT

Marinos said he was happy to ferry me down to the shops to gather provisions a couple of times during the week, and would do the same for any visiting tech divers. There is also a little shop selling pastries, ice creams, biscuits and crisps next door to the dive centre. They even rustle up a tasty home-cooked lunch most days. During the evenings I managed to sample a few of the local restaurants. The moussaka and souvlaki were particularly tasty, and prices were not too expensive, even with a carafe of wine thrown in.

The three-star Alexander hotel and the four-star Ever Eden beach resort are located just a few miles down the road. I took a look inside the Alexander and some parts of the hotel had been modernised, while some of the rooms were still 1980's decor. But there was a good-sized swimming pool, bar and beach facilities, so probably a better choice for families. Prices were in the region of €70 B&B. I didn't bother checking out the neighbouring Ever Eden, as internet prices quoted €170 a night, which was way too classy for most of the divers I know! The final option was an AirBnB apartment that sleeps six for €200 per night, which is located right next to the Calypso hotel and has an uninterrupted view of the picturesque little bay.

Aegeantec offer nine normoxic wrecks at depths between 40m-65m, this include planes, paddle steamers and freighters, and six full trimix wrecks at depths between 70m-120m, including a U-boat, and the one-and-only Britannic. Some of the wrecks require permits, so booking up in advance will avoid any disappointments. Boat journey times vary from 15 minutes to one hour 30 minutes. I spent my first day warming up on several shallower wrecks. It had been a number of months since my last tech dive, so I wanted to get comfortable again wearing a twinset and stages. The remains of SS Eleni lie about ten minutes RIB ride away. Even though the wreck is well broken up, there are still one or two overhead sections to negotiate at a maximum depth of 29m. The second dive site was located close to the steep cliff face at Legrena. Over the years a number of cars, vans and trucks had been driven



There is some great wreck penetration



Monster propeller

off the road either as an insurance scam or stolen and then dumped. Depths range between 20m-35m. The first car we sighted had been badly crushed, so I couldn't make out what it was, but the Jeep Wrangler complete with B.F. Goodrich tyres was still recognisable. We followed the wall, stopping to look at various bits of wreckage, most covered in a thick layer of growth. On our deco stop a bottlenose dolphin swam around us and then disappeared into the blue. Marinos said they were often sighted due to the nearby fish farms.

My first 'serious' dive was on a World War Two Italian Savoia Marchetti SM79 fighter bomber lying at a maximum depth of 59m. I was using OC, so opted for 19/35 in my twins, a 32 percent deco gas one 1 and a 72 percent deco gas two, giving me a bottom time of 25 minutes. Marinos had prepped his JJ rebreather. Weather and surface conditions couldn't

“ Athens, Greece, is not just about the Britannic. There is a good range of wrecks suitable for all experience levels, depths ranging from 20m to 120m ”



Greek waters off superlative tech diving

COMPUTERS • O2 CELLS • GAS ANALYSERS CABLES & CONNECTORS • REBREATHER PARTS PATHFINDER STROBES • SENSORS TOOLS • SOLENOIDS



The wrecks are great for photographers

have been any better. An hour later we were at Poros Island kitting up for the dive. I had already watched a video of the wreck site on YouTube and discussed the optimum positions for my pictures. A wide-angle plan view of the intact plane with Marinos shining his light inside the cockpit was my number-one picture composition. The three radial Alfa Romeo engines with props still attached came a close second, followed by the cockpit complete with dials, throttle and glass canopy. As far as World War Two aeroplane wrecks go, it wouldn't get much better than this!

The descent was uneventful until we hit 54m. For some reason, the seabed had erupted into a cloud of silt which was steadily rising up towards us. I caught site of the plane's propeller tip and could just about make out the fuselage, but with only one to two metres of visibility, I had absolutely no chance of getting any decent pictures, let alone explore the wreck. Marinos had no idea what had caused the silt cloud. There was a hotel on the shore nearby and he thought there might be an effluent pipe flushing out somewhere. If so, there was a whole lot of effluent coming out! The wind had changed direction while we were preparing to dive, so maybe this had caused an upwelling? Marinos last dived at the site in June where water clarity on the day had been 30 metres plus. Whatever the reason for the extreme variation, this was a huge disappointment for both of us.

The following day Marinos planned a dive at Kea Island, the final resting place of paddle steamer Patris. The ship hit the reef and sank in 1868 without any loss of life. She now lies in two pieces at a maximum depth of 50m. I was feeling quite apprehensive as we kitted up for the dive. I wasn't concerned about my equipment, surface conditions or the dive itself, just the underwater visibility! Again I checked out several YouTube videos just to see where the most-photogenic areas were likely to be. In this case, the giant paddle wheel, squared off stern with lifeboat

davits, and the skeletal remains of the bow section. Costas, our support diver, peered over the sponson and assured me the water clarity looked much better, which raised my confidence levels. We did a bubble check and made our descent down the shotline to the wreck site. I was relieved to see the visibility was at least 25 metres, maybe more. I got some great shots at the stern, and my strobes illuminated the bright red sponges growing over the metal structure. I followed Marinos over to the remains of the bow, where the sunlight streaming through the deck supports looked very dramatic. We made our way up the side of the reef wall and finished our deco watching the reef fish nibbling on the flora.

The advanced weather forecast was beginning to look grim. Strong winds coming from the north didn't bode well for diving, but for now we soldiered on. Close to Piraeus harbour at a maximum depth of 52m lies the Pilaros. In September 1976, the 59-metre-long freighter was carrying a cargo of timber from Dubrovnik to Syria when she capsized and sank. The crew had already abandoned ship, so no fatalities were reported. The bridge, the rudder, and propeller and the openings on deck area are well worth exploring.

Athens, Greece, is not just about the Britannic. There is a good range of wrecks suitable for all experience levels, depths ranging from 20m to 120m. I was surprised to hear that there had only been around 30 small groups visiting the area in the past few years, so this is still pretty much virgin territory. Currently, it's just Marinos running the tech show, with some strong support from Athen's Dive Club staff and facilities. Unfortunately, on this trip, shit did happen. I had the foresight to add one or two contingency days to my trip just in case, but I didn't expect to be battling with the weather and underwater visibility in the Med of all places. I guess if there's one thing I've learnt over the past 30 years of diving, it's that nothing is ever predictable. As soon as I returned to the UK, the weather conditions around Athens returned to mirror calm with excellent underwater visibility every day! This time around I had lucked out on the Burdigala, but I did manage to explore some of the shallower wrecks ranging from 20m-60m. From what I could see, the area has a lot of potential, enough for me to book a follow-up trip sometime next year. I will get on the Burdigala! ■



You can get epic vis in the Mediterranean