

Clifton Gardens

Featured Dive

Category: Shore Dive

Depth: 8 m (jetty), 14 m (wreck)

Rating: Easy, open water certification required

Access: Carpark, Clifton Gardens Reserve, Mosman

John Turnbull

Executive Committee Member, National Parks Association of NSW

Location

Right in the middle of Sydney, this easy shore dive never ceases to amaze me. If you get it on a bad day (i.e. poor visibility) it's a muck dive treasure hunt; on a good day like we've been getting this winter it's a photographer's delight.

You don't have to go far – in fact, the last couple of dives I've stayed under the jetty, less than 100 m from shore. I like to jump in off the end of the jetty and end my dive back on the sand. The jetty is where you'll find all the interesting critters like White's and Big-belly Seahorses, Painted and Striate Anglerfish, Nudibranchs, Red Rock Crabs, Decorator Crabs, Pygmy Leatherjackets, Red and Mourning Cuttles and more sponges and ascidians than you can poke a stick at (not literally of course!). The best spots are the pylons themselves, around the base of the pylons and the netting on the swim enclosure.

If you want to venture further afield you can swim out to the "wreck" – it's an old yacht that sank to the bottom in a convenient spot. Out here you'll get Red Bigeye, Pineapple Fish, various Leatherjackets and, if you're lucky, the odd Pipefish and Blenny-in-a-bottle en

route. You can find the wreck by surface swimming out to the yellow buoy, or following the chains on the bottom.

Equipment

Normal SCUBA gear is fine for this dive, but it can get dark under the jetty so a torch is recommended. Go slowly – if you swim around too quickly you'll just stir up sediment and pass right over all those well-camouflaged critters. Take a macro lens if you have one, as most of the marine life will happily pose for you as you creep up for that one great shot. Whilst some people snorkel here, in my view it's too deep to see the good stuff under the jetty with a snorkel unless you're a freediver. On snorkel, however, it is worth exploring the seagrass beds close to shore in the swim enclosure as you'll see Luderick, Tube Anemones, Toadfish and a Flounder if you're lucky.

Hazards

There are a few hazards to watch out for at Clifton Gardens. The ferry comes in from time to time and recreational boaters pose a risk if you surface without warning away from the jetty.

You also have to watch out for discarded and active fishing gear; there is quite a bit hanging from the pylons and tangled on the bottom, and I have had a dive buddy hooked at this site. It's safest to stay under the jetty, or right away from it at the wreck.

Overall it's a great dive considering it's on the doorstep of our biggest city. Last dive there we had 15 m visibility and I counted 30 species of small fish and invertebrates just under the jetty. Get in early though – it's popular on weekends!

Clifton Gardens Media

Video: bit.ly/clifftongardens

Photos: bit.ly/clifftongardensp



Diver under the jetty **Photo:** John Turnbull

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