

# (RE)BREATHE DEEPER

Reap the benefits of closed-circuit scuba at Wakatobi Resort, where rebreathers have been a staple since the early days  
By: **Walt Stearns**

The reef system surrounding Wakatobi Resort presents divers with an impressive array of underwater topographies with profiles beginning a mere one to three metres (3–10 feet) from the surface plunging to drop-offs bounding into the abyss. For open-circuit divers, a single bottle will easily provide a run time of 60 to 70 minutes without even going into deco. The one limiting detail is depth, as recreational divers are pretty much confined to the upper part of these reefs, between the surface and 39 metres (128ft). For these divers, what lies beneath will

remain a mystery, unless of course they happen to be diving a closed-circuit rebreather.

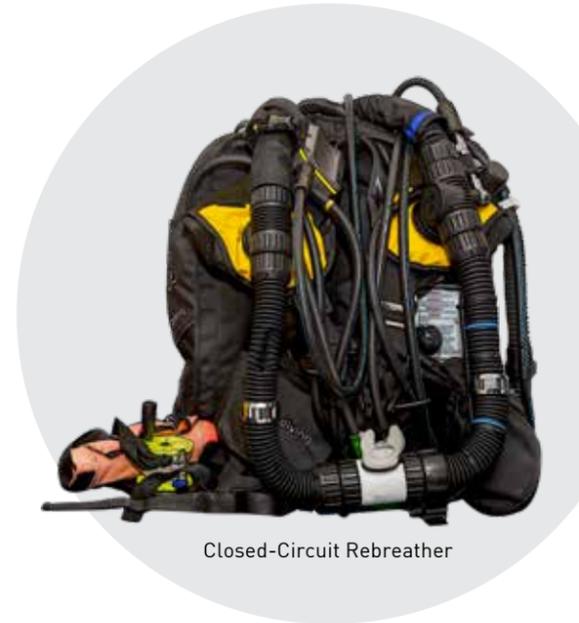
While this sophisticated underwater breathing apparatus has in no way replaced the widespread use of open-circuit scuba, their popularity has grown substantially. In addition to the benefits of delivering warmer, moister gas for the diver to breathe, which can go a long way in reducing the loss of body heat and dehydration for added comfort, the most beneficial aspects of a closed-circuit rebreather

(CCR) is the ability to provide extended range dive profiles in terms of both depth and time. Then there is the silent factor, as most rebreathers can perform this task without making hardly any noise at all, which often allows divers to approach marine life without startling them.

The one complication for diving CCRs in remote locations around the world is the operations offering support must be able to provide more than a sufficient supply of pure oxygen and absorbent medium for the rebreather's scrubber as well as air, nitrox or even helium for the unit's supply cylinders and bailout tanks. The operation's staff should have adequate knowledge and understanding of CCR diving, as they often encompass modified diving itineraries to accommodate longer run times.

## AMONG THE FIRST

Dating back to 2006, Wakatobi has actively catered to CCR diving in the Indo-Pacific region, and is among the very first to have done so. Here, rebreather divers are provided not only the support structure required to service their equipment, but they also have access to the same reefs that allow open-circuit scuba divers to enjoy long multi-level dives. To a rebreather diver, this can be nirvana, as a profile can begin with the investigation of the deeper portions of a given site, followed by a long, leisurely hour-plus ascent along the side of the reef. Taking into consideration that reef profiles often terminate just below the surface, the underwater scenery along with its abundant collection of marine life is unending until the diver exits the water.



Closed-Circuit Rebreather

**“Overall, it would be hard to imagine a more perfect environment. You don't have to dive a rebreather to experience all the wonderful attractions of Wakatobi, but having these systems can add yet another layer to your enjoyment of Wakatobi's magnificent ecosystem.”**  
– Craig Willemsen,  
Owner of Silent World Diving

**RIGHT:** One the greatest advantages CCR divers have is the ability to stay submerged for extended periods of time  
**FAR RIGHT:** At Wakatobi divers have the option to enjoy extended CCR dives mere steps away from the dive centre, entering from the beach or off the jetty ladder  
**IMAGES:** Marco Fierli



## HIGHLIGHTS

Why Wakatobi took on this level of service is due to the interests of the resort's founder, Lorenz Mäder. Soon after purchasing his first rebreather, Lorenz realised the need to invest in the systems required to support closed-circuit diving, and not just for his own benefit. The dive centre quickly acquired the appropriate equipment and supplies. This includes gas boosters and oxygen supply for pumping CCR oxygen cylinders to 206-bar (3,000 psi). Additionally, a constant supply of Sofnolime 797 (8-12 mesh)

absorbent, along with a cache of two-litre CCR oxygen and Dil tanks in both steel and aluminium are on hand, along with an assortment of off-board bailout tanks and regulators. The measures do not end there, as the delivery of helium to support trimix diving is available when requested.

### GROUPS AND GUIDES

The resort maintains a steady level of support for up to 15 rebreather divers at all times. Larger groups can, with advanced notice, be accommodated

as well. Cartridge absorbent can also be provided given sufficient lead time to ensure shipping. To accommodate rebreather diving, Wakatobi's dive team maintains a set of protocols and boat schedules to carry out CCR intensive dives. Larger rebreather groups are often assigned their own boat, allowing them to take maximum advantage of the silent diving experience and enjoy the full freedom the technology allows. On many trips, rebreather divers are paired with a dive guide who is also rebreather qualified, and who



**ABOVE:** Rebreather divers can explore the deeper portions of Wakatobi's walls and reefs, taking their time as they move up into the shallows, **IMAGE:** Dr. Claus Meyer

**OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:** Wakatobi's house reef is ideal for rebreather diving. Divers have the option to enjoy extended CCR dives mere steps away from the beach fronting the resort's villas and bungalows, **IMAGE:** Walt Stearns

**OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM:** At Wakatobi rebreather divers are provided not only the support structure their equipment requires, but also enjoy a marine environment that is ideally suited to maximising the in-water benefits of rebreathers, **IMAGE:** Steve Miller



will accompany the dive team through an extended profile. Even on those occasions when rebreather-qualified guides are not available, the dive team can create a plan that allows rebreather divers to enjoy extended bottom times with guides on open-circuit equipment who split their services into two shifts.

### LIVEBOARD CCR

CCR diving is also available aboard Wakatobi's liveboard dive yacht, *Pelagian* – but only upon advance request of at least four months with Wakatobi's administrative offices in Bali.

Diving from *Pelagian* is conducted from the yacht's tenders, therefore diving a rebreather from these smaller boats requires a higher degree of fitness and comfort with

the equipment than would be the case aboard the resort's large day boats. In addition, because gear space aboard the tenders is limited on trips when the *Pelagian* is filled to capacity, CCR diving at such a time would be limited to a single off-board configuration rather than the more complex rigging needed to stage extended decompression or trimix dives.

Any rebreather divers planning to visit Wakatobi should be certified on the equipment they bring, as the resort is not geared to provide CCR instruction. Visiting groups are not allowed to perform their own classes, as the instruction would require an Indonesian permit. The dive centre stocks spare parts for AP Diving rebreathers, but divers using other brands will need to carry any spares they feel necessary.

Regardless of your preference to go deep or shallow, there are plenty of reasons to bring a rebreather to Wakatobi. But even with all these advantages, there's still one thing you will have in common with those who use traditional scuba: At the end of your trip, no matter how much bottom time you logged, you'll want to come back for more. **AD**

For more information about Wakatobi's rebreather support services, or to plan a trip, contact [office@wakatobi.com](mailto:office@wakatobi.com), or complete a quick trip inquiry at [www.wakatobi.com](http://www.wakatobi.com).