

HiTek Scuba

Purchasing Your “Personal” SCUBA Equipment



Most dive stores that teach scuba classes require you to either purchase your own personal gear from their store when you sign up for a class, or at the very least provide your own personal gear prior to the first pool session. Usually this cost is NOT included in the advertised course cost. The reason for this is three-fold. One of the big reasons that you need to buy your own "personal" stuff is for health reasons. It's very difficult to keep items like booties, snorkels, and masks disinfected between each class use. I don't know about you, but I would rather not put on a pair of boots against my bare feet that just came from another class. Not to mention grabbing someone else's snotty mask. Another reason is that because we humans come in all different shapes and sizes, it would be very difficult and costly to carry enough rental gear to accommodate everyone for those types of items. Finally, those personal items we're talking about require a very good "personal" fit in order to function. The items we are referring to are: **mask, snorkel, fins, boots, and gloves**. Improper fit or style of those items would mean that the diver would not be comfortable underwater; a situation that new divers want to avoid at all costs. If your personal gear doesn't work for you, then you won't be safe and you probably won't be having fun either. Safety is the name of the game here, and of course we always want to have fun as well....right?

So what should you do? Well, first begin by reviewing the material from your PADI Open Water Diver Manual on equipment that begins on page 27. This is a good place to start. The material will help you become familiar with the different pieces of equipment, what they are used for, and what features to look for. Next, you might go take a look at some of the gear in several dive shops to see what they offer. I wouldn't buy anything yet, just look at stuff and maybe try stuff on. Finally, I would talk to your dive instructor about equipment and see if there are any considerations that are relevant specifically to the locations that you plan on diving (warm water, cold water, etc.). WE dive cold water here, so the equipment needs to suit cold water diving. Usually, if the gear is of high enough quality to use here, it will work where the water is warmer without problems, the reverse is not always true. HiTek Scuba has put together some packages that have worked very well for most students in the past, and based on experience we definitely know what minimum features you're going to need. Since we are a training company, and not a retail store, we sell it basically for what it costs. We have no intention of making money by selling equipment. This is a very personal thing though, so if you want to "customize" your basic equipment (one piece from here, one from there) then feel free to go "collect" your own stuff. Especially if you happen to be one of those people that has a hard time finding stuff that "fits" right. Other wise you can ask us about buying "personal gear packages", and we'll be happy to provide you with information on what we offer.

Regarding Your Mask Purchase

The mask fit is the single most important fit in scuba diving equipment. If the mask doesn't fit right then it will leak, pinch, or worse, generally making diving miserable. Cost of the mask has nothing to do with fit. Personally I have tried on and dove dozens of different masks primarily just to see what they are like, but I was lucky many years ago, because I found one that fit me very well back in 1989

and I've worn it as my main mask ever since. In my many years of experience however, I've noticed that the mask that I use fits a very wide range of people and faces very well. That doesn't mean that there aren't a lot of other masks out there that will also fit your face.

There are many different shapes out there now, basic square, tear drop, rounded, multiple windows, single window, and variations of all those. The only one that I have seen problems with as far as shape goes is the teardrop shape. One possible problem that I have seen students that buy one of these masks come across, is that exhaust bubbles from their regulator are more likely to catch and push the mask away from their face causing it to leak. Once divers get used to clearing their mask, this isn't as big of a problem. The single window type has a drawback in that it is not conducive to changing or replacing the lenses if they get scratched or damaged, and you cannot use prescriptive lenses if you should need them at some point.

The TUSA Liberator Plus, and masks that are similar to this style, have the advantages of a low volume profile, dual removable lenses, and a rectangular design that seems to stay on a divers face really well. The TUSA Geminus, or masks that are similar, are another good mask design with excellent vision, designed for those with a slightly wider face. There are many others, most of them are from a similar mold with different frame configuration. The big feature you should be looking for however is a low volume mask, as it states in the PADI manual, is important to make clearing of the mask easier especially for beginners. When you have to exhale into your mask to clear it, the less effort expended to do that, the better.

Regarding Your Fins Purchase

Fins are all about thrust to effort ratios and maneuverability. Long fins or fins made of heavier material require more leg strength to make them work, and they are much more difficult to maneuver. If you don't have the leg strength, then you will get leg cramps, foot cramps, sore muscles, and leg fatigue during your dives. Also if the fins are real long, then they tend to hang down behind you unless you keep them in constant motion. This causes the fin to touch and stir up the bottom, which damages fragile marine life, and makes your dive buddies hate diving with you. These people are called "Bottom Pounders".

One of the biggest causes of bottom pounding that I see is the macho guy with the biggest fins in the store because "size matters" right? If, however, you are a very strong swimmer, (fin swimming is different than swimming in a pool for exercise by the way) and can handle long or heavy fins, then you will be able to travel faster and swim against a stronger current with the larger fins, but you MUST be able to control where your fins go and do so with purpose. So you need to evaluate yourself, the kind of diving you will be doing etc. and then make a decision. I recommend any of the fins that I list in the packages that we offer (check with us at orientation for more information). The X-Ten fins from TUSA are great starter fins they are light, maneuverable and require very little leg strength to operate. The amount of thrust is the least of all the fins that I recommend, but it is still plenty for most diving situations that you will encounter in your entry level experiences. The Expert Z-3 Zoom split fins are definitely a lot more expensive, but they have the advantage of providing more thrust than the lighter fins with about the same amount of effort, therefore they have a good thrust to effort ratio. On the down side, they tend to sink, and because of the lack of surface area they do not stay up behind you as easy when you stop swimming, instead they drop to the bottom, and you can't frogkick with them either. The Imprex fins or Tri-ex fins are much less expensive but a bit more work to manipulate than the split fins. Because of the heavier material they provide more thrust than the X-Ten fins, they are a bit longer as well. The downside of course is that the extra thrust with this style fin requires stronger muscles to manipulate. Again, for the most part cost should have little to do with your choice of fins, it's more about what type of diving you are doing, and what body type will be trying to use those fins.