

Interview with **Sarah DeGraves**

2008 GoPRO Challenge Testimonial Contest

\$10,000 Grand Prize Winner

2008 GoPROSM Challenge

PADI: Tell us about yourself.

Sarah: I am a MSDT from Maryland, that started diving in 2006 when I went to visit a friend, Jessi, who worked in Honduras as a PADI Instructor. I was supposed to take a six month backpacking trip around Central America, but Jessi encouraged me to try diving, which I fell in love with! I ended up staying on the island of Roatan for five months completing my Open Water Diver through Divemaster courses. I met my boyfriend, Cameron, there and in 2007 we traveled and dived around Asia eventually working in Dahab, Egypt last year before heading to Mexico at the beginning of this year to complete my IDC. We are both now living and working as PADI Instructors on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea.

PADI: Do you have a favorite dive buddy?

Sarah: One of my favorite buddies is Alex - he was my good friend and instructor for my Advanced Open Water through Divemaster courses. I did about 75 of my first 100 dives with him and never laughed so much underwater. My first memories of diving will always begin with him along with a great big smile. My boyfriend, Cameron is my "most favorite" buddy. We have been lucky enough to travel to some amazing places and have done a lot of dives together. There is just something special about diving with the people that you love.

PADI: What is your favorite dive spot?

Sarah: That is a question I get asked by so many of my divers and it is so hard to answer! I love the diving on the West Coast of Thailand. I had my first conversation with a manta there. Also, off of Sipidan Island in Borneo where there seems to be as many turtles as there are grains of sand.

But if I had to say one place where I like the whole diving experience would have to be Dahab, Egypt. It is great shore diving, great people and so relaxed. Where else do you spend your surface interval surrounded by divers and camels in a Bedouin hut with a beautiful view of the Red Sea and the contrasting Sinai Mountains? The most difficult thing all day is deciding whether to have a fresh lime juice or a nap before you go in for your second dive.



PADI: What inspired you to become a diver?

Sarah: Honestly, I showed up on this island in Honduras and it was like I arrived in a world I didn't even know existed! I was surrounded by divers, including my friend, Jessi, whom I had come to see. I went to Sundowners for sunset drinks every day. Everyone there was talking about diving and what they had seen that day and I knew I had to try it. I was quite nervous at first but once we went on our first open water dive I was hooked! I remember it as if it were yesterday; I felt like I was in a movie and couldn't believe that I had been missing all this for my whole life!

PADI: Why did you decide to become a PADI Pro?

Sarah: When I did my dive courses, I took them one at a time not knowing if I would keep going. I started Divemaster training as a way to keep diving and learning about diving. Then, at some point, I realized I was living on this divers' island I knew that I could teach diving and that I didn't have to go back home (sorry mom!) to the real world; I was sold. I saw that



becoming a PADI Pro was a way to see the world and be able to maintain my lifestyle with what I loved - which was diving. I saw these people getting paid to dive and thought, what could be better?

PADI: Tell us about your current job.

Sarah: I am currently working as a dive instructor for H2O Divers in Malta.

We had a contract with an English Language School this summer and most of my students so far have been from the ages of 12-18, which has been such a great experience. I have been fortunate as a new instructor to teach a wide range of courses including Junior Open Water, Open Water, Advanced Open Water, Rescue, Emergency First Response, and even two Divemasters!!!

Because there are mostly Instructors working on the island, I get to take certified divers out as frequently as teaching courses which, is a good balance for me. Malta has great walls, caves and loads of wrecks, including some from WWII. It is great living in a diving town! And, I will have the opportunity to do my Staff Instructor Course in the spring after gaining more experience. I am fortunate to be able to keep my job over the winter (Brrrr!!!) and plan on staying here through next season as well.

PADI: Are you adventurous? Do you like to travel?

Sarah: YES!!! If I could I would travel constantly! There are so many places that I want to go and the list keeps growing. I love visiting new places and stepping off the plane with no idea of where I'm sleeping or how long I'm staying. It's the best way to travel! I'm keen to eventually get to all the amazing remote places one day like Micronesia, Galapagos and Lembeh Strait - just to name a few!

PADI: Was there a PADI Pro that acted as a mentor?

Sarah: My diving mentor, especially as a professional diver, is my boyfriend, Cameron. He is a PADI Instructor too, and he's been there since I started diving. He is a very driven, goal-oriented person who is always working and always focused on improving his skills. He is great at encouraging me, teaching me and has been there to help me achieve whatever goals I have set for myself. He taught me almost everything I know about diving.

PADI: What does winning the Go PRO Challenge mean to you?

Sarah: Well, it feels really great to be recognized for my video, especially because it is very personal to me. But the core of my story isn't unlike those of the Instructors I met in Roatan in the beginning (not to mention PADI Pros all over the world,) so it's quite nice to be able to share the story from all of us.

PADI: How do you see your future as a PADI Pro?

Sarah: I just became an Master Scuba Diver Trainer this season and plan on doing my staff instructor course in the spring after I have more experience. I am not very good at making long term plans, but I can't imagine my life without diving so I have a feeling I will be working as a PADI Pro for a while!

PADI: Is there anything we haven't asked you but would like to share?

Sarah: I was fortunate to be invited to Las Vegas for the DEMA Show and the PADI Member Social to be announced as the winner of the Go PRO Challenge. When I got the call that I was a finalist all my friends wanted to know why they hadn't seen the video but I was reluctant to share since it is quite personal. Little did I know that a few weeks later it would be shown to 1,000 people on 3 huge screens!!! We had such a great time at the the Member's Social and it left Cameron and I both feeling really fortunate to be a part of this dive community. There were so many people who came up to me that liked the video and said they felt the same way about diving. It made the shock of sharing my story with 1,000 strangers feel more like a privilege. Thanks to everyone at PADI for making me feel so special.

I also wanted to say that I am so lucky to have amazing family and great friends that support my unconventional lifestyle and I just wanted them to know how much I appreciate it.

PADI: What will you do with the \$10,000 US in prize money?

Sarah: To thank Cameron for everything especially all the amazing diving footage he has taken of us over the years, some of the money will go towards his PADI Staff Instructor Course and an Advanced Nitrox Instructor Course he will take this winter. I may splurge on a dry suit as I am shivering just thinking about the water temperature in Malta in the winter.

I plan to save some as well and the rest will definitely go towards a diving holiday ideally with a big group of friends and BIG FISH!



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