

Snorkelling in South Devon

This document is based on a discussion on the SoSD Facebook site by contributors, C1 and C2, who are local snorkellers

Recommended places in South Devon and east Cornwall

Great snorkelling spots are:

Babbacombe, Ansteys Cove, Meadfoot, Armchair Rock, Elberry, Churston Cove, Fishcombe Cove, Brixham Breakwater, Fairy Cove, Hope Cove, Soar Mill Cove, South Milton, Thurlestone, Wembury, Heybrook, Rum Bay, Kingsands, Cawsands, Finnygook, Portwrinkle, Talland Bay and Millendreath.

Not recommended

Dawlish and Teignmouth are hardly ever clear, probably because of their proximity to the outflows from the rivers Exe and Teign.

Best conditions

C1 The state of tide can be any, because you get different views although low springs might not be swimmable for some locations!

C2. From my experience each site has its own merits at certain times of the tide. You have to take time at each site to get to understand its rhythm. Definitely no waves and no swell is best although that doesn't happen very often. For example, at Cawsands and Talland Bay I would go out at high tide to snorkel round all the submerged rocks. Babbacombe at night is pretty awesome.

C1. Goodrington or Broadsands at dusk/after dark have been really good for cuttlefish. Will check.

Kit

C1. From May onwards water will be noticeable warmer (it's already warming noticeably for those of us who swim all year with no suit). A standard wetsuit for water sports will do, unless you have need to swim crawl, in which case a swim specific one for more flexibility in shoulders. But they tend to be thinner in parts at least. A pair of fins is really good for getting down, maybe a weight belt if you're really serious about it, but might need some breath hold training too. If not fins then neoprene shoes for rocky bits. I have a belt with camera pouch on it for easy access but put it away when swimming.

Personally I don't go too deep for too long, but still really enjoy ducking down for a few strokes and practising slow, low energy demand movements. A good place to do this is inside the old jetty that shows at mid-low tide at Institute Beach, Livermead.

C2. As with everything you can spend as little or as much as you like depending how far you want to take this hobby. I started off with a standard full wetsuit with a zip and get fed up with flushing. So I bought a 2 piece 5 mm spearfishing suit with an integrated hood. It means I can stay in the water for longer. The piece is 5 mm and is super toasty. It overlaps from waist to chest which gives 10 mm.

I would recommend a separate mask and snorkel for flexibility; a hood; and some form of neoprene boots/shoes. Maybe fins if you want to dive down more or go some distance. I would only introduce lead weights if you are seriously buoyant or want to start diving and staying down for a period. But research breath hold techniques first.

I built it up over time and geared it up to night time use as well. It's amazing how many sea creatures come out to play at night. It's probably a good idea to hook with someone who's done it before on your first couple of times. Also, no matter what kit you end up getting the main thing is that you are comfortable, having a great time, enjoying the underwater world and being happy snapping all the amazing sea creatures and maths many colour seaweeds. If you only want to go out in warmer weather then 3 mm is fine. 5 mm you could use throughout the year. Sometimes I don't move around much especially if I'm trying to get a particular shot so staying warm is important.

Flushing is water ingress via weaker points of a wetsuit especially back zipped suits. You'll find cheaper suits are prone to this. One way around that is to buy a neoprene sleeveless top with an integrated hood which you wear over your wetsuit. I think people generally put up with flushing in the summer months.

I got frustrated with flushing so I sold my wetsuit and bought my 2 piece. Haven't looked back and so glad I did. But it just depends how far you want to take your hobby. Yes, a hood will keep your head warm and will make a difference.

This is all the kit I wear now.

