

# SCUBA

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The Official Magazine of Britain's Biggest Diving Club

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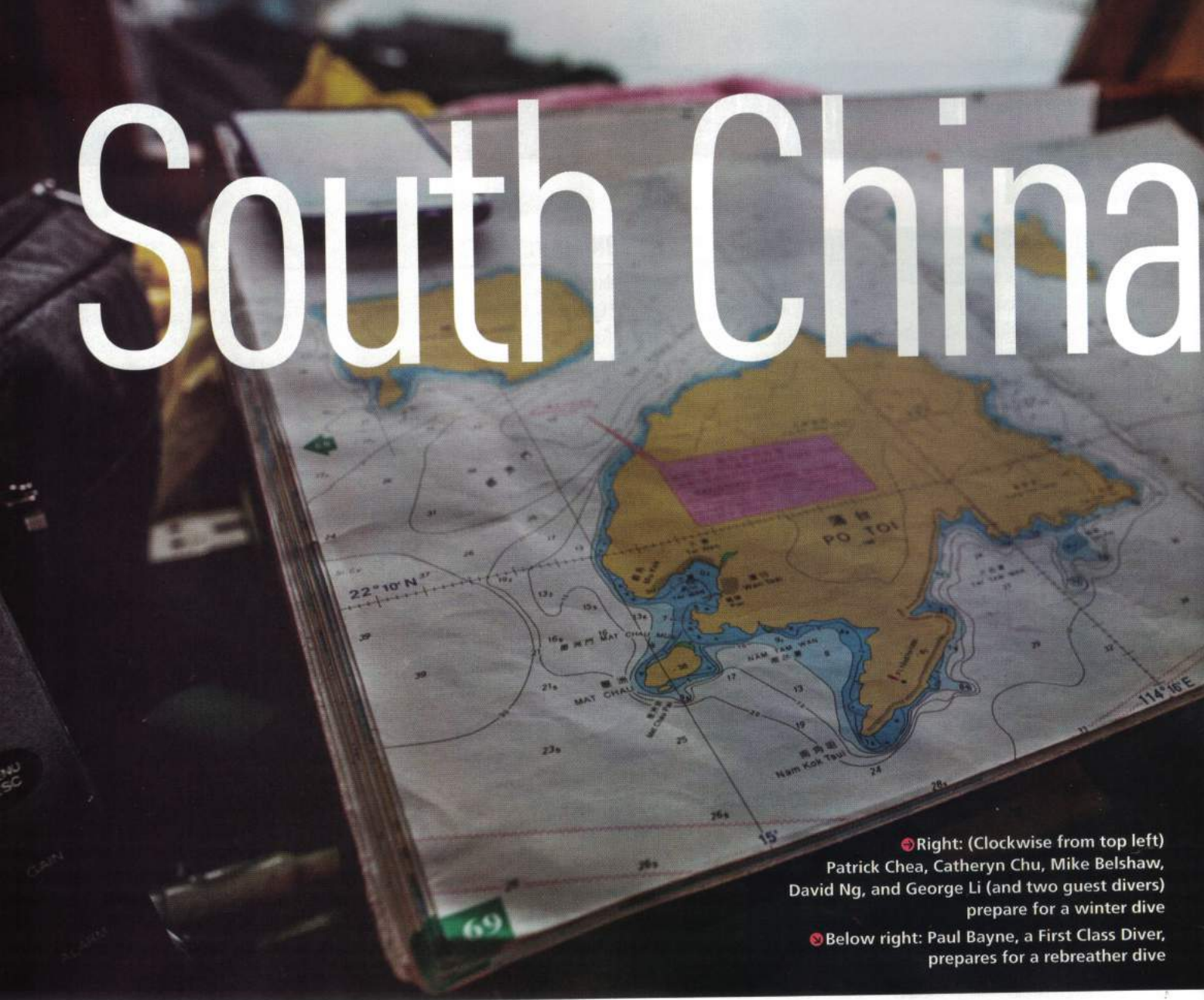


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# South China



Right: (Clockwise from top left) Patrick Chea, Catheryn Chu, Mike Belshaw, David Ng, and George Li (and two guest divers) prepare for a winter dive  
Below right: Paul Bayne, a First Class Diver, prepares for a rebreather dive

British administration of Hong Kong ended in 1997, but BSAC still has a friendly presence in the fragrant harbour thanks to this busy, diverse club. Interview by **Kristina Pedder**

## NOT ALL BSAC MEMBERS ARE IN THE UK.

The South China Diving Club is based in Hong Kong, which is now a Special Administration Region of China in the southern province of Guangdong. The local culture is predominantly Cantonese-speaking Chinese but there are many expatriate workers from a variety of countries, mostly from Europe and America.

This is a very diverse club with members representing many cultures. During dive expeditions or social events you hear a variety of languages spoken and see a wide variety of food being shared.

What's different to the UK? The most obvious answer is that the water is warmer: 29°C in summer and 14°C in winter, so it's a mix of wetsuit and even drysuit diving.

However, most members visiting from the UK would immediately recognise that in terms of its spirit, this overseas club is no different from theirs. Members organise regular diving, there are weekly social events and a deep appreciation and enjoyment of diving.

## Q What kind of divers are your members?

A In 2016 we had 51 members: These included five trainees, 11 Ocean Divers; 13 Sports Divers; 12 Dive Leaders; 8 Advanced Divers and two First Class Divers. About half are long-term and the rest join for two to three years at a time. Among our members we have five Advanced Instructors, two Open Water Instructors and two Assistant Diving Instructors.

## Q What resources does the club have?

A In the past few years we have downsized to make the club more cost effective. Having had a compressor and selection of cylinders for many decades, we finally sold them to the local dive shop and we vacated a rented storage facility that we had used for more than 20 years. We also sold off all club kit, including regulators and BCDs. We have retained all of our safety equipment, including oxygen kits, first aid kits, Dive Manager kits, drift lines, shots and buoys, which we store in a much smaller, more economical location. Overall we found the maintenance of our own equipment was costly and difficult to manage, and didn't provide much advantage compared with renting equipment, when required.

# Diving Club



**Membership Fees:**  
HK\$1,600

**Contact:**  
info@scdc.org.hk

**Online:**  
www.scdc.org.hk



## Q What boats do you use?

**A** We hire three types of boats regularly. What we call a 'junk' is really more of a large pleasure-cruiser (18m in length) with a covered area in the stern with plenty of seating and space for kitting up as well as relaxing, plus a lower deck where there is usually a pantry and changing area. These tend to be slow, travelling at around 10 knots, but comfortable, with space for up to 26 people. We also hire a slightly smaller (11m) and faster (18 knots) type of boat that might typically be used for sport fishing, these go further but can only take 10 divers. Last are the small open boats that are fast but can only carry eight divers. Our standard boat fee is HK\$250 (about £25) per diver.

## Q What has the club achieved in the past year?

**A** In 2015 BSAC recognised the club for qualifying a high number of Sports Divers and First Class Divers. Each year we run

training; typically we wait for at least four students to sign up to a course. We are finishing Ocean Diver training that started last summer, and a Sports Diver course started in March. There is interest in a Dive Leader course. However, we are really looking forward to the introduction of electronic versions of the training materials as it will save us time and a lot of postage.

## Q What is most popular?

**A** Skill Development Courses: First Aid and Oxygen Administration are very popular. Nitrox training is run once a year for new members. We are planning a Buoyancy and Trim Workshop to tie in with an archaeological survey course later in the year, to be taught through the Hong Kong Maritime Museum by Bill Jeffrey, professor of anthropology at the University of Guam. Buoyancy and Trim is a good complement to the archaeology, as conducting a survey requires taking measurements and drawings while being stable in the water.

**Q What is your local diving like?**

**A** The tropical climate is hot and humid in summer, cool and dry in winter. We dive all year round. We're often asked about whether diving in local waters is worth it. There's a common perception that there's nothing to see. Although Hong Kong probably wouldn't make the top-ten list of world-class sites, it offers a marine environment worthy of exploration, which has been steadily improving since a trawling ban was introduced and enforced in 2013. There is also a rich maritime heritage. Diving here is very accessible, with departure piers within a 30-minute drive from most points in Hong Kong.

**Q How much diving do you do?**

**A** We dive on Sundays at least twice a month all year, mostly on coastal sites with small reefs at depths no greater than 25m, typically on the sheltered side of one of Hong Kong's outer islands. A favourite site over the years has been a rocky outcrop on the north-side of Port Island that is called the Dragon's Teeth where the depth gradually slopes down to about 15m. The rocks and boulders provide perfect hideaways for octopus, crabs and large fish such as groupers and sweetlips. Schools of smaller fish such as cardinalfish and butterfly fish will often sweep through the area, while blennies, gobies and hawkfish perch on the rocks. More difficult to dive is a wreck sunk as an artificial reef at about 20m near Tolo Harbour in the northern part of the territory. It isn't marked on any charts, but we've been fortunate enough to be shown it by friends (keeping it off charts

helps to protect it from illegal fishing). The 20m-long fishing boat has become home to large groupers, crabs and soft coral.

**Q Is the club involved in any projects?**

**A** We do an Annual Reef Check for the Hong Kong Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. We have an assigned reef in the northern part of the territory that we have been observing and recording for five years. The reef is quite secluded, so we go by speedboat. Each year we record the indicator species (clams, urchins, sea cucumbers), the condition of the terrain, and the health of the coral. We're pleased it's generally improving over the past years, but it is a very delicate environment that clearly suffers from illegal fishing.

**Q Are there other protected areas?**

**A** There are a number of marine parks in Hong Kong waters with fields of plate coral in no more than 10m depth; easy dives that are wonderful for fish and other life. Hoi Ha Marine Park is one of the best preserved coral reefs in Hong Kong, with more than 50 types of stony coral. Yan Chau Tong Marine Park in the north-eastern-most part of the territory is a bit more difficult to reach, but it always proves to be the most rewarding diving in Hong Kong: giant clams, octopus, large and small fish, plus a variety of terrains from gentle sloping 'muck' dives to 20m wall dives.

**Q Any other local conservation issues?**

**A** Fifteen years ago we took up a letter-writing campaign to demand that one of

the local theme parks (one that is well known around the world) remove shark's fin soup from its banquet menu, and we succeeded. Since then we have seen great progress in stopping this terrible fishing industry. Today, members actively support a number of local groups such as Shark Savers and the WWF.

**Q Where do you go for holiday diving?**

**A** We organise one overseas trip a year. Regular destinations include the Philippines, Chuuk, Malaysia and Indonesia. We look for a mix of diving that includes deep dives, wrecks, drifts, and as much shark watching as possible. Our latest was a 10-day trip for 25 divers to Malapascua in the Philippines to photograph and video thresher sharks.

**Q You mentioned underwater archaeology training?**

**A** Yes, the club has discovered a number of underwater artefacts and we are trying to work with local foundations and government agencies. We are very careful with the antiquities of Hong Kong, so a number of club members have received training from the Nautical Archaeology Society in order to record the sites for possible research. Over the years we have regularly found shards of pottery, old Chinese anchors, cannons, and parts of boats that may be quite old. We are always careful not

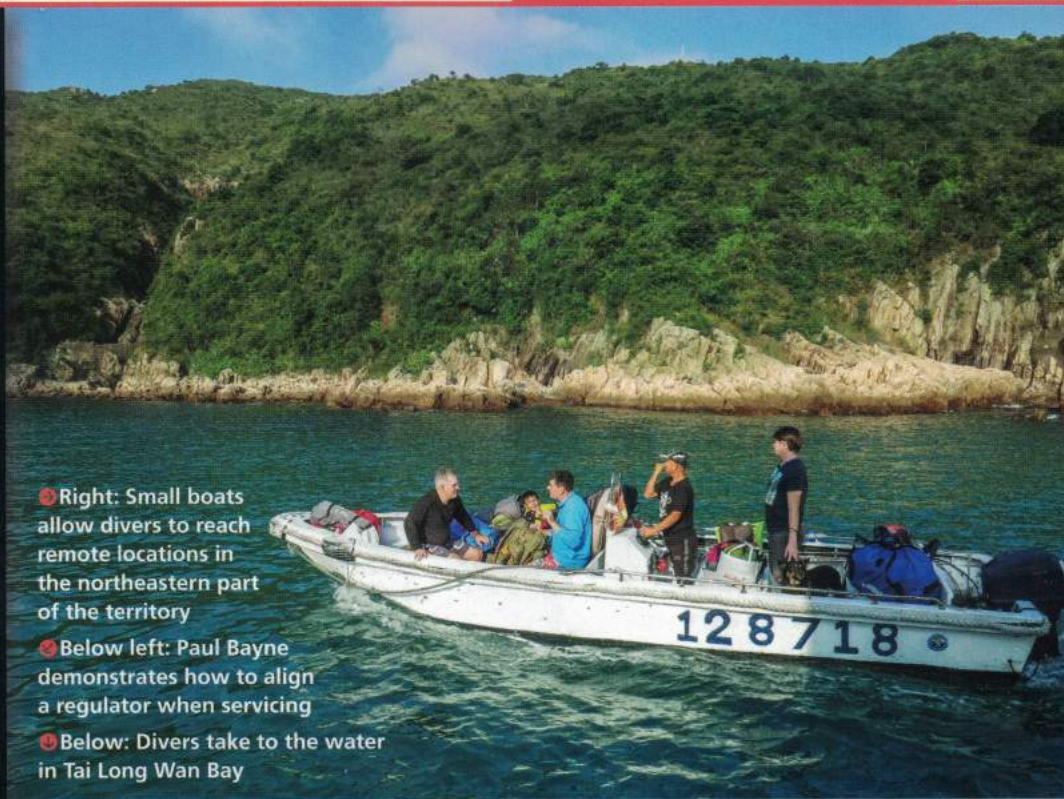


**➤ Above: Superheroes at the annual Dive Camp weekend**

## SOCIAL MEDIA HELPS RECRUIT

Social media can help your club attract new and retain existing members. Here's how to get the most from it...

1. Don't spread yourselves thinly over multiple platforms. Facebook and Twitter are still the most effective platforms for BSAC clubs.
2. Take photos and / or video on **every** single dive trip or event you organise and share online.
3. Encourage your members to share their diving photos and videos on your social media feeds.
4. Create and share club videos. To get started, download the 'Guide to creating a promotional scuba club video' at [www.bsac.com/vidguide](http://www.bsac.com/vidguide)
5. Ideally, monitor your social media accounts daily and post content at least 1-2 times per week. On average Britons spend one hour and 20 minutes each day managing social networks, so hopefully this can fit into the mix.



Right: Small boats allow divers to reach remote locations in the northeastern part of the territory

Below left: Paul Bayne demonstrates how to align a regulator when servicing

Below: Divers take to the water in Tai Long Wan Bay



Below: Jo and Chris Roberts, Catheryn Chu, Eppie Kwok and Chris Dillon during a surface interval



to disturb or remove items, but we felt it was time to start recording and reporting.

**Q What is the club planning for the next few years?**

**A** We're in the middle of preparing a licence application to survey an historical wreck that we found. We've only been able to see anchors, cannons and scattered parts of what we believe are windlasses used for pulling up the anchors. Based on the anchors, we think the boat is from the late 1800s, possibly 30m to 40m in length. We're hoping to take proper measurements and get local experts involved. The wreck is not on any charts, and we haven't found any historical record of it, so far. We've kept the site location a secret, but often visit it to ensure that there is no damage or theft.

We also want to run an Open Water Instructor course later this year, and we are planning an expedition to Christmas Island.

**Q Anything else you'd like to tell SCUBA readers about?**

**A** BSAC is alive and kicking across the world. We find that dive resorts in the Asia-Pacific region recognise and give a lot respect to divers with BSAC qualifications. Overseas clubs have much to offer and share with UK clubs. We are always happy to chat over a beer with any BSAC divers passing through. We would really encourage you to come and meet us if you ever visit Hong Kong, as it's a great way to be introduced to a new city and its diving. ●