

Forfar Diving Guide

For Divers and Group Leaders

[Forfar Field Station](#) is owned and operated by International Field Studies (IFS), a non-profit founded in 1970 dedicated to providing environmental education, scientific research, and cultural awareness through experiential learning.

SCUBA diving at Forfar is a valuable technique for investigating and observing the Andros marine environment.

While diving is fun and rewarding, it also has the potential to be dangerous. With this in mind, it is important that group leaders and students are familiar with the IFS program, procedures, and safety standards. The safety of our guests is the number one priority of IFS and our staff. A dive orientation will be held upon arrival to familiarize divers with all safety procedures.

In order to dive at Forfar, guests must be already scuba certified and present their certification card on island. All required paperwork must be completed and turned in prior to diving. Check with the IFS office to see if any certification classes are available during your stay. A minimum of 3 divers is required to go diving or else a minimum payment is required for dives with less than 3 paying divers. Please contact the IFS office for the minimum payment rates prior to your trip. Unless diving is the main reason for a groups visit or taking place as an entire group activity, certified divers will have the option to dive before breakfast (6 AM) prior to the scheduled group activities for the day. If you're a group leader looking to schedule a trip focused on diving, please contact our office for specialty pricing. Note: discounted diving prices are available for groups during our off-season.

Please speak with your group leader or contact the IFS office (office@intlfieldstudies.org; 614-268-9930) with any questions.

POLICIES

IFS acknowledges divers with training and/or certification by internationally recognized certifying agencies including, but not limited to PADI, NAUI, SSI, and YMCA. IFS reserves the right to determine what certifying agency it will recognize. Please call the IFS office if you have any questions. Divers without the proper training and proof of certification will not be allowed to dive with IFS at Forfar Field Station.

Dive plan decisions are at the discretion of the staff divemaster, who is ultimately responsible for a safe diving program. The staff divemaster can judge water and weather conditions and select dive locations. The Station Director and staff divemasters reserve the right to cancel a dive trip due to adverse weather conditions. The Station Director and staff divemaster also reserve the right to prohibit a diver from future dives if they have shown unsafe practices.

Forfar's Alcohol Diving Policy: No alcohol within 12 hours prior to diving. No alcohol the night before a morning dive. Forfar recommends that you do not drink alcohol until at least 2-3 hours after the completed dive as best diving practices.

COSTS

All dives and equipment rental must be paid for with cash or credit card at the station before the dive takes place. Contact the IFS office if you're a group leader wishing to be invoiced for diving ahead of time. A minimum of 3 divers is required to go diving or else a minimum payment is required for dives with less than 3 paying divers. Contact the IFS office for the minimum payment rate.

Please note that the following dive rates are valid for Forfar guests only and rates are subject to change:

- One tank dive: \$45
- Two tank dive: \$75
- Night Dive: \$75 (minimum of 5 divers)

EQUIPMENT

IFS has some dive gear available for rental, in limited sizes. If you plan on diving at Forfar, let your group leader know or contact the IFS office so we can assure enough gear is available during your visit.

Equipment Available for Rent (*package deals may be available for multiple dives*)

- Scuba Kit Rental: BCD, Regulator, Weight belts and weights (\$25 per day)
- Weight belts and Weights (\$5)
- BCD (\$12)
- Regulators (\$15)
- Mask & Snorkel, and Fins (limited availability, free for guests, \$10 per day for non-guests) ●
- Wetsuits (\$10 per day, limited availability)
- Underwater Light (\$5 per dive, limited availability)

Fees for Lost or Damaged Equipment:

- Lost weights: \$5 per pound
- Lost weight belt: \$15
- Lost or damaged dive light: \$30
- Lost or damaged wetsuit: \$120
- Lost or damaged tank: \$150
- Lost or damaged BCD: \$150
- Lost or damaged Regulator \$250

The following equipment should be brought by all participating divers:

- Underwater timing device
- Certification card and logbook

If you have specific dive-goals or diving objectives, please communicate those to your group leader or the IFS office, and consider bringing additional, specialized equipment, such as:

- Compass
- Dive Boots
- 3mm shortie or full wetsuit (especially November-May)
- Underwater light
- Underwater slate

- Mesh bag for onboard equipment organization
- Spare straps for mask, fins, and snorkel

SAFETY STANDARDS

IFS is a PADI Dive Shop, and all diving at Forfar Field Station is required to adhere to PADI Recreational Dive Standards. IFS adheres to recreational diving depth limits, based on diver age and training. All divers at Forfar Field Station must be accompanied by a Forfar staff divemaster.

Please note, there is absolutely no decompression diving permitted at IFS. All dives must be within the no-decompression limits prescribed by the PADI Recreational Dive Limits. SCUBA Instructors and Divemasters must follow the same guidelines as Certified Divers.

Required Medical and Liability Release Forms

Divers are required to fill out the Medical History Form, Medical Consent & Assumption of Risk form, PADI Travel and Excursions, PADI Medical form, and PADI Boat Travel and Scuba Diving (Certified Diver) form. A signature by a parent or guardian is required for all divers under the age of 18. All of the required forms can be found here: www.intlfieldstudies.org/register. Every diver must read, complete, and sign all required forms prior to arrival at the field station.

If you're being dive certified at Forfar, you will need to complete the PADI General Training form rather than the PADI Scuba Dive Certified form; contact the IFS office for access to this form.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In the unlikely event of an emergency, Forfar will provide emergency care to the best of its abilities. Due to the remote location of Andros, professional emergency care could be hours away. Each diver must be aware of and take responsibility for the risks inherent in diving in a remote location. Oxygen is provided on all dive trips.

IFS strongly recommends that all divers at Forfar belong to DAN and have active DAN insurance. Divers that plan to receive their dive certification at the field station are required to have dive insurance. Please review our [blog post](#) about dive insurance for more information.

Staff divemasters are trained in CPR and Emergency Oxygen, as well as the Forfar Emergency Procedures. All medical release forms must be readily available at Forfar.

DIVING ENVIRONMENT

The fringing barrier reef located off the east coast of Andros stretches north and south for nearly 100 miles in both directions, offering a tremendous variety of shallow (10-25 feet) coral gardens. The bulk of shallow formations consist of Elkhorn coral and sea fans. At low tide, portions of the formations protrude above the surface of the water.

Seaward from the barrier reef, the bottom slopes gradually away for a few hundred yards. The depths here range from 30 to 150 feet, and the coral changes to be more large staghorn and brain corals with frequent sand channels. This shelf ends abruptly at the wall, a near vertical drop into the Tongue of the Ocean, a 6,000 feet deep trench.

Visibility

The clear waters off the windward coast of Andros seldom offer less than 40 feet of visibility, and 100 feet is often exceeded. Seasonal weather may stir up bottom sediments and cause temporary visibility problems, so please consider the time of year for your visit if diving is a priority.

Blue Holes

Oceanic blue holes often have strong currents generated by tidal changes, and may also constitute an overhead environment requiring specialized training and certification in cave diving. For these reasons, we do not offer oceanic blue hole diving. Dives in inland freshwater blue holes may be permitted under certain circumstances (see below for SPECIALTY DIVING).

Water Temperature

In the summertime, the water temperature on the reef is usually in the lower 80's°F. In the shallow waters closer to shore, water temperature can get as warm as 90°F. In the winter, the temperature can drop to the low 70's°F. While normal exposures at these temperatures are quite comfortable and safe, prolonged or repeated exposures may induce the initial symptoms of hypothermia. In the winter, we encourage visitors to wear at least 3mm shortie wetsuits. We also recommend a dry towel, sweatshirt, or rain jacket for the boat ride back to the field station.

DIVE SITES

A-Flats

This site is located slightly South of Forfar near Pigeon Cay. It has a sandy bottom and is around 20-30 feet deep making it perfect for teaching courses and beginner divers. There is a stunning variety of corals, fish, and invertebrates found here and it's only a short boat ride away from Forfar.

Aladdin's

With a variety of different depths and substrates, Aladdin's is suitable for all experience levels. You drop down directly above some beautiful coral heads which continue to the north and the east at around 60 feet. However, if you swim southeast you will reach a large sandy area at a depth of 90 feet where large hog fish are often spotted.

Amphitheater

Just 10 minutes past Staniard Pass, a large sand pit at 60-80 feet is surrounded by 20-30 foot high coral heads, this is perhaps our most breathtaking dive. About 200 yards east of it, cruise over the Tongue of the Ocean, as a wall drops off to 6,000 feet. To the west, more shallow waters (30-45 feet) stun viewers with dramatic spur and groove formations.

Cardo Flats

Centrally located, behind Calabash. This shallow site, less than 30ft, is sandy and has patchy mounds of coral. In these shallow waters, all the colors of the diverse corals pop in the sunlight. This is a good site for checkout dives, new divers, dive training, and photographers.

Coral Nursery

This site is named after the coral propagation site located in the center. This fascinating site is around 30-40

feet in depth with the coral nursery in the center of a large sandy patch. The sandy patch is surrounded by coral heads and sea fan gardens.

Coral Palace

A site often frequented by larger species including grouper, rays, and sharks. This beautiful site has a small sand patch in the center and then extends out into a more complex coral structure. Just a 5-minute swim east you can see Archie's freezer, dropped off a boat here years ago. This site reaches depths of around 60 feet and if you continue east you will reach the Tongue of the Ocean (TOTO)!

Cousteau's Blue Hole

Cousteau's is an inland blue hole deep in the Blue Hole National Park. It is named after famed ocean explorer, Jaques Cousteau who allegedly lost his underwater camera in the depths of this blue hole. Depths can exceed 300 feet, but for our divers it's a great place to practice buoyancy in the low-visibility darkness. Only appropriate for more experienced divers.

Jeremy's Jungle

Located North of Forfar near Saddleback Cay this is one of our most stunning dive sites. There is a large sand patch for mooring at a depth of 35-40 feet. There are large coral heads with abundant fish life to be explored at this depth. Swimming west leads you to a drop off around 60 feet and if you swim east, you reach an even more dramatic drop off to 100 feet. Look out for larger pelagic species swimming out in the blue.

Kate-atorium

Located a little further into the reef this sheltered spot is ideal for dive training. It has a 30 feet wide sand bowl ideal for skills. It is also surrounded by a ridge of corals with lots of life. It reaches depths of 35-40 feet with numerous coral channels and large coral heads.

Morgan's Shipwrecks

This is one of our few shore sites, accessible directly from the beach by the docks at Morgan's Bluff, a 45-minute drive from Forfar. This site has three sunken ships to be explored, small schools of fish under the hulls, and rays and turtles have been spotted here.

North Pass

Deceptively named a pass, this site takes 45 minutes to get through a maze of Coral heads. Unspeakable beauty located in 30-45 feet of water.

Paul's Wall

Outside the North Pass, Paul's Wall is named for one of Archie Forfar's safety divers. The ledge is concave, allowing divers to maintain their depth at maximum 130ft, overlooking a deeper, sand balcony in the Tongue. This site is only appropriate for advanced experienced divers, at the Forfar staff discretion.

The Pool

Our closest site, directly behind Calabash Cay, the pool is our go-to site for Confined water training, because it is nice and sheltered. Maximum depth of 8ft, there is a wide sand patch, surrounded by shallower seagrasses. There are two bathtubs in the grass on the edge, where you can peek under and find some Caribbean spiny lobsters. The sand patch has a few coral heads with small invertebrates to show new divers completing their training.

South Pass

This narrow pass has stunning Elkhorn Coral gardens and a variety of fish, coral, and invertebrates. Most check-out dives are done here in 10-15 feet of water. Just outside the pass are several stunning sites in 30-50 feet of water. This is the quickest access to the reef, with a travel time of only 20 minutes.

Staniard Pass

This large pass is 30 minutes away. The pass itself has a soft sandy bottom at 12 feet with coral rising on the south side. Just outside the pass, it seems wherever we drop anchor we find a stunning labyrinth of coral heads and sandy rivers at 30 feet. Keep your eyes peeled for the resident morays.

SPECIALTY DIVING

Special diving experiences such as night, blue hole, and deep diving, are generally considered beyond the intended scope of IFS field study activities. However, if you are advanced divers interested in specialty dives, please speak with the IFS office prior to your dive trip. With the written permission of the IFS office and the consent of the staff divemaster and the Station Director, you will have the chance to see some of our more unusual sites. ***Due to distance and related costs, some specialty dives will incur additional fees.***

Night Dives

The reef at night offers a new and exciting perspective to the reef environment. Due to the difficulty in navigating boats on the reef after dark, proper planning and specific materials are required. If the resources are available, night dives from the boat at some of the above sites may be an option. Diving from shore at night is also a potential option. Each diver **MUST** have an underwater light. Although it is up to the discretion of the Forfar staff divemasters, a safe divemaster-to-certified diver ratio of 1:4 is generally practiced for night dives. Please contact the IFS office to receive approval so that the field station may be prepared to best accommodate your night diving plans.

Blue Hole Dives

One of the natural wonders of Andros is the crystal clear blue holes that dot the island. Each blue hole is unique; therefore, careful planning and diving are essential. Blue holes are near vertical shafts that reach depths between 70 and 400+ feet. Entries and exits from the water may be strenuous, often requiring lowering/raising gear with ropes, jumping into the blue hole, and climbing a rope or wooden ladder back to a platform. The top layer of every blue hole is fresh water. Below the fresh water is salt water. Between the two, at a different depth in every blue hole, is an interface layer of murky, brackish water. At the interface, decaying material creates a black sulfur cloud. Once below the interface, there is no light. Due to these unusual conditions, the following rules apply:

1. Only certified divers who have demonstrated proficient buoyancy control may be allowed to dive in the Blue Holes. This is at the discretion of Forfar staff divemasters.
2. Group size is not to exceed 4 divers under the direct supervision of a divemaster who must accompany the group on the entire dive.
3. Depth limitations are not to exceed those outlined earlier.
4. Each diver must have an underwater light.

Deep Dives

The wall of Andros is one of the most spectacular in the world, with a near vertical drop to 6,000 feet. The deeps of Andros (60 to 130 feet) are teeming with life: massive corals, delicate crinoids, and immense pelagic fish. Experienced divers with the appropriate training can explore the far corners of the Amphitheater or

hover over the Tongue of the Ocean.