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TRAVEL

Underwater Meditation Is Taking Wellness Travel to New Depths

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It was the fourth day of my Great Barrier Reef getaway, and my frustration had neared its crescendo.

For years, I'd fantasized about diving this world wonder. In June 2025, I made it happen. My accommodation, [Lizard Island Resort](#), a remote property on the reef's northern fringes, put me right near the path of the dwarf minke whale migration.

To reach the cetaceans, and other showstoppers like human-sized potato grouper, travelers typically take a scenic ride from Lizard Island to the outer reef. Yet four days of incessant wind meant we couldn't swim more than a stone's throw from shore.

While I'd known this was a possibility— island weather is always unpredictable—I let the angst get the best of me. On that final shore dive, though, I made a pact with myself. Instead of bemoaning what I couldn't see, I'd use my time below the surface to hone two important scuba skills: buoyancy and breathwork. Within minutes of the practice, I felt the tension ease, and I left that trip with a new appreciation for the power of underwater meditation—a routine that's gaining traction across the wellness world.

Now, the mental health benefits of diving aren't new to scuba enthusiasts. The sport pairs key elements of mindfulness—controlled breathing, no technology, and bodily awareness—with the myriad benefits of the sea.

The Blue Mind Theory suggests that simply being near water fosters a semi-meditative state. Dipping below the surface can take this to the next level. “The hydrostatic pressure [of being in water] is similar to a weighted blanket or gentle compression,” says Chloe Markham, a yoga teacher and coach based in the UK. The mammalian dive reflex, a physiological response that helps us preserve oxygen when we're submerged, may also contribute. “When you put your head in water, especially around the nose area...your heart rate will naturally slow and your blood pressure stabilizes.”

Deep, diaphragmatic breathing, like the kind required for scuba diving, can also activate the vagus nerve, which helps minimize stress, according to an article from the Yale School of Medicine. Plus time beneath the sea provides a rare chance to escape the world's hustle and bustle. “We can't hear as well, perhaps we can't see quite as clearly, and we can't have our devices,” says Markham. “That downshift from hyper-arousal, and breath awareness, are both bonuses.”

My foray into underwater meditation was accidental, and an antidote to a frustrating string of poor weather—but destinations around the world are now crafting experiences to help travelers find calm under the waves.

The Octopus Dive School on Roatán, an island in the Caribbean, runs a multi-day underwater meditation course that links breathwork and buoyancy with mindfulness in the Honduras island's crystal clear water. Participants develop relaxation routines, including setting pre-swim intentions and establishing mid-dive attention anchors, to sharpen mental focus and soak up the ocean's awe.

At Zen Resort in northern Bali, visitors can blend a handful of healing experiences: meditative diving and snorkeling in the saltwater, along with yoga, deep breathing, and Ayurveda therapy back on the palm-dotted land. St. Lucia's Windjammer Landing Resort and Residence hosts programming that incorporates mindful breathing on the boat and marine yoga mid-swim.

And jet-setters aren't the only ones benefiting from peaceful time in the sea. Research from the University of Sheffield Medical School shows that scuba could even help military veterans who've faced life-altering injuries both mitigate depression and release severe stress.

Fraser Bathgate, the global coordinator of adaptive techniques for the Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI), has witnessed this transformation during his own scuba work with past service members. "When they got in the water, you could see their bodies relax in front of you," Bathgate says. He now works with PADI to help those with disabilities experience the mental and physical benefits of diving through adaptive courses and programming.

Even those who don't know how to scuba can enjoy water's calm-inducing benefits as well. "It doesn't really matter how you engage with water," says Markham. "Being near water was always advantageous for us from an evolutionary standpoint, and we've evolved to feel the nervous system benefits of that, even if we don't know it."

That's why water-based wellness treatments are increasingly on offer. Take float therapy, like the sessions at Banyan Tree Vabbinfrau in the Maldives, where travelers can enjoy guided reflection while bobbing with the gentle waves. Lime Wood Hotel in southern England has experimented with another offering: free dive-inspired breathwork sessions followed by aquatic gong sound baths.

Just meditating or unwinding *near* the water can support mental health as well, and I learned this firsthand while navigating weather woes on the Great Barrier Reef. While that final Lizard Island dive opened my eyes to scuba's wellness potential, the resort's waterfront yoga and breathwork sessions helped me slow down, listen to the waves, and fully appreciate the world wonder around me.