

Otugi Pass

Tuamotu Archipelago, French Polynesia

“Otugi Pass has everything I could ever want. It is such a perfect place that when I ‘fall off the perch’ it’s where I want my ashes scattered.”

SIMON BUXTON is a professional photojournalist based in Bali



MAXIMUM DEPTH 40m

VISIBILITY 50-200m

LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE Intermediate

FAVOURITE PART Blue water and hundreds of sharks

PACK YOUR BAGS Fly to Pape'ete, Tahiti, then on to Fakarava. To'au is accessible via a 45-minute boat ride.

DIVE WITH Fakarava Diving Centre (fakarava-diving-center.com), Te Ava Nui Dive Centre (tuamotu.plongee.free.fr)

TIPS Dive the incoming tide at midday for the most amazing visibility and action

MISSED THE CUT Pelelieu Express (Palau); Tiputa Pass, Rangiroa (French Polynesia)

I love the Otugi Pass because even on a bad day you're guaranteed to see four species of shark in the warmest, brightest blue water imaginable.

For a dive here, incoming tide is key to ensure nice blue water and safe diving conditions. Divers drop in on the eastern edge of the pass and proceed to descend through the blue to about 25m, where the current pulls you in toward the reef. As the shadow of the reef looms nearer, silvertips and grey reef sharks swim out to greet you, while out in the blue you might bump into marlin, sailfish, and dolphins.

Swimming northwest along the wall you arrive at a series of rocks, where you must latch on using a reef hook. From this perch you can watch a procession of schooling sharks and barracuda as they swim back and forth in the current, and smaller white tips, Napoleon wrasse, and huge snappers on the reef. After 15 minutes, move to the shallows and let the current drift you back into the "Wrasse Hole."

This depression in the reef allows vast schools of nocturnal fish to rest in the day, including hundreds of crescent-tailed big eyes and humpback snapper. Swimming through this school is a heavenly experience, but the icing on the cake is when the school is so thick the sharks cruising through can't sense you, swimming to within arm's reach before making a quick U-turn.

With all of this going on, remember to look up and into the blue where the occasional dogtooth tuna and Napoleon wrasse cruise by looking for an easy meal. This area isn't all sharks and currents: Guests love visiting the small *motu* inside the lagoon to look for nudibranchs, leaf scorpionfish, pipefish, and...well, there are sharks there too, including baby silvertips, black tips, nurse, and lemon sharks. **SD**

above, from left: The Otugi Pass's greatest feature, its stunning visibility, allows photographers to get clear shots of big fish like mantas (*Manta birostris*) and sharks