

Marelux SOFT Pro

by Kate Jonker

As an underwater photographer, I am constantly on the lookout for new equipment that can help me capture the beauty of the underwater world in new and exciting ways. So, when I heard about the Marelux Smart Optical Flash Tube (SOFT) Pro, I was immediately intrigued.

The SOFT Pro is the latest snoot from the relatively 'new kid on the block' Marelux. Already producing high-quality underwater housings for mirrorless and video cameras, Marelux has added snoots, viewfinders, vacuum systems, flash triggers, hydrophones and monitors to its innovative stable.

Marelux introduced its first flash tube, the SOFT to underwater photographers towards the end of 2021 and has recently released the Marelux SOFT Pro, a more compact and feature-rich model, onto the market.

I was very lucky to get my hands on one recently and have been putting it to the test on dives in my hometown of Gordon's Bay, just outside Cape Town, South Africa.

Marelux products are incredibly well made, beautifully finished and robust, and the Marelux SOFT Pro is no exception.

I was pleasantly surprised to discover how much smaller the SOFT Pro is compared to its predecessor.

For those who are familiar with the SOFT, the SOFT Pro comes in 5.5cm shorter and is 182g lighter than the SOFT which is 210cm in length and weighs 972g on land.

The SOFT Pro is made from scratch-resistant, black anodized aluminium, depth rated to 100m. It comes with a thick neoprene sleeve which fits snugly over the flash tube, adding extra buoyancy underwater.

The SOFT Pro has a diffuser that

The Marelux SOFT Pro can adequately light larger subjects, such as this small common octopus, by moving it further away from the subject and using its widest aperture and strobe on a high setting.

Camera: Canon R5. Housing: Marelux MX-R5 housing. Lens: Canon EF-100mm macro Lense. Strobes: Inon Z240 with Marelux SOFT Pro

Aperture: f/20. Shutter Speed: 1/160. ISO: 160



The Marelux SOFT Pro with optional extras (filters and filter holder) and the extension lens.

softens the light of the strobe, before it is narrowed and channelled down the flash tube. Optical lenses inside the flash tube condense the light, producing a bright, snooted light of excellent quality.

To attach the SOFT Pro to your strobe, you will need to purchase a SOFT Dock designed specifically for your model of strobe. This costs extra, but does mean that if you change strobes, you will only need to purchase the SOFT Dock for your new strobe, and not a new SOFT Pro.

The SOFT Dock is also made from black anodized aluminium and fits securely onto the front of the strobe. The SOFT Pro attaches to the dock easily by aligning two dots and turning until the lock on the dock clicks. This is incredibly secure and the chances of losing your SOFT Pro once attached are virtually zero. The SOFT Pro can easily be removed by pressing the lock and twisting the SOFT Pro.

As the SOFT Pro has its own



focus light, it requires an 18350 battery which is not included. This is not a common battery size in my country, and I had to order some online. If you want to use this snoot as soon as it arrives, make sure you order batteries well in advance if they are not easy to find in your local shops.

Features at a glance

- White aiming light with adjustable brightness
- Red aiming light with adjustable brightness
- Aiming lights automatically switch off when the strobe fires
- Length of time that the aiming light



This Cape dorid was photographed in very shallow, bright water, and with the very bright aiming light, I was able to see it and get the Marelux SOFT Pro to light exactly where I wanted it to. Camera: Canon R5. Housing: Marelux MX-R5 housing. Lens: Canon RF 35mm macro lens. Strobes: Inon Z240 with Marelux SOFT Pro Aperture: f/22. Shutter Speed: 1/200. ISO: 100

stays on for when the strobe fires can be adjusted

- Neoprene buoyancy cover for the flash tube
- Ball mount attachment with screws, washers, and Allan key
- Comes with spare o-rings for the battery compartment
- Sturdy rubber protection cap for the end of the snoot
- Several optional extras for creative lighting are also available for purchase

In the water

In water, the compact size of the SOFT Pro made it an absolute pleasure to use. I am quite petite and have short arms, so reaching the end of the snoot to move it into position was easy. It is still a little heavier than most regular snoots and I attached it, using the provided ball mount, to a jumbo float arm to assist with balance and buoyancy.



I enjoyed using the Marelux SOFT Pro at different angles and found it a great help when photographing fish such as this Longnose pipefish, as the sea fans they live in can often block out the light with traditional downward-facing snooting.

*Camera: Canon R5. Housing: Marelux MX-R5 housing. Lens: Canon EF 100mm macro lens. Strobes: Inon Z240 with Marelux SOFT Pro
Aperture: f/20. Shutter Speed: 1/200. ISO: 320*

Aiming the SOFT Pro

Most other snoots make use of your strobe's focus light to show where your strobe light will fall. However, if your strobe has a dim focus light, or you are diving in bright water, finding the focus light is virtually impossible. Additionally, many fish don't like the constant white light of a focus light and tend to swim away before you can even focus on them.

And this is where the in-built aiming light of the SOFT Pro shines.

I found that activating the aiming light was simple, and just required a firm, 2-second press of the power button. By rotating the dial of the power button, you can adjust the intensity of the light. On my deeper dives, the minimum brightness was sufficient and on my shallower and brighter dives, turning the button to its full brightness made it easy for me to see where the aiming light was pointing, and where the strobe light was going to fall.

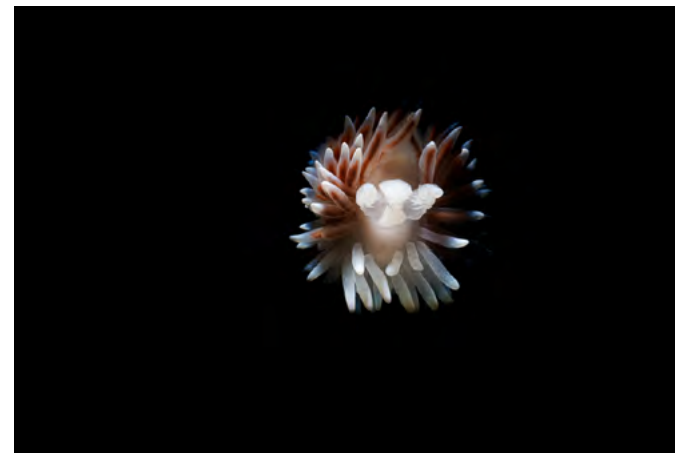
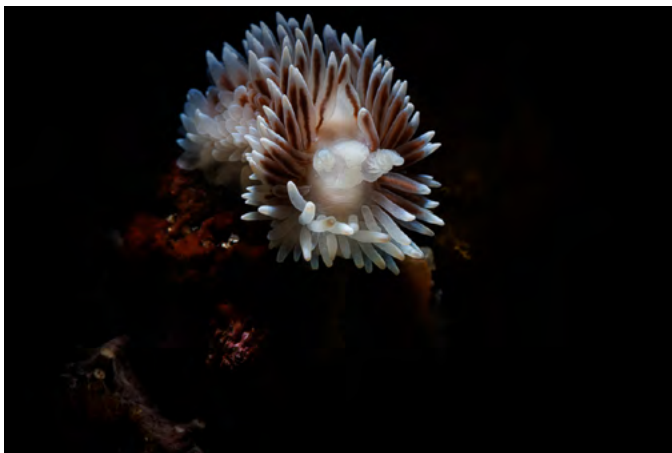
One of the game-changers is that the aiming light can be switched from white to red light by briefly pressing the power button. This is a huge bonus, especially when photographing timid

fish who tend to be frightened away by constant white light before you can take the shot. The intensity of the red light can also be increased or decreased by rotating the power button.

Horned blennies and Cape triplefins are very shy subjects and I've always found snooting them near-impossible as they hate white focus lights and dart away even before you can focus on them. However, whilst using the red aiming light, they seemed not to notice me, and I was able to grab some great shots.

The aiming light of the SOFT Pro shows precisely where the light of the strobe will fall, and exactly what size the spot will be. This means you know exactly what your photo will look like before you press the trigger. I was able to take home many more keepers than usual with the SOFT Pro, which made me very happy, as time underwater is always too short.

Marelux certainly had the creative underwater photographer in mind when they designed the SOFT Pro. Photographers can choose



To show the different size apertures, I photographed this very small Silvertip nudibranch with the largest aperture (left), then turned it halfway (centre) and then to the smallest aperture (right). Camera: Canon R5. Housing: Marelux MX-R5 housing. Lense: Canon EF-100mm Lense. Strobes: Inon Z240 with Marelux SOFT Pro Aperture: f/22. Shutter Speed: 1/200. ISO: 320

whether to keep the aiming light on for 0.2s or 1.2s after the strobe has fired, which is a huge plus for photographers who enjoy shooting at slow shutter speeds.

Adjusting the size of the beam

As subjects vary in size, the beam diameter needs to change accordingly to ensure only the subject is lit. To achieve this, most snoots require masks with varying size holes. These need to be slotted into the snoot, and changing masks often results in the snoot being moved out of position and the often frustrating and time-consuming process of snoot positioning needs to be repeated.

This is where the Marelux SOFT Pro is spot on. Instead of masks, the SOFT Pro makes use of an internal aperture that can be adjusted by turning a dial. This regulates the diameter of the beam of light being emitted. At the working distance of 150mm between the end of the flash tube to the subject, it can produce a spot of between 50mm and 3mm.

That is impressive!

On my dives, I was easily able to turn the dial with my right hand whilst still looking through my viewfinder. This meant I could control the size of the beam without moving my head, let alone the SOFT Pro. Additionally, without the need to change masks, my snoot stayed firmly in position throughout the dive except when I needed to bring the end of the SOFT Pro closer to the front of my housing when using a diopter.

Optional accessories

For the creative underwater photographer, several optional-extra accessories can be purchased and attached to the dock when not using the SOFT Pro. These include colour filters for creative lighting, diffusers, and a dome diffuser. There is also an extension lense that attaches to the front of the flash tube, increasing the working distance of the snoot for subjects that are hard to reach.

Pros:

- In-built aiming light makes positioning easy.
- Ability to adjust the brightness of the aiming light according to the environment.
- Red aiming light does not scare timid fish away.
- Changing of beam size with aperture knob – no need for masks.
- Adjusting delay-off of aiming light for creative photography.
- Optional extra accessories for creative underwater photography.

Cons:

- Despite its compact size, it is still one of the heavier snoots on the market and using a good float arm helps.
- Need to purchase a 18350 battery that can be difficult to find in some countries.



This Gasflame nudibranch was beautifully lit with the excellent quality of light produced by the Marelux SOFT Pro. Camera: Canon R5. Housing: Marelux MX-R5 housing. Lense: Canon EF-100mm macro Lense. Strobes: Inon Z240 with Marelux SOFT Pro. Aperture: f/22. Shutter Speed: 1/200. ISO: 320

Conclusion

With its Soft Pro, Marelux has waved a magic wand, giving underwater photographers everything they could wish for – and more – in a snoot. Not only is it future-proof, rugged and well-made, but it is also easy to travel with and simple to use, increasing your snooting success rate on every dive. After using the SOFT Pro on several dives, I can confidently say that if you invest in a Marelux SOFT Pro, you probably won't need to buy another snoot ever again.



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