

Oceanic + iPhone Dive Housing

by Shannon Moran

I recently had the opportunity to test the shiny new Oceanic + iPhone housing whilst on a trip to the Red Sea. There certainly was a lot of hype surrounding this housing, it has been heavily advertised on my Instagram and Facebook feed and I was quite excited to get my hands on one.

Having done a few dives with the unit, it certainly is a great way to get underwater snaps on your holiday but I'm not sure the Oceanic housing brings any major advancements for underwater photography and videography, most of the perks are seemingly in the dive computer and app functions.

On first impression the housing is sturdy, but heavy, it feels like a quality item that can survive knocks on a dive boat and keep your phone dry and protected.

On dry land my first thoughts when holding the housing are about the size, its quite big and noticeably larger than I expected it to be after seeing the first few marketing images appearing on my social media channels.

Measuring 24.6 cm x 11.2cm x 6.9cm and weighing 975g it is slightly larger and much heavier than both

the Sealife (21.3 cm x 12.5 cm x 5.4 cm and 641g) and Divevolk (12 cm x 22.6 cm x 4.1 cm and 375g) iPhone underwater housings.

The design is sleek and ergonomic, the buttons are all easy to access without moving your hands around and can all be reached with your right hand. The housing has a thick rubber grip across the right side giving you great control when moving the housing, and the shutter button on top of this grip, making it easy to hold and operate the shutter with one hand.

The housing has an incredibly intuitive set up process, all you need is a relatively new iPhone (SE 2nd gen or newer) with iOS 16 or higher. To get started all you need to do is download the Oceanic+ app, and turn on the housing. Once in the app it prompts you to follow the step-by-step set up process, this is a great way to prevent leaks and walk you through the set up if you have never set up any underwater cameras before. There is also a selection of "getting started" videos available on the Oceanic YouTube channel if you're having any problems during your set up.

The set-up process is easy to



follow, you are prompted to turn the phone onto airplane mode and turn on the Bluetooth to allow the phone and housing to connect, then you insert your phone into the spring-

loaded phone grip.

This grip is a little fiddly, there are some small rubber grips which can be moved into the optimum position to hold the phone, if you don't get those

in the right place your phone may ping out of the spring-loaded grip before you get chance to close the housing. It did this a couple of times until I had the rubber grips in the right place.

The case opens and closes with a twist lock and the rear of the case is attached on a hinge, and one o ring on the rear of the housing to seal the unit. The twist lock has a yellow lever which you have to lift to be able to move the twist lock, preventing it accidentally unlocking, you can however twist in the wrong way so be aware of that when operating the lock.

My favourite feature of this housing is the automatic vacuum pump, seal check and leak detector. Once you have followed the set-up process via the app and closed the housing, you are instructed to unscrew the vacuum valve and then the automatic vacuum seal begins, this removes air from the housing and once completed you can close the valve.

Next the housing begins its seal check and a 3-minute countdown begins and hopefully a pass, I find this incredibly reassuring, not only does the set up have an almost fool-proof set of instructions to follow but it also then checks the quality of the set up for you and can find a leak before you get in the water.

I did set the housing up with no checks of the o ring and the seal test failed, once I inspected the o ring I found lint and sand, so no surprises that the seal test failed. Once I had cleaned the oring and sealing surface and retried the set-up, then the seal test was passed. I would trust this unit with my iPhone; it has a very thorough leak test system.

You will need the Oceanic + app to use the housing, there is a free and a paid subscription option for using the app. The free version includes



the basic dive computer with depth, time, temperature and allows access to the photo/video modes. The paid version gives you access to the NDL and decompression information on the dive computer, which I think is necessary if that is your only dive computer on the dive, and the colour-correction software.

A slightly irritating feature I discovered once set up is that you can't turn the phone or housing off again once sealed. This is fine for a short journey to a dive site but if you were on a boat for the day for example, your phone is trapped inside the housing and on the app until you unseal the housing and disconnect the app. The phone does go into a "sleep" mode but I was concerned about wasting the battery before the dive.

The housing has a similar issue, there is no off



0.5x wide



1x standard



2x tele

The Auto Color Correction does a pretty good job most of the time and can be manually tweaked to suit individual tastes.

button. To turn off the unit you have to disconnect the phone and just leave the housing for a few minutes until it turns off by itself. I suppose this doesn't affect the usage but I would prefer an off button for battery saving.

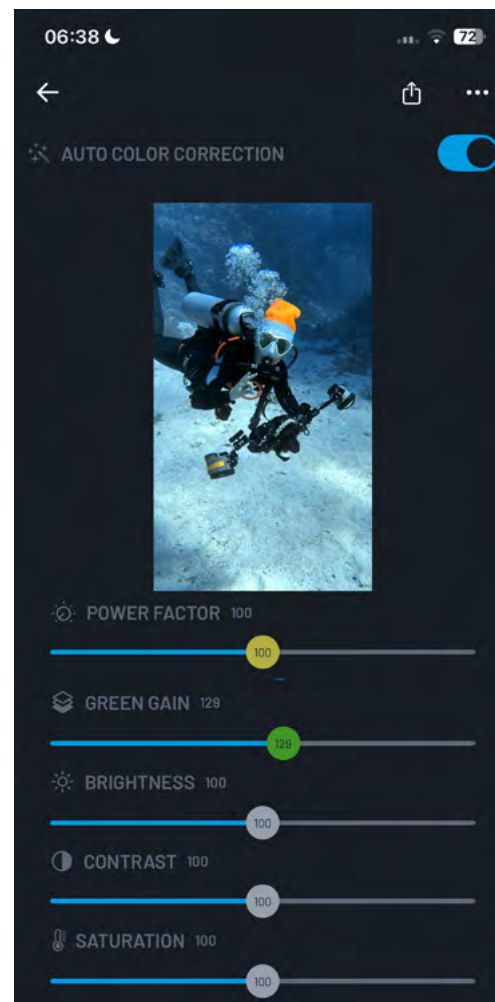
Underwater the housing is great for snaps, it is still a little heavy in the water but it certainly isn't enough to make your arm ache when using it. The moulded grip is very comfortable and I enjoyed the ease of using a phone underwater. The photo mode has 3 lens settings, wide, standard or a zoom which is great for some variation in your underwater images. I enjoyed the wide for reef shots and big shoals of fish, the standard was great for photos of the reef and corals and the zoom did well at fish portraits without having to get too close.

The performance of the camera was great, the only thing it really struggled with was direct sunlight particularly in the shallows (0-10m) where the sun was at its brightest. If you were shooting into the sun a white patch of blown out sunlight was common, and reflections of the phone inside the housing were also a possibility, but shooting away from the sun or blocking it with coral or a structure could be used to avoid



a white blown out surface in your images.

The shutter button is soft and has the right amount of resistance when pressing, there is enough resistance to stop you accidentally pressing the button but not so much that it hurts your finger operating the button. In contrast to this the arrows on the back of the housing are very hard to press, they can't be operated easily; you have to really press the button in to get it to register on the app. I was



using this housing in 25-28c waters with no gloves, in these temperatures you don't really worry about cold hands and gloves, but if you were to use this housing in a more temperate climate, I would be concerned about operating these buttons once my hands started to get a bit cold and weak.

It is quite frustrating operating the menus and dive computer with



Unlike the shutter release button, the arrows on the back of the housing are very hard to press, they can't be operated easily; you have to really press the button in to get it to register on the app.

these arrows, they are awkward to press and to navigate from the camera to the image library you must press three arrows, and to go back to the camera you need to go all the way back through those 3 menus. There is no press shutter to return to the camera like most other cameras have. Not having this in the software cost me a few images of slightly faster moving subjects, by the time I had navigated back out of the menus I missed the subject! It seems strange to me that the shutter is so easy to



Shoal of Indian mackerel with zoom lens, colour correction in Oceanic + app

press, and the arrows are so much more difficult to operate. I would also say the buttons are a little bit too close together I did slip onto the wrong button a couple of times when navigating the menus.

Once you have collected a few images and would like to review them, you can navigate through the menus using the arrows to see all of the images and videos taken on your dive. Just a note that you cannot delete any photos or video whilst in dive mode, but this isn't much of a problem unless you have low memory on your device.

When reviewing images the app doesn't show you your most recent photo first, instead it displays them from 1-35 etc and to see the 35th and most recent photo you would need to start at 1 and press the button to move forwards until you reach your most recent photo, and with those hard to press buttons I didn't bother to review my images on the dive.

The app also has a built in colour-correction software that can be turned on or off during the dive, but this had a few bugs and after a couple of tries I resorted to shooting it without the colour correction. I didn't have much success with it,



Shoal of Indian mackerel with zoom lens, colour corrected in Lightroom

when turning on the corrector the screen flicked between the natural blue water colour and a slightly pinker colour corrected screen so quickly it was hard to tell if the photos has the colour correction on or not. When facing directly into the sun the colour correction had a bit of a problem and went completely white as it struggled to correct the colours, I think I'll stick to editing the images after the dive.

I have to say, the dive computer which is integrated into the app is spot on. On multiple occasions during the dives I compared the dive computer to my Shearwater Perdix and the depth, time, NDL and safety stops were all the same.

I was also pleasantly surprised to see the computer also has a compass, it was accurate when compared to my Shearwater, many entry level dive computers don't even have a compass. The dive computer sits on the top right corner of the screen, it is visible throughout the dive and I did not find it distracting at all, if you want more information you can scroll through the dive computer to see additional information including the compass and more NDL data.

I do think the app needs some work; practically it works well and the step-by-step set up is great, but some more thought is needed to develop the app for photographer and videographers to streamline the usage. And if the buttons on the back could be made as smooth as the shutter button it would drastically improve this housing, I think it has great potential but it just isn't quite there yet.

There's great potential here, with a few bug fixes and an update to the app many of these issues could be solved. A shutter button press and return to photo/video mode would be a great feature to update and showing you the most recent photo/video you have taken first and not last would drastically improve the user experience.

I think they could be onto a winner, hopefully an update is scheduled for the near future and I'd happily take this housing out for another dive.

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