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Diving Spain's Costa Blanca

with Phil Rudin

When I mention European diving to most of my Floridian friends here in the US they immediately think of cold murky water and wreck diving. The truth is that Europe has some of the most devoted divers I have ever met and some of the most diverse diving on the planet. One such diving location is the picturesque town of Calpe on Spain's Mediterranean coast.

The city of Calpe is located on the Mediterranean Sea in a coastal area known as Costa Blanca siting 61 km (40 miles) north of Alicante and 125 km (78 miles) south of the Valencia. Airports are located in both of these major cities along with Madrid and Barcelona which are both 460 km (285 miles) from Calpe. Frequent bus and train service to Calpe is available from all of Spain's major cities.

I chose to rent a car and made the drive south from Valencia using the outstanding costal highway system for my five day stay. Calpe has a population of around 12,500 and sits at the base of Penon de Ifach (Ifach Rock) an immense white limestone outcropping which rises 332 meters (1090 Ft.) above the

the Mediterranean. Ifach Rock is a protected natural park which towers over Calpe and separates two beautiful white sand beaches. Too the north much of the coast line is dotted with rugged cliffs some reaching as high as 100 meters, these rock formations are separated by many secluded white sandy coves were sunbathers abound during the tourist season.

Some of the diving is focused around Ifach Rock, at sites like Los Arcos where huge chunks of limestone line the sea bottom forming large caves, caverns and arches. The depth in this area ranges from about 10 to 40 meters and is most easily accessed by boat. Visibility averages around 20 meters and I had dives where it well exceeded 30 meters.

(Top) RECOVERING DIVERS
Olympus E-330, Olympus PT-E02
housing, 8mm fisheye, ISO 100, f/9.5,
1/250th

(Right) ELEPHANT CAVE
ENTRANCE
Olympus E330, Olympus PT-E02
housing, 8mm fisheye, ISO 100, F/4,
1/20th





ELEPHANT CAVE

Olympus E-330, Olympus PT-E02 housing, 8mm fisheye, ISO 100, F/5.6, 1/20th

Water temperature in the summer months runs around 27c (80F) and during my late September visit it had dropped to around 21c (70F) with air temperatures ranging from 18 to 35c (65 to 95F) depending on the time of year with September being quite pleasant.

Among the giant boulders surrounding Ifach Rock divers will find conger and moray eels, octopus, eagle rays, sting rays, a variety of fish including grouper, goldline wrasse, scorpion fish, cow bream, vibrant hard



RED STARFISH

Olympus E-330, Olympus PT-E02 housing, 8mm fisheye, ISO 100, F/13, 1/20th

and soft corals, nudibranchs, sponges, anemones, scalps, sea-grasses and more. Large schools of barracuda, Dorado, dolphins and the occasional odd looking ocean sun-fish may also be seen in the open water areas around these rocks.

Along the rocky coast line north of Ifach Rock is Elephant Cave which has two cave entrances at the base of a towering limestone cliff. The first is a broad entrance found at 12 meters leading to a large well lit cavern. A second entrance at 9 meters



MEDITERRANEAN-BLENNY

Olympus E-330, Olympus PT-E02 housing, 50mm macro+1.4 tele-converter, ISO 100, F/16, 1/250th, Athena ring-flash

leads much further under the cliff face to a wide cavern which opens to an immense open air space. If you climb out of the water a winding tunnel system can be explored on foot. Light enters the cavern from a large crack in the surface of the cliff some one hundred meters or so inland lighting up the large room below. As a photographer I would have been happy to spend a few days at this cave site just to explore the lighting

possibilities. The sea bottom outside the cave is covered with sea-grasses and large rocks which made great hiding places for eels, lobsters and a wide variety of bottom dwellers.

Les Basetes Dive Centre a five star PADI instructor development center is one of several dive operations located along Costa Blanca and very convenient to Calpe and Moraira. Les Basetes is in a protected marina at the Harbor of Benissa just a