



Adventure Scuba Center teaches people to dive and does final certification testing in Lake Tahoe.  
COURTESY/AMY HAGEN

## Get tanked

Tahoe diving

To anyone interested becoming a certified scuba diver, one weekend this summer will include lugging heavy air tanks and sweltering in a full neoprene suit before spending upwards of an hour submerged in the perpetually frigid waters of Lake Tahoe. To local divers, it's all part of the fun.

"We're in our 60s, and we still dive almost every weekend," said Amy Hagen, who owns Adventure Scuba Center in Sparks with her husband Scott. Combined, they have a total of almost 4,000 dives between them.

In order to rent scuba equipment and safely plan and attend dive trips, all prospective divers must meet the minimum standards set by the Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI). This begins with a classroom segment.

"We check you out, you pay for the class, and then we give you what's called a crew pack," said Hagen. "In that crew pack is the manual and your training folder and the log book. Your training folder has all the segments that we'll be covering."

The classroom portion takes a total of around eight hours spread over two weekday evening classes and covers topics like basic dive terminology, necessary equipment and safety procedures.

"Then we go to the pool," Hagen said. "You're going to do about seven, eight hours of pool work. We start [with] baby steps—put your face in the water, breathe off your regulator—and then we gradually show you how to clear your mask and how to, if it got kicked out of your face, how to recover it."

The practical part of the certification usually takes place in the Carson or Fernley aquatic centers, where divers are taught

how assemble the tank and air regulator, as well as the weight system and flotation vest used to manage buoyance under water. Most of the practical skills, however, are devoted to emergency preparedness.

"All the skills that we teach you are basically survival skills," Hagen said. "If this happened, you'll know how to react to the situation without freaking out."

The final step in certification takes place at Lake Tahoe, where divers repeat the drills they learned in the pool at greater depths for longer time, under the supervision of a team of instructors. Hagen's instructors usually favor Sand Harbor for its gently sloping bed and comparatively warm temperatures.

"We have you in full neoprene from head to toe to keep you warm," Hagen said. "We are into the 50s temperature-wise in Sand Harbor right now, so it's warming up."

Student divers must demonstrate underwater orienteering with sunken landmarks, buddy rescues and a final theory review before earning their lifetime basic certification, which qualifies someone to dive to a maximum depth of 60 feet with a standard air tank only.

New and career divers alike can find resources about advanced certification on the PADI website, as well as at dive shops around the Truckee Meadows and Lake Tahoe. Hagen said that Adventure Scuba also hosts a yearly calendar of dive trips for anyone who wants to join—after they pass their test, of course.

"Last Saturday, we did our Easter egg hunt," Hagen said. "What we do is hide golf balls underwater and you go dive and collect your golf balls. ... We have monthly fun dives. We also have [underwater] pumpkin carving on Halloween." □

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