



## Safe Cave Diving with Swiss Cave Diving Instructors

### Diving with a dive guide – a blueprint for the client's survival

People hire a guide for many reasons but probably the two most basic are to facilitate logistically their diving vacation and to increase their feelings of safety and comfort.

The perception of an increased level of safety may in fact be a false one depending on the planning and judgment of the guide and the attitude of the guided people.

Divers may undertake dives they would never normally attempt themselves just because they are with a guide. This is a very dangerous situation and one that both, the responsible guide and client should guard themselves against.

The fact that they are guided may encourage some divers to abrogate some of their responsibilities during the dive to the guide becoming merely sightseers following the guide (ducklings following the mother duck) around rather than being full, active, participating members of the team, who remain self-sufficient and self-reliant at all times.

This again is a dangerous and unsafe attitude and should be discouraged at all times.

Guides must exercise a professional attitude at all times and bear in mind that they have a duty of care to and responsibility for their clients particularly when planning dives.

The primary considerations for any guide when planning dives should be first and foremost the diver's safety and cave conservation. Good judgment should be exercised as well at all times and plans should err on the side of conservatism.

It is very important, that the guide plans all dives taking into account the experience levels and abilities of every person within the group and selects an appropriate dive site and dive plan with this in mind. As well as the makeup of the group, the number of people in the team should be another very important consideration when planning both the dive site and the dive itself.

Dive shops employing guides should ensure that their guides are meeting acceptable standards particularly with regard to Safety, Cave Conservation and Professionalism.

**When looking for a guide as a potential client, it may be worth asking some questions, including:**

- Is there absolute no linguistic barrier; can you easily understand each other, even when speaking about complicated matters? → **If communication is more with hands and feet: hands off!**
- Is the guide certified by a recognized organization of good reputation or of governing authorities? → Let you show the certificate(s)! → **If there is none or the issuing organization is of doubtful reputation (in the cave training area): hands off!**
- What is the guide's level of qualification or certification? → **For guiding only: minimum Divemaster (min. 2 years) + Rescue Diver + Full Cave Diver (min. 1 year), otherwise: hands off!**
- Can the guide show to you a proof of his/her current status in this organization (should be active, teaching)? → **If inactive: hands off!**
- What other credentials can the guide present to you?
- How much cave diving experience does the guide have (how long has he/she been cave diving and how many cave dives has he/she already logged)? → **Less than 200 cave dives, less than approx. 1 year of professional guiding, less than 10 routinely visited cave systems OR less experience than yourself: hands off!**
- How much experience does the guide have in the actual location you will be diving? → **Less than 10 dives in this cave: hands off!**
- How many students did this guide certify and at what level during the past 6 months? [Caution: guides do not need to be „real“ instructors, who teach courses; however, this is no disadvantage!]



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- Does the guide reside full time in the area or is he/she only a visitor like you? → If he / she is a tourist only who comes from time to time: hands off!
- Can the guide give you names of other reputable cave diving exponents as references? → Ask also yourself in the neighborhood of the shop → If this demand is rejected: hands off!
- Does the guide work for a well-known and reputable dive center or is he/she working alone? How do the premises look like?
- Has the guide ever been involved in a cave diving incident? If yes, what was his/her role then? → If there is only the slightest shadow of a possible causal or fault contribution: hands off!
- Can you attend as guest one briefing this guide makes with other clients and if yes, what is your out-of-the-guts impression?
- Is he/she able to draw a sketch of the cave dive plan, with all relevant parameters such as Ts, jumps, important markers, switches of directional markers, restrictions, current, haloclines, further exits, and specific dangers (silt-out) as well as the approximate swimming times to these way-points? If not in written form, then at least orally. → If not: hands off!
- What is the maximum number of clients that the guide will take on a dive? → Max. 4 in the cavern area (zone 1), max. 2 in the cave zones Cave (zone 2 and 3)? → If more clients per group: hands off!
- Ask the guide about their guiding philosophy; can you agree with it?
- Does he show interest in your own certification- and -competence level? Does he ask you about your equipment, your configuration? Does he ask for a medical attest (fitness for diving)? Does he plan do to some kind of assessment or another suitable form of a quick check (safety drill etc.) with you? → If not: hands off!
- What is your personal feeling about the guide's personality, attitude and appearance and his professionalism (feeling out of the guts)? → **The belly sometimes is cleverer than the head!**

### Caution:

It has happened that guides have been asked by their employers (diveshop),

- to leave the cavern zone (zone 1, daylight) with Cavern Divers and to go beyond
- given the opportunity, also to leave the line and to lead the client somewhere sidewise to "an interesting" place. Especially this behavior has led the several fatalities.

Further, there are cases, where the guide has gone by own intention into areas for which the client has not been trained at all (depth, penetration, number of Ts and jumps, restrictions, stage tanks, etc.)

Also there are some guides who take the application of the rule of thirds (or a more severe one) quite sloppily.....

**For all this: NEVER dive beyond the limits of your training-and your experience and strictly abide by all known and relevant safety rules, especially always stay on the line, never make any visual jumps, strictly abode by the gas-management rules and immediately abort the dive, whenever you get the slightest uneasy feeling!**