

Drive & Dive Jersey Five-Pack

Scuba Diving Magazine

New Jersey is known worldwide as the Garden State for the fresh cranberries, tomatoes, peaches and other fruits and vegetables it brings to the table, but often is dismissed domestically as the parking lot for New York. Local scuba buffs, though, call it the Diving State for the array of sites delivered along the 131-mile-long Jersey Shore by war, commerce and conservation.

The Garden State Parkway runs along the coast, delivering divers in their four-wheel gear bags to shore points. Just get a roll of tokens, roll down the toll road and take the exit to the site that best suits your diving skills. There's everything from easy low-surf shore dives to challenging offshore wrecks, all teaming with life and decorated in dizzying colors over time by Poseidon's paint brush.

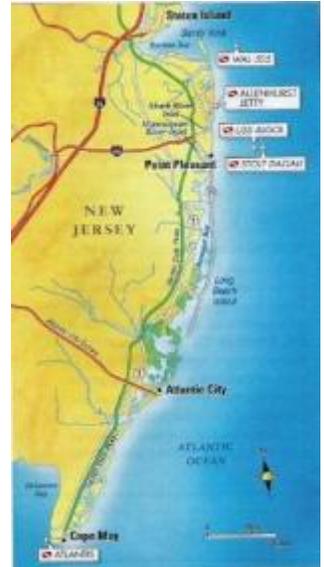
Shore diving can be iffy in a state with one of the nation's most aggressive beach replenishment programs. The best guides – Dan and Denise Berg's "New Jersey Beach Diver" and Tom Gormley's and Ben Gualano's "Shore Diving In New Jersey" – are stocked in most dive shops. If a site in their books is buried under tons of sand, just come back in a few months and currents may have washed away the overburden to re-exposed the site.

Allenhurst Jetty

Allenhurst Jetty is a shore site that generally escapes the state's program to shovel sand against the tide. This rocky jetty juts eastward from Allenhurst, just north of Asbury Park of rocker Bruce Springsteen fame. Its L shape shields the entry from the Atlantic's waves, making it an easy first ocean dive for beginners and a place where experienced divers check out gear, go sightseeing or shop for dinner.

Mussels and seastars cling to the craggy rocks and tucked away in holes are blue claw crabs and lobsters. Blackfish and stripped bass forage around the jetty and doormat flounder camouflage into the sandy bottom, which ranges from 5 to 20 feet. In late summer through early winter, colorful tropical fish wash up here as they do along the Jersey Shore. Occasionally waves bare brass items that hint of some forgotten maritime disaster. Plan your dive for the hour around high tide to minimize the hike to the water and the bottom surge around the jetty. Visibility can

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range upward to 20 feet, but can be much less depending on wind and waves. If a strong wind is out of the south, as we say in the land of TV's fictional "Sopranos" crime family, "f'geddaboutit."

WAL-505 Relief Ship

Commerce piled up wrecks off Jersey, either through U-boat sinkings or collisions, so Relief Ship *WAL-505*, which helped usher commercial traffic into New York harbor, is a good pilgrimage for wreck divers. Before Ambrose Light Tower was erected off Sandy Hook, ships with powerful lights and fog horns rotated into position at the mouth of the harbor 24 hours a day. The 1904-built *WAL-505* was providing relief for a newer lightship on June 24, 1960, when the freighter *Green Bay* emerged from pea soup fog and slammed into it amidships. Although it quickly sank, all crewmen were rescued by the relatively unscathed freighter.

Today, *WAL-505* is excellent for building wreck-diving skills. Although it's 110 feet to the sand, the structure rises to within 75 feet of the surface. It's upright, fairly intact and has nominal currents, but its location in the Hudson River's silt plume means visibility can be less than 5 feet. You don't need to see very far to be dazzled by colorful anemones and plants contrasting the few visible patches of its bright red hull. The wreck's color is literally alive. A great primer for this underwater classroom is a carbon copy of the 129-foot-long *WAL-505* that is docked at Manhattan's South Street Seaport.

Stolt Degali

Fog shrouding New York's busy harbor created a popular site for divers in the Thanksgiving Day collision of the Israeli passenger liner *Shalom* and the Norwegian tanker *Stolt Degali*, or "Pride of Degali," a city in Norway. The 629-foot *Shalom* was picking up speed as it left the harbor on Nov. 26, 1964, bound for the Caribbean when it sliced into the 582-foot *Stolt*, as it headed toward Newark, N.J., from Philadelphia to unload its cargo of vegetable and coconut oil. The crash left a 40-foot gash

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Scuba Diving Magazine was kind enough to illustrate this story with images by veteran underwater photographer Herb Segars. To see more of his great photos click:

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in the *Shalom*, but sliced off the 142-foot stern of the *Stolt*. It quickly sank to 130 feet 40 miles east of Manasquan, N.J. About half the crew was asleep when they were flung into the 50F water, killing 19. The *Shalom*'s 1,066 passengers and crew survived.

The *Stolt*'s port side now rises to within 65 feet of the surface and is heavily coated with anemones and hydroids. The 70-foot wide hull now forms the closest thing to a wall dive in the region, and the gaping hole offers easy penetration to the crew quarters. It's a popular site for fishing charters and spearfishing divers alike, and its china plates and cups can be seen in local dive shops and divers' homes. It's good to watch the depth gauge while diving the wreck for today portions of the interior have settled to 140 feet.

Only the stern can be seen by divers today. The bow of the *Stolt* was towed back to Norway in 1965 and joined with the stern of the tanker C.T. Gogstad and renamed the *Stolt Lady*. That tanker was later sold and renamed the *Lido* under which it sails in the Great Lakes. The *Shalom* was repaired and renamed the Sun. It sank while under tow to a salvage yard in July 2001 off Cape St. Francis, Africa, where depths reach 15,420 feet.

USS Algol

Everything from New York City subway cars to Army tanks to boats and ships of all description have been sunk through New Jersey's busy reef-building program. The king of all artificial reefs, though, is the *USS Algol*, a 459-foot-long Navy attack freighter that saw extensive service in World War II and off Cuba. Since Nov. 22, 1991, it's been serving as a popular dive site about 15 miles east of Manasquan River Inlet. Sitting upright as if sailing across the sandy bottom at 145 feet, the ship rises to within 70 feet of the surface. All surfaces are coated with mussels and colorful marine organisms that are swarmed with schools of fish seeking shelter from the currents, making it a favored stop for dinner divers. Its massive size and ease of penetration means there is always more to see no matter how many times you dive this ship.

The *Algol* is but one of more than 3,000 artificial reefs that have been added to the hundreds of shipwrecks off the Jersey shore. Learn more about the natural and artificial reef sites at www.njscuba.net and www.njscuba.com.

Atlantis

Just off the southern tip of New Jersey lies the *Atlantis*, one of a dozen experimental concrete-hulled ships cast by the Navy in World War I. The *Atlantis* broke free from its mooring on June 8, 1926, and grounded at 20 feet off Cape May. It's a magnet for mussels, but what draws divers to endure surge around its rebar are golf-ball-sized Cape May "diamonds" on either side of the wreck. These translucent quartz gems are polished smooth by tumbling for thousands of years from the headwaters of the Delaware River to the confluence of Delaware Bay and the Atlantic. They are as prized today as they were by the native Kechemeches. Although the exposed wreck is tantalizingly close to shore, it should be visited only on calm days at slack tide.

GETTING THERE

Full ¼-inch wet suits can be worn from mid-July through October, when water temperatures range from mid-60s to mid-70s F. Dry suits will feel better during other months as the temperatures dip to the low-30s in March. Visibility can rival Caribbean sites in the winter, but can be limited in mid-summer especially after storms.

Allenhurst Jetty: Take Garden State Parkway Exit 102, and go east on Asbury Avenue. Turn left onto Main Street and then right onto Cedar Avenue. At its end, turn left onto Ocean Place and start looking for parking. The jetty is on the other side of the gate leading to the beach. This is likely to be crowded on summer weekends.

Stolt Degali, *USS Algol*: Brielle is on Manasquan Inlet, home to several dive charters. Take Garden State Parkway Exit 98 and head south on Route 34 into Brielle or Point Pleasant. These sites also are visited by operators on Shark River Inlet. Take Parkway Exit 100B and head east on Route 33.

WAL-505 Relief Lightship: Although it's just off New Jersey, the wreck is visited more frequently by charter boats from Rockaway, Sheepshead Bay and Staten Island, N.Y.

Charter boat operators who visit these sites are members of the Eastern Dive Boat Association. Learn more about their sites and directions to their docks by visiting www.edba.com.

Atlantis: Take the Parkway south to its end at

Cape May. Turn right (west) at Collier's Liquor. Go straight as the street becomes Route 606, West Perry and Sunset Boulevard until its dead end at Sunset Beach, which is just beyond the last turnoff for Cape May Lighthouse. Consult NOAA tables to dive during slack tide.