

Pastizza

A dive site with a variety of itineraries, full of forms and shapes, walls, boulders, passages and caves, that hide marine life in each and every of its corners.

Just South from the port of *Ustica* an imposing rock rises from the sea in front of a wide opening that hides the *Grotta di San Bartolomeo*. Starting from this point, on a seabed of mixed *posidonia* sea grass and rocks, the *dive* can lead either to the *Pastizza* reef wall or the *caves* route.

Swimming in a southern direction, passing a landscape of boulders and volcanic rock formations, we head towards the *Pastizza reef wall*. The wall rests on a sandy bottom and reaches down to a maximum of 30m. Colourful *sponges*, *tube worms*, *sea urchins* and *sea stars* decorate its surface, while its many inlets and crevices, hide both small marine such as *nudibranchs* and crustaceans as well as larger species such as *moray eels*, *octopuses* and big *brown groupers*. Looking into the blue big *pelagic* such as *amberjacks* can be spotted swimming by. On the way back, swimming over a field of *posidonia*, a shoal of *seabream* decorates the blue waters. Arriving back at the *Pastizza* rock, we can swim through a suggestive *underwater canyon* and end the *dive* exploring the surroundings where often various types of *gobies* and *blennies* can be seen.

The *cave* itinerary of the *Pastizza dive* heads in northern direction, swimming over a large meadow of *posidonia* sea grass at 13m depth while enjoying the shoals of *seabream* and *salema* that swim around until a rocky wall is reached. This wall is a tongue of land reaching out from the coast towards the open sea and hides the first *cavern* to be explored. Big brown *groupers*, *slipper lobsters* and *crabs* can frequently be seen here. Exiting the cavern and following the lively reef wall in a southern direction, the *Grotta dell'Accademia* or “academy cave” is found after 100m at 10m depth. Its name describes its form, as it is an imposingly large room that slowly slopes upwards resembling a lecture hall. The floor is covered with pebbles, which offers juvenile *conger eels* a perfect environment for protection and many crustaceans and *nudibranchs* can be spotted throughout the rest of the cave. Beams of light penetrate from the openings on the cave's walls and roof, illuminating the room and forming a fantastic light colour spectacle. Exiting the *cave* and heading further south, we swim past the starting point of the *dive* and reach very shallow depths of 4m where a collection of large boulders lies in front of the entrance of an articulated submerged cave, the *Grotta di San Bartolomeo*. Passing through a passage at 8m depth, we enter a very large obscured room bustling with crustaceans and bivalves along its walls and juvenile species of saddled *seabream* swimming in mid-water. We surface inside the cave, where the statue of San Bartolomeo, patron of *Ustica*, can be admired.

Due to its simplicity and limited depth this *dive site* is also a perfect location for *night dives*. During the darker hours this location is literally bustling with *marine life* as *crabs*, *slipper lobsters*, *moray eels*, *octopuses* and many more become active. Also, a perfect opportunity to admire the magic *berried anemone* showing itself in all its beauty exclusively by night, when it pops out of its inactive spherical shape and exhibits its elegant elongated white body and long colourful tentacles.

Characteristics of the dive

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Type: Cave / Reef wall

Certification Requirement: OWD

Recommended Certification: AOWD

Difficulty Level: Medium

Depth range: 8-30m

Duration: 50-60 min

Typical encounters: Grouper, moray eel, octopus, seabream, salema, crab, shrimp, slipper lobster

Notes: Good visibility, no current