

Water Safety

Please Visit the Joint Region Marianas Water Safety Video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTVJsEI3wTg>

Guam's waters offer a wide range of recreational opportunities. Swimming, scuba diving, snorkeling, water skiing, wind surfing and sailing on Guam are some of the best in the Pacific. Along with these recreational activities come certain precautions you must practice to avoid the hazards. When you and your family or your friends head out to enjoy Guam's beaches, maintain a constant, direct line of sight of your children and your fellow swimmers even if only a few feet into the water.

For swimming and snorkeling, the safest areas are those beaches protected from the ocean by a barrier reef. Inside this reef, the water is calm, shallow and with only a slight current, if any at all. But don't let this calm water fool you because many times people venture out near or onto the reef into deeper water in the pursuit of fish or just sightseeing. This can be extremely dangerous because of two primary dangers in swimming too close or onto the reef.

The first is caused by the waves breaking on the reef. Even in the calmest of conditions, it is difficult and dangerous to be near the reef. The coral itself is extremely sharp and can cause deep and painful cuts. There are also large cracks and holes in the coral, which can catch a foot or hand and trap a person. Naturally larger waves increase the danger and in the past have proven fatal to swimmers.

The other danger is the current caused by the waves. In almost all cases where the waves are consistently larger than one foot, a strong current runs along the reef. This current is created when water forced inside the reef by the waves is higher than the sea level outside the reef. The water will flow along the reef or shoreline until it finds a place to flow back to the sea. This current can be very strong. A person swimming too close to the reef's edge can become caught in the current and be swept onto or over the reef.

The waters of Guam need not be feared, just respected. We offer this information for you.

Always dive and snorkel with another person and use the proper equipment. If you are not an experienced swimmer, and snorkeling, wear a snorkel vest (this will help to keep you afloat and not tire yourself out). Ensure proper training and certification before diving. Always have a dive partner, the proper equipment, and plan your dive and dive your plan.

Know where you are going. Contact the local dive shops for information on areas you intend to visit. The National Weather Service (**Dial, 811 - from an off-base line**) has a recorded message on surf, winds, and tide conditions. Local TV, radio, and newspapers also publish this information.

Have fun, but use some situational awareness and a little risk management before venturing out. Be sure to observe any posted warnings and remain within the designated areas for swimming, snorkeling, and diving. Watch out for your children and your fellow Airman; know where to go to contact emergency help if needed.

If the water conditions for your chosen location are not safe, pick another beach!

Guam's waters offer outdoor sports enthusiasts a wide choice of recreational activities. Unfortunately, water-related activities sometimes lead to tragedy. A very real danger exists near, on and beyond the reef. For that reason, the reef is off limits to all DoD employees and their family members. That means no reef walking. The waves and current are often misleading and can sweep the unwary over the reef and they may drown.

Several Safety Tips:

- Swim only where lifeguards are present or where it is safe for swimming.
- Never swim, snorkel or dive alone. Always have a buddy with you and keep an eye on each other.
- While in the water, wear protective footwear to prevent painful coral cuts or stepping on sea urchins. Wearing hand protection is a good idea too.
- Wear fins when you snorkel. There are some strong currents here especially when the tide is going out. You may need the power fins can give you.
- When snorkeling, wear a snorkeler's vest. This will help you stay afloat if you become tired or the current pulls you out to sea
- Become familiar with the dangerous aquatic life in these waters. Treat all shells as poisonous and don't handle them.
- Cancel snorkeling, diving or boating plans when weather forecasters have issued hazardous surf or small craft warnings.
- Use extreme caution if snorkeling in areas with rip currents. Rip currents usually occur in areas where there is a cut in the reef. Do not swim in these areas when hazardous surf is likely.
- If a rip current catches you, don't panic. If you can't make any headway, grab onto a coral formation and pull yourself to shore.
- Protective gloves are real assets here. If the water is too deep for grabbing the coral, swim with the current away from the reef. This will prevent the water from continually slamming you into the sharp coral. Once you have cleared the reef, stay afloat and wait for a rescue team.

Boating Tips

Make sure there is at least one lifejacket on board for each person. All children and those who are poor or non-swimmers must wear life jackets.

Ensure the boat is equipped with the required visual distress signals such as flares and lights. Being able to signal rescuers can mean the difference between being found or not.

If operating the boat off shore, make sure it is equipped with a working radio. Although CB radios are popular, their power and range is limited to a distance of three miles. The preferred radio to carry is the VHF-FM radio all Coast Guard units monitor. It has a range of more than 50 miles.

In addition to radio, many commercial and recreational boats must carry an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon. The EPIRB is a small radio transmitter designed to transmit the international distress signal. Boats, airplanes and even satellites can pick up the signal. Those receiving the signal relay it to the nearest rescue agency, which uses the signal as a homing device to pinpoint the location of the international distress signal.

File a float plan. Let someone on land know where you'll be going, when you're leaving and when you expect to return.

Carry extra fuel, food and water, and any tools you may need to make repairs if a mechanical difficulty arises. Make sure the boat has an adequate anchor and line suitable for use in the area; ocean floor drop off can be severe and very deep.

- Don't operate a boat in designated swimming and diving areas.
- Don't operate a boat if drinking alcohol or taking medications.