Japanese Garden, Aqaba: the easiest dive site in the Red Sea, with the highest density of fish

Open Water-friendly, accessible from shore at Tala Bay, 5–18 m depth, and the Aqaba reef wall starts a few metres from the entry point. The reef site Aqaba dive shops use for first-timers and refresher dives.

Anas Hu · May 5, 2026

If you have an Open Water certification and an afternoon free in Aqaba, the Japanese Garden is the dive that justifies the drive south. Shore entry at Tala Bay, a 50-metre swim along a sandy bottom, and the Aqaba reef wall drops straight in front of you — sponges, fans, anthias clouds, and the occasional shark. Maximum depth is around 18 metres; the easy parts of the dive are at 5–10 m where most of the colour is. Visibility runs 25 metres in summer, 18 in winter. The Aqaba dive shops use this site for refresher dives, first-time-back-in-the-water reorientations, and nervous Open Water-1 students. There is a reason: it is the easiest dive site in the Red Sea, and it is still very good.

1. Why dive Japanese Garden
2. Dive plan: depth + route
3. What you will see
4. Shore entry from Tala Bay
5. Practical tips
6. References

1Why dive Japanese Garden

Aqaba's reef is one of the northernmost coral ecosystems on Earth, fed by the warm waters of the Red Sea but cooled by the Gulf of Aqaba's deep-water current dynamics. Japanese Garden is one of the dive sites within the Aqaba Marine Reserve (established 1997), and it sits in a sheltered cove on the south end of Tala Bay. The combination of **shore access** (no boat needed), **shallow**

profile (Open Water-friendly), and **high biodiversity** (the same 500 species as the wider reef) makes it the standard first-or-refresher dive in Aqaba.

2Dive plan: depth + route

The standard Japanese Garden plan:

- **Entry.** Shore entry from Tala Bay south end. Walk into the surf in fins; the bottom is sandy for 30–50 m.
- **Surface swim.** 50–80 m to the reef edge, depending on tide. The reef wall is visible from above water.
- **Descent.** Down the wall to 5–8 m for the first leg; deeper if your air budget allows.
- **The wall.** Run the wall north for ~150 m at 8–12 m depth. The Japanese Garden name comes from boulder corals shaped like Japanese garden stones — they are concentrated in this stretch.
- **Turn-around.** At 100 bar, turn back along the wall at shallower depth (5 m) for safety stop.
- **Exit.** Reverse the entry route. Total dive time: 45–55 min depending on consumption.

> Open Water-friendly, shore entry, 25 m visibility in summer, and the same 500-species reef as the deeper sites.

3What you will see

The Japanese Garden site is one of the easiest places in the Red Sea to see:

- **Hard corals.** Acropora (table corals), Pocillopora (cluster corals), brain corals.
- **Reef fish.** Lyretail anthias (the pink/orange schools), Picasso triggerfish, parrotfish, butterflyfish, surgeonfish.
- **Pelagics (rare).** Eagle ray (occasional), whale shark (May–June, very rare).
- **Endemic species.** Red Sea anemonefish (IUCN: Near Threatened) — found only in this region.
- **Macro life.** Nudibranchs, gobies, blennies on the boulder corals — bring a torch.

4Shore entry from Tala Bay

Tala Bay is a small resort area 15 km south of central Aqaba. Several dive shops operate there with rental gear. Most travellers either:

- **Drive yourself.** Park at the public beach access. Free.
- **Book a 2-tank day.** Dive shop transports you, suits you up, runs both dives. Includes lunch. ~80–110 JD per person depending on shop.
- **Stay at Tala Bay.** Several resorts have dive shops on premises — walk from your room to the entry point.

> **For solo travellers**
>
> Pair with another solo diver at the dive shop. The 2-tank day is the social option; you will know your buddy by the second dive.

5Practical tips

- **Bring your C-card.** The dive shops will check it. Bring your logbook too.
- **Best season.** Year-round, but May–October for the warmer water (25–28 °C). Winter dives are still pleasant in a 5 mm wetsuit.
- **Surface interval.** If diving twice, plan a 60–90 minute surface interval. Eat at the resort café.
- **Sun protection.** Reef-safe sunscreen only — non-coral-toxic formulations.
- **Hyperbaric chamber.** The Princess Haya Aqaba Hospital has a chamber. 15 minutes from Tala Bay by car. The dive shops know the protocol.

References

1. Wikipedia — Aqaba (Marine Reserve, Gulf biodiversity)

Verified by locals: TBD — this article will be reviewed by a PADI dive instructor based in Aqaba before final publication. Drafted from Wikipedia and reader-diver experience.