

Feel alive on the dive

For the last four years the London School of Diving in Power Road, Chiswick, has been helping people to take the plunge.

LIZ NICHOLLS dipped her toe in with a try dive

BEING born without gills, breathing underwater never seemed like a natural prospect for a rain-hating land-lover like me.

But finding myself submerged at the bottom of a Chiswick pool and enjoying a game of silent frisbee, I realised anyone can take to it like a fish to water.

The London School of Diving in Power Road, just off Acton's Gunnersbury Avenue, is a PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) school catering for everyone from beginners, aged 10 and up, to those looking to become dive masters.

And with its own custom-built heated pool descending to three-and-a-half metres, instructors can offer the personal attention (even helping people overcome hydrophobia – a fear of water) which wouldn't be possible using a local leisure centre's facilities.

The school's Open Water Diver Course is perfect for those who'd like to learn to dive before they go on holiday, as the entire course can be done in the UK over two weekends. This means you don't

have to spend two days of your precious vacation in a foreign classroom when you could be diving the ocean with your buddy. The first part of the process is a try dive – an hour-and-a-half session which I sampled – and the centre is offering these free to everyone on Saturday, July 1 for a special open day.

Before getting into the water, my dive instructor Sarah gave me a quick but reassuring lesson on the science of breathing underwater (the first rule of diving is never to hold your breath), the equipment, and how to communicate in

underwater sign language.

Once strapped up with all the gear and feeling very buoyant, Sarah guided me with baby steps to the bottom of the pool floor and, struggling as I was with balance and coordination at first, the serene blue world suddenly seemed calm and welcoming.

After this taster, the appeal of the open water with its marine life is so strong that I promised myself I would do the full course and learn before my trip to the Mediterranean this summer – diving has proved a real eye-opener.

diving centre factfile

■ The London School of Diving is holding an open day from 10am to 4pm on Saturday, July 1 – everyone is entitled to a free try dive (normally £25) to teach the basics of underwater breathing followed by a guided try dive in the custom-made pool. Call the centre to book a place or simply arrive on the day with your swimmers.

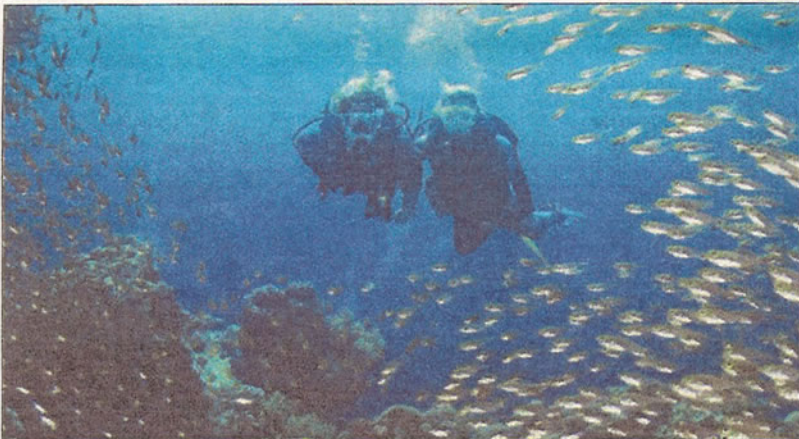
■ The internationally-recognised

PADI Open Water Diver course is the most popular scuba course in the world, qualifying you and a buddy to dive independently of supervision in conditions similar to or better than those you were trained in.

■ The London School of Diving is at 11 Power Road, Chiswick, W4 5PT. Call 020 8995 0002 or visit www.londonschoolofdiving.co.uk to find out more.



IN DEEP: Liz Nicholls gets in the swim at the centre's pool



EXOTIC DEPTHS: Swim with the fishes in a foreign sea after learning to dive. Right: Enthusiastic learner divers at The London School of Diving in Chiswick

