



opinion

Text by Simon Pridmore

At some point, many keen divers entertain the notion of giving up their 9-to-5 job and following the dream of becoming a professional scuba diver, making a living from their hobby and combining work with passion. After all, the advertisements for instructor courses in the dive magazines make it sound easy. All you have to do is sign up, fork out the dough and take the plunge. What could possibly go wrong?

If you have a similar dream, then this is for you. If you find that this short story brings you down to earth with a bump, then that is only because your feet were off the ground to begin with.

Some do succeed in living the dream, but not many. And for those few that do, it often does not last for long. The story below points out one of the reasons why this is the case.

The job opportunity

I shall begin with the thing that sparked off this article. The following was posted on a Facebook page called Dive Jobs Worldwide. I reproduce here in full, verbatim:

Selling Yourself Short

— *Your Skills Are Worth Nothing & You Work For Free*

Looking for young, enthusiastic, newly certified PADI instructors to volunteer at our dive centre.

We are a small dive operation with a main objective: catering

to a diver's specific needs while operating in an environmentally friendly manner. For this reason, it is VITAL to have a passion for marine ecology. As a volunteer instructor, we give you the opportunity to

gain experience and build up your number of certifications.

Successful applicants must be:

- Available for a one to three-month commitment

- Single – please note that couples need not apply

- At least Open Water Scuba Instructor and specialties

PIXABAY





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- Able to speak English fluently. Spanish and French are a plus.
- Professional, friendly and helpful. An open and approachable personality is important to be successful in this role.
- Excellent guest focus and safety is paramount.

This position is available from September 2018 and volunteers are entitled to:

- Accommodation on a 4-share basis, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms (swimming pool, wi-fi, TV, air-conditioning, utilities, drinking water and laundry)
- Weekly food allowance of US\$35

- Airport / Ferry pick up and drop off
- 1 day off a week

If you'd like to work in a nice and friendly environment, please submit your diving CV along with a recent photo of yourself.

In not so many words

So, just to summarise, this is a job for multilingual (ideally) and passionate new scuba diving instructors, who have just spent several thousand dollars on acquiring their professional qualification. The successful applicant is expected to work six days a week for a "food allowance" of US\$5 a day plus accommodation.

The role is defined as being that of a volunteer, although you will have noted that the volunteer is expected to be "professional." Presumably if, being volunteers (that is, people who work because

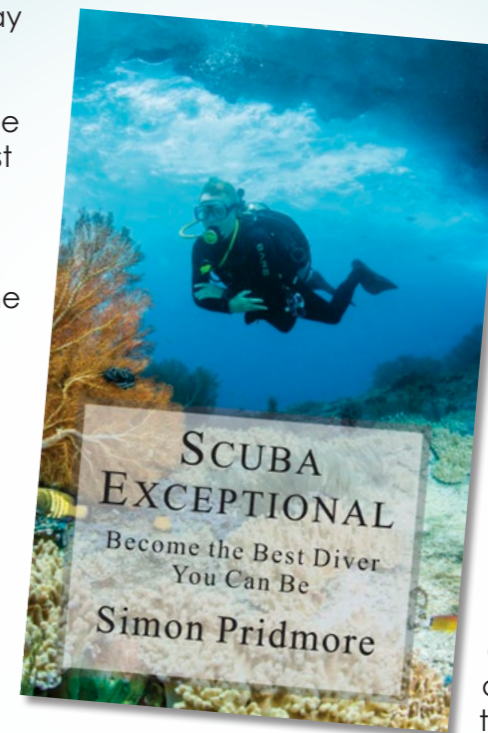
they want to work, rather than for some reward), they wake up one morning and decide they don't want to work that day, then that is not an option. They have to be "professional," a word which normally implies that someone is paid or salaried. Here, as this is not the case, we have to assume that "professional" means something else—probably that they are expected to be as diligent as someone on a paid contract would be.

The website for the dive centre in question states that it charges US\$280 for a PADI Open Water Diver course and its five-night fun diving and accommodation packages start at US\$360. These prices, it says, INCLUDE INSTRUCTOR FEES! Not only is this misleading, as it is clear that at least some of their instructors do not receive a fee at all, it leads one to wonder why they choose to mention it at all. It is certainly not something you usually see on a dive centre price list. Are they trying to dissuade customers from tipping

A New Book for Scuba Divers!

Scuba Exceptional may be the fifth in Simon Pridmore's *Scuba* series, but it is actually the true follow-up to his first book, the best-selling *Scuba Confidential*.

The philosophy of safer diving through the acquisition of knowledge and skills is the same, although this time the themes are different. As before, Pridmore provides us with a whole host of extremely useful advice and techniques, illustrated by real-life experiences and cautionary tales. The focus this time, though, is more on issues that experienced divers face. There is more technical diving content, and Pridmore covers some relatively complex issues in his usual clear and easy-to-read style. In many cases, the issues that concern technical divers reflect those that affect scuba divers at every level. After all, as Pridmore writes, technical diving is on the same spectrum as conventional sport diving:



It is just a different frequency.

Scuba Exceptional also deals in more detail with the psychological approach to scuba diving, broaching familiar topics from new angles and borrowing techniques and procedures from other areas of human activity.

While most of *Scuba Exceptional* focuses on the diver, it also takes a look at the wider picture and highlights a number of areas where scuba diving professionals and the "industry" as a whole are letting divers down.

As always, Pridmore is realistic in his assessments. He may shine a little light on the dark side of the scuba diving world, but he does this in order to illuminate bad practices and encourage change, while offering solutions.

Scuba Exceptional: Become the Best Diver You Can Be by Simon Pridmore is available on: **Amazon.com**.

their instructors? Do they not want the instructors to earn any money, from anywhere? It is all very strange.

The word according to *Scuba Professional*

However, in the world of diving, it is far from unusual. I discussed the topic in my book *Scuba Professional*. Among a number of other points, I wrote:

"Salaries and benefits for new scuba instructors vary widely but, generally speaking, diving jobs are not well paid, and this is another reason why you really need to have a vocation for teaching in order to survive in this line of work. You need to have the same sort of dedication that other profession-

als like nurses or schoolteachers have, in order to endure very long, difficult working hours for little financial reward.

"In the early days, you may have to take what you are offered but, as in any field of work, make sure before you sign up for a job that you know what the conditions are. Then decide if they are acceptable and do your best to ensure that your bosses keep to their word. Get as much as you can in writing with a signature. Of course, you have to be professional and keep to your side of the deal too.

"Be wary of accepting positions that give you no days off or wages that are ridiculously low. There are some cynical dive operators out there all too willing to take advantage of the wide-eyed





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enthusiasm of newly fledged instructors. If you work every waking minute for next to nothing, then you will probably burn out very quickly. The cynical operators do not care—every week, the system churns out new instructors to replace you.

“There is another consideration. If you do not have enough respect for yourself to ensure that your rewards in monetary terms as well as lifestyle terms are commensurate with your efforts, it is unrealistic to expect others to treat you with respect. Dive instructor colleagues will not thank you for helping to bring down still further a salary bar that is already much too low.”

The reaction

Predictably, the people on social media who were most upset by the above “job” offer were indeed those who already work in scuba diving, who find it difficult enough to get reasonable pay for their work. Others sought to excuse the dive centre by pointing out that they were not the only operation that tried to get people with professional qualifications to work for nothing. This is sadly all too true, although it does not constitute an excuse. In scuba diving, the line between work and play is fuzzy, and there are plenty of people who take advantage of that for their own gain.

Other commentators tried to make the case for a win-win scenario. The dive centre gets free labour. And, it may well be that new instructors who sign on for this opportunity will have the time of their lives. Maybe they can

afford to do it because they have some money saved up to pay for their flights, insurance, training agency fees, entertainment (and food costs beyond US\$35) or perhaps they have generous parents. In the process, they will learn a lot, and they will find out whether being a full-time scuba diving instructor really suits them. They will spend three months on a tropical island as a dive guy or dive gal, make friends galore and have plenty of stories to tell when they get back home.

So, they claimed, everybody wins

Well, not everybody wins. As I pointed out already, job opportunities are already rare enough for full-time scuba diving professionals, without them hav-

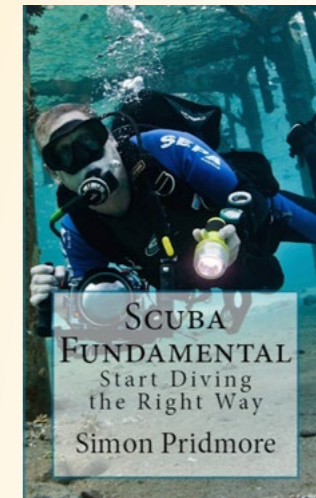
ing to compete with self-financed people who will work for nothing. The dive centre customers do not win, as they are being duped into thinking that their instructor is a paid member of staff. If they were aware that this was not the case, they might feel uncomfortable. The country, where the dive centre operates, does not win, as it seems likely that it is being conned out of overseas worker visa fees and taxes. Finally, the various bodies that administer and oversee scuba diving, who tolerate this sort of thing at the price of their reputation and self-respect, are not winning either. ■

Simon Pridmore is the author of the international bestsellers Scuba

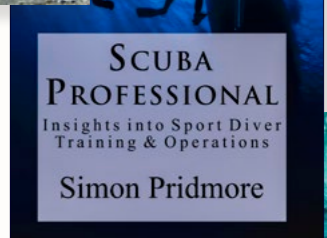
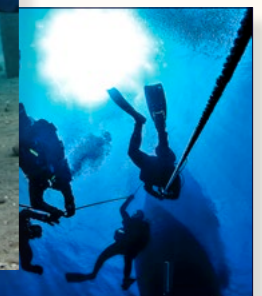
Confidential: An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver, Scuba Professional: Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations and Scuba Fundamental: Start Diving the Right Way. He is also the co-author of Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Bali and Raja Ampat & Northeast Indonesia and a new adventure travelogue called Under the Flight Path. His recently published books include Scuba Exceptional: Become the Best Diver You Can Be, Scuba Physiological: Think you Know All About Scuba Medicine? Think Again! and Dining with Divers: Tales from the Kitchen Table. For more information, see his website at: SimonPridmore.com.

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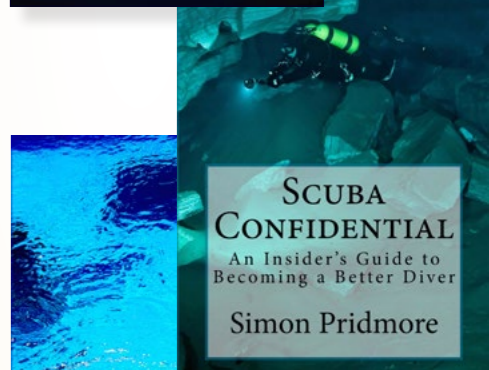
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