

Divers in a pool session at Purple Dive Penida in Bali, Indonesia

Text by Simon Pridmore  
Photos courtesy of Purple Dive Penida

**Recreational diving as a sport today is in a better state than commonly thought just two decades ago. Simon Pridmore takes a closer look and offers insights into the positive developments in diving.**

Not so long ago, diver training agencies, equipment manufacturers and resorts were lamenting the fact that the activity was much less popular than it used to be. There was a great deal of pessimism over the future of sport diving as a whole. The early adopters were ageing, divers were dropping out, young people were not interested in an activity their parents and grandparents did, working people could not afford it and the ocean environment was deteriorating. If someone was interested in marine life, they did not even need to get wet. They could watch videos on their computers instead. There was a good chance that virtual reality experiences might soon replace true-life adventures.

Yet, fast forward a couple of decades, and the picture is transformed.

We live at a time when the diving world is wider and more inclusive than ever, and more people are diving in more places than ever before. Sport diving has evolved into multiple disciplines. You have scuba diving, freediving, cave diving, wreck diving, rebreather diving, mixed-gas diving

and sidemount diving, each of which has its own advocates but none exclusive to any particular group. As a diver, you can dip your toe into them all. Most of these disciplines have their own communities, organisations, dedicated dive centres and online groups, and a couple of them

(I am thinking particularly of freediving and sidemount diving) attract a younger audience.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the arrival on the scene of full-service dive centres and high-end liveaboards, where the staff are more like butlers than dive guides,

has enabled people to continue diving later in life than their predecessors. It is not unusual for a boat to find itself catering to a group of 70 to 80-year-olds. In fact, the other day, an 82-year-old friend asked me for advice on buying a new BCD.



## Sport Diving *in 2025* *Is in a Good Place*



Students participated in a pool session during an intensive dive course at Purple Dive Penida in Bali, Indonesia (left); Divemaster Made working with divers in a pool session (above); Classroom work for students during the intensive dive course (right)



## Expansion, popularity, inclusivity

Not only are there more destinations, expanding the diving world to include almost every country on the planet, but in many places, the people who are learning to dive now are the first generation to go underwater for fun. Their parents never learned to swim, let alone disappear below the ocean's surface for an hour or more for entertainment. Diving is now one of the most popular sports for young people in places where, less than two decades ago, there were almost no divers at all. Also, more women are diving and taking on leadership roles in the sport, particularly in East Asia,

where it is estimated that 40 percent of new divers are female.

## Technology

Technological advances have enabled us to learn more about the animals that live in our oceans, locate long-lost shipwrecks and discover new and spectacular underwater environments, and diving equipment is now produced by companies in dozens of countries around the world instead of just a handful.

From the 1950s right up to the 1990s, all dive gear was manufactured in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Italy, Switzerland,

Finland and Japan. Now, rebreathers are made in the Czech Republic, one of the top technical diving gear producers is in Poland, some of the best dive computers around are made in Taiwan and Canada, and factories in India, Mexico and China are turning out excellent equipment for customers all over the world.

## Expansion and events

The expansion of the sport has brought diving to more people in more cities. As well as in multiple locations around Europe and the United States, there are now annual dive exhibitions in several cities in China, as well

## A New Dive Book from Simon Pridmore

"Simon Pridmore's new book, 'Technically Speaking' is an outstanding tour de force from one of modern diving's most accomplished practitioners and best-selling authors."

— David Strike, Oztek & Tekdive Convenor

"Simon has completed a complex task with consummate skill and has accurately unravelled the when's, the who's and some of the why's, much of which would have been unjustifiably lost in the mists of time if not for this work."

— Kevin Gurr, Technical Diving Inventor & Innovator

"It will take some doing to better this account of tech's first steps... as no matter how much you know or think you know; you will still find many obscure historical gems..."

— Kevin Denlay, Early Adopter & Wreck Finder

Technically Speaking is the latest book from best-selling Scuba series author Simon Pridmore. It is a selection of themed talks telling the early history of technical diving—where it came from, how it developed, how it expanded across

the world, who the important movers were and how, in the decade from 1989 to 1999, the efforts of a few determined people changed scuba diving forever.

These ten years saw the greatest shake-up the sport has ever seen but technical diving's road to universal acceptance was anything but smooth, many obstacles had to be overcome and there were times when even viewed in retrospect, it seemed that its advocates might fail in their mission. Ultimately, success came down to per-

severance, people power, good timing and more than a little luck.

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as Singapore, Tokyo, Okinawa, Taipei, Manila, Jakarta, Sydney, Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai and Bangkok. All of these events have one especially notable thing in common: They are swarming with crowds of young divers. The ADEX show in Singapore regularly reports an attendance of more than 40,000 people over one long weekend.

This process has been going on for a while. A few years ago, I wrote a chapter about it called "The Future of Scuba Diving in a Flat World" in my book *Scuba Professional*.

## A new generation of leaders

What got me thinking about all this

now? As is often the case, it was a message from a friend, who told me about a recent PADI Instructor Development Course (IDC) run by an operation called Purple Dive Penida, on a small island called Nusa Penida, which lies to the south of Bali and is famous for manta ray and oceanic sunfish encounters.

The dive centre is owned by two women, Julia and Hélène, who run several IDCs annually. This time, it just so happened that all eight instructor candidates were women, as were the two course directors and one staff instructor. They were a cosmopolitan, multilingual bunch, hailing



Participants with certifications in hand at the end of the course (above); Divers in a pool session at Purple Dive Penida (right)

from France, Germany, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States and Indonesia. Here are brief pen portraits of the candidates.

**Made** is 38 years old and a native of Nusa Penida (where Purple Dive Penida is based). Made started diving three years ago during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the encouragement of an Indonesian dive instructor. She trained all the way up to the Divemaster level and has been working as a divemaster since then. She could not afford to take the IDC, but Purple Dive Penida started a fundraising campaign to help her. With this, plus the assistance of an organisation called Daughters of the Deep and support from PADI, Made could fully



fund the IDC and her Instructor exam. More on Made later.

**Qhintan** is also Indonesian. She is 24 years old and has been working as a project coordinator for the last two years for the Indo Ocean Project (IOP), a community of ocean researchers and educators dedicated to conserving Indonesia's marine environment through scientific studies and education. Purple Dive Penida has set up a grant with the IOP to

encourage more Indonesian women to work in marine science.

**Valentine** is from France, and she is 28. She currently works as a choreographer, started diving about a year ago and is now passionate about it. She aims to change course and start working in diving instead.

**Axelle** is from France, too. She is 22 and has just finished her Divemaster programme with the IOP. Now, she

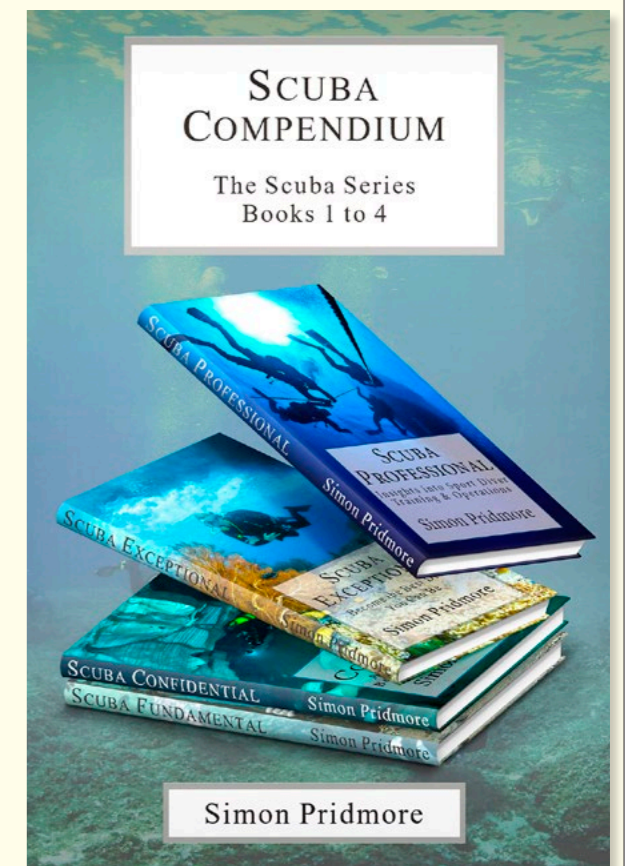
## NEW 4 in 1!

Simon Pridmore has released a new single-volume e-book, bringing together four books in his bestselling Scuba series:

- *Scuba Fundamental – Start Diving the Right Way*
- *Scuba Confidential – An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver*
- *Scuba Exceptional – Become the Best Diver You Can Be, and*
- *Scuba Professional – Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations*

As Simon puts it, this is "a remastering and repackaging of the original albums rather than a greatest hits." Nothing is missing. *Scuba Compendium* gives e-book readers the advantage of being able to access all the knowledge contained in the four books in one place, making this a unique and easily searchable work of reference for divers at every level.

Simon has always promoted the idea of safer diving through the acquisition of knowledge, which is why he has chosen to release this highly accessible version. If you have read his work before, you will know that he provides divers with extremely useful advice and information, much



of it unavailable elsewhere; his points often illustrated by real life experiences and cautionary tales. He examines familiar issues from new angles, looks at the wider picture and borrows techniques and procedures from other areas of human activity.

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wants to pursue a career in diving or marine sciences.

**Matilda** is 23 years old, and she is from Germany. Matilda is still a student in the Netherlands, but she loves diving and has decided to take a break from her studies to participate in the course so that she will have the option to work in diving when she graduates.

**Lisa** is 24, and she is from Singapore. She is currently working as a divemaster

in Singapore and has decided to go to the next level in her diving career.

**Rainbow** is 28 years old and from Hong Kong. She works in education and is preparing for a PhD in marine science.

Finally, **Casey** is from the USA. She is 26 years old and was working as an environmental scientist, but she has taken a year off to study and become a scuba-diving instructor.



# opinion

Made is the first woman from Nusa Penida to become a professional dive-master.



island live mainly off income from tourism, and until very recently, divers were the only tourists, so they never benefited from Bali's rise to riches.

For a person born in Nusa Penida to become a professional divemaster, leading foreign tourists on a scuba dive in Nusa Penida's exciting underwater paradise, showing them the treasures to be found there and keeping them safe and happy, is already a rare accomplishment. To be a dive instructor, a sport diving leader and someone who can now teach others to dive and become divemasters themselves is extraordinary. Very few people from Nusa Penida have ever done that, and Made is the very first woman to do so. She is unique, and I am pretty sure that there are now little girls on Nusa Penida—and little boys—who look at Made and think, "Maybe I can do that!"

When something like this can happen, it encourages me to believe that, in 2025, the sport of scuba diving is in a pretty good place. □

*Simon Pridmore is the author of the international bestsellers Scuba Fundamental: Start Diving the Right Way, Scuba Confidential: An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver, Scuba Exceptional: Become the Best Diver You Can Be and Scuba Professional: Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations, now available as a compendium. He is also co-author of the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Bali and the Diving & Snorkeling Guide to Raja Ampat & Northeast Indonesia. His latest books include The Diver Who Fell from the Sky, Dive into Taiwan, Scuba Physiological: Think You Know All About Scuba Medicine? Think Again! and the Dining with Divers series of cookbooks. Visit: [SimonPridmore.com](http://SimonPridmore.com).*

## Intensive training

The course was an intensive programme conducted in Purple Dive Penida's pool and classroom and in the ocean surrounding Nusa Penida, which is very fishy and offers sightings of some incredible marine animals but can also be current-swept and a little chilly. So, it is the perfect environment for preparing new dive instructors.

All the candidates passed the course and the subsequent exam, so they are now fledgeling instructors. As you can see, they are all young, talented, enthusiastic, and perfectly qualified to forge a long and successful career in sport diving, becoming future leaders of the community, business owners, scientists, administrators, inventors, tour guides, cruise directors, professional underwater photographers and even writers. It is an exciting prospect.

## Forging a path

But, not to minimise what the others have achieved and what they will achieve, it is Made who is forging a path through the thickest undergrowth. Nusa Penida has always been one of the poorest parts of Bali. Until the 1930s, it was a penal colony for Bali's Klungkung Regency. Prisoners and political enemies were banished there, as were witches and black magicians. Even today, people on the

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