

#Divelocal: How Diving Is Getting Its Groove Back

Please note: the epidemiological and regulatory situation is constantly evolving, and we will do our best to keep you informed and updated of any changes at DAN Europe. Note that diving activities may be currently restricted in some countries/areas. We suggest you stay up to date with the latest regulations and restrictions issued by national, regional, local, or administrative authorities in your country of residence. You can also check the PADI COVID-19 scuba diving [status map](#).

There's something new, organic and not a little bit exciting happening in the diving world that has come about in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and is arguably driven by our innate predisposition to explore. I speak of course, of the growing movement within the industry to focus on local diving — **#divelocal** — that is, to rediscover the joys of diving in your own backyard, be it your local quarry, river, lake, loch, beach, or if you're lucky, a water-filled cave.

"You don't have to travel to have an adventure," explained DAN Europe's marketing director Cristian Pellegrini. "If you're not able to travel safely, concentrate on local diving. Your DAN team will join you there."

This new found focus on local diving clearly provides a needed boost to help support and sustain our beloved sport during these challenging times. But it's also an opportunity for each of us to thrive and grow as divers, a chance to rediscover our roots. This is how sport diving began!

When The Diving Stood Still

It's been seven to eight months since the pandemic began its sweep across the water planet sending much of the world into lock down, turning lives and businesses upside down. In response, DeeperBlue.com publisher Stephan Whelan and myself published an article examining the depth and breadth of Covid-19's early impact on the diving community, apocalyptically titled, ["The Day The Diving Stood Still."](#)

At the time we had little inkling of what we were up against. Expectations were that the pandemic could possibly last into the summer, and we speculated if, and how, the industry could possibly survive a three, four or even a six-month shutdown, which would clearly be an existential threat. Now, more than a half a year later with the virus still spiking and travel analysts cautioning that international travel could be literally disrupted for years—have you checked out airfares lately?—we realise that our early expectations were painfully naive.

Whatever else it's done, the pandemic has served to dramatically demonstrate just how much our diving life and culture had become dependent on dive travel, both domestic and international. Whether it's taking courses, attending dive camps, photographing wild life, or booking that holiday dive trip on a liveaboard or any number of exotic dive destinations, until the pandemic, good diving for the most part meant getting on a plane, more often than not bound for foreign soil.



The Urge to Submerge

Fortunately, divers are an indefatigable lot with irresistible propensity to submerge ourselves in water. It's not surprising then, that it was only a matter of time before divers began trekking to the nearest source be it a quarry or lake, beach or local sink hole as soon as local restrictions began easing, in order to satisfy their deeper urges. Their actions helped point the direction to set the industry back in motion.

PADI, arguably the way *most* of the world learns to dive, was one of the first organisations to identify the trend and realise its critical importance for the diving industry's recovery. Accordingly, it applied its formidable resources to support and amplify these efforts to get divers back in the water and gave it a hashtag to boot. In doing so it helped PADI business members along with the industry to begin to recover and survive.

Beginning in March, PADI conducted over 400 "Business Survival" webinars for its members and expanded its eLearning offerings. They produced the ["Love, Your Local Dive Shop,"](#) video in April, a global [Covid-19 dive status map](#), and the [PADI Adventure app](#) which helps users find local diving sites, in May. And they were just getting started. Throughout the summer PADI hosted webinars promoting local diving throughout Europe and parts of Asia. Try-dive anyone?

It also launched a massive global public relations blitz promoting local diving and learning to dive while at home. The results? The campaign generated hundreds of stories in premier outlets like *The BBC*, *Forbes*, *The Guardian*, *National Geographic*, *MSN Singapore*, *The Sun*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Women's Health*. An example? How about, "[During the Lockdown Why Not Learn to Scuba Dive from Home?](#)" Get the idea? Here's another: "[How the scuba community is navigating the pandemic's uncharted waters.](#)"

PADI was soon joined by other major diving brands like Cressi, DAN Europe, Fourth Element, Girls that Scuba, Mike Ball Expeditions, RAID, Scubapro, Shearwater and SSI to name a few, and the #Divelocal movement was born!

“PADI has led the way and we’re happy to join them along with our industry partners and agencies; we’re all on the same wavelength,” Pellegrini pointed out. “It’s one of the few movements we can all agree on. Local diving is clearly the way to go.”



Think Global, Dive Local

It’s useful to acknowledge that diving began as a strictly local activity. In the beginning, there was no organised dive travel, no liveboards or destinations and as often as not, much of the very early equipment including masks, fins, exposure suits, lights, reels, backplates and buoyancy devices (remember the belly bag?) were homemade.

I still remember my open water course in the mid-70’s. Call it *“Coldwater One!”* We were diving at a local site called “The Breakwater,” a gravelly beach bordered by an L-shaped breakwater, several hundred meters long. That’s where instructors usually took their new students. Visibility was less than two meters and it was all I could do to keep my teeth from chattering in the 9°C ocean water despite my 7mm neoprene rent-a-suit. “I promise it gets better than this” our instructor offered as we negotiated our way back through the surf. Fortunately, as I later learned, he was telling the truth.

Now in the midst of the pandemic, we have a new opportunity to spend some time revisiting and exploring our local dive sites, and hopefully discovering some new ones. There are several potential benefits. First, it’s an opportunity to **explore** sites that you may have not visited for a while, or local sites that you’ve never been to. Be adventurous, try diving somewhere new.

It’s also an opportunity to **try some new kit**. You say, the local waters are a bit chilly for your tastes. How

about investing in a dry suit to keep your warm, along with a dry suit specialty course? You wouldn't be alone. Dive ware manufacturer Fourth Element told me they were experiencing a surge of dry suits sales in China, something they had not seen before. Or throw down some cash for a couple of diver propulsion vehicles (DPVs) so you and your dive buddies can motor out from the beach to that local outer reef. Can you see the possibilities?

Alternatively, you could **expand your diving education** by taking a course locally. In fact, most training agencies have expanded their online learning courses to supplement their local instructors. Some like RAID even offer free online learning. Been wanting to take that nitrox class, dive theory, dry suit, DPV, freediving, learn underwater photography or improve your buoyancy and trim? There's a plethora of knowledge awaiting; feed your head! Even better, this may be an ideal time for your partner or other family members to learn to dive. You get the point.

Or perhaps you're interested in saving the planet? How about **getting involved** in your local clean-up and conservation efforts? PADI's [Project Aware](#) anyone? Or become a citizen scientist, and begin exploring, documenting and protecting your local habitat through [Project Baseline](#). By all means: Think global! Dive local!



Your #Local DAN is Here

Ironically, DAN Europe began in the early 1980s as dive travel was just beginning to take off and destinations like Sharm El Sheikh, Malta and the Maldives were booming — see [“Necessity, The Mother of Invention.”](#) Now the organisation is refocusing its efforts to help celebrate and support local diving.

In fact, the DAN Europe team recently [teamed up with marine biologists to survey](#) the autochthonous freshwater crayfish living in the nearby Pescara Springs Natural Reserve in Popoli, PE, Italy, a little more

than a half an hour drive from DAN's Continental Operations office. The survey will help scientists better monitor the types, distribution and health of crayfish that populate the reserve. This is the first of several local projects that the team plans to participate and support going forward.

In addition, DAN Europe is offering several membership options specifically supporting local diving. The first is DAN's [basic membership package](#) which does not include insurance. The membership provides you with 24/7 access to the DAN hotline and diving medical advice, access to MyDAN and the ever-useful DAN app.

Second, the organisation is in the process of launching a "local diving" insurance product that will exclusively cover you in the event of a local diving accident. As you probably know, even if your country has a robust national healthcare system, it likely does not provide the specialised knowledge and assistance required for diving injuries or fully cover hyperbaric therapy. DAN's local diving plan will save you money over its regular travel-centric diving insurance. Details to be announced soon.

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Finally, DAN Europe invites divers to help us share, and celebrate our collective new focus on local diving. Be sure to use #divelocal, #divesafe in your social media posts, and tag @DANEurope. If you have a local diving story that you want to share, you can also drop an email at editor@alertdiver.eu.

"You may be surprised to learn if you do your research, that every country has special places to dive," DAN senior vice president Laura Marroni explained. "It's not always warm, clear water with colourful fishes, but you can find unexpected beauty and majesty in your own back yard; whether its diving Viking wrecks in the frigid North Sea, drifting along a spring-fed mountain river like we recently did at the Pescara Springs, discovering the thermal water caves of Budapest or Tuscany, or seeing how many kinds of nudibranchs you can identify on a beach dive on the Adriatic."

"Don't let anything stop you from exploring the submerged world around us. And as you do remember, you always have a silent, caring dive buddy at your side with DAN," she said.



Before taking the plunge make sure your DAN membership is still active. If it isn't, join DAN or renew your membership at www.daneurope.org.

Your DAN membership ensures the services of the biggest international network for assisting divers anywhere, during any emergency.

About the author

AlertDiver.eu contributing editor Michael Menduno is an award-winning journalist & technologist who has written about diving and diving technology for decades. He coined the term "technical diving." His work has appeared in magazines such as Alert Diver, DeeperBlue.com, DIVER, Quest, Scientific American, Sports Diver, Undercurrent, Undersea Journal, WIRED and X-Ray. He founded and served as editor-in-chief for aquaCORPS Journal (1990-1996), which helped usher tech diving into the mainstream of sports diving. He also produced the first Tek, EuroTek and AsiaTek conferences. In addition, Michael serves as the editor-in-

chief of InDepth, Global Underwater Explorers (GUE) online magazine.