

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Diving doesn't have a growth problem. It has a retention problem.

Underwater Atlas launches today: a free, science-grounded platform built to close the information gap that sends new divers home disappointed, and out of the sport.

Tampa, FL — July 22, 2026 — Underwater Atlas (underwateratlas.com) launches today. It's a free, independent platform that helps divers plan trips with accurate, science-grounded expectations of what a dive site is really like before they book their next dive trip. It covers more than 10,300 dive sites across 133 countries. Each site has month by month coverage on conditions and marine life, using established scientific data. That way a diver can weigh the odds of a great dive rather than making a decision based on a glossy marketing photograph.

The sport needs it. Every year, roughly a million people around the world learn to scuba dive. Yet the number of active divers worldwide has stalled at an estimated six million. The entry-level certifications that bring in brand-new divers are flat or falling. The sport is losing divers almost as fast as it trains them.

Most divers who leave the sport don't do so because they dislike being underwater. They leave because a trip failed to meet the expectation they arrived with. That failure traces back to information. Reliable, planning-grade information about the underwater world is scattered and hard to compare. It lives in a forum thread here, an operator's own page there, a magazine feature somewhere else. None of it is built for the way divers actually plan. Divers want to be able to compare dive sites across the world easily and without endlessly searching the internet. But until now, no one had pulled the whole picture together in one place a diver could compare and trust. So a newly certified diver books a week somewhere on the strength of a photo or outdated write up. They travel thousands of miles at real expense. They find poor visibility, rough seas, or no sign of the animals they came for. After one costly, disappointing trip, they decide the sport isn't worth it. They were failed by the absence of good information, not by diving itself.

Diving doesn't have a growth problem. It has a retention problem, and the cause is friction. We say that as divers who've felt it, and as marketing and media executives who spend our working lives removing it. Good, current information about specific dive sites is hard to find. So people get frustrated and book a different trip, or they make an expensive guess and come home underwhelmed. Either way, the sport loses them.

— Tommy Nolen, co-founder of Underwater Atlas

Underwater Atlas is built to close that gap. At its center is a data engine that reads nearly two decades of satellite and scientific records. Month by month, it reports the likelihood of the things divers care about such as water clarity, calm seas, healthy reef, and reliable windows to see specific species. Underwater Atlas reports the odds rather than a single, fixed "best time." It is also honest about the trade-offs. For example, the nutrient-rich water that draws manta rays and whale sharks is often the same water that clouds visibility. So the clearest conditions and the richest marine life can fall in different months. This "divers paradox" exists across thousands of sites. Underwater Atlas doesn't bury that behind one "best time." It lays out the clearest months, the wildlife months, and the data behind each, then lets the diver's own priority make the call. The decision stays with the diver. The platform's job is to make it an informed one.

The **Dive Site Finder** is how divers put that data to work. Instead of filtering a list, it ranks every site by what a diver is actually there for: the quality of the dive itself, a specific bucket-list animal in its real season, a balance of the two, or freshwater on its own

terms. It then narrows by month, region, and experience level. Each result shows its season, its conditions, and what is in the water when the diver plans to go. Every rating is traceable to established scientific data, not opinion. That includes satellite records from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), climate data from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), and the world's leading marine-life databases.

But data alone can't tell you what a dive is like. Every one of Underwater Atlas's 10,300-plus sites also carries an original write-up. It explains what the site actually is, how deep it runs, and what certification it calls for. It says whether you reach it from shore or by liveaboard, when it's at its best and why, and what you can realistically expect to see. That context turns numbers into a decision a diver can actually make, and it's there for every site, not just the famous ones. Underwater Atlas also publishes in-depth guides for divers: on gear, training, conservation, and destinations. Some blogs are aimed squarely at the decision point divers leave the sport, like a guide to the first fifty dives after certification.

We built Underwater Atlas to take the friction out of planning. Divers can dig deeper into real data, plan smarter, and have better dives. They get back in the water excited for the next one. And the best part is, it's free.

— John Kennerty, co-founder of Underwater Atlas

Better information leads to better expectations. Better expectations lead to better dives. And better dives are what keep divers in the sport. A diver who understands a site before arriving is a happier guest for the liveaboard and the dive center, and a returning customer for the destination. A tool built for divers ends up serving the operators, the destinations, and the reefs too. Underwater Atlas soft-launched quietly in May 2026. It spent the months since gathering feedback from the diving community, including at the Scuba Show in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where the team met dive-center operators, liveaboard crews, and other industry insiders. Today's public launch is a result of industry conversations and feedback.

Underwater Atlas is available now at underwateratlas.com.

About Underwater Atlas

Underwater Atlas is a free, independent scuba diving reference and dive-planning platform, built by divers, covering more than 10,300 dive sites across 133 countries. Its data engine draws on satellite records from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), climate data from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), and the world's leading marine-life databases: the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS), the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, alongside U.S. State Department and UK Foreign Office travel advisories. It helps divers plan trips with accurate, evidence-based expectations of conditions, marine life, and travel safety. The platform is expanding continually, with new sites, data, and features, and its conditions and reef readings refresh from live scientific sources. Underwater Atlas sells no dive trips and takes no payment for placement. Its mission is simple: to grow the sport by helping divers have better experiences that bring them back. Learn more at underwateratlas.com.

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Notes to editors

- "Roughly a million people learn to dive each year" is an Underwater Atlas estimate, not a published figure. It is derived from DEMA's US entry-level open-water count (~128,000 in 2023) and an estimated US share of global certifications (~13%), implying ~985,000 worldwide. PADI issues roughly 80% of the world's certifications and recorded a record 1,317,383 in 2024. That total counts all certification levels (entry-level plus continuing education), so it is not itself a count of new divers. Underwater Atlas will share its working with any editor on request.

- Supporting the estimate: PADI's own 2024 regional data puts the Americas at 28.4% of its worldwide certifications (Asia Pacific 42.5%, EMEA 29.1%). The USA is the single largest certification destination but only one part of the Americas, so the US share of global certifications sits materially below 28.4%, consistent with the ~13% used above. The two figures are not directly comparable: PADI's regional split covers all certification levels by regional HQ, while the 128,000 is US entry-level across all agencies. (PADI 2024 Worldwide Corporate Statistics.)
- Where diving is growing: PADI's regional mix has shifted sharply. The Americas fell from 41.4% of certifications in 2021 to 28.4% in 2024, while Asia Pacific rose from 22.8% to 42.5%, reflecting the post-pandemic recovery of dive travel. Top five certification destinations in 2024: USA, Thailand, Malaysia, Egypt, Philippines. (PADI 2024 Worldwide Corporate Statistics.)
- Active-diver estimate: Diving Equipment & Marketing Association (DEMA), drawing on Sports & Fitness Industry Association data. Approximately six million scuba divers worldwide. Estimates vary with the definition of an "active" diver.
- Entry-level trend: DEMA and the Business of Diving Institute. US entry-level open-water certifications fell from roughly 198,000 in 2001 to about 128,000 in 2023. In 2023, entry-level certifications declined for 32% of training agencies and rose for only 7%.
- Conditions data sources: visibility from NASA MODIS-Aqua satellite ocean-color chlorophyll-a (~19-year monthly climatology, 2003 to 2022, via NOAA CoastWatch); water temperature from NOAA Optimum Interpolation Sea Surface Temperature (OISST v2.1), 10-year climatology; sea state, wind and rainfall from the ECMWF ERA5 reanalysis; storm risk from IBTrACS (NOAA); reef health from NOAA Coral Reef Watch (weekly bleaching-alert data).
- Marine-life data sources: Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS), iNaturalist, World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.
- Travel-safety data: U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories (primary signal, refreshed daily) and UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) travel advice. Visa and entry information is editorially maintained and periodically reviewed. It is not a live feed.

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