



services

case study

Diving centres in Egypt

(ISO 24803:2017 – *Recreational diving services –
Requirements for recreational diving providers*)

An underwater photograph showing a large, rusted metal structure, likely a shipwreck, on the seabed. Two divers are visible in the mid-ground, exploring the site. The water is clear and blue, with sunlight filtering through from above.

ISO Strategy for Services Case study

Introduction

The ISO strategy for service standardization

Over the last two decades, world exports of commercial services have more than quadrupled, and international trade in services has continued to grow. Based on this observation, ISO anticipates that market demand for service standards will increase steadily over time, along with growing maturity and competitiveness of actors in the services sector who will demand for ways of having their business recognized and interoperable. Thus, we want to make sure that the organization and its members will have the necessary tools and knowledge to respond to this demand, and to the challenges and opportunities it brings. This is why ISO adopted in February 2016 its ISO strategy for service standardization. Our mission? Raising ISO's profile as a provider of service standards while continuing to respond to market expectations and helping our members to do the same.

For those not familiar with ISO, we are a membership-based network of national standards bodies that come together to develop International Standards ensuring products, processes and services are fit for purpose. ISO standards provide practical tools for tackling many of today's global challenges, bringing tangible benefits to business, society and the environment. ISO has already published more than 700 standards related to services in various sectors, including

finance, business, brand valuation, customer contact centres, outsourcing, assessment services, IT services, marketing, and many more.

ISO defines a “service” as the “result of at least one activity, necessarily performed at the interface between the supplier and customer, that is generally intangible”¹. However, the concepts of “services” and “service standards” are broad, and many different definitions and classifications exist. Some standards purely support the provision of a service. Others may support the infrastructure (e.g. IT or financial) necessary for the provision of a service. Then, there are horizontal standards such as management system standards that can be applied to the provision of a service, but also much more broadly.

Rather than concentrate on questions of definition or classification, ISO has chosen to develop case studies to illustrate the use of these different kinds of service standards and to give real-life examples of how standards are being implemented in different industries, citing tangible results in terms of service delivery and consumer satisfaction. By highlighting success stories, this case study helps understand where standards are being implemented, how they work, and why they benefit more than outweigh the investment.

Note : This case study comes in addition to studies published in 2016 covering technical specification ISO/TS 13131 (telehealth services) as well as International Standards ISO 24510 (activities relating to drinking water

and wastewater services), ISO 17680 (thalassotherapy), ISO 20121 (event sustainability management systems), and ISO 20022 (universal financial industry message scheme).

More information on ISO’s strategy for service standardization and ongoing work can be found at:

www.iso.org/sites/servicestandards/index.html.



¹ Definition from ISO/IEC Guide 76:2008, *Development of service standards – Recommendations for addressing consumer issues*.

Analysis

What is ISO 24803?

ISO 24803:2017, *Recreational diving services – Requirements for recreational diving providers*, is a standard on recreational diving services that focuses on requirements for recreational diving providers.

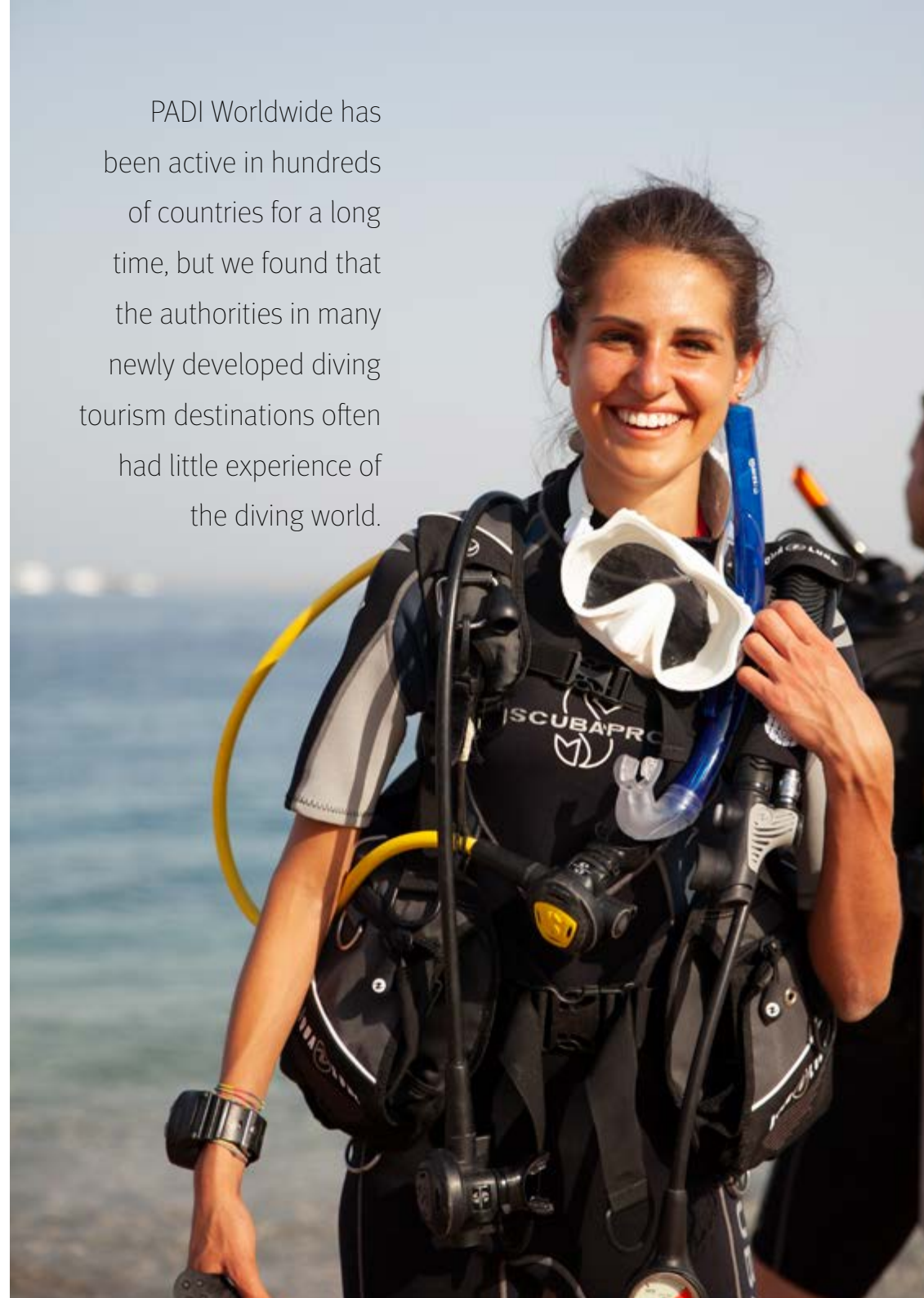
Operators in the diving industry offer a variety of services including diver training and education, guided dives and snorkelling excursions, as well as the rental of diving equipment and courses leading to diver or instructor qualifications. Examples of service providers are land-based dive centres, boat-based operations, dive clubs, individual instructors, water sports centres, and operators offering snorkelling excursions.

Why do they need a standard?

Before signing up for a diving lesson or excursion, customers need to trust that their scuba instructor is properly qualified to teach and guide. Delivering quality services in a safe environment has become a major indicator of success in many business sectors over the year as companies come to realize that services are drivers for reputation, customer satisfaction and economic growth.

Several years ago, the industry agreed that standardization was becoming important for recreational activities. ISO 24803 covers recreational activities such as diving, snorkelling, organized and guided dives for qualified divers, training and education, and the rental of diving and snorkelling equipment.

PADI Worldwide has been active in hundreds of countries for a long time, but we found that the authorities in many newly developed diving tourism destinations often had little experience of the diving world.



Safety through training

Service providers want to ensure their customers can enjoy recreational activities safely and that they are aware of the risks. How? Through training and education, which feature prominently in the standard.

Diving industry experts have realized the importance of training and experience in order to carry out their activities safely. Recreational diving is potentially hazardous but, with appropriate precautions, risks can easily be reduced to acceptable levels, both for people (the divers) and natural resources at dive sites.

How was the standard developed?

Scuba diving is a very popular activity and a very safe one as long as proper rules are followed. Long-established training agencies such as PADI, a worldwide recreational diving association, have been providing excellent training programmes for many years. However, new training agencies come on the scene from time to time and they need a proper structure in place within which to conduct their activities. So it is very helpful for government agencies, tourism providers and the public to have an ISO standard that codifies proper procedures for running a diving centre in a trustworthy manner.

Many other organizations involved in scuba diving saw this as a good way to provide a structure for the cross-recognition of credentials² between organizations. They realized it would give governments confidence that the

2 Credentials are certificates proving a successful completion of a diver training level.



PADI is the world's leading scuba diver training organization. It is a privately held corporation that is international in scope with service offices and distribution centres in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

PADI Worldwide's corporate headquarters are located in California, USA. PADI Regional Headquarters support the efforts of individual professional members and PADI Dive Centres and Resorts in more than 183 countries and territories. 6 500 PADI Dive Centres and Resorts, and more than 135 000 individual PADI Professionals who have issued more than 25 million certificates around the world

industry can regulate itself by proposing meaningful guidelines to enhance the consumer's experience and well-being.

Resources are key

ISO 24803 grew out of the work of technical committee ISO/TC 228, Tourism and related services, an international forum of 100 countries – led by Spain's national association for standardization (UNE), ISO's member for the country, in collaboration with INNORPI, the ISO member for Tunisia – which aims to find consensus on the best way to deliver tourist-related services. Its work has given rise to over 40 standards to help public and private organizations improve their tourist services in areas such as diving, thalassotherapy, protected natural environments, adventure tourism, and marinas.

Within ISO/TC 228, a dedicated working group of experts (WG 1) was created to develop ISO 24803. It took the working group 26 months to develop the standard at an average rate of two meetings per year. Experts from 27 countries met to reach consensus on the way forward. Finding a common ground is not easy when working in a multicultural environment, which has to contend with different languages and cultures. Mark Caney, Industry Relations and Training Executive – PADI Worldwide, was



consistently involved in the development of the standard, with active participation from five experts working at PADI Worldwide. And through consistency and hard work, they made it happen.

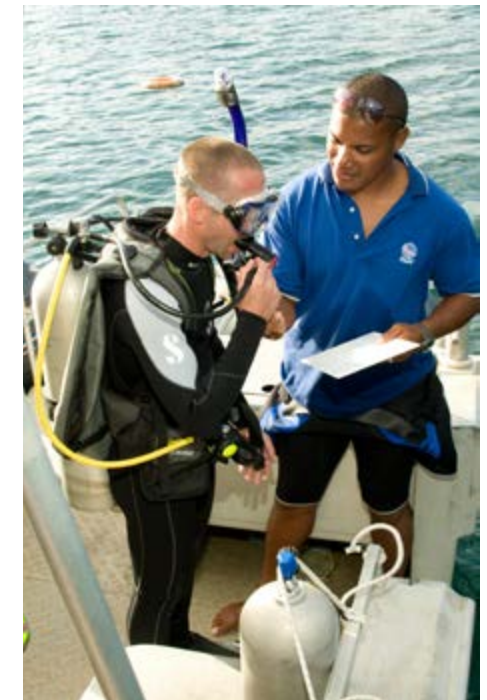
Because of the growing popularity of diving tourism worldwide, governments became more inclined to define a framework for regulating its activities. PADI Worldwide felt it was logical and natural to contribute extensively, as an industry, to the development of the standard by helping to codify best practices – not to do so was not an option.

How do PADI qualifications equate to ISO standards?

ISO level*	ISO reference	PADI equivalent
Introductory training programmes to scuba diving	ISO 11121	Discover Scuba Diving
Diver Level 1 – Supervised diver	ISO 24801-1	PADI Scuba Diver
Diver Level 2 – Autonomous diver	ISO 24801-2	Open Water Diver
Diver Level 3 – Dive leader	ISO 24801-3	Divemaster
Training programmes on enriched air nitrox diving	ISO 11107	Enriched Air Diver
Requirements for gas blender training programmes	ISO 13293	TecRec Gas Blender
Instructor Level 1	ISO 24802-1	Assistant Instructor
Instructor Level 2	ISO 24802-2	Open Water Scuba Instructor
Recreational scuba diving service providers	ISO 24803	Dive Centre or Resort

* Each level corresponds to a specific standard where specific requirements apply.

“We found that showing that we comply with ISO standards gives them confidence. It is a concept that is easily understood, even when someone has no knowledge of diving.”



Case study

Diving centres in Egypt and ISO 24803:2017

Red Sea diving

The Red Sea is one of the most beautiful places to dive in the world. Separating Africa from Arabia, it has been described as Europe's Caribbean, providing the closest access to clear tropical waters for millions of European tourists. Historically, the bulk of the diving activity has taken place in Egypt, which owns a large portion of the coastline, including some of the finest dive spots such as Ras Muhammed, the Straits of Tiran and the famous Thistlegorm wreck, a British armed Merchant Navy ship initially discovered by French oceanographer Jacques-Yves Cousteau.

The expansion of diving tourism

At the turn of the millennium, the Egyptian government became more focused on diving tourism. **The overall number of visitors was growing and would reach nearly 15 million a year by 2010.** The government soon realized that a large portion of these were not just visiting the historic sites, such as the pyramids of Giza and Luxor, they came specifically for the Red Sea! Many were non-divers initially, who learned to dive in Egypt, but even more were dedicated, certified divers who flocked to Egypt for its unique marine environment.



“As they became aware of the importance of diving for their tourism industry, the Egyptian government realized that the sector needed clear guidelines for dive centre operations.”

Harmonization through ISO: how the joint work started

Although there were many quality dive centres run by internationally renowned training agencies, a number of others, particularly smaller ones, were of more dubious quality. The Egyptian government had appointed the local Egyptian diving federation to inspect such centres, but this proved ineffective as they worked to their own protocols that were largely unfamiliar to overseas divers.

How the collaboration started

The government needed clear guidelines for dive centre operations that could be applied fairly across the board and would be recognizable as a quality benchmark by foreign tourists. **They soon became aware of the ISO standard for service providers, which filled the purpose perfectly.**

They also contacted EUF Certification International, a certifying body jointly set up by the European Underwater Federation, a not-for-profit with representatives from diver training organizations across Europe, and Austrian Standards (ASI), ISO's member in Austria. **EUF Certification International has become the default route for demonstrating compliance with recreational diving standards** and all major international diver training agencies have chosen to be audited by it to show their adherence to the ISO standards.

The Egyptian government appointed a new group to oversee diving standards in the country – the Egyptian Chamber of Diving and Water sports (CDWS). The CDWS was instructed to use ISO 24803 as the benchmark for dive centre operations. Every dive centre in the country was to be inspected and compared to this standard to be allowed to operate legally. Since there were around 250 centres at that time, this was a major undertaking.

The CDWS worked with EUF Certification International to train a team of assessors, all of whom were experienced diving instructors in their own right. They visited dive operators to determine if they were meeting the exacting standards of ISO 24803. This is a continuous process and there are presently eight full-time auditors in Egypt who regularly visit dive centres across the country to ensure they remain compliant with the standard.

Focus of ISO 24803

The standard ensures that operators incorporate best practices into their business and outlines what they should provide in the following areas:





“Consumers have a more positive and consistent experience. Operators working in the business have clear guidelines as to what they need to do to be compliant with best practices.”

Mark Caney, Industry Relations and Training Executive – PADI Worldwide

Benefits of ISO 24803

Q&A with Mark Caney, Industry Relations and Training Executive, – PADI Worldwide

Mark, can you explain how ISO 24803 improves recreational diving services as a whole?

M.C: Following the adoption of ISO 24803 as the benchmark for dive centre operations, we saw a noticeable improvement in the overall quality of the diving industry in Egypt. It has removed the tendency for any one country to create its own rules for the conduct of diving, which were usually inappropriate and ineffective. They can now simply use the ISO standard as an “off the shelf” solution. It has also avoided protectionism, improved cross-border trade within the industry and reinforced the importance of safety.

Can you tell us what the main improvements are on a customer/service provider relationship level?

M.C: Clients have more confidence in booking a service that meets an ISO standard. They are also able to show that the credentials they receive have ISO standards backing them up, which makes them more transferable and meaningful. All parties have more clarity about what should be done and what it means.

“ISO 24803 and the related suite of recreational diving standards have altered the organization of diving in Egypt in other ways too.”

Mark Caney, Industry Relations and Training Executive – PADI Worldwide

Do you feel an increase in loyalty from customers?

M.C: The ISO standard enhanced the credibility of PADI courses and made our instructors, dive centres and customers even more secure in the knowledge that the service PADI provides meets the highest standards.

What about the reputation of your company and the recreational diving profession?

M.C: The standard was written by a very experienced team of international experts from the diving world, so it is a practical and meaningful codification of best practices.

M.C: All of the big international training agencies have aligned their courses and procedures to the standards, and so all the instructors and dive masters working in Egypt have credentials aligned with the standards. **Many of the agencies state on their diver certification cards that the bearer has been trained according to the ISO standard.** PADI issues about a million cards a year. So, this alone has been a very effective way to spread the word about the importance of ISO standards for recreational diving.

That’s not all!

Standardization can also indirectly contribute to improving other factors we did not consider in the first place. For example, ISO 24803 contributes to preserving marine ecosystems. How, you may ask? By implementing the standard, the impact on the marine environment, particularly fragile marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, can be reduced through proper education and training of scuba instructors, dive leaders and divers.



What's next?

Also developed by working group WG 1, ISO 13289 and ISO 13970 deal specifically with recreational snorkelling. The first one focuses on the particular conditions under which snorkelling excursions can be provided while the second deals specifically with snorkelling guide training programmes.

Finally, another two standards are close to being completed that will cover best practices for operating a diving business in an environmentally sensitive manner, as well as provide guidelines on training divers in environmental awareness. These will be most relevant given the delicate nature of the Red Sea's beautiful coral reefs and the need to protect the marine ecosystems. Many Egyptian dive centre operators are in the process of implementing them to complement the existing guidelines in ISO 24803!

Our sincere thanks for their support:

- ▶ Mark Caney, Industry Relations and Training Executive – PADI Worldwide, for his valued contribution to this case study
- ▶ All delegates of ISO/TC 228, Tourism and related services, WG 1, Diving services
- ▶ Martin Denison, Convenor of ISO/TC 228/WG 1
- ▶ Dr Peter Jonas, Secretary of ISO/TC 228/WG 1



Conclusion

ISO services standards and the 2016-2020 strategy

Though only halfway through its current strategic plan (the ISO Strategy 2016-2020), ISO is already working on the next chapter for 2021-2025, keeping its sights on service standardization. ISO's current strategic direction includes a communication pillar aimed at building recognition of the value and impact of International Standards among the public and private sectors. This helps the organization achieve its ultimate objective to have "ISO standards used everywhere".

International Standards help maintain a healthy competition in the marketplace by ensuring that companies which have already invested considerable amounts of money to offer better quality at affordable prices are rewarded accordingly. The more diverse and competitive a market, the more guidance consumers need to be sure they are purchasing the services they want at the best price.

This case study makes a clear business case for service standardization, positioning it as a natural extension of product standardization. It illustrates how service standards set a framework for the supply of services and provides a golden opportunity to significantly improve their quality, thus contributing a growing share to the added value of a product.

In preparing this case study, we consulted the technical committee that developed ISO 24803 to learn from their experience and get their market feedback. This helps take the pulse of the business community, which in turn will help determine where services are being traded, and which sectors and stakeholders could benefit most from the development of International Standards. But the ISO strategy for service standardization does not stand alone and it is worth reminding ourselves of the bigger picture surrounding ISO's efforts in this area. For although you may not see it yet, ISO is already working hard to make your life easier and the world a better place!



About ISO

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 161* national standards bodies. Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market-relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

ISO has published more than 22 000* International Standards and related documents covering almost every industry, from technology to food safety, to agriculture and healthcare.

For more information, please visit www.iso.org.

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