

I M M E R S I O N

Singapore's First Freediving Newsletter brought to you by Apnea Association of Singapore

Feature Interview

Shuyi Chua talks to first Singapore National Record holder (Free Immersion), Nuraliza Osman

Mid-Year Updates

A glimpse of our events and initiatives for 2021

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APNEA ASSOCIATION OF
SINGAPORE



AIDA National Representative



Member of Singapore Underwater Federation (NSA)



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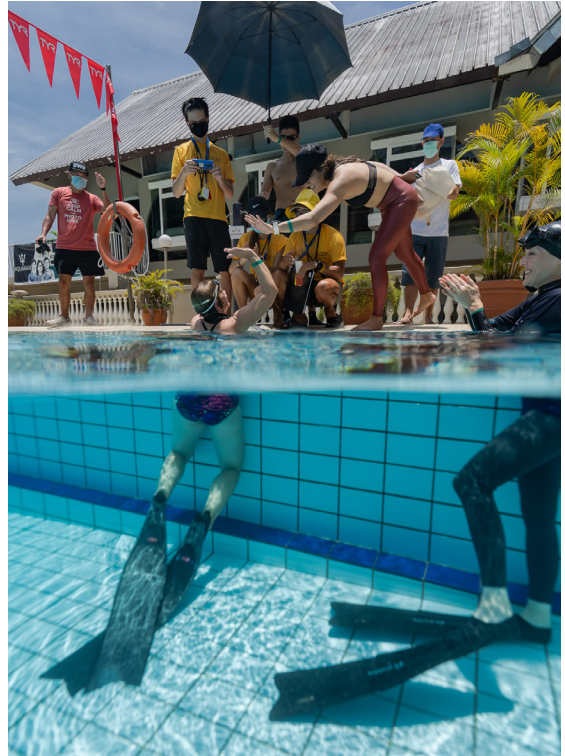
Writer and freediver Shuyi Chua sat down with the first Singapore National Record holder, lawyer, and Miss Universe alumni, Nuraliza Osman for a chat.



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Brief overview of 2021 events and initiatives, and what's coming up next



Foreword

Hello! This newsletter has been some time in the making, and the exco thought it would be a nice way to engage with our members and keep you updated on what we have been doing. With the pandemic still on the back of everyone's minds, The Association is thinking of ways we can proceed with our planned calendar for 2021.

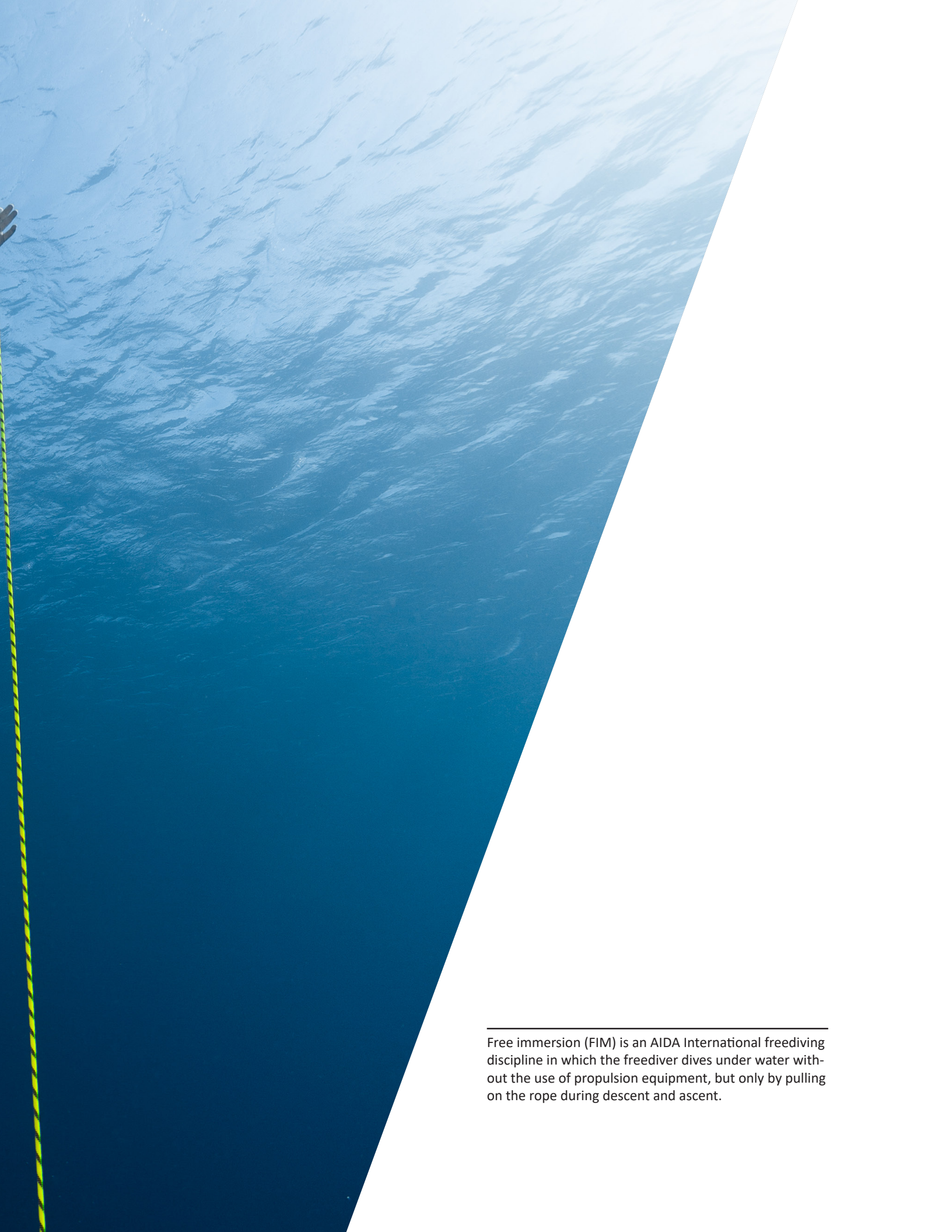
We are now already halfway through the year and making preparations for the freediving national competition. Initially slated for July, we have now been thrown a curveball by Phase 2 (Heightened Alert), and delays are to be expected. More will be revealed in the Mid-Year Updates section. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy reading the articles prepared.

This being our inaugural newsletter, we would like to start with the beginning of competitive freediving in Singapore. We go all the way back to 2012, when the first Singapore national record for Free Immersion (FIM) was set.

Until next time, take care.

Afiza Affandi
President





Free immersion (FIM) is an AIDA International freediving discipline in which the freediver dives under water without the use of propulsion equipment, but only by pulling on the rope during descent and ascent.



Image: Facebook

FEATURE: INTERVIEW WITH NURALIZA OSMAN

Shuyi Chua

What was it like to be a freediver in Singapore 10 years ago? Back then, there were no freediving schools in Singapore. You may start learning freediving overseas, but when you returned to Singapore, there was no community to share your excitement with, nor help you to solve your technical problems. You were thankful if you had a buddy to train with.

Earlier this year, Aaron, Judee, and I interviewed Nuraliza Osman, a lawyer and former Miss Universe Singapore 2002. She was also the first woman to establish a record for Singapore in a freediving competition. She shares with us her story and lessons.

What inspired you to take up freediving?

It all started with the dream of diving with whales. I was a scuba diver but I realised that when you scuba dive, the bubbles scare the fish away. When we freedive, there are of course no bubbles so we are able to get up-close and personal with the fishes. You also then get the most beautiful photographs with fish that are naturally inquisitive.

Tell us more about your national record.

When I first picked up freediving, it was for the love of the ocean. I wanted to dive with whales and their young after they gave birth and while their young are gaining strength. As scuba diving was prohibited in many of these protected areas, I thought I should learn how to freedive. Out of curiosity, since other people in the school

were looking at their own country records, I also checked the records for Singapore. To my surprise, I realised that Singapore had no records for women in depth related disciplines such as free immersion. At that moment, I thought, "I am going to try to see if I can add our little red dot to the list for female records"!

Looking back, I realised that trying to establish a record with 3 months training was a little mad but it also lit a fire in my soul and gave me a goal to gun for as I trained and practiced in the evenings after a long workday. Of course, my record was nothing (and crappy!) with 3 months training but hey, Singapore was finally included in the list and that was reason enough to make me smile. I am so heartened to see that our women have gone so much deeper and achieved so much more since then. It is wonderful that the freediving scene in Singapore has progressed so much further since then.

Only three months? Tell us how you started freediving.

I went for my first apnea course in Gili Trawangan with Freedive Gili. Back then, the school consisted of a simple hut. The teacher passed me some books and told me to come the next day in my swimsuit and to bring a change of clothes. The next few days, after classroom learning and some practice holding our breath in a pool, we were brought out to sea for our first depth training session. I felt insecure as we were quite far out to get the necessary depth. We didn't have tanks like scuba divers and were given masks and snorkels and asked to jump in! I was really scared, but I was pleasantly surprised that all of us did at least 14m on that first day.

How did you prepare for the competition?

When you're a new freediver, you have no clue what you're doing and more importantly, what your physical limitations are. Basically, I trained in the swimming pool with my buddy three or four nights a week for static to build my carbon dioxide tolerance. Through some fervent internet and facebook searches, I was lucky enough to find Jade (Leutenegger). She was the first freediving instructor in Singapore and was part of the Canadian gold medalist team. At that time, Jade was not teaching commercially and she joined us for training for the love of the sport. For static, she shared her techniques and mental discipline with us which proved really helpful. Personally, I always felt that static was harder than depth as it was a battle between you and your mind. Between understanding your limits and giving up too soon. The underwater convulsions frightened me and learning how to embrace them and keep calm was a skill to learn. This contrasted with depth diving which was so very peaceful

and had a natural flow.

Tell us something memorable about your freediving competition.

It was the Blood Red Philippine Depth Challenge in 2012. Jade, Bjorn (my coach from Freedive Gili) and I had all decided to sign up (following Bjorn's lead). During training in the days before the competition, I did 35 to 40 meters comfortably. However, the day before the competition, the stress was building up and during one of my dives I started coughing a lot of blood when I surfaced. I remembered asking my coaches if I should continue to compete. They advised me not to push it and that if I did decide to proceed, that I should attempt a depth that I was confident and comfortable with. I then decided to err on the side of caution and thought 25m was indeed mentally a depth that I was comfortable with achieving. It was fun and enjoyable, and most importantly, a safe dive. I remember that I almost hit a record as well for constant weight save that I bungled up my surface protocol because of the excitement!

Why were you stressed during the competition?

We read about injuries during competition because of stress and other factors and some of these injuries are very serious. On competition day as well, when you see divers sustain injuries, it rattles you and reminds you of the importance of safety. Many people pick up freediving quickly and tend to push limits to hit a goal depth. The exhilaration of constantly going deeper quickly sometimes doesn't give the body enough time to physically get used to the depth and be ready to achieve it without strain and injury. Looking back, I would certainly have given myself much more time before I attempted any competition!



Nuraliza with her teachers, Tristan and Bjorn in Freedive Gili.



Nuraliza learning to freedive in Gili Trawangan.

This situation has improved since those days, and there are now stricter regulations for competitions.

The regulations are important as they help protect athletes. The rules help ensure that we surface alive, injury free and able to dive another day. That's the best advice I have ever received throughout my scuba diving and freediving life – always be careful so that you can go home to your family and live to dive another day. Don't be careless and reckless, because it is your life that is at stake.

Could you tell us what you liked most about freediving that kept you going?

Freediving inculcates discipline of the mind but also teaches you to trust in yourself. I like the

fact that my freediving skills made me safer underwater because I could hold my breath for longer (for instance if I went surfing and was held under by a wave). Freediving also really taught me how to control negative thoughts and to reign in my mind. A lot of the time, we give up because we mentally believe that we can endure no more, and not because we are physically unable to do so. Freediving enabled me to deepen my understanding of my own body and what my physical and mental limits were.



Nuraliza after a successful free immersion dive at the Blood Red Philippine Depth Challenge 2012.

Where would you recommend diving?

Diving has been a gift that I will always cherish. The memories from diving with killer whales in Norway, walls of hammerheads in the Galapagos islands and bull sharks and Great Whites from South Africa will remain till I am old and withered. My best diving memory however is in Mexico. Isla Revillagigedo which are part of the Socorro islands of Mexico is my favourite place to dive in the world because you get to dive with the world's largest species of mantas which look like B-52 bombers. They are not afraid of humans and on the contrary, love playing with divers. The dolphins and other marine life crave human contact because Isla Revillagigedos is a protected area where they have never been hunted and can roam freely and safely in their watery universe. I still cherish these memories (and videos) to date and thank my countless blessings for these encounters.



Nuraliza celebrates with Jade and Bjorn after a successful static dive of 4:09.



Nuraliza freediving with whalesharks in Oslob, Cebu.

If you could rewrite your freediving journey, is there anything you might like to change?

I would definitely wear more sunscreen! Skin cancer is real, don't skip your sunscreen please!

Who do you admire in the freediving world?

The person who we respected during our time was Natalia Molchanova, an incredible female freediver and professor from Russia. We watched all her videos for inspiration

and respected her because she was a true pioneer. She established depth records which were unheard of! Most importantly she set those records in her 50s. To me, that is passion and that is why she's my version of a rock star.



Nuraliza plays with mantas in the Maldives

What are you up to these days?

I spend much more time on the surface these days and dive only when I am on vacation. I am still pursuing my passion though but in different fields. Currently I sit on the board of directors of two separate charities i.e. one that helps children from low income families and another that supports children who suffer from critical illnesses. I also run a team of lawyers across Asia and China specialising in mergers in acquisitions and hosted my own television talk show last year focussing on women's rights. I still love the ocean and will always have a soft spot for freediving. I look forward to the day we see the Singapore flag fly high if the sport is accepted as part of Olympics or SEA games. Till then, I wish every Singaporean freediver a safe and wonderful journey into this magical world underwater.

MID-YEAR UPDATE

A rundown of events and initiatives in 2021 so far

Here's a throwback of the events that happened in the first half of the year!

Safety is #1 priority in freediving. In preparation for the upcoming dive competitions to come (optimistically withstanding COVID-19 measures), we restarted our safeties trainings in February, and a selected few went on later to deliver a well-done job during our mini-comp.

We finally had our first AIDA mini-comp in March at Changi Beach Club after a forced hiatus by COVID-19. It was a bountiful competition as 5 National Records were set by our athletes representing Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore and Switzerland. We are honored to be part of our athletes' freediving journeys as they break their limits despite the pandemic. Let's look forward to more of these and what our freedivers are capable of achieving!

In an effort to engage our community members and possibly spreading the word about freediving, we organised a beach clean-up in April 2021, in collaboration with Zen Freediving. We also had support from SG Beach Warriors and FATUWR. The event unexpectedly attracted more than 50 participants. Despite the rain, our participants rallied on in their ponchos and umbrellas with a strong will to gather as much plastic waste and debris on the St. John's and Lazarus island as possible. In hindsight, the cooling weather made the cleanup bearable

for our Muslim participants who were fasting, as it was also during the Ramadan period. Everything panned out eventually and we collected approximately 163.5kg of trash from the islands.

Despite our best intentions to go forth with the Pool Nationals in July, our government has bought back some of the earlier restrictions that has forced us to put our plans on hold. The COVID-19 measures had also posed many logistical difficulties as it involves external parties who also needs to abide by the sudden change in government regulations. With a heavy heart, we have to postpone the pool nationals until further notice. We hope for your understanding as this is ultimately for the interests of our community, external parties and nation.

As more people are being vaccinated in the coming months, things are expected to pick up, and we are exploring options such as Pre-Event Testing for the competition. Please bear with us and we hope to see you in August or early September 2021!



Photos from March AIDA DYN mini-comp and April beach cleanup.





Jun Hua and Margret Yoko modeling the AAS Tee shirts

2021 TEE SHIRT DESIGN

We decided it is high time for our AAS tee shirt to have a new design. Previously we had a lone freediver who was diving downwards. We have flipped the silhouette's orientation and gave him a buddy. This new design signifies our hopes that things are looking up and we are never alone in this freediving community. We also hope freedivers in Singapore will continue to stand as one, to come together and bring

awareness to our beautiful sport regardless of what school we are from. Credits to Jacky and Patricia for coming up with the new design.

2021 Design



2019-2000 Design

