

Dr Thor Ju An from Queen Elizabeth Hospital Kota Kinabalu,

Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) regional manager and course Director Mark Hedger was also present along with over 40 volunteers including from India, Singapore, Brunei, Australia, Netherlands and the US.

Meanwhile, Iziani Hayati Abbas, who has been wheelchair bound for her whole life never thought that she would one day have the opportunity to try out scuba diving.

The 39-year-old charity worker was diagnosed with spina bifida at birth, was part of the five-people group that got the chance to be part of Diveheart Adaptive programme.

“Thanks to Diveheart and all the volunteers, we were given the opportunity to learn how to scuba dive. After going through the first day course in a swimming pool, we were taken to open waters to test out our new learned skill,” said the youngest of five siblings.

Iziani said that the whole experience was not only educational and memorable, but more emotional.

When she was in the water, she felt like she was just like other people without any disability.

“I did not expect to be able to do this, because when I first tried to get into the sea on the first day, I got scared and had to be brought back to the shore.

“But today, one day later, I made it about three metres down and saw some fish. It is beautiful and a whole new world opened up for me when I was diving,” she said.

For Lidwina Isidore Andilah, who became paralysed



waist down after injuring her spine following a fall when she was five, the thought of scuba diving was always on her mind.

“I have only kept this intention (diving) at the back of my mind because I did not know who to approach and am not sure if there is anyone who can cater to my condition for the activity,” said the 29-year-old who has always been into extreme sports, including paragliding and rafting despite her condition.

She said having grown up with her able-bodied friends, she has always seen them going for dives and swims, and that is one reason why she keeps pushing herself to try new things and just get out of her comfort zone.

“For others like me out there, don’t be afraid to try new things because we can do what others can do too. We just need more help getting there,” said Lidwina,



Another participant, Nurizzati Zahidah Hasanudin, 26, was quick to change her social media profile picture after her dive at the Mamutik Island on the first day of the program.

“I am so happy and excited. I want to do this again and I know that with the right trainers from DiveHeart, guidance and support from qualified Volunteers, we too can do much more than just sitting on our wheelchairs,” she said, adding that about five to six volunteers were needed to help them out to sea, when diving and back up to the shore. ☀