

Divevolk SeaTouch 4 review

by Peter Rowlands

Avid readers who are still awake will know that I am a great fan of Smartphones for underwater photography and the iPhone in particular. Way back in Issue UwP112 Christian Baki reviewed the Divevolk SeaTouch Pro 3 and I have one which I have used on a regular basis here in the UK.

I was delighted, therefore, to meet up with the nice folk at Divevolk again in New Orleans in November at the DEMA Show and came away with a SeaTouch 4 Max to review. The form factor and size are very similar but there is a more sensitive gel screen and the construction incorporates much more aluminium to give it an even more reassuring feel.

I use the word 'reassuring' intentionally because I think that is what is needed if you are to entrust your iPhone within this housing. Personally I kind of organise my world around mine and the thought of losing it doesn't bear thinking about. Underwater photographically I decided, and have advised you, to use a previous model iPhone and treat it much more as a dedicated camera while you still have your up to date

model in your pocket ready to take calls etc etc.

I tend to update my iPhone every couple of years and, to be honest, this is usually only if there has been significant camera developments. My trusty old iPhone 11 Pro Max had introduced a 0.5x wide lens which struck me, at 130° coverage as being ideal underwater together with 4k 60fps video so when it was the current model I upgraded to a 13 Pro Max as my phone and kept my 11 Pro Max as a 'camera'.

The SeaTouch 4 Max that I was given was a kit which included a sealed dome port for use in front of any of the iPhone's 3 lenses but would primarily be ideal in front of the 0.5x wide lens. In addition there was a 'red' colour correction filter which, as half of Magic Filters, I was sceptical about but more of that later.

The arrival of the Divevolk SeaTouch 4 and an OM System TG6 meant that I just HAD to go overseas to try them out, especially as it was nearing mid winter here in the UK.

As a result I booked to go to the Red Sea in November with my iPhone 11 Pro Max and was looking forward



to some clear, warm water in which to enjoy the 'fun' of Smartphone/iPhone photography underwater.

In order to experience, and report on, the typical situation which I think most Smartphone users find themselves in, I brought the outfit out unpacked, as most impulsive people might, - pretending to having bought

it as a last minute decision prior to a much anticipated holiday away from the pressures of life and with a new 'toy' to play with. So I opened the nicely packaged and presented Divevolk case in my room at the resort for the first time.

What I was presented with was comprehensive yet simple and



My first Red Sea panorama straight out of the camera. iPhone 11 Pro Max, DiveVolk SeaTouch 4 housing, DiveVolk red filter. 0.5x wide, at F3.4. 1/104th sec. ISO 160

obvious as to how it should be assembled. The backbone is the rectangular adaptor which keeps it in the right position within the housing. Between these two the housing can accommodate the iPhone 6P/7P/8P/XSMAX/14P/15P, iPhone 12/13/14/15 PRO, iPhone 11PROMAX/12/13/14/15 PRO MAX, Samsung S23 Ultra, Samsung S22ultra/S21 Plus, Samsung S21 Ultra/S20 Ultra.

Just to provide an extra bit of firmness for the adaptor sticky side firm neoprene is provided to cut a suitably shaped strip to stick on the inside of the adaptor to help insertion and retention. Nice little touches like this show an attention to detail. To top all of this, and another

excellent attention to detail, there is a professional plaited lanyard/loop handle which looks very classy indeed and works well.

Virtually nothing needs to be adjusted on the iPhone but a good idea is to change the Display & Brightness setting to 'Raise to wake'. This eliminates the need to swipe up which works most times but can be sluggish just when you don't want it to be. The downside is that, underwater, the housing is almost certainly being moved around in the water even when not in use that it will activate the Raise to Wake facility whether you want it or not and could lead to battery drain. In practice I got at least two one hour dives before the phone needed

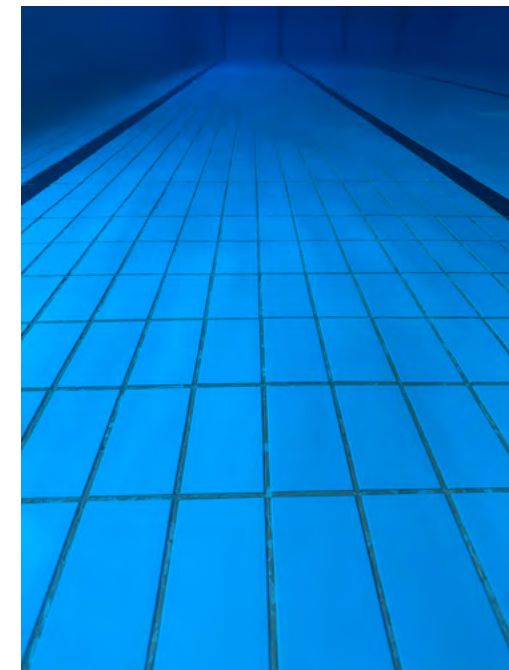


Simple and effective, what we did on our hols pic. Plenty of detail. Phone 11 Pro Max, DiveVolk SeaTouch 4 housing, DiveVolk red filter. 0.1x (26mm), at F1.8. 1/121st sec. ISO 100





The 0.5x wide lens behind a flat port produces images that race off towards the edges but the DiveVolk Dome ports corrects this very successfully. iPhone 11 Pro Max, DiveVolk SeaTouch 4 housing, DiveVolk red filter. 0.5x wide, at F2.4. 1/121st sec. ISO 160



Without a dome and behind a flat port (left), the 13mm 0.5x lens exhibits strong pincushion distortion but with the DiveVolk dome fitted (right) this is eliminated very well indeed.



Be aware that there is a small gap (left) between the filter holder and the housing port which can let in stray light (as in the image above) if the sun is in the wrong position. A short piece of black tape would eliminate this possibility and DiveVolk are working on an accessory solution.

Phone 11 Pro Max, DiveVolk SeaTouch 4 housing, DiveVolk red filter. 0.5x wide, at F2.4. 1/121st sec. ISO 160sec. ISO 160

charging.

Once mounted in the appropriate adaptor the iPhone can be slid into the housing, the rear fold over door closed and retained with two small but sufficient screws to compress the main seal. You are good to go down to 60 metres.

Basically speaking that's the end of the review from the operating point of view for the iPhone can now be used in just the same way as you would on land and I suspect you don't need any help with that. The unique capability of the Divevolk SeaTouch 4

is to allow you to use the iPhone just as you would on land and that's what makes it so exciting and full of future potential.

The membrane screen has been improved to make it more tactile and sensitive and that is certainly true over the SeaTouch 3 so it is very easy to use with no delay.

The ability to use the iPhone just as you would on land is quite revolutionary and, imaging aside, it is available as a mobile communicating device which brings a tremendous safety factor.



Classic Red Sea subjects are a doddle and I have to admit that the red filter did a perfectly acceptable job even though I am half of Magic Filters :-) iPhone 11 Pro Max, DiveVolk SeaTouch 4 housing, DiveVolk red filter. 1x lens (zoomed in to 52mm), at F1.8. 1/122nd sec. ISO 100

For my first dive I was itching to get my hands on the Pano function of the camera. For those not familiar with this capability, the iPhone will record the image as you pan from left to right and stitch it together live to form an instant panorama. The capability is incredibly impressive on the land, and, with a few limitations, equally so underwater. Because Panos are best shot with available light I fitted the 67mm Red filter into the swing holder

and adjusted it to be in front of the 0.5x lens without vignetting.

I can't deny I was like an excited kid in a sweet shop and it wasn't long before Panos were appearing on my screen in no time at all. Like all Panos, even on land, not all of them work for some reason but they cost nothing and take no time at all to reshoot. The results are here for you to see and I'm happy with them in the main but the 0.5x wide lens behind a flat port

produces distracting distortion/fall off towards the edges so that's where the dome port comes into its own and does a really good job at correcting the geometry of the lens coverage underwater. I never got a chance to try this combo until I got back into a tiled pool here in the UK and the results show that this dome does an excellent job (see the illustrations). As a result my next dives here in the UK (or abroad if I'm lucky) will be with the wide dome securely fixed in front of the 0.5x lens for some quality underwater wideangle images and Panoramas.

An iPhone underwater is a bit like Marmite (or Vegemite). You either take to them or not, attracted or repelled. I doubt there's little I can do to persuade the negativity but all I would say is that, if there is a small part of you that is curious despite owning a very capable full frame and 4/3rd, seriously consider it. The housing is hardly expensive at \$229 (nor the housing, dome and red filter kit for \$459) and you most likely already have the iPhone. Take it into a pool and see just how much fun you have. Then it's up to you how seriously you want to take it - and the latest iPhones, photographically, can be taken very seriously both on land and underwater. The Divevolk SeaTouch housings are also designed to grow with you by providing an expanding

range of well thought out accessories including a large dome for split shots and macro lenses for even more exquisite detail.

I rest my case but I'm sure I will be back in future issues of UwP to keep you updated as to more and more of the capabilities and attractions of what is effectively a new genre of underwater photography.

Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com

www.divevolkdiving.com

