

and a huge coral head split in half. When we came up, he(divemaster) said that they had obviously been fishing (with dynamite) a few days earlier. He also said that the vis was usually better from November through March. If I had known they had din valve tanks available, I wouldn't have converted to yolk before I went. The Bahari Beach and the dive operation were about an hour outside of town. The Bahari Beach is a functional hotel, right on the beach. There were very few people staying there when we were there. We only had one meal there — dinner — which consisted of a chicken leg and thigh and French fries. We couldn't eat the lettuce and tomato (fresh veggies in a foreign country washed in their water is a "no, no" for us). The hotel was about \$100 per night and the meal was cheap. Diving was \$60 for a two-tank dive.

INDONESIA

Indonesia is a dive hot spot that unfortunately provides few choices. . . . While Bali's culture is fantastic (especially if you get away from the coast), the diving's not as spectacular as in other parts of Indonesia. . . . On Bali's east coast the *Liberty* wreck at Tulamben is a favorite among fish specialists, who claim to find a new species on every visit. On the north end there's a good chance of diving with mola molas. . . . While they're certainly harder to get to than Bali, I think the Banda Islands have some of the best coral and fish life

in the world. . . . Although it offers few big fish, Wakatobi, a operation in remote southern Sulawesi, offers fantastic color, amazing biodiversity, and one of the best beach dives in the world. . . . If bizarre and rare creatures are a lure, Ambon has a dive that surpasses even PNG's famous muck dives, as does Kungkungan Bay in northern Sulawesi. . . . If you're into big turtles (and lots of them), Borneo Diver's operation on Sangalaki, which once got excellent reviews, is again open, and nearby Derawan Resort dives these waters as well. . . . The island of Flores had great diving until it was hit by a typhoon and tidal wave that destroyed its reefs. . . . Although it's seldom been reached by live-aboards, the diving around Komodo, the home of the dragons, is excellent.

. . . . The volatile political scene has put a cloud over diving Indonesia, so check with the State Department before travel, and inquire about specific destinations rather than asking about the country as a whole. Before you leave, get a copy of Kal Muller's *Underwater Indonesia*. . . .

Bali

Bali Club Diver, April 2001, Les Sowitch, Morrison, CO. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 83-87 F. Logged dives: 50+. B.C.D.allowed us a short ride by auto to get to the boat. The entire operation was bad: 45 minutes late to pick us up — no apologies; 20 min

late to pick up at next hotel (divers took a cab on their own); no organization at the dive shop — we waited almost 1 hour for the van to take us to the boat; personnel loaded gas tanks in the van and all 3 employees lit cigarettes on the ride to the boat. (Ph: + 62 361-28726; fax + 62 361-287263)

Bali Diving Perdana, Bintang Bali, February 2001, Chuck Atwell (catwell44@yahoo.com) Aurora, IL.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm currents. Near Kuta — nice, clean accommodations. No need to pay US prices for 5 star resort. Dive operation is small operation but efficient. I was the only diver. The young dive guide “I Wayan” was very pleasant and concerned that my dive experience was fulfilling. If you want all the “bells” chose Bali Hai Cruises. Shore dive — the USAT Liberty (WWII victim) located NE Bali. Incredible variety of corals and marine life — large gorgonians, barrel sponges. Vis can be limited. “Lembongan Marine Park” small island east of Bali. Incredible dives and diversity, starfish and soft coral of every color, large banded sea snakes, rays, shark. The “Blue Corner” was a rush! Wild current and much life. Balinese people (mostly Hindu) are beautiful and friendly. They don’t expect a tip and make very little — please be gracious. Get away from Kuta and see the real Bali and its people (temples, volcanoes, rice fields, villages and arts). Forget the beach massage — hot sand in your face etc. Get one at your resort — only a few \$ more and

much better. Don’t even think of driving! One of the most inexpensive places on earth to spend some time. (Ph: + 62 361-227078 or (0361) 286493; fax (0361)288871; e-mail bdpdive@dps.centrin.net.id)

Baruna Water Sports, Malia Resort Hotel, February 2001, Pat and

Richard Putler, Chester, IL. Vis 30-40 ft. Water: 29 degrees C. Excellent hotel.

Food and rooms were superior. Baruna Sports was just fair. The boats had no water. They were small with a canopy over them and you could not stand up. To get back you had to use the prop housing as a step and climb over the outboard motor mount. Divemaster spoke broken English. My wife’s BC had a continuous air leak. On my second dive my tank was not full. (Ph: + 62 361-753820; fax + 62 361-753809; e-mail baruna@denpasar.wasantara.net.id; website www.baruna.com)

Baruna Water Sports, Bali Hilton, April 2001, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com) San Juan,

PR. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. The corals are in excellent condition and there are as many reef fish as anywhere I have been. The walls at Manjangan are splendid. The dive at Nusa Penida has great reefs and very strong currents with up and downwellings which keep you on your toes. The attitude of the guide was excellent. I wonder what criteria PADI uses when awarding an operator its “5 Star Rating.” One of the boats was a locally manufactured outrigger, wooden hulled, 30-foot vessel powered by two 125 hp outboard

engines. Entry was by a back roll and exit was up a wooden step ladder which required that all your equipment be handed up to an assistant. The other boat was an 18-foot fiberglass skiff with a 40 hp outboard, from which the only method of entry was by throwing your gear overboard and donning it while trying to stay close to the boat in a respectable current. There was no ladder by which to re-board the boat and one had to climb up using the outboard's propeller housing as a foothold. None of the dive boats have oxygen, radio, or life preservers. In short, the diving is outstanding but the facilities are not.

David's Dive Center, Bali Dive, Pavilions, Matahari Beach Resort, 2001, Bob Herrick. 400 dives.

"Monsoon Season" notwithstanding, the seas were calm everywhere. Currents up to 2 kts on Lembongan. Most other places, slow currents. Water temp was 82 most of the time, with dips to 78 below 30-40 feet. Vis was 50-60' in Sanur, 100' on most other dives. In the south, we stayed in the Pavilions in Sanur, where our private villa cost \$200/night (www.balipavilions.com). In the northwest, we stayed at the Matahari Beach Resort, (www.m-b-r.com) where our Deluxe Villa was \$363/night with tax. Garden rooms are a better value, and MBR is putting together packages where diving, accommodations and meals is \$1000 per person for a week. Check out the Bali Travel Forum. (www.balitravelforum.com). Like Undercurrent, you can get unbiased reports from readers, pose questions, and read recommendations from

others. EVA airlines —Business Class for the price of coach (only \$948 each way)! Driving is unnerving and unpleasant, and even the roads that look like they'd be scenic aren't. Many divers stay in the South, where most of the hotel rooms are, and "commute" 3 or 4 hours each way to Tulamben or Menjangan and complain later. David Pickell's book "Diving Bali" has maps and good dive descriptions (Periplus Action Books). Bali's reefs were affected by the 1998 El Niño, with water temperatures rising into the 90's, which killed a great deal of the coral. This was in evidence in the northwest and in Sanur, although there are some areas that came through okay such as Nusa Penida. At Bali Dive Sports Club (www.bali-dive.com; e-mail: balidive@indo.net.id), our divemaster was Dickee. Be attentive to the exact name of the firm: there's also a "Bali Sport Divers," "Bali Divers," and all sorts of other similarly named places. pro: best price, with no surcharge for just two going; convenient free pickup; good Internet correspondence, flexible scheduling, nice location by the beach, with showers, a place to clean your gear, and a nice café next door. Cons: our dive guide wasn't very good; the boat we used was in pretty poor condition, and the ride was deafening. In Sanur, the reefs above 10m were in reasonably good shape, but below 10m, where our guide took us, were dead, with silt coverage, and virtually no fish or invertebrates. Penida and Lembongan Islands are across the channel—a 15-20km crossing which takes an hour by speedboat. Many

operations drive for an hour to Padangbai, then boat over. A case could also be made for staying in Candi Dasa, then boating from Padangbai, which is only 10km or so away. After a one-hour deafening ride over in an old boat with twin 40hp outboards, we dove SD point on the NW corner of Nusa Penida, easily my best dive in Bali, with outstanding coral, invertebrate and fish life, on a par with good dives I've done in Palau and the Solomon Islands. We then rode 15 minutes back toward Sanur, along the middle of the Nusa Lembongan coast, to our second dive: the currents were ripping, which prevented us from seeing much. The coral was mediocre, and invertebrate and fish life were both much less plentiful. David's Dive Center at the Matahari Beach Resort is run by the Englishman Paul M. Turley. He was a joy to talk with, and one of the best dive guides I've had. The reefs in the northwest suffered significantly during the 1998 El Niño. We saw quite a bit of dead coral. I saw a couple of boats net fishing near just off Menjangan (strictly against the rules, but the Wardens are very lax); we felt shock waves from distant dynamite fishing and we saw aquarium fisherman right next to us on the reef, who were using cyanide for fish collection. Our first day was the (free) annual cleanup dive. We collected 10 large trash bags from Menjangan Island. Saw 4 pipehorses, a huge cluster of shrimp, tunicates, a turtle perhaps 120cm long; unusual batfish, leaf fish, and stonefish. Each day, we dove "Anker Wreck" in the NW in the morning, and

the walls on the SE near Pos II in the afternoon. The coral wasn't that great, although the fish and invertebrate life was pretty good. The vertical walls near Pos II have beautiful encrusting sponge-covered areas, and lots of interesting stuff to photograph. As far as big stuff, don't expect to see any. One or two little sharks on many dives and a whale shark about 4 meters long. We also dove the local reefs and found plenty of macro interest. The night dive on the Matahari reef was both my best night dive ever. Two stonefishes on a sponge, a tiny octopus you couldn't even see unless it moved, baby lionfish, a "cat shark." \$75 for diving Menjangan, including equipment rental. (Ph: (62-361) 731520; fax (62-361) 734379; website www.baliwww.net/matahari)

Dive and Dive's Secret Bay Resort, November 2000, Edward & Bonnie Edens, San Jose, CA. Gilimanuk City, north-western corner of Bali. Vis: 10 to 25 feet, varies with tides. Temp: 83'-85' F. Dive Restrictions: If you want to go deeper than 35 feet, bring a shovel. Another great trip to Indonesia. However, we were not so happy with the "service" provided by Dive & Dive's at Secret Bay, but the actual muck diving and facilities there were very good. On the first morning after we arrived in Bali, we were met at our hotel at 6am by our dive guide and a driver from Dive & Dives. They were both very kind hearted and but their English skills were not very strong. During the 3 hour drive up to Gilimanuk, we managed to get from

the dive guide that he had only been diving at Secret Bay once before and he had only a limited knowledge of the local marine life. When we arrived at Secret Bay, we found out why we were assigned an inexperienced dive guide. A Japanese television crew was there shooting a documentary on the Mimic octopus. All experienced dive guides were assigned to work with the T.V. crew carrying underwater lights and scouting for the Mimics. The topper came when our dive guide informed us that the resorts only boat had been chartered for the film crew. We had to do beach diving for two days, only one dive were we allowed to use the boat, when the T.V. crew wasn't using it. Macro photography at Secret Bay is very good. We saw more ornate and robust ghost pipefish than we have ever seen. There were several hairy frogfish within 30 yards of the beach. Lots of seahorses and flamboyant cuttlefish, fingered dragonets mating and small schooling catfish. We never saw the Mimic, no doubt they had been traumatized by the bright lights and a huge 4 foot long T.V. camera in it's underwater housing, not to mention being surrounded by half a dozen divers for hours on end. The diving and camera facilities at Secret Bay were also quite nice. This place definitely caters to macro photographers and camera divers almost exclusively. They had 3 large fresh water rinse stations, 2 for cameras only and one dedicated to wet suits. 3 shower stations with moderately hot water flowing and a BIG camera table inside the main lodge. Rooms were clean but nothing fancy.

O.K. for guys, but if you have ladies with you, stay at the up-scale resorts nearby, Taman Sari Hotel or Mimpi Menjangan resort, and just go to Secret Bay by car for day trips. It's only a 20 minute drive. In fact, we did end go to Mimpi Menjangan resort after 2 days diving; 2 other members of our group were getting sick of the 15' or 20' visibility and the lack of coral. We had not pre-paid. The coral and vis were especially good in the channel directly between Bali and the extreme western tip of Menjangan island, the site is called "eel garden". Mimpi resort is beautiful, luxurious, and priced well if you ask for the internet rate of U.S. \$65 per room per night. (Ph: + 62 361-288652; fax + 62 361-288892; e-mail divedive@indo.net.id)

Euro Divers, Hidden Paradise, May 2001, Ken Sigg (KSigg7476@aol.com)
Southampton, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm, no currents. The USS Liberty is very healthy with coral and small fish life. The wall dives were average but we did see a bright purple sea fan at least 8 feet in diameter. The dive master was very good for finding different life (octopi, rock fish, shrimp, grouper, crab, etc.) All the dives were shore dives because the local fishermen wanted the dive shop to hire them for boat dives but the dugout canoes that they use were not diver friendly. Euro Diver was negotiating with the locals about getting a dive boat and hiring them on as crew. Hidden Paradise was a very lovely property with a nice black sand

beach, a pool that was surrounded by gardens and a restaurant that was open air and had good food and terrific service. The rooms were spacious (individual bungalows) and the grounds were well kept. The dive shop is not on the grounds of Hidden Paradise but they can make arrangements to have the dive shop pick you up. The dive operator is from Holland and his name is Robert. Very accommodating. The whole Bali trip was a very enjoyable experience. **(Ph: + 62 771-92801; fax + 62 771-92826; website www.euro-divers.com)**

Euro Divers, Tiri Shanti (The Doctor's Place), July 2001, Rance Wadley, St. Maries, ID. Hot & dry, rain on two mornings left the seas flat. Visibility: varied: Amed 15 meters, Tulamben 1-12 meters experienced divers can follow their computers; novice divers follow the divemaster, including to 27 meters (90 ft) on the Tulamben! Those low on air are sent up, leaving the others to continue the dive; 90% of the corals in Bali perished 3 years ago during El Niño; careless divers (including two French guys) knock off what little coral remains on the famous Tulamben wreck. Ask the divemaster to find a pompom decorator crab off Tulamben beach. I stayed next door in a traditional Balinese cottage with hand-carved doors and windows, goldfish pond, outdoor bathroom, and tiled terrace overlooking the sea and the street below: for about \$US8 per night. I never turned on the fan. Fantastic accommodations. Lots of other choices. The PADI dive shop is

new and run by a Dutch family who emphasize quality equipment and safety. You know the air you are breathing is clean — not something you can be sure of everywhere on Bali. The staff is helpful and friendly. Divemasters are competent, but lack knowledge of the underwater world (i.e., even after describing and finding photos of frogfish and comets, they didn't know what they were, so were unable to find some for me). Dive briefings are nonexistent. The Tulamben wreck can be a tricky entry/exit in surf over rolling stones on a steep slope. Tanks are carried to the site on the heads of village women. Their service is included in your cost. The advantage of staying on the north coast (Amed, not Tulamben) is rural quietness and ability to arrive at the Tulamben site before the hordes from Kuta and Sanur. Diving at Tulamben meant diving the wreck twice in a row; then another day Tulamben drop-off again twice in a row. The shop had arranged for an advanced diver trip to fast-current/shark-filled waters off Gili Selang but heavy surf swamped our fishing boat within five meters of the beach, so we went to Tulamben drop-off instead. Only the divemaster and I were in the water for the night dive on the Tulamben wreck: absolutely wonderful. The highlight was the Ringed moray out hunting plus the basket stars. Bali a great place to do other things — and a couple days of diving.

Mimpi Resorts, November 2000, Jeanne & Bill Downey, Baden, PA. Vis; 50-100 ft. Water: 84 F. Certainly has some interesting diving! After

arriving back in Sulawesi from our Wakatobi adventure, we flew from east to west Sulawesi, then back to Denpasar, in one day. We were met at the Bali airport for our transport to Mimpi Resort on the northeastern coast of Bali, a trip that was supposedly three hours. Unfortunately, it was dusk, turning dark, and raining. Once out of Denpasar, we headed into the hills; it was really pouring there! Traffic began backing up and eventually came to a halt. Water was gushing down the road, getting high enough to float cars and it was impossible to see the deep ditch along the side of the road. It suddenly became very quiet in our van, but eventually our intrepid driver got us off the main road, zigzagged through a rice paddy, and back on our way. We reached Mimpi at midnight, after a four-hour drive. The grounds are very pretty, with flowers and plants everywhere. Our room was in a cluster of four. Each room had a lockable wooden door that opened onto a private courtyard. To the right was a large open-air daybed, overlooking a fishpond and the resort walkway; lights and a fan made this a cozy nook for reading or napping. A rattan blind could be lowered to screen the area from passersby. To the left of the courtyard were glass doors that opened into the bedroom, which had a large bed, small refrigerator, and night stand. The closet had storage shelves and a decent sized safe. Through a slatted door was the bathroom, with a covered, outdoor shower. It looked great, but mosquitoes had easy access to the bedroom through the door slats, and at night, when neighbors burned

every mosquito coil they could find, the smell flowed into our bedroom, clogging our sinuses and giving us headaches. We finally hung a long towel over the bathroom door, which solved most of the problems. At the end of the week, I opened the closet door to pack, and a horde of mosquitoes flew out! We didn't get many bites. The dive shop was less than a minute from our room, next to the restaurant. They seemed to be well organized; once they had our name and room number, we were pretty much able to do what we wanted. We did one dive with a guide to find the Liberty Ship. After that, they'd ask when we planned on diving next, and our gear would be ready. After diving, we trekked back to the dive shop, stripped off our gear, threw it in one of the three rinse tanks, and the staff took over, rinsing and hanging everything. All gear was locked up at night. The shop usually closed about 9:00 each evening, which left plenty of time for night dives, since it gets dark about 6:00 P.M. The beach diving is great. Besides the Liberty ship itself being a good dive, there are all kinds of neat fish and critters living in and around the wreck. Good muck diving straight off the resort, and a wall with coral to the right. If you want to go farther, you can arrange transport in outriggers that look like water-strider bugs when they move across the water. The beach is made up of fairly large, round lava rocks that are feet-killers! Tank sherpas, tiny Indonesian girls and women, carry one or two tanks on their heads, BCs and regulators attached, using a towel for cushioning.

It's absolutely mesmerizing watching them walk the ten-minute stretch to the Liberty wreck with two tanks on their head, sometimes a weight belt over each shoulder, wearing only flimsy flip-flops! Just walking across the rocks hurt our poor, wimpy feet, so we started wearing our thick soled sandals over our boots; when we arrived at the entry point, we took the sandals off in the water and used a weight belt to attach them to one of our tanks. We also dove off the resort for two days, driving up to one hour each way with Baruna divers. The diving was not terrific and the coral was sparse and beat, but we were able to see leaf fish and the largest cuttlefish we've ever seen, and we got to ride in the water-strider boats. The food at the resort was plentiful and cheap. Breakfast was American or Indonesian style; lunch and dinner were from the same menu, or a sandwich menu was available. There were also several local restaurants and other resorts to visit. Although the diving would not be considered world class in Bali, we saw plenty of interesting things and were very satisfied. (Ph: (62-363) 21642; fax (62-363) 21939; e-mail tulamben@mimpi.com; website www.mimpi.com)

Mimpi Resorts Tulamben, June 2001, Doug & Amy Jerum, Rochester, NY. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm choppy. Tulamben, on the Northeast corner of Bali, is three hours by car from Denpasar. MIMPI can arrange for a pickup at the airport. Tulamben is about a mile long. There are several inexpensive places to get a

room, plus MIMPI, which is a small resort style hotel and the best accommodations. Located on the stone beach the rooms are great, especially the ocean view suites, at \$110US per night. The room has a view of the ocean from the bedroom, a courtyard, outdoor day bed, a front porch with chaise lounges and air conditioning — very nice place. The dive operation is very good, but we hired an independent dive guide, Wally Siagian, a somewhat famous/infamous person in the Bali diving community. He is the co-author of *Diving Bali* (Periplus). The book was so interesting that we read it cover to cover. Wally is a professional photographer and generously shares his knowledge. He can find anything. Ask to see the crab named after him! The famous Liberty Wreck, a cargo ship torpedoed WWII was run aground in the bay at Tulamben where it sat until the eruption of Mt Agung in 1963, which pushed it back in to the water. The ship is 395 ft long and has wonderful hard and soft coral all over it, tons of critters everywhere. The Dropoff at the other end of the bay from the Liberty Wreck, is a wall that extends perpendicular from the shore well into the bay. It is densely populated with corals, fans, gorgonians and massive amounts of life. You can see a rich wall for as deep as you might care to go, and certainly past 200'. The House Reef is pretty shallow (for Tulamben, where dives can go pretty deep) and a big patch reef. Tons of life, fish, critters. Great for macro. We dove 7 days in Tulamben and never found it dull. \$100US lasted us about five days

for incidentals. Bintang, the local, and surprisingly good, beer is about \$0.80, most food in a restaurant, or even at the hotel, is \$2.50 to 5.00 for an entree. You can get a massage on the beach in front of the hotel for \$5. The kids selling things can get annoying, but if you just tell them you are not buying, they will leave you alone! One day a large surf, which made the entry hazardous. An unexpected current started and was coming from the shore at the Dropoff. Not dangerous, just tiring. Email Wally at walldive@denpasar.wasantara.net.id

Mimpi Resorts Tulamben, July 2001, John Crossley (jcrossle@csufresno.edu) Fresno, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100+ Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm no currents. 3 hour van ride from the airport at Denpasar to Tulamben on the east coast of Bali, but it is very scenic. Mimpi resort is very nice with a good dive shop. Their restaurant is very good and reasonably priced, but just down the street are other restaurants with lower prices. There are a few other resorts, at about half the price, but not as nice. Mimpi's dive shop is well managed, and their guides, particularly Christiana, are good at finding critters — e.g., a pygmy seahorse. Lots of good shore diving, but it can include trekking as much as 200 yards of rocks to dive the Liberty wreck. Women porters carry your gear. If you want a boat its just \$7, and if you want a guide, add \$5 more. They let you dive on your own if you want. The Liberty wreck is great! Lots of beautiful soft corals, lots of swim though areas, and

tremendous variety and quantity of fish including a school of swirling jacks. Tulamben also has excellent sloping walls and some shallow black sand flats that are loaded with macro critters of many types.

Nusantara Diving Centre, Manado, Jan 2001, Steve Dauzenroth, Seattle, WA. Bunaken Island and National Park area. Vis 60 to 90 feet some times less with wind and rain when shallow. Great diving with lots of normal tropicals. Occasional crocodile fish and dugongs. Go to northern islands such as Nain and Mantehage. No extra charge and better vis. Two of us paid \$40 a day per diver for 2 tank dives, 3 meals, and lodging in a spacious room 13' X 19' (plus the bathroom) with A/C, hot water and fridge, but I'd rate it a 2 star. If you don't dive for the day it's \$7 for meals and room/day/person. Food was good and plentiful but not exciting. Coffee, tea and snacks when you get back from diving. Third dive \$10. Lombok Strait for \$10 extra is worth the time and money. Pygmy seahorses, robust ghost pipefish, mimic octopus, muck diving and also great open water diving such as "hole in the wall". Chinese Mandarinfish (*Synchiropus splendidus*) available too. Average guide has been here 15 years and does an outstanding job. Not much for ID books, take a taxi to Dive Center Thalassa to buy some. Boats are slow wooden fishing boats that are a bit tired with twin 40 HP Yamaha's using kerosene, pretty much the standard in Indonesia. NDC will drive you into town for free, News Cafe, owned by

an American is the best Internet spot, good food and drinks. Two tank trip to Bangka Islands for \$10 extra on a fast boat for soft corals and nudies is a definite must, but pick a calm day. Did about 35 dives for the whole area here. (Ph: + 62 431-860638; fax + 62 431-854668)

P.T. Archipelago Dive, February 2001, Keith Cooper, Elkton, MD.

Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 75-85 F. Dives logged: 50+. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. My wife and I dove the Liberty shipwreck shore dive. Tons of fish schooling. Jackfish second dive was Amed Wall, same fish but on a colorful wall shore dive. Spend nite at dive center grass huts with running water and A/C. Dove "Close Encounters" and "Temple Wall" as a boat dive. Great restaurant and bar on site. Dives were a boat dive on a small boat. Wonderful cultural experience. (Ph: (62-361) 761414 Ext. 7810 (Bali); fax (62-361) 756944 or 287666 (Bali); e-mail info@archipelagodive.com; website www.archipelagodive.com)

Borneo (Indonesian)

Sangalaki

Borneo Divers, July 2001, Bob Puschinsky (puchinsky@aol.com)
Seabrook, TX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. Huge green turtles all over the place. Every night at least 20 turtles come ashore to nest, even under the huts. Frequently we had them rubbing against the hut pillars. Commercial egg collectors live on the island and have a license from the government to collect eggs. They

collect 2500 eggs per day and now give 20% back to a turtle researcher stationed at the resort. He has to re-bury them in a special spot he has laid out. When they hatch he collects them and releases them into the water. As recently as 10 years ago the egg collectors were getting 10,000 eggs per day but have managed to decimate the turtle population. Excellent manta cleaning station (like Yap's) that draws one or more mantas every day. At Manta Parade it is common to see mantas passing. Some of the best hard coral in the world. The thin cabbage and plate coral is in perfect condition and very healthy. "Coral Garden" is a terrific experience. There are quite a few small critters including cuttle fish, lion fish, leaf fish, banded pipe fish, ghost pipe fish, crocodile fish, nudibranch, flat worm, ribbon eel and jaw fish. Occasional white tip shark, a few dog tooth tuna, tame barracuda, occasional hump head parrots, morays and lots of small reef fish. Most of the larger, edible, fish are hard to find.. I was almost run over by a green turtle. Sangalaki has an excellent jelly fish lake. A five day visit is about right for the number of dive sites available. Great companion to a five day companion visit to Sipadan which offers quite different diving. The cost of land accommodations and diving in Malaysia and Indonesia Borneo is very reasonable. Hotel in Tawau, Malaysia was on the order of \$25 per night double occupancy and the Hyatt regency in Kota Kinabalu was \$56 per night. Meals were on the order of \$6-8 for dinner. The accommodations were very nice. We had air conditioning but

most rooms did not. The weather is such that you really don't need more than the ceiling fan at night. The food was very good. The dive masters do a good job but are somewhat over protective for experienced divers. Our travel arrangements were made by Great Destinations in Sacramento (<http://www.skindiver.com>). (Ph: 6 088 222226 (Malaysia); fax 6 088 221550; e-mail diving@bdiver.po.my; website www.jaring.my/bdivers)

Irian Jaya

Irian Diving, Camp Kri, February 2001, Jose Miguel & Peggy Duran
(DuranJM@worldnet.att.net)

Corpus Christi, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm currents. A rustic land-based operation run by Irian Diving (www.IrianDiving.com). LAX to Bali, overnight in Bali, early am flight to Sorong on the Bird's Head Peninsula of western New Guinea, with a stop in Ujung Pandang, overnight in Sorong at a decent if basic hotel and 2 hour boat trip to Kri Island, a small almost uninhabited island, part of the Raja Empat (Four Sultans) archipelago. Thatched bungalows over a shallow lagoon along a long pier, with toilets (western and eastern style) on the shore. Two open shower enclosures ("mandi" style: big drum of water and a dipper) and a large bungalow for dining and lounging are also located on the shore. We were the only two guests the first week and were joined by two couples the second week. Our bungalow had two large rooms) with 3 large windows, plenty of air circulation and

very clean. No problems with bugs, except mosquitoes in the evening on the shore. No furniture except a bamboo table in the room and bamboo chairs on the verandah, a mattress with a mosquito net over the bamboo floor provided a comfortable night rest. Primitive enough to be romantic rather than just uncomfortable. The meals were family style and with a good variety of rice, noodles, fish and vegetables and fruits. Very good considering that all were cooked on a wok over a small kerosene burner. Towels, pillows, sheets and kerosene lamps were provided. A generator supplied 220 V power for charging batteries. Personnel were very friendly and helpful, never intrusive. Otto an excellent divemaster and had a great eye for pigmy seahorses and an incredible variety of small unusual creatures. The owner Max Ammer and his staff are Seventh Day Adventists and they do not dive on Saturdays, but snorkeling, kayaking, strolling along the beach or reading provided us with a good desaturation rest after six days of intensive diving. Malaria is endemic; take prophylactic drugs and if in spite of that you develop a febrile illness during the few months after your return, always ask your doctor to rule out malaria. (I did get malaria). They have a large comfortable covered boat (that they built themselves) and most of the sites are nearby. For some sites we made full day excursions. The diving was incredible. Much better than Mapia Atoll or Madang and Milne Bay in PNG. As much variety as Komodo and huge schools of fishes, from

barracudas, to mackerel, jacks, unicornfishes, sweetlips, blue runners, fusiliers etc, etc. (Larger schools than we had seen in Mapia or Ai or Penyu in the Banda Sea). Many huge tasseled wobegong sharks, some mantas, white and black tips, schools of bumphead parrotfish. Big and colorful sea fans and tridacnas everywhere. Lots of macro: from pigmy seahorses to pigmy cuttlefishes, dragonets, leaf scorpionfishes and waspfishes and some of the most unusual nudibranchs we have ever seen. They had a muck dive site that may rival Lembeh Strait. Would not trade one dive in Raja Empat for one hundred dives in the Caribbean. 2 Bungalows with photo table, Charging stations on al bungalows when generator running. (Ph: (62-951) 327 371; fax (62-951) 325 274; e-mail info@IrianDiving.com; website www.iriandiving.com)

Irian Diving, July 2001, Tony Moats (AMoats6900@aol.com), Boulder, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 88 F, After diving and sea kayaking numerous places in Indonesia (Alor, Wakatobi, Manado, Togians, etc.), I am convinced the Raja Empat is some of the highest quality diving in the world. We not only dived for 8 days but traveled 10 days by sea kayak, snorkeling every day and were genuinely impressed with the health of the underwater ecosystem. Most of the area is sparsely populated by 100-200 people villages. Locals practice low impact fishing (line, speargun, etc). The nearest city, Sorong is two hours away and though fishing pressures are

on the increase, there seems to be significant momentum to discourage destructive fishing practices (especially dynamite). Owner of Irian Diving, Max Ammer, has been working diligently to prosecute invading bomb fisherman. We witnessed two arrests. Max Ammer originally came to search for wrecks. His dive "camp" has been built with local Papuan craftsman, labor, and materials. Accommodations are comfortable but basic: bedrooms are of traditional construction using local wood, palm, etc. and come with mattress, mosquito netting, and a beautiful setting over the water on the pier. There is no hot water but ample water that is warmed by the daily sun. Meals are basic but hearty and tasteful: local fish, vegetables, rice, etc. prepared with great care by Yolando and her kitchen crew. Otto, one of his dive guides has great eyes and a genuine warmth that makes diving enjoyable. The diving is mostly on sloping reefs that more or less start at the surface and bottom out at 80 to 100 feet. Some of the best sites are 5 to 15 minutes from the camp. Others are up to an hour away. Currents can be strong but are easily predictable with tides. Not many large pelagics but loads of small to large reef fish, especially on the points during strong currents a la Blue Corner in Palau (but without the schools of sharks). One dive was so packed with schools of reef fish, you couldn't see past them. Lots of small blacktip sharks and tons of turtles during our diving and snorkeling. The hard and soft corals are abundant, healthy, diverse, and

extremely colorful. Soft corals often are growing with 5 ft. of the surface! Good muck diving (not on par with Kungkungan) but still very good as a diversion. Tons of nudibranchs, many not in any guides that we had (i.e., Debelius). Beautiful topside scenery. Several areas have rock islands to rival Palau. No diving or transport on Saturdays due to 7th Day Adventist religious observances and only barely cool beverages available (from a cooler with ice packs). Best bet for travel is to fly Pelita air from Jakarta to Sorong, Irian Jaya. They're more reliable than Merpati according to Mr. Ammer. Then a 2 to 2 1/2 hour boat ride.

Irian Diving, July 2001, Lori Brown & Chris Green (chrisg@lplizard.com)
Germantown, MD. Dives logged 200+. Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 85-90 F. Kri Island in the recently renamed Papua Barat (West Papua) is the site of Irian Diver's camp. Four thatched bungalows on stilts line the 400 foot jetty. Max Ammer, a Dutch expatriate, has nurtured his dream diving resort since 1994. Our quarters consisted of a small room in one of the huts with two twin mattresses and a mosquito net anchored on the wall. When open, our suitcases crowded the room. The only other furniture was a crudely built camera table with a 220V outlet for charging batteries. The generator is turned on by request. Our son, age 10, occupied the adjacent room. At dusk, the lamp brigade lit gas lamps around the camp. There is one toilet and it needed to be primed by hand. The "shower," consisted of a barrel of brackish water in an open air shed fed

by a hose from the well. Occasionally the hose would be operating. More often, bathing consisted of dumping cups of brackish water over my head. Drinking and cooking water is brought in from a nearby island. The beach is beautiful soft white powdery sand and our son spent hours building castles. A tame cassowary bird haunts the exterior of the dining room, waiting for bananas, which she swallows whole the cassowary, not the brightest bulb on the island, mistook his kiwi-green colored Gameboy for a banana. Our luggage was delayed for six days. No B.C. No regulator. No computer. No cameras. Not even a prescription mask. So, we made a mistake. We accepted Max's offer to patch together some equipment so that we could dive. Old, worn out, and didn't fit well. Max only had one computer and suggested that my husband and I should dive on the same computer. The first fifteen minutes of the dive were directly into a stiff current. We inched our way along by pulling ourselves from one rock to the next. Without a computer, my husband had no idea how long we had been down or how deep and thought that he was out of air based on the wildly fluctuating needle on the borrowed pressure gauge. Max offered to relinquish his computer and not dive so that I could dive. The diving was spectacular. Mike's Point is minutes away near a small island just across from the camp at Kri. There is a spectacular overhang, covered with a coral garden. It was here that I saw seven titan trigger fish swimming in the blue in what appeared to be a formation. At

Straight Across Reef, we saw a large school of 30 or more barracuda, hundreds of red tooth triggers and swarms of tangs. At Sardine Reef, a field of waving snake eels undulate in the sand and a slow moving school of about a dozen large bump head parrot fish grazed on the coral like a bunch of fat buffalo. At stick reef, a nine foot nurse shark slumbered under a coral outcropping. This was the only large shark we saw other than numerous wobegong sharks (also known as carpet sharks). Many small black tripped reef sharks swimming around in the sea grass off the balcony of our room. More distant sites were distinctive. Melissa's Garden was one of my favorite dives. Large gorgonians, table corals with big groups of antheas popping in and out, and hordes of Moorish idols. During our surface interval, we anchored in a mangrove swamp and slogged through gooey, slippery, mud in murky waist-deep water to the island. We snorkel along the passage since the current was too swift for diving. It was like a fast trip down a jungle river. There were numerous rock and coral outcrops. There were spitting archer fish and many cardinal fish as well as brightly colored soft coral. During the surface interval in a nearby cove, six little dolphins cavorted twenty feet from the boat. Our day in Kaboie Bay also included a side trip to a burial ground. There were a dozen skeletons spread out in the gash in the cliff. To complete the Halloween atmosphere, we stopped at a bat caves. The only wreck we visited was a P47B airplane off the island of Wai parked upside down at

90 feet. Completely encrusted with coral. A ray glided down over the plane and disappeared. Peering into the cockpit you can imagine the terror experienced by the pilot; the intact lens of the gun camera used to confirm kills still gleams in the wing. There were patches of bright red crinoids on the wing and delicate nudibranchs gliding about the propeller. The basic dive package was three boat dives per day but they would take you out again if you asked. We often had to swim against very strong currents that could have been avoided by more flexible dive planning. We aborted one dive after 15 minutes of swimming against a brutal current. When we surfaced, the boat was out of sight on the other side of the island and we were left cooling our jets in the water for about fifteen minutes before the dive guide could swim to where he could be seen by the boat crew. The dive planning improved with the return of Otto, the main dive master, after sick leave. On another dive, when we surfaced, the boat was nowhere to be seen. The boat crew evidently spotted another boat fishing with potassium cyanide and took off to alert the police. We were never in any danger but it is rather disconcerting. The dive guides regularly stood on, hung onto, and broke live coral. Having extra gear on hand should be a requirement for any dive operation, particularly at a remote site where there are no other options. No diving on Saturday policy because of religious convictions. It seems a bit inflexible to impose your religious restrictions on someone who has

traveled halfway around the earth to dive. A fair compromise would be to leave adequate tanks for shore dives. Instead of being readily accessible, tanks for shore dives (on any day) had to be requested. Whining aside, we had a memorable Saturday stalking the elusive bird of paradise in the nearby town of Yenwaupnor (meaning sand turtle eggs). After a forty minute hike over a 500 foot bridge that was remarkable for its lack of cross boards, up a steep hill, through the community garden, and up another hill in 80 ° heat and 80% humidity, we sat in the forest, where, as our guide explained, the birds of paradise “play.” Cameras ready, our guide, an older Papuan, squatted and called the birds. The forest was full of the sound of birds calling. Dinners ranged from the sublime, such as the spicy rendang beef, savory curried fish, eggplant petjal, sambal goreng telur (eggs in chili sauce) and a variety of deliciously prepared local greens; to the ridiculous, such as sliced hot dogs with sautéed squash or ramen noodles with hot dog. On a few occasions, there was not adequate food. Not that anyone went hungry, just that it wasn’t satisfying. Lunch was usually light and the best lunches were the prepared picnic lunches. There was no formal lunch on Saturdays and we were not told that we needed to fend for ourselves. Most of the guests had an American breakfast with toast or cereal. There were also pancakes and eggs available for the asking. Fruit (papaya, pineapple, bananas, selack, and some unidentified fruit) was usually available but the supply waned

between trips to Sorong. Crackers, peanut butter, and cookies were always available on the table as was hot water for tea or instant coffee. One of the guests inquired before leaving Sorong and was told there was plenty of beer at the camp on Kri. His notion of what plenty was and Max’s did not match up and he was disappointed to learn that there was no beer left after his third night.

Sulawesi - North

Froggies Divers, June 2001, John Crossley (jcrossle@csufresno.edu) Fresno, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100+ Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. On Bunakan Island, the best location of all resorts to get to the Bunakan marine park’s best dive sites. The bungalows are basic, without air conditioning, but clean. The rooms were hot in the late afternoon sun. The food was plentiful, with fish and no meat about half the time. Veggies, deserts, and salads were basic, but at \$25 per day for room and 3 meals, it was a good value. Diving was from small wooden pangas with space for 4 divers and a guide. The corals were in great condition. We had 3 single tank boat dives a day to sites that were within 15 minutes. Marine life was varied and plentiful, though we did not see many big critters. Sea snakes, bumphead wrasse, a blue ring octopus, mandarin fish, mantis shrimp, blue ribbon eels, several types of jawfish and dartfish, anemone fish, nudibranchs. (Ph: (62) 812-430 1356/1464 (Indonesia); fax (US): 530-6846038; e-mail manado@divefroggies.com; website www.divefroggies.com)

Kungkungan Bay Resort, September 2000, Dennis Marguet, Pleasanton, CA. Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 82 F. Dive restrictions: Shore diving controlled due to currents. Good. Best place in the world to see rare critters. Bungalows next to shore are roomy, no air conditioning. Restaurant food served from a menu and open 24 hours a day. Resort has great camera room. This is a great place for macro, leave your wide angle at home. Want to see specific critters? They have wish list and guides that will find them for you to see or photograph. Very photographer friendly, yet they protect the animal life. Expect muck diving at its best (better than New Guinea). Try to spend 10 days here. Seven was too quick. It's cheaper per day the longer you stay. Been there twice and videoed an undescribed species each time. This is not 100 ft + vis with schools of fish and soft corals. (Ph: (925) 825-1939 (US) or (62) (0438) 30300 (Indonesia); fax (925) 825-0105 (US); e-mail info@kungkungan.com; website www.kungkungan.com)

Kungkungan Bay Resort, November 2000, Edward M. Strauss, Solana Beach, CA. Vis: 5-15 ft. Water: 81-83 F. Dives logged: 400+. Dive restrictions: 95'. True muck diving — limited visibility, but macro photo was wonderful and well worth any inconvenience.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, November 2000, Bob & Léone Woods (bobwoods@pacbell.net) Hillsborough, CA. Vis: 15-60 Ft. Water: 82-84 F, choppy. My wife and I spent 6 days (7 nights) with 4 other

friends with whom we had dove in the Maldives the previous week. KBR is situated in the Lembah Straits, which is probably the world's finest muck diving, with a black sand bottom and little current. On our very first dive, supposedly a checkout, we saw a harlequin ghost pipefish, a tiny orange frogfish, and a mandarin shrimp, as well as the usual assortment of exotics. On a single night dive, we saw a pair of stargazers (buried in the sand except for their faces), several spiny devilfish, lionfish, and frogfish, a banded snake eel, a cockatoo waspfish, several Pegasus sea moths, and a strange-eyed scorpionfish. On nearly every dive we saw some combination of pipefish, scorpionfish, and ghost pipefish, and of course nudibranchs were rampant. Lionfish were so common we generally ignored them unless they were really unusual (all black, or black with white tips). We saw six seahorses on one dive, all in separate locations, ranging up to 8" and from seaweed brown to bright yellow. We saw pygmy seahorses, two large frogfishes, about 9" end to end, a horrid stonefish the same size, white humpback scorpionfish, flying gurnards, leaf scorpionfish, and a couple of coral snake eels. On a twilight dive to a submerged volcano crater (rim at 12', bottom at 40'), we lay belly-down in rubble until it began to get dark and the mandarin came out to feed and mate. We saw a half-dozen. Incredible. The resort was clean, comfortable (but hot-ceiling fans but no AC), well run. The food was excellent and the service was attentive and friendly. The dive

operation was absolutely first-rate, with some of the finest dive guides I've dived with. When we were diving a reef or wall (rather than just the sand bottom) the coral was generally healthy. The house wine in the restaurant was abysmal, but I'm speaking as a Californian with a French wife.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, March 2001, Norman Rainer, Richmond, VA. Vis: 5-50 ft. Water: 79-83 F.

Dives logged: about 2000. Dive restrictions enforced: must stay with guide. A after many trips to the Caribbean and other reasonably accessible locations, the excitement has evaporated. So I tried Kungkungan Bay Resort in Sulawesi, after checking out the Chapbook.. Although a tough two-day trip from Virginia, it exceeded all expectations. The resort consists of separate guest cabins and a central building which houses the dining room and photo facilities (including E-6 processing). The cabins are spacious and clean, but no AC. The food was good, the service great, the staff very friendly, and a refreshing no-tipping policy throughout the resort and dive operation! The dive guides were extremely helpful in carrying all gear to and from the boats, and were wizards at finding elusive critters. I usually had a personal guide on each dive, and he even carried a second housed camera for me! The boat rides were less than 20 minutes over flat waters. Depths 10-85 feet. Silt bottom requires good buoyancy control. No large or schooling fish, but the macro menu was awesome. Pigmy seahorse, harlequin shrimp, mandarin

fish, Sargassum fish, cuttlefish, nudibranchs galore, crocodilefish, blue-ringed octopus, stargazer, mantis shrimp, cardinal fish, frogfish, etc. Like a kid in a candy shop on a feeding frenzy, I photographed exquisite rare macro species which most divers never see in a lifetime. Added to the experience was the presence of underwater photo pros Larry and Denise Tackett, whose slide shows and instructional advice were inspirational..

Kungkungan Bay Resort, July 2001, Mel Butler, (mbutler621@aol.com) Claremont, CA. Vis: 25-50 ft. Water:

78-82 F. Dives logged: 800+. Dive restrictions: Proposed depth and duration guidelines but very tolerant. On the water, in a bay on the straight of Lembeh. Clean neat cottages with ceiling fans and lots of space. Great dining room and building with room for video upstairs. Wonderful dive program. Manager couple Valerie and Kevin greet you on arrival and orient you. That evening Kevin presents a great slide show of the rare "critters" in this area. Two dives done as individual boat rides each morning and one boat dive in the afternoon. One twilight dive was just to see Mandarin fish when they come out from under the coral, small octopus and a sea horse, several cuttlefish On one dive, we studied a little flamboyant cuttlefish, seahorses, Pygmy seahorses, devil fish, scorpion fish, decorator crabs, stargazers, Pegasus sea moth, lion fish, great variety of nudibranchs, piperfish and cockatoo wasp fishes. About 60% of the dives

here “muck dives” and the rest were in beautiful reefs, or drop-offs, or on sunken ships. We dived 5.5 days and took a very interesting trip to see some miniature tarsier monkeys on our last afternoon. Dives were on time and well organized. There were no political incidents or anything else to cause us concern. Prices were very reasonable and accommodations were excellent.

Santika Resort, July 2001, Mel Butler (mbutler621@aol.com)

Claremont, CA. Vis: 30-75 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Dives logged: 800+. Dive restrictions enforced: proposed depth and time limits as rough guidelines. Bunaken Marine National Park just established early this year. Santika Resort with associated Thalassa Dive Center is right at the park. The resort is delightful with nice rooms, friendly, helpful staff, helm, the manager and excellent food. The dive center and guides are excellent. They know the dive sites and can point out many macro activities. Boat rides are around 30±10 minutes. Two dives in the morning; stop at an island for a lunch cooked by the islanders, then, one dive after lunch. We had two fabulous night dives with things to see 10 ft.! This was mostly coral walls and drop-offs, some with fun currents. Met us at the airport and we rode air conditioned bus an hour to the resort. They took care of all our equipment from then on, and they took good care of it. We did 16 dives with two wonderful night dives. I needed a new high-pressure air hose at Santika. It was available and installed in 15 minutes at a very reasonable price. The last day, when

we finished diving at noon, we arranged a tour of Manado as we “off gassed” before the flight the next afternoon. We had a five piece band playing every night, and they accompanied us back to the airport, singing and playing all the way. We flew southern tip of Sulawesi to Ujung Padang, now called Makassar. We were met by an enthusiastic tour company and stayed at a beautiful hotel facing the bay. My wife and I had the best massages ever for one hour for \$5. Beautiful 12-passenger bus for the 10 hour ride to Toraja land. This is a unique region in the Northern portion of Southern Sulawesi up in the highlands, where the people have villages of Buildings with boat shaped roofs and a very interesting philosophy of life and afterlife. Our guide was from Toraja, and we were able to attend two funeral ceremonies, which last from 2-14 days. We toured this area for 4 days and took a different route back to Makassar, viewing the cocoa, nutmeg, and clove growing areas. The State Department had issued warnings about central Sulawesi but did not clarify that Toraja was in Southern Sulawesi. All the people we visited were friendly, quite happy to see us, willing to let us take their pictures without charge, and anxious to have us like their country. (Ph: + 62 431-850230; fax + 62 431-850231; e-mail santika@indo.com; website www.indo.com/hotels/santika)

Thalassa Divers, Hotel Santika, March 2001, Patricia Stevens, Vero Beach, FL. The owner, Simone

Gerritsen, is developing a new area called Bangka Island, a one hour fast boat ride from Manado and fairly close to Lembah Straits. Each two diver hut will be fully furnished and have its own bathroom and porch. The beauty of Bangka is the shore dive directly in front of the lodge. It seems to be a nursery for the fish of the area. All sorts of juveniles call it home as well as widely diversified adult species. A slender snake eel, coral shrimp, a school of 1-1/2 inch Moorish idols, mantis shrimp, cuttlefish, tiny octopus, seahorses, marine worms — an endless variety. The site is 7 to 30 feet deep so bottom time is generous. The Hotel Santika which houses Thalassa Divers, offers every comfort. We stayed for three weeks and dived at Bangka four days. The diving at Bunaken Island took up the other days. Thalassa Divers are extremely well organized. A more pleasant and upbeat group would be difficult to find. (Ph: + 62 431-850230; fax + 62 431-850231)

Sulawesi - South

**Wakatobi Resort, November 2000,
Jeanne & Bill Downey, Baden, PA.**

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 84 F. Adventure travel takes time. Our flight to Guam was late and our flight from Guam to Denpasar, Bali is not held for us. We spend the night in Guam, everything paid for by Continental. We leave Guam and land five hours later in Denpasar. It's midnight by the time we arrive at the Hyatt, and our departure is 7:00 A.M. the next morning to Bali. After an hour flight from Denpasar to Ujung Pendang in west Sulawesi,

we're whisked off on a private tour visiting Bantimurung and its giant waterfall and butterfly park. As we walk along the vendor-lined walkway, the locals walk up to say hello, shake our hands, and try to sell us dead butterflies sealed in plastic. Next to the waterfall is a pep rally for a cigarette company, including perky young ladies dressed in bright red suits, handing out cigarettes to potential smokers of all ages. Next stop is Leang-leang, where a short walk and many steps allow us to view ancient hand prints and a painted pig on the vertical cliff face, and to look inside a prehistoric cave. We check in at our hotel, eat lunch, and rest before heading out to the fishing docks, Fort Rotterdam, and a private orchid garden. It is now raining and the bicycle taxis are encased in plastic to keep the passengers dry. At 4:00 A.M. very loud wailing awakens us; it's the first call of the day for devout Muslims to pray to Mecca. Now we know what the arrow on our bedroom ceiling is for — it points to Mecca! At the airport. Wakatobi Dive Resort personnel take care of our luggage. After a short forty minute hop from Ujung Pendang to Kendari, on the east side of Sulawesi, we're met by more Wakatobi staff who herd everyone into various vans for the thirty minute ride to the dock. We board the Ciska for our Indonesian 18 hour cruise to the resort. Our assigned cabin is above deck with four bunk beds, two of which have a large diameter pipe running up through them. Most people drag their mattresses up onto the top deck. The resort is lovely, and very

private. The name is actually a composite of the four main islands in the nearby area—two letters from each island. The main lodge consists of dining and sitting areas, the dive shop with separate camera and gear storage rooms, eight second-floor bedrooms, and a communal bathroom. There are also four bungalows with en suite bathrooms. The strong smelling tap water is used for showers, but drinking water is hauled in by boat. November is supposed to be the start of the rainy season, but most of our stay was very hot and dry. Two boat dives each morning, leaving about 8:30 A.M., using the Ciska and the Wakatobi Tika. A smaller boat is also available; there were never more than eight divers on any boat. After divers set up their tanks, the tanks and remaining equipment are carried to the boat. The water was about 84 degrees. Many dives are wall drift dives; one in particular felt like under water white-water rafting! Other dives include large pinnacles and rubble areas, where the boat is anchored on a mooring. There was always at least one divemaster in the water, hunting for neat critters, like leaf fish. There weren't any dive restrictions, although we saw them get on one couple's case about staying together better. Long safety stops were encouraged—the top of the wall begins shallow. Divers are rotated between different boats, divemasters, and departure times, so no one feels stuck in a rut. Although we saw a couple of sharks and eagle rays, most of the diving is macro to mid-size. We found pygmy sea horses, nudibranchs, and many crabs we've

never seen before. Next time I'm taking a magnifying glass! The corals are in very good condition, and the soft corals are as impressive as Fiji's, but it was depressing to see large amounts of trash floating during some of the drift dives. The boat crew is very attentive and during the hour-long surface intervals, there are cookies and cold or hot drinks. Back at the resort, the gear is hauled back to the dive shop. Divers rinse their own gear, hang up wetsuits, and replace their equipment. Lunch is served between 1:00 and 2:00, and then it's time for unlimited, shore diving; sign the blackboard, walk twenty feet to the water, snorkel across four foot deep water to the edge of the wall, pick your depth and direction and dive! It is also possible to hitch a ride on the small outboard for a short ride up the shoreline. There's a fantastic cavern starting in about 70 feet of water, full of neat critters like pipefish, tiny crabs and shrimp, and a disco clam. After exploring the cavern it's usually an easy drift back. If the current is running the wrong way, the boat picks you up. Closer to the resort, it's a cinch to find all types of nudibranchs, crabs, shrimp, eels, lionfish, and lots of very cooperative clownfish! Most people did 3-4 dives each day. Night dives are off the shore and a few boat night dives are also an option. Breakfast is buffet-style: eggs, juice, toast, cereal, and wonderful oatmeal. Lunch and dinner are served family-style, usually starting with soup, then a main dish, bread, vegetables, rice, and dessert. The meals seem to be Indonesian trying to appeal

to American appetites. Most people liked it; some of us didn't. There were pre-dinner snacks; some were more successful than others. Over the course of our stay, about half of the guests and a couple of the staff got sick; whether due to water, food, or a virus, we don't know. Bottled water is available for a small charge. Two afternoons, trips were made to neighboring villages to meet the natives, tour the village, and watch the children dance. **(Ph: +62 (0) 361 284 227 (Indonesia); fax +62 (0) 361 284 226 (Indonesia); e-mail office@wakatobi.com; website www.wakatobi.com)**

Wakatobi Resort, March 2001, Larry & Barbara Murphy (lemurphy@aol.com) Atlanta, GA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm currents. Healthy hard coral on the atolls, fringing reefs and barriers with soft corals not as prominent as Fiji. A few small schooling tropicals, nothing much big. The advertised frogfish and elegant ghost pipefish were nowhere. Definitely a wide-angle destination. A few pygmy seahorses, many leaf fish and mantis shrimp. Larger critters were stonefish, crocodile fish, scorpionfish — not the variety of critters found at Kungkungan Bay. By day 4 the diving became repetitive and boring though beautiful. Set up your own gear on every dive, though tanks are carried to the comfortable reconfigured island cargo/dive boats. Boats are very slow, but crew quick to pick up divers from water. Only rinse for regulators was the brackish, sulfurous island water which was also

in the room showers and sinks. This mineral gunk began to eat away at the regulators immediately. Bungalows had mosquito netted beds, ceiling fans, porches, hot water, and terrible reading lights considering the sun sets around 6:00 PM. Food was mainly fish caught locally but from outside the marine reserve. Without adequate refrigeration, most of the fresh vegetables spoiled over the 12 day period, so late in the stay it's a diet of potatoes and cabbage. We had the misfortune to travel to and from the island via "The Ciska," a refurbished motor sailor for 18 hrs each way. The generator broke down, so there were no lights, no a/c in the slave-hold type berths below. Slept on deck, but in high seas not an option as the gun-wales were so low to the water that one would be swept away. A/C below was nonexistent. His boat is chartered out as a live-aboard dive boat in Sulawesi. Direct flights from Bali started in July. Only fresh water available for gear was for cameras both on boat and land. No E-6. Camera room needs more light, would be cramped with more camera-toting guests.

ISRAEL / RED SEA Eilat

Red Sea Sport Club/Manta Diving Center, April 2001, Isaac Aharon (scuba99779@aol.com) New York, NY. Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 22 to 23 C. Dives logged: 125. Dive restrictions: 100 feet. I have been diving with them for four years. Great operation, PADI diving courses for all levels. I went