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**Sea Breeze Dive Centre, White Sands Hotel, March 2002, Anne W. Simon ([simonawehotmail.com](mailto:simonawehotmail.com))**  
**APO, AE.** Vis: 21-30 ft. (7-10 m). Water: 28 C. Dives logged: 150+. While in Dar for work, made two dives on a Sunday with Hannes Potgieter/Sea Breeze Dive Center. Hotel seemed to be four star beach hotel but I stayed at Sea Cliff on peninsula (an hour by taxi/\$20). Nice staff, good quality equipment, boat left at 9 a.m., 15 min. to sites offshore. Both Pinnacle (70' max. depth) and Bongoyo Patches (40' avg, has training dive for some) had lots to see. Mantis shrimp on sand, cuttlefish, sea anemones and two varieties of clownfish, Indian feather worms, nudibranchs, Christmas tree worms, starfish, giant clam, lots of butterfly fishes, orange tube coral, soft leather coral, barrel coral, find gobies and, of course, Moorish idols and royal angelfish. Healthy reefs and fish, nice dives! (Ph: 255-812-783241 or 255-811-320741)

### 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. . . . While domestic flights have suffered cutbacks, there are some real bargains on international fares. . . . 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

**Aquamarine Diving, Serai Hotel, September 2001, Mel McCombie, New Haven, CT.** Dives logged: 1300. Spent four weeks here and Wakatob) and it was the best trip of our lives for diving, for culture, for food, and pleasures like massage. Spent ten days in Bali, diving with Aquamarine Diving and staying at the Serai, a beautiful hotel on Bali's east coast, near most dive sites. Aquamarine, owned by expat, Brit Annabel Thomas, reflects her own highly organized behavior. I made arrangements via e-mail and Annabel tailored a series of days for us to explore sites at Tulamben (on the northeast coast), Nusa Penida, Padang Bai, and have thrilling current dives off Gili Biaha. We were picked up at our hotel each morning by van; the dive staff and driver carted our gear. The rides ranged from twenty minutes to an hour; though Balinese roads are not for the faint of heart, the scenery was heart-stopping — rice terraces, altars festooned with offerings, local women balancing enormous bundles on their heads with a baby or two on their hips. Our dive guide explained the day's sites, usually over tea or coffee. The dives were either shore (Tulamben) or by slow but charming boat. I had devoured David Pickell and Wally Siagan's excellent book on diving Bali. The bathymetry of Bali is unusual in that its east coast is a narrow channel through which the waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans mix, often in raging currents and deep, cold upwellings. The diving

is best for the experienced diver. At Tulamben, both the small wall and the wreck of the *Liberty* were havens for unusual shrimp, pipefish, eels. The *Liberty* is a particularly handsome wreck, its structure easy to read yet fully covered by soft and hard corals and frequented by thousands of fish. I am not a wreck nut (I think of wreckheads as a guy thing, coded on the Y chromosome) but I could have spent a week diving the *Liberty* just for the life. Around Gili Biaha, aka The Toilet, the guide wisely offered the spirits of the sea incense and a prayer before we entered. It was much like the rocks and currents of some hairier sites at Cocos Island, only with IndoPacific life. However, when I watched our bubbles go out and then spiral straight down, I got attentive to my depth gauge! It is a great site, with gobs of life, but conditions can be very adult. Aquamarine was extremely attentive to detail, but the rhythms of life in Bali are best described by the local term: rubber time. Traffic on Bali moves like schooling fish. Relax, enjoy the ride (van or boat), take time for the snack or drink, and don't expect more than two dives a day. That also leaves time for the fun stuff, like massages! Avoid the hotels in Nusa Dua and the southern areas, and stay near the dive sites on the east and northeast coast. The same company that runs the astronomically priced Aman Resorts manages the Serai in Manggis (at one third the price) and shares the Aman resorts' commitment to modernist aesthetics rendered in warm local materials like palm wood and thatch. The Mandara Spa was

heavenly (imagine a massage with two therapists working on you simultaneously while gamelan music plays and the aromas of sandalwood and lavender perfume the air). The food was fabulous and healthy; The Serai runs its own cooking school and is serious about presentation, service, and ingredients. Used Cathay Pacific via Hong Kong. Weather was perfect (hot). Water varied depending on the upwellings, from 72 degrees to 82. I wore a 7mm and hood or hat! (Ph: +62 361 730 107 or +62 81 236 588 29; e-mail [info@AquaMarineDiving.com](mailto:info@AquaMarineDiving.com); website [www.aquamarinediving.com](http://www.aquamarinediving.com))

**Aquamarine Diving, Nusantara Famili, August 2002, David Lenderman ([underh2o@mail.ev1.net](mailto:underh2o@mail.ev1.net)) Houston, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, no currents. Secret Bay in Gillimanuk is muck diving capital of Bali. Aquamarine Diving ([www.aquamarinediving.com](http://www.aquamarinediving.com)) put us up at a local home stay, Nusantara Famili that provided meals and 1/2 mile transport to and from Secret Bay shore dive facility. Nusantara Famili is very small place with only five air conditioned rooms for rent in a family compound. Much nicer than rooms available at the Secret Bay facility. Dive times are determined by incoming and high tide. When tide starts out vis really drops (<10 feet). We did two day and one night dive per day. Critters include: several ghost pipe fish, numerous frogfish, schooling catfish, various crabs and shrimp, numerous species of lionfish and scorpion fish, bobbit worms, Pegasus

fish, wasp fish and many nudibranchs. On most dives I managed to shoot two cameras full of film. Annabel of Aquamarine Diving took care of many logistical details to make trip go smoothly. Ramon the guide was a nice guy and service oriented. Shore facility at Secret Bay is nicely set up for underwater photographers. Shade, showers, plenty of room for gearing up, changing film, etc. Four rinse tanks, two dedicated to cameras.

**Diving 4 Images, Matahari Tulamben Resort, August 2002, David Lenderman, ([underh2o@mail.ev1.net](mailto:underh2o@mail.ev1.net)) Houston, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, Tulamben offered several types of diving. The wreck of the *Liberty*, a 300-foot WWII wreck, is totally covered with hard and soft corals. A large school of jacks is usually circling above. The other beach dive sites include Paradise Reef and The River for macro photo opportunities and The Drop Off for wide angle. A fifth site, Batu Kelebit, can be reached via a short boat ride. For nominal charge porters carry tank/bc set up to beach entry point of your choice. The beach is composed of smooth, flat rocks about 8-12 inches in diameter. Heavy, thick sole booties are a must. Even with thick sole booties the rocks hurt our feet. Day trippers from South Bali show up late morning to dive the wreck. Plan your wreck dives to avoid the crowds. Before day trippers arrive and after they leave Tulamben is a quiet place. The village is small. We stayed five nights at Matahari Tulamben

Resort ([www.maturebali.com](http://www.maturebali.com)). Room was adequate for divers. Big gated outdoor area to store dive gear. For \$18/night including breakfast for two it was a bargain. Beachfront restaurant had friendly staff and cheap, tasty food. Of the less expensive places I thought Matahari Tulamben was the best pick. If you need top end accommodations Mimpi next door is beautiful. For diving we enlisted the services of Graham Abbott of Diving 4 Images ([www.diving4images.com](http://www.diving4images.com) or e-mail [info@diving4images.com](mailto:info@diving4images.com)). After working in Indonesia for five years, with the likes of Wakatobi and Kararu, Graham started his own operation. He caters to photographers, videographers and film crews. He does Bali-based diving and custom live-aboard charters throughout Indonesia. I dived with him two years earlier at Wakatobi. He is an amazing critter spotter. He keeps detailed notes on what he sees and where it was found. He has a good understanding of in what habitat/terrain different critters can be found. Ask and he finds it. 10 ghost pipefish of several varieties, three Spanish dancers, boxer crabs, ribbon eels, frogfish, tons of different shrimp, crabs and nudibranchs. On night dives Graham would find so many bizarre little crabs and shrimp that I was overwhelmed. I was amazed at his ability to relocate photo subjects on subsequent dives. Being able to return to subjects with more film helps to get the shot of rare subjects. Matahari Tulamben Resort had no special rinse tanks for photographers. We were able to borrow a large tub to keep at our room for a rinse tank.

Owner is considering adding camera rinse tanks near pool. Mimpi, next door, had nice rubber lined rinse tanks at their dive center. (e-mail [info@diving4images.com](mailto:info@diving4images.com); website [www.diving4images.com](http://www.diving4images.com))

## Sulawesi - Northern

**Kungkungan Bay Resort, October 2001, Maxine Barrett, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA.** Vis: 60 ft. Water: 83-84 F. Logged dives: 2300. Sulawesi is entirely safe from the Muslim problem. The resort has hired extra security, just to be safe. AK47's look strange around a dive resort. A police officer rode on the bus that picked us up. At customs, the custom official assured us there is no unrest in North Sulawesi. N. Sulawesi is almost 100% Christian and the people tell us they will not tolerate that "crazy Muslim behavior." The dive resort is remote from Jakarta and the Muslim fundamentalists have better targets close to Jakarta. The resort offers package prices with three or four dives per day included. Recommendation is to book three and pay extra for the 4th — although I do five dives/day on live-aboards, three dives of 70 minutes was enough. The diving is fascinating, with every creature you have seen in the books. Macro divers will be in heaven. Dive guides are great. (Ph: 925-825-1939 (US) or 62-0438-30300 (Indonesia); e-mail [info@kungkungan.com](mailto:info@kungkungan.com); website [www.kungkungan.com](http://www.kungkungan.com))

**Kungkungan Bay Resort, May 2002, John Sommerer** ([john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu](mailto:john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu)), Silver Spring, MD. Experience: 251-

500 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Unbelievable critters. We gave them a wish list, and we saw everything in three days (except mature mimic octopus, and our boat got that the first dive after we had to stop). The dive guides were good, some truly outstanding. Some guests (most of whom were repeats) said some newer guys were not as good as some older ones, but we had Nus and Robyn for almost our whole time, and they found so much stuff I hardly had time to look on my own. Superb facilities for camera setup, careful handling of gear by boat crews. Some relatively gentle wrangling of critters by dive guides to improve photo prospects. New dive operations manager, and a few minor problems at start of stay, swiftly addressed when discussed. Food good but a bit bland. Very obliging staff. Beautiful, spacious room with excellent lighting, excellent plumbing, and a great porch. Excursion to Tangkoko to see tarsiers was great, but we must have been only guests in history who thought so (a hard drive to get there). We were gently discouraged from going, but when we made it clear we really wanted to, KBR arranged everything, and sent a staff member with us. Airport transfers handled with great efficiency. No-tipping policy — extra gratuity beyond service charge already included to be shared among staff. Some of the most interesting diving I've ever done. But watch out for the wicked hydroids at Police Pier: everybody had scars! Half the guests were pro photographers.

**Kungkungan Bay Resort, September 2002, Jerry (JerryL3515@aol.com)**  
**Las Vegas, NV.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 90 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F. For small critters there can be no other place like it on earth. The Resort is wonderful, with excellent service, large spacious cabins and a happy and helpful staff. A month there wouldn't be too much. You'll fly Singapore to Manado and then by SUV to the resort. Menu is expansive and varied. They offer Mexican, Italian, Oriental (of several different varieties) plus American. They try hard and they are most eager to please — if it's not on the menu just ask — but the cooking does have an Indonesian flavor. The diving is spectacular. We felt as though our brains were going to overload with the unique critters we saw on every dive. The dive guides know where to find what you want — pygmy seashores, ornate ghost pipefish. Excellent camera room, charging stations, clean and convenient. Rental gear available.

### **Sulawesi - Southern**

**Wakatobi Resort, September 2001, Paul Johnson (pajkotwf@aol.com)**  
**Santa Rosa, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, currents, no currents. We left for Wakatobi 2 weeks after 9/11. Our travel was without incident, though we did get to see a few submachine guns up close. We spent nights in Denpasar, Bali, coming and going and felt no animosity. I walked down a street in a commercial district at midnight with a friend and felt safe.

In Bali, we were welcomed by Henrik, Renee, and Lorenz, the guiding lights of Wakatobi. They oversaw our time in Bali and made our time interesting, safe, comfortable and informative. Diving is spectacular, the healthiest reefs I have seen. No pelagics but incredible tropicals, innumerable small critters (pygmy seahorses!) The array of ocean life was dizzying; so many wonderful things, not enough bottom time. On a single dive (Roma) we saw ribbon eels in their blue, black, and yellow phases, a pair of robust ghost pipe fish and a crocodile fish. Each day began with a wonderful buffet breakfast, then two boat dives using either the Ciska or the Wakatobi Tika. After lunch the afternoon could be spent reading sleeping or diving the house reef 20 feet from the end of the dock. No night life, we dove hard and slept early. The genius cook, Nickolas, kept us well fed with local and European delights. The accommodations were comfortable and pleasant and given the location we probably lived like royalty. The divemasters Sue, Paul and Fred were knowledgeable, safety conscious without being intrusive, and all-around delights not withstanding my breaking the 75 minute rule. This is world class diving, in a remote location where the operators are working with the local economy, respecting the local culture, treading lightly on the earth and below the seas, and serving up the best that there is to offer. (Ph: 800-959-9031 or +62-361-284-227 (Indonesia); e-mail [office@wakatobi.com](mailto:office@wakatobi.com); website [www.wakatobi.com](http://www.wakatobi.com))

### **Wakatobi Resort, October 2001, Mel McCombie, New Haven, CT.**

Dives logged: 1300 dives. Flew from Bali to Makassar on Garuda (spring for the \$50 RT upgrade to business class) and transferred to charter flight to Tomia, the island next to Wakatobi, then a short boat transfer to the resort. The transfer via Makassar was perfectly smooth, and en route back offered excellent shopping for coffees, handicrafts, and jewelry in the airport. Makassar had worried us originally, as it had been the site of anti-American demonstrations after 9/11 but the Wakatobi staff assured us that everything would be fine, and it was. Lorenz Mader, the founder of Wakatobi, accompanied our group for the entire trip. I am on the board of directors of The Coral Reef Alliance, and this trip was partly to support a grant CORAL had made to Wakatobi to install mooring buoys around the islands. We stayed in a bungalow, which was large and comfortable, with en suite bath, fridge, and coffee maker. No air conditioning anywhere in the resort, which did mean very hot afternoons. A few days I would rather have taken a siesta, but it was just too darn hot — so we dove on the fine house reef. It combines wall, muck, cavern, seagrass — the species we found in front of the resort included blue ringed octopii, all kinds of reef octopii, varieties of leaf fish, pipefish (leaf and regular, no harlequins), bobtailed squid, heaven knows how many crocodile fish, adults and juvenile lionfish (including the bi-ocellatus) — total sensory overload. We had dives lasting just under two

hours regularly there. The sites reached by boat were fabulous. Roma had stony corals akin to room-sized roses; trees of porges festooned with psychedelic colored crinoids; critters like ribbon eels and leaf pipefish; the occasional tuna streaking by. One day, we tracked a small humpback whale from the boat as it made its way through the channels; one of those peak moments resulted when we jumped in on snorkels and frozen with awe watched it slowly flick its fluke and sound right beneath us. Wakatobi is dedicated to preserving the health of the reefs. Divers are carefully briefed and checked out; one diver needed to be babysat to ensure he didn't kill things, and there was always a divemaster quietly at his side. Wakatobi provides a blueprint for how to run a win-win resort in a developing country. The food was quite good, though shorter on veggies than I like. The resort pays 20 percent over market for line-caught pelagic fishes, so we enjoyed great sushi every day, and fresh fish at many meals. The Swedish chef, Nicholas, loves punk rock, and it cracked us up to see his staff of demure Muslim village women rocking away to the Ramones in the kitchen. Dietary requests are cheerfully honored. My only real cavils are comfort-related: the running water is local and odious, smelly and saline. (Drinking water is imported and great.) There were a few times when we could have used air conditioning! Call me wimpy, call me Miss Five Star, but those were my only complaints. Knowing what a fanatic Lorenz Mader is, he will probably find

an ecologically sensitive way to correct those lacks. He's an extraordinary hands-on person, brilliant, practical, and deeply dedicated to the future health of the reefs. Coming home (via Hong Kong) was a shock after the cultures of Bali and Wakatobi. Indonesia is huge; troubles in Jakarta are thousands of miles from Bali and Wakatobi.

**Wakatobi Resort, November 2001, Steve Werlin, Dillon Beach, CA.** My third trip to Wakatobi, S.E. Four grand bungalows have their own porches, bathrooms/showers, etc. The long house itself has a camera room, separate camera rinse tanks, outdoor drying facilities for dive gear, new dining area, and hot showers! Board one of the two dive boats from the pier. New chef who has added flair to the menu (fish is still the primary entree but sushi, pizza, pasta, soups, and nice desserts added diversity). Diving is fabulous! The house reef is holding up well. The seagrass may not be quite as rich in life but still provided nudibranchs, clownfish, sea snakes, mating marbled dragonets, blue ringed octopus, baby cuttlefish and in less than six feet of water. The wall of the house reef remains the best house reef anywhere -- two different species of pygmy seahorses, ghost pipefish, leaf fish, crocodile fish, juvenile bat fish, eastern and western clownfish, nudibranchs, anthias, schools of jacks, and on and on. The boat dive sites were always great. Black ribbon eels and a blue ribbon eel evolving into a yellow ribbon eel! False stonefish, robust ghost pipefish,

jawfish, two types of mantis shrimp, three colors of leaf fish, a Spanish Dancer 2 feet long and had emperor shrimp living in its gills. Little else to do except dive, read, relax, nap, etc., primitive by luxury standards.

**Wakatobi Resort, May 2002, Mel Cundiff (Cundiff@Colorado.EDU) Boulder, CO.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. The best coral reefs anywhere. Others have described it more eloquently: "This is the epicenter of biodiversity in the world — it doesn't get any better than this" (*Undercurrent*, 10/97); "It's not the end of the world, but it is close enough that you can see it from there" (Some clever person whose name I can't find). Charter flight from Bali is only three hours away. I've been fortunate to dive on the world's major reefs and have found the best to be in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Lorenz Mader's vision in discovering the isolated reefs of Wakatobi and the support of his wife Renee and others to protect them from exploitation by fishers is to be commended. This is the only dive operation within hundreds of miles. Wakatobi is a hundred miles off the southeast coast of Sulawesi on a small island among others that have few native inhabitants. Lorenz, the locals and their chief are environmentally sensitive and are doing a great job in maintaining the reefs as a protected underwater preserve. The resort will accommodate 22 guests in four bungalows and a long house. The former have in-house showers and toilet facilities, but these

are shared in the long house. While accommodations are not five-star, they are adequate, comfortable and clean. The long house houses the kitchen, dining room, lounge/bar/salon, camera room, repair shop and dive-equipment/storage area. No in-house E-6 processing. Our group took malaria prophylaxes, but I only encountered a single mosquito during my 11-day stay and chose not to use the provided mosquito netting for sleeping. Ceiling fans were totally adequate for ventilation. Three dive boats took small groups on 5-40 minute excursions each morning to two different sites — most were 10-20 minutes away. Boats were also available for a 3 p.m. dive and for night dives; however, many of these dives were done on the several-hundred meter house reef. This is a world-class reef, easily as diverse and pristine as any others in the area and can reveal new species on almost any dive. It is unquestionably one of the best house reefs anywhere in the world. It is unusual for an area like this, relatively isolated from large landmasses, to have 3-meter tides, but these strong tidal flows are precisely what are sustaining the high density and large varieties of corals and critters. These strong currents are not recommended for novice divers, but I had four students with my having logged only 15 dives each, and they did a superb job of handling the conditions. Safety sausages were standard equipment, but our boat captains were always nearby when we surfaced, and the sausages were not needed. The food was prepared family style by a Swedish chef, and divers



with special dietary needs were accommodated. At every dinner was an ample supply of sushi and sashimi appetizers. Lorenz has employed a mostly European, multi-lingual staff, and they are friendly, competent and knowledgeable of the reefs and aware of the locations of the special critters. There have been few American clients there since September 2001. This is not a destination to see the big pelagics. We saw four eagle rays, lots of hawksbill and green turtles, schools of hump head parrotfish, large barracuda and not much more, but some of the most diverse, undisturbed coral reefs found anywhere: hard corals, leather corals, gorgonians and broccoli corals on the same reef that is almost devoid of rubble. Disturbances and rubble fields are found around 10-15 meters and lower. Ecologically, disturbance breeds diversity, and the diversity is certainly evident. There is not the high density of weirdo critters one can find on a muck dive in the Lembeh Straits 500 miles to the north, but there were easily several dozen endemic species that I got to see for the first time. It was pleasant not to witness the presence of dynamiting and cyaniding that I have seen on many Indonesian reefs. Only two reefs showed evidence of this. I saw no coral bleaching. The reefs in the shallower, sunlit waters above 10 meters exhibit an extraordinary high percentage of cover by living material — at least 90%. Bali is still a safe tourist destination — and so is Wakatobi because of its remoteness. Check it out at [Wakatobi.com](http://Wakatobi.com)

## MALAYSIA

Sipadan, the tiny island off Malaysian Borneo, was the scary site for a political kidnapping in 1999, so before considering this destination, get information from your government. Sipadan is crowded with new resorts... Why? Imagine 20 to 30 giant turtles on every dive, sharks, jacks, schooling barracuda, and the best shore diving anywhere. While there's an abundance of turtles year-round, counts are highest in July and August, although the reef in front of the resorts is showing signs of distress from the crowds. . . . Layang Layang Resort is a relatively young resort in the Spratly Islands; because of their oil reserves, the islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Taiwan as well as Malaysia. Schooling hammerheads and pristine reefs lure divers, but nothing lives on the flat coral atoll except birds. . . . Hammerhead season is March and April, but the resort operates from March to October. . . .

## Borneo

**Kapalai Dive Resort, March 2002, Barbara & Larry Murphy, Atlanta, GA.** Kapalai Resort is built on stilts over the shallows of the Celebes Sea. It is 45 mins by boat from Semporna, Borneo and features comfortable individual kampung style chalets. There is always a breeze and no insects. The food was above average non-spicy Chinese style. There are