

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

three daily boat dives and unlimited diving from the marina/dive shop area. There is no camera room so toting a heavy housing is a muscle builder. Diving is on shallow reefs, macro heaven, and bottom times are set at 45-55 minutes when on boat dives. The dive guides are most helpful at finding the critters, just give them your list. In 11 days we saw five different colors of ornate ghost pipefish, robust ghost pipefish, seahorses, snake eels, ribbon eels, flying gurnards, devil fish, jawfish with eggs, five different types of frogfish, mantis shrimp, leaf fish, stone fish, nudis and flatworms, crab-eye gobies, orangutan crabs and squat lobsters. The greatest mandarin fish site is in 20' of water about 10 fin strokes from the pier. Nightly from 5:30 P.M. onward, the mandarins were fighting and mating and easy to photograph. Another great dive site is the oil platform with its collection on underwater junk a habitat for four frogfish, flamboyant cuttlefish, and Elvis, the monster green moray. A great bonus to diving Kapalai is the ability to dive Sipadan, 25 boat minutes away, without having to stay on the crowded island. We did three days there and saw the multitudes of sharks, turtles, schooling barracudas and jacks the island is famous for. There is a small, friendly Malaysian military detachment residing at the resort to protect the guests from a repeat of Sipadan, 2000. Aircraft and patrol boats cruise the area too. The diving was easy, seas calm, water temperature 82 and visibility between 40-100'. (Ph: 60-89-765200 (Malay-

sia); e-mail [info@sepilok.com](mailto:info@sepilok.com) ; website <http://sipadan-kapalai.com>)

**Lankayan Resort, April 2002, Barbara & Larry Murphy, Atlanta, GA.** Lankayan Resort solely occupies a small island in the Sulu Sea 1-1/2 hrs. by fast boat from Sandakan, Borneo. Traditional individual chalets are a better choice of lodgings over the multi-room hotel style alternative. At capacity, there could be 80 divers that could lead to tight boat conditions. Guests were German, Italian and Japanese. There is a large marina and dive center but no camera room. Rental equipment is suspect. Three boat dives daily, night dives about \$15 extra. Depths are rarely below 80' and bottom times designated at 45-55 mins. Emphasis is on macro. Some guides really try to find critters while others are just displacing water. Our 10 days were adversely affected by NW winds that had not shifted to the SE after the monsoons. The result was a dirty, cold layer of water below 45' that dropped vis from 5-20'. Above this, the water was 82 and vis from 40-100'. Several reef systems such as the north end of East Reef, Lost Reef, and South Reef are among the most beautiful we've seen in 20 years of worldwide diving despite parts having been dynamited in the past by Philippine fishermen. Rides to sites averages 10-20 mins. The star attraction of marine life was a species of jawfish with heads as large as bullfrogs. With a mouthful of eggs, the males made great photo subjects. Other notable marine creatures were stonefish, devil fish, leaf fish, frog fish, juvenile

sharks, leopard sharks, numerous ribbon eels, exotic nudis, and an assortment of tiny crabs, shrimp, and gobies on sea rods and anemones. Every site had nice schools of reef fish. The resort is trying to promote itself as a whale shark destination, but so far the contacts have been few. Happy hour features the feeding of a school of juvenile blacktips from the dining area. Turtle eggs laid on the island are collected and hatched in pens. Hatchlings are released at high tide in an area away from the blacktips. Malaysian military stationed on island to safeguard guests because of proximity to the southern Philippines. A nice side trip out of Sandakan is the Sepilok Nature Resort to see the orangutans. (Ph: 60-89-765200; e-mail [info@lankayan-island.com](mailto:info@lankayan-island.com); website <http://lankayan-island.com>)

### Sipadan Island

**Borneo Divers, January 2002,**  
**James Lyle (jlyle@beachnet.com)**  
**Hermosa Beach, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm. We were disappointed after hearing great things. The visibility was awful and there were no big schools of fish (reported to have been blown out by a cyclone last year). Lots of turtles. One dive site is called Coral Gardens. Coral Rubble might be a better name. Borneo Divers is a nice operation, the accommodations are Spartan but clean and adequate. The photo pro has left the resort and there was no E-6 processing available. A long way to go for not good diving. (Ph: 6-088-222226; e-mail [Reservations@BorneoDivers.Info](mailto:Reservations@BorneoDivers.Info) or

[Information@BorneoDivers.Info](mailto:Information@BorneoDivers.Info);  
website [www.jaring.my/bdivers](http://www.jaring.my/bdivers))

### MALDIVES

These 7000 low-lying coral islands in a 1200-mile chain southeast of India will be the first to disappear if global warming raises sea levels significantly. Warming has already taken a serious toll on the reefs, which suffered significant coral bleaching. About 200 of the islands are inhabited (although visitors have very little interaction with the 175,000 predominantly-Muslim residents), and several are devoted entirely to small resorts that offer average to excellent tropical reef diving with big fish action - if the resort has a knowledgeable staff that knows where and when to find it. However, the Maldives are best dived from live-aboards. . . . Dive rules are strict for this part of the world. . . . Expect year-round daily temperatures of roughly 85 degrees and abundant rainfall, which is distributed evenly from May through December. . . .

**Bandos Island Resort, October 2001, Barbara & Larry Murphy (lemurphy@aol.com) Atlanta, GA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm no currents. Chose this mid-priced resort for some jet lag recovery three days before boarding *Manthiri*. It's a 20 min. boat ride from airport that is a plus at 2:00 A.M. Guests are mainly the European sun, diving and disco crowd. Meals are an undistinguished