

Alor, Alor

by Anita Verde

The thing we love about scuba diving is that it takes us to places way off the radar, and our recent trip to the magnificent Alor Archipelago In Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara province was no exception.

Diving in Alor is like stumbling across a treasure chest with a kaleidoscope of colors and hidden gems that take your breath away. Boasting over 50 dive sites, with an array of marine life, some of which are only found in Alor's waters, this is definitely scuba heaven. The reefs here are exceptionally healthy, tourism is undeveloped with only a few eco operators catering for experienced divers, and the islands here are still inhabited by many of the Flores sub ethnic peoples who still preserve their traditional ways of life.

Renowned for having some of the more difficult diving in Indonesia, the diving here is catered to quite experienced divers. Alor has everything; with rare critters, hammerheads, pristine reefs, pods of dolphins & false killer whales, astonishing visibility and adrenaline pumping currents.

The currents here can be very challenging depending on the moon phase, with some dive sites being

inaccessible during this time. The unpredictability of the currents here means you must be experienced enough to be flexible and nimble with your dive plan. On a single dive it's not uncommon to experience up-currents, down-currents, vertical currents, horizontal currents and the odd 'washing machine'. But don't fear them, as it's these currents that bring a variety of pelagic fish species and keep the reefs in their pristine condition. Strong currents are also present on the surface, so make sure you bring your SMB as there are few boats to find you if you were to drift far from your group.

Water temperatures in Alor range from 26 to 29 degrees, but thermoclines of 20 degrees or less are not uncommon. We dived in a 3 mm full suit with a combination of thermal under layers depending on the dive site.

Most dive operators in the area close from mid December to mid March, so the best time to dive Alor is between April to November. We chose to visit in April and experienced exceptional visibility, clear sunny skies and pleasant evenings.

Many of the dive sites are located near local villages which provides



a wonderful up close encounter into village life. On many dives you are greeted by children swimming or waving from the shore, or local fisherman with their home made goggles and spears. If you're lucky enough, you'll be down on your dive while a local fisherman free dives to depth to check his fishing basket.





Here are a few of our favorite dive sites:

Bama Wall

This stunning wall is covered in a spectacle of corals with abundant fish life. This is a wide angle photographers dream, but don't neglect the wall itself where you'll find a diverse array of macro life. The wall drops below 40 meters but there's also lots to explore in its shallow waters, so extending your dive time here is worthwhile.

The Edge

This is a dive we will never forget. The current here can be tough and unpredictable; but as you descend below its initial slope and on to its endless wall you'll find protection amongst unimaginable

species of the most spectacular corals you'll ever see. Vivid enough to burn your retinas! The steep wall appears to be endless, so keep an eye on your dive computer as the sheer beauty of this wall tends to draw you deeper!

The Jetty

The local jetty at Bajalang doesn't fail to impress. Apparently only five years old, it's pylons are covered in amazing coral growth and numerous varieties of nudibranch, frogfish, ghost pipe fish, shrimps, sea spiders, and crabs. The Jetty also provides a safe habitat for many



species of juvenile fish to grow before they leave the protection of the Jetty for the open ocean. A resident school of very friendly Bat fish provide for some fabulous wide angle photography. An impressive dive site not to be missed.

Black Sand

This was our first proper muck dive and one of the very few places in the world where you can encounter the famous Rhinopias. Often described as the 'Holy Grail' of underwater photography for muck divers, the Rhinopias top our list of weird and strange critters.

Yellow corner

Unfortunately the moon phase during our visit meant the diving conditions were not ideal for us to dive this site, but from what we heard from other guests, it is spectacular! If you can manage the sometimes death defying currents the key draw card here are the Scalloped Hammerhead sharks.

Alor Divers

We stayed at the Alor Divers Eco Resort, one of very few options in the area. The resort itself is nestled delicately amongst the native vegetation on a pristine white sandy beach. Catering to only 16 divers, this place is barefoot luxury at its best.

The resort has a selection of standard and deluxe bungalows. We chose to stay in one of 3 recently built Deluxe Bungalows at the end of the beach.

Exceptionally private, each are tastefully appointed in a traditional style, complete with all the comfort divers need. Proper hangers for drying wetsuits, two desk stations complete with power



boards for assembling and charging your precious underwater camera equipment, a super comfy bed with mosquito net and lovely outdoor bathroom with eco body products.

The bungalows are not air conditioned, but this didn't bother us in the slightest. While the days are warm, the evenings cool to a pleasant temperature for sleeping and the open air design of the Bungalows means the air flows through the building structure keeping you completely comfortable. We slept under the mosquito net with the double sliding doors wide open, allowing ourselves to be immersed in the sounds of the ocean, the light from the moon, and the rising of the sun.

Managed by British/ Dutch couple Rob and Yardena Wareham-de Haan, we felt completely at home the moment we arrived. Both Rob and Dena are very experienced in both managing the resort and guiding guests on the local dive sites. We were less experienced than some of the other divers, but they made us feel instantly comfortable and helped us improve our diving and camera skills during our stay. The stand-out quality of management was how



engaging and fun loving they are. Well travelled and open minded, they had all the guests in stitches with their stories, making it easy for everyone to integrate and enjoy each other's company regardless of country or culture. During our stay we had divers from France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, Hong Kong and of course us Aussies.



The resorts eco credentials are impressive. Each of the individual buildings are positioned to compliment the natural environment and were built from local materials with natural thatched roofing. The resort was constructed by local people from the nearby villages, and was designed to ensure protection from the heat eliminating the need for air conditioning.

The dive boats are small, efficient and quite and adhere to the strictest emissions standards. Water is supplied from the resorts own underground water reserve, and all waste is either composted or returned to the main island where it is shipped for recycling.

How to get to Alor

Alor may not be the easiest place to access and facilities here are limited, but that's what makes it so

special.

Alor's Mali Airport is serviced by direct flights from Kupang, which has connections to the major Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Denpasar, Bali. Kupang is only currently serviced domestically, so transiting through Bali or Jakarta is necessary.

While the lack of easy connections and flight cancellations can make traveling a bit arduous depending on where you are coming from, once you arrive and descend beneath the surface you'll soon understand why the journey was worth it. Would we return? Absolutely! When's the next flight!

Anita Verde

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