

SCUBA DIVER PRESENTS A GUIDE TO

WAKATOBI

TOP DIVE SITES

WAKATOBI DIVE RESORT'S
MUST-DIVE SITES
REVEALED

PHOTOGRAPHER'S PARADISE

IS THIS THE ULTIMATE
MACRO DESTINATION?

10 THINGS YOU MUST DO AT WAKATOBI DIVE RESORT



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Photographs by WARREN BAVERSTOCK, GLEN COWANS, MARCO FIERLI, SHAWN LEVIN, DIDI LOTZE, WAYNE OSBORN, RICHARD SMITH, WALT STEARNS, MARK SNYDER, JASON WOLCOTT

1 ROMA DIVE SITE

Visit the outstanding coral rosette at the dive site 'Roma' – The site has some of the best hard coral growth in the area, and the rosette is the jewel in the crown. Make sure the dense schools of fishes in the shallows don't distract you from reaching your goal though.

2 HOUSE REEF

Walk right off the beach and experience the world-renowned 'House Reef' – there are few places on the planet where such a rich reef is accessible so easily from shore. You can head off with your buddy to explore at anytime of the day.

3 SPA TREATMENTS

Relax, with a variety of invigorating and sumptuous spa treatments – you're on holiday after all, so treat yourself to one of the various treatments on offer. The fusion of European and Asian offerings will leave you relaxed and ready for the dives ahead.

4 SEAHORSES

Find your own pygmy seahorse with the help of your eagle eyed guide – of course, pygmy seahorses are preposterously small, but imagine the thrill of finding your own. Once you know where to look, you've already cleared the biggest hurdle.

5 WATER SPORTS

Try other water sports: wakeboarding, paddleboarding or kayaking – calm waters and little boat traffic make Wakatobi Dive Resort an excellent location to sample other watersports. Or try kitesurfing during June through September when the resort has a dedicated kiting instructor on staff.

6 PRIVATE DINING

For a romantic treat, enjoy a private dinner for two by the beach – why not have the resort arrange a quiet and intimate dinner for two. With the sand beneath your toes, you can celebrate a special occasion in memorable fashion.



7 NATURE TRAIL

Spot birds and lizards along the nature trail to a local village - a small village at the far corner of the island is linked to the resort by a nature trail. Along the trail, you can spot stunning tropical birds and other colourful local wildlife.

8 CORAL LAGOON

Join non-diving friends and family to snorkel the resort's shallow coral lagoon - the lagoon in front of the resort is full of fascinating reef creatures, so you needn't don your scuba equipment to share this with non-diving loved ones.

9 NIGHT DIVING

Join a night dive to meet a whole new cast of coral reef characters - night dives are a time of serenity and calm. They also provide a rare glimpse into the private lives of the nocturnal creatures that emerge as the regular diving day ends and the sun sets.

10 JETTY BAR

Enjoy the buzz and beverages of the Jetty Bar at sunset - located at the perfect vantage point to soak up the almost-guaranteed sunset spectacular. You can sip a great cocktail at the same time. What could be better?

FROM THE EDITOR

I've had a long history with Wakatobi Dive Resort spanning more than a decade. I first visited as a guest in 2005; I loved the diving and was drawn to its environmental awareness, the friendliness of its staff and outstanding natural beauty of the region. The resort had already long established a marine reserve protecting their local area, and the bustling reefs brimming with life were a testament to this. I returned several times over the next few years to spend more than six months collecting data for my PhD research on the biology and conservation of pygmy seahorses. Fortunately, they welcomed me with open arms, as few sites would have provided sufficiently rich and pristine reefs accessed straight from shore. After several hundred dives at Wakatobi, I have understandably had countless amazing encounters. Some of my highlights have included swimming with a pod of pilot whales enroute to the dive site Blade, and melon headed whales from the liveaboard Pelagian. I shall never forget the sense of awe as a herd of 40-plus enormous bumphead parrotfish ponderously grazed the coral buffet around me. Although, most certainly the icing on the cake was watching a pair of pygmy seahorses give birth and almost immediately begin to dance and mate again, just 30 minutes later.

I consider Wakatobi my second home and I've been back as often as possible since completing my research. As the world's ecosystems change before our eyes, thankfully Wakatobi Dive Resort is remote enough, and protected with enough forethought, that its bounty remains. The bustling reefs with their fantastical tropical fishes, kaleidoscopic corals and many special resident characters keep bringing myself and other divers back year after year.

DR RICHARD SMITH

BIOGRAPHY: Richard Smith, a British underwater photographer and writer, aspires to promote an appreciation for the ocean's inhabitants and raise awareness of marine conservation issues through his images. A marine biologist by training, Richard's pioneering research on the biology and conservation of pygmy seahorses led to the first PhD on these enigmatic fishes. Over the past decade, Richard's photographs and marine life focused features have appeared in a wide variety of publications around the world. Richard leads marine life expeditions where the aim is for participants to get more from their diving and photography by learning about the marine environment.

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A DIVERS PARADISE

As man inexorably encroaches upon the world's last remaining wildernesses, it's increasingly hard to find pristine places to dive. Sadly, mass tourism now intrudes upon locations that only a decade ago were considered extraordinarily remote. It is reassuring that some places remain beyond the reach of human interference. Wakatobi Dive Resort in southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, is one such place.

The Wakatobi archipelago stretches in a south easterly direction from the tip of the Sulawesi mainland; starting with Wangi-Wangi, then to Kaledupa, Tomia and finally Binongko Island. The first two letters of each island create the acronym WA-KA-TO-BI, after which the resort gets its name. To reach this forgotten corner of the planet, you can't hop on an easyJet flight. During the resort's early years of the 90s, long ferry and overland journeys lasted several days. Thankfully, in order to more easily share their magnificent reefs, Wakatobi decided to build a private airstrip on a neighbouring island. Exclusive flights now run twice a week directly from Bali to the resort, making access easier than ever.



HEART OF THE MATTER

It is well documented that, sitting at the heart of the Coral Triangle, the biodiversity in the waters around Wakatobi is extremely high. Twenty kilometres of reef are protected around the resort and here literally thousands, or more likely millions, of reef creatures flourish. While the resort is a perfect base to explore the immediate area, to voyage beyond the Sawa reef systems to even more remote and unvisited sites requires a liveaboard. In 2005, Wakatobi Dive Resort acquired Pelagian to do just this job, and she has been cruising there ever since. Together, Wakatobi Dive Resort and Pelagian offer the perfect combination for experiencing the wider region.





LUXURY LODGINGS

Several aspects of Wakatobi Dive Resort stand it apart from other dive resorts: the extremely high level of service, five-star accommodations and gourmet food - not to mention the diving. There are three tiers of accommodation offered at the resort, from Palm Bungalows nestled among tropical vegetation just a stone's throw from the lapping waves, to the middle tier Ocean Bungalows, which offer a porch affording stunning views out across the flat tropical waters. The most opulent level of accommodation options are the villas. With unobstructed views of the ocean, and sunsets, the four spacious yet private villas are surely the gold standard of dive resort lodgings anywhere in the world. With a butler to optimise your holiday on land, and a private dive guide for your in water experience, what could be better? One and two bedroom villas offer different options for families and the latter even have private pools.

If food is high on your list - and let's be honest, what diver doesn't need a good feed after a long day of diving? - then you'll be more than catered for at Wakatobi, with buffet style international cuisine served in an open air dining room overlooking the ocean. It's very easy to forget how remote Wakatobi actually is when you have such outstanding fresh food served daily. Most of the supplies come from Bali by plane and the logistics behind the operation, that go on seamlessly behind the scenes, must surely be military in their planning.

Wakatobi is one of the world's most well-known dive resorts, and for good reason. Over the years Wakatobi has developed into a leader in quality of diving accommodations, ambience and dining. Ultimately, however, the key to the resort's success has been the outstanding diving. The diving is accessible to all levels, with corals growing all the way from the surface to the deepest realms of the rebreather diver, so let's explore some of what its reefs have to offer...

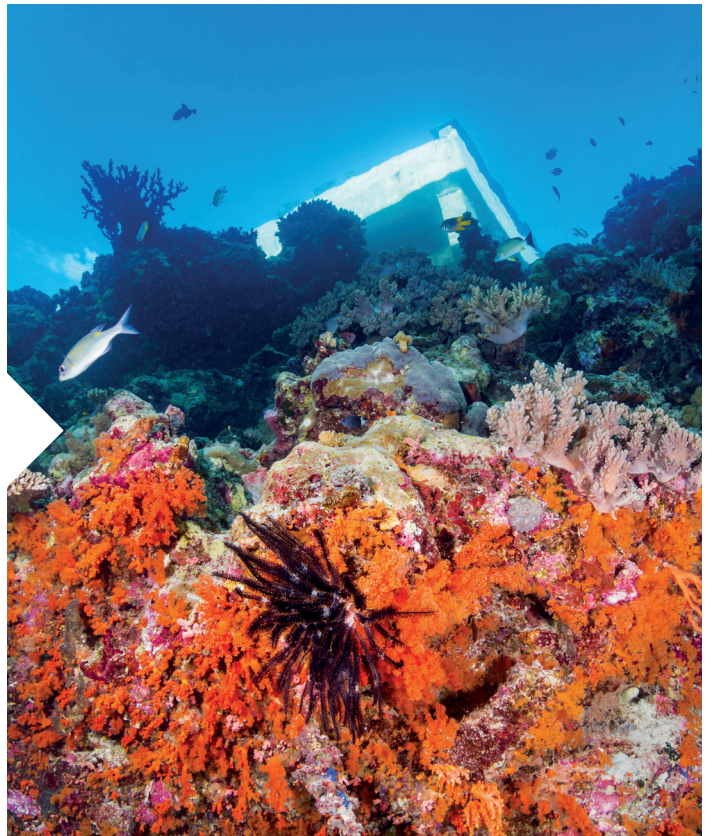


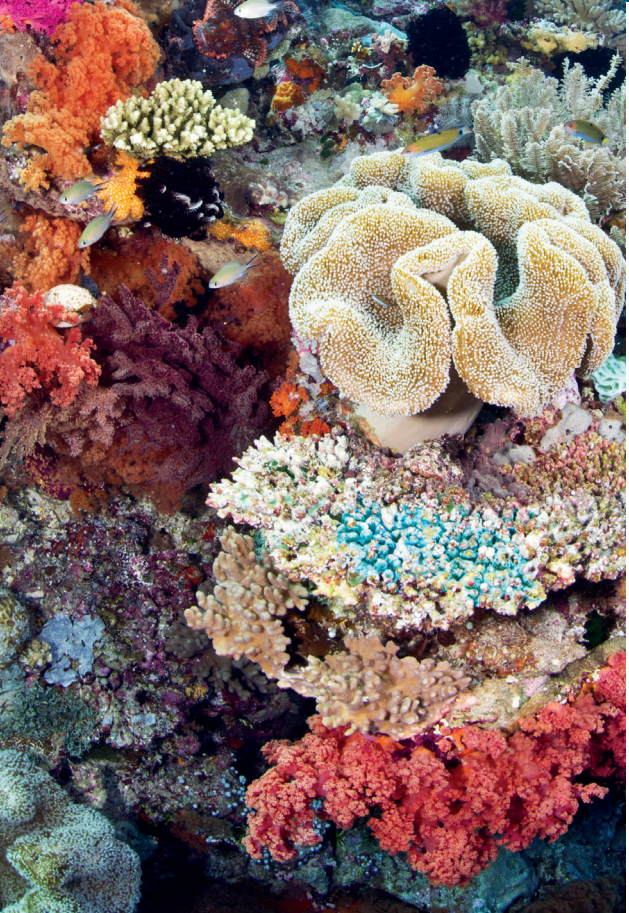
A HOUSE REEF OF DISTINCTION

Wakatobi Dive Resort, in my opinion, has one of the world's best house reefs. It is a vibrant coral wall that meanders for several miles in front of the resort. At slack tide, both high and low, it is an excellent spot for a current-free saunter searching for the reef's diverse macro critters, such as pygmy sea-horses, ghost pipefish and frogfish. When the current is running, it is a fast-paced, adrenaline-filled ride with bigger creatures such as trevally, barracuda and turtles often making an appearance. Currents also encourage the abundant soft corals to swell, showing off a rainbow of colourful hues. And all this just a stone's throw from your veranda.

ORIENTATION | To help with orientation, one of your first days' guided dives at the resort will be on the House Reef. The dive is conducted from one of the large and comfortable day boats, for those not accustomed to shore diving. This helps you to get your bearings should you wish to do an unguided dive later during your stay. Pottering along the uneven wall, full of overhangs and clefts, your guide will point out many of the local residents. Several species of anemonefish dance among the fronds of their tentacular homes and an inquisitive school of bigeye trevallies are often found near the Jetty Bar. It is also one of the best sites to find turtles; I've commonly seen half a dozen individuals on a single dive. Both hawksbill and green turtles glide along the wall, with the former occasionally stopping to munch on colourful sponges. As you naturally move into shallower water towards the end of the dive, life becomes evermore intense. Coral reefs aren't a world of complementary colour palettes from the pages of a fashion magazine. They are a assault on the senses, and here there isn't a square inch of vacant space to be found.

For a relaxed unguided dive, at any time during the day, the house reef can easily be reached by swimming over the reef flat. Actually, the reef flat is a great dive in on its own at high tide. I have seen creatures such as seahorses, blue-ringed octopus, snake eels and unusual nudibranchs among the corals, rocks and seagrass. From the reef flats at high tide, it is easy to pop over the reef crest directly onto the house reef. Along the reef, there are two gullies in the wall, which enable you to shelter from current, or simply use as visual cues so you don't accidentally travel too far. The resort's tenders are always on hand to drop you off or pick you up, should you wish.





WHO'S HOME

The House Reef is a macro photographer's dream. Every available nook and cranny among the corals is packed with all manner of crustaceans and small reef fish. Because reef contours rise to within a few meters of the surface, it's possible to perform multi-level dives lasting 70 to 80 minutes without going into decompression. One need not venture far from the jetty to find interesting subjects. The large concrete columns and beams of the jetty create shelter for schooling fish, and are home to an assortment of shrimps, crabs, moray eels and gobies. Time spent in the seagrass beds and branching coral colonies of the sunlit shallows yields subjects from leaf scorpion fish and pajama cardinalfish to robust, halimeda and ornate ghost pipefish. In addition to a bevy of nudibranch species, there are cuttlefish, and when the sun goes down octopus and small squid join the carnival of weird and wonderful creatures.

THE **MACRO** LIFE OF WAKATOBI



Wakatobi Dive Resort has reefs to suit everyone. Snorkellers can see fishes up close and personal in the shallows, while divers easily burn through their 70-minute dives pouring over luscious coral growth deeper below the surface. The resort also offers rebreather diving, which is beyond my remit but sure to deliver mesmerising marine life encounters too. Whichever depth is your preference, macro life flourishes from the shallowest reefs to the deepest ridges.

STARTING SMALL | Pygmy seahorses obviously initially attracted me to this remote corner of Indonesia. Wakatobi is one of the best places in the world to see these diminutive fishes. Three species are commonly encountered there: Bargibant's, Denise's and Pontoh's. All of these are shorter than the diameter of a two pence coin, and Pontoh's is even shorter than a five pence! Never fear, if critter spotting isn't your forte, a knowledgeable and eagle-eyed guide, who will find a huge variety of macro life on your trip, leads each dive group. If there's something you'd specifically like to see, within reason, you need just ask. If the abundant pygmy seahorses are too small for you, then the reefs also accommodate multitudes of other macro critters. Pairs of Halimeda ghost pipefish blend effortlessly into their namesake algae; here even the weeds have eyes. Unlike their seahorse relatives, females brood developing eggs in fused pelvic fins (male seahorses brood their young in a pouch). If you see a pair of ghost pipefishes, keep an eye out for the larger female fanning open the paired fins on her belly. If you're very lucky, you might just catch a glimpse of the eggs within. Another newly discovered member of the seahorse and pipefish family is the thread pipehorse, *Kyone-michthys rumengani*. It's as long as a pygmy seahorse, but very much thinner, it's hardly surprising that these fish went undiscovered for so long. Wakatobi is also a great spot for nudibranch aficionados. Year-round there are many species that you can find on the reef. It helps if you know their food sources, or have a good eye for these gaudy slugs. There are also a variety of species that come and go seasonally, which makes sightings different each time you visit. Guides carry a slate and can often help with identification if you're interested. This is true of any creature you see during your dives.



CRITTER HUNTING

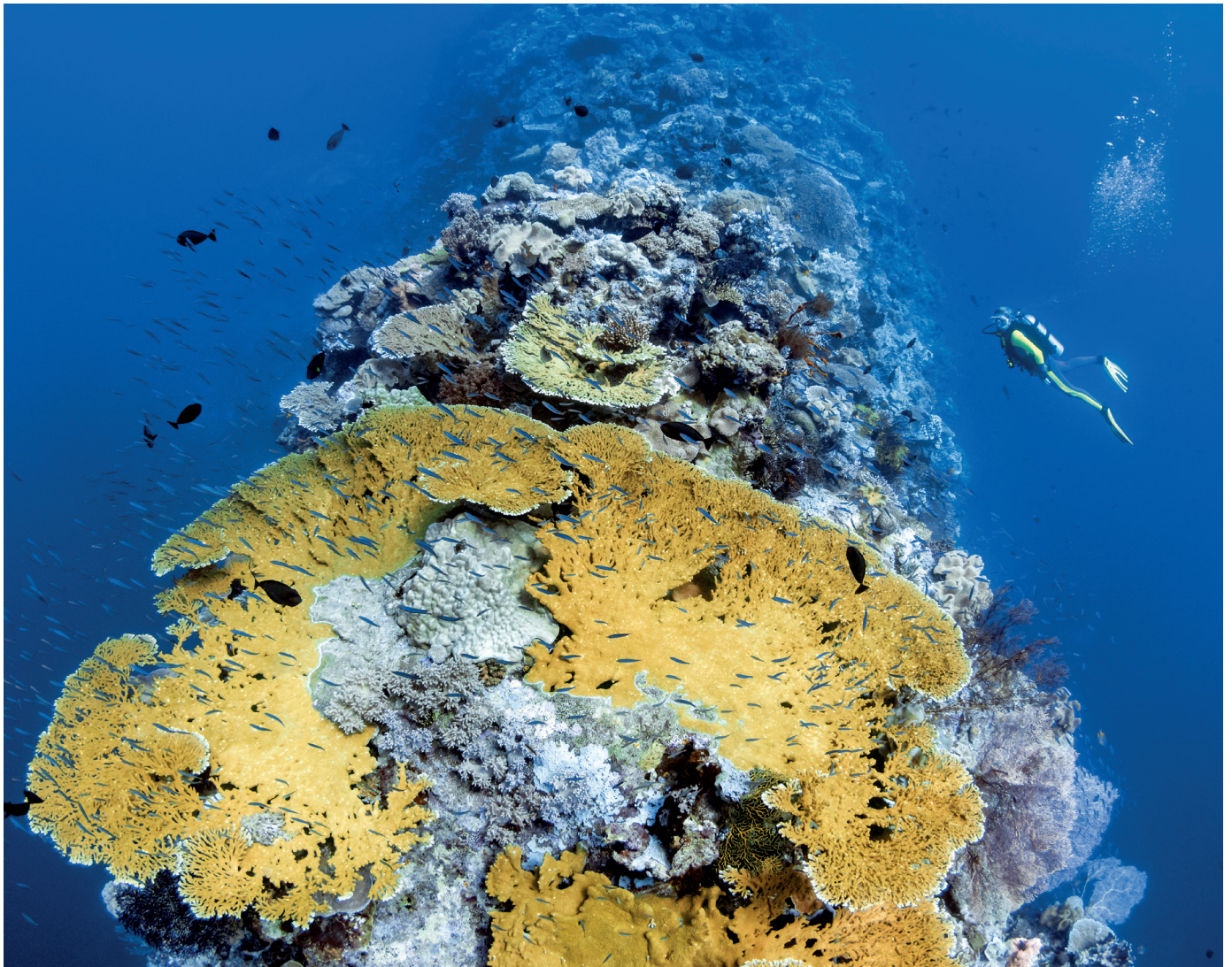
Every invertebrate at Wakatobi seems to accommodate a tiny hitchhiker; you just need to know where to look. Crinoids (also known as feather stars) accommodate a multitude of creatures from squat lobster to shrimps and even tiny clingfish. The nocturnal counterpart of the crinoid, the basket star, also has a stunning little shrimp hitchhiker, found only on their arms. Most recently, the giant clams revealed their own residents in the form of jewel-like spotted shrimps living deep inside and exposed only to the most patient and observant of divers. The dive guides at Wakatobi are trained not just to help spot all these tiny creatures, but to assist with your interaction too. Sometimes it's not the easiest trick to get in and have a proper look at the smallest animals. Your guide can provide a steady anchorage if you'd like to stabilise yourself, while they use a pointer to indicate the animal's location. What I love about the guides is that they never manipulate or harm the creatures while showing it. If you've read my Critter Hunting series, you'll know that I'm very much in favour of leaving animals undisturbed. I'm always so happy to dive with resorts that respect and value their marine life.

CRITTER HUNTING: Pygmy Seahorses | Halimeda Ghost pipefish | Nudibranchs

TOP MACRO DIVE SITES: House Reef | Teluk Maya | Kollo Soha

THE BIG AND THE BOLD

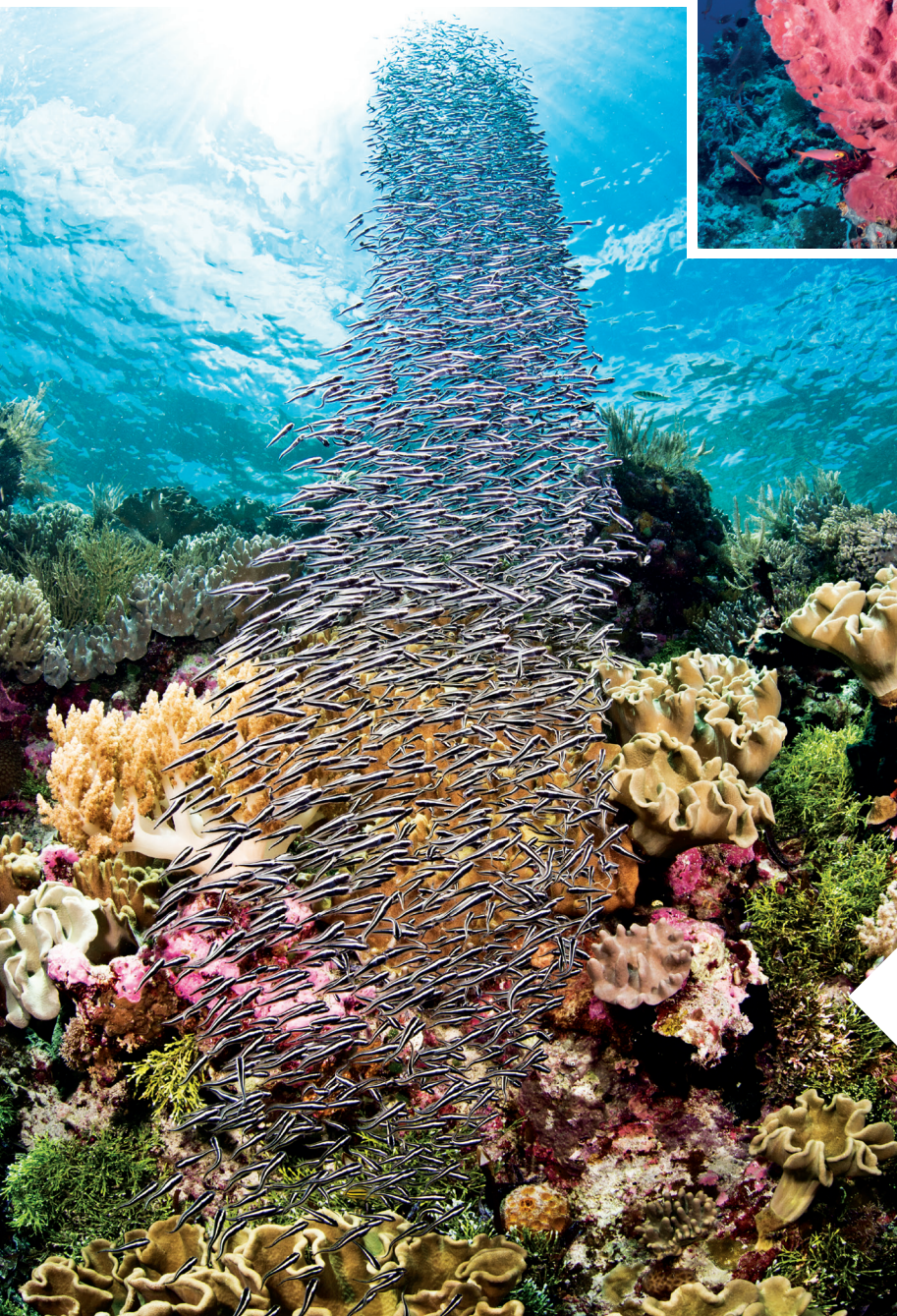
When it comes to reefs, Wakatobi has a huge variety on its doorstep. There are stunning hard coral gardens at Roma, colourful soft coral and sponge encrusted walls at Cornucopia, huge fields of gorgonians at Blade and critter rich sands at Teluk Maya. Such a variety of different ecosystems of course provide homes for all the different organisms that inhabit each individually. Large reef creatures aren't as common as some locations outside of Asia, but turtles are common and schooling snapper, bumphead parrotfish, blacktip reef sharks and big eye trevally are regulars at certain sites. Other big animal encounters I have had at Wakatobi, include swimming with pilot whales and spinner dolphins on the trip out to Blade reef, as well as melon headed whales from Pelagian. They were kind of skittish, but even to catch a glimpse of these magnificent cetaceans underwater is incredible.



FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHER

As a photographer, one of my favourite areas to shoot is the shallows. Here, with plenty of sunlight, large leather and hard corals grow to within inches of the waters' surface. At low tide they can even be briefly exposed. Given the often very calm waters in the area, there is ample opportunity for shooting reflections and capturing Snell's window (a cone of light, created by refraction, that acts like a window through the water surface). As you descend down the reef, the gentle slopes tend to develop into steep walls. Here, with limited light, colourful sponges, soft corals, gorgonians and tunicates dominate. With a little current to draw out the polyps, these walls make for stunning wide-angle images. With a little luck and patience, you might even be able to enhance the shot with a passing school of parrot or batfish.

REEF CREATURE HIGHLIGHTS: Cuttlefish | Bigeye trevally | Turtles

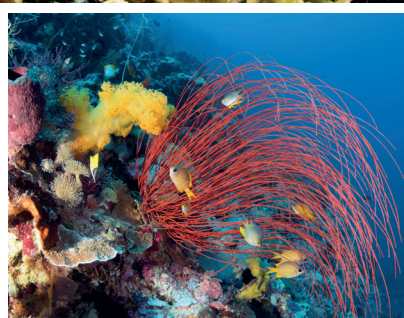


TOP DIVE SITES

BLADE | Blade is one of Wakatobi's most iconic and well known sites. It's also its furthest, taking about three quarters of an hour to reach. Keep your eyes peeled during the journey for a pod of pilot whales that often rest between the two reef systems. Blade is an elaborate ridge system, but the part we dive is a narrow ridge with pinnacles along its length, resembling a knife's blade. Although it's great for wide angle, and is certainly stunning topographically, there have often been unusual macro sightings such as frogfish and ghost pipefishes there too.

ROMA | This large pinnacle comes from the depths of the ocean up to perfect safety stop depth. The pinnacle is actually connected via a ridge to other parts of the system, on the top of which you can find a huge coral rosette. Shot from above, this makes a lovely image for photographers. The reef itself also has resident schools of large fishes such as barracuda and snapper.

CORNUCOPIA | This is one of my personal favourite reefs for its astounding diversity and abundance of reef life. The wall is simply covered in growth from the top of the reef, for as far as you can see. Well beyond the scope of the recreational diver. With a little current, the wall is almost overwhelming, but it's easy enough to gently ride the current and follow the reef's contours for the entire dive, never reaching a break in the lush growth.



UNPARALLELED SERVICES

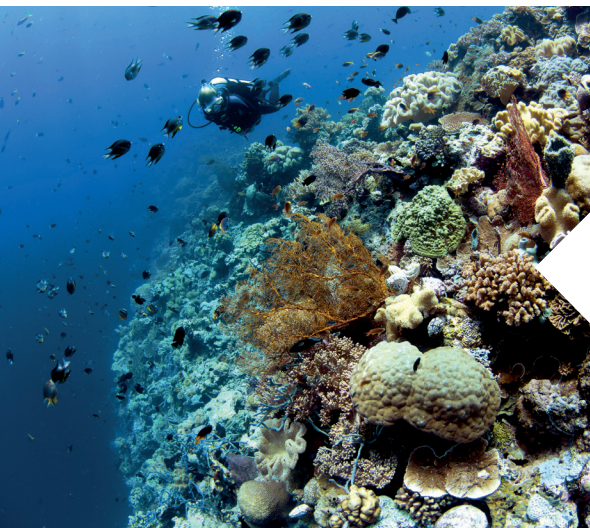


Wakatobi's famously high standards of service become apparent as soon as you start to plan your visit. Before even getting to the resort, the concierge team are at your disposal. They are able to organise a stay in Bali to take in the sights, relax to get over your jetlag or sample some local cuisine. Even if you only have transit time between your Bali arriving or departing flight and your flight to the resort, the concierge team can happily arrange a transfer to a local restaurant or spa, to kill a few hours in style. However, it really all starts after dropping your bags with the Wakatobi team at Bali domestic airport. Amazingly, you won't need to worry about these again until they're seamlessly deposited at your bungalow or aboard Pelagian. After an easy and personalised check-in, you're escorted to a private lounge to have a short and relaxed wait to join the flight. There are snacks available, and you have the opportunity to make some new buddies who'll also be heading to the resort.

NON DIVERS

If you are coming to Wakatobi with a non-diving partner or children, there are plenty of services and activities to keep them occupied and happy. For a truly relaxing non-diving activity, a significant other can spend some time at the spa—or enjoy a spa service right at your bungalow or villa. There's a library for quiet times, and a wildlife media presentation several evenings of the week. Infants and young children can be trusted to the care of Wakatobi's nanny service, and children 5 and up have exciting activities at the Kids Club. Active teens can go for kayaking, snorkeling trips, waterskiing or wakeboard runs. And, kitesurfing at the resort during June through September has become a very popular option. If shopping at the resort's boutique isn't enough retail time, there are tours to island villages that include stops at the local markets.





STREAMLINED DIVING

For most of us, however, diving is paramount and any little ways that this can be made more streamlined and personalised is often greatly appreciated. Dive group sizes are always small at the resort, in the region of one guide to four guests, and sites are never crowded; however, at Wakatobi they can go one step further. It's possible to charter your own private boat. You can do this by the day, or for your entire trip. With your own boat, guide and crew you can head off wherever you want, whenever you want. You can choose to take a packed lunch and stay out all day, staying at the same site for all your dives, or head off further afield. Is there a certain site you want to revisit or animal you really want to see? Then this service would suit you perfectly and it's surprisingly affordable. Definitely one for the photographers.

Taking their dive services a step further, Wakatobi now offer the skills of a resident photo and video pro. Whether you are a total beginner and want help setting up your first underwater camera, or you're an experienced shooter wanting to hone your skills, these one-on-one classes are sure to be beneficial. You can even learn how to organise your pesky Lightroom catalogue or sharpen your post production techniques.



Pelagian is the ultimate boutique liveaboard. With just ten guests, living on this floating lap of luxury for seven nights, it allows a select few to explore beyond the immediate vicinity of the resort. The dive sites differ quite markedly between the resort and the Pelagian's itinerary, so a combination of the two offers the best of both worlds.

There are two flights a week to the resort and one of these co-ordinates with the Pelagian's schedule. After she has set sail, she heads off to explore some of the other islands in the Wakatobi chain and she doesn't return until seven days later, to co-ordinate with a departing flight. Obviously, it's then up to you whether you stay on or head back to Bali.

Day to day life on Pelagian is both busy and relaxed in equal measure. Four dives are offered per day, which keep you plenty busy enough. Fitting in delicious meals and snacks, plus the odd nap, takes a good deal of planning. Luckily the attentive crew are there to keep you on track. With the large and well-appointed cabins, it would be tempting to luxuriate in these but then you'd be missing out on the dives. With the family-style dining, you'd soon hear all about the creatures you'd missed and regret your lethargy.

Reefs encircle almost all of the islands in the Tukangbesi Islands, the other name for the Wakatobi chain. Pelagian has a varied route, but usually dives are conducted around three of the four main islands. One of the other diving highlights is off Buton Island, a large satellite of the Sulawesi mainland. Here there is some of the best muck-diving in all of Indonesia. It really is a hidden gem. Here, I have seen blue-ringed octopuses, rare poison ocellate (mototi) octopuses, frogfish, seahorses, ghost pipefishes and even a rare *Rhinopias* scorpion-fish. It's also well known for the abundant and huge mandarinfish that live around Asphalt Pier. At dusk they gather and conduct their ostentatious courtship rituals. There are so many of these gaudy fish, that I once even witnessed a cheeky ménage à trois.

Its close ties with Wakatobi Dive Resort make Pelagian an excellent add-on to a land-based holiday. The different sites visited perfectly complement each other. The diving aboard the Pelagian is perfect for new and experienced divers alike, with the outstanding biodiversity that the area has to offer providing new creatures around every coral head.



life on Delagian





An experience without equal

"The diving and snorkelling at Wakatobi is outstanding, that's well known. But also important is the excellent customer service of every staff member. Wakatobi can teach customer service to any industry or organization. You feel at home the first day, and it just gets better every day after that."

~Steve and Cindy Moore



www.wakatobi.com