

Papua New Guinea

By Mike Bartick

Papua New Guinea is one of those destinations that I've always heard about but never imagined myself going to, that is until I received a phone call on Christmas morning informing me that I had won the world shootout! The Grand Prize was 21 days of travel in PNG with flights, for 2. Holy cow, you gotta be kidding me man PNG?

Instantly I began to search for info on the diving there, only to find it scarce and uninformative, mostly fluffy trip reports. As a macro guy I didn't really see anything regarding macro for Kimbe Bay either, so I wasn't sure how to prepare. Naturally, instead of being caught short, I brought everything I could, including clothes this time which for anyone that travels with camera gear will know, a change of clothes is a luxury!

Getting to PNG is simple enough with daily flights arriving Port Moresby (POM) from around the world. Inter island flights aren't difficult either but can be a little unreliable, particularly afternoon flights.

The bonus is, that if you present your C-card to either of the inter-island carriers, you will be granted an

extra allowance for scuba gear! finally some love for divers.

Contrary to what I had read on the internet, I found the people of PNG to be friendly and helpful. Almost everyone spoke English there and sported a giant red toothed smile anytime you said hello. On the first trip down we connected through with short layovers. We stayed in the local Hilton on the way out and I highly recommend the restaurant adjacent to the Hotel. One of the best steaks I've ever eaten and it wasn't expensive. On the second trip I made a few months later, I was forced to grab a day room at a local resort in POM. There were plenty to choose from so that was simple and all of them offered free airport shuttles.

You can also opt for cultural tours, birdwatching, butterfly watching even a trip to the highlands.

When In Kimbe:

Walindi plantation was built by Max Benjamin and his lovely wife 32 years ago on the shoreline of Kimbe Bay, Papua New Guinea of which it is also the capital city of the province of West New Britain. Kimbe Bay, aprx. 1500 sq. miles is also a nature reserve



Barracudas are present on several of the dives. The schools are good sized and if approached slowly, they will hang out and allow you to get some nice keeper shots. I've found that approaching schools like this can be done slowly and moving sideways to the school. A head on approach will spook them so take your time. Allow them to come to you if you can and you will keep the best benefits.



banning commercial fishing as early 1993, “but its the natural geography of the place that is the real police here, the real protector” as explained by the captain of the Febrina, Alan Raabe.

The Febrina one of 2 liveaboards that also operate out of Walindi are the only 2 LOB’s in the whole of Kimbe operating at this time. In fact there are only 3 LOB’s in the entire country which means at any given time, the only other divers you will ever see here while diving, will be from your boat.

The resort name is in itself, indicative of the grounds on which it is built, being 100% plantation style. Low slung bungalow style rooms, surrounded by sprawling gardens, lovely tropical foliage, exotic birds, colorful butterflies and all connected by a nice footpath. Rooms are pleasant with comfy beds, a workspace for cameras, refrigerator, kettle and even some great local PNG coffee.

The main lodge is the heart of the resort with the dining facility, the bar, a swimming pool and a great deck for watching the sun drop



Walls, pinnacles, sponges, corals, swim throughs and more can all be accessed from the Walindi resorts fast speed boats. Lunch is also served on the boat and most dive days are planned around a 3 dive schedule.



Goby and bubbles. Using the Backscatter Minifish and snoot along with some items I grabbed from the boats galley, Digger helped me to make some fun macro images.



Nudibranch surrounded by a bubble raft and eggs. These slugs live inside of this little bubble, super small too. Thanks Digger!

over the horizon.

Of course the real magic is offshore and I only found myself at the resort for a quick drink, a meal and a little rest before heading out to dive in the vast Kimbe Bay once again.

As a diver and or photographer expect natural undisturbed reefs with great corals and a healthy balance of subjects on every dive. Giant colorful sea fans, sea whips, unusually shaped orange sponges, hard coral gardens and soft coral trees growing right up to the surface. Black sand dives, white sand muck dives, even a well preserved Japanese Zero resting just offshore in aprx. 50 feet/15 meter or water.



Bruce on the Zero- The Japanese Zero lays in shallow water and is in very good condition. Discovered only a short time ago, this well preserved WW2 artifact makes for a great dive and is accessed either from the resort proper or from either of the LOB's operating there. Try to get down to the wreck before the other guests arrive for a chance at cleaner water.

Dive conditions in Kimbe bay are very predictable and generally offer flat calm seas with little current for much of the year. This is both good and bad. Due to rains, the lack of current can lead to poor visibility during certain times of the year so do your home work and plan accordingly:

Off reef, you can see schooling fish including a variety of barracuda, rainbow runners, jacks,

Travails, bumphead's and a variety of sharks including silver tips.

Overall the diving is easy once your in the water and made even easier with nitrox.

Most dive days from the resort will keep a diver out for 3 dives coordinated the day prior by a dive manager. The boat rides from the the resort can be a bit lengthy so I suggest packing a dry bag



This lovely frogfish was the only one I had seen on either trip

Knowing that I would see some blennies on this trip i was prepared. I love bennies for their personality, big eyes and thick lips. They can be a bit reluctant to photograph at first but will pose once relaxed. Using my 105 and +6 diopter to frame and the Backscatter Mini Flash to snoot.

Squid Reflection at Resorts Island. I enjoy shooting squids and with the light from the boat's dive deck, the squids gather in nice numbers after sundown. If the water is calm like it is in PNG then reflection shots are a snap!

for lens and battery swaps throughout the day. I chose to take advantage of the morning sunlight everyday by shooting wide angle but carried my macro gear for the afternoon dive before heading back in. Walindi has a great house reef which I recommend for Macro and should not be missed.

It will require a short boat ride though.

Diving on the Febrina is another experience. We boarded the boat late in the afternoon and steamed for the Vitu (Wee-Too) Islands stopping and visiting different reefs along the way.

The boat itself is simple with an attentive staff, comfy rooms, a big





My trusty model and Mate posing while I framed her through a hole in a red sea fan. Many of the dive sites also have massive sea fans.

clean salon area and a very functional dive deck that includes a camera workstation for each guest.

The Witu's are a small group of islands that surround a volcano some 2 days away from Walindi proper.

The diving is done from the mother ship, moored right at the dive sites. The FeBrina has a nice dive platform with a big dive ladder on the stern so stepping in is all you need to do and after the staff hands down your camera, your on your way!

Be prepared for wide angle on almost any dive site and you cant miss. The Witu islands itinerary also

has some decent Macro but overall I would say that the diving in Kimbe bay is mainly wide angle work.

Vitu Island's main attraction is the Garove island Volcano. The FeBrina actually motors into the flooded crater creating a one of a kind topside experience where your totally surrounded 360 degrees by lush green jungle, similar to being on a lake. The water is warm, the sand is black and the muck dives were are on!

Be prepared:

Dive conditions can vary in Kimbe bay due to run off so try to



The Percula is an endemic anemone fish in PNG. This one was on the house reef for Walindi plantation which i found to be a great dive and a good way to wind down a day of reef dives. I used my 60mm with a reflection tube which i find to be a fun tool on some occasions

plan accordingly.

My trips were made in September and December and we enjoyed flat calm waters.

Water temps: 27-31

Best dive times: September -November/May - June, best overall travel time is May-December.

January - March is the rainy season with poor visibility

Best Lens choices:

Wide angle: Full Frame-15mm

Cropped sensor- Tokina 10-17

Best Macro lens: 60mm, 100 or

105mm. Diopters-Yes

Macro subjects can range from pygmy seahorses, hairy shrimps and nudibranchs to flasher wrasse, Anthaes and the endemic Anemone fish. There was also some great Blenny action!

The dive style on the FeBrina was a bit more relaxed, offering 5 dives a day including a night dive, these done at decent intervals which made it very easy to do all 5 in a day if your choose to.

Digger, a lifer on the FeBrina



Odd shaped sponges adorned the walls and reefs on most of the dives. This one looked like a giant head to me and the black crinoid looked like a slight mohawk. Granted I was a little deep, so use your imagination!

staff of guides is legendary, full of energy and always on the hunt for great subject matter. He has dived with all of the the scuba industries greats and is extremely insightful when it comes to photo ops, current, tides and angles. He works with each guest with a contagious smile and he also makes a great model underwater.

Wide angle shots were all made with my D850 and Sigma 15mm lens. I used my Sea and Sea YSD2-J strobes and the 100 degree diffuser. Sadly in my packing haste, I forgot my domed diffusers, take them if you own them.

During the second trip I used the new Backscatter MF-1 Mini flash for wide angle fill and with the OS-1 optical snoot for macro. I find the compact MF-1 and OS-1 strobe kit easy to pack, easy to use and powerful.

Macro Images were shot with my D850, 60mm and 105mm. I used my Sea and Sea YSD2-J and MF-1 Mini Flash and OS-1 optical snoot.

Garove Island was certainly well worth the trip and lived up to everything I had hoped it would.

Heading back into the bay for the final days of diving we hit Barneys, Krakafat and Restorf Islands. All

of these are signature dive sites of Kimbe bay. I shot so many photos that even now I am stuck on choices of which dive I liked more. Between the lush corals, the fish life or the sheer fact that were the only divers out there made made both of these trips memorable.

Overall I would say, Kimbe Bay's Walindi resort and FebRina LOB were definitely worth going back to which says a lot for me. I'm not totally jaded but having a reef in my own backyard can certainly qualify me as being a bit selective.

Please feel free to contact me for information regarding the trip to PNG and ill do my best to point you in the right direction.

Special Thanks to:

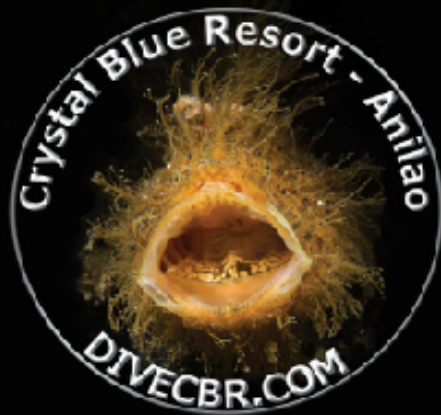
Max Benjamin and Alan Raabe

David Polosof and The World

Shootout Judges

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