

# GUINJATA BAY

## All the Action - None of the Crowds by Will and Demelza Postlethwaite

Five minutes no-deco left and she glides slowly in and stops feet away. Holding at a 45 degree angle pointing up to the surface she remained motionless just above the reef. Angel's four metre wingspan and spotted markings around her eyes make her one of the most special mantas that come to be cleaned by the little reef fish that appear as she stops. A majestic spectacle, we just hung there with her and squeezed off the two remaining shots on the reel. It is why we dive.

As photographers we are always looking to find those special things to get on film. No portfolio is complete without a shot of this or that, be it mini macro, stunning wrecks or just pristine, colourful reefs, we all look at those shots in the magazines and books and think, "I wish I could do that". Or even "I could do better than that!". The only thing stopping you is that you have to be there, in the water, with your set-up, the right conditions and the subject there too.

This is not a revelation as anyone who has joined the merry throng of dive boats at the wreck of the Thistlegorm in the Red Sea, or the day boat navy searching for whale sharks off Exmouth, Western Australia will tell you. The trouble is that everyone else knows where to go to see these things too. The more 'dialled in' or definite the experience the greater the numbers. In Exmouth they have



*Guinjata bay. The view from our 'casita'.  
Devil Rays. Nikon F90X in Subal housing, 20mm with compact dome.  
No flash. 1/60 f16. Fuji Provia F 100*



spotter planes and if you do not see a whale shark you get your money back. In Yap the bay is floodlit to bring in the plankton. What we all want is that secret place where our quarry is awaiting us but there is no queue to get in. Herein lies the catch. How do you get to hear about these secret places! Well, Manta

Reef is not really a secret and quite a few people know about it but for a number of reasons the site has yet to get the recognition that it deserves among the world's premier dive spots.

The experience starts on the beach with Morne's dive briefing. The topography of the site and navigation are not

straight forward but in a couple of minutes he has transformed the wetted sand into a perfect scale model of the reef showing the three manta cleaning stations that are the basis of the dive.

Ingenious. All the stations are quite close to each other giving you plenty of time at the 22m depth to see them all and the critters on the way. The mantas are here year round. They are found on dives at this site 95% of the time. They vary from 1-2m juveniles to 5m monster adults. If you are relaxed and calm they circle and then come in "to land". Hovering half a metre off the reef an array of reef fish rise to clean them. While all types of small wrasse and butterfly fish come and nibble at the skin and gills you can edge ever closer. Morne says they have even tapped their wing tips on his head! They know you are there and can be nervous if upset, quite a few have large shark bites on their wings. But when they are relaxed the whole experience is spell binding.

It is easy to lose yourself in it all but watch that no-deco time and look up because there is a resident troop of 20-30 Devil rays that patrol mid water above the reef. You will almost always see them while on your safety stop and we were lucky enough to see a whale shark too! These are another year round resident and, while not a common sight on a dive, are a likely encounter on the 25 minute ride to and from the dive site. Not only are they the biggest fish in the sea but one of the most beautiful. Majestic as they glide by with a little golden trevally riding their bow wave.

Just in case you thought it could get no better, if you



venture there between July and October then you have a good chance of snorkelling with a Humpback whale and her calf. We were lucky enough in November to still see one from the shore migrating back south and had one memorable dive on Manta Reef with a background soundtrack of a male singing somewhere in the distance. Hauntingly beautiful. Unlike in other countries there is no restriction here on how close you can get to these animals which is great from a photography stand point but leaves it up to you and your boat operator to act responsibly.

*All shots taken with a Nikon F90X in Subal housing, 20mm with compact dome. 1/60 f8 Fuji Provia F 100*

Please do.

If for some reason you tire of encounters with big stuff ( big game fish and all manner of sharks are a possibility too!) or you are cruising between the cleaning stations then do not forget your macro. Spanish Dancers crawl about during the day almost as a challenge to other myriad nudibranchs that cover the reef. Crabs and gobies of all types and definitely the biggest sizes we have seen any in



the world inhabit the anemones. With a little care you might even encounter frogfish or Harlequin shrimp.

So why is Manta reef so relatively undived? Well it is in Mozambique. The painful civil war ended ten years ago and slowly the country has been getting itself back onto its feet. Most of the resorts are less than five years old and the South Africans have been keeping it a secret! But while they know all about it they only go for the occasional weekend or during the school holidays (Easter and December to February). The rest of the time the resorts are virtually empty. However the beer and wine are still excellent as are the steaks.

For photographers this place has it all but the big stuff feeds on plankton. The vis. therefore is not that of the Red Sea or the Caribbean but at between 15-25m is amazing considering. Sometimes the plankton itself is big enough to shoot. The place still has that aura of adventure especially with the southern African trademark surf entries and exits in the dive boats. In years to come the crowds might arrive like they have done to Yap and Exmouth but in the meantime we have it to ourselves and it is unbeatable.

**Will and Demelza Postlethwaite**  
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