

# In the Shadow of Jakarta

by Nicholas Kouvaras

As of late 2025–2026, the Jakarta metropolitan area (Jabodetabek) is often ranked as the most populous metropolitan area in the world, with an estimated population of around 42 million people. In recent years it has surpassed Tokyo in several population estimates.

Jakarta is known for its iconic Monas (the National Monument), the historic district of Kota Tua (Old Town), and its enormous shopping malls. It is a vibrant and crowded megacity, famous for intense traffic, diverse street food, and a lively nightlife scene, earning it the nickname “The Big Durian.”

But would you travel to Jakarta for diving?

Probably not. Indonesia offers some of the most spectacular dive destinations on the planet. Raja Ampat, Komodo, Bunaken, and Lembeh Strait attract divers from all over the world.

But if you happen to be in Jakarta for business, if you live there, or even if you are just passing through, there are actually some surprisingly nice diving spots nearby.

Just north of Jakarta lies a small tropical archipelago. The Thousand Islands, locally known as Kepulauan Seribu, are a chain of more than 300 islands scattered across the Java Sea just off Jakarta’s coast. Administratively, the islands form a regency of Jakarta and offer marine tourism, white sand beaches, diving spots, and small resorts.

Some of the most popular islands include Tidung Island, famous for its “Bridge of Love,” Bidadari Island, located less than 30 minutes from Jakarta and known for its resort, Sepa Island with

*The channel at Ayer Island from above, with our dive boat during a lunch break. DJI Neo 2. f/2.2, 1/3000 sec, ISO 400, Program mode.*

*(Below) Swimming through the pipes in the Karya Coral Garden. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye PRO lens, 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/8, 1/320 sec, ISO 800, Aperture Priority mode.*





*A typical view while crossing the channel. DJI Action 5 Pro. f/2.8, 1/2500 sec, ISO 286, Program mode.*

its white sand beaches, and Pulau Macan with its eco-resort.

Pulau Pramuka is the administrative center of

the archipelago and is also known for its conservation centers.

It is also the center of the diving activity in the Jakarta



*Artificial reef structures at the soft coral site. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye lens, 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/9, 1/125 sec, ISO 800, Shutter Priority mode*

area. Most SCUBA diving centers in Jakarta, as well as the freediving schools, conduct their open water dives around Pramuka and the surrounding islands. Visibility varies and is not strongly tied to the seasons. On average it ranges between

10 and 15 meters, although on some days it can reach 25 meters. The weather is generally mild and even on windy days the many small islands create natural protection from waves. You can almost always find sheltered dive sites, and the currents are usually

gentle. The best season is often considered to be between May and October, but in reality this is a destination that can be visited year-round. Small local wooden boats take divers, snorkelers, and tourists on day trips



*A large gorgonian north of Ayer Island. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus M.Zuiko Digital ED 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye PRO lens behind a 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/8, 1/500 sec, ISO 800, Aperture Priority mode*



*Swimming through the pipes in the Karya Coral Garden. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye PRO lens, 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/8, 1/320 sec, ISO 800, Aperture Priority mode.*

between the islands. The freediving community on the island is quite active and they often combine line training with fun dives around the reefs.

Let's take a small virtual tour of some of the best dive spots around Pramuka.

### **Pulau Ayer**

One of the most popular islands in the area is Pulau Ayer. The island is divided by a natural channel, which makes it very photogenic and particularly popular for social media pictures.

It also has some of the deepest water in the area.

On the north side of the

island there is a coral garden rich in marine life and usually well protected from the wind. On the east side there is a site known for its soft corals. As the name suggests, the reef is covered with colorful soft corals, and several artificial underwater structures create an interesting environment for both marine life and photography.

It is surprising how rich the coral life is here, just an hour away from a city of 40 million people.

### **Pulau Panggang and Pulau Karya**

Just across from Pramuka lies Pulau Panggang,

a densely populated residential island. Next to it are a couple of smaller islands.

Pulau Karya is actually a prison. Possibly the nicest prison I have ever seen. It has a long pier and a pleasant walkway around the island. This is usually where we stop for lunch between dives.

Very close to Karya there is a coral garden filled with underwater structures made from concrete tubes. They create an interesting background for underwater photography and apparently provide a good foundation for coral growth.



*The floating pool shipwreck. Not exactly how it was supposed to work, but still fun.*

*Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus M.Zuiko Digital ED 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye PRO lens behind a 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/11, 1/320 sec, ISO 800, Aperture Priority mode*



*The northeast side of Pramuka has many turtles. This one came close enough to reveal her expression. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus M.Zuiko Digital ED 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye PRO lens behind a 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/8, 1/500 sec, ISO 800, Aperture Priority mode*

## The Floating Pool Wreck

Another small island nearby does not even have a name, but it has a small restaurant and two excellent dive spots.

One of them is the wreck of a floating swimming pool. I still don't understand what people were thinking when they built it. Why construct a floating pool in an area that is already perfect for swimming, snorkeling, and diving?

The project eventually failed, but the remains of the structure now form a very interesting dive site. The

submerged pool creates great photographic opportunities and a few small areas where divers can explore the old compartments.

## APL Reef

On the north side of the same island lies a dive site called APL. I never managed to figure out the origin of the name, but it is one of my favorite spots in the area.

Beautiful coral formations, frequent turtle encounters, and small reef walls rich in marine life make this site particularly

enjoyable.

Occasionally we even see dolphins swimming just beyond the reef.

## Pramuka Island Reefs

On the northeast side of Pramuka Island there is another popular dive site featuring a small wall with beautiful coral formations and interesting rock structures that create great photographic compositions. Turtle encounters are very common here.

The island also has two additional dive spots near its piers.



*The pier's columns create an interesting perspective. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus M.Zuiko Digital ED 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye PRO lens behind a 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/11, 1/125 sec, ISO 800, Shutter Priority mode*

*Inside a speed boat just outside the fishing shelter in Pramuka. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus M.Zuiko Digital ED 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye PRO lens behind a 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/8, 1/40 sec, ISO 800, Aperture Priority mode*



The new pier is still under construction, but between its columns large schools of fish often gather. The light filtering through the structure creates a unique underwater atmosphere and very different photographic opportunities.

On the opposite side, in front of the small fishing shelter near Seribu Resort, there is a small speedboat wreck resting at around 15 meters. The wreck is very diver-friendly and easy to explore, with plenty of fish moving through the structure.

### **Life on the Island**

Above the surface, Pramuka Island remains very simple.

The island does not offer much

in terms of tourism infrastructure. There are a few small warungs (local restaurants) and one small resort with a café. For dive groups, the easiest way to organize meals is through local catering services.

Several local families prepare food for divers and deliver it directly to the boat or to your accommodation. The meals are simple but very local, often prepared with fresh ingredients from the surrounding area.

Pramuka offers beautiful sunrise and sunset views, but in my opinion the best thing about the island is its atmosphere.



*Turtles at APL. Some days are very relaxed, some not so much, but they are always there. Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark III with Olympus 8mm f/1.8 Fisheye lens, 140mm dome port in a Nauticam housing. f/8, 1/640 sec, ISO 800, Aperture Priority mode*

Life here feels pleasantly disconnected from the pace of the modern world. Walking around the island in the evening almost feels like time travel. Apart from mobile phones and the small electric scooters people use to get around, daily life here still moves at a slower rhythm.

The island itself is small, around 40 acres, and home to roughly 2,000 residents. It has a mangrove forest and a few small beaches scattered along the shore.

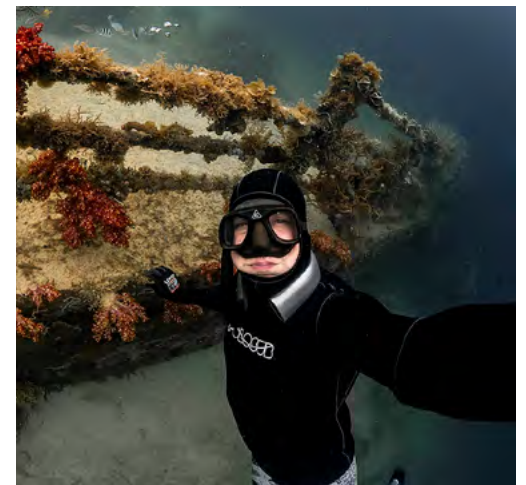
Pramuka may not be a luxury dive destination, and that is part of its charm. The facilities are simple, the boats are traditional wooden vessels, and life moves slowly.

But just an hour away from one of the largest cities on Earth, you can still descend into healthy coral gardens, swim with turtles, and spend the evening watching the sunset with the local community.

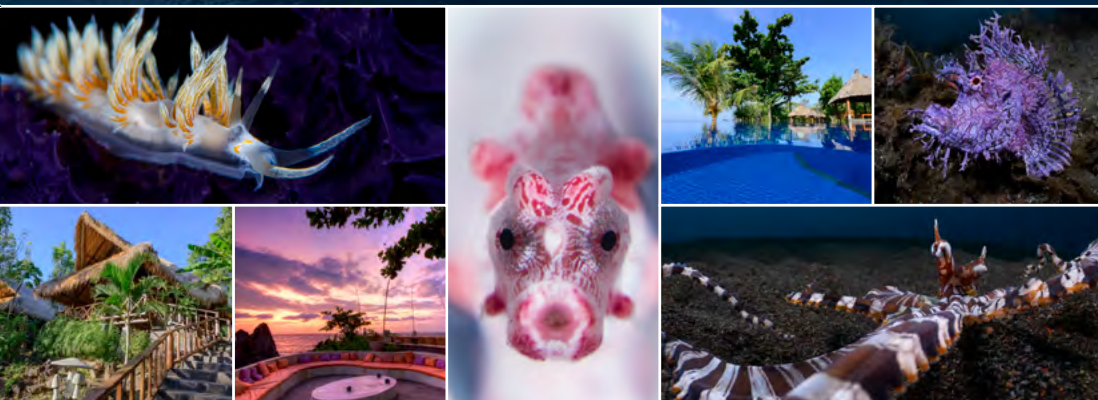
Jakarta may not be famous for diving, but for those who know where to look, it offers a surprisingly rich underwater world.

*Nicholas is a freediving instructor and underwater photographer based in Jakarta, Indonesia. He was born and raised on the island of Paros in Greece, where he grew up swimming, sailing, and diving from an early age.*

*He received his first underwater camera in 1978 at the age of nine, a Minolta Weathermatic, and has been taking pictures underwater ever since. A lifelong freediver, he was also captain of the Greek National Team for several years before eventually focusing on teaching and training. He became a full-time instructor in 1998 and has since worked in Athens, Crete, Kalamata, Bali, Cebu, Menorca, Moalboal, and now Jakarta. While he spent some time working as a freelance photographer for Greek diving magazines, most of his photography happens in the water with his students, documenting their progress and experiences underwater.*



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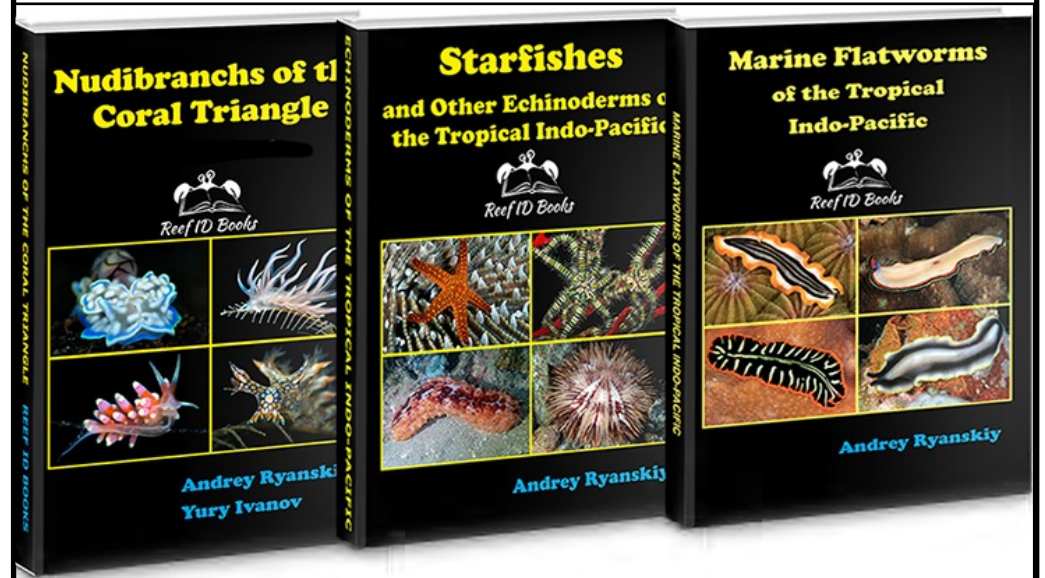
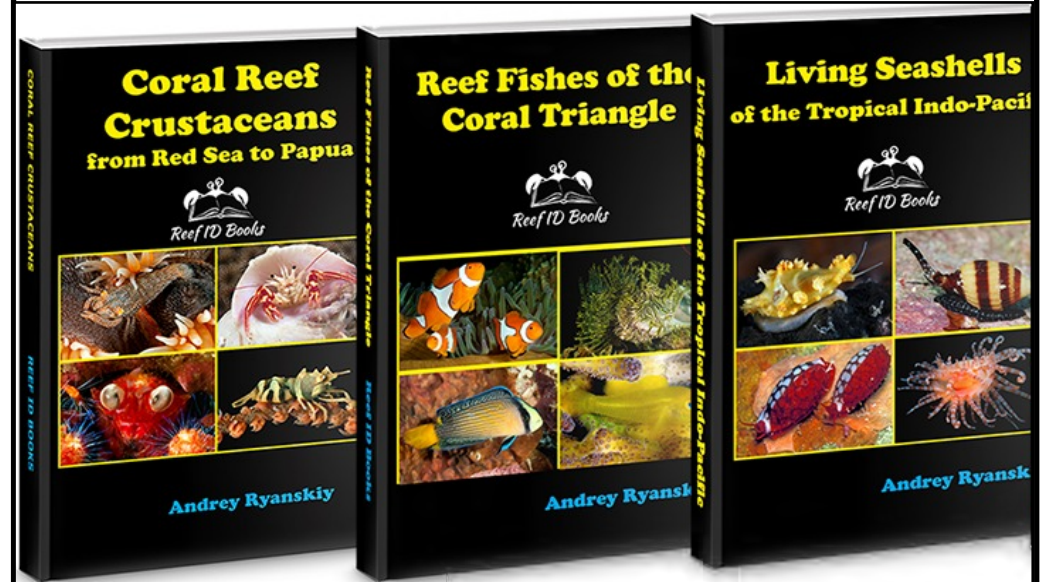


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