

Bali High

by Mark Webster

For many years Bali has enjoyed a reputation as an exotic and romantic destination for a beach holiday and a taste of far eastern culture. The island has also been the departure point for live aboard trips to the more remote areas of the Indonesian archipelago, but Bali's own attractions as a stand alone diving destination has remained somewhat hidden in the constant search for the next 'untouched' area. However, discerning photographers should not only be enticed by the promise of virgin reefs as Bali itself offers some excellent diving, many rare and unusual photographic subjects and some very comfortable and reasonably priced resorts and dive centres.

I have traveled to and dived in Bali several times en route to or returning from a live aboard trip, but it was not until my last visit that we decided to dedicate the whole trip to diving from the island. Arranging travel, diving and accommodation is very simple using the internet and unless you feel you need a travel agent you can easily construct an itinerary to suit yourself. The majority of the diving in Bali is on the east coast, extending up to the island's most northerly tip at Menjangan.

Depending on how long you have here you can choose to resort hop along the coast, or base yourself at one location and explore as far as a day trip will take you. We elected to stay at Tauch Terminal in Tulamben Bay, which is perhaps the best known diving location in Bali due to the wreck of the USS Liberty which lies just off the beach. There are a number of resorts here and in the



Schooling jacks at Tulamben - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 12-24mm zoom, twin Subtronic Minis, ISO 100, f8 @ 1/60

immediate surrounding area of various grades, but having stayed here before I knew that the location offered a number of advantages, in particular the selection of beach dives. Tauch Terminal is right on the beach in the centre of the bay, has good facilities





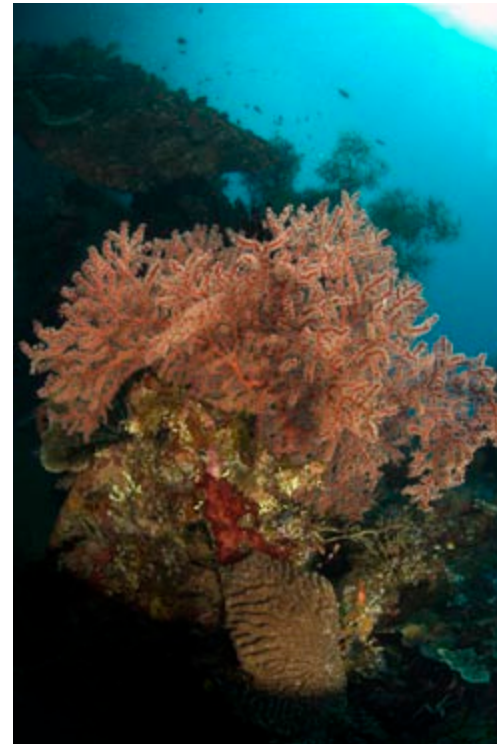
Divers return from a dive at Tulamben, even the boulders in the shallows hide all sorts of macro life. Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 10.5mm FE, ISO 100, f11 @ 1/60

for the photographer and you are only a short stroll away from the centre of Tulamben ‘village’ with its selection of restaurants and small shops.

What makes Tulamben so attractive is that within a few metres stumbling distance (I will elaborate that more fully in a moment!) you have a truly world class wreck dive, muck diving, shallow reef diving and a wall dive. Whilst the coral growth here (with the exception of the wreck) is not as lush as say the reefs in Komodo, there is a stunning variety of marine life and different habitats to

keep your camera busy for a week or more.

The beach is a product of the active volcanic history of this island and comprises pebbles and boulders of various sizes which don’t look too challenging at first glance, until you try and walk any distance with a scuba set. Because we, mostly, pampered divers have such soft feet the local villagers have established a co-operative whose sole (pardon the pun) activity is carrying the scuba sets from the dive centres to the point of entry, which saves your feet and



Soft corals grow on the stern of the USS Liberty - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 10.5mm FE, twin Subtronic Minis, ISO 100, f11 @ 1/125.

(Right) Young Balinese girl carries a scuba set on her head across the beach at Tulamben.

preserves your dignity but also leaves you feeling totally inadequate. This is because small girls and old grannies will carry one or two tanks (complete with BC and regulators) on their heads across this marine scree slope in only a pair of worn flip flops whilst you struggle to keep pace carrying only your camera and fins. In fact for the



sake of your pride the best procedure is to put your desired location and time on the dive schedule board and then totter along the beach when the tanks have been deposited! When you finish your dive you just shed your tank on the beach and it will be collected and returned - bliss!

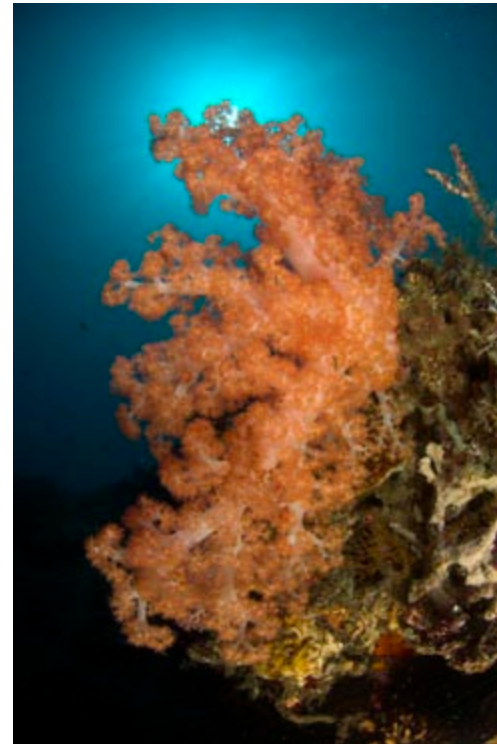


Cottage rooms in lush gardens at Tauch Terminal, Tulamben. The USS Liberty wreck is a shore dive from here. - Nikon D200, 18-200mm zoom, programme mode.

The wreck of the USS Liberty is now broken into several large sections and is a spectacular dive. At nearly 400ft (120m) in length and a 55ft (17m) beam this is a big ship and every square inch of her is now covered in colourful corals and marine life. The dive starts at the stern which in early morning is the rendezvous point for a school of large bumphead parrot fish who settle on the grey sand to be cleaned before departing for the day's feeding on the reef. It took me a while to realise that the trails of white

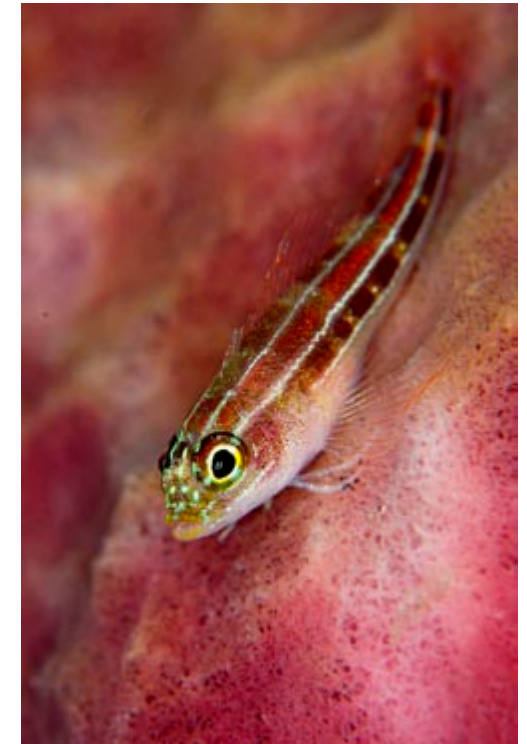
sand that contrasted so well with the dark seabed were in fact produced by these Neanderthal looking fish - I will leave you to imagine how!

The rudder and stern section are mostly intact and now covered in sea whips, sea fans, soft corals, sponges and all manner of invertebrates. This colonisation is a common theme all the way to the bow section, which is the deepest point of the wreck at 27-30m. Here there is a sea fan with resident pigmy sea horses, but they are difficult to spot without a guide



Soft corals grow on the stern of the USS Liberty - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 10.5mm FE, twin Subtronic Minis, ISO 100, f11 @ 1/125.

and you don't get long to photograph them at this depth. Fish life on the wreck is as varied as any reef and there are numerous exotic finds for sharp eyed divers. Frog fish, leaf scorpion fish, ghost pipe fish, cuttle fish, octopus and many species of nudibranch and crustacean are found regularly and with the help of one of the local dive guides you are almost guaranteed success. There is also a spectacular resident school of several



Triple fin blenny on sponge - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f22 @ 1/125

hundred jacks that move between the wreck and the wall dive at the other end of the bay and show no concern at yet another close approach from a diver with a camera.

For me the wreck is so good that I dive it again and again - wide angle in the early morning and macro in the afternoon when visibility is poorer. At busy times of the year avoid the wreck between 10 am and 4 pm when groups of divers from other locations on the



Mating nudibranchs Tulamben - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f16 @ 1/125

island arrive to dive here.

Between wreck dives there is the house reef (right in front of Tauch Terminal and called the Coral Garden by other centres) in the centre of the bay which has some wonderful macro subjects and good fish life and is a particularly good night dive - look out for numerous species of urchins, crinoids and sea pens which all have commensal crabs, shrimps, squat lobsters or tiny gobies living on them. During the day the shallows are filled with numerous juvenile fish including some tiny black tip sharks who scoot up and down the shoreline trying to look menacing!

At the southern end of the bay is a headland featuring a wall dive which has some impressive sea fans and barrel sponges and offers the chance to see some larger pelagics - almost anything can pass by from large Mola mola (sun fish) to schools of dog tooth tuna and apparently even a whale sharks. One morning as we ate breakfast overlooking the bay we gazed in awe at several whales breaking the surface



Hinge back shrimps on USS Liberty Tulamben - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f16 @ 1/125

for air as the came around this headland and moved across the bay.

Between these sites and the wreck itself are small reef outcrops and areas of dark volcanic sand and rubble. These patches are classic muck environments and harbour a surprising variety of exotic and unusual creatures - the area close to the entry for the wall dive is particularly good for nudibranchs. There are now also a couple of steel frame structures (one in the shape of an airplane) installed in the shallows to measure coral growth and these are already attracting residents including ghost pipe fish and schools of glass fish. As with most muck sites you need to move slowly and let your eyes adjust to reveal nudibranchs, snake eels, blue ribbon eels, exotic dragonets, Inimicus scorpion fish, stonefish, seahorses and a host of other well camouflaged species. Pick up any marine guide book to Indonesia and you will find numerous species which have been photographed at Tulamben and a high proportion are to be found in these



Diver swims down from Jukung fishing boat - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 10.5 FE, ISO 100, f16 @ 1/100

‘muck’ sites.

There are also some excellent dives outside the bay and you should not miss the chance to take one of the local ‘jukung’ outrigger fishing boats to visit them. These are surprisingly stable and give you a great view of the coast and mount Angung as you



Diver amongst schooling jacks at Tulamben - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 12-24mm zoom, twin Subtronic Minis, ISO 100, f8 @ 1/60

make gentle progress to the dive. You can choose to dive directly from the jukung, donning your tank in the water, or from the beach when you arrive at your destination.

To the north is the small village of Kubu which has a very healthy reef with a dense carpet of miniature staghorn corals covering a submerged volcanic headland. Here we encountered schools of bat fish and barracuda, swarms of glassy sweepers and yet more pigmy seahorses on fans at 25-30m. There was also a particularly aggressive titan trigger fish who made this dive all the more memorable - fortunately only my fins bear the scars. You can make a second dive here on an adjacent spur which has numerous coral outcrops and bommies and seems to be a good place for frog fish - my guide found a mated pair of tiny clown frog fish, one yellow and one white who were perfectly camouflaged amongst the sponges and hydroids.

You can also go south from Tulamben to Batu Kelebit and the Alamanda and Emerald



Swimming pool on the beach at Tauch Terminal, Tulamben - Nikon D200, 10.5 FE, programme mode.

reefs where, strangely, the dark volcanic sand of Tulamben is replaced with the more familiar pale coral sand running between steeply sloping coral spurs and numerous coral heads and pinnacles. We spent several dives here looking for the numerous different species of shrimp to be found within anemones and on feather stars, starfish, urchins, sea cucumbers and even riding on the backs of gaudily coloured nudibranchs. At the end of one dive we came to a close stand off with two male giant cuttle fish who were determined to stay between us and their mate who was carefully depositing her eggs between the fold of a cabbage coral just a meter or so away.

A little further to the south is 'Seraya Secrets' which is gaining a reputation as a classic muck dive site. The seabed topography here is gently sloping with raised ridges and is home to harlequin shrimps, boxer crabs and Coleman shrimps and zebra crabs on fire urchins amongst a host of other subjects. We found two pairs of harlequin shrimps here, one



Harlequin shrimp with starfish on red gorgonian at Seraya Secrets - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 105mm

pair was considerably consuming their starfish on the base of a bright red gorgonian fan coral. In the shallows is a steel frame dome structure, again to monitor coral growths, which attracts all sorts of interesting species, including a pair of ornate ghost pipe fish and numerous dwarf lion fish.

If you want to venture further a field then



A diver photographs glass fish inside the Japanese wreck at Amed - Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 10.5mm FE, twin Subtronic Minis, ISO 100, f11 @ 1/60

day trips can be arranged to sites at Amed, Pandangbai, Menjangan, and the island of Nusa Pendida which has some exhilarating wall and drift dives. My favourite is Amed which is the location of the 'Japanese wreck', which does not appear on any of the 'must do' sites at the dive centre but is perfect for photographers. This is a small wreck (perhaps 30m long) and lies in 6-10m of water a stones throw from the beach. It is smothered in coral growth and has all sorts of attractive residents - a small school of batfish, glassy sweepers in side

the wreck, resident leaf scorpion fish, numerous scorpion fish, and countless reef fish to keep you busy. A short swim away to the north around the headland is a spectacular reef on a steep slope with just about every species you could hope for. This site is around 45 minutes by road from Tulamben and is certainly worth a couple of days diving to explore fully. There is a small restaurant right on the beach where you can enjoy a cool drink and some lunch whilst you prepare cameras and change lenses between dives and even a fresh water

Information about Bali:

Getting There:

There are a number of routes from Europe to Denpasar in Bali via Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jakarta. We flew with KLM and Garuda Indonesia via Jakarta - KLM offer a 'scuba equipment' rate of EU40 each way for 20kg (book before you fly) and Garuda allow 30kg free hold allowance.

Diving:

The diving will suit all levels of experience, although less experienced divers should be cautious of sites with strong currents.

When To Go:

Bali can be dived year round. The European winter months are the 'rainy' season but this is normally limited to occasional short down pours between sunny spells with calm seas.

Air temperature:

27-30c and humid

Water temperature:

27-29c but can be 20-25c in the cold currents - 3-5mm wetsuit advised

Time:

Bali is GMT +8 hours

Health:

currently Bali has no requirement for anti malarial pills - but you should consult your pharmacist or MASTA or the current situation and prophylactic

Voltage:

220V with European style two pin plugs

Entry Requirements:

you can purchase a 30 tourist visa on arrival (\$25) and passport must be valid for at least 6 months with 4 blank pages.

Money:

bring US Dollars to change locally into Rupiah. There are money changers everywhere but exchange rates are often best in the banks and you can withdraw cash from ATM's

Cost:

Flights will cost between £550-750, shop on the internet for best prices. Mark Webster dived with the Tauch Terminal Resort at Tulamben where packages cost between \$480 and \$780 For a 4 to 7 day packages.

www.tulamben.com
www.tourismindonesia.com



Classical Balinese dancer at Ubud temple - Nikon D200, 18-200mm zoom, programme mode.

shadow puppet shows.

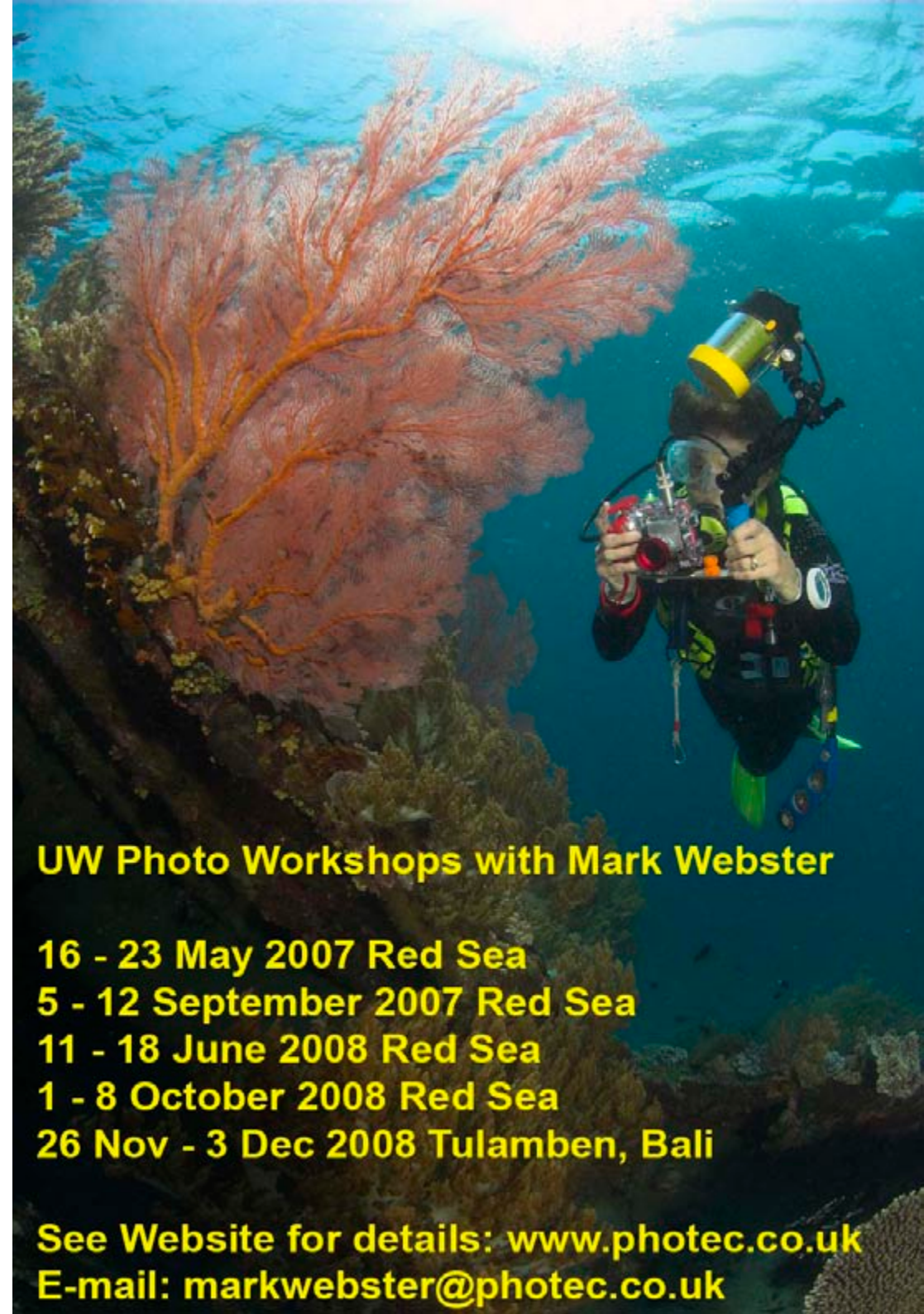
Although Bali has hit the headlines in the past (along with other 'diving' destinations) for all the wrong reasons, it is very quiet away from the tourist centres and as potentially safe as any other location in the world today. We felt nothing but secure and relaxed and all the Balinese we met were warm and welcoming and grateful for those tourists making the effort to visit. It puzzles me to know that New York, London and other major cities can suffer terrorist outrages and our Foreign Office would not dream of advising against travel to these locations. But sadly the same logic does not seem to apply to Indonesia - it is up to you to decide where you will feel safer.

Mark Webster
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shower.

Having traveled all this way you should not miss the opportunity of seeing what else this wonderful island has to offer. Away from the tourist hot spots of Kuta and Sanur the pace of life is totally relaxed and the scenery amongst the volcanic highlands, jungle, sculpted rice terraces and temples is simply stunning. If you are keen to experience a little culture then Ubud is worth a visit - this is the craft centre of Bali and has a fantastic market area as well as numerous shops. It is also the place to see the traditional Balinese dances and



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