

Walea

by Angel Cegarra

Walea is a diving protected area established in year 2003 by private owners and Indonesia Government; it consists in an extension of 200 square Kms of coral reef marine life under continuously surveillance by local authorities in order to avoid fishing with bombs and cyanide, which unfortunately happens still all over Asia. The place is located in the Togian Islands into the Tomini Gulf at Northeast of Sulawesi.

The first stage of the trip is the flight from Singapore to Manado. Manado airport is very small compared to Singapore one, the main point of stopover in diving trips to Indonesia. European travelers need a visa to enter the Country and it can be managed in advance before the trip by the Indonesia Embassy at the Country of origin. It is possible also to get it directly in Manado at arrival, but I prefer to have it prepared in advance in order to avoid delays and paper work. They are sometimes strict with the goods brought in the luggage so it is better not to carry many electronic devices or they may ask you for their value (no problem with underwater camera equipment anyway). Not too

much choice into the airport for a good place to have breakfast except for an executive VIP room where you can enter for only 3 euro price, a breakfast buffet is available with some drinks and free internet, nice place to stop on the way back while waiting for your connection flight to Singapore

To travel from Manado you should take a Merpati's charter flight booked exclusively for Walea clients, Merpati is a local small airways company. The plane leaves Manado and 1 and ½ hour later lands at Luwuk. It is such a pretty adventure and there is a very nice view of the sea and the islands from the sky. The plane is not prepared in a luxury style but it is enough for its purpose, maybe a bit noisy since the propellers are very close to the passenger's

Gorgonians and sea fans
Canon EOS 400D, Sea&Sea DX-350D housing, Tokina 10-17 mm at 10 mm. Two Sea&Sea YS-250 on manual mode. Exposure: 1/160 sec at f/8. ISO 200





*On the way to Tanjung Keramat
Canon EOS 400D, Tokina 10-17 mm at 10 mm.
Exposure: 1/200 sec at f/10. ISO 200*



*Sea fan on top of reef pinnacle
Canon EOS 400D, Sea&Sea DX-350D housing,
Tokina 10-17 mm at 10 mm. Two Sea&Sea YS-250 on
manual mode. Exposure: 1/250 sec at f/8. ISO 200*



*Nudibranch on a reef rock
Canon EOS 400D, Sea&Sea DX-350D housing,
Canon EF100 mm f/2.8 USM. Two Sea&Sea YS-250
on manual mode. Exposure: 1/250 sec at f/20. ISO
200*

windows. A very good idea by the Flight Company would be to provide the passengers with ears protectors. It is definitely very practical to wear headphones with some nice music during the flight.

Once at Luwuk, a private car with luggage porters will be waiting for you. The car is similar to the typical airport shuttle you can find at any of occidental airport and will take you on a road trip between some small villages and a nice forest until reaching Pagimana Harbour, in the opposite side of the Island, then a 400 CV speed boat will transfer you through the bay until reaching the resort, at Waleabahi Island.

The total time for this entire trip (Manado-Walea) takes approximately 5 hours.

We arrived to the resort at late night and were not able to recognize anything from ours reminds from the pictures saw in the Walea webpage. Were so tired that decided to have dinner and go to bed

afterwards, supposed to discover the paradise the day after.

The resort has a number of Cottages around a living area with a restaurant and recreational area. There is also a sunset bar close to the jetty and a separated relax/spa area when you can have a nice massage and rest in the poll after the diving “hard work”. Next to the restaurant are located the diving infrastructures with all the equipment to rent, air compressors, freshwater raising area, etc. All your equipment is looked after by the diving guides so it is not necessary to carry around with diving gear.

Marine life has an incredible diversity as you can see so many fishes and invertebrates. There is a dominance of stony corals although soft corals, sea fans and sponges are frequent in all dives. Is nice to have encounters with several species of clown fishes in their host sea anemones and also a great variety of macro life like nudibranchs, small crabs and

shrimps and of course the new species of seahorse discovered here some years ago: hippocampus waleananus, smaller than a human finger nail and impossible to see elsewhere in the world.

We saw some small sharks and even baby sharks protected underneath some coral branches, crinoids are always associated with big sponges and they are really a spectacle in night dives, also huge Spanish dancers, lion fishes, puffers, sea cucumbers, octopuses and squids are frequent in night dives. Corals are dominated by acroporas and porites species and thousands or triggerfishes are easy dive mates.

The resort staff and dive guides are very friendly and they try hard to search for marine life for you. The philosophy in this place is to mix the dive adventure with enjoyment of calm of the warm water around the jetty and the possibility of snorkeling facilities and relax activities. So if you



Sea fan and small soft coral

Canon EOS 400D, Sea&Sea DX-350D housing, Tokina 10-17 mm at 10 mm. Two Sea&Sea YS-250 on manual mode. Exposure: 1/160 sec at f/14. ISO 200

think a life aboard is a bit stressful or too much “sport oriented” this is the place for you. In my opinion I would prefer Walea in the months of the year with less humidity in the air since temperatures are high and the wind is quiet.

The daily plan includes two dives from the boat in the morning, one evening dive from the jetty and an optional night/twilight dive from the jetty or by boat. Two tanks are brought aboard for the first two dives so guides take care of swap your

empty tank with a new fresh charged tank, after the first dive. There is a typical surface interval of one our before the second dive. The guides are very friendly and take care of all your equipment back in the resort in order to raise everything in fresh water and leave for drying in the diving center. No nitrox is available in Walea.

There is an interesting land activity which consists in an excursion walking from the cottages to the end corner of the island, which name is Tanjung Keramat. During the walk



Schools of fishes under the jetty

Canon EOS 400D, Sea&Sea DX-350D housing, Tokina 10-17 mm at 10 mm. Two Sea&Sea YS-250 on manual mode. Exposure: 1/250 sec at f/3.5. ISO 200

you can see exotic animals as big and small crabs living in their sand refuges, medium size lizards, exotics birds and a lot of dense vegetation, mainly trees and palms covering the sky above you. Is it possible to watch local fishermen in their small canoes working under the sun to capture their food. In fact we used to see local persons sailing to the resort early in the morning with some fresh fishing captures. Staff was buying these fishes in order to prepare for cooking, so we could have them later at lunch or

dinner.

Just at the end of the corner there is a small fishermen village where you can find some houses made of palm tree branches and strips of wood available in the small jungle surrounding the area. When the vegetation finishes, a very nice lagoon appears just in front of a very small white sand beach. It is a fantastic corner to swim and enjoy the sun and the calm waters. We went for snorkeling in this area and could feel medium force water current because



Anemone shrimp

Canon EOS 400D, Sea&Sea DX-350D housing, Canon EF100 mm f/2.8 USM. Two Sea&Sea YS-250 on manual mode. Exposure: 1/125 sec at f/16. ISO 200 (Top right) Pink anemone fish Shot as above. Exposure 1/125 sec at f/11

of the edge position of the island, nothing to be worried about anyway. After the swimming experience, we came back to the beach and saw one of the resorts fishing boats coming “to our rescue” with drinks and food. They brought everything needed for a fantastic lunch under the shadow of a big tree, beers included. It was a magic moment for all of us, enjoying so much our private beach and small restaurant just on the sand of this beautiful place.

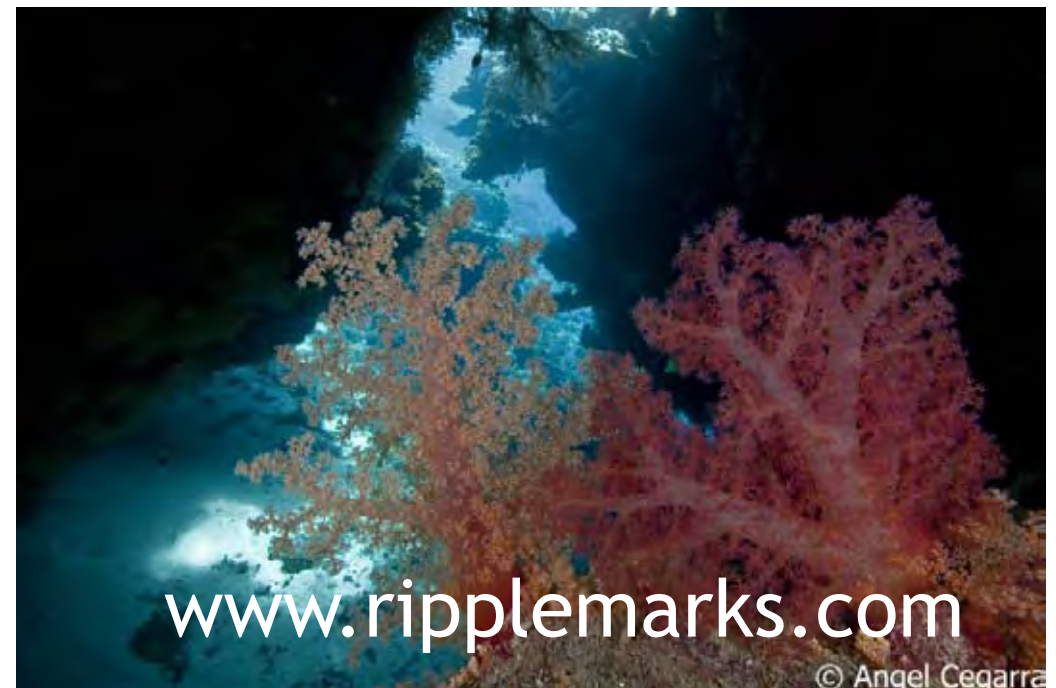
Post-diving activities includes the visits to the relaxing spa and massage area. This zone is located in a different reef house, separated only 50 meters from the main restaurant and diving center. There is a complete menu of available type of massages to chose and professional staff of both sexes in order to assist you. It is a very quiet place and a way to have a break from diving and snorkeling in case you feel tired or just for relax. Next to the massage area you can find



the spa pool with marine water which makes very tiny bubbles. It is very nice to stay for some time into the spa watching the sunset after a calm massage and feeling the water current and bubbles that embraces all you body.

So this is the philosophy of Walea. If you feel identified with it, this is the place to spend your next diving holidays.

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