

Secret Bay

By Demelza & Will Postlethwaite

Muck dives, black sand or 'critter hunts' have always proved to be a favourite among underwater photographers, nudibranch freaks and scientists on the look out for something new to bear their name. Indeed locations which can provide for these enthusiasts and professionals have reached almost devotional status. The recent publication of lavish coffee table books depicting the stunning and freakish marine inhabitants of these incongruous dive sites is further testament to their popularity.

Now, I've never been known to keep a secret for long and a bay known by just a handful of photographers is certainly a secret worth sharing. If I also let slip that diving here will cost you a mere sliver of the wad demanded by its infamous native counterpart, it should be enough to get your trigger finger twitching.

Located on the arid western tip of the spirituous island of Bali, Secret Bay follows the established pattern for muck diving venues in its appearance from the surface. Far from being a tropical idyll the bay is positioned close to a ferry terminus and the slightly grotty shore supports fiddler crabs, a scattering of litter, half a dozen shabby fishing vessels and a small dive resort, at that time host to a single Japanese photographer and his assistant.

Leaping eagerly from our comfortable transport we could see that the tide had some way to come in before our guide, Romon, would be satisfied of the best conditions for diving. Our attempt at a cheery, get to know your fellow diver type 'Good morning', in either English or Japanese to the resorts guest was met with purposeful ignorance so we were whisked off for a quick tour of the local attractions.



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Previous to this trip we had visited similar sites in Papua New Guinea, Southern Sulawesi and the Lembeh Strait so it was with accustomed eyes and high expectations that we waded in to the water.

Within five minutes Will's 60 mm lens was occupied with a Flying Gurnard while I struggled with depth of field on the 105 mm and an Ornate ghost pipe fish.

Nudibranchs peppered the black sand, porcupine fish peered dolefully from the rims of discarded truck tyres and isolated anemones housed shrimp and angry damsel fish. The dive was typically shallow and therefore film was the primary limiting factor to our dive time. Having earlier made the impudent comment 'If I see Frog fish and Seahorses then I will be happy' I was ruthlessly reminded of it after the next dive, having spent 36 exposures on nothing but Frog fish and Sea horses!

Secret Bay is sometimes referred to as Gilimanuk which is the location for the terminal despatching and receiving ferries from Java. A large horseshoe shape, it is dotted with mangrove islands providing a huge area to explore.

During our shore diving forays



A seahorse fills the frame with a 105mm macro lens

we simply decided on an entry point and a rough direction of travel and after a couple of days our sightings list included Ambon scorpion fish, dragonets, pegasus sea moths and some very large brown sea snakes. Many of the nudibranchs were simply unidentifiable, purple and orange lilliputian sized snails inched along decaying palm leaves and seahorses cruised between the sandy cones made by snake eels.

Our fellow diver from the



Marine wildlife ignores man's rubbish



A weird dragonet



A snakelock anemone on the sandy seabed

Frogfish are in plentiful supply



resort spent six hours in the water protectively guarding the lair of a mimic octopus.

Not far from Secret Bay lies the island of Menjangan. This is deservedly one of Bali's most popular dive sites and the mainland is thus able to support a handful of boutique hotels. The individual thatched cottages, kingsize bed, voluminous mosquito nets, horizon swimming pool, stunning open air bathrooms and lush gardens created a tranquil tropical haven for weary divers and non divers alike.

Photographically our time here was very productive, equalling that of more well known areas. Annabel of Aquamarine Diving in Bali is a specialist in dealing with the demands of underwater photographers and will produce a tailor made trips for individuals with startling professionalism and refreshingly realistic prices.

For those of us unable to afford the likes of Lembah or those on the look out for new mecca of muck diving, Secret Bay should be on the top of your list .

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