

# Diving Deer Island

## Menjangan

with Attila Kaszo

The island of Bali in Indonesia is well known and regarded as a popular tourist destination. Its varied landscape, long sandy beaches, and cheap clothing seem to be a magnet to the visitor. However, what it's not so well known for lies under the water.

I have always enjoyed Bali, but not so much the tourist congestion of Kuta, which at times can be a bit overbearing. I prefer places like Ubud, Candi Dasa and Tanah-Lot, picturesque and laid back.

This time we decided to check out some of the dive sites around the island and put shopping on the "back burner", after all, how many T-shirts can one own?

Previously all our diving had been out of Flores, places like Komodo Is. and Rinca Is., beautiful in all respects. So we thought this was going to be a few steps down from that, but since we were so close...why not!

At the north west part of Bali is Menjangan. Depending on which part of the island your on, say Denpasar, the drive can take up to eight hours,

not because it's that far by road, but due more to the poor state of the roads and the general congestion along the route, sometimes down to a crawl.

There are a number of resorts of varying quality on the mainland at Menjangan. We chose to stay at Mimpri Resort a four star landscaped hideaway with its own dive centre.

About half an hour boat ride from the mainland, situated in the West Bali National Park is Menjangan Island. Its name comes from wild deer populations swimming over to the island during spring. The island is a 175-hectare sanctuary in the Bali Sea, home to Hindu monks, wild deer, rabbits, goats and some spectacular

*When shooting dropoffs, I try and squeeze in a diver somewhere to bring that personal touch to the picture. I also try to frame something that is eye catching in the foreground but doesn't entirely make up the frame.*

*Aquatica / Nik D2X – S/S 1/60th  
– 10.5mm – f5.6 – ISO 125 – Lens  
10.5mm f2.8 Nik – Inon Z240 Strobes  
x 2*





*Not that common to see juvenile Barramundi Cod (*Chromileptes altivelis*) at any time, but I came across four in a short space of time. Not looking anything like their adult colour, they make a great subject if they keep still enough. Aquatica / Nik D2X – 1/60th – 105mm – f16 – ISO 125 – Nik 105mm f2.8 macro – Inon Z240 Strobes x 2*



coral dive sites, regarded by many as the premier dive location in Bali.

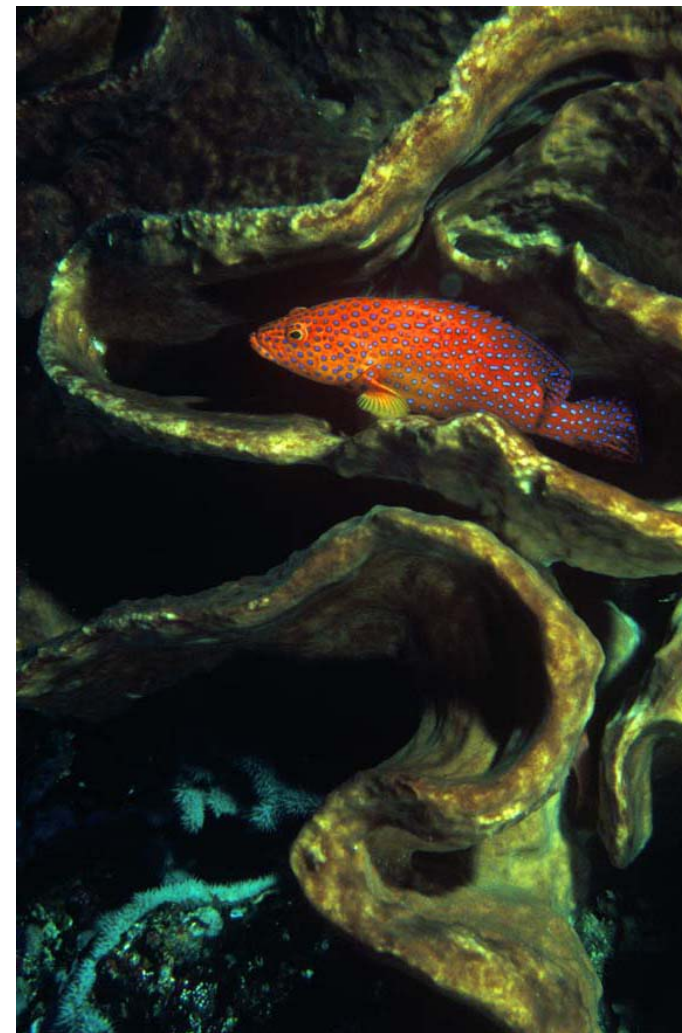
Tourism in this part of the world is less noticeable but still apparent. But to keep tourists in check, especially those who dive, a traditional maritime security force made up of local fishermen have been deployed to patrol around the island. I guess in part that works, but does little to prevent damage underwater, especially to some delicate corals. I think education and better diving practices can really do that.

We did many dives in this area including night, and probably saw about a third of the reputed 226 reef fish, which live here. For me the standout dive is a long wall, which stretches almost the length of the island. The coral walls around Menjangan are almost vertical down to about 60 meters. At about

20 meters there are huge barrel sponges growing, some are so big that a diver could sit in there, others just stunning in formation and colour.

The reef surface is fairly typical of reef that gets a battering now and then: caves, grottoes, crevasses and funnel-like splits break up the coral wall, and the surface is textured with small hideouts ideal for invertebrates and just about anything that can take refuge there. Gorgonians of many shapes and sizes blanket the dropoff, interspersed by layers of soft corals all the way down.

One thing that was obvious was the lack of large fish. Maybe the occasional reef shark was spotted, but no schooling Bigeyes, Humphead Parrot fish or Barracuda usually seen in similar areas. No doubt finfish harvesting in the past has played a significant role in this, but I would have



*Coral Trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*) in an unusual pose on a coral fold. Clearly it didn't realise it's camouflage was inadequate.*

*Aquatica / Nik F4s – 1/60th – 24mm – Velvia film ISO 100 – Nik 24-50 f3.3-4.5 – Sea & Sea 300 & 150 TTL strobes.*





*I found this relatively common Anemone Shrimp (Periclemenes brevicarpalis) just sitting there undisturbed by my presence. The trick was to wait until the tentacles of the anemone moved out of the way so I could get a shot.*

*Aquatica / Nik D2X – 1/60th – 105mm – f29 – ISO 125 – Nik 105mm f2.8 Macro + Macromate 2x Diopter – Inon Z240 Strobes x 2*

expected some sort of recovery by now unless of course it's still occurring.

The dive centre at Mimpí resort had taken on a well managed conservation and recycling program in the area. They have collected loads of bottles that would usually go into a landfill area, and made an artificial reef assemblage by cementing the bottles together and placing them

around areas where the coral is either depleted or non-existent. The migrating coral seeds quickly establish themselves on the blocks and the bottles become excellent habitat for a range of marine species. This was one of the first conservation recovery plans I had seen in this part of Asia, and was certainly encouraging.

Overall I would rate the diving at Menjangan to be very good, lots



*Boat loaded with discarded bottles from the nearby resort destined as part of an artificial reef structure program off Menjangan.*

*Nikon V1 – 1/500th – 16.9mm – f5.6 – ISO 100 – Nik 10-30 f3.5-5.6*

to see, clear water at about 30 meter visibility, 29°C water temperatures, safe and friendly.

Getting there may be a bit tiresome, but once there it's hard to pack up and leave.

**Attila Kaszo**  
[www.ambvision.com](http://www.ambvision.com)

