

Indonesia

by Eric Lambert

As scuba divers, we have different criteria when choosing for the best site. However, when adding underwater photography to our check list, we raise the bar to a different level, as we want to share with our stunning pictures why we go scuba diving and why what we capture through the viewfinder is so fascinating.

Indonesia consists of a 5,000 kilometer long archipelago offering some of the most diverse coral reefs on the planet. There are over 16,000 islands, most of them not inhabited, with a coastline stretching over 50,000 kilometers all lying in tropical waters, a perfect environment for coral growth. The amount of coral reef the archipelago contains is far more than neighbor Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Diving in Indonesia offers over 3,000 fish species and 450 species of coral, steep walls, deep water trenches, underwater volcanic mountains, World War II wrecks, and an endless variety of macro life.

Indonesia sits on the western edge of the Pacific Rim, a seismically active area known as the "Ring of Fire." This volcanic volatility makes

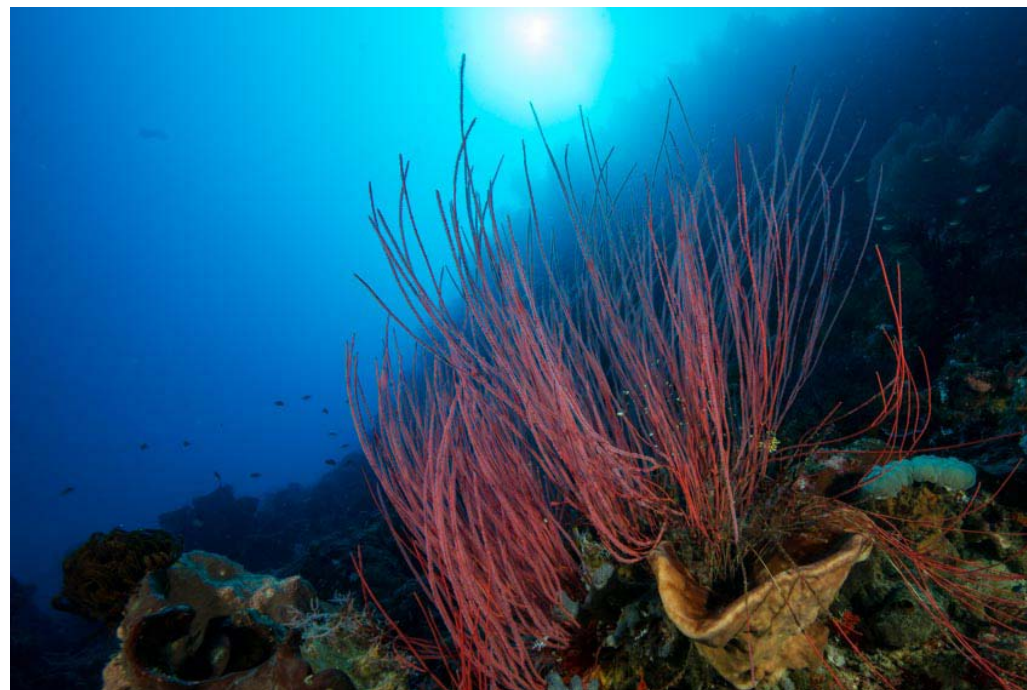
Indonesia a hotbed of biodiversity. With a rich environment of warm equatorial currents, nutrient-rich upwelling and a tropical climate it is not surprising that Indonesia is home to over a quarter of the fish species found on earth.

Last but not least, the stable political situation in Indonesia can only add to the attraction of no overcrowding at dive sites, except a few well known high touristic spots such as Bali.

The biggest challenge for divers in Indonesia is choosing from the many great locations in which to dive. The best dive sites are in unpopulated, remote locations where mankind hasn't destroyed the reefs yet. To get to these remote locations could become a tactical challenge, especially now that the price on new budget-oriented airlines has led to

Sony Alpha 850, BS-Kinetics, Sigma 12-24 on 13mm, F13, 1/100, 100 ISO, 2 x SUBTRONIC Mega

Sony Alpha 850, BS-Kinetics, Sigma 105, F16, 1/100, 100 ISO, 2 x SONY HVL56AM in custom housing





Sony Alpha 850, BS-Kinetics, Minolta 16mm Fish-Eye, 16, 1/60, 100, 2 x SUBTRONIC Mega



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decreased flights by national airlines to distant islands.

That being said, the Island of Ambon and the other islands in the Banda Sea in Maluku met all my criteria for my 16th trip to Indonesia. I have this time chosen for Nabucco's Cape Paperu Resort, a 1.5 to 2 hours car and then boat drive from Ambon Airport. Ambon is easily reached twice a day by 2 local and good airlines from Jakarta major and international hub.

Paperu Island is where in Indonesia Pepper grows and locals harvest this famous and unique peppercorns. This is where time seems to stand still, and where Swiss couple Eliane and Kurt Gross have realized their dreams with "Extra Divers" base dive. Eliane and Kurt are two Swiss citizens whom have travelled throughout Indonesia to decide where to install their dive centre before choosing Paperu, best diving site in the country according to them. Cape Paperu Resort is the only one real professional dive resort in the wild environment of the central

Maluku. More than 50 dive spots bring the required diversity, around the islands of Saparua, Molana, Nusa Laut and Haruku, reached in 10 to 60 minute speedboat drive from the safe jetty of the resort yet to see ones among the most beautiful reefs of the world. Really. Luxurious coral gardens, steep walls, or white sandy bottom with coral rocks formations, with all-what-you-can-imagine diversity of fishes, with unbelievable colors.

Nabucco's Resort Cape Paperu is built up on the cliffs at the entrance to Saparua Bay of Saparua Island, in the heart of the Moluccas. The island is also well known as "Spices Island". The resort is located in a 10 hectare comprehensive nature park with more than 100 year old shade spending trees, uncountable coconut palms, a large variety of bushes and wild orchids. Opened in autumn 2007, and constantly maintained to the highest level of quality, the Resort provides a restaurant, reception, bar, a small boutique, Lounge with wifi-connection (also working well in all bungalows), a

spa-centre (for unforgettable Indonesian massages after the dives) and a wonderful pool in the middle of the palm garden. The 12 bungalows are built to international standards and either have breathtaking views over the Banda Sea, and on some lucky days, one can see Dugong (Manatee) here and around,



Sony Alpha 850, BS-Kinetics, Sigma 105, 20, 1/80, 100, 2 x SONY HVL56AM in custom housing

or a little more privacy in the natural tropical gardens. All bungalows offer air conditioning and a semi-open bathroom with shower / WC. All rooms have a safe, a minibar, a water dispenser for free drinking water and a coffee and tea maker.

I had one of the bungalows close to the pool, in the palm gardens, looking out to sea. It was spacious, charming and very comfortable. I was able to retire quietly, back from the dives, to my bungalow to relax and yet not feel remote from the activity around the pool.

There isn't anything anywhere else close enough to dine out. So, you will get Full board at Cape Paperu with the vintage regional cuisine exclusively dressed with fresh ñ if possible even home farmed -ingredients . As a matter of course, freshly caught fish is one of the main components of the delicious meals. Chicken is also one of the main ingredient in the local cuisine. All ingredients come from the easily reached local market of Ullath. The food is tasty and varied and there is plenty of it. Fresh water from Water



Sony Alpha 850, BS-Kinetics, Sigma 12-24 on 12mm, 13, 1/160, 100, 2 x SUBTRONIC Mega

dispenser is freely available all the time in addition to local beers (small or large) or fruit juices. The restaurant has also a small list of wines, red or white. You will find also Water dispensers in the room and on the boats, of course, was free of charge.

Various tours to the neighbor islands Ambon, Haruku, Nusa Laut, Molana and Seram can be offered on place. The resort is closed in July and August each year during the wet season.

Extra Divers operate the CMAS and PADI affiliated dive centre at

Cape Paperu Resort. Lush coral gardens, sheer walls and a myriad of colorful fish await the avid diver and snorkeler. This is really an unspoiled area with plenty more to discover as we need to say that the reefs are almost intact, without being damaged by cyanide or bombing . For those who enjoy their marine life a little larger; eagle rays, bump head parrot fish, white tip reef sharks, manatees and humpback whales have all been spotted locally, some on the house reef! All of this strongly depends on the season. Which is the best? Hard to

say as it depends on what you prefer to see... If only we could stay for more than a week, say half a year... Kurt, as also an amazing land and underwater photographer will help you and guide you, recommending you when to come. Say for instance that most of the numerous pygmies seahorses are spotted around December-January, when rare large Harlequin shrimps are seen in May.

Each day you will be offered a two-dive trip in the morning and a one-dive trip in the afternoon with a night dive offered most nights. The boat trips mostly involved a five to 30 minute journey along the Saperua Island coast or to the a nearby island of Molana. Twice a week, also a day trip of three dives is offered to Nusa Laut, a slightly further island 45 minutes away. Notice that a small extra charge for park fees will be required. The night dives can be done almost every day, and will take place on the house reef, in front of the overlooking restaurant. It is very shallow waters (max 6 meters) but one can see more creatures than on any night dive you would have done before.

The 2 boats (the resort will not accommodate more than 20 people at the same time) are not large nor small and basic however and quite fast; They can host up to a maximum of eight or ten divers. Water, tea, fresh



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bananas and cake are available for snacks. As the boats are speedboats, there is no toilet on board. You will enter the water by rolling off the boat wearing fins and mask and weight belt if not attached to the BCD and you will get from the crew (locals) the BDC and the 12 liters aluminum tank at the surface. The same crew will be of invaluable help at the exit after the dive. involving handing weight systems, BCD, camera and fins up to the crew and then climbing a ladder.

The crew are locals who are experienced divers. They have been very well thought by Kurt and Eliane. They set up and transport all the equipment to the boat. After each dive they will wash and stow your gear. They also have a drying room, which



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means that at the end of your stay, your stuff will be delivered dry and no more wet to your bungalow within a couple of hours after the last dive.

The guides are also locals and they know the sites well and are excellent at spotting marine life for you. Dives are rarely less than 60 minutes, and often much longer if you have sufficient air supply.

I have done a few dives guided by Kurt himself, and really enjoyed them. He obviously knows the sites extremely well and his passion for the marine life was a joy to share. It is a

pleasure to listen to him giving some lessons on marine biology.

All the dive sites are very good with a reasonable variety of topography including steep walls, gentle slopes and coral rock formation on white sand bottom. Coral Reefs have stunning hard and soft corals and all with more than interesting marine life, of course on an underwater perspective or view point. As already said, the marine life highlights really depends on the season, time of the year you are visiting Papua. Please make sure you discuss it with Kurt



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Sigma 105, 20, 1/60, 100, 2 x SONY
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So, in conclusion, did I have all the ingredients for a perfect underwaterphoto and diving trip?

Paperu Resort on Saparua is a fantastic resort, keeping in mind you are at the far end of what we call "civilization". That's what I was looking for. The diving operation is very well organized and well maintained with boats and equipment are in very good condition. I had made all my dives in a very safe mindset. The pictures I brought back can witness i could focus on my viewfinder rather than anything else.

The food was excellent and my friends know that's a point on which I am very demanding. Last but not least, but very important to my eyes, the dives are relaxing and quiet because there not many divers. Yes, that was very interesting for macro stuff but certainly less spectacular compared to, for example, Raja Ampat for big fishes. Though there was at each dive really amazing underwater landscapes. Would I come back? Definitely yes...

Eric Lambert

or Eliane, before you plan your trip. During my stay in May, which is close to the end of the season, I had mostly macro including a range of shrimps, crabs, squat lobsters and nudibranchs. I had not a single of the so lovely and so photogenic pygmy seahorse, however, you will see a lot of them earlier in the season. But, and this is the BUT. You will have the chance to spot the unique crab and may be endemic in the Banda sea. Kurt and Eliane gave him a special name. There are also sites with bigger marine life such as sharks, turtles and rays. Most of the dives have little or no current. However if any, you will make a drift dive.

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