

Gangga - Island Of Dreams

by Len Deeley

I was first introduced to Gangga Island Spa and Resort, NE Sulawesi, in 2004 by an Italian, travel agent. I decided to organise a trip to Lembeh for a week and then transfer to Gangga for another week, which is just a boat ride north with diving on the way so no dive time is lost. I organised a group of underwater photographers and the combination made for a very successful trip. While Lembeh is well known and rightly so, Gangga was less well known in UK, being mostly visited by Italians, Germans and Japanese at that time. With excellent accommodation, food and facilities it is quite upmarket and still attracts honeymooners and guests who just want to get away to a small part of paradise, as well as divers.

Since then I returned twice more with the two centre set up with underwater photographic groups. So it is fair to say that it is one of my favourite destinations. Therefore, in December 2015 my wife (non diver who accompanied me on the three previous trips) and I decided to return to Gangga for a two week trip just on our own.

Gangga Divers is the only resort on the island and therefore there is

little chance of seeing other divers at any of many dive sites that are visited by their dive boats. Normally the arrangement is to go out and do two dives in the morning, return for lunch and then take another boat for a single dive in the afternoon. Night dives are also available each day (including an excellent mandarin fish site).

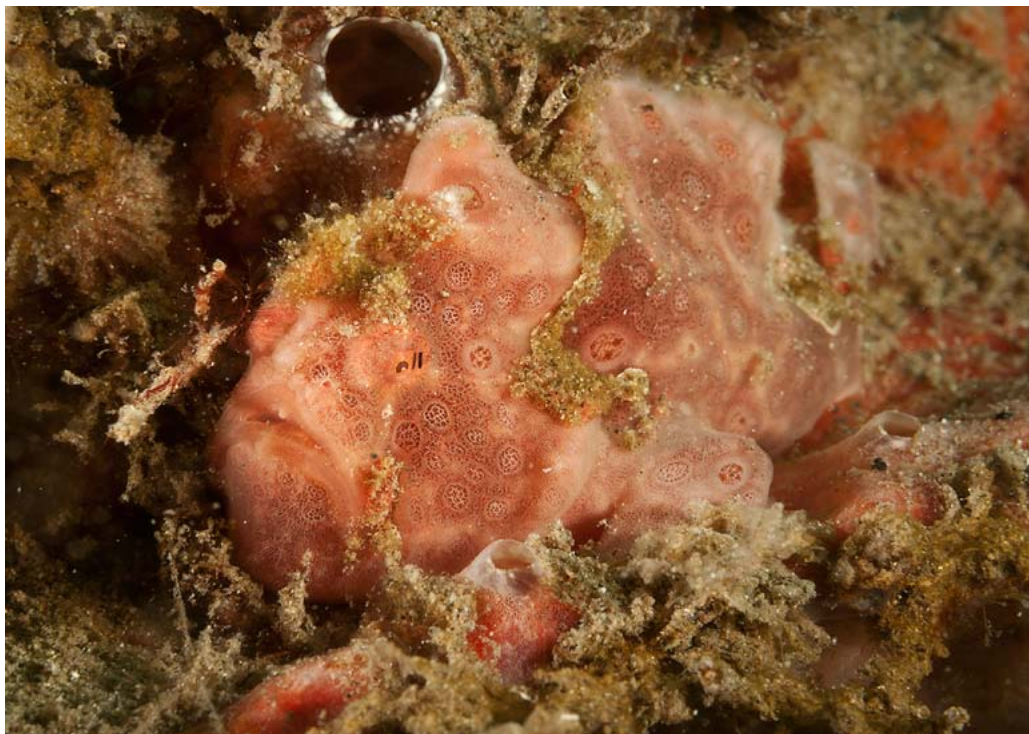
For some of the sites that are slightly farther afield a full day diving excursion is organised stopping off at one of the islands to enjoy lunch.

Located at the conjunction of the Indian and Pacific Oceans with more than 30 world class dive locations around the archipelago of islands such

Diver with feather star. I had a one to one dive guide which made life very pleasant. This was taken with a Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing and two Inon Strobes. 12-24mm lens at f11 and 1/40 sec. The lens had a Polaroid +4 close up lens filter to enable the lens to get closer to the foreground subject.

Mandarin fishes mating. Gangga has an excellent mandarin fish site. This image taken with Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing 60mm lens at f16 and 1/60 sec





Frogfish taken with Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing and two Inon Strobes. 60mm lens at f29 and 1/60 sec

as Lihaga, Tindila, Talisei and Bangka as well as sites on the North Sulawesi coast, the diving offers some excellent reef diving as well as amazing muck diving sites. It is a paradise for critter lovers with all the exotic variety that you would expect from a part of the world that is the epicentre of marine diversity. Critters include Frogfish, anemone shrimps, ornate ghost pipefish, nudibranchs, cuttlefish, banded cleaner shrimps, banggai cardinalfish, stonefish, stargazer snake eels, weird scorpionfishes .

As we have come to expect in this part of the world everything is done for you leaving you to relax and concentrate on your diving and photography. The dive guides are amazing in their ability to find even the most allusive of creatures, such as boxer crabs, pigmy sea horses, harlequin and marble shrimps, crinoid shrimps of amazing variety matching so well the colours of their host feather stars, nudibranchs, leaf fish, frogfishes from the giant to the tiny and much more.



Barnacle blenny taken with 60mm lens with wet close up attachment. Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing and two Inon Strobes. F18 and 1/60 sec. I find the wet close up attachment useful to give a bit more flexibility for very small subjects.

There are thirty elegantly furnished and air conditioned wooden bungalows with high ceilings and a spacious veranda overlooking the white sand beach set against the backdrop of a jungle covered hill. Facing west you can normally expect to get some spectacular sunsets from your veranda.

There is a large salt water pool and a traditional spa with a high quality service, which offer various treatments and massages, manicures

and pedicures by well trained staff.

The restaurant and bar area has large lounge facilities also and a large collection of books, although many not in English so be sure to stock up on your reading matter.

If you want to take time out from the diving there are various land excursions, including Tangkoko Nature Reserve where you might see the smallest monkeys (*Tarsius spectrum*) and birds of paradise. You can also climb one of the magnificent



Harlequin shrimp taken with a Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing and two Inon Strobes. 60mm lens with wet close up attachment at F20 and 1/60 sec.

volcanoes in the Minahasa Highlands or take one or other of various excursions that are available.

It is difficult to select particular dive sites for special mention but I was pleased to re-dive on two occasions on this trip the Efratha dive site, which is situated off the North Sulawesi coast. This I included in the book by Karen Gargani and myself called Ultimate Diving Adventures in 2007. Efratha is not listed on their normal publicity and I had to ask them to give me location details for the book. Some sites they keep to themselves solely for the benefit of their guests. It has beautiful corals and a drop-off to die for with wonderful exotic species. You start the dive in about 20m where there are areas of white sand interspersed with outcrops of coral. On red branching corals you may find cowries with mantles that match the colouration



Imperator Commensal Shrimp on sea cucumber. Taken with a Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing and two Inon Strobes. 60mm lens plus wet close up attachment at f25 and 1/60 sec.

of the coral. Clams also display their colourful mantles and seem quite insensitive to your presence, enabling photos to be taken of the wonderful colourations of the living tissue. Many species of nudibranchs can be found on the sand and among the corals. Various species of shrimp that live in symbiosis with sea anemones can be found within the anemone tentacles as well as other arthropods



Sea snake taken with a Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing and two Inon Strobes. 17-35mm lens with T4 close up at F14 and 1/60 sec.

such as orangutan crabs. There are plenty of fish such as blacktipped grouper, trumpetfish, lionfish, scorpionfish, frogfish and pipefish.

Once you reach the sheer wall you will find it festooned with marine life including leaf fish butterflyfish, spinecheeks, angelfish, trunkfish and



Ornate Ghost Pipefishes. Taken with a Nikon D300 in a Sea and Sea housing and two Inon Strobes. 60mm lens at f18 and 1/60 sec.

many more species on this unspoiled reef. Another delight was the electric clam. It's name derives from what appear to be streaks of electricity flashing across the red mantle. This is in fact caused by phosphorescence and is an amazing light show in miniature.

You finish the dive swimming along the wall, which enables you to ascend slowly while discovering more and more species and enjoying the dive right to the end.

Another dive site that I made a point of going to twice on this trip was Paradise Reef. This is very much a muck dive and the variety of critters is simply amazing, including

sand eels, frogfish, various anemone shrimps, nudibranchs, shrimp gobies with their accompanying shrimps, shoals of razer fishes, trunk and puffer fishes, ghost pipe fishes, banded boxer shrimps, stonefish, crocodilefish, and cuttlefish, you can finish the dive under a pier which is festooned with life.

Gangga Island SPA and Resort is certainly worth considering for some exciting diving in a resort that gives many creature comforts. It is not beyond the realm of reason that I may return at sometime for a fifth visit.

Len Deeley

www.imagine-photography.co.uk

MEXICO

UNIQUE DIVING COMBINED IN ONE TRIP



**HIDDEN
DEPTHS**
DIVE TOURS
IT'S TIME TO EXPLORE



Tel No 01722 780810

Email Info@hiddendepthsdivetours

www.hiddendepthsdivetours.com

ESCORTED BY LEN DEELEY JAN 17



Sailfish - These majestic animals are chasing the sardine migration which they feed on. By swimming with them you will only be inches away from the sailfish, right in the middle of their hunting dance. Being the fastest fish in the ocean, this activity will be filled with energy, adrenaline and beauty at its maximum splendor. These magnificent fish are active at hunting from sunrise to sunset and our guests are welcome to enjoy this spectacle until they are fully satisfied. This trip is highly recommended for underwater photographers and videographers..

Bull Shark Dives - These dives take place in a sandy bottom area at the depth of 60 ft., you drift dive for 45 minutes close to the area where we attract the sharks. We do not use any type of bait or attractant on this dive, you will see sharks in their natural environment and you will have the opportunity to take pictures and be close to the sharks.

Cenote Diving - Your guide Eric Budgie Burgess has spent the last 10 years as a cave and cavern guide in the Riviera Maya meaning his knowledge of the cave and cavern systems is extensive. All the caverns are unique and offer gin clear visibility with superb light penetration, so those worried about being claustrophobic needn't.

Itinerary:

08 JAN Arrive Cancun met and transferred to Beachscape Hotel, Cancun 4 nts B & B Beachscape Hotel
09 JAN 3 days of Sailfish trips.
12 JAN AM Transfer to Playa Del Carmen, 5 nts B & B Unic Design Hotel
13 JAN 2 days Bull Shark diving, 1 day Cozumel
17 JAN AM Transfer to Los Lirios, Tulum 5 nts Half Board Los Lirios
18 JAN 3 days Cenote Diving inc torches, entrance fees, lunch & guide
22 JAN Transfer from Tulum to Cancun airport
Price per person £2,655 inc flights, transfers, board, accommodation & diving as above escorted by Len Deeley