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SPECTACULAR DIVE SITES
INDONESIA

BY LINDA CARTLIDGE

Indonesia is an archipelago of 17,000 islands spanning both sides of the equator and located in the ‘Coral Triangle’ in the middle of the ‘Ring of Fire’... how can this place not be home to the best diving on the planet? Of course it is!

A fascinating destination for superyachts in search of unique and gorgeous locations, her islands are blessed with what many consider to be the world’s most spectacular scuba and snorkeling dive spots.

Pristine white sand beaches, untouched rainforests and remote villages are woven around extraordinary dive locations which present a wide diversity for all levels of experienced visitors. Exotic and unpretentious, Indonesia is attracting an ever growing number of Superyachts, whose owners are enticed by its privacy, ancient heritage, untapped adventure and untamed beauty.

Superyacht cruising in Indonesia is relatively new for local authorities and villagers alike; thus having an on board dive guide can be extremely helpful notes Captain Jimmy Blee of Asia Pacific Superyachts Indonesia. Captain Jimmy, who runs APS Indonesia along with Richard Lofthouse is a renowned boat builder and vessels operations manager, he has, over the past 20 years, also established himself as a legendary Superyacht Guide.

In planning a visiting yacht’s dive itinerary having an ‘on board dive guide’ can make a big difference to the captain and guest experience. These impressive vessels themselves, as you can imagine, tend to make quite an impression when they turn up at some of the more outlying locations and the skills of an on-board boat/diving guide come to the fore here in dealing with this attention in an empathetic and culturally effective manner. As
seahorse to top predators. In many places brightly coloured soft corals can be found close to the surface which when illuminated by natural sunlight make the sites spectacularly vibrant.

The diving in Raja Ampat is also well known by Didier Romero, a highly favored Asia Pacific Superyachts Indonesia 'Top Gun’ dive/boat guide. Born in Guadeloupe in the West Indies, Didier grew up in Paris and fell in love with diving, becoming a certified Dive Master in Mexico, then working as a dive guide in the Dominican Republic and Barbados. When traveling through the Caribbean and the Philippines as a dive instructor, he landed in Indonesia in 1999 where he continued his diving education to become a master instructor for recreational diving as well as a technical diving instructor. He extended his experience (7000+ dives) and knowledge of this wonderful archipelago as a cruise director on 'live aboard' diving boats operating in the Komodo region. ‘Didier speaks Indonesian like a native and has a wonderful sense of empathy for the Indonesian people and the differing cultures,’ Jimmy says.’ A leader in Indonesia diving locales, one of his strengths is his ability to relate to all Indonesians whether they are high level officials or local villagers with a perception and dignity, all of which makes him an absolute asset to have on board.’

**KOMODO DIVE SITES: DIVE SPLENDOR IN KOMODO**

The spectacular Komodo National Marine Park presents divers and snorkelers with an overwhelming variety of marine life at a part of the 'coral triangle' which boasts the richest concentration of marine life in the world! The diversity of dive sites is almost unparalleled with warm, gentle reefs housing hundreds of species of colorful fish and corals to the crazed excitement of sea mounts with huge currents and massive
pelagics like manta rays, sharks and tuna through colourful nudibranch, special shrimp and frog fish.

Dolphin, eagle ray, pygmy seahorse, ornate ghost pipefish, clown and blue-ringed octopus can all be seen along with many varieties of shark, turtle and even dugong, to delight all that come to experience the special beauty of Komodo. Divers are astounded at how rich the diving experience is along with the unique geology and location between the two seas and two different climates – it is unlike anywhere else in the world.

KOMODO DIVE SITES: THE GEOLOGY MAKES IT SPECIAL
Komodo Island and Rinca were once part of Flores and are separated from the large Island of Sumbawa to the West by the Sape Strait. The ocean in the Strait drops hundreds of meters with the Pacific Ocean to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south - actually at different heights. The flow of currents from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean during tidal exchanges makes the currents here among the strongest in the world. In the (relatively) shallow waters along the east coast of Komodo towards Labuan Bajo these currents can be extremely dangerous.

With the much cooler waters of the Indian Ocean flowing north and the warm tropical waters of the Pacific flowing south, the nutrients and plankton in the water makes for a nearly perfect

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feeding zone for large pelagics. At sites like ‘Manta Alley’, dozens of them feed and play, along with sharks and other large fish, near the shallows housing corals fed year-round by cool nutrient rich waters.

Komodo is not your typical dive location and with some massive currents, huge fish and a remote location – safety is very important. Your guide in Komodo must not only understand how to lead groups but it is essential they understand daily tidal changes as well as monthly tidal strengths. Entering some sites can appear safe and then, 15 minutes later, become very dangerous. By focusing on safety Komodo dive sites are suitable for almost all levels of efficiency, with a few exceptions – including areas of strong downward currents and cold upwelling’s.

The great thing about Komodo is that the safe dive sites can have almost as many fish, pelagics and fantastic corals, and can be enjoyed by all levels of divers.

Most Komodo dive sites can be accessed throughout the year; however, a few areas are seasonal. The best conditions for the Northern Komodo dive sites are April through October due to the surface conditions of less wind and rain; from October through April the better diving tends to be in the South, and again – mostly due to the surface weather conditions caused by the northern monsoonal winds.

Following are some of the more popular sites, though new sites are being discovered all the time. The division is basically along weather and water temperature conditions with the southern sites tending to have much cooler water temperatures than the northern sites.
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**KOMODO DIVE SITES NORTH**

Batu Bolong – Tatawa Kecil – Tatawa Besar – Cauldron – Castle Rock – Crystal Rock

The Northern Komodo dive sites features the warm waters of the Flores Sea and the marine life is similar to most tropical seas worldwide – but with a magnitude and diversity that is unsurpassed. This is partly due to the geology but also the combination of strong currents and rich waters. Extensive and pristine hard coral reefs amidst clear water and incredible visibility make the sites a haven for nudibranch, pigmy seahorse, rare invertebrate, pipefish and tiny frogfish.

January to March can see rough surface conditions at the Northern Komodo dive sites which should only be accessed during good surface conditions. This is important as much of the diving is done from dinghies from where guests can be seen and collected. The currents are more powerful here as the through flow of the Pacific hits Komodo Island straight on in the north and makes for shifting currents and eddies, though the good news is it also attracts numerous large fish.
KOMODO AND RINCA DIVE SITES – SOUTH

The Southern Komodo dive sites have cooler waters that arrive from the Indian Ocean, the result of upwellings which occur when deep ocean currents encounter a continental shelf. This provides a constant supply of plankton which makes for an amazing array of corals and fish with a whole chain of predatory feasting fish. The corals in the south tend to be more vibrant and colourful, attracting some incredible macro species. Many big and small filter feeders enjoy this plankton rich water and manta rays can be seen in huge numbers along with some great passing migratory species.

The weather in the Southern Komodo dive sites tends to be rougher than in the North, especially during July and August, though in the months of November through March surface conditions are generally calm. The water tends to be rather cold and some cold upwellings bring the temperature below 20, though 25 is the average. The dry season runs from April to October with SE winds and the wet season runs November to March with NW winds. Temperatures typically range 28 to 34C year-round but local variations come about due to mountain ranges and island size.

Captain Jimmy Blee has a wealth of experience to share from his amazing voyages of adventure and discovery in Indonesian waters that can help visiting superyachts plan unforgettable diving experiences.

Contact: jblee@asia-pacific-superyachts.com
Or visit: www.asia-pacific-superyachts.com

Photos courtesy of Ricard Buxo – APS Indonesia