# Diving & Snorkeling Guide to

# Raja Ampat

Northeast Indonesia

By TIM ROCK and SIMON PRIDMORE

2016 Edition



### About the Authors:



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Simon Pridmore lives in the deep south of Bali among the fascinating contradictions that make up modern-day Indonesia. He has spent the last 20 years at the sharp end of the scuba diving scene in Asia, pioneering mixed-gas deep diving, running an instructor training agency, organizing expeditions, developing dive equipment and writing for divers and travellers. For more about Simon and an in-depth look into scuba, go to: www.simonpridmore.com

### Acknowledgements

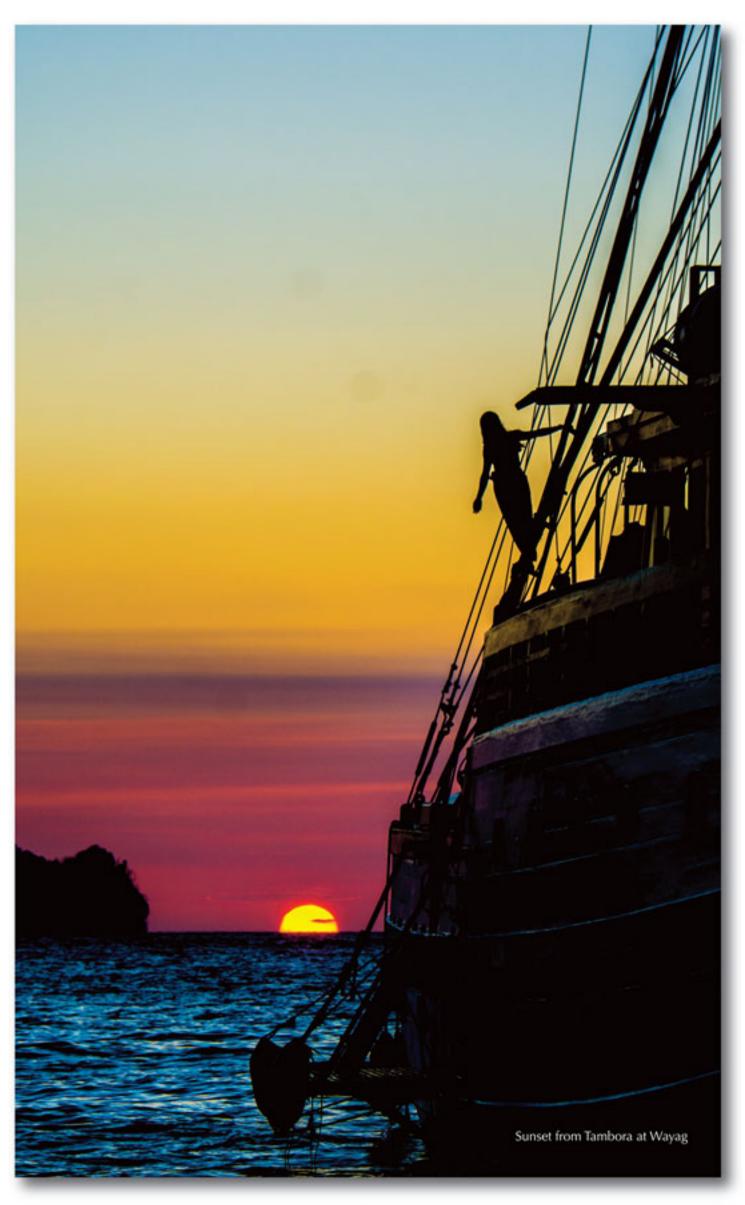
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#### Photographic Equipment Used

Rock and Pridmore use Aquatica housings with Ikelite strobes and TLC arms. They use Nikon and Sony cameras. Underwater Modeling by Karl Klingeler, Russell Stoddard, Miyuki Konda, Olga Spoelstra, Simon Pridmore & Sofie Hostyn and Yoko Higashide. Cover Photo: Cape Kri dive site © Tim Rock

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## & Northeast Indonesia

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### Words from the Authors

This guide is for you, the adventurous travelling diver. We will tell you and show you what to expect from the various regions in this remote, fascinating and often downright astonishing part of the world, to help you plan a trip and to enhance your experience when you get there.

The area covered by this guide is enormous. We offer descriptions of well over 100 dive sites but there are many, many more. Every new resort that opens discovers new dive sites within its operating radius. Every liveaboard has its own secret places.

Some sites have numerous names, having been "discovered" and named independently by different people at different times. There have been earlier guides to a couple of the regions covered by this book, particularly Raja Ampat, and we have endeavored to keep names consistent with these wherever possible, to avoid confusion.



No travel guide of any sort can ever claim to guarantee that readers will have similar experiences to those the authors describe. We have dived all the sites we cover in this book, in many



cases
several
times over
a number
of years.
However,
the action
on any dive
site can
change
from one
season to
the next,
one day to

### Ternate Gateway to Halmahera

Ternate and its neighbor Tidore are both volcanoes that rise straight out of the sea. You can see them in person or see Tidore on the back of the 1000 rupiah note. They are fascinating islands to visit and you can find independent guesthouses and tour operators there to make a stay of two or three days extremely pleasant.

Both islands were important sultanates and centers for the spice trade for centuries and although they are now backwaters, you can still see traces of that era in abandoned forts and other ruins.

The hills of both islands are still covered in clove, cinnamon and nutmeg trees and, if you wind your car windows down as you pass through



mountain villages you will be greeted by the intoxicating whiff of spices being dried in the sun.





Activities

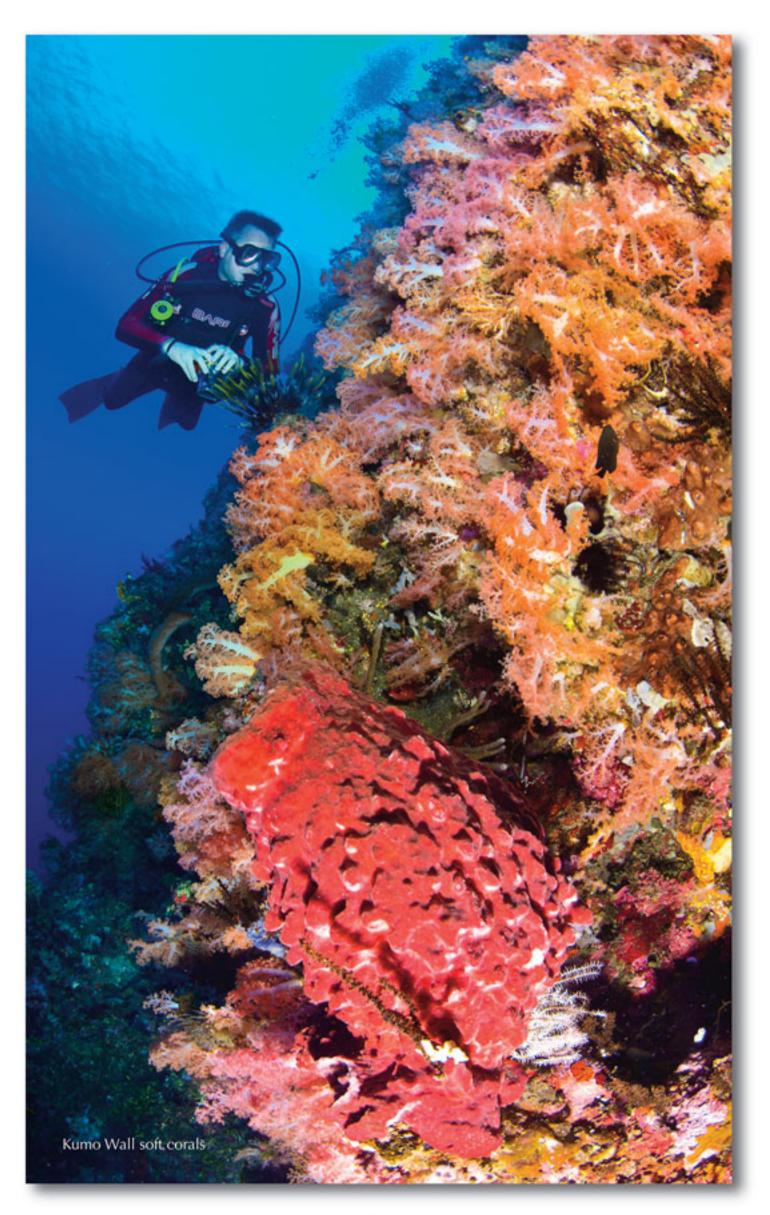
History tours, hiking, riverwalking (see P. 36), bird watching, town tours and limited shopping make up most of the regional activities that are not water, beach, snorkeling or dive related. The area has dense jungles where odd insects and rare butterflies are found.

Many towns do not have a developed handicraft industry so be aware that you may be buying a souvenir that was made in Bali or Java. Most artists still work out of their homes. A pleasant tour can be done in Manokwari visiting the residences of weavers, carvers, painters and traditional artists. While conversation may be a bit limited, they will proudly show their creations so you can get an authentic Papuan craft directly from the artist. Sorong and Biak have some local craft shops as well.

What to Bring

Medical Supplies - When you are making your travel plans, check the Internet for specific health warnings for travelers entering Indonesia. A risk of malaria exists throughout the year everywhere in Indonesia except in the large cities and major tourist resorts of Java and Bali. Dengue fever is also common so pack a good mosquito repellent and plenty of it. Use only bottled water.

Bring all the medical supplies you think you will need although, if you find on arrival that you have forgotten something, there are pharmacies in every town. Look for the Apotek/Apotik sign. The state-run Kimia Farma pharmacies are the best supplied and the best equipped and prescriptions are generally not required.





but this seems to be the westernmost point of their range. Hard coral gardens abound, schools of bumphead parrotfish forage across the reef and everything is very healthy.

This area is rarely dived and you may find boatloads of local residents coming out just to see what you are up to. On one visit to the north coast of **Pulau Gebe**, we inadvertently terrified some fishermen by appearing off shore of their rudimentary campsite at dawn. They ran off into the trees and we saw no sign of them until midday

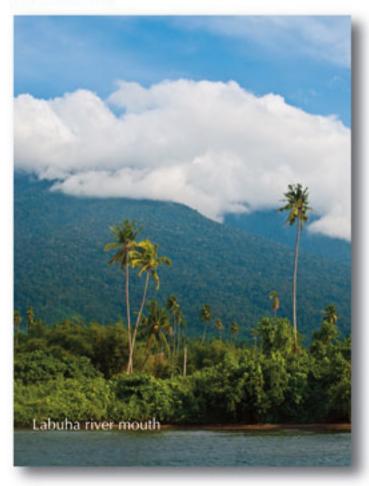
when they quietly emerged on to the beach, having concluded that we presented no threat.



### South Halmahera



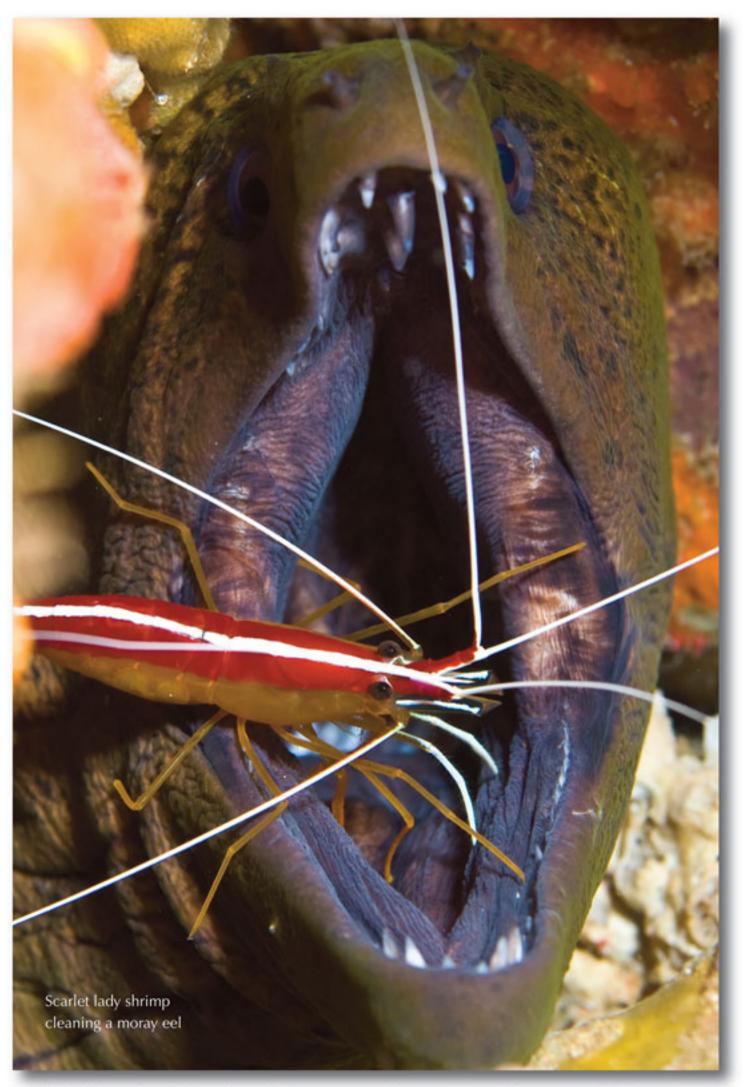
10) Labuha, Bacan Muck Diving Heaven Snorkel: Yes



A small Bacan port town around the South Halmahera horn is a macrophotography bonanza. The term muck dive could not be better defined at this amazingly diverse site.

Actually, the town pier here has been known as a good spot to dive for macro, but the currents can get to be quite strong and also, there are ferries and other boats going in and out. On one rather strong and currenty day back in December of 2014 we were aboard Damai II and did not like the looks of the site. Also, there was a ferry at the town pier.

So I said to my friend and stellar Indonesian explorer and divernaster Gusti Sukawana, how about trying near the river mouth? He said it looked



small fry like glassfish and myriad juveniles, which in turn attract predators. We have seen this very photogenic undersea small fish phenomenon in the Equator Islands in the month of July.

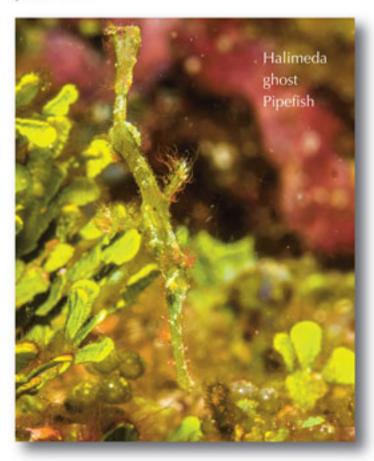


into a gentle slope in many places and where the corals are more likely to be bathed in light. Teardrop corner is very fishy and where the wall flattens out and there are small bays, schools of juveniles gather around small coral outcrops.

Aljui Bay: Pearl Farm Jetties

Your night dive along the white sand seabed under and around the Pearl Farm jetties may turn out to be one of the best of your entire Raja Ampat trip. You will not only encounter the usual cast of characters found under a jetty in Eastern Indonesia at night, but also wobbegongs and walking sharks. Most of the best finds are in the shallows around the rocks and discarded junk. Basket stars abound and keep you knees and hands off the sand, not only to avoid silting the site up and spoiling the

visibility but because blue spotted stingrays and stonefish lurk all over the place. Permission to dive here has to be sought and granted by the Pearl Farm operators. This is normally not a problem.



## Central Raja Ampat

17) The Passage, West Waigeo & Gam Narrow Channel, Soft Corals Snorkel: Yes

This classic Raja Ampat dive site is entirely unique. A narrow ribbon of sea divides the islands of Gam and Waigeo. From the west, the channel is invisible until you are right upon it. What seems to be just an unbroken wall of mangroves lining the shore opens up and permits access to a narrow waterway lined by tall cliffs covered in foliage that runs for over two kilometers until it emerges into Kabui Bay.

You must visit the bay before or after diving The Passage as it offers one of the area's iconic seascapes, a cluster of small limestone rock islands covered in green and jutting out from a flat blue sea. So calm is it that Alfred Russell Wallace, probably the first Westerner to navigate the passage, was convinced he had chanced upon an inland lake.

A strong current often runs through The Passage, but if you dive this as a fast drift, you might get an adrenalin rush but you will miss the best bits. The waterway is not man-made; it does not have straight sides. Instead, it courses sinuously through the cliffs and this creates a number of bays where there is little to no current and divers can explore caves, investigate behind large rocks and marvel at the glorious red, orange and yellow soft corals that adorn the shallows.

There is no real need to go below 20ft





27) Manta Sandy, Dampier Straits Mantas, Sand, Scattered Corals Snorkel: No

This is one of the most popular Raja Ampat sites, primarily of course, because of the mantas, the great winged beasts of the sea that use the bommies here to get themselves cleaned by the thousands of small fish that surround them.

The site lies between two ridges in the Dampier Straits that run north to south and that are visible on the surface when the tide is low. A sandy channel between lies at a depth of 50 to 60ft (15 to 18m) You can imagine the fear that these shoals induced in William Dampier and his crew as they inched their way along these uncharted waters. Due to the fame of the site and the increasing number of divers that visit

Raja Ampat, particularly in diving season, a procedure has been established to ensure that everyone gets a good experience and the enjoyment of some is not spoilt by the carelessness of others, (or vice versa.)

A small wall of dead coral has been established along the centre of the channel close to the bommies. The protocol is that entries and exits are made to either side. Follow the channel to the wall and line up on the west side facing of the wall and wait for the action to begin. Don't forget to look behind you from time to time too.

If the mantas don't show up, never fear. Swim up the channel to find one of the largest stands of cabbage coral in the Dampier Straits. Also, up in the shallows is a rock with stunning sea fans, copper sweepers and spinecheek clownfish... a great place for photos.

bommie covered in corals and swirling fish. The top is at 30ft (9m) and the rock plummets way beyond recreational scuba levels. The best of the dive is near the upper reaches. Fusiliers course among the beautiful soft corals. Bumphead parrotfish cruise along the sand valleys that run in between the

coral-covered points, munching as they roam the prolific reef.

Pigmy seahorses can be found on the many small *Muricella sp.* fans.

Barracuda may not always be found but you will see jacks and the location at the end of the straits means that pelagic visitors such as manta rays may pass by.



and will come close. Of course, it would be extremely impolite if you were to try to touch them, not to mention a serious breach of diver etiquette. Please resist the temptation.

A t first, some people find it a bit intimidating encountering such huge fish. But after a while, their graceful swimming style and gentle demeanor ensure that any fears are soon replaced by awe and admiration. The slow, rhythmic swaying of their tail belies their immense power. If a whale shark wants to out-swim you, it will, so it is pointless to chase them. There is no need anyway. You are in a whale shark photo studio. Stay still and the big fish will come right by. Being one of a

handful of divers on the entire planet, suspended in the warm ocean for hours on end and surrounded by whale sharks, is a rare and magical experience that few people ever experience.

Most of the whale sharks are immature, relatively small, males, about 10ft (3m) long, but occasionally a larger female may join and she may be 30ft (9m) long and weigh many tons. Whale sharks can grow to around 60ft (18m) The Kwatisore sharks are being studied to learn more about their migration patterns and other habits.

Once feeding ceases, the sharks disappear. They truly march on their stomachs. Chances are they will be back at dawn for more.









Diving or snorkeling in Raja Ampat, or anywhere else in Northeast Indonesia, is a life affirming, bucket-list-topping experience! This region at the edge of the Pacific Ocean, abundantly rich in marine life, is proving to be a gift for divers that keeps on giving. Raja Ampat is the superstar destination, but other areas such as Cenderawasih Bay, Triton Bay and Southwest Halmahera are shining brightly as well and acquiring similarly mythical status.

This richly illustrated, detailed and informative guide is the first to cover all of these incredible places! It tells and shows you - the adventurous travelling diver - what to expect from this remote, fascinating and often downright astonishing part of the world. It will help you plan your trip, enhance your experience when you get there and provide you with the best possible souvenir of your visit.

And once you have been there, it will whet your appetite for adventures ahead – because you WILL be back!

- 100+ Dive & Snorkel Sites
- Over 235 color images
- Map
- Dive safety tips

- Travel advice
- Topside attractions
- Diving terms in Indonesian
- Much, much more