

Triton Bay



Temple of Paradise



By Markus Roth.

After exploring Triton Bay, Dr Mark Erdmann, senior marine biologist at Conservation International, commented: “If Raja Ampat is paradise, Triton Bay is the temple of paradise”. The combination of pure beauty and species diversity above and below the water makes this area a dream come true for any diver and nature lover.

The marine wonderland that is Triton Bay was explored for the first time in 2006 by a group of employees from Conservation International and scientists from the State University of Papua (UNIPA). It was expected that there would be even greater species diversity and a larger number of endemic species than in Raja Ampat. This was confirmed, as Dr Gerry Allen counted 330 different species on one single dive.

This place is a jewel for Bruno Hopff, cruise director and one of the owners of the live-aboard *MSV Amira*, which calls at Triton Bay. “I felt privileged to be able to see this bit of earth and to be able to dive in this biodiversity hotspot,” he says, remembering his first visit to Triton Bay in 2009.

A whale shark (Rhincodon typus) is checking out his reflection in my dome port in Triton Bay.



'Candy' decorator crab on host soft coral.

Little Komodo – a Superlative Dive Site

"The Little Komodo dive site quite simply left me speechless! The unbelievably healthy stock of coral and the huge quantity of fish were overwhelming," says Hopff.

However, the price to pay for the unusually high biomass in Triton Bay is low visibility of around 15 metres and some raging currents.

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Sea beams spotlight the reef.

When diving down, a dense shoal of rainbow runners is passed through. A degree of concentration is required here so as not to forget about breathing. The effort of battling against the current is forgotten by the time you



have reached the split (the area where the current splits on the reef) and can rest for a while and watch the spectacle offered by the schools of fusiliers, barracudas and mackerel.

If you leave the area protected from the current and drift into the channel, which is 30 metres wide at most, you will pass by walls of white-coloured black corals, giant gorgonians and orange-coloured soft corals. At the end of the channel, a large group of bumphead parrotfish awaits, which seems to hang effortlessly in the current. In the afternoon, when the sun shines into the channel, an additional spectacle is visible, as it is possible to see the jungle-like karst cliffs even from a depth of 10 metres. Neither the paradise above the water nor that below it goes unobserved.

But this spectacle has only been admired by a few people. Around five years ago, safari boats were warned against heading out into this remote area of the Bird's Head Peninsula, as trouble with the locals erupted time and again.

"We were worried about our natural resources and our basic foodstuff fish," explains the mayor of the fishing village of Sisir, Mohamed Jeia. After all, shortly after the first headlines about the potential of Triton Bay, the fishing fleets came, caught the big fish in the water and vanished again.

According to Jeia, the locals were unsure whether the first liveboards to arrive were also fishing fleets. "We feared for our existence and didn't know any other way to help ourselves than by making threats!"

Tourism Ensures Education

Triton Bay is now a protected area, and locals have recognised that tourism can represent an additional source of income for them and that this money makes it possible to give their children a good education. At any rate, ten children from the village with just 70 families made it to a university in the country.

The Ultimate Best Place in the Land of Species Diversity

In a top dive site like Batu Jeruk, you'll often find a hasty current but also a multitude of fish shoals and a fully intact soft-coral landscape.

"I think it's how you'd imagine a very positive LSD trip," comments my diving buddy, Tom Ingpen. The Australian has already dived in some remote corners of the world, but he thinks that "Triton Bay has everything in even more lavish proportions". He reveals that "even night dives here are particular fun".

During night dives at places like Disney Land and Macro Rock, you can find the denise, bargibanti and pontohi species of pygmy seahorses as well as rare creatures like solar-powered nudibranchs, decorator crabs and wasp-fish. Some of the dives are very demanding, but excursions, for instance to Mauwara Bay, provide an opportunity to recover.



Whale Sharks on the Hunt for 'Ikan Puri'

"For as long as I can think, there have been whale sharks in our waters, but the people of Papua have great respect for these creatures and a dreadful fear of being eaten by them," says 45-year-old mayor Mohamed Jeia.

The whale sharks in Triton Bay exhibit similar behaviour to those in Cenderawasih Bay. The 'bagans' (a type of fishing platform, fixed or floating) of the fishermen, the Bugis from South Sulawesi,

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appear to attract the creatures magically. The Bugis fish during the night for 'ikan puri', Indonesian for sardines, and later sell these in the market in Kaimana. To keep the fish fresh for as long as possible, they remain in the nets. This wealth of potential food attracts the whale sharks. They suck the nets

to get their meal. Watching the creatures, which grow up to eight metres in length, from this proximity is an incredible spectacle. Again and again, they swim from the depths towards the surface of the water to get at the nets. If you get a particularly good day, you can also see dolphins, and an Indo-Pacific sailfish stops by to help itself to the easy spoils.

On the final evening of every trip on the MSV *Amira*, it is the custom for the guests to gath-

er with the crew on the bow of the ship, and the crew band provides entertainment in the shape of some Indonesian oldies. Bruno Hopff just grins at the satisfied faces of the divers: "Dr Mark Erdmann was right when he said that Triton Bay is without doubt the temple of paradise." 

A determined whale shark sucks a fishing net for its bounty of delicious sardines.

INFO-SNIPPET

- Location:** Raja Ampat, Indonesia
- Seasons:** Dry June–September; the rest is rainy season
- Temperature:** 26–33°C
- Water temperature:** 29°C
- Language:** Indonesian
- Currency:** Indonesian Rupiah

The easiest way to get to Raja Ampat is to fly to Sorong via Jakarta or Singapore. Domestic travellers can also fly via Makassar or Manado. From Singapore: Silkair operates regular flights from Singapore to Manado. From Manado to Sorong regular flights are offered by Lion Air and Merpati.

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