

BALI REVISITED

I N D E P T H

TWENTY YEARS AGO Bali was discovered as a diving destination and, in an incredibly short period of time, the market expanded and grew exponentially. Then returning divers complained the diving was not so good. How did this happen and is it still true today? Sue Crowe found out.

Bali today is a major tourist destination; take an empty suitcase and go shopping, surfing, wining and dining. It has more than 120 dive operations. However, as most of these are simply fronts and booking shops, it is imperative to separate the “wheat from the chaff” or you may well be disappointed.

Whatever its past reputation, Bali is a place of outstanding beauty above and below the waterline; with more diversity of species than Ambon and Manado – areas long heralded as brilliant dive destinations. The trick to a truly successful and rewarding dive holiday in Bali is to understand how it

A FEW TRUTHS ABOUT BALI

Truth No 1 - None of the world class diving is on Kuta's doorstep. It is not possible to buy a half-day dive trip and expect good diving.

Truth No 2 - Bali is not a huge island BUT getting from A to B is a wonderland of sights and takes much longer than mere kilometres suggest. Splitting your holiday is the best way to make the most of Bali diving (and sightseeing).

Truth No 3 - Most people are tempted to Bali by the incredible package deals (understandably) but travellers do not always realise they can stay on after the package is over or split the package and do their own thing in the middle. Using package deals to your advantage allows travellers to get the best of both worlds and miss nothing.

works, know where the great diving areas are and use the Bali tourist phenomenon to your advantage.

Today, professional tour operators survive amongst the not-so-professional by understanding what customers want and making sure they provide only the very best dive experiences.

This is a brief guide to get you started.

WHERE TO DIVE?

1 & 4. Mystery Point, North of Tulamben, favourite spot of Tony Medcraft, Tulamben Wreck Divers.
2. Fantasea Wall, Tulamben.
3. Salang Drop-off.

Nusa Penida, Nusa Lembongan & Nusa Ceningan

This group of small islands south-east of Bali is recognised by experienced divers, photographers and marine biologists as one of Bali's most exhilarating dive locations. It is here you will find the illusive Sunfish (July through November) and all the really big fish!

The excellent high action adventure diving in this area is due to the islands fringing a deep seaway channel which moves large volumes of water between the Indian Ocean and the Java Sea. With the upwellings and currents, the big fish come to feed on the nutrient-rich waters.

Predominantly drift diving, famous dive sites include: Blue Corner, Crystal Bay, Toyapakeh and SD. There are also beautiful healthy reefs with almost no coral bleaching. It is fantastic to see these huge beds of coral disappearing into the distance and, needless to say, the marine life they support is equally breathtaking.

Area Overview

Bali access point: Kuta, Legian, Tuban, Jimbaran, Nusa Dua, Denpasar – boats leave from Benoa Harbour. Transport provided

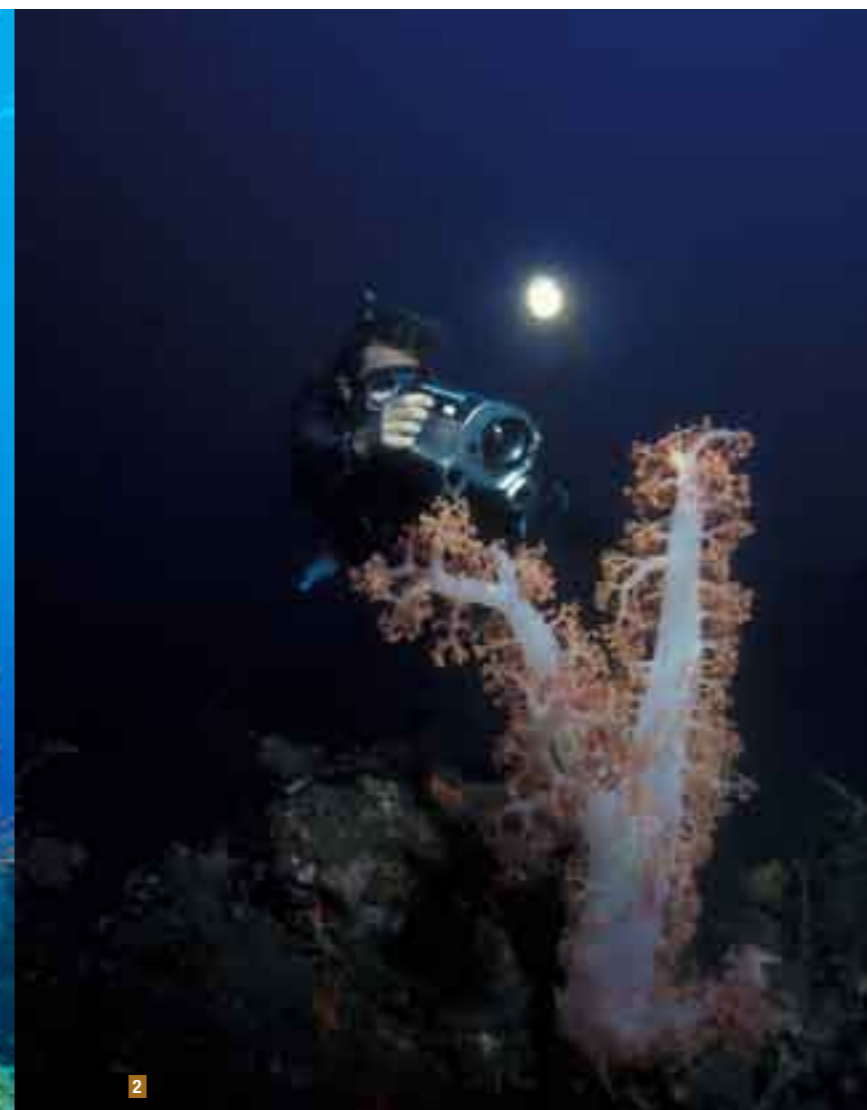
Overall rating: 7/10

Photo ops: 7/10

Expect to see: Lovely reefs with healthy hard and soft coral beds, plenty of fish life including sea snakes and blue ribbon eels. On the more advanced dives expect to see rays (Bull and Spotted), barracuda, reef sharks, whalers, Manta rays and, if you are really lucky, the fabulous Mola Mola (Sunfish) and whalesharks.

Added incentives: Possibility of staying in lovely beachside Hai Tide Huts on Lembongan and diving 'in situ'. Not travelling everyday means more diving and a wider variety of sites – it is also much more relaxing.

Need to know: Blue Corner is an advanced dive due to the currents but most of the other sites are intermediate. A trip to this area is at least one whole day – more if you stay in the beachside huts.



Padang Bai, Candidasa

Padang Bai is a small, scenic and busy fishing village and port. The reefs in the area all have white bottoms and the diving can be absolutely stunning.

Tepekong, a short boat ride from Padang Bai and an even shorter hop from Candidasa, is a volcanic hump rising out of the water. Underwater this area is covered with medusa-like coral heads absolutely adorned with blood-red sea fans, tunicates and various sponges. The competition for space is unbelievable. A drift dive, Tepekong can have strong currents but you are often rewarded with the sight of big pelagic fish and, sometimes, Sunfish. Grey reef sharks are also common in the area.

Gili Mimpang consists of three mini rock islands, slope and walls 12 minutes by speed boat from Padang Bai. This area has excellent coral coverage and variety with a 95 per cent chance of seeing sharks and occasionally Manta rays and Sunfish. Good variety of reef fish. A highlight is Shark Junction, one of the few spots to get a shot of a swimming shark from underneath. Note that around new moon diving is only enjoyable for the experienced diver because of strong and tricky currents.

The Blue Lagoon is a five-minute boat ride from Padang Bai harbour and both north and south sections are excellent dive sites. The southern part of the reef drops vertically to 20 metres and continues in a sandy area. The underwater landscape is dominated by up to four-metre high soft coral and ledges hiding large spiny lobsters. Within a short distance a large staghorn coral field stretches in eight metres of depth, alive with oriental sweetlips, basslets and schools of glassfish. Finally, hard coral fields replace the sandy area.

Area Overview

Bali access point: Area & villages surrounding Padang Bai

Overall rating: 7/10

Photo ops: 6/10

Expect to see: Big pelagic fish around Tepekong due to currents, and lovely reefs around Padang Bai. Two extremes but perfectly suited dive types.

Added incentives: Surrounding water garden and temples.

Need to know: Beware of strong currents at Tepekong and on the new moon at Gili Mimpang.

WHERE TO DIVE?

Tulamben Wreck Divers Resort



Scuba Seraya Resort



Tulamben, Amed, Rubaya

There is a fantastic variety of dive sites in this area but the most famous is the Liberty Wreck off the beach at Tulamben. At 120 metres long, the wreck – previously an American supply ship – rests at a 90-degree angle with the deck facing the sea side.

Anchored off the coast of Lombok, the ship was hit by a Japanese torpedo during World War II. The American Navy's plan to tow the ship to Singaraja Harbour (north Bali) failed as the harbour was completely occupied, so the ship was intentionally stranded on the rocky beach of Tulamben. In 1963 Mount Agung (the volcano which towers over Tulamben) erupted and the magma flow pressed the ship back into the sea where it presently rests at a depth of range of three to 29 metres. Coral has coated the wreck turning it into a new home for an extraordinary number of fish, coral and invertebrates.

The Liberty Wreck is an absolute underwater wonderland of marine life. Schools of trevally, bream, fusilier and anthias mill all over and around the wreck, often following you during the dive. Batfish, large sweetlips, angelfish, butterflyfish and anemonefish (with resident anemones of course) hover under ledges and in crevices. Lionfish, scorpionfish, hawkfish, Bumphead parrotfish, pufferfish and coral trout are everywhere, as are the gobies, blennies, shrimps and dotybacks out on the sand flats. Napoleon wrasse and barracuda are regularly spotted around the wreck.

This wreck is simply alive with life; corals, sponges and gorgonian fans are breathtaking along with the infinite invertebrate life within them. It is simply a stunning dive site with an endless variety of marine species in, on and around the wreck.

The Liberty Wreck, however, is not the only brilliant dive site in this area. Reefs, walls and drop-offs abound with new dive sites being found all the time.

Amed and Rubaya both have similar dive sites. Lovely reefs, drop-offs and clear water. At Amed diving in a traditional Balinese fishing boat tops off the experience.

Area Overview

Bali access point: Tulamben, Amed, Rubaya, Amlapura and surrounding villages

Overall rating: 10/10 for variety – something for everyone.

Photo ops: 10/10

Expect to see: Healthy corals, brilliant marine life on wreck, huge gorgonians and barrel sponges, Bumphead parrotfish, Napoleon wrasse, reef sharks and barracuda and so on ... too many to mention.

Added incentives: Excellent access to water gardens, paddy fields, temples, volcanos and general sightseeing. Brilliant diving from the shore. Professional Tulamben Tank Carriers who, without complaint (and payment by the dive operators), carry all your equipment on their heads to the beach!

Need to know: This area often gets very busy so it is worth booking in advance

Menjangan Island

In the far north-west in Bali, Menjangan Island is a marine reserve and features excellent walls and corals. The diving is only accessible by local boat which is just delightful.

Area Overview

Bali access point: Menjangan and surrounding areas, including Lovina.

Overall rating: 8/10 for variety – something for everyone.

Photo ops: 8/10

Expect to see: Healthy wall diving with wonderfully healthy corals of all types, brilliant marine life including gorgonians, barrel sponges, Bumphead parrotfish, Napoleon wrasse, reef sharks and barracuda.

Need to know: Going with a known operator is advised.





Tulamben Bay is one of Indonesia's successful models of eco-tourism. One unique sight that can only be seen at Tulamben is the porter service for scuba divers provided by women from the local village. From girls as young as twelve to the grandmas, all exhibit a prowess that will leave even the strongest divers' agape. With a weight belt slung casually over their shoulders, and wearing only rubber flip-flops, they carry the fully set-up scuba tanks, complete with BCs and regulators... on their heads! With 20-kilogram or more loads balanced precariously, and with the posture of ballerinas, they skilfully maneuver their way up and down the beach of fist-sized round pebbles. Even with rubber boots and nothing in hand, divers are often seen tripping over.

The women are remunerated by the dive and resort operators, the money shared on a communal basis amongst the members of the village. As a result of income earned from the divers, the local fishermen voluntarily stay away from fishing in Tulamben Bay. No conservation rules and guidelines are required; just the simple concept of tourist dollars going directly to the local people to support their livelihood. Through this we learn that we must support the local people to preserve the sea.] sd

RECOMMENDED OPERATORS

Nusa Penida, Lembongan & Beyond

Queen of the Sea, offers special 4 day liveboard trips of the best of Bali – Tulamben, Gili Islands, Lombok, Nusa Penida & Nusa Lembongan. Departures also to Komodo and Raja Ampat.
Tel: (61) 7 55934649 or (61 361) 742 5604
Email: sales@queenofthesea.info
Website: www.queenofthesea.info

Bali Hai Diving Adventures provide a variety of diving adventures and can also organise six-day diving safaris and overnight diving on Lembongan Island.
Tel: (62 361) 724 062 Email: diverse@indosat.net.id
Website: www.scubali.com

Tulamben, Menjangan, Candidasa – Road Safari

A range of operators offer diving safaris in Bali, some recommendations:

AQUAMARINE DIVING BALI
Tel: (62 361) 730 107 Email: info@AquaMarineDiving.com
Website: www.AquaMarineDiving.com

BARUNA
Tel. : (62 361) 753820 E-mail: baruna@indosat.net.id
Website: www.komodo-divencruise.com

ENA DIVE CENTRE
Tel: (62 361) 288829
Email: enadive@denpasar.wasantara.net.id
Website: www.enadive.co.id

YOS MARINE ADVENTURES
Tel: (62 361) 773774 Email: yosbali@indosat.net.id
Website: www.yosdiving.com

Tulamben – On Location

Scuba Seraya Resort – boutique resort on its own small bay 3km before Tulamben. Amazing critter site in front of the resort and close access to the delights of Tulamben.
Tel: (62 812) 3811563 Email: scubaseraya@eksadata.com
Website: www.scubaseraya.com

Tulamben Wreck Divers – great value for diving and accommodation. Small, thoughtfully designed resort (only 7 rooms from deluxe to penthouse) with swimming pool, dive centre and internet café attached.
Tel: (62 363) 23400 Email: info@tulambenwreckdivers.com
Website: www.tulambenwreckdivers.com

Tauch Terminal Bali – Larger, older resort with dive centre attached. Attracts large numbers of German and European visitors ('Tauch' being German for dive). Comfortable accommodation in stylish rooms in tropical setting.
Tel: (62 361) 730200 E-mail: resort@tulamben.com
Website: www.tulamben.com