



## Banda Sea – Raja Ampat

Combine the historic Banda Sea with the islands of Raja Ampat!

The Banda Sea, with its spice islands played an important role in history in the 15th to the 17th Century. For centuries the indigenous people traded with nutmeg and thus came into the focus of the Europeans, because this special seasoning was found only on these islands. The islands were first colonized by the Portuguese before the Dutch took over the colony in fierce fighting. Meanwhile, the islands are again visited by sailors, fishermen and divers, especially due to the extraordinary world of fish. Because many remains of the colonies are still visible, this area is especially exciting to visit.

West Papua is a unique dive region. The best-known archipelago is "Raja Ampat" which means "4 kings". The area has over 1,500 islands. The four main islands are Misool, Salawati, Batanta and Waigeo.

The Indonesian archipelago of Raja Ampat lies in the Coral Triangle. This expanse of 40,000 square kilometres of marine territory and pristine reefs make these waters a diving haven second to none. Reputed to be the most biodiverse marine habitat on Earth, Raja Ampat is home to many species not found anywhere else. Spectacular, is a word often used to describe this region and is irresistible to divers.

Photo-and videographers find the best opportunities to create macro shots at its finest. But also, wide-angle shots of the beautiful reef life are recommended. There are countless dive sites, all with different character.

The attentive viewer can find all sorts of "macro-animals" in crevices and on terraces of steep walls. "Raja Ampat" is also a Mecca for lovers of pygmy seahorses. These cute dwarf seahorses are found here in every shape and colour, red, yellow, orange, purple or white. Other places offer an overflowing abundance of fish along exposed underground rock saddles. Napoleon fish, mobulas, white tip reef sharks and schools of other pelagic fish can be seen in the blue when you can drag your attention away from the walls. Manta rays, barracuda, rare wobbegong and epaulette sharks guarantee plenty of variety.

## Itinerary

Pindito puts great importance to plan the best possible tour for their guests. When planning the route, many factors play an important role. The most important factor is the weather. Since there can be storms in the tropics at any time, Pindito might change routes and itineraries at short notice.

The cruise runs from Sorong, West Papua's capital, to Ambon, the capital of the Moluccas (or vice versa). Here is an example itinerary: The cruise starts from Ambon in direction of Saparua, and Nusa Laut to the Banda Islands. Following the east coast of Ceram we head directly to the islands around Misool. We

continue via Jef Fam into the Dampier Straight before the journey ends in Sorong.

## Nusa Laut

Right in front of the village Ahmed, a varied reef scape with beautiful coral gardens, and no shortage of fish waits for the divers. Schools of surgeon fish, big eye jacks, and a variety of reef fish including barracudas sweeten the dive. With some luck you can even see hammerhead sharks. Another highlight is the night dive under the pier, where we "hunt" critters. Frogfish, scorpion fish, pipefish and many other creatures are on display.

## Banda Neira

Banda Neira is the main island of "Banda Islands", which are part of the Maluku archipelago. The "Banda Islands" consists of 10 small volcanic islands. Visit the old fortress of the Dutchman on Banda Neira or climb a volcano can all be part of our program. Over 20 years ago lava flowed into the sea and formed a hard-coral garden in this "short time".

The reefs here excel through their unique underwater fauna in all colours and shapes. Large schools pass by and the macro world is ever present. With a little luck at dusk dives, the mating ritual of the mandarin fish can be observed. The coral gardens in the lava units with their 5-meter-wide plate corals are just a small sample of what you can see here.

## Koon

A famous dive site which the Pindito lovingly calls "Sh.. place". Everything a diver could wish for can be seen in this canal, which flows towards the Banda Sea. It guarantees a unique school of fish spectacle; giant groupers, large schools of barracudas, snapper, surgeon fish, sweet lips in the midst of beautiful coral. Many a photographer despaired at this place (in a good way!), because you often do not know where to look first. The sometimes violent currents cannot guarantee the best visibility, but it is a good chance to see large fish such as manta rays, sharks and even mobulas.

## Misool

Diving in the endless maze of the islands of Misool is a very special treat for any diver. It is paradise for macro enthusiasts but encounters with larger fish such as manta rays are often possible. Misool is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world with fish, corals, sponges, soft corals, shrimps, crabs and countless nudibranchs and other invertebrates. Huge shoals of sardines are a definite highlight. Soft corals and sea fans (diameter of 3-4 meters) in all sizes and colors dominate the underwater landscape.

One of Pindito's special places is called "Vreni's Garden". It is a legendary dive site that has it all, because of its diverse landscape. Overhangs, huge caverns with swim throughs, lush steep walls with all kinds of corals are found here.

## The Dampier straight

The Dampier straight separates the "Birdshead" Peninsula from Waigeo and Mansuar. The name comes from the Dutch colonial times. It refers to the shape of the peninsula on the map, but it is also a paradise for many rare bird species.

Here the Pacific Ocean meets the Halmahera Sea, with an explosion of marine life as a consequence. With regular strong currents, big fish feel especially comfortable. Manta rays, reef sharks, different schools of mackerel, tuna and barracuda are seen again and again. Even dolphins and whales (Bryde's whales, pilot whales) keep spending time in the Dampier straight. Since May 2011, we offer a special Whale-Macro tour that combines the macro-diving with whale and dolphin watching. This tour is accompanied by a marine expert in whale and dolphin behaviour.