

## Raja Ampat (Misool, Dampier Strait & Wayag)

from: Sorong, to: Sorong

Please note: this is a sample itinerary. Itineraries may change without further notice due to weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances.



Raja Ampat is right in the heart of the Coral Triangle and has over 1,500 islands. Many scientists believe Raja Ampat has the most coral and fish diversity in the world! Raja means King and Ampat means Four – Four Kings. The four kings are the main islands in Raja Ampat – Waigeo, Batanta, Salawati and Misool.

Starting from Sorong in West Papua we head south to Misool. Misool's small surrounding islands are soft coral paradise and another area of Raja Ampat. With its abundance of stunning dive sites and the natural beauty of karst limestone, jungle clad islands, this area invites us to linger for several days.

Misool can be divided into many areas where we can spend the whole day at a selection of amazing dive sites. Daram is in the very east of these islands and has inviting names such as Candy Store, Andiamo and Warna Berwarna (meaning Colourful Colour!) The sea fans forests here have to be seen to be believed!

In the iconic areas of Boo, Fiabecet and Yuliet we look through the iconic Boo Windows, with tonnes of fish surrounding us. We explore fabulous dive sites like Shadow Reef (aka Magic Mountain), Nudibranch Rock, Batu Kecil, Whale Rock, Boo West Corner and Yuliet Kecil. And if we are lucky, we see the majestic Giant and Reef Manta rays around here. Admire large coral heads covered in soft corals, maybe spotting the famous Santa Clause Pygmy Seahorse, while schools of Barracudas and Batfish might pass by. Our eagle-eyed dive masters will look for a 'Walking Shark' (Epaulette Shark) on a night dive at Romeo.

Sagof, Wagmab, Farondi offer us stunning underwater walls, overhangs and cave structures plus amazing macro, such as Nudibranchs, Flatworms, Anemone Crabs and all kinds of shrimps. In this area, we have the opportunity to visit the wonderful Lagoons, a must-see place, with its iconic bee-hiveshaped karst limestone formations and hard coral colonies at the bases of these amazing geological structures. If the tide is high enough our crew will take you to the secret bay right at the back!

There are also lagoons at Wayilbatan, including the Love Lagoon. The hike up the steep stairs is well worth the view. A drift dive through a channel covered in sea fans at Neptune Fan Sea is the perfect place to cool off after the hot walk. Wedding Cake and Barracuda Rock are other stunning dive sites in this area.

It is a long crossing up to Penemu so on the last day of diving in Misool we will do two dives before heading north. Famous Melissa's Garden awaits us with its spectacular, healthy and wide-spread hard coral plateau in the shallows. At Keruo Wall we can admire large gorgonian sea fans and lovely reef tops, and we might also explore My Reef and Batu Rufus. A short hike to the viewpoint of Penemu offers a spectacular view of the lagoons and its surrounding islands.

Next, we make our way to Wofoh. Wofoh has several unique dive sites easily reachable from one mooring point, allowing us to relax in this incredibly scenic area. On one side, we will have the backdrop of Wofoh and Taman Wofoh, two small islands with pristine white coral sand beaches and on the other side we can take in vistas of the forested mountains and valleys of West Waigeo. The dive sites at Wofoh are famous for stunning black coral forests, where schooling fish are on the constant run from larger predatory fish. The walls are interesting with ledges and shallow caverns where it is not uncommon to find wobbegong sharks. Wofoh has some very healthy hard corals in the shallows, where dense schools of anthias and damsels can be found.

We will do one or two dives at Wofoh before heading into Aljui Bay. Our afternoon and night dive will be at Aljui Bay, where we will be on a critter hunt. Inside this bay, there is also an opportunity to take a little tour to visit the pearl farm and learn all about how pearls are grown. A late afternoon dive at the pearl farm jetty might be possible and it can be full of schooling fish and wobbegong sharks. During the night dive, it is not unusual to find macro favourites like toadfish, octopus and Epaulette walking sharks.

An even more stunning panorama can be indulged at world-famous Wayag, which is in the very north and across the equator in the northern hemisphere. Uninhabited and incredibly picturesque, Wayag Island is an icon of Raja Ampat. Covering a total area of 155,000 hectares it is known for its beautiful atolls and lagoons. Breath taking at every turn, in Wayag you will find pristine beaches and the unique Karst islands that resemble mushrooms sprouting from the sea. In the morning, for the fit and adventurous, we will climb to the top of Mount Pindito for the fantastic views. We can then do two dives. The dives at Far Out Rock and Figure Eight are characterised by pretty sloping reefs where we look for nudibranchs, leaf fish and moray eels. In the afternoon, we will go for a scenic tour in the speedboats. Look for baby manta rays and turtle as we cruise around. At the ranger station, we look for black tip reef sharks swimming over the sand in the shallows.

The following day will be spent on the western tip of Gam island, at an island called Yangeffo, which protects a sheltered bay. This small area has multiple world class dive sites. Famous ones like Citrus Ridge and Mayhem always amaze divers with their vibrancy and biodiversity. The area here is probably so abundant due to the surrounding mangroves. Beautiful hard and soft corals grow under and among the roots of the trees, so a dive at Mangrove Ridge is truly enjoyable. And our crew will be happy to take you out in the dingy to snorkel in the mangroves in between dives. Sunsets and sunrises are very special at our mooring point at Yangeffo: as the sun drops, the surrounding forested hills become alive with flocks of Sulphur Crested Cockatoo's and Blyth's Hornbills emerge to return to their roosting places.

The remainder of our adventure will be spent diving in the Dampier Strait. We will select the best dive sites for the experience of the divers and according to the current and weather conditions. Here you can expect to dive at some world class, adrenalin-packed dive sites such as Cape Kri, Chicken Reef, Sleeping Barracuda, Sardine Reef, Mioskon and Blue Magic. Our guides can take you to places where the current meets the reef head on, where you can witness predatory fish like for black tip, white tip and grey reef sharks, giant trevally, Spanish mackerel and dog tooth tuna hunting huge schools of smaller fish like fusiliers and big eye jacks. Sea mounts and long reefs offer this hunting action as well as sightings of bumphead parrotfish, napoleon wrasse, turtles and manta rays.

At the other end of the Dampier Strait is the island of Arborek with a great jetty dive. Lalosi is a drift dive completely full of fusiliers and with a chance to see wobbegong sharks. The well-known manta aggregation sites of Manta Sandy and Manta Ridge are also in this area. Sawandarek is on the island of Mansuar and the dive on the reef and jetty in front of the village is a fantastic dive. You can also visit Papua Explorer's coral restoration project here. For those interested we can take a walk around the village at Sawandarek or Arborek.

Our last day will offer two more action-packed dives in the Dampier Strait. We can also arrange for a bird watching trip on the last morning to see the enigmatic and endemic Red Bird of Paradise. After lunch, we make our way back to Sorong for hearty goodbyes.