

snorkelventure

MAGAZINE

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SNORKELING WITH INDONESIA'S GENTLE GIANTS

Snorkeling with whale sharks in the remote bays of Indonesia for unforgettable and prolonged encounters

MUCK SNORKELING, NOT WHAT YOU MIGHT THINK

Discover the hidden world of muck snorkeling, where volcanic sands reveal fascinating marine life and unique underwater treasures

CAMERA COMPARISONS

We compare popular underwater cameras like the GoPro and the Olympus TG-6 for your next adventure.

SV CHARITY PARTNERS IN ACTION

See how our charity partners are making waves in marine conservation through impactful initiatives worldwide.

/01

CONTENT

04 SNORKELING NEWS

Dive into ocean discoveries, inspiring conservation efforts, and eco-friendly gear updates.

06 ON TOUR IN 24 WITH SNORKEL VENTURE

12 MUCK SNORKELING, NOT WHAT YOU MIGHT THINK

Hidden world of muck snorkeling, where volcanic sands reveal fascinating marine life and unique underwater treasures.

16 CHARITY PARTNERS IN ACTION

See how charity partners are making waves in marine conservation through impactful initiatives worldwide.

26 WAY OUT WEST KOMODO

West Komodo's remote snorkeling havens, brimming with vibrant reefs, abundant marine life, and serene underwater encounters.

31 SNORKELING WITH INDONESIA'S GENTLE GIANTS

Snorkeling with whale sharks in the remote bays of Indonesia for unforgettable and prolonged encounters.

38 CAMERA COMPARISONS

We compare popular underwater cameras like the GoPro and the Olympus TG-6 for your next adventure.

41 THE PROBLEM WITH VIDEO LIGHTS AND FLASHES FOR SNORKELERS

The challenges of underwater lighting for snorkelers and learn how to capture vibrant images with proper techniques.

44 SNORKEL VENTURE RASH GUARDS

Eco-friendly rash guards made from recycled ghost nets and support marine conservation with every purchase.

46 THE STORY OF MISOOL RESORT AND THE MISOOL FOUNDATION

Impact of Misool Foundation's marine conservation efforts and how they're revitalizing Raja Ampat's biodiversity.

49 2025/2026 TOUR SCHEDULE

52 IN FOCUS WITH MARCUS BLAKE

Capture Indonesia's underwater beauty with tips for photographing split shots and Mola Mola encounters.

56 THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF FROGFISH!

Explore the strange and captivating lives of frogfish, masters of disguise in the underwater world.



02

EDITOR'S LETTER

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Welcome to the first edition of [Snorkel Venture Magazine](#). This biannual magazine is designed to inspire and inform, whether you're planning your next snorkeling getaway, curious about marine conservation efforts, or seeking tips to improve your underwater experiences. In these pages, you'll find breathtaking travel destinations, essential gear reviews, and firsthand accounts from people who are making waves in ocean conservation.

On that note I want to say thank you to everyone who joined us on tour in 2024, together we raised 55,000 USD for our charity partners through our [Every Trip & Rash Guard Program](#). Our main feature in this edition will give you a bit of insight into the people driving these charities forward and what you can do to further support their endeavors.

Also in this edition Alex Lindbloom has an extensive destination review of West Komodo, plus Snorkeling with Giants in remote Indonesia and an Introduction to Muck Snorkeling.

When it comes to photography we discuss the problem with video lights and flashes for snorkelers as well as a comparison guide

between a Go Pro, your smartphone & the Olympus TG-6.

If you're reading all this chances are that snorkeling is more than just a pastime; it's your doorway into a vibrant, interconnected ecosystem. From coral reefs teeming with life to encounters with majestic manta rays and weird and wonderful critters, each snorkel we take immerses us in nature's artistry.

But this journey is about more than just exploration; it's about fostering stewardship. The health of our oceans affects us all. Together, we can learn how to reduce our impact, support sustainable practices, and become advocates for the seas that enchant us.

Thank you for joining us as we explore the beauty and importance of our underwater world. Let's celebrate its wonders—and work together to ensure its future.

Happy snorkeling,

Ben Stokes

Editor, Snorkel Venture Magazine



N

Our Oceans

If you haven't seen it yet, make sure you check out the new Netflix series - Our Oceans. It's an amazing natural history series showcasing some seriously awesome never-before-seen or documented behaviors from fish and everything else that lives in the ocean. For example, an octopus that uses its siphon like a blow-dart gun to shoot small stones at fish, or bumphead parrotfish ramming each other like bighorn sheep!

I'm pleased to have a little sequence in the Indian Oceans episode that I filmed in Bali back in 2022. One of the ongoing themes of the series is the effects

Eco-Friendly Gear for Women

Fourth Element, one of the industry's leading manufacturers of high-quality eco-friendly snorkeling gear and attire, has just released a new full-body snorkeling skin they're calling the **Fin Hydrosuit**. This eye-catching and brilliantly designed snorkeling skin is made out of recycled nylon from old fishing nets. It features a front zipper to get in and out of easily, thumb holes in the sleeve, and foot straps that keep the cuffs from riding up your arm or leg. This recycled material is not only durable and awesome-looking but offers a UV protection factor of 50+.

Order yours at <https://fourthelement.com/product/womens-fin-hydrosuit/>



The Reef-World Foundation Celebrates 20 years

We're proud to announce that one of our Conservation Partners, The Reef-World Foundations, has just celebrated twenty years of marine conservation! The Reef-World Foundation is best known for its Green Fins Initiative, a global outreach program that "provides the only internationally recognized code of conduct used to reduce the environmental impact of the diving and snorkeling industry." "The Green Fins Initiative is proud to have supported more than 1,300 different local dive and snorkel businesses around the

by Alex Lindbloom

us humans are having on the planet, like habitat destruction, ocean plastics, etc.

Mantas are filter feeders that feed on things like plankton and plankton which is pushed around by the ocean currents which ends up collecting in bays in dense clouds. Ocean plastics are pushed around by these same currents as plankton and it too collects in the same bays—in giant floating rafts. Mantas then come to feed in these bays, targeting the plankton, but no doubt ingest a fair amount of microplastics. It's a sad reality for our oceans, but the more awareness we can all generate about such issues, the better our chances of stimulating a radical change in our collective behaviours are.

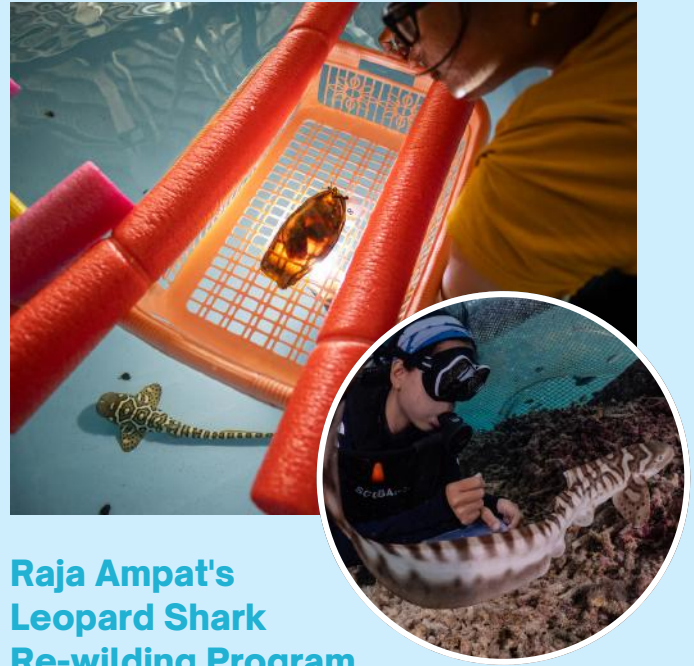
Basically, if you love the ocean and or just love things that are awesome, this series is for you. Visit [Netflix.com](https://www.netflix.com) for more information



world in meeting their sustainability goals over the past 20 years.”

As we move into one of the hottest years on record for the ocean which has inevitably brought on the fourth global coral reef bleaching event, the importance of supporting the marine conservation efforts by groups like The Reef World could not be more apparent. Just like Thrive Conservation and the Misool Foundation, your donations to our Every Trip Campaign have helped us make regular financial contributions to the Reef-World so they can continue to fight the good fight...

Visit <https://reef-world.org/> for more information.



Raja Ampat's Leopard Shark Re-wilding Program

For those of you who have been to Raja Ampat's Misool Resort in the last year or so, you will likely have encountered one of the many baby leopard sharks being reared at the resort's aquarium and sea pen just off the South Beach. Misool Resort is one of two locations in Raja Ampat where the StAR Project is hatching leopard shark eggs brought in from aquariums around the world, monitoring the newly hatched leopard around the clock, tagging them, and then releasing them when they reach an acceptable size back into the water of Raja Ampat.

Raja Ampat used to be home to these beautiful sharks. However, due to illegal and mismanaged fishing activities, the population was essentially wiped out a long time ago. The goal of this groundbreaking project is to re-wild Raja Ampat's waters with a projected 50-100 adolescent leopard sharks by 2025, and up to 500 or more in ten years. These numbers will, in theory, bring the leopard shark population to a recoverable level as they begin reproducing. As of November 2024, the StAR Project released a total of 20 sharks just last year. With more eggs having recently hatched in Misool's aquarium, and more eggs being delivered shortly, it's only a matter of weeks before more leopard sharks are released back into the wild and the hatch-rear-release cycle continues!

Both Thrive Conservation and the Misool Foundation are some of the founding partners of the StAR Project and we are thrilled to see their hard work pay off! Thanks to your donations via our Every Trip Campaign and our Rash Guard Program we've been able to make regular contributions to both of these outstanding marine conservation groups.

For more information on this project visit <https://www.misoolfoundation.org/reshark>

ON TOUR IN 24 WITH SNORKEL VENTURE



Here's a collection of our favorite images from our 2024 tour season. We took a total of **536** of you fabulous snorkeling enthusiasts on tour with us to **six** different countries and **19** different snorkeling destinations over the **34** tours we ran. Thank you all very much for the love and support you've shown us, we very much look forward to seeing many of you again in 2025!





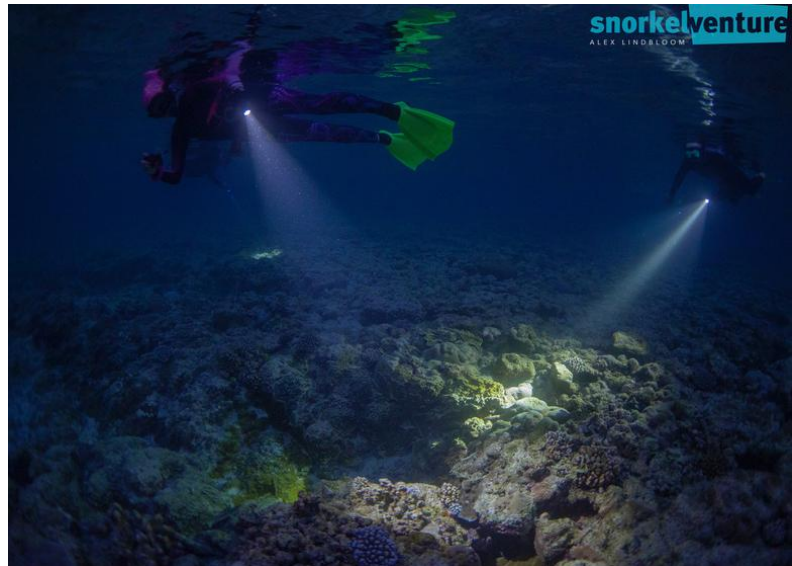


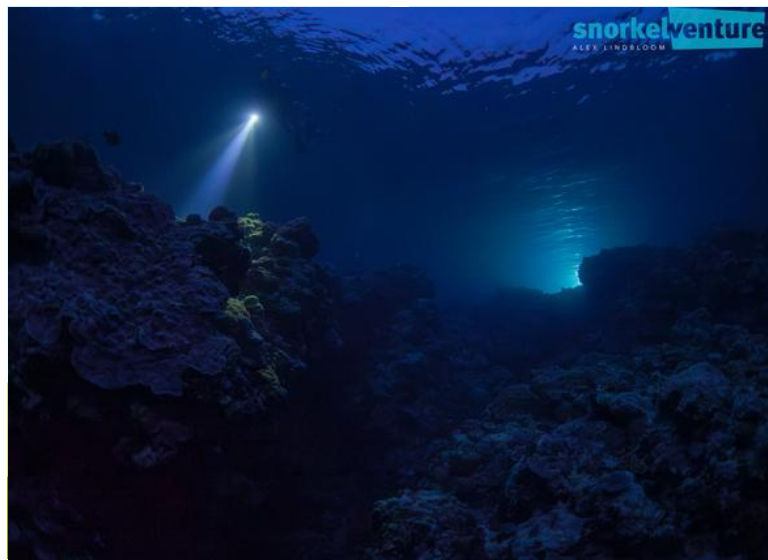
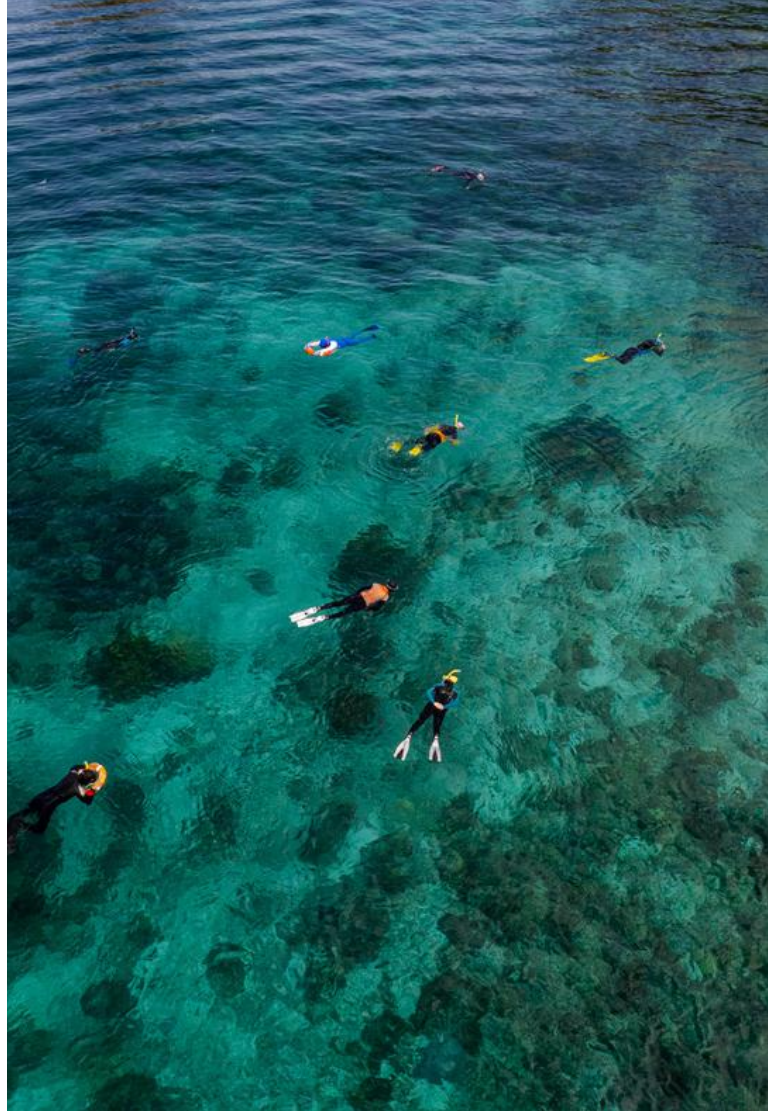


snorkelventur
MARCUS BLAKE



snorkelventur
ALEX LINDA LOOM





04

MUCK SNORKELING, NOT WHAT YOU MIGHT THINK



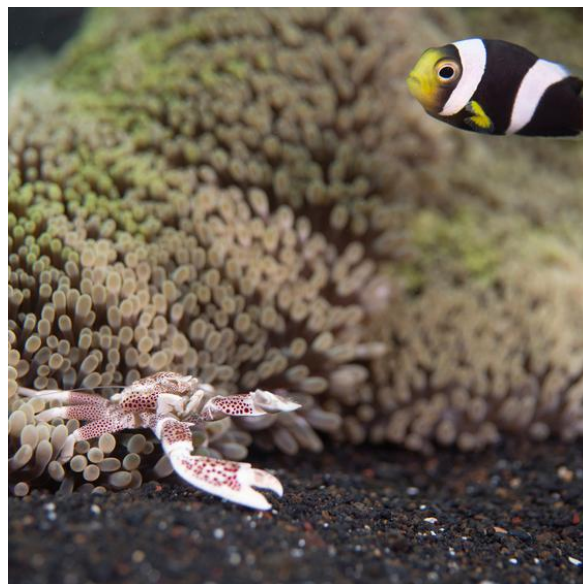
Words and Photos by
Alex Lindbloom


Whoever was the marketing professional responsible for developing, executing, and overseeing global branding for the genre of snorkeling characterized by the pursuit of some of the ocean's most fascinating and bizarre creatures—creatures like seahorses, frogfish, and nudibranchs—completely missed the mark when they decided to call it “**Muck Snorkeling.**”

So, what is muck snorkeling then? Well, muck snorkeling is basically the same as your tropical reef snorkeling, only muck snorkeling takes place in areas where there is more sand, usually volcanic black sand which tends to cultivate a diverse garden of sponges, sea grass, a few corals, and beautiful patches of algae. This combination of nutrient-rich substrates and the life that grows from it provides the perfect environment for critters. By critters, I mean things

like seahorses, flying gurnards, sea moths, frogfish, ghost pipefish, scorpionfish, octopuses, snake eels, and so much more. While a few of these creatures can be found on coral reefs, most of them—seahorses for example—will really only be found on muck sites as this is their natural habitat, not reefs.

Muck sites will vary a lot in terms of how they look and what sort of corals, sponges, and algae they have—if any at all, depending on where you are in the world and which site you are at. Some sites will be made up almost entirely of black sand with a few patches of sea grass and algae here and there, while others will be more balanced in their composition of sponges, sand, and corals. Some muck sites will even resemble your typical coral reef, the only thing that sets them apart is the types of creatures that inhabit them.



An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. In the upper left, a small building with a corrugated metal roof sits on a rocky shore. The water is clear and greenish, with several divers visible in the lower right. A large, rectangular concrete structure is partially submerged in the water. The background is filled with lush green trees and palm fronds.

“The combination of nutrient-rich substrates and the life that grows from it provides the perfect environment for critters”

The makeup of the site will dictate what types of critters you are looking for. For example, if you're in an area where there's a lot of sand, you will be looking for things like snake eels, Indian Ocean Walkman, various species of octopus, flying gurnards, nudibranchs, and anything else that either hides in the sand or hunts on the sand. If there's a mixture of sand and sponges then you'll be looking for everything I just mentioned, plus ambush predators like frogfish and scorpionfish who like to camouflage themselves amongst the sponges. If you're swimming over a muck site that more closely resembles a coral reef only instead of your typical hard and soft corals it's a vast network of sponges, crinoids, and colorful algae, then it's very likely that you're going to be searching for species like moray eels, nudibranchs, cowfish, and ambush predators like frogfish, leaf scorpionfish, and if you are very lucky, rhinopias.

“I'll admit, muck snorkeling can seem a bit strange when you first jump in, especially if it's a site composed primarily of sand.”

All the colors and textures of the reef are absent, as is the marine life—at first glance. However, once you get in the zone and your eyes adjust to the change in terrain, that dark sand punctuated by unusual colonies of sponges will quickly become a beautiful treasure trove. Each sponge becomes a potential hiding place for a frogfish, every patch of seagrass becomes the hunting grounds for a seahorse, and every trail in the sand could lead you to a flying gurnard or an Indian Ocean Walkman. Instead of the sensory overload that a reef can deliver to us snorkelers, a muck snorkel becomes a much more serene and relaxing experience punctuated by abrupt moments of joy and excitement when you spot a cool critter.

So, where are the best places to muck snorkel? Well, Indonesia reigns supreme when it comes to this unique type of snorkeling. The general diversity of marine life in Indonesian waters complimented by the fact that the country has around 130 volcanoes

spread out over its 17,000 islands just sets it so far ahead of anywhere else in the world when it comes to finding critters. Lembeh Strait in north Sulawesi is probably the most famous of all the muck snorkeling destinations in Indonesia. The sites here are typically more sandy in makeup, but the critter density in Lembeh is on another level. Alor is another of Indonesia's fantastic muck snorkeling destinations, and one of my personal favorites as several of the muck sites are quite beautiful and offer snorkelers predictable encounters with the more seldom-seen species like mandarin fish, frogfish, seahorses, and even rhinopias. Ambon is also home to some wonderful muck snorkeling sites that share a lot of similarities with Alor in that the sites are really quite pretty, and the chances of finding those more elusive critters can be great!

For many people, muck snorkeling can be an acquired taste, like someone who has developed a pallet for aged cheeses that tend to be a bit on the smelly side. What once used to be something you approached with a healthy dose of apprehension or avoided altogether, suddenly turns into an obsession, something you find yourself craving after trying it a few times!





**GREEN
FINS**

WHY SHOULD WE CHOOSE OUR SUNSCREEN CAREFULLY?

Sunscreen is widely used when swimming, diving and snorkelling.

However, studies have shown some chemical components in sunscreen, including **oxybenzone, octinoxate, nano zinc oxide and nano titanium dioxide**, can have negative impacts on the environment, even in very small doses.

Toxic sunscreen
**will wash off into
marine or freshwater
and could harm corals
and other aquatic life.**

These chemicals have **harmful and sometimes deadly effects** on a wide range of species – including on their immune systems, reproduction, behaviour and resilience.

**THESE EFFECTS CAN LAST
MULTIPLE GENERATIONS.**

You can prevent harmful chemicals entering the water by

**COVERING UP
IN THE SUN**

and/or use sunscreens that **ONLY HAVE NON-NANO ZINC OXIDE OR TITANIUM DIOXIDE** in their active ingredients list. Do not rely on claims like “reef safe”. This is not backed by science.





SNORKEL VENTURE CHARITY PARTNERS IN ACTION

Thanks to everyone who joined us on tour in 2024, in doing so you enabled us to support our charity partners who are making positive changes in the regions that we explore. For every person who traveled with us we donated **100 USD** on your behalf.

We've selected a range of organisations to work with, covering a cross section of conservation initiatives in areas such as protected marine reserves, local community engagement, the protection of endangered sharks and manta rays and coral reef preservation. If you are traveling with us in 2025 we'd also like to thank you as we seek to raise our fund raising to **75,000 USD for the year**.

If you would like to make a further donation to any of these organisations you'll see the details and a QR code at the end of their feature.





The Coral Reef Ambassadors at Reef World

The Reef-World Foundation is a coral reef conservation charity working towards a world where all coral reefs are healthy and thriving. As well as protecting this precious ecosystem they want to ensure there are increased benefits and improved well-being for those who rely on coral reef resources; and that local livelihoods and food security are improved for reef reliant communities.

For over 20 years the charity has worked alongside champions from these local reef communities to develop tools and knowledge enabling direct action in reducing local threats to coral reefs, building their resilience and health.

CORAL REEFS TODAY

Two-thirds of the world’s coral reefs have already been lost due to human activity and according to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change), 70-90% of the remaining coral reefs could disappear in the next 10-15 years if no actions are taken. If they go, the protection, health and well-being of people and our planet will be affected to the point of no return. Without corals and related ecosystems, the ocean would lose a huge amount of biodiversity as coral reefs provide homes to more than 25% of all marine life. These vital ecosystems not only absorb carbon but also supply rainwater, drinking water and oxygen. Additionally, they provide essential livelihoods, drive local economic growth, enhance food security, protect coastlines making them safe for coastal communities, support mental health and well-being, and offer life-saving medicines. Sadly, today, 24% of remaining reefs are in impending danger of collapsing.

WHAT DOES REEF-WORLD DO

The Reef-World Foundation works to inspire and empower people to change this through direct action. They equip governments, reef-dependent local businesses and individuals with practical tools and knowledge to reduce harmful environmental practices and to help them reduce their ecological footprint. Recognising the sizable impact and potential of the scuba diving and snorkelling industry — with 1 million new divers joining the 10 million already certified each year — Reef-World has targeted marine tourism and developed the Green Fins initiative — a proven industry-wide approach to drive scalable positive change for reefs globally.

For over 20 years, Green Fins has been reducing the environmental impact of over 1,300 dive & snorkel operators in over 80 countries. It provides the only globally recognised environmental standards for marine tourism companies. By following the Green Fins Code Of Conduct, everyone has the opportunity to do their bit for coral reefs. Whilst enjoying an incredible marine experience, snorkellers and divers can contribute to the conservation of reefs by behaving in a reef-friendly way. With over 10 million divers in our ocean annually, this makes a significant impact. Reef-World has seen great success with an average 14% improvement in sustainable activities year-on-year among participating marine tourism operators, which translates directly to improved coral reef health.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

But there is more work to do and the situation for coral reefs is critical. The Reef-World team is in high demand to meet the growing requests from national governments and marine tourism operators to help build their capacity and knowledge in the implementation of Green Fins at new and existing locations. We want to share the programme as widely as we can before it's too late. We know the difference Green Fins makes but we can't do it without support.

If you think you would like to support Reef-World's work and help ensure a greater selection of beautiful dive or snorkel spots for you to choose from in the future — please donate! You will also find information on how to sign up to receive more information on Reef-World's work and subscribe to their quarterly newsletter.



Sharks off the menu with **Bite-Back**

For the past 20 years Bite-Back Shark & Marine Conservation, a UK charity, has been trailblazing initiatives to end the trade and consumption of shark products across the country. As a result of its campaigns it's no longer possible to buy shark meat from any mainstream supermarket, the biggest health food retailer took shark cartilage capsules off the shelves in 580 stores, 67 Chinese restaurants removed shark fin soup from menus and, just last year, Britain became the first country in Europe to ban the import and export of shark fins.

On top of that the charity is well known for its groundbreaking campaign Mind Your Language to educate and motivate the media to accurately report shark news without the sensational clickbait headlines that typically define sharks as man-eating monsters. Among the campaign's international supporters is Wendy Benchley, widow of Peter, the author of JAWS.



Two years ago, when the Bite-Back discovered that no educational materials were freely available for teachers to discuss sharks in the classroom, the team set out to create a suite of teacher notes and lesson plans, curated by education experts, and endorsed by wildlife TV presenters. Since its launch, the six week programme has been downloaded by 392 schools.

Campaign director for Bite-Back, Graham Buckingham, said: *“It never fails to surprise us that most people’s ‘knowledge’ of sharks comes from blockbuster movies and newspaper headlines. As a result, fundraising for our work is difficult. So we’re enormously grateful to Snorkel Venture and its customers for supporting our work and generating vital funds that keep us moving forward with projects that have real, tangible results for sharks and the oceans.”*

Next, the charity is developing a set of high impact advertising messages that directly link the conservation of sharks with the health of the oceans and address the importance of sharks and how they positively affect climate change.

Graham said: *“Recently we did some nationwide research and were horrified to discover that 67% of adults in Britain would prefer sharks not to exist. Rather than be discouraged, we’re now working hard on inventive ways to change the narrative around sharks and present the public with compelling information that positions sharks as crucial to life in the oceans and equally important to life on earth. Without sharks, the oceans may no longer generate half the oxygen we breathe or absorb much of the CO2 we generate. Reasons enough, we hope, for people to start to regard sharks as good rather than evil.”*



You can scan this code to find out more about [Bite-Back Shark & Marine Conservation](#) and make a direct donation or view its range of merchandise. Alternatively you can watch its TEDx talk ‘The terrifying truth about sharks’ by scanning this code.





CHARITY PART

in Action

Ray of Hope: *Manta Conservation in Indonesia with The Manta Trust and Indonesian Manta Project*

If you've ever snorkeled alongside a manta ray, you know it's an unforgettable experience. For many of us, encounters like these are life-changing. Yet, many remain unaware that these gentle giants face significant threats and have only recently become the focus of dedicated research and conservation. Over the last 15 years, organizations like The Manta Trust have worked tirelessly to address this gap. By uniting scientists and conservationists, they've built a global network to protect manta and devil rays. In Indonesia, this vital work is led by the Indonesian Manta Project (IMP), a regional affiliate of The Manta Trust.

Indonesia is home to both species of manta and plays a pivotal role in their conservation. As the largest shark and ray fishing nation, the country's manta populations have long faced significant pressures from targeted fishing and bycatch. In 2014, a landmark victory was achieved when both species of manta were granted full protection under Indonesian law, creating the world's largest manta sanctuary. IMP played a key role in this success and continues to support manta monitoring and protection efforts.

IMP operates in key regions including Raja Ampat and the Savu Sea, where mantas face diverse challenges. In Raja Ampat, our research reveals thriving manta populations, but growing tourism presents threats to their fragile habitats. In the Savu Sea, illegal fishing and bycatch remain persistent issues. Through research and advocacy, IMP works to strengthen protections and empower local communities to steward their environment.



Words and Photos by
Sarah Lewis

TNERS

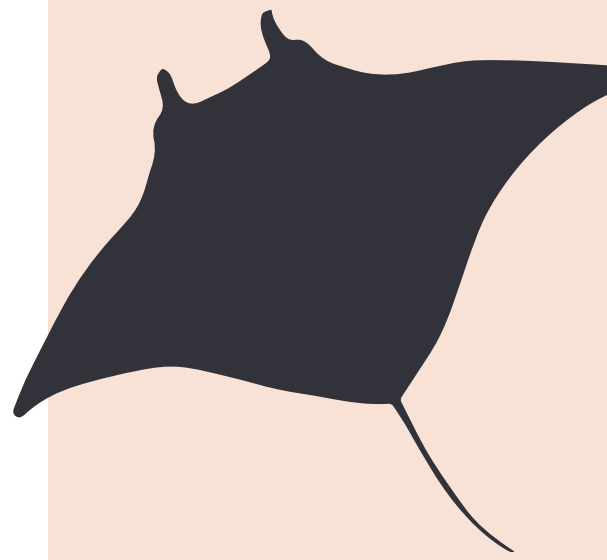


A Vision for the Future

While manta rays still face challenges, we see a ray of hope as recognition of their importance and the need to protect them grows. IMP's success is driven by the dedication of our passionate Indonesian team, supported by our valued partners. Looking ahead to 2025, with Snorkel Ventures' continued partnership, we aim to strengthen our efforts, focusing on empowering the next generation of Indonesian conservationists to protect these iconic species.

Some of our most notable achievements include:

- ❖ Conducting long-term manta population monitoring, contributing critical data to global conservation efforts.
- ❖ Supporting the policy changes that granted full legal protection to manta rays in Indonesia.
- ❖ Training over 50 local environmentalists in manta research techniques, fostering a new generation of conservationists.
- ❖ Reducing manta fishing in key areas through holistic, community-based initiatives.
- ❖ Discovering critical habitats, including Southeast Asia's first-known manta nursery in Wayag Lagoon, Raja Ampat.
- ❖ Designating Heliana Island in Rote as an Important Shark and Ray Area (ISRA) based on our regional manta data.



How You Can Help

Conservation is a collective mission, and we value our partnership with Snorkel Venture, whose responsible approach to travel supports our work and leaves lasting positive impacts.

If you would like to support IMP further, your contributions can make a tangible difference:

- **\$50** can provide marine education materials for local students.
- **\$100** can fund a day of manta fieldwork.
- **\$500** can supply essential research equipment.
- **\$1,000** can sponsor an Indonesian student to join our team as an intern.

By donating, you're not just protecting manta rays—you're supporting communities, fostering education, and empowering future conservation leaders. Together, we can ensure that Indonesia honours its status as the world's largest manta sanctuary.

Scan the QR code or visit

<https://donorbox.org/indonesian-manta-project> to donate now.



Sarah Lewis

Founder & CEO,
Thrive Conservation
Founder & Project Leader,
Indonesian Manta Project
(Manta Trust affiliate)

Sarah Lewis is a dedicated marine biologist and conservationist specializing in the conservation of manta rays since 2009. As the founder and CEO of Thrive Conservation, a nonprofit organization, Sarah leads efforts to amplify conservation initiatives across Indonesia by empowering the next generation of Indonesian conservationists. While manta ray conservation remains a cornerstone of her work, she also addresses a diverse range of challenges, including combating the illegal wild bird trade and supporting marine protected area management.

In 2010, Sarah founded the Indonesian Manta Project, one of the longest-running affiliate projects of the Manta Trust, helping bring significant conservation attention to manta rays in Indonesia. Her efforts played a key role in securing national protection for manta rays in 2014. Over the years, Sarah has worked with NGOs and the Indonesian government to implement community-based solutions for manta conservation. Her work has been featured in outlets such as National Geographic and BBC.

With over a decade of frontline conservation experience, Sarah advocates for a holistic approach to conservation, blending proven strategies with innovative and inclusive practices. She champions empathetic leadership and youthful creativity as key drivers for sustainable change.

Beyond her non-profit work, Sarah is merging her passion for art, nature, and conservation with the founding of Ullassa Gallery. Set to launch in 2025, Ullassa Gallery will bring the beauty of nature into living spaces through fine-art photography, with a portion of profits supporting vital conservation projects.

THRIVE CONSERVATION: NURTURING THE FUTURE OF OUR PLANET

Indonesia, a global treasure trove of biodiversity, boasts the world's most diverse coral reefs, and countless species found nowhere else on Earth. Yet, it is also one of the most critical regions for global conservation, grappling with mounting environmental challenges. Amid these challenges, the past decade has witnessed a growing wave of young Indonesians eager to make a positive change in their country. This surge is a hopeful sign, but opportunities in the field of conservation remain scarce.

Thrive Conservation was founded to bridge this gap. Our mission is rooted in investing in people while actively engaging in high-impact conservation projects. We uncover exceptional early-career Indonesian conservationists and equip them with the resources, mentorship and opportunities they need to evolve into conservation leaders. Thrive believes lasting conservation happens when local leaders take the helm, directly addressing challenges in their own communities.



Creating Change on the Frontlines

At Thrive, we don't just train individuals—we empower them to lead long-term, holistic, and community-driven conservation solutions. Our projects are designed to address critically important conservation issues while strengthening local expertise and building a network of skilled conservationists across Indonesia.

One of our flagship initiatives, the Rote Island Marine Conservation Project, exemplifies this approach. On Rote, Indonesia's southernmost island, we are working with local schools to provide marine conservation education, offering internships to university students, and collaborating with government agencies to improve management and enforcement of the island's Marine Protected Area (MPA). We're also gathering critical data to monitor the health of the marine ecosystem and identify ongoing

threats that need urgent attention. Additionally, we've launched a sustainable seaweed farming initiative that offers local communities an alternative livelihood to the harmful practice of gillnet fishing. This shift helps communities thrive without compromising the health of their environment.

In iconic Raja Ampat, Thrive Conservation is a founding member of the ***Stegostoma tigrinum* Augmentation and Recovery (StAR) project** – a world-first initiative to repopulate zebra sharks in their historic ranges. As of January 2025, 22 sharks have been released, with 25 pups currently in the hatchery. Over the coming months, we expect to receive an additional 20-30 eggs from aquariums, bringing us closer to our goal of releasing 50 pups by 2025.





The Power of Your Support

Our work is only possible because of the generous support from our partners and donors like Snorkel Venture. As we look ahead, we're excited to deepen our impact, support more conservation leaders, and take on new projects that will continue to safeguard Indonesia's biodiversity. But we can't do it alone. Conservation is a collective effort, and every donation helps us continue our vital work. Your support is the fuel that drives our efforts.

Together, We Can Help the Planet Thrive

We invite you to be part of this movement. Scan the QR code below or visit <https://donorbox.org/thrive-conservation-together-we-can-help-the-planet-thrive> to make a donation today.

If you'd like to explore other ways to get involved or support our work, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to us at hello@thriveconservation.org, and let's find new ways to make a difference together.





The South

The snorkeling in the south of Komodo can be exceptional, however, sea conditions in the south can be a little bit on the bouncy side for snorkeling and visibility can be less than ideal, not to mention cold water. That being said, if you have a window where the swell is minimal and have a 3-5mm wetsuit you can have some exceptional snorkeling. One of the best manta spots is in the south of Komodo where on a good day you can find them feeding on the surface or lined up in the channel in big groups!

If you move over to the south of **Rinca Island** (pronounced Rincha) the sea conditions will be much better, but the water is generally still quite cool and it can be a bit green. Once again, if you have a 3-5mm wetsuit and aren't bothered by a bit of plankton in the water, you'll be sure to enjoy the psychedelic mess of colors and critters that the reefs here are known for. Bright orange cup coral colonies, crinoids, hard and soft corals, barrel sponges, sea apples and tunicates cover every inch of the terraced landscape. Hiding amongst this colorful chaos is where you'll hunt for those unusual critters like frogfish, cuttlefish, ornate cephalopods, and even ghost pipefish.





06 WAY OUT WEST KOMODO



Words and Photos by
Alex Lindbloom

Komodo is one of Indonesia's oldest marine protected areas, and probably one of the most famous snorkeling and diving destinations in the world, with people traveling from all over to witness the rich diversity of life that thrives within these waters. Komodo is one of the few places in the world where you can almost guarantee that you'll snorkel alongside manta rays, turtles, reef sharks, and big fish like giant trevallies, groupers, batfish, and barracuda. The reefs are beyond beautiful and there are even some fantastic muck snorkeling sites!

Komodo National Park is made up of 29 islands and covers a total area of 1,733 square kilometers. However, despite the expansiveness of Komodo, most of the snorkeling and diving is contained within a very small area of the park. Although the reefs and marine life are just as prolific throughout the national park and the islands beyond, very few people venture past the northeast point of Komodo Island or south of Padar, leaving the west of Komodo and the south essentially untouched. These remote and seldom visited regions of Komodo, even the islands outside the national park boundaries like Gili Banta, Sumbawa, and Sangeang Volcano, all offer exceptional shallow reefs and encounters with marine life that are on par—if not better—than what you might expect to find in the more popular areas of Komodo. The only difference is, you won't have any other boats, divers, or snorkelers around!

Really, the only reason that these more remote corners of Komodo are seldom visited is the distance from Labuan Bajo. Labuan Bajo is the jumping-off point for Komodo. To arrive at the south or even the very west of Komodo by the typical boats used in that area would take anywhere from three hours to much longer, which is just not practical. A small handful of liveaboards will venture to the south, and only two or three of these liveaboards will spend any time in West Komodo or around islands like Gili Banta or Sangeang. As far as resort-based snorkeling goes, there aren't any reasonable options to explore the south of Komodo from, and only one resort-based option for the west of Komodo and the islands beyond.

The West

The west of Komodo offers much more in terms of available snorkeling sites when compared to the south. First, there is more protection from the elements yielding more amenable surface conditions, warmer water temperatures, and much better visibility. Second, the west is vast—much larger than Eastern Komodo especially when you include Sangeang, Sumbawa, and Gili Banta—so you can easily spend days snorkeling and exploring the area without repeating sites.

West Komodo and Gili Banta can offer quite similar types of snorkeling experiences as their geography and underwater topography are comparable. Both islands are lined with white sand beaches that lead into beautiful bays where the reefs are absolutely stunning. The corals in these bays are a mixture of hard and soft corals with the occasional barrel sponge and sea fan. In most cases, as you move out of the bays where the terrain comes to a point and the current picks up, you'll likely notice a change in landscape, coral, and marine life. In the bays you'll find your typical tranquil reef scene with schools of smaller reef fish dancing about, the odd turtle munching away at the corals, and, with a bit of luck, the occasional reef shark passing by. As you move to the edges of the bay, the coral density drops and you'll start to see more of the filter-feeding corals

like sea fans, barrel sponges, cup corals, tunicates, and crinoids. The terrain also tends to be a bit more rocky and in some places turns into walls or ridges. Where fish life is concerned, you are likely to encounter a lot more of the brilliant orange anthias exploding from the reefs and walls with schools of larger fish out in the blue. Unicorn fish and fusileers and the occasional group of giant or bluefin trevally are very common in these parts of Komodo, especially when there is a bit of water movement. In certain places around Gili Banta and the very north-west of Komodo, chances of encountering mantas are very high, especially around Gili Banta as there are several shallow cleaning stations where you can see anywhere from a couple to a dozen of these beautiful animals, once again, without any other boats in site!





"Fields of leather corals, sponges, hard corals, brilliantly colored soft corals, and crinoids are the makeup of this unreal island."

As you move away from these larger islands you'll notice some much smaller rocky islands sitting in the middle of the sea. If the swell and currents are mild these can be wonderful snorkeling sites full of life. Some islands might be more rocky in their structure, with a carpet of compact corals and sponges covering the sheer rock faces that plummet deep into the blue. On one island in particular, you can swim deep into a crack between two halves of this island for a very surreal snorkeling experience. Other islands in the area are fringed with dense colonies of Acropora corals like table corals which offer the perfect resting places for whitetip and bamboo sharks beneath them. One of these islands, which just looks like a pile of rocks, is home to another cleaning station that's very popular with the mantas.

Moving north to Sangeang, this stunning twin-peaked volcanic island offers snorkelers some sensational reefs which are very different from just about anywhere else in Indonesia. Fields of leather corals, sponges, hard corals, brilliantly colored soft corals, and crinoids are the makeup of this unreal island. In certain spots where the reef meets its burgundy-colored sand, a sparkling wall of volcanic bubbles effervesces upwards.

While Sangeang may not be a hotspot for schools of larger fish or pelagic species like reef sharks or mantas, at least not at snorkeling depths, the critter life is prolific. The nutrient-rich volcanic sand is home to Kuhl's stingrays, peacock flounders and unique species of octopus, while the crinoids,



sponges, and corals of the reef host many species of lionfish, scorpionfish and neon anemones with their resident clownfish. Things like sea hares and nudibranchs are also in great abundance at certain sites around the volcano, and with a bit of luck, you might be able to find one of the many species of ghost pipefish and even seahorses that reside in the more 'mucky' areas.

The coast and smaller islands off of Sumbawa are also very much worth a visit. Though the reefs and larger fish life might not be quite what you would experience around Komodo, Gili Banta, or Sangeang, there is still lots of beauty to behold, especially around that finger of land that sticks out in the south. Here, you can find those picturesque coral reefs leading right up to desolate white and pink sand beaches. If you head a bit further northwest along the coast line you'll soon find yourself coming into prime critter territory. The reefs here change from their vibrant colonies of hard and soft coral into swaths of nutrient-rich black sand dotted with interesting colonies of sponges and algae patches where things like leaf scorpionfish, nudibranchs, cowfish, frogfish, juvenile batfish, and with some luck, rhinopias can be found.

An aerial photograph showing a group of divers in clear, turquoise water. The divers are scattered across the frame, some near large, dark rock formations. The water is a vibrant blue-green color, and the rocks are dark and jagged. The overall scene is a beautiful underwater landscape.

GETTING TO KOMODO

To access these more remote regions of Komodo and beyond, you'll need to choose your liveaboards and resorts carefully, because, as I said before, there are only a handful who include these places on their itinerary. Mermaid Liveaboards has two boats, Mermaid I and Mermaid II, both of which will spend time exploring these areas. If conditions allow, the Mermaid boats spend a full day in the south of Komodo and Rinca followed by a few days in the west of Komodo, Gili Banta, & Sangeang Volcano.

For resort options, there is only one and it's called Kalimaya. Kalimaya Resort is situated on the east coast of Sumbawa, and from this boutique snorkel and dive resort you can access all the above mentioned areas with the exception of the very south of Komodo or Rinca. That being said, as the resort is conveniently located between Sangeang, Gili Banta, Sumbawa, and Komodo, you'll have days with exclusive access to this diverse region, not to mention Kalimaya's house reef which is home to some extraordinary critters.



/07

SNORKELING WITH INDONESIA'S GENTLE GIANTS

Whale sharks are very much a bucket list creature for most snorkeling enthusiasts. A few reasons contributing to their fame amongst ocean lovers could be because they are sharks—the largest of all the shark species—only they don't have the intimidating set of serrated teeth most sharks are equipped with. They spend a large part of their time hoovering up their planktonic prey on the ocean's surface where we snorkelers can enjoy swimming next to them, and on top of that, they are covered in polka-dots!



Words and Photos by
Alex Lindbloom



“Nowhere else in the world can you snorkel alongside multiple whale sharks at a time in the wild—for hours—without hoards of other snorkelers in the water with you”

If you've ever encountered whale sharks randomly in the wild, like you're just snorkeling along a reef and you happen to see one swimming towards you, for example, you will very likely have had the same experience everyone else has had in this same situation. You see the whale shark and get excited. It doesn't appear to be moving fast but as it gets closer you soon realize it's moving at an incredible pace despite its slow tail movements. You try to keep up with it but after a few seconds you are well behind it and there's no chance of you ever catching up. This is a very typical whale shark encounter. A few seconds of excitement, and then it disappears back into the blue leaving you floating on the surface questioning whether or not that encounter actually happened. In fifteen years of working as a professional guide and underwater camera-dude in waters where whale sharks are known to live, I have seen a grand total of three whale sharks by chance, and the combined time I was able to spend with these three whale sharks is less than a minute.





There are many places around the world where you can snorkel with whale sharks. Australia's Ningaloo Reef is one of the most famous as the operators there can almost guarantee sightings since they use spotter planes to find the sharks. The only thing is that the sharks there are moving quickly as they swim up and down the coast in search of food. Encounters are brief and generally full of other snorkelers. In a few spots in Mexico you can find some of the world's largest congregations of whale sharks as they come to feed on masses of tuna eggs and plankton. The sharks are there to feed so you can generally spend a good amount of time swimming alongside them, however, you will also encounter several hundred other snorkelers trying to do the same, not to mention the fact that they make you wear giant orange life jackets!

So, where can we predictably swim next to whale sharks without the hoards of other snorkelers? Well, Indonesia's Triton and Cenderawasih Bays in West Papua have the largest population of whale sharks in all of Indonesia. Local regulations only allow one group to be around the sharks each day, and you can predictably swim alongside them for hours at a time since sharks are there to feed on the bait-fish these two bays naturally cultivate. Oh, you also don't need to wear a cumbersome life preserver if you don't want to!

Indonesia's Cenderawasih Bay and Triton Bay offer unique and much more prolonged encounters with whale sharks because of a semi-symbiotic relationship formed over many decades between the sharks and unusual-boats called bagans. For years, Indonesia have been fishing for from bagans. bamboo

looking fishing fishermen across anchovy-like fish These are large platforms/boats with giant nets that hang beneath the strange floating structures. At night, the fishermen lower the nets beneath the a set of very bright lights to small fish into the nets. All lower and raise their nets the concentration of fish

platform and then use lure shoals of these night these fishermen full of fish. The smell of attracts the whale sharks.

Rather than see the large sharks as a nuisance, the local fishermen appreciate the whale sharks' presence as they believe the large animals are a good omen for their catch. Nowadays, this relationship also provides the fishermen and their communities with an additional source of income as liveaboards and resorts pay the fishermen a fee to snorkel and dive with the whale sharks around their bagans.

The way a typical bagan/whale shark snorkeling experience works is as follows. If you are on a liveaboard, the liveaboard will anchor in the bay where all the bagans are fishing,



Swimming alongside the largest shark in the ocean, covered in a comical pattern of polka-dots, is an experience unlike any other.

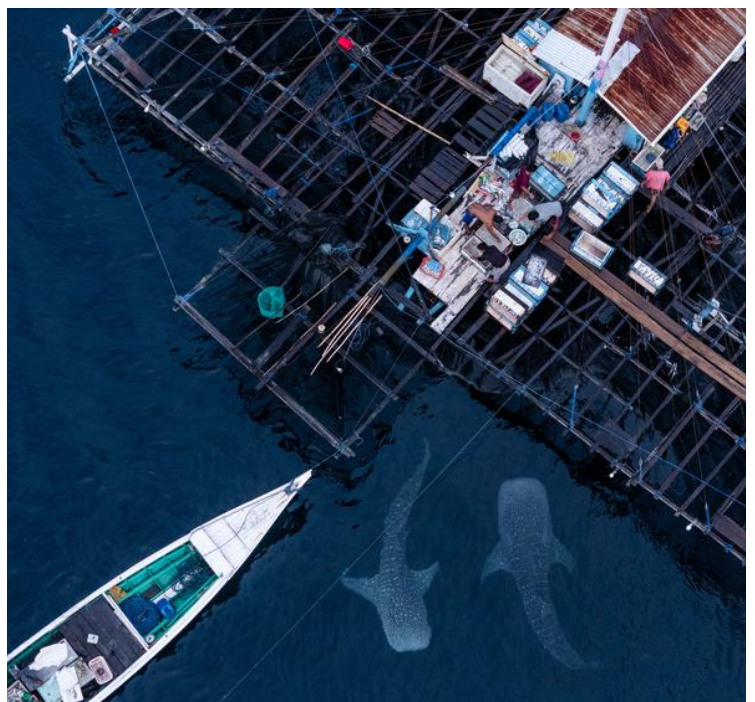
which they buy some of the fish they've caught to feed the sharks and keep them around the bagan so we can snorkel with them. With the help from the fishermen, the whale sharks will stay around the bagans all day and will often attract more sharks.

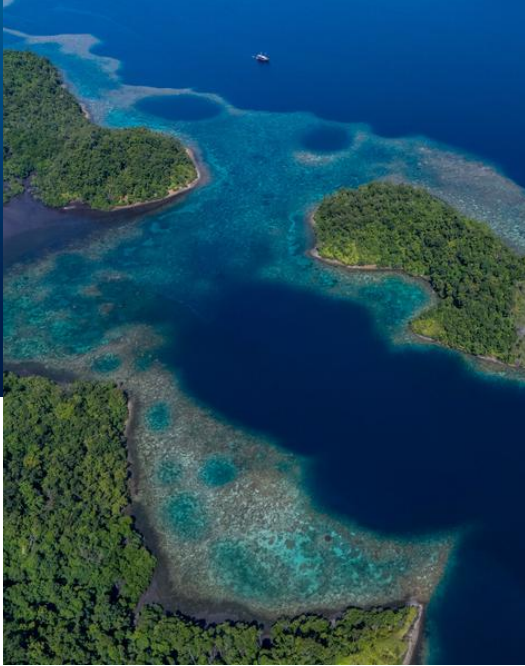
Now, I'm going to guess that there are a few of you who are thinking something along the lines of, "I don't like the fact that the sharks are being fed, this is a manipulated encounter that could affect the shark's natural feeding and migratory habits."

When I first heard that the sharks were being lured in by food, I felt the same way. However, after speaking with some whale shark experts who've spent years studying the interaction between the sharks, bagans, and tourists — while doing a bit of my own research—my concern for the well-being of the sharks has been put at ease. You see, whale sharks aren't migratory species, at least not in the same way some whales and many other species

generally the night before. The following morning, well before the sun rises and the fishermen stop fishing, the liveaboard will send out one of the tender boats to find the bagan with the most whale sharks around it. The sharks typically congregate around one or two bagans. Once they've established which bagan has sharks the snorkeling can commence, usually just after the sun has come up. If you are snorkeling from a resort, you will generally depart the resort very early in the morning so that you arrive at the bagans just as the sun is coming up. You'll then search for the bagan with the whale sharks, and once found, the pool is open!

Very likely, one of the first things you'll notice once in the water is that the whale shark or sharks are sitting vertically in the water right under the bagan, seemingly gasping for air as their mouths open and close at the waterline or sometimes above the water line. Like all sharks, whale sharks have gills so they aren't gasping for air, instead, they are feeding on the small fish that the bagan fishermen are now throwing back into the water to entice the whale sharks to stay around. Once the nets go up, so does the opportunity for food and the sharks move on. However, the resort or liveaboard will make an agreement with the bagan in





are, with very specific routes during specific times of the year. According to Conservation International, a global conservation agency who's been operating a whale shark monitoring initiative here in Indonesia since 2015 using tracking devices mounted on the animals, "These whale sharks (tagged in West Papua, Indonesia) are not as migratory as many believed. They disperse periodically in different directions, covering distances up to 1,000 miles, often to return to 'home waters' in a matter of weeks."

Another thing to note about the whale sharks in Cenderawasih and Triton Bay is that the sharks often seen in these places are adolescent males who have not yet reached sexual maturity. Two of the big factors that contribute to a species migrating are mating and food. If the whale sharks aren't mating yet and have a bay full of food—with or without the bagans—there's no reason for them to leave. To add to that, in a collaborative effort between Conservation International and the Georgia Aquarium to assess the overall health of the whale sharks in Cenderawasih Bay, the research teams were able to confirm that the sharks

were not only healthy but didn't show any signs of stress as a result of the human interactions.

I think we can all agree that it would be a dream come true to be able to snorkel along reefs and predictably encounter whale sharks that we could swim alongside for extended periods of time in a completely natural setting. This is just not a reality though as pelagic species like whale sharks don't just hang around reefs because reefs don't support their food source. Again, you might get lucky with a quick flyby from a whale shark as it searches for its next meal or mate, but to predict these encounters is nearly impossible. If we want to swim alongside the largest shark in the ocean for hours at a time, the only way to do so is to go to where their food is, in this case, it's around bagans. For us snorkelers, bagans cultivate the ultimate whale shark snorkeling experience as there is nowhere else in the world where you can snorkel alongside multiple whale sharks at a time in the wild—for hours at a time—without hordes of other snorkelers in the water with you.



Both Triton Bay and Cenderawasih Bay are very remote regions of Indonesia which naturally helps keep tourism at bay. It also means there are a limited number of options for snorkeling in either of these places. To snorkel with the Cenderawasih Bay whale sharks you have to do it via liveaboard as there are no resorts in the area. Coralia is a fantastic liveaboard and one of the few in Indonesia running snorkeling safaris to Cenderawasih. Coralia will generally spend a couple of days snorkeling with the whale sharks around the bagans, but before and after the whale shark experience, the liveaboard will spend days exploring all the different islands and atolls which are just brimming with tropical life.



Indonesia's Cenderawasih Bay and Triton Bay offer unique and prolonged encounters with whale sharks because of a semi-symbiotic relationship formed over many decades between the sharks and unusual-looking fishing boats called bagans.

Triton Bay—which is much smaller by comparison—can be snorkeled much more easily from a resort. There is only one resort, called Triton Bay Divers, and they've been operating in Triton Bay since 2015. From this picturesque little resort, you can not only access the bagans where the whale sharks come to feed but also enjoy the absolutely stunning reefs that the area is famous for.

There are a lot of animals in the ocean that are thrilling to encounter. Octopus and other cephalopods like cuttlefish are mind-bendingly awesome as they change color, textures, and shapes right before your eyes. Turtles fill us with a sense of peace and tranquility as they calmly glide over the reefs. Then there're mantas, the fish with the largest brain-to-body ratio and one of the few ocean animals to make direct eye contact with people while seemingly trying to communicate by bobbing their heads and unfurling and furling their cephalic lobes. Of course, all of these animals are exquisite, and swimming with them will never stop being an experience we crave, however, there is nothing quite comparable to swimming alongside the largest shark in the ocean, sometimes up to eight individuals at a time, all of which are covered in a comical pattern of polka-dots and clearly have a one track mind, FOOOOOOD!

CAMERA COMPARISONS

08



Words and Photos by
Alex Lindbloom

There's a lot of chatter out there about underwater cameras. People—especially camera people—have very strong opinions on this particular subject and will readily share their opinions on which camera is best because of this reason and which one is “totally unusable” for that reason, whether you asked or not. These opinions—which are often conveyed as facts—seem to get more in your face as you move up from compact cameras to larger mirrorless and DSLR cameras. This is very annoying and off-putting, especially if you are new to underwater photography, or just photography in general, and are just looking for an affordable camera that's easy to pack in your reasonably sized suitcase and is going to take a decent underwater photo on your snorkeling adventure.

There's a saying—which is absolutely 100% correct and has the peer-reviewed credentials to prove it—that goes a little something like this, “the best camera is the one you have with you.” Basically, there's no one camera that's perfect, all cameras have their strengths and weaknesses, and knowing what they are will allow you to get the most out of your camera. So, with that in mind, let's just talk about some of the cameras we have with us, and by that I mean three of the most common cameras snorkelers tend to use and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each to help you make a better decision on your camera purchase.



Olympus TG-6

The Olympus TG-6—or Oly TG-6 if you want to sound really cool—is by far the most popular camera on our snorkeling safaris. This camera is like the GoPro in a lot of ways, except it's geared towards people who are more interested in still photos rather than video. It still does do video, quite well I might add, but its underwater photo abilities are what it's best known for.

Like the GoPro, it's reasonably priced as far as cameras go and is pretty much ready to go out of the box. It's waterproof—though I'd suggest getting the housing for it as an added precaution—and it has some pretty amazing underwater shooting modes that really bring out the natural colors of the reef. Its lens is not as wide as the GoPro's or a smartphone's set to 0.5x, but there are some aftermarket lenses that you can get for a reasonable price if you really like wide-angle. That being said, if you prefer to focus on reef fish as your main subject, the lens is perfect and also has great optical zoom and macro/super macro modes.

One thing I really appreciate about the TG-6 is that it's great for beginners right out of the box, but if you decide you want to take your underwater photography a bit more seriously there's a lot of room for that with this camera with just a couple aftermarket purchases like flashes or video lights, lenses, and different housings.



GoPro

The GoPro is a solid camera choice and one we see a lot of on our snorkeling safaris. They are reasonably affordable as far as cameras go, and have some seriously high-end specs, particularly where video is concerned. They are also very durable and are waterproof right out of the box, which is a major bonus. That being said, I'd still get the housing for it as an extra precaution against water and accidental droppage.

While the GoPro does take some nice photos, it's definitely geared more towards those that are more interested in filming but would still like to take a photo here and there. Something else that's great about the GoPro camera is the wide-angle lens that works amazingly for capturing schools of fish, reefscape, and other big animals like mantas and turtles. It's definitely not a great camera for shooting small things like nudibranchs or crabs and shrimps because of this wide-angle lens. Finally, one of the other great things about this camera is its ability to color-correct underwater for images to show off the great natural colors and not just shades of blue and green.



Smart Phones

I'll be honest, I don't see a lot of smartphones being taken underwater on our snorkeling safaris, maybe just one or two, but we recently did a snorkeling safari to Mexico, and one of our guests, Gert Walter, was really pleased with the results from his iPhone 12 Max, and I wanted to share his thoughts. In terms of practicality, using a smartphone as your underwater camera is really one of the most ideal situations. New smartphones have pretty amazing camera specs for both videos & photos, not to mention the ultra-wide angle lens many of the newer ones have when you switch it into 0.5x zoom. Then there's the added convenience that all your photos & videos are already on your phone, no need to download & then transfer the images.

One of the big things to invest in if you are thinking of using your smartphone is a housing, even though many of the new smartphones are waterproof. Gert was using a housing he bought off Amazon for about \$55.00 and it looks pretty solid. There are, of course, many other types of housings for smartphones that range from a sort of heavy-duty plastic bag (please don't), to more professional-quality enclosures made out of aluminum or sturdy plastics. Please take into consideration that smartphones are operated through their touch screens and some housings don't allow you to use the touch screen outside of one or two-button to toggle the shutter. This means you have to have your phone set up,

unlocked, and in the camera mode before you put it in the housing. Gert's housing is meant to allow access to the touch screen, and it sounds like he was able to, but he had to press pretty hard just to be able to do so.

Now, one really big thing to consider with the smartphone option is that smartphones are pretty essential to our daily lives, particularly when we are traveling. All of the new QR codes we need are stored on them along with our flight tickets and traveling apps, not to mention all the other photos, passwords, and Tinder profiles! If your housing just happens to flood and the saltwater permanently damages your phone, you have lost something far more important than just a camera. I'm not saying the smartphone option is a bad option at all, I'm just saying there's a bit more to risk when taking it underwater, that's all.



Occasionally you have to push this several times on the iPhone. A firm push is best, not a tap. Using two fingers to zoom in and out does not work consistently underwater but pushing on the photo or video icon selects the correct one.



Words and Photos by
Alex Lindbloom

THE PROBLEM WITH VIDEO LIGHTS & FLASHES FOR SNORKELERS

We regularly post photos and videos from our many different tours on our website and social media platforms which are taken by our Snorkel Venture Snorkel Guides, and quite often this content prompts questions from our guests. The bulk of these questions center around video lights or strobes/ashes.



“I just saw the latest video on Facebook. What kind of lights were used for these shots? I don’t have an underwater light but maybe I should get one. What would you recommend?”



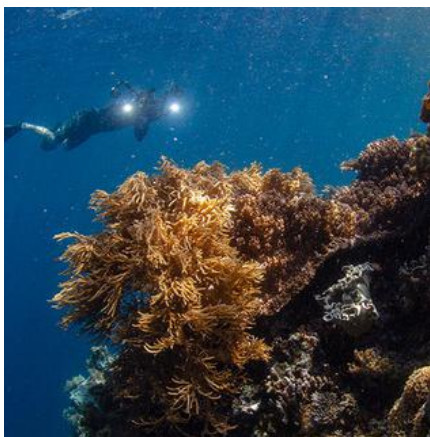
“I have a question about my Olympus TG 6 camera. Would it make sense to add a Backscatter TTL mini flash? I thought it might help on cloudy days or for dark settings and maybe murky waters if close enough to the subject. I would appreciate your advice.”

A lot of people think, and rightfully so, that adding a video light or an external flash to their current camera setup will help yield photos or videos with more true-to-life colors. In the simplest of terms, they are not wrong. More light underwater does equal more color. However, light doesn’t work the same way underwater as it does on land and there are quite a few variables one needs to take into account for this to be true.



YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED

1.



First of all, water is significantly more dense than air is, around 840 times more so. What does this mean? Well, it basically means that your light, whether it's a strobe or a constant video light, just won't travel very far.

2.



Secondly, we need to consider the sun's power versus the power of our light. If you walk around your garden or a park on a bright sunny day and shine a flashlight on the different flowers, you're really not going to notice a difference in light because the sun will almost always out-power your handheld artificial light source. The same goes for underwater, but the results are even more drastic as your little light is also now battling the increased density of the water.

3.



Thirdly, one needs to take into account their ability to duck dive down to the reef. Because of the density of water and the strength of the sun, video lights and strobes/ashes are really only effective when the subject is within one to two feet of the camera. If you can not dive down to the reef and maintain a position there for several seconds to capture your photo, any sort of lighting accessories will just fall short of providing any additional color to your images. Even if you can dive down, the additional light source will—in many situations—be minimal.

So, how do you get those nice natural colors that you saw in our posts or other people's photos? The answer lies in a function nearly every camera has built right into it. **White Balance**.

By using the intense tropical sun and the white balance function on our cameras we can achieve fantastic color results, no matter the camera. A couple of things to keep in mind though.

01.

You still need to be close to your subject, a distance of one to three feet will yield the best results. On particularly sunny days in clear water, you can still get great colors while being further away, but always try to get as close as possible.

02.

You should always shoot with the sun, and not into it.

03.

Set your white balance for the depth that your subject is at, not the depth that you are at. For example, if you are using an Olympus TG series camera and you are on the surface with your subject at ten feet (in clear water), set your white balance mode to “Underwater Deep.” If you are using a GoPro 7 or newer in this same situation, just leave your GoPro in Auto WB and it’s smart enough to know what to do.

04.

Turn your flash off. If you leave the built-in flash of your camera on, everywhere that the flash hits will come back in dark shades of red, instead of the nice natural colors we were hoping for. Also, your flash will almost always introduce a bunch of illuminated particulates into the image and ruin it. Remember, we’re using the sun as a light source now, not artificial light. Unless you have a keen sense of how both work underwater, artificial light and natural light just don’t mix very well.

White Balancing for underwater photography is absolutely paramount to getting images bursting with color. It’s the main lighting principle all of our Snorkel Venture Photo and Video Pros follow, along with just about every prominent underwater photographer and videographer out there.



White Balancing vs. No White Balance

SNORKEL VENTURE RASH GUARDS



Words and Photos by
Alex Lindbloom



If you've been on tour with us you might recognize our personally branded rash guards – it's the first bit of kit our tour leaders pack alongside a mask and snorkel. They are quick drying, loose fitting for extra comfort, and have superb eco credentials being made from recycled ghost nets. In a nut shell they are top quality and we absolutely love them.

The team at Snorkel Venture were very much involved in the unique design process of these rash guards. Alongside creatives at Fourth

Element we wanted to bring colour and style to the shirt. Frontside is a colourful reef image with the iconic whaleshark. Our SV logo is on the back and we have a logo for Snorkel for Good on the right arm.

We've pledged **20,000 USD** for the **Misool Foundation** via our **Rash Guard Program**. It's pretty simple, purchase one of our personalized **Snorkel for Good-Fourth Element Hydro-T rash guards** and 100% of the funds go to Misool Foundation.



The Misool Foundation team manages a suite of conservation programmes which combine marine governance, waste management, community empowerment and species conservation.

The founding programme is the Misool Marine Reserve. The reserve protects 300,000 acres/1220 sq. km in South Raja Ampat – that’s the size of all five boroughs of New York City combined. It comprises two distinct No-Take Zones (NTZs) and a linking restricted-gear, blue-water corridor that is closed to all commercial fishing.

Additionally the foundation manages the following marine conservation and social development projects in Indonesia:

- Misool Ranger Patrol – Misool, Raja Ampat
- Savu Sea Alliance – Lamakera, Solor Island, Nusa Tenggara Timur
- Bank Sampah Community Recycling Project – Sorong, Waisai and Yellu, Raja Ampat
- Community Education Programmes – Fafanlap, Raja Ampat
- Reef Restoration Project – Raja Ampat
- Misool Manta Project – Raja Ampat

Fourth Element Hydro-T Rash Guard

For years Fourth Element has been creating leading products for snorkelers. The **Hydro-T Rash Guard** is made from a thread derived from reclaimed ghost nets, yet the way it fits and functions makes it ultra versatile in or out of the water. The advanced and durable material offers SPF 50+ while also wicking away water from your body keeping you comfortable thanks to the loose fit. In the water it functions just as a rash guard should and then dries rapidly when you surface.

With the **Fourth Element Hydro-T** you don’t have to worry about packing multiple changes of clothes, with this one vest you’ll be set for everything from kayaking, paddle boarding, hiking and of course many hours of snorkeling.

Visit here to purchase a Snorkel for Good Rashguard - www.snorkelventure.com/rashguard-order-form/



THE STORY OF MISOOL RESORT AND THE MISOOL FOUNDATION

 misool

Over the last year, with thanks from all our Snorkel Venture guests we raised a total of **17,785 USD** for the Misool Foundation, this is alongside the 100 USD donation levied by Misool Resort for visitors entering the national park meaning the total amount raised was **26,785 USD**.

Read on to hear how the funds raised have had such a positive impact on both the marine life that surrounds Misool Resort and also the local communities in the area.



Behind the stunning vistas of Raja Ampat, Indonesia, lies a tale of transformation, passion, and unwavering commitment. Andrew and Marit Miners, the visionaries behind Misool Resort, have not only created an amazing resort to snorkel from but also spearheaded groundbreaking conservation efforts through the **Misool Foundation**. As one of Snorkel Venture's key partners, we think this unique synergy of hospitality and marine conservation sets a global standard for sustainable tourism and environmental stewardship.

While Misool Resort thrives as a premier snorkeling resort, the heartbeat of the mission created by owners lies in the **Misool Foundation**. Established as a non-profit organization, the foundation amplifies the Miners' core belief: true conservation requires collaboration with the local community and long-term commitment.

At its core, the Misool Foundation is dedicated to protecting Raja Ampat's rich biodiversity, empowering local communities, and ensuring the sustainability of these efforts. Its initiatives address a range of environmental and social challenges, from marine protection to waste management and education.

One of the foundation's crowning achievements is the creation and ongoing management of the **Misool Marine Reserve**, a 300,000-acre protected area surrounding the resort. This no-take zone, established in collaboration with local communities, is a model of successful marine conservation.

The reserve's boundaries extend to former shark-finning sites, now transformed into vibrant habitats teeming with life. Sharks, once heavily hunted in these waters, have returned in abundance, along with manta rays, turtles, and other marine species. Coral reefs, once damaged by destructive fishing practices, have been rejuvenated, becoming some of the most biodiverse underwater ecosystems in the world.

Scientific studies show that the reserve has achieved a staggering **250% increase in fish biomass** within its protected boundaries, with spillover effects benefiting surrounding fishing zones.



10

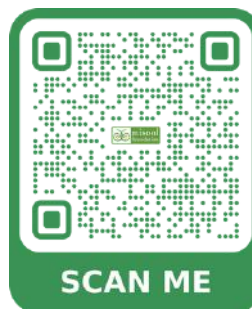


Whilst the ocean faces an ever-growing threat from plastic pollution, the Misool Foundation has stepped up to address this critical issue. Its **Plastic Repurposing Program** tackles waste management in innovative and impactful ways including community engagement, education initiatives and recycling projects.

The Misool Foundation's success also hinges on its strong partnerships with local communities. Andrew and Marit believe that conservation efforts are only sustainable when local people see tangible benefits. To this end, the foundation has focused on job creation where many former shark finners now work as marine rangers, safeguarding the very waters they once exploited.

Furthermore, scholarships funded by the foundation provide local children with access to education, health, and well-being programs addressing clean water access and waste management, improving the quality of life for communities in Raja Ampat.

So what next for Snorkel Venture, Misool Resort, and the Misool Foundation? In 2025 we expect to increase our donations via our fundraising efforts and we are looking to improve the synergy between our organisations.



If you would like to make a further donation to Misool Foundation you can do that via this QR code or Wildlife Conservation Network at [https://donate.wildnet.org/?fund=Coral - Indonesia](https://donate.wildnet.org/?fund=Coral_-_Indonesia). Any contributions are greatly appreciated.

2025/2026 TOUR SCHEDULE

JAN 2025

Raja Ampat by
Liveaboard | Coralia
[21 – 31 January](#)

Triton Bay Raja Ampat
Snorkel Safari
[24 January – 5 February](#)

APR 2025

Sulawesi & Raja Ampat
Snorkel Safari
[8- 23 April](#)

Misool & Wakatobi
Snorkel Safari
[11 – 28 April](#)

Alor, Bunaken & Raja
Ampat Snorkel Safari
[12 April – 4 May](#)

Alor & West Komodo
Snorkel Safari
[20 April – 4 May](#)

Misool Resort Snorkel
Tour – 14 Night Tour
[25 April – 9 May](#)

Alor & Misool Snorkel
Safari
[28 April – 18 May](#)

FEB 2025

Belize by Liveaboard |
Aggressor IV
[1 – 8 February](#)

Dominican Republic
Humpback Whale
Expedition by
Liveaboard | Aggressor
[8 – 15 February](#)
[15 – 22 February](#)

Sulawesi and Beyond by
Liveaboard | Mermaid II
[11 – 23 February](#)

Belize Snorkel Week |
Turneffe Island Resort
[14 – 22 February](#)

Cuba by Liveaboard |
Aggressor
[15 – 22 February](#)

Raja Ampat & Misool
Snorkel Safari
[15 February – 4 March](#)

Belize Snorkeling &
Shallow Freediving
Workshop at Turneffe
Island Resort
[21 February – 01 March](#)

Misool & Wakatobi
Snorkel Safari
[23 February – 14 March](#)

MAR 2025

Palau Snorkel Safari
[5 – 16 March](#)

Belize by Liveaboard |
Aggressor IV
[8 – 15 March](#)

Epic Indonesia Snorkel
Safari 2025 | Wakatobi –
Alor – West Komodo –
Bali – Misool
[20 March – 20 April](#)

MAY 2025

Alor & West Komodo
Snorkel Safari
[16 – 30 May](#)

West Komodo and Alor
Snorkel Safari
[17 May – 1 June](#)

2025/2026 TOUR SCHEDULE



AUG 2025

Alor & West Komodo
Snorkel Safari
[2 – 16 August](#)

Wakatobi Snorkel Tour
[17 – 25 August](#)

Halmahera Snorkel Tour
[18 – 30 August](#)

NOV 2025

Forgotten Islands and
Misool by Liveboard |
Amira
[9 – 21 November](#)

Raja Ampat by
Liveboard | Coralia
[15 – 26 November](#)

Halmahera Snorkel Tour
[22 November – 02 December](#)

Misool Resort Snorkel
Tour – 11 Night Tour
[30 November – 11 December](#)

SEPT 2025

Alor & Forgotten Islands
by Liveboard | Mermaid
II Liveboard
[20 September – 2 October](#)

Egypt Snorkeling Safari
2025
[27 September – 11 October](#)

JAN 2026

Raja Ampat by
Liveboard | Coralia
[6 – 18 January](#)

Triton Bay & Raja Ampat
Snorkel Safari
[9 – 21 January](#)

MAR 2026

Raja Ampat & Misool
Snorkel Safari
[3 – 23 March](#)

Palau by Liveboard |
Aggressor
[7 – 22 March](#)

OCT 2025

Misool Resort Snorkel
Tour – 14 Night Tour
[5 – 19 October](#)

Sulawesi & Raja Ampat
Snorkel Safari
[21 October – 5 November](#)

FEB 2026

Triton Bay & Raja Ampat
Snorkel Safari
[6 – 18 February](#)

Belize Snorkel Week |
Turneffe Resort
[13 – 21 February](#)
[20 – 28 February](#)

APR 2026

Belize by Liveaboard | Aggressor IV
[4 – 11 April](#)

Sulawesi & Raja Ampat Snorkel Safari
[4 – 19 April](#)

West Komodo, Bangka & Raja Ampat Snorkel Safari
[6 – 26 April](#)

Alor & West Komodo Safari Snorkel Safari
[13 – 27 April](#)

Belize by Liveaboard | Aggressor IV
[18 – 25 April](#)

Alor, West Komodo & Raja Ampat Snorkel Safari
[20 April – 13 May](#)

Solomon Islands by Liveaboard | Bilikiki Liveaboard
[22 April – 06 May](#)

Belize Snorkeling & Shallow Freediving Workshop by Liveaboard | Aggressor IV
[25 April – 2 May](#)

Misool & Wakatobi Snorkel Safari
[30 April – 18 May](#)

MAY 2026

West Komodo & Alor Snorkel Safari
[6 – 21 May](#)

Alor & Beyond by Liveaboard | Mermaid I
[10 – 20 May](#)

Egypt Snorkel Safari
[16 – 30 May](#)

Misool Resort Snorkel Tour – 14 Night Tour
[16 – 30 May](#)

Komodo & Beyond by Liveaboard | Mermaid I
[20 – 30 May](#)

Alor & Misool Snorkel Safari
[20 May – 6 June](#)

AUG 2026

Halmahera Snorkeling Tour
[17 – 29 August](#)

OCT 2026

Sulawesi & Raja Ampat Snorkel Safari
[3 – 19 October](#)

Alor, West Komodo & Raja Ampat Snorkel Safari
[23 October – 15 November](#)

JULY 2026

Cenderawasih Bay by Liveaboard | Coralia
[15 – 26 July](#)
[27 July – 7 August](#)

SEP 2026

Wakatobi Resort Snorkel Tour | 12 Night Tour
[13 – 25 September](#)

Misool Resort Snorkel Tour | 14 Night Tour
[28 September – 12 October](#)

Alor & West Komodo Snorkel Safari
[25 September – 09 October](#)

NOV 2026

Raja Ampat by Liveaboard | Coralia
[26 November – 6 December](#)

Misool Resort Snorkel Tour | 11 Night Tour
[28 November – 9 December](#)

IN FOCUS WITH MARCUS BLAKE



Words and Photos by
Marcus Blake

Misool, Indonesia

Both of these photos were taken in the bay at Misool Resort, it's an ideal setting with white sand in shallow waters. I've been trying out new ways to get split shots, setting my camera in fast burst mode and quick shutter speeds and honestly just hoping to get lucky. Patience is definitely key to getting good split shots and just to keep trying!





📍 Alor, Indonesia

Alor is a place I love to lead tours to. It's very wild and you really never know what is going to turn up. Along with its remoteness comes great photo opportunities.



In the channel near Alami Alor Resort there are great chances of Mola Mola encounters. The trick to shooting Mola Mola is to be in the right place at the right time. Local fishermen still use hand crafted spearguns and wooden carved goggles. I got both these shots by anticipating where they would be next. A tip for shots like these, where the subject is moving around, is to be prepared with your settings.

📍 Garden of the Queens, Cuba

Snorkeling with the sharks was a highlight of our Cuba Snorkeling Safari with Caribbean Reef Sharks and Silky Sharks aplenty - the crystal clear water made life much easier to get this shot. I like this shot very much as it shows how curious they are to see us in the water too. I really wanted to get this shot of one of our guests and the shark's swimming together. Duck diving down and shooting towards the surface gave a great perspective of this. Tip for getting a shot like this is mastering the art of duck diving and control under water. with practice is achievable.



📍 Komodo, Indonesia



I've been lucky to call Komodo my home for many years. Komodo has some of the best larger sea animals I like to photograph - especially Mantas and Turtles. I always like to try and have the animal swim towards me as it makes for a great portrait photo. For shots like this it's good to be as calm and still as possible so they swim comfortably towards you.



For the last 3 years I've been a tour leader for Snorkel Venture, so my year is spent snorkeling in some of the best places in the world for marine life encounters. I'm originally from the UK but now live year round in Indonesia. I previously spent 5 years managing a dive and snorkel resort in Indonesia. I love photography above and below the water's surface!

Marcus Blake

WIN A fourth element BUNDLE!



Send your best shot to alex@snorkelventure.com by the 1st of June 2025 and the best one as judged by the Snorkel Venture team will receive a Fourth Element bundle including a Gulper, Dry Sac & Towel worth 150 USD.

Fourth Element specialize in high-performance, eco-friendly diving & snorkeling apparel and gear. Founded in 1999, their mission is to create innovative dive & snorkel wear that is both functional and sustainable. They're particularly recognized for their use of recycled materials, like ghost fishing nets and post-consumer waste, in producing wetsuits, rash guards, and base layers.

Check out the full range here - <https://fourthelement.com/>.

Rules: Only 1 image per person, sorry this is only available to USA, Canadian and UK residents. Winner announced 1st of July 2025.

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF FROGFISH!

12



Words by Dalton Hopper
Photos by Alex Lindbloom



Have you ever heard of a fish so quirky it could win an underwater talent show? Meet the frogfish – nature’s funky little oddball that takes camouflage, hunting, and plain weirdness to a whole new level. These peculiar creatures belong to the anglerfish family and are found lurking in many of the sites we visit on our Snorkel Venture Tours. Because they stay mostly stationary, many people snorkel right past them. But trust me, once you’ve met the frogfish, you’ll never look at this underwater critter the same way again.

Masters of Disguise

Frogfish are the ultimate hide-and-seek champions of the sea. Thanks to their incredible ability to mimic their surroundings, they blend seamlessly into coral reefs, sponges, and rocks. Some species even grow skin filaments that resemble algae or coral, making them practically invisible to predators and prey alike. Imagine being able to change your outfit to match your surroundings perfectly - well, that’s the frogfish’s superpower. They can change their color over days or weeks to better match their environment. It’s like being a chameleon in the fish world - only way cooler (don’t tell the chameleons I said that).

A Mouth that’ll Blow you away

One of the frogfish’s most mind-blowing tricks is its ability to gulp down prey at lightning speed. With a mouth that can expand up to 12 times its normal state, a frogfish can swallow prey twice its body size. This critter creates a vacuum to suck in prey in as little as 6 milliseconds - that’s faster than you can blink. Frogfish certainly aren’t picky eaters, either. They’ll snack on anything from small fish to crustaceans if it fits into their cavernous mouth.





Fishing for Dinner

Now, here's where the "anglerfish" side of their family comes into play. Frogfish have a built-in fishing rod, or an illicium, right on their heads. This rod is tipped with a lure that resembles a tasty morsel, like a worm or a shrimp. When an unsuspecting fish comes in for a closer look, the frogfish snaps it up faster than you can say, "Is that a...". It's like having your dinner deliver itself straight to your mouth.



The Not-so-great Swimmers

For all their hunting prowess, frogfish fail one talent category - they aren't winning any swimming competitions. To put it bluntly, they're pretty terrible at it. Instead of swimming around like normal fish, they use their pectoral fins to walk along the seafloor. But they do have another trick up their fin. Sometimes, they use jet propulsion by squirting water through their gills to move around. It's not exactly graceful, but it gets the job done.

Why Frogfish are the Coolest

Frogfish can range in size from under an inch to over a foot long. Despite their size, they're all about the ambush predator lifestyle. You'll find them in oceans worldwide, from the Caribbean to the Indo-Pacific. During mating, females can release up to 180,000 eggs at once, which float to the surface in a gelatinous mass. Talk about making an entrance. Whether it's their wild camouflage, lightning-fast hunting skills, or their funky way



of getting around, frogfish are a reminder that the ocean is full of surprises. So, next time you see one of these hidden gems, remember that you're looking at one of the ocean's most unique and fascinating creatures.

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