

We were moving between Sambawa and Flores; the passage between these two islands funnels tides between the Savu Sea below and the Flores Sea above. Right in the middle is Komodo, surrounded by islands, islets and reefs. The terrain is tall volcanic mountains with wild grass slopes plunging down to small beaches and mangroves. Komodo National Park is in one of Indonesia's most arid regions and its two distinct temperate and tropical marine habitats are separated by just a few nautical miles. The main influences are cold upwellings from the Indian Ocean and the warmer flow from the Flores Sea, but five ocean currents contribute to the immense biodiversity found in this region. The aquatic and terrestrial environments of Komodo National Park are a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to over 1000 species of fish, 385 species of corals and 70 species of sponge, plus, land based, the largest lizard on earth, the Komodo dragon.

Underwater the Komodo Islands are hugely varied. On our first dive we swam through reefs encrusted with layers of thick healthy growth – almost no gaps were seen. The corals and waters above buzzed with schools of runners and feeding anthias, and every outcrop sheltered a plethora of fish. Glassfish in the thousands swarmed above giant sponges where prowling lionfish pounced faster than the eye could see to gulp down the

# KOMODO

➤ WE SAILED TOWARDS THE RUGGED RED CLIFF FACE REFLECTED IN THE CALM BLUE OCEAN. IT WAS REMINISCENT OF NORTHWESTERN AUSTRALIA SHORE-SCAPES, BUT WE WERE HUNDREDS OF KILOMETRES TO THE NORTH. INSTEAD OF KANGAROOS, THE LAND-BASED ATTRACTION HERE IS A FEROCIOUS DRAGON.

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# DANCER



tiny silver snacks. Massive plate corals sheltered sweetlips, batfish and anthias, all blurred by the quicksilver of tiny baitfish. After taking five minutes with a curious turtle captivated by its reflection in my dome port, out of the corner of my eye a manta appeared, silently hovering. It then swam through our group almost as if welcoming us to the islands.

In the northwest region is Sangeang Island, which features a simply stunning dive. The signature dive is called Hot Rocks and crystal clear water revealed magnificent leather coral gardens of bright pastels juxtaposed with black volcanic sand. The ambient wide angle scenes were spectacular and yet you could spend your whole dive looking for macro. The eastern slope has sulphur yellow patches of sand with gas percolating upwards in a multitude of bubbles. Drift with the current around a stepped and sloping outcrop of boulders covered in black coral trees to another slope covered in corals and anemones, completely encrusted with life. But keep an eye on the blue, on our dive the schooling fusiliers and runners were agitated but nothing prepared us for the massive dogtooth tuna that torpedoed in and ripped a fish out of the school within metres of us.

The many islands create reefs and channels with incredible drift dives that sweep through rich coral gardens full of

soft coral trees and gorgonians, hard corals, anemones and massive sponges, all within waters varying from crystal clear to thick with plankton and teeming with fish life. On any one dive you'll often change water temperatures, and currents that can reverse direction. One moment you're swimming through warm water then an upwelling momentarily delivers cold water, then if you ascend or descend slightly, it's warm water again. The temperature variations can be several degrees! Then there's the complete opposite – black sandy bays with a sloping bottom in front of a river mouth, the combination for perfect muck diving with weird and wonderful creatures.

There are so many impressive and unforgettable sites, but another must-do dive is Shotgun. Timing here is crucial as this is a narrow channel between two islands and the water movement can be extreme at the wrong time. Starting your dive on a sloping wall, it's a drift around a corner at 25m; coral bommies covered in corals, fans and glassfish are scattered amongst the sand. You gradually drift shallower into a fishbowl with whitetip sharks circling. To the left hand side is a narrow rising canyon with walls covered in yellow coral and full of fish hanging in the current. You must ascend up this canyon carefully monitoring buoyancy, as the accelerating current will whip you up to within four metres of the surface. Once



Top to bottom: A plethora of anemones at Hot Rocks; Just one of many nudibranch species on the reefs and sand; A white tip reef shark with signs of bite-marks from mating; Sunset in Komodo.

over the hump you realise instantly that everything you've seen so far is just the appetizer for what awaits now. Quickly hooking on the downward lee slope, again to the left as much possible, brings a milder current flow where you can simply sit back and enjoy the show. Majestic manta rays swim in feeding in the current, at times coming to within an arms reach as they glide and swoop.

Diving from the *Komodo Dancer* places you out on the best sites and the right tides, something that is nothing short of essential for getting the most out of virtually any dive in the region. With 19 crew for 16 guests the level of service is excellent and the food is a tasteful mix of Indonesian and western delights. The crew are attentive and remember names and your likes and dislikes within a day, and will generally hand you your morning coffee, exactly as you like it, without even being asked. Most meals are enjoyed on deck at one very large table which makes socialising and making new friends very easy. The cabins are well sized for a sailing vessel and all feature private en-suites and very comfortable beds allowing for pleasant dreams each night before busy fun filled days of diving and discovery.

Your typical day on the *Komodo Dancer* starts with an early pre-breakfast at around 6:30am, then the first dive of the day at around 7:30am which is followed by a "made to order" breakfast that you have surprisingly built up the appetite for during your dive. The second dive is around 10:30am followed by a buffet lunch, then

its relaxation time until around 2:30pm for your third dive with more relaxation or a shore excursion until the scheduled night dive at around 6:30pm. Dinner and socialising follows before climbing into your bunk for another great nights sleep. Non diving travelers are also well catered for in snorkeling opportunities which are available at almost every dive site.

Your Komodo odyssey is not absolute without land excursions to see the formidable Komodo dragon, which are under the watchful eye of local rangers or your dive guides, who provide interesting commentary as well as safeguard from the dragons themselves in the form of long forked sticks. Once you have seen a two or three meter long dragon complete with forked tongue, dagger like teeth, large muscular tail and razor sharp claws, you

can see why. Add to this that they can suddenly run at up to 18km/hr and you feel very glad for the protection indeed. Other excursions include hikes up to the top of island peaks to witness spectacular island vistas and a pink beach, where a red coral that does not lose its colour has eroded into fine granules and then when mixed with white sand, it manifests as a wonderful pink hued beach. Komodo truly is a destination to appreciate below AND above the waves and I am definitely looking forward to a return visit.

Below left to right: Louise and a Komodo dragon; Strong currents allow for plentiful gorgonians.



#### KOMODO INFO

**Getting there:** From Australia via Denpasar in Bali to Labuan Bajo. Travel & flights can be arranged directly through Dancer Fleet [www.dancerfleet.com](http://www.dancerfleet.com) or via their agents in Australia: Diversion Dive Travel [www.diversionoz.com](http://www.diversionoz.com) or Dive Adventures [www.diveadventures.com.au](http://www.diveadventures.com.au). **Taxes & Fees:** Park fees for diving and the

Komodo dragon tours are included in your package.

**Health & Vaccinations:** Routine vaccines and medicines are always a good preventative measure no matter where you travel and recommended for some areas in the region are anti-malarials and insect repellent. Like all remote locations, tetanus and hepatitis A could also be considered.

**Entry & Exit Requirements:** You must possess a passport with at least 6 months remaining validity and 2 blank visa

pages within (these differ from standard blank pages). A visa is required on entry to Indonesia, 7 day stay US\$10, up to 30 day stay US\$25. Departure tax on leaving is \$150,000 rupiah. For local flight departure at Lebuwan Bajo, airport tax of \$10,000 rupiah.

**Climate:** Komodo is a year round diving destination. The region is considered to be one of the driest regions within Indonesia. Average daily temperatures are around 24-31°C. Water temperatures vary from 22-29°C.

“INCREDIBLE DRIFT DIVES SWEEP THROUGH RICH CORAL GARDENS FULL OF SOFT CORAL TREES AND GORGONIANS, HARD CORALS, ANEMONES AND MASSIVE SPONGES, ALL WITHIN WATERS VARYING FROM CRYSTAL CLEAR TO THICK WITH PLANKTON AND TEEMING WITH FISH LIFE...”

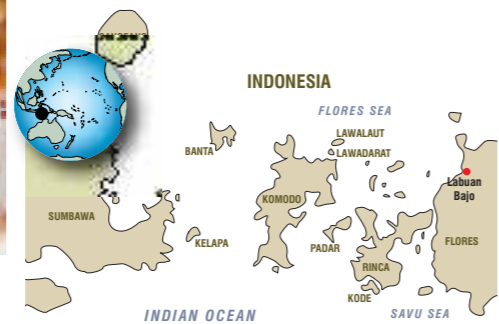


## KOMODO DANCER INFO

**Yacht & Voyage Specifics:** A luxury 30m traditionally crafted twin masted sailing yacht accommodating up to 16 guests. All staterooms feature en-suites. *Komodo Dancer* voyages are generally 10 night duration with up to 4 dives per day. Your stay on the *Komodo Dancer* includes all diving, meals, and drinks including local beer. All diving from the *Komodo Dancer* is done from two tenders with a simple backwards roll into the water and the crew will pass down any camera gear to you. Nitrox is available and I recommend it highly for multiple diving days.

**Electricity & Camera Equipment Capability:** 220v and 110v outlets (multi pin compatible). Large camera table with lockers and compressed air. Charge station just inside the saloon and two separate rinse tanks are maintained purely for camera equipment.

**Gratuities (Tips):** Totally voluntary & if you wish to tip it is based on the quality of service you have received. **Airport Transfers:** Three transfers are included in your live-aboard package. From your hotel in Bali to the airport on the day of your domestic transfer to



Labuan Bajo, then from the airport at Labuan Bajo to the *Komodo Dancer* and finally from the *Komodo Dancer* back to Labuan Bajo airport.

**>LINK:**  
[www.dancerfleet.com](http://www.dancerfleet.com)

Top: Batu Balong, amazing corals and great fish action.  
Bottom: Wilson's egg cowrie nestled on a soft coral.