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TEXT AND IMAGES: KEN HOPPEN

# UNMISTAKABLY MALAY



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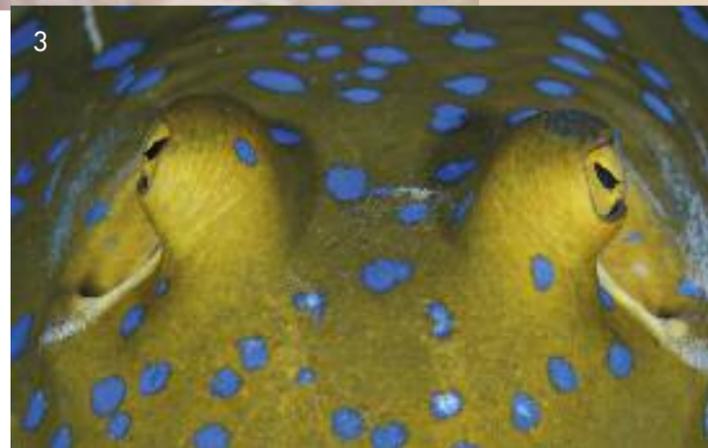
> I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DIVE IN MALAYSIA. I THOUGHT I'D BEGIN WITH SIPADAN OR LAYANG LAYANG OFF THE COAST OF MALAYSIAN BORNEO. BUT WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY AROSE TO DIVE TENGGOL ISLAND ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE MALAYSIAN PENINSULA, I DIDN'T HESITATE TO BOOK A FLIGHT.

Land- ing at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's vibrant capital city, an hour flight to the northeast took us to the regional city of Kuala Terengganu, where we were picked up from the airport and driven 75 minutes down the coast to Tanjung Jara Resort.

Peninsular Malaysia's east coast is the gateway to one of the country's best-kept secrets – some of the finest diving and snorkeling in the world is found in the Terengganu Marine Park around Tenggol Island in the South China Sea. From March to October, the waters here offer a window to untouched coral gardens and rare marine life species. Over 20

stunning dive sites in this protected area provide both for beginners and experienced divers. Although less than three kilometres long and two kilometres wide, the steep rugged cliffs of Tenggol continue underwater with spectacular terrain. There's bright corals, nudibranchs, a wealth of colourful marine life, with every species imaginable from giant double-headed parrotfish, yellowtail fusiliers and sea turtles, to eagle rays, blacktip reef sharks and barracudas.

A five minute drive from Tanjung Jara Resort took us to our boat on the river running through neighbouring Dungun. The Resort's new twin outboard engine speedboat easily reached Tenggol Island



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1 Hard to spot, there were several of these transparent shrimp on a small rocky outcrop. 2 Blue-ringed angelfish are a feature of the reefs around Tenggol Island. 3 Here's looking at you kid!

4 Ready to clean, a Durban hinge-beaked shrimp waits for a client with several dozen of his mates. 5 One site here has a shallow area that is home to juvenile blacktip reef sharks. 6 Hawksbill and green turtles are commonly seen on dives at Tenggol Island.



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in just 45 minutes, and here the snorkelers were transferred to the beach along with their own divemaster and the cook who was to prepare lunch. From here it's a short trip to any of the dive sites around Tenggol and other small rocky islands in the group.

Resort instructor Richard Harris, whom I'd met the day before was my guide during my dives. Some of the images on the wall of the dive shop had caught my eye, especially one of a blue-ringed angelfish, and a very nice shot of a blue-spotted fantail ray and I was assured of getting shots of both while I was here.

My first dive was on the east side of the island at Tanjung Api. The topography comprised huge boulders littering the bottom, sloping into the depths at a shallow angle. There was fish life everywhere! Golden damsels, parrotfish, butterflyfish, slingjaw wrasse and many less familiar species were all going about their business, totally ignoring our intrusion. Very impressive!

After about 10 minutes or so I began wondering about that angelfish, but they'd been noticeably absent. Richard pointed at a strange shape in front of me. Bewildered by an unusual angle, the four front-on blue-ringed angelfish quickly morphed



7 False clown anemonefish are common on the reef here. 8 Small soft corals abound here. 9 Finally, a shot of a blue-spot fantail ray! 10 A water feature near the entrance to Tanjung Jara Resort.



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into more recognisable shapes as I moved closer. All the large angelfish are beautifully marked, and these blue-ringed beauties were definitely up to speed. Then other angelfish appeared – six-banded, half-circle, emperor and yellowmask, all very large individuals. At the end of the dive, we checked out a shallow wall with several nudibranch species grazing on the short algae covering the rocks.

Lunch was spent onshore, relaxing and swimming from the beach before sitting down to sausages, prawns, hamburgers, salads and more. Then, divers and snorkelers were taken to one of several sites where both can enjoy the terrain – Turtle Cove is where both hawksbill and green turtles are commonly seen. Dropping down a few metres below the boat, I was immediately distracted by the small bommie the mooring line had been attached to. False clown anemonefish abounded, along with Clarke's anemonefish and a dozen or more small fish species. Time here was limited, so we moved along the wall of the cove into deeper water, encountering the first of several blue-spotted fantail rays we saw on this dive. Richard had explained that many of the ledges they try to hide under here weren't very deep, so often you can get a good angle – again he was proved to be right. I've spent so much time on these rays in other places without getting good shots! The boat ride back and the short bus trip had us back at the resort by 3pm, which left plenty of time for a swim and a cool drink before changing for dinner.

The dives at Tenggol Island are varied in their complexity and skill levels required. The maximum depth for this area is generally around 35m, but in most sites the best diving is shallower, making it accessible for all experience levels. Some of the outer island sites, such as Tokong Talang, Tokong Burung and Tokong Laut, generally have some current running, so divers are swept onto the reef after exiting the boat. Tokong Laut has a large resident school of barracuda, and there's a chance of seeing manta rays on all of these sites. With so many different dive sites around Tenggol, the Resort's guests seldom see any other groups on their dive, ensuring a truly personal and memorable experience. Depths of up to 25 metres guarantee sightings of some of the world's most spectacular sea creatures – the famous Amazing Grace site often has shovel nose sharks in their natural habitat swimming amid blue spotted stingrays. Whether it be Moonraker's remarkable coral formations climbing 10 metres tall from the seabed, or the spectacular fish life at Tokong Talang, the resort's experienced dive instructors deliver new discoveries with each unique site. In March/April and September/October larger pelagic species are generally seen, including whale sharks. These giants seem to cruise up and down the eastern side of the island and are often encountered at the small islands north and south of the main island. Visibility here can get to 35m, but is generally around 25m on average, and the water is warm and tropical.

Tanjung Jara Resort is the perfect dive holiday destination for divers who want to mix their dive holiday with a touch of



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luxury, rather than just bombard themselves with five dives a day. It is perfect for divers with non-diving partners, as they can join the snorkelling trips and participate in the many activities that the resort offers. Similarly, groups with non-diving participants will find this a perfect destination.

New diving equipment is available for hire from the Water Sports Centre and a range of PADI licences, including Open Water Diver and Advanced Open Water Diver as well as Emergency First Response and Rescue Diver courses are on offer. Interested guests can receive

the PADI theory book prior to their visit and for beginners an introductory diving class is available to 'test the waters'.

The resort is superb, and the standard of the diving here will more than pleasantly surprise you!



**TANJONG JARA RESORT**

Reflecting the elegance and grandeur of 17th century Malay palaces, Tanjung Jara is a 99-room resort with an authentic taste of the region and the Malay art of service and hospitality. The Resort is built on a 17-hectare site facing the South China Sea. The riverine town of Dungun is eight kilometres west.

Tanjung Jara Resort is spectacular, very green and luxurious with spacious airconditioned rooms. There are two restaurants, two swimming pools (one is adults-only and is also for dive courses), tennis courts, a gymnasium, health spa, plus a lovely beachfront. The relaxing and stylish ambience of this resort is unforgettable.

Both restaurants are top shelf. Authentic Malaysian cuisine is enjoyed in the 'Di Atas Sungei' restaurant overlooking the South China Sea, or there's the 'Nelayan' on the shore where seafood is the order of the day. The meals were superb. The staff are friendly and very competent; Concierges Kumar and Hairul ensure your stay was as seamless and pleasant as possible. The entire team, from reception, the restaurants, the gardeners, and the dining waiters were happy and cheerful.

There are plenty of non-diving activities: a gym, two swimming pools, tennis, Malay spa treatments at the Spa Village, market visit with the chef, private dining on the beach. There's also kayaking, jungle trekking, Marang river cruise, night market, cycling, Malay 'kampong' or village activities, batik painting and cooking classes, and even watching turtles come in and lay their eggs. Nearby golf is also available. The resort is open all year, but diving only occurs from April to October due to the monsoonal rains during the remaining months.

Guest Room Amenities • Flat screen TV with satellite channels • Personal care toiletries • Coffee and tea facilities • Electronic safe • Hair dryer • International direct dialing telephone • In-room refrigerator • Writing desk • Complimentary daily mineral water

**GETTING THERE**

Tanjung Jara Resort is situated on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, between Kuala Terengganu in the north and Kuantan in the south.

Malaysia Airlines, Air Asia and Firefly operate flights out of Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, arriving at Kuala Terengganu Airport, Kerteh Airport and Kuantan Airport. Upon arrival at either airports, you may continue your journey to the Resort via private car transfers.

The Resort is accessible by road from all major cities within Peninsular Malaysia. It is approximately a mile away from the expressway and one hour drive from Kuala Terengganu Airport. The Resort provides transfers via limousine services from the Kuala Terengganu Airport, Kerteh Airport, Kuantan Airport (in the state of Pahang), or Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) at Sepang.

**LINKS:** [www.tanjongjararesort.com](http://www.tanjongjararesort.com)  
[travelcentre@ytlhotels.com.my](mailto:travelcentre@ytlhotels.com.my)  
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