

: : PAUL MACDONALD

# Madang

AS I WALKED INTO THE NEW AQUAVENTURES DIVE SHOP, THE OWNER TIM ROWLAND ANNOUNCED: "GRAB A BEER FROM THE FRIDGE AND PULL UP A CHAIR". IT HAD BEEN A LITTLE OVER 5 YEARS SINCE I'D DIVED WITH AQUAVENTURES AND WHILST THE DIVE SHOP HAD CHANGED, TIM AND HIS WIFE LESLEY WERE STILL THE HAPPY FRIENDLY AND WELCOMING PEOPLE I REMEMBERED. MY DIVE BUDDY GENEVA BOYD AND I'D LEFT ADELAIDE AT SOME UNGODLY HOUR THAT MORNING AND WERE IN NEED OF A BEER OR THREE.

Clockwise from left: Stonefish, Badilu Reef, Bagabag; Eddy Reef, Karkar; Clown anemonefish, Tuale Island, Karkar; Stonefish, Henry Leith wreck, Madang; (Photos by Paul Macdonald)



**A** reef wall some 25 kilometres in length protects the waters around Jais Aben. Along the wall are some beautiful tropical islands as well as some deep passages. The top of the wall is generally in five metres and teems with marine life, which provides for some interesting safety stops. Most dives are conducted around the islands, on the wall itself, or in the passages through the reefs.

Being there in November, the days were generally bright and sunny with temperatures in the mid 30's and overnight lows of around 23 degrees. In the lead-up to the wet season, clouds built up in the evening and there were thunderstorms and/or rain most nights. The rain meant that the water inside the reef wall became somewhat dirty with the runoff, so most of our dives in 29 degree water were on the outer wall or within the passages.

During one afternoon Geneva and I caught a ride on the resort shuttle bus into the Madang township to see the sights and do some shopping at the local market. On another afternoon we made the short walk from Jais Aben

to the nearby Riwu village. I had taken balloons, coloured pencils and paper for the children and was quickly swamped. Other days we spent the afternoon relaxing, shore diving or snorkelling.

The diving was fantastic with visibility ranging from 10 metres inside the reef to 30 metres on the outside. The marine life was as diverse as it was spectacular. Here's a sample of some of the dives:

**Magic Passage:** This lies between Kranket and Leper Islands. We dropped down the outer wall to around 32 metres and turned into the passage which is about 40 metres wide. At the start of the passage in 31 metres is a huge fan about four metres across and here I found an adult plus a juvenile leaf scorpionfish. Whilst setting up to photograph these strange creatures, a large school of barracuda swam past. Drifting further along the passage we encountered reef sharks cruising up and down. On the walls of the passage were huge barrel sponges, black coral trees, large fans and seawhips. This passage is teeming with fish life including huge Maori wrasse and batfish. The safety stop is at five metres on top of the wall, and is a haven for the smaller and brightly coloured reef fish.



Top: Lyretail pigfish, Barracuda Point, Madang  
 Above: Scorpion leaf fish, Magic Passage, Madang  
 Centre: Fire dartfish, Lagotec, Karkar  
 Far right: Dining room, Jais Aben Resort  
 (Photos by Paul Macdonald).  
 DMV Kamai at Jais Aben wharf, Jais Aben (Geneva Boyd)

NEXT PAGE  
 Safety Stop, Magic Passage, Madang (Paul Macdonald)  
 DMV Kamai chef Sampson with village children on stern, Bagabag (Geneva Boyd)



WW2 Gun, Madang (Geneva Boyd)

**Planet Rock:** This is south of Madang in open ocean, a dome-shaped pinnacle about 100 metres in diameter that rises from the depths to five metres. On the trip out we met a huge pod of dolphins which set the mood for a great dive. On the dive there were large pelagics everywhere including reef sharks, trevally and barracuda. Out off the wall in 33 metres we spotted a large hammerhead. Again this site was teeming – you get a sore neck twisting and turning to take in everything that is going on! On the reef top safety stop I found, amongst other things, a clown triggerfish and some banded coral shrimp.

**B25 Mitchell Bomber:** On the slope of a small bommie near Wongat Island is a fairly intact B25 Bomber. Shot down during World War II whilst on a raid over Madang, the plane now hosts wonderful marine creatures. Descending from the mooring, a huge barrel sponge grows on the port wing tip in 15 metres. Swimming down the leading edge, huge fans hang under the wing around where the port engine once was. From a hole in the sand under the wing a blue ribbon eel sways in the current. In the remains of the aircraft's nose, destroyed by the impact on the water surface, the bullets that fed the four nose guns can still be seen in their belts. Under the starboard wing is the only remaining engine with the propeller tips bent backwards. On top of this wing at the tip in 25 metres we found an anemone with four playful clownfish. Alongside was the open cockpit, full of fish. Most



Traders at Madang market, Madang; Fish school, Planet Rock, Madang; Geneva and fan on wall, Badilu Reef, Bagabag (Paul Macdonald)



of the controls remain and it's easy enough to sit in the co-pilot seat and imagine you are flying.

Heading astern, the twin Brownings poking out of the top turret still look menacing. You can stick your head into the holes where the waist guns used to be and see the numerous fish swimming inside the fuselage. The twin fins of the tail plane, surrounded by numerous fish, are massive and the tail guns are still in situ. This is an *awesome* dive.

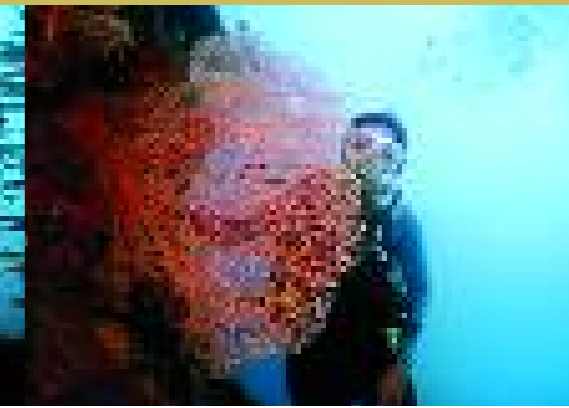


**Mandarin Fish Night Dive:** Nozaki, the fabulous divemaster, took us on a very special night dive to see her favourite mandarin fish out the front of Tim and Lesley's house in the grounds of Jais Aben. For the entire hour's dive we knelt beside a small bommie to watch these amazing little fish and actually saw them mating. Male and female would rise together from the protection of the coral, do their thing and swim over in a loop back to the safety of the coral.

After six days we headed out on Aquaventures' liveaboard DMV *Kamai* to dive around Bagabag and Karkar Islands. *Kamai* is a magnificent catamaran and comfortably takes up to eight divers and four crew. One of the best things is that chef Sampson is a wonderful cook and willingly caters to the needs of all on board.

Out at Bagabag and Karkar we dived in 30 degree water to depths around 30 metres with vis up to 50 metres. Dives were conducted at 7.30 am, 11.00 am and 3.00 pm with an optional night dive at the mooring. The majority of dives were on walls dropping into deep water. Nozaki carried a shark attracting device – a plastic water bottle which, when squeezed, made a sound sharks associate with bone being crushed. Because of this, on most of the dives and we had numerous large grey reef sharks around us; they'd come straight at us at lightning speed to within about two metres before darting off. Who needs a shark feed?

Around the islands the fish life was amazing – huge schools of pelagics, coloured reef fish galore, turtles, all



sorts of nudibranchs and, during a safety stop, a batfish bit my fin! We also snorkelled with a huge pod of dolphins and whilst sitting on the deck one day caught a fleeting glimpse of a dugong.

After six wonderful days we were back at Jais Aben again. In 12 days I made 34 fantastic dives. Both Geneva and I had a great time and thanks must go to Ted, Heather and the staff of Jais Aben as well as Tim, Lesley, Nozaki, Sampson, Angmai and all the other staff of Aquaventures.



# Madang

## MADANG DIVE SAMPLER

### DIVE SITES

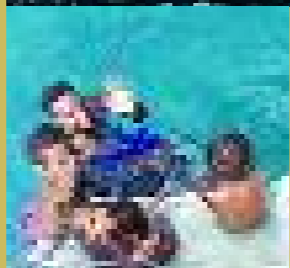
1. PLANET ROCK: Open ocean sea mount renowned for its variety and abundance of small and pelagic marine life.
2. MAGIC PASSAGE: A 90 ft deep channel through the outer barrier reef where schools of fish congregate, also gorgonians and soft corals.
3. BANANA ROCK: Small sea mount starting at 20 ft rocky outcrops with gorgonians, barrel sponges and reef fish.
4. EEL GARDENS: Sloping sandy areas lined with a variety of corals, highlighted by garden eels and reef fish.
5. BARRACUDA POINT: A coral point dropping off sharply with schools of jacks and barracuda. Can be strong currents.
6. LE JEAN POINT: Coral wall with drop offs, pelagic and reef fish.
7. PIG POINT: Outer reef dropoffs, pelagic and reef fish.
8. RASCH PASSAGE: Walls and drop offs with pelagics, reef fish and corals.
9. NORTH LEPER ISLAND: Shallow shelf with large coral heads, many macro subjects.
10. CHIMNEY: Vertical swimthru on the wall at 80ft. Corals, reef and pelagic fish.
11. SEK PASSAGE: 60ft passage, large schools of jacks, barracuda and sweetlip.
12. PIG PASSAGE: Shallow passage abounding in varied fish, hard and soft corals.

### WRECKS

1. B-25 MITCHELL BOMBER: Intact WW II bomber with guns and ammunition and large fans and sponges.
2. HENRY LIETH: 115ft Tug/freighter in 60ft with prolific soft corals.
3. CORAL QUEEN: 150ft freighter in 100ft of water. Home of the flash light fish. Unique night dive.
4. SEPIK RELIANCE: 130ft tug sits in 120ft on a sloping shelf, large pelagic fish.
5. NINSA II: 80ft freighter sits in 50-80ft of water.

## info

The Aquaventures dive shop is alongside the wharf bar at Jais Aben Resort which is about 22 kilometres north of Madang in Papua New Guinea. Jais Aben had changed little since my previous visit and is a beautiful, peaceful resort on the shores of Nagada Harbour. Set amongst the coconut palms and overlooking the islands and quiet waters, it's a paradise. I even recognised John the barman from my previous visit, who's quick to serving thirsty divers. Our first six days were



spent diving various sites just a short boat ride from the resort. Typically, double dives were held in the morning followed by an afternoon dive for those like me who just couldn't get enough. There were many wonderful experiences on the liveaboard trip including the Tabor school sing sing on Bagabag, visiting a copra plantation and watching a village soccer game on Karkar. Mention must also be made of Tim's great taste in 60's and 70's music that was piped through the boat. At one stage everyone was fully geared up on the dive deck waiting to get in the water when we all started in unison tapping our fins side to side and singing along to the music!