



ECO HEROES

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## FOUNDER OF WAKTOBI DIVE RESORT & THE COLLABORATIVE REEF CONSERVATION PROJECT



Lorenz Máder

Lorenz Máder, the founder of Wakatobi Dive Resort, worked in partnership with local leaders and village elders to establish the Collaborative Reef Conservation Programme. The programme was designed to motivate the people living in the Wakatobi region to take an active role in protecting the marine ecosystem.

Gaining regular payments and alternative employment in the resort the villages realized that it was a wiser economical use of their natural resources to preserve sections of the reefs untouched for the enjoyment of visitors. Conservation is properly managed jointly with the dive resort, the natural environment has replaced fishing as a source of income and pleasure for visitors, especially in the amazing Wakatobi locale.

### **When was the protected area established?**

"The Collaborative Reef Conservation Program began as a pilot project launched in 1997, which turned 6 km of reef into an effective no-fishing sanctuary. As the success of this project was shown, the protected zone was extended, and today covers more than 20 km of reef."

### **Where is the protected area located and how big is it?**

"These privately sponsored reef sanctuaries lie within the later confirmed Wakatobi Marine Reserve in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. The National Marine Park area was recently designated as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, and is recognized as one of the most bio-diverse marine ecosystems on earth. Currently, the program includes 17 communities around Wakatobi Dive Resort and covers 20 km (12.5 miles) of the best protected reef structures within the National Marine Park."

### **Why did your team decide to establish the protected area?**

"We believe in a solid integration of conservation into our business model and accept that keeping intact the marine environment as the foundation of our business and the enjoyment of our guests is an integral part of a sustainable dive operation."

“Because year after year Wakatobi Dive Resort is sticking to this commitment, it has earned the trust and the endorsement of a large majority of the population, of the village elders and island leaders. We don't know a more effective and cost efficient model for reef conservation in this environment.”

#### **Why did the community agree to establishment of the protected area?**

“Over the years substantial investment has gone into keeping the reefs shielded from destructive fishing methods. Every month each of the 20 villages obtains a cash amount in form of a ‘reef lease’ payment into their communal budget. This amount is meaningful enough to motivate them to keep outside intruders away from their revenue generating ‘prime underwater real estate’ and convinces them, and all community members, to stick to the agreed upon respective non-fishing zones. For that purpose it has to be a multiple of the potential fishing yield as you can easily imagine. In addition, the village nearest to the resort obtains its electrical power supply from the resort.”



#### **What special marine life is found in the protected area?**

“The Coral Triangle – as this region is also called – is defined by Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, and home to more than 605 coral species, at least 3,000 varieties of fish, and an even greater number of invertebrate species. Everything from reef sharks, rays, whales and turtles to crocodile fish, cuttlefish, stonefish, nudibranchs, shrimps and crabs, and precious pygmy seahorses are found within the Wakatobi reef system.”

#### **What changes and improvements have you seen in the protected area since it was established?**

“Overall the protected reefs are in better shape than before the sanctuaries have been established. They have turned into a huge sheltered breeding area and there is so much fish, the fisherman now catch more fish swimming out at the fringe of the protected area than they caught before in the entire area. Most locals understand now the benefit of reef resource management, which includes more income for the fisheries.”



#### **What is the importance of the protected area to your dive operation?**

“The protected reefs include some of the world's most pristine and beautiful marine ecosystems and are therefore the most important business asset, which also provides the financial means to sponsor the resort's conservation initiatives.”



#### **What challenges have you faced in establishing and maintaining it?**

“It took years of steady support and communication to establish solid trust and motivate the majority of the local population. By today compliance with the rules in the sanctuaries is 95 to 99% depending on how close the reef section is to the resort and patrol posts. Also it was not easy for a small private business to maintain steady reef lease payments through all economical downturns. Still, the business approach proved to be by far the most successful and economical conservation approach in the area.”

#### **Would you like to add any comments?**



ts what we are doing in conservation without being too serious for a holiday setting. As many interests need to be balanced, conservation is a serious matter and has more to do with drawn out negotiations and attention to detail and management than with putting hope in changing habits by preaching to and educating adults. It is neither romantic nor achieved by putting out a few catchy slogans. That is why we prefer to just do it rather than speak about it and let our guests enjoy their precious holidays without being bothered by the complexities involved in keeping the marine environment pristine."

"If a guest shows an interest, we are always delighted to go deeper and explain. We find that it is often those among our guests who are themselves professional communicators, or have built their own companies, who are intrigued by this successful and effective conservation approach and take the time to understand more. Either way, anyone who comes to Wakatobi endorses conservation through his or her enjoyment, and that is the way we believe it should be."

[www.wakatobi.com](http://www.wakatobi.com)

*Photos Courtesy of Lorenz Mader, Didi Lotze, Steve Miller, Wayne MacWilliams & Mark Snyder*

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