

THE SEARCH FOR PARADISE



WHEN LORENZ Mäder first came across a pristine stretch of beach on a small island in Indonesia's Sulawesi region, he knew his quest was over, writes Juliette Myers.

For several years, he'd been searching for the ideal location to establish a dive resort. In the waters surrounding the Wakatobi Islands, he found a collection of coral reefs that mated abundant marine life with dramatic underwater profiles.

From the first, his goal was not only to build a resort honouring local architectural traditions and operating in an eco-conscious manner, but to also provide tangible benefits to the local environment and the native people.

Even before construction began, Lorenz met with village elders and local fishermen from surrounding communities. Together they formulated a unique lease program in which the villagers agreed to refrain from destructive fishing practices and honour a series of no-take zones on the reefs.

In exchange, they were pledged a portion of revenue generated by the resort's operation, provided both in the form of direct payments as well as upgrades to schools and other civic

improvements to a group of 17 area villages.

In the early days, travel to Wakatobi Dive Resort took nearly 24 hours from Bali. As the property's reputation grew, so too did its infrastructure. A private runway was constructed on adjacent Tomia Island and direct charter flights now arrive from Bali in just two-and-a-half hours.

Resort guests choose from a collection of beachfront villas and bungalows, each constructed of native materials that blend into the landscape. A full service dive centre and a fleet of custom dive boats give access to more than 43 mapped dive and snorkel sites, while Wakatobi's renowned House Reef offers more than four kilometres of snorkelling and diving exploration that can begin right off the beach.

Additional resort amenities include a beachside restaurant, full service spa, a jetty bar that becomes a gathering point at sunset and a white sand beach which is ideal for a range of land and water sports.

Wakatobi's original Collaborative Reef Conservation Program has expanded to encompass some 20 kilometres of prime coral reef habitat. As a result, fish and coral

life are more abundant than at the time of the resort's founding and it is estimated that more than 600 species of hard and soft coral, 1,000-plus types of fish and several thousand invertebrate species call these waters home.

Many of the coral gardens surrounding Wakatobi begin in shallow depths then plunge down steep slopes. This topography allows divers of all skill levels to choose a depth and dive profile best suited to their abilities.

It also rewards snorkellers, who are welcome on the dive boats, and can spend hours exploring the upper portions of the reefs. The resort also operates a luxury live aboard dive yacht, the Pelagian, which cruises to more distant regions of the Wakatobi archipelago.

Equally appreciated by guests is the staff's dedication to providing the highest levels of personal service. From many care to private diners served beachside, personal dive instruction to hosted island tours, every aspect of the stay is overseen by attentive staff.

wakatobi.com



An experience without equal

"The quality presented at Wakatobi is quite astonishing when you consider where you are, or indeed even if you don't. We took the option that gave us a private dive guide, and this worked very well as we could pretty much do what we like and everything happened as if by magic."

lan Davies, August 2014



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