

Perfect 10

Wakatobi, Indonesia

Wakatobi brings to the table shore dives, boat trips and luxury liveboard adventures in one resort setting — all at the center of the world's marine biodiversity

BY TERRY WARD

1.

The Zoo

A sloping reef right near the resort, this site is among the fishiest in all of central Indonesia and could just as easily be called the Aquarium. So abundant is the marine life here, it takes next to no effort to spot all manner of frogfish, ghost pipefish and leaf scorpionfish hiding in plain sight atop corals. wakatobi.com

2.

Blade

Named for the row of long, narrow seamounts that call to mind the slicing side of a bread knife, this dive makes for some fantastic wide-angle photo ops with enormous sea fans and red whip corals erupting from vertical walls. Let the gentle currents pull you from peak to peak for a laid-back drift dive, and enjoy that addictive feeling of underwater flight.

3.

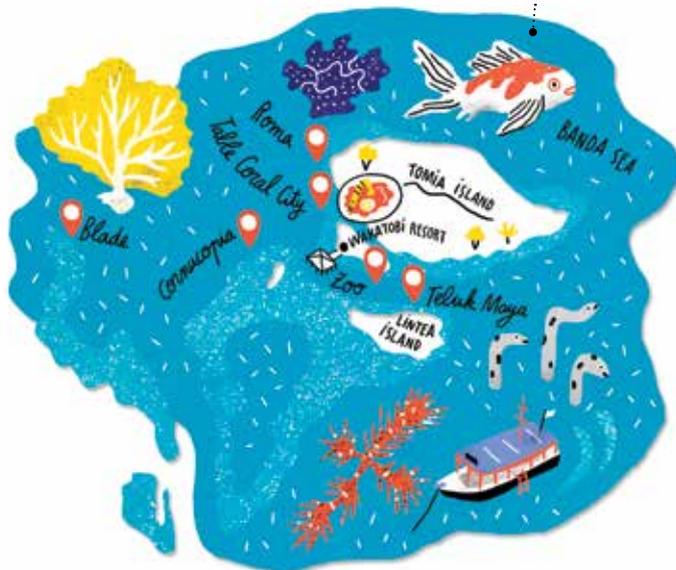
Spa time

Nothing soothes a sunburn or sore muscles like a topside treatment at Wakatobi's on-site spa, where you can kick back with a Balinese massage, a hot stone massage, aromatherapy, a foot massage and more.

4.

Table Coral City

Broad umbrellas of table corals balanced atop slender support columns create a Seuss-like scene at this favorite pinnacle dive. Fin down past colorful gardens of sponges and gorgonians



while looking for the chevron barracuda prone to patrolling the mound. Among the fish that flock to this surreal scene are anthias thick as clouds, pyramid butterflyfish and eagle rays.

5.

Teluk Maya

Showing off nearly all the biodiversity of Wakatobi in a single dive, this site mixes it up with varied depths and underwater environments. Look for one of the area's most celebrated critters, the solar-powered nudibranch, which grows zooxanthellae algae to eat within its elongated tentacles.

6.

Roma

Bring a sweetheart of a dive buddy to this beloved site known for a stand of rose-shaped turbinaria coral that stretches more than 20 feet across in what looks like a giant

underwater bouquet. And a huge grove of pavona coral positively vibrates with the rainbow motion of anthias, redtooth triggerfish, fusiliers and sergeant majors by the hundreds.

7.

Village visits

Like most Indonesians, Wakatobi's staff members are super-friendly. Don't miss the chance to check out the nearby villages they call home during informal walking tours and visits to open-air markets. Kids are always happy to pose for photos, and you'll find unique handicrafts to bring home.

8.

Cornucopia

Abundant critters sheltering in undercuts that perforate the great wall at this dive site make Cornucopia's name fitting. Look for comet fish, juvenile grouper, and a range of odd and wonderful macro life. Large gorgonians

thrive in the deep water, while waving sea fans make for a pretty backdrop near the surface.

9.

House reef

Slip into the water from the shore or from Wakatobi's jetty for one of the world's best shore dives that takes in critter-packed grassy seabeds and the fringing reef. On a single dive, you'll likely spot everything from pygmy seahorses to eagle rays. Opt for a mellow slack-tide foray or dive the house reef as a fast-paced drift, and let the resort's taxi service drop you off up-current to start.

10.

Indonesian cooking class

Known for its fabulous food too, Wakatobi offers a fun cooking class with the resort's chefs that you can experience during an extended surface interval. Put your pestle to the mortar while learning to make things like *sambal oelek* (a spicy relish) and *kare sari laut*, a fragrant Indonesian seafood curry.

DIVERS GUIDE

Average water temp:
Low 80s F

What to wear:
Skin or shorty

Average viz:
80 to 100 feet

When to go:
Year-round

More info:
sportdiver.com/wakatobi