

Case Study: Wakatobi's Cleaning Team

How one resort can make a world of difference to a plastic-free ocean

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The world is waking up to the realisation that the oceans are not a dumping ground. And while some are calling for plastic bans and government regulations, a growing number of organisations and communities are confronting the issue head-on by organising waste

reduction, recycling and cleanup projects at a local level. This is the case at Wakatobi Resort. More than two decades ago, Wakatobi's founder, Lorenz Mäder, established a community-based conservation programme that provides proactive protection for some 20 kilometres of

coral reef. This initiative has helped restore and maintain these reefs in near-pristine condition by eliminating destructive fishing practices, anchor damage and other human impacts. And these efforts don't stop at the waterline. Lorenz and others at Wakatobi are committed not only to



ABOVE: A diver from Wakatobi's cleaning team removes plastics and other rubbish found underwater

OPPOSITE PAGE: Divers scour Wakatobi's waters for discarded plastic

IMAGES: Walt Stearns



protecting the reefs, but to keeping waters, beaches and the islands free of trash and waste through sponsoring a variety of local campaigns and engaging hands-on projects.

This all begins at the resort Wakatobi has established its own recycling station, and actively works to reduce the use of disposable plastic items in all phases of resort operations. This includes measures such as providing guests with reusable aluminium water containers to eliminate the use of disposable plastic water bottles. To combat the problem of plastic waste carried by ocean currents, the staff engages in a number of ongoing debris removal efforts. Four times a day, the staff cleans more than a kilometre of surrounding beaches, removing plastics and any other debris that may wash ashore. On a daily basis, the dive teams remove any trash and debris that may collect on the reef, while team members working from the dive centre, operating taxi boats and otherwise

assisting snorkellers and divers make similar efforts to keep the shallow reef tops clean.

Wakatobi's commitments to environmental protection and cleanup go far beyond the resort boundaries. The resort sponsors weekly village cleanups that involve up to 100 local people, and works closely with local communities and governments on the issue of waste management. Wakatobi provides waste bins, organises waste collection vehicles and sponsors additional waste storage and removal mediums for the adjacent island of Tomia. To enhance local awareness of the issues, and promote sustainable practices, the resort pays a team of 20 well-respected community leaders

Wakatobi's community-based conservation programme has helped restore and maintain these reefs in near-pristine condition

and influential individuals. These spokespersons use their social status within the community to increase public awareness on the issues of reef conservation and waste management on Tomia.

Lorenz also remains personally committed to the issues of waste management and water quality. "In my voluntary function as an ecotourism consultant, I had countless discussions with ministers, governors and other high-ranking politicians and policy makers," he says. "I always urge them to improve nationwide waste management on land and on boats."

As coastal communities around the world increasingly come to terms with the urgent need for more responsible waste management practices, and the equally important need for the control and removal of debris already polluting our oceans, community-based programmes such as those initiated by Wakatobi Resort may emerge as one of the best solutions to the issue. **AD**