

# S P O R T DIVING

AUST \$6.95 incl GST  
ISSUE 124

SUB ZERO DIVES IN  
THE WHITE SEA

THE RMS NIAGARA

**SS SUDDHADIB**

INDONESIA:  
AMBON AND THE  
LEASE ISLANDS

A TASTE OF  
ABROLHOS  
HISTORY

YOUR CRITTERS  
IDENTIFIED

DOING DIGITAL: SPLIT SHOTS MADE EASY!

**DIVE MEDIC: PULMONARY BAROTRAUMA**

THE ASIA-PACIFIC'S PREMIER SCUBA MAGAZINE



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Silent Killers

# AMBON

## THE LEASE

# ISLANDS



The pristine reef at Ahmeth village on Nusa Laut. The mast of the 'Shipwreck'; Barrel sponge on Ambon



+ AT THE EASTERN END OF THE VAST  
INDONESIAN ARCHIPELAGO LIE THE 1000-  
PLUS ISLANDS OF THE MOLUCCAS, NOW  
KNOWN AS THE PROVINCE OF MALUKU. IT  
WAS IN THIS REMOTE AREA, WITH ITS LUSH  
TROPICAL CLIMATE AND RICH VOLCANIC  
SOIL THAT THE EXOTIC SPICES OF CLOVES,  
MACE AND NUTMEG FIRST ORIGINATED  
AND SERIOUSLY IMPACTED ON  
INTERNATIONAL TRADE.

: DON SILCOCK

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south coast reef; Fimbriated moray eel; Tanjung Setan reef on Ambon's north coast

**T**oday these and other spices are commonly found on supermarket shelves, but in the 15th century they were so valuable that they actually drove the 'Age of Exploration' – a two hundred year period when the major powers of Europe sent sailing ships to find and control the source of the spices. In the process of locating the legendary Spice Islands Christopher Columbus discovered the New World of the Americas, Ferdinand Magellan's expedition circumnavigated the world for the first time and Vasco Da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of Africa and established the sea route to the Indian sub-continent.

Now, that's real spice power...

**AMBON ISLAND** The capital of Maluku province is also its best known and most developed island. The strategic location and superb natural harbour is the reason the Dutch made Ambon their regional headquarters when they seized control of the spice trade at the end of the 16th century and went on to become the colonial rulers of the East Indies. It is this Dutch heritage that created the strong Christian presence on the island, in a country dominated by the Muslim religion.

**AMBON DIVE CENTRE** Ambon had established a strong reputation as a remote but first rate dive location and the Ambon Dive Centre, run by Carol Palmer & Sonny Tjandra, had built up a loyal following. Located about 30 minutes southeast of Ambon City at a pleasant beachside location near the village of Latuhalat on the Letimar Peninsula, the dive centre provided meals and accommodation and a base from which to explore the 30+ dive sites that Carol & Sonny had identified. Unfortunately the dive centre had to close down in early 2000.

**AMBON DIVING** I first visited Ambon in September 2006 on SMY *Ondina* after a very rough crossing of the Banda Sea. In April 2007 I returned



Left - Exploring Waeyase reef on Ceram's southwest tip

Below - The rusted stern buoy of the 'Shipwreck'

Facing page - The pristine reef at Ahmeth village on the island of Nusa Laut; scorpionfish and hermit crab at night; a turtle skipping over Tanjung Sial reef; a diver on the south coast reef of Ambon

to the Banda Islands on *Ondina* via the north coast of Ambon and the nearby Lease Islands, and on the way back we dived sites on the south coast. This second trip began and ended in Ambon and in perfect weather.

These trips, plus a couple of days with Maluku Divers after the second trip, allowed me to complete over 30 dives around Ambon and the Lease Islands. I was impressed, as it was a great combination of muck, blue water pelagic and reef diving.

#### MY TOP 3 DIVE SITES

**The Twilight Zone:** This is a special place and my feature article ran in *SportDiving* Aug/Sep 2007 issue #123. For the full story I recommend you get a copy, but meanwhile here's a condensed version. The Twilight Zone is near the village of Laha roughly half way up the northern shore of the large bay that separates the Letimar Peninsular from the main island. Close to the airport, the main jetty, which is the epicentre of the Twilight Zone, is home to a small fleet of fishing boats that ply the rich waters around Ambon. A unique combination of reasons create the conditions that nourish an incredible ecosystem around this jetty.

I've yet to dive Lembah Strait in Sulawesi, which is reputed to be the mother of all muck diving, but I've dived

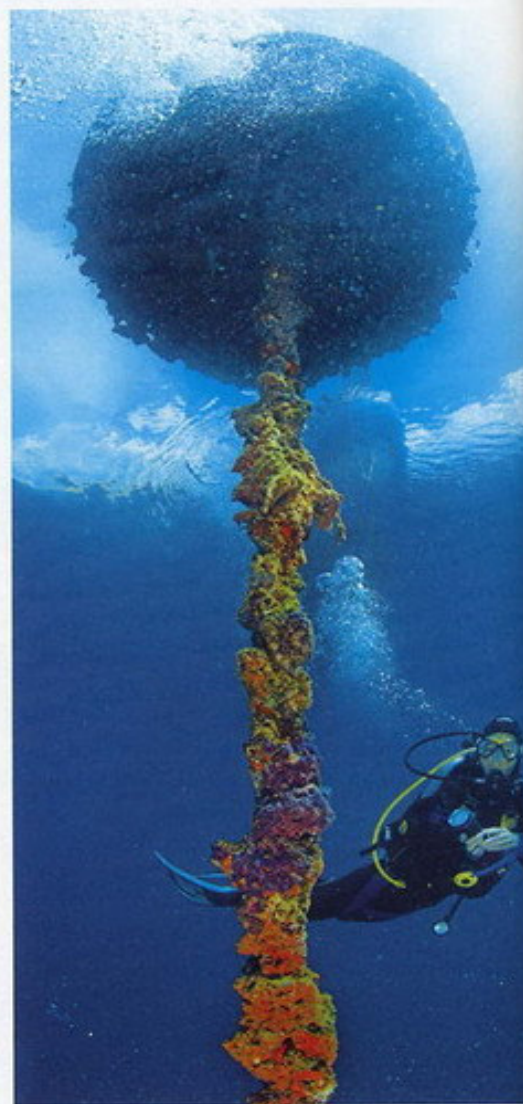
many other muck hotspots in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, but I've never seen such a diversity of critters in one relatively small location as exists at the Twilight Zone!

The local dive guides call the site Laha 1, but I prefer the more dramatic name because it accurately reflects the atmosphere under the jetty. You can (and I did) literally spend days diving here!

**Nusa Laut:** This small island is the most easterly of the Lease group and about 80 kilometres from Ambon. The sites are probably only reached by liveboard, but if you get the chance, do it!

The villages of Ameth and Akoon on the east coast of Nusa Laut are two of only seven on the island and are shining examples of what can happen when people realize that their local reef is more valuable in good condition than when ravaged by dynamite or cyanide fishing. Both villages refuse to allow such practices and have protected their reefs with a combination of *sasis* (spells) and more physical methods – urban myth has it that the Ameth village chief carries an ancient handgun in his sarong which he flourishes at the first opportunity!

Their local reef quality delivers sustainable fish supply plus they're able



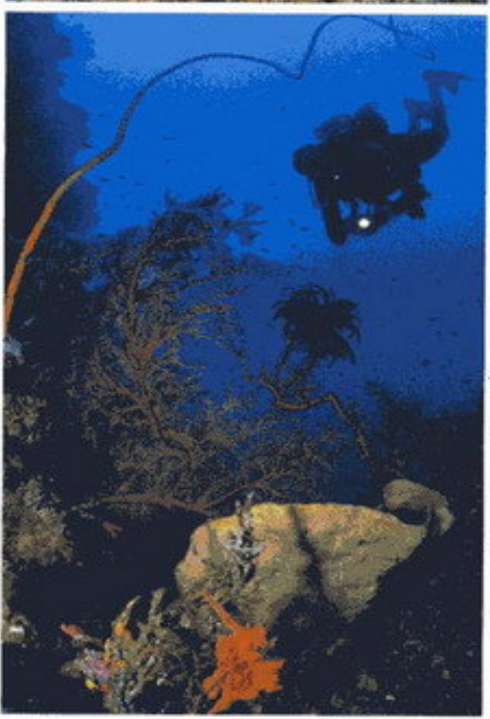
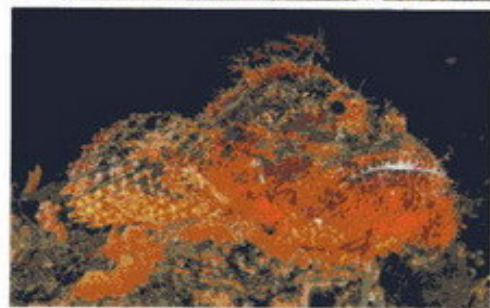
to charge dive operators to bring people there – which I was more than willing to do twice over after diving there!

I was really impressed by just how good these reefs were; the profusion of fish life and the healthy vibrant coral were amazing. Ameth's house reef in particular was stunning and amongst the best I've ever dived. I surfaced thinking that this was what it must have been like 20 odd years ago!

**The Shipwreck:** Located further up into Ambon's natural harbour than the Twilight Zone, this is commonly believed to be a Dutch cargo ship. The history of the wreck is very vague; some tell you it was sunk by the Dutch during WWII to prevent it falling into Japanese hands. Others tell a story about it being sunk by a single bomb dropped down its funnel by a (very good) mercenary pilot during civil strife in the 1950s. Whatever its heritage, it's a very good dive site. It is close to the state oil company Pertamina's main jetty and marked by a large rather rusty buoy attached to the stern of the wreck, which lies in just 12 metres.

The wreck is 100 metres long and lies facing down the slope, so the foredeck is at 32 metres and the bow in over 40 metres. As it's in the harbour, visibility isn't that great and varied between five and 15 metres on my dives but the wreck is very much intact and all features are clearly identifiable. The limited vis makes wide-angle photography a challenge on the wreck, but in the right conditions this really is a very photogenic site.

Soft and hard corals literally cover the wreck and every nook and cranny seems to have an occupant; macro buffs can easily stray towards decompression if they're not careful. I found a superb fimbriated moray eel being serviced by a multitude of cleaner shrimp and got so carried away that I incurred a seven minute stop on the buoy line!



### THE WALLACE LINE

The English naturalist Alfred Wallace spent 8 years from 1854 exploring the flora and fauna of Malaysia & Indonesia, or as it was called then the East Indies. His results were famously published; The Malay Archipelago. A major conclusion of this epic journey was the 'Wallace Line', a zoogeographical line that dissects the archipelago into the Asiatic species and organisms to the west of the line, and the Australian ones to the east of the line. The line itself runs between Borneo and Sulawesi in the north of current day Indonesia and Bali and Lombok in the south. Wallace stated of Amboyna (Ambon) in the Malay Archipelago that "the species are perhaps unrivalled for variety and beauty by those of any one spot on the earth" Praise indeed...





Ambon harbour

The only way to experience Ambon diving after military restrictions in the area relaxed, was on liveaboards that worked the area on their way to Raja Ampat. Then in July 2005 Mike Hillis & Buck Randolph, owners of Unexplored Adventures, took over the lease on the Ambon Dive Centre and relaunched the operation as Maluku Divers. Unexplored Adventures also have Spice Island Explorers which provides non-diving 'soft adventure' 8-10 day exploration trips around Ambon and the surrounding islands. They also operate the large and luxurious *Archipelago Adventurer I and II* liveaboards.

**GETTING TO AMBON** The island is remote but well serviced by domestic Indonesian airlines. The 'red-eye' flight to Ambon from Jakarta arrives early morning. I flew from Sydney to Jakarta, arriving late afternoon, and the following morning flew on Garuda to Makassar, then Lion Air to Ambon.

**BAGGAGE** I had no problem with excess baggage charges even though I was way over the 20kg limit.

**VISAS** A visa is required to enter Indonesia  
**MONEY** You'll get roughly 7000 Rupiah to the A\$ and 9000 to the US\$, so you can quickly become a millionaire... But do change a few hundred dollars at the airport on arrival as credit cards are not generally accepted except in major hotels.

**SAFETY** I've traveled extensively in Indonesia for diving and business for the past seven years and I've never had a serious problem.

I'm always careful and think ahead but I have no hesitation in visiting.

**ACCOMMODATION**

**SMY Ondina:** I've now done three trips on this liveaboard and will be going back for my fourth next year. I thoroughly recommend the boat, its crew and, in particular, its style of diving. [www.thebestdivingintheworld.com](http://www.thebestdivingintheworld.com)  
**City Seahorse:** Deb Fugitt runs City Seahorse from her home in Dallas, Texas. I've done three trips with Deb, which I guess makes me one of her regulars. Indonesia trips are booked on the Ondina.

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

**Maluku Divers:** Maluku Divers was recommended to me and though the accommodation is basic, I found the people there well organized, great to deal with and full of local knowledge.

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



# Scuba Rangers at MIDE 2007

Great news from Kids Scuba – their Youngest Master Scuba Rangers with 21 logged dives in SE Asia and their Scuba Rangers Team were honoured during the opening ceremony of the Malaysian International Dive Expo (MIDE) held in Kuala Lumpur Putra World Trade Center (PWTC) from 6 - 8 July 2007.

During the SSI award dinner ceremony, Kids Scuba was also honoured with the 'Best Scuba Rangers Award' for the second year running and have now been officially certified as 'The Single Largest Scuba Rangers Club in the World' by the Director of International Division SSI (Scuba Schools International), Mr Ed Christini.

The presentation was made by the SSI Regional Director, Mr Tan Chee Wah from Singapore for the accomplishment of certifying the most Scuba Rangers from the age of 8 - 12 in the world.

**For the full story visit:**  
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