

TRIP TEASER
Come with X-RAY MAG to Wakatobi!



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**Wakatobi
Getaway
2017**

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Pristine coral reef around Wakatobi's jetty provides snorkelers with hours of entertainment.



In my long career as a writer/photographer, I have had the opportunity to visit a large number of destinations, which has translated into an even higher number of resort visits. Among the more widely regarded is Wakatobi Dive Resort in southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Wakatobi is unique in that it could easily be classified as a destination, resort and an "experience" all at the same time. In my book, getting to see the really cool stuff in those far off corners of the world is what traveling is all about. When you consider Wakatobi, located below the southeastern corner of Sulawesi, Indonesia, in the Banda Sea—home to more than 450 coral species, some 3,000 varieties of fish, and an even greater number of inverte-

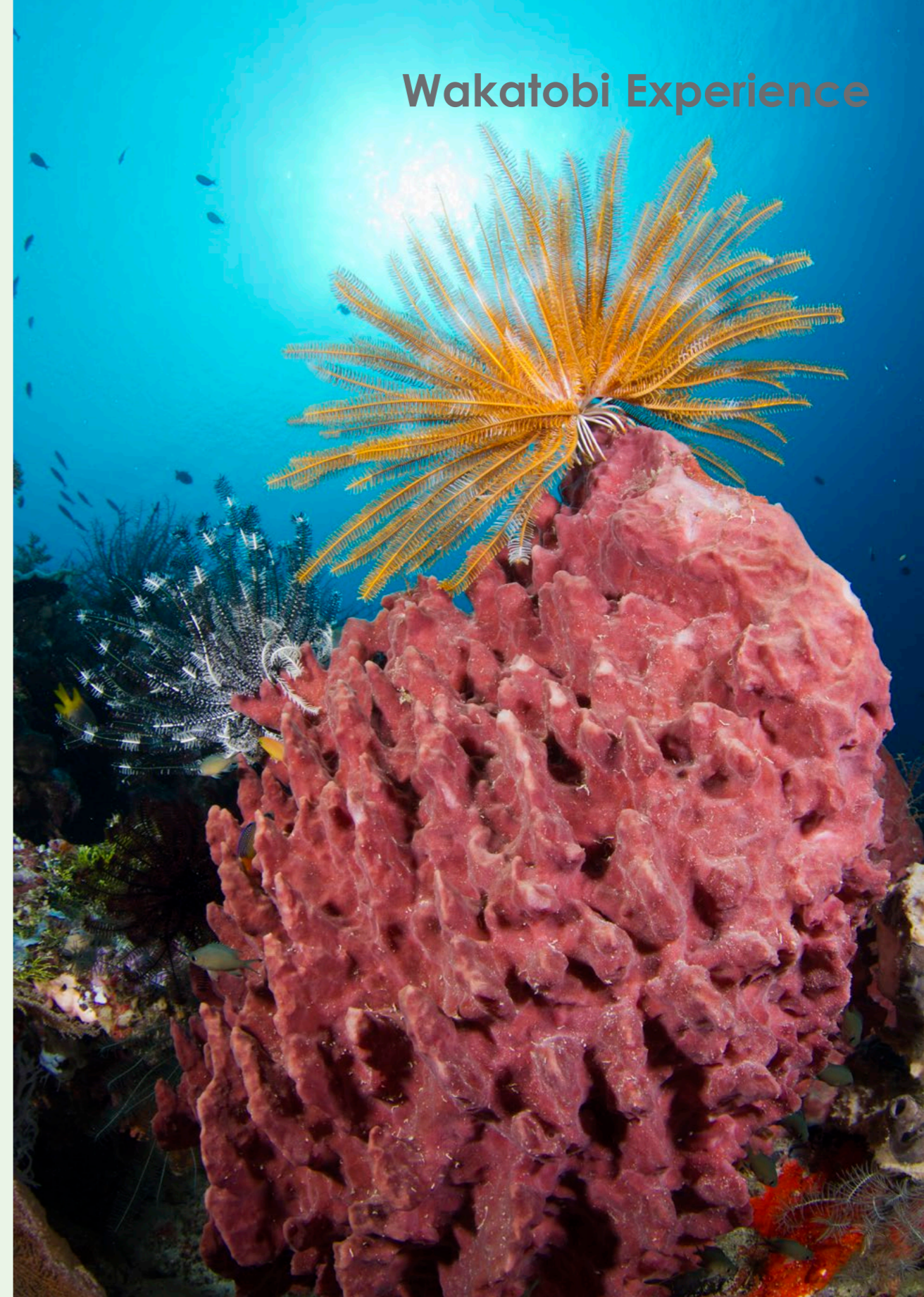
brate species—it is certainly not a reach (in terms of biodiversity) to say, "Wakatobi delivers."

The attraction to this pocket of the Indo-Pacific is further enhanced by the fact that its comprehensive reef system has remained surprisingly pristine, largely with the help of Wakatobi Dive Resort's Collaborative Reef Conservation program, which serves one of the world's largest privately funded and managed marine protected areas, the Wakatobi National Park. This protected area encompasses some 1,400,000 hectares of the Tukang Besi island group, which includes Wangi-Wangi, Kaledupa, Tomia and Binongko. If you haven't figured it out, the first two letters of each island spells Wakatobi.

Getting there

Getting there is not exactly a skip, jump and a hop—first you need to get to Bali. From there, Wakatobi Dive Resort has it

Wakatobi Experience



A brilliant crinoid "star" shines atop a barrel sponge at Treasure Chest. There is never a shortage of colorful nudibranchs (left) on the reefs at Wakatobi. They come in all colors and sorts, this pair of purple *Hypselodoris* nudibranchs appears to be getting very chummy. PREVIOUS PAGE: An "alien" cuttlefish sports its colors at the popular site, Starship, located on the western side of the Sawa reef system, just a 20-minute boat ride from the resort.

dive event



covered with a private charter flight on board one of Garuda Indonesia's ATR 70 passenger propjets directly to the the resort's own airstrip. And to make matters even better, the only passengers you will see on your flight are guests staying at the resort or going aboard Wakatobi's liveaboard yacht, *Pelagian*. This ensures that everything you're bringing—dive gear, photo

equipment, etc.—all of it is going with you on that flight, no worries there.

Accommodations

Accommodations include a collection of Indonesian-style bungalows and villas. Ocean bungalows offer a lovely beach and ocean view, while Palm bungalows are conveniently located among the beachfront's palm grove slightly



Wakatobi



The dive site Roma is a large, wide pinnacle that leads down to a wide coral ridge and is a favorite of Wakatobi's guests. Coming down its hard coral ridge, you will find large barrel sponges and sea fans sporting crinoids and prolific fish life.

further back. If you are seeking the ultimate accommodations, Wakatobi Villas will not disappoint. Villa numbers 1 and 2 have two full bedrooms with shower rooms, plus private plunge pools, and the package includes a private dive guide assigned to the villa guests for the duration of their trip.

Cuisine

While I am by no means a self-described foodie, Wakatobi's reputation for five-star dining services and premium meals is not an exaggeration. A seductive array of incredible cuisine, including traditional Indonesian dishes, American and international favorites, are all prepared fresh by a team of trained chefs. And they will cater to any dietary requests, needs or requirements. Believe me, you are going to be happy.

As gorgeous as that first breakfast or lunch might be, the view

from your table is a mighty big distraction. The feature attraction that will always catch your attention, as it has mine, is the sharp boundary line between a broad expanse of shallows with a montage of sea grass beds and coral formations, and the deep blue where the edge of the reef drops off into the void. This is Wakatobi's House Reef, one of the best I have ever experienced.

Diving

The gateway to the House Reef is the resort's 80-meter (262-foot) long jetty where divers can enter the water by a ladder midway on the jetty, or take a step off the end where the reef's shelf makes a sharp turn downward, making it a near vertical plunge beyond 76 meters (250 feet). Of course, you can wade in from the beach in front of your bungalow or the dive center, and a few fin kicks across has you on the wall. In



Just a few fin kicks from the beach or off the jetty ladder is a snorkeler's heaven. Snorkelers enjoy a wealth of marine life and pristine coral reef. A diver (far left) gets friendly with clownfish at Treasure Chest. The site known as Zoo is one of the prime locations of Wakatobi's signature Fluo-Dives (top right) and the light show is nothing short of psychedelic. Divers, and especially photographers, love this experience as they can capture rare creatures in a whole new light.



dive event



Wakatobi



Schools of black snapper are commonly seen roaming the upper portions of Wakatobi's reefs. Photographers (left) find endless opportunities to create stunning macro images. I have found seven species of clownfish on Wakatobi's House Reef alone.

House Reef. If it happens to be running south to north instead, the site known as Turkey Beach makes a clear choice.

are attentive and lead each underwater excursion, providing a personal experience for each diver/snorkeler. Another positive is that they also allow divers the freedom to explore each site at their own pace, as long as it is conducted within the safe range of their personal experience and training. Yes, so do a lot of other operations this side the world.

addition to the "pool" always being open, dive center personnel monitor the House Reef between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. every day. This team also provides taxi boat service on request.

The taxi boat—or shuttle, as I coin it—is quite an advantage. The dive team shuttle you via skiff to a portion of the reef of your choosing, dropping you at a spot based on the direction the current is flowing during the changing of the tides. For example, if currents are flowing north to south, the taxi boat can drop you off at Tanjung Patok, a lovely dive site that is part of the same reef as the

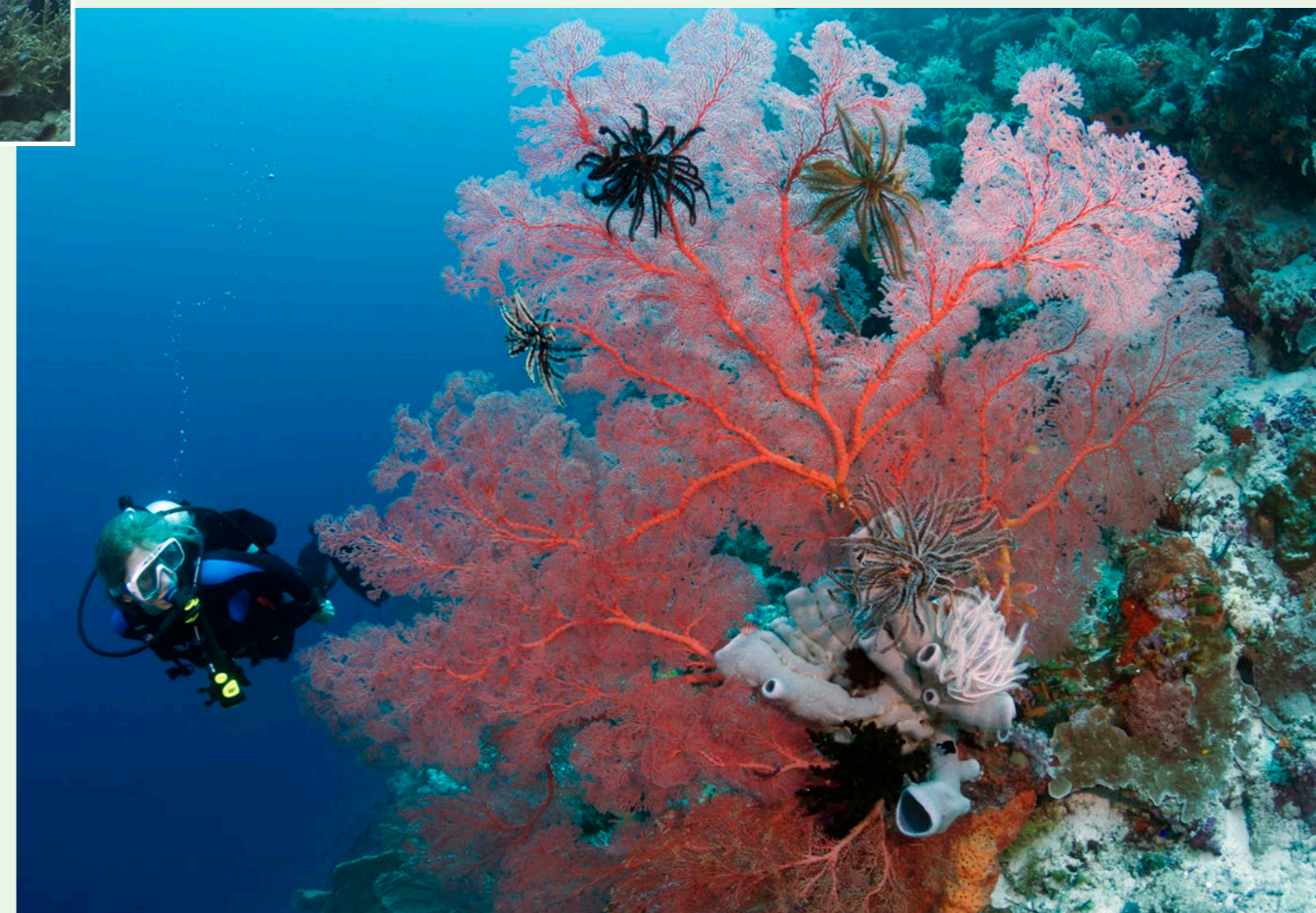
Dive center

A few steps from the water and jetty, the dive center provides a full range of support services, including full rental equipment, repair and instruction. The adjacent climate-controlled photo center offers ample workbench space for a multitude of camera systems with plenty of both 220 volt and 110 volt outlets for recharging batteries. Pretty much what would be expected at any well-run resort.

The dive center is first class, run by a very capable team. Dive guides

Fleet of dive boats

So, if you are wondering how Wakatobi differs from some of the others, let's start with the Wakatobi fleet of six dive boats. These locally-crafted vessels each measure 21 meters (69 feet) in length and provide an expansive amount of room with protected covering from the sun. Needless to say, surface intervals are relaxing. More amazing is that



If wall diving is something you enjoy doing, you do not need to go far at Wakatobi. Just a short swim from the beach or a step down from the jetty brings you to the outer edge of the House Reef. This adorable hairy squat lobster (top right) was spotted hiding in a sponge on Wakatobi's House Reef.

dive event



A diver peers through the brilliant keyhole of a giant overhang along one of Wakatobi's signature walls. At Treasure Chest (left), a scenic dive site just a 10-minute boat ride from the resort, brilliant sea fans and schooling black snapper are a common sight.

when you want, and how long you want. Take a private dive guide along and you will find one problem: you are not going to want to go back—just send the meals over by taxi boat!

Service

Wakatobi is all about service, and I do not mean everyone knowing your name from day one (although that is true).

the typical maximum number of divers on board is 12, plus the crew (captain, two deck hands and two to three dive guides). Then again groups of 8 to 10 divers per boat is not uncommon. One of the best values offered by the dive center is a private dive boat. For a very reasonable price, you can take a dive boat for the day, which includes crew, full breakfast and/or lunch; dive where you want,

From the moment you step ashore, you are made to feel like a king or queen. The staff really does not let you lift a finger. Throughout my travels around the globe, I have repeatedly heard remarks about Wakatobi's service ethos being an example for all resort operators. I have also heard many comments like: "The place is all about service and maximizing your diving—it doesn't get any better than this" or

"All we can say is ask and you shall receive—it's an awesome place, and the service is far beyond anywhere else we have ever been." When you hear this over and over again from divers who have been to a destination, you simply have to see for yourself what it's all about. I can tell you, it is worth it.

Wakatobi offers a range of other activities and watersports from kayaking to even kitesurfing. The sheltered waters of Wakatobi's lagoon are ideal for first-time kite riders, so why not give it a try? There is an on-site spa, nature trails and village tours that showcase the island's flora and fauna, and provide a chance to experience the local culture. Add in the unrivaled diving and you have the makings of a one-of-a-kind dive vacation experience. Let's just say it's "an experience without equal." ■

Wakatobi Getaway - April 10 - 17, 2017

Join X-Ray for an unforgettable week at Wakatobi Dive Resort, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia



During this special week at the resort there will be a series of image clinics for underwater photographers hosted by Walt Stearns and Peter Symes (publisher of X-Ray Magazine), along with a photo contest for the best wide-angle & macro subjects taken during the week.

In addition to numerous prizes for wide-angle and macro, one winning image will make the cover of X-ray magazine! There will be a Post Trip Photo Gallery featured on xray-mag.com of top images from participating photographers.



\$3,950 USD covers 7 nights / 6 days of diving plus:

- Round trip airfare between Bali and Wakatobi Dive Resort
- Accommodations in Palm Bungalow (twin share)
- All inclusive meal plan: breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks (excluding sodas & alcoholic beverages)
- 3 boat dives per day
- Unlimited shore diving with taxi service on Wakatobi's famous House Reef
- Nitrox on all dives, complements of X-Ray magazine
- All clinics and seminars plus photo contest participation

We are booking space now!

For more information or to reserve your spot contact:
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