



Malaysia's Untouched Piece of Art



EVER SINCE diving celebrity Jacques Cousteau raved about the diversity of marine life calling it an 'untouched piece of art', the mecca of Sipadan has been a major scuba destination and one that the committed diver cannot miss. The small tropical island is located off the east coast of Sabah, Malaysia's eastern most state, and lies on the north-eastern corner of Borneo. It is surrounded by sheer walls of soft coral and a drop-off to 2,000ft that is a mere 30 yards from the beach. It is a haven for a myriad of marine life and attracts large creatures like green sea turtles and immense schools of barracudas.

Sipadan was at the top of Scuba Diving magazine's Gold List for The Top Dive Destinations of the World, a distinction it shared with two other locations known for an equal diversity of their marine life - the Galapagos Islands and Truk in Micronesia. The Sipadan diving legend has passed through the world's dive community to the extent that all divers, with an interest in visiting the best sites in the world, have this small island at the top of their wish list.

The marine topography of the island makes it an astonishing place to dive, with caves, walls, canyons, plateaux and overhangs. Seeing 10 turtles in one dive is not uncommon, nor is seeing a school of about 300 Barracuda. With possible pelagic sightings of mantas, eagle rays and scalloped hammerhead

sharks, each dive at Sipadan is an eagerly anticipated event.

Green and hawksbill turtles are regular inhabitants, coming ashore in season to lay their eggs on the island's pristine beaches.

The island has an eco-system so fragile that it is now forbidden for anyone to stay - since January of this year, all its resorts have been closed, which means that the best way to dive and experience the many attractions of underwater Sipadan is undoubtedly on a liveaboard.

Dive off the *MV Celebes Explorer*, a superb liveaboard with great facilities, and you can visit areas unavailable to shore-based divers. Top of the list of dive sites to visit is the extraordinary Barracuda Point. If you are lucky, and the water conditions are right, you will witness a remarkable vortex of thousands of chevron barracuda; hence the name of the site. Barracuda Point is also home to dozens of huge green sea turtles and hawksbill turtles, white tip reef sharks are also common. Make the most of up to five dives per day, as opposed to just two a day if land-based on Sipadan's neighbouring islands, with time to relax in between on this luxury cruiser.

A huge benefit of diving Sipadan is the climate. Because of its position, the island escapes the monsoon rains. The daytime temperature varies between 28 to

Is Sipadan top of your wish list?

34°C and the cooling sea breezes negate any humidity. Water temperature is a balmy 27°C which means that a three mil shortie is more than adequate; in fact, diving without a wet suit is a good option and an enjoyable experience.

However, it should be noted that diving here may not be for everybody - occasional strong currents and the extreme depth and vertiginous nature of Sipadan's drop-offs suggest that you should be of some experience before attempting to dive off the island.

A 10-day holiday costs from £1,449 p/p based on twin share and including flights, transfers, 7-nights cruising with full board on *MV Celebes Explorer*, up to four dives per day including night dives, plus tanks, weights and air. You can save 10% on all departures between November 06, 2005 and February 28, 2006 if you book by January 01, 2006.

So if you fancy a trip where you can observe in excess of 3000 species of fish and hundreds of corals then look no further than the stunning island of Sipadan.

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