



## Dive sites around Alor and Pantar

Print version of [www.starfish.ch/dive/Alor.html](http://www.starfish.ch/dive/Alor.html)

The first divers visiting Alor have written enthusiastically about the dive sites being full of schools of fish and sharks (there is even dive site called Sharks Galore see No 12). Nowadays you come here more for the beautifully covered walls and the interesting critters you find in the muck here. In 2015 I spend 2 weeks in Alor and we didn't see many sharks except while snorkelling in front of our resort in Kepa, but I took loads of photos of the smaller critters there, among them some nudibranch species I hadn't seen in my over 20 years of diving except in books! So I think it is still well worth to come here, just enjoy the spectacular walls and the weird critters!

Alor Island, situated in the east of Indonesia (Nusa Tenggara) has become more and more accessible with flights from Denpasar / Jakarta to Kupang and daily flight on to Alor. Alor can also be reached by ferries either from Kupang (Timor) or overland from Maumere (Flores) through Lembata and Pantar. There are 4 dive centers in Alor and Pantar and also liveboards stopping in the area.

### Dive conditions

Between the islands of Alor and Pantar lies the strait of Pantar (Selat Pantar). Here the water coming from the Pacific in the north is flowing through this strait to the Indian Ocean in the south. This big "river" in the ocean is called the Indonesian Throughflow and the Pantar strait is one of the few gaps in the long chain of islands reaching from Sumatra to Timor where it can flow through, mostly from north to south. The smaller islands of Pura, Kepa, Ternate and Buaya lie smack in the middle of the strait and where the strait narrows the currents can be quite fierce. At some places the currents are so strong, that boats get turned sideways and have to really fight to reach places up current.

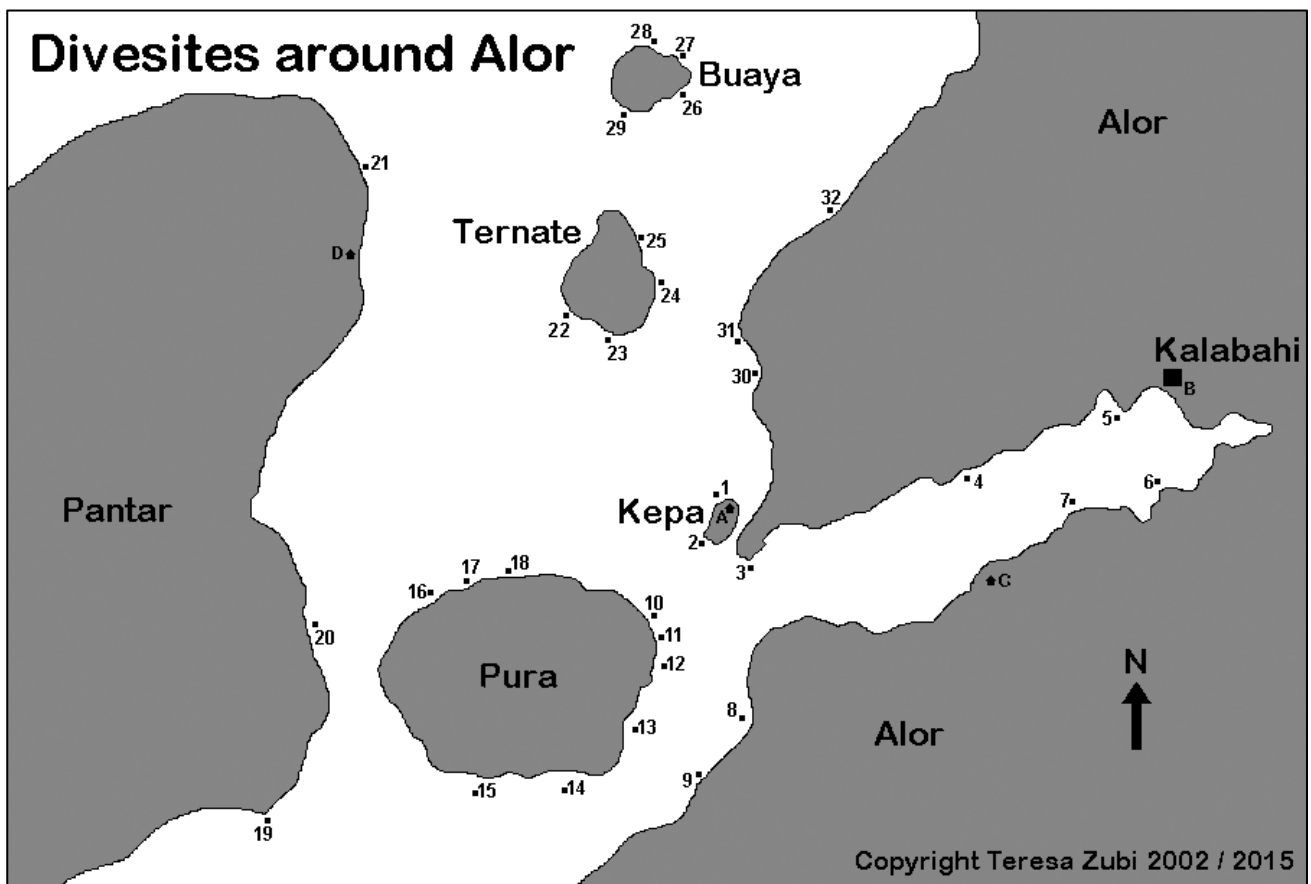
Water temperatures are around 27 degrees, but especially in the south it can get quite cold – we had 23 degrees at some of the dive sites. Cold water is upwelling from the very deep parts north of Alor and then hitting the southern shores. This also means that sunfish (*Mola mola*) and Thresher sharks come from the deep to get cleaned. Sometimes very strange animals appear from the depth (see *Lophiodes fimbriatus*, a deep sea anglerfish). The bay is somewhat protected, so there are often large pods of dolphins and whales travelling through.

### Night dives around Alor - a must!

I did several night dives, mainly on some of the muck dive sites in Kalabahi Bay and I really recommend that you include some, while you are staying in Alor since they were all truly spectacular!! On each we saw a great many nudibranchs, with several species I didn't know before (*Ceratosoma moloch*, several *Marionia* species, *Pleurobranchaea brockii*, *Phestilla melanobranchia* and more), although I dive since 20 years. Then cuttlefishes and octopuses, shrimps and crabs, stargazers, stonefishes, pegasus sea moths, ghostpipefishes, frogfishes (a black frogfish at night, luring.....) and much more...!

The dive operators also offer night diving, mostly close to the resort in sheltered bays. Try places like **Nite Delight No 30**, **The Mini Wall No 7** or some of the muck dive sites (**4. Mucky Mosque**, **5. Pertamina Pier** and **6. Dive Logs**) I described below.

## Map of the dive sites around Alor and Pantar



1. Kal's Dream (Pulau Kepa) - 2. The Bullet - 3. Tri-Top - 4. Mucky Mosque - 5. Pertamina Pier - 6. Dive Logs - 7. The Mini Wall - 8. No Man's Land - 9. The Cathedral (Motolang) - 10. Hari Lalong - 11. School's Out - 12. Sharks Galore - 13. Clown Valley (Apuri) - 14. Malal - 15. Slab City - 16. The Boardroom (Tangaban) - 17. Smart's Lament (Abila Wall) - 18. Coconut Grove (Teluk Limraning) - 19. Sea Apple Slopes - 20. Bama - 21. Pan Abang - 22. The Arch - 23. Babylon - 24. Coral Cliffs - 25. The Edge (Umapura) - 26. Crocodile Rock - 27. Peter's Prize - 28. Half Moon Bay - 29. Cave Point - 30. Nite Delight - 31. The Patch - 32. Fault Line

### Diving around Alor and Kepa (Kumba) Island

**1. Kal's Dream (Batu Kepa):** You dive on two underwater pinnacles (top = 7m and 2m) lying northwest of Kepa island. The currents coming from the north hit these rocks smack on, so most of the time it is too wild to dive here. Sometimes the currents also shift and what was a nice dive turns into an up and down, left and right tugging experience!

On my first trip to Alor in 2002 with a liveaboard this dive site was supposed to be the ne plus ultra with large fish, sharks and rays. Actually at the start of our first dive it seemed like great things were to come - we saw a group of barracudas, then a whitetip shark and a large marble ray. When these animals disappeared, there was nothing more to report. Nearly no medium sized fish, just Anthias over corals and current. We waited and waited, but nothing large showed. On our second dive not even a single large fish showed up. The most adventurous thing was actually surfacing among the up and down currents where one of my dive buddies came up with 20 bars left, because he was swept down to a considerable depth before he was able to surface.

Coming back in 2015 I dived with Cedric from La P'tite Kepa. He knows the divesite inside out and he checked out the dive conditions on the site over several days. So when we actually dived there, the currents had

calmed down for most of the dive, though they switched and picked up somewhat towards the end. We even managed to first dive around the deeper pinnacle and also follow part of the spur going out to a corner where there were lots of fish gathering and then leisurely swim over to the other pinnacle and finish our dive there. We saw a large dogtooth tuna, three large Napoleon wrasses, two of the fighting with each other, some trevallies and sweetlips. The pinnacles are nicely covered, though corals are low lying because they are exposed to the currents. Interesting were also some Coral Crouchers (*Caracanthus maculatus*) and several Yellow-spotted Scorpionfishes (*Sebastapistes cyanostigma*) packed tightly between the branches of an Acropora coral. Still a spectacular dive site, but only dive there, if the conditions are right!

## The Bay of Kalabahi

This narrow and steep bay looks like a finger pointing to the east and it nearly separates Alor kecil (small Alor) from Alor besar (big Alor). The bay is quite long and deep with some pearl farms and fishing rafts close to the shore. The terrain is very rugged with Kalabahi situated where Alor kecil and Alor besar are joined together - the only flat area...

**4. Mucky Mosque dive sites:** Along the northern coast of Kalabahi bay are several muck dive sites. These dive sites are also good for night dives. You find everything you want, from Rhinopias scorpionfishes to leaffishes, ghostpipefishes (Halimeda, Ornate and Robust) to frogfishes, seahorses and dragonets as well as crabs, shrimps and a lot of different nudibranchs. Often long ropes covered with hydroids and small corals come down from the shore – a good place to look for frogfishes perching there. On one of my dives a big black Giant frogfish was actually swimming away from one of these ropes and trying to perch on my (black) camera housing instead. When I moved away (I wanted to take photos of the frogfish swimming!) it decided on the next dark place which was one of my dive buddies. It made straight for him as if attacking him and ended up sitting on his chest, face to face with him! Probably thought he was a nice black sponge.....

**5. Pertamina Pier and 6. Dive Logs:** Further up towards Kalabahi close to the Pertamina Pier is another nice muck dive site – lots of sand but with many interesting animals living on it. I found a fingered dragonet, two Ambon scorpionfishes, juvenile batfishes and lots of squat lobsters, some on featherstars, some on sponges and a nice selection of slugs and nudis. My dive guide told me, you also find the Wonderpus (*Wonderpus photogenicus*) and Mimic Octopus (*Thaumoctopus mimicus*) here. On the other side of the bay (**Dive Logs**) there is an area with mangroves which is also very interesting for muck diving. Here you can find Randall's goby, the metallic goby, waspfishes and also Rhinopias and other interesting scorpionfishes.

## Between Pura and Alor

**9. The Cathedral (Motolang):** I really liked this dive site! Above water there is a steep rock wall descending into the sea, so underwater there are huge jumbled rocks and boulders and a steep wall covered with lots of hard and soft corals and sponges. We saw Barbiganti seahorses, a Potohi Seahorse (in the Halimeda algae), a blurring octopus and two different species of frogfish. There is a swim through with a cave at about 25 meters and we were lucky and found a huge tawny nurse shark (*Nebrius ferrugineus*) lying in the cave there.

**10. Hari Lalong:** A really beautiful dive site with huge rocks lying side by side with many narrow spaces in between to swim through. There was a hidden comet fish, mandarin fishes and a large morey eel which was gaping at us. Good for a slow drift dive with a gentle slope at the end, covered with soft corals and plenty of small fish. You finish the dive leisurely following a small group of Barracudas in the shallow and taking a close look at the huge coral blocks covered with glassfishes.

**12. Sharks Galore:** Our dive started in the dive site called Sharks Galore but the sharks must have all been on vacations because we didn't see a single one. The underwater landscape is quite nice and like in other dive sites along the eastern coast of Pura there were a lot of anemones. Coming out of the water our dive guide laughed and said he had just thought of a new name for this dive site - "**Sharks No More**".

**13. Clown Valley (Apuri):** This dive site is astonishing, because every surface is covered in sea anemones. Nearly all of the anemones I believe are Bulb-tentacle Sea Anemone (*Entacmaea quadricolor*) mostly with Clarks Anemonefishes (*Amphiprion clarkii*) and a few with Tomato Anemonefish (*Amphiprion frenatus*) in them. Considering how many anemones there are – I calculate there must be millions - there are only relatively few anemone fishes living in them. I often saw them flitting from one anemone to the next when I approached, so they seemed to change their host frequently. Apart from the anemones we saw also some sea apples (see **Sea Apples Slope No 19**) and – what a nice surprise – two yellow *Miamira miamira* nudibranchs in the shallow. While surfacing we also noticed bubbles coming out from the ground – a testimony to the volcanic nature of Pura Island.

**14. Malal:** This is another dive site where the entire area is covered with thousands of anemones. Just for that it is well worth to go there, it is a sight seen only in very few places. The reason for this abundance of sea anemones is unclear. Apart from the anemones we were lucky to find a Wobbegon shark (*Orectolobus leptolineatus*), a smaller species than Wobbegon sharks in Papua and with only a few tassels.

## Northern Pura

Pura island is a small volcano cone island, the extinct volcano is 1015m high with a heavy forested crater. Pura being an extinct volcano there are several dive sites where there are air bubbles coming out from the ground, mostly in the shallow sandy areas.

**16. The Boardroom (Tangaban):** A muck dive site with low coral cover on a slope. My dive guide found two pegasus sea moths, a pair of robust ghostpipefishes and a large *Kentrodoris rubescens* nudibranch which in my opinion looks just like a poodle without legs....!

**17. Smart's Lament (Abila Wall):** A nice wall with lots of small crannies, covered with soft corals, black coral bushes and hydroids. Halfway on the wall there is a huge Elephant Ear sponge, perhaps 3 meters wide, like a vertical barrier. Lots of yellow cup corals, so if there is some current it must look really beautiful with the tentacles out. During our dive the current picked up and we had schools of fusiliers and hunting jackfishes.

**18. Coconut Grove (Teluk Limraning):** You descend on dark volcanic sand mixed with small coral boulders covered with soft corals and hydroids. Doesn't look like much but to my amazement our dive guide Bram found three Weedy Scorpionfishes (*Rhinopias frondosa*) in reddish-brown-yellow colours and with a lot of skin flaps. Every time I took a photo and looked away to adjust my camera settings and looked again I found it hard to find the scorpionfish again, it was so well camouflaged! They seemed to disappear among the algae and soft coral, even imitating the jerky movements of algae in a swell.

I think we were lucky to find so many *Rhinopias* since they also seem to move around, so sometimes you might find them on one dive site, then at the on one next over...

## Pantar island

I only visited the dive sites on the east coast of Pantar close to Pura island. The southern part of Pantar is dominated by Gunung Sirung (862m), an active stratovolcano which erupted last in 2012. You can hike up to the crater rim from nearby village Kakamauta. There is large sulphurous crater lake and active steam vents inside the caldera. A small natural harbour, Beangabang Bay, lies in the southeast of the volcano (not on the map) with three dive sites (**Hot Property, Ribbon Eel Run and The Lava Flow**), all of them on black sand with lots of critters. The water here is generally colder.

**19. Sea Apple Slopes:** The further south you go the colder it gets but like in the Komodo islands but this also means some special animals are living here. This is a good place to find the rare filter-feeding sea cucumbers called sea apple (*Pseudocolochirus violaceus*). This sea cucumber is round like a football and of a bright red and purple colour with white or yellow stripes. Long colourful tentacles grab small plankton animals from the water and transfer them to the mouth opening on top of the sea cucumber. Small yellow sea cucumbers

(*Colochirus robustus*) are also found here, some clinging in large numbers to the underside of the brownish leaflike sponges (*Phyllospongia sp*) found here.

**20. Bama:** After a boat ride from Kepa with sightings of bottlenose and Fraser dolphins we dived on this nice slope on the east side of Pantar. The strait narrows so there is sometimes quite some current on this dive site. The whole dive site is just covered with fish – anthias, butterflyfishes, triggerfishes, surgeonfishes, damselfishes. Out in the blue lots of Long jawed Mackerels (*Rastrelliger kanagurta*) were swimming in a tightly bunched school, feeding on plankton with their mouths opening simultaneously and schools of fusiliers were passing by. When we came to the wall the current started to pick up and we were swept alongside. Our guide found nudis, flatworms and in one of the black coral bushes a longnose hawkfish. I spent a lot of time looking into the blue, though, because there were groups of bluefin trevallies (*Caranx melampygus*) out hunting. Deeper down I even saw a Napoleon wrasse, but my computer told me – too deep for you....

**21. Pan Abang:** This is one of several dive site lying close to the Eco Dive Resort in northern Pantar. It is a good muck dive site where you can see interesting critters like Wunderpus, Mimic octopus, Rhinopias, ghostpipefishes, spearing mantis shrimp, frogfish, devil fish, pegasus and Coleman shrimps. You dive on sand interspaced with some corals.

## Ternate island (Alor)

**22. The Arch:** This place is very beautiful! On the wall huge underwater cervices form a large arch at about 20 to 30 meter. Very healthy coral cover with whip corals and gorgonians. On some of the over 3 meter long whip corals you might find the rare Wire Coral Shrimp (*Pontonides ankeri*). I also saw some interesting animals in the upper part of the reef such as the marble dragonet, some special filefish and nudibranchs such as *Jorunna funebris*. Some dive sites have very impressive topography like big walls, arches, chimneys, cracks and overhangs, this is one of them!

**23. Babylon:** Our dive guide who likes Bob Marley was trying to sing underwater to live up to the Caribbean name of this dive site while I was looking for nudibranchs and found 6 different species of them - Alor is always quite a good place for nudies. This is a nice dive site with some interesting overhangs at 30 meters.

**24. Coral Cliffs:** A steep wall with a lot of whip corals, some 3 to 4 meter long. Nice dive but not so spectacular.

**25. The Edge (Umapura):** For this wall dive it is well worth coming all the way to Ternate. When you perch on top the wall seems to go down and down and then disappear! There are overhangs and small crevices everywhere, sponges, black coral bushes and large corals cover everything. We had a leisurely dive along the wall, shining our lights into all the holes and crannies and just having a great time. And as a highlight, already on our way back and during the safety stop our guide Bram found a white frogfish perching on some blue sponges under an overhang! We spent our safety stop watching it luring and yawning in between.

## Buaya island

**29. Cave Point:** A nice easy dive on a wall riddled with small caves between 20 and 35 meter. The wall is nicely covered with corals and sponges and we found a lot of nudibranchs and had a nice long swim with a banded sea krait (*Laticauda colubrina*).

