

Dive sites in Flores, Indonesia

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The island of Flores lies in Nusa Tenggara, between the Komodo and Rinca islands to the west and Adonara, Solor, Lembata (Lomblen), Pantar and Alor islands to the east. The coasts of Flores are mostly unexplored and practically all the diving is done in the north because the south coast is very rough. There are two main diving areas - Maumere and Labuan Bajo (see diving in Komodo and Rinca). Flores is one of the most rugged island of Nusa Tenggara with a collection of 14 active volcanoes. The island is well worth a visit for its nice landscape, the high volcanoes and fine ikat weavings. There is the famous volcano, Keli Mutu in central Flores, which has three colored lakes near the summit.



Maumere Bay

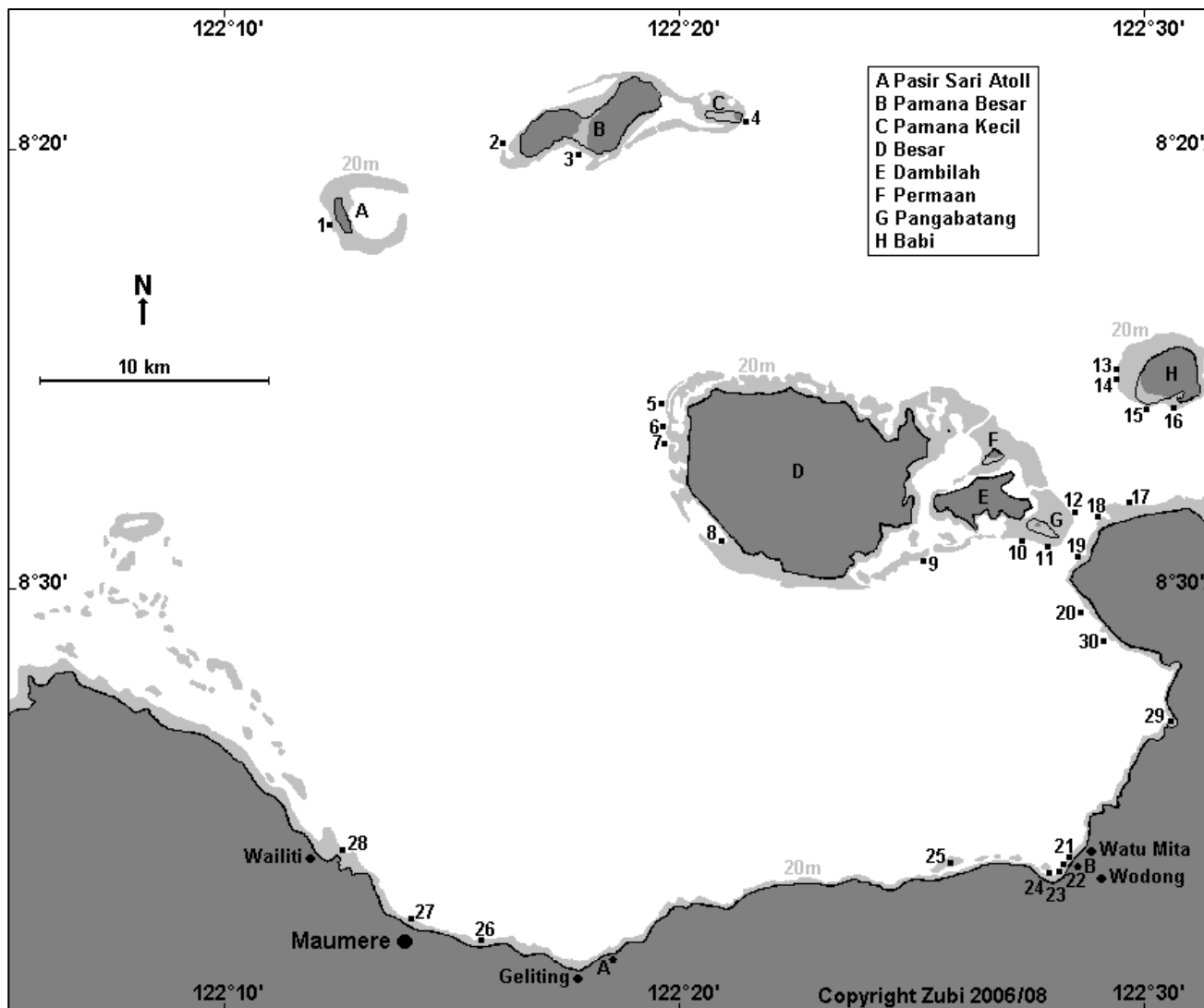
I recommend Maumere on the northern coast of Flores specially if you are interested in small rare critters, it is well worth a visit. There are several dive sites on the coast good for muckdiving where you find frogfishes, mimic octopus and special nudibranchs. The area is also known for a lot of endemic species, actually it is said that the photographer Rudie Kuitert catalogued in Maumere Bay alone over 1200 species of fish, including some new to science!

Maumere Bay is very beautiful, surrounded by volcanoes and other mountains. The islands on the outer edge of the bay have nice coral reefs with steep walls covered with hard corals and large sea fans. Pulau Besar is the largest of the islands with high mountains and together with Dambilah and Pangabatang it forms a barrier to the water flowing in and out of the bay. For this reason the bay is calm at most times and dolphins, sperm whales and whale sharks like to come here. Dolphins and pilot whales are common and can be seen during the whole year, mostly if the sea is calm. Sperm whales can be seen during the rainy season from November to December. The best time to see whale sharks seems to be April and May but they are around the whole year, it seems, though, that if there are waves they are very difficult to spot from the boats. Actually when I was there in July they spotted one on the way to the dive sites in Babi.

On the 12th of December 1992 an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 and with the epicenter located only a few kilometers from Pulau Babi and 15km under the surface of the ocean caused a series of large tsunami waves. 1690 Flores islanders died, and the tsunami destroyed approximately 18,000 houses. The strong earthquakes continued over several months and Maumere was completely cut off from the rest of Indonesia. Since the waves hit the islands and the northern coast very hard, they devastated some of the dive areas here. The reefs have recovered nicely though, on the dive sites I visited in 2006 there was only one place, where corals in the shallower parts had been destroyed otherwise no damage can be seen.

I have dived here many times and consider the corals around here very healthy - huge gorgonians grow everywhere on the walls in Pangabatan and Babi, large table corals abound in Pondok and Little O dive sites. Only on the coast close to Maumere there are not so many corals but more sand and rubble interspersed with small corals, hydroids and sponges, ideal for muck diving.

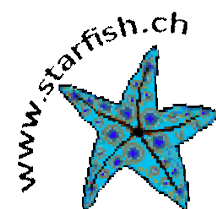
Map of the dive sites in Maumere Bay



1. Atoll Pasir Sari (Gosong Bone Atoll) - 2. Pamana West - 3. Pamana South - 4. Pamana Kecil - 5. Labuan Tur - 6. Easteregg - 7. Happy Wall - 8. Maragajong - 9. Dambilah - 10. Fishsoup - 11. The Channel - 12. Pangahbatan North - 13. The Crack - 14. Majella's Ledge - 15. Poison Sardeen - 16. The Village - 17. Bugis House - 18. Bad Mood - 19. Shark Point - 20. Tanjung Darat Pondok - 21. New Ankermi Slope - 22. Wairterang Wreck - 23. Mandarin Patch - 24. Old Ankermi Muck - 25. Waigete - 26. Pertamina Jetty - 27. Maumere Harbor - 28. Wailiti Reef - 29. Zubinarius - 30. Little O

Divecenters

- A) Sea World and Bugis Sun
- B) Happy Dive (Ankermi)



THE DIVING



Atoll Pasir Sari and Pulau Pamana

I did only a few dives here on a liveaboard trip in 2002, but didn't like it that much, because the corals were at some places totally covered with algae and funnel weed. Visibility was quite bad and we heard explosions from dynamite fish bombs on both dives. I talked to Kermi my dive guide from Ankermi Happy Dive about this place and he said, that specially the **Atoll Pasir Sari (No1)** is quite nice if you dive at the right places but you have to be there early in the morning and go deep and **Pamana west (No 2)** is also a great dive site. Since it is way out from the bay it isn't visited much though by dive operators from Maumere, more by liveaboards.

Pulau Besar, Dambilah and Pangabatang

One of the few barrier reefs in Indonesia occur here at Pulau Besar (another one is found in the Togian islands and Sumbawa) where the reef also forms a large lagoon in the east. The group of islands can be reached from Maumere or Wodong by boat and can also be visited while traveling on one of the liveaboards which pass by on their way to and from Alor or Komodo.

5. Labuan Tur: This dive site on the west coast of pulau Besar is supposed to be nice but I haven't dived there yet. Since this dive sites is closer to Maumere it is possible that dive operators from Geliting (Sea World / Budi Sun) dive here more regulary.

8. Maragajong: You start the dive in a kind of small valley with huge coral blocks which are cleaning stations for sweetlips and batfish. With some patience you can see the sweetlips opening up their mouths and the cleaner wrasses fluttering in an out of it. Then you swim over the reef edge and reach a steep slope. The visibility here was incredible, I guess about 40 meters and we went down to the huge gorgonians fans and barrel sponges while out in the blue mackerels and small tunas passed by and a large schools of long-jawed mackerels (*Rastrelliger kanagurta*) were opening their mouths always in synchronous movement. Just beautiful!

9. Dambilah: This dive is perfect for relaxing, taking some time to search for small animals but at the same time enjoying the nice underwater landscape like the coral gardens at the top and the soft corals on the slope. Our trove included two species of flatworms, shrimps and clingfishes in the featherstars, orang utan crabs in the bubble corals, a huge but shy crocodilefish, pipefishes in the sandy areas and my favorite - a large beautiful *Phyllodesmium kabiranum* nudibranch which looks like a anemone because the cerata are shaped like tentacles.

11. The Channel / Fish Soup: This is one of my favorite dive sites in the area, the landscape is very impressive with huge Gorgonian sea fans, a dramatic precipice where sharks, jacks and rays congregate and a beautiful coral garden to finish the dive. A place you come up and out of the water always with a smiling face and a "Wow - I want to go diving here again!"

Between the mainland and Pangabatan there is a channel which is about 2 km wide. The current flowing through can be quite fierce, so this dive site is only for experienced divers. You dive down through a coral garden interspersed with sand until you reach the deeper part, a large plateau of sand with coral blocks and sea fans. Here at about 30 meters you should take some time to look out in the blue, there is a good chance to see eagle rays, marble rays, mackerels and tunas and on the sand between the corals often lie white tip sharks or cowtail rays.

You continue with the current and reach a beautiful coral garden. With the morning light it is magic! Unfortunately you usually can't spend that much time here because the computer tells you that you have to go up. You continue drifting to a sandy slope and finish the dive between hard corals, sea fans and lots of small reef fish. A good place for large fish and sharks but we also found on each dive some interesting small animals for example a rare whiskered pipefish, nudibranchs and several leafish, crocodile fish, mantis shrimps and cuttlefish. Often large groups of bumphead parrotfish gather in the sandy areas, on one spectacular dive easily a hundred of them past us, going in the other direction!

12. Pangabatang (Pangabatan) North: Normaly diving here is quite easy, so it is a good place for beginners, but if there is a strong current you have to stay close to the reef and finish the dive before you are swept around the corner into **The Channel**. Your start on a beautiful coral garden with white sand and large coral blocks and then you continue on a slope nicely covered with healthy soft corals and gorgonian sea fans. There is a good chance to see eagle rays or sharks, but you should also check out the corals for shrimps and nudibranchs. To finish the dive you go up to a shallow coral garden, often there are marine turtles and even sometimes banded sea kraits. On one occasion we also saw a dugon. Also a good place for snorkelling and the Pangabatan island is a really nice place for a little stroll on the white sand.

Pulau Babi

Pulau Babi lies beyond Pulau Besar and was hit specially hard by the 1992 tsunami. The two villages located on the flat sandy land in the south were totally wiped out by the waves who topped 5.6 meters. Of the population of 1'093, 263 humans were victims of the tsunami. The area was declared as too dangerous to be inhabited and therefore the villages had to be abandoned and no rebuilding was permitted. Today you can see only makeshift bamboo huts here, which are used just part of the year for fishing. The beach is a nice snorkeling area, though. As far as the diving goes, I didn't notice any damaged areas here, actually the amount of different species was impressive - but at one dive site (**The Crack**) you can see the results of the earthquake.

13. The Crack: You dive at a place, where a huge crack, about 18 to 20 meters down and reaching into the reef for about 30 meters was formed by the earthquakes which caused the 1992 tsunami. The crack is about 70cm wide, so it isn't possible to swim in. Table corals and other hard corals growing here have started to close the gap, but if you swim on top you can see down into the inner structures of the reef.

The diving here is very nice, a beautiful and colorful wall covered with sea fans, coral bushes, hydroids, sponges and lots of sea squirts going down to 25 meters and then becoming a slope. It is well worth looking in all the crannies and overhangs, because a lot of small animals are hiding here. Apart from plenty of nudibranchs, shrimps and crabs we also found several species of flatworms and on the very edge of the reef two yellow-brown leaffishes and further down a beautiful purple one in a sponge under a overhang there was even a small giant frogfish! If you are lucky it is possible to see hammerhead sharks here, eagle rays and turtles, since you are facing towards open water.

Actually in a very memorable dive Kermi and myself saw around a dozen huge marble rays feeding - the noise of the flapping and crunching was very impressive! Unfortunately we were on 6 meters for our safety stop and couldn't go down, but we sure stayed there until our tanks very nearly empty, following the group on their feeding spree.

14. Majella's Ledge: Depending on the currents you either start from the Crack and go to the left on the wall or you dive towards the crack from the south on a slope that ends as a wall. There is a large saddle going out from about 25 meters down to 40 meters. Down there is a good place for big sting rays and sharks. The whole wall is covered with gorgonians, black corals and hydroids, so you usually find a lot of nudibranchs, small shrimps and crabs like Orang Utan crabs or spider crabs. A nice dive, usually with good visibility.

15. Poison Sardeen lies north of the Crack and forms a steep slope. Groups of Spanish mackerels, sharks and eagle rays can be seen and in some of the Muricella Gorgonians are small pygmy seahorses.

16. The Village: A bit to the north of the small fishing village lies a great dive site, we dived there several times. When you enter the water you go down on a sandy slope (doesn't look like much), straight away there was usually a large schools of silvery long-jawed mackerels around us and then Kermi, our dive guide called the sharks - a special trick with a bottle - and they came! First five black tipped reef sharks, all starting to circle around us, then other fish like jacks and tunas came and I didn't know where to look anymore, so much was happening! My dive buddy told me later, that a shark had been behind me, very close, but I didn't notice, because I concentrated on what was happening in front of me.

We continued the dive on a nice miniwall with lots of soft corals and beautiful gorgonian fans, many of them are of the species Muricella, a gorgonian known to be the habitat of the pygmy seahorse. So we looked closer and actually found one, but I guess there must be more. We dived further towards the coral garden, all the time seeing a few sharks, jacks and also a very large tuna. The coral garden is a nice place to finish the dive, specially the large coral blocks there which are cleaning stations with dancing shrimps underneath and glass fish clouding everything.

Flores Main Land

17. Bugis and 19. Shark Point: These dive sites on the mainland are supposed to be nice, but I haven't dived there yet. Shark point is a steep wall where you make a drift dive and with strong currents sometimes, Bugis is a drop off.

18. Bad Mood: At this dive site the point where you can jump in is difficult to find, because it is a bay where the current forms whirls that change their pattern often. There is sometimes quite a lot of current so you can make a nice drift dive. You have to go down to about 30 meters and hang out, because this is an excellent place for sharks (which I guess are in a bad mood because they are not allowed to eat the divers). Lots of whip corals and large sea fans in the lower areas, not so much covering in the upper areas but there we found a reef octopus under a coral block and saw a nice cuttefish.

20. Tanjung Darat Pondok: While this dive site had some damage from the tsunami of 1992 it has recovered nicely. The mini wall on the upper meters is nicely covered with corals. Below lies a large plateau with rubble and large chunks of dead hard corals now interspersed with soft corals. The plateau abruptly changes to a steep wall, if visibility is good you can look down to 50 meters where it flattens out some.

We started our dive and reaching the edge of the plateau, the depths beckoned and we glided down. Straight away I saw an eagle ray and then suddenly a turtle accompanied by two remoras swam out from between my feet and into the blue. During the dive we saw mackerels, small tunas and some lazy jacks and deep down huge groupers. This is also a good dive site for sharks, sometimes hammerheads, but it is a deep dive and such more for experienced divers. The safety stop on the rubble plateau was also interesting, we found *Marioniposis nudibranchs*, juvenile angelfishes and there is often a frogfish on one of the coral blocks.

30. Little O: A really nice dive site, that Kermi discovered in 2014. Already from the boat you can see one beautiful table coral after the other growing on the rim of the drop off. Then you start the dive, first a mini wall, then a small plateau and a steep wall, all covered with healthy corals and sponges. Small anthias, damselfish and angelfish everywhere and of course if you dive with Kermi he always finds some nudibranchs, orang utan crabs, shrimps and flatworms!

MUCK DIVING ON FLORES MAINLAND

21. New Ankermi Slope: Just in front of the Ankermi Happy Dive Resort is a small reef. Coral cover is not so good and there are patches with rubble and a large sandy area but the place is great for small and weird critters. The sand is very fine, mixed with ash from the nearby volcano Egon and even small movements from the fins can raise a cloud. Seems all the critters that lived in Ankermi Bay (No 24) moved here when Kermi and Claudia moved to their new resort - I saw frogfishes (counted 4 different species), ghostpipefishes (2 species), mimic octopus, starry octopus, Ambon scorpionfish, stingfish, devilfish, special pipefish, mandarin fishes, seahorses, eels and moreys and then really a lot of slugs and nudibranchs, shrimps, crabs and mantis shrimps. I have a camera with a strong macro lens, but I recommend that you take a magnifying glass with you if you want to see all the treasures! And make a nightdive!

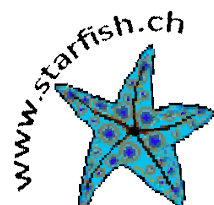
22. Wairerang Wreck (Wodong): This wreck lies close to Ankermis between 13 and 32 meters about 70m from the beach on sandy bottom and is about 60m long. I recommend you dive first along the right hand side and go down to the deeper part straight away, then circle back, now over the wreck and finish the dive exploring the sandy area.

The wreck is very open, one part in the middle is badly crumbled but on the top there is not much damage and it lies flat on the ground, the deeper part of the ship is twisted and lies to the side. It is interesting to look at what seems to be rails going along the middle of the wreck but also check out the deeper part where you can see the portholes, a ladder and hatches. It is not clear, what kind of ship this was. Diving books usually claim it is a Japanese freighter or controller, but according to Claudia from Ankermi a specialist from Germany who came to look at the wreck and searched for identification clues thought, she might have been a ship used as a bridge to transport tanks between two other ships. This would explain the rails on the wreck. I tried to find pictures or description of this kind of ship in the internet, but couldn't find anything.

On the wreck itself we found ghostpipefishes, a pair of twinspot lionfishes, nudibranchs and special shrimps and on the hydroids are small cowries. A school of jacks often hovers above the deeper part, sometimes also some fusiliers, but since visibility isn't always so good, you have to swim out a bit to see them.

23. Mandarin Patch: Claudia from Ankermi Happy Dive discovered a mandarin fish in a patch of staghorn corals, so Kermi and myself went there to see if we could find them also. To our surprise there were more than a dozen of these beautiful dragonets around, foraging among the corals. We became very enthusiastic and I suggested to go back just before sunset to see them mating - I had observed this in Lembah and Mabul. One hour of hanging around in the evening and we barely had a glimpse of one or two Mandarin fishes!! Frustrated I expressed the opinion, that Flores Mandarinfishes behave different than their relatives in other parts! However after checking on the patch whenever we were close I finally figured, that they come out to forage only when it is high tide, then they leave their holes, flit about and it is really easy to see them. We planned the dives accordingly and saw them every time!

Around this coral patch there are also stonefishes to be found, ribbon eels and nudibranchs. You can combine diving the wreck and finishing at the patch or starting here and go to the sandy area. Actually in the very corner of the bay there are small sponges, corals where you find frogfishes, ghostpipefishes, special morey eels and plenty of crabs and shrimps.



24. Ankermi's Bay (Old Ankermi Muck): This was the reason I came to Maumere the first time- a frogfish fan had told me about the excellent muck diving here. I have done numerous great dives here and fondly remember the week I did a 90-minute-night dive every day. Unfortunately there was a large storm in 2013 and high waves covered the whole dive site with rubble and stones. The small river which flows into the bay close to the dive site was diverted and continued covering the site. Every year I make one dive there just to check out if the dive site has recovered, but - shi...! - no not yet. But as you can find all the critters on the sand in front of the new Ankermi resort (No 21) I just do my long muck dives there.

25. Waigete: I dived here once when Claudia did a open water course and visited the reef with her students. A nice small reef a small distance from the beach with hard corals and feather stars everywhere. A resident octopus lives in a hole somewhere in the corals and peaked out. Nice easy dive.

27. Maumere Harbor: The harbour seems to be getting dirtier and dirtier so I am not sure if I recommend diving here anymore. If you decide to make a dive, start is going towards the river, so you don't have to be careful about outgoing boats. You dive on a slope of dark volcanic sand with a lot of garbage and dead wood lying around. A true muck site! Plenty of critters are hiding away in the tyres or rusted tin cans, inside shoes and other garbage. We saw several demon stingers fingered dragonets, stonefish, rare species of morey eels and in the upper part of the slope crocodilefishes and on one dive a total of 6 seahorses. There was also a very unusually colored Shortfin Lionfish (*Dendrochirus brachypterus*) with yellow instead of brown stripes.

29. Zubinarius: I am honored that a dive site has my nick name (Zubi) and part of my favorite animal (Antennarius – frogfish) in it. It is a true muck site of course with sand, mud and some garbage and with visibility usually not so good. The frogfish species I found here are shaggy frogfishes (*Antennarius hispidus*) so I guess the name for the dive site is appropriate. The dive site lies close to the Nangahale village and a small river. You dive on a slight slope, at the top there are a lot of stones where the seahorses hide. Further down there is fine sand - a flicker with your fins and visibility drops drastically. Of course there are a lot of other critters like large seahorses, cuttlefish, nudibranchs, small pipefishes, coconut octopuses, lots of sea cucumbers and slugs.

NIGHTDIVES

Nightdives here are a must for any photographer and immensely interesting for any diver! On one of my numerous visits here I did a night dive every night for a whole week and saw something new every time! Since the water can be quite cold (26° or less) I then had to quit and did also some day dives again... Kermi told me that the best time is on new moon when it is really dark and then he like to go in late at night. Then it is also possible to find the rare bobbit worm here. We did one dive with plenty of moonlight which was also excellent - bob tail squids, V-octopus and coconut octopus, then the elusive painted stingfish (*Minous pictus*) and the whiteface waxfish (*Richardsonichthys leucogaster*), hellfire anemones with shrimps on top, sleeping ghostpipefish and flying gurnards. On each dive "eagle-eyed" Kermi finds something new and unexpected, he is even able to find 5mm juvenile frogfishes and 1cm pygmy pipehorses!

SNORKELING

The best snorkeling areas are around Pulau Besar and specially Pulau Babi. Either you rent a fishing boat for the use of your group or you join the divers on one of the island trips and snorkel while they dive. On Pangabatan and Babi it is also possible to go on land and enjoy the white beaches there. You can also snorkel around the resorts on the main land. Like on any beach - just be careful, when you walk in from the beach, because some of the poisonous scorpionfishes also like to live close to the shore!



DIVING ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF FLORES

On the way to Alor, east of Maumere

We did a 2-week liveaboard trip diving around the Komodo islands, Flores and Alor and also did a few dives on the northern coast of Flores which I liked a lot. While going east towards Alor we passed the islands of Adonara, Solor and Lembata (Lomblen) and did a few dives there. I regret to say, that there is also some damage from dynamite fishing on the north coast of Flores (not in Maumere itself). We heard several explosions while diving and also saw the sad results - craters of destroyed reefs!

North coast of Flores, on the way to Alor

Tanjung Gedang: It is only accessible by liveaboard. We did two dives here, one going towards Alor, and on our request, one more coming back. This is a great dive site, we saw eagle rays as well as several sharks on both dives. A huge grouper - must have been nearly 2 m in length - swam lazily just below us for a long time and dogtooth tunas and rainbow runners accompanied us. On the flat reef top I found a velvet snail and other nudibranchs such as *Pteraelidia ianthina* (blue dragon) and *Chromodoris kunei*.

Lomblen island (Lembata): A steep slope with lots of black corals and large sponges. We did a night dive at the sea mound, but I didn't find anything special.

Batang island: We dived at this place on our way to Alor, it is only accessible by liveaboard. The dive site might be interesting if you are willing to go below 50 meter. We went to 46 m and just swept over a jagged drop-off, taking glimpses of what lay beneath us. We had a nice drift dive past a forest of long, white whip corals, all bent nearly to the ground by the strong current. On the reef flat there were beautiful table corals, some with a diameter of over 3 meter and untouched! As a nice surprise two eagle rays were swooping over the reef and we followed them for over 10 minutes before they turned away.

On the way to Komodo, west of Maumere

Sambolan kecil: This island lies in the western part of Flores, close to Labuan Bajo. It offers diving on a slope, then a flat sandy area with sand eels and a stationary group of barracudas, and an underwater mound at about 25 to 30 meter. Just behind the mound we encountered a huge group of bumphead parrotfish (over 20 animals) and schooling batfish. A nice dive. Dive sites here and in the north of Komodo can be reached by day trip from Labuan Bajo or on a liveaboard trip. See separate page for all dive sites around the Komodo National Park.

