



23. Pillarsteen - 24. Three sisters - 25. Swallow Hole - 26. Jimmys Rock - 27. Torpedo Point - 28. Cannibal rock - 29. Yellow Wall (Overhang) - 30. Crynoid Canyon - 31. Toro Sie - 32. Apple orchard - 33. Kerita Tol

A) Padar island and west Rinca

If possible try to spend some time in the south of the Komodo National Park. The water usually is much colder (21° to 26°C) than in the north and visibility poorer, but I just love it here for there are so many unusual critters you find. South of Pulau Damar there is a marked change in what kind of animals you see. There are filterfeeders like feather stars and sea cucumbers everywhere and soft corals and sea fans in incredible orange, purples and yellows grow on every surface. The abundance of life is just amazing! Diving in the south is best during the northwest monsoon, October to April. Some dive sites can be inaccessible because the seas are too rough. Visibility is sometimes not so good (10-15m) because the water is very rich in plankton.

23. Pillarsteen: This dive site lies on the southeast of Padar island. A tremendous dive site where the underwater topography includes huge boulders and rocks with nice cuts, swimthroughs, chimneys and canyons. There are some caves at about 40 and 16meter. Everything is beautifully covered with colorful soft corals, gorgonians, hydroids, sponges and also the sea apple (see No. 32). This was one of the nicest dive in this area but we sure had to swim a lot against the current (on another dive here it was much easier, it just depends on tides and currents)!

24. Three sisters: These are three large rocks connected to each other with ridges, nicely covered with corals and just teeming with life. Around 30m are two smaller boulders that are especially nice. We saw several species of nudibranchs, small sea cucumbers and a special starfish. You dive in the shade of the current and finish the dive on the peaks which top at 6, 7 and 8 meters respectively.

25. Swallow Hole lies to the way south to the Horseshoe Bay on the southwest side of Rinca. There is a small island with a large cave where swallows live. If conditions are right you can enter the cave through one of three entrances. For diving you go to a pinnacle some distance offshore from the island where you dive around the pinnacle, on a ridge and in the channel. Everything is covered in beautiful corals and colourful tunicates and sponges.

B) Horseshoe Bay

I have been several times to the horseshoe bay and we usually anchored just a short distance from the best dive sites. The slopes are all covered with trees and the beach is visited by monkeys, Komodo dragons, pigs, deer and herons. There are several eagle nests on some of the larger trees and you can observe these beautiful birds how they catch fish.

26. Jimmys Rock is a submerged sea mount lying to the southwest of Kode island. The top of the mount is around 8m. A good place for sharks and barracuda and lots of small interesting critters on the slope.

There are several other dive sites in the horseshoe bay. **Batu Mandi Rinca** to the west is a slope with large coral blocks covered with lots of hard and soft corals and the ever present feather stars. **27. Torpedo Point** looks similar but with more sandy areas between. Both are excellent for nudibranchs and frogfishes - but also look under the coral blocks for nurse sharks and the torpedo rays.

28. Cannibal rock: This is one of my favorite dive sites in the south. An underwater mound covered with soft corals, sponges and hard corals. On every available surface there are either feather stars, brittle stars, sea cucumbers or sea stars. Both Cannibal rock and the **Apple orchard (No. 32)** are also literally covered with the colorful filter-feeding sea cucumbers called sea apples (*Pseudocolochirus violaceus*). This sea cucumber is round and of a bright red and purple color with white or yellow stripes. It holds on to the substrate with tiny feet (it looks like a colorful sponge) and stretches its tentacles into the current for planktonic food. It is rarely seen but here in the southern part of park they are very abundant. Cannibal rock is well worth doing several dives because of the abundance of life here. On every dive we saw several species of rare nudibranchs, special crabs like the Zebra crab, sea urchin shrimps, frogfishes and scorpionfishes. On the reef top there are a lot of anemones with their host anemone fishes, I reckon there are at least 5 different species close to each other. The only disadvantage - the water here is really, really cold!

29. Yellow Wall (Overhang) and Crynoid Canyon (No. 30) are quite similar - walls covered with feather stars and sea cucumbers - and a short distance out the open ocean lies another excellent dive site, the **Pyramid**. To some divers feather stars might all look the same, but here you can really observe many different species! The water here is especially cold, since it is upwelling from deep in the ocean south of Rinca. Especially good for nudibranchs (I saw 8 uncommon species on one dive!), special shrimps like *Vir philippinensis* or the needle shrimp which lives between the spines of the sea urchins. On one dive there I even saw the rare Coleman shrimp on one of the colorful toxic sea urchins.

31. Torro Sie lies to the southeast of Rinca. It is supposed to be a good place both for macro and also for pelagics. From here it is possible to go north through the Molo Strait to reach Labuan Bajo. This strait is extremely narrow so the currents are very fierce. Last time we used this strait the captain of our liveaboard told me we were making 9 knots - but actually we were only crawling north, because the currents were around 8 knots against us. The narrowness of this strait also makes for dangerous navigation, so some captains prefer the longer but safer way up the west side of Rinca.

C) Montong

33. Kerita Tol: lies east of Gili Motong (also called Gili Mota) in the Molo Strait. It is supposed to be very cold (upwellings) and the visibility not always very good. Lots of plankton, so from what I heard you often see mantas and sometimes whalesharks here.

