

Diving at Cape Paperu

by **Jak & Corinne Denny**

On the remote island of Saparua in the Banda Sea a Swiss couple, Kurt and Eliane Gross, have established a paradise for divers looking for a diversity of marine life, especially small and unusual critters.

The Cape Paperu Dive Resort offers interesting and varied diving sites around the Lease Islands, which are part of Indonesian Maluku, the modern day name for the Moluccas or Spice Islands. This region formerly called Dutch East Indies, was famous in earlier times as the world's best source of cloves, pepper, nutmeg and other spices. Nowadays it is establishing itself, along with nearby Raja Ampat, as a mecca for divers seeking largely unspoilt waters where marine life abounds.

The interesting and varied diving sites around the islands of Saparua, Molana, and Nusa Laut stand amongst the best dive sites we have visited in recent times. They offer luxurious and healthy coral gardens, walls, swim-through caverns, and a huge variety of fish and invertebrates, all relatively close to the resort.

During our two weeks of diving at Cape Paperu, we encountered numerous species

of fish including butterfly fish, anthias, angelfish, groupers, dart fish, ghost pipefish, leaf fish, frogfish, hawk fish, damsels, lionfish and anemone fish as well as the other usual coral reef dwellers. Amongst the highlights for us were encounters with an unusual small black frogfish and at least four different coloured leaf fish. Yellow frogfish were also sighted and made excellent photographic subjects. One of the rarer sightings was that of a tiny southern pygmy pipefish, which is a species featuring a prehensile tail of a seahorse together with the head of a pipefish. Hippocampus pygmy seahorses were also photographed.

Pipefish were frequently encountered including ornate ghost pipefish, the thin ghost pipefish, a messmate pipefish, banded and ringed pipefish. The ornate ghost pipefish were found in varying colours from yellow to brilliant red and were often in pairs with the much larger female bearing eggs and the smaller male swimming close by her side. Thin ghost pipefish provide a challenge for the underwater observer as they are camouflaged as a piece of floating seaweed.

Underwater macro photographers always enjoy colourful nudibranchs and Cape Paperu certainly didn't disappoint us as we



Ornate ghost pipefish pair, Pombo Booi, Paperu



Pink leaffish, Pombo Booi, Paperu



Reticulidia fungia nudibranch, Nusa Laut

tiny azure blue coral lobster was an interesting find, although a challenge to photograph with its long waving white antennae.

In addition to the spectacular marine life the underwater scenery was superb with walls encrusted with colourful sponges, ascidians and soft corals. The hard corals were extensive and colourful with, fortunately, no evidence of bleaching. Our underwater experiences were complemented by several sightings of humpback whales and dolphins during surface intervals.

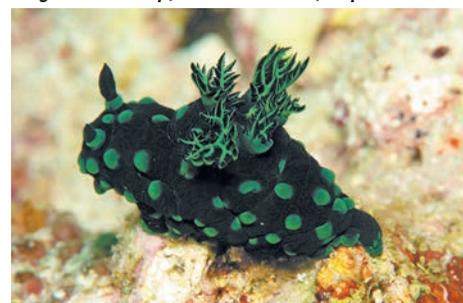
The resort and diving operations were first class and very well organised ensuring maximum enjoyment. The dive team were always prepared to do their utmost to meet the wishes of the divers, especially providing opportunities for us as photographers to spend time at locations where rare beasts were encountered. The accommodation and general facilities, including the restaurant, provided everything that divers needed to ensure a relaxing and rewarding holiday experience. The staff were, without exception, friendly, obliging and contributed to our enjoyment of this idyllic location.

Despite its remoteness, making our way to Cape Paperu was well worth the effort and we would recommend it to any divers looking for a diving holiday with warm, unspoilt waters and a vast array of marine life.

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Hingebeak shrimp, Garden of Eden, Paperu



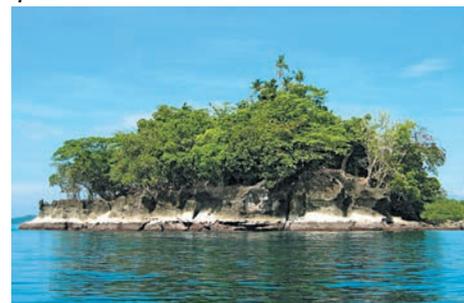
Nembrotha cristata nudibranch, Armani 2, Molana Is, Paperu



Black leaffish, Pombo Booi, Paperu

found numerous species, including several which we had never seen before.

Perhaps the rarest sighting of all was of a tiny Galathea squat lobster, which lives in a hole in the coral. A patient diver was rewarded with the appearance of a tiny red face with white eyes and disproportionately long red and white, hairy front nippers. Other crustacea were common with many different species of shrimps and crabs. A



Booi Island, Paperu



Galathea squat lobster in hole, Pintu Batu, Paperu



Pair fire dartfish, Armano Forte, Molana Is, Paperu



White leaffish, Garden Eden, Paperu



Yellow leaffish, Pombo Booi, Paperu,