

## **LAYANG LAYANG ISLAND RESORT: DIVE HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Dogtooth Lair**

This is a one-in-a-million dive. It has all that one could wish for with fish and corals of every size. Turtles gently glide along, schools of fusiliers and surgeon fish swim by, and swirling horse-eye jacks move like twisters across the thick and healthy coral formations. There are overhangs and ledges to be explored. One can find stingrays asleep next to white-tip reef sharks. At the drop-off, large sun-fish have been seen. And look out for the hammerhead sharks as this is part of their cruising area. Cleaning stations abound and there is a wide variety of nudibranchs alongside flat-worms.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle

### **Wreck Point**

This dive site is also an enjoyable snorkel. In the shallows there are hard coral gardens awash with an abundance of small, beautiful tropical reef fish. These reflective spots of colour dance about the dense hard corals in choreographed tranquillity. On the drop-off, clusters of soft corals hang defying gravity, swaying in the current. Over the edge, at 20m+ levels, there are barrel sponges, gorgonian fans, sea whips and an amazing view as the wall fades into the depths of the ocean. Manta rays, dogtooth tuna and reef sharks are spotted here on a regular basis, so look seaward from time to time as you make your way along the wall. Wreck point is also an interesting night dive in the shallow caverns and cul-de-sacs. A huge humphead parrot fish sleeps in the shallow drop-off. Be careful not to stare at this gentle giant or it may, in an attempt to get away, collide with you, and we all know who will come away worse off! Take your time in the sandy slopes where there are sand-divers / razor fish that simply dive straight into the sand. You need to go slow to catch these interesting characters.

Best lens for this site: Macro

### **The Tunnel**

The Tunnel is a hard coral-lovers dream and a beautiful night dive with its spectrum of colourful and dense marine corals. There's a myriad of hard corals such as staghorn, plate, table, mushroom and brain corals and an abundance of reef fish, ranging from anthias to travellers. Moray eels lie in the cubby holes and gullies of the coral formations and occasionally a turtle drifts past indifferently. At 10m, the coral slope gives way to a vertical drop-off which is home to soft corals and sponges of all descriptions and colour. On occasion amber-jacks can be seen swimming around, forming a large barrel. If you drift to this formation slowly, you can enter the coil of fish and provided you swim in the same circular manner, the 'jacks' will accept you as one of their own; and round and round you go with your new-found friends.

Photographers should stay with the close-up or macro kits, but if you are going to move along the wall face, go 'loaded for bear'. You're in 2,000m of water, the large and unusual can present themselves to you in the blink of an eye.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle close up

## **Runway**

The Runway is a breathtaking dive with deep vertical walls, gullies and crevasses. Reef fish swim vertically, an unusual sight that takes some getting used to! Schools of jacks cascade down the wall and large tuna swim by, on the lookout for a free meal. Schools of bait fish, fusiliers, and surgeon fish sparkle and glitter in the crystal clear water. Sharks and manta rays cruise the wall; hammerheads have on occasion been seen in this area, so always look seawards, with fingers crossed. Remember that the depth limit is 40m in these waters. With so much to see it's easy to accidentally exceed this limit, especially the photographers among you.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle.

## **Snapper**

Snapper ledge is a safe and easy dive with magnificent corals and colourful reef fish. For photographers, it's a good spot for wide angle, macro and close up, when the sun is directly on it. One can simply drift along with the current and relax-lah, as we say in Malaysia. Remember to watch your depth and avoid collision with the corals.

Best lenses for this site: Macro, close up and wide angle

## **D'Wall**

D'Wall is a sheer, vertical, straight-down, free-fall - an amazing piece of nature. The drop-off starts in 1m of water and then presto... you're falling into 2,000m of water. The wall plummets to the depths so mind your buoyancy and depth control to a max of 40m. The wall face is breathtaking, simply adorned with life and colour. Schools of surgeons and jacks cascade down the face of the wall like a waterfall. Sea whips and sea fans defy gravity, while silver and bait fish dart and dive about.

Sharks cruise this area: white tips, grey-reef and hammerhead sharks have been seen on many occasions. And the majestic manta rays glide gracefully and slowly up the wall. On the wall face, barrel sponges, coral formations, even anemones grow, and gorgonians extend into the blue. Take a while to appreciate the many small creatures such as arrow crabs, nudibranchs, clams and the tiny formations of 'stem coral'.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle, or hire an additional unit

## **Sharks' Cave**

No free beers for guessing what the attraction is here! You start the dive on the edge of the drop off in 3m of water and you drift down the face to a sand ledge where you will find several Leopard sharks resting. If you move slowly and carefully, you'll be able to get close to them, and watch them watching you with eyes as black as coal.

Swimming past sea fans, whips, and coral formations, you'll see tuna and reef sharks glide by, then come in close. You then find yourself in front of the sharks cave. At the back of this tranquil cavern, lay the small white tips huddled together as a family. Move slowly and gently. Do not fence or entrap the sharks and they will stay there posing photographs. But move erratically and you will steer them

and there will be sharks, divers, bubbles and sediment everywhere. You will not be popular with the other divers who miss out on these often misunderstood creatures.

Once out of the cave you can make your way along another majestic portion of the wall. With the deep water that surrounds the atoll, monitor your depth, air supply and your bottom time. The island is fairly well set up for diver emergencies but prevention is better than the cure.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle close up

### **The Valley**

The Valley is a gentle slope with large formations of hard corals. Groupers, sweet lips, large schools of surgeon fish and fusiliers roam the site. Trigger fish have their nests here so mind your manners! Though the depth stays shallow, 10 to 15 meters until it drops off into the deep blue, there are many areas to explore. Schools of barracuda and skinner swim in the area with the occasional reef shark cruising the length and breadth of the dive site. Turtles tend to settle in this area to rest in the shallows.

The coral formations are huge with plenty of overhangs and crevices to explore. Soft corals adorn the underside of these formations. Keep a lookout for the small and unusual. Flat-worms, nudibranchs and crustaceans crawl along the corals in a rainbow of colour and size. Among the numerous anemone patches a Golden Anemone has been spotted. So if you locate this rare species, inform the Divemaster so that it can be shared with the rest of the divers.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle

### **Wrasse Strip**

Wrasse strip is one of the most eye-opening coral dives in the world. Hard and soft corals are on display in full technicolour and unique formations, some so intricate that they resemble an English horticulture show. The fish each have their own little kingdom of coral that they seem to stand guard over. There are large coral bommies with small caverns and overhangs that are home to batfish, sweet lips and soldier fish. Trigger fish lurk in this area so keep an eye out for the Titan Trigger. These guys will have you hustling your butt out of there quicker than you can say 'golly that chap tried to head butt me and steal my fin!' Turtles are seen regularly as well as schools of surgeons, jacks, barracuda, and if you are lucky, a small school of manta rays. Hammerheads are also regulars here in their hundreds and compacted groups.

### **Crack Reef**

Crack reef is a relax-lah dive site with lots of reef activity and gravity-defying corals, sponges, sea-whips and sea-fans. The fish tumble down the wall side and then race back up the wall as if going to the surface for air. Turtles cruise indifferently along the steep walls and white tip sharks drift by lazily. This site is called Crack Reef because the dive begins on a large vertical crack in the wall that starts at the surface and plummets to 40+m. Please watch your depth limit and air consumption. Sometimes strong currents will help you cruise the wall with ease, so please do not grab the coral formations just to get that one shot in a million.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle close up

### **Navigator Lane**

This is a magnificent dive with an abundance of healthy corals, sea fans, whips and fantastic hard coral formations so dense that you cannot put your hands anywhere! The dive is one of spectacular colour and breathtaking beauty. The corals are awesome and there's fish life of every size and description. The hammerheads are also seen here on a regular basis and in great numbers. Photographers should be sure to hit the water loaded for panoramic views with large pelagic and colourful nudibranchs. Dive this site a couple of times to get the full scope of the magnificent marine life it holds.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide angle

### **Gorgonian Forest**

This one of the main areas for hammerhead sharks, but its most beautiful feature is the dense forest-like formation of gorgonian sea fans that line the drop-off wall. Schooling fish large and small are abundant here and the hard corals are spectacular. Sponges of fantastic proportions grow along the walls and the sea whips spear the blue. Amongst all this plentiful growth, charge the horse-eye jacks in their thousands, swimming alongside tuna, surgeon fish, fusilier and grey reef sharks. If you're lucky, you'll also catch schooling hammerheads here. Keep your eye on your Divemaster - in case he or she swims out, follow slowly and quietly. Although hammerhead sharks may have a fearful reputation, they are in fact shy creatures and will swim off quickly.

In the shallows, there are many small to large coral formations. Sweet lips can be photographed up close and giant groupers hang out along the wall. Approach gently or they will disappear down a little hole. Barracudas cruise by and swim along with you as if escorting you through their domain. One or two dives are not enough for this unbelievable site of breathtaking beauty.

Best lenses for this site: Macro and wide-angle