

## Dive Sites

### Pedrinha:

Located in the south part of the Island, at approx. 4nm from the marina this is one of the mandatory dives in the island. Composed by several small pinnacles at one site, the beautiful lava formations and canyons are magnificent; also has two galleries that clients can pass thru very easily.

The local is filled with small life and at time is possible to see large pelagic fish there, the dive itself starts at 7 mtr. normally we go straight to a wall filed with beautiful Marguerite (*parazoanthus axinellae*), exiting that we go into the first gallery located at 17mtr, exiting in a beautiful canyon at 32mtr, turning right and ascending to 18mtrs, were large schools of damselfish crowd the wall of the pinnacle, going thru a shelf we proceed into the second gallery that has 3 possible exists and were are located some very beautiful small coral formations, exiting there sometimes there are a couple of very large groupers. Then ascend to 15m passing thru lots of small lava formations were moray eels can be seen, again we end up at a small plateau near the point where we star the dive, and there is still time to go see Veronica, a big resident moray eel that exist at the very end of the dive.



## **Baixa da Maia:**

Located at the East part of the island at approx. 8nm from the marina, this is a very small islet located in front of Maia small village. The islet is very small, approx. 10 Sq. mtrs, and starting from the surface we can go to depths of approx. 18-24 mtrs, most of the dive is done between 16-20mtrs.

This is a place where lots of island groupers can be seen as such as blue fish, amberjacks and barracudas make their appearance also in the summer months, it is also possible to see one or two small groupers during the dive, again lots of Marguerite exist in the east part of the islet specially below the big boulders that exit there. Lots of bait fish are common all around and also big schools of brown damselfish exit in the wall that exists in the wet part creating a beautiful sight from the bottom at 17mtr till near the surface. On the south side a small lava tube has lots of Marguerite and it is very common to see lots of chromodoris (small sea slugs) blue with yellow dots. This is a place where current can be felt so it is necessary to plan the dive according to the existing tides.



## Ilhéu da Vila:

Located at ½ mile from the marina, there are two possible dives here. The first starting at the pinnacle that exit in the south side of the islet, in depth that vary between 13 and 18 mtr, go true lots of small trenches of lava ending up in the ocean side of the islet. Here island groupers, dog fish and other benthonic fish can be seen, also lots of small life and hulls exist during the entire dive, and moray eels are a constant here. Current can be an issue on this dive

The second dive starts at the north side of the islet about half way thru the ocean side, and ends up in a beautiful small cave were sometimes big bluefish and trevally can be seen, the bottom here is very constant with big lava hulls and formations, the normal depth is 15-17 mtrs and again the wall of the islet have lots of bait fish and also lots of peixe –rei (Coris julis) and it is common to see plenty pelagic fish as barracudas, blue fish and amberjacks there.

Necessary Gear: buoy and spool, and camera for those who want to take advantage of all the small life that exists there.



## **Penedia da Maia:**

Located at the East part of the island at approx. 9nm from the marina, this is a very small pinnacle that exists at approx. 100 mtr from the island.

The depth of the top part ranges from 3-12 mtr. And then there is a big drop-off with a fantastic wall all around finishing at a depth of 32 mtr. There are a couple of small caves in the north wall, and also a cave in the bottom part of the west side (facing the island) where a very big grouper and pretty good numbers of big trevally's can be seen, Tube worms are common all around the pinnacle wall, and lots of small fends gather many life as brim, moray eels, etc ,etc. Due to its small depth at the top lots of light allows photography enthusiasts to attempt a couple of very nice macro pictures.

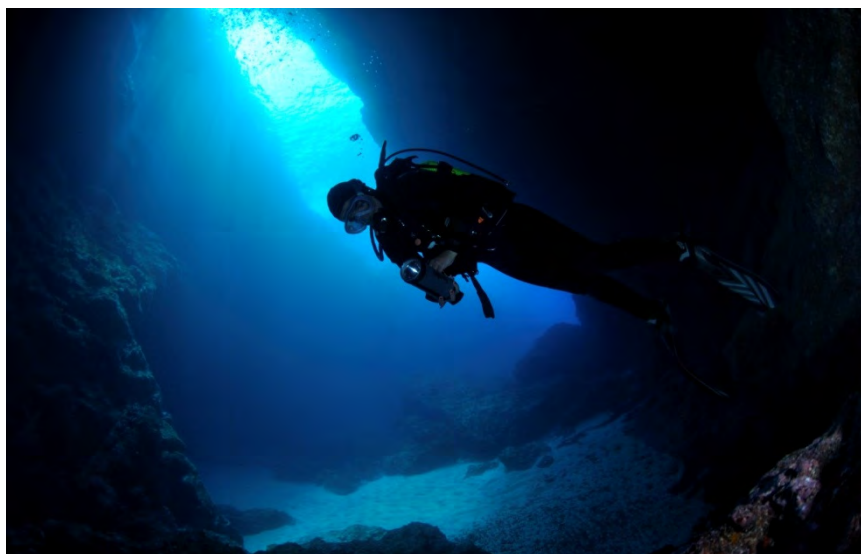
Because of all its beautiful fauna and flora this site was along with Pedrinha the two dive spots elected for the 1 Master Fotosub realized in the Azores and Portugal.



## Gruta Azul:

Located at the east side of the Island at approx. 11nm from the marina. This is one of our favorite dives, with a maximum depth of 17 mtrs and average depth of 13 - 14 mtrs this is a cave with 3 possible entrances and exists that cross a point of the island from one side to the other.

The main entrance is at 12 mtr and we travel inside the cave approx. 30 mtr until we arrive on the second entrance, were another small cave has some stalactites and shrimp, from there we proceed to the main gallery, were normally stingrays are, all the cave is extremely wide and at some points it looks like a church because it runs from 13 mtr to the surface and all the group can move freely inside, the average length is 150mtr but in all places we are able to see the light from one of the exits, at the regular exit a huge bolder provide a very beautiful light effect, picture here are mandatory.



## Gruta do Paralelo:

Located in the north part of the island, at approx. 10 nm from the marina, this dive is only for expert divers, but is fabulous, it starts at 15 mtr, were we enter a big lava tube were the ceiling and wall are full of chromodoris (small sea slugs), then the sealing of the tunnel disappears and we continue on the lava tunnel without the ceiling, ending at a cave around 32 mtr, the cave normally if full of big trevally's and the ceiling has lots of coral, if all divers are ok in air we may cross the cave exiting at about 40 mtr from the entrance at a depth of 33 mtr were we turn back and start preceding into lower depths because all of the divers must be very close to enter deco stops, the remain of the dive is the way back to the boat anchor.

Along the dive it is possible to see grouper, trevallies, dog fish, and island groupers as well as parrot fish and other local species, sometimes inside the cave there are rays, and in some places shrimp.



## Gruta dos Encharéus:

Located in the west side of the island at approx. 5 nm from the marina this is again a very beautiful dive, we start at a depth of 15 mtr, entering a very beautiful gallery with 2 light entrances, were sometimes trevally are and also rays, dog fish is also very common, exiting the gallery we stay inside a channel that lead us to 32 mtrs were a cave exists, in this cave there is another cave at the end were most of the times very big trevally are found, shrimp is also very common on the second cave, again divers must be aware of their dive computers because with all the action going on it is quite possible to enter deco stops, from the cave we start ascending to 16-17 mtr circling the channel, and proceeding back to the boat.



## **Ilhéu das Lagoinhas:**

Located in the north part of the island at approx. 9,5nm from the marina near the Lagoinhas islet there is a small pinnacle that starts at 5 mtr and ends at 22mtr were again there is a lot of small life and also a small cave, but the best thing about it is a very friendly grouper that normally is there and make everyone very happy with its presence because the grouper in question is very curious about the divers. If the grouper does not shoe we circle the pinnacle and the swim towards the islet enjoying all the live that exists there.





## **Ambrósio:**

Located in the north side of the island at 3nm from shore and 9nm from the marina this is beyond no doubt one of the best dives in the Azores/Europe and the world, from late June to mid-October there are normally groups of 12-20 manta rays there, it is not unusual to see 40-50 at the same time, the record is 63, large pelagic fish are also quit common here, despite the pinnacle being 46 mtr deep we have there a float at approx.. 12 mtr connect to the bottom by a large rope, to this float we tie the boat and the divers stay the dive holding the rope and appreciating all the manta passing by. Large schools of barracuda and tuna sometimes make their appearance as well as bait ball from the small oar fish that the mantas try to eat.

This is a fantastic dive and always the clients ask to repeat it a couple of times or more during their time in the island.



## EXTRAS

### Formigas:

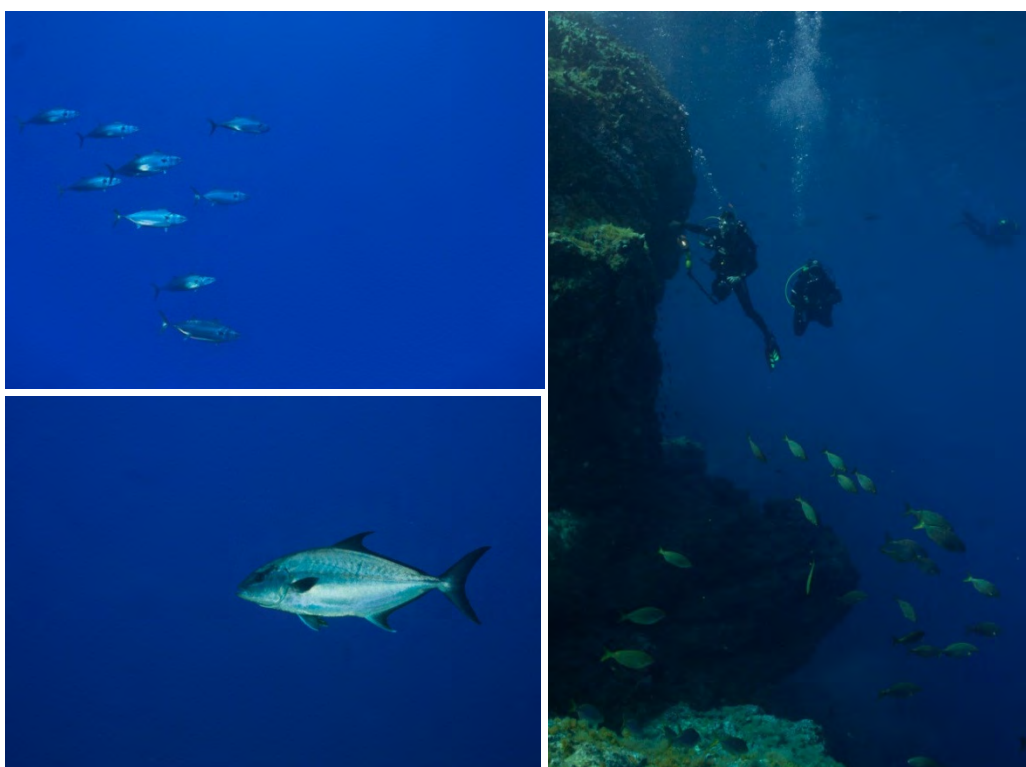
Formigas are a group of very small islets located North-North-East of the island.

Along with Dollabarat Dive ( the two are normally made in the same day), this are one of the most fantastic dives the Azores have to offer, being a marine reserve normally large schools of different species can be seen here, with special interest to the large pelagic normally seen here.

Located at 24 nm from the island of Santa Maria and 30nm from the marina the travel itself can be a fantastic experience, dolphins and whales are most of the time seen in the journey there.

Since it is an offshore dive the visibility's can be impressive, in same day at the East wall of Formigas were we have depths of 60 mtrs the bottom can be seen from the surface.

There are many possible dives here for all levels of divers but the more common is on the north point, turning then to the East side, normally there is no need to go beyond 15-18 mtr deep, but at time the large school of fish or the corals that exist there may awake the need to go a bit deeper on the divers. Other pelagic as sharks and mantas can be seen often here.



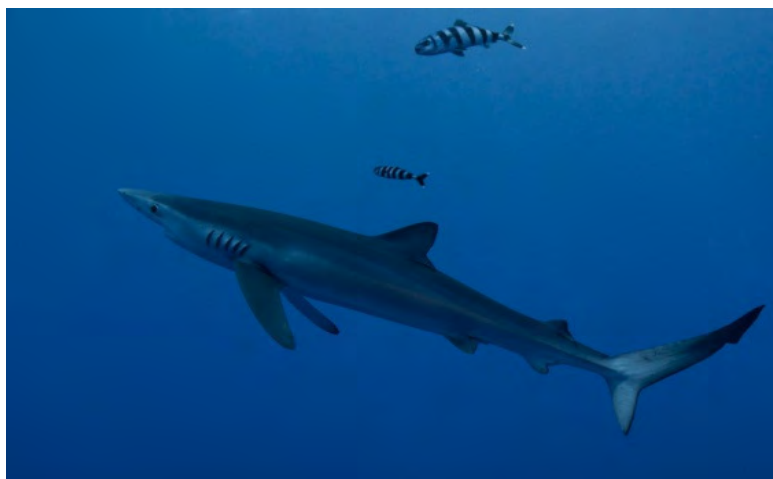
## **Dollabarat:**

Located at approx. 3 nm South-South-East of Formigas islets Dollabarat Reef is a reef as long as a soccer field that rides from surrounding depth of more than 1000mtr to the east and 100-200 mtr to the West (Formigas channel), horizontal visibility's here are normally difficult to explain, some days they can be over 100mtrs since the reef has an average depth of 15 mtrs, and it's made of rock that reflects the light, it is common to feel the sensation of diving in an aquarium. The lava formations here are impressive, there are lots of small channels that Crosse the reef filled with life and along Dollabarat walls it is very common to observe very large pelagic fishes as long as Manta rays and sometimes sharks, there is plenty of live here from all species common in this part of the Atlantic, large groupers are common and also large schools of island groupers can be seen, the normal dive will take us to 25mtr were some very big groupers usually are found, from there we proceed to the West wall to look for pelagic fish or manta or other animals that luck may bring us one that day, finally we enter on top of the reef to end the dive and have clients take full advantage of its wonders.



## Blue Sharks:

FANTASTIC dive with this animals, this is absolutely an extreme offshore dive, located at more than 20nm from the island we go to sea mounts located in the north side of the island and we use chum bait to attract the sharks (there is no feeding nor is the chum bait big enough for the sharks to eat or enter frenzy). Normally we send a anchor with cable to a depth of approx. 15 mtr, we will use this cable to hold on as the boat drifts and the sharks appear, they tend to be extremely shy at first but as time goes by they can come very close to the divers, blue sharks are easily read and predictable, even so this is a dive with sharks all divers must be aware that the risk of a dangerous situation may always occur despite the fact that we have done dozens and dozens of dives of this kind with no problems of any kind (along with other operators thousands of dives have been made with blue sharks in the Azores with no problem of any kind reported) despite this divers must be aware of potential of danger diving with sharks with no care. By the end of the day the release of adrenalin and the taste of this fantastic experience will last in divers memory as a lifetime experience,



## Whale Sharks:

Normally they appear in the months of July (normally mid-July) and stay the summer till late September, because they appear offshore sometimes it is not easy to spot them, but we look out for the tuna boat news and if in the days that clients are in the island whale sharks are seen in numbers we go out looking for them, on our worst year our average of sightings were 63%.

Again this is a FANTASTIC experience because most of the time this whale sharks have thousands of tuna swimming around them, and the visibilities offshore are fabulous, for safety reasons we only allow clients to snorkel with them, there are too many variable to allow clients to scuba-dive with them.

This is an experience difficult to quantify but again it is a lifetime experience for those lucky enough to found them.



## HALIOTIS DIVE CENTER

HALIOTIS, Dive center in Santa Maria is situated in Hotel Colombo with internal access to it. We have the best conditions for our guests, changing rooms, rental or purchase of equipment, bottles, compressor, class room and also a professional team of PADI Instructors and Dive Masters to give the client's the best service.

**2 RIB Boat's, with 2 engines and all the safety equipment. 12 mt and 10 mt.**

