



# Niugini Diving Adventures



## MADANG DIVE SITES



The warm, fertile waters that surge through the many passages and channels in the barrier reef around Madang make the ideal environment for a vast range of marine life. Marine Biologists from all over the world make pilgrimages to the Madang waters to study their wonders. For sheer colour and diversity of life, the seas around Madang have no rival.

Although you can enjoy world-class diving only minutes from the Madang Resort, the best spots are a little more remote and require more effort to get to. Undoubtedly, the most exciting destination is Bagbag Island, lying 32 nautical miles off the coast. This small island has several excellent harbours that were put to good use by the Japanese Navy during WW2. These were the only foreign people to inhabit the island in any numbers and today there are only the delightful village people to greet you. Approximately 10km in length and 25km wide, the island was one of many peaks of a long mountain range pushed up from the sea floor by cataclysmic volcanic forces thousands of years ago - the peaks surround an extinct volcano.

The island's close neighbour, Karkar, is still an active volcano. The other peaks remain underwater, sheer pinnacles that spear from thousands of feet to within 15 feet of the surface - being so far from the mainland there are no estuaries too muddy or soil the crystal clear waters.



## Planet Rock



Three kilometres offshore from Madang town is the volcanic seamount known as Planet Rock. The seas around the mount plummet to a depth of over 2,000 feet, but the strong ocean currents that surge through Astrolabe Bay sweep around and across the apex of the mount at only 15 feet. These currents bring with them large schools of predatory, pelagic fish.

One recent visitor coined the quotable quote "When I dived on Planet, I really felt like I was entering a food chain!"



This statement is no exaggeration. As soon as you hit the water on Planet Rock you are aware of an agitation and excitement amongst the smaller schooling fish which inhabit the surface of the mount. Premier amongst these is the magnificent *Balistoides conspicillum* (Clown Triggerfish) which is often caught in ambient light conditions by lucky photographers. Care needs to be taken however, as the many species of Triggerfish that make their homes on the mount are

aggressive and territorial. Another popular inhabitant of Planet Rock is the "*Gymnothorax flavomarginatus*" (Agate Eyed Moray Eel), which, although a nocturnal hunter, can often be seen peering out of the rocky crags as the spritely little "*Labroides dimidiatus*" dart in and out of the fearsome jaws, going about its cleaning duties. These eels are also abundant along the Barrier Reef where they present a more accessible photo opportunity as part of a night dive.

Schools of Blue Fin Trevally and Jacks glide through the currents around the edge of the mount and their occasional darting scatters are inevitable signs that some large predator is approaching. Virtually all of the larger sharks that inhabit PNG waters have been seen and photographed in the currents around Planet Rock. The white tipped reef sharks of the reefs closer to shore are less obvious here, as they make way for the larger Silver Tips and Whalers. Fortunate divers also have encounters with Hammerheads, which have been known to school here, and the awesome "*Galeocerda Cuvieri*" - the Tiger Shark. Due to the strong currents and its location offshore, Planet Rock is not always accessible, but when it is, you won't find a better spot to get the adrenaline pumping.

## Barrier Reef

The extent and diversity of Madang's marine environment is legendary amongst biologists, photographers and sport divers alike. The sheer volume of fish and coral life that engulfs the extensive barrier reef encircling the Madang area is unique - so unique that many species remain to be catalogued.

The walls of the reef are sheer and bottomless. The volcanic forces that spewed forth the northern coastline of PNG, aeons ago, have given rise to the ideal marine habitat. The deep waters of Astrolabe Bay surge along the walls of the barrier reef. The same fertile currents that gave birth to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia have shaped the evolution life in the seas off Madang. Being isolated from the rest of the Pacific, however, has ensured that its marine life has developed divergently from what one can experience anywhere else. More new species are being discovered along Madang's barrier reef than in any other marine site anywhere in the world. This has made it a popular research site for both the Cousteau Society and National

Geographic.

The Barrier Reef is punctuated in three places by man-made and natural passages. These passages offer the best opportunity to experience the variety of Madang's fish life.

## Magic Passage

Most popular of the passages and very aptly named. The passage bottoms out at about 100 feet and is about 120 feet wide. On the change of tide this passage becomes a seething mass of schooling fish. This is one of the few remaining places divers can experience the sights and sounds of the enormous schools of the "*Garanx Sefasciatus*" that once infested the Pacific. These silvery jacks form an immense living wall around divers as they hang suspended in the passage. Known as ocean fish, these jacks have a relatively small territory around Madang and if you can keep still enough, for long enough, you will hear the rhythmic drumming of their tails as they swarm around you.



Clouds of Bannerfish and Rainbowfish intersperse with the jacks to give the passage an aura of pulsating colour. If you happen to catch Magic Passage on one of its better days you will have your breath taken away as you gaze across from one side of the passage, through gin clear water, to the other side - 120 feet distant.

The dominant corals of the reef slopes and reef fronts are the "Acroporids". These hard corals exist in a myriad of colours. Most spectacular, and offering the best photo opportunity, is the brilliant purple of the "*Acropora Secale*". The range of soft corals on display around the mouth of Magic Passage is extensive. These vary in size and colour from the delicate, pastel shades of the "*Sarophyton*" whose colonies on the reef stretch to more than a meter in diameter, to vivid blue of the "*Heliopora Caerulea*".

A great garden of "Seas Pens" grows at seaward mouth of the passage. These grow at right angles to the prevailing current as the swaying tentacles sieve the changing tidal waters for food.

## The Bomber

During the allied campaign to seize the Japanese strongholds north of Lae during 1943, Japanese anti-aircraft guns around the Madang coastline shot down many allied aircraft. Most famous of these, in diving circles is the B25 Mitchell Bomber, which lies in 60 feet of water near Wongat Island. The bomber lost its port engine on impact, but apart from this, it is virtually intact. Several of the crew survived and swam to nearby Wongat Island before being captured by the Japanese and later executed.

Friendly villagers hid the pilot, however, and he was kept out of Japanese hands for several days. He was eventually captured and transferred to a prisoner of war camp in Rabaul, but survived the war. Several years ago he revisited Madang to take a look at his old bird.

Penetrating through the cockpit of the aircraft you can peer down into the bomb bay, the doors of which were open on impact, and you can take a look at the rack of bombs still wired up and ready to offload as they were in 1943. The gaps between the bombs are home to a collection of enormous cray fish.

Many visiting divers pose for photographs by sitting in the cockpit of the bomber or by pretending to man one of the 50 cal. machine guns protruding from its turrets.

## Henry Leith

A spectacular night dive location due to its sheltered position inside Wongat Island, several hundred meters from the bomber. Originally an iron sailing vessel, converted for action during WW1 and again in WW2 it was last used as the flag ship of Pimpco Shipping on coastal freight service along the coast of PNG. It once has the distinctions of being the oldest commercial vessel still in use in Pacific Waters and even when it was sunk, the iron hull had many more years serviceable life.

The 65 feet ship is now jam-packed with soft corals, sea fans and hydroids. At night the stark reds, pinks and oranges and silhouetted vividly against the pitch, night sea. The hold also contains the remains of a rusting dodge truck, and some very large cod.

There are several small patches of the stinging yellow-brown milleprids, but these are greatly outnumbered by the delicately branched "Stylasterid" called the "Elegant Hydrocoralline". In the sheltered confined of the wreck, its brilliant pink clouration, contrasts beautifully with the deep reds of the "bryozoans".

Many species of "crinoid" can also be seen clinging to the rails and hatches of the wreck. At night their long feathery tentacles sway to and fro in the gentle current seeking to catch passing plankton.



## North Coast

A forty-minute boat ride from the MADANG RESORT takes you to the north coast area. This region is characterized by very precipitous drop-offs, which are swept by powerful and unpredictable ocean currents that pass between the mainland and the southern tip of

Karkar Island. The two best dive locations are the wreck of the "USS Boston" and "The Quarry" - rocky outcrop, less than a hundred meters apart.

The Quarry is a section of north coast reef which, although only meters from the shore, drops off to over two thousand feet at a near vertical angle.

## The Quarry

Swimming out over the reef you can identify many species of "dendrophyllid corals"; especially giant barrel shaped "Turbinaria Frondens". Some are over a meter in diameter. These are surrounded by a dazzling array of colonies of "golden Daisy" or "Sunshine Coral" - "Tubastraea Aurea", which cling precariously to overhangs and the walls of small caves located in the reef wall. There is always the opportunity for photographing the beautiful "nudibranch mollusc" "Phestilla Melanobrachia" which seems to consider the aurea its staple diet. The aurea is also eaten by the "Wentletrap Snail", which eats out the polyps and leaves strings of bright yellow eggs in the cavities.

The shallow water on top of the reef and its crystal clarity make this an ideal option for even the ambient light photographer.

The ecosystem of The Quarry also seems particularly favourable for virtually every other species of marine mollusc. Although classified by the anatomy of the animals living within them, the vast range of univalve shells found around The Quarry area have some very descriptive common names. Here have been found "Tiger Cowries" and even the prized "Golden Cowrie". Numerous "Spindle Cowries" can be seen feeding on "Gorgonias" and soft corals. Also to be found are the full range of "Olive Shells", "Strombs" and "cones".

Lucky divers have even witnessed a "Charonia Tritonais", the rare "Giant Triton", over fifty centimeters in length consuming a "Crown-of-Thorns" starfish here. Unfortunately the bustling tourist trade in Madang sees a number of these fast disappearing "Tritons" on sale at local markets. The villagers along the North Coast seem more farsighted, however, and refuse to have any shells removed from the reefs in their area.

Besides the mollusc and corals, the other main attraction at The Quarry, are large sharks, which inevitably follow the ocean currents that flow past the reef wall. Silver Tips are commonly seen here their thick, barrel like torsos distinguishing them from the more sleek reef sharks which are more common along the barrier reef. You may also have the opportunity of comparing the Oceanic White Tip, that occasionally appears here with its smaller cousin, the Reef White Tip.

The current at The Quarry is strong and unpredictable, in that its direction can vary according to the depth - it is possible at times to drift dive south at 100 feet and then ascend to 60 feet and drift dive back to the north.

## USS Boston

Just north of The Quarry is the USS Boston, an American liberty ship, which was converted for mine sweeping duties. The Boston struck the exposed rocky outcrop and sank to the bottom of a coral drop off in 30 meters of water.

The wreck is about 70 meters long by 25 meters wide and apart from the two bronze screws is virtually intact. It has been described, by some travel writers, as one of the best dives in the world.

The prevailing longshore current here, at The Quarry, travels north. As the wreck is oriented with the bow pointed towards the north, it is a very relaxing procedure to start at the stern and drift through and around the wreck, to the bow. You ascend the reef wall by clasping the hard corals that cover it to the decompression zone, where many of the animal and plant



attractions of The Quarry are also to be found, making it quite an interesting decompression stop.

On either side of the Boston project the long powerful booms which once swept the harbour of New Guinea's northern coastline hunting for mines. Amazing feats of acrobatics are possible if you sit on the booms and wrap your legs around them while the current tries to pull you with it.

There are many large "pelagic" inhabiting the holds and superstructure of the ship, including sweet Lips, Jacks, Spotted Cod and Barracuda.

The holds are filled with crates, some intact - others broken open and spilling open their contents upon the decks. The contents of the open crates are quite unusual for a minesweeper - typewriters, wine bottles, crockery and machine parts.

## Hole in the Wall



The third major attraction on the North Coast. This is a natural, tidal lagoon formed by a wide wall of volcanic rock. The wall completely encloses the lagoon but at a depth of 15 feet it is pierced by a magnificent arch which allows divers to enter the sea from the lagoon - a particularly useful entry when the south east winds make shore dives impossible at other locations of the North Coast.



The wall is outside the lagoon and well down where an extensive range of colourful reef fish can be seen.

Photographers are attracted to the reef here in hopes of getting footage of the "Epinephelus Microdon" - called the curious cod but really a member of the grouper family. Unfortunately for the microdon it has absolutely no fear of humans and can often swim so close it becomes a nuisance. This has resulted in its almost total disappearance from the islands of the Pacific.

A common sight here, are small schools of red-orange squirrel fish which is a night hunter, but can be seen darting in and out of small crevices.

### Coral Queen (Night Dive)

Though Madang is highly regarded for its remarkably intact wartime wrecks, the wreck of the "Coral Queen" has often been declared by visiting divers to be the most spectacular dive anywhere in the world.

This is a small colony of "Anamolops" or flashlight Fish, one of several species of 'bioluminescent' fish that abound in tropical waters. They project a brilliant white glow, and at night they have the appearance of large aquatic fireflies. One other species common to the Madang area is the "Photoplepharon", which have some similarities to the "Kryptopharon" which divers may have encountered in the Caribbean.



Bacteria living on a specialized organ just below the eye produce the luminescence of the Anamolop.

It is important not to have any torches switched on while making this dive so as not to spook the fish into 'switching off'. Not that there is any need for artificial light. The apprehension one feels at descending 100 feet in total darkness is soon relieved. After descending about 20 feet, you can make out a dull glow becoming stronger. Looking down in the hold it seemed to be illuminated within by neon lights.



The hold is home to an enormous colony of Anamolops. Thousands of dazzling little lights swarmed around us in a dizzying vortex. The fishes' bodies

are not visible. Just clouds of tiny, disembodied suns. I could hear the exclamations and sighs of disbelief from others around me.

### Barracuda Point

East corner of Pig island. Reach here around 15min from resort. A point at the of two reefs, dropping off into deep water. The site is renowned for good sights of barracuda, big eye trevally and grey reef shark. Strong currents can be encountered, but huge school of fish comes to this point. You can watch that easily and close with using current hook.

### Rash Passage

Rash Passage is a bottomless channel between Wangat island and Pig island. We can access to here around 20min. An incoming tide produces a quick drift dive with a variety of pelagics, 2m seafans and a lot of hard coral. Shallow reef is so beautiful, Visibility is constantly good, Current is not so strong. You can see school of bat fish and napoleon fish in the middle of drop off. Also plenty garden eels or spaghetti eels on the sand.

### Banana Rock

Long reef like a banana extend from west offshore of Pig island. Boat can reach 15min from Madang Resort . Here have huge and completed coral reef, like stairs. You reach in Pig Island, see the catamaran boat on the coral reef around 18m. This site is cross over point between Pig Passage and Eel Garden.

### Doilon

There is a spot in northern tip of the Krangket Island. It will take just 10min from Madang Resort. Doilon was owned by Pimco Shipping, it formerly a sailing ship built in lat 19<sup>th</sup> Century out of pig iron. It served the Ausytralian Navy in WW2 and was was converted by Bill Byers and used as a cargo ship along the coast and Sepik River after the war. It is 30m length @ 25m depth. A lot of soft corals and lion fish are around ship, you can go into ship

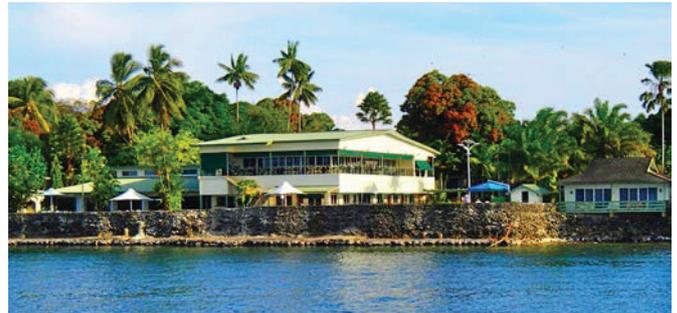
from around screw, if you want.

### Pig (Tab) Passage

One of the dive site in Pig Island. This site is consist of beautiful coral, a lot of Melanesian Anthias and Purple Beauty is dancing on the coral. Sometimes buffalo fish come up from drop off in morning time. Around catamaran boat where is on cross over point between Eal Garden and Banana Rock get be good wreck to gather fish. Bat fish, big size maori snapper and also napoleon fish come around wreck.

### Sek Passage

There is a channel between Seki island and Wangat island. It will take about 20min from Madang Resort. This site is consist from very beautiful coral, and bottomless point, migratory fish sometimes come. Big eye trevally, golden trevally, rainbow runner and mackerels encounter. Current is not so strong, so you will swim with the current.



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