

Below Bali's Waves

Tulamben

A Macro Photographer's Playground

Text and photos by Kate Jonker





Tulamben

Red hairy shrimp, *Phycocaris simulans* (2mm), with eggs. Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +15 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/16, 1/250, ISO 160.

Harlequin anemone crab, *Lissocarcinus orbicularis*, hiding in an anemone's mouth at Sidem (above). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/22, 1/250, ISO 160. Orangutan crab, *Achaeus japonicus*, with its hair swaying in the gentle surge (previous page). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/22, 1/250, ISO 160.

With a wealth of macro subjects to choose from, the Indonesian island of Bali is a macro photographer's dream. Underwater photography instructor Kate Jonker takes us to the quaint fishing village of Tulamben on Bali's northeastern coast and shares her insights and tips for making the most of your trip.

As I slid backwards down a steep slope of black sand, trying desperately to hold my camera steady

and focus on a tiny critter no larger than a grain of rice, I could not help but laugh at the absurdity of it all. Bali's underwater world is as challenging as it is breathtaking, and beneath the surface of the warm, turquoise waters lies a treasure trove of marine life, especially for those passionate about macro and super macro underwater photography.

In May 2024, I travelled to Tulamben, a small village on Bali's northeastern coast, renowned for its black sand slopes and biodiversity. My goal? To teach an underwater photography workshop and capture the intricate beauty of Bali's

critter-rich waters. What I found was an unforgettable mix of creativity, camaraderie and cultural discovery.

A destination designed for exploration

Bali's appeal goes beyond its underwater world. It is a destination that combines stunning natural beauty with a rich cultural tapestry. Direct flights to Denpasar's Ngurah Rai International Airport from major hubs like Singapore, Dubai and Jakarta ensure accessibility. Once you arrive, it is a scenic drive to Tulamben, a sleepy village that transforms into a haven for divers.



Oxynoe kylei, about 3mm in size. Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +15 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z-240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/20, 1/250, ISO 320.



Grape doto, *Doto ussi* (right).
 Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +15 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z-240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot.
 Settings: f/20, 1/250, ISO 320.



Hairy squat lobster, *Lauriea siagiani*, hiding out in its barrel sponge home (left). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12.5 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/8, 1/250, ISO 100.

We stayed at Utama Villa, a resort that felt like a home away from home. Designed with divers in mind, each room offered en-suite bathrooms with their own entrance straight from the garden (no walking through your bedroom in a wet swimming costume or wet-suit!), spacious tables for setting up camera gear and well-appointed bedrooms with air conditioning—an important feature after a day in Bali's tropical heat. The delicious meals, blending local Balinese flavours with international favourites, catered to every palate. Fresh dragon fruit, snake fruit and a traditional feast of *babi guling* (roast suckling pig) on our last night added a memorable culinary dimension to the trip.

The unique charm of Bali's diving

Unlike many dive destinations that rely on boats to access sites, Tulamben's dives are primarily shore entries, which adds an element of adventure from the start. One dive at Batu Ringgit was especially memorable—not just for its critters, but for the unexpected



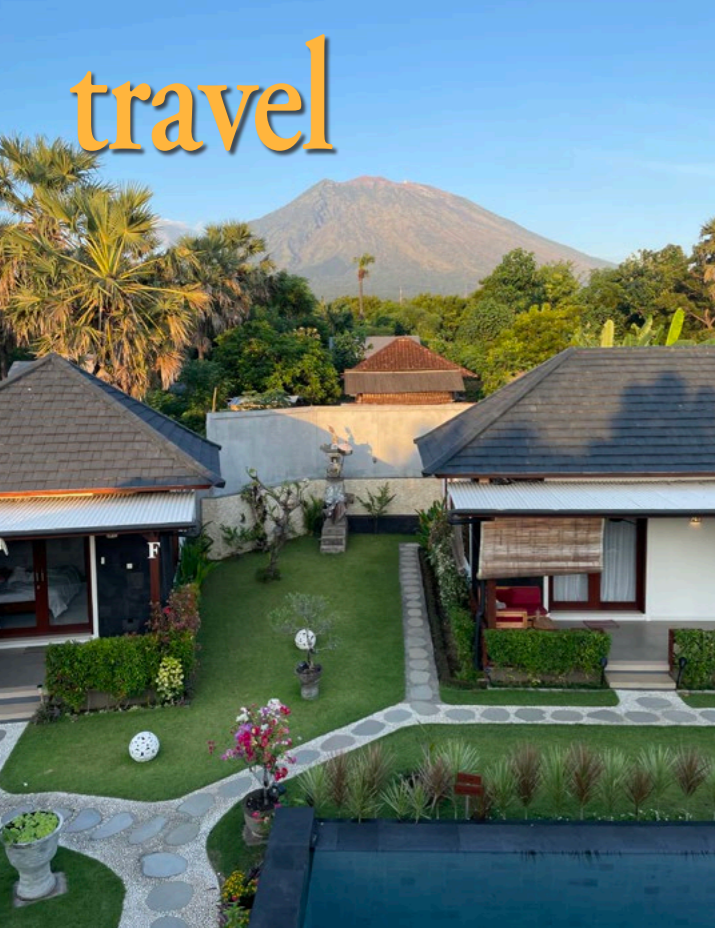
- ✓ 5 STAR SERVICE
- ✓ LUXURY CABINS
- ✓ GOURMET FOOD
- ✓ MASSAGE & SPA

KOMODO
 RAJA AMPAT
 AMBON
 ALOR
 SPICE ISLANDS
 TRITON BAY
 HALMAHERA
 SULAWESI
 BORNEO
 FORGOTTEN ISLANDS

23 CREW TO MAX 16 GUESTS
 5 DIVE GUIDES
 WESTERN CRUISE DIRECTORS



WWW.THEARENUI.COM / INFO@THEARENUI.COM



The gardens of Utama Villa, with Mount Agung in the background (top left). Diving in Bali is done from the shore, usually over rocky or pebbly beaches that give way to black sand and then a steep, sandy slope (top centre). Our group of photographers and dive guides (above).

occurrence of an earthquake. As I was lining up a shot of a Zanzibar shrimp, a low rumble filled the water. Initially, I thought it was a passing boat, but the vibrations quickly intensified. Our guides swam frantically to and fro above us, signalling for us to stay low, and we sank to the sandy slope, feeling the earth shuddering beneath us. Thankfully, the rumbling subsided, and we continued the dive, marvelling at the resilience of the marine life around us.

Tulamben is a quiet village that belies its bustling dive scene. While its old tarred and gravel roads lead down to serene shores, these same shores are gateways to world-famous dive sites that draw divers from around the globe. This juxtaposition of tranquillity on land and vibrant activity underwater makes Tulamben a uniquely compelling destination. Stepping off the pebbly—and sometimes rocky—beaches, we were greeted by steep slopes that descended into

Peacock mantis shrimp, *Odontodactylus scyllarus*, smiling for the camera. Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/5.6, 1/200, ISO 200.



Tulamben

Zanzibar shrimp, *Dasycaris zanzibarica*, photographed with blue-coloured torch and a snoot torch (above). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing. Settings: f/9, 1/160, ISO 200.



Juvenile zebra batfish, *Platax batavianus*, at Sidem (above left). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/20, 1/250, ISO 160.



Red spiny seahorse, *Hippocampus histrix*, with red backlighting and a touch of snoot to light up its eye (above right). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot and OrcaTorch D710V (red). Settings: f/9, 1/160, ISO 160.



A couple of unusual *Aegires malinus* nudibranchs (right). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12.5 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/20, 1/250, ISO 320.

A beautiful but unidentified nudibranch with pearl-like cerata (below). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12.5 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/18, 1/160, ISO 160.



Tulamben



Yellow and blue "Shaun the Sheep" nudibranch, *Costasiella* sp. (above). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +15 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/9, 1/160, ISO 320.

A donut doto, *Doto greenamyri*, photographed using a creative filter (left). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12.5 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/9, 1/250, ISO 160.

"Marilyn Monroe" nudibranch, *Goniobranchus geminus* (centre). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12.5 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, one Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/18, 1/200, ISO 100.

a world filled with tiny treasures.

Each day began with a photography workshop, where I introduced techniques such as shallow depth of field, creative lighting and snooting. These lessons were put into practice during our three daily dives. The water, a balmy 31°C, offered calm conditions perfect for both begin-

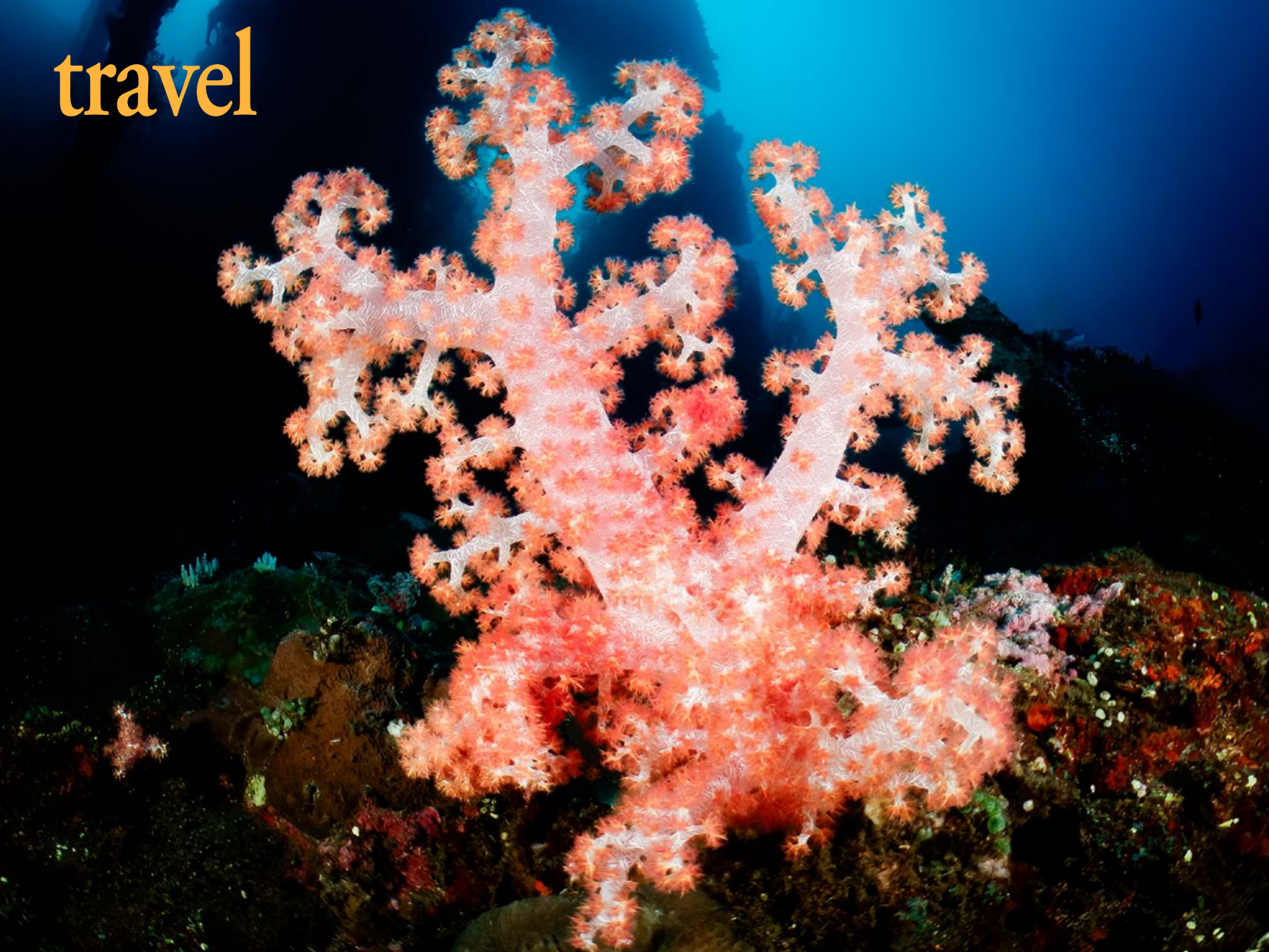
ners and advanced photographers.

However, during our stay, the warm temperatures meant that many critters had moved to cooler depths, adding an extra layer of challenge.

Dive guides in Tulamben are among the best I have encountered. Each guide was paired with two divers, ensuring

personalised attention. Their expertise

in spotting critters allowed us to capture incredible subjects, from "Shaun the Sheep" nudibranchs to harlequin shrimp, mototi octopuses and tiny frogfish. One particularly memorable moment occurred at Sidem, where we encountered a group of divers swimming above



Soft corals on the wreck of USAT *Liberty* (top left). Gear: Olympus TG6, Marelux, two Backscatter Mini Flash MF2. Settings: f/5.6, 1/125, ISO 400. *Elysia ornata* sea slug shot with a creative filter (above left). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, Marelux MX-R5 housing, +12 diopter, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/5.6, 1/250, ISO 100. Ghost shrimp on a tunicate at Gerombong dive site (above right). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +15 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/9, 1/250, ISO 100.



MASTER
LIVEBOARDS

Secure online bookings:
masterliveboards.com

Destination Deals!

Summer Getaways

Get a great deal on your summer liveboard cruise



Scan me!

Egypt (Red Sea)

- Brothers Islands
- Elphinstone Reef
- Daedalus Reef
- Ras Mohamed Marine Park
- Zabargad
- SS Thistlegorm and more!



Scan me!

Indonesia

- Komodo National Park
- Manta Alley
- Cannibal Rock
- Sangeang Volcano
- Komodo Dragons
- Castle Rock



Squat anemone shrimp, *Thor amboinensis*, photographed using a creative filter (above left). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/9, 1/160, ISO 100. Harlequin shrimp, *Hymenocera picta*, at Sidem dive site (above right). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot. Settings: f/22, 1/250, ISO 160.

us. As they churned up silt that clouded the water, it became clear how delicate these ecosystems are and why patience and care are critical for underwater photographers.

Highlights from the depths

Several dive sites stood out during the trip, each offering unique opportunities:

Melasti. This site was a haven for macro enthusiasts, featuring an abundance of Shaun the Sheep nudibranchs, ghost shrimp and ribbon eels. The black sand created a stark contrast that highlighted the vibrant colours of the marine life.

Batu Ringgit. Known for its variety of nudibranchs, this site offered a treasure hunt for



Hypselodoris confetti nudibranchs photographed using a creative filter (above). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12.5 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/16, 1/250, ISO 160.

photographers seeking unique critters like donut and grape doto nudibranchs.

Sidem. This site combined deep slopes and shallow areas perfect for extended safety stops, revealing surprises like mototi octopuses and wonderpus.

Gerombong. With its mix of vibrant coral and diverse critters, this site provided an immersive experience for macro and wide-angle pho-



Tiny yawning orange frogfish, about 5mm in size, photographed with a snoot and coloured torch (above). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +15 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, one Inon Z240 strobe with Marelux SOFT Pro snoot and OrcaTorch D710V (blue). Settings: f/8, 1/160, ISO 320.



THE DIVER'S CHOICE FOR 30 YEARS

AWARD WINNING SERVICE SINCE 1992



Geometric moray eel, *Gymnothorax griseus*, (above left). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, +12 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/5.6, 1/200, ISO 100. Soft corals on the *Liberty* wreck (above right). Gear: Canon R5, TTArtisans 100mm macro lens, +12 diopter, Marelux MX-R5 housing, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/2.8, 1/250, ISO 100.



tographers alike.

Despite occasional challenges, such as waves or silt stirred up by other divers, the overall conditions were excellent. Visibility often reached 20m, and the calm waters allowed us to focus on the creative techniques we had learnt.

Experimenting with creativity

As a macro photographer, Bali's black sand slopes provided an unparalleled canvas

for creative techniques. Using coloured torches, snoots and macro diopters, we explored ways to capture the "bling bling" and "blur blur" effects that Bali's underwater photography is famous for. However, the silty environment required a delicate approach. Even the slightest touch could send up a cloud of sand, obscuring subjects and forcing a pause for the water to clear.

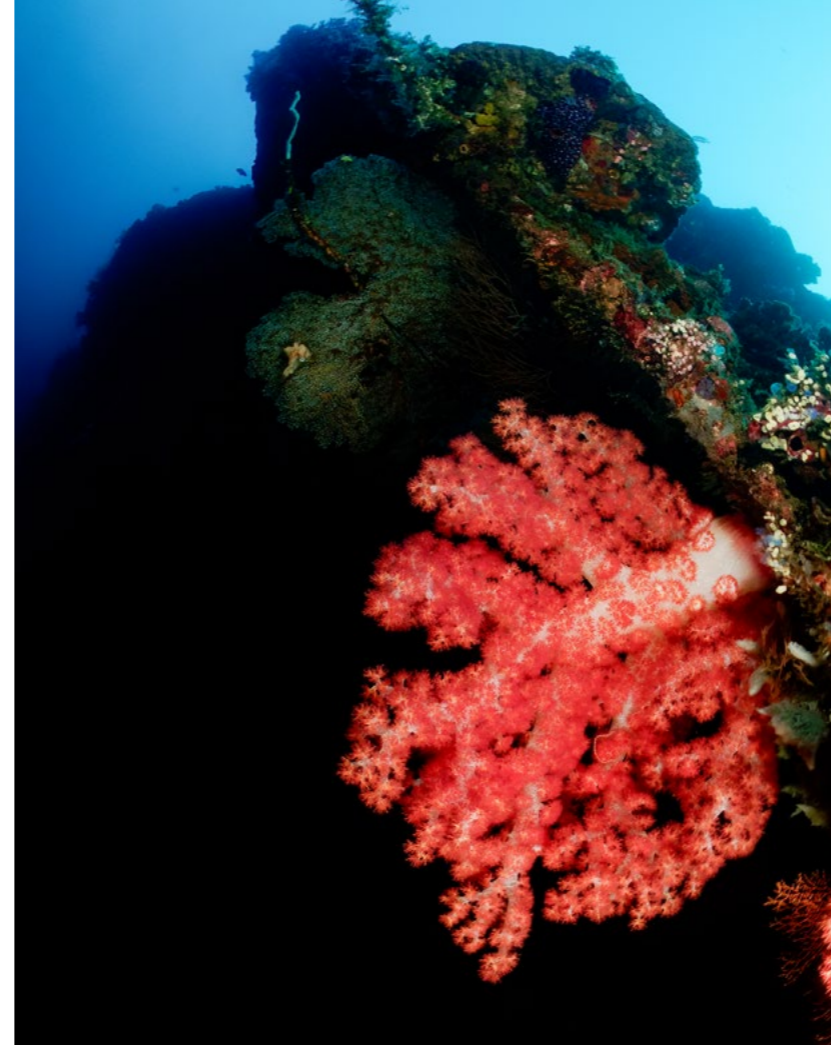
One of my favourite creative experiments involved

pairing shallow depth of field with coloured lighting to create dramatic, artful compositions. These techniques not only enhanced my portfolio, but also pushed me to think outside the box and embrace the challenges of this unique environment.

Beyond the water

While Bali's underwater world captivated us during the day, its rich culture provided plenty to explore after the dives. Each

A very well-camouflaged Napoleon snake eel, *Ophichthus bonaparti*, at Melasti dive site (below). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, Marelux MX-R5 housing, +12 diopter, two Supe D-Pro strobes. Settings: f/7.1, 1/160, ISO 160.



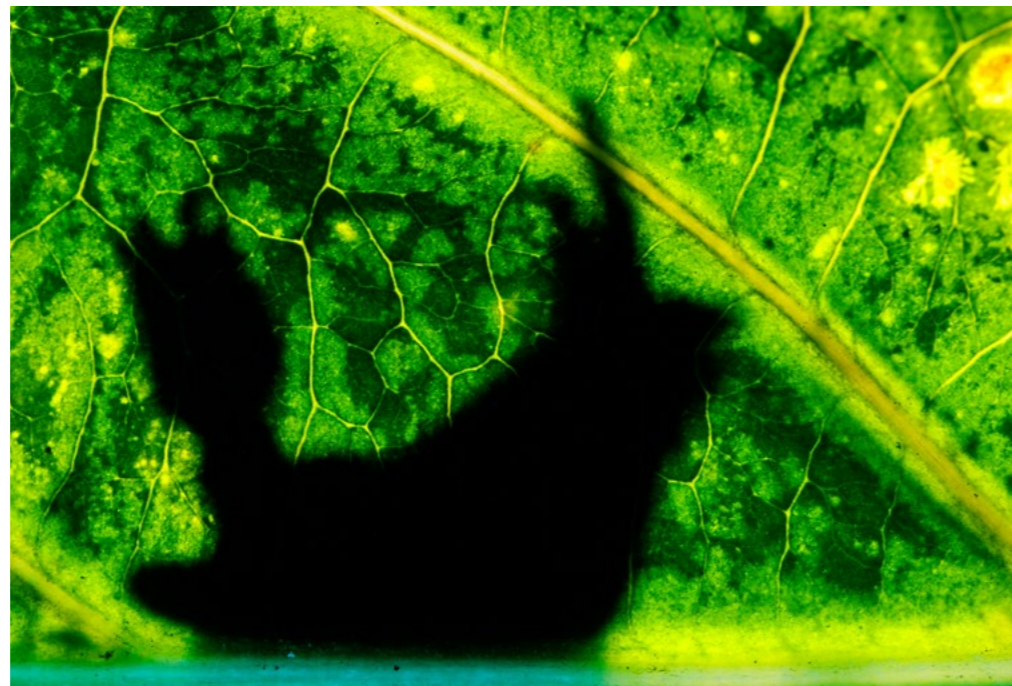


SCUBA DIVE GORDON'S BAY - CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICA





www.indigoscuba.com | info@indigoscuba.com
+27 83 268 1851



evening, small offerings of flowers and incense were placed outside our rooms, a reminder of the Balinese commitment to spirituality and tradition. On our final evening, we were treated

to a performance of traditional Balinese dance. The intricate movements, steeped in symbolism, had us entranced and offered a deeper connection to the island's heritage.

Another highlight was learning about Bali's kite tradition. Known as "layang-layang," these colourful kites are flown not just for leisure but as a sacred ritual to thank the

Soft corals on the *Liberty* wreck (above). Gear: Olympus TG6, Marelux housing, two Backscatter Mini Flash MF2. Settings: f/5.6, 1/125, ISO 400. A little bit of nudibranch fun—playing shadow games on a leaf at Gerombong (left). Gear: Canon R5, Canon 100mm macro lens, Marelux MX-R5 housing, one snoot torch. Settings: f/8, 1/160, ISO 320. The beautiful *canang sari*, a daily offering placed outside our rooms every evening (far left).

gods and pray for a bountiful harvest. The sight of kites dotting the sky added a magical touch to our drives to and from the dive sites.

Practical travel tips

For divers planning a trip to Bali, preparation is key. Applying for the 30-day EVOA B1 visa online before arrival

will save time at the airport. Another important step is filling out the customs declaration form (ecd.beacukai.go.id) at least three days prior to arrival. Make sure to save your QR code and keep your boarding pass handy for customs and immigration checks.

From a diving perspective, pack strong macro diopters (+15 is a good strength), snoots and coloured torches to make the most of Bali's creative potential. Dive guides are well-versed in working with photographers and can help you find and photograph the most elusive subjects.

Conclusion: A photographer's paradise

Bali is a destination that offers more than just spectacular diving. It is a place where culture, creativity, and camaraderie

come together to create an unforgettable experience. Whether you are a seasoned underwater photographer or a curious traveller looking to explore the island's unique marine life, Tulamben provides the perfect setting. For me, the trip was a reminder of why we dive: not just to capture images, but to connect with the beauty and wonder of the underwater world—and to push the boundaries of what we can create. □ *Kate Jonker is an underwater photographer and dive writer, underwater photography instructor, dive guide and dive boat skipper based in South Africa who leads dive trips across the globe. For more information regarding diving and underwater photography workshops, divers are welcome to find her at: katejonker.com.*