

+ TUCKED AWAY IN THE REMOTE WEST OF BALI AROUND FOUR HOURS DRIVE FROM DENPASAR IS AN AREA INFREQUENTLY VISITED BY TOURISTS. IT HAS DIVERSE CORAL REEFS WITH SPECTACULAR FISH LIFE, WHILE ABOVE WATER ARE SCENIC MOUNTAINS AND JUNGLE. THIS IS A DIVER AND NATURE LOVERS PARADISE.

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MENJANGAN MAGIC



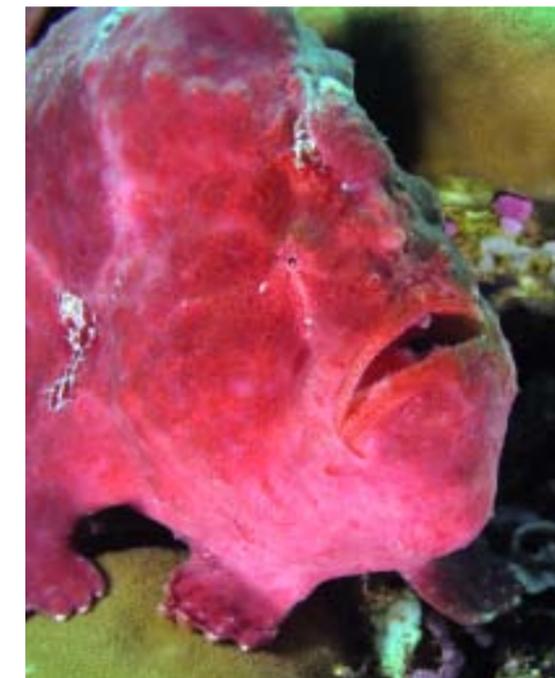
The Bali Barat (West Bali) National Park encompasses 780 square kilometres, almost 10% of Bali's total land area. Menjangan Island is part of this National Park and is located just offshore from the extreme northwest corner of mainland Bali. Menjangan Island is the diving focus of the park, as surrounding its shores are some of Indonesia's finest coral reefs. From vertical dropoffs to shallow coral gardens, there's a dive site to suit every taste - including snorkelers.

Although close to the mainland, the boat journey to Menjangan takes around half hour, as the departure point is from the Park Ranger Station located at Labuhan Lalang a few kilometres away on the mainland. The journey is a treat for the visual senses with views of the massive volcanoes on the distant coast of East Java and the mountain ranges of Bali stretching away to the east. Menjangan (Indonesian for 'Deer') Island itself fairly barren, composed of sandstone with no permanent inhabitants except the native deer and other wildlife. Near its western end sits an ancient temple which is thought to be the oldest of all the Balinese Hindu temples.

At its western end the island is less than a kilometre from mainland Bali, but is surrounded by relatively deep water. The island is renown for its steep coral walls that start in the shallows, typically around six metres deep, and fall vertically to between 30 and 50 metres. The best of these walls are along the southeastern shore where 30 metres from the beach depths are around 50-60 metres.

In 1998 a particularly strong El Nino weather pattern saw many of the very shallow water corals around

Menjangan Island and the nearby coast, suffer from bleaching and many of these died shortly after. The good news is that many of these damaged areas have recovered very well in the last eight years, with beautiful new growth in vibrant colours. The deeper waters suffered very little and healthy soft corals, gorgonias, sponges and ascidians cover the walls and reefs. Although it is rare to see rough seas at the island, there is often a current running at some sites dependant on tides so dive sites are selected according to these currents.



- From left -
- The volcanic peaks on eastern Java feature in spectacular sunsets - viewed from Mimpri Resort in Banyuwedang Bay
 - Dawn Mullins photographs the rich soft corals at Pos 2 dive site.
 - The Eel Garden has beautifully rich reefs full of gorgonia fans.
 - Dive boats tied-up to the jetty at Pos 2 dive site; the cut in the reef is the entry point to the dive site.
 - This giant frogfish was found in shallow water at the Eel Garden

“ A CONTINUOUS WALL SURROUNDS THIS END OF THE ISLAND, DROPPING FROM A COUPLE OF METRES TO OVER 50 METRES DEEP – ALL STRAIGHT DOWN. HUGE GORGONIA FANS IN VARIOUS COLOURS SPROUT FROM THE REEF, FROM THE SHALLOWS ALL THE WAY DOWN TO 50 METRES. ”



DIVE SITE SAMPLER

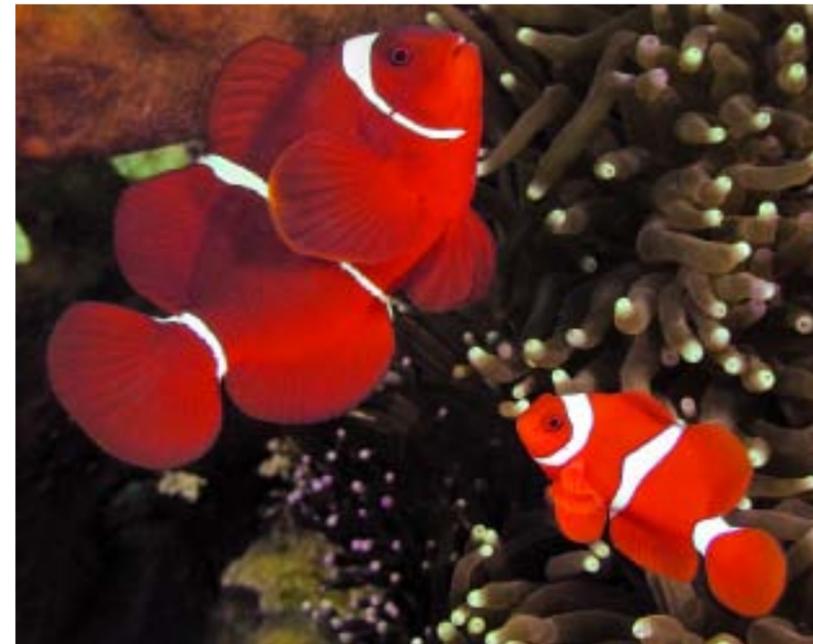
Midway along the north coast, Coral Gardens is a steep sloping wall leading from eight down to 40 metres with lots of soft corals, gorgonias and sponges, plus the odd blacktip reef shark may cruise past. The shallows have some nice gorgonia fans and hard coral growth, with large snappers, blue-spotted trevally and schools of fusiliers

On the western tip of the south coast and just beside a small jetty, Pos 1 dive site is a sandy slope from a couple of metres down to 30 odd metres. Big rock formations are spread along the slope with hard coral growth alongside soft corals and gorgonias. We've often encountered a group of lionfish finning around one area of reef, they work together hunting down the small glassfish that hover around the ledges here. The slope has lots of smaller life like shrimp gobies, sea stars, mantis shrimp, small coral cod and lots of the brilliantly coloured royal dottybacks. Nudibranchs abound and are often found in pairs; the shallows between four to 15 metres are the most productive. Larger fish are also seen here – one day we saw a sailfish jump clear of the sea while we were preparing to dive. And do keep an eye out under the small jetty for juvenile batfish and harlequin ghost pipefish and other small critters. Most divers don't take the time to look as it's very shallow (0.5 - 2 metres depending on tide height).

Pos 2 is located at the southeast corner of the island where a break in the continuous fringing reef allows boats access to the sandy shore and a small jetty. A continuous wall surrounds this end of the island, dropping from a couple of metres to over 50 metres deep – and all straight down. Huge gorgonia fans in various colours sprout from the reef, beginning in the shallows they continue all the way down to 50 metres. Dotted along the wall are small ledges at various depths and these harbour most of the reef's interesting inhabitants. Masses of fusiliers and surgeonfish patrol the reef wall and batfish often follow divers here. A slow drift along the reef face usually reveals angelfish, coral cod, nudibranchs, shrimps, trevally, sharks, barracuda, lionfish, parrotfish, scorpionfish – you name it is here, this is a very rich site.

The west end of Menjangan Island has a site known as the Eel Garden. One of my personal favourites, this dive has a bit of everything. Beginning with a wall that offers the standard vertical profile of most Menjangan sites – some big gorgonias, lots of angelfish, some nice black corals, schooling fusiliers and a group of lionfish that often hunt together along the reef wall. A short swim from the wall is a shallow sandy area alive with garden eels, hence the name.

Heading from the Eel Garden towards the mainland there are some beautiful corals growing on ridges in depths



BOATS TO MENJANGAN

Small boats run by the Park Service leave each morning from Labuhan Lalang after filling-out visitors permits for everyone onboard. Expect between 4-10 divers per boat. Boats generally go straight to the first dive site. After the first dive they will generally tie-up at one of the islands three jetties for a lunch break and return back to Labuhan Lalang after a second dive. Don't leave valuables unattended on the boats, sometimes the temptation is too great for the boatmen whilst you are diving!

OTHER GREAT NEARBY DIVE SITES

One of Bali's best muck diving sites is only a half hour drive from the departure point for Menjangan Island. Diving is actually inside of Gilimanuk Bay from the shore, and is known to divers as Secret Bay. If you're into frogfish, dragonets, rare lionfish and nudibranchs this shallow bay is well worth visiting. Ask your dive operator for more information.

Banyuwedang Bay is a small lagoon-like bay a few kilometres east of Labuhan Lalang. Deep inside this bay are fresh water springs rich in sulphurs where the local Balinese bathe alongside a dive resort. At the bay's narrow entrance are some of the most delicate hard corals I've ever seen, growing in high tower-like structures. Colours are bright and vibrant in different shades of green and yellow. One area in particular has dozens of these two and three metre high coral towers, all closely packed together. In this area we've seen nudibranchs, mandarin fish, crocodile fish and trevally. Among the corals are various gobies, blennies and lionfish flitting around. Deeper inside the bay is the realm of devilfish, frogfish and pipefish. Visibility here is very dependant on tides, best to dive on the peak of high tide. Pemuteran has some nice bank reefs a few kilometres of shore plus some shore dives. Though these are nice dive sites, they're not as spectacular as Menjangan. But if you're staying in Pemuteran they're certainly worth a dive or two. Night diving isn't allowed at Menjangan Island itself, but the reefs around Tanjung Gelap just outside Banyuwedang Bay are fantastic night dive sites. These reefs are easily accessible from boats available inside the bay and have good visibility and marine life on steep sloping coral reefs. Pemuteran's shore dive sites also make good night dives.

From left -

- A group of juvenile batfish are often seen around the small jetty at Pos 1.
 - Angelfish in a number of varieties are a feature of the Eel Garden.
 - Look out for nudibranchs at Pos 1 dive site, they're often in pairs.
- This pair of spine cheek anemonefish were seen at the Eel Garden.
- Crocodilefish are seen around the sand flats at the Eel Garden and Pos 1 dive sites.
 - Schooling trevally cruise along the walls that surround the east end of Menjangan.



• This lionfish was yawning at me, I think it may have been tired of having its picture taken!

between six and 15 metres deep. This is the liveliest area with large gorgonia fans, huge barrel sponges, hard and soft corals. There is often a current here, which attracts schools of pelagics that cruise past, but there are also lots of reef fish – coral cod, angelfish, lionfish, scorpionfish, basslets, anemone fish, cuttlefish, giant puffers and trumpet fish can be seen surrounding the luxuriant coral growth.

Underwater visibility around the island is generally very good, 20 metres is average but 30 metres is quite common. In November and early December it can reach up to 50 metres. Best time to dive at Menjangan Island is between April and early December, the driest time of year. Late December to March is the wet season and can be windy, but generally is still diveable. Water temperature is around 27-28°C in July/August up to 29-30°C in December/January.

There are two areas to stay around Menjangan with reasonable access to the island:
Banyuwedang Bay – One resort is situated on the shores of this bay (approximately 8kms from the Menjangan); Mimpi Menjangan is a beautiful resort on huge grounds with dive boats loading directly from their own jetty inside Banyuwedang Bay. The resort has pools fed by sulphur springs throughout the grounds and some rooms have private dip pools. www.mimpioresorts.com or email menjangan@mimpi.com
Pemuteran – There are quite a few dive operators and accommodations in this area (14kms east of Menjangan). Recommended are:
Taman Sari Bali Cottages – Accommodation & Dive Centre www.baliwww.com/tamansari or email tamanri@indosat.net.id
Pondok Sari – Accommodation and Dive Centre www.pondoksari.com or email bali@wernerlau.com
Reef Seen Aquatics – Dive Centre www.reefseen.com or email dive@reefseenbali.com
Getting to Bali – All major regional airlines regularly access Bali. Check with Singapore Airlines, Silk Air, Qantas, Air New Zealand, Garuda, Philippine Airlines for special travel packages and best season to visit. Most dive travel agents can book your diving and accommodation, but make sure they've experienced the island and the diving first hand.



Jeff Mullins has been exploring under the seas of Australia, southeast Asia and the South Pacific for 35 years. He began taking underwater photographs in 1976 and has since been published worldwide. Jeff was awarded the PADI Hallmark of Excellence Award for Outstanding Contribution to Photo Journalism in 1995. A regular contributor to Sportdiving Magazine, his first article was published in 1979. Currently Jeff and his wife Dawn run dive tours from their property near Tulamben in Bali specialising in small groups of divers with an interest in underwater photography and marine life - www.reefimages.i8.com Jeff & Dawn have also recently published a book titled *Reef Wreck & Critter*, a pictorial guide to Tulamben's dive sites and marine life - www.tulamben.i8.com