

: JEFF MULLINS

on the road from Amed...



✦ ALWAYS HUNGRY FOR A NEW MUCK DIVING SITE, WE HEARD THAT THE SANDY SLOPE IN FRONT OF AMED VILLAGE WAS REGULARLY REVEALING UNUSUAL CREATURES LIKE FROGFISH, GHOST PIPEFISH, MIMIC OCTOPUS, AMBON SCORPIONFISH, AND DEVIL SCORPIONFISH.

When a prominent English underwater photographer showed us his images from a single dive (that included an encounter with a Wonderpus), we visited the very next day. It was muck diving at its best; a wide sandy shelf out to 6 metres, and then a steep slope down to infinity. Here and there were seapens, anemones, the odd crinoid or sponge, each with some interesting small critter seeking shelter.

A small pile of rocks brought our first find, a well-camouflaged estuarine stonefish. In the same area was an orange scorpionfish and two zebra lionfish. Close by a hairy ghost pipefish hovered near a clump of algae, and in the sand a few metres away was the distinctive head profile of a mimic octopus peering from a hole. After a brief 'who's-watching-who' the mimic left its home and began searching around the bottom. It poked its thin spindly arms into every likely hole in the sand in

Gili Selang has a great variety of angelfish, and like this blue mask angel are very approachable.



The Japanese Wreck lies in shallow water very close to the shore it's a great snorkel or safety stop after diving the surrounding reef.

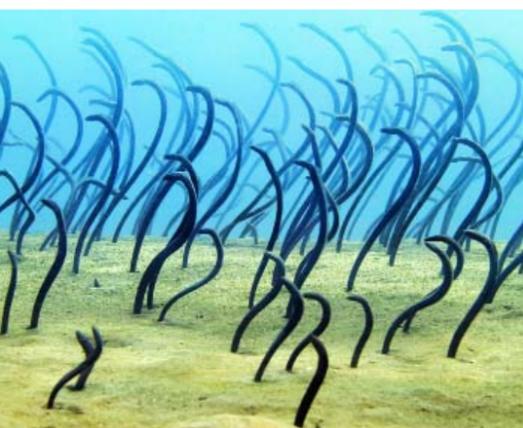
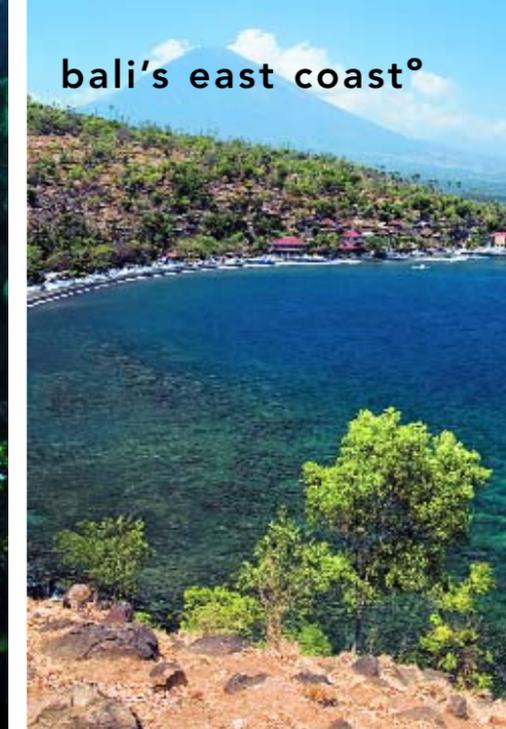
search of food, with us tagging along flashing away!

Tanjung (Cape) Bunutan Barrel sponges bigger than barrels, immense gorgonia fans, swirling schools of barracuda, sweetlips and surgeonfish. This reef has it all, our friend boldly stated. There are cruising giant trevally, moray eels, inquisitive sharks, nudibranchs and even an occasional marlin! This is a reef that you just have-to dive. I'd like a hundred dollars for every time someone's told that! But this reef, and the unusual method of finding it, weren't the half-baked dream of some nitrogen-crazed diver. The reef at Tanjung Bunutan on the northeast coast of Bali was everything he described and more.



Every coral bommie in the shallows of Tanjung Bunutan has groups of colourful basslets.

Tanjung Bunutan is just one of a seemingly endless series of rocky headlands interspersed with small bays for many kilometres along the far eastern extremity of Bali's coast. Known as



the Amed Coast, the area is separated from the interior by the lofty peaks of the Seraya mountain range. It's also one of Bali's most scenic coastal drives, with elevated views across the sea to Lombok, Bali's nearest neighbour, and many fishing villages and bays along the way.

Jemeluk Bay was originally the only dive destination on this coast, and is only a few kilometres east from the beginning of the coastal road at Amed village. One of Jemeluk Bay's dive highlights is just below the high volcanic headland on the eastern arm of the bay.

Surrounded by a narrow shelf of shallow water, there are large fallen boulders from the cliff above forming beautiful coral encrusted bommies in the shallows. These are covered in table corals, sponges, soft corals, and huge gorgonia fans. Fish swarm around in dense schools, and every ledge reveals something of interest; mantis shrimps, nudibranchs, anemones, and sea stars. Just 50 metres out, the cliff continues underwater as a vertical wall that has even more diversity including the odd reef shark, pygmy seahorse, and even an occasional whale shark.

The entire coastline had always intrigued us, and as the area developed we began exploring likely dive sites.

Banyuning One of our first destinations was this small village, with a small shipwreck close to shore we'd often snorkeled. Known locally as the

'Japanese Wreck', little is known of its history. The wreck itself isn't spectacular, a small steel ship about 20 metres long lying in shallow water, its bow almost on the shore. It's become a popular snorkeling spot – visitors can hover on the surface watching a plethora of fish meandering below. The shallow coral reef that begins just beside the wreck has some of the healthiest hard and soft corals we've seen in Indonesia, all only 2-5 metres deep. A few years ago

This page -A hairy ghost pipefish in front of Amed Village, drifting near some algae.

The shallows of Jemeluk Bay have boulders covered with spectacular gorgonia fans.

These garden eels are found in the shallows off Bunitan Village, they are over a metre long and number in their thousands.

This white leaf scorpionfish was hiding among sponges at Tanjung Bunitan.

Lizard fish are seen perched around the reefs inside the bay at Gili Selang



a series of steps were built down the steep cliff adjacent to the wreck down to the pebble beach, so now we are easily get scuba gear down to the shore and explore a little deeper around the reef. We were pleasantly surprised to find a spectacular reef we now visit regularly, with steep slopes teeming with life. There are beautiful overhangs and high bommies coated with soft corals and big healthy gorgonia fans.

Around 10-12 metres deep are large areas of pristine hard corals where thick schools of damselfish and anthias hover. We often see cuttlefish and a lone banded sea snake around this part of the reef. Nudibranchs seem to thrive in the often cool currents that brush past this reef; we have seen as many as ten varieties on one dive here. Pelagics also cruise past, including dog-tooth tuna and giant trevally; occasionally a school of 15-20 bump-head parrotfish meander along the reef.

JUKUNGS Traditional outrigger fishing boats (or *Jukung* in Balinese) are used for diving around Gili Selang, Tanjung Bunutan, and the walls and slopes of Jemeluk Bay. This great experience brings a whole new meaning to having very little room on a dive boat! Jukungs are very narrow, just wide enough for a diver's posterior. But they are excellent sea boats and stable diving platforms. Normally scuba equipment is donned in the water and after diving it is removed before climbing back into the jukung. The boat driver picks up divers where they surface and also helps divers with equipment. The boats are beached after diving and local porters ferry scuba equipment between the nearest access point and the jukung. A unique experience!

The maximum depth is only 35 metres at the base of the reef slope, and with the Japanese Wreck lying between 3-10 metres around the corner of the reef, it's an ideal safety stop. Look out for leaf scorpion fish, batfish, and nudibranchs on the wreck itself.

Gili Selang Further east and top on our list of explorations, this high but relatively small rocky island is at the eastern most extremity of Bali. On days with no swell or wind, it's not unusual to see the ocean flowing like a fast moving river only 200 metres offshore. Strong currents off the northeast Bali coast seem to accelerate as they approach Gili Selang, continuing south through the Lombok Strait to the Indian Ocean. When the east wind is blowing, the sea becomes a mass of white water as the current runs against the wind. Some dive companies take experienced divers to the outer edge of Gili Selang where they can drift in the fast flowing currents that sweep past. Their reward is a glimpse of

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The Japanese Wreck at Banyuning often has a group of batfish hovering around.

Bumphead parrotfish are often seen in groups around the reefs of Amed.

Jemeluk Bay is the centre of dive activities around the Amed area; accommodation and dive facilities line the shore.

manta rays, sharks, or an occasional whale shark that hangs out here.

The island connects to the mainland via a shallow reef shelf, forming a sheltered area inshore just north of the island. This catches some of the main current, bathing the inner reefs of the bay with cool, clear oceanic waters, but without the wild offshore currents. It's a great place to dive among large coral bommies, some encrusted with soft corals and eroded with small caves, in only 8-12 metres depth. Whitetip reef sharks meander around and moray eels seem to reside at each coral head.

Along the deeper sections between 15-25 metres, are large areas of branching staghorn and other acropora corals interspersed with rocky bommies. These are densely populated by anthias and chromis, so thick it is often hard to see the reef for the fish. Coral cod and a wide variety of angelfish also seem to find these reefs attractive; we see lots more here than elsewhere around Bali.

Visibility in low-swell conditions is often

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around 40 metres and rarely drops below 20 metres. We have found all sorts of critters here including orangutan crabs, stonefish, peacock flounder, cuttlefish, leaf scorpion fish, and nudibranchs. Sharks often cruise past, even an odd thresher or hammerhead is sighted here.

We're still exploring this coastline and finding new sites along the way. It is evident to us that this is truly one of Bali's richest dive areas, with many beautiful reefs within a few fin-kicks of the shore. All it takes is a little looking.



Until the late 90s, a lack of good roads and general infrastructure along the Amed coast meant visiting divers only saw one or two of the more accessible dive sites. The area slowly developed, with many small boutique accommodations and restaurants being built. Then roads were maintained and bridges constructed across the larger rivers, allowing year-round access. The whole area has now flourished, and is Bali's newest dive 'escape'.



WHERE TO STAY There are many nice places around the Amed area. Some personal recommendations are: Anda Amed Resort - www.anda-amed.com Baliku - balidodo@yahoo.com Blue Moon Villas - www.bluemoonvilla.com Coral View Villas - www.hiddenparadise-bali.com Hidden Paradise Cottages - www.hiddenparadise-bali.com Santai Hotel - www.santaibali.com All are run to western standards with spacious, clean, airconditioned rooms and have their own restaurants.

DIVE FACILITIES We can recommend the following dive centres around Amed: Jukung Dive - www.jukungdivebali.com Eco Dive - www.ecodivebali.com Euro Dive - www.eurodivebali.com All dive centres have English speaking guides and instructors, have quality equipment, and have been established in the Amed area for a number of years.