NAD-LEMBEH

LEMBEH GUIDEBOOK

2026/27

GETTING TO LEMBEH

The gateway to Lembeh and North Sulawesi is Sam Ratulangi International Airport (MDC).

The majority of international travellers arrive in Manado via Singapore, most commonly using Scoot. As a subsidiary of Singapore Airlines, Scoot offers a straightforward and generally hassle-free connection, with through-checked baggage to Manado on a single ticket. There are typically at least four flights per week—operating on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday—with additional services sometimes added during peak seasons. Singapore Airlines services from most major global hubs usually provide the shortest overall travel time to North Sulawesi.

It is also possible to route via Soekarno–Hatta International Airport (CGK), with several Middle Eastern carriers codesharing onto Garuda Indonesia for the domestic leg. Longer transit times in Jakarta can make an airside hotel worthwhile; having tried most options, Anara Airport Hotel stands out as the most comfortable. There are also cheaper domestic airline options with good safety records, though afternoon delays are not uncommon.

Once in Manado, Lembeh is around an hour away, including the short boat transfer across to the island.

1	Northern Lights	BS	31	Tanda Rusa 1	BS	61	Tanjung Tebal	C
2	Batu Angus	C	32	Tanda Rusa 2	BS	62	Aer Bajo 1	BS
3	Pantai Maleo	BS	33	Madidir	BS	63	Aer Bajo 2	BS
4	Aw Shucks	M	34	Goby a Crab	C	64	Aer Bajo 3	BS
5	Hey Nus	M	35	Kapal Indah	M	65	Batu Sandar	BS
6	Hairball 2	BS	36	Trikora	M	66	Rojos	BS
7	Hairball 1	BS	37	Pulau Abadi	M	67	50/50	M
8	Suprise	M	38	Kelapa Dua	M	68	Binuang	BS
9	Tk 1	BS	39	Mawali Wreck	Wr	69	Jojos	M
10	TK 2	BS	40	Pantai Kira Kira	M	70	Angels Window	C
11	TK 3	BS	41	Exploration	BS	71	Bat Bay	C
12	Retak Larry	M	42	Hey Mi	M	72	Batu Merah	BS
13	Slow Poke	BS	43	Tanjung Kusu[2]	M	73	Hairy Larry	C
14	Magic Crack	BS	44	Seagrass	BS	74	Pulau Putus	C
15	Magic Rock	M	45	Pintu Kolada 1	M	75	California Dreaming	C
16	Coral Garden	C	46	Pintu Kolada 2	M	76	Jiko Yanci	W
17	Nudi Retreat 1	C	47	Tom's Garden	C	77	Kaina's Treasure	W
18	Nudi Retreat 3	C	48	Sarena Besar	M	78	Garis Gila	W
19	Makawide Pier	M	49	Sarena Patah	M	79	Dante's Wall	W
20	Makawide 1	C	50	Susan's Reef	C	80	Tanjung Malamise	W
21	Makawide 2	M	51	Pussy Galore	C	81	Batu Kapal 1,2,3	C
22	Jahir 2	BS	52	Critter Hunt	C	82	Simon's Hole	C
23	Jahir 1	BS	53	Lampu Merah	C	83	Batu Bunyan	C
24	Aer Perang 3	C	54	Tanjung Harus	C	84	Goby Point	M
25	Aer Perang 2	BS	55	Pantai Parigi 1	WS	85	Pulau Susulina	C
26	Aer Perang 1	BS	56	Pantai Parigi 2	WS	86	Bommies	C
27	Waterfall	C	57	Tanjung Kareko	C	87	Jiko Dolom	BS
28	Nudi Falls	M	58	Kareko Pasir	BS	88	Gani	BS
29	Police Pier	M	59	Kareko Batu	BS	89	Pulau Dua	C
30	Bianca	M	60	Tanjung Kubur	BS			

*BS=Black Sand, C=Coral, M=Mixed, Wr= Wreck, WS=White Sand

SEASONS

Northwest (Wet) Monsoon
From December to April surface waters warm and conditions often stabilise, with visibility frequently improving despite increased rainfall. Lighter winds during this season make "East Lembeh" and offshore diving more reliable, and it is often considered the most favourable period for blackwater diving.

Southeast (Dry) Monsoon
From June to August, driven by southeasterly winds - this season brings coastal upwelling to Lembeh and the strongest phase of the Indonesian Throughflow Current. Cooler, nutrient-rich water reaches shallow depths, increasing productivity and drawing many rare and cryptic species out into the open. Currents within the Lembeh Strait tend to strengthen on incoming tides during this period.

WHAT THE MUCK ?

Muck diving is a term that can be misleading. For many, it suggests murky water and featureless mud; in practice, it refers to the exploration of shallow coastal habitats in Southeast Asia that support an extraordinary diversity of small and often highly specialised marine life.

Underwater, dive sites in Lembeh are varied in both structure and appearance. Most dives take place along gently sloping rubble habitats composed of sand, coral fragments, and patches of healthy coral in the shallows. Black sand bays are also a key feature of the area and are home to many of Lembeh's signature species, including mimic octopus and hairy frogfish.

Muck diving is best enjoyed with a camera and, at minimum, a small torch to assist with observation. The style of diving is often likened to a treasure hunt, with experienced, observant dive guides identifying subtle microhabitats where unusual and cryptic species are most likely to be found.

This guide is intended to provide an introduction to what you can expect when diving in Lembeh. The following sections explore the local environment, the team, and the style of diving that defines this unique destination.

SEAVIEW BUNGALOWS

Civilised Jungle Livingspace

Our Bungalows are accessed via stairs, with B1 requiring the fewest steps (~10) and B2 the most (~25). They offer a more rustic experience, constructed from ironwood and finished with tiled floors.

Each bungalow includes an adjoining dayroom furnished with a small daybed, water dispenser with fridge, a Nespresso Coffee machine and a desk suitable for setting up a compact workspace. The larger private balconies are surrounded by forest and landscaped gardens, providing increased opportunities to observe wildlife during the early morning and twilight hours.

All bungalows are equipped with air conditioning, hot water showers, and reliable Starlink Wi-Fi throughout.

There are 5 Bungalows in total, they are only available in double-bed configuration

BEACHFRONT ROOMS

(Almost) No Stairs!

Our Beachfront Rooms are located at beach level, close to the pool and within easy walking distance of the restaurant and camera room. Arranged in a gentle crescent, these rooms offer a more economical option while maintaining comfort and convenience.

Each room features a private indoor shower room and toilet, a small desk suitable for a laptop, and an outdoor balcony equipped with seating and space to dry dive equipment. For the comfort of all guests, smoking is not permitted on the balconies.

All rooms are equipped with air conditioning, hot water showers, and Starlink Wi-Fi.

There are 10 Beachfront Rooms in total, each available in either twin or double bed configurations.

BAR & RESTAURANT

Join the long table or dine alfresco by the beach

Our Bar and Restaurant are arranged around the central camera room, with the restaurant located closest to the Beachfront Rooms.

The Restaurant offers excellent views across the Lembeh Strait and benefits from a cooling sea breeze throughout the day. Meals are served buffet-style, with individual dietary requirements and preferences accommodated on request. A free-flow espresso machine and ice maker are also located here for guest use.

The Bar is spacious and comfortable, providing an alternative place to relax with a drink or meal away from the restaurant. It features ample seating, a pool table, and an 85-inch television for guests looking to unwind or take a break from dive-related conversation. A selection of cocktails, beers, and other drinks is available.

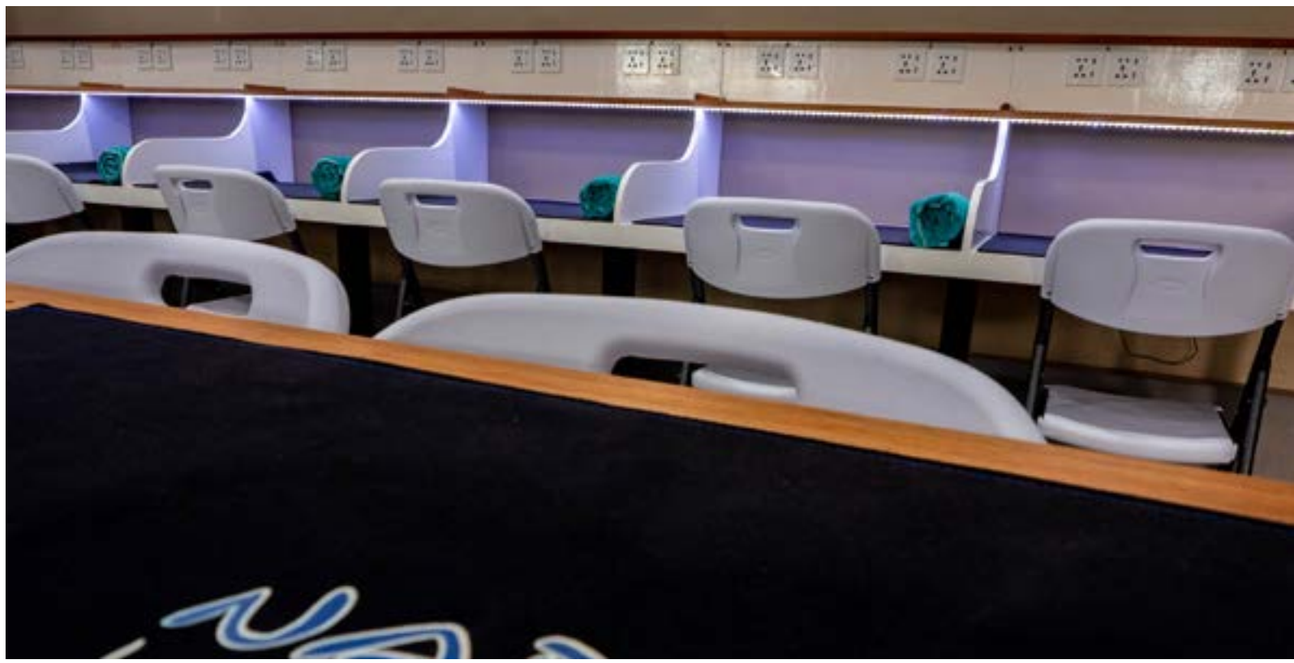
CAMERA ROOM

Our purpose-built camera room features individual workstations for every guest, along with larger central tables for those who prefer additional space to spread out. There is ample room for hard cases, dry cabinets, and a small gift shop.

The camera room is likely the largest of its kind in the world—and certainly the only one with its own dedicated toilet.

Each workstation is equipped with USB charging ports and five international power sockets, ensuring convenient and efficient setup for all camera systems.

The beating heart of NAD



DIVE BOATS & JETTY

At NAD Lembeh, we operate a fleet of five purpose-built dive boats, each measuring approximately 13–15 m and powered by reliable Suzuki four-stroke outboard engines.

Constructed from a combination of wood and fibreglass, the boats are designed specifically for comfort, safety, and Lembeh diving. All vessels are fully equipped with toilets, towels, dry storage, equipment hangers, dedicated wetsuit storage, camera rinse tanks, and comprehensive first-aid and oxygen support. During surface intervals, guests are welcome to relax or sunbathe on the roof deck.

Throughout your stay, dive equipment is lightly rinsed at the end of each diving day and securely stored aboard the boat. Wetsuits are rinsed daily and hung onboard, where the constant ocean breeze allows them to dry more quickly than ashore.

This system also reduces the chance of forgotten or misplaced equipment, ensuring everything is ready for the next day's diving.

Our custom-built jetty has been refined through several design iterations and now provides an efficient, comfortable, and well-organised staging area for daily dive operations.

The floating section can accommodate up to four dive boats at a time, while the adjacent fixed concrete platform offers generous space for sunbathing, or simply watching life on the strait.

The jetty also serves as a small wildlife viewing area, with several species of kingfisher frequently hunting nearby and archerfish often seen patrolling the shaded waters beneath the dock.

2:1

Guest : Guide Ratio

DIVE & BOAT TEAM

The BEST? We think so!

Dive guides in Lembeh enjoy an outstanding global reputation, built on three essential strengths: exceptional observational skills, deep local knowledge, and a consistently positive attitude. This combination has made North Sulawesi - and Lembeh in particular - famous within the diving community, with guides from the region highly sought after throughout Indonesia and beyond.

At NAD Lembeh, our guiding team is highly experienced, with many members having worked with us for over a decade. The team is led by three supervisors and ***every buddy team is assigned its own dedicated guide***, ensuring a personalised and attentive diving experience throughout your stay.

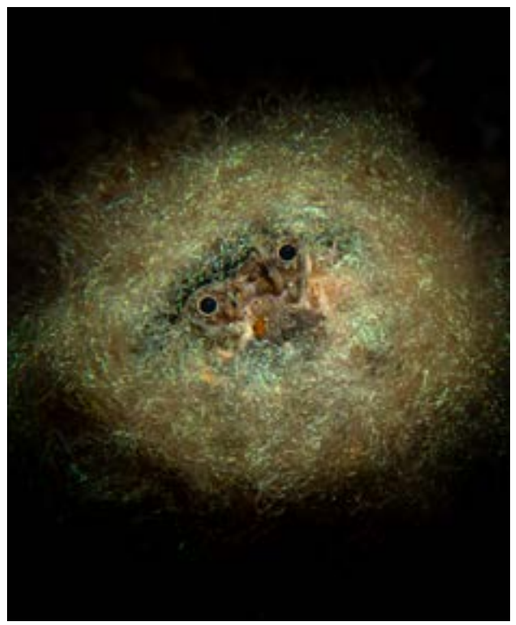
HOUSE REEF

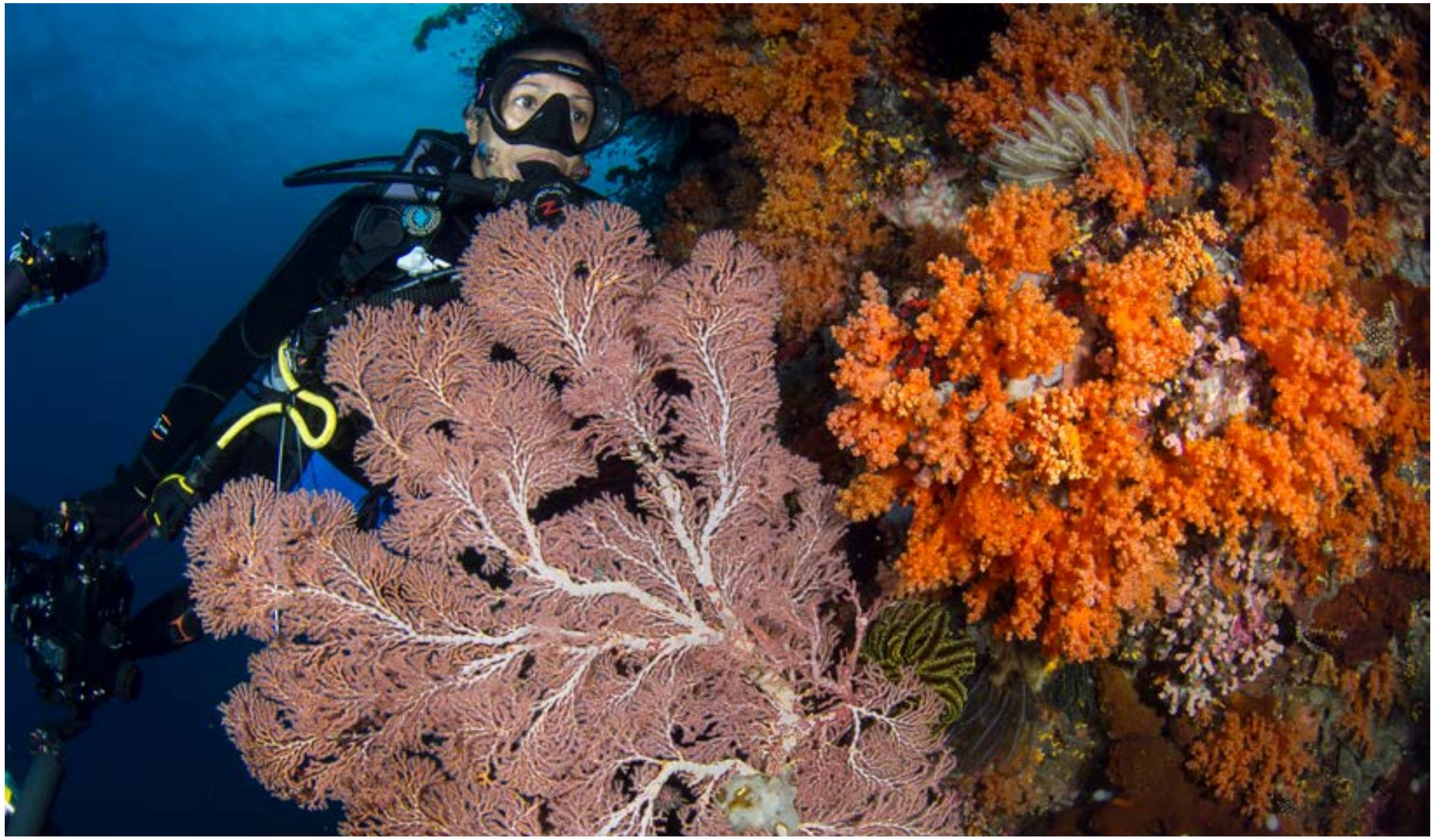
A great place to practice technical shots

The NAD house reef is a very safe site for both diving and snorkelling. A sandy plateau extends from the beach to approximately 3 m (10 ft) deep, before gently sloping down to around 18 m (60 ft). While the deeper areas can be muddy, they are a good place to search for crab-eyed gobies.

The most interesting areas for visitors are the shallow zones, where numerous mantis shrimps can be found, along with clownfish hosting tongue-eating Cymothoa exigua parasites and Banggai cardinalfish mouthbrooding their eggs.

At night, the most exciting encounter is the bullet worm, and the site is also particularly well suited to fluorescence photography of corals.





EAST LEMBEH TRIP

A full day trip to the ‘other’ side

East Lembeh refers to dive areas off the eastern and outer edges of Lembeh Island.

Offering a contrast to the famous black-sand muck diving found in the strait, a day trip here can provide a welcome break during a longer stay in Lembeh. Best dived from December to May when the wind is more gentle, the sites here usually provide 2 good wide-angled dives in the morning, and then a solid macro dive around the corals in the afternoon.

All dives are great for macro critters, so it is still a trip worth doing for general fish photography, and the clear water will provide backscatter free images for all to enjoy.

BANGKA TRIP

A full day trip to the North

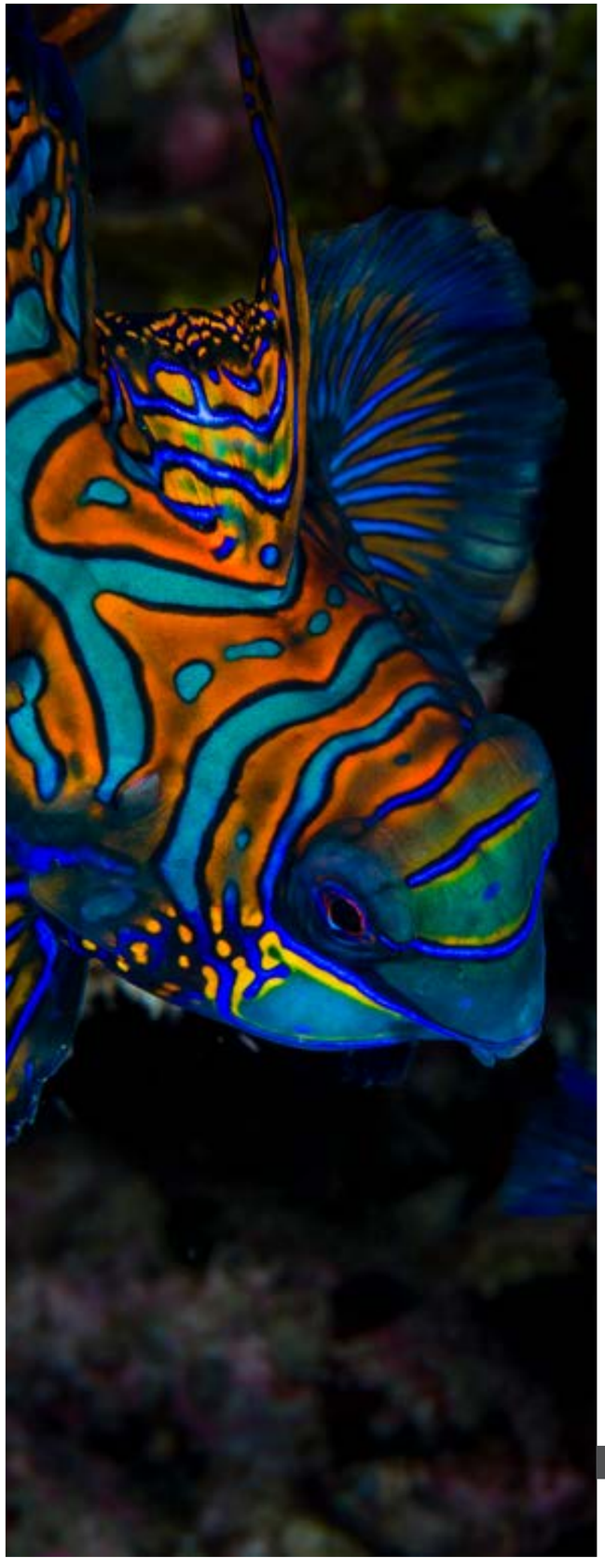
A “Bangka trip” from Lembeh is the perfect contrast to the strait’s dark volcanic muck sites.

Leaving early, you cross open water toward Bangka Island, where the scenery shifts dramatically from black sand slopes to vibrant coral reefs.

Visibility is typically better, colours are brighter, and wide-angle opportunities replace macro obsession. Expect small walls draped in soft corals, huge sea fans, and bommies alive with anthias pulsing in the current.

Pygmy seahorses cling to gorgonians, while reef sharks and schooling fusiliers cruise the blue.

The diving can be more exposed, with gentle to moderate currents adding energy to the reef. For photographers, it’s a refreshing reset - swap snoots for domes and enjoy sweeping reefscapes before returning to Lembeh’s critter-rich sands.



MANDARIN & NIGHT DIVES

Hold off on the deco-beer to see the Night Shift

Mandarinfish (Synchiropus splendidus) are most famous for their dusk mating displays, when pairs rise briefly into the water column to spawn. A very weak focus light or red light will disturb the Mandarinfish less, your guide can also assist with their spotting torch.

Night dives are not to be missed, bobbit worms, stargazers and amazing Cephalopods are commonly seen. Typically no deeper than 15m (45') at least one should be completed every Lembeh visit, more if you enjoy observing feeding behaviour or are shooting video.

*minimum 2 divers for the boat to depart
** Night and Mandarinfish dives are an additional charge on top of the package dives.

BLACKWATER NIGHT DIVES

Blackwater diving is not new - it is something we've been perfecting for almost 15 years. Descend the downline and drift slowly around the lights as a parade of extraordinary planktonic life emerges from the deep.

Some creatures are drawn into the glow, while others lurk at the edges, slipping in from the darkness to hunt. Your guide keeps the dive dynamic, constantly searching for rare and unforgettable encounters. Beginners can refine their skills on ever-present mantis shrimp larvae and shimmering comb jellies, before being rewarded with truly spectacular sightings as the dive unfolds.

CREATURE FEATURE

Text and Images by Sam Robertshaw

If Lembeh is the world capital of muck diving, then frogfish are among its most iconic residents. At NAD Lembeh Resort, we are fortunate to encounter an exceptional diversity, with 11 species recorded in local waters: Hairy, Hispid, Painted, Clown, Ocellated, Freckled, Spotfin, Randall's, Sargassum, Giant, and the rare Rosy frogfish. Although they vary greatly in size, all share a distinctive stocky form and a characteristically "grumpy" expression that makes them firm favourites with photographers.

Identification can be challenging, as frogfish are masters of camouflage, able to slowly change colour to match surrounding sponges, algae, or coral, often resembling nothing more than discarded debris.

Among the species regularly found by our guides, the Hairy frogfish remains the most sought-after "bucket list" critter. Its filament-covered body closely mimics algae, allowing it to blend seamlessly into the silty environment of the Strait. While the Hairy draws most attention, Painted and Clown frogfish are encountered more frequently.

Juvenile Clown frogfish are particularly striking, often mimicking toxic nudibranchs or flatworms, before developing the warty textures and complex patterns that help adults disappear into the reef. From the shaggy outline of a Hispid to the impressive scale of a Giant frogfish, there is always something new to discover.

Frogfish behaviour is as distinctive as their appearance. Poor swimmers, they use modified fins to "walk" across the seabed and rely on ambush predation rather than pursuit. Each is equipped with a specialised lure, which is twitched to attract unsuspecting prey before an extraordinarily fast strike—one of the quickest feeding movements in the animal kingdom. Between feeding attempts, frogfish may gape their mouths to flush the gills and realign the jaws, offering brief but dramatic photographic moments.

Photographing frogfish often requires creative lighting to separate the subject from its background. Snoots or side-lighting can help emphasise shape and texture, with the eye usually providing the clearest focal point. Frogfish occur across a wide depth range in Lembeh, offering consistent opportunities for macro photography, and our guides are always keen to help guests make the most of encounters with these remarkable anglers.

CREATURE FEATURE

Text and Images by Simon Buxton

"Which goby did we see - the one with the yellow nose?" is a question often heard on the boat after a dive. As the images to the left illustrate, the answer is not always straightforward. In Lembeh, there are at least three distinct shrimp gobies that share this striking feature.

At the top is the true yellow-nosed shrimp goby *(Stonogobiops xanthorhinica)*, followed by the black-rayed shrimp goby *(Stonogobiops nematodes)*. The third, pictured at the bottom, appears to be unique to Lembeh. Its exact status remains uncertain; it may represent a hybrid of the other two species, it also occupies the same habitat and displays very similar behaviour, adding to the identification challenge.

All three species form symbiotic partnerships with Randall's pistol shrimp and are best observed on a rising tide, particularly during the morning hours. After feeding, the gobies often retreat as the shrimp seals the burrow entrance, preparing for the night. Mornings are therefore the optimal time to watch these gobies actively feeding and maintaining vigilance while their industrious shrimp partners excavate and maintain the shared burrow.

These three gobies rank as my second favourites, surpassed only by Stonogobiops yasha—the elusive, candy-cane striped shrimp goby that seems to dislike any close attention. While it is possible to photograph this species with a 100 mm macro lens, doing so is always a challenge. Success requires slowing your breathing to a near standstill and inching forward on the tips of your fingers with extreme care.

Most frustrating of all, the Yasha shrimp goby appears to have a extreme sensitivity to disturbance. Once startled, it retreats completely, often taking 20 minutes before re-emerging.

CREATURE FEATURE

Text and Images by Sam Robertshaw

Nudibranchs are soft-bodied slugs that have ditched the traditional shell in favour of some of the most flamboyant patterns and colours in the animal kingdom. The name itself means “naked gill,” which refers to the exposed, feathery branchial plumes used for breathing, often found on their backs. At NAD, we are situated in a global hotspot for these creatures, with hundreds of the estimated 3,000 global species found right here in the Strait. Beyond their looks, their anatomy is fascinating; they navigate their world using rhinophores to track down food and mates in the muck.

Some of the most intriguing aspects of nudibranchs is their specialised diet and clever defence mechanisms. These slow-moving hunters feed on a variety of organisms, including sponges, hydroids, and even other nudibranchs. Some species have developed the incredible ability to “steal” the stinging cells from the hydroids they eat, incorporating them into their own bodies for protection. Others, known as ***solar-powered nudis***, can even harness sunlight through a process called *kleptoplasty*, where they absorb chloroplasts from algae to photosynthesise like plants. They are also hermaphrodites, possessing both male and female organs, which means any two adults can mate - a highly efficient strategy for life on the seafloor.

When it comes to photographing these jewels, their stationary nature makes them the perfect subjects for experimenting with different styles. For a classic “ID” shot, we recommend using a narrow aperture (f/16–f/32) to ensure the rhinophores and the gills are both tack-sharp. However, if you want to get creative, try opening your aperture to f/2.8 or f/4 creating a dreamy, blurred “bokeh” background that makes the colours pop.

For those who want to eliminate background distractions entirely, using a snoot or a narrow-beam focus light can isolate the nudibranch against a black background, highlighting the intricate textures and neon hues that make them so iconic. Whether you are a dedicated “nudi-hunter” looking to tick rare species off a list or a first-time visitor simply enjoying the riot of colour, these sea slugs never fail to impress.

Our guides are experts at spotting even the tiniest “micro-nudis” that often hide amongst the hydroids or on the underside of sponges. Because they move so slowly, they offer the perfect opportunity to slow down your dive, refine your lighting, and appreciate the incredible biodiversity of the Lembeh Strait. We love seeing the “nudi-fever” take hold of our guests, and we can’t wait to help you capture your own portfolio of these stunning ocean gems during your stay with us.

TANGKOKO NATURE RESERVE

Spend an afternoon in the forest

A day trip to Tangkoko Nature Reserve offers an outstanding opportunity to experience North Sulawesi's remarkable terrestrial wildlife and landscapes. Guided walks through lowland rainforest, mangroves, and volcanic slopes frequently reveal iconic endemic species, including the elusive Spectral Tarsier, Crested Black Macaque, Bear Cuscus, as well as hornbills and vividly coloured kingfishers.

Late-afternoon visits are particularly rewarding, as animal activity increases and cooler temperatures make walking more comfortable. This timing also coincides with the emergence of tarsiers from their daytime roosts, often providing one of the highlights of the visit.

The reserve is exceptionally biodiverse, allowing visitors to encounter multiple endemic species within a single excursion. For divers staying in Lembeh, a visit to Tangkoko makes an ideal surface interval before travelling home.

NAD lembeh

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2:1

Guest : Guide Ratio

instagram