



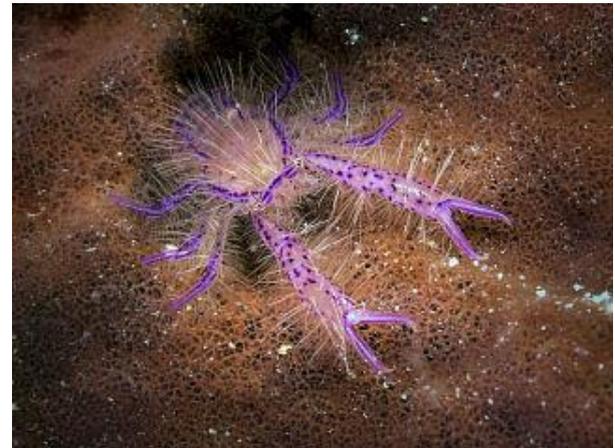
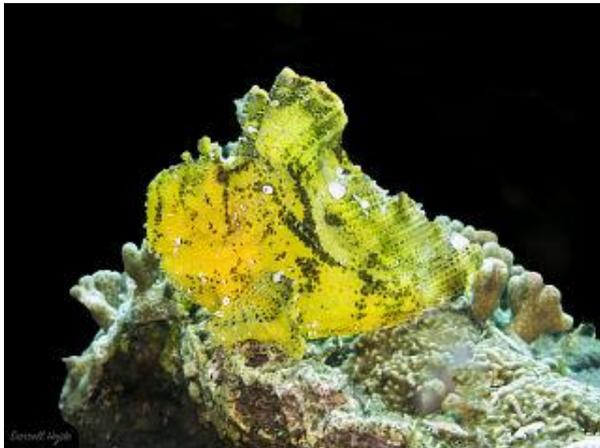
The Forgotten Islands, November 2016

Trip Report by Karen York. Photos by Darrell Hejde.

On the sixth of November a diverse, multi-national group of adventurers boarded the good ship Seven Seas and cruised off to discover the Forgotten Islands of Indonesia. Remote, isolated and difficult to reach, Maluku Tenggara - The Forgotten Islands - was important to the spice trade centuries ago. Today its seas offer spectacular reefs filled with a great variety of fishes, corals and creatures, unspoiled, uncrowded - a true diver's paradise!

So off we go . . . Each dive begins with Sonia's cheerful call, "Rubber Ducky, Rubber Ducky!" This is our cue to climb aboard the dinghys and speed off to the chosen dive site. A backward roll from the boat to the water and down we drift to begin our adventure. The reefs are amazing in their diversity of species and color and life. Currents run the gamut from non existent to a lazy drift to "hang on to your hat!" Visibility is also variable although usually good to excellent. Everyone finds some source of wonder, excitement and awe in this spectacular world. Steve and Marianne swim off in search of new and unusual nudibranchs. Karen (Spike) hovers motionless, patiently gains acceptance from a large octopus and proceeds to capture the most amazine video as it grooms itself atop it's coral perch. "There goes Doug again" as he disappears into the blue, then reappears, then disappears again. Darrel and Nancy descend over the wall, down and down, cameras flashing away.





Divers report such wonders as winged pipefish, crocodile fish, a hammerhead shark. Susan helps us identify the different species we find. Feather stars cling everywhere in a great variety of colors but beware - if you get too close they might jump and hitch a ride - harmless but a bit un-nerving! On Maoporo Teland we watch as a pair of large cuttlefish mate and tuck eggs deep in the crevices of a coral head to protect them until they hatch. At Pula Meatimiarang we discover a lovely honeycomb gold fish wearing a brown mask over its eyes. No-one can identify it - perhaps a new species? Naming rights should go to Karl and Sonia! A large school of Batfish pass us by in the blue on the West Wall of South Terbang and a pair of juvenile Rockmover Wrasse entertain us in the shallows. On Dai Island the crew bargains with each village head man to secure diving rights in their waters. One such negotiation breaks down so Karl decides to try an unknown site. He warns us - "Don't go beyond the longest point or they may shoot arrows at you." We name this one "Archer's Point". On this same island Irwan discovers a spectacular dive - high coral walls and ridges interrupted by sand and rubble covered slopes all teeming with life. We call it Karang Irwan - Irwan's Reef. Here the night divers encounter the attack of the worms. Bill motions Marina closer to see, but her bubbles spell out "Oh HELL NO!" as she speeds away. We turn off our lights to experience the flashlight fish darting everywhere and the magic of the phosphorescent "fairies" dancing all around us. This is the closest I have ever been to being "narced". Every dive here is, as Sonia would say, "the best dive ever"! (Except maybe the worms).



On board between dives we pass the time reading, eating, and jumping into the sea from the bow of the ship. Dave executes an 8.0 jackie dive! He and Margy enjoy the snorkeling on the shallower reefs. Andy and Marina waltz (or maybe a 2-step?) on the water's surface while waiting for the dinghy.

The Seven Seas crew are the best you will find anywhere. The expert dive guides find unusual sea life everywhere. The boat crews take us out and bring us back with apparently effortless skill, even

finding Bill and me when we are swept away in the raging current and have to surface out in the blue!. They lift our heavy gear into the dinghies time after time. The chef and his staff surprise us each day with tasty new creations and local Indonesian dishes. So much for my plan to lose a little weight on this trip! Chris creates new napkin art for each evening meal. The ship is run very smoothly from the Captains to the cabin crew, making our cruise relaxing and enjoyable.

Our last evening together is spent reliving the wondrous dives as Karen, Darrell and Bruce share their videos and photos. I wish I could start over and do it all again.

Sadly all good things must end, and so we take leave of this wondrous underwater world . . . but wait . . .
. . . Will someone PLEASE get Christina out of the water?!

Karen York,
November 2016

