

Diving at Walindi

Kimbe Bay, West New Britain

Kimbe Bay is home to some of the healthiest coral I've ever seen, as well as the largest diversity of both coral and fish anywhere on the planet. In fact, Prof Charles Veron, former chief scientist of the Australian Institute of Marine Science had this to say - "The coral reefs of Kimbe Bay take me back forty years to a time when corals grew in lush profusion, untroubled by the problems that beset them today...."

Walindi Dive runs three purpose built and recently refurbished day boats to take you on an amazing adventure each day. *Cheyne* and *Charmaine*, our two larger boats hold a maximum of 12 divers, and *Emma* holds six divers.

We have a variety of different sorts of dive sites, underwater sea mounds where we're more likely to see bigger stuff, unbelievable sheer walls, fabulous coral gardens, huge fans and funky critters. Our dive sites are suitable for all levels of diver, and whatever the length of your stay we'll try and give you a great selection – the one thing we can promise is that you won't be bored!

I'm giving you site descriptions for some of our favourites, but please remember these are only here to give you an idea of what you might find on the reefs around Walindi. We've listed some of the more interesting fish and critters that have been seen at the sites listed, but of course there are no guarantees that you'll see them on every dive. What we can guarantee however, is that you'll see vastly more than can ever be described in the brief overviews given here. Take your time and dive carefully, and you'll be able to better appreciate what is one of the most diverse and healthy ecosystems on the planet.

Inglis Shoal

There are a number of isolated sea-mount type reefs rising from very deep water around Walindi. It is believed that these reefs have formed where corals have established on submerged volcanic peaks. As sea levels have risen the corals have grown vertically and sheer sided pinnacles are the result.

Inglis Shoal rises from very deep water to within 11 metres of the surface and is very rich in fish life. Pelagic fish species are common and include Dogtooth Tuna, Barracuda and Bigeye Trevally. Scalloped Hammerheads are regularly seen at Inglis Shoal.

Along the reef face, schools of surgeonfish and fusiliers are common. Around the top of the reef there are hundreds of species of fish. Amongst the most noticeable are the Clown Triggerfish with its dramatic colors and the Azure (or Redtooth) Triggerfish which swims off the reef edge with alternating undulations of its dorsal and anal fins. Near the reef top it is possible to find a school of Pinjalo lewisi. This fish belongs to the snapper family and are a deep red color, usually forming a dense school at the edge of the reef.

As well as the larger fish are the smaller species. Feeding in the current you can find various Fairy Basslet and Wrasse, and living in the many anemones on the reef top there are a variety of anemonefishes.

Restorf Island

The waters around Restorf Island hold an incredible diversity of marine life. It would be possible to spend a week diving here and still find new things in the various habitat types around the island. Depth is from the surface, down to 32 m, and this site is one of many that are also excellent for snorkeling.

On the main reef, a ridge running at a 45° angle away from the island, is a profusion of coral growth, especially gorgonian fans and black tree corals, with many many anemones occupied by Clown Anemonefish near the second boat mooring. There is a great variety of reef fishes along the full length of the main reef, and towards the far end, Black Tip- and Gray Reef Sharks are often seen.

On the western side of Restorf, the reef slopes downward away from a wall in a patchwork of loosely connected coral bommies, many serving as anchors for gorgonian fans, sea whips, barrel sponges, and elephant ear sponges. Among these live many species of smaller reef fish such as hawkfish, gobies, colourful anthias and numerous invertebrates including nudibranchs, shrimp, feather duster worms and an occasional octopus.

On the sandy flats between the island and the reef are large colonies of garden eels, at least four species of shrimp gobies, burrowing gobies, sand anemones, occasional flatheads and flounders. Watch out for the Titan and Yellowmargin (or Pink-Faced) Triggerfish over the sandy areas. Usually easy to spot, these fish excavate large depressions in the sand and rubble in which to lay their eggs. Observe from a distance though, and don't get too close as the males have been known to bite divers when they are guarding eggs in the nest.

Christine's

Christine's Reef is actually a collection of reefs joined by underwater ridges to form a large horseshoe shape complex. A photographer's paradise, Christine's features a beautiful collection of extremely large barrel sponges, many different gorgonian fan corals and red whip gorgonians, along with staghorn and plate corals in the shallower areas. As will all Walindi reefs, reef associated fishes are abundant and diverse. Commonly seen are Butterflyfishes, Angelfishes, Snapper and Surgeonfishes. A number of more cryptic fishes have also been seen at Christine's. They include Spiny Devilfish (*Inimicus didactylus*), Harlequin Ghost Pipefish (*Solenostomus paradoxus*), and Crocodile Flathead (*Cymbacephalus beauforti*). To find these types of fish you need to look carefully and to have a bit of luck as well. On the sand you will probably also find a bizarre sea cucumber (*Thelenota rubolineata*). This "horny" sea cucumber has a maze of red lines that make it rather attractive than most of its relatives.

In the undercuts around the reefs large puffer fish such as the Map Puffer and the Starry Puffer are regularly seen. The smaller Blackspotted Puffer, which is one of the most common pufferfish in this area can be seen in a variety of colors from grayish to brown and yellow. There are several different moorings on Christines, giving some very different perspectives of this amazing collection of sites, and the best diving throughout is generally from surface to approximately 18 m.

Susan's Reef

Dense stands of Red Sea Whips (*Ellisella* sp.) give Susan's Reef a unique aesthetic quality that sets it apart from other Walindi reefs. Susan's is a submerged ridge, connected to a much larger reef by a saddle, which creates a channel between the reefs. A stunning collection of corals is particularly rich at the southern end of the reef where it connects to the saddle. This area is crammed with hard and soft corals and a wide range of other phyla. The more obvious invertebrates include sponges, ascidians, bryozoans and a variety of annelid worms such as fan worms and Christmas Tree worms. Particularly spectacular are the large gorgonian fans, red sea whips and elephant ear sponges, everything adorned with colorful crinoids - a delight to all who dive here.

Seemingly oblivious to the surrounding splendor, a multitude of fish life go about their business. In the channel between the reefs, a photogenic pair of Longfin Bannerfish (*Heniochus acuminatus*) will often be seen posing beside one of the many gorgonians on the reef wall or on the sandy floor. A school of Razorfish (*Aeoliscus strigatus*) live in the red sea whips at 14 m near the southern corner of the reef. These fish swim head down in a bobbing manner, making them difficult to see amongst the sea whips. When danger approaches they turn their narrow body sideways making them even harder to see.

The larger of the two dark red sea fans at the southern end of the saddle is a particularly good place to observe Long Nose Hawkfish (*Oxycirrhites typus*). There are a variety of Butterflyfish (*Chaetodontidae*) and Angelfish (*Pomacanthidae*) commonly seen around the reef and the Pixie Hawkfish (*Cirrhichthys falco*) is particularly abundant here.

Well, I hope that's whet your appetite, and we're looking forward to meeting you!

Dive Manager,
Walindi Plantation Resort