

Diving in Malaysia



Malaysia's Indo-Pacific wonderland blooms with postcard landscapes: waving coconut palms, powdery beaches and undulating rainforests. While many visitors come to stretch out on a hammock and melt into the landscape, scuba divers have a different mission: to check out the matchless biodiversity that swims around the country's hundreds of tropical islands.

Sipadan Island

- Rough Guides describes the oceanic island as "one of the 10 best dive sites in the world," noting that "every diver who comes to Sipadan will see something that they haven't seen before." That's a big claim, but the site rises to the occasion with a famously massive population of turtles, reef sharks and magnificently overhanging coral, all spouting from the top of an ancient volcanic cone that rises 2,000 feet from the sea floor. A recorded 3,000 species make the waters around the island home. Hitch a boat ride with one of the many dive shops in nearby Mabul or Kapalai to visit resort-free Sipadan.

Kapalai Island

- Just 20 minutes by boat from Sipadan, the accessible, shallow reef at Kapalai Island is demarcated into more than 20 dive sites including the turtle-trawled Jetty and nudibranch-crowded Mid-Reef sites. Many of the residents of the reef are rare, but some are odder than others. Look for the reef's "invisible" frogfish, which occasionally wiggles and attracts attention to make a liar of its namer.



Kapalai's frogfish, which look just like coral, are often invisible to swimmers-by.

Perhentian Islands

- Peninsular Malaysia, the western part of the country that attaches to Thailand at its skinny northern end, is home to a small group of islands called the Perhentians. Just 13 miles off the coast, the two dozen dive sites surrounding the islands cluster around the fringing reefs, shipwrecks and undersea spire of Tokong Laut. Watch the easygoing black-tips prowl Shark Point and scorpionfish patrol the decks of "Sugarship," a sunken freighter.

Redang Archipelago

- The protection of the Palau Redang Marine Parks keeps the much-visited, much-dived Redang Archipelago thriving. These nine islands house plenty of dive sites, from beach-access to deep-water, that fit all skill levels. Some consider Redang's offerings to be, according to PADI, "the world's most developed coral gardens."

Spot sea turtles frolicking in the shallows at House Reef, a shore dive a few hundred feet from Seamonkey Divers, the archipelago's main dive shop. The shop provides access to the deep-water sites -- like the highly photogenic Terumbu Che Isa or the aptly named Stinger Reef -- via speedboat.



Sea turtles cruise through the Redang Archipelago.

Tioman Island

- Little-visited Tioman Island -- whipped by strong currents that prevent access to some of its bounty by any but the strongest divers -- takes its unique undersea topography from the pile of enormous granite boulders that formed it. Plunge into the waters from the main beach for a shore-accessible dive at Salang House Reef, or cruise around the island's technical wrecks and the dense coral growth at Tiger Reef. At the time of publication, seven dive shops operate from the island's main village, making it a breeze to find equipment and boat space.