

Diving Trip Report

Gangga Island

North Sulawesi, Indonesia

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Agent.

Snooba Travel. We were able to include pre-paid dives and half board accommodation into the costs.

Getting there.

We were already in Manado, but to get to Gangga Island directly from the UK would have involved a scheduled airline flight to Singapore with a connecting flight to Manado in North Sulawesi. Expect a total travel time of about 19 hours to get to Manado from the UK. Our initial outbound trip was from Heathrow with Singapore Airlines. The flight time to Singapore was approximately 12 hours. This friendly airline did all they could to make the trip as comfortable as economy class allows & the food was excellent.

There was a 2 hour wait in Singapore until our connecting flight to Manado departed. The second leg of the trip was via Silk Air (a subsidiary of Singapore Airlines).

Singapore Airlines provided an extra 10 kg baggage allowance per diving passenger. It is important that your agent requests this extra allowance when ordering the flight tickets.



On Arrival in Manado, visitors have to pay US\$ 25 per person for an entry visa (and allow for a further US\$10 on departure). We would advise any visitors to take some US\$ cash to cover these costs. Transfer to Gangga Island resort from Manado airport is about 1 hour by 4 X 4 and a further 30 minutes by boat from the mainland.

So What's the location like?

Gangga Island is relatively small. Gangga Island resort & Spa is based at the southern most tip of the island. The resort itself is reminiscent of the Maldives.

The amenities and accommodation are excellent. The air-conditioned chalet style rooms are set just back from the beach. The restaurant serves excellent meals. After a mornings diving, lunch is a 4 course meal (typically with a choice of 4 dishes for the main courses) and a similar menu configuration for dinner, which is served from 8.00pm and is taken at a leisurely pace before decanting to the bar for a relaxing drink.

The quality of service & accommodation are a tribute to the dedicated effort made by your hosts Gaspare, Hanne and their staff.



Accommodation on the beach

The weather

We visited Gangga in late August. The average air temperature was about 30-32 degrees. The weather was mostly dry but most days started off sunny and clouded over by the afternoon. The first day was quite windy which made for choppy sea conditions, but as the days went by the sea settled down to a relatively calm state. The conditions did not mean dives had to be cancelled, but we did have to find alternative sheltered dive sites on the first day.

What do non-divers do on Gangga Island ?

The beaches and views back to the mountainous mainland are spectacular. just watching the sun set each evening was awe-inspiring.

Within the hotel grounds, there is a salt water swimming pool and a spa/massage area. Additionally, there are boat-based snorkelling trips & day fishing trips with the local fishermen. For those who like to stay on terra firma, there are trips to the mainland to visit the nature parks and volcanoes in the Minahasa highlands.

It is possible to leave the resort complex and visit the two local fishing villages on the island, which are within walking distance.

The locals are very friendly. You will be met with frequent requests by the village children for you to take their photographs. The plan is that you send the pictures back to the resort for distribution via the headmaster of the village schools.

Sundays are the recommended days to visit the villages. We did not manage to do this ourselves but did go on the Monday and were invited into the local school to observe and meet some of the teachers and classes.

Gangga Island Dive Centre

This is a mediocre operation that serves the purpose of getting divers to/from the dive sites and some basic PADI instruction but little else. Nitrox is not available.

There are probably about 20 dive sites within an hour of Gangga Island. These are relatively shallow sites in the 20-30m range and are noted for their macro life and colourful corals. First time visitors should be aware that the local dive sites are macro life havens and you will probably not see any marine life larger than the average grouper.

If you want something different in terms of marine life and possible sightings of bigger species such as sharks, you will have to take a day trip south to the Bunaken National Park.

The boats carried from 4 to 8 divers. The guides tended to work with small groups of divers in the water, depending on guide to diver ratio. The guides were adept at finding macro-life for photography. The water temperature was 27-28 degrees C depending on the site.

The boats are traditional wooden longboats, driven by two stroke outboards. Refreshments are offered between dives and include bananas, soft drinks, tea, water or coconut juice.

Unless you opt for an excursion to the Lembeh Strait or Bunaken National Park, the first 2 dives will be completed by early afternoon and lunch is available back on Gangga. It is possible to dive again after lunch or do a night dive.

At the end of the day, your kit is packed away by the staff, returned to the dive centre & washed. And as if by magic, will be set up on the boat waiting for you, the next time you decide to dive.

Most experienced divers tend to visit Gangga for the macro photography opportunities. At times it seemed the cameras on board had a collective value that exceeded that of the boat.

We spent the afternoons relaxing on the beach, and contemplated the morning dives.

If you do visit Gangga and have not dived in the Bunaken National Park or the Lembah Strait and want some variety, then it would be worth the additional cost to take these excursions if they are available



Gaia, the latest addition to the Gangga fleet

The Dive Sites

We visited the following dive sites, all within 1 hour of Gangga

Busa Bora

This sheltered site provides diving down to about 20 metres or so. There is a good selection of hard and soft corals. You will also see the usual reef fish and unusual marine life such as frog fish, nudibranch, octopus and cuttlefish.



Cuttlefish

Kayu Bulan

This site provides a slope dive to about 20 metres. Interesting marine life included a crocodile fish, banded sea snake, banded pipe fish, nudibranch, titan trigger fish & barramundi cod



Nudibranch

Pulisan

This site provides a shallow wall dive. This is a very good location for nudibranch and frog fish. Although we dived to a maximum depth of 23 metres we found most nudibranch in the 10-15 metre range.

We also did a night dive on this site. Probably one of the most uneventful night dives we have made in recent years. All the marine life seemed to have gone to bed, however we were rewarded at the end of the dive with our first sighting of a large Spanish dancer.



Spanish dancer

Sempini

Another good site for cuttle fish and nudibranch



Nudibranch

Tanjung Tarabitan

Good for corals



Tubastraea faulkneri

Paradise

This site starts under the jetty in a sheltered cove. The dive is a slope dive on volcanic sand and is reminiscent of the dive sites in the Lembeh strait. Under the pier we found ghost pipe fish and frog fish. There is also a hot volcanic spring on the sea bed adjacent to the pier. Further down the slope we found a sea horse, scorpion fish, cuttle fish, nudibranch, painted reef lobster and several varieties of shrimp.



Ghost pipe fish

HBO Point

Good for nudibranch and corals. There are also crocodile fish, pinnate bat fish, banded pipe fish and spotted sweetlips.



Crocodile Fish

Sahaungsatu

This is one of the more adventurous sites and is a series of pinnacles about a mile off shore. Initially we saw large quantities of schooling snapper and a few barracuda coming in from the big blue yonder, before exploring the inner pinnacles and plateaux where we saw some good corals and the usual reef fish. We managed to get depths of over 30 metres on this site.



Spotted Sweet lips

Tanjung Toto

Our final dive on two pinnacles close to shore. We saw black ghost pipe fish and then moved on to an area littered with massive boulders and gullies. There is a 10m long swim through which was absolutely full of small reef fish.

The Journey Home

We left Gangga Island by boat about 4 hours before the published departure time. Check in at Manado Airport was easy, but don't forget your US\$ 10 departure tax- cash only. We had about a one and a half hour wait at the airport before taking off on schedule.

Back to Singapore with a late afternoon arrival and overnight stop before departing at lunch time for the UK.

Photography: Copyright Sophie Parry

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Links

Snooba travel www.snooba.com

Gangga Island Resort <http://www.ganggaisland.com/>

www.seahorse-media.co.uk