

The 2013 Edition

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# The Travelin' Diver's Chapbook

A compendium of unexpurgated opinion, criticism and commendation of the world's dive resorts and liveaboard boats by the 15,291 adventurous subscribers (and the incognito editors) to Ben Davison's UNDERCURRENT  
*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

**undercurrent**

# The 2013 Travelin' Diver's Chapbook

**chap•book** (chap'book) n. A small book of popular tales, ballads, poems, or tracts formerly hawked about by chapmen (peddlers or merchants) [1790-1800, chap(man) + book].

The editors of *Undercurrent* are the chapmen, the subscribers are the balladeers. *The Travelin' Diver's Chapbook* is a compilation of reviews of dive resorts, operations, and live-aboards worldwide from the readers of *Undercurrent*, the consumer newsletter for scuba divers.

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*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

Dear Fellow Diver,

I first must thank you for being a loyal subscriber. Your support has allowed us to bring you 37 years of Undercurrent, unfettered and uninfluenced by anyone in the diving industry other than our fellow divers. What we have written has not always made people employed in the industry happy, but our audience and our supporters are exclusively sport divers who want to know the truth before spending their hard-earned money. It's you we serve.

This year's Chapbook is filled again with interesting and valuable reports. While the Caribbean and Hawaii remain our readers' favorite destinations because of their proximity, those who have the time and resources are exploring the world's more prolific reefs, especially in Indonesia. The reports here provide plenty of information about these exotic destinations, as well as those in Mexico, Bonaire, and the Caymans. Something for everyone, we hope.

While we would love to offer a printed Chapbook, as we did for so many years, the evolution of the Internet as well as the cost of printing and postage make that impossible. That's even more reason why we prize you and our subscribers.

Next year, look for even more first-hand travel reviews, and continued insight and reporting on those issues that make your diving safe, economical, and supremely rewarding.

My best to you and your family

*Ben Davison*

Ben Davison, Publisher  
Since 1975

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the deck after every dive, this done by the crew. Fills ranged from 2600 to 3100. I complained of a short fill and was told my equipment was faulty. Towels were either scattered about or unavailable, seldom dry. Hangars for wetsuits were too high for me. I'm five feet four. I was always on tiptoe, no help offered. The briefings were just that--brief. We were told to get in the water and go with the current. The food was bland, fried tofu often the vegetarian option. Some of us asked for yogurt or ice cream. We were told it was unavailable. Yet the divemasters, who sat at a separate table, were eating it. They also had a separate, private place in the refrigerator. The diving itself was good. I've been to Raja many times. Today there are many boats in Raja. I would never choose the Pindito again.

---

**Raja4Divers in Raja Ampat, Nov 2011 (Rpt #6365)** by Mike Cavanaugh (*Email author*),

TX, US. **Dive Experience:** 501-1000. **Where else diving:**

Caribbean, Australia, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand.

**----- Ratings (1: worst -- 5: best) -----**

Advanced: ★★★★★ Beginners: ★★★★★ Value for \$\$: ★★★★★

Dive Operation: ★★★★★ Accommodations: ★★★★★ Food: ★★★★★

Service and Attitude: ★★★★★ Environmental Sensitivity: ★★★★★

Shore Diving: ★★★★★ Snorkeling: ★★★★★

**----- Dive Conditions -----**

**Weather:** sunny. **Seas:** currents. **Water:** 84 to 86 °F. **Wetsuit Thickness:** 1 mm. **Visibility:** 50 to 80 Feet.

**----- Dive Policy -----**

**Liveboard?:** no. **Nitrox Available?:** yes. **Dive own profile?:** yes. **Enforced diving restrictions:**

No deco diving (nearest chamber is Manado) Dive with computer.

**----- What I Saw -----**

**Sharks:** 1 or 2. **Mantas:** 1 or 2. **Dolphins:** 1 or 2.

**Whale Sharks:** None. **Turtles:** 1 or 2. **Whales:** None.

**Corals:** ★★★★★ **Tropical Fish:** ★★★★★ **Small Critters:** ★★★★★

**Large Fish:** ★★★★★ **Large Pelagics:** ★★★★★

**----- Underwater Photography -----**

**Overall rating for UWP's:** ★★★★★ **Subject Matter:** ★★★★★

**Boat Facilities:** ★★★★★ **Shore Facilities:** ★★★★★

**UWP Comments:**

**Boat:** There were no rinse/soak tanks on the boats but R4D had nice padded baskets to place photo/video gear in and would keep gear covered with a towel. Photo/video gear was handled professionally by boat crews and the baskets were stored in the stern with the boat captain.

**Dock:** There was a single rinse tub on the dock for photo/video gear which was adequate for a couple of

large size cameras. If you had multiple photographers the rinse tank would quickly become crowded.

Camera Room: R4D had a beautiful air conditioned camera room that had 6+ stations to assemble, clean and maintain photo/video kit. There were cleaning supplies and compressed air available and multiple outlets for recharging lights and batteries. There was a small rinse tub outside the photo room which was useful for bringing the camera gear to ambient temperature in water after setting up for the next dive..

### ----- Overall Comments -----

Resort:

Raja4Divers is a relatively new resort (5-6 months of operation) on the island of Palau Pef. R4D were proactively waiting at the airport in Sorong to greet you and help in collecting luggage. The Sorong airport is definitely 3rd world and is not that well organized. R4D coordinated the land transfer to the dock where you embarked on a 3 hr journey to Pulau Pef. The rustic boat was narrow, long and a bit cramped but it was an "island" boat with twin 150 HP motors (Indonesian cigarette boat). The greeting at R4D on Pulau Pef was personalized and memorable. R4D has a great website and they provide you with useful documents to prepare you for the trip and stay. No surprises for us once we got there. The bungalows were nicely decorated and met the basic needs. There was a desk area, shelves and plenty of lighting and outlets for chargers. The bungalows are open air concept and there is no A/C. They do provide a fan which is sufficient when the wind dies down. The resort had planned generator outages between midnight and 0500 which really sucked because there was no light or air circulation. It could get really hot at night. I understand they will have the generator issue resolved in the near future. There was hot and cold water but no shower. bathing was restricted to a large water basin and a wooden ladle. While it was a crude way to bathe I looked forward to at least 2 baths a day. This is the first dive resort I have stayed at without A/C and while it was comfortable I will not likely stay at this kind of resort again. Too spoiled for my A/C after a day in the sun. The resort staff was always friendly and cheerful and are the unsung heroes for R4D. We really appreciated their cheerfulness and making us feel welcome.

Food:

The food was plentiful and typically Indonesian/Papuan cuisine. Plenty of fish, rice and fried foods. Not too many western dishes were served. No pork was offered in any form. The food was always tasty and I did not grow tired of the cuisine like I thought I would. Snacks and local fruits were available as long as the kitchen was open. Cold drinks, beer and wine were available but expensive. You will not find any liquor in Sorong so bring your bottle if you want to drink.

Diving:

We placed our dive gear in the baskets provided on the dock when we arrived and did not have to touch the gear again until we got ready to leave. The dive operation is well run and very organized. We rarely had more than 6 divers on a boat (not counting crew) and rarely more than 2 divers per guide. The boats were island boats and were a bit crowded or cramped but easy to work with. Everyone geared up and then made a backward roll entry at the same time. Photo/camera gear was handled professionally in and out of the boat. If you have special handling instruction you could tell the crews what you needed. The folks that ran the dive operations (Armin & Sabine) made the diving in Raja Ampat a memorable experience for us. They



bent over backwards to accommodate you whenever they could. Armin was very accommodating in offering photo/video suggestions to improve on the quality of pictures and video. Nitrox was readily available (membrane - always 32%) at no charge. You would analyze your tanks the night before so it was not in the critical path the day of diving. All dives sites (never the same sites for a 1 week stay) were a 10-40 minute boat ride from Pulau Pef. The house reef was not bad, we only dove it twice (ck out & night dives). Raja Ampat was definitely world class diving for us. The abundance of soft and hard corals, marine life (both juvenile and adult), macro subjects and large pelagics was quite impressive. The manta dive was awesome. Current was ripping but you didn't have time to think about it because of the sight. Unfortunately there is always live stuff in the water that affects visibility. "The Passage" was another world class dive. This is a dive site which is similar to a river channels between the multitude of islands.

---

**Raja4Divers in Raja Ampat, Nov 2011 (Rpt #6766)** by Michael N. Hofman (*Email author*), CA, US. **Dive Experience:** Over 1000. **Where else diving:**

Palau, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Belize, Thailand, Indonesia: Raja, Gorontolo, Wakatobi, Komodo, Bali, Lompoc, etc..

----- **Ratings (1: worst -- 5: best)** -----

Advanced: ★★★★★    Beginners: ★★★    Value for \$\$: ★★★★★  
 Dive Operation: ★★★★★    Accommodations: ★★★★★    Food: ★★★  
 Service and Attitude: ★★★★★    Environmental Sensitivity: ★★★★★  
 Shore Diving: ★★    Snorkeling: ★★★★★

----- **Dive Conditions** -----

**Weather:** sunny. **Seas:** choppy. **Water:** 79 to 82 °F. **Wetsuit Thickness:** 5 mm. **Visibility:** 30 to 100 Feet.

----- **Dive Policy** -----

**Liveboard?:** no. **Nitrox Available?:** yes. **Dive own profile?:** yes. **Enforced diving restrictions:** They liked to keep the dive times to an hour but never strictly enforced..

----- **What I Saw** -----

**Sharks:** Lots. **Mantas:** Squadrons. **Dolphins:** Schools.  
**Whale Sharks:** None. **Turtles:** > 2. **Whales:** None.  
 Corals: ★★★★★    Tropical Fish: ★★★★★    Small Critters: ★★★  
 Large Fish: N/A Large Pelagics: N/A

----- **Underwater Photography** -----

Overall rating for UWP's: ★★★★★    Subject Matter: ★★★★★  
 Boat Facilities: ★★    Shore Facilities: ★★★★★

**UWP Comments:**

Not many accomodations on dive boats because in general the trips were short to the dive sites. But great

camera room and lots of assistance and facilities available..

**----- Overall Comments -----**

Wanna get away? go to Palau Pef. It's a 3+ hour boat ride from Sarong, in eastern Indonesia but right in the middle of Raja Ampat diving area. PP is a small, new resort started by a Swiss partnership and when we were there last year mainly with European guests. Great people, huge bungalows on the water (BUT NOTE NO AC). Power went off at 1 am and on at 5 am due to a generator problem, but I understand this is now fixed. The dive operation was well tailored to beginning, experienced, photo geeks and snorkelers as well. With only seven rooms (out of a maximum of 12 rooms) think of it as a smaller Misool or Wakatobi. IT was designed in the local way, so don't expect showers (there's a bucket in the huge outdoor bathroom instead). Don't expect luxury in the dining area -- it's a long table with family style service and the employees eat at the same time as well (usually at a different table). We grew a little tired of the food (one night one of the Italian guests made pasta which was so great we ate it for the next three meals)...I understand a new chef was being recruited.

Three dives a day and house reef which is kind of interesting. Some potential for night dives but not especially emphasized. Brilliant coral, lots of smaller things and not uncommon to see silver tips, white tips and woebegone(sp) sharks. Great trip to see the mantas at a cleaning station with a second dive at a village pier.

We had such a great time, we're going back November 2012 and bringing some snorkeling friends.

---

**Raja4Divers/Raja4Divers on Pef Island in Pef Island, Raja Ampat, Jul 2012 (Rpt #6696)** by Frederick R. Turoff (*Email author*), PA, US. **Dive Experience:** 501-1000.

**Where else diving:**

BVI, USVI, Saba, St. Lucia, Bonaire, Grand Cayman, Little Cayman, Cayman Brac, Costa Rica, Coco Island, Revillagigedos, Sea of Cortez, Palau, Yap, Red Sea, Sipadan, PNG, Indonesia, Philippines.

**----- Ratings (1: worst -- 5: best) -----**

Advanced: ★★★★★    Beginners: ★★★★★    Value for \$\$: ★★★★★  
Dive Operation: ★★★★★    Accommodations: ★★★★★    Food: ★★★★★  
Service and Attitude: ★★★★★    Environmental Sensitivity: ★★★★★  
Shore Diving: ★★★★★    Snorkeling: N/A

**----- Dive Conditions -----**

**Weather:** sunny, rainy. **Seas:** calm, currents. **Water:** 79 to 84 °F. **Wetsuit Thickness:** 3 mm.  
**Visibility:** 40 to 100 Feet.

**----- Dive Policy -----**

**Liveboard?:** no. **Nitrox Available?:** yes. **Dive own profile?:** yes. **Enforced diving restrictions:**

Try to keep dives about 1 hour so group stays together. No diving below 40m..

----- **What I Saw** -----

**Sharks:** Lots. **Mantas:** None. **Dolphins:** None.

**Whale Sharks:** None. **Turtles:** > 2. **Whales:** None.

**Corals:** ★★★★★      **Tropical Fish:** ★★★★★      **Small Critters:** ★★★★★

**Large Fish:** ★★★      **Large Pelagics:** ★★

----- **Underwater Photography** -----

**Overall rating for UWP's:** ★★★★★      **Subject Matter:** ★★★★★

**Boat Facilities:** ★★★      **Shore Facilities:** ★★★★★

**UWP Comments:**

In the photo room there are six stations for photographers, which could get crowded if everyone brought a camera. However, each station had several power supplies, towels, plastic trays with useful tools and supplies for camera care. These were clearly thought out by those familiar with photography needs. A computer with a large monitor was in the room for those who didn't bring their own..

----- **Overall Comments** -----

Raja4Divers operates on Pef Island in the Raja Ampat area of eastern Indonesia. Once you get to Sorong and are transported to the waterfront, it's a three hour boat ride through the Dampier Strait to the remote resort just past the west tip of Gam Island. After being greeted by the resort crew singing, dancing and playing instruments, we were given an introduction to the resort and its operation by Armin Keller and Sabine Kaufman, the able dive operation directors. [Manager Maya was away that week.] With six seaside and spacious bungalows just a short walk from the restaurant and dive operation areas, this new resort has much going for it. Each bungalow has a king bed, desk and shelves, porch with lounge chairs and a bathroom area that is indoor-outdoor, having a small courtyard next to the covered area. The Papuan shower, which consisted of a large stone basin with hot and cold taps into which you dip a large ladle and then pour the water over yourself, was a new adventure - but to which one easily adapted. The spacious restaurant adjoined a lounging area and library where numerous underwater life ID books could be found. Meals were sumptuous, with several choices of course at each. Fresh island smoothies and a variety of other drinks were also available.

A short walk from the restaurant takes you to the photo room. There are six stations for photographers, which could get crowded if everyone brought a camera. However, each station had several power supplies, towels, plastic trays with useful tools and supplies for camera care. These were clearly thought out by those familiar with photography needs. A computer with a large monitor was in the room for those who didn't bring their own.

The office and store were at the land-end of the dive dock. At the far end, out on the water, was the dive area which featured a gear room, supplies and the boats. Night dives took place around this dive dock and the house reef on which it was built. Nitrox was supplied at no extra charge, which pleased this 65-yr old diver. The only requirement besides nitrox certification was to prepare tanks for all the next day's dives the night before.

For those not familiar with Raja Ampat diving, the amount and variety of fish, critter and coral life will astound you. Although visibility was usually 40-60 feet and water temperature around 79-81 degrees, the

many-hued corals and the variety of fish and critters will make you want to return (this was my 5th trip to Raja Ampat). Dive sites were anywhere from 5 minutes to an hour away. For longer trips, we often spent our intervals on small islands and had a meal or snacks. The longest trip, an hour into the Dampier Strait near Sorido and Kri resorts, put us in 84 degree water with nearly 100 feet of vis. Lunch on this day trip found us on an island with trees full of fruit bats that flew around us if disturbed. We also had visits from monitor lizards looking for lunch scraps. Our group numbered 11, so we split into two groups to dive, with at least two guides on each dive. Armin and Sabine usually went with us as well. Each day and night had some rain, with only our last dive day dry during dives but raining on the way home.

I had a new experience on our last night dive (which had only two divers plus a guide) – a Wobbegon shark grabbed a small black tip shark just to our right and swam directly by us, pausing right in front of us for a short while. Of course, Murphy's Law dictated that I was taking macro photos on that dive, but I managed to back up and get a shot of the Wobbegon's head with the other shark in its mouth before it swam off slowly with us in pursuit. It headed under a coral outcrop, its body convulsed, and the small shark was gone. What an exciting end to the visit's diving.

We had originally planned nine dive days, but upon arriving at Jakarta and checking into the Jakarta airport hotel, none of us thought to do a final check on our next flight, scheduled to depart 5am the next day as the most recent communication we had received stated. As it turned out, the flight left shortly after midnight, so we missed it and had to spend another day in Jakarta, get new tickets, catch the next flight out and arrive at Raja4Divers a day later than planned. So this is a reminder to all who travel to remote places – always check on your next flight and don't rely on recent communications.

The resort and diving so impressed three of our party that they cancelled their next week's plans to go to another area and extended their stay an additional week. I'd be happy to return in the future as well. I can't imagine anyone being disappointed by a stay with Raja4Divers. When we departed, the staff sang, danced and played instruments for us once again. Of course, we joined in as much as we could. I headed to Bali for a few days of different diving before heading back to the US. My report on Scuba Seraya is filed separately.

#### **----- Other Subscribers' Comments -----**

By carl berenson in shoreline, US at Sep 22, 2012 17:29 EST  
considering Raja4divers or sorido, cenderawasih on boat OR bali/komodo boat for 7/13. what would you pick for ist time raja?

-----  
By Frederick R. Turoff in Philadelphia, US at Sep 25, 2012 14:41 EST  
I'd consider either Sorido or Raja4Divers plus the resort run by Grand Komodo Diving ([www.komodoalordive.com](http://www.komodoalordive.com)). Prices may vary, find the one that suits your budget. All give you a wonderful week with good food. Sorido doesn't dive on Sat due to the owner's religious beliefs. If you like liveboards, Grand Komodo boats are cheaper but not as fancy as Aggressors

or Dancers. The Komodo trips give you the opportunity to see the dragons on Komodo during a dive interval. No matter where you go, you'll experience superb diving. Currents exist sometimes, so be prepared - bring a reef hook. The guides will take care of you. Feel free to call me if you wish - 215-880-6632.

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**Raja4Divers, Pef Island in Raja Ampat, Oct 2012 (Rpt #6797)** by Randall S Preissig  
*(Email author)*, TX, US. **Dive Experience:** Over 1000. **Where else diving:**  
 Red Sea, Thailand, Burma, Tahiti, Palau, Truk, Ponape, Hawaii, Cocos, Galapagos, Cozumel, Caymans, Bonaire, Belize, etc..

----- **Ratings (1: worst -- 5: best) -----**

Advanced: ★★★★★    Beginners: ★★★★★    Value for \$\$: ★★★★★  
 Dive Operation: ★★★★★    Accommodations: ★★★★★    Food: ★★★★★  
 Service and Attitude: ★★★★★    Environmental Sensitivity: ★★★★★  
 Shore Diving: ★★★★★    Snorkeling: ★★★★★

----- **Dive Conditions -----**

**Weather:** sunny, dry. **Seas:** calm. **Water:** 80 to 84 °F. **Wetsuit Thickness:** 3 mm. **Visibility:** 40 to 80 Feet.

----- **Dive Policy -----**

**Liveboard?:** no. **Nitrox Available?:** yes. **Dive own profile?:** yes. **Enforced diving restrictions:** No decompression dives. Sport limits of 130 feet..

----- **What I Saw -----**

**Sharks:** Lots. **Mantas:** Squadrons. **Dolphins:** Schools.  
**Whale Sharks:** None. **Turtles:** > 2. **Whales:** None.  
 Corals: ★★★★★    Tropical Fish: ★★★★★    Small Critters: ★★★★★  
 Large Fish: ★★★★★    Large Pelagics: ★★★★★

----- **Underwater Photography -----**

Overall rating for UWP's: ★★★★★    Subject Matter: ★★★★★  
 Boat Facilities: ★★★★★    Shore Facilities: ★★★★★

**UWP Comments:**

Excellent climate controlled photo room with several individual stations(remember, there are only 7 cabins total), computer, huge monitor, etc..

**----- Overall Comments -----**

Fantastic! If you are reading this report, you are interested in finding the best place/way to dive in Indonesia. Look no further.

I sandwiched 2 weeks at Raja4Divers in between two liveaboard trips to Komodo and Raja Ampat. I prefer liveaboard diving, but this resort may end up converting me to shore based. The setting is simply breathtaking--"paradise" is often used by us guests. Take a look at their website--the setting, rooms and resort are even more beautiful than shown. The resort is run and owned by Swiss nationals who have lived in Indonesia/Raja Ampat for years. They have run and worked at many other resorts prior to building this one in 2010 and seem to have incorporated the best of all of them. After 14 days I was still noticing nice "details" in the decoration, etc. The resort, island hikes and activities were so good and the staff so anxious to make every minute of your stay enjoyable that I opted out of my usual 5 dives a day routine to enjoy my stay at this fabulous dive resort. Your significant other will be happy.

The dive operation is top notch. Many sites with a great variety of diving have been mapped out 2 to 40 minutes boat drive from the resort. Further trips are sometimes combined into a 3 dive trip with lunch on a beach. All morning dives have a beach break between them with cappuccino, tea, etc. Afternoon dives are usually single but a second boat dive is available if requested. Night dives can be on the boat or on the very good house reef. The house reef had batfish, huge cuttlefish, mandarin fish, sharks(black tip, wobbegong,bamboo) and more. Snorkeling was outstanding.

What else did I see? All the Mantas you want, 3 breeds of pygmy sea horse, schools of jacks and barracuda, turtles,giant clams, beautiful coral gardens with zillions of fusiliers,etc in them, nudibranchs everywhere,leaf fish, juvenile drum & batfish, sea snakes, etc., etc.--everything Raja Ampat is famous for.

Snorkling and certification courses are available for beginners.

Not only was this diving the equal of any I've done, but the overall experience was the most enjoyable ever.

**----- Other Subscribers' Comments -----**

By Randall S Preissig in San Antonio, US at Nov 21, 2012 10:04 EST  
Date should read October 2012!

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**Scuba Seraya Resort in Tulamben, Bali, Jun 2012 (Rpt #6582)** by Martin Roberts  
(*Email author*), ZZ, GB. **Dive Experience:** 501-1000. **Where else diving:**

Many Indonesian locations - Bali,Komodo,Alor,Wakatobi,Lembeh,Raja Ampat. Philippines, Thailand, Maldives, OZ, Tanzania, South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, Costa Rica, Egypt, Jordan, Ecuador, USA, Grenada, Tobago, Cayman Islands, Bonaire, Cuba..

**----- Ratings (1: worst -- 5: best) -----**