

St. Some (*Tiaré*) Times

June 26, 2022
to July 7, 2022

Special Volume

Diving Indonesia

ON BOARD THE TIARÉ LIVE-A-BOARD VESSEL





2022 Indo Trip

My trip started with a 45min flight from Damam to Dubai, an 8 hour bar layover and another 9 hour flight to Bali, Indonesia.

**Komodo Island
National Park**

My overall trip was uneventful. The long layover in Dubai is easy if you spend the entire time in the Hard Rock Café and play with a new iPhone.

I had no choice but to buy a new iPhone 13 for the trip. My old DiveVolk case died a few months ago. Something happened to the gel pack. It sprang a leak. Dead. The 4th version of the DiveVolk fits the newest 13 models so I upgraded my phone to a 1Tb 13 Pro Max. This may sound like an expensive phone, but I bought it for the camera only. Imagine, most divers that are fanatics about photography are using DSLR cameras and cases that cost *starting* at \$4,000. My camera setup is less than \$3,000 and doesn't require its own suitcase. I wanted to be ready for the best trip of my life, with the best camera setup I've ever had. Done.

When I arrived in Bali airport, I was ready with patience for anything. And I needed it. Two other international flights arrived at the same time.

All of the passengers descended on the Indonesian customs agents like a flood. Imagine a lot of waiting. Now imagine a lot of tourists that are not used to third world "style" of customs.

The flood arrived just a little bit post covid. The Indonesian Covid app was advertised on posters as required. But it wasn't active. No one could download it because there was no wifi. Those that had international data and the app already downloaded, found the app no longer working. Ugh. I just floated on to the "Visa on Arrival" line.

Another hour in line? Yep. Waiting to pay my \$50 US entry fee. The person I finally talked to required me to show my flight itinerary proving I would be leaving within 30 days. I watched as she checked her cell phone three times and filled out some form before putting a little sheet of paper in my passport. Soon it was past 1am with more to come.

Traveling Alone

The only real entertainment in the hot and muggy airport was a drunk British guy in line behind me. When he finally got himself and girlfriend through the Visa line, he joined the longer customs lines. Even though there were close to thirty windows, only a half dozen were manned by customs officers. The drunk got even louder and started raving about the long lines. His jokes were making the line laugh, but he was getting madder and his jokes turned into accusations about bribing the customs. Everyone in the customs lines watched as the belligerent Brit was guided to his own little "waiting room". His girlfriend joined another half dozen security officers and followed into the office - most likely for the remainder of the night if not for their trip.

I paid way too much for a 20 minute taxi ride to a tiny Holiday Inn partner hotel. Thanks to their 24hr room service, I had a bacon sandwich and a few beers before falling into a travel induced coma.



Relaxation Execution

The next two days were a blur in and out of sleep. I deserved some respite from work and the school year. I didn't leave the hotel. I didn't feel like exploring. I didn't have any clothes anyway. All I had was for diving.

The restaurant and front desk staff won't forget me. Mali, my waitress asked me what I was doing for the next few days. She didn't believe me when I said eating bacon and drinking beer. I spent most of the next two mornings drinking beer and eating bacon while I typed out my June newsletter. I also came down during the evenings for a bacon burger and more beer. Never left the hotel.

My final morning, the restaurant staff had a plate of bacon and a beer waiting at my table. I left generous tips all around.



THE BEST

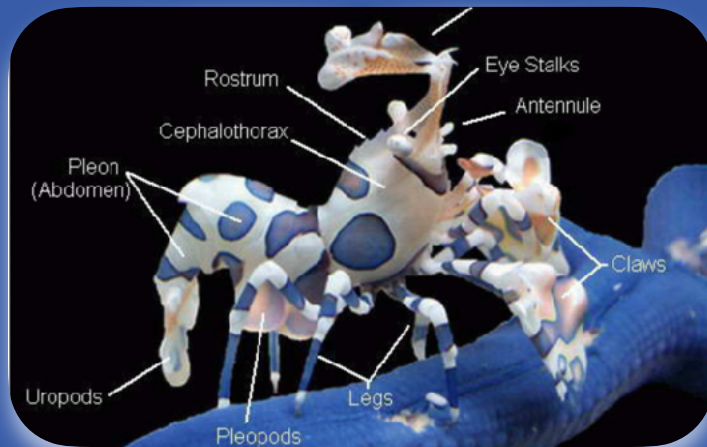
This was the most fantastic dive trip to date.

From the moment I was picked up from the hotel, this trip was awesome.

I still have to say the Maldives are my favorite relaxation dive spot. Indonesia is farther away by five hours of plane travel and three hours of customs pains. However, I still haven't been to Raja Ampat and that part of Indonesia might take the lead in the future.

Indonesia's main appeal for diving is its creatures. Look in any sea creature identification book and one of the most distinct and beautiful animals you will find is the harlequin shrimp. The picture to the left shows the larger female and the smaller male. Anto found them on a night dive. I couldn't believe my eyes. My website includes a short video of them. These amazing creatures feed exclusively on starfish, including the deadly crown of thorns.

Besides the mandarin fish and the peacock mandarin shrimp, these are probably the most impressive creatures I have ever had the privilege of finding. Yes, we even found the elusive Mandarin Fish. More on that inside.



Top 10 Fun Facts about my Tiare Trip

01

ONLY THREE DIVERS

It is rare for a dive guide to bring his/her own camera. The last time before this was Borneo. Only when you are with great divers!



02 THE PROFESSIONAL CREW
It's not easy to impress me. Tiare was 5 Star. Always with a smile.

03 ANTO'S GUIDING
He reads his client needs very well. We were included in his decisions of where to dive and how long to dive and how fast or slow to fin.

04 CREATURE FEATURES
We saw amazing creatures. Thank you Indonesia for your diversity.

05 DIVE SITE VARIATION
Hard corals, sandy banks, coves, heavy current for professionals, diverse depths, night/day, coral forests, muck diving, we did it all.

06 A WOODEN SHIP EXPERIENCE
You can actually hear the ship frame creaking and breathing at night.

07 COMFORT DIVING
The Tiaré is a very comfortable ship. She's built with diving in mind. Everything from a camera station to tank tending to the dunk tanks. Everything was clearly set up for a scuba diving experience.

08 SPOILING THE GUESTS
Guests do nothing to prep for a dive. Unless you ask them to leave something alone, they do everything.

09 DINING MIDSHIP
Every meal was served in the shaded midship area. We had sunny, windy days but I can't think of a better 360 degree view of the ocean.

10 MY OWN CABIN AGAIN
Perhaps it was just a post covid special, but I didn't have to pay any extra to have my own cabin. I could snore to my heart's content.

Anto the Cruise Director

Whatever you need, Anto will provide it for you, adapters, photo adjustments, small creatures, big creatures ...even mandarin fish.

Anto picked me up from the Holiday Inn with a taxi and took me to the boat marina in Bali. On the way, I told me I was looking for two kinds of fish on this vacation...hairy frogfish and a mandarin fish. He just smiled and simply said he had never seen the hairy frogfish in Komodo, but they can be found in Raj Ampat. I was left wondering about the mandarin fish.

The taxi took us through different areas of Bali for about 20 minutes and all I could think about was how much the country reminds me of Cambodia. Motorbikes are more ubiquitous than cars. Poverty. Small shops with apartments above lining the roads. Barefoot kids. The tropical heat. Yep. Pretty much like life in Cambodia.

We arrived at the marina and I fended off three women hawkers trying to sell me wooden statues of Komodo dragons, fanta, water, and any number of gift items. The "tender" zodiac took us out to a wooden Pirate ship. I boarded the ship and Anto gave me the 50 cent tour, introducing me to about ten crewmen and one female chef.

I guessed I was early so I sat myself down at a wooden table midships and sipped a couple beers while the chef made me an early lunch. Anto excused himself saying, "excuse me, I have to go into town and get the other two divers. You'll like them. One is even a rescue diver and the other is experienced as well."

Sure enough, 45 minutes later, Anto arrived with two guys. They took their shoes off, sat down, and Anto announced we were set to take off! None

of us could believe it! Three divers? This ship was built for 14! Cancellations. Covid. Indonesia had only really been "open" for a few months.

Anto was not only the dive guide but also the cruise director. Anything we needed, he could find. For example, I had brought all the wrong adapters. The website had said the ship was equipped like the british 3-prong adapters for 220v. So I only brought one USA 110v adapter and the rest 3-prongs. Crap. When I looked at the camera prep area and my room, there were only the 2 pronged round outlets. So I asked Anto. Sure he had adapters for me.

No matter what, he happened to find what was needed: tape, toothpaste, dive gear, a random battery, an extra bill when I ran out and couldn't tip a little girl for rescuing my iPhone on Komodo island. Anto was the Boy Scout.

He was also an expert at finding the different critters on the dives. Anto could spot a millimeter sized crab in a square meter of coral. Nudi Branchs turned out to be one of his favorites to find. Later between dives, he admitted that diving for macro stuff was a lot more fun than looking for the pelagic fish like most guests want to see.

Anto ate every meal with us and even started bringing his own camera on dives. That is rare. Most dive guides never bring a camera because they are keeping their divers safe. Our small group of three professional divers gave him a break from all of that. Sometimes, he'd come up with less air than us. He didn't have to worry about our safety. Anto just had to find all the great creatures, so he'd take a camera.



THE AMAZING TIARÉ CREW



Darrin and I spent a lot of time talking. We are both about the same age and had a similar schedule of waking at dawn and napping between dives.

He's a self made man with a past worthy of a book biography. He grew up poor in London with barely a pot to piss in. Since then, he put himself through school as a self learner on up to a stellar educational pedigree, including a PhD from Cambridge. Along the way he acquired another doctorate and some kind of Queen's award.

Now he runs his companies remotely from Costa Rica, where he maintains his habit...diving. Diving there sounds difficult and rewarding but they don't see a lot of small stuff there. Darrin thoroughly enjoyed all the exotic macros on this trip.

Someday I'll probably run into Darrin again. Hopefully it will be a live-a-board in Galapagos taking photos with iPhones and Killer Whales. I wish him happiness and continued success with his companies and his partner Zach!

Costa Rican Darrin



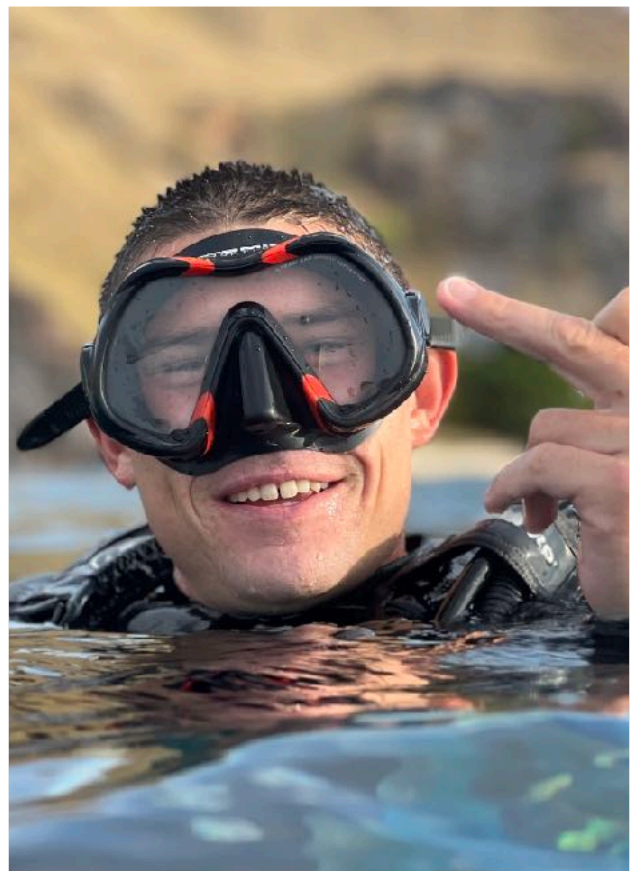
These guys have been a couple for going on seven years already. I had a lot of fun hanging out with them. Even though they aren't married, they sure do act like it. Hah!

Zach the DJ Trainer

Talk about a happy energy. Zach provided a steady stream of great music throughout the trip and the upbeat energy of a teenager - except in the mornings. This is pretty surprising considering the dreadful withdrawals he was experiencing with no weed to smoke on board. He had gotten hoodwinked in Bali by a street dealer! Hah.

Zach is a self-made day trader when he's not diving or doing his daily 15 minute ab workout. He even got Anto to workout with him on the upper deck each day!

Here's two middle fingers at you boys! You make a great couple, made it a great trip, and I'll be seeing you around the world some day. Thanks for putting up with the fat straight guy. This was a most excellent dive adventure!



Marine Life and Fishes of Indonesia

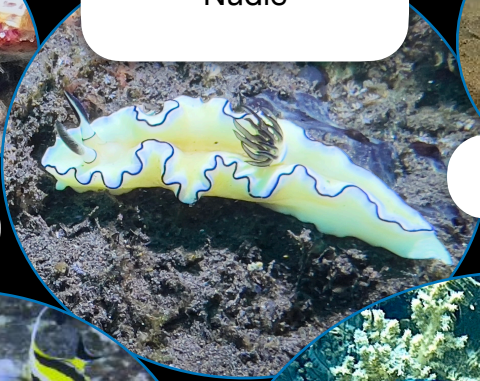


Nudie



stingray

Anther nudie



surgeonfish



Napoleon wrasse

Octopus on night dive

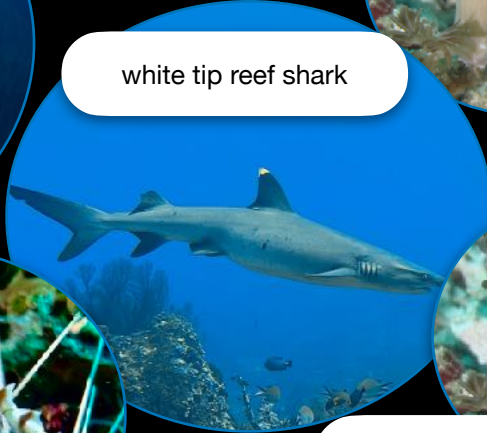


black tip reef shark with a armor

Ghost Pipefish



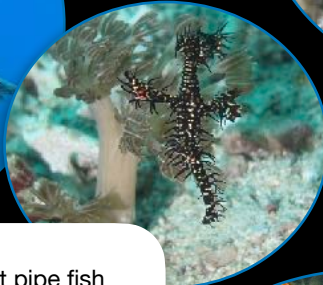
white tip reef shark



Ornate ringed pipefish



ghost pipe fish



ornate crab on a rainbow urchin



Another nudie



orangutan crab



red mantis shrimp



Peacock Mantis Shrimp!





The Exquisite

Mandarin

RED LIGHT HUNTING WITHOUT A FLASH

It all started when Anto picked me up at the hotel. I told him my goal for this entire trip is to photograph a mandarin fish. He just smiled and said "OK".

All three of us were shooting photos and videos with iPhone 13 pro plus in different underwater cases. None of us had a flash. Just flood lights and red floods. This was fantastic because I have never been able to discuss iPhone strategies with another diver. Now I had two divers to share and compare underwater photos with. Except...we didn't have a flash.

Not having a flash posed a problem because mandarin fish are scared by bright lights and they are instant escape artists. The way to hunt for mandarin fish (and their cousin, the dragonette) is to dive at dusk. Mandarins live in broken coral patches in shallow water from 3 to 5 meters. In order to find them, hunt around with a red flood light or torch. They crawl very slowly between the broken corals and stop every few inches to look for predators. They are incredibly skittish and shy.



Their true, exquisite colors from the net

According to a little research on the net and information from Indonesian dive guides, these little critters are known as Mandarin Fish, Mandarin Gobies, Psychedelic fish, and their official science name of *Pterosynchiropus splendidus*. (I had a few other choice words for them while we were hunting.) They eat small crustaceans, worms, and protozoans. Supposedly, the best time to find them is when they float to the surface in great numbers to spawn and do their "spawning dance".

We didn't witness any of this. The little critters were devious and secretive even though we were in the water just before dusk. It took us several dusk dives to find them too. The first time we hunted for about 15 minutes to no avail. Darrin used his



Under red lights, Darrin got this shot with a quick switch to white floods

white floods once in a while and actually got a good picture of one specimen, but it turned out to be a dragonette instead.

The second dusk dive we went in earlier and hunted for over an hour. Using our red floods and Anto's makeshift red torch, Anto found the right spot and pointed out three or four fish. It was difficult to keep my eyes on them as they crept between the dead branch corals.

The top photo was the best shot Darrin could get the final hunting night dive. I tried to get the reds out of the photo but getting the true colors of the fish is too difficult. It was an excellent team effort to catch the mandarins on camera, but this page represents what we ended up with. We agreed Darrin would try the white floods while we all combed the area with red floods.

Following the hunt, I have since learned the best place to see and photograph the mandarin is either in Lembeh or Raj Ampat. I was originally scheduled to go to Raj Ampat, but this trip was at the wrong time. Summer Diving in Indonesia is in the South around the Lesser Sunda Islands (Bali and Komodo). During the Winter, the live-a-board ships transit closer to the equator, North and East to Raj Ampat and Lembeh.

I am content with my first hunt. All four of us were working together for the best shot and we got a few. I'll just have to travel to Lembeh and Raj Ampat for my next Mandarin expedition and arm myself with the right equipment. One strobe and one flood or two floods and a strobe will be my complete camera outfit with the iPhone 13 and the DiveVolk ProTouch 4.

Until then, I'll just have to make do with the wonderful diving in Maldives for Christmas with Jeff and head to Indo again during a future Xmas break. That's the plan, Stan!

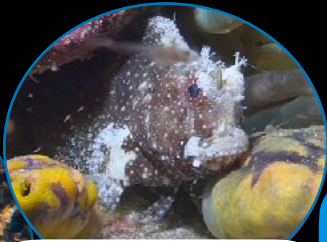
More Ocean Creatures of Indonesia



batfish or spadefish



powder blue anemone



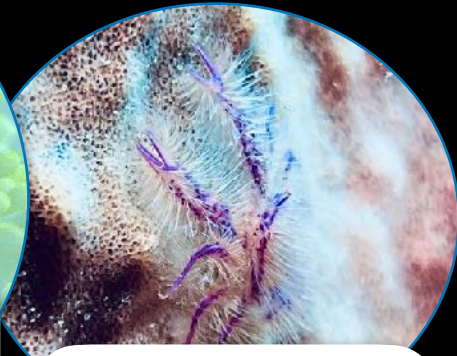
frogfish



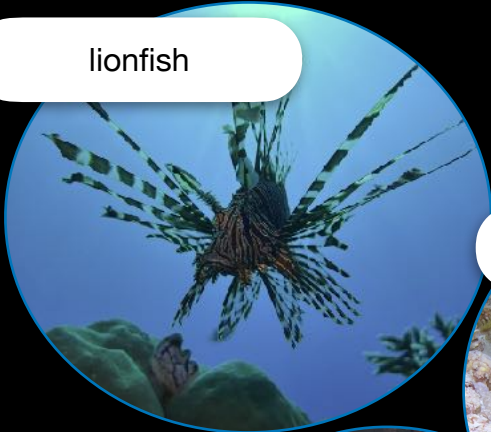
oriental sweetlips



2 Nemos in a bright yellow anemone



hairy spider crab



lionfish

unicorn fish



crocodile fish



whale shark

Peacock mantis shrimp



garden eel



two nudies



Another nudie



dragonette



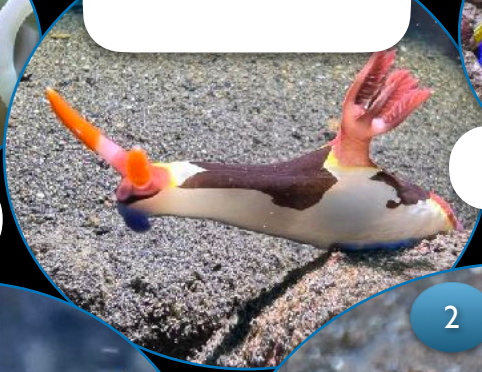
purple frogfish

More Ocean Creatures of Indonesia

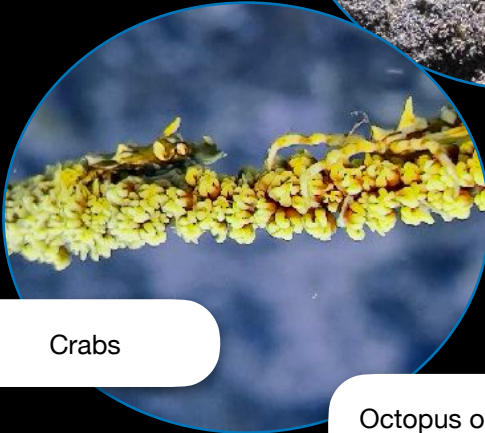


Porcelain Crab

Nudie



Tape moray



Crabs



Octopus on night dive

2



anemone fish in a pink anemone

Moorish idols



Ghost Pipefish



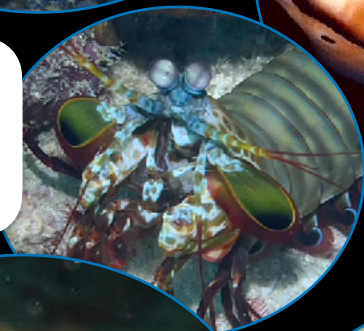
another nudie



Reef manta



Peacock mantis shrimp



Yet another nudie



Parasite on a dragonett



Golden mantis shrimp



Another nudie



Strawberry nudie





THE

WHALE SHARK

In all of my dives, I've rarely been able to be close enough to a whale shark to take a decent photo. This trip was obviously different.

As the Tiaré sailed into a cove on the morning of the second day, a fisherman hailed on the radio to say they had a whale shark feeding in their area. The

experience was 45 minutes of the proverbial "shooting fish in a barrel" but this was the biggest fish in the ocean. What an opportunity for photos. You cannot get tired of seeing whale sharks, whether in an aquarium, in the wild, or fed by local fisherman for tourists and divers to see. Thank you fishermen!



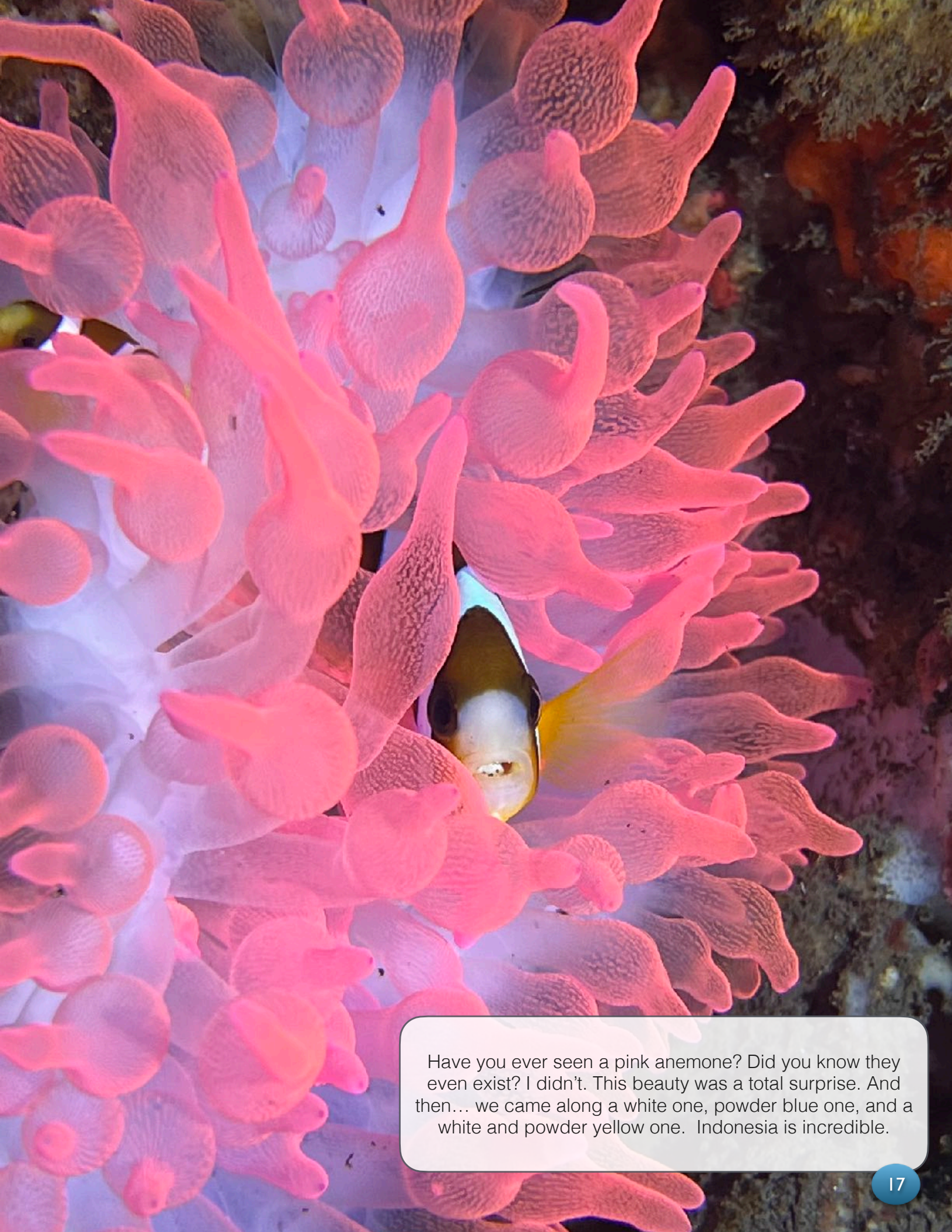
Here There Be Dragons

Komodo dragons are indigenous only in Komodo, Indonesia.

They live on the main island of Komodo and two other smaller, uninhabited islands.

Komodo dragons are known for their predatory methods. They will eat anything, including carcasses or cannibalize the young. One bite is deadly due to the bacteria in the mouth of the dragon. The dragon will hunt down the prey that was bitten, which will die from the bite within four days. Komodos are on the endangered species list.





Have you ever seen a pink anemone? Did you know they even exist? I didn't. This beauty was a total surprise. And then... we came along a white one, powder blue one, and a white and powder yellow one. Indonesia is incredible.



“Left Turn Clyde”

Meet the Orangutan Crab! I haven't seen one of these since Borneo in 2008! This one was about 2cm in length.

Orangutan crabs, like their namesake, actually have fur. They are part of the decorator crab family and found throughout the Indo-Pacific ocean area. They are very difficult to photograph because upon seeing light, they burrow into the bubble coral.