Liveaboard MatahariKu – Raja Ampat

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Day 1
The MatahariKu staff will pick you up in your hotel or await your arrival at Sorong Airport to assist and accompany you to the liveaboard MatahariKu in the harbour of Sorong, only a short drive of around 10-15mins away. Our experienced staff will look after your luggage and transfer it to your cabin onboard The MatahariKu, while you enjoy our “refreshing welcome drink”. As soon as the last guests are onboard, you will be introduced to our team and have plenty of time to settle in, get everything ready and enjoy your first dives of this trip with us. Today we will sail off in the direction of Batanta, just a few hours from Sorong’s harbour. The ship will anchor in the bay and we can make our first dive. You can relax on the beach and explore the island while our crew prepares a wonderful Indonesian diner.

Batanta counts 11 dive sites. Banta’s mountainous interior is little known, but recently divers begun exploring its rugged coast and charting some of Raja Ampat’s most divers dive sites. There are a few Batanta sites with excellent
coral cover. But the flow also attracts animals that prefer back eddies. Batanta is quickly becoming known for its “critter” or “muck” diving. A treasure trove of nudibranchs, several species of ghost pipefish, frogfish, the devil’s scorpionfish, the elusive mimic octopus and even flamboyant cuttlefish can be spotted at Batanta’s dive sites.

With its rugged mountains blanketed with pristine rainforest, Batanta is one of the most exciting islands for naturalists to explore. Western Batanta is in fact one of the first corners of Raja Ampat that was declared an official nature reserve. As the island is quite narrow, the interior mountains are never far from the coast, making access easy. At a few points, you can even travel into the interior by boat, following a river! We stay here for the night. We describe three of the eleven sites below.

Batanta 5: Diversity – location: Southwest coast of Batanta 10-25m
Diversity is a wonderfully mixed dive site, which slopes off a rocky point west of a shallow bay. Depending on the current’s direction, divers should enter the water a bit east or west of the point and swim with the reef on their right or left, going with the prevailing current. Hard coral gardens with fine acroporid corals dominate the first 10 meters. As the reef descends, Diversity turns into a nearly vertical wall that meets a sandy slope at 25 meters. Soft corals and sea fans decorate the wall. Fusiliers, surgeonfish and angelfish roam over corals festooned with crinoids busy filtering the currents. Diversity’s wall’s numerous overhangs are favourite hiding places for moray eels and wobbegong sharks.

Batanta 7: Pulau Yum – location: Eastern quadrant of Batanta 5-30m
Pulau Yum is a small island with excellent macro subjects at all depts. Start at the beach on the north end of the island and swim north with the reef on your left. Descent down the 45 degree slope and look for interesting critters like cuttlefish and blue ring octopus around the hard corals and elephant ear sponges. Between 22 and 27 meters, the slope flattens out and large soft corals grow from the sandy bottom. Ascend the slope toward the northeastern point of Yum past several species of anemones and their resident anemone fish, and check out the large shallow-water bommies spread over the white sand bottom where devil’s scorpionfish are often sighted.

Batanta 11: Pulau Ayemi – location: Northeast corner of Pulau Ayemi 15-25m
Like most of the critter or muck sites i raja Ampat, this undersea corner of Pulau aye is home to more fascinating species of marine life than a quick look at the environment suggests. This is a sloping site, where hard corals and barrel sponges dominate to a depth of about 15 meters. But the most interesting part of the dive takes place on the rubble and sand slope at about 20 meters. Swim from soft coral to soft coral and inspect them for tiny, fingernail-sized allied cowries and translucent gobies. Cleaning shrimp living on sea stars and colourful nudibranchs are common bottom-dwellers at Pulau Ayemi.

Day 2
Today we will sail into the Dampier Strait. The Dampier Strait conveys massive quantities of seawater, forcing currents to flow parallel to the equator rather than perpendicular, as is usually the case in this part of the world. While diving in the Dampier strait, it is perhaps more important than elsewhere in raja Ampat to coincide entries with the proper current phase, usually the east-to-west falling tide. Dampier’s tidal surges carry the planktonic feasts that attract the famed manta ray aggregations near Arborek island, swirling tornadoes of trivially near cape kris, and seasonally migrating cetaceans. There are 11 dive spots. Below you find a description of 4 of them

Dampier strait 5: Sardine – location: Dampier strait east of Kri island – 5-30 meters
Sardine is one of the premier Dampier Strait dives and can be one of the most action-packed dives in all Raja Ampat. Actually sardines are not found at this site, but you won’t miss them. Fusiliers, surgeonfish, trivially, rainbow runners, sweetlips, and bannerfish crowd the open water and swarm over a reef decorated with sea fans, soft corals, and orange elephant ear sponges encrusted with pastel colonies of tunicates. At Sardine it is not uncommon to hear “fish thunder”, the loud booming sound resulting from the rapid movement of large numbers of fish through open water.

Dampier Strait 6: Cape Kri – location: East point of Kri island – 5-30 meters
Cape Kri has one of the largest concentrations of big fish of any site in northern Raja Ampat. During a survey carried by The Nature Conservancy in 2001, Cape Kri amazed fish expert Gerald Allen when he broke his own record of number of species found in 1 single dive. With 283 species recorded. Dogtooth tunas, giant trivialise and Spanish
mackerels, bigeye jacks, circular batfish, surgeonfish and yellowfin barracuda’s aggregate around the point, while angled butterfly fish put an accent of color to the jagged towers of coral packed with competing marine life. Other large fish species include bumphead parrotfish, Napoleon wrasse and giant sweetlips. Whitecap, blacktop and grey reef sharks are commonly spotted.

**Dampier 9 & 10: Manta Sandy & Manta Ridge – location: Near Arborek Island 5-20m**

These dives are two of the most reliable mantaray congregations spots in the Dampier Strait. At Manta Sandy, divers wait in a spot defined by a rubble wall on the eastern side of the 20 meter-deep sand channel that runs between parallel rows of hard coral bommies. Manta’s swoop through the channel after pausing over their favourite cleaning station. The current at Manta Ridge is usually much stronger than at sandy. A reef hook is often used at the ridge, especially if you plan to photograph. The mantas can approach this site from any direction. Some of the mantas are quite large up to five meter wingspans with varying coloration from solid black to mottled white on their undersides. Small groups of yellow pilot fish accompany a few of the larger rays. After diving you can explore the area above water by kayak or let our speedboats take you wherever you want to go ashore and explore mangrove forests. At nightfall, enjoy the beautiful sunset on the upper deck of the MatahariKu. We anchor here and spend the night in these quiet waters.

**Day 3**

Today we arrive at Fam and Penemu. Fam and Penemu’s vivid corals thrive while withstanding, indeed revealing in, some of Dampier’s strongest currents. Below Penmen’s lofty karst spires, submerged ridges extend in all directions. Above these ridges, schools of fish whipped into feeding frenzies by gusting currents, mass in the blue. Fam’s delicate hard coral gardens, full of life even at shallow depths, give way to sloping walls dimpled with bommies blanketed in soft corals. Diverse sites are the hallmarks of Fam and Penemu. Above water, the long, hilly, and uninhabited Penemau is home to another of Raja Ampat’s scenic wonders, called “Hidden Bay”. The entrance of this bay can be easy to miss too, but once inside, this is smaller, yet packs in a good amount of beauty with rugged cliffs and pretty rock islets all the same. North of Hidden Bay, Penemu’s steep cliffs are punctuated with some very pretty, unspoilt beaches. During the night we sail to Aljui.

**Penemu 1: Barracuda – location: North tip of Penemu 10-30m**

Barracuda is a long, oval-shaped reef. Depending of the direction of the current, great aggregations of fish—especially barracuda, fusiliers and bannerfish—gather at either end of this reef where they mass over hard corals decorated with soft corals and sea fans. Reef crevices are filled by groups of batfish and surgeonfish waiting to be cleaned by busy wrasses. Large Napoleon wrasse and cruising tunas often join the frenzy.

**Penemu 7: Melissa’s Garden – location: East of Penemu 3-15m**

This dive site was named after the daughter of pioneer operator Max Ammer. Three small islands form a protective semicircle around a shallow, sunlit platform thick with delicate Montipora and blue-tipped Acropora corals. Perhaps nowhere else in Raja Ampat will you observe stony coals as vibrant and full of fish. There are at least three Tridacna clams located around the platform, all giants that have lived at Melissa’s for close to a century.

**Penemu 5 & 6: Keruo Channel & Night dive – location: Between Penemu and Melissa’s 3-30m**

The best way to dive Keruo Channel is from northwest to southeast on a falling tide. The reef slopes radically to 35 meters and is notable for its colourful sponge life and good macro subjects, including spider crabs on sea fans, allied cowries and nudibranchs. Begin the Keruo night dive on the southeast corner of the easternmost Keruo island and swim north with the reef on the left. This dive takes place on a gradual slope with sandy patches. Decorator crabs are one highlight of this night dive.

**Day 4**

In the morning we arrive in Aljui bay. Aljui bay is a 20-kilometer-long indentation on the western side of Waigeo, the largest of Raja Ampat’s Four Kings. Vertical limestone walls partition the bay on the north and south widening from the main passage as you enter the anchorage. The bay’s sheltered waters provide some of Raja Ampat’s best macro sites and easy-to-access night dives. Vividly coloured fire urchins, many carrying commensal shrimps and crabs, are more likely to be found in Aljui bay than any other Raja Ampat location.
Aljui bay 1: White Arrow – location: south wall of entrance to Aljui Bay  5-30m
White Arrow is named for the mark on the wall at the entry point for this dive. Depending on the current, you will drift toward the entrance or deeper into Aljui bay. Below steep limestone cliffs, the underwater terrain slopes into a deep channel, but the main part of the dive takes place above 30 meters. If you are keen to spot sea slugs, look for the solar powered nudibranch’s. The improbably coloured Nembrotha kukaryana, with its green and black mantle and orange-tipped gills and rhinophores, is seen regularly at White Arrow.

Aljui Bay 2: Channel Island – location: South side of the island across Cendana 15m
With its carpet of pale blue tunicates and forest of rose-and-white soft coral trees, Channel Island is a wonderful site, and shallow enough to be repeated several times during the day when the falling tide slows for a pleasant drift. Myriad nudibranchs and even fire urchins are found at shallow depths. Observe them carefully to locate the black and white Coleman’s shrimp or zebra crabs that live among the urchins spines.

After lunch we set sail to Wayag. Wayag island and its surroundings are the most beautiful parts of the Raja Ampat. Wayag is well known for its pristine beaches and crystal clear waters. We will hike to the top of the island to enjoy the great view. Lets explore the underwater world as well. Lots of blacktip reef sharks are swimming around! Our cruise director Eric will bring you to our secret bay. The rest of the day we stay there relaxing on the beach or do some more diving. There are around 11 dive spots here. Tomorrow we will be diving here all day. We will have a beach dinner and stay here for the night.

Wayag 5: The Bommie Bowl – location Central Wayag northeast of In Island 10-25m
This central Wayag dive site has something for everyone: colourful bommies surrounded by excellent fish life, interesting macro subjects, and a trio of enormous Tridacna clams. These coral colonies attract coral trout, sweetlips and butterflyfish. Garden eels, nudibranchs, and sea cucumbers, often carrying commensal shrimp and crabs, forage in the sand between massive colonies of star and Acropora corals.

Day 5
Today we stay in Wayag and around Wayag, there are so many good dive sites here.

Wayag, Bag, Quoy and Uranie are part of the 155,000-hectare Kawe Marine Protected Area (MPA). Although the MPA is uninhabited, two nearby village clans hold inherited rights to control and utilise its marine resources. Guests in the MPA, wether international or domestic, are strictly forbidden from catching or collecting any living creatures, including not only marine life, but also the exotic plant life growing on the MPA’s karst islets. The complete elimination of the turtle poaching is also an important goal of this MPA. Today green and hawksbill turtles feed around area reefs and nest nearby. Dive profiles in the north are diverse, and range from leisurely swims through lovely hard coral gardens to adrenaline-charged drifts past sloping walls arrayed in Raja Ampat’s signature purple soft corals and glass fish. Surface intervals in northern Raja Ampat can be as spectacular as the dives. Rising abruptly from the sea, small groups of uninhabited islands form a spectacular panorama of jagged limestone cliffs that tower over tiny dome-shaped rocks topped with a wild profusion of threes and vines.

Wayag 8: Ikan Campur – location: East Wayag south of Pulau Quoy 5-25m
Ikan campur (mixed fish) is one of the fishiest dives in this region. The best way to see this site is to drift along the west face. Ian Campur slopes down to about 27 meters and is chock full of bommies covered with swirling schools of snappers, rainbow runners, barracuda and trevally. Midway on the west slope at about 10 meters depth, one of the largest bommies has a meter-long Tridacta clam attached to its base.

Wayag 9: Magic Rock – location: East end of Bag Island 15-35m
A stellar site full of windows, overhangs and swim-thoughts, Magic rock is one of the premier dives in Northern Raja Ampat. Magic Rock should be dived when the currents raise the soft corals covering the boulders and excites the masses of fish patrolling the entrance of the cavern. Approachable schools of sweetlips often hover just inside the cavern. Also look for pixie and longnosed hawkfish flitting between clusters of soft corals.

Wayag 11 &12: Edi’s Cave Jendela Cave – location: Northeast of Uranie Island 5-30m
Edi’s Cave is named after Edi Frommenwiler, one of Raja Ampat’s diving pioneers. This cave is just west of the northeast corner of the island. The 30-meter-tall opening slit supplies a tremendous light source for several hundred meters. Do not shine your light toward the bottom of the cave, because you may disturb a group of grey reef sharks that usually rush to the cave’s exit and have been known to bump into divers. Jendela cave is about 150 meters west...
of Edi’s Cave. At least five large openings illuminate the interior. Despite the semi-darkness, Jendela is a colourful place. Just shine your light over the walls of the cave to see the array of tunicates and crusting sponges carpeting the interior.

**Day 6**

Early in the morning we sail to Kawe. Kawe straddles the equator along the western edge of northern Raja Ampat. This 15 kilometer-long island and its uncountable satellite islets reflect the habitant diversity prevalent throughout the entire region. Kawe’s advantageous geographical position and varied habitants translate into world-class sites that attract marine life likepowerfull magnets. Some of Raja Ampat’s thickest gatherings of fish take place when currents scream through Kawe’s offshore coral labyrinths. around such acclaimed sites as Black and eagle Rocks, manta ray’s soar over resting wobbegong sharks while fingernail-sized pygme seahorses weave their tails through a sea fan’s matrix. Kawe’s vibrant coral maze offers a unique treat: crossing the equator underwater while diving around the equator islands. Spanning Latitude 0 on scuba has been hailed as the dive of a lifetime!

**Kawe 4: Changgo (do it again) – location: South of Kawe 5-30m**

Changgo is an outstanding dive site and, like several others nearby, it could be dived at least twice depending on the current. A falling tide from the east is the perfect time to dive Changgo, as the protected west side of the rock is pocked with interesting swim-throughs and tunnels. Of the main reef, huge boulders and towering pinnacles arrayed in rainbow colors shelter massive schools of sweetlips and fusiliers.

**Kawe 5: Black rock – location: West of Kawe 7-30m**

Do Not be fooled by the small bits of blackened rock grazing the surface at this site. Below water, Black rock is an extensive area easily worth multiple dives along the west face. Schools of raccoon butterflyfish and several large map and emperor angelfish gather here. Scattered bommies are home to smaller fish, octopus and several species of nudibranchs. As you approach the northern point, the plateau gives way toTubastrea-clad pinnacles, bringing in groups of batfish, barracuda and surgeonfish.

**Kawe 6 & 7: Eagle Rock 1 & 2 – location: South of Kawe 5-30m**

Along with the usual schools of fish, mantas are often seen here, but this site also supports some interesting macro life. More fish congregate around Eagle Rock 2 during a rising tide. Enter off the west point and keep the reef on your right as you explore the north side of the rock. Keep your attention focused mainly in the blue where mantas glide by, but don’t be surprised if clouds of digested sand showered down from a passing school of bumphead parrotfish lower the visibility.

**Day 7**

Our trip carries on to West Waigeo, where we find several island groups including Wofoh, Batangpele, Yemen, and Yanggefo. These islands are home to many of Raja ampat’s pre- eminent dive sites. This is an area that is so much alive with schooling fish. The big-eyed trevally and the black-tipped shark where first described from specimens collected near Waigeo.Take a look at the region’s stunning marine diversity: the kaleidoscopic color transformations of displaying male flasher wrasse, schools of venomous catfish rolling over the substrate while foraging; or a pair of mandarin fish engaged in an intimate sunset mating dance. We will pick the best dives in the area today and try to see as much as possible. Below you find a description of some of the best dive sites.

**West Waigeo 4: Mayhem – location: west of Pulau Yanggefo 10-30m**

This submerged reef can be a very high voltage dive when the current brings its massive schools of fish including barracuda, at least three species of fusiliers, silvery trevally, and unicorn surgeonfish. The top of the reef comes out to about seven meters below the surface and is characterised by Acropora corals and a few small, mixed bommies. As you descent, you will pass several larger bommies decorated by glass fish and feeding lionfish. The real point of this dive is watching the amazing conflux of schooling fish!
West Waigeo 5: Citrus Ridge – location: channel between Yanggefo and Gam 3-30m

Citrus ridge is one of Raja Ampat’s most stunning sites. The sloping slides of the ridge are so covered with life that most divers compare the dive to swimming through a well-stocked aquarium. The shallower bommies on the Yanggefo side have some of the most spectacular soft corals in northern Raja Ampat. In a current, vast stretches of spectacular orange corals open and feed while barracuda, batfish, and surgeonfish swirl overhead. Pairs of emperor and blue angelfish circle the bommies, and lion fish usually hover close to the reef while hunting among glimmering schools of baitfish.

West Waigeo 8: The passage – location: passage separating Gam from Waigeo 25m

One of Raja Ampat’s most celebrated dives, the Passage is a winding waterway that separates Gam from Waigeo. When Alfred Russel Wallace passed through the Passage on his way to Waigeo, he at first thought he was traveling through an inlet to a large lake. Later Wallace realised he had entered Kabui Bay. Here you will find one of the most picturesque landscapes you have ever seen! Studded with numbers of rocky islets, surrounded by mountainous shores. The stunning topside beauty is only equaled by the breadth of its marine habitants.

Day 8

In the morning we sail trough Dampier strait to have some more fantastic diving, relaxing on the beaches and explore more nature around you. Our diving program for today is very exciting.

Dampier strait 3: Mioskon – location: Dampier strait south of Kabui Bay 5-27m

Mioskon is an excellent Dampier site to dive on a rising tide when the entire southeast tip of the feed is covered with schooling fish. Hundreds of lined snappers usually cover the slope from the shallows to about 25 meters where coral meets a sandy bottom. Bommmies sheathed in northern Raja Ampat’s signature purple soft corals shelter glassy sweepers and several species of anthias. Look carefully around these bommies for marine life ranging from two-meter-long wobbegong sharks to tiny Pontohi seahorses.

Dampier Strait 4: Mike’s Point – location: Dampier Strait off southeast of Gam 3-30m

Mike’s point, named by Raja Ampat dive pioneer Max Ammer in honor of his son, has some of the best fishwife in the Dampier Strait., including a great group of sweetlips that aggregate off the south side during a lively current. Down at about 30meters, the south side of the reef has great bommies. Check these out, and then ascend to the wall, which is pocked with numerous overhangs and depressions. Interesting macro subjects like small octopus,
nudibranchs and shrimp thrive in these craggy coral niches. Ascend on the east wall, where surgeonfish school around sea fans and large table corals, and friendly batfish nibble at diver’s rising bubbles.

**Dampier Strait 7: Blue Magic – location: about 6km south of Mioskon 10-30m**

This site is a small east to west ridge, which rises to only 10 meters, and is composed of mainly hard corals with a few colourful bommies on the east end. What makes this dive site “magical” are the great schools of fish that congregate around the east end during a falling tide. Spanish mackerel hunt in small groups of 4 to 5 large individuals and stream in and out of schools of tuna, jacks, barracuda, and the ubiquitous fusiliers. Around the bommies, angelfish, lion fish and squirrelfish hover over colourful, low growth soft corals.

**Day 9**

We arrive back in Sorong, this is the end of an amazing diving adventure! We hope you had a wonderful time onboard of our ship The MatahariKu. Our transfer service will bring you back to your accommodation or to the airport for your flight back home.