

TAWALI – MILNE BAY THE NEW DIVING FRONTIER PAPUA NEW GUINEA By Theo Starr

Looking for the words to describe Tawali in Papua New Guinea, and what I come up with, **Remote Luxury with more than a Splash of Warmth mixed in with a Spirit of friendliness.**

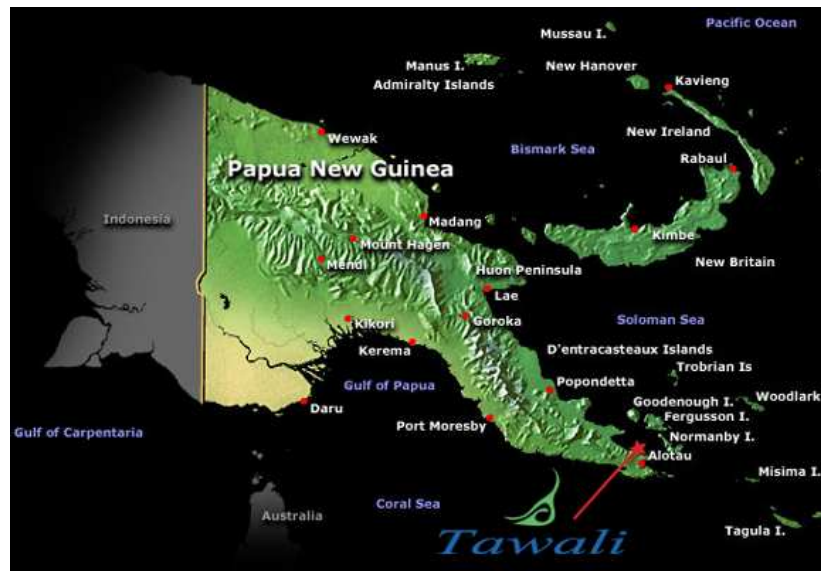
Undoubtedly Tawali is one the best resorts I have had the pleasure to visit and most probably one of the few that caters for both Divers and Non Divers, Singles and Families that will put this resort on the top of any listing.



And what makes this resort one of the best.... It is in the middle of nowhere. The best time of year to do this trip is between September and December that is not to say that the other time of the year is not good.

Where is Tawali?

Being a person who works with Geographical Information Systems here are the GPS Coordinates in Lat/Long for you to find things on your GPS based Software and Hardware - 10.2666S and 150.7761E. For all the rest of you just check out the Map.



How do you get there?

Air Niugini in conjunction have daily flights to the capital of New Guinea, Port Moresby. From Port Moresby there is a daily service to Gurney airport in Alotau, Milne Bay Province. Once in Alotau, guests are picked up and escorted to Tawali resort by bus and boat.

On this occasion, we left from Brisbane for Port Moresby, a flight that took 3 and half hours and connected with a flight to Alotau which took another hour. From there it was a 2 hour bus and both transport to the resort.

Flights are available from Sydney but due to the Air Niugini timetable, a stopover in Port Moresby might be required, this may be a cheaper option for those leaving from Sydney, taking into account the expense of the domestic flight to Brisbane and price of any excess baggage.

A visa is required for entry to PNG and 30 day visas are issued upon arrival at the airport in Port Moresby and cost 100 Kina or approximately \$35 AUD. You can be issued with a visa beforehand and using the Visalink service is highly recommended, they pick up your paperwork, get it processed and return it to you personally. More info at <http://www.visalink.com.au/>.

On Arrival

When we arrived we were greeted by enough staff to take our luggage to our respective rooms, there was not anything for us to do, and climbing that ascent, I am glad we didn't.

We were then escorted to main foyer of the resort where we given refreshments and formally welcomed by the manager, Rob and the admin staff. Rob then proceeded to discuss the operations of the Resort while we completed our paperwork.

This attention and friendliness was continued throughout our stay, staff always greeted us with smile and a salutation.



The Rooms

The Rooms can be described as luxurious but I like to use the word, HUGE. 2 Comfortable and firm Queen Size Beds (I didn't have to turn myself at an angle to fit), a balcony, fridge, own amenities and heaps of space, you can tell money was spent here, and talking to Rob, he mentioned something like 150 trips for the boat back and forth bringing in the building supplies.

There was both air conditioning and fans, but why would you have the air conditioning on when you can open the windows and have that New Guinean Sea breeze coming in through.



The Bar and Restaurant

The Bar and Restaurant catered for all tastes, it would be impossible to go hungry!

Breakfast had everything from hot buffet to cereals and fruit. Lunch and dinner always offered the different variety of meats, vegetables and salads, followed by dessert.

Snacks and Drinks were always available between Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.



Dive Facilities

In General

In terms of the Diving you and your equipment are looked after from the time you get there to the time you leave, the dive staff will do everything for you or do as little as you like.

You are given a crate or dive tub which is allocated to your room, when you are settled in, you place your dive equipment in that tub and leave it outside the door, the dive staff will take the crate down to the boat, and that is where it stays for the duration of trip, where it is looked after and washed for you. All you have to do is set things up to go diving when you are on the boat.

In the foyer, there is a whiteboard where you can place a tag with your room number to the dives you want to do on a given day, you dive with a group on the big boat, but if you want to dive away from the group for a given reason, the dive staff at Tawali will cater for your diving desires, whatever they are, there is not much they will not do for you.

There are triple boat dives, double boat dives in the morning, followed by a 3rd dive in the afternoon. If you are interested you can then do either a dusk/mandarin fish dive or a night dive. To quote Rob, "there is a minimum of 3 dives".

For the photographers, there is camera room and tables where you can leave your rig and set yourself up between dives and everything can be locked, and to complete your pre dive check there are 2 big tubs.



If you need to hire gear they have an well organised setup for that also, just go down to the dive shop and anything you require will be catered for.

On this resort, they have Nitrox, if you haven't got your **nitrox cert, get it for this trip!** Nitrox is available to 32% nitrox only, and produced from a membrane system. On average the dives are between 15 to 25m and getting that extra bottom time and additional safety is well worth it.

Now here is the point where I thought I had died and gone to Diver's Heaven, they have **Steel Tanks**, yes steel tanks, and a good size too, at 10 litres you had more than adequate supply and these can converted between yoke and DIN.

Did I mention that all your diving needs and desires would be catered for.....

The Dive Boat

20 metres of pure unadulterated diving space, it has enough space for about 12 divers, their cameras and enough tanks for 3 dives.

During the surface intervals you are handed a warm towel, ice water, hot tea/coffee and yummy cake and biscuits to nibble on during lunch you are given a hearty lunch, no passing out here due to the lack of food.



The Diving

All the dive sites, except for House Reef which is right in front of the resort are anything from 20 to 40 minutes away and most are easy boat rides, depending on which dive site you are heading for on a given day.

The guides were quite experienced and knew who needed looking after and who didn't. The dive briefs were clear and concise.

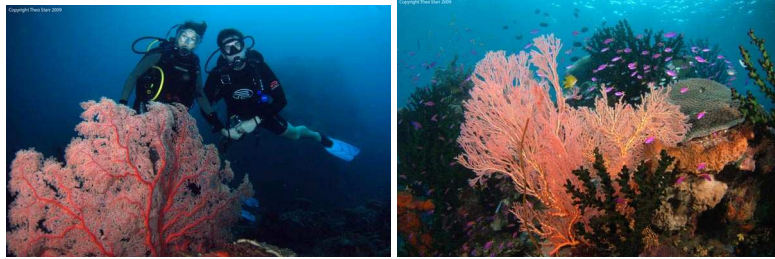
The dive sites done on this trip were.

- Deacons Reef
- Wahoo
- Cobbs Cliff

- Barracuda Point
- Barracuda Point to Coral Gardens

All the dives ranged in depth from 15m to 25m and lasted from 55 minutes to an hour and were navigated with ease., as easy as keeping the rocks on the left one way and on the right on the way back.

Deacons Reef had the large fans and the Coralscapes and teeming with fish life.



Wahoo had the Fish Life of Deacons and Coral Scapes of Elephant Ear Coral and was more of a Wall Dive. This dive is also noted for its Bigger Fish Life as well which includes Whale Sharks, Mantas and Hammerheads.



Cobbs Cliff is situated in what the guides call the Outer Reef and is a 50 minute Boat Ride and plays host to the large pelagic and a variety of macro subjects such as leaf scorpion fish, Rhinopious and Blue Ribbon Eels.



Barracuda Point was a wall dive with heaps of Macro Life and yes there was Barracuda, despite the guides telling us that there were no Barracuda at this location for years.



Barracuda Point to Coral Gardens was another wall dive with heaps of swim throughs and caves ending up in the Coral Gardens and that's what it was Garden full of Coral, everyone on the trip mentioned how picturesque it was..



For the Non Diver

The Non Diver has the option of relaxing and taking in the scenery and ambience that Tawali has to offer.

There is a beach where one can relax. The resort is planning to put in a pool and I would say the way they do things it would probably be done within the year.

There is snorkelling along House Reef, where you can find Pipe Fish laying on top of the reef in less than a meter of water amongst other macro which includes Anemone Fish and Moray Eels. Having said that, a Lone Barracuda was seen near the Jetty and snorkelling towards the deeper water at House Reef produced some Batfish and a very large wrasse.

Tours include walking through the villages to the Skull Cave and the Waterfall.



In Summary.....

Fantastic! Loved it and very happy to go back!!!! In fact I will go back I have unfinished business, I need to add a Pigmy Seahorse and a mandarin to add to the Photographic Collection.



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