

New discoveries in the Solomons

Tulagi's reefs unexpected wow factor

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With a wealth of World War II ship and plane wrecks Tulagi rightfully has a reputation as a wreck diver's heaven. But on a recent visit we discovered the area also offers a rich collection of reefs, as good as those anywhere in the Solomon Islands.

Tulagi is just an hour's boat ride from Honiara, one of the easiest dive destinations to reach. Taking divers to the wonderful reefs and wrecks there are the Raiders Hotel and Dive, a small hotel run by expat Kiwis Bob and Yvie Norton who daily offer visits to their lovely array of dive sites.

On our four day stay we dived four seaplane wrecks; amazing. Plus a large American fuel tanker, the USS *Kanawha*, a Kiwi minesweeper HMNZS *Moa*, a scuttled fishing trawler and a vast pile of World War II junk at Base One.

While all that was totally fascinating, what surprised us most was the reef diving - we simply hadn't expected it!

Our first reef dive was on a large pinnacle called Twin Tunnels Reef. Rising from 60m to 12m, the top is covered in hard corals with walls of lush, soft corals - a great place to see sharks and pelagics. But the main feature is an L-shaped cave starting on the top and exiting on the reef wall at 33m.

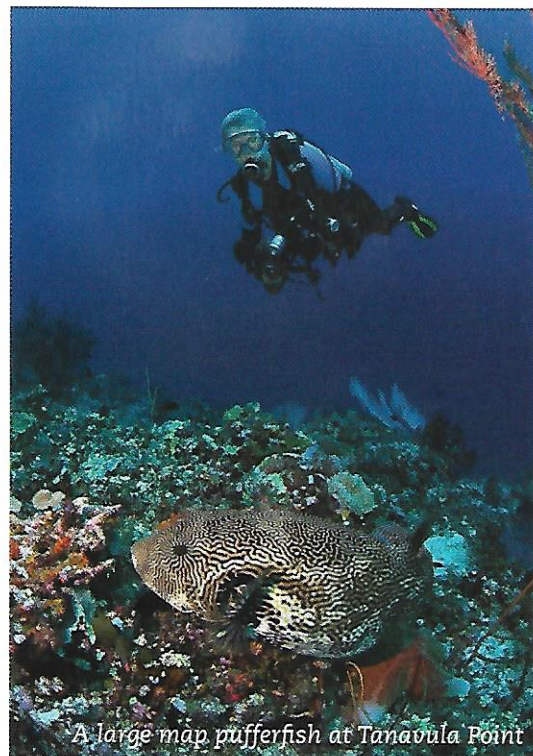
Equally good was Tanavula Point. Coating this wall were beautiful soft corals, sponges and gorgonians - a truly sensational drift dive; reef sharks, humphead parrotfish and schools of fusiliers.

The most surprising reef though was right

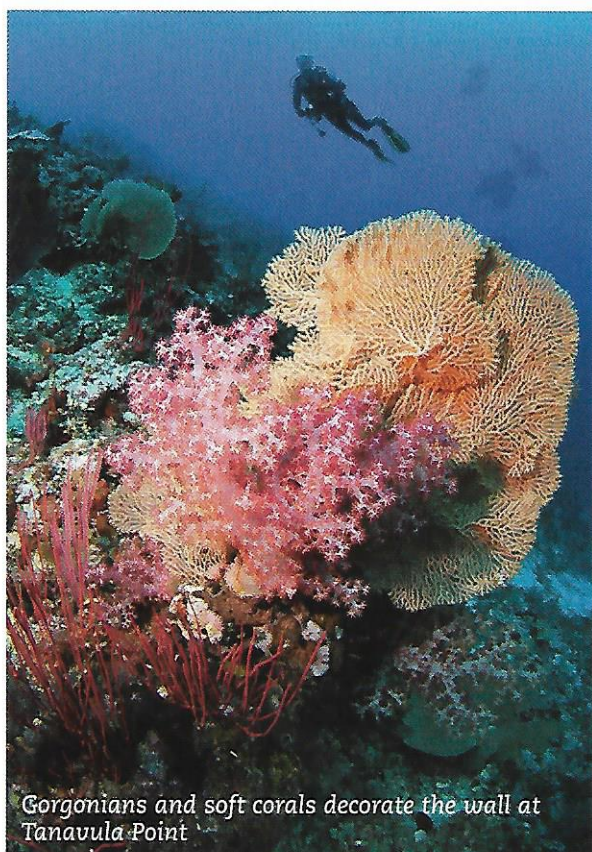
in front of the hotel, the Raiders House Reef. Only 10m deep, this reef and muck site was a delight, full of critters - shrimps, pipefish, gobies, anemonefish, scorpionfish, nudibranchs and even a pair of common seahorses.

We always thought Tulagi was just for wreck divers, but discovered this wonderful destination was something else again - with something for everyone.

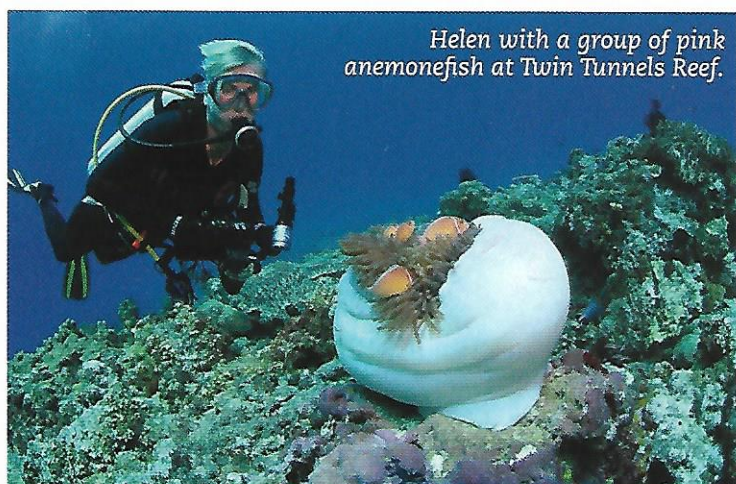
www.raidersshotel.com



A large map pufferfish at Tanavula Point



Gorgonians and soft corals decorate the wall at Tanavula Point



Helen with a group of pink anemonefish at Twin Tunnels Reef.