



Diving in Gorontalo (Copyright Teresa Zubi www.starfish.ch)

What is special about diving around Gorontalo? The walls are spectacular with lots of bends and twists, crannies, small caves and see-throughs. The marine life is rich and varied with several endemic species which are found only here in the Bay of Tomini. Spectacular large sponges and seafans abound and in the upper reaches there are beautiful hard coral fields. To complement there are 2 wrecks in depths suitable for scuba diving and several muck sites. Rantje Allen from Miguel's Diving knows his dive sites in and out - seems to me like he has a list of all the species living here in his head and knows on which dive site and where exactly to find them. He is also very knowledgeable about the weather in this corner of Sulawesi and plans the dives accordingly.

The city of Gorontalo lies on a flat plain but is surrounded by steep hills on both sides. The harbour lies at the end of a narrow opening, a crack formed by a geological faultline, where the river reaches the sea. Miguel's Diving is the only dive operator in the area, they provide a good map of the area. from Gorontalo you can also go by ferry to the Togian islands.

The dive sites are all situated to the west and to the southeast of the city. Here the hills fall steeply into the sea, just a few hundred meters out the ocean is already over a kilometer deep. Most of the dives are on steep slopes and deep walls, the muck diving is done on sandy areas and shallower depths. Visibility is around 20 meters, sometimes up to 30m or down to 10m. You do 2 or 3 dives at the time and Miguel's Diving has a nice comfortable boat and reaches the dive sites in around 10 to 35 min (west) and 10 to 60 minutes (southeast).

The diving season is from November to April. During the rest of the year this area has some heavy wind and waves. If you are in Gorontalo outside of the main dive season and you want to dive, you just contact Miguel's Diving and see, if some of the dive sites are ok to dive or not.

To the West of Gorontalo City

Sand Channels (No. 2): From the surface you can see the white sand channels going down from the reef top. This makes for an interesting mixture of animals that live on sand and reef creatures. Lots of pink anthias cover every coral, dart gobies hover over the sand (at one spot I counted 11 gobies), blennies jump around and on the small sand ledges you found the shy goby Old Glory (*Amblygobius rainfordi*). Suddenly Rantje was trying to get my attention – I turned and there was a eagle ray right in front of us, slowly cruising by with a samora riding on its back! A perfect dive!

Tanjung Barat (West Point) (No. 4): A steep slope covered with hard and soft corals and sponges. The dive guide found a small Muricella sea fan with two Barbiganti Seahorses close together – time to take out the macro lens. Just after it was big fish time with a large napoleon and some makerels and a small tuna flitting by. This is also the place for the endemic Blue Belly Blenny (*Ecsenius caeruliventris*), known only from the Tomini Bay.

Sponge Wall (No. 5): Really amazing wall covered with lots of gigantic sponges and black corals – that sums it up...! On the black corals small longnose hawkfishes hide, pufferfishes sleep on the sponges and groupers lurk between the corals. A very special sight are the foxtail tunicates - this tunicate normally only forms small roundish balls, but here they form colonies which hang like long ropes from the roof of the crannies. Take a closer look and you see the individual tunicates with multiple zooids radiating a central stem (actually the cloaca...).

Windows (No. 6): A dive site that Rantje from Miguel's diving says he is not visiting that much, but that is really nice. A very craggy wall with lots of bend and corals jutting out, interesting views up to the surface. Lots of small animals, some nudibranchs, crabs and shrimps and the extremely shy longfin dottyback (*Pseudochromis polynemus*) all along the wall. Definitely good for revisiting!

To the Southeast of Gorontalo City

Tambo'o Fish House (muck) (No. 11): A sandy slope in front of the village. Ambon scorpionfish, ghostpipefishes, pipehorse, coconut octopus, sometimes mimic, moreys and eels. Another muck site is No. 15 Old Port.

Tjendrawasih Barge Wreck (No. 12) and Japanese Cargo Wreck (No. 13): I haven't dived these wrecks, but they seem to me to be quiet interesting. The Tjendrawasih Barge Wreck sank in December 26 1993 and now lies almost up side down tilting at a 20-degree angle on 26 meters with the crane tower extending another 16 meters beyond the barge. Rantje told me that the wreck has attracted a lot of fish life and is well worth visiting. The Japanese Cargo Wreck lies close by but much deeper in 26 - 45 meters. It is quite large (50meters) and the bow has broken off and slided down even further. This ship caught fire and sank in 1942 and now rests upside down.

Mirabela (No. 16): This dive site consists of long rows of coral ridges and several pinnacles more out in the deep (18 to 25m). This makes for very nice scenery with hard corals mixed with large sponges with lots of reef fishes and the occasional turtle. This is a good site to see the Salvador Dali sponge (*Petrosia lignosa*), a sponge with a very interesting morphology, very craggy with lots of folds and ridges and also to see the very large finger sponges.

Sunken Island (No. 22): This again is a totally different dive site from the others. A submerged gentle slope with sand around it. Huge field of beautiful staghorn corals and other stony corals and anthias and damselfishes forming a dense colourful fishsoup. A group of Yellowtail barracudas hovers over the corals, butterflyfish and angelfishes dart between and the staghorn coral is packed to capacity with cardinalfishes. At the bottom there are several lairs of jawfishes and a blue ribbon eel. We found also a beautiful *Ardeadoris egretta* in the sand as well as mantis shrimps and two Fingered dragonets (*Dactylopus dactylopus*).

Shadow land (No. 27): Rantje planed this dive so that there was actually quite a lot of light available – no shadows..! A steep wall with a small cave at 25m depth. This wall sees quite a lot of waves, so the sponges and corals are smaller and grow closer to the wall than on other dive sites. There is also an interesting white sponge which covers some of the corals entirely and looks like somebody splashed white paint on parts of the reef wall. You follow the wall and look into each cranny, there are lots of small crabs and shrimps, some longnose hawfish and plenty of gobies on whipcorals.

Honey Comb (Marine preserve) (No. 28): The area around Olele Village (Nr 28 to 30) is a marine preserve. The villagers administrate the preserve themselves. No fishing is allowed and the area is patrolled. There are 3 glassbottom boats, so visitors can look at the reef life.

Traffic Circle (Marine preserve) (No. 30): This dive site is full of fish life! Over the gentle slope swim lots of anthias, fuseliers, damselfishes and redtooth triggerfishes crowded the blue water together with surgeonfishes and the occasional snapper. If you take a close look you might see dartgobies, the shy longfin dottyback (*Pseudochromis polynemus*) or the Pictus Blenny (*Ecsenius pictus*).

Jinn Cave (No. 32): This dive site is definitely a must. You anchor at a cove with steep walls and inlets and you dive down to a large cavern, bottom about 26m or so. The walls tower over you with only a small opening at the top and your eyes get accustomed to the dark you see some nice sea fans and sponges and on the sandy bottom you find the rare filamented goby (*Exyrias* sp). You slowly go up at the walls and look out for the Harlekin grouper (*Cephalopholis polleni*) and the black and white butterflyfishes (*Chaetodon burgessi*). This species of butterflyfish is rarely seen, because it usually lives down to 80m depth, but here they rise to up around 20m. The dive is continued along the wall outside, then you double back and explore the cave's upper reaches.

