

## Spectacular Diving at Christmas Islands

Christmas Island is most famous for the mass migration of millions of red land crabs which move en masse from the forest to the ocean once per year to spawn, but it also has plenty of marine action to sink your claws into. It may be just a tiny speck in the Indian Ocean, but it is gaining quite a reputation as a "must-see" dive destination.

### UNIQUE LOCATION

The marine inhabitants of any scuba diving destination are defined by its terrain and

location. Christmas Island scores high on both counts: being the top of an extinct, steep sided volcano that rises 6,000m from the sea floor below and is located just 300km south of Java in the Indian Ocean.

10° south of the equator with abundant sunshine and nutrient-rich up-wellings, the steep-sided walls are

covered in pristine coral reefs down to 20 or 30m where great gorgonian sea fans take over.

Conditions like this are perfect for all kinds of fish – from the smallest to the largest and Christmas Island boasts about 650 identified species all up, including the largest fish in the ocean, the Whaleshark.

### PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT

The coral reefs are home to great shoals of herbivores and parrotfish, surgeons and unicornfish, which, on every dive, can be seen working their way along the corals. On the near-vertical walls, the fusiliers stream up and down in search of plankton, and in the pocillopora coral heads humbugs and hawkfish play hide and seek with divers as they pass.

There is no urban pollution from the island and being 300km from any neighbour means the waters are exceptionally clear. It is often possible to see the reef sharks and eagle rays patrolling the reef wall 20m below.

### TREATS IN THE SEA

Being steep-sided allows deep water pelagics to come in close to the island's shoreline and divers are usually treated to some exceptional, though often brief, encounters with ocean going manta rays, scalloped Hammerhead sharks and whale sharks – particularly towards the end of the annual red crab migration, when the abundance of crab larvae in the water attracts them to the island.



PHOTO: GLEN COWANS



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