

JULY/AUGUST 2008

**nau**ique****

[lifestyles@rafflesmarina](mailto:lifestyles@rafflesmarina)

## **AEOLIAN ISLANDS**

Sicily's home of the winds

## **THE RIGHT YOGA FOR YOU**

## **BOUNTIFUL BATAM**

Luxury resort living



# Rosy Splendour OF RAJA AMPAT

An underwater frontier braves the ravages of civilization and reveals a kingdom of majestic sea creatures and marine treasures.

By **Orla Doherty**,  
Managing Director PCRF.



Our voyage from the Solomon Islands took us on a 2,000-mile wide open journey from the Pacific into the Indonesian seas. We were not too familiar with the mainland of West Papua so clearing into the city of Sorong was an exciting prospect. However, our real interest lay offshore in the reefs and waters of the now-famous area known as Raja Ampat (meaning “four kings”). It actually represents an archipelago of more than 1,500 islands. Having explored just a few of them and their surrounding reefs, we envisaged spending months here, discovering both renowned diving sites as well as virgin reefs. There are few subaqueous frontiers left on this blue planet and Raja Ampat is definitely one of them.

Underwater highlights of our experiences here included the sheer thrill of diving on coral reefs so frantic with life that no inch of substrate was left bare; a green turtle that came so close to two divers that they could stroke its shell as it nonchalantly passed by; red, yellow, orange, purple and scarlet soft corals bathed in midday sun-rays until the entire reef appeared to be a shade of pink; pygmy sea-horses that reside in the gorgonian fans drifting along on a three knot current over some of the densest hard and soft coral coverage ever seen in an age; manta

rays somersaulting on portside; a sand patch in which more than 40 conch shells dwelt, and a rare observation of fish in their full adulthood and in schools of a substantial size.

Sunsets at sea always seem to be rosier than anywhere else in the world. Adding to that, we had an amazing cetacean encounter of a lifetime in these rich waters – a pod of Orcas just outside the Fam Island group. They decided instantly that they liked *SV Infinity* and the entranced attention they were receiving from all of us on board. They spent more than two hours circling the ship and displaying their status as masters of the sea – somersaulting, splashing the sea’s surface with their tails, surfing on the waves, and shooting along the length of the ship at a phenomenal speed. One of the six Orcas had an extremely large dorsal fin typical of an adult male. He made swift motions close to the ship and in one sweep past us, raised his huge body through the surface waters, only for us to watch a piece of trash – a purple flip-flop – fall off his starboard flank. It was a moment where beauty met reality.

That said, the blot on the seascape is unfortunately the amount of trash in the water. We watched as the strong currents carried polystyrene, plastic waste, the ubiquitous flip-flops and all sorts of debris past the ship. This area is beginning to receive some marine protection, but there is a long way to go in solving the mounting global issue of how to keep junk out of the sea.

Presently we are in the Moluccas visiting friends and diving on a reef site off Banda Island which was severely damaged by the eruption of Gunung Api 20 years ago. From there, onward ho to Malaysia and then a celebration of our two-year voyage with our friends at the Raffles Marina!

*“Join the Voyage” of the SV Infinity, Raffles Marina’s “club at sea” in Nautique and PCRF’s homepage at [www.pcrf.org](http://www.pcrf.org). Together on our mission to conserve and protect the coral reefs and oceans, we can make a difference!*