

12 Places of Interest



Mantanani Islands

The Mantanani Islands are a group of three isolated islands located northwest of Kota Belud, a town located about an hour's drive north of Kota Kinabalu. This island group, which consists of Mantanani Besar, Mantanani Kecil and Lingisan, is approximately 35 minutes by speedboat from the mainland.

Until recently, the islands were only known to a few locals and tourists. The islands boast crystal clear blue waters filled with a myriad of marine life and white sandy beaches fringed by coconut palm trees, making it an excellent destination for snorkelling, scuba diving or island hopping. Visitors preferring a more relaxed pace can simply sit back and relax on the beach with a fresh coconut drink while soaking in the picturesque view.

The surrounding waters offer splendid fishing and scuba diving adventures. Sailfish and marlin are the main quarry of sport fishermen in these waters. Scuba divers come here for the underwater wrecks, which still hold plenty of secrets from the day they first settled on the sea floor. These wrecks are now home to a menagerie of marine creatures, such as lionfish, scorpionfish, octopus, glassfish and coral reefs. Also found there are many species of rays, including the marbled stingray, the blue-spotted ray and large schools of eagle rays. Twenty dive sites have been identified at Mantanani Islands, with many more yet to be explored. Even for the novice scuba diver, the coral reefs of these islands offer some of the best scuba diving on the western side of Sabah.

Yet one of the main reasons that the Mantanani Islands have

recently attracted many visitors—locals and overseas tourists alike—is a special creature called the dugong or sea cow that resides around the islands. Over the past years, there have been sightings of numerous dugongs within the area but recently, the figure has dwindled due to fish bombing activities. These endangered animals were thought to resemble mermaids (duyung) by local fisherman due to their coloration and size, thus the name 'dugong'. Dugongs are sometimes called sea cows because they graze on sea grasses, a marine plant that grows on the sandy sea floor in shallow water. Today, dugongs are a protected species in Malaysia.

Mantanani Besar is more popular than the other islands as it is often visited by a resident dugong named 'Nicky' due to a nick on its tail. Its friendliness and playfulness amongst the local village children make it well-liked by the locals and tourists visiting the island. Visitors to Mantanani Besar who are lucky to spot this dugong while snorkelling or diving will be treated to an unforgettable experience.

Excursions to the islands can be arranged through Scuba Paradise Sdn Bhd in Kota Kinabalu which offers excellent snorkelling, scuba diving and island-hopping packages to Mantanani Islands. The packages are inclusive of land and sea transfers, barbecue lunch and snorkelling or diving equipment.

Visitors interested in experiencing a dugong adventure or simply wanting to relax in a beautiful setting can contact Scuba Paradise Sdn Bhd at (6088) 266695 or e-mail scubadiv@tm.net.my or info@scubaparadiseborneo.com.my for more inquiries.



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