

# Paradise

# Islands

By Ivan Choong

## Pick-me if you can

From frogfishes to seahorses and what better place to see them at the dive site under the oilrig –turned - resort. The reef offers you encounters of the smallest kind - Measuring just 5mm in length, these seahorses are normally found on the gorgonian sea fans. The pygmy seahorses (*Hippocampus bargibanti*) are shy critters and usually face away once you have spotted them on the sea fan, making photography a challenge. Not considering that the size is hardly visible on your camera's screen, you might need assistance from your guide or buddy to point them out again. Give it a go and relate to your friends how small they are. Do be careful though, long-nosed hawkfishes and trumpet fishes prey on these pygmy seahorses. Before and while you are photographing them, keep a lookout for these fishes for they might steal your subject for their meal instead.



The resort directly facing the oilrig resort has a fabulous house reef to observe marine life coming to certain spots to be cleaned. These cleaning stations are normally anchor points for mooring lines hidden with cleaner shrimps and wrasses. After the day is done, turtles can be seen resting close to these cleaning stations, letting the shrimp and wrasses do their job of removing parasites and algae.

## Kapalai Sights

Over at Kapalai's house reef, register yourself for a sunset dive and watch the breeding ritual of the mandarin fishes. Coming out from hiding among the rubble, the male searches for his harem and engages in multiple mating behaviour daily. The repeated performances take only seconds from the time they lift off the reef into mid-water, releasing their eggs and sperm each time. Once the entire show plus encore is over, swim along the reef slope and close to the jetty. The proliferation of marine life is large mainly because they seek shelter under the jetty.

Most dives around these islands usually last much longer since the depth between the surface and the seabed is shallow. The perfect condition for any diver wanting to stay longer or photograph their subjects.

## Conservation starts with you

Points to take note for divers with cameras are careful when taking photographs and watch the placement of your fins. Avoid placing them on corals or damaging them. For personal safety, check to ensure that venomous fishes like the stonefishes and lionfishes are not under you. Likewise, check before moving off once you have photographed your subject. Refrain from touching corals for support and if necessary use a pointer to help stabilize you with the camera, ensuring that the pointer rests on the sand or rubble.

A special note for all - with their minute size, over photographing the pygmy seahorse is like having huge 2,500-watt floodlights flashing in your eyes. If you are with a group of photographers, try to limit the number of photographs each one is taking. We never know how many times the seahorse has to go through these paparazzi daily.

Some resorts have implemented "no-dive" timing in the evenings. This is to allow marine life to settle down and the change of shift from day to night, while others move to cleaning stations. Others resorts have also implemented a "no-gloves" policy. We can play our part by observing and adhering to these rules in order to preserve the eco-system and to benefit everyone to enjoy what we have experienced.

## The Writer

Ivan Choong is a Field Editor with Scuba Diver Australasia magazine. He often travels around Asia to satisfy his passion for photography and diving in equal measure. When he is not travelling, you can find the Computer Engineering Diploma holder in front of his computers managing his online business – [www.i-nsc.net](http://www.i-nsc.net)