

Raja Ampat

Whale Sharks, Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise and Wobbegongs

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2 To Sorong, West Papua

Day 3 Boarding the Katharina and to Waigeo

Your flight will arrive in the West Papuan port town of Sorong, the gateway to Raja Ampat. From the airport we will transfer you to the harbour where the Katharina will be waiting at anchor. Once settled into your cabin, your cruise director will familiarise you with the vessel's facilities and safety procedures. Ready to start our adventure, we will weigh anchor, leave the harbour behind, and enter the marine protected area of Raja Ampat, an archipelago of four large islands (Misol, Batanta, Wageo, and Salawati) and over a thousand smaller islets. This is the most bio-diverse marine system in the world boasting the largest range of fish, invertebrates and corals anywhere on the planet. Close to fifteen hundred types of reef fish and over five hundred types of hard corals are found here as well as five species of sea turtle, rays, unique sharks and seahorses. A recent scientific expedition discovered many species new to science and one of the scientists logged the most species of fish recorded on a single dive (somewhere around 280). We will cruise towards the island of Waigeo, stopping for a refreshing swim/snorkel along the way before watching the sun set on our first day at sea as Red-footed Boobies and Silver Gulls fly past.

Day 4 Wilson's Bird of Paradise

While it is still dark, our tenders will ferry those of us who are feeling fit and adventurous to the village of Sapokren, where a local guide will take us on a challenging trek into the forest in the hope of seeing the Wilson's Bird of Paradise. The male is red and black with a yellow mantle on his neck, light green mouth, rich blue feet and two violet tail feathers. The featherless crown is turquoise, ornamented with double black crosses. If we are lucky, we may be able to observe the male dancing from a distance of just five metres. Before the dance, he will clear the ground from any leaves or other obstacles that may disrupt his performance. On our way back to the boat, accompanied by the sounds of the forest coming to life, we'll see some fantastic birds including the colourful Moluccan King Parrot and the elegant and surprisingly difficult to spot Common Paradise-Kingfisher. In the darkest corners of the forest we'll hope to unearth two more rather impressive and very strange kingfishers, the Hook-billed Kingfisher, and the almost terrestrial Shovel-billed Kingfisher. The gorgeous Blue Jewel-Babbler is very shy and we may have to be content with hearing it, however we'll certainly hope to see the bird-of-paradise relative, the Glossy Manucode, and the strange

Raja Ampat Pihui, a bird that has poisonous plumage! Overhead the Pygmy Eagle will be on the lookout for prey and nearer at hand we'll see two colourful pigeons, the Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove and the Beautiful Fruit-Dove. Land mammals are few in this region but here we've a chance of seeing the Waigeo Spotted Cuscus.

We will spend the remainder of the day resting from the morning's activities and enjoying the waters and reefs of Raja Ampat. There are lots of gigantic mushroom leather corals, purple soft corals and sea squirts. Hard table corals, staghorn patches, green and brown elkhorn and finger corals cover the substrate, along with brown soft coral bushes and hydrozoans. We'll see the bizarre looking Wobbegong Shark, these are well-camouflaged, with a symmetrical pattern of bold markings, resembling a carpet. The camouflage is enhanced by the presence of small, weed-like whisker lobes surrounding the Wobbegong's jaw, which it uses to lure and catch fish. Another strange shark we'll hope to see is the Raja Ampat Epaulette Shark which seems to walk on the ocean floor with its fins. We'll try hard to spot Denise's Pygmy Seahorse and the equally tiny Pontoh's Pygmy Seahorse. As the sun sets we should watch for pairs of Blyth's Hornbills flying between islands to their roosts.

Day 5

Red Bird of Paradise & Dampier Strait

Today will present another opportunity for keen birdwatchers, as we rise early and walk into the forest on a pre-dawn quest to spot the remarkable Red Bird of Paradise, one of the species that Wallace was most anxious to collect. With a little luck and the help of our knowledgeable guides, we might catch sight of this rare bird's elaborate courtship display as dawn breaks over the forest canopy. The Red Bird should watch out though for Variable Goshawks cruise through the trees on the look out for unwary prey. Hooded Pittas lurk in the shrubbery, their calls drawing attention to them, and another bird with a distinctive call here is the Wompoo Fruit-Dove, a bird that says its name! Also here is the diminutive Dwarf Fruit-Dove, the strikingly marked Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, and two really gorgeous species in Blue-black Kingfisher and Golden Cuckooshrike.

After returning to the ship, we will turn our attention from the sky to the sea as the Katharina makes her way through the Dampier Strait, home of some of Raja Ampat's premier reefs. The underwater world of the Ceram Sea and the Raja Ampat is home to a glorious range of sharks, manta rays, batfish, groupers, pygmy seahorse, schooling jacks, barracudas, fusiliers, Pale-tailed Surgeonfish, goatfish, giant Six-banded Angelfish, and Purple and Threadfin Anthiases – all these and more add to the panoply of color. Hiding in the cracks and crevices of the reef are the occasional Panded Pipefish, plus White-eyed and even Giant Morays. Titan Triggerfish can be spotted feeding on chunks of hard coral. Not to mention Slender Fusiliers, and green and blue damsels. Let's not forget about Napoleon Wrasse, Whitetip and Blacktip Reef Sharks, groupers, snappers... Just off the reef, keep an eye open for Redtooth Triggerfish and schooling bannerfish by the hundreds... If the currents are in our favour, we might see some of the area's

larger specimens of marine life, which are attracted to the strait's nutrient-rich waters. These include a unique form of Manta Ray - Raja Ampat Manta Rays are unique - they are black on both the top and the underside!

We'll see Dolphins pretty much daily on this tour. Long-beaked Spinner Dolphins are perhaps commonest and certainly the most playful leaping out of the water by our boat in spectacular fashion. We'll also see Dwarf Spinner Dolphins and probably Fraser's Dolphins too. Whales are often seen in the straits too though which we see among a number of species is very much open to chance, Fin Whales and Bryde's Whales are among the more likely.

Above the water we'll watch for the delicate Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel and marvel at the aerial efficiency shown by Short-tailed Shearwaters as they arc across the waters. We will end the day by mooring off Pulau Arborek in front Arborek Village. Here, we can easily circumnavigate the tiny island by foot and gain a sense of the Asai culture, which is still kept alive by the villagers living in this isolated place.

Day 6

Pulau Arborek & Tomolol

A swim through Tomolol's mysterious dome-topped cave is undoubtedly one of Raja Ampat's most memorable activities. After an early breakfast, our tenders will take us into the heart of the bay to see this partially submerged cave where it is possible to swim, snorkel or simply float while gazing up at the cavernous grotto adorned with astonishing stalactites. The more adventurous can swim or paddle through the dark waters to the other mouth of the cave.

There are so many different species of butterfly and angel fishes. Latticed, Black-lip, Threadfin and Eastern Triangular Butterflyfishes are all found here, as well as boldly-marked Vagabond and delicate Chevroned Butterflyfishes. Pretty Longnose Butterflyfishes move in pairs, and lurking by steep coral walls are groups of strangely-shaped Pennant and Humphead Bannerfishes. Among the large Angelfish are Regal and Emperor. 'Herds' of Pinktail Triggerfish and Tomini Bristletooths mix with groups of Parrotfishes and Foxface Rabbitfishes, often many hundreds together, the parrotfishes including Chameleon Parrotfish and Bleeker's Parrotfish. There's Polkadot Coral Trout and its cousin, the Chinese Footballer! By intricate coral heads are all sorts of brilliant small fish, especially Jewel Damsels and Chromis, whilst anemones give shelter to Orange-finned Anemonefish. Scarlet Soldierfish lurk in the shade of convoluted corals. Scarlet-breasted Maori-Wrasse look more like parrotfish in size. Shoals of Keeled Needlefish drift past.

After returning to the ship, we will use our tenders to explore more of this impressive maze of karst islands, both above and below the surface, complete with mysterious skull cairns in sea-cave cemeteries, and prehistoric 'petroglyph' cave paintings, estimated to be anything from 3,000 to 5,000 years old and depicting various human figures and huge human palms, fish, flowers and plants, tools and vessels. Eastern Reef-Egret and Grey-tailed Tattlers inhabit the coral-rag shores and

we might see Little Pied Cormorant and Great-billed Heron too. We will then spend a quiet night at anchor.

Day 7

the Misool Archipelago

This morning we will wake to see the sun rise over the picturesque chain of islands that makes up the Misool Archipelago. The topography is typical of 'karst dissolution,' featuring a great number of tiny islets whose bases have been eroded over time by the relentless motion of the tides. We will spend the day maximising everything that this fascinating area has to offer by marvelling at both the marine wonderland under the water and the magnificent landscape above the surface. The Purple Bowl Corals, maze-like Measure Coral, Cylinder Coral, and forests of convoluted Leather Soft Coral provide homes for Sea Anemones, the green Noble Feather Star, some stunning Sea Slugs and starfish such as Cumming's Sea Stars and the beautifully reticulate Indian Sea Star. Banded Pipefish drape over the corals, looking like little snakes, and among the anemones fabulous Eastern Clown Anemonefish stare up at one. The variety is mesmerising – Golden Sergeant, Fire Damsel, blue and yellow Blue Damsel, stripey Many-banded Angelfish, Saddled Butterflyfish, Beaked Coralfish, and Citron Butterflyfish. Fabulous Moorish Idols cruise amongst Midnight Tang, Convict Tang, Monocle Bream, Spotted Unicornfish and Masked Rabbitfish. There are Checkerboard and Exquisite Wrasse, as well as Gaimard Wrasse, the latter shading from green at the front to blue at the back with blue-ringed white spots all over. Its tail is sunshine yellow and the front of the fish is fringed with pink. Three strong green lines meet at the eye – what a fish! As the reef descends into bluer depths shoals of immaculately patterned Oriental and Yellow-ribbon Sweetlips, Clown Triggerfish and huge Blunt-headed Parrotfish hover above green corals. Sitting above corals on flashing golden fins set down like a tripod are Red-blotched Basslets. Violet Soldierfish hide in the corals while Stars and Stripes Puffers float peacefully amongst the melee. We can test out our paddling skills in the sea kayaks, watch for birds perched on the rocks, or just sit back and take in the glorious scenery. Sacred Kingfishers are frequent along the coasts and we'll look for its larger and rarer cousin, the Beach Kingfisher as Eastern Ospreys and White-bellied Sea-Eagles hunt over the fabulous scenery.

After a full day of island hopping, the Katharina will begin her overnight journey. As we head out to sea the evening light will be perfect for cetacean watching. Pygmy Sperm Whales have been seen in this area and we've a chance of Short-finned Pilot Whale and Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins among others. We might also see Tahiti Petrels and there should be plenty of Black Noddies, Bridled Terns and Crested Terns about as the sun drops to the horizon.

Day 8

Pisang Islands

This morning we will explore the Pisang Islands. These tiny gems isolated in the vast waters of the Ceram Sea offer us a chance to relax and enjoy the sparkling white-sand beaches, clear waters, and vibrant reefs before making our way to the

shores of West Papua. Here we will follow the shoreline until we reach the village of Sipitnanam. This is one of a number of places where we'll likely encounter the world's largest invertebrate. Adult coconut crabs are about a metre from leg tip to leg tip and weigh about 4.5 kg (10 pounds). The coconut crab is known for its ability to use its massive pincers (chelae) to crack open coconuts and can exert a force of 3,300 newtons (about 742 pound-force) with these pincers. They have also been known to open coconuts by dropping them from trees and striking them repeatedly with their pincers or using their pincers to pierce the coconut's husk before splitting the seed open. Spice Imperial-Pigeons watch them from the tree tops. After visiting the village and meeting the residents, who spend their days fishing the nearby waters and tending their nutmeg plantations, we will continue south along the coastline through the night.

Day 9

Kitikiti Waterfall & Cape Papisol

Today we will wake up to the beautiful sight of Kitikiti Waterfall. Here, in the wilderness, a roaring river cascades down the rainforest-clad mountains and crashes into the sea below. We'll hope to see the impressive New Guinea Harpy Eagle soaring above us whilst nearer at hand are Lowland Peltops, the brilliant Red Myzomela and an assortment of Honeyeaters. The Long-tailed Paradigalla is perhaps not the most spectacular-looking bird-of-paradise being mainly black – but it does have a most striking yellow face. Beaufort's bare-backed Fruit Bats roost in trees where we'll hope to see both Superb Fruit-Doves and Moluccan Fruit-Doves. Lurking quietly under the subcanopy will be the Red-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher, a stunning bird, and if we are lucky we'll encounter Yellow-billed Kingfisher and the gorgeous Red-bellied Pitta too.

We can swim under the waterfall and explore the extraordinary reefs nearby where several species of clownfish include Spine-cheek Anemonefish and Clown Anemonefish. The very upright Teira Batfish float about in small groups as elegant Smooth Flutemouths drift silently past us. Sweetlips form stacks so thick that you can see nothing through them, the fish moving mesmerically back and forth in front of you. The fantastically frilly and richly-hued orange-red striped Ragged-finned Firefish is an amazing sight, almost equally red is the Strawberry Rockcod. Battering the corals are the reefs demolition mob, herds of Blue Parrotfish along with Double-headed and Red-speckled Parrotfishes. There are some superb Moray Eels, big Bumphead Parrotfish and Napoleon Wrasse. This is a great spot for Turtles, and Grey Reef and Whitetip Sharks are often seen. And if you've had enough of seeing the big species then it is time to look for the Pygmy Seahorse!

Later in the day we'll round Cape Papisol where seabirds might feature Streaked Shearwater, Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy, Black-naped Tern and the gorgeous White-tailed Tropicbird. We'll head to the Karawawi region, where we will stop to refresh ourselves before journeying on to Triton Bay.

Day 10

Triton Bay

Triton Bay is a place of unsurpassed natural splendour, where time and tides have sliced the limestone landscape into tall cliffs and numerous islands separated by lagoons and narrow channels. It is also home to fishermen who keep masses of baitfish in nets that attract a migratory group of Whale Sharks, which we should have the chance to swim and snorkel with. We can't make any promises, as we don't have these wild animals on a leash, but fingers crossed we will. We also hope to cruise amongst them in the Fenders which should allow us a good chance of photographing these majestic creatures. We will also spend our time swimming from secluded beaches, snorkelling the vibrant turquoise waters and kayaking amongst the rocky outcrops.

Green Turtles and Hawksbill Turtles are frequently found on snorkels here and we'll see and hopefully snorkel with Reef Manta Rays too. Underwater life here includes the Mimic Surgeonfish, Ocellated Spinefoot, the widespread Moorish Idol and the amazingly named Sleek Unicornfish. Groups of shimmering Blueback Damsels mix with Blue-green Chromis, elegant Three-spot Dascyllus and the extraordinary almost completely opaque Fragile Cardinalfish. Swarthy Parrotfish and Blue-lined Sabretooth Blenny are a pair that sound a little dubious, and the Coral Pigfish hardly sounds more attractive, though in truth is a little beauty. We'll see Long-finned Batfish, Titan Triggerfish, Yellow-dotted Maori Wrasse and both Spiny and Smooth Squirrelfishes, new species seem to be at every turn!

We can also enjoy watching the birdlife from the comfort of our tenders as we explore this extraordinary maze of karst islands, before visiting the village of Lobo, which is a friendly place at the foot of a 1000-metre-high cliff. Here we'll look for the Lesser Bird-of-Paradise.

Day 11

Triton Bay & the Namatote Passage

We will make the most of our last morning in Triton Bay by cruising through the undisturbed coves, caves, and lagoons, and snorkelling again with the Whale Sharks, before heading north through the Namatote Passage. Namatote's cliffs are also well known as a gallery of prehistoric art, boasting an impressive collection of cave paintings, glyphs and pictorial signs left by ancient nomads high upon the rock walls.

There will be one last chance for snorkelling. What will be the highlights this time? Perhaps shoals of Purple Anthias hovering over coral heads; the purple-pink a shocking and vibrant colour. Maybe the sight of the amazing Smashing Mantis Shrimp. This strikingly colourful creature, with yellow and green 'flags', packs quite a punch. Or a metre long Crocodilian Longtom hovering in the water next to us, its menacing presence probably due to a passing resemblance to a Barracuda! There's so much to see – shoals of Red-bellied Fusiliers, numbers of golden Threadfin Anthias and when the superb little blue damsels and a shoal of Tessellated Fusilier get mixed up with these the effect is kaleidoscopic. Our butterflyfish list continues to increase with Yellow-dotted and Spot-tailed Butterflyfishes. Groups of Orange-spine Triggerfish cruise past, and marauding

parrotfishes include the impressive Steephead. Pairs of pretty One-spot Demoiselles have their territories right on top of the reef, centimetres from the surface. The light generally in these reefs is superb and every fish seems perfectly lit. We'll find IndoPacific Bluetangs, stunningly marked Blackpatch Triggerfishes, yellow Black-spotted Pufferfish, and lots of Neon Damselfish before exhausting our memory banks and heading back for lunch!

We will spend our final evening on the ship resting at anchor and enjoying a farewell dinner with our captain and crew.

Day 12

Kaimana

In the morning, we will find ourselves at anchor in the harbour of Kaimana. After a final, hearty breakfast, we will say goodbye to the Katharina and her crew. Our tenders will take you ashore for your transfer to the airport for your onward travel.

Day 13

Arrive Europe

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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