

SORIDO BAY RESORT

PARADISE FOR DIVERS IN RAJA AMPAT

TRIP REPORT BY: VAL SAKHNENKO

DATES OF VISIT: DECEMBER 26, 2019 – JANUARY 12, 2020

RATINGS

1 (WORST) – 5 (BEST)

Diving	5	Photography	5
Diving for Beginners	4	Environmental Sensitivity	5
Snorkeling	5	Accommodations	5
Dive Operation	5	Food	5
Service and Attitude	5	Value for \$\$\$	5



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Resort website: <https://papua-diving.com/our-resort/>

This report is about our second visit to Sorido Bay Resort (SBR), with the first being a year ago for the same duration (18 days).

We learned about this resort from a French couple, whom we met at Misool Eco Resort in early 2018. They told us that they took about 40 diving trips to Indonesia, and, in their opinion, Sorido Bay Resort is the best. So my wife and I 'took the dive' and booked two and a half weeks with SBR for December 2018 and we were really glad we did.

RESERVATION

I made a reservation directly with the resort, which is my preferred way of booking. By booking directly with the resort you will automatically get 'enrolled' in their loyalty program, which will give you 15% off on the 2nd trip and 20% off on the 3rd trip.

Considering the remote location, I would recommend a minimum stay of at least two weeks. There are only seven bungalows at the resort - five Sentani (for 2 people) and two Kaimana (for up to 4 people), so consider booking in advance, especially if you are planning to come over the holiday season. In our case, both of the times we booked almost a year in advance to ensure that we got what we wanted.

Communication with the resort via email was easy, their replies were quick and detailed. They accept several payment methods, and I used TransferWise, which made payments from Canada easy. I've been using TransferWise for overseas payments for several years now without any issues.

You should keep in mind that the resort does not provide regular diving trips on Saturdays, but you can dive at the house reef. Therefore, when you schedule your trip you may want to explore leaving the resort on Thursday rather than on Sunday. If you are leaving on Thursday, you could make three or four dives on Wednesday, but stay overnight in Sorong and fly the next morning.

GETTING THERE

GETTING TO SORONG:

From Toronto (Canada) it takes a 15-hr flight to Hong Kong and then to Jakarta (~5 hrs) by Cathay Pacific, arriving to Jakarta by 1:30 pm or so. Then, there are several options:

Option 1 – Stay overnight and next day in Jakarta (i.e. at the airport hotel-resort FM-7), then take an overnight red-eye (but direct) flight to Sorong.

Option 2 – Book a half-day stay at the airport hotel, get 5-6 hours of sleep, and then take an over-night red-eye (but direct) flight to Sorong. This is a bit riskier option than Option 1, in case your luggage is delayed. We tried this option last time, and it took us 48 hrs from leaving our house to the resort's jetty.

Option 3 - Stay over-night in Jakarta (i.e. at the airport hotel-resort FM-7), then take a daytime flight to Sorong, and spend a night in Sorong at Swiss-Belhotel Sorong (I could not recommend any other hotel in Sorong). This option would allow you to have two normal nights in a hotel, so you would come more rested and acclimatized to the resort. We have not tried this option yet.

If you have never been to Hong Kong, it is worth spending 3-4 days there. Here is a link to my video [Hong Kong in 7 Minutes](#), to give you some ideas about Hong Kong and what to see there.

If you are flying from the US or another country that has an option of flying via Singapore, it could be another great option. It is a fantastic city and spending 3-4 day in Singapore would be very memorable. You could watch my video/slideshow [Four Days in a Dream City](#) about our four-day stay in Singapore.

Other options for flying to Jakarta, that we would like to explore in the future, are (a) flying by EVE via Taipei, and maybe spend a few more days in Taipei, which we like very much, and (b) flying via Japan (my favorite country).

INDONESIAN AIRLINES:

Although Garuda Indonesia is the most expensive airline in Indonesia, it is our favorite local airline because of several reasons:

- It is easier to communicate with them via email or a phone
- Their luggage allowance is higher (23 kg vs. 20 kg), plus they allow an extra piece of luggage for scuba equipment free of charge. This is important to me as I have a lot of videography equipment.

Unfortunately, it is my understanding that Garuda got into some financial troubles in 2019, and they canceled our return flight. This created a lot of trouble and I had to deal with Lion Air and Batik Air, which are low-cost carrier airlines.

I had to book a return flight with Batik Air, which is owned by Lion Air, and arranging payment for additional luggage was very problematic. The resort had to send someone to the airport to prepay my extra luggage, as this was not possible to do via the internet or phone. So, in total it was as expensive as flying by Garuda. Ignoring troubles with the luggage, the flight by Batik Air was very good. With regard to Lion Air, other divers told me that they always fly by Lion Air and never had any issues.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

1. Prior to booking a local flight, I would recommend contacting the resort to check what is the latest situation with local airlines, as it is quite unstable.
2. If you need to prepay for any extra luggage tell the resort manager at least one week in advance so that they could make an arrangement.

MEETING IN SORONG AND BOAT TRANSFER TO AND FROM RESORT

If you arrive in Sorong on the day of departure to the resort, a representative of Papua Diving will meet you at the airport. If you are a guest of the Sorido Bay Resort they will transfer you to Swiss-Belhotel for breakfast and some rest in a lobby. You may want to confirm with the resort at the time of booking and with their rep at the airport that they will take you to Swiss-Belhotel, not any other hotel, as based on our and other divers' experience, Swiss-Belhotel is the only decent hotel in Sorong.

Boat transfers are relatively short (about 1.5 hr) and quite convenient. On the way back you could be in Sorong by 10-11 am, so you could catch a flight the same day. If you have extra time before the flight, they could bring you back to Swiss-Belhotel for a rest.

ACCOMMODATION

SBR is a very small resort - maximum 18 guests, but it is rarely 100% full. This, along with the outstanding staff led by Chris and Jade, created a very welcoming, family-like atmosphere, where you do not feel like you are at a resort at all, but rather like you are visiting your best friends who would do anything to make your stay as pleasant and memorable as possible.



All bungalows are very spacious and they are located on a nice sandy beach, about 10 meters from the water. The design and quality of construction is very good. Everything in the resort is well-thought out and built to last.



The rooms are very big and cozy, with firm and comfortable bed. The AC is very powerful, so you will be as cold as you want.



Each bungalow has its own 'camera room', which includes a long table, a camera washing sink, and both international and US receptacles. Every guest is provided with a 'camera taxi', which is a glorified wheel barrel. I found this arrangement is much more convenient than having a centralized camera room.

GROUNDS

The grounds at Sorido Bay Resort are very nice, with a good sandy beach. If you like walking, there are many options. One of our favorite is go for a visit to another sister resort (Kri Eco Resort), which is just around the corner (about 15 - 20 min away) and has a very good house reef for diving and snorkelling.

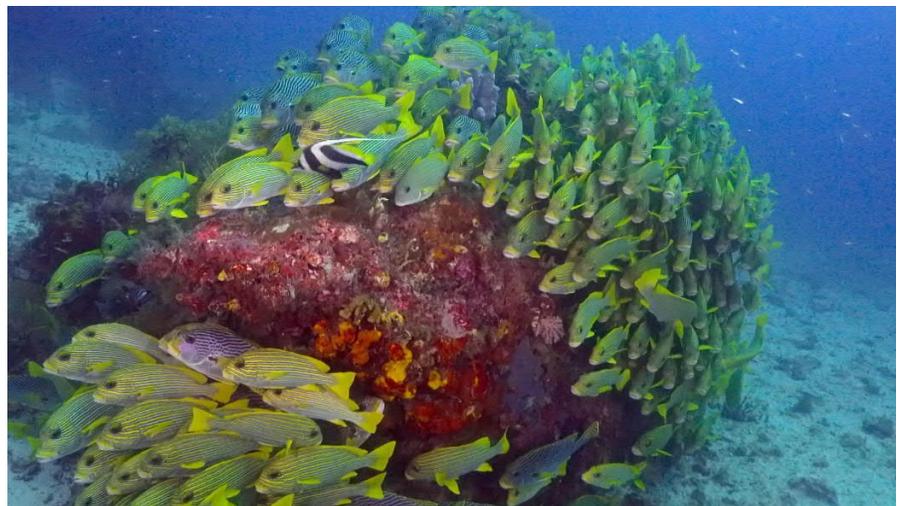
We like the bungalows of Sorido Bay Resort better than 'water cottages'. To us, having a nice sandy beach is a big advantage of the SBR. Families with small kids would appreciate it very much.

Another pleasant surprize of the area around the Sorido Bay Resort was that during our both visits we did not see any rubbish in water and on the beach. I could not say that during our dive trips we did not see any rubbish at all, we did at a few dive sites of Dampier Strait, but the amount was very negligible d to other places we visited in Raja Ampat. I assume that this is probably because of the geographical location of the Dampier Strait and currents. Whatever the reason is, we like it.

DIVING

Diving was fantastic. Because of the variety, number of fish, and beauty of healthy corals, you may experience a 'sensory overload', as one of divers pointed out quite rightly. And it is very hard to say which dive site is the best. The underwater world is constantly changing and you could go to the same dive site on different days and see different fish.

The only what is constant is a big school of sweetlips at Cape Kri. They are always there at about 35 – 40 m.



In the Caribbean, I used to write down all the fish I saw. Here, because of the variety of fish, it is pointless. At the world's most famous dive site 'Cape Kri', which is just a few minutes away from a resort. Dr. G. Allen recorded the world record of 374 different species of reef fish during 1 dive, making this the richest dive site in the world!

Mantas were on top of each other and on top of divers at the Manta Ridge site. In December 2018, we saw a number of oceanic manta rays at the Blue Magic site. However, during our last visit in December 2019 – January 2020, we were not lucky, and we did not see any mantas at this site, probably because there were too many divers over there. To satisfy our hunger for mantas, they took us to a 'secret' manta cleaning station, where there are no other divers and nine mantas.



At the same time, there were many blacktip sharks, wobbegong sharks, crocodile fish, huge schools of jacks, barracudas, sweetlips, etc., etc., etc, particularly at Cape Kri, but elsewhere as well. This time I had a very memorable encounter with a big school of large humphead parrotfish at Sardines Reef. Usually, they are in rush, but this time, it felt that they adopted me, and were grazing on corals all around me for about 20 min.

The current in the Dampier Strait can be very strong, but guides are very careful to avoid any trouble. First of all, the seafloor is only at about 30 – 40 m, so you could not get into much trouble to begin with. Secondly, at dive sites with strong currents, the guides instructed us to stay at a depth with a mild current (lets say between 15 and 20 m), and only at the end of the dive, when you ascend higher, you get picked up by the stronger current. It is like a ride on a high-speed train – a lot of fun. At the Manta Ridge site, they

even secured a rope to accommodate a safety stop because the current was so strong.



In any case, fish are where the current is, and on a number of occasions we had to move to another dive site because there was no current (and not many fish). At another site (Manta Ridge), we had to wait for a few hours for the current, but it was worth it, many mantas came with the current.

We like night dives as well. My wife was very hesitant to go the first time, but at the end she was very happy that she did it, and asked to go again, and again.

At the resort, we met several experienced divers, who after trying various resorts in Raja Ampat 'settled' for Sorido Bay Resort, which in their opinion was the best. It looks like we got addicted to it as well, and we are planning another visit in 2021.

Visibility: During the 'manta' season (December - February) visibility is not the greatest, as the water is full of nutrients and plankton, which is problematic for photography and videography. You could see it in my videos. At the resort they told us that the best visibility is during September – October. This is the time when professional video crews are coming to the island. Next time, we are planning to come during that period in a search for an infinite visibility.

IS DIVING SUITABLE FOR NOVICES?

The answer is YES. You could take any dive course at the resort, and Chris, the resort manager and a dive instructor, is a phenomenal guy, who will provide you with any training you need.

Despite some dive sites at Dampier Strait, including the famous Cape Kri, being known for strong currents, there are many other sites with very mild to no current, and the guides are extremely careful about where they take you to.

My wife, who used to be only a snorkeler, completed her PADI certification just four months before this trip and had only 20 dives, but she did not have any problems. Because we had one dive guide for two of us, he was helping my wife, while I was doing my 'video' stuff. So, there should be no concern for a novice diver.

HOW ABOUT SNORKELLING?

This is a fantastic place for snorkelling as well, and many people come to the resort just for snorkelling. My wife was snorkelling during our first visit and was very happy with it.

FOOD

In December 2019 the resort hired a new chef and this improved their menu significantly. Our preferred diet is a whole-food plant-based diet, and the new chef met with us on the very first day, where we explained to him what we like, and he worked very hard to satisfy our dietary preferences. We are very grateful to the resort management for taking care of this.

EXCURSIONS

Do not miss an opportunity to visit Fam Islands. It is a day trip, and it includes diving at Melissa Garden, which is a beautiful dive site, one of my favorite.



WARNING:

And finally, a WARNING: *"By visiting this resort, you may become addicted to it, and may want to visit it again and again in spite of its remoteness and cost."*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

You could visit and subscribe to my [YouTube Channel](#) for more exciting travel and technical videos.

Also, you could watch several of my videos about diving in Raja Ampat on YouTube:

[Sweetlips of Raja Ampat](#)

[Mantas of Raja Ampat](#)

[Humphead Parrotfish of Raja Ampat](#)

[Mandarinfish Mating at Jetty of Sorido Bay Resort in Raja Ampat](#)

[The BBC Cuttlefish in Raja Ampat](#)

[Screensaver: Sorido Bay Resort - Papua Diving](#)

[Diving in Misool, Raja Ampat](#)