

# In awe of coral reefs at Port Dickson

Despite its somewhat unclear waters, Zulkifly Ab Latif takes a dive into the popular Blue Lagoon to explore its reefs and their inhabitants

The limited visibility while diving near Blue Lagoon is a challenge some divers seek.



**T**HE ride-hailing driver glances at the scuba diving fins peeking out from the sides of my backpack as I get out of the car.

"Can see, ah, down there?" he asks, referring to the waters of Tanjung Biru, a small but popular secluded bay just before Cape Rachado, about 17 kilometres south of Port Dickson town.

As I reply with a short "I hope so", he shakes his head slightly and then drives away, perhaps thinking I may not be so sane. His scepticism is understandable, since not many people have heard of people scuba diving in Port Dickson.

Although the coastal town of Port Dickson is famed as a seaside playground and boasts of some of the most visited beach resorts on the west coast of Malaysia, describing the waters of PD as crystal clear would be a stretch of the imagination.

Despite its somewhat murky waters, there is an abundance of marine life here, namely its treasure of coral reefs, said to be one of the among the last few remaining off the west coast of Malaysia.

## DIVING INTO THE LAGOON

I am gathered with 18 other scuba divers here at Tanjung Biru, more popularly known as Blue Lagoon. The beach here is a favourite picnic spot, since the waters are particularly calm and shallow, perfect for little children to frolic in.

The beach is more crowded today thanks to the Eco Fest Action Dive, the main reason I am here. The dive is part of a programme known as Eco Fest Eco District, organised by the recreational club, Mountain Diver, in cooperation with Negri Sembilan Fisheries Department, Port Dickson Municipal Council and Negri Sembilan Tourism Board.

It is low tide and it is quite a walk from the beach to the boats out at the water's edge. My bare feet sink slightly into the soft sand, weighed down by the scuba diving equipment on my back. I begin to understand how the bay is so very popular among families - large expanses of mudflats and sandbanks emerge during low tide, creating shallow pools of water that children can safely play in.

The boat ride to the dive spot of Blue Lagoon takes mere minutes and before I realise it, most of the other scuba divers are already in the water. Splintering into two groups, we descend to a depth of six



Sea turtles were also released at the Blue Lagoon by the Department of Fisheries during the Eco Fest Eco District event.

metres, where I finally get a glimpse of the hidden corals of Port Dickson.

The dive experience is just as I expected it to be - with limited visibility, ranging between four and five metres. Through the green tinted water, long stretches of soft and hard coral can be seen, with an abundance of nudibranchs and sea anemones, the latter also serving as homes for vibrant orange and white striped Clownfish.

Slowly making our way along the reef, the fins of a fellow diver in front of me briefly grazes the sea bed, stirring up muddy silt that further deteriorates the limited visibility. Without a doubt, scuba diving at the Blue Lagoon is best described as muck diving, with a more focused approach on spotting small critters in nooks and crannies instead of admiring vast expanses of coral reefs.

Ascending to the surface at the end of our dive, I spot tiny human forms high up a nearby ridge. These are hikers atop Bukit Batu Putih, a popular hiking spot within Tanjung Tuan that provides a wonderful view of the bay below. The Blue Lagoon is

Clownfish swim through the tentacles of sea anemones at the Blue Lagoon dive spot.





### **MOUNTAIN DIVER RECREATIONAL CLUB**

THE Mountain Diver Recreational Club has been around since 2015. The club actively promotes nurturing and preserving the eco-system, both on land and underwater, as well as maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Registering 50 members (both registered and online), the club actively organises outdoor activities such as scuba diving trips and hill or mountain plogging in Malaysia and neighbouring regions.

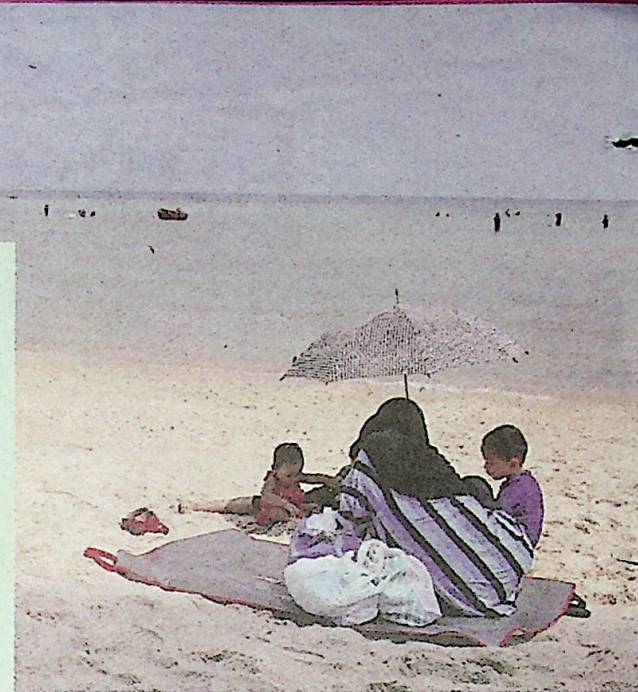
Besides that, Mountain Diver has also participated in various CSR and volunteering programmes such as Special Ability Diver hosted by Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, and Dive Heart International in Pulau Bidong, Terengganu, in 2018.

For more information on future activities organised at Blue Lagoon by Mountain Divers, visit <http://Facebook.com/ecodistrict.official>.

actually right beside Tanjung Tuan, making the area a destination for hiking as well as seaside activities.

### **MARINE PARK**

I am back on the beach of Blue Lagoon, along with other participants of the conservation event. About 20 hawksbill and green sea turtles are being released into the sea by the state's Fishery Department with hopes that they will survive and thrive. The turtles have a fighting chance here since the waters around Tanjung Tuan and the Blue Lagoon have been gazetted since 1994 as a fishing-protected area



*Family picnics are a common sight during the weekends.*

under the Fisheries Act 1983.

Realising the ecological importance of the area, the department is also working to further conserve the area by proposing it be gazetted as a protected Marine Park. If realised, the waters and coral reefs of Blue Lagoon would be better protected under the Marine Park status, with prohibitions against activities such as fishing, destruction or removal of corals and aquatic life, and riding jet skis.

Through beach cleanups and informative exhibitions, and support from various groups and organisations such as Trash Hero Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Oku Sentral and Tourism Malaysia, The Eco Fest Eco District event is a right step toward realising better conservation of the marine environment in Port Dickson.

The coastal town and Blue Lagoon perhaps needs no introduction as a visitor destination, but more dedicated efforts in promoting environmental awareness to protect its underwater treasures.



*Coral propagation technology was also on display by the Department of Fisheries during the event.*

*One of the released sea turtles swimming out to sea at Blue Lagoon, Port Dickson.*



*Macro photography subjects are plenty at the Blue Lagoon reef, such as mud branches.*