



Short form Diving Guide

Ligitan Coral Shelf

The New Sipadan Experience

Produced by The Oceanway Corporation Limited
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Index

The Ligitan group of 7 dive sites	2
About the Ligitan Coral Shelf.....	2
The Islands:.....	2
The Diving:.....	3
Contacts:	3
1. Soft and Nice	4
2. The Avalon Speedway	7
3. Sea-slide	9
4. The Treasure Trove.....	12
5. Ligitan Bommie #3	14
6. Ligitan Bommie #4	16
7. Cust Reef Bommie #5.....	18
Key to the maps:	20

This guide has been produced in good faith to help guide divers around the area known as the Ligitan Coral Shelf. It is not meant to replace a diving course, nor does it teach any diving skills. It assumes that all divers using this information and/or diving in this area will always adopt safe diving practices.

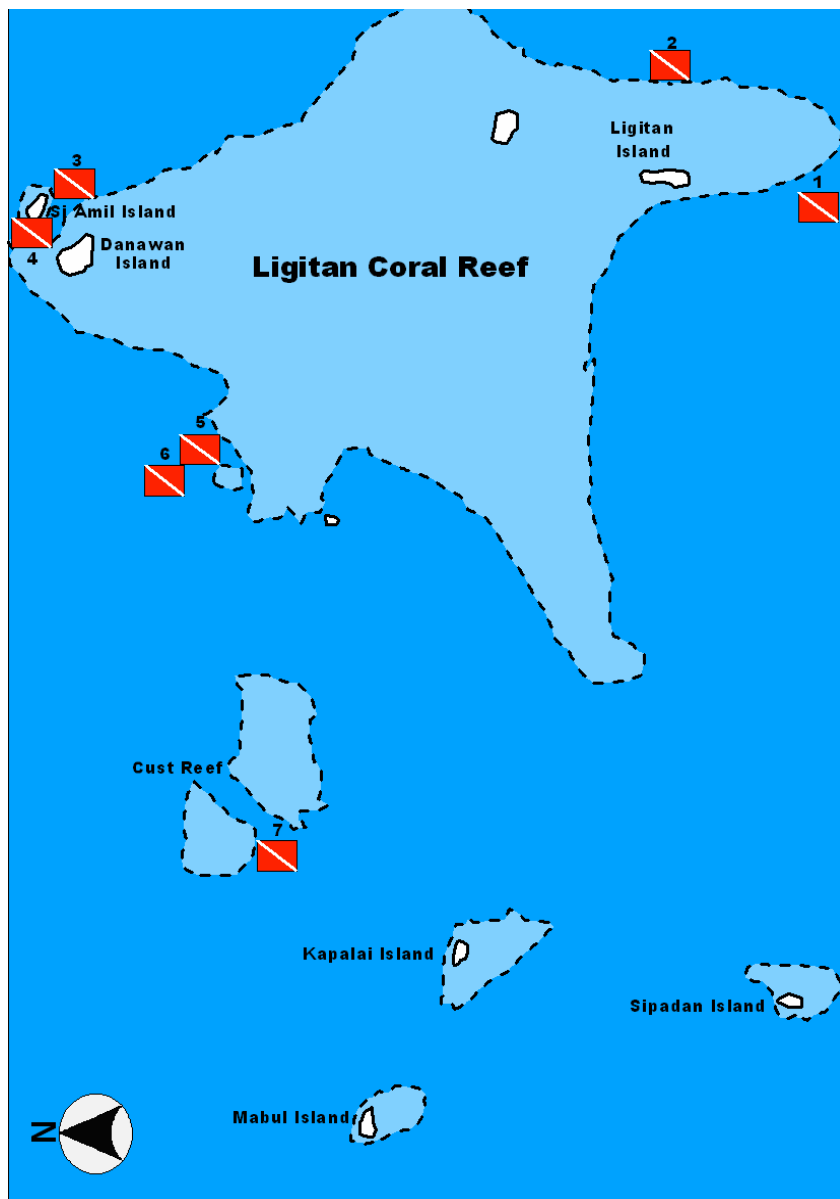
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The Ligitan group of 7 dive sites



About the Ligitan Coral Shelf.

The Ligitan Coral Shelf is a huge slab of coral to the north-east of Sipadan Island, Sabah, Malaysia. The area is still under military control, so divers need to get permission to enter this area for diving. Unfortunately illegal blast fishing is still being carried out in the area and there is evidence all over the place, but the bombers keep away from divers and the military usually step up patrols when divers are in the area. Sadly the southern area probably had a coral area similar, if not better than Sipadan Island, but alas only the very shallow areas remain, the fish bombers have reduced all areas deeper than ~3metres to rubble and now they continue to bomb the rubble further.

This initial survey was carried out over 5 days with six reasonable dive sites identified. No doubt more work in this area will uncover even more areas.

The Islands:

There are three islands on the Ligitan Coral Shelf. Each is geologically unique. Ligitan Island, in the South is a small sand atoll. Si Amil Island in the north is volcanic and the nearby Danawan Island is limestone-sandstone formation. It is highly likely that Si Amil is part of the same volcanic caldera (cone) as Sipadan Island.

Ligitan Island is very small has no settlement and possibly totally covers during a storm surge. Si Amil currently has a military base occupying part of an area of ruins that once was a Japanese sardine factory during the Second World War. (Please ask permission from the soldiers at the base before exploring the ruins). Danawan Island has a Kampong on the western side. Friendly people and even a small restaurant welcome the occasional and infrequent visitors.

The area around the eastern side of Si Amil Island is a wall dropping down to ~60m. The southern section of the wall is still in reasonably good condition however the north eastern side is suffering from a "mild case of over-bombing". Very little of the corals below 5m depth have survived.

The eastern side of Danawan Island is a sandy slope. In the north is a very interesting area (Treasure Trove), lots to see in shallow water. The

Sea dragons, Pipe Fish, giant Clams as well as the occasional sea snake make this area very interesting.

Further south, still on the eastern side, there is a sandy slope to 60m. This area only has patches of coral but a lot of interesting small animals to see including baby turtles, some smaller than 10cm, living amongst the corals.

Ligitan Island is tiny and located quite some distance from the edge of the Shelf. The area has been totally bombed out. Except for the area of 'soft and nice' and the 'Avalon Speedway'. Unfortunately new damage was observed in the already bombed out areas, indicating that this destructive practice is still on-going. The obvious lack of fish in this area also suggests that the bombing has not stopped.

The eastern side of the Shelf is fast and furious especially during changes of tide. The area is a gentle sandy slope with patches of coral in the shallows and the occasional leopard shark in deeper water. Turtle and blue spotted rays can be frequently seen.

The Ligitan bommies are an interesting group. Over 10 were observed, but only two explored up until now. These masses of coral rise up from the sandy seabed at 18m deep seabed. This type of area is perfect for novices who want to see nudibranchs, baby sweetlips, lots of coral (both hard and soft) as well as an assortment of other reef fishes. This area is still quite pristine with only the occasional area of fish bomb damage.

The Diving:

The size of the Shelf allows for a variety of different diving to be carried out from simple novice dives, all dives to fast drift dives. The eastern side is exposed and usually has a strong current (see the Avalon Speedway). The southern section is mostly walls down to 250metres in places. The northern side also consists of mainly sloping sandy areas down to depths of up to 40metres. The western side is perfect for novices in terms of 16~20metres depths with large sandy plateaus teeming with marine life. Look carefully the area and you will see Sea Dragons, baby turtles, nudibranchs and a myriad of other small animals. (The Treasure Trove and south east of Danawan Island).

Contacts:

For information about diving in this area:

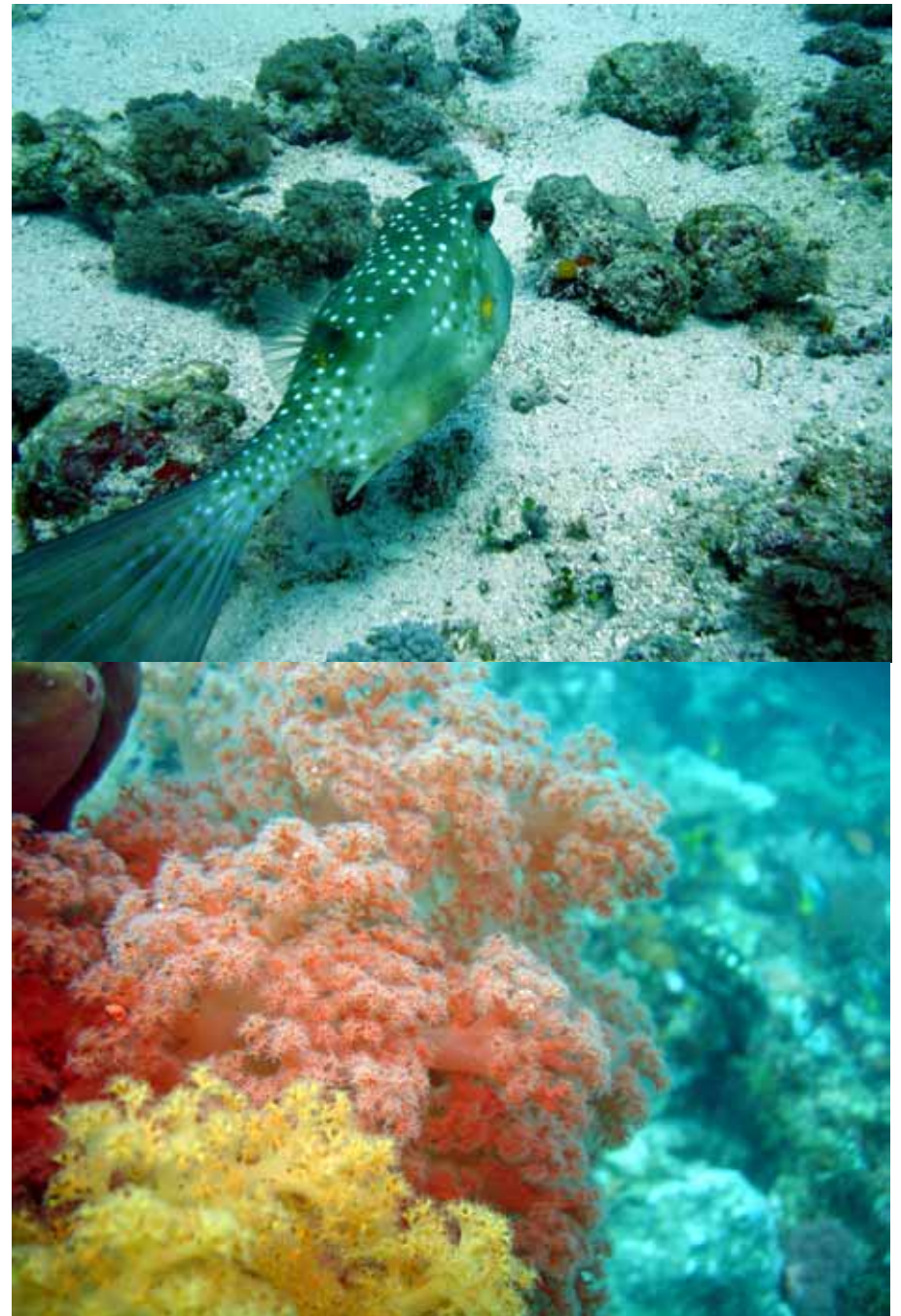
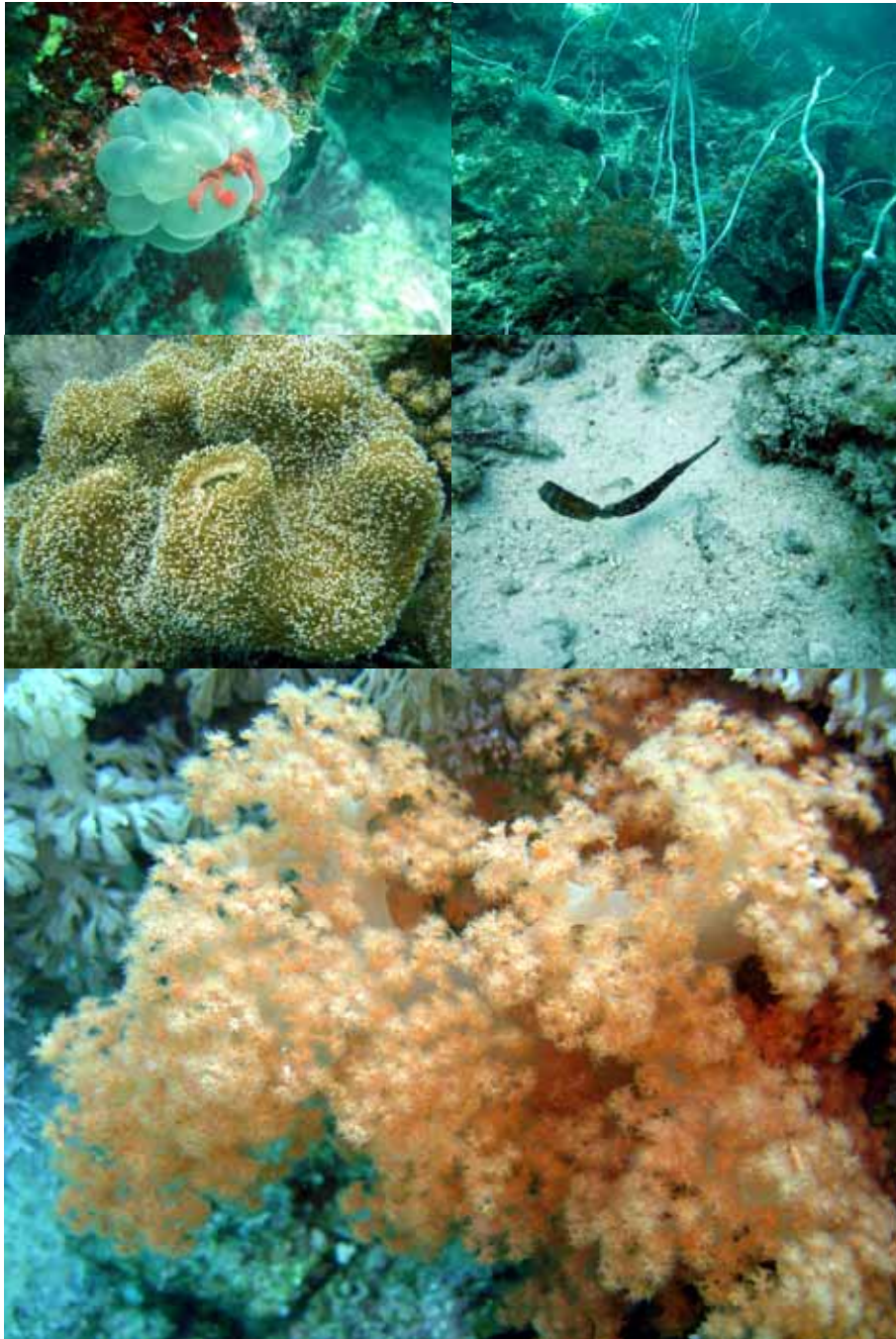
Sipadan Mabul Resort,
Lots A 1202-7 toll, 12/F, Wisma Merdeka phase 1,
Jalan Tun Razak, 88000 Kota Kinabalu,
Sabah, Malaysia.

Mailing Address: P O box 15571
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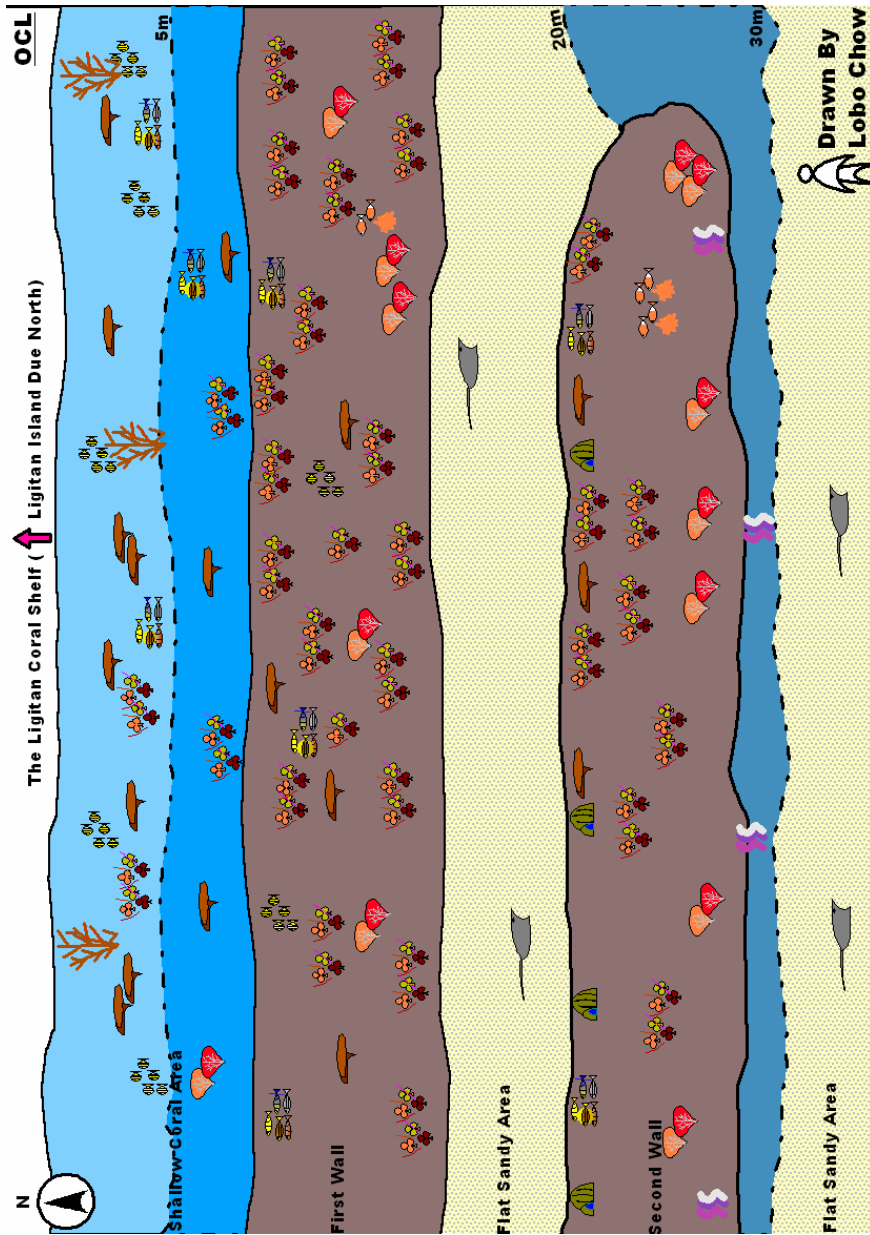
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This area is remote and borders on Indonesia. It is also relatively isolated. It is sensible to make sure that boats visiting this area are reliable have plenty of fuel and water and have a radio for communication. The Kampon and Military Base may be of assistance in the northern area of the Shelf. In the southern area there is very little chance of any assistance. It is prudent for dive boats to operate in pairs when visiting these areas.



Soft and Nice---Area Map



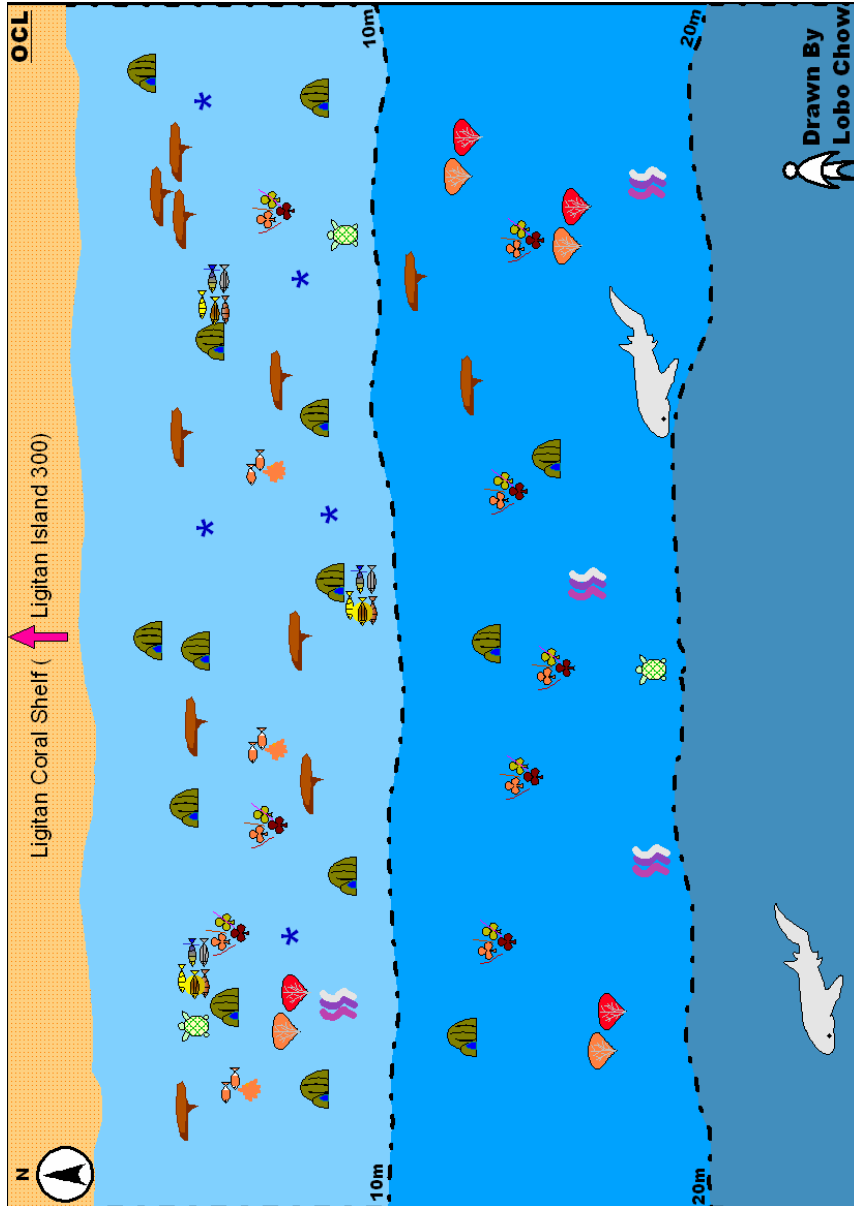
Dive 1---Soft & Nice

- General:** Start this dive with Ligitan Island due north of the boat. This dive is around the western side of the south-eastern end of the Ligitan Coral Shelf. The cover is predominantly soft corals, with some hard corals particularly in the shallow waters.
- Current:** Moderate usually towards the east. Sometimes the surface current is stronger than the mid water at high tide probably due to the water flowing over the Shelf in the shallows. Moderate to mild current can be experienced on the exposed side of this area. Normally the northern side is the most exposed. It is a good idea to drop down into a protected gully as soon as you enter the water on this dive.
- Marine Life:** Sixty-eight species of soft coral and 45 species of hard coral so far recorded. Blue spotted rays, feather stars, barrel sponges, sea whips (*Junceella* sp. & *Cirripathes* spp.), Starfish, Boxfish, lobsters, ghost pipe fish etc. All of the boulders are covered in a sparse coating of hard and soft corals. The yellow coloured Gorgonians can be found on overhanging areas on the side of many boulders. Octopus and large fish are common in this area, with two Humphead Wrasse seen lurking in the distance during the first dive done here.
- Dive Tip:** Move slowly. The rays are very timid and can usually be found under corals. There are not many fish in this area, but more than most other areas. The corals on the first wall, down to the 18m shelf are very different than those on the second shelf. This area is very suitable for the novice diver with a new camera. This area has a lot to offer the diver who goes slow and looks for the animals that live in this area. On first view, the rocks look fairly barren, but actually there are a lot of unusual animals that can be found amongst the rocks.

2. The Avalon Speedway



The Avalon Speedway---Area Map



Dive 2---The Avalon Speedway

- General:** For those who like the thrill of speed but none of the effort. The Divemaster changes to the “Speed Master” for this fast and furious drift dive. Start the dive on the western side with Ligitan Island at about a 300° bearing from the boat – just past the large sand patch in the shallows ~2km up the eastern side of the Shelf. The normal dive time is 30mins but expect to travel at least 1.5~2km. Just drop in and go.
- Current:** Fast and furious. Slower in the shallows but at least 4 knots during the change of tide in deeper water (~18-20m). The inner sections of this dive area are sheltered and therefore not prone to the really strong currents. There is also the possibility of surge in the shallow areas.
- Marine Life:** Turtles and rays (effortlessly swimming against the current with a grace we can only dream about achieving). Feather stars, scattered mounds of hard and soft corals in shallow water, barrel sponge and leopard sharks in deeper water. They are fairly easy to see since the sea bed is almost featureless past 20m depth. The actual coral reef consists of patches reef formations in the shallows where all of the corals form boulders.
- Dive Tip:** Take a safety sausage so that you can be clearly visible on the surface. Things happen quickly so be prepared. Groups of divers should stay together as much as possible. Be careful that you do not overshoot the end of the shelf into depths of over 500m. This area is for those divers who like corals.

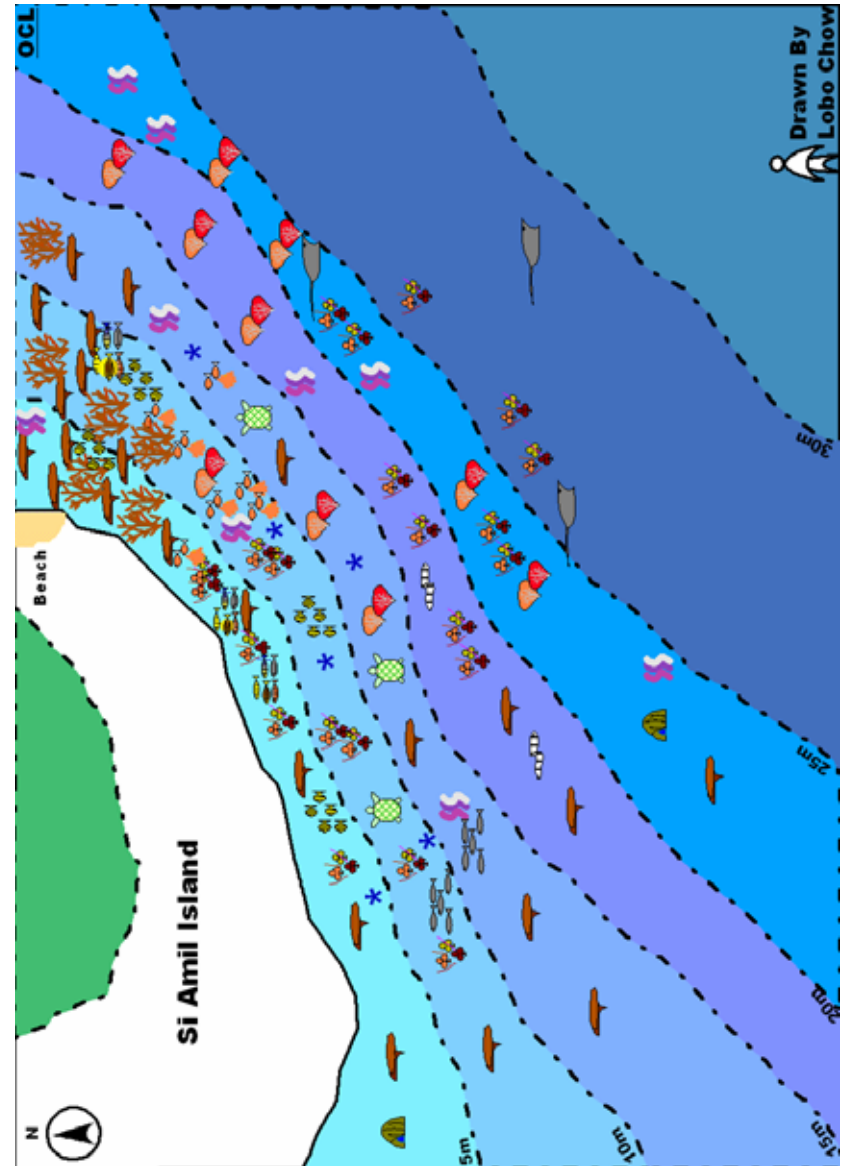


3. Sea-slide



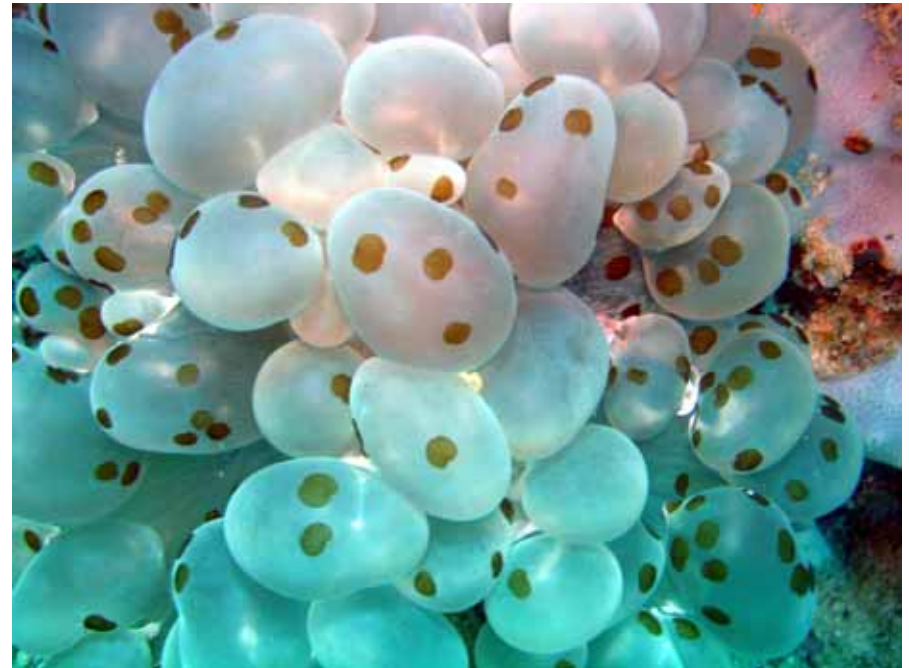


Sea-slide---Area Map



Dive 3---Sea-slide

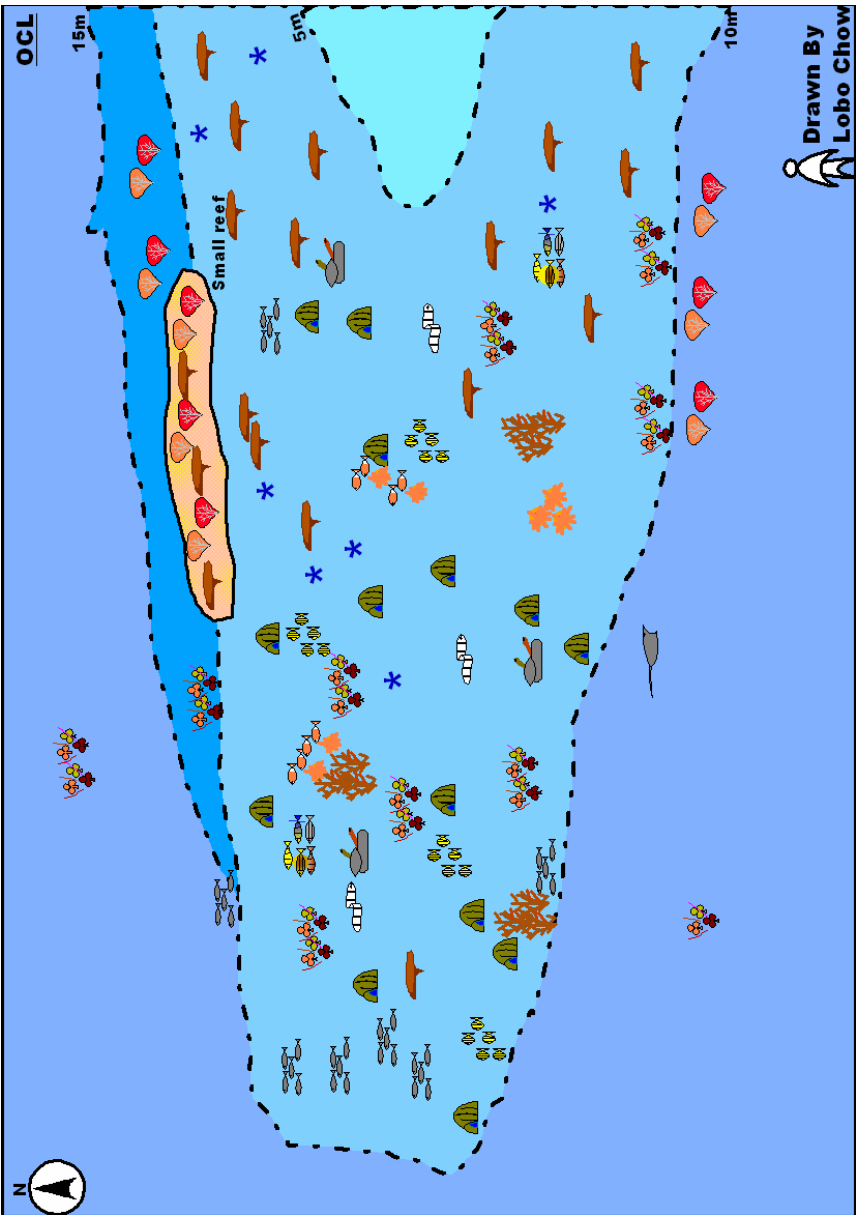
- General:** This dive is along the south east wall of Si Amil Island. Depths start at about 8m dropping down to 40m. The wall is a sloping sand wall with a lot of coral holding it together. The dive starts on the southern most tip of the Island and follows the wall in a northerly direction until the small beach. There is some scattered bomb damage but most of this dive is still in good condition. The very end of this dive is an area called the “Acropora Garden”. This area is perfect for a 5m safety stop with a lot to see.
- Current:** Even though this area is somewhat exposed there was very little current even during the change of tide. Note that the current changes direction during change of tide. This area is prone to very mild currents and some surge.
- Marine Life:** Hard corals and soft corals with good cover in the shallows. ~41 species of soft and ~ 50 species of hard corals. Many sea orange cucumbers clinging to sponges and dead coral. Clown fish in anemones, nudibranchs and sea fans. Feather stars and sponges can be seen along the walls. Juvenile turtles can also be observed under table corals in the shallow areas near the end of the dive. Watch out for the Wasp fish on the sandy areas. There are also scattered nudibranchs, cuttle fish and stone fish. Sea Pens can be seen below 15m.
- Dive Tip:** It is too easy to miss the small animals on this dive. The slope seems very dynamic hence the name Sea-slide. The clown fish are sort of friendly except for the black and yellow ones with 3 white stripes (A. Clarkii). Good dive for a camera. A very good dive for novice divers trying wall diving for the first time.



4. The Treasure Trove



The Treasure Trove---Area Map



Dive 4---The Treasure Trove

General: This dive is to the north of Danawan Island. The maximum depth is around 9m allowing for a long dive time in calm water. There is a large variety of marine life. This dive is a good family dive, safe, interesting and quite easy. An excellent first dive after certification. Also a good dive for young divers.

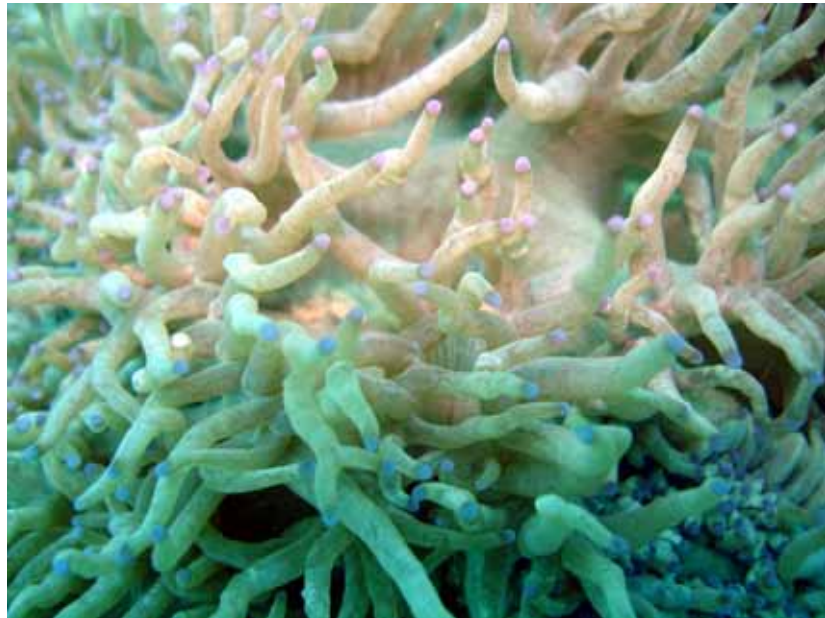
Current: Very mild. It changes direction as the tide changes

Marine Life: Too numerous to list it all. Lots of hard and soft corals, Sea snakes, baby turtles, Mantis Shrimps, feather stars, Sea Fans, nudibranchs, cuttle fish, Morey eels, pincushion, blue and mottled starfish.

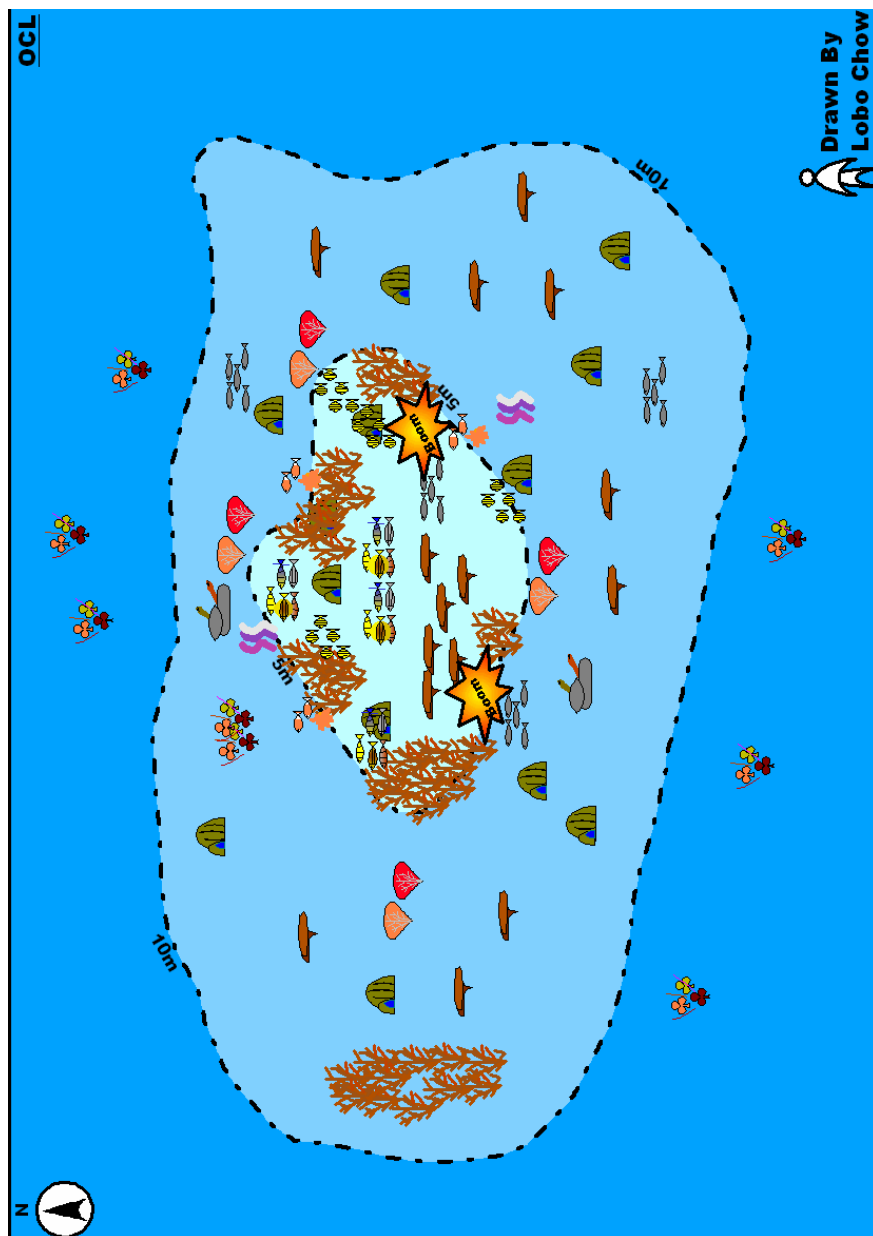
Dive Tip: Look in, over and around. Remember to keep a distance from the sea snakes and never swim over one; keep to one side. This whole area is a simple meander through a lot of marine life.



A map of the Ligitan Coral Reef area. The map shows the coastline of a large island with several smaller islands and reefs. Labels include: "Ligitan Island", "Daweran Island", "Ligitan Island", "Coat Reef", "Kigatan Island", "Sipatan Island", and "Makal Island". A red arrow points to the reef area near the coast. A compass rose is located in the bottom left corner.



Ligitan Bommie #3---Area Map



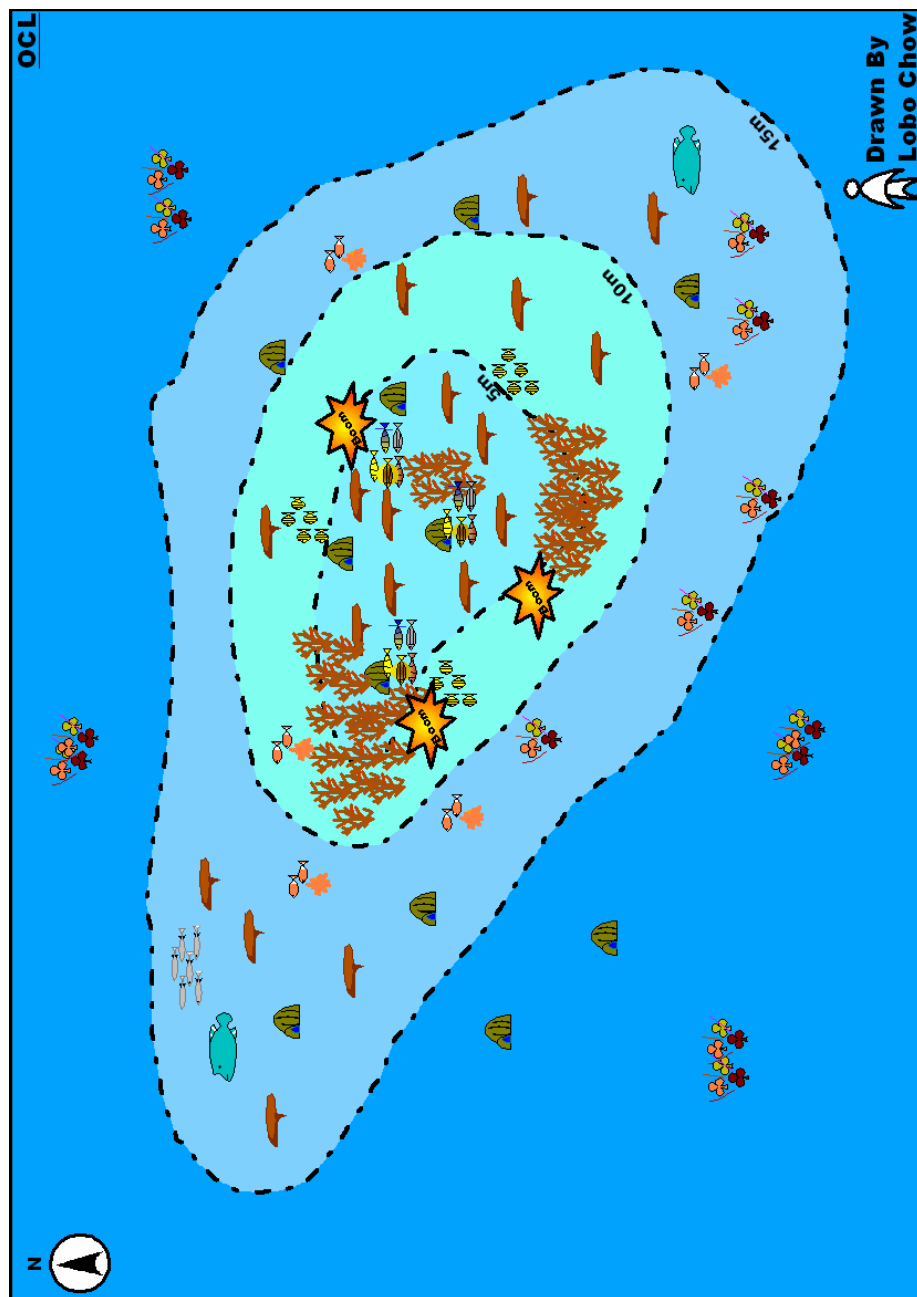
Dive 5---Ligitan Bommie #3

- General:** There are many coral bommies (>10) on the western side of the Ligitan Coral Shelf near the centre. Nos 3&4 are the two largest located furthest away from the Shelf and are obvious when heading there from Mabul. Number 3 is about 300m east of number 4. There is one smaller bommie situated on the southern side (follow 110° compass).
- Current:** Slight on this side of the shelf. This area is much protected.
- Marine Life:** Both soft and hard corals including stag, table corals and really large (>40cm across) fungi corals. Sea whips and cirrhipathes, flat worms, anemones feather stars. Baby sweetlips are also quite abundant. There is a lot of starfish, sea urchins and small fishes. Look for rays if you venture out over the sand.
- Dive Tip:** Swim around the base of the bommie at 15~18m depth then spiral up continuous to swim around it. Look for baby Sweetlips and nudibranchs. The top of the bommie is in about 5m of water so perfect for a safety stop.

6. Ligitan Bommie #4



Ligitan Bommie #4---Area Map



Dive 6---Ligitan Bommie #4

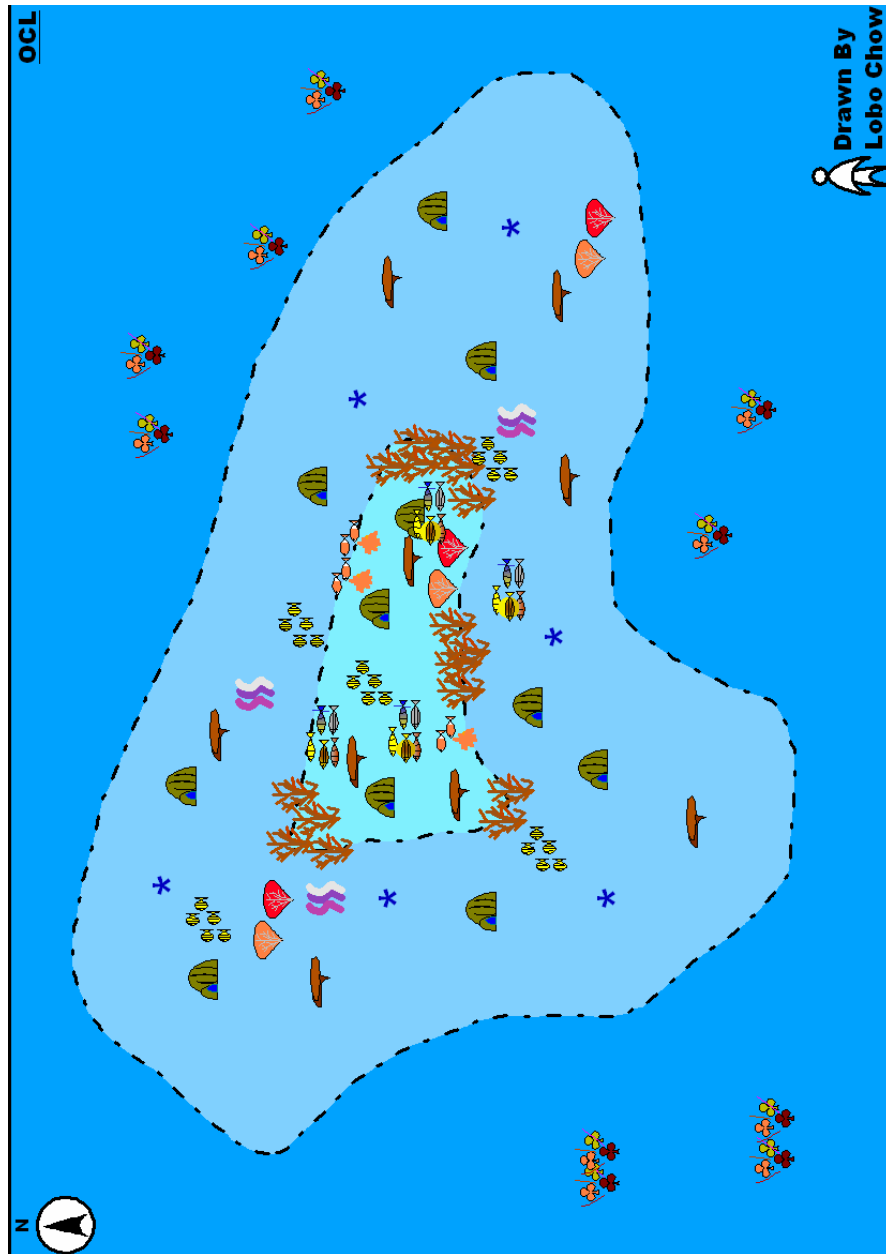
- General :** The largest and most furthest bommie from the Ligitan Coral Shelf. The area is very good for novice divers since visibility is reasonable, very little current and a sandy sea bet at 18m.
- Current:** Very mild but changes direction when tide changes.
- Marine Life:** Hard and Soft corals including stag horn and table corals. Sponges and anemones. (Look for the small white eels in these). Lion fish, large sea cucumbers and nudibranchs. This coral area has been bombed a lot more than Ligitan Bommie #3 but it seems that it was some time ago. The damaged area is slowly recovering.
- Dive Tip:** Dive this area the same as for Ligitan Bommie #3. Stand by diving at the bottom of the bommie and then slowly spiral up to the top for the safety stop. Take this dive very slowly.



7. Cust Reef Bommie #5



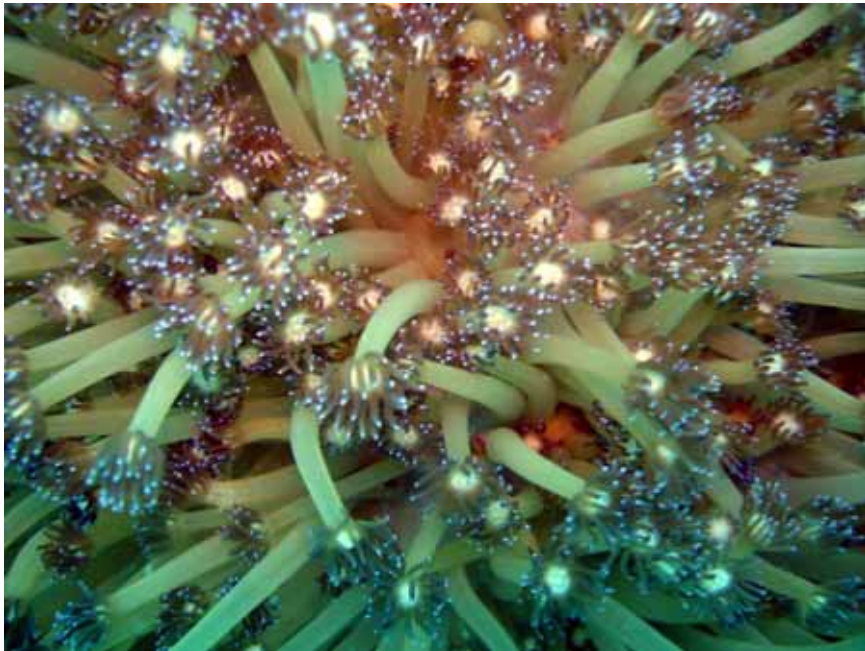
Cust Reef Bommie #5---Area Map



Dive 7---Cust Reef Bommie #5

- General : This is the largest of the bommies just inside the passage between the two sections of Cust Reef. This area is still actively being bombed so expect to see recent damage.
- Current: Mild but can get strong during the change of tide. This area is prone to very mild currents.
- Marine Life: Hard and soft corals including stag horn, sea whips and table corals. Most of the Porites corals have christmas tree worms in them. Sea fans, pincushion stars and feather stars. Catfish, clown fish and other reef fish are quite abundant. Look carefully for the white egg cowries.
- Dive Tip: As with all bommies start the dive by swimming around the base and then spiral up towards the top for the safety stop.





Key to the maps:

	Rocks		Banner fish.
	Rubbish		Large reef fish.
	Starfish area		Sargent majors.
	Anemone bed		Reef fish.
	Plate corals		Schooling fish
	Coral bommie		Clown fish
	Sea fans		Tuna
	Soft corals		Barracuda
	Sea whips		Ray
	Staghorn coral		Morays
	Bombed area		Turtle
			Leopard shark
			Shark
			Sea snake