

SODWANA

WORLD CLASS DIVING

Shona Lawson writes about the diving paradise from her base at Coral Divers.

IT'S QUIET AND PEACEFUL UNDER THE WATER, BUT FAR FROM BORING. Every flicker of movement could be something more interesting: a frogfish, a crocodile fish skittering across the sand, an eel sliding out of his crevasse. It's a kaleidoscope of colours and shapes and you never know when you'll see a sleeping turtle, eyeball a quizzical potato bass, and the shadow above could be a giant manta, or even a whale shark.



In summer Sodwana Bay is hot. The days are of course really warm and the water too, while the diving is nuclear. Sodwana's white sandy beaches and lush green forests provide a beautiful frame for the most magnificent reefs in southern Africa if not the world.

Turtles come here to lay eggs, dolphins are year-round entertainers, humpback and southern right whales sing as they pass close in-shore. The long beach is shaped like a fishing hook with the Jesser Point launch channel at the point of the fish-hook, and part of a marine reserve given World Heritage Site Status in 1999 and re-named iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

Coral reefs are the main attraction, and the magnet for sea-life and divers

alike. There are five bands of reefs, named for their distances away from Jesser Point: ¼-Mile, 2-Mile, 5-Mile, 7-Mile and 9-Mile. They are some of the southern-most reefs in the world, and at depths from 13m to 35 meters allow divers of all abilities a new challenge. With the reefs adjacent to steep drop-offs (the prehistoric depth dwelling coelacanth is also found here) juvenile fish can find sanctuary and larger predators can hunt.

Starting with whale sharks and moving down to nudibranchs, a checklist of species is simply too long – more than 1,400 species of fish can be found on the reefs, which themselves are made from all shapes, sizes and classes of corals.

Coral Divers – the perfect base

Coral Divers is your ideal base because of its easy accessibility to all the dive sites, top instructors, good equipment, reasonable dive prices, great package deals and affordable accommodation.

Coral Divers offers something for everyone, rustic wooden cabins lead off the main building built around a swimming pool and deck. The daily routine revolves round diving. Guests can check into en-suite bedrooms, or take the budget 'glamping' option of beds with mattresses in domed safari tents. Dive-planning starts at 7pm every evening, where guests are matched with a dive master, instruc-

tor, and a dive site.

You can hire all the gear you require or hire only that which you need. Coral Divers hires the 'softs' like a wetsuit, mask, fins and snorkel, as well as BCD, regulator, weights and a tank. The resort can also fill your own cylinders with compressed air or nitrox. And if it's all unfamiliar jargon to a newbie, the on-site dive teams are at hand to explain and interpret.

Dive Options

Dive options range from PADI-accredited Discover Scuba courses which get you into the sea within a few hours of pool work and theory to a full professional diving career development programme.