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Expedition Banda

Join the *SV Infinity* as they make their way to Banda, Indonesia's legendary spice islands and uncover a web of mystery.

By **Abigail Alling, President PCRF, and Orla Doherty, Managing Director PCRF.**

The call to Banda was beamed over the Banda Sea, as the *SV Infinity* set sail from Alor Island towards the legendary spice islands—a land pulsing with legends of the Chinese Treasure Fleets and a history of spice traders and gruesome nutmeg wars.

Sailing steadfastly, we arrived and slipped into this hidden land, to drop anchor alongside Gunung Api (fire mountain): An active volcano that loomed over our heads with puffs of smoke still rising from its crater. Its last mighty roar in 1988 destroyed much of the reef fringing the island and our mission here was to study the coral reefs that have grown in the course of the last 20 years after the lava flow.

Banda was bustling with merriment and excitement—an entire microcosm tucked away in the vast ocean and enveloped by an unmistakable presence of past eras. Battles between colonial powers, over the prized nutmeg, were tangible in the forts and canons found on almost all the Banda Isles. Poised on the hill of Banda Neira is Fort Belgica—a massive pentagon structure that was built by the Dutch in 1611 to protect their stronghold on the Banda Islands and all nutmeg trading.

Over two centuries, the Bandanese almost disappeared, in a series of massacres, but have now risen from their troubled times as a new people representing many nationalities, loving their land, heritage and history. Banda's waters are as rich as its land. We found beaked whales, spotted dolphins, exotic mandarin fish, cuttlefish, an eight metre tall barrel sponge, sea fans spanning three metres and countless bluestreak fusiliers.

Exuding warmth and generosity, Des Alwi joined us under his yellow-roofed hotel, situated in the heart of Banda Neira. He entertained us with stories of his grandfather who travelled to Holland in the early 1900s, to present a



Mark Van Thillo & Abigail Alling relaxing next to a giant sea fan.

pearl (the size of a quail's egg) to the Queen of Holland. He had spent his youth growing up with Indonesia's first Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir, and Vice President Mohammed Hatta, who were both exiled to Banda by the Dutch prior to Indonesia's independence.

Inspired by the great biodiversity of the reefs, Des Alwi has worked throughout his life to preserve Banda's unique heritage and at his invitation, PCRF together with members of RM are returning to Banda to initiate a marine conservation programme in the Spring of 2008. We welcome you in this endeavor! For more information, please contact PCRF Singapore representative Karenne Tun, e-mail: karennetun@gmail.com.

"Join the Voyage" of the SV Infinity, Raffles Marina's "club at sea" in Nautique and PCRF's homepage at www.pcrf.org. Together on our mission to conserve and protect the coral reefs and oceans, we can make a difference!



Captain Klaus Eiberle, Des Alwi, Abigail Alling on board SV Infinity.

Gunung Api, Fire Mountain.