

An underwater photograph of a scuba diver in a cave. The diver is on the left, wearing a blue tank and a patterned wetsuit. The cave walls are dark and textured, and the water is a deep blue. Light from above creates a bright opening at the top of the cave. Another diver is visible in the distance.

THE MOMENT YOU DISCOVER ANOTHER WORLD

— DIVING EXPERIENCES — IN VANUATU

From colourful reefs teeming with tropical fish and gentle sea turtles, to underwater caves and forgotten shipwrecks, Vanuatu's waters are the perfect destination for scuba diving.

ANSWER.
THE CALL OF
Vanuatu

12.38pm The Cathedral, Efate Island

VANUATU'S TOP 10 DIVING EXPERIENCES

While snorkelling can offer a glimpse into the world below Vanuatu's gentle waves, scuba diving immerses you in it. Some of the world's best dive sites can be found off the islands of Santo, Efate and Tanna, with tours suitable for every level from novice through to expert.

1

The SS President Coolidge | At almost 200m long, this Second World War US troop carrier is one of the world's largest and most accessible wrecks. Explore the jeeps, ammunition and barber's chair in the cargo holds, enter the old ballroom to kiss the statue of 'The Lady', then descend 70m for the ultimate photo next to the ship's name.

2

Million Dollar Beach | So called because US forces dumped millions of dollars' worth of military equipment into the ocean at the end of the Second World War. Now encrusted with colourful corals, this artificial reef made from jeeps, tractors, cranes and bulldozers is a playground for divers.

3

Gardens of anemones | Everywhere you go in Vanuatu, you're likely to find anemone gardens in the reef shallows. One of the largest can be found on a dive called the *Bonzer Wreck*, a five minute boat ride from Hideaway Island Resort. This bright orange anemone garden is several metres in diameter – and is home to dozens of curious clownfish.

4

Awe-inspiring caverns | Perhaps the most impressive of Vanuatu's many caverns and canyons is *The Cathedral*, a 10 minute boat ride from Port Vila. The entrance to the cavern is tall and wide, about 22m deep at the sandy bottom, and it gets narrower as you approach the 'pulpit' at the apex.

5

Dugongs | Dugongs may be shy creatures, but there are many to be found in the waters off Vanuatu. The trick to meeting one? Go for lots of dives to increase your chances! They can be found around all large islands north of Efate.

6

Giant moray eels | You'll often find moray eels peeking out of the coral walls and bommies that surround Vanuatu's islands, but the most famous is an enormous old girl called *Nessie*. She lives on the *SS President Coolidge* and is pretty tame – as she's used to the thousands of divers that visit her home.

7

Turtles | Hawksbill and green turtles can often be seen nibbling on seagrass and coral reefs. But the best place to see turtles is at *Tranquillity Island Eco Resort* in Efate. Home to a turtle sanctuary that raises hatchlings until they're large enough to fend for themselves, the resort's house reef is also a great place to see turtles.

8

Underwater post office | At *Hideaway Island*, you can send a postcard back home from the world's only underwater post office. A short swim from the beach, the post office is located a couple of metres underwater in the middle of a coral garden. Waterproof postcards can be purchased at the resort's gift shop, and the post office is open every day.

9

Plenty of fish and coral, but few people | In Vanuatu, diving takes place in small groups, in isolated and clean locations. So you will feel like you have the ocean pretty much to yourself. For the most pristine locations and crystal clear waters, head to Tanna.

10

Amazing coral diversity | From fields of staghorn coral and towering pinnacles, to enormous brain corals and colourful fans, Vanuatu is home to some of the most diverse dive sites. One of the most spectacular is *Owen's Reef* near *Tranquillity Island Eco Resort*, where a visiting marine biologist once said he'd never seen so many different species of coral on a single dive.

OUR TOP 10 CORAL GARDENS & REEFS

Vanuatu is well known for its wreck diving, but look beyond the Second World War artefacts and you'll discover an amazing world of coral gardens. Here is our pick of the best sites in Vanuatu.

1 **Owen's Reef, Tranquillity Island, Efate |**
At a depth of about 25 metres, this reef's coral landscape changes at every turn. You'll find enormous porites, brain corals, staghorns, colourful soft corals, large sea fans and whips that sway in the current. All while patient groupers and sweetlips wait their turn at the various cleaning stations around the reef.

3 **Tutuba Island, Espiritu Santo |** Around a 30-40 minute boat ride from Luganville, this is one of the island's most popular dive sites. Enormous plate coral fields and a seemingly endless variety of soft and hard corals lead into swim-throughs – gloomy trenches and caves where you can spot lobsters guarding their homes. Look up and you'll likely see schools of tropical fish, cruising barracudas and occasionally eagle rays and reef sharks.

5 **West Side Story, Hideaway Island, Efate |**
A five minute boat ride from Hideaway Island, this seriously huge field of staghorn coral comes to within six metres of the surface. Despite the large number of anemone fish to be found here, this colourful site looks more like a scene from Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* than *Finding Nemo*. At its centre, a towering hard coral structure resembles a fairy tale castle, surrounded by forests of staghorn coral instead of thorny woods.

7 **Twin Bommies, Efate |** This popular dive site about 15 minutes from downtown Port Vila consists of two large coral 'bombora' as well as a steep wall peppered with brightly coloured coral formations. You'll find a huge variety of fish, including butterfly fish, lionfish and leaf scorpionfish. Dive trips to Twin Bommies and other sites off Efate can be arranged through Big Blue.

9 **Tasman, Efate |** Shipwrecks are one thing, but how about the opportunity to dive a plane wreck? For those experienced enough to dive 40m into the murky depths, the wreckage of the ill-fated *Qantas S26 Sandringham Flying Boat* awaits. It's mostly intact, and divers can climb through the cockpit, making this dive one for the bucket list.

2 **Bonzer Wreck anemone garden, Hideaway Island, Efate |**
The star attraction here isn't the wreck. It's the spectacular anemone garden – just a five minute boat ride from Hideaway Island Resort. Situated on top of a large coral bommie, it's home to dozens of clownfish, butterfly fish and shoals of bright orange and purple basslets.

4 **Fan Garden, Aore Island, Espiritu Santo |**
A few metres off the beach on Aore Island, this drift dive has to be seen to be believed. You'll feel a bit like Alice in Wonderland as you drift with the current through a forest of seriously enormous sea fans. In the shallows, you'll find colourful nudibranchs and anemones, military artefacts and even the odd mantis shrimp.

6 **Blue Hole One + Blue Hole Two, Tanna |**
The volcanic island of Tanna offers a dramatic underwater landscape with blue water caves, swim-throughs and reef walls. Volcano Island Divers provides access to the dive sites located off the island – the four connected sinkholes that make up Blue Hole One and Blue Hole Two, with its intricate caverns, tunnels and grottos. Keep your eyes peeled for turtles, moray eels, reef sharks, rays and dugongs.

8 **Cindy's Reef, Santo |** A relatively simple dive that's great for beginners, you'll find a huge variety of corals here, including the native 'potato head' coral. Cindy's Reef is also home to an abundance of marine life, with a myriad of tropical fish as well as turtles and sharks.

10 **Mele Reef, Efate |** This large reef offers divers a vast range of corals and marine life to explore. The main reef rises to around 6 metres below the surface and a dive here is ideal for beginners. The bay that surrounds Mele Reef is also home to two major wrecks worth exploring – the *MV Konanda*, which is ideal for beginners and, for more experienced divers, the *Star of Russia* – a grand vessel crafted by the same builders as the *Titanic*.



DIVE OPERATORS IN VANUATU

Big Blue Scuba Diving, Port Vila
bigbluevanuatu.com

Hideaway Island Resort, Port Vila
hideaway.com.vu

Tranquillity Island Resort, Port Vila
tranquillitydive.com

Sailaway Cruises, Port Vila
sailawayvanuatu.com

Nautilus Watersports, Port Vila
nautilus.com.vu

Santo Dive, Espiritu Santo
santodive.com

Volcano Island Divers, Tanna
whitegrasstanna.com

Pacific Dive, Espiritu Santo
pacificdive.net

For bookings or more information, go to
vanuatu.travel/en/experience/diving