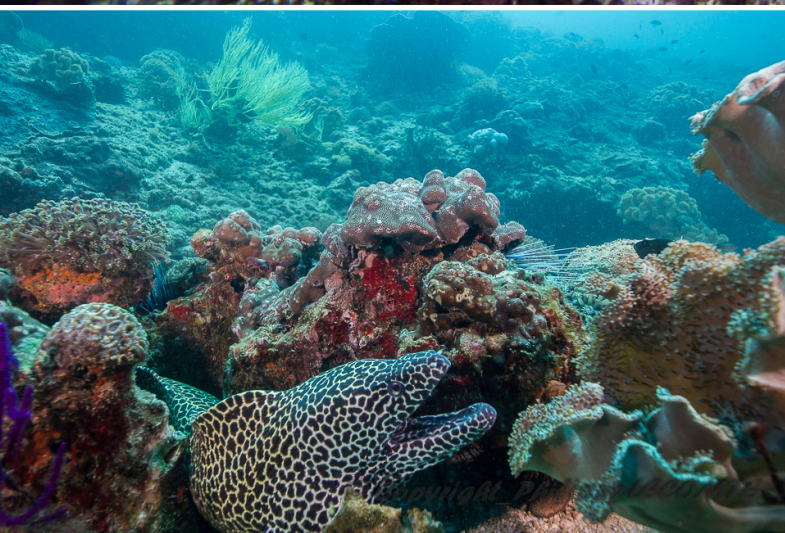


A full-page underwater photograph serves as the background. It depicts a sea turtle with a patterned shell and head swimming towards the right. Below the turtle is a diverse coral reef with various types of coral and some green algae. The water is a deep, clear blue, and many small, dark fish are visible in the upper portion of the frame, swimming near the surface where light rays penetrate.

THE DAYMANIYATS

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY **PHILIPPE LECOMTE**

The clear blue water was so amazing that all of us thought we were in the Red Sea.



When summer arrives in the UAE, most people think about going on holiday back to their home countries. In fact, it could be a good chance to spend a weekend in a little paradise not too far from Abu Dhabi or Dubai. The wonderful "Daymaniyat islands" in Oman are accessible within a 4 hour drive via Al Ain.

For many divers, it's one of the best dive sites around here. The closest dive centre to dive there is in the Al Sawadi Beach Resort, 70km before Muscat. You have to drive towards Sohar, a little town on the border of the sea. Be aware of the road works that run all along the stretch to travel and the danger of surprises such as goats, pedestrians or crazy trucks.

I often go and dive the Daymaniyats in June. Firstly, the prices fall this time of year and secondly, they're the best dive sites around. This year I had asked 3 good friends to come along with me. We had booked our dates and headed down to Al Sawadi.

When we reached the resort, we were surprised to discover Extra Divers was moving to another resort further south of Muscat. Euro Divers is set to run the future dive operation hereafter.

After a shower and a good night's sleep, we woke up at 7am, enough time to eat our breakfast. At 8am we headed over to the dive

centre in order to fill out the forms and to prepare our gear. With a sunny day and no wind upon us, we loaded the boat waiting for us on the beach. The captain gave his usual dive briefing before starting the boat and heading to our first dive site, Wadi Junn.

A 20-25 minute journey by boat and we arrive at our destination, the second island. With the clear weather, the first island can be seen just after passing the little peninsula of the Al Sawadi point. The Daymaniyats are made up of a group of 9 islands with a total area of 100 hectares, 18kms offshore. The Daymaniyat islands are a nature reserve. Turtles, dolphins, whale sharks and whales are regularly seen swimming around here.

The clear blue water was so amazing that all of us thought we were in the Red Sea. Diving at the Daymaniyats is not difficult and can be done by divers of all levels. Little walls, boulders on sandy bottoms, caves or fields of soft and hard corals are some of the beauty that the Daymaniyats offers. The marine life is vast with schools of Fusilier, Damselfish and Bat fish.

You will see new fish around these islands, in comparison to the Musandam or Khor Fakkan. One common resident to this place is the Leopard Shark. We unfortunately did not cross paths with this amazing shark this time round. But we know that he is around and commonly seen.

Macro life and huge Leopard Eels are also very common. Hawksbill or Green Turtles swim all around these islands. They even nest on some of the long beaches. They feast on some of the delicious corals or crabs here. During one dive, we managed to stay with a Hawksbill Turtle for about 15 minutes. She was eating a soft coral and our company was not disturbing her.

During the safety stop, we normally glide over some calm and large areas of Acropora. If you carefully look inside, you'll spot some crabs or a yellow goby looking out at you. Do not hesitate to look inside the many caves. You'll find Stingrays resting or disappear through a

cloud of sand. As an offshore island, you will often experience thermoclines during the dives, so be prepared to pack both a thin and thick wetsuit. Cold water is not very comfortable and difficult to manage!

The dive center offers two dives in the morning with a surface interval in a safe creek. If there are enough people on the trip, four divers or more, the dive centre can also offer two afternoon dives. It's also a chance to see the reef change in ambiance as the colours change with the late afternoon light. A sunset dive is interesting at the best of times. Keep in mind that the Daymaniyats are a good destination all year round.