

DIVING PROHIBITED IN MALAYSIA BECAUSE OF CORAL BLEACHING



Malaysia has gained a reputation for offering some of the top diving spots in the world. However, recently up to 90% of local coral has been damaged by coral bleaching and the government acts immediately. A dozen sites have been closed already.

Malaysia is renowned for its wonderful marine world and nearly half a million divers come here every year to admire some of the world's most popular diving sites. The attention is fantastic as it helps raise awareness of some of the problems associated with global warming, yet on the other hand, such an amount of divers continuously returning to a few spots has a very negative impact. **Due to the rising sea temperature (from 27°C to 29°C), the corals have started to develop a condition known as bleaching.** Between 60 - 90% are already affected and without a 'rest' they will surely die.

The Department of Marine Parks has been very clear about necessary actions to be taken in order to give the corals a chance to recover; **twelve most frequented and most threatened sites around the islands of Tioman, Redang and Perhentian have been 'closed' until the end of October 2010.** That way, no divers will come anywhere near them and the stress will be at least limited. Even though the increased temperature is the main cause of coral bleaching, **divers often accidentally touch or brush over the corals, raise sand from the sea bed and generally damage the corals.** One or two would not make a difference, however, half a million divers undoubtedly does.

The Department of Marine Parks as well as environmentalists hope that the corals will have time to regenerate naturally and with a bit of luck will survive. Fortunately, they are prepared to fight uncontrolled tourism and protect their marine world as fiercely as possible in order to preserve its fragile beauty.

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