

Seven Natural Wonders

of the Coral Triangle and Great Barrier Reef

CORAL TRIANGLE

Both the Coral Triangle and the Great Barrier Reef are themselves Wonders of the World! Marine scientists, scuba divers and tourists flock to these incredible centres of marine life and extraordinary biodiversity. Want to check out seven natural wonders here? Let's go!

1. Palawan

At the north western edge of the Coral Triangle lie the coral islands of Palawan, with their amazing archaeological sites and even an underground river. The Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP) contains a complex cave system, the Tabon Caves, with their remarkable rock formations and loads of bats. These caves were inhabited as long as 50,000 years ago, and have been called the *Philippines' Cradle of Civilization*. Palawan has its very own (endemic) animals, such as the Palawan tree shrew, the Palawan Hornbill and the Philippine Fairy-Bluebird.

Fun Fact: Adventure seekers can climb Ugong Rock and ride the 350-metre zipline from the top, over cultivated fields and mountain views.

2. Tubbataha Reef

Located in the northern spike of the Coral Triangle, Tubbataha Reef sits in the middle of the Sulu Sea, and it's no easy feat to get here. A ferry from the mainland takes 10-12 hours - these journeys are made only from mid-March to mid-June.

Tubbataha Reef is home to fourteen species of shark, including tiger sharks, whitetips and blacktips. Shark Airport is a great dive site here where night divers might glimpse giant star pufferfish or even fimbriated moray eels.

Fun Fact: Located at the northeastern edge of Tubbataha Reef is the 'Washing Machine', an area named for its unpredictable currents, but with great visibility and loads of different coral fish.



HIGHEST AND DEEPEST POINTS ON EARTH

Mountain Everest (Chomolungma)

is the Earth's highest mountain, located in the Mahalangur section of the Himalayas.

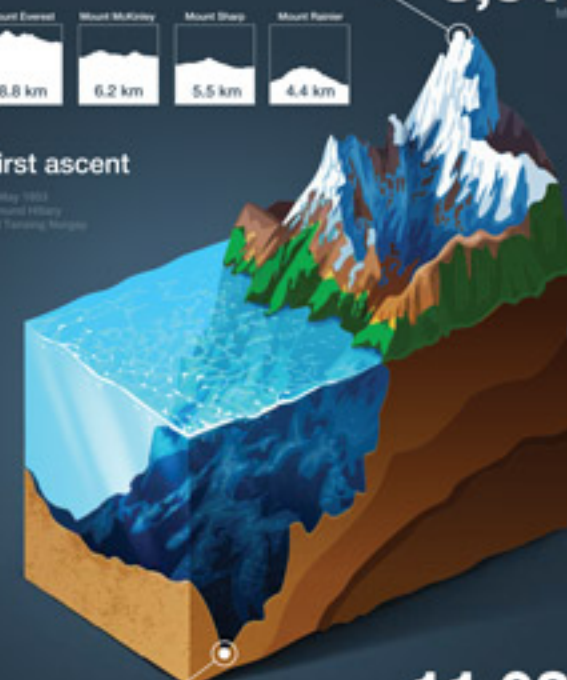
Location

8,848 m



First ascent

29 May 1953
Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay



Mariana Trench

is the deepest part of the world's oceans.

11,034m

Location



3. Mariana Trench

Going down, down, down to the **deepest place in all the oceans**...it takes quite a while for specially equipped submersibles to reach the bottom of the crescent-shaped Mariana Trench. It's located at the northern edge of the Coral Triangle in the western Pacific and is home to the deepest spot in the ocean, known as *Challenger Deep*. Water pressure at the bottom, 11,034 metres below the ocean's surface, is absolutely crushing - more than 1,000 times higher than at sea level and equivalent to the weight of fifty jumbo jets!

Fun Fact: Compare the height of Mount Everest (8,848 metres) with the depth of the Mariana Trench, and you'll find the Trench is 2,186 metres deeper than Everest is tall!

4. Ghost Fleet of Truk Lagoon

Imagine seeing a fleet of ships and aeroplanes beneath the ocean's surface! During World War II, the ships of the Japanese Imperial Fleet operated from a heavily fortified base, in Truk Lagoon in Micronesia, Central Pacific. In 1944, US forces launched an attack on the base, destroying the fleet and leaving many ships and aircraft lying beneath the waves. This ghost fleet provides an ideal habitat for lots of marine life, including manta rays, sharks, turtles and so on. And the hulls of many ships are covered in coral. Visitors to Truk Lagoon, divers and historians alike, learn much about the lives of soldiers and sailors in the World War II Battle of the Pacific.

Fun Fact: Over 300 varieties of hard and soft coral have attached themselves to the Ghost Fleet of Truk, making this one of the world's biggest artificial reefs.



5. Milky Seas

For centuries, sailors have told stories about miles upon miles of ocean that looked milky, like it was glowing. Most people took these stories as just tall tales. But recently, in 2005, oceanographers used special satellite sensors to investigate. And guess what? The tales were true! Satellites have captured images of milky coloured tropical waters, including in the Indian Ocean. And the cause? Millions of bioluminescent bacteria affecting many sea animals, including coral.

Fun Fact: In 1995, a British ship sailing through the northwest Indian Ocean came across an area of milky seas the size of the English county of Yorkshire (15,400 sq km).

6. Bird's Head Peninsula (Caka Vogelkop Peninsula)

Ever since the first European explorers arrived here, Bird's Head Peninsula on the westernmost part of New Guinea has beckoned marine scientists and nature lovers alike. The peninsula hosts a huge variety of coral reef fish and other marine life. Called Bird's Head because of its shape, at the same time it is home to a large number of birds and animals endemic to this region: the King Bird of Paradise is but one spectacular avian resident. Three new monitor lizards were found on the tiny islands off the Peninsula in the early 2000s. But you never know what will be discovered next on this prolific peninsula!

Fun fact: One of the peninsula's rarest residents is the Arfak Ringtail possum. It's never been seen anywhere else on Earth!



GREAT BARRIER REEF

7. Blue Holes - Australia

Ever heard of blue holes? They are underwater sinkholes, or deep vertical caverns, their intense blueness contrasting dramatically with the lighter blue shallow waters surrounding them. There are a number of blue holes along the Great Barrier Reef, which are popular among scuba divers. Wonky Hole is one of the most well known - it's 80 metres deep and brimming with sea life, such as whip coral.

Fun Fact: Dean's Blue Hole, located in the Bahamas, is the world's deepest at over 200 metres.