

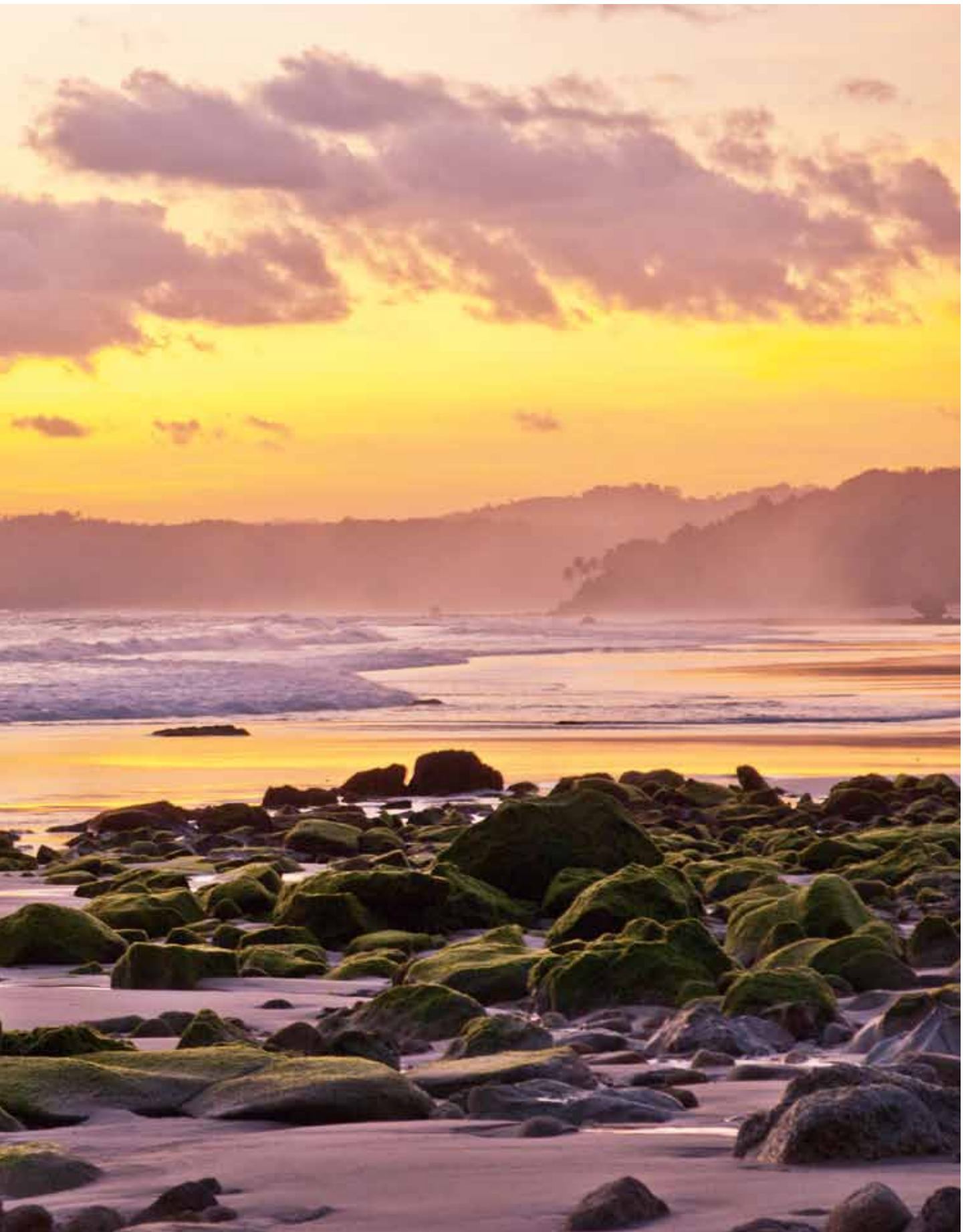


Destination Sumba

# Hidden Treasure

It takes some time to get to the isolated Indonesian resort of Nihiwatu, but the superb sport fishing alone makes the trip well worth the effort.

By Brent Delaney





*Two iconic sentinels of rock stand guard over the resort*



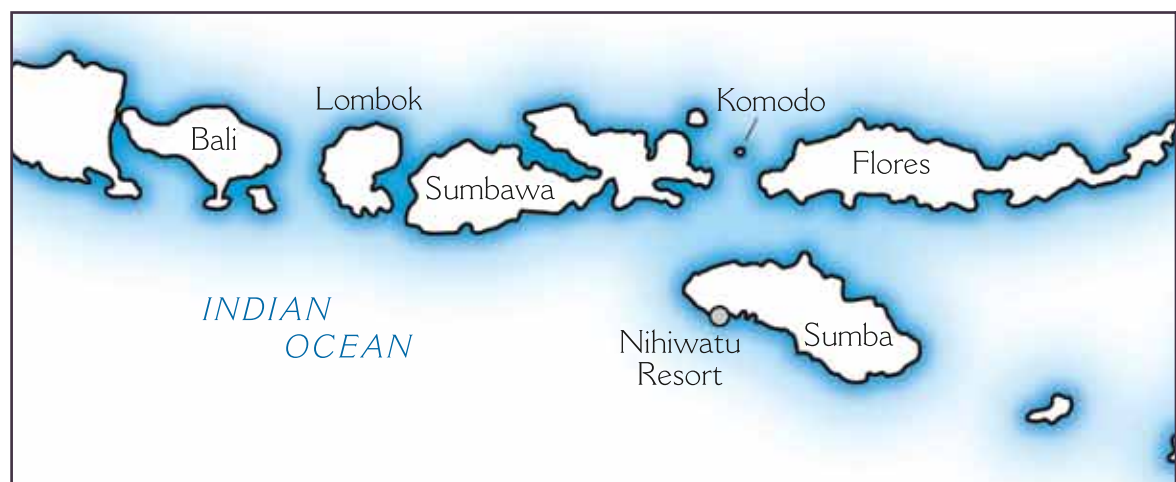
Once heard a whisper – it wafted to my ears on a warm zephyr. A hushed utterance by a member of the lucky few. A whisper of a tropical Avalon, located deep in the shrouding mists of isolation at the far end of Indonesia. A place of sweeping vistas and ancient sentinels of rock; of bright coral reefs and long, lonely beaches. A place of grinding ocean swells and water brimming with piscatorial predators ... a whisper of the word, 'Nihiwatu'.

Hoping to unveil a new angling El Dorado, I soon launched my own pilgrimage to this 'promised land'. I discovered that reality exceeded the reverential murmurings I had overheard. Endless kilometres of unexplored tropical dreamscape, replete with deserted white-sand beaches, untouched seamounts, gaping reef passes and vast numbers of rocky islands – a new angling nirvana indeed! However, Nihiwatu offers more than just incredible fishing – here you will find the space to do whatever you wish in a remote yet exclusively luxurious setting on the edge of the world. This destination is unquestionably one of the greatest eco-resorts on the planet.

### SUMBA DREAMING

Nihiwatu is located on the remote island of Sumba in the Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia. The journey to this ethereal paradise begins in Bali. There you board a large private jet, before being whisked to the island that time forgot.

When you hit the ground in Sumba, you are conveyed by luxury vans to Nihiwatu – a one-and-a-half-hour journey. As you arrive in Nihiwatu, swords whirl and flash as you are greeted with a traditional Sumbanese dance before you wander down through the verdant gardens to the



*Top: The resort has made minimal impact on this largely unspoilt coastline.*

*Above: A traditional Sumbanese welcome.*

*This destination is unquestionably one of the greatest eco-resorts on the planet*



Left: Life as a guest at Nihiwatu isn't overly taxing ...

Below: The self-contained cottages offer comfort and seclusion.

opulence of your villa. Once you arrive in Bali you don't have to lift a finger until you arrive in your room at Nihiwatu.

The island of Sumba is a cultural treasure-chest that provides a fascinating backdrop to Nihiwatu's salubrious surrounds. Sumba is one of the most 'culturally intact' islands in the Indonesian archipelago, thanks to the fearsome reputation of its local warriors and the prevalence of headhunting in former times. Portuguese and Dutch colonialists gave Sumba a wide birth and as such its local animist traditions remain largely intact and unaffected by Christianity. In more recent times administrative control has been asserted by Jakarta, but outside of a couple of major towns, the Sumbanese live in much the same fashion as their ancestors.

Perhaps the most spectacular local custom is Pasola – a wild melee involving hundreds of charging horsemen battling with spears on a large

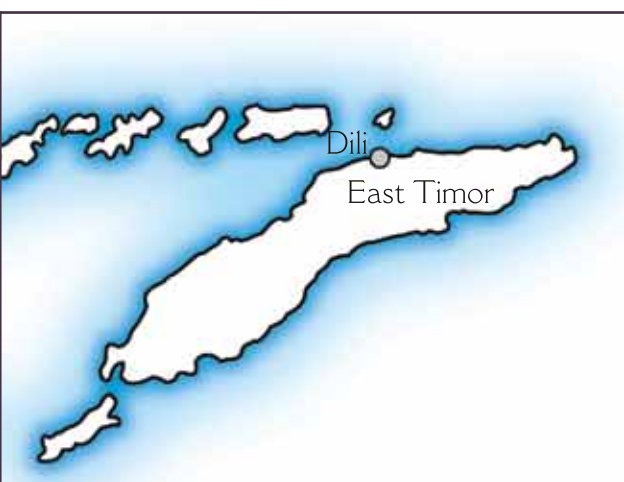


field. Injuries are common and deaths do occur. In fact, the spilling of blood is the aim of the game! Sumbanese believe that blood on the ground makes it fertile and Pasola is aimed at ensuring optimal conditions for the rice harvest in April and May. If you plan your visit accordingly you can even see this spectacle unfold for yourself – just watch for stray spears coming your way!

Pasola is but one of many rich cultural events you can observe during your stay at Nihiwatu. Guests here will experience a slice of the local culture on a daily basis, as the resort is primarily staffed by members of nearby communities.

### A RARE EXPERIENCE

Nihiwatu was recently voted the second-best hotel in Indonesia by internet travel and



*I started hooking dog tooth  
from the first drop*



accommodation specialist, Trip Advisor. In fact, Nihiwatu wins bags of awards every year and is consistently rated as one of the best eco-friendly and culturally responsible resorts on the planet. The service is friendly and attentive, the food is divine and the accommodation and surrounds are luxurious and unobtrusively woven into the natural environment – all of which is a significant achievement considering the resort's isolation.

In addition to providing direct employment for local residents, the owners of Nihiwatu have created the Sumba Foundation. Every year it raises large sums of money that are plowed back into Sumba. There are now more than 20,000 people living in 400 villages within a 120sqkm area that have clean water from wells, medical clinics, schools and economic opportunities because of the existence of Nihiwatu.

Two iconic sentinels of rock stand guard over the resort. The region is reminiscent of a tropical version of Victoria's Great Ocean Road, except there are many more than 12 Apostles and there's no road! The surrounding waters are plankton rich and support an impressive tropical biomass – meaning the area abounds with fish and marine mammals. One afternoon I witnessed literally hundreds of manta rays skimming and flapping on the water's surface, directly in front of the resort.

*Up for a fight? In this part of the world an angry dog tooth tuna is never far away.*

It was a rare ecological occurrence, but when you are on the edge of the world anything can happen ...

## BOUNTIFUL WATERS

If you have ever wanted to be the first person to jig a new seamount, or to throw a popper at fish that have never seen lures, then Nihiwatu is for you. You can access unlimited miles of coastline and there is no local commercial fishing fleet, providing the ingredients for prolific sport-fishing action. The marine charts of the area are not comprehensive and you can find many uncharted seamounts and underwater walls.

The rich waters of the area receive attention from good numbers of sailfish and marlin at times, while hordes of Spanish mackerel and wahoo patrol most offshore structures. Of particular interest to me were the prolific stocks of dog tooth tuna and giant trevally (GTs). I was probably the first person to drop a knife jig on the seamount in front of the resort and I started hooking dog tooth from the first drop. I also hooked some thumping Spanish mackerel and various trevally species using large soft plastics. The local GTs are also lure virgins and you can cast poppers to a startling diversity of structure – from classic GT reef passes to clumps of submerged rocks and small washy islands.



The waters off Sumba offered unparalleled sport-fishing action, with GTs being caught by either spear-fishing (right) or rod-and-reel.



Apart from my initial forays, the popping and jiggging scene here is basically unexplored, so there is a prime opportunity for guests to be involved in the discovery of the full sport-fishing potential of the area. Trolling baits and lures for the healthy stocks of pelagic fish in the region is a well-established tactic and usually reliable.

If that wasn't enough to attract your attention, one of the world's hardest-fighting fish, the Papuan black bass, is also present in the rivers of Sumba. This fish completes the line-up of an all-star piscatorial dream team. The black bass fishery is still being explored, so stay tuned for further developments as word spreads. There are rivers near the resort that provide land-based access and a variety of freshwater targets, so it's worth a day exploring – pack a lighter casting rod and head for the jungle!

The resort has an American-built 28ft Raddon powered by twin 200hp Yamaha engines. It's a solid boat and very fishing-friendly, including for those who wish to pop and jig. Nihiwatu's head waterman, the aptly-named Christian Sea, expertly pilots the craft and through his many years of diving and fishing in the area knows where to find the fish. Nihiwatu is currently developing new luxury accommodation and has plans to expand its fishing services, so expect to hear more 'buzz' on this premium sport-fishing destination as Sumba's true potential is realised.

## WANT MORE?

For such an isolated location there is so much to do at and around Nihiwatu. If you want a break from fishing there are a multitude of day-trips to experience. Go horse riding, mountain biking, trekking or bird watching, or take an overland tour to a deserted beach or traditional village market. I went on an invigorating hike through rice paddies and lush jungle to eventually arrive at a waterfall of astounding proportions. Unfortunately I didn't take a fishing rod – an oversight as I spotted fish in the jungle-bound river and in the pool beneath the waterfall. Oh well, next time!


Virtually all types of water activities are at your disposal, such as surfing, kite surfing, diving, and spear fishing – you're only limited by your own desires (and perhaps the prevailing weather conditions). Christian is a skilled spear-fisherman and can introduce you to some of the best spear



fishing in the world. Afterwards you can pull up on a deserted beach and have a beer as your fish are cooked against a backdrop of sparkling waters ...

After punishing your muscles by taking on the ocean and its inhabitants, you may need the ministrations of the spa team or perhaps a yoga class in a variety of inspiring locations. Maybe lazing in opulence while sipping on a margarita is more your style? Either way, it's all possible at Nihiwatu.

Since my return from Nihiwatu I have constantly fantasised about returning to explore this marine playground. This is a rare place, known only to a few. For those who hear the whispers and take action, a living dreamscape awaits. For staying at Nihiwatu is like living in a lucid dream – a place where you can make your every whim a living reality.

For more information, visit: [www.nihiwatu.com](http://www.nihiwatu.com). 

*Above left: Meditation, anyone? If you can't find 'inner peace' in Sumba, you never will ...*

*Below: Rush hour at a Sumbanese beach – the island epitomises the cliché, 'unspoilt paradise'.*

