

Scuba diving in

Colombias

Underwater Cathedral

COLOMBIA 

"Aren't you going to have lunch?" Jorge asked Luisa as their ship sailed across the Colombian Pacific, leaving behind the rocky isle where a flock of masked trogons flew overhead.

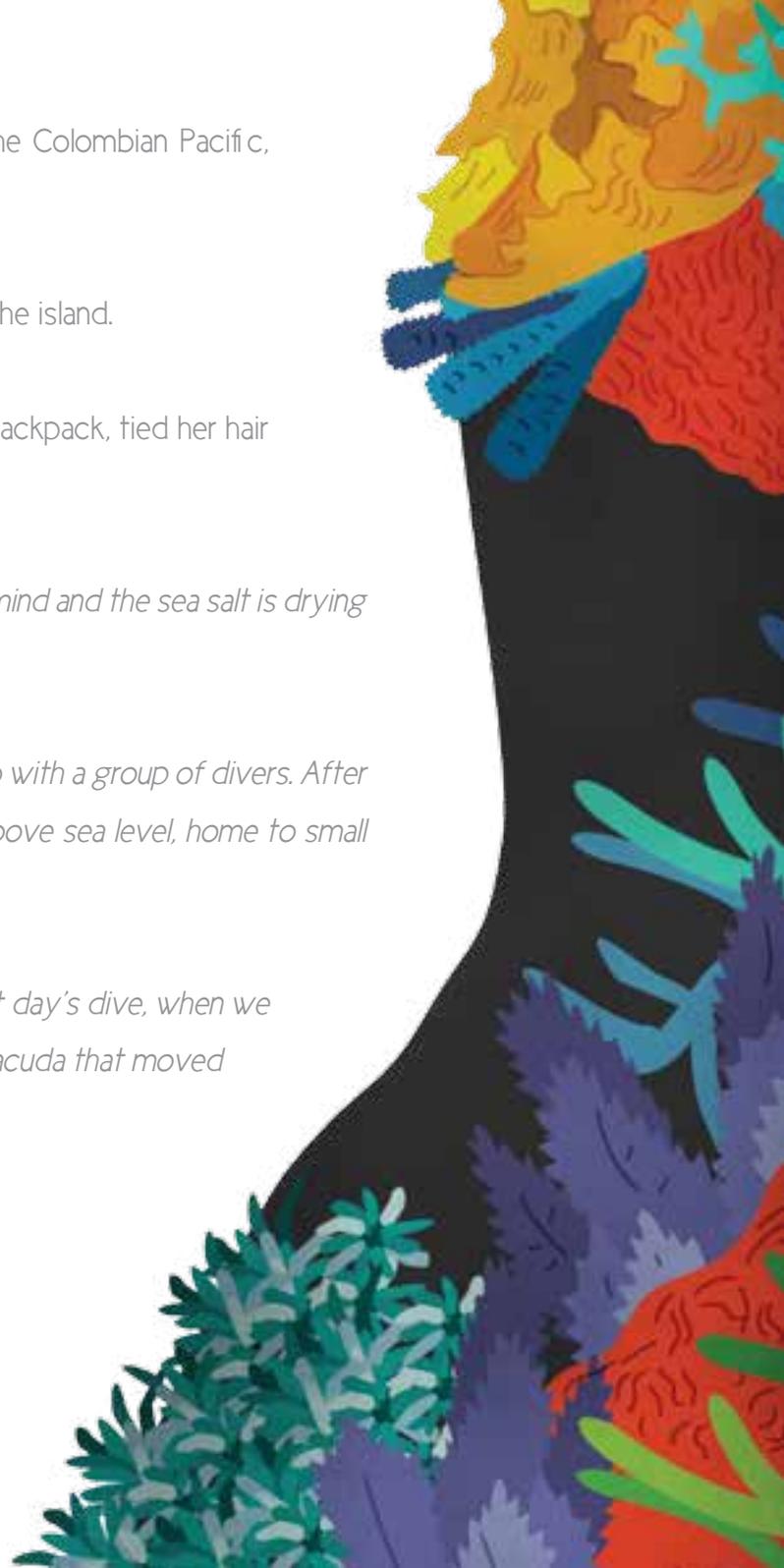
"No, Jorge, I'm not hungry. You eat," said Luisa smiling, without taking her eyes off the island.

Sometime later, Luisa went into her room to grab a pencil and notebook from her backpack, tied her hair into a ponytail, and wrote the following words:

I have to write down what I just saw before even I don't believe it. While it's still fresh on my mind and the sea salt is drying on my skin.

Three days ago, around midnight, my brother Jorge and I sailed from Buenaventura to Malpelo with a group of divers. After thirty hours of sailing, an island appeared from behind the fog: a rock jutting 350 meters above sea level, home to small lizards, crabs and some sea birds.

But I knew that the beauty of Malpelo was beneath the water. This was confirmed on the first day's dive, when we saw countless tuna, schools of yellow tail, and silver whirlpools made up of hundreds of barracuda that moved in perfect synchrony with the current. On the second day, I encountered the giant.



That morning we took a boat to some small isles northwest of Malpelo called The Three Musketeers. Can you imagine a city populated by fish? An underwater metropolis? I saw it that day, it's found in the Colombian Pacific. As I entertained myself observing a school of blue and gold snapper fish, a huge bulk peppered with white spots brushed my side. It was a whale shark.

Mesmerized by the enormous creature, I began to swim alongside it, and then I saw it go into a tunnel that opened between the rocks. I went in after it, following the walls of the tunnel, which were covered with coral and sponges.

The whale shark was leading the way. Just then I spotted three rocks with an opening in the middle, light coming from within. It was the gateway to the most beautiful scene I have ever seen. A cathedral rose before my eyes, complete with Gothic arches, the rays of the sun shining on silhouettes of silvertip and Galapagos sharks, groupers and surgeon fish. It was the largest fish convention I had ever seen in my life.



Little by little, over millions of years, nature erected this rock cathedral, home to eagle rays swimming above a brilliant sandy floor decorated with mollusk shells.

Exiting the cathedral I looked up, and above the column of bubbles I released as I breathed, I saw an army of hammerhead sharks moving in, elegant and silent. By then I had lost sight of the whale shark that led me to the cathedral.

Before returning to the boat, a five-meter long devil ray seemed to wave goodbye.

I never imagined that Malpelo could touch my soul the way it did. Now I understand why it is considered a Flora and Fauna Sanctuary, why it's a World Heritage Site, why those who dive in

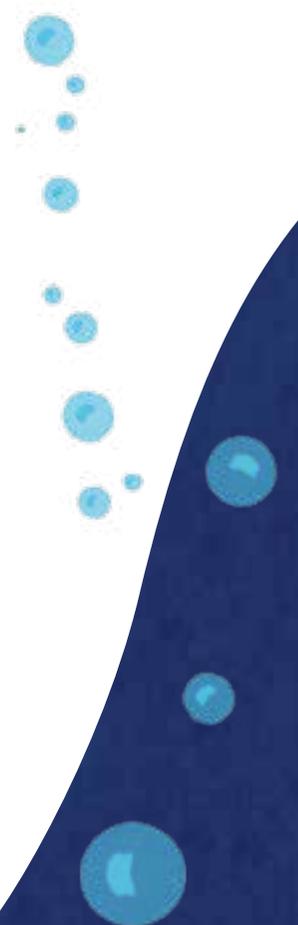
Fact Sheet:

<http://www.parquesnacionales.gov.co/portal/es/ecoturismo/region-pacifico/santuario-de-flora-y-fauna-malpelo/>

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The end



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