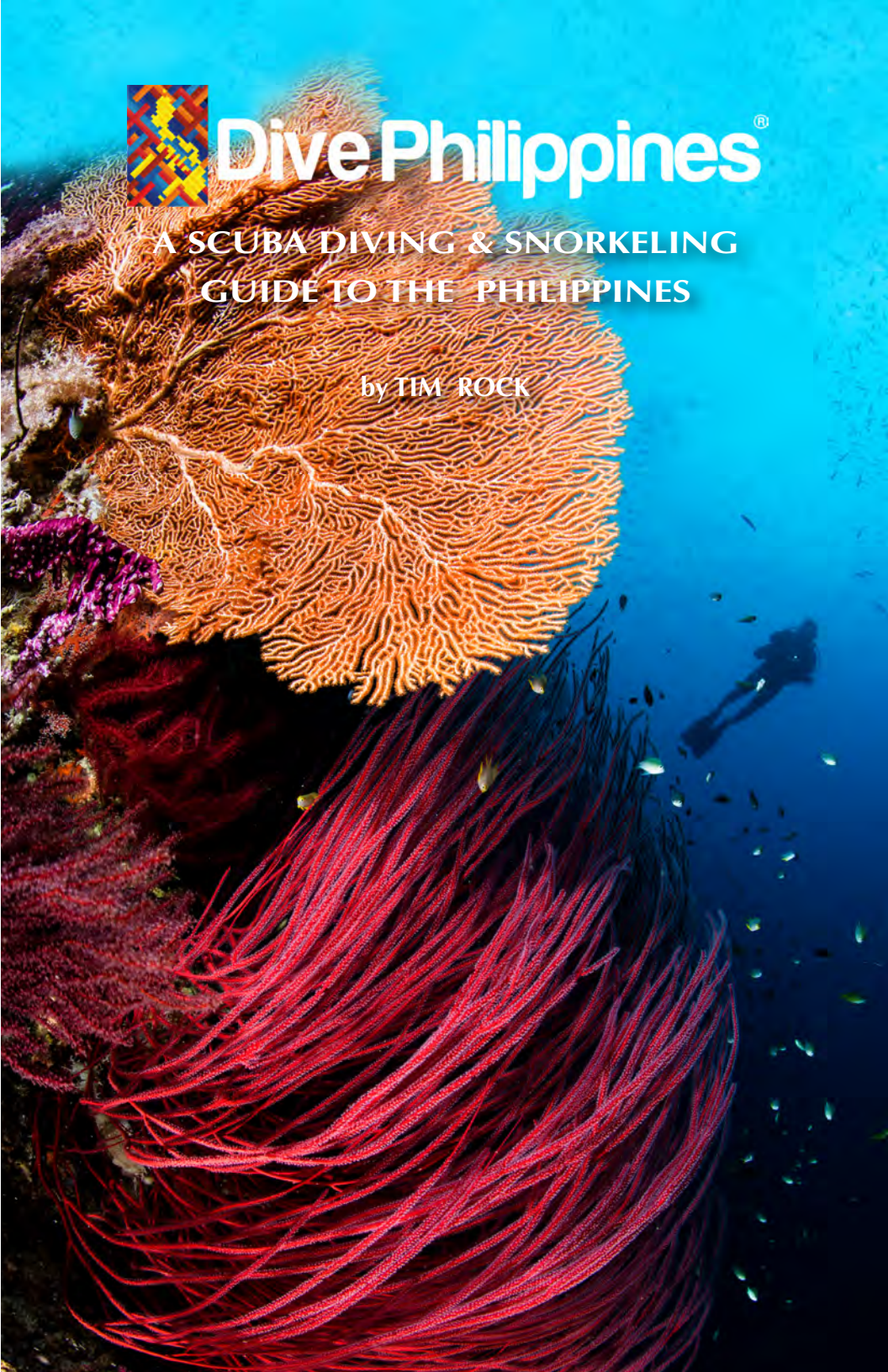




# Dive Philippines®

A SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING  
GUIDE TO THE PHILIPPINES

by TIM ROCK





A large school of silver fish, likely Jacks, swimming in clear blue water over a sandy ocean floor. A diver is visible in the lower left corner, swimming horizontally. The fish are densely packed in the center and right, with some swimming towards the camera.

# **Diving and Snorkeling Guide to The Philippines**

**by TIM ROCK**

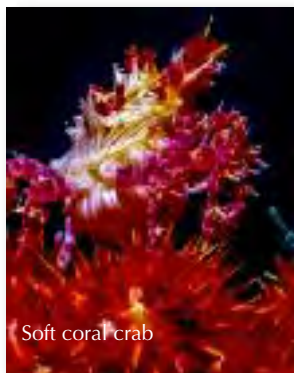
**[www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com](http://www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com)**

Jack school - Dimakya Island



## Welcome to the World's Best Diving Destination

Greetings and welcome to the best diving in the world. In the following pages you will see amazing underwater dive sites full of healthy coral reefs, beautiful fish, seascapes, sunken wrecks and much more. The Philippines is a wonderful combination of ocean diversity. Our many islands and large landmasses provide an amazing array of habitats under the sea that attract some of the most unusual and sought after creatures in the world.



SCUBA diving is a highly-developed industry in the Philippines. Divers and non-divers will enjoy the facilities and amenities available in the wide choice of special destinations. Couple this with the exceptional quality of service and unpretentious hospitality of the Filipino people and a visit to The Philippines becomes a sublime experience.

Some amazing reefs - like those in Anilao, Calamians and Cebu islands - are just a shore entry away. Visit Coron, Apo Reef and Tubbataha for clear water, healthy corals and extreme dropoffs. Take a trip to Malapascua to see rare thresher sharks. Numerous Marine Protected Areas provide a look at tiny and rare macro and muck creatures sought by divers worldwide.

The country has amazing geographic attractions. Combine this with a welcoming and outgoing culture and wonderful cuisines and you have a destination that truly "has it all". **Your Philippine Dive Team** welcomes you to this wonderful world.



Baby sea turtles in Palawan



## From the Author

I have been fortunate enough to live in close proximity to the Philippines and have visited this amazing country numerous times over the last three decades. I have written numerous diving guides for Lonely Planet and I shoot for Getty Images. This has taken me all over the world.

I find the variety and diversity of the undersea world in the Philippines is really like no other place on the planet. Whether it be a sandy plain that is home to myriad odd and unusual marine creatures, a wartime shipwreck holding secrets of the past or a shark-filled dropoff into the deep, blue abyss of the sea, I am constantly and pleasantly surprised and rewarded every time I make a trip to this vibrant country. And I have watched as the dive industry has grown into a world-class offering.

It is my pleasure and honor to present to you this diving and snorkeling guide to the Philippines.



Photojournalist  
& Author  
Tim Rock

I hope through these pages you will be educated and thrilled at the great diversity of the Philippines. I also

hope you will be inspired to work to preserve and protect these undersea treasures that are part of the rich Coral Triangle. I know from firsthand experience, the

Philippines is a special place.

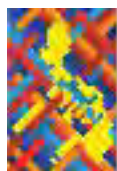


Author and  
whale shark

**Author Tim Rock has written over 50 books about Asia-Pacific diving destinations. He is an internationally published photojournalist, a Getty Images Lonely Planet Collection photographer and frequent visitor to the Philippines. He uses Nikon, Ikelite and Aquatica photographic equipment.**

**Front Cover Photo © Jerome Kim**





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Juvenile batfish

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## Overview

The Philippines has always been a dive destination favorite and with new resorts on new island destinations popping up along with the tried and true, it is becoming one of the most popular places in the diving world to visit. Toss in reasonable prices and a normally favorable exchange rate

for most of the world's leading currencies and you have a real gem dive destination to explore.

It is one of the most diverse countries in Asia. Sitting along the eastern reaches of Oceania, it has the Pacific Ocean (Philippine Sea) at its lengthy east coast. Malaysia and Indonesia are south and southwest and the South China Sea is to the west. To the north are Taiwan and China. This convergence of sea and

various landmasses has formed the richest coral reef area in the world. Known as the "Coral Triangle", the Philippines is at the northern point of the triangle that also includes Papua New Guinea and Indonesia/Malaysia. In this cradle of diversity more species of both corals and fish can be found than any other place on the planet. Then within the vast Philippine isles are smaller seas... the Sibuyan, Sulu and Visayan. Each has its own biosphere and characteristics, many odd and unusual creatures thriving in their own special worlds.

The country has remained stable and a favorite for travelers. Above water is as luxuriant as below creating a natural sensory overload. And, there are cultures within cultures here. It is a fascinating country to dive and visit.



Eating green mango



Bringing cattle to market



Sunset over Manila Bay by Mall of Asia

## History

The first people in the Philippines were hunter-gatherers. However between 3,000 BC and 2,000 BC people learned to farm. They grew rice and domesticated animals. From the tenth century AD, Filipinos traded with China. Then in 1521 Ferdinand Magellan landed in the Philippines and claimed the islands for Spain. The Philippines is named after King Philip II of Spain (1556-1598). It was a Spanish colony for over 300 years. Friars converted the Filipinos to Catholicism.

In 1898 came war between the USA and Spain. Spain lost and ceded the

Philippines to the USA. Then, in 1942 in WWII, the Philippines were in Japanese hands. American troops returned and recaptured Manila in February 1945. The Americans left Subic Bay in 1993. Fidel Ramos became president. He improved the infrastructure in the Philippines including the electricity supply. Industry was privatized and the economy began to grow more rapidly. Today there is reason to be optimistic for the future. The population of the Philippines is now a robust 103 million.



White Beach, Puerto Galera

## Diving History

In the Philippines, the birth of sport diving is generally said to have taken place in Anilao, which is still a popular dive destination to this day. The pioneering Aquatropical Divers opened in 1966 and scuba tourism was born. That makes sport diving here one of the earliest founded anywhere on the globe. Since then, the sport has blossomed, expanding to areas like Puerto Galera and now pretty much all across the country. Divers used small traditional outriggers back then to get to the dive sites and many beach dive areas were found.

The Philippines was also at the forefront of the technical diving revolution in the mid 1990s. Puerto Galera, well placed logistically from a gas and equipment point of view and with deep water just off shore, was the starting point.

Other dive centers followed soon after.

Wreck diving meccas such as Coron Bay and Subic Bay opened up to tek. John Bennett took the world scuba depth record in 2001 off Puerto Galera. That put the Philippines on the radar of technical divers internationally.



Now, the Philippines still offers outriggers, but these are custom-made for diving. They are quite large and comfortable with plenty of room to relax, to walk around, to put dive and camera gear and to get dressed. These boats have modern safety features as well as toilets, small kitchens and covered cabins. And modern dive boats are being introduced.

While growing in spurts over the decades, the industry in the last ten years has seen phenomenal growth. Modern facilities and beautiful resorts combined with excellent multi-lingual training beckon divers from all over the world. Many local guides are highly certified, excellent marine life spotters and extremely qualified divemasters and instructors.





Diver exits a jail area of Olympia Maru, Coron

## Wartime Shipwrecks Abound

**T**he WWII years and even earlier have left an undersea legacy that now benefits divers. Subic Bay, just north of Manila, is a popular wreck diving spot. The American WWII victim USS New York and many others, including remnants from Spanish Manila Galleon days, are covered in marine life. Following the exit of US troops after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, the bay is now open for exploration and hosts wreck divers, deep tek and lots of training.

Subic has provided shelter for ships for many decades. The first major naval base was Spanish.

Another very popular area lies south in Coron. For diving, Coron's history started on September 24,

1944, when US Navy strike forces attacked a Japanese supply fleet at anchor in Coron Bay and north Busuanga Island.

Today some of the ships are quite shallow and snorkelers can enjoy their coral-laden hulls. Others are large freighters that attract all sorts of marine life and are adorned in brilliant soft corals and black coral. Time has turned them into shipreefs and divers can explore the reef aspects above and also penetrate to see the artifacts of a wartime ship. Malapascua also has a few wartime coral-laden wartime wrecks.

On top of this, some places like Puerto Galera have purposely sunk shipwrecks which attract shoals of fish and are good for wreck training.



Mt. Mayon, Luzon

## Geography

There's a saying that the Philippines "has it all" and this is certainly true above the sea (as well as below). Northern terraced mountains give way to steamy southern rainforest. In many parts of the country rice fields sit in the shadow of volcanic cones (some still active). Their past eruptions have created some extremely fertile regions making farming popular for nearly half of the Philippine land. And the Philippines boasts over 7,000 islands (official count is 7,107) and some stunning, coconut covered atolls.



Limestone cliffs, Coron

2,000 of the isles in the Philippines have inhabitants. In contrast, it is said 2,500 don't have names. Luzon and Mindanao are the largest islands making up two-thirds of the country's landmass. 66% of the country's land is found on these two islands. In fact, most of the islands here were formed from past and current volcanic and tectonic activity. The Philippines is a huge archipelago stretching 1,850 kilometers (1,150 mi) from the 15th to the 20th parallels north latitude. Landmass is 300,000 square kilometers (115,831 sq mi).

## Climate

There are two seasons in the country, the wet season and the dry season, based upon the amount of rainfall. This is dependent as well on your location in the country. The average year-round temperature measured from all the weather stations in the Philippines, except Baguio City, is 26.6 °C (79.9 °F). Cooler days are usually felt in the month of January with temperature averaging at 25.5 °C (77.9 °F) and the warmest days, in the month of May with a mean 28.3 °C (82.9 °F).

Dry season is November into June and this is considered the best time to visit for diving, although diving can be done year 'round. In fact, during rainy season in places like The Visayas, the sea flattens out and makes it easy to get to most any site. The rains are dictated by the amihan (northeast monsoon) and the hagabat (southwest monsoon). The southwest monsoon

sometimes brings winds with it and that can make some sites inaccessible, so check with your dive operator about his particular region and how it is affected.

The Philippines are in the typhoon belt and occasionally get storms that blow across the western Pacific. Weather in the Philippines is monitored and managed by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).



Anilao sunset



Snorkeling, Calamians



## Language & Culture

**Language** - A total of 182 native languages are spoken in the country and four languages have been classified as extinct. There are 13 indigenous languages with at least one million native speakers: Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilokano, Hiligaynon, Waray-Waray, Kapampangan, Coastal Bikol, Pangasinan, Maranao, Maguindanao, Kinaray-a, and Tausug. One or more is spoken natively by more than 90% of the population.

**T**he good news for visitors is that English is also very widely spoken. So communication in the Philippines is normally very easy. Menus are in English at restaurants and hotels and stores have English signage and English-speaking staff. Thus, the Philippines is considered one of the most visitor-friendly countries in Asia.

**Culture** - The Philippine culture is famous worldwide for its colorful dances, songs and tasty cuisine. The culture of the Philippines has been heavily influenced by both Asian and Western cultures. The Philippines was first settled by Melanesians. Today, few in numbers, they preserve the traditional way of life and culture. After them, Austronesians, or Malayo-Polynesians, arrived on the islands. Today the Austronesian culture is very evident in the ethnicity, language, food, dance and almost every aspect of

the culture. While dance, cinema, music and indigenous art are strong, travellers are most likely to encounter the many Filipino food dishes. Rice is a staple. Popular dishes such as adobo (a meat stew made from either pork or chicken), lumpia (meat or vegetable rolls), pancit (a noodle dish), and lechón (roasted pig) are popularly served and should be experienced. Also, some spicy dishes, like the ceviche called the “Bicol Express” are not to be missed by seafood lovers. The lively culture and cuisine of the Philippines add to any holiday visit.



Spicy peppers



Traditional dance, Manila



Rice paddies, Bicol

**The People** - According to the 2010 Census, there were 92,337,852 in the Philippines and about 10 million living outside the Philippines. The Filipino identity, with its Austronesian roots, was developed with Malay, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and American influences. Today, this very eclectic culture creates a welcoming and friendly people. Over 80% of the Philippines is Catholic.

The name Filipino was derived from the term "las Islas Filipinas" ("the Philippine Islands"). Many Filipinos refer to themselves as "Pinoy" for a man or "Pinay" for a lady. This is slang formed by taking the last four letters of "Filipino" and adding the Y.

For visitors, Filipinos offer a very interesting and proud culture that they are happy, even eager, to share. This natural hospitality makes visitors return frequently, whether it be for diving or just for a pleasant holiday.

Visitors will find a great range of education and wealth in this country. Education is becoming a priority in order to stem poverty and improve the standard of living of all Filipinos.



Donsol kids



## Practicalities

**Getting There** - Manila and Cebu City are the major international gateway cities to the Philippines. They host major and lesser airlines coming from all Asia airports, the Far East, Australia, the USA and Guam. Philippine Airlines (PAL) is pretty much considered the country's national airline with a route network that spans 35 foreign cities and 29 domestic points.

**Getting Around** - There are car rental companies but for visitors using local transport is usually the best option. Public transportation is cheap and one can avoid trying to fit in with the local driving style. One can take tricycles and taxis to local eateries and stores. For long coastal trips to new dive destinations, there are experienced drivers in spacious, air-con cars and vans are available.

For getting from a major air hub to your destination in-country, there are numerous daily flights to Philippine cities and islands. For divers, Philippine Airlines is

diver friendly with allowances for dive gear.

Not all destinations have daily flights. Schedules and routes frequently change, so plan ahead, especially during peak seasons like Christmas, Chinese New Year, Easter and Philippine summer vacation (April, May).

**Visas** - Nationals from 156 countries that have diplomatic relations with the Philippines may enter the Philippines receiving a Tourist Visa upon arrival. This allows for a maximum of thirty (30) days, provided these entry regulations are met:

- 1) your passport is valid for at least 6 months beyond your period of stay in The Philippines
- 2) you present a return or outward bound ticket to your country of





Watermelon stand, Bohol

origin or to a next country of destination. A few countries have special arrangements allowing for longer stays. Chinese Nationals, require a special permit. If planning to stay longer, extensions must be arranged with the Bureau of Immigration. Tourist visas from 7 to 59 days are also available at the Philippine Embassy or Consulate in some countries. For your particular country/nationality see:

**[www.dfa.gov.ph/consular-services/visa-information](http://www.dfa.gov.ph/consular-services/visa-information)**

**Customs** - For the latest in passenger guidelines for Customs regulations and Duty-Free allowance, visit the website of Philippines Bureau of Customs at: **[www.customs.gov.ph](http://www.customs.gov.ph)**

**Clothing** - It is generally warm and tropical in the Philippines, especially for destinations that

divers like to visit. So just wear light breathable clothes and comfortable shoes. Sandals or jogging shoes work well for shopping and beach walking. Wide-brimmed hats are handy when island hopping and out on dive boats. Wear beach attire only around the resorts. Dress as



Busuanga

you would at home when away from the tourist hotels. Filipinos place a high priority on appearance. Wearing appropriate clothing to formal occasions and when visiting places of worship is appreciated.

**Accommodations** - Once considered a budget destination, that has all changed in the past couple of decades. Small, reasonable hotels are still available but the level of service and rooms has risen to five-star in many Philippine destinations. Boutique hotels catering especially to divers with excellent international fusion cuisine, spas, spacious rooms and reliable and fast internet can now be found in many of the popular



Vida Homes Condos, Dauin

dive destinations. One can truly pick the place for any travel budget.

**Safety & Security** - Negative news abroad sells and sadly has an impact on one's perception of safety in the Philippines. However, incidents are rare. Overall the Philippines is a safe country for travellers. Visitors, however, should be aware that there continues to be



Amun Ini, Anda



a risk of politically motivated violence in parts of the country. Travel to some portions of Mindanao, in the Southern Philippines, should therefore be avoided. In particular: Sulu archipelago, Basilan, Lanao del Sur/Norte, North Cotabato, Maquindanao and parts of the Zamboanga Peninsula.

Visitors should also use common sense: don't get involved with drugs or drinking or go places you are unfamiliar with late at night. Do not argue or criticize and avoid public scenes. If needed, the emergency number is 117.

**Money** - The Philippine currency is the Philippine Peso (PHP). It is divided up in 100 Centavos. The US Dollar is the most recognized foreign currency and can be used

for some transactions. Upon internationally arriving in Manila, the airport offers foreign exchange counters. Banks are open from 9 am- 3 p.m., M-F 5 days-a-week.



Automatic Teller Machines are available in the major cities. Money changers are open nearly 24 hours in the big cities. Credit cards are widely accepted, sometimes with a 3 - 3.5% a charge. A passport or similar I.D. may be required.

**Tipping** - Tips of 10% of the billing amount are common practice. Whether or not to tip is a personal decision. Taxi drivers may try to get their cut by saying they have no change. In most restaurants and hotels, a 10% service charge may be included.

**Health** - No immunization is needed for The Philippines. Yellow



Cowboy, Matapalay



Market onions

fever vaccination is required if you come from infected areas. Ask your doctor for advice about malaria prophylaxis. It is recommended only for a few isolated islands. Dengue fever is prevalent in some dive regions as well so mosquito repellent is recommended.

Be wise and carry health insurance and a small medical kit with the mosquito repellent. The more you go off the beaten track, the more necessary it is to take additional precautions. Hospitals are available in Manila, Puerto Princesa and Cebu. Ladies should bring sanitary supplies as usually only "napkins" are available locally. Drinking bottled water is also advised as many areas do not have potable water supplies.



Evening market

diving liveboards. In most resorts there are plenty of sockets in the rooms to charge camera and strobe batteries and work on the laptop editing photos.

**Shopping** - A visit to a busy and bustling Shopping Mall like Mall of Asia, Ayala Center, SM Megamall,

**Electricity** - Power is generally 220 Volts, 60 Hz. and luxury hotels in Manila and Cebu may have 110 Volts. For divers, laptops, tablets, camera chargers, smart phones, etc, usually can be used in the Philippines, as in most other countries of the world. Look for the following statement on the charger: 'INPUT: 100-240V, 50/60 Hz'. The actual wall female plugs can vary from the US style two flat pins to the flat pins with a round ground. And sometime a Type C socket with round pins is found. You will need an adapter for European chargers. Power fluctuations are less frequent these days, however, still common in The Philippines. Blackouts occasionally do occur, so pack a flashlight.

Many dive centers have camera rooms with charging areas as do

Shangri-La Plaza or Greenhills Shopping Center is worth the experience. Opening hours are normally 10 am-8 pm. Prices are set and most have camera and/or electronics stores in case an extra SD card or power adapter is



Fresh lechon

needed. Visiting public markets is fun and there is usually one in every village great and small. Be prepared to bargain in these places. Look for wooden carvings, tribal items, religious figures, dried fruits, musical instruments and woven pineapple/banana fabrics and baskets.

### **Communication -**

There are 3 major mobile phone providers: Globe, Smart and Suncellular. One can get a SIM card and go prepaid. One can also use one's phone as a mobile hotspot for WiFi. All are available in cities and major tourist places such as Boracay Island, Mactan Island (Cebu), Puerto Galera (Mindoro Or.), Panglao Island (Bohol) and some places in Palawan. Internet cafés are around but slowly disappearing as cell phones get more powerful. Call for directory assistance in Manila 114 or 112 in the provinces.

**Time** - Local time is GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) + 8 throughout the Philippines.

**Travel Insurance** - It is smart to



make buying a general travel insurance policy a part of the travel plan before departure. Generally liabilities and insurance coverages are basic and limited in the Philippines. For divers, DAN diving insurance has a travel option and your local insurance provider may also offer travel insurance through your home policy.







## Philippine Diving

**D**ivers come to the Philippines for a number of reasons but tops on the list are three items. First, they come for dive training. This country has such a variety of

sunken seascapes, war wrecks and secluded bays that offer it all, from intro diving, to basic certification to specialty dives (like wreck diving, rescue and deep diving) to



Thresher shark, Monad Shoal

instructor training and special tek training can all be done here.

Divers also come to see a vast array of macro creatures. These are highly unusual fish, invertebrates like shrimps and crabs and even odd cephalopods like mimic octopus and blue-ring octopus or

various frogfish species. Nowhere in the world but in this Coral Triangle can these creatures be seen in such abundance. It has evolved into a specialty and highly-trained divemasters have sharp eyes that can spot the proper habitat and pick these creatures out. Some make

amazingly colorful and unusual photographs.

Thirdly, divers come here just to enjoy the diversity of the reefs and marine life, relax in the fine facilities and enjoy the amenities and cuisines and friendliness of the Filipinos.

## Diving Summary

**Visibility** – Depending on the location and the weather, visibility can range from 15-150 ft. (5-45m). Water is generally clear and warm in most locales.



**Water Temperature** – The Philippines has nice warm water, varying between 23-30°C/73-86°F depending on the area and season.

**Bring** - Anywhere from a rash guard to 3mm wetsuit usually covers every situation. If weight of luggage is a problem, most dive operations

have equipment for rent and most dive shops have a decent selection of mask/fins/snorkel should you want to buy your gear upon arrival. Check ahead and reserve your gear.

**Weather** – You can dive year-round in the Philippines, but there are three distinct seasons that affect dive conditions. December through March is the northeast monsoon that can bring strong winds. April through June is usually dry with warm days and little wind. July through November is the southwest monsoon, which is wet but the water is warm. Air temperatures

average 25-32°C/78-90°F with high relative humidity.

**Courses** – With walls, currents and wrecks, it's a good idea to take Deep Diver, Drift Diver and/or Wreck Diver courses.

Technical diving on the deep wrecks requires special training. Many dive centers offer NITROX certification now and that opens up diving in special situations, like extending bottom times on deeper wrecks or at deep water cleaning stations. The Philippines is one of the most active dive training countries in the world.



Gorgonian sea fans

## The Best Dives

The Philippines has thousands of dives to choose from but some stand out. Here are some of the highlight dives:

**Beach Dive** – It is hard to beat the walk-in dive at Busuanga's **Dimakya Island**. Sea turtles, swirling jacks and dugongs are always a possibility. Plus the macro critters are diverse and abundant.

**Shark Dive** – While Oslob has consistent whale shark action, **Monad Shoal** at Malapascua Island is the one place in the world where divers consistently see thresher sharks at cleaning stations.

**Reef Dive** – The **Black Forest** at Balicasag is a haven for hundreds of sea turtles of all sizes and ages and a tornado of bigeye jacks.

**Marine Park Dive** – **Tubbataha** is the premier marine park in this country. Isolated far out to sea, it can only be visited during calm periods when the sea is flat. Big marine life like manta rays and hammerhead sharks can be found along sheer, coral-covered dropoffs.

**WWII Wreck Dive** - The **Okikawa Maru** lies in a currenty area that keeps the ship bathed in water movement. So the coral growth is lush. The bow is mangled but holds a forest of black coral.

**Macro Dive** - The **Rockpile** in Dauin has small steel pyramids, cars, and steel crates and is home to many critters like frogfish, ghost pipefish, spiny seahorses and even harlequin shrimp. Sandy and full of tiny surprises.





Apo Island

## Photography

Above and below the Philippines has an amazing variety of landscapes, seascapes, creatures and people to photograph. Taking a camera along should certainly be part of any Philippines holiday.

For divers, look for shops that offer courses like the PADI Digital Underwater Photographer and perhaps combine that with the Coral Reef Conservation and/or Fish Identification to be able to understand and to capture the beauty of the marine life in these waters.

There are not many high end camera stores outside of Manila. For serious photographers, it is best to bring everything needed including back-up batteries and chargers. If one edits while traveling, bring a laptop as well.

Using an app like Vivid-Pix also aids achieving proper color in post production editing.

GoPro cameras are quite popular now with many travelling divers. Using a dedicated color filter gives best results with GoPro.

Most boats now have camera freshwater buckets and most dive shops have dedicated camera rinse areas too.



Rinse tank

SSI and PADI are especially well-represented here. To take courses during a dive holiday, check ahead as the better dive centers offer course in many languages and a broad range of specialties.

**Fitness** - Diving properly and safely requires a certain good fitness level. Proper fitness will reduce risk of injury and accident. Remember, divers operate in a water world somewhat foreign to humans. Take some time to start a fitness routine prior to a dive trip, get a medical check-up and remember to stay hydrated and rested while on a dive holiday. One can also help prevent things like cramping by doing yoga and other stretching moves. Many hotel spas in the Philippines now offer yoga courses and other such light



Yoga, Malapascua

fitness programs that may fit well with a diving regimen.

Spas also offer relaxing massages that soothe sore muscles after a long dive day.



Pool session at Asia Divers



## Philippine Technical Diving

While most people think of colder, deeper waters as places for technical diving, the warm, clear waters of the Philippines are ideal to learn one or more aspects of technical diving. Deep walls, sharky points and numerous WWII shipwrecks are all venues that beckon some sort of technical experience. Starting from the use of NITROX in recreational diving, which extends bottom times in places like Monad Shoal's thresher shark viewing area, to planned penetration into the deeper shipwrecks in Subic Bay, tek diving has found a place in the Philippines.

Divers can learn proper deep diving techniques, staged deco, double tank, sidemount, wreck

penetration and rebreather diving and all the way up to TRIMIX instructor through a series of skill development courses. Even cave diving has taken root in places like Siargao Island. At least five certification agencies are represented with classes held in venues like Subic Bay, Puerto Galera, Malapascua and many others.

For many, technical diving opens up a whole new world of undersea exploration, providing new challenges and learning experiences. Each tek discipline has different course pre-requisites with different aims and goals.

Discuss specific tek needs and goals with the suitably equipped dive centers.





Coleman shrimp  
in fire urchin





Batfish and diver, Anilao



**Liveaboards** - There are currently many liveaboards operating around the Philippines and their popularity seems to be growing with new routes and venues being offered every season. It pays to do a bit of research to see if the liveaboard trip you envision is actually the one being offered. Some can be quite luxurious while others can just be a notch above camping.

The liveaboards provide a very convenient way to see the far away sites and visit the diverse natural parks like Apo Reef and Tubbataha. A liveaboard trip is highly recommended for the hard-core diver who wants to see a lot of the Philippines' undersea world. They normally offer the usual dive until you drop agenda of three or four daytime dives and a night dive interspersed with ample meals and naps. Food can be varied and very

good, featuring both international and some savory local specialties.

Check with your operator to see if any extras are offered like free NITROX, airport transfers and that sort of perk. Do a bit of research to find the best fit for you and what you want both above and below the water.

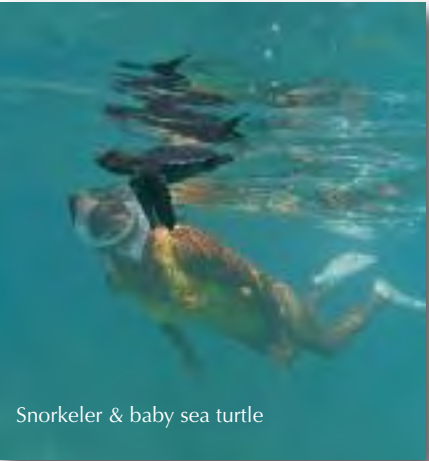
**Snorkeling** - Most of the popular reef diving destinations also have good house reefs and shallow bays that offer snorkelers a place to spend long hours enjoying the reef and its inhabitants. As the water here is normally very clear, especially at morning high tide, and shore access is easy at many beachside resorts, snorkeling is a very popular pastime.

Many local people come to the venues with their families, especially on weekends, just for the

snorkeling alone.

The corals in the Philippines are healthy due to current flow, so be well aware of the currents in the area you wish to snorkel. Also, some places have a lot of small boat traffic. Its very dangerous to snorkel around these lanes and the fishermen really don't look for or expect snorkelers to be there. Carry a flag or a float or, better yet, just avoid the high traffic banca areas.

Snorkeling can be especially rewarding at wild places with clear water like Apo Island and Tubbataha (along the tops of the dropoffs). But make sure your boatman knows where you are and you both keep an eye on one



Snorkeler & baby sea turtle

another as currents can come up quickly here.

**Conservation /Environment** - This country is making great strides to protect it's marine environment. It is still far from perfect as there is no



Jack school & snorkeler



Dynamite damage  
on the left, healthy  
reef on the right

federal agency that really has the resources to police the vast seas of the islandy country. But incidents of reported dynamite fishing are becoming less frequent as fishermen become educated about the long-term damage this and other forms of detrimental fishing can do to the world of the coral reef.

People are also seeing how they can benefit from using conservation as an ally. Donsol's whale shark viewing industry has made the entire region there prosperous. Malapascua has seen the same thing happen with people coming from around the world to see thresher sharks. Apo Island enjoys a brisk

tourism business due to it's far-sighted decades old program of reef protection.

Small marine preserves are being established and being looked after by villages, resorts and locally formed conservation groups. The economic gain translates into community prosperity. There are many marine preserve success stories now in the Philippines as this philosophy gains in popularity.



Dugong conservation





## Using This Dive Guide

**T**his guide, produced by the Philippine Department of Tourism, cannot fully cover all of the dive sites and underwater offerings in The Philippines. With so many beautiful, natural and diverse dive destinations in the country (and more being found every week) that is an almost impossible task. But this guide attempts to present a broad spectrum of what a visiting diver may see above and below the surface of Mother Ocean.

Through this book, readers can enjoy the many regions of the Philippines to help plan for the perfect dive holiday.

We ask that divers remember that the ocean is a beautiful place but a strange environment for humans. Please always respect the ocean

and, most importantly, be safe. Have proper training, conditioning and well-maintained equipment to venture into this amazing underwater world.

It is the hope of the Department of Tourism that every diver will both enjoy and respect our natural attractions. We ask that you help us to preserve, protect and conserve the ocean and its resources by taking care not to grab, break or kick coral. Please do not harass marine life or marine mammals. And take only pictures and leave only bubbles. That way our amazing Philippine reefs will be around for generations of divers to appreciate for many years to come.

In the following pages please find regional descriptions, a brief

## The Dive Site Icons

Each of the 126 dive sites listed in this book comes with a set of icons for quick visual reference as to what each spot has to offer. These are just suggested visuals of what a

diver may or may not see or encounter. Talk to your local guide to ensure that you are able to see and do what you want and what your skill level dictates.



**Good Marine Life/Preserve**



**Snorkeling/free diving areas**



**Rock, wall and/or cave(s)**



**Good for macro photography**



**Good for wide angle photos**



**Large marine life and pelagics**



**Deep dive**



**Shipwreck or remnants**



**Possible currents/drift dive**



**Shore/beach dive**

summary of sites found in the various regions and short selected dive site descriptions of what a diver may encounter when going below the waves to see the beauty of the Philippine reefs. The information in the site descriptions ranges from brief to detailed. The dive sites described include some known favorites dived frequently by many divers for decades. Also, there are newly described sites only dived a few times by a few.

Most information provided is based on the author's observation at the sites. Information is provided without prejudice but is not guaranteed accurate or complete. Use it at your own risk. The Philippine Department of Tourism and the author assume no liability

for the information provided here.

Please do the homework and book with a reputable dive center. Many can be found contacting:  
**[www.divephilippines.com](http://www.divephilippines.com)**



Shallow boulders,  
Sinadingan Wall,  
Puerto Galera



Clownfish & purple tip sea anemone

# Philippine Dive Destinations

## Luzon Dive Sites

Manila is located on the huge island of Luzon and as a result, this may be the first island in the Philippines that divers encounter. While some of the areas around the city are not suitable for diving, sites to the north, south and in Subic Bay are quite interesting. Manila holds dive and travel centers where one can book trips, get new gear and get repairs. If travelling from afar, Manila is a good place to rest and get rid of jetlag before continuing on to your resort.

Once out of the big city, there are popular dive areas like **Subic Bay** and **Anilao**. The relative newcomer is **Bicol** which features **Donsol** and **Ticao Island** and its mantas and whale sharks. Other dive areas outside of Manila include **La Union** and **Bolinao**.

## Subic Bay

Longopo, on Subic Bay, is a 2.5 to 3.5 hour drive northwest of metro Manila. One can more easily take a 20-minute flight from Manila. Or take a local bus if time isn't a big deal. It is a free port (duty-free) zone with a number of hotels on offer and a good night life. Nearby you'll find several fair beaches with basic

infrastructure, as well as accommodations ranging from modest to luxurious. There is a sea park with dolphins, sharks and turtles and a number of dive shops, many offering technical training and wreck diving certificates.

Most of Subic Bay's best diving is in the harbor, on the historic wrecks. For visibility, the best time to go is February through May but the bay has little in the way of currents and can be dived year 'round. Visibility ranges from 100 ft. (30m) to very low so ask about the best season.

Snorkelers will like **The Canyon** off Grande Island and there are some other coral spots in the bay for both snorkeling and diving.

With all the wreck and tek, Subic also has a fully-functional recompression chamber staffed by experienced professionals.







Goby in wire coral polyps

## 1) Oryoku Maru

**Icons:**    

**Location:** Off Alava Pier

**Depth:** 50-90 ft. (15-27m)

**T**he Oryoku was leveled after the war as it sits in the shipping channel and posed a navigational hazard. It is not much to see and visibility isn't usually all that good. Divers like this wreck for its bloody history. Sunk in a U.S. air attack during WWII, it was subsequently discovered that more than 1,600 U.S. prisoners of war were onboard, all of whom perished in the attack.

Not much is left to suggest it was once a Japanese passenger vessel, but it's now home to a variety of

fish, including a resident shoal of barracuda, butterflyfish and sweetlips. It also features some soft and hard corals, sponges and hydroids. The current can pick up here, and the visibility, which can vary from 10-50 ft. (3-15m), is usually better just after high tide. It isn't a real deep dive so there is time to explore.

## 2) USS New York

**Icons:**   

**Location:** 15 min from Alava Pier

**Depth:** 50-92 ft. (15-28m)

Not far from the Oryoku is a dive on a US battleship considered a must dive for those diving the

## Wreck Diving Safety

Wreck diving can be safe and fascinating. Penetration of shipwrecks, however, is a skilled specialty and should not be attempted without proper training. Wrecks are often unstable; they can be silty, deep and disorienting. Use an experienced guide to view wrecks and the amazing coral communities that have developed on them.

wrecks of Subic Bay. The battleship was commissioned in 1899 as the USS Rochester and subsequently renamed New York. It saw action in Manila Bay during the Spanish American War, in China during the Chinese Revolution and throughout the Pacific during WWI.

She was decommissioned in 1932 and was stripped of most fittings and lay at anchor for 10 years off Alava Pier. In early WWII, retreating U.S. forces scuttled her to prevent the massive guns from falling into the hands of the advancing Japanese army.

Today USS New York rests on her port side in 100 ft. (30m), relatively intact. The hull has the large holes the demolition experts blasted in it to sink her. The large guns have escaped salvage and are still mounted along both sides of the

vessel. The huge aft propeller is also intact.

The battleship is easy to penetrate for those tek and wreck trained. It is best to have an experienced guide as the vessel is massive (360 ft./109m long) so one could easily get lost in the maze of corridors and passageways.

The New York holds sponges, hydroids and a variety of soft corals with their soft coral crabs. Lionfish are ubiquitous. Other fish life includes sweetlips, fusiliers and batfish. Look inside the main interior passageway for groupers. There is a shoal of barracudas cruising around the wreck at times. Divers sometimes see bluespotted rays, especially along the muddy bottom of the bay.

Visibility on the wreck varies from 10 ft. - 50 ft. (3 - 15m). To best enjoy the ship, plan two or more dives to see it all properly.

## 3) El Capitan

**Icons:**    

**Location:** Ilanin Bay

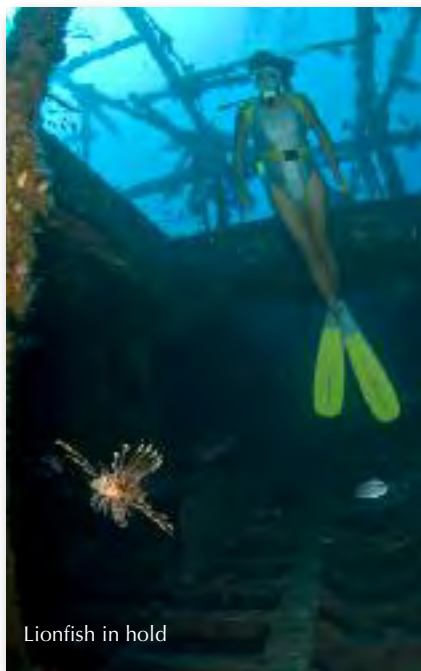
**Depth:** 16-65 ft. (5-19m)

Easy, shallow, a great history and marine life make this a very popular wreck in Subic Bay. El Capitan is certainly one of the better wrecks for photography. Visibility, as with most sites in Subic Bay, ranges from

fair to good. Try to hit it just after high tide for the best vis.

This is a small freighter. It had a major role in WWII and, even though damaged, served throughout the war and was awarded a Battle Star for service. It sunk during a storm after the war.

It is actually the USS Majaba (AG-43) and was built in 1919. This is a penetrable wreck sitting on the port side with the bow at 65 ft. (20m). Marine life includes soft corals and sponges, hydroids and clouds of small tropical fish. Around the wreck are tropicals like glasseyes, wrasses, tangs and gobies. Due to the depth, this is an excellent novice wreck dive site.



#### 4) San Quintin

**Icons:**

**Location:** Near Grande Island

**Depth:** 40-53 ft. (12-16 m)

Most of the wrecks here were sunk during World War II, but the oldest known dive site within the bay is the resting place for this steam-powered galleon sunk during the Spanish-American War in 1898. The Spanish scuttled the San Quintin at the mouth of the bay to hinder American warships from entering Subic.

The wreck is now little more than rubble but surrounded by marine life, much of it larger than is found within the bay itself. Look for wrasses, gobies, glasseyes, tangs, spotted sweetlips, lobsters and crabs.

Go with a local guide who understands currents as this is one spot in the bay that has them, thus the marine life. But, one can get swept off the wreck and into open water. The site is somewhat exposed so sea conditions can pick up quite quickly, making waves and complicating exit and entry a bit. However, the currents make visibility better here than in the bay.

Other good wrecks in Subic include the **Seian Maru**, the **Japanese Patrol Boat**, the **Sakura Maru** and the deep wreck **LST**.



Soft coral crab



## Anilao

Just south of Manila is Batangas Province with some of the best underwater diversity in the Philippines. This place is very popular on the weekends as it is only a couple of hours drive from Manila. Traffic can be forgiving and you can make the trip quickly on a mostly good tollway road. Be warned, on the way back, if you're heading into Manila, traffic can be heavy to gridlocked, so give yourself plenty of time and leave Anilao very early, especially if flying out of Manila the same day.

At the Balayan Bay area, the port village of Anilao appears and the road meanders through hilly and lush terrain dotted with weekend retreats, dive centers and resorts. This is considered the birthplace of



Philippine diving and there are well over 60 sites in the area from Janao Bay, around Bagalangit Point, in the Maricaban Island area and spilling into Batangas Bay. There are some showcase marine preserves full of fish, sea turtles and big jack schools. And Anilao is famous for its rare small creatures seen while doing macro and muck diving.

The hillside and beach locations are open to nice sea breezes and most face the western sunset but there isn't really a central tourist area, so pick a nice place to stay with good food and entertainment.

While the weekends are big here, during the week it can be quiet. Check for midweek deals. The water gets cooler in January and February, around 25C/77F. The best months are November thru May. Visibility is consistently fairly good. There are a number of marine sanctuaries and that trend is growing.



Seahorse



## 5) Kirby's Rock

**Icons:** 🏠 🌴 🐠 🐙 🐡 🐙 🐠 🐙

**Location:** North of Maricaban Island's western point

**Depth:** 10-130 ft. (3-40m)

**K**irby's (sometimes called Kerbis) is a nice combination of deep and shallow. It can be two dives in one with a deep sea mount full of life at the start and then a mini-wall and shallow pinnacle a bit farther on in the dive. You don't have to go to the deepest part of the dive to see the beautiful sunken mounts or rock. The top of it is at 65 ft. (19m) but the sand below is at 125 ft. (37m) or so.

Divers enter the water at a buoy shrouded by the high cliffline of the elongated Caban Island. One

normally heads straight down to the deepest part of the dive that is a stunning sunken pinnacle at 65 ft. (19m) to 100 ft. (30m). Healthy corals, plenty of anthias and shoaling fusiliers highlight this deep oasis of life. Be careful as this area is healthy due to the strong currents that sometimes roll over it. But you can usually hide on one side away from the current if its bothersome.

Then head back up to the mini-wall starting in 70 ft. (21m), keeping the reef on the left. Here you will find plenty of nudibranchs, hiding lionfish and small, brilliant yellow sea cucumbers.

As the dive ends, head into the shallows where a pinnacle pokes out of the water. Between the pinnacle and the Caban cliffs,

there's a crack full of sea life and more of the colorful anthias. Look also for a good selection of nudibranchs, juvenile batfish and lots of silvery baitfish near the surface. They are good entertainment and well-lit as photo subjects as divers explore and decompress from this dive.



Large claw lobster

## 6) Sombrero Island

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📷 🐠 🐙

**Location:** North of Maricaban

**Depth:** 20-90 ft. (6-27m)

Sombrero looks exactly like its namesake. A sombrero is Tagalog for a high-crowned hat with a wide brim. Bancas like to pull up to the white sand beach where divers, snorkelers and beachgoers can get off, eat lunch and have a surface interval. Explore the beach and snorkel the shallows and the rocks here to see some nice table corals and an occasional sea turtle.

The island has some impressive drop-offs falling away from its edge

that further enhance the illusion. It's home to some great diving as well, notably at adjacent **Beatrice Rock**.

Crevices, tunnels and piles of large boulders are scattered off Sombrero Island's northern cliffs, and the dropoff delves to 90ft. (27m) on the island's western side.

One should follow the guide as currents are usually strong here and a good guide can keep a diver out of trouble and still allow for viewing of pelagic action. Rainbow runners and yellowtail fusiliers and lots of anthias play in the currents and blue water column. There are some beautiful staghorn coral gardens and lots of bright yellow crinoids at shallower depths.

The reef itself is festooned with gorgonians, black coral, shells and lots of soft corals. Jacks, snappers and, with some luck, hawksbill turtles will be on the reef.

## 7) Bajura

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐡 🐢

**Location:** Caban's North Point

**Depth:** 40-121 ft.

**(12-36m)**

Bajura reef, just off the northern point of Caban Island, is more than a half mile (.5km) long. When it is calm (low current), snorkelers will share the area with fishermen who move in for a chance to catch something from their small outriggers.

Bajura's fish life is similar to Sombrero's but more prolific. Lots of caves and overhangs provide resting places for whitetip sharks, and the reef is also home to parrotfish, sweetlips, snappers, angelfish, batfish and an occasional eagle ray. The current is usually strong here, which keeps the coral vibrant and healthy. These include table, staghorn and smaller mushroom corals, as well as a lot of

soft corals and crinoids. Follow the guide to avoid any current problems for a rewarding dive.

## 8) Sepok Wall

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐡 🐢

**Location:** Westernmost Point of Caban Island

**Depth:** 14-100 ft. (4-30 m)



Soft corals and barrel sponges

Sepok Wall, also called Philip's Garden, is covered in a variety of soft and hard corals and drops off impressively from west of Sepok Point to the southwest. This is a good place for macro photography, although there are opportunities for wide angle. But nudibranch lovers will find this site rewarding with many various and colorful members of the *Chromodoris* family making this site home. It does get its share of pelagics cruising by so it doesn't hurt to look off in the blue for the





Sea turtle at Twin Rocks

occasional dogtooth tuna or schooling yellowtail fusiliers. Turtles like the sandy plain below the wall and there are small corals. Look for nice coral-covered bommies a bit to the north halfway into the dive.

## 9) Mapating

**Icons:**    

**Location:** Maricaban's west point

**Depth:** 36 - 140 ft. (11 - 42m)

This is not a sea mount so much as an open ocean rock coming up to fairly shallow depths just southwest of Sepok Point and wall. It is known for strong currents and has its share of corals at the reeftop along with a wall that drops to deep sand and then keeps dropping. This is a site for experienced divers only and should not be done without a

knowledgeable guide.

Divers often see an impressive parade of pelagics, including large rays, whitetips and other shark species. The shallower portions of the reef are festooned with nudibranchs going about their business surrounded by prolific soft coral and some hard corals. On the tek side, for qualified deep divers, the entrance to a massive cave lies below 144 ft. (43m). There may be large marble rays. This should only be done with proper technical prep.

## 10) Spring Bubbles

**Icons:**    

**Location:** SSW of Sepok Wall

**Depth:** 10-130 ft. (3-40m)

A fascinating and unusual dive site, the main feature is... you

guessed it... hot springs. They percolate beneath the sea creating bubbles flowing up to the surface. At 33 ft. (10m) at the north end of the site, volcanically heated fresh water gushes from cracks in the sea floor. The area is covered in unusual bright green, yellow and pastel-hued soft corals. The hot water merges into the cooler seawater, creating a naturally heated underwater pool. Unlike similar dive sites around the world, this water is pretty hot so "feel the heat" with gloved care.

The reeftop slopes down to an area that promises anything from sea anemones to sea snakes at the 40 to 50 ft. (12 to 15m) area. From there you can drop over the edge of a small wall that is home to

nudibranchs and the occasional big frogfish. The sandy area at the wall's bottom and toward the north attracts whitetip sharks and bluespot and marble rays. Because of the unique underwater environment, the visibility is almost always good.

A further bonus is that one can prepare lunch while diving. Simply place an egg over one of the hot water vents. It will be hard-boiled and ready to eat by the time the dive ends.

### 11) Secret Bay

**Icons:**   

**Location:** Caban Island

**Depth:** 10-100 ft. (3-30m)

This sandy slope also features a few hot water vents down deep and attracts a great variety of macro creatures. Boat traffic is light, making this the kind of dive that starts out deep and goes up the slope to the shallows for a nice, long mucky session.

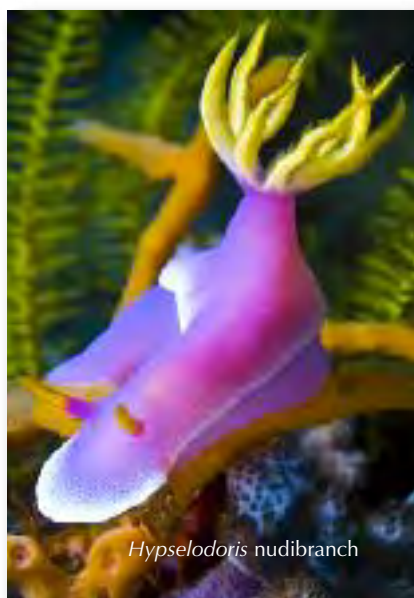
Photography conditions are quite nice with the bottom sandy but not too silty. There's a current that sweeps away fin wash. Sand anemones, halimeda algae and sea pens sprout from the sea floor. There's a bit of debris here and there and one may find a coconut octopus or seahorse attached.

Other oddities include fire urchins



Schooling bigeye jacks

with Coleman shrimp, blue-ring octopus, fluorescent urchins plus lots of gobies and their bulldozer shrimps. It is a great macro spot that also has some very photogenic bobtail shrimp and hiding spotted crabs on the sand anemones.



## 12) Mainit

Icons: 🏠 🗺️ 📏 🌊

**Location:** Off Cazador Point

**Depth:** 16-115 ft. (5-35 m)

This rocky point is one of the better dives for variety and fish life. Mainit means “hot” in Tagalog and nearby onshore there are hot springs. You can bring eggs and boil them here too!

There are no springs underwater

## Muck Diving

The term “**muck diving**” is attributed to Papua New Guinea dive pioneer Bob Halstead . He found that there were unusual, exotic and juvenile critters near his wife’s home at Dinah’s Beach at Milne Bay. These odd and unusual creatures make their homes in the volcanic black sand, sediment and even trash that the popular sites seem to have in common. Lucky divers may find colorful nudibranchs, frogfish, blue-ringed octopus, scorpionfish, seahorses and a host of other strange and hard-to-find marine creatures in these habitats. While not as pretty as corals reefs, the muck dives are fascinating and require a sharp eye and a knowledge of how a fish or invertebrate uses camouflage. Perhaps those that enjoy muck diving the most are the macro photographers. The normally calm and shallow water provides amazing opportunities to photograph the creatures and the dives are normally longer, providing plenty of bottom time. Anilao is considered one of the better muck diving regions in the Philippines.

but there is a good variety of terrain

Flamboyant cuttlefish  
at Elmer's



along a rocky, boulder-strewn, ridged and sloped reef. The dive starts in a protected eddy and, keeping the reef on the right, gets progressively better as you head into the current point. There are lots of soft and hard corals including big clusters of salmon colored tubastreas that have bright yellow polyps that open to feed when the current is strong. There are stonefish and lots of lionfish about as well.

Look also for big, green tree tubastreas, big plate and vase corals and lots of crinoids. There are many big, healthy barrel sponges along the dropoff. Although the rocky, sloping wall goes quite deep, the

shallower areas hold much more to see so one can make a nice long dive looking for small stuff like nudibranchs and cowries. There are also a couple of nearby submerged pinnacles at 70 ft. (21m) that offer a good vantage point from which to see the passing parade of pelagics.

### 13) Twin Rocks

**Icons:**     

**Location:** NE of Babalangit Point

**Depth:** 53-100 ft. (16-30 m)

A marine sanctuary, this site has even seen Philippine president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo make a few of her dives here. The site only allows 20 divers at a time according





Anthias at the Twin Rocks

to a sign on the beach and does not allow training or checkout. So the

good news here is divers will have the place to themselves, although it is a very popular site.

The fish here are used to being fed so batfish head to divers as they descend. Other fish like damsels and butterflyfish will join the fray. The dive is normally started at the south buoy and divers can feed the fish, look at the corals and check out sea anemones and some well-placed giant clams.

There are some tridacna clams near the remains of a wreck and other wreck remnants sit at 100 ft. (30m) but aren't much to see.

Go a bit deeper down the sloping bottom and there may be a large school of bigeye jacks. Look for



Coastal Anilao Islands

hawksbills resting on the bottom including a large, old male.

Toward the end of the dive the twins appear in the shallows. They are just two similar looking rocks split by a small canyon in the middle but they are smothered in marine life. Pink anthias are everywhere. Yellow and orange crinoids nestle on balls of the pink tubastreas. If there is some current, the tubastreas open their yellow polyps giving the twins even more color. Anemones and all kinds of hard corals cover the rest of the rocks. The twin rocks are a great place to make colorful images.

#### 14) Elmer's

**Icons:**  

**Location:** NE of Babalangit Point

**Depth:** 30-100 ft. (9-30 m)

This is a great macro site almost adjacent to the Twin Rocks Marine Sanctuary and it is good for nice sea anemones, corals and a variety of nudibranchs including quite a few from the *Nembrotha* sp. family. Its very good for macro photography.

What's nice is that this area isn't dived much as its known as a site that "only photographers enjoy". The reason they like it is that such colorful oddities as flamboyant cuttlefish, pygmy seahorses, Spanish dancers and nudis like the beautiful

purple Chromodoris (*Hypselodoris bullocki*) can be found.

There are also some nice plume worms, the occasional blue ribbon eel and lots of anemones throughout the dive including bubble tip anemones with spinecheek clownfish.

#### 15) Cathedral Rock

**Icons:**   

**Location:** NE of Babalangit Point

**Depth:** 53-100 ft. (16-30 m)

A marine sanctuary, this site is a popular weekend haunt for Manila divers. Nudibranch lovers flock here for macro photography.

There are a few other sites around the country named the same thing, but this Cathedral Rock site is, without a doubt, the most famous. It's actually a flourishing artificial reef developed in 1967 by scuba enthusiast Dr. Tim Sevilla. This pioneer transplanted the now-prodigious live corals onto the previously barren twin rocks. At the time this was an act thought to be impossible. These rocks are now teeming with fish awaiting a handout from divers, who for years have been feeding them. This has spurred a few other endeavors. There is a nice artificial reef in the making at the end of Basura 1, for instance.



Octopus in a bottle shard

This is also one of a handful of sites in the area that are both protected and allow fish feeding. This makes getting fish photos pretty easy. Just don't throw out too much food at once or there could be a frenzy of damsels, surgeons and batfish creating havoc.

At around 48 ft. (14m) there is the small cross from which the site gets its name. The cross was blessed by Pope John Paul II and placed here in 1983 by then Gen. Fidel V. Ramos, who went on to become president of the Philippines.

It is possible to go deeper than 100 ft. (30m), but there isn't much to see below the Cathedral's area. Enjoy the diverse marine life which

is plentiful and includes nudibranchs, Moorish idols, butterflyfish, clownfish hanging around some large anemones, angelfish, triggerfish, wrasses, parrotfish, damsels, puffers, surgeons and even, in the shallows, juvenile batfish.

#### 16) Basura 1

**Icons:**    

**Location:** NE of Babalangit Point

**Depth:** 53-100 ft. (16-30 m)

This is one of the more famous critter dives in Anilao as far as sheer variety of strange muck creatures goes. Some divers say night diving here is best and they do three dives

running into the night and then they rest by day. Others think the site is good any time of the day.

Photographer Scott “Gutsy” Tuason produced a very nice hard cover book called “Anilao” that features a lot of Basura’s macro critters.

Basura means “trash” in Tagalog and you will see that the prevailing currents seem to carry junk here and leave it. It is quickly converted into habitat by octopi, seahorses, frogfish and scorpionfish.

There are also a lot of naturally occurring sand anemones with clownfish, crabs and shrimp. There are also small frogfish, harlequin shrimp, Bobbit worms, ghost and ornate pipefish, crocodile snake eels, commensal shrimp and the list goes on.

## 17) Basura 2

**Icons:** 🏠 📍 📏 📷

**Location:** NE of Babalangit Point

**Depth:** 53-100 ft. (16-30 m)

This site is a continuation of the first dive and extends almost into Anilao town. The terrain isn’t as sandy. Its scattered with more coral bommies and holds a different host of small fish. It’s known to be a very good place to find ribbon eels.



Yellow spiny seahorse

But there are also a lot of rare and unusual nudibranchs including hammerhead nudis.

Look for striped fantail pipefish in the urchins, cardinalfish schools, plumeworms, and plenty of guardian sand gobies with their bulldozer shrimp. There are also many roaming shoals of juvenile catfish scouring the bottom. This can be another long and shallow dive for great macro shots.



## Donsol/Ticao/Masbate

The popular whale shark and manta ray viewing area around Donsol and Ticao Island is called Manta Bowl and has become a destination for those wanting to see large marine life, big fish schools and even pelagics like marlins and sailfish in the open sea.

Donsol is reached by flying in to southern Luzon via Legaspi. The “perfect volcano”, imposing Mount Mayon, looms over Legaspi City and the surrounding countryside. The airport is out of town so divers head for the hour ride through the surrounding countryside into the Province of Sorsogon. Most stay at the resorts a few miles out of town along the beach where there are also some very good little eateries. Make sure you try the Bicol Express.

Or, one can fly or take a ferry to Masbate City on the Island of



Masbate in the Bicol region of the Philippines. The Province of Masbate comprises three major islands, Masbate, Ticao and Burias. There are coastal resorts here as well and Ticao Island is a short ferry ride away. Manta Bowl is quite close to resorts along the eastern Ticao coast.

The best time to visit is October to June. After that, the north monsoon, “habagat”, blows in and makes water rough and creates low visibility in the bay.



Mt. Mayon from Donsol area



## 18) Manta Bowl

**Icons:**     

**Location:** Ticao Island Channel

**Depth:** 55 to 80 ft. (17 to 25m)

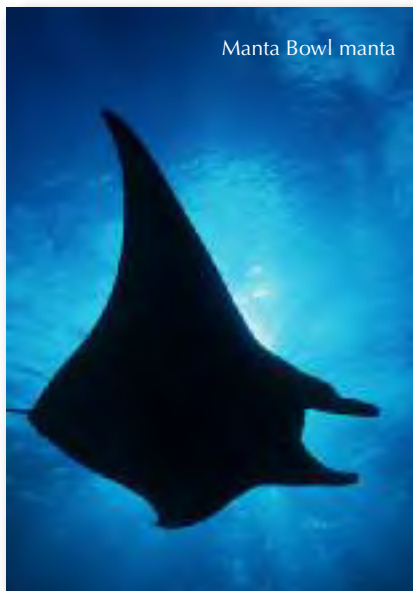
This is one of the major pelagic dive sites in the Philippines and is normally current swept and full of a

variety of open water marine life. Divers bring reef hooks, hook in and wait for the large creatures to show up. This is a tricky dive, however, and should be done only with an experienced guide.

From Donsol, it's about an hour ride in calm seas to the dive area. Much shorter from Ticao dive resorts. There are no moorings and an open water fast descent is required to get down to the reef top. Since the reef is only 55-60 ft. (16-18m) in many spots, this is done fairly handily.

The Manta Bowl Shoal is a submerged atoll covering around eight hectares. There are five different dive sites here ranging from 55 to 105 ft. (14 to 29m) and all offer the chance to see Mr. Big. Manta Bowl lies in the Ticao Pass and Burias Pass. This area is known for plankton-rich water and a

Manta Bowl manta



consistant current. These traits make the waters of Ticao an alley for other pelagics like big oceanic mantas, marble rays, tiger sharks, great hammerhead sharks, thresher sharks, oceanic whitetips, great barracudas and seasonal whale sharks. The strong currents also bring out the schooling fish and it is common to see blackbar barracuda shoals, schooling bigeye jacks and even beautiful yellowfin tuna.

Stick close to the guide and be weighted enough to be able to avoid being swept away. The top of the mount has some scattered corals but most of it is open reef flat. These coral stations usually hold sea anemones with clownfish, lots of crinoids and a few other small fish like hawkfish.

The cleaning stations are not all that obvious so it is again

imperative you have a good guide to show you where to hook in and observe. Also, some of the better spots are a bit deeper at 80 ft. (24m) as the reeftop slopes gradually down with the current.

Trips usually start early to take advantage of morning tide. This incredible show of marine life depends on good currents, so don't shy away because of currents. Fish life decreases significantly at slack tide.

After watching the action, unhook the reef hook and do an open ocean drifting deco stop, again following the guide and the safety sausage. Because this is really out to open sea and it has currents, each diver should have a safety sausage in case he or she gets swept off and is separated from the group or guide.



Anemones on Manta Bowl reef flats

## 19) Bobby's Wall

Icons: 🐠 🐡 🐠

**Location:** South Point of San Miguel Island

**Depth:** 30 -100 ft. (9 - 30m)

Along the west side and the far point of San Miguel island there is a drift dive along a wall that is fun and full of surprises. This is normally a drift dive with a manageable current running along the steep cliffs. These cliffs are nice to see above the surface as they hold caves and have rugged formations.

Below they also offer exploration as the diver can enter any one of three caves at about 70 ft. (21m) and look for inhabitants.

Inside and along the wall and sea bottom you can find boxer shrimp in the cave, banded sea snakes, stonefish, spotted stingrays and many kinds of nudibranchs.

The wall and caves also have nice arrays of soft corals. This site is good for macro and wide angle.

## 20) Bobby's Garden

Icons: 🐠 🐡 🐠

**Location:** SE tip, San Miguel Island

**Depth:** 10 to 60 ft. (3 to 18m)

This is a relaxing and shallow



Linkia blue starfish

boat dive that can be done on the way back from Manta Bowl or as a second dive after the nearby Bobby's Wall. Both were found by local guide Bobby Adrao and are a couple of roughly a dozen dives found around San Miguel. This features lots of small coral heads, table corals and undercuts.

The bonus is that this seems to be a manta ray area as well and an occasional manta ray is seen around the table corals at 40 ft. (12m). Look also for eagle rays.

The corals hold various anemones and spinecheek clownfish, spiny puffers, lots of variety in





**Depth: 0 to 30 ft. (0 to 9m)**

Pasil Reef is right in front of Ticao Island Resort and is a great third dive and it is generally reserved as a night dive. Look for the usual suspects including sleeping

nudibranchs, shrimp, crabs and lots of other small critters. This can be a good macro dive and it is shallow enough to allow for looking around for small things in the shallows.

## 21) Alea Beach

**Icons:**   

**Location: W. San Miguel Island**

**Depth: 0 to 10 ft. (0 to 3m)**

This is a private beach and permission to use the beach can be gotten in Donsol. But even if you don't go ashore, snorkeling from your anchored banca is very nice. It's a shallow open bay and the bottom has small coral heads, brain corals and sea feathers. Lots of starfish are also found in the area. Look for pufferfish and lizardfish in the sea feathers and trumpetfish hiding in the fronds.

## 22) Pasil Reef

**Icons:**   

**Location: Ticao Island Resort**

whitetips, mantis shrimps and marauding crabs looking for a meal.

## 23) San Rafael

**Icons:**  

**Location: Off San Rafael Village**

**Depth: 5 to 30 ft. (1.2 to 9m)**

This is a shallow and mucky dive with just enough current to sweep the silt away, making photography rewarding despite silty conditions. This is the kind of dive where two is a crowd as silt gets kicked up easily and visibility lessens quickly, so divers should spread out to avoid making too much of a mess for one another, especially if macro photography is the goal of the dives.

Among the creatures seen here are hairy frogfish, waspfish, lots of aggressive little saddleback anemonefish and their anemones, mantis shrimp, nudibranchs, small red or orange frogfish and lots more. One can see Mount Mayol from the boat on the ride back.



Whale shark feeding at Donsol

### Donsol's Whale Sharks

Whale sharks are the biggest shark and also the biggest fish found in the sea. And Donsol's big claim to fame is that they come to feed fairly consistently in its waters. They are in the highest numbers from mid-February until the end of March but they can start to appear much earlier and leave in May when the hagabab winds start coming in and make the bay murky. They may actually start to show up as early as the start of December or late November if there have been no big rains. A couple of years the plankton the sharks seek has shown up elsewhere and the sharks have not come, but that is not the norm.

The ones that show up are young males and not huge by whale shark standards. Whale sharks reach 60 ft./18m and average 40 ft./13m and

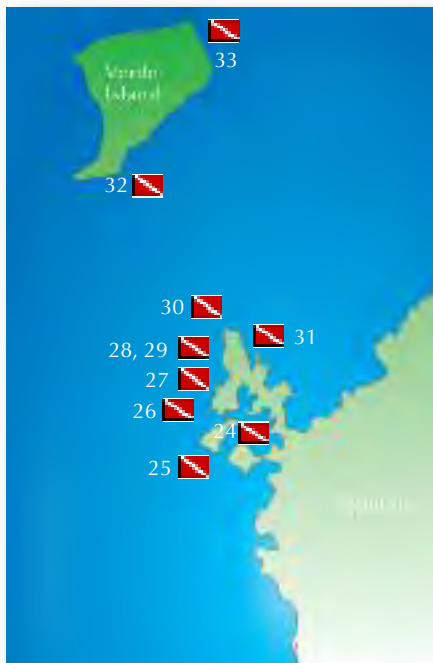
weigh 8 -13 tons. So these aren't that big at 13-20 ft. (4-6m) and 2 tons. But they are bigger than anything else swimming around the bay. Thus, their dark forms can be seen cruising just under the surface in a tasty layer of Donsol Bay's plankton, small fish and crablets. The spotters have great eyes as the sharks rarely break the surface.

There is an association of whale shark watching boats and the crews are trained in spotting and approaching the sharks. Everyone must get a license and take a course to see the whale sharks which is done at the Department of Tourism. The quick course is on video and is well done. World Wildlife Fund guidelines for whale shark interaction are generally followed in Donsol waters. Snorkelers are not allowed to touch the fish and everyone pays a conservation fee.

## Puerto Galera

This very popular diving, holiday and nightlife destination offers great diving by day and lots of partying by night. Good local food stands line the beach and fine dining can be found in the hotels. Accommodation is plentiful, ranging from simple beach cottages to air-conditioned resorts. The shoreline is the home of the famous The Point Bar. Here many dive stories are both created and then greatly embellished. Food and revelry aside, there are dive shops that are very advanced and equipped well for anything from basic instruction all the way up to advanced technical diving.

The northeast tip of beaches and bays of Mindoro Island is actually referred to commonly as Puerto Galera. Puerto Galera town is



actually a bigger non-tourist city a bit southwest of Sabang. Generally, the whole area just gets called Puerto Galera but the divers mostly hang out around Sabang's beaches which include Monkey Beach, Big



Puerto Galera

La Laguna and Small La Laguna.

The coastal waters of Puerto Galera were declared a marine sanctuary several decades ago. As a result, the reefs have become amazingly diverse and prolific over the years.

Folks who fly into the Philippines usually take a two-hour bus ride from Manila to Batangas followed by a one-hour crossing of the Verde Island Passage. Puerto Galera is easily accessible. Most resorts and dive centers can arrange transfers from anywhere in Manila. Boat transfers to and from Anilao are also common and take anywhere from 40 minutes to two hours depending on the type of boat and the currents. Diving is possible at PG year 'round.

In the gorgeous coves and bays east of Puerto Galera you'll find more than 40 excellent dive sites within 20 minutes of most diving services, and more dive sites farther



PG kids eating ice cream

out. This area is also a huge technical diving area. This book deals with just the major sport diving sites but there is an array of deep (150 ft.+ 45m+) sites that are regularly done with mixed gas and rebreathers. Accessible snorkeling is just offshore, where marine life abounds even in shallow water.

Currents can be quite strong at some of the sites, and unwary divers have been swept out to sea on occasion. Always dive with a knowledgeable local guide, of which there is no shortage.





## 24) Clam City

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📷 📱

**Location:** Puerto Galera Harbor

**Depth:** 10 to 80 ft. (3 to 24m)

A fun site for macro that has its own local guard is Clam City. Located in the channel southeast of Sabang, in Muele Bay, many giant tridacna clams have been placed for snorkelers to see and also to help reseed the area with giant clams. This was done by researchers from the University of Manila over a decade ago. As these can be tasty, a guard is posted in an anchored outrigger to ensure no one tries to get the clams for dinner.

The shallows are interesting and

one doesn't have to go any farther than 35 ft. (11m) to see plenty of macro life. Most of the clams are situated near reefs and a few are out in the sand. Since they feed by photosynthesis, they are in open, sunny water. Most are in 20 ft. (6m) or even less so snorkelers can enjoy them too. Thus, there is a lot of boat traffic. So divers need to surface at a mooring line or next to your guide's safety sausage.

In the clam area there are many jawfish. Sometimes two even share one hole. Look to see if any are incubating eggs in their mouths. There are blue linkia starfish with small commensal shrimps, bubble anemones, snake eels, bluespot

stingrays and bulldozer shrimp doing their thing as the sentinel goby watches warily. Deeper in the channel look for roaming schools of catfish, seahorses, plumeworm colonies, solar powered slugs, lizardfish and many other unusual critters. Fish life swirls overhead.

This whole area is beautiful above the water and has some unique marine life down below. Sites like **Coral Gardens, The Hill** (which is considered to be the shallower snorkeling area at Clam City) and even the populous **White Beach** all offer venues for sea critter hunts.

## 25) Coral Gardens

Icons: 🏠 📷 🗺️ 📱

Location: Batangas Channel

Depth: 10 to 50 ft. (3 to 15m)

If heading by boat to any of the



beaches northeast of Puerto Galera, one passes this attractive site on the way out of the harbor channel near Long Beach.

It has prolific hard corals and tube and encrusting sponges that grow in the shallow water here.

This is normally an easy dive that is frequently used for training and is also a great snorkeling spot. Staghorn and basket corals are prolific and shell fanciers will appreciate the variety of cowry species, clams, morays, lionfish and the occasional frogfish.

Photographers will also like this site as the shallow reef makes it easy to play with light for wide angle scenes. Soft and hard corals make colorful backdrops for fish and macro work.



Snapper school on Alma Jane

## 26) Alma Jane

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📷 📖

**Location:** Off Asia Divers pier

**Depth:** 40 to 100 ft. (12 to 30m)

Almost directly off the Asia Divers' pier in Sabang Bay is a scuttled shipwreck that is a great fish magnet. It's the most substantial wreck in the bay and can be dived from shore or the pier but is best done by boat as it is deep. The actual ship is a 60-ton, 115-ft. (33m) steel-hulled cargo ship. It was built in Japan in 1966. It was purposely sunk in March 2003. It landed upright, making it a great wreck to photograph.

With a variety of marine life taking up residence in and around the wreck, wreckies and tekkies

love having such an easily reachable ship. Photographers love it even more, especially for wide angle work.





Hull of a Sabang Awencha

There is usually a buoy aft and divers can descend all the way to the back prop area. The sand is at about 100 ft. (30m), the deck 80 (24m) and the upper bridge-type structure is 55-60 ft. (18m). The prop has been removed but there is a rudder still intact and spotted sweetlips, snappers and batfish like to hover here.

Most of the wire and stuff that could entangle a diver has been removed, but not all, so be aware. Cardinalfish hide here. The lionfish are always in full attendance as there are large baitfish and fusilier schools that form thick shoals inside and give them plenty of food. Aside from the fish, the holds are open and empty and easy to explore.

Snapper and batfish like the outside of the wreck and a school of the yellowtail snapper is usually in the bow area. The batfish seem to follow divers as a curiosity. Do an open water drift ascent and look for a very large, flowing school of batfish. Divers can play with them and drift with them as they slowly make their way up to a deco stop. This is a high boat traffic area. Have a large visible safety sausage and ascend close to the guide.

## 27) Sabang Wrecks

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📊 📅 📌

**Location:** East of Sabang Point

**Depth:** 10 to 130+ft. (3 to 40+m)

This dive has some reef and wreck





Sabang sea grasses

action and can be either a wide angle or a macro dive. This can be a walk-in from the sea grasses in the shallows, but its easiest to grab a banca ride out to a buoy that's attached to an anchor and descend to about 70 ft. (21m).

Nearby is the stripped out hull of an old sailboat named "Awencha". The ship rests on it port side and may have some macro critters inside to shoot. Be careful of scorpionfish that inhabit the wreck. There are lots of cardinalfish inside as well. Outside, lizardfish, encrusting sponges, soft corals and other invertebrates and clouds of anthias have made the hull home.

From here swim south to find the tossed remains of a Vietnamese wooden vessel. Its pretty well

leveled due to the years and a typhoon, but the ship's ribs are still present. Crinoids, rope sponges and anthias are all over this one as well. Also look for white-eye morays, frogfish and cuttlefish.

Moving on, normally with a batfish and surgeonfish entourage following, there's another wooden wreck that was once a Taiwanese fishing junk. Now the remnants are the home of a good number of cardinalfish and anthias. This attracts the beautiful coral groupers and lots of small damsels. There's still and old, encrusted engine, the ballast stones can be seen aft and there's part of the stern.

Look for cuttlefish around the wreck, some butterflyfish and puffers. Frogfish also conceal

themselves well in the aft ribs.

Now comes the critter and macro search. Start heading into the shallow part of the south bay where sand and sea grasses hold snake eels, stargazers, helmet gurnards, sea pens with small commensal crabs, ghost pipefish and arrays of chocolate chip sea stars.

This productive and interesting area is only 15-20 ft. (4-6m) deep and divers can do a long deco stop/critter search by scrounging around. This is a high boat traffic area so make sure to follow a guide up a safe mooring. The sandy area down to the Taiwanese wreck makes for a very interesting night dive and then chances of seeing a stargazer are pretty good.

## 28) West Escarceo

**Icons:**     

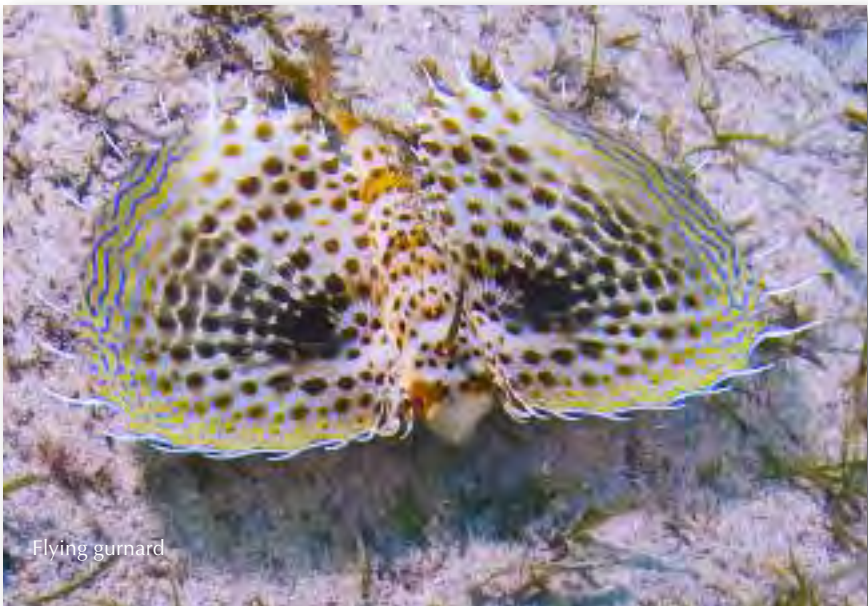
**Location:** West of Escarceo Point

**Depth:** 10 to 100 ft. (3 to 30m)

This site is a photographer favorite for its normally calm waters at reeftop that hold beautiful hard brain, boulder and table corals and lots of small marine creatures.

The dive then goes into a sharp slope that bottoms out at 100 ft. (30m). Bring a local guide to point out some of the critter haunts and also to be able to tell if the current is changing in any way.

One can dive around and return back into the eddy area or elect to drift and follow the current which may go by a couple of sites.



Flying gurnard

## 29) Hole in the Wall

**Icons:**      

**Location:** Off Escarceo Point

**Depth:** 30 to 60 ft. (9 to 18m)

**Range:** Novice

The table corals below at this site are healthy and they are in consistently clear water. Drop down to 30 ft. (9m) and then slowly head down the reef. This site off Escarceo Point is renowned for its sometimes ferocious currents and riptides, whirlpools and eddies. But that also accounts for the healthy coral cover that flows down this terraced and seemingly landscaped layered drop. That said, again, take an experienced guide.

This is a popular dive and the “Hole” itself is not that deep but is found under a ridge and can be missed if you don’t follow the guide. You get there by swimming

along several drop-offs festooned with hard and soft corals. This brings you to the namesake hole at around 45 ft. (13m). The hole itself is about 5 ft. (1.5m) wide, which allows a fully equipped diver to easily pass through. Be careful not to brush the side as it’s covered in soft corals and invertebrates.

The wall falls away, so keep an eye out into the blue for large pelagics. Local divers have from time to time reported seeing mantas, whale sharks and other big fish here and the nearby Canyons.

Head back up around a point at about 50 ft. (15m) and through a series of coral heads and sand and finish up for deco at the same pretty table top coral area entry point.

## 30) The Canyons

**Icons:**      

**Location:** Off Escarceo Point

**Depth:** 25-130 ft. (8-40 m)

An advanced site, The Canyons, has always been one of the popular adrenalin dives. Local knowledge of the currents is imperative here, as you must rely on the prevailing current to sweep you into position on this dive. After racing with the current over several small drop-offs festooned with big, golden gorgonians and past thick schools of golden anthias, soft corals and



The Canyons



sponges, you'll find yourself in an area with several crevasses (the canyons) that are cleft into the wall. These afford some respite from the usually raging current.

Expect to see large schools of trevallies, snappers, sweetlips, barracuda and sometimes whitetip sharks. Lionfish, surgeonfish and lined angelfish are also often present. There's lots going on as the currents always seem to make the ocean creatures come alive.

The usual end point of this dive is a large anchor embedded in the reef. Open ocean deco is the norm. Follow a guide, use a safety sausage and look out for boat traffic as it is a main shipping lane.

### 31) Sinadigan Wall

**Icons:**

**Location:** SW of Escarceo Point

**Depth:** 10-130 ft. (3-40 m)

This is an interesting dive with two walls, a wide variety of marine life from tiny nudibranchs to the occasional pelagic and some

shallow end-of-dive swim-throughs that make great photos.

Start by entering at about 15 ft. (5m) and then slowly head down the reef slope. There is an interesting little coral valley that leads to the first wall in about 45 ft. (13m) of water. This dive has some nice wide angle possibilities but is famous for its nudibranch diversity. There are lots of *Chromodoris*, *Nembrotha*, *Glossodoris*, *Hyselodoris*, *Flabellina* and flatworms and lots more.

The second wall is about 45 ft. (13m) deep up to 20 (6m) or so. There are snapper schools and yellow damsels, yellow sea cucumbers and lots of anemones. The cliffs fall right into the sea with big boulders and swim-throughs. This upper area has sun rays beaming through the clear water.





### 32) Washing Machine

**Icons:**     

**Location:** Verde Island's West Tip

**Depth:** 10-50 ft. (3-15m)

Verde Island is a small island across from Puerto Galera between the provinces of Batanagas and Mindoro. Verde Island Passage is a very busy shipping lane. Bamboo covers most of the island.

This dive is located at the island's northwest tip and is great for big barrel sponges. As the name implies, the current here can be pretty wild and mixed-up, putting the diver through wash and rinse cycle during the course of the dive. While this site may not be everybody's cup of tea, when the current is running at full tilt, the Washing Machine is like a crazy amusement park ride. For those who would like to slowly explore a nicely decorated reef with big barrel sponges, spiny pufferfish, lots of colorful crinoids and a bunch of sea anemones, go at slack tide.

### 33) Verde Island Wall

**Icons:**     

**Location:** SE Point of Verde Island

**Depth:** 15-100 ft. (4-30 m)

This is one of the best dives in the country. The wall itself is easy to find: Look for the two rocks jutting



Chromis at Verde Wall

out of the sea off the island's southeast point. Drop in south of them, then head north. The visibility is usually excellent. The wall itself has lots of cracks and crevices to duck out of the current, but remember that it falls away to great depths. Most divers remain above 80 ft. (24m) and there is no good reason to descend any deeper.

The wall itself is festooned in an impossible array of colorful corals. Whitetips and other sharks, occasional mantas, eagle rays, tuna and jacks, rainbow runners, wahoo and Spanish mackerel are among the pelagics along with Napoleons, parrotfish, unicornfish, batfish, tangs, sweetlips and emperors throughout. There are clouds of anthias everywhere making the whole place move with color.

At the safety stop on top of the reef, there are some very nice shallow coral gardens with chromis in thick clouds. Also, the reef belches occasionally, literally! Look for the bubbles of volcanic gases escaping from cracks in the reef.



Batfish school off Alma Jane

## Southern Leyte

Sogod Bay is a large bay in the southern part of Leyte Island and an extension of the Bohol Sea. It is fully surrounded by the province of Southern Leyte. The municipality of Sogod is located at the head of the bay so the bay has that moniker.

For divers, the waters are home to a profusion of beautiful marine life. As it is a bit off the beaten diver path in the Philippines, the reefs are considered to be uncrowded with spots waiting to be found and explored. It is known for having some great macro sites with lots of rare and unusual invertebrates and small fish like tiny pygmy seahorses, nudibranchs, frogfish and pipefish to turtles, Napoleon wrasses and reef sharks. The bay has also



recently been the focus of swimming with the biggest of fish as whale sharks are known to seasonally frequent the area.

The bay has coral gardens, steep dropoffs, cascading shelves and walls, as well as black sand, which is what macro buffs seek for the prolific macro life.

Local dive resorts are dedicated to marine conservation and have sponsored marine protected areas (MPAs) throughout Sogod Bay. The bio-diversity of the marine ecosystem offers visitors an unforgettable and unique experience.

Divers will find certified PADI instructors and the knowledgeable Filipino divemasters. Over 25 unspoiled dive sites are now regularly dived. Underwater photographers and videographers are welcomed. For instance, at Sogod Bay Resort, within ten to thirty minutes of the resort there are over 20 dive sites, including some



Ribbon eel



Juvenile whale shark

interesting wide angle spots.

**D**ivers get to this area a couple of ways and there is some driving and flying involved.

International flights can arrive at both Manila and Cebu.

There are a number of ferry services from Cebu to Leyte. Contact your resort to check the schedule of ferries as they can change seasonally and without notice. Usually transfers by car from Leyte ferry terminals in Bato, Hilongos, Ormoc or Maasin can be made.

From Manila, a number of flights are available to Tacloban, Leyte, (TAC) pretty much daily. From Tacloban to most dive areas by car then takes about three hours.

From Bohol, ferries are available

from Ubay, Bohol, to Bato and Hilongos in Leyte. The land transfer from Maasin then takes around 45 minutes.

Not all operators take part in the reef restoration and marine preserve programs. Those who do plant and grow live corals on the reefs. They do this work with the help of the local marine biologists. Ask as they allow guest divers to help so divers can give back to Mother Ocean.

Leyte is a big area and there are parks, beaches and waterfalls for people to visit if not just there for diving. Padre Burgos town is the jump-off point because of its concentration of dive shops and lodging facilities. Check Napantao Marine Protected Area sanctuary.





Table corals

### 34) Napantao MPA

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 🏊 🐠 🐡 🐙

**Location:** Near San Francisco town

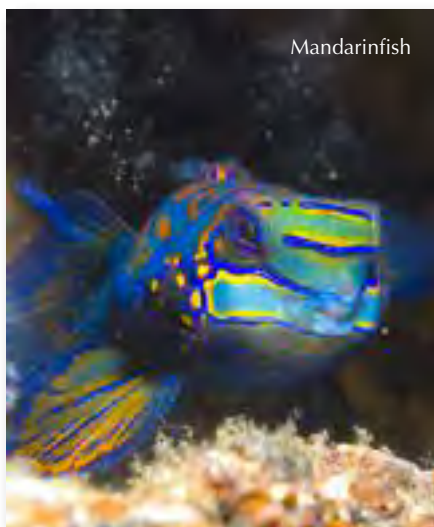
**Depth:** 10-140+ ft. (3-40+m)

Napantao is the oldest marine protected area in Sogod bay. Coral Cay Conservation is based in the area and as a result, there is not a lot of illegal fishing in the sanctuary. It is said to be one of the top 10 wall dives in South East Asia.

Napantao is a fantastic wall dive starting at around 45 ft. (13m) and drops down past safe diving limits to 160 ft. (50m). Currents can be a bit tricky but this is a plus as when currents are strong pelagic fishes are often seen. Tuna, wahoo, devil rays, rainbow runners and midnight snappers all school in the area and can be seen with the fusilier masses in the blue water. The wall is covered with red soft corals gorgonian fans and green *Tubastrea* sp. tree corals that open their polyps when the currents are strong for a burst of reef color.

The best time to dive Napantao is mid morning. The colors can be tremendously nice with the right sunlight on the upper reef. There are two walls with the major one shaped like a horseshoe. It has a big and deep crack past 140 ft. (42m) full of sweetlips and spotted groupers. It is normally dived with the prevailing current and divers zig-zag up the wall. At the top of the wall there is an abundance of marine life and hard and soft coral. Look for the occasional whitetip reef sharks in the limestone caves.

There's also a second almost mini-wall that is also very colorful and drops down deep. Look for batfish schools and hiding frogfish on this wall. Divers can do both walls in one dive if the current is strong. Napantao is a must to dive when visiting Sogod Bay.



Mandarinfish

### 35) Padre Burgos Pier

Icons:    

Location: Padre Burgos

Town Pier

Depth: 15-20 ft. (4-5m)

The Padre Burgos Pier is a popular night dive in shallow water and local operators bill it as “the ultimate night dive”. Photographers will love it as there are seahorses, frogfish, nudibranchs, eels, octopi, stargazers, razorfish and many types of crabs calling the pier home.

Padre Burgos jetty or pier is one of the best night dives in the Philippines but day dives can also be productive. Located in the town of Padre Burgos, divers can use the pier on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights and by day when not in use by larger ships.

Three dive operators in the area dive this site on a regular basis. Maximum depth is around 15 to 20 ft. (5m) and visibility is good and 50-70 ft. (15-22m). Things to see include stargazers by night and the tiny blue-ringed octopus to flying gurnards scurrying along the



Chromodoris nudibranch

bottom. It is a good site for nudibranch lovers as well. A true muck dive, the pier has its share of junk and trash but these seem to go hand-in-hand with the habitat for the odd and unusual.

Macro is the key here but the many pillars under the jetty let light in for wide angle work for the creative shooter. They are covered in soft corals and ascidians. The sandy area around the jetty has sand dwellers like stargazers and snake eels and ubiquitous lionfish.



Saddleback anemonefish

### 36) Tangkaan MPA

Icons:     

**Location:** South of Padre Burgos

**Depth:** 10-100 ft. (3-30m)

**T**angkaan is situated on a peninsula south of Padre Burgos. It has both a wall dive and a angled coral slope. It drops down

to about 100 ft. (30m). There are plenty of barrel sponges, green tree corals and big tables corals as well a number of big gorgonian fans. There is an abundance of marine life along the wall and reef.

Black frogfish are often seen perched on the forest green tubastrea coral trees. Divers see macro life like pygmy seahorses and nudibranchs and larger critters like batfish, turtles and the occasional whale shark. Tankaan is a marine protected area.

Nearby **Medicare North** and **South** have been sanctuaries for over five years, named from their adjacent position to the Padre Burgos medicare facility.



Surfacing to a banca



Ornate ghost pipefish

### 37) Turtle Rock

Icons: 🏠 🗺️ 🏊 🐠 🐡

**Location:** South of Padre Burgos

**Depth:** 10-100 ft. (3-27m)

Turtle rock is a spectacular dive site. Situated on the outside of Sogod bay on the peninsular of Tankaan. It has four large rock formations starting at 45 ft. (13m) and dropping down to around 130 ft. (40m). On the second rock there is a massive *Gorgonian* fan. In the

sand around the rocks is a large garden eel colony. Midnight snappers, longnose emperors and unicornfish abound and the hard corals are outstanding.

### 38) Sunok

Icons: 🏠 🗺️ 🏊 🐠 🐡

**Location:** S. Padre Burgos

**Depth:** 10-100 ft. (3-27m)

Known locally as Ihotiki, whale sharks are found in Sogod Bay from November to April. Whale sharks annually gather at the southeast tip of Sogod Bay at a place called Sunok in the southern part of the bay. While encounters are never guaranteed, if a diver stays for at least a week chances increase of seeing one or more whale sharks.

Sunok is also a fish sanctuary and dive site an hour ride from Padre Burgos. Sunok Point has a wall similar to a terrace that drops down to 65ft (20m,) then, at the end, falls away deeper. One side of the terrace is a sloping coral reef with beautiful soft corals, fans and barrel sponges. The currently other side of the terrace is a nice wall with huge fans, sea whips, Napoleons and reef sharks.



## Romblon

Existing in relative isolation from the rest of Luzon, Romblon retains much of its Spanish legacy and its natural attractions are largely unexplored. Some say it is like the Philippines of 20 years ago. Lining the shores of the province's three major islands – Romblon, Sibuyan, and Tablas – are some of the best, most unspoiled beaches in this part of the country. Ringed by palm-fringed white sand, these beaches boast a wealth and variety of marine life offshore. Inland, there are a number of waterfalls and an inland salt lake.

For divers, Romblon is becoming synonymous with macro photography and super macro photography. The coasts around Alad and Logbon and the west



coast of Romblon boast over 30 dive sites that are producing some amazing results for the hardcore macro diver looking for such elusive creatures as the barely discernable green algae shrimp, many rare and extremely cryptic nudibranchs like the tiger butterfly (*Cycerce nigra*) and various pygmy and sea grass seahorses.

There are five marine sanctuaries in the three-island area. There are also some beautiful reefs here.



Romblon sunset -  
photo ©Monika Pirdzuns

### 39) Alad Island and Sanctuary

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐙 🐙

**Location:** Alad Island

**Depth:** 18-85 ft. (5-25m)

Alad is an inhabited island close to Romblon Island. On the west coast you find wide fields of soft and leather corals with abundant hydrozoans and colorful sponges. On the east coast there are large table and staghorn corals. Known well is Alad Marine Sanctuary for its high biodiversity and its big barrel sponges.

**Alad Marine Sanctuary** is located in a marine protected area and is known for its vast fields of soft and leather corals. Near the beach the soft corals gently move in the surf. There are large barrel sponges and hydroids. This special coral community is a habitat to



Bobtail shrimp

numerous marine species like marble snake eels, sea moths, frogfish, dragon shrimp and lots of Durban shrimp. This dive site is not only suitable for scuba diving but also for snorkeling and swimming.



Glassfish at tubastrea tree coral - photo © Jerome Kim



Brown & green *Nembrothas*

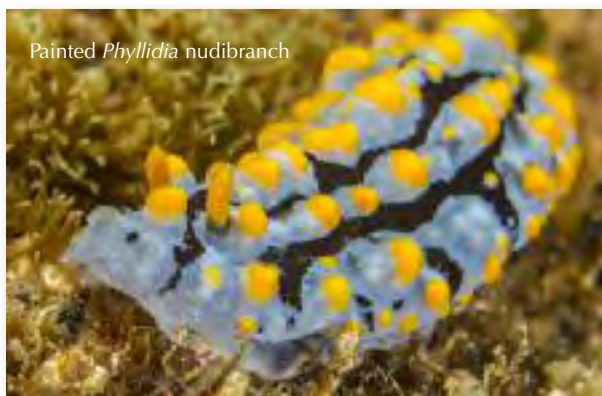
Also within the Alad Marine Sanctuary is the **Alad Sanctuary Garden**. This large wall is covered in soft and leather corals, sponges and hydroids. Divers look for small marine life along the wall and find nudibranchs, various crabs, frogfish and shrimps. Look into the blue for schooling fusiliers and others fishes.

**Alad North** is a site with a huge cover of healthy and large table corals. Spread over a wide sloping plain, these table corals are found in many colors and with

many reaching impressive sizes larger than a diver's length. Look under the corals for snappers and sweetlips and also eels, lobsters and sea turtles.

The site **Alad South** has a more varied terrain. There are stretches of sand and large coral bommies and fields. Various coral species compete and intermingle here making the entire reef structure fascinating. The usual entry point is a sandy plain with a large field of garden eels. Then the coral life takes over. This site has plenty of places for fish to hide and divers should look under the corals.

Also found here is the **Alad Channel**. This drift dive runs between the two islands Logbon and Alad. Here you can see lots of coral bommies teeming with marine life. Large shoals of small fish like chromis and anthias give the reef color and action. Look for various rays here too and also reef whitetip and blacktip sharks.



Painted *Phyllidia* nudibranch





*Melibe colemani* nudibranch  
photo © Jerome Kim

#### 40) Three P House Reef

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐙

**Location:** Barangay Lonos

**Depth:** 10-67 ft. (3-20m)

Around Romblon Island there are various dive sites: walls, cliffs, soft coral spots, muck dive sites for macro fans, giant gorgonians, marine sanctuaries, underwater canyons and much more. The Three P Holiday & Dive Resort house reef is just that, a walk-in dive that offers an amazing amount of macro subjects. It can be entered directly from the beach and then the search for the odd and unusual begins. This dive site is

characterized by sandy areas, sea grass and big coral bommies providing excellent habitat. Divers find a great variety of marine species including rare tiger shrimp, mandarin fish (best at dusk) and marble shrimp. This site is also suitable for snorkeling and perfect for night diving. Photographers prefer macro and super macro here.

The Three P Resort is named after three brothers whose name starts with P, but of great interest worldwide is the Facebook page **ID Please!** created by Kati Hachenberg, the wife of one of the brothers. Odd creatures worldwide are identified at this site. Try it! Great responses.





Butterfly sea slug  
photo © Jerome Kim

#### 41) Lunas

**Icons:** 🏠 📷

**Location:** Barangay Lonos

**Depth:** 10-67 ft. (3-20m)

This is a true muck dive with a sandy-muddy bottom that is one of the better critter sites in the country. While it might not look like much, to trained eyes it is heaven. There are lots of rare creatures that macro and super macro buffs constantly look for. Found here are the reclusive wunderpus, the beautiful flamboyant cuttlefish, small but

deadly blue ring octopus and also mimic octopus. Look on the smaller black coral bushes for beautiful sawblade shrimps. At night and even by day one can also see the humorously named Bobbit worm.

This is one of the more popular critter dives in the area and even though the sandy bottom seems endless, it is constantly changing so go with a good macro guide. There is usually a brisk current that rolls over the sand and small reefs here so be weighted properly and prepared for a bit of current.

## 42) Magnificat

Icons:   

**Location:** Barangay Lonos

**Depth:** 10-115 ft. (3-35m)

This dive site is known for large sea fans and beautiful coral reef. While the site may beg for wide angle, divers find pygmy seahorses here. *Hippocampus denise* and *Hippocampus bargibanti* are found in the gorgonians that line the walls and outcrops. This is also a great sites for colorful nudibranchs and beautiful scorpionfish. For wide angle, look for coral clusters and



soft coral formations that thrive in the consistent ocean currents that feed this site.





Spinecheek anemonefish

protected and diverse terrain. Various fish schools like the protection of the corals and look for sea anemones of all kinds and their accompanying anemonefish swimming in their tentacles. Anemone crabs can also be seen as can glass shrimp.

Also within the sanctuary are the **Agpanabat Caves and Canyons** which is a site marked by a rugged terrain as

### 43) Agpanabat Marine Sanctuary

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐙 🦀 🐛

**Location:** Off Barangay Agpanabat

**Depth:** 18-84 ft. (5-25m)

**T**his dive spot is characterized by a series of very large, towering coral bommies covered in all sorts of marine life. Sandy channels and plains mark the bottom between each coral head so divers can expect almost anything in this

the name suggests. The area is a mix of steep walls, coral laden overhangs, small caves and deep gorges. The coral diversity is quite nice here but a lot of the dive is just swimming in and out of the different terrains.

Fun to explore and great habitat for fish like snappers, sweetlips, lobsters, the craggy rock formations make Agpanabat a unique scuba diving experience.

#### 44) Logbon Coral Canyon

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📷 📱 📺

**Location:** Barangay Logbon

**Depth:** 9-131 ft. (3-40m)

One of the great things about Romblon and the surrounding area is that there are some sites with varied terrains and diverse marine life. Logbon Coral Canyon is one such dive site.

As the name might suggest, there are mountains, valleys and ridges all densely covered in a broad variety of corals and sponges. This underwater scape is habitat for many marine creatures both large and small so photogs can choose between macro or wide angle set-ups. This is the kind of dive that can be done many times so one dive can be close-up subjects and the next go for the wide ones like grogonian sea fans, clumps of soft

corals and the occasional stand of red sea whips.

Expect to see clouds of anthias, schooling fusiliers, possible bigeye jack shoals and more. Sea turtles like this reef and can be found resting on the corals.

For the smaller species, critters like ornate ghost pipefish, spindle cowries, coral crabs and other crustaceans and a wide variety of colorful and rare nudibranchs can all be seen on dives here.

The site also has swim-throughs for divers to play with.



Crab on sea pen



## The Visayas

After Boracay was named one of the best island destinations in the world by Travel & Leisure Magazine in 2013, this area no longer is a best-kept secret.

It has been a favorite of Europeans for decades but now Asia has also discovered the various Visayas destinations with their wide range of accommodations, great variety of cuisines and numerous activities and famed beaches.

Divers fly into Cebu City and from there branch out to their favorite dive areas looking for thresher sharks or rare macro critters or shipwrecks or all of the above.

Some of the best snorkeling sites in the Philippines are also here.

The iconic photos of Boracay hail from White Beach. There are quite a few White Beaches in the Philippines, but this one is, by far,

the most famous. It is two miles (four km) of white, powdery fine sand dotted with resorts, shops, dive shops and restaurants.

Because the waters off White Beach are calm during Amihan season (November to May), tourism is at its peak during these months when the northeastern winds blow. Conditions reverse during the rainy season, when the Habagat or monsoon winds blow.

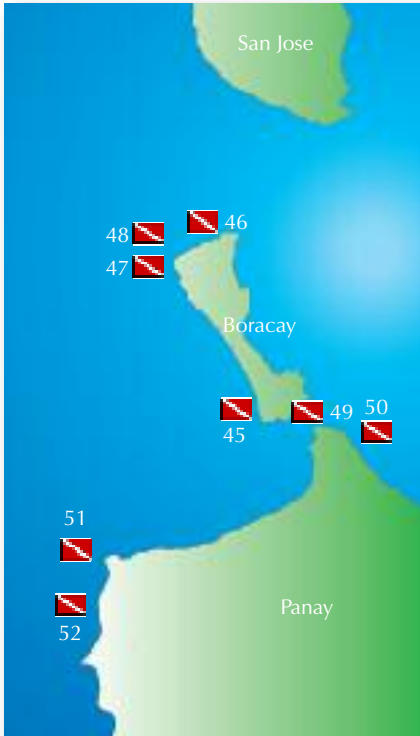
There's a room for every type of traveler here. Boracay gets tourists from different parts of the globe, thus a wide variety of food choices: Chinese, Indian, American, Mexican, French, Italian, Swiss — even Moroccan food! Fresh seafood is a given.

There's no shortage of activities for you at this island paradise. Boracay has around 25 dive sites that cater to all levels of experience. Training is a big deal here and all

sorts of courses can be taken to advance skills and certificates. After all the sports, indulge in a luxurious massage right on the beach or at one of the health spas.



## Boracay



### 45) Cathedral Cave

Icons:

**Location:** West Carabao Island

**Depth:** 82-130 ft. (25-40m)

This is a favorite that can be a bit of a boat ride to get to this Carabao Island site. The dive features walls and caverns and crevices and one large and somewhat deep cave.

This huge cavern starts at 80 ft. (24m) and extends far into the reef wall. Its not so deep and dark that cave diving training is needed, but bring a good light. The blue hue of the entrance is always in sight.

Poke around the walls and cracks to see what's in there on any given day. Fish swim upside down, orienting themselves to the cave walls. *Tubastrea* and black corals grow from the ceiling.



Clown triggerfish



Blackbar barracuda

two separate walls but both begin at 100 ft (30m) and drop down past safe sport diving limits.

To see whitetip and blacktip sharks, hammerheads and even an occasional

This is the largest but not the only cave or crevice along this wall. Look for nice coral growth along the walls and schools of barracuda, snapper and others in the blue water off the wall.

#### 46) Yapak

**Icons:**

**Location:** North of Boracay

**Depth:** 100-130 ft. (30-40 m)

Yapak can be an exhilarating deep drift dive that is best done on a rising tide. The site provides divers the opportunity to see the larger marine life of Boracay. This can be a very colorful dive as the wall is full of *Gorgonian* sea fans and soft corals. The barrel sponges and clouds of smaller fish are part of the attraction as the current runs past the terrain. The walls are deep and there are actually two different dive sites at Yapak. **Yapak 1** and **2** are

whale shark look off the walls into the blue water. A smorgasbord of pelagics, there are also yellowfin and dogtooth tuna, jacks, wahoo, blackbar barracuda, Spanish mackerel and all of those current loving blue water fish. Even mantas have been seen passing by.

This is more for experienced divers only who have had deep diving training and practiced deep dives.

**Punta Bonga** also offers good pelagic action at shallower depths.

#### 47) Punta Bonga 1 & 2

**Icons:**

**Location:** North of Friday's Rock, West Boracay

**Depth:** 26-130 ft. (8-40 m)

This site is the start of a series of walls which connect to Yapak. There is a shallow start to the dropoff. It is pocked with holes and crevices that

hold moray eels, triggerfish and other reef residents. At the wall bottom, there is sand and marble rays like to lay here.

**Punta Bonga 1** is the shallower of the two dives. Look for a nice, healthy selection of hard corals, swaying soft corals and lots of smaller fish.

**Punta Bonga 2** has similar cover but is ledgy and cascades down in broad steps to deeper water. Look for more pelagics here.

#### 48) Friday's Rock

**Icons:** 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐚

**Location:** Off Balabag, W. Boracay

**Depth:** 23-60 ft. (7-18m)

This is a well-used site for dive training and for photography as the fish are fed here so the fish are

friendly and come in close. There are two different dives here. One is at **Friday's Rock**, a submerged mount with lots of fish living in and around a big coral boulder. Nearby a coral garden rises up (**Friday's Reef**) into the shallows and can be a second dive or part of the first.

Plentiful marine life can be found on the rock. But also look at the sandy areas and patch reefs surrounding the rock for abundant fish and beautiful invertebrates.

#### 49) Crocodile Island

**Icons:** 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐚

**Location:** Off Boracay's SE Tip

**Depth:** 16-82 ft. (5-25m)

This is an uninhabited island that looks like a big croc. Since the reef starts in the shallows, snorkelers



Diver and sea turtle





love the site for its nice corals and variety of fish life. And just over the wall are gorgonians and lots of colorful anthias.

Divers like it for the marine life the currents attract. Known for its sea snakes, it is likely there will be banded sea snakes on most every dive. Reef fish include fusiliers, Moorish idols, sweetlips, snappers and parrotfish. For macro shooters there are nudibranchs including some of the *Chromodoris* family.

## 50) Laurel Island 1 & 2

Icons:     

Location: SE of Crocodile Island

Depth: 10-65 ft. (3-20 m)

The big attraction here is also the fish life and nice coral growth. This is a good spot for snorkeling as

many corals come very close to the surface at both sites.

This is a beautiful wall dive with feather stars, sponges and healthy coral varieties, especially table and soft corals. Many different types of nudibranchs can be found here and this site is great as a dive for macro photographers.

**Laurel Island 1** has a special feature. There is a tunnel about 25 ft. (8m) long that is full of tubastrea corals that blossom into bright colors in fast current. **Laurel 2** has similar corals and great fish life.

## 51) Nasog Point

Icons:    

Location: NW Panay

Depth: Surface to 115 ft. (0-35 m)

This is a good snorkeling site

when the current is not too strong. Nasog Point has an interesting bottom composition of massive boulders and canyons with some good coral cover, including sea fans and soft corals.

There is better chance of seeing pelagic fish swim by. Dogtooth tuna, barracuda and even an eagle ray may make an appearance.

Nasog Point is a regional favorite and Boracay dive centers like to combine this with nearby Dog Drift.

## 52) Dog Drift

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 🐟

**Location:** South of Nasog Point

**Depth:** 16-100 ft. (5-30m)

As the name implies, this is normally done as a drift dive. It is a pleasant drift dive but chances are a

diver won't encounter a dog. This is usually a drift dive with plenty to see when there is current. This relatively small wall has lots of caves and crevices to explore, some of them with painted lobsters. This wall is only about 300 ft. (90m) but it is packed with many caves, crevices and holes. Look also for resting sea turtles and lots of rather colorful soft corals.

Look into the blue as pelagic fish are known to drift into the water column to have a look at divers.

The reef is very nice like nearby Nasog Point, but the fish life here is more prolific. Groupers, snapper schools and some batfish are among the residents. The cracks and crevices hold moray eels as well. Lionfish can be seen here too. It's a slow and easy drift.



Jack school in shallow water

## Malapascua



The huge towering palm trees are a bit scarce on Malapascua now. But after a supertyphoon flattened the island in 2013, the island has rebounded nicely, thank you, and is a beehive of diving and beach activity. Known as one of the few places on Earth where divers fairly consistently can see the unusual and rare thresher shark at deep cleaning stations along the walls of Monad Shoal, the island has a variety of diving to offer divers including the early morning (usually around 5 a.m. departure) thresher shark dives, some incredible macro diving, shipwrecks, deep and tek dives, dusk mandarin fish spotting and critter-fueled night dives.

One has to visit Malapascua to really appreciate the rustic charm of

the island. There are no cars; not even a lot of motorbikes and not a lot of pavement. All the “streets” and walkways are sand... sometimes very thick, slog-through sand. And Long, white sand beaches adorn a good part of the island. There are some trendy little hotels perched on rocky overlooks and beach bars. Beachfront cabins abound and guest houses and boutique hotels can be found hidden inside the maze of walkways that make up the heart of Malapascua.

You do have to get used to having sandy feet. It is just part of the lifestyle here. The going can be a bit slow along the beach walk. And, the sand is hot as the sun gets high. Always wear at least zoris (flip-



Thresher shark carver



Chocolate Island

flops) to keep the hot sand at bay. However, this inner maze in the center of all the local and tourist housing, with the less sandy more trampled paths, may be most interesting after dark with stalls of food, fruits and carved thresher sharks. Also tucked away are restaurants and small pubs offering Filipino, seafood and Western/Euro dishes and plenty of cold beer and the ubiquitous karaoke. Many bars offer some great music and a relaxing place to tell those tall diving tales. For those who have done a successful 5 a.m. thresher dive, one can enjoy the late night life and local people, who are both friendly and fun.

### 53) Chocolate Island

**Icons:**   

**Location:** East of Malapascua

**Depth:** 10 -70 ft. (3-21m)

This may be the most amazing macro site in the Malapascua area (and there some other good ones). This rocky outcrop is closer to the Maya pier than Malapascua. It is a long, shallow dive mainly at 40-55 ft. (12 to 16m) looking at small bommies and coral rubble and finding a bonanza of nudibranchs, flatworms and cuttlefish, including flamboyant cuttlefish.

It seems like every few fin kicks here brings something new including some nudis laying eggs and mating and cruising the sea bottom. For nudibranch lovers, this site is especially good with a huge variety ranging from tiny to quite large. As the site is shallow enough,





Smoothies and local fruit

are good and full of diversity.

The island is a marine reserve and designated as a sea snake sanctuary. There are about five dive sites with varying terrain and marine life. The macro life is particularly good and this

divers should make this a slow and easy dive and look closely at the rocks, small coral clusters and sea floor to find an array of photogenic macro prizes.

Even the deco area near the island is productive. Leather coral cowries can be found as well as other tiny critters.

#### 54) Gato Island

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📏 📏

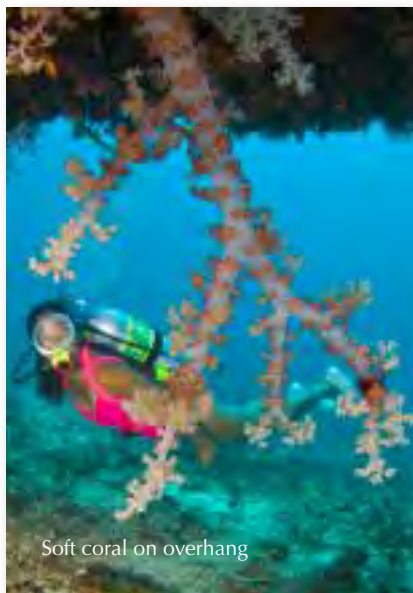
**Location:** 40 mins NW of Malapascua

**Depth:** 16-82 ft. (5-25m)

Gato Island sits off in the distance a little northwest of Malapascua and is a popular all day destination. Two dives are normally done here or else one at Gato with a first deeper one at the Dona Marilyn wreck north of Gato. Whatever the plan, the dives here

island has a unique novelty feature in that it has a tunnel that runs through the entire island. Divers can drift along the high rock walls here, explore the undercuts and small caves, swim between the rocks and hide in the lee for leisurely exploration. There are many options and wide photography may be good for a dive while macro is good for all of the dives. The sandy bottom flattens out around 80 ft. (24m) but the dives can be done shallower with great success. Its not necessary to go deep to see a lot.

Look for the banded sea snakes, of course, as well as cuttlefish. The undercuts hold large black coral trees. In these you will find arrow crabs, anthias, lionfish and lots of other creatures taking refuge in the wispy coral. Look for many different



Soft coral on overhang

type of *Antipathes sp.* around the island including the beautiful white bottle brush black coral.

The big novelty dive is the one swim-through that goes completely across the island. The cave dive site normally starts by entering on the island's west side. It is a really long tunnel. The shallow part of the dive starts by swimming between some big boulders that are up shallow. More than a pair of divers can fit side by side in the big entrance. There is also a rope at the tunnel roof. The

cave does get a bit deeper as one goes through it and the blue glimmer of the entrance disappears just before the blue glimmer of the exit appears. You need a guide and a light and its about a five to ten minute swim totally through to the other side of the island.

This 100ft (30m) long tunnel houses all the usual cave dwellers like decorator crabs and painted lobsters and usually some large pufferfish. The cave is also home to whitetip sharks which seems to add to the thrill factor. The whitetips like to sit inside or near this exit and rest and let the current run over their gills. The sharks will begrudgingly move from resting. There are cat and bamboo sharks as well as the whitetips.

Macro buffs will like poking along the walls of the island for small prizes to see and photograph.



Time out for massage  
at Buena Vida Spa



Yellow spotted gobies

## 55) North Point

**Icons:**

**Location:** North tip of Malapascua

**Depth:** 18-70 ft. (5-22m)

This dive requires roughly a five-minute boat ride from Bounty Beach and is an interesting dive site with varied terrain and a variety of sea creatures to see. A series of ridges lead to sandy plains. The ridges are undercut and covered in brilliant soft corals. There is also a large boulder near the mooring adorned in brilliant orange soft coral and a coral garden of leather corals that stretches over a wide area.

As it is at the point, when the tide is changing, the corals open up in

the current to feed and are really beautiful. It is completely different at slack tide. In the current, the beautiful soft coral really opens up and the reef is more colorful. But the current is strong and it's a bit of work getting to the habitats of some of the varied small marine life including giant and clown frogfish found in many colors, fire urchins with their commensal crabs or shrimp, nudibranchs and a couple of sea fans with pygmy seahorses.

Whether the current is running or not, end the dive at the large coral garden. Puffers rest in the huge leather corals and the healthy reef stretches for a nice swim or drift up into the shallows for a deco stop. You may find yourself drifting at deco here. Follow the guide and the sausage and look for some big jellyfish that sometimes blow into the area and have small jacks hiding in their tentacles. People can snorkel here as well.

## 56) Lapus Pinnacle

**Icons:**

**Location:** East of Malapascua

**Depth:** 40-80 ft. (12-24m)

Small enough to circumnavigate in one dive, this current-fed pinnacle has some mini walls covered in beautiful soft corals, wire and whip corals and small fans. The cracks and crevices along



parts of the wall are well worth exploring with clusters of huge catfish inside. One part of the dive is shallower with a more sandy, rubbly slope where one can find the beautiful flamboyant cuttlefish or a

pair of mating nudis.

This is a great second dive that is not overly deep and best with current to make the soft and wire corals open up. Currents can get a little strong here and the dive usually starts and ends at the anchor line, so conserve accordingly.



## 57) Bantigue

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📊

**Location:** North tip of Malapascua

**Depth:** 18-65 ft. (5-18m)

This is considered a muck dive locally but is also a good wide angle and fish dive. This fascinating area has a bit of everything stretched across a rolling plain with a mini-wall, tons of anemones, a sandy slope full of the filamented





*Nembrotha nudibranch*

elegant sand divers and lots more.

Look for sponges and sea fans and a small cave that sometimes holds a giant frogfish, lionfish and a mass of sweepers. Then swim across a sandy plain to a ridge dotted with some cotton candy corals, curly wire corals and sea fans. The gorgonians hold pygmy seahorses.

End the dive looking at the many sea anemones, cotton candy gorgonians, various nudibranchs and other marine life going up into the shallows.

## 58) The Sand Patch

**Icons:**    

**Location:** North tip of Malapascua

**Depth:** 18-65 ft. (5-19m)

This shallow dive is like a treasure hunt across sandy plains and into sea grasses that hold all

kind of odd and cool macro critters. This area is normally protected with not much in the way of currents. It is shallow so long dives can be made and you never know what will pop up next.

The sand holds an assortment of nudibranchs, guaranteed smashing mantis shrimp in tiny and not-so-tiny holes, comical looking devil scorpionfish, wire coral shrimp, pipefish, decorator crabs and anemone hermit crabs, Pegasus sea moths, chocolate chip sea stars and juvenile catfish schools.

There are a number of sand anemones with lots of clownfish and shrimp that may try to clean a curious diver.

This is also a good place to see a variety of gobies and their bulldozer shrimp. Mimic octopus have also been spotted here. This is a place for a nice slow and easy dive.



Cuttlefish at Lopus Pinnacle



## Malapascua's Threshers

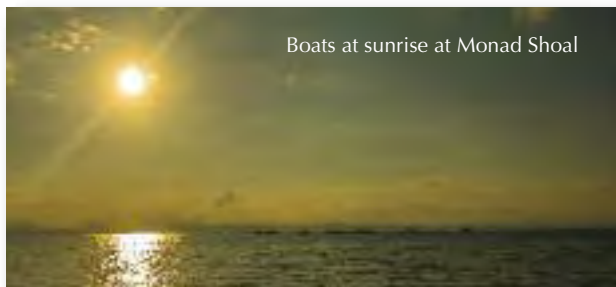
**T**he thresher shark cleaning stations at Monad Shoal have become world famous. First seen by Malapascua fishermen, early pioneer divers worked the shoal to find out if they could be seen and it turned out threshers have cleaning stations on the sea mount. By now, the behavior has been carefully observed. This is about the only place in the world where they appear with any predictability and scientists have come to study them here on more than one occasion.

Threshers are a wary shark. Divers should not get in their way. They are not seen schooling here but are usually solitary. They sometimes circle the cleaning station in twos and threes, but they arrive and leave

separately.

Thresher sharks grow to a maximum of 12 ft. (3.3m). With their long, sweeping tails and bulbous bodies, threshers are easy to differentiate from other species. Their tails may make up 50 percent of their body. Not generally regarded as a threat to man, divers should not get too close as it could interrupt their cleaning behavior and they just swim away.

Threshers, as with other members of the mackerel shark family, give birth to live pups, usually between two and four at a time. The sharks have also been observed leaping from the sea. They use their tails to swim through shoals and stun prey, returning to eat the victims.



Boats at sunrise at Monad Shoal

maneuverability and a flowing whip of a tail that can snap through a shoal of fish, rendering some fish senseless to be gobbled up by the returning thresher.

## 59) Monad Shoal

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📷 📹 📱 📺

**Location:** East of Malapascua

**Depth:** 50 -130 ft. (15-40 m)

A new series of cleaning stations have been found that afford a much more predictable chance of seeing the amazing hydrodynamic thresher shark appear from the open sea and glide in to a cleaning station. The ribbon-like tail flowing as the shark moves gracefully over the station, striped cleaner wrasse fly up from the protection of the reef to nip parasites from these beautiful creatures.

These sharks are one of nature's most impressive creatures with huge eyes for hunting in the depths, broad, paddles of pectoral fins for incredible pelagic

They are also known to leap from the water... probably to dislodge remoras from their silvery bodies. When seen doing these leaps they usually jump three or four times so grab a camera if you see the first jump. It will probably happen a few more times.

There is a protocol for diving the sharks. Divers must stay behind certain lines placed on the bottom so as to not encroach on the cleaning station. Photographers and videographers are not allowed to use flashes or lights as these may



Thresher shark

Thresher shark getting  
cleaned at Monad Shoal



disturb the sharks natural cleaning rhythm. And divers should stay low to the reef, kneeling in the sand to keep a low profile. Floating in the water column near the cleaning station is a surefire way to drive off the somewhat shy threshers.

Although shy, they can also be curious and elusive. So occasionally look overhead and even behind as one might be swimming by.

Most cleaning stations are at 100 to 110 ft. (27 to 32m) and NITROX is the best way to do an extended dive. Thresher veterans say that while early morning is the most productive time to see them, they also come later in the morning when the light is much better with a strong overhead sun. By the second dive it may be less crowded and the

light will be better.

Oceanic mantas (*Manta alfredi*) can also be seen at Monad Shoal and the occasional whale shark. Manta Point on Monad is the favored place to try for the pelagic mantas which are noticeably larger than their location-oriented cousins, the *Manta alfonso*. Nearby **Kimud Shoal** also has hit and miss sighting of scalloped hammerhead schools.

The wall here also has some nice large bushes of black corals with hawkfish and lots of anthias in their branches. Up top in the deco area at 55 ft. (16m) is a rubbly bottom. Along the dropoff look for anemones and clownfish and wire coral gobies. In the rubble there are nudibranchs and there are signal gobies in their hole homes.



## Malapascua's Shipwrecks

The combination of attractions at Malapascua includes reef, dropoffs, pelagics, great muck dives and both modern and World War II wrecks. Most of these war victims can be seen without much difficulty and they have become great artificial reefs, attracting an array of marine life.

The **Dona Marilyn** wreck is one of the more popular wrecks but it is in open sea northwest past Gato Island. Conditions must be fairly calm to dive this wreck. She is a passenger ferry that went down more than 20 years ago in a typhoon and is now covered in marine life. The Dona Marilyn is 300+ ft. long (90+m) and held a lot of passengers. The sinking was a major disaster and many people lost their lives. It is now lying on its starboard side at 105 ft. (31m), amazingly intact.

The corals on the wreck provide a nice overswim at about 65 ft. (19m) along the port side.

**Lighthouse Wreck** is a shallow WWII Japanese landing craft and is one of three known war wrecks in the area and is available for long dives and for snorkeling. It was sunk before it could land and went straight down with a load of cement that was destined to be used to



solidify a land gun emplacement on the island. The wreck is mostly in shallow water with remnants of the hull, which has broken in two.

The **Tapilon Wreck** freighter hasn't been identified but the wreck at Tapilon was hit by torpedoes and sunk in 90 ft. (27m) of water. It's broken up but its still recognizable as a large ship. The resulting scattered wreckage has created great habitat and the currents feed soft corals making it very colorful.

There is another famous war wreck at Malapascua but it's a technical dive only. The **Pioneer Wreck** sits north of the island in 140 - 170 ft. (42m- 54m) and is in good shape. A gunboat, the guns are still pointing upward and can be seen on descent. This is deep and in open water and for mixed gas tekkies only on calm days.



Thorny-back cowfish

## Mactan and Cebu City



**I**t is hard to believe that such a densely populated small island like Mactan is a dive Mecca, but it has a huge number of dive centers (more than 100 at the last count) that service divers from all over the world doing everything from having relaxed holidays to getting advanced dive training.

Both international and domestic flights land at the Mactan-Cebu International Airport. Mactan is a densely populated island located just a few kilometers from Cebu Island in the Philippines. The island is part of Cebu Province and it is divided into Lapu-Lapu City and the municipality of Cordova. The island is separated from Cebu by the Mactan Channel which is crossed by two bridges.

The resorts offer a wide range of accommodations. Somewhat spread out, the resorts are mostly on the island's eastern side, which has a fringing reef with an impressive wall

dropping off along its length. Mactan is also the jumping-off point for many sites in the Visayas, several of which are less than an hour away by banca boat. Most resorts and dive centers throughout Mactan offer dive training, much of it is PADI oriented.

Cebu City, a short taxi ride across either of the two bridges, has no dive sites. But it does have several retail dive centers that supply the region's many dive operators and their customers. Mactan also has a small, family-style aquarium.

Cebu's harbor is a convenient boarding point for live-aboard boats and to catch fast ferries to outlying islands like **Moalboal**, on the southwest coast of Cebu Island.

**Oslob** is a small municipality in the southern tip of Cebu Tan-awan village, where the whale shark feeding occurs. Divers also embark on the whale shark tours from Dumaguette and Bohol.



## 60) Tambuli Fish Feeding Station

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐟 🐠 🐡

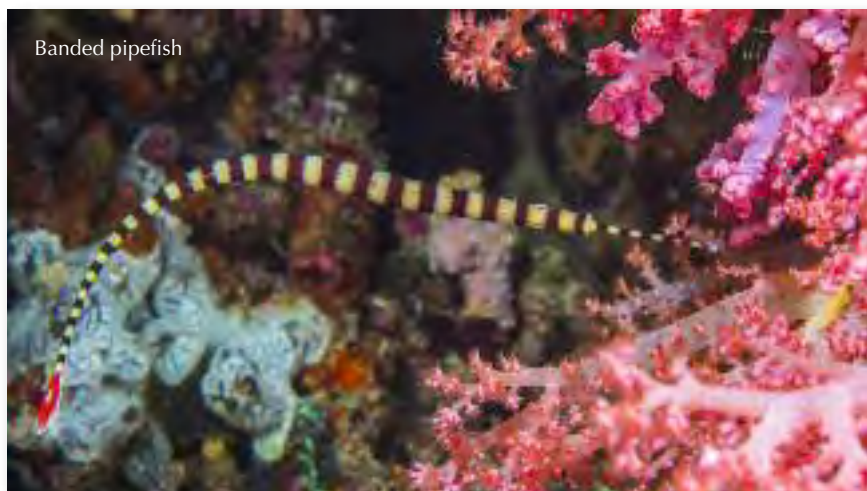
**Location:** Off Tambuli Beach Club

**Depth:** Surface to 100 ft. (0-30 m)

**T**ambuli has always been a popular dive training site. Tambuli Beach Club is a long-established dive resort at the northeastern end of Mactan. The site is known not so much for great coral cover as it is for fish life.

depths. But this is normally done as a shallow dive in usually clear water with minimal current.

Also, there is an airplane on this site. Tambuli Beach Club anchored an old twin-engine Bonanza aircraft to the sea bottom. It is now home to a variety of marine animals and is quickly being covered by small hard and soft corals and barnacles. To permit easy penetration, the doors were removed. It is a high



This is a good place for underwater photographers to shoot the willing fish. Tambuli is also known as a great macro diving site for close-up work. Divers encounter nudibranchs, anemone shrimp, tiny anglerfish and beautiful juvenile angelfish.

The reef slopes down gently to the lip of a wall which then falls to the

traffic site so listen for the sound of banca motors before ascending.

## 61) Kon Tiki House Reef

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐟 🐠 🐡

**Location:** Kon Tiki Resort

**Depth:** 10-100 ft. (3-30m)

Kon Tiki is a dedicated dive resort that is a pioneer property developed



along the coast. The owners have guarded the reef, which starts right off the seawall (there is no beach here). Kon Tiki House Reef is a showpiece of marine conservation and small sanctuaries have popped up in other areas due to the success seen at Kon Tiki. Kon Tiki is situated in between the other sites of **Tambuli** to the north and **Agus** to the south.

The top of the reef is covered in coral bommies and it gently slopes to a wall. This wall falls down into the depths of the Hilutugan Channel that separates Mactan from nearby Olango Island. Thus, these waters are often visited by large pelagics, including occasional whale sharks. The shallow part of the reef offers corals and sea grasses. There is an artificial reef that is a giant iron clam which was sunk by Kon Tiki in the '90s. The clam is now totally overgrown with hard and soft corals.

Other good diving areas that are local marine sanctuaries are **Shangrila Marine Sanctuary**, **Talima Marine Sanctuary** and **Hilutungan Marine Sanctuary**. The Hilutungan Marine Sanctuary is one of the oldest in the area, and fish populations have thrived there. Talima has a small shipwreck.



Barber pole shrimp

## 62) Marigondon Cave

**Icons:**

**Location:** East of Marigondon

**Depth:** 16-115 ft. (5-35m)

Marigondon Cave is one of the most famous dive spots of Cebu, strictly for advanced divers only. Usually divers drop in well before the cave and drift with the current to the cave mouth at 90 ft. (27m).

The cave entry area stretches from 90 to 130ft. (27 to 39m). There are lionfish at the mouth and some black corals growing as well as encrusting sponges and bottom-oriented fish. And the highlight is deeper inside there is a school of flashlight fish blinking in the darkness. The cave is also known to have some very large crabs crawling about or hiding in the crags.

NITROX is strongly recommended for this dive. Divers must watch bottom time as it is necessary to descend several meters to get out of the entrance. This is a dive for experienced divers.



Lionfish in black coral

## Moalboal



**M**oalboal means “bubbling water,” referring to the area’s freshwater springs. To get there from Cebu City cross the mountainous spine of Cebu Island by arranging for a private car and driver with the destination resort.

Since the 1970s, Moalboal has developed a tourism industry based on recreational diving and beaches. Panagsama Beach is where most

resorts and restaurants are established. Further north on the peninsula is yet another White Beach that is now developing and gaining in popularity. There are plenty of accommodations near either beach, although Panagsama has the most bars, restaurants, people and dive shops.

Since the resorts in the area cater mostly to divers, entertainment is laid back and more of a chilled out pub style atmosphere. Recreational diving is the main tourist activity in Moalboal. The reefs along the west coast of the Copton Peninsula are home to a great variety of diverse marine life.

Other popular tourist attractions such as waterfalls, caves and canyons, are found within 12 miles (20k) of Moalboal. Ahead of its time, Moalboal was a ragged collection of cheap cottages and restaurants... a backpackers’ paradise. Times have changed. Moalboal is now an internationally

recognized center of diving excellence, with high-quality dive centers teaching reasonably priced courses to all levels of divers. Aside from visiting



Territorial parrotfish

local sites, Moalboal dive centers organize dive safaris to parts of the Visayas, including nearby Apo Island.

### 63) Copton Point

**Icons:** 🏠 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙

**Location:** West Copton Peninsula

**Depth:** 0 to 130 ft. (0-40 m)

This can be two different dives.

**Copton Deep** starts with an airplane wreck that was sunk in 1993 as a dive attraction. The slope changes at 75 ft. (23m) into a beautiful wall covered with sea fans, barrel sponges and soft corals. With lots of fish life it is easy to miss the macro but the site has nudibranchs and various shrimp and anemones.

**Copton Shallow** might even be fishier. Divers start at 15 ft. (4m) and work their way down to 80 ft. (25m). There are many table corals, soft corals and huge variety of fish like scorpionfish, sweetlips, puffers, titan triggerfish, sea turtles, nudibranchs and more.

### 64) Panagsama Beach (House Reef)

**Icons:** 🏠 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙

**Location:** Off Panagsama Beach

**Depth:** 50 to 35 ft. (15-10m)

The reef is a popular training ground, and its shore accessibility allows dive centers to pass the



transportation savings on to their customers. The wall stretches quite a way along the coast. Divers and snorkelers may enter from several areas between Panagsama and up to Bas Diot.

This is an excellent dive for beginners and for the divers who love small things. It starts at 50 ft. (15m) and slowly ascends to 35 ft. (10m). The chances of seeing an immense school of resident sardines being chased by tuna, jacks or even thresher sharks is high. Photographers and videographers love this action. Morays and sometimes sea snakes prowl this area, and there are lots of species of colorful crinoids .



## 65) Pescador Island

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 🏊 🐠 🐡 🐟 🐙 🐙 🐙

**Location:** West of Panagsama Beach

**Depth:** Surface to 130 ft. (0-40 m)

Pescador is considered one of the best dive areas in the Philippines with a number of sites around the island. Easily seen from Moalboal's Panagsama Beach, dive boats head here on a daily basis to bring divers to take in the walls, gardens and reefs. Local dive operators have effectively placed mooring buoys at several locations around the island to protect the reef from anchor damage. It's possible to swim around the entire island in one dive, but

Pescador deserves several dives to be fully appreciated.

Currents are usually strong, but the visibility is frequently great as a result. Snorkelers can swim over the shallower sections of the reef to the wall. There is plenty to see, but watch out for banca traffic.

**Pescador Island Cathedral** has a wide coral variety, frogfish, lionfish squadrons, barracuda shoals, tuna

and snappers, and much more.

There is a magnificent cave that has a heavenly view of the surface which is why it's called the Cathedral. At midday, shafts of light dapple the corals and illuminate the interior in an ethereal light show. There is also another smaller cave, known as Lionfish Cave, and some large boulders.

At **Pescador Island East** the dive starts at a plateau that turns into a



Feather duster worms

slope covered with hard and soft corals. Scorpionfish, razorfish, sweetlips, potato cod, snappers, schools of tuna and barracuda all come in here. The dive ends on a plateau with a lot of small marine life as well. This spot is great for a night dive and night diving at Pescador, with all of its soft corals, is a colorful experience that compares to few other night dives.



## 66) Tongo Point

Icons: 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐡 🐟

**Location:** South Copton Peninsula

**Depth:** 10-100 ft. (3-30 m)

**T**ongo Point is a good site year-round, though currents are sometimes strong and unpredictable. The corals are exceptional with staghorn forests at the reeftop and sea fans along the wall. Some healthy soft corals grow here too. The dive starts and ends along a deep wall with small caves that can be explored all along the dive. Some parts of the reef are exposed during low tide. At dusk, mandarinfish can be found in the shallows in the staghorn. Razorfish, sea turtles, lots of fusiliers some occasional barracudas are all on this site. The shallows are also home to harlequin ghost pipefish and many colors of the ebbing and flowing leaf fish.

## 67) Talisay Wall

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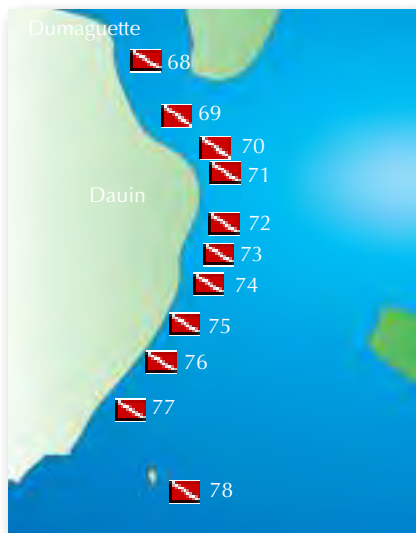
**Location:** Pescador Island

**Depth:** 10 -100 ft. (3-30m)

The dive starts with a slope going to 40 ft. (12m) and then it becomes a flat wall with a deep ledge at 115 ft. (35m). The wall has vertical canyons with wide deep slopes. The profile of this area is diverse changing from slope to wall and giving divers plenty to look at and fish and marine critters plenty of habitat. Some caves are deeper than other and a light will help to see farther inside. Look for gobies in the sandy bottoms of the caves.

Divers will also see big stuff in the blue like batfish, mackerel, barracuda, turtles and yellow margin triggerfish. The shallows have mandarinfish (*Synchiropus splendidus*) so dives can be made here at dusk to see mating.

## Dauin/Dumaguette



When divers say they are going to Dumaguette they are most likely referring to a week or two of diving in Dauin. Only 30-60 minutes from the Dumaguette airport, this is the longtime macro hotspot rivaling Anilao for the odd, rare and wonderful. While still retaining its beachy charm, this area is becoming a rather trendy place with a mixture of laid-back hotels and now more upscale dive boutique hotels, condos and residences. Some people

buy beautiful penthouses and use them for their personal getaways while others buy to rent to visitors, using their income properties as their accommodation when diving in Dauin.

No matter what way a diver chooses to go, the dive experience here is bound to be pleasant. Most of the dives here are sandy or rocky bottoms sloping into the deep. Most sites are considered marine preserves and a fee is charged per day for use. This money is supposed to go to the patrolling and care of the preserve.

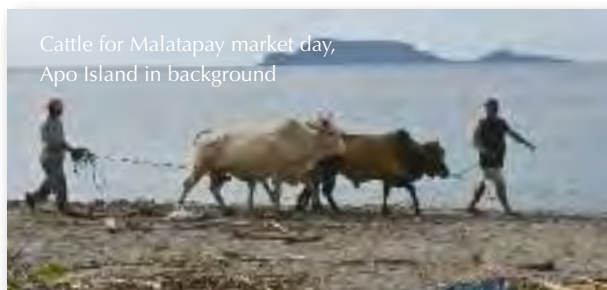
As a result, one doesn't see the big bamboo fish traps across the sea floor that are retrieved using large belts of rubber that drag across the corals. Fish life is plentiful. It seems fish, turtles and inverts somehow know they are safe in the confines of these various coastal MPAs and can be seen contentedly living





Giant frogfish blending with sponges





Cattle for Malatapay market day,  
Apo Island in background

jacks pursuing  
clouds of silvery  
baitfish or perhaps a  
small raft of  
Sargassum weed  
floats by. These kind  
of weedy rafts can  
produce bonanza  
of critters like

unmolested around Dauin and  
Dumaguette. Marine life is easier to  
approach, observe and photograph.

The dive sites vary and each has a  
certain set of critters to offer divers.  
In all there are at least 60 known  
dive sites between Sibulan,  
Dumaguette City, Dauin and Apo  
Island. One site may be known for  
the elusive mimic octopus while  
others may be great for a herd of  
seahorses or for seeing zebra crabs  
living in the spines of colorful sea  
urchins. While much of the terrain  
may look the same, its marine life is  
dictated by currents that flow over  
the seabed or by rivers and streams  
that may feed various runoff and  
nutrients into the site.

For the macrophotography nut,  
this is heaven. Secure a guide with  
good knowledge of the local Dauin  
habitat, give him or her a wish list  
and have a blast getting wonderful  
photos or checking the odd and  
cool off the macro checklist.

But don't forget to look up and  
see what's happening in the water  
column to see feeding mackerel,

seahorses or the well-camouflaged  
Sargassum frogfish. Dauin is also a  
good place to plan a day for bigger  
marine life. Divers take a day trip to  
**Oslob** for whale sharks and then a  
stop at **Sumilon Island** to see reef  
sharks and then a stop at **Apo Island**  
for a big jack school. There are  
countless possibilities with all of the  
major dive sites in the area. Or  
spend an entire day exploring the  
corals, sea turtles and big fish  
schools at Apo Island.

Dumaguette and Dauin sit in the  
shadow of the impressive, cloud-  
shrouded dormant volcano Mt.  
Talinis. Set aside some time to visit  
the very busy and bustling market  
in Malatapay. This barrio becomes  
alive with livestock, fruits, produce  
and lechon starting Wednesday  
morning and runs all day.

Dumaguette is the lively capital of  
the Oriental Negros province on  
Negros Island. It is reliably served  
daily by domestic airline flights  
from Manila and Cebu City. Flights  
take less than an hour.



Hairy frogfish

## 68) Mainit

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 📷

**Location:** North of Dumaguette

**Depth:** 20-65 ft. (6-1m)

Mainit is located north of Dauin near Dumaguette and it is one of the larger sanctuaries in the area. The site has a long, sandy slope with big coral heads all around. There is enough current that it feeds leather corals and some beautiful soft coral formations.

This is a very fishy site, so wide angle photography can be as rewarding as macro. Look for big schools of fish like blackbar barracudas, striped sweetlips, surgeonfish and yellow snappers. It is usually done as a drift dive all along the slope and around the

many coral bommies. The dive ends with something special, an underwater hot spring source. Warm water percolates through the sea floor making it a fun way to spend the end of the dive at 15-20 ft. (5m). This can be a nice, long relaxing dive as it is usually done at a depth of 60-65 ft. (18m).

## 69) San Miguel Point

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️

**Location:** North Dauin

**Depth:** 15-82 ft. (5-25m)

Sand, sand and more sand! This site is known as a good macro spot and there are corals scattered across the sand at this buoyed sanctuary. But it is mainly a macro heaven with seahorses, frogfish, octopus,



now an artificial reef consisting of several wrecks, interesting concrete blocks and a steel pyramid. It has attracted many of the usual suspects like lionfish, seahorses, blue-spot stingrays, snapper schools and juvenile batfish. This is an

bobtail squid and pygmy cuttlefish.

Most of the diving around the corals and sandy areas is in the 30 to 60 foot range. The sand is both deep and shallow.

Take a good guide as the oddities like devil scorpionfish (Inimicus), harlequin and robust ghost pipefish, twin eye goby, double-spot lionfish, flasher scorpionfish, blue ringed octopus and Spanish dancers (you can often see the egg ribbons) are all found here.

## 70) Pura Vida House Reef

Icons:    

Location: Pura Vida Beach

Depth: 15-80ft. (4-24m)

This site is located just in front of the popular dive resort Pura Vida. Local guides say what used to be an underwater "Sahara" is now a small oasis for marine life. This area is

easy walk-in so the site is quite suitable for night diving.

## 71) Bonnet's Corner

Icons:  

Location: North Dauin

Depth: 15-100 ft. (4-24m)

Named after the nearby Pura Vida



dive center crew member, Bonnet's corner is a dive site only for the macro enthusiasts. The site consists of a broad sand plain. There are some sparse grasses, small basins but no corals to speak of. But the sandy indents in the reef sometimes hold surprises like hairy frogfish and juvenile sweetlips.

The guide will usually move slowly through the shallows here and look for any sign of movement. That's because this site has some very special critters like mimic octopus, wonderpus, blue-ring octopus and mototi octopus that just peek above the sand floor. They can be very elusive, so move slowly and watch carefully to see these special and somewhat dangerous

creatures. Both blue ring and mototi are considered quite poisonous.

Other creatures like flamboyant cuttlefish, snake eels and frogfish can also be found.

## 72) Banca Wreck

**Icons:**     

**Location:** North Dauin

**Depth:** 15-100 ft. (5-30m)

Two sites sit pretty much side by side, the Banca Wreck and the Car Wreck, and are great for seeing the many odd and unusual critters that this area has to offer. The first is a sandy plain leading to a slope. Down the slope at 70 ft. (21m) are the remnants of a large banca boat. Its starting to fall apart but that



Cardinalfish with eggs



doesn't keep it from being a great artificial reef and lots of critters have been attracted to it. The site is home to seahorses, ghost pipefish, sea moths and frogfish. The site gets the name from a deep remnant



down the sand slope at 100 to 110 ft. (28m to 30m). Here rests an old Philippine-made outrigger boat. Although there is not much coral life to see, marine diversity is quite good. It is an excellent spot for macro lovers, photographers, advanced and NITROX divers.

Nearby is also an artificial reef of old tires. There are hingebeak shrimp of all sizes found in this cleaning station and schools of

snapper. On the banca, look for more cleaner shrimp that will come out and clean a diver's teeth if given a chance. Juvenile sweetlips, angelfish, mantis shrimp and others can be seen here. Keep and eye out for stonefish and scorpionfish that can be found in the sand and in the old wreck.

Make your way back up the slope and you will find thorny seahorses, pygmy cuttlefish, harlequin ghost pipefish, beautiful male elegant sand divers, roaming nudibranchs, juvenile lionfish and lots more. The shallows have sea grasses good for even more small stuff and look out for the possibility of a mimic octopus which has been seen here.

### 73) The Car Wreck

**Icons:**

**Location:** North Dauin

**Depth:** 15-100 ft. (5-30m)

The Car Wreck site actually adjoins the Banca Wreck. Go down to 90 ft. (27m) and there are the wrecks of two cars that are now encrusted in marine life. Look around to see what is living in the vehicles now.

In this sandy area, there are robust ghost pipefish, crabs, sea moths, moray eels and other creatures. Two cars are surrounded by concrete pipes and steel boxes. This makes it



Open mouthed frogfish

a perfect hideout for many creatures, especially frogfish and cardinalfish.

This is a good dive to use NITROX as a diver can then slowly work back up the sandy slope catching all the macro action on the way. There will be frogfish, flamboyant cuttlefish, pipefish, dwarf lionfishes and lots more. A good guide can make you feel silly here as they see things a normal diver tends to overlook.

#### **74) Dauin North and South**

**Icons:**    

**Location:** Poblacion Dauin

**Depth:** 15-100 ft. (4-24m)

This is another one of the small, buoyed marine sanctuaries found along the coast and can be done as a shore dive or by boat. As the small sanctuaries go, it is actually one of the bigger ones and divers can split their dives into an exploration of north and south. But it can be done in one dive.

Divers enter and find a sandy bottom to about 15 ft. (4m). Then they are greeted by some amazing hard coral cover that runs across the sanctuary and down past 75 ft. (24m). Large fields of staghorn coral hold clouds of sapphire chromis. Big cabbage corals hold refuge for small puffers and the occasional



Spiny seahorse gathering

depths here is also interesting to see.

Near the sandy area on the north is a pile of used tires that serves now as an artificial reef. Check the mouths of the cardinalfishes for eggs. There are also other juvenile fishes like sweetlips here. There is also some sea grass that holds some interesting small creatures. You may see some razorfish flitting around. Because there is not much current present in this area, it is an ideal

scorpionfish.

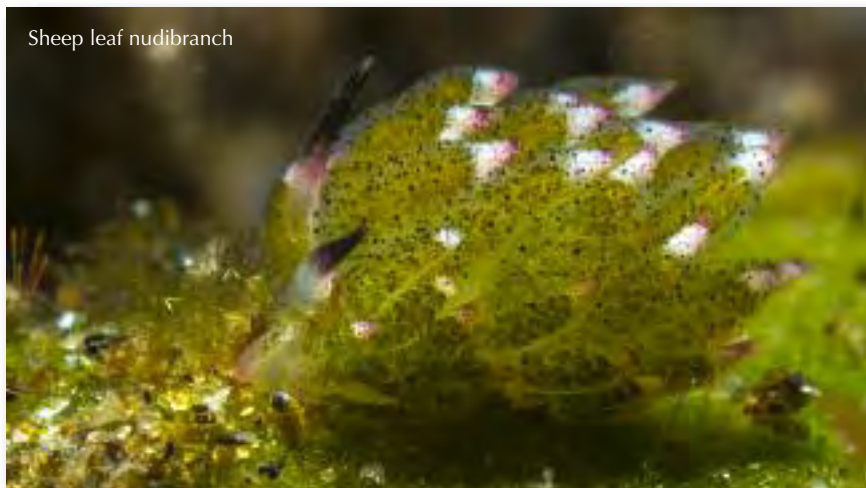
Swim around and through the various formations looking at crinoids, rope sponges and sea anemones. These coral formations are great habitat for smaller fish. The variation in coral species by

site for Open Water divers, refresher courses and for orientation dives.

## 75) Masaplod Norte Sanctuary

**Icons:**   

**Location:** North Dauin



Sheep leaf nudibranch



Harlequin shrimps

**Depth: 15-80 ft. (5-24m)**

The Masaplod Marine Sanctuary is divided into two sections and those are Masaplod Norte and Masaplod Sur. They are not connected and have somewhat different terrain although you may see some of the same inhabitants. The northern section of the sanctuary seems to be synonymous with bluespotted stingrays. It is also home to a good variety of fish. And these have become accustomed to divers and are approachable so they make great photo subjects. Big

coral formations in the shallow area as well as in the deep make it home to schools of small jacks, trevallies, sweetlips and snappers. There are also triggerfish, big turtles, and groupers.

Enter on the south and swim down a coral ridge to 70 ft. (22m) or just explore shallower. There's an open sandy area with interesting creatures in the shallower sea grasses. Scattered coral heads lie deeper. Look for such reef dwellers as double-ended pipefish, the blue spotted stingrays, yellowtail snappers and even nudibranchs



making their way across the sand.

North has another large coral section that runs down the slope and sweetlips, batfish, bluestripe fusiliers and bigeye jacks swoop in. End the dive by swimming up into the sea grasses just outside the buoys where seahorses and pufferfish are often hiding in the blades of grass.

## 76) Rock Pile

**Icons:**    

**Location:** South Dauin

**Depth:** 15-80 ft. (5-24m)

One of the newer dive sites in the area takes advantage of the fact that a river empties into this part of the coast and creates a unique environment great for nudibranch hunters and those seeking some nice macro images.

Rockpile also has an artificial reef of small steel pyramids, cars and steel crates and is home to many critters like juvenile clown frogfish, ornate ghost pipefish, seahorses and even harlequin shrimps have been spotted here.

The site is also next to a dry riverbed where large boulders and rocks have naturally gathered during heavy runoffs over the years. These form perfect shelter for fish, crabs, eels and urchins. This is a very good spot for nudibranchs like *Nembrotha* sp.



Longnose rock shrimp



Burrowing crab

crawling along the sea floor and also nudis in the various grasses and weeds. There is also a nice assortment of flatworms.

Check the sand for small scorpionfish and burrowing crabs. Rock Pile has lots to see.

## 77) Masaplod Sur Sanctuary

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📷

**Location:** South Dauin

**Depth:** 15-60 ft. (5-18m)

A bit down the beach from Rock Pile is the Masaplod Sur Marine Sanctuary, which is also very fishy and is better known for its nice coral variety. Again enter here at the south buoy and head down the sandy slope to 30-40 ft. (9-12m).

Here the coral cover of table corals, staghorns and lots of other

hard coral formations is much more dense than Masaplod to the north and it continues down past 80 ft. (24m) and far into the center of the sanctuary waters.

This dive is fishiest at the south end. Look around between the corals at 60 ft. (18m) where lots of schools like snapper, sweetlips, rabbitfish and others have taken residence in the valleys between the coral heads.

About three-quarters of the way across the sanctuary there is a sand plain and then some more coral cover at the end of the dive. Look for mantis shrimps, stargazers and thorny cowfish. Again exit outside the sanctuary buoys in the sea grasses. It is also a good site for fish and macro photos and not too deep.



## 78) Apo Island

**Icons:** 🏞️ 🐠 🌊 🏠 🏞️ 🏠 🏠 🏠

**Location:** SE tip of Negros Island

**Depth:** 10-115 ft. (3-35m)

Apo is one of the big conservation success stories in the Philippines. It has been a well cared for marine sanctuary since 1982 when the residents made a wise decision to care for their resources. The result has been good for the economy and good for the Philippines.

Apo is a volcanic island that juts out of the endless blue depths of the Tanon Strait trench. The channel between Dauin and the island is also an important migratory route for dolphins and pygmy sperm whales. In season, marine mammal

tours are organized by some dive shops to observe the five species of whales and six different dolphin species that have been sighted here.

Apo Island is home to the first community-run marine sanctuary. Small resorts are based on the island and daily visitors come to dive and snorkel. There are nine buoyed sites and a snorkel preserve.

The island has some very impressive rock formations scattered out into the sea from its 72 hectares, fine white sand beaches and coves, some high cliffs, a lighthouse and diverse reefs. There are at least 650 documented fish species and 400 kinds of corals.

Although it did suffer some recent typhoon damage, the reefs are on



Hawksbill sea turtle

the rebound and the reef life is robust. **Chapel Point**, for instance, has a small wall that starts shallow going down to 80 ft. (25m). Along the wall are nudibranchs, leaf fish, frogfish and ribbon eels. There is a small silvery baitfish-filled cave at 60 ft. (18m). A beautiful coral garden can be found at the shallow plateau on top of the wall.

Then you go around the island to **Mamsa** and the diversity, fish life and terrain are completely different, more like that seen on Malapascua. Divers aren't allowed to wear gloves here. The island has some no fishing areas. It also has a couple of no diving areas. Conservation rules are enforced and there's a fee, usually covered through the dive shop, to use sanctuary reefs.

**Katipanan Point** is generally blessed with just light currents and

is protected most of the time. Sea turtles love it here and there are big elephant ear blue sponges. **Rock Point West** leads to a point atop a flat plain that sometimes attracts manta rays when there is current. **Rock Point East** is situated at the island's eastern end with a large reef up top and a wall. Very fishy. The list goes on. Also make sure to go ashore here. The people are charming and the little village quaint and clean. Bring a lunch to eat on the beach.



Baitfish at Chapel Point



## Bohol

Chocolate Hills of Bohol



**B**ohol may be best known as the home of the Chocolate Hills. This island treasure is a series of undulating hills over a vast plain sometimes considered an “Eighth Wonder of the World”. Bohol has at least 1,268 perfectly cone-shaped, simially-sized hills scattered throughout the municipalities of Carmen, Batuan and Sagbayan. They are covered in green grass, which turns to brown during dry season, making them look like chocolate mounds.

But for divers this lovely island of Bohol is another well-kept secret. A home to proud and independent people, Boholanos take care of the many natural wonders of their land and also those undersesa. Bohol is the tenth largest island in the country. Mainland Bohol is oval-

shaped and surrounded by 72 smaller islands, the largest of which is the Panglao Island facing Taglibaran City in the southwest. Most of the people speak the native dialect Boholano. Cebuano, Tagalog and English are also widely spoken and understood.

Numerous waterfalls and caves are scattered across the island of Bohol, including the beautiful Mag-Aso Falls in Antequera. The water is cool and often creates a mist in humid mornings which can hide the falls. Bohol is also known for the Philippine tarsier (*Tarsius syrichta*), the smallest known living primate dating back 45 million years.

**Alona Beach** is on **Panglao**. This centerpiece of the island is a one mile (1.5km) stretch of glittering white sand. Divers flock here but also to **Balicasag**, **Cabilao**, newcomer **Anda** and other costal retreats for some great diving experiences. Alona Beach is a jumping-off point for dive safaris throughout the Visayas. Visitors arrive through Taglibaran City.

Crinoid shrimp



## Anda



The Anda area is a relative newcomer to the diving scene but is being developed with tourism and conservation in mind. Getting to Anda from Taglibaran is a pleasant oceanside ride along the southern coast where fruit stands line the road and rice paddies flourish. Or a trip through the Chocolate Hills can also be made to get a glimpse of this Bohol famous natural attraction.

Dive resorts and retreats are situated along the coast where limestone cliffs, separated by sandy beaches and some scattered rock islands, cater to divers in a quiet and natural surrounding.

Boutique resorts like Amun Ini are dedicated dive resorts that specialize in finding macro creatures and the guides even know the names of these odd and unusual marine critters by their Latin names. Thus, they are popular with all levels of diver and also with photographers and videographers.

For miles along the shore, shallow reef flats are covered in beautiful corals that extend to dropoffs that end in sandy slopes that extend into the depths. The upper reef ranges from scattered coral heads with soft and hard corals and lots of sandy patches to some sites that have every inch covered in thick coral





Sargassum frogfish

patches of healthy leather corals and many soft corals.

The limestone walls present some canyons, cracks and crevices and even small caves. These walls and overhangs hold plenty of sponges, large soft coral trees and gorgonian sea fans.

Then below these varied dropoffs are sandy flats ranging from areas with various coral heads and cleaning stations to deeper sites with huge black coral gorgonian bushes. Divers can see hawkfish in the big black corals and the odd sawblade shrimp in small black corals. The beautiful Coleman shrimp pairs live in fire urchins and so do the wonderfully patterned

zebra crabs.

This area has only been thoroughly explored in the last half-decade and it seems every macro critter on a diver's bucket list can be found here. There is truly amazing diversity for those wanting to see small reef life.

Go to the points where there are currents to find schooling fish. Fusiliers, striped snappers, occasional grouper, big puffers and the odd turtle may all swim by. The points that have current can have very good action. Many dives are circular back to the anchorage with nice deco stops at reef top. Drift dives are also done. The area is still largely undeveloped and quiet.



Pregnant pygmy seahorse

Its location in the northern corner of the Coral Triangle puts Bohol in one of the highest marine biodiversity hot spots in the world. In layman's terms, a diver's paradise.

### 79) Panorama

**Icons:**      

**Location:** SW Anda Peninsula

**Depth:** 20-100ft (6-30m)

This Bohol dive site is especially appealing for advanced divers but can be enjoyed by all. Located along a wall at western Anda's peninsula, Panorama is specially protected and has only been open for diving since 2001. It is named because of its steep wall

that stretches as wide as 100 ft. (30m). With the wall to a diver's back, it gives a dramatic and panoramic view of the open water. In the open water, look for barracuda and the odd reef shark. The wall has nice coral growth and has lots of marine life including leopard sea anemones.

### 80) Wonder Wall

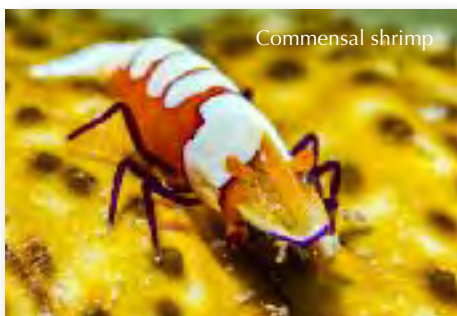
**Icons:**     

**Location:** South Dauin

**Depth:** 15-90ft (5-27m)

The main attraction of Wonder Wall is a small wreck and a freshwater source at 90 ft. (27m) at the bottom of steep wall. The site has some natural grottoes deep along the wall. While the urge is to go down and see the small shipwreck, a shallower dive exploring the wall makes for a much more interesting dive.

Also, there is a sandy valley with coral heads and even fluorescent mushroom corals. Look for ornate ghost pipefish in the crinoids.



Commensal shrimp



Mating *Nembrotha cristata*



### 81) The Caverns

Icons: 🏠 🐠 🐙 🦀 🐡

Location: South Dauin

Depth: 15-100ft. (4-30m)

A dive site in Bohol within a short boat ride of most dive centers, the Caverns is a simple dive site that nevertheless boasts of a stunning variety of fish, many natural underwater grottoes, a steep wall...plus a chance to encounter “Bruno”, a resident giant octopus!

### 82) Coco White South & North

Icons: 🏠 🐠 🐙 🦀 🐡

Location: South Dauin

Depth: 12-70ft. (3-21m)

Coco White South is a relatively simple dive site in Bohol with a steep wall suitable for any diver. Lots of sponge growth can be found here and it is good for nudibranchs as well. Look for skeleton shrimp too. Aside from nudis including the graceful Spanish dancers, there are also shells and lots of blennies and gobies. Occasionally a barracuda school will also swim by.



Barrel sponge hairy squat lobster

**Coco White North** has similar features with good sea fan and sponge growth, schooling fish and a good chance of finding unusual nudibranchs and shrimps.

### 83) Snapper's Cave

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 🧭 📏 📊 📅

**Location:** South Dauin

**Depth:** 15-90ft. (4-27m)

This is a very well-adorned and steep wall starting shallow and going down to 100 ft. (30m) There is a large gorgonian tree and a wide cave entrance at 90 ft. (27m). This is a good preparatory dive for Neptune House, as it is normally not as currenty. The dive connects to dive site **Paradise Garden**. Experienced divers with a proper light can enter the cave. There are snapper schools along the wall. The reeftop here is very lush with leather and hard corals.

### 84) Dap Dap

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 🧭 📏 📊 📅

**Location:** South Dauin

**Depth:** 15-60ft. (4-18m)

This is a relatively shallow boat dive and is a great way to spend a second dive as a long time can be



Bohol coast and corals



Blue-ring octopus

taken looking around the reef.

It's also a great site for beginning divers or even as an intro dive for total newbies trying out diving during their vacation. There's so much to see at Dap Dap, including the occasional shoals of barracuda, a good collection of colorful nudibranchs, sea spiders hiding in black coral trees and marauding, crunching schools of big bumphead parrotfish. The corals are both hard and soft with nice leather corals and their flowing tentacles.

### 85) Birhen E. & W. House Reef

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐟

**Location:** Amun Ini Resort

**Depth:** 15-100ft. (4-30m)

These are the sites in front of the Amun Ini dive shop and they are a very short boat ride (like two

minutes) to get to the reef. But the site is a good spot for all kinds of creatures including sea turtles, schools of fusiliers and snappers and nice coral growth. The fish come to **Birhen East** because it has some currents but not usually anything too stiff. **Birhen West** features steep underwater walls filled with vibrant corals. This is another one of the sites that has a lot of fish due to good current flow.

Occasionally, a lucky boat of divers will happen onto a floating mass of Sargassum weed. These thick carpets hold all kind of sea creatures from a special kind of frogfish that is well-camouflaged with this weed, seahorses and cryptic nudibranchs. It is possible April through June or whenever the prevailing currents decide to bring this floating mass in close to shore.





Anemonefish guarding eggs

## 86) Neptune House

**Icons:** 🏠 🐠 🐙 🦀 🐡 🐛 🐢 🐟

**Location:** N. of Anda Town

**Depth:** 82-118ft. (25-35m)

This is a high quality drift dive along the eastern part of Anda's reef quite

a bit north of the town. The average depth is fairly deep at 82 ft. (25m) or so. This dive has coral walls and reefs and is done as a drift, so divers must keep an eye on current strength and look for up and down currents. It is great for the numerous pygmy seahorses that can be found on the various sea fans. This site also has a special feature that is for advanced divers and guides usually only let experienced diver try this. At 105 ft. (31m) there is an entrance into a cave. Having a light source is obligatory to go inside. The wall here isn't so pretty but divers are usually allowed a maximum of 8-10 minutes inside the cave to explore. Look for lobsters, schools of fish and bluespot stingrays!

After that head back up the wall to look for more small stuff like the various pygmies and anemones. Nudibranchs also like to crawl along this wall.



Black coral shrimp



## Cabilao



This small limestone isle is a relaxed place with five nice villages, a nice range of beachfront hotels and good dive operations. It is so chill here that there are no cars. The only motorized transport is in the form of a few tricycles and a couple of motorcycles, which also serve as so-called 'habal-habal'.

Most of the distances on Cabilao island are quite short and can be

easily walked. People are friendly and the island has a charm that endears repeat divers. The lack of roads also means that everything on the island has to be brought in by banca including building materials, wood, food (except fish caught locally), and, during periods of drought, fresh water for drinking and bathing.

The triangular shaped 2.8 sq. miles (7.2 sq. km.) island sits at the west side of Bohol, facing Cebu Island. Cabilao has about 5200 friendly inhabitants who survive on fishing, tourism, some small agriculture and weaving of bags. The island is the home to Bohol's only natural lake, Lake Lanao, near the barangay Pantudlan, which also serves as a small bird-sanctuary for passing migrant birds.

Divers love this place as it has a

Cabilao beach



great variety of diving with 20 sites all around its shores as well as a couple of nearby sites on other islands. It is for all ranges of diver with most sites offering easy step diving starting deep and having interesting terrain all the way up to the shallows.

There are nice, current-fed points with batfish, barracuda and surgeonfish schools. Large and small sea turtles are also seen. It was once a place to see scalloped hammerheads but they were fished out a couple of decades ago and have not returned... a sad reminder of the need to sustain the ocean's resources. But, there are some absolutely stunning soft coral



Anthias fish and corals



Bubble coral shrimp

displays along the walls as well as large gorgonian sea fans that have both *H. denise* and *H. bargibanti* pygmy seahorses and very large *Muricella* sp. sea fans.

The macro is surprisingly good for white sand outer reef slopes. The reefs and sandy plains hold frogfish, harlequin ghost pipefish, sea moths, a very nice variety of nudibranchs and orangutan crabs and soft coral shrimps. Some sites, like **Lighthouse 1 & 2**, are very good for wide angle, video and macro and are good for repetitive diving.

Some resorts also have spas and offer a nice massage after a diving day with shiatsu, Swedish or harmony massages or a hand and foot reflexology treatment. Great way to end a dive day.



Soft corals at Lighthouse

## 87) Gorgonian Wall

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐚

**Location:** NW Cabilao

**Depth:** 18-140ft. (5-42m)

This beautiful wall runs the length of a football field out from shore. It starts at 18 ft. (5m) and goes down to the depths past sport diving limits. This is a rich wall that is completely covered with different kinds of corals, giant *Gorgonian sp.* sea fans and sponges. It also has great topography with many small caves and overhangs. All along the wall is plenty of hard and soft coral, fish, rare nudibranchs, frogfish and pygmy seahorses.

Also, this is the sign of a healthy reef, occasional mature Napoleon wrasses cruise by. For nice light this one is especially recommended for afternoon dives.

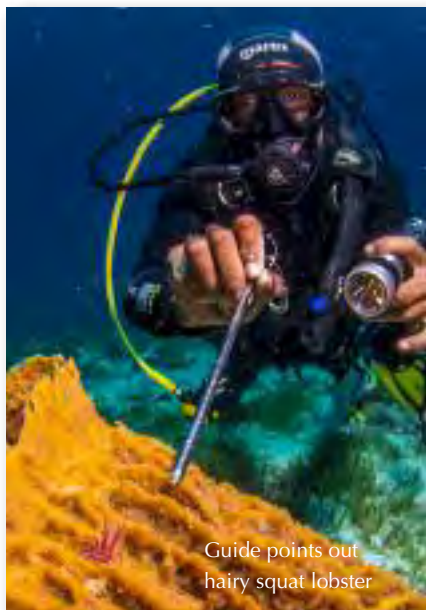
## 88) Lighthouse 2

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐚

**Location:** NW Cabilao

**Depth:** 15-65ft. (4-20m)

This site is on a very nice slope with sandy bottom, which is partially overgrown with sea grass and individual coral formations. It gently declines from shore to the wall to a depth of approximately 65 ft. (19m). It is also home to a great variety of species like devilfish, leaf fish, robust and harlequin ghost pipefish, sleepy little sea moths, stonefish, moray eels, sea kraits, the beautiful harlequin shrimp, mantis shrimps and an extraordinary variety of nudibranchs. To add to that, occasionally eagle rays will also swim by. This is also a good spot for large sea turtles. And back in the macro category, divers also



Guide points out hairy squat lobster

find both blue-ring and mimic octopi and two different kinds of pygmy seahorses.

### 89) Lighthouse 1

Icons:     

Location: NW Cabilao

Depth: 15-80 ft. (4-25m)

Next to **Current View Point** is a slope covered with sea grass and corals going down to 70 ft. (21m). This is an excellent site for underwater photographers as it has a great variety of rare marine life. Several kinds of scorpionfish, different ghost pipefish, pegasus, stargazers, crocodile snake-eels, sea snakes, many different kinds

of shrimp and crabs and the fascinating “disco” file shell are all regularly sighted. This very productive site, which also has some big elephant ear sponges, is a great night dive spot as well.

### 90) Fallen Tree

Icons:      

Location: W Cabilao

Depth: 15-140 ft. (4-40m)

Yep, there’s a fallen tree on the shore here. This dive is along a gradual slope from the shore to 55 ft. (16m) and then a steep wall which slopes down deep. There can be a gentle current feeding the soft corals and that makes this a great drift dive. Off the wall and into the blue look for schools of large blackbar barracuda or cruising sea turtles. All along the site, frogfish and nudibranchs are to be found



Red frogfish



and pegasus sea moths are seen on the slope. At the end of the dive, in the shallows, are the beautiful pyjama cardinalfish and other colorful fish in the hard corals. Look for the cardinalfish to be incubating eggs in their mouths.

### 91) Pangangan Wall

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 🐠 🐙 🐙

**Location:** Pangangan Island

**Depth:** 10-60ft. (3-18m)

This is a short boat ride across the channel to the island of Pangangan. It is a white sand muck diving area in the shallows and also along a sloping wall of crevices and sand patches. Lots of small stuff like this site including various harlequin and robust ghost pipefish and frogfish

that like to blend into the rope and encrusting sponges. It is also home for pegasus sea moths, devil scorpionfish and various nudibranchs. There are also soft and hard corals along the steep slope area. Look for undulating ribbon eels, juvenile batfish and more nudibranchs. Occasionally, a few whitetip reef sharks and eagle rays also pass by. As there is a lot to see in shallow water. This is a great third dive where one can take plenty of time to look around.

### 92) Cambaquiz

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 🐠 🐙 🐙

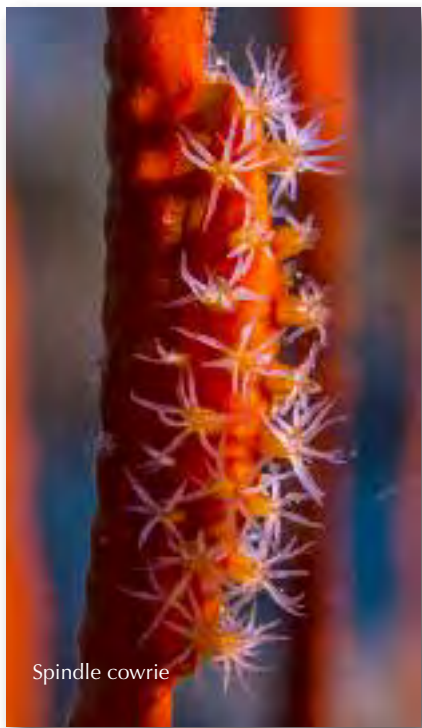
**Location:** Pura Vida Cabilao beach

**Depth:** 20-100ft. (5-30m)

This wall at the northeastern tip just



Gorgonian sea whips



Spindle cowrie

in front of Pura Vida Cabilao Resort and Spa dive center and goes from 35 ft. (10m) down to very deep. In some of the many caves there are baby whitetip sharks and at 100 ft. (30m), there is a large cave that divers can enter. A light is needed to see the inner walls properly. A gentle slope on the east side of the wall is rich with reef fish and quite often has turtles. There is also great night diving in the area with stargazers,

occasional wonderpus and many different crabs and shrimps.

### 93) South Point

Icons:     

**Location:** N. of Anda Town

**Depth:** 30-140ft. (9-42m)

This is an excellent wall with overhangs and caves and very lush coral growth. The wall drops past safe sport diving depths into the blue abyss.

The dive site is located at a “corner” where some currents occur. It has spectacular formations of old growth hard corals at shallow depths that have been growing here undisturbed for centuries. One can see the competition for space and light here. The dive is also home to an abundance of fish. Along the reef schools of mackerel and many other fish patrol. Down about 70 ft. (21m) some small caves hold resting whitetip reef sharks.



Elephant ear sponges

## Balicasag



This marine protected area is popular with every dive operator in the area. Day boats galore show up from Panglao and also Cabilao and even Dauin. There is a dive operator and hotel on the island too. And little bancas selling trinkets and jewelry zip from dive boat to boat. This is a busy place so always use a safety sausage and surface with care or go up close to

the guide. Balicasag's marine sanctuary status has helped it to flourish. Despite the volume of divers, neither marine life species nor coral growth has diminished. It has pretty blue waters with sandy flats running to deep drop-offs.

### 94) Black Forest

Icons:       

**Location:** East side of Balicasag

**Depth:** 15-130 ft. (4-40m)

The site is named for large black coral stands but best part of the dive is not deep but in the shallows where turtle grass grows. This area is a sea turtle meeting, breeding and feeding area. It has large tracts of sandy grasses and clear waters. Many turtles from young to very old can be found feeding on the shallow sea grasses so the dive can





Green sea turtle

be long and relaxed at 20-45 ft. (6-13m), although many divers go down to the current depths to see the black corals and the large fish there. Expect to see frogfish, large groupers, large snappers and other big reef fish not seen commonly in some of the other destinations.

Watch for mating action with the sea turtles. Some are used to divers and can be slowly approached.



Playing green sea turtles

## 95) Diver's Heaven

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 📏 🐠 🐡 🐢 🐙

**Location:** NE side of Balicasag

**Depth:** 15-130 ft. (4-40m).

This is an amazing dropoff with underhangs, cuts and crevasses. There are lots of small fish like anthias and fusiliers along the wall. The site is also known for its large bigeye trevally tornado. Barracuda schools are also sometimes seen. The upper reef shallows is very rich hard corals with lots of chromis and anthias. It is very pretty. And there's the occasional sea turtle that swims by. The island also gets visits from whale sharks so divers should keep an eye out into the blue. Every site on the island is a good dive.



## Panglao



Panglao Island is a favorite haunt of divers and has a number of dive sites around it. It is also a jumping off point for dive safaris, trips to Balicasag, Cabilao, Pamilacan and Maolboal, dolphin watching tours, trips to the Chocolate Hills and a number of other activities.

Alona Beach is the hotspot here. Somewhat crowded with hotels and

dive shops, the beach is a hangout for divers and snorkelers but can have quite a bit of boat traffic so a safer option might be to take a trip to a less active dive or snorkel site rather than always be on the lookout for boats off Alona.

There are a variety of great restaurants right on the beach. Pizza joints, Swiss, Italian, Thai and Filipino dishes are all available.

Although there are a lot of divers and dive shops, Alona Beach is not generally known for crazy nightlife. It can be a quiet, romantic place at night. Restaurants set up candle-lit tables on the beach and couples and groups gather to eat good food and listen to live acoustic music right on the beach.

Divers going to Alona Beach, can arrange pick up at the Tagbilaran airport or pier.



Heading to Balicasag past Panglao



Soft corals

moray eels, Moorish idols, giant frogfish and anthias.

The reeftop runs a fair distance and is quite shallow and excellent for snorkeling. Find razorfish, damselfish, butterflyfish, parrotfish and a large shoal of anthias. The wall and overhangs are quite impressive, covered with a good selection of hydroids, gorgonians, sponges and crinoids and lots of soft and tubastrea corals.

### 97) Doljo Sanctuary

Icons:     

**Location:** NW Panglao Island

**Depth:** 18-130 ft. (5-39m)

### 96) Napaling

Icons:     

**Location:** NW Panglao Island

**Depth:** 10-65 ft. (3-19m)

This is shallower dive with lots going on and some great places to snorkel. It is around to the north side of Panglao maybe an hour boat ride from popular accommodations at Alona Beach.

Because of the frequent current, Napaling is often dived as a drift dive. The reeftop is at around 10 ft. (3m). A vertical wall stretches down deep with many holes, crevasses, overhangs and caves. Look out for juvenile barracudas, bannerfish,

This dive spot at Doljo Beach is a marine sanctuary. The reef top starts



Denise pygmy seahorse

at around 10 ft. (3m) and slopes down to a wall at 40 ft. (12m), with many table corals on it.

The vertical wall goes down to past 130 ft. (40m). Many crevasses, black corals and whip corals can be seen along this wall. Keep an eye out for colorful cardinalfish including pyjama cardinalfish that like to hover over the reeftop table corals. There are also a lot of sea anemones with a variety of anemonefish like spinecheeks and one-stripe anemonefish.

### 98) Doljo Point

**Icons:**     

**Location:** NW Panglao Island

**Depth:** 18-130 ft. (5-39 m)

Doljo point is about 40 minutes away from Alona Beach by boat. The reeftop starts at 18 ft. (5m), with

a combination vertical wall and steep slope starting at 25 ft. and down to the depths.

Giant sea fans, leather corals, elephant ear sponges and barrel sponges decorate the steep slope. Look out for giant frogfish that like to sit in the green leather coral. There are also many angelfish and butterflyfish.

This is a good site to keep looking into the blue as big pelagics like Spanish mackerel, barracudas and eagle rays all swim by.

### 99) Gak Ang

**Icons:**   

**Location:** West of Panglao Island

**Depth:** 18-80 ft. (5-24m)

Gak Ang sits off southwestern Panglao and is a great dive for macro shooters and wide angle



Soft coral on dropoff

buffs as well. The vertical wall reaches about 80 ft. (24m) and starts at 18 ft. (5m). Divers will see an abundance of beautiful soft corals and sea fans along this pleasant wall.

There are giant frogfish, tiny clown frogfish, bannerfish schools and a lot of other macro life.

### 100) Tawala Sanctuary

**Icons:** 🏠 🗺️ 🐠 🐙 🐚 🐛

**Location:** East Panglao Island

**Depth:** 18-70 ft. (5-22m)

The relatively new Tawala sanctuary has a varied reef formation with short wall sections starting in shallow water. There are also some

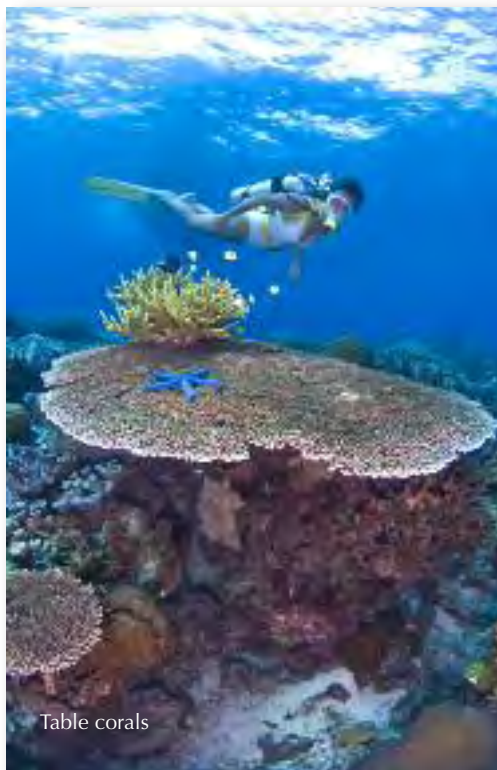


Table corals



Robust ghost pipefish

beautiful submarine terraces which have lots of corals and nice fish life. This is often used for newer divers as it is not a deep site and there is plenty to see.

Look for lots of schools of fish including the feeding mackerels, large yellowtail barracudas and ubiquitous surgeonfish. Schooling bigeye jacks also come by in large schools. The site also has a nice selection of macro critters like nudibranchs, shrimp and crabs. Sea anemones are also well-represented at the sanctuary. Make this a nice slow and easy dive to take in the diverse marine life.



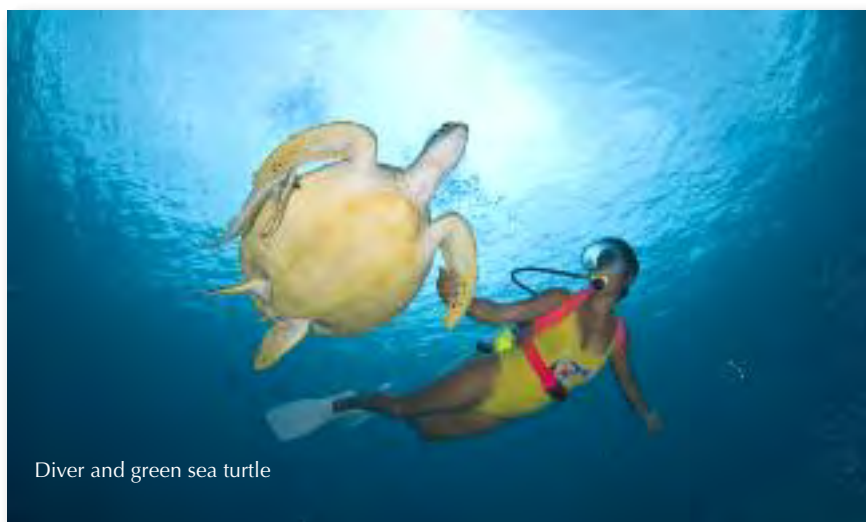
## Camiguin/Misamis Oriental



Camiguin is charming and small in both area and population. It is just 14 miles (23 km) at its longest and just a bit more than 8.5 miles (14 km) at its widest. And within this small area lie an amazing seven volcanoes. Lovely little Camiguin is the island “born of fire.” As much of the island was formed through earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, it has some

interesting above and below water natural formations. In the late 1800s, for example, the eruption of Mt. Vulcan submerged the old town of Catarman, pushing it below the sea, leaving behind the ruins of a church and its bell tower. The **Sunken Cemetery** dive site, now marked with a huge cross, was also one of the areas in this old town. The isle has over 20 sites.

Popular **White Island**, a sandbar, and Mantigue Island, a smaller island off the shores of Camiguin, are great for swimming, snorkeling, and diving. Cool, refreshing waters amid trees, ferns and boulders can be found at waterfalls like Katibawasan Falls or the more remote Tuawasan Falls. Just as refreshing is a dip in the Santo Niño Cold Spring. It offers waters at 68F/20C and small fishes



Diver and green sea turtle



Jack school

that will give you a unique massage! In contrast, there's Ardent Hot Springs' 104F/40C waters heated by Mt. Hibok-Hibok, still an active volcano.

Located off the coast of the Misamis Oriental province in northern Mindanao, it is technically a part of Mindanao. But Bohol

divers often visit Camiguin on dive safaris coming from Alona Beach, which isn't far away. Domestic flights come in to Camiguin's quaint airport. Many modest family, dive and eco resorts dot the island.

### 101) Agutaya Reef

**Icons:**

**Location:** Off White Island

**Depth:** 16-130 ft. (5-40m)



Saddleback anemonefish

Hibok-Hibok Volcano towers over this idyllic sandy cay that is a great place for snorkelers and divers alike. The large, shallow Agutaya Reef has some healthy corals and lots of small reef fish darting around, and some larger specimens are holed up in the nooks and crannies of the corals.

The eastern portion of the reef

drops away and divers can have a leisurely and fairly shallow dive going along the reef top and see nudibranchs, anemones, angelfish, triggerfish and an occasional big grouper. Or a deeper dive can be done looking in the cracks, caverns and crevices that are home to a variety of larger fish.

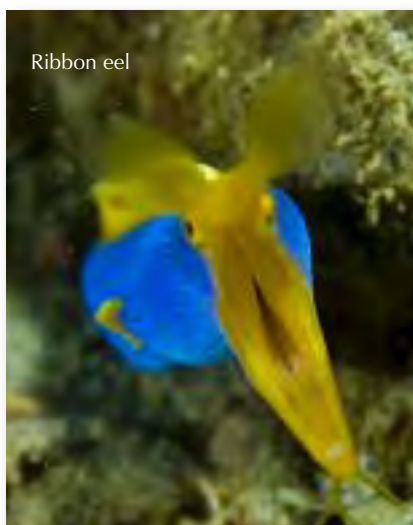
### 102) Medina Underwater Springs

**Icons:** 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠

**Location:** Off White Island

**Depth:** 20-108 ft. (6-33m)

There are two dives here, both interesting and unusual, that feature cold freshwater springs (known locally as alibuag) bubbling out of the seafloor. These sites are both about 300m west of White Island's beach and are at the edge of the coral reef.



Descending to around 100 ft. (28m), Paradise Canyon's walls are decorated with plenty of cracks and holes, home to a wide variety of marine life. Take a dive light as there is a cavern that divers can enter and explore.

A second dive in the area, known as **The Aquarium**, is (as the name implies) well endowed with corals and assorted marine life. This is an excellent training site and snorkeling spot, as it's relatively shallow 30 to 70 ft. (6 to 20m) deep.

### 103) Jigdup Slope & Wall

**Icons:** 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠

**Location:** 2 km from Mambajao

**Depth:** Surface -130 ft. (0-40m)

Teeming with all sorts of marine life, this reef is a wide-angle photographer's dream with big stands of green tubastrea corals, soft corals and gorgonians. There is usually some current varying from mild to quite strong.

There are actually a couple of dives to be had here with one slope dive and another a wall. The tropics are out in force and macro photography subjects like frogfish, leaf fish and nudis make this a favorite repeat site. The currents also bring in blackbar barracuda schools, tuna, sharks and seasonal

manta rays.

#### 104) Sunken Cemetery

Icons:     

Location: NW Camiguin

Depth: 25 -70 ft. (5-20 m)

This is a former land cemetery site that was pushed into the sea during an 1800s volcanic eruptions. Now marked by an above the surface white cross, underwater the reef is alive and well with a good variety of huge brain and table corals and a great diversity of tropical fish life. The slope has nice hard coral cover interspersed with soft and leather corals. Cuttlefish like this site as well as anthias. This is also quite popular with snorkelers. There are a couple of 1800s grave markers still visible underwater here.



*Chromodoris nudibranch*

#### 105) Old Volcano

Icons:      

Location: NW Camiguin

Depth: 25 -120 ft. (5-35m)

A fitting dive for an island with seven volcanoes, this site has sharp undersea pinnacles formed by the volcanic lava flow of years ago. The varied terrain has small walls and black sand chutes. This can be both a wide angle dive and macro dive.

Gorgonians on the deeper area hold pygmy seahorses. Look at the crinoids to see if there are ornate ghost pipefish or check the sponges for hiding frogfish.

The areas with current flowing over the sand are home to garden eels. Whitetip sharks also patrol the reefs. Also a bonus, usually when there is some current is the appearance of eagle rays. Manta rays and even mobulas also come to the Old Volcano site seasonally.



White-eye moray eel



## Mindanao



This destination has suffered some bad press over the years due to its association with extreme insurgent groups in the south and west. But some parts of Mindanao, particularly **Cagayan de Oro, Davao and General Santos**, have become popular with visitors and have

proven safe for divers and any kind of visitor.

Divers will be happy to learn that some outstanding dive sites are within reach of these cities and amenities are in place to facilitate training and diving once there. There are good hotels and resorts at reasonable prices and a choice of dining and entertainment all in a safe environment.

**Davao** is a genuine year 'round diving destination; something that is not lost on local dive entrepreneurs who visit sites around nearby Samal Island. Two Japanese ships lie in 40m (130ft) in the Malipanao anchorage of the Pearl Farm Resort.

There are caves, walls, sea mounts and other outstanding topographic offerings in the Davao region. There are roughly 20 dive sites and sanctuaries that hold a great amount of marine life and the area is usually uncrowded.





Baitfish at reeftop

## 106) Ligid Caves

Icons:     

**Location:** NE Samal Island

**Depth:** 26-115 ft. (8-34m)

Located at the extreme northeast of Samal Island in the Gulf of

Davao (right between Big Ligid and Samal Islands), this sanctuary affords the perfect habitat for a leather-coral carpeted reeftop.

The site is named after two curious looking caves starting below 80 ft. (24m). At the entrance there are crabs, scorpionfish, tunicates, rabbitfish and lionfish, moray eels and razorfish. One of the caves actually has three entrances that all lead to a rocky corridor. They are filled with amazing numbers of reef fish, sponge crabs and black coral trees and soft corals.

Due to its location at the tip of Samal, the cave occasionally has some reef sharks. Pelagic sharks and bigger fish swim outside in the blue water.

At a depth of 60 ft. (18m) Ligid



*Facelinid nudibranch*

Cave dive site shows interesting deep sea life all the way down to the cave entrance areas. The current is normally relatively calm due to the bay of Davao Del Norte, Davao City, Samal and Big Ligid acting as barriers. Night diving is recommended, especially for macro photography. Nearby are the sites **Balet Wall** and **Tagpopongan**. For underwater spelunkers the Ligid Cave dive site will prove rewarding.

### 107) Pinnacle Point

**Icons:** 🐠 🐡 🐢 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙

**Location:** SE tip of Big Ligid Island

**Depth:** 26-115 ft. (8-34m)

Pinnacle Point southeast of Big Ligid, an islet near Samal, is actually an imposing pointed rock formation. It has fascinating pink corals and is surrounded by two other lower pinnacles. The three rock formations stand at 30 to 65 ft. (9 to 19m) high. The Pinnacle is surrounded by tubastrea corals, anthias, black corals, gorgonians and scores of deep sea invertebrates.

Head southeast along the wall, current permitting, taking in views of the gorgonians and sea whips. Check out the cracks and crannies in the wall for bigeyes and cardinalfish. Some octopi and morays also dwell in the holes.

Southeast of the point are three reef formations where schools of pennant butterflyfish, surgeonfish, jacks and several types of angelfish are frequent visitors. The center structure is covered in lush pink soft corals, while the leeward side is festooned with large gorgonians, black coral and a host of anthias and tubastrea.

### 108) Marissa 1, 2 & 3

**Icons:** 🐠 🐡 🐢 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙

**Location:** South of Samal Island

**Depth:** 26-60 ft. (8-18m)

Almost everyone from snorkeler to experienced diver can enjoy this site. Marissa is good for training and not a bad night dive either. The Pearl Farm maintains three reefs as a marine sanctuary, so there is plenty of life. The coral heads, undercuts, small walls and drop-offs are interspersed with gentle slopes for divers and snorkelers.

### 109) Malipano Japanese Wrecks

**Icons:** 🐠 🐡

**Location:** Off Pearl Farm Resort



Painted triggerfish

## Siargao Jellyfish Lake

Siargao is known for its great surf but snorkelers and divers may want to make a stop at this idyllic isle as well. Located in the province of Surigao del Norte, it has some beautiful limestone formations at Sohoton Cove. Of interest to divers and snorkelers is the Jellyfish Lake.

A rare find, these marine lakes are known only to Palau and one site in Indonesia. The isolation and lack of predators has caused the jellyfish to effectively lose the sting in their tentacles. The jellies are most plentiful April through June. Outside the cove is a fan-covered wall great for diving and snorkeling. The cove has clear water, stalactites, bats, wild orchids and some climbing adventures too.



Non-stinging jellyfish

### Depth: 60-130 ft. (18-40m)

These wrecks are only about 130 ft. (40m) apart, allowing divers to visit two wrecks on the same dive. The lack of currents has prevented much coral from growing on the two hulls of these Japanese ships that sunk in WWII.

Sponges and tunicates, whip corals and the odd shell or two decorate the wreck site.

### 110) Linosutan Coral Gardens

Icons:   

Location: SE Talicud Island

Depth: 16-130 ft. (5-40m)

Found west of Talicud Island, this attractive dive site in Davao is also fondly called Linosutan by local diving folks of Barangay Linosutan.

Divers are treated to submerged sand dunes, hard and soft coral beds, tropical fish, wrasse, garden eels and parrotfish. Anemones here have lots of shrimp, damsels, anthias and fusiliers.

This is a great all-around site for photographers and divers levels.



Goby beneath feather duster



## Palawan



Coron limestone cliffs

Of the 7,000-plus isles in the Philippines, it is said Palawan has 1,768 of them. Many are idyllic sandy beaches with coco palms and lush jungle. Others are stunning limestone cliffs shielding untouched coves and native plant and animal life. It's a very pretty and diverse place. And, on land, visitors might even find a giraffe or a zebra!! Yes, there is an island with both African and Philippine wild animals.

Divers have a bonus here as the

many islands and bays created a sheltered and hidden anchorage near Coron that the Japanese used to hide ships during WWII. The ships were discovered and sunk by the U.S. on its quest to retake the Philippines. Now they are coral laden mini-reefs full of marine beauty as well as war history.

Divers can fly into **El Nido**, **Puerto Princesa** and **Busuanga**.

Busuanga is for those going to both the Calamian Islands and Coron.

While most of the Philippines is heavily populated and sectioned out for farming, Palawan has wide open spaces. It holds untouched sandy beaches, high limestone cliffs and large tracts of land set aside for cattle grazing. There is still wild jungle here and some rare animals on land and in the sea. The freshwater crocodile, an extremely endangered species, is found here.



Passing over dugong and turtle sea grass beds in the Calamians

## Calamian Islands



One of the most interesting dive areas in Palawan, and at times overlooked due to the fame of the **Coron** shipwrecks, is the **Calamian Group**. These islands have a variety of formations that include powder white sandy beaches, rocky outcrops and towering trees full of fruit bats. They are found along the northern shores of Busuanga Island and out into the north and eastern reef systems of the Mindoro Straits. The outer banks include the famous **Apo Reef Natural Park** and sites around the **Tara Islands**.

Scenic and diverse, this is a main habitat area for the rare and endangered dugong, a sea cow that looks somewhat like a manatee but has a forked tail like a whale or dolphin. They graze on the sea grasses that grow on the slopes and up into the shallows of many of these islands. Sea turtles, especially green sea turtles, also nest in the islands and munch the

same grasses.

Many of these islands are incredibly photogenic and uninhabited and romantics can arrange for a day with a special someone on a desert isle, getting a taste of Robinson Crusoe existence (albeit with a well-packed cooler, liquid refreshment and adult beverages). Snorkeling is generally good with minimal currents at most beaches.

Busuanga is served by frequent flights. Get a window seat as on a sunny day, the flight over the islands is like a special tour with stunning tropical colors.

Most hotels and spas have package deals that can include diving. Instruction, daily dives and special charters can all be arranged.

The island group holds great fish diversity, an array of coral life and one of the war wrecks. The water here is generally quite clear and the presence of the resorts and their group of Coast Guard reserve



volunteers has assured dynamiters and poachers have not had a presence here. It's a special area in this vast country of islands.

### **111) Club Paradise Housereef**

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐛

**Location:** Dimakya Island

**Depth:** 16-56 ft. (5-17m)

The site cleverly named Housereef at Club Paradise on Dimakya Island is one of the most interesting sites in the region. That's because the reef has been protected as the resort's kind of personal preserve for two decades now. And it shows. Turtles graze the sea grass beds and lay eggs on the beach. A virtual tornado of schooling bigeye jacks can be found just offshore in 10 ft. (3m) of water. Look also for big bumphead parrotfish. Giants clams can be

found along the reef in a couple of places and it's a great spot for macro oddities like sleepy sea moths, ornate ghost pipefish, jawfish (at times with eggs), frogfish large and small, nudibranchs and flatworms.

The corals are varied and a great variety of hard corals and sponges can be seen along the southwest slope. Look also for larger fish like barracuda and mackerels. Diving here is normally a walk-in and can be done pretty much any time of day from the Club Paradise dive center. Instruction is done in the pool but also in a natural bowl right off the beach.

The main attractions here are the grass munchers. From March to May the area is frequented by dugongs. They like the grass beds directly in front of the resort. The other

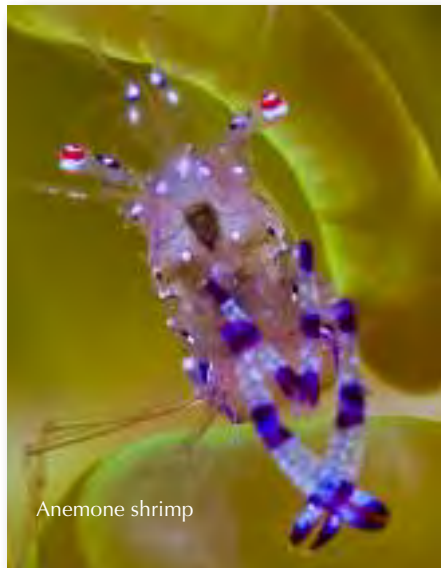


Nudibranch crawling on a lionfish at Dimakya Island

attraction is the constant parade of sea turtles who like the same grasses. A couple of beautiful green turtles with unblemished shells have become quite accustomed to divers and are like the Housereef pets. They like to have their shells stroked and cleaned and will eat sea grass if fed by a diver. They are very good photo subjects.

Many dives can be made at this fascinating reef with varied sites for wide angle and macro photography.

Dimyaka also has some fascinating birds and land creatures like monitor lizards and a colony of fruit bats that fly at night at late dusk. Its makes quite a sight to see if you are just getting into the water for a night dive or just getting out



Anemone shrimp

after a mandarinfish dive.

Eagle rays and other pelagics do come by here on occasion. The island has some other sites as well that are no more than ten minutes

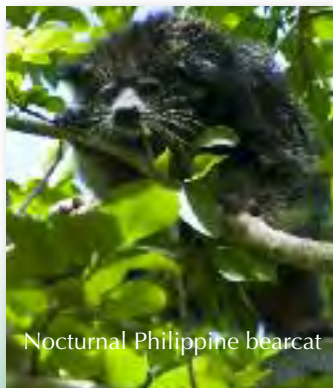


Green sea turtle eating sea grasses



## Calauit Island

In the 1970s days of the Ferdinand Marcos presidency, the president was friendly with Kenya and was gifted with a number of African animals. Now they thrive on the Calauit Island Game Preserve and Wildlife Sanctuary. So for over 30 years now the herds have roamed this vast island. It is the Philippines major conservation showcase for wildlife habitat and has the distinction of being the first successful wildlife translocation experiment in Asia. Seeing giraffe tracks going down the beach or seeing one towering along with the palms is not unusual. Rangers will let visitors hand-feed the giraffes. Other gazelles, zebra, local Calauit deer, mousedeer and a range of wildlife can be seen on these plains. There are also some cages near a rest area with local porcupines, freshwater crocodiles (highly endangered) and the reclusive nocturnal bearcat. Pythons and some other colorful snakes are also found here but are wild so not guaranteed. It's great fun and takes only about a half day for a visit.



Nocturnal Philippine bearcat

by boat and have their merits.

### 112) Dimipac Island

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🏞️ 🐠 🐙 🐙

**Location:** NW of Dimiyaka Island

**Depth:** 6-50 ft. (2-15m)

A new dive site that doubles as a dugong watching spot is Dimipac Island, a short ride northwest of Dimakya. The island is uninhabited and has a very nice beach. The sandy beach continues down into sea grass beds and the dugongs have been seen here grazing.

In front of the beach, the slopes

are mainly sea grasses with scattered coral heads and sponges. Look for *Cassiopeia andromeda* (upside-down jellyfish) laying in the sand. Sometimes decorator crabs carry these jellies on their shells.

There is a nice path reef system with tube sponges, nice sea anemones, lots of roaming juvenile catfish packs and many small things. The big bonus is that a dugong may be nearby grazing. Keep an eye out for clouds of sand as they really stir things up. If they are eating they usually can be approached and photographed.

### 113) Kyokuzan Maru

Icons:     

**Location:** East of Busuanga

**Depth:** 35-130 ft. (10-40m)

This is one of the best wreck dives in the Coron area as the water here is generally clear with good visibility. The ship is upright with little in the way of currents and it sits in a sheltered area off Dimalanta Island.

This Japanese freighter was scuttled by its crew when the crew got word of the attacks in nearby Coron. After scuttling the ship the crew is believed to have gone to nearby Dimalanta Island.

The ship has two buoys on the two masts of this five-hold freighter. They are at the fore and aft, so



Kyokuzan stack hole

normally two dives are done here.

Starting aft, the mast and cargo booms are covered in corals, zigzag clams and sea anemones. The holds are open and the hold behind the bridge, on the port side, has the remnants of a fancy car, complete with whitewalls. The majority of the ship was salvaged after the war. But there is still a lot to see. One room under the bridge leading to the engine room holds the remnants of bowls with the Japanese Navy insignia on the shards.

The engine room is open and one can exit through the stack hole. It is believed the engine was salvaged through this hole. The stack lays on its side leaning to starboard.

For the second dive head up to the massive bow. Swim under the gun emplacement area and down into the holds where there are more car remnants, truck parts and some odd bales that may be asbestos. Up top around the bridge is more marine life. Batfish are ubiquitous.



Whitewall tire in hold of Kyokuzan Maru

## Apo Reef

One of the most popular and isolated protected marine areas of the Philippines, Apo Reef is said to be the second-largest coral reef area in the world. The sites are now visited from all over this region including Pandan Island, Apo Reef Club south of San Jose, Mindoro, (perhaps the closest venue) and by speed boat from Dimakya Island in Busuanga. Dives such as **Shark Ridge**, **Binangaan Dropoff** and **North Wall** are some of the many attractions.

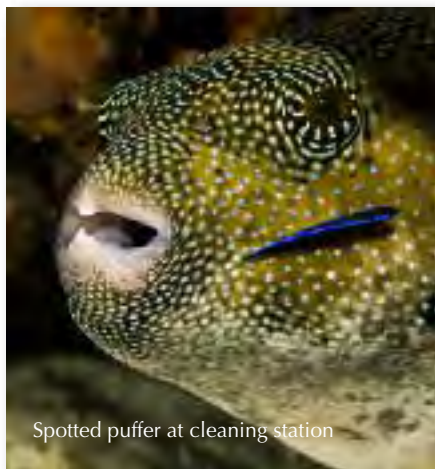
### 114) Apo Reef

**Icons:**        

**Location:** Mindoro Straits

**Depth:** 7-130 ft. (2-40m)

This is referred to as a “natural



Spotted puffer at cleaning station

park” and is one of the premier dive destinations in the area. Not to be confused with Apo Island, also a well-kept undersea national park near Dumaguette, this reef is in open ocean just like its southern counterpart, **Tubbataha**. This is a reef system that offers many dive sites and is good for anywhere from one to five day liveaboard trips.



Apo Reef Natural Park  
Photo © Arthur Kraft

Area dive shops do make the visit as a day trip and try to squeeze in three dives. With a fast boat it is not so bad. With a slow banca, it is a long day.

Also like Tubbataha, there's little protection from the elements. It must be dived during calmer months. December to May is considered the season for this area although some nearby dive shops will go if conditions look to be calm in the off season. One small island, **Apo Island**, has a lighthouse and the reef is a dual lagoon system divided by a narrow channel that runs west to east.

Dive sites include **Shark Ridge**, **Binangaan Dropoff** and **North Wall** are some of the famous sites and at these and others a diver can expect to see big fish like dogtooth tuna, whitetip/blacktip/gray reef sharks, wahoo, Spanish mackerel, Napoleon wrasse and bumpheads.

Flowing currents can bring in mantas, barracuda schools, bigeye

jack shoals and even apex predators like tiger sharks. 400+ species of fish and 500 corals have been identified here. The reef is now well-protected and a park fee is charged to keep the rangers in food and supplies. On the whole, it is a very healthy reef system and the walls are spectacular.

**Bainangaan Dropoff** is an amazing wall that eventually drops away into the abyss and is best known for its scalloped hammerheads and manta rays.

**Apo Island** has soaring walls covered in swathes of soft coral and sponges with seas turtles grazing along the wall and resting among the ledges.

**Shark Ridge** has black and whitetip reef sharks and often an encounter with manta rays. It is peppered with shallow caves and overhangs with roaming groupers.

**Apo 29** is a sea mount with currents and lots of pelagic action. Normally done with a long blue

water drift in. Once atop the mount divers can hold on or hook in and watch for thresher sharks and various reef sharks, possible scalloped hammerheads, mantas and shoals of schooling pelagic fish. It is an advanced and very exciting dive.



Dogtooth Tuna



## Coron



visibility can vary greatly, but most sites are accessible year 'round.

There are a number of dive centers to choose from. Tech diving is popular with many courses

If flying into Busuanga, one takes a left for a scenic drive through cattle country past plains and down winding hills and jungle to Coron. This town has become the wreck diving capital of the Philippines.

The town has a newly remodeled, eco-oriented waterfront, a wide selection of hotels, dive centers and various tours. Look for locally designed T-shirts and traditional handicrafts at Corong Galeri Lokals.

Coron Bay is a large sheltered body of water that was a perfect sheltered anchorage for Japan's ships during WWII. The drawback of this sheltered area is that there isn't much water movement so

visibility can vary greatly, but most sites are accessible year 'round. There are a number of dive centers to choose from. Tech diving is popular with many courses offered. The relative lack of currents on most wrecks and the depths of some of the wrecks means they are perfect for training and the practice of technical diving. All of the ships have mooring buoys and lines going down to the wrecks.

There are also new sanctuaries here with great soft corals, hard corals, macro life and fish life.



Coron Bay - Seven Lakes area



The Skeleton Wreck

## Coron War History

In September 1944, United States Navy Admiral "Bull" Halsey's fleet was heading north toward Luzon. Having no accurate charts of the area, he sent reconnaissance planes ahead to map out a route. As they flew over Coron Bay, they discovered an auxiliary Japanese fleet at anchor in the bay. He immediately ordered an air attack. The sortie was to cover a chart distance of 350 miles (564km) from the carriers east of Leyte to Coron Bay. This became one of the longest bombing missions in the history of U.S. Naval aviation.

Action reports show that just before dawn at 05:55 hrs. local time on September 24, the carriers Lexington, Intrepid and Cabot

launched their planes. In all, 24 bombers and 96 fighters were ordered to sweep by on the bay area. After a three-hour flight they surprised 15 Japanese ships in the bay, the Coron Passage, the area just west of Coron Island as well as three more vessels in a remote anchorage at the northern coast of Busuanga.

Ships attacked ranged in size from small freighters to 15,000 ton tankers. To date, nine of these wrecks have been discovered around Coron and are regularly visited by divers. The others believed to have been hit await discovery. Corals and fish life now thrive on the ships and many are shallow enough for snorkelers.

## 115) Okikawa Maru

Icons:    

**Location:** SW of Concepcion

**Depth:** 33-85 ft. (10-26m)

The Okikawa Maru, (sometimes called the Concepcion Wreck) is a huge ship at over 550 ft. (168m) in length. This is a civilian oil tanker pressed into military service. Sunk during the 1944 air raid, its most remarkable feature is the bizarrely bent and disfigured bow with black coral trees and lionfish. This may be in part due to the huge ship sinking nose first and crashing to the sea floor. The deck lies between 35 ft.(11m) at the bridge down to about 50 ft. (16m) towards the bow. Divers can enter one of the upper deck cargo areas and swim through the bow wreckage. It is not



Jellyfish in rock islands

particularly deep at 85 ft. (26m) to the sand. Currents here can be strong as it sits in a channel. Divers can hide by staying in the lee.

A shoal of barracuda often circles divers and divers are likely to encounter sweetlips, groupers, batfish, lionfish, surgeons and feeding mackerel. Large Jellyfish often drift by this wreck in the prevailing currents.



Bent bow of the Okikawa



## 116) Akitsushima (Seaplane tender ship)

Icons:

**Location:** SE of Pompion Caye

**Depth:** 60-125 ft. (18-37m)

Although this is one of the deepest wrecks in the area, divers can see plenty without descending too deep. This ship was a seaplane tender ship. There is no sign of any planes, but the crane that was used to lower the planes into the sea sits off the port aft and stretches out into the sandy sea floor at 118 ft. (35m).

This is the only actual warship sunk in the attack and one can see the anti-aircraft guns midships and forward. The wreck is penetrable through a huge crack midship. Divers can enter here with a guide and see lots of twisted metal and clouds of glassfish. Very photogenic.

And check out the engine room as it escaped the salvors and has its big engine.

This wreck is known particularly for the huge school of batfish that hang around the ship. Tuna, barracuda and yellowfins frequently patrol the wreck. Lionfish, groupers, sweetlips and snappers hide inside. The wreck also has some nice growths of large, fish-filled black coral trees.

## 117) Lusong Gunboat

Icons:

**Location:** South of Lusong Island

**Depth:** Surface to 33 ft. (0-10m)

Both the wreck and the reef adjacent to this small gunboat are an easy dive and an excellent snorkeling site. At low tide, the jagged stern of the small 140-foot





ship actually breaks the surface. This is a perfect introductory wreck dive because of its shallow depth. Its also a good choice for a second or third dive of the day. And its great for snorkelers who want to see a war wreck.

### 118) Olympia Maru

Icons:

**Location:** Between Lusong & Tangat

**Depth:** 40-82 ft. (12-25m)

Lying on its starboard side, this wreck features black coral, finger sponges and a variety of soft and hard corals encrusted along its 400 foot-long (125m) hull. There appears to be what is the damage hole that sunk it on the port side below the bridge. Divers can inspect all of the open cargo holds

and even enter the bridge through the hold nearest. The engine is also open for inspection.

There are lots of anemones and clownfish, as well as resident batfish, a couple of large groupers and many smaller ones, goatfish and fusiliers. Look for a variety of nudibranchs on the ship.

### 119) Irako

Icons:

**Location:** Between Lusong & Tangat

**Depth:** 100-138 ft. (30-42m)

This wreck is deeper than most in the bay and experiences strong currents at times so its for the more advanced diver. It sits upright with its deck sloping from 80 ft. at the bow to deck level at 100 ft. (25 to 30m). The Irako was a refrigeration

ship and you can see the cooling pipes in the holds.

For those with excellent buoyancy due to the heavy siltation on the wreck, penetrate to see the pots and pans in the galley and the inner bomb damage. It is a tricky but interesting penetration.

The hull and deck are quite well covered in a variety of soft corals and sponges. Again, the current can get quite strong here, so plan the dive well.

## 120) Tangat Wreck

**Icons:**       

**Location:** Off SW Point of Tangat

**Depth:** 60-100 ft. (18-30m)

Another good site for underwater photographers is the Tangat Wreck. It is also known as Sangat Wreck as its just a 10 minute boat ride from the Sangat Resort. The ship is about 400 ft. (121m) long and is covered with lots of soft corals, purple and blue sponges and some hard corals.

Those wanting to penetrate can enter the aft hold and swim through to the next hold. You can then head through the boiler room and you'll exit midships near the bridge.

Several large, friendly pufferfish make for accommodating photo subjects. Cockatoo waspfish can be seen here. Cuttlefish like this ship. Look for clouds of photogenic



Sea turtle and black coral on the Tangat Wreck

glassfish in the black coral trees along with lionfish in their midst.

## 121) Tangat Gunboat

**Icons:**     

**Location:** East of Tangat Island

**Depth:** 7-60 ft. (2-18m)

Tangat Gunboat is another great snorkeling site and an easy diving site. The bow is about six ft. from the surface. This 110-foot long vessel lies just off the rocky east coast of Tangat Island. It's easy to find, as you can see the wreck clearly from the surface. This is a popular site with kayakers, snorkelers and divers. It lies right next to a reef as well.

Not a lot of coral grows on the

wreck, but some lettuce sponges and a few small reef fish including harlequin ghost pipefish and striped pipefish call this home.

## 122) Black Island Wreck

**Icons:** 

**Location:** West of Malajon Island

**Depth:** 55-115 ft. (17-34m)

Not far offshore from Malajon Island, Black Island Wreck sits upright on the sloping sandy bottom. It is sometimes called the Nanshin Maru although there seems to be some controversy about the exact name of this ship. It's on a slope with the stern at 65 ft.(20m) and its bow at 100 ft.(30m). This is the northernmost of the Coron wrecks.

Unlike most of the region's wrecks, this one wasn't sunk during the September 1944 air raid and may not even be of Japanese construction. Like Palau's Helmet Wreck, it may be a spoil of the war from another nation and converted for war use. The visibility is generally good, making it popular with photographers.

Named for the black rocks of adjacent Malajon Island, the wreck is home to lots of

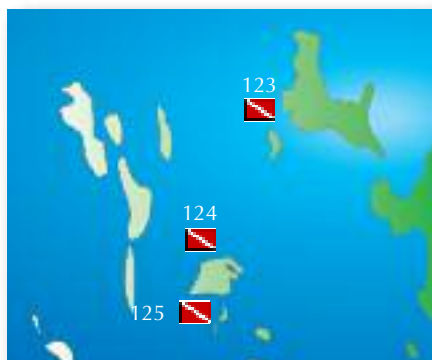
sweepers, shoals of snappers, fusiliers, several different species of angelfish including the beautiful six-banded angels and the emperor. The wreck also has groupers and scorpionfish and lionfish. Sponge life is also nice.

Other Coron dives include **The Skeleton Wreck** (there are 11 wrecks in all), **Barracuda Lake** (Cayangan Lake), **Seven Picados Reef** which is one of many marine protected areas, **Barracuda Lake Cave** and **Cathedral Cave**. The **Sangat Housereef** is a favorite night dive and has big and active jawfish and **Dynamite Reef** is good for macro photos.

Batfish on the Nanshin Maru



## El Nido



Blessed with extraordinary natural scenery, El Nido is one of the country's main natural attractions and has been hosting tourism for a couple of decades.

Being one of the most important sites of biological diversity in the country, the El Nido-Taytay Managed Protected Area in Northern Palawan has one of the country's richest reserves of marine

life. The clear waters are home to hundreds of species of ocean life, from the smallest nudibranchs to the gentle whale sharks. There are 20 dive sites near Miniloc Island Resort and Lagen Island Resort in Bacuit Bay, El Nido, and ten dive sites near Apulit Island Resort in Taytay Bay, Taytay.

The dive sites range from gradual slopes to drop-offs, wall dives to reef flats. Visibility is generally good especially March until May.

El Nido resorts have mainly PADI dive centers and offer open water recreational diving and a variety of dive courses. Night diving can be arranged. Cave diving, however, is not allowed.

The accommodations range from standard to some new, eco-luxury resorts. Numerous exciting, low-impact activities are offered.

Chromis & table corals







Snorkeler and blue linkia starfish

### 123) Dilumacad

**Icons:** 🏠 🏞️ 🌊 🐠

**Location:** N. Dilumacad Island

**Depth:** 33-82 ft. (10-25m)

This popular site has one feature that makes it very popular. It has a tunnel big enough for a pair of divers that starts at about 40 ft. (12m). The tunnel opens to the wall at 70 ft. (21m) after narrowing down a bit. The sandy bottom holds shells and crabs and some gobies. After exiting, divers rummage around moving slowly shallower among the large rocks.

### 124) Tres Marias

**Icons:** 🏠 🏞️ 🌊 🐠

**Location:** Tabago Island, Miniloc

**Depth:** 16-92 ft. (5-28m)

This site is good for both divers

and snorkelers starting in about 15 ft. (4m) of water and presenting big boulders and rocks for the divers to play in and explore. Expect to see lots of fish both adult and juvenile hiding among the cracks and crevices. And lobsters really like this habitat. They are sometimes found in groups with their antennae waving curiously.

### 125) Miniloc Island

**Icons:** 🏠 🏞️ 🌊 🐠

**Location:** SW Bacuit Bay

**Depth:** 42-70 ft. (13-21m)

This has two sites, **South Miniloc** and **Twin Rocks**. South Miniloc has lettuce corals, sponges and blue ribbon eels. Twin Rocks is different terrain with big table corals, sponges, tunicate colonies, hard corals and colorful sea whips.

# Tubbataha



Designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Site, one of three in the Philippines, this is a superb destination for diving. Despite its remote location from Puerto Princesa City, Tubbataha has become a popular site for the liveaboard crowd.

It was proclaimed Tubbataha National Marine Park in 1988 and is a special series of sunken atolls and sea mounts in the Sulu Sea protected from local and foreign poachers and dynamite fishermen.



Liveaboard and Tubbataha sunset

White sand slopes of Tubbataha



That's good news for divers as this is one of the finest Indo-Pacific dive destinations in the Coral Triangle.

The seasonal diving runs from March into June when the seas are normally flat and calm. There is little weather protection for ships as the few islands are just sand spits. Liveaboard ships are normally pretty full so it pays to book in advance, although there can be

some good deals due to last minute cancellations. The ships normally leave at night from Puerto Princesa in Palawan and arrive in the morning. Trips average five days.

Each visitor to Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park pays a conservation fee and



South Tubbataha lighthouse

this is usually included in the liveaboard fee. This revenue is used to manage, maintain and improve the park.

This is an important site biologically. The area is a spawning and grow-out sanctuary for corals and fishes. This spawn may be carried by oceanic currents to replenish coastal reefs and as far as Papua New Guinea, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The official website for Tubbataha is: [www.tubbatahareef.org](http://www.tubbatahareef.org)

## 126) Tubbataha North

**Icons:**

**Location:** 180km or 110 miles SE of Puerto Princesa , Sulu Sea

**Depth:** Surface to 130 ft. (0-40m)

A week of liveaboard diving may

start at **Shark Airport** and run from North Tubbataha to the south, diving at sites along the way kind of depending on what the wind is doing. The ship will normally anchor in the lee.

The north end of Tubbataha has a sandy islet that is a sea bird sanctuary mostly as a nesting spot for boobies and egg laying beach for sea turtles. It is called **Bird Islet**. **Shark Airport** and **South Shark Airport** have a series of sandy channels leading out to a wall. This is a great spot to see sea turtles, eagle rays and lots of various jack species. Whitetip reef sharks rest in many of the sand valleys like planes on a tarmac, thus the name.

The wall has schooling bannerfish, bigeye jacks and unicornfish. Look for some great

undercuts with soft corals and sea fans along the wall areas. Huge barrel sponges start shallow from about 40 ft. (12m) to the depths. Look closely at the sponges for the tiny hairy squat lobster (*Laurea siagiani*) that lives in the deep folds of some of these giant sponges.

The **South Shark Airport** has a manta ray cleaning station where divers can see mantas cleaning.

The **Washing Machine** is a current drift starting almost under the boat mooring and following the current. The term refers to the surface chop seen here, not the conditions beneath the surface. Lots of Napoleon wrasse can be seen along the wall and in the upper

coral gardens as well as masses of schooling tangs. On all of these sites, look for shallow schooling bigeye jacks. Often you will see giant trevally harassing the school.

There's an old wreck here dubbed the **Malayan Wreck**. Right now it is pretty well broken up and is quite shallow at low tide. It has become a large cleaning station and attracts a wide variety fish both resident and passing through for a cleaning. It has two kinds of sweetlips, groupers and even a mature resident Napoleon wrasse.

Shallow and a bit jagged in places, the wreck has a couple of swim-throughs but mostly it is a great fish refuge. The nearby reeftop is a



Tubbataha water so clear the ship and sky can be seen



habitat for red-speckled blennies. Also, there is a resident and large crocodilefish lurking.

This is also the site of a blue water dive at sunrise to sneak a peek at schooling scalloped hammerhead sharks. Divers get up when its still dark and try to be in the water at first light. The boat crews say there is about a 70% success rate.

### 127) Tubbataha South

**Icons:** 🏠 🌊 🐠 🐡 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙 🐙

**Location:** SW of North Islet

**Depth:** Surface to 130 ft. (0-40m)

There are many notable sites at the southern end of this reef system plus the old lighthouse sits bravely on an inner reef sandbar with trees, sea birds and bushes. It is off limits to visitors.

**Delsan Point** and the area heading south past **Staghorn Point**

and **South Wall** is a popular and prolific area that produces sightings of cool pelagic life like spinner dolphin pods and whale sharks most every diving season. There's an area called **The Valley** in this area that is marked by sea whips. It is in here that the big guys are seen. If there is some southern moving current, drop in north of the Delsan for the most fish life like rainbow runners and blackbar and yellowtail barracuda and bigeye jacks.

The shallows and sandy upper reef is called **Staghorn** but some have suggested a name change to Turtle Town. Multiple sightings of green sea turtles can be seen here, especially on the afternoon dives. Manta rays are also reported to frequent this area near the end of the diving season in May and June.

**Black Rock's** currents attract a goodly population of sharks and other pelagics. like the occasional tiger shark. **Ko-ok** is beautiful in places. It is good for jacks, barracuda and has a sheer wall with golden and square spot anthias.



The Malayan Wreck



Baby sea turtle swimming for open sea

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# Medical and Recompression Facilities

## PHILIPPINE COMMISSION ON SPORTS SCUBADIVING

**Hyperbaric Chambers Help Line:**  
**+63 928 - CHAMBER (2426237)**

**E-Mail Inquires:** [chamber@divephilippines.com.ph](mailto:chamber@divephilippines.com.ph)  
**For chamber updates:**  
[www.divephilippines.com.ph/hyperbaric-chamber/](http://www.divephilippines.com.ph/hyperbaric-chamber/)

### PCSSD HYPERBARIC CHAMBER FACILITIES

**Manila:** Lung Center of the Philippines  
Hyperbaric Medicine Center and Wound Care Facility  
Quezon Ave, Diliman, Quezon City, Metro Manila  
**(02) 924 6101** [lcp.gov.ph](http://lcp.gov.ph)

**Cebu:** TIEZA Bldg., P. Burgos St., cor. Andres  
Soriano Avenue,  
Barangay Centro, Mandaue City  
**(032) 253 3532** [tieza.gov.ph](http://tieza.gov.ph)

### DAN ASIA (Divers Alert Network)

Divers Alert Network (DAN) is an international membership association of individuals and organizations sharing a common interest in diving and safety. It operates a 24-hour diving international emergency hotline for Asia at Tel: **+61-8-8212 9242**. DAN does not directly provide medical care; however, it does provide advice on early treatment, evacuation and hyperbaric treatment for dive injuries.

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Tiger shrimp

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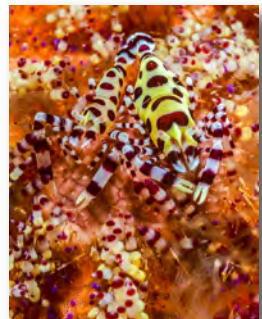
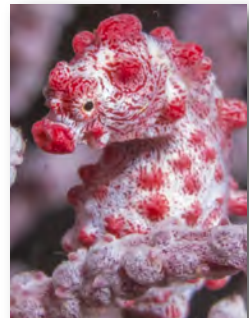
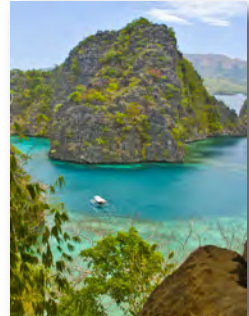
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