

## Trip Report – Philippines April 2011

The 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2011, saw the annual migration of Vision Divers from Melbourne to the Philippines. It involves a plane trip, car journey and ferry ride and seems like it's a long journey to get to Sabang, Puerto Galera but, it's definitely worth it.



This was my first trip to the Philippines, but I was in the company of seasoned veterans who assured me that if I was looking for great diving, relaxation and wonderful company, then I was in the right place. Although we arrived at night, the lights over the water as we approached made the view very pleasant and inviting. The view in daylight was even better and wetted my appetite for the coming days. Looking out from the resort over the bay, boats, islands and shimmering water was fantastic.

The first day we all wandered down to Action Divers, got our gear all sorted out and acquainted ourselves with the staff who were pleased to see everybody back. Getting to the dive sites was easy, normally a five to ten minute boat ride, with a little bit of chatter on the way. Once you were geared up all you had to do was a gentle backward roll off the boat and you were right on top of the dive site. That's the beauty of Puerto Galera, there are so many dive sites so close by and visibility was excellent, normally 20 to 30 metres. For someone who's done most



of their diving in Victoria, this was something I enjoyed, as well as the huge array of marine life. The 28degree water temperature was certainly much more enjoyable than what I had been used to back home!! For those that had cameras with them, which was about 80% of the group, there was a large number of nudies, feather stars, lionfish, stonefish, electric clams and a turtle or two to photograph. There was something for everyone, it did not matter if you did not have a camera, there was plenty to see with your own eyes instead of looking into a viewfinder.

A personal highlight was Verde Island - it was like dropping into a massive aquarium, there was so much marine life. We actually dived the pinnacle off Verde Island, which drops to 40 or 50 metres but everything you want to see is around the 10-25m mark. Almost everybody who has dived this site claims that it is one of the best dives they have done, and I agree with them. Everybody who had been on the trip before was eagerly looking forward to diving it again. It does take some beating. I thought the schools of fish with the crescent moon tails were particularly stunning, only to discover on surfacing that they were Trigger Fish and at times they can be very aggressive, which thankfully they weren't because there were hundreds of them at a particular location on the dive.



Surface interval was spent snorkelling around the tip of the pinnacle, and then we geared up to go down again. At this point I learnt a very valuable lesson - always check your own gear (no names will be mentioned, but he knows who he is). Unfortunately, a weight pocket was lost when I went over, subsequently; I didn't do the second dive, though everyone tells me it was a great.

A great highlight of the trip of Jess Milvan completing her 200th dive. Well done Jess.

While the diving was sensational, what makes a trip memorable, is the people. The staff at Portofino Resort could not do enough for you; they were warm, friendly and always had a smile for you on your return.

I think we came close to depleting their supplies of mangos and bananas due the large number of fruit smoothies that were consumed. The boys were more into the cold beer and night clubs but were spotted at times during the day hiding behind a coconut tree sipping on a fruit smoothie.



The staff of Action Divers, who were our above and below water guides - Rosco, Hugh, Simon, Troy and the boat drivers were a constant source of information, guidance and laughter. Most of the dives were over reefs, but everybody looked



forwarded to diving on the wreck of the Alma Jane (30 metres), diving the Sabang wrecks both during the day and on the night dive. The traditional Sunset Cruise (booze cruise) was great with a glorious sunset over the water keeping the camera buffs snapping away and very happy. The gangplank on the return home seemed a bit wobbly, or was that just a self inflicted personal ailment by us all??

And last but not least, Peter Webster and my fellow Vision Divers co-horts. You made the trip memorable, for all the right reasons. What happens on the trip stays on the trip, but there were many funny moments and events, with one particular photograph etched into everybody's memory, for all the wrong reasons.

One last point, the non-dive day adventure. While the thought of not being able to dive on the last day was initially disappointing (to comply with safety regulations), we undertook a jeepney adventure which comprised, waterfalls, multiple river crossings, waterholes, water buffalo, swinging bridges, local villages, great Italian pizzas, landslides, flooding rains and we have the photos to prove it.



If you get the chance to travel with Vision Divers to Puerto Galera, take it - you won't regret it at all. I certainly will be going back again.

Toni.