

1995 when I was there. This area contains, on average, some of the best, most complex, intact and diverse hard coral one can find anywhere in the world. A few dive sites in Indonesia might be the very best, but they are among many damaged by dynamiting and cyaniding. An added bonus was to be able to get within touching distance, we didn't touch, of a 15-ft. calf sperm whale nursing on its 30-ft. mother. A 20+ foot sibling was also very close to us. This was part of a pod of ten that was a part of a larger pod of 30 sperm whales that spent over an hour on the surface in Kimbe Bay. While sperm whales don't sing like humpbacks do, they were making high-pitched, rapid clicking sounds around us.

**Walindi Diving Resort, July 2000, Jim Parkhill, McAllen, TX.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 86-88 degrees. Dive restrictions: None. Resort: Picturesque and charming setting in lushly landscaped grounds. Friendly, relaxed atmosphere. Wonderful staff. Free laundry service. Great DMs. Staff washes diver's gear daily. Healthy hard and soft corals. Great for small critters and reef fish, sharks on half the dives. Rest of island a virtual beehive of marine activity. Diversity of dive sites. Rather expensive at US \$153 per person double occupancy for room plus US \$120 per person per day for 2 tanks of diving. The boats are not diver friendly and can be uncomfortable on long rides to dive sites in rough seas.

**Walindi Diving Resort, September 2000, Jim Ferman (jpferman@cs.com), Wickenburg, AZ.** Vis: 80 to 100+

Feet. Water: 84 F, calm. Dive your own profile. Boats were small, slow and getting long in the tooth. No showers on board. Not a lot of room to maneuver around the dive deck. Can't imagine what it would be like with many divers. The huts were really charming, but a couple of nights were hot and humid! Ran out of hot water very quickly. Owners were terrific, staff was wonderful. The room was keep clean, they provided mosquito nets. The food was truly gourmet. Diving was out of this world. They had just located a Japanese Zero and it was in pristine condition. The dive-masters were helpful. The grounds were lovely. The new dive master, an Australian, is very nice. He told you about what diving spots were favorable for what you were looking for and did his best to get you there. Diverse and interesting group of people there. No rinse buckets on one boat, the other had a tiny rinse bucket.

## PHILIPPINES

Major dive areas are concentrated around Batangas, Mindoro, Palawan, and the Visayas. . . . Though the reefs here are among the most diverse in the world, supporting more than 2000 species of fish (the Great Barrier Reef, by comparison, supports around 1500), they are also among the most threatened. Up to 70 percent of Philippine reefs are dying or dead. . . . The best diving is in the Sulu Sea, which can only be accessed by live-aboard. . . .

**Asia Divers, El Galleon Beach Resort (Puerto Galera), May 2000, John Crossley, Fresno, CA.** Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: One hour. The Philippines can be reached easily on flights from Los Angeles and can include a free stopover in Hawaii. If you arrive by mid afternoon, you can make it to Puerto Galera by dinner time by taking a private car to Batangas and private boat to El Galleon Resort. The resort can arrange this reliable transfer, and at under \$100 round trip, it is a lot better than trying to arrange your own transfer using public busses and ferry. El Galleon Resort is one of the nicer hotels on the beach, with 28 clean, though fairly basic rooms. We had excellent breakfasts included in our package, and ate most of our other meals at the resort as well. There are numerous shops, bars, and restaurants within easy walking distance, but El Galleon had more selections on their menu. Food was well prepared and very reasonably priced. It has a scenic and non-trashy beach, and a small pool. Asia Divers, located at El Galleon, has the best dive operation on the beach. Your gear can be locked up at night, and crew will carry it to the small pangas for each dive. They have about five boats, but we never had more than five divers on board, and sometimes just two. The dive guides, especially Wowie, did a good job with their briefings and were exceptional in finding unique macro critters. Although it rained some nights, daytime sky was clear, seas were calm, with water temp about 83

degrees. Most dive sites were only 5 to 10 minutes away, and were one-tank trips. Visibility ranged from 30-40 ft in the shallow sand flats to 50-80 ft on the reefs. One of the more distant sites (20 minutes), "Canyons" had very strong currents, but with sharks and beautiful soft corals open and feeding in the breeze, it was a great dive (except in the eyes of divers who got blown away in the current). The great advantage of diving here was the abundance of macro critters. In most cases, the dive guides knew exactly where to find them. Even the shallow black sandy and grassy flats in limited visibility were exceptional. There were sea horses, hawkfish, pipefish, ghost pipefish, mantis shrimp, octopus, flying gurnards, frogfish, tilefish, flatheads, crabs, several types of scorpionfish, anemone fish, snake eels, flatworms, nudibranchs, cuttlefish, cleaner shrimp and more. On night dives, the lionfish were so common and curious (or trying to hunt in your lights), you had to scare them away or they would nose into every photo being set up. Overall, El Galleon is an excellent choice for divers seeking macro critters, and it is also an excellent value. Five nights lodging, with transfers from Manila, breakfasts, and 12 dives cost about \$480. (+63-973-865252; e-mail: [admin@asiadivers.com](mailto:admin@asiadivers.com); website: [www.asiadivers.com](http://www.asiadivers.com))

**Bohol Beach Club, February 1999, Bob Puschinsky, (puschinsky@aol.com), Seabrook, TX.** 2 min from beach by small boat to terrific 30-45' diving loaded with

many type mantas, frog fish, stone fish, masses of crinoids, great soft coral, many fish. Resort very good too. (+63 6338-411-5222; Fax +63 6338-411-5226)

**Dive 7000, May 2000, Robert S. Gadbois (bobclarg@mcs.com), Chicago, IL.** Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 82-85 degrees. Located at Batangas Bay in southern Luzon, 3-1/2 hour drive from Manila. For many years the favorite of Lynn Funkhouser, noted underwater photographer. It has seen better days. But makes up for it with a friendly family atmosphere, good food and prime location. Super-rich in small-to-medium marine life, a photographer-naturalist's paradise. Two boat dives can be supplemented by unlimited shore diving. The richness of marine life is astounding, new species are still being discovered.

**Splash, Coral Cay Resort, Siquijor, March 2000, Max Herndon, Pismo Beach, CA.** Vis: 30-80 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130'. Just north of Mindanao and east of Negros, Siquijor is a beautiful unspoiled island. Tourism is only in the infancy stage and accommodations and restaurants are limited. There are only two beach resorts of which Coral Cay Resort is by far the nicest and offers the best food with a staff that made us feel like we were family. Well appointed, spacious beachfront bungalows were \$25 to \$40 per night. Swiss-run Splash Dive Center is a low key but efficient operation. All rental gear and tanks are nearly new. There's about 8 or 9 good dive sites on the

west side of the island, nice wall and beautiful hard and soft coral gardens. Don't expect to see any big fish but the reefs are in great shape and there's plenty of small critters and reef fish. We saw a black frog fish, two ribbon eels and a banded sea snake on one dive. Probably isn't a destination for the dedicated diver but it's definitely worthwhile if you're there.

**Victory Divers, Boracay, January 2000, Michael Igoe (mike\_igoe@estreet.com), Aurora, CO.** Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F. Dive your own profile. Good, professional dive operation. While there were some good dives, I wouldn't return for the diving. Over-rated and overpriced.

**El Nido Resort, Mactan Island, September 2000, Michael Igoe (mike\_igoe@estreet.com), Aurora, CO.** Vis: 30-70 Feet. Water: 84F. Dive your own profile. Not too restrictive. Attentive. Not an exciting dive destination for experienced divers. The dive operation is very well run, with good and personable dive masters. Favorite was Doi Pasquale. Dives priced @ \$20. each. Dives generally lasted 45-60 minutes. Depths never exceeded 80 feet.

## SOLOMON ISLANDS

Because of its civil uprising, this has become an unsafe destination for tourists. Before considering it, get your national government's current recommendations. . . . One of the last countries to jump on the tourism bandwagon, the