

hammerhead at about 130 feet. There were also several gray reef sharks and white tip reef sharks. They circled around the seamount so we encountered them repeatedly. There was also a massive school of barracuda and on one of the dives at this site, they allowed me to get within 5 feet and swim parallel to the school for a while before they circled up again. There was also a large school of batfish. At Christine's Reef we saw spectacular sea whips, enormous sea fans covered with colorful crinoids, large barrel sponges, a healthy stand of *Acropora* coral, all sorts of nudibranchs, and even an evil crown-of-thorns starfish. Agu Reef which is like a narrow ridge that seems to be terraced in all directions. On either end of the ridge, there was step after step of *Acropora* coral stands. There were terraces down both sides and as you looked down, they seem to go on endlessly. There were nudibranchs galore along the wall. At Kirsty Jaynes Reef we saw multiple pygmy sea horses, a harlequin ghost pipefish, a swarm of razor fish hiding in the sea whips, and a squat lobster hiding in a crinoid. Dinner was served buffet style and there were plenty of entrees, vegetables, and salads. Long tables encouraged guests to mix it up for sociable dinners. Lunch was always an appealing picnic between dives, usually chicken and plenty of salads, at one of the small islands. Breakfast was eggs, bacon, toast — the usual. Snacks and drinks were available for purchase and they kept a tab. Joseph, a senior dive master, volunteered to carry extra cameras down and was very helpful spotting for macro photos. There is also a photo shop at the island for those wishing to

rent camera and instruction available. (www.walindi.com)

PHILIPPINES

Major dive areas are concentrated around Batangas, Mindoro, Palawan, and the Visayas. ... The reefs here are among the most diverse in the world, supporting more than 2,000 species of fish (the Great Barrier Reef, by comparison, supports around 1,500), and divers find inexpensive accommodations and diversings, splendid critters, and, while plenty of divers from other countries, few Americans.

Arthur's Resort, September 2003, Joseph Gallagher (jpgallag@itt.com), Fort Wayne, IN. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Ft. Water: 72 F, calm. Anilao in Batangas is a two to three hour taxi ride (depending on Manila traffic) from downtown Manila. Leaving early, 5-6 am, makes a day trip possible arriving back to Manila between 5-8 pm. The roads in Anilao can easily be blocked by heavy rainfall, so check conditions before leaving. The offshore diving makes the trip well worth the ride and if you have the time for an overnight stay will provide great opportunities for great dives. Dive resorts in Anilao are rustic by most Western standards, but most provide direct access to the beach and have facilities for rinsing dive equipment. Arthur's Place provides tanks and weights and dive equipment for rental as well as a small motorized boat to reach the better dive sites. The dive masters are friendly and accommodat-

ing willing to let the diver set the pace and depth of the dive. Philippines offers breathtaking diving with all types of little critters, nudibranchs are especially abundant, living on vibrant reefs of soft and hard coral. Anilao is no exception and is the most accessible dive spot from Manila. Shore diving was problematic, the visibility depended very much on the current which could raise havoc with the silt on the ocean floor and the plankton. Off shore diving 15 min. to 30 min. ride on a small craft was fantastic. The currents, sometimes strong, provided outstanding visibility and in the protected parts of the reef great subject matter and outstanding photographic opportunities.

Atlantis Dive Resort, October 2002, Giles Charlton-Jones, Grand Cayman, BWI. Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. Great service, great accommodations, and great dive-staff. Very enthusiastic guides/instructors, even when doing five dives a day. Some guides were new to the area and not especially knowledgeable about a few of the creatures on our hit-list of things to see, but they are learning! Strong tidal currents at varying times, and although unpredictable the guides mostly had it spot-on. At slack tides in many areas current was absent or negligible. Underwater photographers that want the longest dive times should take a safety balloon and reel. Overall a superb resort with everything on-site. The rooms are clean, comfortable, and well appointed, and the restaurant is first class. Great macro photography, quite a few frogfish, plenty of nudibranchs,

interesting shrimp but not numerous. The pygmy seahorses were not playing while we were there, no sightings but we were assured that they are normally around. Very short boat rides (five to 10 minutes), but no camera buckets or safe area, although the boatmen were good at taking care of and handling cameras. Large camera/regulator rinse tank at the shop but was not policed well. Frequently saw people dunking wetsuits, BCDs, and even a weightbelt once! (www.atlantishotel.com)

La Laguna Beach Resort, January 2003, Douglas Hansen (mhel@pop3.concentric.net), San Jose, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 55 to 80 feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy, currents. The diving was very good. The corals seem to be in good shape, although there were very few big fish. The dive operators seem to be protective of the reefs, and it shows. Our dive guide, Leo, tried hard to point out critters that we were interested in. Diving is from Bancas, which takes getting used to. Our night dives were in Sabang Bay, which were muck dives. We saw Spanish dancers, eels, a variety of nudibranchs, and a frogfish. Nitrox was \$6 per tank. The accommodations were inexpensive, but small; we upgraded to the largest room available. Cleaning was not as thorough as we would have liked. The food in the on-site restaurant was good and inexpensive. No accommodations for cameras on the boats.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Solomon Islands' tourist