

## Philippines Puerto Galera & Dumaguete November 6-21, 2009

Route 1<sup>st</sup> leg: Vancouver BC-Hong Kong-Manila

2<sup>nd</sup> leg: Manila-Dumaguete



Thursday Nov. 5:

We depart from Anacortes Diving at 8:45pm in torrential rain and howling winds. I think it rained the hardest as we were loading all the luggage in the van. No issues crossing the border and the drive to the airport was easy and smooth. Our flight departs at 2:00am for our 14-hour joy ride to Hong Kong. Flight left on time and was actually not that bad, plenty of movies to choose from.

Saturday Nov. 7:

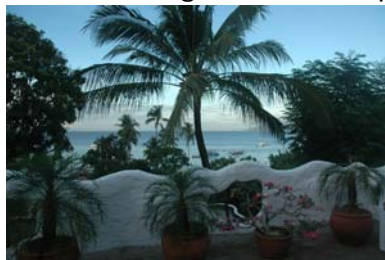
Arrived in Hong Kong early so we had plenty of time to locate coffee and begin boarding our next flight to the Philippines. The flight is not full so it makes for a very quick 1-½ hr hop to Manila. Our Hawaii contingency should already have arrived the night before and should be waiting in the bus for us when we get through customs.

We arrive safely and sail through customs quickly and wait for the luggage. Why is that it always comes out last? Everyone's bags made it; we quickly exchange some money and load into 3 vans. Our other group will be meeting us at the first pit stop.



After about an hour, and we haven't traveled very far due to the traffic trying to get out of Manila! And like most SE Asia countries you need to be a local to drive here. It is crazy bob and weave driving, there are 3 lanes but the cars make it about 6 lanes. So we stop for a quick break and meet up with our 4<sup>th</sup> van and there is a Starbucks, McDonalds and a few little stores to grab something. "Dong" our driver tells us it's another 2 hours before we get to Batangas. During the drive, I constantly try and help Dong break from the back seat and I think my hand covered my eyes only once! We finally arrive at the beach, load into several boats and now we have an hour boat ride to the resort. Puerto Galera is a small village on the

beach of Minduro Island, as the boats hit the sand and we walk a short distance to the resort. They have ice cold towels and a cool drink waiting, just what the weary traveler needs! A quick briefing by Richard, while we all receive a nice shoulder and neck massage from the spa team and then we are off to find our rooms. The resort



is built up a hill and the construction is what we termed "Fred Flintstone". Everything is molded into the wall structure and it looks very cool. In typical fashion we have a lot of work to do, unpacking all dive gear and getting it put together as well as camera equipment. It is now 6:30 pm and dinner is served as we hustle over. The friendly staff patiently goes over how it all works and we quickly order up. The food is wonderful, I can't

wait to see what tomorrow's menu is. It is 7:10pm and most of us can't keep our eyes open, so off to bed.

Sunday Nov. 8:

We woke early around 5:00am with a much clearer head and are ready to see what this day has in store for us. Breakfast at 6:30am then meeting at 8:00 for dive briefing.

Bob and I head down stairs to find some coffee as "we think" it is after 6:00am. The resort is very dark and we encounter the security guard at the front desk and he looks at us like we are crazy and we can't figure out why there is nobody around. I look up over the front desk and see a clock and it says 5:00am! I look at the guard and ask him if that time is correct and he says "yes". This can't really be happening; did we really set the clock wrong? We head back to our room and sure enough Bob had set the clock an hour ahead, it really is 5:00am and nothing happens until 6:00am. Back to bed to watch some TV and we will try again in 1



hour. I have to say this is a first. We meet up at 8:00am for the dive briefing and paperwork and then we divide into 3 boats and get ready for our first check out dive. No cameras on the 1<sup>st</sup> dive so you can get your buoyancy dialed in. After the second dive we have a wonderful lunch and our boat is doing a long third dive instead of two shorter dives. After the dive, back to the dock for a cold San Miguel and equipment wash. If you are diving Scuba the staff unloads, rinses and hangs up

all your equipment, with Rebreathers you tear apart all your own stuff. We met Rusty (our dive guide) at the 50bar for a couple of beers and catching up in our logbooks and planning of the next day dives. Off to dinner, which was absolutely phenomenal with fresh grilled Ahi and mushroom risotto. It's been a very long day as we wish everyone a goodnight and head for our room.

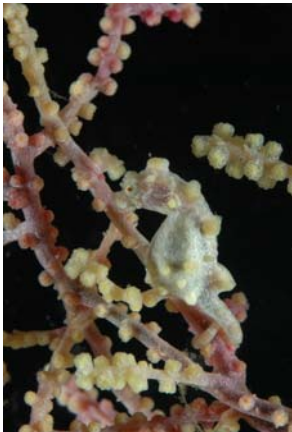
Monday Nov. 9:

Boulders, Coral Cove, Dougong, Sabang Reef



We are up early again...not too early this time and head down do get the rebreathers set up. It is amazing to see how many bright and shiny faces are also up. The rebreathers are all set up by 7:00 am and it is now time for breakfast before our 8:00 am dive brief. We are trying to get an earlier start today so we can squeeze in all four dives. Rusty tells us that we are headed for a dive site with Pygmy seahorses (Yes, more than one and maybe even 6), Sea moths and other cool sand

dwellers. We arrive at the dive site and back roll in and head right for the seahorses. Wouldn't you know there was the sea fan with 6 little yellow pygmy seahorses (hippocampus Denise).



Everybody gets their photos or video, then it's off to explore the sandy patches for the really strange animals. Lets just say we were not disappointed. Lots of cool creatures and nudibranchs were spotted. We head back to get ready for dive two. Kelley and I notice that our computers are still really loaded from the first dive but we hope that they will clear before we go in on the second dive. They didn't. So we sat out in the sun and the now rough seas while everyone else went for a dive. After 30 minutes Kelley was ready to jump ship on any boat to get her back to shore. Luck would have it that one of our group was diving the same site. So off she went as

soon as they were up. Back to shore for another great lunch. The afternoon dives were just as good as the morning dives. The long boat rides are great (3-10 minutes). You barely have time to put your suit on and then you are there. Tomorrow we are heading to Verde Island for a three tank day. After our special briefing about the days activities we all head to the dining room for what turns out to be another incredible meal. Can barely make it through dinner before the eye lids get really heavy...off to bed at 8:30pm. This travel, dive, eat, then dive some more schedule is exhausting.

### Day 3 Verde Island



Off to Verde Island for a three tank dive day with lunch. The waters are calm, the sun is shining ...it looks to be a great day. The first dive is the drop off. Verde Island is known for its currents and the incredible amount of fish life. We drop in on our dive...we find a sea fan with ten Pygmy Seahorses on it and we're all shooting wide angle! As we drift down to the end of the pinnacle, we start to encounter more and more schooling fish. Now by the hundreds. As we come around the corner of pinnacle we get to see huge schools of small fish and larger fish trying to eat the smaller fish. We come up for the dive and head for the "Ozone", the divers beach. It is a compound that the owner built for the use of dive operations while at Verde Island.



Now, the Atlantis team does not just pack a lunch, they bring a team of cooks to cook our lunch and post dive snacks. Then after a quick break it is back to the drop off for dive two. There is a little more current this time that brings out more of the orange cup corals. There are both yellow and orange cup corals now at the point, making it spectacular. After surfacing we head back to the "Ozone" for our lunch. The cooks did not disappoint! Fresh fish and grilled pork on the beach...with a perfect sunshine day. Who could ask for anything more? The third dive had two options...the washing machine or coral

gardens. Half the group did the washing machine and the other half did the coral gardens. The adrenaline junkies only got the delicate cycle on the dive due to lack of current. The other group had a nice dive with no current and lots of small fish life to be seen. After everyone was aboard we all headed back to resort. A perfect day was had by all.

There was an announcement made before everyone headed up to their rooms...there were two milestones reached today. Russ Rockwood reached his 1200<sup>th</sup> dive and Bob reached 6400<sup>th</sup>. There is a long tradition at Atlantis



resorts....the snorkel test. They fill a "snorkel" with beer and you have to drink it down while wearing a mask. It sounds easy enough but remember you still have to breath with a larger than normal snorkel and mask on...with the snorkel full of beer! Needless to say Russ and Bob had no problem and were awarded a t-shirt each embroidered with their accomplishments. Then it was off to dinner-Pizza and pasta night.

#### Day Four:

Another sunny day, with a good breeze this morning. Good thing we went to Verde Island yesterday, as it would have been a very lumpy ride. All three of the boats had great dives today with plenty of critter sightings. We top the day off with a beer at 50bar and head over to listen to Goto give his evening critter talk, tonight the topic is the Mandarin Fish. After the talk, we head over for another great meal.

#### Day 5:

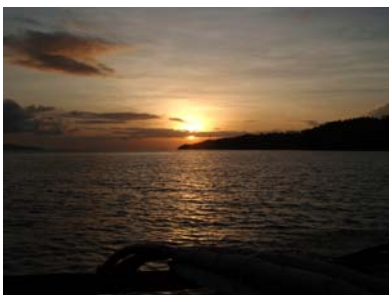


Another sunny day, but a bit breezy. The visibility has been clearing up each day making for some great diving. All three boats came back with a very long list of critter sightings. We did see on Sabang Point a very large turtle, he was huge! Our boat did a Mandarin Fish dive at dusk, which we did see many Mandarins but very few came up to mate. Always exciting to see since they are such a beautifully colored fish. A few cold beers

after the dive, and then we consume one more fantastic dinner. By 8:30 pm most of the group has cleared out and headed for bed. Couple folks opt for a late evening massage, which I highly recommend.

#### Day 6:

This will be our last dive day as Saturday we will depart for our second half of the adventure; Dumaguette. All three boats decide to only do two dives so we have plenty of time to dry our gear and start to pack. It's a hot, sunny day so the gear should dry quickly. After another wonderful lunch, the work must begin with camera equipment. We are having a cocktail party up on our patio at 5:30pm so we need to have everything done ahead of time. It took us about 4 hrs to get everything done with enough time to sit down and enjoy the view with a cold San Miguel. Our room had a huge patio with a built in bar, so what better excuse than to have a party. The staff has already brought up a huge cooler of mixed beer and wine and we even have our own bartender! Everyone makes their way upstairs along with some of the dive guides and we toast a great first week in Puerto Galera. Time for one more delicious dinner, then off to bed as we have to depart the resort at 6:00am.



#### Day 7:

4:00am alarm going off, yuck. We quickly finish up packing and head down to the restaurant. The staff has gotten up to feed us a full breakfast, made to order eggs, hot chocolate muffins and fresh fruit. Not to mention a cappuccino! This staff rocks! We load onto the boat for a beautiful sunrise ride across the bay which takes us about an hour. This time we have a big

bus for the entire group to ride together. The driver puts in a movie and we are on our way for a three-hour tour to the airport. Our flight is not until 2:10pm and we have arrived nice and early around 11:00am, which is always good with the amount of luggage that the group has. We make it through the first security scan before we can even check in. We finally find two agents to check our whole group in and the battle begins on overweight luggage fees. The first agent doesn't know about the sport plus package, so that takes some time to square away, then it turns out that the agent is a diver. We try and smooze our way thru which most everyone makes it except Bob and I as we are 59 kilos over weight. He can't let that slide, so we end up paying an additional \$120. Oh well, that's the price you pay to haul two rebreathers and all supplies, including tanks. Had a little scare as I had set down our ticket holder in one of the luggage cart seats and someone had come by and gathered them up. It was sheer panic for about 10 minutes as this contained everything that is most important! All our vital paperwork and of course all our money. Fortunately, Bob found it under a ladies purse, as she had not even noticed it when she had grabbed the cart. I thought I was going to stroke out! That was one of the dumbest mistakes I have ever made traveling. That will never happen again.

We all head to the next security checkpoint and we get snagged again with our carry-ons. She wants to know why we have more than one and why they are so heavy? Fortunately, she grabs the one Bob has which is full of camera equipment and we have to go get a special yellow tag from a check in gal. The rest of us just say it's camera equipment and they let us through. Wasn't sure what would have happened if they said no.....

We grab some food, most of it is sweets, they certainly enjoy their sugar here. Dale grabs a massage while we wait for the flight.



We arrive in Dumaguette and are greeted by "Biggs" the resort manager as she points us in the direction of the bus. The ride to the resort was about 30 minutes from the airport and nowhere near the traffic of Manila. The two destinations are like night and day. Puerto Galera is very busy, lot's of vendors trying to hawk you something and Dumaguette is a sleepy little seaside resort on the beach, very quiet and relaxing. Since we have already dove with Atlantis, check in is a breeze as

we hit our rooms and then get to the task of setting up dive gear. We meet our guides, go over how everything works, then off to dinner. The outside temperature and humidity is much higher here than PG and the water temperature is supposed to be warmer as well. Everyone enjoys a fantastic dinner with dessert and it's off to bed as we are all excited to see what this new destination has in store for us.

Day 8:



A beautiful sunrise wakes us this morning as we anticipate the days diving ahead. After a good breakfast, we load onto our assigned boats and we are off and diving. The diving is a mix of black sand muck but with good visibility to do even wide angle photography. After the first two dives, everyone is busy checking all the different creatures off their "must see" list. Frogfish, Flamboyant cuttlefish, Winged Pipefish,

Sea moths, Sea spider and the list goes on and on. Our boat ops to do a Mandarin Fish dive tonight, which turned out to be great, lot's of action! One male in

particular was very, very busy! Back to the resort for what was another incredible meal, then over to do some camera work as we need to switch everything to wide angle. I think the entire resort is heading over to Apo Island for a 3-tank dive day. It is a small island about an hour boat ride from the resort and is supposed to offer some incredible diving, we may even see a Manta Ray. Time for bed, as the morning will come early.

#### Day 9:



All 17 of us climb aboard the big "banka" and head for Apo island, which is about 40 minutes away. When we arrive, we get ready for our dive with our guides and each group jumps in about 10 minutes from the last group. The hard corals here are in pristine condition and we have bright sun and clear blue water. We drift slightly along the slope and are visited by a couple of turtles. The only thing missing here is big fish, or schooling fish for that matter. We take our surface interval on board and then jump in on the second dive. This dive is a more dramatic vertical wall, we search the blue in hopes that something big might swim by...Manta Ray...Hammerhead...we are not too picky. The wind has picked up, but our dive sites are still protected from the island, so it is not all that difficult on entries and exits. After our second dive we pull in real close to shore for lunch and retail therapy. Part of the group goes ashore and is immediately mobbed by the gals on the beach. They mainly sell sarongs and t-shirts in any color and size that you need. It's pretty funny because as soon as another boat load of people hit the beach, they are off and running, literally just leaving you standing there. Time for the third dive, which we encounter a little bit of current, but really we have had pretty much nothing all day. The wind has really picked up and the ride home is going to be lumpy. We watch another smaller Banka depart before us and take waves over the bow. We decide it might be better to remain in our wetsuits as we are going to get soaked. Our captain Moymoy knows exactly how to get us home in this rough water and does a great job. A big round of applause for the captain as our group is thankful we are back in one piece. Everyone calls it a day except Penny and Mary who decide to go out for a dive on the house reef. Did I mention it was windy? It was pretty rough and the water looked like chocolate milk, but once they hit 20 feet the vis was pretty good. Way to go gals, true diehards. Another great day has come to an end.



Day 10:



The wind is still blowing this morning, but not too bad. Bob and I opt for a shore dive to check our rebreather as we had some issues the other day. Another day of great macro diving, I think San Miguel Tires produced the most amount of critters in such a small area. Starting the dive you had a orange & white Frogfish on the mooring block, a Flamboyant Cuttlefish just off in the sand. At the tires you have Harlequin Shrimp, Hairy Frogfish, Ornate Ghost Pipefish, Bubble Coral Shrimp, Nudibranchs (too many to name) and the smallest fingered Dragonet found by Penny.



I think I forgot to mention how our group has single handedly kept the spa busy this week. Several of the group members have scheduled massages EVERYDAY! Penny was the first to do ear candling and then anyone with ear issues decided to give it a try. Apparently it has worked wonders for all the soggy dive ears. The Mt. Everest of all the massages is the two hour Swedish Hot Rock Massage. Dale & Peggy came back one evening

and looked like walking spaghetti noodles and almost fell asleep in their dinner plates. Bob had never had a massage, so tonight we went and did a one hour aromatherapy during which he muttered, "why have I waited so long?". Tomorrow night we go in for the two our marathon. Chalk up another great day in the Philippines.

#### Day 11:

This morning most of the group decided to go to the local market. It is held once a week on every Wednesday. We climb aboard a Jeepney for a ride in style, complete with multi colored lights in the ceiling. The market is very busy with the locals buying and selling whatever they have. There is a livestock sale, which when loading the pigs they are the loudest screamers of all. They load cows, pigs, chickens and people on all these tiny little trikes that they use to get around. There



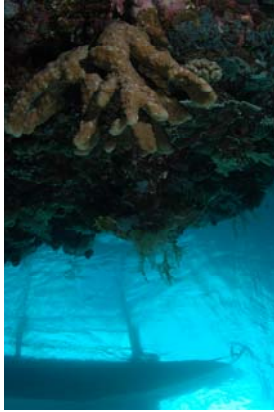
is every kind of dried fish, fresh fish, something that looks like mud made out of fish or shrimp. The staff from the resort lead us along the road explaining what everything is or what it is used for in cooking. You have to pay attention so you don't get run over by the vehicles also trying to pass on this tiny alley way. As we make our way to the beach a table is set up for us to try the local food. Of course there is roasted pig, Bob's favorite, with crispy skin you just have to try. Different rice and fish along with a cerviche, which was fantastic. This was truly a great experience. We head back to the resort for a dip in the pool, some more food and afternoon diving.

Tonight Bob and I have scheduled a 2 hour hot rock massage from 7-9pm, we order our dinner ahead so we can eat when we get out. At 9pm we arrive at the restaurant and the entire hotel looks deserted other than staff, I really don't think there is one guest still awake! We quickly grab a bite, and then we are headed for the room as tomorrow is a 3 tank dive out and away at Siquijor Island or Apo Island depending on weather. This will pretty much be our last day of diving as we are flying out early on Saturday morning.

#### Day 12:

Kelley and I are excited to be heading out to the far Island of Siquijor. This island is known for its dramatic walls and sheer drops. The seas have finally calmed a bit, no major white caps yet. So we board three different boats and head out. I think it looked calmer from the beach but out on the water it is a different story. After

the first big splash of water hits over the bow we all start scrambling for cover. The ride was not that bad and we got just a little wet so we set anchor for our first dive.



We drop down and swim maybe ten feet to the edge of the wall...wow. Nothing but a straight vertical drop, this is always a very cool feeling for me, as you look out and down into the blue. Siquijur has a small fringing reef, then a sandy area, then nothing but dramatic drops/walls. The next two dives were just as good as the first. Great wide-angle opportunities and also great macro subjects could be found everywhere. There was little to no current on all three dives...always Kelley's favorite. Even though we were all on three different boats, we somehow all ended up swimming down the wall together. It was a fantastic dive day. On the ride back most people decided to leave their suits on in the event the ride home would be a wet one. Leaving the suits on was the right choice. We still got wet

but at least we stayed nice and warm. There is nothing better than enjoying a cold San Miguel on the way home. Once we return everyone is busy cleaning gear, a handful of the group is doing a dive in the morning. The rest of us decide we will spend the last day doing...well...maybe.....simply nothing. We meet out at the beach table for drinks at sunset, which turns into a big party, and possibly a sigh of relief that we have had a great trip and everything went smooth. Apparently, I was really relieved as I pretty much put my party shoes on and didn't stop until the late hour of 9:00pm. Penny made sure I made it back to room and didn't get lost along the way. Bob was pretty much laughing upon my return to our room....

Day 13:

My heads pretty fuzzy this morning, not much to do except pack and we really have all day for that. It is cloudy and overcast, so much for my plan to lay by the pool and soak up the last bit of sun rays. We head out for coffee and are informed that last night there was a terrible accident and two of the staff were in a head on collision. They were part of the kitchen staff and one was killed instantly and the other is not doing well. The entire staff is like one big family and this a terrible tragedy as they try and do their jobs, all while smiling. Our group is heartbroken for them, and try our best to make their jobs easier for the day. Many of the group opt



for the ½ day waterfall trip, while the rest of us start to pack and just take the day at a very slow pace. The spa staff will be crying as our group departs as I think our group alone has kept the place hopping! I have to say that I went in for a pedicure this morning and ended up having my eyebrows "threaded". The girls said that Bob had signed me up for this, but it turned out that wasn't the case. Anyway, I have to say that this had to be one of the most painful experiences of my life! This has to

be a traditional Filipino way of waxing, without using wax. They take thread and weave it between their fingers, then tangle it up in the hair that they plan on



"plucking" out. All I can say is OUCH! I had to ask the girl if I was bleeding!

We gather again at sunset for drinks before dinner, tonight there is also a photo contest, which everyone has entered their best shots. After another great dinner, Edward had a birthday cake brought out for Karma and Kirsten, whose birthdays are right after we return





home, as we didn't have a single birthday this trip. All the staff votes on the photo's and a guy from another group won best photo, as Peggy and I got honorable mentions. Oh and a free drink! Our dive guide Marco, discovered that Gary Klein was on the boat and he has to be the biggest Klein bike fan in all of the Philippines. He had a magazine from the early 90's that had a Klein bike ad that he wanted Gary to autograph. Gary was now an instant rockstar! Gary also autographed our group t-shirt and gave it to Marco. It was so sweet! Just when we were wrapping things up a huge wind blew in and in a blink of an eye it was torrential rain. I knew I should have made a run for it! 10 minutes later it stopped raining and we finished getting our luggage to the front desk. Early morning tomorrow as we depart around 6:45am to begin our long journey home.

#### Day 14:

Once again the staff has gotten up early to have a great breakfast laid out for us before we depart on our flight. The staff has loaded all our luggage already and is taking it to the airport to check it in for us. How cool is that? I'm not sure how all the overweight luggage fees are going to work out, but we'll deal with it when we get there. After breakfast and hugs for all the staff, we load on the bus and make our way to the airport. The Atlantis crew has taken care of everything and we don't even have to pay any overweight fees! Wow, these guys are miracle workers. We go thru two security checks then jump on the plane for our short flight to Manila.



Arriving in Manila, we make our way to luggage pickup as you actually have to change terminals from Domestic to International and that requires a taxi ride. I was a bit concerned as we didn't have a huge amount of time and with the traffic in Manila I wasn't sure we were going to make it. I should have known better because as soon as we were out the door we were met by the Atlantis rep. Theresa who guided us quickly into vans that whisked us right over to the International terminal. This is also

where we parted ways with our Hawaii contingency, as their flights were not out until late evening. We made it to the terminal in no time flat, got ourselves checked, and began mentally preparing for the long flights home.

All flights went well and we arrived back in Vancouver B.C a little a head of schedule. We breeze thru customs and immigration with no hang-ups and Bob, Dale & Stan head to the parking lot to grab vehicles. The border wait was 5 minutes at most and the drive home went smooth.

#### Summary:

The Philippines offer you great muck and wide angle diving for a very affordable price. The Atlantis Resort operation is top notch and that goes for both destinations. If you requested something, it was taken care of. The staff knew your name by the first day and which room you were in. I didn't even know which room I was in! Same for the dive staff, they knew how to handle your dive equipment and camera systems with care. They even carried our rebreather to and from the boats and gave us plenty of room for putting them together and tearing them down. At the end of a long day, the dive guides would still hang around and meet up with you at

the bar for a beer. They would help remind us of the dive site names and the animals we had seen at each site as we fill in our logbooks. The restaurant staff at both resorts were outstanding as well. We have done a lot of traveling and I have to say that Atlantis Resorts runs a well-oiled machine. The Puerto Galera staff called over to Dumaguete and told them all about us before we arrived. It was like they already knew us as soon as we walked in the door. I would definitely return to Atlantis Resorts at both locations. They each offer you something different, not only in the diving but each city is unique, that's what makes it so fun.

Our hearts go out to the staff at Atlantis Dumaguete for the loss of their dear friend and family member. You will forever be remembered.

Thanks to everyone that joined us, we loved having you along for the ride!



# PHILIPPINES 2009

## Puerto Galera & Dumaguete



### Anacortes Adventure Dive Team

Gary, Mike, Bridget, Liz, Stan, Kirsten, Robin, Karma,  
Aaron, Marle, Mary, Russ, Dale, Peggy, Penny, Kelley, Bob