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scubaH2Omag.com

June 2016 • Issue 6

CUBA & H₂O

ADVENTURE



**POMPANO
BEACH
WINS BIG**



**DESTINATION
CONNECTICUT**



**MUCK DIVING
IN
MUKILTEO**



CONTENT

SE	Bugfest Returns to LBTS	6
	Pompano Beach Wins Lady Luck	10
	Diving Palm Beach County	12
NE	Every 65 Minutes:	18
	Destination Connecticut	20
MW	Mermet Springs Goes to the DOGS	26
	Haigh Quarry Celebrate a Legacy	28
NW	Industry Spotlight: Bellevue Divers	34
	Muck Diving in Mukilteo	36
SW	Friendly, Fishy and Diverse	38
	APO Reef - Philippines	40
	Commercial Diving	46
	DAN - Air Travel with Gear	48
	Fall Deep in Love in the Bahamas	52
	Gritter Corner	55
	Gear Check	56
	Directories	58



About the Cover

Mukilteo Lighthouse shot during a stormy summer sunset using a fish eye lens to create a unique effect.
Image by Michael Riffle.

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WELCOME SUMMER SEASON

As the calendar pages turn to June, the Outdoor season has begun. For those of us in the outdoor industry it is a short season. Three months to cram in as many adventures as possible. While other folks are enjoying their summertime adventures, we are guiding, leading and instructing every day, night and weekend – all summer long.

I would like to let everyone know what is has been going on with our Dive Local campaign and dive industry Summits. After holding our Dive Local Summit across the country this spring we took a bit of time to analyze the results from the Summits and come up with a plan of action. The summits, held in Dallas, Chicago and Secaucus NJ were well attended and yielded a variety of ideas to improve the industry. At the summits we invited speakers to talk about their businesses and highlight best practices that they are using to compete effectively in an otherwise down economy.

At the Northeast Summit we invited great speakers and earned high praise from the many attendees who felt that it was highly worthwhile. This success gave us an idea, we would invite dealers to contribute their ideas and best practices to share their secrets and success with others, to help an otherwise down industry. The combined efforts yielded a theme – sharing Success by Sharing Best Practices. Sort of a rising tide that rises all boats, except we influence the tide.

We are launching a survey in the next few weeks to see if retailers are willing to offer up some secrets or just tried and true actions that produce results. Retailers who wish to contribute will be interviewed and their practices highlighted for adoption by others looking for something that works. This practice is common in call centers with highly competitive people, working to achieve themselves but also knowing that their success is tied to the success of others.

We also met with a great new volunteer organizer for the Dive Local Campaign. Northeast dive instructor, Michael Hyduk, attended the Northeast Summit and spoke passionately about needing to work together to benefit the industry. Michael offered to join Gene and I on the Dive Local team to assist us in developing ideas and programs. His assistance has been invaluable already. He has formulated the next series of steps the organization will take this summer. Using one of the suggestions from the Northeast Summit, we are beginning a national Go Diving campaign – aimed at supporting the dive industry and helping create demand for the sport. It will be largely graphical and feature images of “happy divers” diving all over the world.

We encourage everyone in the industry to adopt this campaign and assist it to grow by sharing on Facebook or other social platform. By promoting it to our circle of friends, we can encourage the “choir” to return. By commenting on the photos, we are sharing our story with many friends who are yet divers... Sounds like a good idea to me!

Here is to a fun and adventure filled summer.

Rick

SCUBA & H2O Adventure is published monthly by the Dive News Network Media Group at PO Box 1494, Oak Harbor, WA 98277.

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We encourage readers to participate in determining the content of this publication by giving us their opinions on the types of articles they would like to see. We invite letters to the editor, manuscripts and photographs related to diving or dive-related business. Send us your stories and photos!

Apo Reef Expedition: Treasure of the Philippines



Article and images by Michael Salvarezza and Christopher Weaver (Eco-Photo Explorers)

There are more than 7,000 islands in the Philippines, and this archipelago, which straddles the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea, is considered the second largest in the world, behind only Indonesia in size. Located squarely inside the Coral Triangle, a vast ocean region known for its amazing biodiversity and teeming coral reefs, the Philippines can easily boast numerous world-class dive sites and exciting travel opportunities.

Perhaps topping this list, however, is the remote Apo Reef Island and its exquisite reef system.

Our journey to Apo Reef began on the sands of White Beach, just a few miles from Puerto Galera on the island of Mindoro. It was there that we boarded the 82-foot safari boat *Big Beth*, from the



Apo Reef is home to large schools of fish, like these Blackfin Barracuda

Marco Vincent Dive Resort, and within moments we were headed west to the fabled Apo Reef.

Apo Reef, an impressive reef structure that rises from the deep ocean to actually break the surface of the water at low tide, is a bumpy 12-hour run from our home

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base at White Beach. We spent our time gazing at the shimmering reflection of the full moon, marveling at the curtain of stars above us and enjoying a sumptuous meal prepared by Omar, the on board chef. The anticipation of diving one of the most spectacular reef systems in the world was palpable.

By daybreak, the comforting light of the Apo Reef Island Lighthouse flickered from across the horizon and before long we were resting comfortably alongside this tiny sliver of land, surrounded by miles of open ocean. The entire area is a designated Philippine Natural Park covering 15,792 hectares (39,000 acres) and is known for its extensive coral cover and high level of biodiversity. Apo Reef Island is tiny (just 22 hectares or 54 acres) but it is home to a protected mangrove forest and other tropical island habitats, along with a unique and historical lighthouse and a small ranger station where you can learn more about this unique and protected ecosystem.

There are more than 20 established dive sites at Apo Reef and it was now time to dive.

Our first dive was at a site known as



Yellowbarred Jawfish can only be identified by the bright yellow mark on the front of their eyes

South Corner and a school of Barracuda cruising slowly along the reef wall immediately greeted us. Descending to 30 meters (100 feet), we were able to instantly appreciate the extent of the coral biodiversity: healthy stands of branching corals, brain corals and star corals mixed with soft corals and other types of reef building organisms.

All along the wall were clouds of Anthias, damselfish and other reef fish that darted in and out of the protective

shelter of the reef. Drifting in the current were schools of Triggerfish and Jacks and tucked beside huge barrel sponges were colorful anemones and their resident anemonefish. At **South Corner**, Apo Reef had its finest reef display on exhibit.

Eagle's Wall was our next dive site, another wall dive with a similar profile as South Corner. Here, we glimpsed several white-tip reef sharks tantalizingly swimming just beyond our maximum depth range. Closer to the surface on the backside

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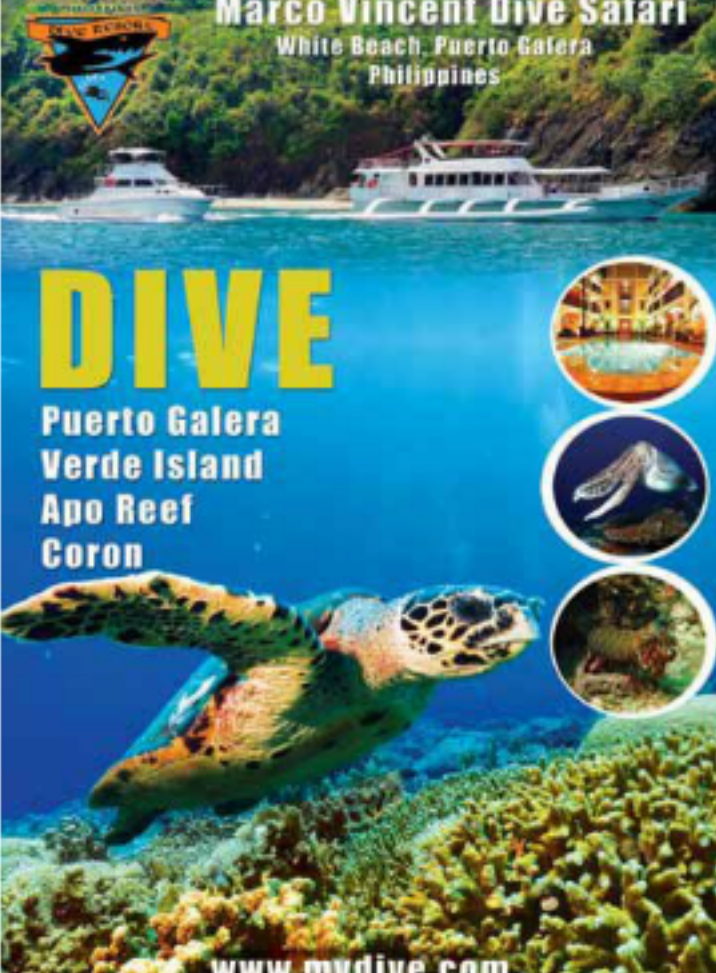
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of the reef wall were several Napoleon wrasse and bumphead parrotfish. These impressive but shy fish managed to hold their appearance until after we had begun our safety stop. As photographers we could almost swear they were mocking us with their late arrival!

The Apo Reef system was, unfortunately, subject to dynamite fishing practices prior to its designation as a marine reserve, and some of the detrimental effects of this can be seen in spots as piles of coral rubble can be found. Some of this damage is not attributable to blast fishing but, rather, typhoon damage through the years. Now that the reef system is protected, the damage has been contained.

Apo Reef is home to numerous macro critters and underwater photographers can delight in searching for riotously colored nudibranchs, the gaudy mantis shrimp, the aptly named orangutan crab, and many other creatures on their diving bucket lists. But for big animal action, Apo Reef divers look toward **Shark Airport**, a unique stretch of reef that is home to stretches of white sand,



Marco Vincent's dive vessel, *Big Beth*, preparing to leave for Apo Reef

which white-tip reef sharks often use as convenient resting places from the currents sweeping the area. Sometimes there are so many that it appears as if they are airplanes waiting to take off at a busy airport.

Most of the dive sites at Apo Reef are along walls and deep drop-offs, and the nutrient rich currents help to fuel a parade of large pelagics and big animals. But

along the shallow end of the reef east of the island lies the wreck of an unknown freighter. Resting upright in just 10 meters (30 feet) of water, the bones of this wreck have become encased in marine growth and the decaying hulk is home to blizzards of reef fish. We were transfixed by swarms of glassy sweepers, small baitfish, cardinalfish, and anthias as we explored the remains of this wreck. As we swam towards the bow of the wreck, which is embedded in the reef itself, a banded sea snake undulated towards us, unconcerned by our bubble making scuba gear and focused intently on finding its prey.

Apo Reef has been protected and studied since 1980. The Apo Reef strategy for management of the area consists of activities such as the protection of the reef system, law enforcement of violations, information and education programs, research into the biodiversity of the region and the responsible management of eco-tourism activities, including diving. Scientists have identified 385 species of fish in these waters, along with 78 genera of marine invertebrates and 190 species of hard corals. Thirty-eight percent of the 500 known coral species in the Philippines Archipelago can be found here. In addition, a number of threatened or near-threatened species of wildlife, such as several species of sea turtle and marine mammals, depend on Apo Reef for food, shelter and breeding areas. This dizzying array of life is on full display across the Apo Reef system and it is a special example of why the Coral Triangle in total is such an essential marine ecosystem.

After several days of mesmerizing dives, it was time to leave the Apo Reef area and head back to Puerto Galera. Along the way, we stopped for a dive alongside **Bonita Island**, and explored lush coral gardens so healthy that some have

referred to these stretches of coral jungle as God's Gardens. We then stopped to explore **Verde Island**, and its famous current-swept drop-offs teeming with life. Indeed, the Puerto Galera, Apo Reef, Verde Island "triangle" can almost be considered a mini-coral triangle within the Coral Triangle!

Actually, the entire area surrounding Puerto Galera is a diver's amusement park. There are opportunities to dive on ghostly shipwrecks, experience current-swept dramatic walls, search for weird and wonderful macro subjects and count the myriad species of coral and fish inhabiting these waters. But it is Apo Reef that holds a special place for divers willing to make the journey to this remote site.

As we stepped off the *Big Beth* and dug our toes into the sand of White Beach upon our return, we stopped and turned to look back over the tranquil waters of the South China Sea and realized that we had left a piece of our hearts at Apo Reef. It would be necessary for us to return!

Marco Vincent Resort

Located on White Beach in Puerto Galera is the Marco Vincent Dive Resort. This Mediterranean inspired property boasts 38 tastefully furnished rooms that are the most spacious in the Puerto Galera Area. All rooms are equipped with cable television, LED TV, refrigerator, A/C system, hot/cold showers and Wi-Fi Internet connection. The resort features three restaurants (two on-site and one beach front), an indoor pool and Jacuzzi as well as a full service dive shop located adjacent to the property.

Guests of Marco Vincent Dive Resort are taken care of the moment they arrive into the country. Representatives will personally meet guests at the airport, take them to the port at Batangas and arrange for ferry transport to Puerto Galera, which takes about one and a half hours. Throughout their stay, a very cheerful, capable and helpful staff tends to the needs of resort guests.

Marco Vincent Divers currently features two dive boats: Lady Merci is a 40-foot single hull dive boat fully equipped to comfortably support the needs of divers. Big Beth is an impressive 82-foot custom equipped dive boat that can accommodate up to 28 divers on dives to Verde Island, Puerto Galera and remote locations such as Anilao. The dive center has a full complement of rental gear and

offers a variety of PADI training options. It is complete with a swimming pool, classroom facilities, gear washing area, lockers and Nitrox capabilities. Marco Vincent Divers can also arrange for multi-day expeditions to Apo Reef.

Visitors to any area, including Puerto Galera, should take some time to experience more than just the sites under the water. The staff at Marco Vincent can arrange for zip line tours, treks to nearby volcanoes and waterfalls, and visits to World War II sites, including Corrigedor Island, home to a fascinating war memorial and museum.

Getting There

The gateway city into the Philippines is Manila. Flights arrive from numerous locations around the world, with many convenient connections available through Hong Kong. From Manila, various travel options, including domestic flights and ferry services, are available to other provinces in the country. For U.S. visitors, a VISA is not required. If you are a citizen of another country, check the VISA requirements before planning your trip. A valid passport is required for entry, and must be valid for six months after arrival.

Immunizations and Medicine

As with any travel to tropical regions, make sure all your vaccinations are up to date! All travelers should visit their personal physician or a travel health clinic to discuss what vaccinations (e.g., Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Malaria, Typhoid, or Tetanus-diphtheria) and

travel medicine are recommended. All medicine should be packed in their original, clearly labeled containers. Having a signed and dated letter from a physician describing your medical conditions and medications is suggested.


Note: Travel health clinics usually provide more detailed health protection measures since they specialize in travel medicine. Beware of travelers' diarrhea, which is the most common travel-related ailment.

Weather

The Philippines has a tropical climate. There are basically two seasons: the wet season (May-October) and the dry season (November to April). April and May are the two warmest months, marked by high temperatures and humidity. During these months, temperatures can reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. In the cooler months of December and January, temperatures moderate with less humidity.

The Philippines is in the tropical cyclone belt, and typhoons threaten the region between July and October.

Electricity

Power voltage used in the Philippines is 220 Volts (50 Hz). Be sure to double-check your appliance's compatibility before plugging them in. Converters and adaptors are usually available upon request at your hotel front desk. 



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