

DIVE LOG

Celebrating 25 years

AUSTRALASIA

December 2013

Number 305

Merry
Christmas

**2013
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12S**

**FULL DETAILS
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WHALE SHARKS OF CEBU ISLAND

by Peter Boyle

Images by Bill Boyle

Distant lighting flashed high in the night sky, illuminating the fronds of the jungle canopy above me. But, the tropic air was still and our friend the sea was quiet and gentle calm and even more inviting to any diver.

Tomorrow, our intrepid group would swim with whale sharks; incredible as it seems a close encounter with the world's largest shark was guaranteed!

SCUBA doctor Peter Fear was our group leader and it had been a mind-blowing week of full-on diving from Atmosphere Resort, located on Negros Island, and situated about one hours flying time south of Manila, in the Philippines. Alan Wiggs has covered the resort diving in Sportdiving Magazine issue 151.

However, in the past 12 months, a new chapter of incredible diving has opened with the whale shark encounters at Cebu.

The story goes that whale sharks have in the past been regarded as a nuisance to the native fishermen, as it was believed that this huge and intimidating marine fish was scaring the fish. Then one day, a fisherman enticed a shark to a sheltered area by feeding the whale shark. This caring experiment worked so well that soon other whale sharks gathered in the same location, also awaiting a free feed.

Soon a local dive operator heard of this freak marine behavior and display and the over the past 12 months the whole underwater show has really taken off. Both snorkel diving and scuba is allowed while diving with the sharks, however, no flash photography is permitted. The rules regarding the whale shark encounters are explained in English by an authorized marine ranger and of greatest importance no touching or riding the whale sharks is permitted and to ensure visitors comply a police diver may be present, in the water, among the wildly excited divers during the allotted 30 minutes swim.

Divers are also instructed to maintain a 4 meter distance, but if the whale shark should approach the snorkelers this is quite allowable and at times unavoidable. Actually with 5 to 7 whale sharks milling around the krill thrown into the tropic water by fishermen from their canoes things can get a little mind boggling as the action erupts in an aquarium like feeding frenzy!

The island of Cebu is about 1 hour from the Atmosphere Resort and involves a bus ride to Dumaguete then from there a 30 minute car ferry ride to the island. Fifteen minutes later you are welcomed to the briefing area.

Snorkeling with tame whale sharks: In all my life I've never experienced such awesome diving. Let's hope it lasts forever!



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