

# LHP

Lighthouse Point Magazine

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## LHP Divers Explore Philippine Waters

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Africa's Serengeti

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# Local Divers Explore The Philippines

Article by Eunice E. Hamblen

Photography by Linda Ianiello, Nils Jacobsen, Patrice Marker and Eunice E. Hamblen

**Editor's note:** An adventure-seeking group of divers from Lighthouse Point, including some from all over the world, set out on a journey to experience the waters of the Philippines. Those traveling are members of the Undersea Adventurers Dive Club that meets in Pompano Beach. This is another in a series of excellent articles submitted by local resident Eunice E. Hamblen.

**W**e arrived in Cebu City in the Philippines, after a number of flights starting in Fort Lauderdale to Atlanta, on to Seoul, Korea, and then finally to Cebu City in the Philippines, flights taking 21 hours.

After a night's stay near the airport, we began our next trek, taking another six-hour drive and a ferryboat ride to arrive at our destination, the beautiful Atmosphere Resort on the southern end of Negros Island.

Our plan included a seven-day trip aboard the Philippine Siren, heading toward Southern Visayas and Cebu for live-aboard diving. Seven divers from Undersea Adventure Divers included Bob Weybrecht, Linda Ianiello, Roger and Nancy Stiles, Patrice Marker, Carol Schurtz and myself.

We were the first guests at the newly-completed suites at the Atmosphere Resort. As such, we received a complimentary bottle of champagne that was immediately consumed, followed by a badly-needed complimentary head massage at the Atmosphere Spa.

The suites were so new that final touches like the caulking around the toilets, full-length mirrors and towel racks were added while we



Local divers explore the Philippines.

were there. Each room was tastefully appointed with high ceilings, plenty of storage area, TV, desks and outdoor showers. All had a front porch with lounges and hammock swing. This is called living high on the hog.

Muck diving (macro photography) was on the agenda for the first three days we spent just off Negros Island. Our Dive Master, RJ, was excellent at finding all kinds of critters, from the tiniest to the best disguised. Patrice said she took photos of things so miniscule that she could only see them later on her computer. RJ found an octopus that was as big as a breadbox sitting out in the open, looking very much like a rock. I swam quite close and over it before RJ brought it to my attention. What a thrilling sight!

Other sea life included razor wrasses, white eyed eels, spiny seahorses, lots of pipefish, cuttlefish and, of course, lots of nudibranchs (colorful snail-type creatures). We also found smaller frogfish (a type of anglerfish) just off shore.

The water was a comfortable 81-86 degrees. Night dives close to the resort included a mandarin fish dive that was popular. The reef close to the resort was damaged from a typhoon in February that provided considerable rubble for the mandarins.

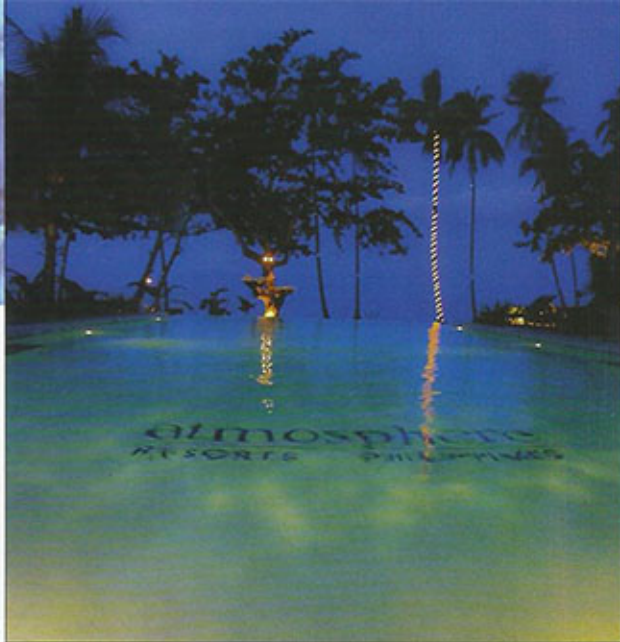
Our dive boats were outriggers that required a 5-6 foot drop into the water, but luckily had stairs for climbing back up. We used an old-fashion gangplank to board from the beach. The crew was very helpful with both inbound and outbound transport.



Our outrigger dive boat with Apo Island in the background.



Mandarin Fish. Photo by Linda Ianiello.



Atmosphere Resort where we spent ten days.  
Photo by Patrice Marker.

During this three-day dive, the remaining club members arrived.

This included Nils Jacobsen, Joanne and Frank Morgan, Mike from Nevada and Deb from Montana. They were housed in the older suites that were very much like ours, but also included an outside bathtub that was little used.

On Sunday morning, July 8th, we got a taste of early morning monsoons but this cleared up nicely for our trip to Apo Island. Apo was my kind of diving with beautiful coral reefs, anthias, bird wrasses, sea snakes, angelfish with electric blue lips and stripes of all colors. Approximately 750 people live on this island, including a church, an elementary school, a dive resort and just like every other village, it had a well-used basketball court. Basketball seemed to be the national sport. Courts were everywhere.

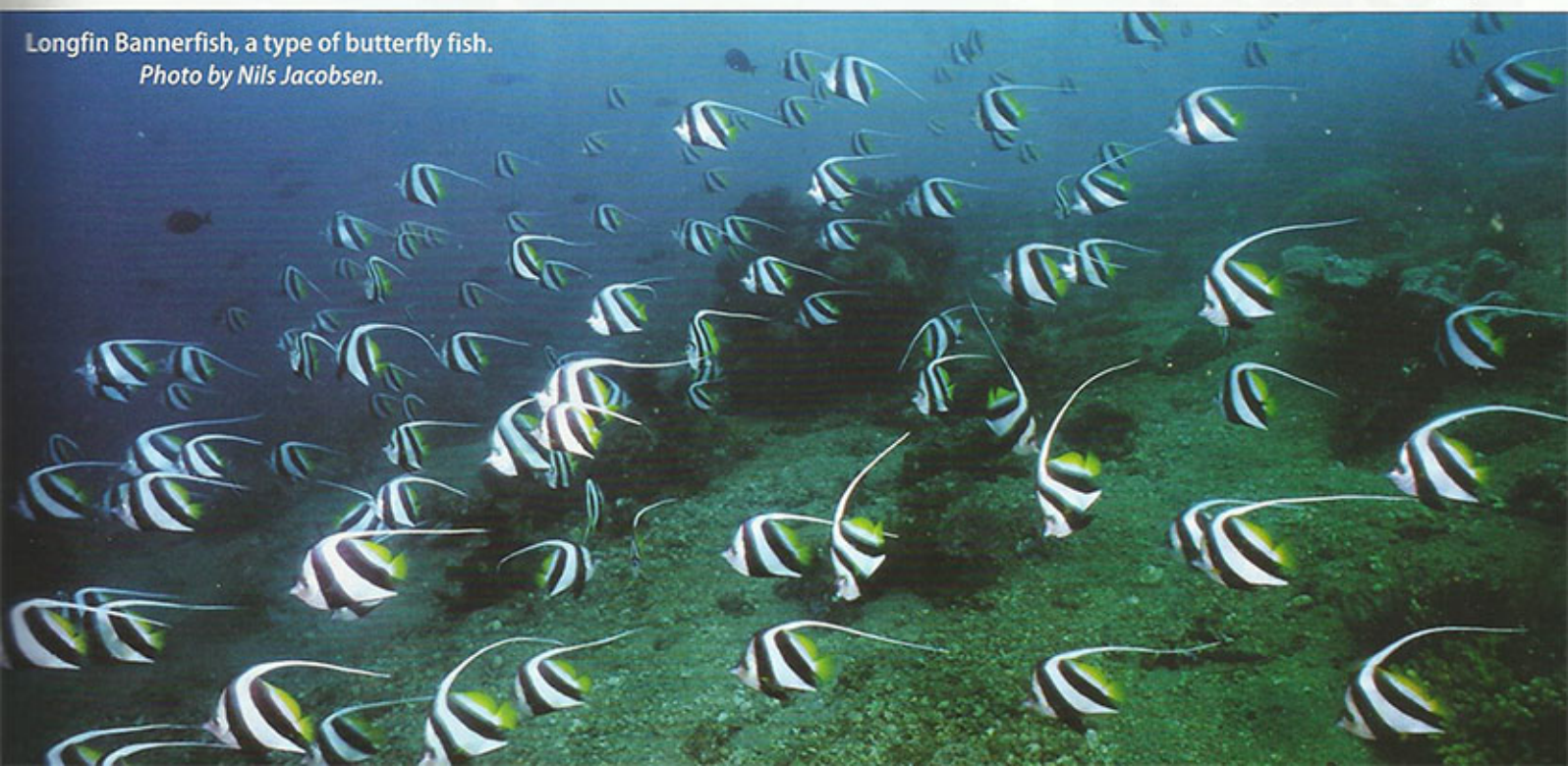
Wednesday, July 11th called market day, we dove in the morning, spent an hour at this very busy local market and came back to the boat for one more dive before lunch. The market was large with a significant livestock trading area, including water buffalo, Brahmas, milk cows, tons of goats and pigs.

I am still amazed at how much livestock was transported on Kawasaki motorcycles with a steel frame cargo carrier attached. In the city, the steel frame included three rows of benches for people transport. Of course, the people are not nearly as large as we are here, but it is still impressive to see a motorcycle transporting six people plus the driver.

Saturday, July 14th we packed our belongings for a beach transfer to the Philippine Siren, our home for the next week. The two

*Continues on page 30*

Longfin Bannerfish, a type of butterfly fish.  
Photo by Nils Jacobsen.



# Local Divers Explore the Philippines

*Continued from page 11*

inflatables picked up twelve USA Divers plus three additional divers for transport to the Siren. Our dive party added Mike from Germany, Mark (the cutie) from Australia and Jeanine from Switzerland. Poor Mark, age 36, saw the "Singledivers.com" on the website and thought he would be with young single people. He still got lots of attention from us old cougars!

We sailed north inside Cebu straits and dove a popular dive spot near the village of Moalboal on Sunday, July 15th and saw lots of turtles, large-mouth mackerels and lots of pipefish on this day. Monday we dove Pescador Island that sits in the middle of the strait with fisherman and many colored bangas on the north side where dynamite fishing destroyed the reef.

The current flows north, so the south side was full of schooling fish along the wall and beautiful corals in the shallows. Pescador Island is known for its large schools of sardines and fusilier that attract the big game fish. The mesmerizing wall of small fish is fascinating to watch. This day at lunchtime we witnessed a sailfish jumping several times just off our stern.

Tuesday, July 17th, after diving Sumilon Island South, we sailed the short distance to Oslob, Cebu where savvy village leaders have commercialized whale shark encounters in their newly created sanctuary. They set up Individual single-person outriggers called



Seahorse. Photo by Linda Ianiello.

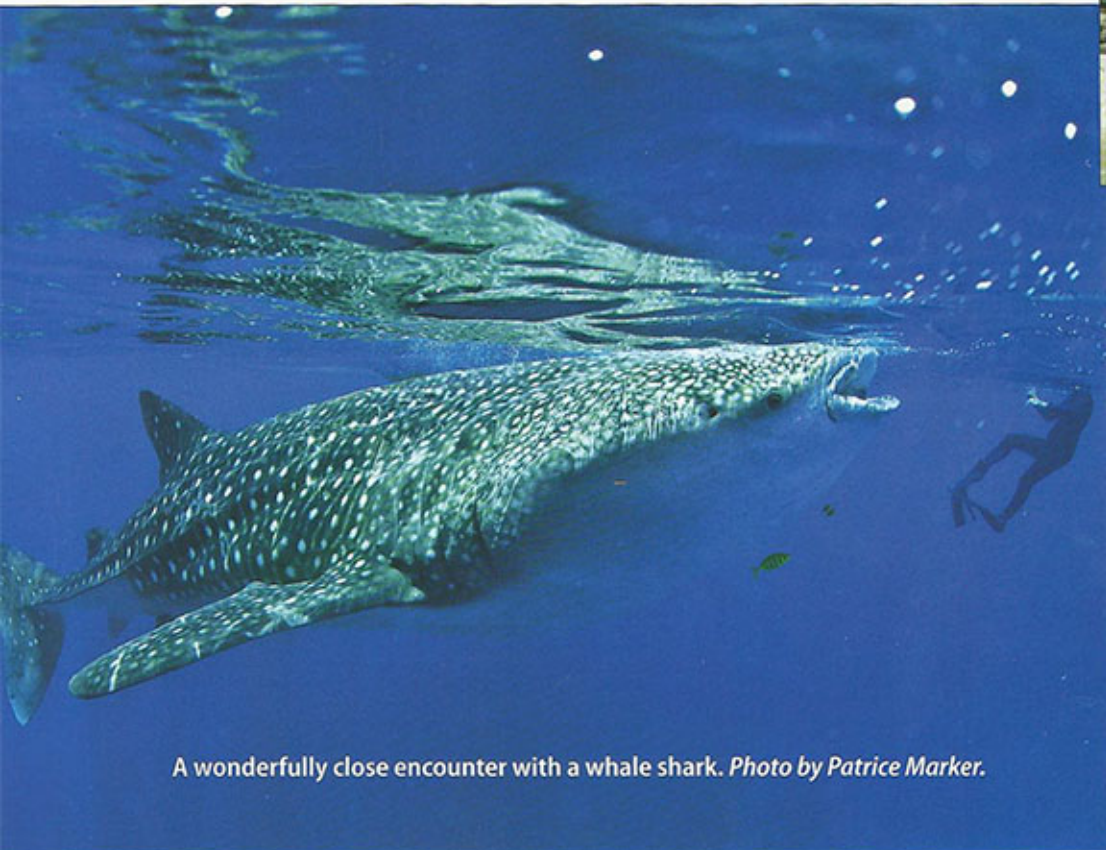
bangas in three areas of the sanctuary to feed four whale sharks each.

The Siren divers were assigned to one of these groups and we were allowed one hour to snorkel or dive with the whale sharks. We observed four youngish whale sharks from 20-30 feet hanging next to their banga feeding station. These gentle giants were quite a sight. One entertaining banga captain was taking his whale shark on a "walk" around the entire group. Another was throwing the krill at the snorkelers, so the whale shark swam directly into the camera. This was a special diving experience.

The day's last dive and night dive was on Sumilan Island's northwest side. Night brought out all the



General merchandise store on Apo Island.



A wonderfully close encounter with a whale shark. Photo by Patrice Marker.

# Local Divers Explore the Philippines

Continued from page 31

The weather continued to deteriorate on Friday, July 20th. Strong currents and big waves accompanied the first dive. The second to last dive of the Siren trip was called the "Lighthouse" that used to be called Hammerhead Point until the Japanese fished out all the hammerheads. It was a beautiful wall dive until currents dropped visibility to zero. We ended our dive in the shallows where the reef was beautiful. Topside the swells were large and rain was pouring down.

In summary, the Atmosphere Resort was over the top and the food was outstanding. The Obi ice cream, which is purple and made from a root, was special. The Siren was well run and comfortable and once you got past the diesel fumes it was an enjoyable live-aboard. This trip was well organized and most enjoyable for UnderSea Adventure divers of South Florida.

For more information about  
our local dive club or this trip,  
please visit [www.underseas.org](http://www.underseas.org)



Boarding the outrigger at Atmosphere Resort.

Schooling Jacks, photo by Nils Jacobsen.



Bob Weybrecht with  
Banana split  
with Obi ice cream.





Frogfish. Photo by Linda Ianiello.



Nudibranch, a colorful snail-like creature. Photo by Linda Ianiello.

different colored sea urchins, decorator crabs, eels and various crustaceans. As a novice night diver, I was fascinated by all the tiny sets of reflective eyes staring up at me from shrimps, crabs and other mysterious critters. Butterfly fish were wedged face down into the corals and parrot fish were wedged even further underneath, so only small patches of color could be seen. They wanted to save themselves from the carnivorous night raiders.

Wednesday, July 18th, the wind and waves started to pick up. Getting on and off the dingy was challenging for the next three days. We traveled back to south Negros for another mandarin dive, and then cruised overnight to the East side of Cebu for diving Panglao and Balicasag on Thursday and Friday. It was here that we saw the giant school of jacks. It was another hypnotizing experience. There were many large green turtles, baby eels, orangutan crab, blennies and dart gobies.



The Philippine Siren, our seven-day live aboard.



Whale sharks begging krill from pangas. Photo by Nils Jacobsen.

*Continues  
on page 32*