

A day in the life of an Easy Diver in the Philippines.

We've been talking about the Atlantis Dive Resort amenities, delicious food, the accommodating staff, the swanky Azores liveaboard—Let's talk about the real important stuff: the diving!

We arrived at the Atlantis Dive Resort in Puerto Galera early in the afternoon and had lunch and a welcome briefing about the resort. One of our first questions was "when can we go diving?!" The quick response was "how about in an hour?!" YES!

The dive shop staff had already assigned us our cubby holes and our gear was sitting there waiting for us to unpack and get ready for our first dive in the Philippines. The dive guides (most of whom are PADI instructors) briefed us on the dive procedures, boats and then on the site itself. The dive shop area has detailed maps of the dive sites, pictures of marine life, multiple rinse tanks, and hot fresh water showers for after the dive.

We clamored to the two small boats tied to the beach and climbed in. The boats have this really cool non-skid, padded, blue stuff on the extra-wide gunwales—perfect for sitting and holding on-- to and from the dive sites. After a 5 minute ride, we put on our gear and back-rolled into the water.

Crinoids! Everywhere, as far as the eye could see! Colorful tumbleweeds moving along with the slight current. As a Kentucky Derby fan, they reminded me of feathers in a Kentucky Derby hat. We also saw carpet anemone, a fimbriated eel, and peacock manta shrimp. My logbook entry for this dive: "So cool. Like first ocean dive".

I admit that all of my diving until this trip has been in the Caribbean, Atlantic and local fresh water dives. The marine life in the Philippines is so very different from these areas. You know those creatures in Steven Spielberg movies where you scratch your head and say how in the world did they come up with that thing? Well, they're underwater in the Philippines. The nudibranchs alone could be in a science fiction movie. Luckily for me, our dive guides always had a slate to identify creatures.

For those of you who don't like being part of a crowd when you're diving, don't worry. The dive groups are usually just 6-8 divers. The guides are there to help find and identify things (critters and boats), but give you enough space to explore on your own and at your pace. If you're the only guest who wants to go on a dive, your guide will go with you as your buddy. The guides usually dive with the same group and build a great rapport with their divers.

I call a lot of the dive sites in Dumaguete sunny muck dives. These shallow dives are close to the shore and not necessarily "pretty" reef dives. But, this is where the tiny mandarin fish and the veined octopus live, as well as pygmy seahorses. These dive sites are treasure hunts. Bring your magnifying glass and fill your logbooks with lists of your finds.

The reef off of Apo Island is blanketed in coral. No scattered coral heads here! I positioned myself vertically and turned in complete circles to take in the view. The reef was covered in mounds of healthy and large staghorn, elkhorn and other stony corals. A couple of turtles cruised by and nibbled on the coral.

I'm looking forward to returning to Dumaguete, as well as exploring new areas from the Azores liveaboard. There are so many different things to see and experience. I hope you will join me in this adventure!