



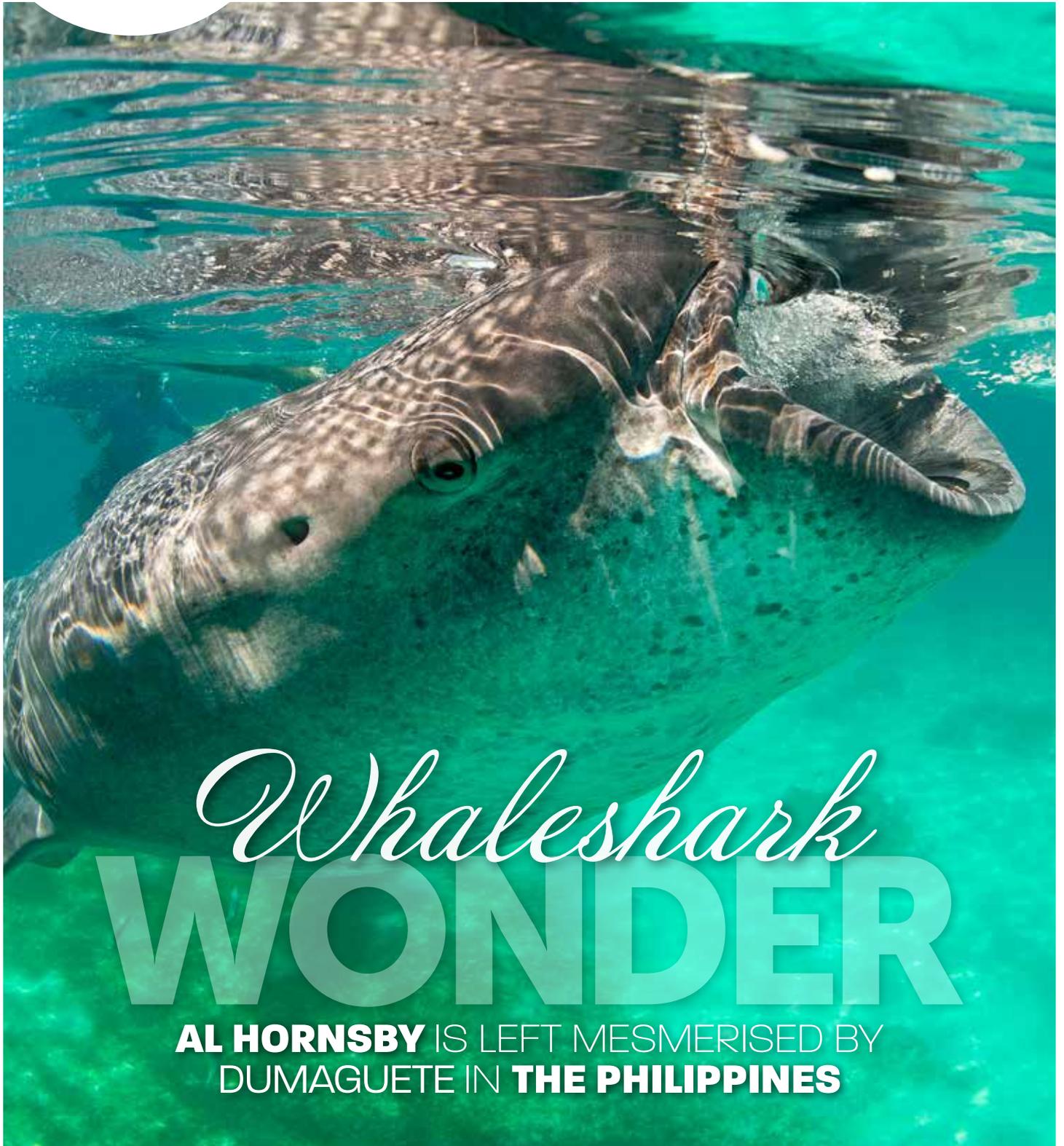
**JILL HEINERTH Q&A:**  
THE CANADIAN ICON TALKS  
ICEBERGS, CAVES, CCRS  
AND WHAT DRIVES HER

**BUOYANCY AT THE BACK:**  
THE TEST TEAM RATES AND  
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## *Whaleshark* **WONDER**

**AL HORNSBY** IS LEFT MESMERISED BY  
DUMAGUETE IN **THE PHILIPPINES**

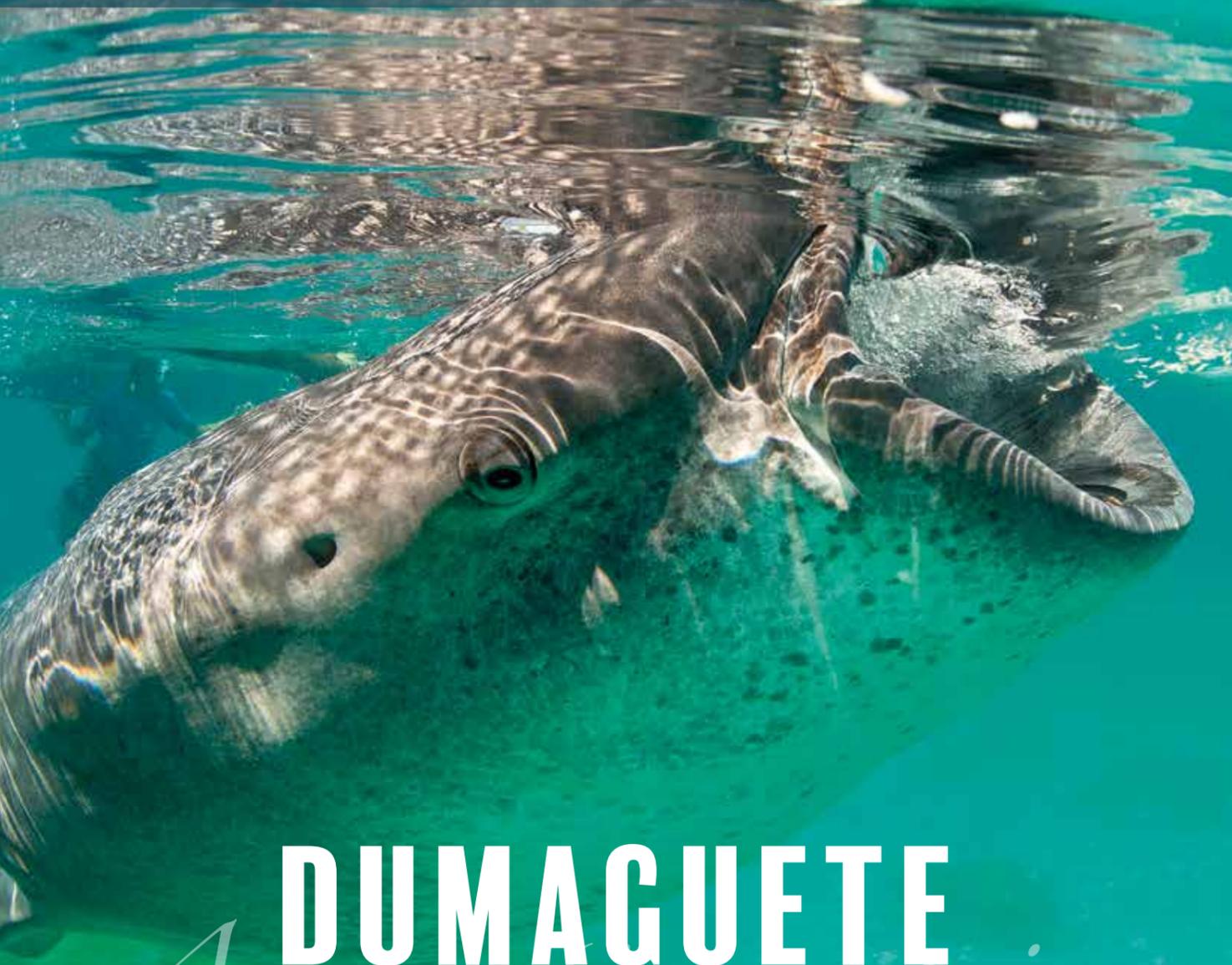
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“ What would you think of snorkelling or diving, as close as you might want to be, with a large gathering of whalesharks? ”



# DUMAGUETE

*An exotic surprise*

Well-travelled photo-journalist Al Hornsby has seen a lot in his globe-trotting, but even he found this part of the Philippines held some surprises in store

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AL HORNSBY

The Dumaguete coastline, on the southeastern corner of the large Philippines' island of Negros, is a tranquil, pleasant place. It's lovely, with palms and large trees hanging over a long, dark-sand beach. Its fringing ocean is typically flat calm, so much so that dive boats can pull right up onto the sand at our resort (Atlantis Resort Dumaguete), meaning that from dive centre to boarding was a matter of but a few strides.

Equally reachable are the dive sites, which stretch one-after-another along the coastline from Atlantis' just-offshore House Reef, in both directions to as far, and to as many sites, as one could dive in weeks of trying. Dropping in, you find a warm, calm world of muted colours among dark sand, scattered corals and turtle grass fields. Reaching the bottom, your relaxed frame of mind is soon replaced by intense interest as you realise you have stumbled into a vast treasure-trove of strange, lovely (or bizarre) species, more than you can count, seemingly something new every few metres, whichever way you turn. The contrast is striking... an effortless, utterly relaxing diving environment versus your acute, energised mental state, built around pending – and near constant – discovery.



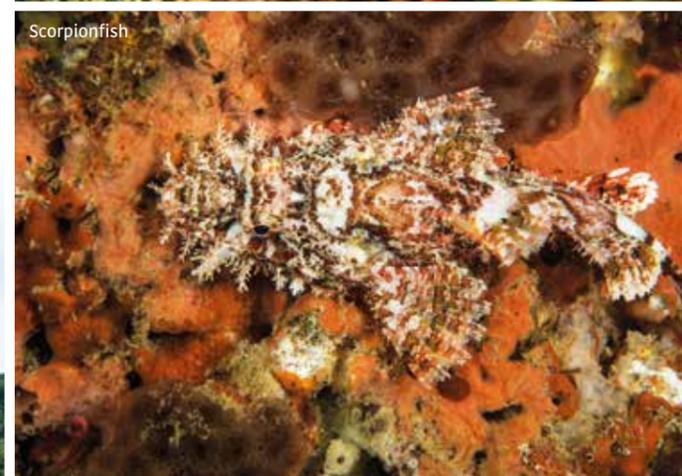
Topside is lush and green

If you have ever been curious about what muck-diving is really about – or (especially) if you are already an experienced, muck-diving fanatic – you must prepare to be amazed by the sheer number of species and individual animals crawling about or hovering over the bottom, seemingly crammed into every nook and cranny, and perched on hard corals, tube anemones and soft corals. It's not an accident – this coastline borders the Sulu Sea, oft-acclaimed as being an epicentre of bio-diversity in the Indo-Pacific.

Equally important to this diversity and population density is that, especially due to the large amount of marine research that has occurred along this coastline, the locals understand the value – both to tourism and ongoing, sustainable local fishing – of protecting their near-shore waters, and every town and village along this coastline maintains its own Marine Protected Area (MPA), often with each one abutted against the one before and the next one to follow. The result is an assortment and population of undersea creatures that really must be seen to be believed. Conveniently, it also means that there are remarkable dive sites found every couple of hundred metres – and less.



Nudis of all shapes and sizes



Scorpionfish



Mantis shrimp

On our trip, we came to realise that House Reef – reached by boarding the boat from the beach and swinging around only far enough to reach the shallow mooring just offshore – was one of the most-diverse, critter-find areas we visited (dived by day and as one of the most-populated night dives one will ever find). In just two dives there, we saw and photographed a sea moth, porcelain and decorator crabs, many species of nudibranch, schooling coral shrimpfish, starry puffers, moray eels, several species of lion and scorpionfish, live shells, an orange-banded pipefish (a male carrying eggs), a bizarre maculate spearer mantis shrimp and more. On the night dive, my guide found a coconut husk in the sand, and turning it over, found a clutch of flamboyant cuttlefish eggs attached to its inner surface. ▶

Outrigger dive boat



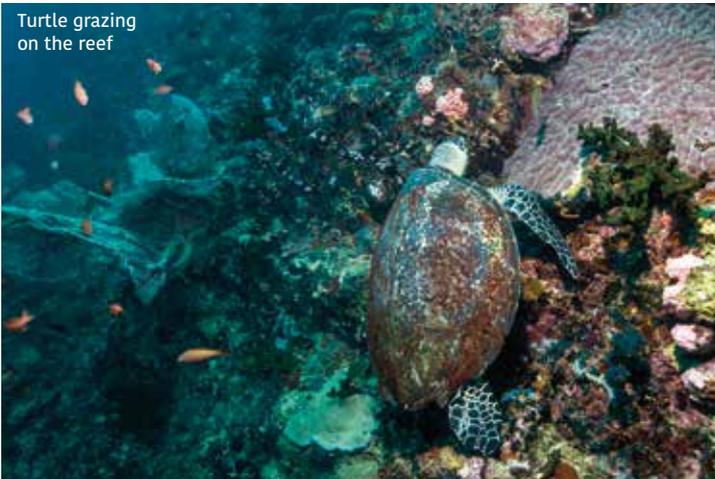
Shrimps on anemone



Flamboyant cuttlefish



Turtle grazing on the reef



“ With such short boat rides and five dives a day on the regular schedule, it was easy to shoot huge numbers of images – without even straining ”

Knowing that flamboyants don't move very far from their eggs, we began a search, and within moments had found the exotically beautiful parents hunting nearby, who calmly endured my picture-making, exhibiting no noticeable concern.

To the south, about five minutes from the resort, the Punta site is a sand, rubble and scattered-coral slope reaching 20m that was another muck-diving, critter center. On just one dive, I photographed several species of butterfly and anemonefish, a juvenile sweetlips, a number of nudibranchs (including the unusual *P. postulosa* and *P. briarium*), a strange, white-hatted *Galathea* squat lobster, a lovely pair of *Periclemenes* shrimp on an anemone, a live *Diana* conch and, a special find, a yellow warty frogfish. With such short boat rides and five dives a day on the regular schedule, it was easy to shoot huge

numbers of images – without even straining (Oh - and, did I mention the regular, sunset mandarinfish dive at a site called Bahura, which could be done in lieu of a night dive?).

And, if this non-stop bounty of muck, macro-critter findings and images might leave aside a moment for a completely different sort of great diving, that was also easily accomplished. Another superb option was a day trip to nearby Apo Island, just an hour's boat ride to the south. The small, jungled-covered islet juts up out of the sea and is surrounded by coral reefs, drop-offs and walls decorated with soft corals and gorgonians. Fish life is rich, and green and hawksbill turtles are common.

Our family's favourite place was the Apo Island Marine Sanctuary area, a large, utterly-calm bay along the southeast coast. With crystalline water and marvelous stands of hard corals jutting up from a 15m-deep, white-sand bottom, the spot was lovely for divers and snorkellers alike. My 11-year-old daughter Juliet and I spent a carefree hour freediving, ▶



Landscape shot of anemone shrimp

spotting snapper, sweetlips, chub and many colourful reef fish, while my wife, Christine, snorkelled alongside.

After lunch aboard the resort's large boat, the Titana, we moved a couple of hundred metres southward to the island's tip, to a beautiful site named Rock West, for a high-excitement dive. Dropping down, we rode a moderate current along a steep, hard and soft coral-covered slope. Nearing the bottom at about 23m, there is sand with intermittent coral ridges and lots of marine life. We saw green turtles, a large resident school of big-eye trevally, a huge malabar grouper and several banded kraits, which were much less shy than I have experienced in other diving areas. The end of the dive was a long, shallow glide over beautifully rich coral gardens, the water thick with damsels, chromis, moorish idols, anemonefish, butterflyfish and more.

This transition, from muck and small critters to some of the loveliest coral reefs one could ever hope for, was delightful, with the sharp contrast making both extremes somehow even more enjoyable. But... our diving hadn't ended yet. The next day-trip was, if anything, even more remarkable. What would you think of snorkelling or diving, as close as you might want to be, with a large gathering of whalesharks?

Just a few hours away, by van and ferry, the small Cebu Island fishing village of Oslob has transformed itself into one of the most-popular whaleshark diving locations on the

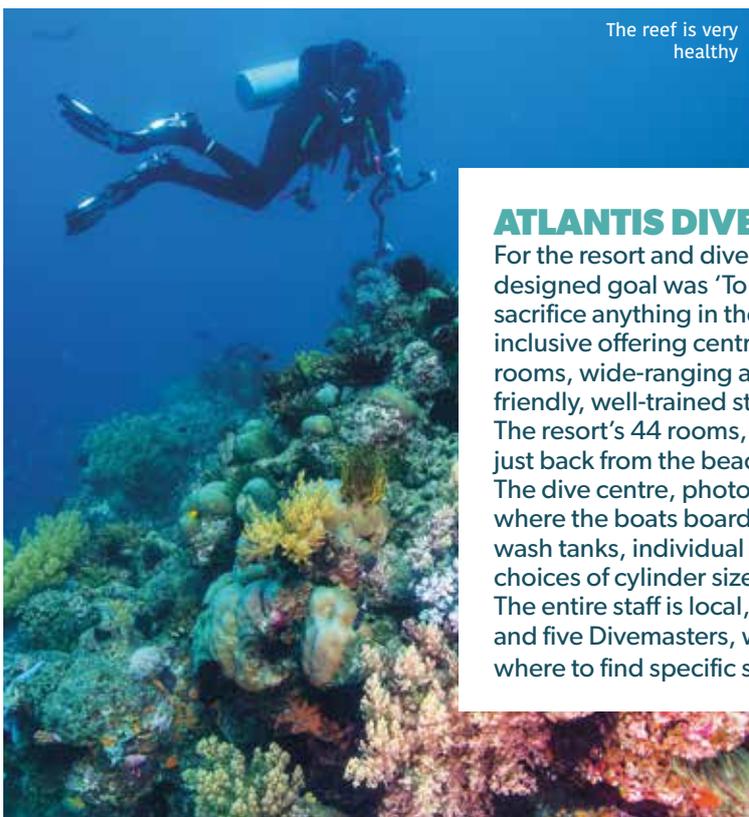
planet. Some years ago (as a local biologist studying the Oslob phenomenon explained to me), a local diver/fishermen noted, after the regular migratory-group of whalesharks had moved on, that one had stayed, and was frequently seen hanging about, just offshore. Aware that the sharks migrated seasonally through the area for swarms of a small local shrimp, on a whim he obtained some from local fishermen and tried feeding the shark from his boat. To his surprise, the shark readily fed, and the interaction became a regular event.

At some point, another shark joined in, then more as time went by. The villagers, formerly fishermen who might occasionally take one of the huge sharks for their fins, became involved as word reached the local diving community, and tourist divers began showing up. By the time I had first visited four years ago, 186 different sharks had been identified as having participated in the daily, morning feedings, which last from around 8am until noon. As the fishermen throw handfuls of shrimp and squid into the water, generally eight to ten big whalesharks, typically around eight metres in length, casually come and go, moving closely (like really close) among the gathered snorkellers and divers to feed. When the hand-outs end, they gradually disappear back into open sea...

This rare opportunity for interaction is in some ways one of the most-incredible shark protection stories one will ever find. A small, struggling fishing village has transformed itself into a successful marine park, the local population thriving economically by protecting the local sharks and educating their children, neighbours and tourists about them. And, in so many ways, we lucky divers benefit most of all... ■



Atlantis Resort



The reef is very healthy

### ATLANTIS DIVE RESORT DUMAGUETE

For the resort and dive operation, a PADI Five Star Dive Centre, the owners' designed goal was 'To create a great resort that makes sure guests don't have to sacrifice anything in their search for the best diving'. They work to provide an all-inclusive offering centred on great service, great diving, modern, comfortable rooms, wide-ranging activities (including a luxurious spa), delicious food and a friendly, well-trained staff.

The resort's 44 rooms, some at the water and the remainder in a garden setting just back from the beach, have full facilities and amenities, including Wi-Fi. The dive centre, photo room and classroom are well-designed and close to where the boats board. The dive centre itself is spacious, with gear and camera wash tanks, individual diver storage, complete gear-handling service and choices of cylinder size, with air or EANx.

The entire staff is local, and thoroughly trained, including two PADI instructors and five Divemasters, whose specialty is local marine life knowledge – and where to find specific species. [www.atlantishotel.com](http://www.atlantishotel.com)