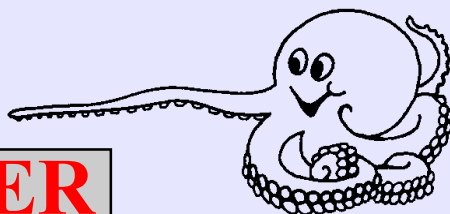


THE REEF SEEKER



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October - 2026



PHILIPPINES 2026 TRIP REPORT

(This is the first part of the trip report. The full report will be e-mailed to you later this week.)

Part of my job as a trip leader is dealing with the various logistics of putting together group trips and this one certainly had its share of challenges . . .

We have just returned from our two-week adventure in the Philippines, spending the first week on land at Atlantis Resort Dumaguete and the second week on their liveaboard *Infiniti*, exploring the various areas around the Western Visayas, specifically encompassing the Cebu, Bohol, Leyete, and Malapascua Island areas.

We started as 19 strong for the trip, and it seemed like we were traveling on 19 different itineraries. The group initially consisted of (in no particular order) Tony Mischel, David Mischel, Glenn Suhd, Glenn Heins, Bill & Susan Patroliia, Kirk & Leigh Dean, Michelle Leonard, Patti Wey, Stacey Carr, Don Banas & Mary

Raske, Paul "Doc" Anes, Shirley Parry, Tom & Bobbie Beuthin, Marilyn Lawrence, and me (Ken Kurtis). Mary was only doing the first week and Marilyn was only doing the second week so our total group size was actually maxxed at 18. However . . .

A few days before the trip started, both Tony Mischel and Susan Patroliia had to drop out. And while we were on the trip, some nasty URI (Upper Respiratory Illness) spread through half the group to varying degrees but got so bad with Michelle and Stacey that each of them decided they were too sick to do the boat portion and went home a week early.

Their collective experience underscores the value and wisdom of having trip insurance, especially when you consider that this was a \$6,500 trip (not counting the airfare). In fact, Stacey and Michelle were able to confer with their respective insurance companies while trying to decide whether or not to continue the trip, to make sure they would be covered and to see what documentation the insurance companies might need when they submit their claim.

Travel insurance generally runs 5-10% of the trip cost (depending on a number of variables) and is a good investment should something go awry. I think Stacey went

through Seven Seas and Michelle went through DAN but you can shop policies through the website www.insuremytrip.com which is a clearinghouse for various providers.

You may also find you have coverage through your credit card company if you paid for any part of the trip that way. On Reef Seekers trips, the prices we quote are cash/check. We're happy to take a credit card payment but we add 4% to the payment as that's what we lose to our credit card processing company (Square). But the point is that if you pay us with a credit card, and your card company includes trip insurance, you may be covered for 4% of the trip cost rather than 5-10%.

On with the details of the trip . . .

As I mentioned above, this was a two-week trip, all with Atlantis, with the first week being land-based and the second week being boat-based. We can't say enough good things about the Atlantis staff, both at the resort and on the boat. From the dive guides to the wait staff to the housekeepers to the administrative folks and everyone else, they are doing everything they can to give you a top-notch experience and vacation.

When we go on any trip, not just this one, there are certain things that are out of our control. We

can't determine what animals you'll see, we can't control the diving conditions, and we can't control the weather. But what IS within our purview is the overall composition of the group (this group got along together especially well) and the attitude and attentiveness of the resort or boat staff. Also first class. So even if we didn't see a Mimic Octopus (came close) or some of the dive sites weren't quite up to snuff (more on that later) the attitude of the group and the staff more than made up for that. And when you put that together, that means it's almost impossible to have a "bad" trip.

I've been to Atlantis Dumaguete before, in 2020 and 2024. Manila is the central starting point for these trips, so that's where you fly into. To put it simply, the Manila Airport is a mess. There are only three terminals but they're spread out and it can take an hour to get from one terminal to another. Not to worry because Atlantis staff was there to meet each of our incoming flights and personally drive us to our connecting terminal. That really saved a lot of headache and hassle for everyone. This is part of the service they provide when they book the domestic (Manila-Dumaguete) portion of your trip. So we all flew into Manila and they took it from there. From a group standpoint, it added about \$20/person to the overall cost but IMHO was worth everyone penny of it. (They did the same meet-and-greet and escort to the connecting terminal on the return flight as well.) So if you're booking a group or on your own, allow them to do the domestic portion.

The Philippines consists of over 7,000 islands. Dumaguete proper

is in southern Philippines, just north of the island Mindanao, and is roughly a 90-minute flight from Manila. So no matter where you are in the world, it shouldn't be too difficult to get to Manila and then fly to Dumaguete (airport code is DGT). The resort's actually in Dauin, not Dumaguete itself, which is about a 40-minute drive from the airport. The resort staff meets you at the airport, tags your bags, loads you into a van, and off you go. It was quick, painless, and efficient.

Atlantis Dumaguete is quite nice and secluded. Once you turn off the main drag and go down a long winding road, you find yourself in what could be called a tropical oasis. Lots of trees and lots of birds chirping. The resort is laid out along a central pathway that leads down to the main office, dive shop, restaurant, camera room, and the shoreline where you get the boats.

We were escorted into the open-air (but fully covered) restaurant area where we were given a welcome drink, short shoulder massage (they've got a spa on-site), and general orientation, as well as paperwork to complete. While we

were doing that, our bags were being delivered to our respective rooms.

There are four room types: Deluxe, Garden Suite, Ocean Front, and Premier. When I was there in 2020, we stayed in a Garden Suite, which was really nice and fairly big with a king-size bed, a work table, a sofa, large bathroom, and good-sized front patio. In 2024, I was in a Deluxe room which also had a king-size bed but was a bit smaller, had a small-ish work table jammed into a front corner of the room, and small patio. This is what we had booked everyone in for this trip. One issue with these rooms is that there's very little storage area for clothes. There was a closet with a couple of shelves and that was it. Two people in this room might have to live out of their suitcases somewhat.

I'd suggest you splurge and get a Garden Suite room, which has a bit more space. For this trip, I was given what I assume was a Premier room (#36) which was huge, had plenty of storage, and even had a small patio/sitting area in the front. Very nice.

All of the food is included when you stay here and it is not only

2027 DIVING VACATIONS

Feb or Mar 2027 • Saba

May • Bonaire

July/Aug • Dive & Eclipse

Fall (TBA) - Roatan

very good, but was very artfully presented as well. For breakfast you ordered off of a menu and could get pretty much anything you wanted. For both lunch and dinner, you order off of their black-board menu which is visible right when you walk in and lists the appetizer/main/dessert choices for lunch and for dinner. Menu options change every day and there's something there for everyone's palate (including vegetarian and vegan options) plus they can accommodate specific needs. All meals are wait-staff served and there are numerous tables spread all around the restaurant so finding a place to sit isn't an issue.

The camera room is also quite nice and roomy. It's a climate-controlled room (though we usually left the air-conditioning off) that has 21 individual camera stations with cubicles for storage, charging outlets (both 110V and 220V – clearly labeled), work lights, and air guns for drying.

The “dive shop” is a large open-air area that has plenty of gear storage areas (you're assigned a dive cubby when you check in), separate rinse tanks for cameras and dive gear, an analyzing station for nitrox tanks, compressor whips for filling tanks (the staff does that, not you), a large board indicating who is diving at what time on what boat and at what dive site, and some benches and tables for pre-dive briefings and between-dive snacks. It seems a bit chaotic at first glance but it works, especially when you get into the rhythm of the resort.

For those diving nitrox . . .

(And this is where we'll end things for the monet. Details about what we saw will be forthcoming.)

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED ACTIVITY	\$\$\$
Thu.	Oct. 8	Veterans Park	••• Night Dive •••	25
Sat.	17	Veterans Park	Surf Entries Made Easy	25
Wed.	21	Catalina Express	Avalon UW Park	180
Sat.	31	Veterans Park	Beach Diving Made Easy	25
Wed.	Nov. 4	--- CLASS ---	--- TABLES & COMPUTERS ---	25
Wed.	11	Catalina Express	Avalon UW Park	180
Thu.	19	Veterans Park	••• Night Dive •••	25
Sat.	28	Veterans Park	Navigation Made Easy	25

LOBSTERS ARE OPTIONAL. SAFETY IS NOT.

RISKS TO SCUBA DIVERS AND SNORKELERS DURING CALIFORNIA RECREATIONAL LOBSTER SEASON

EXCITEMENT, CROWDS, AND NIGHT DIVES CREATE A DANGEROUS COMBINATION. STAY AWARE. STAY TOGETHER. DIVE SMART.

TOP RISKS DURING LOBSTER SEASON



TASK LOADING & TUNNEL VISION

Focusing on the hunt can reduce awareness of depth, air, buddy, and surroundings.



NIGHT DIVING HAZARDS

Limited visibility increases the risk of disorientation, separation, and missed hazards.



KELP FOREST ENTANGLEMENT

Kelp is beautiful but can trap and disorient. Maintain good buoyancy and awareness.



SURGE & ROCKY REEFS

Surge can push you into rocks, drain your air faster, and make exits difficult.



BOAT TRAFFIC & SURFACE RISKS

Crowded anchorages and low light make surfacing dangerous. Use a SMB.



INCREASED AIR CONSUMPTION

Exertion, excitement, and current can drain your air faster than expected.



BUDDY SEPARATION

Searching for lobsters can lead to lost buddies. Separation is a leading cause of serious incidents.



TRAPS, LINES & GEAR

Lost or abandoned gear can cause entanglement at depth or on the surface.

SMART DIVERS FOLLOW A PLAN



PLAN YOUR DIVE

Know the site, set depth and time limits, agree on turn pressure, and plan your exit.



STAY WITH YOUR BUDDY

Keep in sight, communicate often, and establish separation limits.



MONITOR YOUR AIR

Check your pressure frequently. Turn the dive when you planned, not when you have to.



USE A SURFACE MARKER BUOY

Make yourself visible to boats—every time you dive.



CONTROL YOURSELF

Good buoyancy, slow movements, and clear thinking prevent accidents.



KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Cold, current, fatigue, and overexertion increase risk. It's okay to call the dive.

CHECK THE RULES. RESPECT THE RESOURCE.

Follow California regulations:

- Know the season dates and daily bag limits
- Minimum size: 3 1/4 inches carapace length
- Take only what you need
- Protect the ocean for future generations



SNORKELER SAFETY

- Stay close to shore and your buddy
- Watch for boat traffic and divers
- Don't reach into holes or under rocks
- Strong currents can occur—be ready to exit the water

IN AN EMERGENCY



Get help. Call 911 or VHF Channel 16. Provide your location and situation.

THE OCEAN DOESN'T REWARD URGENCY. IT REWARDS DISCIPLINE.



LOBSTERS ARE OPTIONAL. SAFETY IS NOT.

LOBSTER SEASON OPENS FRIDAY NIGHT

6:00PM is the magic hour when you can start legally taking lobster again. But it's also a time when divers sometimes throw caution to the wind and sometimes with tragic consequences. That's why we want to re-emphasize the poster that Dan Orr created which is on page 3. It's full of little reminders and tips to make sure you come back from your lobster hunt. No lobster is worth your life. As Dan puts it, "Lobsters are optional – safety is not." The biggest problem? Running out of air because you paid more attention to the lobsters than to your gas supply. And not to get too morbid about this but the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber, the Coroner, Baywatch, and Coast

Guard all go on a heightened alert on opening weekend because, statistically speaking, someone's going to get in trouble and need their help. Make sure that it's not you.

AQUARIUM TO THE RESCUE

You might have heard that we got a highly unusual event happen in that two Olive Ridley turtles came ashore and laid eggs in the local sand. This hasn't been documented ever before. The first came ashore in Seal Beach and the second one a few days later in Huntington Beach. But wildlife officials were concerned that high surf from the Pacific hurricanes would destroy the nests so they dug up the eggs and have placed them in the care

of the Aquarium of the Pacific. Incubation period is generally 45-60 days and while there's no guarantee that any of the eggs will hatch, Aquarium vet staff will keep an eye on things and will return the hatchlings to the ocean if the emerge from their shell. So think good thoughts for the little potential hatchlings and maybe a few of them will make it.

L.A. COUNTY SALES TAX GOES UP

Be aware that the sales tax rate in Los Angeles County is going from 9.75% to 10.25% as of October 1. This increase was approved by voters this past June (Measure ER). The additional 0.5% tax will be in effect for five years.

PICTURE PAGE - Phabulous Phillipines

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2026)



**Twin
Lizzies**



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**Blenny
displaying**



**Clownfish
tending eggs**



**Juvy
Batfish/Spadefish**



**Colorful
nudibranch**