

Atlantis Puerto Galera May 24-27, 2010

After a week on the Atlantis Azores at Tubbataha reef, and a short journey to Donsol for whale shark encounters, I had a few days so I booked with Atlantis Puerto Galera. The Atlantis organization again showed its smooth running. I was met at MNL airport by the same young man who took my unneeded luggage from me before I headed to Donsol, but which I would need in Puerto Galera. Atlantis arranged all transport from the airport to the resort, which involved a van ride of 2+ hours to the port city of Batangas to the south and a 1-hour boat ride to the resort. Upon arriving at the resort beach, I noticed many other hotels and dive operations crowding the beach. My choice of Atlantis showed benefits immediately, as the grounds, restaurant and dive operation were excellent. I had a full package for the short period I was there, so all meals were provided on site in an attractive, airy restaurant. Food was high level as I'd come to expect from the food on the Atlantis Azores liveaboard. Everyone seemed to learn my name much faster than I learned theirs. I was able to rent a slave strobe for use with my housed Olympus camera (since my SLR had broken the previous week) which came with a fiber-optic cable to sync it to the camera flash. I operated my camera on manual, as TTL was not an option with a slave. This allowed me to get a few fine photos in the six dives I had scheduled.

Diving was done from the skiffs that were boarded from the beach. They were uncovered, but the longest ride to a site was 10 minutes. Before the dive briefing, each diver using EAN had to test his tank, write his name and % on it, and place it in the set-up area where the crew would assemble tank, BC and regulator and put it on the boat. If you were doing the next dive that day, the gear stayed on the boat and the crew switched tanks for you as long as you had tested another EAN tank. A warm shower and adequate rinse tanks divided for various types of gear surrounded the dive prep area. Suits were hung in a room next to the rinse tank/shower area. Adequate storage space was evident, although I was there when the hotel attendance was low.

Visibility was disappointing, running between 20-50 feet. Manager Simon told me there are periods like this and periods when the water is clear. A group that took an excursion to nearby Verde Island told me the life and clarity there was distinctly better than our near-town dive sites. Air temps hovered in the 85-86 range with high humidity, while water temp ran 84-88 depending on the site and currents. Simon told me of the macro life at Atlantis Dumaguete, which makes that another place to add to my list of must-see sites. Each of the Atlantis operations is reachable from Manila by one flight followed by land/water transport.

PG offered more nudibranchs in one day of diving than I saw all week at Tubbataha, although the latter was much better at water clarity and big fish. We did find two small white tip sharks resting under a ledge on our first dive. A banded krait swam by as well. Our dive plan was adjusted as current blew us away from the prime destination. However, we still saw peacock mantis shrimp and a juvenile boxfish. We hit a warm patch of water at Small Lalaguna point, 88 degrees, where two cuttlefish did their dance for us among coral heads. Overall there were not the large coral formations I had seen the past week at Tubbataha, but enough coral to hide lots of fish and critters. A night dive revealed a stargazer (a fish I had not yet photographed) along with a variety of sand-burrowing eels, mantis shrimp, harlequin ghost pipefish pair and some Pegasus seamoths along with two black frogfish. Had I more time here I would have taken some excursions to nearby island dive sites to see the wonders I was told were there, but that's for another trip.