

Atlantis Dumaguete

by Byron Conroy

I have always heard great things about diving in the Philippines, and I was finally ready to experience it for myself. It was time for me to book my resort, and as an underwater photographer who likes to work deliberately, there was only one option that kept coming up time and time again that fit my needs: Atlantis Dive Resort Dumaguete.

Atlantis Dive Resort Dumaguete is designed for the underwater photographer, allowing you to be a photographer rather than a pack mule. The resort is centered around diving, but it has the amenities and logistics that let you focus on getting the best shots on your dive.

If you have a full camera system - housing, strobes, multiple lenses, and accessories, then the resort's dedicated camera room, ample rinse and drying areas, comfortable accommodations, and personal dive operations mean that you can spend more time looking for the image and less time worrying about the little things, like where to charge your battery or dry your dome port.

After checking in, we had a few hours to relax in the afternoon and prepare our dive equipment for the

following day. The diving area was a mere 30 feet from the room and had everything you could need and more. Inside, there were multiple rinse tanks and freshwater showers, meaning you could rinse your camera in a dedicated camera tank and take a freshwater shower post-dive, before entering the camera room which was right across the way.

To me, all of these details are small but cumulative for an underwater photographer, as I found it to change the rhythm of the workflow from a scrambled one to a seamless one. Everything is also so close together, so if you forget something, it is not a hassle to go back and grab it, and the atmosphere was nice, quiet, and calm. I have been to other resorts where service was great, but staff felt a bit stiff and awkward, so for me, to see staff do everything with a smile on their face and full of enthusiasm was a game-changer and made my stay more enjoyable.

If Atlantis Dumaguete has one defining feature for shooters, it is the camera room. This is not an add-on. The resort offers a large, air-conditioned camera room that was designed to be practical and



Healthy coral reefs at Apo Island, Sony A7RV, Nikonos 13mm, F13, ISO 500, 1/80



functional. Each shooter can have their own individual spot, which is equipped with an under-the-counter cubby for storing your camera bag or luggage.

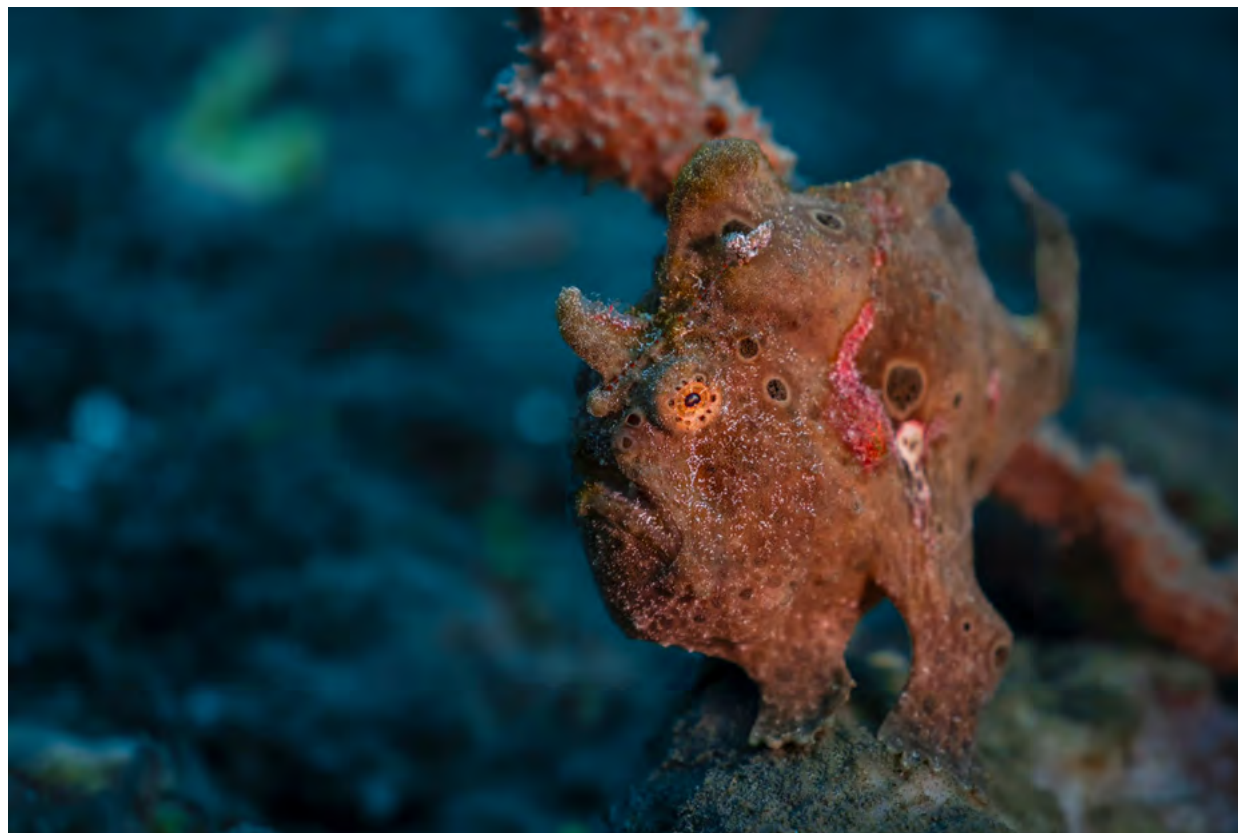
Once unpacked, you can use the special towels provided by the resort and start utilizing your bench space for setup. There are plenty of power outlets in 110 and 220 volts for making your own charging station, an individual reading light to inspect seals and O-rings, an air gun to blast salt from those nooks and crannies, and a shelf to store all of your extras like lenses, batteries, memory cards, and accessories.

The convenient setup removes many issues often faced at other resorts, such as having to carry your rig back and forth to the room after every dive. While top-tier photography resorts share this feature, Atlantis executes it seamlessly. This leaves you more time to clean a lens, charge a battery, or swap strobes in between dives, allowing you more time to relax in between dives and enjoy a clutter-free room.

Dumaguete is famous for macro, and as you may know, macro is my bread and butter. I can spend weeks diving only using a macro lens, but one of the main appeals of Dumaguete is that it offers wide-angle opportunities. There is reef diving at Apo Island and the opportunity to shoot whale sharks at Oslob, a place where an encounter is guaranteed. What other resort offers three distinct photographic opportunities all within such a close distance?

A standard dive package at Atlantis includes an incredible five dives per day: two morning dives, two afternoon dives, and one night dive. We chose to do four day dives per day and take the evening to prepare cameras, download images, and process things for the next day. Our guide, Daryl, was super flexible and accommodating with this, allowing us to make the decisions that gave us the best photo chances.

Dumaguete is actually the city of your arrival airport, but all of the diving and resorts are located 40 minutes



A painted frogfish lying in wait, Sony A7RV, Retra pro max with restrictors. Nauticam MF03 – F4.0, ISO 80, 1/20

away in Dauin. For macro shooters, Dauin has become a legend, and for good reason.

The black sand slopes just outside the resort are packed with tiny, well-camouflaged subjects: frogfish, juvenile fish, a dazzling array of nudibranchs, rare ghost pipefish, and a high number of cephalopods. For me, the stars of Dauin

were the cephalopods, like the rare mototi octopus. In fact, in many years of going to Lembeh, I have only seen them a handful of times and have not really had any great photo opportunities.

However, after my 10-day trip to Atlantis, I have had more shots of them doing pretty much anything they can do, such as standing,

curling arms, changing colors, or being in a bottle; these are examples of the type of encounters I had, and more than I can even process.

We also had great success with flamboyant cuttlefish. The sightings were consistent and reliable, and we even had a pair of them together for one whole dive.

Not only does



Atlantis turned out to be the dream cephalopod destination. Sony A7RV, Retra pro max with restrictors. Nauticam MF03 – F4.0, ISO 80, 1/20

Dauin have the subjects, but as a photographer, it is easy to repeat a site where you know the action is happening. During our stay, the dive site “Punta” was pumping for cephalopods, and during our nine days of diving, we repeated the site six times as it was so rewarding. What you learn with macro photography is that dive sites go through seasons, hot and cold patches, and when the action is on at one site, it is best to dive it repeatedly. Atlantis knows this and makes it happen for all guests.

Apo Island is best known for its pristine marine sanctuary and

exceptional coral reef, and it is only a short boat ride away from the resort. If you are eager to shoot large reef scenes, schooling fish, or sea turtles against a blue backdrop, Apo is the place to go. It offers a range of dive sites, from gentle sloping reefs to dramatic walls, and the visibility is often excellent. Depending on conditions, photographers can expect turtles, reef sharks, large schools of fusiliers and snappers, and sea snakes.

We chose to only dive the shallow top of the reef where we knew the best corals would be. Shooting



Atlantis Restaurant on the beach

against the sun in the shallow, crystal-clear water was a welcome change from the muck slopes of the mainland. If you are looking for a day off from macro, then this day trip is for you, and despite being such a popular island, we did not encounter any other divers from the other resorts.

A day trip from the resort includes three dives at Apo Island and a buffet lunch served onboard the boat. Atlantis even sends a chef over on the boat with you who fires up the BBQ during your second dive and prepares lunch for the group during your final surface interval. There is also the opportunity to buy souvenirs like t-shirts and sarongs, so make sure to bring a little extra cash.

Oslob in Cebu has become synonymous with whale shark interactions. Hesitant about going, we discussed the way the tour worked with the resort, and the candid honesty that Gordon, the owner, gave us was why we decided to go. He



The rooms located on the beach

informed us that there would be a lot of snorkelers and boats in the water and did not paint us a picture of a peaceful solo encounter.

Since it was also our last day at the resort and we could not dive due to flying restrictions, we decided to let our equipment dry and check it out. From a logistical standpoint, Oslob is offered as a long day trip from Dumaguete with a transfer via ferry followed by a van ride. We arrived on location around 10 a.m., ready for our snorkeling session to begin.

With Atlantis, you are taken through a private dive resort and given a quick briefing, and then taken to a private area where you can change and prepare for your snorkel. Remember, this tour is offered to average tourists to check off their bucket list, and many of them struggle to swim and have never seen an animal like a whale shark.

The challenge for photographers is to get away from the crowd in a



Whale shark at Oslob. You can get clean shots if you work hard, even better with a co-operative model. Sony A7RV, Nikonos 13mm, ambient light, F8, ISO1000, 1/800

restricted area, which is not hard to do if you are a good swimmer and are able to predict the pattern the whale shark will move. It is important to know that the whale sharks in Oslob are not held captive. They have the ability to swim in and out of the area as they please; however, they are being fed, and that is what draws them to the area. You can get good photos if you work hard at it, but go into the situation with realistic expectations and just enjoy the special interaction. If you think you are going to have a private encounter, you will be disappointed.

The central Philippines has a tropical climate, and seasonal changes in visibility and sea state affect what you can shoot and when. Generally, the months from November through May are regarded as the most favorable for both visibility and calm seas, while the monsoon season brings more rain and choppier conditions that can limit surface access and reduce visibility. That said, many photographers travel outside of peak months specifically to catch different animal behaviors or to avoid crowds. Black sand shooting around Dauin can be productive year-round,



A pink anemone fish, Sony A7RV, Retra Pro Max with restrictors, ND4 Filter, Nauticam MFO-1, Vortex filter, F3.5, ISO 100, 1/4

though larval blooms and plankton seasons will alter visibility and subject presence. Apo Island's sanctuary is relatively consistent and can be dived equally all year around.

If you want a mix of macro and wide angle in a single trip, plan for a week or longer. Macro shooting is a cumulative experience, and by that, I mean it adds up over time, where maybe you see two cool creatures per dive.

Do ten dives and you may feel a bit light from a trip, as perhaps you only get twenty great opportunities; do twenty dives and you will probably

have forty or more great shooting chances. For me, this is a place where you want to go for between ten and twelve days.

Reaching Dumaguete from America or Europe is straightforward but will always require at least two flights. There are no direct intercontinental flights into Dumaguete. The usual approach is to fly into one of the Philippine international gateways, Manila or Cebu, and then take a domestic flight to Dumaguete's Sibulan Airport.

Manila and Cebu both have multiple daily connections to



A pair of mating flamboyant cuttlefish, Sony A7RV, Retra pro max with restrictors, Nauticam MFO -3 F7.1, ISO80, 1/30

Dumaguete, with carriers such as Philippine Airlines and Cebu Pacific running regular services. From the United States, the most common routing is to fly into Manila via one of the major carriers with a single stop, or into Cebu via Singapore, Hong Kong, or a direct long haul, depending on the season and routes. From Europe, the usual path is to fly via a hub in the Middle East or Southeast Asia, such as Doha, Dubai, Singapore, or Hong Kong, and then pick up a domestic connection.

Domestic flights from Manila to Dumaguete are short, typically

around one hour and a half, and are affordable if booked in advance. The overweight luggage fees are minimal on these local domestic flights; I paid twenty dollars for my additional weight.

The Philippines hosts a lot of photographers, and dive traffic can be busy at popular sites, so good etiquette matters. Keep a low dive profile, follow guide instructions, and maintain distances that do not stress the animals. For macro dives, never shuffle across the substrate or rest a knee on living coral. In wide-angle shooting, be careful of the reef;



A rare flasher wrasse on one of the coral sites. Sony A7RV, Retra Pro Max, F5, ISO160, 0.4 seconds

with a high number of divers in Apo Island, it is important divers treat it with respect. Gloves are not allowed during diving, so maintaining good buoyancy and spatial recognition is very important. Some areas have been shut down temporarily to reduce diver stress and allow them to recover.

One of the underrated advantages of a resort like Atlantis is the ability to use downtime productively. The camera room becomes a hub for review, critique, and post-processing. Many visiting photographers make a habit of reviewing and processing a

selection of images each afternoon, comparing notes with other shooters, and planning the following day's dives with guides based on what was seen. Atlantis supports this workflow with comfortable seating, a reliable internet connection, and an atmosphere where other shooters are doing the same thing. That communal aspect is invaluable. You learn tips about local sites, you discover new compositions, and you leave with both better images and a network of contacts for future trips. If you are traveling with a non-diver or want to take a break from the workflow, the



Divers escorted back to shore after a great macro dive

resort offers a variety of spa services which can be booked anytime during your stay.

If you are a photographer who values a mix of macro, healthy reef wide angle, and the possibility of pelagic encounters, Atlantis Dive Resort Dumaguete is worth your attention. The resort's camera facilities and operational flow allow you to treat a trip as a working photographic assignment.

Dauin is an exceptional macro playground, Apo Island gives you clean water, wide-angle shots and coral reef shots, and the proximity to Oslob makes a whale shark day trip a viable addition to any itinerary.

Expect efficient operations, a camera-friendly environment, and local guides who are experienced at finding and handling photo subjects with care. To get the best from a trip, plan for at least a week, pack for

macro and wide angle, and coordinate with the resort about your specific photographic goals before you arrive so they can tailor dive schedules accordingly.

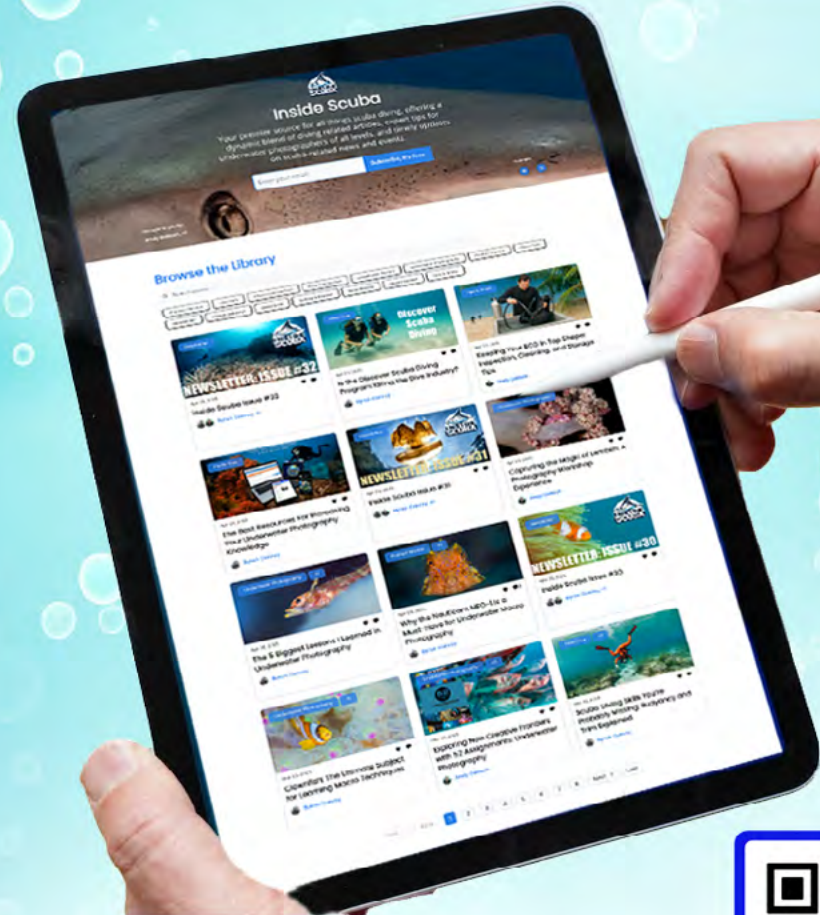
Some dive resorts do not feel like a holiday; they make things hard. Atlantis makes things easy for you, allowing you to focus on your shooting and relaxing on vacation.

In short, for underwater photographers who want a single base that offers a wide range of photographic subjects, reliable camera facilities, and a professional operation, Atlantis Dive Resort Dumaguete presents a compelling option.

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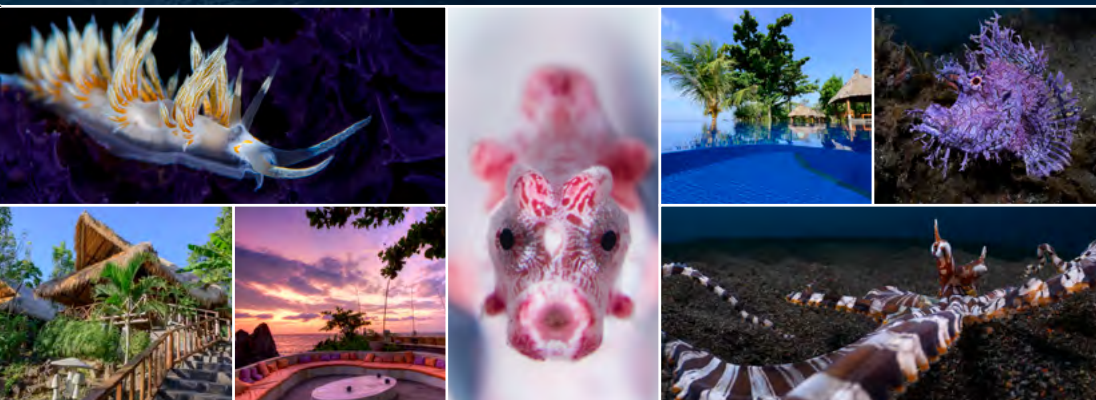
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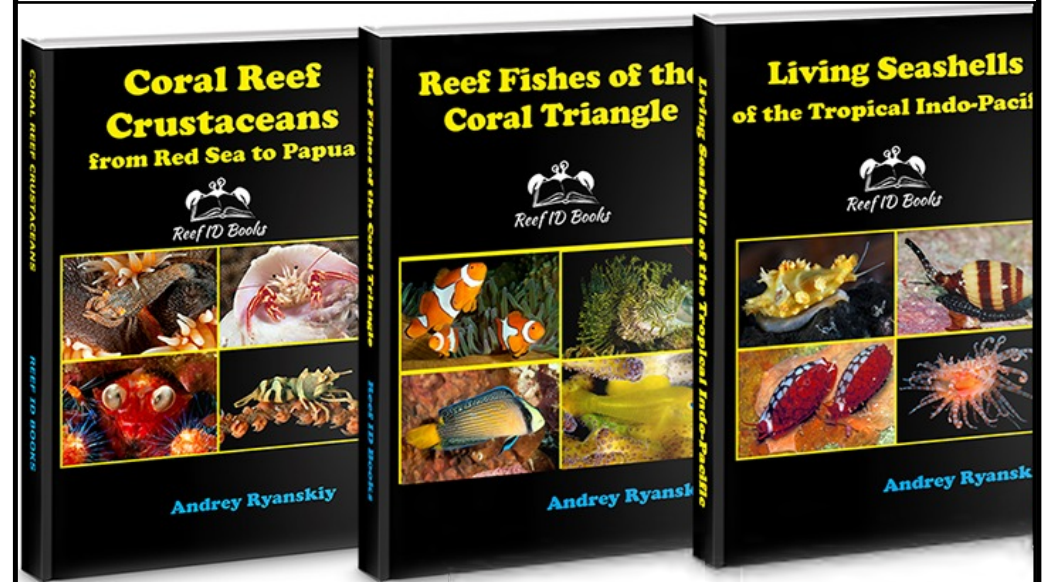


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