

Dive Photo Fest Puerto Galera

The Dive Photo Fest/Asia Divers Puerto Galera underwater photography workshop from June 3-10, 2007 was a great success!

Puerto Galera was the perfect destination to hold our workshop due to the abundance of dive sites within a 10 minute boat ride, a variety of macro and wide angle photo opportunities, and absolutely flat calm water and sunny weather for the entire week.

With folks from North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia in attendance, we had a varied group of personalities with one thing in common: a love of macro photography. This is one area where the Philippines really excels. Located in the “golden triangle” of marine life; the marine biodiversity of this area is the highest on the planet. In this regard, Puerto Galera certainly didn’t disappoint. Highlights of the week included: pygmy and thorny seahorse, ornate ghost pipefish, nudibranches galore, banded sea kraits, schooling juvenile catfish, cuttlefish, mandarin fish, clouds of anthias, frogfish, mantis shrimp, Anemonefish...the list goes on and on. Add to this some fantastic wreck dives and sloping reefs covered in soft corals and Puerto Galera is a perfect underwater photography destination.

Aside from the diving, the photo workshop went off without a hitch. Simon Buxton and Mike Veitch conducted the teaching for this event with topics ranging from the use of Adobe Bridge and Photoshop, the basics of light, composition, white



balance and Magic Filters, and creating multimedia presentations. Each day consisted of two dives in the morning followed by a lecture and a third dive in the afternoon with the evenings before dinner reserved for critiquing and individual attention.

What sets the Dive Photo Fest workshops apart is the individual instruction given by the instructors underwater. Mike and Simon didn’t take their cameras along on the dives, instead they buddied up on a one-to-one basis with a different student on every dive in order to help with camera settings, strobe positioning, holding a modeling light, or to help find photogenic critters. According to participant Mel Betley, “In pointing out subjects, and helping with angles, the instructors were in a much better position to help suggest underwater what would work having obviously been through a lot of trial and error themselves with the same subjects in the past.”

One of the highlights of the week was the chance for everyone to try out filter photography thanks to workshop sponsor Magic Filter. Once everyone understood the theory of manual white



Sean Kearney (above) and Sue Kearney (below)





Above and below by Simon Buxton



Sean Kearney



Sue Kearney



balance, trial filters were handed out, as well as white balance cards courtesy of PADI. We headed out to two shallow and colourful dive sites with plenty of soft coral and sea fans to try out the filters in the best possible conditions. After a bit of trial and error, everyone sorted out their method of composing this type of photo and had a great time looking for panoramic scenes to shoot. Needless to say, everyone was impressed with the ability to make the reds and purples of the soft corals “pop” without the use of strobes.

For something different, in the middle of the week we spent a spectacular day at Verde Island, located about an hour’s boat ride away from the resort. The dive sites in Verde are spectacular vertical walls alive with sea fans, soft coral, crinoids, and enough schooling anthias to block out the sun! The pinks and yellows of these fish, coupled with the bright colours of the coral, made for some of the finest wide angle photo opportunities of the week.

During our surface interval, we were able to pull up alongside a beach where the local children came to play on the outriggers of our boat. Always the opportunists, our group took advantage of the fun to fill a few cards worth of images of the kids making faces into our dome ports.

At the end of the week, a big slideshow finale was organized in order to showcase everyone’s best images, and what a show it was! The quality of images improvement from the beginning of the week was very evident and everyone in attendance

remarked on the strong colours and composition of the photos. Stunning photos of nudibranches and clown fish were popular as were fantastic images of jawfish, frogfish, the wrecks, filter photos, and some funny “candid” photos of everyone throughout the week. The big end of week affair also marked the opportunity to hand out prizes from our generous sponsors: Aquatica, Magic Filters, PADI, Cressi Sub, Scuba Diver Australasia, uwphotoshop, Ikelite, and Think Tank Photo. Foregoing a competition, as it creates too competitive of an atmosphere, prizes were drawn from a hat instead. With much fanfare and bad jokes from Mike and Simon, everyone went home with more than one prize.

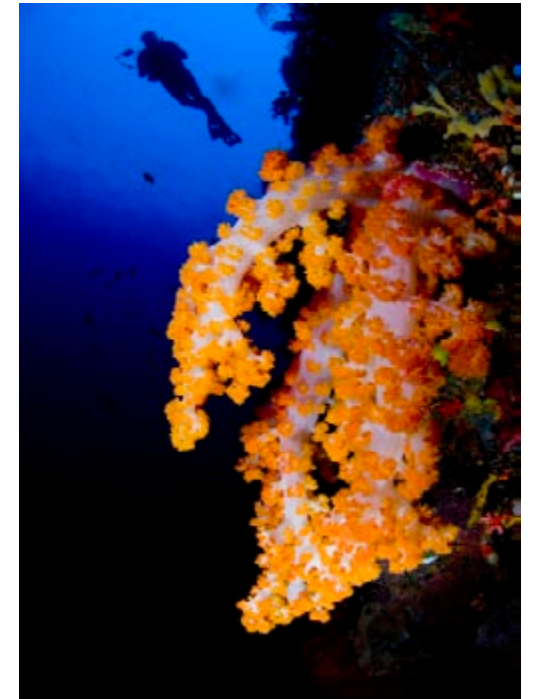
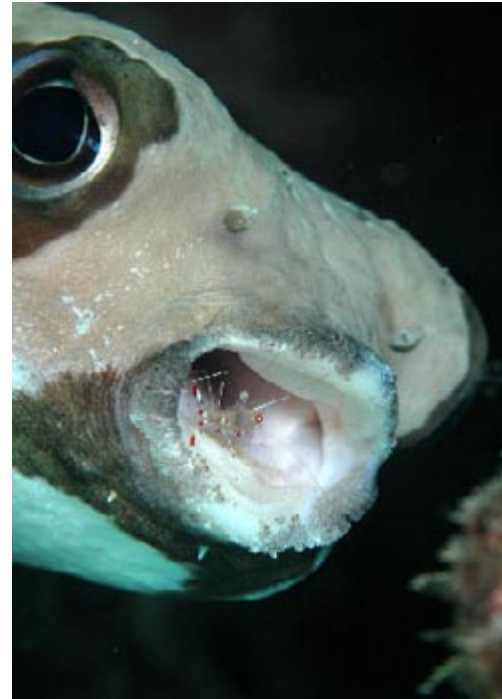
Overall it was a festive week with great diving, fantastic photography, good friends, good food, and some learning thrown in there as well! Thanks to all who attended and we look forward to returning in 2008.

Layang Layang Photo Shootout 2007

26 excited participants from all over the globe descended on the island of Layang Layang in Sabah, Malaysia from July 17-23rd for a 6 day extravaganza of camaraderie, photography, and spectacular diving. Judges and presenters for the week included Stephen Wong from Hong Kong, Dr Kurt Svrcula from Malaysia, Settimio Cipriani from Italy, and Mike Veitch from Yap. Participants enjoyed 3 to 4 dives per day on Layang's spectacular walls and enjoyed a never ending variety of food when not in the water. The weather could not have been better as there was nothing but bright blue sky and flat seas throughout the event. With so many participants taking part, the evenings were lively affairs with everyone gathering around the restaurant and bar areas for nightly presentations from the judges.

The diving in Layang Layang is varied and exciting. The island itself

is a small atoll situated 300km to the north of Kota Kinabalu surrounded by nothing but rich blue water. It is encircled by sheer dropoffs that start at 5 metres and plunge 2000 metres straight into the abyss. With such dramatic surroundings there was a feeling that anything could show up at anytime, and often it did! Many of the participants had close encounters with grey reef and white tip sharks, mobulas, massive dogtooth tuna, and beautiful scalloped hammerhead sharks! The reefs are covered in a variety of gorgonians, soft corals, and whip corals along the dropoffs, with an incredible variety of extremely healthy hard coral in the shallows. For anyone interested in macro photography, the jetty offered great photo opportunities in just 5 metres or less of water during the day or night. For those willing to ignore the schooling jacks and massive sea fans, a macro lens also came in handy on



(Top right) 1st place Macro Mr. Bradley Cox (Australia)

(Right) 2nd place Macro Ms. Takeko Taniguchi (Japan)

(Far right) 2nd place WA Ms. Leander Wiseman (Australia)