



The wreck of a WWII Float plane sits upside down on the bottom of a coral reef. still with unexploded cargo trapped within the bomber bay doors. Canon EOS 5D Mk111, Seacam Housing 15mm lens, 1/100, f8, ISO250

for its shifting currents and huge numbers of pelagic and reef fish gliding through the rapid currents feeding on the rich nutrients, I was told for other divers this was a must-see dive. Unfortunately, the tides were not cooperating the few times I dived there, but you could see by the way the channel was that an influx of ocean currents would bring in the large numbers of fish. I did however see a few sharks and eagle rays on the drop off.

There are several interesting wrecks in the region and very close to

the main town, including the Wreck of the Catalina, all that remains are the 2 main propeller engines and some of the wing and fuselage sitting isolated on a sandy bottom. The water is clear and the remains of the plane is fascinating to say the least.

A nice wreck that sits in less than 12 meters of water is a B5N Kate Bomber plane, still intact and very close to the coral reef. It was encompassed by a rich array of fish life and corals but surprisingly no over grown. Most of the dive sites are very close to each other so you can do



A leaf scorpion fish hides in plain site among the myriad of colourful corals. Canon EOS 5D Mk111, Seacam Housing 15mm lens, 1/200, f20 ISO200

a number of different wrecks in a day.

But after each day we ended up back at the beautiful resort on Lissenung Island. I think one of the biggest surprises about the Island, was the house reef. Once we discovered what it had to offer, we didn't venture to far from the island for the rest of our stay. The reef covers two, thirds of the island and is between several channels with moving currents, so the coral reef is very healthy and teaming with life. From the moment, you put your head underwater, you are surrounded by schools of fish and

intricate coral structures. On one small bommie just off the island you will find 3 different species of anemones and their inhabitants. You could easily spend hours circling this small structure. And at night even more life, anemone crabs, shrimp, crocodile fish and much more.

A favourite spot for me on the island was the lagoon where the local staff would wash the dishes. It seemed to be attracting small reef fish in the shallows who would frenzy to grab the morsels of food scraps. But in their flurry, they would also attract a



Grey Reef shark surrounded by a small school of trigger fish on the edge of the reef in the Witu Islands Canon EOS 5D MkIII, Seacam Housing 15mm lens, 1/200, f5, ISO500

good numbers of blacktip reef sharks. I literally would lie in the water as the locals fed the scraps to the fish and watch the sharks come in to be part of the action. A few bumps to the camera and brushing past my exposed white toes made me a little cautious but I persisted for many hours, very rarely coming out of the water with any decent photograph. Combined low visibility and frenzied sharks churning up the backscatter, it wasn't ideal conditions, but fun nonetheless.

PNG offers so much for divers and photographers, you are presented

with something new on each and every dive and it can be a sensory overload once you process it. But it is the diversity of what you can see in this part of the world that makes it so special. Blue water, pelagic schools of fish, plane & ship wrecks, muck diving, drop offs, coral gardens, sharks, turtles, the list just goes on. PNG just keeps surprising me and I will look to explore more of what it has to offer in the future.

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Dumaguete

Frogfish capital of the world

by Nigel Marsh and Helen Rose

There is something about frogfish that makes them irresistible as a photographic subject. It might be the way they walk on their hand-like fins, or the fascinating way they flick their lures to attract prey, or it may be because they look like a child's cute soft toy. Either way they are one of our favourite camera subjects and we can never go passed one without taking dozens of images.

We have been fortunate to encounter many species of frogfish at a diverse range of dive destinations throughout the Indo-Pacific region, but recently dived an area overloaded with these delightful creatures. A wonderful location that claims to be the frogfish capital of the world - Dumaguete in the Philippines.

Located on the island of Negros, Dumaguete has always been popular as a reef diving destination, with the coral reefs at nearby Apo Island a major attraction. However, in recent years, with the discovery of amazing muck sites along the coast south of Dumaguete, the area has also attracted divers looking for weird and wonderful critters. This has made the

area perfect for those that want a great dive holiday combo of reef and muck diving, and also means a wonderful range of subjects for underwater photographers.

There are numerous dive resorts at Dumaguete, most located around the town of Dauin, and for our stay we booked a week at one of the newer resorts in the area, Liquid Dumaguete. This wonderful resort has all the standard features, a pool, bar, restaurant and comfortable rooms. It also has a great dive centre offering daily boat and shore dives, and being a PADI 5 Star IDC Dive Resort, it is also a popular spot for people learning to dive or continuing their diver education.

Liquid Dumaguete is a wonderful dive resort at Dumaguete (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 18-300mm, ISO 400, 1/500, f11)

We were surprised by the number of baby painted frogfish we saw at Dumaguete (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f16)





A pretty warty frogfish captured mid-yawn (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f13)

After a morning flight from Manila and only a 30 minute drive to the resort, we quickly settled in our spacious room, setup our camera gear and were ready to dive. With a love of muck diving, and working on a book on the subject, we requested a few of the local muck sites to start our Dumaguete experience. Our first site was only five minutes from Liquid Dumaguete by boat, a lovely site called Bulak. The sloping sand at this site was a great place to observe and photograph garden eels, shrimp gobies, nudibranchs, anemones, razorfish and harlequin crabs. And

with 20m visibility and 29°C water, it was a great introduction to Dumaguete diving. No frogfish unfortunately, but our guide Rocky said we were visiting in the frogfish low season (November) and during the peak season (March to May) dozens are seen on most dives. He said we would still see plenty of frogfish, and he wasn't wrong.

In the afternoon we dived another interesting muck site called Poblacion, which also had pretty coral gardens. Here we photographed ghost pipefish, mantis shrimps, moray eels and even a turtle, but still no frogfish. Next up was San Miguel, and Rocky



A tiny baby hairy frogfish next to Helen's muck stick (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f13)

assured us we would see frogfish. The sandy slope at this classic muck site was occupied by cuttlefish, snake eels, waspfish, dragonets and sand divers.

We were beginning to think we wouldn't see any frogfish until Rocky pointed out a tiny orange spot on the sand. At first we thought this orange spot was just a piece of sponge, but getting very close we could see a tiny eye and hand-like fins. It was a minute painted frogfish, barely 4mm long!

Rocky then proceeded to pointed out several other tiny spots over the next half hour, a collection of miniscule hairy and painted frogfish

that varied in size from 2mm to 10mm. These were the smallest frogfish we had ever seen, and very difficult to photograph with a 60mm lens. After the dive Rocky promised we would see plenty of larger frogfish in the coming days.

Frogfish were far from our minds the next day as we joined Liquid Dumaguete for a day trip to Apo Island. Expecting clear water and pretty corals we got out the wide angle lens to explore this wonderful marine reserve. It takes around an hour to travel to Apo Island, so the trip includes three dives and lunch.



Green turtles are common at Apo Island and often found sleeping on the corals (Nikon D7200, Tokina 10-17mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f10)

Our first dive set the tone for some spectacular reef dives, jumping into the water at the northern end of the island at a site called Coconut Point. This site often gets washed by strong currents, so has rich corals and a multitude of fish. There was only a gentle current for our drift dive, but still no shortage of marine life.

Drifting around the coral canyons and coral gardens we saw large barrel sponges, beautiful gorgonians and feather stars everywhere. But the highlights were the prolific fish and numerous reptiles. Coconut Point has a healthy population of reef fish, including triggerfish, groupers, snappers, fusiliers and angelfish. We also saw schools of batfish, bigeye trevally and quite a few large mackerel. However, a special treat were several green and hawksbill turtles, and a good population of sea snakes. Swimming amongst the coral and fish we encountered several common banded sea kraits, but also saw four larger and rarer black-banded sea



A rare Mototi octopus at Bonnet's Corner. This male is displaying to a nearby female (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f13)

Giant frogfish are seen in many colours at Dumaguete (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f13)

kraits. These serpents kept our cameras busy.

On the other two dives at Apo Island we explored coral walls, caves and coral gardens at Chapel and Katipanan. While these sites didn't have the fabulous fish life of Coconut Point, they had lovely hard corals and an abundance of green turtles. At both sites we saw turtles resting, swimming and feeding. We also had fun photographing the resident giant frogfish at Chapel.

We may not have visited Dumaguete in the right season for frogfish, but we had timed our visit perfectly to explore a brilliant muck site called Bonnet's Corner. The dive crew had mentioned this muck site to us upon arrival, informing us it was 'going off with cephalopods'. On our third day we finally got to see what the fuss was all about.



Bonnet's Corner is a sandy rubble slope, and located on a point is often swept by currents. Within a minute of descending Rocky was showing us a wonderful wonderpus, this was quickly followed by a mantis shrimp, a dwarf lionfish, a baby painted frogfish and then we were very surprised to see a Mototi octopus. Closely related to the blue-ringed octopus this was only the second time we had seen one of these rare cephalopods. From there it just got better and better. Coconut octopus, snake eels,