



Flamboyant cuttlefish are abundant at Bonnet's Corner, as one guide said 'common as cockroaches' (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f13)



Wonderpus are always amazing to watch, and we encounter two at Bonnet's Corner (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f13)



Napoleon snake eels are another wonderful muck critter at Dumaguete (Nikon D7200, Nikkor 60mm, Ikelite Housing, Inon Z240 strobe, ISO 200, 1/100, f13)

pipefish, cockatoo waspfish, garden eels, cowfish, flamboyant cuttlefish, box crabs, razorfish and many other species. But the biggest surprise was seeing three more Mototi octopus, including a pair that looked like they were involved in a courtship ritual. To say this site was going off was an understatement, it was more on steroids!

We managed to dive this site three more times, and each time it seemed to get better and better. On each dive we photographed a great collection of cephalopods, including courting flamboyant cuttlefish, meandering coconut octopus, plus several greater blue-ringed octopus, a group of pharaoh's cuttlefish, another wonderpus and numerous small stumpy spined cuttlefish. The Mototi octopus were there on every dive, but we also encountered a number of rare algae octopus. This site must rate as the best cephalopod dive site in the world! However, the dive crew from Liquid Dumaguete did

inform us that octopus and cuttlefish are only seen in large numbers from October to December, which is possibly the breeding season from the mating behaviour we witnessed.

While Bonnet's Corner was the highlight of the trip, every muck site we explored at Dumaguete had something special and a good population of frogfish as promised. At Sahara we explored two different areas of this large site, which also has corals and artificial reefs. At Sahara Shallow we photographed harlequin ghost pipefish, thorny seahorses, snake eels and a painted frogfish. While at Sahara Deep we watched the antics of a family of convict blennies, a strange eel-like blenny that sucks the skin of its young to receive nourishment. This site also had a resident painted frogfish.

On the coral and sand at Masaplod North our cameras focused on a xeno crab, candy crabs, leaf scorpionfish and a baby seahorse on a sea pen.

This site was also home to a lovely orange painted frogfish and a pretty warty frogfish. We have often waited for ten minutes or more to capture the moment when a frogfish yawns, and more often than not ended up disappointed. But we got very lucky at Masaplod North when the warty frogfish yawned as soon as we started taking images. After dark San Miguel really put on a show with coconut octopus, bigfin reef squid, snake eels, nudibranchs and bobtail squid. However the biggest surprise on this night dive was when we found a rare freckled frogfish.

At Pyramids we photographed a giant frogfish, as well as a rhino shrimp, several moray eels, Pegasus sea moths and many nudibranchs. We also saw several giant frogfish at Ginamaan Point, plus mantis shrimps, cowries, snake eels and octopus.

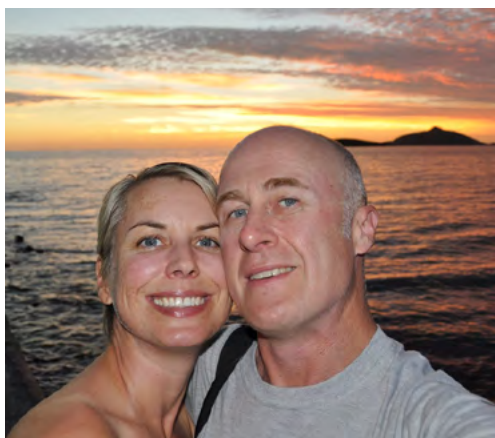
To balance out the muck diving we also did a return trip to Apo Island. We couldn't miss a

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



chance to dive Coconut Point again, and it was just as good the second time around. We then explored a very unusual sandy slope at Largahan. Swimming over the grey sand we saw a few bentstick pipefish, garden eels and panda anemonefish, but the most interesting aspect of this site was the volcanic bubbles trickling through the sand. Our final dive at Apo Island found us exploring the pretty coral gardens at Rock Point West. Here we saw trevally, mackerel and a host of reef fish, but a hawksbill turtle munching on the coral stole the show.

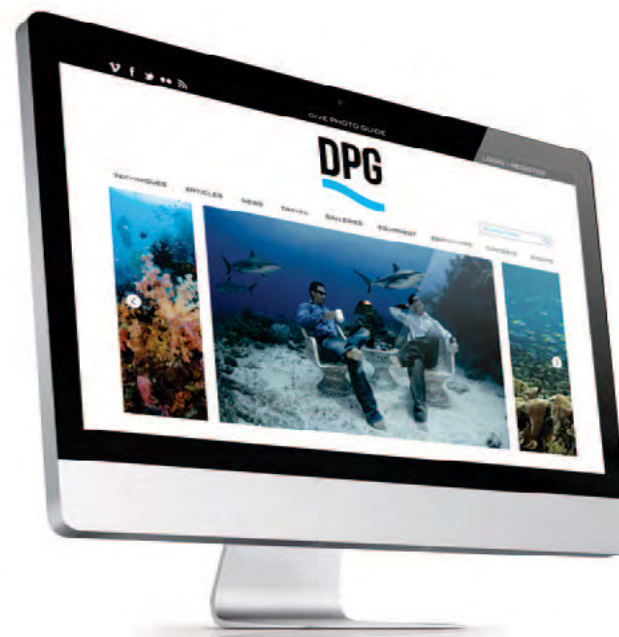
We had a wonderful week at Dumaguete, exploring a great combination of muck and reef sites and photographed many wonderful critters. And even visiting in the frogfish off season, we saw and photographed more frogfish at Dumaguete than we have seen at any other dive destination.



Nigel Marsh and Helen Rose
www.nigelmarshphotography.com

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Down Mexico Way

by Dr Alex Tattersall

Four years seem to have flown by since we last had the opportunity to head to Mexico, and the magical lure of turquoise seas, barking (if not slightly fishy) sealions and refried bean burritos came flooding back as we boarded our plane from Mexico City to Cabo St Lucas, near the tip of the Baja California Peninsular on the West coast of Mexico.

Our previous trip had taken us to the vibrant and metropolitan city of La Paz and we were keen to return but decided to have a quick stop off in the sleepy, dusty little town of Cabo Pulmo. From here, we spent three days exploring the Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park which offers some spectacular diving, not least the resident school of horse-eye jacks for which the area has become increasingly well-known, particularly among photographers.

Cabo Pulmo is located some 1.5 hours East of the airport Cabo San Lucas. We originally looked into car hire but decided to have a taxi arranged for us by our very competent hosts at Cortez Expeditions, a La Paz based company run by the hugely enthusiastic Luke Inman, a British expat. We were picked up by a local taxi and delivered to our destination at a cost of US\$150. Adding this to the US\$200 we later paid for a taxi two hours North to the city of La Paz, this worked out to be about 2/3 of the price of car hire for the same period, but did mean we were not able to explore the local area as freely. That suited us though as we were there to dive!

Our diving was arranged by Cortez



A powerful female sealion cuts through the water at los Isolotes. Canon G7X2, Nauticam housing, Nauticam WWL-1, F8, 1/100, ISO 400

Expeditions using Dive Cabo, one of several dive operations working out of Cabo Pulmo. The marine park is I believe quite unique in that boats have to book time slots for their divers to enter and leave the water at certain sites in order to prevent diver congestion and environment pressure on the precious reefs. A result of this is that dive times are limited to 45-50 minutes which, as a photographer, naturally disappointed me at first, until we discovered that most of the sites were at

about 20 metres depth and there was no supply of nitrox or large tanks. Whilst the dive times were short, the dives themselves ranged from excellent to spectacular, and we never felt shortchanged to be assisting in an impressively functioning reef and fauna preservation scheme. There is also a rotation of sites which are closed on certain days, so ideally to do the area justice and explore more of the marine park, the three days we spent were not really enough. Photographically, I could happily spend a



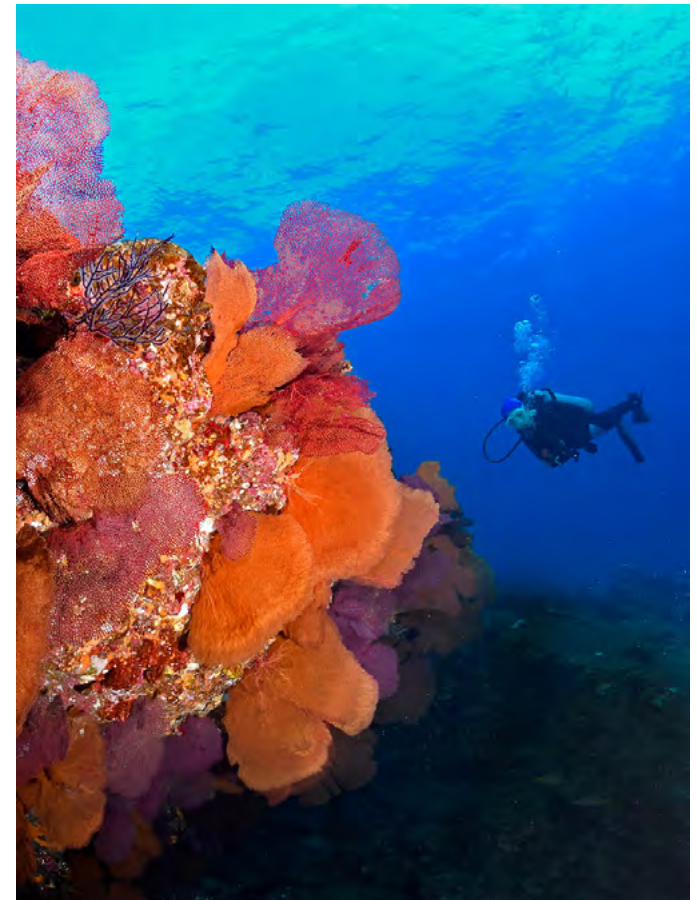
The huge resident school of horse eye Jacks in Cabo Pulmo - Nikon D500, Nauticam housing, 200mm Zen dome, Tokina 10-17, F13, 1/100, ISO 400

week or more in the area.

Whilst I remember, there are no banks or ATMs in Cabo Pulmo, it is quite remote, and internet services are sporadic. As the town has a captive audience of divers, food and drinks are relatively pricey, as is the diving at approximately US\$50-\$55 per dive. It is however a place which should go on your bucket list for the pristineness of the reefs and the wildlife that lives thereupon.

Cabo Pulmo Diving

The jewel in the crown of the Cabo Pulmo area for me was the enormous school of docile horse-eye jacks, spiralling from a 20 metre sandy bottom up to the water surface. Boatmen can easily locate the school from the surface as it appears as a huge dark patch. As you drop in on the school, even if smaller schools have split off from the main group, it is still a staggeringly impressive sight to behold. Each of the many thousands of fish is a metre long



Incredible colours on the reefs of Cabo Pulmo National Park - Nikon D500, Nauticam housing with 140mm mini dome, Tokina 10-17, F11, 1/80, ISO 400

with huge eyes that watch you placidly as you swim in and out of the group. Below the school you can find large rays buried in the sand and groups of black and white pufferfish feeding from the 'waste products' of the school. The water when we were there (end of November) was a perfect rich blue at an average temperature of 27 degrees, although the whole area does see a significant change in water temperature throughout the year (from about 18 degrees to 29 degrees around the beginning



A female Sealion hareem waiting to be photographed, Nikon D500, Nauticam housing, 140mm minidome, Tokina 10-17, F13, 1/80, ISO 640

of November). This water temperature variation results in transient pelagic Cetaceans (Whales and Dolphins) and Elasmobranchii (Sharks and Rays) moving through the region at various times of year. November is prime time for bull sharks which were spotted at a distance by our group on one of the other popular sites, the La Esperanza wreck.

The La Esperanza Wreck is relatively small and scattered but is host to numerous schools of snapper species and smaller reef fish. It is a popular

site for bull sharks during the October/November season and has some impressive colourful sponge and coral growth. Lots of little blennies dart in and out of holes in the wreckage and surrounding rocks. For soft coral growth however, there are two excellent sites to see large numbers of colourful gorgonian fans, 'El Bajo' and 'El Isolote'.

In our limited time in Cabo Pulmo, we also dived two reef sites, the first, El Bajo, a deep reef of rocky terrain and mild current, located near the huge



Longnose Hawkfish, macro subjects around La Paz, Nikon D500, Nauticam housing, 105mm VR macro, F22, 1/200, ISO 400

school of jacks. Our slight drift took us past rays, eels, small schools of porkfish, snapper, pufferfish, and the rocky topography was littered with soft and hard corals with small gorgonian fans ranging from deep red, through bright purple, to light pink growing in the cracks between the rocks. The



A relaxed female sealion - Nikon D500, Nauticam housing with 140mm mini dome, Tokina 10-17, F11, 1/200, ISO 400

second site was a pinnacle called El Isolote, one side completely encrusted with large colourful gorgonian fans. With the marine protection scheme in place, everything seemed pristine and was a joy to behold. After three days though, we packed up our cameras and dive gear, hopped into a taxi and spent two hours on the road through some breathtaking scenery to the buzzing and vibrant city of La Paz.

La Paz

We were met by our host, Luke Inman of Cortez Expeditions, who had just returned from the DEMA

dive show in Las Vegas. In spite of having spent 4 days at the show, his boundless enthusiasm saw him up at 6am preparing his fully equipped 26ft 'Superpanga' custom dive boat, 'Monkey Business', to take us for our first trip out to los Isolotes sealion colony, a one hour run North of the jetty in La Paz. As we approached the small outcrop, we caught a familiar waft of fishiness and then our ears started picking up the sounds of barking echoing through the crevices and cracks in the rocky outcrop.

The excitement mounted as we caught sight of some of the many



Horseeye Jacks at Cabo Pulmo - Nikon D500, Nauticam housing with 140mm mini dome, Tokina 10-17, F16, 1/10, ISO 100

sealions basking on the rocks under the blue sky and dazzling Mexican sun. In we jumped and knew at once that we were there during the right season as groups of nibbly little pups at once set about us, nibbling our BCD straps, fins, fin straps, masks, hoods, cameras, strobes, indeed anything 'nibblable' they could find! It is without doubt among the most magical of interactions you can ever treat yourself to and we instantly fell in love with the entire colony once again.

The photo possibilities with the sealions are endless although

unless they are basking in the water, they do move very quickly, testing your reflexes as a photographer. The islands has small caves that you can go into and find yourself surrounded by nibbling pups, whilst adults males and females cruise by gracefully, less curious, occasionally letting out a warning bark which rumbles through the water like a bass guitar. With some of the larger males weighing in at more than 300kg, we are to be thankful that they are not as 'nibbly' as their pups.

Without doubt, you could spend a month in the water with the