

Philippines trip 30th Sept – 8th Oct 2005

Friday morning saw myself and Malcolm driving to Heathrow for the flight to Schipol airport in Amsterdam for our connecting flight to Manilla. We met Jason and Mike at the airport, they just happened to be checking in at the desk next to ours. Malcolm and I had to pay for extra baggage allowance as we were quite a bit over due to taking camera kit, but it wasn't as much as I had expected. It was a different story on the way home. A word of warning to anyone thinking of flying KLM – they are very strict on baggage allowance, but they will allow an extra 15Kg for 80euros. I wasn't really looking forward to the flight from Amsterdam but the in-flight entertainment system helped pass the time. You could choose from an extensive choice of films and TV programmes to watch whenever you fancied it, on your personal video screen and select music to listen to from a very varied selection to suit all tastes. Even mine!

On arriving in Manilla we went to a hotel for one night before an early start next morning for a short flight to the island of Busuanga, where we were to spend the week at Seadive Resort in the main town of Coron. At the hotel that evening we were introduced to the rest of the group we would be diving with for the week. Most were friends of Jason from a dive centre in Thailand, although 2 of them were actually from Swindon. The flight to Busuanga was on a small twin-prop plane, seating 19 passengers, which was quite an experience.



The Seadive Centre has everything you need, with dive centre, accommodation, restaurant and bar all very well set out and the whole building is built on stilts over the water. The week we were there, the restaurant was being refurbished and not in use so all meals were served in the bar. The food and drink are very cheap; you can have a 3 course meal for around £2.50 - £3.00. Breakfasts were thrown in free. We didn't spend much money that week!

The dive centre has its own boat but for the first part of the week we were there the boat was out of commission, waiting for spare parts, so they had to hire boats. They are all built along the same basic design, long and narrow with

stabiliser bars on either side. You are out on the boat all day and do 3 dives a day. A midday meal is provided aboard which was usually very tasty, if a bit samey every day. One day we had to be driven to the other side of the island to do the intended dives and the boat we had that was out for its maiden voyage. Luckily it fared better than the Titanic.



The diving was very interesting; even if the visibility wasn't anything to shout about - no better than an average day in Lyme bay but a fair bit warmer. Most of the dives were in 28-29°C. The majority of the dives were on Japanese shipwrecks. They were trying to hide around the Philippine Islands when they were attacked by an American task force on 24th September 1944. They all sank the same day or just a few days later.

The wrecks we dived were:- The Akitsushima, a seaplane tender; Taiei Maru, an oil tanker; Kyukozon Maru, a freighter; Irako, a refrigerated provision ship and Olympia Maru, another freighter. We also dived a barge on a shallow slope. All of the wrecks are easily penetrated although Malcolm and I only went in a couple, preferring to stay outside photographing and videoing. There was really nothing to see inside most of them although one had the remains of an officer's car with white walled tyres. Mike thought he had found a porthole on one dive but it turned out to be a pan lid. One of the non-wreck dives we did was Cathedral cave; this is a small tunnel at around 10 metres which opens up into a large chamber. Ascending inside the chamber, you surface into an air space which is fed by fresh air so it is safe to breath without regulators. There are some impressive stalactites hanging from the ceiling. There is also another tunnel inside to a smaller chamber. Most divers went through but Malcolm I wimped out.



The same day we dived Barracuda Lake, apparently so named because there used to be a barracuda in residence but it has since disappeared. This is a fairly strenuous exercise with dive kit. You have to jump off the boat, paddle across to the island and then do a bit of rock climbing to get to the entrance to the lake. It starts off ok because wooden stairs have been erected but they don't go very far up. Then it is just rocks which are fairly steep and pretty sharp. You really need to wear gloves. The lake itself is very interesting. There is no life to speak of except very small shell creatures on the rocks. The sediment on the bottom is heavy and doesn't create clouds when disturbed. You can put your hand in, move it about and a large area around it just wiggles about, a bit like jelly. As you go deeper the water gets warmer. This is due to the deeper water containing a lot of limestone salts which create heat. The water was 28°C at the surface but we measured a maximum of 36°C at the deepest depth. The water also changes from salt water to fresh water and you seem to be permanently passing through thermoclines and haloclines. The climb was hard work but it was certainly worth it for the experience.



Although the Philippines are a long way to go for a week we had a great time with a good bunch of divers and the locals were very friendly. I would certainly go again and would recommend it, but don't go in the rainy season and you can expect better visibility.

Report by Paul Cole