



WOW Philippines

A recurrent series of articles about the Philippines and its people, places, events and heritage — presented by the **Filipino American Association of Greater Columbia, SC**



CEBU DIVING In Love with Moalboal and Oslob

In February 2012, I returned to Cebu after my first trip to it in 2003. Cebu is nicknamed the *Queen City of the South* and is home to the Mactan International Airport — the Cebu Pacific Airlines hub. The airport has provided many international visitors a way to enter the country and bypass the crowded megacity of Metro Manila, which consists of 16 cities and has a population of at least 20 million people. (*A megacity is often defined as a metropolitan area of at least 10 million.*)

For the second time in a few years, a Philippine dive trip I was signed up for was cancelled. I quickly scrambled to find an alternate location. I wanted to dive in the Visayas and was choosing between Bohol and Cebu. I decided that going to both would be time-consuming given the ferry schedules. Therefore, I chose **Moalboal** in Cebu, not just because it calls itself the *Diving Paradise of Cebu* (visit the official web site of the municipality of Cebu at <http://moalboal.gov.ph> for more information.) but because of its proximity to Oslob.

Oslob is just further south of Moalboal. A few whale sharks in Oslob had just, a few months before my arrival, started to attract snorkelers and divers. I was determined to see the whale sharks in nature. I also almost cancelled the trip to Moalboal because of the 6.8 earthquake in Negros that occurred just days before my scheduled arrival. The island of Negros is visible from Moalboal in Cebu. Tañon Strait separates Negros and Cebu.

I stayed at Love's Beach and Dive Resort (<http://www.lovesbeachresort.com>) because of its very convenient setup. I was in room #3 and from my door, I saw the swimming pool, the restaurant, the shore, and the dive center. I could be at any of these places in less than a minute from my room. The owners of the resort are Elvie and Tata Nacar. Elvie's name sounds like LV and she decided to put the O and E to form LOVE; hence the resort's name.



View of Negros from Moalboal after the 6.8 Earthquake

The white streaks on the mountains are reportedly from the landslides that occurred after the earthquake.

Photo by I.C.Go

Elvie's guests are international and many are repeat visitors. Such visitors often become her good friends. Love's has a home-like atmosphere, which I very much like. Its location is somewhat more secluded relative to the other resorts on Panagsama Beach. When I visited, there were guests from Belgium, Germany, Canada, Ukraine, Russia, and the U.S.A. Half the time I dove with the Germans and the other half I dove with the French-speaking Belgians. I also found it serendipitous that Frank from Germany ran into his neighbors from the same city in Germany a few days before his departure. It is a small world indeed.



Blue-Ringed Octopus

This is one of the most venomous marine animals in existence in spite of its relatively diminutive size of 5-8 inches.

Photo by Frank Möhlenbrink

The highlights of my dive trip included seeing many green turtles in the area. It was interesting to see a very big frogfish camouflaged amidst the coral. I saw a blue-ringed octopus, which is often seen at night but which we saw in the day time. On a night dive, we saw many beautiful mandarin fish among the staghorn coral.

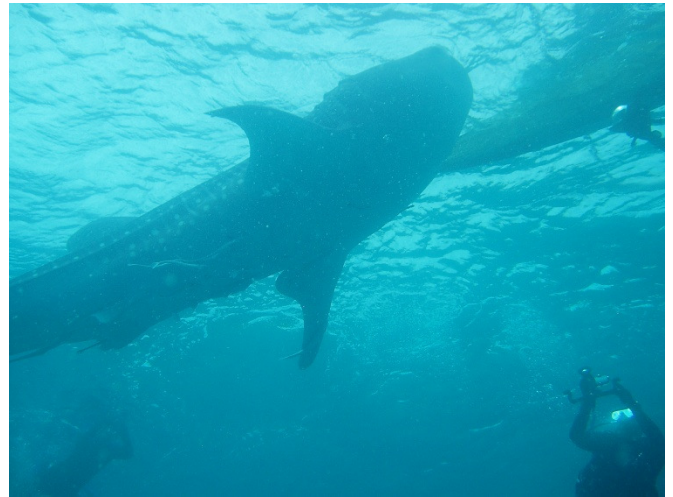
Nearby is **Pescador Island** (*Pescador means fisherman in Spanish*). True to its name, the island still harbors many fish even though large schools of fish have been reduced in size over time. There were also observations that a large

school of sardines in the area had disappeared after a very destructive typhoon. Even with signs of coral destruction by typhoons, run-off, and pollution, Moalboal still has great diving!

I took a side trip to Oslob with the Belgians to dive with the whale sharks. Oslob is approximately two hours away from Moalboal by car. The locals in their *bangkas* (Philippine-style outrigger boats) feed the whale sharks. During the feeding, the whale sharks stay in the area, which enables the snorkelers and divers to see the sharks up close.

Filipinos can be proud of the Philippines' underwater beauty. The Philippine scuba diving industry attracts many serious divers worldwide because of its world-class dive spots, like those I went diving with:

- **Walter Schmidt** and **Renate Lipp** from Germany have each been diving for over 25 years and have gone diving in places such as the Maldiv Islands, Thailand, Turkey, Germany, Madeira, and Gozo Island in Malta.
- **Frank Möhlenbrink** from Germany has been diving since 2000 and has dived in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Red Sea, and Egypt. This was his second dive trip to the Philippines. This year he planned a 6-week dive trip, while last year he was also in the Philippines (Padre Burgos, Southern Leyte) on a 4-week dive trip.
- **Benoît Baudry** from Belgium is a CEDIP Dive Instructor who's been diving since 2000. He has nearly 200 dives in Moalboal alone after over 10 visits to the Philippines. He's gone diving in the Red Sea, Malaysia, Indonesia, North Sea, Sulu Sea, and The Visayas.



Whale Shark

Photo by **Walter Schmidt** and **Renate Lipp**

Many of my American friends wish they could dive in the Philippines. They know I'm spoiled when I dive in the Philippines. Many tourists also remark on how friendly and warm the Filipinos are. It is a great pleasure for them to visit the Philippines. ❖



Frog Fish

Can you recognize the camouflaged frog fish positioned tailside up in the picture?

Photo by **Walter Schmidt** and **Renate Lipp**



Mandarin Fish

Photo by **Walter Schmidt** and **Renate Lipp**

