

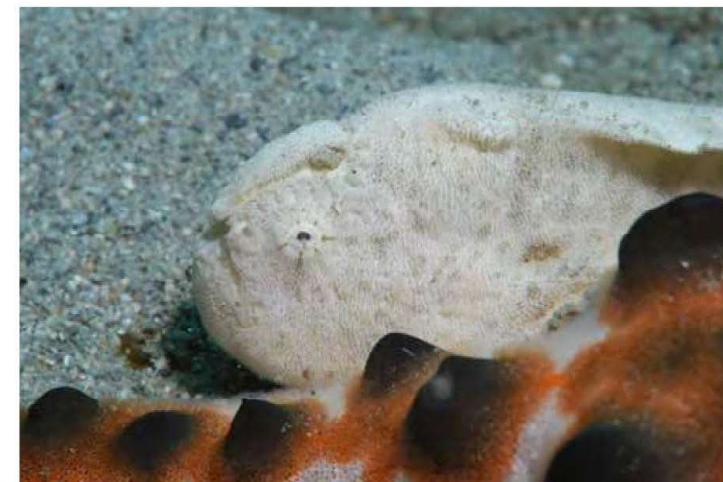
Different In Anda

by Nigel Marsh

Anda is a new destination in the Philippines that few divers have heard about. Located on the east coast of Bohol, Anda has only been accessible to divers for the last few years with the building of several dive resorts in this remote area. Anda has quickly built up a reputation as a great area to see macro critters on its wonderful reef and muck sites. So, when I recently visited the area, I thought it was time to do something a little different photographically – I left the wide-angle lens and dome port at home.

For our stay we booked into the Magic Oceans Dive Resort for a five-night package. Anda is located a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the main airport on Bohol at Tagbilaran. The drive to the resort is very scenic, following the coast road through many small towns. We had heard the resort was quite remote, and the final drive down a narrow dirt track confirmed this. The nearest town with bars and restaurants is many miles away, so the resort includes all meals as part of a package.

Greeted by the very friendly staff, we had time for a quick look around the resort before getting ready for the afternoon dive. The resort has 16 bungalows set around a large pool with fabulous gardens that are home to birds, lizards and crabs. Lush jungle surrounds the resort, and the staff informed us that monkeys are sometimes spotted in the trees. At the centre of the resort is a pavilion for dining and lounging, with a day spa nearby. The well-appointed dive centre is not far from the water front, with a jetty leading to the three banka dive



Green Turtle at Turtle Point - 1/100, f8, ISO 200, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing with Kraken Wet Lens and Inon Z330 Strobe

Hairy Frogfish at Larry's Corner - 1/125, f22, ISO 200, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing and Inon Z330 Strobe

Mimic Octopus at Larry's Corner - 1/125, f13, ISO 200, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing and Inon Z330 Strobe

boats the crew use.

We assembled our dive gear and camera gear, then headed down to the dive shop for our first dive. Now I may have left the wide-angle lens and dome port at home, but not wanted to miss out on larger marine life I had packed a new wet lens instead – a Kraken Wide Angle Conversion Lens KRL-09S.

This amazing lens can be added in front of a 60mm macro lens, or any equivalent lens, to instantly change your macro lens to a wide-angle lens (Nauticam make a similar wet lens that is a little more expensive). The Kraken lens is a very solid build, and quite heavy, clocking in at 2kg. However, with internal buoyancy it only weights 212g underwater. Its optics include seven elements, six of which are glass, and finished with a polycarbonate resin dome (which Kraken say can be buffed or replaced if damaged). The lens has a M67 mounting thread, so can be attached to a flat port with that feature. It can be used with full frame, APSC or M4/3 cameras, with each giving a different angle of view. With a full frame camera, it changes the field of view from 39.7° of the 60mm lens to 154.8°.

I have used this wonderful Kraken lens a few times at home in Australia, and got some great results, shooting everything from small sharks to manta rays, so was keen to give it a go at Anda. My only problem with the Kraken lens is the attachment to my Isotta housing. Kraken don't make a flip for the lens, so I tried using a Saga flip which is really designed for a lighter macro lens, but found it very flimsy, even flipping down when shooting macro. So currently I have the lens screwed to a bracket on my strobe arm and screw it to the port when required. Not the best setup, but better than nothing.

For our first dive our local guide Lee Ann suggested Turtle Point, a reef dive with critters



Kraken wide-angle wet lens fitted to my Isotta Housing



Oriental Bluespotted Maskray at Lamanok Island - 1/125, f13, ISO 200, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing with Kraken Wet Lens and Inon Z330 Strobe



Zebra Moray on the House Reef - 1/125, f16, ISO 200, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing and Inon Z330 Strobe

One of the colourful nudibranchs seen at Anda - 1/125, f16, ISO 200, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing and Inon Z330 Strobe



and turtles, perfect for the 60mm and Kraken lens combo. This site, which is right next to the resort House Reef, is typical of the area, with coral gardens in the shallows, then a colourful wall dropping to 25m. In the coral gardens we spotted a wonderful assortment of reef fishes, plus shrimp fish and peacock mantis shrimps. The wall itself was covered in the most beautiful corals – spikey soft corals, sea whips, sponges, gorgonians and a huge variety of colourful featherstars.

I enjoy shooting fish portraits with my 60mm



Giant Frogfish at Birhen Point - 1/125, f16, ISO 400, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing with Kraken Wet Lens and Inon Z330 Strobe

macro lens, so found no shortage of subjects with angelfish, butterflyfish, tobies, rock cods and several varieties of anemonefish. Lee Ann also pointed out nudibranchs, morays and a gorgeous warty frogfish, all great subjects for my macro lens. After drifting along the wall for forty minutes we headed into the shallows and turtle territory. We quickly encountered over a dozen turtles, both green and hawksbill. I first shot a few head shots with the macro lens, then attached the Kraken lens for some full body shots of these friendly turtles, capturing a good variety of

images.

The dive crew from Magic Oceans Dive Resort have around thirty dive sites in the area. On a typical day they run a double dive in the morning and a single dive in the afternoon, and either a twilight or night dive depending on demand. With three dive boats they also keep the numbers on each boat to a manageable number, so the dive sites are never crowded. They are also a very photographer friendly resort, with a spacious area for cameras on each boat, and individual camera prep areas in the dive centre.



Leopard Shrimp at Lamayag Point - 1/125, f20, ISO 200, Nikon D500 with 60mm lens, Isotta Housing and Inon Z330 Strobe

The next morning it was time for muck diving at J Edens Place. This sandy slope was full of great critters, so the Kraken lens didn't get a look in. For over 70 minutes Lee Ann found us critter after critter – warty frogfish, robust ghostpipefish, snake eels, shrimp gobies, scorpionfish, pipefish and morays.

After a morning tea of fresh fruits, we then dived another reef wall at Birhen Point. This was another pretty wall, but also with a sandy slope at its base where thousands of Barnes garden eels were swaying. The macro critters included a Bargibant's pygmy

seahorse, nudibranchs and more morays. While I attached the Kraken lens to photograph a large giant frogfish.

Over the next few days we dived a wonderful balance of reef and muck sites, and quite a few sites had both environments. Dapdap was a great muck site where we saw cowfish, frogfish, pipefish, snake eels, oriental flying gurnards and a rare adult convict blenny. Larry's Corner was another brilliant muck site with mimic octopus, wonderpus, hairy frogfish, pipefish, cuttlefish and mantis shrimps.

The reef dives at Pygmy House and Mandarin Garden had lovely corals, more turtles, a good collection of nudibranchs and even muck critters like Pegasus sea moths and fingered dragonets. The House Reef was a great twilight dive to see the mating antics of dozens of splendid mandarin fish. However, this site was also a good spot for critters with cuttlefish, hermit crabs, flatworms, harlequin shrimps and even a zebra moray.

My favourite reef dive was at Lamayag Point, as I finally got to see a special critter I have always wanted to see and photograph, a leopard shrimp. These highly camouflaged small shrimps only live on tiger anemones, and this site has plenty attached to the sea whips. It took Lee Ann almost five minutes to locate the tiny critter, but it was worth the wait to see this spectacular and rare shrimp.

For most of these dives I was happy to concentrate on macro with the abundance of small subjects. However, the Kraken lens got its best workout at Lamanok Island. This special dive site has a little bit of everything – coral gardens, overhangs and crevices, a coral wall and lots of sand for muck critters. I had the Kraken lens on and off half a dozen times, going from flamboyant cuttlefish to oriental bluespotted maskrays, then robust ghostpipefish to giant frogfish. I also photographed

spindle cowries, murex shells, nudibranchs, boxfish, morays and mantis shrimps.

I had a wonderful time at Anda with Magic Oceans Dive Resort, the diving was superb and so was the resort and its very friendly and helpful staff. I am sure more and more divers will discover Anda over the next few years, but with its remote location making it a little harder to get to, I hope it remains a little undiscovered gem.

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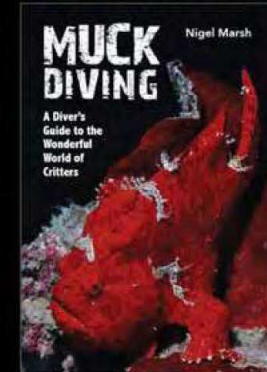
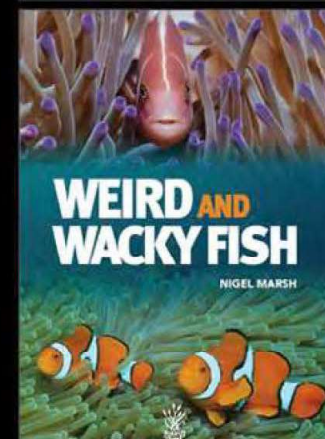
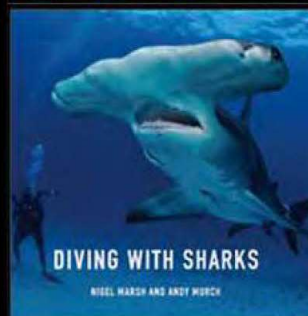
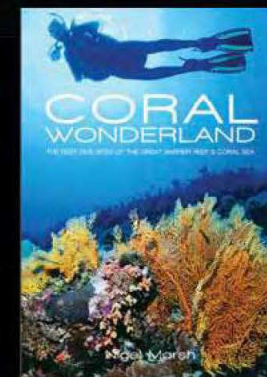
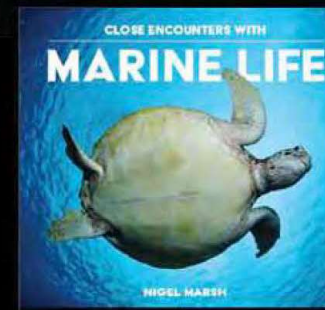
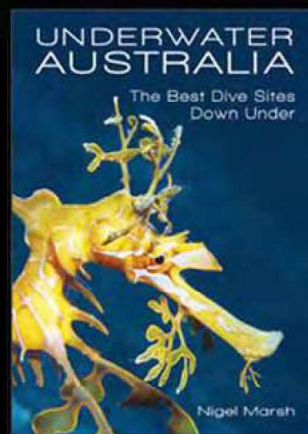
For more information about Magic Oceans Dive Resort visit –
www.magicoceans.online



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Nigel Marsh is an Australian photojournalist, underwater photographer and author. Working with New Holland publishers, Nigel has produced a number of guide books for divers and snorkelers, and also a series of children's books with marine related themes.



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