



Simply **MAGIC!**

:: images and text by SE Experiences KEN HOPPEN

Located on the south-eastern corner of the Philippine Island of Bohol, there is a resort that takes things to a new level. Magic Oceans takes some getting to, but it's well and truly worth it!

After a ten-hour flight to Manila from Australia, an hour and a half flight back to Bohol, assorted stopover times, and a two-hour car drive from the airport, our little group expected nothing more than to be poured into our rooms at our 11pm arrival time. However, the staff at Magic Oceans were to prove for the first time, and not the last, that they are in a league of their own! We were promptly sat down to a three-course meal, which we were definitely not expecting, but on starting found we were really appreciative of! The entire kitchen staff, waitresses, administration and half the dive staff were all still up to greet us and make sure our stay started well.

The resort is centred around its own swimming pool, with most of the rooms facing the pool, with those that don't facing the ocean. A large bar leads towards the spacious eating area, and only ten metres on from there is the dive centre. After a sleep in and a morning gathering dive gear and setting up cameras, we ventured down to the water to start the week's diving. We had managed to cop the tail end of a hurricane that was crossing into China, so the weather conditions for the first few days of our trip were a little on the windy side, dropping the viz a little and making boarding the boat from the jetty a little tricky. That didn't stop us though!

The diving at Magic Oceans is very diverse. There is a wide range of wall diving sites, backed up by some sandy slopes and some true muck dives thrown in. Most are less than a ten minute trip from the jetty by boat, the most about half an hour. We started with a shore dive from the jetty, where a short swim took us past two turtles to a shallow wall. Nice start!



A grey norse god Nudibranch was one of the more interesting nudibranchs we saw.



Lamark's angelfish is a common sight on the wall dives around Magic Oceans.

Close to the resort are Turtle Point and Magic Point, two wall dives that offer different vistas. Magic Point has a lot of sea whips, with zebra anemones prominent. Leopard shrimps are commonly sighted here, though no luck on that front for me this time. We did have a wide variety of xeno crabs and shrimp, with a plethora of colourful fish trying to obscure the reef wall. Turtle Point lived up to its name, with eleven turtles sighted on the wall dropoff.

Seahorse Point brought gorgonian fans full of pygmy seahorses, often several to a fan. Mostly Bargibanti, with some Denise's, all pygmy seahorses are a special find.

The weather nearly defeated us for a couple of days, and we had to take a car for a half-hour drive eastward to Lamanok Point to pick up the banca boat and dive from

this new location. The diving from here was primarily muck diving, with fantastically coloured and large nudibranchs taking centre stage until we came to one dive site in particular. Larry's Corner is a muck dive not to be missed.

We did two dives here. The first one was notable for the number of wonderpus found. Six different individuals on the one dive makes this a wonderpus hot-spot in my opinion. One was easily the smallest I have ever seen, with a head less than 5m in length. It didn't hand around long, and dove straight into the sand soon after it realized it was noticed. Two mimic octopus were also sighted on this dive, just not by me unfortunately. Swimming to catch up to my buddy I noticed a strange sight. A wonderpus was standing virtually straight up, looking a lot like some of the seagrass



Wonderpus are a great find at any time, six in one dive however will take some beating!



A three spot angelfish pauses to look at me.



A larger female tomato clownfish poses with the smaller male.



Most of the turtles in the area that we sighted were green turtles, with an occasional hawksbill thrown in.

structures in the area, and was happy to pose for a series of shots before lowering itself back onto the sand. I can only assume that it was surveying the area to see what was around, but I've never heard of this behaviour before or seen it in any octopus species. Not to be outdone, an unidentified sole, pretending to be a toxic nudibranch made a very welcome appearance. This was a fish I never thought I'd find, so to see one was something special.

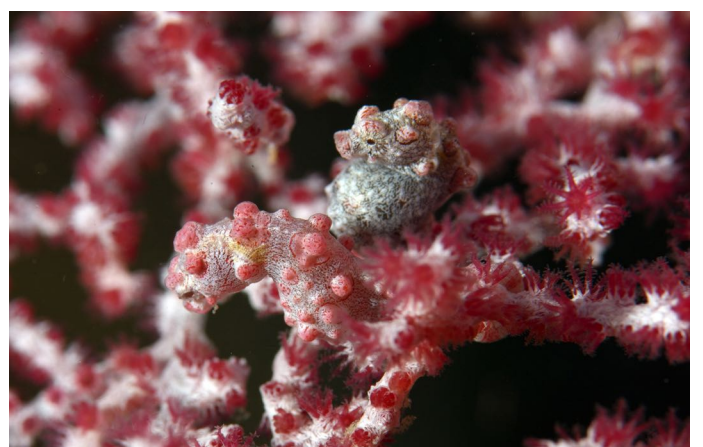
An hour's surface interval saw us dive in exactly the same spot for a completely different experience. No octopus at all this time. Small thorny seahorses stole the show, as did a zebra crab on a small sea urchin. A small rocky bommie in the middle of the sand desert proved to have a wealth of critters on it, from a large blenny that wasn't afraid to show its face, to both juvenile and mature dwarf lionfish, Djibouti shrimp, and quite a few goldspotted sweetlips. Sleeper gobies were out in force, as was a leatherjacket pretending it was a leaf, and a harlequin snake eel that was far less shy than most.

One of our days here was spent on a trip around the southern parts of the island. Whilst here there are many things to see and the Chocolate Mountains are top of the list. We dropped in on a tarsier rehabilitation facility to see these small primates, and also to a long-tailed macaque sanctuary. For the more adventurous there was the opportunity to zip line across a canyon and back, as well as spending an hour on quad bikes zooming around a large reserve. There is plenty to do for non-divers here too!

Whale sharks are on the agenda here too. They are often seen on the wall dives here, passing as the divers complete their daily dives. Down the coast at Tagbilaran there is a whale shark encounter that works the same as that in



The colorful nudibranch is a common sight in this area.





Some of our group enjoying lunch on a river cruise in Bohol.
 Left : A beautifully patterned warty frogfish hides in a nook on a wall.

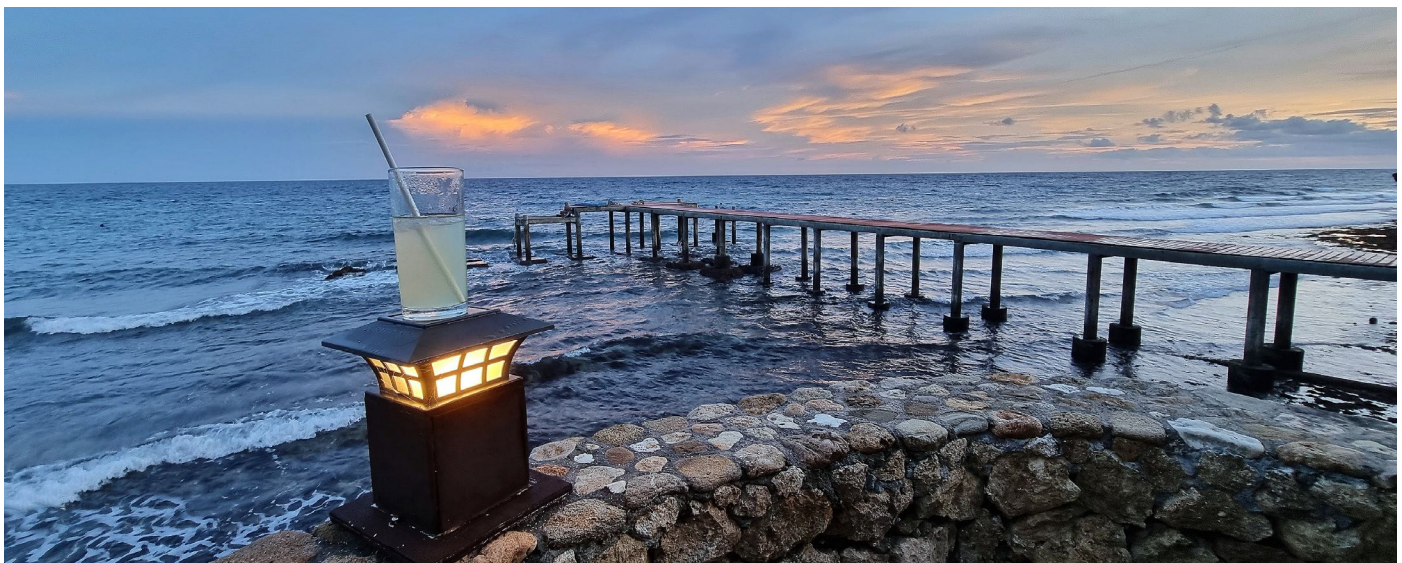


The zip line spans over half a kilometre over a river. About 180m over the river!

Oslob, where the whale sharks are fed small amounts of shrimp to keep them interested in coming in the morning hours. Our trip here had dirty water, but still the whale sharks were visible to our group of snorkellers.

Mention must be made here of all of the staff that made our visit here special. Dive guides Ailyn and Lee Ann, ably supported by Larry, Jay-R and all of the boat crew. Evelyn ably looks after the bookings, and Ester and Ian do a great job at the bar. The entire kitchen staff have to be applauded for their efforts as the standard of the meals here was nothing short of excellent, and we had a chef who could sing too! Three of our party had birthdays during the trip, and the kitchen managed a superb cake, and an even better rendition of 'Happy Birthday'. These are the things that make a holiday stand out.

The best way to describe the diving and the resort here is to make a simple statement. We've already decided to go back. ☀



Lemonade and sunsets at Magic Oceans Resort in Bohol. Photo Credit Madhi Mahakumbura.