

# PALAWAN PHILIPPINES

## DIVING ATTRACTIONS

### WRECK DIVING

The islands' claim to fame are the world-famous Coron Wrecks, which are mostly found in varying depths within Coron Bay. During World War II, the area served as a secure anchorage for the Japanese Fleet. But on 24 September 1944, a US Navy strike force of fighters and dive-bombers attacked the Japanese supply fleet of up to 24 ships. This resulted in one of the most condensed spectacular wreck diving sites in the world.

#### Akitsushima

The Akitshushima is a Japanese Seaplane Tender located between Culion and Busuanga islands. It is a huge warship laying on its side barely held together by half of the metal on each side. The internal damage to the ship remains a sight to be seen. Attractions of the warship include the intact crane used for lifting seaplanes, its weapon armaments and the resident groupers and barracudas.

#### Irako

This Japanese refrigeration ship is arguably the best possible wreck dive in the country, with its huge size and superb visibility compared with other wrecks. At 146.9 metres in overall length and 19 wide, it is quite remarkable that the Irako is still quite intact and because of its good visibility, you get a scale of the magnitude of the wreck. Numerous marine life call this shipwreck home, from rays, groupers, tuna and lionfish to sea turtles.

#### Kogyo Maru

One of the most internally intact wrecks ever is the Kogyo Maru. It offers divers the chance to swim through an impressive path starting from all the six holds until reaching the engine room and bridge area. Fixtures include a completely intact bulldozer, a tractor and an air compressor. The port side of the bridge is where both hard and soft coral can be found including the school of barracuda which often swims by.

## **Kyokuzan Maru**

Located northeast of Busuanga Island, the Kyokuzan Maru is a spectacular wreck diving experience. It is one of the more intact vessels complete with Japanese staff cars and trucks found in the cargo rooms. It usually has a good visibility of about 20 meters with ideal diving conditions most of the year. The deck level lies between 22 and 28 meters reaching to about 40 meters at the bottom.

## **Lusong Gunboat**

The Lusong Gunboat wreck is submarine hunter shallowly submerged where the stern breaks the surface at low tide. It is great for snorkeling and skin diving covered with hard corals offering a variety of marine life. This wreck is great for snorkeling. It is nicely covered with hard corals and offers a nice variety of fish life.

## **Nanshin Maru Tanker**

Located 3.5 hours away from Coron, the Nanshin Maru Tanker also known as Black Island Wreck is a spectacular dive amidst clear water. Suitable for beginners and underwater photography. This dive is usually coupled with the Okikawa Maru as a second dive on the return trip.

## **Okiwaka Maru**

A treat for advanced wreck divers, this Japanese tanker is blessed with numerous traversal routes including penetrating the propeller shaft leading up to the engine room. The wreck is often awash with strong tidal currents generating the best visibility for viewing aquatic life including snappers, bat fish and groupers. The tanker is the largest in volume of the Coron Wrecks at 168 metres long. While the Okiwaka Maru is best suited for advanced divers, beginners can also view the beautiful corals covering the entire wreck.

## **Olympia Maru**

A Japanese freighter 122 meters long and 17 meters wide, located near Tangat Island in Coron Bay. As a dive spot, the Olympia Maru is blessed with a variety of marine life. Large schools of banana fish, giant bat fish and puffer fish congregate around the mast, bow and stern. It is a relatively easy wreck dive ideal for beginners.

## **Skeleton Gunboat**

The wreck is the remains of a 25 meter long steel-hulled gunboat located in Coron Island. This wreck was beached with the bow a dozen meters from Coron Island. The stern points directly away from the island. The wreck slopes along the reef from 5 meters deep

at the bow to 22 meters at the stern. A pass through on the starboard side of the hull at 14 meters allows you to swim from the inside of the boat out over the coral reef.

### **Taiei Maru**

This is a striking wreck dive site where you can observe groupers, sweetlips, occasionally turtles and sea snakes. Hard corals envelop the port side 12 to 16 meters below the surface. The cargo rooms and the engine room allow easy penetration of this wreck. The boilers in the centre of the ship remain one of the big attractions on this dive. The damage resulting from one of the bomb strikes that disabled the ship is apparent behind one of the boilers. The Taiei Maru is one of the rare wrecks where its is possible to do a swim-through and pass from bow to stern without exiting the ship.

### **Tangat Gunboat**

This submarine hunter is one of the few wrecks where it is possible to skin dive or snorkell to view the ship. The wreck starts at only 3 meters down and is 40 meters long. It is suitable for diving beginners and allows for underwater photography.

## **NATURAL DIVE ATTRACTIONS**

### **Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park**

It lies in the centre of the Sulu Sea and is undoubtedly the best diving location in the Philippines. It is one of the most outstanding coral reefs in Southeast Asia consisting of two coral atolls covering an area of 33,200 hectares. It contains a very high density of marine species surpassing any reef of the same size anywhere in the world. The islets also serve as an important refuge for seabirds in Southeast Asia. Tubbataha's islets are believed to be one of the last breeding grounds for a host of endangered bird species.

### **Barracuda Lake**

Touted as the craziest dive site in the Philippines, reaching this location involves some mountain climbing through the breathtaking jurassic limestone cliffs of Coron. The lake itself is an everchanging body of water with the top 4 meters being warm fresh water and salt water at the bottom. Thermoclines and dramatic changes in water temperature is always apparent with the entire terrain likened to the surface of the moon.

### **Barracuda Cave**

For advanced cave divers looking for an extreme challenge, this perilous cave located in Barracuda Lake, is a dive one should not miss. The cave grants divers an eerie experience with its faint to zero, dark sediment walls and with strong currents leading to the ocean. Divers should be prepared with the necessary redundant and backup equipment as this remains to be ultimate in penetration dives.

### **Cathedral Cave**

Cathedral Cave is a beautiful dive spot. It starts 6 meters deep at a hole in the bottom of the sea next to the sheer rock wall of Coron Island. You enter a tunnel and descend to 12 meters. Then you pass out of the tunnel and see a shaft of daylight penetrates the interior of a cave. You follow the light and surface inside a big underground cathedral. You pass over the sand dune and continue ahead and left to another passage that leads to a chamber with an air pocket above ocean level. Back through the tunnel into the open sea and you dive among beautiful corals with 20 to 30 meter visibility.