

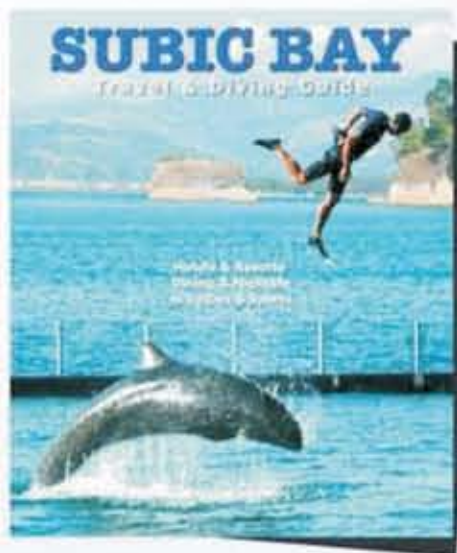


BOOKS

BOOK OF THE MONTH

SUBIC BAY TRAVEL AND DIVING GUIDE

By Charles W. Davis



ABOUT THE BOOK

Carefully researched by resident writer Charles W. Davis, this invaluable and colorful 152-page guidebook is the most comprehensive work to date covering the area in great detail. A wealth of essential information nowhere else to be found provides readers with vital in-depth descriptions.

The book is geared toward three main goals: to provide a wealth of essential information and descriptions of about 75 hotels and resorts; to highlight unique activities and sights only to be found in Subic Bay; and thirdly, to let readers delve into exhaustive diving research and explore a variety of colorful reefs and mysterious ship wrecks.

Several pages have been allotted for accurate GPS-referenced maps of Olongapo City, Subic Bay, the freepoint zone and Zambales. The book ends with a comprehensive and practical index.



INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

I love diving at Subic Bay and this is the main reason why I wrote this book. I feel that both Filipino and international divers have overlooked Subic Bay for too long. As work on this book progressed, it became clear that it was not just the diving community that was over-looking this area. When I submitted the final draft of the diving guide for publication, the publisher and I decided to change the book's editorial direction towards a full-scale travel guide that features extensive information for divers. As a travel guide, this book gives both first-time and returning visitors a fresh look at the ever-changing face of the Subic Bay area. Olongapo has had a negative reputation for decades due to the presence of the U.S. naval base. Such reputations die hard. If

you look on the Internet and search for Olongapo or Subic, the majority of web sites that come up talk about the area how it was decades ago. More than a decade after the US Navy's departure, so many things have changed. Today, Olongapo is a booming tourist destination. The transformation of the former naval base into an economic zone — with a concentration on recreational activities and a wide variety of accommodations — has made it an alternative domestic travel destination, especially for those visitors coming from Manila. The recent improvements of the North Luzon Expressway and the new 94-km Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway will make the area more accessible. The influx of international tourists is one reason for Subic's growth. The increase in the number of flights and destinations at the Subic International Airport and the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport in Angeles City is opening up the area to these travelers. Ignoring one's own backyard is part of human nature, but it is time for domestic tourists to find out what they are missing. Olongapo is affordable for everyone's budget. There are accommodations in all price ranges that cater to all sorts of activities. Olongapo is a city and — at the same time — a tourist haven.

DIVING OVERVIEW

Many Manila divers flock to the dive sites in Batangas where many offer great visibility and a large variety of marine life. Its dedicated following of die-hard divers has made this area the King of Central Luzon Diving. However, the average diver may find that the single focus of many of the resorts there is less than satisfactory. Subic Bay, on the other hand, is relatively easy to get to, has a wide variety of accommodations, an active nightlife and everything else that a small city can offer. The diving may not have crystal clear visibility but it has a range of different wrecks and reefs available for divers of all experience levels. I think there are a number of reasons why, despite so many things going for it, diving in Subic is taking a long time to develop. First, diving at Subic Bay — until 1992 — was the exclusive domain of the U.S. Navy. Dive operators in Manila had to find other areas for diving. When the U.S. Navy departed, the area was still recovering from the eruption of Mount Pinatubo. Diving in Subic Bay after this catastrophic event was not a very appealing prospect for tourists. Thus, when the conditions improved and a dive operator was established at the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), Subic as a dive location was not promoted. The departure of the U.S. Navy and the establishment of SBMA also left a knowledge gap about the wrecks of the bay. This book hopes to clarify some misinformation about the wrecks in Subic. For example, one diving guide lists the USS Rochester as sitting 200 meters to the east of the USS New York. These are different names given to the same ship at different times in its long military career. Another error comes from a map of one of the local dive centers. It shows a map with the names of major shipwrecks. Out of the six sites that specify a war after the name, four are wrong. When I started to dive in Subic in 1997, the dive operators offered very little information about the wrecks and treated them just as an artificial reef with little regard to the ship's background. I vividly recall seeing a list of shipwrecks posted on the wall next to a navigation map in the back room of a dive center. When I asked what the list was, the staff replied that they did not know what it was, and that the list was there



when they moved in years ago. The list contained 25 shipwrecks, of which only five were. Since then, many of those ships have been located. Some sites are still worth diving while others offer little to divers. This book highlights the ten most popular wrecks and a few reef sites within the Bay itself. Additional wrecks that are for technical divers located outside the bay or are of less interest to average divers are also listed. I have organized this book in a manner that is easy to use — as a travel guide including historical information, and extensive diving information at the end. Two distinct parts make up the diving chapter: brief introductions outlining dive sites, and a ship history section. Each of the major dive sites has its own description and vital infos needed for dive planning. Depth, current and highlights of the site is included as well as an evaluation of the suitability for different dive experience levels. Wreck sites are enhanced with an orientation drawing. In the ship history part, I have gone to great lengths to provide verified factual information. A lot of research has been done to identify the wrecks and to learn of their background. Like folklore, it has often been difficult to separate fact from fiction. Some ships are still unidentified until this day, a challenge to overcome. There are relatively few quality dive locations in the world that are also great holiday destinations for the non-diver at the same time. Subic Bay is well on its way to join those ranks. The last few years have seen a dramatic increase of dive operators in Subic — now is the time for the dive community to wake up and start enjoying our bay.



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