

# Southern Leyte & Bohol, Philippines with LAMAVE

## Itinerary

The following is a sample itinerary of dive sites we may visit during your liveaboard cruise with the Philippine Siren. We wish to show you the very best diving possible, however, a number of factors determine which route the yacht takes and which dive sites we visit. Weather, tides, currents and the number of other dive vessels at a particular site all play a part in the Cruise Director's decision of where the Philippine Siren is heading to. This itinerary involves some long distance travel. Whilst we attempt to ensure the number of dives we have scheduled is fulfilled, bad weather can hinder the yacht's ability to reach a specific dive site in good time. The safety of our guests on board is paramount and we always do our best to offer diving at alternate locations, should we be unable to visit those sites listed below.

Your Cruise Director will schedule up to 4 dives per day; 3 day dives and either a sunset or a night dive. A typical diving day is scheduled as follows:

- Light Breakfast followed by a briefing & Dive 1
- Full Breakfast, relaxation followed by briefing & Dive 2
- Lunch, relaxation followed by briefing & Dive 3
- Snack
- Briefing for Sunset or Night dive
- Dinner

Generally, we schedule 2 dives on your final dive day in order to allow enough time for off-gassing. To remain on the safe side, we kindly request our guests to check their own flight times and ensure that they leave a minimum of 24 hours between their final dive and their return flight. Guests are welcome to suggest preferred dive sites to the Cruise Director. He/she will be happy to accommodate guests' wishes, providing it is possible and the schedule allows for it.

Executive Director Gonzalo Araujo from the Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines (LAMAVE) will join us on this special Siren trip and you are invited to assist with their research to deploy/retrieve and service their acoustic receivers at multiple sites along the route of the trip, including Cabilao, Balicasag, and Pamilacan.

Throughout the trip, your observations and pictures enable LAMAVE to do photo identification of green and hawksbill turtles, mantas, and whale sharks as encountered. There will be presentations explaining LAMAVE's research to the various species.

These will show how the collected data is used and interpreted, why it is important, and how it can lead to conservation. Find more information about LAMAVE [here](#).

## Balicasag Island

The small island of Balicasag, just off the tip of Panglao, is characterised by its many turtles, coral gardens and steep walls which provide overhangs, cracks & crevices in which to search for a variety of marine species. This area has become a marine protected area since July 2017 and allows two dives per day only with valid permits.

**Divers Heaven** - The main attraction of this beautiful dive site is the green sea and hawksbill turtles in the shallow waters. The reeftop edge is a nice habitat for schools of colorful damsels and anthias and when lucky also for giant frogfish.

**Black Forest** - Once famed for its black coral is where we encounter schools of jacks, long-jawed mackerels, red tooth triggerfish and different kinds of fusiliers.

## Cabilao Island

There are several interesting wall and coral garden dives around the island of Cabilao and we choose from the following:

**Gorgonian Wall** - Provides a gentle drift along a fantastic coral reef with schooling fish and plenty of macro life in the shallow water, including the possibility of spotting a Denise's pygmy seahorse.

**Lighthouse** - Sloping walls full of sponges and gorgonian fans. This is a great place to dive with large green turtles. Also being seen are giant frogfish which can be spotted resting on sponges and numerous cowries hiding amidst the stunning hard coral garden.

**Talisay Tree** - Beautiful wall with gorgonians where bubble coral shrimps and orangutan crabs can be found in the bubble corals. The shallow grassy garden with its elephant ear sponges and barrel sponges is a perfect spot for wide angle photography.

**Cambaquiz** - A fantastic spot where we often make night dives. A gently sloping reef and sandy bottom to 20m - soft corals and sea pens can be found dotted over the sand; also a great site for sightings of bottom dwellers. The grassy top is a favourite crab hide out.

## Limasawa

**Gunter's Wall** - Covered with green tree corals and barrel sponges, the wall here is a great place to spot nudibranchs and crustaceans such as pink squat lobsters. Turtles and sea snakes are also common and the shallow coral gardens are a superb place to hunt for leaf fish, robust ghost pipefish and seahorses.

**Crocodile Rocks** - A shallow coral garden which turns up little gems such as cuttlefish, nudibranchs and octopus.

**Limasawa Pier** - A superb place to find the small macro species - finds include frogfish, cowries. Whale sharks do come into this area at night to feed on plankton.

**Adrian's Cove** - clinging to sea whips divers will often find xeno-crabs at this dive site, as well as many sand dwelling fish such as gobies, jawfish and moray eels.

## Padre Burgos

**Maureen's Place** - A small banca wreckage (i.e. a traditional Filipino boat) can be found in the shallow waters whilst the reef slopes down to a whip coral covered wall where schools of snappers and banner fish hang out in the gentle currents. Different coloured pygmy seahorses can be found in the gorgonian fans and stingrays can be seen hiding beneath the table corals.

**Padre Burgos Pier** - At just 6m divers could spend hours at this wondrous site and still not find all of its hidden gems. Freckled frogfish, stargazers, seahorses, ghost pipe fish, blue ring octopus, pleurobranchs, nudibranchs all muddle together on the soft coral and sponge laden pier supports. Juvenile batfish can also be seen mimicking leaves in the shallow water, meanwhile at sunset the mandarin fish come out to play; definitely a spot for the weird and wonderful.

## Sogod Bay

**Napantao Fish Sanctuary, San Francisco** - One of the best dive sites in the Philippines. This long-established, community-enforced marine protected area hosts a rich selection of marine life. Hard and soft corals make up the slope to the reef wall. Large quantities of fish of all colours can be seen here. There are a few resident hawksbill turtles, giant frogfishes, some white-tip reef sharks under big coral structures, and occasionally, whale sharks swim by the wall during their season in the area.

**Santa Paz Sanctuary** - This rocky and dark sand muck dive is full of critters. Robust pipe fishes, ornate ghost pipe fishes, and hairy frog fishes are found here in the dark sandy substrate. Although cephalopods can be seasonal, coconut, mimic and wonderpuss octopuses can be found here. These last one is a night predator so keep an eye out for them on a sunset or night dive.

**Son-ok Point, Pintuyan** - Son-ok point is 15 km south of Napantao. This point is rich in soft corals and some hard coral cover can still be found. The currents can be strong during tidal changes, but when there is current, fish are swarming everywhere. Frog fish and hawksbill turtles are found here along the reef's edge at 12 - 15 m. Like in Napantao, when it is the season for these gentle giants, whale sharks can be encountered during lucky dives here.

## The Whale Sharks of Southern Leyte

Whale sharks have been visiting the coast of Pintuyan for decades. In 2007, small-scale community run ecotourism started out of the village of Son-ok through a People's Organisation called KASAKA. In 2009, the municipality passed an ordinance to regulate ecotourism activities and minimise any potential disturbance to the whale sharks, trying to ensure a long-term sustainable livelihood for the community of Son-ok. Since 2012, LAMAVE has been working closely with KASAKA and the local government to understand whale sharks and how to ensure long-term conservation strategies are in place.

Whale sharks visit Pintuyan to forage on zooplankton blooms that happen close to shore, normally copepods or sergestid shrimps (krill-like shrimps). Whale sharks appear to visit the area, and should food availability be good, stick around for an average of 40 days. Some whale sharks are very resident and stick around throughout the whole season (which can be 1 to 6 months long), others might come in and out throughout the season. Some individuals have returned every year since LAMAVE started monitoring them!

How they can tell them apart is through their unique spot pattern on their bodies, a fingerprint to each individual whale shark. They use a technique called photo-identification (or Photo-ID for short). This can then be matched against a local Philippines catalogue (in which there are more than 1,200 identified whale sharks!) and an international catalogue containing more than 7,000 individuals.

Through photo-ID, LAMAVE has matched the whale sharks of Southern Leyte to northern Mindanao provinces, to south Mindanao, to Donsol in northern Philippines, to Cebu and Bohol. One individual actually came from Taiwan! Complemented with satellite tagging of these whale sharks, these moved west to the Sulu Sea to Tubbataha, and east to the Pacific Ocean.

Gonzalo Araujo is one of the world's top whale shark experts leading regional collaborations to enhance conservation efforts in South East, and East Asia, with partners in Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. During your trip, Gonzalo will elaborate on how the local efforts also contribute to the bigger picture of whale shark, and shark conservation in general. He can talk whale sharks for hours!