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BIOTA FILIPINA

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Whale shark mystery still unsolved

At the recently held International Whale Shark Conference in Perth, Australia, representatives from 23 countries concluded that the whale shark mystery is still haunting the world. And that poaching is still the number one threat to the existence of these gentle giants.

Up to now, no scientific group can ascertain the migratory path of the whale sharks or their breeding pattern. The urgent need to beef up regional and international collaboration in whale shark research reverberated in the conference.

As it is, the state of scientific knowledge regarding the world's largest fish is insufficient to determine the more accurate level of threat to the animal's survival. However there are evidences indicating serious declines in the abundance of whale sharks in some parts of the world.

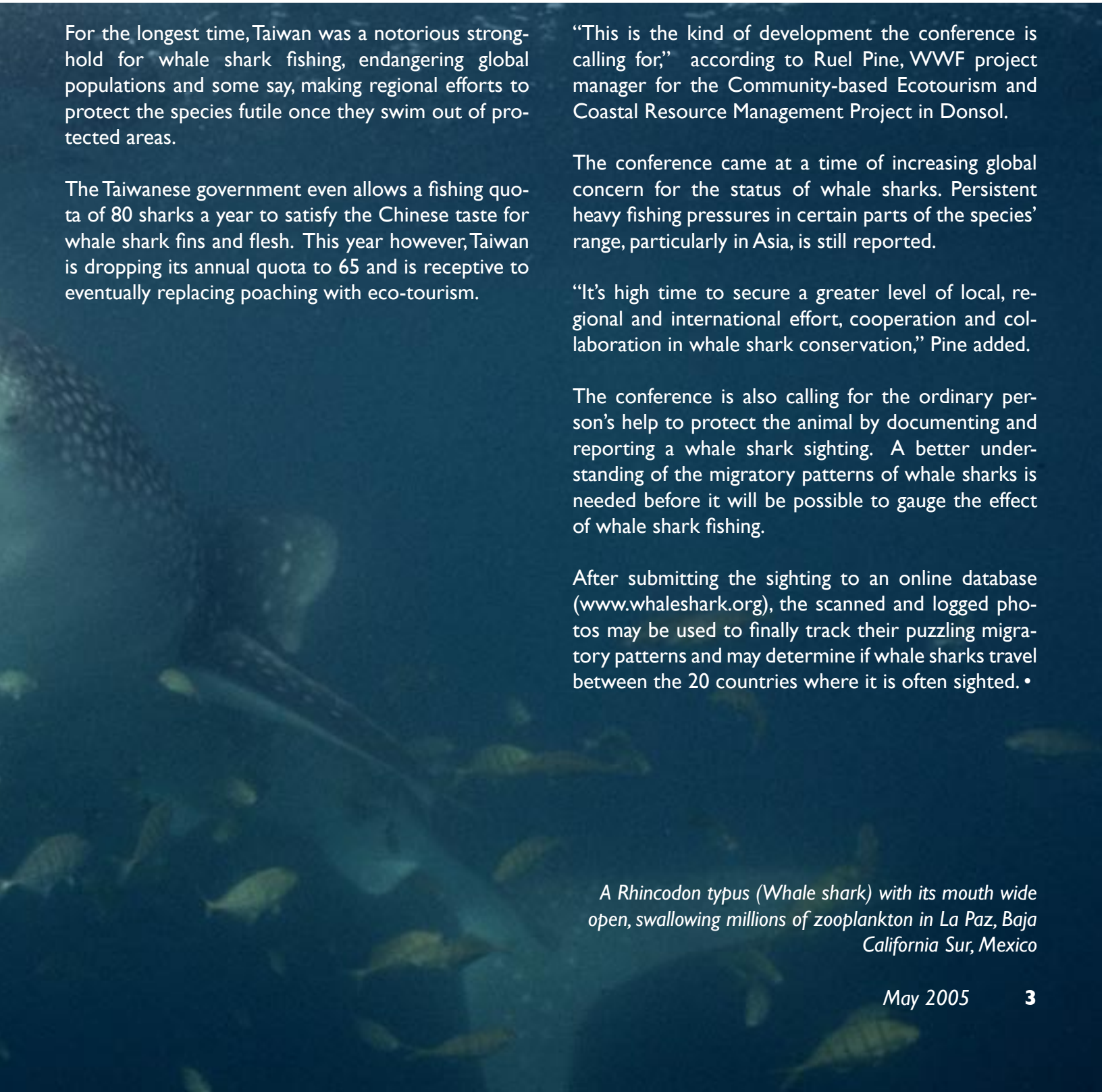

Studies from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) show that whales sharks visiting Ningaloo Reef have declined in fish size, from over 7 meters in 1995 to just around 5.5 meters today.

“Any fish population that is undergoing unsustainable mortality usually shows a drop in average size of individual fish, and a drop in abundance,” says Dr. Mark Meekan of AIMS.

Researchers don't know exactly why the fish is shrinking but they speculate that over-fishing in unprotected international waters, injuries caused by collisions with sea vessels and a drop in the average age of the fish may be some of the reasons.

Dr. Meekan adds, “If we're losing the adults in the population, leaving only juvenile whale sharks, then we'll have no population there to reproduce. That's a real concern.”





For the longest time, Taiwan was a notorious stronghold for whale shark fishing, endangering global populations and some say, making regional efforts to protect the species futile once they swim out of protected areas.

The Taiwanese government even allows a fishing quota of 80 sharks a year to satisfy the Chinese taste for whale shark fins and flesh. This year however, Taiwan is dropping its annual quota to 65 and is receptive to eventually replacing poaching with eco-tourism.

“This is the kind of development the conference is calling for,” according to Ruel Pine, WWF project manager for the Community-based Ecotourism and Coastal Resource Management Project in Donsol.

The conference came at a time of increasing global concern for the status of whale sharks. Persistent heavy fishing pressures in certain parts of the species’ range, particularly in Asia, is still reported.

“It’s high time to secure a greater level of local, regional and international effort, cooperation and collaboration in whale shark conservation,” Pine added.

The conference is also calling for the ordinary person’s help to protect the animal by documenting and reporting a whale shark sighting. A better understanding of the migratory patterns of whale sharks is needed before it will be possible to gauge the effect of whale shark fishing.

After submitting the sighting to an online database (www.whaleshark.org), the scanned and logged photos may be used to finally track their puzzling migratory patterns and may determine if whale sharks travel between the 20 countries where it is often sighted. •

A Rhincodon typus (Whale shark) with its mouth wide open, swallowing millions of zooplankton in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico

Run like your life depends on it: the WWF Great Outdoor Adventure Race

The raising of each wind turbine in Bangui Bay was also a countdown to one of the most anticipated outdoor races of the year.

In celebration of the first wind farm in the Philippines, and Southeast Asia, WWF is organizing **Racing the Wind**, an outdoor adventure race that goes beyond pure athleticism. More than 100 racers are pegged to join and show their support to the renewable energy industry as the nation continues to struggle in the darker days of escalating power rates.

“The idea is to use a popular activity like an adventure race to promote something non-mainstream like a wind power plant. We also want to inform people that they have the right, the social and moral responsibility to find out where their energy comes from and to choose clean energy when given an option,” says Jasper Manlapaz of WWF-Philippines’ Energy and Climate Program.

The 24.75 MW wind farm constructed by VESTAS Wind Systems on a turnkey basis for NorthWind Power Development Corporation, is already delivering electricity to its offtaker, the Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative. Today, 75% of Ilocos Norte’s power requirement comes from clean gusts of air, and while the residents used to pay P4.71 per kwh, they now only pay P4.61.

Racing the Wind is divided into two categories, the Elite division and Fun division. Elite covers an 80-100 kilometer course and 40-60 kilometers for the Fun. Various groups from all over the country and from all walks of life have already signified their interest to take part in this momentous occasion. The Renewable Energy Coalition will race for the passage of the Renewable Energy Bill while groups from the south will be racing for sustainable energy

The WWF adventure race disciplines include trail running, trekking, mountain biking, open water swimming, paddling, rope skills and rubber tubing.

Racers should be in Bangui, Ilocos Norte on June 10 for the briefing in the evening at the Bangui National High School. The race will commence the next day at around 7 AM, with the Elite division estimated to run for 7-12 hours and 4-8 hours for the Fun division. The race and wind farm ceremony will start at 7 AM with the special participation of Gov. Bong Bong Marcos, WWF-Philippines president Lory Tan, Chairman of the North Wind Power Development Corporation Atty. Ferdinand Dumlao, and other local officials.

“It’s quite symbolic that the wind farm launch and the race falls on the Philippines’ independence day weekend. This perhaps signifies that the nation is now slowly gaining its independence from dirty, expensive and exhaustible fossil fuels. And all we can say is it’s about time,” adds Manlapaz.

For the complete race information and to register, visit

http://www.powerswitch.org.ph/news_racingthewind.htm

RACING THE WIND:

**WWF'S GREAT OUTDOOR
ADVENTURE RACE**
JUNE 10 - 12, 2005

Powered by:

In Cooperation with:

Province of Ilocos Norte • Municipality of Bangui • Municipality of Pagudpud • Municipality of Burgos

Sablayan Celebrates Month of the Ocean

You can't think of a more suitable way of celebrating marine conservation than having a fiesta on the sea.

Sablayan, Occidental Mindoro, one the most enthusiastically protected bodies of water in Luzon and the home of the ecologically vital Apo Reef, successfully celebrated the Month of the Ocean this May.

WWF, which spearheaded the event, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the local government units viewed this month's celebration as a partial indication of the Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) success in the area.

"In last year's coastal clean-up, only a few people participated. While marine enforcement in Sablayan is assertive, conservation awareness among the locals

is still low. That is why there is a need to intensify activities for consciousness-raising and capacity-building," said John Manul, WWF Project Manager for Apo Reef Conservation.

"So this year, seeing that much more people participated, we will now consider using popular and traditional methods in pushing preservation and conservation causes for our ocean," he added.

The celebration is but one of the many activities lined-up for the year with the theme "Pagkaing Sapat at Ligtas, Abot Kaya ng Lahat." The event started off with a massive fluvial parade participated by fisherfolks and their families. Majority of the participants are members of the Solidong Hanay para sa Apo Reef at Karagatan ng Sablayan or SHARKS, a volunteer group that helps facilitate with enforcement in Apo Reef.



Fluvial Parade

With their bancas, they paddled through the waters of Sablayan all the way to the nearby market where the parade culminated, bringing with them placards calling for immediate coastal resource management. Just as the parade was about to end, the much-awaited bangkarera or boat race took place. The participants came from different barangays in Sablayan and only non-motorized bancas were allowed.

“Seeing how this event was accepted warmly, we are planning to have this every year,” says Linda Aquino, DENR Officer and volunteer staff of WWF.

WWF calls for more information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns, capacity-building and partnerships, and law enforcement. WWF’s on-going activities include patrolling in Apo Reef’s strict protected zone, mangrove reforestation, an environmental radio program, and CRM planning.



Bangkarera

Species of the Month

The simple word “rat” summons visions of aggressive, filthy, disease-ridden pests which irritatingly gnaw on our stocked-up food, smelly shoes and garbage. On the contrary, most mice and rats species are quite the opposite of this typical image of the household rodent. They are, in fact, rather clean and timid animals.

Of the 63 species of rats and mice in the Philippines, six are known to have minimal destructive behaviour. It is interesting to note that several thousand years ago, these six species were not native to the Philippines, but accidentally imported from the Asian mainland



Locally known as “dagang buut,” cloud rats are characterized by their thick lustrous pelages and long furry tails. They usually feed on tender young leaves, seeds and fruits, with their large foreclaws and hind feet perfectly adapted for arboreal life. These forest-dwellers are also nocturnal creatures, using the night as a cover to search for other food like earthworms. Females give birth only to a single young in tree holes, hollows or underground.

There are two general classifications for cloud rats, the bushy tailed *Crateromys* and the slender-tailed *Phloeomys*. Both live in the mountains and are somewhat similar in appearance but can be differentiated by their tails. One of the two species under the slender-tailed *Phloeomys* is the Northern Luzon Slender-Tailed Cloud Rat (*Phloeomys pallidus*) or “buwet,” which can be found in the 12 provinces above Laguna. When it was still common until the end of World War II, it was the primary prey for carnivores like the Philippine eagle in the Sierra Madre Mountains.

Because they are large and meaty, they are still heavily hunted. One farmer living at the base of Mount Isarog, even admitted that he tracks and kills 50 cloud rats per year with the help of his dogs. Since cloud rats generally are known for a distinct fruity and musky odor, which act as a defense mechanism against other animals, humans have utilized this for its easy tracking and catching.

For a long time now, this slender-tailed cloud rat has remained an alternative source of protein for farmers and an additional source of income for export trade, with its hide being used in the creation of hats, bags and belts. Although once endemic to the Philippines,

and specifically to Luzon, heavy hunting intensified by continuous destruction of their habitat, has unwittingly led to its near endangerment.

As of now, not much is known about them. Practically all six species of cloud rats are considered to be an endangered species under Republic Act No. 9147 otherwise known as the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act of 2001. The Northern Luzon Slender-Tailed Cloud Rat is deemed to be nearly threatened. Several Northern Luzon slender-tailed cloud rats are currently under the bureau’s care in its Wildlife Breeding Center in Los Banos, Laguna. •

NORTHERN LUZON SLENDER-TAILED CLOUD RAT

Kingdom: ANIMALIA

Phylum: CHORDATA

Class: MAMMALIA

Order: RODENTIA

Family: MURIDAE

Genus: *Phloeomys*

Species: *pallidus*

Sources:

Field Museum; http://www.fieldmuseum.org/Vanishing_Treasures/V_CRats.htm

Suite University; http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/philippine_wildlife/73509/2

Cavite City Botanical and Zoological Park; <http://www.geocities.com/cavitecity-zoo/learn/gallery/img021.html>

Minnesota Zoo; http://www.mn zoo.com/animals/tropics_trail/cloudrat_2.asp

USA Today (Society for the Advancement of Education), Jan, 2005 by Lawrence R. Heaney; http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1272/is_2716_133/ai_n8688116 http://www.mn zoo.com/animals/tropics_trail/cloudrat_2.asp

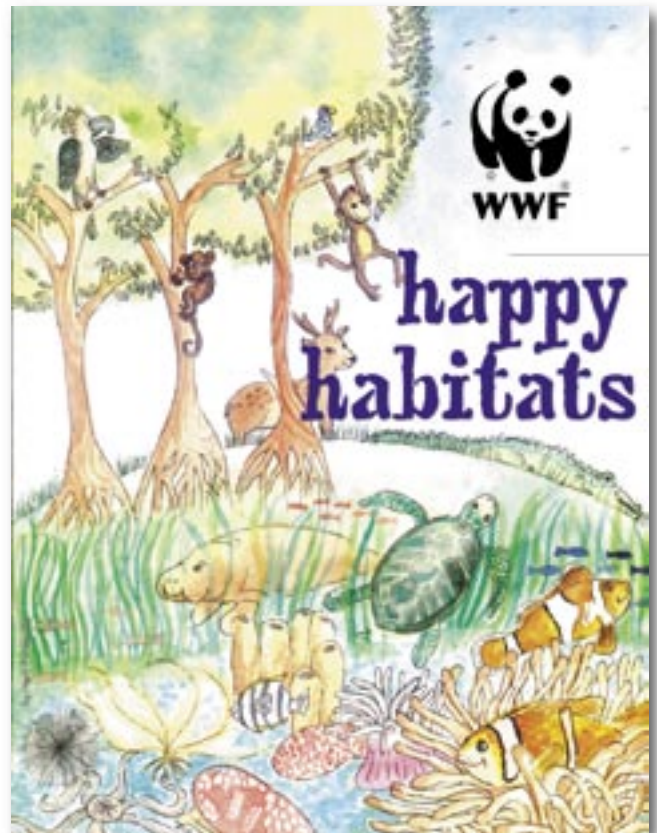
Environmental Education NewsBits

WWF-Philippines embraced summer with a bang! School is out but not WWF. Before classes came to a close, Xavier High School had its culminating activity for school year 2004-2005. WWF participated at “Endangered State: A Second Look at the Philippine Environment,” a weeklong exhibit organized by the Ecology Club of Xavier School. This was a stand-alone exhibit merged with original research work of the club members on endangered forests and marine animals.

Great news for kids! A new workbook is out with lots of fun-filled pages to color, draw, read, write, play, scribble on! The workbook entitled Happy Habitats is the latest work of the Communications group of WWF-Philippines together with the talent and artistry of Ang INK (Ilustrador ng Kabataan) in cooperation with San Miguel Corporation. The Happy Habitats workbook will take you on a tour of ecosystems: forests, wetlands, seagrass beds, coral reefs and mangroves. Fun and educational, the workbook promotes environmental literacy among Filipino children, and hopes to encourage environmental stewardship.

Summer is the time to hit the beach, travel, take art or dance classes, or join summer camps! Tagaytay Highlands organized their annual summer camp for kids aged 7-12 years old at Camp Highlands. Now on its 6th year, WWF was invited to facilitate environmental activities set on Day 2 of the camp. Two hours of interactive crafts and activities tickled 48 curious campers. WWF facilitators Lissa, Vicson, Mang Butch

and Ani, (our WWF volunteer) taught them how to make a simple 5-step whale origami, demonstrated the concept of the web-of-life through acting, played environmental games such as The Wild Chase Game (a human multiple-choice game featuring endangered animals), and viewed short underwater marine life clips taken by WWF-Philippines staff. After an environment-rich filled morning, campers and facilitators led by Camp Master Jeng Arabelo and EE Officer Lissa Lesaca took souvenir snapshots with the famous Project LIFE van.



My Nature Trip: Pick of the Month



Sideview



Close up of dorsal fin

30 Seconds Experience

Text and photos by Rochelle Reventar, *WWF-Philippines member*

Our boat chopped through the municipal waters of Donsol to take us to an underwater adventure beyond our imagination—we are going to see a whale shark. Mang Ute, our Butanding Interaction Officer (BIO) said that we should be prepared to quickly jump into the water at his cue. So we geared up, ready to pounce the sea to swim with the biggest fish in the world. After some time, Mang Ute finally spotted a whale shark and eagerly urged us to jump in. Since I was already prepared, I was asked to get in first. I held my breathe, moved quickly, and felt adrenaline coursing through my veins. I stared blankly at the empty deep blue sea for a few seconds. Then I felt Mang Ute pulling me. He was leading me towards a whale shark! The huge dark spotted animal swam gracefully right before my very eyes and what was more phenomenal was when it swam right below me. I was a little scared, surprised, overwhelmed and also excited when I saw its large head beneath my legs. I was fortunate enough to take a few shots before it completely disappeared.

That day was unbelievable, unforgettable and left a lasting impression in my heart I can hardly describe. Somehow I feel a part of me changed. I'm almost giddy! So now, every time I'm a little down, I just hold on to my "Butanding" necklace and I'd feel a smile forming already.

My Donsol experience is nothing short of great. •

Join the "My Nature Trip" contest by submitting photos of places you have been to, recent or not so recent, and email them to Vicson Chua at vchua@wwf.org.ph. All photos should be in high resolution (at least 3.5 x 5 inches with 300 dpi saved in jpeg format). Include a title, the place where the shot was taken, and a short description of your memorable experience (not exceeding 150 words). Join now and win prizes from our Conservation Circle Partners!



Conservation Circle Partners

Travel Agencies

Acropolis Travel Agency

Discount on selected local and international packages

Contact Person:Weng

Contact Numbers: 9297039 or 9203903

Dumaguete Outdoors Tours and Services

10% discount on unbound and outbound tours

Contact Person: Michelle Villanueva

Contact Details: 2256079,

e-mail:dumagueteoutdoors@eudoramail.com or

Branch: 3-A Noblefranca St., Dunaguete City

Restaurants

Bizu Patisserie

Get a free WWF “Rainforest” cake for a minimum order of 2 entrees

Branches: Alabang Town Center, Glorietta 4 and Greenbelt 2

Kitchen

Complimentary Sticky Situation or Monkey Business

Branches: Greenbelt 3 and Robinson’s Galleria

Segrafredo Espresso Bar

5% discount on food

Branch: Greenbelt 2, Liberty Plaza and HV Dela Costa and Salcedo Village

Seattle’s Best

10% discount on all drinks

Branches:All outlets

Taters

5% discount on all items (Cash payment only)

Branch: all outlets

Tavern on the Square

5% discount on all items (Cash payment only)

Branch: Greenbelt 3

Shops

Alfredulla Corporation

10% discount on decorative animal figures

Contact Person: Jeffrey Bosales

Contact Details: 2459999, HYPERLINK “http://www.alfredulla.com” www.alfredulla.com

The Maya Kitchen Culinary Art Center

5% discount on one day/half day courses

Contact Person: Rory Subida

Contact Details: (02) 8921185, HYPERLINK “mailto:mayakitchen@pacific.net.ph” mayakitchen@pacific.net.ph

Branch: Makati City

Ocean Colors

15% discount on regular items

10% discount on specialty courses

5% discount on major dive trips

10-15% discount on Open Water and Medic First Aid courses for atleast 3-5 people

Free Discover Scuba Diving

Contact Person: Chester Lee

Contact Numbers: 8901785 or 8904142

Conservation Circle Partners

Play Underground

15% discount on Membership Fees and Party Rental Rates
Free Gear Rental for Rock Climbing
Branch: Powerplant Mall

Scuba Ventures Dumaguete

15% discount on diving equipments and courses
Contact Person: Andre Montenegro
Contact Details: (035) 2257716,
e-mail: scuba_inc@yahoo.com
Branch: Ponce de Leon Compound, Tubod, Dumaguete City

Softspot Inc. / the B Shop

20% discount on all items (except items on SALE)
Special discount on made-to-order stuffed toys and other giveaways
Contact Person: Eric Jugueta
Contact Number: 5325189
Branch: Robinson's Galleria

Southbay Badminton Center

Waived player's fee
Contact Person: Marivic Campillo
Contact Number: 8079576
Branch: Villongco St., West Service Road, Sucat, Paranaque

VX Boulder Climbing Gym and Training Center

Discount on regular climbing day passes
Contact Person: Dennis Diaz
Contact Details: 9342774
e-mail: vx_boulder@yahoo.com

A Different Bookstore

5% discount for regular priced books.
Branches: Eastwood City, Glorietta and Podium (Ink and Stone)

Hotels/Resorts

Atlantis Beach Resorts Philippines

20% discount on accommodation and diving
Contact details: (035) 4252327
e-mail: dumaguete@atlantishotel.com
Branches: Dumaguete and Puerto Galera

Aqua One

15-20% discount on Scuba Equipment
5% discount on Scuba Courses and Dive Tours
Free Intro Dive
Contact Numbers: 8992831 to 32

Astoria Plaza

Php 3,000 NET for 1 bedroom Suite
Php 4,500 NET for 2 bedroom Suite
10% discount on Café Astoria (bar and restaurant)
10% discount on weekend social banquet functions
10% discount on Streetscape Spa Center
Contact Person: Vivian Ng
Contact Details: (02) 6871111
Branch: J. Escriva St. (former Amber Ave.) Ortigas Business district, 1600 Pasig City

Diamond Head Hotel and Convention Center

30% discount on rooms based on published rates
10% discount on water sports (once available)
Contact Person: Roger Begre
Branch: Baloy Beach, Bo. Barretto, Olangapo City



Conservation Circle Partners

Discovery Suites

10% discount on Local Residents package

Contact Details: 6852222,

e-mail: rsvn@discovery.com.ph

Branch: Ortigas

The Marikina Hotel

10% discount on accommodations

10% discount on Food and Beverages except on promo items

Contact Person: Ed Endaya

Contact Numbers: 9988290 / 9988342 to 45

Branch: Pio Del Pilar St. cor. Tangerine St. Brgy. Concepcion II, Marikina City

Oceana

10% discount on accommodations during weekends

30% discount on accommodations during weekdays

Contact Person: Tere

Contact Number: 6426215

Branch: Puerto Galera

Pandan Island Beach Resort Corporation

15% discount on accommodations and buffet meals

Contact Person: Dominique Carlut

Contact Number: 0919 3057821

Branch: Pandan Island, Sablayan 5106, Occidental Mindoro

The Pearl Manila Hotel

Php 1,900 NET for Superior

Php 2,450 NET for Junior Suite

Php 3,350 NET for 1 bedroom Suite

Php 4,250 NET for 2 bedroom Suite

Php 7,000 NET for Splendour Penthouse Suite

Php 8,500 NET for Oriental Penthouse Suite

Php 8,500 NET for Palazzo Suite

Php 10,000 NET for Enchantment

10% discount on Streetscape or massage services

10% discount on Food only

Contact Person: Mary Ann Valenz

Contact Details: 4000088,

e-mail: fo@pearlmanila.com.ph

Branch: Gen. Luna St. corner Taft and UN avenue, Ermita, Manila

Puerto Del Sol Beach Resort and Hotel Club

10% discount on Local Rates for all room types (Mansion Villas, Casitas, BAhay Kubo) of non-peak season

5% discount on Local Rates during peak season

Contact Person: Rene Isidro

Contact Details: 6378963,

e-mail: csr@puertodelsol.com.ph

Branch: Bolinao, Pangasinan

Robbinsdale Hotel

Php 1,200 NET for Standard Room

Php 1,500 NET for Deluxe Room

Php 2,000 NET for Junior Suites

Php 2,500 NET for Two-Bedroom Suite

Php 300 for Extra bed/Person

10% discount on facial and massage

10% discount on food and beverage minimum Php 1,000 on food purchases

Contact Person: Grace Enriquez

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