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Philippines Travel: Gentle Giants Of Donsol, Sorsogon

By John Grant

Donsol used to be a sleepy coastal town in Sorsogon—a province in the southernmost tip of Luzon.

Nobody knows Donsol except for, of course, its local inhabitants until a few years ago when tourists from all over the world began to flock this remote place to get a look-see at the largest fish on earth: the whale shark.

Before, fishermen in Donsol were ignorant of the ecological (and tourist) value of whale sharks. They used to hunt, slaughter and sell the poor gentle sea creatures to Japanese traders. Local folks call them "butanding" or "big fish" in the vernacular. Early sightings of the butandings were reported in the Visayan seas in Bohol further south. It was said that massive slaughtering caused their migration to Donsol waters.

Although, according to stories, the first butanding that was netted out in the area was also butchered. A marine biologist witnessed it and instantly recognized the fish as a rare marine specie. The biologist immediately reported the incident to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), an international organization promoting the preservation of the wildlife.

WWF wasted no time and launched an education campaign about the giant creature. After coordinating with the Department of Tourism, whale-watching soon became a tourist activity that allowed extra income for the people of Donsol.

Whale sharks can grow up to 50 feet in length. It has a rather wide mouth with hundreds of pointed teeth. It usually comes in grey or greenish brown color with white or yellow spots all over its body.

It earned the label gentle giant of the sea because of its harmless nature, considering it is of the shark family. It has nothing in common with whales except for its size, thus the name. Divers can swim and interact with them and are only known to sink deeper into the ocean when it gets upset. There has been no known attack on humans of whale sharks.

Scientists are still baffled with the large migration of whale sharks in Donsol. These fishes are known to prefer the cold waters, not the tropical seas that we have. One explanation would be the flourishing of

planktons in the area. Planktons are organisms that fill the diet of the whale sharks. It is also hard to record the number of whale sharks that now thrive in Donsol. But early studies show that whale sharks can travel 14,000 miles in 40 months and is capable of breeding in different sea environments.

Whale sharks swim on the surface of the water especially during the morning and early afternoon. It opens its mouth rhythmically when feeding on the planktons and visitors may be treated to this wondrous sight if they spot the fish at the perfect time. But don't expect them to jump up and down the water like the whales or dolphins. That's actually another beauty of the whale shark experience because this makes it perfectly easy and safe to get near them.

John Grant has been living in the Philippines for 5 years and has travelled the country extensively. His online Philippines Travel Guide

<http://www.netguard.dk>

gives you an extensive coverage of

destinations like Sorsogon

<http://www.netguard.dk/luzon/sorsogon/>

Philippine Travel: When And Where

By John Grant

When you're about to embark on a journey to the Philippines, the two most important questions to ask is "when" and "where". If you're traveling to the Philippines, do be aware that the experiences you're about to encounter is unlike anything you'd encounter anywhere else in the world. Each and every country has its own unique experience to offer you and when you travel to the Philippines, you should expect the same.

When Is It Best To Travel To The Philippines?

Are you allergic to rain? If so, it would do you good to avoid traveling to this part of Southeast Asia during the months of June till November as that's when the occasional typhoon or two makes time to visit the Philippines. Traveling during the rainy season of the Philippines can be quite a hassle, especially if you don't have a car. But if you do, you could expect smaller crowds to contend with as most people tend to stay indoors.

If you're unable to take the heat and still be merry, then you should not travel to the Philippines during the months of March till May because that's officially the summer season of the country. Everyone heads for the nearest beach so if you don't want to feel crowded when you're sunbathing, set your travel date for another time of the year. The Easter season is always busy for everyone in the Philippines so expect a difficult time on reserving transportation when it's Holy Week.

If you're on the lookout for the world-famous fiestas that only the Philippines could offer, schedule your travel date for January, May or December. The flower season of Baguio - described as the summer capital of the Philippines because of its perennially cool weather - is something to look forward to. And then there's the Santacruzán during May and which each and every town parades its most beautiful residents in a walk around town.

Where In The Philippines Is It Best To Travel To?

There are so many types of places to visit in the Philippines that it's hard to enumerate each and every one of them. Beaches, however, are one of the most favorite travel spots of the country so if you want to enjoy your stay in a beautiful paradise of clear blue green water and cool white sand, you could check out Tali Beach, the world-famous Boracay or try surfing the secluded beaches of Surigao and La Union.

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covers major destinations like Boracay

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Puerto Galera and Palawan.



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