

BUCKET LISTS

Dive into the “center of the center” of the world’s biodiversity. Catch a sunrise atop a sacred mountain. Surf a wave called Cloud 9. Bucket lists are all about asking yourself, when was the last time you did something for the first time?

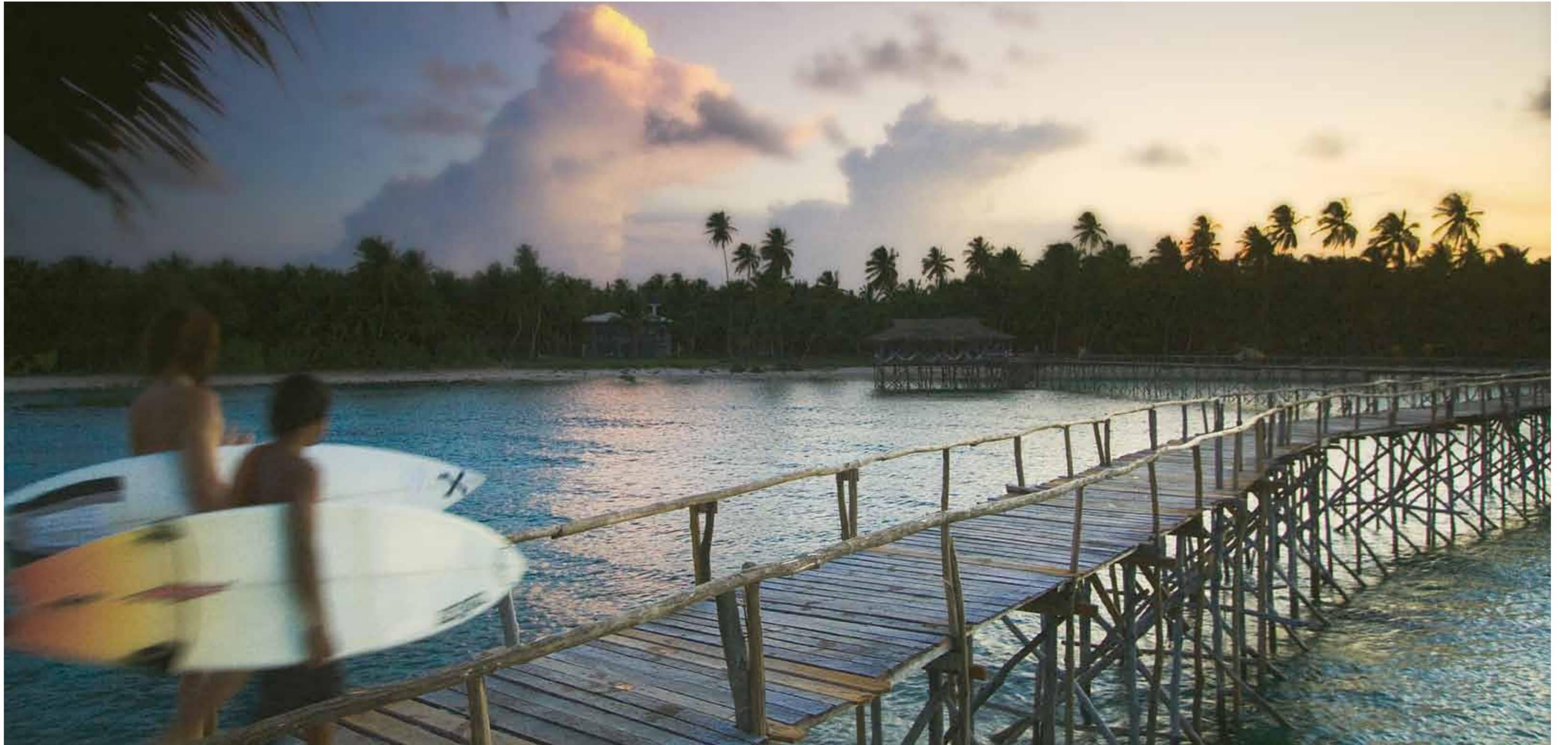
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Siargao, the Philippines' surfing capital, is one of the world's top 10 surf spots according to CNN. Photo by Tommy Schultz

BEST SPOTS FOR DIVING

When God created marine life, he was especially generous with the Philippines. Within the country's waters you'll find the "center of the center" of the world's biodiversity, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the curious presence of a shark airport and schools of dancing sardines.

TUBBATAHA REEF MARINE PARK PALAWAN

Best time to go: March to May
Best to dive with: Advanced Open Water and Nitrox

They didn't name this place a UNESCO World Heritage Site for nothing. Here, a "shark airport" has sharks parked side by side underneath a huge table coral. Sea turtles are just but common and divers can fit themselves within huge basket corals. Best of all, the presence of manta rays maintain a good and healthy ecosystem.

WHAT IS NITROX?

Nitrox aids divers in staying underwater twice as long as the regular air tank. It is a gas mixture containing higher levels of oxygen, which then decreases the possibility of decompression sickness or the "bends."

VERDE ISLAND BATANGAS

Best time to go: When weather conditions of nearby Puerto Galera and Mindoro are good
Best to dive with: Advanced Open Water and Nitrox

Dubbed as the "center of the center" of the world's biodiversity, Verde Island hosts the earth's greatest number of shorefish species—many still just waiting to be discovered. Everywhere you look, there seems to be swarms of gathering fish coupled with huge fan and basket corals. It's like being in a candy factory with an unending display of life and colors.

DARYL LAUT TINGLOY, BATANGAS

Best time to go: Diving is all-year round

For beginners who want to experience a shipwreck dive without the presence of currents, visit the Daryl Laut. It was once a floating casino back in the 1970s but sank when hit by lightning in 1980. Today it lies on a slope of a shoreline accessible at 30-120 feet. At 40-60 feet, the metal beams are generously covered with healthy corals and there are resident schools of batfish and squirrel fish.

SECRET BAY ANILAO, BATANGAS

Best time to go: Diving is all-year round

Within Secret Bay is one of the country's best muck dive sites. Muck diving is for those who enjoy scouring through muddy sediment, dead coral skeletons, and rocks to spot rare and unique critters. It's a plus if you're into macro photography so you can zoom in to find mega minute creatures like frog fishes and tiger shrimps as small as 2mm in diameter. This site also has various octopuses, which can change its color in a split second to camouflage itself. Hiring an experienced dive guide is recommended.

KONTIKI REEF AND PESCADOR ISLAND CEBU

Best time to go: Diving is all-year round

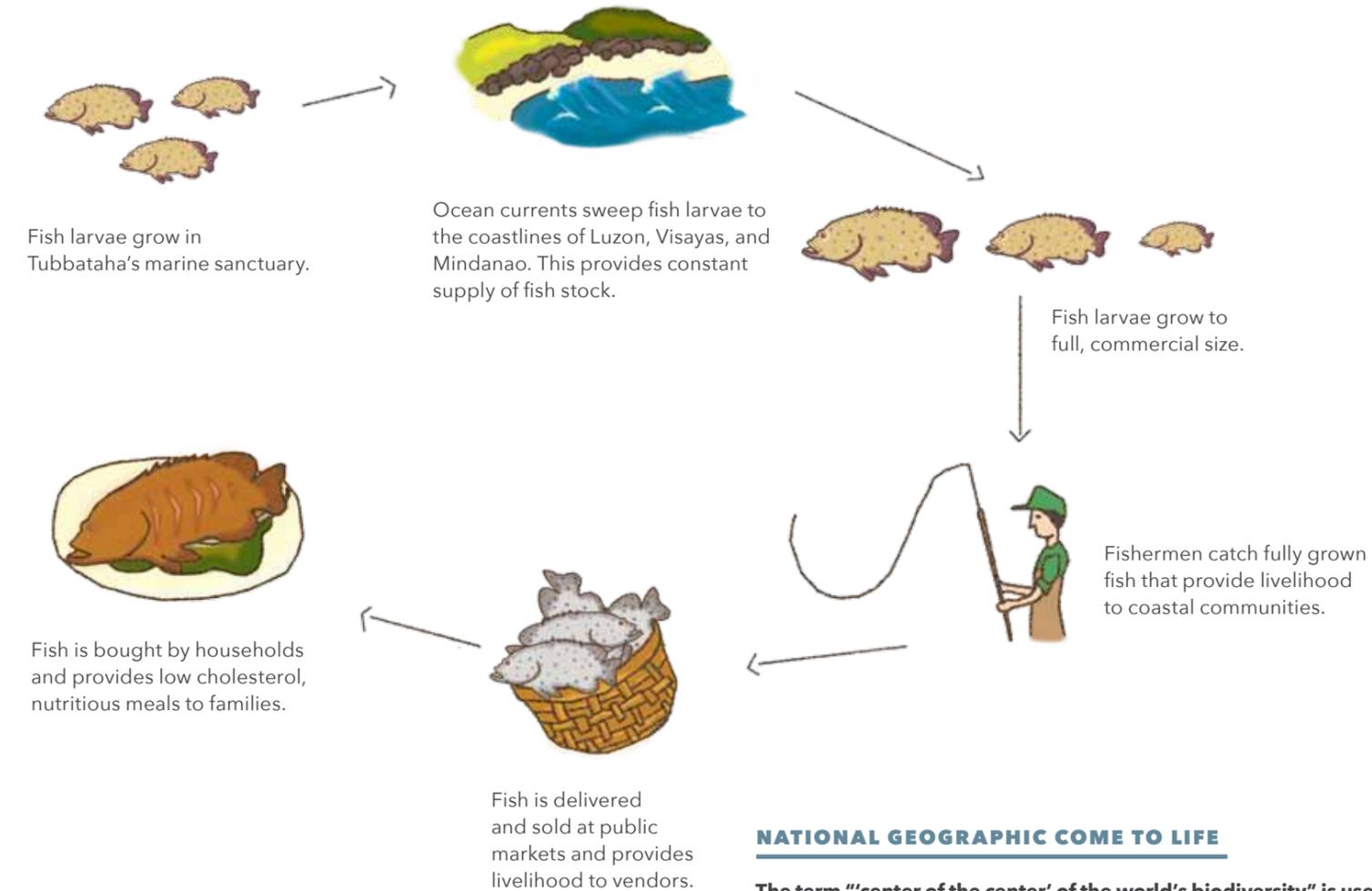
Remember that scene from *Finding Nemo* when they meet a big ball of sardines? Moving as one, dividing, regrouping, then exploding again—this spectacular dance can be witnessed in two sites in Cebu—Kontiki Reef in Mactan and Pescador Island in Moalbaol. Kontiki also has chance sightings of whale sharks and gray reef sharks; while Pescador Island has a history of thresher sharks, sea turtles, and whale sharks.



(Clockwise from top left) Verde Island's expansive corals; Tubbataha Reef's resident sea turtles. Photos by Wowie Wong; Dwarfed by sardines at Pescador Island. Photo by Jun Lao; Up close with a tiger shrimp in Secret Bay. Photo by Wowie Wong

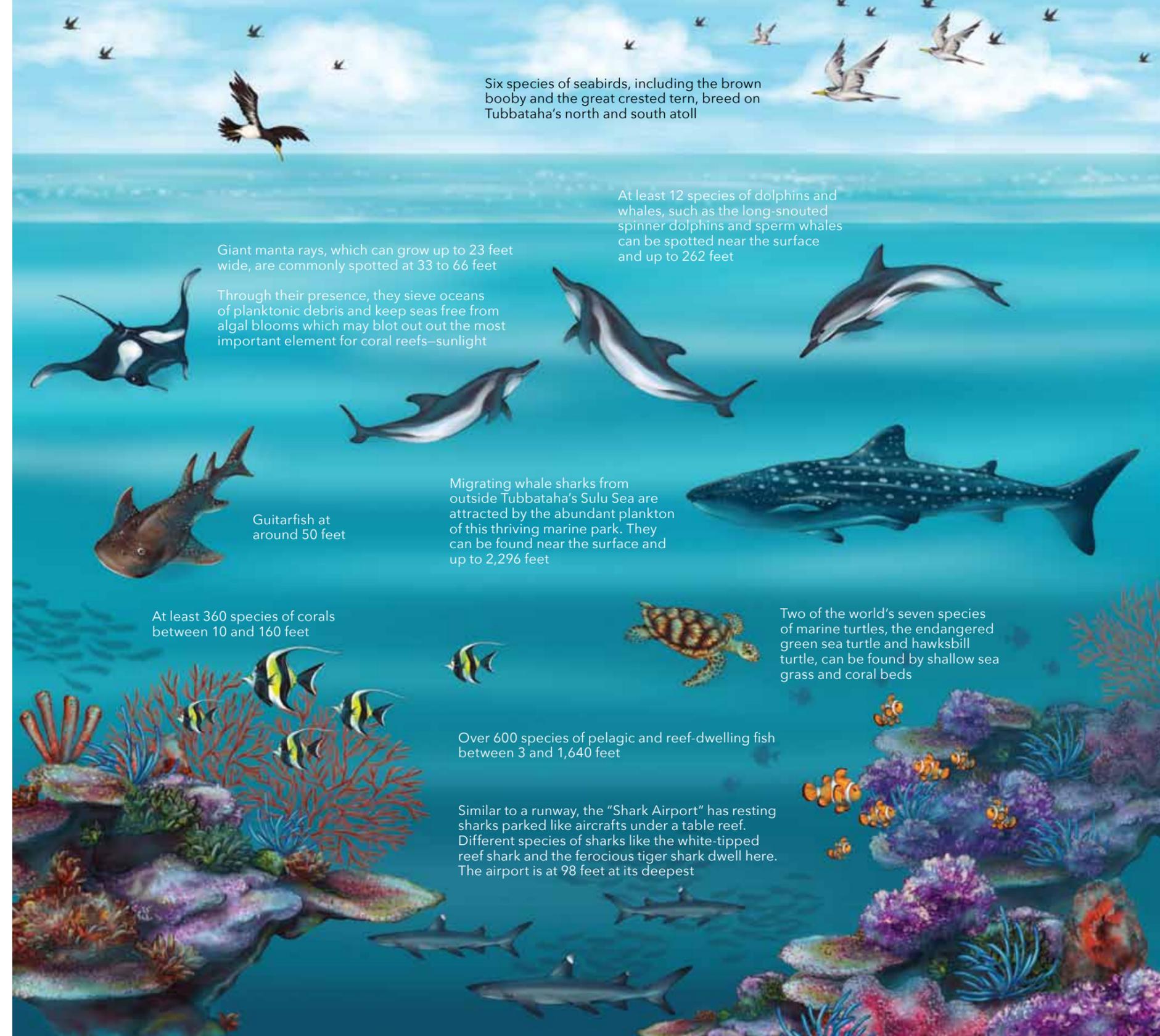
TUBBATAHA: BEHIND THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

According to seasoned diver and writer Alya Honasan, "you may never dive Tubbataha, but chances are, the fish you are having for dinner was spawned and grew in its waters." More than a scuba diving paradise, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a significant spawning ground for fish that feeds households across the entire Philippines. Here is an idea how Tubbataha's fish go from reef to dinner table:



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC COME TO LIFE

The term "center of the center" of the world's biodiversity" is used to describe Tubbataha Reef which is located in the heart of the Coral Triangle. This area is home to 75 percent of the world's coral species and at least 40 percent of the world's fish species. (Opposite page) Tubbataha's resident species and the corresponding depths they inhabit. Illustration by Hazel Tan



Six species of seabirds, including the brown booby and the great crested tern, breed on Tubbataha's north and south atoll

At least 12 species of dolphins and whales, such as the long-snouted spinner dolphins and sperm whales can be spotted near the surface and up to 262 feet

Giant manta rays, which can grow up to 23 feet wide, are commonly spotted at 33 to 66 feet

Through their presence, they sieve oceans of planktonic debris and keep seas free from algal blooms which may blot out the most important element for coral reefs—sunlight

Migrating whale sharks from outside Tubbataha's Sulu Sea are attracted by the abundant plankton of this thriving marine park. They can be found near the surface and up to 2,296 feet

Guitarfish at around 50 feet

At least 360 species of corals between 10 and 160 feet

Two of the world's seven species of marine turtles, the endangered green sea turtle and hawksbill turtle, can be found by shallow sea grass and coral beds

Over 600 species of pelagic and reef-dwelling fish between 3 and 1,640 feet

Similar to a runway, the "Shark Airport" has resting sharks parked like aircrafts under a table reef. Different species of sharks like the white-tipped reef shark and the ferocious tiger shark dwell here. The airport is at 98 feet at its deepest