

# Shoring up marine restoration

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*In Photo: Underwater cleanup at the Japanese Garden*

Medina, Misamis Oriental, is a quaint town quite unknown to people from Metro Manila, despite its rich biodiversity and enthralling beauty.

Not much has been written about this gem, tucked in a shoreline in between more famous destinations Cagayan de Oro and Butuan.



*A volunteer diver picking trash underwater.*

A half-an-hour ride away from Camiguin, Medina is a fourth-class municipality, whose primary industry is coconut production. A popular coconut drink, an export product, originates from here.

Its rich, lush mountains are untainted, almost untouched. Viewed from the sea, the ranges are a various mix of green hues patched with a few brown spots.

But what it really offers is a plethora of underwater treasures: a wide array of healthy corals, both soft and hard; and a diverse population of marine life.

There are three known dive sites in Duka Bay, Medina, each offering visitors different underwater experiences.

Right in front of Duka Bay Resort and its partner dive shop, the dive sites—Japanese Garden, Paradise and Aquarium—are considered marine-protected areas (MPAs), which are considered priority areas for conservation.



*The Virgin Mary is the marker for Almost Paradise.*

The Japanese Garden is an underwater forest of different species of coral and marine life. Artificial structures, such as make-shift tripods, were placed to promote coral growth. These are now home to a variety of fishes.

Locals quip that Paradise is divided into three parts: Almost Paradise, Paradise and Beyond Paradise. Almost Paradise is the shallow part of the reef. It features a recently mounted statue of

the Virgin Mary that is now attracting coral growth. It is home to an array of colorful soft and hard corals, in between of which fresh spring water spurt out randomly, creating thermoclines.

Paradise requires divers to swim through a crevice lined with different families of corals, now home to a variety of critters and marine life.

Passing by the swim-through is Beyond Paradise, the deeper part of the reef.

Aquarium, as the name suggests, is a natural aquarium for a variety of marine life. During descent, divers are greeted by different fishes on the thick soft corals in the reef. But, despite being MPAs, these reefs are still prone to threats—such as chemical pollution and eutrophication, fisheries operations, habitat alteration, invasion of alien species and global climate change.

The Metro Pacific Investments Foundation, the corporate social responsibility arm of Metro Pacific Investments Corp., stepped in to help preserve and conserve these reefs.

The foundation conducted Shore It Up activities in Duka Bay recently. It included shore and underwater cleanup, with 2,120 volunteers—almost a hundred are representatives from the MVP Group of Cos.

The volunteers were able to collect 787 kilograms of garbage from the three dive sites, and from 7 km of coastline.

“Medina is the birthplace of the first batch of Marine Protection and Inspection Custodians,” Metro Pacific Foundation Executive Director Melody M. del Rosario said, referring to the volunteers.

Experts, like Jake Miranda, a scuba-diving instructor who specializes in cave diving, shared their knowledge in marine protection to the locals.

Miranda led the assembly and deployment of marker buoys to allow boats to dock near the reef without the need for an anchor, which may damage corals.

“The fight to preserve the environment is easier said than done. It is a life-long quest. In a small way we started protecting our marine biology in Medina,” Mayor Donato Chan said. During its three-day program, Metro Pacific led the investiture of 200 junior environmental scouts, which are young ambassadors of change in their respective communities.

Volunteers from Metro Pacific taught students about the significance of putting prime importance to rescuing, restoring and reviving the country’s bodies of water.

Being an archipelago, the Philippines boasts of a rich marine biodiversity. It sits at the apex of the Coral Triangle, recognized as the global center for marine biodiversity, along with Papua New Guinea, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands.

As the apex of such a coral “center”, the Philippines is home to a diverse species of corals, seagrass beds, mangrove and beach forests, fisheries, invertebrates, seaweeds and marine mammals.

These are home to at least 2,000 species of fish 5,000 species of clams and other mollusks and crustaceans; 22 species of whales and dolphins; more than 900 species of seaweed; and more than 400 species of corals.

For nine years now, Metro Pacific has taken the cudgels to help rehabilitate these precious marine resources, beginning with Shore It Up, the country’s longest-running corporate-backed environment program. It has helped remove tons of garbage from Philippine waters—from Batangas to Subic, to Siargao, among others—and set up mangrove centers in the country. It has also ventured in giant-clam rearrangement and seeding and artificial-reef restoration.

“Over the years, Shore It Up had 75,000 volunteers, 3,000 junior environmental scouts and two mangrove centers,” del Rosario said. “We made sure that we have a contribution that is lasting—that is sustainable.”

Shore It Up’s activities for the year are the construction of a Mangrove Propagation and Information Center in Cordova, Cebu, and the establishment of coral-restoration field laboratory in Mabini, Batangas.

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