

## HEADLINES

MONTH OF THE OCEAN

# DENR seeks youth groups' help in preserving PH seas

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UNDERSEA ENCOUNTER Actress and environmental advocate Antoinette Taus is giddy recounting her encounter with a marine turtle during a youth camp in Batangas province. PHOTO COURTESY OF DENR-BMB

MABINI, Batangas — From trekking mountains, Rozelle de Leon, 23, has come down to the oceans to explore what she calls a “bigger horizon.”

It was through a friend that she learned about “Sea to Believe,” a two-day marine and dive camp of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources’ Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) for coastal protection.

“It’s an eye-opener,” De Leon said. As a medical student from Manila, she said she was happy to learn about marine animals’ potential in the medical field.

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Like her, software engineer Rommelson Fabro, 30, said the camp “ignited” his deep interest in underwater biodiversity.

He used to dive around the country, saying “the more you actually see it (marine ecosystem), the more you tend to love it.”

### **Youth tapped**

The activity, organized in celebration of the 19th Month of the Ocean, was held on May 12 to 13 at Barangay Bagalangit here, one of the communities on the Verde Island Passage (VIP).

VIP, a 1.14 million-hectare marine ecosystem, is dubbed as the world’s “center of marine shorefish biodiversity,” with the Philippines playing host to more than 2,000 species of fish alone.

Camp participants were 16 college students and young professionals selected by the BMB through an online art competition early this month.

Lectures on marine conservation were delivered by youth-led, nongovernment organizations like The Pisces Project, Reef Nomads, and Communities Organized for Resource Allocation (Cora), with snorkeling and skin diving guided by the Institusyong Skin Divers sa Ateneo.

“We need [the youth’s] help in promoting our advocacy,” said Marlynn Mendoza, BMB coastal and marine division chief. “The government cannot do this alone,” she added.

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Jhorace Engay, BMB’s senior ecosystems management specialist, said they tapped the younger generation to become BMB’s “young influencers.”

“We could see how [far] their reach [and] influence is in social media alone. The younger generation is very active and very willing to do it,” she said.

### **Going viral**

Giddy from her 12.19-meter dive here, actress and Cora founder Antoinette Taus described her underwater encounter with a hawksbill turtle and an octopus as simply “magical.”

Taus, who described herself as a “fan of the oceans,” talked about her advocacies to reduce plastic use and stop people from littering.

“For me, it’s just a choice for each one of us. Instead of looking outside at who should be doing this, let’s just think of what we can do,” she said.

Gela Petines, Reef Nomads managing director, talked about community development projects that mainly took off online.

Petines, 27, a free diver, has developed sustainable livelihood and tourism programs in the fishing villages of Verde Island in Batangas City.

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