

Diving Mazatlan

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In June, 2007, my family and I went to Mazatlan, Mexico. I had read multiple online posts some saying diving was good there, others saying it wasn't so I must admit I really didn't know what to expect. In anticipation that visibility might be an issue for my normal 17-85 mm lens, I purchased a 100 mm Macro and the required Ikelite port since the reduced water path for macro photography would allow better photos (at least for small critters!) than the longer path required by the 17-85 mm lens. I'm glad I did!

Mazatlan is actually three areas, Old Mazatlan (now called something else), Mazatlan, and "New" Mazatlan. New Mazatlan is where the new resorts and developments are occurring and is only 30-40 years old. Mazatlan is about 2 years older than Washington D.C. and Old Mazatlan dates from the 1500's. We stayed at the El Cid Marina resort in New Mazatlan.

On the day following our arrival I went down to Sea Sports at the El Cid Castillo and talked with the Dive Master there, he said that the high waves had made the visibility poor and that we should give it a couple of days, so I set my wife's and my first dive for the next Wednesday. When Wednesday rolled around the waves seemed smaller and less frequent, the dive master said visibility was much better than before and we would dive off of Bird Island (one of the three islands off of Mazatlan, Wolf, Deer and Bird Islands) there are also two rock spires called the twin Brothers.



Deer and Bird Islands

We would be diving with another couple who just completed the Dive Adventure course, they would have one dive master and Susan and I would have Hector, our own dive master. The dive boat was an open boat able to hold about 6-8 divers and their gear, although only 4-6 would be comfortable. Sea Sports has a amphibious Duck but only uses it to ferry groups over to Deer Island for a visit to the beach there or snorkeling.



Sea Sports Dive Boat and Duck

The biggest problem with the dive boat was getting back into it after the dive. For us older divers or divers that aren't in the best of shape it was not very dive friendly. The best suggestion I could make to Sea Sports would be to replace the dive boat with a larger Boston Whaler type boat with a center console and the capability to have a dive ladder for re-entering the boat after a dive.



Hector and Susan

The visibility on the first dive was 15-20 feet so I opted to try out the 17-85 mm lens, as you can see from the picture of Hector and Susan, there was still a bit of suspended matter to deal with.

On the first dive we dove off of the south end of the leeward side of Bird Island (the side toward land where there were no waves.) The average depth for the dive was 13 feet and the max depth was only 19 feet. We hugged the shore since the majority of the life lives in rock and coral at the edge of the island. The water temperature was 81 degrees at depth and with aluminum 80's we were able to get over an hour of bottom time.

On the first dive we were lucky to see a spotted sea snake, I watched as it dove into the sand to pluck out some tasty morsel. We also saw puffer fish, shrimp, and an octopus as well as nudibranches. The spotted sea snake is poisonous as are most of its relatives, luckily you really have to make it mad before it will bite you.



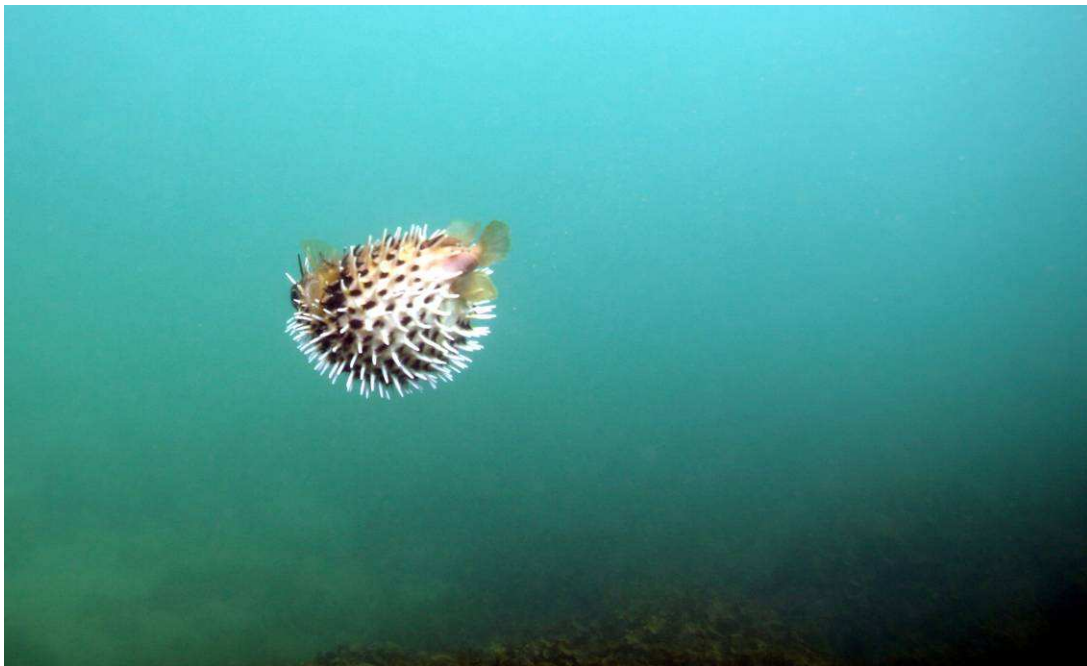
A Spotted Sea Snake

The rocks abound with small life and a macro photographer would have a field day searching it out and documenting it. On each dive I felt a bit rushed since I was with other divers it seemed just as I got set up for a shot or two I would look up to see Hector's bright yellow fins disappearing in the distance.



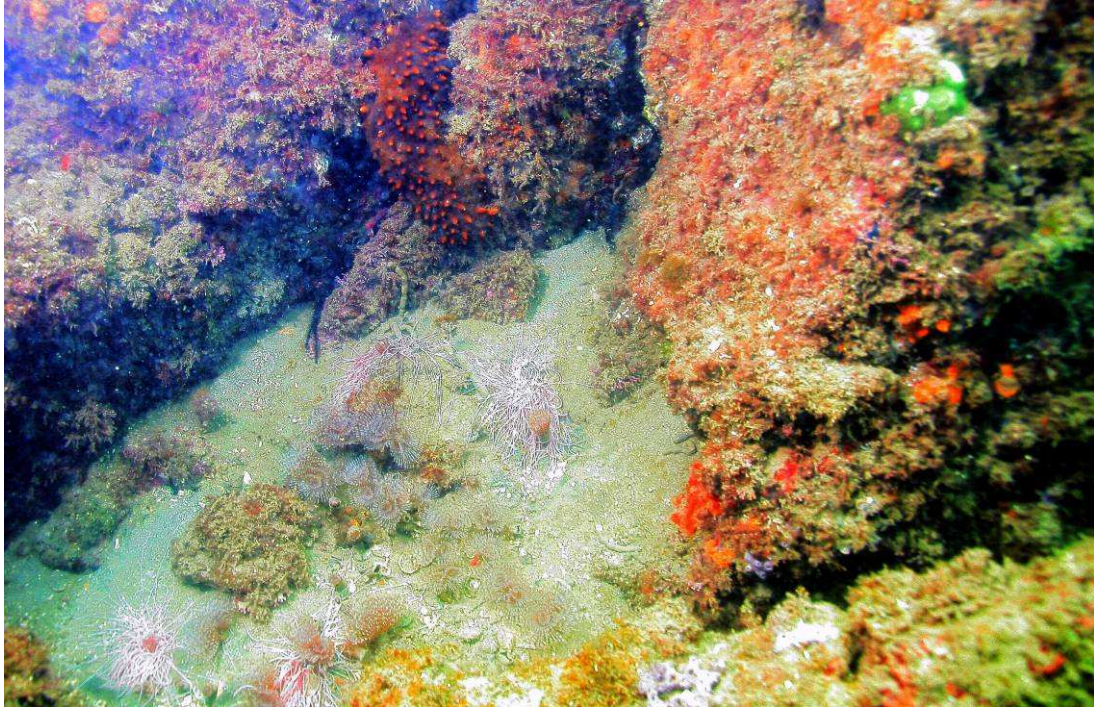
Susan holding a small Crab

Puffer fish seemed to be around every corner as did juvenile box fish. We saw several puffers and startled one into displaying the reason for his moniker.



Puffer fish doing what it does best

We also saw many star fish, urchins and sea cucumbers.



A purple sea cucumber

On the second dive I switched over to the 100 mm macro lens and we moved to a dive site on the north end of Deer Island after a 2 hour surface interval. During our surface interval the visibility had worsened to 5-10 feet, and the surge at the second dive site was much more noticeable. This was my first dive using the 100 mm Macro so I'm afraid I got a few "skin" shots as I was too close to the subjects.



Skin of a Puffer Fish

Once I got a little better at the use of the lens I was able to capture a bit more of the subjects, such as with the star fish in the next shot. Unfortunately shortly after we rounded the northern end of the island the visibility dropped to 5 feet and we called the dive.



Star Fish

I was able to capture some of the small coral using the macro lens as well. Due to the surge and low visibility it was difficult to get a good focus.



Coral

I set up a dive for the following morning hoping for better luck with the macro lens.

On the third dive I partnered with an experienced diver from California and there was a second pair of an experienced diver and a discovery diver with our one dive master, again Hector. I would have preferred just the dive master and myself but this was not to be. We dove the south end of Deer Island. The surge was the worst of the three dives since we were diving the north end of the channel between Wolf and Deer islands.

As with my first two dives there was a lot of life to photograph and we located several nudibranchs and I was able to get some shots of them using the 100mm macro. What follows is one of my attempts, no doubt as I get more experience with the 100mm my photos will improve.



Nudibranch

I didn't see any more colorful versions of nudibranchs but no doubt they were about. During the third dive I was also able to photograph a jewel eel, it was nestled down into the rocks and it was a bit of a challenge to hold still in the surge to get its picture. This was the first Jewel Eel I have seen, I guess they are more prevalent on the Pacific side than in the Caribbean where I have done most of my tropical diving.



Jewel Eel

As with the other dives there were numerous puffer fish around and I was able to get a close up of one of them.



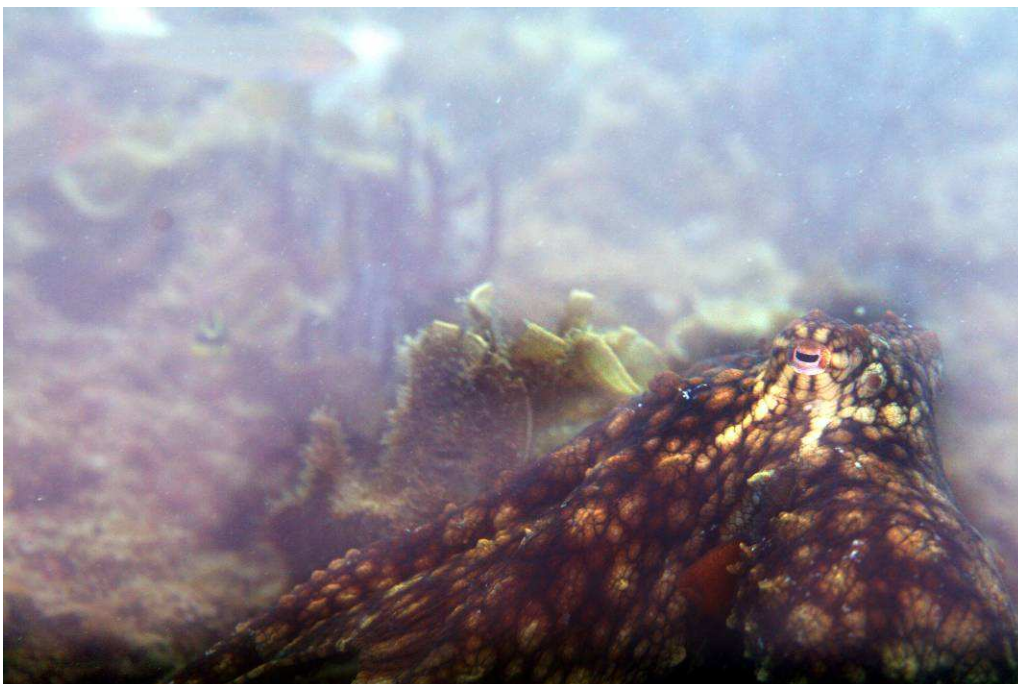
Close up of Puffer Fish

We also scared up a hermit crab that posed for a shot. I never realized crabs had blue eyes.



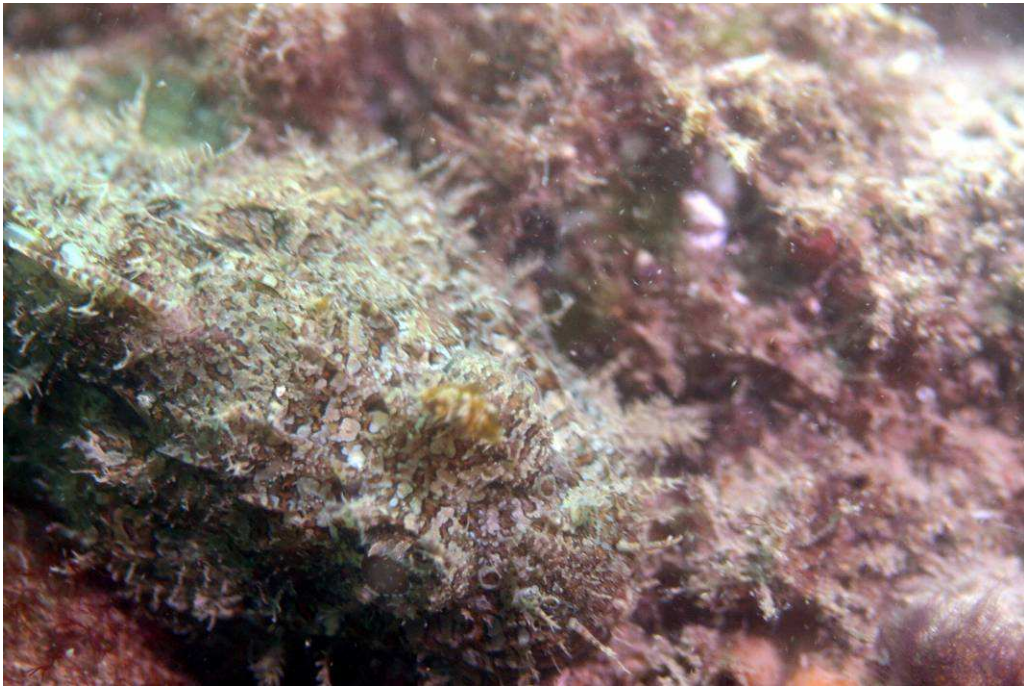
Hermit Crab

An octopus also came out for a look and a photo opportunity. He was only a foot or two from end of his tentacles to the end of his body, but look at the attitude in his eye.



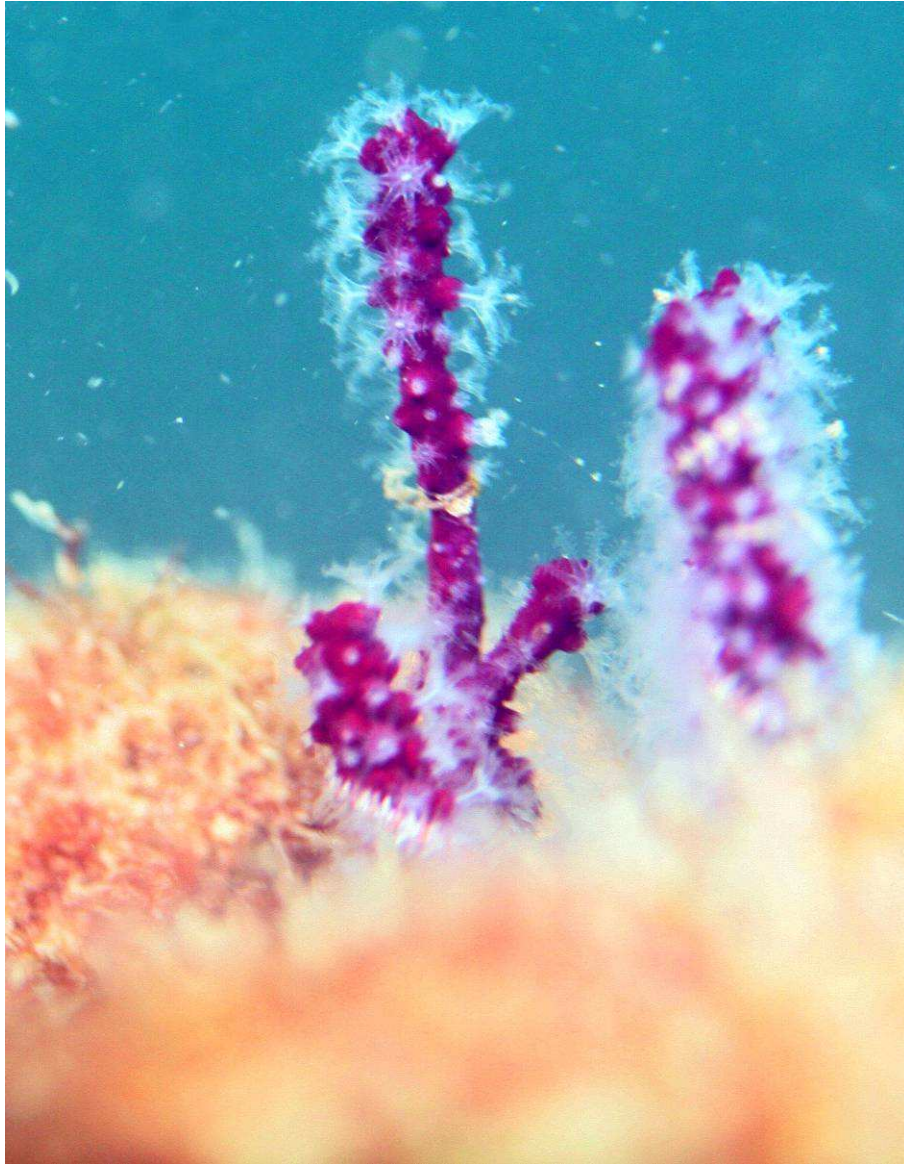
Octopus

As a final treat, we found a stone fish, I'm glad we saw it before putting out a hand to stabilize ourselves in the surge!



A Stone Fish

As a parting shot, here is a close up of some of the small coral in slightly better focus than my previous shot.



Close up of Coral

Diving in Mazatlan is not like Caribbean diving, the visibility will never reach the crystal clarity of such sites as Cozumel or Grand Turk. However, if you like seeing the small creatures and enjoy muck diving, then you will find Mazatlan to your liking. I do not suggest Mazatlan for beginning divers or divers that don't have experience with limited visibility, however, for those that like shallow diving with lots of sea life then Mazatlan will please you.