

Only 100 kilometres west of the Philippines' capital of Manila, Subic Bay's been an important military area since the Spanish established a naval base here in 1885. They didn't keep it for long – in 1898 the US took over the Philippines and Subic Bay after their victory in the Spanish-American War. During World War II the Americans lost control of the Philippines when they were caught unawares on December 1941 – the Japanese bombed Subic Bay the same day they attacked Pearl Harbour, and landed troops two

days later. After fierce fighting, General Douglas MacArthur fled to Australia in March 1942, famously vowing to return. The American troops surrendered to the Japanese in May 1942. General MacArthur finally returned to the Philippines in October 1944, but didn't defeat the Japanese there until February 1945. Many ships were lost in Subic Bay during the war, and many more were dumped there afterwards.

The Philippines achieved independence in 1946, but US control of Subic Bay continued; it became their largest naval

base outside the US and home to the massive Seventh Fleet. This consolidation was largely due to conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. The Philippine people resented this large American military presence and associated social problems; they finally regained possession of the Bay in 1992.

While the US controlled Subic Bay diving was banned. But the very day the Americans left, divers were in the water exploring the shipwrecks. One was Johan De Sadeleir, owner/operator of Johan's Dive Centre on the waterfront at Beloy Beach, near the town of Olongapo. They

now offer daily dives on the shipwrecks, nitrox fills, dive courses, and the complex includes a restaurant, bar, and basic accommodation. While there are over 30 diveable wrecks in and around the Bay (including a submarine and Phantom jet deeper than 45 metres) the most popular are in depths between 20 and 35 metres.

**USS NEW YORK** The most famous shipwreck is the 8150 ton armoured cruiser the USS *New York*. This 116 metre long battleship was launched in December 1891, and is probably the oldest steel warship anywhere in the

world that divers can explore. The *New York* carried a crew of 40 officers and 516 enlisted men. The ship's very impressive arsenal weapons included four 8-inch guns, 12 4-inch guns and two Whitehead torpedo tubes. She first saw action in the Spanish-American War and was flagship for the Caribbean campaign. In 1911 before the First World War she was renamed the USS *Saratoga* and was active in the Pacific and Atlantic. In 1917 she was renamed again as the USS *Rochester*, and served post-war in the Asiatic Fleet until decommissioning in April 1933.



> THIS ISN'T THE MOST ATTRACTIVE DIVE DESTINATION. IT HAS GREENISH WATER, GREY SAND BEACHES, BASIC ACCOMMODATION AND SOME RATHER SEEDY BARS. BUT IT HAS SOME OF THE MOST INTERESTING SHIPWRECKS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC.

# THE UNIQUE SHIPWRECKS OF SUBIC BAY

: NIGEL MARSH & HELEN ROSE

Main: The prop of the USS *New York*.  
Inset left to right: The winch gear used to lower the ramp of the LCU; The bow of the cargo ship *El Capitan*; Helen inspects a vent on the *El Capitan*; The watchful eye of a blue spotted stingray at *The Barges*.