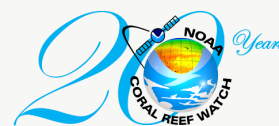




# Philippines - Palawan



Regional summary of 12 dive sites. Figures are averages across the sites that report them (n = sites with a value); each site's own page has its individual values. Part of the [Philippines](#) overview.



**Coral Health Index: TBD**



Photo: Anderson Mayfield/Coral Reef Diagnostics — [Philippines](#) - Port Barton, Palawan: island-hopping stop 1 (San Miguel area)

COUNTRY

**Philippines**

SITES

**12**

each linked below

HARD CORAL COVER  
(REGIONAL MEAN)

**28% ± 9.3%** (std. dev.)

n=12. range 15–43%

WATER TEMP. DURING  
SURVEYS (REGIONAL MEAN)

**27.3°C**

CORAL HEALTH INDEX  
(REGIONAL MEAN)

**not yet scored**

n = 0 of 12 sites

MOST RECENT WATER  
TEMPERATURE RECORD

**30.6°C**

16 Sep 2026 · [Western Philippines](#)

n = 8 of 12 sites; surveyed Jan 2017

#### MOST RECENT HEAT STRESS RECORD



**1.1°C-weeks**

16 Sep 2026 · below alert level

#### MEAN ANNUAL MAX DEGREE HEATING WEEKS (DHW), LAST 5 YEARS

**3.2°C-weeks**

2021–2025 · Western Philippines

#### HIGHEST ANNUAL HEAT STRESS

**12.1°C-weeks** 🔥

in 2024 · Western Philippines

#### SEVERE HEAT-STRESS YEARS

**4**

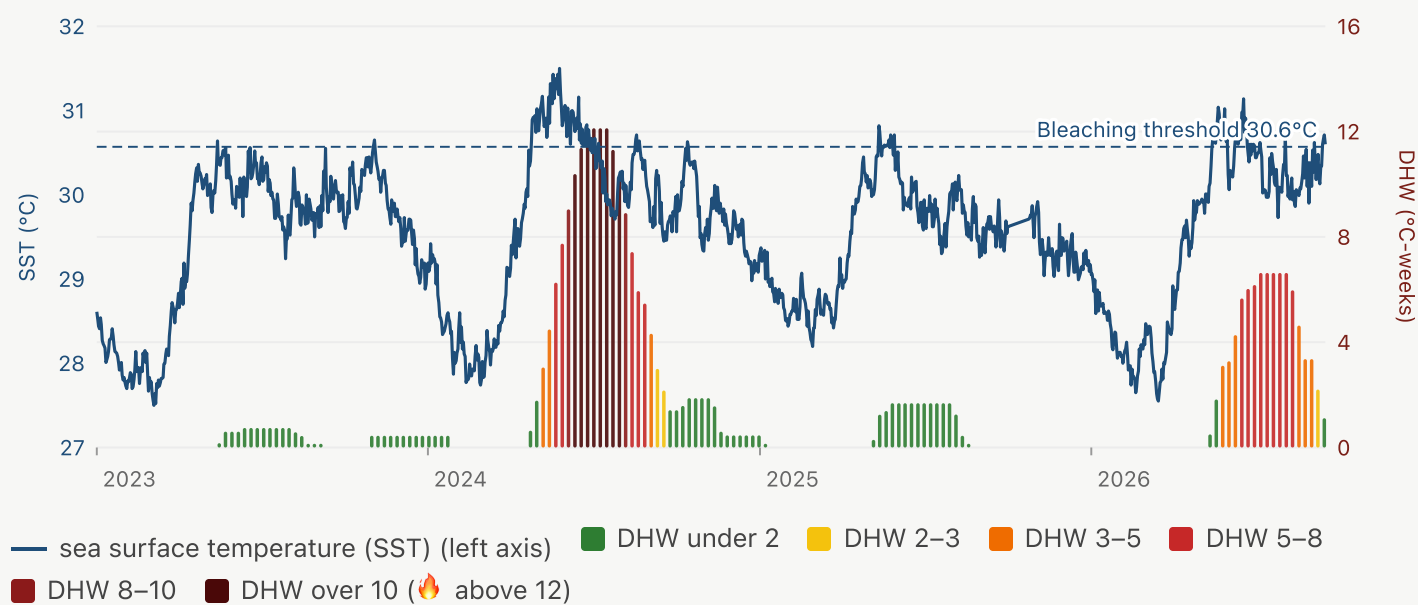
1985–2025 · 3 in the last 10 years

Heat-stress figures: [NOAA Coral Reef Watch](#) — [Western Philippines](#) 5-km virtual station. Each pill links its source record and carries the values behind it.

#### REGIONAL SUMMARY

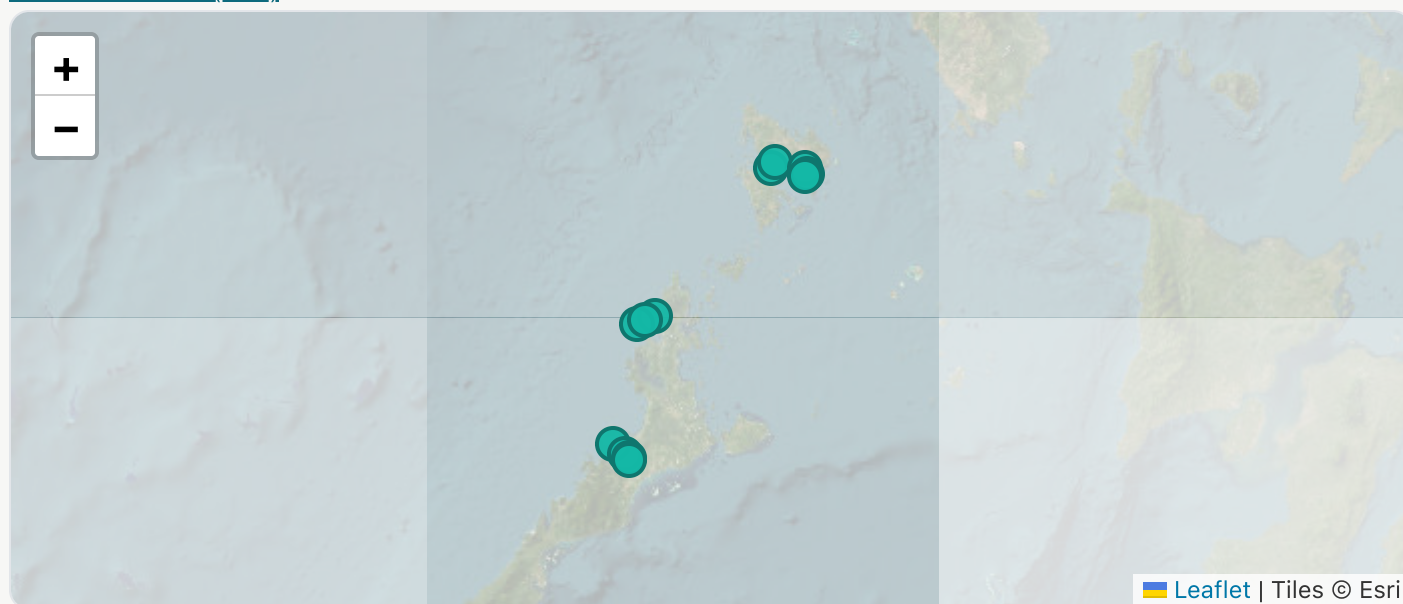
Palawan's reefs and WWII wrecks at Port Barton, El Nido, and Coron, visited in January 2017, feature vast staghorn and table-coral thickets and coral-colonized hulls. Condition was mostly good, though one Port Barton bay held extensive standing [dead coral](#) with new recruits growing on it.

## Heat stress



Daily SST (line) and weekly maximum Degree Heating Weeks (bars), Jan 2023–Sep 2026, [NOAA Coral Reef Watch](#) 5-km Western Philippines virtual station. Dashed line: bleaching threshold (maximum monthly mean  $29.6^{\circ}\text{C} + 1^{\circ}\text{C}$ ).  $\text{DHW} \geq 4$ : bleaching likely;  $\geq 8$ : severe bleaching and mortality likely. A bar is drawn only where DHW exceeds zero, so a stretch with no bar is accumulated heat stress of zero, not missing data — the SST line runs the full period.

Long-term record: 4 years since 1985 reached 8 or more °C-weeks at [NOAA's](#) Western Philippines station. [Download the annual DHW data \(CSV\)](#).



12 sites in this region — click a marker to open that site.

Read this summary in:

English

Tagalog

## Regional setting

[Spalding et al. \(2001\)](#) rank Palawan's reefs among the most fully developed in the Philippines, with fringing and patch reefs along most of its coast and live coral cover reported at 50-90% in places. Banks and shoals off the west coast are thought to belong to a long, submerged barrier reef, and the Sulu Sea holds two major atoll systems, the Cagayan Islands and Tubbataha, the latter made up of two atolls. At the time, Palawan, eastern Luzon, and the southern Sulu Sea were the only areas where the authors did not consider demersal fish stocks overfished, but they flag pooling, in which a hundred or more divers drive fish into nets with jets of compressed air, as possibly widespread off Palawan. Their protected-area list includes the Palawan Biosphere Reserve (11,508 km<sup>2</sup>, 1990), El Nido Marine Reserve (950 km<sup>2</sup>, 1992), and Tubbataha, a World Heritage Site since 1993. Nationally, they estimate about 25,060 km<sup>2</sup> of reef, with 421 coral species recorded and 577 estimated. [Souter et al. \(2021\)](#) place the Palawan/North Borneo ecoregion in the largest East Asian Seas subregion, 32,567 km<sup>2</sup>, or 41.6% of the region's reef area.

In that subregion, [Souter et al. \(2021\)](#) found considerable swings in modeled hard coral cover and a substantial fall in algal cover, but the data come from 171 sites, none monitored for longer than 15 years. Region-wide, they tie coral losses to the 2010 and 2016 mass bleaching events and cite overfishing, coastal aquaculture, siltation, eutrophication, and marine plastics as the main local pressures. [Wilkinson \(2006\)](#) described reef condition in the Philippines as still

declining in 2004, under heavy fishing pressure, including damaging methods, and sediment from coastal development.

## Overview

The 12 Palawan sites were visited between 20 and 28 January 2017 in three areas: Port Barton, the Bacuit Archipelago off El Nido, and Busuanga and Coron Island. They mix natural reefs with three wrecks. At Port Barton these are the *Alberguin* wreck on silty sand, a shallow bay snorkel (Reef 1), and two island-hopping stops. In El Nido they are Nat Nat, Paglugaban Rocks (a gently rolling fore reef around an offshore rock outcrop), and Abdens. At Coron they are the WWII wrecks *Akikushima* and *Taiei Maru*, Coral Gardens, and snorkels in the karst lagoons of Twin Lagoon and Green Lagoon. Logged maximum depths on the scuba dives ran from 15.2 m at Coral Gardens to 34.4 m on the *Akikushima* wreck; Reef 1, the two Port Barton island-hopping stops, and the Coron lagoons were snorkels.

*Acropora* and plating corals define the best reefs. The first Port Barton island-hopping stop had vast monospecific staghorn and tabulate *Acropora* thickets beside an unbroken pavement of violet-edged foliose plating coral, with massive *Porites* bommies between them. Abdens had broad fields of tabular plates, one table several meters across, and Coral Gardens had overlapping foliose corals including *Pachyseris* interleaved with staghorn thickets. Paglugaban Rocks showed striking genus diversity, from *Seriatopora* and *Pocillopora* to *Montipora*, *Porites*, and brain corals. The wreck hulls were colonized by *Euphyllia*, *Plerogyra*, *Turbinaria*, soft corals, and at *Taiei Maru* an intact *Acropora* table on a beam.

Photo-derived cover estimates on the natural reefs ranged from 17.2% at Nat Nat, with Abdens close behind at 17.5%, to 43.4% at the second Port Barton island-hopping stop. The first stop's 37.9% is likely an understatement given how much of it is solid living coral, and wreck values index hull colonization rather than reef cover. Condition was mostly good, with no site-wide bleaching. Flags were local: a partially bleached colony at the second island-hopping stop, where fleshy brown algae crowded rubble and dead framework, and scattered white patches or recent-mortality spots at Paglugaban Rocks and Coral Gardens. Reef 1 near Port Barton town was the clear exception, with extensive standing dead branching *Acropora* from an older mortality event. Small live recruits were growing on the dead branches there.

Visibility was poor on several dives, especially at Nat Nat and the Coron wrecks. Sightings include cuttlefish and a giant clam at Paglugaban Rocks, *Culcita novaeguineae* at Abdens, a batfish on the *Taiei Maru*, and a cluster of free-living mushroom corals at the second island-hopping stop.

## Highlights

- 12 sites visited 20–28 January 2017 across Port Barton, El Nido, and Coron
- Port Barton island-hopping stop 1: vast staghorn and tabulate *Acropora* thickets beside an unbroken pavement of foliose plating coral  photo: Philippines - Port Barton, Palawan: island-hopping stop 1 (San Miguel area)
- Abdens: continuous fields of tabular *Acropora*, one table several meters across  photo: Philippines - El Nido: Abdens (Bacuit Archipelago)
- Paglugaban Rocks: striking genus diversity on a rocky fore reef, one of Anderson's favorite Philippine dives  photo: Philippines - El Nido: Paglugaban Rocks (Bacuit Archipelago)
- Two WWII wrecks at Coron (*Akikushima* and *Taiei Maru*) colonized by *Euphyllia*, *Plerogyra*, and foliose corals
- Photo-derived cover on natural reefs from 17.2% (Nat Nat) to 43.4% (island-hopping stop 2)  photo: Philippines - Port Barton, Palawan: island-hopping stop 2

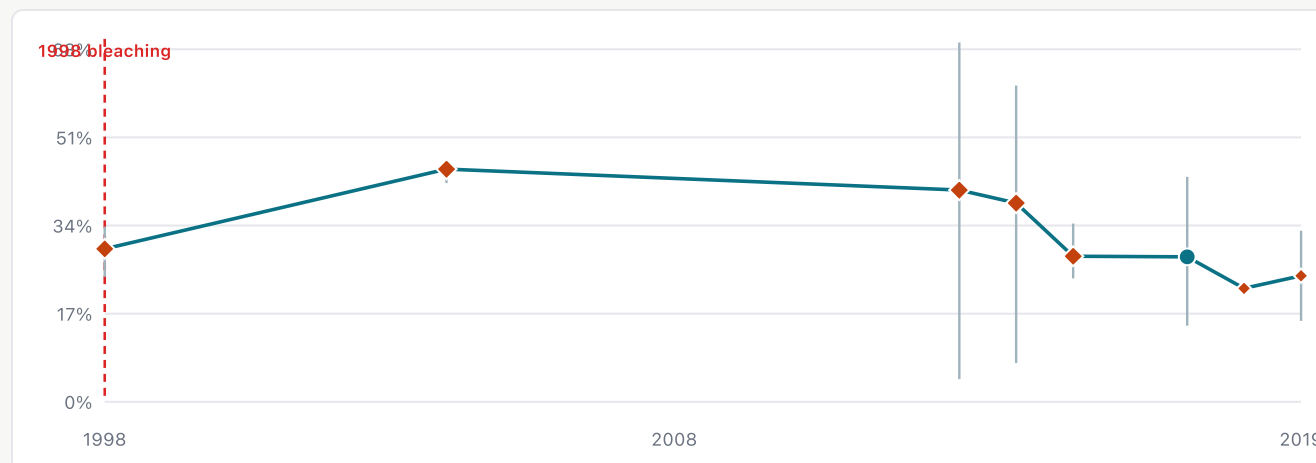
## Notable observations

- [Philippines - El Nido: Nat Nat \(Bacuit Archipelago\)](#): A *Seriatopora* colony photographed and labeled dying 
- [Philippines - El Nido: Paglugaban Rocks \(Bacuit Archipelago\)](#): Scattered stark-white patches on single colonies read as isolated recent-mortality spots; one large white plate consistent with recently dead skeleton; broken branching framework ('brittle reef') - physical breakage, not disease; no [crown-of-thorns starfish](#) (COTS) 
- [Philippines - El Nido: Abdens \(Bacuit Archipelago\)](#): One small white patch on a single colony, the only ambiguous spot; not a site-level signal 
- [Philippines - Coron: Coral Gardens, Busuanga](#): Four frames with localized white: a stark-white branch cluster, a pale lesion on one plate, two white pavement patches, and one bare *Acropora* skeleton; no site-wide bleaching 

- [Philippines - Port Barton, Palawan: Alberguin wreck](#): Several colonies conspicuously pale (cream pocilloporid, whitish Acropora, pale *Favites*); no lesions, tissue loss, or COTS 
- [Philippines - Port Barton, Palawan: Reef 1 \(bay snorkel\)](#): Extensive standing dead branching Acropora, algal-colonized and breaking to rubble (old mortality); one frame captioned 'pollution damaged reef' by Anderson 
- [Philippines - Port Barton, Palawan: island-hopping stop 1 \(San Miguel area\)](#): Two frames with a small bright-white patch read as a recently broken or recently dead branch cluster, not a bleaching event 
- [Philippines - Port Barton, Palawan: island-hopping stop 2](#): One small coral colony showing partial, localized tissue bleaching - not reef-wide; fleshy brown macroalgae over rubble and dead framework 

## Coral cover over time (pooled)

One point per year: the mean of every hard coral cover value available for this region that year — Anderson's own dives and every independent survey station within 5 km of them. The vertical bar is the full range behind that mean. Different programs use different methods at different stations, so this is a regional summary, not a single comparable series. One value above 70% was excluded as best-patch figures rather than site means. Years resting on fewer than three values are drawn as smaller points (2018, 2019). Non-CRD points are from [Reef Check Foundation](#). Marker shape: ● his own dives, ◆ other organizations' surveys.



### ► Sites in this region (12)

## Nearby external survey stations

32 independent survey records within 5 km of a site in this region (deduplicated across sites).

## ► Show all 32 records

All images from [Coral Reef Diagnostics](#). Data are from Coral Reef Diagnostics and [Reef Check Foundation](#).



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## References

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- Souter D, et al. (eds) (2021) *Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2020*. International Coral Reef Initiative / [Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network](#). [\[PDF\]](#)
- Spalding MD, et al. (2001) *World Atlas of Coral Reefs*. University of California Press, Berkeley. [\[PDF\]](#)
- Wilkinson C (2006) Status of coral reefs of the world: summary of threats and remedial action. In: Côté IM, Reynolds JD (eds) *Coral Reef Conservation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. [\[PDF\]](#)