

## ***A paradise named Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park...***

***By: Jenevieve Hara***



I truly considered Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park as one of my most favorite place on earth, it is situated within the coral triangle, a richly biodiverse corner of Southeast Asia, and is known as one of the most pristine coral reefs in the world.

It's not hard to fall in love with this UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its 360 coral species (just, you know, almost half of all known coral species in the world), 600 species of fish, and 100 species of birds, and many more.

Being able to see and work in this paradise which is considered as one of the Best Managed Protected Area in the Philippines, and covers an area of more than 100,000 hectares of high-quality marine habitats containing three atolls and a large area of deep sea, was truly an unforgettable and fulfilling experience. It is a unique example of an atoll reef with a very high density of marine species; the North Islet serving as a nesting site for birds and marine turtles. The site is an excellent example of a pristine coral reef with a spectacular 100-m perpendicular wall, extensive lagoons, and two coral islands. The reserve also protects one of the few remaining colonies of breeding seabirds in the region.



A National Geographic writer once asked a question that states, "As corals worldwide find themselves besieged, Tubbataha Reef remains shockingly pristine. Why?" As for me, the answer to this question is that it is the result of the combined efforts of people as well as proper sustainable management and conservation initiatives, including protection requirements that are in place. It is legally protected through national protected areas legislation and a range of other international environmental legislation which enable action to be taken against a wide range of threats.



Among the unsung heroes who show a life of the selfless and full of passion for this national heritage are the MARINE PARK RANGERS, who never get tired of guarding it, day in or day out. These people are leaving their families, the comfort of home and friends, just to brace the two-month tour of duty in Tubbataha, The team is composed of personnel from the Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard, Local Government, Philippine Marines, and Tubbataha Management Office.

Another person that I do really look up to, and to whom all my 'FINS' are UP' with full respect and honor I could say, is none other than the Tubbataha Park Manager, Ms. Angelique Songco (the amazing woman seating beside me on the photo below), she's the main person behind the success stories of conservation and protection of TRNP. Driven by her initiative, she prepared for the role by studying natural resources management. Now, she is affectionately called by friends and colleagues as Mama Ranger, a fitting nickname for someone who has nurtured Tubbataha for 16 years.



And as I bid farewell on our last day of stay in this place during sunset (oh I still can't still forget this moment 3 years ago), I just hoped, dreamt and prayed that all people, especially Filipinos, will consider Tubbataha as a national and natural treasure, one that must be fully protected and conserved. 😊