One moment: Michael Aw takes pictures of a sea turtle while diving in Bunaken, North Sulawesi.

Photo festival to showcase fragile beauty of the seas

A picture is worth a thousand words, especially when it comes to protecting the sea.

Sarah Wormald
CONTRIBUTOR/MANADO

Activists and underwater photographers will use the power of pictures to inspire conservation and the protection of the oceans during next year's "Celebrate the Sea Festival 2018," slated to be held in Manado in North Sulawesi starting on March 31.

The festival will also serve as a platform to call for a ban on shark fins in restaurants and to eliminate the use of single-use plastic bags in the province — two initiatives supported by the provincial government that, if successful, will mark a breakthrough in Indonesia.

The incredible richness and marine biodiversity in the Bunaken Marine Park, Manado Bay, Bangka Island and in the Lembeh Strait will be in the spotlight as the festival tries to highlight threats to marine environments from climate change and pollution.

Launched in 2002 and in previous years staged in association with the World Festival of Underwater Pictures, "Celebrate the Sea" is now in its 13th year running.

It will be the second time for Manado to host the festival, after the first time in 2011. Previous festivals have been held in destinations around the globe, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Past presenters include some of the world's most prominent luminaries in underwater imaging and science, including festival founder and acclaimed underwater photographer Michael Aw, award-winning cinematographer and pioneer of underwater film and photography Stan Waterman and National Geographic photographer David Doubilet.

The 2018 event in Manado will take place in conjunction with the 5th annual "Ocean Geographic Pictures of the Year" competition, and highlights of the festival weekend will include the screening of finalists' images, an underwater photography "shootout" and a children's art competition.

Michael Aw, who is also the founder of the Ocean Geographic Society and publisher of the Ocean Geographic Journal, said he had a strong reason to bring the festival back to Manado for a second time.

"This is a very special place to me. I first came to Manado in 1992 on assignment for GAHAWISRI Indonesia, and I was so impressed that I returned in 1993 for a period of eight months to finish my photography book *Beneath Bunaken*," he said.

GAHAWISRI is an acronym for the Indonesian Marine Tourism Association, which comprises of business leaders in the marine tourism industry from throughout the archipelago. This industry is made up of vessel operators, diving and surfing operators, builders and all kinds of marine tourism businesses operating in the country.

Aw said Hanny Batuna at Murex Dive Resorts was kind enough to host him, and as a conservationist, Hanny supported Aw's vision to bring greater attention to the marine park. He said it was the graciousness of Hanny and his wife Ineke Batuna that enabled him able to launch his underwater photographic career.

"I still return to Murex to dive now," he says.

Aw hopes to exceed the success of the 2011 Manado festival, which attracted more than 3,000 entries in the children's art competition and almost 1,000 entries for international underwater imaging competitions. Back then, the festival saw over 80 children from Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore and India compete in the finals.

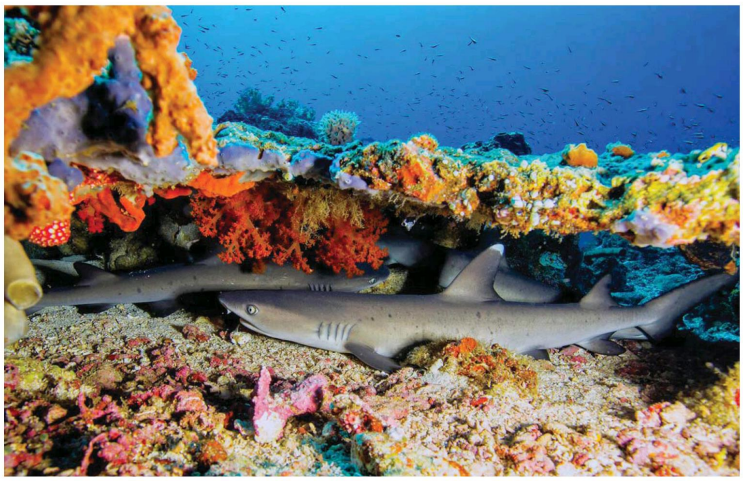
The 2018 competitions will once again include a children's art competition and several different competition categories for underwater imaging, which boast an array of prizes ranging from US$5,000 in cash to resort holidays in North Sulawesi and opportunities for winning images to make the cover of Ocean Geographic.

Cash prizes and funding for the event has been put forward by the provincial government under the direction of North Sulawesi Governor Olly Dondokambey and the head of the North Sulawesi Tourism Agency, Daniel Mewengkang.

Michael Aw went on to say that "Bunaken Marine Park is small and easily accessible for everyone — it is a public aquarium in a natural environment located in the world's richest biological province. If we are to take on issues to protect larger areas, then Bunaken should serve as a template."

"I am looking forward to seeing the interpretation of the image makers of my favourite marine park and to seeing the younger generation involved in the art competition," he said.

— PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CELEBRATE THE SEA FESTIVAL



Home sweet home: White tip reef sharks can be found in Bunaken Marine Park.

Michael Aw

World of wonder: North Sulawesi and its vibrant marine life will be the center of attention at the 2018 Celebrate the Sea Festival.

GUESS WHAT?

Kapanlagi.com

Oki spending Ramadhan with kids in hospital

JAKARTA: Actress Oki Setiana Dewi has been spending Ramadhan at the hospital because her two children have contracted measles.

"It's God's will that in the first 10 days of Ramadhan, my child, Maryam Nusaibah Abdullah, was admitted to the hospital. My other child Khodijah was admitted the week after," she said as quoted by *kompas.com*.

She said Maryam had also developed an inflammation in her lungs, which required surgery. Prior to being hospitalized, the little girl had developed a fever at home.

"At first we wanted to take care of her at home. But the doctor insisted she should be treated at the hospital," Oki said. — *JP*

AFP

Ed Sheeran fans scramble to get concert tickets

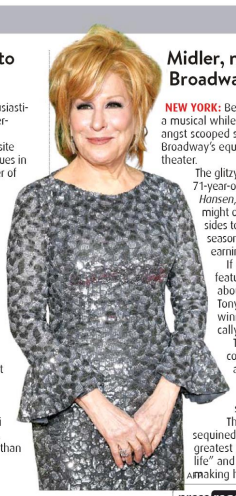
JAKARTA: Ed Sheeran's fans in Indonesia enthusiastically tried to book tickets to their favorite singer-songwriter's show on Monday.

The *BookMyShow Indonesia* website reportedly experienced technical issues in the first hour due to a large number of people trying to access it.

Twenty-four-year-old Raden Arsi Agnitasari got tickets after almost two hours of trying. "I got a queue number, but it moved slowly. I then tried to open the website in another browser and finally succeeded [in getting tickets]," she said.

Meanwhile, 30-year-old Stephany Josephine got a ticket through a friend. Her friend and her colleagues had been on standby on the website, she said. The group got tickets at around 12:30 p.m.

The concert, slated to be held on Nov. 9 at the Indonesian Convention Exhibition (ICE) in Bumi Serpong Damai, Tangerang, Banten, is expected to be held in front of more than 10,000 people.— *JP*



Midler, millennial angst scoop Broadway's Tony Awards

NEW YORK: Bette Midler won best actress in a musical while an edgy new tale of millennial angst scooped six awards including best musical at Broadway's equivalent of the Oscars for United States theater.

The glitzy revival of *Hello, Dolly!* starring the 71-year-old Midler and the breakout *Dear Evan Hansen*, about wanting to belong and the might of social media, spotlighted different sides to New York's famed district, which last season grossed a record US$1.45 billion in earnings.

If other award ceremonies have featured a never-ending stream of jokes about President Donald Trump, Sunday's Tony Awards, hosted by double Oscar winner Kevin Spacey, were more politically restrained.

The gong was Midler's first Tony in a competitive category and comes half a century after the famed, Grammy-winning singer and songwriter made her Broadway debut. She received a special Tony award in 1974.

The singer, who shimmered in a silver sequined gown, called the show "one of the greatest professional experiences of my entire life" and gave thanks to make-up artist for making her "look 30 years younger." — *AFP*

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