

THAILAND MASTER

Mergui Archipelago, 7 nights

Ranong, Thailand | Mergui Archipelago, Myanmar

Isolated pinnacles, caves and tunnels, soft and hard corals and rarely visited reefs make the Mergui Archipelago diving at its most untouched.

Healthy gorgonian sea fans stand in a forest on a submerged pinnacle, with schooling snapper, trevally, rainbow runners and fusiliers around them.

Tiny islets are a mix of caves, canyons, vertical walls and sloping reefs, with fields of anemones and tiger tail seahorses on the deep edges.

Out in the blue, wahoo, tuna and barracuda pass by, and a granite island of gorges and swim-throughs draws eagle rays and the occasional manta.

LENGTH	DEPARTURE PORT	ARRIVAL PORT	EXPERIENCE
8 days / 7 nights	Ranong, Thailand	Ranong	Advanced Open Water







Your route

STOP 1

Embarkation

Embarkation, lunch and orientation briefings, then the short crossing to Kawthoung in Myanmar before cruising into the archipelago.
There is no diving on embarkation day.

STOP 2

Days 2 to 6: Diving days

Your Cruise Director schedules up to 4 dives a day: 3 day dives and a sunset or night dive.
A typical diving day is a light breakfast, briefing and dive 1; full breakfast, relaxation, briefing and dive 2; lunch, relaxation, briefing and dive 3; a snack and a briefing for the sunset or night dive; then dinner.

STOP 7

Last diving day

We usually schedule 2 morning dives before the boat cruises back towards Ranong.

STOP 8

Disembarkation

Breakfast on board, then disembarkation between 09:00 and 09:30.

THE TRIP

How the trip works

ITINERARY DETAILS

This itinerary involves some long distance travel. Weather and sea conditions can affect the boat's ability to reach a specific dive site and the number of scheduled dives.

WEATHER AND ROUTE

The sites below are a general indication of the areas usually covered. The inclusion of named sites is not guaranteed, and the sites chosen depend on sea and weather conditions and the length of the trip.

DIVING EXPERIENCE

Some of the diving around the Mergui Archipelago can be challenging for divers who have not dived in similar conditions. Some sites are deeper than entry-level certification limits, and there can be strong currents and reduced visibility. All divers must have PADI Advanced Open Water certification, or equivalent, with a minimum of 30 logged dives and, ideally, experience diving in currents. Guests who do not meet the requirements, or whom the crew feel lack the skills or experience for certain conditions, may be denied some or all dives. Diving insurance covering emergency evacuation and recompression is mandatory.

THE DIVING

Dive sites

Named sites are examples of where the boat may dive; which sites are visited depends on conditions and the length of the trip.

ROCKY ISLAND A.K.A. HIGH ROCK

This is a tiny islet with a solitary tree growing on the top, located roughly 75 kilometres northwest of Kawthuang. Beneath the surface, you will find a steep rocky reef with a variety of corals and a huge, colourful anemone garden where large schools of yellow five-lined snappers hang out. A garden of small granite boulders at depth provides a home for octopus, cuttlefish and numerous moray eels. The cracks provide refuge for plenty of critters for macro

lovers to discover including nudibranchs, pipefish, razorfish and seahorses while hunting wahoo, tuna, and barracuda can be spotted passing in the blue. Visibility and currents can sometimes be challenging but it is a rewarding site.

NORTH TWIN AND SOUTH TWIN

Strong currents around these granite islands bring with them groups of schooling barracuda, hunting tuna and mating cuttlefish. With often clear visibility the atmosphere on the reef at North Twin is breathtaking. Healthy Gorgonian sea fans can be admired at depth, while soft corals adorn the reef and bring plenty of vibrancy and colour. North Twin features a sloping reef strewn with huge boulders covered with soft corals and encrusting sponges. Sweetlips, barracuda, a variety of angel fish and many smaller creatures including devil scorpion fish, pipe fish, shrimps and flabellina nudibranchs can be found all over the reef. Mantas may also be seen here. On South Twin, you will find large boulders, steep-walled gorges, wide valleys, caverns and swim-throughs carved out of the granite foundations of the island. You can expect to see an abundance of moray eels, harlequin sweetlips, and cuttlefish. Eagle and devil rays may fly by while Kuhl's stingrays and spotted garden eels can be seen on the sandy bottom.

BLACK ROCK

Black Rock stands alone in the Andaman Sea acting as a natural magnet for oceanic mantas and other large pelagics such as whale sharks and eagle rays. The underwater terrain consists of sloping reefs around most of the island with a vertical wall down to roughly 27 metres on the south side where it becomes a more gradual slope. Deeper sections are decorated with orange gorgonian fans, along with fields of Corallimorpharia and, at the eastern tip, you will find vast numbers of magnificent anemones. Off the southwest corner a detached rock formation, covered with small, vibrant soft corals rises from very deep water to about 24 metres where we often see schooling snappers and rainbow runners. A wide range of invertebrate life can be found at Black Rock, including smashing and spearing mantis shrimp, spiny lobsters, hermit crabs, sea stars, cowrie shells, harlequin shrimp, octopus and cuttlefish.





THREE ISLETS

The three sites across these tiny islands (Shark Cave, Submarine and Square Rock) are rich with diverse marine life and a mix of caves, canyons, vertical walls, and sloping reefs. Many areas are populated with fields of anemones providing homes to five different species of anemonefish. Elsewhere, large tubastrea coral trees sprout from the rocky terrain, accompanied by crinoids, gorgonian fans, blue dragons, and pastel green rope sponge. Tiger tail seahorses are often encountered on the deep edges of the slope, as are a variety of moray eels with several species regularly sharing the same hole. Cuttlefish may be found at nearly any depth, sometimes courting and mating. Ornate ghost pipefish, cowrie shells, octopus, reef squid, jawfish, porcelain crabs, longnose pipefish, and mantis shrimps are often seen at this site. Scorpionfish are very abundant, so be careful where you place your hands! Shark Cave easily lends itself to several dives, where you can enjoy the diversity of the reef and marvel at the chasm that splits the island. Nurse and white-tip reef sharks can sometimes be found lurking inside the deeper part of the cavern along with marble rays, ghost pipefish and plenty of other fascinating creatures, including blue ribbon eels.





SEA FAN FOREST

As the name suggests, this submerged pinnacle, starting at 5 metres depth, is famous for its abundance of gorgonian sea-fans. The biggest gorgonians are in deeper waters around 20m and below. They are very healthy and support a wide variety of marine life including feather stars, cowries, hawkfish and shrimps. Schooling fish include snapper, trevally, rainbow runners and fusiliers. Moray eels and scorpion fish are also numerous. We are also likely to encounter giant marbled groupers and eagle rays here.





WESTERN ROCKY

A short cruise south of Sea Fan Forest, Western Rocky consists of a main islet and several detached pinnacles. Among the most striking features is a huge underwater archway where schooling snappers often hang out. The soft limestone island is riddled with holes and crevices, providing hiding places for hinge-beak shrimp, thorny oysters, cowrie snails, nudibranchs, spiny lobsters and moray eels. Large Gorgonian fans and lush soft corals populate many of the deeper areas, while shallow portions of the south side wall are covered with orange cup corals and colourful encrusting sponges. Fish life can include almost anything from ornate ghost pipefish, seahorses and frogfish to schooling batfish and barracudas. Several kilometres south of the main islet, Western Rocky Pinnacle is shaped like a cheese wedge covered with hard and soft corals, lots of trevally and tuna and, if you are lucky, guitar sharks resting in the sand. Little Torres Island (10 night itineraries only) This is a good dive site for appreciating a kaleidoscope of colours created by the abundance of multifarious corals such as table corals, mosaic corals and red whip corals, to name just a few. Surrounded by healthy reef life and huge submerged boulders, there is a good chance of seeing black-banded sea snakes here as well as the occasional sting ray and the rare leopard sharks on the sea bed or even reef sharks, whale sharks and mantas.