

THE JUNK

Best of Thailand, 10 nights

Chalong or Thap Lamu | Southern Thailand, Similan and Surin Islands

Limestone cliffs rise vertically from the sea around Phi Phi, and beneath them the walls drop away with gorgonian fans, soft corals and swim-throughs.

Leopard and nurse sharks sleep on the sand, blacktip reef sharks patrol the reefs, and tigertail seahorses hide in the fans.

Further out, open-ocean pinnacles reach down past 70 metres, with huge gorgonian sea fans and encounters with manta rays and whale sharks.

A sunken car ferry is covered in soft corals and home to large schools of snapper.

LENGTH	DEPARTURE PORT	ARRIVAL PORT	EXPERIENCE
11 days / 10 nights	Chalong Pier or Thap Lamu Pier	Thap Lamu Pier or Chalong Pier	Advanced recommended







Your route

STOP 1

Embarkation

Embarkation at 18:00 is followed by introductions, safety briefings and dinner.

STOP 2

Days 2 to 9: 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 10

Last diving day

Usually two morning dives before the boat commences the cruise to port.

STOP 11

Disembarkation

Breakfast on board followed by disembarkation between 09:30 and 10:00.

THE TRIP

How the trip works

ITINERARY DETAILS

The Best of Thailand itinerary combines our 4 nights Southern Thailand itinerary with the 6 night Similan and Surin Islands itinerary. The itinerary involves some long distance travel. Bad weather and sea conditions can affect the boat's ability to reach a dive site in good time and may reduce the number of dives.

IF YOU DISEMBARK EARLY

Itineraries starting from Chalong and ending at Thap Lamu do 4 nights Southern Thailand followed by 6 nights in the Similans and Surin Islands. Itineraries starting from Thap Lamu and ending in Chalong do 6 nights in the Similan and Surin Islands before heading south for 4 nights. The areas visited and the number of dives stay the same.

KOH LIPE

The ten night trip adds Koh Lipe in the Tarutao National Marine Park. It is not guaranteed and depends on conditions.

WEATHER AND ROUTE

The itinerary is an example. The route and dive sites depend on local regulations, weather and sea conditions, and are at the Captain's discretion. Where a named dive site cannot be reached, the crew offers diving at an alternative location.

DIVING EXPERIENCE

We recommend divers have PADI Advanced Open Water certification, or equivalent, with a minimum of 10 logged dives and experience in strong currents. The Advanced Open Water course can usually be completed on board with advance notice. Guests who do not fulfil the minimum certification and experience requirements may be denied participation in some or all dives. Diving insurance covering emergency evacuation and recompression is mandatory. Leave a minimum of 24 hours between your final dive and the departure of your flight. Safety and dive briefings are given in English.

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.

KOH PHI PHI NATIONAL PARK

Lying in Phang-Nga Bay, about 45 km east of Phuket and 30 km southwest of Krabi, two breathtaking limestone islands make up the greater part of Moo Koh Phi Phi, an archipelago of 6 islands, with the largest island of Phi Phi Don being a few kilometres north of Phi Phi Lae. Limestone cliffs rise vertically into the sky, where the trees take over. There are many beaches, coves, and bays which make for dramatic scenery to enjoy during surface intervals. There are many, many dive sites around the Phi Phi island group, many consisting of wall dives, the limestone dropping to depth ranges between 10m and 25m. The walls can have gorgonian fans, soft corals and coral bushes and interesting rock formations and swim throughs. At the base of these walls there are often hard coral gardens to explore. You can expect a great amount of fish life, including lionfish, wrasse, moorish idols, angelfish, rays, trevallies. Also keep an eye out for leopard and nurse sharks sleeping on the sandy bottoms or blacktip reef sharks cruising the reefs. Turtles are also commonly seen here. Lastly, check the fans and bushes for tigertail seahorses and harlequin ghost pipefish.

KING CRUISER

The King Cruiser was a car ferry that used to travel between Phi Phi and Phuket until, in 1997, 'The Cruiser' hit Anemone Reef on her crossing and sank a short distance away. No lives were lost, but divers were left with a great wreck dive! Although now largely broken up, she is covered with soft corals and hides some wonderful gems, as well as being home to several large schools of snapper. While currents can be strong and visibility sometimes challenging, this is a great site to dive as part of an Advanced Open Water Course.

SHARK POINT AND ANEMONE REEF

These pinnacles are part of the same reef system and are only a very short distance apart from each other. Both sites are covered with colourful soft corals and anemones with a variety of fish to suit all divers. From barracuda to seahorses and, for the lucky ones, the iconic leopard shark!

KOH HAA NATIONAL PARK

Possibly some of the most underrated diving in the whole of Thailand, Moo Koh Haa (meaning Five Islands) sits almost halfway between Hin Daeng and Phi Phi and is part of the Ko Lanta National Marine Park. While they may not be much to look at above water, these amazing islands offer a variety of pinnacles, walls, boulders, caverns, and swim-throughs beneath the surface. There are several dive sites around Koh Haa but the highlights are Koh Haa Lagoon, Koh Haa Neua, and Koh Haa Yai. Koh Haa lagoon is ideal for night dives, courses, and snorkelling, while The Chimney and The Cathedral offer things that you cannot see on other Thailand liveaboard itineraries with caverns, swim-throughs and chambers littering the sites. Koh Haa has varied marine life too, with ornate ghost pipefish, morays eels, octopus, hawksbill turtles, sea horses, marble rays, and sometimes even leopard sharks.

HIN DAENG AND HIN MUANG

Translating as Red Rock and Purple Rock, with their names derived from the colour of the corals they host, these two sites are pinnacles in the open ocean, reaching down to over 70m, and are best known for manta ray and whale shark encounters. Whether these are sighted or not, the sites also offer giant moray eels, pharaoh cuttlefish, schooling rainbow runners and snappers, barracudas, groupers, fusiliers, and bluefin trevally. On the pinnacles, there are fields of Magnificent Anemones, walls of Hemprics soft corals, and huge gorgonian sea fans. Almost perpetual good visibility and dramatic topography combined with huge fish numbers makes for excellent liveaboard diving.





SIMILAN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

The above water scenery will provide stunningly beautiful white sandy beaches with small forested areas. Dive some of the following sites; Boulder City, Sharkfin Reef, Anita's Reef and Three Trees. Under the surface you may see: Leopard (zebra) shark, blue spotted stingrays, clown triggerfish, rabbit fish, scorpion fish, snappers, emperor fish, giant trevally and angelfish. The coral gardens, bommies and boulder formations are wonderful to dive. Elephant Head Rock, visible from the surface, is the biggest pinnacle in the Similans and has some fantastic swim-throughs. White tip reef sharks, batfish, trevally and barracuda can often be seen on the perimeter of the boulders. If you look closely in the cracks and in the rubble you can see smashing mantis shrimp, porcelain crab, moray eels and cleaner shrimp. There are also sites dominated by huge granite boulders such as Deep Six, Christmas Point, and North Point where you can see white tip reef sharks, schooling giant trevally, and schools of neon fusiliers.





KOH BON

This is generally the most likely place to see manta rays on this itinerary. You are also likely to see Napoleon wrasse, sweetlips, octopus, bluefin trevally, giant moray eels, great barracudas, fire dart goby, spiny lobster and nudibranchs of many types. The dive sites vary from wall diving to gently sloping reefs and from submerged boulders to coral gardens. Diving on the West Ridge can be an adrenaline filled drift, with amazing views, while the North Reef is a gentler experience over a hard coral garden.

KOH TACHAI

This island is famous for its pinnacle dive site, known by many as Twin Peaks as well as more relaxed reef diving on the North Reef and South Reef. Normally, turtles, barracuda, pipefish, and nudibranchs can be found here. There is also a chance to see bigger species in this area like manta rays and whale sharks, especially by late January until April.

RICHELIEU ROCK

This limestone pinnacle was named by Jacques Cousteau after Cardinal Richelieu due to the similarity to the colour of his gown as there are gorgeous purple dendronephthya soft corals covering most of the pinnacle. There are other areas covered in magnificent sea anemones as well. Barely breaking the surface at low tide, this horseshoe-shaped outcropping slopes steeply to a sandy bottom at 18 to 35 metres (60-120 Ft). This site offers great diversity for such a small and isolated spot. It also offers excellent multi-level diving and, because it’s a high-profile reef, there’s always sheltered areas to hide from currents. The marine life is prolific and includes amongst, many other things; pharaoh cuttlefish, large octopi, all 5 varieties of anemone fish of the Andaman Sea, variety of moray eels, ornate ghost

pipefish, smashing mantis shrimps, harlequin shrimps, tiger tail seahorses, spanish mackerel, frog fish, many schooling snapper and occasional sightings of manta rays and whale sharks.





SURIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

The topside scenery of Koh Surin, with evergreen forests, mangroves, and small beaches, surpasses even that of the picturesque Similan Islands. Under water the reefs of Surin have some of the greatest hard coral diversity in Thailand. Across sites like Torinla Pinnacle, Hin Kong, and Turtle Ledges you are likely to see Napoleon wrasse, yellow-masked angelfish, bumphead parrotfish, tomato anemonefish and barramundi, as well as lots of turtles that still come ashore in this area to lay their eggs. Because of the remoteness not many liveaboard boats visit these islands and you will be able to enjoy the dive sites without sharing it with tourist hordes.

KHAO LAK WRECKS

Before disembarking in Khao Lak, if conditions and timing are favourable there is a choice of easily diveable wrecks between the Similan Islands and the port of Tap Lamu. The Boonsung and The Premchai are old tin miners that were sunk in the 1990's and are a treat for underwater photographers as well as lovers of life of all kinds! Only in 18m of water they are covered in nudibranchs and various kinds of shrimps. Many quite unusual honeycomb morays also made these wrecks home. There are also huge numbers of schooling fish as well as rays and sharks that can occasionally be seen. Sea Chart 1 is a slightly more challenging dive and lies between 40 and 25 metres. Sunk during a storm in 2009 with a full load of teak, she is relatively new but already hosts an abundance of schooling fish. Along the route there are some incredible views from the boat including verdant forests, deserted beaches, and limestone karsts climbing vertically from the ocean. There will be several opportunities to leave the boat and take a walk on the islands. A walk up the trail to Sail Rock is definitely time well spent! You can even be entertained by marine life while relaxing on board The Junk as dolphins cruising along with the boat are not an unusual sight.



