

THE JUNK

Manta Trust Expedition, Best of Thailand

Chalong Pier to Thap Lamu Pier | Racha, Koh Haa, Hin Daeng, Similans and Richelieu Rock

A trip built around close encounters with manta rays, with scientists photographing every manta met and inviting divers to name any new ones.

Open-ocean pinnacles are best known for manta ray and whale shark encounters, with fields of magnificent anemones and huge gorgonian sea fans.

Almost perpetual good visibility and dramatic topography combine with huge fish numbers.

Around Koh Bon, manta rays are most likely, and Koh Tachai adds leopard sharks, marbled whip rays and turtles.

A limestone pinnacle covered in purple soft corals finishes the trip, with frogfish, tiger tail seahorses and the occasional whale shark.

LENGTH	DEPARTURE PORT	ARRIVAL PORT	EXPERIENCE
11 days / 10 nights	Chalong Pier, Phuket	Thap Lamu Pier	All levels, some currents







Your route

STOP 1

Embarkation

Embarkation at 18:00 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

Two morning dives before commencing the cruise to port.

STOP 11

Disembarkation

Breakfast on board, then disembarkation between 09:30 and 10:00.

THE TRIP

How the trip works

CITIZEN SCIENCE AND PHOTO ID

Workshops in collecting and recording manta ID images give divers the tools to get involved, knowing they are contributing meaningful data to the Manta Trust's research and conservation. Every manta sighting is crucial information for developing effective management and conservation strategies for these vulnerable animals.

YOUR TRIP LEADER

Jamie Monmaneerat is project leader of the Thailand Manta Project, which she founded in 2015 to research the manta population in Thailand and increase local protection of manta and mobula rays. She worked with the Manta Trust in the Maldives in 2014 and has over seven years' experience as a PADI dive instructor in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. She gives presentations on manta rays during the expedition.

DIVING

A mix of large and small marine life, colourful reefs, submerged pinnacles, boulders and swim-throughs. 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.

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.

RACHA YAI

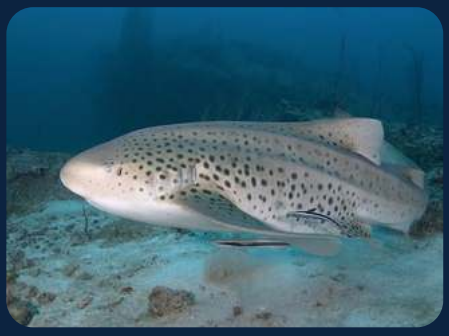
Located south of Phuket, Racha Yai offers the perfect location for a check dive with great visibility, sheltered sandy-bottomed bays, sloping hard coral reefs and underwater statues to explore.

RACHA NOI

This island has some of the best visibility of all sites in the area. Often described as a ‘mini Similans’ the granite boulder topography is also unique compared to other sites in the area. It offers a choice of hard coral reefs, boulders with large swim throughs and the beautiful pinnacle on the south point of this island. Strong currents can make the southern sites challenging, however, with a year round chance to see manta rays, it is worth the effort to dive here.

KOH HAA

Possibly some of the most underrated diving in the whole of Thailand, Moo Koh Haa (literally 'five island group') sits almost halfway between Hin Daeng and Phi Phi and is part of the Ko Lanta National Marine Park. There are actually several dive sites around Koh Haa but the highlights are Koh Haa Lagoon, Koh Haa Neua, and Koh Haa Yai. Around these amazing islands you can see pinnacles, walls, boulders, caverns, and swim-throughs. 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

These two sites are pinnacles (translating directly as Red Rock and Purple Rock) 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

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 Honeymoon Bay. 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, Elephant Head Rock is the biggest pinnacle in the Similans and has some fantastic swim-throughs. If lucky, you might see some white tip reef sharks, batfish, trevally and barracuda can often be seen on the perimeter of the boulders and if you look closely in the cracks and in the rubble you can see smashing mantis shrimp, porcelain crab, moray eels and cleaner shrimp.

KOH BON

Often, this is the most likely place to see manta rays on this itinerary. You are likely to see Napoleon wrasse, sweetlips, octopus, bluefin trevally, giant moray eels, great barracudas, fire dart goby, popcorn shrimp, 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.

KOH TACHAI

This island is famous for its pinnacle dive site and more relaxed reef diving. Normally leopard sharks, marbled whip rays, 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 the character in the Three Musketeers, Cardinal Richelieu, as it reminded him of his deep scarlet cape. There are gorgeous purple dendronepthya soft corals covering most of the pinnacle and 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 current. 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.





TOP SIDE

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 onboard with dolphins cruising along with the boat, not an unusual sight.