

Hotel staff is excellent! The staff at the restaurants remembers your personal likes/dislikes. The Dive Masters and all other staff were extremely helpful and competent. They were able to help us with small repair. The island was basically empty as many tourists cancelled their trips. The island did not suffer any damage. The viz was quite a bit less than we anticipated. The locals said it was probably due to the tsunami and impending storm season. We saw "squadrons" of mantas. We were in 12' of water, and they virtually "flew" right over us. Amazing. There is lots of new coral growth which is good to see since El Nino. I lost my camera at sea. There were no facilities on the boats, as we were only out for a maximum of 3 hours at a time. There was a fresh water rinse area in the locker area when we returned to shore.

RED SEA (EGYPT)

Hurghada dive operators are failing to care for their reefs, so divers — mainly European — are heading farther south. Live-aboards are the way to get to the best diving. Water temperatures can drop into the cool 60s during February and rise to the 80s by August. Many divers combine a Red Sea trip with a visit to Israel and historical biblical sites.

Lucky Divers, June 2005, Roberta Levin (roberta@reddog.net), Boulder, CO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 25- to 75 Feet. Water: 76-78 to F. Getting to Sharm from Israel wasn't easy, no direct flights, so we flew to Eilat and drove

three hours. Lots of hotels offering all classes of accommodations. Stayed at the Hyatt that was not walking distance to Naama Bay, but did have good shore diving and a water park. Lucky Divers were terrific with us and our two inexperienced 13-year-old divers. Lucky Divers gave us the same guide for just the four of us for two days without asking. We spent all day on the boat as they are slow, but Ras Mohammed corals are spectacular, healthy and colorful. Lots of tropical fish, little to moderate currents. We were restricted to 60 feet with the kids and didn't feel we were missing much except maybe a dive to see lots of hammerhead sharks! Sharm in the summer is hot, very hot. It's a big resort area with a couple of casinos, but not much in the way of culture. The ATV ride into the desert was lots of fun.

THAILAND

Of course the tsunami had a disastrous effect on many of Thailand's reefs, but live-aboards visit the areas that remained intact and excellent. From Phuket, day boats make trips into the Andaman Sea to Richelieu Rock where fish life can be exciting. Many live-aboards visit as well and good ones extend their trips to more distant areas, including the Burma Banks in Myanmar. Thailand has unending opportunities for broader travel experiences so take extra time to appreciate the culture.

Koh Tao, January 2005, Jim Pryde, Mendocino, CA. We were scheduled to spend two weeks on Koh Tao, in the Gulf of Thailand, but after the Tsu-