

used in most Caribbean destinations. I usually like to do a shallow "check-out" dive as my first outing but we went to almost 40 meters every dive. Wandered the reef until one of us hit 50 bar. Headed for the top of the reef and finished in about 20 meters until it was time for our safety stop. Went into Deco once but had plenty of air to work my way out of it without problems. Fun dives and lots of new and different fish life. Dive operator capable, friendly and professional. Advanced level recommended. Visibility limited compared to Caribbean. Lion fish were abundant.

THAILAND

The December 2004 tsunami affected many of Thailand's reefs, but live-aboards visit the areas that remained intact and excellent Day boats from Phuket still make trips into the Andaman Sea to Richelieu Rock where fish life can be exciting. Many live-aboards extend their trips to the Burma Banks in Myanmar, where most divers find superior diving. Thailand has unending opportunities for broader travel experiences and many travelers take extra time to appreciate the culture.

Coral Grand Divers, April 2006, Phil Tobin (Philtobin6625@yahoo.com), Portland, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 15-40 feet. Water: 85 F, smooth. Koh Tao, the island and its beaches are beautiful. It is peaceful and the sunsets are breathtaking. Coral Grand is on the north end of the scenic Sairee beach. The accommodations are simple but clean, most bungalows have air conditioning and sit close to each other. However, it was never a problem. The food at the resort was expensive, so

we ate most of our meals 10 minute walk to beachside restaurants. The two of us ate 4 Thai dishes with beer and water and ice cream for \$8. April is hot and humid, with temps up over 100 degree and humidity in the 80% range. The dive shop is a few steps from the bungalows. The divemasters were friendly and knowledgeable. We met every morning at 6:15am, got in a truck and drove 10 minutes to the dock. The scene was right out of a movie. You had boats unloading their fruit, vegetable and bottle of water, tourists catching the ferry, divers getting to their boat and dogs barking. Often we had to climb over several boats to get to ours. Equipment handling is fairly rough. The diving was structured, you had to follow your dive master at all time and surface after 45min. He would stop during the dive and check everybody's time. I was annoyed at first but what could I do? After a few days, most divemasters realized we were not beginners, relaxed and let us do our own thing. After 2 dives we would boat back to the dock, unload, and truck back to the resort. If we wanted to dive again in the afternoon we had to be at the dive shop by 12:15. You barely had time to rinse up and grab a quick bite. Afternoon dives were shallow, crowded with beginners getting certified and the coral was badly damaged. The best diving took place in the morning. My favorite sites were the Southwest Pinnacle and the Chumphon Pinnacle. I have never seen such an abundance of anemones and anemone fish, huge school of jacks, barracudas and trevallys. We never saw a turtle and only one shark in 34 dives. Trigger fish were aggressive and attacked several divers. One morning we paid extra and went to Sail Rock. We saw the most beautiful formation of bat fish, like a cloud.

Unfortunately this type of trip was only offered once during our 2 week stay. You had to be experienced and few people signed up. Early twentys was the average age of most divers and even if they had the experience, they did not have the money for the trip to Sail Rock. The classes are cheap, the dive masters attentive, patient and thorough.

Taa Toh Lagoon Dive Resort, February 2006, Richard Masin (rmmmase@aol.com), Bend, OR. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. This is a fantastic place for new divers and a relaxing enjoyable place for more experienced divers. The resort (and I use this word liberally) is on a beautiful bay outside the main tourist hub but close enough to allow easy access. The bungalows are bare bones, shower, bed and fan like most bungalows on Koh Tao. The cost is \$7.50 to \$15/n and the dives are \$20 each. The food at the resort is fair but there are several good restaurants near by. The divemasters are friendly, knowledgeable and careful. The boat is comfortable and roomy and the dive sites are nearby. The diving here is not as good as in the Andaman Sea but does not require a live-aboard to reach the best dive sites (Similan Islands). Thai people are friendly, exotic and they like Americans.

ZANZIBAR

Mnemba Island, October 2005, Cottrell Fox (cfox@jwterrell.com), St. Louis, MO. Experience: 600+ dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 75 to 80 F. Mnemba is a beautiful, exclusive island 2 miles off the north coast of Zanzibar. Diving is in small groups off a large twin engine Zodiac. Mostly drift diving, with lots of healthy reefs, turtles,

dolphins and vibrant fish. Didn't see many large pelagics. Excellent dive operation as befits a "seven star" resort favored by Bill Gates.

Ras Nungwi Beach Resort, March 2006, Stanley Zuk (szuk@nyc.rr.com), New York, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, choppy. Due to overfishing Zanzibar is not a good dive destination. The only good dive on the island is around the marine reserve Menemba atoll, where you can see rich fishlife, a few frog fish, some nice treacly, batfish, and snapper schools and a few turtles, coral seems healthy and nice particularly around Nungwi dives, but there's no large pelagics and no large fish. You will be lucky to see some small blue spotted stingrays, a few young moray eels, and some mantis shrimp. If it wasn't for Menemba atoll, one big Napoleon, a few turtles, and bommie reef with countless lionfish, there would be nothing to see there. Locals killed all the small fish around beaches and even snorkeling is only good around Menemba atoll. Ras Nungwi is a nice resort, but the food is repugnant, even with all inclusive expensive package you'd rather go to Nungwi village for better food. Had a rental car to see the rest of the island, monkeys in Jozani forest and swimming with dolphins in Kizimkazi, and eat better than bad food in Ras Nungwi and Matemwe Beach hotels. Expect to get a dive test from revolting dive operation in Ras Nungwi Beach Hotel, even if you dove all over the world, and have more experience than their own dive guides, if you haven't been diving for more than two months.