

## 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.

**Dive Asia, Safaribeach Hotel, December 2006, Dan Panzica (sipa\_dan@hotmail.com), Scottsdale, AZ.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Dive Asia is the Toyota Camry of Phuket Diving. Good reliable service, knowledgeable, unobtrusive dive masters, great Thai food, excellent value for your money, large, comfortable boats, and attention to detail. There are more luxurious and faster boats available for both the day trips and live-aboard trips. However, Dive Asia is your best value for your money. Dive Asia's reputation as an excellent operation is well deserved. Dive Asia operates day trips to Koh Phi Phi, Shark Point, and Anomie Reef as well as 4-5 day trips to the Similan Islands. Both their live-aboard and day boats are 84 ft in length, which provides lots of room to spread out. We had 16 divers on the first day and 10 divers on the second day. Experience levels included everything from divers in training to seasoned East Coast wreck divers. The rental gear was brand-new

ScubaPro equipment. Dive Asia rents everything including wetsuits. The divers were from all over the world. Briefings were given in 5 languages. Divers were grouped based on experience, which worked out well. The food on the boat included excellent rice and curry, sandwiches, fresh fruit, and canned soft drinks for a nominal charge. Beer was available for the ride home. The sites are comprised of islands or small sea mounts that have a max dept at ~80'. The vis was excellent, ranging up to 100' depending on the sunlight. There are swim-throughs and numerous small crevices to explore. The reef is alive and well after the tsunami. The coral life is prolific, especially the soft corals. There are large fans, barrels, and fields of staghorn corals. We saw several large leopard sharks, smaller nurse sharks, schooling barracuda and jacks, large eagle rays, sting rays, lion fish, stone fish, angel fish, and lots of small stuff including seahorses, dragon fish and several types of nudibranchs. Accommodation choices are infinite, from 5-star spa-hotels to a \$10/day hooch with a light bulb and fan. The Safaribeach Hotel (3 stars @~\$50/night) was centrally located in Patong beach. The Safaribeach is a wonderful hotel with a great pool, beach, and several restaurants. They advertise wireless internet, which did not exist. However, you could check email at the two computers located in the lobby. I lived on the cheap and excellent Thai food. However, there is a Subway, McDonalds, Starbucks, and hundreds of other places to eat within walking distance from the hotel. Most of the clean-up from the tsunami was complete. Phuket is fully recovered, open and ready for business.

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