

Less stony and more soft coral than I thought; great Fish life. Huge Napoleon wrasses (four), two large turtles, lots of lionfish, large schools of anthias. On a night dive a Spanish dancer, octopus, lots of lionfish following us. No sharks fewer pelagics than hoped for. The dive master Carmen ("Cuckoo") did a good job picking sites and provided good briefings. Personal favorites were the Straits of Tiran (Thomas, Jackson, Woodhouse Reefs) and Dunraven wreck. Thistlegorm is definitely at the limits of recreational diving and has big crowds of day boats and live-aboards that show up within an hour of each other. I wonder about safety on this wreck with all the boats tying up to the wreck. Saw two boats run into each other. While an enjoyable and interesting dive, it is for the experienced diver and sometimes conditions are difficult. Carmen and the crew did a good job getting us to the more popular sites early so we often finished dives as the day boats were arriving. Diving was mostly from the Zodiac. Only once did we have to wait a few minutes for a pick up. Got in over 20 dives. Could have done more but you have to rest sometimes. Some tremendous diving sites with something for all. Good value. (Ph: +202.735.3111; fax +202.735.8697; e-mail petrome@link.net; website www.redseadiving.com)

THAILAND

*Andaman Seafarer, PIDC Divers,
February 2001, Bill Brennan,*

Chicago, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm currents. Four-day cruise to Similan Islands and Richelieu Rock. Good vis (50-100 ft.), warm water (85 F), moderate to strong current on most dives. Not for beginning divers. Variety and abundance of marine life on almost all dives. Richelieu Rock — incredible soft corals, profuse anemones, outrageous animals (huge octopus, lionfish, etc.). Our captain was knowledgeable about the dive sites and currents, managing to get us there at optimal times (always three or four other live-aboards at each site). As the price (\$600 or \$720 per person for the four-day cruise, depending on accommodations) suggests, don't expect Aggressor-type amenities. One towel for the entire trip, No E-6 processing. Boat holds 14 passengers in cramped cabins (two quads, three doubles), and everyone, including the crew, shares two heads with barely adequate showers and primitive Thai-style toilets. Heads are a deck and a half up from the cabins, so during the night be prepared to negotiate stairs in the dark. Air-conditioning in the cabins was on only at night or when the boat was underway. There's no ventilation in the cabins, making them virtually uninhabitable when the AC isn't on. Breakfast area on the spacious dive deck, and a dining area on the mostly covered sundeck. No chaises and no indoor lounge/salon. Food, prepared by a cheerful Thai cook, was quite good. Custom-cooked eggs, along with bacon and toast, for breakfast; delicious Thai dishes for lunch

(sensitive palates beware); basic dive boat fare (pork chops, spaghetti, chicken wings, etc.) for dinner. Bottled water, coffee, and tea were included; beer and soda were extra. No fruit juices, milk, or liquor on board. Didn't seem to be any way to accommodate special dietary requests. Except for the captain, the crew speaks almost no English, and no one offered to help with gear. The motto seems to be "we never touch your tank." Almost all dives are from an inflatable dinghy; each buddy pair is required to deploy a safety sausage to signal they are returning to the surface. Inflatable was generally slow to pick up divers. I waited in the water for 15 minutes at the end of one dive. The crew nonchalantly allowed five minutes to pass before heading out to pick up other surfacing divers. The number and times of dives were controlled by the captain/owner, Guy Lidureau, whom everyone calls Charlie. Max. five dives a day, for each of two days; four dives on a third day; and two on the last. Charlie's briefings were often confusing. While he and/or crew members were often in the water on dives, Charlie made it clear that they were diving strictly for their own enjoyment. He trumpeted the joys of the dives we would be doing in deep water and strong, shifting currents — the washing machine as he called it. One person in our group was a newbie, and several were photographers. We often asked if there were less challenging, if admittedly less glamorous, dives. Only reluctantly — and rarely — did Charlie say we could do a garden-

variety dives. He treated such requests with thinly veiled contempt. Charlie resolutely refused to accommodate his guests. We booked our trip to through a US travel agent that worked in tandem with a Thai travel agency. Upon arriving at Charlie's shop to check in, we were informed that all seven of us had been booked in the lowest class of service (quad cabins). The other two divers were sharing a double. Charlie offered to allow the seven of us to spread out among the remaining two doubles and the two quads if four of us would upgrade at \$120 per. Otherwise, he said, he would have to keep the other two doubles locked. We forked over some plastic. One of our group, whose bags didn't make it on time, was having trouble finding a wet suit to rent — or buy — at Charlie's shop that would fit. He asked if he could be taken to another dive shop. Charlie became irate and verbally abusive before he agreed to accommodate this request. I lost a macro lens for my camera. I told Charlie it was insured through DEPP and they would be in touch with him to verify the loss (standard operating procedure for DEPP). He said fine and asked that I send him an e-mail after I got home with all the details. I did so, and the next day, I received an e-mail from Charlie in which he forwarded another e-mail he had received from our Thai travel agent, noting that our group coordinator had been in touch with them about the captain's rudeness. Charlie informed me that because we had stabbed him in the back he wouldn't be able to help me with my insurance claim. DEPP

reviewed this exchange of e-mails, asked me to fill out an affidavit, and replaced the lens. (Ph: +66- 76 28 06 44 (Thailand); fax +66- 76 38 12 19; e-mail info@seafarer-divers.com; website www.seafarer-divers.com)

Aqua One, March 2001, Brant Shenkarow (brantkarow@aol.com)
San Anselmo, CA. Vis: 50-150 ft.

Water: 80-83 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 2,000±. Dive restrictions: stay within no deco limits. my second trip on the 110 ft. ship. Excellent ship and crew and food. New cruise director, Johnny, seemed to be cutting deals and keeping secrets — unnerving to all the divers. Myanmar fishing has greatly affected several of my favorite sites from only a year before. We heard a half dozen explosions diving and they're loud. Most notable site this trip was Black Rock — 6 dives there during which I sighted silver tips, leopards, hawksbills, mating cuttles, squid, octopi — big ones, tons of small critters. Shark feeding frenzies at sunset right off the bow two nights in a row. This trip best when combined with more travel. (Ph: .(66-2) 6621417-8 or (66-2) 2584592 (Thailand); fax 303-652-8604; e-mail aquaone@dive-aquasports.com; website www.dive-aquasports.com)

Aqua One, March 2001, Sunny Morrison, Love Tree, CO. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 82 F, calm and flat, choppy. Logged dives: 250. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. max, return with 500 psi. Lion fish everywhere -- sometimes groups of six, turtles, stingrays, sea snakes, lots of different varieties of clown fish, squid, cuttle-

fish, lots of soft coral, leopard sharks, cow ray. Excellent night dives and macro -- 2 sites with harlequin ghost pipefish. Many different nudibranchs. Boat does not have a/c control in room. Some overnight crossings rough. Dive briefings need improvement. The crew said that they haven't seen whalesharks in 3 years.

Aqua One, June 2001, David Ho, West Palm Beach, FL. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 82-85 F. Dives logged: 295. Dive restrictions: Depth, time. Occasional spots of coral graveyards caused by dynamite fishing a long time ago. Lots of tropical fish. Silversides in schools of millions. We saw blue spotted sting rays and a few schools of barracudas. Despite the area is often marketed for whale sharks and manta rays, we did not see any. Did not see any sharks other than the few leopard sharks. Is it the result of shark finning? We saw lots of eels and little critters such as crabs, shrimp and nudibranchs. The ghost pipefish are neat. The crew was friendly. The service was very good. There were 12 divers but the boat has a 16-passenger capacity. It would be a bit crowded if the boat is full. The food was good with plenty of fruits and seafood. During one night dives dive guide left the group of 2 divers after the first 15 minutes. I supposed he had gone to look for some interesting critters. By the time I found him, his dive light was very dim and then it finally quit, probably low on battery. (Ph: (66-2) 6621417-8 or (66-2) 2584592 (Thailand); fax 303-652-8604; e-mail [537](mailto:aquaone@dive-</p>
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aquasports.com; website www.dive-aquasports.com)

Atlantis-2000, January 2001, Terry Umbach (Janzart@sunshine.net) Sechelt, BC. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 29 Celsius, calm, no currents. A return trip to dive the Similan Islands and Richelieu Rock. 4 full days and 4 nights (about \$375US) including meals and 14 dives. Food was from a menu for lunch and dinner. Huge portions. Thai and western food. Several spectacular dives with circling manta rays (for 10 or 15 minutes) and another with a circling whale shark while the whole boat load of divers hovered 15 feet below it! Lots of fish and coral. Atlantis-2000 was a clean, efficient operation with the crew and office staff friendly and helpful. Contact: Bert Boyle B.K. Atlantis Adventure Co., Ltd. Soi Patong Resort 58/6 Patong Beach Phuket 81500 Thailand Tel. +66-76 344 850 Fax. +66-76 344 850 Websites: <http://www.atlantis-asia.com/> <http://phuket-atlantis.com/> E-mail: Info@atlantis-asia.com 220 volt plug in your room. No camera table or separate rinse bucket for cameras. Crew very helpful in guarding your camera on deck and handing it to you in the water. (Ph: +66-76 344 850 (Thailand); fax +66-76 345 931; e-mail atlantis2000@atlantis-asia.com; website www.atlantis-asia.com)

Atlantis, December 2001, Mimi Wong (spahkee@yahoo.com) Saint Paul, MN. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. MV Atlantis is based out of Phuket and we did their 4 night trip up to the

Similans and Surin Island — an overnight trip from Phuket. Of 15 dives I would characterize about 20% to be great whereas many featured either low visibility, strong currents or degraded reef due to dynamite fishing or over fishing. We encountered some rough seas. Thai live-aboard boats are converted fishing vessels with far fewer amenities than others. The rooms barely have enough room to walk to a bunk. Most of the boats have 1-2 shared bathrooms (which empty out into the ocean rather than having separate sewage containment — careful when and where you flush!) with very small bunks which are shared 4-10 to a room. Atlantis was in fairly good shape however, their advertised air conditioning was nonexistent except the bottom cabins — which meant that with the small portholes and lack of a breeze on many nights, sleeping was an exercise in sweat and discomfort. We probably only got 4-5 hours of sleep each night. The crew had not brought on clean towels so one small (2x3) towel was all we had despite numerous assurances by the operator that clean daily towels were standard so “no need to bring your own.” Breakfast was a buffet of cereals, toast, eggs, bacon. However, lunch and dinner was made to order from an extensive menu featuring both Thai and Western dishes — each dish was amazingly prepared — curries, noodle salads, soups, stir fries. Mid afternoon, a huge platter of fresh pineapple, papaya and watermelon was served. Crew tries hard to please and was wonderful. The rock formations that make up the

Similans and Surin Islands are amazing. They continue underwater — however, very little coral grows on these rocks so diving is similar to diving around large boulders. We did have some shallow dives where we did have coral gardens with beautiful soft and hard corals though. Did not see a single whale shark. Most of the diving is around the boulder type formations and many of the dive sites are actually not very big. We saw the usual tropical fishes and nudibranchs that are typical of Pacific diving — nothing special. Sadly, on our dive around Elephant Rock, we heard a very large, sharp blast underwater. Fishermen were dynamite fishing a couple of miles away. This degradation of the environment plus the stress brought on by the development and lack of infrastructure (raw sewage goes right in the ocean around Phuket which is why our diving sites were 6 hours away) is a sad reflection of the destruction of a heritage and destination. The beach around Patong in Phuket 20 years ago supported enough coral and fish so that friends who had been there in the early 80s reported good snorkeling. Today, Patong beach is a murky gray blue with no coral and high bacterial counts. Thailand is an amazing country with more attractions and diversity than the renowned diving based destinations. (Ph: +66-76 344 850 (Thailand); fax +66-76 345 931; e-mail Info@atlantis-asia.com; website www.atlantis-asia.com)

MV Colona VI, February 2001, Charles F. Points (seapoints@scubadiving.com)

Parker, CO. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 82-85 F. Dives logged: 1,200+. Dive restrictions: 35m/1 hour. Excellent staff. Meals were good with a nice variety of Thai and European meals. Colona VI is a nice 28m boat set up for 14 divers. We had 12 aboard during our trip and it was very comfortable. Cabins are not deluxe but each had their private shower and toilet.

Crescent, Scott Herbstman, Seattle, WA., April 2001. Advertised as a 10 day luxury adventure dive trip (about \$2000) to the Mergui archipelago in Burma {Myanmar} with S.E. Asia Live-aboards based in Phuket, Thailand. We set out from Kawthoung in the south of the country heading to Mergui town with 4 days of diving on the outward bound trip, 2 days in Mergui town, and supposedly 4 days of diving on the return trip. About half way through our trip, our dinghy {a zodiac with an outboard engine} sunk and had to be secured to the back deck of the yacht. It had been leaking air badly since day 1. The dinghy was the only access to most of the more impressive dive sites, needless to say the quality of our dives suffered. On our 7th day out we encountered bad weather, the captain estimated force 6 winds with 3 meter seas. Soon after, the main engine, which had also been troublesome most of the trip, broke down. The captain decided to sail to a safe anchorage as our situation was deteriorating rapidly. A gust of wind hit us off the edge of a nearby squall resulting in a near knockdown, the jib was shredded, the captain decided to

pull in the mainsail as it was too dangerous to continue trying to sail and went below to attempt to fix the engine. By this time we are all wearing life jackets and suitably worried as to our present condition as well as future prospects. I inquired whether the Crescent carried a life raft. It didn't! Imagine, an English flagged vessel operating as a dive live-aboard not carrying a life raft. Luckily the captain managed to get the engine operating if we kept to low revs and 6 hours later we limped into a safe anchorage. All's well that ends well I suppose and after waiting out the storm for a day arrived once again in Kawthoung safe and sound, only a day late and having missed out on only 3 days diving. (Ph: (66) 76-340406, 340932 (Thailand); fax (66) 76-340586; e-mail info@seal-asia.com; website www.sealiveaboards.com)

June Hong Chian Lee "The Junk", May 2001, Rick Tuss (rtuss@aol.com)
Wilmington, DE. Vis: 50-90 ft. Water: 83-84 F. Number of dives: about 500. Weather: overall, sunny and windy. End of high season and beginning of monsoon. Water: choppy with strong currents. Restrictions: time limit in water 1hr and 4 dives a day. A converted Chinese Junk that makes a very comfortable and unique live-aboard. The dive deck is very spacious and well laid out with more than sufficient room for a full load of divers. Cabins were nothing special, but had sufficient room and storage. Each cabin is equipped with a toilet and shower. The cabins do not have windows so

there is no chance of bringing in outside air, so thankfully, the air-conditioning worked very well. The food was adequate and plentiful. The boat crew is Thai and the divemasters European. All were friendly and helpful. We dived the Similan Islands exclusively due to the rough seas. The corals were healthy and plentiful, but I have seen better. There is still evidence of old dynamite fishing on many dive sites. Few pelagics or large fish, although we did spot some shark s(eight on one dive), tuna, and turtle. Tropicals were typical of Southeast Asia. We spent most of our time looking for the little critters, frogfish, giant mantis shrimp, jawfish, leaf scorpion fish, Pegasus fish, etc. We spotted about 6 other live-aboards in the same area while we were there. I've been told that during the high season, one can expect 10 times that number of boats full of divers — not my kind of diving. (Ph: 66-76-342186; fax 66-76-342453; e-mail info@thejunk.com; website www.thejunk.com)

M/V Ocean Rover, December 2000, John and Edith Summey, Carbondale, IL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm no currents. After an overnight at Nilly's Marina Inn overlooking the Petong beach. This was the maiden commercial voyage. Owner Jeroen Deknatel constructed the boat with his crew in the Phuket shipyard. Thus, the crew, which has worked with Fantasea Divers through the years, is thoroughly

knowledgeable of every nut and bolt. Their bond with the boat and attitude of service to the divers is unparalleled. Great food, support, and assistance on the dive deck are the hallmarks. With the owner aboard for both Christmas and New Year's Eve, the food and fanfare were exceptional. We welcomed the New Year with toasts and fireworks on the water. We had an group of experienced divers from Germany, France, England, and the US. Photographer extraordinaire, Mark Strickland and his wife, Suzanne, directed activities. Mark knows where to find each resident of the reefs. Our destinations included the Similan Islands and East of Eden, a spot teeming with soft and hard corals, anemones, and a vast variety of colorful tropical fish. Every view is a panorama of color, form, and texture, alive with interesting activity. infinite variety of underwater structure: pinnacles, boulders, peaks, as well as coral patches, slopes, walls, and swim-thrus. Visibility is usually excellent and fish life plentiful. Looking for the five varieties of anemone fish, abundant nudibranchs, and an occasional sea horse require a sharp eye. An ever-present variety of sharks. Burma Banks required complex advance arrangements with the officials of Myanmar, and we were accompanied by a guide during our time in Burmese waters. On Silvertip Reef we were treated to a shark feed which attracted both sharks and a very large grouper. During a stop at the town of Kawthaung to replenish the water, we walked around with our Burmese guide and get a glimpse of

local life. We watched a street ball game played in the dark, peered into dimly lit shops, visited a "Goddess of Mercy" temple, and observed the locals gathered in a watering hole where they were all watching an old American western on TV. John Wayne is alive and well here. Fantasea Divers plans to take the Ocean Rover to Bali in the summer in 2002. (Ph: (+66) 7628 1387 (Thailand); fax (+66) 7628 1389; e-mail info@fantasea.net; website www.fantasea.net)

Ocean Rover, Fantasea Divers, March 2001, Jim Parkhill, Edinburg, TX. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-83 F. Diving Myanmar's Burma Banks and the Mergui Archipelago, and Thailand's Andaman Sea. After clearing Myanmar entry procedures at the fishing village of Kawthuang (colonial name of Victoria Point), we cruised 80 miles to the Burma Banks. At one time there were no less than nine different species of sharks in the Banks, however, the shark population there has been on a steady decline because of illegal shark fishing. Tawny nurse sharks and black tip reef sharks are numerous but the big and powerful ocean silvertips, are not evident in the numbers of the past. It took a "shark feeding" dive to draw in the silvertips and, while impressive, they did not linger with us for 15 minutes before disappearing. One leopard shark and a bamboo shark. I hovered above two large nurse sharks taking turns trying to extract a stubborn octopus from a crevice. On the shark feeding dive, the nurse sharks behaved as playful puppies and

were totally unafraid of the divers. True open-ocean diving with no sheltered anchorages. The banks are square profiles beginning at 80 ft. Strong and changeable currents. Other than the sharks, the Banks do not offer much else exceptional. Little coral and the marine life isn't as prolific as in the Mergui Archipelago, which teems with fish and critters: blue lobster, cuttlefish on every dive, squid, octopus, spindle cowries, purple fire gobies, banded sea snakes, an abundance of tiger tail seahorses, gray reef sharks, long nose hawkfish, porcelain crabs, harlequin shrimp, egg shell shrimp, filamented wrasses, giant mantis shrimp, saron shrimp, bornella anguilla nudibranchs, pipefish, lionfish, scorpion and stonefish, black coral, pigmy pipehorse, Baramundi cod, cowries, and all of the usual reef fish and pelagics. Three islets (also called "In Through The Out Door"): our first dive took us down a long, narrow canyon which terminated with a large dead-end grotto accessible through a giant archway. The grotto was a secluded gathering spot for grey reef sharks. From the grotto, a long tunnel of about 60 yards takes one out to the opposite side of the island. I spent the better part of one dive entranced by two pairs of mating cuttlefish. The males tenderly stroked, caressed and mounted the females before mating face to face. The females would then deposit their eggs in a crevice and dutifully return to the male for more. On another dive, I was amazed by a school of squid numbering over one hundred. (Ph: (+66) 7628 1387 (Thailand); fax (+66)

7628 1389; e-mail info@fantasea.net; website www.fantasea.net)

Ocean Rover, Fantasea Divers, March 2001, Jim N. Parkhill (jnparkhill@aol.com), Edinburg, TX. Vis: 60-125 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 475. Third live-aboard trip with Fantasea Divers. The underwater topography of the Similan and the Surin Islands ranges from the other worldly enormous granite boulders of Elephants Head; to the extensive network of passageways and swim throughs of Christmas Point; to the large coral heads of The Bommies; to the lush corals and sand flats of East of Eden; and to the looming critter laden pinnacles of Richelieu Rock and Koh Tachaf. Some sites are easy dives washed with gentle currents while others can present currents and conditions which will challenge the most experienced of divers. Depending upon the site, dives may be drift or moored, live boat dives or back roll entries from dinghies. Diverse and abundant marine life. Mantas, leopard sharks, cuttlefish, squid, Napoleon wrasses, unicorn fish, juvenile and adult ribbon eels, a 10 meter Bryde's whale, arc-eyed hawkfish, Andaman sweetlips, golden phostilla nudibranchs, hypselodris bullock nudibranchs, purple fire gobies, hawksbill turtles, porcelain crabs, Andaman foxface, hinged beaked camel shrimp, harlequin ghost pipefish, long nose hawkfish, acres of orange cup corals clown triggerfish, titan triggerfish, frogfish, giant clams. Tremendous variety of corals, both hard and soft,

gorgonians, crinoids and the like. The opportunity to dive with Mark Strickland is reason enough to make the trip. Mark has been leading trips to the Andaman Sea for over 15 years and his knowledge of the dive sites and the marine life is intimate and unsurpassed. His wife Suzanne was not on this trip as she was more importantly occupied in becoming a new mother. Dive Master Allard is extremely familiar with the dive sites and is as personable and as helpful. The Thai crew is, simply, outstanding. They are proud of the Ocean Rover because they all had an important hand in designing and in building her. The deck crew had our gear and cameras memorized by the second dive. One was always around to assist with the gearing up and to handle the cameras. We had mostly photographers diving solo and they were popping up at the end of dives spread over a large area and even on opposite sides of an island. The dinghy drivers seemed to have an innate sense of where everyone was and surface waits were minimal. When one of the drivers, Chai, would pick me up he was always able to tell me not only how many divers were still down, but who they were. Amazing. Owner Jerome Deknatel has put together a land and office staff that will go to any lengths to assist divers with any request. The Ocean Rover was designed specifically for diving the Andaman Sea and was inaugurated in the 2001 season. She is comfortable, safe, and extremely diver friendly with all the features that one could wish for on a live-aboard. She will add Nitrox.

I liked the assortment of snacks between dives and hot and cold beverages available 24 hours, and the do-it-yourself coffee and espresso machine. Wonderful assortment of nondiving activities and adventures.

Ocean Rover, March 2001, Larry & Barbara Murphy (lrmurphy@aol.com)
Dunwoody, GA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 150 Feet. Water: 76 to 84 F, calm choppy currents. Most comfortable live aboard compared to 10 others we've been on. It replaces the Fantasea. The boat's double berths are really big enough for 2 tall people. Dive deck is spacious with 3 camera tables, wide swim platform. Once gear is set up, tanks are filled at bench stations. Crew is tops for handling gear and picking up divers. Ripping currents in some spots and the Zodiac crew was always there immediately. At Richelieu Rock we observed divers from other live-aboards being carried away because of inadequate Zodiac support. Some were in the water over 30 minutes while a few made it to our swim platform. So many boats operate out of Phuket that it pays to ask hard questions about their ability to get divers out of the water safely. After all, the next stop is the Bay of Bengal. Mark Strickland, dive director, and his assistant, Allard, were great at locating photo subjects despite the currents. More unusual ones included blue ringed angelfish, reticulated ghost pipefish, many harlequin shrimp feeding on sea stars, tiger-tailed sea horses and the rare pipe horse, a seahorse/pipefish relative. Big critters included mantas,

bronze whaler, silvertip and nurse sharks. No whale sharks. Perhaps the new, fashionable market in shark tofu has caused them to be slaughtered off the East Indian coast. 3 large camera tables on dive deck, air-conditioned salon used between meals for camera work, e-6 processing and lots of help from Mark Strickland, photo-pro extraordinaire.

Ocean Rover, April 2001, Frank Arroyo, La Grande, OR. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 80-84 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 200+. Dive restrictions: must dive with computer. Great trip especially Richelieu Rock and the Mergu Archipelago in Burma (although some dynamite bombing seen). Divemasters Hans and Allard helpful and pointed out some great critters: harlequin ghost pipefish, tigertail seahorses, harlequin shrimp, mantis shrimp, whiskered pipefish, frog fish, scorpion fish, stone fish, lots of colorful nudibranch, Andaman sweetlips. No whale sharks. Also few sharks — overall saw a few nurse sharks, leopard sharks, and white tip reef sharks. Also saw one silvertip. Did see schools of barracuda, jacks, trevally, mackerel. The boat was great but the food could have been better.

Ocean Rover, April 2001, Jody Lawrence, Oakland, CA. Vis: 30-15 ft. Water: 82-89 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 1,000+. Dive restrictions: slow down relax, enjoy your dive and see everything you can — also dive as long as you can last on a cylinder. All of the dive magazines promote Thailand as a place to see giant pelagics and whale sharks. When

in fact that has not been the case for several years. Reality is there is a tremendous amount of smaller life. Once you make the adjustment mentally you can only then appreciate all of the amazing things the Andaman Sea has to offer. Pack light and make sure you leave time before or after your trip to see Phuket, Bangkok, Kiabi and all of the amazing things there is to do and see.

Ocean Rover, April 2001, Renie Arroyo, La Grande, OR. Vis: 15-65 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Logged dives: 200+. Dive restrictions enforced: computer was required for each dive. Food: Breakfast was always the same, uninspired and boring. The other meals were pretty mediocre. On other boats I've been on we've had fresh lobster, crab, fish. Here, the only fish we were served was one repetition of an unidentified fish smothered with a thick sauce. A couple of people claimed they got sick from the fish. I didn't like the way it tasted, so I avoided it for that reason. The highly touted "farewell dinner" of imported beef and complimentary wine was horrible. The steaks were tough and overdone. The wine was really bad. The cook would make desserts but, being unfamiliar with such, the desserts were pretty bad. We had to pay for sodas, tonic waters, anything and everything we drank (except coffee). The coffee maker was self service and available all the time. A lot of nice padded seating area on deck to enjoy sunrises and sunsets. Fantasea Divers required you be at their office for registration at 6pm; departure was

supposed to be at 8 pm. (but, inevitably, that was delayed). Not a friendly welcome. Divers milled around in a small, hot office and filled out paperwork amidst confusion. There was not a crew member present. Nor were there refreshments or snacks. By the time you got dumped to the boat, many were tired, hot, thirsty and irritated. Immediately upon boarding you were hit with all the rules of the boat, the usual, but it felt like we had joined the Navy. Although the boat was new, too bad they cut corners on the bathrooms. They could have made a separate shower stall rather than try to cram in a shower track on the floor. Water sloshed all over the floor and you would stub your toes on the floor shower track. Nonetheless, this design is still exceedingly better than the heads of yesteryear. Engine noise was excessive. The anchor drop was another grinding experience. For light sleepers, earplugs might be useful. The rooms themselves were comfortable, a good size, and the closet shelf area was very nice. There was ample room to store suitcases. The bunk bed above the double bed was an obstacle that made it awkward to get in and out of the lower bed. Only crew members were allowed to put on and change CDs. Dive deck was nice and roomy. Boat was kept very clean. Crew was great. Diving procedures went smoothly and well. Boat did not have nitrox. Wonderful crew! Crew was unbelievable-very helpful, friendly, genuine, and available. Exceptional spirit and attitude. The pick up boats were excellent. They would always be there whenever and wherever you

surfaced! Rental gear was not very good-pretty old and trashed. We were awed by harlequin ghost pipefish, tiger tail seahorses, harlequin shrimp, mantis shrimp, fabulous frog fish, and more. There were two shark attraction dives. Since I am philosophically opposed to shark attraction dives, I have no comment. didn't think the Burma portion of the dive trip was worth all the hassle, travel time, and extra expense. Thailand and Richelieu Rock were our best diving. Mark Strickland, since he was unexpectedly not on our trip. Hans was an excellent crew master and all was well organized and managed. Hans and Allard are great guys and good dive masters. They provided excellent dive briefings. Divers were given a clear picture of what to look for and where and also what sorts of conditions to anticipate. Safety was stressed but so was personal responsibility. Divers had a lot of freedom if they so desired. If experienced, the diving did not present any unusual difficulty.

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