

The Best of Thailand, The Junk

Itinerary - 10 Nights

Join The Junk and Manta Trust on this unique expedition exploring the very best diving that Thailand has to offer, taking in the highlights of the Similan Islands including Koh Bon, Koh Tachai and Richelieu Rock PLUS the delights of the South Andaman Sea: Koh Haa, Hin Muang & Hin Daeng. The focus will obviously be on manta rays, and the Manta Trust representative will give several presentations about issues regarding manta rays conservation during the trip.

Arrival airport: Phuket International Airport (HKT)

Departure airport: Phuket International Airport (HKT)

Phuket to Tap Lamu

Embarkation: Chalong Pier, Phuket at 18.00hr

Disembarkation: Tap Lamu Pier, Khao Lak at 10.00hr

Shared transfers between Phuket Airport, Phuket hotels or Khao Lak hotels and the vessel on embarkation and disembarkation day are included in the cruise price. Transfers from and to hotels and resorts outside of these areas can be arranged for an additional charge.

Marine & Port Fees

- 115 USD per person

Marine park fees can be paid in advance or on board.

Diving conditions in the Andaman Sea are generally suitable for all levels of divers. Divers who wish to join this itinerary are advised to have Advanced Open Water certification or equivalent* with a minimum of 10 logged dives and experience with diving in currents.

*Advanced Open Water course can be completed on board

For this itinerary, your Cruise Director will schedule up to 33 dives. This itinerary involves some long distance travel and, whilst we attempt to ensure the number of planned dives is fulfilled, bad weather and sea conditions can affect the boat's ability to reach a specific dive site in good time and may impact on the number of dives that are possible. Safety and dive briefings are conducted in English. If you, or any of your group, do not speak or understand English, please contact us.



The following is an example of the day-to-day itinerary.

Day 1: Embarkation at 18.00hr followed by briefings and dinner.

Day 2-9: Your Cruise Director will schedule up to 4 dives per day; 3 dives and a sunset or night dive. A typical diving day is scheduled as follows:

- Light breakfast, followed by briefing & Dive 1
- Full breakfast, relaxation, followed by briefing & Dive 2
- Lunch, relaxation, followed by briefing & Dive 3
- Snack
- Briefing for Dive 4
- Dinner

Day 9: Depending on the itinerary there will be 2 or 3 dives* scheduled before heading back to port.

Day 10: Following breakfast on board, disembarkation is scheduled for between 09:30am and 10:00am.

*We kindly request that guests check their flight departure times to ensure that they leave a minimum of 24 hours between their final dive and the departure of their flight. While we wish to show you the very best diving possible, the safety of all on board remains paramount. In the unlikely event we are unable to reach a specified dive site; we always do our best in offering diving at alternative locations.

The following is a description of the dive sites that we may visit during your liveaboard.

Southern Thailand

Koh Phi Phi

Lying in Phang-Nga bay about 45km east of Phuket and 30km southwest of Krabi, two breathtaking limestone islands make up the greater part of Moo Koh Phi Phi; the largest island of Phi Phi Don being a few kilometres north of Phi Phi Lae. Limestone cliffs rise vertically into the sky, where the trees take over. There are many beaches, coves, and bays which make for dramatic scenery to enjoy during surface intervals.

There are many, many dive sites around the Phi Phi island group, many consisting of wall dives, the limestone dropping to depth ranges between 10m and 25m. The walls can have gorgonian fans, soft corals and coral bushes and interesting rock formations and swim throughs. At the base of these walls there are often hard coral gardens to explore. You can expect a great amount of fish life, including lionfish, wrasse, Moorish idols, angelfish, rays, trevallies. Also keep an eye out for leopard sharks sleeping on the sandy bottoms or blacktip reef sharks cruising the reefs. Turtles can also quite commonly be seen here. Lastly, check the fans and bushes for tigertail seahorses and harlequin ghost pipefish.



King Cruiser

The King Cruiser was a car ferry that used to travel between Phi Phi and Phuket. In 1997, 'the cruiser' hit Anemone Reef on her crossing and sank a short distance away. No lives were lost, but divers were left with a great wreck dive! While she is largely broken up now, but is covered with soft corals and hides some wonderful gems, as well as being home to several large schools of snappers. While currents can be strong and visibility sometimes challenging, this is a great site to dive as part of an Advanced Open Water course.

Shark Point and Anemone Reef

These pinnacles are part of the same reef system and are only a very short distance apart from each other. Both sites are covered with colourful soft corals and anemones with a variety of fish to suit all divers. From barracuda to seahorses and for the lucky ones of course, the iconic leopard shark!

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 Koh Lanta National Marine Park. There are actually several dive sites around Ko Haa but the highlights are Ko Haa Lagoon, Ko Haa Neua, and Ko Haa Yai.

Around these amazing islands you can see pinnacles, walls, boulders, caverns, and swim-throughs. Ko Haa lagoon is ideal for night dives, courses, and snorkeling, while The Chimney and The Cathedral offer things that you cannot see on other Thailand liveaboard itineraries with caverns, swim-throughs and chambers all over the sites. Ko 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 & 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 **Three Trees**. Under the surface you may see: Leopard (zebra)



shark, blue spotted stingrays, clown trigger fish, 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, this is the biggest pinnacle in the Similans and has some fantastic swim-throughs. Whitetip reef sharks, batfish, trevally and barracuda can often be seen on the perimeter of the boulders. If you look closely in the cracks and in the rubble you can see smashing mantis shrimp, porcelain crab, moray eels and cleaner shrimp. There are also sites dominated by huge granite boulders such as **Deep Six**, **Christmas Point**, and **North Point** where you can see white tip reef sharks, schooling giant trevally, and schools of neon fusiliers.

Koh Bon

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

Diving on the **West Ridge** can be an adrenaline filled drift, with amazing views, while the **North Reef** is a gentler experience over a hard coral garden.

Koh Tachai

This island is famous for its pinnacle dive site, known by many as **Twin Peaks**, as well as more relaxed reef diving on the **North Reef** and **South Reef**. Normally, turtles, barracuda, pipe fish, 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 from late January until April.

Richelieu Rock

This limestone pinnacle was named by Jacques Cousteau after Cardinal Richelieu due to the similarity to the colour of his gown as there are gorgeous purple dendronephthya soft corals covering most of the pinnacle. There are 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 meters (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 octopuses, all 5 varieties of anemone fish of the Andaman Sea, variety of moray eels, ornate ghost pipefish, smashing mantis shrimps, harlequin shrimps, tigertail seahorses, Spanish mackerel, frogfish, many schooling snappers and occasional sightings of manta rays and whale sharks.

Surin Islands

The topside scenery of Koh Surin, with evergreen forests, mangroves, and small beaches, surpasses even that of the picturesque Similan Islands. Underwater the reefs of Surin offer some of the greatest hard coral diversity in Thailand.



Across sites like **Torinla Pinnacle**, **Hin Kong**, and **Turtle Ledges** you are likely to see Napoleon wrasse, yellow-masked angelfish, bumphead parrotfish, tomato anemonefish and barramundi, as well as lots of turtles that still come ashore in this area to lay their eggs. Due to the remoteness, not many liveaboard boats visit these islands and you will be able to enjoy the dive sites without sharing them with tourist hordes.

Khao Lak Wrecks

Before disembarking in Khao Lak, if conditions and timing are favourable there is a choice of easily diveable wrecks between the Similan Islands and the port of Tap Lamu. **The Boonsung** and **The Premchai** are old tin miners that were sunk in the 1990's and are a treat for underwater photographers as well as lovers of life of all kinds!

Only in 18m of water they are covered in nudibranchs and various kinds of shrimps. Many quite unusual honeycomb morays also made these wrecks home. There are also huge numbers of schooling fish as well as rays and sharks that can occasionally be seen.

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 on board The Phinisi as dolphins cruising along with the boat are not an unusual sight.

Should you have any questions or queries concerning the dive sites or whether this itinerary is suitable for your experience level, please contact our reservations team info@thejunk.com who will be pleased to assist and advise you.

