MANTA MAGIC IN MYANMAR & THAILAND

Join MMF researchers in Myanmar and Thailand on this exclusive once a year expedition to the Mergui Archipelago and the Similan and Surin National Parks to conduct research on giant manta rays.

Expedition Date: 4-12 March 2017

FOR BOOKING ENQUIRES CONTACT:
info@rayofhopeexpeditions.com

Please note that there is an immediate 50% deposit required to book spaces on this expedition. Places will only be held with a full deposit & completed terms and conditions form.
Our Expeditions

Our bespoke ‘Ray of Hope’ expeditions were created to allow the public to engage in citizen science while following MMF’s manta researchers to the most remote and exciting destinations for these rays in the world. The goals of each expedition are unique but every trip is tailored to engage participants while producing high quality information for science.

Marine Megafauna Foundation researchers have been monitoring the giant mantas in Southeast Asia for the last six years in a bid to enhance conservation efforts for these gentle giants. On these Ray of Hope Expeditions our team travels to all of the main aggregation sites in the region from Black Rock in the north of the Mergui Archipelago of Myanmar (which ranks as one of Andrea’s top 10 manta dives in the world), to the Surin and Similan National Parks in Thailand.

The Mergui Archipelago in Myanmar is world famous for its color-saturated reefs boasting incredible fish and invertebrate life. This area is still relatively off the grid, and it is rare to encounter other boats or divers during the navigation. The remoteness of the islands, the pristine seascapes and the abundant marine life all make this a destination one not to be missed. The trip also includes visits to some of Thailand’s premier manta ray and whale shark dive sites including the famed Richelieu Rock, Koh Tachai and Koh Bon- also great sites for wide-angle and macro photography.

In addition to the rich and varied dive itinerary, guests will also have the opportunity to kayak, visit beautiful beaches and explore the border town Kaw Thuang as the boat docks for immigration procedures. Evenings will be spent in comfort, dining on local cuisine, listening to research talks and improving photography skills with mini workshops.

On their journey guests will have the opportunity to become real citizen scientists, assisting our team with visual transects for mantas, setting camera traps and recording behaviour. All photographed manta rays will be uploaded to ‘Manta Matcher’, the global online database, to check for previous sightings or to register new individuals. These expeditions have resulted in hundreds of identified individuals being uploaded to the Thailand and Myanmar manta ray databases, which has in turn highlighted this region as one of the most important aggregation sites in the Indian Ocean for giant manta rays.

The diving conditions are more suitable for advanced divers so we recommend that you brush up on diving skills and be in good health in order to capitalize on the experience. Certification cards will be required in advance. We limit the guests on our expeditions to ensure that you get the most out of your time with us. A minimum of three instructors/divemasters will be available at all times so that groups can be broken down into small groups, which results in better encounters with wildlife.
Expedition Guides

Andrea Marshall

Dr. Andrea Marshall is a world-renowned expert on manta rays and a National Geographic Explorer. Andrea, dubbed the ‘Queen of Mantas’ in 2009 by the BBC in the Natural World documentary by the same name, was the first person in the world to receive a PhD on the ecology of these mysterious animals. She currently is the principal scientist of the Marine Megafauna Foundation’s global manta ray research program. MMF is a not-for-profit organization which spearheads conservation efforts for our ocean giants across the world through rigorous research programs and the application of sound management practices. Andrea spends most of the year conducting research around the world, most notably through her unique ‘Ray of Hope Expeditions’.

Janneman Conradie

Janneman Conradie is an MMF conservationist specializing in aerial surveillance and underwater filming. Traveling the world with Andrea, Janneman over-sees project logistics and ensures that our field teams are using the most efficient and state of the art technology to conduct our research. Having filmed with the likes of National Geographic and the BBC, Janneman is a skilled cameraman and is onboard to help participants learn more about capturing incredible underwater imagery for fun and for science.

Richard Parker

Ric is originally from the un-tropical seaside town of Blackpool in the North-west of England. In 2005 he moved to Thailand and had his first encounter with giant manta rays- not realizing at the time what a life changing moment this would turn out to be. Ric’s affection for these majestic animals grew over the years and so did his knowledge of the waters off Thailand and Myanmar. Ric is now one of MMF’s most dedicated volunteers in South-East Asia working to help educate communities about the plight of manta rays in the region and helping to lead expeditions to observe these gentle giants in the wild. He also leads efforts to promote and collect data for MantaMatcher in Thailand and Myanmar and teach the PADI Manta Specialty courses to local and visiting divers.
Expedition Itinerary

Day 1 (March 4th) - It is recommended that guests arrive the day before the trip and stay the night in Khao Lak. There will be a non-mandatory but encouraged group dinner on March 3rd to introduce everyone. On the 4th, guests will be transported by private mini-bus to Ranong (boarder town) from Khao Lak or Phuket. After clearing immigration participants will board the MV Diva Andaman and motor into Myanmar to the Three Islets area. Day 1 is a no diving day but guests will be able to set up their diving gear, prep camera equipment and begin diving courses (if applicable). There will be briefings in the evening and a manta ray lecture by Andrea.

Day 2 (March 5th) - Three Islets. Day two is a 4-dive day with an optional beach visit. In the evening we will motor to Black Rock. There will be an optional evening photo/video tutorial with Janneman and Andrea.

Day 3 (March 6th) - The famed Black Rock. Day 3 is a 4-dive day looking for giant manta rays and other megafauna like whale sharks. Optional 'MantaMatcher' workshop with Andrea and Ric in the evening.

Day 4 (March 7th) - 4-dive day again at Black Rock. In the evening we will depart for Boulder Rock. Optional 'MantaMatcher' workshop with Andrea and Ric in the evening.

Day 5 (March 8th) - Boulder Rock, Fan Forest Pinnacle and Western Rocky dive sites (4-dive day).

Day 6 (March 9th) - 2-dive day to Western Rocky & Cock Combes Island and then we will steam back to the boarder for immigration. Guests will have an opportunity to visit the boarder town of Kaw Thaung to shop or visit the local temple. Motor into Thailand toward Surin National Park.

Day 7 (March 10th) - 4-dive day, 2 dives at Richelieu Rock and 2 dives at the very special Koh Tachai.

Day 8 (March 11th) - 4-dive day, 2 dives at Koh Tachai and 2 dives at Koh Bon.

Day 9 (March 12th) - 2 dives at Koh Bon. Motor back to Tap Lamu. Transportation back to Khao Lak.

**Rerouting during a cruise can always happen if safe sea and/or dive conditions are not met. This is the decision of the Captain and the Dive Expedition Leader. Rerouting is not considered as a cancellation and is not refunded.**
Expedition Vessel

A prestigious trip like this one requires a suitable vessel! We have chosen to do this particular expedition aboard the liveaboard *MV Andaman Diva*, one of the finest boats in the region.

The Andaman Diva is a classic wooden sailing yacht, with an expedition-style look and feel. The ‘Diva’, as we like to call her, is a 35-meter schooner and is both luxurious, safe and diver friendly.

Guests will sail or motor in style with spacious, boutique style cabins complete with air conditioning, en-suite bathrooms with showers and complimentary toiletries, and flat LCD screen entertainment systems.

Guests will also enjoy the air-conditioned salon where they can conduct dive classes, listen to lectures from MMF researchers, watch movies, share their trip images, or browse through an extensive library of marine books. There are popular cushioned relax areas towards the bow and on the top deck, which afford guests the opportunity to sunbathe, read, listen to music, get a massage or enjoy sundowners.

With both indoor and outside deck dining available, guests will dine in comfort and style. Divers will be treated to gourmet cuisine prepared by a qualified chef. Food is plentiful and diverse, with both Asian and International dishes available. Special diets can be catered for on request. The Diva has a wine cellar and other alcoholic beverages are available for an additional charge. Guests can bring specialty beverages with them but note that there is a corkage fee.

The dive deck on the ‘Diva’ is spacious with individual kit up areas and a camera table and rinse tanks making this an ideal boat for serious photographers. Guests interested in kayaking in-between or after dives may use the four single kayaks on board free of charge. Traditional Thai massage services are available for an extra fee but this might be exactly what you need after a long day diving as the sun sets!
Expedition Details

Rates:

- **Double Cabin (for couples):** US$2,750 per person sharing
- **Twin Cabin (for single travelers)*:** US$2,750 per person sharing
  * single bed as opposed to other options which include a double bed

Price Includes:

9 day / 8 night liveaboard cruise on the MV Andaman Diva
All food (Full breakfast, lunch, snacks and dinner and dessert everyday)
Hot and cold non-alcoholic beverage selection
1 complimentary bottle of champagne
28 dives (Air only, Nitrox is an additional cost)
All dive gear- including SCUBA diving equipment, tanks, weights, dive computers and dive torches
Vessel insurance covering accidents on-board
Transfers to and from Phuket to Khao Lak. Transportation is also provided between Ranong and Khao Lak, i.e. from the airport to the boat and back
Research talks and activities with Marine Megafauna Foundation biologists/staff
$150 donation to the Marine Megafauna Foundation
MMF ‘Ray of Hope Expedition’ gifts

Price Excludes:

International or domestic flights
Hotel in Khao Lak (Optional)
Personal visa fees and national park fees (approximately US$250 to be paid in cash)
NITROX tank fills (Optional) (250THB per fill, approximately $7 per tank)
Dive Courses (Advanced Open Water or Nitrox Classes available on request)
Alcoholic Beverages (wine, beer, cocktails and liquor)
Thai Massages (750THB/hr approximately $22/hr)
Gratuity (not required but encouraged)
Travel Insurance** (dive insurance required, general travel insurance is highly recommended)

**Ray of Hope Expedition and the MV Andaman Diva both take no responsibility for scheduling or itinerary changes due to changing weather, political situations, natural disasters or other events beyond our control. We strongly recommend that you purchase travel insurance for this or any dive trip you do anywhere in the world. As we are diving in a remote part of the world DAN or other comparable diving accident insurance is required to protect you from an unanticipated evacuation or other treatments that may not be covered by your regular insurance. Proof of policy will be required before you embark. Short-term policies can be purchased, for approximately 1,000 THB, on request, enquire if necessary.