SEASON OF GIANTS
March 4th - March 12th
Join MMF researchers in Myanmar and Thailand on this exclusive once a year manta ray research expedition to the Mergui Archipelago and the Surin National Park.
Expedition

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 our scientific programs.

Marine Megafauna Foundation researchers have been monitoring the giant mantas in Southeast Asia for the last eight 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 regional manta aggregation sites from Black Rock in the Mergui Archipelago of Myanmar (ranking as one of Andrea’s top 10 manta dives) 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 and Koh Tachai.

In addition to the rich and varied dive itinerary, guests will also have the opportunity to kayak, visit beautiful beaches and dine under the stars. Evenings will be spent in comfort, sampling local cuisine, listening to research talks and improving photography skills. Guests will also be able to assist our team with aspects of our research from photo ID and drone transects to setting camera traps and sample collection. 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 has highlighted this region as one of the most important aggregation sites in the Indian Ocean for giant manta rays.

Our trips are designed for advanced divers looking to participate in something a bit more challenging and stimulating than your average dive trip. We recommend that you brush up on your 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 and have the best possible encounters with wildlife.
Expedition Guides

Andrea Marshall

Dr. Andrea Marshall is a world-renowned expert on manta rays, a passionate underwater photographer 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.

Today Andrea oversees global research on manta rays as the principal scientist of the Marine Megafauna Foundation’s manta ray 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 lives with her family in southern Mozambique but spends much of the year conducting research around the world.

Believing it to be an important seasonal aggregation area for giant manta rays Andrea and her team have been working off the coast of Myanmar and Thailand since 2011. She is currently encouraging the creation of a formal research and monitoring program in the region with the hope of safeguarding this population from continued exploitation.

She and her husband Janneman started Ray of Hope Expeditions as a way to creatively support costly international field research. They are passionate about sharing experiences with the public and creating an army of citizen scientists around the world who are able to assist research groups with data collection in a meaningful way.

Janneman Conradie

Janneman Conradie is a marine conservationist specializing in aerial surveillance and technical diving. Using these specialist skills he helps MMF teams to monitor and capture data in some of the most remote and challenging environments on the planet.

Janneman also over-sees project logistics for many of MMF’s field expeditions ensuring their teams are using the most efficient and state of the art technologies to execute their research.

As professional underwater and aerial cameraman, Janneman always has some type of camera in hand. He has filmed with some of the best in the business and worked on projects with the likes of National Geographic and the BBC. Now with his own production company, Janneman is passionately committed to capturing compelling imagery and sharing stories that inspire. In addition to being one of our expert guides, he is onboard to help participants learn more about the technical side of taking photos and videos for fun and for science.
Expedition Itinerary

Day 1 (March 3rd)- Guests to arrive in Thailand and/or travel to Khao Lak. We will hold a non-mandatory but encouraged group dinner on March 3rd to introduce everyone. Guests can choose from many accommodation options.

Day 2 (March 4th)- Guests will be transported by private mini-bus to Ranong to clear immigration. Participants will then board the MV Diva Andaman and motor into Myanmar. This is not a diving day but guests will be able to set up their diving and camera gear and begin diving courses (if applicable). A briefing and a special manta ray lecture will be given in the evening.

Day 3 (March 5th)- Three Islets. Day two is a 4-dive day with an optional beach visit. In the evening we will motor to the famed Black Rock. There will be an optional evening photo/video tutorial with Janneman and Andrea.

Day 4 (March 6th)- Black Rock. 4-dive day looking for giant manta rays and other megafauna like whale sharks. ‘MantaMatcher’ workshop with Andrea in the evening.

Day 5 (March 7th)- Black Rock. Full day at the Rock. In the evening we will depart for Boulder Rocks.
Day 6 (March 8th)- Boulder Rock, Fan Forest Pinnacle and Western Rocky dive sites (4-dive day).

Day 7 (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 8 (March 10th)- 4-dive day, 2 dives at Richelieu Rock and 2 dives at the very special Koh Tachai.

Day 9 (March 11th)- 4-dive day, 2 dives at Koh Tachai and 2 dives at Koh Bon.

Day 10 (March 12th)- 2 dives at Koh Bon. Motor back to Tap Lamu. Transportation back to Khao Lak. Debrief and non-manadory final dinner in Khao Lak that evening. Guests may be able to make very late evening flights from Phuket but it is recommended that they schedule their onwards travel from the 13th of March.

** This is a suggested schedule and one that has worked well for us in the past. Opportunistic changes in this schedule or itinerary due to conditions, animal presence, foul weather and/or research requirements are at the discretion of the Captain and the Dive Expedition Leader.**
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 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

Double Bed Cabin (for couples): US$3,300 per person sharing
Twin Bed Cabin (for single travelers): US$3,300 per person sharing

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
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
$200 donation to the Marine Megafauna Foundation
MMF ‘Ray of Hope Expedition’ gift

Price Excludes:

International or domestic flights
Hotel in Khao Lak
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 or )
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 Expeditions 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. Travel insurance is strongly recommended. A DAN or comparable diving accident insurance policy is required for unanticipated evacuations or treatments that may not be covered by your regular insurance. Proof of policy is required in advance.