SEA OF GIANTS

March 17th - April 5th

Join MMF researchers in Thailand, Myanmar and the Andaman Islands for a unique, 20-day research expedition to some of the finest giant manta ray aggregation sites in the Indian Ocean.
The Opportunity

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 nearly a decade in a bid to enhance conservation efforts for these gentle giants. On these Ray of Hope Expeditions our team travels to 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. In 2020 we will add the Andaman Islands to the itinerary in the hopes of extending our research efforts across the Andaman Sea in the coming years.

The reefs of the Andamans are rich with life and almost completely unexplored. This is a place that few people have dived and sites are often closed to foreign tourism. The northern islands of Barren and Narcondam are rumored to be incredible locations for encountering both reef and giant manta rays and were favorite locations of Jaques Cousteau. We will visit volcanic islands, explore pristine beaches, and enjoy the pelagic wonders of this remote region. The Mergui Archipelago in Myanmar is world famous for its color-saturated reefs boasting incredible fish and invertebrate life. With thousands of islands, this pristine seascape, filled with abundant marine life, is a destination not to be missed. The trip also includes visits to some of Thailand’s premier manta and whale shark sites including Koh Bon and Koh Tachai as well as dives at the famed offshore Burma Banks which have made a strong recovery in recent years and are known for their shark aggregations and towering coral formations.
In addition to the rich and varied dive itinerary, guests will also have the opportunity to kayak, visit beautiful beaches, take land trips to appreciate regional architecture and temples, engage with local people and visit national forests to look for terrestrial fauna. When we are not on the move, evenings will be spent in comfort, sampling local cuisine as we dine under the stars on the boat’s top deck. Guests can retire to their cabins to watch movies, relax on deck or opt to improve their photography and editing skills with private or group tutorials with Janneman and Andrea.

As this is a researcher oriented trip, guests will also be able to assist our team with aspects of our scientific program from photo ID and drone transects to setting camera traps, sample collection and satellite tagging. All photographed mantas 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.

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. 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. Our expeditions are living breathing adventures. We go where the conditions tell us to go, we often alter our schedule to capitalize on wildlife sightings, and we approach things with a positive spirit of exploration, knowing that we sometimes have to travel far to experience the best. The ocean is not a zoo but we always strive to provide the most stimulating and fun trips possible.
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 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 meaningful ways.

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

**Pre-departure day (March 16th)**- Guests are encouraged to arrive in Thailand and/or travel to Khao Lak. We will hold a non-mandatory but encouraged late group dinner on March 16th to introduce everyone and give a pre-expedition briefing. Guests can choose from many accommodation options or take your chances and schedule yourself to arrive the next morning.

**Day 1 (March 17th)**- Official start day. Guests will be transported by private mini-bus in the early morning (usually after 9am) to Ranong to clear immigration (3 hour drive). 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). An expedition briefing and a special manta ray lecture will be given in the evening.

**Day 2 (March 18th)**- South and North Twin. Day two is a 4-dive day at twin islands known for their giant manta ray sightings. In the evening we will motor to the famed Black Rock.

**Day 3 (March 19th)**- Black Rock, one of the highlights along our navigation. We will have a full 4-dive day looking for giant manta rays and other megafauna like whale sharks.

**Day 4 (March 20th)**- Black Rock. 3 more exciting dives at the Rock. In the evening we will depart for the Thai Boarder.
Day 5 (March 21st)- We will do one morning dive (to be determined), then we are off to clear customs and enjoy some time on land visiting the temple and town at Kauwthoung. Night faring to Burma Banks.

Day 6 (March 22nd)- We will do 2 dives exploring the famed Burma Banks to look for sharks and other pelagics. Night faring across the Andaman Sea.

Day 7 (March 23rd)- Andaman Sea Crossing. Whale watching and 1-2 potential blue water dives or freedive exploring along the way. Night faring to the Andaman Islands.

Day 8 (March 24th)- Immigration at Port Blair while the group enjoys a land visit to Mt Harriette or Chidya Tapu. Both involve hiking to vistas, bird watching and herp spotting.

Day 9 (March 25th)- 2-3 dives at Cinque Island. Night faring to Barren Island.

Day 10 (March 26th)- 4 dives at the Barren Island, an active volcano and acclaimed spot for giant mantas and pelagic species.

Day 11 (March 27th)- 4 dives at Barren Island. Night faring to Narcondam Island.

Day 12 (March 28th)- 4 dives at another remote offshore volcanic island called Narcondam, a sanctuary developed to protect a highly endangered and endemic species of hornbill.

Day 13 (March 29th)- 3 more dives at Cousteau’s favorite Narcondam Island then a night faring to Barren Island.

Day 14 (March 30th)- A final 3 dives at Barren Island. Night faring to Havelock Island.
**Day 15 (March 31st)**- 3 dives at Havelock Island, a favorite in the Andamans. Afternoon land visit to Ross Island.

**Day 16 (April 1st)**- Emigration out of the Andamans at Port Blair. Optional land visit. Night fairing to Flat Rock.

**Day 17 (April 2nd)**- 2 dives Flat Rock during our 40 hour crossing to Thailand.


**Day 19 (April 4th)**- 3 dives at the best marine megafauna sites in Thailand, Koh Tachai and Koh Bon. These are the two best reefs in Thailand to see giant mantas but there are also often sightings of whale sharks. Motor back to Tap Lamu. Last group dinner under the stars.

**Disembarkation Day (April 5th)**- Early morning Immigration and transportation back to Khao Lak. Guests can arrange onward travel or departure immediately upon arrival.

**Please note this is only a suggested schedule. Opportunistic changes in this itinerary due to conditions, animal presence, foul weather and/or research requirements are at the discretion of the Captain and the Dive Expedition Leader. This trip is extremely exploratory and we encourage guests to be flexible and open minded. There will be long hauls on this trip but the benefit will be that we are exploring 3 countries and diving very unexplored and unique areas. If you ever wanted to see and experience this region, this is your all-in-one trip to do so while helping to contribute to important exploratory research.**
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. They 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, whale-watch, read, listen to music, get a massage or enjoy sundowners.

With both an 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’ has individual kit up areas, camera rinse tanks and two zodiacs to help reduce the sizes of dive groups. Guests interested in kayaking in-between or after dives can take advantage of the single kayaks on board. Traditional Thai massage services are available and may be exactly what you need after a long day diving!
Expedition Details

Double Bed Cabin (for couples):
US$6,800 per person sharing

Twin Bed Cabin (for single travelers): US$6,800 per person sharing

Price Includes:
- 19-day liveaboard cruise across 3 countries 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
- Approximately 44 dives (Air only, Nitrox is an additional cost see below)
- All dive gear- including SCUBA diving equipment, tanks, weights, dive computers, dive torches and some personal safety gear
- Transportation between Khao Lak hotels and the Diva at start and end of trip
- 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 (if required)
- Personal visas and national park fees (approximately US$650 to be paid in cash at various ports)
- NITROX tank fills (Optional) (300THB per fill (approx $10) or 8000THB package for entire trip (approx $260)
- Dive Courses (Advanced Open Water or Nitrox Classes available on request)
- Alcoholic Beverages (wine, beer, cocktails and liquor)
- Thai Massages (750THB/hr approximately $24/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. Please note we are traveling to VERY remote areas.