

## The Junk - Best of Thailand, 10 Nights Manta Trust Expedition



Join The Junk and the Manta Trust on this unique itinerary exploring the very best diving that Thailand has to offer, taking in the highlights of The Similan Islands plus Koh Bon, Koh Tachai and Richelieu Rock.

### About the Manta Trust

Formed in 2011, The Manta Trust is a UK and US registered charity that coordinates global mobulid research and conservation efforts. The team consists of a diverse group of researchers, scientists, conservationists, educators and media experts; working together to share and promote knowledge and expertise. The shared mission of this team is to conserve mobulid rays, their relatives, and their habitats, through a combination of research, education and collaboration.

The goal is a sustainable future for the oceans, where manta rays and their relatives thrive in healthy, diverse marine ecosystems. The Manta Trust takes a unique, multifaceted approach to mobulid conservation, which sets them apart from others in the field. The trust's approach revolves around three fundamental pillars: Research, Education and Collaboration.

As part of the mission to raise awareness and provide education on manta ray conservation, the Manta Trust has teamed up with regional eco-minded tourism operators to provide 'Manta Expeditions'—a series of liveaboard dive and snorkel trips that focus specifically on getting guests in close proximity to manta rays, whilst imparting expert knowledge and skills.

### **What to Expect**

A core focus of this expedition is to not only to provide close encounters with manta rays, but to enthuse and educate guests in marine conservation issues and the environment surrounding them. The Manta Trust has ongoing research and conservation projects located all around the world at many of the ocean's top manta ray dive destinations. Through a series of presentations on topics covering local marine species and habitats, they also ensure that divers leave with an increased awareness of the threats these graceful creatures are facing and how they can help beyond their holiday.

### **Citizen Science & Photo-ID Workshops**

Workshops in collecting and recording manta ID images cement the theoretical and practical aspects of the research being conducted by giving divers the tools to get involved, knowing that they are contributing meaningful data to the project. During this liveaboard trip aboard The Junk with The Manta Trust, you will have the opportunity to experience and participate in cutting-edge conservation research to protect one of the ocean's most majestic animals. Manta Trust scientists will be collecting photographic identification images of all mantas encountered throughout the expedition and, for those interested, the trip leader will provide workshops to any guests that wish to get involved. All manta rays encountered during the trip will be added to the regional database, and guests will be invited to name any new mantas that are identified.

Every manta sighting is crucial information in developing effective management and conservation strategies for these increasingly vulnerable animals. Through these workshops, divers will be able to enjoy world-class marine encounters, whilst knowing they are also contributing meaningful data to Manta Trust's research and conservation efforts.

### **About Your Trip Leader – Jamie Monmaneerat**

Winner of Miss Scuba International and Miss Marine Conservation 2012, and project leader of Thailand Manta Project, Jamie has always been fascinated by the oceans and their inhabitants. Since then she has been traveling, diving and promoting marine conservation to the world. With so much love for the oceans, Jamie furthered her knowledge and received her diploma education in Marine Biology with distinction at Oxford College.

Jamie's devotion to manta rays started when she learnt about manta gill trade back in 2012. Although frustrated, she stayed optimistic and dedicated herself to the conservation of these majestic species. In 2014 she spent 3 months working with the Manta Trust in the Maldives. After countless hours in the water with hundreds of manta rays, Jamie decided to develop the experience and knowledge she gained in Maldives into a manta project in her home country. In 2015 the Thailand Manta Project was established with the goal to research the manta population in Thailand and increase local protection of manta and mobula rays in Thai waters. Since then, Jamie has been dedicating her time to educate and raise awareness on manta rays and marine conservation in Thailand and its neighbouring countries.

Apart from her love for manta rays, Jamie is also very passionate about diving, with over 7 years experience working as a PADI dive instructor in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Join Jamie on Manta Expedition aboard The Junk, and she will share her extensive local diving knowledge as well as giving presentations on manta rays and how you can help make a difference to the current ocean crisis.

## Itinerary - 10 Nights

- **Arrival airport:** Phuket International Airport (HKT)
- **Departure airport:** Phuket International Airport (HKT)
  
- **Embarkation Point:** Chalong Pier, Phuket at 18:00
- **Disembarkation Point:** Thap Lamu Pier, Khao Lak at 10:00

Transfer from and to Phuket Airport or local hotels on embarkation and disembarkation day are included in the liveboard price.

Arrival and departure transfers on other days, or outside of the local embarkation and disembarkation areas can be arranged for an additional charge.

**Marine Park Fees & local taxes:** 115 USD per person

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

### Itinerary & Diving Details

- Suitable for photographers
- A mix of large and small marine life
- Colourful Reefs
- Boulders and Swim-throughs
- Manta tracking, research and education
  
- Reefs: A mix of colourful reefs, submerged pinnacles and boulder sites
- Large Fish & Pelagics: Mantas, Whale Sharks, Leopard Sharks
- Macro: Everything you can dream of and more.
- Night Dives: Up to 6
- Experience Level: All Levels, expect some currents

Extras: Presentations from Manta Trust guide, manta identification and tracking

#### Minimum dive certification and experience:

Diving conditions in and around the Andaman Sea are generally suitable for all levels of divers although experience of diving in currents is advantageous.

Ideally, divers wishing to join this itinerary should have Advanced Open Water certification\*, or equivalent, with a minimum of 10 logged dives and experience in strong currents.

\*Advanced Open Water courses can usually be completed on board, if booked in advance; please check with our reservations team for further information.

Guests who do not fulfil the minimum certification requirements, or who our crew feel lack sufficient skills or experience in certain conditions, may be denied participation in some or all dives.

**Number of scheduled dives:** Up to 33

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.

**All 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 18:00 followed introductions, safety briefings and dinner.

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

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

**Day 10:** We schedule 2 morning\* dives before commencing the cruise to port where the vessel will remain at anchor overnight.

**Day 11:** Following breakfast on board, disembarkation is scheduled for between 09:30 and 10:00.

\*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.

It is a mandatory requirement for all divers to have insurance which covers scuba diving activities, including emergency evacuation and recompression chamber costs.

Participation in this liveboard itinerary is subject to acceptance of our Terms & Conditions as outlined here: [www.masterliveboards.com/terms-conditions](http://www.masterliveboards.com/terms-conditions).

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.

Following is a description of the dive sites that we may visit during this itinerary.

## The Racha Islands

### Racha Yai

Located south of Phuket, Racha Yai offers the perfect location for a check dive with great visibility, sheltered sandy-bottomed bays, sloping hard coral reefs and underwater statues to explore.

### Racha Noi

This island has some of the best visibility of all sites in the area. Often described as a 'mini Similans' the granite boulder topography is also unique compared to other sites in the area. It offers a choice of hard coral reefs, boulders with large swim throughs and the beautiful pinnacle on the south point of this island. Strong currents can make the southern sites challenging, however, with a year round chance to see manta rays, it is worth the effort to dive here.

### 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 Ko 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 snorkelling, while **The Chimney** and **The Cathedral** offer things that you cannot see on other Thailand liveaboard itineraries with caverns, swim-throughs and chambers littering 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 Honeymoon Bay. Under the surface you may see: Leopard (zebra) shark, blue spotted stingrays, clown triggerfish, 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, Elephant Head Rock is the biggest pinnacle in the Similans and has some fantastic swim-throughs. If lucky, you might see some white tip reef sharks, batfish, trevally and barracuda can often be seen on the perimeter of the boulders and if you look closely in the cracks and in the rubble you can see smashing mantis shrimp, porcelain crab, moray eels and cleaner shrimp.

## Koh Bon

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

## Koh Tachai

This island is famous for its pinnacle dive site and more relaxed reef diving. Normally leopard sharks, marbled whip rays, turtles, barracuda, pipefish, 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 by late January until April.

## Richelieu Rock

This limestone pinnacle was named by Jacques Cousteau after the character in the Three Musketeers, Cardinal Richelieu, as it reminded him of his deep scarlet cape. There are gorgeous purple dendronephthya soft corals covering most of the pinnacle and 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 metres (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 octopi, all 5 varieties of anemone fish of the Andaman Sea, variety of moray eels, ornate ghost pipefish, smashing mantis shrimps, harlequin shrimps, tiger tail seahorses, Spanish mackerel, frog fish, many schooling snapper and occasional sightings of manta rays and whale sharks.

## Top Side

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 onboard with dolphins cruising along with the boat, not an unusual sight.