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DIVE AND SAIL

## **SIMILIAN ISLANDS AND MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO 10 NIGHTS THAILAND AND BURMA**

The following is a sample itinerary of where you might dive during your holiday with us. We wish to show you the very best diving but a number of factors can determine where we visit. Weather, tides, how busy a site is with other dive vessels all play a part in the Cruise Director's decision of which route the yacht takes. The safety of all on board is paramount and we always do our best in offering diving at alternate locations. The Cruise Director is happy to listen to requests from guests to visit or remain at certain sites and providing it is possible and the schedule allows, then guest's requests are respected.

### **Similian Islands and Mergui Archipelago- 10 Nights- Phuket to Phuket Up to 31 Dives including up to 5 night dives**

- **Day 1-** Arrive Chalong

Meet members of the Worldwide Dive and Sail crew near the Chalong Pier, where our office is situated, at 1 p.m. Board the SY Oriental Siren around 2 p.m. After boarding settle into your cabin and assemble your equipment with help from our friendly crew. The boat briefing is followed by dinner and enjoy the rest of the evening at your leisure.

- **Day 2-** Similan Islands

Do up to 4 dives starting with a check out dive at Anita's Reef. Colourful coral gardens are scattered along white powdery sand creating beautiful natural scenery. The highlight of this site is a huge coral bommie that is covered with gorgeous fans and soft corals, and home to a wide variety of friendly reef fish. Dive East of Eden, considered to be the most scenic dive in the Similans. Scenery is excellent throughout both the deep and shallow areas, with a good variety of hard corals, accented by some impressive soft corals and fans here and there. Elephant Head Rock is probably one of the most popular dive-sites. There are numerous swim-through and alley-ways under and in-between some of the boulders and one can spend a whole dive by just exploring those.

- **Day 3-** Similan Islands

Boulder City features underwater terrain characterized by rocks—huge, rounded chunks of granite that are scattered over quite a large area. Blue spotted stingrays and zebra sharks are often seen here. Schooling surgeon fish, snappers, pyramid butterfly fish and fusiliers can sometimes be seen in mid-water. Then head to Koh Bon for two dives, one at the Pinnacle, the other at West Ridge. This site is known for manta ray sightings but offers up plenty more should they not put in an appearance. Zebra sharks and nurse sharks may be seen in deeper parts. End the day at Koh Tachai and Twin Peaks. Often good for schooling fish, this site is also known for occasional sightings of zebra sharks, mantas, and even whale sharks.

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- **Day 4- Richelieu Rock**

Dependant on the weather we aim to dive 2 or 3 dives at Richelieu Rock, Thailand's most known dive site. 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 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 octopi, all 5 varieties of anemone fish of the Andaman Sea, variety of moray eels, ornate ghostpipe fishes, smashing mantis shrimps, harlequin shrimps, tiger tail sea horses, Spanish mackerel, frog fish, many schooling snapper and occasional sightings of manta rays and whale sharks.

Depart for safe anchorage near the Burmese border

- **Day 5- Leave Thailand and enter Burma**

Depart early morning for the border, sort our paper work out and on being cleared we head to the Mergui Archipelago.

Two dives in the afternoon at High Rock which is a small, picturesque islet distinguished by a single tree; this site seldom has very good visibility, but is extremely rich with marine life. Of particular interest is the north side, where the vertical wall drops to 18 meters. Just away from the rock is a forest of green tubastrea coral trees, accented by black corals, sponges and occasional fans. This area is often teeming with schooling fusiliers, sometimes pursued by blue-fin trevally, queen fish and various snappers. Invertebrates like nudibranchs, flatworms and mantis shrimp are common, and harlequin shrimp have been found here as well. Move slowly and look carefully, and you may even find a tiger-tail seahorse, frog fish or ghost pipe fish. Moving back to the wall, there are interesting overhangs and pinnacles, most of which are covered with orange tubastrea corals.

- **Day 6, 7, and 8- Mergui Archipelago**

Three days in the Mergui Archipelago making up to 12 dives at sites such as:

Three Islets: marine life is extremely rich and diverse all around this site, which features three different rocky islets with vertical walls as well as sloping reef. Many areas are populated with fields of anemones, which are home to five different species of anemone fish. Elsewhere, large tubastrea coral trees sprout from the rocky terrain, accompanied by crinoids, gorgonian fans and pastel green rope sponge. Tiger tail sea horses are often encountered on the deep edges of the slope, as are many varieties of morays—often several species in the same hole. Cuttlefish may be found at nearly any depth, sometimes courting and mating. Ornate ghostpipe fishes, cowrie shells, octopi, reef squid, jaw fish, porcelain crabs, long nose pipe fish, and mantis shrimps are often seen at this site. Scorpion fish are very abundant, so watch where you place your hands!

Between the three pinnacles and surrounding bottom, this site easily warrants a full day of

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diving.

Black Rock stands alone in the Andaman Sea 100 miles North West of the Thai-Burmese border town of Kawthaung. Black Rock acts as a natural magnet for fish and other marine life. An excellent multi-level site, you can start your dive anywhere around the perimeter, depending on currents. Underwater terrain on the south side consists of vertical wall down to roughly 27m, where it becomes a more gradual slope. Just off the south-west corner is a particularly interesting area, where a detached rock formation rises from very deep water to about 24m. These rocks are covered with small, vibrant soft corals, and often attract schooling snappers and rainbow runners. Back at the main islet, deeper sections are decorated with orange gorgonian fans, along with fields of corallimorpharians on the sloping west and north sides. At the eastern tip, watch for vast numbers of magnificent anemones, especially at dawn and dusk when they show off their colourful bases. A wide range of invertebrate life can be found at Black Rock, including smashing and spearing mantis shrimp, spiny lobsters, hermit crabs, sea stars, cowrie shells, harlequin shrimp, octopus and cuttlefish. During safety stops, move slowly along the eastern and western ends of the south wall to find brilliantly coloured elegant hermit crabs and a variety of nudibranchs, as well as golden wenteltrap snails that feed on the orange cup coral. Fish life is also abundant and varied, with a chance to see almost anything from scorpion fish and giant morays to marbled sting rays. Mantas and even whale sharks are also sometimes visitors of this site.

Fan Forest Pinnacle, as the name suggests, is a submerged pinnacle famous for the amount of sea-fans here. The biggest gorgonians are in deeper waters around 20 m and below. They are very healthy and support a large variety of marine life including feather stars, cowries, hawkfish and shrimps. Schooling fish include snapper, trevally, rainbow runners and fusiliers. Moray eels and scorpion fish are also numerous. On the deeper reef edges white tip reef sharks and zebra sharks can be seen with fair frequency. Wherever you are at this site, keep an eye on the blue water for schooling barracuda and occasional visits from mantas, eagle rays and even whale sharks.

Western Rocky; dramatic underwater terrain greets you at this excellent dive site, which consists of a main islet plus several detached pinnacles. Among the more striking features of the main islet is a huge underwater archway where schooling snapper often hang out. There is also a tunnel leading from one side of the island to the other, but as it is silty and completely dark in the middle, it should be avoided unless you are properly equipped and Cave Diver certified. The soft limestone island is riddled with holes and crevices, providing hiding places for hinge-beak, saron and harlequin shrimps, thorny oysters, cowrie shells, nudibranchs, spiny lobsters and moray eels. Large gorgonian fans and lush soft corals populate many of the deeper areas, while shallow portions of the south side wall are covered with orange cup corals and colourful encrusting sponges. Fish life can include almost anything from ornate ghost pipefish to frog fish to schooling batfish. Western Rocky is one of the very few places where, if one is lucky, the elusive bowmouth guitar fish and the golden moray eel can be seen.

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- **Day 9-** Leave Burma and return to Thailand

On leaving Burma we make our way back to the Surin Islands. Depending on conditions we may stop off again at Richelieu Rock or dive other sites such as Koh Torinla Ridge, Koh Torinla East or Koh Chi. We head back to the Similan Islands after our last dive.

- **Day 10-** Similan Islands

Three Trees has a wonderful coral garden on a gentle slope with some patchy sandy areas. With luck you might see a white tip reef shark, Napoleon wrasse, porcelain crabs, bluefin trevally, fusiliers and more. Sharkfin Reef topography is similar to Boulder City, except that the long granite ridge comes all the way to the surface, making it more suited to multi-level profiles. On the north side, some areas feature sea fans and healthy hard corals, while others are mostly rock. A good variety of reef fish can be seen throughout the site, including blue-fin and giant trevally, bumphead parrot fish, clown and titan triggerfish, and schools of anthias in the shallows. Hawksbill turtles are also seen here on occasion, as are zebra sharks, and blue-spotted rays. The number of dives you do is dependent on your onward flight arrangements. In the evening enjoy a BBQ on the boat and start planning your next adventure aboard the Siren Fleet.

Depart for Phuket after 3 dives

- **Day 11-** Disembark Chalong

After breakfast say your farewells and disembark the SY Oriental Siren. Depart around 10 a.m.

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