



:PAUL LEES

# A SCUBA ADVENTURE

The island of Phuket, off the western coast of southern Thailand has on offer a number of liveaboard vessels that simply must be categorised as economically priced, that is, the onboard comforts have no visions of grandeur but they certainly seem to satisfy, a point proven by the droves of repeat customers year after year. A good point to remember is that an affordable service does not necessarily translate to a low level of care and attention, or indeed for that matter, safety. The majority of boats carry a variety of modern navigational instrumentation and adequate supplies should emergency situations arise.

One particular operator – the only one on the beach road running the length of Patong Beach – Scuba Cat Diving, has

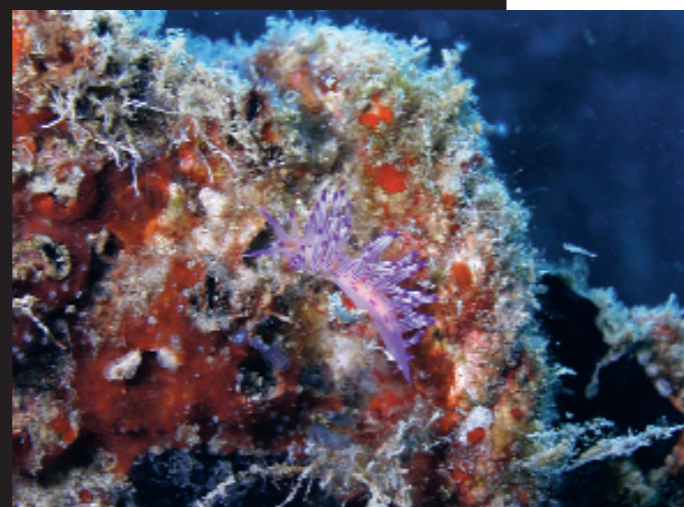
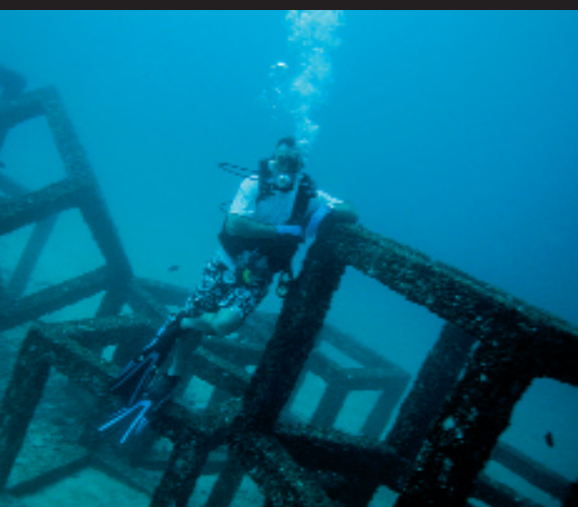
steadily grown over the years and now proudly displays the banners of a PADI 5 star CDC Center and Go Eco Operator, plus International Association of Handicapped Divers and Reef Check Center decals. Their goal, which they readily achieve is to provide a specialized quality service in relaxed and friendly surroundings and to ensure their guests get the most out of their holiday all year round, no matter what diving experience they have.

The company owns and operates four diving vessels which are all individually kitted out for day trips or liveaboard excursions depending on their intended purpose. Of the liveaboards, MV *Scubacat* is based in the Similans throughout the high season between October and April. A transfer service runs to and from the mainland on a

regular basis; the boat is a great way to dive the Similans as you can come and go as you choose and it has the largest dive deck in Thai waters!

However, heading the liveaboard fleet is MV *Scuba Adventure*, which embarks on regular multi-day liveaboard excursions of varying durations and destinations around the Andaman Sea. She follows well established routes, firstly around the southern sites in the Mu Koh Lanta Marine National Park with large pelagics off steep walls and dropoffs around the two blue water sites of Hin Daeng and Mouang; the caves and reefs fringing the Koh Ha Yai group and the Phi Phi Islands, both rich with varied marine life, are a superb contrast. The second route heads northwest of Phuket to the opposing

> Services, standards and levels of comfort available on dive liveaboards vary from boat to boat and between countries; those falling in what's considered to be the low-price bracket in one place could well be regarded as highly priced in another.



Top: Even scuba tanks enjoy a glorious Similan Sunset. Isabelle Dechamps.

Bottom L-R: A diver poses on a recently placed geometrically shaped artificial reef. Philip Lineker. Batfish at Koh Bon. Philip Lineker.

The Similans provide numerous opportunities for macro and critter enthusiasts alike. Philip Lineker.

Bottom L-R: Scuba Adventure. Mood Prasith Boonsob. Chevron barracudas at Richelieu rock. Philip Lineker.



Up close and personal with a green sea turtle on the reefs around Koh Tachai. Philip Lineker



Schooling jacks. Philip Lineker.



Briefing the divers. Isabelle Dechamps.



A reef octopus. Philip Lineker.



Adventure's crew. John Murray.



Exploring a wreck. Philip Lineker.

coastlines of Mu Koh Similan and the fringing reefs of Surin Marine National Parks, including the manta ray magnet of Koh Bon and the picturesque coral gardens at Koh Tachai; not forgetting the now legendary Richelieu Rock, with its minute marine organisms frequently shadowed by whale sharks, shovel-nose

functional salon where you can catch a movie and a photographer workstation. The cabins are divided between this and the lower deck. The dive deck is both accommodating and functional and a good feature for 'techies' and photographers is there's a separate rinse tank reserved for

*The Rock features highly on photographers' must do lists, with its range of subjects for wide angle and macro enthusiasts alike.*

rays and a host of open ocean visitors. The Rock now features highly on photographers' 'must do' lists, with its range of subjects for wide angle and macro enthusiasts alike. An amalgamation of both these routes is also available.

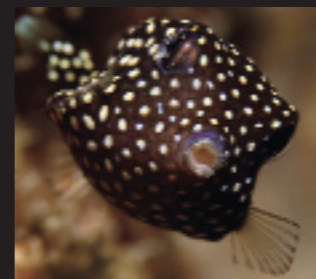
The boat is a comfortable 23 metre vessel with 5 twin cabins and two double cabins, all with individually controlled air-conditioning. Though there's plenty of room for up to 14 guests, Scubacat's policy is to accommodate a maximum of 12. All the comfort and fun takes place over three decks, the upper, or 'Party Deck' is reserved for dining and relaxing such as listening to music, reading, or discussing past and future dives with your buddies and has sunny and shaded areas. The middle deck features a

cameras and dive computers.

Meals on board follow a similar pattern; in that the day's diving and a night's sleep are both juggled around them! The day starts with a light breakfast followed by a refreshing plunge, after which a full breakfast is served. More diving precedes a lunch of a selection of Thai and western hot dishes followed by more underwater excursions and finally an evening meal of either tasty local or European fare. Intending guests can easily avoid any awkward fuss by enquiring about meal types or simply informing the guys at Scubacat of any special dietary considerations prior to booking, such as vegetarian, vegan, ingredients that trigger allergy's or meals disallowed by religion.



Isabelle Dechamps



**Digital Adventures**

One available service that's both educational and great fun is the selection of underwater photography courses run under the watchful eye of onboard professional photographer Cedric Saveuse in a variety of languages. No matter what the student's experience level is, even a non-photographer without a camera, Cedric will be able to either better it, or introduce a new diversity of skills altogether. He also can provide the equipment to do so! Courses can either follow standard outlines including the two-dive PADI Underwater Digital Photographer Specialty, which is packaged with a manual and certification, or there's a range of courses authored by Cedric himself. His Practical Photography Course, for instance, does exactly what it says on the packet – it runs for the duration of the trip and is accompanied by an in-depth manual. There are valuable tips on equipment use and maintenance, focusing modes and selection scenarios, wide angle and macro techniques and image editing – all of which are supported with training dives and loads of practical opportunities to master the newly acquired skills. Evenings are spent at the workstation accessing the day's efforts along with constructive comments and input. Lastly an assignment is set for the next day, taking into account the dive sites and their particular subjects.

Snacks are also complimentary throughout the trips and include fruit, cakes and cookies, as are free-flowing hot drinks including tea, coffee and drinking chocolate. Soft drinks and alcoholic beverages, and for those with a sweet tooth, chocolates, are all available but not included in the trip price!

Those divers only recently certified need not worry about finding themselves in situations that they feel uncomfortable with such as strong currents, deep, or night dives as the experienced dive crew specialises in paying attention both audibly and visibly to the divers performance level and basing their diving experiences on what they'll enjoy the most.

Liveaboard trips are a great place to continue diver education and Scuba Adventure is no exception; a selection of training materials are carried onboard and instruction is available in a variety of languages. And what an ideal place to continue diver education, and open up more doors to the underwater world; ones that can be put to good use, immediately!



> LINK: [www.patong-beach.com](http://www.patong-beach.com)