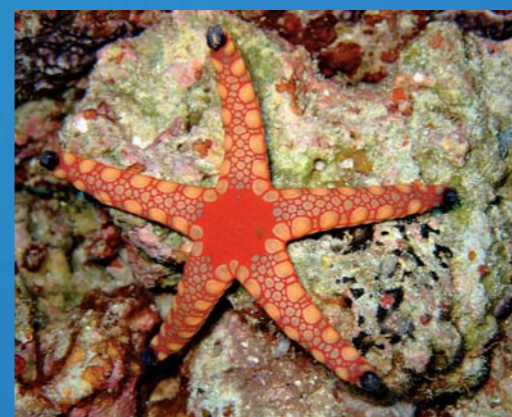


a change of office



: BRENDON MITCHELL

+ WHILE TRAVELLING THROUGH AUSTRALIA BACK IN 2004, A FRIEND AND I DECIDED WE SHOULD REALLY TAKE THE PLUNGE AND GIVE SCUBA DIVING A TRY, ESPECIALLY AS WE WERE IN CAIRNS AT THE TIME. WE HAD A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE AND ONE WE WERE KEEN TO REPEAT. SO MUCH SO, THAT WE BOTH SIGNED UP FOR OPEN WATER DIVER COURSES RIGHT THERE AND THEN!



Thinking back, I still remember dreaming of what life must be like as a diving instructor, with all those sights and sounds of the ocean as your office. Unfortunately, for me it was back to my land-based job and the sounds of the city so the dream temporarily disappeared.

Three years later I decided it was time to take my love of diving to the next level. Not really knowing where to begin, magazines and the internet seemed like good places to start, especially as I planned to return to tropical waters and was based nowhere near any!

I searched the websites of dive centres from all four corners of the world and sent off endless enquiry emails until a satisfactory response hit my inbox from Sunrise Diving, a 5 star IDC *National Geographic* dive centre based on Patong Beach in Phuket, southern Thailand. The office manager Damian had replied and what impressed me was not only the speed of the response but also how personal it was, not just a pre-formatted reply using a template. He'd paid attention to my questions, concerns and needs and returned a detailed reply.

The following day Damian invited me to have a chat through the live online help service on the dive centre's website and this was really helpful. He told me all about the Dive Centre itself, bits and pieces about Thailand

and Phuket life, even the centre's resident Course Director Anthony Andrews chipped in also, as it turned out we hailed from the same area. After chatting for what seemed like an hour, I was more than happy and decided to make the jump and booked the Advanced Open Water all the way through to Dive Master. The course would take six weeks so I also booked the Sunrise Diving Apartments featured on the website.

I arrived in August 2007 following my dreams to a place I hadn't been to before, so to say I was a little nervous was an understatement. However, I was met at Phuket International Airport by the centre's staff who took me to the apartments, which made me feel at home right from the word go. As I expected, my home away from home was really self-contained with everything I needed and was quiet, clean and near all the Patong Beach amenities. The airconditioned apartment had TV and DVD, fridge, bathroom and a writing desk which was to be invaluable for reading up on the following day's topics and private studying. And on a lighter note, a large balcony for those chilled-out evenings!

After settling in I visited the guys at Sunrise Diving in person. The dive centre was easy to find – a bright new building opposite the Jun Ceylon shopping complex on Patong Beach – you can't miss it!

Main image:
My dive buddy Andrea Sottano showing-off his new buoyancy skills during the Advanced Open Water Diver Course. *Alessandro Rossi*
Small images top to bottom:
~ A leopard shark taking it easy on the seabed at Shark Point. *Anthony Andrews*
~ Instructor Ayala Cohen and fellow student, Pam Holt running through some Rescue Diver skills in the swimming pool -

who says a serious topic can't be fun? *Anthony Andrews*
~ Look at the fantastic colourations of this Necklace sea star. *Anthony Andrews*
~ The PADI Sunrise Course Director, Anthony Andrews and I planning the 'Underwater Navigation' dive of the Advanced Open Water Course during the surface interval at Koh Racha Yai. Remember: Plan the Dive - Dive the Plan! *Stephen Longworth*

