



REEF CHECK COURSE WITH SCUBA CAT DIVING

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The students were staying on the liveaboard diving boat MV Scuba Cat, where they completed their PADI Open Water Diver and Advanced Open Water Diver courses – the latter being the prerequisite to participate in the Reef Check Eco Diver Course.

The Reef Check Eco Diver Course includes a buoyancy check dive not just to refresh buoyancy skills already learnt, but to teach new methods of manoeuvring underwater so as not to cause damage to the environment. It also provides training in globally standardized Reef Check methodology. Students are taught how to identify different types of coral formation and to assess whether they are healthy or

damaged. Key indicator fish and invertebrates selected by Reef Check are also identified for global monitoring. The students also learn how to collect data that is then submitted to Reef Check's global reef-monitoring database.

Responsibility for collecting usable data weighed heavily upon the minds of the twelve to fifteen year old, newly qualified Reef Check Eco Divers as they entered the water at their designated times, in order to collect and compare scientific data along a 100 metre stretch of shallow fragile reef. The results of the survey would then be sent to the 'Reef Check Foundation' - a scientific organisation engaged in studies to evaluate human impact on ocean reef

systems that would then add the collected information to its database and share it with scientists and educators all around the world.

Supervised by appointed Reef Check Dive Center Scuba Cat Diving and Professor Suchana 'Apple' Chavanich, Ph.D. from Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, the students were divided into data collection teams comprising six students, one Reef Check instructor, and a CISS assisting adult leader.

Each team followed along the same 100 metre section of reef to identify the different species of fish and invertebrate thereon. They also collected data on the health and variety of coral species along

> DURING JUNE 2008, 18 STUDENTS FROM CONCORDIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN SHANGHAI (CISS) DONNED SCUBA GEAR AND DIVED INTO THE ANDAMAN SEA AROUND THE FRINGING REEFS OF KOH RACHA YAI, A POPULAR DIVING DESTINATION TO THE SOUTH OF PHUKET IN SOUTHERN THAILAND. BUT THIS WAS NO ORDINARY DIVE, IT WAS A QUEST TO MONITOR AND THEREFORE CONSERVE THE REEFS!



The trip wasn't all work and no play! There was also time for 'kids' to be just 'kids'.

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After all the monitoring and data collecting the details of the dive itself needed logging!

divetheblue.net



Left: The students floating home, classroom, and playground, the MV Scubacat.



A happy student refers to her notes. Examining the marine life.



Students of the end of the day. A buddy pair after their monitoring. More playing!



A buddy pair after their monitoring. More playing!



A buddy pair after their monitoring. More playing!

the selected stretch. Each team would follow the same course at a designated time chosen for the study, so as comparisons could be made at different times of the day.

The first team entered the water early in the morning. The six-student team immediately paired off into three buddy teams with the supervisors looking on.

In the early afternoon, the final six divers entered the water to collect data that could be compared with the earlier findings. Conserving air as much as possible, they spent a full eighty minutes underwater identifying, counting, and rechecking for accuracy. The end of this data collection ended the first Reef Check study for CISS and Scuba Cat Diving, and answered the one question

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The first buddy pair conducted the initial fish count; fifteen minutes later, the second followed and identified as many invertebrates as possible; the third then performed a substrate coral study. Seventy intense minutes later, all the team members had completed their tasks and surfaced with the precious data they had worked so hard to collect.

A little more than an hour later, a second dive team left the MV Scuba Cat diving deck. Dividing into a similar pattern, the team followed the same format as their predecessors and collected additional data during a similar seventy minute period.

that had haunted the students, instructors, and adult leaders for the past nine months: Could a group of middle school students conduct a strict scientific study that went far beyond classroom expectations and into the realm of scientific field research? The answer was a rousing... yes!

After eight days aboard MV Scuba Cat, diving three to four times a day to achieve perfect buoyancy and finely tuned scuba skills, interspersed with hours of lecture, study, briefings, and tests, the young ambassadors had taken on adult responsibilities and proved themselves more than worthy to execute the task in hand.



The Reef Check Eco Diver Course includes lectures and hands on training before getting in the water.

About Reef Check

The Reef Check Foundation was founded in 1996 by marine ecologist, Dr. Greg Hodgson. The Foundation is dedicated to research, education, and conservation with respect to two ecosystems: tropical coral reefs and California rocky reefs.

With headquarters in Los Angeles and volunteer teams in more than 90 countries and territories, Reef Check works to create partnerships among community volunteers, government agencies, businesses, universities, and other non-profit organisations.

Reef Check goals are to: educate the public about the value of reef ecosystems and the current crisis affecting marine life; to create a global network of volunteer teams trained in Reef Check's scientific methods who regularly monitor and report on reef health; to facilitate collaboration that produces ecologically sound and economically sustainable solutions; and to stimulate local community action to protect remaining pristine reefs and rehabilitate damaged reefs worldwide.

Reef Check has received international environmental awards for its work, and is the United Nations' official community-based reef monitoring program.

> LINK: <http://reefcheck.org>

More importantly, they proved that young people really do care about the planet on which they live and the creatures with which they interact. Now other students will follow and, hopefully, help save the Earth's fragile reef systems for future generations.

The same students, along with 12 new recruits, returned to Koh Racha Yai in 2009, again they boarded MV Scuba Cat to further study the reefs and to observe its condition compared with what they discovered last year, they also completed the PADI Rescue Diver Course, the next step in their diving adventures!



A future PADI Dive Master?