

2010 WHALE SHARK EXPLORATION PROGRAM GOLDEN BUDDHA BEACH RESORT and BLUE GURU DIVING

ALL INCLUSIVE 8 NIGHTS PACKAGE INCLUDING:

4 nights at Golden Buddha Resort in sea view or ocean front house with:

- All meals
- 1 hour thai massage
- Return transfers from Phuket airport or town
- Transfer from Golden Buddha to liveaboard

4 nights on liveaboard boat in twin or double cabin with:

- All meals, snacks & soft drinks
- 14 dives including Richelieu Rock, Koh Tachai & Koh Bon
- 4 days dive equipment rental & experienced instructor/dive guide
- PADI Whale Shark Awareness specialty course
- National Park entrance/diving fees

PRICE PER PERSON BASED ON DOUBLE OCCUPANCY:

Above package with Sea View House at Golden Buddha - \$1399

Above package with Ocean Front House at Golden Buddha - \$1299

*** plus 7% VAT and 10% service fees**

Prices for singles, groups, families & non-divers available upon request.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS:

Additional massages & spa treatments at Golden Buddha

Yoga, snorkeling, kayaking & other activities at Golden Buddha

Other PADI dive courses with Blue Guru at resort or on dive trip

Extra days diving with Blue Guru at Koh Phra Thong, Surin or Richelieu

Extra nights at Golden Buddha

PROGRAM DATES:

February 14-22, 2010 (only 1 place left!)

March 10-18, 2010

DIVING PRE-REQUISITES:

Our Whale Shark Exploration Program is open to everyone, including those without any diver certification...yet!

Snorkelers can participate in the Whale Shark specialty course & snorkel at many dive sites. Some offshore dive sites we visit are subject to currents, so may not be suitable for snorkelers.

Divers must have PADI Open Water certification (or equivalent). As many dives can be to 30m max depth, PADI Advanced Open Water certification (or equivalent) is highly recommended.

Anyone wanting to gain their PADI Open Water during their stay at Golden Buddha can do so in just 4 days with Blue Guru Diving, which is based at the resort. The Advanced Open Water course can also be completed with Blue Guru Diving in just 2 days during the liveaboard trip.

Everyone will need to be medically fit to dive/snorkel or have a doctor's signed consent, evidenced by completing the standard PADI medical questionnaire.

EXPERIENCE WHALE SHARKS & MUCH MORE!

Feb - April is prime whale shark season on our doorstep in Thailand's Andaman Sea! During these months we offer a unique experience that supports eco-tourism and marine conservation with the opportunity to learn about, search for, identify & help track migrating whale sharks.

Graceful, rare & mesmerizing, whale sharks can grow up to 12.2 m long (although some 14m sightings have been reported), weigh upwards of 13.6 tonnes & live for 70 years. The most elusive & largest fish in the sea is found in warm tropical waters & it is believed to have originated 60 million years ago. Currently listed as a vulnerable species by The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), whale sharks are frequently targeted by commercial fisheries.

Relatively little is known about this magnificent fish & even less known about their mating habits, migration patterns & actual living population size. The Whale Shark Exploration Program's objective is to raise awareness about whale sharks & help protect this rare species. In particular, this involves learning how to safely observe whale sharks whilst photographing them to identify individual sharks & monitor migration paths. Participants will then have the opportunity to submit any photos & data to the ECOCEAN and Whale Shark Project databases.

Throughout the week, we also offer the opportunity to see & learn about a diversity of marine life indigenous to premiere dive locations in the Andaman Sea. Blue Guru offers a wide range of marine conservation activities & diving courses that will enable you to get even more enjoyment from your time underwater during the whale shark program & on future dives.

WHALE SHARK PROJECT BACKGROUND

ECOCEAN Whale Shark Photo-identification Library (www.whaleshark.org) is a visual database of Whale shark encounters and of individually cataloged Whale Sharks. It is maintained & used by marine biologists globally to collect & analyze encounter data to learn more about these amazing creatures. Unlike older tracking & monitoring methods that involve invasive radio tagging, ECOCEAN's primary tool is the underwater digital camera.

The Photo-identification Library uses photographs of the skin patterning behind the gills of each shark & any scars to distinguish between individual animals. Cutting-edge software supports rapid identification using pattern recognition & photo management tools. This technology was developed by Australian marine scientist & Rolex Laureate, Brad Norman. It is based on an algorithm pioneered by NASA scientists working with the Hubble space telescope to record & identify constellations. The breakthrough for marine biology & conservation came when Brad adapted & applied this formula to identifying individual Whale Sharks by their unique pattern.

Norman has been collecting information since 1994 & so far there have been over 4000 photographs submitted & 1200+ whale sharks are identified from all over the world. One of the most personally rewarding aspects of this research is that the technology allows individual sharks to be identified & recorded. For example, a whale shark spotted at Richelieu Rock by one of our divers can be identified the next day as the same whale shark spotted previously feeding in the Red Sea 1000 miles away. Brad Norman explains; "When whale shark photos are logged in our online library each shark is assigned its own number & when someone photographs the same creature again, both photographers are informed by email. In this way you can track of the progress of 'your' shark as others spot it."

Blue Guru Diving is also a registered operator for PADI's Project AWARE Whale Shark Project. http://www.projectaware.org/english/take_action/whale_shark_project.aspx)

Photos & data will therefore also be submitted to the Whale Shark Project database managed by Shark Trust in Australia. (<http://www.sharktrust.org/sd/>) (

Start your experience with 4 days luxury of nature at Golden Buddha Resort...

Golden Buddha Beach Resort has long been regarded as one of Asia 's finest eco-resorts. Established 16 years ago, it is the only resort located next to a spectacular uninhabited 10km beach and private bay on the island of Koh Phra Thong (Golden Buddha Island). The area remains one of the last unspoiled coastal areas in Thailand affording guests an experience that is both unique and completely in touch with nature.

Golden Buddha Beach Resort extends for over 10 km along the Andaman Sea, comprising uniquely designed beach houses that comfortably sleep between 2 - 5 people. Our tropical island resort has only 25 private beach houses, so crowds are non-existent while peace, privacy and tranquility are guaranteed. Both exotic and rare wildlife can often be viewed from the comfort of your own veranda. Hornbills, monkeys & deer are all commonly seen. The pristine beach remains one of Thailand's few nesting sites left for leatherback turtles.

We will meet you at Phuket International Airport (or the surrounding area) and transport you to Kuraburi by car and onto Kho Phra Thong & Golden Buddha Beach Resort by boat to begin your all-inclusive 8 night holiday of a lifetime.

Relax during your stay at Golden Buddha by enjoying massages included in the package. You can pamper yourself even more by choosing from other spa treatments available at a supplement. Yoga, snorkeling & kayaking are amongst the other optional extra activities.

You can also take a wide range of PADI dive courses during your stay at Golden Buddha. Blue Guru Diving is conveniently based at the resort, conducting dives from the beach or on local reefs only 3 mins boat ride. So you can still enjoy delicious meals at Golden Buddha!

The PADI Open Water course takes just 4 days to complete at Golden Buddha resort with Blue Guru, resulting in the most recognized diving certification in the world. The course consists of:

- knowledge development through reading & knowledge reviews
- skills development in safe confined water
- skills practice & underwater tours during 4 open water dives

The PADI Advanced Open Water course takes just 2 days to complete, developing highly valuable skills & knowledge. It's also great fun, consisting of 5 adventure dives:

- Navigation & Deep dives (max 30m)
- Choice of 3 other adventure dives from the list below

PADI specialty courses combine particularly well with the Whale Shark Exploration Program to develop valuable diving skills & build more knowledge about other marine life & conservation.

- Underwater Naturalist
- Fish Identification
- Peak Performance Buoyancy
- Digital Underwater Photographer
- Underwater Videographer
- Boat Diver
- Drift Diver
- Night Diver
- Underwater Navigation
- Project AWARE (no dives; open to non-divers too)
- Coral Reef Conservation (no dives; open to non-divers too)

All the above courses can easily be integrated in the whale shark experience program, either at the resort or during the dive trip. So you can choose any extra training to suit your interests.

During your 4 night stay at Golden Buddha, Blue Guru will also develop your knowledge through the Whale Shark Awareness specialty course. You'll learn about:

- whale shark's biology, distribution & behaviours:
- how to safely & passively interact with them;
- how to help identify specific creatures using their unique spot patterns.

You'll be given guidance on how to:

- take photos & record data on whale shark sightings
- submit photos & data to the Whale Shark Project, so you can help support whale shark research & protection.

Blue Guru is a registered operator for Project AWARE, Coral Watch & Whale Shark Project.

The owners, Chris & Helen, are highly professional & experienced PADI instructors. They will flexibly cater for all your diving interests.

Chris has taught & guided dives throughout Thailand & Malaysia. He's therefore well placed to view Richelieu Rock as the best dive site in the region!

As a PADI Master Instructor, Helen is qualified to teach the whole range of PADI courses, including Whale Shark Awareness Specialty. She is also a Beautiful Oceans Science Instructor. Blue Guru employ another enthusiastic instructor, Kristina, who is a Master Scuba Diver Trainer. Kristina is qualified in conservation management & biology.

Blue Guru is defined by its commitment to environmentalism. Our underlying motivation is to protect the wide biodiversity within the local Andaman Sea through a variety of ways. We believe the most effective way to achieve this goal is through education of our guests & our local Thai community. We encourage our guests to learn more about the aquatic environment because we know from experience that you then get even more enjoyment from your diving & interactions with amazing marine life.

...continue your experience with 4 days diving with Blue Guru at Richelieu Rock, Ko Tachai & Ko Bon in search of whale sharks...

After boarding the liveboard boat, you'll enjoy your 1st evening meal before setting sail. You will be eating a lot this trip: breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks & fresh fruit available all day! Juice, water, tea, coffee & hot chocolate are also available all day & included in the package price.

Your 4 days on board will also be packed with diving... 14 dives including 2 night dives. You'll visit some of Thailand's top dive sites including Koh Bon & Koh Tachai and one of the world's top 10 dives sites: Richelieu Rock, famous for its whale shark sightings!

Searching for whale sharks is exciting enough but imagine the exhilaration when you actually spot the largest fish in the world: truly awesome! Obviously being nature, we can't guarantee any whale shark or other marine life sightings. However you increase your chances by being in the water!!

After disembarking from the liveboard boat, you'll be transferred back to Phuket airport (or surrounding area) for your onward travels.

Want to extend the adventure?

You can start your trip earlier by booking additional:

- nights at Golden Buddha to spend more time enjoying the luxury of nature
- days diving/snorkeling with Blue Guru at Koh Phra Thong or Surin Islands

LOCAL DIVE SITE INFORMATION:

Water temperature between Feb-Apr is about 28-29 degrees, so a 3mm wetsuit is sufficient. Visibility is usually about 30m but can be less in plankton-rich waters favoured by whale sharks.

Surin Islands

Located 60km offshore from Kuraburi & just south of the Burmese border, the Surin Islands are one of Thailand's most relaxed & scenic travel destinations. Surin National Park headquarters is based on Koh Surin Nuer. The Surin Islands boast fantastic snorkeling & amazing diving, especially around the south of Ko Surin Tai. In the shallows you will find very healthy hard coral reefs teeming with marine life. This is the place to see macro life in full force living in harmony with a large turtle population. Also common around Surin are sightings of manta rays & the occasional sail fish, as well as the possibility of Whale Sharks.

Richelieu Rock

A world top 10 dive site & the best place in Thailand to spot whale sharks, Richelieu Rock is an isolated pinnacle located 14km east of the Surin Islands, within Surin National Park. Being known for whale shark sightings is not Richelieu's only claim to fame. Amazement awaits divers in every square meter of the dive site. From colorful soft corals to huge sea fans & sea anemones - the topography here is spectacular. The diversity of small & large marine life is un-matched anywhere else in Thailand & as such it's a favorite location for underwater photographers. Marine life spans from exotic macro life like ghost pipe fish, seahorses, frog fish, harlequin shrimp & nudibranch to cuttlefish mating, moray eels, octopus, barracuda, giant groupers & manta rays for those looking for possible encounters with larger species.

Koh Tachai

Ko Tachai is also within Surin National Park, 52km south of Ko Surin & 50km west of Koh Phra Thong. The main reef plateau is located approximately 700m south off the island & is completely submerged. The reef offers a plethora of colorful soft, hard & fan corals in combination with rock & boulder formations. Big schools of barracuda & batfish are regular sightings here & from time to time even the gigantic whale shark finds its way to Koh Tachai. Look for camouflage experts like the stonefish!

Koh Bon

Koh Bon is an island a few miles north of the Similans, part of the Similan National Park. The amazing underwater scenery includes an interesting wall that eventually fades into a long reef stretching down to a maximum depth of 42m. Manta rays are often seen here from Nov-May. You may also be lucky enough to encounter a whale shark feeding in the plankton-rich waters here. Koh Bon is a cleaning station for mantas & whale sharks and you can see them glide slowly past you while the cleaners do their work. The sandy spots at the deeper end are home to blue spotted stingrays, reef sharks and leopard sharks.

Similan Islands

The Similan islands are a string of nine granite islands 65km off the Andaman coast, providing breathtaking scenery above & below the water. The Similans are more famous for their rocky dive sites. Enormous granite bolder formations form numerous swim throughs, gullies and canyons. The islands are fringed by extensive coral reefs and home to a multitude of tropical fish, with frequent sightings of turtles, rays and sharks. Similan National Park Headquarters is based on Island number 4 and you may have an opportunity to go ashore during your trip to experience the beautiful white sands there.