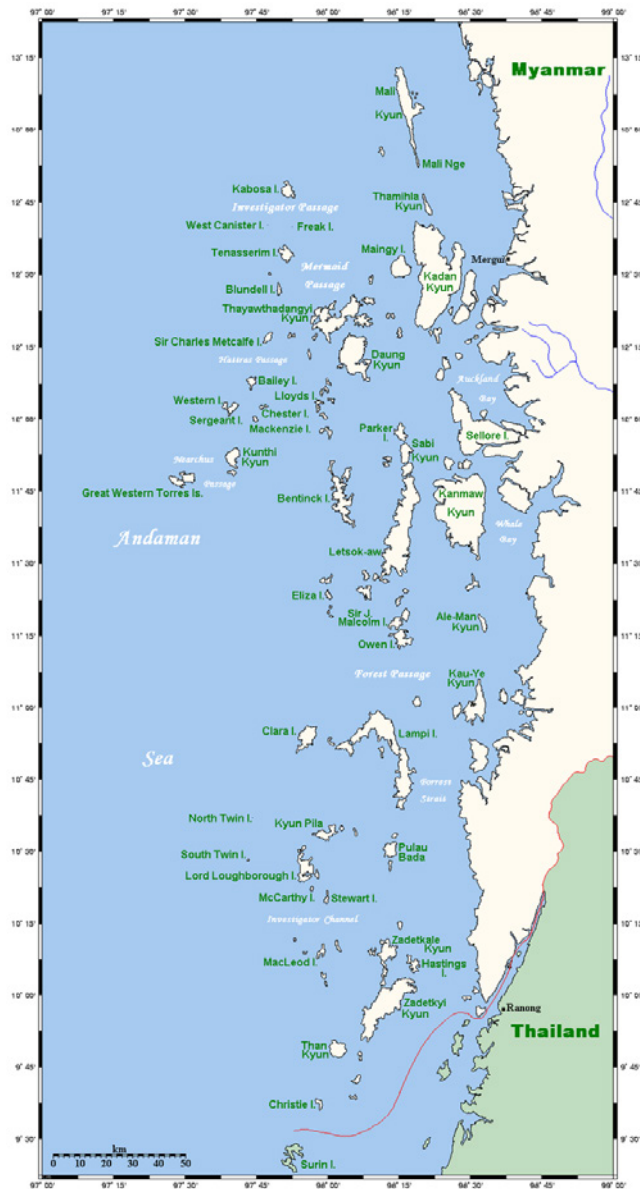


# *Freediving Trips to the* **MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO**







## About the Mergui Archipelago

Imagine yourself sailing between 800 or so white-sand islands covered in tropical jungles. The water is a clear turquoise and is undisturbed by the few local fishing boats and an occasional visiting yacht. Beneath the surface is a bounty of marine life waiting to be discovered.

### Welcome to The Mergui Archipelago!

(AKA the Myeik Archipelago, Myeik Kyunzu, or မြိတ်ကပ္ပဒွန်းစု in Burmese)

The Mergui islands are situated in the Andaman Sea. They lie just off the western shore of the Malay Peninsula, in Myanmar. The islands are sometimes referred to as the Pashu Islands because the people living in the Tanintharyi region, in far southern Myanmar, are called the Pashu.

Thanks to the archipelago's isolation, it has escaped much of mankind's destructive impact on the environment. The islands and the surrounding waters of the Andaman Sea boast a biodiversity rarely seen elsewhere. While abundant marine flora and fauna has contributed to the region's growing popularity as a diving destination, it remains relatively untouched. For this reason, endangered creatures such as whale sharks and dugongs make their home here.

The area is also important for migrating cetaceans. The aptly named Whale Bay, to the east of Kanmaw Kyun, is notable for its resident populations of Bryde's and Omura's (dwarf fin) whales. Occasional blue, beaked, strap-toothed, and killer whales pass by. Irrawaddy dolphins can also be seen making their way through the bay. On the islands themselves, the animals thrive. Species of deer, monkeys, wild pigs, and tropical birds can be seen.

The Moken, with a total population of just under 3000, are the indigenous people of the Mergui Archipelago. They speak Moken and have been sustaining themselves from the islands in the same way they have for centuries past. They are renowned for their intimate sense of the sea. In fact, in 2004 the Moken predicted a Indian Ocean tsunami before it swept in. Heading to high ground, they escaped the wave which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Most Moken live on their boats in the dry season and sail freely around the archipelago. Some have established a less nomadic base on Lampi Island.

During the rains, the Moken usually head back to land. Local mythology has it that the islands were torn from the mainland after a giant flood. We will do our best to meet the so-called Sea Gypsies and freedive with them as they have freedived for generations.

The archipelago's isolation means that much of it is completely unexplored. The best diving conditions exist from December to April, with whale sharks and manta rays visiting from February to May.

## EXPEDITION INFORMATION

### Climate and weather

Myanmar boasts excellent diving conditions. There are three seasons: “summer” runs from March until May, the “rainy” (but still full of sunshine) season from June to September, finally, the “cool” seasons is between October and February. The annual temperature averages at 28°C (83°F). The tropical climate is impacted by the southwest and northeast monsoons. The southwest monsoon (May to October) hits the coast of both Thailand and Myanmar. The northeast monsoon affects the east side of the Gulf of Thailand between October and December. To make sure all our divers are comfortable, our phinisi (a two-mast sailboat) travels during January to April.

### Water temperatures and exposure suits

The water temperatures in Mergui average around 27°C (80°F). There are some thermoclines but none are much cooler than a comfortable 20°C (68°F).

We suggest a 3mm wetsuit for the warmer months, which we will be diving in. But if you feel the cold, particularly after repetitive dives, bring extra thermal protection such as gloves and a hood. Some divers prefer a 5mm suit. In short, go with what you feel most comfortable in.

The visibility varies but is generally around 10 to a whopping 50m, dependent on the season. We’re diving in the best conditions so expect good vis. The currents are normally mild to intermediate.



Photo by Seadrops Photography



### The Dirty Dozen Expeditions

The boat team and The Dirty Dozen have carefully handpicked some of the most rarely visited dive sites, with depths ranging from 10 to 50m plus. During the expedition we will anchor at one or two dive sites per day, but expect to have skiff rides from the nearest mooring to exploratory dive sites as these will not have a mooring for our boat. The Phinisi will be available to guests freediving during the entire day and does not move at night unless there is an emergency.

If the group feels one dive site is enough for the day, then we stay there. If we have weather and organizational logistics on our side, we may visit another dive site or two, the captain and the team will try our best to accommodate requests. As the trip nears, we will have a Facebook group for the expedition where we will periodically discuss preparations. This is a great way to share information among the participants prior to the expedition and for everyone to get to know each other.

Detailed dive briefs are given for each of the dive sites with teams forming for different missions. On the dive sites, it's almost guaranteed that we will have the surroundings to ourselves. During the expedition you might see the occasional small day boat on the well-known dive sites, but even then, they will probably not dive at the same time as us.

You are responsible for your own safety and dive planning at all times.

### Equipment considerations

There are absolutely no dive shops in Myanmar for the purchase of freediving equipment. If you have your equipment serviced/buy new equipment before coming to Myanmar, then use it a couple times before traveling to ensure there are no problems.

### Freediving considerations

We will be using professional freediving buoys with a high buoyancy level which are comfortable to hold on to. The lines are 10 to 12mm thick-marked and measured at 30, 40 and 60m deep.

For the warm-ups and trainings, the buoys will be attached to a surface line which is connected to the boat. This is a preliminary plan and the final decision about the set up will be made each day during a team briefing and according to the weather conditions and the objectives of the sessions.

For the fun dives, you'll be asked to team up into groups of three or four—to work and dive in a buddy system. Each group will be provided with a buoy for safety purposes to mark their diving area, and so they are visible for the on-board support team. There will also floating/rescue devices available in case they are needed.

We are providing the necessary number of buoys so that no more than four freedivers will be share each one.

There is freshwater always available at the boat to rinse your equipment and a special area to dry it.

We want to stress that the boat only has scuba diving equipment available on board, so you should bring your own set of freediving equipment: your wetsuit, mask, snorkel, computer, fins, lanyard, nylon weight belts and yoga mat.

To feel yourself comfortable and safe during our expedition dives, you need to be certified as AIDA2 (or the equivalent in other agencies) or higher. Please bring a medical form, verified by a doctor, that states you are allowed to freedive and have no medical conditions which preclude this kind of activity. The standard medical form is available at: [www.aidainternational.org](http://www.aidainternational.org). The liability release form can be filled out on the boat.

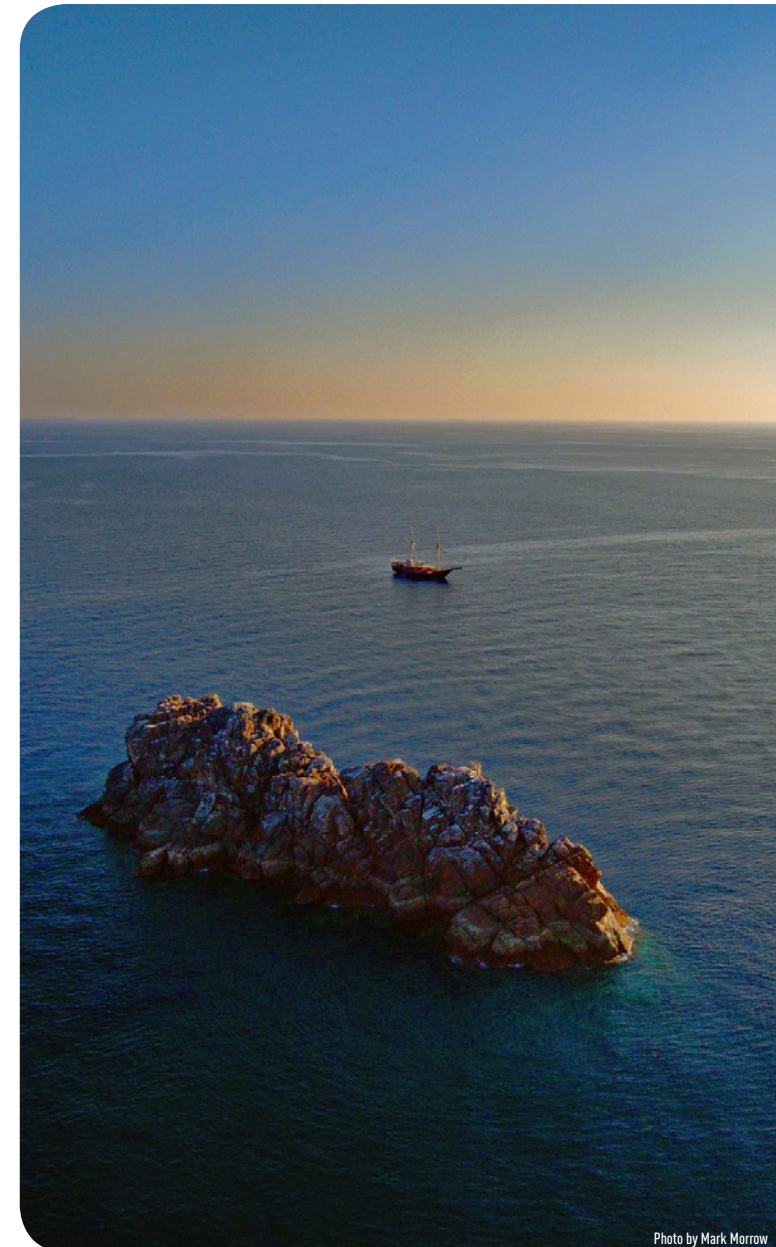
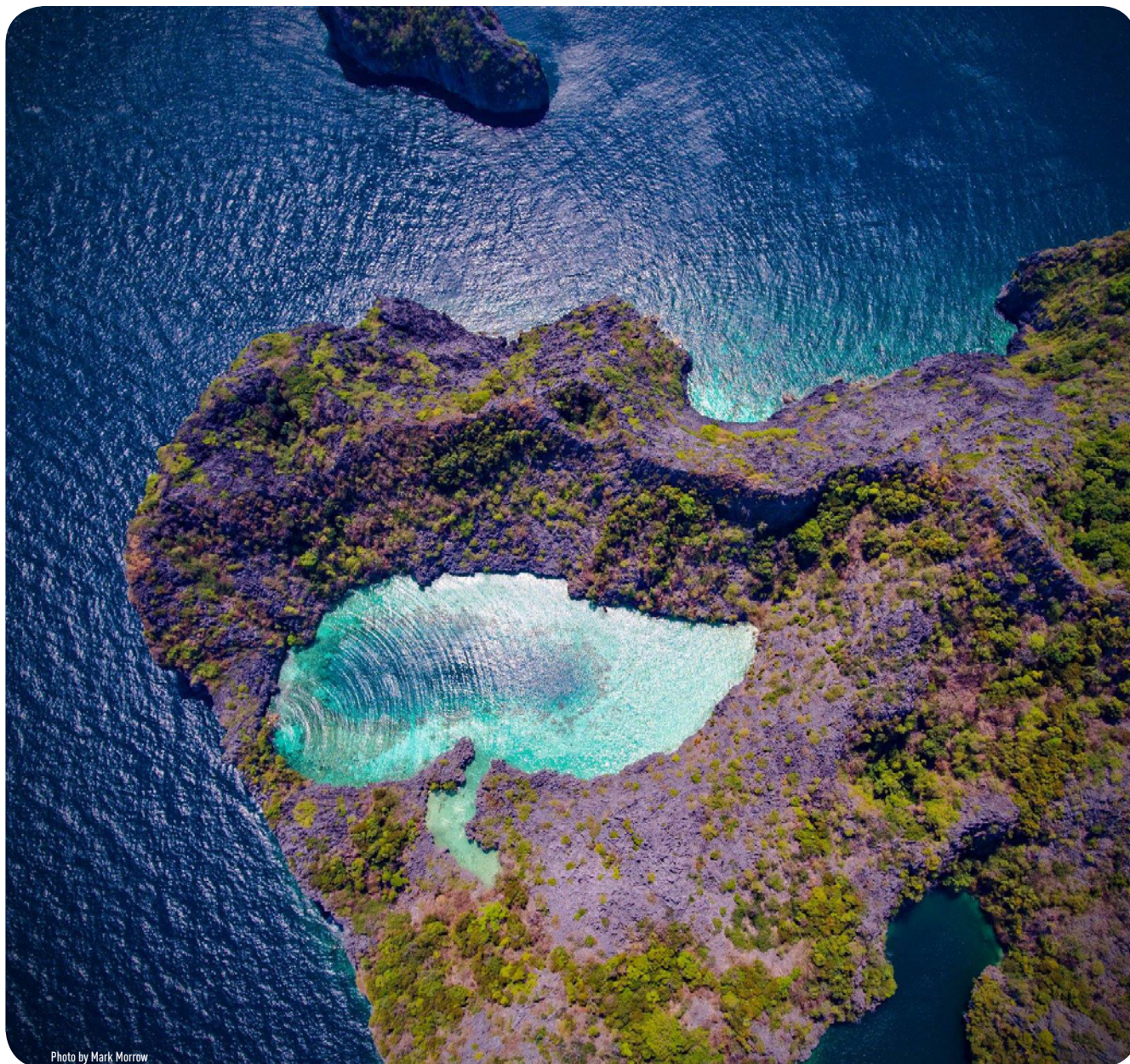


Photo by Mark Morrow





### Proposed travel schedule

- » **Arrival** – 23 February in Phuket. Transfer from Phuket to Ranong will be on 24 February.
- » **Day 1** – 25 February (Tuesday). Embark The Phinisi at the Ranong Pier.
- » **Day 2** – Boat briefing, paperwork, safety procedures, emergency procedures, equipment setup, first full day of diving
- » **Day 2 until day before disembarking** – Diving
- » **Day 8** – 3 March. Disembarking day. Settle remaining bills, disembark The Phinisi to Ranong Pier.
- » **Departure** – Transfer to Phuket from Ranong.

### Typical day

This will be the schedule for a typical day of diving:

- » 07:00 – Wake up! Morning exercises!
- » 08:00 – Breakfast
- » 08:30 – Briefing/Session 1
- » 12:00 – Lunch
- » 15:00 or 16:00 – Briefing/Session 2
- » 19:00 – Dinner
- » 20:30 – Team Debriefing



### How much will all this cost me?

Please contact us on [freediving@thedirtydozen.org](mailto:freediving@thedirtydozen.org) for pricing on board The Phinisi.

The Dirty Dozen in Mergui Archipelago has been designed to avoid any unnecessary surprises at the end of the trip. The only thing we cannot bill you for in advance are costs like flights and on-board costs such as marine park fees. Please budget for this! Marine park fees are at the moment US\$280 (subject to change) and flights start from Europe at around US\$600 for a round trip to Phuket.

### How do I secure my spot?

Due to limited spaces, a **40% non-refundable deposit** is required to secure your spot. **The remaining 60% has to be paid at the latest three months before departure.** You can pay via wire transfer or credit card. The Dirty Dozen Expeditions has had good experiences with DiveAssure and their live aboard insurance. You can learn more about them here: [www.diveassure.com](http://www.diveassure.com)



### Payments on board

#### Marine park and port fees

The marine park, port and visa fees are US\$280 for seven nights, which will have to be paid on board in cash. Please bring US dollars and budget for this. Note that these fees are liable to change without notice.

#### Optional extras

The Phinisi offers a range of services to make your stay on board even more enjoyable. We offer beach visits during your cruise. The following are also available at an additional cost:

- » Beer & Wine
- » Torches
- » The Phinisi Merchandise

All prices are given on board in US dollars, however, we also accept cash payment in Euro, GBP, THB, and AUD. Moreover, we accept payments by credit card (Visa & Master Card), for which there is a 3.5% surcharge. Guests are advised to bring additional cash for any incidental expenses.

If you need to purchase freediving equipment before the trip, feel free to contact our team and consult with Nataliia Zharkova, she may be able to organize great gear at excellent prices. Equipment can even be delivered to your house, if you'll make the order no later than two months before departure. Otherwise, we cannot guarantee delivery on time.

If you need to purchase freediving equipment before the trip, feel free to contact our team for consultation from Nataliia Zharkova. There can even be organized delivery of the purchase to your house, if you'll make the order not sooner than two month before departure. Otherwise we could not guarantee the delivery on time.

### What is included on board?

The team at The Dirty Dozen Expeditions makes it a high priority that there is no big, surprise bill at the end of a trip. Therefore, we include as much as possible so that you can budget accordingly.

#### On a Dirty Dozen trip to the Mergui Archipelago, the following is included:

- » Accommodation during the cruise
- » Three meals per day
- » Fresh coffee, tea, fruit juice, and soft drinks
- » Weights and buoys
- » Two sessions per day
- » Transfer between the airport and Ranong on the day of embarkation
- » Transfer between Ranong and the airport on the day of disembarkation
- » Expert hosts with expertise, workshops, and other fun activities on board
- » 24/7 support from The Dirty Dozen Expeditions. We will be there every step of the way from the beginning to the last dive

#### Not included:

- » Flights to Phuket (from US\$600 per person from most parts of Europe).
- » Marine park, port and visa fees.

### Trip information

#### Arrival Airport

Ranong Airport (UNN) or Phuket International Airport (HKT)

#### Departure Airport

Ranong Airport (UNN) or Phuket International Airport (HKT)

- » **Embarkation:** Ranong Pier at 12:00
- » **Disembarkation:** Ranong Pier at 11:00

We highly recommend that our guests follow our arrival dates at the suggested airports. This is where we will all meet and share ground transportation to Myanmar, which is included in the price. Guests should aim to arrive/depart three hours earlier/later for embarkation and disembarkation if choosing to fly into Ranong to allow time to clear immigration and customs.

### Flights, hotels, transfers & excursions

Traveling within Thailand is exceptionally easy when you book with The Dirty Dozen Expeditions and The Phinisi. From booking domestic flights and hotel accommodation to land tours, we can arrange everything you need before and after your cruise.

Bus transfer from Phuket to Ranong is included in the price so we highly recommend you fly into Phuket and join the entire team on the transfer.

### Advice on international flights

Ranong Airport is exclusively served from Bangkok and is located about 25 minutes south of Ranong town. There are several airlines that offer direct international flights to Phuket International Airport, though you may need to book a short hop from another local hub such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, or Singapore. Phuket to Ranong is a five-hour transfer by taxi or minivan. Transfers are included in the trip price so a flight into Ranong is not needed.

We recommend staying one night in a hotel before the trip departs so you are well rested and ready to dive. Embarkation time is 12:00 and disembarkation at the end of the cruise will be at 11:00 o'clock. Please allow at least two to three hours for international flight check-in and one and half to two hours for domestic flights.

### Travel insurance

The Dirty Dozen Expeditions and The Phinisi strongly recommend that all guests carry full travel and cancellation insurance as we cannot be held liable for delays which occur during the trip, nor any delay or cancellation of flights, accommodation, or tours and transfers we organize on your behalf.

The Dirty Dozen Expeditions and The Phinisi work in partnership with DiveAssure and can offer you a selection of competitively priced dive and travel insurance policies, including short-term and multiple-trip policies.

### Visas and passports

Guests who need to apply for a Thai visa in advance must ensure that they request a **multiple entry** visa, otherwise they are not allowed back into Thailand. Passport holders from most Western countries will be issued a visa upon arrival for stays of up to 30 days in Thailand. However, upon re-entry to Thailand from Myanmar guests will only be issued with a 15-day visa. Please ensure your onward departure from Thailand is no longer than 15 days after disembarking, or apply for a multiple entry visa at your nearest Thai embassy or consulate.

Guests are not required to obtain a visa for Myanmar prior to boarding, our Cruise Director from the boat and a local agent will make the arrangements on your behalf, please bring two photocopies of your passport ID page and two passport-sized photographs. Please make sure that your passport is valid for at least six months after the duration of your stay in Thailand. You may be required to show proof of onward travel from Thailand. Be prepared to show proof of funds, enough to support you during for your stay.

Visa and passport regulations for different countries are constantly in a state of flux. We always advise our guests to check regularly for updates and changes, please visit your local Thai Embassy website for more information.

### Time zone

The local time zone in Thailand is GMT+7. In Myanmar it is GMT+6:30.



Photo by Derwat Art Agency

### Money matters

The local currency in Myanmar is the Burmese Kyat. The majority of established hotels and restaurants accept major credit cards, however, smaller, family-run places probably will not. There are currency exchange booths and ATM machines located at the airport and near the meeting point for your convenience. Bring US dollars and Euros, both are easy to exchange. Some places will also exchange Thai Baht, though they might take a bit more effort to find.

### Health

No inoculations or vaccinations are required unless you are coming from or passing through contaminated areas. Yellow fever certificates are required for those who are coming from 14 following countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Angola, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan and Zaire.

Health services in Myanmar are generally good. Hospitals in major tourist destinations in nearby Phuket have modern technology and well-trained doctors. Please make sure you use insect repellent and cover exposed skin to prevent any insect-borne diseases. We recommend that travelers follow normal precautions with food in order to prevent stomach upset, and be sure to drink bottled water only. Please consult your doctor or nearest health authorities for up-to-date medical travel information well before departure.

### Diving insurance

Diving insurance is mandatory aboard The Phinisi. Your insurance must cover all of your freediving and snorkeling activities, including the costs for recompression chamber treatment and emergency air evacuation in the event of an emergency. The Phinisi and The Dirty Dozen Expeditions strongly recommends purchasing freediving specific insurance and is working with DiveAssure and DAN Europe to offer policies which cover everything our guests need.



## TRAVEL PREPARATION

### What to bring

Below is a checklist of items you should bring with you on your liveaboard cruise on The Phinisi:

#### Passport

Six months validity and at least two empty pages for visa stickers and stamps

#### Travel documents

Flight tickets international and domestic, hotel bookings, booked excursions

#### Cash and a credit card for emergencies

Recommended amount (additional to marine park fees): US\$250-500

#### Freediving certification

#### Travel and freediving insurance documents

To include in case of emergency medical evacuation

#### Essential freediving items

Freediving computer with full batteries

#### Toiletries and medications

Including eco-friendly sunscreen (on board) and insect repellent  
Please inform the bookings team of any pre-existing medical conditions

#### Essential clothing items

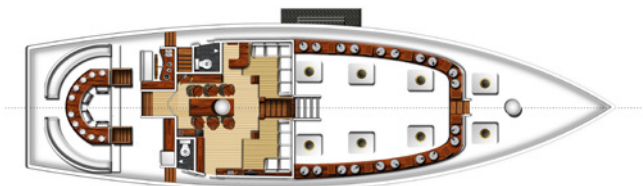
Swim wear, hat, and a lightweight jacket

Guests are strongly advised to carry essential items in their hand luggage in case of lost or delayed luggage through international or domestic flights.



Photo by Mark Morrow

## LIFE ON BOARD THE PHINISI



Upper Deck



Lower Deck

### The yacht

Built in 2007 out of wood, The Phinisi is 34 meters long and has a cruising speed of 8 knots. The two decks provide ample room for you to dive from and relax in. There's also plenty of space for your dive equipment as well as your underwater cameras and accessories. You'll be supported by knowledgeable and specially trained expedition crew who are ready and waiting to show you all the amazing sites of the Mergui Archipelago!

### Guest facilities

- » Five double (fixed and flexible) A/C and en suite cabins
- » Two four-person A/C and en suite cabins
- » 18 guests total
- » Indoor lounge with plasma screen, library, and music
- » Outdoor dining area
- » Personal item storage
- » Camera table
- » Indoor charging station
- » Shaded outdoor area
- » Sun deck (not shaded)
- » Cushioned loungers
- » Equipment rinse tank
- » Camera rinse tank
- » Deck towels
- » Two deck hands
- » Two tenders



## EXPEDITION INFORMATION

### Safety on board

A thorough yacht safety briefing will be provided by your cruise director at the start of your trip.

### Emergency equipment

The Phinisi is equipped with modern safety features such as an automated life raft and emergency pumps.

### First aid

The Phinisi is equipped with a fully stocked medical first aid kit for treating minor injuries and ailments, as well as for assisting trained medical professionals in remote locations. The ship carries medical-grade oxygen which can be administered to divers through DAN kits or unit specific attachments.

### Food and drink

Guests will be offered a choice of international and Asian cuisine served buffet style in the indoor dining area. We cater to special dietary requirements, just inform our reservations team prior to your trip to ensure that we have plenty of dishes to suit your needs. A range of carbonated soft drinks, fruit juices, black, green and herbal teas are available, as well as some 'naughty' treats should you feel hungry between meal times. Guests may also select beer, wine, or spirits from our cocktail bar for an additional fee.

### Clothing and footwear

Dress code on board The Phinisi is very casual and most guests feel comfortable in little more than swim wear, shorts and a t-shirt. A sweater is advised for cooler nights, particularly after multiple dives. Most guests prefer bare feet on board the ship, however, island visits may require sturdy sandals or cross-trainers.

### Electricity

On board The Phinisi we have two round pin sockets (European style). Please make sure you bring universal adapters with you if necessary. The sockets in Thailand and Myanmar are 220 volts.

### Smoking

Smoking is permitted on board in designated areas.

### Staying connected

We are unable to provide internet service on board The Phinisi. Our trips are in a remote location and internet service is intermittent at best. Most mobile phones that have 'roaming' will function at some point during your cruise. However, signal strength can be very weak and in some of the areas we visit, there may not be a signal at all. The cost of calls made is determined by your service provider.

Our out-of-office contact numbers can be found below, should your family need to contact you during the cruise. Please remember that this number is reserved for emergencies only.

### Tipping

At The Phinisi we believe that tipping is a matter of personal choice. Should you feel that your crew has made your holiday extra special then a tip is always appreciated. On the day of disembarkation, a tip box is provided for your convenience. All gratuities are divided equally among the crew, including the captain and dive guides. Please note that we can accept tips in cash only.



## ABOUT OUR SPECIAL GUEST



### Nataliia Zharkova

After a ten-year career in competitive swimming that began at the age of seven, it's no surprise that Ukrainian freediver Nataliia Zharkova is a specialist in Constant Weight No Fins (CNF). But having broken four CMAS world records in depth (two in CWT bi-fins and two in CNF), as well as being the third deepest female in Free Immersion (FIM) and the sixth deepest in Constant Weight (CWT) in the AIDA rankings in 2018, it's fair to describe Zharkova as a very strong all-round athlete. In a period where the level of competition amongst world-class female freedivers is at a peak, this is no small achievement.

Born in 1989, Zharkova appeared on the competitive freediving scene in the pool in 2009, a year after she began freedive training, taking all the Ukrainian national records at her first competition. From then on, every personal best for Nataliia was a national record.

Following this impressive start in the pool, Nataliia realized that she preferred to dedicate herself to the depth disciplines. Zharkova competed in the AIDA Team World Championships in 2012, ending that year fifth in the world rankings. The following year, in the AIDA Individual World Championships in Kalamata, Nataliia took two silver medals (CNF 60m, FIM 78m) and a bronze (CWT 85m), to firmly establish her among the top-tier female freedivers.

Already holding all the national depth records for Ukraine, Nataliia has most recently broken a total of four world records in the CMAS Outdoor Championships in 2017 (European Championships) and 2018 (World Championships).

Winning her two gold medals, she broke the CNF World Record (WR) with a dive to 65m, and the CWT Bi-fins WR with a dive to 85m. The following year, she took the CNF WR to a depth of 70m — winning gold jointly with Italian freediver, Alessia Zecchini — just three meters away from the AIDA WR, set by Zecchini earlier that year. Zharkova also won gold in the CWT Bi-fins discipline, taking the recently broken world record of 86m, set in the pre-comp by Sofia Gomez Uribe, to an impressive 89m.

Nataliia is also an architect, an AIDA master instructor, and an Apnea Academy instructor, who has designed No-Fins master classes and workshops which she has taught worldwide.



## THE PERSON BEHIND THE DIRTY DOZEN EXPEDITIONS



Photo by Jesper Kjeller



Photo by Jesper Kjeller



### Aron Arngrimsson

Aron started diving in 2005 in an attempt to break away from the rat race. Since then, he has never looked back. His passion for technical diving has taken him to some of the best diving locations in the world, and on some fantastic expeditions. He has written articles for dive publications and training organizations, developed products with Fourth Element, Hollis, and Ocean Reef, and has regularly helped organizations developing training outlines. Aron has filmed documentaries and commercials along with hosting numerous TV and film productions including National Geographic's One Strange Rock, Dive Odyssey, and Monty Halls on Channel 5.

One of the co-founders of Team Blue Immersion, one of the most renowned technical diving facilities in the world, Aron operated the business with Jonas Samuelsson and Erik Brown from 2010 to 2016. During these years he taught up to Advanced Trimix, CCR, Gas Blending, full face masks and support diving in the technical diving mecca of the world, Dahab. He was also responsible for in-water safety on CCR, OC, and freediving dives up to 200m deep.

Since selling his business, Aron has been traveling the world on expeditions with world-renowned divers exploring caves, mines, and wrecks and little-known dive treasures. The Dirty Dozen is the result of Aron's deep love for diving and his wish for you to see these hidden wonders.

We hope you found this FAQ sheet useful, if you have any other questions or comments, please contact us on [info@thedirtydozen.org](mailto:info@thedirtydozen.org) or catch Aron on Facebook Messenger.