

An aerial photograph of a group of divers in clear blue water. In the foreground, a diver is floating on their back, wearing a black wetsuit and large white fins with black stripes. They are holding a camera to their eye. Several other divers are scattered in the water around them. In the top left corner, a boat is partially visible. The water is a vibrant turquoise color.

Thailand Marine Conservation

Location: Koh Tao, Thailand

Duration: 4, 8 or 12 Weeks

Who is this Course for?

This marine conservation program is a comprehensive diving program focused on reef ecology and conservation. Aimed at developing a knowledge and understanding of coral reef eco-systems and the threat these reefs face in today's world, you will develop a deep understanding of reef ecology combined with internationally recognised dive training!

Individuals will actively participate in long-term monitoring and research projects, gathering essential data from the reefs of Koh Tao. We accept all levels of experience and no prior diving or marine biology experience is necessary to join us as you will be fully trained during the course!



Why choose Thailand?

Lying in the crystal clear, tropical waters of the Gulf of Thailand, Koh Tao's abundant and diverse coral reefs offer some of the finest scuba diving found anywhere on the planet! The perfect location to maximize your diving and reef ecology experience, this exciting and in-depth program has been specifically designed for those wishing to engage in marine conservation activities that protect, restore and conserve Koh Tao's coral reefs.

Koh Tao is a hotspot for many travellers, with quirky cafés, bustling restaurants and stunning beaches making it one of the 'go to' backpacker destinations. Combine this with over 25 dive sites surrounding the island, including a variety of different reef types, and it's no wonder this island is so popular with divers and travellers alike! On your dives you'll enjoy perfect conditions with minimal currents and visibility often reaching over 30m, allowing for an intimate and unique connection with marine life!



Your Program at a Glance

Depending on how long you join us for, your program will look like this:

4-Weeks

Week 1: RAID open water & RAID advanced open water certifications

Week 2: Marine ecology & conservation training: coral ecology, invertebrate identification

Week 3: Marine ecology & conservation training: vertebrate identification, survey techniques

Week 4: Project design, data collection dives and data interpretation

8-Weeks

Weeks 1-3: Same as 4-week course above

Week 4: Advanced first aid, oxygen provider and rescue diver skills

Week 5: Ecological research – crown of thorns research, coral restoration

Week 6: Ecological research – pelagic fish research & grouper population research

Weeks 7 & 8: Project work and data collection

12-Weeks

Weeks 1-8: Same as 8-week course above

Weeks 9 - 12: Divemaster training, nitrox & deep 40 training. Marine ecology & data collection



Your Itinerary



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Phase One: RAID Dive Training

Week One: RAID Open Water & Advanced Training

After being picked up from Samui International Airport, you will be transferred to the dive centre in Koh Tao for an official welcome from the team and the start of your adventure! Your first week will include entry-level dive training plus the **RAID Ecological Diver** certification - a valuable addition to your diving education and CV.

Your program will begin with the entry level **RAID Open Water** certification, which will teach you the basic principles of scuba diving through a combination of confined-water dives, to learn basic scuba skills, and open water sessions to review skills and put all you've learnt into practice!

Once you've completed your Open Water training, you will then move on to the **RAID Advanced Open Water** certification. This will help increase your diving confidence and build vital scuba skills enabling you to become much more comfortable in the water. This certification builds on what you have learnt so far, and develops new skills in areas such as underwater navigation, deeper water diving and buoyancy control - perfect preparation for all the exciting research work ahead!



Phase Two: Marine Conservation Training

During the course of the next two weeks, you will be attend a range of marine science and marine conservation workshops and be taught survey methods and conduct vital data collection to help monitor and conserve the biodiversity and overall health of the reef and marine life it supports.

Week Two: Coral Ecology, Physiology & Identification Workshops

Marine ecology and conservation training begins this week! All classroom and underwater sessions are conducted by highly qualified and experienced staff who specialise in marine biology/ecology and have extensive knowledge of Koh Tao's reefs. Get ready to dive deep into coral taxonomy, anatomy, reproduction & monitoring. You will then take your studies outside of the classroom through:

- Coral condition surveys and data collection
 - Identification of coral growth forms
- Coral & invertebrate threats, and signs of compromised health
 - Monitoring coral and invertebrate introduction class
 - Data submission introduction and practice
 - Invertebrate surveys

Week Three: Vertebrate Identification & Advanced Survey Methods

Underwater surveys are used to identify and monitor the reef bio-diversity and factors associated with reef health. This week you will learn about vertebrate taxonomy, anatomy and biology in the waters surrounding Koh Tao. Use observational features for identification and study threats specific to vertebrates. You will also learn a variety of new survey and cover the following topics:

- Vertebrate taxonomy, anatomy and biology
 - Observational features for identification
 - Vertebrate ecology and threats
- Reef monitoring techniques using underwater survey methods
- Workshops on how to plan and conduct conservation projects to gather, analyse and interpret data



Phase Three: Surveys & Project Work

Week Four: Project Work, Data Collection & Interpretation

For those of you booked onto the **4-week program**, it's time to put the conservation skills you've learnt to the test as you conduct vital data collection and aid in crucial project work. Workshops will be given on how to plan and conduct conservation projects to gather, analyse and interpret data. Your work during this week will directly contribute to long term monitoring and research projects gathering essential data on the health status of coral reefs.

For those booked onto the 4-week course, your program ends here. You will be transferred back to Samui International Airport for your flight home!



Phase Three: RAID Dive Safety Training

Week Four: Advanced First Aid, Oxygen Provider & Rescue Diver

For those booked onto the **8 & 12-week programs** you will spend this week completing your Advanced First Aid, Oxygen Provider and Rescue Diver certifications in preparation for the next stage of your adventure.

The **RAID Advanced First Aid** certification is a basic first aid and emergency management course, which teaches internationally recognized first aid and lifesaving skills specific to those divers are likely to encounter out in the ocean. You'll be taught simple to follow principles in emergency care whilst building your confidence and willingness to respond safely, promptly and effectively in emergency situations with an understanding of the role of the first-aider.

Next is the **RAID Oxygen Provider** certification. Knowing how and when to use emergency oxygen is a great skill to have and means you're ready to help others should the need arise. This course is designed to expand your knowledge of safe oxygen administration and will greatly expand your diving skill-set.

The final certification of the week is the **RAID Rescue Diver**. In order to be a good diver, you first need to be able to look after yourself and then be able to help others if needed. The Rescue diver cert is a must for all experienced divers, in particular those who wish to take responsibility for the safety of other divers. It is also a pre-requisite to further professional level dive training and covers:

- Self-rescue and advanced buoyancy control
 - Risk assessments
- Recognizing and managing stress in other divers
 - Emergency management and equipment
- Rescuing panicked divers and unresponsive divers



Phase Four: Marine Ecology Research

Week Five: Crown of Thorns and Coral Restoration

Ecology helps us to understand how the world works, and that is what weeks 5 & 6 are focused on! To start, get to grips with the complex world of the **Crown of Thorns starfish (COT)**, a prolific echinoderm species that predate on coral polyps in tropical reef systems. With the natural predators of the COT on the decline due to anthropogenic pressures, the COT is rapidly spreading across the reefs of Koh Tao, raising concern as to the knock on ecological effects of their population boom. In the past, this has led to the loss of entire coral reefs and outbreak populations, commonly associated with human activity, threaten reef ecosystems on a global scale.

The research projects in week 5 aim to monitor the population density of COTs, and identify areas where outbreak populations may form. Research is also conducted to investigate seasonal patterns in population dynamics, as well as the habitat and dietary preferences of COTs in order to improve our ecological understanding of COT outbreaks on a local scale. Your role will be to assist in the practical application of already established research methods to support existing databases.

During week five you will also learn of the essential role that **corals** play in reef ecosystems and carry out data collection dives on the artificial reefs to monitor the growth and condition of transplanted corals.

Corals play an essential role in the provisioning of habitats to other marine organisms that are found living in reef ecosystems. In the last 100 years, corals have been exposed to a number of threats, and reefs across the globe have seen a mass reduction in coral cover.

Coral nurseries are artificial reefs established and used for the active restoration of coral reefs. Coral fragments are transplanted onto artificial structures which offer stability, and create a favourable environment for coral survival and growth. As new coral colonies develop, the artificial structures create habitats for a multitude of reef fish and other organisms, promoting biodiversity across the reef.



Phase Four: Marine Ecology Research

Week Six: Pelagic Fish and Grouper Population Research

Predatory fish, which are most commonly pelagic, play an essential role in controlling populations of other organisms within an ecosystem and are important for maintaining ecological balance in reef and pelagic systems alike. Many of these predatory fish species are high in value and are therefore heavily targeted by the artisanal and industrial fishing communities.

You will help conduct population assessments on pelagic fish communities around deep submerged pinnacles around Koh Tao, including Chumphon pinnacle, Southwest pinnacle and Sail Rock. This project aims to identify and monitor population trends for a number of pelagic species in order to identify and help protect vulnerable populations. You can look forward to conducting deep dives to gather data on large predatory fish populations!

Groupers, although not a pelagic family of fish, play an extremely important role as higher trophic predators on the reef. Long term data collected in Koh Tao has revealed a significant population reduction in several large grouper species since Covid-19 measures were enforced, which reduced scuba diver presence on local reefs and has caused significant concern as to the effects this may have had on the surrounding ecosystems.

Research is now being conducted to investigate a number of hypotheses for the observed decline, as well as quantify the relative impacts that stakeholders may have on vulnerable grouper populations living around deep isolated pinnacles - a necessary step for protecting their populations in the future.



Phase Five: Surveys & Project Work

Weeks 7 & 8: Project Work, Data Collection & Interpretation

Combine everything you have learned over the previous 6 weeks with two weeks of active marine conservation survey work. Working within long-term monitoring and research projects, you will take part in vital data collection on the condition and biodiversity of the reef ecosystems surrounding Koh Tao, helping to develop our ecological & behavioural understanding of key reef organisms and trends associated with reef health.

For those booked onto the **8-week program**, these two weeks of active marine conservation project work will bring your adventure to a fitting conclusion. Your hard work in these conservation initiatives will help restore the reefs of Koh Tao and the diverse and abundant marine life they support!

For those booked onto the 8-week course, your program ends here. You will be transferred back to Samui International Airport for your flight home!



Phase Six: RAID Divemaster Internship

Weeks 9-12: RAID Divemaster, Deep 40 & Nitrox Training

The full 12-week program ends with 4-weeks of professional dive training. The main focus is the 4-week Divemaster certification, but you'll also get your Deep 40 and Nitrox certifications as well - fantastic additions to your diving CV!

The **RAID Divemaster** course is one of the most highly respected certifications in the dive community and the first level of professional scuba diver training. It is the best way for individuals to become more competent and experienced divers. As a RAID Divemaster you can plan, organize and lead dives for certified divers, meaning you are able to work in the diving industry across the globe. Your in-water skills will be refined to demonstration quality for dive students. You will also support RAID Instructors during other practical parts of RAID training courses, including being trained to assess dive conditions and potential risks at dive sites.

The **RAID Deep 40** specialty is designed to extend your knowledge and skills at operating safely at a deeper depth. You will increase your confidence, build new scuba skills and become more comfortable in deeper water. In these final four weeks you will also complete the **RAID Nitrox Specialty**. Extend your time underwater on each dive by enriching your breathing gas with some extra oxygen! This course will teach you how to plan, analyse and use an Enriched Air NITROX breathing gas mix. Gain more time, less fatigue and obtain one of the most popular RAID specialties!

On completion of the full 12-week course, you will be a fully qualified RAID Divemaster with a focus on Marine Ecology and Conservation, providing you with an excellent springboard into employment opportunities around the world!



Weekends on Koh Tao & Beach Clean-ups

Your course runs from Monday-Friday. Weekends are yours to go out and explore! There is something for everyone with optional activities including kite surfing, trapeze, climbing and bouldering, paddle-boarding, Koh Tao Cinema, 18 hole crazy golf, cooking classes - and the list goes on and on!

Dive centre staff will offer advice and support if you would like to go exploring at your own cost. However, you are of course welcome to relax at home, or enjoy the natural surrounding for little to no cost. You will always have something exciting to do on this tropical island paradise!

Part of this course includes optional opportunities to **lead weekly beach clean-ups**. This is great practice in leadership, supports the Koh Tao community, marine life and combats local pollutant threats.



What's Included



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What's Included:

- Pre-departure support
- Airport arrival and departure transfer from Koh Samui airport
 - Local co-ordinator and project staff
 - All accommodation for the duration of the course
 - Breakfast & dinner (Monday – Friday)
 - Dive and conservation training as listed in the itinerary
 - Career Night (12-week only)
 - 24/7 emergency back-up
 - Financial bonding
- Full set of dive equipment provided for all dives. All equipment is up to date and maintained by an in-house dive technician

Training & Certifications:

- RAID Open Water certification
- RAID Advanced Open Water certification
 - RAID Ecological Diver
- RAID Advanced First Aid certification (8 & 12 week program only)
- RAID Oxygen Provider certification (8 & 12 week program only)
- RAID Rescue Diver certification (8 & 12 week program only)
 - RAID Deep 40 certification (12 week program only)
 - RAID Nitrox Specialty (12 week program only)
- RAID Divemaster certification (12 week program only)
 - All dives and survey dives

Not Included:

- Flights
- Travel Insurance
- Visa & Vaccinations
- Spending Money
- Lunches & weekend meals
- Some personal dive equipment (12-week program only). Kit list provided upon booking. Contact us for more details.

Please note that due to the nature of expeditions, prices, dates and itinerary may vary. Please call for details.



Additional Information



Accommodation

You will be staying in dorm-style rooms right above the dive centre, where classes will be conducted daily, and a 2 minute walk to the restaurant where breakfast and dinner are provided Monday – Friday.

Accommodation is dorm-style with free Wi-Fi, air conditioning, en-suite bathrooms & private lockers.

Meals

You will be provided with breakfast and dinner Monday to Friday at a local restaurant.

Dietary requirements: While Thailand is very good at catering for both vegetarian and vegan requirements, meeting the demands of other dietary requirements cannot always be guaranteed. This is especially the case with regards to specific allergies (e.g. nut allergies). As we have chosen to partner with an external restaurant, we cannot guarantee or be responsible for providing meals that meet the demands of all specific allergies or dietary requirements. Please contact us for your specific dietary concerns.

Staff

All classroom and underwater sessions are conducted by highly qualified and experienced staff who specialize in marine biology/ecology and have extensive knowledge of Koh Tao's reefs. You will also have support through a local coordinator at the Dive Centre who will make sure you have the best possible experience throughout your program and also provides you with 24/7 emergency support during your program. At least one first aid trained and oxygen provider staff member will be present on the boats at all times. This Dive centre is partnered with RAID Dive agency and therefore adheres to all RAID standards and safety procedures in all related dive aspects.

Visa

It is up to you to sort out your individual visa requirements and ensure you fulfil any other entry requirements stipulated for the destination country. Please check the regulations using the advice of your home countries government before you get on the plane. Visas can take several weeks to process, so make sure you allow time for processing.



Climate

The weather in Koh Tao is typical of any tropical island – for the most part sunny, hot, and glass-flat waters. For this reason, diving is open 365 days of the year. The year can be split into three main seasons; dry season, hot season, and a short spell of monsoon season.

Insurance

We insist that you have repatriation and medical insurance before you travel with us on our trips and expeditions. Please check that your insurance will return you to your home country in the case of any type of emergency. We also strongly recommend that your policy includes cancellation & curtailment cover. It should also insure you to dive down to 40m.

Medical

It is your responsibility to check with your own doctor or travel clinic which vaccinations are recommended for your expedition and we recommend you do this at least 2 months prior to the start of your expedition. You must also complete both a Gapforce & RAID medical form and have it signed by your GP or Doctor.

Spending Money

You will need money for extra meals, drinks & snacks, as well as for any activities not on the itinerary. We advise you to budget for £100 / €120 / \$150 per week. Please note this is a guideline only.

Flights

You are responsible for booking your own transport to and from the meeting point at Koh Samui Airport. Information and advice about booking flights will be provided upon booking but please do not hesitate to contact us if you need further assistance.

Kit

Upon booking you will be provided with a comprehensive kit list. Being prepared is of paramount importance and our advisors are happy to help with any kit related queries you may have. Additionally, if you choose to use it, a full set of dive equipment is provided for all dives. All equipment is up to date and maintained by an in-house dive technician. This includes:

- BCD
- Wetsuit
- Fins
- Weights and weight-belts
- Mask
- Snorkel
- Dive computer

As a dive professional in training, those on the 12-week program will be expected to have some of their own personal safety equipment for scuba diving. These items can be purchased ahead of time, or through the dive centre, where a bundle price of recommended affordable items has been developed, including dive centre discounts. Contact us for more information.



Transport

Your accommodation is a short walk away from the Dive Centre where your course is run, approximately a 10 minute walk. Local taxis are used to transfer divers between the dive centre and the boat. Taxis on Koh Tao are pick up trucks with an open back seating area and no seatbelts (see photo below). We do not encourage people to hire their own transport to get around the island, and should you choose to do this (e.g. motorbike or bicycles) it would be at your own risk.



Supervision and Optional Activities

During the course of your program, there will be times outside of scheduled dive activities when you are not under the direct supervision of Gapforce e.g during free time at weekends and evenings. During these times, your supervisor and other dive staff will be in the vicinity but may not be able to intervene immediately in the event of an emergency and you are therefore expected to act responsibly and be safety minded at all times. Your program supervisor will provide you with 24/7 contact details for emergencies.

Any optional activities not included in the program fee that you choose to book with local activity providers will not have been risk assessed by Gapforce and you will therefore be outside the jurisdiction of Gapforce from the moment the activity begins until you return to the group. Check with your insurer beforehand that you are covered for that particular activity.

Travel & Covid-19

Gapforce always follows the advice of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and will not run programs to a destination whilst the FCDO advises against travel for tourists.

At destinations that the FCDO considers to be safe, Gapforce will be implementing preventative measures aimed at reducing the risk of participants and leaders becoming infected. All group members will be expected to follow required safety protocols and instructions, however there will still remain a risk of exposure to the virus that could lead to infection or other consequences, such as periods of quarantine, during your program. By travelling on one of our programs, participants are confirming that they accept the risks of travel during this pandemic and will not hold Gapforce responsible if they become infected with the virus or if their program is otherwise disrupted due to Covid-19.

It is recommended that all participants have adequate insurance that covers them for covid-related incidents including medical cover, cancellation, curtailment and quarantine costs. Check you meet the entry requirements of the destination before travel. Any covid tests required before or during the program will need to be paid for by the participant if not provided free of charge by the State.

Further information on the measures and action plans that Gapforce has in place to respond to Covid-19 will be provided after booking, or on request.



Our Credentials



Here at Gapforce, we are committed to providing the highest levels of customer service, and we demonstrate this through our accreditation and membership of the following organisations:

Protected Trust Services (PTS)

Through our membership of PTS, we offer full financial protection for all customer money paid to us through Package Travel Regulations compliance and the PTS trust account. Businesses must have extensive experience in travel and undergo stringent financial and risk checks to qualify as a member of PTS. Our PTS membership number is 5482.



Year Out Group

We are a full member of the Year Out Group; an association of approved gap year organisations committed to providing high operating standards. In order to become an approved organisation, members must evidence a demanding set of criteria including liability insurance, financial protection, program authentication, risk assessments and crisis management plans.



Young Explorer's Trust (YET)

Our Gap Year and school group programs are BS 8848 compliant following an external audit of our operating standards by a panel from YET. British Standard BS 8848 are standards set "for the provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the UK". These rigorous standards provide a recognised benchmark against which to assess the acceptability of safety and general good practice on overseas expeditions.



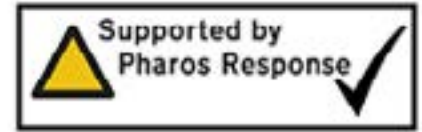
WYSE Travel Confederation

We are a member of the World Youth Student and Educational (WYSE) Travel Confederation. Their global community consists of over 600 members in 70 countries and aims "to contribute to the personal and professional growth of students and young people and positively impact our global community by fostering international understanding, responsible international travel, cultural exchange and education".



Pharos Response

We utilise the services of Pharos Response to ensure our staff both at home and overseas have access to comprehensive emergency and critical incident support. Through their team of experienced incident managers, Pharos Response provides 24/7 support and assistance in the event of an emergency.



Travel Aware

We've partnered with Travel Aware to ensure British nationals are better prepared for a safe and healthy trip abroad. Together with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, they provide essential travel advice and up-to-date country information for those living and travelling overseas.



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