



## Environmental Considerations and Guidelines for Koh Tao

As scuba divers we have the privilege to interact with the marine environment and this brings extra responsibilities with it.

Unfortunately, all marine environments, especially coral reefs, are under threat. Rising ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, pollution, and overfishing are only a few of the threats the marine environment is facing, and they can all be traced back to anthropogenic (human) activities.

We recognize that we are in a climate emergency and that we should act now to make sure we dive thoughtfully and in ways that are sensitive to the needs of the marine environment.

Scuba divers must accept that their sport has had a major impact on the health of many coral reefs.

Research has shown that anywhere between 70-90% of divers make contact with coral reefs during a dive, with average contact being 5.79 times per dive.

This is a major problem if we consider the number of divers each boat can carry, and how many boats can visit the same dive site every day.

To minimize your impact on the marine environment, always follow these environmental considerations and guidelines:

### Prevent Pollution

Pollution affects wildlife, but also the quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. To prevent pollution as scuba divers we can:

**Reduce plastic use:** single use plastics are a global problem. We encourage all our customers to use reusable water bottles that can be refilled at the water station inside the dive center.

We also invite all our customers to use reusable lunch boxes, cutlery and bags if they want to bring food on the dive boat. Plastic can cause the death of marine animals through ingestion, suffocation, entanglement and/or by releasing toxic compounds that alter a marine organisms endocrine system.

**Properly dispose of cigarette butts:** smoking on the dive boat is not allowed in accordance with Thai law. If you do smoke, please always make sure to properly dispose of your cigarette butts while on land.

Beaches are not ashtrays and if you leave cigarette butts on the beach they will soon be washed away and end up in the ocean, where they will harm marine animals by releasing toxic chemicals and/or by ingestion.

**Use reef safe sunscreen:** normal sunscreens contain UV blocking chemicals such as oxybenzone and octinoxate. When released in the ocean, can cause harm to marine life by, for example, causing coral bleaching.

For this reason, we encourage all our customers to use reef safe sunscreen, which is available to purchase at our dive center. Alternatively, we invite you to use our own, homemade Reef Safe sunscreen that is available at the dive center.

### **Weight Check**

Calculating your correct weighting is affected by both environmental and personal conditions (salinity, body composition, wetsuit requirement etc.). Therefore, it is important to always complete a weight check before a dive, as this contributes to better buoyancy and control.

Having good buoyancy will help protect the marine environment from accidental damage. **Kicking corals and stirring up sediment** are two of the most common consequences of bad buoyancy.

While diving you want to ensure a horizontal body position so that your fins are away from the sea floor, avoiding any contact with the marine environment.

If you do not feel confident with your buoyancy, please inform your instructor or dive leader, and they will help with the necessary changes and give you advice on how to improve your buoyancy.

### **Dangling Dive Equipment**

Before each dive you will perform a pre dive safety check with your buddy. An important part of this is ensuring your Alternative Air Source (AAS) and SPG are secured to your BCD.

An unsecured AAS or SPG can damage fragile organisms such as corals, and be harmful to marine life. Please ensure all dive equipment is properly secured.

Make sure you are always aware of the correct positioning of your diving equipment, and if you notice that something is out of place, take the time to readjust it.

While diving, if you notice that someone in your group has unsecured equipment please let the dive leader know.

### **No Touching**

As scuba divers we encounter a wide variety of marine life on each dive and we need to ensure we do our best to protect them. It is important to only interact passively with marine life.

This means NO TOUCHING any marine life. Touching marine life can cause serious injury or death to the animal by removing protective mucus, spreading disease, affecting predatory instincts and by damaging their tissues.

Remember that corals are not rocks, even if they do not move and some of them look quite sturdy, they are a very delicate and fragile organism that can easily be damaged.

Keep in mind that corals have one of the slowest growth rates (about 1cm/year), so while breaking a coral takes only a second, to rebuild the part that has broken, can take decades.

In addition, some marine organisms have a high risk of injury if touched and they can be very well camouflaged, so please make sure you apply a **no touching policy** every time you go in the water.

### **No Collecting**

Collecting any marine organism, alive or dead, is **prohibited by Thai Law** and can result in prosecution.

While you may think that a shell can be a perfect bead for your necklace, that same shell can become home for many organisms underwater. Moreover, shells can breakdown to form sand, which acts as an important buffer to coastal erosion.

### **No Harassing**

As scuba divers we are guests of the marine environment and we want to ensure we are not causing any harm or stress to ANY marine life we see during our dives.

When encountering marine organisms, please ensure you are leaving adequate space between you and them to give them the opportunity to swim away freely, so they do not feel trapped.

If the marine animal is swimming away, do not follow it, as this can cause unnecessary stress.

Sea Turtles and Whalesharks have specific codes of conduct that we follow:

When encountering a sea turtle, make sure to leave the area in front of their head and at the back of their rear flippers free, and you want to maintain a distance of no less than 1m from their sides.

When encountering a Whaleshark, make sure to leave the area in front of their head free and you should maintain a distance of no less than 3m from their body and 4m from their tail.

### **No Feeding**

Either from the boat or while diving make sure you do not throw any organic matter into the ocean. All marine organisms have specific diets and they are all connected by a food chain.

Introducing an external source of food, alters fish behavior by attracting them away from their natural food source and by disrupting the balance of the food chain.

Moreover, feeding fish the wrong type of food can alter the range of digestive bacteria in their stomach making them no longer able to digest their natural food.

## **Responsible Photography**

Every diver wants to go back home after a nice day spent diving with great photos and/or videos of the marine life.

Unfortunately, photographers are amongst the worst offenders of coral reef contact. If you are bringing an underwater camera or GoPro with you during the dives make sure to:

- Assess the area before approaching a photo/video opportunity
- Pay special attention to your fins and buoyancy
- Do not come into contact with any coral reef structures
- Do not manipulate marine life in order to get the perfect shot/video
- Do not hold onto the reef

If you are unsure what to do, please follow and respect all the above guidelines and ask your dive leader for advice. If your buoyancy is not at a good enough standard then seek further training prior to engaging in underwater photography.

## **Diving Torches**

Underwater diving torches are widely used and essential during night dives. Torches have a very powerful and bright light beam, which can have detrimental effects if pointed directly at the head of marine organisms.

When using a diving torch make sure to use it sensitively to avoid disturbing normal fish behavior and affecting marine animal health, energy levels and survival strategies.

For additional advice when using a diving torch ask your dive leader.

These guidelines are for our customers to consider and incorporate into their diving practices to help protect and preserve our marine environment. Thank you for your understanding and consideration.

I hereby acknowledge, that I have read, understood and agreed to the guidelines listed above.

Participant name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_