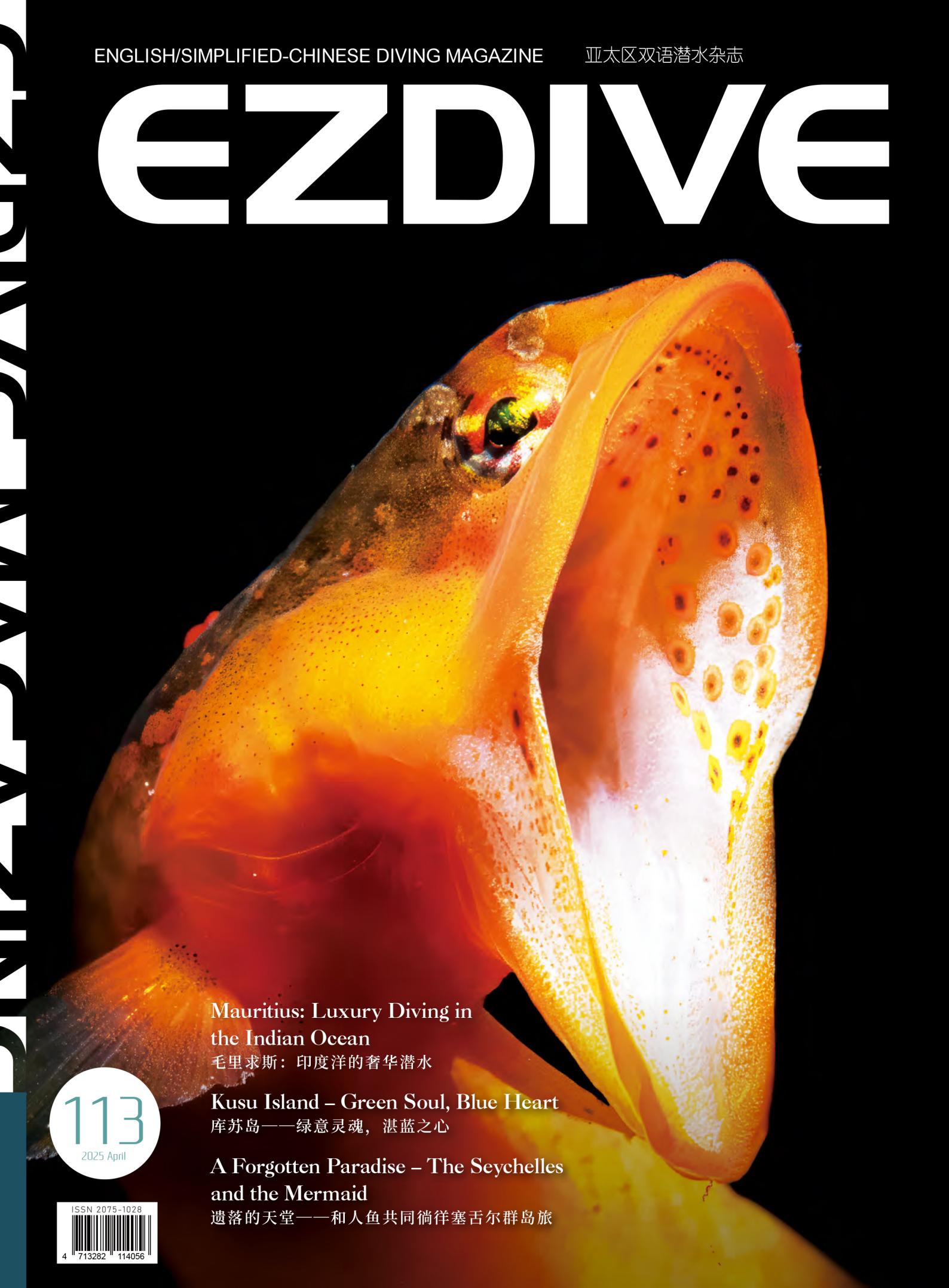


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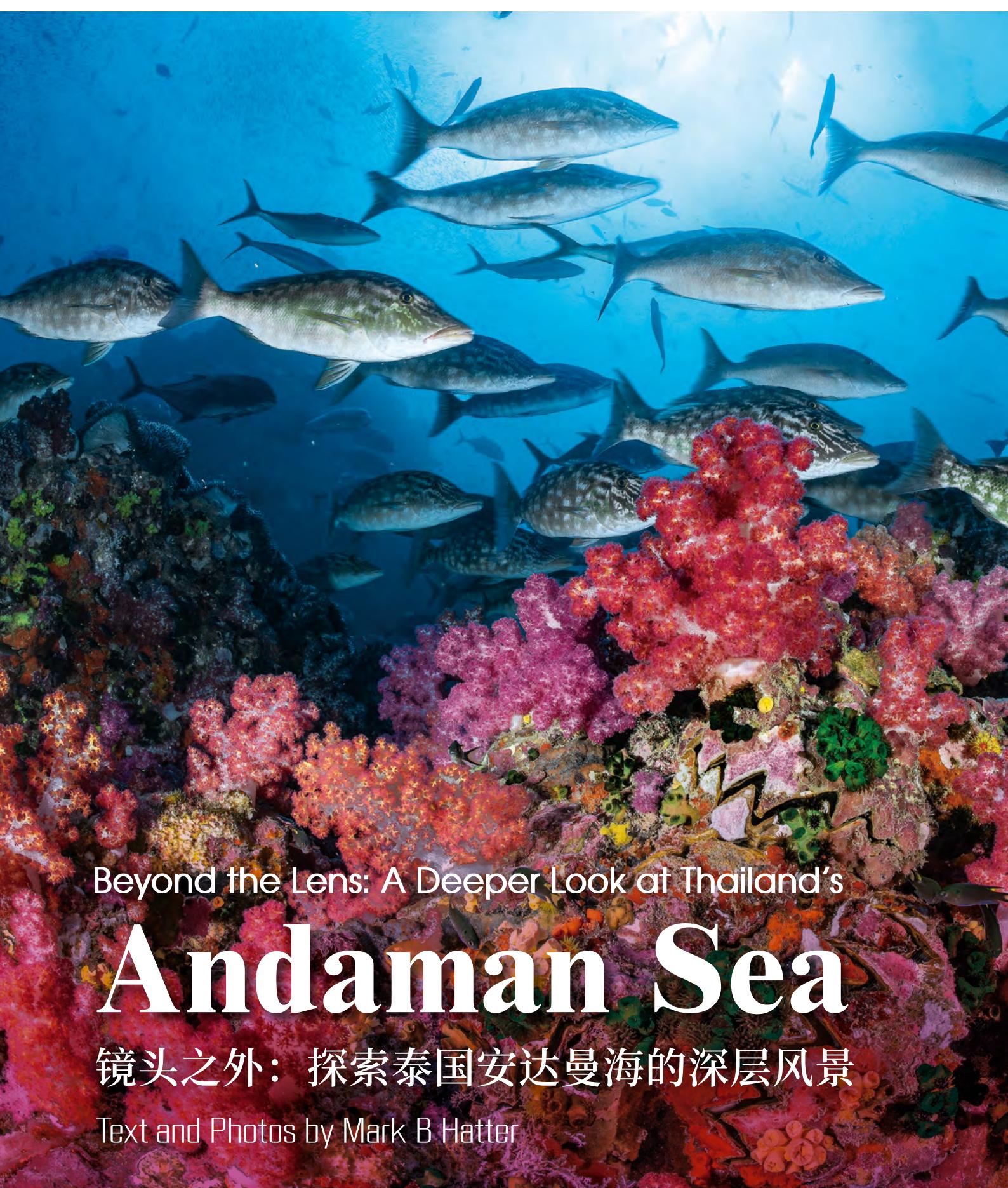
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Beyond the Lens: A Deeper Look at Thailand's

# Andaman Sea

镜头之外：探索泰国安达曼海的深层风景

Text and Photos by Mark B Hatter



**R**ecommissioned in October 2024, Thailand Aggressor has been completely refreshed, from its diving equipment to cabin amenities. I chose the Andaman Sea route, which covers dive sites at the Similan Islands, Surin Island, and Richelieu Rock. The experienced dive team's laid-back approach allows divers plenty of freedom to explore - something particularly appreciated by underwater photographers.

Everything seemed perfect on this final morning in the Similan Islands, capping off an already wonderful week-long cruise on the Thailand Aggressor. The sea was smooth, super-clear and the early morning sun, slightly muted behind a thin layer of high clouds, would likely provide excellent sunburst photographic opportunities.

We'd visited Christmas Point earlier in the cruise and I was looking forward to again shooting the wildlife in and around the massive granite boulders strewn around the dive site. The smooth rocks are signature surface and underwater topography features of the Similan Islands.

泰国 Aggressor 号于 2024 年 10 月重新投入服务，从潜水装备到舱房设施都经过全面翻新。我选择了安达曼海航线，涵盖斯米兰群岛、苏林岛和黎塞留岩的潜点。经验丰富的潜水团队采用轻松的方式，让潜水员有充分的自由探索空间——这一点特别受到水下摄影师的欢迎。

在斯米兰群岛的最后一个早晨，一切看似完美，准备为这无比精彩的一周船宿之旅画下圆满句点。海面平静、水质清澈，早晨的阳光被薄薄的高空云层微微遮挡，有机会拍摄到绝佳的水下阳光射线。

我们早些时候曾造访过 Christmas Point，我很期待能再次拍摄在这里周围巨大花岗岩之间悠游的海洋生物。这些光滑的岩石是斯米兰群岛标志性的地表和水下地形特征。

But things don't always happen as we wish. Settling onto the sandy floor at 20 metres between two massive granite boulders, I attempted to test fire my camera to validate aperture and shutter speed settings in preparation for shooting the dive. As I attempted to fire off an image, the lack of a camera response was puzzling and unsettling. Up until now, I'd had no issues with my kit.

Quickly running a sequence of checks, the 'err' message on the camera's LCD was soberingly clear. I had left the memory card out of the camera after downloading my last series of images the night before! Something I would have realised had I completed my gear check before climbing into the dinghy. We'd already dived Christmas Point early in the cruise but, nevertheless, this mistake, would still cost me... Or so I thought.

Without the concentrated burden of searching for viable subjects or scenes, my eyes and mind were suddenly opened on that final dive. I could now truly see the spectacular underwater vista that is classic Thailand: outstanding visibility combined with an underwater landscape dominated by granite walls and boulder-falls.

Indeed, I'd been shooting Similan's granite based reefs for the better part of a week. But, taking in the majesty of this underwater vista before me without the distraction of my manic search for viable photography targets, all under the time constraints of depth and cylinder pressure, was refreshing and enlightening. Metaphorically, without the 'burden' of my camera kit, I had the subsurface equivalency of 'stopping to smell the roses.'

The Similan Islands and associated sea mounts, running up the west coast of Thailand, are mainly composed of 'intrusive granitoids,' rocks that formed between 150 and 250 million years ago as a result of plate tectonics which allowed magma to bubble up from deep within the earth's core to form protrusions and small mountains.

There are 11 'Ko,' the Thai name for Island, in the Similan archipelago, all of which are under Thailand's protection as a national park. Each Ko has a formal name, however, for the sake of simplicity, they are more commonly known as islands one through 12 locally. During our 7-day cruise we visited dive sites along most of the islands along with dive sites at Ko Surin and Richelieu Rock.



但事情并非总会如我们所愿。当我潜到 20 米深处，在两块巨大的花岗岩之间的沙地停下时，我试着测试相机，想要确认光圈和快门速度的设置，为接下来的潜水拍摄做准备。然而当我按下快门时，相机毫无反应，这让我既困惑又不安。在此之前，我的器材一直都运作正常。

快速检查后，相机 LCD 上的“err”错误信息清晰地表明：我在前一晚下载完最后一组照片后，忘记将记忆卡放回相机了！如果我在登上小艇前就做好装备检查，就能发现这个问题了。虽然我们之前就已经潜过 Christmas Point，但这个疏忽仍然会让我付出代价 ..... 至少当时我是这么认为的。

没有了专注寻找拍摄主题或场景的负担，我的眼睛和心灵突然开阔了。在那最后一次潜水中，我终于能真正欣赏到泰国经典的水下美景：在能见度极佳的水域中，花岗岩墙和巨石群主宰着水下景观。

事实上，我已经拍摄斯米兰的花岗岩礁将近一周了。但这一次，没有了疯狂寻找拍摄目标的干扰，不用担心深度和气瓶压力的时间限制，我得以完全沉浸在眼前这片壮丽的水下景观中，这种体验既清新又富有启发。不带着相机设备的“负担”，让我终于有机会“停下脚步，细品人生”。

斯米兰群岛及其周边的海底山，沿着泰国西海岸延伸，主要由“侵入性花岗岩”构成，这些岩石形成于 1.5 亿到 2.5 亿年前，是由板块构造运动导致岩浆从地球核心深处涌出，形成突起和小山脉的结果。

斯米兰群岛有 11 个“Ko”（泰语中“岛”的意思），都属于泰国国家公园保护范围。每个 Ko 都有正式名称，但为了简单起见，当地人更常用 1 到 12 号岛来称呼它们。在我们 7 天的航程中，我们造访了大部分岛屿的潜点，还包括苏林岛和黎塞留岩的潜点。



We began our journey with an introductory dive at a shallow site called Anita's Reef between Islands 5 and 6, where classic coral bommies rise up from a shallow sandy plain. The morning light was perfect to capture colourful anthias and damselfish streaming over stoney coral formations.

At Ko Bon (Island number 10) we got the best of both worlds. Almost immediately we encountered an enormous school of batfish hovering in the current, mid-water, which captivated half of our dive group. But I, on the other hand, was drawn to shoot the massive shoals of golden and translucent sweepers.

On the afternoon of our fifth day, we left the Similan Islands for the Surin Islands, an archipelago of 5 islands, closer to the coast of Thailand but still within the Andaman Sea. My dive buddy and I were blown away by massive tabling corals, easily two and a half metres in diameter, complemented by forests of branching stag horn corals, lettuce corals and many other species of smaller plating corals.

The following morning we travelled before dawn to reach one of 6 mooring buoys off fabled Richelieu Rock, a massive underwater pinnacle barely reaching the surface between the Similan Islands and the Surin Island group. As an isolated pinnacle in the open ocean, The Rock is swept by unimpeded currents, which support an astounding abundance of life. The signature animals on The Rock include a myriad of pastel-coloured carnation corals, giant sea fans and impossibly more magnificent anemones than any other place on earth.

When the current is raging at Richelieu Rock, the side of the rock receiving the brunt of the current, is where everything happens. There, shoals of glass fish are under continuous assault from schools of predator jackfish, long-nose emperor fish, groupers and snappers. Richelieu is almost a theatre of the absurd in its beyond-concentrated circus of wildlife.

The day boats are gone, and divers have been retrieved from the few other liveaboards still moored on fixed buoys. We selfishly have The Rock to ourselves in the waning light.



Magnificent anemones often fold up into the shape of an onion at twilight. At Richelieu Rock, seeing this phenomenon with hundreds, if not thousands of anemones, was a sight to behold. It was an amazing event, leaving me shooting continuously, until it was time to exit the water.

I had a lot of images to process after 4 dives at Richelieu, which is why I might have forgotten to put my memory card back in the camera immediately after completing the download. Thus, I found myself at Christmas Point, completing my last dive with the self-inflicted wound which would keep me from shooting yet even more images.

But now, with my eyes and mind free to observe Thailand's Andaman Sea wonders, my mistake turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

The fatigue from each day's underwater exploration is always soothed by the chef's carefully prepared cuisine upon returning to the boat. Authentic Thai dinners paired with selected red and white wines, along with made-to-order Western breakfasts, make the simple daily rhythm of 'dive, dine, rest' especially satisfying. If I were to recommend a first liveaboard diving experience, this journey would undoubtedly be among the best choices. **ez**

我们的旅程始于 5 号和 6 号岛之间的 Anita 礁，这是一个浅水潜点，经典的珊瑚礁柱从浅浅的沙地上升起。那天早晨的光线完美，可以捕捉到彩色蝶鱼和雀鲷在石珊瑚上游弋的画面。

在 Ko Bon (第 10 号岛) 我们获得了双重惊喜。几乎立即，我们就遇到了一大群在中层水域随着洋流漂浮的蝙蝠鱼，吸引了半数潜水伙伴的注意。而我则被大群金色和半透明的拟金眼鲷所吸引。

第五天下午，我们离开斯米兰群岛前往苏林群岛，这是位于安达曼海泰国海岸较近处的 5 个岛屿群。我和我的潜伴被巨大的桌形珊瑚震撼了，它们的直径轻易就超过 2 米半，周围还配衬着鹿角珊瑚林、生菜珊瑚和许多其他较小的板状珊瑚品种。

第二天黎明前，我们前往传说中的黎塞留岩，这是一座位于斯米兰群岛和苏林群岛之间的巨大水下尖峰，仅仅露出水面，有 6 个固定的系泊浮标。作为开阔海域中的孤立尖峰，这里经常受到不受阻碍的洋流冲刷，孕育着令人惊叹的丰富生命。这里的标志性生物包括无数粉色的穗珊瑚、巨型海扇，以及比地球上任何地方都更加壮观的海葵。

当黎塞留岩的洋流澎湃时，承受洋流冲击的那一面就是一切发生的地方。在那里，玻璃鱼群不断受到成群的掠食性杰克鱼、尖吻龙占、石斑鱼和笛鲷的袭击。黎塞留岩几乎是一个荒诞的剧场，

上演着超乎想象的野生动物马戏团。

日间潜水船已经离开，其他还停泊在固定浮标的船宿也已接回潜水员。在渐暗的光线中，我们独享这片礁岩。

壮观的海葵在暮色中常常会折迭成洋葱的形状。在黎塞留岩，目睹数百甚至上千朵海葵同时展现这一奇观，实在令人难忘。这是如此惊人的景象，直到离水前我都在不停地拍摄。

在黎塞留岩进行了 4 次潜水后，我有许多照片要处理，这可能就是为什么我在完成下载后忘记把记忆卡放回相机的原因。就这样，我在 Christmas Point 进行最后一次潜水时，因为自己造成的失误而无法拍摄更多照片。

但现在，当我的眼睛和心灵能够自由地观赏泰国安达曼海的奇观时，这个失误反而成了因祸得福。

每天水下探索带来的疲惫，总能在回到船上后被厨师精心准备的美食抚慰。正宗的泰式晚餐搭配精选红白葡萄酒，以及按需准备的西式早餐，让简单的每日节奏“潜水、用餐、休息”变得特别令人满足。如果要推荐第一次船宿潜水体验，这段旅程无疑会是最佳选择之一。|

