

The Lazy Persons Guide To Diving

The weather the day before had been atrocious, sheet rain had drenched me and everything I was carrying on the motorbike. But I had already committed to try out the new Power Snorkel around the corals of Phi Phi. The forecast was for more of the same for the next three days. When I awoke the next morning, I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that it was sunny and it looked like it was going to be a good day to go to the islands.

I arrived at Rassada Port where I boarded a PP Island Tours speedboat for the 45-minute trip out to Phi Phi Don. Having never been to Phi Phi before, the sight of the islands as you get closer is quite amazing. I wanted to get photos for the scrapbook, but at the speed the boat was travelling, it made it a little difficult to frame a shot. They did slow down at one stage so I could fire off some shots, but as I seemed to be the only one interested in doing this, it wasn't a regular occurrence.

We arrived on Monkey Beach for the first of many snorkelling runs and this is when I first got to try the Power Snorkel. Tours don't automatically come with the Power Snorkel set-up; you have to request it as an extra. I was the only one on board to try this out and found it was well worth the extra charge. Mine host, Khun Santi, took the Power Snorkel off the boat and had it all ready to go in a few minutes. The Power Snorkel is a self-contained surface air supply unit that pumps clean air via a hose to your diving regulator. Now this is where the lazy bit comes in. You also get a Sea Scooter, which is battery powered personal propeller. It cruises along at around 3 kilo-

metres per hour, just below walking pace and means all you have to do is guide it and hang on. Each Power Snorkel allows for two divers and for this I was quite happy to have Santi show the way, as once under water, I had no idea where I was or where I was going.

The difference between bobbing around on the surface and cruising among the coral two to three metres down is enormous. I had always wanted to go diving but never really could be bothered going through the PADI course to get the required ticket. This on the other hand is a very easy introduction into scuba diving and has whet the appetite for more.

We left the beach and headed for Phi Phi Ley for a look at Maya Bay. The amount of boats there in what could be considered to be low season was astounding. With foghorns and whistles blaring as individual boats tried to round up their respective passengers detracted from the tranquilly of the spot. PP Tours said they had even thought about dropping the stop from their itinerary and go to some better, more peaceful coves, but their clients wanted to see the 'famous' Maya bay, so in it stays.

After lunch back on Phi Phi Don, we headed for another coral reef for a bit more swimming. At this spot I tried only the Sea Scooter and a snorkel. Once again it gives you a great way to cover a lot of reef with



speed and ease. Only this time it was on the surface, I did take a few dives down a couple of metres, but couldn't hang around long with just one lungful of air.

Our final stop was Khai Island, basically a rock with a beach, halfway back to Phuket. It was mid afternoon and we were able to relax for an hour or so before going back to Koh Sirey and the port. We arrived back exhausted from lazing around all day but with memories of the abundant fish life that live around the corals.

The tour including the Power Snorkel is 2,950 baht and includes pick-up and drop-off, a big lunch on Phi Phi Don and lots of sightseeing and swimming. Without the Power Snorkel it is 2,200 baht. They are also going to do a shorter trip to Coral Island off Rawai so you will save on the travelling time.

It is run by Power Snorkel Tours and can be booked through the Internet via www.1800phuket.com or a Freecall can be made to 1800-PHUKET from a landline and 1401-PHUKET from a mobile. Their office in Chalong can be contacted on 076 383 581 or 01 370 3181.

If the PHUKET bit throws you, the number is 1800-748538, but you knew that already didn't you!

