

Green Fins: A Sustainable Future for the Diving Tourism Industry and the Impacts on Local Communities

Chloe V. Hunt*

Niphon Phongsuwan*

James J. Harvey

Kanyarat Kosavisutte

Anne Miller

Green Fins (GFs) is an inspiring programme which promotes environmentally responsible diving and, through this, coral reef conservation and the promotion of the sustainable tourism industry. At the core of the GF programme is an innovative Code of Conduct (COC) designed to reduce the threats posed by SCUBA diving. Under the programme, diving clubs (dive) Operator Members commit to operate according to the Green Fins COC, while divers and snorkelers are trained to follow Guidelines for Environmentally-friendly Diving and Snorkeling. The Code of Conduct covers 15 items, ranging from dealing with garbage and other waste responsibly, to educational and awareness raising activities, such as beach and underwater clean ups and reef monitoring. The Green Fins programme, established by UNEP-COBSEA in 2004, involves governments, private sector, local NGO's and communities in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. Green Fins is active where diving tourism has grown around the most unique, beautiful and fragile coral reefs of the world.

Green Fins specially trained teams assess dive operators to see how well the Code of Conduct is being followed and then offer guidance to help them to protect marine life even more. Green Fins now has a secure online database to store such dive operators' assessments so any improvements can be monitored. All Green Fins countries can easily enter this on www.greenfins.net. This allows the GF teams to identify the best ways of helping divers and dive operators to be more responsible and to share this with other Green Fins countries.

GFs also works directly with dive operators' staff to help to them understand more about the coral reefs ecology and how they can help to protect and conserve them. For example, Green Fins divers in Thailand are told about how fish feeding can cause Crown of Thorn outbreaks and how



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this can cause damage to coral ecosystems. This training is available for all staff including guides, instructors, boat crew, and management so they realise what little things can be done at work and at home to really protect their local marine environment.

The programme has 'in-country teams' working nationally, and a 'regional team' to coordinate and share information between these countries. GFs in Thailand have progressed greatly and there are currently over 100 members. The Green Fins Association (GFAS) was successfully established in late 2008 and has cooperated with the government sector to take the lead to introduce and implement GFs in Thailand. GFAS has run a number of marine conservation awareness raising activities focused on local communities, especially targeting children. GFAS's mission is aimed at developing the programme to best suit the problems, situations, circumstances and culture of Thailand. GFAS has been raising funds domestically for its sustainability.

The Reef-World Foundation leads the regional team to establish Green Fins further across South East Asia and ultimately into other regions. This will be done by strengthening the skills and capability of 'in-country teams' and communities through training, knowledge sharing, support and the effective use of management tools to further spread the Green Fins message for a sustainable tourism industry.