



Eastern Gulf



PATTAYA

The bustling resort area of Pattaya was Thailand's hotbed of diving back in the 1970s. A favorite R&R spot for Vietnam soldiers, this bay had a few pioneer dive shops and some small hotels that hosted soldiers during their week-long break from the war and also the military and their families stationed in Thailand.

Things have changed. Pattaya is now a world-class mass tourism center in the order of Hawaii's Waikiki or Australia's Gold Coast, with all of the top hotels and something for virtually everyone to do. This of course includes diving. The handful of dive shops has burgeoned to now include full-service PADI 5-star shops and those of other agencies totally equipped to outfit any diver and teach most any course.

The majority of the diving done here is introductory scuba and basic to advanced training. But many other specialties, including tech diving and instructor training courses, all take place around this hotbed of the east. Many of the nearby sites are somewhat shallow

training sites, but there are some nicer reefs away from the main tourist area. For the most part, it isn't considered a destination for a full-blown dive vacation. It is more of a place to get in some dives while enjoying all of the other activities that Pattaya has to offer, by both day and night.

This area is also known to have some good shipwrecks with more being found on a regular basis. The east is better known for wrecks than the west-side of the country. From ancient ships to recent sinkings, there is a pretty wide gamut to be seen by 'wreckies'.

Eastern Gulf		GOOD SNORKELING	NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
71	HTMS KHRAM	•	•		
72	HTMS KUT			•	
73	KO KHROK			•	
74	KO RIN	•	•	•	
75	PETCHBURI BREMEN			•	
76	HARDEEP	•	•		

71 HTMS KHRAM

Location: 300m off Ko Phai
Depth: 50-100ft (15-30m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Advanced



The HTMS *Khram*, a decommissioned US warship, was sunk on 1 February 2003 by the Thai navy. It now sits in 100ft of water near Ko Phai and Ko Larn islands off Pattaya and has quickly become an excellent artificial reef.

It is officially the USS *LSM-469* but was given to the Thai Navy by the USA and renamed HTMS *Khram*, way back in May of 1962. Once it fell out of use, the idea of sinking her came about and the Thai Navy went through environmental procedures, drained it of oil, removed wiring and cut large passageways for divers to easily navigate. (This has also been done with great success to two Australian decommissioned destroyers farther south along the Australia west coast.)

These days the ship sits upright with the bridge area coming into view at 50ft. Two moorings lead down to the ship aft and bow. If the water is clear, it is possible to go down the mooring and then swim to the center of the ship when the bridge comes into sight. Visibility is typically low on the wreck, however.

Soft corals and other encrusting marine life have already taken hold. The water here is very silty and that has also already covered the wreck, so penetration dives must be done with care to avoid silt kicks causing a white-out. The passageways are open and well-lit and divers are not usually out of the natural light. It has been noted that a few of the rooms have steel watertight doors still fitted, which could be locked easily with a diver inside.

The Eastern Gulf

The Ko Chang area near the Cambodian border is being explored and developed as a dive destination. The islands here have excellent beaches and natural beauty, and the offshore pinnacles are producing sites with good marine life. Ko Chang is a boom town right now, with the range of accommodation extending from economically priced bungalows to luxury resorts. Construction has been limited to the height of a coconut tree, so there is an attempt being made to retain the natural aesthetics of the place.

Offshore rocky pinnacles are home to rays and some sharks, and the coral cover is beautiful with good fish variety. Live aboard diving is opening to this area and some dive shops are now located in Ko Chang, Ko Rang and Ko Kut. They have sites like the Ko Rang Pinnacles, Ko Wai Reef and Hin Luk Bat Reef. These sites commonly have visibility ranging from 20ft to 45ft with mild currents and hard corals.

Roughly 85% of Ko Chang, along with about 50 smaller islands, is part of the Ko Chang Marine National Park.

Divers can enter the bridge of the ship, which is open and devoid of any old navigation equipment. Because the HTMS *Khram* was a troop carrier, there is a large open deck which was used for vehicles and equipment and launching troops onto a beach zone. The aft engine room is also accessible, although the engines have been removed and there is also a lot of light here due to cut-out access ways. (Pattaya dive operations use this for tech training.) This area is also silty, so movement should be slow and easy.

Outside the ship there are a lot of soft corals, sponges, fish life and particularly baitfish. A batfish school has already called the HTMS *Khram* home.

72 HTMS KUT

Location: Northeast tip of Ko Sak, southwest of Pattaya
Depth: 40-108ft (12-32m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Advanced



Very similar to sister ship HTMS *Khram*, HTMS *Kut* is the most recent of Pattaya's growing fleet of undersea wrecks that now support artificial reefs. Its sinking on 17 September 2006 was a success, as the wreck sits upright with moorings stern and fore. It also underwent preparations by the Royal Thai Navy, so provides a similarly safe dive site. Munitions, engines, oil and pollutants were removed, while large holes in the deck allow divers to easily enter the passageways and engine rooms.

This ship sits on a bit of a slope with the bow at about 108ft and the stern at about 90ft in the sand. Marine life and encrusting invertebrates are starting to take hold, and schooling fish have already made the ship home. Visibility is only about 20ft to 30ft on a good day, so try diving at slack tide.

73 KO KHROK

Location: 4 nautical miles (7km) southwest of Pattaya
Depth: 0-66ft (0-20m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Novice



This site has a coral bed that runs down a slope to around 65ft. Lots of hard corals thrive here and a gentle current keeps things healthy. The current can allow for shallow drift diving or drift snorkeling if there's a surface current. Look for staghorn, brain and star corals. The shoals of chromis and damsels are found around the staghorns, while cleaning stations for parrotfish, butterflyfish and other tropical species are staffed by cleaner wrasse at the hard coral heads.

During Pattaya's meteoric development, the corals suffered a great deal from runoff and other neglect due to infrastructure and construction work. This area has now been targeted by Pattaya and Bangkok environmentalists to bring awareness to a new Pattaya Region Environmental and Use Policy, and aid in coral growth.



Anemone colonies

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The detail of a scorpionfish fin

74 KO RIN

Location: 13 nautical miles (24km) southwest of Pattaya
Depth: 0-46ft (0-14m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Intermediate



Considered one of Pattaya's best coral dives with a nice selection of hard corals on a shallow and rocky reef and good visibility being the norm. This is also

very popular as a day trip for divers and snorkelers.

Though shallow, there are canyons between rocks, swim-throughs and hard coral formations – some shallow enough for snorkelers to enjoy. Black coral can be found in just 40ft of water, and big barrel sponges host hundreds of tiny, white sea cucumbers clinging to their outer surface. The fact that this site has some occasional current also helps the invertebrate count, with nudibranchs, flatworms and anemones all present. Fish include harlequin sweetlips, lionfish, squirrelfish and ember parrotfish.

75 PETCHBURI BREMEN

Location: Between Ko Khram Yai & Sattahip
Depth: 62-82ft (19-25m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Intermediate



The *Bremen* is in a fairly poor state due to its use as a demolition target for the Royal Thai Navy at one time. Its parts cover an area across about 300ft of the sea floor. Some wreck exploring can be done, as parts of the ship still remain upright. Its biggest plus may be that it is a very good artificial reef that schools of yellowtail snapper, barracuda and jacks gather around.

The ship went down due to an engine room fire in the 1930s near the village of Sattahip, just south of Pattaya. Its depth and low visibility make it a good training site for advanced divers who can navigate the ship and the sandy bottom while getting the depth requirement out of the way.

It isn't used that much for wreck diving courses as penetration isn't really safe due to its broken condition. The newer HTMS wrecks are actually the shipwrecks of choice these days for a lot of Pattaya wreck diving. The good news is that it tangles up fishing nets, so net fishermen stay away from the jag-



A jewel box urchin

76 HARDEEP

Location: Between Ko Samae San & Ko Chuang
Depth: 50-85ft (16-26m)
Access: Boat
Expertise Rating: Intermediate



The *Hardeep* is a better wreck for those wanting to see a WWII victim. This Indonesian freighter was sunk in 1942 (some accounts say 1943) by Allied bombs. Only about 200ft long, she sits on her port side on a sandy sea floor in depths ranging from 50ft to 85ft, and can be covered in one dive. Encrusted with sponges of brilliant orange and bright yellow tubastrea corals, she has been a fish magnet for decades. The ship is also decked out with large gorgonian sea fans, barrel sponges and wire corals, and resident schooling fusiliers, snappers and longnose barracuda. Blue-spotted stingrays like the sandy areas around the ship.

Divers normally follow the descent line down, as visibility can be low and the wreck is small. Thus, currents can easily push those free descending off the wreck. One line goes down by the forward hold while the other is aft near the stern. It is wise to note where the line is and use it on the way back up as well. There are open hold areas and the bridge that can be entered. But some of the deeper parts of the ship are starting to deteriorate and are not really safe for mass swim-throughs with a group of divers.

One can find more ship parts, including the mast and funnel, in the sandy area around *Hardeep*. There are also two large bombs close by.