

REEF

EDUCATION CENTER

Phuket Marriott Resort and Spa, Merlin Beach is unique among hotels in Phuket because it has its own house reef. This enables the hotel to offer snorkeling and SCUBA diving to guests who can explore the colorful underwater world without ever leaving the property. Many nearshore reefs in the Phuket area have been destroyed due to anchoring or overdevelopment, however, the reef in front of the Marriott remains in good health due to difficulty of public access.

Healthy corals act as refuges for juvenile fish, which hide among the reef crevices until they are large enough to venture into deeper waters. The reef hosts a wide variety of colorful creatures, from the elegant black and white Moorish Idol, to the schools of rainbow colored parrotfish that can be seen grazing on bright green algae in the shallow waters. Vibrant giant clams seem to glow bright blues and greens, a result of the colorful zooxanthellae algae that live inside of them, in a mutually beneficial relationship called symbiosis. Massive Porites corals hundreds of years old build structures two meters tall and the same distance across, creating underwater islands and enabling snorkelers to see the life that these giant colonies support. Magnificent anemones sway in the current, tentacles extended, to collect as much sunlight as possible throughout the day. Swimming down to look closer reveals bright orange and white clownfish dancing in between the stinging tentacles, protected from the sting by a film of mucus covering their bodies. At night, the anemones retract their tentacles, displaying their bright purple stalk.

A closer examination of the reef while SCUBA diving reveals more details: 1.5 meter spotted map pufferfish hide under coral overhangs, often competing for hiding spots with the nocturnal lionfish. Honeycombed moray eels peek out from crevices, too shy to leave their burrows, while schools of yellow striped butterflyfish spend all day out in the open, grazing on seaweed. Deeper down, those with a sharp eye can spot beautifully colored tiny nudibranch worms, or bright orange shrimp nesting near bubble corals. Larger animals on the reef include the elusive reef octopus, and its relative, the cuttlefish, both able to use camouflage to match any environment. More conspicuous, a green sea turtle is also often seen swimming peacefully on the reef, or grabbing a seaweed snack in the shallows.

At low tide, non-swimmers and children also have a chance to explore the reef and its inhabitants. The ocean retreats twice daily, creating small tide pools that are ideal for exploring. Juvenile fish, a few centimeters long, can be seen darting amongst the rocks. Crabs scurry away upon hearing footsteps, but patience pays off, and they will eventually re-emerge to continue scavenging their next meal. Jet-black sea cucumbers of all sizes are abundant in the tide pools, slowly eating through the organic matter in the sand. On shore, hermit crabs carry shells of all sizes that they use as protection from birds and other predators, hiding inside their armored shells when they hear noises or see shadows above. Guests of all ages can explore the house reef and beach and learn about the incredible diversity and importance of coral reefs to ocean ecosystems, and what they can do to reduce their impact on these essential habitats.

The Marriott has collaborated with the International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and Sea Bees Diving to work together to conserve and restore the unique reef ecosystem in front of the hotel. The "house reef" is one of the healthiest nearshore coral reefs in Phuket, with high coral cover and diversity, which recruits a range of fish species and other reef-dependant organisms.



PHUKET MARRIOTT RESORT AND SPA, MERLIN BEACH
299 Muen-Ngoen Road | Tri-Trang Beach | Kathu | Patong | Phuket |
T: +66 76 335 300 | F: +66 76 335 335

E: mhrs.hktmb.reservation@marriotthotels.com W: Phuketmarriottmerlinbeach.com