

Dave in Thailand ...

Chumphon

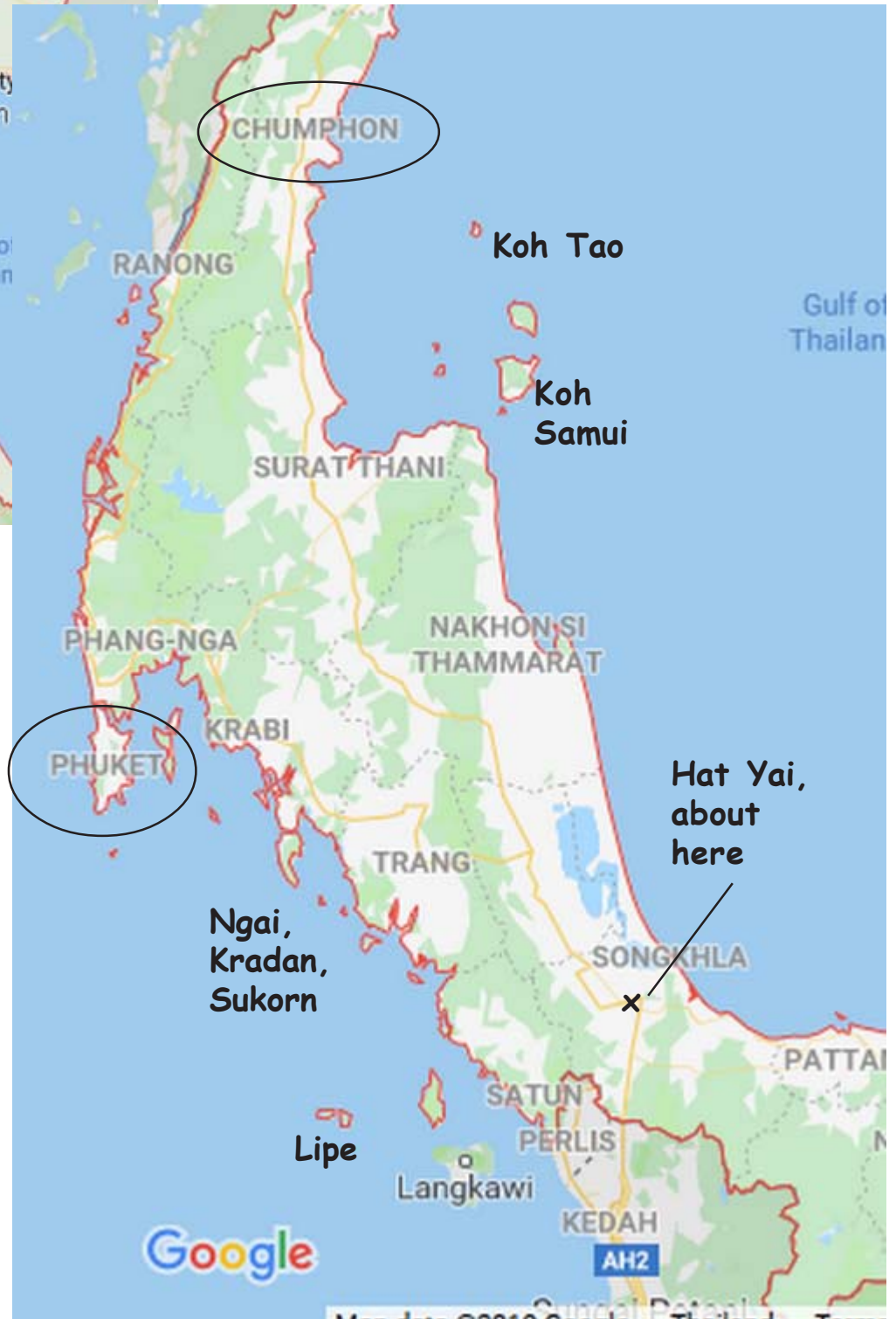
May 2019



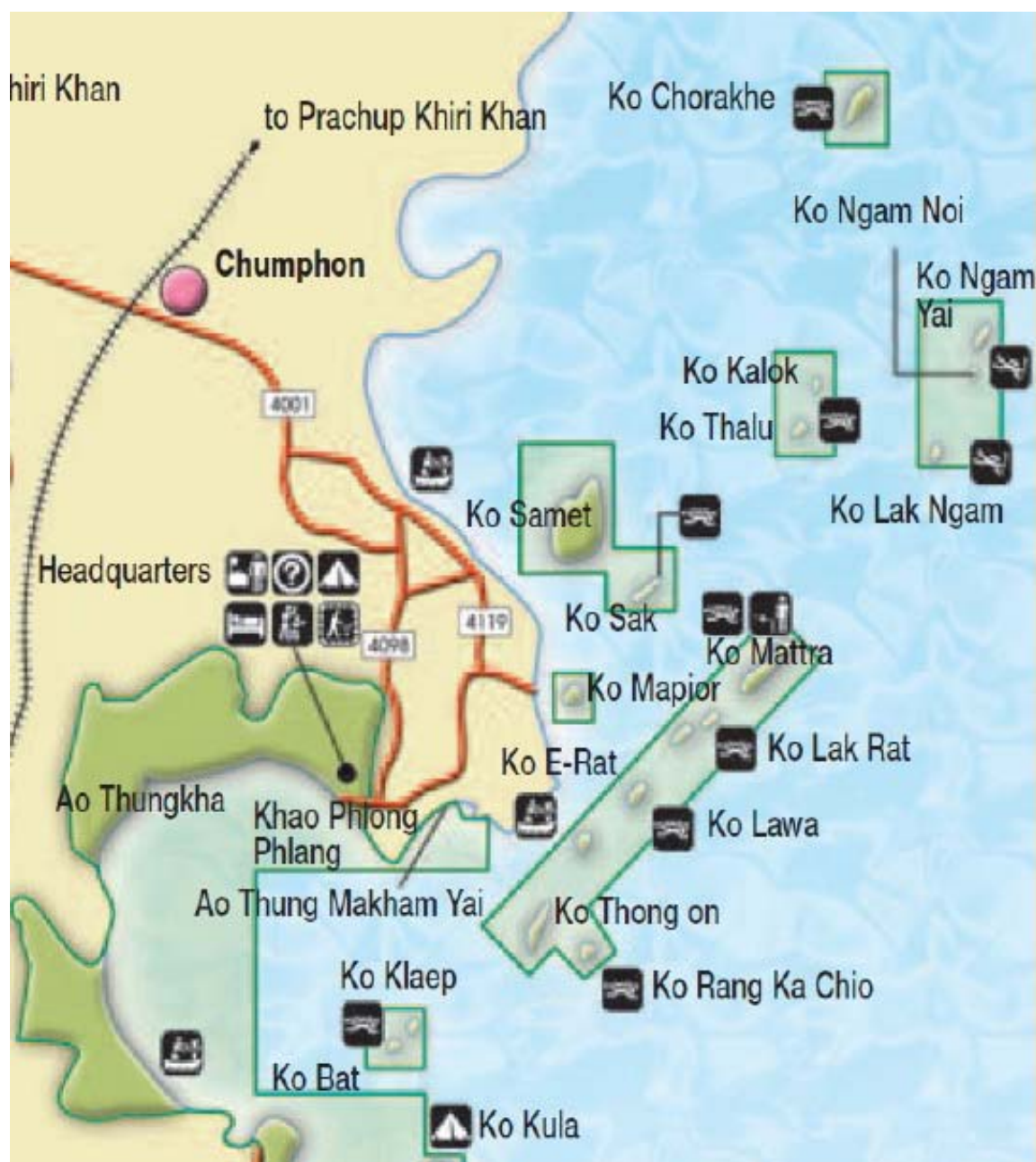
-mission accomplished, good ending



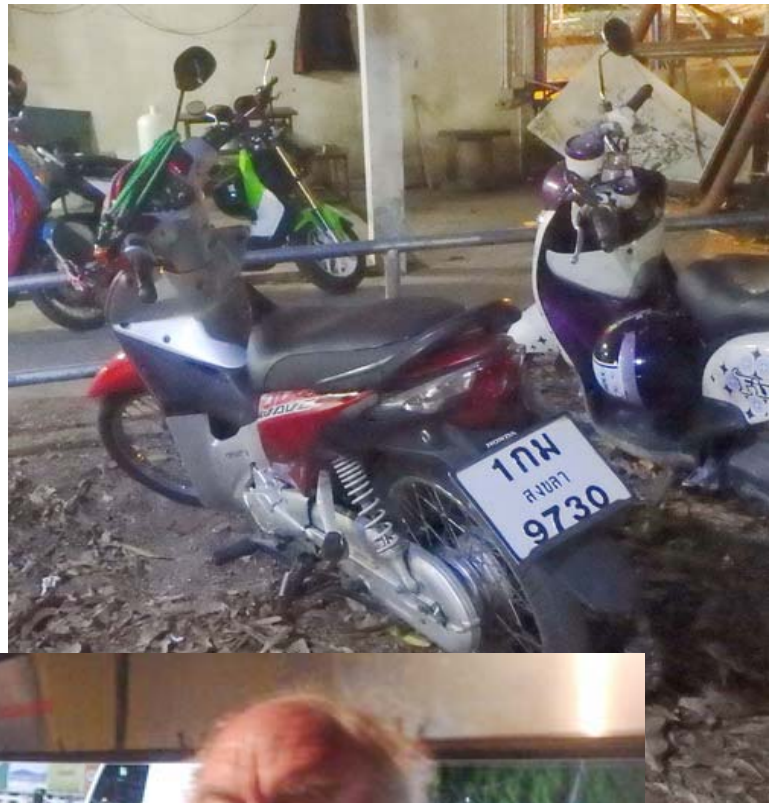
ORIENTATION - Thailand map to the left, southern Thailand below -



The plan - I love snorkeling around coral reefs - the last few years, the coral in the Andaman has been becoming very degraded, which is very tragic for the world. Various times over the last few years I have heard people say the coral in some islands in Chumphon province was very beautiful, so I wanted to check it out. I knew nothing more than I read from various websites, which of course are not always reliable, but there was general agreement that the best coral was found as in the map below, in islands that are mostly part of the Chumphon marine park. So my main plan was just to go and see what I could see, knowing nothing of what was available in the way of tours or renting private boats, or distances, etc etc. An exploratory trip, mainly to see if there was indeed some good coral at some of these islands, as given in one of the maps I found on the internet.



GETTING THERE - always many ways of getting around in Thailand - first my own MC to the hospital parking lot, then a 'song taew' to the bus station, and the 9PM bus for an over-night trip to Chumphon - it's about an 8-hour trip (I'm not really grumpy, it's just my face when I'm wondering if the camera is pointing in the right direction ...)





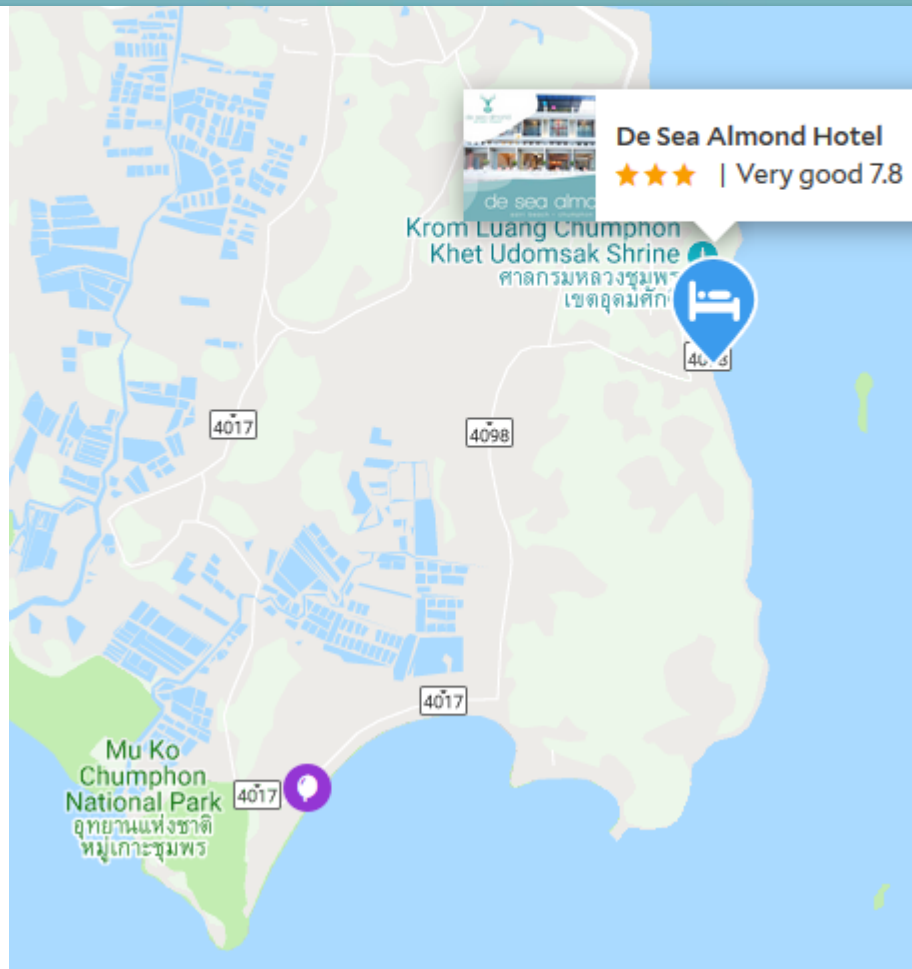
GETTING THERE - on the bus, then a break about halfway there - free food!! - bowl of rice with some stuff -



Arrival! - forgot to get pictures at the Chumphon drop off point, about 4 am, tired and trying to find the transportation to my hotel - eventually with some help this friendly tuk tuk guy came along and took me to my resort, the de Sea Almond and Sairi Beach, about 20 km from Chumphon town - arrived about 5am



with Agoda, settled on this place, de sea almond, on a beach called Had SaiRi Beach, more or less right opposite the lower group of islands, which various places had said had the best coral



First Trip - so, got there early, checked in before 6am, and I'd read about tours to the islands from this place called Siam Catamaran, and not wanting to waste any time on a short trip, I'd asked the hotel to book me one of these tours, which picked people up at the hotel around 8am - I got checked in, and had an hour's sleep, and down for breakfast, and this guy showed up to take me and a couple others from this area to the dock where the tour would leave from - unfortunately not a great start, a quite scary trip, this guy drove crazy fast, with me and a couple others sitting in the back of the pickup,



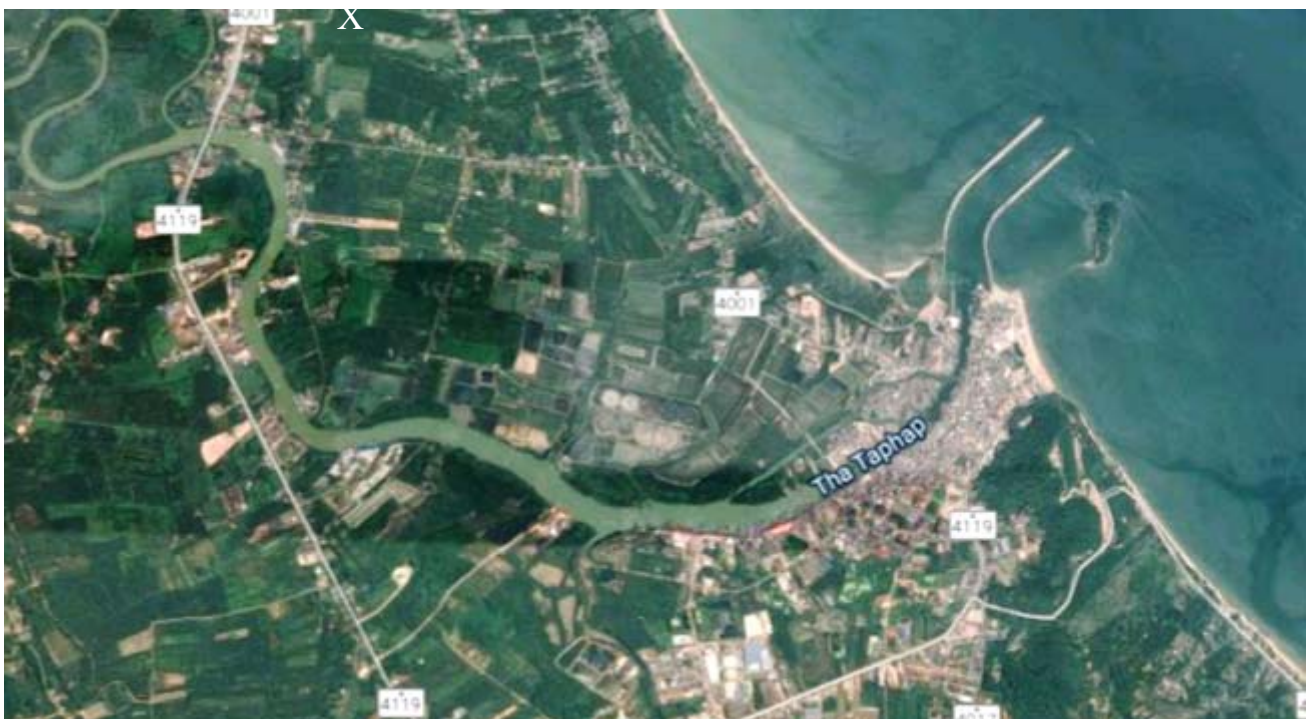
- but we made it safe - and here was the catamaran I thought we'd be taking to the islands -



- but they put us on this smaller boat - I guess the weather was expected to be bad, and many of the people cancelled, so they used their 'second boat' -



- so here is the 'big overview' map - Chumphon city on the left there, and we're heading for 'Koh Ngam Yai' on the far left (we gotta love google maps ...)



- more google earth stuff for those interested, about the trip down the river to the sea ...



- approaching the islands, still a ways out

- and a pic of the upstairs of the boat - only about 10 people, the usual crowd is 40-50 apparently - nice in that way, but this was a SLOW boat - about 90 minutes to get to the first island, normally I like a boat trip, but the more time you spend getting there and back, the less time you have for the actual purpose of the trip, looking at the coral! - the little speed boat passed us going out about half way there, and then passed us going back, already off to another place!!!

- more google earth - this is where we are headed, Ngam Yai and Ngam Noi





- and finally we get there - just two pics to show the interesting way perspective changes - above we are coming to Ngam Yai from the west, kind of 'side on', but the driver decided not to stop there first, too many boats around the snorkelling area I guess (not to mention someone on a frigging jet ski blasting around!!!!!! - way out here over a coral reef!!!!!!), then below at the south side of the above pic, so we went to Ngam Noi to the south, and from the south, this (below) is the same island ...



- and so finally to the first snorkeling site, Ko Ngam Noi, below, the coral stretching out for a ways on either side of the boat (which is of course parked out in front of the reef, not over it ...)





- saw a lot of this around the Chumphon islands - and have seen it many places in Thailand - some hardy souls seem to like to build dwellings way high on some kind of cliff on an island overlooking the sea - must be very beautiful and peaceful at times, and very scary at others, and very hard to get enough beer up and keep it cold ...

- so, into the water, finally, my favorite place -





- and very quickly looking at these small anemone gardens, with lots of anemone fish (damselfish, or 'nemo' fish) living in them, although there were no 'nemos' here, but the closely related, and common, pink anemone fish seen here



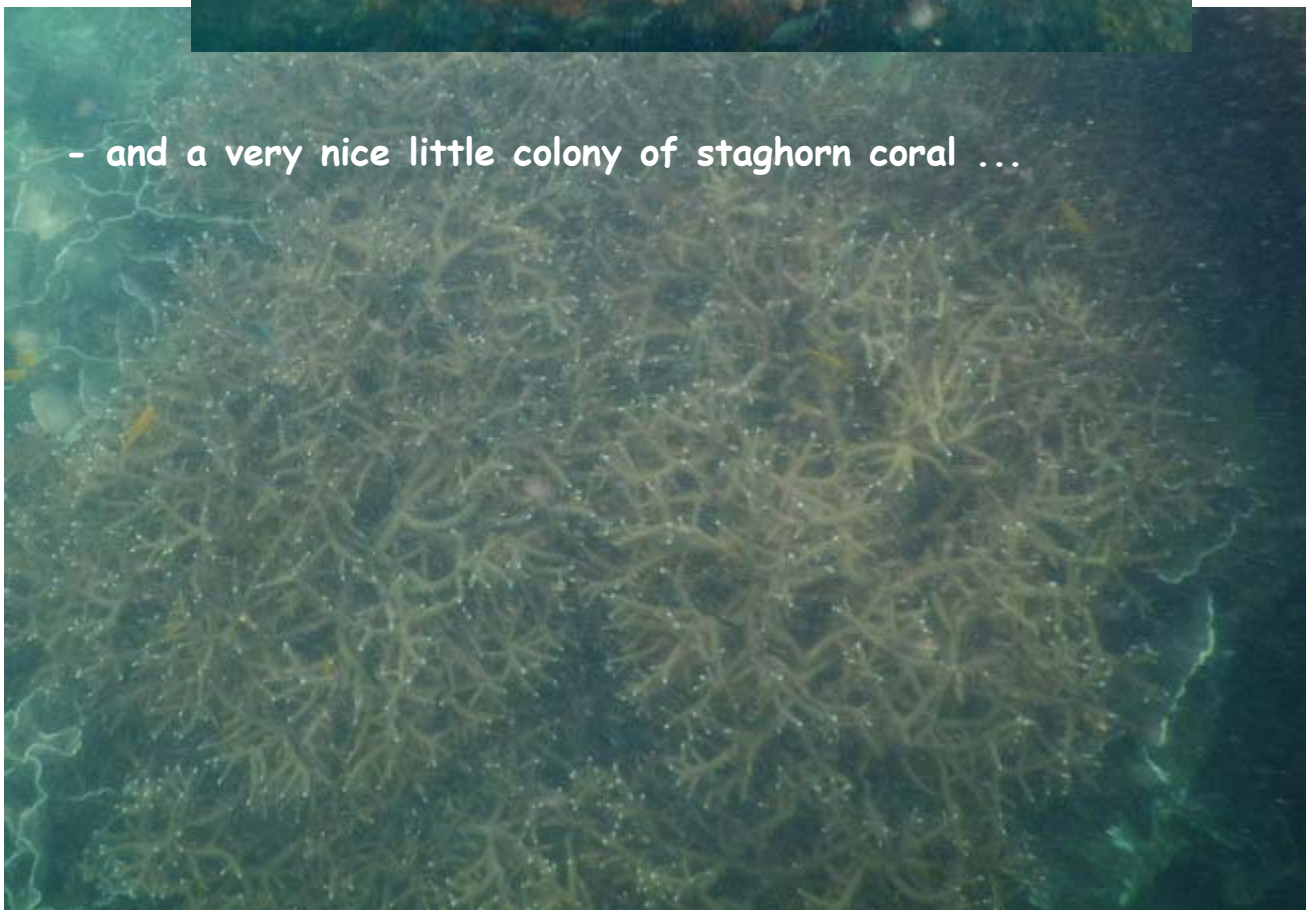
- a closeup of some of the really cute little guys above

...

- and another lovely scene, some lovely red 'cup' coral, not very common, at least places I've been



- and a very nice little colony of staghorn coral ...





- and here, the first disturbing signs among the otherwise very nice coral - some bleaching along the finger corals on the right hand side, and the one piece at the center bottom completely bleached ...

- and more bleaching - thinking back, I would say that there was not a lot of bleaching, maybe 10-15% - it is easy to see, there are no living corals that are all white - if you see this kind of white, it is bleaching - it is possible for coral to recover from bleaching, but it has to happen quite quickly, within a few weeks, or it will then die completely, and that is a terrible thing











- some fish - there were not many larger fish here, a double barred rabbit fish here, kind of common around reefs



- large parrot fish - but usually in a healthy reef there should be lots of these

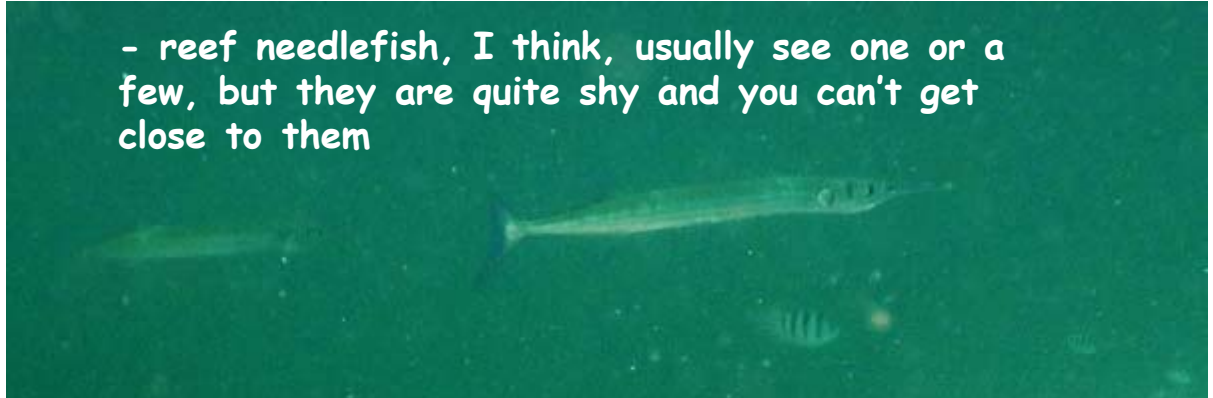


- fusilliers, quite common everywhere





- reef needlefish, I think, usually see one or a few, but they are quite shy and you can't get close to them



- sad bit of bleached brain coral ...



- copperband butterfly fish - a bit uncommon - more bleached coral behind it, some nice leaf coral below



- and all good things come to an end - eventually they call everyone back to the big boat, time to move on to the next place, around the south of Ko Ngam Yai, as in the pic at the left - we drove around a bit, the water was getting quite rough, and they weren't actually going to stop at all, but eventually they decided to stop for a bit at the '2nd place' as in the pic to the right -





- looking in to
the shore from
where they an-
chored the boat
- the water is
rougher than it
looks here ...

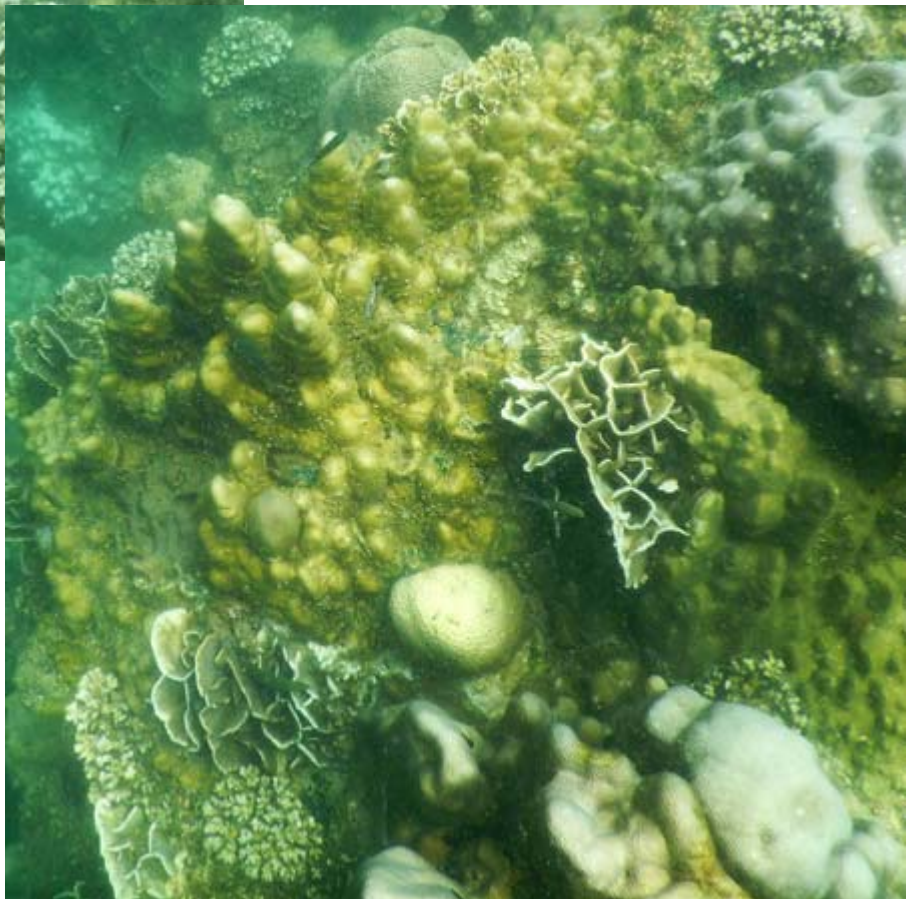
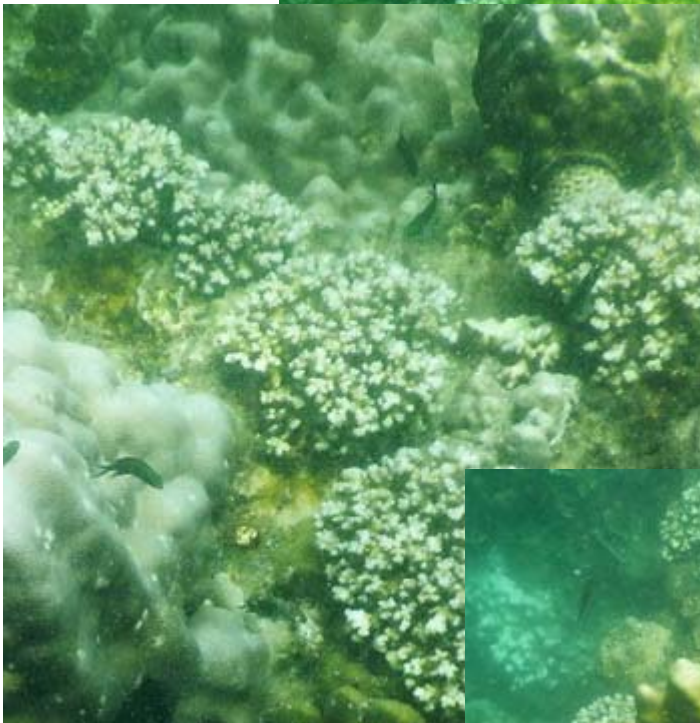


- and quite a bit of nice coral here also











- make sure my
ride's still there
... I get carried
away when I am
enjoying myself,
can stay out for
longer than most
people want -
you can see the
water is a bit
rough here,
everyone else is
back at the
boat, and
they're calling
me





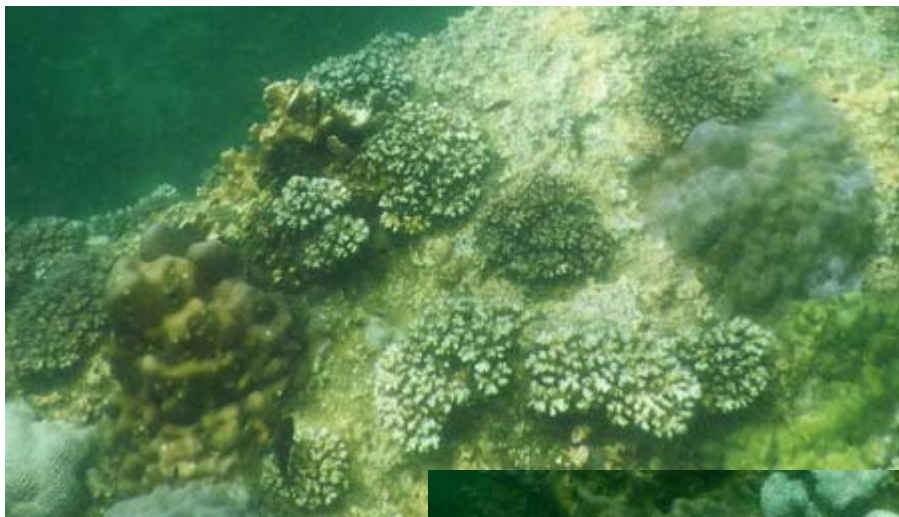
- few more pics as I
make my way back,
some more bleaching
..





- some nice
leaf coral, or
maybe lettuce -
coral
identification is
REALLY diffi-
cult, there are
so many varie-
ties of every-
thing, but that
is one of the
things that
makes it always
so interesting





- yellow en-
crusting coral,
many shapes
of this stuff



- and that was all, it was only noon, but the weather was getting quite rough, so they decided to head back, a long drive as on the way out - as we got close to shore, some terns showed up flying behind the boat (my amazing Nikon camera! more later) - and then as the water calmed, they had some lunch -





- a few pics as we made
our way along the river to
the docking place -



- and no time for more pics, or I just forgot, they rushed
us right into vans to head back to our hotels (fortunately
a 'van' and not the pickup with the crazy driver of the
morning)

- the room - ok, not great





-very beautiful end of day (not actually sunset, of course, the view is east here, but) a lovely view as the light faded
- not a lot of choice for supper, there were a few beach restaurants, but this was the off season so many closed, not much choice, esp for a single traveller, they mostly cater to families or groups - so just got a simple bit of food from one of the places near the inn - tom yum, fried veggies, rice - to bed early, another early morning trip arranged for the next day





beautiful sunrise to start the day - then an early start for the trip as it eventually happened below



my ride on Friday - a whole fishing boat! to myself!!



Capt Wirut - quiet for the first while, but when he learned I could speak enough Thai to talk to him, he was very friendly and chatty



off to sea!! - my spirit is singing in happiness much more than this pic would seem to indicate! - I think I don't believe my luck or something

so first stop after a half hour or so (that fishing boat moved along pretty good) - Koh Ranka Chio -



I can now say that all of the black stuff along the west coast here, in front of those beaches, is good coral - and don't we just love google earth!! - this kind of thing is really useful ... (I didn't have time to swim the whole beach, just approx the lower area in red)





- two aerial pics I got from the park office I will talk about later - the coral is very clear along the shore, now I really want to get back and do the whole thing!!



- another pic from one of the websites ... looks so good!!

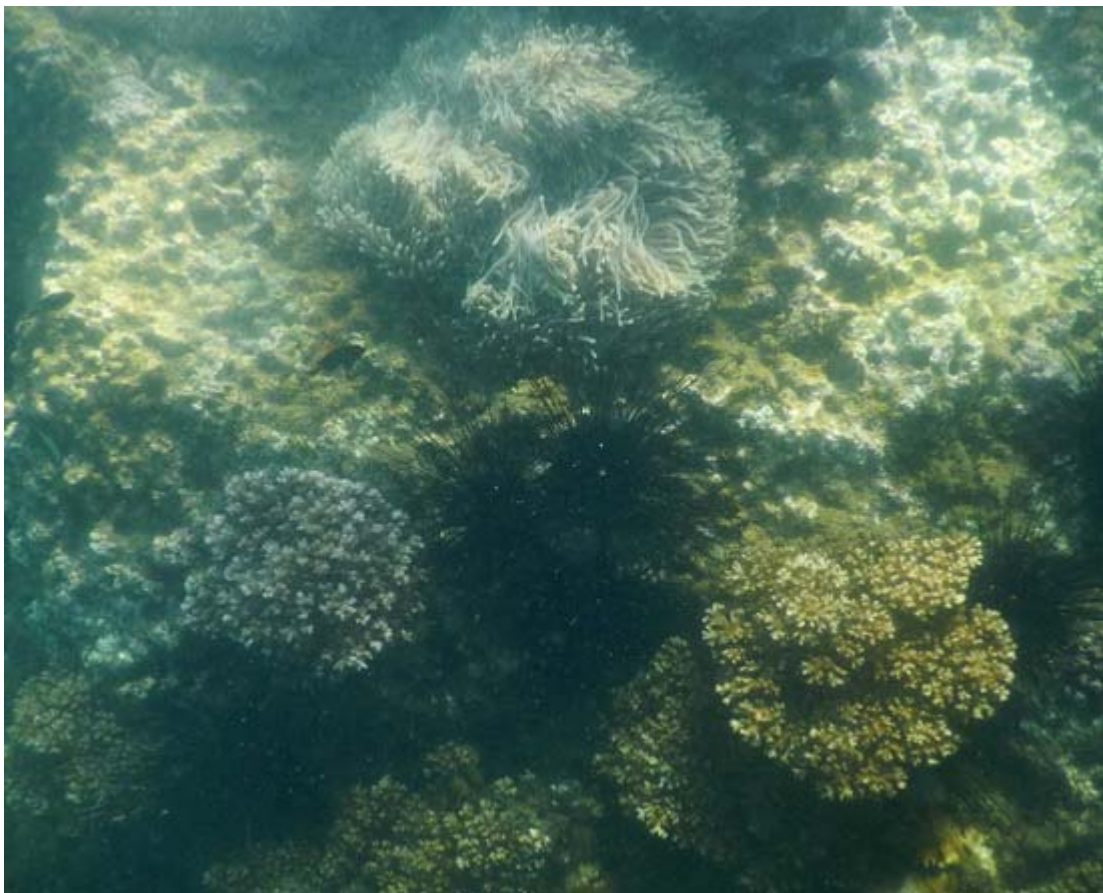


- so, into the water - and immediately seeing signs of very good coral, and distressing signs of bleaching the big and very common everywhere boulder coral above, and the leaf coral below (green color in the pic, as it was a bit deep, but it is actually a brown color as in the pic to the right I grabbed from the net)





- been in the water 2 minutes - things are looking very good already ...





- a little school of some kind of small reef fish, way too many kinds of these guys to know all the names of the different kinds...



- and a quick glimpse of a blue ring angel fish, like most of the big guys, they won't let you get close for a good pic!! (the inset again from the net, so you can get a better look)

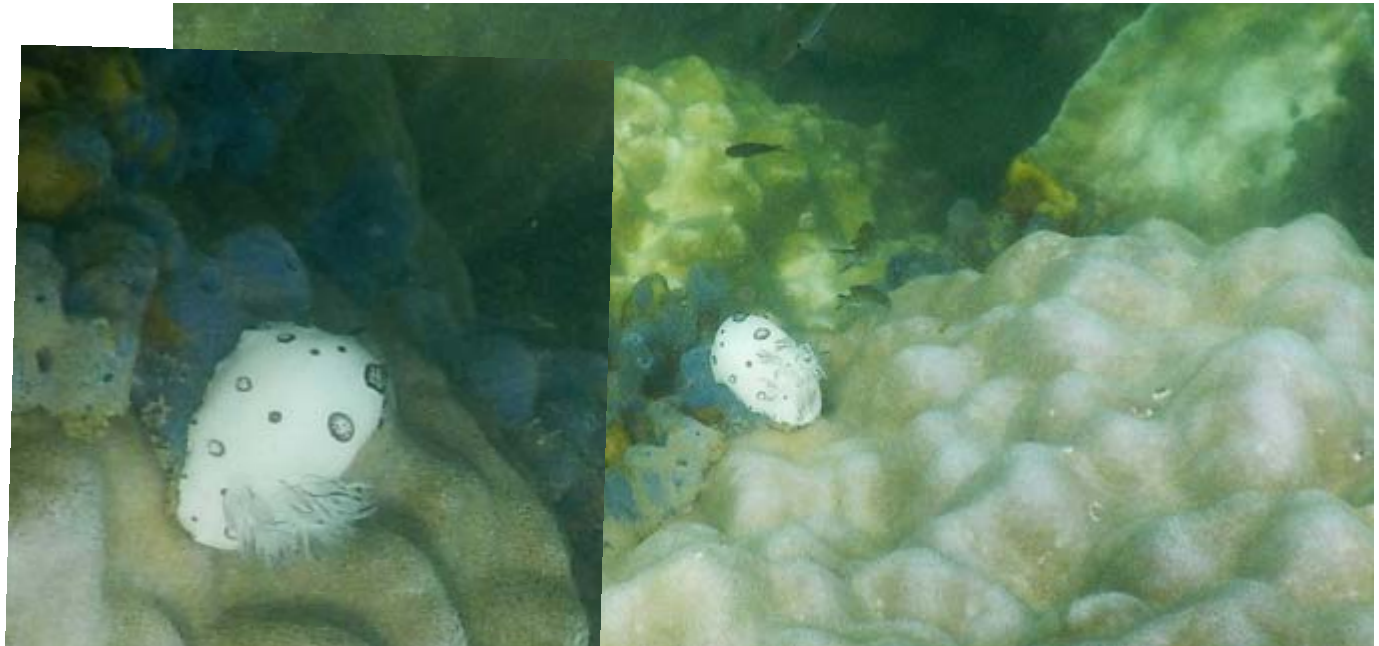


- more lovely coral - been a few years now since I have been on a reef this good, all the main places in the Andaman are very degraded now , , , ,





- and the prize of the day, of the trip, of this year - this white black-spotted nudibranch, I've been looking for nudibranchs for years - this is the first I've actually seen



- a school of 'sergeant major' damsel fish, one of the most common small fish on every reef - and then the big Siam Catamaran shows up with a whole herd of splashing noisy snorkelers, so time to be moving on ...!





google maps again - here's a closeup of our next stop, Koh Lawa - apparently nothing at the beach on the south shore, we drove right around to the beach at the south-west, pic from the water below



- another boat, just leaving





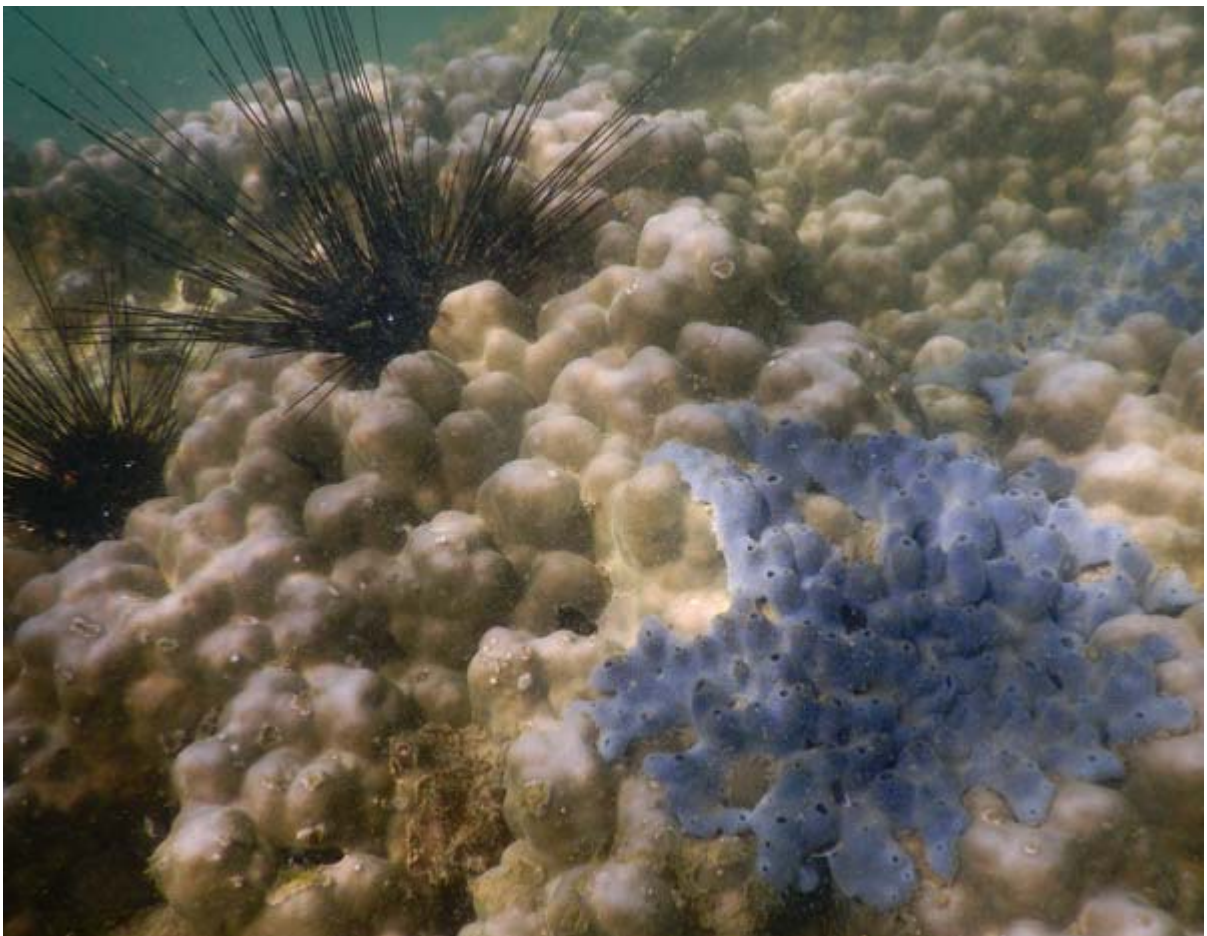
- into the water - and again immediately, beautiful fields of large, healthy leaf coral, and then the big healthy beautiful lettuce coral below - a little feather worm inside the leaf coral to the left here



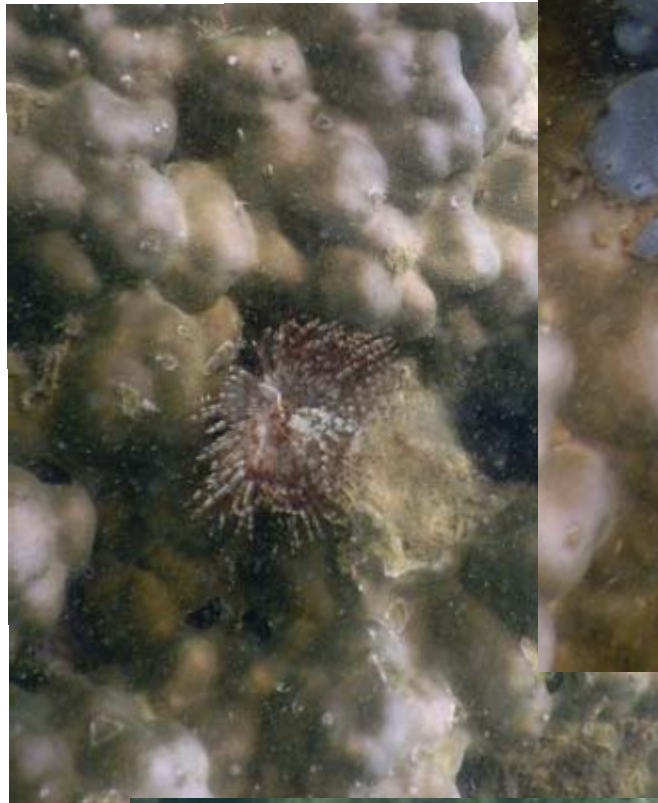
big healthy leaf
coral, a spiny urchin,
lovely healthy little
ring coral, cauli-
flower coral - what
a lovely coral gar-
den!!



big beautiful healthy piece of
the 'rock coral'



- some blue sponge, common here - not
everywhere ..





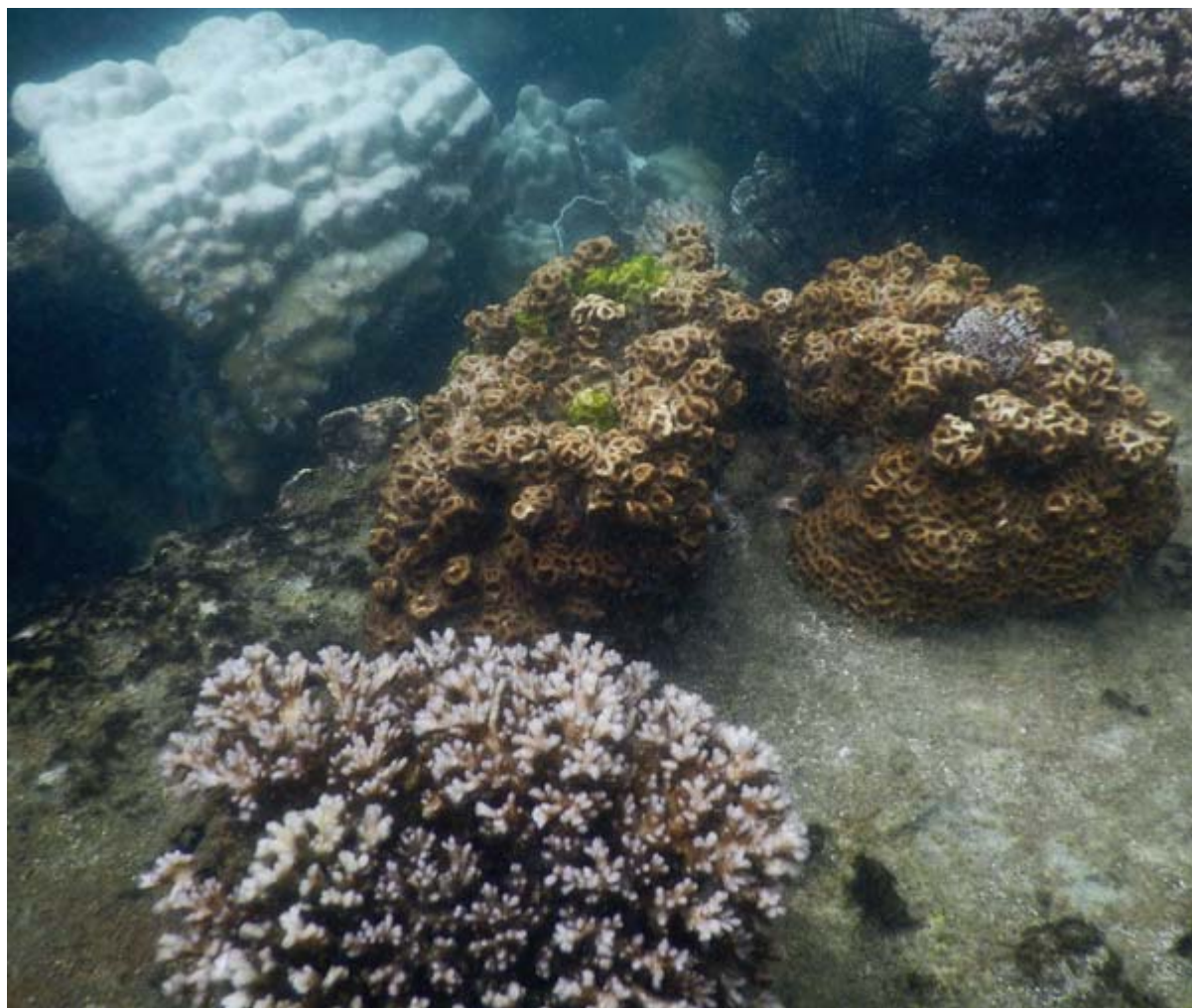
- unfortunately, perhaps ominously, some bleaching too ...





- cauliflower coral, maybe, hard to identify
coral - in front of some bleached rock coral
...







patch of mushroom coral,
fairly common most places





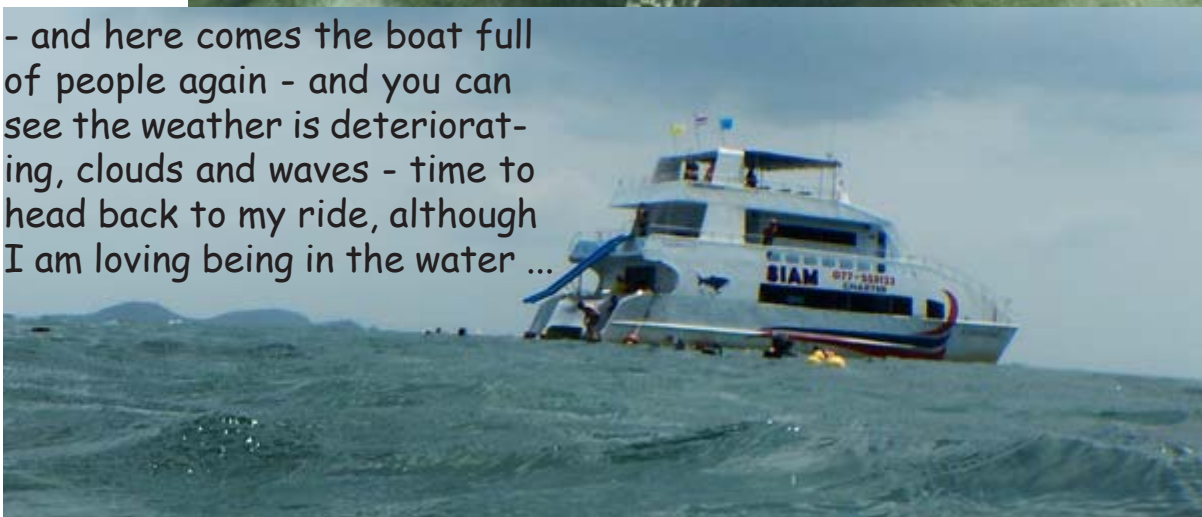
- some 'barrel sponge' quite common most places in the Andaman, did not see much here





more bleaching

- and here comes the boat full of people again - and you can see the weather is deteriorating, clouds and waves - time to head back to my ride, although I am loving being in the water ...

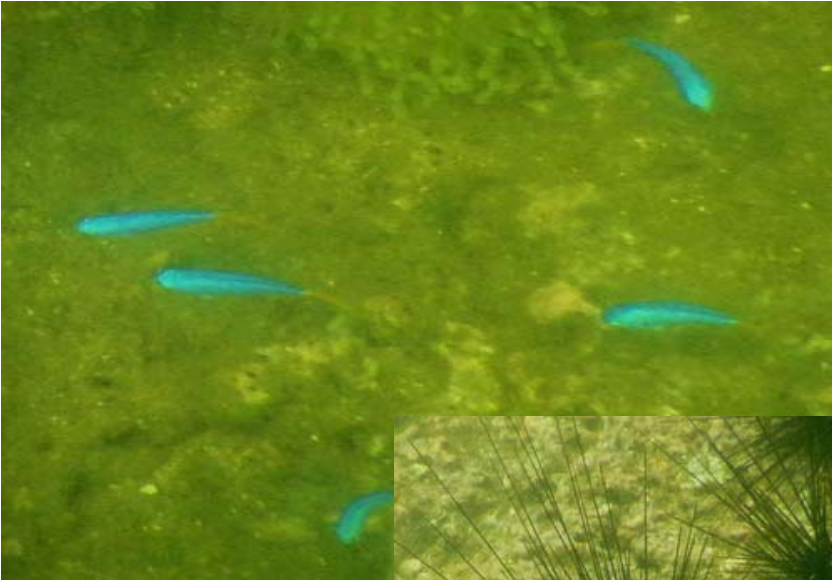


featuring my new black mask that I tried from the captain - no leaking! no fogging! - bought it when we got back



one more stop - Ko Lak Raet - just a bit of rock really, but supposed to have a big 'garden in the sea' of beautiful anemones -





- a few of the cute little blue fish that are quite common on every reef I've ever been to, but hard to get pics of because they are usually far away

- the tide was low and the water rough, so we didn't spend long here, I couldn't get over the coral near to the shore where the nice stuff was supposed to be - big giant clam here - quite common everywhere





- Captain Wirut below - and time to head home, sadly





- nice scene getting back to Sairi Beach - that's my resort, de Sea Almond, right in the middle - water calmer close to the coast here, but big waves out where the islands are ...



- I didn't know how good the underwater pics were until I got back home and put them on the big computer - but they were great, much better than comes across in a PDF like this - and all thanks to this camera - a Nikon Coolpix - I've tried a few underwater cameras now, the Olympus Tough is good, I think the Coolpix is a bit better ..

- so - home for awhile, got a bit of lunch and showered, and the resort had a motorcycle available, so I decided to take a tour around the nearby area before my bus later that evening, mainly to get a look at the Chumphon Marine Park office just a few km away
- first job below, getting gassed up - strange system, it's a self-serve, you put a bill into a slot, the machine recognizes it, and you punch a button and get the nozzle into the gas tank while it pumps -



- looking out again towards the Ko Maprao from the southern end of Sairi Beach



- a bungalow resort just down the road from the de Sea Almond, Nong Mai, just across the road from the beach, only 1000 baht o night the girl told me - maybe next time



- and a woman taking her kid somewhere on the MC sidecar - people in Canada would have a fit if they saw this, but I think it is fine, a lot more freedom here, and personal responsibility - the kid is smiling and happy and obviously not worried ...





- a quite striking temple along the way ...



- land finally, after a very enjoyable tour around on the bike, I find the park -



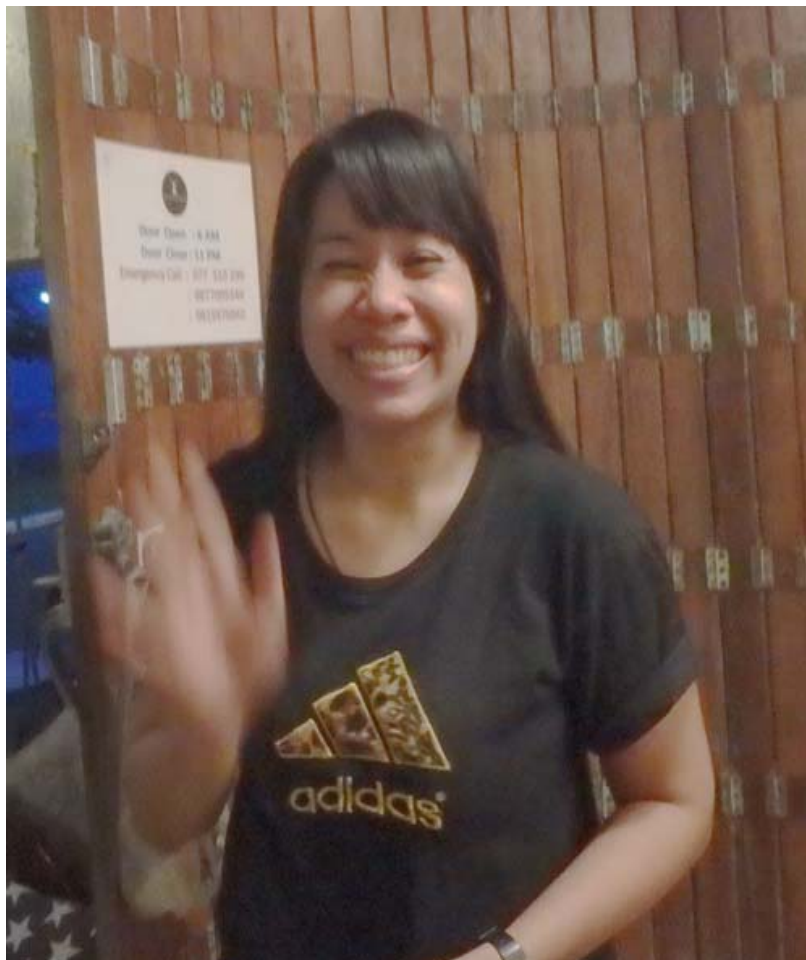




- and finally scored these beauties - as someone who really likes to be able to identify things I see around me, I have many books, and collect anything that will help figure out the reefs I love - many places have posters like this, but until now I have never been able to find how to get one - at the park, I found a park office and asked - and although they said no at first, as i was leavintg, a couple of girls came running after me and gave me these, said they rmembered they had some in the back room -(one on 'other reef stuff' as well) (nice big ones, about 100x60 cm)



ท้องทะเลคือโลกกว้าง คือบ้านของสิ่งมีชีวิต ให้โอกาสโลกฟื้น คืนความสดใสให้ชีวิต



- and so back 'home' to de sea almond, get my stuff together, say goodbye to the lovely and very helpful Janey, manager of the hotel, and there's the tuktuk (they call it a 'taxi' here) waiting to take me back to Chumphon to catch the over-night bus back to Hat Yai again - overall a very, very nice trip, so nice to see some healthy coral again - will be back for sure -





- so to the bus station early, good Cdn, all checked in, time for a short walk around, look for some noodles, this place right across from where I first arrived just 40 hours ago - been a good trip - no more pics, when I got to Hat Yai, 5am, a bunch of motorcycle taxis were waiting at the bus station, no traffic that time of day, back to PSU in 5 minutes - home and to bed - but will be back to Chumphon next year for sure - mission accomplished for this trip, checking out the coral at the Chumphon islands, very pleased with what I found ...

