Thailand

Thailand is a known diving country. It has lots of islands and inlets, the water is warm and currents are a rare thing. Lots of people start their Open Water Course in the backpack areas of Koh Phi Phi, Koh Lanta or Koh Tao because it is really cheap. More experienced divers can go on liveaboards and enjoy the Similan islands or the Mergui Archipelago in the Andaman Sea.

Diving in Thailand is divided in 2 areas: The Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. As Thailand has two monsoons, you have to plan your trip. Due to weather conditions, diving may be limited to only day trips or it may just not be possible.  
The Andaman Sea, on the West Coast, has the best weather during the northeast monsoon, from October till May. The Gulf of Thailand, the East Coast, can be very choppy. During the southwest monsoon, May till October, the West Coast has the higher waves and the East Coast is easier to dive. Most liveaboards won’t go out as weather conditions aren’t predictable long enough and because islands are closed to tourists.

Koh Phangan, Koh Tao and Koh Samui are located in the Gulf of Thailand. They are on the East Coast of the country so the best diving season is during the southwest monsoon, from May to October.

I am sorry to say but I am not a big fan of learning how to dive on Koh Tao, the number-one backpackers island. There are too many people, too much destruction, too shit dive instructors and too many diving schools that give cheap but bad and unsafe courses, just so they could get more people than the school next door. Their MO seems to be quantity over quality…  
I am not going to say they are all of poor quality but compared with the Gili Islands in Indonesia, their standards are much lower. If you do want to learn how to dive and you are really sitting on your money, then still shop around and go for the school you feel comfortable with and that follows the safety standards. Do not go to the big dive centers… Unless you really want to be a paying number.

There are so many dive schools on the island that there is a fierce competition in getting the students. Prices go down and accommodation is included, what is great if you are on a budget, but don’t expect a great course. Instructors will go to big instructor/student ratios to earn at least some money to be able to stay. They don’t have time to explain lots or to take you separate, if you have some fears. Don’t let your diving experience be ruined by dive centers with a quantity over quality MO.   
Also, there are so many divers during high-season, that the sea looks like a divers zoo. All waiting in line to see that next cool fish.

If you are a diver already, then rather go to the *Similan islands*. Go on a liveaboard and enjoy. Take a look at the time of year when you go. Thailand get monsoons so places can be closed for some months.

Phuket, Koh Phi Phi and Koh Lanta are all in the same area on the West Coast of Thailand. They all follow the same weather patterns. Diving is possible the whole year round but during the southwest monsoon, from May till October, diving is limited to day trips and to protected dive sites.

Mergui Archipelago

These islands are part of Myanmar but lots of liveaboards leave from Ranong or Khao Lak, Thailand. They are located in the Andaman Sea, on the Burmese West Coast, what means that there is only diving during the October-May monsoon season.

There are not many divers going this direction. The Burmese Government only opened the islands to tourists in the late 1990. Lesser divers, lesser destruction, way to go, no?

The Similans are a group of 25 islands in the Andaman Sea. They are the best diving area of Thailand and perfect for more advanced divers. You can only reach them from on liveaboards leaving from Phuket or Khao Lak.

During the southwest monsoon, the islands are closed so there are no diving trips. The weather is too unpredictable and, of course, safety goes first. The Thai government also closed the islands to let the underwater fauna and flora recover after all the damage done by divers. Fishes are spawning in rainy season so by the time the park opens again, on October 16, plenty of young colourful reef fish will be around.