

## zoom in on koh tao's free diving mermaids



Go scuba diving around Gulf of Thailand and you may encounter a mermaid. Propelled by her monofin and plunging to depths of 50 metres on a single breath of air, Monica Ganame is the nearest you'll come to meeting one of these mythical creatures underwater.

The Argentinian-born professional free diver wears no air tank or other bulky scuba gear – instead, Monica can hold her breath underwater for up to six minutes. The absence of equipment not only allows Monica to interact much more closely with marine life, but also to feel a part of the ocean herself.

Together with her business partner Eusebio Saenz de Santamaria, Monica has spent the past five years promoting free diving through their diving school Apnea Total on Koh Tao, an island two-and-a-half hours by boat from Koh Samui.

Free diving is associated with only the super fit, and those who have nerves of steel. But Monica dismisses this myth: "Anyone can free dive," she says emphatically. Certainly one could under the tutelage of Monica or Eusebio, and Apnea Total is considered one of the top training centres of its kind in Asia.

The duo are now planning a free diving festival this April, where they hope to bring some of the sport's most renowned figures to Koh Tao. Looks like there will be plenty more sightings of mermaids and mermen in the Gulf of Thailand.

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