

Captain's Account of Myanmar (Burma) Superyacht Journey

Gordon Fernandes, General Manager of Asia Pacific Superyachts Phuket and Myanmar, shares the following account from a Captain of his experiences cruising from Phuket and journeying in Myanmar (Burma).

“The name Myanmar doesn't mean a lot to most people as the word has only been associated with a short portion of that country's long history. Mention the name Burma, however and it evokes something completely different. Burma is old, exotic, romantic, undiscovered. It is a nation with a long and glorious history, and an enormous variety of stunning landscapes and vistas.

Our cruise started in Phuket, Thailand, where our friends at Asia Pacific Superyachts helped us to arrange the trip. Burma is not short of bureaucracy and paperwork and a permit for the yacht to enter has to be granted – the dealings of which do not appear possible on one's own.

For example, every visiting vessel is required to carry a government appointed official at all times whilst in the country – at first consideration an invasion, but realistically a huge helping hand. These officials can be a great source of knowledge and insight into the country; they answer the numerous check-up calls from the navy, smooth things over with the port authorities, translate with the locals and are worth their weight in gold. Asia Pacific Superyachts should be able to organise a good official for you, give them notice as we did as we've heard that there are good and bad officials who can go with you.

We cleared into the country at Kawthaung on the Southern border with Thailand, collected our official and then headed to the Mergui Archipelago and we were not disappointed. We found island after island with countless white beaches under green hills of dense rainforest - their canopies alive with birds and butterflies. Monkeys left the trees for a stroll along the beaches where we found tracks of the many elusive animals that live in the forests. Our minds wandered to the stories of wild elephants and tigers and we dreamt of catching just a fleeting glimpse. We paddled up Mangrove Rivers and found trees overhanging quiet canals that teemed with juvenile fish.

Gypsy fishermen live within the archipelago - mostly on their boats but venturing ashore to collect firewood from the beaches and water from the streams. They are nomadic and live a simple life sustained by sea. They have been proven to be excellent pearl divers and fishermen, who only work as much as is required in order to live. We found them friendly and ready to exchange seafood for a few of our dry stores.

After the 2004 tsunami, amazing stories came to light of the understanding and perception that the Gypsy fishermen have of the ocean. Villages along this and the Thai

coastline were saved because the elders had visions or remembered tales about previous such events – goodness knows how long ago, but they put their knowledge into practice and many lives were saved.

One evening whilst having sundowners on a beach, we invited a couple of fishermen to join us for a soft drink. They nervously mingled and answered the questions that our official, Aung Kyaw, translated for us. As darkness fell they needed to head out fishing for the night and so took their leave, but not before thanking us with a gift of a dozen small pearls. They said they'd never spoken to white people before. We were stunned!

During our month in the country to be wholly exciting and interesting and were all delighted to discover that Burma still resides in Myanmar. We were captivated throughout by a huge variety of experiences and all aboard are already dreaming of another opportunity to continue exploring this intriguing country.”