

SUPERYACHTS STREAM TO PHUKET

PHUKET HAS ESTABLISHED ITSELF NOT ONLY AS THAILAND'S PREMIER YACHTING DESTINATION, BUT ALSO ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR CRUISING LOCATIONS IN ASIA, PARTICULARLY FOR LARGE VESSELS.
| BY LINDA CARTLIDGE

With Europe still dominating the on-water leisure scene during its summer season, the main question superyacht owners and captains ask when planning the rest of the year is: “What’s the difference between Caribbean cruising and the waters in Southeast Asia?” Gordon Fernandes, general manager of Asia Pacific Superyachts Phuket & Myanmar, has one answer.

“The main difference is that we don’t have the high winds and big swells that you get in the Caribbean,” he says, referring specifically to Thailand and the Andaman Sea.

Such advantages have been catching the attention of

superyacht owners and captains for a number of years now, with Phuket becoming a favoured port of call for superyachts. This has prompted improvements to the island’s marine infrastructure and also seen the emergence of a host of onshore services for yacht owners and their crew that includes everything from practical amenities such as dockside electricity and fresh water hook ups to agents that can handle customs and immigration procedures.

“Yachts have the best of both worlds on Phuket”, adds Fernandes. “You can anchor in a secluded bay and enjoy cultural experiences during the day. There’s also a sophisticated nightlife of high-end beach clubs on offer on

**ASIA SUPERYACHT
RENDEZVOUS, PHUKET**



Phuket in the evening. Visitors can enjoy sports, historical and cultural tours and great Thai food, followed by a relaxing sundowner on a white sandy beach. Or head up to Myanmar and choose from hundreds of deserted beaches to relax and make your own party.”

Vessels can take advantage of a wealth of cruising options from Phuket, while also making the most of what is also a culturally fascinating region. The surrounding seas provide a wealth of fantastic yachting opportunities in a safe environment and during the cruising season that runs from November to April, owners and their guests can expect endless days of blue sky and favourable northeasterly winds.

Areas such as Phang Nga Bay, with over 100 islands to explore, provide year round sheltered cruising to nearby islands. The endless coves and bays offer surrounding white sand and privacy, with plenty of delightful hidden spots to relax and enjoy as you look forward to the next adventure just around the headland. For this reason, the Andaman Sea is fast becoming one of the world’s premier destinations for superyacht visitors, which also means fabulous charter opportunities.

Close cruising choices from Phuket include the Racha Islands and Naka Islands, while the tiny Kai Island is a renowned (though often busy) snorkelling spot. Larger

DESTINATION



ANDAMAN ISLANDS,
NARCONDAM



PHANGNGA BAY, THAILAND

vessels, however, tend to strike out for more distant archipelagoes, and Phuket is the perfect base for voyages to the Similan Islands, Myanmar's Mergui Archipelago or even India's pristine, volcanic Andaman islands.

"Superyacht owners are particularly impressed with the Similan and Surin Islands as you can enjoy 30 plus feet of visibility around the lovely uninhabited islets there," says Fernandes. "And Myanmar's abundance of lush, tropical deserted islands also makes for some unique and remote cruising."

Many captains return to Europe from Southeast Asia with tales of having visited these pristine islands and remark on the quietly beautiful anchorages, all commonplace in Thailand, Myanmar and The Andamans. Such reports have encouraged more and more owners to head for Phuket every year so that they and their guests can enjoy world-class cruising, swimming, diving and snorkelling – untroubled by crowded bays.

"Word of mouth among captains sharing down the pipeline has been a prime motivator," says Captain Charlie Dwyer of the S/Y Yanneke Too, co-organiser of the annual Asia Superyacht Rendezvous.

When superyachts frequent any destination in the world, demand swiftly increases for professional and experienced agents on the ground to ensure smooth and trouble-free cruising. Captains know in advance that due to the formalities required for entering countries like Thailand and Myanmar, the paperwork is best handled with the help of an agent, otherwise boats can expect a lengthy bureaucratic check-in process .

"We are a very busy private yacht that operates worldwide," says the captain of 58m M/Y Annaeva. "Our agents [Gordon Fernandes and Toby Koehler] were instrumental in taking care of Annaeva while we cruised this beautiful part of the world. Their attention to detail, good advice and professional attitude made even our most difficult and complicated plans come together flawlessly. The complexities of this region were expertly taken care of."

Although local government offices can be strapped with red tape, agents can help owners bypass the bureaucracy and the queues. They also know the nuances of local procedures and can therefore troubleshoot problems in advance of a yacht's arrival.

"There are a lot of rules and regulations, but in general



the local officials welcome superyachts,” says Fernandes. “Crews are given visas on arrival, but for longer stays it’s recommended that a visa is obtained before the crew arrives. In Thailand, most nationalities also get a visa on arrival at the airport.”

Visitors looking to charter or even buy a boat in Thailand also have a wealth of options on Phuket. Princess Yachts Thailand, based at Boat Lagoon Marina, offers a full range of luxury new and used boat sales with additional owner services and yacht management, as well as a dedicated charter yacht division. Simpson Marine also operates out of Phuket, representing top global brands such as Azimut, Lagoon and Beneteau Yachts. Meanwhile, Lee Marine’s range of new boats are amongst the world’s best and most respected brands on the market, including respected Italian brands like Ferretti, Riva and Pershing, and even customised explorer yachts by Cantiere Delle Mare.

In the past few years, the services for superyachts arriving to Phuket have improved considerably. The most obvious upgrades include better marina facilities and berth expansion, better provision supplies and suppliers, better parts availability and a higher quality of sub-contractors for engineering and maintenance work.

All of these improvements have inspired a dramatic increase





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YACHT HAVEN
MARINA, PHUKET



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in the number of superyachts visiting the island with some 55 vessels over 30m reported at Yacht Haven Marina alone during the last high season. The marine infrastructure in Southeast Asia and specifically on Phuket is expanding at pace with marina extensions planned, along with more onshore services for owners and their crew. Ferenandes notes that here are also more engineering companies based in the region and most of the big brand names like CAT, MTU, Northern Lights can be serviced. “Overall, with time, most projects can be completed,” he advises.

Other developments also support the growth in leisure yachting around Phuket. More luxury resorts, villas and apartments have been added in recent years providing attractive accommodation options ashore and Phuket airport is being expanded to cope with continually growing schedule of direct international flights, which already includes arrivals from destinations such as Doha, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore and Frankfurt.

Captains and owners also learn about the great cruising opportunities around Phuket thanks to the island’s popular

regattas and sailing events. The Phuket King’s Cup is the largest event on the Asian Yachting Grand Prix circuit, while The Bay Regatta in February and Cape Panwa Hotel Phuket Race Week in July also attract large numbers of international entries.

The prestigious Asia Superyacht Rendezvous held every December is supported by Feadship and last year welcomed 10 spectacular superyachts, including three Feadship vessels, M/Y Callisto, M/Y Samax and M/Y Helix. Royal Huisman’s award-winning sailing vessel S/Y Twizzle, two Indonesian Phinisi’s, as well as S/Y Yanneke Too, S/Y Asia and S/Y Shamoun and M/Y Maverick.

“The social gathering brings attending superyachts together for festivities and fun and many of the boats stay on for an extended cruising holiday”, adds Captain Dwyer. “We specifically design the programme to make sure all the invited participants can relax and enjoy themselves. We respect the yacht owners’ privacy, and there’s no hassle or people telling them what to do. It’s all about having a good time and bringing together some fantastic boats for a few days of fun in a wonderful location.”