

## Super Year – A sailor's travel guide to seeing Asia

Phuket Gazette - Monday, January 7, 2013 4:23:18 PM



Sunset in the Andamans.





PHUKET: The Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific regions are fast becoming some of the best cruising grounds in the world – a fact well known to those who have cruised them for many years, but something that is only now becoming common knowledge around the world.

"Recent expansions in marina facilities have provided the kind of support today's demanding professional captains are used to and the pristine ecosystems found throughout these diverse regions are exactly what yacht owners have been missing all these years", reports Nick Coombes of Asia Pacific Superyacht.

**An Overview of the Journey**

At first glance it might seem daunting... but with an abundance of stunning cruising possibilities and the excellent shore-based assistance now available, it really is a joy to cruise throughout Asia's waterways. Working on an early September departure from the Mediterranean, a Suez Canal transit and a passage through the Red Sea will put you out into the Indian Ocean to start your journey to the pristine islands of the Maldives.

Journeying on to Sri Lanka and Langkawi, Malaysia respectively in October and November, December and January will find you in Phuket, Thailand and at the half-way point in February in Myanmar. Then it's on to the Andaman Islands in March, Singapore in April, Koh Samui, Thailand in May, Hong Kong in June and a final stop in the Philippines in July, prior to a stunning end in Indonesia in August and the option to journey further to Australia and New Zealand.

Stunning Asian regions are briefly described below in planning a cruising itinerary, which comprises a Superyacht year-long journey through Asian waters.

**Maldives – September**

First Port of call is Malé, the Capital of the Republic of the Maldives. Arrival formalities are simple although you will need a pilot for your first entry (Port regulations); clearance is done in an hour's time and then you're free to leave the Customs anchorage.

Most yachts head north approximately four miles and anchor off the resort island of Bandos. Unlike some of the other exclusive resorts, Bandos gladly welcomes yacht crews and generally several yachts will be at anchor when you arrive.

**Ruhiveli Island (Bird Island)**

As there are no Marina facilities in the Maldives large enough for today's Superyachts, you must rely on your ship's tenders or boats provided by the agent. Basic spares are available in Malé and Petrol/Diesel can be supplied at anchor anywhere close to Malé.

The Maldives are a nature lover's paradise with more than a thousand small islands surrounded by pure white beaches, like 'Bird Island', and pristine reef systems, providing an unending opportunity to fish, dive and snorkel to your heart's content.

In all but the heaviest weather there are plenty of places to cruise. The best and busiest time is November to April and Asia Pacific Superyachts Maldives' Mohamed Hameed and his team are helpful and can provide excellent dive and fishing guides. A little planning will help you avoid having to ship lots of supplies into the Maldives.

#### **Sri Lanka – October**

A very short 450NM passage from the Maldives takes you up to Sri Lanka – a good option for a fueling point. The islands 18 million strong population provides an intoxicating mix of cultures and diverse ethnic groups. There are three main ports: Colombo, Galle and Trincomalee.

Colombo and Galle are both manmade while Trincomalee is one of the world's largest natural harbors; all have deepwater berths for Superyacht use.

#### **Malaysia – November**

Captain Nick Coombes, who's based in Malaysia, reports: "My first stop east of Sri Lanka is always Langkawi. This group of 99 Islands is the perfect place to re-supply and relax. As the region's only 'Duty Free' port, you will find cheap, low sulphur diesel, as well as petrol, A1 jet fuel, alcohol (including fine wines) and tobacco products. Two Superyacht marinas provide safe berthing, with a varied supply of support services available in the main town of Kuah."

There is a custom built Superyacht refit center, with a 500 ton travel lift, 2 x 60 meter work sheds and plenty of hard stand. For larger yachts the shipyard offers a 100 meter floating dock for short or extended visits. For the crew there are plenty of beaches, restaurants, bars, 5-star hotels, golf courses, uninhabited islands and an international airport.

Cruising around Langkawi's 99 islands will provide guests with plenty to do and allow easy access to the southern Thai islands in the Butang Group. Nick suggests the best time to visit is September through May.

#### **Phuket – December and January**

Just a few hours north of Langkawi you will find the very popular Island of Phuket.

Dubbed the 'Monaco' of South East Asia, Phuket now has two Superyacht marinas and more are being planned.

The locals are very friendly and there is a substantial ex-pat population on the island. For off duty crew the nightlife in Patong and Phuket City is spectacular with plenty of 5-star restaurants and wine bars along with a great mix of local restaurants. Lots of high end beach clubs are being set up, giving owners a choice of secluded bays or exclusive nightlife.

#### **Malaysia – Gayana**

Experienced Asia Pacific Superyachts Phuket's Gordon Fernandes can recommend the best in yacht planning, noting, "Starting out and staying close to Phuket you have Phang Nga Bay with its limestone monoliths rising up out of the sea or further south, the islands of Koh Phi Phi, made famous by the film, *The Beach*."

World class diving is within easy reach and guests can beach, swim, snorkel, look for monkeys and wildlife before heading off to the Similan Islands; 60NM's north west of Phuket and classed as one of the 'top ten global dive destinations' – a paradise for diving and snorkeling and often guests will enjoy 30M+ water visibility.

For a more private diving experience, head a little further north to the Surin Islands and the Surin Archipelago, a 135 square kilometers area lying in the Andaman Sea some 53 kilometers off mainland Ranong Province (the park's five islands lie just south of the border with Myanmar).

Gordon suggests a brief return to Phuket for refueling/re-provisioning before heading off for Myanmar. Yachts planning to be in Phuket for Christmas can also join the exclusive Asia Superyacht Rendezvous. It's an event aimed at both motor and sailing yachts and a great way to start the festive season.

#### **Myanmar – February**

Travelling further north is Myanmar and the Mergui Archipelago, partly famed as the home of small groups of 'Moken' (sea gypsy) villages. The Archipelago is lightly populated and it's easy to find perfect places to relax and enjoy the solitude and beauty.

The Mergui Archipelago and the Andaman Islands are among the world's top preferred diving destinations.

#### **Andaman Islands – March**

Moving from the Mergui Archipelago, you will soon encounter the vast spread of the Andaman Islands in India. The journey offers stunning cruising vistas as well as land attractions and discoveries.

Visitors will find deserted islands of pure white sparkling beaches and crystal clear water. Moving inland, lush vegetation and towering cliffs with unusual bird and flora/fauna all wait to be explored and active volcanoes can be viewed during the journey.

The Andaman Islands of India deliver adventuresome cruising and vessels often seek out Asia Pacific Superyachts Andamans', R Rathnam, to create an itinerary that opens onto a secret world of tropical jungles and serene beaches scattered throughout much of the Andaman Archipelago.

Travelling on, some of the most enticing of unexplored waters can be found in the Bay of Bengal, with deep seas and hundreds of hidden bays teeming with marine life.

Mr Rathnam notes the best cruising months for the Andaman Islands are between November to April.

#### **Singapore – April**

Heading back south along the Malay Peninsular you will arrive at the island city of Singapore. This is one of the financial shining stars of South East Asia, and offers all the trappings of a modern city, all packaged together on a tropical Island.

"Singapore is one of the busiest ports in the world and as such requires some pre arrival formalities and pilotage services for any vessel over GRT300,"

comments Asia Pacific Superyachts Singapore head, Captain Scott Walker.

Scott and his team can easily handle all requests and will ensure your stay is very enjoyable, noting:

"As you can imagine, a port as busy as this also has an extensive choice of shore support facilities and pretty much all major repairs can be completed locally."

### **Koh Samui – May**

Koh Samui is a lovely sand-kissed Island, offering opportunities to enjoy some of Eastern Thailand's legendary hospitality and some very good diving, reports Captain Charlie Dwyer of the 36m *Yanneke Too* – heading up Asia Pacific Superyachts Samui.

Koh Samui is the 'Jewel of the Gulf of Thailand' – filled with natural beauty and many options for anchoring along the coast along with many attractions both on Koh Samui and the surrounding islands. The island offers elephant trekking, snake and monkey shows, temples, waterfalls, Thai cultural dancing and a mountain safari trip. The island is also home to some of the finest restaurants and spas in Thailand.

Of special interest and just 20 NM from Koh Samui, is the Anghong National Marine Park with its spectacular group of 42 uniquely different and exciting islands. A mere 7 NM from Samui is the tropical Island of Koh Phangan, famed for its natural beauty and world-famous 'Full Moon Party'. To the north is Koh Tao, famed for its diving.

Koh Samui is used as a base for discovering the many beautiful islands located in the turquoise seas of the gulf with names like Koh Chang and Koh Samet. From Samui it's possible to sail on to Pattaya and Bangkok - the cultural capital of Thailand. The best months to visit are May through September.

### **Hong Kong – June**

Hong Kong, at the mouth of the Pearl river delta, part of China yet so different, is a busy commercial port with a high rise skyline and one of the most exciting cities in Asia, where east meets west. Though Hong Kong does 'urban' well, surprising to visiting yachts are the beautiful seascapes and the fact that almost 60 per cent of Hong Kong's land mass is still country park.

Hong Kong's 236 islands, studded with beaches, provide unexpected stunning cruising offsetting the fast pace of life in the world's third financial center. Business combined with entertaining on board is normal practice in Hong Kong.

The proximity of museums, fine dining, tourist attractions and shopping plus some world famous international sports events make Hong Kong a unique destination.

The occasional typhoon may occur between June-September; however, Hong Kong waters are mainly protected. Outside the harbor, you can anchor almost anywhere hassle free or dock at Gold Coast Yacht & Country Club where Asia Pacific Superyachts Hong Kong's Bart Kimman and his team can arrange typhoon proof berths for Superyachts and any other services required.

The marine department facilitates guaranteed corruption-free port clearance facilities and it's a free port, making it easy to obtain spare parts. There are excellent shipyard facilities and repairs can be arranged for with an agent. The APS Hong Kong team has a 'can do' attitude to make life for the visiting yacht easy and exciting and most crews love to stay in Hong Kong.

### **The Philippines – July**

Most yachts stay around the brilliant scenery and prime anchorages of the Puerto Galera and northern Mindoro areas. You can make day trips and overnight stays to the white beaches of Mindoro and the Maricaban Islands. There are great bars and restaurants along the commercial side of the island and end the holiday with a sail back to Manila Yacht Club, taking about 15 hours with plenty of beaches to anchor.

### **Borneo – August**

Heading South from the Philippines, you will find the island of Borneo with the best cruising to be found in the state of Sabah", explains Alvin Teh, heading up the Asia Pacific Superyachts Borneo team. Sabah's cruising waters from Labuan to Sipadan offer spectacular and beautiful waters, islands and mainland attractions.

Tropical islands and mainland coastal bays offer extraordinarily diverse mainland beauty which includes the highest mountain in Southeast Asia, Mount Kinabalu; virgin rainforest conservation areas (including the Maliau Basin, known as the 'Lost World'); exotic wildlife and flora and fauna and a myriad of adventure and eco-tourism activities – all accessible as a day or overnight excursion from your yacht.

A stopover in Kota Kinabalu at the Sutera Harbor Marina which will allow for land excursions to the wild interiors of Borneo, diving at Layang (famed for schooling hammerheads) and the jewel of Sabah, Sipadan.

And for true adventure, take a river journey up the famed Kinabatangan River to see rare and endangered species including orangutans, proboscis monkeys and pigmy elephants.

### **Indonesia – September**

As Indonesia spans the equator, she is unique in her diversity and opportunities for year round cruising.

"From November to March, the northern sector is at its best", explain Richard Lofthouse & Captain Jimmy Blee of Asia Pacific Superyachts Indonesia, "From Borneo it is only three to five days steaming or sailing to Bitung in North Sulawesi where you can clear in and take good quality fuel."

From there you have ready access to Bunaken National Park, the world class muck diving of Lembah and deserted islands to the north – all within a fifty mile radius.

Moving East is the untouched Halmahera and the diving at Raja Ampat. Beyond that is the opportunity to discover new tribes in Indonesian Papua and spend time in a place called Fak Fak!"

In November and December a run to the Spice Islands and the beautiful Molluku area is a must – a living history of nutmeg, old forts and unique beauty.



From April to October, the 8th Parallel is ripe for exploring – from Borobudur in Java, Uluwatu in Bali or the dragons of Komodo and Rinja.

Then there's Sumatra and Sulawesi – (two of the biggest islands in the world), Kalimantan (the Indonesian side of Borneo), Sumba ('The land that time forgot') or many other of the 15,000 islands Indonesia has to offer, you will see that the riches available are abundant and the exploration, endless.

Captain Jimmy and Richard have over 20 years experience exploring Indonesia and making even the most remote trip possible.

*For more information or for a more detailed look at each region's cruising options, visit [asia-pacific-superyachts.com](http://asia-pacific-superyachts.com) and click on region/country and view photos, testimonials, itineraries, description and contacts by region agent directly.*

**– Captain N Coombes and  
L Cartlidge**

*Phuket, Thailand*

*16:23 local time (GMT +7)*