Finding paradise amidst the stunning archipelagos of Thailand, Myanmar (Burma) and the India, Andaman Islands, becomes a reality many times over for Superyachts setting forth on an adventurous journey after a stay on the ‘Pearl of the Orient’, Phuket.

Phuket, Thailand is the perfect introduction to an owners’ Asian cruise, awarding incredible scenic adventures through the island’s vastly unexplored South East Asian waters, waters that contain hundreds of uninhabited islands and pristine beaches, an amazing display of colourful marine life and timeless beauty. Phuket is a lush island steeped in an exotic culture and offers some extraordinary cruising options. Making the destination even more attractive are the Thai people, who have to be among the friendliest on the planet, that offer the world’s most popular cuisine from road stalls to 5-star dining.

Phuket is a sailor’s dream, recognised worldwide as a major destination for yachts visiting the Indian Ocean and used as a base for the yachting season (November to April) and a springboard to waterways throughout Thailand, Myanmar and the Andamans. The island enjoys an average ocean temperature of 28 to 32°C and is favoured throughout most of the year by calm sea conditions.

‘Superyachts of various sizes have been coming to Phuket for many years, earning its moniker, the Superyacht Hub of South East Asia’, explains Gordon Fernandes, of Asia Pacific Superyachts (APS) Phuket. ‘In the early days marina facilities were limited but now the island boasts three marinas for superyachts to berth with a fourth under construction and more planned as the island develops its plan to cater to more high net worth individuals. Most owners and crew have loved their stay in Phuket with many becoming owners of a condo, holiday home or Villa!’

Many Superyachts are also drawn to the island to join in the fun and festivities of the elite annual Asia Superyacht Rendezvous held annually in Phuket on December 16–18.

Remarking on Phuket’s growing popularity of Superyacht visitors to Phuket, Gordon reports: ‘Generally crew and owners
love Phuket and the surrounding area and we need to keep this image going. All the captains and crews talk to each other... it’s a very word of mouth industry that we work with. We need to keep them entertained and keep the “Thai” hospitality going. This is the land of smiles and we need to make sure that this comes across to visiting crews and owners. There are thousands of large yachts in Europe where there is a shortage of suitable berths, another reason to bring these yachts over to Asia for the winter.’

Nearby islands and cruising grounds are ranked among the best in the world with access throughout the year with fantastic sailing grounds off the protected waters of Phuket’s east coast. An hour’s boat ride from Phuket is the location for one of the most unique and attractive clusters of islands in the world, Mu Koh Phi Phi.

An idyllic island retreat, the collective name for this small archipelago in the Krabi Province is the ‘Jewel of the Andaman Sea’. The six islands in Mu Koh Phi Phi – Nopparat Thara National Park include Phi Phi Don, Bamboo Island, Yung Island, Bida Nok, Bida Nai and Phi Phi Ley. Only Phi Phi Don is inhabited, all others are undeveloped and protected by their Thailand National Park status.

The impressive Phang Nga and Krabi provinces form Phang Nga Bay feature over 100 islands that consist of low sloping mountains to steep sea outcrops. Ao Chalong at the south end of Phuket is the usual port of entry into this region and the location for the main port control centre. The provinces are famed for there pristine beaches which are often mentioned as being amongst the most beautiful areas in the world with excellent snorkelling and diving. A visit to a rock outcrop 22 km from Phuket, Shark Point, awards the adventurous with an amazing underwater display of colourful marine life, including docile leopard sharks and seasonal whale sharks.

The island of Phi Phi Ley was featured in the Hollywood blockbuster movie ‘The Beach’, with Maya Bay as the ultimate tropical island showing a bay of aquamarine water surrounded by towering limestone cliffs harbouring an arching white sand beach. Another movie reference can be found at Koh Tapu, shown as the James Bond Island featured in ‘The Man with the Golden Gun’.
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The Similan Archipelago in Thailand’s Andaman Sea off the coast of, and a part of, the Phang Nga Province is comprised of nine islands, mostly uninhabited with lovely pristine white sand beaches. Rated one of the ‘top ten global dive destinations’, the Similans are a paradise for diving and snorkelling and are around four hours sailing distance from Patong.

Journeying on to the southern province of Myanmar and the border town of Kawthaung, which is literally the gateway to the vast and beautiful Mergui Archipelago that includes an incredible 800 tropical islands and an amazing diversity of marine life, wild life and plant life. This remote archipelago has a rich history of maritime trade and mysticism but was closed to foreign visitors for about 50 years (until late 1996). Its virtual isolation provided protection from modern developments, leaving the archipelago pristine and untouched. The area now offers an incredible mix of cruising, exploring, diving and hiking options and cruising into Myanmar is like entering an ancient world, according to one Captain who shared some of his journey with us:

“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 where our friends at APS 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 this gentleman was considered an invasion, but realistically he became a huge helping hand. These officials can be a great source of knowledge and insight into their country, they answer the numerous check-up calls from the navy, smooth things over
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with the port authorities and translate with the locals. APS should be able to organise a good official for you if you give them good notice as we did.

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 and water. They are nomadic and live a simple life sustained by the 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. 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!

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. We found the country to be wholly exciting and interesting and were all delighted to discover that Burma still resides in Myanmar. We
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... LEAVE THE RISK TO US.
were captivated throughout by a huge variety of experiences and all aboard are already dreaming of another opportunity to continue exploring this intriguing country.

Leaving Myanmar and before moving on to the Andaman and Nicobar islands, a return to Phuket for a land break and re-provisioning is recommended. Whilst preparing in Phuket, APS Andamans in Port Blair come highly recommended in providing the necessary paperwork and arrangements for a custom itinerary and smooth cruising to special areas and attractions in the Andaman and Nicobar islands of India.

The Andaman and Nicobar archipelagos are located east in the Bay of Bengal and are home to some of the oldest tribes in this part of the world. At this time the Nicobar Islands and tribal contact is off limits as most of the tribes are on the verge of extinction. However, yachts will find some of the most enticing of unexplored waters in the Bay of Bengal, with deep seas and hundreds of hidden bays teeming with marine life. The best cruising months for the Andaman Islands is again November to April.

The islands have prolific aquatic life with some of the best diving and fishing to be found in the world. Powder white beaches, coral reefs, lush green rain forests and abundant bird life create this remote island paradise of 572 islands lying 420 miles northwest of Phuket and 115 miles from Cape Negrais in Myanmar. Only 36 islands are inhabited in this undisturbed cruising destination formed by a submarine mountain range, separating the Bay of Bengal from the Andaman Sea. The islands have a tropical climate similar to that of Phuket with medium to heavy rain during the southwest monsoon from May to mid-December.

A sea journey through these archipelagos of Thailand, Myanmar and India are among the most fantastic adventure voyages in the world and filled with uninhabited and stunning islands waiting to be explored.

Phuket’s Gordon Fernandes shares his take on the growing number of Superyachts to Asia: ‘The comments I get from most Captains is…they’ve done the Caribbean for the past 15 years and they want to find a new and exciting cruising ground. Asia has this in abundance! The Caribbean has some fantastic cruising areas but the difference is that there will be 15 yachts in the same anchorage; in Asia there are many beautiful beaches where the yacht can be anchored with no other boats nearby. Couple this with some of the most beautiful adventure cruising in the world and the fact that Asian people are generally more hospitable – and visitors know they will have a fantastic holiday!’

Thailand, Myanmar and the Andaman Islands Archipelagos are truly a dream journey for a Superyacht!

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