

SET SAIL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. WHETHER IT'S CRUISING FOR A DAY OFF THE COAST OR MOTORING ACROSS THE REGION IN A SUPERYACHT, A PRIVATE CHARTER PUTS YOU IN CONTROL—AND THAT'S THE POINT. **BY STEVE MOLLMAN**

Exploring Phang Nga Bay, off Phuket, on an Omni Marine yacht.



NOT EVERYONE CAN afford a yacht, and the hassles of ownership scare away some who can. But it's getting easier to charter in the region, whether you're ready to spend US\$500 or—if your pockets go deeper than ours—US\$500,000 (hint: team up with friends and split the cost). Among the factors in your favor: more yacht owners, disenchanted with overcrowding in the Caribbean and Mediterranean, are docking and renting out their vessels in Southeast Asia. What's more, the region is blessed with some of the most—the most, many contend—stunning cruising areas in the world, from the turquoise seas and limestone karsts of the Andaman to the sand-fringed monsoon forests of Saleh Bay, in Indonesia.

Keep in mind that the possibilities are nearly endless, with the craft, duration, destination and often even the broker—a single yacht can deal with many—all up to you. Read on for some luxury chartering possibilities, all with captain and crew included (and in some cases optional). »



MARINE CHIC From top: Ready to dine on the *Andara*; a stateroom on the boat; exploring the waters off Phuket.



■ SINGAPORE

The Lion City is the perfect place to stretch your sea legs. Not only is a yacht-filled marina never far away, but it doesn't take long to reach destinations such as Malaysia's Pulau Tioman or Indonesia's Riau Islands, which offer pristine beaches and great diving. But what's especially fun about chartering in Singapore is how quick and convenient it can be. For some boats, you can even buy slots via PayPal—take the 11.6-meter **Jobel** (*ONE15 Luxury Yachting*; 65/6274-0175; one15luxuryyachting.com; S\$2,688 for a six-hour weekday slot, 10 guests maximum), docked at Sentosa Island's **ONE°15 Marina Club**, just a quick cab ride from downtown.

The fully air-conditioned motorboat has two cabins with double beds, and an entertainment system with a 19-inch LCD TV, DVD player and interior speakers that stream music to the outdoor deck. Dining is alfresco, and while you can bring your own food and wine *sans* corkage, you can also order upscale fare in advance—think sautéed Alaskan king crab with linguine and chili—from the marina's Latitude Bistro. A typical jaunt heads first to the Southern Islands, where guests can swim, fish or explore on land, and then cruises past city-skyline highlights like the Singapore Flyer and Marina Bay Sands—the scene is especially beautiful at dusk, as the buildings light up and the sun fades away.

■ THAILAND

Just off Thailand's west coast in the Andaman Sea, Phuket has a profusion of marinas and luxury villas matched by a dizzying array of chartering options. Where to begin? For starters, check out an overnight cruise on the **Andara** (66-76/338-777; andarayachts.com; US\$9,000 from 3 p.m. to 11 a.m.; eight guests maximum), a 28-meter Italian yacht you'll find at the **Yacht Haven Marina** on the island's north side. The four-cabin boat exudes style, from the spacious earth-toned main lounge to the chic open-air flybridge, with oversize wooden tables and wide cushioned recliners for sipping cocktails. The comfy seating extends to the front exterior, where about the only thing between you and water is the wind and a bit of sea spray.

Heading out into Phang Nga Bay, one of the world's most beautiful cruising areas, you'll glide past giant limestone formations that rise from the calm waters like surreal, monumental artworks. But your main destination might be even better. Turning northwest, you'll find the Similan Islands, with sugar-sand beaches, dazzlingly clear water and world-class diving sites. The underwater sightseeing takes in massive schools of colorful tropical fish and vast stretches of even more colorful soft coral—don't miss Christmas Point, on Koh Bangru, where divers can swim through a series of dramatic archways. Non-divers can head to Koh Miang, home to the Similan Marine National Park office, for superb snorkeling just off the beach. »

COURTESY OF ANDARA YACHTS (3)

SEA BREEZE From top: On board the *Jojo*; the boat sets anchor; the Andaman Islands offer pristine diving and snorkeling.



■ MALAYSIA

The Langkawi Archipelago, a sprinkling of about a hundred islands in the Andaman Sea, has stunning bays and beaches as well as sublime luxury resorts, such as the waterfront Casa del Mar and the rainforest-nestled The Andaman, both on Langkawi island. Take it all in from the *Jojo*, a 25-meter motor yacht with alfresco dining and an upper deck offering 360-degree views. Indoors, the master cabin has a walk-in wardrobe and Jacuzzi, while the saloon includes a 42-inch TV complete with karaoke system. (Don't worry about waking the neighbors—there are none.)

Simpson Marine (60-4/966-8188; simpsonmarine.com; RM38,000 per night, eight guests maximum) offers overnight cruises on the charter, starting at Langkawi's **Telaga Harbour Marina**. Graced with a jet ski, a dinghy, fishing equipment and snorkeling gear, you'll make the most of the area's stunning natural attractions: stop by the Kilim River to explore lush mangroves, emerald lagoons and feed eagles; splash around on Pulau Beras Basah, an undeveloped island with crystalline waters and secluded beaches; and discover the forest-covered Pulau Dayang Bunting, rich in wildlife and believed by locals to bestow fertility upon visitors—the hills behind a lake at its center take the shape of a pregnant woman lying on her back.

■ INDIA

Looking at a map, you might guess the remote Andaman Islands belong to Burma or Thailand. Try India. Many people like to access them from Phuket, a trip of about two days by motor yacht, with some superb big-fish diving along the way. This being India, there is some bureaucratic hassle—though that's for your broker to contend with, so relax. Just bear in mind that permits must be arranged well in advance, and you need to leave the way you entered the islands, so don't plan on yachting there and then flying out.

Cruising here is not for the inexperienced or, for that matter, the impecunious. But you don't need a superyacht. Consider the 16-meter *Riviera 47* (66-86/2830-209; omnitrips.com; Bt130,000 per day, four guests maximum), offered out of Phuket through broker **Omni Marine**. Ideal for two couples, the charter has two cozy staterooms and an intimate main lounge, where guests can snuggle up on the sofa or take meals at the curved dining table. Up on the flybridge, an airy outdoor deck gives unobstructed views and, once this powerful boat gets going, an exhilarating sense of speed and freedom. Yet the vessel also boasts an energy-efficient design, so engine noise is minimized.

Fishing, diving and snorkeling gear are all on board, along with a smaller boat for accessing deserted shores—some local tribes remain almost untouched by the modern world. On the north coast of Havelock Island you can swim with an elephant. Barren Island has superb fishing and »

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF SIMPSON MARINE (2); COURTESY OF OMNI MARINE



OCEAN ADVENTURES Above: The *KLM Atasita*, inspired by Indonesia's *pinisi* schooners; the boat's interior. Inset from top: The *Ligaya*; a sundeck on the *Moecca*; the superyacht's master stateroom.

diving and is India's only active volcano. Pods of dolphins are a frequent occurrence off Long Island. And in the capital city, Port Blair, on the east coast of South Andaman Island, don't miss the prison where Indian freedom fighters were held during colonial times.

■ **INDONESIA**

Italian motor yachts with chic leather sofas? State-of-the-art marinas? While these have yet to arrive in Indonesia, the archipelago's stunning cruising waters, especially east of Bali, and rich cultural diversity are within reach thanks to some unusual yet delightful charter options.

Try the *KLM Atasita*, a 38-meter double-masted sailing schooner that provides top-notch comfort and style—and is built locally. The design inspiration comes from the *pinisi* schooners that powered the spice trade centuries ago and still ply the waters today. On board are five spacious air-conditioned cabins with big picture windows, a bar with a Russian marine clock, diving equipment and a main deck that's almost as big as a badminton court.

The *Atasita* is chartered by Jakarta-based outfit **SongLine Cruises** (62-21/787-5021; songlinecruises.com; US\$4,000 per day, 10 guests maximum), whose sister company SongLine Yachts built the yacht in 2007. Try a seven-night cruise starting from **Serangan Island**, accessible by road bridge off Bali's southeast coast, and head to Komodo National Park, where you can disembark and wander amid the namesake lizards in their natural habitat. Stops along the way include the up-and-coming Gili Islands, with their blindingly white beaches, and excellent diving and snorkeling, and, at the mouth of Saleh Bay, off Sumbawa, the still-under-the-radar Moyo Island—the setting for the luxurious Amanwana resort—blessed with a monsoon forest and a three-tiered waterfall. ✦

SUPERYACHT SPOTLIGHT

Loaded with cash? Commute in a helicopter? Then consider these superyacht charters

- Explore the Andaman Islands from Phuket on the spacious 38-meter *Ligaya* (Omni Marine; 66-86/2830-209; omnitrips.com; €95,000 per week, 10 guests maximum, one-week minimum), which has five plush staterooms—including a master suite with king-size bed—satin-stained mahogany paneling, marble-floored en-suite bathrooms, a stylish wine rack and, naturally, a Jacuzzi. This month and next she'll be based in the Maldives.
- The stately 45 meter *Moecca* (Simpson Marine; 65/6274-3359; simpsonmarine.com; US\$195,000 per week, 12 guests maximum, one-week minimum) is actually a giant water-jet-propelled catamaran; nearly all the interiors are above water level, guaranteeing great views. Perks include spacious cabins, saloons and decks—think plush recliners for sipping cocktails and white-umbrella-shaded outdoor tables—a helideck (just in case), spa and massage treatments, gourmet cuisine, high-end scuba gear (including spear guns), two Yamaha Waverunners, kayaks, kneeboards, windsurfing gear and a swirly tub in the master bathroom, complete with waterproof head-cushion.



COURTESY OF SONGLINE CRUISES (2); INSET FROM TOP: COURTESY OF OMNI MARINE; COURTESY OF SIMPSON MARINE (2)