





# LUXURY YACHTING TAKES OFF

How luxury yachting is redefining not only Phuket's tourism landscape but also the unique lifestyles and experiences that the island offers

by Percy Roxas

**W**hen Gulu Lalvani, chairman of **Royal Phuket Marina (RPM)** in Phuket received the Luxury Yachting in Thailand award for RPM last February, he said, "I believe that Phuket and Thailand have many of the best marinas in the region and is very well positioned to indeed become the regional marina hub." He couldn't have been more right.

Indeed Thailand and Phuket especially – thanks to its beautiful sailing grounds and marine facilities -- ranks high in the status of the leading marine lifestyle and tourism in the region. With five big international regattas – including the annual **Phuket King's Cup Regatta** in December and **Phuket Raceweek** in July that draw thousands of sailors and tourists from around the world, the island is veritable regatta hub; a top favorite of many sailors from many parts of the world.

But it's not only the high profile regattas that give Phuket's marine tourism a boost. Silently but surely, luxury yachting is redefining not only Phuket's tourism landscape but also the unique lifestyles and experiences that the island offers.

Today, luxury yachting and its benefits can be enjoyed by more people than ever – from those who dream of owning a yacht to tourists who just want to enjoy the appurtenant pleasure of sailing into the sunset over the Andaman Sea either by programmed tours or private charters. But while they may be a bit more accessible, they are certainly not meant for those with shoestring budget.

Anyway, several options are available for travelers to enjoy luxury yachting. One is to avail of the yachting services offered by their respective hotels, such as **Sofitel Phokeethra Krabi** or **Cape Panwa Phuket**, both of which has regular services geared for those into pleasure yachting. Another is to arrange for (rent) the services of luxury yachting cruise operators, which offers a range of



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programs to suit all kinds of yacht fun fanatics.

One of our new favorites in this regard is the **Hype Luxury Boat Club**. Hype offers three options: Morning, Day, and Night – at varying prices (per person or per charter and depending on the season). For example, if you want to book a private charter during the high season (Nov. 15-April 15) price starts at THB 65,000 for a group of less than 30. From December to January (peak season), a charter can cost you some THB 360,000 or up per charter.

But their website also shows that you can book a Hype Experience for just THB 2,900 per person or VIP Hype Experience for THB 3,900 per person. Other luxury yacht operations probably charge the same range more or less.

Hype Luxury Boat Club departs from **Yacht Haven Phuket Marina** during low season and Patong during the high season. There are several marinas now open for these kind of experiences in Phuket, and travelers can find information of the trips and tours available, including price and all, at their hotel's tour counter. You can also contact your preferred Yacht Charter Broker to help you plan a perfect yachting vacation itinerary, combining your party's needs with recommendations about the best time to visit each area.

And the superyachts are coming to town. One of the biggest news recently was that from **Kata Rocks**, which was reported to be launching its very own 'Superyacht Rendezvous' in December. Sponsored by Infinite Luxury, the development and management brand behind Kata Rocks, the '**Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous**' (KRSR) will welcome

sailing and motor yachts over 24 meters in length along with selected industry partners.

Set for Dec. 10-12, the inaugural **Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous 2016** will be an entertaining event designed with superyacht owners in mind. There will be opportunities for owners to meet other owners in the privacy of an exclusive dinner and for yachts wishing to charter to get excellent media coverage, and to meet potential clients.

Kata Rocks has hosted similar superyacht rendezvous events over the past few years and is now launching its own spectacular rendezvous. By invitation only, it is designed to bring like-minded people together - for Kata Rock villa owners to mix with superyacht owners in a relaxed social environment.

Events like the "Superyacht Rendezvous" highlights Phuket's growing appeal not only for pleasure yachting but also for yacht buying. Indeed, since the Thai government abolished the luxury tax system for boats in 2004, "buying a boat in Thailand has become an attractive proposition especially for owners wanting to spend extended periods in the kingdom's cerulean waters," to quote Princess Yachts SEA, Phuket (Princess Yachts SEA runs an advice column in Phuket News on buying, owning, maintaining, and making the most of a private yacht in Thailand).

Thus the huge success of boat and yacht shows (such as the "Thailand Yacht Show") not only in Phuket but also in other major tourist destinations like Pattaya.

"Owning a boat is the ultimate way to explore the stunning marine landscapes for which Thailand is globally famous, and since the abolition of the luxury tax, a standard 7 percent VAT is the only financial burden above the price of the vessel. In fact, continues **Princess Yacht SEA**, those who choose to register their boat under a foreign flag can avoid paying any purchase taxes at all."

State support has augured well for the marine industry indeed and since Phuket was announced as one of Asia's major yachting and marina

destinations, the government has done more than just revoke the import tax. It has also done much to encourage investors and builders of marinas and related infrastructure and properties to come.

Thus, Thailand now has companies like **MGC (Asia)** Thailand's sole distributor of yachts from Azimut-Benetti Group, one of Italy's leading yacht producers. The company expects to sell three to four middle-sized yachts a year in Thailand.

MGC (Asia) does not only sell yachts to Thai high-end customers but also offers full after-sale service package, in which yacht owners pay 10 percent of the yacht price per year, according to a *Bangkok Post* report.

While it is difficult to get the exact figures yet for the growing luxury yachting sector, there is obviously a market and demand for it. With continuing government support for it, luxury yachting should become much more popular among upscale Thais in the near future – and by extension, to incoming high-end travelers too! **LE**

## TRAVEL TIPS

Buses leave daily for Phuket from Bangkok's Southern Terminal Station. Overnight buses are the most popular choice since they are comfortable. Journey takes approximately 12-14 hours. More info: 02 435 1199, 02 435 1200, or visit [www.transport.co.th](http://www.transport.co.th). There are also buses leaving from Khaosarn Road.

You can also drive your way to the total distance of 862km (approximately 12 hours) or take train at Hua Lamphong Train Station, get off at Surat Thani and take a bus to Phuket. d (Hua Lamphong Train Station) at 1690, 02 223-7010.

But the most convenient is flying, which takes approximately one hour (unless the flight is delayed. Several domestic flights operate daily from Bangkok to Phuket, including Thai Airways ([www.thaiairways.com](http://www.thaiairways.com)), Bangkok Airways ([www.bangkokair.com](http://www.bangkokair.com)) and Nok Air ([www.nokair.com](http://www.nokair.com)).