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LUXURY TRAVEL TRENDS | NEW YEAR WELLNESS | FLYING IN STYLE

TRAVEL EDITION

The PHUKET *effect*

Tempus visits the invite-only Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous to discover why Phuket is the new superyachting hotspot

Words: Chantal Borciani

With hundreds of ink-drop islands, world-class diving sites and kaleidoscopic marine national parks within easy cruising reach, Phuket is a sailing paradise. With miles of emerald waters and a burgeoning infrastructure, the island is tipped to become Asia's prime superyacht destination but it is events such as the Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous that are placing Phuket firmly in the superyacht spotlight.

Phuket rocks

The Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous was held in December with superyacht builders Feadship, Royal Huisman and Burgess all on the bill. Hosted at the luxury resort Kata Rocks, the invitation-only event brings together the most prestigious superyacht brands with industry figures and high-net-worth individuals, representative of the high-end yachting potential in Asia.

Richard Pope, CEO of Infinite Luxury (the company behind Kata Rocks and the rendezvous), explained: "What we are doing with this event is promoting the region and trying to get the right clientele to come and experience Phuket. The yachting world has been going from the Med to the Caribbean for years now but superyacht owners increasingly want to explore new territories. We want them to turn left and come to Asia because Thailand is truly a world-class cruising ground."

The impressive fleet for the event included the 70m Feadship Lady Christine and the 50.9m Northern Sun, represented by Burgess. During the exclusive three-day rendezvous, guests were invited on board the fleet of superyachts to watch the King's Cup Regatta and cruise up the beautiful coast of Phuket. Itinerary highlights included the opening cocktail party, a host of private dinners and the Kata Rocks Charter Season Opening Party. "The Caribbean has had the St Barth's Bucket for more than 20 years and that's the idea here, to create something similar," added Pope.

Peter Mahony, general manager of Benetti Asia, has seen the growth in interest in the region: "The value of this type of event and others in Phuket is that they showcase the lifestyle



The 50.9m Northern Sun by Burgess Yachts was one of the clear highlights of the show



and everything Phuket has to offer and increases the appetite for longer-range luxury yachts in the region.”

Tiah Hwee, business development manager for Burgess Asia, said the company is keen to promote region as a whole. “There’s so much to explore, with great diving, a lot of culture in Thailand, great weather, good food and friendly people,” she added.

Many agree that what sets Phuket apart for future development and superyacht growth is its relatively good infrastructure.

Lies Sol, charter manager and broker for Northrop & Johnson in Phuket, said: “In Hong Kong there is a lot of wealth but marinas are full and it can be difficult to find a berth. Phuket is well connected and has an expanding marina network so this will really help the island become significantly more popular for yacht owners.”

Sol currently has Thai and foreign flagged yachts on her portfolio ranging from 65ft to 140ft with another six potentially coming aboard in 2018 and has seen a growing demand for local Phuket charters as well as international charters in south-east Asia.

And the brands also continue to arrive – Contest Yachts, a leader in custom-built sailboats, chose the Superyacht Rendezvous to launch its brand in Asia.

Chic retreats

Along with incredible cruising grounds – Phang Nya Bay boasts a cluster of over 70 islands to explore while the stunning Similan Islands are relatively untouched and lie to the north in the Andaman Sea – the Phuket on-shore scene is also shifting. Luxury property portfolios such as Kata Rocks, a cool, contemporary oceanfront resort comprising 34 villas on the south of the island, appeal to a discerning, international clientele with all but two units quickly snapped up for sale. Around 80% of the stylish villas are offered to the rental market when not in use by owners and have proved incredibly popular.

Michael Nurbathian, director of marketing for Infinite Luxury, believes the last ten years have been pivotal for Phuket. “Look at what happened with Ibiza. Ibiza was once known for hedonism and partying and then become the byword in Med luxury,” he said. “The combination of luxury hotels and properties and yachts made Ibiza a high-end option. The same could happen with Phuket.”

If Phuket is to really boom, one issue that will need to be resolved is the tax currently required to be paid by foreign-flagged yachts. When this law is relaxed, there is expected to be a big influx of superyachts from areas including the Med, providing the last piece of the puzzle for Phuket’s superyacht hub prowess.

With a maturing superyacht infrastructure, signs for Phuket are encouraging. “When you get back to basics people come to Thailand for amazing beaches, incredible food, first-class spas and clear blue seas – all things Phuket has in droves,” concluded Pope. “After all boating is a lifestyle and there is no better place to enjoy Phuket than from the water.”

katarockssuperyachtrendezvous.com