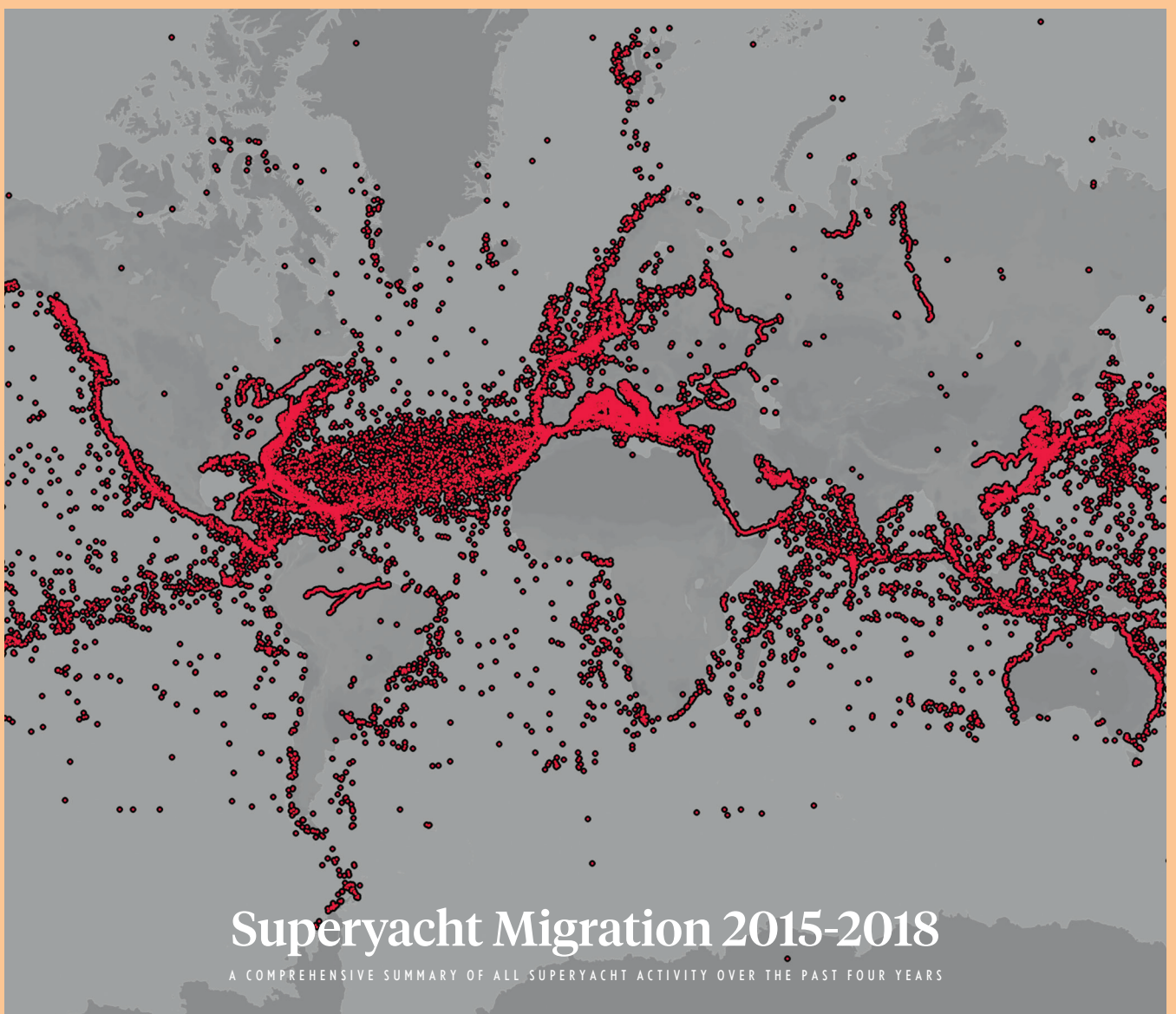


The Superyacht Migration Report

A REPORT WORTH READING

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06/2019



The beach



In light of its burgeoning tourism industry, we consider the growth of Thailand and its neighbouring countries as a superyacht destination.

BY RORY JACKSON

“Start in Thailand, do four or five days around Phuket and then spend four or five days in Myanmar; it doesn’t get any better,” advises Adam Frost, founder and managing director of Seal Superyachts. So as Thailand is increasingly mentioned in the same breath as some of the world’s most established superyacht destinations, just what are the myriad benefits of south-east Asia?

“Phuket is south-east Asia’s premier yachting hub. There is far more going on in Thailand than the likes of Singapore,” adds Frost. “When superyachts visit this area of the world, they come to Phuket. We are getting more superyachts coming every year and, importantly, we are increasingly seeing repeat clients [who] are coming to south-east Asia for the third or fourth time. The region is great for owners, charter guests and crew alike.”

When one considers Thailand as a destination, the first things that usually spring to mind are harem-pant-clad twentysomethings, full-moon parties and Danny Boyle’s *The Beach*. While none of these are typically what one would associate with luxury, the influx of tourists to Thailand over the past 15 years has had an important impact on the development of the country’s offering as a luxury alternative to the tried and tested superyacht hubs of the Mediterranean and Caribbean.

“Over the past 10 to 15 years, Thailand has become more popular with tourists,” explains Frost. “While this means that the hidden gems are no longer so hidden, given that they are now splashed all over TripAdvisor and easily accessible by speedboat, the increase in tourism has had a positive impact on the region as a whole. Off the back of this rise in tourism, the five-star and luxury resorts have arrived, as well as the clubs, restaurants, beach bars and so on. When people come to Thailand they want to experience the food and the music and everything in between. If owners and guests want to go ashore, Thailand

now has everything they could possibly want.”

Although some of the gems may no longer be so hidden, the one thing that Thailand certainly does not lack is cruising grounds, and with abundant natural beauty and 1,430 islands, there is plenty of Thailand to go around.

“The main difference between somewhere like Thailand and the Mediterranean or Caribbean is that it is significantly quieter; you are often the only yacht in a particular location,” says Robert Smith, captain of 54m *Talisman Maiton*. “If you exported these locations to the Mediterranean they would immediately become yachting hotspots. When you are here, even if you encounter another yacht, you can usually just nip around the corner and find somewhere private. Another big difference is that the seas are typically calmer and the winds are more predictable. Plus, because there are so many islands, if the wind is coming from the east you can just cruise around the corner or visit another island with a westerly bay.”

And Frost adds, “If you want to be more exclusive, then the best advice would be to visit one of Thailand’s neighbouring countries. Start in Thailand and then travel to either Langkawi, Malaysia or Myanmar. While Myanmar was closed off from the world for a number of years, I am now able to get a permit pushed through to visit Myanmar in a superyacht in less than 10 days, start to finish. There is an additional expense because you have to pay the government fees, but once you are there it is 800 islands that are just completely untouched. It has everything a charter guest could possibly want from a destination.”

In recent years, much has been made about the availability of Thai charter licences. The problem is that the actual licence is already available from the harbour department but the revenue department will not accept the legality of the licence until certain laws within its body are amended. As a result, it is still officially illegal to operate a charter that solely cruises in Thailand.

“The Thai charter licence has been spoken about a great deal, but really people are making a lot of noise about something that is relatively unimportant to potential charter guests,” says Frost. “The simple solution is that you have to visit more than one country which, realistically, is the preferable way to

operate a charter. Start in Thailand, do four or five days around Phuket and then spend four or five days in Myanmar; it doesn’t get any better!”

However, Jean-Marc Pouillet, chairman of Burgess Asia, says, “There does need to be a change in domestic regulations. There is still antiquated charter regulation against foreign-flagged vessels which requires yachts to leave Thai waters at the end of the charter. While this doesn’t necessarily affect all charters, it does mean that, typically, charters have to be at least a week long.

“Once the regulations get sorted out, they can look at changing the charter model to encourage a shorter charter period, which would be of great benefit to the domestic market given that Asian clients are less likely to take long holidays. The government is keen to update but taxation remains a sticking point.”

Typically, when owners and guests consider chartering or cruising in a destination that is a little off the beaten track, one of the common concerns is about the quality of provisioning and the technical support. Such worries may have been valid a few of years ago, but thanks to Thailand’s burgeoning luxury tourism industry, high-quality provisions – even rare wines – are eminently attainable.

“In terms of provisioning, Thailand is the perfect place to be. There is absolutely everything you could want or need for a trip, with no real issues,” adds Smith. “The quality of the fresh fish, meat and vegetables is incredible and they are all typically available locally or through superyacht markets. Personally, on board *Talisman Maiton*, we prefer to source our food through the local markets; all the goods are pretty much straight from the tree or the ocean. Additionally, the expertise for specialist services out here is brilliant. Most technical repairs present no problem.”

Another common preconception is that Thailand and surrounding nations are lacking in superyacht infrastructure. Compared to the Mediterranean, for example, it’s undeniable there are significantly fewer marinas for superyachts, but given the calmness of the ocean and the wealth of anchorages and islands, the region does not really require many marinas.

“More marinas are not needed. As more superyachts visit the region, the marinas will grow organically,” says



54m M/Y Talisman Maiton during the Burgess Billionaires tour of Thailand.

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Pouillet. “The bays are protected from a regulation point of view and all the superyachts that visit prefer to anchor. More jetties would certainly make life more comfortable and it is a low-cost investment. That is the only infrastructure that is really needed.”

As the world’s superyacht hubs continue to become more congested and many of the world’s most beautiful countries become more adept at catering to UHNWIs, places such as Thailand, Malaysia, Langkawi and Burma will become increasingly appealing for both private and charter voyages. With abundant beauty, renowned gastronomic culture and a vibrant nightlife, not to mention a 12-month season, south-east Asia is surely set to continue growing as a superyacht destination. **RJ**