

CRUISING GUIDE & THAI

Offering ageless tranquility and wellness, Thailand is as much loved for its crystal-blue waters as it is for its land and people. While exploring the country's scenic west coast islands by yacht, you can enjoy the best of both

WORDS MIRIAM CAIN

LANTA



Krabi's fairytale limestone formations come to a dramatic climax at Railay Beach



ITINERARY

A - B Phuket to Khao Phing Kan (18nm) • **B - C** Khao Phing Kan to Koh Hong (14nm)
C - D Koh Hong to Phi Phi Islands (16nm) • **D - E** Phi Phi Islands to Lanta Islands (38nm)
E - F Lanta Islands to Batong Group (36nm) • **F - G** Batong Group to Langkawi (20nm)

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Step ashore for wow-factor at the Amanpuri Resort

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Pan-Asian delicacies can be enjoyed at Black Ginger

It may be a cliché but Thailand is famously known as the “Land of Smiles,” and for good reason. The raw beauty, ridiculously clear waters, uninhabited islands, pristine beaches, amazing underwater life and well-protected anchorages give anyone cruising this hauntingly beautiful region of Southeast Asia something to smile about. The “Gateway to Southeast Asia,” the “Reigning maritime jewel of Southeast Asia” and “Land of Plenty” are other well-known clichés but there really is no better place to get a first taste of Asia than Thailand. The westernized feel of places such as Bangkok and Phuket provide a gentle introduction for those new to the region, while the marine paradise that runs around the Andaman Sea coastline is better than any picture postcard. The only question is, in a country that has so much appeal, where should you go?

▲ Phuket

For many of those embarking on a luxury yacht charter, Phuket is probably the most popular place to start. At the northeast end of Phuket, the **Yacht Haven Marina** is the ideal launchpad. Just minutes from Phuket International Airport you can step aboard your yacht and acclimatize to life on board as you explore what is the largest and most heavily developed of the nation’s islands. Avoid the crowds as you steer away from bustling Patong beach, stepping ashore to the less intense and relatively peaceful east coast to discover the fabulous food and exotic nightlife, spirit houses and magical markets. The island boasts a number

of Buddhist temples, the most famous being **Wat Chalong** and **Wat Phra Thong**. Phuket is also home to some of Asia’s finest golf courses. **The Blue Canyon Country Club** offers two championship layouts: the Lakes Course and the Canyon Course, both boasting fantastic views. There are also a number of stylish resort spas on the island where those with weary sea legs can step ashore for pampering treatments. The spa at the **Banyan Tree**, located on the northwest coast, has earned accolades from leading magazines the world over. Alternatively, **Amanpuri** is the place to step ashore for wow-factor wellbeing – it’s almost impossible not to attain an inner glow at this glamorous hideaway retreat.

Tip – Take an endorphin-releasing kickboxing class followed by a relaxing massage at **Amanpuri**.

The cuisine on Phuket is some of the finest in Thailand. Blending Indian, Malaysian and Chinese influences, Pan-Asian delicacies can be found at **Black Ginger**. Designed like a traditional mansion, the setting in the middle of a lagoon is as spectacular as the menu that celebrates the authenticity of the island’s heritage. Sitting on a rocky bluff between Kata and Kata Noi beaches on Phuket’s winding and verdant west coast, the award-winning **Mom Tri’s Restaurant** boasts stunning views over the Andaman Sea. For seasonal tasting menus with a seafood focus, the **Beach House** is located in a secluded setting on Natai Beach. Alternatively, for authentic street food, feast on local specialties from stalls found in Phuket’s Old Town.

Phuket has a reputation for its party scene, and while the island does have a sleazy side, it's easy to avoid this by simply bypassing Patong beach. Instead, head to the south of the island to witness the sunset from the rooftop bar at **Baba Nest**. Suspended in the rocks of the island's Cape Panwa peninsula, the bar's square terrace is surrounded by infinity pools and provides incomparable sunset views over Panwa Bay and all the way to Phang Nga Bay.

Tip – *Make reservations well in advance – Baba Nest is a regular on the “Best Rooftop Bars in the World” lists and can be fully booked up to a month in advance.*

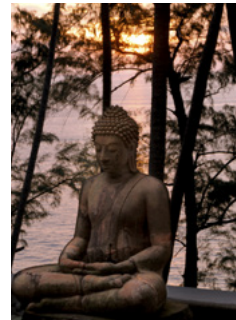
There is a choice of beach clubs on the island, the most popular of these among the superyacht set being **Catch Beach Club**. Occupying a plum spot on Bangtao Beach, Catch attracts a more grown-up crowd than its rivals. The look is Thai serenity combined with St. Tropez chic, with whitewashed decks, sumptuous lounging areas and a large pool that sweeps down onto the sand.

Tip – *Come to Catch Beach club for a long lazy lunch followed by a snooze on the sumptuous loungers before dancing to the latest playlists from guest DJs from around the world while the sun goes down.*

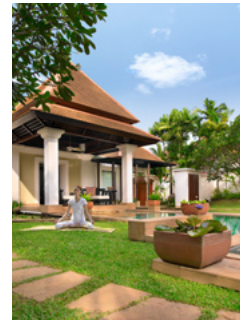
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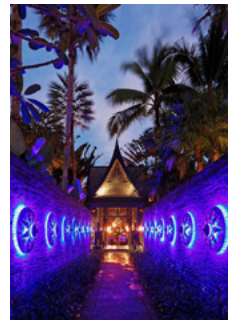
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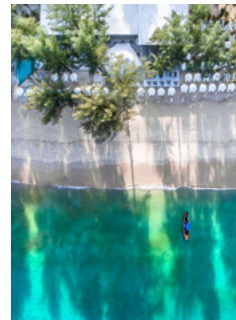
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Amanpuri's kickboxing classes are perfect for releasing tension while their spa is a relaxed haven

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The spa at the Banyan Tree has won many awards for its holistic treatments

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Phuket's Black Ginger restaurant boasts a spectacular setting in the middle of a lagoon

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The Catch Beach Club occupies a plum spot on Phuket's Bangtao Beach

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Enjoy a spectacular sunset from Baba Nest's world-famous rooftop bar



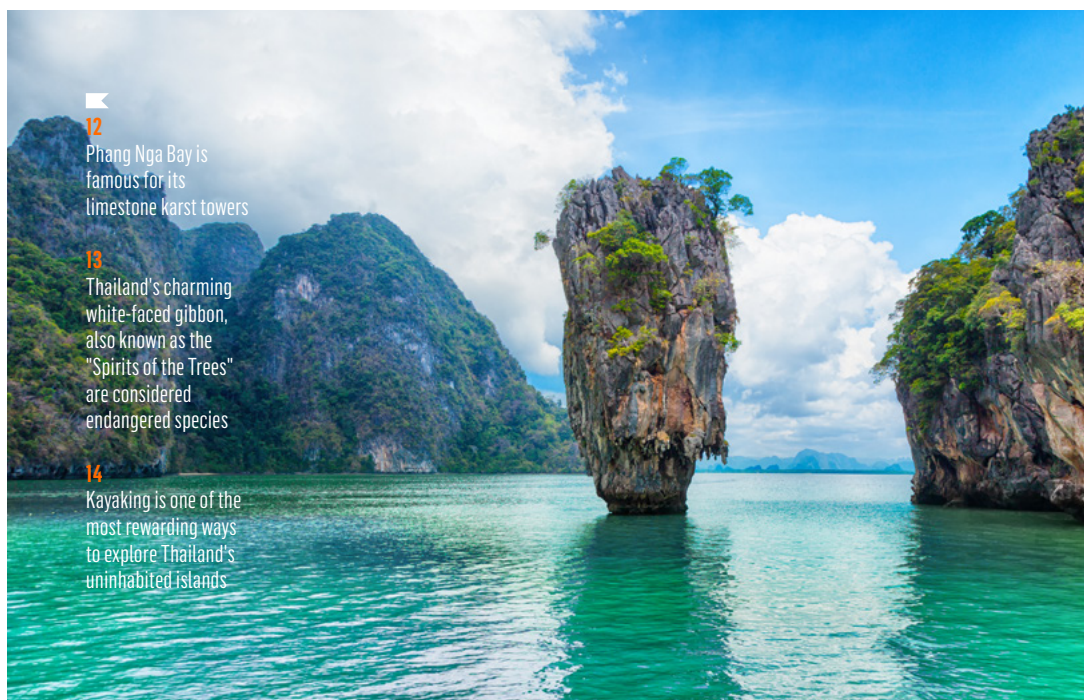
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Cruise through the beautiful Phang Nga Bay (Ao Phang Nga National Park) and witness the sheer limestone karsts that jut vertically out of the emerald-green water



**THE FOUR ISLANDS OF THE KOH HONG GROUP
INCLUDE THE UNINHABITED KOH HONG. HERE YOU WILL
FIND RARE SPECIES OF BIRDS, WHITE-FACED GIBBONS
& LIZARDS LAZING ON THE WHITE SANDY BEACHES**

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12 Phang Nga Bay is famous for its limestone karst towers

13 Thailand's charming white-faced gibbon, also known as the "Spirits of the Trees" are considered endangered species

14 Kayaking is one of the most rewarding ways to explore Thailand's uninhabited islands

Phang Nga Bay

Phuket's **Yacht Haven Marina** is the ideal launch pad for a cruise through the largely uninhabited surrounding islands of Phang Nga Bay. You'll quickly ease into the tranquil pace of life on board, relaxing on deck for the first leg which takes you across to Khao Phing Kan – once the location for the James Bond classic *The Man with the Golden Gun*. The island boasts incredible topography, including steep karst outcrops and ancient "hongs" (the Thai word for rooms). Take a starlit expedition through the famous caves – accessed by narrow tunnels – to the spectacular open-air spaces where you will discover a unique eco system with rare species of flora and fauna.

Tip – Plan your visit for late afternoon, when the crowds have eased and the daytrippers have gone home.

After a peaceful night's anchorage it's just a short cruise south across Phang Nga Bay to the Hong Islands in the Krabi province. Part of the National Marine Park, the four islands of the Koh Hong group include the uninhabited Koh Hong. Here you will find rare species of birds, white-faced gibbons and lizards lazing on the white sandy beaches. On arrival, transfer to a somewhat more modest form of waterborne transport than your superyacht – a kayak. Kayaking is one of the best ways to explore the many uninhabited islands of these waters. Guided by the crew, or venturing out on your own, you can weave between rock formations and glide beneath dramatic cliffs that surround large lagoons.



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SUNDOWNERS RECIPE 4 Knots & Ascots

Ingredients

2 oz Chai Rum
3 oz Thai Coco mix (see below)
0.5 oz Falernum
1/2 oz Fresh lime juice
1-2 Sprigs of Thai basil for garnish

Thai Coco mix (makes 12 oz)
8 oz Thai Coconut Cream
4 oz Simple syrup
1/2 tsp Five Spice powder
5-6 dried Pandanus Leaves

Method

Mix all ingredients in a blender until smooth. Cover and let sit for one hour. Strain with a fine mesh strainer into a separate container and store in refrigerator.

To Serve

1. Pour the blended beverage into a tall glass and garnish with sprigs of Thai basil
3. Add a dash of Five Spice powder on top. (optional)

Credit Brett Hart – Barman & Certified Whiskey Steward
Sweetwater & Saxon, Palm Beach County, FL

Phi Phi Islands

Cruise south to the world-famous Phi Phi Islands, securing a prime spot from which to explore these two charming isles the following day. Phi Phi Don (hilly island) echoes the shape of a lopsided butterfly, half of which is scrub-covered cliff and the other half jungle-clad with coconut groves and palm-fringed beaches. The sandy spit connecting them was originally a peaceful little Muslim fishing village but, despite the growth in tourism, this idyllic corner of the world still retains its remote beauty. Phi Phi Don is also stunning below the waterline, making it one of the finest diving spots in Southeast Asia. Hard coral gardens are a colorful playground for rare and remarkable tropical creatures, and soft corals and dramatic vertical walls make for the most diverse marine environment. Swim and snorkel along the coral reefs, wander up the sand to a beachfront café and enjoy the jungle-like interior with a hike up to Phi Phi Viewpoint.

Lanta Islands

One of the traditional activities for the inhabitants of Lanta Islands is fishing, and most of the longtail boatmen

offer fishing trips. Head out early morning and enjoy your very own “catch of the day” in the evening back onboard. Alternatively, take to the water by kayak and discover the considerable area of mangrove forest between the two Lanta islands of Koh Noi and Koh Yao Yai – home to all sorts of rare species of birds, monkeys, crabs and other wildlife.

Protected as part of **Mu Ko Lanta National Marine Park**, the pristine corals and shallow waters of the twin Koh Rok islands are probably the best snorkeling spots in the south Andaman Sea. Koh Rok Nok is the larger of the two islands and the best spot from which to explore the waters and see the breathtaking numbers of tropical fish and other marine life. Step ashore and stroll along the white sandy beaches of Ao Man Sai, Laem Tong and Sarn Chao and discover foot-long monitor lizards as you go. Separated by an 850-foot channel carpeted with coral, much of which is no more than 15 feet under the surface, the second island, Koh Rok Nai, is mainly rocky with a tiny beach. Cruise to the west of the island for views of the magnificent waterfall and its fresh water tumbling down the sheer cliffs into the sea.

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The Phi Phi Islands offer some of the best diving in Thailand



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16 Batong Group

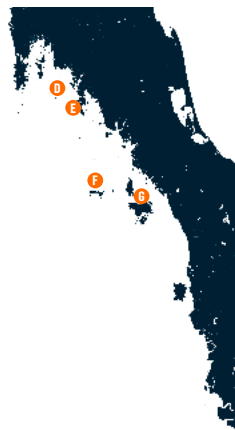
Thailand's southernmost islands, the Batong Group, are not far from Thailand's maritime border with Malaysia. Here, the towering rock formations and crystal waters of **Tarutao National Marine Park** – a 61-island group some 20 miles from the mainland – are still relatively off the radar for most superyacht itineraries. Drop anchor at Ko Adang, its empty shoreline and untamed jungle are a timely reminder of how islands like Phuket once looked before tourism took hold in the 1960s. Like the Lanta group of islands, the Batong Group is still protected by their National Park status and provide untouched vistas and secluded beaches aplenty. Jump in and snorkel through the crystal clear waters teeming with marine life.

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17 Langkawi

Deep in the heart of Southeast Asia, Malaysia and the heavenly islands of the Langkawi archipelago entice the discerning traveler to experience a fusion of Chinese, Indian and native cultures. Langkawi itself is actually a group of 99 islands showcasing a geological and ecological purity that simply cannot be found on Malaysia's mainland. The waters around Langkawi are shallow and warm, but in terms of sea life, unfortunately, they suffer by comparison with the snorkeling and diving opportunities that the Thai islands have offered previously. Instead, step ashore and enjoy the luxury island resort of Langkawi, renowned for its opulent hotels, superb spas and fantastic cuisine (Langkawi cultivates its own island variation of Malay cooking). There are no high-rise developments in Langkawi and much of the main island is still given over to traditional buildings. **The Four Seasons Resort**, for example, is a low spread of traditionally built Malay-style houses and is where you will find the resort's **Geo Spa**. Step ashore for an Ayurveda treatment focusing on creating an "elemental balance" and prepare yourself for your transition back to 21st century life. If you are not quite ready to contemplate city life, the private island of **Pangkor Laut Resort** offers unadulterated indulgence. Spend a few nights ashore relaxing at the hotel's **Spa Village** and gather your strength for a return to the real world. ●



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Discover the limestone karst island at Talo Wao Bay

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Step ashore to the Four Seasons Langkawi