

*Review by Chantel Shafie*

# ALL ABOARD!



Swaying in a hammock, five miles out to sea, perched precariously over the pristine aqua waters of the Andaman Sea, I watch a lone Kingfisher rocket into the ocean, for its daily catch. The hum of a dragonfly resonates beside me, in harmony with the lapping waves. The snarl of zodiac engine disrupts the tranquility, followed by another; I ignore it, focusing on the rock of the boat. “Oi! Giv ‘us a smile Luv! Over ‘ere!” The Zodiac, with another in tow, is full of paparazzi, snapping away, zipping around the boat, vying to get the best shot. “Isn’t she a beauty?” I hear a voice behind a flash. “Never seen anything like it,” says another, “Out of this world”. Feeling exceptionally self-conscious, I realize it isn’t me they are in awe of; they have come to get a glance of the new Princess of the ocean, “The Raja Laut”.

Recently hand crafted by French enthusiast and boat designer George Carras in Borneo, The Raja Laut is an impressive newly built 115ft luxury schooner yacht. As if from a bygone era, The Raja Laut is breathtaking. She encompasses both the traditional craftsmanship of a classic gaff-rigged schooner, along side all the modern day luxuries you would expect from a five-star hotel. Akin to the grand vessels from the voyages of discovery, from afar you might mistake The Raja Laut as one of the great explorers such as Cooke or Columbus. With her majestic white sails, it is easy to understand why she is creating such a buzz wherever she goes.

The Raja Laut is appropriately named after a Joseph Conrad classic novel, which saw brave explorers, fitting out schooners on the Australian coast, and invading the Malay Archipelago in search of money and adventure. The most audacious of these men was Tom

Lingard, who was named by the natives as the Raja Laut, or King of the Sea, due to his trading success and vicious fights with the pirates who infested the seas.

Cunningly bringing the 18th century to the 21st, as I stepped aboard The Raja Laut, I was presented with a cool towel, fresh mint soda, and was greeted by my eight-crew members for my stay. The main deck is deceptively large, decked in rich teak and pristine Balinese accessories, appropriately placed sun loungers, and a sumptuous dining table for the future feasts. In prime position, the hammocks are draped either side of the bow, over the water. The Balinese theme continues inside, with bamboo cladding the air-conditioned interior walls and subtle ethnic accents on the cream linen sofas. Each of the six staterooms sleep two, and have a surprisingly comfortable bed, with monogrammed linen and waffle robes. Not at all what I was expecting from sleeping in a cabin. I was even happier to discover the charming mosaic en-suites, with power shower and glorious hot water. If a break is needed from the beautiful scenery outside, then the state-of-the-art entertainment system can occupy time, by watching a DVD on the plasma, listening to some music, phoning a friend or surfing the web on the satellite and internet communication system.

There is no compromise on luxury on board The Raja Laut. As opposed to traditional cruise ships, there is the freedom to explore undiscovered parts of Asia that are normally hard to get to. It tops the current trend in five-star eco-resorts such as the Six Senses Hideaway Ninh Van Bay, Vietnam, and the Langham Place Eco-Resort in Koh Lanta, Thailand, which offer guests complete luxury in perfect harmony with nature. The quest for ‘getting back to basics’,



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and tapping into tranquility is conquered, and I had no choice but to completely relax, immerse myself with the natural beauty of the Andaman Ocean, and get utterly spoilt rotten.

Each morning I was awoken by the gentle sway of the ocean, and once above deck my butler who took care of my every need during my stay greeted me. As a child I couldn't even lie on a waterbed without being ill, so naturally I was worried I would spend half my holiday pale faced, with my head over the side of the boat, or inspecting the bottom of the loo. But even though the nights were a little 'rocky', I was absolutely fine. The only trouble I had was once back on dry land, when the sand began to sway beneath me; yet another reason why I couldn't wait to get back onboard.

Having both a French owner and Captain, certainly dictates the quality of the gourmet cuisine and wine. Every morning the dining table is laid out with a plethora of exotic fruits, continental breakfast and freshly grounded coffee. Lunch and dinner are three course affairs, with the highly skilled chef preparing anything you desire, from Australian sirloin, to freshly caught lobster. For the more discerning guest, and at an extra cost, a Michelin trained chef will prepare your food for the duration of your stay. The only problem being which lounge to recline on after the feast is over.

"No, there isn't a karaoke machine, or a glitter ball on board", much to the dismay of a recent guest, but for the rest of us who want to enjoy the diversity of the ocean, Connie Lieberher, the full time PADI dive instructor and activities manager will be at your disposal. Whether you are a novice or seasoned professional, she will be your guide to the Southeast Asian underwater kingdom. "The route of the Raja Laut follows the most perfect spots for a diving holiday,





with great visibility, and warm waters, the area offers one of the most comfortable and safe diving environments found anywhere in the world”, explains Connie. From past experience, the number one thing that you are most likely to see when diving in Asia is other divers. But with no real agenda a secluded reef, in an isolated bay was found, and the results were incredible. Expect to see turtles, Leopard sharks, Manta rays, Lionfish, Parrotfish, Lapu Lapu, eclectic nudibranches and a abundance of multicoloured reef dwellers. Other activities include snorkeling, kayaking, water skiing, surfing and on board masseuse.

As with all private yacht charters, the freedom to decide your route is yours. However the joint Captains, William Bartels and Arnaud Le Meunier have pinpointed four areas for you to choose from. I visited Phuket, due to proximity to the international airport. Not only was the scenery was absolutely breathtaking, the night life on the island is unparalleled, so you can climb ashore, party till the sun comes up and relax and recover all day onboard. Other destinations of choice are Langkawi and Butangs in Malaysia, Indian owned Andaman & Nicobar 400 miles west of Phuket, famed for its vertical wall dives, and fascinating culture of ethnic jungle tribes, and Burmese Mergui, a land time had forgot, with dense rainforests, indigenous creatures found nowhere else on the planet and perfect diving locations. Whatever your idea of paradise is, you will find it in one of the itineraries.

If you are looking for a good old-fashioned adventure, but want complete comfort and luxury, then this is the holiday for you. As you decide your destination, every journey is different; so no two encounters are ever the same, therefore you choose your own experience. There is nothing quite like the constant fresh air, the wind on your face, and a bare horizon as far as the eye can see. I felt like I was the only person on the planet, but I still got to enjoy the beauty of this spectacular yacht, sit back, relax and have someone else do all the hard work. Heaven.

The Raja Laut sleeps up to 12 people and prices start at \$3094USD per night, plus moorage and fuel charges. See [www.rajalaut](http://www.rajalaut) or call +60 88 228599 for more details. 

