

LIVING

Tropical

THAILAND



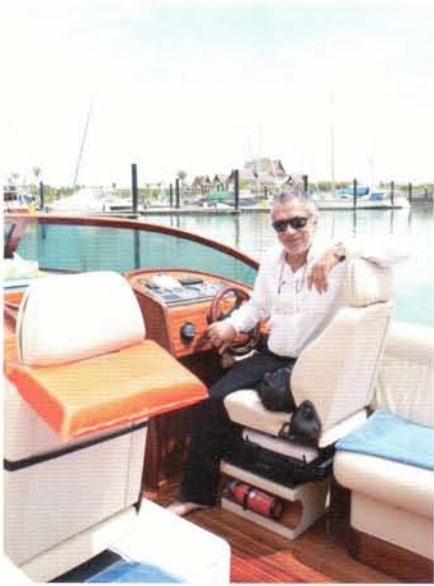
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Mr. Gulu Lalvani



Royal Phuket Marina, or RPM



RPM is at present the biggest marina in Phuket with 350 berths and is a sign of the development of the infrastructure of the industry. Indeed, the developer of the marina, Gulu Lalvani, has a vision “that Phuket will be the world’s number one sailing destination.”

Other marinas are following suit and as well as the start of two new marinas at Ao Chalong and Ao Po, there has been significant expansion at Yacht Haven Marina in the north east of the island. An almost fifty percent increase in capacity has shown no signs of being enough as Nick Wyatt, the Marina Manager of Yacht Haven Marina says, “we were full before, and still are”. He also comments on the increased traffic of Superyachts, and “at one stage we had more than 14 Superyachts on our docks”. This highlights a major shift in the type of visitor to Phuket, and these changes demand better quality services and

support. As Gareth Twist, Managing Director of Yacht Solutions, a Phuket based marine management and consultancy, says, “Phuket will develop a high quality marine support system. The growth of the industry will mean there is an easier and better supply of boat parts, and more competition will push standards higher.”

Last season Yacht Haven Marina was the only marina in which a Superyacht could berth but with the addition of Ao Po this year, it will give owners another option. This provides greater choice and should maintain and drive standards on. It also focuses on the amount of investor confidence in the area, this is apparent in well-established Phuket businesses, other regionally known businesses opening in the area and also the amount of new businesses aiming to get a foothold in the market. There are also an increasing number of large hotels expanding their interests in the industry and they seem to be confident that their guests are happy to venture out onto the ocean.

In fact, one of the major growth areas this year has been in the charter industry, so much so that Kevin Quilty, Managing Director of Sunsail Asia, a leading charter agency, has imported a further seven yachts. “This brings the fleet size up to 30 yachts ranging in size from 33 to 50 ft.” he said, and obviously shows the companies’ belief in the area. “Phuket is rapidly becoming the yachting centre of Asia, and with more top quality marinas and better skills and facilities for maintenance it will continue to grow,” he added.

Vincent Tabuteau, the Managing Director of Asia Marine agrees. “It is difficult to predict the pace but the momentum is clearly irreversible even if we have variation in the rhythm of growth.” He is well placed to comment as Asia Marine were awarded “Best Asian Charter Company” at the aforementioned Christoffle awards. This has seen them develop the business and acquire new bare-boats and also develop crewed boat fleets such as on Lady Anita. He believes that the ongoing developments now show that Phuket is recognized as a yachting centre.

One of the most notable benefits of boating in Phuket is the almost year round perfect weather and conditions, which set it apart from many other worldwide destinations. However, this increase in boat traffic must be done with respect to the environment, but



Mr. Gareth Twist

many business owners are sure that the increase in traffic will also attract more professional people to the area; and in turn also push the local work force to become trained to an international standard.

One of the most important movements this year may not be on the water, however, but in the creation of the Thai Marine Business Association. This is a sign that the industry is maturing and more importantly, gives it a lobbying voice in Bangkok. It has long been the case that the regulations in Thailand have proved to be a grey area but recently the authorities, and organizations such as TAT, have shown much more willingness to promote



Boat Lagoon

the industry, and to work with it in improving marine regulations and the efficiency and helpfulness of customs. However, much still needs to be done in this field, as investors need safe and workable rules. Additionally the financing of boats may need some work as boats in most mature destinations are funded by loans or leases, yet these are not available in Thailand, making the road to owning a boat a more difficult one to navigate.

Despite this, the industry continues to grow at a rapid pace and businesses are committed to raising the bar even higher. The wealth of cruising grounds, the investment in infrastructure and the determination of local businesses to provide first class boating facilities should ensure that Phuket has a good chance of retaining its' well-earned title of Asia Maritime Capital for years to come. ■



Royal Phuket Marina