



Charting new territory

Myanmar: Mergui Archipelago

For those devotees of sophisticated marinas, crowded anchorages, fashionable restaurants and suave designer boutiques pass on by; this may not be for you. However, if the opportunity to immerse oneself in remote locations unsullied by westernization appeals your soul, then cruising the pristine coast of Myanmar is a must on a charter or passage plan in the near future.

Welcome to the Mergui Archipelago, where heaven and earth meet...



Having only opened up its borders to tourism in recent years, Myanmar is virtually unspoilt... for the moment.

T

Turquoise waters lap at empty white sand beaches, secluded anchorages nestle in the lee of islands as rich in biodiversity as the seas that enclose them... this is Myanmar. It used to be once known as primarily as Burma. A this beautiful place is a virtual nirvana in terms of diving, cruising and disconnecting from 'the grid'. the Mergui Archipelago of this ex-British colony—sandwiched between South East Asia to the east and the Indian subcontinent to the west—is a yachting paradise. Having spent a week exploring just a fraction of the treasures afforded by this island chain comprising comprised of 800 uncut untouched emerald-like islands, we highly recommend it as a cruising destination... especially if introduced to its delights aboard the venerable yacht Calisto: a storied vessel of remarkable provenance in her own right.

Having been fortunate enough to complete our trip in the most recommended season—the dry period between December and February—we found the weather to be most agreeable: always sunny, but not too hot. The sun sets early, being just 12-degrees north of the equator, and by 6pm on the first day one learns to adjust one's pace to enjoy the natural attractions by day and one's company in the evening. Having emerged from decades of self-imposed political isolation, Myanmar has been protected in ways other than its previous military rulers intended. It—Myanmar's travel infrastructure is mercifully largely 'undeveloped'—depending upon one's person scale of reference of development—so forget bustling waterfront fine dining, throbbing nightclubs and the over-hyped distractions of the latest 'cool' fleshpot, because in the Mergui, that feels like a world and life—

time away.

Following an international flight to Phuket, Thailand a short transfer flight delivers us to Kawthaung, the southernmost town on Myanmar's western seaboard that previously went by the name of Victoria Point. Met warmly at the airport by a member of Calisto's crew, at the airport we're whisked to the docks and are soon being welcomed on board by her French master, Captain Phillippe Cathala, and his eight crew members... and of course our obligatory mandated Myanmar guide. In fairness, however, his presence does appear to expedite the process of customs formalities. English, French and Thai are languages all spoken fluently by the crew.

Over a welcome cocktail Captain Cathala explains that previously Calisto cruised in Andaman Sea to the west of the Thai peninsular, but its new owner—the Saigon, Vietnam-based founder of Exotissimo travel agencies—quickly recognized the desire by adventurous parties to explore the previously hidden treasures of Myanmar to the north. Calisto's first exploratory cruise of the Mergui Archipelago took

Calisto was the
first yacht to
explore the
opportunity
of charter in
the Mergui
Archipelago...
her crew are
now experts
on the area.

place in the fall of 2012. Since then, she has visited regularly enough since to ensure the Captain and crew are familiar with the region's most attractive aspects. Settling in after dinner, ahead of an early departure we eagerly anticipate exploring the nautical Eden eden that we've been promised lies ahead.

The next morning we sailed towards Zar Det Nge Kyunn, a snorkeler's paradise where dolphins are regularly spotted. In fact the entire Mergui Archipelago is known for its rich marine life and world-class diving, many of which produce a startling variety of species encountered on a single dive. The Calisto is popular with divers too, due in no part the Cpt. Cathala's own passion for the sport. A certified PADI Divemaster, Cathala regularly guides his guests on subaquatic adventures, and having spent two decades exploring the waters of Southeast Asia, . As a result, and his knowledge of species, behaviour and 'hot spots' is extensive. We enquire after his favourite dive sites and he quickly reels off a whole list; "Djalan Pinnacle, High Rock, Shark Cave, Black Rock, High Rock, Western Rocky, there are just so





many. Diving in Mergui you can admire all kinds of shark, whale shark white tip shark, gray shark nurse shark, manta rays, majestic coral and unusual fish, and that's without even getting into the squid, octopus and corals. The underwater fauna is so rich and varied, is a true Technicolor delight to dive in."

The following day we discover some gems of the 115 isles near Lampi Island, including Poni Island where one of the archipelago's few private resorts is currently under construction, and Kyunn-Phi-Lar another beautiful deserted island of thick tropical vegetation, deserted beaches and pristine waters. The region, however, may not remain undiscovered for long: Again, a developer has apparently purchased this island and the a resort is currently in the planning stage. So you'll understand our encouragement yet another reason to visit the region sooner rather than later if

Ancient and
protected, in
Myanmar it feels like
the clock is
suspended and each
mile is one sailed
back in time...

'off the beaten track' is your preference.

As it must have been in many of the popular cruising grounds before the influx of yachts and commercialism, bartering with local fishermen and 'sea gypsies' for their wares is still an entertaining aside, and can often produce a fine fish for the table or a highly authentic souvenir. Toward the end of our cruise we happened upon just such a remote fishing village, still endearingly authentic where its inquisitive inhabitants live a life that appears to be as colourful and cheerful as it is simplistic. The whole trip in fact feels like a suspension of the clock, a journey where every mile sailed is a decade back in time. This, no doubt, is aided in no small part by the good yacht Calisto herself...

This quintessential family yacht is ideal for cruising with a larger family or small party of friends. Spacious and comfortable, she offers multiple separate



From rich cultural experiences on the mainland to pristine beaches, Myanmar is intoxicatingly fresh and fashion-free.







areas for entertainment and repose, and whose distribution on various decks allows socializing or seclusion as the mood dictates. Children too will invariably enjoy her historical charms, while parents can relax knowing their youngsters are in a safe environment, as highlighted by her high bulwarks. Leaning on the rail of this gentleman's cruiser one allows one's imagination to be swept back to the golden age of travel, when the glamor lay as much in the grandeur of the journey as arriving in style.

A nostalgic fragrance permeates Calisto, a survivor from a bygone era when the deep glow of glossy mahogany, crisp white lacquer and mirror finish chrome come together in perfect harmony. The initials of the old RYS (Royal Yacht Squadron) can still be seen embossed in the casting of some of the deck hardware, a reference back to when the yacht sailed under the ownership of the Guinness family, – purveyors of that dark Irish liquid that rises and falls around the world every evening with the metro-nomic certainty of the tide.

Calisto offers seven cabins, three doubles, two twins and two singles, all period decorated with the tasteful refinement of her halcyon days. Our cabin was lo-

cated off the starboard passageway and was cosily reminiscent of a 19th Century English manor house. But reassure technology has not passed the good yacht by and Calisto is equipped with the modern trappings of civilization: including TV, WiFi and satellite communications. In truth however, little time was sent using any of them these modern trappings, between barbecues, trips to the islands, swimming, water skiing and scuba diving, our week on board seemed too short to take advantage of all the wonders offered by this region the world forgot.

Each day we took breakfast and lunch on the main deck, which has a very user-friendly outdoor dining area. Dinner is served in the elegant indoor dining room. Each is a true festive occasion and serves as an opportunity for Chef Guillaume to demonstrate equal expertise in both Asian fusion dishes and his native French cuisine. Meanwhile Chief Stew Arnaud administers to everyone's wishes with attentive care, including the serving of some excellent wines from a wide variety of origins. One of the highlights of the week's culinary experiences is when ancestral traditions are observed and respected during the formal dinner with the captain, and Calisto is one

An eminently 'family-friendly' charter yacht, Calisto offers many opportunities to interact with the local population and explore new culinary experiences. Each meal taken onboard is a true 'occasion'.



Aboard this graceful gentleman's cruiser one is convincingly swept back into the glorious golden age of travel by sea...





yacht that's not short on history or tradition...

CALISTO, NOT CALYPSO?

If Calisto and subaquatic adventures sounds vaguely familiar, you may not be too far from the truth, though the vessel you may be thinking of is "Calypso". Both boats were minesweepers of the same type and after the war both vessels had the distinction of having been purchased after the Second World War by the same person: Thomas Loel Guinness. Guinness one converted and fitted Calisto out for his private use (Calisto), Calypso the other was discovered in Malta by the pioneer of subaquatic discovery Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Having found the boat that appeared his ideal for him to explore the sea exploration vessel, Cousteau discussed the project with Guinness who benevolently acquired the boat and charged Cousteau a token charter fee of one franc per year. After her purchase Calypso headed to a shipyard in Antibes to be transformed into an oceanographic ship.

Calisto meanwhile began life as a warship, launched in 1943 for the US Navy by the Astoria Marine Construction Co. in Oregon. It is reported that the shipyard won the contract for the construction of the

SPECIFICATIONS

Length: 136' 1" (41.50m)

Beam: 24' 3" (7.40m)

Draft: 11' 6" (3.50m)

Displacement: 370 t

Fuel capacity: 15,850 US Gal (60,000L)

Water capacity: 400 US Gal (28,000L)

Max speed: 14-knots

Range at 10-knots: 5,000 miles

Construction: Wood

Engine: 2x 550 hp Caterpillar

Number of cylinders: 12 cylinders

Consumption @ 10-knots: 25 US Gal/h (100 l/h)

Transmission: Shaft

Generators: 2x 80kw MWM +1x 16kw Northern Lights

Stabilizers: Vosper

Naval Architect: Admiralty (Admiralty) & Vosper (conversion)

Manufacturer: Astoria Marine Construction Co. (Oregon, USA)

Calisto is proposed charter on the basis of US \$65,000 per week, all inclusive (including meals, drinks, and four hours of daily navigation).



With a Dive Master for Captain,
it comes as no surprise that Calisto is
well-equipped to explore Myanmar's
rich and diverse marine habitat...



To explore the islands Calisto offers seven cabins—three doubles, two twins and two singles—all period decorated with the tasteful refinement of her halcyon days.

vessel, as they were able to lay the vast wooden keel in a single piece. In Calisto's class, 35 different US shipyards built no less than 561 units. This sprightly wooden minesweeper—measuring 141' (43m)—was then transferred into the charge of the British Royal Navy for the duration of the war.

After hostilities ended, the boat returned to the US Navy before being sold in 1947 to Italian investors who renamed her Orchida. In 1950, billionaire Thomas Loel Guinness, a member of parliament and the famous family of Irish brewers acquired the second of these twin ships and sent it to the Vosper shipyard in England for conversion into a luxury yacht dedicated to personal use. Maintaining the majority of her external lines, the most obvious visual transformation was the addition of the aesthetically pleasing iron superstructure.

Named Calisto upon her launch by Guinness, the yacht sailed throughout Europe, welcoming on board numerous celebrities and politicians of the day. Calisto also holds the distinction of being the world's first yacht to feature stabilizers, which were developed and fitted by Vosper in 1954. Calisto remained in Guinness family possession until 1965, thereafter according to Lloyd's Register of Yachts, between 1966 to 1969 Calisto was the property of Olblich Ltd, Nassau. The beneficial owner however can be surmised from a report in 1967 where Saint-John Perse writes: "Guinness sold his modern boat (The Calisto) to the son of Paul Louis Weiller," (1893-1993), a French hero of the First World War, an industrialist with aeronautics and oil interests, and one of the first directors of Air France.

The Weiller family retained Calisto for four decades, home-porting her in a purpose-built slip in Antibes and sailing solely in the Mediterranean until her sale in 2007. Falling into some neglect, it was Frenchman Eric Merlin who took it upon himself to ensure her survival and restoration, acquiring her and registering Calisto in Bridgetown, Barbados, before her sale to her current owner in Asia. Her Speaking of his yacht the latest owner told us: "I appreciate Calisto as a well-constructed yacht, stable and secure. She's not a sophisticated yacht and is easy to main-

Launched in 1943 and with a storied list of owners that includes the Guinness family, Calisto has been faithfully restored to former glories





Swap the Gucci loafers and heels for a pair of Havaianas. Once one steps off Calisto Myanmar immersion in the Myanmar experience does not involve high end luxury.

tain in an engineering sense, but as a shrine to the essence of yachting in the 1950's we ensure many hours are put in to preserve the exemplary condition she is currently in."

Before joining her future homeport, Phuket Thailand, Calisto underwent a major restoration and refit at the Raffles Shipyard, Singapore. Overseeing the refit Eric Merlin made good on his commitment to save her, rejuvenating Calisto with a completely new hull, reconditioned engines, new electronics, air conditioning and a lot more. The work was carried out with considerable sensitivity to ensure this grand dame of yachting lost none of her original charm. Though much has changed, her heart remains, due in no small part to the incredible quality of her original 3-inch thick Oregon pine on oak frames. As such, Calisto now appears equipped with everything required to sail gracefully through to celebrate her centenary in

MYANMAR QUICK FACTS

Previously a British colony, Burma gained independence in 1948.

It was renamed The United Republic of Myanmar in 1989.

The state has experienced a tumultuous recent history under military rule before democratic reforms in 2011. Until 2011, visits by foreign nationals were not encouraged, resulting in a dramatically under-developed tourism infrastructure.

With a population in excess of 50-million, Myanmar is the 25th most populous country on earth and possesses one of the widest income gaps in the world.

One third of Burma's total perimeter of 1,200 miles forms an uninterrupted coastline along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.

Countries that border Myanmar: Bangladesh, India, Tibet, China, Laos and Thailand.

The primary religion in Myanmar is Buddhism.

