



THE SAIL THAILAND 2018 EXPERIENCE

By Bert van Muylwijk

LANGKAWI TO PHUKET RALLY

In the sunny morning of 15 January 22 yachts with some 65 people assembled in Langkawi at Rebak Marina for the second edition of the Sail Thailand Langkawi to Phuket Rally. A Big Breakfast followed by a Rally briefing was the official start of the Rally that would take the yachts through the exquisite southern islands of Thailand's Andamans Coast on their way to the second stop in Chalong Phuket. On the way some yachts met for an "Aussi Barbie" on the beach.

After a smooth clearance process in Chalong, a lavish lunch was waiting at the Phuket Yacht Club on 23 January from which later that afternoon the Phuket Welcome Tour started to visit some highlights of the island, including a visit to the operational Pearl Farm in Ao Yon and a tour and tasting at the Chalong Bay Rum distillery.

Soon after the boats and their crews made their way to "the other side" to visit Krabi and moor their yachts in Port Takola Marina.

Here something very special was awaiting them: the Krabi rally stop coincided with the wedding reception of the Marina Director, Matthew Na Nagara and his wife Liu Sinut, who invited the Sail Thailand Participants to their party in the spirit of true Thai hospitality. An unforgettable evening with Thai top stars (Boom Pannada and Nadda) and the Thai Navy Band performing until late. Early next morning 25 crew members joined a Krabi land tour and climbed the 1257 steps to the Tiger Temple leaving the rest behind in awe.

"Sweet & Short"

After more cruising through spectacular Phang Nga Bay, the Rally participants prepared for the grand finale in Phuket Yacht Haven Maria on 1 February with 2 events. Morning and afternoon was for learning new skills and information at the **Sail Thailand Cruisers Market**. Thai batik, towel folding, fruit carving, rope work, Thai language for cruisers, pandan

leave folding, ins and outs of yacht transport and many more experiences were practiced and enjoyed.

After a short break the annual **Sevenstar Phuket Cruisers Party** started, open to all cruisers in Phuket. Some 170 people danced to the tunes of a great Thai band after having enjoyed a sumptuous buffet dinner and getting the results of the Premier Boatyard Photo Competition. Again, it was late when the last songs entered the night.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

After the Rally an online survey asked the participants about their experience. At the moment of writing 63% has answered with all respondents qualifying the Rally as either 'excellent' (54%) or 'very good' (46%). The crew of sy Taka Oa wrote: "The rally exceeded our expectations. Great organisation, excellent communication with the fleet and in a spectacular location. What more could you ask for?" SY Osborne Star wrote "Sail Thailand provides a not to be missed introduction to cruising in Thailand's beautifully unique

Top to bottom:
Khun Kriangsak, Ao Yon Pearl Farm
Port Takola Krabi Party
Learning Thai for Cruisers by Galileo Maritime Academy

waters. The local people proved to be most friendly and welcoming. The rally-organised events were fabulous and the program provided great value. We hope to participate again next year". Another interesting comment came from sy Asterie: "Flexible, friendly introduction to Thailand". As it turned out for around 70% of the yachts it is their first visit to Thailand. There were quite a few suggestions to improve the event such as: 'can the rally last 1 week longer' or can we have more stops'. Some critical remarks were: 'can more vegetarian food be added' and there were also suggestions for participating in an activity beneficial to the environment, for instance a joint beach clean-up at one of the National Park islands".

WHY ORGANIZE SAIL THAILAND?

In South East Asia more and more countries are focusing on marine tourism development and are keen to attract visiting yachts. By organizing rallies with nice activities they try to interest sailors to visit, stay longer and/or return. For instance, Indonesia has now 4 different rallies, Sail Malaysia has 2 and right now the one month Andamans Marine Carnival is taking place. The rationale is simple: more yachts mean more spending in the country, more demand for marinas, service industry, more facilities, more job opportunities, more trained staff etc. This again will attract more yachts ...

Also, a large group of today's cruisers are different from say 15 years ago. The yachts are bigger and more luxury. Often there is more money to spend on maintenance, on traveling in the guest country, on trips, on food etc. Cruising yachts are an economic factor as they have become the 'bread and butter' of the marine industry in Asia.



"There's nothing better than meeting new sailors and hearing about their experiences and interesting new destinations."

Learn how to make a Thai herbal hot compress at the Cruisers Market at 'The Haven Spa'





Dot and Jonathan King of Bali Hai IV at the wedding reception of Matthew and Liu at Port Takola Krabi; Party table and Thai Diva Nadda.



Another reason to organise events is that cruising yachts are a tight knit community and are very good ambassadors. They like to share information, especially tips for destinations, good yacht services etc. Given these objectives it is clear that we should make the cruisers as welcome as we can. And when we do so, it is important to tie into the Asia Rally Circuit and make sure that the whole region is considered to be a hospitable area for cruising yachts. This hospitality should not only show in the way we treat the cruisers, how they are welcomed in terms of dealing with the authorities and how transparent rules and regulations are, but also on the level of experiences in which the cruisers are inclusive, i.e. are taken seriously and it is important to understand the issues cruisers face with red tape and regulations when they visit Asian countries.

Creating Sail Thailand together

And not only for the cruiser the Sail Thailand experience aims to be inclusive. The initiator of Sail Thailand, Marieke Derks of Sevenstar Yacht Transport Asia, started the rally with the help Sazli Kamal Basha of Sail Malaysia, Zara Tremlett of Phuket Yacht Haven Marina and Matthew Na Ngara of Port Takola. To her the further development of Sail Thailand is a cooperative effort: "It is something we organise as a team with the industry together. We encourage sponsors and supporting parties to play an active role and try to think with them how they can interact with the cruisers and offer benefits not only in a monetary terms but especially by sharing knowledge, skills or any other beneficial ways in order to establish a relationship. It is in

"Well organised rally and good introduction to Phuket and Krabi sailing grounds. There were great highlights at the events ... a nice steady and structured introduction to cruising in Thailand"

this spirit of joint efforts that in Sail Thailand we prefer to talk about "Partners" and "Friends" rather than sponsors. The difference being that Partners contribute monetarily and in kind while Friends contribute in kind". To Marieke these two aspects are the essence of a successful development of and an inclusive experience for Sail Thailand in the future.

The 2018 edition of Sail Thailand reflected that philosophy, some examples:

- Sevenstar Yacht Transport has been organizing the annual Phuket Cruisers Party since 2013. From this effort Sail Thailand evolved. Not only is Sevenstar a monetary sponsor of the final party but also takes a big role in the overall organisation and initiation of new activities such as the Sail Thailand Cruisers Market. The rationale for Sevenstar, apart from reaching out to the cruisers community is to also give back to the marine industry and cooperate with other countries in Asia.

- Phuket Yacht Haven is an obvious choice for cruisers in Phuket with its excellent infrastructure, welcoming atmosphere and perfect hang out The Deck. They have been a partner from the beginning. This year Alice played a major role in the organisation of the Sail Thailand Cruisers Market in the new "The Haven Spa"

- Port Takola in Krabi is a marina in development. This year the cruisers had

full access to all facilities and a fantastic cultural experience. For the marina having cruisers inside means a good publicity through websites and word of mouth. Last year Sail Thailand brought the 1st yacht in the marina, this year it was the first time for a full dock.

- Phuket Premier Boatyard is a succesful haul-out facility and boat yard that is upgrading to accommodate larger yachts as well. Brand awareness is of utmost importance and the Rally offers a perfect opportunity for this, as well as to build relations with potential customers.

- East Marine Asia is chandlery and distributor with large stocks for popular marine brands. Through its sister company Precision Shipwright there is also a large skill set on everything to do with rigging and refit activities. Both companies love to share their expertise with the cruisers. All participating yachts receive a free rigging check and for the Cruisers Market they organized a fun Rope Work Competition.

Marieke smiles: "For 2019 Sail Thailand is open to suggestions and further cooperation. One of the things we are working on together with Ocean Marina Yacht Club is a Rally in the Gulf of Thailand as a split-off from Sail Malaysia's Passage to the East. Also there suggestions and support are welcome!"

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Winning photo in the Premier Photo Competition in the category "Surroundings" by Mick McDonell on motor at Relax.



Sail Thailand Phuket Cruisers Market at "The Haven Spa"

Entries in the East Marine Rope Works Competition and judges David, Ian and Tom