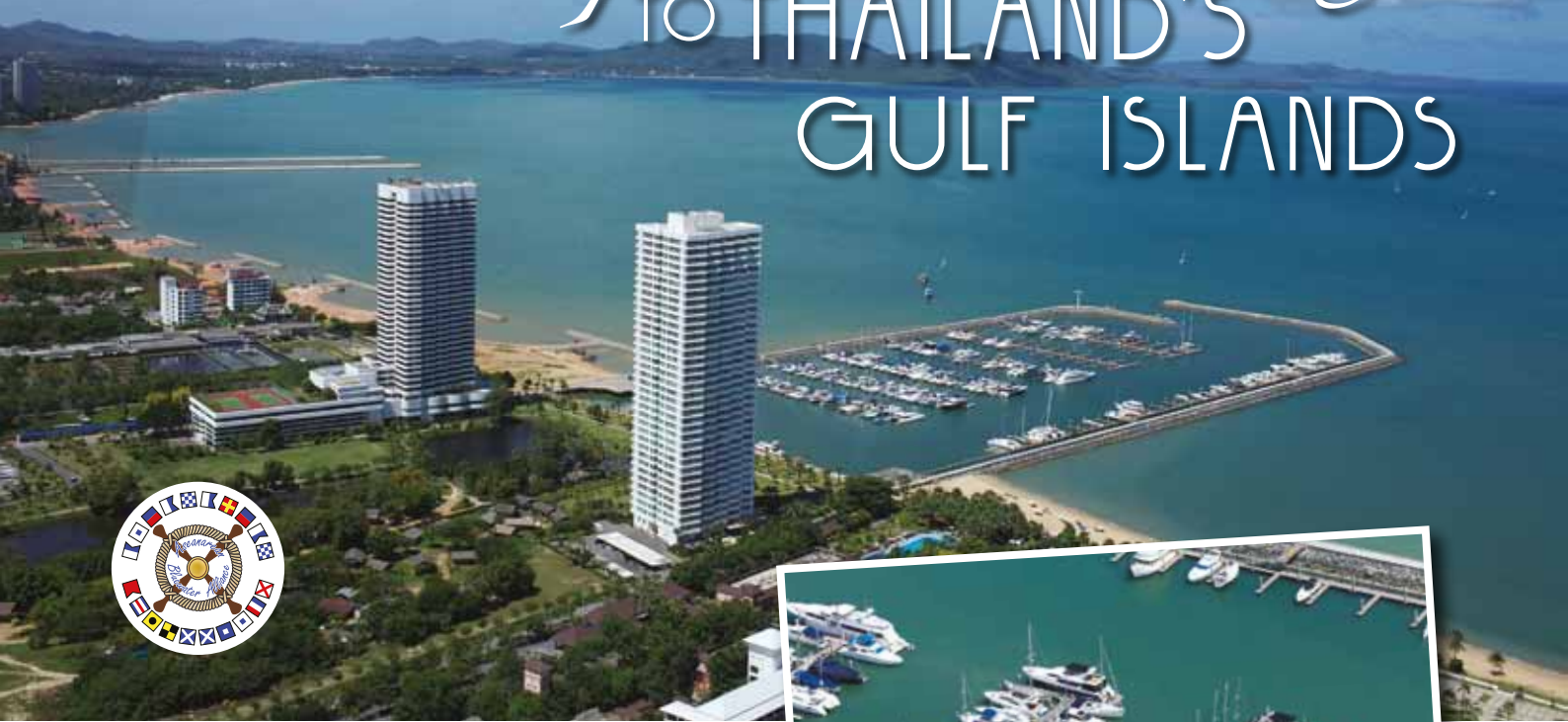


Superb Gateway TO THAILAND'S GULF ISLANDS



Our ABA Reciprocal Marina - Ocean Marina Yacht Club

The latest news from our ABA reciprocal marina Ocean Marina, brought to you by man on the beat **Bruce Maxwell**



Bruce published Asia-Pacific Boating for 25 years until selling equity in 2001. Since then he has written for Yachts, Luxmedia and other print and online titles, and handles marine consultancies and nautical books. In this 3rd installment, he continues this series of benefits that Raffles Marina members can enjoy while visiting any of the 13-strong Aseanarean Bluewater Alliance marinas.

Many people know Pattaya for only two things: shopping and nightlife, says Scott Finsten, Harbour Master of Ocean Marina Yacht Club, which is located slightly south of the resort's hub, on Jomtien Beach.

"The islands, beaches, crystal clear water and coral reefs get overlooked. There are 187 islands in the Gulf, compared with 114 on the Andaman Sea side of Thailand. Chonburi, a day trip from Ocean Marina, has 43 islands alone. Rayong has 13 islands, Chantaburi 8, Trat 33, Prachuap Khiri Khan 23, Chumphon 27, and Surat Thani including well-known Koh Samui, 35."

Raffles Marina members are entitled to Ocean Marina privileges for up to 30 days under the Aseanarean Bluewater Alliance (ABA) agreement. This means that a 36'-40' vessel can berth there for \$25 a day, or \$500 a month. The voyage is about 720 nautical miles from Singapore. Local owners visit Pulau Tioman fairly regularly, and if venturing further into the Gulf, there are plenty of stepping stone islands to Pattaya, as well as varied route options for the way back. Koh Samui and Top of the Gulf Regattas are popular sailing events.



Alternatively, Air Asia offers direct flights from Changi Airport to Pattaya's U-Tapao Airport. Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways and Jetstar fly into Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport; plus Tigerair and Air Asia into Don Muang Airport. Transfers, particularly from U-Tapao, are fast and inexpensive. Ocean Marina has over 50 excellent guest rooms available to Raffles Marina members at \$95-\$115 a night depending on the season.

About 50 charter boats operate from the 380-berth Ocean Marina. Some do luxury voyages, such as those run by Ocean Marina itself, while others specialise in the "Join-In" concept, like Serenity Yacht Charters. Raffles Marina members can get special charter rates if using Ocean Marina's own boats, and 20 percent off food and beverages purchased at the club.

The marina has five principal charter boats. There are three 26', 43' and 53' sailing cats, a 37' Sea Ray and a 48' flybridge cruiser. The largest, *Siamese Twin*, costs \$1,150++ for a full day charter, but it is licensed for 25 guests, so going as a group is more economical. The 48' motor cruiser, *Champagne*, takes 12 people, and costs \$1,375++ a day and \$265 per engine hour used. Half day and even hourly rates are available too.

"Join-In" cruises are \$115 a head. The voyage starts at Ocean Marina, then makes a first stop at Koh Pai for swimming and fishing. This island features several undisturbed beaches with a variety of coral clusters and marine habitats of interest to snorkelers. After an extravagant Thai-style buffet lunch, the tour continues to Koh Rin's underwater canyons and corals where moray eels, squirrelfish and lionfish can be seen. Next up is Koh Ped to feed fruit to the monkeys, and back to Ocean Marina.

The 140' Norman Foster-designed *Ocean Emerald* is currently based at Ocean Marina. The vessel can be hired for more extended, luxury passage-making around



the Gulf or up the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok. The largest vessel to stay at Ocean Marina so far, for two weeks, was the 63m or 207' superyacht *Suri*, which took aboard 260,000 litres of diesel! "We had the trucks queued up," laughs Scott. A 42m Baglietto is in residence too.

The marina itself was founded by the late Ocean Insurance CEO, Kris Assakul, a keen Bangkok-based boater in the 1980s and 1990s. Royal Varuna Yacht Club (RVYC), between Pattaya and Jomtien, had only sailing dinghies in those days, but its interest in keelboats was whetted when the King's Cup Regatta was launched in 1987 in Phuket.

I recall walking down Jomtien Beach about this time with an RVYC member who worked for Khun Kris. "And here," he said, waving at an empty expanse of sand with hardly a headland in sight, "will be our keelboat marina." Here? Hard to believe. Normally marinas have some sort of natural protective feature. Ocean Marina required breakwaters going straight out into the gulf.

But Khun Kris' philosophy was "build it and they will come". And although he wasn't flooded with applicants for berths when the facility first opened in 1995, the likes of regional racer Bill Gasson and one of his *Buzzards* were attracted. Gradually the marina filled up, expanding in 2012 and 2014 to its present 380 berths, making it the largest in Southeast Asia. Serviced slips are available to 80m.

Apart from the marina's 25-75 ton travelifts, forklifts, tractors, chandleries, boat builders and fuel supplies, the boutique hotel is augmented by long- and short-term condo rentals, restaurants and bars, two swimming pools, a gymnasium, tennis and squash courts, library and meeting rooms. The complex is home to the Top of the Gulf Regatta and Ocean Marina Pattaya Boat Show. Definitely worth a visit!👍

For more information, visit www.oceanmarinayachtclub.com