



As I approach the 51-metre *Northern Sun* by tender at her anchorage off the Langkawi Yacht Club, the yacht's sleek exterior belies her past life. From the outside, the only real clues to her origins are the thin trace of her previous hull line and the original windlasses still in situ on the forward deck. Looming majestically out of the turquoise blue sea, with lush and vibrant island outcrops in the background, she seems fully at home in her surroundings and rightly so, having spent almost all her life in the warm South-East Asian waters. It's a little hard to believe she began life as a Japanese ice-class research vessel launched in 1976.

She had been originally purchased by her Hong Kong resident American owners in 2006, and it had taken a two-year refit that was a true labour of love to convert *Northern Sun* to the superyacht she is today. Her owners chose to make no secret of her past, embracing her history to create a beautiful blend of old and new inside and out. "We wanted to keep the elements that make her a ship, while at the same time making her comfortable and usable for adventure holidays," the owners explain.

Having undertaken many refit and renovation projects in the past, both on and off the water, her owners weren't put off by the extensive work that it would take to create the *Northern Sun* they so love today. "When we bought her, she was a well-built, well-maintained vessel with a proven cruising history, beautiful lines and the strength needed to be a true sea-going ship," say the owners. "It was easy to see beyond the fisheries and research equipment and imagine her with a sleeker refit as an expedition yacht."

On board, where the cool of the interior makes a welcome change from the outside heat, she boasts a classically elegant style. With clues to her history and her owner's passion for travel and yachting, décor includes collections of antique Iranian rugs and ship models. The retention of elements such as the original camber in the full-beam master cabin hark back sentimentally to her past, giving the yacht added character. From a practical standpoint, many of the retained original features, such as the windlasses and the engineroom – which is very much a ship's engineroom, albeit immaculate – have made her incredibly well suited for cruising the region, with added stability and increased anchorage capabilities.

Carefully maintained, the yacht is ever-evolving. Different spaces have been created across all the decks to ensure guests have privacy and variety. "Our philosophy is to maintain her consistently high standards," say her owners. "It is the respectful way to



EASTERN PROMISE

When the owners of the 51-metre *Northern Sun* put her on the charter market after nearly ten years of ownership, their choice was driven by a desire to share their love of the yacht and of South-East Asia

Words | Ellie Brade

Main photo: *Northern Sun* – at home in South-East Asia. Above left: Guests can come out to play on the yacht's extensive portfolio of toys and tenders.



treat a fine vessel." Recent additions include a forward seating area that has proved popular with guests as a versatile on-board space both under way and at anchor. "The forward seating is great for quiet reading and evening cocktails, and is a wonderful pre-dinner gathering place," explain the owners. "We also love the aft-deck dining area and the upper-most Jacuzzi deck for daytime reading and relaxing." One senses that the refit bug continues to bite the owners. "Perhaps we are not alone in always thinking about improvements," they confess. "Maybe we need to start another project!"

Having enjoyed the yacht privately for many years, the decision was taken to place her on the charter market last year. Much of the owners' enjoyment came from using her as a base to explore the endless variety of South-East Asia, and this was a main driver for making her available for charter for the first time. "Our guests have always had a wonderful time on board, so we want to offer her to clients looking to have as much fun cruising as we do," say the owners.

Although growing in popularity, South-East Asia is still a vastly under-utilised cruising ground for superyachts, and there are limited options for those looking to experience the region. This is what should make the addition of *Northern Sun* to the region's charter offering so appealing as not only is she a beautiful and stable base for cruising, she truly does offer a standard of service consistent with, if not higher than, many of those yachts chartering more popular traditional destinations.

Just as with the refit, getting *Northern Sun* charter-ready was a carefully managed process and investment, undertaken with painstaking attention to detail by the owners and their long-term captain, Chris 'Lawrie' Lawrence. As she is a unique vessel, ensuring the right crew was even more important than usual. The owners were driven by a belief that securing the right team was the most important ingredient in the recipe for charter success, and Captain Lawrence has painstakingly built a crew of seasoned professionals from both the local area and around the world to ensure the highest levels of service for guests. "Our crew make our vessel," say the owners. "We have tremendous respect for all that they do."

This investment has more than paid off; the crew are personable, thoughtful and offer a raft of talents, from diving instruction and masterful execution of the regional cuisines, through to command of the local languages and a deep knowledge of the surrounding areas. This high standard of service is one of the yacht's biggest assets, particularly in a region with so few charter vessels operating to this level.



"We want charter guests to have as much FUN cruising as we've had"

Charter Facts

LOA 51.0m
 Builder Narasaki
 Shipbuilding
 Build/Refit 1976/2009
 Guests 12
 (six cabins – master, two VIPs, three twins)
 Crew 12
 Rate \$140,000pw
 Contact 37 South Yachts
 www.37southyachts.com

A recent familiarisation trip for leading yacht brokers was an initiative that served to showcase the yacht to the brokers and for the crew to receive all-important feedback as a means of further improving the yacht's charter offering. A thoughtful itinerary saw the yacht weave her way from Langkawi to Phuket, allowing a whistle-stop sample of the region, including dive spots, secluded islands, and culture villages and markets, all in a beautiful on-board setting with exquisite service and food. Whether guests visit a floating village or nearby caves extending hundreds of metres into the rock, it's a seamless way of being immersed in the local culture and surroundings. Fully equipped with all the tools to explore the region, *Northern Sun* carries no less than 16 watercraft.

Based out of Phuket, her usual cruising grounds centre around Malaysia and Thailand, but with a 12,000-nautical-mile range the options are extensive, with on-board charts detailing mile upon mile of stunning cruising grounds to take advantage of. "Cruising Asia is like stepping back in time. There are clear waters, no crowds, beautiful scenery," say her owners. "What's not to like?" With such a range of destinations and activities, the main difficulty for charter guests is deciding where to go during their time on board.

Northern Sun's primary cruising grounds are within easy reach of large cities, good transport links and excellent provisioning options. Unspoilt cruising grounds with no other yachts for miles around mean that often *Northern Sun's* only companions in the water are 'longtails' – the distinctive local fishing boats.

"We think the waters around Phuket are about the most beautiful in the world, although Myanmar is also a great favourite," say the owners. "The diving is wonderful and the beaches are beautiful, but one of the best things about cruising these waters is how few other people are around; we rarely share a mooring, which can be quite rare in other regions."

Although there are small elements where *Northern Sun* is a little more ship-like than some more modern yachts, this is reflected in her charter price and in many ways this adds to the adventure of exploring such an untapped region. To some extent an adventurous itinerary requires an adventurous yacht capable of handling the remoteness of the region, and the kind of charter client who will really appreciate the region is also the kind of client who will enjoy the ship side of *Northern Sun*. One can imagine a family, or two families, enjoying her, just as *Northern Sun's* owners and their extended family have taken so much enjoyment from her over the years. **SYW**



Above: The crew are on hand to help guests when they go exploring off the beaten track.

Above left: Experiencing a cave system by kayak.
 Right & left: *Northern Sun's* interior is traditional, warm and welcoming. There are six guest suites.

