



MY CALISTO SETS A COURSE FOR MYANMAR

SISTER SHIP TO JACQUES COUSTEAU'S CALYPSO SMOOTHS ENTRY TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST EXCITING NEW DESTINATIONS.

After two years cruising the waters of the Andaman Sea off Phuket, MY Calisto is steering for the waters of Myanmar. From its home port on Phuket, the 42 metre yacht expects to embark on its first trip to the Mergui Archipelago in the Autumn of 2012, and regularly thereafter, as Myanmar emerges from decades of isolation.

"The demand for Myanmar is swelling like nothing I've seen since Vietnam opened in the early 1990s," said Eric Merlin, the yacht's owner and a Saigon-based entrepreneur who founded one of South East Asia's leading travel agencies, Exotissimo, in the early 1990s. "The Mergui Archipelago is just a few hours from Thailand's Similan Islands, where we cruise regularly. Given all the changes in Myanmar, the lure north has been irresistible."

The new itinerary charts a six-hour course from Phuket to the Similans, and another seven hours before the vessel cruises into Myanmar waters. Calisto will clear customs and immigration at Kawthaung (known to the colonial British as Victoria Point), not far from Ranong, Thailand. A government tour guide from Myanmar joins the cruise at that point, clearing the way to journeys among the archipelago's 4,000 islands.



"These are the islands that people have been dreaming about for years," said the boat's skipper, Philippe Cathala. "Think of Phuket and Phi Phi before the tourists descended. That's Mergui today."

Cathala has sailed to Myanmar on a number of occasions and says the appeal of the new destination is enhanced by the ability to travel to Myanmar in first-world accommodation.

"The problem with a new destination," said Cathala, "is that the appeal and quality of accommodation are not always in sync. For backpackers, it's fine. But on Calisto, it's fine for everybody."

Built in 1944 as a YMS-1 Class minesweeper, MY Calisto transitioned from wartime service in the British Navy to the ownership of Thomas Loel Guinness of the Irish brewing family. Guinness also purchased the Calisto's sister ship, MY Calypso, which he leased to Jacques Cousteau for one franc per year from 1950-1997.

Meanwhile, a prestigious French family bought MY Calisto from Guinness, maintaining the vessel for four decades before Merlin bought the boat in 2007. Today, she is renowned for her expansive sleeping quarters (seven cabins, as opposed to three or four on a typical yacht), value for money and adventure cruising.