

TRAVEL & CULTURE

The Lost Kingdom: Lamima's Indonesian voyage

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The northern tip of Papua fractures into a thousand lesser isles to form the Raja Ampat archipelago. To picture the scene, imagine the Marquesas Islands meets the Maldives. Towering islands of limestone rainforest are ringed by icing sugar shores.

Many are separated by lagoons that shine a Tiffany hue of sapphire blue. Others form entire ecosystems that could shelter – and feed – the world's largest superyacht inside a jungle-lined bay. Here DayGlo birds-of-paradise and the warbling laughingthrush sing a song far removed from the modern day.

The 21st century is, quite literally, a thousand miles distant. The Raja Ampat islands are far closer to Australia and the Philippines than the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, a week long sail (or five-hour flight) away. The ten million acres of sea are the realm of the phinisi, Indonesia's majestic wooden cruisers, hand-built on the beaches near the Spice Islands. These two-masted schooners are based upon the 17th century ships of the Dutch East India Company, which traded nutmeg and pepper in the archipelago. Like the Turkish gulet or Arabian dhow, phinisi have tailored their design to the local topography over the centuries. The result is a handsome hull carrying

a regatta's worth of sail, with lines muscular enough to carry timber or tins of beef through the 15,000 island Asian nation. Yet lithe enough to tiptoe over an unchartered reef in search of giant manta, a species protected for eternity thanks to a 2014 government fishing ban.

Such immutable settings gave veteran captain Dominique Gerardin the idea of *S/Y Lamima*. The Madagascar-born Frenchman, whose career has spanned from the Caribbean to South East Asia, sought to pair the accoutrements of a superyacht with the timeless lines of a phinisi. "Indonesia is a closed maritime registry," explains Gerardin, which means that no foreign yacht is allowed to charter in these hallowed seas. "As Indonesia had no real yachts to speak of, I knew I'd have to build my own." In order to "answer the needs of charter guests", Gerardin's boat would have to be big. The target was 65m (213'), several times larger than any phinisi

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hitherto built. To be a world-class yacht under RINA specifications, the Catalan naval architect Marcelo Penna secreted seven luxury en-suite rooms under a tiered teak hull. It would also need a dive room. Raja Ampat has the richest marine diversity on the planet. As the spawning ground for both the South Pacific and Indian Ocean, 1,000 species of fish cavort around 500 species of coral – ten times more than the Caribbean. With a mask and snorkel one could witness a kaleidoscopic parade of snapper, grouper and milkfish, ingredients all welcome in the yacht's capacious kitchen. For post-dive recuperation, a spa and a cocktail lounge would be a bonus too.

"Almost all wooden boats in Indonesia are built on the forest backed beaches of Sulawesi," continues Gerardin. "At age 12, local boys can use all the tools. By 18, they have spotted which ironwood trees they would like to utilize in future builds. By sheer chance I was directed to Haji Baso, a master boat builder who learnt the trade from his father in the 1960s. At first, when I mentioned the size of yacht I needed, he didn't believe me." Amazingly, the hull was constructed with the plans not on paper – but inside Baso's head. On completion it took 50 men two months to drag the hull across the sand into the water by chainblock – a little further each day. "I invited Baso to Bali when *Lamima* was fitted out. He couldn't imagine how we had introduced a luxury specification inside his wooden frame."

The toys tally with *Lamima's* ethos of exploration and ecology. There are 11 stand-up paddleboards, allowing guided groups to chart an unnamed island then Instagram the scene using the WiFi back on board. Because nobody wants to wait for a Balinese back rub, there are two masseurs, plus two jetskis and two traditional jukung canoes. And diving gear for all 14 guests. Add in a 400hp 10m tender ("to reach shark processions and tuna reefs") and this 2014 yacht has it all. "Which is important, because in quiet months like September, we probably won't see another boat."

The yacht's additions fulfil another purpose close to Gerardin's heart. While no one starves in the verdant wilderness of Sulawesi, incomes and education remain poor. "This idea started when we took a group of schoolchildren from the boat building town of Sorong out for the day. We put these kids on the banana boat and donut. Had lunch on a desert beach. Then danced and sang." The children were allegedly in heaven. "The crew loved it as much as the kids, so we repeat it regularly." Little wonder the staff turnover of *Lamima's* 20 engineers, chefs, deckhands and dive instructors is, after three years, precisely zero.

Gerardin wants to do more. "Often the government will make news by building a school. However, there are sometimes no teachers employed in them. I don't want my boat to be labelled with charity, but I'd like to promote a week where I donate half my charter fee to a community where it will make a difference. It's important that we are cruising these areas every year, so we can really monitor the growth of our teaching project." Guests who book one of Gerardin's exploratory voyages will be contributing to a noble cause.

Until then, *Lamima* has a packed itinerary. There's Komodo Island, where dinosauric lizards prowl an austere scrubland bound by treacherously beautiful beaches. Plus the Dampier Straits, a watery funnel for hawksbill turtles, named after William Dampier, the first Englishman to explore Australia. Up to Cape Kri, where the world record was set for spotting 374 fish species during one scuba dive. Then in winter she will snake up between Singapore and Sumatra, like the spice ships of old, to Myanmar's Mergui Archipelago, another marine frontier where superyachts are as rare as a branch of Starbucks. But that's a story for another day.

S/Y LAMIMA IS AVAILABLE TO CHARTER FROM
\$126,000 PER WEEK



ABOVE Offering the charm of an Indonesian two-masted phinisi with opulent luxuries of modern yacht design, *Lamima* is a nautical masterpiece available for charter.