

WINTER *Wonderlands*



Head for warmer climates, recharge those empty batteries and exchange the midwinter blues for a new palette of azure and sunflower, as some of the most exotic places in the world welcome the most exclusive superyachts to their balmy, crystal-clear waters

WORDS: MIRIAM CAIN

Winter in the Northern Hemisphere is traditionally a time when many animals, even of the human variety, hunker down, retreat from the world and wait for those first green shoots of spring. But when

there's so much of the world out there to explore and different types of yacht charter to consider, why hibernate for the winter?

For those looking for the very best of everything, where better to spend the first few weeks of January than anchored off St Barth in the Caribbean? Or, if it's pure relaxation and a soul-charge you need, why not head to the Andaman Sea and discover holistic local therapies on a wellbeing charter? Picture yourself al fresco dining on the aft deck looking out to frangipani- and hibiscus-covered foothills, bathing in water as clear as Evian, floating above a rippling rainbow of tropical fish or strolling along deserted white sand beaches at sunset – the world is your oyster and the possibilities are endless. It's never too early, or too late, to start dreaming, and with convenient flight times and routes available – even to those with limited time – short breaks can make that long cold winter seem so much shorter.



EASTERN CARIBBEAN

A playground for superyachts for many years, the islands of the Caribbean cover a vast area and offer countless cruising possibilities. From the alluring Leeward Islands of St Barth and Antigua to the rugged tropical Windwards of Guadeloupe and St Lucia or the tiny sand-fringed Grenadines, the Caribbean offers an array of dramatic scenery, fantastic beaches and welcoming locals. Its islands are best explored from the water – the myriad coves and bays available to superyachts make them a haven for waterborne travellers and are the perfect antidote to winter blues.

December to April is drier, cooler and less humid, with the peak season falling during the festive holiday period. Whether you are looking to welcome in the New Year in Mustique or to rejuvenate in St Lucia, the warm temperatures and steady trade winds make the islands a hotspot for both motor and sailing yachts. Your Burgess charter broker will be able to recommend the best itinerary for your chosen yacht and preferred activities.

TOP FIVE CARIBBEAN DELIGHTS

1 Foodie hub From beachfront shacks to romantic waterfront restaurants, the Caribbean gastronomic scene is an eclectic mix of international and locally influenced Creole cuisine. For fresh grilled lobster, head to Pinel Island, located on the north end of St Martin, and for a fantastic evening try Bonito in Gustavia, St Barth.

2 Pampering ports Acclimatise to 'island time' and take advantage of the local flora and fauna signature treatments at some of the finest spas the islands have to offer. Try the Clarins Spa at Le Guanahani or the recently renovated Cheval Blanc Spa on Flamands Beach, both in St Barth. leguanahani.com; chevalblanc.com/stbarthisledefrance

3 Step back in time The Caribbean is steeped in maritime history. Nelson commanded the naval dockyard in Antigua and this cultural attraction, with its forts and colonial buildings, are a lasting symbol of Britain's historic naval power.

4 Boutique therapy For chic Mustique beach style, head to the Pink House for designs by Lotty B and Elle Macpherson. St Barth has some wonderful boutiques: try 100% Capri for linen clothing, Calypso for beautiful boho kaftans and Diamond Genesis for watches. And don't miss the boutiques at the island's top hotels, including Le Toiny and Cheval Blanc St-Barth Isle de France.

pinkhousemustique.com; 100capri.com; calypsostbarth.com; diamondgenesis.com; letoiny.com

5 Underwater world Reef, wreck and wall dives are on offer for experienced divers, while snorkelling trails are marked with signs describing typical marine life.

OTHER THINGS NOT TO MISS

La Guérite, St Barth First established in Cannes on Île Sainte-Marguerite, this fashionable and refined offshoot on the harbour in Gustavia offers fine Mediterranean cuisine with an emphasis on fresh seafood. restaurantlaguerite.com

Chocolate Experience, St Kitts Discover why the island is nicknamed 'Sugar City' as you tour its first



RELAXED STYLE

Top to bottom: the striking Pitons on St Lucia; head ashore for a round of golf at Canouan Island's Pink Sands Club; shop for stylish beachwear at Mustique's Pink House. Opposite: life in the slow lane at One&Only Reethi Rah

and only chocolate boutique, sampling handcrafted sweet creations. You'll also have the chance to make your own edible delights. stkittsfoodtours.com

Dasheene, St Lucia Take in the spectacular views of the Pitons from the terrace of the restaurant as you savour innovative cuisine from chef Nigel Mitchel. Typical dishes might be Caribbean lamb salad, Cajun Creole vegetable bakes and plantain gratin with coconut rum sauce. ladera.com

Pink Sands Club, Canouan When cruising 'down island' in the Grenadines, try your hand at a round of golf on the spectacular, Jim Fazio-designed 18-hole championship course, which has amazing panoramic ocean views and waterfalls. pinksandsclub.com

Blues Festival, Mustique Anchor off Britannia Bay to join in the fun at this annual charity blues festival with live headline acts hosted at the ever-popular Basil's Bar in the last week of January. Reservations recommended. basilsbar.com





MALDIVES

When it comes to tropical getaways, the Maldives are in a league of their own. Perfect for drifting, Robinson Crusoe style, the archipelago consists of a string of coral atolls that comprise more than 1,000 desert islands. Around one in 10 are inhabited (generally by luxury resorts), but the ultimate way to escape to some of the truly deserted islands is aboard a superyacht. Discover island upon island surrounded by crystal-clear lagoons encrusted with reefs.

The Lhaviyani Atoll abounds with uninhabited islands that are perfect for peaceful anchorages, fishing and snorkelling. Further south, the Baa Atoll has some amazing diving. The best weather is between November and April, with the high season falling between December and March.

TOP FIVE MALDIVIAN MARVELS

1 Adrenalin zone The islands offer everything from diving and snorkelling to surfing and fishing, but the glut of watersports equipment on board your yacht will provide adrenalin-fuelled activities in these warm Indian Ocean waters.

2 Beneath the surface The Maldives are billed as the ultimate diving experience and a superyacht provides the opportunity to access unexplored reefs and virgin dive sites. Non-divers can also see clear down to nine metres (30ft) in most areas, so snorkellers can spot pretty much everything a diver can.

3 Beach bound For the ultimate island fantasy, the crew can set up cushions and loungers on your own deserted island while your chef barbecues the catch of the day.

4 Cultural acclaim The Maldives are home to a diverse range of cultures and a superyacht allows you to visit remote communities. Discover the heritage site Redhinge Usgandu on the island of Ugulu. Anchor outside the Kudarikilu lagoon and take the tender ashore to discover the local island life with a visit to the village school and the market.

5 Catch of the day Fishing is a way of life in the Maldives. Fish at sunrise when dogtooth tuna, saltfish, red snapper and wahoo mill beneath the surface. You might even spot various species of whale, including the mighty blue whale.

OTHER THINGS NOT TO MISS

One&Only Reethi Rah A firm favourite on the cruising map, sybarites can indulge at the award-winning Japanese spa with a purva karma four-handed massage, followed by a yoga session with visiting yoga guru Dr Gopal Govindasamy. oneandonlyresorts.com/reethirah

Cargo, Vommuli Step ashore to the new St Regis resort for an aperitif at the quirky Whale Bar before dining on delicious street cuisine at the equally quirky Cargo. starwoodhotels.com

Crab Shack, Finolhu Relaxed but oozing class, this beach restaurant is the latest eating spot. Situated halfway along Finolhu's stunning beach, it attracts the yachting crowd to feast on soft-shell crab tacos washed down with goblets of rosé. finolhu.com

Javvu Spa, Amilla Fushi Step ashore to Amilla Fushi for a mind-blowing massage based on traditional ancient African tribal methods. amilla.mv

Angu Faru Dive at Angu Faru in the Baa Atoll, where the waters are a breeding ground for grey reef sharks and a habitat for turtles and schools of barracudas.

SEYCHELLES

With five Marine National Parks and a host of exclusive resorts, the Seychelles archipelago is the perfect cruising ground for an alternative winter charter, although they are a good year-round cruising destination safely outside the cyclone zone. Adrift in the Indian Ocean, the 115 postcard-perfect islands are split into two groups. The Inner Islands consist of some 41 granitic islands clustered around the capital, Mahé. A handful of these beautiful islets are situated just off Mahé's eastern coast in a marine park, while slightly further afield are a host of uber-luxurious eco-resorts.

The warm equatorial currents and pollution-free environment offer perfect sailing conditions, although the typically calm seas are equally suitable for cruising by motor yacht. Sailing or cruising the islands is easy, thanks to the relatively short distances between the main islands and the good anchorages available.

The Outer Islands, famed for their shallow-lying coral reefs, comprise four atolls. They include the Amirantes, closest of the Outer Islands to Mahé, and lend themselves well to cruising with spectacular diving and snorkelling spots. Only a few visitors travel further to the far-flung atolls of Aldabra, Cosmoledo and Astove, which lie some 630 nautical miles further on from Mahé and require special cruising permits.

TOP FIVE SEYCHELLES EXPERIENCES

1 Blue planet The underwater topography is a reflection of what lies above with massive boulder formations strewn across the sea floor, providing hiding places for all manner of sea life and an adventure playground for divers and snorkellers alike.

2 On the surface From big-game fishing to paddleboarding, kayaking, snorkelling and surfing, the crystal-clear turquoise waters offer ample opportunities for non-motorised watersports.

3 Sunset strolls Peppered with immense boulders and lapped by the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, discover some of the best beaches in the world, including the pink coral of Anse Lazio, Coco Beach and Anse Source d'Argent, to name but a few of the beaches that regularly top the lists of the world's finest strands.

4 Bird-watching The Seychelles are a paradise for bird-watchers, and you can visit the various conservation areas and spot a number of critically endangered and endemic species. The area is home to some of the world's most spectacular seabird colonies with islands such as Praslin, La Digue, Bird, Aride, Frigate, Cousin and Aldabra having become bywords for the best bird-watching opportunities. The islands are home to 13 species and 17 subspecies that cannot be found anywhere else on earth.

5 Eco hideaways Discover the luxury eco-resorts of North Island, Cousine and Frigate Island Private. north-island.com; cousineisland.com; frigate.com

OTHER THINGS NOT TO MISS

Bonbon Plume, Praslin Take a stroll along Praslin's Anse Lazio Beach and dine on traditional Creole cuisine at this small, secluded lunch spot. Ask for a table beneath a palm-thatched canopy and bury your toes in the satin white sands while you dine.

Maia, Mahé Maia's ethos is de-stressing, reviving and relaxing, so where better to head before embarking on your yacht than the spa for a Gentle Soul Massage or a qigong session. maia.com.sc

Port Glaud Waterfall, Mahé Take a guided walk in the jungle interior and jump into the freshwater pool at the spectacular waterfall at Port Glaud.

Six Senses Zil Payson, Félicité Indulge in yogic sleep at the new sybaritic spa on Félicité. Located high on the rocks above Anse Reunion Beach on the wilder eastern side of this private island, it's exceptionally idyllic. sixsenses.com/zil-payson

Eagle's Nest, La Digue Hike up Eagle's Nest Mountain and watch the sunset while dining on fresh Creole dishes from the small restaurant at its summit.

BEAUTY SPOTS
Appreciate the Seychelles' natural splendour on the private Denis Island (below) and the Vallée de Mai on Praslin (right)



ANDAMAN SEA

The ancient land of Myanmar is a beautiful fusion of sleepy villages, sacred cities and mist-shrouded jungles. The mystical cruising grounds of the Mergui Archipelago have long been hidden from foreign eyes and remain untouched by time. It is therefore a privilege to visit them now and experience a rare and magical culture little touched by the western world.

Scattered over some 250 miles in the inky blue Andaman Sea, this chain of 800 islands offers breathtaking scenery, virgin rainforest and world-class diving on undiscovered reefs. December to February is high season with a steady 20 knots of wind – a month either side still has favourable cruising conditions.

Lying just across the border, Thailand's Andaman coastline is an established yachting area, yet still retains its off-the-beaten-track appeal. The secret of any winter charter here is to mix the two faces of the nation and spend time partying on the larger islands, then recover by exploring untouched jungle-strewn isles that seem to be a million miles from anywhere. November to March is high season with near-perfect cruising conditions and guaranteed good weather.

South of Thailand, Malaysia is blessed with warm temperatures and balmy waters year-round thanks to its proximity to the equator. Langkawi is the largest of a cluster of more than 100 islands on the west coast. With dense jungle to explore, striking shorelines and pristine waters to dive into, the Malay experience is one to rival its northern neighbours for an alternative winter charter.

TOP FIVE ANDAMAN ACTIVITIES

1 Dive on in Don your flippers and jump in to an underwater paradise. From the Coral Garden at Pulau Payar Marine Park to the Similan Islands, some of the best dive sites in the world are located in the Andaman Sea.

2 On the shore Kayak through Langkawi's numerous Geoparks, trek through Thailand's jungle interior and discover virgin rainforest in Myanmar – South East Asia has as much to offer above the surface as it does below.

3 Party scene From high-end resort bars to beach shacks, the main islands of Langkawi, Phuket, Ko Samui and Ko Pha Ngan have a vast array of restaurants, bars and live music venues.

4 Sacred sights Admire the famous, shimmering sacred temples from the decks of your yacht or step ashore and soak up the local culture at every turn.

5 Lo-fi hideaways Retune your body and senses at one of the many luxurious, holistic retreats that dot the coastlines of Langkawi and Phuket.

OTHER THINGS NOT TO MISS

Amanpuri, Phuket Experience the ultimate in meditation with a mind-training session with a former Buddhist monk, before having a Royal Thai Massage (created for the Thai Royal Family) at the Aman Spa. aman.com/resorts/amanpuri

Langkawi Geopark Take a boat ride or private jetski safari through mangroves and explore the UNESCO status Kilim Karst Geopark. Its amazing wildlife includes monkeys, rare white-bellied sea eagles and bat-filled limestone caves. langkawigeopark.com.my

Dayang Bunting Island, Malaysia Legend has it that women who swim in the cool waters of the Lake of the Pregnant Maiden will be blessed with fertility.

Ko Muk, Thailand Swim 200 metres (656ft) through the magic cave of Ko Muk to access a beautiful interior bay with a deserted white sandy beach.

Sea Gypsies, Mergui Encounter real-life sea gypsies (or the Moken people), of whom more than 2,000 live among the 800 islands of the Mergui Archipelago.



WILD AND CALM
Spot Malaysian wildlife such as flamingoes and relax at Phuket's Amanpuri spa



WHY CHARTER A SUPERYACHT THIS WINTER

1 FAVOURABLE CHARTER RATES Unlike the Mediterranean, where most of the summer is considered high season, the winter cruising grounds have a much longer low season (essentially any time other than Christmas and the New Year), so there are well-priced offers to be found.

2 BETTER BERTHING OPTIONS Outside of the absolute peak season, berths are readily available wherever there are marinas at far lower prices than in the Mediterranean, allowing you to step from your yacht straight onto the dock and explore the land-side of your destination, although in reality the preferred option is likely to be tenders to take you ashore.

3 SHORTER LEAD TIMES AND MORE AVAILABILITY Even the most popular charter yachts usually have a few weeks of availability during off-peak periods, so you can plan later and have more leeway with your travel dates.

4 QUIETER ANCHORAGES Aside from the prime time surrounding Christmas and New Year, the majority of anchorages and ports tend to be quieter than those in the Mediterranean. Not only is this more pleasurable overall, but you can also be more impromptu with planning your dining and spa choices ashore, which makes for a more relaxing and spontaneous charter experience.

5 IT'S COLD AT HOME How much nicer does it feel to enjoy 30°C (86°F) heat, crystal-clear blue waters and sunshine when your phone tells you it's 6°C (46°F) at home!

Contact your Burgess charter broker to plan your next winter charter or email charter@burgessyachts.com. See the Charter Directory on page 133.

CARIBBEAN UPDATE Unfortunately, some Caribbean islands were in the path of the hurricane activity last September, but their communities are committed to returning to normality and very much look forward to welcoming visitors to their shores. Ask your charter broker for the latest news on the restoration of these beautiful islands.