

# THE GREATEST PHINISI EVER BUILT

SIT BACK AND RELAX ON A VOYAGE AROUND KOMODO WITH THE OWNER OF A 65M KETCH THAT'S DESCRIBED AS THE MOST LUXURIOUS INDONESIAN PHINISI EVER PRODUCED.

*Text and photos by Mark Eveleigh*





A GREAT CURVED TIMBER HULL lies almost hidden among the forests at the foot of a volcano. The stern is deep among the coconut palms but, from where I stand on the scaffolding, the bow sweeps out towards the sea in a graceful curve. Deep down beside the keel, two carpenters are working. They are so far away that I don't even notice them at first.

They're part of a Konjo community (the master-carpenters of Sulawesi) who established a tiny boat-building hamlet on the shore at Sangeang volcano, off the north shore of Sumbawa. When Sangeang erupted last year – blasting a cloud of ash and pumice so far into the stratosphere

that planes were diverted from as far away as Australia – the Konjo had already anticipated the signs. Long before the rest of the world knew anything was going on, they had evacuated the island.

The timber of the hull is still rough under my hands and it's hard to imagine that, in the not too distant future, this vessel will emerge from her jungle shrouds and take her place among the growing fleet of luxury phinisi that are plying the waters of Indonesia. Her bow points out to the watery horizon where a statuesque vessel is at anchor; it's as if she's pointing enviously towards a vision of her future.

But she can only hope. At 65.2 metres, the ketch out there is more than double her size and she is rigged and equipped as no phinisi has ever been before. The lettering on her bow reads *Lamima* and she's the biggest traditional sailing vessel ever built in Indonesia.

"She was built by Konjo people, too," says Dominique Gerardin, *Lamima's* owner.



"It took nine months for the hull to be constructed, in very similar conditions to this in Bira, Sulawesi."

There are unusual complications in building a boat Konjo-style. Even master shipwrights like the famous Haji Baso (who built *Lamima*, along with scores of others) never work from paper. The entire design is carried in the builder's head and, at most, sketches are scribbled in the sand. Of course when working on a project with specifications such as those demanded for *Lamima* there is no substitute for the involvement of a formally trained yacht designer (in this case Marcelo Pena Yacht Design of Barcelona).

"There was a moment of shock early in the project when I realized that the boat was going to be much bigger than planned," Gerardin admits. "Western yacht designers measure dimensions from the outside of the keel but the Konjo take it from the inside. Also, they have an extra inner keel that they call the 'dragon'. So when the keel was laid, we suddenly realised that the boat would be five-metres longer than expected."

Launching a 65.2-metre hull from a flat beach is a Herculean task in its own right. It took 50 people 45 days to float her and at best the 350-tonne hull moved just three metres a day.

Although she was born in the tradition of great Konjo boatbuilding, *Lamima* is in truth an international project. The mast alone was made in Spain of Oregon Pine from Canada, and fitted with British rigging (from Marine Result, UK). The great two-metre diameter hoops that hold the Californian sails (North Sails) in place are made from Thai teak covered with animal skin. There are 38 of these hoops and a separate skin was used on each.

Gerardin wanted the boat to be made entirely in Indonesia, but despite his best efforts much of the work was completed in a Bangkok shipyard. "We towed the hull from Sulawesi to Surabaya, Java," he



explains, “and spent three weeks there while I tried to find contacts who could guarantee that the work would be completed in a reasonable time. It was a naval dockyard though and, of course, the navy contract would always come in front of our own needs.”

Finally he gave up and the boat was towed for a further month all the way to Bangkok with Gerardin and a few crewmembers camping in the hull.

“It was an interesting voyage and I wouldn’t have missed it for anything,” he says. “We lived in the great hardwood shell with just the skin of the deck over it. We ate simply and, in timeless Indonesian fashion, did our business from an overhanging long-drop over the side.”

It’s hard to picture such a voyage because when I hear the story we’re sipping gin and tonic in *Lamima*’s ample saloon. It might be our second gin and tonic – more likely our third – and I struggle to imagine the living conditions during that voyage. Below us there are now six of the most wonderfully spacious cabins you’ll find anywhere in Indonesian waters and, back on the aft-deck, a full beam master cabin that would be considered a generous suite in any hotel. The lounging areas on deck are nothing short of vast for a maximum passenger capacity of just 14 and there is even a spa with two dedicated masseuses in a shaded section of the aft-deck.

There’s a feeling of space on *Lamima* that is hard to find on other phinisi even approaching her size: the clever layout of the en-suite bathrooms (stretched across the deck rather than parallel to the gangway) adds to the space, but a preference for gleaming superyacht style white paintwork and trimming instead of moody dark timber undoubtedly helps.

Gerardin’s ocean-going experience is entirely in luxury motor yachts and when you’re walking around the pristine, state-of-the-art engine room (with the 1000hp Mann engine that is capable of bringing the ship





up to 12 knots) it is hard to remember that you're in a traditional boat. We're anchored in a sheltered cove in the heart of Komodo National Park. Normally *Lamima's* captain finds secluded anchorages, but this time there are several other phinisi spread through the bay and I notice that they are rigged only for posing with a token display of canvas for photographic purposes. *Lamima* seems to be the only one that was designed to function well under sail.

"I spent 18 years cruising luxury motor yachts around the Med and Caribbean," the owner says. "So many wealthy people in the Med who charter yachts are primarily motivated by the wish to be *seen* – it's a status symbol and for many being *seen* on a yacht is more important than the sheer fun of boating. I started to dream of sailing more exciting waters and of the unique thrill of exploring Indonesia under sail in a traditional timber boat."

The diversity of the islands is matched by the diversity of culture and *Lamima's* 19-strong crew is made up of people from five islands and three religions, giving passengers an immediate sense of the amazing diversity of the world's greatest island nation.

"I never had a crew like this on any boat in Europe," Gerardin enthuses. "They have a natural talent not just for making guests feel at home, but for working together efficiently

and getting things done as a team. They are so pleasant and easy to work with!"

The *Lamima* website claims it is the only world-class charter yacht to be registered under the Indonesian flag (a pre-requisite when sailing with clients in Indonesian waters). Gerardin believes that when navigating remote Indonesian waters, phinisi captains and owners



should fully live up to their responsibility to adhere to the highest maritime safety practices.

"*Lamima* is the only phinisi certified by RINA [Registro Italiano Navale]," he says. "She will have to be examined by a certified surveyor every year to ensure that she adheres to international standards for safety, stability, fire protection and pollution prevention. The necessity to get all materials and equipment class-approved can literally double the cost of your boat... and there are not many phinisi owners who are happy to go to those extremes. I don't believe in compromising on safety. Even if I had a big hole in the hull I'd be able to close two watertight doors and isolate the damaged compartment. Even with one compartment entirely flooded I could still navigate safely. No other phinisi can do that."

"The art of Indonesian boat-building is already recognised throughout the world for producing some of the finest wooden vessels available anywhere and *Lamima* has now raised the bar to new levels," Gerardin adds. "I wanted this boat to be seen as nothing short of an Indonesian sea-faring masterpiece."

*Lamima* boasts six spacious lower-deck cabins and a palatial master cabin. The all-inclusive rate (including crew, fuel, meals, massages, dives, dive certificates, shore excursions, internet via satellite) is US\$20,000/night (+21% Indonesian tax) for a minimum of three nights in Komodo. *Lamima* is equipped with one jet tender and two outboard tenders, two 1300cc Yamaha jet skis, a full range of watersports toys and the best dive equipment that money can buy (with two dive-masters). South East Asia Exotic Cruise can arrange bespoke itineraries to match the interests and demands of clients. [www.lamima.com](http://www.lamima.com)

<i>Lamima</i>	
Type	Ketch
Launched	2014
Length Overall	65.2m
Beam	11.2m
Draft	3.6m
Builders	Haji Baso & Haji Sakka (Master builder Bira)
Architect & Design	Marcelo Penna Yacht Design
Classification	RINA & LY2
Hull	Iron Wood
Deck	Teak
Superstructure	Teak
Guests	14 – 1 DBL master cabin (ENS & D/R), 4 DBL cabins (ENS), 2 twin cabins (ENS)
Rigging	Service Yates (Spain)
Crew	19
Sails	North Sails 1,277sqm
Main Engine	MAN 1,000 hp/735 kW
Max Speed	12 knots
Cruising Speed	10 kts
Fuel Capacity	52,000 litres
Generators	Kohler 3 x 50 kW, 1 x 25 kW
Fresh Water Capacity	12,000L, 2 water makers (10,000L/day)
Waste Treatment	Hamann mini compact system
Flag	Indonesian