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ANDREW HARPER'S Hideaway Report[®]

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Traveling the world in search of truly enchanting places



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This issue took us into uncharted territory, with our first editorial exploration of Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido. The destination, known for its superlative skiing and unspoiled nature, draws few foreign tourists, but we doubt that it will remain a secret for much longer. For something completely different, we spent a week in Nashville, taking in its

live music, its burgeoning gourmet scene and its best new hotels. That's all we'd originally planned for this *Hideaway Report*, but the prospect of a few days aboard a luxury wooden sailing yacht in Indonesia was simply irresistible. Finally, look for a roundup of recent feedback from Andrew Harper members. We love hearing about your travels.

SAILING AMONG KOMODO DRAGONS

An invitation to review an Indonesian yacht proves too tempting to decline



This summer, I sailed through the otherworldly Komodo National Park in Indonesia aboard the seven-cabin *Celestia*. This ship is available only for private charter, cruising in Komodo during summer and Raja Ampat in the winter (itineraries among the Spice Islands of Hatta, Banda Neira and Banda Besar are also possible).

After landing in Labuan Bajo on Flores Island, I was whisked to the breezy and bohemian Sudamala Resort, Komodo to meet up with the rest of the group. The

next morning, after a short drive to the port, we transferred by dinghy to the gorgeous wooden *phinisi*. Thus began one of the most relaxing and criticism-proof trips I've had in recent memory.

The 148-foot yacht was built in Sulawesi using UNESCO-recognized techniques. The impeccable interior design seamlessly blends age-old traditions with modern style, resulting in a glamorous yet timeless ship (the interiors are by the Deirdre Renniers design studio, which also did the *Amandira*'s).

Everything is sumptuous but understated: beautiful, unpolished teak; luxurious linens; and a creative use of space that provides numerous places to simply relax and enjoy the scenery.

The accommodations comprise two double cabins and two twin cabins on the lower deck, the Main Suite on the main deck and two Owner's Suites on the upper deck. My Owner's Suite was cozy but well thought out, with a queen bed and two walls of windows. Two closets and a small built-in desk provided plenty



of storage. The bath was surprisingly spacious, with a wood-paneled shower that looked like a sauna. But sometimes form trumped function, typified by the heavy and unwieldy glass shower doors.

One of my favorite places on board was the private back deck of my cabin. But I enjoyed the more convivial spaces, too, like the indoor salon, where we played games one night during a particularly turbulent crossing, and the large outdoor dining table on the main deck.

To top it off, we were sailing amid scenery of unbelievable beauty. Instead of the lush, green Indonesia depicted in Bali travel posters, Komodo is an archipelago of desert islands, with scrubby brown mountains rising out of the deep sapphire-blue sea. Each day was a new adventure: swimming with sea turtles in a colorful coral reef, sunning ourselves on the delicate white arc of the Taka Makassar sandbar, walking along Padar Island's pink beach at sunset. On our last full day, we woke up early to see the Komodo dragons, giant reptiles that can grow to 10 feet long.

But even a beautiful yacht in a fascinating destination means little without the people on it. The staff threaded the needle of professionalism and fun. And even with 17 crewmembers on board for a maximum of 14 guests, it feels as if the staff-to-guest ratio is even higher, since so many crew had multiple skills.

Each meal on board seemed better than the last. Executive chef Wayan Kresna Yasa (who honed his cooking



skills at New York's Blue Hill at Stone Barns) prepared a delectable array of Indonesian, European and fusion dishes that wowed everyone. The local menu items, like opor ayam (a coconut chicken curry), had me wishing we had more Indonesian restaurants back home. Fusion dishes like duck confit with miso glaze were revelatory creations.

On our last night, the staff set up a candlelit dinner for us on the beach of a private island. Chef Wayan prepared another incredible meal over a bonfire.

If you're looking for a low-key yet luxurious adventure in an underrated tropical destination, a charter of *Celestia* may be just the ticket. (Just don't forget to invite me.) **HR**

Note: This yacht journey was provided on a complimentary basis to our editor.

Opposite: *Celestia* yacht. Clockwise from top left: The Upper Deck and the Main Suite aboard the *Celestia*; our hike on Komodo Island, Indonesia

CELESTIA

LIKE The simple yet stunning design; the hospitable and capable staff; the superb Indonesian-fusion cuisine; the fascinating custom itinerary planned to avoid crowds.

DISLIKE Depending which way the wind was blowing, I could sometimes smell exhaust on the back deck above the engine; the onboard Wi-Fi was spotty.

GOOD TO KNOW While the Main Suite is the biggest and most glamorous, the identical Owner's Suites are the most private and therefore feel the most luxurious. Rates include four hours of massage per day and diving equipment, plus house wine and local beer.

RESERVE Call the Travel Office to book your journey at (800) 375-4685.