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# UNDERWAY

NEWS and NOTES from the CRUISING COMMUNITY

Edited by Jennifer Brett

## ANCHORED AMONG GIANTS

After years of anchoring inside South Pacific atolls—where tropical islands of sand and coral lie just a few feet above shimmering seas, and our tallest companions were rustling coconut palms—we've entered a new region, one of imposing scale and grandeur. It feels like we've wandered into the mythical world of King Kong.

These rare geographical giants emerged more than 200 million years ago, forced by shifting tectonic plates from below the ocean to rise hundreds of feet above. They are weathered by centuries of driving monsoonal rains, and dripping with great stalactites of calcium deposits hanging the height of *Dream Time's* mast. These pillars stand sentry throughout Southeast Asia, resting gently on emerald waters while towering into wispy skies.

Thailand is unlike any other region my wife, Catherine, and I have explored since sailing from New York's Long Island Sound 12 years and 40,000 nautical miles ago. The warm tropical waters lying off Phuket's eastern shoreline is a rich and seductive cruising territory, offering mariners hundreds of impressive limestone karsts to explore, where behind craggy folds and

overhangs concealed by tropical jungle, caves, sinkholes and hidden chambers wait to be discovered.

Light winds and distances between these islands of just a few nautical miles have us sailing under only a genoa and often, to shade us from the equatorial heat, the shelter of our canopies. And by early afternoon, *Dream Time* rests in anchorages where our only company is the island watching over us, and on one occasion, a family of long-tailed macaques foraging for oysters among the rocks at low tide.

And just before the sun disappears into the Indian Ocean, fruit bats emerge, rising by the thousands in a swirling black mass from caves hidden deep within the island. Warm light plays across ancient rock faces that seem fixated on a point far beyond our horizon, and with *Dream Time* nodding gently in calm waters, these giants of the Andaman Sea, balancing on foundations eroded by time, seem to stir, rocking and swaying with the tide, and it is both humbling and hypnotic to be anchored so very close, resting quietly in their shadows.

—Neville Hockley