

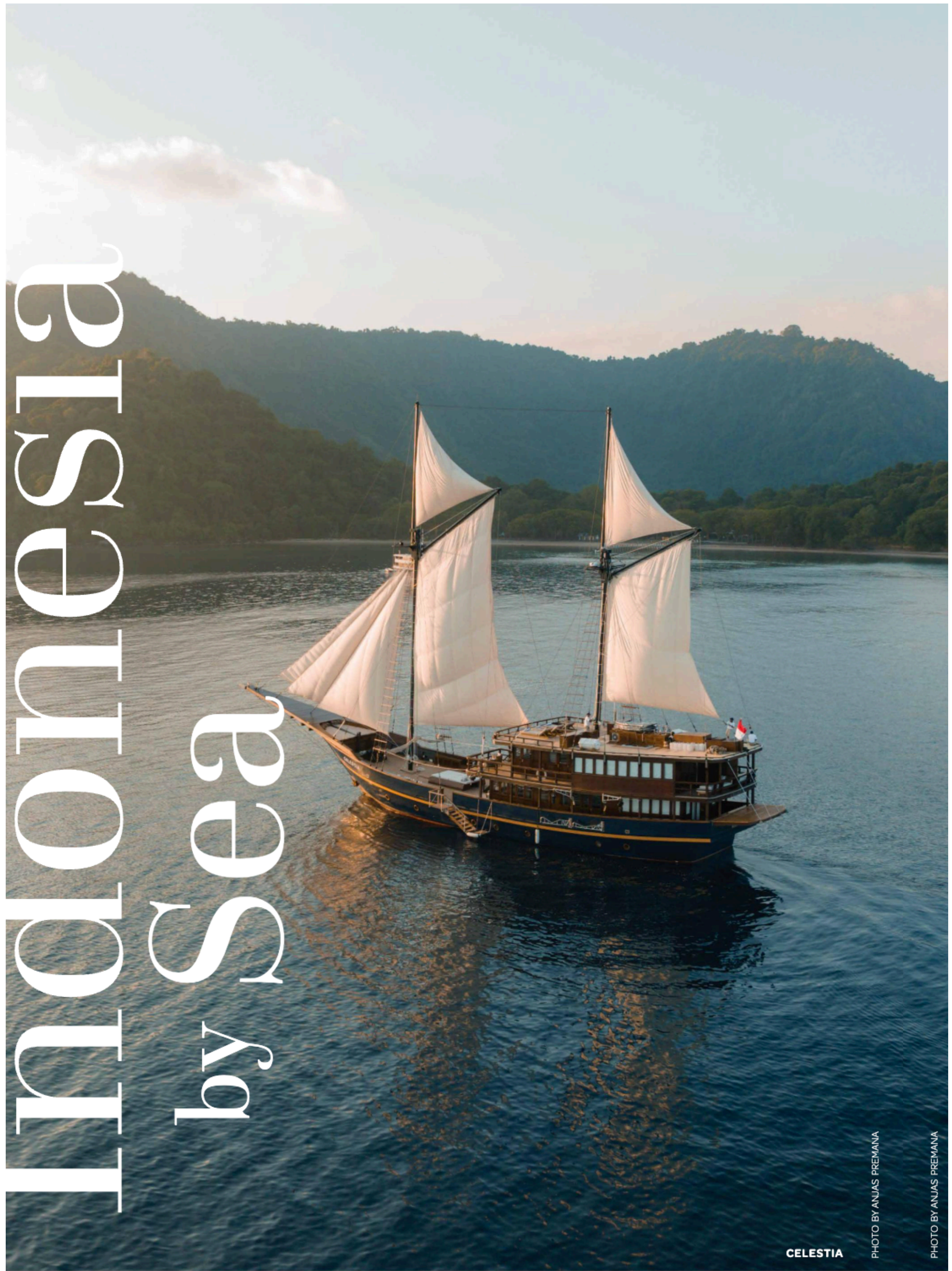
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KRISTIN
CHENOWETH
A FREQUENCY ALL HER OWN



Indonesia by Sea

CELESTIA

PHOTO BY ANJAS PREMANA

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A Private Charter Aboard a Handcrafted Phinisi Yacht Blends History, Luxury, and Adventure

BY STACEY LASTOE

With more than 17,000 islands scattered across the equator, Indonesia is less a country than a constellation—with volcanoes rising from turquoise seas, jungle-fringed coves, and villages reachable only by boat. To truly experience it, you have to travel the way Indonesians have for centuries: by sea.

The phinisi, a twin-masted wooden schooner hand-built by the Bugis shipwrights of South Sulawesi in the early 20th century, is both a national symbol and a thing of rare beauty. First developed centuries ago by the Bugis and Makassarese shipbuilders of South Sulawesi, the phinisi was once the workhorse of Indonesia's maritime trade—carrying spices, timber, and textiles between the country's far-flung islands and beyond. Built entirely by hand from local ironwood and teak, these twin-masted vessels became a proud emblem of Indonesia's seafaring heritage and were officially recognized by UNESCO in 2017 for their cultural significance as the "Pinisi, art of boatbuilding in South Sulawesi."

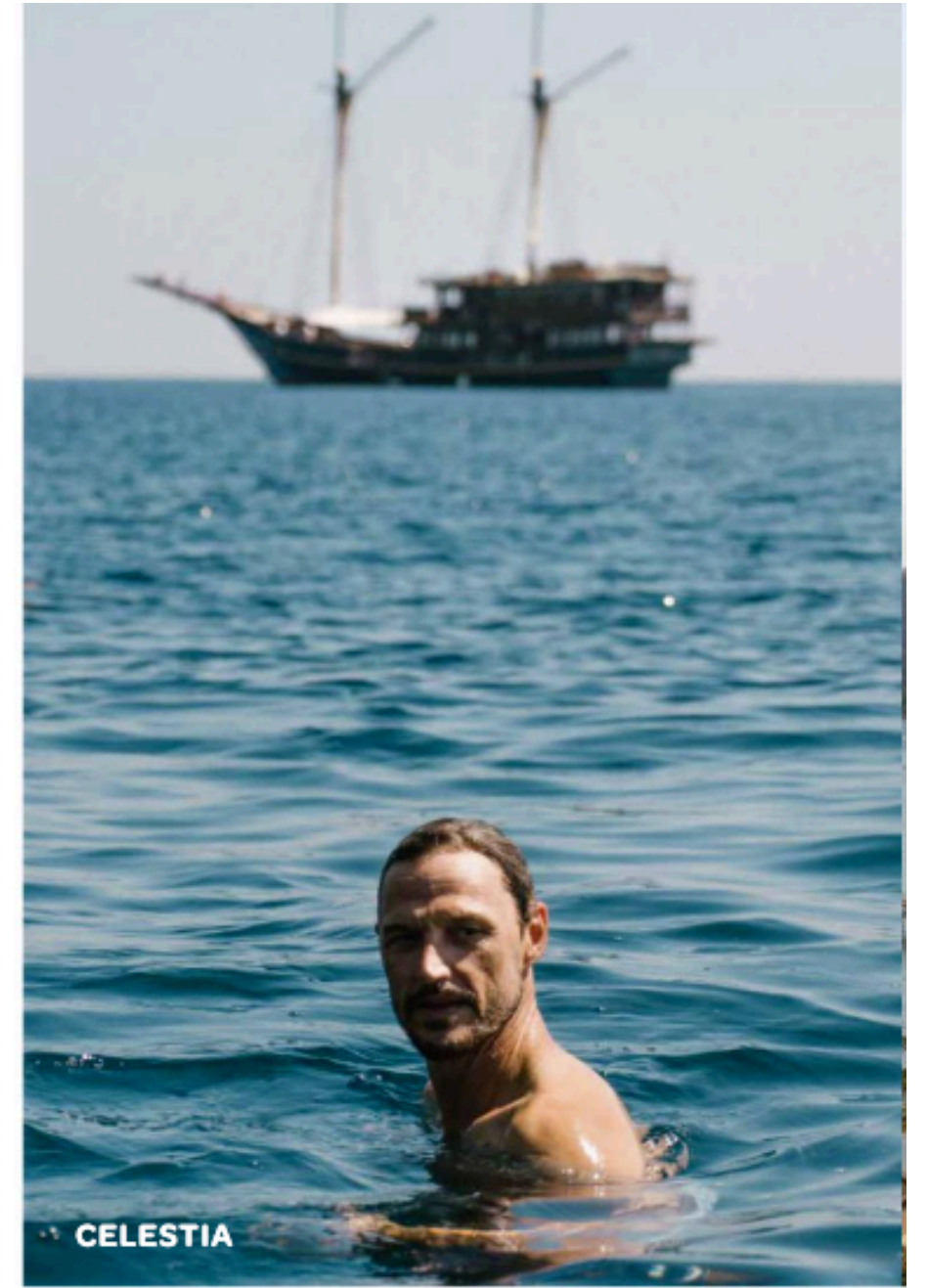
In recent decades, the phinisi has undergone a renaissance. The result is an upscale modern fleet of hand-built yachts that preserve the soul of the original vessel, giving intrepid travelers an exclusive experience at sea.

One of Indonesia's newest luxury phinisi, *Celestia*, a private yacht, merges this traditional craftsmanship with understated glamour. The hand-built, 45-meter phinisi, crafted according to UNESCO-protected methods, made its debut in 2023 and runs charters year-round.

The name *Celestia* nods to the sky above rather than the sea below. "When you're on a boat in Indonesia, everyone's looking down . . . at the corals, the marine life, all the color," said designer Jasmine Chong who owns the ship with her brother, Jason Tabalujan. But one of Chong's family's favorite things to do is lie on the daybed at the front of the yacht and just look up. "We don't do that enough in our everyday lives," Chong added.

The vision for *Celestia* was clear from the start: "As Indonesians, Jason and I wanted to celebrate our cultural heritage," Chong says. "The phinisi is so ingrained in the culture. It's what's always been used to explore these waters. It just felt like the right vessel to showcase the archipelago in a way that's both authentic and celebratory."

Interiors by Deirdre Renniers feature textiles and furnishings sourced from local artisans, and while the Owner's Suite is the largest onboard the ship, it's the two upper-level rooms, tucked away but with expansive views of the sea—that may



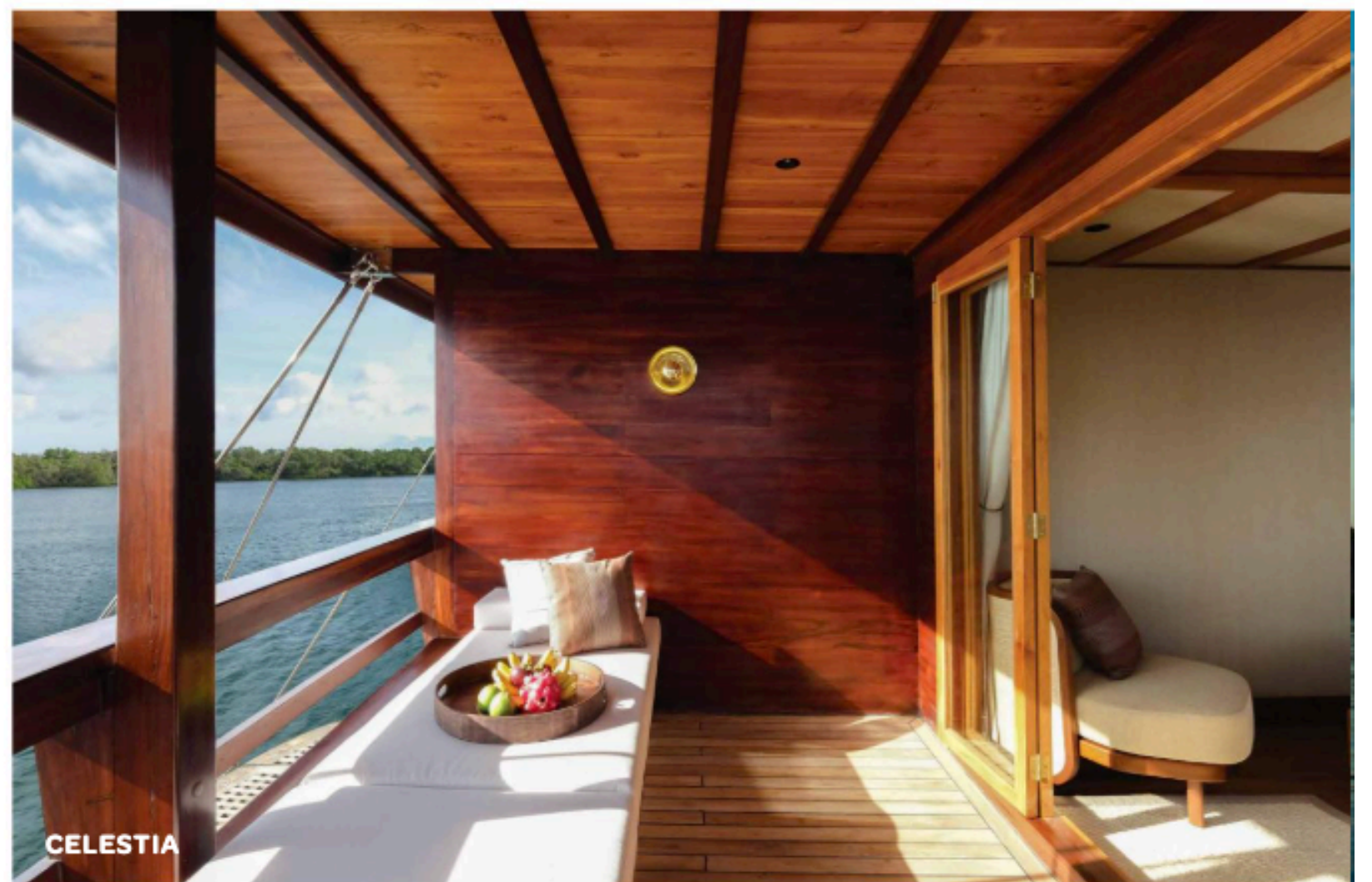
be the most coveted. All sleeping quarters include ensuite bathrooms; even the bath products are bespoke, formulated exclusively for Celestia with notes of green mandarin, teakwood, and jasmine.

Helmed by Michelin-trained Balinese chef Wayan Kresna Yasa, who spent time in such esteemed kitchens as Chicago's Acadia and New York's Blue Hill at Stone Barns, a small team works magic out of a galley-sized kitchen packed to the gills with spices, herbs, and fresh seafood. To dine (and drink) on Celestia—three delectable squares a day plus snacks, fresh-squeezed juices, and expertly-made cocktails—is to experience a masterclass in contemporary Indonesian hospitality. Food is largely sustainable, too, with the majority of ingredients coming from the archipelago.

Chartering a ship like Celestia means spending the morning swimming with whale sharks, snorkeling with manta rays and sea turtles, and exploring volcanic islands. It also means getting a full-body massage before dining on Balinese classics like babi guling, a suckling pig dish that is to die for, beef rendang, and grilled satay, all served with a different homemade sambal to add even more flavor and a bracing heat.

Afternoons for the ship's guests (14 maximum) and a crew of 17, including a captain, dive instructor, gracious serving staff, and massage therapist, unfold naturally. Although there are technically three Indonesian destinations to choose from in the region: Komodo Islands, Raja Ampat, and Spice Islands, no sailing is ever exactly the same, and, blessedly, there's never a strict schedule to adhere to. Last year, Celestia launched three themed itineraries, and new ones are on the horizon.

You can sleep in or rise early to see the sunrise with a hot cup of coffee in hand. Yogis can practice yoga on the upper deck and sun worshippers can get a head start on the tanning. If part of your group wishes to snorkel, you can don a bathing suit and head out in a tender in search of colorful schools of fish. As Chong put it, "You can reach villages, waterfalls, and volcanic islets that are impossible to get to any other way. It's incredibly transporative. You're immersed in another world."





Chong pointed out that most travelers to the region go to Bali, which she agrees is amazing, “but to truly understand Indonesia, you have to see it by water.”

Given the distance to travel to the region, it’s advisable to add on to your Indonesia adventure by booking a stay on one of the islands. Celestia’s team can arrange pre- and post-sailing stays, whether at the Ritz Carlton Reserve Bali or St. Regis Jakarta, or Ayana Komodo. The team can also help arrange commercial or private flights.

MORE VESSELS IN THE PHINISI FLEET

ALEXA

With just one glorious cabin, this ship was designed with couples in mind. It may just be the most romantic, and certainly the most intimate, escape in all of Indonesia. An attentive crew anticipates every desire, and Alexa’s passengers can fill their days at sea with onboard spa treatments, snorkeling, and even fishing for the dinner’s fresh catch. Seafood barbecues on secluded beaches are another draw, noted Rachel Rose, travel designer at Jacada Travel. For couples seeking complete seclusion, it’s hard to imagine a more cinematic way to experience Indonesia’s islands.

SI DATU BUA

Expect nothing but the highest quality of service and hospitality aboard this traditional Indonesian phinisi, where a professional crew of 12, including a divemaster, private chef and expedition leader, caters to up to six guests. Deeply rooted in Indonesian heritage, the ship features Sumatran wood carvings, ikat textiles, and antiques. Built by the famed Konjo shipwrights, it’s the sister ship to Silolona. The original in the small fleet, Silolona can be chartered in tandem with Si Datu Bua. Culture and history are as important as deep-sea diving on Si Datu Bua, and hosts Kelly and Goris are happy to dispense their deep knowledge to curious guests.

SAMSARA SAMUDRA

Part of the curated fleet represented by Ultimate Indonesian Yachts, this newer generation 42-meter, six cabin ship is led by





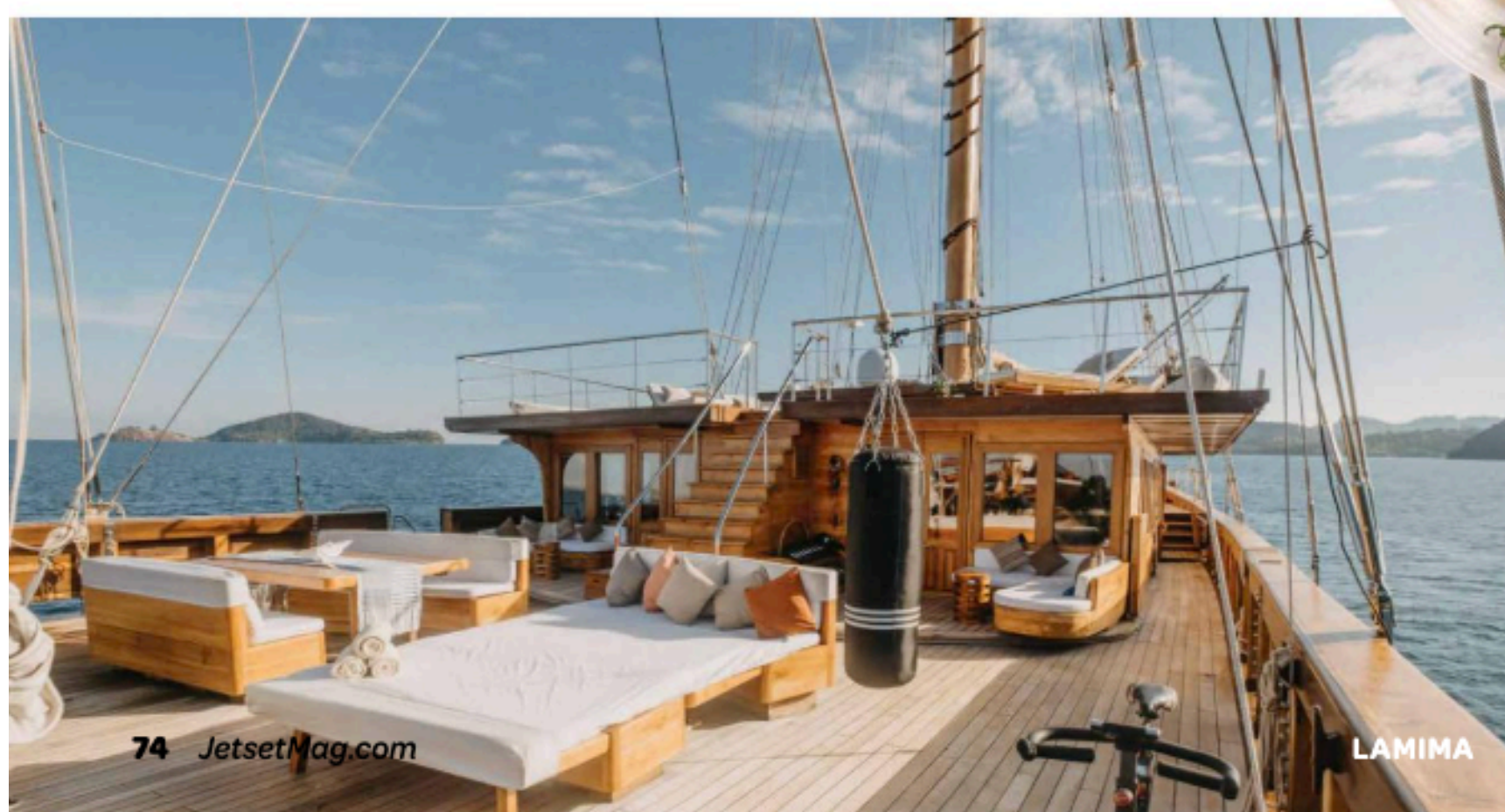
SAMSARA SAMUDRA



SAMSARA SAMUDRA



LAMIMA



LAMIMA

a crew of 16. Light woods and a cream and deep green palette were inspired by Indonesia itself, and the calming design with its open decks, and a spa-like ambiance results in a luxurious serenity-at-sea vibe. You might wish to bookend the onboard experience with a stay at The Samsara Collection's lush villa retreat in Ubud, Bali to keep the mood intact.

MUTIARA LAUT

Its name, "Pearl of the Sea," is, in fact, a superb description for this classic two-mast schooner, which combines the elegance of 18th century North Atlantic design—evidenced by dramatic, billowing sails—and thoughtful Indonesian touches. Seven cabins on the ship house up to 14 people who are graced with the natural beauty of Raja Ampat, Alor, and Komodo. Since its debut in 2010, the Mutiara Laut has hosted royalty and celebrities, but every guest can expect the same old-school hospitality, gourmet cuisine, and opportunity to witness some of the world's most beautiful backdrops.

LAMIMA

Evoking the same serene minimalism as an Aman resort, Lamima, at 65 meters, is the world's largest wooden sailing yacht and one of the sea's most luxurious. Seven cabins can accommodate up to 14 guests and the polished crew numbers 20. The PADI-certified dive center means ample opportunity to discover Indonesia's reefs, but an argument for lounging on the sun deck with a crisp cocktail in hand can be made, too. There's a dedicated wellness area as well. Run by Balinese therapists and included in the cost of the charter, it's a mighty fine place to sink even further into the journey of a lifetime.

PRANA BY ATZARÓ

Typically, the Indonesian sailing itinerary is determined by season, the routes customized around seasonal marine life and weather patterns. It's Komodo National Park from May to October, the Spice Islands from March to September, and Raja Ampat from November to April. No matter when you sail on Prana by Atzaró, you'll find an enticing array of experiences on and off the water: open-air cinema, yoga, diving, paddleboarding, and kayaking. When it's time to rest, nine soundproofed suites ensure that the only thing lulling you to sleep is the soft rhythm of the sea. 🌊



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