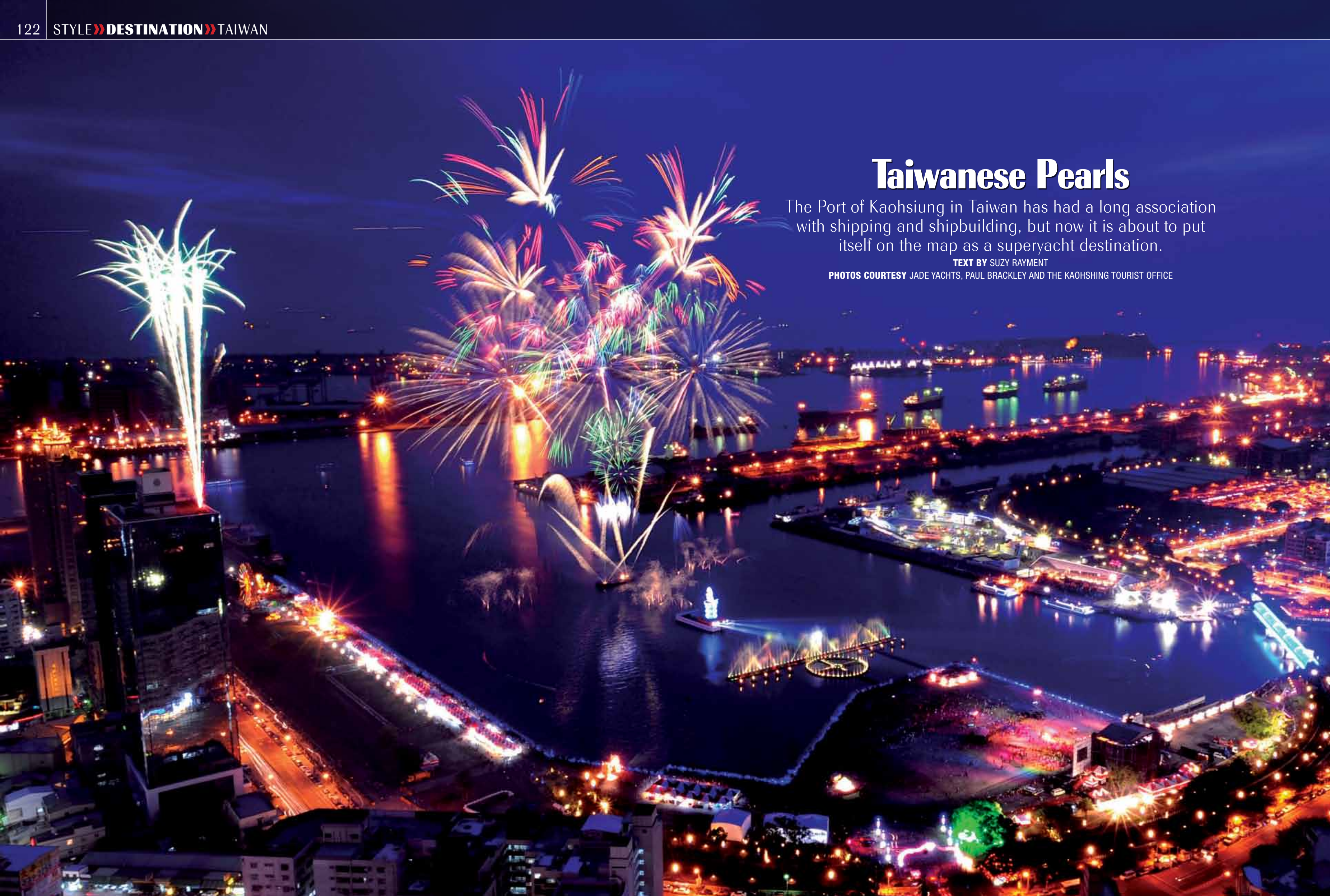


Taiwanese Pearls

The Port of Kaohsiung in Taiwan has had a long association with shipping and shipbuilding, but now it is about to put itself on the map as a superyacht destination.

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PHOTOS COURTESY JADE YACHTS, PAUL BRACKLEY AND THE KAOHSING TOURIST OFFICE





Taiwan – Formosa, as it was previously known - is opening up to the boating world, and the southern port of Kaohsiung is setting its sights on attracting superyachts. Well-known as a shipbuilding centre, Kaohsiung in recent years has reinvented itself as a modern city with wide streets, harbour-side parks and cultural venues.

According to the owner of M/Y Ambrosia III, there are a number of things that make Kaohsiung a great superyacht destination. The local government is working very hard to attract visiting superyachts, first with the development of the Love River Marina Kaohsiung complex and beautification of the surrounding area, and secondly with a substantial reduction in bureaucracy and administration where visiting yachts are concerned.

The new Love River Marina offers safe and secure berthing, especially for larger yachts, and even during the typhoon season (from June to September). Located very much in the heart of the city, the combination of marina, retail and property developments are in the process of completely transforming the surrounding area. There are very few marinas in Asia that can accommodate these bigger boats (Ambrosia III measures in at 65m, or 216ft), let alone offer berths for significant numbers (10-15) in one marina.

While Kaohsiung may not quite be Nice or Cannes, it is a historic town, and there are many interesting and historic spots to visit. The Lotus Pond in the north of the city has been popular since the Qing

dynasty, and is well known for the 20 temples dotting the shoreline. The British Consul's Residence is a reminder of the British Empire trading era when tall ships sailed into the harbour. Cijin Island, just a stone's throw from the city centre, is the site of a temple dedicated to Ma Tzu which has its origins in the 17th century and is famous for its stone carvings and reliefs. There's also an old lighthouse, and a population of monkeys who greet visitors on arrival to the mountain Residence. After a steep climb up to the ever-popular seafood street, you can enjoy a well-deserved sundowner whilst taking in the fantastic views of the harbour and the ocean beyond.

Kaohsiung has certainly not lost its traditional charm, and the Love River - which had a very dubious reputation in the past! - is now home to an entirely different sort of activity along its banks. Parks line the waterway, and there are a number of cultural attractions such as the Museum of History and the Pier 2 Art District.

The local authority's vision for the harbour is not one of just refurbishment, but rather a cultural and economic hub for a city. A city, which is young, and vibrant. The vibe of Kaohsiung is one of 'on-the move' but it still has a 'chilled out' ambience which is attractive to visitors. The economics of the city have changed in recent years, with a greater affluence among the population, which now demands a richer cultural environment. The development of the marina facilities and surrounding area is just one part of a complete overhaul towards which the current government is working.

PREVIOUS PAGES:
Kaohsiung marina and port on display

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE:
Love river in bloom; temples; bridge across the Love River, Kaohsiung at night

OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE:
Kaohsiung city by night; M/Y Ambrosia III moored in the new marina; Kaohsiung celebrates a new age and look



The Penghu archipelago, locally known as the Pearl of the Taiwan straits. The chain of 64 islands has a combined coastline of more than 160nm

But safe berthing is not the only attraction for superyacht owners and captains. The local authorities have reduced paperwork to an absolute minimum, and now offer unrestricted crew visas and substantially relaxed immigration procedures, which are unique for the region. This means that crew of any nationality can stay for anything up to a year without having to renew their visas. According to Paul Brackley, the owner's representative and previous captain of Ambrosia III, "Other Asian cities such as Hong Kong enforce highly restrictive regulations, making it difficult for superyachts to base themselves there for any length of time. Some boating destinations in mainland China make it extremely difficult for visiting vessels to process the necessary paperwork, and immigration can be time-consuming and expensive. Kaohsiung is a breath of fresh air in that respect, and it can be economical for yachts and crew who are looking to base themselves in the region for extended periods of time."

Another major draw card are the facilities available to superyachts looking to do a major refit or extensive repairs. Brackley explains, "All the major equipment and component brands that can be found on superyachts have agents in Kaohsiung. Companies such as Cater-

pillar and Sea-Tel all provide excellent service. This, combined with the ease of finding qualified workers and experienced technicians, makes Kaohsiung a prime location for all and any refit work." High quality spraying and repairs can be offered by local yards such as Jade Yachts and Horizon, two of the better-known yards which are also builders of superyachts in their own right.

Within an easy day's sail of Kaohsiung is the Penghu archipelago, locally known as the Pearl of the Taiwan straits. It is a chain of 64 islands which presumably makes it a 'pearl necklace', a combined coastline of more than 160nm, with an eclectic history that includes Dutch, French, Japanese and Qing Dynasty influences. Until recently the area was closed to visiting yachts due to its proximity to mainland China, but cruising permits can now be obtained and M/Y Ambrosia III was the very first foreign registered vessel to be granted one.

Only one third of the islands are inhabited, and the small towns and fishing villages offer recreational retreats for the local Taiwanese residents. Makung (or Magong) is a thoroughly modern town, even sporting a McDonalds, and the Manjung township has plenty

of history to explore. Narrow cobble stone alleys and temples entice visitors to explore the delights of this historic seaside town with a history that stretches back to the 14th Century. The Penghu Ma Tzu temple is believed to be the oldest in Taiwan, and other attractions include a Living Museum that introduces all aspects of Penghu life to the visitor. The local 'wet' market has produce from both land and sea, and if you time it correctly you can purchase the 'salt-bush' lamb (goat) which is considered a local delicacy. Outside the township lie traditional villages, which ooze charm with coral walls, stone walkways and brick facades.

The island of Chipei is popular for its beach and water-based sporting activities, and strong and consistent winds have made Penghu a popular windsurfing destination. Wang'an is a smaller island that is home to the Green Mossback Turtle Sightseeing and Preservation Centre, and Chimei is famous for the Two Hearts Stone Weir, a local style fish trap. Geologically the area is also interesting, as it was formed from the solidified lava of volcanic eruptions some 17 million years ago. Stunning rock formations and towering basalt columns and stacks provide some interesting scenery for the cruising superyacht.

But at the end of the day it is the friendliness of the Taiwanese themselves that makes Kaohsiung and the Penghu archipelago such an attractive destination for boat owners and their crew. "People here are genuinely friendly", says Brackley, "and this makes staying in Kaohsiung a more pleasant experience for all aboard." The city is easy to get around – there's a new subway system - taxis are cheap, and scooters are a good option for crew transportation. Cost of living is very reasonable, and in recent years Kaohsiung has become a great deal more international with an influx of language students and schools. English is widely spoken, and fashionable bars and restaurants are springing up all around town. For those who like to shop, all the major luxury brands – LV, Chanel, Prada etc - can be found in the stylish shopping malls that are now a part of the city's landscape.

Taiwan is a continually evolving and changing environment, and now an emerging cultural force. With good marina facilities and easy port regulations its attractiveness to superyachts is a sure thing. Once the marina and surrounding port developments are completed, Kaohsiung will be offering visiting yachts an opportunity to experience modern China in a unique way. 🐼

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE: Superyacht visiting one of the remote Penghu islands; natural rock formations; monkey population on Cijin island; stunning rock formations; underwater scenery

OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE: Chipei Island in the Penghu archipelago; Ma Tzu Temple; the stone weirs fishing traps