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Charter expeditions, from ocean-going sailing yachts to the new breed of megayachts, are the ultimate way to explore the most isolated parts of the world—reachable only to a few.

Writer **Sandra Lane**

Nearly 15 years ago, I discovered what it was to be a speck on the ocean. I was on a chartered yacht on a tiny coral islet on the edge of Rangiroa's lagoon in French Polynesia's Tuamotu Archipelago; an hour away by motorboat from the nearest village and 350 kilometers from Tahiti, almost 10,000 kilometers of open ocean lay between me and South America. It was soul stirring—more profound than anything I have felt on land, no matter how isolated the location.

Despite the peace and beauty of a super yacht, there, today, though, more blue-chip private yachts are making the journey, and those with the means to charter a big boat can explore these pristine and scarcely populated waters in phenomenal comfort. With hundreds of islands scattered over thousands of square kilometers, such remoteness brings rare privileges as well as certain logistical challenges.

Yacht charter agency YCo's tongue-in-cheek advice to clients is, "A private supply of both oxygen and Don Berenson are needed." On a motor yacht such as the 45-meter *Big Fish* (from USD \$245,000 (\$328,000 Canadian) per week), purpose built for long-range exploration, on-board diving and game-fishing experts help guests make the most of the location—and the Greg Marshall-designed interiors supply creature comforts.

While French Polynesia is geographically remote, it seems almost pedestrian compared with Papua New Guinea. Or, further west, Borneo, East Timor, Western Australia's Kimberley region, Myanmar's Mergui Archipelago, the Andaman Islands, that top-drawer yachts—both power and sail—can now be chartered in such far-flung places is evidence of a desire to spin the predictable destinations of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean in favour of places that will provide more than just an escape from the crowds. Going remote imparts a more profound experience of nature, culture, and yachting itself.

Owners and charterers are willing to forgo the traditional expectations [of luxury yachting] in order to have an extraordinary experience," says Ben Lyons, CEO of yachting expedition company EYOS. "For us, it's a matter of getting them out of their comfort bubbles—in a good way."

On land, hideaways that combine luxury and remoteness are a well-established option, but the management of Aman resorts was among the first to see that by extending beyond the boundaries of its already remote Amanwana property in Indonesia, it could offer another layer of value to its guests. In 2009 it launched *Amanhara*, a 32-meter craft that combined the external form of the traditional Indonesian *pinisi* with architecturally Aman interiors; in 2015 *Amanultra*

followed—a 52-meter big sister with five double cabins and 14 crew. Based at Amanwana, the boats take guests to the Komodo National Park (famous for its primeval dragons), the Gili Islands (which have superb diving), or Raja Ampat—a string of 1,500 islands and cays scattered over 40,000 square kilometers of sea.

"In addition, such areas don't lend themselves to staying in one place; you need to move around in order to get a good sense of them," says Cayle Patterson, a charter broker at Camper & Nicholson's Monaco office. "On the plus side, every day you can have a pristine beach to yourself or be the only divers on a particular section of reef. And you can move away when other boats arrive."

The more crowdphobic may prefer Vanuatu, a string of 82 islands east of Papua New Guinea where striking landscapes, magnificent reefs, and rich tribal culture remain intact. In such places, charter yachts are increasingly available thanks to owners who want to discover some where remote or do something unique. "While the yacht is there, it's only sensible to offer it for charter when the owner is not aboard," says Tom DeBuse, director of charter management at YCo.

While some expedition-style charterers have graduated from conventional destinations, brokers estimate that about half are completely new to yachting—including a breed of youngish clients who have no interest in just sitting on a tropical beach. Nick Henning, also of YCo, cites clients who have "just sold a business and have the time and money to reward themselves," and notes that the great majority are families. "Parents see this as a way to offer an education to their children. They go to extraordinary places in a way that is far beyond any school curriculum."

Today, more governments allow foreign yachts to be chartered from their ports and infrastructure has improved. Most important, though, is the greater number of yachts with the capacity to make longer voyages. Gaining the 59.2-meter *Sense* (from USD 325,000 (\$445,000 Canadian) per week from YCo), as an example, DeBuse says: "We have seen a trend in the past 10 years for motor yachts with long-range capabilities and high-speed tenders, matched by very luxurious interiors." Currently based in the South Pacific/Australasia (winter) and Southeast Asia/the Indian Ocean (summer), *Sense* has a 6,000 nautical-mile (11,112-kilometer) range; four high-speed tenders, a helipad, top-of-the-line dive gear—and interiors by Philippe Starck.

Thanks to automated systems, today's sailing yachts need fewer sail-handling crew members, which means more space for guests and the hospitality crew, who take care of the food and drink, the water sports, and the land excursions. While some clients are open to considering various remote destinations, Camper & Nicholson's Patterson notes, "Many



come to us asking for a specific destination, usually because of a particular interest." This has brought a change in the yacht crew's skills: the 54.3-meter sailing yacht *Tara*, currently in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia from €180,000 (\$255,000 Canadian) per week from YCo, has an on-board kite-surfing instructor; *Lambini* is a certified PADI diving centre with two instructors. Stewards who are certified yoga or Pilates instructors are par for the course these days, adds YCo's Henning.

"There's an important difference between a regular charter and an expedition," says Ben Lyons of EYOS. "The latter requires local guides, ideally born into that culture, but at least able to speak the tribal languages and know the customs intimately, so that they can arrange access for our guests." A charter in remote waters is often thought of as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But, says Henning, "It becomes highly addictive." ●

Photos: Aboard luxurious charter yachts, from Camper & Nicholson's *Rapture* (top), a 30.48-meter sailing yacht and YCo's *Sense* (bottom), a 59.2-meter super-yacht, with interiors by Philippe Starck.



PHOTO OTIM MUKENNA.

YCO'S SENSES PHOTO (BOTTOM), OTIM MUKENNA.