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THE WORLD: *Adventure with New Friends*

BY TARA LOADER WILKINSON

For those seeking an adventure by sea but consider life aboard a yacht too isolating, a residence on The World could be a good compromise.

WHEN MIKE AND KARIN OPEN THEIR bedroom curtains this morning, they will be greeted with unobstructed views over Japan's palm-fringed Amami islands. Tomorrow, they will wake up to the volcano of Kagoshima. And in two weeks' time, they will be marvelling at the icy coastline of Okhotsk over a cup of coffee.

The retired banker and his wife, a former teacher, enjoy the luxury of a new horizon every few days. Within the last year they have sailed in the Black Sea and Mediterranean, experienced the wild horses on Easter Island and a Baining Fire Dance ceremony of a Papua New Guinea tribe, visited the orang-utans in Eastern

Borneo, and dined with the King of Ubud in Bali. And every night, they come home to their own comfortable apartment.

They live aboard The World, a 644ft ship that is sold as 'the largest privately owned mega-yacht on the planet.' This 12-deck ship, with 165 bespoke residences, sails continuously around the world, docking at whichever port its residents fancy.

Today, 130 of the world's wealthiest individuals and families own an apartment here. Some have even bought two and knocked them together. Residents vote each year on the ship's itinerary, generally three years in advance to allow planning time.

Together, these families enjoy a one-of-a-kind travel lifestyle to the most fascinating and exotic destinations on the planet — a different locale every few days.

Like most owners on the ship, Mike and Karin only spend part of the year on board and the rest of the time at home in Switzerland. They were attracted to The World as a way to experience the yachting lifestyle and maintain a feeling of community. They admit they had their reservations at first.

"We were initially hesitant about living on a boat full of affluent, 'A-type' personalities," Mike says. "But we were

pleasantly surprised to find a like-minded adventurous community that gets along very well.”

One of the most rewarding aspects of living on *The World*, say Mike and Karin, is being able to bring aid directly to remote and underprivileged communities. Many residents have global charities they closely support, which during the trip they can arrange to visit to make donations of food, money, educational tools and equipment. Whenever the ship undergoes one of its regular refits, old furniture and fittings such as computers will be donated to a worthy source in that port.

Mike adds: “It is the community aspect that really separates *The World* from private yacht ownership. Many residents have owned boats in the past but prefer *The World* because of the sense of camaraderie. In fact, most of us feel our fellow residents have become our best friends.”

Could buying on *The World* ever be considered an investment akin to traditional bricks and mortar? Probably not, agree both Knight Frank and JLL, although it could work out cheaper than an equivalent round-the-world yacht voyage. Prices range from US\$1 million to US\$13 million, from 290 square foot studios to a 4,000 square foot, six-bedroom en-suite penthouse that accommodates up to 12. Many residents come on board for the parts of the trip that interest them and fly off for the bits that don’t, and some rent out their vacant apartments in the ship’s by-invitation-only Guest Stay programme. Prospective buyers can stay up to 180 days aboard *The World* through the rental programme, although a representative is tight-lipped on the number and prices of rental apartments available.

Once residents have had their fill they usually seek to sell, so there are a few apartments available to buy. Do they ever turn a profit? Again, no numbers from a representative but she admits: “A purchase of a residence on *The World* should not be viewed as an investment opportunity — it is very much a lifestyle choice.”

That said, compared with a round-the-world trip on a superyacht, the costs of

buying on *The World* seem to make sense. If you are going solo, year-long charters are rare, so most long-term yachtees would need to buy their yacht first, which would usually attract at least a US\$4 million price-tag. Then add on living expenses, maintenance, berthing, fees and the cost of all the trips; it could be another 50 percent of the value of the yacht, according to Colin Dawson, chairman of the Asia-Pacific Superyacht Association.

He points out that unlike *The World*, a traditional yacht can slide into discreet coves and bays without being constricted to a timetable. One is not an alternative to the other, says Dawson, as the yachting experience would attract a very different type to one attracted to *The World*.

The residents of *The World* vote each year on the ship’s itinerary. It could take them anywhere from the cliffs of Antarctica to the east coast of Madagascar, with varied fascinating expeditions guided by a team of experts commanding a comprehensive exploration of an area.

In 2009, for example, *The World* visited the Bering Sea and Russian Arctic sighting a record 119 polar bears. In 2010, residents made a 15-day expedition to Greenland and, later that year, sailed to the ice-encrusted desert of Antarctica. In 2012 the ship embarked on three expeditions, including a trek across North America, where the ship completed a record-breaking voyage as the largest passenger vessel to sail Canada’s Northwest Passage, ocean to ocean, unescorted. Also that year, residents spent a relaxed few days with a voyage to Melanesia through its 80 islands, stopping a while at Vanuatu; and experienced a sailing trip across the Pacific to Polynesia to discover some of the most remote and mystical parts of the archipelago.

The journey for 2015 has already been decided and it looks set to be an exceptional year, with a journey starting from Southeast Asia, diving into the Maldives, Seychelles and West Africa, and visiting 104 ports in total, with 15 new ports such as Colombo, Sri Lanka and Bazaruto Island, Mozambique.

But the enriching experiences are not only limited to the great outdoors. There is a library with 4,000 books aboard *The World*, and guest lecturers whose talks about the areas visited bring the destinations alive.

Facilities and amenities that would be cost-prohibitive on a traditional yacht are what attract those seeking a luxurious lifestyle on *The World*. These include a 12,000-bottle wine cellar (and sommeliers who know each resident’s personal wine preferences); *The World* Spa & Wellness Center with personal trainers and physiotherapists; not to mention its world-class restaurants and chefs that rival the world’s finest.

There is a range of dining on board to suit every mood and occasion. Restaurants include East, for eclectic Asian cuisine; Marina, which serves prime cuts and seafood; Portraits, which offers haute cuisine; and Tides, which serves Mediterranean cuisine inspired by northern Italy. There are other more casual dining choices such as Fredy’s Deli, which gets stocked with local produce in every port.

Many of the bottles in the wine cellar are specially selected from the world’s finest vineyards by the sommelier or from winemakers who also come on board to lecture and host tastings. Residents can imbibe in numerous cocktail lounges and bars, including the Cigar Club, which stocks 40 different cigars, the Lobby Bar, Marina Bar, Quantum Bar and Regatta Bar.

The expeditions are no less luxurious. The concierge team is able to get insider access to spots not available to the general public such as an exclusive, private dinner at *elBulli* before it closed its doors, or being greeted by crew serving Champagne and caviar atop an Antarctic glacier following a private helicopter flight.

It might not be everyone’s cup of tea, but for those in search of once-in-a-lifetime adventure combined with luxury, it ticks all the boxes.

For more information call (954) 538-8449 or www.aboardtheworld.com. ♦

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