



home sweet

yacht

For a growing number of people, life on a well appointed boat has become an attractive proposition. Whether used as a permanent residence or a weekend retreat, a yacht offers owners an ideal way to unwind. **Gigi Onag** reports

For the past four years and a half, Philip Giles has awakened to the salty scent of the sea. The 65-year-old sailing enthusiast is currently a long-stay resident yachtsman at the premier Royal Langkawi Yacht Club in Malaysia. His boat, christened *Nom De Plume*, is docked in the exclusive 200-berth

marina located southeast of the island.

"Living on a yacht helps to keep you fit. It's a healthy lifestyle. I have plenty of open space in front of me and a lot of fresh air. I don't have to stay holed up in a hotel," says Giles, who decided to settle in Langkawi after spending 16 years in China. His 17m-long monohaul sail yacht has

four cabins and two bathrooms, and is outfitted with all the conveniences of a modern home and the safety features to make it seaworthy for sailing.

"I was introduced to sailing in my early 30s when I was living in Sydney. At first, it was just something we did for family enjoyment and it has evolved into

a passion. I've taken my boat on sailing competitions in the past. But living on the water is something I've always wanted to do.

"Cruising and living onboard yachts gives you the opportunity to meet many wonderful people with common interests and attitudes. Generally speaking, the yachting fraternity is filled with friendly and helpful people – all with a sense of adventure."

And there are challenges too. Giles continues: "It (owning a yacht) is like running a small town. There are extra things to keep an eye on like managing the sewage and electricity.

"Furthermore, for neophytes, the learning curve is difficult. It's not like driving a car. It does not respond the way you steer a car and there are other factors like the wind and the condition of the water that have to be taken into consideration. You also have to have a working knowledge of navigational charts. Fortunately, yachts today have better electronics and satellite equipment onboard, which make sailing easier."

With his current business project in Langkawi, Giles is sometimes too busy to take out *Non De Plume*. But he looks forward to his plan to bring the yacht around Malaysia, Borneo, Thailand and Indonesia.

The live aboard experience is a growing phenomenon in Asia, according to high-profile yachtsman Gulu Lalvani, founder and chairman of Binatone Telecom Group, the world's second largest manufacturer of digital cordless phones.

"We have many people from Singapore and Hongkong moving to Phuket to live in a yacht," says Lalvani, whose pet project is developing the island into a world-class yachting hub, following the likes of Miami and the Riviera.

Royal Phuket Marina, Lalvani's upscale THB6 billion (US\$176 million) yachting, residential and lifestyle complex, provides a safe harbour for these individuals who have made the unusual choice of living in their yachts.

He adds: "Owning a boat is a huge investment and some people live in their boat to justify that investment. And why not? Their yachts are very comfortable and the marina has all the facilities both on

land and on shore. We are located close to the road. Our members, who have their yachts as their main residence, keep their car within the complex and they drive to work every morning. They get the best of both worlds."

YACHTING AT LEISURE

Lalvani found his sea legs in the mid-1970s while living in Europe. He got hooked on the hobby after years of spending two to three weeks of summer and long weekends on a boat in southern France with friends and family.

He fell in love with Phuket at first sight. It's well known that he was set for retirement, but fate had other plans for him as he hatched the plan to turn the island into a world-class yachting community. The tycoon spends six months of the year there – enjoying being a weekend sailor, usually spending his Sundays on one of his five yachts.

"Phuket is the best place to own a boat because it is surrounded by 30 beautiful islands. There is so much to see. Unlike southern France, where we would be lucky if we are able to use the boat five months of the year, it is one of the few places in the world that you can go boating throughout the year."

The avid yachtsman likes taking his boat out for a day trip and any

one of his three speedboats – which cuts the water at up to 15 knots an hour – is great for travelling quickly between point A and point B. But on multi-day trips to neighbouring Vietnam, Andaman Islands, Singapore, Burma and Malaysia, he uses one of his two bigger yachts (one is named *Ananta*) – which may be slower but are more comfortably equipped for an overnight stay. Sailing to neighbouring countries from Phuket takes from one to two days one-way. Lalvani's personal fleet ranges from 30 to 140 feet.

"I normally go for a maximum of five to six days on a boat. Most of the time, it will be day trips or perhaps an overnight stay. Once a year, I explore a neighbouring

Below: Gulu Lalvani on one of his "toys" and *Nom De Plume* on the high seas



country. It's great that Phuket is strategically located and you've got four countries to explore. For a business traveller, the fastest way to unwind is being on a boat. A day on a boat gives the equivalent benefit of a one-week holiday," says Lalvani.

"People who are stressed should seriously consider spending time on a boat. They will be able to think better, work better and make the right decisions. Sometimes when you are bone tired, you don't make the right decision."

As a word of advice to prospective yachtsmen, he says: "The best thing is to charter a boat first and have a feel of what is suitable for your requirements."

SEEK INDEPENDENT ADVICE

For Simon Turner, managing director of Iconovista based in Singapore, no experience can compare with owning a yacht.

"There is a certain magic in owning and captaining your own boat. Learning navigation, how to handle the boat and learning all about safety – it's really great to acquire a new skill. And when you take friends out on the water for a day with nice drinks and food, they think it beyond their wildest dreams. A quick trip to a beach they have never even heard of really gets them excited, and it's just a brilliant, stress-free day out."

Turner owned his first boat in England in 1996. When he moved to Southeast Asia and found sailing conditions in the region so much better, he bought his first boat in Asia three years ago.

"The major advantage is that you

WHY BUY WHEN YOU CAN SHARE

A yacht is a very expensive piece of hardware. However, this should not stop budding sailors from taking on the high seas.

Florida-based Monocle Yachts, which operates a yacht share-ownership business since 1964, has recently added Asia-Pacific to its cruising destinations. This allows private individuals and companies in the region to enjoy the benefits of luxury yacht ownership at just a fraction of the cost – without the management and maintenance hassles usually associated with sole ownership.

Working with its Asian partner Iconovista in Singapore, the company already brought its first yacht in Asia, with many more in the months ahead. Cruising destinations will include Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia with owners benefiting from their yacht being in at least two destinations during the year.

"The trend now is towards fractional ownership, whereby someone can own a share of a yacht and not have any of the management and maintenance hassles. Many people simply want a nice holiday out on the water, but cannot justify full ownership of a yacht. Fractional ownership, where you can have as little as a 10 percent share, is a perfect solution," says Iconovista's Simon Turner.

How it works is very simple. Monocle acquires brand-new yachts or enters a pre-owned immaculate yacht into the programme on behalf of a group of buyers. The ownership of the yacht is then divided into 10 percent shares held under a management company. All the costs of operation, including maintenance, crew management and berthing are then shared equally among the owners. One of the major benefits of Monocle ownership is the ability to exchange weeks usage with other

can go sailing all year-round here. The weather, although too hot, is much more reliable and we never get cold. My favourite is longer trips where you might have a passage at sea for 12 hours or longer. You need good planning and a good crew, but it's magical to navigate from one country to another. You feel like Captain Cook."

Turner savours every chance out at sea to escape the stress of the city, and he has taken his yacht around Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia.

"Tioman Island (off Malaysia's east coast) is where the movie *South Pacific* was filmed. It is a pretty amazing place with blue waters that are great for swimming and snorkelling.

"Borneo is next on the list for me. There are many new marinas over there and a lot of stunning places to explore."

He notes a growing number of people are buying boats to use during their leisure time in a different way. And people are buying bigger boats and going further as they gain experience.

"The best combination is a

waterfront property and a place to keep your boat right outside of your home. This is happening in Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. There is nothing better than coming direct back to your own home after a day out on the water, simply parking the boat up and putting the kettle on and not having to drive a long way home."

While yachts can cost from US\$20,000 to US\$100 million, Turner says typical purchases in Asia are between US\$150,000 and US\$600,000. There are people who buy US\$10 million yachts as well.

"For first-time yacht buyers, seek independent advice. Getting good advice at the time of purchase is always a challenge. Don't be too ambitious at the beginning or buy one too big. Start small.

"Maintenance is another issue. You need advice and a proactive maintenance programme to keep your boat in tip-top condition. No maintenance will mean you have problems at sea. The wrong advice may lead you to spend an awful lot of money unnecessarily, you need to do your research and understand it properly," Turner says. ■

Below: a stylish bedroom aboard *Ananta*





yacht owners in the fleet. This means that a share of a yacht in Asia gives owners vacation time on yachts in the Mediterranean or the Caribbean at no extra cost, a huge attraction and a unique benefit.

Monocle's fleet includes over 50 superyachts, measuring from 30m to over 90m. Located in key yachting destinations worldwide, asset value is estimated at over US\$250 million.

"We started with the vision of enjoyable yachting. We eliminated the aggravations of luxury yacht ownership for our clients by handling all the daily tasks from selecting the best crew members, to searching for the lowest prices on fuel, through stocking our clients' yacht with everything from noodles to champagne," says Dr Loren Simkowitz, founder and director of operations, Monocle Yachts.

With its bulk purchasing requirements, the company saves owners huge amounts of money. On fuel, for example, Monocle saves owners as much as 40 percent of the cost.

What's more, if an owner does not want to use his full shareholding, Monocle can arrange for the yacht to be chartered for a week with the net proceeds going directly to the owner – which will more than cover his whole operating costs for the year.

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