



SKIP NOVAK

NOT EVERY CHARTER GUEST WANTS TO LEARN THE ROPES BUT BECOMING A USEFUL MEMBER OF THE CREW IS A FULFILLING GOAL FOR ANYONE

It's usually an interesting conversation talking to charter guests about their previous chartering experiences – from the operator's perspective, there are so many ways to go about the business. More often than not the guests recall the positives: the beautiful boat; an impeccably turned out and capable crew and the superb location. Then the truth comes out when they admit that although it was great, they felt completely useless, never having been asked to lift a finger.

Bareboat chartering I can fully understand. The charterer is in control of the operation of the vessel, come what may. It is DIY sailing. Even if the laying of the anchor is not executed every time with textbook precision, much the same as that slightly skewed bit of

woodwork or that corner cut in a plumbing operation you did in your own home, there is a great sense of satisfaction in not having called in the experts, nor having to pay for them.

Granted, skippered chartering really exists for those who are either incapable of safely running the show, or for sailors and non-sailors who want a full service holiday, where as if by magic, the meals appear and afterwards the dishes disappear, leaving the charter guests alone to socialise obliviously (or maybe to wonder what they are actually doing there in the first place). This is the classic Mediterranean and Caribbean model that we who sail are all familiar with – either as the waiters for, or the consumers of, the fine meals and wines on offer.

What is a skippered charter for?

Discounting superyacht chartering, which always falls into the full-service category by virtue of scale, I am a firm believer that in the medium size range of skippered chartered yachts, most of the guests would rather be crew or considered thereof, at least in some degree. Everyone, even the most rank beginner or a non-sailor, if asked, can do something useful on deck under

supervision and they will, with few exceptions, rise to the occasion and enjoy it. Grabbing the tail of a jib sheet and pulling or winding a winch handle and working up a sweat in the process will, in my view, give more satisfaction to a charter guest than a sunset rum cocktail, a drink that only tastes better for having in some fashion or another contributed to the day's sailing. Equally, if they hadn't got stuck in to the deck work, it is mightily hard to ask them to help wash or dry the dishes.

Signing on as crew

This is certainly the *Pelagic* way. Everyone who signs on is crew and immediately is melded with the professional team. We take many sailors of minimal experience and many people who have none at all. These folk have come to witness Antarctica, South Georgia or Patagonia by boat. This means standing watches, working the deck, launching the Zodiac, cooking and washing up – to name a few of the daily chores required from a working crew. We don't entertain, we engage with people who want to live aboard, work the deck, navigate and maintain the vessel during an adventure sail. I would venture to say that most everyone who charters a yacht would like to say the same, but that is usually not on offer.

Most often charter guests are left to languish staring out to sea. It is the norm, with exceptions of course, for a professional crew to be set up to handle what they assume to be useless guests, who cannot be trusted to touch any sail control systems and who are not encouraged to help out – even where no harm can be done. It is true that on the *Pelagics* we have no electric winches where unsuspecting people can wind themselves into pretzels by pushing the wrong button.

Nevertheless it is incumbent on a professional charter crew to encourage people in some fashion or other to partake rather than simply chivvying them out of the way for every manoeuvre. Of course, the charter crew is ultimately responsible for the safety of the guests so this is always a judgment call. It is clear though, the more experienced the professional crew, the more they are likely to get the charter guests on side and contributing, making for a happy ship.

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