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# Set Sail Forever

THOUGH A CRUISE CAN LEAVE YOU WITH LASTING memories, the experience itself invariably ends after a week or two or three. But what if that itinerant, oceanic journey became a lifestyle? What if that ephemeral escape transmogrified into an everyday reality for years, decades or the rest of your life?

If you have the requisite net worth of at least \$10 million and want to sail around the globe for months or years at a time in the comfort of your own home on a luxury yacht, a vessel called *The World* ([www.aboardtheworld.com](http://www.aboardtheworld.com)) may be your answer. Launched in 2002, it is the largest privately owned residential yacht on the planet. It incorporates 165 residences, the majority of which are two- and three-bedroom,



Are you a stay-at-home type who also harbors a desire to travel widely? As a resident of *The World*, you can satisfy both urges at once.



furnished apartments that range from 1,100 to 3,200 square feet and include full kitchens, washer/dryers and countless other amenities.

I sailed aboard *The World* briefly last year and witnessed a seemingly flawless operation, from food and service to the captain's bridge. The 644-foot ship operates like a nautical chariot, whisking passengers to far-flung destinations in unparalleled style. *The World* moves quietly and elegantly, yet garners the sort of attention accorded to celebrities. When the ship pulled into Honfleur, France, for example, throngs of passengers on other boats, beachgoers and pedestrians stood motionless or waved, riveted by the majesty of this 12-deck behemoth with a bevy of multimillionaires in tow.

*The World's* motto is, "Only 200 make the journey," but the actual number onboard at any given time may be even lower. During my visit, 100 passengers were reportedly on the ship. The only place I found a small crowd was in one of the bars on karaoke night, which drew a throng of surprising talent.

Unlike a cruise ship, which has hundreds or thousands of people funneling into the same place at the same time, whether for dinner or

debarcation, *The World* is a floating neighborhood. Passengers operate independently and at whim, flying in and out as they please. Residents, who mostly hail from North America and Europe, typically have two or three other homes, which means they sail, on average, for only three to six months of the year—and often not consecutively. *The World* also stays in each port for at least two-and-a-half days, but often longer, allowing residents time to go ashore, check in to a hotel and explore.

Residents opt in or out of the lifestyle in varying degrees, depending on how long they want to sail. I met one couple who spend all year onboard. Another resident I met wants to do the same, but his wife likes being land-based. He travels back and forth "to save his marriage," but concedes he is enamored of the endless journey. "In one day, we'll move from Belgium to France," he told me, "but in one month we'll be in Greece and in five months we'll be in South Africa."

Some of the ship's staff is equally smitten. "People ask why I don't want to settle down and lead a normal life," said food and beverage manager Ludovic Chevrot. "Well, what is a normal life? What makes this any less normal? This is normal and right for me."

Indeed, what most residents of *The World* have in common is an adventurous spirit, whether they are age 30 or 80. "The majority of our community is very active and likes to go out," said global director Rusti McFarland, who pegged the residents' average age at 65. "We are not a retirement community." She referenced a visit to Antarctica, where virtually everyone onboard went ashore at 3 a.m. to see penguins and watch the sunrise.

That voracity can pose a challenge to the ship's staff. Many residents are avid golfers, for example. Sports and golf manager Damon Allard upped the ante by leading golf excursions to the far northern and southern reaches of the globe. "We played in Nuuk, Greenland, and had to wear hiking boots to take shots from rocks," he said. Residents also visited a course in southern Argentina that is spliced by a glacial river.

Entertainment on *The World* runs the gamut, from a casino and a cigar club to a 7,000-square-foot Banyan Tree spa, two pools, a full-size tennis court, a fitness center and a youth center called Camp Caravel. There are also four

restaurants serving everything from gourmet French cuisine to sushi, a wine cellar with 12,000 bottles from 18 countries and a grocery store stocked with generic staples as well as foods from each destination.

Prices for private residences on *The World* range between \$675,000 and \$7.3 million. Owners also pay annual fees based on the size of their residences to cover the ship's operations, maintenance, crew salaries and food.

Since its launch in 2002, *The World* has sailed to 800 ports in some 140 countries. Residents make decisions by committee regarding destinations, which are not repeated for at least three years. Ports of call in 2012 included Walvis Bay in Namibia and the islands of Melanesia, where the ship spent 10 days.

*The World's* "enrichment manager," Tim Spicer, said his job is to weave education into each destination through lecture programs, celebrity guest speakers and workshops. Unlike vacationers on a cruise ship, who he said expect "big entertainment," residents of *The World* want meaningful, daily enrichment. "This isn't a holiday for our residents," he said. "This is their life." —M.F.