
YOU CHARTER ME CRAZY!

A SIDEWAYS GLANCE AT THE CHARTER INDUSTRY SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHARTER BROKER,
FRANCES AND MICHAEL HOWORTH REPORT.

When it comes to working late in the evenings, over weekends or even during their own holidays many Charter Brokers go that the extra mile to make charters happen and arrange everything to accord with their client's wishes. It is not always easy and it is not always fun but it is their job and it is the one that they have built their reputations on so they knuckle down and get it done.

Finding a berth inside St Tropez on a Saturday evening in August, how to serve the finest Single Malts to guests who cannot be seen to drink in public, (use a tea pot and serve malt in tea cups) are just two stories we have heard but must not reveal where! Here we talk with some of the industry's top charter brokers and get them to tell us a story or two!



Valeria Alekhina, Fraser Yachts

IT'S A DOGS LIFE

Valeria Alekhina, a retail broker with Fraser Yachts, once organised a charter for a principle who wanted to surprise friends spread across five generations and aged between 18 and 70.

"He had chartered a Perini Navi through us," says Valeria. "It was for a boys-only week but to avoid his guests knowing too much about the surprise, he suggested to them all that they were going to be hiking for a week in the South of France starting in Villefranche".

Inevitably they all turned up with sleeping bags and rucksacks which they clearly would not need but one young man, the principle's nephew a student in Cannes, turned up bringing with him his dog, a Doberman named Lily.

VA: I was on the yacht and thought this group was just simply saying goodbye to the principal charterer. I had no idea that one would bring a dog and I knew that animals were not allowed on board.

When I explained this to the principle, he said *"if my nephew cannot with me then I will cancel the charter."* I was pondering what to do when the only solution came upon me, I would have to look after Lily for a week! So as the Perini pulled off the dock I pushed Lily into my new convertible VW Beetle car. I had no idea what to do with a dog especially one as huge as Lily but she looked pleased at the prospect of a week with me so off we set back to the Fraser Yachts offices.

Not everyone there was delighted but as soon as they heard the story they had to agree with me that no matter what, the guest has to get what they asked for in a charter. So for one week Lily and I led a dog's life of walkies and feedings.

Lily and I got on just fine and my guests enjoyed their charter. When the yacht docked in Antibes after the charter they were so pleased with me for what I had done that they took me to dinner in Eden Rock Hotel restaurant.



Timothy Clark, Ocean Independence

ORCHIDS

Timothy Clark, a Senior Charter Broker with Ocean Independence, remembers placing an American couple on a large motor yacht for three weeks in the Caribbean to celebrate their 40th Wedding Anniversary. *“I talked at length with the husband about how the day of the anniversary could be made as memorable as possible. During our conversation, it transpired that that he had proposed to her 40 years previously in Hawaii and had presented her with some rare orchids indigenous to the islands”.*

TC: So the plan was hatched, I was to organise a bunch of these wonderful rare orchids and get them to him so that he could present them to his wife on the morning of their anniversary over breakfast at a stunning anchorage in the British Virgin Islands.

Things did not go so well after that! After an exhaustive search through every contact I had in the exotic flower industry, it quickly became evident to me that in fact Hawaii was the only place in the world to find these particular flowers. Fearing the worst and with a somewhat nervous disposition, I rang the client to give him the not so great news that we wouldn't be able to get this particular flower without actually going to Hawaii. To my surprise, he asked me to dispatch his private jet to Hawaii to get the flowers.

So the airplane, with one of the crew from the yacht on board, was dispatched on an interesting route that took the private plane from St Maarten to Florida, across to San Diego and out to Hawaii. While refuelling in San Diego, we arranged for some of

his favourite wine to be collected from his home in Napa, California. The 10,000 mile round trip took just under 24 hours but the client was very pleased with what we had done.

The anniversary complete with perhaps the most expensive orchids in the world went down as the most memorable of all the other events we had planned for the couple in the Caribbean and they remember it to this day.

From my point of view it was certainly the most extraordinary use of a private plane I know of and I am not sure if the client was ever aware of the logistical and legal nightmares of flying a rare species of plant and un-bonded rare wines from A to B across certain International boundaries! But as they say, what they do not know, will not hurt them!



Adelheid Chirco, Ocean Independence

HORSING AROUND

Adelheid Chirco, Charter Director at Ocean Independence, recalls, *“a couple in love had chartered a large motor yacht for two weeks in Italy and planned to spend the day in Pompei for a visit to the ancient ruins”.*

AC: On a country road on their way to the old city they encountered a farmer badly beating his old horse. Upset about what she saw, the lady asked the driver to stop the car. Alighting, she approached the farmer telling him to desist and asking how much money he wanted for the horse. When a fee was agreed, the boyfriend (very much in love) bought it from the farmer! That was the easiest part of the

deal. Imagine my surprise when the Captain of the yacht told me that the number of guests had increased by one horse!

The Captain was wonderful, I don't know how he managed it, but he found a contact for a veterinarian who at first believed the story was a joke. Finally the Captain managed to convince him and he agreed to take care of the horse for a couple of days while we organised transportation to a domain near Paris, the horse's future home. Apparently the transport cost more than the horse!

I wish the story had a happy ending but that was not to be. The couple fell out of love, did not get married and cancelled the honeymoon charter they had booked through me. I never did get further news of the horse - but by now it must be resting in peace.



Lara-Jo Houghting, Churchill Yacht Partners

WAVE RUNNER

Lara-Jo Houghting, now a Charter Fleet Manager with Churchill Yacht Partners, was in the early days in her career managing a yacht about to charter for the very first time. She says, *"I always get a thrill out of a challenge and ultimately the accomplishment that follows completion. The best part is that generally charter guests have no idea what really happens behind the scenes!"*

LJH: On this occasion, the charter contract had been written by June Montagne of Yachtzoo one of the big European houses who exhibit each year at Monaco and had specified that the yacht be able to supply a two person wave runner for one of those days on which she was on charter. Nervous about the situation, I flew to the Bahamas at the yacht Owner's suggestion, to ensure that the yacht and

crew were ready for their first charter only to discover that the yacht did not in fact have a wave runner!

Walking over to the beach I finally found someone who agreed to rent me one for a day. He assured me he would deliver the machine to the yacht in the marina at Atlantis within the hour. I trustingly paid the businessman in cash, said a little prayer, and trekked back over the beach to Atlantis. Within 60 minutes, as promised, my new best friend arrived, all smiles, complete with two life jackets and fuel. Success! Or so I at least thought!

When I very proudly presented the solution to the captain he said that that was great, but then told me the yacht's crane was not working and so he could not lift it on board.

I knew the charter was in jeopardy if we did not make sure the guests had the use of the wave runner when they got to their lunchtime anchorage.

The story ended with me wearing a yacht crew uniform and driving the wave runner behind the yacht from Atlantis to Rose Island so that the guests were able to enjoy a full day of water sports activities including the use of the wave runner just as they had asked for.



Robin O'Brien, Fraser Yachts

MOVING MOUNTAINS

Sometimes even the simplest of tasks can seem monumental for a charter broker and there are some who have to go to great heights to get it right. Sometimes quite literally!

Robin O'Brien, a charter broker with Fraser Yachts recalls that a very popular charter yacht with a very full calendar was booked by a client of hers who never did quite get around to putting pen to paper and signing the contract.

Worried that it might all go array, Robin telephoned the principal's PA to get her to remind him to do so. The PA, however, replied that her boss was skiing off-piste, staying in a remote cabin, out of mobile phone range and was not answering his emails.

With a charter guest totally oblivious that he might not just lose his deposit but also might, in all possibility, lose the charter as well, fast positive action was called for.

«There was nothing for it,» says Robin but for me to go see him personally and get him to sign the contract myself.

«You know what they say: If Mohamed will not come to the mountain then the mountain must move towards Mohamed!

«So guess who ended up getting cold in borrowed ski jackets and snow goggles being swept up the mountain in great haste just to get a signature for a charter in Antarctica and it was a huge success.»



Sara Hill, Y.CO

SURPRISE

A wise man once said to me in the superyacht industry *“We don't just create a holiday, we create dreams”* said Sara Hill, a Yacht Charter and Management Support agent with Y.CO. I have a

story about family and how I witnessed a dream come true the day they boarded a charter yacht.

SH: A nice young gentleman contacted me one day and was enthusiastic to book a charter for his mother. He explained she had never left her home in the mid-west part of America and worked hard her whole life striving to be the best working mother she could be.

Now all her grown children wanted to give her the trip of a lifetime and a birthday present beyond anything she could have dreamed of. A sweet gesture indeed and I was invited to be on board for her arrival on her 60th Birthday.

I hadn't realised the extent they had gone too to lure their mother to this remote location in the Caribbean. She was told in a fake phone call she had *“won”* a week in a hotel and her flights were paid for. She graciously accepted this offer as she had never been to an island or travelled to such an exotic destination.

After a day had passed to settle in, she was told a snorkelling excursion was booked and she was escorted by a small dinghy to the larger dive boat anchored offshore. With her snorkel gear in hand the dinghy *“Captain”* suggested they drive by for a closer look at this beautiful mega-yacht nearby.

“Of course!” she exclaimed and as she pulled up to this shiny white yacht, all 5 of her children were standing on the swim platform anxiously waiting to see the look of surprise on her face. The moment she saw her family was a moment I will never forget. The look of overwhelming joy, happiness, and utter shock is beyond words.

She immediately burst into tears as everyone sang Happy Birthday. Watching this family cry tears of joy and embrace their mother with the surprise of her lifetime was such an incredibly rewarding experience. I still get goose bumps thinking about it.

Some people might suggest Charter Brokers are merely booking agents for the extremely wealthy.

I like to think of us as hard working folk who care about making dreams come true and I think that it is memories like this that makes this job more rewarding than most can imagine.