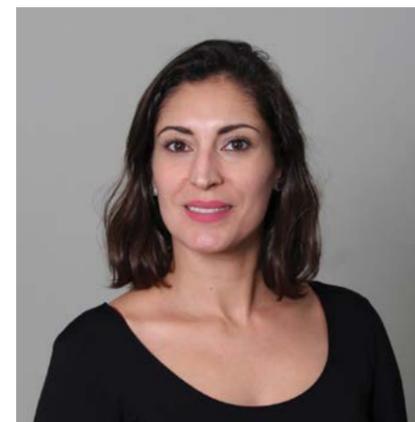


YACHT CHARTER *insight*



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The key to the perfect yacht holiday is to exceed the guests' expectations. Most clients have specific criteria and desires when choosing their yacht such as the age of the yacht; the interior décor; the number of decks; the water toys list; the size of the beds; whether there is a Jacuzzi on board or not etc. The charter agent will aim to match all these criteria by selecting the right yacht.

However, ultimately what will make the difference between two or three shortlisted yachts is the crew onboard. Visiting the yachts prior to the season (during open days, boat shows or during private visits in their home port) is of crucial importance so that the charter agent knows the general state of the yacht and can also meet the crew. We tend to describe a captain as a "can do" or "can't do" character and this is very important when determining whether a holiday is likely to be good or excellent. A brand new 100ft yacht from an English or Italian shipyard with a wow factor when looked at in photos or brochures may seem the ideal but, if the chef on board is inexperienced or more of a cook than a chef, or the captain can barely speak English, it can ruin the experience.

The captain's primary role is the safe manning and operation of the yacht. Every crew member falls under the ultimate command of the captain. However, on a yacht the food is what a charter guest or an owner will always remember so the chef plays an incredibly important role and his position can be very challenging. The deck crew will encompass many responsibilities, but most importantly will maintain the exterior of the yacht and keep it in pristine condition at all times, whilst also being responsible for the general day to day operation and maintenance of jet-skis, toys and tenders. The most important aspect of the role of the interior crew is the attention to detail. It requires the ability to think ahead, provide a service before the guest makes the request and to anticipate events before they happen. Maintaining the mechanical and electrical operations of the yacht is the main function of the engineer who will, ultimately, be responsible for keeping the mechanical side of the yacht running without a hitch.

Yacht crews are dedicated and professional. They create the memories of a yacht holiday. What makes the difference between a good yacht holiday, and one family and friends talk about forever, is the crew. The crew is the reason why charter guests often charter the same yacht year after year. A great captain will know all the best cruising areas including the most secluded beaches and the best restaurants. A crew's professionalism translates to a yacht chef who can prepare either a simple and delicious roast with vegetables or to French-Japanese modern twist and fusion gastronomy. An accomplished chef will be able to demonstrate his/her skills through a culinary voyage. Cuisine plays a crucial role in the guest experience. Cuisine is the communication between the chef and the crew with their guests.

I had the honour to be a Judge at the Mediterranean Yacht Show Chef's competitions in Greece in May 2016 and April 2018 for the Platinum Category (yachts over 30m/100ft). 20 of the best Yacht Chefs in Greece will showcase their culinary skills and the stewardesses on these yachts will also showcase their table scaping and serving skills. On that day alone I was able to feel how the crew would interact with the charter guests and understand if this yacht would be a good choice or not for my clients.

The deck crew is vital in making a trip enjoyable and unforgettable by, for example, teaching passengers how to explore sea life with a sea bob or how to water ski, leading an unforgettable dive or throwing the riders off the inflatable banana in the water. Behind the scenes, there is a team of interior crew who ensures your cabin is kept immaculate and the engineer keeps the yacht running in perfect condition. These crew will always be discreet and invisible but their role is just as crucial to a successful holiday as the captain at the helm of the boat.

The yacht is a luxurious asset, with different indoor and outdoor areas to relax and have fun with friends and families. What will keep everyone smiling and make the experience memorable is the private BBQ on a secluded beach organised by the crew by surprise; the discovery of six or seven different ports in the space of a week; the on-shore adventures including a hike in a national park; a unique treasure hunt with real set up on a deserted island with actors; the themed dinner parties; the adrenaline-pumping water sports; or the films projected onto the sails, making this unusual outdoor cinema beat any indoor theatre experience. You will not be able to do all these things without a great crew. Each crew member delivers a different experience to each guest and each charter. Ultimately, team work is key for the smooth and happy running of a yacht holiday.

The languages spoken onboard are also very important for a good interaction with the guests. It does seem obvious but sometimes this is not being taken into consideration by the charter agent.

Although it seems fairly obvious that a yacht should have an excellent crew on board it's surprising how often this factor is ignored. Some owners are just not willing to spend the time and money on their crew and therefore prefer to hire less experienced crew. This can quickly result in a bad charter if the crew is not well trained and unhappy.