



ALL HANDS ON DECK

FROM AN EXPRESSION of blue-blooded pleasures to high-profile corporate leisure breaks, yachting in India is moving ahead in impressive knots

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Lounging on a floating vacation pad with a sundowner in one hand and a bikini-clad woman on another was strictly a visual snippet from James Bond movies for Indians until they created their own French Riviera and Caribbean yacht counterparts off the fringes of Mumbai's Gateway of India. Nudging close to an impressive 150, the number of yacht owners in India has expanded considerably with a much broader class of wealthy Indians acquiring status symbol. Gateway of India, today, is a white spread of marine toys, all thanks to speedy progress in the government's attempts to make Mumbai and Goa marinas functional, and the craze of yachting among the *crème de la crème* of India. "The yacht is the new second big car," says Ashim Mongia, managing director, West Coast Marine Yacht Service. "Today, it is not just about owning a yacht but also knowing how to sail it." Ashish Gupta, managing director, Beyond Design, a yacht design house, could not agree more. "Regardless of who one is, today everyone wants his name on the water. The *desi* definition of yacht is somewhat inclusive, as some customers are strictly looking for large sailboats, racing boats and other smaller craft, but nonetheless yachts spell 'rich' for high-profile Indians."

Deck-by-deck

Punctuated by glossy headlines of a high-profile's yacht ownership, this white hull and powerboat story along the Indian shores is a riveting tale. Not so long ago yachts were prized possessions of India's industrial honchos. It was an era in the Indian yachting industry when luxury yachts' presence along Indian shores was marked by the absence of its spread, which ended even before it started. When liquor baron Vijay Mallya moored his 50-metre yacht *Kalizma* (earlier owned by Hollywood star Richard Burton) outside Gateway of India in Mumbai in 1998, the city's urban sprawl inched closer to the shore to catch a glimpse of this rarity. *Kalizma* perhaps was the first luxury yacht to sail Indian nautical miles. It was only in 2006 that Mumbai saw its counterpart, ➤

EMOTION

Ashena, the 153-foot, tri-deck power yacht with a Burmese teak hull, owned by Raymond's Gautam Singhanian, parked next to it. Soon Godrej Group CEO Adi Godrej's Ferretti 592, a flybridge and Anil Ambani's TIAN joined the group.

In 2015, the names of yacht owners may not be that famous but the white spread off the fringes of Gateway of India is expanding. While Mumbai remains the hub for yachting industry, it is slowly taking root in Kochi and Goa as well. Not only has Mumbai seen the rise of private players, but also Bhopal, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai, Goa and Kochi are equally zealous about the business. And if this weren't happening, Snapdeal would not announce its partnership with West Coast Marine Yacht Services, India's premier luxury boat dealer. Now even buying a boat is just a swipe away; a line of yachts starting at ₹20,00, 000, is currently available for purchase on the site.

Diwen Mehta, 46, an investor in the equities market, owns a plush home in Alibaug, relaxes at the Sea Lounge in the Taj Hotel Mumbai and has his boat parked opposite where he eats. "I have an office at Nariman Point. I use my yacht to cut travel time. On the road, it's three hours but on the Sea Glimpse it's a 20-minute dash to open space," says Mehta. He owns two boats, including an oryx, priced at ₹1 crore. Joining Mehta's league is Mumbai businessman Pratik Doshi, who owns the 135-foot avior, which can host 120 people. "Yachts are going to be the next big thing. I am also learning sailing to not just own but control my luxury at sea," he says.

Getting afloat

However, for this impressive and expanding group of yacht owners, just owning a yacht is not enough, controlling it is what matters. An increasing interest in sailing is also fuelling the yachting industry in

**ANIL AND
TINA
AMBANI'S
TIAN IS** a
34-metre long
Ferretti, which
cost the couple
34 million euros
(₹400 crore)



HEADWAY
Mumbai-based
Aqusaail offers
yachting lessons
spanning modules
in learning how to
sail, long and short
vacation options.



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the country and, of course, contributing to the wider expanse of marine toys off the fringes of Indian coastlines. The seventh edition of Monsoon Regatta, a yachting championship for India's finest sailors at the Hussain Sagar Lake in Hyderabad, is a fine example of how sailing is becoming popular in the country. New private companies are trumping over the presence of older establishments such as the Royal Bombay Yacht Club, Cochin Yacht Club, Royal Madras Yacht Club and more, which have held the legacy of yachting until now.

Zia Hajeerhoy, Director of Mumbai-based, Aquasailindia, confirms, "A majority of my high-profile clients are looking to do something unique as part of amping up their vacation. Creating an unforgettable memory is on the agenda."

Other companies are exploring alternative to ocean cruises, where hundreds are part of a long sojourn, with minimal customised interaction. According to Gitanjali Balani, director, In Rhythm and India

AHOY SAILOR

The list of yacht clubs and private sailing companies has been swelling in the past few years. Mumbai leads the way with companies such as West Coast Marine Yacht Services India, Aquasailing, Oyster and old-timers such as Royal Bombay Yacht Club. Other inland cities such as Bhopal, Hyderabad, Pune, Bengaluru, Kolkata and even Nainital rely on water bodies such as lakes and reservoirs with small-format sailing options.

representative for SeaDream Yacht Club, "Yachting is certainly being looked upon as the new way to see the world. There is a steady segment being carved out for luxury yachting experiences. The intimate, experiential, meticulously created ambience and five-star cuisine at sea is being appreciated by a growing breed of well travelled elite individuals, who are willing to spend for a fresh take on vacationing." Active leisure, venues for private celebrations and serious learning - yachts are going the extra mile to accommodate different needs. Sailing enthusiast and an alumnus of Aquasailing, Premal Shah (CEO, AFCL), says, "Sailing gives a unique perspective of a destination. Having completed my advanced course, I am set to take a break in Croatia to test new waters."

Some are quick to drown the rise of yachting interest in India, thanks to the recent security, import duties and regulatory impediments. But talk to a true sailor and the scene looks heartening.