

Full-Service Charters

Crewed Power Charters Are More Popular Than Ever

BY ELAINE LEMBO

If you thought cruise ships were the only way to pamper yourself on the water, it's time to change that view and consider the crewed powerboat charter. Here, too, trained staff are at your beck and call 24/7, and you don't have to take out a second mortgage to support your vacation habit.



Captain Tim Miller (above right) and his partner, Julie Brown (above) emphasize water sports and family fun in charters aboard their 58-foot Hatteras McGregor II (right).

While bareboat and crewed sailboats still dominate the Caribbean scene, crewed powerboats are more available than ever. They offer small groups (as small as two and as many as eight or 10) an all-inclusive vacation whose cost stacks up quite favorably when compared to other types of vacations.

"Midsize crewed powerboats are, I feel, gradually increasing in numbers," says Ed Hamilton, a leading broker of crewed and bareboat sailing- and power-yacht vacations. In the business for

more than 30 years, Hamilton says his company's database shows that 21 private, crewed powerboats of less than 80 feet in length are currently chartering in the Caribbean.

Of course, these numbers are still small compared to the 247 crewed charter sailboats of less than 80 feet available in the region, according to Hamilton's data. Still, according to records kept by at least one power-cruiser owner who's a veteran of the Caribbean charter scene, only a handful (maybe eight powerboats)

from water sports to diving, golf and sightseeing.

In addition, a professional skipper and crew maintain and clean the boat; they fix anything that breaks, even in the middle of the night; they handle all clearing-in (customs) procedures; and, last, they know intuitively when to be involved and when to vanish, so that you and your group of family members or friends can luxuriate in private during this special time.

All you need to do is show up on the dock and remember to pack your swimsuit.

Any charter broker can help you find the right crew and power yacht; brokers are paid nothing directly by you, the client, for this service, as their fee is part of the overall charter price. Here are snapshot profiles of a few boats and their crews, based on suggestions from Ed Hamilton.



McGregor II

You're in for a ton of giggling, water sports and family fun aboard *McGregor II*. This 58-foot Hatteras motoryacht is owned and run by Captain Tim Miller, a decades-long sailor, powerboat owner and SCUBA-diving instructor. He and his clients get no small measure of help from his wife, mate, business partner and chef, Julie Brown. The

were available for hire in the region 10 years ago.

Consider the benefits of crewed charters: Skilled, conscientious mariners, who are often the owners of the boat, take you cruising daily. They are knowledgeable about local waters, people and culture; they prepare high-quality meals tailored to your specific needs and desires; they supply you with a range of activities,

McGregor II's cruising grounds include most of the Caribbean, and the boat accommodates up to six guests.

"We boast the largest squirt-gun arsenal in the Caribbean, and we're very proud of that!" says Tim. Joking aside, McGregor II really does have a store of such "weapons" in its lazarette. Tim and Julie are even more proud of their informal water sports program, which has evolved considerably over the years.

This is in part a response to the age of the McGregor II's clientele: families that include children ages four through the teens and twenties. It's also due to a vast inventory of equipment that includes snorkeling gear, kneeboards, wakeboards, water skis, a towing tube, kayaks and an aquanaut, which Tim describes as "a planing device for lazy snorkelers."

Central to the water sports program is SCUBA diving; Tim has been certified to teach it since 1979 and is eager to introduce beginners to the sport. "A lot of times people come because of that option," he says. "They'll snorkel for a couple of days, then try SCUBA. We have the same families on the boat four, five and even six years in a row, and usually, they wind up wanting to use the tanks."

Besides being well appointed and maintained, the McGregor II and her crew pamper charterers young and old with high-quality fare, a carefully balanced mix of fresh food and sophisticated, mouth-watering desserts. And on one night during each trip, young guests are treated to a special dessert called the Captain's Ice Cream.

"I don't know if we should divulge the ingredients," Tim tells Julie during our three-way phone conversation.

"I don't know either," Julie replies.

"Let me guess," I venture. "Oreos, crushed nuts, M&M's ..."

Over the phone line, more giggling abounds: "You got it, all lined up in a row!" the crew replies.



Wreck diving is a specialty aboard the big Cheoy Lee motor-yacht *Bermuda IV* (above), which exposes guests to visual treats like lionfish (top right).

Bermuda IV

This luxurious 96-foot Jack Hargrave-designed Cheoy Lee motoryacht is perhaps most notable for its uncommon home grounds (hence the name). In fact, the vessel is Bermuda's only fully crewed term-charter yacht. But, the boat is also well known for its specialty: wreck diving.

"At least 400 documented wrecks date to the 15th and 16th centuries," says Captain Mike Davis. "Our guests can dive them and, at charter's end, be issued wreck certificates." Among the PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) courses from which *Bermuda IV* charter guests

can choose is the new Wreck Historian Distinctive Specialty.

"History is right here," Mike says, "and it adds another level of interest to a reef or wreck dive, one that people seem to appreciate."

"We're promoting Bermuda as a year-round destination," he adds. "We anchor in a different cove each night." Mike reports that the accessibility and brevity of flights from the U.S. East Coast make this the ideal crewed charter experience for those who live east of the Mississippi.

But diving on historic wrecks isn't the only feature of a cruise aboard the *Bermuda IV*, he emphasizes. "We can tailor a charter to the clients," he says, naming options that range from museum and aquarium visits to an array of entertainment events including festivals and outdoor concerts, golf, spas and gourmet dining.

There's hiking, too, and Mike, a Bermudian by birth, knows the way to remote wilderness areas such as Tom Moore's jungle. "The trek is quite a thrill," he says. The 96-foot motoryacht can handle up to eight guests; if the group includes children age seven and younger, parents must bring a nanny aboard.

Flame

The story of Wayne and Barbara Elsworth and their chartering activity in the Virgin Islands is a tale of many passions and one common denominator: their love of the water. Both are experienced sailors and powerboaters who have worked as charter crew for more than 20 years together.

When the Elsworths aren't entertaining guests aboard *Flame* and showing them all the secluded spots that the crowds overlook, they're at home in Massachusetts, restoring antique speedboats (an avocation that has led to a charter referral or two). "I have a slew of them — eleven," admits Wayne.

A few years back, the collection ballooned to the point that something had to go. The Elsworths packed up and moved from their home in New Hampshire to Massachusetts. In the meantime, however, they picked up a few classic cars in need of restoration (they now have four).

Back to *Flame*. Wayne and Barbara found the 1956 Feadship in 1992 and worked nonstop for the next three years restoring



Wayne and Barbara Elsworth draw many repeat clients to their Feadship, *Flame*.