

IN YOUR FACE

BY LINDSAY SHAPIRO



Renting a luxury yacht, such as Merle Wood's 204-foot *Fortunato* (here), for a \$580,000-per-week excursion is a favorite of A-listers looking to enjoy the most decadent amenities (below right) and exotic destinations (bottom right).

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A WHOLE YACHT OF LUXURY

Power Cruises Are the Ultimate Getaways

Imagine the serenity of slipping away on a carefree, ocean-bound getaway. Now picture the vacation vessel being a 200-foot yacht complete with a 12-person staff (including captain, crew, chef, bartender and full-service maid), Jet Skis and a smaller tender boat in tow. Welcome to a power cruise—no ordinary vacation.

According to Antonio Maldonado, president of The Advantaged Yacht Charters & Sales, the sky's the limit (think helicopter pickups and drop-offs at select locations) when it comes to chartering a yacht. "It's all about the wow factor," Maldonado says. "It's not easy to duplicate. You walk onto a luxury yacht, you won't forget that experience."

True, considering the vast number of boating options, destinations and playthings that can be included in the trip-package selection. The luxe vessels available to the most glam celebrities and vacation-seeking South Floridians range from about 40 feet to 200 feet, depending on the destination, the number of guests, and budget. For the fearless boater looking to impress, the 600 Sports Rodriguez is a sleek silver cruiser with two staterooms, a guestroom, crew's quarter and opulent parquet flooring throughout. A step up on the lavish scale is the \$12 million 122-foot OceanFast motor yacht *Never Say Never*, chartered in the past by celebs Pat Riley and Enrique Iglesias. The *Scott Free* 157-foot Christensen Motor Yacht is another whopper of a vessel, containing six cabins, each with its own bathroom, including shower and tub. The *Scott Free's* sun deck boasts gorgeous views and prime sunbathing space, with a Jacuzzi and cushioned sun pad. Aft, a spacious sky lounge with bar, cocktail room and lounge appears to sprawl out to sea.

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YACHT VACATIONS

The 157-foot Christensen *Scott Free* (here and below) is one of Merle Wood's most popular rentals, boasting stunning amenities and gorgeous interiors at about \$215,000 per week.



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"As you depart from Fisher Island, you enjoy mimosas and a custom-created breakfast."

The *Never Say Never* is an all-inclusive five-star hotel on water at \$15,000 per day from The Advantaged.



The Advantaged's hot selection includes the 600 Sports Rodriguez, a sleek vessel available for \$5,000 per day.



Without even mentioning the added toys, destination or expenses, the *Scott Free* will run you \$215,000 per week.

Boats can be scheduled for departure in a matter of hours and taken to the most exotic locations for months at a time. Merle Wood & Associates charter broker Crom Littlejohn explains that his clients typi-

cally want to leave the state and, often, the country. "The majority of Floridians are chartering in areas outside of Florida on a global basis," he says. "The ability to travel by yacht is virtually endless—anywhere there's a large enough body of water to stick a boat in, we can make it happen." Common requests are excursions to the Bahamas, the Mediterranean, Hong Kong and the South Pacific.

If you're only looking to leave civilization for one day, you'll still experience an idyllic getaway. "As you depart from Fisher Island, you enjoy mimosas and a custom-created breakfast onboard," Maldonado says. "We take you to Elliott Key, drop anchor and let you snorkel around as you enjoy the sights of the natural island before we invite you to enjoy lunch on the bow as you regroup for a last stop in Key Biscayne. There, you could Jet Ski under the sun with family and friends before returning home." If you're looking to experience something other than water travel, there's the option to hop aboard a helicopter at designated spots. A common sky tour is a leisurely trip to Islamorada and back to the city.

While the vessels themselves are impressive, South Florida's chartering companies pride themselves on the little "extras" that make these yachting sprees so magnificent. Accordingly, the majority of the boats are fully stocked with the clients' preferred champagne, along with any other food and cooking

items they request. These are mere distractions, however, compared to the toys available on the yachts. In addition to 31-foot and 15-foot tender-towed boats, the yachts carry water skis, inflatable equipment, Jet Skis and scuba gear. They also have fully stocked gyms with stationary bikes, elliptical steppers, boxing bags and gloves, Bowflex dumbbells, Pilates mats and weight benches. Charter companies can even throw in Pilates and yoga instructors, as well as vegan- and raw-diet-trained chefs. All boats have multiple phone lines and Internet connections available 24 hours a day, which allows the most tuned-in businesspeople to tend to work while still enjoying themselves.

"In the grand scale, we have everything from movie stars to top A-list members of the Forbes 100 list," Littlejohn says. "We have clients who will charter a boat for eight weeks at half a million dollars a week plus expenses—this is how our guests are choosing to spend their downtime. If anyone is thinking of a light vacation, a yacht charter will exceed his expectations."

In the end, yachting vacations offer both ultra luxury and simplicity. So whether it's a trip to Venezuela, Bimini or just Fort Lauderdale, there is no equivalent to a yachting vacation. "We're called 'dream makers,'" Maldonado says. "The whole point of boating is simply to get away from it all—to leave your life for a while." 📸