

A privately owned residential ship, The World is at the summit of seafaring luxury, with a community of co-owners who are having some of the greatest adventures on earth. ALTO received an insider's tour / By Stephanie Plentl

Hello, World

Before boarding The World in Barcelona, I'd been reassured that it was nothing like a conventional cruise liner. Admittedly, there were advance clues: the complex confidentiality agreement, strict dress code and three security checkpoints on arrival were all signals that the largest luxury residential ship in the world is determinedly elite and exclusive. With few visitors allowed on board this unique nautical neighbourhood, I couldn't be more curious.

The ambience on arrival resonates with the aura of a superyacht. In a grand, flower-filled atrium with plush carpets, clad in immaculate teak, everyone welcomes me by name with offers of champagne, cold towels and warm smiles. We pad down the long corridor to my studio suite and I curl into a cosy and elegant home-from-home. This is smallest style of the fully customisable 165 residences on board the 644ft ship. Its large window has

framed many of the most epic and remote views available to mankind: iguanas in the Galápagos, penguins in Antarctica and polar bears in the Russian Arctic (access to the remote Wrangel Island was signed off by Putin himself). I pop into my mouth a chocolate truffle crafted by the ship's master chocolatier. It's exquisite. I conclude that everything on The World is bound to be extraordinary.

A two-hour tour of the ship's 12 decks runs the gamut of five-star amenities: a library (2,200 books and 2,700 DVDs), theatre, fitness studio, kids' games room, an outdoor putting green and virtual golf studio, a pool table (cleverly built on a gyroscope), small casino, chess room, indoor and outdoor pools, a full-size tennis court, a chapel, spa, deli and convenience store, and two boutiques for clothes and jewellery. Among the many marvels, two things in particular strike me: the fact that everything - >

The World, docked in Bordeaux. The vessel is not a cruise ship, but a collection of continually on-the-move private residences. Destinations in 2014 include Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Sea of Okhotsk





The comfortable living area in one of the cabins. There are currently five residences up for resale

even the eco-driven engine room, which runs on a cleaner alternative to marine 'bunker fuel' – is pristine; and that a Mars bar in the shop costs a sensible 80 cents. The reason for both is that the residents themselves have owned the ship since 2003, a year after its launch. A melange of largely US, Australian and European self-made multi-millionaires, The World is their investment, so they say what, when and how much.

The resident community also decide on their destinations. The captain and the enrichment manager (who is in charge of on-board leisure activities) then further develop the ship's itinerary. Together they coordinate the most jaw-dropping experiences and excursions possible – think following in Shackleton's footsteps on South Georgia Island, a silver-service beach barbecue on Assumption Island or sleeping on outdoor beds under the Northern Lights while traversing Canada's Northwest Passage (which broke the record for the largest ship to ever

make the journey). Before arrival, experts are handpicked to lecture on the history, culture or natural wonders of the destination. Residents' personal contacts have often produced rabbits out of hats: in the British Virgin Islands, Richard Branson casually hopped aboard to talk about Necker Island and his career.

That evening, I get lost in the labyrinth of corridors trying to find East, one of The World's four exceptional restaurants. An elderly woman offers directions – she's piecing together a jigsaw puzzle with her daughter in the library and sweetly invites me to help them after dinner. Moments later, I'm using Christofle silver-tipped chopsticks to savour sushi that rivals Tokyo's finest – butter-soft yellowtail, juicy gyoza and delicate tuna carpaccio accompanied by a selection of the ship's 40 sakes (for subsequent meals, the waiting staff all correctly anticipate my preference for sparkling water with lemon – impressive). At the table next to me, a gaggle




Personal service and outstanding amenities complement the one-of-a-kind excursions and sightseeing tours

in their fifties are rhapsodising about the impending adventure to Machu Picchu in Peru. Tonight, other residents are eating out at El Celler de Can Roca in the suburbs of Girona, recently named number one on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list. Militant reservation managers seem to soften when The World's concierge calls – the residents were the also final group to dine at El Bulli before it closed in 2011.

The next morning, the high-calibre concierge team organise a customised tour of Barcelona for me. In order to show me architect Gaudí's candlelit grave in privacy, my local guide is surprised to be offered the keys to the crypt of the Sagrada Familia basilica. It's the first time he's been granted such access in his 17-year career, but clearly it's a simple string for The World to pull; this must be the kind of sightseeing that the residents have come to expect. Back on board, I indulge myself with a Natura Bissé facial in the 600 sq m spa.

Later, I'm sitting in the lounge with the anonymous Mr Resident, a charming Scot in his seventies who is highly successful in retail. He tells me of the strong friendships forged within the community and the lack of arrogance despite the concentration of A-types ("Most of us are very used to telling other people what to do"). He invited his nautical neighbours to dinner at a local castle when the ship visited his home town, a gesture frequently reciprocated by the residents and I believe, evidence of genuine camaraderie.

My curiosity satisfied, it's hard to find fault with this floating city – The World might just be enough for anyone. The ship currently has five residences available for resale, with properties ranging from US\$800,000-\$7.7m (plus annual maintenance fees). Its By Invitation programme allows potential owners to visit the ship on up to three occasions prior to purchasing. 

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