

ULTIMATE CHARTER EXTRAS

WATCH A DOCUMENTARY OF YOUR DIVE JUST HOURS AFTER A SHARK ENCOUNTER, LEARN TO WATERSKI WITH A PRO COACH OR HIRE JIMMY BUFFETT FOR A PRIVATE CONCERT—YOUR NEXT CHARTER COULD BE EVEN MORE UNFORGETTABLE.

TEXT BY DOUG THOMPSON



DIVING INSTRUCTOR RODOLPHE HOLLER KNOWS THE look—eyes twinkle and search the big TV screen and laughter is continuous as the HD video plays to an eager audience in the yacht’s main salon. After days of astounding diving around Moorea, French Polynesia, his students watch a meticulously edited video presentation of their trip just 12 hours after completing their last dive.

The wonder of seeing a big whale or shark in the tropical waters is relived in superb detail; this is the exclamation point of Holler’s guide service. It includes the laughs, the gaffes and reflects the guests’ wonder as they get up close to nature. Viewing the video while still anchored in pristine waters makes it all the more special—the memories are hours old and the trip home is still on the horizon.

“The final movie makes us different,” explains Holler, who runs Tahiti Private Expeditions from the high island of Moorea, located about 11 miles from Tahiti. “Everyone on a charter trip has a camera on board. Pictures are taken by everyone, but no one knows what to do with the pictures after the trip. Each day we are compiling video and pictures and making the final product. When we show the video, the impact and emotions are incredible, so much higher right on the boat and not two weeks later watching it from their office.”

Holler has focused on superyacht diving trips since 2005. He’s worked with charter guests on *Big Fish*, *Lady M*, *Octopus* and scores of others, and he’ll travel worldwide to be the Divemaster on yachts.

PREPARATION IS KEY

Having an expert like Holler can add a whole new dimension to a trip, transforming it from a mere relaxing holiday into a life-enriching experience. This practice of bringing in outside experts and guides is known as rendezvous activities in the charter world. In addition to diving, these can include sportfishing and watersports such as waterskiing, kiteboarding and personal watercraft riding.

For example, “Instead of the yacht having to carry all the fishing rods and lines and hooks, you hire a local expert who picks up your guests for a half day or full day of fishing,” says Mark Elliott, a yacht consultant and charter agent for International Yacht Collection. “The goal is to hire the best guide or company you can find in the area, and we have preferred guides and companies that we work with depending on the location.”

Finding a reputable sportfishing guide that knows the local waters requires research. “The IGFA (International Game Fish Association) has representatives in different countries and is a great resource,” says George Poveromo, a renowned saltwater angler, writer and television host. “The captain can talk to the IGFA and get recommendations, and then learn all about the sportfishing guides that work that part of the world and the fishing they do,



ZENON BILAS

including what type of boat they have. It’s also important to know the migration patterns of the fish, whether the marlin or tuna fishing is good depending on the season and where the charter is headed.

“Through phone conversations, email and word of mouth, the yacht captain can line up the trip well in advance,” Poveromo continues. “You never want to go to a place without preparation.”

INSPIRATION INCLUDED

Zenon Bilas has trained people to waterski, wakeboard and barefoot ski for more than 30 years, and now he’s offering rendezvous waterski coaching to superyacht guests. In addition to providing high-caliber professional training in slalom, trick, wakeboard and barefoot skiing, Bilas—a seven-time U.S. barefoot waterski champion—performs for the guests.

“My barefoot show includes a wide range of skills that I have learned,” Bilas says. “This excites the guests and students in a very positive way, often inspiring them to try just a little harder on their next set.”

For the regular folk, he adapts his program to the individual’s skill level. His program capitalizes on the trend of using ski boats as yacht tenders instead of traditional inflatable or center console boats. Malibu, MasterCraft and Nautique ski and wakeboard boats are among the leading brands that yacht owners are purchasing for both tender and recreational use. He can also adapt his program to whatever type of tender is aboard the yacht.



"My work begins well in advance of the trip," says Bilas. For example, if the yacht only has a center console outboard-powered boat as a tender, Bilas can set up the boat properly for optimum waterskiing and wakeboarding. Bilas makes equipment recommendations and assists the captain in acquiring any needed gear such as water-skis, wakeboards or accessories. For example, barefoot coaching will require the tow boat to have a training boom for quicker learning, while for wakeboarding, a tower on the tow boat is beneficial.

Working with the needs and abilities of individual

these pages
 Champion waterskier Zenon Bilas (right page, bottom left) and Divemaster Rodolphe Holler (right page, top and center right) in action. When looking for the best fishing, be sure to use local experts who know the migration patterns. Oceanbluefishing.com (top right and left page, bottom right) provides rendezvous fishing trips for yachts cruising Vanuatu.

guests is crucial. "Every student is different, but typically my students make rapid progress," Bilas says. "I employ a relaxed, very positive, motivating and easy-to-understand coaching style. By closely observing each skier, I can build on what they are already doing correctly and suggest subtle changes for even greater success.

"For example, a seventy-seven-year-old student could not run the slalom course when we first started training. By implementing changes to body position and slowly replacing bad technique with a better technique, he now successfully runs the slalom course."

EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE

Working with charter guests necessitates stellar people skills. "International exposure has challenged me to coach creatively," Bilas says. "I have had situations in China and Japan where students spoke little or no English yet I successfully coached through example and



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demonstration, or with a single word or two.”

Holler chooses his diving instructors carefully, putting them through a four-month apprenticeship before allowing them to interact with guests on their own.

“You must be a nice person and most importantly, you must be flexible,” Holler says. “If the guests want to go dive at two a.m., then yes, it’s possible. We have a contract with our instructors, and our instructors have a contract with us. They must follow the rules, because every set of charter guests is different.”

Some guests are friendly and want to interact with the instructors, others are more distant. Either way, the instructors must adapt to what the guests want and comply with the captain’s rules.

“Getting the absolute best experience for our owners and guests has been our constant goal,” says Captain Gordon Scott of the 210-foot Palmer Johnson *Lady M*, who used Holler’s services while he ran the Feadship *Bullish*. “Having Rodolphe or one of his team aboard has aided us with this and surpassed my owner’s expectations.”

TAKE YOUR TIME

Hiring an expert to join a charter for the entire week can open realms of discovery far beyond what a day visit can provide. For example, kiteboarding is a demanding activity not easily mastered in one or two sessions.

“I use a pro or an expert trainer for a week with sports like kiteboarding and surfing,” says Captain Carl Sputh of the 180-foot Benetti *Starfire*, which charters in the Baltics, Caribbean and Mediterranean. “It can work out if the trainer is flexible and understands the charter experience. With kiteboarding, unless the person is really good already, they need to stick with one person to learn.”

For a truly deep dive into the history of an area, even college professors can be added to the crew.

“We did a trip in Turkey and I hired a professor from Columbia University to be part of the crew for a week,” Captain Sputh says. “He specializes in Greek and Turkish history, so while we hired local guides for tours, the professor made it special while aboard. At dinner the guests discussed the tour and asked questions, and it was fascinating.

“That’s also how it works with a kiteboarding instructor aboard for a week,” Sputh says. “While on the aft deck at sunset they discuss the day’s training: did they turn upwind at the right time, what technique should they use in a situation. You would never get that in just a few hours.”

STAR POWER

Captain Sputh once hired a famous standup Jet Ski pro for a charter. “It was more than just great; the charter guests were able to ride a Jet Ski with their hero,” says Sputh.

Charter guests’ heroes are not always athletes; rendezvous extras can even include A-list musicians.

“One boat wanted Jimmy Buffett to play,” Elliott says. “So we got Jimmy Buffett and he sang all the songs. It costs one million dollars whether you want him for one hour or three hours. Other charterers want magicians to perform at a party, and we can set that up.”

THOSE LITTLE EXTRAS

Holler’s video presentation encompasses more than just whales, sharks and divers. It’s a high-quality documentary that chronicles the trip for the guests and provides a lasting keepsake.

“Rodolphe documents these guest experiences onto a Discovery Channel-quality DVD for their continued enjoyment and later bragging rights,” Captain Scott says. “Rodolphe also organizes shore excursions to the most beautiful pink-sand, coconut palm-fringed beaches, Tahitian dances—the list is endless. This is not just a trip with the best big animal diving you will ever experience, it includes cultural and terrestrial experiences as well.”

Making the dive trip part of the big-boat charter experience includes working with the crew to make sure the guests are comfortable—which includes being well fed.

“It’s important that the rendezvous company coordinates with the chief stew to make sure there is the right beer, sandwiches and snacks sent out on the journey,” Elliott says. “That makes the activity feel as if it’s a part of the charter. You are obviously out of the water between dives so having the right food is important.”

Holler’s planning helps yacht captains ensure their guests are ready to go, yet even the best plans must be tempered with the reality that charter guests are on vacation, and plans can change on a whim.

“I like to say that anything is possible,” Holler says. “We are in the business of helping people have the best vacation of their lives, and we take pride in making their trip exciting, lively and memorable.”

Resources:

INTERNATIONAL GAME
FISH ASSOCIATION
www.igfa.org

MOTOR YACHT *STARFIRE*
www.mystarfire.com

TAHITI PRIVATE EXPEDITIONS
www.tahiti-private-expeditions.com

ZENON BILAS
www.zenonbilas.com