

## FINANCIAL REVIEW

# For \$21.5m you can live aboard this ultra-luxury ship

*Residents of the privately owned ship The World enjoy a remarkably privileged life at sea. Just don't call it cruising.*



The World has been ferrying its ultra-rich residents around the globe since 2002

**"N**o one uses the C word," says Eddie Wong as he's giving me the grand tour of MS The World, the floating home of an ultra-wealthy elite who pass their days circumnavigating the globe. Sydney-born Wong is the ship's residential director – responsible for its 165 apartments – and social spark plug. He greets and exchanges pleasantries with every resident we meet while strolling from the main plaza on deck five to the expansive spa and fitness area, the four restaurants, theatre, library, pool deck and up to the full-sized tennis court (the only one at sea) on deck 12.

At first blush the architecture and amenities do feel rather like a cruise ship, even if no one uses the C word. But a three-day voyage from Melbourne to Sydney in January reveals the many extraordinary ways in which The World differs from commercial cruising.



Guests enjoying some water sports via the onboard marina of the privately owned ship The World.

Any prejudices I had about the stuffiness of the ship's affluent inhabitants vanish on night one when Austrian general manager Thomas Legner, a silver fox in a chalk-stripe suit, ushers me below decks to the mess where crew are enjoying one of their regular "enhanced dinners" sponsored by residents. There are carving stations of ham, salmon and beef, a triple-deck tower of king prawns and abundant wines. Seeing mega-millionaires dine alongside their employees in the vessel's underbelly was not on my bingo card.

Afterwards in the split-level Marina restaurant, which transforms into an actual marina in ports, Legner explains The World is “a combination of so many different things ... it’s a homeowners’ association, a country club, a ship, a five-star hotel”.

Today’s special is Sydney rock lobster, served grilled or steamed with buttery sauces. I have the Ibérico ham and a spicy prawn kedgerree, Legner has the barramundi, and we share a terrific Rosengartl gemischter satz from his native Vienna, one of 1400 premium labels stocked in the award-winning, 15,000-bottle cellar.



Antarctica is a regular stop on The World's annual itineraries.

Choice is a cornerstone of the charmed life on The World. Staff maintain a 2200-strong list of food and beverage preferences ranging from allergies to what shape ice cubes owners like in their cocktails. “We are working with very high net-worth customers,” says food and beverage director Armand Louw. “It’s about personalised services and creating memories for them.”

For example, Max – one of the ship’s youngest residents (two families live on board more or less permanently) – turns seven during our voyage, so staff prepare a menu of his favourite things: Alaskan king crab, Italian truffles, and a chocolate salted-caramel birthday cake.

When the ship was in Curacao, executive chef Sebastian Gnida had a 250-kilogram tuna flown in because one guest eats only cold-water fish. “We have a very wealthy budget. As long as we stay within it, there’s no problem,” says Gnida.

On the same day I come aboard at Melbourne’s Station Pier, a couple from Monaco arrives to test-drive the ship to Sydney and over to New Zealand. They are “very familiar with private yachts”, Wong assures me, but want to see if this is the right fit for them. Prospective buyers can sail three times before making up their minds. Residents’ friends and family are also welcome on The World, as are guests of Exclusive Resorts, an invitation-only holiday club that owns four apartments.



The ship's wine cellar contains more than 15,000-bottles.



Personalised fitness classes are de rigueur.

Wong says he sold around 20 apartments last year. Prices range from \$US3 million-\$US15 million (\$4.3 million-\$21.5 million); annual maintenance (similar to strata) fees average \$US500,000 to \$US600,000.

There are still a handful of original residents and some 20 crew from The World's conception. Launched in 2002 by the Norwegian shipping magnate Knut Kloster as a hybrid homeowner-hotel model – deck six was bookable cabins sold to help cover running costs – it sailed into bankruptcy a year later. Residents rallied to rescue the ship from insolvency (one bought 10 apartments) and have owned and managed it since.



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Prospective buyers can sail three times before making up their minds.

Itineraries are planned by committee years ahead to secure anchorages in an increasingly competitive cruise market. Port stays tend to last several days so that residents can explore properly via ‘destination experiences’ (nothing so gauche as a shore excursion), overland adventures and thrice-yearly, expeditions to remote parts of the planet.

After touring New Zealand, The World set course for Antarctica, hoping (but ultimately failing) to reclaim its 2024 record for voyaging the furthest south of any vessel. The last time it was in Antarctica, board member Andrea Newman camped on the continent with 14 fellow residents at the ultra-exclusive Three Glaciers Camp, whose past guests include Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page.

After flying to the geographic South Pole, they spent a week snowmobiling, skiing, hiking and “having a wonderful time,” says Newman, who worked in the Reagan White House and as a lobbyist for various US-based airlines. “And it was all set up by the ship!”

This is my third stint on The World. The first was in Auckland in 2003 (pre-bankruptcy) for the America’s Cup. As a hotel guest, there was very much an us-and-them divide. In 2016, I was invited back because there were apartments for sale and management wanted to spread the news to potential buyers in Australia. The ship’s second-most numerous nationality, their ranks include a well-known woman mining billionaire and titans of commerce and culture.



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The World has 165 private apartments.

It was more formal then. Jackets and ties at dinner. Zero social media. Dodgy internet (Elon Musk's Starlink satellite constellation has been a gamechanger). My contact with residents was strictly controlled, but I met one Australian man, the pseudonymous Bob, in his elegant deck-10 apartment. Bob had been recently widowed; this time I dine with him and his new wife – let's call her Katherine – at the sleek pan-Asian eatery East.

Bob agrees the vibe onboard has changed noticeably in the past decade. The community is younger – the average age is early 60s – the mood more relaxed. Nevertheless, Katherine took some convincing to first join him on the ship in 2019. Her only previous experience of cruising was a disappointingly celebrity-free Celebrity voyage.

“I think it took about 33 seconds to get the difference between Celebrity and this place,” she says over miso cod and duck pancakes. Like every resident I speak to, they both single out the importance of the onboard community. “The friendships are incredibly deep,” says Katherine. “I always use the expression: ‘Disparate backgrounds, common interests,’” says Bob. “You share these pretty incredible experiences that add to the dialogue and the memory building.”



Setting off from Sydney Harbour.

I'm back on board this year thanks to The World's new era of glasnost, sparked by the threat of other resident-owned ocean liners such as Utopia (now a decade behind launch schedule) and the proposed 'gigayacht' Ulyssia.

“While there hasn’t been any true competition (yet) ... I think there was awareness that we should be out there,” says The World’s president and CEO Jessica Hoppe.

I tell her the difference between 2016 and today – when most residents are only too happy to chat with the visiting journalist – feels like secret society turned country club. “Look, this is an opportunity,” she says. “When something becomes so exclusive that ... nobody knows [about it], then it’s a little too exclusive.”

As we cruise, spectacularly, through the heads into Sydney Harbour on a Saturday morning, residents sip champagne on deck 12 while Wong’s on the mike pointing out major landmarks and the harbourside homes of various World residents. Among them are the philanthropist and gallerist Judith Neilson, and others I can’t name with homes in Mosman and apartments at Woolloomooloo Wharf and One Barangaroo. He shows no discretion whatsoever. It’s a whole new world.

*The writer travelled as a guest of The World.*

## Need to know

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- ◆ Rates | From \$US3 million to \$US15 million (\$4.2-\$21.2); apartments sizes from 30 square metres; up to 301 square metres for three-bedroom residences. There was only one three-bedroom apartment for sale at the time of writing, priced at \$US9.8 million.
- ◆ For more | Craig Bowen at [thetravellergroup.net](http://thetravellergroup.net) is the Australian ‘ambassador’ for The World and the best contact for inquiries. [aboardtheworld.com](http://aboardtheworld.com)