

Come holiday or high water

The best yacht charters in 2023 offer intrepid travellers access to hard-to-reach destinations or once-in-a-lifetime experiences, says Adam Hay-Nicholls, who rounds up some of his favourites



Decked out: cruise the Champagne region and sample French cuisine in style on the top deck of Belmond's newly renovated *Coquelicot*

WHETHER we're talking endless oceans, choppy channels or narrow canals, a holiday on the water is pure escapism. But once you've polished off a paperback and felt the benefit of fresh air, it can sometimes get a bit samey. The solution? To charter a private vessel with friends and/or family somewhere a bit unusual or with a bunch of engrossing sights and activities.

Experiential travel is all the rage, especially when it's you—and not the captain—calling the shots. Sasha King, founder of High Point Yachting, says it's all the more fulfilling when charter companies work with the client to create bespoke itineraries. 'Experiential trends are about getting to the heart of things and places that make us feel good and expand our interests. We recently booked a client on a heli-skiing expedition to Greenland by explorer yacht (with a heli-pad), accompanied by world champion and Olympic gold-medal skier Bode Miller. Also in high demand,' she says, 'is kite

‘It is all about getting to the heart of things and places that make us feel good’

surfing by superyacht. Being able to launch off the boat makes it more memorable. Specialised voyages are never black and white—it's about what shade of grey the client wants.'

What follows are our top-five charter picks for 2023, from bracing Scottish lochs to volcanic Pacific islands, and sleek superyachts to rustic old fishing boats. Ahoy adventurers!

Eda Frandsen, Western Isles, Scotland

Who? Perfect for watercolourists. Eight guests in single berths, so more for friends than couples.

Why? Wild and distinctive scenery, best explored by boat, and an excellent opportunity to model knitwear. The charming 60ft *Eda Frandsen* is a traditional gaff cutter built in Denmark in 1938, which spent the bulk of her life as a fishing trawler before being converted. Current custodians Stella and Mungo sail the Inner and Outer Hebrides, including to really remote areas, such as the St Kilda archipelago (weather permitting) and the Callanish Stones on Lewis, greeting puffins and gannets and keeping an eye out for orca and basking sharks.

How? 10-day voyages from £12,950 for the whole vessel, leaving from Mallaig (www.eda-frandsen.co.uk)

Kudanil Explorer, Komodo and Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Who? Best for surfers and divers. Up to 16 guests (attended by 23 crew) in eight double or twin cabins, all with private balconies. →

Why? Luxury expedition yacht *Kudani*—a former oil-rig supply ship—visits the turquoise bays of some of South-East Asia's most spectacular islands and boasts an arsenal of water toys, including a jet ski, a RIB, water skis, various boards and kayaks and plenty of scuba gear. Here one can meet manta rays, whale sharks and more coral-fish species than anywhere else on the blue planet. *Kudani* has a resident PADI diving instructor and, although it's best to be certified before you go, training can be undertaken aboard.

How? SJ Villas offers eight-day voyages from £129,000. Fly either to Bali and onto Labuan Bajo to meet the boat on Komodo island, or Jakarta and then Sorong for Raja Ampat (www.sjvillas.co.uk)

Coquelicot, Champagne, France

Who? Ideal for Francophiles who love fizz. Three couples, each with a generous cabin.

Why? Cruising the canals and River Marne between Epernay and Sillery, the Belmond-owned, newly renovated and graceful *Coquelicot* will launch in May this year and promises bubbly-quaffing nirvana. Top-deck dining invites one to feast on the finest French cuisine against an ever-changing backdrop, whereas vineyard, cellar and *château* visits and an exclusive partnership with Ruinart, the oldest Champagne *maison*, take guests deeper into the effervescence and romance of the region.

How? Seven-day charters from \$73,000. Helicopter transfers from Paris are available on request (www.belmond.com)



The wild life: the charming 60ft *Eda Frandsen* sails the remote Western Isles of Scotland

Aqua Mare, Galápagos Islands, Ecuador

Who? Naturalists who wish to travel by gin palace. Up to 16 guests across seven sea-facing suites.

Why? The 50m (164ft) *Aqua Mare* is the only superyacht permanently based in the Galápagos—18 islands and more than 100 small islets in the Pacific. Endemic life includes the giant tortoise, land and marine iguana, penguins and the blue-footed booby. Guests hike up volcanoes, visit black-sand beaches and go on snorkelling excursions. Two Nature guides

bring the total crew to 16. The spacious vessel includes an 860sq ft master suite, five stylish state rooms and a flybridge Jacuzzi.

How? Eight-day cruises exploring either East or West Galápagos, from £173,000, or both over 15 days, from £329,000. Guests should fly to Baltra Island—there are commercial flights from Quito, Ecuador, with Equair (www.aquaexpeditions.com)

‘The *Satori* boasts a 250-bottle wine cellar (with an on-board sommelier)’

Satori, Amalfi Coast and Sicily, Italy

Who? Foodies, wine connoisseurs and culture vultures. Up to 10 guests in five cabins.

Why? Large schooner *Satori* was built in 2017, but is styled inside and out as if it's the 1930s and boasts a 250-bottle state-of-the-art wine cellar (with an on-board sommelier), making it the perfect berth from which to explore the incredible food and wine scenes native to Sicily and along the Amalfi Coast, as well as ancient Greek and Roman ruins. The crew of seven includes chef Serdar Elci, who has worked at the acclaimed Borgo Santo Pietro in Tuscany. After dinner, the crew can erect an open-air cinema screen to watch *The Talented Mr Ripley* or *The Godfather* under the stars.

How? Weekly charters from £111,600 (www.highpointyachting.com)



Surf's up: there's never a dull moment touring the Indonesian islands aboard *Kudani*