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On the Waterfront

We Check Out the Latest Mega-Yachts for Charter: Our Guide to What's New

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Genoa, Italy

THE DISPLAY at the city's old port last week was spectacular: nearly 70 yachts, among them some of the world's largest and most expensive, lined up for Europe's biggest annual charter trade show. What can you get for 00,000 to nearly €700,000 a week? We took this opportunity to compare the latest in mega-yachts for hire, climbing up and down the gangplanks to tour boats ranging from sleek restored sailing vessels to tubby new motor-yachts that look like miniature cruise ships.

We found luxuries to suit all tastes. Parsifal III, a 54-meter sailing yacht finished two weeks

TAKEOFFS & LANDINGS

ago, was stocked with Baccarat crystal glasses, sterling silver cutlery and

mink bedspreads. The newly renovated 55-meter motorized Indian Princess featured two speed boats, scuba gear, a helipad, a karaoke machine and a disco ball.

Other not-uncommon amenities these days include marble bathrooms with power showers and massive DVD libraries. Most of the motorized mega-yachts came with a speedboat or two, jet skis and perhaps windsurfers. (One charter agent told me he had seen a mega-yacht in the Mediterranean with a mini-submarine on board.) Doing business on board is often an option. Titan, a 60.4-meter converted Royal Navy ship new on the charter market, had desk space in every suite, high-speed voice and data communications systems, and an area for conferences with a table that seats 22 and a big pull-down projector screen. Price: €320,000 a week for 20 guests maximum.

Every year the yachts get bigger, newer and more ostentatious, attendees say. "A 30- or 40-meter yacht used to be huge. Now that's the small scale of the mega-yachts, and the 60- to 80-meter yachts are coming more and more to the market," says Ann Poux, manager of the Mediterranean Yacht Brokers Association, which runs the show. This year, the Annaliesse was one of the heaviest hitters, at 85.3 meters long and €661,500 a week. Spread across its five decks were 23 flat-screen television sets, five Jacuzzis, a wine cellar, movie cinema, helipad, elevator, spa, beauty salon and a gym.

Once a casual industry dominated by wealthy yacht owners, the charter yacht world is increasingly controlled by professionals looking for profits. They're building larger yachts and taking them straight from the shipyards into the charter market. "The bigger the boat, the busier it is," says the Annaliesse's owner, Andreas Liveras, a 70-year-old Cypriot.

The good news is that charter yachts are getting safer as more adhere to international standards. And more than ever, they offer the equivalent of five-star accommodations, with crews who don't mind whipping up omelets (or at least act like they don't mind) for guests climbing back aboard at 3 a.m. after a night in port.

The bad news is all the wall-to-wall car-

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Black Swan

An 1899 ketch
Length: 40.5 meters
Crew size: 6 **Maximum guests:** 10
Price per week (high season): €40,950
Plus: Sailing that feels like sailing
Minus: No hot tub here



Annaliesse

A massive, five-deck boat
Length: 85.3 meters
Crew size: 34
Maximum guests: 36
Price per week (high season): €661,500
Plus: The elaborate spa
Minus: As intimate as a modern cruise ship!



SS Delphine

A restored 1921 steamship
Length: 78.65 meters
Crew size: 24
Maximum guests: 28
Price per week (high season): €350,000
Plus: Taste of a bygone era
Minus: Stuffy decor makes it hard to put your feet up

Parsifal III

A newly built sailing yacht
Length: 54 meters
Crew Size: 9
Maximum guests: 12
Price per week (high season): €198,000
Plus: Spacious, airy interior
Minus: Is this a sailboat, or a luxury hotel?



Photos: Courtesy of the companies