



provisions also can be easier to come by, especially in the European ports.

“In a very succinct way, [all] yacht provisioning in the Med, including parts, supplies and equipment, during the off-season is something [that] cannot be neglected considering [it’s] approximately twenty percent of the total annual turnover,” says Giacomo Spiaggi, president and CEO of Mansueto Marine, supplier of a full range of yacht support services in San Remo, Italy.

“I’ve enjoyed being in the Med after most everyone else has left for the season,” says Capt. Bennett. “Probably the best aspect is the easy availability of dockage.”

He lists some of his favorite off-season ports: “1) Portosole, San Remo: Quiet, but with plenty of shops and services close by. Also centrally located along the Riviera, with more attractive dockage rates than many others. However, after seeing [January’s] crazy weather and rogue waves breaking over the seawall, I’d worry a bit about how protected it is compared to some other spots; 2) Port Vauban or the IYCA, Antibes: Good protection from winter weather, close to shops and services, close to what ‘action’ and nightlife there is during the winter in the South of France, close to the highways and routes into the Alps for skiing during downtime; 3) Palma, Mallorca: Good shipyard services, maybe the best winter weather in the Med, lots of activities to keep the crew entertained during downtime, incredible natural beauty.”

The 63-meter Benetti *Lionheart* enjoys an extended Med season that lasts from April to November. In the off-season months, says her master, Capt. Thomas Jones, “We tend to cruise up and down the Riviera between Monaco and St. Tropez and enjoy what can be very, very quiet anchorages.”

While colder than the Caribbean, the air temperature

in the Med stays relatively mild throughout the winter. The real difference is in the water temperature, which can put off owners and guests who equate yachting with water-sports. “The water gets down to fourteen degrees Celsius [fifty-seven degrees Fahrenheit] in April,” says Jones.

In addition, winter brings a vastly increased chance of inclement weather. As in the Caribbean, keeping an eye on the forecast can be a make-or-break factor when it comes to enjoying a successful off-season in the Med. “Some of the storms here can be pretty violent,” Jones explains. “Once you move out of September, it can rain a lot, and there are big, strong swells coming in from the north and east.”

“Weather conditions across the Mediterranean Sea can change very rapidly, and these changes are mainly caused by orographic effects,” says Spiaggi. “Captains must be able to count on accurate and detailed forecasts.” Many of them rely on subscriber-based weather services. Mansueto Marine provides one that not only provides routing tips and services, but also transmits the information to the yacht via telephone, SMS, email or satellite communications.

When in doubt, it’s wise to send the guests ashore. “Since rough seas and foul weather are more likely and frequent, we usually wind up spending more time...putting together shoreside expeditions and entertainment,” Bennett adds.

Marketing the Off-Season

Capt. Lauro points out the obvious advantage of being one of a very few yachts to offer charters in an off-season destination. “We pick up a lot of extra Caribbean charters in the summer while other yachts are competing with each other in the Med and Northeast,” he says.

“In the Caribbean, I feel like [marketing charters is] easy: ‘Is the July sun baking your brain in the concrete jungle of New York City and you need to get away for some peace and quiet?’” says Bennett. “Marketing winter cruising in the cold is likely to be a good bit more difficult. I think you have to specialize and drop your rates considerably. For example, I know of one yacht that carries a hard-core helicopter and charters out of B.C. and Southeast Alaska during the winter to do heli-skiing trips. Now that sounds like a lot of fun to me.”

The Extreme Off-Season

Capt. Henk Koster, owner, designer and master of the 158-foot classic motor yacht *Grace* takes off-season cruising to extremes: He spends the winter and spring voyaging with guests and charter clients on board along the western coasts of Sweden and Norway, north to the Arctic Circle.

“It has stolen my heart because of the light and the seasons of nature,” Koster says.

Intense preparation is the key to a successful cruise in the far north, because services and amenities are few and far between, Koster says, adding, “If you are amongst the islands there, you are on your own. It’s important to have local knowledge and good friends.”

On the other hand, Capt. Koster often is moved by the reception *Grace* gets when she pulls into a small Norwegian village. “When we enter a fishing port somewhere, then the next day we are all over the local newspaper, because it’s so rare to see a yacht. If you have guests on board, the local people will go all out to be sure they have a good visit.”

While he says the west coast of Norway stays ice-free in the winter, gale-force winds sometimes keep *Grace* in port for a number of days. “There are some capes you don’t want to pass in those conditions, and they are really notorious,” he says. That’s only about 15 percent



Roger Lean-Vercoe

of the coast, however. “[Along] the rest, you can hide behind the islands and make a long voyage in the inner passage.” He adds that when transiting in rough seas is unavoidable, “The [guests] can hike overland to the next fjord and the yacht can go around.”

Koster has found that a lot of people want to sign on for a winter charter on *Grace*. “It’s a different culture,” he says. “This expedition-type [yachting] is really a voyage rather than entertainment.” **DW**

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