

A PEOPLE BUSINESS

TRANSPORTING YACHTS INVOLVES A LOT MORE THAN PUTTING ONE BOAT ON TOP OF ANOTHER AND SENDING THEM TO FARAWAY LANDS.

A RELATIVE NEWBY IN YACHT TRANSPORT with a background in marketing and some years of professional yacht captain stints, my new position as agent for Sevenstar Thailand & Malaysia has opened my eyes to a world of big ships, big operations, international logistics and a high level of professionalism.

A Simple Concept?

True, I started with the same expectations and questions as everyone else. Put a boat on a boat, leave from A on agreed day X and arrive in B on day Z. Pretty simple and straightforward, right? No, not quite, or perhaps I should say it is what we ultimately aim for in an ideal world.

The reality of planning in shipping is often different. Carriers can be appointed only about two months before the intended loading date, simply because the availability of suitable vessels is not known much in advance. Once nominated, we receive an estimated time of arrival (ETA) for loading. This ETA is influenced by factors such as weather, sea state, port congestion and progress of port operations, additional port calls, etc. Then during the actual loading and discharge of the yachts the current, wind and waves provide a big uncertain timing factor. For instance, a tiny swell can cause a lifting hook to swing over the deck from side to side, sometimes resulting in a delay of one or more days.

It is our challenge to create a client experience that is as close as possible to the simple “ship from A to B” concept and, at the same time, manage expectations about the realities of planning in the shipping industry. It is this ‘stretch’ that makes yacht transport a real people business.

Synchronised Worldwide Dance

What goes on behind the scenes is a synchronised dance on many levels and locations against the uncertainties of merchant shipping. This includes in-house engineering (creating lifting and stowage plans), logistics of loading material (there is a separate flow of cradles and lifting material), the nomination of vessels and the actual loading and discharge operations (20 full-time Sevenstar loadmasters fly around the world to supervise it all).

Last but not least is sales and customer service, where we aim to accommodate individual wishes as much as possible. Questions about technical aspects, logistics, client itinerary changes, yacht delivery assistance, customs clearance and import, personal visas... these all pass my desk at some stage.

Yacht transport is teamwork and the ultimate challenge is to bring ships, yachts, yacht captains, material, loadmasters, and paperwork together on the days of loading and discharge. At Sevenstar this happens on average 1.5 time per day: every two days, three port calls are made somewhere in the world.

Apples and Oranges

Knowing all this has brought me a lot of confidence in working with the company I work for. But how do people find the best transport options in the market, among the range of yacht shipping handlers out there? Comparing yacht transport offers is often like comparing apples and oranges, and I have become aware that the lowest-priced offers are often not what you really need in the end.

A Few Tips

Firstly, how safe is the transport of your yacht? What track record and experience does the company have in transporting yachts? Do they



have an in-house engineering department where the lifting and stowage plans are created? How well are loadmasters trained? Who provides the loading materials and cradles? And should things go wrong, what is the conduct of the insurance company?

Secondly, how can you know if a ship will arrive to transport your yacht? Is this a route regularly serviced by the company? What's happened in previous years? Some companies will offer to give your money back (best case) when they don't show up.

Thirdly, what is comprised in the freight price? Are transport insurance and Suez Canal fees included? How does the initial offer compare to the contract? What additional costs can you expect (e.g. who is paying the cost for waiting days when the vessel experiences delays during loading & discharge)?

Lastly, how solid is the company and how safe is your deposit? It is common practice to request a deposit at booking. Several cases have been in the news about yacht transport companies going bankrupt or disappearing completely.

The best source for information is the Internet. Research what others have written: is the company for real? What is their track record, and... how is their conduct in case of damages or problems? With what I have learned about the industry, I can recommend that the safest bet is with the older, well-established transport companies, which not only have a demonstrated track record for yacht transport, but also have proven to be financially sound. They might make a mistake, but they will always work with you to find solutions.

Fortunate to have this opportunity, I find myself learning every day and loving every minute of it.



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