

NIGEL  
BURGESS



## TO THE SHORES OF THE CORAL SEA

*In the last issue of Superyacht Living and Style we previewed the innovative catamaran motor yacht Seafaris, which was specifically designed for luxury charters on the Great Barrier Reef. Alev Karagulle went to see whether the reality of the yacht, and the region, could possibly live up to expectations.*

The thing about Australia is that it's so far away. From everywhere. Why charter a yacht in Australia when you could go to the Caribbean? Or the Greek Islands? Most of us can find great beaches and beautiful water in places much closer to home than Australia.

But that is to miss the whole point about Australia – and the Great Barrier Reef in particular. This is a wondrous, beguiling country and the Great Barrier Reef, sometimes called the Eighth Wonder of the World, extends for almost 1,200 miles (2,000 kilometres) along the northeast coast of Queensland, offering the most amazing seascapes.

Flying in over Lizard Island in the owner's Pilatus PC12 private plane, we catch our first glimpse of Seafaris, gently bobbing at anchor in turquoise water off the curving sweep of sandy beach in Watson's Bay. From here, she looks exactly as she did in virtual form a year earlier, but within 20 minutes we are being welcomed on board the real live yacht by her congenial Australian crew of 10, headed by Captain Duncan Smith.

*A tour of the yacht reveals an incredibly spacious, luxurious interior and endless deck space.*

Seafaris' twin hulls and exceptional 36ft (11m) beam, give her the feeling of a much larger yacht than her 134.5ft (41m) length would predict. Located on the main deck, the sumptuous full-width master suite and all four

guest cabins have huge comfortable beds with gorgeous cotton sheets, fluffy towels, ensuite marble shower rooms, organic bathroom toiletries, full audio-visual installations and satellite communications. Large picture windows look out onto panoramic views, huge skies and endless horizons.

The main deck also houses a library and media room, while up on the bridge deck, the formal dining room is open-plan with the galley, saloon and bar area. This unusual arrangement works really well, giving a great sense of space and light.

There are two outdoor dining areas, one of which is a teppanyaki bar, while the other features a large built-in barbecue, and there are plenty of padded sunbathing and lounging areas as well as a deck jacuzzi. The 28ft custom Blackwatch tender "Blakey" is carried between the hulls and is lowered and raised from the main deck on a special hydraulic platform.

Needless to say, snorkelling and scuba gear is available. Underwater life here is beyond belief and there are endless world-class dive sites, renowned for their variety of coral and large pelagic species. Seafaris also has two kayaks and waterskis, ideal for activity-oriented guests.

*Seafaris offers remote, adventure cruising, while enjoying every possible comfort.*

As we cruised the Reef before heading up to the furthest reaches of Far North Queensland, lazy days of swimming, snorkelling and lounging on the sundeck with a good book, were interspersed with a trek ashore at Stanley Island National Park to see the Aboriginal cave paintings, a picnic on the sandy cays of Forbes Island – not forgetting the waterfall excursion by helicopter, with some crocodile spotting on the way!

And then there's the fishing. Seafaris carries a full inventory of fishing equipment, and coral trout, yellowfin tuna, Spanish mackerel, barramundi and trawls are all in a morning's catch. The best part comes later when Seafaris' master chef, David Maunder, serves up the freshest sushi you've ever tasted. You will eat royally well on Seafaris and the crew make it their business to catch mud crabs, lobster and crayfish for your table.

David's culinary background is in five star hotels, fine dining restaurants and aboard a number of top charter yachts in the Mediterranean and Caribbean. His philosophy is to keep food simple using the freshest ingredients to create a diversity of flavours. Imagine your filleted catch, cooked on the sizzling outdoor teppanyaki grill accompanied by a delicious Asian-style salad.

*With a backdrop of wide ocean views and not another boat in sight, this is like being on the edge of the world.*

Captain Duncan Smith has a wealth of charter experience gained on major yachts all over the world. "This is the very opposite of the Club 55 St Tropez scene or being at anchor off Cala di Volpe with three dozen other yachts. Seafaris offers an entirely unique eco charter experience where family and friends can spend time together while exploring the pristine natural environment of the Great Barrier Reef. There are very few yachts offering this type of charter at the luxury end of the market. Everyone who comes feels enriched and rejuvenated."

However, if you are not looking for quite such a 'last frontier' cruising experience, other itineraries are available. After all, Seafaris' owner has perfected the art of living life to the full, and wants you to do the same.

*Australia might be far away indeed, but I promise you will return with the most enduring memories.*

You could enjoy the boutique shopping, restaurants and golf courses of Port Douglas, before heading up through the Reef towards Lizard Island, and don't miss out on a stopover in Sydney before flying north to Cairns to join Seafaris. Take the time to enjoy a harbour cruise, stopping for a seafood lunch at Doyles in Watson's Bay. Catch a concert at the Opera House and go for dinner at Tetsuya's, famed for its fabulous Japanese/French fusion cuisine and one of the city's best restaurants. Time permitting, a two day excursion to the Blue Mountains and the wine country is also highly recommended.

### Seafaris

LOA 134.52ft (41.00m)

Builder Forgas Shipyard, Australia

Year 2006

Cruising speed about 16 knots

Guests 10 guests in 5 cabins

Crew 9

Winter/Summer The Great Barrier Reef

Charter rates from US\$119,000 per week

See pages 158-159 for further information on Seafaris.  
Seafaris is under charter management with Nigel Burgess.

NIGEL  
BURGESS

## CAPTAIN DUNCAN SMITH'S SUGGESTED 10 DAY GREAT BARRIER REEF CRUISING ITINERARY

day 1

Embark Seafaris at Cairns Marlin Marina towards noon. Cruise north for 35 miles along the coastline to Low Isles, the first of the Marine State Parks, for a late lunch and a chance to snorkel with the resident turtles in the shallows of the fringing reef. After a walk on the beach or exploring the nature trail to the island's lighthouse, enjoy canapés and sundowners overlooking the Tableland Mountains in the distance. Dinner tonight is a simple but elegant affair and a chance to discuss the adventures of the week ahead.

day 2

Breakfast underway to Opal Reef for the first of many opportunities to experience the "outer" Great Barrier Reef. Due to the protective zoning, like many of its neighbours, Opal Reef is teeming with fantastic colourful sea life. An alfresco lunch can be followed by a full afternoon of fishing from Seafaris' comfortable 28ft custom sportsfisher "Blakey", launched 007 style from the main aft deck. Later, a dip in the yacht's jacuzzi spa, allows you to unwind prior to a fun and entertaining evening meal at any one of the three dining areas on board. The outer reef affords great protection from the Coral Sea as you enjoy a peaceful night's rest at anchor.

day 3

Awake to being surrounded only by natural reef and the sounds of the sea. After an early departure and a scenic cruise along the inside of the Barrier Reef, arrive at the beginning of the Ribbon Reefs. Enjoy a spectacular dive at "Steve's Bommie" with the chance to visit an isolated pinnacle, frequented by large schools of pelagic fish and superb hard and soft corals. For snorkellers, the numerous large coral heads within the lagoon offer the excitement of swimming with a tremendous variety of colourful tropical fish. Later, try hand-feeding fish from the yacht's hydraulic platform, which can be gently lowered into the water. In the afternoon, prepare for a dive at Ribbon Reef No. 5, known as "Andy's Postcard" and home to an abundance of underwater life. During certain times of the year, this stretch of coast is visited by migrating minke whales, which will swim right up to the yacht's stern and normally allow guests to join them in the water for a firsthand experience. After dinner, venture on deck for the opportunity to appreciate the southern sky and the chance to star gaze at the constellations.

day 4

An early arrival at Pixie's Pinnacle, renowned for its vibrant coloured marine life and exceptional visibility. Lunch is at anchor in Dynamite Pass and the afternoon can be spent snorkelling at the world class Cod Hole site, which is world famous for its large numbers of huge potato cod. Then a sunset cruise to Lizard Island to anchor in picturesque Watson's Bay for the night. Dinner is a feast from the Teppanyaki grill on the aft deck, followed by the entertainment of the illuminated underwater lights attracting huge grouper and schools of trevally off the stern all night.

day 5

An early morning swim in the crystal clear waters of Lizard Island followed by a shore excursion to climb Cook's Lookout. Alternatively, follow the State Park nature walk across the island to "Blue Lagoon" - a beautiful setting for a picnic lunch and a chance to explore one of the island's 16 beaches. The clam gardens in the sheltered bay offer superb snorkelling within metres of the yacht for all guests to enjoy. In the afternoon, an offshore fishing expedition, beach volleyball or possibly a dive at "snakepit" for the more adventurous. A short scenic helicopter ride offers an aerial appreciation of the panoramic colours of the reef. Music &

cocktails on the bridge deck as the sun sets uninterrupted over the coastline in the west. After dinner, a late evening departure for a 75 mile journey northwest, passing the Howick Group of islands to arrive for sunrise at Stanley Island in the Flinders Group.

day 6

Stokes Bay affords a comfortable anchorage and the opportunity to explore flora and fauna and Aboriginal cave paintings ashore at the National Park. You may be lucky enough to spot a crocodile or two on a nearby beach, although the coast can be safely explored by kayak as well. Cruise to Bathurst Head in Princess Charlotte Bay for lunch, beachcombing and some barramundi fishing up the Normanby River. Ladies might like this opportunity to enjoy a massage aboard in the privacy of the gymnasium, scented with aromatherapy candles, music and oils from the local region. Others could try their luck snagging a couple of mud crabs, to enjoy a wonderful "reef and beef" feast at the Teppanyaki grill later that evening.

day 7

An early departure with breakfast underway while enjoying the sun and scenery before arriving late morning at Cooktown, a quaint country town and the site of Captain Cook's landing. An expert guide can take guests on a "safari" back out to one of the Ribbon Reefs and share his extensive knowledge of the region, whilst diving for crayfish or trolling for large billfish. After rejoining Seafaris, indulge in watersports or enjoy champagne with friends in comfort and style, whilst the crew discreetly decorate the yacht for a theme night, with costumes and entertainment worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster!

day 8

Enjoy a healthy breakfast with a variety of fresh tropical fruit before cruising to Escape Reef, a delightful anchorage that is ideal for a variety of activities, including spectacular fishing, so dinner promises to be a real seafood feast! After an active day, just relax and play one of the many family games onboard or unwind with a movie either on satellite TV or a DVD in the comfort of your stateroom.

day 9

Start with an early morning swim in the turquoise shallows and why not sample breakfast ashore on the picturesque and remote Mackay Sand Cay? Then either take a private tour of the world heritage listed rainforest at the Daintree National Park or continue to anchor off fashionable Port Douglas. Enjoy lunch at one of the outstanding restaurants and indulge in some boutique shopping. Invigorate your senses at Port Douglas' fantastic day spa, before rejoining Seafaris for a sheltered late afternoon coastal cruise to the private Double Island retreat.

day 10

A chance to sleep in this morning with a late brunch and then a tender ride across to the trendy northern beach suburb of Palm Cove for a stroll along the boardwalk and some window shopping. Enjoy lunch at anchor and a last afternoon of relaxation, before Seafaris heads along the coastline bound for Cairns Marlin Marina, signalling the end to a memorable and unique charter experience.

day 11

Prepare to bid farewell to Seafaris and depart for Cairns International Airport.

