

Off the charts

Who ever thought that the comfort of a luxury yacht charter and the adventure of experiencing the world's harshest environments in the Arctic and Antarctic circles could be paired so smoothly? *Bespoke* finds out just how robust Big Fish is.

Once the preferred leisure spot for the world's rich and fabulous, the sun-soaked top deck of a multi-million dollar yacht is becoming a somewhat passé hangout. With rappers, footballers and even the odd reality television star getting in on the act, unwinding on the top of a luxury boat moored in the Mediterranean is losing its sophisticated appeal.

But rather than ditching the sea for a private island or remote holiday resort, keeping away from the riff raff doesn't mean you have to head to solid ground. The trick is to simply take your watery vacation somewhere else, undisturbed by regular yachting excursions. And one company believes it has found just the place.

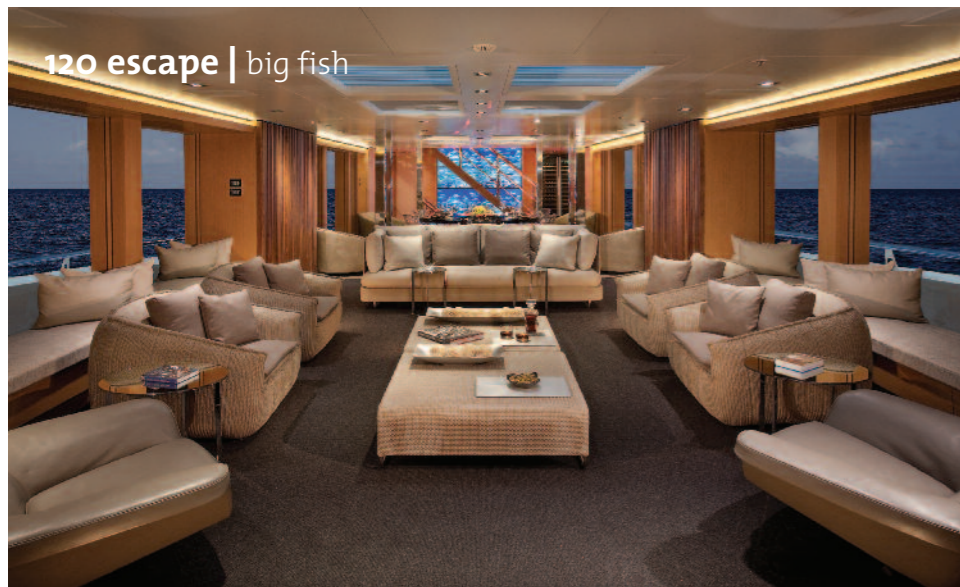
This summer, Big Fish, the 45-metre charter yacht from Aquos which took 3 years to build, will be heading to the Arctic. This is part of a maiden voyage which has already taken it over 40,000 nautical miles, which is almost two times around the Earth, since setting off in July last year. The Arctic expedition will see the award-winning luxury yacht tour Svalbard, an archipelago in the northernmost part of Norway. With a land area about the same size as Ireland, 60 per cent of which is covered in ice, Svalbard is one of the last largely untouched areas of Europe, with pristine mountains, deep fjords and thick fauna. It's also home to over 5,000 polar bears, which those on board are expected to have rather close encounters with.

"We want to capture the hero shot of a big polar bear in the foreground, with Big Fish at anchor in the background," says Aquos Yachts' Jim Gilbert, who assures that the ship's guides will be armed and extremely skilled. "My thinking is that a minor element of risk raises the quality of the 'expedition/adventure' experience. Otherwise it would be like a trip to the zoo or a movie theatre!"

While polar bears might be the top draw, other wildlife experiences are predicted, including with walruses, reindeer, Arctic foxes, puffins and perhaps even the odd minka or beluga whale, viewable from the top deck or on one of the numerous shore walks planned. The waters are also teeming with Atlantic cod, king crab and other shellfish, and the Big Fish has the resources on board to help guests catch their own dinner.

Built by New Zealand's McMullen & Wing, the ship itself is perfectly designed for such an expedition, featuring an icebreaker reinforced steel hull, plus a rugged aluminium tender with a jet drive for safe manoeuvring around ice and rocks, as well as the ability to >





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Above and left: The 45-metre motoryacht Big Fish is an expedition design intended to offer luxury charters in locations where other yachts simply do not go.

carry fuel stores for long-range remote cruising. And having already made a visit to the Antarctic at the start of the year, Big Fish has had a chance to prepare itself for such sub-zero conditions. "She was absolutely amazing in the Antarctic," says Gilbert. "She spent almost two months in icy waters without even a dent or scratch. Everyone was thrilled at the way she performed." Other stops on her trip have included the warmer destinations of the Amazon, Tahiti and the Galapagos islands.

Big Fish is the brainchild of Richard Beattie, who lives in Hong Kong and was getting tired of the unexciting superyachts on the market. He was looking for one with distinctive styling (strong lines and streamlined surfaces which, coupled with a plum bow and expansive foredeck give this vessel a very masculine 'no-nonsense' persona) combined with adventurous prowess (with a transatlantic range of 10,000 miles, it is capable of three full months of independent cruising) and not finding anything to his liking he decided to commission one. It even has a sister ship, Star Fish, also overseen by Aquos yachts. But Big Fish was named in honour of Beattie's entrepreneurial friend, the late Dan Wallace whose son wrote the novel 'Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions' about a dying man recounting stories, with an element of the fantastic, Big Fish is an homage to him.

"There's an increased interest in remote expedition-style yachting all around the world," Gilbert adds. Unfortunately, with the onset of

receding icecaps due to global warming, he doesn't believe the waters around the Arctic will remain exclusive holidaying destinations for long. "I would expect to see more and more boats further north."

With this in mind, perhaps it's time to jump aboard the Big Fish this summer before the hoi polloi start heading to the Arctic en masse. The boat's charter rate comes in at 200,000 USD per week, somewhat more expensive than most seven-day holidays. But, if you've got the money and are after an experience very few have had before, this could be the ultimate adventure. If this isn't enough for you, after Svalbard, Big Fish will be sailing to the Franz Josef Archipelago, making history when it becomes the first yacht to embark on the Northeast Passage over the top of the world. Honestly, who needs the South of France? 📷

www.aquosyachts.com

SPECIFICATIONS

Name: Big Fish
Architect: Gregory C. Marshall
Builder: McMullen & Wing Ltd
Hull: steel
Superstructure: aluminium
Length: 45m

Beam: 9m
Cruising speed: 8 knots
Range: 9,200 nm
Tender: Custom 27ft long-range
Guests: 10 guests in 5 staterooms
Crew: 10

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