New Tricks from Old Charter Dogs for a Better Charter Experience by Steve Austin

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Yelp is a well-known review site that offers a great method for consumers to write online reviews. While Yelp offers a great way to review a simple business (restaurant, printing shop, retail, etc) it falls well short of whatâ€™s needed for Charter Sailors and Charter Professionals to benefit from a review of a yacht charter experience.

At Yacht Charter Advisor we consider the whole charter landscape when capturing your experience. We ask about yacht condition (condition, cleanliness, operation & safety) and the professional service quality (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) of each charter provider (broker, company, school, captain, instructor, chef) and combine them into a single rating (1-5) and review. Charter Sailors benefit from the overall simplicity and ability to search and compare features and benefits while Charter Pros get to dig into their historical detailed ratings and make adjustments.

I was studying some non-YCA reviews (Jt calls them â€œ5 stars and rantâ€•) of recent yacht charter experiences and see increasing evidence that Charter Sailors are leveraging negative online reviews to improve their negotiating position when seeking post-charter refunds and compensation; an unfortunate but necessary evolutionary step for online reviews.

Taking post charter complaints online is usually the result of not finding satisfaction after the Charter Sailor has stated their dissatisfaction privately to the Charter Company. This is a common and ethical tactic to escalate a negotiation that nearly all consumers have access to now, ONLY through 3rd party review services like Yelp and, even better for charter, YCA! (not Facebook or the charter companyâ€™s website as your review can be deleted).

Anacortes Yacht Charters (AYC) began 2012 licking their wounds from prior months/years of negative reviews impacting their online reputation and I assume the bottom line. To their credit, AYC is trying to take action to mitigate the damage but sadly its spotted with fake positive reviews (by AYC associates) and lengthy dialog confirming their bad behavior. Whatâ€™s clear is AYC has some poorly maintained yachts and questionable ethics. Maybe AYC pulls out the shiny penny for repeat clients but thanks to a few brave Charter Sailorâ€™s whoâ€™ve had enough, new (online) prospects see a red flag.

While Charter Companies (and other charter providers) muddle around looking for a way around online charter reviews (Hint â€“ YCA has answers that work for everyone!) here are some tips for Charter Sailors looking at new sailing grounds to help assure a BETTER CHARTER EXPERIENCE:

1) Let the Broker or Charter Company know IN ADVANCE you intend to rate your experience online â€“ this sets the stage for your charter business relationship by stating your not just a potential loyal customer but a potential fan as well â€“ very valuable!

2) Use a (reputable) credit card to make your down payment â€“ I have firsthand experience with this. When the Charter Company has finally had enough of your â€œfeedbackâ€• and demands for compensation it will sound something like â€œdo what ya gotta do â€“ click!â€• (thus began YCA, but thatâ another story). In the U.S., consumers have great opportunity to seek fair relief from a business exchange. If you involve your bank and credit card company with an assurance that you will take your â€œannual businessâ€• to a competitor they have more to lose than the cost of a few days charter an will get involved. I got my 30% refund from Visa after clearly and calmly stating my case and expectations.

3) Charter a privately owned vessel, not the forgotten company owned hull only used for charter and spare parts. Privately owned means just that, a boat with an actual owner that cares about maintaining her condition. After 10+ years I will never charter a company owned boat again. The privately owned boats managed by the brokers and charter companies are about the same cost (sometimes less expensive) and have many eyes watching her.

4) Hire a Charter Captain and Chef. Not kidding! Be sure to use steps 1, 2 and 3 with your crew. You should â€˜expectâ€™ access to an unbiased history of unbelievable reviews from past clients of your prospective Charter Crew. I promise, theyâ€™re out there and not so hard to find. A good Charter Captain and Chef will change your outlook, your week and your mood. Compare the added cost to provisioning, cooking/cleaning, frustration with operating an unknown boat â€“ you get the idea, give it some thought, your spouse will be more than pleased. Be sure to call or Skype with your crew before you go and pick one that â€˜everybodyâ€™ likes.

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Steve Austin is the founder of Yacht Charter Advisor. YCA is the worldwide online Charter Sailor community for power and sail, bareboat and crewed charters, a ship harbour yacht charters . The YCA Ratings and Reviews are impartial and unbiased, not handpicked or otherwise influenced by the Charter Pros.

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