



Suki Finnerty

ShowBoats International photojournalist Jim Raycroft joins the 151ft *Golden Compass* during her inaugural three-month cruise. Cuba becomes the jumping-off point for the first in our around-the-world destination series aboard this impressive charter yacht.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM RAYCROFT

GOLDEN ODYSSEY

WHAT DO YOU DO after you've taken your family on a 16-month, five-star trip around the world, home schooling your two children while experiencing the usual and the unusual, the safe and not so safe, the wonders of the world, and the little gems tucked away in the corners of the globe? After living a life-changing experience that only extended travel can offer, what would you do for an encore? This was the question one family faced. They chose to acquire a world-class yacht and turn it into a unique, six-star travel experience for their family and a few, very fortunate charter guests. After a five-year search, they settled on the 151ft *Golden Compass*, built by the Italian yard Picchiotti. Following a nine-month, multi-million-dollar refit, this luxury charter yacht has embarked on her two-year, around-the-world adventure.

When it comes to foreign travel, many people will not venture far off the beaten path. Most are satisfied with the luxurious but predictable travel destinations and experiences. And why not? From St. Barts to Portofino, *Golden Compass* will certainly see and be seen at the world's well-known, posh cruising destinations—the Caribbean in winter, the Mediterranean in summer—but she also has some rather exciting ports of call on her itinerary that may whet the appetite of the more adventurous charterer. If winding 650 miles up the Amazon River, or tying up in Saigon or Havana sounds more like your cup of tea, you may consider booking a dream passage aboard *Golden Compass*. »

There are those who would ask, "Is it safe?" while others would exclaim, "When do we start?!" That's not to suggest that a venture such as this is handled in a cavalier manner—quite the contrary. As with any major undertaking, the success rests in the details, and these knowledgeable owners know a thing or two about attention to detail. A couple of world-traveling, high-level executives, the owners knew what they wanted. During their worldwide search for the right vessel, they even designed their own yacht and talked with several shipyards about building it, but were put off by the three-year-out delivery date. Instead, they teamed up with broker Noell Vawter of International Yacht Collection in Fort Lauderdale and yacht management director Graeme Lord, who acted as project manager,

and became intimately involved with every aspect of the refit, living aboard for the nine months that it took to remove, replace, rebuild, reposition, re-class, and ultimately transform *Golden Compass* into their vision.

Prepared for ports less-traveled, *Golden Compass* is of sufficient length—at 151 feet LOA and with a 29ft beam—to afford a voluminous interior space for her owners and guests. She features six cabins accommodating 12 guests, dining and main salons, a skylounge, and upper- and lower-deck al fresco dining areas. Her 8ft 6in draft allows access to anchorages generally unattainable to many vessels of similar length, while powerful stabilizers silently maintain comfort aboard. Dual watermakers ensure a never-ending supply of soothing baths and hot showers, while twin Cat D398 diesels propel her at a steady pace with enough fuel to do it nonstop for 3,200 miles.

Golden Compass is under the command of former naval officer and 25-year maritime professional Captain Fernando Silvano, who holds an MCA 5000 GRT Masters license and leads an experienced international crew of eight. Having recently completed a two-and-a-half-year circumnavigation, Captain Silvano has the necessary background and knowledge to ensure a most memorable experience aboard while providing arrangements for off-boat excursions into the local scene and local culture along the way. Captain Silvano advises that "planning, patience, and flexibility

are the keys to maximizing the pleasure of this unique experience." His vast knowledge of local contacts and port agents, regional weather patterns, legal requirements, vaccinations, visa documents, and security issues will facilitate sea travel and land-side excursions of the most interesting and intimate nature.

The cuisine aboard *Golden Compass* is second to none—Chef Severino Contu, a native of Sardinia, is a highly dedicated and skilled professional. His qualifications extend to Michelin Star'd establishments and cover many years of experience creating culinary delights in Italy, London, and Mexico, as well as aboard large yachts plying the waters of the Mediterranean, North Sea, Caribbean, and Venezuela. With a new menu each day, Chef "Rino" masterfully creates "the simple but elegant."

Meal planning for such an adventure is no small matter, and neither is the storage, refrigeration, or freezer capability of *Golden Compass*. Although he will provision for the best local foods along the way, Chef Rino has ample space for his standard of five-star provisions. ➤



GOLDEN COMPASS SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 151ft (46m)
 BEAM: 29ft 6in (9m)
 DRAFT: 8ft 6in (2.6m)
 ENGINES:
 2 x Caterpillar D398 diesels
 SPEED (CRUISE): 12 knots
 NAVAL ARCHITECTURE:
 Arthur LeFever
 BUILT: 1980/2009
 BUILDER: Picchiotti, Italy
 (Now owned by Perini Navi)
 CHARTER:
 International Yacht Collection
 www.iyc.com
 Tel: 888-213-7577
 www.goldencompass.biz
 REFIT: Lauderdale Marine Center/Merrill Stevens



Golden Compass boasts a large main salon and aft deck, both accented with granite countertops and comfortable seating areas.

GOLDEN COMPASS ITINERARY 2009-2012

2009:

Dominican Republic, ABC Islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao), Colombia (Cartagena), Panama, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Cayman Islands, Mexico, Cuba

2010:

Eastern/Southern Caribbean (Bahamas, Turks and Caicos islands, Puerto Rico, British Virgin Islands, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines,

Barbados, Trinidad, Tobago), Brazil (Amazon River), Brazil for Carnival (Bahia, Rio, Recife)

April 2010: Atlantic crossing to Canary Islands, Gibraltar, Italy (Genoa charter show)

May 2010–November 2010: Spain (including Majorca), France (including Corsica), Italy

(including Sardinia), Tunisia, Malta, Croatia, Greece (including Greek Islands), Turkey (including islands of Turkey), Israel

December 2010: Red Sea, Yemen, Oman, Dubai

2011:

Mumbai, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Kenya, Tanzania, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong

2012:

China, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific, TBD



I caught up with Golden Compass at Marina Hemingway in Havana, Cuba,

near the end of the owners' three-month inaugural cruise covering 3,050 nautical miles. Ports of call included Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Isla Margarita, Los Roques, Cartagena, Panama, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Cayman Islands, and Cancun, Mexico. I arrived on board the Marshall Islands-flagged vessel as a guest of Captain Silvano, having been looking forward to visiting the island nation of Cuba for many years. Generally speaking, Americans are still prohibited from spending money in Cuba (*see Reader's Resource*). Non-Americans are, for the most part, free to travel and enjoy the hospitality that the largest island in the Caribbean has to offer.

Golden Compass is the culmination of a family's quest to get more out of their travels.

With only a few days to cover as much ground as possible, we dove into the Cuban scene our first evening

with a show at the famed open-air nightclub Tropicana, where an explosion of rhythm, dance, colorful costumes, and song presents 1950s Cuba. Surrounded by lush vegetation, we enjoyed a glittering spectacle featuring over 200 singers, dancers, and musicians.

The following morning, we set off early for the south coast to the Bay of Pigs on the Zapata Peninsula for some fly fishing at Salinas de Brito, the natural system of inland lakes in the Zapata National Park about 90 miles from Havana.

As has been told, many areas in Cuba look as if time has stood still. American cars from the 1950s are everywhere, held together with whatever is at hand; many repowered with Russian diesel engines. Chevys, Fords, and Cadillac convertibles grace the streets, some looking remarkable for their age and location, others looking a bit worn but still proud. On the outskirts of Havana, horse-drawn carts begin to outnumber old cars, but the road to the Playa Larga Hotel is good and well marked. We met our fishing guides midday and headed down the 25km of dirt road to the Horizontes Don Pedro Fishing Camp, stopping several times along the way to look out at the flocks of pink flamingos, herons, egrets, and countless other birds that inhabit the park. This area constitutes the main wetlands in the insular Caribbean that have been declared a biosphere reserve and Ramsar site by UNESCO. As the small flats boats have no outboards, the fishing guides power them with poles. Curiosity eventually got the better of me, and I took a turn at the pole, enjoying the fine weather in this under-fished environment.

Not far from the Playa Larga Hotel and set back from the road is one of the unique scuba/snorkeling sites of the speleo lacustrine system of flooded caves and sinkholes. The water is fresh on the surface and transitions abruptly to salt several feet down—the transition layer creating a visual blur until you dive below it where the temperature >



A country lost in time, Cuba remains much as it was in the 1950s, with cobblestone streets, colonial-style buildings, and an unspoiled ecological system.



Pilar, Hemingway's prized Wheeler Playmate, and his home office remain—like most of this Caribbean country—frozen in time.

increases noticeably. Following this plunge into the jungle, we headed across the road to the beach for an ocean snorkel session, where the untouched reefs appear very healthy, teeming with coral and tropical fish.

The next day we returned near Havana for a visit to Finca La Vigía, the former estate of Ernest Hemingway where he finished the famous novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. A bell with a long line hanging near the door waits for all so inclined to haul down on it. The house is in surprisingly good condition, loaded with his personal furnishings and art. The famous 1959 Yousuf Karsh portrait of Hemingway hangs on the wall, while his books and typewriter remain in his office, looking every bit as though it were still occupied. Every window gives up another point of view into this fascinating life and residence—all from the outside looking in. I slowly worked my way around the house, sharing window space with tourists

from all over the world.

Hemingway's fishing boat was the 38ft Wheeler Playmate *Pilar* built in Brooklyn, New York, in 1934 for \$7,500. He was a major player in the beginnings of sport-fishing and had reportedly chased around after German U-boats off the Cuban coast. *Pilar* appears to have been completely restored and rests on what was the tennis court under a protective roof next to the swimming pool. I was able to get aboard for a few minutes, sit in the fighting chair, and slip down into the cabin—what incredible stories this boat could tell.

Back in Havana for the evening, we had picked up tickets for the show at the Havana Club featuring the legendary Buena Vista Social Club. There they were, live and in person—a great show in this intimate venue. The following morning we set off for Freeport, Bahamas, but due to deteriorating weather conditions had to put in at Key West, which allowed for a drink at Sloppy Joe's, ending the trip at another of Hemingway's haunts.

The next leg of the *Golden Compass* odyssey will include the Eastern Caribbean, Grenada, and Brazil for Carnival (Bahia, Rio, Recife), continuing on to Uruguay (Punta del Este) and Brazil (Amazon River). From there the yacht will depart in April for a crossing to Gibraltar and continue through the Mediterranean and eastward. Those interested in taking part in any section of this great adventure can contact International Yacht Collection's charter department. ☐

READER'S RESOURCE

U.S. State Department
www.travel.state.gov

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Ernest Hemingway
www.hemingwaypreservationfoundation.org

Cuba Navigational Charts
www.nv-charts.com

