

Lifestyle

The Ultimate Lifestyle at Sea



An Interview with Thomas McAlpin,
President and Chief Executive Officer, *The World*

EDITORS' NOTE Thomas McAlpin spent 14 years at Disney Cruise Line®, most recently as President. Prior to joining Disney, he was Director of Corporate Planning and Analysis for Royal Caribbean Cruise Line/Admiral Cruises for eight years. He began his career with KPMG and also served as Chief Financial Officer of CSB Leasing Company for three years. McAlpin is a member of the Board of Governors for Florida State University's College of Business and has served as an adjunct professor at the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management, and is also a former member of their advisory board. He was a National Board member of the Make-A-Wish Foundation from 2006 to 2012 and served as its National Board Chair in 2012. He holds a bachelor's degree in accounting and finance from Florida State University and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Miami.



Thomas McAlpin

COMPANY BRIEF Launched in 2002, *The World* (www.aboardtheworld.com) is the largest privately owned, residential yacht on earth with 165 luxury residences. A diverse group of residents from 19 countries own the homes onboard and share interests in world cultures, history and adventure, and exploring fascinating destinations. They circumnavigate the globe every two to three years following an extraordinary itinerary that they select. In-depth expeditions and one-of-a-kind experiences are complemented by world-class amenities and impeccable service.

How has the purpose and mission evolved for *The World*?

The original concept of *The World* has not changed significantly. We still offer a unique opportunity for people who love to travel to do so from the comfort of their own home. The idea was to create a small floating city that continually circumnavigates the globe visiting rich destinations. The business model has changed to 100 percent residential from what previously included a rental component. We now have a Guest Stay Program, which is by invitation only, for those who are interested in experiencing the ship before purchase.

It's a unique lifestyle. If you ask new residents what they think they will enjoy most, it's the travel and adventure of waking up every few days in a different port.

What surprises them are the friendships made with people who have similar interests, the camaraderie, and the sense of community.

How much of a niche market is this?

We're in a category by ourselves. Prospective residents must have the financial capability and the time available, and should enjoy travel.

We don't have a problem finding prospective owners – the ship has been sold out since 2002. Occasionally, residences come up for sale. We have a diverse community – 130 families from 19 different countries.

Which services do you offer?

We are the size of a cruise ship but don't consider ourselves one; we are the world's largest private yacht.

The ship has six restaurants; in-residence dining and a Call-a-Chef program where a chef will prepare a meal in your home.

There are two pools; a theater; a fitness center; a spa; a boutique – all of the amenities you would expect in a lush resort.

The *World* Concierge creates unique destination experiences – ways of understanding the area and its distinctive attributes that you can't get elsewhere, such as our crew greeting residents with champagne and caviar when they arrived at the top of an Arctic glacier.

Our services are the ultimate in luxury. We believe that luxury is getting what you want, when you want it, without having to ask for it.

How is the itinerary determined and how does it change yearly?

We develop our itineraries three years in advance with our residents, who are very engaged in the process. Our director of itinerary planning works with a resident committee whose members have a deep understanding of world travel. They develop three alternatives for that year, which are presented to the community and decided upon by vote.

Do you find that there are common traits among the residents?

All of our residents are highly accomplished. Many are either retired, have sold their businesses or have others running them. We have a fair number still engaged in their businesses and thanks to modern technology, can run them from the ship.

Our residents are a pretty active group and enjoy hiking, biking, golfing, fishing, diving – you name it.

Have you made any upgrades to the ship?

We have done a lot of refurbishment lately. In April, we completed an \$11-million renovation, modifying the ship based on residents' needs and making her fresh and modern. We recently turned the casino into a world-class poker room, because on days at sea, playing poker is a popular pastime.

The ship looks great and presents better today than she did at her launch. I would describe her as understated elegance.

How critical has it been to maintain a consistent crew?

The way we deliver exceptional service is with our crew. Our mission statement says that we will be 'best of the best' so we hire along those lines and we keep our crew for as long as we can. Understanding resident preferences is how we deliver excellent service and we have systems for capturing that information. However, that can't replace an individual's knowledge, which is developed over time.

Who are your competitors in this space?

We are the only ship offering this exclusive lifestyle. We're one of a kind.

Will you bring on additional ships?

We're a different business model and don't measure our success by how much money we make; we measure our success by resident satisfaction. We're essentially a not-for-profit entity. It's not about having another ship. What's most important is the quality of this ship.

Do you ever take the time to appreciate how this business has grown?

We're always pushing ourselves and don't ever want to become complacent. Our satisfaction is in seeing smiles on our residents' faces.

One example is when we brought a helicopter onboard during our Northwest Passage Expedition across northern Canada. We wanted to enhance the experience and provide different types of excursions such as spotting wildlife like polar bears and seals.

We try to do two expeditions per year, lasting from two to three weeks, where we take an in-depth look at a specific area. We have created some fantastic customized adventures. On Vanuatu, residents stood on the rim of an active volcano and also watched a century's old ritual as boys hurled themselves to the ground, head-first from a wooden tower, held by nothing but vine-wrapped ankles.

Many people have a vision of seeing the world. This is the ultimate way to accomplish that – in complete luxury. ●

The World - a private residence; exterior; Portraits, the ship's haute cuisine restaurant (top left to right)