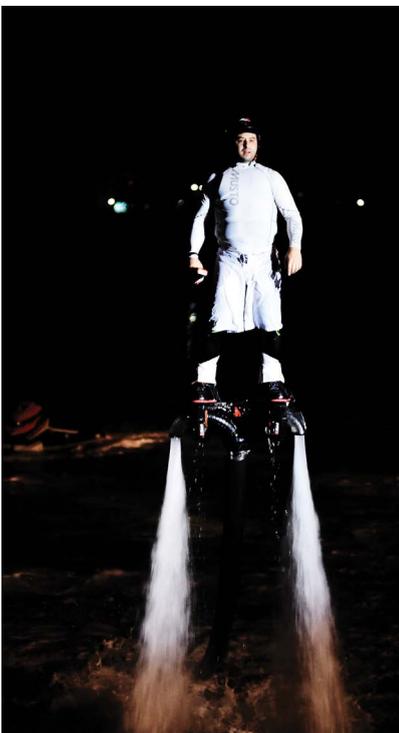


GET SET, SAIL

THE INAUGURAL VIZAG YACHTING FESTIVAL WAS AIMED AT PROMOTING THE PORT CITY AS A REGULAR DESTINATION FOR THE MARITIME SPORT. BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



Can you imagine hopping on to a luxury yacht and sailing on the east coast from Visakhapatnam until the Andamans? Well this could be a reality soon, as the organisers of the Vizag Yachting Festival have this and more in the pipeline.

When I received an invitation to the festival I was intrigued as the concept of yachting is still largely limited in India. But as I made my way into the city commonly called Vizag, I quickly realized why this could be a perfect yachting destination, thanks to its wonderful coastline and the pristine clear waters of the Bay of Bengal.

The Vizag Yachting Festival, organized by Andhra Pradesh Tourism in association with E-Factor, was held for five days recently primarily with the intent of putting Vizag on the map of

marine tourism. With a coastline that extends 973 km, the Navy, Port Trust and local fishermen came together in this first-of-its-kind event. In fact the Navy boats escorted the yachts and the local fishermen participated quite wholeheartedly ensuring the local connect was never lost. Incidentally a small window of ticket sales for the event was kept open and proceeds will be used to benefit the fisherman community. Over the course of the festival plush yachts from places like Bangkok, Chennai and Mumbai could be seen off the port city of Vizag.

The yachts also sailed through beaches like Rushikonda, RK Beach, Totlakonda and Yarada Beach while there were activities like swimming, fishing and snorkeling for the guests on board. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu who flagged off the event opined that Vizag would soon be developed into a

LEISURE YACHTING



world-class tourism hub with a complete circuit for all kinds of travellers and yachting would be a great way for tourists to unwind. There will be two yachts stationed at the new jetty here for people to book an experience for themselves. The festival itself was abuzz with activity. The sailing took place during the day time while the evenings were filled with musical performances by bands like Indian Ocean and Parikrama, among others.

The coastal city of Visakhapatnam is being marketed under the tourism tag line 'Let's Vizag' and aims to showcase the city using novel experiences like yachting. Kaushik Mukherji, Lead Consultant, Andhra Pradesh Tourism said, "Holidays need to be segmented to ensure that the product matches the need and aspiration

of the person. We already had options for the budget and luxury travellers in our portfolio in Vizag so we thought of yachting for the high net worth individuals to give them a one-of-its-kind experience."

Samit Garg, CEO of E-Factor, explained, "Our endeavour has been to attract people to come and enjoy the coastline here. If you notice it is quite a unique one as it also offers views of the hills alongside the ocean. Also with the concept of holidays changing dramatically we need to ensure that we have something unique and different to offer and in our conversations with the government there was a clear need to do something around water, so we decided to have yachts."

The two yachts that will be stationed at the port include the luxury yacht Sea Norita, made by Sea Ray, a leading manufacturer of superior quality pleasure yachts. With a length of 38 feet, the yacht has been built with fibreglass as its hull material and is an ocean worthy vehicle with two cabins and can handle 14 people on board apart from the crew and sleep five. The other yacht is Gypsea, from Silvertone and is a larger one, about 47 ft. long, made of SILV and can accommodate 16 (excluding crew). Garg explains that these yachts will start operations soon beginning with a two hour sunrise cruise.

"We also plan to have two-hour sunset cum dinner cruises and over the next 4-6 months we hope to have weekend cruises where people can charter a yacht to say Rajahmundry or Orissa. In phase three we hope to be able to sail all the way up to the Andamans," he adds. With experiential-driven holidays ruling the roost, it is certain that these yachts have made the start in the right direction. The next time you are in Vizag, do hop over for a yacht ride – it is a memorable experience and a treat that you should gift yourself. ■

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