

TRAVEL WEEKLY

THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

DECEMBER 1, 2008

A new age of
luxury begins.



#BXNPPLE *****SCH 3-DIGIT 894
#013251410/00781# (00000000) 001 0583
2464-10



Restored yacht Grace reclaims its Hollywood glamour

By Mario Correa

Grace Kelly isn't known to have visited the Galapagos Islands, but her yacht soon will. The 1928 vessel, given half a century ago as a wedding gift by billionaire Aristotle Onassis to the actress-turned-royal and her husband, Prince Rainier of Monaco, is beginning life anew as a luxury charter boat bound for one of Latin America's most prized nature destinations.

Starting in December, according to the plan, the newly refurbished, 145-foot motor yacht Grace, which boasts nine staterooms, indoor and outdoor dining facilities and a library, among other amenities, will embark on weeklong excursions in and around the Galapagos.

Prices range from \$4,500 to \$5,300 plus airfare per traveler for the eight-day journey. The tour, which aims to cover both the main islands and less-transited spots, is operated by the Quito, Ecuador-based Quasar Expeditions, the latest in a long line of owners of a storied ship that, among other claims to fame, ferried the Monaco royals during their month-long honeymoon in 1956.

Until its massive restoration this year, however, the aging vessel, known as Deo Juvante II in Princess Grace's day and renamed Zein by a subsequent owner, hadn't known glamour in a very long time.

"She was in very rough shape," Bill Prince, publisher of *Classic Yacht* magazine, said of the vessel, which he had toured prior to its recent refurbishment.

"She had an ugly collection of original but useless pipes," he noted, among other remnants of the onetime steam ship's hasty conversion to diesel. "She was old and tired."

Enter Quasar owner Eduardo Diez, who had been working to carve an upscale, adventurous niche for his Galapagos-focused

ecotourism firm. Diez, a lifelong fan of classic cars and old ships, was on the hunt for a luxury boat to add to his company's small fleet of more functional vessels.

"We had one of the largest trimarans in the world, but the boat wasn't at the level that our customers were seeking in terms of facilities," said Diez. "We needed something more."

That "more" was Zein, Diez decided. Owned by industrialists, repurposed as a World War II hospital ship and bought and sold time multiple times after its heyday with Princess Grace, the Camper & Nicholsons vessel had the wear and tear to match.

"I loved it because of its history and its design," said Diez. "And they didn't ask for that much money because of its condition."

In fact, the boat, sold to Diez in 2006 for about \$300,000, was in such terrible shape that Quasar struggled to find an insurer to cover its journey from South Florida to Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Once in Ecuador, the vessel underwent a 20-month overhaul, at a cost Diez pegged at \$2.4 million. The job centered on wholly revamping the boat's mechanics and amenities while preserving its sleek, classic styling.

"We took it apart bit by bit and started putting it back together again in order to preserve the original line and form," said Diez. "There basically wasn't a boat at one point; it was a shell."

A little TLC and a couple mil-

A rendering of Quasar Expeditions' Grace, a historical luxury yacht set to begin sailing upscale expeditions to the Galapagos Islands this month.

lion dollars later, the radically revamped Grace bears little resemblance to the creaky vessel that Diez found in Florida. The nine staterooms are ample and luxurious, and the communal rooms are spacious and open, noted the proud owner, who is overseeing their finishing touches.

"We've done it in a classical style but with all the modern comforts," said Diez. "It's something that people traveling to the Galapagos will really appreciate."

"The boat re-creates the spirit of the first expeditions to the islands."

But while the vessel's revamped look may be just right, its timing may be a little off. Grace launches amid one of the worst economies in decades, raising the question of whether eco-travelers will pay top dollar to discover the Galapagos in style.

"Grace will have some really good selling points," said Amber Rowland, who toured the ship during its renovation in her role as destination manager for Helena, Ala.-based operator International Expeditions.

"There's going to be an abundance of public space alongside some really nice cabins ... and it's an 18-passenger ship, which means that you'll have two passenger guides onboard, in accordance with [Galapagos National Park] regulations."

But International Expeditions, which sells the Galapagos only through Quasar, has not yet decided whether it will start booking Grace. "Our commitments right now are through the Evolution," a 32-passenger vessel owned by Quasar, said Rowland.

The nature tour specialist is hopeful, however, that Grace, whose history, she said, "adds to the mysticism of the islands," will

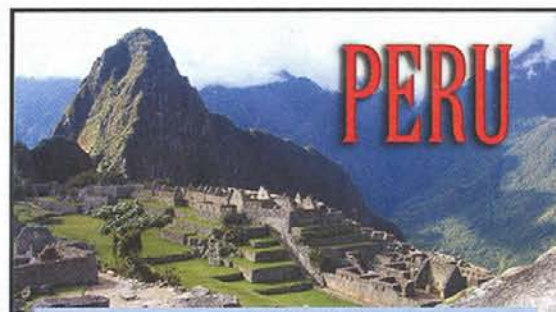
be added to International Expeditions' offerings.

And therein may lie the fortunes of Grace. While Quasar is trumpeting the ship's intimate guide-to-passenger ratio and its ability to explore areas out-of-bounds for larger boats, it may be the vessel's own storied past that proves the biggest draw of all.

"Would you rather tell your friends you were aboard some generic boat or aboard a boat once owned by Princess Grace?" said Classic Yacht's Prince.

For more on Galapagos cruises aboard the Grace, call Quasar Expeditions at (800) 247-2925 or visit www.galapagosexpeditions.com.

CENTRAL / SOUTH AMERICA



PERU

DELUXE PERU BY PRIVATE CAR

Featuring Orient Express Hotels and Train
8 days from \$4450

PERU FOR FAMILIES BY PRIVATE CAR

9 days from \$3313

WINGS OVER PERU

A Journey by Private Air
9 days from \$8988

ELITE TRAVEL
COLLECTION
BY TRAVELWORLD

Rates are per person based on double occupancy. Restrictions and supplements may apply.

800-825-0825

www.isram.us/r/peru/tw

LATOUR
AN ISRAMWORLD COMPANY



Quasar Expeditions plans to offer stops at less-visited spots in the Galapagos. Pictured, a Galapagos iguana.