

What if you could actually live “over seas”? Not just overseas, but actually on the water itself? As the pandemic-exhausted world continues to pivot and reinvent itself, innovative living and working modalities gain traction. Enter Storylines *MV Narrative*—a residential ship with 547 fully-furnished condos traversing the globe.

As a dedicated cruise lover since the *Love Boat* days, to say I have become obsessed with this lifestyle concept would be an understatement. Sure, there have always been individuals who choose to spend their retirement onboard cruise ships, but rarely ever on this sort of scale. These are not simply cabins or suites, they’re full-grown condos.

Hailing from Australia, co-founders Alister Punton and Shannon Lee have two decades of experience in the property, construction, and technology sectors. Six years ago, they created the idea for Storylines while looking for a possible ship to redevelop into their dream residential community. As it turns out instead, by building an entirely new ship, they were able to get everything they wanted.

Alister insists, “We are not a cruise ship. The fundamental difference is that we are community-led. The size of the vessel is big enough to have atmosphere, but not so big that it loses the personal touch.” The *MV Narrative*, when completed in 2024, will be 741 feet long and 98 feet in width, featuring 17 decks.

“Keep in mind a traditional cruise ship this size would house 2,500+ passengers,” Alister explains. “Our maximum will be 1,400, but we expect to have only 1,000 residents on board at any given time. You can find a quiet place, but still find activities,” he reveals.

The vessel will feature many options you might find in your own community—20 dining and bar venues with rotating menu items, a microbrewery, three pools, a pet exercise area (and a vet), an organic garden, a business center, a beauty salon, a movie theater, an art studio, a bowling alley, rotating entertainers onboard, and a 10,000-book library.

For those who enjoy an active lifestyle, they’ll have access to an outdoor running track, a full gym, a yoga studio, golf



Sea breezes and inspiring views come as standard when you live on a luxury cruise vessel.

Wake Up to a New View Every Day, Aboard a Cruise Ship

Kathleen Evans

simulators, a dance floor, and water sports equipment to use while in port. There will even be a youth education program to accommodate up to 70 children—a first of its kind at sea.

Putting all the entertainment, beer tastings, and sports aside, this floating community is intended to be a home, not a vacation. That raises questions about the day-to-day affairs we all have to deal with, like receiving mail, using a cell phone, and keeping up with healthcare needs. Alister’s team seems to have these details carefully thought out.

“The medical clinic onboard includes a doctor, nurse, pharmacist, nutritionist, and physiotherapist. There will be a hospital for emergency medicine and a helicopter landing pad for medical evacuations. But prevention is a huge part of what we do. For example, detox programs, diet plans, immune therapies, and technologies such as sensors in your room and smart watches. Our team looks for red flags and helps with your specialized health plan—including your mental state

through exercise and diet. We want to create a happier, healthier, longer life.” Note that some form of worldwide healthcare coverage is important to consider in your budget.

“A land-based data service for phones will work, since the ship will be in port approximately 80% of the time. We are currently putting together telecommunication programs. There will probably be technology shifts in the future.”

But can you video call anywhere in the world? “Yes,” Alister assures me.

“Mail can be handled by a forwarding service and received in the next port. Banking teleservices will be offered onboard the ship along with currency exchange. We have partnered with a company to work with visas—if we know we are going to India, we can get that done in advance.” Most visas can be done electronically now.

The itinerary is set by the homeowners, and each has the right to vote. The ship will circumnavigate the globe every 1,000 days, stopping for several days (often three to five) in most ports, giving ample time to explore.

The condos that are still available as outright purchases are priced from

approximately \$875,000 to \$8 million. A limited number of 12- and 24-year leases are available with pricing from \$400,000. Most exterior condos feature balconies to enjoy the ever-changing views around your home. Since the ship is yet to be built-out, owners have a number of color palates and schemes from which to choose for design.

“Your friends and family can come on board and stay as long as they like,” Alister adds. “You can also rent out your condo if you prefer to be land-based for a certain length of time. Storylines manages the rentals. If you find someone, that’s fine, but they need to be vetted. The minimum length of a rental is three months. That assures they will be a part of the community and get involved.

“Storylines is using innovative green technologies to ensure the *MV Narrative* is one of the greenest passenger ships in existence. It is sustainably designed with liquid natural gas propulsion—the most environmentally friendly option currently available. Other initiatives include converting waste into energy and growing produce onboard. A first-of-its kind, zero-waste farmer’s market will also be available, with locally sourced products where everything is compostable or recyclable”

Monthly fees for this all-inclusive lifestyle will run between \$4,770 and \$9,600 per person. At first glance, they appear to be high, but when you think of selling everything on land, many monthly budget requirements will evaporate. For example, a car payment and maintenance, property taxes, utility bills, grocery bills (yes, your food and drinks are included), laundry, home maintenance, gym, spa, travel budget. Storylines provide a cost calculator on their website to help with budgeting (See: *Storylines.com*). “If you live onboard for three to four months, you can rent out for the rest of the year, meaning your time onboard won’t cost a cent,” Alister says.

The ship is expected to be sold out by the end of this year, with a wide array of owners: digital nomads in their 20s and 30s, families, retirees, and professional couples with the ability to work from anywhere. Currently, ownership represents 17 countries.

****As with any conceptual residential development, there are risks with investment. Be sure to understand your contract and spend considerable time completing your due-diligence before entering into any agreements. ■**

SO, WHAT’S IT REALLY LIKE ON A LIVEBOARD?

Although life aboard Storylines *MV Narrative* is currently conceptual, the idea of a residential ship is not. Australian-born Tony De Leede and his wife, Sue, bought an 1,100-square-foot, two-bedroom apartment in 2005 on the world’s first luxury residential ship, whimsically named *The World*.

“We took a lot of cruises and I have lived on the water all my life,” Tony shares. “We lived on *The World* for three to four months per year.” The ship has just 165 residences. “Only 10 or 15 people lived on it permanently,” Tony says. “We owned for about seven or eight years and sold up eight years ago. I have missed it a lot.” Tony is not yet retired and owns a number of wellness-focused businesses in Australia and Bali.

Like any real estate purchase, buying a condo on a residential ship can be a gainful investment—but only if the timing is right. “I really didn’t make much of a profit when I sold eight years ago. But three or four years after I sold, the prices doubled, and have now tripled. This type of lifestyle is becoming extremely popular. And COVID has seen a huge push in that

direction,” Tony says.

At the time Tony sold, his businesses required him to be present. However, he and Sue missed having a home on the high seas so much, they’ve invested in a condo on the *MV Narrative*. “Our new condo is slightly bigger: two bedrooms with a small office. The *Narrative* doesn’t have full kitchens like *The World* did, but as it turns out, we rarely used our kitchen anyway,” Tony laughs.

Every deck on the *Narrative* has a kitchen for cooking, if you enjoy that. But with room service and 20 restaurants and bars, why use space for a full kitchen? “I have always traveled and explored different places,” Tony continues.

“We had lots of expeditions. Like our trip on the Siberian coastline and the Arctic Circle. We went to a Russian port where no other passenger ship has ever gone. We did the northwest passage during that six-to-eight-week window when the ice melts enough. Papua New Guinea, the Mediterranean, Asia—it’s incredible waking up in a new place but being in your own home. We really enjoyed *The World*. Look, nothing is perfect, but it was reasonably perfect for us. I was sad when I got off the ship.”

The World has higher monthly fees (Tony and Sue each paid \$4,500 monthly) due to the lower number of condos and the ongoing upkeep of an aging ship. “The monthly fees on *The World* became cost-prohibitive for many. The *Narrative* is more affordable, opening the ownership up to a broader scope of people,” Tony says.

“When we first bought in 2005, technology was not what it is today, and communications could be challenging. But now I want to slow down more. I am fine to be onboard six to eight months per year, and can run my businesses easily. I’m also excited because we can bring our dog. The wellness component is important to me, and the medical facilities will be first-class. There is nothing about this lifestyle that I would say ‘I wish there was more of this,’” Tony concludes.

“A condo on a residential ship can be an investment.”



Wherever your ship takes you, on a liveboard, you’re always at home.