

# [***'Scandals and secrets': On board the world's most exclusive private residential ship***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BDB-6M31-DY7V-G005-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Francesca Street, CNN

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; It's a floating city exclusively home to the 1%, a playground for multimillionaires and billionaires that circumnavigates the world's oceans.

Welcome to The World, an exclusive private residential ship home to 165 superluxe apartments. This vessel is shrouded in secrecy and buying a condo on board is an invite-only situation - you've got to be nominatedby one resident and seconded by another. A net worth of a cool $10 million is said to be compulsory.

If you're imagining decadent parties, filled with intrigue and free-flowing champagne - essentially a maritime episode of the HBO series "The White Lotus" - you're perhaps not far off, at least according to one ex-passenger's account.

"I'm not saying that everything that happened on 'The White Lotus' has happened on The World, but I think, in large measure, the comparison is not inaccurate," former resident Peter Antonucci tells [*CNN Travel.*](https://cnn.com/travel)

"There are a lot of wealthy people doing playful things, sometimes naughty things, sometimes scandalous things."

Antonucci is a retired lawyer who spent six years as a resident of The World. In 2019, he sold up. His reasoning? "Once you've circumnavigated the globe a few times, you've seen it. I had seen what I wanted to see, I was ready to do something new."

Back on dry land, Antonucci started going through the journals he'd kept during his years on board and decided the "country club meets sorority house" vibe was the perfect inspiration for fiction.

Antonucci's since written three novels set on a fictional ship, the most recent of which, [*"Tides of Betrayal,"*](https://www.peterantonuccibooks.com/) promises "secrets, sins, and scandals" on the high seas.

An exclusive invite

Antonucci and his wife heard about The World via an article in the Wall Street Journal, in around 2012. The 12-deck ship launched in 2002 and spans 644 feet.

When he first heard about this floating city, Antonucci was 52 and enjoying the perks of early retirement. He was intrigued by the concept and his wife was also excited to learn more.

Those interested are able to book a trial journey on The World as a "prospective resident." So before long, Antonucci and his wife were boarding in Belize and sailing through the Panama Canal on their taster voyage.

"When I first got on, I thought it was ridiculously expensive. I couldn't believe the apartments cost so much. I couldn't believe the maintenance costs were so much and couldn't imagine why anybody would do this," says Antonucci. "But the second day, I was saying, 'How many apartments do you have available and when can I sign up?'"

Antonucci says he was seduced by every aspect of The World - from the crew, which he calls "the greatest asset of the ship" thanks to their ability to anticipate residents' every need, to the plethora of exclusive experiences on board the ship and on land, and the tightly planned itinerary.

"It was like an orchestra with a lot of different parts. Each one was great. But together, it was a symphony," says Antonucci.

Plus, all the current residents were very welcoming. Antonucci didn't discover until later that they'd all been briefed in advance on who he was, and he says they'd been encouraged to make him feel at home.

"When they bring prospective residents on, there's an email that goes to all the residents," says Antonucci. "There's a paragraph or two or three or more about the prospective resident's background, and inquiring whether you have anything in common with them. And [you are encouraged] if you see them to offer to buy them a drink, offer them dinner, play a round of tennis with them, do something.

"Of course, I didn't know that was going on - I just thought it was coincidental that all these people came up and said nice things to me. But I got to know a few people, and felt good."

If current residents like a prospective resident, says Antonucci, they can be their proposer.

"Many people come aboard already knowing people. But others took the 'prospective resident cruise' and met people there who ended up sponsoring them," he explains.

Following the successful taster sail, Antonucci and his wife signed a contract to purchase a condo on The World. They closed four months later, in early 2014. Antonucci says they'd have done it all sooner, but there were a few things to tie up on land.

"I had kids in New York and I have houses and things like that - you can't just pick up everything and run off to sea," says Antonucci.

Antonucci's children were in their early 20s during his stint as a World resident, but they came and visited their parents on board from time to time.

Million-dollar purchase

Every apartment on The World is slightly different, "some are going to be a little bigger than others, some could be a little smaller," says Antonucci.

Antonucci can't recall the exact figures involved, but he believes he bought his first apartment on board for around $1.6 million.

Unlike on an ordinary cruise ship, residents are able to make renovations and decorate according to personal tastes. That means "some are decorated with modern furniture and really cool appliances, some haven't been touched in 20 years,"according to Antonucci.

And renovating an apartment on board a ship isn't super straight forward - there's no "running to Home Depot."

"Everything has to be inventoried and shipped months and months in advance in crates - it all has to be approved," says Antonucci.

All in all, Antonucci owned four separate apartments during his five years on board The World.

"Not all at once," he explains. "I had two at once. And then I had the other two separately."

Antonucci upgraded each time to something a little swankier - he says the subsequent apartments he purchased were around $4 million.

During the period when he owned two properties, he'd offer the empty one to friends he invited on board.

Planning by committee

Most residents on board The World use their apartment as a vacation home of sorts - these are people who likely have multiple residences across multiple countries, and might be found private jetting their way across the globe at any given time.

When the ship was voyaging Europe, Antonucci would regularly come and go, enjoying the luxuries of The World every other week or so, and heading home to New York in between.

When the ship was further afield, he'd usually stay on board for longer stretches.

"If it was somewhere far away and it was a whole lot of fun, you know, in the Maldives or the Seychelles, Australia, New Zealand, somewhere like that, I would go and spend a good amount of time there," says Antonucci. "If the ship was somewhere interesting, I would always prefer to be on the ship."

The World also times its arrival at certain ports with significant events - like London for Wimbledon, Rio de Janeiro for Carnival.

On-board entertainment is also included in the annual service change and includes lectures from experts and organized activities such as snorkeling, diving, hiking.

Guests aren't tied to the preorganized events. Antonucci recalls one time when the ship was "down south of the Panama Canal" and he and his friends "got a plane or a boat and went down to the Galapagos and went snorkeling and diving for a few days."

"You can go off on your own and do that, and then you catch up with the ship, wherever it is," he explains.

The World's itinerary is planned two to three years in advance, says Antonucci. That planning is a "very complicated" process, according to Antonucci. He says there's an itinerary committee, made up of residents that weighs in, focusing on the experiences available at each destination.

Meanwhile Antonucci says the ship's itinerary director "looks at things like fuel prices, crew changes, where you have the biggest airports, where you have the most accessibility, visa requirements, docking fees." The ships' captains also weigh in.

Using this information, three potential itineraries are proposed to residents, who then vote on their preferred route.

"It gets very political, as you can imagine," says Antonucci, who was a board member for some years. He says, in his experience, residents of The World tend to be "opinionated."

"Everybody is fairly affluent, and has made money - everybody thinks they have the smartest opinion and the best way to do things," he explains. "They're not used to being told no. And you've got a lot of very opinionated people who have opinions on everything from where the salt shaker should be placed on the table, to how far south in the ice in Antarctica the ship should go."

So if everyone on board The World has a pretty endless stream of disposable income, why don't they travel to wherever they want to go via privately-owned superyachts? Why do they opt to sail on a ship where the itinerary is voted by committee?

"Oh, that's such an easy question," says Antonucci. "Many of the people on board the ship had yachts too. I've been a boater my whole life. The reason you'd go on The World is so you don't have to deal with hiring crew, figuring out where to buy fuel, writing checks for every little thing.

You just write one big fat check every year. And it's all taken care of."

'Scandals and secrets'

For many residents, the social life on board The World is also a big part of the appeal. Antonucci calls the ship "a very, very social community."

While children are welcome on board The World, many of the offerings on board cater to adults - a full-sized tennis court, a vast spa and fitness center. There's also an extensive wine collection on board, and guests' food and drink is included in an annual service change.

"There's a lot of drinking, a lot of partying. And that's the fun of it," he says.

When Antonucci was a resident, he says "gentlemen wore jackets and ties." He was last on the ship, visiting friends, in November 2023 and says times have changed - he suggests now you're more likely to see people wearing shorts and tank tops than black tie.

"That's a little unfortunate," says Antonucci, wistfully.

A by-product of the thriving on board social scene was "there were affairs all over the place," according to Antonucci.

CNN reached out to several other residents for their accounts of life on board, but they either didn't respond, or declined to comment. The World's owners also chose not to respond to Antonucci's account of life on board. CNN has been unable to corroborate his claims.

"There's a lot of drinking and carousing" says Antonucci, which can lead to "scandals and secrets."

"Stuff happens," he says. "Some of it is fun. Some of it is people just getting blasted and singing songs and just having a good old time. And that's relatively harmless. And then even some of the affairs and things are harmless - if the people are available, single, that's fine. But there are married people, married couples on the ship, who are not always sleeping with their spouse."

Antonucci says this scene wasn't for him.

"I had my group of friends and none of my friends were engaged in that - although I'd be lying if I said we didn't have a drink and snicker about it."

Experience of a lifetime

Antonucci looks back at his time on The World fondly, but says he wouldn't purchase another apartment on board.

"I had seen what I wanted to see, I was ready to do something new in my life," he says of the decision to sell in 2019.

"I bought a place in Florida and decided to get very aggressive about golf. We have horses. We have a dressage horse and a hunter jumper. It was a time to turn the page in my life, which I try to do every couple of decades and try something new."

Plus, Antonucci says "the ***politics***, and the gossip on the ship got a little overwhelming."

Antonucci says when residents on board The World first heard about his intentions to write novels about a fictitious residential ship, some told him they were "frightened" he was about to spill everyone's secrets.

Current and former residents don't usually speak about their experiences, says Antonucci.

"Many people were offended that I would reveal the inner secrets of The World," he continues. "People begged me, 'Don't write anything about us, don't include us, blah blah blah.'

Then the book came out and of course the people who were so fearful about being portrayed, came to me and said, 'How come I'm not in the book?'"

Antonucci stresses his novels are fiction and do not include any real people.

In a statement provided to CNN Travel, a representative for The World said Antonucci had "assured us in writing that his works are unrelated to The World or its residents, and that his publications are fictional works of art about a fictional ship."

The representative said the ship wishes Antonucci "well in his creative works of fiction, which we understand have no relation to The World or any of its residents."

Antonucci says that, above all, he's forever grateful he spent time on board The World. He says the experience shaped his life and his outlook on the actual world.

"I don't even know where to begin whenever people ask me the most incredible thing I've seen," he says. "I could talk about the Solomon Islands. I could tell you how every time we went to South Africa, we would get off and go on a safari for a week. We set a Guinness World Record for being the vessel that traveled furthest south of any vessel in history."

And while Antonucci didn't always gel with everyone on board, he has good friends from The World to this day.

"Those are all very, very special memories," he says. "And I'm glad I got to share them with friends."

By Francesca Street, CNN

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