

Some dreams come true

Dead-calm devotee VICTORIA BARTLE has no unpleasant sensations as she sails around Tasman Bay.

‘We’re dedicated to making your dreams come true,” promises the letter from the crew of Yonder Star in a flourish of stylish italics.

It’s a magnanimous offer – something a marketing person would write but probably never say out loud.

Cynics might even say it’s verging on “cheesy”, but Yonder Star isn’t your standard hobby-yacht like the guy next door hauls down to the marina on summer Saturday mornings.

She’s all sophistication in appearance and high-tech fittings, too. A head-turning, unashamedly luxurious piece of sea-going real estate that elegantly sails around Tasman Bay from her home port of Nelson. Chartered by international tourists and New Zealanders, if any high-end tourism venture and its staff can turn your hellishly busy and stressful life into calming and heavenly dream-time, Yonder Star is as capable as any.

It dawns on me I have no preconceived ideas – let alone “dreams” – of what a day aboard might involve. I arrive, however, wishing the crew had at least had a premonition. Packing my bag the night before for a night in Nelson city, I’ve forgotten sensible “boating” shoes. Shorts and a pair of killer-heel boots just don’t seem appropriate, so I self-consciously pad barefoot down the jetty to where Yonder Star is waiting. Bare feet are de rigueur on board, we’re told, and I gratefully mumble something about being well prepared.

Yonder Star is an impressive 87-foot ketch, designed by a renowned maritime architect, New Zealander Don Brooke, and launched 30 years ago. Completely rebuilt in 1999, she underwent a second makeover in 2003, and Nelson has been her home port since.

Sea-going chef Roger Wilde had conjured up a list of lunch ideas that had my mouth watering days before my sail.

“Please peruse the menu and advise us of any dietary requirements you may have,” the letter said, listing fresh tender things like salmon, scallops and scampi to walnut, blue cheese, berries and pecan-filled brownies. Everything is locally grown whenever available and certified organic.

I’ve popped a sea-sickness tablet this



particular Monday morning, urged on by a relative who knows my tolerance for boating is usually limited to the description “dead calm”.

By the time we’ve cruised out through the Cut – Nelson’s rocky-edged entry to its port and marina – and into the more open Tasman Bay, I’m feeling a bit silly. Not woozy, “medicine-too-strong” kind of silly, but sheepish at even considering Yonder Star might toss me about until I turn green. Although Tasman Bay is not quite glass smooth, other than the sound of our slicing through the water, there is virtually no sensation of being at sea, even when I close my eyes.

She’s sailed through some hugely challenging waters, Captain Grant Mitchell tells us, and she’s built to be as rock-steady as possible on the water.

When a Nelson business couple, Tom and Ann Sturgess, bought the ketch in Florida in 2002, they employed Mitchell to take the helm and bring her home. Over eight weeks, and with a crew of three, he sailed her Down Under via the Panama Canal, the islands and atolls of Galapagos, Marquesas and Tuamotus, on to Tahiti and along New Zealand’s stormy East Coast to Nelson.

So, it’s with some wonder I eye the elegant crystal and fine china as Roger



serves us local wines, and the creations from his impressive onboard galley.

Clearly, you won’t find practical plastic dishes and Styrofoam cups in the galley cupboards. When Yonder Star ventures into the “real sea”, it’s usually without passengers – and the precious dinner service and glassware are safely packed away.

But today, we’re fine dining in the protected Tasman Bay, complete with an outdoor dining table surrounded by well-cushioned U-shaped seating. When the

sun momentarily disappears behind cloud and the breeze chills us, super-soft and huge blankets miraculously appear. It feels almost decadent, to be snuggling in a blanket on the equivalent of a comfortable lounge suite – wine glass in hand – on the deck of a boat.

Come nightfall, I could quite happily and very comfortably sleep here, even if all four bedrooms were taken. They may be called cabins when you’re talking boating, but these are not the tightly compacted, necessities-only spaces I’ve seen on

Unashamed luxury: Yonder Star plies Tasman Bay, where chef Roger Wilde can indulge his penchant for local delicacies. Accommodation includes the plush aft-cabin, left.

Photos: VICTORIA BARTLE

launches and much smaller yachts.

Each has its own bathroom, and the master cabin is so capacious it doubles as a private sitting room-cum-lounge. Up on deck, teak and highly-polished chrome stretch from port to starboard – and nary a drop of dried sea-spray to hint at Yonder Star’s travels.

Weddings are held aboard Yonder Star. Business lunches, cocktail evenings, anniversary celebrations – and who knows how many proposals have been made, knee to scrubbed teak deck?

I suspect the Yonder Star crew have successfully delivered more often than not on that dream promise.

□ A half-day lunch or dinner cruise (venue only) starts at \$1500 (plus GST), with rates varying depending on numbers, duration and location; www.yonderstarcharters.co.nz, email yonderstar@yonderstarcharters.co.nz