

# WHERE THAI CULTURE SAILS THE WORLD

*International Thai ship management company Highland Maritime continues on its journey of organic growth, including bulk carriers, container ships, multipurpose cargo carriers and offshore vessels. Managing Director Andrew Airey outlined the achievements and operating philosophy at Highland. Report by Phil Nicholls.*

Established in 2009, with support from an international ship manager, Highland Maritime features a team of globally experienced Thai sea and shore staff. This is combined with high standards, integrated online systems and experienced buying power.

"All of our ships are crewed and run to international standards and trade world-wide to some of the toughest PSC regimes," explained Managing Director Andrew Airey. "With a full Thai maritime staff at sea and ashore, we operate almost 30 vessels with over 680 staff."

The Highland Maritime team is fully certified with Lloyd's DOC and ISO accreditation.

Boasting a crew retention rate above 90%, the company continues to invest in future operations.

"In the past year, we have greatly strengthened our 24/7 vessel IT, Satcom and Cyber Security by hardening our vessels' data systems," continued Mr Airey. "Having learnt so much in the process, we can now look to help others with similar projects."

## **The package of services**

Information Technology has always played a key role within Highland Maritime. The recent package of upgrades has only enhanced this service. The team offers highly skilled, world-class support and





service delivery, helping clients mitigate the increased threats from a computer virus or malware onboard a vessel.

Within the remit of these services, Highland Maritime deploys a portfolio of IT security abilities, including onboard firewall, data backup and annual IT inspections. In terms of ship-to-shore communication, the company is proficient with VSAT, Inmarsat Fleet Broadband, Iridium Certus and more. The team at Highland Maritime are experienced with a broad range of maritime software applications.

These extensive IT services are available alongside the comprehensive ship management package. The Highland team have considerable experience with bulk, container, lightering and RoRo vessels, alongside a wide selection of offshore support vessels.

### The Highland family

Underpinning these offerings is the quality of the team at Highland Maritime, according to Mr Airey: "Our sea and shore staff are vital to the Highland family culture, which is so strong here in Thailand. This culture forms the bedrock of our genuine service we offer to clients.

"As a medium-sized office with 30 staff, we are able to run modern, flexible 'in-office' and 'remote-from-home' work schedules. These allow our staff to take good care of their families, and excellent care of our clients."

Appreciating Thai culture is another important aspect of Highland Maritime's family atmosphere. "On Tuesdays, we all support Thai culture and skills by wearing

a huge range of Thai designs, fabrics, and colours," Mr Airey continued. "This helps to link the team to our Thai roots, skills and history in a fresh, young and modern way."

In parallel to this emphasis on Thai culture, Highland Maritime believes in diversity within the team. The company has a strong programme supporting female engineering graduates from Thailand's top engineering and maritime universities.

"Highland's first five women - deck and engine cadets - will come aboard in early 2024," said Mr Airey. "Our crewing and training departments are very focused on all the necessary preparations, policies and awareness building. This will ensure we achieve even better vessel performance from truly diversified and equitable teams on board and ashore, for years to come."

### Overcoming challenges

Thanks to the solid working culture at Highland Maritime, the team have been able to overcome many new challenges. This includes managing four separate fleets worldwide, trading Supramax to Panamax-sized bulk carriers for the past 12 years, with minimal off-hire. Highland Maritime also achieved a full Thai team - Master to Messman, Chief Engineer to Motorman - running its first Capesize bulk carrier on the Australia to China coal and iron ore trade for the past four years.

Another successful project was the full Thai crew and technical management of a sophisticated DP2 ROV Dive Support vessel working for the past six years in the Gulf of Thailand and in SE Asia. Clients included Chevron, PTTEP, PETRONAS and Mubadala. ▽







This led to full Thai crewing on a further five Anchor Handler Towing and Supply vessels for an international customer.

“The most exciting challenge I see is the obvious transition of ship management skills and services,” Mr Airey explained. “These are changing to meet the increasingly automated, maintenance-free and clean-emission vessels coming into management in the next 10 to 20 years.

“In the shorter term, we are most excited by the opportunities in retrofit carbon capture technologies that allow us to help our clients’ mid-life vessels continue viably, until end of design life. These changes allow vessels to move towards zero or minimum emissions, whilst delivering the CO2 feedstock necessary for creating the modern methanol fuels for the next generation in vessels.”

Another change within the industry is the growing availability of AI tools. Highland Maritime is starting to develop the appropriate skills to use AI within its staff of IT specialists. The company aims to streamline many of its routine processes by adapting to this new technology.

### Vital relationships

Highland Maritime’s position in the logistics chain makes the company both a client and a supplier: thus, Highland is in the perfect position to fully understand the importance of these business relationships. The company uses this experience to find and guide both existing and new suppliers so they can support Highland in consistently delivering services to clients at the right standard.

“Once we find the ‘good-fit’ suppliers, we tend to stick with them through all the ups

and downs of the industry,” said Mr Airey. “These are the suppliers that stand beside us during the tough times.

“Open, honest and prompt communication is vital to building trust in the long-term. This is crucial to Highland for delivering on our promises to clients. Highland’s long-term suppliers have proven, time and again, their strength, commitment, ability and integrity, over the many years since our company was established in 2009. We are a team!”

Sustainable operation is clearly an important principle for Highland. The blue whale logo of Highland Maritime is there to remind the team every day, on board and ashore, to sail the oceans of the world with minimal impact. “We share this amazing environment with awesome creatures like the blue whale,” Mr Airey said, in conclusion. “These animals were here long before us, and with



our conscious care, they will continue long after us.

“My mariner father always told me the importance of not making a mess as we travel through this world. However, if we do make a mess, then we must clean it up. Do NOT leave it for others to clean up.” ■

