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Andrew Airey, Highland Maritime

An alternative - Ship management from Bangkok with full Thai crew

Marcus Hand | May 31, 2019

When it comes to Asia and ship management the cities of Hong Kong or Singapore are most likely to spring to mind, not Bangkok. However, the Thai capital is home to Highland Maritime, which since 2010 has been growing itself a nice little business of technical management and full Thai crew.

Speaking to Seatrade Maritime News recently about the company, and being a ship manager based in Bangkok, Highland Maritime managing director Andrew Airey says: “It’s less known, but it makes sense when you think about it.” He notes the lower operating costs that it offers and that, “it’s a major capital city

with great infrastructure and connections and modern well-educated workforce.”

This belief in the Thai workforce extends offering not only to full technical management, but also something which is not so common – full Thai crew. “We specialise in 100% Thai staff that’s come from some 20 odd years in Thailand been through the ups and downs with the guys and built their trust and confidence,” Airey explains.



Prior to the founding of Highland Maritime Airey worked for Bangkok-headquartered shipowner Thoresen Thai Agencies including during the 1997 Asian crisis where the company remained loyal to its local staff in difficult times.

He says he loves the challenge of explaining to people in the industry, who more likely associate Thai workers with leisure industries such as hotels and golf courses, the advantages of full Thai crew. “They don’t realise Thailand is extremely developed in its own right with huge investments from major Japanese, Korean and European companies, and all the processes in these companies are run by Thais, so they are very capable.”

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It is proving to be a successful formula for Highland Maritime which got its first vessel – a wood chip carrier under full technical management in 2012 and now has around 10 vessels under full technical management across bulkers, containerships and offshore, including a dive support vessel. The company has full Thai crew on 18 specialist type vessels in the offshore sector.

Having a full Thai crew is something that is important to Highland Maritime. “We’d rather just do full crew and technical management as we have a service brand as Highland in the way we behave and that way we have a full Thai crew working in a Highland way,” Airey explains.

“If I just give out bodies to others who mix nationalities I have no real control over, so I’m not so interested.”



In the world of the world of the mega-ship manager 500, 600, even 1,000 ships Airey sees a role for the small to mid-sized manager with a personal touch. “Big managers are very good with large, corporate shipping organisations. I think small-to-medium managers are much better with

smaller, especially family owned companies, where the people with the money actually step on board their vessels and know their vessels inside out.

“So they fully understand what is required and they want to talk with someone who has the same connection with their vessel.”

So looking ahead it is not surprising to learn that while Highland Maritime does have ambitions to grow its business it plans to remain in the small to mid-sized niche, with a personal touch Airey says the aim is one of “building the company to maybe a 20 or 30 full management vessel capacity is a horizon and no real desire to grow much more beyond that”.



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