



HAVING A WHALE OF A TIME

Bangkok based boutique ship management company Highland Maritime proves that small can be beautiful. Paul Knight spoke to Managing Director Andrew Airey about the advantages of manoeuvrability in a dynamic marketplace.

Highland Maritime has made a name for itself in the international ship management sector, starting out with just one office, two people “and a belief in Thai maritime skills, ability and attitude,” stated Managing Director Andrew Airey.

Following two years of what Mr Airey detailed as “visiting, meeting, talking, and demonstrating the track record of Thai maritime staff,” the company had built solid relationships with ship owners and in 2011 took on its first Handysize bulk carrier.

The year after that, Highland gained its first woodchip carrier, and followed this success with its first Ultramax in 2013, and its first heavy lift crane later in the same year.

“By 2014 we had expanded our activities further,” Mr Airey continued, “with our first container ship and Sat Dive ROV support vessel in 2014.” In 2016 Highland secured another first, an anchor handling tug supply vessel, and a year later began operating its first ship-to-ship transfer operations and managing its first floating terminal.

2019 saw the company manage its first DP2 Dive ROV support vessel, and now, in early 2020, Highland is supporting what Mr Airey called “an exciting new RoPax project with a unique route and high standard of operation.”

Today, the company has 25 onshore staff working in two offices located in Bangkok and Singapore, and 550 employees working deep-sea/offshore on 27 vessels.

“We work using the latest cloud-based office and vessel management systems, including both our purchasing and accounting data systems, and we are both Lloyd’s Register approved and ITIC insured,” Mr Airey said.

“The range of vessel types we have in management stands as testament to the great skills, adaptability and performance of our Thai staff and the Highland family culture.

Attention to detail

According to Mr Airey, Highland Maritime has been able to attract the attention and trust of world class branded ship owners, charterers and offshore companies due to the reliability and standard of the company’s management resources and services.

“We think of this as the Highland way,” he added, “and we are committed to delivering higher standards, lower costs, greater transparency and greater reliability than our competitors.”

Highland Maritime offers vessel owners a complete package including full crew and all aspects of the technical management





including newbuild supervision of ship and offshore assets – and the figures speak for themselves.

“Vessel owners trust our regional and worldwide experience, and our proven track record, he said. “We can lower costs for ship owners by as much as 20%, with a 30% increase in efficiency compared to the nearest competition. We do this by focussing on and solving clients’ performance needs and challenges, including being able to offer them state-of-the-art cyber security capabilities in-house.”

He added: “Our willingness to step up to challenges and opportunities such as LNG vessel skills and operations, and Wind farm vessel skills and operations makes us different. Another factor is that we are investigating AI assistance to our sea and shore processes, making us as efficient as possible given the current state of technology, though it is an ongoing improvement process.”

Part of what has allowed Highland to stay ahead of the curve is a culture which emphasises the importance of human values as well as high technology.

“We really listen to our clients and potential clients,” Mr Airey offered, “and this is vital to our success, because we waste less of the clients time and money, shortening lines of communication and being more adaptable as a result.

“The sheer variety of the challenge always brings a big smile to my face”

“We make it our business to understand what the client or potential client is trying to achieve, and then we collaborate with them to work out how we can contribute something better at less cost, that is as or more reliable than their current providers offering. It’s a matter of paying close attention.”

A life lesson from a blue whale

Mr Airey explained the inspiration behind Highland Maritime’s choice of the blue whale as its logo is inspired by his own close encounter with one of the planet’s most incredible creatures.

“As a young Deck Officer handling one of the world’s newest, largest and fastest container ships, crossing the Indian Ocean

one bright and sunny day, I thought I was really something, standing on the bridge wing, feeling like the master of the universe,” he recounted.

“I looked down and there cruising alongside us was a blue whale. She rolled a little, seemed to eyeball me with that cheeky, satirical blue whale smile, and then blew me away as she accelerated off into the distance.

“In that moment, I realised that I am not so big and important in the grand scheme of things! I’m just a tiny speck in this big blue ocean and I owe it to that amazing mammal to do my job with great care and consciousness for all the oceans I travel across in life.”

The future

As for the upcoming journey’s facing this young yet established ship management firm, Mr Airey said: “I see fascinating and stimulating challenges for all of us in shipping, driven by the underlying and never-ending demand for trade locally, regionally and around the globe.

“As a ship manager it is our role to provide ship owners with the necessary people, systems, skills and abilities to run their trading vessels safely, cleanly and profitably, be they last, present or next generation designs,” he enthused.

Vessels today are powered by ever cleaner fuels, built for minimum maintenance and are incorporating greater automation.

“With more effective training coupled with machine learning and AI assisted staff, I see a very bright and rewarding future for the shipping graduates of coming generations, both male and female, who embrace continuous learning and the ability to adapt as the industry continues to evolve.”

Highland’s strengths lie with “our people, our systems and our attitude to new challenges and opportunities,” summarised Mr Airey.

“Our size and proven ability to adapt will serve us well in continuing to grow the number and complexity of vessels we manage, be they bulk carriers, container ships, offshore, RoPax, heavy lift or LNG vessels or others.”

He concluded: “The sheer variety of the challenge always brings a big smile to my face.”



Managing Director Andrew Airey

