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Middle-Class Enthusiasm Leads to Yachting Surge

By Irina Filatova

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Boating fanatics sailing on the Pirogovskoye reservoir, which is host to frequent summer yacht club regattas.

Almost every weekend Andrei and Anna Kiryanov, a young couple from Pushkino in the Moscow region, hope to catch a favorable wind as they load their small boat onto a car and head to the Pirogovskoye reservoir, 18 kilometers north of Moscow.

Having completed a training course at a sailing school three years ago, the Kiryanovs joined a growing number of middle-class people who have taken up boating. They compete with other sailors in regattas organized by one of the local yacht clubs during the sailing season, which runs from May through October.

"It's a hobby — a good family leisure activity that takes your mind off the daily routine," said Anna Kiryanova, 29. "Participating in regattas is a pleasure in itself, regardless of whether you win or not," she said.

Moscow yacht clubs are reporting a growing number of visitors this season compared with last year.

Regattas this year are attracting 50 to 70 participants each, compared with 30 last year, said Nikolai Vodyanitsky, president of the eM-Ka yacht association based at the PIRogovo Yacht Club.

The number of clients has grown 40 percent this year, said Alina Servilina, a spokeswoman for the Crocus City yacht club. By the beginning of the season, there were no berths available at the club's docks, she said.

Yachting, which has traditionally been a pastime for the wealthy, is getting popular among the middle class in Moscow, leading to the development of new services and infrastructure.

"It is the middle class that is the main target audience of yacht clubs. ... The potential of this group is enormous," Vodyanitsky said, adding that PIRogovo's clients include young people aged 25 to 35 who work in consulting, IT and finance, as well as people aged 50 and over.

Yana Krayukhina, an administrator at the Avrora yacht club, confirmed the trend. Yachting is very popular among the middle class, with 40 percent of one-time visitors becoming permanent club members, she said.

The membership fees at local yacht clubs start at $1,700 per year and can reach as much as $50,000 for a lifetime membership.

In addition, clients have to pay for anchorage in the summer — which can range from $1,700 per season for a 4-meter boat to $27,500 for a 30-meter vessel — and dry-docking in the winter.

Though permanent membership is too costly for ordinary people, boating is available for the middle class as well because many clubs lease yachts for 3,000 rubles to 5,000 rubles ($100 to $170) per hour, said Alexei Mogila, head of the trade real estate department at Penny Lane Realty.

Expanding interest is leading to increased investment.

The Avrora club owners plan to invest about 2 million rubles to build a bowling alley next year, Krayukhina said.

Servilina, of Crocus City, also said their club would expand infrastructure "in the near future," although she declined to specify the size of investment.

Owners of existing yacht clubs have boosted investments in their projects over the last two years significantly because of their high profitability, Mogila said, adding that new marinas are likely to appear in the Moscow region in the next few years.

"Opening a yacht club is an elite business that requires significant investments but at the same time provides high returns. Apart from the profit, such business provides contacts with many influential people," he said in e-mailed comments.

The cost of building a yacht club starts at $60,000 for a basic facility, with a club house and berths for 12 to 15 smaller boats, and can go up to $1.5 million for a luxury establishment providing a wide range of services.

The number of marinas in the Moscow region has reached 30 over the past 15 years. The Pirogovskoye and Klyazminskoye reservoirs are the most popular locations.

Despite the growing popularity of yachting, the middle class is still sidelined by organizers of luxury events like the invitation-only Moscow Yacht Show being held this weekend.

Meanwhile yachting is catching on in other regions across the country.

The Kaliningrad region government plans to build a marina for 750 boats, which local officials expect to become the biggest yacht club for Baltic Sea regattas.

The club will be part of the Yantarny Bereg resort, which will cost about $760 million to build, said Alexander Rolbinov, the region's infrastructure development minister.

The resort will also include a beach, several bars and restaurants, hotels, a shopping center, as well as a dock for fishing vessels and an international sea terminal for passenger cruise liners, he said in e-mailed comments.

An investor for the project, which will be implemented as a public-private partnership, will be chosen by the end of the year, Rolbinov said.

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