

# Luxury on display at Dbayyeh boat show



A model shows off a Jacuzzi for a yacht at the boat show.



Visitors can board yachts at the boat show.

**More Lebanese are buying yachts, but infrastructure still holds market back**

By Stephen Dockery  
The Daily Star

DBAYYEH, Lebanon: The nation's affluent turned out Wednesday for a sparkling exhibition of boats, yachts and all their accoutrements at the Joseph Khoury marina in Dbayyeh.

Scantly clad women hawked everything from 100-foot yachts to the plush towels to go in them. Exhibition tents were stuffed with fancy wedding cakes, motorcycles and hot tubs. Indoors, patrons could buy high-end hunting rifles for tens of thousands of dollars, while outdoors, European models strutted in designer bikinis.

While visitors drank and dined on snacks marina slips were lined with a potential bounty for attendees: from 20-foot brightly colored sporty crafts to white 60- and 80-foot super yachts.

It was an important day for the country's young yachting scene. Attendees hoped the boat show, that runs until Sunday, would give the yachting community a needed boost.

Craig Barnett, editor-in-chief of LuxMedia that publishes Yacht Lebanon, said other areas like the Gulf and the western Mediterranean have a stronger hold on the yachting market.

Mega yachts are found more in Monaco or Dubai than in Beirut, he said.

But Lebanon is making inroads. Barnett said yacht buying is climbing "now that they [the country] have had this peel of stability."

He said yachters are beginning to frequent ports in Turkey and Cyprus, forming a new boating community.

Many yacht buyers are foreign —

tourists from the Gulf take advantage of the summer weather when Gulf yachting is less pleasurable, but the number of Lebanese yacht owners is increasing.

Several yacht sellers said they sold most of their boats to Lebanese in the past few years.

But before the market can take off many yacht experts say that the country needs investment in one of its perennial weaknesses: infrastructure.

"One of the biggest things about the industry in Lebanon is the infrastructure is holding it back slightly," Barnett said.

Boating experts agree there aren't enough slips for yachts. One yacht seller said the nation's marinas are between 94-98 percent full, and need serious investment.

"If they can find a slip and have a pocket full of cash Barnett suggested potential buyers really consider their purchase before making the buy."

"Sit down with a piece of paper and figure out when you want to use the boat for," he said. "Decide whether you want a boat or a yacht that is suitable for your intended purpose; whether cruising, fishing, diving, entertaining or towing the children in ringos is the first step."

The Lebanese Yachting Federation is trying to inspire young people to take up the hobby as well, particularly the sailing variety.

The organization, which has a stand at the yacht show and a club in Batroun, offers sailing classes and is organizing trips this summer for people with their own boats.

For now, sailing has yet to catch on with many Lebanese. The cost might be prohibitive or motorized boats might have more appeal.

"There are not many sailboats," said Maxim Noun a supervisor at the yacht club. "Lebanese like motorboats more than sailboats."

But the club is trying to change that



Boats and yachts line the marina at the boat show.

by bringing in university students to learn to sail.

"There are way more foreigners, but the Lebanese are increasing," said Ryan Assaf, an instructor at the Batroun yacht club.

"Every summer we are offering new camps," he said. "It's increasing with time."

Yachters said Lebanon's sales during the economic downturn pointed to a potential major market. While the

economy slumped in 2010, Lebanon was almost the only point of sale for the Princess brand yacht made in the United Kingdom.

Sellers of Princess yachts predicted more sales if marina capacity is

expanded. "This opens an opportunity to invest in more marinas; it can attract more yacht buyers," said Mostapha Chehab, the representative from Chehab Marine, which sells Princess yachts.