

Sea lords

From selling boats and yachts, Shroff and Chohan have now diversified into construction of marinas

Partners Malav Shroff and Sujay Chohan must have more saltwater in their veins than blood. Meet Shroff, a medical practitioner at KEM College, Mumbai, and a Rhodes Scholar from the University of Oxford, and also a former strategic business consultant with McKinsey & Co. And his friend

service centre in Mumbai to cater to the fast growing fleet of luxury yachts. Shroff and Chohan pioneered the Mumbai International Boat Show 2007, while still finding time to edit India's first luxury boating magazine *India Boating* – all in all, helping raise the profile of leisure boating both

which meant there were customers not averse to buying kayaks for Rs40,000, speedboats for Rs20 lakh or even the odd luxury yacht costing Rs1 crore upwards. And secondly, by 2020, half of India's population will be under 25 years, seeking a different lifestyle. This was evident from the sales garnered by Ocean Blue, representing international boat brands such as Neil, Pryde, JP Australia, Laser Performance and Blokart. In 2009, the company sold leisure boats worth Rs25 crore, a positive sign. People in India spent over Rs600 crore purchasing pleasure boats in 2009-10, against Rs50 crore in 2007. Not surprisingly, this new lifestyle has caught on along India's west coast. Today, Mumbai, Goa and Kerala's coasts are dotted with luxury yachts measuring 30-100 ft. India's leisure boating industry is set to touch Rs4,800 crore by 2015.

Shroff and Chohan: making waves; (from left) marina at Kochi, Marina House, Speedo – a ski jet manufactured by Marine Frontiers



and partner Chohan, a commerce graduate from Sydenham College, former country director and VP, research, Gartner Inc, and also responsible for Gartner's Research and Advisory Services. They gave up their high-profile jobs in 2007 for sailing!

Rather than just whiling away their time on the high seas, trying to impress young ladies with strange-sounding words like jib, afore and breast-fast, both Shroff and Chohan have bonded to form the Rs100 crore Ocean Blue, a company that sells costly leisure power boats and yachts, through imports. Today, it has slowly diversified into the construction of marinas. In addition, Ocean Blue has set up a state-of-the-art

within India and internationally.

"The conception of Ocean Blue was quite ironic," says Shroff, who is the CEO and MD. "Both Sujay and I were entering various international races, like the World Cadet Class Sailing Championships and European championships in Hungary, and advising the UK's Royal Yachting Club. Once, someone asked, 'What's happening in India with regard to yachting?' which started us thinking. With India's coastline running to 7,600 km, we realised there is a huge market for sailing in India."

Two factors spurred the two to take up this risky proposition. One was a Merrill Lynch-Capgemini report, which stated that India has 85,000 people with savings of over \$1 million,

Shroff and Chohan's vision is to transform the west coast into the next Riviera. Mumbai, with the largest number of millionaires in India, has the potential to become the next yachting hub of South Asia and the Arabian Sea region, due to its close proximity to Dubai. But what India sorely lacks are marinas, especially in Mumbai and Goa, and proper infrastructure, where owners can dock their boats in relative safety and security. Currently, boats are moored in the open sea and owners require motorboats to get to and from their yachts. A marina will facilitate accessibility.

The best locations for marinas are Goa and Kerala. Owners find Mumbai waters choppy, which makes travelling uncomfortable. Goa is ideal to develop large-scale marinas, where owners of

leisure boats can leave their boats and venture out on sailing trips – to travel to secluded beaches of Alibaug, Karwar, Janjira fort or even Mangalore or Kerala. “The west coast is perfect for sailing, due to its natural harbours, sheltered coastline and picturesque villages dotting the shores,” says Chohan. “It’s peaceful for yachting and once the marinas are developed with all amenities, sailors can dock and enjoy. With international standards being specified by Lloyds of London, visitors are assured of the best.”

Ocean Blue’s first break came when the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) awarded it the Kochi International Marina Project – to design, advise, plan and install the necessary equipment – worth Rs20 crore. The project is located on the eastern coast of Bolgatty Island (with its

marans. With slips to accommodate 37 yachts, which will be increased to 50 by 2011, basic services such as fuel, water, power and sewage maintenance are provided for a monthly fee of Rs10,000. For guests, there is a 20-room Marina House, with four suites, clubhouse, health club, cafeteria, recreation facilities and a golf course. Ocean Blue will be the marina manager and service provider.

With confidence boosted by the Kochi International Marina, Ocean Blue aims to build marinas at every 20-30 nautical miles (37-55 km) along India’s west coast. Spread over 200 acres, each marina will have a resort, a restaurant and recreational and repair facilities by 2020. Talks are on with developers in north Goa as well as Mumbai, Gujarat and Karnataka.

“Yachting and boating in devel-

or of their choice. Currently manufacturing 100 boats, the plant is being expanded to make 300 boats by 2012-13. “The Mahindras wanted to be present in all areas of transport – land, air and sea; so they decided to float this JV,” says Shroff. “While we have started small, our ultimate aim is to build cabin cruisers, catamarans and luxury yachts of 60 ft.”

Marine Frontiers will manufacture vessels at Alibaug, Dharamtar, meant for the navy, police, coast guard and Border Security Force, where the vessels will be high-speed, damage-resistant and powerful. Constructed mainly from aluminium for better manoeuvrability and high endurance power, these vessels are equipped with facilities for high impact; they are unsinkable, with non-explosive fuel tanks, ballistic protection and



Bolgatty Palace Heritage Hotel) near Kochi. Despite the fact that Kochi is located along the backwaters and suffers from lack of infrastructure, KTDC is enthused by the number of domestic and international yachtsmen calling at Kochi. “Kochi is extremely popular along the international maritime route, both for the Gulf and Southeast Asia,” says Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, minister for tourism, Kerala. “In 2008-09, the Volvo Ocean Race stopped here. So, a marina will attract high-spending sea travellers to Kochi.”

Marina manager

With over 50 luxury yachts stopping at Kochi, this new international marina will service, repair and provide maintenance to domestic and international yachts, boats and cata-

oped countries are serious leisure activities,” says M.R. Narayanan, MD, Floatels India. “Considered a status symbol now, it is only natural that upwardly mobile Indians would follow this trend. This industry has tremendous potential for growth in India, with hotels and resorts, companies, as well as tourism and transportation sectors waiting to tap this sector.”

As demand is on the rise, Ocean Blue has expanded into two divisions. Mahindra Odyseea is a joint venture between the Mahindra group and Ocean Blue, situated at the Pilerne Industrial Estate, Goa. It will manufacture 22 ft and 33 ft fibreglass powerboats, priced between Rs18 lakh and Rs60 lakh. Customers can choose their own fit-out levels and engines from the Bombardier Evinrude range

weapons’ platform for ‘chase and apprehend’ operations.

To fund these expansions, Shroff and Chohan are raising Rs250-500 crore through private equity funding and they plan to take Marine Frontiers public by 2014-15. The partners are determined to change the face of India’s west coast with their marinas and yachting. The government, realising that 40 per cent of the French Riviera’s GDP comes from leisure boating activities, has become more amenable. All that the industry now needs is an extra boost. Michael Derrett, a Dubai-based yachting consultant, feels that what is required is a little attention to boost sales, *à la* IPL. Some film stars and a wee bit of publicity and... yes, leisure boats will surely create waves.

♦ ROBIN ABREU