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SINK OR SWIM

BY **NICK DALL**

Floating hotels have long been disregarded by serious hoteliers as gimmicks, but if the success of Finnish company Sunborn is anything to go by there may be a future for the concept.

Sunborn's 180-room yacht hotels offer the 'super-yacht experience' to non-billionaires. Their rooms are more like hotel rooms than cabins, and the bespoke service is equivalent to that in a 5-star hotel. They currently have hotels moored in London, Gibraltar and Finland, and Barcelona is next on the list. Sunborn

has shown that simply mooring a luxury cruise ship in a harbour will not cut it.

Floating hotels can be easily relocated for economic reasons or when a location becomes politically unstable, and they can be positioned where there is no available land – next to a luxury marina for example. According to Sunborn's executive director, Hans Niemi, they are also very green:

"As movable hotels, there is no long-term impact on the environment, our hotels discharge nothing into the water, and we have created our own version of a water heat pump system, which provides green air-conditioning and heating from the sea water."

Apart from the 'flotels' used by the oil and gas industry, Niemi is

not aware of similar products currently in use, although there are numerous projects in the pipeline. Dutch Docklands is set to open floating hotels in Tromsø and the Maldives, while Qatar plans to use futuristic floating hotels to house visitors to the country during the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The Burmese capital Yangon will also welcome a floating hotel sometime soon.

Niemi believes there is definitely a future for the concept: "Floating hotels can take advantage of market opportunities where a permanent hotel would not be possible," but, he warns, "This requires quick deployment and flexibility in business models."

