

**THE FINNISH CRUISING ASSOCIATION "MERIKARHUT – SJÖBJÖRNARNA R.Y."
("SEA BEARS") IS KNOWN FOR ITS CRUISING TRADITIONS AND HARBOUR NETWORK.**

Merikarhut-Sjöbjörnarna ("Sea Bears") is a Finnish cruising association whose members are long haul sailors. Established in 1933, the association has today more than 2,700 members in Finland with about 1,200 yachts equipped for cruising. Today Merikarhut is the biggest yachting association in Finland in terms of both members and yachts. It is also known for its advanced environmental agenda. A flying green pendant with a white Ionic sailing boat is the sign of membership.

Over the years, Merikarhut has built an extensive harbour network along the Finnish coastline and archipelago, stretching from Kotka in southeastern Finland up to Rauma in the southwest, including one harbour outside Stockholm, Sweden. The private club harbours are well-equipped to provide safe mooring for the members in sheltered coves with pontoons and buoys. In every harbour there is also at least one sauna.

The saunas and other buildings, as well as the mooring facilities, are maintained by members doing voluntary work. Every spring and autumn special events are organized to open up and close down the harbours. During the sailing season, on-going maintenance is likewise carried out by members. Alongside the shared passion for sailing and cruising, this voluntary work provides the spiritual backbone that unites the members of the association.

The association organizes flotilla sailing for its members. These have proved to be quite popular. Some recent destinations of these trips include Gdansk (Poland), Riga (Latvia), St Petersburg (Russia), Höga Kusten (Sweden) and The Gulf of Bothnia (the northernmost arm of the Baltic Sea).

The association is active throughout the year. In wintertime, contact between members is maintained through regularly organized forums with sailing & cruising topics. Other means of communication include a magazine published a few times a year, and a web site. Merikarhut follows closely and also actively participates in projects and discussions concerning cruising and environmental issues, such as reducing pollution levels in the Baltic Sea.

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