

We thought that it was about time to send a note back home for you mob that are thinking about sailing off to the South Pacific. It has been really great out here, and while we have thoroughly enjoyed it, almost nothing is like we expected it.

First of all, the place is big, I mean Really, Really Big. We thought we had that figured out from looking at the map with all the blue on it, and that part was right, there is a lot of water. But what caught us by surprise was how much there was on all of the land bits. Each island, each bay, each lagoon has something different.

The stuff that dreams are made of is all there, though. Palm trees waving in the warm breezes, deserted white sand beaches surrounded by turquoise water, reefs covered by more fish than any aquarium. There is water so clear that you can see the bottom at a hundred feet, and where big fish will come up and peer right into your mask.

But the South Pacific is not all like that, and not all of it is quite as wonderful. But if you dream about it, then you've really got to get there if you can. We'll try to put some perspective on the area, and tell you about the reality of it. The bottom line is that it ain't easy, and if you decide not to go, well you will have saved a pile of time and money.

The Milk Run

The most-often visited islands of the South Pacific fall into three general groups. French Polynesia is the easternmost group of islands, made up of the Marqueses, Tuamotus, and Societies. Beyond the Societies lie the widely scattered islands of the central area, the Cooks, Tonga, Samoa and a few in between. The western South Pacific is the larger groups of Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomons and New Caledonia. Each area, and indeed each of the hundreds of islands, has its own special character.

It's a lot of territory to cover in one season, and most spend a first season in French Polynesia and the central islands, then go back for a second season in the western islands. Even that will seem like a hurry, and there are a bunch of folks like Peter Sutter who have spent five years at a time wandering around the islands.

We are also talking almost 3,500 miles of ocean from the Marqueses to New Caledonia. The good news is that in most cases it is not very far from one

island to the next. The ends are the big bites, 2,700 miles from PV to the Marqueses, and another thousand to either New Zealand or Australia. That's some serious ocean miles, and if you don't enjoy sailing, then it could seriously impact your enjoyment of the South Pacific. This is a simple point that a lot of people forget.

Getting Ready

There is a lot to getting ready, but the thing that really sticks out in our minds is that most of the boats back home getting ready to leave are already better prepared than most of the boats that have left. It's a bit of a contradiction, but what I think it means is that, beyond the basics, you shouldn't let being ready get in the way of leaving. The list of basics is long enough, but we've seen plenty of folks getting really carried away with the getting-ready process.

The one thing that is rarely overdone is experience. It's quite romantic to trade the farm for a boat, step aboard and sail off into the sunset, learning to sail on the way. The reality is that the ocean can be a scary place sometimes, and the best way to be comfortable is to take it in manageable steps.

Departure

Back to the topic. Where to start your cruise? A winter in Mexico is the obvious starting point from SF. Getting to Cabo can be an adventure, and our advice is to leave in early November before the winter Southerlies start setting in. If you have a good weather window then go for it, nonstop. And don't be fooled by the generally mellow conditions south of Cabo. The South Pacific isn't like that, so be sure that your boat and gear are in good shape when you head west.

Most folks depart from Mexico in March, which is what we did in '93. Puerto Vallarta is as good a jumping-off spot as any, with a good marina, nearby shopping, and plenty of restaurants for the Cook's Night Off. Cabo also works, but the prices are higher, and Zihuatanejo is wonderful, but not as good for provisioning.

A few folks depart right from San Diego or San Francisco, and that works too, just a bit farther to sail. But after the first couple of nights, it's all the same.

Don't worry too much about the timing. The Marqueses almost never

get cyclones, but few people depart before the end of February. If you wait too long you will have to start worrying about northern hemisphere hurricanes in May or June, but you want to be Long Gone by then. There are a few other variations that work, like Hawaii and then Tahiti, but we'll stick with the main program.

The classic "Milk Run" takes cruisers through the Marqueses in April, Tuamotus in May, Tahiti and the Societies in June and July, then to Tonga either via Rarotonga and Niue, or a more northerly path via Suvarov and the Samoas. Some cruisers linger in Tonga, and then head to New Zealand when tropical cyclones begin to threaten in November. Others spend August in Tonga, and then press on to Fiji for September and October, and then to New Zealand or maybe Australia. And a few bail out along the way and head north, sailing to Hawaii and home.

The Longest Passage

The passage from North America may well be the best sailing you will ever do. On the other hand, if you are unlucky and get plagued by light winds and a few mega-squalls in the ITCZ, it will be pretty far down your personal list. It really is a "plan for the worst, hope for the best" sort of passage. Other than being sure the boat is ready, about the only planning you can do is watch the Northeast Pacific weather charts for a stable high, as you don't want to start the trip by beating into Westerlies off the bottom of an end-of-winter depression.

This leg, from North America to the ITCZ, will be lots of light-to-medium running, and some sort of spinnaker will be a real asset. If you use a cruising spinnaker, you will really want to be able to pole it out. Better yet is a full-sized spinnaker. We flew ours for six days running without touching a sheet. Fabulous sailing.

South of 10N and you've got to start watching for the ITCZ, which usually lies between 5 and 7 degrees north latitude. The tropical weather chart from NMC (Coast Guard Point Reyes) provides good information on the position and intensity of the ITCZ. There's not much you can do about it, as things change quite a bit from day to day, but it is good to know what to expect. If you have radar, you will want to use it to watch for squalls at night.

The bigger the Green Blob, the bigger the problem.

Also keep your eyes open for the random fishing boat around the equator, usually an Asian long-liner. It is unlikely that you will get tangled in their gear, but don't count on it especially if the prop is turning. The middle part of the trip will also be hot and sunny, and this is where you will appreciate a sun awning or an umbrella, but it doesn't need to be fancy.

In terms of route, you want to sail the great circle course north of the ITCZ, then cut across the ITCZ on a more southerly course, in order to minimize the time spent in the light and goofy winds. When the mythical SE trades fill in, they can be pretty far south depending on where the high is, so being too far west at that point can make life uncomfortable.

The Marqueses

The most striking feature of the Marqueses certainly has to be the scenery. Young as islands go, the Marqueses jump right out of the ocean, with dramatic mountains and valleys. The islands are isolated even from the rest of French Polynesia, and the people are proud and independent.

The Marquesans are very friendly, but it is hard to get to know them very well because of the language difference. The basics are easy, a few words in French, English, and Arm-waving will be readily understood. But even if you speak French well, most of the locals don't, as it is a language they only use with the officials (talk about lack of motivation!). A few speak English, but again it's hard to get past the basics.

Hiva Oa is the most popular landfall, but is a small, uncomfortable harbor and will not be one of your favorites. The alternative is Taiohae on Nuku Hiva, a wonderful harbor and generally a better place to check in. The only problem is that the rest of the Marqueses are pretty much to windward. One special treat in Taiohae, whenever you get there, is Rose's up the hill, a popular restaurant and yachtie hangout. There is resort at the bottom the hill that makes another great Cook's Night Out.

Fatu Hiva would be the best landfall, as it is the most windward of the islands, but there are no Gendarmes and you can't stop there first.

Officials

A word on officialdom: Your landfall needs to be in one of the ports with a Gendarmerie, where you will check in and get a green "Boat Passport". The Boat Passport gets stamped by the Gendarmes whenever you arrive and depart a port with a Gendarmerie. The rules are easy, and the Gendarmes are very relaxed and easy to deal with as long as you don't try to shortcut the system.

You will also be asked to post a bond upon arrival, although sometimes the Gendarmes will let you wait until you get to Papeete. Funds deposited with one of the French banks in the Marqueses will likely be converted to Francs, and you may gain or lose a bit on the exchange. We used Westpac in Papeete, and they held the funds in US\$ and also allowed us to use a credit card. The bond is the equivalent airfare to the nearest airport in your home country, Honolulu for US citizens.

The Local Attractions

The three most-often heard comments about the Marqueses are that the anchorages are rolly, the no-see-ums are everywhere, and the scenery is spectacular. The first two are exaggerations, and the third is an understatement. The only folks who will complain about the anchorages are those who have never been to the Channel Islands, and the no-see-ums only seem to be a problem on a few of the white-sand beaches.

The things that are most special about the Marqueses are the scenery, some ancient ruins, and the wood carvings. All of the islands are beautiful, tall, rugged and green. Ua Pou and Fatu Hiva are the most spectacular, and the walk to the waterfall from Daniel's Bay on Nuku Hiva is not to be missed.

The water is too murky for much diving, but we did see some wonderful manta rays at Baie d' Anaho on the north side of Nuku Hiva, a lovely spot. (There was also a part-time restaurant there, and you could sometimes buy vegetables and lettuce).

If you are into collecting, the tapa and the carvings in the Marqueses are really first-rate, Fatu Hiva is the place to look for tapa, and Tahuata for carvings. Ask around for the best carvers. You will see similar carvings Papeete for three or four times the price, so if you like them, don't wait.

Provisioning

Provisioning everywhere in the Marqueses is pretty limited, with just a

few Chinese stores and no big public markets. But the local people do eat here, as you will continually re-discover as you cross the Pacific. So if you are not fussy about your favorite brand, you needn't worry about starving. And you will begin to suspect that all the books were wrong when they said to depart with a year's supply of canned food.

You will want some canned goods, though, and our personal opinion is to take enough to get you through to at least Papeete. That will be first stop with any sort of variety (heaps!) but it will still be expensive. We found that, with a freezer and lots of fresh fruit available, we rarely dipped into the canned supplies. What we did wish we had more of were things like canned tomatoes, mushrooms etc., ingredients for favorite recipes.

There is a lot of local fruit, particularly pamplemousses (grapefruit on steroids), and bananas, but relatively few green veggies. With no organized market, the best way to obtain fruit is from the locals, sometimes as a gift, sometimes as a trade, sometimes for cash.

There are also stories of lobster here. But heck, there are stories of lobbies *everywhere!*

Diesel is available most easily at the service station on the wharf in Taiohae. You can either drop the hook and back to the wharf for a big load, or jug it by dink. You can also get diesel (by the drum) from the trading boats if you see them, but it is a lot easier at Taiohae.

Propane is a problem until you get to Papeete, but if you fill in Mexico and have a spare tank, you can almost certainly get by. The alternative is to rent a French tank and jury-rig (or borrow) a transfer hose. It is an excellent idea to have some idea of your average consumption before departing.

Gifts and Trading

Especially on Fatu Hiva, the locals like to trade rather than take money in exchange for fruit or tapa. The reason is that yachties always come up with more interesting stuff than they can buy at the local store. (The exception is that the carvers usually have a better appreciation for money). The best stuff to take along seems to be skinny yacht braid, for example a 10 meter length of 1/4" yacht braid is worth at least 10 pamplemousses.

Other good trade items, depending on the village, are fishing line and hooks, either smallish stuff for bottom fish, or bigger stuff for tuna. One guy

really appreciated a couple of 9/0 hooks that were way too big for our lures, but they bait them and go after big tuna! The usual shirts and hats are well received, but bright colors are better than white, as white is impossible to keep clean. Large-sized shirts will be very popular, like XXXL, as some of these guys are Big! Basic dive masks and snorkels are very popular in some bays and would make a special gift.

Bringing things for wives and children is also important, and note that it is the women in Fatu Hiva that sell and trade for the tapas. So bring small bottles of perfume or cologne, and maybe bright scarves or elastic hair bands. There are lots of kids, and clothing as well as fun things for the schools, like colored pencils or crayons, are all well received.

The Marquesans will value your trade items according to their availability and price in Papeete, so in this case the high prices really work in your favor. Another item that is often asked for is .22 shells for hunting goats. The government rations them, so everybody wants more, but weapons or ammo are not allowed into Polynesia aboard yachts, so its not such a great idea.

Etiquette

As you travel through the South Pacific, never forget that you are visitors in someone else's home. One thing that is common throughout Polynesia is that everything belongs to someone, and that includes the beaches, reefs, fruit trees and the sand your anchor is dug into. You are almost always welcome to share it, but the proper thing to do is find the mayor or chief and, introduce yourself and ask permission to visit and explore.

This courtesy will be very much appreciated and will often be reciprocated with a guide, a gift of fruit or sometimes an invitation to visit ashore. Be sure to reciprocate in some appropriate way, with a small gift, or an invitation out to the boat for juice, a beer or a meal if appropriate. Don't get carried away, as an overly generous gift puts the recipient in an awkward position if they cannot reciprocate.

Regarding alcohol, local customs vary. Most Marquesans enjoy a beer, but some families don't drink for religious or other reasons, so it is always a good idea to ask before offering.

Further Reading

In terms of cruising guides, Charlie's Charts of Polynesia is about all there is for the Marqueses and Tuamotus, and is mostly adequate. Just remember that it is a bit dated. The Lonely Planet guides are always a valuable source of local detail. Herman Melville's "Typee" is a classic about the greatly feared Taipi Tribe of Marquesans, and is great fun to have along.

Passage to the Tuamotus

One advantage of starting your Marqueses tour in Nuku Hiva is that it naturally winds up in Fatu Hiva, arguably the most beautiful of all of the Marquesan islands and a great departure point for the 500-mile trip to the Tuamotus. You likely paid a price getting there of course, but most of the breezes in the Marqueses are quite pleasant and even a beat isn't too bad.

They told you that cruisers never sailed close-hauled? I bet they also said that the check's in the mail, right?

The spoils of your efforts is a ten-degree advantage in wind angle heading for the Tuamotus, and if this is where you meet the SPCZ, then you will be glad to have it. For us, it was a fast but very wet close reach in 25-30 knot Southerlies.

Somewhere on this passage is where you will most likely first encounter "The Beast", the South Pacific Convergence Zone (see Latitude 38 Feb '93). This is a semi-stationary convergence between the warm equatorial Easterlies, really nice weather that you will have grown to love, and the cooler Southeasterlies that follow cold fronts up from the Southern Ocean. When a new batch of cooler air shows up there is trouble, in the form of wind and rain, so keep an eye on the thing. The best information comes from Nadi, Fiji via Arnold's Weather Net (0400Z on 14318kHz, or 1800Z on 8815kHz, both USB).

The Tuamotus

Where to visit among the dozens of atolls? Manihi, Ahe, and Rangiroa are the "Big Three" and most often visited. But they are also the busiest, and many people prefer visiting the more remote atolls farther southeast. Charlie's is a good guide, and the only big change is that many of the lagoons are now homes to Black Pearl farms, requiring a bit of care when anchoring.

Most atolls have at least one pass, usually on the leeward side. The reason is that the surf tends to come over the reef on the windward side of the atoll, and tries to fill the lagoon. All of the

excess water, including a lot of periodic rain water, has to depart somewhere and keeps a gap open on the opposite side.

So the predominant current in a pass will be an ebb. Some passes ebb all the time, but most are slack or flooding weakly during a rising tide. Of course heavy rain or a heavy swell can change things quickly. Since there is no real land, and no muddy rivers, the water is super-clear and you will usually be able to see the bottom at 50' or more. This can be quite disconcerting the first time you see the bottom coming up in a pass, as the mate shrieks "Ackkk! What's the depth???". "Forty feet" comes the reply.

The depth inside most of the lagoons is 40 to 80 feet, and typically 20 feet in the better anchorages. There are lots of coral "bombies" on the bottom, some of which are tall enough to be a navigational concern.

Navigation

The most important thing to remember is that your GPS will be much better than your charts. The French charts are the best, but expensive, and even some of those have ¼ mile datum errors (Rangiroa for instance). Radar can be a big help in terms of correlating your position to the chart, and the coconuts in the tops of the trees make good radar reflectors out to about 5 miles.

Also be careful about the currents around the outside of the atolls. Currents in the open ocean are only a knot or so, but the atolls are strung across a pretty large hunk of ocean, sort of a drift net for sailboats. The difference is that the gaps between the atolls are pretty small compared to the size of the atolls. This means two things: One is that you don't have much chance of making it through randomly, which is why the square riggers called this the Dangerous Archipelago. The second is that the ocean current really has to speed up through the gaps for it all to make it through. So no daydreaming.

Local Attractions

The Tuamotu atolls are where you will find the deserted beaches, and the first of the really spectacular diving if you are into scuba. Some of the best is with the Kia Ora Hotel divers on Rangiroa, who can take you places in their Zodiac that you just can't get to on your own. The hotel also has a great restaurant for Cook's Night Out, not

inexpensive, but by that time it may well be worth it.

The Tuamotus are also where you will meet your first sharks, Black Tip and White Tip and Gray reef sharks, "mostly harmless" but best left alone. The grays are the ones to keep an eye on, as they sometimes get territorial.

Some of the atolls are deserted, or nearly so, and these can be a remarkable experience. You will never be far from the evidence of man, unfortunately, as many of the deserted beaches will be littered with plastic trash tossed from ships years ago, or tossed away by the locals. In settled weather you can sail across some of the atolls to deserted motus, but be careful about the light and watch for the bomies.

Also be careful about unexpected wind shifts. The usual pattern starts with the wind becoming lighter, warmer and shifted to the north, weather so fine that you just can't stand it. That's the first sign of trouble. Then the SPCZ rolls in, disguised as a squall, bringing rain and a strong southerly wind, wrapping your anchor chain around the nearest coral head and putting your back against the reef with the chain hammering against its short scope.

This is the stuff that disasters are made of, so try not to get caught. Pick an anchorage with an eye to what happens in a strong southerly... most of the atolls are big enough to provide miles of fetch if you are on the leeward side. If you get caught with a fouled chain and a short scope, simply let out more scope, even if it's nylon with a float or two to keep it off the coral. You sure as heck won't drag with a half-turn on a coral head. The biggest danger is snapping the chain tight and breaking it, so make a habit of rigging an elastic snubber, either skinny nylon or a rubber dockline snubber. If things get too hairy, buoy the ground tackle and cast it off, then exit the pass and wait it out on the outside in the lee of the reef.

Speaking of visibility, much is made of the necessity of good light, climbing the mast, etc. It is really much easier than it is made out, at least in areas where the water is clear. The only time you will have a problem is around the large islands, Tahiti, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu in Fiji, because of the sediment from the rivers. As long there is at least a bit of ripple on the surface, and the sun is not dead ahead, you should have no problems. It is a good idea to have someone on the bow, but we have almost never felt that it would be worthwhile to be up the rig.

Provisions

Don't expect to find much in the way of provisions in the Tuamotus. There are a few small shops in the villages, but they won't be stocked up in anticipation of your visit. There are virtually no vegetables available, and very little fruit. Lots of coconuts, though.

You may be able to buy premix for the outboard, but more likely the locals will be asking you for any spare gas. If you happen to catch one of the supply boats, you can buy direct from them like the islanders do. Not cheap, though.

You also shouldn't expect to have much luck fishing in the atolls. There is ciguatera in most of the Tuamotu atolls, and while the larger fish will be plentiful, even friendly, they are seriously off-limits (and they know it). We also figure that the reef fish belong to the locals, as they don't have the ability to fish offshore. By trolling between the islands, we can usually keep the freezer full of tuna and Mahi Mahi, which also does not carry a ciguatera risk. We'll come back to fishing lures, you have to keep reading.

After a few weeks or a month in the Tuamotus, most folks are ready for the bright lights and flesh pots of Papeete. It is a lovely 200-mile sail from Rangai, but first we better talk a bit about Paperwork.

More Officialdom

When you checked in with the Gendarme's at Hiva Oa or Nuku Hiva, you got a 30-day visa and a little green "boat passport" to record your comings and goings. If you are lucky, they told you to post your bond in Papeete, otherwise you made a deposit with the local bank.

There is no problem if it takes you more than 30 days to get to Papeete, as it almost certainly will, but if you stop in at Rangiroa to take the cook to dinner at the Kia Ora Hotel, you will need to check in with the Gendarme there and will likely need to get another 30-day visa stamp from the post office. Don't worry about the details, just do what they tell you. But don't forget to stop at the Gendarme's office.

Stay Tuned...

Next month, the Bright Lights of Papeete and downwind from there to Tonga.

On to Tahiti

Would you believe that you could ever get tired of swimming in crystal clear water, taking long walks on deserted beaches, and sipping ginnintonix watching the sun go down? You won't. But there will come a time when the lure of the big city will drag you out of the Tuamotus and towards the bright lights of Papeete. It usually happens about a week after you have finished off the last of anything that even remotely resembles fresh food.

The passage from the Tuamotus to Papeete has the potential to be one of the most delightful sails in the known universe, 200 miles (from Rangiroa) with 15 knot trades right on the beam. That's the good news. It also has the potential to be a lot less glamorous if a nasty southerly front rolls through.

But it's a short sail, relatively speaking, and with any sort of decent weather advice you ought to have a good trip. That is not as easy as it sounds, as the Tuamotus are a bit of a "Black Hole" for weather information.

The NWS charts from Hawaii don't generally show the convergence and frontal lines, the only thing you really care about, and the only local weather is a few cryptic bulletins on the SSB in French. Arnold's Weather Net (ZK1DB) at 0400Z on 14318 is probably your best source. You will likely be too far east for the fax charts out of New Zealand, but keep trying, as most of the adverse weather comes from the west and the Kiwi charts are your early warning. Try 2345Z for the South Pacific forecast on 13550.5 or 16340.1kHz (1.7 lower if you use a computer fax with your SSB).

Timing for a passage to Papeete is a little tricky, as you want good light for navigating within the lagoon as you depart, favorable current in the pass, and plenty of daylight left when you get to Papeete. Two out of three is good enough, and entering Papeete at night is not a big deal, as long as you have the detailed chart and keep your eyes open. Drop a hook off the low-rent district and wait for daylight to moor properly.

Papeete

Don't bother trying to imagine what Papeete will be like, you simply can't. But the first thing to do is find a place to park the boat. The harbor itself is a large commercial port and well marked.

Yachts are not allowed to anchor (unless they arrive at night) but are expected to tie to the famous quay. Most of the prime real estate is taken by permanent residents, a motley collection of French cruising boats the like of which you will never have seen.

Most cruisers wind up in the "low rent district" off the beach, at times moored two rows deep. There are only two problems with this, one is that it is a shallow beach and two very long stern lines will be required. The second is that dingies tend to wander off there, so keep things locked up securely. After half a year or more in Mexico, the Marqueses and the Tuamotus, this locking-up business will not come easy, but you've got to make the effort.

The choicest spots, in our opinion, are those between the Quay proper and the beach, off the little park with a statue of Charles de Gaulle. It is a bit farther from traffic, doesn't have the worries of the beach, and you can sip your ginnintonix looking at the backside of a great statesman. But whatever spot you find, the rule is to park the boat first, everything else second.

The City Life

Whatever you need, you can get it in Papeete. But you probably won't like the price, so try not to need too much.

Priority one is to check in with customs, immigration, and the port captain, all located together a short walk from the Quay. Anything you have been able to put off will have to be dealt with here, like visa stamps, posting your bond, etc. And don't forget to keep trying whatever fractured French you possess. If the French officials know you are trying, they usually take pity on you and help out with a bit of English!

A word on bonds: Every year there is a lot of discussion on how to beat the bond requirement, and while some schemes work for some people some of the time, nothing works every time except putting up the money. We mentioned the exchange-rate risk if your funds are converted to francs. If you posted in the Marqueses you probably had no choice, but if the Gendarmes gave you a break then there are lots of banks in Papeete. Some will even allow you to put your bond on a credit card.

The amount varies, depending on where you are from, the bank, the time of day, and a few other factors, but figure around \$800 if you are a US

citizen, and don't hesitate to point out that Hawaii is part of the States. It might be cheaper to fly there (the basis for the bond) and the Hawaiians have got to take you in.

There are tons of great restaurants, none of which you will be able to afford... except maybe the little Italian place on one of the back streets. (You may have noticed that we keep tossing out these vague references... We are trying to encourage you to explore a bit, and in any event, even if we could remember the details, they would all be different by the time you get there).

Le Trucks are not to be missed for an inexpensive dinner, and the public market is great.

There are also some excellent marine stores, and the best selection of Wichard shackles and fittings you will find anywhere if you are into small polished expensive things. Marine Coral is about the best, and is in the industrial section (Fare Ute) in the east part of the harbor. You can take the dink under the bridge and tie it up at the small marina on the right and walk from there, it's an interesting part of town.

There are also more than a few fancy shops for clothing and jewelry, with designs straight from Paris. If you were lucky enough to have bought a black pearl in the Tuamotus, ask about having it mounted while you are in Papeete. The jewelers here do some beautiful work and the prices are reasonable (for the settings, not for the pearls).

Mundane things: Propane is at the Gaz Company across the bridge, and US bottles are absolutely no problem, forget what you have read. Diesel is at the small fuel dock next to the ferries, but wait until you are ready to depart Papeete and ask about getting it duty-free.

One last piece of business before leaving Papeete: Unless you are on a schedule, you will need to apply for a visa extension to allow you to stay in French Polynesia more than three months. It is unlikely that you will actually receive the extension before you are ready to move on, but that doesn't matter. The important thing is to have applied for the extension before departing Papeete and have a stamped copy of the application to show to the Gendarmes down the road.

The Leeward Islands

Some folks spend weeks sailing around Tahiti island, but most spend a week or two in town, and then head to Maeva Beach or across the channel to hang out for a while in Cook's Bay in Moorea. Circumnavigating Moorea by scooter is one of the world's great trips, and Happy Hour at the Bali Hai Club is a popular yachting pastime.

Beware of the Maraumus in Cook's, that's the same damned southerly gale with a new fancy name. The wind comes down the valley behind the bay and really howls, not much fun. The bottom is soft mud, good holding for most anchors, but this is a good place to stow the Bruce and use something else.

The real gems in the Societies are the leeward islands, Huahine, Raiatea and Tahaa, and of course Bora Bora. Depending on the weather, there are some delightful anchorages around the islands. Marcia Davock's "Cruising Guide to Tahiti and the Society Islands" is indispensable here, and while getting a bit dated with respect to facilities, really does a good job describing the islands. If you are looking for dinner out, ask around for small resorts that are open to yachting for dinner. Most are happy to accommodate and serve wonderful meals, and a few are even affordable.

The lagoon around Raiatea and Tahaa also offers some of the finest sailing in the world. Unless you have been declared clinically dead, getting out for a simple afternoon sail will rank among the highlights of your life. The charts are good and most of the dangers are well marked, so sailing within the lagoons can be done with a lot more confidence than in the lagoons in the Tuamotus, for example. On a nice day with 15 knots of wind and flat turquoise water, it is hard to imagine ever getting into foulies again.

In terms of towns and markets, Uturoa at the north end of Raiatea is about it. There is also a Gendarmarie there, so don't forget the check in & out ritual, old hat by now. There is a small marina next to town, but a better bet might be the Moorings marina around the corner to the west and catch a ride into town from there.

Raiatea is also the home of Raiatea Carénage, a well-respected boatyard just south of the Moorings harbor on the northwest side of the island. Equipped with the only travelift in these parts and most of the usual facilities, this would be a good choice (and pretty much the

only choice) to do any necessary repairs or haul out for the season.

That idea is not as crazy as it sounds, if your notion is to go slow and take time off to return Stateside in the off-season. Once you depart French Polynesia on the fast track to New Zealand it is very tough to get back, and few cruisers do. So breaking the trip at Raiatea is not the world's craziest idea. (The other opportunity to dry-store the boat in the islands is at Neisau Marina in Lautoka, Fiji).

But something more immediate to think about is where, if anywhere, you want to be for the Fête celebrations in mid-July. July 14 is Bastille Day, and if you want to catch the French Military Parade, then Papeete is the place to be. If Tahitian dancing is more your thing, you probably want to be somewhere else.

Dancing and canoe competitions go on everywhere leading up to the main events. Next to Papeete, the next biggest celebrations are in Bora Bora, and the festivities go on over a two-week period.

Bora Bora

Bora Bora is a magical place, and the classic green mountain sprouting from the blue lagoon is one of the most gorgeous sights anywhere. Sailing into Bora Bora is sort of like sailing into a Monet painting.

But as pretty as it is, many folks wind up wishing that they had spent more time in Huahine, Raiatea and Tahaa instead, because the hordes of tourists and dearth of good anchorages in Bora Bora can try one's patience.

The choice spot is a mooring in front of the "Yacht Club", a small resort that served great burgers when we were there. There was no charge for the mooring, just a request to patronize the club. This is a nice local custom (and apparently local law prohibits charging for a mooring), and fortunately very few cruisers tried to abuse it.

The next-best option (and a favorite for those without fast dinks) is to drop the hook closer to town. Not the best anchorage, but plenty adequate and closer to the action. During Fête, the whole island goes on holiday and spends a week partying, and the carnival atmosphere is remarkable.

Among other activities, there are bike or scooter rentals, and some great hikes on the island. If the weather is reasonable, get out to the outer lagoon or on the outer reef for snorkeling or diving if conditions permit. Our weather

wasn't, so we didn't, but there are some really neat spots out there.

On the Road Again

The party is over, the season is slipping by, and its time to move on again. The next major destination is the Vava'u group in Tonga, 1300 miles away, but there are a few stops to make in between. The "Low Road" takes us west and south to Rarotonga, then Niue, then to Vava'u, while the "High Road" takes us on a northern route to Suvarov, then Pago Pago, perhaps Niuatoputapu and then Vava'u.

It's a tough choice, because both Rarotonga and Suvarov are real gems in the Pacific. Rarotonga because it is a vibrant, alive island full of friendly people, inexpensive eats and a unique culture, and Suvarov because it is a beautiful, isolated atoll with a bit of history.

But first we've got to make it out of French Polynesia. Collecting your bond and checking out from Bora Bora is relatively painless, but you want to watch the weather carefully before setting off. This piece of ocean is a favorite haunt of the South Pacific Convergence Zone, and running into an active convergence can really spoil a trip.

There are two possible stops at Bora Bora's back door, Maupiti Island and Mopelia Atoll. Maupiti is a small island, not often visited, and just a daysail from Bora Bora. Mopelia is a sparsely-populated atoll and an easy overnight sail. The pass is about as narrow as they come, but actually is only half as bad as it looks. In settled conditions there are a few bits of a famous wreck right outside, a WWI-vintage German gunboat. Not many cruisers stop at Mopelia and we were enthusiastically greeted (any excuse for a party).

Rarotonga

If you take the southern route, it is about 550 miles to Rarotonga, and with any luck at all, the weather will be merely entertaining. Rarotonga is a delight, with lovely, friendly people, but the harbor at Avatiu is less delightful. Truthfully, it is only half as bad as most of the stories, but you don't want to be there if the weather gets nasty from the north. Fortunately, those are rare and Arnold keeps a close eye on the local weather.

Provisioning is good, with abundant and inexpensive fruits and vegetables (10kg bag of oranges for almost-Mexico prices!), and the first supplies of the

eminently drinkable Aussie wine. Propane is readily available, but diesel will have to be schlepped (or a tanker hired).

If things are dry enough, don't miss the cross-island hike, and the road around the island is perfect for rented bikes or scooters.

And if there are any coin collectors in the family, Cook Island coins are quite special, as is their \$3 bill. The Cook Island dollar is tied to New Zealand, and New Zealand currency is generally used, but the Cooks have their own coins and notes (although the latter are due to be discontinued). There are some very nice and unique carvings in Rarotonga, but the real craft de résistance is the delicately woven hats.

Timing a visit for early August is also a lot of fun, as that's when the week-long Constitution Day celebrations take place, with islanders gathering from all of the outer islands for dancing, eating and partying. We had planned to stay only a few days, but the customs officer said we wouldn't leave until the party was over, and he was right! Even more than in the Societies, the performers really enjoyed their dancing.

The island if Aitutaki is an overnight sail due north of Raro, and a delightful place to visit, but anchoring can be a problem. Boats with a draft much over 5-1/2 can't get into the lagoon and will have to anchor outside in the lee of the reef. It is quite roly in anything but the most settled weather, and most cruisers don't feel comfortable leaving the boat unattended in those situations.

On to Niue

From Raro, it is another 600 miles to Niue, a delightful stop if the weather is cooperative. A stop at Beveridge Reef is also possible on the way. The pass is on the west side and not difficult in good conditions. The anchorage is good, and riding out moderately gnarly weather is not a problem... but note that we said nothing about comfort, as part of the swell will make it over the reef.

There is no real harbor at Niue, just a shallow bight on the west side with a notoriously foul bottom. Not just foul, but deep and full of coral, with large crevasses that the anchor can drop into. The good news is that three mooring buoys were installed in '94, and if they are still in place, then things will be quite a bit easier.

From all accounts, a visit to Niue is definitely worth a hassle or two, but conditions were impossible when we

stopped by. You need to be prepared to sail on if things don't look right.

The Northern Route

From Niue it is a (relatively) short hop to Vava'u, but first we've got to back up and cover the Northern Route to Suvarov and the Samoas. Suvarov (sometimes called Suvarrow) is a Cook Islands National Park, and technically boats are only allowed to stay three days without first clearing in at Rarotonga, 500 miles to the south.

The good news is that application of the three-day rule is at the discretion of the caretaker, and past caretakers have been pretty easy-going about extending visits to a week or two. The bad news is that the caretaker changes each year, and we have no idea whether visits over three days will be permitted in the future. But even a few days would be a delightful stop.

Pago Pago in American Samoa is the logical next stop on the Northern Route, but we are hard-pressed to think of a reason to stop there. Cheap peanut butter is one, but we don't like peanut butter.

Western Samoa is just down the road, and a much nicer place to visit if your travels take you that direction. Apia is the only port of entry, but permission can be obtained to stop in other bays after checking out from Apia.

From Samoa it can be a very tough 300 miles south to Vava'u if there is much south in the breeze. The worst would be right after a frontal line comes through, with strong South-Southeasterlies, wait a few days for an easterly shift. If it shifts northeast and gets lighter enroute, set the kite and get going, as there is a southerly change coming.

Vava'u, Tonga

The Vava'u group of Tonga is one of the true gems in the South Pacific, a sort of "Pocket Paradise". Everyone likes it, and many cruisers love it and spend months there. There is no argument that Vava'u is one of the prettiest island groups anywhere, and the waters between the islands offer some of the finest sailing we have found anywhere.

Neiafu is the only serious town in Vava'u, and offers the minimum requirements and not a lot more. The bay is a great natural harbor, but anchoring is difficult due to the depths and a mixed rubble/hardpan bottom. You can often rent a mooring for day use from the Moorings base, and

Coleman's boatyard (next to Moorings) has buoys for rent.

Coleman's usually has diesel available, propane is usually available in town, and modest provisions are usually available. There are a lot of "usually's" in Vava'u because that's how the place is. Everything comes from Nuku'alofa by ferry and sometimes "island time" gets in the way of commerce.

One nice thing about Vava'u is that it is small enough to easily sail across in an afternoon, and there are dozens of anchorages, so there is no reason to hang out somewhere you don't like.

You will find rubble or hardpan bottoms in a number of the anchorages, not just Neiafu. So it is a good place to dig out the Bruce anchor if you have one stowed, and set and check the anchor carefully.

The best, and only real guide to Vava'u is put out by Moorings. It is dated in spots (the celebrated Coral Garden snorkeling area was destroyed by a cyclone a decade ago, for example) and refers to all of the anchorages by their number. We thought this was pretty tacky until one islander told us, when we asked where he lived, "Number Six!". Then we were sure it was tacky.

There are some good snorkeling spots in Vava'u, and the west side of Ava is our favorite spot. Dolphin Pacific runs first-rate dive trips and classes from the Tongan Beach Resort. Other things to do in Tonga include collecting baskets, probably the finest in the Pacific, and the ubiquitous Tongan feast.

But one of the nicest qualities of Vava'u, its small size, is also one of its drawbacks. After a few weeks, we run out of things to do, and room for baskets, and start to think about wandering onward.

Heading south to the Ha'apai group is one good option, especially if you will be headed to New Zealand from Tonga. The Ha'apais are mostly reefs and a few small islands, and offer some of the beauty and isolation of the Tuamotus. It is important to keep a close eye on the weather, however, as there are few well-protected anchorages.

From the Ha'apai group it is an easy overnighter to Tongatapu for a short visit in Nuku'alofa, the capital city of Tonga, then on to New Zealand via Minerva Reef.

Next month we'll cover a summer in NZ, then just what makes Fiji such a fantastic cruising ground along with Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Australia.

Societies

	Societies	Cook Islands	Tonga
Friendly Natives	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Scenery	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Hiking	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥
Snorkeling/Diving	♥♥♥♥	♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Crafts	\$\$	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Beaches	♥♥♥	♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Day Sailing	♥♥♥♥♥	♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Anchorage	♥♥♥	♥	♥♥♥♥
Provisioning	\$\$\$	♥♥♥♥	♥♥
Diesel	♥♥♥♥	♥♥	♥♥♥
Propane	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Officials	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥

This is the third and last part of our South Pacific Milk Run, and we will finish our marathon cruise through the islands and then include some time out in New Zealand and Australia for a bit of R&R and to hide out from the cyclones.

We left off in Tonga, debating the options to head south towards New Zealand if the summer cyclone season is approaching, or to head west to visit Fiji if time permits. But we're still having fun, so let's put off the discussion of where to spend the cyclone season and continue on our tour of the islands.

Fiji

Fiji is considered by many to be the best cruising area of the South Pacific. The passage from Vava'u to Suva is a bit over 400 miles, and the first part is an easy cruise with plenty of sea room and hopefully good weather. If you can't pick good weather for the beginning of a passage by this time, then it's back to Weather Kindergarten for you! The fun part starts when you get to the eastern edge of Fiji, the Lau Group. The most direct route is through Oneata Passage, a well-traveled thoroughfare that is a few miles between the reefs.

In the "old days", before GPS, passing through the Lau was right up there with threading the Tuamotus in terms of panic-factor. These days neither one is a big deal, but you ought to feel at least moderately uncomfortable approaching reefs that you can't see. If you need some help, consider the fact that the GPS system was built by the low bidder, and if that doesn't work, then what about the time the ensign tripped over the power cord and shut the whole thing down? (Just kidding...but it could happen, couldn't it?). The point is that you need a second opinion as to your position, either visual bearings of the islands on either side of the pass, or a plot of radar ranges from the islands, or even... take a sun sight! (Gasp! Choke!).

And about the time you make it through Oneata Pass or take the long way around, expect to get nailed with 30 knots out of the south. I don't know why, but it just seems to work out that way. And to make it more interesting, the ocean always seems to get bumpy west of Lau, probably a result of goofy currents and an irregular bottom.

It's another 180 miles across the Koro Sea to Suva, so one way or another you are going to be doing some night sailing amongst the reefs. Up to now, you have probably been able to

avoid it, but there's not much choice here, so keep the eyes open, keep careful track of your position, and use the radar if you've got it. You hopefully won't pass close to any of the reefs, but you've got to keep track of where they are.

There are three ports of entry, Suva and Lautoka on Viti Levu, and Levuka on Ovalau. Savu Savu (on Vanua Levu) is also a port of entry for one week a year, in late July, for boats arriving from Tonga for the Savu Savu regatta week. It's a fun event if the timing works out.

Suva

Suva is the first port of call in Fiji for most folks. It is a major shipping port, and is well lit with bright and distinct leading lights (fixed red range lights) so a night approach is not unreasonable. Once inside, the lighted buoys are easily confused, and the most common error is to proceed too far into the harbor before making the right turn to the anchorage. At that point it is easy to mistake the Lami Reef light for some other and take it to starboard instead of port. As the light sits up on the reef this doesn't work too well. Waypoints are cheap, so use up a couple inside the harbor to help you get oriented.

As always, the first order of business is checking in with the authorities, so call Suva Port Control on channel 16 and find out what they want you to do. You will generally be required to bring the boat alongside the ship pier, not a bad pier, but built for a freeboard of about 20 feet. Just do the best you can, and smile. This is Fiji, and everybody smiles.

The most popular yacht anchorage is off the Royal Suva Yacht Club, in the northeast part of the harbor. The club is a wonderful establishment, with an unlimited supply of Fiji Bitter beer, a pretty decent restaurant with great prices (like a \$3 lunch special), and – almost best of all – laundry pickup and delivery service! Diesel and petrol are available from the club's fuel dock (but it's too shallow for most keels), and the center of the city is a \$1.50 cab ride away.

The only drawback, and we would be remiss if we didn't mention it, is that there have been a few thefts from anchored boats in the last few years. The club doesn't consider it to be their problem, as it tends to happen in the anchorage, not at their docks, and the police don't have any way to patrol. So be cautious, lock up when you leave, and do a bit of "neighborhood watching"

when your neighbors are ashore for the evening.

Suva is a great city, it's big and bustling, full of people and full of life. It's also a good place to shop for multi-system TV's and VCR's before heading to NZ, if you are video-inclined. (American TV uses NTSC and the rest of the world uses PAL. They don't mix, although a multi-system unit will play either).

You will need to visit the Fijian Affairs office (in the Native Land Trust Board building across from the Travelodge) for a cruising permit to visit the outer islands, and if you have a ham license you will want to stop by the radio license office (Building #26 behind the government offices, ground floor, turn left, last office on the left).

The public market in Suva is huge, and on Saturday it overflows the building and sprawls across the parking lot. Upstairs is where you find the grog sellers, as well as rice and all sorts of interesting spices. "Grog" is kava, the national drink that Fijians make by pounding the roots of a certain pepper plant and mixing it with water. It looks like dirty dishwater and tastes about the same, but has a great social and ceremonial significance in Fiji.

So run upstairs and buy a few kilos of kava, the more expensive – and longer – the better, and preferably from the native Fijians in the back of the hall selling the good stuff from Kadavu, not the Indians in the front selling who-knows-what. Tell them you want it for *sevu sevu*, wrapped in half-kilo bundles. Don't worry, we'll get to that.

The best (and perhaps only) guide book for Fiji is Michael Calder's "Yachtsman's Fiji", so pick that up in Suva if you haven't found it already. Calder's organization is baffling and the navigational notes are a bit much, but it has a lot of good, solid information, plus great aerial photographs in the new edition. Also stop by the Fiji Hydro office in Walu Bay (down the street from the yacht club) and pick up a copy of F5, F10 and F11 (the Yasawas and Kadavu). And if you tried to get by on the DMA charts, there is a shop in somewhere in Suva that can do large plan copies from borrowed BA charts.

We mentioned cruising permits. To visit any of the outer islands you will need to get a cruising permit from the Fijian Affairs office. Much of the traditional culture is alive and well in Fiji, and one purpose of the permits is to ensure that the visitors understand what is expected when visiting a village.

All of the land in Fiji belongs to some village or another, and that includes the reefs and bays as well as the dirt. There is no such thing as public land. So before you go tromping all over somebody's back yard, or even for a swim in their water, you need to ask permission.

It is no big deal, and this is where the bundles of kava come in. This is the traditional gift, or *sevu sevu*, that you present to the chief of the village at each place that you anchor. He or his stand-in will mumble a bunch of Fijian that amounts to a granting of permission and a blessing of your visit. Most of the time you will be "adopted" by someone in the village to act as your host, show you around and explain things to you.

The Fijians are warm, friendly people and make visiting a very enjoyable experience, and all they ask is that you respect their customs. In the old days they used to eat transgressors, but they can't do that anymore and it makes things awkward. By showing your respect for the traditional customs, you will be made welcome in the village in a way that rarely happens elsewhere.

There are also a few details of etiquette to pay attention to. The Fijians are so polite, they will almost never tell you when you are doing something grievously wrong, but they will appreciate it if you get it right. Things like taking off your hat and sunglasses in the village, wearing a sulu or skirt for women, taking off your shoes before entering a bure, saying "excuse me" when you walk behind someone who is sitting down (say "cheelow" or "teelow" depending on the island). You know, all the stuff that your mom tried to teach you. Calder skips this topic entirely, but there is a bit in the Lonely Planet book. And most chiefs don't permit alcohol in the village.

So the only problem with getting a cruising permit is that they will ask which islands you want to visit. One answer is to write all the islands down, but there are a lot of islands and writing them all down is a lot of work (to say nothing of trying to visit them all).

After the other South Pacific Island countries, Fiji is huge, and it will really make your head spin. The country is 300 miles wide, with roughly 300 islands in four or five major groups. You could spend a bunch of seasons here and still not see it all... just ask Pete Sutter! The major island groups, starting from Viti Levu, are Kadavu to the south, the Lau group on the east side of Fiji, Taveuni and the nearby

islands in the northeast, Vanua Levu, and the Yasawas and Mamanucas on the west side. A special permit is required to visit the Lau. These are available again, but our advice is that there is plenty else for your first season or two.

The opportunities for provisions and mail, besides Suva, are Lautoka on the northwestern side of Viti Levu (near the Nadi airport), the nearby Musket Cove Resort, and Savu Savu on the south side of Vanua Levu. Of these, Suva and Lautoka are big cities and offer the most in terms of shopping and provisions, while Musket Cove and Savu Savu are both great places to kick back and relax for a while. In Musket, particularly, you don't have to go anywhere to see all of your old friends – just spend a few weeks there and they will all wander through.

The Outer Islands

From Suva, Beqa (pronounced "Bengga" – see the handy pronunciation guide) is an easy day-sail, and the people there are remarkably friendly in spite of their proximity to Suva. It is a long daysail to Kadavu if there is not too much south in the breeze. Another good option is to head west from Suva, around the south side of Viti Levu ("Big Island") towards Musket Cove and the Yasawas, or you can head east (and upwind) towards Gau (pronounced "Now") and on towards the Taveuni/Savu Savu area.

Kadavu is a real treat, with a number of good anchorages all around the island. It is only 50 miles from Suva, but a thousand light-years as far as the islanders are concerned. There are no roads and no cars outside of Vunasea, and almost no tourists. Good spots include Ono Island, a good first stop, Matasawalevu, the bay at the extreme east end of Kadavu proper and a good spot to dive or snorkel the Great Astrolabe Reef, Kavala Bay on the north side near Ono, or our favorite, Daku, farther along the north side. There are heaps of other bays on both sides of Kadavu, and most cruisers have a favorite somewhere. There are also a few small dive resorts around Kadavu that will be happy to take small groups, and the Nukubalavu resort runs dive trips to the Astrolabe.

From Kadavu, it is a downwind overnighter to Musket Cove on Malolo Lailai island. Don't panic if you arrive at the pass before dawn, just follow the lead lights into Momi Bay and anchor in front of the light in 10 meters or so, mud bottom. It will be scary as heck going

through the pass in the dark with the phosphorescent surf pounding the reef on both sides of you, but as long as the lights are working and you have a GPS and a good chart, it is really quite straightforward.

Dick Smith's Musket Cove is one of the Truly Great cruiser's hangouts, and also the venue for Musket Cove Regatta Week and the Port Vila Race every September. This is a favorite event of ours, as we've managed to clean up two years running, but Dick won't let us come back again.

From Musket, it is an easy series of day-sails north and east through the Mamanuca and Yasawa islands and some delightful sailing. A great place to hang out for a while and not do much is the "Blue Lagoon" anchorage off of Nanuya Leilei (just north of Nanuya Levu, "Turtle Island").

Another great cruising area is around Savu Savu in northeastern Fiji, including Qamea, Taveuni and the small islands in that area, and there are some good anchorages on Vanua Levu east of Savu Savu, such as Viani Bay. Getting here from Musket Cove is not too tough if you sail inside the reefs on the north side of Viti Levu, then jump across Bligh Waters to the south side of Vanua Levu, then east inside the reef again. The water is murky around the big islands, due to river runoff, but all of the routes are well marked.

A couple of notes on the weather: Musket Cove is in the lee of Viti Levu, and is quite dry and warm even when the weather is unsettled on the windward side. Kadavu is also fairly dry, but it rains all the time in Suva and can be quite wet on the east side around Savu Savu. When the trades are up (i.e. when there is a large high to the south of Fiji) it can really howl between Kadavu and Viti Levu, and also in the northern Yasawas. Plan your trips accordingly.

There are good facilities around Lautoka for yachts, with a haul-out yard at Neisau Marina in Lautoka, and rumors of a new marina at Vunda point that may replace it. Propane (butane, actually) is readily available in Lautoka, along with supermarkets and a good public market. Diesel is most easily obtained at Musket Cove, although it will be available at Vunda Point when the new marina opens.

When it is time to depart Fiji, most cruisers check out from Lautoka. In years past, it was common practice to check out, then head to Musket Cove for a few days or a week until the weather looked right. Customs takes a

dim view of that practice, and in recent years have taken to sending the gunboats poking around various places, checking papers. So it pays to keep them in order.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu is the logical next stop after Fiji, and it is a remarkable country. It is a fascinating area to cruise, yet in many ways much less accessible than Fiji. One of the major attractions is that, more than almost anywhere else on the "milk run", it is still possible to get a glimpse at a culture relatively untouched by modern times. We say "relatively", because the tentacles of progress are everywhere, and the ni-Vanuatu hosted thousands of GI's during WWII when Vanuatu (New Hebrides then) was a staging area for the Americans for the war in the Solomons.

This invasion, and decades of joint English/French rule, have left some strange marks on the country. The charts for Port Vila and Luganville are first-rate, but charts for smaller anchorages around the islands are almost non-existent. There are over a hundred local dialects of the Vanuatu language, yet the official national language (and the one that people from different villages usually use) is Bislama, an English-based pidgin (there is also a French-based pidgin spoken in some areas).

Besides the paucity of adequate charts and guidebooks, the other big hurdle to exploring Vanuatu is malaria. One thought cured, the malaria parasite is alive and healthy in the northern islands of Vanuatu. It is often reported that Efate and the Islands to the south are free from malaria, but there have been a few reported cases. Among the varieties of malaria in Vanuatu is the so-called "cerebral malaria", *plasmodium falciparum*, that is potentially fatal in just a few days, so precautions are called for (see the sidebar on malaria).

The capital of Vanuatu is Port Vila, on the southwest corner of Efate island. Clearing in is quick and easy, and the officials will actually come out and meet the boat in the quarantine anchorage. The usual yacht anchorage is behind Iririki Island, but space is limited due to the number of buoys, and there are both height and draft limitations. At low tide, about 2.8 meters can be carried between the markers into the anchorage. At high tide there is 18 meters of authorized clearance under the power lines, but you can carry at

least 21.5 meters under the wires if you stay as far left (going in) as you can. There is also a path around the back of Iririki if you have a tall boat with a short draft, and larger boats can anchor in the outer harbor near the quarantine buoy.

Moorings or stern-ties are usually available from Yachting World, who also run the fuel dock and will arrange for propane. Taking a mooring is an attractive option as the anchorage areas are either crowded (in the front) or 100' deep (in the back).

The thatched roof right under the power lines is Rick's Waterfront Bar and Grill, a great place and the local yachtie hangout, and right next door is the office for the Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club, a good place to receive mail and faxes. The dingy dock in front of Rick's is the only good place to leave a dink, although the sea wall can be used for a quick dash to the market or to get dingy fuel from the petrol station.

The public market here is first-rate, and grocery shopping is a delightful experience thanks to the French influence. This will be your first chance to find great cheese, paté and wine since Papeete, and at a much more attractive price. There's a neat little French bistro and deli up the hill called Le Bistro, don't miss it.

There is good diving around Port Vila, and the water is generally crystal clear, even right in the anchorage. Another good distraction is to rent a car and circumnavigate the island, and spending the night in a resort on the far side will turn an all-day marathon on bad roads into a leisurely two-day trip.

There are some remarkable crafts in Vanuatu, carvings and ceremonial masks and figures. There are a couple of good craft galleries in Vila, and also (a less expensive) one in Luganville.

In the outer islands, about half of the villages are Christian, while the other half continue the traditional way of life. A few on Tanna are also followers of John Frum, and believe that the gods will someday return in a great white ship loaded with Coca-Cola and refrigerators. Part of their belief is that airplanes full of goods can be attracted by clearing a long strip of land, and lighting oil-drum fires down both sides of this strip. A crazy as it sounds, there are still some old guys around who swear that they have seen it work, many years ago. Like most religions, it is hard to argue.

Most of the traditional villages are remote and virtually inaccessible, and it is probably better that way because traditional culture and tourism don't mix

well. Many areas are *tabu*, and most of the Custom (traditional) villages are off-limits to other villages, much less outsiders. On most islands, touring inland is not permitted without a guide, and there are few guides that will – or can – take you very far off the beaten track. But even the beaten track in a place like Vanuatu can be fascinating, and you will be welcomed into most villages that you encounter.

Like Fiji, kava is the local drink but it is not the custom to present a gift of kava root when you call on a village (although some other small gift, tobacco perhaps, is not inappropriate). Male visitors are sometimes invited to join the men in drinking kava, as a gesture of friendship, but women are never permitted in the *nakamal* (meeting house). Vanuatu kava is much stronger than the Fijian version, so be careful.

The islands are relatively young geologically, and, similar to the Marqueses, have not yet developed extensive reef systems. There are few great anchorages, but there are plenty of spots available in settled weather. Your guide will often be nothing more than a place-name, a 300,000-scale chart and your eyeballs. The water is generally clear, but much of the sea floor is dark, particularly off of the black-sand beaches.

It is said that there is rarely any coral off a black-sand beach. Or maybe it's like Chris Dixon observed during the last Whitbread, that it's a good thing that icebergs don't come out at night, because you sure can't see them!

From Vila, Havannah Harbor is right around the corner, a big open bay that was a big US base during the war. Epi is an awkward distance north, too far for a comfortable daysail and a bit short for a comfortable overnighter, but there is a good anchorage on the east side. Beyond Epi, Malekula and Santo form the west side of a "Y", and Ambrim and Pentecost form the east side. There are good anchorages at the south end of Malekula, behind the islands, and also in Port Sandwich. Pentecost is the site of the famous land divers, but between an early date (May), lack of decent anchorages, and steep entry fees, it is not something that is easy to see.

Luganville, on the island of Espiritu Santo, is an administrative center for the northern islands and the other port of entry into Vanuatu, but the harbor in front of town is pretty exposed and uncomfortable. Unless you are clearing into the country, most yachts anchor in Palikulo Bay (around the corner to the northeast) and catch a cab to town. The

best anchorage is at the head of the bay (follow the nondescript buoys through the uncharted reef) off of Club Nautique, where you can catch a cab to town. (Be careful about mossies here, they breed in the fresh water cisterns).

Look up Glenn at Butterfly Tours if you want a good local guide for some land touring. Luganville is also the site of the Coolidge, a WWII troop ship that hit a "friendly" mine, now a popular dive site.

South from Port Vila is the island of Tanna, an overnight sail and usually a beat or close to it, although there is a shallow bay (Dillon Bay) on the west side of Erromango that can be used to break up the trip. Port Resolution on the east side of Tanna is an excellent anchorage, and the home of the Port Resolution Nipikinamu Yacht Club and the Mount Yasur volcano. The club can arrange a trip to the volcano, and peering into the fiery depths at night is a sight that you will remember forever. Do be careful, though, because there are no guard rails or personal-injury lawyers up there, and a couple of tourists have been killed by falling hunks of molten lava.

Tanna is not a port of entry, and is where Lowell North got into a bit of trouble a few years back trying to check into Vanuatu. It is possible to check out from Tanna, however, if you get a group together and arrange to fly the customs officer down. The cost is reasonable and makes New Caledonia 60 miles and twenty degrees of wind angle closer.

New Caledonia

Whoowhee, getting tired of islands yet? Ready for something a bit different? New Caledonia is about 300 miles south of Port Vila, and is a wonderful end-of-season stop before heading to NZ or Aus. But more than a convenient stop, it is, yet again, unlike anything else in the South Pacific. A visit to New Caledonia is more for scenic beauty and relaxation than for another dose of native culture. Except for a few villages off the beaten track, the local Kanaks lump all visitors in with the French, and that puts you somewhere less than zero as far as they are concerned. But don't worry, it is still a lovely country to visit.

Entry must be made into Noumea, and this is a bit of a nuisance as Noumea lies about 40 miles inside Havannah Pass, around the bottom of the big island of Le Grande Terre. Currents in the pass are typically 3 to 4 knots, no big deal for SF Bay sailors,

but can be a major hazard when a big easterly trade-wind swell meets the east-flowing ebb current.

The ideal situation is a flood that begins early in the morning, providing favorable current and lots of daylight for the trip to Noumea. It never works out quite so well in real life, and there is a good anchorage just inside Baie du Prony if you can't get to Noumea by dark, providing customs will give you permission to stop. This last bit is essential, as the French officials in New Caledonia are very easy-going, but quite strict about not stopping enroute to Noumea without permission. Just call Noumea Radio on channel 16 and ask nicely.

It should also be noted that the French tide information for Havannah Pass differs from that in the American and British pilots. The difference is about two hours, and we really don't know which is correct but we suspect the French information might be better, since they own the place. For your reference, the table on French chart 6719 indicates that flood begins 5 hours before High Water Noumea and continues through one hour after.

Checking in at Noumea couldn't be easier. The officials come down to the Marina at Port Moselle and take care of all of the formalities with one visit. Visas are granted for 30 days, and extensions are no problem until November comes along and the officials start getting anxious about getting you out of cyclone country.

Noumea is a cosmopolitan city, very French, with a wonderful market and shops. Prices are high, comparable to Papeete, but you will find delicacies that you won't find anywhere else in the Pacific. Be careful about stocking up on your favorite goodies, however, if you are headed for NZ or Aus. The quarantine rules are quite strict in both countries, and any sort of French dairy and meat products are generally tabu.

There is a good cruising guide for New Caledonia, "Cruising in New Caledonia", an English translation of a Noumea Yacht Charters guide. The most popular cruising areas are south and east from Noumea, particularly Baie du Prony and Ile Ouen, and the spectacular Ile des Pines. The leeward side of La Grande Terre is the dry side, and the weather is generally quite good and, at 22 degrees south, a bit cooler than islands further north.

The Loyalties also offer some wonderful cruising, and since stopping is prohibited before checking in at Noumea, are well off the beaten track.

Here, particularly, remember that everything belongs to somebody, and asking permission is courteous and expected. The cruising guide has good information on this topic.

Taking a Cyclone Break

Irrespective of how fast or slow your pace, when November approaches you need to think about hiding out from the cyclones. A handful of cruisers spend the summer in Tonga or Fiji, never straying far from a bolt-hole, but they are playing with the odds as well as enduring the heat and humidity of the wet season. Another option is to head north to the islands near the equator or to Micronesia in the Northern Hemisphere. A few cruisers do this, but most folks look forward to a break from the islands for a while, especially this first season which started early.

New Zealand is the logical destination for a cyclone break, particularly if the plan is to return to Tonga or Fiji. There are only two difficulties: one is getting to New Zealand and back in one piece, and the other is the silly nonsense over NZ's Section 21 safety rules.

New Zealand

So just how do you get to New Zealand without getting pasted? Good question, and the short answer is that you can't. A worthy goal is to try to avoid getting pasted more than once. The problem is that the weather fronts cross New Zealand every 7 or 8 days, but the northern end of the front trails behind as the front moves east. So if you think it will take 7 days to get to the Bay of Islands, then depart Fiji just before a weather front crosses NZ. You will meet that one enroute, hopefully about 25S where it has lost most of its potency, and you will arrive in the Bay of Islands just before the next front arrives. If you think your trip will take a day or two longer than a week, then lead the front's arrival across NZ by a day or two.

Having said all that, we now need to point out that the weather around NZ is notoriously unpredictable. Sometimes the weather fronts come more frequently, but the big ones are usually spaced out by a week or more. So don't get fooled into departing on a baby front, a classic fake, only to be nailed by a big one a few days later. Watch the Aussie weather charts (station AXM) for the weather crossing Australia, and try to get some New Zealand weather off the SSB. Keri Keri Radio is off the air, unfortunately, but you can get NZ forecasts and a sense for what is

happening in Kiwiland from Taupo Radio.

The other thing that sometimes happens around the Tasman is that a high will get blocked, and stop dead in its tracks. If this happens east of New Zealand, then you would have Northerlies into New Zealand, and would be loving life. Highs tend to get blocked west of New Zealand, however, and strong southerly-quarter winds can prevail for a week or more. This means sailing close-hauled in 20-25 knots of wind, not much fun but something that you really ought to be able to do.

New Zealand is a wonderful country for sailors. The Bay of Islands is a world-class cruising area, and many folks never get any further. Whangarei is also a large cruising center, and there is an excellent haulout yard at Docklands Five. Other cruisers wandered south to Tauranga on the Bay of Plenty, or Nelson in the Marlborough Sounds (north end of the South Island). These areas are all small-town environments, and getting around without a car is not a problem (and will save some bucks).

Our favorite area was Auckland, with fabulous cruising in the Hauraki Gulf and all the attractions of a not-so-large city. There are plenty of slips available at either Westhaven Marina in Auckland proper, or Gulf Harbor, a rapidly developing area about 30-minutes by car out of town. Auckland is pretty spread out and the public transportation system isn't much, so most folks pick up a car for the season. There are a lots options, but the one that seems to work the best is a visit to one of the weekend car fairs.

There are plenty of boat services available of all descriptions, although with the current exchange rate things aren't the bargain that they were a few years ago. And we need to point out that there are also just as many flakes in the business in NZ as anywhere else, so it pays to check around carefully. One shop that we can recommend without hesitation is Quality Stainless in Auckland, who do first-rate stainless work (including stainless icebox liners with integral cold plates) and also do a good job servicing marine refrigeration.

Australia

The other option for a Cyclone Break is Australia, and there are some advantages over sailing to New Zealand. The weather is generally much better, as you will be in the trades for the whole trip and far enough west that you will miss the worst of the Tasman

fronts. You also won't be supporting the Kiwi's and their silly Section 21 business. But the disadvantage is that, if you want to return to Fiji, you will have to pay for all of that beautiful sailing. But by playing the shifts and stopping at a couple of reef anchorages along the way, it can be a pretty nice sail.

The one aspect of Australian coastal sailing that isn't so nice is the thunderstorms. It's an East Coast phenomenon, and when warm continental air meets a cold front at the water's edge, things can get real black and ugly. Avoid them if you can, and that's also why we would recommend making landfall in Bundaberg or Brisbane before heading south if that is your plan. Once you're landed on the coast, you have the option of waiting for settled weather.

Australia is a fascinating country, and we have barely scratched the surface. It is as big as the states, yet home to only 18 million people. It is much less sailing-oriented than New Zealand, and the facilities for visiting yachts around Sydney leave a bit to be desired. Queensland sees a lot of visiting yachts and is better equipped, but it gets pretty warm and humid up there during the summertime.

Sydney has been fascinating with more things going on than you will ever have time for. The public transportation here and in most other large cities in Australia has been well thought out and you can actually get where you want to go on a bus, ferry or a train. Most grocery stores deliver, as do many other businesses, so not having a car is not a big hardship in spite of the size of things.

One Last Thought

We recently had another lesson on the proper use of the English language from an Aussie friend. We were riding the train from Perth across the outback, and it went sort of like this:

"You Yanks", says he, "Always talking about bunches! Bunches of this, bunches of that! 'Bunches' are for grapes, all connected. The proper word is 'Heaps!'"

"Well, what about that bunch of Kangaroos over there," we said, "Certainly there's not enough to be 'Heaps', couldn't we call them a 'Bunch'?"

"Naw, them's a mob!"

There are certainly heaps of cruisers in the Pacific, and quite a few bunches, also. All connected like grapes. There's nothing wrong with

cruising in company, and we've made a number of life-long friends that way.

But in places where there is an opportunity to get to know the local people, like the outer islands of Fiji or even New Zealand, leave the bunch behind and do some sailing on your own. It is a lot of fun to get together with other cruisers and swap stories, and in fact it is hard to be with other cruisers and not start swapping cruising stories. But as long as a bunch of you sit around talking about sailing, you won't learn a thing about anybody else.

So if you really want to learn something about how other people live, spread out, and go places where others aren't. There will be plenty of time in Musket Cove for drinking beer and visiting with your bunch.

Speaking Fijian

This isn't "Learn to speak like a native in five short minutes", but will hopefully keep you from slaughtering the name of the island the first time you meet the locals. Most Fijians speak pretty decent English, especially the young people, but written Fijian has a few unusual rules for pronunciation.

The Fijian language was first written down by visiting missionaries in the early 1800's. The first attempts used conventional English phonetics, but the Fijians found it incomprehensible that two letters should be used to make one sound, like the "ng" in "Benga". They also had quite a bit of trouble with the notion that the same letter, like "g", should be used to make a hard-"g" sound (Benga) or a soft-"g" sound "Langi". And using two letters to make the "th" sound was totally beyond reason.

So the missionaries reinvented a few letters to avoid the ambiguities, and it's been chaos ever since. A soft "ng" (as in "sing") is represented by a single letter "g", while a hard "ng" sound (as in anger) is represented by the left-over letter "q". So the island of Beqa is pronounced "Bengga" (and spelled that way on some old charts).

A leading "g" is still a soft "ng", but the "g" part of it just about disappears and the result is a slightly nasal "n". So pronounce the island of Gau like "now". And yes, the books say it should be something like "ngow", but the folks that live there say "Now". Good enough for us.

"C" is pronounced as a soft "th" (as in "this"), so the island of Ceva is pronounced "theva".

A "b" is always preceded by a "m" sound, and a "d" by an "n" sound, for example Lakeba ("lakemba") and Nadi ("Nandi"). For words that start with a "b" or "d", the "m" or "n" is still there, but almost silent.

Those are the basics. For the advanced course pick up Lonely Planet's "Fijian Phrasebook", and have fun!

Malaria

Malaria was once thought to be a problem solved, but the malaria parasite is alive and well in many parts of the western South Pacific. The following information was put together from a variety of sources, but it must be understood that the authors have no medical expertise and offer this for reference only.

There is no reported malaria in Fiji or any of the islands to the east of Fiji. There is malaria in the northern Vanuatu islands, and is quite bad in the islands north and west from there, including the Solomans, Papua New Guinea and parts of Indonesia. It is often said that malaria is not a problem on Efate island in central Vanuatu or the islands to the south, but cases have been reported. There is no malaria in New Caledonia. The wet (cyclone) season is the worst, although there is risk year-around.

Malaria is transmitted by the female *anopheles* mosquito, which feeds from dusk to dawn. Of the four principal varieties of malaria, the most common is *plasmodium vivax*. The one that is most feared by cruisers, however, is *plasmodium falciparum*, the "cerebral" malaria that can kill in a few days. To make matters worse, much of the *p. falciparum* in the Pacific has become resistant to chloroquine, the traditional malaria preventative.

And don't worry about the mosquito that buzzes in your ear... *anopheles* is quiet.

There are three ways to avoid malaria: avoid infested areas altogether, avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, and take preventive medication. Avoiding mosquito bites is always a good idea, because besides malaria, mosquitoes carry dengue fever and have been implicated in a variety of other diseases.

One of the popular rumors, generally circulated by those with deep keels and fast dingies, is that mossies can't fly more than 150 yards and that anchoring farther out, and avoiding the beach after dusk, will solve the problem. While it is true that the farther out you anchor, the fewer bugs you will see, on a still night and with wing tanks an *anopheles* mosquito can fly great distances in search of a little fresh blood. Screens are the best protection, and use a repellent (with at least 30% DEET) if you must be ashore past late afternoon.

There are a variety of drugs used as malaria preventatives, and none are without controversy. The classic is chloroquine, but there are so many chloroquine-resistant strains of malaria in the Pacific that it is of dubious value. The CDC (Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, hotline 1-404-639-2572) recommends Larium (mefloquine), 250mg once per week as a preventative, but many local doctors in malaria areas worry about the

development of Larium-resistant strains and recommend against using Larium as a preventative, preferring to save it for a "silver bullet". The problem is that we know of no other preventative that is effective against the *p. falciparum* bug. Larium is not without side effects, including occasional dizziness, insomnia and rash. It is often pointed out, however, that none of the side effects are fatal and malaria can be.

Proper diagnosis of malaria is difficult, as the parasites are small and hard to identify. The tech at a big-city clinical lab may never have seen a malaria parasite, while the island clinics will have seen a lot of cases and will have the best chance at diagnosis. But even they will miss it if the parasites are back in hiding in the liver when the blood sample is taken. Virtually all medical practitioners urge a blood test if malaria is suspected, yet travel is often not an option if a major part of the crew is debilitated. So prevention is all the more important.

Without a blood test, choosing a treatment drug is a shot-in-the-dark, but given the 10% fatality rate for *p. falciparum* that sounds better than no shot at all. Larium can be used also as a treatment drug (single dose of 1250mg), and would make sense if it were not used as a preventative.

Malaria is a serious problem, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't travel to places that you really want to. It is not hard to take reasonable precautions, and by being diligent about screens, repellent and staying off the islands at night you can pretty much avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. If you then add an effective malaria preventative drug to the equation, then the odds of having trouble vanish to almost nothing.

NZ's Section 21

We really wish New Zealand had never started this business of writing their own safety regulations, because it puts the NZ government in the unattractive position of whining about their visitors, and it puts cruisers in the silly position of arguing against maritime safety.

What Section 21 says is that no vessel, NZ or foreign-registered, can depart NZ for a foreign port without meeting certain minimum requirements set down by the Director of the Maritime Safety Authority. That all sounds simple enough, but there are a few problems.

The first problem is that there is no international agreement on what the safety requirements for private yachts

ought to be. There is such an agreement for commercial shipping, the SOLAS requirements, but they are inappropriate for small vessels. The NZ minimum requirements is a list of their own making, although it is based on the ORC Category-1 regulations for offshore racing. When we race, we agree to those regs, but the last time I checked, that was a voluntary activity. Very few cruisers voluntarily subscribe to the ORC requirements.

Any visitor to another country is bound by that country's laws. But that is not the issue here, because Section 21 only applies when departing NZ, not when sailing in her waters. The irony is that NZ has no regulations at all for sailing in her coastal waters. No lifejackets, no flares, no nothing. The same Maritime Safety Authority that is behind Section 21 reviewed this issue and decided that "safety cannot be legislated".

The NZ requirement list was also written without regard to any other country's national requirements. There are no conflicts with US requirements, which are minimal, but some European vessels are prohibited from carrying a 121/243 EPRIB because of the high false-alarm rate. Those sailors face the option of spending \$2000 in New Zealand for a 406 EPRIB, or buying a \$200 unit that violates their own country's laws.

New Zealand's justification for Section 21 is the cost associated with providing search and rescue for the sea area that they have agreed to. In actual fact, NZ maintains no offshore rescue service, and relies on foreign commercial shipping to provide whatever rescue is required. They do perform air searches with three P-3 Orions that perform a variety of tasks including fisheries patrol, but it is rare for those aircraft to exceed their budgeted flight time. If New Zealand feels that their area of responsibility is inappropriately large, then they should approach the International Maritime Organization for a change.

No country has the right to enforce its laws upon citizens of another country in international waters, and to enforce requirements upon foreign vessels only when they are departing for international waters amounts to the same thing.

Whether it makes sense to boycott New Zealand over this issue is a tough question. It is easy for those who have already visited New Zealand to say "stay away", but a large part of cruising is freedom from other people telling you

what to do. I know we would have a hard time passing NZ by, although we don't think anyone should call their Pacific cruiser complete without spending some time in Australia as well.

And maybe the Kiwis will come to their senses and we can all stop worrying about this.

HEART CHARTS

	Fiji	Vanuatu	New Caledonia
Friendly Natives	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥
Scenery	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Hiking	♥♥♥	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Snorkeling/Diving	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Crafts	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥
Beaches	♥♥♥	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Day Sailing	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Anchorage	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Provisioning	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Diesel	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Propane	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Officials	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥

	New Zealand	Australia
Friendly Natives	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Scenery	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Hiking	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Snorkeling/Diving	♥♥	♥♥♥
Crafts	♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Beaches	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Day Sailing	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Anchorage	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Provisioning	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Diesel	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Propane	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Officials	♥♥♥	♥♥♥

Heart of Gold

Jim and Sue Corenman

South Pacific Weather

Ah, the South Pacific at last! Warm trade winds, sunny skies, an occasional afternoon squall to cool things off, sounds lovely, doesn't it? We've done some sailing in the northern trades, and thought we knew what to expect down south: lighter winds, on the average, and maybe not quite so consistent, which sounded great, we were ready for it, because the Northern Trades sometimes get, well, almost boring in their consistency.

Well, I don't think anybody can say that the South Pacific weather has been boring! So what about these famous Southeast Trades? The average winds in the South Pacific Tropical Area are indeed Southeasterlies in the 15-20 knot range, but to fully appreciate that, we need to consider for a moment what this word "average" means. The concept is simple, just accumulate a bunch of observations over some period, do some arithmetic, and *Viola!* Suppose, for instance, that it blew half the time from the northeast at 5 knots, and the other half from the south at 30. The average would indeed be our mythical Southeast 15-20 knot winds, but it never blew 20, nor from the Southeast. The situation isn't that bad, quite, but beware of anyone speaking of "averages".

Actually, the weather on the passage from Mexico was mostly fine, and about what we expected — light to medium Northeasterlies tending to Easterlies north of the ITCZ, generally light and goofy in the ITCZ with occasional squalls, some quite nasty, and becoming medium East-Southeasterlies south of the equator.

The weather in the Marqueses was also mostly gorgeous, but we had a taste of things to come on The Day the Trough Came Through Nuku Hiva. We were sailing a lovely reach in a nice 12 knot northeast breeze, shifting north, heading west around the north side of the island for Daniel's Bay, and sailed right into a black wall of cloud.

"No problem", I said, "just a big squall".

"How about a reef?", Sue said.

"Good idea, but let's at least wait to see if it gets up to 15 knots, don't you think?"

Dumb. The wind went right past 15 knots, and we went right past the first reef. Our 10-

knot Northeasterly turned into 25-30 knots from the southwest at the edge of the cloud bank, cold and raining hard, and as we sailed a wet, sloppy beat around the island, the wind backed to the south, and then southeast to stay right on our nose.

"What the heck was that, Oh Mighty Weather Wizard?", asked a soggy Suzy after we had the hook down in Daniel's Bay.

"Beats me, honey, but it sure acted like a cold front. There's been nothing on the fax charts, but as they always say, 'If it walks like a duck, and talks like a duck, ...'"

We had been mostly watching the Pacific Surface Analysis charts from KVM70 at that point, put together by the National Weather Service (NWS) in Honolulu. They were pretty good at showing general wind flow, but as we were to find out, not too good with those silly discontinuities that we learned to take such an interest in, such as troughs and fronts and other minor disturbances. The Tropical Analysis charts from NMC at Point Reyes, put together by NWS at the National Hurricane Center in Florida (another building with no windows), had been a great help tracking the ITCZ during the crossing from Mexico, but they are mostly useless south of the equator. We tried to get the Kiwi charts from ZKLF, but our schedule was out of date and the charts were fuzzy, and we couldn't get anything that made sense until we got west of Papeete.

So where does this goofy weather come from? To understand what really happens, we first need to talk about the South Pacific High, specifically the fact that there's no such thing. Well, there is, but it's way over next to South America, anchored there for the same reason that the Pacific High is anchored off the coast of California, namely a bunch of mountains and no easy way to get across the summit. To move an area of high pressure across a mountain range requires lifting the entire vertical column of air over the mountains, or finding a surface-level gap big enough to squeeze the air through. The Golden Gate isn't nearly big enough, no matter how hard it blows, so the Pacific High remains anchored a few hundred miles off

California, providing stable northeast trade winds and blocking most of the low-pressure troughs and fronts to the north. There are exceptions, of course, and when the Pacific High breaks down, the low-pressure systems can move south, creating Hawaii's well-known Kona winds, a westerly wind associated with a low-pressure system north of the islands.

The same thing happens in the South Pacific, backwards of course, except the stationary high is well east of the area that we are interested in. The weather books show a broad ridge of high pressure about 30°S across most of the central South Pacific, but that's another misleading "average". What really happens is a series of traveling highs, like wandering minstrels, here today and gone tomorrow, steadily shuffling along from Australia to South America with nothing much to slow them down. North of each high are east-southeasterly winds, the famous trades. If the high is strong, then the trades will also be strong, usually called reinforced trades (which we've always thought was a bit of a misnomer).

Separating the highs are areas of low pressure, troughs, which are connected to the deep lows that march across the Southern Ocean at latitudes of 40–50°S. These troughs, or valleys of low pressure, often extend into the tropics, disrupting the orderliness of the easterly trades, and bringing a northerly shift as the first sign of their approach, and a southerly shift as they pass (i.e. to the west of the trough, see Fig. 1).

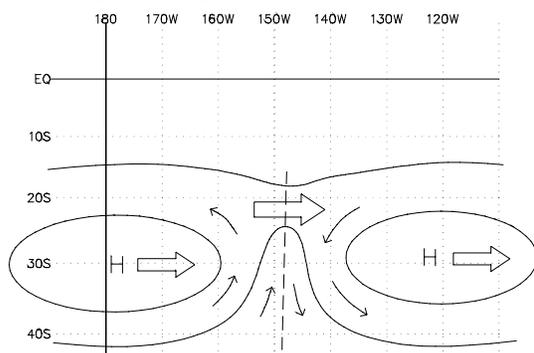


Figure 1. A hypothetical South Pacific trough.

So what we have so far are moderately variable winds, building and shifting from the southeast to the east as a high approaches to the south, and then getting lighter and shifting to the north or northeast as the high passes by

and a trough approaches, and back to the south or southeast as the trough passes and the next high approaches. This is the underlying "beat" of the Southeast Trades, and repeats on a 5-10 day cycle all across the South Pacific (the Fijian name for a strong easterly wind translates to "Eight Days").

What makes the situation a bit more interesting is that the troughs are not usually simple areas of low pressure, but usually contain a weather front, just the remains of an old Southern Ocean front, but a front nonetheless, and they can sometimes be quite strong. The fronts lie in the troughs, and have the effect of making the transition from the north-something's to the south-something's quite sharp and rowdy, and frequently accompanied by quite a bit of moisture.

The actual wind directions will depend on the axis of the trough and its associated front. If it lies north-south, then the wind will be north to northeast as the front approaches, and south or southeast as it passes.

"Great, Mr. Wizard", Sue says, "I understand that it's going to get goofy, but why does the goofy weather come from the west, when the wind is blowing from the east?"

"Ah, humunahumuna, good question. Let me think for a minute ..."

This is an important detail that most people initially miss: These weather systems, highs, troughs, fronts, and the lot, move from the west to the east, against the prevailing easterly surface winds. That's right, backwards. The reason is that the systems are carried along by upper level winds, not the surface winds, and the upper-level flow is from the west, in a broad band from the southern latitudes as far north as 20°S and usually 10-15°S. The surface winds in the Tropics are actually rather thin, only a few thousand feet, and the movement of the weather systems is dominated by the strong upper-level flow.

So having concluded that all this stuff was interesting, but mostly harmless, we took off for the Tuamotus with gorgeous weather, sunny and warm, and a weather chart that looked ideal. It had showed a weak trough a few days previously, which we figured must have gone away. We had a lovely sail, 15 knots of easterly winds shifting northeast and getting lighter.

“Hmm, judging by the lighter winds and the shift to the north, I’d say the trough is still out here, but the barometer’s not doing anything, so not to worry”, I said.

“Then why is the sky so black up there?”, she said.

“Don’t Panic. Larry said on the radio this morning that they had found some lousy weather west of us, so maybe it’s some sort of front. Let’s get rid of this big headsail, just in case”, I said.

As the rain started, the wind got all weird, finally deciding on 25-30 knots from the south, putting us on a miserable close reach with the #4 jib and two reefs, charging into the night with no relief in sight.

“Where did this crap come from?”, snarled my lovely mate as she gave me the evil eye.

“This makes no sense, unless we’ve found the Convergence Zone.” was my rather laconic reply.

A wind shift at a frontal line I have no problem with, kinks in the isobars and that. Isobars are usually kinked sharply at a front, causing a sharp wind shift (actually vise-versa), but here we had two winds blowing towards each other, not just shifting. The axis of this thing apparently was lying east-to-west, assuming it was the same stuff that Larry had, and we had a meeting of northeasterly and southerly winds. The improbability factor must be huge — could this be the infamous South Pacific Convergence Zone that we had read about?

“There’s a lot of air in all this breeze. Where’s it going, straight up?”

“You got it.”

The South Pacific Convergence Zone (SPCZ) is a poorly-kept secret, not mentioned in any of the weather books, at least not in those written in the Northern Hemisphere. Maybe that’s because it is not considered a significant player in the world’s weather, but for those that have met The Beast, it can be quite significant indeed, and is related to virtually all of the South Pacific Horror Stories that we have all heard from time to time. You know the ones, the headlines that read “Yachts Savaged by 70-knot Winds in Bora Bora” or something like that.

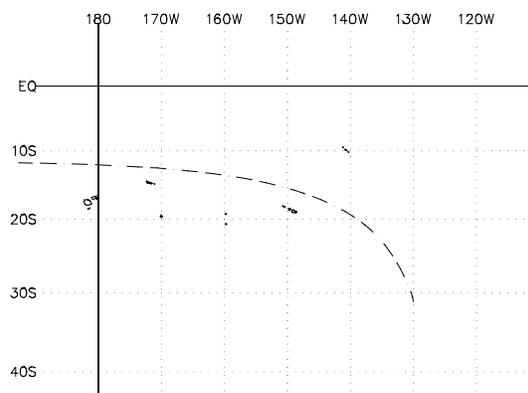


Figure 2. Typical position of the SPCZ

The best previous information that we had on the SPCZ was a letter from Sandy and Sidney Van Zandt (*Soquel*) in the January ‘93 issue of the SSCA bulletin (also printed in the journal of the OCC). The Van Zandts pass along a couple of horror stories, and a very brief description of the SPCZ, including the normal position, from the Solomons in the Western South Pacific, to a point somewhere east of the Societies and then south (see Fig. 2). It still didn’t make any sense, though, in terms of what causes the convergence, where does it come from, why doesn’t it go away, how do you know where it is, and how to avoid it, stuff like that.

To understand things further, however, we need to digress and talk some more about some Weather Theory, specifically Air Masses. “Air Mass” is not what happens at dawn on Easter, but is a term that applies to a large chunk of atmosphere that is relatively homogeneous and uniform with respect to temperature and moisture content. These air masses develop over areas of uniform conditions, such as the tropical ocean, the polar regions, large land masses, etc. Marine Air Masses (developed over the sea) tend to be moist and whatever the temperature of the ocean is, while Continental Air Masses (developed over land) tend to be dry and cold. Polar air masses are obviously colder than tropical air masses.

These things take a while to form, and as they move away from wherever they were formed, they change temperature and density only very slowly — air is a pretty good insulator. Any good weather book does a reasonable job of describing air masses, but they generally miss a bit when it comes to describing the role they play aside from the classic storm tracks.

The basic theory of high and low pressure systems is well understood, and does a pretty good job at explaining where wind comes from, at least in Theory. Surface winds in the northern hemisphere circulate clockwise and diverge around an area of high pressure, and circulate counter-clockwise and converge around low pressure, the so-called gradient winds. The prevailing Trades, for example, result from the pressure gradient between the highs that lie around 30-40° north or south, and lower pressure near the equator.

In Practice, however, things aren't so simple. At each air mass boundary, there is a change of air density due to a difference in temperature and moisture content. Air masses are always moving, propelled by the rotation of the earth, and will be either converging or diverging at their boundaries. Divergence is a pretty benign phenomenon, and is associated with an area or ridge of high pressure, sinking upper-level air that subsides to the surface. This air becomes drier as it subsides and warms.

A convergence, on the other hand, involves rising air in a zone of low pressure. As this warm, moist surface air rises, it cools and moisture condenses, causing a lot of vertical instability and often boisterous conditions (see Fig. 4). The best-known convergence is the ITCZ, the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone, where the North and South Tropical air masses meet in a broad area of low pressure at the equator (actually just north of same, which is the first clue that the planet is not symmetric in terms of weather).

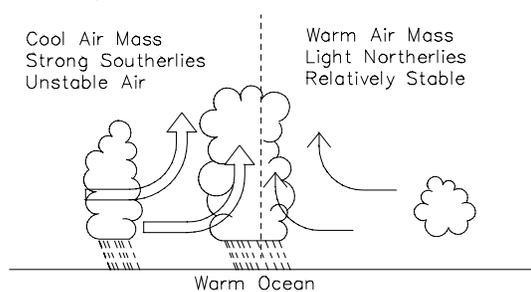


Figure 4. Anatomy of a Convergence Zone

Classic weather fronts are also converging air masses, and things get rather boisterous along these fronts, especially if the temperature differences are large. Rather than sedately mixing, the air masses interact violently, with a lot of vertical convection and instability, condensation and rain, etc. Fronts

also relate to low-pressure troughs, and the circulation of troughs and depressions starts as a shearing motion between two air masses, and the low-pressure convergence feeds the process by drawing the edges of the air masses together. This process, in spite of the instability and violence at the boundary, is stable, and will persist until the cold air mass warms up, the warm air mass cools off, or both.

“So shouldn't the temperature differences even out and make the front go away?”, Sue asked.

“I think it would,” I said, “except that the converging nature of the front keeps it going, by continually pulling in new cold and warm air and sending it aloft, so the air at the boundary never has a chance to reach equilibrium”.

“All right, I'll buy that, but how long is this stuff going to last?”, she said.

“It's hard to tell, but probably not until we sail out of it. I think it's pretty stationary, and waiting for it to go away would be pretty hopeless”, I replied. “But there's got to be more to the story, to explain why things are so boisterous”.

Vertical instability is the key to the potential boisterousness of the CZ, and has to do with the vertical temperature gradient or “lapse rate” of the atmosphere. The lapse rate describes how fast the atmosphere cools with increasing altitude. A rising pocket of air will naturally cool, due to falling pressure, and if the atmosphere cools faster aloft than the pocket of rising air does, then the rising air will be warmer than the surrounding atmosphere, causing it to rise faster yet.

Surface air over the ocean will also be quite moist, causing condensation into cloud and rain as the air rises, which slows the cooling rate (evaporation cools, condensation warms), causing the air to rise even faster. The rising air also tends to gather into cells of particularly high thermal gradient and intense activity, accounting for the bursts of especially nasty weather imbedded in areas of generally nasty weather.

This is also the mechanism responsible for isolated disturbances like squalls and thunderstorms. As cool air moves over warmer waters, for example a cold polar air mass moving into the tropics, the lower levels of the atmosphere will be warmed by the

ocean while the upper levels remain cool, increasing the lapse rate, making the atmosphere unstable, and causing the warm air at the lowest levels to start rising. Cool air over warm water is unstable, warm air over cool water is stable.

“Great”, said Sue, trying to balance her coffee against the motion of the boat, “Nice theory, but you can’t call this cold air!”

“Well, it’s all relative, and it’s certainly not as warm as it was back in the Marqueses!”

So that’s a nice theory of convergence, but the piece that kept eluding us was the answer to the question, *convergence between what?* It takes two to Tango, and all that, and a front at the edge of the cool air mass as it moved into the tropics is (relatively) easy to understand, but why does a stationary convergence zone form? That’s the question we kept asking, without success, until we found Bob McDavitt at the Auckland Met office. Bob explained that the key is the South Pacific High, the one which we dismissed earlier as being useless. This is the high that is stationary off the South American coast, and feeds a well-established easterly flow on its north side (the “Easterlies”). This air has traveled across a lot of tropical ocean by the time it gets to our part of the South Pacific, west of 140°W, and has become uniformly warm, moist and relatively stable, a classic tropical warm air mass moving westward.

As each new trough moves eastward across the Tasman from Australia, it brings a new mass of cold polar air, behind a cold front and ahead of another high. In the higher (more southern) latitudes, these fronts move pretty much due eastward, but in the more tropical latitudes, they slow, and move slowly northwards. The surface winds behind (westward of) the front are initially Southerlies in advance of the next high, and become Southeasterlies as the front moves north. Winds in advance of the front (to the east) will generally be Northerlies of some flavor. As the trailing part of the front moves north, it becomes oriented more east-west, and will eventually meet the warmer Easterlies we just talked about. This new load of cold (or at least cooler) air behind the old front will interact with the warmer air of the Easterlies to the north, forming an active convergence (see Fig. 5). The farther north

this cooler air mass drifts, the slower it goes, because the high-level Westerlies get lighter in the lower (more northerly) latitudes. The convergence becomes relatively stationary, and sits there until it is joined by the next front with a new load of cool air.

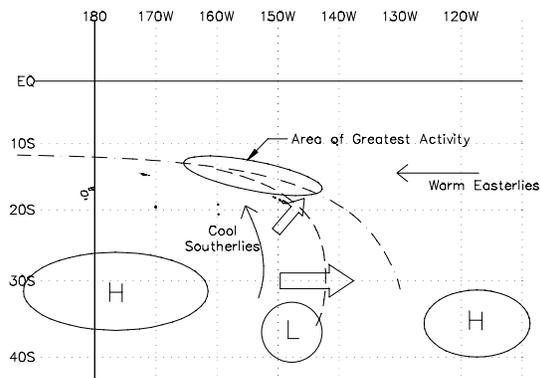


Figure 5. Convergence in Action

So the SPCZ is really just a “graveyard” for old Southern Ocean fronts. The reason they stop here, and don’t continue on to the ITCZ is that they converge with the warm Easterlies that flow from the stationary high west of Chile. The CZ will become less active when there haven’t been any fronts for a while, as the air mass behind each successive front warms up and the density difference across the CZ becomes less dramatic. In these conditions, the zone becomes more of a sheer line, with weaker Easterlies above it (to the north), and stronger East-Southeasterlies below it, but when the next front brings a new load of cooler air to ‘feed’ the CZ, it again becomes unstable and boisterous.

It’s important to remember that the SPCZ is a relatively stable Beast in the geographic sense. Once a new front meets the CZ, it starts another ‘feeding frenzy’ as the cool air gets pulled into the stationary convergence. The convergence zone will wander back and forth slowly, but has little impetus to move, and the predominate change is for it to become stronger and weaker with each new cooler air mass. The basic cycle is the 5-10 day weather period of the Southern Ocean, and for the CZ to move along to some other island group may take all season.

The SPCZ usually starts somewhere near the Solomon Islands, say 5°S 160°E, and extends eastwards to the north of Fiji, Tonga and most of the Cooks, crossing 160°W between 10 and 15°S. It then curves a little south, usually passes north of Bora Bora and

the Societies, then curves southeast between the Tuamotus and the Marqueses. This year the SPCZ was pretty active, and early in the season was pretty much where it was expected, but later in the season was farther south, and spent a lot of time over Bora Bora, Suvarrow Island in the Cooks, and Vava'u, Tonga.

“Wonderful”, Sue said, stifling another yawn, “Is it going to rain tomorrow?”

“Beats me”.

So why is there this almost universal misconception about the nature of South Pacific weather? Maybe the answer can be found in a conversation that we had sitting under the convergence zone at the Bora Bora Yacht Club, talking about the weather with some friends and waiting for the rain to stop. Sharing the table was a professional photographer, on assignment to do some travel shots of Bora Bora. The point is not what was said, which was the usual “How’ya doin’, Where’ya from?” sort of stuff, but simply that he was hanging around the bar talking to yachties instead of out in the rain taking pictures. Ever seen a picture of Bora Bora on a rainy day? We haven’t either, even amongst our own.

Weather Information Sources

In terms of getting weather information, looking out the window is of limited value, but like proper navigation or safe sex, is something that everyone ought to do. The problem is that the atmosphere in the tropics is never overly stable, and ugly towering clouds are usually just a sign of ugly towering clouds. Remember that the air on the north or east side of a disturbance will be warmer, and considerably more stable, than the approaching air mass, so the best indicator of bad weather to come is the presence of particularly nice weather, especially in the presence of a breeze that is backing (shifting north) and getting lighter. The “calm before the storm”, as Mom used to say, but nice weather can also be a sign of nice weather, so don’t be overly paranoid.

A barometer can be a help for certain kinds of disturbances. A low-pressure trough, for example, will show up as a drop of a few millibars as it approaches, coincident with a backing wind shift towards the north, which

is a pretty good indication of an approaching weather disturbance. The diurnal variation of the barometer must be accounted for, however, and the pressure will vary about three millibars twice daily, peaking at about 10AM and 10PM local time. A barometer is not helpful with respect to the Convergence Zone, however, as it is not a pressure-driven phenomena, and a barometer will show no change (other than the diurnal) even while sailing across a strong convergence.

A big problem that meteorologists have in the South Pacific is the scarcity of reliable data. There are islands everywhere, but relatively few with any sort of weather station, and few ships transit the area that are capable of observing and recording the weather. Satellite photos can be a help, as they will indicate cloud height by temperature, which can be measured from the IR photos, and can help locate fronts and convergence zones.

Reliable weather forecasts are available for the South Pacific, but they are a little hard to find, and information on the activity and location of the SPCZ is a problem. The four offices that put together forecasts for the Pacific are the U.S. National Weather Service (NWS) Hurricane Center in Florida, the NWS office in Honolulu, The Fiji Meteorological Service in Nadi (pronounced “Nandi”), Fiji, and the New Zealand Meteorological Service in Wellington. Of these, the only weather office located in the Tropics is the one in Fiji, and it’s probably not a coincidence that they seem to do the best job, but their maps and forecasts are also the hardest to get.

The French also do forecasts for the Societies, but they are useless for most of us, because the information is only available by voice in French. The beauty of fax charts are that they are independent of language, and even a text broadcast sent in Morse code can be translated with a little patience, but there’s not much hope of translating a voice broadcast.

In terms of availability, weather information and forecasts are made available either in the form of charts, or as written text. Charts are usually sent by weatherfax over the radio, but are sometimes coded as a sequence of numbers, and sent by Morse code (CW). Written forecasts are either read over SSB

radio by voice, or sent by Morse code (CW) or teletype (SITOR).

The NWS fax charts from Washington and Florida are transmitted by the Coast Guard station NMC at Point Reyes, while the Honolulu fax charts are sent from KVM70 in Honolulu. The Tropical Analysis charts from NMC Point Reyes, broadcast twice daily on fax, are the best source of information regarding the ITCZ and conditions between North America and the Marqueses.

KVM70 Honolulu covers a much broader area of the South Pacific, but their charts are of limited utility because they don't usually show fronts or convergence zones, and seem more designed to show the 'Big Picture', not very helpful when you are getting mauled by the details. Their Pacific Surface Analysis chart is hand drawn, and does show some features, while the Tropical Surface Analysis is computer-generated and harder to make sense of. Their 24 and 48 hour Surface Forecast charts are also computer-generated, and have some utility in terms of general surface winds, but again, the absence of features (fronts and CZ's) is a real limitation.

The New Zealand Met Office Surface Analysis and Forecast charts are broadcast by ZKLF in Auckland, and cover the South Pacific to 140°W, but don't provide much detail in the tropical areas. The isobar spacing is five millibars, pretty wide for the tropics where there aren't many isobars, and they don't reliably detail fronts and convergence zones in tropical waters. They sometimes show tropical disturbances, and sometimes not, so you never can tell what the absence of features on the charts means, and they don't show the position of the SPCZ on a regular basis. Interestingly, they share data and maps with the Fiji Met Service, so they've got the data. The New Zealand maps do give a good representation of fronts and disturbances to the south, however, a big help for the do-it-yourself forecasters.

As we mentioned, the best source of weather in the western South Pacific is the charts and forecasts from the Fiji Met office in Nadi. They report the position and activity of the fronts and CZ's, and draw their charts with an isobar spacing of two millibars, very helpful in the tropics where isobars are scarce. The catch is that their charts are not widely distributed, at least aside from the *Fiji Times*,

but there's a lot of us that believe that the day-old Nadi chart in the newspaper is still better than any of the available fax charts. Getting the paper can be a problem when you're offshore or in the outer islands, however.

Arnold (ZK1DB) in Rarotonga (Cook Islands) and others get the Nadi charts by phone fax, but for us yachties the only way to get the data directly is to copy the coded map transmitted by ZKLF (New Zealand) in Morse Code at 0500 and 1800Z. It comes at 18 words a minute, but isn't as hard as it sounds as it is all numbers (only 10 codes to learn). You can also copy Morse with a computer if you have a laptop and the right sort of decoder.

You will also need a decode sheet for the "IAC Fleet Code". These are included in the *Admiralty List of Radio Signals*, an otherwise bulky and mostly useless set of volumes, and from some Weather Service or Met offices. We used to copy and draw coded maps in the "old days" before we had a fax (we're talking '82 here), and thought that we had seen the last of them. Imagine our surprise when we got here and discovered that the best weather source in the South Pacific was a coded map, and on Morse, no less! Don't forget your secret decoder sheets!

The other reliable source for information on the SPCZ is on Arnold's Weather Net, if you can get it. The problems are that voice is often hard to copy in general, Arnold speaks Kiwi, which is certainly easier than French but still hard for a lot of Norte Americanos, and his signal is not very strong in most areas of the Pacific. Another unfortunate happenstance is that he comes on the same time as the warm-up session of the Pacific Maritime Net, a popular ham net only 5 kHz away, and it is quite common for someone in a busy anchorage to check into the net, wiping out Arnold's forecast for the immediate vicinity. Unfortunate, but that's life.

This past season the coded map was copied and deciphered every day by Peter and "the Lovely Christina" on *Wild Spirit*, who pass along the weather each morning on the "Comedy Net", an informal 40 meter Ham Net that got started in French Polynesia. This was a great service, and hopefully will continue next year.

Most South Pacific weather comes across Australia, and copying the surface charts from Melbourne (AXM) can be a help, especially for planning a crossing to New Zealand. They transmit surface analysis charts four times daily, plus prognosis (prog) charts, and an especially nice prog chart at 00Z that overlays the high-level contours to provide a sense of relative motion.

Voice or text broadcasts can also be useful, and often contain interpretations not contained on the fax charts, but they are harder to find. The Nadi Met office is the source for a text forecast broadcast on CW (Morse code) by ZKLF from Auckland at 0920Z and 2120Z (as well as the coded maps mentioned above). NMO Honolulu broadcasts voice and SITOR (telex) forecasts, which give the position of the ITCZ, but little else of value. There are no other SITOR broadcasts in the South Pacific, but Fiji and New Zealand do broadcast weather on SSB (voice).

Some computer-type fax decoders can also decode Morse code and SITOR, but often have trouble with Morse. As an aside, KMI transmits their traffic list continuously on SITOR on 8429.3 and 12627.8 kHz (as well as others, copy long enough and you'll get all the frequencies). It's an easy way to check for messages.

What we would recommend is to use NMC's Tropical Analysis and KVM70's Pacific Surface Analysis charts to get you to the Marqueses, continue to watch the KVM70 charts as far as, say, the Cooks or maybe Tonga, and start watching the ZKLF charts for the Southwest Pacific when you can copy them (maybe in the Societies). Decoding at least the part of the Nadi chart that deals with fronts and the SPCZ will also be important if you want to avoid tangling with that little hummer.

Sailing Strategies

So the weather reports will tell us generally where the SPCZ is, and roughly how active it is. We also know that troughs and their associated fronts don't dissipate quickly in the tropics, and we need to remember that they are there, even after the weather service stops drawing them on the

charts. Can we avoid the bad weather? Maybe, if we're willing to be a little flexible.

The key is to avoid being in the wrong place at the wrong time, specifically in the vicinity of the convergence zone when a new load of cool air comes rolling in. If the CZ is in the neighborhood, and looks like it will stay, then don't hang around waiting for something Really Bad to happen, but go elsewhere. Time your passages for a period of minimum activity, and then put some miles between yourself and The Beast.

If you're going to hang out in CZ territory, then a protected anchorage is important, especially protection from the south. Remember that a northerly shift is common as a disturbance approaches, and don't be quick to abandon an anchorage protected from the south just because it is a little exposed to the north. Finding a good anchorage in the Tuamotus can be a problem, because of the shape of the atolls, and because the group lies near the usual haunt of the SPCZ.

An anchorage off a motu that offers good protection in an Easterly will not be so attractive if the wind goes south, and most of the atolls are big enough to offer plenty of fetch to develop a nasty swell. You won't see the three-or-four meter ocean swells you would outside, to be sure, but a meter of steep chop is more than enough to wreck your ground tackle, especially when the chain is hooked up short under a coral head with a reef at your back.

If you think there is potential for a disturbance, try to choose an anchorage protected from the southwest through the southeast, even if it's a little uncomfortable in a light Northeasterly. The potential for strong Southerlies is a lot higher than that for a strong North-anything. Remember that a disturbance will be heralded by a strong wind from a new direction, which will almost invariably wrap the anchor chain around a coral head before it pulls tight and off the bottom, which will leave you well-secured, but with a very short scope. The best thing to do, rather than trying to unwrap it in a blow, is simply let out more chain, and rig a nylon snubber to take the shock loads, or maybe one of those rubber dock-line snubbers. If you wind up with the reef at your back, consider going elsewhere if there is enough daylight left to navigate the coral. Sometimes going

out through the pass, and waiting it out on the outside (in the lee of the atoll) is the best answer.

If you get caught by a trough or a strong convergence offshore, you've got to sail away from it, and not heave to and wait for it to move away from you. Remember that The Beast can be deceptively slow-moving in spite of its general boisterousness, and if you choose to wait, you might wait a very long time. Running off is equally useless, because the converging nature of the winds will send you right down the axis of the convergence. Worse, by staying with the convergence, you are almost guaranteed to get pasted by one of the Truly Nasty Cells that get imbedded in the unstable tropical air.

The only sailing strategy that makes sense is to put as many miles as you can between yourself and the convergence, and that generally requires making good distance to the south. Sailing above a beam reach is usually required to make good any distance from the convergence, and the higher you can sail, the faster life will get better, although it will be a little sloppy in the meantime. A boat with too much windage and too little keel for her load will have a very hard time making much progress to windward, but there's no other way, so give it your best shot.

The Bottom Line

So, on the whole, just how goofy is the South Pacific Weather? That's a tough question to answer, because it depends a lot on individual expectations. Most of the time it was lovely, classic tropical weather. In the vicinity of the convergence zone, however, it was unsettled, and periodically rained quite a bit, sometimes for days, which everyone got a little tired of. The occasions when it got downright boisterous were more rare, but everyone got caught out in it at least once. In only a few cases did anybody have problems, as most boats are well-equipped to deal with heavy weather.

Was this a normal year, weather-wise? Probably not, but what's normal anymore? The Weather Gurus say that we are still in an El Niño pattern, albeit a weak one, for something like the third year running. The occurrence of an El Niño doesn't alter the basic weather mechanisms of the South

Pacific, but any change in sea temperature will have an effect, good or bad, on the general activity level of the tropics.

Would we sail the South Pacific again? Yes, absolutely. We had done a careful job of preparing the boat, without really knowing why, other than it is the right thing to do. We now know why, and wouldn't do anything different, other than plan to be a little more flexible with respect to places and schedules. It's been such an incredible experience, being among relatively isolated places and cultures so different from our own, that a few hassles with the weather seem minor by comparison. Those who would venture unprepared, however, would likely find more than hassles.

Selected Weather Fax Charts

Station	Frequencies ¹	Product	Time (UTC)
NMC (Pt. Reyes)	4346 8682 12730 17151.2 22528.9	Surface Analysis ²	0526, 1730, 2345
		Tropical Analysis	1719, 2334
		500 mb Analysis	2056
		Schedule	2019
KVM70 (Honolulu)	9982.5 11090 16135 23331.5	Pacific Surface Analysis ³	0017, 0617, 1217, 1817
		Tropical Surface Analysis ⁴	0041, 0641, 1241, 1841
		24 hr Surface Forecast ⁴	1306
		48 hr Surface Forecast ⁴	1328
		Schedule	2333, 0533, 1133, 1733
ZKLF (New Zealand)	5807 9459 13550.5 16340.1	Surface Analysis (S.W. Pacific)	0315, 1515
		Surface Prog (S.W. Pacific)	1600, 2345
		500mb Prog (wind field & temp)	0745, 2045
		Surface Analysis (waters around NZ)	0300, 0800, 1500, 2000
		Schedule	0445, 1645
AXM (Melbourne)	5100 11030 13920 20469	Surface prog plus hi-level flow	0000
		Surface Analysis	0215, 0815, 1430, 2015
		Schedule, Frequencies	0115, 0130

Selected Text or Voice Weather Broadcasts

Station	Frequencies ⁵	Product	Time (UTC)
ZKLF (CW) (New Zealand)	5806.6 9458.6 13550.1 16339.7	Tropical Analysis (CW IAC coded map) ⁶	0500, 1800
		Tropical Situation and F'cast (CW text) ⁶	0920, 2120
NMO (SITOR) Honolulu	8414.8 ⁷ 12577.3 22374.3	Pacific Weather and Forecast (ITCZ and significant weather ⁸ only for the tropics)	0430, 0730, 1230, 2030
NMO (SSB) Honolulu	6501 ⁹ 8764 13089	Same as above	0545, 1145, 1745, 2345
Arnold, ZK1DB (Ham SSB)	14318	South Pacific Weather Net	0400

¹Assigned frequency shown in kHz (appropriate for most integrated fax printers). For an independent receiver subtract 1.9 kHz for the carrier frequency. Frequencies should be considered approximate, and may need to be adjusted a few tenths depending on equipment.

²Northern Pacific to 30°N; Marginally useful for the tropics north of the ITCZ.

³Hand-drawn, shows major fronts only, sent a few minutes later than times shown.

⁴Computer-generated, no fronts shown, sent a few minutes later than times shown.

⁵Frequencies are nominal, and will vary a few tenths depending on the receiver type.

⁶Originates from the Fiji Met Office in Nadi, and transmitted by ZKLF at 18 wpm.

⁷Nominal frequency, typically tuned 0.5 kHz lower.

⁸Remember that 'Significant Weather' in the tropics means things like hurricanes, at least in the minds of most meteorologists.

⁹Times and frequencies as published, but not verified.

New Zealand

No matter how nice the beaches, nor how hospitable the locals, there will come a time when you will want to head for higher latitudes. If not for cyclones, then maybe for a good dose of "civilization" and a reminder of what cruising is all about.

So just how do you get to New Zealand without getting pasted? Good question, and the short answer is that you can't. But a worthy goal is to avoid getting pasted twice. The problem is that the weather fronts cross New Zealand every 7 or 8 days, but the northern end of the front trails behind as the front moves east. So the fronts are effectively moving north as you head south. The farther south you are, the earlier you will see the front and the more boisterous it will be. So take your licks early, and try like heck not to get pasted near the end of the trip.

As an example, if you think it will take you 7 days to make the 1,000-mile trip from Fiji to the Bay of Islands, then depart Fiji maybe a day before New Zealand gets pasted by a cold front. You will meet that one enroute, hopefully about 25S where it has lost most of its potency, and with any luck you will arrive in the Bay of Islands a day before the next front arrives. If you think your trip will take 8 or 9 days, then lead the front's arrival across NZ by an extra day or two.

Having said all that, we now need to point out that it's a nice theory, but rarely works out as neatly in practice. The weather around NZ is notoriously unpredictable, and sometimes a weather front follows another in 5 days, sometimes two weeks. But if you catch a stable pattern, it works like a charm and we haven't got anything better to offer.

Don't get fooled into departing on a baby front, a classic fake, only to be nailed by the big one a few days later. Watching the upper air charts can also be a big help, but that's a lot like reading tea leaves and we'll have to leave it for some other time.

The other thing that sometimes happens around New Zealand is that a high will get blocked, and stop dead in its tracks for a week or 10 days. If this

happens east of New Zealand, then you would have Northerlies into New Zealand, and would be loving life. Highs tend to get blocked west of New Zealand, however, and strong southerly-quarter winds can prevail for a week or more. This means sailing close-hauled in 20-25 knots of wind, ugly and not much fun, but something that you really ought to be able to do.

Watch the Aussie weather charts (station AXM) for the weather crossing Australia, and try to get some New Zealand weather off the SSB. We are sad to report that Keri Keri Radio is off the air due to health problems, but you can get local NZ forecasts and a sense for what is happening in Kiwiland from Taupo Radio.

There are three ports of entry into the northern part of New Zealand, Opuia in the Bay of Islands, Whangerei, and Auckland. Opuia is the farthest north and is the most popular, but Auckland has the advantage of no check-in fees. Both Opuia and Whangerei charge for clearance, for the use of the dock and disposal of all of the stuff that MAF (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries) will take off of you.

Getting checked into New Zealand is pretty straightforward, but customs is definitely more rigorous than in most of the islands. A visa is not required for New Zealand, but getting a multiple-entry visa before you go will save standing in some long lines trying to get an extension for the three months granted on entry. Most airlines will also require a visa in advance before returning you to New Zealand on the second half of a round-trip ticket... without a visa, you have to show proof of onward travel, and the airlines just don't seem to understand that it is possible to leave an island by sailboat.

The tribulations of getting through the Ag inspection are well known. The no-no list is long, and includes fresh fruit and veggies of any sort (including popcorn), most dairy products and meat or meat products, honey, and pretty much anything else. US or NZ-canned meat products are OK, as is fresh or frozen ocean fish. Home-canned food is not allowed, no matter what. The best way to expedite the inspection is to have everything

organized and tidy and easily accessible.

Cats and dogs are, of course, a special problem in New Zealand. The country is free of rabies, and they don't put much stock in these fancy new vaccines, so if you have a pet aboard then your style will be severely cramped. You can keep the animal aboard if you agree to the terms of quarantine, which dictate that you must stay at anchor or on a mooring, not at a dock. You will also have to pay for the costs of a weekly inspection by an MAF officer. In town, this amounts to the better part of a thousand bucks a month, which can be shared among multiple boats.

Cruising with a pet aboard is really out of the question, because you would need to fly the MAF officer to each remote anchorage. So most "Cat Boats" wind up on the pile moorings in Whangerei and share the cost of the inspection, but a better option might be to leave Muffy at home.

New Zealand is a wonderful country for sailors. The first place you will likely see, the Bay of Islands, is a world-class cruising area, and lots folks stop right there. But if you yearn for the bright lights of town, you will need to look elsewhere.

Whangarei is much more metropolitan, and usually has a large number of fore-and-aft pile moorings in the town basin available for foreign boats. You can get pretty much anything you need in Whangerei, and there is an excellent haulout yard at Docklands Five. The only problem is that the immediate cruising area is not very scenic, and doesn't lend itself to daysailing or local cruising.

A few cruisers wander south to Tauranga on the Bay of Plenty, or Nelson in the Marlborough Sounds (north end of the South Island). These areas are all small-town environments, and getting around without a car is not a problem and you can hang out pretty cheaply.

Our favorite area was Auckland, all the bright lights of a big city located right in the middle of a fabulous cruising area, the Hauraki Gulf. There are plenty of marina slips available, and the popular spots are Westhaven Marina in

Auckland proper, Gulf Harbor, a rapidly developing area on the Whangaporoa Peninsula about 30-minutes (by car) north of town, and Westpark, up the river and about 30 minutes west of town.

Auckland is pretty spread out and doesn't have much of a public transportation system, so most cruisers who hang out in Auckland for the season pick up a car. It sounds extravagant, but there are no transfer taxes on buying and selling cars in N.Z., so short-term ownership makes a lot more sense than it does in California. Shop carefully and stick to the more popular cars... they cost a bit more initially but are a lot easier to sell at the end of the season. There are a lot of places to buy, but the option that seems to work the best is to visit the weekend car fairs.

There are plenty of boat services of all descriptions available in New Zealand, although with the current exchange rate things aren't the bargain that they were a few years ago. And we do need to point out that there are also just as many flakes in the business in NZ as anywhere else, so it pays to check around carefully. One shop that we can recommend without hesitation is Quality Stainless in Auckland. They do first-rate stainless fabrication (including really trick stainless icebox liners with integral cold plates) and also do a good job servicing marine refrigeration.

New Zealand offers some wonderful cruising, and it is a real mistake to just hang out in a marina waiting for the end of cyclone season. The definitive cruising guide is put out by the Royal Akarana Yacht Club, and is available on most N.Z. yachting bookshelves. Special areas (from the north) include the Bay of Islands, Kawau Island, Great Barrier Island, the Coromandel Peninsula and the islands in the Hauraki Gulf. That gets you to Auckland, and there's heaps more to the south.

Heading further south, it takes some hard sailing to get past East Cape, and many Kiwis headed for Cook Strait (between North and South Island) prefer to sail around North Cape to the west coast before heading south. Cook Strait has a nasty reputation, well deserved, and is usually blowing a gale either from the east or west. The only

other state is dead calm, and that is how we caught it.

Fiordland is a magical place, but is near the south end of South Island and more than a bit challenging to get to. For the adventurous, it does work in nicely with a trip to Stewart Island, and approaching Stewart from the west is a lot easier than fighting the Westerlies from the east side.

There is also a lot of land touring to be done in New Zealand. If you have a car then driving is the obvious choice. Rental cars and caravans (campers) are readily available but fairly expensive, and the intercity trains are a good option. Motels and B&B's are quite reasonably priced by U.S. standards, and nearly all motel rooms come with breakfast or a kitchenette.

Departing NZ for the islands is an easier proposition than getting there, as the area of the worst weather comes at the beginning of the trip, when the forecasts are fresh. The cyclone season officially ends at the end of April, but the tropical weather can still be pretty unstable and delaying an extra week or two won't hurt a bit. A cyclone during May is unlikely but possible, and if you believe the Met Service, the odds of a May cyclone are statistically increasing. Could be global warming, but even a moderate depression can pack a lot of wind at 25 or 30S.

Remember the relationship between isobars, wind and latitude, and a depression in the tropics that looks pretty benign on the weather charts – at least compared to the monsters in the southern ocean – can still be real trouble. Harry on *Whalesong* – a long-time South Pacific weather guru – thinks that most folks depart NZ too soon and advises waiting until June. It's good advice, but few people take it because it is getting pretty cold in NZ by late May, and the islands look awfully attractive.

No discussion of a passage from New Zealand to the islands would be complete without some retrospective on the Queens Birthday Storm of June 4, 1994. Lots of blame has been placed on the Met Service, the sailors, the boats, the organizers of the Tonga Regatta, everybody but God. But it was clearly His doing, unless you go with Diviana's theory of Etherians from the Seventh Realm.

That storm was a cold extra-tropical cyclone, not a heat-driven tropical cyclone, but for those that were in the middle of it the difference is moot. And it occurred a full month after the official end of the tropical cyclone season so you can't blame the timing.

Neither is there comfort to be found in the types of boats lost, no matter what your prejudices. Losses included monohulls and catamarans, short boats and long, full keels and fins, pretty much a cross-section of who was out there.

What about the weather forecasts? The earliest signs of storm development didn't come until late Wednesday, and the message didn't really get out until Thursday or Friday (the shit hit the fan on Saturday). There was a pretty deep upper-level trough that turned out to be the trigger, but it is not the nature of weather services to say things like "Increased possibility of cyclonic development towards the end of the week". But that's the best that could have been said, even with the power of the retrospectroscope.

So take the time to learn something about weather forecasting, watch the fax charts, and pay attention to what happens in the upper levels, as it is the key to most of the ugly surface weather. Then hope for the best and go like hell.

Australia

The other option for a Cyclone Break is a tour of Australia, and there are some definite advantages over sailing to New Zealand. The weather enroute will be much nicer, as you will be in the trades for pretty much the entire trip, and you will be far enough west to miss most of the Tasman cold fronts – they can't make it across the Aussie outback, but move east and north from the bottom of Australia.

There are also some really nice reef anchorages to stop at along the way, and with decent weather you can break the trip into two or three 500-mile hops. Chesterfield Reef is a popular stopping point (east side behind "Anchorage Islet"), and Huon Island, north of New Caledonia, is a beautiful stop for those coming from Vanuatu. Both of these places belong to the French, and Huon is seriously off-limits as a marine preserve, so keep that in mind.

Any of these small uninhabited reef islands are fragile environments, so if you do stop, remember that you don't

belong there, ecologically speaking. Try very hard to leave no trace of your passing. These places are so pristine that we feel bad about even leaving footprints.

But the downside to heading for Australia comes if you plan to return to Tonga or Fiji the following season. It will be pay-back time for all of that beautiful sailing, but if you make a few stops along the way and play the wind shifts, it can be a pretty nice sail.

The one aspect of Australian coastal sailing that isn't so nice is the thunderstorm activity. It's an East Coast phenomenon, and when the warm continental air mass meets a cold front at the water's edge, things can get black and ugly real fast.

Avoid thunderstorms when you can, and that's also why we would recommend making landfall in Bundaberg or Brisbane before heading south (if that is your plan). Not that there aren't thunderstorms in Brisbane, there are plenty, but once you've landed on the coast and checked in with customs, then you have the option of holing up and waiting for settled weather.

Both Bundaberg and Brisbane are popular check-in points, and the drill is pretty much the same as in New Zealand. There is a charge for the Ag inspection, a flat rate of about \$65 (US\$50) unless things get really out of hand. The Ag inspection in Australia is a bit more rigorous than in NZ. Don't get upset when the inspector asks to look in all of your cupboards, he isn't picking on you, it's just the way the inspections go. Just smile, and ask him lots of questions about Australia and you'll get on like gangbusters.

And don't forget your visa. It's not just a matter of convenience or avoiding long lines, you can't get into Australia without one. A visa can be obtained in two or three days from any Australian consulate, but a one-year visa starts running upon issue, not entry, so don't plan too far ahead.

Bundaberg is a sugar town and home of Bundy Rum, really a neat place. Heading south to Brisbane means either sailing around Breaksea Spit, every bit as attractive as its name, or winding through the Great Sandy Straits inside of Fraser Island. Depths are not a problem in the Strait, even for our 8½ feet, but the sandflies are definitely something to be reckoned

with. These are the dreaded biting no-see-ums of Marqueses fame, 6,000 miles late. They go right through the screens, and chemical warfare is the only answer. So don't forget to restock when the Ag folks take away your non-Aussie-approved bug spray.

Brisbane is a major cruiser hangout, and was jammed with overseas boats this year, probably a result of many cruisers boycotting New Zealand over the Section 21 fiasco. A few folks head up the river to Brisbane proper, and there is a good (although small) marina at Dockside. But most folks find a slip in Manly Harbor, just south of the entrance to the Brisbane River. There are a number of marinas there, the most popular being the Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron.

But there were too many foreign yachties in Brisbane to suit us, and we wanted to meet more of the locals. So we headed south to Mooloolaba, a great little resort town with a couple of nice harbors. Next stop was Coff's Harbor, also a real nice spot, and then another overnight hop to Broken Bay, just north of Port Jackson (Sydney Harbor).

This last was a particularly memorable sail. The forecast was north 10-15, and we set the spinnaker in about 8 knots of wind as we left Coff's. It was a lovely sail, and by mid-afternoon the wind was up to 20 knots (true). We changed to the 1.5 oz spinnaker, just having the greatest time and staying well ahead of an Ian Murray 45-footer that was headed for Sydney for the Hobart Race. By dusk it was blowing 25, and we hand-steered a while, figuring it was the last gasp of the northeast sea-breeze before dark. By oh-dark-thirty it was up to 30 knots, and we socked the kite and carried on under main alone as it built to 40+ knots overnight. The forecast was still 15-20, of course.

When we got to Broken Bay, we finally found what we were looking for, a beautiful countryside, mostly national park, with small inlets and bays everywhere, lots of goofy birds, and only a handful of Yanks. (We have nothing against Yanks, you understand, it's just that we see plenty of them). There are plenty of good spots to anchor, but empty moorings are everywhere, at least until the summer Christmas Holidays.

The rule in Australia regarding moorings is simple: If it's empty, take it, and if the owner comes around, then take another. Nobody gets uptight, and those that do paint all sorts of threats on their mooring float. There are also a number of Park Service moorings, no charge but 24 hours maximum stay (we interpreted that to be per mooring). Most of the moorings seem to be in good shape, but you never know for sure.

Australia is a fascinating country, and we have barely scratched the surface. It is as big as the States, yet home to only 18 million people. It is much less sailing-oriented than New Zealand, however, and the facilities for visiting yachts around Sydney leave a bit to be desired. Queensland sees a lot of visiting yachts and is better equipped, but it gets pretty warm and humid up there during the summertime, too warm for us.

Sydney has been fascinating with more things going on than you will ever have time for. The public transportation in most large cities in Australia has been well thought out and you can actually get where you want to go in Sydney via bus, ferry or a train. Most grocery stores deliver, as do many other businesses, so not having a car is not the hardship that it is in New Zealand.

Finding a marina or a good anchorage in Sydney harbor can be a challenge. Most of the marinas you see are attached to yacht clubs and don't have much room for visiting yachts. There are two private marinas run by d'Albora, one in Rushcutters Bay and the other in Middle Harbor, as well as Cammeray Marina in Middle Harbor, all with room for visiting foreign yachts. These marinas, however, are expensive, even by U.S. standards. The anchorages are limited by the numerous mooring bouys scattered chockablock throughout most of the area. There is one anchorage in Sydney Harbor, Balls Head Bay, that is reserved exclusively for visiting yachts and other anchorages can be found with just a little bit of exploring.

Australia is a great country for land touring, in fact there is a lot that you just can't get to by poking around the edges. Melbourne and Adelaide are great cities by any standard, and for wine lovers, the Barossa and Hunter valleys are a New Jerusalem .

The beaches in Australia are marvelous, stretching for miles. In the popular places, like Surfer's Paradise, there is a discordant backdrop of high-rise vacation apartments, just like Miami Beach.

But it is on the west coast that we found the really fabulous beaches. Miles of unbroken white sand, very few people, hot and dry in the morning with a light offshore breeze, then turning cooler in the afternoon as the seabreeze picked up, dropping the temperature to a comfortable 80. This was in late February, late summer... much earlier and Fremantle's famous "Doctor" will blow you right back up into the parking lot.

If you do make the side trip to Perth and Fremantle, check into taking the Indian Pacific train at least one direction. It is one of the world's great trains, and cuts right across the outback where there's not even a road for company. Nowhere else in the world are you likely to get a look at so much empty countryside, at least not without sitting for weeks on a camel.

But back to sailing. The east coast of Australia stretches from 10S at Cape York in the north, to 40S at the south end. That's a lot of coast, and a climate that goes from Mexico to Alaska. Save the northern part of the coast for wintertime, as that will be the dry season in the tropics as well as the off season for some of the creatures like the Box Jellyfish.

There are two definitive cruising guides to this coast, both by Alan Lucas, "Cruising the Coral Coast" and "Cruising the New South Wales Coast". You can purchase them at any chandlery, so pick them up at your first stop.

Except for Broken Bay, there are not many opportunities for gunkholing along the coast until you get down to Tasmania. That means crossing Bass Straits, but it's only 250 miles from shelter to shelter and even a short weather window will do. The folks doing the Sydney-Hobart get beat up more often than not, but they pick their departure date from a calendar and you won't want to do that. Tasmania gets few visitors, and everyone who makes it down there raves about the cruising.

One Last Thought

We recently had another lesson on the proper use of the English language

from an Aussie friend. We were riding the train from Perth across the outback, and it went sort of like this:

"You Yanks", says he, "Always talking about bunches! Bunches of this, bunches of that! 'Bunches' are grapes, all connected together. The proper word is 'Heaps!'"

"Well, what about that bunch of Kangaroos over there," we said, "Certainly there's not enough to be 'Heaps', couldn't we call them a 'Bunch'?"

"Naw, them's a mob!"

There are certainly heaps of cruisers in the Pacific, and quite a few bunches, also. All connected like grapes. There's nothing wrong with cruising in company, and we've made a number of life-long friends that way.

But in places where there is an opportunity to get to know the local people, like the outer islands of Fiji or even New Zealand and Australia, leave the bunch behind and do some sailing on your own. It is a lot of fun to get together with other cruisers and swap stories, and in fact it is hard to be with other cruisers and not start swapping cruising stories. But as long as a bunch of you sit around talking about sailing, you won't learn a thing about anybody else.

So if you really want to learn something about how other people live, spread out, and go places where others aren't. There will be plenty of time in Musket Cove for drinking beer and visiting with your bunch.

Enjoy!

The Heart-Chart

	New Zealand	Australia
Friendly Natives	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Scenery	♥♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥♥
Hiking	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Snorkeling/Diving	♥♥	♥♥♥
Crafts	♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Beaches	♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥♥
Day Sailing	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Anchorage	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Provisioning	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥♥
Diesel	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Propane	♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥♥
Officials	♥♥♥	♥♥♥

Beyond the Milk Run, Part I (Sydney to Singapore) **Heart of Gold**

Jim and Sue Corenman

With a thousand miles of coastline it's not the easiest thing to figure out where to spend a summer on the East coast of Australia. Brisbane is immensely popular with cruising yachties, but at 20 degrees latitude, it's a bit like summer in the tropics, hot and sticky. The winds on the East coast mostly blow from the north in the (southern) spring and from the south in the fall, so the notion of heading south is attractive and the bright lights of Sydney beckon.

Most cruisers check in at Bundaberg or Brisbane, and both are relatively painless provided you are prepared for the rigorous quarantine inspection. We chose Bundaberg in order to save the trip across Morton Bay and back, and spent a delightful week up the river in downtown Bundaberg at the Midtown Marina. Bundaberg is a nifty little city, and the home of Bundaberg Rum, a dubious distinction. Other November highlights were watching the Melbourne Cup at the RSL Club, and the daily afternoon thunderstorms.

Those springtime thunderstorms can be a lot more than mere entertainment for those caught offshore, and we know of a few sailors that have gotten mauled while heading for ports further south. The best advice for those headed south would be to make landfall first at Bundaberg or Brisbane, then harbor-hop south watching the weather.

South of Bundaberg the major stops are Mooloolaba, Brisbane, Southport, Coff's Harbor, and Pittwater/Broken Bay, with lots of other opportunities for harbor-hopping in between. The definitive guides for the East Coast are those by Alan Lucas, one each for Queensland, New South Wales, and the Sydney area. There are hundreds of harbors described, but most fall into the "quaint" category, small fishing-boat harbors with bars across their entrances much like the coasts of Washington and Oregon and too shallow for many boats.

Our last leg from Coff's Harbor to Broken Bay was the only one that seemed adventurous, 45 knots from the north and surfing downwind under a reefed main alone, pounding into a long swell from the south made steeper by the 3-knot current in our favor. But whatever

we thought of that weather at the time, we later realized it was merely being charming.

Bundaberg, Mooloolaba, and Coff's Harbor were all great little coastal beach towns, full of friendly people, locals and cruisers alike. We passed Brisbane by, as it was full to the brim with foreign yachties.

Sydney was a delight, a big city (four million) that didn't feel big, very cosmopolitan and with a transportation system that actually worked. The boating facilities to visitors in Sydney Harbor proper are pretty grim, however, and the options for anchoring out are limited. The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia has a big marina in town, but slips are only available in December for those doing the Sydney-Hobart. Definitely not worth it. Don't misunderstand, Tasmania is wonderful by all accounts, but crossing Bass Strait with no regard for the weather is simply nuts.

Broken Bay is just north of Sydney Harbor, a collection of long skinny bays reminiscent of the Northwest and a delightful cruising area. The first bay on the left is Pittwater with a few marinas, the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club, and about half a million moorings. But again, not a lot to offer the visitor looking for a marina slip. We wound up in Sydney Harbor at d'Albora's Marina in Middle Harbor, one of only three or four marinas offering transient slips. The bus stopped right out front which made it easy to get around.

There is no shortage of amusements in the Sydney area, starting with the month-long Sydney Festival in January, a real overdose of culture of all types. We also had a chance to do some land-touring, the highlight being our trip to Perth and Fremantle, out by air and then back to Sydney on the Indian Pacific train across the Nullarbor Plain of southern Australia. It was a great trip, through beautiful and very desolate country. We even had a few days in Adelaide which we spent sipping wine in the Barossa Valley, Australia's premiere red wine area, with a casual ambiance (and prices) that haven't been seen in Napa for two decades.

Other amusements in the Sydney area include the Blue Mountains, a

series of impressive canyons and some really excellent hiking that can be reached in two hours on the Sydney commuter train. The Sydney Harbor ferryboats are also fun, and an easy way to see Sydney from the water. This is especially true on weekends, when everyone is on the water and you can enjoy not being a victim of the ferry's absolute right-of-way.

Up the East Coast

The change in the seasons comes quickly to the East Coast, and we lingered about two weeks too long before heading north. It was a classic ruse on the part of the wind gods, and we fell for it as we enjoyed the beautiful April autumn weather exploring Broken Bay. It is a beautiful area, mostly national park, and virtually deserted during the week and late in the season.

The first leg up the coast is an overnighter to Coff's Harbor. We departed with a good forecast, then watched it turn windy and rainy for the rest of the trip, but at least the wind was behind us. Coff's is a good place to hole up for a few days, and we departed on the last day of April, again on another good but short-lived forecast. This time it was a more serious problem, a deep tropical depression that popped up on the Queensland coast to the north and started towards us at a good clip.

We were by then more than halfway to Southport on the Gold Coast, the next harbor with a decent entrance and good shelter, so we decided to go for it. It was a fast but bumpy trip with 30 knots on the beam, with the shallow water kicking up rough seas. The Southport Seaway is an impressive channel, with rock jetties extending a good distance to seaward on both sides and an elaborate sand-pumping apparatus to keep it clear, but Lucas is pessimistic about the condition of the channel in any sort of heavy weather. It was mid-morning when we got there, with an onshore wind pushing 40 knots with more forecast, high tide but already ebbing.

Not encouraging, but when we called the coast watch at "Seaway Tower" they said that the sea was breaking heavily offshore opposite the

channel, but the channel itself looked OK and should be navigable for a 50-footer. His advice was to approach from the south and take a look.

It was an awesome and scary sight, endless rows of steep brown waves marching into the mist that marked the beach, with the ebb streaming out from the end of the jetties like a rocket exhaust and turning the sea into a maelstrom of breaking water for at least a mile to seaward. The seas were rolling directly into the channel, but they lost all of their energy breaking on the ebb from the Seaway, and there was nothing left when they got to the channel itself. That left a few hundred feet of smooth water between the end of the channel and the beginning of the Maelstrom, and it looked like the only problem might be making progress against the ebb. It was ebbing at 5-6 knots but we were doing about 8 knots under double-reefed main so it should be OK, right? If not, don't forget to exit south...

We put the boards in, shortened the harness tethers, fired up the engine for a little backup, told the coast watch that we were inbound, and turned left at the south jetty into the channel. Our worries about making progress against the ebb turned out to be unfounded. We were making steady progress against the ebb when Sue, looking back, said "Uh oh". A big wave had made it through the Maelstrom, a Really Big Wave that broke right behind us. It roared under (and over) the transom, the stern lifted and the bow went down, and Goldie took off at 18 knots down the channel. Wheee!

We rode that wave most of the way in, and it sure solved any problem with the ebb. We anchored off Marine World just inside the entrance, and the next four days were wild, 50 knot winds and over three feet of rain, a real gully-washer and we were very glad not to have been caught out by it (the Seaway closed for the duration a few hours after we got in). The famous beaches of Surfer's Paradise were almost completely washed out to sea by the heavy surf.

There are relatively few ports on Australia's East Coast which are worth much in that sort of adverse weather, because the shallow entrance bars break in any significant seas. Mooloolaba has traditionally been a good harbor in

almost any weather, and was our next planned stop. It was another sloppy, windy trip, but when we got there we almost got ourselves in Real Trouble. The entrance had shoaled during a previous storm, but the local coast guard volunteer said on the radio "No worries, mate, just stay to the right of the leading lights as you come in". You would think we would know better by now... We bumped the bottom, right where he said the channel was, and as soon as we had backed off, the entire entrance channel disappeared under a pair of six-foot breakers, sneaker waves from the left. We got the bow into the first, but the second caught us on the beam, fortunately pushing us away from the shoal and towards (hopefully) deeper water. That was enough, we did a fast U-turn, got the sails back up and told the coast guard that they might want to revise their advice. Gladstone was another 200 miles and 24 hours north, a safe and not completely unattractive shipping port.

Once north of Gladstone the drama quotient dropped dramatically, but the weather didn't really turn pleasant until we were well north of the Whitsunday Islands and almost to Cape York and the Torres Strait.

The Whitsundays were great, and lived up to their reputation except for the weather, still wet and windy. The marina at Hamilton Island is really first-rate and priced accordingly, but a real treat for a couple of nights out after all of the bumpy weather. There's a bit of nightlife and some very good restaurants.

There's also quite a bit of exotic wildlife around Hamilton, including a few Wallabies and great mobs of sulfur-crested cockatoos and rainbow lorikeets that make absolute pests of themselves. The cockatoos have a fondness for masthead wind cups, while the lorikeets have all developed an addiction to vanilla ice cream.

We had some absolutely wonderful sailing inside the Great Barrier Reef, jibing through the reefs with the spinnaker up in 25 knots of wind and absolutely flat seas. We never did get out to the Barrier Reef itself for any diving, the weather being what it was, but neither did we hit it, which is more than Captain Cook can say. He first discovered the Barrier Reef by running

into it at night, naming that piece of it after his poor boat, and then spent a few months in Cooktown putting things back together. This was not his favorite piece of coast either but it was fun sailing in his wake, and visiting many of the same places he explored in the 1870's. But we were sure glad to have charts and a GPS!

We passed Cairns by and spent a week in Port Douglas instead, and did all the required tourist stuff-- a tour to the rain forest, and an overnight trip to Cooktown with a rented Suzuki 4x4 up the Bloomfield Track. A stunning trip and highly recommended, but one piece of advice: 4x4's are much like boats in that there is no substitute for waterline length. So assuming a Mercedes Unimog is out of the budget, at least spring for something like a Toyota or Nissan.

In retrospect, the boats that headed north from Brisbane in late March and early April had a much better trip, weather-wise, the only problem with that program being one of pushing the end of cyclone season. But as we again discovered, tropical depressions don't have calendars so we're not sure it matters all that much.

"Over the Top"

We rounded Cape York on June 20 and sailed straight across the Gulf of Carpentaria to our next adventure, Gove Yacht Club's "Over-the-Top" Regatta. Gove Harbor is on the east side of the Australia's Northern Territory, surrounded by Aboriginal lands, and except for Gove Harbor itself closed to cruising unless you have a permit. The local town is Nhulunbuy, a mining town and the home of Gove Yacht Club, organizers of the "Over the Top" rally from Gove to Darwin. It is an interesting event, a 500 mile cruise-in-company rather than a race, two weeks of mostly short hops through the Aboriginal lands of the Top End.

Gove yacht Club itself was a delight, and reminded us very much of Kaneohe YC in Hawaii, one of our all-time favorite spots. A great place to sit and watch the sun set over the ocean, just like it is supposed to. After a week of touring the bauxite mine (red dirt that gets turned into aluminum) and checking out the local Aboriginal art shops (great stuff) we were off in the company of 35 other boats, mostly Aussies and Kiwis

with a few Yanks thrown in (but not so many as to spoil the parties).

The top end of Australia is a fascinating place. June is the middle of the dry season ("The Dry" as it is known locally), and every day was clear blue sky, not a cloud ever. It is a hard land to live in, but there is water if you know where to look and after a few tens of thousands of years the Aborigines know where to look. They were seen by the European settlers as uncivilized and lazy, and haven't integrated well with modern Australia, but it seems to us that their culture has so little in common with European culture that there is almost no basis for integration. But that's not a good topic for discussion with Aussies, and as Yanks we've certainly got no room to talk, but in any event the chance to travel through those lands was a fascinating experience.

There was a relatively short sail almost every day, with beautiful weather and about 15 knots of southeasterly wind, wonderful sailing conditions. One of the highlights about traveling by boat is that we get to do a lot of sailing, and every so often the conditions are just perfect! The whole trip across the top end was one of those times.

The club did a great job organizing everything, and there were plenty of tours, games and BBQ's to keep everyone busy. The Big Social Event before hitting Darwin was "P" night, a barbie where everyone dressed as something beginning with a "P". Prisoners, Priscilla, Police, Pimps, Parties, Pliedes, you name it, it was there.

After two weeks in the wilderness (save a few Aboriginal villages and a few dozen crazed yachties), Darwin was a bit of a culture shock. It's not a large city by any absolute standard but it's the biggest city for a thousand miles and the business center of the Northern Territory. Everything is there. And another great yacht club, Darwin Sailing Club, sponsors of the Darwin/Ambon Race and another verandah where you can sit and watch the sun sink into the sea. Day after day of perfect sunsets, thanks largely to the burning that goes on all over the Northern Territory during the Dry. We had two weeks in Darwin to take care of all of the last bits of civilization before

departing for Indonesia, and it wasn't nearly enough.

Most boats stayed behind the locks at Cullen Bay marina, another fancy development under construction and destined to be Darwin's next prestigious address. The other popular option is to drop a hook off the Sailing Club, but with 20+ foot tides there were certain logistical considerations to landing the dink on the beach, and those without wheels suffered mightily.

One of the best things about Darwin is its proximity to Kakadu, National Park and a fabulous area of native Aboriginal land. The area, in The Dry, looks kind of desert like, but there are beautiful wetland areas filled with birds of every description, crocodiles, water buffalo and wild horses. The entire area is underwater during The Wet. We spent our time exploring old rock formations with paintings depicting stories and legends, swimming in rivers (only the ones without crocodiles of course), and generally enjoying the whole area. The other great spot was Litchfield Park, close enough to Darwin to say "Hey, lets go swimming!" and spend an afternoon splashing in the natural rock pools cooling off. We really enjoyed Darwin and it was hard to contemplate leaving.

But leave we did, and on July 27 when the Australian Navy fired the deck cannon on the frigate to start the Ambon race, we were the third boat over the line (pure luck!) and on our way to Indonesia.

Darwin/Ambon

The Darwin/Ambon Race is a legendary event among cruising sailors, and we had looked forward to it for years. But now that we've done it we can't exactly remember what the attraction was. The regatta does come with a cruising permit for Indonesia, which in past years was a Big Deal but not so much anymore. Any of a number of agents can obtain a CAIT, as it is known, for less than half of the Darwin entry fee.

But it was still a great sail with about 80 boats altogether in four divisions. The serious boats were in the Racing division, comprising about 10 stripped-out Aussie raceboats all with full crews who spent a lot of time not smiling. The Cruising division was the biggest, about 40 boats which were either serious

cruisers with performance-oriented boats, or serious racers with cruising-style boats. The Rally division was for those who couldn't face the 600 miles without motoring, about 25 boats, and there was a multihull division with a half-dozen entries.

Figuring we had sailed far enough to be called serious cruisers, we signed up for the Cruising Division and enlisted Patrick Strange (of Express-27 "UXB" fame) to join us from Auckland as crew. All in all, we had a terrific sail so that is not the problem.

All 80 boats started together on a downwind start with the starboard end heavily favored. The committee boat was a big modern Aussie gunboat, and their deck cannon made an impressive starting gun. The easy start was to run the line on starboard towards the gunboat and jibe, but only a few boats did that with most of the fleet starting late on port, many obviously unsure of the rules.

The first 200 miles were the toughest, as the nice 15-knot breeze at the start faded right away to almost nothing by midnight, apparently a daily event. The trick, which nobody bothers to tell the out-of-towners, is to head for the beach on the south side of Melville and Bathurst Islands to avoid the flood and catch whatever evening offshore breeze there is.

We didn't know that either, but we were able to stay in touch with the lead boats, Australia Maid and Millennium, a couple of local raceboats, and kept the boat moving well in 2 to 5 knots of wind - Pat is really a master at light-air sailing and was a joy to have aboard. The wind finally filled in to a nice southeasterly about two days and a hundred miles north of Melville Island and we had some great times, mostly spinnaker reaching in 15 knots of wind. The multihulls had found their legs by then (they were seriously behind in the light stuff) and were the first in, and we were the third monohull, behind the same two race boats.

Ratings were another matter, and Darwin Sailing Club was using their own rating system for the Cruising class. Besides being time-on-time, which heavily favors small boats in a slow race, there were some real discrepancies with individual ratings which the committee

was disinclined to discuss either before or after the race.

The Darwin committee in general left a sour taste for many (if not most) entrants, and all of us outsiders felt very much like outsiders in a local event. The worst, perhaps, was when one particular committee member greeted the last-to-finish boat on the VHF with "It's about time you got here, we would really like to go off duty". And Welcome to Ambon.

The local Ambon committee, on the other hand, did a great job with the post-race activities and parties, perhaps the most important stuff. Ambon island is just south of Seram Island in central Indonesia and is the provincial center for Maluku. The town of Ambon has a population of about 200,000 that feels more like 5 million... busy, dirty, hectic, noisy, and dirty. You can find almost anything you need with some effort, but watch the price. There is no hesitancy to charge an exorbitant price if the customer is ignorant of the value, and the best protection is to shop around a bit.

There is no marina as such, just an anchorage off of the hotel that served as race headquarters, and the locals really turned out for the event. We moored stern-to off the beach west of the hotel, and just off a row of palapas, temporary bistros made of bamboo and blue tarps. With simple yet delicious dinners for the equivalent of \$1.50 and cold beer at \$2.00 for a quart-sized bottle, nobody cooked aboard much. And for evening entertainment there were Kareoke videos with the locals in every stall!

Ambon was our first experience in Asia, and a couple of things made a big impression. That there were lots of people and lots of trash everywhere (especially in the water) were things that we had expected, but the wide variety of sailing craft we did not. It seems like everyone in Indonesia sails. The fishermen all go about in dugout canoes with outriggers and lateen sails made from blue tarps or rice bag cloth, a polypropylene derivative that is going to replace Spectra as the cloth of choice for large cruising boats. Even the local cargo boats have at least one large gaff-rigged sail in addition to a big single-cylinder diesel. The Age of Sail is not being reborn in Indonesia, it never died.

The large number of local boats does create a bit of a problem with respect to navigation, as wooden sailboats with no radar reflectors and no lights don't show up well at night. A few overnight sails were unavoidable, eyeballs wide open, and while everybody had close-encounter stories to tell we didn't hear of any real problems.

Beyond Ambon

From Ambon, most folks sailed through the Butan Straits on the southeast corner of Sulawesi, then through the Tiger Islands to western Flores, Rinca and Komodo, along the north side of Sumbawa and Lombok to Bali. Our travels took us from Ambon through the reefs south of Sulawesi, then up to Ujung Pandang on the west side of Sulawesi, then south to Rinca.

One of the highlights of the sail to Ujung Pandang was a visit to the village of Tana Beru, on the bottom of the western arm of Sulawesi, and a well-known site for local boat building. There were literally a hundred wooden boats under construction on the beach, anywhere from 30 feet long up to almost a hundred. They are mostly coastal cargo boats with some larger fishing boats (purse seiners fishing for tuna).

The construction was unique in our experience, in that the hull is planked first, and then the frames are fitted to the inside of the hull after it is planked. Each boat starts with a keel timber, and then the hull is built up with 2" planks edge-doweled together. Planks that need to be steeply curved are first soaked in the sea, and then steam-bent by rigging up a clamp arrangement and then building a fire under it.

Once the hull has been mostly finished the frames are fitted, cut from naturally curved trunks selected to fit the particular part of the boat. The frames are typically 6" square or larger, laid in on 12-18" centers and mostly fastened just with dowels (although iron bolts were used on some of the boats). The workmanship was utility grade, but looked as strong as a tank.

From Tana Beru we wandered around the corner to Ujung Pandang, the capital city of Sulawesi. In spite of being 5 times larger than Ambon, we actually thought the pace of life was a lot more sedate, on a relative scale that is. We happened to be there for the Makassar

Regatta, which turned out to be sparsely attended (about 10 boats) but a lot of fun nonetheless. It was just a weekend affair, and not too serious, but we had a good time and took home the prize for second place, Rp500,000 (about US\$220). There goes our amateur status!

But the real attraction of UP was inland, Tana Toraja in the interior of western Sulawesi. The Toraja people have held onto much of their traditional architecture and culture, including elaborate funeral celebrations this time of year. The big trick is always finding someone to watch the boat and run the freezer daily (the anchorage was not great), and we were fortunate that some cruising buddies offered to keep an eye on things. So a group of us got together, arranged two cars and drivers, and took off on a three-day trip. It was a full day to get there with a few stops for shopping, and took us up the coast through the land of the Bugis people, which were the original "Boogie Men". We are happy to report that the Bugi's have mellowed.

Tana Toraja was beautiful, an area of green highland valleys with terraced rice paddies everywhere. We found a good inexpensive hotel and arranged a tour for the next day with the manager. He came along himself as the guide, and we spent the whole day visiting villages, grave sites, craft markets, and dropped in on a funeral celebration that was in its second day. The first two days are the reception and presentation of gifts (lots of pigs and water buffalo), the next two are the ritual slaughter of the animals and cooking and feasting, and the last day is the burial itself. Grampa, in this case, had been dead for a year while the family made preparations for and traveled to the funeral. A bit grim, but fascinating stuff.

Here be Dragons

From U.P. we headed south to the west end of Flores to visit Rinca and Komodo islands and try to see the Komodo Dragons, a goal of ours ever since we read Douglas Adams' "Last Chance to See". We expected that it would be a hard place to visit, and Adams certainly had a hard time of it, but he didn't have a boat either. As it turned out it couldn't have been easier, as there are numerous excellent anchorages around both Rinca and Komodo (the two islands where the dragons are found).

That whole area turned out to be one of our favorite parts of Indonesia.

This is another dry area, no rain for six months, and the islands look a lot like the Channel Islands off of Santa Barbara. Except that the temperature is in the 80's (water and air), the seas are calm, and they are surrounded by beautiful coral reefs. The area is a national park (which keeps the dynamite fishermen away) and we spent almost three weeks there. We got to see lots of dragons, some on a guided walk with the park rangers, and more on our own in some of the deserted anchorages.

The dragons are essentially overgrown monitor lizards, some 8' long with big teeth, but are mostly harmless. They used to feed goats to the dragons on Komodo for the benefit of the tourists, but that stopped a few years ago. In any event Rinca was our favorite, better anchorages and fewer tourists, just a handful of backpackers.

Being a National Park, there were few locals around and perhaps that was part of the attraction. Rural Indonesians don't smile a lot, and are really only friendly when they want something from you. To them, cruisers are the Great White Supply Ship, full of smokes and beer at no charge. The concept of trading doesn't compute, and we found ourselves tending to avoid contacts.

From Komodo it is easy to day-hop along the north coasts of Sumbawa and Lombok, with lots of reasonable if not great anchorages. Senggigi on the west side of Lombok, is a popular stop, a decent anchorage if a bit rilly, and a good place to organize some land touring around Lombok. The weather was very settled in this area, with local land breezes dominating the SE monsoon winds, resulting in moderate Easterlies in the morning and light Westerlies in the afternoon. Which took us to Bali, and a real dose of Civilization!

Bali

Bali is a fascinating island, and dramatically different than its neighbors only a few miles away. It is green right through the dry season, a result of the tremendous amount of water that leaks out of the crater lake all year around, and unique in Indonesia, Islam never gained a foothold and Hindu is still the dominant faith.

Whatever the reason, Bali has also become a very big tourist destination for the world, not many from the US but lots from Australia and Europe. A comment first heard in Bali but to be repeated all across Asia was "Who's minding Germany?".

Benoa Harbor is another of these places that is legendary among cruisers as being dangerous and hard to get into. Maybe at night with no charts and no GPS, but it is a reasonably well marked commercial shipping port with tankers and cruise ships coming and going at all hours. There is a marina of sorts, the Bali International Marina on the east side of the main wharf, but in spite of being only two years old is rapidly crumbling away. We anchored out instead, a good anchorage as long as things aren't too crowded (the wind and tide sometimes get together to make the boats all do a Hat Dance).

Benoa Harbor is also at one end of the runway for the airport, and the amount of air traffic is as impressive as it is annoying. Dozens of planes a day, including many 747's, delivering hoards of Aussies, Japanese and Germans to the tourist ghetto at Kuta Beach. The beach is beautiful but the place is wall to wall with souvenir shops and pushy hawkers selling condos and fake Rolexes. A real cultural experience not to be missed.

At the other end of the spectrum is Nusa Dua, the high rent district with all the big self-contained resorts, and Senur, an attractive town with some quality shops and good, quiet restaurants. But the best places were out of town, and to tour properly really requires some wheels.

Riding the taxis and bemos (jitney busses) is good training to get the lay of the town, and to work out the local driving habits. Yikes!!! Denpasar, the main commercial center of Bali, is a huge city with the traffic to match. The main streets in the city center are all one-way heading out of town (an ineffective attempt to decongest the city center), and there isn't an accurate map to be had anywhere. The favorite mode of transport for most Balinese is a small, under-powered motorcycle, often with mom, dad and a few kids astride the beast. As you drive down any street you are literally surrounded by clouds of

these scooters who think nothing of passing you on both the left and right.

After careful study, we figured out the rules (ignore traffic lights, avoid eye contact, and if a policeman whistles, wave and quickly drive off) and rented a car! Well, sort of a car, but for \$13 a day what do you expect? At least it was new. Our conclusion was that Bali traffic was about the same as Berkeley at rush hour, and it was great fun having our own wheels. We spent a lot of time getting lost and that turned out to be the most fun, and is still the only way we know to find Hero's, one of the big supermarkets.

The trips inland were really the highlight of our visit to Bali. Besides a few day trips, we spent two nights in Ubud, the art center of Bali, where we tried to further our art education by visiting eccentric artists and an excellent museum that illustrated all of the different Balinese art styles through the years. That education helped a lot as there were loads of shops trying to sell art, most of it pretty mediocre after seeing the real stuff. But like everywhere, there were good things at good prices if you looked around.

Another thing that is special about Bali is the dancing. Perhaps because there is plenty of water on Bali and the farming is pretty easy, the people have developed elaborate dances, originally to illustrate the stories in the temples. These have become entertainment in themselves, and we attended a number of dances with great costumes and masks all depicting stories from the Hindu religion.

We stayed in a wonderful small inn in Ubud called the Alam Indah, 9 rooms and just out of town. Our room had two walls of windows and looked out over terraced rice paddies. This was the Bali we had been looking for! When we got tired of sightseeing, shopping or looking at art, we could come back and go for a swim. You didn't have to go very far out of Ubud to still see rural Bali, and we drove down as many small roads as we could find and had our visual senses filled with rice paddies, ducks, temples and much more.

The island of Bali isn't all that big, and heading out for day trips turned out to be really easy. We made one trip up to Mt. Batur to see the large crater lake, the

water source for most of Bali. The water from the lake comes out in springs all around the mountain, most of which are Holy Springs with associated temples. From there it flows through myriad terraced rice paddies, and then finally down to the cities and into the harbor. Needless to say the water gets used for everything, and the farther up the mountain you live, the better off you are. Benoa Harbor was definitely the bottom of the "water chain", but not nearly so bad as other places we could mention, Ujung Pandang being one.

We also stopped at Pura Besakih to see the "Mother Temple", actually a collection of almost a hundred temples altogether. It was huge, but we were disappointed to see that the hawkers have taken over there also. It was too weird to be walking around a beautiful sight like that and have someone trying to sell you a sarong, a banana, or a drink every time you turned around.

Doing a bit of provisioning in Bali is no problem, and the grocery stores were an education in how far western civilization has come. Pringles potato chips are a big seller here, along with Doritos and Oreo cookies. But it is a lot more interesting to get into the local cuisine, and Periplus publishes some really nice regional cookbooks, "The Food of Bali" being our favorite for this area. Indonesian food in general is spicy but plain, lots of variations on fried rice, while Balinese cooking is more complex with interesting curries and sauces.

We departed Bali with little more than a week left on our 3-month Indonesian cruising permit, so it was time to boogie on up to Singapore. We sailed straight through for most of the 700-mile trip, and had a relatively uneventful passage, the Queen Mother of all thunderstorms notwithstanding. There is a new marina at Nongsa Point on Batam island, right across the strait from Singapore, one last chance at cheap beer and a good place to check out of Indonesia.

Singapore

We expected Singapore to be big and busy, but it was still a real shock to see high-rise buildings sprouting out of the ocean as we came up the channel.

The shipping around Singapore is unbelievable, but cruising boats are virtually forgotten. We took a slip at the

Ponggol Point marina, a new one that was still under construction, pretty "rustic" and a long bus ride from downtown but at a reasonable price. The other choices were Sabina Cove across Johor Strait in Malaysia, pleasant and reasonably priced but even farther from downtown Singapore, and Raffle's, an upscale marina on the west side of Singapore. A few moorings are available at Changi Sailing Club but they are no longer very hospitable. Anchorage is still available at the end of Johor Strait near the causeway on the Malaysian side, but there is virtually nothing left on the Singapore side.

Singapore is a busy, hectic place and whatever bargains there may have once been are long gone. But we caught up with our friends Steffen and Maryan, who sailed with us in the Gove Over-the-Top cruise in Aus, and their hospitality was a welcome delight.

For a predominately Bhudist country, Singapore really gets into the Christmas spirit. Every square inch of space downtown was getting decorated starting in late October, and they are very proud to call themselves the most decorated city in the world. We thought it was a good incentive to leave.

Actually the highlight of our Singapore visit was leaving for a week-long trip to Thailand. It is not always easy to find a secure place to leave the boat for a trip inland, so we took the opportunity and rode the Eastern and Orient Express from Singapore to Bangkok, Thailand. The E&O Express is the Asian brother to the Simplon Orient Express in Europe, and was a wonderful trip. It is a very luxurious train through some beautiful country, and the service and food were fabulous. It was stupid-expensive but we're really glad we did the trip.

We spent a few days at the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok just to completely spoil ourselves, and wound up staying an extra day to see the King's Royal Barge Trip down the river to deliver new robes to the monks at the Temple of the Dawn. We had just finished reading "Bangkok Secret" and it was wonderful to see the river procession in real life. There were 52 "barges", long skinny canoes (some up to 150 Ft. in length) each with anywhere from 20 to 50 paddlers, decorated with

carved figures and covered with gold leaf and red paint. It is the 50th year of the King's reign, and they said it was the first barge procession in 9 years.

Bangkok was an interesting city, very large and quite dirty, but centered on the river (we're suckers for water) and with an exciting vitality. From Bangkok we took the local 2nd class express train to Chiang Mai in the north, through some more beautiful countryside. We missed the daylight for the best part, unfortunately, as the train was running a few hours late after sideswiping a gasoline tanker at a grade crossing. Considering the alternatives, however, a few hour delay wasn't a problem.

Chiang Mai was beautiful, but we only had one full day left so we did the whirlwind tour of the countryside with an elephant ride, rafting down a river, and some shopping in the small villages. Beautiful country and not to be missed. Traveling into Thailand from Singapore is easy, with non-stop flights to Bangkok and Chiang Mai. The other good alternative is to travel from Phuket, leaving the boat in the Boat Lagoon, a secure marina.

Underscoring either the importance of good charts or the frenetic pace of Singapore, while looking for Raffle's Marina we found a whole part of the island that wasn't on our charts at all, and they were only a few years old. After a swim and a visit at Raffle's we were off non-stop to Port Kelang. This was one case where traveling a bit later (November rather than October) paid off, as the Sumatra's had finally quit for the season. These are big thunderstorms packing 30+ knot Westerlies, that hit the Malaysian coast most evenings around 10pm. In other words, just after everyone has turned out the lights in an anchorage protected from the prevailing Northeasterlies but open to the west. Great fun, and we're glad to have missed it.

The narrow part of the Malacca Strait lies between Singapore and Port Kelang, and has a nasty reputation for shipping traffic, pirates, and unlit fishing boats. But once again, things weren't as bad as the rumors. The shipping traffic is only a problem in the shipping lanes, and pirates have only ever been a problem for ships carrying the payroll aboard in the safe.

adventurous, but Goldie again got us through without mishap. The Gove Yacht Club cruise was really Over the Top, and the Darwin Sailing Club gets the prize for the best sunsets. They didn't do such a hot job with the Ambon race, although we had an exceptional sail with our mate from Auckland, Patrick Strange.

We enjoyed Indonesia, although we found ourselves put off by all of the trash. We love the sea, and it is hard to see it being used as a garbage dump. To some extent we are guilty of applying the standards of our culture to another, but we all have to live together on the same planet. And there is certainly a contrast between the U.S. threatening \$5,000 fines for tossing a candy wrapper and Penang bulldozing the city's trash into the sea.

Our favorite parts of Indonesia were Tana Toraja, the highlands of western Sulawesi; Komodo and Rinca, where the dragons at least smiled; and the inland areas of Bali. Singapore was amazing, and the bit we saw of Malaysia was fascinating, although trash was everywhere again.

What we have seen of Thailand so far has been a delight, and again our biggest problem will be not enough time to spend in the places that we like the best. But if we linger too long here we will get pestered by the Northerly winds in the Red Sea, and that we can do without. But being slaves to the seasons beats a lot of the alternatives.

Sidebars:

Obtaining a cruising permit for Indonesia:

Sailing through Indonesia requires a cruising permit, actually a security clearance known as a CAIT (Clearance Approval for Indonesian Territory), good for a maximum of three months. These are obtained through an agent in Indonesia and must be approved in Jakarta, a process that can take a couple of months, and the cost is on the order of \$250. There are also some contacts outside Indonesia that can make the arrangements, Thirty-Seven South in Auckland being one, but the cost will be higher and there is no real advantage. One agent that has been recommended in Jakarta is Kustarjono Prodjalito, fax# 62-21-310-7734. Another option is Made Gerip in Bali, fax# 62-361-773-515.

Other than a CAIT, a visa will be required if you want to stay the full three months. Most nationalities can enter Indonesia without a visa for 60 days, but no extension will be granted. With a visa, extensions are possible even if the original visa is for a shorter period.

The Indonesian consulate in Darwin is the usual place to obtain a visa, and it can be done by telephone and mail for those not planning to visit Darwin. In person, three days is usually required and the cost is A\$100, approx. US\$80.

In the past, visas were issued for only 5 weeks and had to be extended in Indonesia. Last year, visas were being issued for two or three months, although in some cases (notably those entering through Kupang in West Timor) cruisers with three-month visas were only stamped in for 60 days, requiring an extension for the last 30 days. An unnecessary nuisance but arguments were useless.

Entry in the Darwin/Ambon race is the other option, and the A\$600 (US\$480) entry fee includes the CAIT but not visas. The CAIT's were not made available until the end of the post-race activities in Ambon, however, making the entrants literally a captive audience. The stated reason was that the permits were

late coming from Jakarta, but apparently the same thing happens every year.

Indonesian officials are prohibited from collecting additional fees, but that word hasn't yet reached the hinterlands and likely never will. Make plenty of copies of the CAIT and passports (title page and visa), and also a few of the most recent port clearance, as there are harbormasters in many of the small bays who will stop by and want copies of your papers. If you can do a good imitation of being organized and distract the guy with questions about his village and grandchildren there is some chance of escaping the bite.

Other Useful Information

Ambon:

Other than for the Darwin race, Ambon is not well equipped for yachts. The best-known local "fixer" is Ferry, who can arrange mechanical and electrical repairs as well as fuel. Ferry's price for fuel is high (Rp 600/liter, about US\$1.00 per gallon) and the fuel is dirty, the result of rusty tanks in his "fuel barge". The other choice is tanker truck arranged by the local organizers, Rp400 but you have to deal with filling jerry jugs from a 3" hose, or a bit cheaper yet from the commercial wharf. Clean fuel is available everywhere that fishing boats hang out for about Rp360/liter (60 cents a gallon).

Ujung Pandang:

The local fixer is Arif Hamid, who does boat clearances and visa extensions, and can arrange fuel, repairs, laundry and tours. Popular rumor has it that clearing in and out of UP is impossible without an agent, but that is a rumor that likely started with Arif as we talked to some folks who did it on their own with no special difficulties once they found the harbormaster and immigration offices.

Bali:

Bali Yacht Services is the local fixer, the only problem being that there are two of them. Clearance is easy in Bali with all of the offices close together on the wharf, and nobody pretends that an agent is necessary for that. Either of the Bali Yacht Services will handle

repairs, fuel, propane, laundry, faxes and incoming mail and packages.

P.T. Bali Yacht Services is Made Gerip and his associates, who handle most of the cruising boats.

P.T. Bali Yacht Services
P.O. Box 42
Nusa Dua, Denpasar 80361
Bali, Indonesia

or if you need a street address for packages:

P.T. Bali Yacht Services
Jalan Segara Kulon No. 2B
Tanjung Benoa
Bali, Indonesia

fax# 62-361-773-515

The other "Bali Yacht Services" is:

Wayan Kotha
Bali Yacht Services
Jalan Segara Werdi No. 6
Tanjung Benoa, Nusa Dua
Bali, Indonesia

fax# 62-361-772-535

Both Made and Wayan are conscientious and very helpful, but whichever you choose don't attempt to split the business. That will simply wind you up in the middle of a family feud.

Yachts in Transit:

One more thing that could be important: Indonesia *does* have duty-free status for parts and supplies for yachts-in-transit, but duty is cheerfully paid on your behalf at the rate of \$10 per kilogram by the freight companies without even looking at the address or invoice. DHL says that if "yacht in transit" is included prominently on the address label, and if it is flagged in the computer by the shipper for special handling as a duty-free shipment, then there won't be any duty. We don't believe that for a moment, but we do know that with "yacht in transit" on the label and on the invoice the point can be successfully argued, at least with DHL.

Heart of Gold

Jim and Sue Corenman

The Raja Muda

"You guys are from San Francisco? That's great, I have a house there!". That was our introduction to His Royal Highness Prince Idris Shah, the Raja Muda of Selangor. Raja Muda means Crown Prince, and we were in town for his regatta, put on by the Royal Selangor Yacht Club and which turned out to be a real highlight.

Port Kelang is not exactly picturesque, and the anchorage off the Royal Selangor Yacht Club is one of the dirtiest we have ever seen. But the club was first-rate, right up with the best, and the folks there couldn't have been more helpful. The format of the race was that of a traveling road show, with three point-to-point races up the Malaysian coast, with two short triangle races thrown in for comic relief.

As with the Darwin/Ambon, there were four classes, Racing, Cruising, Classic and Multihull. The Classic class was the motorboat division, and the others were all serious race classes. We thought about signing up some crew and doing it properly, but all of our friends had their own boats and were heading north themselves. But what the heck, only 80 miles per leg, how hard can that be?

The first race was from Port Kelang to Lumut, starting at 3pm to take advantage of the "more reliable" nighttime winds in the Malacca Strait. Right, and the "check's in the mail". Winds were light and shifty at the start, so we dug out the #1 genoa, the first time it had seen daylight since the Musket Cove Regatta Week last year. It was lovely sailing, warm breezes punctuated by brilliant white towering cumulus. The committee boat paced the fleet to make us all feel safe, said committee boat being a Very Serious Malaysian gunboat with cannons and torpedoes, and all sorts of mean-looking bits sticking out in various directions. There was remarkably little trouble with boats being over the starting line early.

At sunset the shifty, goofy Northwesterlies turned into shifty, goofy Northeasterlies, and the lovely towering cumulus revealed their true nature, as Very Serious Thunderstorms. Having spent the last six months near the

equator we have seen a LOT more thunderstorms than we ever cared to, but these were Something Else. The fishing boats were out also, and just before dark we skimmed past the edge of a long floating net, almost invisible in the fading light.

"Whew", said Jim, "I'm glad it will be dark soon, we won't have to worry about those things anymore". What you can't see won't hurt you, right?

It was a long night, but as our friend Ken Wright always says "Old age and treachery will always prevail over youth and skill". Well, maybe not always, but that night it sure worked, and we were able to stay ahead of the wind shifts and changing conditions and finished with the first few boats in the racing class, coming in an easy first place on corrected time in the cruising class.

We should insert a word about ratings at this point. The racing and cruising classes were scored on CHS (Channel Handicap System) ratings from the UK, a new one for us. The Royal Selangor YC took care of all of the details for us, accepting the numbers off of our out-of-date IMS certificate. The only problem we had was with the metric conversion, as we've been working in metric for so long that we're forgetting feet and inches, but it all got straightened out. CHS is a measurement system, much simpler than IMS (International Mystery System) and attractive as a result. The problem is that CHS is too simple, and doesn't consider basic things like ballast or righting moment, cornerstones of sailing performance. As a result, lightweight boats get severely penalized which left us with a highly unattractive rating.

Lumut International Marina was the destination for the first leg, and they put on a great Malaysian buffet that night with the two things that Ocean Racers live for, Great Food and Free Beer. Morning was spent checking out the small town of Lumut, and then off to another 3pm start for Leg two, 70 miles to the island of Penang.

It was another shifty, goofy night, and we were again surrounded by fishing boats and thunderstorms with only our wits and our faithful gunboat to keep us out of trouble. The thunderstorms

decided to get Serious that night, and we were literally surrounded by lightning most of the night. It was unnerving, but we managed to stay on the favorable side of most of the shifts and had some fun with one of the bigger fully-crewed racing class boats in the pitch dark the second time they tried to sail over the top of us. Like most regattas, the International COLREGS replace the racing rules after dark, but they forgot the usual prohibition on luffing. We finished just before dawn, again with the Big Guys and #2 on corrected time.

Penang Yacht Club hosted the fleet for two days, and made for an interesting study in contrasts. The floating marina is falling apart, mostly a result of being stuck right out into the current with no breakwater, to say nothing of the 2 to 3 knot current flowing diagonally through the slips.

The clubhouse, on the other hand, is still unfinished, an empty shell except for the swimming pool which we all enjoyed. Empty shells make for great parties, however, and the PYC did an outstanding job with dinner and entertainment for two nights in a row.

We didn't have a chance to see much of Penang itself, an old Dutch port and a fascinating city. The one free day was occupied with a triangle race that turned into a bust. The combination of a long course, light winds and short time limit meant that no one finished, the funny part being that nobody noticed the problem until we started looking for the committee boat at the finish line... long gone, back to the bar. But the RM Himself showed a lot of class, and after "Jugra" crossed the finish line they stuck around and gave everyone else a horn and a big cheer. It's little things that like that that make a great event.

The start of the 60-mile Third Leg to Langkawi has to rank as one of Sue's Personal Bests. She had been doing most of the driving, having a much longer attention span, and as she started on port tack at the favored leeward end we were to leeward and slightly ahead of "Jugra", the Raja Muda's Swan 68. "Point" the tactician said, and point she did, squeezing His Royal Highness right out and into our dirty air. The wind was a light Northwesterly again, and with

Langkawi lying to the northwest it was a real pointing contest to stay off the beach on port tack. Some boats (including most of the racing class) tacked west early looking for more breeze, but we stayed on port tack with one eye on the depthsounder as the evening breeze always seemed to fill in from the east. But we couldn't help thinking that maybe there's something we don't know here.

As sunset approached it was just us and Stormvogel on the beach. The wind faltered, and the 75-foot classic ocean racer tacked west chasing the dying breeze, while we held on for a few minutes and met the evening breeze coming off the beach. We will not soon forget looking back and seeing the big ketch a mile back, sailing at right angles to our track trying to get back to the new breeze. We will also not forget the sight of Stormvogel charging through our lee as the breeze freshened and freed up to a reach, proving once again that there is no substitute for waterline and sail area.

The last giggle was ours, however, as the wind died to a whisper in the wee hours as we approached the finish at Langkawi. A light sloop can have her way with a big ketch in those conditions, and we were second across the line behind Starlight Express, a longer-and-lighter Kiwi sloop in the racing class. At this point, people starting coming over to us to find out if there really were only two of us on "Goldie".

So we were 1-2-1 going into the last two triangle races, when the fully-crewed boats in our class finally had a chance to get even. The conditions were miserable, a light easterly breeze, rain pouring down in buckets, and a big westerly swell from a distant hurricane. With just two of us the legs were too short to get a spinnaker up for the downwind legs, but we had some good sailing anyway.

The Raja Muda was a great regatta, well organized with great parties and lots of new friends, and just about everyone we talked to thoroughly enjoyed it. We spent a week in Langkawi, a beautiful island right at the border between Thailand and Malaysia. It is also a duty-free port, and we had a chance to restock the wine cellar, having finally finished most of the Australian wine we loaded up with in Darwin. Wine was virtually unheard of in Indonesia,

there was a bit in Bali but otherwise none until Singapore and that was priced beyond reason.

A note of caution on buying wine in Langkawi: it doesn't age gracefully in the heat, so stay away from the older vintages and try it before stocking up. One of the duty-free shops had a huge stack of box wine at a good price, but they only ever sell one box at a time... it had all turned to vinegar. Two English boats on the Tradewinds Rally (another one of those English Hurry-Around-the-World rallies) found it and bought a couple of pallet-loads without trying it, and were last seen sailing back to Langkawi to try to get their money back while their mates sailed on to Sri Lanka. There was quite a chuckle over that, as the stuff was well-known in most circles.

The King's Cup

Our next stop was Phuket, Thailand for the King's Cup. The race headquarters was at the Phuket Yacht Club, which turned out to not be a yacht club at all, but a resort that doesn't particularly like yachts.

The King's Cup also uses CHS ratings, and again had an official measurer and an international jury in attendance to oversee the details. This time the committee saw through our sheep-in-wolf's clothing disguise and we got put into the racing class, never mind that we are on a world cruise. The format was quite different than the Raja Muda, being a 5-race series of short buoy races, all with early starts. The winds in Phuket are best in the early morning and then start fading around mid-day, which made it really tough for the small boats to do well.

We signed up a crew of 10, all friends from other cruising boats, and unloaded as much gear from the boat as we could fit onto three other boats. We had a bunch of really good sailors on board, but only three of us had much racing experience, the two of us plus Patrick, a Kiwi from "Juliet", the Big Ketch. Sue did the driving, Jim organized the front of the boat with Chris of "Infini", and Patrick organized the cockpit with John of "Amatuaana II" and Victor of "Kal Ikal" doing the heavy work. Laura ("Infini"), Kim ("Amatuaana II"), Kerri ("Integrity"), and Amanda ("Juliet") took care of everything else.

We sailed well, and spared no moves, even peeling a spinnaker change and doing a couple of jib changes upwind. The competition was fierce, however, and without the racing sails (safe in California), and half the cruising gear still aboard, we had a solid lock on the middle of the pack. It was good to be sailing with a fleet that knew the racing rules for a change, and we had some really good races with some other 50-footers.

The non-racing part of the regatta was a disappointment, however, starting right with the elaborate Opening Ceremony, to which the regatta entrants were not invited. It was for bigwigs and sponsors only, and left a sour taste which never completely left. The first couple of the after-race parties were great, and a couple were a bust, free beer and soggy hors-d'oeuvres. It takes more than free beer to make a good party, and the 7AM muster for the next day's racing didn't help.

The regatta over, the race boats headed off to the next one (back in Singapore), and we started to explore Phuket. It is a beautiful island, with loads of dramatic scenery (check out the James Bond movie "Man with the Golden Gun") and lots of friendly, smiling people. We've always loved Thai food, and we were in heaven. Every beach is lined with small palapa-style restaurants where exquisitely-prepared dishes like prawn curries go for about \$2, and the beer is ice-cold. We splurged one night and ordered a big plate of Tiger prawns in garlic sauce, a full pound of prawns (four) for \$12. Yummy.

We spent the rest of our 30-day visa exploring the Phuket area, then checked out and wandered back through the islands to Langkawi, taking almost two weeks to make the 120-mile trip. Langkawi is a duty-free port, and a good spot to have stuff shipped into, like a new spinnaker (to replace the one we blew up in the King's Cup) and a West Marine order.

Across the Indian Ocean

We really enjoyed our visit in Thailand. As we mentioned in our last note, the food was a real highlight and we continued to eat our way around the islands. We spent a couple of weeks on the west coast of Phuket, an area of good anchorages (in the Northeast

monsoon, the dry one) and beautiful beaches, and also lots of tourists. We stayed in Nai Harn Bay for Christmas with a bunch of cruising friends, and one of the local beach-front restaurants put on a buffet and party for Christmas Eve, a really good time complete with fireworks. The Thai's are crazy about fireworks, and every occasion calls for at least a few rockets.

Patong is the big tourist area, a beautiful beach a couple of miles long and jammed with tourists, mostly German it seems. "Who's minding Germany?" we kept asking, but never got an answer. There is a good anchorage off the beach so we wandered up there for New Year's eve, along with about 100 other boats, as we had heard rumors about the great fireworks at midnight. We wandered the "strip" and had dinner early in the evening, almost as good as the beach shacks at ten times the price.

The Navy was in town, a US nuclear submarine, and even in civies the guys stood out, submariners being remarkably pale. And amazingly enough, each seemed to have a Thai niece (along with most of the Germans). The funny part is that not all of the women were really women, Patong being the center of a rather big transvestite and sex-change scene. It was common to see gorgeous Thai women with smashing outfits and big feet. We're not sure the navy guys had picked it up by the looks of things, and we had a few giggles recalling a story that an ex-Royal Navy cruising friend had told.

But the fireworks were the real scene, and every food cart had been converted to selling fireworks for the evening, everything that has been banned for years in the States. With good reason, as the stuff was going off all around us. At midnight (safely back aboard the boat) the sight was spectacular, with no less than six major aerial rocket shows put on by the big hotels up and down the beach, ground-level fireworks covering everything in between, and a continuous roar from the firecrackers. About five times the firepower of the justifiably famous Sydney Harbor New Year's fireworks, but the choreography was weak.

Our 30 days was up in early January, and we spent another two

weeks making our way back to Malaysia (things are pretty relaxed customs-wise) by way of the islands east of Phuket in Phang Nga Bay. These are limestone "Karst" islands thrust up out of the sea, lots of vertical cliffs, caves and hidden valleys called Hong's (Thai for "room"). Most of the hong's are entered through a cave, and it became a real game to find them as they are not marked on the chart and the guide book only mentions a few.

We stopped back in Langkawi, Malaysia (a duty-free port) to replenish the wine locker and pick up our mail, a new spinnaker and a new alternator (having toasted one of each in Thailand), and then departed for Sri Lanka. It was a beaut of a sail, 15 knots of wind mostly on the beam all the way across.

Sri Lanka was an interesting place, very friendly people, but suicidal drivers. The streets are full of pedestrians, bicycles, bullock carts, tuk-tuks (3-wheel scooter taxis), cows, goats, mini-vans, big trucks and busses and even a few cars, all vying for space on narrow roads. Everybody passes at will, whether there is a blind corner ahead or not! After our 2 day trip inland, we kissed the ground when we got back to the harbor. The inland is beautiful, lots of very high mountains covered with tea plantations. We stayed overnight at Kandy, saw a dance and visited the Temple of the Tooth. We even saw some wild elephants crossing the road (one of the few things that a Sri Lankan will brake for!).

There is still a bit of ongoing civil strife in Sri Lanka. The Tamal Tigers are fighting for the establishment of an independent Tamal state, so they occasionally blow up a building or something. The whole time we have been in SE Asia we have been hearing about the problems there, but it has mostly been confined to the north and it never seemed bad enough to worry about. In Galle, the area for yachts is located inside the navy base, very secure and a comfortable anchorage. But there is a concern about the "Sea Tigers" (the rumors are that the navy moved all their munitions to Galle after the bombing in Colombo last year). So the navy closes off the inner harbor (where we were) every night with a big cable stretched across the entrance and

then periodically drops dynamite into the water all night long to discourage scuba diving. I guess they want to make sure no one will try to swim in and blow up a Navy boat or two! That was pretty weird. We waited until we left to tell anybody about this so you wouldn't think we were completely crazy for being there. One cruiser mentioned this to their parents and they got a fax back that just said, "Get the Hell Out of There!".

We actually enjoyed Sri Lanka quite a lot. The town of Galle is centuries old and the old fort is still inhabited, with quite a bit of the town inside. There are touts everywhere trying to sell you gems, "My cousin is a jeweler....", or other cheap stuff, but if you say "No" twelve times and keep walking, they get the message. The provisioning was good, lots of fresh veggies and other necessities. We seem to be used to dirty grubby towns these days and don't mind rummaging through dark little shops for interesting things to eat!

The Maldives are a chain of low-lying atolls stretching south from India, famous for their beauty and their diving. But ironically they are not an easy place to visit by boat as the anchorages are very deep and the only official port of entry is Male, halfway down the group and 200 miles off the track. But thanks to the yachtie grapevine, we learned that it is possible to stop at Uleguma Island in the northernmost atoll of Ihavandiffulu without going to Male first. The village chief simply checks your papers, collects a \$5 fee and makes you welcome, very low key.

It was a delightful spot, and similar in many ways to the islands in the Tuomotus in French Polynesia. The village was large and surprisingly well-kept, comfortable cinder-block houses and they said there were about 400 people living there. They were obviously not self-sufficient, as there was plenty of fish but no sign of gardens, just some coconut, papaya and breadfruit trees. Most of the food comes by boat directly or indirectly from Male, and most of that imported. Atoll soil does not lend itself to growing things, but many village people work in the resorts on the larger islands and there is enough money to buy food.

But there was no shortage of fish! The reefs were covered with them, not just little tiny ones but plenty of dinner-sized fish also. We think the atolls have never supported enough people to eat up all of the fish, and the Maldives government is protective of their fishing rights (a real issue with Sri Lanka and India only a few hundred miles away). We watched the men from the village fishing from a boat over the reef one afternoon with simple bamboo poles, tossing in the lines and pulling out sea bass as fast as they could! They came by later selling fish, two for three dollars, about four pounds of fish and still flipping-fresh.

We happened to be there with a half-dozen other boats for the end of Ramadan, the month-long period of fasting that is obligatory for all Muslims. Eating and drinking is forbidden from sunup to sundown, not even water, and needless to say the end of the month was an occasion for a celebration. Being a Muslim village the party was pretty subdued by western standards, with no alcohol and strict segregation of the sexes, but it was a nice time nonetheless. The highlights were a volleyball competition between the male yachties and the village men, diplomatically ending with one win apiece, and a tug-of-war on the beach. That was originally going to be visitors against locals, men again, but most of the local guys were pretty small and apparently didn't like their chances. So somehow it wound up being women versus men, locals and visitors together, and since the women outnumbered the men about two-to-one they won it! From the shrieks of delight from the women's end of the rope it wasn't something that has happened recently, and judging by reaction at the other end of the rope isn't likely to happen again anytime soon.

The snorkeling around the reefs was great, the coral was not the most colorful we have seen but the fish were amazing. We have our dive gear aboard but didn't see anything in that area that would have been a great dive, as the reefs were all shallow enough for snorkeling.

We saw everything there was to see around the little island in four days, finished our boat projects and then headed off on Feb 11 for the Gulf of

Aden. It was a long trip, 1800 miles across the Arabian Sea (the western Indian Ocean) to Aden at the entrance to the Red Sea. The first 7 days were beam reaching, easy and fast sailing with just our small working sails, and then a day of motoring as we rounded Socotra Island and the horn of Africa. That is an area that is notorious for pirates and we gave it a wide berth of a hundred miles, not knowing if the reputation was deserved or not. A few cruisers who met some Somalian fishermen in Oman reported that they said there were no problems, everyone was friendly, and why didn't anyone ever come for a visit? On the other hand, the only authenticated pirate story we've heard in years was just north of there.

Our original thought was to stop in Sulalah, Oman, for fuel and veggies, but the weather was so good that we carried on all the way to Aden, with very few carrots remaining but plenty of diesel left. Our first impression of Aden was that no one had bothered to clean up after the last war, which turns out to be the case. The geography is impressive, dark brown hills totally devoid of any sort of vegetation, with pale yellow sand dunes between the hills and houses built right up the side of the hills, it would have been a dazzling sight if they had been painted the brilliant white that our imagination was calling for, but none had been painted in years and many were just bombed-out ruins. Up close it was no better, with piles of rubble and garbage on every street corner and all the men sitting around chewing on leaves of qat, a mild amphetamine that has replaced coffee as the #1 agricultural crop in Yemen. The Mocha part of the original Mocha Java coffee beans all came from Mocha, Yemen. Unfortunately, coffee could be traded for hard currency while qat is worse than useless.

The harbor has a reputation for being dirty, so we were grumpy but not surprised to see a brown oil slick creeping up the side of the boat... we had carefully timed our arrival to coincide with a crude oil spill, and Welcome to the Middle East. The officials were easy-going, however, and the veggie markets were good. The lack of exports has gotten to the local currency and it was a kick to pass a single US note to the money-changer and get a stack of bills

almost an inch thick in return, sort of like monopoly money.

Yemen is a very strict Muslim country, as is most of the Middle East. The contrast between women's roles in the US and these countries is striking and disturbing, typified by the majority of the women on the street dressed in chadra in spite of the heat, totally covered in black robe and hood except for a narrow eye slit. It is not even permitted for a woman to look out an open window without being covered; in Oman many apartments are fitted with metal window boxes with slits so that women can look down onto the street without being seen.

We only spent a few days in Aden, bought veggies and diesel, and got our Egyptian visas. Most of the countries bordering on the Red Sea require visas for tourists, but not for yacht crews - they are treated the same as ship crews and are issued a shore pass on arrival. The exception is Egypt, which requires a visa in advance for all visitors. Getting them was easy, and our taxi driver knew how to find the embassy in a run-down compound in a particularly run-down part of town, where we sat around for a couple of hours watching French television until our passports suddenly reappeared, another page filled with rubber stamps and indecipherable script. We checked out of Aden on February 24 and spent another couple of days at Ras Imran, a quiet anchorage just down the coast, scrubbing off the oil and generally relaxing with a few other boats waiting to take the plunge into the Red Sea.

Weather information has been very hard to get for this area, and most of the sources for weather charts are completely unreliable. The winds in the Red Sea are almost always adverse anyway, so maybe there's no point in forecasts, but it is still nice to know HOW adverse. We're feeling anxious to get to the Med, and our plan is to make it up the 1200 miles of mostly windward sailing as expeditiously and as painlessly as possible. It will be interesting to see how well that works out.

In Retrospect:

Looking over the last year, we've had some really good adventures. Some, like the trip up the east coast of Australia in April and May, were excessively

The fishing boats and nets were a nuisance for boats sailing close to shore and anchoring every 40 miles, but those who sailed straight through at the edge of the shipping lanes had few problems. We did manage to tangle a length of 3" ship hawser in the prop in broad daylight, bad enough, but we got it off without having to go swimming.

Port Kelang is another dirty port city, worse than most, but with one redeeming quality: the Royal Selangor Yacht Club. And by total coincidence, we happened to arrive just in time for another regatta, the Raja Muda. But that story will have to wait until next month.