

EXPLORING SUMATRA AND JAVA

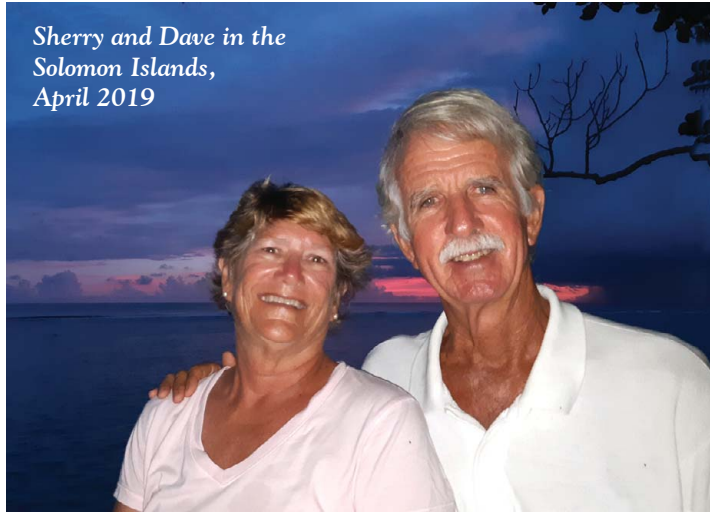
Dave and Sherry McCampbell

(SV Soggy Paws is a St Francis 44 Mk2 catamaran built in 2004 which Dave and Sherry purchased nine years ago. Since then they and their two cats have cruised extensively. Visit their website at <https://svsoggypaws.com/>.)

Dave and Sherry received the Water Music Trophy for 2023 (see page 11), an award which recognises 'a significant contribution ... in terms of providing cruising, navigation or pilotage information', in their case by explaining how they combine satellite imagery with the open source navigation program OpenCPN – see Using Satellite Imagery with OpenCPN in Flying Fish 2023/2.

All photographs are by the authors.)

Located at the far western end of Indonesia's 17,000 islands, Sumatra is the largest island in Indonesia and the sixth largest in the world. Next east is heavily populated Java, with the capital, Jakarta. Both islands have been populated by various kingdoms for well over one thousand years. Sumatra has over 130 active volcanoes, is one of the most active geological areas in the world, and some of the largest volcanic explosions and tsunamis in history have occurred there. Both islands have several UNESCO World Heritage sites and a number of national parks. Sumatra has recently become a popular surfing destination.



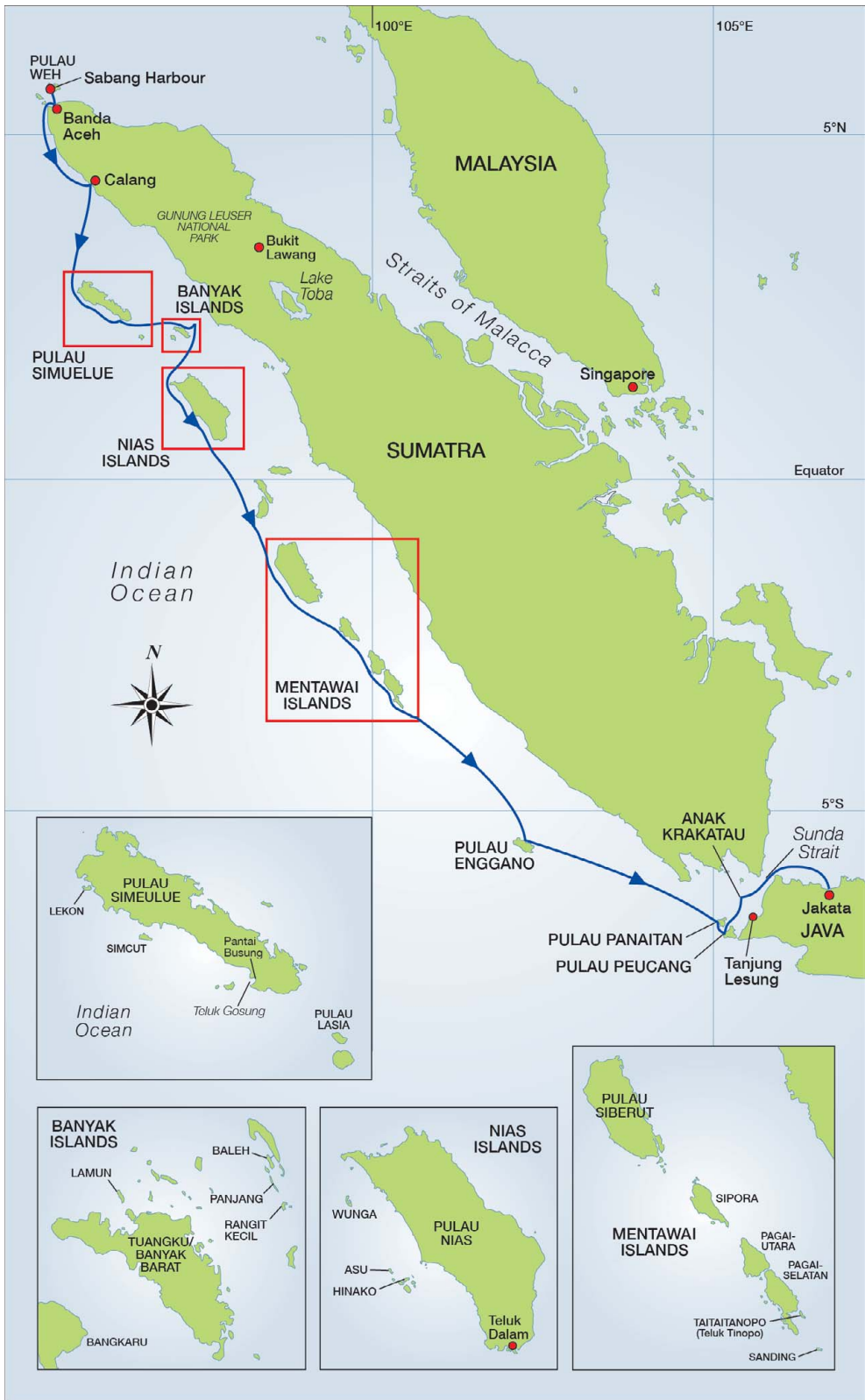
Sherry and Dave in the
Solomon Islands,
April 2019

I (Dave) first became aware of Sumatra over 50 years ago as the young navigator on a US Navy World War Two era destroyer, deployed to the western Pacific and making a fast transit of the Straits of Malacca. We were the lead ship in a column of five including the nuclear carrier USS *Enterprise*, which forced us to steam at 30 knots. Back then, navigation in the Upper Straits was difficult as there were no nearby navigation aids and our paper chart of Sumatra showed many high mountains and volcanoes that would have clouds surrounding the summits. Our air search radar could find them, however, some at more than 100 miles, which gave us the ability to navigate up the Straits with reasonable confidence using our radar and lines of position drawn from the mountain tops.

Accurate navigation wasn't the only problem in the Straits of Malacca, as it is one of the world's busiest ship traffic routes. It was a good thing we had plenty of sailors aboard to help with navigation and ship avoidance as we had no GPS or AIS back then. While plotting our course and looking closely at the chart, I noticed a large lake in the jungle highlands of north Sumatra and wondered what it would be like to go there some day.

Sabang and Banda Aceh

Fast forward 52 years and Sherry and I, with our guest Linda, found ourselves off the coast of northern Sumatra headed for Sabang Harbour on Pulau Weh (*pulau* means island in Indonesian), where we had been invited to join a small cruising rally. Sabang was the starting point for a trip of over a thousand miles down the west coast of Sumatra to the Sunda Strait. There was also to be a Marine Festival that included cultural events, a boat parade, dancing and of course food.





A World War Two era Japanese bunker on Pulau Weh's north coast

Just 20 years ago Sabang, and Banda Aceh next to it, were the nearest population centres to a deadly event. At 8am on 26th December 2004 a major seafloor earthquake with a magnitude of 9.3 and an epicentre only 100 miles south, occurred off the west coast of northern Sumatra. Less than 20 minutes later a massive tsunami with waves up to 30m high started to devastate communities along the nearby coasts and eventually across the whole Indian Ocean. It turned into one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history, killing at least 228,000 people in 14 countries.

Before the marine festivities in Sabang commenced, Sherry, Linda and I took a day tour around the island. Included were a host of World War Two sites, including big guns and relics from the 3½-year Japanese occupation, earlier Dutch buildings, local temples and other cultural attractions, coastal views, a volcano with hot sulphur vents, a nice waterfall and the imposing Kilometer 0 monument at Indonesia's furthest northwest point.

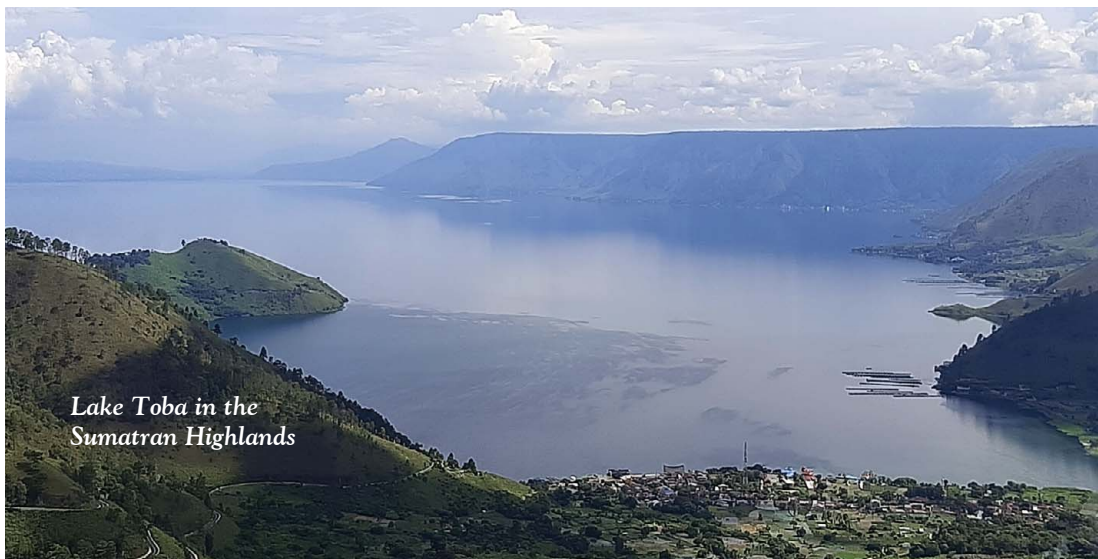
The Sumatran Highlands

Since we had arrived almost a week early, Linda and I decided to go see the nearby Sumatran highlands, which included orangutans in the wild and Lake Toba, the lake I had seen on a chart 50 years previously. Sherry stayed with the boat and cats and enjoyed some down time.



Gunung Leuser National Park: A day's travel took us from Sabang to Banda Aceh by ferry and, after a visit to the Tsunami Museum, by air to Medan on the east coast. Putra, the owner of the very basic but entirely adequate Fun Family Guest House in Bukit Lawang, picked us up at the airport. He was our exceptional guide for two amazing days in the jungle seeing many animals, including monkeys and, of course, orangutans close up at a waterfall and twice at our riverside campsite. Even the food was outstanding, produced by our own camp chef. From there, instead of hiking back to Bukit, we took Putra's hour-long 'local transport' river trip. I can't imagine there being a better, more enthusiastic guide.

Mama and baby orangutan at Gunung Leuser National Park



*Lake Toba in the
Sumatran Highlands*

Lake Toba: After three days in Bukit, Putra's cousin drove us to Lake Toba, stopping along the way at viewpoints and to drop off a fellow traveller to do a volcano hike. Lake Toba is the 100km by 30km by 500m deep *caldera* of one of the world's largest supervolcanoes. It was formed by a massive volcanic eruption about 73,000 years ago, the largest explosive volcanic eruption the Earth has experienced in the past 25 million years. It triggered global climate change and had a major impact on early human populations worldwide, killing most humans alive at the time. Fortunately it didn't erupt again while we were there!

A short ferry ride took us to Samosir island in the middle of the lake, where we stayed at a guest house and ate at a restaurant on the water, both of which Putra had recommended. Nearby, a ten-storey hotel was being built, evidence that Lake Toba has been 'discovered' and is no longer the remote destination it was 50 years ago. We took a private day tour around Samosir island to see the usual tourist cultural sites – a market and an old local village and homestead – then over to the western shore to a waterfall and hot springs. The waterfall is impressive, the hot springs and restaurant are not. Other highlights for younger explorers with more time might include a boat trip on Lake Toba, a climb to the rim of the volcano for sunrise and a multi-day trek into the jungle.

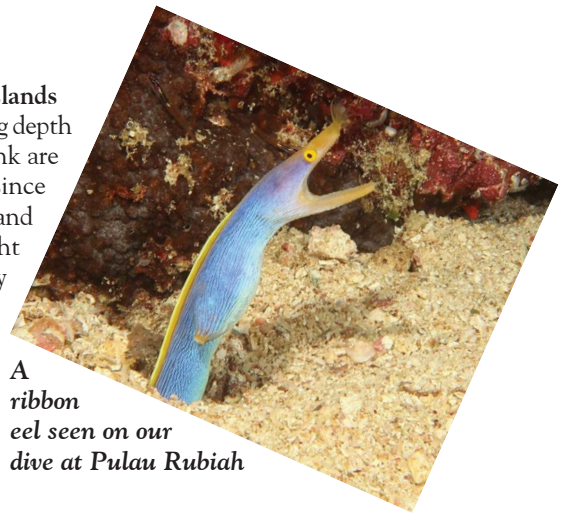
The drive back to Medan in a local van took us via a rural road over the far less populated centre of the island and into the countryside. Along the way there were spectacular views, small lakes, forests, few locals and no tourists. From Medan a reversal of our outward journey got us back to the boat in a long day. After the festival, fuelling, provisioning and a few dives at nearby Pulau Rubiah, we were ready to head south.

*The boat parade at the
start of the Sabang Marine Festival*



'Must haves' for cruising Sumatra's offshore islands

Satellite charts with OpenCPN, a bottom-profiling depth sounder, a good reliable engine and a big fuel tank are highly recommended. Starlink is really helpful since mobile/cell coverage is spotty at best. In March and April the conditions are generally sunny with light southerly winds and a long, slow southwesterly swell. This is not great if headed southbound, as we were, but pleasant conditions if you don't mind motor-sailing. Many boats cruise this route northward in the southeast trades months (June–September) and report good sailing conditions.



A ribbon eel seen on our dive at Pulau Rubiah

The Offshore Islands

There follows a summary of the western Sumatran islands which we visited on our way south to the Sunda Strait. A waypoint list, with greater details and the lat/longs of all our anchorages, available in both PDF and gpx format, can be downloaded from <https://svsoggypaws.com/SatCharts/index.htm#Indo>. After sailing from Sabang down to Calang, a sheltered harbour about 80 miles down the coast, we headed for the north end of Pulau Simeulue approximately 120 miles further south. We delayed our departure for a few hours so as not to reach Pulau Simeulue too early next day, but the 2-knot adverse current slackened somewhat as we approached and we made it in well before dark.

Pulau Simeulue: We cruised along the southwest coast of Pulau Simeulue because of the attractive islets and beaches along this stretch, and chose anchorages protected from the southwest swell even if they were exposed to wind coming from a different direction.

Pulau Lekon: We anchored in 6m at the northeast end of this small island, out of the swell and off a nice beach. On leaving we went through the cut (clockwise from our anchorage). Our commercial charts indicated very shallow depths but we found that, by using satellite imagery, we could pick our way through and never saw less than 5–7m. There are two anchorable bays on the east coast and a nice surf break a little further out.



Pulau Simcut: 15 miles further down we tucked in behind the hook of sand on the north coast of Pulau Simcut in 6–7m over sand. We were surprised to find an army camp on the island, consisting of 32 men who maintain a military presence in the area. Despite looking good on the satellite image the snorkelling was only mediocre.

Soggy Paws at anchor at Pulau Simcut

Teluk Gosong/Pantai Busung: There are several possible anchoring spots in this bay, all out of the swell. The staff at Ranu Surf Lodge on the northern point of the bay are welcoming to yachts and can arrange for a meal and transport for provisions (frozen meat, fruit and veggies ... even beer!). Ranu picked us up from the causeway to the small island on the south side of the bay and took us to his surf resort for a nice meal. Snorkelling is not worthwhile in the area due to the nearby surf.

Pulau Lasia: This spot was one of our favourites, with nice sand, very clear water and no bugs. All four rally boats stayed for an extra day and had a barbecue on the beach. It is a privately funded park, with water so clear that sand areas 5m down look like they are 1m. The coral and fish life were mediocre, however, and the mobile/cell coverage very weak.

The Banyak Islands

Banyak Town: There are ten or so islands in the small Banyak group. The largest, Banyak Barat or Tuangku, provides a nice wave break for all the scattered reefs and islands to the northeast. We anchored off Pulau Lamun, where there was a beach and a good reef for snorkelling. Banyak Town, on the eastern island of Pulau Baleh, is a good-sized town with a decent market where fuelling is also possible. We anchored on the west side of Pulau Baleh in 20m. Dinghy landing is possible on both the west and east sides of town.

Kimo Resort: Two miles east of Banyak Town, on Pulau Panjang, is a nice small resort that serves lunch, dinner and cold beer. Riska, the manager, arranged a boat to take us to a turtle sanctuary. On our way south from Kimo we stopped at Pulau Rangit Kecil to climb to the top of the lighthouse for a worthwhile view of the islands.

Teluk Mariabah: Our final stop in the Banyak was at a small, enclosed bay at the southeastern tip of Pulau Tuangku/Banyak Barat. We anchored there in 13m and took our dinghies west through the small channel to see the famous surfing hotspot, Bay of Plenty. On our way back we found a fisherman with mud crabs to sell.

The Nias Islands

Lahewa Town: The next island group heading south is the Nias Islands. We made landfall at the town of Lahewa, in a cul-de-sac at the north end of Pulau Nias. It has a thriving street of shops

Negotiating for mud crabs at Teluk Mariabah





A Bawomataluo Stone Jumping exhibition.

The traditional buildings in the background are designed to withstand earthquakes

with a few vegetable stalls, an Indomaret¹, *warung* restaurants and a tiny fish market under the trees. From there we opted to travel south down the west side of the island, making a day stop at Pulau Wunga to snorkel and spending the night at Afulu lagoon, which has good protection from the southwesterly swell, a small town and a shallow river you can explore by dinghy.

Pulau Asu and Pulau Hinako: This island group lies about halfway down the coast of Pulau Nias. Asu’s deep anchorage was compensated for by a small resort that gladly served us a nice meal and cold beer. Mama Silvi’s restaurant (62 812 8869 5798) is legendary in the area!

Teluk Dalam: Anchoring here was challenging because our arrival coincided with a large southeasterly swell. The town anchorage was amazingly calm, however, as the bay narrows down and there’s enough protection to knock down the swell. The town has all the services that cruisers require including laundry, ATM, beer, fresh provisions, cooking gas and diesel fuel.

Our rally sponsor arranged several tours for us. The best was the visit to Bawomataluo Village, a traditional settlement located high in a hilly area inland. It is said to have been established in the 18th century when people moved inland from the coast to avoid the Dutch incursion. While at the village we were treated to several cultural dances as well as the famous ‘stone jumping’².

Just south of Teluk Dalam we crossed the equator for the 12th time in our travels.



1. Indomaret (short for Indonesia Market Retail) is Indonesia’s largest chain of convenience stores with nearly 22,000 outlets across 32 provinces. Warung restaurants are small, usually family-owned businesses, typically serving unfussy, local food.

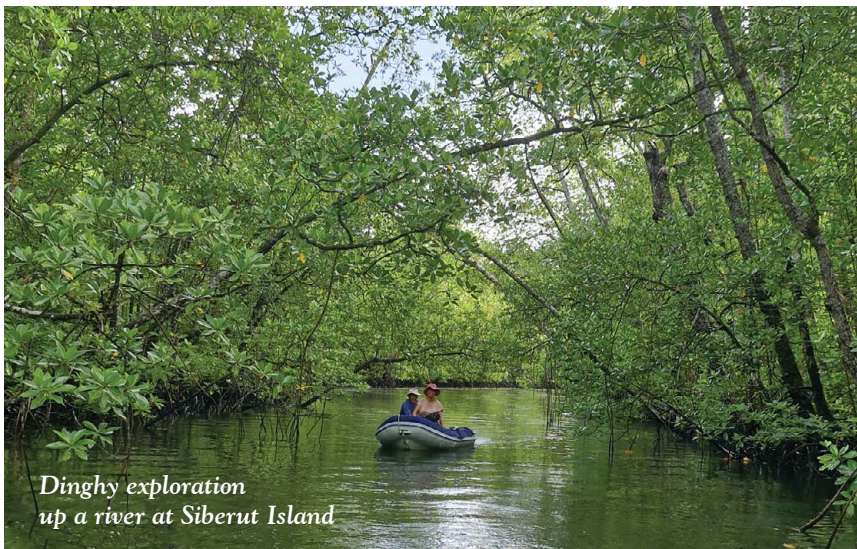
2. Visit <https://discover.silversea.com/to-the-curious/behind-the-lens/stone-jumping-indonesia/> to learn more about this unique and potentially dangerous ritual.

The Mentawi Islands

The Ments, as they are popularly called, are the southernmost 100 islands off the west coast of Sumatra. They claim to be the best surfing destination in the world and, as such, there are surf resorts and tourist infrastructure everywhere.

Pulau Siberut: We opted to sail down the east side of Siberut and, using our satellite charts on OpenCPN, had no problem finding anchorages in small deep bays. One of these bays had a small river on the satellite chart which we were able to dinghy up over a mile before we had to turn around.

There is much to see and do inland on this large island, including an all-day expedition into the mountains to visit a remote traditional village, but we were on a fairly tight schedule to get to the Sunda Strait, still 500 miles upwind, before the southeast trades really started blowing in mid-May.



*Dinghy exploration
up a river at Siberut Island*

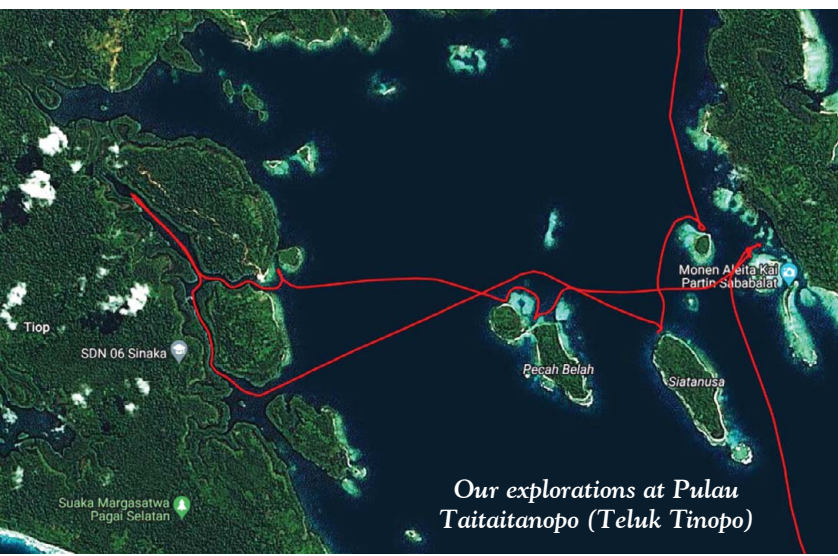
Pulau Sipora:

Capital of the Mentawais is Tua Pejat, on Pulau Sipora. It has a completely enclosed harbour, with the possibility of restocking with fuel, water, cooking gas and food, and would be a good place to leave a boat while exploring Pulau Siberut, just a ferry ride away. Tua Pejat also boasts a Kiwi-owned waterfront restaurant called The Bakery offering cold beer, pizza, hamburgers and a very nice sunset view. Our group stopped there for several days!

Continuing south, we day-hopped down the west coast of Pulau Pagai-utara and then east to the small town of Sikakap on the channel between Pulau Pagai-utara and Pulau Pagai-selatan.

Enjoying pizzas, burgers and cold beer at The Bakery in Tua Pejat





It is a one street waterfront affair where the supply of fruit and vegetables was limited, though gasoline and maybe diesel could be had for a high price. We overnighted there, then headed down the east coast of Pagai-selatan to Pulau Taitaitanopo (Teluk Tinopo), where we planned to

wait for the weather for the last push into the Sunda Strait.

Pulau Taitaitanopo: We had to wait out several days of blustery, rainy weather here, and spent one day exploring an interesting waterway that we could see on a satellite image, to check depths and for possible anchorages. It was completely navigable with many very well protected anchorage possibilities.

Pulau Sanding: When the weather cleared we set out on a day-hop to Sanding Island, just 22 miles away. We managed to find a good anchoring spot in 5m over sand close to the beach and out of the swell. The protection was good enough to spend two nights in this gorgeous reef-bound anchorage.

The passage to Sunda Strait

It was now 20th April and we were facing two long passages to reach the Sunda Strait, which separates Sumatra from Java. The forecast was for light southeast winds for the next week, but the long range forecast said that then the southeast winds would pick up giving squally weather, so we opted to go in less than perfect conditions.

Pulau Enggano: The first hop, an uneventful passage of 168 miles, took us to a small town on a protected bay at the southeast end of Pulau Enggano where we spent one night and did not go ashore. The second, of 186 miles to Pulau Panaitan off the western tip of Java, was overnight and in squally weather. We were thankful for our new digital radar to help us dodge the worst of the thunderstorms.

Anchorages in the Sunda Strait

Teluk Legon Kadam: We reached our anchorage at the northwest end of Pulau Panaitan in the Sunda Strait just before sunset the next day. Since it is open to the northwest and the bottom shoals gradually – we chose a spot in 8m over sand – with our satellite imagery it would have been possible to anchor in safety even had we not arrived in daylight. There is no cell/mobile coverage here.

Pulau Peucang: 20 miles further south, Peucang is part of the Ujung Kulon National Park. We did a nice guided walk through primary forest with a spectacular viewpoint on the western shore. Along the way we saw wild deer, pigs and more birds than we had seen or heard in months. There is a modest anchoring fee and a small per-person fee to go ashore, plus a weak Telkomsel signal.

Tanjung Lesung: After two nights at the Pulau Peucang anchorage, we moved 30 miles northeast to Tanjung Lesung on ‘mainland’ Java where the bottom is mixed coral and mud in

about 5–7m. The west side of the bay is coral, the east side is softer. Both can be roly. Ashore is a small protected harbour with dinghy landing ramp and huge resort with pool, nice restaurant with beer, rental vehicles and an ATM. In the villages nearby we found the usual assortment of small shops, *warungs* and markets, with a huge assortment of fishing craft anchored offshore. There are Indomarets nearby, but not within walking distance, and the nearest true supermarket is in Jakarta, three hours away by car.

Krakatoa volcano: The main reason for stopping at Tanjung Lesung was access to the Krakatoa archipelago, about 25 miles to the north-northwest. The archipelago, now comprising four islands, has been a well-known navigation aid for many centuries. At some point in prehistory a massive caldera-forming eruption occurred, leaving the four-island archipelago behind. It has erupted numerous times over the past 1500 years but famously exploded, after several months' warning, on 27th August 1883. This caused a massive 30m tsunami that, along with the pyroclastic flows and ash, killed at least 36,000 people, mostly in the nearby villages and islands. Some sources put the death toll from its effects at about 120,000 worldwide. It is recognised as one of the most violent volcanic events in recorded history, and was the first natural disaster whose effects were felt worldwide and whose cause was known. It produced the loudest sound ever heard on Earth, approaching 300db nearby, and was audible at Rodrigues more than 3000 miles away in the western Indian Ocean. Krakatoa island itself disappeared during the eruption, but starting in 1927 Anak Krakatau or 'Son of Krakatoa' began to break the surface. It is still growing and erupts violently from time to time.

Despite this, our group decided to take a day tour by power boat from Lesung in order to see the islands and have lunch on the beach, though we couldn't go ashore on Anak Krakatoa due to its active status. Instead we circled it for photos and had lunch and a short walk on one of the other islands nearby. Later, on our way north in our own boat, we tempted fate again and took *Soggy Paws* through the archipelago to take drone photos. Again, I am really glad that it was mindful of our presence and did not erupt while we were being tourists.

Northern Java

The 1000 Islands: We had a couple of days to kill before our reservation started at Batavia Marina so that Sherry could fly back to the US, so we went up to explore the '1000 Islands' northwest of Jakarta and clean the hulls. The islands are nice, but very crowded with small resorts and Jakarta tourists. However, both air and water are somewhat cleaner than in Jakarta. As with many populated Indonesian islands, shoreline trash is a huge problem.

*Soggy Paws in the
original Krakatoa Caldera
with 'Son of Krakatoa'
smoking in the
background*



Jakarta and Batavia Marina: The entrance to the marina is shallow with a couple of turns and requires a bit of local knowledge, best obtained from Abbas, the marina manager, prior to arrival. Contact information is at BataviaMarina.com – they do not monitor VHF. Transient space is limited so it is necessary to reserve early and good fendering is required due to the deteriorated docks. The marina can accommodate longer stays, or boats left for some time. Water and fuel are available and work, including bottom cleaning, can be carried out either by the marina staff or via outside marine contractors. It is a popular venue for large social events so has a large restaurant. Travel into the nearby city is best done by relatively inexpensive taxi.

During the month we spent in Batavia Marina we visited a number of huge malls with supermarkets, great restaurants (including our favourite, Café Batavia), interesting museums, street markets, antique shopping arcades, a huge mosque, a cathedral and beautiful parks. Almost anything you might want, including some marine supplies, is available here. Visit the Glodok Mall and Plaza for an amazing assortment of mechanical and electrical equipment for sale from small stalls on multiple floors.

As in most large cities there is plenty to see and do, and recommended museums include the Mandala Military History Museum, Bahari Maritime Museum, Jakarta Sejarah History Museum, Bank of Indonesia Museum and the huge Jelajah Cerita Park with a number of different displays/museums including a bird and reptile zoo.

From Jakarta we took a five-hour luxury train southeast to visit a couple of early UNESCO World Heritage temple complexes and a big aviation museum in Yogyakarta. The train is air conditioned, very comfortable and provides scenic views of the countryside. There are many places to stay in Yogyakarta, and we'd suggest renting a car with a driver as the most convenient way to see the sights.

Borobudur, about 40km northwest of Yogyakarta, is the largest Buddhist temple in the world and ranks with Angkor Wat in Cambodia as one of the two great archaeological sites in South East Asia. It dates from the early 8th century and was abandoned in the 14th, but was rediscovered in 1815 by Sir Thomas Raffles of Singapore fame. Buy tickets online a couple weeks ahead and be sure to pay the extra to go inside the temple itself.

Prambanan, about 17km northeast of Yogyakarta, is the largest Hindu temple complex in Indonesia and one of the most beautiful in South East Asia. It was built in the 9th century and consists of over 450 separate structures situated in a large gated park area. Don't miss the famous night show. Renting an electric scooter or bicycle makes touring around the complex much quicker and easier for us old folks.

*Batavia
Marina from
the upper floor of
the Batavia Building*



Java's ancient Borobodur temple



Close east of Yogyakarta, and very near the main airport, is the Dirgantara Aviation Museum, the largest in Indonesia. Numerous historic planes are displayed both inside and outside the main building, including a couple of Japanese World War Two planes which came from their huge and remote airfield at Babo, West Papua. Visit early for fewer tourists.

In addition to these main tourist attractions, Yogyakarta and its surrounding area have a number of other museums and sites worth visiting. These include the cool mountain areas around Gunung Merapi and the nearby Montero Motorcycle Museum, Kereta Carriage Museum, Museum Sonobudoyo, Royal Palace, Sultan's Pool, Istana Museum, Kantor Museum and the interesting night market. Unfortunately the large downtown Benteng Vredeburg fort complex and much of the Royal Palace was closed for refurbishment while we were there.

In summary, our cruise from Sabang, North Sumatra, down the island's west side among its many islands, the trips we made to the interior highlands, as well as visiting Jakarta and Java's ancient UNESCO World Heritage sites, was like no other that we have done. Very few cruisers take the time to cruise this area as it is somewhat remote and not on the usual westerly route through southern Indonesia. These days surfers have found the islands and some hardy backpackers have discovered the attractions of Sumatra's highlands, and of course there is no lack of local tourists in Java. Alas, I should have visited in the 1970s while it was still really remote!

A SHIPMAN was ther, woning fer by weste:
For aught I woot, he was of Dertemouthe.

...

But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,
His stremes and his daungers him bisydes.
His herberwe and his mone, his lodemenage,
Ther was noon swich from Hulle to Cartage.
Hardy he was, and wys to undertake;
With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.
He knew wel alle the havenes, as they were,
From Gootlond to the cape of Finistere,
And every cryke in Britayne and in Spayne;
His barge y-cleped was the *Maudelayne*.

Geoffrey Chaucer
Prologue to the Canterbury Tales – The Shipman

Written in Middle English between 1387 and 1400. Visit <http://www.librarius.com/canttran/genpro/genpro390-412.htm> for the full text and a 'translation' into modern English.