



Miss Jody, San Blas Islands,
Panama

Part One: A couple's unexpected journey around the world

By Joanne Bush

Accidental Circumnavigation

I would have never stepped aboard *Miss Jody* had I known we would end up sailing around the world. My husband Ron, a life-long sailor and racer convinced me to go cruising. Our plan was to sail as far as the San Blas Islands in Panama,

with the caveat that I could always go home if I didn't like it. I could jump ship and buy a bus ticket from the Florida Keys back to Pensacola, Fla., and it was relatively easy to return home from the Caribbean.

Don't get me wrong, I love traveling,

and the opportunity to discover new places and meet new people has always been a big draw for me, but I never imagined the "getting there" part would be by sea, and certainly not in a 42-foot catamaran. *Miss Jody* is an Antares 42, a predecessor to the Antares 44, and for a reluctant sailor, a catamaran would be

an excellent vessel for us to explore the Caribbean.

It soon became apparent that our choice to buy a blue water catamaran was prophetic. With no additional prompting from Ron, I soon discovered that the pull to explore distant places trumped any reservations I had about sailing. I was hooked once we reached the San Blas Islands and our eyes were now set to the Panama Canal and the Galapagos Islands.

It would take us six days to sail the 1000 miles to the Galapagos, and

while it would be difficult, Ron assured me that we could always come back home. It would be an expensive “bus” ticket, but it was doable. Surrounded by like-minded sailors and lured by the infectious buzz of planning for a Pacific passage, Ron’s dream to cross the Pacific Ocean would be realized—the first 1000 miles ended up being easy, so what’s another 3000? By now I could see the smoke from the tailpipe as we set sail to the Marquesas and left the last bus to Pensacola idea behind us for good.

THE SOUTH PACIFIC

While we have made some lifelong friends who are cruisers, it is the locals who have made the biggest impression on us and we never imagined we would meet some of Ron’s long-lost relatives along the way. In Fiji and Vanuatu we had some great opportunities to share friendships with local residents. In Sawa-I-Lau Island, one of Fiji’s remote islands, we went ashore to the village of Nabukeru. As is tradition, we presented kava to the chief’s daughter, attended church, had lunch with the village leaders and went to a native dance show in the evening. When the villagers heard Ron’s last name, they took him to meet a family with the same last name, Bruce. The following day, we were warmly invited to breakfast in their home. They believe that they’re direct decedents of Robert de Bruce of Scotland and claim there are several Bruce clans in Fiji. Who knew?

A huge motivation for us to continue sailing in the general direction of an apparent circumnavigation was the spectacular diving opportunities. We anchored off numerous reefs scattered across the Coral Sea about 600 miles from Bundaberg, Australia. One such area was the Huon Reef. We must have seen more than 100 green turtles mating and laying eggs, schools of small black tip sharks, 1000s of masked and red footed boobies with their hatchlings, and various other shore



The author with husband, Ron at Machu Picchu, Peru



Ron visiting a friend in Kumai



Komodo Dragon with Miss Lucy in the background



The author in Chaing Mai, Thailand; people of the Karen Long Neck Tribe, Thailand; Angkor Thom, Cambodia



birds sitting on eggs. The place was a miniature Galapagos. And the further we traveled the more amazing the diving became.



SOUTHEAST ASIA

We left Darwin, Australia with 145 other cruising boats for our passage through Indonesia. The passage, called "Sail Indonesia", was organized by a group of Australian entrepreneurs in cooperation with the Indonesian Government. It was basically an "easy" way for us to work through the

Bali's steep slopes with terraced agriculture, above; the boats of Halong Bay, Vietnam, below

otherwise confusing Indonesian bureaucracy. The agenda would take us 1000 miles north to the NE corner of Indonesia then south to Flores, west to Belitung, near Singapore, a route of 3000 miles to cover in 3 months. Like many other cruisers, we chose not to follow the rally and instead opted for a route that allowed more time to visit selected islands to give us plenty of opportunities to snorkel and discover the wildlife. Our first stop was Samulakki where the local officials were overwhelmed with the staggering number of boats in our armada.

Indonesia was our introduction to SE Asia; another beautiful part of the world with names so strange to our ears we could hardly pronounce them. It carries the fame of having the world's largest archipelago with 17,504 islands. Indonesia and neighboring Malaysia proved to be a diver's



paradise. Sailing south along the coast of Sulawesi to Hoga Island we were positioned in the middle of the "World Coral Triangle" which has multiple dive sites. We rafted with four other boats on a commercial mooring and

dove several times. Even the nearby village was built on stilts, as the residents believe it to be a sin to live on dry land.

Further west of Flores is Labuham Bajo, the gateway to the Komodo and Rinca Islands. These two island





Perhentian Islands, Malaysia

groups make up the Komodo National Park. The sea and land life here was fantastic. Besides Komodo Dragons, deer, pigs, monkeys and turtles inhabited the island and the waters were teeming with mantas and an amazing array of underwater creatures we had never seen before. We dove several times and snorkeled every day. The southern islands are on the edge of the Indian Ocean and the water temperature was 10 degrees cooler and ideal for sea life. We stayed here for two weeks until we were thoroughly waterlogged.

Things have an interesting way of turning out. I never imagined I would be holding court with an orangutan in the jungles of Indonesia half way around the world. But nearly three years after leaving Pensacola, I found myself at the Camp Leaky Orangutan Preserve on Lombok Island.

We got to watch Tom, the alpha male, dominate over everyone, humans and their ancestors alike. As a

male orangutan ages his face becomes larger with the increased levels of testosterone and expands to the size of a dinner plate. The smaller orangutans were clearly aware of his magnificent presence. They would hang back until he moved away from the feeding stations and then would cautiously move in and cram bananas in their mouths, always leary of Tom. Almost every female had a baby and those that didn't were pregnant. Clearly he was a busy guy.

Leaving *Miss Jody* docked in Johor Bahru in Malaysia, we started our tour of SE Asia's mainland in Vietnam. Hanoi was amazing and it was fun to watch the locals travel on 25-foot wide streets, packed with bikes, motorcycles, cars and trucks. There are very limited traffic lights and no one observes the stop signs anyway. We toured the city in cycle rickshaws, and since the largest vehicle has the right of way, we weren't exactly high on the pecking order.

We also visited the "Hanoi Hilton", the prison where POWs were housed during the Vietnam War. Our guide, Son, told us that the past is the past and that the Vietnamese people have moved on. It was still surreal to see all the US military vehicles parked there.

While traveling by bus from Phnom Penh, I was reminded of Ron's offer of a bus trip home if the cruising lifestyle didn't suit me. As we headed to Seim Reap, a small town on the shores of Lake Tonle Sap in the center of Cambodia, that seemed like a distant memory. This was possibly one of our favorite places, a fun little town, loaded with shops in old French houses, inexpensive restaurants and hotels on every corner. There were more than 200 temples in the area all dating back to the time of the Khmer rule, from 800 A.D. to the end of the 16th Century. The complexity of the structures was like nothing we had seen before.

Ron and I traveled to Bangkok and Chaing Mai, Thailand's two largest cities. We spent a day at an elephant park and got to ride through the mountains on Billy, a 30-year-old female with her mahout, Suk. Like our experience in Indonesia, we had the great privilege to interact with the wildlife. I got to hold a two-month-old tiger cub and spent several hours with some of the bigger tigers. It was truly an unforgettable experience.

INDIA AND BEYOND

In contrast, a trip to New Delhi and Agra in India was quite sobering. We had been warned about the poverty in India but were still shocked. It wasn't so much that parts of New Delhi looked like a bomb had exploded, leaving behind trash and broken concrete everywhere, it was the contrast of extremes that were so mind boggling. We traveled by train to Agra to see the Taj Mahal, one of the most opulent structures in the world, and passed slums built of cardboard, people sleeping in fields, and others squatting along the railroad tracks



to use the bathroom. No one seemed to notice this dichotomy as the train sped past.

Our accidental circumnavigation started with what was supposed to be a six-month trip to the Caribbean. We had long since left the last bust stop back to Pensacola and were now entering the next phase of our adventure; waiting for the SE monsoon season to end so we could get to the Red Sea. Up until now, I had sailed every step

of the way, quite an achievement for a self-declared non-sailor. But that was about to change. **BWS**

Unaware of the perfect storm that was looming over the Arab world, Miss Jody and crew were about to test their limits as they endured 20-foot seas and dodged their way through Pirate Alley enroute to the Mediterranean and to finally closing the loop on their journey around the world.



Guilin China, Cormorant fishermen