

# SKY POND

by Roxy Podlogar

*SKY POND Cruising at nightfall*

**O**n March 3rd, 2016 My husband, Carl and I took ownership of our new Seawind 1160 Deluxe in a little bay at the mouth of the Saigon River, with our destination set for Darwin, Australia. We spent ten years preparing for this event - our escape from the day-to-day redundancy of work and land life through blue-water sailing about the world. We chose to begin with a delivery skipper, Alec Warring, who for three weeks created a sailing and living environment of safety through his experience. Today we are sharing our experience of taking delivery and our first big cruising adventure which we hope proves interesting and inspirational.

## The get-go

Our adventurous lifestyle of canyoneering, backcountry skiing, igloo camping, and extreme mountain biking provided the foundation for our future cruising life. And fittingly, we were married on an America's Cup sailboat in Washington State's Puget Sound in August 2005 with the goal of escaping within ten years. So like many sailors we planned thoroughly (or thought we did). Taking delivery in Asia can be challenging because of foreign customs, language and the region's limited yachting infrastructure. However, delivery in Vietnam offered a number of advantages in terms of reducing delivery costs to the United States and maximizing our sailing experience in the South Pacific, so we set ourselves the challenge of tackling Asia first while getting to know our boat along the way.

Having a delivery skipper also introduced a new personality and new systems to our daily lives, which was naturally challenging and unexpectedly added to our adventure. Our delivery skipper, Alec had direct experience as an owner of a Seawind 1160. So we eagerly anticipated learning the boat's systems and developing standard operating practices, but we were not afforded the luxury of much time to take these steps. We had committed to a tight schedule, and so this untried little team was immediately forced to function as a high performance outfit upon disembarking Vung Tau, Vietnam. Were we to do it again, spending more "training" time with our skipper would be worthwhile.

Worthwhile, because four hours into the voyage at around 8 p.m. SKY POND slammed into something submerged in the dark commercial fishing waters outside of Vung Tau. The impact was so great, it knocked me off the bed as I slept. Carl and Alec immediately checked bilges for water, tested the steering for a bent rudder, and checked the transmission and props - all OK. Still shaken, we determined there were no failures in the systems and continued on our passage and to recheck everything in the daylight. Two hours later, while traversing the shipping lanes in choppy seas, our screecher was pulled about a third of the way out of its loose furl at its head by a 25 knot wind gusts. Alec and Carl went to the foredeck with lifelines attached to wrestle the screecher down. I eased out the halyard and manned the helm and started the engines to point into the wind. A gust lifted Carl off the deck and he was forced to let go, which in turn forced me to let the halyard go and it slipped through the mast, the sail sucking into the water between the hulls. Alec shouted to me to put the engines into neutral to avoid tangling the halyard in the props while he and Carl heaved the heavy wet sail onto the deck and lashed it down on the trampoline to inspect in the morning light. I only hoped in this crisis that I had correctly shifted into neutral since I had little experience of driving this yacht.

## From Suspense To Surreal

**S**ailing through the South China and Java Seas those first few days now seems surreal. After settling in and getting past the initial challenges, we were treated to natural beauty: dolphins, sharks and sea snakes, brilliant full triple rainbows, and spectacular sunsets. From SKY POND's galley, I could see the occasional bright green sea snake slither past and dolphins leaping alongside. The daytime skies became supremely bright early in the day as the equator provides no respite from sun or heat. The intensity was a constant. Always in the distance, the clouds themselves looked like pink and tan islands rising from the sea. They rarely produced rain, or useful wind, but created extraordinary brilliant sunsets. The seas at night were so tranquil, with the moon and stars reflecting off the surface. This is what we hoped for when taking delivery in Asia.

The reality was that the boat had a finite amount of food, fuel and water. Our water maker, which we carried with us in luggage from the US, could not be installed in time before the departure as planned – rather we brought it with us to for installation once we reached Australia. Resources needed to be meted out based on our near windless progress to our first destination of Darwin, calculating and recalculating how many more days

remained in the journey as compared to our limited resources. What we didn't realise was that the water and diesel gauges were only an indication of actual consumption.

The starboard engine stopped dead at 3 a.m. in the South Java Sea while I was on watch. A physical inspection of the plastic, transparent diesel tank showed it was completely empty while the gauge showed 50 litres remaining. Further scrutiny of the water gauge proved that the water levels remained at over 300 litres independent of our actual use. Luckily, we were within a day of Bali but we did not possess the proper visas to enter the port nor did we have any information on how to enter the port. By quickly sending satellite emails to our land-base family, we were able to determine where and how to enter the port. Unknown to us, it was a national holiday which explained why no one at the port answered our VHF calls. While struggling to maneuver around the well-worn Bali International Marina, a scruffy, bearded sailor rowed his wooden dinghy to us and provided phone numbers and directions to the local agent who could aid us in getting water and fuel. Within 48 hours, Ruth, the local agent, helped us organise customs and finish provisioning diesel by 10 litre bottles and water by 50 litre bottles, all ferried to our boat by dinghy.





Onward from Bali our surroundings were completely foreign to us. SKY POND would move through the sea by day, hundreds of miles from faint outlines of land masses which we knew were Indonesia and Malaysia, but we knew nothing of the ports, people, or our surrounding environment as this was a delivery, not a cruise, so no stopping. The oceans were hot and filled with colourful, iconic fishing boats lashed together by day while the sailors rested, and hundreds flooding the sea with stadium lights by night to net unsustainable quantities of fish. The fisherman owned the seaways and the airways played local music on VHF channel 16 throughout the night.

We learned how to identify weather patterns, set up radar and AIS guard zones, interpret and evaluate approaching vessel information, and make modifications to our route on the fly. We also quickly became comfortable in hailing vessels who spoke unknown languages to coordinate navigations.

During the weeks of sailing to Darwin, Carl and Alec worked through the commissioning process by identifying and solving technical and mechanical problems. Carl maintained comprehensive

spreadsheets of warranty items while working with Seawind's outstanding and responsive customer service team via satellite email. There were times when it was so strenuous and intense Carl had to remind me that our cruising life would be much more enjoyable and that the delivery phase was not indicative of our future cruising lifestyle.

We had made this a delivery – not a cruise, but I did find the valuable time to reflect, which sailing can afford. Like many other women, sailing around the world wasn't my dream, but continual learning and achieving goals is crucial to remaining agile and vital to our health especially as we age. As much as I had prepared and studied sailing materials on land, it wasn't until we were at sea where I could read user manuals and apply our delivery skipper's instructions that I became more confident and capable. Today I look back and laugh at a 400 point quiz Carl developed to evaluate my skills - yes really. I didn't think it so humorous at the time. We are still learning something new every day and building upon what our skipper taught us in those first weeks. The promise of sailing away together was a prerequisite to codifying our relationship.



On March 21, 2016 we arrived at dawn in Cullen Bay, Darwin, Australia completed the commissioning and first leg of delivering SKY POND, our new Seawind Catamaran.. The previous three weeks of sailing from Vietnam to Darwin is a blur of intense tedium punctuated by moments of beauty, exquisite peace and some fear. As we approach Cullen Bay the sun is just rising and I've completed my watch but haven't returned to bed - it is customary to arrive as a team so that we navigate the beacons together and enter the bay. I've been awake for 36 hours. I am exhausted and emotionally brittle. I don't know if I can tolerate the intense heat, humidity and strain much longer though we need to get our boat through the locks and into the marina at the height of the seven meter high tide.

Arriving in Darwin, I had no idea what to expect. The tide changes alone are mind boggling and require precise planning for entry into the marina's locks. It's difficult to grasp traveling along the edge of a continent for hundreds of miles. Since exiting the Java Sea we have known the location of our sailboat relative to the land mass of Australia, but have no concept of what that land is like. the deep scent of the vegetation and earth is an unexpected sensation. It reminds me that our earth is alive and not just the land we populate. Every land mass we passed while sailing through the China Sea, Java Sea and the Timor Sea exuded its own characteristic scent. The delivery of SKY POND to Australia stands out to us as a significant feat given our experience and skills.



Ash from the volcano falls like snow on the boat

## Cruising Vanuatu

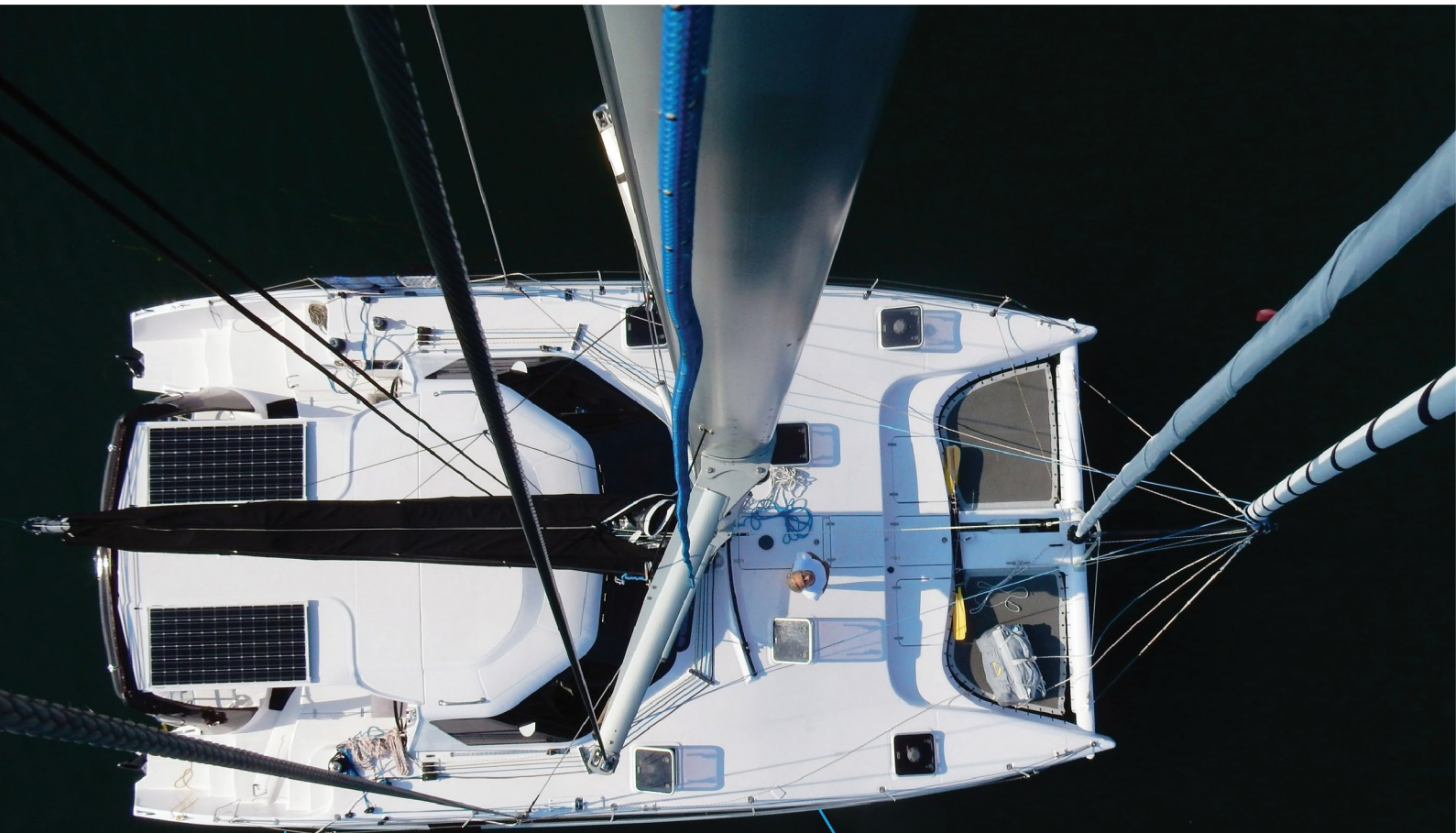


Volcano

**I**t didn't take us long to begin our first proper cruising adventure and after exploring the Great Barrier Reef for several months we set off for Vanuatu. My first report comes from the rim of a volcano on Tanna that was absolutely amazing. We were uncommonly close to the lava which was exploding from a clearly visible huge hole in the base of the crater. Named Mount Yasur, the volcano has been continuously erupting for almost 3 years - reportedly with several eruptions per hour. Just as the sun set we set sail from Ranvetlam, Ambrym for Vanihe, Ambae. As the night became darker, the black sand beach disappeared from view and the orange glow of Ambrym's volcano lit up the top of the island. Later, as it approached the pitch black of midnight, the volcano's orange glow was along side the Milky Way and the rising full moon, spectacularly silhouetted by the outline of the island.

Next stop is the island of Ambae. And as we found in Ambrym, there are said to be powerful sorcerers living on Ambae. So we kept a low profile, relaxing in Vanihe, snorkeling, reading, listening to music, and just taking in the majestic scenery. So different from the delivery trip, and with confidence soaring we are now truly experiencing a lifestyle shift. Towering cliffs reach 150m high, forming a dramatic backdrop as they rise out of the clear blue waters and black sand beach. We're the only ones here and there's no access to this bay from land, so it's quiet. Tomorrow we're off for Asanvari, Maewo...

Vanuatu is remote. And it is also refreshingly tribal - Local males who dance the Rom dance are clad only in 'mambas', a woven sheath that covers only the groin and is attached to a wide bark belt holding it straight out or erect, while women dance only in grass skirts. Ash from the volcano falls like snow on the boat.



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We have now arrived at the island of Ranon, Ambrym. We purchased a small tam tam wood carving from chief Joseph, a master carver and chief of a village of amazingly friendly, curious people. We were also spontaneously invited into the home of a local woman who searched through her home's garden to harvest fresh fruits and vegetables for us. We were happy to accept her bounty in exchange for cash.

Reflecting on the initial delivery, although it was difficult to take delivery abroad while learning the boat at the same time, we gained more in personal way than I expected.

Predictably we have improved our sailing and seamanship skills. Unpredictably but more

importantly, Carl and I have grown as a team and grown as a couple. Witnessing indescribable natural beauty, developing a circle of lifetime sailor friends and gaining insights of foreign cultures have broadened our perspectives and mutual joy. Solving problems jointly have given each of us a new appreciation of each other's abilities and strengthens our relationship at its foundation. It meant that the first real "cruising" was well within our capabilities, and as mentioned earlier confidence is high. And if you are reading this, then I can reassure that after over 20,000 miles in our first nine months of blue water sailing we are still convinced that the characteristics of the 1160 catamaran – and of Seawinds in general, make this the perfect bluewater boat for us.