

THE CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF S/V KAMAL

A journey by Greg and Lauren Henry aboard their Pearson 365

Excerpted from e-mail correspondence between Randy Powers and Lauren Henry in December, 2003. It is presented on this website with the permission of Greg and Lauren Henry.

PART V

Indonesia • Bali to Singapore • Indonesia • Phuket • Sri Lanka

Indonesia 8/01

Our impending visit to Southeast Asia had me excited because I was looking forward to our immersion among different cultures, unique from those we had encountered thus far (no where we've been have I felt far from Western ideology). What has surprised me, however, is not how different things are from places we've already visited, but how remarkably similar. In the islands, fishermen work their home waters, small shop owners sell their limited wares. People smile, invite you to their homes for a drink; in the South Pacific it was kava, here it is sweet tea. The details differ, but the essence remains essentially unchanged. Of course, the language is different, and we've had fun learning to communicate in Bahasa Indonesia. Before arriving, we'd read about the mores and customs of Indonesia never use your index finger to point, keep knees and shoulders covered, don't put your hands on your hips, a gesture indicating anger but we found that as in all places the lines are blurred, and these rules are not hard and fast. After a while we wondered why we were being so careful to obey them when it was clear that no one else was. Admittedly, some areas are different from others - in Muslim enclaves we are conscious about dressing modestly, and we often ask when we are unclear about proper behavior. So far no one has seemed offended by our questions, and in fact I think they find our ignorance amusing. But despite the many differences that do exist from place to place, even East to West, the rhythms of everyday living are familiar wherever we go.

Whenever we stop near a village we find ourselves literally surrounded by people in canoes and outriggers before we've even dropped the anchor. They are usually friendly and curious, attempting to get our attention with the one English phrase they all seem to know: Hallo, meester! Some bring crafts or fruit to sell or trade, but most are there to check us out and ask for bon bons, pens, hats, t-shirts, and anything else they think well part with. We have a policy of not giving handouts, which only encourages begging (and another wave of visitors trying to get in on the action). Rather, we try to explain the concept of exchange, but they often don't understand or choose not to. After a while the

attention does get on everyone's nerves, and I was particularly disconcerted one day to wake up from a nap after an overnight sail to find a teenage face peering in at me through the companionway; I'm not sure who was more startled, him or me.

We arrived in Indonesia on the island of Roti, then worked our way west towards Bali. In Roti we saw ikats for the first time, fabrics woven on backstrap looms from hand spun and individually dyed threads. They are used as sarongs, head wraps, etc, and a large one can take one woman up to 4 weeks to complete. Each island has its own distinctive style and color palette. It was also in Roti where we began to learn the art of successful bargaining, which is practically a national pastime. Prices are so cheap you often find yourself arguing over .50US, but in Indonesia that's a significant amount of money, plus when the note says 5,000 rupiah its hard to remember its not so much by our standards!

East of Flores Island in Lewoleba we anchored in a flat bay flanked by three volcanoes, two of which were continually belching out steam. Sunrises and sunsets are consistently incredible, and seeing a blazing red disc rise and set over the volcanoes was special. Lewoleba was also our introduction to the muezzins call to prayer at and sometimes before sunrise. Mosques have sound speakers mounted outside to announce to believers, and everyone else, that its time to pray, and we quickly learned to anchor as far from them as possible.

On Flores we got even closer to a volcano during our visit to Kelimutu, a volcanic cone whose crater lakes are known to periodically change color as minerals leach into them from the earth. The three lakes are supposed to appear red, blue and green, but to us they looked more like aquamarine and black. To get there before sunrise (after which clouds settle over the lakes obscuring them from view) 12 of us left our boats at 2am for the four hour ride. On the way back we stopped in a traditional village where the headman gave us a tour of his house, a 450 year old dwelling which has been passed down through the generations. We also saw women in the process of dying threads and weaving ikats.

Everyone coming this way wants to see the famous komodo dragons, the largest monitor lizards on earth and likely relatives of carnivorous dinosaurs who roamed this area 130 million years ago. Instead of going to Komodo Island we stopped in Rinca, just to the east, where it was rumored we'd have a better chance of spotting them. That turned out not to be a problem, we saw four the day we went ashore to organize a tour, one snoozing on the dock right as we got out of the dinghy! Greg expressed a perverse desire to touch one, but restrained himself after learning that a 50 kilo dragon can eat 40 kilos of meat in one sitting. Apparently their appetite is limitless if there's food available, they'll

eat it. And as Sharon Stone's husband discovered firsthand, they kill their prey by slashing its tendons, then moving in to devour the carcass after it has died of infection or blood loss. The dragons can reach up to 3 meters in length, although I think the largest we saw was perhaps 2.5 meters (about 8 feet).

Sailboats are meant to be powered by wind, but because we rarely have even the faintest breeze we've found ourselves motoring much of the time. In one port Greg went in search of fuel and ended up asking a local cargo vessel. They asked two times the going rate let the bargaining begin. Eventually they came down to a more reasonable figure if we would also throw in some cigarettes and girlie magazines. Greg was surprised; he'd thought they were Muslim? Oh, no problem, no problem, they assured him! The closest we could come was an Australian GQ-type magazine. Not quite what they were after, but better than nothing, I suppose. They seemed happy, and we got our fuel.

Sailing in Indonesia is tricky business. Fishermen go out in small boats which are low to the water and difficult to spot. They string out fishing nets which might have buoys marking them, but more often than not, don't. You know you're headed for one when the fisherman jumps up and down yelling and furiously waving his arms in the direction of his net. There is also a frustrating absence of common sense the rules of the road seem to be that there are none. Most of the vessels we encounter have no interest in avoiding a collision, and many even seem to encourage it. One day it felt like no matter which direction I turned an oncoming cargo vessel was still heading right for me, and in the end I had to turn 90 degrees to my rhumb line in order to avoid him. We try not to sail at night, negotiating the maze of boats is arduous enough in daylight!

Four weeks after arriving in Indonesia were berthed in a marina in Balis Bena harbor. We haven't seen much of the island yet, but even with our limited forays we couldn't help but notice the small packets of food and flowers laid everywhere as offerings to the Hindu gods; on sidewalks, statues, even taxi dashboards. Were awaiting the arrival of our friend Mike, who will be sailing with us for about a month. With him we'll venture into the mountains of Bali to Ubud, the islands cultural center. Then were headed up to Kalimantan to visit an orangutan reserve and rehabilitation center, and from there we sail to Singapore.

Bali to Singapore 11/01

(Written by Mike, a college friend of Greg and Lauren)

I arrived in Bali to find Lauren and Greg at the Bali International Marina. According to Greg the only thing international about it was the price. It had been over two years since I last saw them,

and they looked great!

Our first adventure was into the town of Kuta, where I quickly learned the art of haggling. Prices are never as quoted. It was quite fun negotiating with the locals as I purchased a couple of necessary souvenirs.

We then hired a driver who took six of us to the city of Ubud. Along the way, we stopped to see a traditional dance of Borang, the good spirit, then some expert wood carvers. Some of the detail on their carvings was absolutely amazing. I bought a Borang carving and Greg purchased a fisherman. We also stopped at some jewelers, but neglected to purchase anything despite the constant attention we received. Our driver finally dropped us off at our lovely hotel. I say this tongue in cheek, but I liked the little place. For three bucks a night we had hot showers, a bed, and a decent breakfast. However, Marti, from the boat Capers, had the opportunity to meet a rodent face to face. Earlier in the evening the incessant barking of a local dog kept us awake, but it was finally persuaded to pipe down after a reprimand (in Swedish) by Mona from the boat Windfall. All very amusing. For Marti the rat was the last straw, and she got up at 2:00 AM to check into another, more swanky hotel for \$12/night.

While in Ubud, we couldn't walk ten feet without being asked if we needed transport, local for taxi. It seems as though everyone in Ubud has some type of vehicle they are willing to hire out. We again hired a transport that took us to several different temples where we had to dress in sarongs, a local skirt, to show respect for their religion. The highlight of Ubud had to be the opportunity to witness a cremation ceremony. With much anticipation, we waited for the procession to arrive. A huge parade passed by including a band, a piata type bull, and an elaborately decorated tower housing the deceased. Again we donned our sarongs out of respect and followed the procession into the cemetery. You would imagine the whole event would be somber, but in fact it appeared to be a celebration. They cut open the bull and placed the wrapped body inside along with gifts of money, food, and clothing for the afterworld. Finally, in an anticlimactic way, they set fire to the bull, sending the deceased off. The actual burning of the body was witnessed mainly by tourists like us, as most of the locals left beforehand, the majority of the celebrations being over.

After making our way back to the boat and shopping for provisions, we set sail for my first open water test. We sailed around the top of Bali and anchored for the night. The next morning, while listening to the Voice of America on the short wave radio, we learned of the tragic events in New York and Washington. We debated whether we should continue or sail back to the harbor. In the end we decided to leave, all the while worried for our friends and family. Having no phone or easy

access to e-mail I felt helpless, but glad to be among good friends. It was such a contrast of emotions. Here we were, anchored off a beautiful lush green island while our thoughts and concerns were with people thousands of miles away.

Continuing on, I did my first overnight sail as we pressed ahead for three straight days. Luckily, I don't know how to sail, so I never really stayed up for a watch. I think Lauren and Greg didn't trust me to stay awake. Anyway, I quickly learned that multi-day passages are not glorious affairs. It's hot, wavy and not conducive to good sleeping or eating. (No wonder they looked so skinny!)

The next major stop was the island of Borneo. Once there, we met up with Harry, the local tour guide, customs agent, and proprietor of just about anything. We had to rush to get all our paperwork done by 4:00PM because after that they shut off the power on that side of the island and we wouldn't be able to use the photocopier! Harry picked us up the next morning along with couples from five other boats we sailed in with. We motored up river to the orangutan rehabilitation center where orangutans who have lost their mothers or have been injured in some way are taught to live independently. They are gradually introduced to the wild in three sites which become progressively more isolated. This was probably the highlight of the entire trip for me. We got to see orangutans in their natural habitat. The most interaction was at the first site, where we all got to play with Barry, a small gibbon monkey. Barry came swinging out of the woods and jumped onto us; he hung around waving his proportionally long arms in the air. We laughed so hard, and Barry kept us endlessly amused. We left Barry and headed to Camp Leaky, where the famous Dr. Leaky taught Princess to communicate by signing. Princess wasn't too happy with all of the attention and ended up biting Linda from Canik on the ankle. A scary moment for all. The guides all swore she had never done anything like that before.

We then hiked into the woods where the guides called the orangutans with a Tarzan-like call. As they hollered, the trees moved with swinging orangutans coming in for their feeding. Mothers with their children, bug males, all kinds coming in for us to watch. Amazing how strong they are, able to hoist themselves up a tree or vine with one arm. We had a little scare when one of them decided not to be too friendly to us tourists. Luckily our guides were quick to intercede and the incident ended peacefully.

From Borneo, we reached Kumai after five long days of sailing. Along the way, we celebrated crossing the equator with proper pomp and ceremony, complete with a rum toast to Neptune. We arrived into an immaculate marina, equipped with swim up bar, golf course, and good restaurants. Strangely, the place was deserted. We barely saw another soul other than fellow sailors

the entire time there. It was a nice way to wind down from the long passage. After several days, we took a ferry across to Singapore where we shopped and ate well, visiting various parts of downtown. From there, I said a sad farewell to Greg and Lauren.

All in all I spent almost four weeks with my friends. I read a lot of books, a common way to pass the time underway. We talked and played games, although after only two matches Lauren got tired of playing scrabble with me, so I sadly played myself, keeping score and making spelling challenges! It was definitely a trip of a lifetime, one I'll never forget. I can only imagine the memories and friends they'll have after three years of adventures.

To them, I wish safe travels.

Indonesia to Phuket 1/02

Departing Indonesian waters we sailed through the Singapore Straits to Johor Bahru in Malaysia. We felt like frogger, dodging one tanker after another; after 150 or so Greg lost count of them. From our anchorage in Johor Bahru we were just a short bus ride from Singapore. We chose to go straight to Malaysia because we couldn't justify the cost of the marinas in Singapore, although their air conditioned showers were hard to pass up! The bus transported us from the third world to the first. The Malaysia side was chaos no schedules, no signs, no timetables, no prices, cramped, dark and dirty facilities. Once you manage to find the correct bus it's a short ride across the river where everyone files out to get their passports stamped. It's like entering another world. The Singapore facility is white marble from floor to ceiling, clean, well lit and organized, characteristic of everything you'll find there. In Singapore, order reigns supreme. Known as the fine city, there are penalties for any number of infractions from chewing gum to failing to flush a public toilet.

One of our excursions took us to the zoo, which features many animals indigenous to Asia. The exhibits are landscaped to appear as authentic as possible, and they've eliminated cages and bars in exchange for natural boundaries. It was often impossible to tell what kept the animals from roaming at will.

After the sparkle of Singapore it took us a while to appreciate Malaysia. The trip up the Malacca Straits was long and difficult with variable winds, erratic seas and unpredictable though spectacular lightening shows. Along the way we visited Melaka, a small but strategically located town which suffered 400 years under foreign rule. As a result visitors today can see the lingering influence of the Portuguese, Dutch and English.

By the time we arrived in Kuala Lumpur we were used to Malaysia's somewhat haphazard city planning. Highways bisect pedestrian thoroughfares, buildings are connected by overpasses you can't locate, street lights are a rarity, and in general it's all one big mess. Despite the craziness KL surprised us as a relatively clean, modern city. It is home to Petronas Towers, and seeing those two gleaming buildings, showpieces of modern Islamic architecture, was somewhat unnerving. Yet despite the symbolism of the towers we never felt unsafe, or the objects of hostility. Whenever people learned we were from New York they invariably asked us if our families were safe, and expressed their sympathies. Although Bin Laden doesn't seem to enjoy support in Malaysia, people here were overwhelmingly opposed to US actions in Afghanistan because they felt the cost to innocent civilians was too great.

As we sailed we spent a lot of time debating what our plans for the coming year should be; continue on, ship the boat back, wait it out? Meanwhile we had Kamal installed on a mooring in Lumut where she would stay while we made a trip home. With ten days until our flight, and the heat and flies almost unbearable, we took an overnight train to Bangkok, then another to Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand. I don't have many good things to say about Bangkok except that the Grand Palace is spectacular. However we loved Chiang Mai, a bustling town set among the hills. We were only there a few short days and could have stayed much longer. Among the highlights were a highland trek, elephant ride, bamboo rafting, temple visit, Thai cooking class and exploration of the extensive night market.

Coming home was hectic and tiring, but being able to connect with friends and family was reassuring after having felt so isolated half a world away. One month later when we got back to Malaysia we were forced to sprint up to Phuket, Thailand where we'd arranged to meet up with friends for Christmas. Along the way north we made time to stop at Ko Muk and visit one of the fabled Thai hongs. Hongs, literally rooms in Thai, are formed when cave systems collapse on themselves and after a hundred million years of erosion evolve into chambers with a view clear up to the sky. They were only first discovered in WWII by pilots flying overhead, and many are now overrun with tourists. Ko Muk is reportedly the most beautiful of all the hongs, and we visited early in the morning before any tour boats had a chance to arrive. You enter the hong on a low tide through a dark, winding tunnel. We rowed our dinghy in as the beams from our flashlight highlighted stalactites jutting down from the ceiling, and bats swinging from nooks and crannies in the rock face. Eventually we could see light glimmering up ahead, and through the mouth of the tunnel saw brilliant white sand. We paddled out onto the beach and saw sheer cliff walls completely surrounding us. At the far edge of the beach was a small tropical forest, with ferns and trees growing

right up along the walls. We were spellbound, and lingered a long time in wonder at this magical and isolated place.

We've spent the last few weeks on Phuket island celebrating Chanukah, Christmas and the New Year (Patong Bays fireworks display rivals almost any other we've seen, but it was nowhere near as outrageous as the scene on shore). Thailand is a wonderful place, and definitely somewhere we would have liked to have seen more of. However, we finally decided to continue on with the trip this year which means gearing up to leave for Sri Lanka only a few days after January first. We were still undecided when we returned from the U.S., but were convinced by the sheer number of boats who would be traveling with us. Because of the increased military presence in the Red Sea most people think this will be the safest time to transit. Next stop, Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka 02/02

Sri Lanka doesn't enjoy a good reputation among cruisers although conveniently located for a boat heading west, many choose to bypass it completely. So we weren't surprised to find ourselves paying \$170 to check in the most some sailors say they've spent in ten years of cruising or handing over gifts to the navy and customs officers. What was a surprise was how much we enjoyed our time there.

Kamal was based in Galle, situated on the islands southwest coast. Galle is known primarily for its 36 hectare fort which now demarks the old city. Built by the Dutch in the 1600s, the fort was voted a World Heritage Site by the United Nations and they say it has scarcely changed with the passing centuries.

Sri Lanka makes an impression upon all your senses, from the ubiquitous aroma of spices and freshly ground hot curries, the intense green scenery of the highlands, women dressed in flamboyantly colored saris, and street vendors loudly extolling their wares. We made our way around in tuk tuks resembling pregnant vespas driven by men who seemed normal but transformed into suicidal maniacs once they got on the road. They weave in and out of traffic as if their lives depend on it. We've already negotiated the cost there are no meters so what's the rush? We never found out, but later learned that everyone practices this kamikaze method of driving. This is the only place we've seen a fully laden bus pass a car going uphill, right before a bend in the road.

Sri Lanka has a long and rich history, and for such a relatively small island has an inordinate number of historically and aesthetically interesting sites to explore. We only had three days to visit the interior, but during that time we saw much to intrigue

us.

Sri Lanka's British legacy includes a typically bogged down bureaucracy, but does not extend to the maintenance of public works. Their main source of energy is hydro-electric power but as the dry season progresses the whole island suffers rolling blackouts lasting up to eight hours at their height. During our stay they were up to two. Roads in particular are terribly neglected, so although distances are not great, travel remains tedious and slow. Our group of seven spent the trip bouncing up and down in a van whose air conditioning quit after the first day. Luckily we were kept entertained by the views outside our windows and conversations with each other and our driver Wimal.

Among our many stops was a visit to a spice farm, where among the various plants we saw huge round divots in the ground, evidence of a wild elephant's nocturnal search for food. We also stopped at an elephant orphanage where we watched herds washing and cavorting in a river and babies being bottle fed. We stayed overnight in the hill town of Kandy, which is built around a huge lake, said to have once been the playground of princes and princesses. Runoff made the field boggy so the ancients turned it into the lake, which remains today.

That night we attended a traditional Kandyan dance performance. Some of the dancers wore elaborately carved masks to represent devils and other spirits, while others did back-flips across the stage, ate fire and balanced spinning tops at the end of long poles. At the very end we were treated to an impressive display of fire-walking. (It was actually hot coals, but I was still impressed).

The next day we visited the Temple of the Tooth, said to house an incisor rescued from the Buddha's funeral pyre in 543BC and smuggled into Sri Lanka hidden in the headdress of a princess.

Sri Lanka is predominantly Buddhist, and both modern and ancient temples can be found all over the island. One of our favorites was at Dambulla, where five caves were converted into rock temples in the 1st Century BC. The walls and ceilings of the caves are covered in colorful though fading frescoes, and they are filled with Buddha statues in three main poses; sitting, standing and laying on his side.

Near Dambulla lies Sigiriya, a spectacular fortress situated on top of a 660 foot high rock pinnacle. Visiting this site was undoubtedly the highlight of our trip. The fort was erected in 473AD by a king fearful of invasion from India. It later became a monastic refuge, and subsequently fell into disrepair until its rediscovery by the British in the 19th Century. Approaching the base of the rock you walk through ancient water gardens, pass under boulder archways and a rock overhang in the shape of a cobra with its hood fully

extended. Reaching the top involves an arduous climb up the rock face. Before the halfway point we took a short detour to see the only secular paintings to survive in Sri Lanka from ancient times. These 5th Century drawings of young women are in a narrow overhang and security is tight; in 1967 a vandal successfully damaged some of the artwork. Continuing up we reached the Lion Platform. All that is left now are the lions paws, but judging by their size the original statue must have been very large. The remaining ascent is made via steel steps embedded in a series of grooves along the rock face with a handrail to keep you in line. Luckily it wasn't a very windy day! From the summit we had a wonderful view of the countryside, and explored the fortress ruins. Foundations are mostly all that remain, but they are extensive and include a swimming pool that some visitors (but not us; it looked like a science experiment in there) took a dip in to cool off.

Later we took a train to Colombo to visit a friend of Greg's from back home. At his house we were treated to a traditional Sri Lankan breakfast curry, of course! Sri Lankans pile rice onto their plates and around that put various curry dishes. Then using the right hand everything is mixed together and eaten with their fingers. For breakfast the rice was replaced by string hoppers, which resemble noodles, fresh bread and pittu, a mixture of flour and grated coconut steamed in a bamboo mould. Sri Lankan curries are said to be the hottest in the world, and we were glad to have the starchy food to help cool our palettes. Of course we also drank tea, one of Sri Lanka's most famous exports.

The conflict between the Sinhalese (descendants of the original settlers from northern India) and Tamils (descendants of later settlers from southern India) seems to have abated somewhat recently. One reason are talks initiated by the newly elected government, but another rumor was that the Tamils were afraid their terrorist tactics would precipitate US involvement in the wake of their war on terrorism. Whatever the reason the people we spoke to (mainly Sinhalese) seemed pleased; they regretted the violence and destruction tearing apart their small nation. Despite recent breakthroughs, in Galle the navy continues to set off depth charges every night in the harbor to deter Tamil frogmen bent on destruction. From our boats they sounded like firecrackers being set off in the bilge, and were one of the things we would not miss upon our departure!

After a 4 day sail we arrived in Uligamu, Maldives, a small island with low vegetation, a clean, tidy village, white sand beach and unbelievably clear water with great snorkeling. We only stayed a couple of days before heading out again bound for Salalah, Oman.