

M.V. SOLITA'S PASSAGE NOTES



**DARWIN, AUSTRALIA TO
KOTA KINABALU, MALAYSIA
SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2010**

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We started this trip in September 2010 and left Australia intending to be in South East Asia for several years. We chose this route for several reasons:

- we wanted to participate in the Darwin-Saumlaki rally
- we were keen to visit the Banda Islands again
- we wanted to get through Indonesia within the 60 days of our visa
- we were keen to try “a road less travelled” and explore where not many other boats go
- we wanted to arrive in Kota Kinabalu before Xmas
- we wanted to use the transition period of calm weather between the two monsoon seasons, as we are a power boat and did not need wind

We achieved all these goals and were very happy with our choice of routing. With the exception of the 2 overnight passages crossing the Arafura and Banda Seas, we “day-hopped” all the way to Kota Kinabalu. We found comfortable anchorages most nights and had no long sea passages. We had no significant problems and would recommend this passage to others with similar plans. Please understand the information in these Passage Notes is derived from our own experiences – others may have a different journey.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Visas:

Indonesia:

In 2010 an Indonesian CAIT (Cruising Authority for Indonesian Territory) was essential to have before you left Australia and difficult to organise. We found it easier to join the Darwin-Saumlaki Rally, as they organised the visa for you. The cost was included in the rally costs, but is usually about AU\$130 per boat. Otherwise negotiate with an Indonesian consulate or an agent who will organise this for you. You also need a personal visa to enter Indonesia – this was AU\$60 per person in Australia in 2010.

When applying for the CAIT it seemed sensible to list any possible areas we wanted to visit, but to avoid large towns where we would need to clear in and out. The Indonesian government requires you to clear in with the harbourmasters in every large town that you visit. Our route meant that we only visited the

authorities in Ternate and Tarakan. We were asked to show our paperwork in several small towns and villages by diligent harbourmasters, and they were very happy to be given a copy of our CAIT, boat registration and a paper we created that stated our boat details (with photo), our crews' personal passport details, passport photo of the skipper and a broad schedule of our visit to Indonesia. (HINT: carry many copies of these papers, in colour and give them out freely.) The CAIT gives you 3 months to get through Indonesia – a very short time considering the size of the country! Your personal visa grants 2 months. You may be able to get extensions to your personal visa at major ports, but we didn't try – it just seemed easier to leave within 60 days.

Malaysia:

No paperwork was required before arriving, and the Immigration authorities were very welcoming and friendly. They gave us a free 90 day visa on entry. We also had to clear in with the Harbourmaster on entry to Malaysia, and at every large port we visited. This was somewhat of a nuisance because we had to find the Harbourmasters' office (Jabatan Laut) in every town. We visited Customs when entering Malaysia in Tawau but they told us we didn't need to see Customs unless we had anything to declare and Quarantine staff were never in their office when we tried to visit them. (HINT: Ensure you are flying the Malaysian flag – they are very patriotic and expect you to fly their flag.)

Provisioning:

Food:

I would recommend really stocking up on canned, bottled, packaged and if you have a freezer, frozen food before leaving Darwin. Especially buy any specialty items (pickled onions, gherkins, gravy mix, vegemite, tinned tomatoes and spaghetti, bread mixes, ham and other tinned meats, pork and related products like bacon, sauces, jams, etc). In Indonesia it was difficult to buy any variety of food and certainly very little western-style products or meat. If you stop in any village or town with a market you can generally buy a good variety of local fresh fruit and vegetables that are in season there. However, there will only be a very limited selection of other food available – mainly rice and noodles, tinned fish in oil, dry biscuits, dried fish products, sweet bread and sticky cakes occasionally. Fresh seafood – fish, crabs, prawns and squid – was available in larger towns that had a fish market, but you have to buy early in the morning as the fish markets have no refrigeration.

Fresh eggs were always available in small villages and chicken was plentiful in the larger towns. We did not see English potatoes, margarine or butter, snack foods like potato chips, pet food, cheese slices, tinned meat or frozen beef until Tawau in Malaysia. Sandakan had more western style foods available in the newer supermarkets but no decent meat other than chicken or frozen lamb or beef of questionable quality. Only in Kota Kinabalu did we find imported items like Gravox, parmesan cheese, potato mash mix, jars of antipasto goodies (roasted capsicum, pesto, sundried tomatoes, pickled onions), decent cheeses and meat, a variety of breads.

Drinks:

Stock up in a big way before leaving Australia. In Moslem areas you won't find any alcohol at all. In some Christian villages and towns in Indonesia we found the local Bintang beer (it is rarely advertised or on display. Some Chinese stores carry it and you will have to ask for it). Beer was much more available in Malaysia and there were several brands to choose from there. In both countries beer was cheaper than in Australia. We saw no wine until Sandakan and there we found a few dusty bottles of an average Australian brand in a newer supermarket for about 80RM (AU\$27 approx.) per bottle. There was a much greater selection of mainly Australian and Chilean wine in Kota Kinabalu and it was available from many outlets. The prices started from 40RM per bottle. Some local and imported spirits were available in Tawau and Sandakan but these were quite expensive.

Coca Cola (and sometimes Sprite) was available everywhere, though usually not available cold until we reached Malaysia. We didn't find any Diet Coke (called Coke Light) until Malaysia, and even then there were few outlets that stocked it. There were local soft drinks available throughout Malaysia, but we found these quite sweet. Soda water/tonic water/bitter lemon was hard to find until we reached Kota Kinabalu. It was difficult to find any bottled fruit juices until Kota Kinabalu.

Access to overseas funds:

Indonesia:

In Saumlaki there was one ATM machine that would give local currency from an Australian Cirrus or Mastercard bank account. This machine was frequently out of action. We did not see another ATM or bank that was capable of giving us funds from our bank account until Ternate and Tarakan.

Malaysia:

All the larger towns we visited had ATM machines which would pay out in local currency for Australian Cirrus and Mastercard bank accounts.

Phone:

In both Indonesia and Malaysia you can buy a SIM card from a retail outlet that will fit into an Australian cell phone. Reception varies but essentially if you can see a telecommunications tower (they are generally painted white and red) you can access the service. The cost of calls, even international ones to a landline, is very cheap. There are many recharging outlets, even in small towns.

Internet:

Similarly you can buy a modem to supply internet access to your laptop or computer in both countries, but there are fewer outlets to purchase or recharge these. This service is available only in larger towns. Generally if you could get phone coverage you also had internet service.

Weather:

We set off from Darwin in September, when the SE trades governing North Australia and the Arafura Sea should be easing. We encountered SE winds of 18-20 knots in the Arafura Sea, which seemed to be fairly constant over the 2-3 days. In 2008, we travelled back from Indonesia at this time, and had calm seas with virtually no wind. We had “glass-out” conditions north of Bathurst Island that year.

Once we were in the Tanimbar Islands of Indonesia, we had predominantly NE winds, though they were generally light, and dropped off at night unless we were in an offshore area such as the Banda Sea. We often had no wind during the day. These conditions continued for us through to the equator and Ternate.

In October and November we experienced very light to no wind in the northern Indonesian islands and across the north Sulawesi Island coast to Kalimantan. We did encounter some dramatic storms in the afternoons some days, which brewed from late morning until they broke, often with spectacular lightning and wind gusts, in mid afternoon. The winds generally dropped by sunset and we had quiet nights, albeit with distant lightning at times.

By late November we were experiencing frequent afternoon storms and rain with increasingly frequent and strengthening ESE wind. The wet season was well established in northern Borneo by early December.

Navigation:

We encountered very few navigation aids except for port and starboard markers showing the approach to major ports. The locals frequently place bamboo sticks into the water to mark fringing reef or a shoal in a river or inlet – these can be useful guides in local waters.

We navigated with paper charts and Sea Map, which proved to be quite accurate most of the time. Occasionally we felt it was “out” by 0.5 KM or so, and we always visually checked when in close to reef or coastline. We used one commercial guide – “Cruising Guide to Southeast Asia Vol 2”, 2 guides to the Tanimbar Islands written by Darwin yachtees Jan Carter and Mike Stephenson, and 3 pilot books – Indonesian Pilot Volumes 2 & 3, and China Sea Pilot Vol. 2.

Water pollution:

We were appalled at the water pollution in all Indonesian and Malaysian harbours, towns and larger villages. There was a significant amount of town garbage floating around – especially a lot of plastic bags, nappies and Styrofoam food containers. There was the occasional dead animal as well. We often saw rubbish caught along current lines way out to sea. We were also alarmed at the huge number of logs and floating trees in the water off the Kalimantan and Borneo coasts. On the east coast of Borneo there are many derelict fishing huts, unlit at night and falling down, often leaving bamboo stakes just at or below the water’s surface. These and the numerous floating logs posed navigational hazards as well as being a huge pollution problem.

Bribes/requests:

In the Tanimbar Islands we found that many of the local people we met expected some handout – after all, “we were so rich and they had nothing”. This attitude has been fostered by many cruising boats who have kindly given goods to these people over the years. We took goods to trade, but rarely did anyone offer us much in return – usually just some coconuts. We did happily give out clothes, food, soap, school supplies, sweets and fishing gear to people we met. We did not regard this as a bribe or “baksheesh”. However, beware of people in some position of power, as they may abuse this trust. We had a bad experience with one kepala desu, or head man, of a village on Molu Island in 2008, who asked us for a cash donation, as well as sugar, oil and a few other food items. The same year we were also asked by one of the interpreters used by the rally organizers in Saumlaki for a cash loan. We did make the loan but were never paid back. When we were checking into Indonesia at Saumlaki in September 2010 the Customs official from Tual refused to clear the boats unless we paid him a bond of 10% of the value of our boats. This bond was clearly impossible to assess, collect and reimburse, and not required as we were part of an official rally, so all captains refused and we continued on our way without Customs clearance. (This made no difference to our journey through Indonesia.) We also had to pay for Immigration, Quarantine and Harbourmaster clearance in Saumlaki and Harbourmaster clearance in Bandaneira. No other Indonesian officials asked us for a fee in any other town.

We had no requests for official fees, goods or payments during our travels in Malaysia.

Health issues:

We had no health problems during our trip, but there are health services in all the major towns in Indonesia and Malaysia. From discussions with other travelers we met, the Indonesian facilities are quite basic. We used some medical and dental services in Kota Kinabalu and they were very good – equivalent to those in Australia.

We encountered very few mosquitoes and sandflies during the whole trip, but we did take precautions (netting over hatches and doorways in the evening, mosquito coils burning in the evening, power outlet repellent dispersers inside the cabin if there were mosquitoes about, use of repellent and long sleeves and trousers if going ashore in the late afternoon or evening).

Pirates/theft/unwanted visitors:

We had no problems of this nature throughout our trip, though we were conscious of the possibilities and rarely left the boat at night. Through discussions with other yachtees and officials in both countries, potential problem areas are:

Indonesia:

Some of the Tanimbar Islands where there have been thefts before – Labobar Is, Wotap Is.

Around Ambon Island and islands to it's east

Malaysia:

To the east of Tawau – mainly the Tawi Tawi Islands and to the east of Mabul and Matakang Islands

To the east of the Balabac Strait, north of Kudat.

We noted that the Indonesian Navy regularly patrolled the east coast of Kalimantan, and in particular the border area just south of Tawau. The Malaysian Military/Coastguard has a permanent presence on some islands around Mabul and Kudat, and frequently patrolled these areas. The Philippines Coastguard also flew over their border areas from Balabac Strait down to the Mabul region, and has a permanent base at Balabac, in the lower Palawan island area. It may be wise to ask the Harbourmasters in Tawau and Tarakan about any recent problems as you arrive.

While we generally enjoyed having locals visit us on board, we had major invasions in some anchorages in Indonesia:

Wotap Island in the Tanimbars

Gumumu Island in the Obi Major group

Mayu Island in the Molucca Sea

Paleleh Bay and Laolalang Bay along the North Sulawesi coast

We rarely had visitors in Malaysia.

We did not carry weapons of any kind, but were conscious of having some devices on board to lessen the chances of unwanted visitors. These included: motion sensor lights on the back deck that also looked a little like CCTV, lockable windows and doors, a night light in the saloon, minimal “goodies” on display on deck. Also to hand we had mace spray, wasp spray, personal alarm with a really loud siren and small fire extinguishers.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON CRUISING AREAS

Tanimbar Islands

This is a great cruising area – lots of good anchorages in protected bays, though you often need to hunt for the more shallow anchoring depths. The scenery is gorgeous – many small islands with attractive beaches, sand cays and foliage. The weather is generally fine with light winds from predictable directions. The locals are generally very friendly, and will want to visit your boat. This can be a little overwhelming and most will have no English. They will also expect some handouts – often just a cup of coffee and biscuits, but some demand more. They are usually looking for clothes, soap, rope, fishing gear, petrol and food. Boating magazines are a popular gift. Some will offer to trade their local produce. Most villages will be either Christian or Moslem but all seem to mix OK with no obvious clashes, though there were some

religious persecution problems in Saumlaki in past years. Theft has been a problem in the past so you need to be careful. In 2008 we were robbed at Labobar Island when we were away from the boat for 1 hour in the afternoon. They took binoculars, electrical tools, sunglasses, small batteries, a spotlight and some other small items. Other boats have been robbed at Wotap Island and Latdalam. There are some beautiful areas that are uninhabited or where the locals don't tend to visit – these are worth seeking out to have a break from the relentless visiting that occurs in most populated areas. There are usually some dried stores and fresh fruit and vegetable markets in the main towns.

Banda Islands

These islands are difficult to get to, but once there you will enjoy the people, their history and the natural beauty of the island group. Anchorages are easy within the three islands of Api Guning, Lonthor and Bandaneira, as they form an excellent natural harbor. The other three islands of Ai, Run and Hatta do not have good anchorages – they are deep right up to the fringing reef - you need calm weather to stay there. The main town, Bandaneira, has good supplies in the local market and small shops. There are several good cafes and restaurants – the Mutiera and Delfica both offer very good food. There is an airport, though only small planes can use the runway. The local pelni, or ferry, visits every week or two. There is a schedule, but ferry breakdowns or poor weather will often interrupt this. The locals will not usually come to visit you on board, but are very friendly and like to engage in conversation – many speak some English. The Banda Islands are predominantly Moslem.

Ambon /Seram Sea Area

We felt this area looked quite ominous and oppressive. There are several large islands with tall mountains and the rain tends to hang around these peaks and create a damp, humid, hazy atmosphere in the area. The people did not seem very friendly – very few visited the boat and people in passing canoes didn't wave. The main towns are dirty and crowded, the coastlines had very few beaches and there were not many shallow anchoring opportunities. Also the recent history of religious intolerance, violence and their reported poor tolerance of "visitors" in the area discouraged us. Villages were either Christian or Moslem, and we felt there wasn't a lot of mixing. We weren't encouraged to linger very long. We felt much more comfortable when away from Ambon Island and amongst the islands of Seram Sea. These islands were beautiful, the water clean. We had little problem finding good anchorages. We had many visitors to the boat- they were enthusiastic to meet us and were very friendly. They greatly appreciated a cup of coffee, biscuits, some music to listen to and a magazine to take home.

Bacan/Sambaki Straits

These straits were interesting to traverse – we enjoyed the differing scenery of the narrow passages and backwater bays. It was a quite well-populated area so there was more sea traffic, but we had very few visitors. People didn't seem so friendly. Anchorages were a little difficult to find as most of the coastline is steep-to.

Ternate area

This area was very different from that just 100 miles south. Here we saw large circular islands – obviously volcanic in nature, surrounded by clear blue water, many smaller islands and islets. The offshore islands were clean and beautiful but Ternate town's waters were quite polluted. All the people we met here were friendly, but the people in Ternate seemed more conservative and religious. They are all Moslems - there was little evidence of Christian religions here. We had no visitors in this area except at Mayu Island.

North Sulawesi island coast

We greatly enjoyed travelling along this coastline. There were many beautiful islands, bays and inlets that offered many excellent anchorages. The eastern end of the north coast hosts many dive sites and resorts so we enjoyed clear water for swimming and snorkeling, and found a great stopover at Gangga Island Resort, where the owners were welcoming. As we travelled west we met many of the locals at our anchorages – all were keen to meet us and visit the boat. Most of our visitors were children and teenagers. Again we found that the village was either Moslem or Christian, but this made no difference to how they reacted to us, or whether we could visit their village. We also enjoyed some amazing storm cloud formations here, as the wet season developed.

North-East Kalimantan coast

This coastline was a contrast to the North Sulawesi coast – the water was generally muddy and we saw a lot of debris and rubbish in it. This was probably caused by the large rivers flooding into the bays along this coast and the extensive logging operations in Kalimantan. The bays did not have sandy beaches – they were more rocky and mangrove-lined. There were some attractive islands offshore but these were surrounded by extensive reef. Anchorages were harder to find, and a couple of nights we anchored off the shore in no wind. There was a greater fishing industry here, and we encountered many fishing huts (both permanent and floating), buoys and vessels.

East Sabah coast

We found Malaysia to be much more progressive and westernized than Indonesia, and the differences were very obvious as we crossed from Tarakan to Tawau, though unfortunately the water pollution problems were the same as in Indonesia. The Malaysian towns were more modern with a greater range of goods and services, and even the villages did not look as poor as their Indonesian counterparts. The majority of people in Sabah are Moslem but they seemed to us more open and less strict than the Indonesians. The Sabah coast was very scenic and had great areas to visit, like the dive areas around Mabul and the islands just to its north. The Kinabatangan River was a wonderful experience. Sandakan was a very interesting town and we met many very helpful people during our week there. There are many outlying Malaysian islands in the north of Borneo which would be fascinating to explore in good weather. There is still some care needed when travelling from Tawau to Sandakan, because of Philippine radicals living in the Tawi Tawi Islands area. Check with the Harbourmaster's office in either Tawau or Sandakan about any recent problems in this area before travelling through. Both the east and west

coasts offer easy access to the interior of Borneo. The Sabah Tourism Board has offices in all major towns and is very helpful about exploring the state.

West Sabah coast

This coast seems to have a different weather system to that of the east coast, as it is mainly influenced by the South China Sea and the Philippines to the north. The coastline is more rugged and there are only 3-4 options for anchorage between Kudat and Kota Kinabalu. However, Usukan and Ambong Bay offer good protection from most weather and this trip can be made in 2-3 days easily. The SW winds are fairly consistent from April/May to October, when there is a brief transition period of calm before the NE winds kick in. They will dominate until around February/March, when there will be another short transition period. Kota Kinabalu has a large and protected harbour, which houses a large fishing fleet and a significant shipping industry. Sutera Harbour Marina, just south of the main shipping channel into KK, offers excellent facilities and the use of the 5 star resorts around it for fees that are very comparative to Australian marina prices. The 5 offshore islands of Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park offer many water activities and chances for a swim or dive. KK offers many services and goods for sale, and provides a gateway to explore the rest of Sabah by land.

DIARY NOTES

Sept 8:

We left Tipperary Marina in Darwin at 1500, in company with Cockatoo 2 and Mandela 2. We motored through the Vernon Islands then north into the Van Diemen Gulf. We rounded Cape Don at 0800 the next morning and anchored in **Popham Bay** by 0915. The weather was good, seas calm for this entire segment of the trip.



Sept 10:



Up anchor at 0830 and we proceeded into the Arafura Sea, where the wind increased to 15-18 knots with a 1-2 M swell. It was fairly uncomfortable as the wind was from the SE and the swell caused us to roll. We averaged 7 knots en route, and made landfall in a large bay on the western side of **Selaru Island**, Indonesia, by 1325 the next day. The crossing had taken us 29 hours. There were some small villages in sight, but we had only one lot of visitors – some young men looking for beer. We didn't go ashore but did put up our Indonesian and quarantine flags, ready for the officials in Saumlaki.

Sept 13:

Left Selaru Island at 0700, travelled up the west coast of the island and across east to Nastabun Island, where we stopped for a swim. This small pretty uninhabited island has clean water and a steep-to beach, excellent for a short stop. We anchored in sand at 5 M. We later proceeded to **Saumlaki**, and anchored off the town, past the fuel wharf, ferry terminal and main concrete wharf. There is a good anchorage near to an obvious wreck at the edge of the fringing reef, in 17 -20 M. As the tides can be quite large, dinghy access may be difficult. The easiest option is to use the ladder and balcony of the Indah Hapraden Hotel. The staff of the hotel are generally friendly and happy for you to use the ladder, especially if you purchase food and beers here. The food is not great, but it is the only place in town to get cold beer. We found the Marina Café, by the harbor, the best eating-out option. There is no supermarket in Saumlaki, but there is a good “wet” market and many small shops where you can get basic supplies. There is a post office and one public internet office, but the connection is often not working. We stayed here for a week, involved with “clearing in” to Indonesia and the festivities of the Darwin-Saumlaki Rally. Saumlaki is not usually an Immigration/Customs port (the nearest being Tual), but clearance by these departments had been arranged for us through the rally organizers. The majority of people in Saumlaki are Christian (note

all the churches) but there are also people who have been resettled here by the government from more crowded areas of Indonesia, and this has caused some local problems in the past.

Sept 19:

Left Saumlaki at 0745 and stopped again at **Nastabun Island** for a swim. Then proceeded on to **Cape Jasi**, where we anchored in front of a small river mouth just north of the cape, in 7 M at 1245. There are some uninhabited fishing huts here but people from Latdalam walk over the 2 miles over the headlands to tend their gardens off Cape Jasi. We enjoyed an on-board BBQ with rally folk from Cockatoo 2, Mandella 2, & Shanghaied, who were all heading off in different directions the next day.

Sept 20:

Solo at last! We travelled across the southern end of the Tanimbar group to **Wolas Island** in good weather – 8-10 knots from NE, and anchored in the channel between Wolas Island and the mangrove island to its east. There is a fishing camp at the southern entrance to the channel, and we had one group in a sailing bagan visit us, but there is no village on this side of the island. The sailing bagans are quite unusual and only seem to be around this area. They tend to fish at night and travel between islands during the day.



Sept 21:

We left Wolas at 0720 and travelled past Wotap and Labobar Islands on to **Mitak Island**, where we anchored on its western coast. We were experiencing some rain squalls with the NE wind gusting to 20 kts at times. This anchorage was quite open, but we found good holding in 15 M. We were visited in the early evening by a small ferry boat, skippered by “Capt Jack”, who leapt on board uninvited and was quite inquisitive about what we had aboard. We asked him to leave, which he reluctantly did, and we were glad he had passengers on board his boat at the time.

Sept 22:

We left this anchorage in a hurry this morning, as we could see Capt Jack returning towards us at 0700. We motored north to **Molu Island** at the top of the Tanimbar group and anchored at the south-western end. This island is very beautiful with clear water, white sandy beaches, etc, and the people seem quite shy but friendly. We had several groups visit for short periods, and none spoke much English. We rested here for the afternoon, and set off to cross the Banda Sea at 1640. As we cleared the Tanimbar Island group, the wind



freshened to 18-20 knots from the NE, with 2-3 M swells. We encountered passing squalls with lightning and thunder overnight. The Banda Islands look spectacular as you approach. They are a collective group of 6



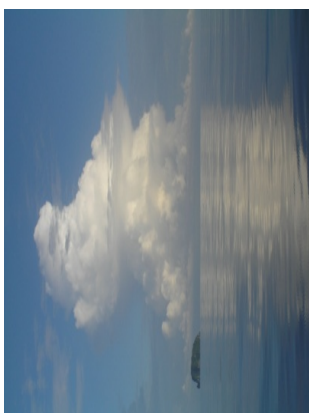
small islands in the middle of the Banda Sea, and the 3 main islands form a naturally enclosed safe harbour that can accommodate a large number of boats. Most people anchor in front of the main town, Bandaneira, opposite the volcano Gunung Api, but there are also excellent anchorage options off Lonthor Island. Prime anchorage can be found right in front of the Maulana and Laguna Hotels, by dropping your anchor in 30 metres and tying a stern rope to the shore. We entered the western channel between Lonthor and Api Guning Islands by 1700 the next day and anchored off **Lonthor Island** in 12 M.

Sept 24:

The next day we moved over to **Bandaneira** Island, anchoring stern-to in front of the Laguna Hotel. The history of these Spice Islands is well documented – they have had a long, convoluted and bloody past that is well worth reading about. The atmosphere of these islands is quite unique – a visit to the town of Bandaneira, with its old Dutch and Portuguese forts, perkeniers' houses, nutmeg and clove trees, old bronze canons lying in the streets and tropical gardens evokes a strong sense of its past. The museum is a treasure trove of artifacts from the spice trading days. Now the locals are mostly peaceful Moslems, keen to have more tourists visit. We had a wonderful few days here, catching up with old friends we had met here in 2008, and walking about the main island. We climbed to the first stage of the volcano, enjoyed a banquet meal at the Mutiera Guest House, did some snorkeling, visited the northern side of the island by bike, reprovisioned our stores and refuelled the boat. On our last night, we had a BBQ at the Laguna Hotel with local friends YaYa, Eddie, Barcri, Sadim and others.



Sept 28:



We left Bandaneira at 0500 for the long trip to **Nusa Laut**. We enjoyed brilliant calm seas with just a cooling NE sea breeze of 3-5 kts. We finally reached Nusa Laut by 1800 and anchored to the right of the main wharf, in 12-14 M. We were visited by Sammy, the local "meet & greet" guy – we also met him here in 2008. We didn't go ashore here this trip, but did in 2008. The island is predominantly Christian. A small road runs around the island just above water level and there are several other villages on the island. You need to climb a huge set of steps to reach the village above the anchorage, where there is a very prominent Catholic church, a school, some small shops and many houses. There are also some hot

water springs, one for men and another for women, which are reached by more steps going down from the centre of the village to water level to the north-west of the anchorage. The island gets several regular ferry visits each week, mainly from Ambon. The ferries use the main concrete wharf and the small roll-on ramp to the right of the wharf.

Sept 30:

We travelled north from Nusa Laut through the Seram Strait to get north of Ambon. We had visited there in 2008 and didn't want to go back. The harbor is very dirty, the holding poor and there were no reasons to visit again. Once we were in this area, the weather became quite rainy – the mountainous islands and numerous sea passages seem to promote stormy and gloomy conditions. We found an anchorage in 20 M, over mud, at **Hila**, on the north coast of Ambon Island. It appeared to be a large Moslem village.



Oct 1:



We left the gloomy atmosphere of the Ambon group to continue north and the weather cleared as we entered more open water. We stopped at **Boana Island**, a very beautiful island with a picturesque coastline – tall mountains, small rocky outcrops, deep inlets, white sandy beaches, great coral. There were a few huts on the north coast where we anchored in 17M, but no village. There was a small village inside the large inlet to the east.

Oct 3:

Moving north from Boana Island, we crossed the Seram Sea in continuing great weather. We stopped at **Gumumu Island** where we anchored in 10M over coral in another beautiful bay on its northern side. We were visited by 12 or so young men from the village who spoke very little English but were very keen to meet us.

Oct 4:

Again we moved further north, through the Obi Island group and tried to find an anchorage in the inlets on the northern shore of Obi Latu. All 5 inlets we tried were way too deep for anchoring and we pushed on to **Bisa Island**, where we anchored in 10M off a pretty beach on its SW corner. The weather was generally calm with variable winds less than 10 kts, but in the afternoon it started to close in and become stormy looking, and we did experience some rain squalls. We thought this area was possibly influenced by the large islands to its east.

Oct 5:

We traversed north between some small islands and then up the Bacan Strait in variable winds – swinging from ESE to SSE and then to NE, although always light. We found a good anchorage in 18 M on the NE end of **Mandioli Island**, west of the Ovit Islands at the northern end of the Bacan Strait. There was a fair bit of local water traffic through the Strait and we were within sight of 3 large villages. There was also a lot of rubbish in the water here.

Oct 6:

We left the Bacan Strait and continued north for just a couple of hours to the Sambaki Strait, where we anchored in a small bay on the eastern side of **Kasiruta Island**. This well-populated area has large areas of its islands being cleared and logged. The water was not clear here and there were no attractive beaches or picturesque bays or inlets that encouraged us to stay more than overnight.

Oct 7:

After leaving the Sambaki Strait we were in more open water, and passed some lovely islands, islets and interesting rock formations. One large one looked like a dragon. The weather again cleared to blue skies with light variable breezes and calm seas. We anchored off **Lilai Island**, over a 10M patch of coral in clear blue water. This was a beautiful spot with sand cays and small islets nearby, and Lilai Island has a run-down but once attractive small resort. There was a path running around the coast of the island, which we took, and the locals in the 2 villages we passed through were very friendly and welcoming. There was also a path up to the summit of the island where someone has built a large modern dwelling. This was a beautiful area and we were loathe to move on.



Oct 9:



Seventeen minutes and 1.5 NM north of Lilai Island we crossed the equator! The weather continued to be balmy and hot, and we passed several large islands that were obviously volcanoes – one was actually smoking. We moved north to the largest of these islands – **Ternate**. This was the biggest town we had seen since Saumlaki and we were a little intimidated by its business, its size and the water traffic. We travelled on past the main wharf, Yani Wharf, where big ships tie up, and found an anchorage in front of the town esplanade just before a large new-looking mosque. This was a very busy area with lots of ferries and speedboats moving about but we couldn't see a better alternative. We spent a few days here reprovisioning and refueling (we had to refuel by jerry can as there was no small fuelling wharf serviceable at the time). We also had to visit the Harbourmasters and Quarantine (both in the wharf complex near where we were anchored) and Immigration, which was about a 10 minute taxi ride from the wharf. This was quite a drama, as they do

not speak English, and we couldn't understand why we had to visit Quarantine and Immigration again – we had done this when we cleared in at Saumlaki. It seems that they like you to officially “clear in” when entering different regions. Ternate is clearly Moslem, and there was no beer to be had in town, either to drink with a meal or to take away. There were many mosques in the town, and they all “called to prayer” frequently and at different times. The weather was quite rainy when we were there, especially in the afternoons & evenings. One night a huge squall blew through from west, and we, along with other vessels in the anchorage, dragged anchor. We had to cross the Ganelama Strait to Rum to anchor against the island for the night.



Oct 13:

We left Ternate early as we had a long way to go to **Mayu Island** in the middle of the Molucca Sea, where we were hoping there would be a suitable anchorage. We had a rolly and confused swell for the first couple of hours after leaving Ternate, then the sea settled to a consistently gentle 1M swell from the SW and the wind remained 10 kts from the south. We passed rafts of rubbish along the current lines, and arrived at the northern tip of Mayu Island by 4pm. It was a beautiful looking island and we did find a good anchorage in the small bay there, off a small village, in 20M over sand.

Oct 14:

Again we had an early start to cross the rest of the Molucca Sea before dusk. The weather was calm and the sea almost glassy for most of this trip, with a 5-8 kt NW wind and minimal swell. We saw only 2 other boats all day until we reached the **Lembah Strait**, which had more traffic going to and from Bitung in the southern end of the Strait. This area is renowned for great diving but it looked quite rocky and muddy to us. We anchored by a rocky shore of Sulawesi Island in 18M over mud.

Oct 15:

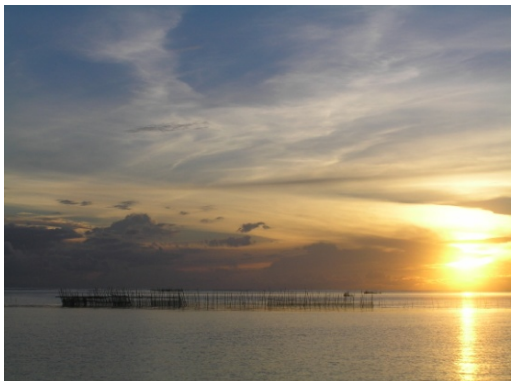
We travelled north and west from the Lenbah Strait, passing some beautiful scenery along the way. We went looking for a nice anchorage to stay for a few days, and found a great spot on the south-eastern end of **Gangga Island**. We later moved north a few hundred metres to gain more protection from N-NW swell. There is also a good anchorage on the southwestern side of the island, just north of the small island there, when it blows from the other direction. The island had many beautiful sandy beaches, rolling green hills, large shade trees and 2 large villages. There was also a small but very attractive dive resort on the southern tip and the owners were very welcoming. They offered us free use of the pool, internet, swap library, bar and restaurant. We had



lunch there one day – a 3-course set menu for approx. AU\$35. They also showed us the positions of the many dive sites around the island. This island is very close to Bunekan National Park, an area well-known as a premier diving area, just off the large town of Manado. We enjoyed a great 2 days here.

Oct 17:

After leaving Gangga we passed by the Bunekan Islands and Manado and continued west along the north

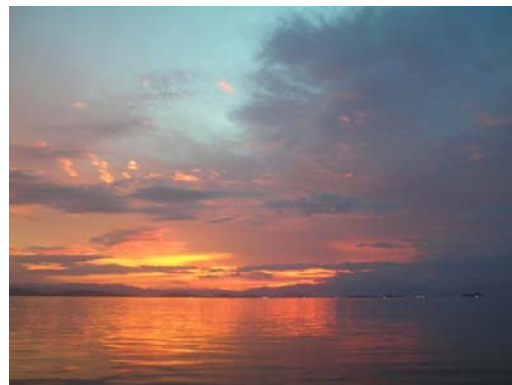


Sulawesi coast. We initially encountered large westerly swells although the weather was fine and relatively calm. We anchored for the night behind **Tetapaan Island** in a small bay with many large bamboo stake fish traps, just off the much larger Amurang Bay. We had to feel our way into the bay, as the CMap chart indicated it was too shallow, but we found plenty of water, and anchored in 18M over mud. It was here we experienced the first of the amazing thunderstorms that we encountered along this coast. The clouds started gathering in late morning, developed

thunderheads by mid afternoon and we had a huge thunderstorm with little wind around dusk. The colours in the sky were really spectacular around sunset as well.

Oct 18:

The skies were beautifully clear after the storm of the previous evening, and the seas were calm. We continued west, staying a km or so off shore, and saw many small fishing boats as we passed villages along the coast. We stopped at **Balaang Uki Bay**, another small bay off a much larger one, with enough depth for us, despite the charts indicated it was shoal. We did have to negotiate around some reef, but managed to get a good anchorage towards the end of this small bay, in 17M over mud. Again we were treated to an amazing thunderstorm, this one starting a little early, at 3pm.



Oct 19:

Again we had clear skies and calm seas this morning, so proceeded further west along the coast to another bay to the west of **Tj. Besar**. We took the left-hand inlet after rounding Tj Besar and made our way towards a creek entrance, negotiating around some coral bommies en route. We anchored in 17M, just in time for the now-regular afternoon storm.



Oct 20:

The weather was wonderfully fine and calm as we travelled along this coastline, though this day we had 12 kts of ESE breeze. We did note

gathering storm clouds inland again as we travelled towards **Palelah Bay**, a lovely large bay with an island in its centre, and several villages along its shore. We had to anchor in 24M just to the south of the small island within the bay. It started to rain as soon as we anchored, and we also had the first of many visitors here – a canoe-load of small children with 2 dads, who stayed until the rain cleared. Three teenage boys “adopted” us and visited several times. We enjoyed their visits, though communication was difficult – they didn’t know much English and we knew very little Indonesian. We stayed over an extra day here as it was so pretty, and we spend some time exploring the small island and visiting the village at the end of the bay. We shopped in the village for fruit, vegetables beer and fuel, and people were quite friendly. We may have stayed longer, but a prolonged early morning visit by our “boys” on the third day decided us to move, immediately!

Oct 22:

The calm weather continued, with SSE winds to 7 kts and no swell. We travelled only a short distance to the next anchorage, a small protected harbour called **Lokodidi Bay** which was only open to the NW. We anchored at the back of this large bay in 15 M over mud. There were many fishing boats here and several large fishing huts but we had no visitors.

Oct 23:



We left Lokodidi early as we were unsure of the next anchorage – CMap showed the next few bays to be too shallow to anchor. During the day the wind picked up to 15 kts from the SW then eased again. We also encountered a strange phenomenon at 11.30am. There was a distant line of small waves heading toward the coast from the NW, in a band about 0.5km wide and close together. These waves were about 0.5 to 1.0 metres in height. We crossed these waves at an angle and the seas behind them were calm and remained so for the rest of the

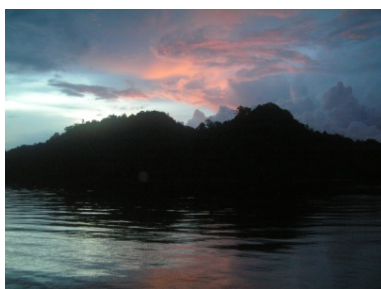
day. We arrived at **Laolalang Bay** by 12.30pm and made for another small arm of this bay in its SE corner. This required some maneuvering around reefs, island and a sand spit but there was good deep water access and it gave us a very protected anchorage, albeit deep at 26M. (HINT: look for sticks or metal bars marking the reef edges as you progress into the main bay, and stay close to the sand spit when entering the smaller bay). We also had many visitors here – mainly schoolchildren from the Christian village on the south side of this small bay. We stayed over a day, and explored the bigger bay by dinghy - it was a very interesting area. We also visited the Moslem village on the sand spit and adjacent land. They were quite surprised to see us and very shy, unlike their Christian counterparts. We also found some fantastic spider shells on the sand spit.

Oct 25:

Another early departure as we needed to travel west and north to round the large headland of Tj Arus, then head south west again towards Simitang Island, and we were keen to be anchored before the first thunderstorm broke. Again the weather was calm in the morning, but thunderclouds started building up by midday. We made our way through the reef to find an anchorage in a corner of **Sentigi Bay** in 30M before the storm started. This was a very quiet bay with just 2 or 3 houses amongst the mangroves, but there was a big village around the headland – we could hear road traffic when it was calm. There was also a great little sand cay towards the entrance that was excellent for swimming. We stayed 2 days here, preparing for our crossing of the Makassar Strait.



Oct 27:



We set off early from Sentigi Bay – at 2.30 am – as we had good moonlight and a fairly clear pathway out of the anchorage. We entered the Makassar Strait by 4 am, after dodging several fishing boats and platforms. We continued to encounter these fishing boats and platforms far out into the strait. The weather was generally light, with wind from the SSW except for a few squalls when we were getting 25 kt wind periods. There was also lightning, thunder and rain about. We encountered a small confused swell as we closed the Kalimantan coast, and arrived at **Sambung Bay** at 5pm. We found anchorage in 20-22 M over mud towards the end of the bay, to the left of the village there. The weather was wet and squally, a big change from the Sulawesi coast.

Oct 30:

We stayed at Sambung Bay until the wet and windy weather cleared. We had noticed a pattern of increasing wind in the early afternoon, so set off at 6 am to use the calm weather. We travelled NW to Karang Besar, a narrow passage that would take us through a large expanse of reef and small islands. The weather remained calm with a 8kt NW breeze until 1.30 pm when storm clouds gathered overhead. We then sought anchorage against the **Kalimantan coast** 7 NM from the end of this passage, in 12M of very muddy water.

Oct 31:

With another early start to use the calm conditions, we headed north past the deltas of the Sodang and Berau Rivers. There was a lot of large ships in this area and many floating logs and trees. The water here was very muddy with lots of floating debris. A marked channel past this delta area took us to **Derawan Island**, a small but beautiful island with extensive reef around it. We anchored at 1 pm at the SW corner of the island by a large wharf, in 6-7 M of clear water over



sand and low bommies. We went ashore here. There are several dive resorts (quite small, old, run-down) and a large village with a busy but clean main street (unpaved) lined with shops and cafes. Not much fresh food was available but we could buy some limited dry stores. We also circumnavigated the island by dinghy and saw many turtles. We also noticed that some areas that were designated on the charts as fringing reef was actually sea grass over sand. Overnight there was a big storm which produced strong SW winds and a confused 1-2 M swell, which made this anchorage very uncomfortable.

Nov 1:

We left Derawan early by tracking east and then north around the fringing reef and then NW towards the coast again. We had some drama as we leaving the island – our water temperature gauge indicated problems with the water pump. We edged over to the nearest bit of reef and dropped the anchor. John then checked it and had to replace the water pump – luckily he carried spares. We were on our way in an hour. We reached **Tanahguning** on the coast by 3.30pm with no more problems and anchored amongst a large group of fishing huts in 8m of very muddy water. All day the wind had been light and variable with calm seas, full cloud cover and passing rain showers. Fishing boats from villages along the coast ventured out to these huts in the early evening, though none of the ones near us were habited. The lights from the boats and huts at night made a spectacular sight.



Nov 2:

From this place on the coast we travelled NW towards **Tarakan**. En route we didn't see much of the coast, and the sea was shallow with scattered shoals. There was a clearly marked channel to take us into the port, which was very busy with large bulk carrier ships, rig tenders, tugs and many speedboats and motorized fishing boats. We could only find room to anchor at the very western end of the anchorage area, not far from the end of the airport runway. We anchored in 7M. There was a lot of passing water traffic and noise from aircraft using the runway. It was a long dinghy ride to the main wharf where we could leave our dinghy - the locals there assured us it would be safe. The town is quite large with many shops and small markets scattered around. There are many huge water villages along the shore which extend right up to the roads and shops. There was no empty shoreline. We hired a taxi for 3 hours and he took us to the various stores we needed. There was even a KFC! The town is mainly Moslem and there were no bars or cafes serving alcohol, but our taxidriver found a small Chinese store that had some very dusty bottles of Bintang beer! We tried to refuel in Tarakan, but the fuel barge would not sell to us because we weren't "local industry", even though we offered to pay a higher price. We did eventually buy 400 litres from a fuel store (a hut built over the water on the edge of the main channel) and had to jerry-can it to the boat. We visited Immigration and the Harbourmasters' office here to clear out of Indonesia. Immigration was



situated in a blue-roofed building in front of the international ferry wharf (for boats from Tawau), about 2 kms along the main road to the east from the main local ferry wharf where we parked our dinghy. The Harbourmaster's office was in an obscure building along the same road, about halfway to the Immigration office and also on the sea side of the road. Best to visit there first – they were very helpful and actually drove us to the Immigration office. Both required passports, clear copies of our CAIT, boat registration papers and our pre-prepared sheet with boat and crew details. We were not required to go to Quarantine or Customs.

Nov 6:

An early departure from Tarakan had us in a passage between Nunukan Island and the southern side of **Sibetik Island** by 4pm. The trip was unremarkable – after leaving the port of Tarakan we travelled through shallow muddy water north in rainy and overcast weather. The anchorage was not ideal. There was a significant current running through it and we had to look hard to find a depth of 20M to anchor. An hour after anchoring we felt a sudden heavy vibration from the anchor chain. Apparently a drift or gill fishing net had let go from its tethers and had drifted down stream with the current, wrapping itself around our chain. John was very concerned that it would then foul our prop, so he cut it, and both sections drifted off with the current. We waited for angry fishermen to approach, wanting compensation, but no-one came. We spent a quiet night here, and headed off early the next morning.



Nov 7:



It was a short trip north to **Tawau** but we were busy watching out for the many fishing huts (and remnants of old ones!) and fishing nets on our approach from the south. The Malaysian border was on the southern approach to Tawau Harbour, so we hauled down the Indonesian flag and put up our Malaysian flag before we reached the port. We were glad we had done this – amazingly most boats were flying their national and state flags and there were many flags on buildings in the town. We motored through the port and anchored just off the Tawau Yacht Club in 5M. We were really looking forward to civilization by now, and to hopefully meet up with other yachts, as we had not seen another one since leaving our friends in Cape Jasi on 20th Sept. However there were no travelling yachts here either. We visited Immigration (on the main ferry wharf in town) and were given a free 90 day visa. The Harbourmaster's Office was in a separate building just 5 minutes' walk away, and they were also very friendly and helpful. We did visit Customs but were told we weren't required to see them unless we had anything to declare, which we certainly didn't. We tried to visit Quarantine in their office



opposite Immigration, but the office was always shut, and one Immigration official told us they were never there and not to bother about it.

We enjoyed Tawau. The town was just a 10 minute walk from the Yacht Club and we were able to stock up with more supplies from the many stores in the town and the large wet market by the ferry wharf. We refueled at a fuel barge parked in the main port anchorage not far from where the speedboats gather. The local people seemed quite friendly. The Yacht Club was not so friendly – only one local ever bothered to talk to us, but we enjoyed their facilities – the pool and large deck with bar and restaurant overlooking the anchorage. The Yacht Club offered free membership for one week, so we stayed 6 days.

Nov 13:

The weather was becoming stormier by now, with heavy clouds and rain most afternoons though the wind remained fairly calm. We left Tawau in fine weather but it deteriorated to overcast and squally by mid-morning. As we detoured south slightly to bypass some outlying reef we crossed back over into Indonesian waters by about 10 miles. We were amazed to see a large Navy ship approach and call us to their starboard side. We were initially quite reluctant to do this as the ship was about 100 metres in



length and the seas were choppy. However they were very insistent, so we had to raft up, using all our fenders and 2 of theirs. John disappeared with some ship's officers to their bridge for 30 minutes, leaving me on board Solita. The other crewmembers were quite interested in our boat, so I chatted with those that could speak English. They were all surprised when Meggs made an appearance, and one officer asked if he could come aboard to pet him! John eventually reappeared, smiling, with some more paperwork that indicated we were in no trouble and had completed all necessary paperwork when leaving Indonesia and entering Malaysia. The ship's captain had explained to John that many yachts do exactly what we had done and that it was fine to do so, but their job was to check any boats in this corner of Indonesia where it adjoins Malaysia and the Philippines, as it had been a previous trouble-spot. Years ago some divers

had been kidnapped from Sipidan Island, and just a few months previously 2 seagrass farm workers in Semporna were abducted by radicals from the Tawi Tawi Islands, just over the border in the Philippines.

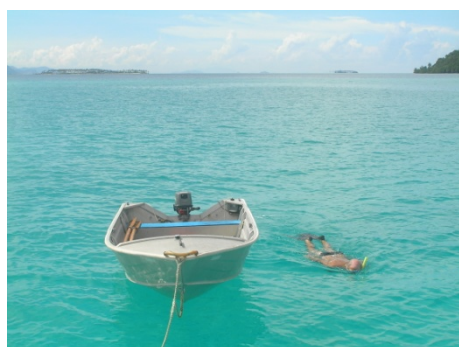
After that drama we headed off to **Mabul Island** where we happily anchored on the northern side in 20 M over sand in lovely clear water. We saw many turtles swim by us here. Mabul Island has many dive resorts which accommodate divers wanting to explore the local reefs, including Sipidan Island. Sipidan is classed as a top dive spot, but access has been severely restricted in recent years to protect it, and there are no overnight facilities there now. One resort in Mabul was actually a converted oil rig! We visited the island and also circumnavigated it by dinghy - the water was so clear we could easily see the reef and fish. There were 2 poor water villages on the island and some sea gypsies



anchored off one beach. One night 2 men from the sea gypsy community come to us asking for food. We gave them some clothes we had saved just for this purpose, and they were very happy with them. One man was particularly pleased with his new day-glo orange overalls. We were troubled by the difference between the lives of the international visitors to the resorts and the locals living in their tiny huts or boats.

Nov 15:

We headed north again from Mabul towards the Tetagon Island group, the main one being **Gaya Island**. We had beautiful weather and calm seas, and were enjoying the passing scenery of distant islands and reefs when our water pump died. John had installed it only a week earlier at Derawan Island when the previous one failed. Again we anchored on the nearest piece of reef and John went to inspect the damage. It turned out that the impellor in the new pump had perished, probably in the heat of the engine room, so luckily he was able to replace this impellor with another spare and get us moving again. (Since this incident, we store rubber spares in a cooler place!) We had not been travelling long before a small group of local fishermen waved us over. They had found a body in the water and needed to contact the police. It seemed that the man in the water was a friend of theirs, and had obviously been in the water for a couple of days. We initially tried with our VHF, but no-one seems to monitor this here. A cell phone call was more successful and we eventually connected with the Semporna Police, giving them the details and GPS position. We were unable to do more, so left the fishermen to await the police and set off again for Gaya Island. We entered what looked like a large lagoon fringed



with reef through a small opening on its south-western side and anchored in front of a small reef within this lagoon in 22M. When we later dinghied over to this fringing reef we found most of it was actually low sea grass over white sand. There was a small but clean water village on the west side of the island not far from our anchorage but they did not visit us, so we had this huge lagoon to ourselves. We explored the lagoon by dinghy, enjoyed a snorkel on the reef near where we were anchored and later a swim on the “fringing reef” by the entrance to the lagoon.

Nov 17:

We travelled north from Gaya Island and passed many beautiful small islands with white sand beaches and coconut trees – they looked just like the travel brochures! We approached to coast to the east of Lahud Datu and followed it east and north, looking for an anchorage. We were hopeful that we could stop at Dent Haven, but the wind had turned to the ESE and was blowing at 15 kts straight into this bay. We continued on to **Tambisan Island**, where we entered the channel between the mainland and Tambisan Island by 5pm with a huge storm looming behind us. The channel entrance was quite deep and

easy to navigate. There was quite a large village at the eastern end of the channel, so we moved west into the channel a mile or so, dodging the many fishing nets and traps, and anchored there in 17 M. The storm passed us and we had a very calm night.

Nov 18:

We followed the passage through to its north-western entrance, where there was another smaller village and shoals with many fish traps at the mouth of the passage. We followed a local fishing boat through this area – the way was partially marked by several stakes in the water. We travelled further north – with winds of 10-12 kts veering from W to NW – through Sula Bay to the southern entrance of the **Kinabatangan River**. This river mouth had shoals extending out for 2-3 miles into the bay, but we always had at least 3-4 metres under us as we approached the river entrance. After entering the river the depth dropped to 10 M with varying shoals near the banks. We followed the river inland, making several definite turns at junctions (see Kinabatangan River notes in Appendix) and travelling through nipah palms and patches of jungle but no villages or lodges until we stopped at 5pm. We had seen several groups of monkeys in the jungle areas. We anchored against the jungle bank in 8M, about 15-18 miles from the river entrance, where we watched a small group of Macaque monkeys play in the trees.



Nov 19:

We travelled back along the river the way we had come, unsure if there was another exit. We had no charts for this inland area at this time. We saw several more monkeys on our way out of the river. Once back in Sula Bay we experienced a short choppy sea as the wind swung to the SSW with a NE swell. We travelled north in the company of many fishing boats to **Sandakan** Harbour. We anchored off the esplanade past the yacht club and town, towards the fishing boat wharves, just out from the Navy boats, in 6M. We were very excited to be in a large town again but also to see our first yacht since Cape Jasi. We dinghied over to say hello – Peter and Aideen on “Petima” were from Brunei and just here to pick up another crew member. They were off to the Kinabatangan River the next day, but it was wonderful to



have a chat with them. We spent a week or so in Sandakan, reprovisioning, putting some fuel on board and having a look around the area. We hired a car one day and visited Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary, the War Memorial Park, Agnes Keith House, the local museum and surrounding areas. We checked in with the local Harbourmaster’s office, situated in the middle of town, just next to the bus terminal and fuel station. They were very helpful there and just required copies of our crewlist and boat registration papers. We also found the woman at the Tourist Information Centre very helpful and pro-yachteer – she has had numerous dealings with cruising folk. We visited the Sandakan

Yacht Club - a lovely building on the waterfront with pool, bar and restaurant, but like Tawau Yacht Club, they were not interested in cruising boats. They did give us some information about the Kinabatangan River which was left with them by Sue on "Lifeline", but charged us 100RM for a week's temporary membership (which gave us a free T-shirt and cap and entitled us to use their dinghy wharf for the week).

Nov 24:

We left Sandakan to return to the **Kinabatangan River** via the northern entrance, this time armed with some information and maps (see Kinabatangan River notes in Appendix). The Mamuyon River forms the northern entrance and while it was very shoal for several miles into the bay, we used the waypoints we'd been given at the Yacht Club and found they were fairly accurate. We further improved this information by adding depths, which did come up to 2M at one point, but settled down to 4-10 M within the river. We really enjoyed travelling along the river looking for wildlife, and it was much more reassuring to have charts, notes and Google Earth printouts to guide us. We passed the township of Apai and travelled up river as far as Suchau, where the power line crosses the river. We fitted under this with no problem but it would stop most yachts. As we were coming into the rainy season we had storms or rain every afternoon and the water was full of logs and debris. We saw many monkeys (Macaque, Proboscis and Silver Leaf) and a couple of hornbills but sadly no pigmy elephants. We had a really enjoyable 3 days in the river this time.



Nov 27:

We had an early start to clear the river mouth and travelled back across the shoal areas into deeper water off Sandakan. We then continued north, through large derelict fishing hut areas with a huge storm brewing behind us. It finally broke as we were passing Libaran Island. With the stormy weather about we sought an anchorage early and dropped anchor off the SW corner of **Pura-Pura Island** in 3 M. This area seemed to be full of fringing reef and shoal patches. There were quite a few locals about in small fishing boats but no-one approached us.

Nov 28:

The stormy weather continued as we made our way further north, sometimes in marked channels between reefs and islands. We entered Schomburgk Bay but could not find a safe anchorage near the entrance, which was very shallow. We went further into the bay and found a spot in 8M off fringing reef at the SE corner of **Jambongan Island**. There was one small village nearby but little passing local traffic – the area seemed quite desolate. We stayed here another day because the weather was so miserable.

Nov 30:

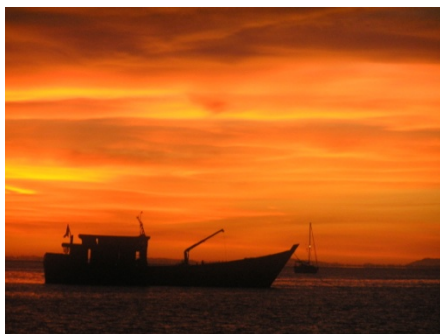
We continued north through areas that in good weather would offer spectacular scenery and well-known diving areas, but the weather continued to be stormy. We passed Tigabu and Maluwali Islands, looking for an anchorage but the prevailing wind remained from the E and ENE, then veering to the S, making these untenable. We had lightning all around us, striking the water just in front of us at one time. We eventually pulled into a small bay at the top of the Pitas Peninsula called **Inaruntung**. We anchored in 5M not far from some small fishing huts. There was a lot more water traffic around here, as ferries and fishing boats were travelling to and from Kudat. The horizon at night was brilliantly lit by the fishing boats with large lights to attract fish and squid.

Dec 1:

From this anchorage it was just a short trip around some reefs, into the large bay and across it to **Kudat**. It was very busy here with many ferries and fishing boats moving about. Kudat Harbour is at right angles to this large bay, and protected by reef either side of the entrance, so is generally quite calm, unless there is any sort of easterly wind. We anchored just off the main wharf area in 7-8M. There were



no other boats anchored here during the day but at night some of the wharves emptied and many fishing boats then anchored to the south and west of us for the night. We tied our dinghy to the rock wall outside the public toilets in the wharf area, but later found that it was OK to tie to the Police Wharf, although the yard at the end of this wharf is locked after a certain time at night. Kudat has an excellent wet market, a large supermarket (Milemewa, on the ground floor of the Upper Deck building – quite expensive though) and many smaller Chinese stores that sell most items you would need. There are 2 fuel stations on the road by the harbor, several banks with ATMs, many Chinese and Moslem cafes, a KFC and innumerable phone and internet shops. There is also a beautiful Chinese temple in town. The Immigration and Customs offices are in a co-joined building at the end of the Police Wharf, next to the Milemewa supermarket. The Harbourmasters' office is on the first floor of a building in the square behind the Chinese Temple. Just north of the entrance to the harbor there is a large break wall and at its northern end is the opening to the swing basin. This area is about to be developed into a small marina but at present can accommodate approx. 12 boats that drop an anchor forward and tie stern-to the shore. This area is surrounded by the Kudat Golf Club and course – the club



has a small jetty for dinghies, and welcomes yachtees for drinks and meals (which are apparently very good and inexpensive). The Kudat Boatyard is also in this area – its travel lift approach faces the swing basin. Mr Wong, the owner of the yard, can be difficult to deal with and the yard is fairly dirty, but the costs of hauling out here are comparatively cheap. We weren't aware of any other haul-out yard in north Borneo that will take yachts. It is a 15-20 minute walk into town from the yard, but taxis are numerous and cheap.

Dec 4:

We left Kudat early because there didn't look to be many good anchorages on the west coast en route to Kota Kinabalu. Rounding the Tip of Borneo we encountered some confused seas and swell, and the easterly wind increased to 20 kts with a NW swell. We decided to stop early just to the south of **Tambularun Reef**, tucked into the corner close to shore. We anchored in 6M over sand, and this was very calm and protected. There are no facilities but a small fishing fleet anchors here. The reef extends out quite a long way but the end is well-marked. There is also good protection from SE wind on the northern side of the reef.

Dec 5:



Continuing south we had fine & calm weather, with a SE to SW breeze of 8 kts rising by midday. The NW swell continued, making it a little rolly. We stopped for the night at **Ambong Bay**, in the northern part. We anchored in 9M over mud. This large bay has several good anchoring options offering protection from different angles, although there are some rocks and reef to be avoided within the small bays and some are very shoal. There are small villages scattered around the bays and the people seemed very friendly. It was an interesting area to explore by dinghy and there

were monkey tracks on many of the beaches. In clear weather Mt Kinabalu can be easily seen to the west of the bay.

Dec 7:

We had a short easy run down to Kota Kinabalu and elected to enter the marina immediately. We had called ahead the previous day by phone (Ph 088 318 888) to book in, and then called via VHF (channel 71) on our approach. The boat boys were there to catch our lines and we were tied up by 12.35pm.

ANCHORAGES:

	Anchorage	Access	Holding	Protection	Facilities
Australia	Popham Bay 11*15.6'N 131*49.4'E	Easy after rounding reef at entrance to bay	Good, anchored in 7M sand/mud	Very good from NE to S.	None.
Indonesia Tanimbar islands	Selaru Bay 8*12.5'S 130*51.6'E	Easy, avoid reef towards shore	Good, anchored in 10 M sand/mud	Good from NE to S, not good SW to NE	None
	Nastabun Island 8*01.7'S 131*11.4'E	Easy	Fair/good, 3-10 M over sand	Only fair from E & SE	Beach
	Saumlaki 7*58.1'S 131*17.6'E	Easy, anchor before fringing reef	Good, 17-20 M over mud	Very good from all directions except S – SW but frequent swell in harbour	Town, ATM, fuel, shops & restaurants, Int & Ph cover
	Cape Jasi 7*58.6'S 131*6.14'E	Easy	Very good, 5-7 M over sand/mud	Good from NE to SE	None
	Wolas Channel 7*31.5'S 131*9.17'E	Easy	Very good, 19 M over mud.	V. good protection from all directions except N	None
	Mitak Island 7*10.6'S 131*28.1'E	Easy but watch for fringing reef	Good, 15 M over sand/mud	Good from E, poor from SW to NE	None
	Molu Island 6*47.0'S 131*30.9'E	Easy but watch for fringing and outlying rocks	Good, over coral in 12 M.	Good from E, poor from S thru W to N	Small village, beach
Banda Sea	Lonthor Island 4*32.3'S 129*53.1'E	Easy, watch fro fringing reef	Good, 12 M over mud	Good from all directions but N-NE	Village, access to main town via dinghy or ferry
	Bandaneira-Laguna Hotel 4*30.6'S 129*53.5'E	Easy	Very good, 12 – 30 M over mud.	Excellent from all directions	Town, shops, Int & Ph cover, market
	Nusa Laut 3*38.7'S 128*46.8'E	Easy	Very good, 12-14 M over mud.	Excellent from all directions but NE to NW	Village shops, Int & Ph cover, hot springs

Ambon/Seram Sea area	Hila, Ambon Is. 3*34.8'S 128*4.5'E	Easy	Good, 20 M over mud	Good from S, open NW to NE	Small town, Int & Ph cover
	Boana Island 2*59.5'S 127*51.9'E	Easy	Good, 15-20 M over sand/coral	Good from NE to S, open to west	None
	Gumumu Island 1*51.57'S 127*33.9'E	Easy but watch fringing reef	Good, 10 M over coral	Good from SE to SW, open NW to NE	None
Bacan/Sambaki Straits	Bisa island 1*16.24'S 127*28.3'E	Easy but need to look for shallow area	Very good, 10- 20 M over mud	Good from SE to SW	None
	Mandioli Island 0*39.13'S 127*16.2'E	Easy but take care with current	Good, 18-20 M over mud	Good from S to SW	Small villages nearby. ?Int & Ph cover
	Kasiruta Island 0*24.3'S 127*16.1'E	Easy	Good, 10-20 M over mud	Good from W only	None
Ternate area	Lilai Island 0*01.5'S 127*13.9'E	Care moving thru reef, sand cays, bommies.	Good, 10 M over coral	Some distant protection from most directions	Small village, ?Int & Ph cover
	Ternate 0*47.2'N 127*23.1'E	Easy but lots of traffic	Poor, polluted bottom over mud, 18M	Good from NW to SW	Town, ATM, markets, shops, Govt agencies, Int & Ph cover
	Mayu Island 1*20.6'N 126*21.9'E	Easy	Good, 22M over sand/coral	Very little protection	Beaches
Nth Sulawesi coast	Lembah Strait 1*33.19'N 125*12.2'E	Easy	Good, 18M over mud	Only from SW	None
	Gangga Island 1*46.4'N 125*3.3'E	Easy	Good, 12M over sand	Good from NW to SW	Resort, beaches, diving, Int. & Ph cover
	Tetapaan Island 1*17.9'N 124*30.5'E	Watch fishtraps and fringing reef	Good, 18M over mud	Good from N to S thru E	None
	Balaang Uki Bay 0*51.5'N 123*56.3'E	Easy, some bommies	Good, 17M over mud	Good from SE to SW	None
	Tj Besar 0*55.3'N 122*58.2'E	Negotiate fringing reef & bommies	Good, 27M over mud	Good from N to S thru E	None
	Palelah Bay 1*02.8'N	Easy	Good, 24M over mud	Open to NE only	Villages, shops, Int & Ph cover,

	121*58.9'E				fuel
	Lokodidi Bay 1*02.9'N 121*40.2'E	Easy	Good, 15M over mud	Excellent all round protection	Small village
	Laolalang Bay 1*19.6'N 120*55.8'E	Reefs at entrance to main bay	Good, 26M over mud	Excellent all round protection	Villages, shops, beaches, Int & Ph cover
	Sentigi Bay 0*58.8'N 120*21.4'E	Reefs at entrance, shoal areas in bay	Good, 30M over mud	Open only to NE	Beach, ? Int & Ph cover
Kalimantan	Sambung Bay 1*03.94'N 118*51.2'E	Easy but fringing reef & rocks in bay	Good, 12M over mud	Very good from all but N to E	Small village
	Kalimantan coast 1*35.4'N 118*16.1'E	Easy – shoaling mud bottom	Very good, 12M over mud	V. good NW thru W to S	None
	Derawan 2*16.7'N 118*14.3'E	Care needed – some markers show reef	Fair. 6m over sand, low bommies	Good from N to E	Town, beaches, shops, Int. & Ph cover, resorts
	Tanahguning 2*38.78'N 117*49.8'E	Easy, need to dodge fishing huts	Good, 8M over mud	V. good from NW to SW	None but ?Int & Ph cover
	Tarakan 3*18.8'N 117*33.7'E	Care needed – markers show approach, some reef/mudbanks in harbour	Good, 20M over mud, but strong current flowing	Good from N to E	Large town, Immig., shops, cafes, Int. & Ph. cover, markets, ATMs
	Sibetik Island 4*6.2'N 117*44.5'E	Easy, but many fishing nets about	Good, 20M over mud, but strong current flowing	Good from N to NE	None
Malaysia	Tawau 4*15.1'N 117*52.4'E	Easy but boat traffic ++	Good, 5M over mud, some current at times	Good from N to NE	Large town, ATM Immig, shops, cafes, Ph. & Int. cover, markets
	Mabul Island 4*15.2'N 118*38.3'E	Easy but no reef markers	Good, 20M over sand	Some protection from SE only	Diving, beaches, shops, resorts, Int. & Ph cover
	Gaya Island 4*36.45'N 118*44.3'E	Easy through passage, watch reef in lagoon	Good, 22M over sand/mud	Good from NW to E	Diving, beaches
	Tambisan Passage 5*26.5'N 119*8.3'E	Watch fringing reef at passage entrance	Good, 17M over mud	Excellent from all directions	Small village nearby, ?Int & Ph cover
	Kinabatangan	See K. River			

	River	notes			
	Sandakan 5*50.1'N 118*6.7'E	Easy	Good, 6M over mud	Good from NW to NE	Govt agencies, shops, cafes, Int. & Ph. cover, markets, ATM
	Kinabatangan River	See K. River notes			
	Pura Pura Island 6*13.48'N 117*43.1'E	Easy	Good, 8M over mud	Fair from NW to NE	None
	Jambangan Island 6*37.9'N 117*20.9'E	Shallow entrance & shoals in bay	Good, 5M over mud	Fair from NW to NE	None
	Inaruntung Bay 7* 0.1'N 117*07.0'E	Easy	Good, 7M over mud	Good from E thru S to W	None but ? Int & Ph cover
	Kudat 6*52.4'N 116*51.2'E	Easy	Good, 8M over mud	Good from NW to NE	Town, ATM, Govt agencies, shops, cafes, Int. & Ph. cover, markets
	Tambularun Reef 6*51.5'N 116*38.2'E	Easy – reef well marked	Good, 6M over sand	Good from NW to E	None
	Ambong Bay 6*18.5'N 116*18.4'E	Easy	Good, 9M over mud	Good from NE thru S to SW	Village nearby. ?Int. & Ph cover
	Sutera Harbour marina 5*58.2'N 116*3.6'E	Easy	Marina pens	Excellent except for strong westerlies	Large town, ATM, shops, markets, Govt agencies, Int. & Ph cover

APPENDIX

Kinabatangan River information:

These notes were compiled from various sources - our experiences, notes from Sue on "MV Lifeline" and the folk on "SV Cetacean", information in "Cruising Guide to South East Asia" - Vol 2, by Davies & Morgan (page 184), Google Earth and "Kinabatangan River" by Wendy Hutton.

Travelling along the Kinabatangan River was an exciting and enjoyable trip - well worth any difficulties getting into the river. There is a wealth of wildlife to see and cruising a river like this is a great change from sea travel. The best time to see the river is apparently May - October, during the dry when there are more animals moving about, but the water level is down, so this makes navigating into and about the river a little more exacting. We visited in November after the rains had begun so the water level was up but there were a lot of logs and debris in the water. Areas of jungle along the river are interspersed with stretches of nipah palms and large sections of the jungle back from the river have been cleared for palm oil production, but recent conservation agreements have dedicated remaining areas to be conserved as a wildlife corridor.

We used 2 different entrances into the river - the northern one called the Mamuyon River and the south-eastern one labelled Dewhurst Bay. We suspect there are others but which are probably not navigable by yachts. The local barges and tourist boats from Sandakan use the Mamuyon River entrance.

For the northern entrance we used CMap and the following waypoints - both were fairly accurate in 2010, and we also followed a local small barge that used a very similar track. The shallowest section started about 2.5nm offshore but it deepened as we approached the entrance, as shown on CMAP. The depths in the right hand column were noted at a tide of 1.0M via CMap Tide Tables. It would be sensible to use a rising tide to enter the river here. The waypoints for this entrance to the Kinabatangan, via the Mamuyon River, are:

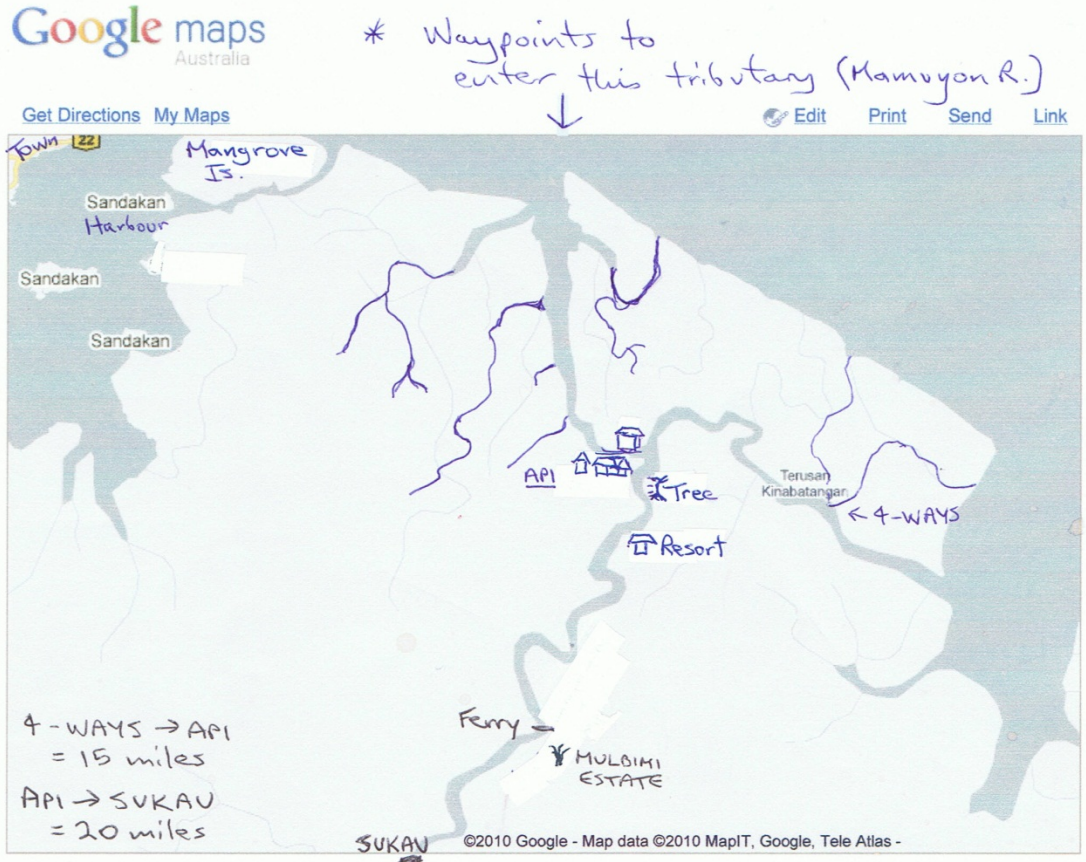
WPT 1	05.54.00'N	118.15.54'E	
WPT 2	05.52.38'N	118.17.63'E	4.3M
WPT 3	05.50.83'N	118.18.47'E	1.8M
WPT 4	05.50.24'N	118.18.98'E	2.4M
WPT 5	05.49.86'N	118.19.48'E	2.8M
WPT 6	05.49.39'N	118.19.79'E	3.0M
WPT 7	05.48.62'N	118.20.16'E	2.3M

WPT 8	05.47.67'N	118.20.46'E	3.2M
WPT 9	05.46.89'N	118.20.97'E	7.0M

We approached the southern entrance from Tambisan Island. Again the shoal areas were 5-6 nm out into Sula Sea – the least depth was about 3M at around 5nm out to sea, with about 0.5m of tide (ie similar shallow depths to the other entrance but for a lot longer). We used CMap for this approach and it appeared accurate. For more detail about this more south-eastern approach, follow the notes on page 37 (an extract from “Cruising Guide to South East Asia – Vol. 2).

Once inside both entrances we usually had depths of 4-10 meters and there was water if you use standard river navigation procedure – ie favour the outside of the bends and don't cut corners.

The 2 river entrances meet at the town of Apia (05.41.89'N 118.23.08'E) where there are about 50 houses and several small tourist lodges. The Kinabatangan then winds inland for many miles. We encountered 2 barge crossings before Sukau. At Sukau there are power lines crossing the river and most yachts will not fit under these. Sukau is a much bigger town with road access, phone and internet coverage, some shops and a small market. There are also more tourist eco-lodges there and it is possible to either join a wildlife spotting group or hire a guide from one of them.



Waypoints :-	Depth :-	(at a tide of 1.0M - via CMap)
2.	4.3 M	
3.	1.8 M	
4.	2.4 M	(mudbank close abeam on port - dry/out of water at this tide)
5.	2.8 M	
6.	3.0 M	
7.	2.3 M	(abeam & close to northern entrance of inlet)
8.	3.2 M	
9.	7.0 M	(holding close to port bank)

24-11-10 - We followed a local barge into river, and he followed these waypoints very closely.

To see all the details that are visible on the screen, use the Print link next to the map.

Kinabatangan River (East Sabah)

The Kinabatangan River is northeastern Sabah's longest river. It rises in the Wittu Range and winds its way through 350 miles of mountains, valleys, jungles and floodplains before emptying into the Sulu Sea between Sandakan and Kampong Tambisan.

This river is easily navigable up to the town of Sukau and further depending on drought and mast height. There are power lines crossing the river at Sukau 05° 30.51N, 118° 17.2E and tall vessels should do their homework before venturing under them.

The Kinabatangan journey is a 'must do' experience for every cruising yacht; permissions are required but are easily obtainable from the local agent. (see below)

From GPS position, 05° 34.04N, 118° 34.19E head 228° directly for the middle of the river, which is clearly visible. Do not attempt to enter north of this position as the shallow bank extends dangerously to seaward.

Inside the entrance is deeper and easier going. Up the river 4 miles is a village on the southern shore. Proceed a further 2 miles to 05° 34.04N, 118° 34.19E and take the Nipah Palm-lined right hand tributary proceeding to 05° 35.24N, 118° 34.19E. From here, the river gets much shallower. A small island of Nipah Palms splits the waterway. Take the right hand tributary and stay close to the right hand bank passing the island. The river turns sharp right and it is possible to return to the middle.

An intersection called 'The 4-Ways' is three miles further up at 05° 37.88N, 118° 31.77E. Turn into the left tributary favouring starboard to enjoy the scenery change from Nipah Palms to verdant jungle over the next 15 miles. At 05° 41.90N, 118° 23.06E is a left hand tributary leading past the village of Api and on to Sukau 20 miles further up stream. There is a small restaurant at Api and the Muslim villagers are warm and inviting. Wear appropriate attire.

Where river meets jungle is a haven for wildlife, best viewed at sunrise or near sunset. You will find Orangutans, Proboscis Monkeys, Grey Leaf Monkeys and common Macaques in the trees lining the river. The rare Pigmy Elephant has been seen along this river and at night, you can spotlight plenty of crocodile's eyes shining in the water.

The river carries logs and foliage that can foul anchor chains and damage propellers. Local barges carrying palm oil roots, logs and sand ply the river all the way to Sandakan. Display plenty of light at anchor so you are visible to them at night and avoid stopping close to river bends where there is less navigable water for them to manoeuvre in.

For all permissions and advice on cruising this area, contact Touchdown Holidays, the local agent.

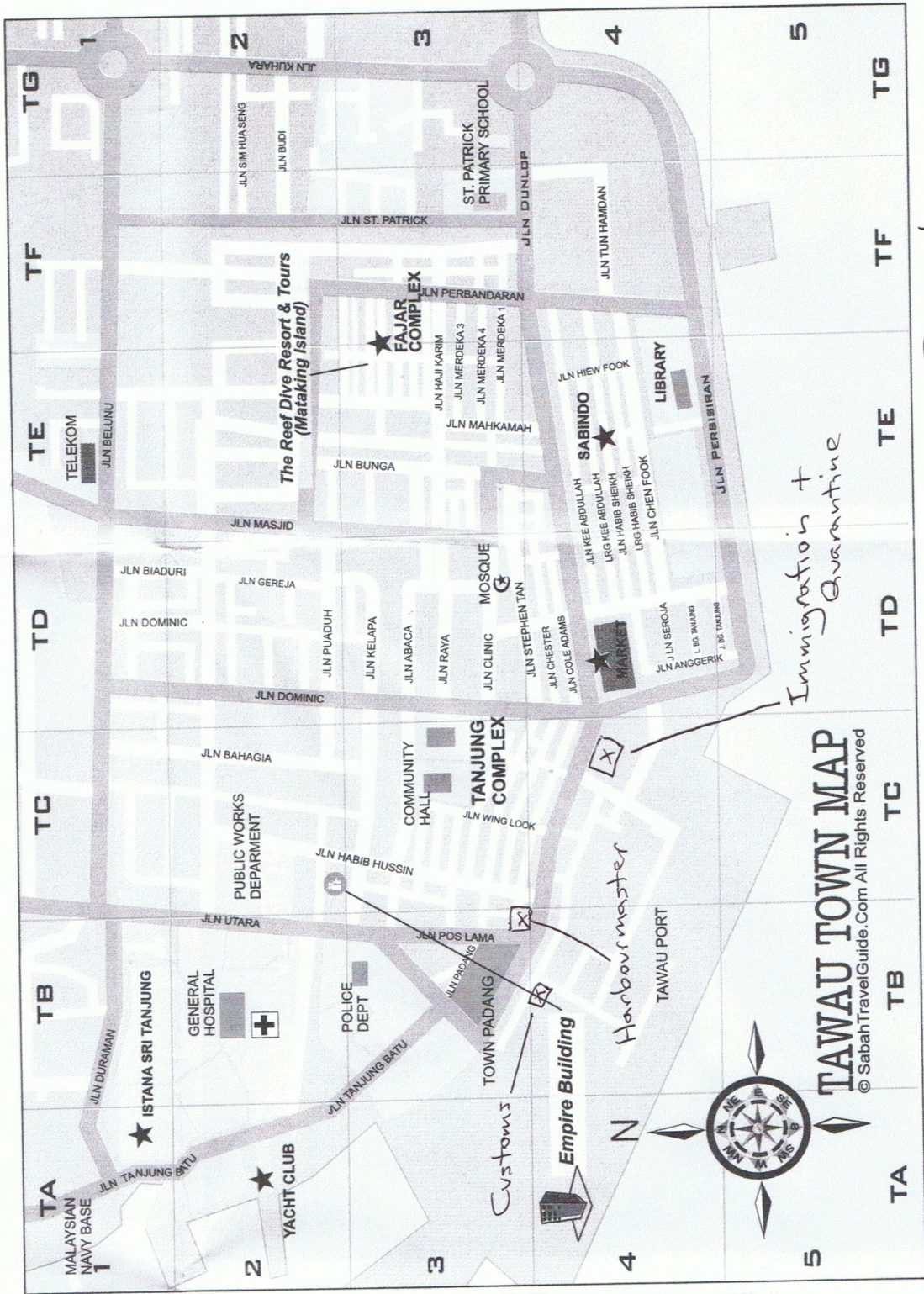
Touchdown Holidays Sdn Bhd
Lower Level Pacific Sutera Hotel,
Sutera Harbour Resort, P.O. Box 14962,
88859 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.
Tel (+60) 088 249 276, Fax (+60) 088 256 408
email: victoria@siaextreme.biz



Ed Shiras x 4

* Areas of jungle with monkey colonies start 5 miles upriver from 4-Ways.
▲ Depth can ↓ to 1.1M. Also sighted a ? rock or stuck log in this area.

* Several tributaries of the K. River lead out to the coast, south of Sandakan. ? navigable for vessels of draft > 1M?



Marks/Rock ▲
 6M over mud ⚓

□ Fuel barge

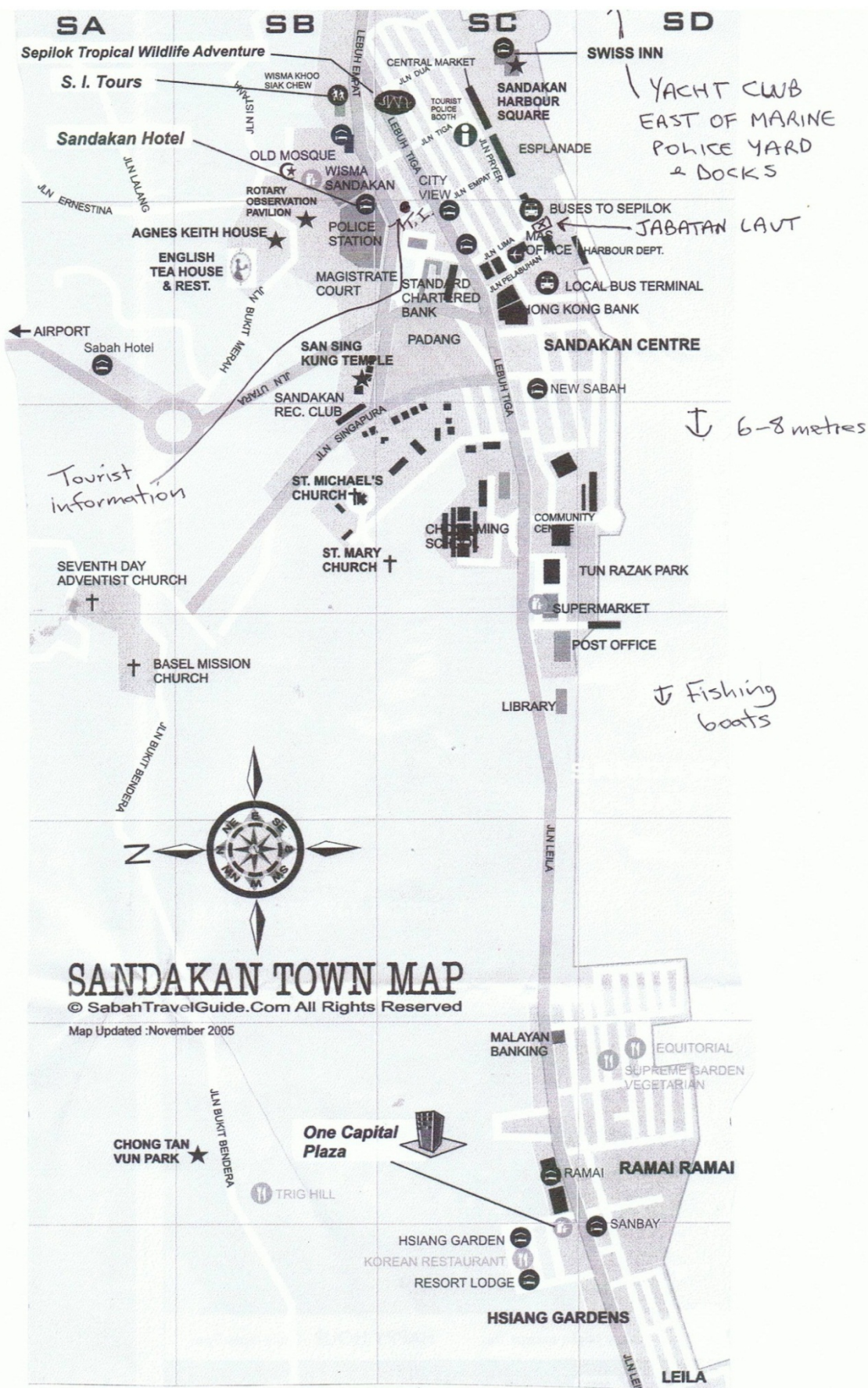
Immigration + Quarantine

Harbour master

Empire Building

Customs

TAWAU TOWN MAP
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KINABALU



Legend

- Shopping Center
- Food Stall
- Street (Jalan)
- Hotel
- Market
- Bus
- Seafood Restaurant
- Tourist Information Centre
- Taxi

LIST OF HOTEL IN SABAH BY CATEGORY

5 Star Hotel Category	Tel no.	3 Star Hotel Category	Tel no.	1 Star Hotel Category	Tel no.	Budget Hotel Category	Tel no.	BBB Category	Tel no.
1. Hyatt Regency Kinabalu(S)	6-086-221234	7. Berjaya Palace Hotel(W)	6-086-211911	14. Casuarina Hotel(C)	6-086-221000	25. Ang's Hotel(V)	6-086-234999	33. Backpackers Lodge B&B (U)	6-086-261495
2. Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort(S)	6-086-226800	8. Hotel Shangri-La(S)	6-086-212600	15. Diamond Inn(W)	6-086-261222	26. City Inn(U)	6-086-218953	34. Borneo Backpackers(T)	6-086-234009
3. Sateri Harbour Resort & Spa(S)	6-086-318686	9. Tang Dynasty Hotel(S)	6-086-263369	16. Full Hus Hotel(U)	6-086-234960	27. High Street Inn S&B(U)	6-086-218111	35. North Borneo Cabin(V)	6-086-272600
4 Star Hotel Category		2 Star Hotel Category		17. Hotel Delegation(V)	6-086-262222	28. Hotel Holiday(S)	6-086-213116	36. Pamel Kinabalu(U)	6-086-219168
4. Beverly Hotel(T)	6-086-269999	10. Century Hotel(U)	6-086-242222	18. Hotel Madani(Q)	6-086-263353	29. Hotel New Sabah(S)	6-086-226010	37. Topocara Lodge(T)	6-086-270284
5. Promenade Hotel(U)	6-086-265555	11. Hotel Capital(V)	6-086-231999	19. Kinabalu Hotel(U)	6-086-245999	30. Water Kinabalu Hotel(U)	6-086-262331	38. The Beach Lodge(U)	6-086-213888
6. The Jewelton Hotel(T)	6-086-223333	12. Kinabalu Daya Hotel(V)	6-086-240000	20. Ruby Hotel(W)	6-086-213222	31. Mandarin Hotel(S)	6-086-225222	39. Trekker Lodge(U)	6-086-262263
		13. Promenade Hotel Apartments(U)	6-086-260808	22. Victoria Hotel(U)	6-086-218511	32. Parital Inn(S)	6-086-219221		
				23. Wah May Hotel(U)	6-086-266118				
				24. Winner Hotel(U)	6-086-243222				