

Solomon Islands to Thailand

Part I

We left the Solomon Islands on December 23, 2006. We thought about staying for Christmas but we were already a week behind schedule and didn't want to have to shorten our stay in Palau by another 5 days since we would be unable to check out until December 27th. So we checked out on the December 22nd (good thing Mike went in the morning because the offices were closing at noon for the holiday weekend) and left bright and early on Saturday morning. The passage was 1763 miles and took us 15 days.

We did not have a lot of wind, in fact I don't think we sailed more than 6 hours at a stretch, but it was comfortable and we only had 18 hours of westerly wind so we didn't have to do a lot of extra miles to get where we wanted to go. Cooking is no problem on a passage like this so we were able to enjoy the lobster and steak dinners we had planned for Christmas and New Year's Eve but holidays are more fun spent in port. We slowed down the last night so we would arrive in daylight.

About 8:30 Sunday morning January 7, 2007 we had the pass in sight. There was no wind, no swell and off and on the sun was blocked by the clouds as they drifted by. As we headed for the waypoint from which to line up the tower and enter the pass we cut inside a little too much and wound up on the reef at about 9:15 Sunday morning. We put out a call on the VHF radio that was answered by Ann on S/Y Surrender who happened to be up at Sam's Tours and arranged for some assistance to pull us off the reef. That assistance came in the form of Dennis in his inflatable and Jim in a 40+ foot power boat Reel Time. Dennis arrived first to let us know that help was on the way and tried to see if he could push us off, to no avail. Meanwhile all the tour boats were headed out for the day's adventure so Integrity caught on the reef is in several Japanese photo albums. Finally Jim and company arrived in Reel Time and Dennis ferried the tow line out to us. By now it was about 10:30 and Integrity was heeled over enough for the water to lap over the toerail but they managed to pull us out to deeper water. We were following Reel Time to the pass when we had a visitor which had been watching the show from a safe distance. It was the Park Rangers who wanted us to stop, but not wanting to be adrift near the reef and unsure what damage we may have incurred, we instead slowed down to allow one of them on board while we continued in the pass. Of course the outer reef is a marine preservation area and therefore they needed to give us a \$100 ticket for entering the area illegally. It didn't matter that we hit the reef we were just not supposed to be there. It would be nice to think that this was all this little fiasco would cost us but we doubted it. Anyway, by 11:30 we were safely anchored in

Malakal Harbor under quarantine until Monday morning when we would check-in. We tidied up the boat and got some rest.

Monday morning we took the boat to the wharf, checked in, went around to Malakal Harbor west and anchored off Sam's Tours. Everyone at Sam's and the other cruisers were friendly and extremely helpful. They provided us with all kinds of information about where things are located and how best to get around. We found several well-stocked grocery stores, including Payless with it's Angus beef which we hadn't had since the Marshall Islands, and numerous reasonably priced restaurants but no movie theaters. Oh well, the internet was cheap and so were the massages, so we managed. Mike got in several dives but did not get to do any of the wrecks. The down side of diving with a group is you go where the majority of the group wants to go and the reefs and caves were much more popular than the wrecks. But he enjoyed the diving (even got his Nitrox certification) with good reefs, abundant sea life, and ultimately felt the wrecks would have paled in comparison to those he experienced diving in Bikini.

After three and a half weeks of civilization we ventured out to the Rock Islands for a few days. There are no charts of this area but we had a land survey map and a few satellite pictures to go by. We stuck to the major channels and common anchorages (not feeling very adventurous after our time on the reef) but we still had them to ourselves and it was nice to be away from the bright lights for a while. After a little rest and relaxation we headed back to Malakal Harbor to watch the Super Bowl and provision for our trip to the Philippines. We had now seen Palau by land and by sea but we got a special treat when Jon Walker's helicopter was shipped in from Guam. He has a fleet of helicopters in Guam that service the fishing boats but was branching out to give sightseeing in Palau a try. Still in the process of obtaining the necessary permits to operate in Palau, he was generous enough to give several of us a free helicopter tour of the area. Before shipping one of his helicopters to Palau Jon had brought his boat to Palau. Arriving about two weeks before us and also hit the reef a little to the right of our spot while attempting to enter the harbor. Other than being a power boat that could sit on the reef as the tide went down, for several reasons he was not as fortunate as we were, he hit it at one in the morning and had to spend the night out there, he had to haul out and do repairs and last but not least Johnnie Walker on the Rocks was the drink special that night at Bottom Time Bar (Sam's Tours).

Part II

We were enjoying our time in Palau but the clock was ticking and we needed to get moving so we left on February 19th for the Philippines. The passage took us about three days and seven hours to cover 573 nautical miles. Overall this was our fastest passage, we have had faster individual days but never three plus days in a row and we got to sail 90 percent of the way

with 10 to 15 knots aft of the beam along with a little current in our favor. We arrived just before sunset, tuck in behind La Jonoza Island and dropped anchor in about 45 ft of water. There is not much in the way of cruising guides for the Philippines and this would be the first of many times we simply picked a spot on the chart that looked good and headed hoping that the chart bore some resemblance to reality. Again we had purchased the Nobeltec charts for this area and found that while at times they lacked in detail when compared to the C-map charts overall they were much more accurate and no G.P.S. offsets were necessary.

We lifted anchor the next morning and headed for the Hinatuan straits. The currents can be quite strong in some parts of the Philippines and therefore some passages need to be timed with the tides. This is one of those passages as the current can run as much as 6 knots in these straits. We did okay for the first narrows but the current was already against us when we reached the second narrows so it was pretty slow going and it was dark by the time we reached the anchorage we had selected.

We anchored off Hikdop Island just as the village fishing fleet was headed out for a nights work. We saw a row of about a dozen lanterns heading out from the shore but it would not be until they returned in the morning that we would get our first look at some of the more interesting fishing craft in the Philippines. The boats were motorized outriggers with eight fishing poles extended four on each side that made them look like giant spiders moving across the water.

After a nights rest we headed for Port Carmen on Cebu Island with one stop along the west coast of Leyte for the night. Now that we are inside the archipelago it is unwise to travel after dark because of the fishing traps, FAD's (fish activation device) and unlit fishing boats. We made to Port Carmen and took our best guess at where to anchor. The water was muddy so it was impossible to tell the depth by the change in color however the locals had old fish traps on every shallow spot so we just had to find a spot with enough swing room. It was okay the first night but we had to re-anchor the second night because the wind was at a slightly different angle and Integrity had found a spot to rest on and it wasn't even low tide yet.

From Port Carmen we took the local bus to Cebu City to check into the Philippines. It was a very colorful trip with tricycles (small motorcycles with various forms of sidecars), motorcycles, cars, jeepneys, local busses and air-conditioned busses all sharing the same road which was often only one lane in each direction. Everyone is in a hurry, weaving in and out of traffic. The signs and lines painted on the road have very little meaning; it is whatever you can get away when driving in the Philippines. This is all very entertaining as long as you are not

driving. It had the color of Mexico but more fast paced, kind of like Mexico on speed. After making the rounds between Quarantine, Immigration and Customs and of course paying the unofficial fees we were checked-in and had 59 day visas for the Philippines. We spent a few hours exploring Cebu City before taking a taxi back to Port Carmen. We had lunch at the Cebu Yacht Club to see which boats were in town, explored a little downtown and ventured into one of the two large shopping malls (I don't think we have ever been patted down to enter a mall before) in the city. Cebu is the most prosperous island in the country and Cebu City has all the amenities of Manila but it is supposedly easier to get around in Cebu. We shall see.

After leaving Port Carmen we spent seven days transiting 450 nautical miles northwesterly through the archipelago to Puerto Galera on the north coast of Mindoro. Up to the northern tip of Cebu we had wind on the nose and spent a couple day tacking back and forth across the shipping lanes to clear the island. After that the trip was sunny days with calm seas and little or no wind. A motorboat ride was fine with us as there were plenty hazards to avoid in the form of fish traps, floats, buoys, FAD's, canoes and small fishing boats etc. It made for some long tedious days and difficulties in finding a spot to anchor, but we managed. On arriving in Puerto Galera we had to anchor across the bay as the Yacht Club moorings were only rated for 20 tons and Integrity at 31 tons is too heavy. The anchorage was comfortable but the dinghy ride into town was pretty wet if the wind came up. The Puerto Galera Yacht Club is one if not the only cruiser friendly establishment in the Philippines. They provide a secure dinghy dock, ferry service to town and the moorings, wireless internet at the restaurant, good and reasonably priced food and drink and the staff is very helpful. We stayed here 5 days and thoroughly enjoyed it but alas we had to keep moving.

From Puerto Galera we did a two day hop up to Subic Bay with two things in mind. To fix the fridge and leave the boat in a marina to do little land travel before leaving the Philippines. After docking Integrity we mentioned to the marina staff who greeted us that we needed to replace the compressor on our refrigeration. They promptly said they had the man for the job and he gets off at 4:00 so they would send him down to the boat. A little after 4:00 he shows up, we agree on a price and tomorrow is his day off from the marina so he will be able to do the work the next day (we had the new compressor already), so the first thing on our list was hopefully about to be taken care of. He showed up first thing in the morning and by the end of the day our fridge was purring again. Mike was very pleased with the man's knowledge and thoroughness, and also glad he decided against doing the job himself.

Inside the Subic Bay Freeport Zone things seems a little deserted to us but several people commented that it was much more crowded when it first opened. The duty-free shopping

was good but the rest of shopping left much to be desired. For the Philippines prices were quite high and the quality was often poor. We only bought what we needed, nothing extra. Next we rented a car for a week to do a few errands and drive up to northern Luzon. After a little running around and booking some airline flights, tours and hotels for the following week we took off in the car and headed for Banaue to check out the famous rice terraces. Driving in the Philippines is a bit stressful because of the traffic, lack of street signs and poor quality of the roads. It takes a long time to get anywhere because there are no significant stretches of open roadway in which to make good time. The best is when you can get behind a big air-conditioned bus that stops for nothing and just go.

After running out of gas, getting a flat tire and spending an unscheduled night in Bontoc we made it to Banaue. Driving through the mountains there were terraces everywhere but the ones in Banaue were spectacular though we were about a month early for prime viewing. They have four viewpoints along the road and the best time to view them is late afternoon so in the meantime we had lunch, walked around town, and did a little shopping. Each viewpoint has a few souvenir stands, snacks for sale and a group of little old ladies in traditional Philippine dress ready to pose for pictures for a few pesos. The sun cooperated and we got some good pictures then headed back to the hotel for dinner and a good nights rest before the long drive to Vigan the next day.

Vigan, spared the bombing during WWII, is best example of the Spanish colonial era in the Philippines. With it's narrow streets, massive stone buildings and horse-drawn carriages, it was a delightful city to wander around and we enjoyed our stay here but it was time to head south to check on the boat and embark on the second part of our land travel. Integrity was fine when we returned and we still had the car for another day so we drove to the Shrine of Valor. This is a 90 meter cross on the Bataan Peninsula that commemorates the Bataan Death March. The cross is atop a hill and the crossbar is an observation platform from which you can see out to the South China Sea and across to Manila. There were also several displays outside and a small museum.

It was convenient to have the car but Mike was glad to be done driving in the Philippines. The next day rode a van into Manila and stayed several days exploring the waterfront, museums and the Intramuros. Then it was off to Palawan to see the subterranean river and Leyte to see the WWII memorials. We returned to the boat and after a few days of preparation we left the Philippines on March 31, 2007 bound for Singapore.

Part III

The passage to Singapore was 1377 nautical miles and took us 9 days, 4 hours. It was another calm passage with light winds but this close to the equator that is to be expected. We had a lot of ship traffic on this entire route but approaching and transiting the Singapore straits was something else. The congestion really starts about 30 miles out as ships are coming from various directions and timing their arrival at the straits. Coming from the east we were on the southern side of the shipping lanes and of course needed to be on the northern side. We found our opening to cross over after traffic lanes had begun but before they narrowed down. There were gaps in the eastbound traffic so we cut straight across that lane and steered for the stern of oncoming westbound ship, cutting in behind as soon as safe to do so. After that it was a matter of paralleling the westbound lane but staying just outside it, and watching out for the ships coming in or out of the various anchorages and wharfs.

It was not as bad as we envisioned but it did make for a long, intense day. Fortunately the current was with us and we were doing between 8 to 9 knots most of the time, but we still arrived at Raffles Marina after dark. However the marina staff works until 8:00 so they were there to greet us when we arrived and help us get settled in the slip. The next day we filled out the paperwork and the officials came to the marina to check us into the country. No hassles, additional requirements nor did they visit the boat. The whole thing took about 5 minutes. The marina staff is very helpful and they still do the stay 10 nights and pay for 7 nights but watch out for the electricity costs. Ours was about two-thirds of our slip rental and we don't have air-conditioning. But they delivered the newspaper every morning and the wireless internet was included in the slip rate.

The next order of business was to explore Singapore. The free shuttle from the marina to the four closest MRT stops worked great. Two of the stops are at shopping centers which include grocery stores. But for serious provisioning the Carrefour will deliver to the marina and the marina loads it in their cart and drives it down to the boat. Of course Carrefour was busy the day we did it so the groceries didn't arrive at the boat until 10:00 p.m. but they were carefully boxed so nothing was broken, bruised or smashed, great service. Next stop was the Thailand Embassy to apply for our 60 day visas. There was a little bit of a line but in two business days they were ready for us to pick up. With the business out of the way it was time to play or shop as the case may be in Singapore. It seems everywhere you turn there a shops or malls and of course the food courts are not to be missed. We spent several days on Orchard Rd and Holland Village but only scratched the surface. We also ventured out to Sentosa Island and took in the Boat Show.

We saw some beautiful boats if you like power boats but they didn't offer much interest to the average cruiser. There was a lot more of Singapore to see but we were anxious to get on up

the Malacca Straits to Thailand before the start of the southwest monsoon season, besides we will be back here two or three more times to apply for new Thai visas. So we departed Singapore on April 21, 2007 bound for Langkawi, Malaysia.

The passage up the Malacca Straits was a motorboat ride but again that was okay with us because of all the boat traffic, fishing and floating debris. There is no dozing on watch in this part of the world and no time to worry about pirates either, you just keep moving. We arrived in Telaga Harbor, Langkawi after a 416 nautical mile passage that took us 3 days, 8.5 hours. For Integrity this is three marinas in a row, I think she is getting spoiled and so are we. This is the second one with wireless internet on the boat and numerous restaurants within walking distance.

Customs, Immigration and Harbor Master are all located at the marina which makes it convenient to check in even if their hours are a little irregular. Telaga Harbor is about a half hours drive from the town of Khua so we rented a car for the week to do some sightseeing and shopping. We made several shopping trips to town but other than the duty-free stores the quality and selection was poor, however we had been warned of this in Singapore so we came prepared. Our only goal was to re-stock the liquor cabinet before heading to Thailand where it is much more expensive. The most enjoyable tourist attraction here was the cable car out of the Oriental Village. It is on the northwest corner of the island and from the top you can see the marina and the Malacca Straits to the south and the Andaman Sea to the north. Quite a view, especially on a clear day. After a short week it was time to move on, but we would be back.

Part IV

We left on May 1, 2007 for the 120 mile passage to Phuket, Thailand. We arrived at Ao Chalong at 8:00 the next morning, checked in to Thailand, traveled another 15 miles to Roh Rang Yai and anchored along the island for the night. This was the closest anchorage to Open Water Channel into Boat Lagoon. This channel is very shallow so we had to enter close to high tide which for us would be about 11:00 then next morning. We radioed Boat Lagoon to confirm our reservation for a slip as well as a pilot to guide us through the mangroves for the first time.

The next morning the pilot met us at the opening at 11:00 sharp and guided us through the channel which is well marked and only a little tricky as you round the last corner and approach the marina. We were settled in our slip by noon. The next day we rented a car and began our hunt for a place to live and contractors to do work on the boat. We found Jo, an Aussie who speaks fluent Thai, and she was a big help in getting started. We had names and numbers of some contractors and she had others so she set meetings with those of our choosing to begin getting bids for the boat work. She explained to them what we wanted done and even

translated their bids into English, if necessary. She also drove around with us looking at a few apartments to rent. We have been in Thailand for 3 ½ weeks now and have moved everything off the boat (again) and are living in a serviced apartment at Boat Lagoon large enough to store all our possessions as well as most equipment being removed from the boat.

The boat is up on the hard. Other than the 4 inches missing from the corner of the rudder you wouldn't know the boat sat on the reef in Palau. The masts have been pulled, stripped of hardware and ground down to the bare aluminum. Everything has been removed from the cockpit, house and decks including all the teak trim with the exception of the toerail. The teak deck has been removed and they are plugging the holes. Now I know I said we were not going to put teak decks back on but we have changed our minds. It was just too hard to imagine Integrity without them especially when the caulking is more expensive than the teak. So Integrity will have the existing paint and gelcoat ground off down to the fiberglass, two new coats of glass, be sprayed with primers and new gelcoat, and get new teak decks, new rigging and some new canvas. We will most likely be here between six and nine months to accomplish all the boat work and then remain in the area until January 2009 when we will head off across the Indian Ocean.

For those of you who worked in the Auditor's Office in 1989 or before, Neil is alive and well and still loving it in Phuket. We have been to visit him twice already and will see a lot more of him in the coming months.

In summary, in the seven months since leaving Fiji we logged 6855 nautical miles and cruised 6 countries. We hope this finds you all happy and healthy. Sorry if I got a bit wordy. Take care and we would love to hear from you.

Linda and Mike
S/V Integrity

P.S. Check our website 'SVINTEGRITY.COM', for Boat Lagoon, Thailand pictures. And soon, Fiji (few), Vanuatu, Solomon, Palau and Philippine.

P.S. #2 You can now call us here in Boat Lagoon Thailand by call us on our SKYPE Friday Harbor phone number 360-356-1007. Best time to call us is 0600-0800 Thai time (PDT 1600-1800, MDT 1-1700-1900, CDT 1800-2000 and EDT 1900-2100). If you want to use SKYPE, a computer voice-over program that allows you to makes very inexpensive long distance phone calls, logon to SKYPE.COM.