

Blood Sweat & Beers Goes North By Hollie Connery



When approached by Marguerite with the task of encapsulating a month's voyage to sea and our small yet significant role in preserving sensitive national relations with the Maluku Islands, still stained with the civil unrest of the last decade, as well as our closest neighbours, I was overwhelmed. How could I convey an accurate description of our month's voyage, firstly within the prescribed word limits and secondly that would bring justice to the extent of hospitality that was



awarded on our behalf. But if you have a moment I would like to share a glimpse of what has been a remarkable journey.

The indescribable smell of Indonesia that suffocates the back of the throat in the same way I imagine milk and lemon juice would, is our first contact with the Spice Islands and after our first three days at sea, it is a welcoming change. As the official Customs crew embark upon our vessel with their beaming smiles and clouds of Garam, I start to understand Jam Merat - Rubber Time, a unique time parallel Bruce and Morgan have explained on the trip over.

Our first couple of days are filled with the over-stimulating simplicity of the sights and sounds that are Saumlaki. We were greeted with the warmest of welcomes and ceremonies galore!!!! Everyone gorged themselves in all of the attention we received, including the bevy of entertainment featuring all things traditional. The following days are full of crazy motorbike journeys, breathtaking beaches, karaoke and drinking Bintang. My initial impression was that all Indonesians wore an infectious smile and laughed from the heart, all bananas should be deep fried and that sometimes it is better not to ask what meat is in the soup.

After four days in Saumlaki we are the second of four boats to leave and embark on the next leg of the journey to Ambon. At this point in time we leave behind thirteen boats that were a part of the Darwin to Saumlaki rally, but choose not to go on to Ambon for various reasons, mainly out of concerns for safety due to the civil unrest that has sparked up riots in recent years. Nevertheless we are joined by vessels: (1) Imagination, dual skippered by the curry and custard tart gurus Gavin and Cathy; (2) fittingly named Cruise Missile belonging to the tallest, fastest, skipper Wayne (whom may I also note bought the biggest cannon) and his lovely-natured, princess Di look-alike, wife Elaine; (3) Ocean Road, skippered by dog lovers, sh#t-stirrers and all round nice couple Ray and Shaunnah. And of course, the bachelor pad, Blood Sweat and Beers, skippered by King Bruce and expert crew and sea dogs Morgan, Siobahn and myself.

Our over-night deep sea journey proves to be rougher than anticipated and even the most experienced of sailors arrive in Ambon feeling a bit battered by the angry ocean. Being the first Darwin to Ambon rally to return in the over seven years, there was a hint of uncertainty in the air of what to expect and how we would be welcomed. Any doubts instantly dissipated when we arrived to a welcoming ceremony of singing children and camera crews. Little did we know that over the next couple of days we



would be in newspapers and television, lunching with the major, brunching with the prime minister and acting a symbol for the return of their tourism industry that has been thwarted over the last decade. Again we attended an extensive program in which we were shown the best of what the island has to offer, with traditional dancing, not-so-crazy bamboo, karaoke, tours of sacred sights, karaoke, traditional meals, jungle treks, oh, . and did I mention that Indonesians absolutely love karaoke? Needless to say our time was jam-packed with activity and the extent of the hospitality we received would dwarf any five star resort.



All the locals wanted to have us drink Soapie in their homes and meet their families. If we had enough time Siobahn and I would have visited every single one as all of them had incredible stories to tell of both their concerns of safety as well as their relief of the return to peace. It was quite surreal at times and I often found myself forgetting that Ambon is fresh out of civil conflict, my only reminders being the odd street corner we would turn down only to find all the buildings levelled.

The islands we visited on the return home were a lot smaller and more quiet giving us time to re-couperate from our busy schedule in Ambon. The rest of the trip was spent enjoying some of the best diving islands Indonesia has to offer, at some of the most colourful and lively reefs comparative to our own Great Barrier Reef, frolicking on remote beaches and fine dining aboard Imagination.

It's amazing the kind of perspective you can achieve in only 26 days. How our closest neighbours live a world away, a cluster of islands so rich in living history and full of all the spices of life exist unknown to so many Territorians. Despite a disgruntled past decade I can say in all honesty that not once did I feel that the safety of myself or my sister was being threatened. My deepest thanks and appreciation goes out to the hundreds upon thousands of Maluku Islanders that greeted us with those beautiful, beaming, sometimes toothless smiles and open arms, to our skipper King Bruce, and Morgs for giving us such an awesome opportunity to join you two larrikins, and, of course, to 'Blood, Sweet & Beers, Magination, Cruz Misil and Osen Rod' (one of the many ways to spell the names of the yachts by the local newspapers!) for making it all memorable.



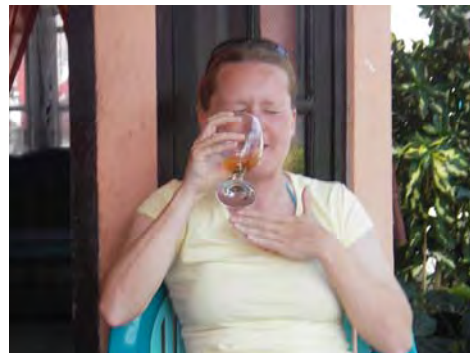
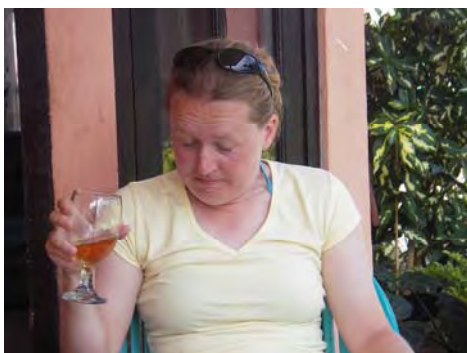


A Celebrity in Saumlaki

Sea Urchin II participated in her fourth Sail Saumlaki in 2006 and it was somewhat different to previous years as we had our son, Stuart, on board and his girlfriend. She has a celebrity name: Nicole Kidman (she is also relative to the famous person with that name). Upon arrival old friends greeted us enthusiastically and as soon as we introduced Stuart and Nicole to Aristote we knew this trip was going to be very interesting indeed. I was suddenly no longer Mrs Bridie but Mama. Steve managed to maintain the title of Mr Steve and not be called Papa all the time. Aristote was most taken with Nicole so we told him she was Nicole Kidman. His jaw dropped as he exclaimed: "The Hollywood movie star!" Yes indeed we replied.



Later that day Aristote said we were to have lunch the next day at his sister's house because she really wanted to meet Nicole Kidman. Aristote meet us at the Harapan Indah mid-morning and guided through Saumlaki to the village where his sister lived. Saumlaki town appears to consist of a number of villages. Family members fussed about making sure we were comfortable on the little front verandah. Some bottles of warm Bintang appeared and this was put into a large plastic jug with ice. It seemed we were to have some drinks before lunch and there's nothing quite like warm Bintang with ice. Curious villagers watched from their front doors and kids began to gather in the street. We had an absolutely fabulous lunch and then Aristote announced that we must have some special sopi (local firewater) he had acquired from Barbar. A crowd had begun to gather by this time. It seemed they were politely waiting for us to finish eating before they came to meet Nicole Kidman. According to tradition, Aristote skulled a small glass of sopi. It obviously passed the test. He then poured one for Nicole. He called the greeting local "Kilwedo." She responded "Kidabella" and attempted to skull the sopi. The following photos describe better than words the impact sopi can have on an unsuspecting victim.



DSC's Nichole Kidman



This process was repeated with each of us, then the sopi was tipped into the large plastic jug with the warm Bintang and melted ice. It wasn't any more palatable and the Bintang was now definitely undrinkable. Then Aristote's father, brothers, cousins and a variety of people gathered to take photos and have photos taken with Nicole. She also had to touch the belly of Aristote's pregnant sister to ensure the baby would be beautiful and fair skinned. The afternoon's proceedings were highly entertaining.



What was particularly interesting was the widespread adoption of mobile phone technology. There did not seem to be any in 2005 but this year almost everyone seemed to have one. The crowd that had gathered in the village were all taking lots of pictures with mobile phones. Nicole even had to sing part of a song so it could be recorded as a ring tone. We are wondering how many times this has been copied since we left. Nicole enjoyed celebrity status on and off for the rest of our time in Saumlaki. The locals got a real kick out of it, even those who knew she was not the Nicole Kidman of Hollywood fame. They said it didn't really matter. Word spread rapidly of her presence. When Blood, Sweat and Beers arrived in Ambon some locals asked Bruce if it was true. He kept the story going and they wanted to know if Nicole would speak to them if they rang Saumlaki. Bruce and I reckon more boats in Sail Saumlaki should try to get a crewmember with a celebrity name to entertain the wonderful people of Saumlaki.

Bridie O'Reilly: Sea Urchin II

