



1. Philippines 2019



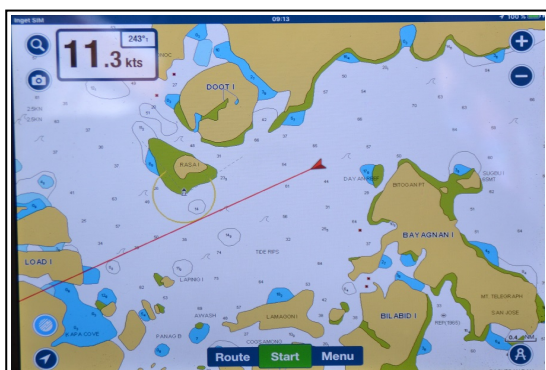
by Johan Kjellander 2019



We launched Bird of Passage at the Holiday Ocean View Marina on the 17:th of January 2019 and a few days later we continued our circum navigation. Shortest and easiest route would be to sail west over the south Sulu sea and through the pass between Borneo and the Philippine islands of Palawan. This route however is not safe because of pirates. The Abu Sayaf terrorists are active on the south Sulu sea.

The only safe way to go west is to first go north along the east coast of Mindanao. Then west through the Philippine islands, and finally south west on the South Sea of China.

Going north along the east coast of Mindanao is no fun. In January you have the north east monsoon wind against you and there is also a current of 1-2 knots setting south along the coast. It took us thre days to reach the north end of Mindanao and we had to burn quite a lot of fuel.



There are many narrow passages between the Philippine islands and the tide can create strong currents. The Hintuan passage is one such place. As you see on the instrumet above, our speed through the water is 4.9 knots while

the speed over ground (SOG) is 13.5. That means the current is more than 8 knots!



Michael and Birgit from Germany have spent many years sailing in south east Asia on their big catamaran Mariposa (a Lagoon 50). Michael is a retired dentist and has a complete setup of tools and instruments for basic toothcare onboard. Sometimes he stops at remote places and offers free toothcare to people living there. He told us once he had extracted more than 100 teeth in one day. In spite of the painful work this is a true philanthropist.

We were four boats that passed the Hintuan passage at the same time. All of us had previously been at the Ocean View marina so we all knew each other. Michale invited us for a party on his boat and we had a very nice evening together. Many interesting stories to tell, as usual when cruisers come together.

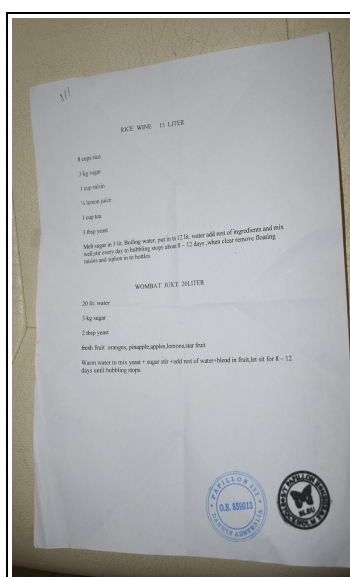


The next day started with a furious squall that created a bad swell so we had to leave our anchorage early. In very strong winds from behind we sailed west with only a small piece of our foresail unfurled. A few hours later the weather was fine again.

Our next stop was to be a place called Port Bonbonon, 150 NM west of the Hintuan passage. A small bay with a narrow entrance and a good place to hide during bad weather. On our way we were approached by local fishermen who wanted to sell their catch.



First boat we met in Port Bonbonon was a beautiful yellow trimaran named Papillon. Owner was 78 years old Klas. A Swede that had worked as a boatbuilder in many countries and now lived a good life as retired with his wife Nanette and their dog in the boat he built himself.



Klas made his own wine after this recipe.



The second boat we met in Bonbonon was also a Swede. How likely is that ? We hadn't met a single Swedish boat since Tahiti two years ago and now there were two of them ! But it didn't end there. Birger on New Moon came from the same place in Sweden as us (Örebro) and we had even lived on the same street.



There were many large Bangkas in Port Bonbonon, some were old, even wrecks but there was also new bangkas being built, in wood, glassfibre and epoxy. The new one on the right picture is about 9 metres long and will do 10 knots with a 45 Hp engine.



Bangkas come in all sizes. Here's a really small one and also our own dinghy made in HD Polyethylene. Very different from a technological viewpoint.



There are several nice places to eat along the shore of Port Bonbonon. One is Tongo Sail. Nigel runs the place and he can also take care of your laundry, offer you a ride to the city (Dumaguete) or build you a new bangka.



When we arrived, Nigel was just lifting the engine out of an old jeep. The engine was still in good condition and was going to have a second life in the new bangka that was built at Nigels boatyard.



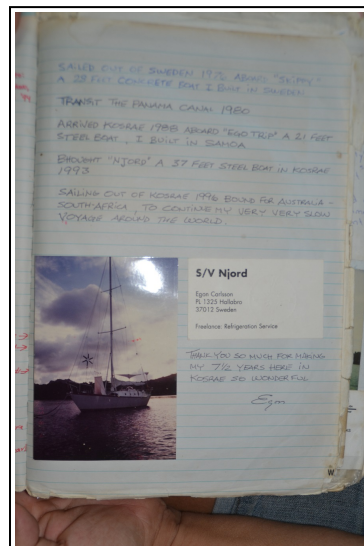
A few steps away from the bar, in Nigels garden, lies the hull of an old wrecked sailboat. I asked Nigel about it and he told us the most fantastic story...

Many years ago, in 1976, a man named Egon left Sweden in a 29 feet sailboat that he had built himself. He sailed it to Samoa in the Pacific to escape Swedish military service so the boat was named Skippy. In Samoa, he built a larger boat that he named Egotrip and sailed it to Kosrae. In Kosrae, Egon met Peter, an American in a sailboat with a Djonk rig. Egon and Peter decided to exchange boats so Egotrip was now in Peter's possession. Peter sailed Egotrip to Hawaii and there he was arrested by the local police. They thought he was Egon because he was in Egon's boat. Peter was released after two weeks and then sailed to the Philippines where he met a nice girl and married.

In the Philippines, Peter got to know Nigel and they became friends. One day Peter decided he needed a bigger boat and went to Japan to buy one. He started sailing it to the Philippines but somewhere around Okinawa he was caught in bad weather. He stopped to anchor, very tired, put some food on the gas stove and fell asleep. The food cooked dry and the smoke killed him.

Sad story but Nigel decided to help a bit and bought Egotrip, which was left in the Philippines with Peters wife and for that money she could get a piece of land. Nigel placed Egotrip in his garden and after a long time as playground for kids the boat is now more or less a wreck. But, this is not the end of the story....

When Tove and I came to Kosrae in 2017, we were invited by the local "chief", Smith Sigrah to celebrate Christmas with his family. He then showed an old guestbook and we started reading, One of the pages was this!



Smith Sigrah told us about the Swede that spent seven years in Kosrae and now we crossed his trail again, in Nigel's garden in Port Bonbonon in the Philippines. Nigel mentioned another person who might know more and that person also happened to be somebody that we knew. Terry Sargent in S/Y Valhalla, currently in Holiday Ocean View Marina on Samal Island. Terry remembers meeting Egon in Kosrae 1988 and also seeing Egotrip in the Philippines 1999, then owned by Peter. He sent us a long mail with what he remembers from this strange story. It really is quite fantastic how small the world is and how big, isn't it?



One day at Nigels, Tove happened to mention that she would like to get hold of a big piece of bamboo. She had seen a picture somewhere of a kitchen lamp that was made from bamboo and said she would like me to make her

something similar for our new house in Aland. Nigel heard and to our big surprise, the next day he presented us with a nice piece of bamboo, just the right size. It is now securely stored under one of the benches on our bridge deck and will follow the boat wherever we go. Hopefully it will find its way back to my workshop in Aland somehow. Thanks Nigel !



After a week, we left Port Bonbonon and continued north-west, spent a night at Cuyo island and then further west through the Palawan islands into the South Sea of China where we turned south. First stop was a small town named El Nido. Full of young tourists, backpackers, kite surfers, divers and people on a short vacation who wanted to have fun. Not exactly our favourite kind of place but interesting. The landscape around El Nido is dramatic. Volcanic origin, with steep cliffs and mountains and many caves.



Tove heard from an old friend in Aland that his daughter was backpacking in Palawan. With Facebook and messenger, Tove managed to get in contact and the next day we met Lisa on the beach in El Nido! Hearing the beautiful language of a person born in Aland, so far from home, was a nice reminder of our life in Scandinavia.



We were reaching the end of our year in the Philippines and needed to visit customs and immigration for checkout. To do that we continued south along Palawan to Port Barton, where we took an early 3 hour bus ride to Puerto Princesa. A zarpe (customs clearance paper) and a stamp in the passport from immigration and then 3 hours on the bus back again. It was well beyond dark before we had dinner.



After a beer and a nice fish filet you feel better. There are many restaurants along the beach in Port Barton but it seemed much less crowded than El Nido and not so noisy. We liked Port Barton.



An old colorful bus and a gas station nearby with a truck that seemed to have died there. Many unexpected scenes.



Next to the bus terminal we found "Pellas Place" where you could learn self defence (MMA) and Yoga, run by a Swede !



The Philippine forests still grow some of the best hardwood in the world and the Philippines are good carpenters. I like their heavy hardwood furniture.

After a few days in Port Barton we left the Philippines for good and set sails towards Brunei on Borneo. The Philippines is a big country and we have only seen a small portion but we have been here for more than four months in total and the boat almost a year so we have learned some. We also have gained a number of new friends and one or two we might meet again in the future.



End of Philippines 2019

