

**SOUTH CHINA SEA – Jo Winter. Published in hard covers by Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson [[www.imray.com](http://www.imray.com)] at £55.00. 328 A4 pages in full colour throughout, ISBN 978-1-8462-3186-5**

This excellent cruising guide – subtitled *Singapore to Hong Kong via the Gulf of Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan* – is a timely update for the increasing number of cruisers heading to Japan and those who simply wish to enjoy the delights of southeast Asian cultures. It covers in great detail the available cruising grounds surrounding the South China Sea and reflects the author's obviously extensive experience in these waters. There are those who query the place of cruising guides in the modern internet age, but this one-stop compendium of accurate, well-researched information from seriously experienced sailors answers that question.

The book starts with an introduction covering just about all aspects of the history, culture, weather systems, boat preparations and associated data that one could reasonably expect. There is an informative section on typhoon tactics and a detailed section on medical problems particular to this amazingly diverse and fascinating part of the world. Isolated, 'lost', primitive tribes still exist in parts of Borneo and the Philippines, contrasting with sophisticated high-tech societies in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The pilotage section opens with the major routes between Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, including exploration of the Gulf of Thailand. It describes the ideal months for the passages and offers advice on the best routing tactics, all of which seem admirably sensible. The more detailed pilotage is divided into regions, starting in the south with Singapore and the Johor Strait. As with each section it opens with a history and goes on to describe the current situation including formalities, immigration, health, business hours and a range of other useful cruiser-relevant data. All this is supported by clear, annotated chartlets of various scales, as well as high-quality colour photographs. For Singapore it alludes to the draconian penalties meted out for even the most trivial offences – in our experience Singapore has a greater range of 'Prohibited' signs than any other country we have visited. It would be worth mentioning, however, that Sabana Cove Marina is a fresh water berth and a good safe place to leave a boat laid up.

Next follows the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, then the Gulf of Thailand, divided into two sections comprising Thailand and Cambodia. The most popular region with cruisers is the Thailand section of the Gulf and this is covered in detail offering a plethora of attractive, stunning anchorages. The Cambodian coastline is short and the formalities tedious, but the few possible anchorages are well described. Since Vietnam does not welcome yachts there is little to say about it and the pilotage concentrates on the Borneo side. This is divided up between Malaysian Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei. It is a fascinating area, but the coastline can become dangerous in the strong NE monsoon season when large seas build up at the southern end of the South China Sea.

By far the most extensive section is the detailed coverage of the Philippines. The author opens by expressing amazement that 'this stunningly beautiful archipelago is largely ignored by the yachting community'. Maybe people find the recent slaying of cruisers, kidnapping and piracy, frequent severe typhoons, active volcanoes and storm surges somewhat off-putting. Not everyone wants to spend Christmas Eve stripping off canvas and clearing the decks in preparation for a severe typhoon as we did. Fortunately the worst missed us, but there was devastation in Puerto Galera, largely caused by

ferries and local boats breaking free and smashing into moored yachts. However, with the above caveat the Philippines are a beautiful cruising area and the majority of the people are as friendly and welcoming as you could wish for. The extensive platter of exquisite anchorages offered should satisfy the taste of any cruiser, and hopefully will tempt more to explore what is undoubtedly a magnificent cruising ground. The final two sections cover Hong Kong and Taiwan, a particularly useful addition for those on passage to Japan.

The presentation is generally of a high standard, but there are inconsistencies. Some charts show latitude and longitude while others do not. Some of the anchorage descriptions are quite distant from the relevant chart – for example the paragraphs describing the Port Barton area on Palawan lie 14 pages after its chart. Anchorages are referred to either by name or number, and some are single line entries while others have anchoring depths and bottom type though, pleasingly, all include their latitude and longitude.

These criticisms are minor, however, in the context of the overall excellence of the book and its ease of access to all the necessary information to provide a safe and rewarding cruise in one of the world's most exciting, exotic and enjoyable regions. I would unreservedly recommend *South China Sea* to anyone considering sailing in that area.

GMJ

