

REVIEW

THE PACIFIC CROSSING GUIDE – Kitty van Hagen, 3rd edition. Published in hard covers by Adlard Coles Nautical [www.adlardcoles.com] and the RCC Pilotage Foundation [www.rccpf.org.uk] at £32.50. 256 A4 pages, with hundreds of colour photographs and four-colour plans. ISBN 978-1-4729-3534-2

‘Vibrant’ is the foremost thought as one scans pages packed with vivid images confirming many sailors’ dreams of the vast Pacific Ocean. This is no coffee table trifle, however – it is a seriously informative tome packed with hard-earned insight and information invaluable to dreamers and doers alike. It is a natural evolution of the late Mike Pocock’s original opus, reflecting the incredible pace of change and development in the cruising world. Nevertheless, despite amazing technological advances, the natural challenges remain as real and daunting as ever. This edition still fully addresses the requirements for safe and enjoyable passage making.

The Pacific Crossing Guide is a product of the collective expertise of members of the Ocean Cruising Club and the Royal Cruising Club. Kitty van Hagen, herself an immensely experienced and competent mariner, has achieved an impressive collation, producing this book in her own delightfully accessible style. It is divided into two logical sections: Preparations – encompassing the major considerations before departure and answering likely worries and concerns; and Passage Planning – individual descriptions of the major routes transiting the Pacific and principal ports.

Preparations covers a huge spectrum from casting off to abandoning ship, where I admit to a chuckle when reading that I should include my iPad in my grab bag ... first I must get one! However, it illustrates the guide’s relevance to current cruisers, embracing all the latest technologies. The reality of seawater and electrics making unhappy bed-fellows is not lost, and Kitty subtly cautions against over-reliance on electrical systems. Throughout, relevant websites or publications are suggested to enable further exploration. Numerous ‘tips, hints and advice’ panels containing gems of wisdom enhance the already impressive wealth of information presented.

An introduction to the Pacific is followed by a comprehensive section on preparing the boat, covering all the likely systems of a modern cruising yacht. It provides an excellent insight into the particular requirements for sailing long distances in remote tropical waters. Staying safe is fundamental and well covered, incorporating details of the latest technologies for locating casualties. The critical issue of chart accuracy is discussed, as even electronic charts still rely on old survey data. Producing chartlets from Google Earth satellite imagery is described (we use this system extensively, but it is not foolproof). A very useful section on navigation amongst coral atolls is included – there is still no substitute for the Mk.1 eyeball!

Following on are chapters on Communications, including internet access

and sat phones; Power usage and methods of generation; and Routine maintenance with useful checklists, suggested tool kits and spares. It's worth noting that many epoxies, glues and rubber items suffer badly if stored in high temperatures so it does not pay to overstock, or buy big bargain sizes.

It is evident from the chapter on Provisioning and Store Keeping that anyone lucky enough to sail with Kitty is in for a sublime culinary experience. Freezing limes and lemons to grate over one's food is just one 'top tip' that will remain on my dream list. Needless to say the chapter encompasses all you need to know and think about for successful tropical catering and galley management. It ends with a piece on trading and bartering, with a list of goods you may consider bringing for the purpose. Maintaining good health should be top of everyone's agenda and the chapter dealing with the likely tropical health problems is outstanding in its clarity and recommendations. 'Tropical paradise' is full of stinging and biting things – even a minor cut may turn into a significant problem if not properly treated. The section concludes with chapters on Managing the Paperwork, including recruiting crew, formalities and pets aboard, and finally the decisions to be made with the approaching Cyclone Season and Laying Up.

The opening pages of the book carry a small-scale Pacific chart with all the various routes shown in a colour-coded format. Each group is cross referenced to its relevant chapter in the Passage Planning section, providing excellent accessibility. The section begins with a chapter on weather – it is an outstanding example of how a complex system can be made comprehensible to the layman.

Each route chapter follows a similar top-down format. The routes are shown on a small-scale standard chart with an overview of the distances, significant weather issues and most favoured times for departure. Then follows a more detailed description of expected passage conditions and course considerations. Each country is introduced with a picture of its flag, time zone, spring and neap tidal heights and currency, though there is some inconsistency. This is followed by an overview with helpful insights regarding entry formalities and the indigenous culture.

Port Information boxes generally start with co-ordinates, time zone, spring and neap tidal heights and local currency. A brief description and directions for approach and entry follow, alongside large-scale colour Navionics charts. Given that the majority of today's cruisers use electronic charts, it seems appropriate to present them in the format with which sailors will be most familiar. The objection that there is no latitude and longitude scale is valid, but is countered by the large amount of data presented, a significant cost saving, and the modern image presented. It is a brave but justifiable move by the Pilotage Foundation and I hope it is well received. The majority of the small-scale charts reflect a traditional paper chart with appropriate scales. Every country and port is illustrated by a number of stunning colour pictures. The associated texts are tantalising and evocative tales of places and passages one can only yearn to explore. All illustrate the breadth and wonder of the Pacific.

My only significant criticism of *The Pacific Crossing Guide* is the limited

discussion of the people and customs. Occasionally cruisers give offence quite unwittingly, and it should always be remembered that you are a guest in their country with all the responsibilities that entails. As one chief recently said to us, “If these people don’t want to talk to us why have they anchored next to my village?”.

Overall this is an exceptional work that should be considered essential reading for anyone considering a Pacific Crossing. I’m sure Mike would have been thrilled to see this latest incarnation of his original work. Well done to Kitty and her team.

GMJ & AMJ