

south pacific opening up to cruisers

Imagine how you'd feel if you'd worked for years toward the goal of island-hopping across the South Pacific aboard your own boat, when your window of opportunity to chase that dream suddenly slammed shut, leaving you and your boat in an infuriating state of limbo.

That's precisely what happened two years ago when COVID-19 case counts skyrocketed all over the world, elevating the deadly scourge into a bona fide pandemic.

In mid-March 2020, almost every island nation in the Central South Pacific abruptly closed its borders to international yachts, and only now are they finally poised to open up again — effectively signaling to would-be Pacific cruisers all along the West Coast of the Americas that the South Pacific cruising scene might soon return to some semblance of normalcy.

As reported earlier, throughout the pandemic French Polynesia — the first possible South Pacific landfall for westbound passagemakers — has been cautiously letting cruising boats in on a case-by-case basis, despite being officially "closed" to international yachts. But due to the long-established maritime tradition of offering "harbors of refuge" to vessels in need, a veritable logjam of sailboats has built up in the main anchorages

of Tahiti — many of them presumably belonging to absentee owners. Meanwhile, New Zealand, which has been locked up tight since the pandemic began, has long been a favorite cyclone-season (November-to-March) refuge for many international cruisers. And last month the NZ government made a much-anticipated announcement that may lead to a resolution of this logjam conundrum: Late next month, New Zealand will finally open up to "visa-waivered" international travelers, including Americans and Canadians, with yachts to be let in by July, if not sooner.

Not only will this give owners of boats effectively stranded in Tahiti and Fiji (now open also) a prime target for a long, cyclone-season layover outside the tropics, but it will likely revitalize the so-called South Pacific Milk Run. That is, the popular idea of island-hopping west from Tahiti to the Cook Islands, Tonga (both closed now, but expected to follow New Zealand's lead), and Fiji before jumping south to New Zealand or Australia (whose entry rules are also evolving).

This writer caught up with several dozen westbound sailors in late February at three South Pacific Bon Voyage events at Mexico's Vallarta YC, and both Shelter Bay Marina and Linton Bay Marina in Panama. (All were sponsored by the South Pacific Sailing Network and the Pacific Puddle Jump rally, and supported by *Latitude 38*.)

We met a typical mix of cruisers from a dozen nations, including veteran circumnavigators and first-time bluewater passagemakers. Not surprisingly, a common thread among them was a burning desire to end the waiting game, cast off their docklines, and let their South Pacific adventures begin.

One crew that stood out within this disparate cluster of cruisers was Andrew and Jazz Veritas of the 37-ft Prout Snowgoose catamaran *Villa Veritas*. Not only were they a decade or two younger than most (both are in their mid-30s), but these former Bay Area residents seemed to embrace the attitude that whatever challenges the cruising life deals them, they will somehow overcome — and chalk up each challenge, no matter how aggravating, as part of their never-ending cruisers' education — even shearing off engine bolts while trying to repair their vintage 27-hp engine.

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what i saw

shares her triumphs and failures while moving her Cal 2-27 *Dura Mater* from anchorage to harbor, somehow always landing on her feet. In a very pleasant and positive way, she talks of some harrowing situations that turned out well, with only a story of some time spent in the mud, tree branches and leaves on the deck, and new homes for opportunists in the form of spiders.

The book starts out talking about what she had heard about the Delta and continues on to sailing up the river and back five times. She talks of all the advice she received on transiting Honker Bay and

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Pittsburg Slough, going with or against the ebb — they both work, but one of them is wetter.

She tells a nice story about how everyone in the Delta seems happy to be there, happy to help out, and ready to share stories and a beverage during the sunset hours. The Delta is fun! The Delta is forgiving! The Delta creates memories. You need to read this book whether you are new to the Delta, or, like Ann and me, have spent many years tied to a tree watching both daily performances of the sun.

—craig perez

south pacific — continued

With a lot more wanderlust than experience, they bought *V.V.* in Georgia in 2018, with the intention of taking her to the Bahamas on a honeymoon cruise. The boat had been advertised as a "turnkey vessel." So what could possibly go wrong, right? Well, apparently plenty of things. "We didn't know what we were doing in the beginning," admits Jazz. "No idea!" Nevertheless, after a four-month refit followed by four years of East Coast and Caribbean cruising, *Villa Veritas* is ready to face the Pacific.

We applaud Jazz and Andrew's can-do spirit and their wise approach to experiencing the cruising life. That is, getting 'out there' now, while they are young, fit and energetic, rather than waiting until they are old, gray and creaky, as so many (of us) sailors do.

Find more South Pacific info at www.south-pacific-sailing.com and www.pacificpuddlejumps.com.

—andy turpin



Although neither Andrew nor Jazz grew up around the sailing life, they are certainly in it now.

