

**Sidebar to “Southern Indian Ocean and South Africa, Part I”:
DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS**

by

Beth A. Leonard

Like the vast majority of circumnavigators, we followed the traditional tropical route for a westabout circumnavigation—the “coconut milk run.” Defined by the planetary air circulation, seasonal tradewinds, ocean currents and tropical storms, that route exits the Atlantic through the Panama Canal and the Pacific through the Torres Strait, leaving little room for improvisation. But in the Indian Ocean, the route splits forcing potential circumnavigators to choose between two mutually exclusive alternatives for “tying the knot”—crossing their outbound track and completing their circumnavigation of the world.

The road more traveled turns north from the Torres Strait and passes through Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand before striking off across the northern Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea. Once through the Suez Canal, it meanders across the Mediterranean to the Straits of Gibraltar, hops to the Canary Islands, then crosses the tropical north Atlantic to the Caribbean. The road less traveled heads south after the Torres Strait and island hops across some 6,000 nautical miles of southern Indian Ocean to Durban, South Africa. It then works its way around the southern edge of the African continent in a series of two- and three-day passages to Cape Town. To reach the Caribbean islands, it crosses 5,500 nautical miles of empty ocean with at most three island stops or calls in at Brazil after 3,000 nautical miles before coasting up and over the right shoulder of South America.

If two boats both left New Zealand in mid to late April, one following the traditional timing along the Red Sea route and the other heading around South Africa, neither dallying along the way but both respecting seasonal wind patterns and storm cycles, the South Africa boat would sail an extra thousand miles, make twice as many long ocean passages and still reach the Caribbean a full six to eight months before the Red Sea boat (see Chart 1). As many crews decide to spend an extra year or two cruising Europe while few crews who round South Africa choose to winter over, it might be two years or more before the two boats shared an anchorage in the Caribbean.

Both routes have their attractions and their difficulties. The Red Sea with its sand storms, contrary winds and political intrigues offers some of the best diving and snorkeling in the world. Beyond it lies all of Europe with its familiar history and culture, its wealth of art and cuisine. Those who have not had the opportunity to live in and experience Europe for months or years will often choose the Red Sea route for education and enlightenment. In contrast, the “dark continent” awaits at the end of the southern Indian Ocean run with its gale-force trades and legendary storms in the Gulf Stream-like Agulhas Current. The southern Indian Ocean route offers what for many will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience South Africa. Most visitors are forever changed by even a short stay in this beautiful and varied land, and the voyage around one of the Great Capes imbues an otherwise tropical circumnavigation with a certain romantic mystique.

Our decision was made more easily than most. Even before we left, Evans very much wanted to “round a Great Cape” as part of our circumnavigation. We had lived in Europe for three years before setting sail and believed we might never get another chance to see Africa. As we entered the Indian Ocean, Yemen on the heel of the Saudia Arabian peninsular boot broke out into civil war and South Africa elected Nelson Mandela. Eager to witness a turning point in history, we took a left after crossing over the top of Australia and struck out across the southern Indian Ocean.

April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	
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Via Red Sea ~13,600 nm	-----NZ/Aust to Torres Strait----- ~2,500 nm			---Torres Strait to Malaysia--- ~1,800 nm		Monsoon season			
	Red Sea ~600 nm	-----Cruising Med: Red Sea to Straits of Gibraltar----- ~2,000 nm				To Caribbean ~3,200 nm			

Via South Africa ~14,650 nm	NZ/Aust to Torres Strait ~2,500 nm	To Cocos Keeling ~2,000 nm	To Mascarene Islands ~2,400 nm	To Durban ~1,500 nm	To Cape Town ~750 nm
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Photos for “Southern Indian Ocean and South Africa, Part I”

Christmas Island:

- **Slides 1-2. Flying Fish Cove.** *Silk* at anchor in Flying Fish Cove. The large tenders can be seen lifted out of the water at the large quay. In Slide 2, Kampong, the Malay housing, can be seen in the background.
- **Slide 3. Buddhist temple.** One of many such temples located in small clearings around the island.

Cocos Keeling:

- **Slide 4. Cruisers’ paradise.** A group of cruisers and their children enjoy one of the shelters on Direction Island with the yachts anchored in the lagoon behind them.
- **Slides 5. Home Island.** The Malay settlement on Home Island.
- **Slide 6. Malay fisherman.** One of the Malay fisherman gave us a shy smile when he landed his boat along the shore of the lagoon.
- **Slide 7. Coconut grove.** A path winds through a coconut grove on Home Island.

Rodrigues:

- **Slide 8. *Silk* secured to the quay.** *Silk* tied up next to a South African boat on the quay at Rodrigues.
- **Slide 9. Local boats.** Local boats tied up to the opposite side of the public jetty in Port Mathurin, Rodrigues, with a yacht at anchor beyond them.
- **Slide 10. Maneuvering for space.** The inter-island freighter sets the yachts in motion in the small harbor.
- **Slide 11. Supermarket, Rodrigues-style.** The largest supermarket on the island even boasts a freezer though it was empty the whole time we were there.
- **Slide 12. Local fishermen.** Local fishermen consider their boat along the southern shore of Rodrigues.

Mauritius:

- **Slide 13. Port Louis.** The large harbor at Port Luis where yachts must clear in.
- **Slide 14. Grand Baie Yacht Club.** The waterfront of the Grand Baie Yacht Club which welcomed us with great hospitality.
- **Slide 15-16. Grand Baie.** The large, well-protected bay at the northern end of the island has all the charm and beauty of the major Caribbean anchorages.

Photos for “Southern Indian Ocean and South Africa, Part I” (Continued)

- **Slide 17. Interior of Mauritius.** The interior of the island alternates flat plains where sugar cane is grown with steep volcanic mountains which rise straight out of the plains below.
- **Slide 18. Hindu temple.** An ornate Hindu temple, one of many different types of religious buildings on the island.

Réunion:

- **Slide 19. St. Denis.** The largest town on Réunion can be reached by a relatively long bus ride from Port des Galets.
- **Slide 20. Cirque de Mafate.** The interior of Réunion where we went hiking has no roads and is accessible only on foot or by helicopter.
- **Slide 21. Beth at Cirque de Mafate.** About this time I was realizing that sea legs aren't up to hiking miles into the mountains!
- **Slide 22. Plain de Chicots.** The strange lichen-laden woods on the plateau atop the mountains called the Plain de Chicots.
- **Slide 23. Cabins for guests in Cirque de Mafate.** Hikers can pay a reasonable fee and stay at one of many cabins in the mountains equipped with fireplaces, cots, blankets and a keeper who will make a proper camping dinner (complete with a few shots of whiskey) for a few dollars extra.