

SLOEPMOUCHE - 46' Norman Cross trimaran - 5' draft – November/December 2018
Subject/ Area: Malaysia: West coast with Sail Malaysia 2018

After enjoying 4 months of slow exploration of the north coast of Borneo by ourselves, we now joined the Sail Malaysia 2018 rally from Puteri Harbor to Langkawi. This time, socializing and organized events would be the order of the day as well as a faster pace.

Johor Bahru: Arriving from Sarawak, we cleared in easily by ourselves in Pengelih (see our last letter). Cleared in/out simultaneously with Langkawi as the arrival port. That way, you are not required to check in/out in any of the ports on the way. But duty-free islands require yachts to clear in/out regardless of where you come from/go to (same goes for entering/exiting Sarawak & Sabah). Luckily for us we had the current with us for our passage to Puteri Marina (about 44nm) with no good anchorage anywhere in between.. We had the Singapore Harbor Police chasing us away from Singaporean waters as they seem very touchy about their territorial waters. You have to stay in or on the very edge of the big ship channel around the south of Singapore. With the tough regulations, high clearance fees and expensive marinas, most cruisers stay in Malaysian marinas and just make day trips to Singapore across the 2 causeway bridges traveling by public bus, altho those who don't mind paying for Raffles Marina, say it is very posh. Note: at this writing, 40Rm=\$1 USD

Puteri Harbour Marina has floating docks where you should be able to secure a spot unless a group of boats arrived before you do... but the harbor has also a non-developed area (yet!) where several boats can anchor (25RM/day for use of marina facilities). Since the whole development (several high rises and malls) is still being built, public buses pass infrequently (an hour to maybe two) so you might take a taxi or grab car (also not always easy to find) to nearby Medini Mall to catch more frequent public buses. Causeway buses (yellow bus with smiley faces) have several runs, 3 of which come to Puteri. Taking LM1 will bring you to Johor Bahru (JB) Sentral near Little India and the Link 1 bridge to Singapore. Another line does a circuit to nearby malls and Johor Premium Outlets, where international clothing, bags, perfumes, watches and more offer deep discounts. Finally, Link2 brings you to the Tuas bridge to **Singapore**. This bridge is much closer and the bus brings you to the Malaysian CIQP where you jump out of the bus, run thru the different airport-type checks and get back on a same-company bus that drives you to the Singapore CIQP where you do the same routine to get to a different bus (on the same 5RM ticket) that brings you to the Singapore MRT (metro) that now connects you via different, clearly-marked, well-organized, color coded lines to most parts of Singapore. They certainly put to shame the public transports in Belgium or France. In Singapore, the employees are very nice & helpful! If you have been staying too long in the islands, you will be in for a shock :) While in Singapore, one feels under the watchful eye of big gvt, but the result is, for a visitor, the town is clean & services well organized! Crime is low, graffiti non-existent and people unobtrusive and well behaved. But when spoken too, people are quite pleasant & helpful. Most speak fluent English. We had good service at Alex's Computer Laptop Services & Repair and got our ship's PC back up & running well (123bingo@gmail.com/96337161). As everywhere in SE Asia, big urban malls are ubiquitous and offer lots of stores. Sim Lim Square mall has lots of electronics.

Important: When you come back, make sure you get off of the MRT at the exact station where the bus dropped you on arrival, because if you continue on the MRT all the way back to the Tuas CIQP station, (as we regrettably did) they won't let you walk across .. you will have to pay another ticket to backtrack to the exchange station!

Sail Malaysia activities in Puteri were sign up/ cocktail and technical briefing on day 1 and next day, complimentary bus tour of SW Johor during which we visited the Pineapple Museum, a Mangrove park at the Southern-most point of Malaysia, and had a nice typical local lunch & cultural dance entertainment, and house tour at the Daeng Haddadek Memorial House, organized by Tanjung Piai Homestay community.

To reach the next rally stop in Melaka, we did 3 small 35nm~ day trips. First leg was 34nm to **Pulau Pisang** in front of a uninhabited island. After seeing in the morning how our swim ladder was covered with small barnacles after our 10 day stay in Puteri Harbor, Luc decided to check the prop, shaft and other non-painted u/w parts. Good that he did, as these were completely covered by the same small shells that were easily scrapped away in snorkeling, in nicer waters away from the mainland and thus less risk of crocodile encounters! Right after our early morning start, the next day, we had a squall with lots of wind and rain. This allowed us to sail at over 9kts, which has not happened since our passage from Palau to Davao about 4 years ago! In these regions we tend to forget what those big white pieces of cloth are for! Mid-day, we sailed in regular winds at 5-6 kts and then motor sailed to arrive just before dark in **Muar**. We anchored off the entrance channel since we did not want to risk running aground going all the way to town inside the river ... since we only had 4 ft on the depth sounder even between the red and green markers. Next day passage was sunny and very light wind. With only 2ft under our keel, we exited the Moas channel and slowly motor sailed to deeper water going towards the Water Islands. When rounding the SW corner of **Pulau Besar**, we could not resist anchoring for a few hours in a very scenic bay. Zotke & Zonne were very happy to run & swim on the beach there and we had lunch in the cockpit admiring the beautiful view ashore! Only 7nm now to our 2nd rally stop: **Melaka**.

Melaka: The small govt owned marina next to the river, despite being reported as silted and too shallow to enter, did have space for 2 sailboats, side to a floating dock. Only 1/3 of the marina space has floating docks and these are occupied by small local motor boats. Rally boats last year were caught during a spell of heavy SW swell that made the marina space very dangerous and some damages to vessels occurred. Most of the fleet (over 20) this year (other than the 2) thus anchored off the marina in 7-15ft of water. Some land reclamation areas nearby offer some protection but at 1am on the night following a great tour organized ashore, an onshore wind picked up during a 2-h SW squall (15-30kts) and a terrible swell created very steep rows of breaking waves on the shallow plateau where we were anchored causing many boats to drag or be so uncomfortable that many left in the middle of the night. We only experienced these types of breaking waves during the few cyclones/typhoons we lived through in our 25+ years of cruising. If local authorities needed another testimonial about the necessity to provide a safe harbor for visiting yachts, this was another opportunity!

But back to Melaka (Malacca, in former times) town. What a surprise to see a town playing the historic tourism card quite well. With it's rich history going back over 500 years and through numerous foreign invaders as an important spice trading center ... the town was declared an UNESCO heritage city in 2008. The 2nd Millennium version of this cultural cross roads boasts lots of tourist attractions like 32 different Museums, canal tour boats thru "Old Town" on the Melaka River, richly decorated tricycles twinkling with LED and blasting boom boxes taking people to the restaurants they booked for dinner. Lots of museums and historical buildings kept intact to be visited. It is nice to see lots of people fighting to retain their rich culture and specialty foods ... Next to that, like everywhere else on the planet, modern malls

pushing global consumerism are burgeoning like mushrooms and we felt as if being in any other metropolis anywhere else at times. One new activity worth doing is going up the tower with the rotating viewing disk. It's easily seen from just about everywhere in Old Town. From the top, you get a 360 degree view of the whole countryside and bay and town of Melaka from 80meters up. We were there before sunset, and the afternoon sun created a beautiful glow over the countryside. We DID do a unique tour at the Hang Tuah Museum a little ways out of town. The builders of this complex of buildings seek to preserve their cultural heritage by presenting in a modern way, the history of their most famous legendary hero, Admiral Hang Tuah, who by cunning and use of a unique martial art form called today: "Sikume", was the greatest Malaysian personage. It's worth a visit.

Port Dickson: After the memorable night described above, we left at first light and had a very pleasant sail the 32nm that separated us from Port Dickson. Actually the timing of the tide was perfect: 6 hours going north soon after we departed and got in deeper water and calmer seas. The posh Admiral Marina attracted most of the fleet, eager to have a peaceful night and a swimming pool and bar after the harrowing night before. A few of us anchored just south of the marina in a small canal, part of a development not yet completed. Only drawback was the tourist boats and jet skis zooming by during the day! We enjoyed the team building games and cocktail event at the marina for the rally boats. That cocktail was combined with a potluck dinner for Thanksgiving, suggested by one of the American cruisers :)

Passage to Pangkor: Navigational Note: the currents in the Malacca Straits can be very strong , and depending on the tides and your direction of travel, a boon or a curse...study your tide tables, seek local knowledge. Considering strong tides changing about every 6h and the numerous fishing nets and other debris one can run into at night, careful planning is in order. Alas sometimes it is not easy to find well sheltered anchorages especially in case of a Sumatra, sudden strong mini-storms, often at night with thunder & lightning. We planned our first leg of 47nm to anchor in the protected waters of the **Selat Lumut**, next to the **Pulau Indah** marina. The tide timing was perfect! We left Port Dickson at the crack of dawn, the first 2 hours with not very strong current against us and favorable early morning breeze, followed by 6h of favorable current, the last hours with favorable winds from the west so we could motor sail all the way to the anchorage, even benefiting of favorable current now that we were going in! We motored near the Pulau Indah marina but decided that there was no advantage in tying up to the floating pontoons wide open to waves and swell and river currents if stormy wx. After a good night of rest, next day, we waited until 1 hour before the current would turn favorably to slide back out and round the point to enter Selat Klang with favorable current all the way, only a few miles short of our overnight chosen anchorage off **Pulau Angsa**. Alas, the east side of both tiny islets is too deep (or too shallow to anchor) so we anchored on the north of them in exposed conditions but we did not bounce too much or have a squall so we had some sleep. Our next leg started with thunder, lightning and rain and adverse current then we had no wind and dry skies with favorable currents. When the current became unfavorable again, we had nice 15kts wind on the port side to give us extra power but we could not make it into Sungai Bernam before dark so we anchored in semi-exposed water again, off **Tanjung Sauh**, where Terry (Valhalla) anchored several years ago:). At the end of the day, several other rally boats came here too to rest before the last leg to Pangkor Marina. Leaving at first light, we had very little current against us as we passed the river estuary (not like the evening before when we tried!) and very soon we had favorable current and wind all the way to...

Pangkor Marina: James, the owner/manager is really the one deserving credit to run a "true"

cruisers marina & boat yard! Unlike the other Malaysian marinas we visited so far, that are, either inexpensive govt run marinas in poor condition & with little to no services, or fancy , expensive and impersonal marinas that are mostly for storage in the water of absentee owners, Pangkor Marina has a life with lots of boats being worked on in dry-dock and boats coming in/out of the wet berths. The marina personnel make you feel welcome with their nice & efficient attitude! You get a list of contacts to local businesses that are often needed by cruisers, free wifi, big book exchange and small chandlery in office. James is the kind of man that sincerely tries to help with any cruiser's requests no matter how small or unimportant, which is a nice change from people shrugging their shoulders at you and sending you on wild goose chases because they have no idea of what you might need! Many cruisers come back to Pangkor Marina after seeing the options further North, (even after the many choices in Thailand), finding James' marina a better value. Tho there are only small chandleries, James is ingenious to get what you need shipped in the most easily, quickly, and most inexpensively.

During the very busy time when the Sail Malaysia rally arrived James offered participants 5 days of free berthing, to be used during the rally or up to 4 months later. Several fun activities were organized: a half day tour of **Pangkor Island** followed by an exquisite 8-course lunch put on by Nipah Deli at scenic Teluk Niipah beach with a view overlooking small idyllic islets sitting in clear water!

Next day James sponsored a shopping trip to 3 hardware stores stocking boat parts, and the big Aeon Mall. The Aeon super market has good choice of Western-type goods, an extensive organic dry goods isle, and in the non-Halal section, James's wife sells premium quality pork! The great shopping was followed by a great dinner where about 200-250 cruisers attended (Sail Malaysia, and everyone in Pangkor Marina); then 2 days later, the weekly Sunday evening BBQ/Potluck, this time with a sailor's flea market beforehand. Pangkor was definitely the highlight stop of Sail Malaysia! Just this stop more than pays back the fee for the Rally!

After a day of small boat projects, we took advantage of the afternoon tide to sail to **Pulau Talang**, just 14nm away .. we also had some favorable wind. Surprise as we found 7 other sailboats here, mostly fellow rallyers:) Next morning, we left shortly after dawn but with 6 hours of unfavorable tidal current, we could not make it before dark to **Penang Island**, so we anchored in 30 feet about 10nm south of Penang, just before a rain squall hit us! Next morning, we had favorable tidal current and even light breeze to make it into Penang by mid-day.

Penang and it's main town of Georgetown is a very interesting place to visit but difficult for suitable anchorage and landing one's dinghy! Right in front of old Georgetown, in a perfect location, they did build a marina a few years ago but the absence of a breaker wall protecting from strong NE monsoon waves, the marina was destroyed in no time. Bad politics (hopefully soon changing after the last elections??) do not have any plans to rebuilt a suitable marina or at least a suitable safe dinghy landing. The only relatively protected anchorage is just north of the dump (at least we are upwind from it :) and having one of the rally fleet doing dinghy taxi to ferry the others ashore, we made do ... No events were organized here this year because of lack of local sponsors and few rally boats did visit. A real shame as our good friends Patrick and Elizabeth from LaBarque would say it's one of their favorite towns in Malaysia.

A stop here has a few perks for cruisers like the only **Thai Consulate** on the West coast to obtain your Thailand 60-day renewable visa (one time +30-day renewable in Thailand). This

year, one has to get to the Consulate and submit all documentation and fill application between 9-11am weekly and get visa the next afternoon after 3pm. Because the logistics were such a hassle between trying to get a ride from another yachtie to get dropped off ashore, getting to the bus terminal to take a bus to the Consulate on time, and going back the next day, some cruisers decided to hire an agent in Langkawi to do all that paperwork for a fee. We found a way to ultimately end up with 60 days plus 2 weeks by just arriving in Thailand and getting the 30 Day-on-Arrival visa which you can extend by 1 month. We reveal the trick in our next letter about Thailand and the Sail Thailand Rally.

A very useful business in Georgetown, Penang, is Ong Liang Ching, nicknamed “The Chemist” who sells all kinds of raw chemical products, from health substances like Ascorbic Acid, to cleaners like Borax or even toxic substances we might need in our boat projects. (Liangtraco & Sons – 22, Jalan Pintal Tali / 04-262 1610 liantraco@gmail.com). Another 2 recommendations from our friends Patrick & Liz are the Kawan Shop, a second hand clothes store benefiting the local homeless community (41 Chulia St. 604 2618405 kawanshop@gmail.com) and Woodlands Vegetarian Restaurant where one can have a nice 9-dish Indian food platter for 7.50 Rm (60, Penang St 04-2639764 woodlandspenang@gmail.com). From the dump anchorage you can take the #12 public bus (1.20Rm) to Georgetown and there at the bus station you can hop in the free bus that takes you all around historical town (get a free map at bus station). A great place to shop for European/US type of food including organic foods is Cold Storage supermarket in Plaza Gurney where you go with a Grab or from G'town bus station, bus #101/102/103 or 104 (2Rm). It was a real treasure trove! There are even more Western specialties than Aeon in Pangkor, including some French products,, and even more choice of organic foods! Be sure to stock up on all those things you've been missing, because Langkawi does not have the big name supermarkets or the choice of hard-to-find “foreigner” specialty products. Give yourself enough time to look in every corner!

The passage from **Penang to Langkawi** is best made in 2 smaller trips. First we motor sailed to **Pulau Bunting**, just 29nm away. Well protected from the northerlies behind this small island, we spent the afternoon doing some small boat projects and going ashore with the dogs ... On our 40nm passage, next day, to **Langkawi**, we finally felt what trade winds feel like ;) and with favorable tidal current at the beginning, we were making good speed ... the lighter wind later still helped us when the current was not favorable anymore. Sometimes dodging fishing net floats, sometimes dodging bigger fishing boats trolling or trolling big nets, we had a good passage to Langkawi, our last passage in the Sail Malaysia Rally! Entering into the Kuah Harbor anchorage at the end of the afternoon was quite special as the sunlight cast a glow that intensified the colors as we passed by Royal Langkawi YC Marina, then the Ferry terminal where we would clear in, then a gigantic statue of a white headed eagle with red-brown body, the symbol of Lang (*eagle*)- *kawi* (*red-brown color*). After 20 years of hearing about the legendary duty-free island of Langkawi...we were sailing in!!

This being a duty-free island, yachts have to check in and out anytime they arrive or leave from/to anywhere, int'l or domestic. All 3 offices: Immigration, Port & Customs are conveniently located in the new ferry terminal (altho you may have to be a bit creative to find them), A short dinghy distance from Bass Harbor, the Kuah town anchorage, is the dinghy dock at the pier where all the local tourist transport boats zoom in/out of...Put the dinghy on the blue floating pier (beware, it almost dries at low tide, so raise the motor if you have long shaft like us). For the second time, we were asked for a copy of our yacht liability insurance;

compulsory for all foreign yachts plying Malaysian waters. We are fully insured so this was not a problem but anyone not insured should get a liability coverage before entering Malaysia to avoid problems. Wish all local fishing boats also complied with this requirement as they sometimes inflict damages to visiting yachts and rarely indemnify their victims! So a full coverage might also make sense here!

Since we had a parcel to pickup and a cocktail party at Rebak Marina, we motor sailed the 12nm with some wind from aft and anchored just outside Rebak Marina entrance channel. There was a nice breeze and calm waters the night we were there, with a fairly short dinghy ride into this well-protected marina. We caught the Resort/Marina ferry service to "mainland" Langkawi next day for a sponsored tour where we planted some mangrove shoots at the Kilim Geo Forest Park and had a brief visit at Oriental Village, home of the impressive Sky Cab Cable Cars worth to come back to ride to the top and spend a full day! As we did later.

Six weeks after our rally departure from Puteri Harbor and about 450nm later, we had the farewell cocktail at Rebak Marina. **Sail Malaysia** was a well-organized, activity-packed rally well worth being part of! Between Sazli, the affable and laid back organizer and Patrick & Elizabeth on s/v La Barque ready with advice and help (this year's cruiser coordinators and fleet support), participants were well informed on the many different activities organized. Just the value and enjoyment of the free land tours, breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and parties, and 5 days free at Pangkor Marina makes, the less than 100USD registration fee an incredible bargain! The Sail Malaysia pre-printed and online rally information booklets were very well done and invaluable to make the trip from Singapore to Langkawi. To our surprise, we did not feel rushed in and between ports despite our slow passage speed when motor sailing in light wind (compared to most vessels with big or twin engines). Some boats only participated in some activities, we were happy to participate in all of them as you can see in our videos. And the rally schedule kept us going and enjoying cruising areas that are not that fantastic, especially if arriving on ones own without any events organized. If you're going to pass this area anyway, we can highly recommend participating in Sail Malaysia, we are sure you will enjoy the experience! Even if you are not "Rally Types", this experience will greatly enhance a passage across a relatively boring area and even make it fun!

Langkawi has several marinas and boatyards and we have seen more cruisers here than in any Malaysian port so far... If you look for a very well wx protected place to park your boat at reasonable prices, Rebak Marina is probably the place for you. If you stay aboard then it might not be so great as you are isolated from town (you are limited by the marina shuttle boats to shore) and it can be very hot as it is completely landlocked with a expensive resort on this private island. Telaga Marina is less isolated but also hot being totally enclosed, but you have a nice anchorage just outside that is fine in NE monsoon season. The anchorage in Kuah town is very convenient to town and supplies, and a good base from which to cruise around Langkawi archipelago and explore various anchorages protected from different wind directions. The Royal Langkawi Yacht Club Marina is right there if you prefer marinas. (but more expensive than the 2 above).

A must area to visit are the anchorages near the fresh water lake, in the Dayang Bunting Marble Geoforest Park. Look on the chart to find the area nearest the end of the lake. With your dinghy you can land on the small beach and climb a few rocks to get to a wooden walkway that leads you along the west edge of the lake to the official entrance where most of the tourists will be with paddle boats, kayaks, ... You will probably have close encounters with

macaques right on the walkway .. we did not feed them and they were non-threatening. You can swim in the lake: fresh water but not the clearest water! This back door to the lake avoids hordes of tourists and shows you the most natural area of the lake. Another highlight is a day at the Oriental Village, an amusement park, where you can go to the top of Matchinchang mountain via the SkyCab and walk on the suspended Sky Bridge: 80m above the canyon. In the park, you can also drive a small electric vehicle on different guided tours, and visit some fun exhibits.

Shortly after we arrived in December, we had the chance to discover the Tao rituals of the Langkawi Thean Hou Temple during the 1st anniversary celebration of the new temple. Got to see the Mediums going into trance to incarnate the Ancestor Spirits, selecting temple icons, healing sessions and fire walking and more. The community welcomes all visitors and even feed everyone vegetarian food during the events. See Joe at Hainese Chicken and Rice small restaurant. Each year similar celebrations are held!

If you are in Langkawi in January, you might like to volunteer to help during the 5 day Royal Langkawi Yacht Club Regatta .. great ambiance and perks as far as food and marina berth! You'll get to see the racing boats up close without risking your own boat, as you'll be recording times at the markers where they turn or finish.

In a few days,(mid-Jan 2019) we will be departing for the west coast of Thailand with Sail Thailand ... but that will be the subject of our next letter :)