

A Voyage on

ANDANTE

Words and photographs: **Geoff Gowing**



Fleming yacht Andante

A 1300 nm return passage from Cairns across the Coral Sea to the **LOUISIADES ARCHIPELAGO** in Papua New Guinea

The Louisiades Archipelago is a string of coral islands that trail off the eastern coast of Papua New Guinea out into the Solomon Sea. The region is constantly bathed in 5 – 15 knot tropical breezes and warm tropical sunshine, often with a refreshing afternoon shower of rain and temperatures mostly in the mid to higher 20's.

Most of these islands are populated by the local PNG natives who are English speaking, Christian, educated and friendly. They lead an idyllic tropical island lifestyle living in coconut palm thatched houses at an almost subsistence level of existence. Money is not very important and on many of the islands the locals have little use for the Kina as there is no store nearby to spend it. They maintain their lifestyle by fishing and cultivating homegrown produce (bananas, paw-paw, coconuts, sweet potato, taro etc) and they keep chickens and sometimes pigs. At this stage they have not yet been exploited by western-style tourism so it is refreshing to encounter friendly, happy people, who in spite of their simple living conditions, do not yet aspire to have our western lifestyle. Bartering with visiting yachts and the occasional powerboat provides a welcome boost to their level of existence. We took with us all sorts of goods for bartering; knives, machetes, hammers, fish hooks and line, clothing, rice, pens pencils, books and magazines. These things we exchanged for fruit and vegetables from their hillside gardens and also some handmade artifacts.

On most occasions we were also able to help supplement their food supplies with fish we had caught when moving from island to island. As we had caught the fish (usually Spanish Mackerel, Tuna or King Snapper) in their own local waters we handed them over to the local people as a gesture of goodwill. It was always much



*Master Geoff Gowling
manoeuvring Andante
through the islands*

appreciated and often they would return with gifts of coconuts or bananas.

Compared with their dugout canoes and outrigger canoes with lateen sails (called 'lakatois'), the Fleming was a source of great interest to the locals and being men of the sea they admired and understood the beautiful seaworthy lines of Andante. The engine room was a source of fascination and they were certainly >>



The reward for bartering with locals, fresh produce



Local PNG children visiting the Fleming Motor Yacht

ANDANTE is a Fleming 55 Pilot House Motor Yacht 18 m long with 2 x 500 hp Cummins engines. The hull is semi displacement with a max speed of 18 knots. The comfortable passage-making speed is 8 – 10 knots. Fuel capacity is 3800 litres that can be extended to 5400 litres with 2 x 800 litre fuel bladders.

very impressed with us having crossed the Coral Sea from Australia to visit them.


Power boats are usually limited by their range but a passage-making boat like Andante, an extended range vessel, enabled us to make the whole passage without having to refuel. In fact we arrived back in Australia with over 1000 litres of fuel on board.

The 500 nautical mile passage across the Coral Sea with the

prevailing 25 – 35 knot trade winds from the SE on the stbd beam with 2.0-3.5 metre seas was one of the more challenging passages for Andante and crew. Three and a half days at this angle had the stabilisers working at their limits most of the time. Without them the passage would have been very uncomfortable and would have required waiting for the trade winds to moderate before starting out.

As with our Bass Strait passages in SE Australia, Andante met all the conditions with ease. Many times on this particular passage we remarked on how the robust design and the wonderful sea-keeping qualities maintained our already high confidence in our vessel. Both this leg and the return run back to Australia were in identical conditions. It certainly is reassuring knowing that you have a solidly-built vessel designed exactly for the conditions.

Wherever we anchored in the Louisiades the swim platform soon had children on board just watching us go about our day. Except in very special circumstances, we did not allow them beyond the transom because of the numbers. Always well-behaved, the children would often bring shells or produce with them to barter for a pencil or a book and very canny barterers they were too! On many occasions I am sure we paid too much for a cowry shell or a hens egg, but it was always good fun and an enjoyable encounter. The region is well charted and the charts are accurate although some of the 'bommies' appear to have moved since they were charted so, as always, care needs to be taken when near the fringing reefs. In addition there are a number of books written by other cruisers with 'mud maps' of various anchorages.

This voyage being our first venture out of Australian waters in Andante made it one of our epic voyages to date. As with all passages, preparation is essential and we are preparing now for our next adventure. 

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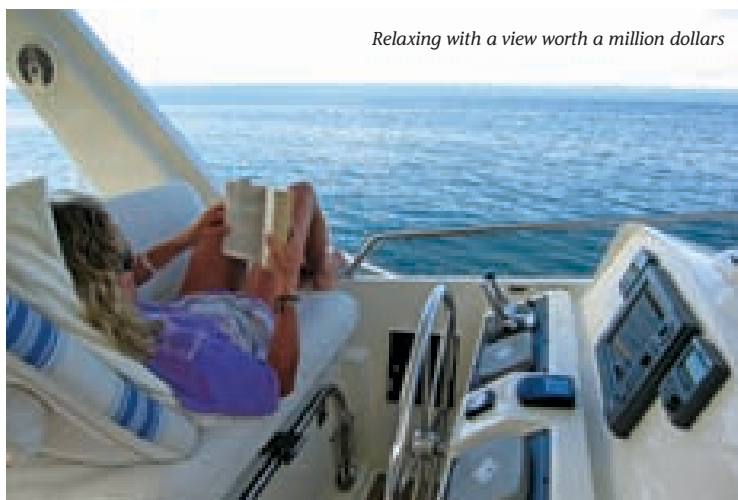
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Relaxing with a view worth a million dollars

Tips for taking your boat overseas for the first time.

Geoff Gowing – Master "ANDANTE"

1. Your vessel must be an Australian Registered Ship. It's a one off lifetime registration. You can't go overseas without it. Visit www.amsa.gov.au.
2. Australian Customs administers your departure and return to Australia. I have found them very helpful and they are happy to guide you through the process of leaving from and returning to Australia and the associated paperwork. Don't be afraid to ask.
3. If you are taking alcohol away with you that you have purchased in Australia (not duty free) then you need to provide customs with a list of what you have on board.
4. Australian Customs require at least 96 hours notice of your return from overseas and the Port of Entry. Visit www.customs.gov.au.
5. Your Medical Kit on board would probably contain serious lifesaving medicines. If you have drugs like Morphine etc make sure that you have the OK from the authorities to be carrying this type of medication out of and in to Australia. Visit www.health.gov.au.
6. Quarantine is as equally helpful as Customs. The basic rule is to declare everything. The Quarantine Officer will decide if there is any risk associated with what you are bringing back home. Visit www.aqis.gov.au.
7. Overseas countries usually require a visa. It's a lot easier to arrive with your visas than discover that you can't get them on arrival. Find out from the embassy or consulate before you leave Australia.
8. You will need a crew list with name, date of birth, address passport number. This list will be needed throughout the voyage for Customs and any other authorities that you will encounter – take plenty of copies.
9. Have a ship's stamp for your vessel – Boat Name, Official No., Call Sign. In addition, have business cards printed for handing out to people you meet; include a picture of your ship on the card if you can.
10. Show respect for all officials and dress the part of a Ship's Master when conducting 'ship's business'.