



Trawler World List Article

Sandy has asked that we post to the TWL something about what we are doing. This is a long and rambling email, so either hit your delete button or go for a cup of java.

Who We Are

Long-time TWL readers may recall that we were on the list from the very beginning. In those days, we were between boats and were looking for our retirement boat. The list was invaluable to us and we exchanged ideas in hundreds (maybe thousands) of emails with TWL members, both on the list and on the side. In those early years of the list, we did not have so many participants and as one of the 'grey beards', we answered a lot of questions. Of course, we received all sorts of good advice too. These days, by the time we get around to surfing the net and looking over the posts, they've all been answered, usually better than we could have.

Anyway, at least in part because of the list, we ended up buying a Kadey-Krogen 48 Whaleback named AKAMA. While Maurice continued to work for a living he spent a fair amount of time on the TWL. We also started the Krogen Owners list, exclusively for owners. However, once we retired and went cruising full time, that all ended. We asked Georgs to put us on the TWL without email delivery, and we found a listmeister couple for the KK list. It is hard to get email while at sea and while running all over SE Asia on AKAMA.

Cruising in SE Asia

We could go on about the places in SE Asia that we've visited. The full details would take nearly a small book already! This is a trawler paradise of thousands of islands, bays and coves with nobody there, warm weather and great swimming/snorkelling (eat your hearts out those on the PNW). The Scenery is superb in some areas, with limestone cliffs, sand beaches, and on some islands caves that can be explored. Some of these caves, called hong, open up into atria the middle of hollow islands.

- We've travelled up and down both coasts of Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia.
- We went to the equator for the millennium new year, just so that we would have something interesting to remember for such an auspicious occasion. This we did in company with two sailboats. After the crossing, we had a big party, attended by King Neptune, who inducted us all as shellbacks.
- We went to the Anambus Islands' Terempah group in the South China Sea between Singapore and Borneo. This is a place that gets maybe four or five cruising boats a year! We were with three other trawlers and the locals were so impressed that they threw us a party! The mayor and other notables gave speeches and asked how they could entice more tourism. Well, the locale is both the charm and the curse. This is a drop dead gorgeous cruising ground, full of fishes and live coral. But it belongs to Indonesia, which scares the hell out of a lot of people, and you can't get there by air.

- We went to Tioman Island off the East Coast of Malaysia, which is the island where South Pacific was filmed.

- Off Langkawi (another Malaysian island) we anchored off the movie set of Anna and the King, which is now a museum.

- Up in Thailand we went by the spot where they made The Beach, and we anchored by the island where they made Survivor-Thailand.

So, if you've seen any of these places on the TV or at the movies, you've got an idea of the kind of paradise this is.

Cost

We reckon that with a good boat (paid for) and a little luck, one can live on the boat and do what we do for something in the order of US \$20 to 25,000. The lower limit (living on the hook on a minimalist sailboat) is probably in the order of \$10,000 a year and living like a king (eating out a lot and trips "back home") would take about \$30 to 40 thousand. We have a lot more detail on this but space does not permit getting into the nitty-gritty.

Buying a boat out here is fairly easy, although the selection is much less than in the US or Canada. There are quite a few in Hong Kong, some on the west coast marinas of Malaysia and Thailand (mostly sail boats) and a few in Singapore. The cost is generally somewhat less than it is stateside. Of course, trawlers like AKAMA are hard to find (we have the only Whaleback in Asia). There are a few Nordhavns for sale, mostly 46s in Hong Kong, and a few KK-42s. Coastal boats (twin-screw semi-displacement and planning hulls), on the other hand, are more plentiful. There are some good yards in NZ, Australia and China that will turn you out a good boat. We have visited two good ones in China, near Hong Kong and almost had one built by a fellow TWL listoid (Bill Kimley) before AKAMA came our way. Cost of locally built boats is favourable and the quality of those built in recent years is world class.

Weather in SE Asia

The weather is never "bad", as hurricanes never happen here. Indeed, we rarely get dangerously strong winds at all. It is usually fairly calm, especially around Singapore and southern Malaysia, much to the chagrin of our sailing friends. And, the boating is good year-round. During the NE monsoon (from about November to March) we boat on the west side of the Malay Peninsula; during the SW (from about May to September) we boat on the east side. During the two transition seasons, April and October, one can go just about anywhere, although we can get a lot of thunderstorms. Frankly though, boaters used to the variable weather in temperate waters would find the off-season boating on either coast reasonably good over here. Of course, you have to like warm; the temperature at night is generally about 24 or 25 degrees Celcius and during the day it can run up to 33 or 34. (C to F conversion in your head: double the degrees in C, take off 10% and then add 32).

Experiences

There are also some not so good things around here, but nothing that we did not walk away from intact. And, we've left no boat parts behind. For example:

- The authorities here all have different paperwork for CIQ and different rules about how long you and your boat can stay. Some are corrupt, but in over 10-years we've never fell prey to one. Smiles and courtesy go a long way.

- We got run down by a drift net one evening and had to cut it loose before it took us onto the shallow water on a lee shore.

- The Malaysian navy threatened to sink us one night. Of course, we knew they wouldn't and they knew that they wouldn't (or at least so we hoped) and eventually we went on our merry way. It seems we inadvertently (their fault not ours) strayed into the target zone for a 5-navy live-firing exercise (gasp!). The telling of this tale is much longer than space here permits.

- We were intercepted by the Singapore Coast Guard, who for unexplained reasons decided that the spot we were in was in line with the target for their guns (we were clearly outside of the live firing range). They were courteous and professional and we did not feel threatened or abused in having to move off shore a bit farther than the Sailing Directions indicate we should.

By the way, we have NOT been chased by pirates, nor have we even seen any, nor have any of our friends been bothered.

Lifestyle

Both the indigenous people and the cruisers we've met and cruised with have been great. There is a camaraderie and easy interaction among boaters, which is one of the things that distinguish boating from other leisure activities. For example, we were exploring a shoreline in our dinghy, when we started chatting with another couple who are doing the same thing. We then enjoyed each others company for drinks and snacks at sundown. It's the same around most of the marinas. We've met many wonderful people from Canada, South Africa, Indonesia, Britain, Australia, Germany, the USA, Japan...the list goes on.

Traffic

Vessel traffic is very heavy in these waters. The Singapore Strait is one of the busiest routes in the world. It can be a little intimidating bobbing around in a 50-footer with a top speed of about 9-knots, when the ships are doing about twice that and are MUCH bigger. The thing is, you get used to it. We routinely cross the traffic separation zones in very close quarters. It's a lot like crossing a busy street; you get a sense of when to start out to avoid getting run down. Of course, we often tell the oncoming ships what we are up to by VHF radio.

On the other hand, there are nearly no other yachts, motor or sail. Annually, we get a small parade of round-the-world cruisers. There are some local sport fishermen, but not many. There are few boats for hire, just two Sunsail bases that we know of, both on the west side, one at Langkawi (Malaysia) and one at Phuket (Thailand). We are the only serious ocean-going motor cruiser in these waters, not counting crewed motor yachts.

Repairs Yards and Marinas

It is a bit hard to get good help and good repairs over here. There are a few places where it is excellent and at a good price. But mostly work is rather poor. Most yards specialize in fishing boats; so the work

is rather “rustic”. I swear they sometimes must weld with batteries and trim with chainsaws. On the other hand, the prices reflect the low quality.

Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia have a few world class marinas, some with hard stands. Prices are low by NA and European standards, except for a few marinas in tourist spots and one in Singapore.

Living aboard in marinas is neither legal nor illegal. In the western way of thinking it is therefore legal. However, according to the type of law used in these parts, theoretically it is illegal (if the law does not say you can do something then you cannot). From a practical perspective, though, lots of people live aboard everywhere with impunity.

CIQ

Customs, Immigration and Quarantine is easier here than in most other places, with the possible exception of the EU (once you’re in there). The best place is Malaysia, where they give 3-months to most foreigners, don’t care how long you stay (as long as you make a visa run every 3-months) and don’t charge import duties on the boat. Singapore is a pain, as the boat can stay as long as it likes, but the crew must report to the authorities every 2-weeks. They will renew without a trip outside if you have a good excuse (the boat is being fixed is the usual one). Thailand requires a mass of paperwork, the boat can stay only 6-months duty free and the crew must make a visa run monthly. Other than in Singapore, enforcement is lax.

M/Y AKAMA

On board AKAMA, we’ve spent a lot of time finding things, documenting them, taking things apart, moving them and installing new systems. There is no part of this boat that we have not touched, wiggled, smacked with a hammer, turned with a wrench, lubed, painted, or at least written up in our AKAMA Technical Manual.

Seriously, AKAMA now has a technical manual just like the one you get with a new car. We went through all the material that came with her, got a bunch more via the Internet and got some other stuff from other cruisers. Now, rather than page through the hundreds of pages in the CAT manual, most of which don’t have a thing to do with our boat, we just look in our Technical Manual; ditto for the air-con units, electronics, plumbing and every other system aboard. Making this was an excellent learning process. BTW, we also wrote two guest ‘manuals’ (really just a few pages). One we send to guests before they come to see us and the other we give them once they are aboard.

In terms of refitting, we’ve gradually moved a lot of stuff around. Things that looked perfectly good when we were just living aboard and cruising only once in a while became glaring faults once we became full time cruisers. For example, the water maker was installed just outboard of the house battery box, up against a bulkhead. The seacock was right below it. This made for seawater all over the entire mechanical space whenever we did a cleaning. Worse, the filters were so close to the bulkhead that you needed triple jointed fingers and two opposing thumbs to get them off. Likewise, the inverter was installed on the floor under the port water tank, right next to the speed log. This made changing out the speed log a dangerous affair, with risk of flooding the inverter. It also meant very long wires to the batteries, way longer than Heart recommends. Then there was the seawater boost pump and the water maker boost pump, both installed way forward where servicing meant salt water all over the place at the least slip-up.. So, we moved the water maker farther aft, put the inverter next to the batteries and put the two pumps where the inverter was. This solved all the shortcomings and should have been done

by the builder and the commissioning yard in the first place. At the same time, we moved the air –con seacock to a spot near the bilge sump, where it should have been.

In the engine room, we had a mess of diesel lines and valves scattered all over the place and a transfer pump. To move fuel we had to go into the engine room (hot, smelly and damned dangerous), scampering back and forth across the front of the engine. At our last refit, we had the yard pull all the diesel lines and valves out, leaving only a shutoff valve on each tank. New lines were run through to the maintenance space and an orderly system of valves and manifolds was installed along with a transfer pump and one of Charles Bells' fuel polishing systems. Now, we can go into the relatively nice space to take readings, switch tanks and so on while underway.

Worse than this, someone had installed the seawater strainers for the main and the wing engine at the front of the main engine. They installed the main seacock in a spot that needed another triple jointed hand to throw, the genset seacock UNDER the genset (nearly inaccessible) and to add insult to injury (well potential injury), the wing engine seacock was installed in a place that could only be accessed by going all the way around the main engine. We moved all these items to within sight of and arms length of the day hatch. Now, when underway, we only have to open the day hatch once an hour and have quick look, smell and listen.

Least the foregoing sounds like an indictment of Krogens, we hasten to point out that we love our Krogen and feel that they build a very good boat. Things like these lurk on all boats.

Boat Operation

Boat operation is markedly different from when we were living at the dock and only cruising for weekends. So, how does it all work? Well, at the dock, the shore power runs everything and the primary charger (in the inverter) keeps the batteries topped up (12 golf cart batteries). All the circuit breakers are switched on, just like in a house. Better than in a house, should the shore power fail, the inverter (Heart 2500) will kick in automatically and keep all of the essential things running; when the power is restored the two chargers (the backup charger is a Pro-Mariner 50) will quickly bring the house battery back to full charge.

When we leave on a cruise the big appliances (air con, clothes washer, dishwasher...) are shut down and the alternator (Balmar 100 Ampere with 3-stage regulator) keeps up with the demand; so the batteries remain fully charged. Our household needs average about 1/3 of a kW; but, when we are cruising, especially at night, we must also run a lot of other equipment (e.g., GPS, Autopilot, RADAR, and navigation lights). The alternator keeps up with this demand, with about 300 Watts (25-Amperes) left over for battery charging.

Once we arrive somewhere, we usually shut off the engine and any unnecessary AC circuits, leaving the house bank to run the refrigeration and a few other essential things via the inverter. If we are just stopping overnight and then are moving on, we don't need to do anything, as the alternator will just about bring the batteries up during a full day's run (something in the order of 250 AH). However, if we are staying in one place or only moving short distances, then we must run the generator.

We try to plan generator running for specific times, so as not to bother our neighbours (or ourselves). Generally, we try to run it while we are going somewhere, as the noise is less noticeable. If we need it at anchor, we try for times when day-tripper boats are roaring about.

Of course, there are unscheduled runs, such as if we want to run an air conditioner, or one or more of the big appliances; this can be fairly frequent. For example, we often start it while making meals. This saves loading the batteries with the microwave oven, electric kettle and so on.

On the average, unless making passage, we must run the generator about 3 to 4 hours a day. This is the amount of time needed to bring the batteries up and make enough water (we don't try to conserve water). The limiting time is usually the battery charging, as we have a household deep freeze that is an absolute power hog here in the tropics. Also, the water maker is quite big for two people, a 600 GPD Sea Recovery unit (20 to 25 gallons per hour).

We could slightly alter the system if we were starting from scratch. The first thing we'd look at is load. Most of the drain is from the refrigerator and the chest freezer, both standard household models. Neither is very energy efficient, especially the freezer. If we re-engineer the system, we'd probably keep the standard household refrigerator, but the freezer would be changed to a custom-built, heavily insulated model. We estimate that we could save as much as 1.20 kWh (100 Ah) per day. This is two-thirds of an hour of generator running time, which would bring our charging time more into line with our water making time.

Secondly, we increase the amount of battery charging capacity to 300 amperes. When the batteries are really low, one can safely push two times as much into them as our 2-charger, 150-Ampere combination does. A rule of thumb is 20 to 25 Amperes of charge current for every 100 Ah of battery capacity. With about 1000 Ah of house bank we could double our charging rate if we fitted a temperature sensor. We sometimes do this by running the main engine and the generator at the same time, which pushes about 180—Amperes into the battery. We could save an hour of generator time by doing this. If we ever got our charge time down to less than the water making time, we could always catch rain water to reduce water making time. All in all, on a 50-footer like AKAMA we reckon that with good engineering and a little conservation the generator would only have to be run for one or two hours a day.

Future Plans

We've decided to go the long way from here (Peninsular Malaysia) to Australia: Sabah/Sarawak (Borneo) - Philippines - PNG - Solomon Islands - Vanuatu - (side trip to Fiji) - New Caledonia - Lord Howe Island - Sydney, Australia. The plan is to stay in the Philippines until around March 2004 and then head east and south: Palau, Helen Reef (Palau), along the outer islands of PNG, The Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, by which time it will be storm season. We plan to be in Fiji for that (there's a very sheltered marina there). Then, in 2005, we will complete the trip to Australia, going back to Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Lord Howe Island and finally Sydney. We'll spend most of 2006 in Australia (up the East Coast then across the top through the Kimberleys to Broome). By the end of 2006 we'll either be able to safely go to the Mediterranean through Indonesia or if not we will go straight from Western Australia to the Mediterranean, via the Southern Indian Ocean Islands.

Well, that's about it. I don't know if this is what Sandy had in mind when he asked us to post something. We hope this is interesting.

Smooth Sailing,

Maurice & Louise-Ann

M/V AKAMA

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