



AKAMA REPORT 13  
11 September 2003

We are tied up in Sutera (Silk) Harbour Marina, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Borneo, a great place to stay. We thought we were living in the lap of luxury when we lived at Raffles Marina in Singapore. Well, this one is even better. The property is nearly 400 acres of waterfront, containing not just the 5-star marina and club/resort, but also two five-star hotels, one on either side of the marina. There is a 27-hole golf course on the property, and they are in the process of building residences around it and on the nearby shore. The Pacific Hotel specializes in tourist travellers and the Magellan Hotel in conferences & business; both have full facilities. As residents of the marina, we enjoy all of the facilities. So, we have many restaurants to choose from, several swimming pools, several tennis courts, a squash court, two gymnasiums with all the latest implements of torture, a mini movie theatre, water-sports centre, a bowling alley...the list is nearly endless. The rooms range in cost from RM 500 to RM 4000 (RM 2.28 = C\$1), not bad prices for the facilities provided. In contrast, the marina only costs us about RM 30 a day, not counting electricity, a bargain for such facilities.

The resort/marina is a very active place, with lots of business and special events. One event that we attended was a charity event that included a 7 km run (we did not actually run of course...we're couch potatoes). Another was a social evening for the marina guests and the staff of the marina club. Drinks and food were free for the first hour...what a feeding and drinking frenzy that hour was! At these events, they often have dozens of food stands, entertainment and so on. Well, at one big event, we looked at that food and thought about the heat and humidity and decided not to eat there, until we saw a McDonalds stand. McDonalds is always safe, right? Wrong! We both got food poisoning. Louise-Ann was only down with it for a day, but Maurice was really sick. He did not eat for nearly a week, as nothing would stay put. After a few days of this he went to the doctor and was put on antibiotics and a bunch of other medicines. After a week, he was again eating, but was weak as a lamb for the next week. He's fully recovered now, including gaining back about 10-pounds that he lost in the process...life can be cruel!

The Kota Kinabalu area is interesting, a good thing as we plan to stay here until the weather settles north and east of here, which could take a few months. The main attraction on land is Kota (Mount) Kinabalu, which can be climbed easily in two days by novice climbers (but not by us couch potatoes!). In town there are very good wet markets, a dozen good-size shopping malls, and plenty of other shops. There are also lots of industrial parts vendors, so getting repair parts for the boat, is not a problem, unless specialized parts are needed.

One of the big attractions beyond the city of KK is orang-utan watching. There is an orang-utan sanctuary about a day's drive away and several smaller ones around the state. Nick, the Captain of a super yacht that is based here, offered to take us to see some at a private preserve owned by one of the major hotels. Unfortunately, before we were able to make the trip, Nick came to us really upset to tell us that those orang-utans had been speared by persons unknown. The hotel had 5 orang-utans, three were killed and two seriously injured. We were so upset to hear this and it became the talk of the marina for a time. No one understands the motive of this killing, which made the headlines of the local

paper. We still have not gone to see the orang-utans, but will probably do so when we leave here, as our route will pass closer to the sanctuary at Sandakan.

The water here is quite clear. As we travelled towards KK, we were startled several times by the shallows we passed over. We could see rock, coral and sand patches, even while moving at 6-knots. A look at the depth sounder revealed that the water was not dangerous at all, as it was over 6-metres deep. Even in the marina, the water is fairly clear; we can see the bottom of the boat, making underwater maintenance a much easier chore. There is some live coral in the marina and a lot of fishes and jellyfish, making it a bit like an aquarium. They sell little packets of food to feed to the fish, so they are very tame. There is one very big grouper fish, which we have not seen. One day, a couple of Taiwanese tourists spotted it. While one of them was feeding it, the other was readying his fishing rod! The resort staff came rushing over in the nick of time. Box jellyfish have been spotted here, so everyone is careful about underwater maintenance.

As ever, maintenance is on our minds. The good news is that the leaky one-way bilge pump valve that plagued us seems to have cleared itself somewhere between Miri and Brunei. At Brunei we found diesel at the cheapest we'd ever seen and filled AKAMA's tanks. To our surprise, the bilge pump stayed off and has remained good ever since.

However, the gremlins are back in AKAMA's electrical system. This has been a real pain over the years, as we've reported from time to time. With each repair we think we've solved all the problems, only to have the old ones resurface or new ones pop up. Lately, the voltage output from the generator has been erratic and it has at times been hard to start. While checking these things out we discovered that the heat exchanger (like a car radiator but cooled by seawater instead of air) was leaking seawater into the engine cooling system. We've had the heat exchanger repaired and have ordered a new one (\$1100...ouch!). While this has nothing to do with voltage regulation and starting, we must have disturbed whatever is wrong; the generator voltage is nice and stable (and the problem now impossible to find). Then, the damned thing suddenly stopped running altogether and we thought, "Aha, we've got you now!" But it was only a defective oil pressure switch (if the oil pressure drops off that switch shuts down the generator's engine; there's a similar one for cooling water temperature and one for exhaust temperature). So, the generator is running (again), hopefully with no more drama!

Still on the electrical system, some of you may recall that some time ago we sent out a "special report" describing the electrical system on AKAMA. The bottom line on this system is that we rely on our generator set and have to run it four to six hours a day, mostly to make water, charge the batteries and run the bigger appliances, most notably the clothes washer/dryer that we run about once a day. You may also recall that we recently added a water catchment system. Well, it turns out that the water catchment system has reduced the need to run the water maker to about an hour a day (on the average). This means that we are now running the generator mostly just to charge the batteries, not an optimum situation. Sailboats often use several solar panels to make much of the electricity they use (which is easy for them as they typically they use a quarter to a tenth of the energy we use). Generally it is not considered worthwhile to add solar panels to a powerboat, as one would need so many of them to make any significant amount of electricity. But, we have a large area atop the pilothouse that could take a dozen solar panels; so, we are installing there 600-Watts worth of solar panels; for a boat this is a lot...about 70-square feet. These should provide about twenty to thirty amperes of charge current to the batteries most of the day, on sunny days, greatly reducing the need to run the generator set for battery charging. We'll report on the results once we've lived with them for a while, which won't be until we resume cruising.

Our emergency engine became very hard to start; it would not start at all when we came into the marina. This is not good, as it is useful as a steering engine when manoeuvring in close quarters.. This little diesel has only about 70-hours on it, and this lack of use, coupled with the salt environment has taken its toll. The injectors and glow plugs checked out fine, so we had the compression tested. Three cylinders are fine but the fourth is below spec...nothing to cause hard starting. Mysteriously, after doing this checking and repairing absolutely nothing, the mechanics put it back together and the damned thing now starts fine.

We are off to Canada shortly after we send this, returning at the end of October. By then the weather should be better. Right now it is storm season in the Philippines and the effects are felt down here, as swell and stormy weather. We're not really sure where we will head on our return to KK, possibly around the NE corner of Sabah, maybe up into the Philippines or maybe just up and down the Borneo coast some more. We hope to head south around the end of February or March, once the hurricanes start moving back south. The long-range plan is now to head to New Zealand, via PNG, The Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and New Caledonia. We were going to weather the cyclone season in Fiji, but we figure it is better to simply stay out of storm zones in storm season. Besides we wanted to see New Zealand anyway. As usual, this is all very tentative, but at least we have a plan...sort of!