

Cruising Indonesia and Thailand



Piping Shrike in severe weather (Note reefs in main) and back together with errant dinghy

This article was taken from the Christmas Correspondence of *Piping Shrike*

2015 – the New Year commenced in Langkawi at the Pier Hotel (an ex-pats hangout), before taking a month or so to circumnavigate Langkawi and some of the surrounding islands. You can drive around Langkawi in a day – taking a month certainly gave us time to sit back and enjoy the anchorages.

Early in February we sailed the huge distance of 25 miles from Langkawi to the Butangs (in Thailand) where we stayed for the duration of the 30 day visa. The Butangs consist of about six islands including the most well-known, Koh Lipe. Whilst a bit touristy, Koh

Lipe is far less so than some other islands in Thailand. Compared to the water around Langkawi, the water at the Butangs is crystal clear and the snorkelling at some of the islands is pretty good.

Unfortunately, during the early part of our stay and during a strong overnight wind our dinghy unshackled itself from *Piping Shrike* and went walk-about. After much scouring of outlying islands in another yachtie's dinghy we assumed our dinghy was well on its way to Sumatra.

However, such is the yachting fraternity that a yacht in the anchorage where the dinghy went missing spoke to another yachtie at another anchorage, whose girlfriend is Thai, who spoke to a park ranger, who told the girl who told her partner who told the other yachtie who told us they saw a long-tail towing a dinghy back to Koh Lipe two days previously.

We hired a local long-tail to take us to Koh Lipe to seek out said fisherman (and dinghy) who was 'found' with just a little bit of asking. The finder wanted Thai Baht 30,000 (\$A1,000) to give us back our property. Negotiations got the price back to \$400 – still more than a carton of beer but much cheaper than a new dinghy and motor, especially considering the motor was only two months old. Needless to say our dinghy is now attached by two lines to *Piping Shrike*.



Waterfall and bathing nymph on Rawi Island



Longtail ride on way to collect errant dinghy

We had toyed with the idea of joining a rally that departed from Langkawi, down the western side of Malaysia, past Singapore to Tioman Island and then onto Tawau Malaysia on the eastern side of Borneo, but considered the travel time to be too fast to do justice to an area we had not explored. Therefore in April we headed south by ourselves anticipating going to Tioman and back to Singapore or thereabouts.

Instead of the fast-track rally, we started a slow cruise to Singapore and then on to Tioman. Our first stop was a week in Penang, to make up for the two-day visit in 2007 on our way north to Langkawi. Penang has a lot of history, some great eating places and a well-situated marina at Straits Quay.

The further south we headed, the more late afternoon storms we encountered but we

were mainly on anchor when they passed through. A few days were spent in Lumut where we met up again with *Yindee Plus* and travelled in loose company with them until we left Port Klang. *Yindee Plus* has now started a passage back to the UK via South Africa.

The Royal Selangor Yacht Club is the oldest yacht club in Malaysia and is situated in the Klang River, a very fast-flowing river, where we happened to arrive on the highest tide of the month. *Yindee Plus* and *Piping Shrike* were allocated berths on an anchored pontoon in the middle of the river. Each turn of tide piled rubbish (fortunately no bodies this time) between our boat and the



And we had to pay for this privilege

pontoon. Pushing the boat away from the pontoon allowed the rubbish to pass – only to arrive back on the next tide change.

The fast-flowing river also caused the ageing and poorly maintained pontoon to break up. We tied it up with ropes from the supply of both yachts and eventually some crane webbing from the yacht club. From then on, by agreement, one boat crew would stay with the boats on the pontoon while the other crew went ashore. We were not sure what we would have accomplished but at least we knew the two boats would float together down or up stream!

Our next main stop was Port Dickson for a week – considering it's a mainland port in the Straits of Malacca, the water in the marina is crystal clear with very little growth on any of the pontoons or the boats tied up there. Port Dickson is good for replenishing supplies of food and beer, and the pool at the marina was much appreciated. Local shops and restaurants have sprung up since we were last there in 2007.

After three over-night stops, each with fierce thunder and lightning with white-out rain, we were anchored in Johor Straits on the Malaysian side of Singapore. Next, it was up Johor Strait to Puteri Harbour Marina where we spent the following six weeks waiting for the SW monsoon to kick in before heading across Singapore to the eastern side of Malaysia, then up and around the corner towards Tioman Island.

To kill a little time while waiting for the weather to change, we took a week's holiday up the east coast of Malaysia at Cherating. The large resort which catered mainly for locals (not many foreigners) was hosting the local hospital staff for a family weekend. Despite all the stories one may hear, in this situation there was a very relaxed attitude to sexes mingling and partaking in all sorts of team sports/games. Harassment of opposing teams was encouraged and there was much laughter, water and sand flying around.



Sand sculpture competition

We're not sure what it felt like to be fully dressed rolling around in the beach break with sand inside the clothes.

Singapore has very strict maritime rules which we 'inadvertently' broke by sailing into Singapore waters and were then requested by a fast patrol boat to vacate their waters. Their radio communications did not work and we could not determine what the issue was, although it was quite obvious we were not welcome.



South eastern tip of Singapore ship clutter

Singapore Straits are incredibly crowded with shipping as can be seen from the photo of our GPS screen – the black triangles are ships, which come up on screen through the AIS system.

One can certainly sail to Tioman in a couple of days, but true to form we took three weeks, stopping along the way to 'smell the roses', something we could not have done had we done the rally as initially intended. SE winds meant the anchorages at most islands were not as comfortable as we would have wished but we found an anchorage back on the mainland that was so smooth we stayed

a week. It was here that Helen saw fierce monkeys and wild buffalo on the beach, and a tiger on the roof of a disused resort (or was it a big stuffed toy – who cares? We didn't stay around long enough to find out.)

Ramadan was in full swing so the majority of small resorts and stores were closed, and our supplies were running low. Fortunately we found a young guy, with the worst car on the road, to take us into a bigger centre to stock up.

When we eventually got to duty-free Tioman, we stayed for a month, swimming and snorkelling in crystal clear waters teeming with a variety of colourful fish and coral, and met a new bunch of yachties to socialise with. Even though most restaurants and food stores were closed for the last two weeks of Ramadan and then a week after that to celebrate the end of Ramadan, we had a



thoroughly enjoyable time. The duty-free aspect and incredibly cheap marina were enhanced when Helen scored nine days of online work for her company – she's seen here getting ready for knock-off drinks.

We sailed back against current and wind over three days and spent a couple of weeks at various marinas in Johor Straits before leaving *Piping Shrike* in Seban Cove in Johor. Heading back to Australia in late October, we undertook a number of house-sits for friends or contacts while we caught up with many friends and relatives.

We looked after cats and dogs in Melbourne and East Geelong enabling us to catch up with Helen's family, then drove to Adelaide to house-sit (house only – no pets) where we caught up with lots of friends and spent far too much time eating and drinking. The drive back to Melbourne (four days) along the Great Ocean Road (and meeting up with more friends at Kingston SE) was an excellent and worthwhile trip.

In mid December we flew to Perth to house-sit two dogs and a fish near our daughter Vicki's house, enabling us to spend time (including Christmas and New Year) with Vicki, her husband Gary and all our grandkids.

By the middle of January we'll be back in Malaysia, preparing the boat for this year's sailing to ...