

Reaching for a Dream with Admiral Yacht Charters

By Roelf & Elize Pretorius



Right. Admiral Explorer at anchor at Iranja Island.



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It all started in Middleburg, Mpumalanga, with a man and a dream to sell his farm and start a new adventure by sailing around the world.

The 'man' is me, Roelf Pretorius. I'm quite adventurous, having had a career in Special Forces and worked in Iraq. But my wife of 30 years, Elize, on the other hand, is not so adventurous.

Nevertheless, I started researching yachting and reading everything possible on the subject, including *SAILING* magazine.

Upon seeing the competition for a trip for two for five days to Madagascar on the Admiral Charter yacht, we joked that this might be exactly what she needed to get over her many fears about leaving all behind to live on a yacht the size of a postage stamp.

Imagine my joy and surprise when we heard we'd won the prize. After discussions with David Bird of Admiral Yachts, who handled all travel arrangements, and a very competent and helpful lady, Glenda from West Beach Travel, we were soon on our way via Air Madagascar to Antananarivo, and eventually Nosy Be. We were picked up at the airport and taken by taxi to Crater Bay where Captain Albert Spalding welcomed us.

Bad weather the previous day had left the sea rather choppy, and my wife was not happy about the rocking yacht and spending the first night in 'a very small room'.

Fortunately, the sea-sickness almost disappeared and for the next six days we could enjoy ourselves, from glorious sunrises to sunsets. All the while we were treated like royalty by the Admiral staff, Capt. Bert, cook Frederick and deckhand Hassan. The captain had to answer all the questions about rigging, navigation, boat electronics, weather forecasting, yacht specifications, piloting, etc., etc., and my



A bonus when cruising is a nice fresh Cobia.

wife was sure that he was relieved when we eventually left the yacht.

We snorkelled in aquarium-like waters at temperatures of 28 degrees, and met a couple - the Bassons - who own a guesthouse in Yzerfontein on the West Coast of Cape Town, at Tana Kelly Island. Whenever we sailed, we trawled for fish, with great success.

We spent a night on Sakatia Island and had sundowners at Sakatia Towers (owned by ex-South African John Sheppard, who sends his regards to all who know him in SA). We met many interesting people, and often the topic of conversation was the strict and unnecessary regulations and skipper certification in the RSA, which all agreed surely must deter potential visitors.

We again left early the next day for Barahamay river for another glorious day, swimming and walking. As soon as the locals saw the yacht they started playing music very loudly. Capt. Bert told us that on a previous charter the guests went to a bar until the wee hours and spent some much needed currency; it was evident that the locals were hoping for a repeat performance. However we opted for a quiet night onboard, bought some hand-made table cloths from locals who came to the yacht, and left early the next morning for Iranja Island.

This 5-star Island is frequented by

celebrities. We strolled through the village, and were pleasantly surprised by the friendliness of the local people. They seemed very happy, although the poverty was evident. The villages don't have power (with the exception of a few generators) but they almost all have communal taps with fresh running water, and this is where you will find everyone bathing, old and young, naked and not. Because of the extreme heat, the locals bathed four or five times daily. We were reminded how very privileged we were on our farm.

After another day spent lazing on the beach, swimming with dolphins and sea-turtles, and snorkelling some more, we left for Russian Bay, named as such because of a mutiny on a Russian steamboat in the 1800s. Apparently the last surviving Russian sailor died there in 1938.

Next stop was Nosy Komba Island, and the village of Ampangorina, where we were treated to a guided tour to feed the lemurs, before visiting the local 'zoo' consisting of a Boa snake, three species of turtles, and a few geckos. Again, we met many interesting people - French, German and American - as we browsed around looking for curios, before wending our way back to the yacht for the night.

On our last day we sailed back to Hell-Ville Port, and were escorted by Capt. Bert to do some final shopping at the local market. There was time for a bit more sight seeing and we had the best pizza at Nosikombo restaurant, run by a Spaniard.

With farewells said, we left for Nosy Be airport on our way to Antananarivo. It was another hair-raising trip by taxi. As soon as a camera appears, the driver stops to accommodate a photo opportunity, even in the middle of the road. The most amazing thing was that we never saw any 'road-rage' from these peaceful people. The roads are worse in Antananarivo, with many potholes, huge dongas and in most places the tar is non-existent.

Due to flight restraints Admiral Yachts kindly arranged for an extra day and night on the yacht, as well as a night stay in the lovely IC Hotel in Antananarivo, before departing for Johannesburg.

I now know exactly what I want to do. I shall seriously pursue my dream. And Elize? Well, slowly but surely, she is getting there!

To Admiral Yachts, thank you again; it was, indeed, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It was a fantastic prize, and we can highly recommend Admiral Yacht Charters for an unforgettable holiday experience. ⚓

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