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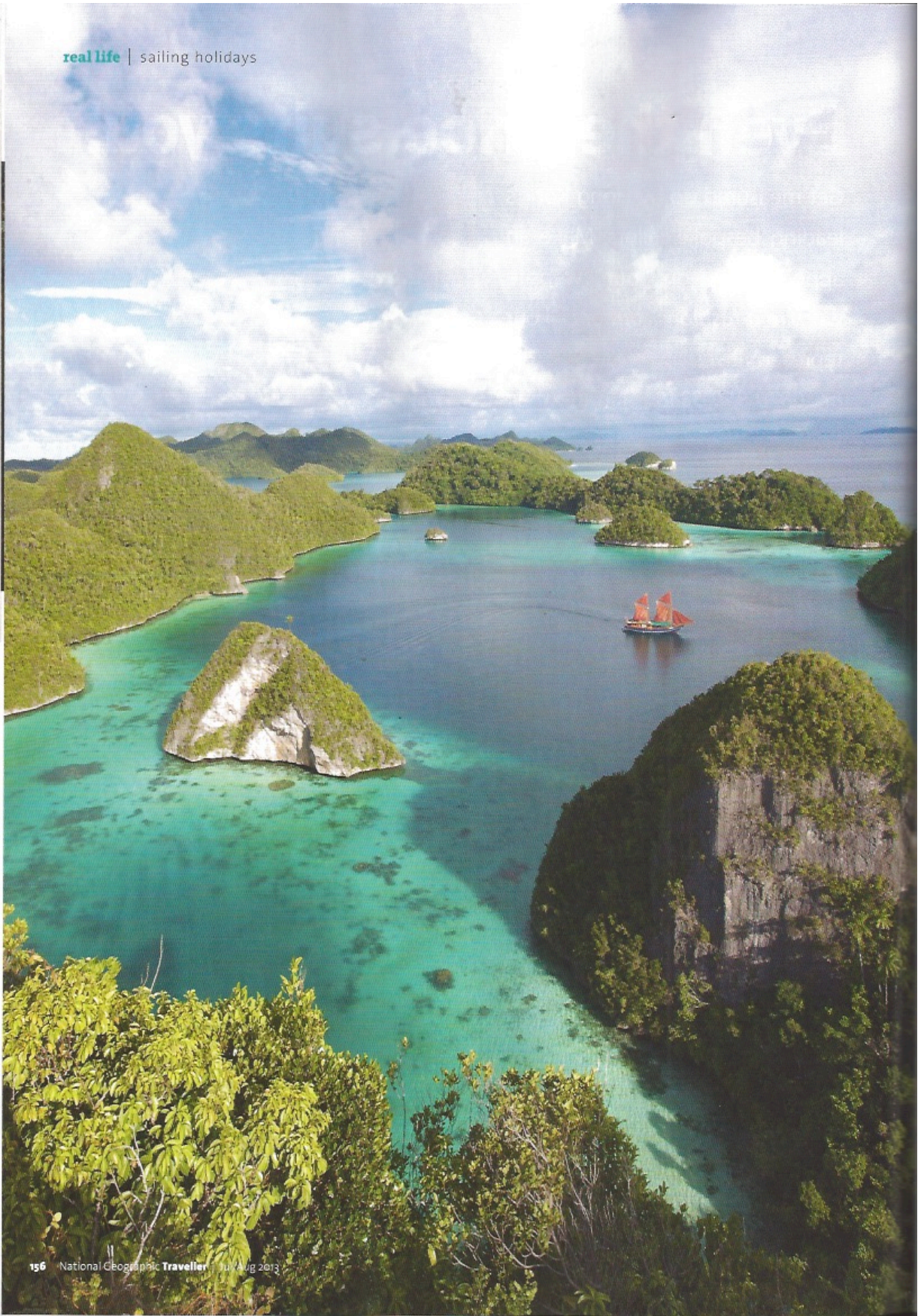
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SETTING SAIL

HIGH SEAS ADVENTURES

Drop anchor and sail the open seas. How turning skipper for a week and heading out on a water-bound experience can make the trip of a lifetime.

Words by Clover Stroud

The squelch and splash of water against the hull of a boat is as synonymous with my definition of 'holiday' as the sound of unfamiliar accents as I pick my way through a foreign food market, or the thrill of another stamp in my passport. Perhaps this is because, as a child, I spent much of the summer on a boat — a 'Cornish shrimper' — belonging to my uncle, a keen and talented sailor, who kept it moored in Cornwall. It left me with an abiding sense there are few things more exciting than leaving the stability of land and stepping aboard a boat for high seas adventures.

I love the sense a boat creates of moving into an entirely new world, albeit one in which everyday survival depends on understanding a cat's cradle of knots or how to throw up a sail.

However, I'm the first to admit that, when it comes to understanding the technicality of boats, I'm all at sea. I love being on board, but I could no more attempt to sail across an ocean alone than I could fly to the moon. At the same time, I want a great deal more from a sailing holiday than the boozy impersonality of a cruise ship. So finding a sailing trip that could leave me with that salty sense of adventure has always been high on my list of priorities.

I found exactly this last spring aboard a 34ft, teakwood phinisi schooner, off northwest New Guinea in West Papua, eastern Indonesia. With bleached-out, rust-coloured sails, and more than a little sense of Captain Jack Sparrow about her, *Tiger Blue* is a beautiful boat. She was built by two families who share her for the ultimate in family holidays, but also hire her out to groups of 10-12 for exploring the

slice of the Coral Triangle spread between the Philippines, Bali and the Solomon Islands. She has an inspiring heritage, too, as this type of boat was first built in the 16th century to ship spices out of Indonesia. Today she's more likely to be found exploring the Banda Islands, where nutmeg was first found, or to Komodo, land of dragons. But I'd chosen a trip around Raja Ampat, a heavenly cluster of islands lying between the Indian and Pacific oceans, made famous by the explorer and anthropologist Alfred Russel Wallace, whose discoveries here during the 19th century contributed to Darwin developing his evolutionary theories.

Manned by an Indonesian crew of eight, plus an excellent Dutch cook, I knew I wouldn't have to worry about getting in a tangle with my knots, and instead could spend my time enjoying the extraordinary seascape and a vessel that looked worthy of a starring role in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

I'd joined *Tiger Blue* in Sorong, throwing my bag, heavy after a journey that had seen me stop in Dubai, Jakarta and Makassar, into the spacious cabin and shower room below deck. My spirits soared as I felt the first keel and sway of the boat around me, and heard the flutter of a breeze filling the sails.

For a week, I forgot I had another life back on dry land, because one of the treats of travelling on *Tiger Blue* is that I ventured so far outside normal civilisation, I lost all mobile signal. For once, my life wasn't interrupted

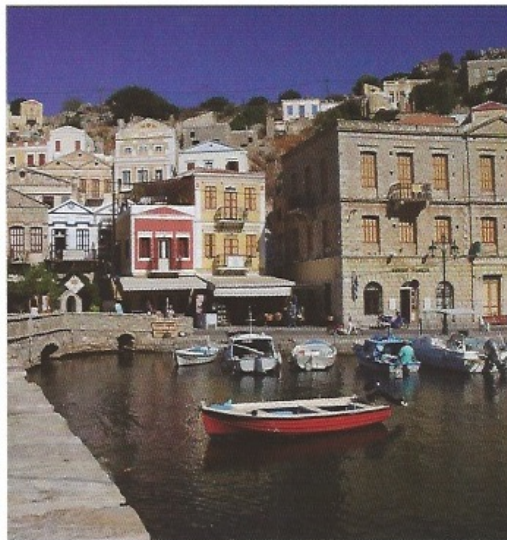
by the ping and flash of my BlackBerry; quite simply, the rest of the world vanished.

By day, we threw down the anchor, stopping to swim and snorkel, and explore the islands we came to. At Sawinggrai, we went ashore to sit in dense jungle, hoping to spot an elusive bird of paradise. Later that afternoon, we swam above the wings of giant manta rays. Each day brought unfolding treasures: green turtles at our furthest point north, Pulau Pai; the extraordinary limestone peaks and mangrove swamps of the Wayag Islands; and the teak forest we climbed through to reach the peak of Mount Pindito. We counted dolphins, flying fish and even a sperm whale at the island of Gam, and collected cowries and conch shells on the pure white sands of the tiny islands — most too small to even have a name.

But while these desert island adventures were dreams come true, the real highlight was the time spent on the boat. Meals were taken at the huge wooden table on deck, with the chef slicing up the freshest *sashimi* from tuna we'd caught off the back of the ship. This same table was invaluable for spreading out maps to plot the course from one anchorage to the next, or reading up on the 537 types of coral which make these waters so compelling for divers.

Best of all was falling asleep on deck, the inky blue night skies enveloping the boat as she chopped through the waters, an electric storm crackling on the horizon. While there were four large bedrooms below deck, I preferred sleeping with the warm night air caressing me and the creak of the sails and rigging above me. It was the stuff that dreams are made of. >>

Opposite: *Tiger Blue* at Pulau Wayag, Indonesia



A catamaran on the Greek Mediterranean coast

Poppy Calvert, a hairdresser from Dulwich, spent nine nights sailing along the Greek coast in a catamaran in October 2012, with her partner, Serhan Cetin, who works in finance. "We wanted to feel we were on a real boat, rather than a big impersonal cruise, but I was also aware a yacht sways from side to side a great deal. I was worried about sea sickness, and it was something my partner had suffered from before. A catamaran is stable, whether you are sailing or with the anchor down, which suited us well as we were keen, but inexperienced, sailors. As well as making the sailing easier, the stability of the boat means that hanging out on deck, or moving between the galley and saloon, or even just sitting down for a meal, was also more relaxed, as we were not keeling from side to side in the water all the time," says Poppy.

Because they lacked the experience to take the boat out alone as a 'bareboat' charter, they chose to travel with a captain and two crew members, but did all the cooking themselves, and were also involved with helping sail the boat. "We left Bodrum in the Gulf of Gulluk, then sailed around the Greek islands and back towards Turkey. I really enjoyed the contrast between the pine trees on the Turkish side, and the more rocky, dry landscape of the Greek islands. Sailing with a captain as a beginner was ideal, as it meant we could get involved as much as we wanted with the technical elements of sailing, but without overall responsibility for safety. We all enjoyed learning how to sail, as the captain would shout orders to us, and we were mostly involved with tying off the boat when we arrived in harbour, or finding sheltered spots for anchoring. I enjoyed pulling up the anchor too, as that is such a quintessential element of sailing."

Travelling on a catamaran also meant the couple could stop in the most secluded and inaccessible coves and beaches, giving them a unique view of this stretch of the Med. "As well as experiencing sailing, we wanted to holiday here because the sea is so stunning. Although we were there in October, it was still quite hot, and we did a lot of swimming. Being able to swim straight off the boat was particularly lovely, and we had a little motor boat so we could explore even more secluded coves. We did all our sailing during the daytime, stopping in

fishing villages to buy fish from markets, and then picking herbs we'd use for the cooking. Later, we'd throw the anchor down in an isolated bay, and the only thing we'd see all day were mountain goats on the rocks. It really did feel like a holiday off the beaten track, which was all down to travelling by boat." Poppy's partner actually proposed to her on the boat, and they're now planning another sailing holiday. "Coming back onto dry land after nine nights on the boat was actually quite strange. I really loved the feeling we'd been incredibly close to the sea, and it's the memory I'll take from having such an authentic sailing experience. The boat became our private sanctuary. I feel more confident about the idea of a sailing holiday now, and we'll definitely do another trip like this again."

Above from left: Anatolia Catamaran; Symi, Turkey

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