
*Davao to Soron:
Davao, Philippines to Bitung, Sulawesi, Indonesia*

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sv Soggy Paws:

2004 St Francis 44 MKII Catamaran

Draft 3.5'

Homeport: Melbourne, FL USA

SSCA members since January 1992

12 Jan-Feb 10 2022

Author's Note: The below cruising information covers the first months of our planned 12 month, 3000 nm trip from the southern Philippines south through eastern Indonesia, and then west through Indonesia's large string of southern islands and via Borneo to Singapore.

On our website www.SVSoggypaws.com, you can find additional detailed cruising destination information in the Indonesia Compendium. In addition, all anchor waypoints (gpx) and satellite imagery (KAP and mbtiles) can be downloaded for use in OpenCPN from Terry Sargent's [Terry's Topics](#), available from our website. We continue to rely on satellite imagery for inshore navigation as ALL commercial charting is often inaccurate and lacking in shoreline detail.

An abbreviated list of anchor waypoints is provided in table form at the end of this article.

We Escape Davao for the Last Time:

After 2 full years stuck in the Philippines due to Covid 19, we finally left Holiday Ocean View Marina at the top of Samal Island off Davao, Philippines, on 12 January. We had used this marina as a base for our multiple SE Asia cruising trips for the last seven years. It was well past the time to head further west through Indonesia, this time all the way to Singapore and the Malay/Thai peninsula. Our planned route for this year is a distance of about 3000 nm, but we have plenty of time—we are not expecting to reach the Malay Peninsula until the end of the year.

Planning our Year:

Our planned route is to go south to Bitung, on the northeast corner of Sulawesi to check in to Indonesia, and do a little diving and sightseeing. Once cleared in, the plan is to make our way SE around Halmahera, and then on to Sorong, on the north tip of West Papua at the top of the island of New Guinea. After a few weeks of diving and exploring in Raja Ampat, we plan to cruise down the west coast of New Guinea via the McCluer Gulf to Triton Bay, one of our favorite dive spots that we last visited in 2017.



Our planned route for 2022

From Triton Bay, we must sail south to Tual, in the Kai Islands in the SE corner of Indonesia to extend our visas. Once the paperwork is finished, we plan to cruise west through the Tanimbar Islands, Timor, Flores, Lombok, Bali, Java, South Borneo and Sumatra to Singapore.

Visa Extensions Control Our Schedule:

The current Indonesia tourist visas allow 60 days on entry and then four 30-day extensions, for a total of six months. This sounds reasonable for a tourist staying in one area, but is a real trial for a cruising boat trying to cruise Indonesia. The recommendation is that you submit your extension paperwork approximately 5-7 days in advance of your current visa expiration date. So this leaves you only three weeks to get from one visa office to another. Cruisers continually are hurrying to their next visa extension—sometimes having to ignore the weather to make the schedule. This is not a good situation which we hope will be corrected soon!!

We will do our first visa extension in Sorong. Then we have about three weeks to get to Tual in the Kai Islands for our next extension, about 450 nm away. It is dangerous to travel at night in most of SE Asia, due to the proliferation of unlit nets, fishing boats, FADs, and large logs and other debris. At a long travel day of 45 miles a day, 10 of our 21 days are taken up moving—long days motor sailing in the mostly wind-less equatorial environment. You see the problem??? And Indonesia is huge—2,300 nm East to West and 1,000 nm North to South, comprising over 17,000 islands! Once your six months are up you HAVE to leave the country to get a new visa (this was waived during Covid as all neighboring countries were locked down). Pre-Covid, most cruisers either cruised or flew out to a neighboring country to get a new visa.

There ARE talks of a true 6 or 12 month visa for cruisers that doesn't require monthly extensions, but so far it has only been talk. We are not sure whether the Covid-era "on shore visa" after your initial six months are up is still possible. We'll find out in July!



The route south from Davao, Philippines

The Trip South from Davao:

From Davao it is possible to day hop south via the Sarangani Islands at the southwest corner of Davao

Gulf, through Sangihe Island and all the way to Sulawesi. Sarangani offers at least 4 good anchorages and is a favorite stop for cruisers on their way south. We also anchored overnight at Kawio, Sangihe, and Ruang along the way, but did not venture ashore as we were not yet checked into Indonesia. This is pretty cruising grounds because islands are volcanic in origin, and at least one volcano is still smoking.



The Ruang Volcano Smoking in the Distance



A Recent Lava Flow

Bitung, Our Clearance Port:

This commercial shipping port has a number of attractions for cruisers. Foremost of those is Lembeh Strait, “muck diving” capitol of the world. The black sand, somewhat littered bottom, is home to some of the most unusual small critters in the underwater world.

While checking in and diving there, we anchored off Solitude Resort which is located a few miles north of the port of Bitung along the coast. Out of about 25 dive resorts operating when we were last there in 2017, Solitude is one of only 3 that are still operational during Covid lockdowns.

The managers of Solitude, Patrick and Virson, were very accommodating both with their warm welcome and competitive pricing for our many dives with them. Patrick is a well-respected underwater photographer who gave Dave constant instruction to improve his underwater images. Virson, as assistant manager and an Indonesian, was extremely helpful with local knowledge and arranging for our land trips.



A One Inch Long Nudibranch



A Juvenile Ribbon Eel

Formalities: Previously, we could secure our own visa through the Indonesian Consulate in Davao for \$50. But these overseas offices were all closed down in 2020 during Covid lockdowns. Instead, you can now arrange a visa electronically, but it requires the help of an official agent to obtain a visa that is good for longer than a 30 day stay. We used a visa company, Lureta Visa in Bali, to arrange the available B211A 6 month Visa. The current price for obtaining a visa varies widely depending on who you talk to, from \$500 USD to \$215 USD (per person). We shopped around a bit and managed to get our visas for \$215 each.

In addition to the normal paperwork (boat papers, passport copies, etc), we also had to submit proof of full Covid vaccination. For the boat paperwork, we also had to submit all the boat particulars on the online Customs Vessel Declaration System. This serves as our “notice of arrival”, as well as documents our boat details and valuation for Customs.

On our previous visit to Bitung, we anchored in the port area and without contacting anyone, took our dinghy ashore and walked around to the various offices to do our clearance. (Immigration, Customs, Quarantine, Harbormaster). Back then, Quarantine was an afterthought! Not anymore!

When we left Davao, the Covid procedure for entry into Indonesia was:

- Negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure from last port
- Covid test on arrival
- 7 day quarantine
- 2nd Covid test after 5 days
- THEN all the officials would be permitted aboard to complete the clearance.

So our first challenge was arranging for the Covid testing and quarantine on arrival, without going ashore. In a US port, contacting officials would be easy—VHF 16 would be the method, of course. But a friend who had preceded us into Bitung had called and called on Ch 16 and not received any reply. He eventually made contact with a taxi driver who’s number we had, who acted as his agent, arranging for a PCR test, and calling officials. This taxi driver eventually presented our friend with a bill for \$500! We were shocked at this price, but had contacted a professional yacht agent, and were quoted \$1,000 USD for the same service.

After this experience, we asked around for ideas from our cruising friends. We found a friend who had a contact in the Tourism Office in Bitung, and this contact came through for us big time. Our Tourism helper was an energetic young man named Jeffrey. He was spectacularly helpful arranging for our Covid testing, interaction and transportation of officials and advice regarding resources in town and inland attractions. All this at no charge, as his boss assured us and him that this is their business (facilitating tourism).



Jeffrey and the Quarantine Officials

A bonus... by the time we had island-hopped down the island chain between Davao and Bitung, the Bitung mayor had declared that yachts checking in to Bitung—because of the time required to get to Bitung from anywhere outside of Indonesia—did not need to quarantine. This was also due to Bitung's high vaccination rate and low Covid incidence. (Cruisers at other ports in Indonesia were still required to quarantine at that time).

Besides the diving in Lembeh Strait, we spent a day up in the highlands with Patrick and Virson seeing the area around Lake Tondano. The highlands area with a large lake, cool air and local culture are major tourist attractions to most tourists. In addition to the normal tourist sites, we also wanted to see the Japanese storage caves, historic Dutch Seaplane Base and nearby Langowan airfield, all used during World War II or WWII by the Japanese.

Caves built into the mountain by the Japanese during World War II

The details of the WWII sites in the Bitung/Manado area are documented on the Pacific Wrecks website: <http://pacificwrecks.org>

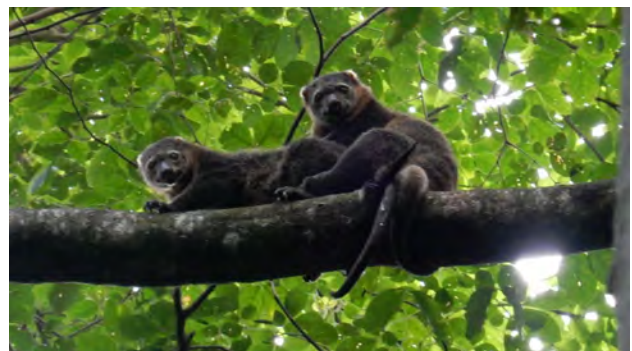


The other inland trip we did was to nearby Tangkoko National Park for an overnight stay to see the Tarsiers (small squirrel-sized monkeys), Cuscus, monkeys, birds, and other wild animals in the jungle. We travelled by private car, arranged by the Solitude Resort, to Tangkoko Lodge. After a three hour drive, we arrived in time for lunch at the lodge. It's also possible to make this trip by a relay of public transportation (motorcycle to town, mini-van to the transport hub, and truck to Tangkoko). This is much cheaper, but would take the whole day to accomplish.



The Tangkoko Park Entrance

After lunch we used our pre-arranged guide, Mansuar Dalambide (look for him on Facebook) as our guide for a five hour afternoon hike in the park. He was able to find various birds, monkeys, lizards and the elusive Tarsiers and a Cuscus for us to photograph. The lodge arranged local less expensive car transportation back Solitude for us.



A Pair of Cuscus in the Forest



A Nocturnal Tarsier Hiding in His Tree

It was a comfortable and enjoyable trip except for a load of chiggers we both acquired on our legs and feet. We had been warned about “bugs” and took precautions—wearing long pants and shoes with socks, but that didn’t deter the chiggers at all. It took over a week to finally rid ourselves of the itching. Socks and long pants are necessary, but more important is a coating of strong bug spray underneath!

Meanwhile, we’d communicated the warm welcome we received in Bitung back to our cruising friends in the Philippines, and two other boats followed us to Bitung in the following weeks. Several more we know of are planning to use Bitung as their check-in port in the next few months.

After two weeks in Bitung, we needed to head out for Sorong, as our visa clock was ticking.

Next month, we’ll cover our island-hopping trip, 460 nm from Bitung to Sorong.

We have written a very complete Indonesia check-in guide, with details, recommendations, costs, and links. It is posted as a PDF on our website in the Files section under Indonesia.

<http://svsoggypaws.com/files/#Indo>

Anchorage List

| Date | Latitude | Longitude | Depth/Bottom | Cell? | Comments |
|--------|------------|-------------|------------------|-------|---|
| 12-Jan | 06°30.04'N | 125°34.34'E | 70 ft Sand | Yes | <u>Tubalan Bay</u> , Small Village |
| 13-Jan | 05°27.24'N | 125°28.29'E | 65 ft Mud/Sand | No | <u>Sarangani</u> , <u>Tamano Bay</u> |
| 14-Jan | 05°25.76'N | 125°27.32'E | 65 ft Sand | Weak | Middle Bay, no village |
| 18-Jan | 04°39.64'N | 125°25.88'E | 25 ft Sand | Weak | Visited by <u>Indo Navy</u> in RIB |
| 19-Jan | 03°24.51'N | 125-31.85'E | 55 ft Sand | No | 1 house on shore |
| 20-Jan | 03°36.30'N | 125°30.13'E | 45 ft Sand | 4G | Mosques close ashore |
| 21-Jan | 03°10.52'N | 125°30.37'E | 70 ft Sand | No | 1 house on shore, fishermen |
| 22-Jan | 02°19.26'N | 125°22.95'E | 60 ft Sand slope | Weak | <u>Ruang Island</u> , in the shadow of a volcano. |
| 23-Jan | 01°28.62'N | 125°14.16'E | 65 ft Sand | 4G | Solitude Dive Resort, N of <u>Bitung</u> |
| | 01°26.15'N | 125°12.70'E | 45 ft Sand | 4G | <u>Bitung</u> , dinghy distance to port |
| | 01°27.49'N | 125°13.86'E | 45 ft Sand slope | 4G | Serena <u>Besar Island</u> |
| | 01°27.38'N | 125°14.50'E | 60 ft Sand | 4G | Off <u>Lembeh Resort</u> |

We always try for anchorages of 30 ft or less, but many anchorage areas in Indonesia and the Philippines go from very deep to very shallow coral in a very short distance. Hence the need to anchor in deeper water for sand and good swinging room.

Commodores Sherry and Dave McCampbell

Editors Note: Dave McCampbell is a retired US Naval Diver and Salvage officer with more than 40 years cruising and sailboats' maintenance experience.. He is the editor of the SSCA Cruisers' Workshop, found in these pages and on the www.ssc.org website. Submit your workshop articles at anytime to cruisersworkshop@ssca.org.

We "B" Gammin' 2022 SSCA Gams

Penobscot Bay GAM (Rockland, ME) July 22 -23

Annapolis Cruising Conference & Gam (Pasadena, MD) Sept 30 – Oct 2

70th SSCA Anniversary GAM, San Diego CA, October 2022

St. Augustine Cruising Conference, Annual Meeting & Gam (St. Augustine FL) Nov 11 -13

gam: A social visit or friendly interchange especially between sailors or seafarers