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Taking on the World

Christi and Eric Grab wanted to see the world, so they bought a Nordhavn 43 and circumnavigated on their very first cruise.

BY CHRISTI GRAB

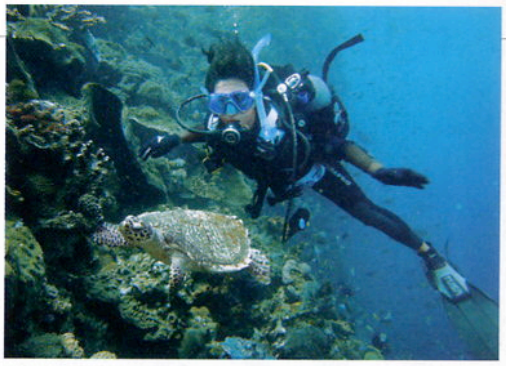
My husband and I were both young professionals climbing our way up the career ladder, both successful in our respective fields. So when we announced we were planning to quit our jobs and circumnavigate the world on a powerboat, almost everyone we knew thought we had lost our minds. "What?" they wondered aloud. Yet in that word we heard all the other questions and concerns: What made this responsible and seemingly sane couple go off the deep end and decide to get themselves killed on the open seas? They have no boating background! They are so ignorant about cruising they don't even know it's impossible to cross oceans on a powerboat. They are going to run out of fuel halfway across the ocean and get attacked by pirates and be viciously murdered.

Friends had their doubts, but that didn't stop us from getting under way. Why did we do it? Ever since I was in college, I have dreamed of taking a year off work to travel around the world. My husband, Eric, dreamed of buying a yacht. One day we realized our dreams were compatible. We also realized it was now or never. Our aging parents were still in good health. We didn't have children yet. We were young enough that we could get jobs again. So, we started planning a circumnavigation.

The first thing we figured out was, due to hurricane seasons that restrict cruising times in some parts of the world, we needed at least two full years to achieve our goal. That was a problem

CHRISTI AND ERIC GRAB

LONG-RANGE CRUISER. Kosmos *on the hook in Nuku Hiva in the South Pacific (top). Christi and Eric Grab on the beach in Apataki, Tuamotus, French Polynesia (right).*



DOWN TIME. *Christi diving in Komodo National Park, Indonesia (top). Eric at the Pyramids in Egypt (above).*

because we'd only planned to be gone one year. We could make our budget stretch to two, but no more. Early on, we discussed doing the trip on a sailboat. But because sailboats in the size range we were comfortable handling only average 4 to 4.5 knots (course made good), we realized we would spend about 45 percent of our time at sea, which wasn't appealing. Our goal was to see as much land as possible, not sit on the ocean. Plus, the more we learned about sailing, the less attractive it became. Sailing, it seems to us, is complex, has many limitations and can be stressful and even downright dangerous in bad seas.

That's when we started thinking about a powerboat. We had seen the Nordhavn 40 that went around the world at a boat show, so we knew our cruising goals were possible. What we didn't know is how rare this type of trip is and how few people in the boating community are aware that some small powerboats are capable of crossing oceans. We found out that purpose-built full-displacement powerboats in this size range can consistently run at about 6 knots and go thousands of miles on a single tank. That would mean spending only 30 percent of our time at sea, which was more appealing. After much research, we decided on the highly refined design of the Nordhavn 43. Its capabilities, safety and accommodations were perfect for us. While the boat is smaller than our house, it is every bit as comfortable. And Nordhavn is a trusted brand for blue-water trawlers.

We started taking boating classes, and when we eventually took delivery of our boat, *Kosmos*, we spent nine months shaking it down in the waters near San Diego. When we left on the very first leg of our circumnavigation, we had logged only 1,800 nautical miles, and our longest consecutive time at sea was three days in coastal waters. Oh, did I mention that the first leg was a 2,832-natucial-mile passage from San Diego to the Marquesas Islands, which would take 21 days?

The first passage was miserable, with consistently big seas, and we wondered if we were in over our heads. But then we made it to beautiful Nuku Hiva, and all doubts melted away. We were in a paradise difficult to get to by plane, and the next few islands we planned to visit were impossible to get to without a boat. We decided that being in such awesome, unspoiled paradises was worth any and all rough time at sea. It turns out the Pacific has the roughest seas in the world, and the seas got better as we progressed.

We can't even begin to express how incredible and eye-opening our journey was. We went to some of the most remote and sparsely populated places on Earth and some of the most densely populated. We went to some of the very richest and very poorest places. We went to Animist, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian areas and got a taste of Australian, Asian, Indian, Arab, Turkish, European, Caribbean, Latin American and even a few Indigenous cultures. We saw many spectacular natural wonders, including the Great Barrier Reef. We often experienced nature up close, as when we climbed to the rim of an active volcano that was shooting lava over our heads and when we swam with sharks, whales and dolphins.

We saw some of the oldest man-made structures in the world, including the Egyptian Pyramids, and some of the most famous engineering marvels, like the Panama Canal. Every place we visited had something about it that made it special and unique, and we treasured each stop. Did we have some scary or unpleasant times? Yes. But the bad times were a small fraction of our time away. It was mostly good.

As planned, we completed our 29,000-nautical-mile circumnavigation in exactly two years and two days. Would we do it again? Absolutely! Any regrets? None at all. ❖

MED MOORED. **Kosmos** *tied up in Malta, then more than halfway around the world.*