Around the World in a 40-footer

By Jim Leishman

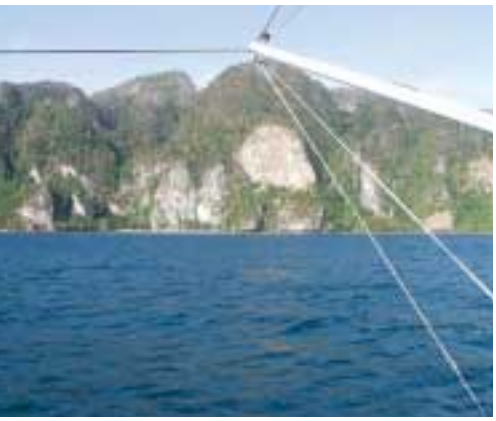
A Trawler

Exploring the Pacific — from

On November 3, 2001, a Nordhavn 40 began a six-month, 23,000-plus-mile circumnavigation of the globe. At the helm for the first part of the cruise — from Dana Point, California to Honolulu — was Jim Leishman, vice president and co-founder of Pacific Asian Enterprises Inc. (P.A.E.), builder of the Nordhavn line of expedition-capable trawler yachts.

During the next portion of the trip, from Hawaii to Singapore, the boat was skippered by Dave Harlow, also of P.A.E. Leishman rejoined the crew in Singapore, to continue skippering the boat all the way to Greece.

It had been a long flight — 14 hours to Taiwan and another four to Singapore — but that was nothing compared to the 12 long weeks it had taken our 40 foot Nordhavn to travel the 8,000 miles from Dana Point, California to Singapore.



Dave Harlow and the crew were scheduled to arrive at Singapore's Raffles Marina on November 25. Our flight arrived that morning — and new crewmembers Brian Saunders, Paul Grover and I arrived at the harbormaster's office around noon. Borrowing the office's VHF radio, I hailed *Nordhavn*, and Dave replied: He was less than a mile out.

Around the outer breakwater, past the Raffles Marina lighthouse, *Nordhavn* sparkled as it approached its slip. With the final two days of calm weather, Capt. Dave and crewmembers Ray Danet and Brad Smith had vacuumed, cleaned, polished and waxed the vessel to perfection.

photos courtesy of Pacific Asian Enterprises

SECOND STRING — After starting the second leg of its voyage in Singapore, *Nordhavn* went on to Phuket and the Maldives island group.

in Paradise

Singapore to the Maldives

A clean, modern floating concrete dock awaited them — with running water, rubber dock cushions and electricity (240v, 50 cycle). Raffles is one of the nicest marina facilities in the world. It was a complete contrast to the open anchorages and dirty commercial quays of the past 6,000 miles of the cruise since Honolulu.

With uniformed marina attendants securing the lines, Capt. Dave silenced the boat's trusty Lugger diesel. He had safely completed Leg One of our around-the-world voyage. It was time to celebrate our success — and Raffles Marina was just the place to do it.

READY TO CRUISE AGAIN

My team for this second leg of our around-the-world voyage consisted of Brian Saunders (a PAE sales rep) and Paul Grover (a friend of the office and an accomplished sailor). We spent the next three days tending to the needs of the ship: re-provisioning, doing oil changes, making adjustments and refueling. Despite the hard work, we were able to find time to enjoy the Raffles facility's fine restaurants, bars and meandering swimming pools.

We had completed our work by January 27 and departed the next morning. Our first stop would be Phuket, Thailand — about 600 miles to the northwest.

Departing Singapore required vigilance, as there are huge land reclamation projects under way. Charts cannot be kept current, as dry land exists where open water existed only a short time before. The navigable channels are clearly marked — and, in daylight, it was fairly easy to find our way seaward, where we could finally take up a northwesterly course.

We expected an easy trip, from a weather standpoint. However, for months, we had been concerned about passing through the infamous Straits of Molucca — recognized for years as a stronghold for pirates who routinely board cargo vessels, steal cargo and sometimes hijack entire ships. Everyone we spoke to in Singapore assured us that pleasureboats were almost never a target — however, large ships still have problems passing through the region.

In January and February, the northeast monsoon is predominant. During our run up to Phuket, we anticipated favorable currents and light wind conditions.

We had a few light rainsqualls the first couple of days out — but, in general, the weather was ideal. On this short run to the islands of the Maldives, we had no concerns about fuel consumption. With the generator running, we pushed along at 1,700 rpm. With a favorable current, we enjoyed speeds well in excess of 8 knots.

STRAIT AHEAD

The Straits of Molucca are legendary for the huge quantity of shipping traffic. The stretch of water from Singapore up to Bukit Jugra (about 180 miles) is divided into sectors — each with its own VHF radio frequency.

Large ships (above a certain tonnage) ply these waters under a traffic separation control scheme, and all vessels are required to monitor the assigned radio frequency and report positions. We stayed to the far right of the shipping lanes, hugging the coast of Malaysia, so we had no trouble with the traffic.

One night during our cruise through the straits, I kept noticing the smell of hot oil. I had not noticed it before, and I could find no hydraulic or oil leaks

ONCE MORE, WITH FEELING — Dave Harlow handed the ship back over to Jim Leishman in Singapore. *Nordhavn* later crossed the Indian Ocean with *Feeling* (above, left), a Phuket-based Nordhavn 62.

photos courtesy of Pacific Asian Enterprises

COLORFUL VOYAGE — Top: The *Nordhavn* crew caught a glimpse of many unusual local boats during their cruise from Singapore to the Maldives. Above: Crewmember Paul Grover enjoyed exploring the waters off the Maldives island group by dinghy, when he wasn't busy aboard *Nordhavn*.

within the boat. Brian, who is familiar with these waters, assured me it was only the smell of cooking oil wafting seaward from the small villages along the coast.

We passed through the narrow and most dangerous part of the Straits of Molucca without incident. As we worked our way northwest, our reliable northeast wind began to build and clock around to the north, giving us a few hours of discomfort.

We were approaching the island of Langkawi and decided to anchor in a cove called Kuala Melaka, on the island's west side. Within the beautiful cove, we noticed a resort with thatched bungalows on stilts over the water, with larger resort buildings inshore.

Here, guests enjoyed the white sand beach, and they were snorkeling and windsurfing as we settled in for our evening barbecue. I would have loved to explore the beach, but we did not have the time to clear into Malaysia — so, we had to enjoy our surroundings from the boat.

Brian knows this prime cruising region well, and told me of the gibbon apes that inhabit Langkawi. Entire families of them can be seen on the beaches, foraging for food.

Weighing anchor at 5:30 a.m., we were back under way for Phuket's Boat Lagoon. By late afternoon, we were approaching the Malaysian island of PhiPhi and decided to make another stop.

We were only 30 miles from Phuket, and we knew we had to enter Boat Lagoon during daylight hours and at high tide — the first opportunity being at 3 the next afternoon. PhiPhi has to be one of the most scenic areas I've ever seen — with rugged terrain, dense vegetation and vertical cliffs that seem to reach to the sky.

FINDING BOAT LAGOON

We departed PhiPhi at 8 a.m. After an easy run, we arrived at the entrance to Boat Lagoon — which did not appear on any of our charts.

Picking up the outer piling, we began the 3 mile passage through a narrow channel, dredged into the shallow surrounding water. Following a photocopy of written instructions and a simple little map that we had received from Raffles Marina, we passed each piling within 15 feet to port — and we carefully made our way in.

At the end of the cut channel, we finally turned to the right and cut through a dense mangrove swamp. There was absolutely no sign of any marina — but just when I began to get concerned, we saw, above the trees, superstructures of numerous megayachts and sailboat spars. Then, we spotted the marina facility, with its hotels, restaurants, bars, shops and a full-service shipyard.

We did some minor re-provisioning in Phuket, changed the oil on the generator and topped off our fuel tanks.

We were a bit low on fresh water, and I was hesitant to run our watermaker in the marina or take on water from the dockside water supply. After inquiring with the marina management, I was advised that I could order up drinking water purified through reverse osmosis, which would be delivered in sealed 20 liter bottles.

A couple of hours later, a small truck showed up. Two guys hand-carried 150 gallons of water down to the boat and filled our tanks to the brim. They worked for two hours in the hot sun, and charged us just $8 for the service. I can see why so many people settle into Phuket and stay. It's a really nice place — and everything is an incredible value.

MALE' CALL

After a pleasant four-day layover in Phuket, we departed Boat Lagoon at 1:50 p.m. on February 4. Our next port would be 1,600 miles ahead: the capital city of Male', within the Maldives island group.

Our course would take us across the Andaman Sea to the Great Channel, which lies between the north end of Sumatra and the Nicobar Islands. We would cross the southern end of the Bay of Bengal and then into the Indian Ocean, direct for Male'.

We planned to travel with our larger sistership, *Feeling*, a Phuket-based Nordhavn 62. *Feeling*'s owner, David Loh, has friends who own a resort in the Maldives. They had planned to cruise the islands until the onset of the southwest monsoon, which appears in late April.

Our passage across the Indian Ocean was textbook perfect. The weather was ideal, with northeast winds generally under 15 knots and a favorable current all the way.

Beginning the voyage at an engine speed of 1,600 rpm, we consistently cruised at over 7 knots — and as each day passed, the current improved. I was

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confident about our economical fuel consumption, considering the total remaining mileage to Male' — so, we increased our engine rpm to 1,700. On February 9, we enjoyed a 200-mile day — and we cruised 207 miles the following day.

With continued hot weather, we ran our air conditioning and generator throughout the entire voyage. I concluded that our added fuel consumption — although running the generator took less than 3/10 gallon per hour — amounted to only about 7 gallons per day. However, it made life aboard luxurious, and sleeping in the dry, cool staterooms was extraordinarily comfortable.

During the day, we would close in on *Feeling* and converse with it's crew on Channel 72. At night, our separation would increase to 2 or 3 miles. It was nice to have our big sistership continually in view.

The ocean teemed with flying fish and provided us with abundant wahoo and dorado catches throughout the passage. With comfortable weather, our days were spent standing easy watches, with excess hours each day for sleep, reading and writing. As rested as we were, the night watches were a joy — with the Southern Cross off our port beam and a pleasant balmy breeze flowing throughout the saloon and wheelhouse.

After a delightful eight-day passage, we arrived after dark and had to rely heavily on our C-MAP electronic charts and Raymarine radar to navigate the pass between Male' and the airport island of Huhule. We dropped anchor off the west side of Male' at 8 p.m. on February 12.

The Maldives island group is made up of some 19 major atolls, encompassing approximately 1,200 coral islands and extending over 300 miles from north to south. Many of these islands are very small and sit no more than 8 feet above sea level.

In the past 20 years, the area has grown to become a vacation paradise — mostly visited by Europeans. Many of the small islands have been developed into self-contained upscale resorts.

Along with David Loh and *Feeling*, we were invited to be the guests of the Bondos Island resort. Bondos, located only about 5 miles north of Male', is about a half mile across. Here, we found beautiful white sand beaches and palm trees. Tropical vegetation and flowers cover the island.

Bondos is a completely self-contained resort with about 250 beachfront bungalows and a staff of over 400. The resort generates its own electricity, has a water desalination plant, provides water taxi service to Male' and the airport island of Huhule, and operates numerous excellent restaurants, bars and shops.

When guests arrive at the Bondos resort, just about everything they need or desire is supplied. The resort offers daily scuba and snorkeling trips to the surrounding islands; there's sportfishing, wind surfing, catamarans, tennis and parasailing.

The resort management allowed us to use their harbor facility, a tiny man-made harbor that provides shelter for the dozen or so resort boats. It is also used by water taxis to load and offload guests. The entrance is no more than 75 feet wide, and there is breaking surf along the north cut of the channel where the coral has been dredged.

It was a white-knuckle ride entering, as lots of headway is required to maintain directional control. We literally surfed into the tiny harbor basin and went hard into reverse to keep from hitting the resort's seawall. There were plenty of helpful line handlers and we tied up — bow-to — with a mooring line astern to keep us off the seawall.

TRUE HOSPITALITY — The crews of *Nordhavn* and *Feeling* were invited to be the guests of the Bondos Island resort (above).

Our two Nordhavns dominated the little harbor — and we found ourselves answering many questions raised by the interested resort guests.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

After four short days in paradise, it was time for us to resume our voyage across the Indian Ocean.

We had passed through the notorious Molucca Straits, encountering only waving, smiling fishermen and a lot of large commercial traffic. Despite what we had heard, we found it to be a safe and friendly place.

Ahead was our entry into the Middle East — a region that deeply concerned us after the events of September 11, 2001. We had no way of knowing the pleasant surprises that awaited us.

In the months ahead, Leishman will share further adventures of the Nordhavn 40 round-the-world cruise with Sea *readers. For more details on the voyage and a link to the daily cruise update, go to www.goboatingamerica.com*