


JOINING THE SAIL
TIMOR-LESTE RALLY
GAVE THIS CRUISING
COUPLE AN EASY WAY
TO HEAD OFFSHORE AND
EVEN FIND THEMSELVES
HONOURED GUESTS

BY MELIAN TOMSETT

Honoured inclusion

Dili and Oecusse



 **DILI** was always on the list of places we wanted to sail to, due to its proximity to Australia and because we knew it was still relatively untouched. So when we discovered there was a race/rally two weeks before the Sail Indonesia and that it ended in Kupang, where the Sail Indonesia fleet were checking in: decision made.

We emailed Sail Timor-Leste who were extremely helpful and suddenly we were all organised for our first trip overseas on board *Indian Summer 1*.

An informative briefing was held at Darwin Yacht Club where we cleared out. Eight boats left from Fannie Bay at midday on July 23rd and sailed the 400 nautical mile to Dili. There were serious racers in the fleet who made the journey in 50 odd hours, but the cruisers amongst us took about four days.

Although it is a race, it is very laid-back and we were even allowed motors and autopilots. We were all given a Yellow tracker so that all our family and friends could follow us. Very thoughtful of the organising committee.

We arrived into Dili late afternoon and the organisers had everything completely under control. A check-in desk was set up with customs, immigration and the harbourmaster all waiting. I reckon it took less than 30 minutes

to check in, then we all headed off for Gino's for our welcoming drink.

We had around twelve days in Dili to explore before we had to leave to get to Kupang to join Sail Indonesia. This gave us plenty of time to see the area. Sail Timor-Leste organised trips around the region including visits to the museum with its famous Christ the Redeemer statue (Christ the redeemer); a 27 metre high statue of Jesus located on top of a globe which dominates the Dili skyline.

One the last day in Dili we had our welcoming ceremony and presentation. This was attended by many government officials including the Tourism Minister, as they had given a \$15,000 prize pool to the rally. They are keen to encourage tourists to visit so they take a proactive role in Sail Timor-Leste. The ceremony lasted all morning, with dancers, singers, speeches and of course the prize giving.

Ian and I branched off from the main group and visited Atauro, a small island about 25nm from Dili. Unfortunately, the west coast is very unfriendly to boats and even though we did manage to anchor during the day and take a walk around, the anchorage was not suitable for an overnight stay.

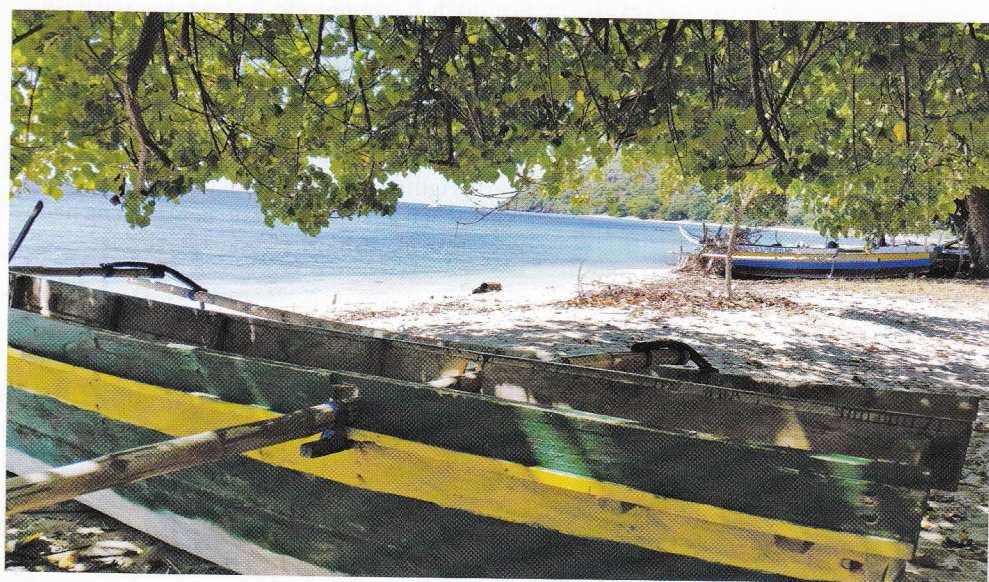
We loved Atauro, the snorkelling was magnificent and every sand path led to another gorgeous little village.



LEFT: Sailing into Dili at 6am.

BELOW: *Indian Summer 1* at anchor at Atauro Island.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A proud Oecusse warrior.



Four boats then set sail for Oecusse, a small East Timorese enclave completely surrounded by Indonesia. They are spending a lot of cash here improving the infrastructure, building bridges, hospitals, hotels etc. At the moment they do not even have a supermarket, but they have huge plans for the area.

Again, we were given an amazing reception. It seemed the whole town had come out to greet us with dancing and speeches.

After a night anchored about two mile down from the main area of town, we all moved up and anchored right off the main street. It was a great anchorage and so convenient.

Oecusse is very small, only a couple of restaurants one of which was closed, one coffee shop and one small mini market. It was while we were having coffee in the one coffee shop that someone appeared and asked us if we could please come over and speak to the President of Oecusse and give him some feedback on how to get tourists to visit!

So we all headed to the President's office and had a meeting with him in his boardroom. He was very keen to hear our perspective on what was needed as he was keen to bring some dollars into Oecusse. It was quite an interesting morning, never met a President before.

We were given a police escort for our stay. Not for security purposes, but because they had no crime and, therefore, nothing to do. They followed our car every day: six policemen in a ute!

We were taken to a local school run by Portuguese nuns where the kids sang to us and showed us around. This school sponsors local children and we were shown how they grow their own vegetables, teach how to sew other school uniforms and raise chickens. We took various gifts that we had on board: clothes, pens, books even a basketball hoop and then we all danced with them.

We found out afterwards that it was not actually a school day and they voluntarily came in to meet us. Every student came.

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MOVING MOMENT

The highlight of our visit to Oecusse came on one of our final days.

We were all taken up to the highlands behind the town to meet some of the local villagers whose lives are very hard. They have no access to transportation to get down to Oecusse, they mainly survive on subsistence farming and have no power or water.

Many of these villagers had not seen westerners before and we were the first tourists in Oecusse. What followed was an incredible experience. Villagers from all over the area converged on this small hillside, schools shut down, the women bought all their vegetables to sell to us and all the elders had prepared speeches.

On arrival, there was chanting, banging of drums, bells ringing etc. It was noisy and busy and totally overwhelming, we had never had a reception like that.

We spent the next few hours with these gorgeous people. They showed us how they made their coffee which was delicious. The kids were frightened of us, one of them burst into tears when I bent down; I do not think he had ever seen blond hair!

The elders all then gave speeches welcoming us and we all stepped forward and gave some information about us. We stayed for most of the day, enjoying their hospitality and generosity before heading back to the coast.

We stayed at Oecusse for about a week before heading out for the overnighter for Kupang. The Sail-Timor-Leste Rally is timed to coincide with the Sail Indonesia which makes it very easy.

We loved our time in East Timor, the rally is really well organised and made our first overseas trip very easy. We saw a part of the world that is as yet, completely untouched.

If you are thinking of participating either of the Indonesian rallies, seriously look into joining Sail Timor-Leste beforehand. It is timed to allow boats to easily join up other rallies.

The 2017 Sail Timor-Leste will start on 15th July from Darwin. ≈

MELIAN & IAN TOMSETT



Melian and Ian Tomsett from Perth are travelling around the world on a 40 foot catamaran *Indian Summer 1*. They left in May 2016 travelling through the Kimberley to Darwin and from there joined the Sail

Timor-Leste rally to Dili. They then joined the Sail Indonesia rally which took them through Indonesia, then on up the Malacca Straits to Langkawi before heading into Thailand to spend a year sailing the Islands around Phuket. Check out their travels: svindiansummer1.com



Villagers walked for days just to come and meet us.