

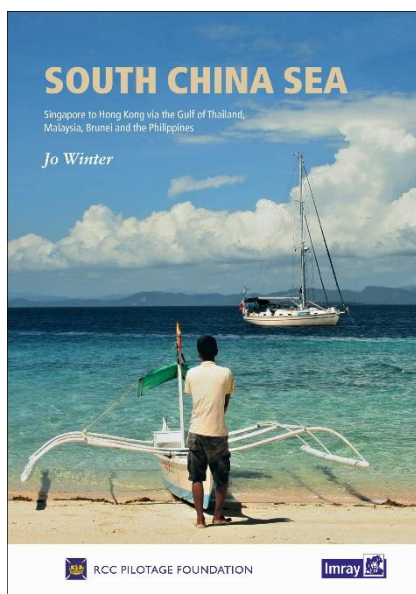


ROYAL CRUISING CLUB PILOTAGE FOUNDATION

Book Review

South China Sea - Singapore to Hong Kong via the Gulf of Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan – Jo Winter.

First edition published October 2019.



None of us wants to be caught out in a Tropical Revolving Storm if we can possibly help it. Guidance on what to do if you are, either at sea or riding it out at anchor, comes at the end of the Introduction to the new Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation edition, *South China Sea*, by Jo Winter. The guidance is clear, to the point, but spine-chilling. It comes after advice on how to minimise the effects of several other features of cruising in the South China Sea – piracy, theft, corruption, volcanoes, pollution, and crocodiles to name but a few. Why on earth would any of us want to go cruising there?

The answer lies in much of the rest of this beautifully laid out cruising guide. For the introduction Jo has sensibly drawn much of her material directly from this guide's predecessor, *Cruising Guide to Southeast Asia Volume 1* (Davies S and Morgan E), which despite updates, is showing its age: it was published in 1998. Jo's guide has the huge advantage of being able to use

colour charts and to fill the book with photographs. And that is far from all. The 1998 guide needed 67 introductory pages to cover the ground Jo through judicious editing manages in just 38, including photographs. Most importantly, despite the highly relevant advice on how to face the horrors of climate, pirates, and the rest, Jo's affection for the area, for both its geography and its people, shines through. She gives enough away in those first 38 pages to intrigue rather than deflect. She calls it 'one of the most diverse, beautiful, unspoilt and undiscovered sailing areas in the world'.

The rest of the book, the real pilotage meat, is much longer than its predecessor – for a very simple reason: it contains a much more comprehensive, up to date body of well presented, accurate information spanning a huge and complex geographical area, much of it never previously covered by any guide. Jo has of course relied on contributions from others, properly acknowledged, for much of her material, but a majority of it results from her own first-hand knowledge of the area, gleaned over several years up till 2017.

Chapter 1, *Crossing the South China Sea*, is a helpful bird's eye view of the through-routes across the South China Sea. The sweep of the rest of the book is logical, starting in Singapore, moving eastwards, from mainland Eastern Malaysian Peninsula, Gulf of Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysian Borneo and Brunei, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. All chapters follow a sensible structure, starting with helpful country-wide comments, including bits of history, hints on protocol, bank holidays, immigration formalities etc. Small scale charts then give way to larger scale ones, properly labelled and (often) numbered so it is quick and easy to relate their detail to the relevant part of the accompanying text.

The most difficult section to structure must have been that on the Philippines. Its many islands and 'seas' pose a challenge. Jo has cleverly divided the country into twelve subsections in a way which is easy to follow and avoids duplication. The chapter is twice the length of its 1998 predecessor and is a mine of fine-grained pilotage information.

The section on Taiwan is a delight, covering bits of the island not previously described.

Those nuggets of which I have personal knowledge I can confirm reflect what I believe to be true. In only one or two cases could I identify examples where Jo's own information has been superseded by the passage of time. For example at Pulau Lankayan on p148, we found a resort that was no longer friendly, and wanted enormous sums of money just for us to land, let alone eat or drink ashore. I imagine that the section on Hong Kong will also need to be rewritten soon.

A small niggle is the occasional lapse in the otherwise high quality of copy editing, leading usually just to irritation, but occasionally to mystification: for example on p308 Open CPN overlay with 'GR' should read 'GE', ie Google Earth. Another is that under 'Anchoring and ground tackle' on p13, in the event that your chain gets entangled around a coral head, Jo argues for popping somebody over the side 'with a snorkel to try and work out how to undo the tangle'. That may well be all that is required, but in my experience, being able to scuba dive is in some circumstances more likely to lead to disentanglement.

All in all, the book is a triumph, and represents a significant raising of the bar. Jo is to be congratulated, and I do hope readers will be enthused sufficiently to cruise the South China Sea.

Mike Gill

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