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On her way to Timor, *Golden Compass* lays at anchor off the Indonesian island of Flores (left). *Golden Compass's* owners and guests had the opportunity to accompany United Nations pilots on a photo mission along the north coast of East Timor (right).



Yachting's AMBASSADORS

IN HIS LATEST DISPATCH FROM THE GLOBE-ENCIRCLING *GOLDEN COMPASS*, OUR PHOTOJOURNALIST ENJOYS A PRESIDENTIAL WELCOME IN EAST TIMOR, A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND NATION LOOKING TO CLAIM A NEW FUTURE.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JIM RAYCROFT**

MARK TWAIN NAILED IT WHEN HE SAID, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow mindedness." For those aboard the motor yacht *Golden Compass*, whether it's stepping onto the dock at Marina Hemingway in Havana, Cuba, or wading ashore from the tender in Timor-Leste on the far side of the world, the travels have been life changing.

"*Golden Compass* has enabled us to meet and interact with all types of people from various socio-economic, cultural, educational, racial and religious backgrounds—from subsistence farmers to heads to states," the owners attest. "It has also provided us the opportunity to experience the beauty and rawness of remote areas where few yachts or even tourists would venture."

The yacht's latest port of call, Timor-Leste (East Timor) is one such remote destination. Setting out from Florida in the fall of 2009, the 151-foot Picchiotti-built yacht *Golden Compass* traveled through the Caribbean, down to South America and up the Amazon River. She crossed the Atlantic, made the rounds in the Med, ventured through the Suez Canal and into the Red Sea, dodged pirates in the Gulf of Aden and cruised the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. By the summer of 2011, she was in Southeast Asia with various stops planned in the Indonesian archipelago. When *Golden Compass* reaches the end of her more than two-year-long circumnavigation, approximately 40,000 nautical miles will have passed under her keel.



“In our worldwide travels there are some less-traveled areas where we are like de facto ambassadors, and many of the people we meet will base their opinions and actions as a result of our chance encounters.” – *Golden Compass's* owners

When the owners of *Golden Compass* mentioned we'd be putting in at Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, I was only vaguely aware of this former Portuguese colony. Some quick research reminded me why the name seemed familiar—a bloody revolution had recently taken place there. In fact, the country had been struggling for autonomy since the mid-1970s, when it gained independence from Portugal only to be taken over by Indonesia in a brutal 25-year occupation that left more than 100,000 dead.

While Timor enjoyed a successful vote for independence from Indonesia in 1999, the celebrations were short lived as the Indonesian military and Timorese pro-integration militia pushed back with violence and intimidation. International peacekeeping forces stepped in, and in September 2002, amid national celebrations, Timor-Leste was declared a new country in the United Nations. Continued infighting and rioting prompted the return of U.N. peacekeepers in 2006, and elections in 2007 again brought celebrations to Timor, only to be followed by a failed coup and assassination attempt of President José Ramos-Horta in 2008, leaving him critically injured. Peace has finally found the island, and in 2011 the U.N. handed over control of the police force to Timor-Leste authorities. United Nations police officers still patrol the street; their mission is scheduled to end after the 2012 presidential elections.

In August 2011, Timor-Leste was little more than a political science footnote to me, but soon it would become much more personal. It had taken *Golden Compass* 22 months to reach the small cove off the primitive village of Maumere, tucked away under the trees on the north coast of Flores—one of the more than 18,000 islands that make up Indonesia. It would take me a comparatively short two-and-a-half days via New York, Hong Kong and Bali to reach this spot on the globe where *Golden Compass* waited, riding peacefully at anchor framed against a palm-lined shore that gave way to

verdant green hills and jagged mountains beyond.

With warm greetings from the owners and crew and a welcome drink in hand, I was glad to be back. Returning for my fourth journey aboard *Golden Compass*, I felt a sense of familiarity, and I understood what the owners meant when they said the yacht was akin to a “bubble” that allowed comfort and security while taking them to the farthest-flung spots on the globe.

At dawn, a thick mist flowed down from the hills, defusing the morning light into layers of blue-gray, and the smell of smoke from wood fires ashore hung in the still air. Fishermen repaired nets using seashells for weights and headed out to sea in small outriggers—some built of wood and fiberglass, others simple dugout canoes fashioned from a single tree. The quiet morning faded as the engines came to life and Captain Luis ordered anchors aweigh. It would take 26 hours to reach Timor-Leste. We traveled east, mountains rising ahead then sinking in our wake. We'd arrive at Dili, the “City of Peace,” by the next morning and wait for good light to enter the reef-studded harbor.

A spectacular sunrise of purple, red and gold greeted us over Dili Harbour. The morning mist turned the small fishing and cargo boats anchored inside the reefs into soft, monochromatic silhouettes. The harbor has one commercial dock suitable for small container ships, but no dock for yachts. Other than a couple of old, small cruising sailboats, there were no pleasure boats to be seen. Yachts on a scale of *Golden Compass* are virtually unknown in Timor-Leste.

Several weeks earlier in Singapore, the owners had met an Australian who was very familiar with Timor and had suggested they give serious consideration to a visit. He had followed up with the name and contact information of a friend who worked for President Horta. It proved to be a marvelous connection with the new contact helping to ease port entry

clockwise from top left
The almost 90-foot tall statue of Jesus on Cape Fatucama, overlooking Dili Harbour; Church of Motael in Dili; the rugged terrain of Atauro Island; business as usual on the beach at Dili Harbour; Timorese children in traditional costume greet President Horta at the Elsaa Coffee Plantation near Gleno village; the home of President Horta in Dili; women from the coastal village of Liquiçá prepare to dry fish at the Empreza Diak co-op.





and even arranging a visit by President Horta aboard *Golden Compass* during our first afternoon in port.

As we cruised from Dili Harbour to Atauro Island—20 miles to the north—and back, we enjoyed fascinating conversation with the president, learning about the nation's emergence to independence, the Tour de Timor bicycle race, the Dili Marathon and the Darwin to Dili Yacht Rally. Atauro is an oasis from the rush and crowded streets of Dili. Its 57 square miles are home to 8,000 Timorese and offer trekking, snorkeling, world-class diving and accommodation options that include beach-front thatched huts.

President Horta—a Nobel Peace prize co-winner in 1996 for his work to bring peace to East Timor—has the strong yet engaging personality of an intelligent, effective and caring leader, and so it was with much pleasure that we accepted an invitation to dine with him at his residence in Dili the following evening. He met us at the beach, driving his refurbished 1960s six-wheeled Mini Moke, accompanied by a Jeep and driver to transport us. A gracious and entertaining host, President Horta opened his home and a bottle of 1949 port to *Golden Compass's* owners, guests and crew. He spoke of his country's struggle for independence and his plans to improve the nation's infrastructure and raise the country from war-ravaged poverty through shrewd investments of the funds produced from offshore oil and gas revenue deals he brokered. It's evident Timor-Leste is his passion, and he doesn't miss an opportunity to educate and inform on the subject.

To this end, President Horta invited us to accompany him on his official travels the following day, which would introduce us to this new republic of more than one million people. By 7:30 a.m., we were rolling through Dili in the presidential motorcade, escorted by National Police, U.N. Peacekeepers and armed bodyguards. We didn't finish until 10:30 p.m., traveling from seaside towns to high mountaintop villages. Our

tour included the fishing village of Liquiçá, a colorful maze of huts and gardens laid out beneath shade trees with fenced-in pathways running to the beach. A fish-drying co-op project is being created here, which when fully operational promises to bring work and revenue to the area.

We accompanied the president to a dedication ceremony of the new library in the mountain village of Ermera, greeted by the Ermera Biblioteka project managers and what seemed to be most of the village. Then we climbed farther to the village of Gleno and the Elsa Café coffee plantation, where 60 percent of the crop is headed for Starbucks. Here the President received a ceremonial greeting with music performed by local children dressed in traditional costume and a presentation of Tais. Woven by the local women on simple looms, Tais is a prized item in Timor-Leste; the individual patterns can be traced to particular areas of the country.

The final push of the day took the motorcade higher along some of the most difficult unpaved roads I've ever encountered. The reason Jeeps are the official vehicles of choice here was made obvious as we crawled along thin, deeply rutted dirt tracks, skirting the edges of cliffs, crossing precarious bridges, passing under the occasional huge, fallen tree, all the while climbing higher up the dusty mountain road into the old-growth forests. Hours later, we arrived at the village of Hatolia. This was President Horta's first visit, and the entire town had turned out to welcome him, the street lined with enthusiastic villagers greeting us with cheers, chants, music and dance.

After touring the country by sea and land, we took to the sky the next day—President Horta had arranged a ride for us, a big Bell 212, reminiscent of the Bell UH-1 of the Vietnam era. An Australian Air Force crew stationed in Timor on U.N. duty pilots this one. We lifted off on a strikingly clear day and headed east along the coast. Once past Dili Harbour, there is

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Being part of the presidential motorcade allowed *Golden Compass's* guests to gain an insight into this developing country's struggles, challenges and triumphs. President Horta arrives in traditional Timorese costume amid great celebration in the village of Hatolia (above). *Golden Compass's* owner, President Horta and photojournalist Jim Raycroft (right)

Only a fraction of yacht owners are using their vessels in such an exploratory fashion as *Golden Compass's* owners, who see yachting as not only a way to broaden their own perspectives, but also to broaden the world's perspective of yachting.



EAST TIMOR



fact file

TIME ZONE: UTC +9

LANGUAGE: Tetum and Portuguese; Indonesian and English are also spoken.

NAME: Formally the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, shorthand Timor-Leste, Timór Lorosa'e in Tetum

CAPITAL: Dili

CURRENCY: U.S. dollar

POPULATION: 1,177,834

AREA: 5,743 square miles, slightly larger than Connecticut

AIRPORT: Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airport in Dili, Timor-Leste. Merpati Airlines flies seven times per week from Denpasar, Bali, to Dili. Air North flies two to three times a day from Darwin, Australia, to Dili.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS: Apply for visa upon arrival at the international airport in

Dili or at the Port of Dili. The fee is \$30 and grants a single-entry stay for up to 30 days.

Those who wish to stay longer (up to 90 days) or seek multiple-entry privileges may apply online in advance of arrival. All travelers must hold a valid passport with an expiration date no less than six months from the date of entry and hold a return or onward ticket or show ability to fund departure.

WHEN TO GO: Timor-Leste has a tropical monsoon climate—hot and humid with distinct rainy and dry seasons, monsoons from December to March and dry weather from July to November. Cooler weather can be found in the mountains. Avoid monsoon season and visit during the Northern Hemisphere summer and fall.

TOURISM: gov.east-timor.org

USEFUL WEBSITES:

Discover East Timor: www.discoverdili.com

Tour de Timor: www.tourdetimor.com

Dili Marathon: www.dilimarathon.com

Com Fishing Festival:

www.comfishingfestival.com

Dive Timor Lorosae: www.divetimor.com

CHARTER INQUIRIES:

International Yacht Collection

Tel: (954) 522-2323

Email: charter@iyc.com

www.iyc.com

GOLDEN COMPASS IN:

The Maldives – “Miles from Nowhere,” *SBI* May 2011

The Amazon – “A Golden Opportunity,” *SBI* June 2010

Cuba – “Golden Odyssey,” *SBI* March 2010

little development to be seen other than the construction towers that will carry power to the outer reaches as the nation gets back on its feet.

Timor-Leste has a rugged beauty, from its coastline—a mix of beaches and rocky cliffs—to its mountains, topping off at 9,721 feet above sea level at the summit of Foho Tatamailau (also called Mt. Ramelau) near the village of Hatu-Builico. On a clear day, the intrepid hiker is rewarded with a view of both coasts from this peak. From the air, we spot Jaco Island, an uninhabited three-square-mile jewel set off the eastern shore. Still considered a sacred place by the Timorese, overnight visitation is not permitted, but you can tender to shore and immerse yourself in the stunning natural beauty and peace and quiet of Tutuala Beach. On any given day you might have the island all to yourself.

Our last evening in Timor-Leste, we attended a reception at the Indonesian Embassy as guests of President Horta where local musicians and dancers performed and an abundance of local dishes were

served. The owners of *Golden Compass* were appreciative of the reception they received in Timor and the opportunity for an insider's view into this emerging nation.

“These opportunities [found traveling aboard *Golden Compass*] have broadened our perspective and given us a keener insight on the challenges faced, especially by developing countries like Timor-Leste,” say the owners. “Because of our visit and the time we had with the President, we see ourselves finding new and better ways to help this country meet their challenges. The President and the experiences he shared with us have proven that he and the Timorese [are] the best ambassadors for their country.”

To venture from our shores is to become a “de facto ambassador” for yachting, and it's an experience and opportunity that I hope will be embraced and enjoyed by more and more yacht owners, their families and their guests. ■