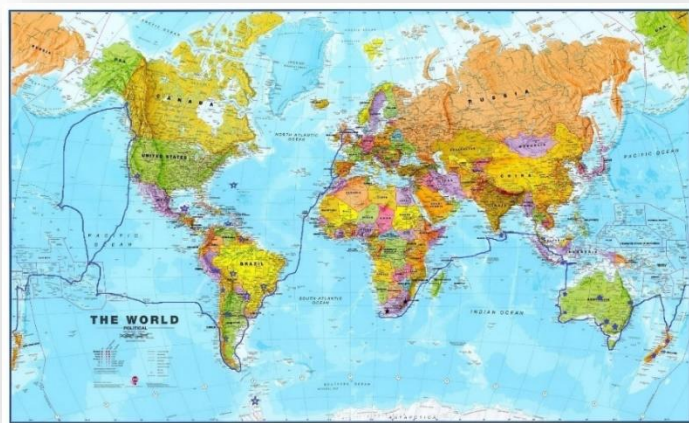




International cruisers – Around the world in eight years

Dutch cruisers Wietze van der Laan and Janneke Kuysters have been sailing along the coast of South Africa since early November. Their yacht is a steel Bruce Roberts 44, a traditional heavy displacement, semi-long keeled cutter-rigged design. She was built in 1989 in New Zealand and named Anne Caroline van Staeten Landt – after the names of their mothers and the name that Abel Tasman gave to New Zealand.

Wietze and Janneke set off from the Netherlands almost eight years ago now; South Africa is their last stop before they begin their long voyage north, back to Europe. Along the way, they work as journalists for five different international sailing publications including British magazine *Yachting World* and the Dutch magazine *Zeilen*. We caught up with them to find out more about their intriguing journey...



1. When did you arrive in South Africa and how long are you planning to stay?

We arrived in South Africa on the 1st of November in Richards Bay, where we quarantined for a few days. On the 6th of November the South African government granted tourist visa for the cruisers that were waiting in Richards Bay. This was the result of the tireless work of a team of three passionate people: Peter Sherlock, Jenny Crickmore-Thompson and John Franklin. They saw the problem looming for many cruisers who were struggling to cross the Indian Ocean and who were trying to escape the cyclone season. Their positive and constructive approach was picked up by the government, which led to the decision to let the cruisers in. All cruisers (over 70 boats this year, less than a third of the normal number) are very thankful for their efforts and for the South African government to help us in this dire situation.



We have the regular tourist visa for three months, but the government has already decided that they will automatically be extended for another three months. We plan to stay here for almost four months, partly because we love it here so much and because we are waiting to see which countries will open up on our way north up the Atlantic”.

2. What are you hoping to see and experience while you are here? And how have you found your visit and the sailing community here so far?

We had been in South Africa before, travelling over land in the east of the country. So our aim was to spend more time in the Western Cape. But of course we went to Hluhluwe and St. Lucia to see the amazing wildlife. We then stopped in Durban for a few days to wait for the weather. The walks along the long waterfront were lovely there. Then on to East London, where we found the most hospitable yacht club in the world. The members of the Buffalo River Yacht Club have been so kind and helpful to us. While our boat was safe on the trot moorings there, we rented a car and went inland to Hogsback for some hiking and to Morgans Bay for a long walk on the beach and in the dunes. Then on to Mossel Bay, where we saw our first *dassies* and went to a penguin sanctuary. We were there just when the summer vacations had started; the place was packed with South African tourists. We loved the laid back atmosphere there. And then the pinnacle of our trip west: sailing around Cape Agulhas and the Cape of Good Hope: the third of the big capes of the world that we passed: Cape Horn (Chile), Cape Leeuwin (Australia) and Cape of Good Hope. The weather was perfect and our arrival in Cape Town will be in our hearts and minds forever. A grand entry in a grand city.

3. Going right back to 2013, what inspired this mammoth trip around the world? And has the trip lived up to your expectations so far?

The Netherlands is a very wet country with lots of rain and lots of waterways. Did you know that we have 40 different words for 'rain' in Dutch? So there are lots of ponds, rivers, streams and lakes. Not to mention that half the country borders on the North Sea. So at a young age, we all learn to swim as a safety precaution. Sailing or any other watersports are popular because they are easily accessible. Ice skating in the winter is a logical extension of that. We both learned to sail at a young age: four and eight years old. We more or less grew up with it: Wietze has sailed races for the Royal Netherlands Navy Yacht Club for over 10 years and I have worked as a helmsman and chef on large traditional Dutch sailing vessels. From 1994 onwards, we have owned a yacht. In 1999 we sailed around the North Atlantic in a 31 foot steel boat: 12,000 miles in one year... our honeymoon. We loved everything about it, but felt we needed a bigger boat for a trip around the world. So we worked hard, looked for another boat, fixed her up, worked even harder and saved all our pennies to make it happen. In 2012 and 2013 we sold everything and left in July 2013. The reason for sailing around the world is two-fold. First, we love being out on the water and reaching goals that are challenging. Second, we are eternally curious about other cultures, languages, food and traditions. Sailing around the world in a boat gives us the opportunity to go slow and have time to learn and experience. The trip has lived up to our expectations and more!

We have sailed over 75,000 miles together in the past 30 years and still love it.



4. Can you tell us a bit about your arrival in the Maldives and having to be in isolation there? Did you ever actually get to go on land and see a bit of the islands?

In January last year, the first news about Covid started to appear. We were in Thailand then and never expected it to spread over the world so fast. Early February we sailed to Sri Lanka and it became apparent that this was going to have a lot more impact. Turning back to Thailand wasn't really an option, given the seasons. So we went west, to Maldives. A few days after we arrived, they closed the borders like many other countries did. Along with 18 other boats we were in an anchorage near a small island all the way in the north of the country. Everybody, including the Maldivian government, was trying to develop a strategy on how to deal with Covid. The result was that we were isolated on our boat for 102 days. The first 10 weeks we were not allowed on land and were forced to stay in one anchorage; after that we were allowed to anchor near a small uninhabited island with a beach where we could

stretch our legs. Later, we sailed to the capital Male where we were able to get food, fuel and water. So we never saw more of Maldives than those three anchorages. Early June the government of Seychelles opened the borders for yachts. We were delighted to arrive in Seychelles after a 14-day sail from Male. Such a wonderful country: they made us feel incredibly welcome”.



5. What have been some of the highlights/favourite places or experiences of your trip so far? And some of the not-so-nice parts (apart from the Covid isolation)?

This is a question that many people ask us and it is really hard to answer it without writing a novel. In the years that we have been under way, we have been in places with incredible natural beauty or with very interesting

monuments or other historical artefacts. But other places will

be in our hearts always because we found amazing people that took the time to show us around, tell us about their country and culture and gave us assistance when we needed it. The not-so-nice parts usually had to do with inclement weather or not being able to source something that you need to fix or maintain the boat. But they are few and far between”.

6. How do you think you experience a country and travel in general differently when you sail there rather than just arriving on a plane?

They say: ‘the body travels on horseback, but the soul follows on foot’. Arriving somewhere on an airplane is very efficient, but arriving by boat gives you the advantage of ‘processing’ the past experiences during your crossing and getting excited about the new country while you are slowly getting closer. Once we arrive, we live in the country: we need to shop, get fuel and water. Just like the locals. So we experience the country more in-depth and make friends easier than being a tourist on a schedule. We find that having the time to do that is the biggest gift that we have given ourselves with this voyage.

What was very important for us is that we sometimes leave the boat in a safe place and go backpacking inland. For instance: we ended up living in beautiful Chile for almost a year: first sailing the Patagonian channels from south to north. And then backpacking all around Chile, Argentina, Peru, Bolivia and Suriname for about five months. In other places we have made longer or shorter backpacking trips or trips with a campervan also; it gives you a better understanding of the country when you travel inland too.

7. Can you take us through your plans for what’s next after South Africa?

From South Africa, we go to Namibia (if it is still open), then we’ll make a short rest stop at Saint Helena (which is closed), Ascension Island and then Azores. From the Azores, we’ll head to the UK (Brexit permitting) and then to the Netherlands. 8,000 miles still to go!

8. What would your advice be to people who may be thinking of taking on a cruising lifestyle like yours?

Do it! There are lots of reasons not to go. But if you have a good boat, you are fit, healthy and able to sail it and have some budget to do it: don’t delay.

9. Is your trip funded solely through writing and photography? Which publications do you contribute to?

Funding a voyage like ours cannot be done only with income out of publications: there are only a handful of boats that can make a living of it. La Vagabonde, Delos, Uma are a few well-known sailing teams that do really well. But the amount of time they have to invest in the work is incredible. We have found that for us it pays for the extras, like all the land travel we do. But the main voyage needs to be funded otherwise.

10. How difficult do you think it will be to adjust to life back in the Netherlands on your return? And do you have any other trips planned once you've returned or what do you plan to do?

Of course we think a lot about the year ahead of us: the change from a cruising lifestyle in which we are together 24/7 to a new phase in our lives in which our activities will be different will be huge. We have some plans for new voyages, but most of all we look forward to seeing family and friends again. It's been well over two years ago since we last saw them and we are aching to be with them again. First steps will be to find a house, find work and make new travel plans. There are lots of countries still on our list to be visited either by boat or over land. It's so hard to pick and choose. We are lucky that we are still relatively young (56 and 58) so we have time to keep working on that list.

11. Anything else you'd like to add in conclusion?

In many places in the world, we have met South Africans with whom we have forged fantastic friendships. It is amazing how their friends here in South Africa open their doors and their hearts for us without even knowing us. We feel so spoiled by all the good people here.



