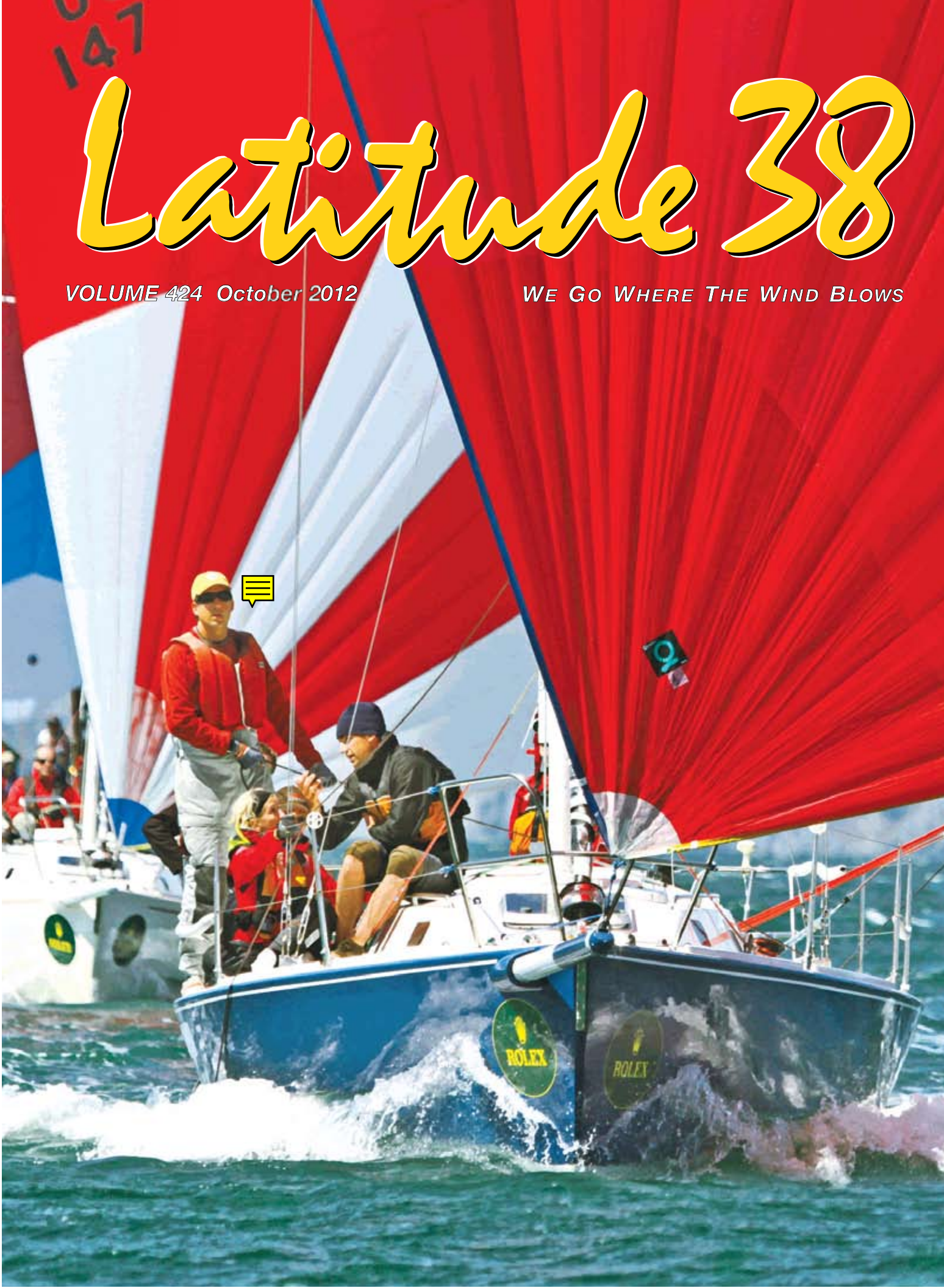


Latitude 38

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VOLUME 424 October 2012

WE GO WHERE THE WIND BLOWS



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CHANGES

**Geja — Islander 36
Andrew Vik and Friends
Another Adriatic Summer Cruise
(San Francisco)**

When the summer fog settles in along the Northern California coast, I can't think of a much better place to be than the Mediterranean, celebrating life with happy, vacationing, scantily-clad Europeans. Thanks to a 'boat for sale' ad in *Lectronic Latitude* back in '07, I'm able to kick back there aboard my own sailboat, the '76 Islander 36 *Geja* that departed from the Bay back in the '90s.

This was my fifth straight summer aboard *Geja*, and it consisted of 37 days and 36 nights, with 27 different overnight stops, and two overnight sails. I covered nearly 700 miles, 60% of them under sail alone — the highest percentage in my five summers. It was also the hottest summer to date, with typical highs around 95°. While it wasn't horribly humid, it was definitely more humid than in inland California.

The best part of my little summer jaunts around the Med has been sharing them with the many friends and acquaintances who have joined me for one-week legs. I had 10 friends join me this summer, most of them veterans of previous trips on *Geja*. Over the five years, I've hosted 55 great people on my Islander 36, sharing experiences that none of us



will ever forget.

This summer I set sail from *Geja's* home base near Split, Croatia in mid-July, just as the summer tourist season was getting into full swing. I'm clearly not the type of person who is afraid of crowds, as July and August are prime time in the Med. These are also the months in which fickle European weather is most stable. Or so I thought.

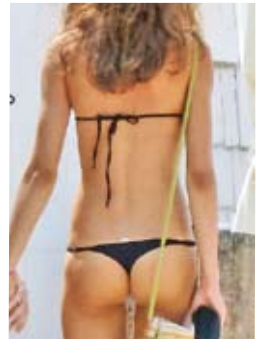
I kicked off the summer with Marikken, a Norwegian crewmate. The first weather forecast to come over the Navtex receiver called for gusts the next day of up to 65 knots. For the record, Navtex is the most flawless way to get forecasts — always in English — while sailing the Med. An unlocked iPhone or iPad with a local data-enabled SIM card is the way to go if you would be sticking around in one country.

Given the forecast, it was a good thing that I'd become familiar with most of the 'hurricane holes' in the central Dalmatian coast. I decided on the immensely

IN LATITUDES



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Clothing isn't a big thing in Croatia

Yes, that naughty Andrew Vik cruised the Adriatic again this summer. Spread; Norwegian crew Marikken at Hvar. Insets top and bottom: Andrew once again spent hours tirelessly furthering international relations. Center inset: Andrew patriotically 'flew the flag' for most of his summer cruise.

popular town of Hvar. The place has lost some of its local charm since my first visit by land in '02, as it's now overrun by English-speaking backpackers. But it's still as magnificent a harbor town as you'll find anywhere, and the 'after beach parties' at the Hula Hula Bar are excellent, as hundreds of young people, some still in their swimwear, drink, dance, and swim until well past sunset.

Most sailboats visiting Hvar line up like sardines in the mooring field on the harbor's west side, attaching to a forward buoy with a long stern line aft, as it's too shallow to back all the way to the quay. I felt very secure as the wind picked up during the night — and pick up it did!

Powerful gusts hit *Geja* broadside, inducing quite a bit of heel. During one such gust, I felt a strange tug, and soon discovered that the metal ring on shore had popped out of the cement! Worse yet,

the metal ring atop the forward mooring buoy had burst open, too, releasing our forward line. Luckily we had a back-up line attached to a neighboring buoy, though we still had to scramble to get some lines onto neighboring boats to keep us in place. When cruising the Med, you're bound to have such excitement now and then.

With high pressure settling back in, accelerating the typical northwest afternoon winds, we had fast off-the-wind sailing down the island-strewn Dalmatian coast. We ended the first week in the southern Croatian town of Dubrovnik, one of Europe's most impressive medieval walled towns. Since my last visit two years ago, it seems that control of the public quay had been transferred to a private con-

cessionaire, as I was quoted a minimum charge of 230 euros — about \$300 U.S. — a night to tie up to the noisy main quay. With all the megayachts around — many of them more than 200 feet in length — it's hard to blame the Croatians for being opportunistic. Nonetheless, I chose to moor at a nearby yacht club for 40 euros instead, still a bargain compared to the government-run ACI Marina's price of 85 euros. Taking a 45-footer there would have set an owner back 111 euros — or about \$140 at this summer's relatively favorable exchange rate.

Dubrovnik is a fantastic place to hang out for a few days. The walled town is enormous and extremely well preserved. The walking tour atop the walls is a must-do. Dubrovnik also has an international airport, making it an ideal place to take on crew.

The second week brought additional crew aboard *Geja* for the trip south across the border into stunning Montenegro. There are formalities to contend with when crossing international borders, and most southbound pleasure yachts check out of Croatia at Cavtat. It took plenty of jostling to squeeze into the small customs zone on the quay, designated by a simple rope railing.

Knowing from experience that it would take up to an hour to check out, I told my crew to enjoy some coffee at a café while they waited. Part way through the three-step checkout process, I was summoned back to *Geja* to reposition

When it comes to picturesque harbors of the world, not many can compete with Hvar. Unfortunately, that's what makes it expensive.



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her a bit. While I was onboard and adjusting *Geja's* lines, a guy from the port authority asked where my crew was. He was less than thrilled to learn that they were not on the boat.

"Your crew must remain on ship when at the customs dock!" he hollered at me.

"This is the rule everywhere in the world! Where did you get skipper's license?! You can be fined 150 euros per crew-member!" With that, he disconnected my lines. "Go float in the harbor for hour before you come back!"

As I floated 100

feet away, my confused crew returned to the quay. "Oh, the princess is done with her coffee!" the asshole official sneered at Marikken. Despite my crew's efforts, he would not reduce my one-hour 'sentence'. Marikken then took matters into her own hands. She swam out *Geja* and took over the helm, allowing me to paddle the dinghy back to shore to complete the paperwork and fetch the remaining crew.

While in line at the police office waiting for passport stamps, other sailors sympathized with me. A charter skipper mentioned that an incoming boat was once fined when one of the crew took a quick dip in the bay while waiting for a spot on the customs quay. Seriously, what country routinely fines its visiting sailors/tourists?

With all of the paperwork sorted out, we were happy to leave town immediately. Actually, once you get your exit stamp, you *must* depart immediately,

Given her choice, Marikken decided she preferred sitting in a treehouse overlooking boats to being yelled at by nasty officials.

which is another Croatian rule. And don't even think of stopping for a swim in that little bay 15 miles down the coast.

Because of this one official asshole, who no doubt is a poorly paid guy who gets off by bossing others around, we were fed up with Croatia. Government workers seem slow to shake off the bad habits of the region's Communist past, casting a poor light on an otherwise lovely country. Thus my love-hate relationship.

Some 20 miles south of Cavtat is the Montenegrin border and the entrance to a series of bays, including the spectacular Kotor Fjord, which goes 15 miles inland. With a full-boat crew of five onboard, we sailed into Montenegro, bypassing the commercial customs pier at Zelenika for the more yacht-friendly one at Kotor. In just 20 minutes, I had a cruising permit and stamped passports in hand. Both the harbor master and police official were smiling and friendly. How nice to be in a country that seems to appreciate its visitors!

Stunning Kotor Fjord is surrounded by steep mountains, some of which are over 5,000 feet tall, Think Yosemite Valley partially submerged in the sea, or a Norwegian fjord with the heat turned up. No wonder it has UNESCO designation. The megayachts have certainly discovered the place, but as there is no charter base, there were relatively few private sailboats to battle with for mooring space. Mooring costs were a relative bargain, too, as we paid just 30 euros for a spot on the quay just outside of Kotor's town walls. This included water, power, and mooring lines.

Our week ended in the raucous and raunchy Montenegrin town of Budva, the country's biggest tourist destination. One would never guess that a Pippi Longstocking film was shot here in the '70s. Surprisingly, Budva is off the

map of most western tourists, and is instead frequented by Serbians, Russians, Ukrainians, and others of Orthodox affiliation. Yet there is eye candy everywhere, day and night, and the folks come to party. When the outdoor bars in the old town shut down, people head for the clubs, the newest being the awkwardly-named 5,000 person capacity Top Hill.



Outdoor dining.



After three nights and new crew in Budva, it was time for a complete change of scenery and an overnight sail to Italy. As *Geja* remained in the marina, I began the checkout process with the police. Despite not being at the customs quay, and with the crew still wandering around town, I completed the exit paperwork with little fuss — a far cry from the previous week's exit from Croatia.

Winds were forecast to be 11-16 knots on the beam for the 24-hour crossing to Italy, which sounded great. But 10 hours into an initially fast and pleasant crossing, in the middle of the night, the seas picked up and little *Geja* started being tossed around like a toy boat in a bathtub. Sleeping and eating were difficult, and an increasing amount of water from some unknown source squirted up from the shallow bilge when we heeled too much. I dreaded sunrise, as I didn't really want to see the sea state. Feeling it was bad enough.

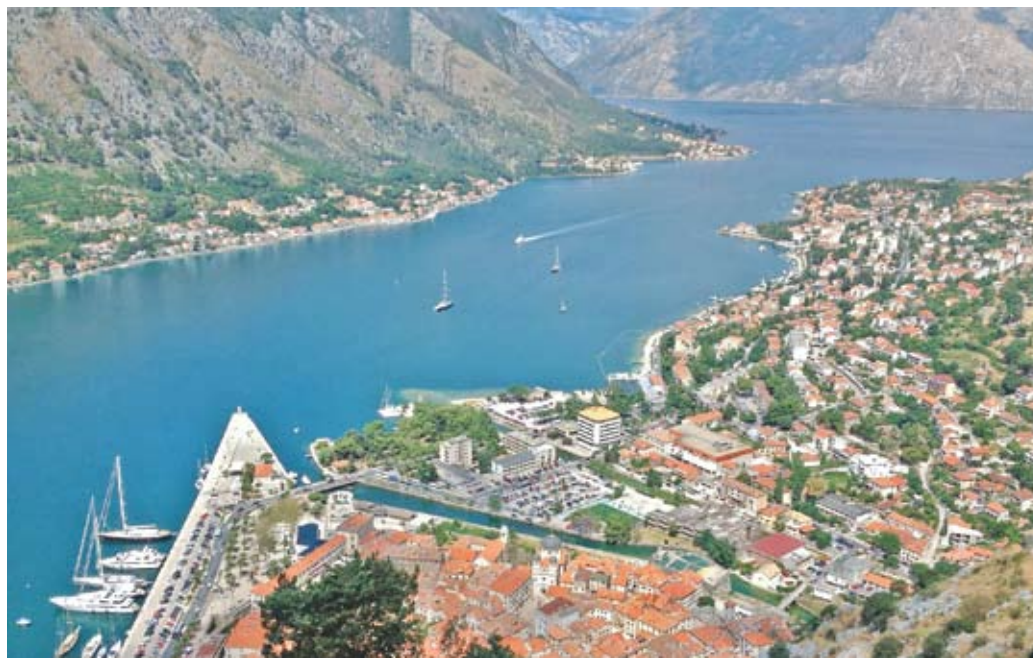
Daylight confirmed that the sea was a raging mess. The wind was only 20 to



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Scenes from cruising Montenegro. Clockwise from above: Stunning Kotor Fjord. A full crew aboard 'Geja'. Lovely Cervic Novi. Perast, one of Andrew's favorite towns in the Med. Our Lady of Rocks monastery near Perast. When the gals misbehaved, they were towed behind 'Gaja'.

25 knots, but the seas had built over a distance of about 300 miles. I was completely disheartened to see that we still had 60 miles to go. But it wasn't all bad, as daybreak brought a pod of dolphins, and I got to watch them surf down waves. This was something that I didn't think I'd ever see in the Med. In addition, we were under sail, and able to point to our desired section of the Italian coast.

We were tired and hungry, and *Geja* was heavily reefed as we neared the Italian coast. I'd heard bad things about Bari, so we pointed toward a little port just north of it. But when we reached Santo Spirito, there was nobody around to guide us to a dock, and there were no apparent open spots. The pilot books had been — as they often are — annoying optimistic about finding a place to tie up. So down to Bari we rolled in the ongoing swell.

Once we were at Bari, an attentive

yacht club employee helped us to a nice side-tie, at which point we all collapsed onto the floating wooden docks. Cold beers in hand, of course. Two cops showed up soon thereafter, officially checking us into the European Union with little fuss and no cost. Bari turned out to be a great overnight stop, with the yacht club next to the busy historic old town.

It was great to be back in Italy! I'll tell you more about it next month.
— andrew 08/15/12