

Latitude 38

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WE GO WHERE THE WIND BLOWS



CHANGES





Spread; The isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, home to the San Giorgio Sailing Club where 'Geja' got a berth. Insets from top left: Vik and crew joined the gondolas with their inflatable. The view of St. Mark's Square from 'Geja's slip. The famous 300-year-old Rialto Bridge over the Grand Canal.

to Pacific. My *Witch* was the only vessel in the locks on the way down!

Sept. 2012 - Feb. 2014 —Puerto Barrillas, El Salvador.

May 2014 — La Cruz, Mexico.

Now you're up to date. Stay in touch if/when you feel the urge, and I threaten to do the same.

— steve 11/26/2014

**Geja — 1976 Islander 36
Andrew Vik
A Wet and Stormy Med
(San Francisco)**

Not to repeat what I reported last month, but for the seventh straight summer my salty old Islander 36 *Geja*

and I, both hailing from San Francisco, enjoyed an exciting voyage in the Med. More specifically, it was in the northern Adriatic Sea. Croatia's Dalmatian Coast had been an excellent foreign home to *Geja* for five summers, so I'd already covered much of the Adriatic Sea at least twice. The one region that I'd only visited once was the far northern Adriatic, so this year it was Venice or bust!

The entrance to the Venice lagoon is about 50 miles due west of Piran, and getting there was a mellow light wind sail. Just as I'd observed in 2009, construction of the enormous gates that will prevent the Venice lagoon from flooding was still ongoing.

Inside the lagoon, of which the city of Venice is just a small part, things get a little crazy. While watercraft of all types zoom around, one must also monitor

Outrageously colorful Burano, which was 'Geja's stop before Venice, shares the same lagoon as the 'City of Canals'.



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the depthsounder and heed the various aids to navigation. Dredged routes are marked by rows of pilings, but not all routes are deep enough for a sailboat. I found it hard to distinguish between those routes that were deep enough and those that weren't.

With both trepidation and excitement,

we made it over thin water to Burano, the colorful little cousin of Venice. Unsure of where to moor, we were motioned by an older fellow over to a great side-tie, where we carefully aligned *Geja* to some vertical wooden pilings. The mooring was free, and permitted us to step off *Geja* into the

heart of Burano, which is world-famous for lace-making.

We backtracked a bit in the lagoon the next day, motoring nine miles into the heart of Venice. We couldn't help but get goosebumps while motoring around the sights of one of the most celebrated cities in the world. I did have to pay careful attention to traffic, however, as water buses, water taxis, gondolas, private boats and cruise ships all share the waterfront in front of famous St. Mark's Square.

There are several marinas in or near Venice, and we grabbed a spot at the sailing club on San Giorgio Maggiore, an island opposite St. Mark's Square. Berthed there, we had a priceless view of Venice from the cockpit. The fee was the same 70 euros — about \$100 — that we had become accustomed to paying in Croatia.

Despite all of my talk about summer

Forever crowded Piazza San Marco, the most famous plaza in the world, was just across the lagoon from 'Geja's berth.

GEJA



A free berth at Burano after sunset.

GEJA



storms, I'd yet to be caught in anything really nasty while underway. Shortly after tying up in Venice — which is less than fun when the harbormaster is guiding you by dinghy while screaming in Italian — the skies opened up once again. Our view of Venice disappeared, as did our need to rinse *Geja's* decks. But it was a mellow, short-lived little cell that I won't add to the summer thunderstorm tally, which then still stood at five.

When the sun returned, we boarded the dinghy for a very special experience — roaming the famous canals of Venice on our own little boat. We first had to cross the lumpy waters in front of St. Mark's Square, pushed by my little 3.5-hp two-stroke outboard, before choosing one of several entry points to Venice's internal waterways. Once inside, we then had to steer clear of all of the gondolas, which were mostly full of Chinese tourists. We spent much of our two days in Venice exploring the canals by dinghy.

We began Week Five by exiting the Venice lagoon at its southernmost point near Chioggia, from where it was a 57-mile sail down to Ravenna. The Italian side of the Adriatic is pretty much the opposite of the sailing paradise found on the Croatian side. It was goodbye to clear water and cute island towns, as the Italian coast is one long, unprotected, low-lying beach with murky water. Shallow water extends far out, and most harbors are expanded river basins with extensive seawalls. When the wind blows hard onshore, as it did on that day, the entire coast is a nasty lee shore. Our final 30 miles to Ravenna was a close reach, and it took some effort to point high enough into the confused seas to avoid getting pushed ashore.

After the rough ride, I was more than happy to tie up in Ravenna's enormous marina. But what a soulless place it was! Instead of festive charterers coming and going every day as in Croatia, this was essentially a massive parking lot

for boatowners from the entire region. On the plus side, it is a superbly protected marina without any morning commotion, allowing us to finally get some proper sleep. Sleep is a precious commodity on *Geja's* summer trips.

While my all-male crew enjoyed the beaches and many beach bars just south of the marina, I decided to finally solve an intermittent starting problem that I'd had for years with *Geja's*



old Yanmar 3GMF. The new battery I'd picked up in Opatija didn't make a difference, so I worked my way toward the starter, cleaning and troubleshooting all of the connections. Finally I gave up and hired some electricians from the marina. They poked and prodded, and finally emerged with the starter in their hands. It was shot, so they managed to swap in a factory replacement by the end of the day at a very fair price. I was happy to spend the money to solve that problem.

Another 30-mile sail south, this time with a stiff offshore breeze, brought us to Rimini, one of the original Mediterranean party destinations. A local yacht club in the river basin invited us to a free berth just steps away from Coconuts, one of Rimini's main nightclubs. Strangely, most of the girls we met in Rimini were Russian, not Italian. Go figure.

With four guys onboard and Week Five ending, the unthinkable happened. The head clogged for the second time in seven

IN LATITUDES



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY ANDREW VIK



What could possibly be wrong with this starter?



Clockwise from top left: Helping Italians with their nutrition. With Rob and Christine Aronen, vets of the 2006 Ha-Ha. St. James Cathedral, Sibenik, Croatia, a UNESCO site. Marikken of Norway on wheels. The big FW in Rimini, Italy. Typical lunch fare aboard 'Geja'. The individualistic beach scene in Rimini. Toilet troubles. Center photos; Kornati National Park, Croatia. Flipping out in Ravenna.

seasons. Not at the pump, but once again at the thru-hull end. (*Geja* has no holding tank, nor has anyone ever asked about it). As my female crew arrived for the final leg back to Croatia, there I was still trying to get things flowing again.

Finally, with the toilet end of the big discharge hose disconnected and leading into a bucket, I jumped into the water with a running water hose. Using a specially made rubber gasket, I jammed it up the thru-hull from the outside. That finally broke through the clog, backfilling the bucket inside with pure nastiness. But problem solved with minimal fuss and stink.

Although the east coast of Italy is featureless — aside from tens of thousands of beach umbrellas organized in neat, color-coded rows — we enjoyed a few

more stops down this coast as part of this summer's counterclockwise Adriatic tour. The food was delicious, towns were interesting and bustling, and the people were extra-friendly.

Fano was our departure point for the 100-mile overnight crossing back to Croatia. The weather had been unstable, and the forecast not great, but we gave it a try. But after a couple of hours of the waves not letting up, and an amazing but scary lightning storm brewing dead ahead, we changed our minds. We hung a right and enjoyed a lovely nighttime broad reach back to the Ital-

ian coast, a bit farther south than where we'd begun. All the while, the lightning show out over the sea became ever more intense.

We departed again the next morning from Senigallia, sailing part of the way in calm seas and clear skies, completing the overnight trip back to Croatia. At midday the next day, Med-moored in Sali with passports freshly stamped, we were hit by a massive thunderstorm that blew through, dumping ridiculous amounts of rain. Let's call this thunderstorm number six.

My Norwegian crew and I spent the remaining days casually island-hopping down the coast toward Split, with sunny skies and excellent sailing conditions. At 80 degrees, the sea temperature was still quite warm for late August. (I'd seen it as high as 85 during the trip). Maybe the unusually warm sea contributed to this summer's strange weather.

But it was while back in Trogir, getting *Geja* put away for the winter, that I was hit by the mother of all storms. Anchored near the castle, I spent an entire night getting blasted by wind and rain. The lightning, which came in multiple flashes per second, came closer and closer. So I shut everything down aside from my iPhone, which I used to research what happens to humans when lightning strikes a boat. The results were not encouraging, but I survived uninjured. Call me a wimp — I was freaked out — but we just don't experience this in California. Nor do I expect such weather at the peak of the peak season in the Med.

The anchorages of Kornati National Park were so great that 'Geja' hit them at both the beginning and the end of the cruising season.



GEJA

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To remove *Geja's* sails for the winter, I pulled alongside the bustling quay in Trogir. There was no shortage of assistance, with competent folks eager to help get the sails down and folded. One such fellow was a higher-up at Ireland's

Royal Cork YC, the oldest yacht club in the world. Apparently they're having a big 300th anniversary celebration in 2020.

Communications technology has evolved enormously during my past seven summer cruises.

Just a few years ago, foreign travelers would sometimes pick up a local SIM card in order to make local calls and texts. Now, the main thing that matters is that the SIM card offers an Internet connection for our SIM-unlocked smartphones. Most communication is done in writing these days, and I'm not talking email or even standard SMS. These days one needs to have Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, Viber, Snapchat, and Tinder in order to keep in touch with old and new friends.

Tinder is an interesting app for the single traveler, as only people within a certain distance who each find the other attractive can chat with each other. During one of the stops this summer, in a small and quiet little town, one of my crew managed to connect with some backpacker girls that were Tindering at a bar just a few minutes away from the boat. ***Tinder isn't always this extremely***
In addition to having one of the best beaches in Croatia, Primosten is known for its huge and beautiful vineyards.

efficient, but stands to have a big impact on dating life, both at home and when 'travel dating'.

The problem with all this connectivity is that I often find my crewmates looking down at their devices. Few read books, probably because they no longer have the attention span to last past 160 characters. They devote so much attention to their Facebook 'friends' and Instagram 'followers', and although Tinder can deliver results, the time spent swiping through possible matches and sending pointless messages is huge. Hopefully the connectivity fad will fade; otherwise I'll install a data-jamming device on *Geja*.

Despite the constant weather watch, I enjoyed an awesome 790 miles of summer cruising, 40% of which were sailed with the engine off. Ten crewmembers from eight different countries joined me this summer. *Geja* was underway for 38 out of 50 days, overnighing in 34 different locations, 12 of which were new to me. Due mostly to Croatia's infamous anchoring fees, we paid overnight fees in all but eight places.

I'm a really lucky guy to have stumbled across such an inexpensive but capable sailboat as *Geja* in the Med. Even luckier still to have so many good friends with whom to share the cruising experience. Life ain't bad.

— *andrew 11/12/2014*



Vik concurs with the belief that talking to people is better than texting them.

GEJA

