

Sailing

The Beauty of Sail

The Most
GORGEOUS
Cruising

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Bob Perry critique:
Beneteau 43

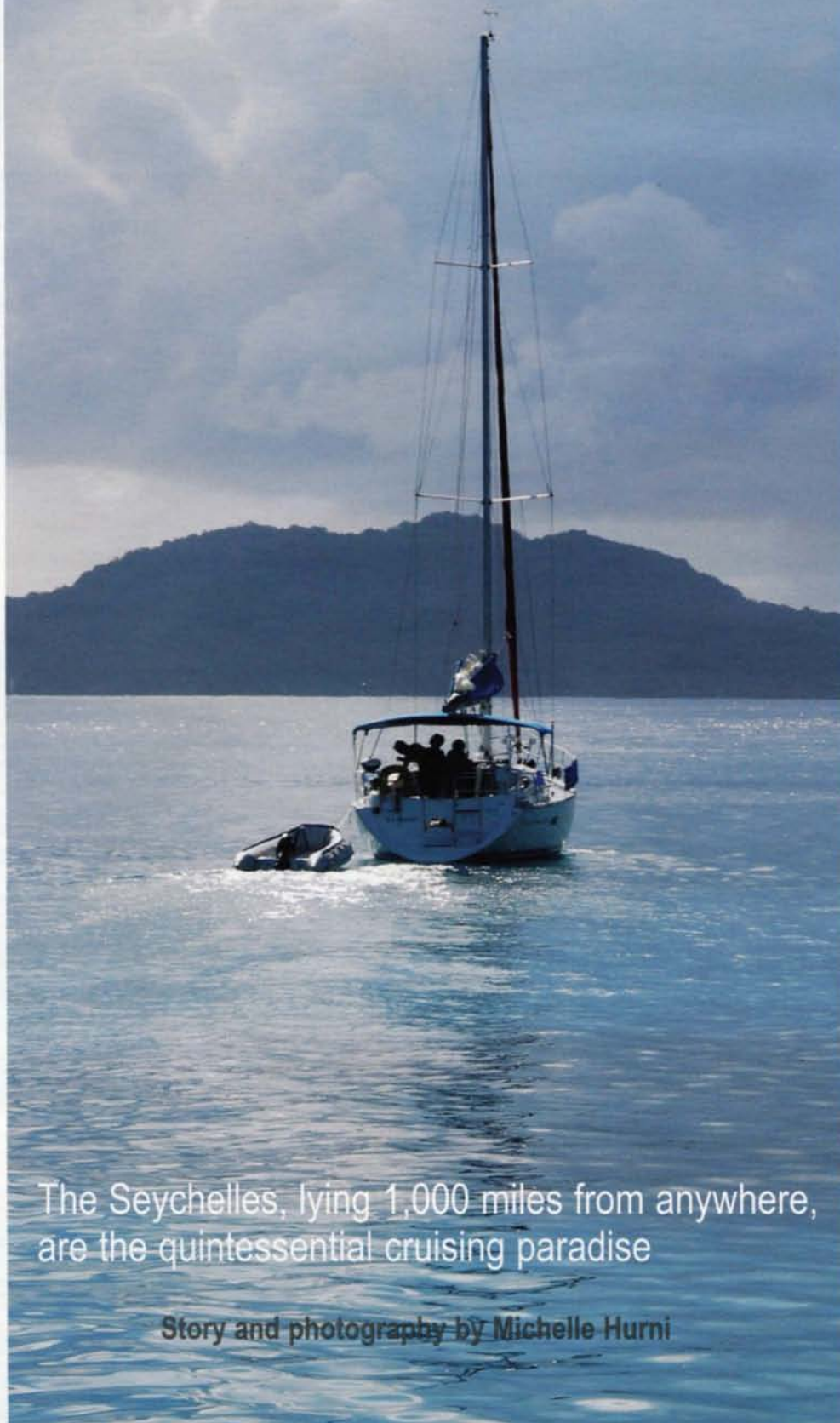
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Light-air sunset
on Storm Bay

Fitting
Out
ISSUE

Escape to Exoticland

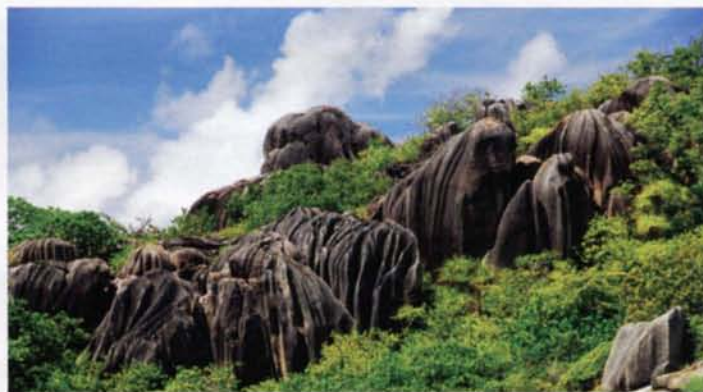


The Seychelles, lying 1,000 miles from anywhere, are the quintessential cruising paradise

Story and photography by Michelle Hurni

As landlocked Coloradans, with only small lakes to sail, we look forward to chartering in exotic destinations as an escape from the mountains. And the Seychelles, a remote group of islands in the Indian Ocean, was a dream destination for us. The Seychelles tourism slogan, “As pure as it gets,” doesn’t come close to describing this lush, undiscovered paradise. This archipelago of 115 tranquil islands located just a few degrees south of the equator and around 1,000 miles off the east coast of Africa should be the poster destination for all travel advertising.

It seemed there would be no way to surpass our preconceived notion of the islands, and yet, upon arrival, the sheer beauty surrounding us blew away our expectations. Rain forest canopies carpet the highly contoured main island of Mahé; with granite rock faces that shoot to the sky. The island is ringed with world-renowned beaches, with sand like



The unique granite rock formations punctuate the hillside of Mahé, above. *Bay Berry* heads to her next anchorage, left.

sugar; add a little water and it seemed to dissolve under our feet. The high equatorial temperatures and humidity barely matter with the balmy water footsteps away, and lying just off shore, a coral reef under crystal-clear turquoise water just begged to be explored. A driving tour of the island unveiled a giant tortoise, a local’s market, Creole cooking and a 100-acre spice farm, the Jardin du Roi, or King’s Garden.

We, however, were in the Seychelles for one thing—sailing. For 10 days we lived aboard a chartered Sunsail 36-foot Beneteau, *Bay Berry*. It was the perfect size for our family of three to sail around the inner islands and not mutiny. My husband George and I had planned this trip for three years. Our teenage son Garrett was a reluctant participant, but we managed to steal him away from the public education system so he could travel the world for two months. After the first few days on the boat he was well adjusted, complete with a tan like milk chocolate.

A basic Seychelles itinerary is to sail 30 miles from the capital of Victoria to the secluded “inner islands,” island hop, and then return to Mahé on the final day. The main order of business once on the boat was simple: sail, snorkel, dive and explore. With a relaxed cruising attitude, life doesn’t get much better. The diving among soft coral is astounding, curious turtles swim to your mask at every bend and sharks swim below us, sometimes only five feet away.

Bay Berry and cruising mate Monkey Puzzle anchor off Anse Lazio on the island of Praslin.



One striking difference we discovered between Seychelles and our usual sailing ground of the British Virgin Islands is the food. Fruit trees abound on the islands, and the numerous varieties of bananas, jackfruit, papaya, mango and soursop contribute to the unique flavors on the islands. Upon entering the markets, however, we found the ability to stock a boat nearly nonexistent. Shelves contained paper goods, but basics such as butter, milk, cereal and rice were in short supply. After traveling to three markets, we admitted defeat and returned to *Bay Berry* with only two bags of groceries to our name.

Not wanting to eat out every night, we followed the locals to a hidden treasure—takeaway. Nearly every island has a small house with a sliding window and a smorgasbord of offerings: curried octopus, chicken green curry, lentils and rice. We were hooked. With plastic containers brought from the boat, we stocked up and ate well every day without breaking the budget.

From reading the sailing guides to the Seychelles, we were under the impression the sailing would be more challenging than we previously experienced. Once underway, however, we found consistent 10- to 12-knot winds from the southeast, the anchoring sound and the water heavenly. On most nights we were the only boat in the bay or joined by only a few.

When we stopped in the city of La Digue, we had our first experience at Med mooring. Dropping anchor in the middle of the bay, we reversed *Bay Berry* until we could get a line to a ring in the sea wall. We were joined by two other sailboats, side by side, fender to fender. It was a regular slumber party. An Australian/German couple was on our starboard side, and a group from South Africa to port. In the close, hot tropical quarters, friendly insults were flung around like water between the Australian and South Africans, while we lounged on the deck of *Bay Berry*, soaking in the sights as the ferry came from Mahé for the night and the local children dove off the dock.

It's the company who can make or break a trip, and while we were prepared to spend our time in Seychelles as a family, we enjoyed making new friends. So we happily accepted an invitation to join our new neighbors aboard *Monkey Puzzle*. Chris is a photographer from Australia, who was supporting himself as a chemist. He was in the process of moving to Germany to be with his wife Peggy, who is in marketing. Over a bottle of wine and travel stories, we found ourselves to be compatible sailing partners.





Bay Berry sails around Curieuse, above. Garrett lowers the anchor off Anse Lazio, and George, far left, swims with a friendly turtle. The author enjoys the sweet breeze, top left. The crystal Indian Ocean meets the sugar sand of Anse Lazio, top.

The next day, we discovered we had the same snorkeling destination—ilet Saint Pierre—the perfect uninhabited island. It was a mass of rounded rocks with a small sand beach and palm trees swaying above the water. Green turtles stuck their heads out of their shells in curiosity, nurse sharks hid under ledges, and batfish on steroids surrounded us under water. Blending the two worlds together are dramatic rock formations, rising from the sandy bottom in vertical valleys.

With no discussion of spending more time together, we finished our wine and returned to our respective boats. Then we heard Chris call across the water, “See you in Anse Lazio,” which we immediately accepted as a challenge. The boats were a perfect match for our impromptu regatta, with *Bay Berry* and *Monkey Puzzle* being sisterships. Soon, however, Chris and Peggy were able to eke out a little more speed from *Monkey Puzzle*. OK, it was only about 100 yards, but enough for us to wonder what we were doing wrong. We pulled out the binoculars, spying on the couple on the deck of *Monkey Puzzle*, trying to figure out what they were doing better.

Our radio cackled and the taunts from the Aussie began. “Where are you guys? I can’t get a good photo, I only have a 300-millimeter lens.” They only beat us around the bend into Anse Lazio by three minutes, tops.

The following day, there was nothing for us to do but redeem ourselves. The only rule was no engines, and the course was set, around Curieuse and back to ilet Saint Pierre to snorkel with the turtles again. Before weighing anchor, our main was up and we sailed off, dead even with *Monkey Puzzle*. We stayed long enough to wave and that’s the last they saw of us. With the wind gusting over Curieuse to the southeast, we headed north, tucking in close to Aride, a protected island, before coming about and skimming close to the jagged shoreline. *Monkey Puzzle* set off on a tight beat to the northeast. We watched them fall behind as we came about to the south, rounding the corner out of sight. When we saw them next, we were obeying the no-engine rule as Chris’ voice boomed across the radio, “Now you’re just toying with us.” And we casually dropped anchor while still under sail.

By the time *Monkey Puzzle* pulled alongside *Bay Berry* at ilet Saint Pierre, George was showering, Garrett was napping, and we had appetizers and cold beer waiting. We had won our own version of the America’s Cup, taking it back from the hands of the Aussies again. It was an unexpected prize for the Hurni family, topping off our time in the Seychelles.