

Ducks In A Row

The importance of logistics for world travel.

Story
and
Photos
by
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and
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Dirona in spectacular Hall Arm in Fiordland, New Zealand

“Fanning Radio, Fanning Radio. This is Dirona on 16.”

For several hours we'd been trying to contact Fanning Island, a remote atoll about 1,000 miles south of Honolulu and our first foreign port since leaving Hawaii. The atoll is part of Kiribati (pronounced 'Kiribas'), an archipelago strung across the Pacific Ocean near the equator. Before leaving Hawaii, we'd corresponded with a customs official in the capitol city, Tarawa. They had advised us on entry procedures and requirements, copying their counterpart at Fanning Island. Our instructions were to contact Fanning Radio on VHF channel 16 when entering Kiribati waters, but so far we'd had no response.

Not wanting to miss slack water in the entry channel, we proceeded through without radio contact and anchored off the main village with our Q flag flying. A small skiff soon arrived with four people on board: customs, immigration, biosecurity, and the boat's operator. After inspecting our boat and paperwork, everything was in order, but the immigration official levied a \$500 fine for not having exit stamps on our passports. The official in Tarawa had stated that we only needed a Zarpe, or clearance paperwork, for the vessel. (The U.S. doesn't require any formal clearance processing for departing U.S. pleasure craft and their crew, but we did specifically obtain the required Zarpe in Honolulu.)

We asked if one of the officials was Jonathan (not his real name) and the customs official looked very surprised and said yes. We showed him the email thread with Tarawa and this persuaded the immigration officer to drop the fine and process our entry. When we later went ashore, we learned that the island's generator had broken down long ago and the entire island had been without power since. That is why we couldn't reach them by radio, and all those emails from Tarawa copying Jonathan were never seen.

Traveling around the world in a small boat is romantic and exciting. But any sort of marine travel between countries brings the challenges of clearing in and out, obtaining spares and provisions, refueling, and in our case, travelling with our cat, Spitfire. In this second of three articles, we'll discuss what we learned during our trip around the world to make the logistic complexities fade into the background so we could enjoy the trip. The first article (56,000 Miles and Counting, *PassageMaker* April, 2017) covered planning and various aspects of being underway; the final installment will cover how we rigged *Dirona* for the trip.

Clearing In and Out

Prior to departing Hawaii in early 2013, we had plenty of experience traveling into and out of the U.S. by boat, but only to and from Canada. Neither country requires clearance for departing pleasure craft, only entry processing, and we'd always had CANPASS or NEXUS cards, so were able to clear through over the phone in most cases. Even upon returning to the U.S. from St. Lucia after nearly four years away, we still were able to clear entirely over the phone through Florida's Small Vessel Reporting System

Every other country we visited around the world, however, required departing pleasure craft to formally clear out of the country and arriving pleasure craft to present exit paperwork from the previous port. Most clearance processing was done in person, typically aboard the vessel. At a minimum, we needed clearance from both customs and immigration. We typically also needed biosecurity clearance for our cat, and possibly

any foodstuffs on board. And sometimes additional officials were involved, such as local police or Coast Guard officers.

We research in advance the clearance requirements and fees, then contact local officials to confirm our understanding of the rules. This is particularly important when traveling with pets. A record of this correspondence smoothed our entry on several occasions. In some countries, the process is time-consuming, because officials are located throughout town and have to be visited in the appropriate order to obtain clearance from each. In the South Pacific, where yachts of all sizes regularly clear in and out, a flourishing agent business supports visiting yachts and efficiently handles the process for a reasonable fee. We never needed an agent, but retaining one could save hours of time and frustration and is a good value when the cost is sufficiently low.

Generally the clearance process has gone most smoothly in countries with well-documented entry procedures, such as New Zealand, Australia, and St. Helena. We found agent support particularly helpful in French Polynesia, Tonga, Fiji, and Vanuatu, where the clearance process was less clear, more cumbersome, or had special requirements for pet entry. Overall, Fanning Island was our most difficult entry, and South Africa was the most difficult country to exit. We had to clear out of each South African port as we moved within the country, and spent nearly a day meeting their paperwork requirements before being allowed to leave the country.

Most countries issue a visitor visa or entry permit when you arrive, some bounded to no more than 90 days. Australia was the only country we visited that required a visa be obtained prior to arrival. Before leaving Hawaii, we also got six-month multi-entry visas for New Zealand, as we'd be staying there at least that long. New Zealand gives visitors a three-month visa that can be renewed if you leave and return, but we didn't want to be forced to leave the country on a 90-day schedule.

Separate from immigration limits, all the countries we visited had restrictions on how long a foreign boat could be in the country without tax implications. These limits were generally quite long and had little impact on our trip decisions. Both New Zealand and Australia, for example, issued 12-month temporary import permits, and we were able to extend the Australian permit for a second year.

We buy courtesy flags for every country we expect to visit and spread them out in the pilothouse in preparation for swapping with our Q flag once cleared through. Several officials commented that they appreciated our showing respect for their country by having the appropriate flag on board.

Our printer/scanner gets heavy use during our travels. Often in preparation for clearing in or out, an online document needs to be printed and filled out, signed, and submitted online or presented in person. The ability to scan, email, and photocopy documents is also essential, so we recommend adding an all-in-one printer/copier/scanner to your equipment list. We also want

Above: Taking delivery of a 2-cubic-meter pallet on the Gold Coast, Australia. When you only shop twice a year, it's a big one.

Middle: Purchasing a local cellular data SIM card at Digicel in Port Vila, Vanuatu. We have unlocked Android phones and have so far been able purchase local cellular data SIM cards in nearly every country we've visited.

Right: Roger Phillips of Biosecurity Vanuatu giving Spitfire an examination before we depart for New Zealand. Not surprisingly, New Zealand was the most difficult country to enter with Spitfire. Part of the entry requirements was that he be treated for parasites by a local veterinarian and inspected by a government veterinarian at the port prior to our arrival.



to have records of our clearance paperwork in case we have to surrender them at the next port, or we must fill out paperwork brought by officials who clear us. And for organizing all that paperwork, a binder with A4-size divider pockets is quite useful.

Going Local

Typically the first things we do after clearing into a new country are to purchase a local cellular data SIM card and obtain local currency. Since James is working full-time, we're heavy satellite communications users. This is between 100- and 1,000-times more expensive than cellular data, so we only use it where Wi-Fi and cellular are unavailable.

The two approaches to international cellular data are to buy an international plan in your country of origin or use an unlocked GSM phone and buy cellular data in the country you are visiting. We found that purchasing local SIMs was the better performing and more economical approach. We both have unlocked Android phones and have so far been able purchase local cellular data SIM cards in nearly every country we've visited. Unlimited communications plans in any form, whether Wi-Fi or cellular, are rare. Even Wi-Fi normally is metered at many international locations, especially in remote islands.

Before leaving Hawaii, we purchased small amounts of local currency for the countries we'd be visiting in the South Pacific to handle any clearance fees. Except for Fanning Island and Aneityum in Vanuatu, local currency was available from ATMs everywhere we cleared through. Something we had not considered before leaving was foreign transaction fees on ATM and credit cards. Partway

through the trip we noticed these fees mounting and switched to credit and ATM cards without foreign transactions fees.

In New Zealand and Australia, where we'd be for many months, we opened local bank accounts. Both countries have good online financial infrastructure and local accounts simplified merchant transactions. We also got better foreign-exchange rates when wire-transferring a larger lump-sum to the foreign account instead of piecemeal through an ATM.

Surface Mail

We lived aboard for a few years while still in Seattle and set up a UPS box near our marina. This gave us a real address, not a Post Office Box, which worked for all couriers. The UPS box worked well for mail in addition to packages of all shapes and sizes. Where possible, we set up all our accounts to be paperless, reducing the amount of mail that we receive and allowing us to handle things remotely. We also requested that mail-order companies remove us from their catalog mailing list.

When we left Seattle, we kept the UPS box and it continued to work well for us. Any surface mail we get just goes there. If we're expecting something or it's been a while, UPS will forward the mail to wherever we are for a reasonable price and discard any catalogs or advertising flyers on request.

Getting the Goods

While in New Zealand, we needed to replace our house battery bank. Sourcing the batteries yielded some interesting surprises.

International Pet Travel Tips

For traveling with pets, we recommend *Where There Is No Pet Doctor* by David Lavigne. We bought it mostly for medical purposes, but it turned out to have an excellent section on preparing a pet for international travel. For example, from it we learned that the microchip Spitfire had was U.S.-specific. Countries such as New Zealand now have scanners that will read a U.S. chip, but the scanners in many countries won't detect it. We got Spitfire an international chip to be on the safe side.

Most countries we visited wanted to see the paperwork recommended in the book, but so far only Hawaii, Vanuatu, and New Zealand have cared to scan the chip. After a couple of scares where a veterinarian's scanner malfunctioned, we bought our own scanner, a Datamars Micromax. It's good insurance for just over \$100.

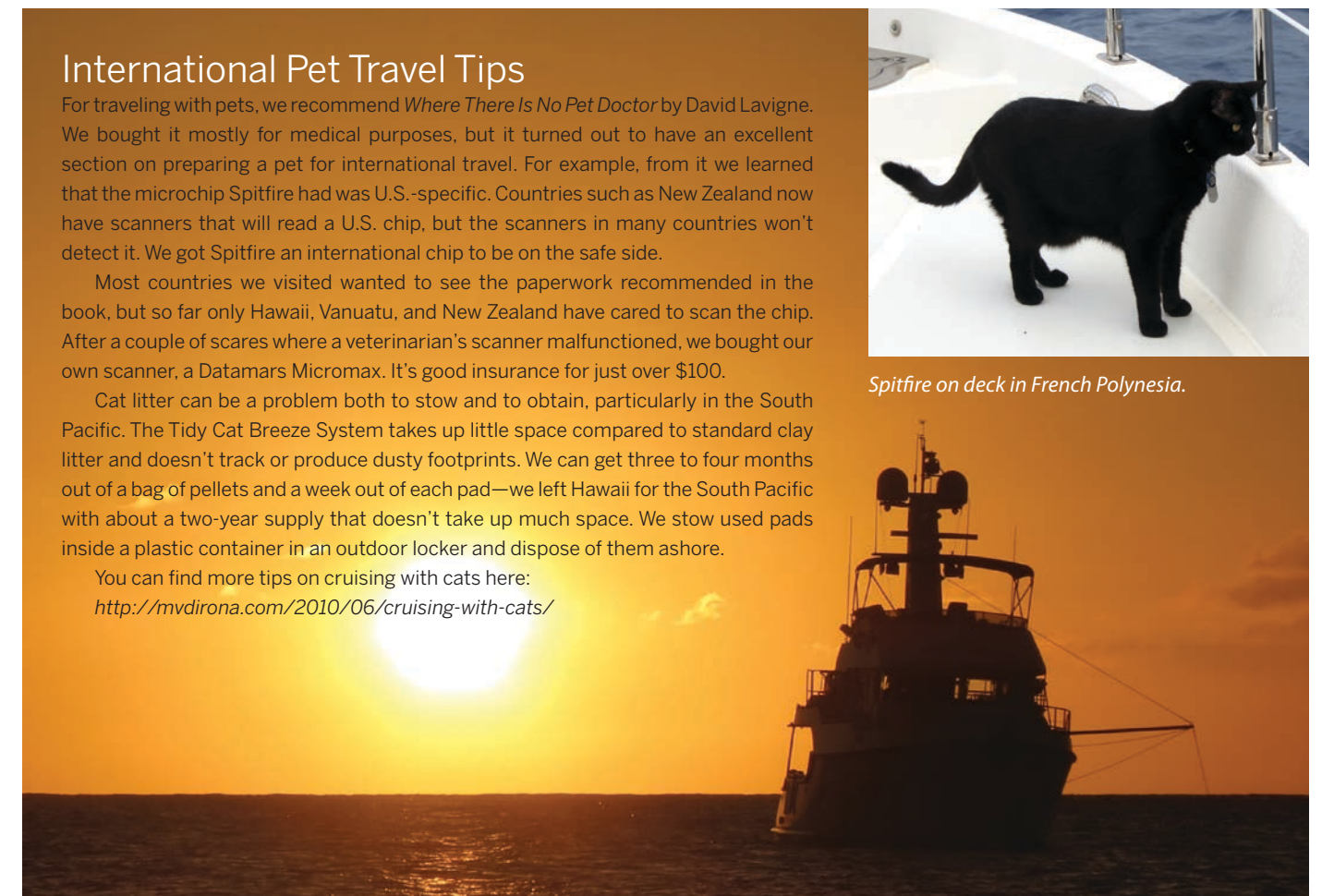
Cat litter can be a problem both to stow and to obtain, particularly in the South Pacific. The Tidy Cat Breeze System takes up little space compared to standard clay litter and doesn't track or produce dusty footprints. We can get three to four months out of a bag of pellets and a week out of each pad—we left Hawaii for the South Pacific with about a two-year supply that doesn't take up much space. We stow used pads inside a plastic container in an outdoor locker and dispose of them ashore.

You can find more tips on cruising with cats here:

<http://mvdirona.com/2010/06/cruising-with-cats/>



Spitfire on deck in French Polynesia.



Almost all pricing quotes were for the standard New Zealand retail price, without any discount for buying eight batteries and spending over \$8,000 in a single purchase. Quotes in the U.S. for eight batteries were at least 35% less than in New Zealand. We expected the cost of shipping more than a half-ton of merchandise would exceed the price advantage, so our natural inclination was to not even consider that option.

The interesting lesson here was that shipping can be amazingly cost-effective. We shipped the batteries via sea freight from Florida to Auckland for just under \$800, including all clearance and transport fees, saving more than \$2,000 compared to purchasing the batteries in New Zealand. The disadvantage of sea freight is that it is slow, taking just a bit more than 30 days.

Once we'd learned how economical sea freight was, we shipped a pallet of goods to ourselves roughly once a year. Many products we use are far less expensive sourced from the highly competitive U.S. market. Other items, such as 60Hz appliances or the marine coating we use on our outside teak, are simply unavailable in many parts of the world.

Our approach to sea freight is to decide where we're going to be in three months and use that as a shipping destination. We then place our orders for delivery to our UPS store, which aggregates all of the boxes onto a pallet. A regional transporter delivers the pallet to a Seattle freight-forwarder, which arranges transport

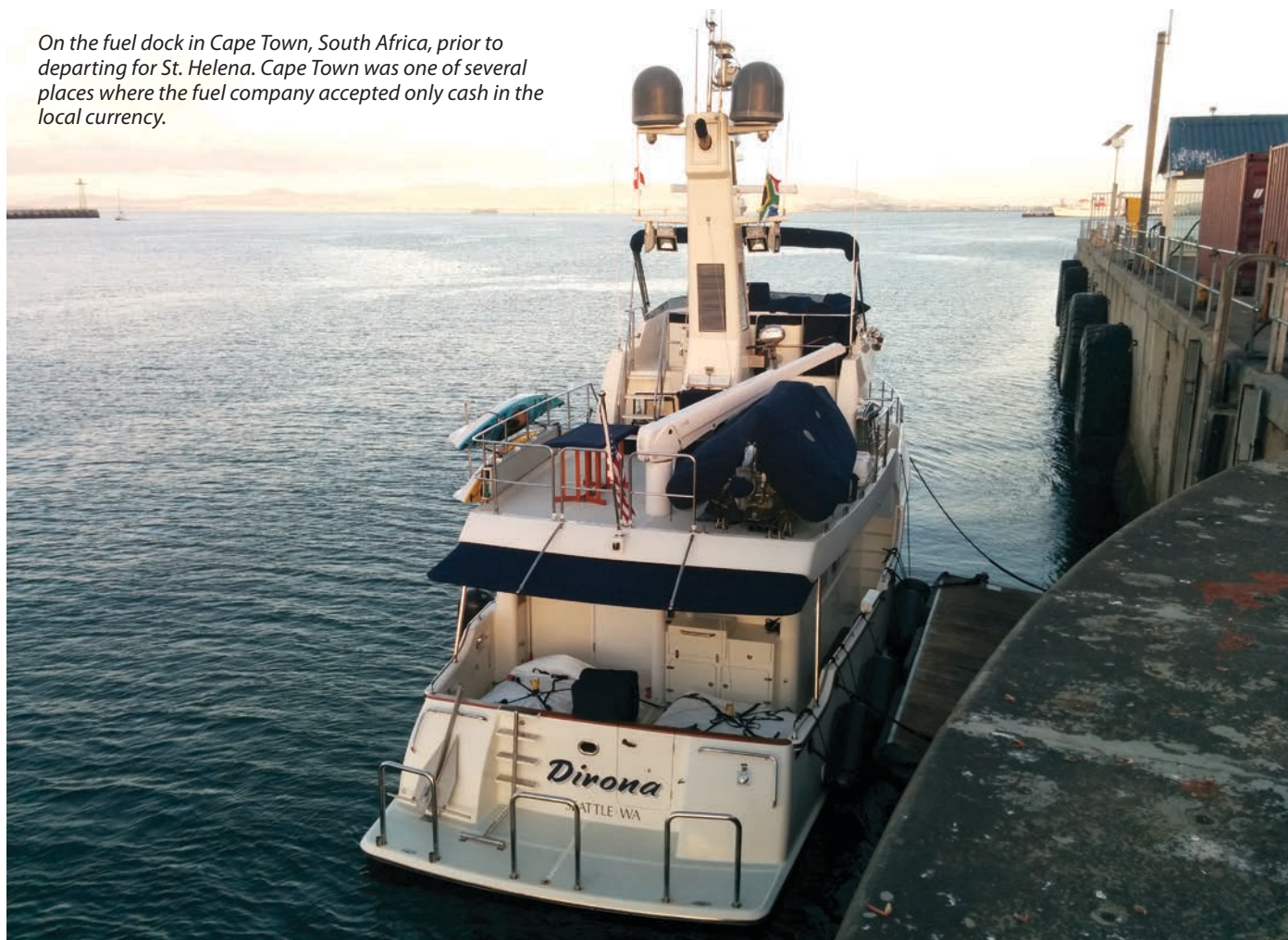
to the destination. On the destination end, we arrange regional transport to deliver the pallet to the marina. Our Amazon Prime shipping time goes from two days to three months, but it sure is wonderful to see that pallet arrive.

We also carry parts in our luggage whenever we return home. Initially, we carefully packaged the parts in cardboard boxes, but everything was subject to unpacking for TSA inspection, and since cardboard doesn't take weather well, the airlines won't take any responsibility for damage to the boxes. We often had to pick them up separately from our luggage in the same area as oversized baggage. We later bought large collapsible duffel bags that we carry empty to the U.S. and bring back full on the return. This is more efficient and reliable.

Whenever shipping internationally, whether by sea freight or checked baggage, theft, damage, or loss is a relatively small but always present risk. We've had pretty good luck, where all sea freight has arrived complete and without any issues. We did lose one airline checked bag when returning to Auckland via Los Angeles.

All the countries we've brought goods into had some provision for duty-free import of parts for yachts in transit. Some, such as Fiji, required no paperwork, but a customs official had to personally deliver the items to the boat for a nominal charge. In New Zealand and Australia, paperwork prepared by a customs broker was required to import parts duty-free by pallet or in checked luggage through the airport.

On the fuel dock in Cape Town, South Africa, prior to departing for St. Helena. Cape Town was one of several places where the fuel company accepted only cash in the local currency.



Above: Rodrigues, Mauritius was among our most difficult fuel fills of the trip. After spending the morning filling out paperwork and purchasing the fuel, the truck arrived with only a four-inch diameter hose and no nozzle to control the flow from their high-speed pump. We had to gravity-feed to avoid spills and were lucky to the job done in just one day. Middle: Withdrawing Mauritius Rupees at an ATM in Rodrigues, Mauritius. Partway through the trip we switched to credit and ATM cards without foreign transactions fees. Below: Hoisting our first foreign port after leaving Hawaii. Several officials commented that they appreciated our showing respect for their country by having the appropriate flag on board.

Fueling

We generally organize our fuel purchases in advance, particularly before and after long crossings. Rarely is this difficult. Where we have a choice, we prefer to fuel directly from a truck rather than marina fuel docks, partly because we got better pricing, but also because the fuel in a truck usually hasn't been sitting around long. In some cases, a truck is the only available option.

Most fuel fills went as planned, but at times there were a few challenges. Tonga, Rodrigues, and Cape Town, for example, only accepted cash in local currency for fuel purchases. In Tonga we used an agent who handled the fuel purchase on our behalf. For the other two we made ATM withdrawals in chunks over several days and stored the cash in our onboard safe. For Rodrigues, we withdrew Australian dollars in Darwin and converted the cash to Mauritius Rupees upon arrival. For Cape Town, we withdrew Rand locally. An ATM card with a high daily limit and no foreign transaction fees was particularly useful here.

In Port Villa, Vanuatu, the fuel dock doesn't keep enough fuel on hand to fill our boat. We'd ordered the fuel in advance, but they still had to order a truck to fill their tank once we'd arrived at the dock. We would have preferred to take the fuel directly from the truck since the marina tank was nearly empty and filling it stirred up a lot of rust and sediment (although little water), but that option wasn't available.

The two most difficult fuel fills of the trip were in Nuku Hiva, French Polynesia, and in Rodrigues, Mauritius. In Nuku Hiva we Med-moored in an open roadstead to prevent ocean surge from slamming *Dirona* into the solid concrete dock and ran a fuel hose a few feet across the water to the boat. Even though we'd ordered the fuel ahead of time, we still had to negotiate to get what we'd requested because a superyacht was attempting to buy everything they had.

In Rodrigues, we spent the entire morning filling a multi-page bunkering request document for the Port Captain, answering questions, such as "number of tons of fuel needed" and "initial and final delivery pressures requested." Once the Port Captain approved that form, we then needed to deposit our Australian cash directly into the fuel company's bank account, who needed to be present at the bank with us to approve the deposit. Then we could finally take on fuel. The fuel truck arrived with only a four-inch diameter hose used to bunker ocean-going freighters and no nozzle to control the flow from their high-speed pump. We had to gravity-feed to avoid spills and were lucky to complete the job in just one day.



Resources

Most countries document their clearance process online in some form, and noonsite.com has good information, including recent cruiser feedback. The site wasn't as useful for Spitfire, as their data focused on importing pets rather than keeping them on board. For clarification, we contacted the officials directly in every country we visited. Contact information often was on government department websites, but sometimes we had to work through other sources such as tourism offices for the right contact.

We bought appropriate-size 2x3-foot courtesy flags for each country we planned to visit from J&S Surplus (www.surplusinc.com). The flags are not very durable and didn't last more than a couple of months, but at under \$15 each, were cost-effective for countries for which we'd planned only short visits. For our longer stays in New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa, we bought additional flags.

For sea freight, you need a freight-forwarder that accepts shipments of less than a container, but will pack them into a container for shipping. When we shipped out of Miami, we used TransCaribe. All other times we shipped through Famous Pacific. Normally you would work with a shipping company at the origin location but we usually used the target country shipper. They would touch the shipment last, so we'd work with them if we needed to retarget a shipment to a different location or make other changes. Once we needed to transfer a pallet shipped to Melbourne to the Gold Coast in Australia because the shipment had been delayed for a month by a longshoreman strike on the west coast of the United States and we'd left Melbourne before it arrived. When arranging regional transport, ensure that they are equipped with a forklift or that forklift facilities are available at the destination to remove the pallet from the truck.

Spitfire Around the World

When we first started planning the trip around the world, we expected that travelling with our cat, Spitfire, would limit the countries we could visit. In reality, the French territory of New Caledonia was the only destination that we opted not to visit due to a minimum one-week on-shore quarantine period. Over the entire four-year trip, Spitfire only needed to be quarantined a single time, for 10 days in New Zealand.

Many countries have well-documented entry procedures for pets, but most are oriented toward commercial air travel where arrival times are predictable and the travel duration is measured in hours. When arriving by boat, travel dates depend on weather and the trip's duration is measured in days or weeks. We sometimes had to negotiate with officials to allow for longer travel windows.

Travelling with Spitfire taught us about several loopholes where some countries with stringent animal entry requirements are more lenient with animals traveling from specific countries. For example, pets brought by yacht into Australia are quarantined for a minimum of thirty days. But qualifying pets coming from New Zealand can enter quarantine-free, and New Zealand's minimum quarantine period is 10 days. Another example is that pets cannot be



Above: Heading to shore in the harbor taxi at St. Helena in the southern Atlantic Ocean. Two customs officials (left), and the harbor master (right) came out to clear us through, then we completed the clearance with immigration at the police station ashore.

brought into the United Kingdom by private yacht at all, except from Ireland. And Ireland follows standard EU quarantine-free procedures.

New Zealand was the most difficult country to enter with Spitfire. Despite a reputation for a difficult clearance process, Australia was relatively easy (in part because we were coming from New Zealand). Traveling between two U.S. ports was unexpectedly the second-most in difficulty and overhead. Bringing a pet from the mainland to Hawaii free of quarantine requires about four to five months advance preparation, most spent waiting for test results.

We only needed to formally import Spitfire into Hawaii, New

Below: At anchor off Bald Cone on Stewart Island, the southernmost of New Zealand's three major islands. A few days earlier we'd reached 47° 2' South as we passed Southwest Cape, one of the five Great Capes and the first of three that we've rounded.



Zealand, and Australia. All other countries had no requirements so long as he remained on board. Fiji, however, levied a bond of approximately \$500 to be refunded when customs sights the pet on exit. We've heard reports that it can be difficult to "find" the appropriate customs officials to recover the deposit on exit. Our Fiji agent posted the bond on our behalf and reclaimed their funds after we'd left.

Barbados was the only country where we had any issues with Spitfire being aboard and another example where a paper trail with an official was helpful. We had an email from a Barbados Ministry of Agriculture veterinary officer stating we could bring Spitfire into the country without formality so long as he remained on board. On arrival, though, we were told we needed an import permit. We produced the email and that resolved the situation. Later in our stay, two Barbadian customs officials sighted Spitfire on board and came to investigate a possible illegal importation. The paper trail was key to resolving that one, as well.

Conclusion

There is no question that travel between countries, whether by boat or otherwise, brings additional complexity. Each country has its own requirements and constraints, and, in remote locations, parts or supplies may be unavailable or difficult to obtain. The two-day delivery time many of us have become accustomed to may be closer to two months. But everything can be obtained and efficient logistical solutions are available for most problems.

Many of the techniques we covered here require a bit more advanced planning, but we are happy to invest time up front to simplify our lives later. In our around-the-world trip, we had surprisingly few difficult experiences with officials, and we've wasted relatively little time trying to repair or source unusual parts in remote locations. This makes the trip more enjoyable and less stressful, and we can spend more time having fun. We've finished this trip, but we're nowhere close to done. ■

About the authors: Jennifer and James Hamilton are authors of Waggoner companion guide *Cruising the Secret Coast: Unexplored Anchorages on British Columbia's Inside Passage*. They

have been cruising under power since 1999 and moved aboard full-time in 2009. In 2016 they completed a four-year trip around the world in their Nordhavn 52, Dirona, and have since travelled the North American east coast as far north as Newfoundland, Canada. They maintain a blog at mvdirona.com focused on trip highlights, mechanical systems, equipment, and approaches they've found useful along their journey. The site also includes a live map showing a real-time location fix on Dirona, current weather, fuel-on-hand, and fuel consumption rate.

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