

## A sailor's life for me

**A** lone with the elements, under the stars and out of sight of any land is where Phuket-based German business man and avid sailor Reinhard Haiber gets into his zone.

He's planning a solo sailing trip around the region soon and this time he'll be filming his voyage to make a documentary of the ethnically diverse people and cuisine of the Indonesian archipelago.

Reinhard, who runs Karma Lounge with his wife Lek in Karon, has spent the past few months preparing for his latest solo voyage on his 50-foot yacht *Pytheas Aura*, which will take him from Phuket to Malaysia and Indonesia.

Now in his fifties, Reinhard is well qualified for the new voyage with a lifetime of sailing experience behind him, which began in the Caribbean when he was just 11 years old. Since then, Reinhard has crossed the Pacific three times.

Growing up mainly in the Caribbean, Reinhard was the only white kid in an all-black school, run with British colonial discipline. It was during those early years that he learned how to build boats and sail them by the stars. He joined the Grenada national sailing team when he was 14 years old, before spending his high-school years in Canada.

"When I was in the Caribbean, it was a time of high-caliber yachting. It was very competitive and the dingy sailing training has been very useful," he said.

Reinhard's sailing skills got him into the Auckland Silver yacht race. That experience helped him land a job on a New Zealand yacht which he sailed to Tonga.

In those days sailors like Reinhard relied on their own expertise and the bare minimum in equipment to get them through a voyage, he explained, but for his planned solo trip, Reinhard is taking no chances and has packed his boat with the latest navigation and mechanical equipment.

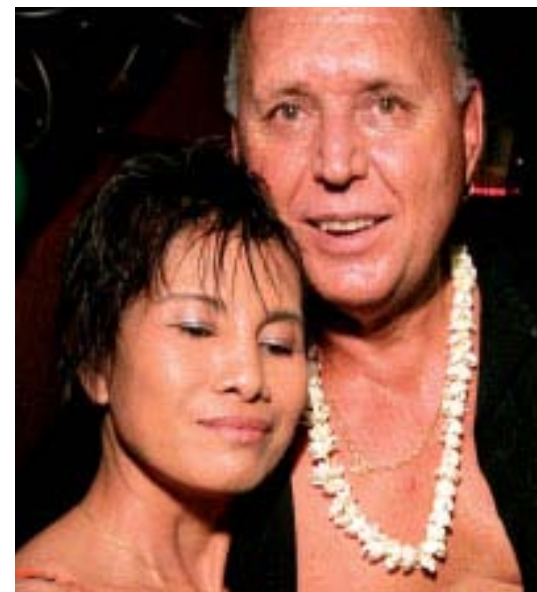
Reinhard built his first boat in New Zealand when he was in his early twenties. He bought the flexible ferro-cement hull from a local boat builder for just over 1,000 New Zealand dollars and made his own 29-foot sailboat, which he named *Ganesh*, after reading an article about the Hindu deity describing Ganesh as 'the god who rides the waves'.

Reinhard sailed into Phuket for the first time on *Ganesh* in 1981 and began making a living by operating boat charters.

"In those days, the only expats around Phuket and Phi Phi were yachties, but that all changed in the mid 80s with an influx of tourists after a well-known German travel documen-



LEFT: The 50-foot yacht *Pytheas Aura* will be Reinhard Haiber's home during a two-month solo trip to Indonesia and back this month. RIGHT: Reinhard and his wife Lek at their bar Karma Lounge in Kata.



tary was filmed here," he said. Feeling disillusioned, Reinhard left Phuket in the late eighties and headed back to the Caribbean in search of a bigger yacht.

He eventually found a slightly outdated racing boat in New York which was designed to give its sailor a combination of comfort and speed.

"I sailed that boat to the Caribbean but when I got there I found that it had changed, too, just like Phuket. It just wasn't the same place that I'd known when I lived there in the 60s."

Reinhard left the Caribbean in 1990 and sailed solo back to Asia, passing Martinique, Panama, Galapagos, Tahiti, Samoa, the Solomons and Australia on the way.

"I then realized that the whole world was changing. It's now much smaller than it was."

As much as such a well traveled man can, Reinhard calls Phuket home. He worked for Thai Marine Leisure – now Asia Marine – from 1992 to 2001 and then set up Karma Lounge in Kata. The venue has become a popular Friday night hang out for its live music and friendly atmosphere.

Reinhard's upcoming two-month solo voyage to Indonesia and back through Malaysia is a challenge to stay in touch with the adventurer in him get away from the comfort zone once again. However, he admits that his boat

has been fitted with many home comforts, for this trip, including a 110hp engine and three-blade propeller, which is powerful enough to travel against the current if necessary.

"Years ago, I wanted to inspire people to travel, but everyone's doing that now. I'm glad I was able to experience the real spirit of traveling when I did. Wherever you went, people would be curious about you and other travelers would greet each other. It's not like that anymore. To find that, you have to go to a place without an airport, and there aren't many places like that left anymore."

"When you are the first visitor to an island in five months you are made to feel a bit special. That experience is something you can't buy, no matter how wealthy you are."

Reinhard will be sailing the 'milk run' across the Pacific, so called because of the calm conditions when done at the right time of year, making the voyage relatively easy. But the milk run is not without its dangers for the not-so-well prepared.

Reinhard recounted a time when he sailed a familiar route to India and hadn't prepared for the complete loss of power he experienced in the open sea, leaving him without light and vulnerable in the dead of night.

Reinhard's biggest concern about sailing solo is the possibility of breaking a limb or suffer-

ing from appendicitis.

"When I was younger, that kind of thing didn't bother me but it's a bit more to think about these days, so I have installed a self-steering device, which can essentially sail the boat for me if I can't do so myself."

In a race, a yacht the size of Reinhard's would usually need a crew of ten or more to man the sails. He will compensate for the lack of crew on the upcoming trip with lazy jacks and roller furling systems, which help operate the sails mechanically.

"It's the discipline and challenge of sailing alone that attracts me. The thrill of sailing comes when you lose sight of land. I like the isolation. You have some pretty far out thoughts. You realize our insignificance. You deal with your own fears."

"At the end of the day, no matter how much technology you have on board, you still rely on your basic sailing skills and senses, which are sharpened when you are at sea. There are always five or six rhythmic sounds going on when you're sailing. If one of those sounds changes pitch, then you notice. It means the wind has picked up or something has changed."

Reinhard will be setting his new course and leaving Phuket on his solo voyage to Indonesia this month and plans to upload daily updates to his website ([www.karmalounge.asia](http://www.karmalounge.asia)) during the journey.

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