

## SPICE ISLANDS DARWIN AMBON YACHT RACE - 2017

Having been a recreational 'day sailor' around Darwin Harbour for many years, I was keen to explore further and jumped at the chance to crew on one of the boats taking part in the Spice Islands Darwin to Ambon Yacht Race in August. This was an easy process via the Race website with skippers and crew being matched and introduced – just like Tinder but more fun!

On the morning of Saturday August 5, 18 boats with a total of around 160 crew gathered in front of Stokes Hill Wharf in Darwin for the start. We were joined by quite a few spectators, both on the water and on the wharf, as many friends, family and interested onlookers farewelled the fleet. The Dinah Beach Cruising Yacht Association hosted a number of VIP guests, sponsors and friends on the Spirit of Darwin cruise vessel, and we were also honoured to have the Navy Patrol Boat "Larrakia" alongside.

Light winds presented an early challenge for many as we made our way out of Darwin Harbour and north toward the Tiwi Islands, but really isn't any day out sailing a great day, regardless? The light winds gave us calm seas which gave us the opportunity to revel in the company of a large pod of dolphins that played around the boat for more than 30 minutes. It was hard to determine who was having the most fun, them or us!

The winds picked up as we headed into the Banda Sea which gave us the chance to fly the spinnaker for a good long run.

As we approached Ambon the rain settled in and low cloud embraced the island. This diminished our view of the landscape but we were still able to make out the mountainous islands and the colourful buildings dotted throughout the tropical flora.

Crossing the finish line at the community of Amahusu, we were greeted by a fireworks display and a warm welcome by race control. It was easy to pick up a mooring close to the beach and it didn't take too long to receive visits from Customs, Immigration, Quarantine and Port Management. Once cleared, we jumped in the tender and headed ashore to check out the sites of Amahusu and Ambon City.

The welcome we received from the local community was way beyond expectations! The people of this small, poor village are rich with generosity of spirit and their wide friendly smiles and genuine interest in us was humbling. During the five days we were there we met so many children and adults and many of us made new and firm friendships that will continue way beyond one yacht race.

A highlight for us was a visit to a local school that had been arranged by the Race Community. The race organisers had also worked with some schools in Darwin to get their students involved in donating school supplies, and ten boxes of stationary and other useful items were donated on behalf of the race. The school children all came out to meet us and performed some traditional dances and showed us around their school, this was an experience that will stay with us forever.

The support and welcome we received from the Ambon City Council was also amazing, with the Vice Mayor hosting all skippers and crew at his home for Presentation Night, complete with a fantastic spread of food and drinks plus live music.

My experience on and post-race was nothing short of incredible and I am already looking forward to taking part next year. If you've ever thought that this might be for you, I say 'do yourself a favour' and block the dates in your calendar now. Next year's race departs from Darwin on Saturday August 4 and you can find all you need at [www.darwinambonrace.com.au](http://www.darwinambonrace.com.au)

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