

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2011

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Race reports and pictures inside



An Anambas Escapade

Mir, from the beaches of Pulau Durai



An educational cruise on sailing vessel *Mir* offers an insight to interesting cultures and a sea turtle conservation programme.
By Dan Chi

A sunset toast celebrating our arrival at Anambas



Endearing baby sea turtles

The freshness of azure, the playfulness of turquoise, the opulence of cobalt, the enigma of cerulean... I marveled at the shades of blue of the South China Sea while huddled at the beam of the boat. My 16-day journey on *Mir* was unraveling as the waves rocked gently by. The wondrous colour spectrum mirrored my experience with *Mir* and her crew: a tapestry of stories delicately woven into a delirious escapade.

Home At Sea

It was a cheery Friday morning when we set off from Raffles Marina for the Anambas Islands. *Mir* was to be my home for the first time, and the crew, my family. A sturdy 100-year-old beauty of 113 feet, *Mir* managed to be magnificent and homely at the same time. Decked in teak, she



Happy onboard *Mir*!

housed an admirable collection of books ranging from seamanship to classic literature and cookbooks, as well as an inquisitive,

warm-hearted, fun and diverse bunch of people. *Mir* physically brought us to places by sailing, but it was an intellectual and mental journey to be on *Mir* itself as we travelled across continents and ideas through reading, writing and spirited conversations.

Save The Turtles

The Anambas Islands are picture perfect, complete with a generous spread of coconut trees, clear skies and white sandy beaches. Tucked amidst the islands, Pulau Durai is an exceptional highlight. It is a tale of transformed lives, of man, turtle and fish. A novel conservation programme, initiated by Biosphere Foundation, oversees the protection of Durai's beaches — considered the most populous sea turtle hatching beach in the region.

Pak Lahanie, the affable 90-year-old resident caretaker, who was hired to collect the turtle eggs for sale, is thrilled to be the protector of the nests of these majestic animals instead. Hundreds of thousands of turtle hatchlings have returned to the sea since and the fish population has begun to blossom due to the influx of baby sea turtles as food. The natural ecosystem has been restored.

The Storyteller

This account can only serve as a mere introduction of what the journey to Anambas Islands left in my heart and mind. I recall stories of joy, of us spending the night on the turtle beach witnessing the gentle giants laying their eggs, the kerosene-lit dinners beneath the stars where strangers turned into friends and the tastiest coconuts I have ever eaten. I recall stories that make my heart ache, of long shores of dead coral depleted of their colour and life, and murky streams of water tainting the clear marble sea.

I hold close these threads of memories, woven together like a quilt. I have disembarked from the physical voyage to Anambas, but the desire and journey to protect the natural beauty of Anambas has just begun.

Dan Chi (better known as "DC") is the Secretary of Biosphere Society. The Society will be set up formally this year and aims to further the extensive marine conservation work that Biosphere Foundation has been building on in Southeast Asia and Asia. To find out more, visit www.biospherefoundation.org