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Distant Shores

Sailing the World, Living Large & Loving Life

By Paul & Sheryl Shard



When Sheryl and I first started full-time cruising 23 years ago people asked us three common questions: Where are you going to sail? Are you worried about storms? Aren't you worried about pirates?

Well, we sailed around the Atlantic, we did worry about storms but managed to avoid them or deal with them, and steered clear of areas where there were risks of pirates.

On that first three-year cruise we fell in love with the cruising lifestyle, explored 23 countries while sailing over 20,000 miles, and developed our skills in photography and videography as we documented our experiences. We were as passionate about filming as about sailing and as a result, our plan to return to the real world never happened... Cruising became our job when Discovery Channel and other television

broadcasters licensed our travel documentaries about the cruising life. We have been making sailing television programs for 20 years now starting with our first documentary, “Call of the Ocean,” then our first TV series, “Exploring Under Sail,” and are now shooting season 9 of our current TV series “Distant Shores” with over 100 half-hour episodes broadcast worldwide in 24 languages. Distant Shores celebrates the cruising life, profiles the world’s top cruising destinations, and offers hints and tips on safe and comfortable cruising.

Now when we tell people that we sail the world and film it all for a television program their common question is, “How did you get that job?!”

The short answer is we made our own job. The long answer is more interesting!

At 29 years old we set off on our first three-year cruise with a plan to film what we could of our adventure. We had training in film and photography and had been doing freelance work before departing. From Toronto we headed down the Erie Canal and Hudson River to New York City, then down the Intracoastal Waterway to Florida. We had splurged on a professional underwater camera housing to add to our collection of photography and video equipment as we are both keen divers.

Crossing the Gulf Stream to the Bahamas we spent that first magical winter exploring the undersea-Bahamas and learning more about underwater filming. We are both qualified SCUBA divers but on our first boat, a small 37-footer, we didn’t have room for tanks and a compressor. Instead we developed what would become a passion, free-diving and filming underwater. I think we are one of the rare film crews to film while free-diving. It yielded one of our most magical underwater scenes, thanks to the lack of bubbles that scare off larger animals.

On that occasion, we were diving in a deep cut between two islands in the Exumas. Swimming down to eight meters I saw a squadron of three huge eagle rays swimming past. These animals are often nearly two meters across the wings and three meters long to their whip tail. I sank down quietly to hide beside a rocky coral head as they flew majestically away. I had been down just about a minute and was getting ready to come back up when the rays turned and headed back toward my coral head. My longest dives are nearly three minutes but the rays were still ten meters away and I hoped I would have enough breath to wait for them to swim by.

As they came closer it seemed they would come right for me - with no bubbles to give me away, just the large underwater camera peering out and capturing the whole scene. The three eagle rays swam





directly for the camera and went so close over my head I had to duck even further. The resulting shot looks like a Star Wars scene where the enormous Imperial Cruiser passes right over the Millennium Falcon. Lungs bursting I quickly headed for the surface as soon as the whip tails had safely passed. Whew!

After that first winter in the Bahamas we felt ready to tackle an ocean crossing. We had sailed to the Azores and learned that sperm whales were often to be encountered in the waters near the islands. We dedicated almost a full month to filming whales underwater in one of our most ambitious early projects. We discussed our plan with marine biologists who were filming a documentary about the white whale, and got hints for how to safely get film of these magnificent animals.

We spent 12-hour days travelling grids searching for our quarry, most often returning with little to show for it. If we saw whales I would slip into the water some ways ahead and swim to intersect them. Sheryl would move the boat away and hopefully a whale would come close enough to be filmed. After many days we were rewarded for our patience with a precious few minutes of film.

On the day that we decided to leave the Azores and head on to Madeira we were in “passage-mode”

not really ready to meet whales - but there they were! Well practiced by now, I slipped into the water and the largest whale we ever saw swam right toward me. Seeing this whale, 15 feet longer than our boat, point his bulbous head right at me, Sheryl had to decide whether to intervene with the boat or take the chance and let me get the shot.

Thankfully it all worked out! After pinging me with his sonar (I could feel the vibration in my chest the way you sometimes do when standing in front of a loud stereo speaker) he swam up to gaze at me with a grapefruit-sized eyeball, then rolled away and swam off. I got a nice piece of footage to add to the sperm whale segment in our first documentary, *Call of the Ocean*.

Call of the Ocean was licensed by the Discovery Channel since it had a lot of nature and underwater filming. That first contact is important in television, and this opened the door for further television work. On our next television project, we worked with noted Canadian film and television director, Peter Rowe, on a sailing series called “Exploring Under Sail” and over those four years learned a lot more about the industry. When we branched off on our own and started



making the Distant Shores TV show in 1998 we had been working professionally in television for five years.

We never grow tired of the joys of sailing and filming. It's always fun planning voyages and thinking of destinations with the television show in mind. So many kind viewers have written telling us what aspects of the show they enjoy and we appreciate these letters from all over the world. Meeting interesting characters has always been popular, and as cruising sailors we seem to meet quite a few! Sometimes it's just a lucky break - filming the amazing Greek Orthodox Monastery at Patmos we happened to be there when the former King Constantine II of Greece was visiting. We scored a quick interview with him and his Danish Wife, Queen Anne Marie, who told us she loves watching the Travel Channel where Distant Shores is shown across Europe!

Although a number of millions of people catch the show around the world, we always keep in mind that our most loyal viewers are our fellow sailors and potential cruising sailors. For our sailing audience we always try to craft a show that will help inform and entertain from a sailor's perspective, but will still satisfy the interests of the general traveller who make up the much larger segment of the television market. Topics include dealing with unusual conditions in local waters such as the strong currents in the Dardanelles en route to Istanbul, the extreme tides of the Channel Islands off France, or the challenges of piloting the shallow waters of the Bahamas.

As well as to entertain while profiling great nautical tourism destinations, our goal is to pass on what we have learned over the years to help out fellow sailors if they are interested in making the journey themselves. It has been immensely gratifying to meet up with sailors who have followed our shows on television, got inspired to try the lifestyle, have learned to sail, and then got out cruising.

One year in Marmaris, Turkey, when we were hauled out in the yard sweating over the annual maintenance chores, a cruising sailor with long, sun-bleached blonde hair recognized us and came over to thank us for the inspiration the show had given him to set off cruising. He invited us to come down at happy hour and see his new catamaran. We brought along a bottle of "cruiser wine" and were astonished when we saw his boat, which was at that time the third largest catamaran in the world at nearly a hundred feet long! A waiter





came to the upper deck to take our drink order and we quietly hid our wine under the table. Despite having a very different style from most cruisers we meet, this guy was out exploring and having adventures. (Turned out he'd just sold a hotel chain.) We marvelled at this cruising life we all share!

Our most recent cruising has been to Northern Europe where we filmed the season 7 and 8 episodes of the Distant Shores TV series. Over the past three years we cruised the Baltic, the UK, Norway and France.

Our Baltic cruise started with an early spring cruise of the Solent, then sailing east to Holland and Germany where we headed through the Kiel Canal

into the Baltic to explore Denmark and Sweden. We returned through the Dutch canals and visited Amsterdam, filming 13 half-hour shows on the trip.

In 2011 we explored Ireland and Scotland, where we sampled whisky and sailed through Loch Ness keeping a sharp eye out for the monster. On that trip we went our furthest north ever, 61 degrees, filming in the dramatic Sognefjord on the west coast of Norway, the longest fjord in Europe.

Then in 2012 we fulfilled a longtime dream to cross France by the canals. Our Southerly 49 sailboat has a lifting keel which allows us to reduce draft to less than one meter (three feet) so we put the mast down on deck and set off up the



Seine River. An idyllic 10-week cruise followed, entering Paris on our own boat, crossing the tiny canals of France (via 179 locks) and sampling the local wines and fine foods. We filmed the adventure of course, then emerged from the canals in the Med at Port St Louis.

Next was a quick passage out to Gibraltar, Morocco, and the Canary Islands before crossing the Atlantic as part of the ARC - the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers. We have documented all these experiences for season 9 of Distant Shores.

Now comes another key part of the project - we must sit still for a while to edit up the shows we have shot. This is always an enjoyable part of our job. It usually takes two weeks to edit down the

five hours of raw footage that will make the final 24 minutes of film that is one episode of Distant Shores. As I sit here in the British Virgin Islands we are starting in on that job. We will hang here for a month or so, doing preliminary rough editing, then fly home to the studio to do the final sound and colour work to complete the shows to television standards. It's a fun job, and we know we are lucky we have been able to make it work.

So if you are back home planning that next cruise, perhaps an episode of "Distant Shores" will help you make those plans and get out cruising. And if you are already out there and spot Distant Shores II at anchor - please come by and say hi!

See you out there!



Paul and Sheryl are the hosts of the Distant Shores sailing adventure TV series which airs in the USA and Caribbean on WealthTV, in Canada on Travel and Escape Channel, and in Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa and New Zealand on Travel Channel. Paul and Sheryl have travelled to more than 60 countries and colonies around the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean, Mediterranean, North and Baltic Seas. They've sailed 90,000 nautical miles and have crossed the Atlantic Ocean five times. You can follow their voyages on www.distantshores.ca and their shows are available on DVD as well. 🚩

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