



# NEWS FROM *FLEUR DE SEL*

December 2015

DEAR FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD,

Although it has been a very long time since we last wrote such a newsletter, it is with great pleasure that we do now, hoping that this letter finds you all well. And because it is the end of the year, it also gives us the opportunity to wish you a **very happy holiday season**, as well as a **most wonderful 2016**.

We take the occasion here to give you an update on our travels, although there has been a major interruption. Indeed, in 2013, after having cruised through much of the South Pacific, from the tropics in Samoa and Tonga to temperate New Zealand, we halted our progression. We settled in New Caledonia for just over two years, both of us finding professional activities, but all the while still living aboard. An interesting and profitable experience it was, for sure, but we were nonetheless itching to resume cruising: we had an unfinished around the world navigation to complete!

Most of you know that unfortunately, our logbook is kept only French (we would gladly do it in English as well, but it already takes a lot of time!), so what we will do is give you a few highlights hereunder. For the rest, we will refer you to [our location page](#), which is the graphical answer to questions such as: Where are we? Where have we been? And where do we plan to go? Also, our travels are illustrated through both [our photo albums](#), as well as [a few slideshows](#). Finally, do not forget the [main summary page in English](#).

Fair winds to all, **Merry Christmas** and **Happy New Year**, and we hope to hear from you soon!

HEIDI & NICOLAS



Wineglass Bay, Freycinet National Park, Tasmania, on December 12, 2015

Fleur de Sel

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Samoa** (July 2012) – This dates back a while, but after we left French Polynesia, we did a quick stopover in the atoll of Suvarrow (Cook Islands), before crossing the International Dateline and arriving in Samoa. We spent 3 weeks in this lovely country made up of two main islands, which we both visited. We discovered a very religious people living a truly traditional lifestyle. It was a very pleasant stay and perhaps a bit off the beaten path.



Spectacular blowholes at Alofaaga (Samoa)

- **Tonga** (August 2012) – What a contrast when we arrived in the Vava'u archipelago in Northern Tonga! There, everything seemed to be touristy, both for land-based visitors (mostly New Zealanders and Australians) and for cruisers. The local people didn't seem better off, though, and although the cruising ground as well as the diving were interesting, we found the whole a bit too artificial and bland. We didn't overstay the 3 weeks we had planned, and set off for a 10-day passage, skipping Fiji as we felt the 2 or 3 weeks we could allocate it would not do it justice in anyway.
- **New Caledonia** (September - October 2012) – Our next destination was familiar and not. It is a French territory (although contrary to popular belief it is highly autonomous) and we could find familiar



Typical landscape of the far south near Baie de Prony (New Caledonia)

foodstuffs there. But the landscapes are truly unique in the South Pacific and are completely different to any other archipelago we had seen before, in addition to it being really bigger than other islands as well, which is why we chose to spend a bit more time there. Moreover, it was our first encounter with the complex Melanesian culture. We cruised both the coralline Loyalty Islands and the red-soiled Grande Terre and Isle of Pines. The lagoon is huge (the largest in the world),

and the snorkeling was often great, but it was compulsory to be good at planning with the wind, because it often blows strongly. Eventually, after about 7 weeks, we set off heading south, not thinking we'd return.

- **New Zealand** (November 2012 - April 2013) – We had long decided that we wanted to spend that cyclone season in New Zealand, not only to escape the then potentially dangerous tropics, but as a destination in itself. We were not disappointed, on the contrary! We started off by visiting the wonderful subtropical north, in the surroundings of Auckland. We were startled by the pristine beaches and by the wonderful birds, and we enjoyed the first class cruising at hand. Thinking that we'd explore the North Island by sea and the South Island by land, we pushed on into less travelled areas, reaching splendid Wellington for Christmas and New Year's. But the weather proved engaging and we continued south, reaching remote and wild Stewart Island, which enabled us to cruise amazing Fiordland thereafter. Reaching Cook Strait once again, we had completed a circumnavigation of



**A tui bird in a pohutukawa tree: the quintessential Kiwi wildlife experience!**



the South Island! Although as a result we got to see little of inland New Zealand, we did visit many truly unique and out of the way places as a result, and we thoroughly enjoyed our visit.

Note: stunned that we were by the beauty of this country and the uniqueness of its wildlife, we produced three slideshows which may be found at <https://vimeo.com/channels/fleurdesel>

- **New Caledonia** again (May 2013 - July 2015) – Induced into looking for jobs in New Caledonia by a favorable conjunction of both promising market conditions and not too complicated visa/permit requirements for us, we returned there instead of pursuing our original plan. Quickly we had several options and we shifted into a different setup. *Fleur de Sel* now acted as our apartment and we were lucky that for most of the time we managed to have a spot in the marina at Port Moselle. For the rest of the time, the boat was at anchor in the Nouméa harbor, and Nicolas' commuting was done with the dinghy, the dressing room being in the car! As for Heidi, her job was in a nickel plant in the north of New Caledonia, 4-5 hours away, which required her to commute every weekend, and to stay on the premises during the week. All of this required some organization and was acceptable as long as it was temporary. Eventually, however, and despite professional challenges being interesting, we were glad to end this, and to get back to serious stuff! ;-)



- **Europe** (June - August 2014) – Halfway through our long stopover, we took the opportunity to fly back to Europe, so as to visit friends and family. While for Heidi it was a short stay, for Nicolas it was possible to stay there longer, which was great in order to see even more friends and family. We also enjoyed longer summer days than in the tropics where sunset invariably occurs around 18:00 and lasts a minute or two!

- **Vanuatu** (July - October 2015) – While we were completing the professional obligations we had gotten into, we worked intensely on *Fleur de Sel* to provide her with maintenance and upgrades. Then once our jobs were over, we set off towards Vanuatu, the neighbor archipelago to the north. Surely, it was Melanesian like New Caledonia, but in a vastly different way. People live in a more traditional and



**It doesn't get more genuine than this, does it? (Vanuatu)**

rudimentary way, both enjoying the simple way of life where lodging and sustenance are all available with a reasonable amount of work, but where anything else (starting with a mobile phone) comes at a price many people can only afford with difficulty for lack of any cash-providing resource. Contacts with people we met were often wonderful, we did visit extraordinary places such as the rumbling volcano Yasur on Tanna or the remote Reef Islands, and witness intense ritual dances.





- **Australia** (since November 2015) – After a (very) quick final stop in Nouméa, we finally headed west, or southwest that is, for we were heading towards the southern part of a new continent. Needing a change from the tropics, we decided to avoid the crocodile- and jellyfish-prone Queensland, and to visit New South Wales and especially Sydney instead. We just spent three weeks there, enjoying city, nature, shopping and food. Since then, we have pushed on further south and reached the (large) island state of Tasmania, where we will spend Christmas and New Year's. It is truly a scenic place to be, the climate is neither too warm nor too cold, and at this time of year, we are enjoying many hours of daylight!

## OUR PLANS

Our current plan is to continue exploring Australia's southern half, beginning with the west coast of Tasmania in January. We will then travel west, to South Australia in February, crossing the Great Australian Bight in March, and we should reach the west coast in April. Australia being a huge country, this will require us to travel many miles in a short time, but we hope to be somewhere around the northwest corner by early May, when the tropical cyclone season is over. If all goes according to plan, our next country should then be Indonesia, where we hope to visit the Lesser Sunda Islands (Bali, Lombok, Komodo, Flores and the such) for about 3 months. It will then be time for us to do a major ocean passage, that of the Indian Ocean, probably in September, with a stop in Mauritius and Réunion in October-November, and then on to South Africa where we plan to be at this same time next year.

Of course, plans are made to be modified, and boy did our last plan change with that long stop in New Caledonia! This means that while the above may happen, it may also not happen, or not exactly so. But if it does, we will then be in a good position to sail back up the Atlantic Ocean in a general direction for home, although that may happen after a loop on the east coast of North America... Stay tuned! But if you believe there is a possibility that we may meet, either because you will be cruising in the vicinity, or because you plan to travel to some of the places we mentioned, please tell us. We would be delighted to see you again, or at the very least to have news from you!



Wombat on Maria  
Island, Tasmania