

BOOK REVIEWS

SAILING THROUGH RUSSIA – FROM THE ARCTIC TO THE BLACK SEA – John Vallentine and Maxine Maters. Published in soft covers by the authors [sailinginrussia.org] at £24.95, €29.95 or 2100 Rubles. 315 214mm x 149mm pages, with hundreds of photographs, chartlets and maps. ISBN 978-1-5262-0258-1

In 2013 the Australian yacht *Tainui*, a 1973 Peterson 46, became the first foreign-flagged vessel in over 100 years to sail through Russia's inland waterways from the Arctic to the Black Sea. This book, a follow up to the article John wrote for *Flying Fish* that year, describes *Tainui*'s 3000 mile journey, and is both a personal account and a detailed cruising guide.

All long distance cruises need careful planning to ensure a successful outcome, as any OCC member will agree, but John and Maxine's voyage in *Tainui* must surely have demanded the most complicated, lengthy and difficult preparations of any cruise undertaken by anyone in recent years. John, a retired doctor from Australia, and his indispensable Dutch crew Maxine, a trained lawyer who has lived in Moscow for 25 years and speaks fluent Russian (an essential skill for at least one crew member on a yacht whose skipper is contemplating this route), managed to negotiate all the problems – visas, permits, lists of itineraries, negotiations for getting fuel, arrangements for taking the mast down and, later, putting it up again, and passing through 56 locks on the course of the journey.

Sailing Through Russia is richly illustrated with 340 colour photos and small navigational charts. There are pictures of short-term crew and visitors to *Tainui*, often seen enjoying friendly chat helped along by generous glasses of vodka, but the most striking photographs are of the beautiful 'onion' domes of a variety of churches and monasteries. The colours are striking – yellows and blues, or white, seemingly dripping like icing from terracotta roofs, all topped off with gold crosses – iconic Russian architecture on almost every page.

After four months on the Volga and Don rivers, *Tainui*'s mast was raised again just before the town of Azov – life was easier with a clear deck and the rigging back in its proper place. But getting out of Russia proved a complicated hassle, because a foreign yacht wasn't part of the usual process, unlike the thousands of commercial ships that pass up and down the waterway. The officials were genuinely keen to help, but a maze of regulations confounded them and it took three days to sort everything out. Finally *Tainui* and her crew were given permission to make the 200 mile passage to Kerch in the Ukraine. John and Maxine arrived exhausted, but were soon celebrating their unique achievement.

Sailing Through Russia includes a comprehensive overview of the river system, extensive historical notes, and an appendix of general information and advice about Russia – everything a visitor might need to know. Despite John's expectation of 'sailors coming after us', it seems unlikely that more than a very few will ever use this book for pilotage in earnest, given the

difficulties described. A possible alternative would be to take a river cruise on a ship from St Petersburg to Moscow, leaving the cruise company sorting out all the details. This fascinating and entertaining book would be the ideal guide to take along. Everyone interested in cruising off the beaten path – which surely includes most OCC members – as well as anyone with a specific interest in Russia, will enjoy this book.

EHHM