

Star of the East

Sailing in Indonesia means being ready for anything, finds Jane Archer – but that's part of the fun

The haunting strains of Vangelis's *Conquest of Paradise* fill the air and suddenly everyone has gone. The music is like a clarion call on Star Clippers' ships, heralding the moment to dash up to the top deck and watch as the crew hoists the canvas and the ship sets sail.

They do it at every port, but the first time is always the most magical because it means it's the start of the cruise. In this instance, it's even more exciting because we're setting sail from

Benoa in Bali, on an Indonesian adventure that promises beautiful beaches and scary dragons.

► GO WITH THE FLOW

A few weeks before our cruise, two islands we were due to visit, Gili Meno and Gili Trawangan, were damaged by an earthquake. It didn't put anyone off coming, but it did mean the itinerary had to change.

It was no problem. Most people on my sailing – both past cruisers and numerous first-timers – had



Passengers know things might change – it's a sailing ship with a small engine

chosen our itinerary to see the dragons on Komodo Island, and that call hadn't changed.

So far, so simple. But on the morning of the first day, plans

started to unravel. A strong current meant we couldn't make Moyo Island, the first stop of the new itinerary, so we had a day at sea instead. The good news was the Indonesian government had given the captain the green light to go to the two Gilis after all.

On many cruise ships, the changes would be an issue. On *Star Clipper*, it's very different. Passengers understand things might change because it's a sailing ship with a small engine that relies on the 'right' winds ➔



ABOVE: Satonda Island

RIGHT: Komodo dragon

BELOW: Star Clipper



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MORE SOUTHEAST ASIA CRUISES

An orangutan sanctuary in Borneo, snorkelling in the Philippines and a river cruise safari await on a 13-day voyage from Bali to Singapore with [Silversea](#).

From £5,760 per person cruise-only departing March 8, 2019.

Seabourn's

Jewels of Southeast Asia, from Singapore to Shanghai, visits five countries in 18 days including Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam and China. From £5,699 per person cruise-only departing April 10, 2019.

Few have heard of Vietnam's Red River, but those who sail it are rewarded with a cruise around Halong Bay, a day in Hanoi and trips to markets and workshops. From \$2,925 per person cruise-only with [Pandaw](#), departing May 20, 2019.

→ and currents. As Captain Sergey said, you always need a Plan B, C, D and E.

You also need to be fairly agile (there are no lifts on the ship and trips ashore are made by tender and Zodiac, often transferring between the two and usually landing on a beach) and curb expectations when it comes to entertainment. There was a fun quiz one evening and dancing on the deck after dinner every day, but if clients want production shows or cabaret, this is not the cruise for them.

► DRAGONS' DEN

After our unscheduled day at sea, things settled down a bit. We had a



Komodo dragons are carnivorous lizards that grow to about 10 feet and enjoy tucking into pigs, deer and buffalo

morning at Satonda Island to swim, snorkel or stretch our legs, and the next day anchored off Komodo to go in search of dragons.

They're nothing like the mythological

fire-breathing creatures of storybooks, but carnivorous lizards that grow to about 10 feet and enjoy tucking into pigs, deer, water buffalo – and even their own babies.

The rules for visiting Komodo Island are strict. No one is allowed to carry food ashore or wander off without a guide. Given that 10 people have been killed by the dragons in the past 40 years, everyone was happy to comply, but I did wonder whether the sticks our guides carried were up to the job in hand.

By the end of a 90-minute walk we had seen four dragons – a good tally, even if it did seem a bit



SHUTTERSTOCK: JOERG MIEDZA/JAN LEONARDO WOELLERT; DIRK MEUSSLING



LEFT:
Scuba diving
off Komodo

FAR LEFT:
Star Clipper

BELOW:
Pink Beach,
Komodo

→ 'staged'. But since they looked as fearsome as they sounded, it was probably a good thing we didn't encounter one hunting for dinner.

ASIAN ADVENTURES

Star Clippers launched its Indonesia cruises last summer, offering mainly seven-night itineraries that sail either west or eastbound from Bali, the former visiting Java, the latter going to Komodo.

This year's season has ended and *Star Clipper* is now heading back to Phuket in Thailand, from where it sails two seven-night itineraries that visit tiny islands off the Thai coast. It will be back in Indonesia from June 2019.

After an excellent morning looking for dragons, we had an afternoon to relax, swim, snorkel or scuba-dive on Pink Beach on Komodo. You can borrow snorkel gear for free; scuba diving, for



It was wonderful to to be anchored off Gili Sudak, an island basking in sunshine with a lovely beach

beginners and experts, costs from €55 a dive.

Next morning, we had a few hours to stretch our legs in Wera, a town in Sumbawa Island that sits in the shadow of a smouldering volcano and is known for boat-building. But by midday we were on our way again so we could make the two Gilis by lunchtime next day. And we nearly did, with a fabulous morning of cruising before the wind changed and scuppered our time on both islands.

By now even the most stoical among us were wondering what else could go wrong, so it was wonderful to wake next morning to find that we were anchored off Gili Sudak, a tiny island basking in hot sunshine with a lovely beach and great snorkelling, where the crew were busy setting up a barbecue ashore.

It was a fabulous day and a great high to end on – except it wasn't quite the end, because that evening *Star Clipper* set sail with all its canvas hoisted while we were out in the tenders to watch and take pictures.

They say you should always keep the best to last. I suspect by then it was Plan Z, but it worked!

Book it: From £1,530 cruise-only, departing June 22, 2019. The seven-night Eastbound Indonesia cruise round-trip from Bali visits Komodo Island, Gili Meno and Gili Trawangan.

starclippers.co.uk

Sulawesi earthquake

On September 28, the Indonesian island of Sulawesi was hit by a 7.4 magnitude earthquake that claimed hundreds of lives. Star Clippers' UK general manager Fay McCormack said: "Our hearts go out to the people in Sulawesi after the latest terrible earthquake. Agents need to understand that it

is a long way from Bali, where *Star Clippers* sails. *Star Clipper* has now returned to Thailand for the winter season and doesn't return to Indonesia until June 2019. We hope this will not put clients off cruising in Indonesia, because, moving forward, the islands need tourists to help them rebuild."

