



Intrepid Australian Sailors Regaled on Arrival in Gizo, Solomon Islands

Participants in **The 2006 Brisbane to Gizo Yacht Rally** could not have been more warmly welcomed at Gizo in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands last week. Ten resplendent traditional war canoes, each manned by 20 strong Solomon Islanders, escorted them into the harbour with songs and chanting.

War canoe races were the culminating event for a colourful week of festivities, the **Vakatepe Festival of the Sea**. Sailors in the rally left Australia in early May and sailed 1200 miles across the Coral Sea to arrive on the first day of the festival. In spite of troubles in far-off Honiara, citizens of Gizo and the Western Province continue to celebrate their cultural diversity and welcome visitors from all countries. The week-long festival (15-19 May) included a triathlon, an impressive fishing competition, and moving traditional dance and costume competitions... and the best Solomons live bands kept happy crowds of tourists and locals hopping well into the night.



There has been universal praise from yachtspeople for the rally's organisation and the support offered by Gizo Yacht Club and Alan Profke, its Brisbane-based counterpart. The rally is non-competitive and gave less experienced sailors the incentive to try for an adventurous offshore cruising destination. "The last two weeks have been the best of my life" said Daryl Calvert, after completing his first ocean crossing on board sloop *Azzan*.

Jonathan Taicia, Vakatepe Coordinator, and Senior Tourism Officer for the Western Province, explained that the festival is extremely important in encouraging Solomon Islanders to reconnect to their rich history and culture. “The festival gives people a chance to witness and feel proud of their cultural history and the role it can play today,” he said. “Tomoko [war canoe] building in villages, and the nurture of crafts and ancient arts, in turn, help to develop the country’s attractions for visitors.”

Gizo Yacht Club commodore Ian Hawes reflected, “we are thrilled that all the yachts arrived safely from Australia, that they’ve had such a great time at the festival events. We’re especially grateful to the people of the Western Province for the kind welcome they’ve given the yacht crews. A whole new set of good adventures is ahead for these yachts as they discover the famous cruising grounds of the Western Province. This first year for the rally has been an overwhelming success, and we look forward to next year’s event being even better.”

More information about Vakatepe and an upcoming October Music and Culture Festival are available through Jonathan Taicia at the tourism office in Gizo at bahai_gizo@solomon.com.sb

Some great photos are available free of charge through Commodore Ian Hawes at ian@iclarm.org.sb

ask to view a database of spectacular photos through photographer John Tycia at access@solomon.com.sb

For information about next year’s Brisbane to Gizo Yacht Rally, contact the Gizo Yacht Club at GYC@solomon.com.sb or look at their website at www.gizoyachtclub.com.sb

