



SKIP NOVAK

CAPE TOWN IS AN OCEAN AWAY FROM MY BASE IN THE FALKLANDS, BUT IT'S WORTH THE TRIP TO GET A PROPER REFIT DONE. THE SCENERY'S NICE TOO

Sailing to Cape Town is a long haul from just about everywhere. Rather, it is more of a logistical break en route to somewhere else. The Dutch East India Company was the first to realise this in the mid 17th Century. Initially they stopped to take on wood and water and thereafter established farms and livestock to augment fresh provisions for their ships sailing on to Batavia (Indonesia). After several skirmishes, by the close of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814, the British finally affirmed possession via the Anglo-Dutch Treaty. And so the Cape Colony evolved, known to seafarers down through the ages, right through to the present day.

Right off the Tradewind cruising map, South Africa also suffered sailing sanctions in the late 1980s during the death throes of apartheid. In fact the Whitbread Race skipped it and went to Uruguay in 1989. Recently we are seeing an increase in traffic coming through Cape Town. Superyachts and megayachts – sail and power – have been stopping here for lengthy periods staging themselves for their next cruises going west to the Caribbean or east into the Indian Ocean. And for the small to medium size cruisers, the Royal Cape Yacht Club is always welcoming – situated right in the middle of the port's ship repair facilities with the most extraordinary commercial vessels to marvel at.

A southern superyacht base

For one who has spent a fair amount of time in refits, living in less than salubrious shipyard environments, the port of Cape Town is a dream scenario. We do an annual service on *Pelagic Australis* from June to September, which is our off season. It is worth sailing across the breadth of the South Atlantic – albeit with charter clients on the way there, though not on the way back – to avoid South American ports (I have tried them all), where I

have always ended up wasting time negotiating bureaucratic hoops and ladders and dealing with a less than efficient workforce.

Although there is a lack of hauling out facilities for small craft in Cape Town and little or no hard space on which to linger, 'in the water' refits benefit from a well represented marine industry. A large portion of the world's catamaran charter fleets are built here with Robertson Caine leading the field. Southern Wind builds three 30m plus yachts per year to European standards. Mast makers and sail makers are on hand for parts (yacht spares or hardware items) or raw materials and are easily accessed in either of two industrial parks within a ten or 15 minute drive. It is all so easy when compared to chasing bits and pieces across town, where the shops with the O rings are on one side of the city and the alternator repair shops are on the other. We have all been there, done that, spending our days in taxis.

Attractions and distractions

But what I really enjoy, if doing a refit can ever be that enjoyable, is the atmosphere in the V&A Waterfront Marina. For those of a certain age who remember what developers did to Newport Rhode Island in the 1970s and 1980s stripping out all the commercial wharfage, shipyards and fishing boats to accommodate condominiums, restaurants and knick knack shops, the V&A stands out as a perfect blend of a waterfront shopping mall that co-exists seamlessly with a real working port. The artisanal fishing boats are still there, as are cold storage facilities. A dry dock serving medium size ships is an attraction for the tourists, while the syncrolift, which lifts us out of the water, is next to a five star hotel. Granted that is not for luxury yachts – when up on the syncro, we spend a fair amount of time side-slipping away from shot blasting operations and dodging overspray from work done on commercial rust buckets from all nations.

However, with the winelands close by, beautiful beaches and the wilderness of Table Mountain overlooking the city, there are plenty of distractions when the frustration of a refit is too much to bear.

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