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## Indian Ocean Passages (July 2011) (with thanks to David Ridout)

Until recently circumnavigators from Australia to Thailand had the option of heading for the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean, or to South Africa and the Atlantic. The increasing piracy threat to the northern routes has been well publicized.

Most yachts coming across the north of Australia bound for South Africa used the trade winds to visit a combination of Christmas Island, Cocos atoll, Chagos (British Indian Ocean Territory) and the Islands of Rodrigues, Mauritius and Reunion. Before the pirate menace became a fact of life it was possible to go from Chagos to the Seychelles and on down the western side of Madagascar. This route is a most enjoyable way of getting to South Africa but is now not advisable due to the extended area that the Somali pirates are operating over.



In addition, increasingly stringent regulations are likely to affect the use of Chagos. For detailed requirements to visit these various islands see [www.noonsite.com](http://www.noonsite.com) and/or the various government web sites. Basically Christmas and Cocos require an up to date Australian visa. Chagos requires pre booking with the British Government. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/british-indian-ocean-territory> This can be done on line and also the sum of £50 per week up to a maximum of four weeks will have to be pre paid. For Rodrigues/Mauritius and Reunion no visas will be required for most Nationals but if in doubt check.

In 2011 the preferred options were reducing to shipping the yacht - shipping to the Eastern Mediterranean (Marmaris, Turkey in 2011) is practical (seek local advice, Google 'shipping yachts Indian ocean or try <http://www.sevenstar.nl>) - or alternatively, route south of Madagascar. .

The southern tip of Madagascar should be avoided as a combination of winds and seas make for unpleasant conditions. The yachtsman's main worry is the approach into either Richard's Bay or Durban. Here the strong south going Agulhas current is fine when the winds are blowing from their usual northern quarter but when a sudden southerly change comes through the conditions can get very nasty. As you approach the coast watch the forecasts very carefully and if a southerly change is expected wait well offshore east of the Agulhas.

In the Indian Ocean the winds are usually rather stronger than in the Pacific though for many years this was the standard way for circumnavigators. Many yachts find the going to be on the strenuous side but provided this is accepted then combination of good weather forecasts from both the Australian and French authorities and the use of GRIB files should give the mariner safe if fast passages. Most yachts will have sailed many miles by the time they get here. This means experience will be high but do not venture into the Southern Indian Ocean with the yacht in any but well found form. Sails will take a hammering and many days will be spent with force seven blowing.