

A large three-masted sailing ship is seen from a distance on the water. The sun is low in the sky, creating a bright, shimmering path of light on the water's surface that leads towards the ship. In the foreground, the dark hull of a small boat is visible, partially cut off by the bottom edge of the frame. The background shows a hazy coastline with mountains under a cloudy sky.

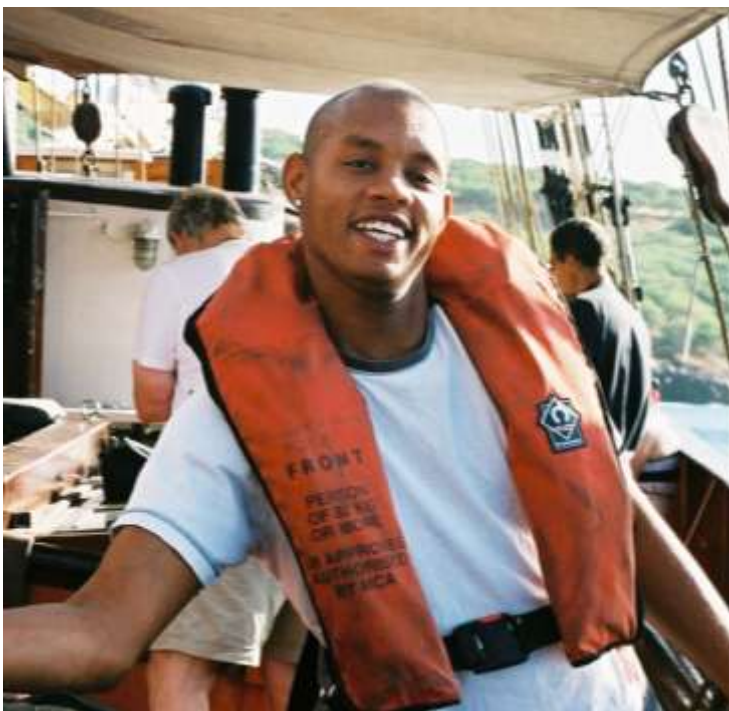
Christmas Crew In Cape Verde

A photo diary of a sailing expedition on Oosterschelde by Debbie Purser in 2010



My photo journal of a sailing expedition around the Cape Verde Archipelago.
12 days of island hopping & trade wind sailing over Christmas 2010 & New Year.

& Introducing Dutch Schooner Oosterschelde
(Debbie Purser is a tall ships enthusiast and charter skipper)



All I wanted was a tall ship, strong trade winds, hot sun and a destination virtually unknown to mass tourism.

The Cape Verde archipelago lies off the West African Coast on the same latitude as St Lucia in the Caribbean. It has the same sailing ingredients as the Windy Indies but very few sheltered ports or anchorages. Until Dutch run schooner Oosterschelde decided to over winter in Cape Verde (Cabo Verde) in 2008/09 the majority of visiting yachts were only using the islands as a stop over on a world voyage.

Local Knowledge & Ocean Sailors

Oosterschelde is an ocean going tall ship that likes to explore remote locations and has taken charter crew to Spitsbergen, Antarctica and Indonesia. One of the ships Captain's has a Cape Verdean husband, and the ship had other links with the islands. Our Cape Verde guide on board was Ario who flung himself into both the rope pulling on board and organising jeep safaris and mountain walks ashore. He introduced us to his many friends on each island, and he even organised crew meals in Cape Verdean homes.

Sal to Santiago

Whilst Heathrow was shut to snow, we managed to escape the British winter on Christmas eve with a direct flight from Manchester to Sal with Thomson (also daily flights with TAP). Tourism and holiday property development has touched the Southern end of Sal with a flurry of enthusiasm and if you saw the beach you would know why. Perfect cross onshore winds onto a perfect 3 miles of white sandy beach make it a kite surfing and wind surfing mecca.

Sadly most tourists just see the rather barren island of Sal, soak up the tropical sun, feast on fresh wahoo and watch the supremely fit locals play beach volleyball, somersault off the wooden jetty and perform endless pull ups on outdoor exercise bars. There is a lot more.....

Working Language is English

Adam and I had sailed on Oosterschelde before but it is always exciting joining a ship and wondering what the rest of the crew will be like. Several nationalities of slightly nervous novice crew gathered under a shady tree in the port of Palmeira watching rather swamped fishing boats unload their big fish. Blond bombshell deckhand Thjis wizzed in to pick us up in the dinghy. The opulent saloon on Oosterschelde is always a surprise as it seems to take up half the ship. Cabins are a mix of 2 and 4 person sizes but all have a open skylight above. A few guests arrived later in the night, and our local guide Ario joined us early morning after Christmas Eve with his family.

6 Course Christmas Dinner at 7 knots

The ship sailed off her anchor without the engine so Adam and I wasted no time in finding an opportunity to go aloft. Oosterschelde's ratlines are very steep compared to many other tall ships and by the time I had reached the yard I was feeling a bit puny in the arm strength department. Plenty of muscles to work on in the next 11 days, but the 6 course Christmas Dinner later that night had me wondering about my waistline. The chef Jan gave us a meal with class, served on long polished wood tables, whilst we perched on chairs chained to the floor. The ship was tanking along under full sail in the dark so not everybody had acquired their sea legs so the gathering dwindled with each course and I have to confess eating 3 champagne fluff puddings. Boxing Day morning was a visual treat—anchored in Tarafal, Santiago, 100 sea miles from the main tourist hotspot on Sal.



Anchored off Tarafal on the leeward island Santiago.



Surf waves steam into the beach and a tricky landing.



Canyons and spires with cobbled roads built by slaves



Boxing Day families enjoy the wild beach at Tarafal. Not a anchorage for a small yacht.

Boxing Day Surf for Locals

Watching the waves steaming into the beach, we were all glad to be anchored on a large steel schooner and not the 40ft yachts rolling in the anchorage. The whole crew decided a minibus trip up into the mountains could not be resisted, so we bumped our way up the cobbled mountain roads peering at a landscape that was a mix of Grand Canyon and the spiky spires of more glaciated landscapes.

Spiders, Slave songs & Birds of Prey

Euphorbias, flax and all types of plants from around the world have been planted to re-forest the slopes and we were a bit shocked to see huge yellow spiders on the bushes as we all stretched our legs on a circular mountain walk. A women's group entertained us with some sad and angry songs and drumming from the days of slavery. By the time we returned to the ship, the whole beach was full of Cape Verdean families enjoying boxing day....and no other tourists in sight.

Wahoo Steak Barbeque on deck

Oosterschelde is a ship built to entertain and feed us well. A barbeque on deck cooked wahoo fish steaks and beef kebabs, and the bar below decks did a roaring trade in wine and beer as the sun set.

Going to Windward a pleasure in the tropics

An 140 mile beat to windward is not something I normally enjoy on a tall ship, but in the brilliant turquoise seas and strong trade winds, with tons of ship pushing a huge bow wave—it was one of the best sails in my long professional sailing career. Spray on deck was a cooling treat. With a steady force 4-5 the ship was a joy to steer. I climbed aloft to take photos but at 7-8 knots the whole rig was humming so it was hard to keep the camera (and my heart beat) steady. We all got a bit sunburnt as it was just so pleasurable to be on the open deck all day. Flying fish, an ibis and a school of 30-40 dolphins came to play. At night huge phosphorescent balls trailed in our wake, and it took a while to realise they were jelly fish glowing.

Sao Vicente - Island of Musicians, Poets & Artists

We arrived in Mindelo is the biggest port in the archipelago and there were plenty of artist studios and places to eat, if you strolled around town. A few of us took a taxi to a lagoon and saw an osprey.



Across the strait to Sao Antao

A boisterous sail across the 7 miles strait from Mindelo on Sao Vicente to the high mountains of Sao Antao. We are all geared up for the big walk from the volcanic crater to the rim and down the big valley to the sea. Three very shiny jeeps* took us up to 1200 metres (*posh 4WD pick up trucks with lots of chrome and very hard wooden seats in the back is the standard Cape Verde jeep taxi). Inside the crater was a lost world of tranquil farms and bleating goats. We climbed to the rim, swathed in trade wind clouds and mist, and over the edge was the steepest donkey track I have ever seen, bedecked with beautiful flowers and ferns. Hairpin turns and stone walls kept us safe, but it was going to be a long day for the knees.

The big Walk from Crater to Sea

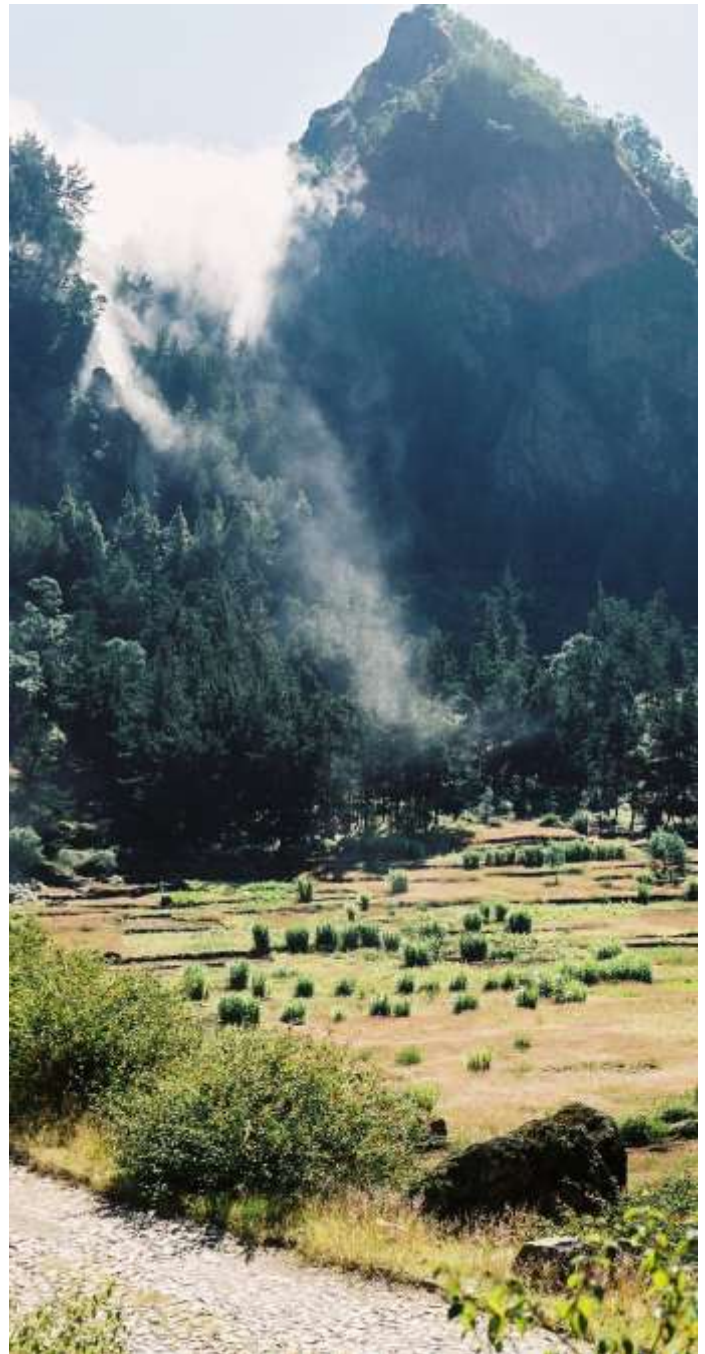
Aoliiums, the scent of damp pine trees, ferns and an amazing farming landscape began to evolve as we dropped down out of the mist into sunshine. The steep volcanic hillsides had been transformed into a garden of Eden with terraces everywhere. Coffee, sugar cane, bananas, mangoes, bamboo, and even rice paddies. Small hamlets, kids walking to school, even invites into peoples houses for a coffee—made it a very special day.

Cape Verdean home cooking

Ario arranged for us to have a late lunch of Cachupa in a local lady's house—a hearty stew that has been served up in Cape Verde homes for centuries. It is based on the bit of everything pot served to African slaves, but the rich mans version involves chicken, goat, cassava, maize, sweet potato, beans.....and Oosterschelde crew woofed it down with beer and a few tastes of home made grog.

Party Night in Mindelo

After our mountain walking on Sao Antao the ship nipped back to Mindelo Harbour. A night ashore? Did any of us have enough energy? Well perhaps a couple of beers and some mellow traditional music in the Club Nautico. Somehow the evening also managed to fit in Ario's local bar (which was all chrome and lap dancing pole) and then dancing until 3am at an open air stage with hundreds of young Cape Verdeans dancing to techno music and strobe lights! We now need to go to sea again for a rest.



Flying along in a Force 6-7

A cracking sail with waves coming over the lee rail and lots of little gleeful squeals as various crew get caught by a dollop of ocean. We blasted past the uninhabited islands of Santa Luzia, a flurry of sail handing to shoot the gap between islands and then the wind dies as we approach Sao Nicolau. 40-50 dolphins were sighted—rounding up fish and leaping in the air. We anchored off Ario's home island—of which he is very proud (although he seemed to have family on every island !).

Rum, Grogue & Sugar Cane

We visited some sugar cane farms where children were carrying huge piles of cane on their head to the wood furnaces. The distilling of rum grog or grogue seemed to be a cottage industry here with small presses and stills everywhere, but only the smoke gives them away amongst the banana plantations and cane fields.

Wild North Coast Drive

The North coast seemed as wild and spectacular as the West Coast of New Zealand, but a lot drier. This is the shoreline that gets the full force of the NE trade winds. Small hamlets perched on the cliff tops with substantial stone walls and low roofs that would not look out of place in the Outer Hebrides. We stopped our windswept 4WD convoy to buy some beer from the only shop / bar in one village. Two of us sat on the kerb helping an old lady shell peas, because it seem the thing to do on a hot dusty afternoon.

Extreme Infinity Pool & Wild Swim

A tempting pool on top of a wave lashed cliff. Once a few of us took the plunge, we looked out of the lip of the pool to see huge ocean swell marching in....and yes big waves do come right in....and more scary, drain out over the edge pretty fast. Try it at your own risk !



Boa Vista—A camel too far ?

I'm not normally an excursion type of person. I hate being organised and far prefer to mooch around a new port or island and explore everyday scenes of life. Having a Cape Verde guide like Ario on board, and extremely good value 'chip in to costs' jeep safaris arranged on each island was too good to miss for such an unknown destination....and I had a duty to report back to Classic Sailing customers about this brilliant winter sailing destination. Boa vista tour was a jeep ride too far. The 30km white beach and the encroaching Sahara like sand dunes were amazing, but when the beaches are that good, I would much rather swim, kite surf or windsurf than go to see a grumpy camel.



Kite Surfing Heaven & Great Fresh Fish

Tip for Boa Vista or Sal—If you are remotely into watersports and can afford the lessons —go kite surfing. Photo is one of the local instructors showing off. Simple cooked fresh fish is sold in many beach front restaurants, and a few Italian run restaurants.

Cape Verde Visas. For UK citizens living and flying from the UK Visas are simple to purchase on landing at Sal Airport.

If you do not exactly meet these criteria seek advice!

FACT SHEET:

Debbie travelled with Classic Sailing - a Cornish based company specialising in 'hands on' sailing holidays on traditional boats and tall ships around the world.

Website: www.classic-sailing.co.uk

Bookings and advice: 0044 (0) 1872 580022

More on the tall ship Oosterschelde: <http://www.classic-sailing.co.uk/vessels/oosterschelde>

Tall Ship in Cape Verde Sailing Expeditions 2011-2012

30 Nov	11 Dec	12 days	Sal - Sal	Explore Cape Verde Islands
11 Dec	22 Dec	12 days	Sal - Sal	Explore Cape Verde Islands
22 Dec	02 Jan	12 days	Sal - Sal	Christmas & New Year 2012
02 Jan	13 Jan	12 days	Sal - Sal	Explore Cape Verde Islands
13 Jan	24 Jan	12 days	Sal - Sal	Explore Cape Verde Islands
24 Jan	04 Feb	12 days	Sal - Sal	Explore Cape Verde Islands

Prices:

The price for a berth on a 12 day voyage is €1600 euros. - typically in a 4 person cabin with other solo travellers of the same sex. All cabins have opening skylights and a wash basin and there are good quality showers and male and female WC close by. For couples you can reserve a 2 person cabin for €1825 each.

Prices include all sailing instruction, accommodation on board with bed linen and hand towels. There is a chef cooking great meals - served in the saloon (see below) or on deck.

Extra are: flights out to Cape Verde (direct charter flights from Gatwick or Manchester to Sal with Thomson or daily with TAP), taxi transfer to port, Cape Verde Visa, shared contribution to any excursion (not compulsory—about £8 for a jeep all day), and your bar bill.

Is it for me ?

No sailing experience is needed. As long as you are agile enough to climb down a boarding ladder into a dinghy to go ashore, and have no serious health problems then your booking application should be approved. You are officially signed on as ships crew, but levels of participation varied from the pull every rope / climb the rigging enthusiasts to the soak up the atmosphere and steer occasionally types.

