

Ibanez family on *Constante* Singapore

Travel plans between continents usually involve long-haul flights that can take up to 20 hours. For Frenchman Franck Ibanez and his Singaporean wife, Wang Meng Ngee, their trip home from Singapore to France will take them on a three-year adventure on the high seas.

During five years in Singapore, sailing and living together in their own sailboat at Raffles Marina made the couple realise that this was what they wanted for their children. They would find a way to raise their two daughters, Carmen and Julie, ages 4 1/2 and 3, on board a boat and spend every minute with them — both as parents and teachers. A year and three months ago, their dream finally became a reality as the family of four set sail from Raffles Marina onboard the *Constante*.

"I have always dreamt of travelling the world in a small sailboat, in harmony with nature and a loving family," confides Franck. "I dreamt of offering my family a life across the oceans of the world. At age 44, with no debts, a prepared boat, a VERY PATIENT wife, two young daughters and a bit of savings, Meng Ngee and I felt that the time was finally right to begin our journey."

Life on the water, however, is a whole different kettle of fish than life on land. "A moving boat is so different from a stationary one comfortably tucked in a luxurious marina," says Franck. "Meng Ngee was initially seasick and I was so stressed by the energy, responsibilities, worries about the unknown and a never-ending list

of preparations. Eventually, we slowly adjusted our rhythms to our new way of life."

Indeed, the Ibanez family has come a long way. As we read this, the intrepid explorers are sailing from Cape Town, South Africa towards Brazil and perhaps Argentina in South America. Prior to that, they made many stopovers during their seafaring odyssey. They enjoyed Malaysia and Thailand, where life was very affordable and the people, welcoming. They also experienced their first major water crossing to reach the Maldives in 14 days. So far, the Chagos archipelago constitutes the peak of their voyage. "No humans, no commerce, no pollution, no officials, just us and a few sail boats. We lived there simply; fishing, burning our garbage, hand-washing our clothes and ourselves from a well," recounts Franck.

As idyllic as it sounds, there have been hiccups along the way such as crime, danger and illness (when Franck and Meng

# A Life Less Ordinary

Franck and Meng Ngee Ibanez, together with their two daughters, left Singapore last year on a voyage of discovery aboard their sailboat, *Constante*. Back for a Chinese New Year visit, the seafaring couple shares a personal account on living their nautical dream in pursuit of all things they hold important and dear to their hearts — freedom, respect and love.

By **Meng Ngee Ibanez**

Ngee caught the dengue virus in the Maldives). Fortunately, they always found wonderful friends among the different cultures they encountered. Being together at sea has also provided them with an unparalleled closeness as a family.

Time away from home is less time with friends and family. "Franck and I have our siblings to thank for being near to our parents so that we can embark on this family journey. We are both lucky to be raised by responsible and loving parents," says Meng Ngee. "We've learnt it's not how much we can give to our kids but how we present life to them. We all have to measure our cloth and cut them to what fits us, to not be afraid to try new adventures and new ways of living once in a lifetime. The richness of life is what we dare to plant in our mind and soul, and not in what we possess."

Wise words indeed. Here's to a life less ordinary but far more enriching. ☺