



ALL AROUND THE WORLD

PRECISELY 125 YEARS AGO, JOSHUA SLOCUM BEGAN THE FIRST SINGLE-HANDED CIRCUMNAVIGATION, INSPIRING A RAFT OF SIMILARLY EPIC JOURNEYS. TRISTAN RUTHERFORD TAKES A LONG LOOK AT YACHTING'S ULTIMATE VOYAGE

In 1895 Captain Joshua Slocum, born in Canada but a naturalised American citizen, weighed anchor on a voyage no solo sailor had done before. Sailing his 11-metre sloop *Spray*, and using only dead reckoning and an old tin clock to chart his endeavour, he sailed alone around the world.

His three-year circumnavigation comprised experiences that would make a modern charter party weep. The highlights included a personal tour of Robinson Crusoe's island (Juan Fernández, near Chile) where the real-life Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk, had been "discovered" and rescued by the English privateer and explorer William Dampier 200 years earlier: "The hills are well wooded, the valleys fertile. Why Alexander Selkirk ever left you was more than I can make out," Slocum wrote.

He also recalled at length an all-night party off Papua New Guinea. Slocum's timeless travelogue, *Sailing Alone Around the World*, sold by the millions. The book inspired dozens of other circumnavigators and remains, quite simply, the greatest sailing story ever told.

TAKING ROUTE

As the Panama Canal was still under construction, Captain Slocum (pictured above) followed a well-worn circumnavigating trail, but this had not been his intention. He had planned to sail west to east but, in Gibraltar, after learning about piracy in the southern Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, he altered course for Brazil, picked up the trade winds, and the rest is history.

At the age of 14, Dutch sailor Laura Dekker also followed the trade winds from the Canary Islands on her record-breaking 2011 circumnavigation. "There are lots of other amazing voyages," she explains, "but there is something so special about setting sail in one direction then returning from the other side of the world." Across the Atlantic, Dekker read Slocum's travelogue for inspiration. Flying fish flew alongside her 12-metre two-masted Jeanneau *Guppy*. She provisioned on the Dutch Caribbean island of St Martin then set sail for the Panama Canal and Pacific, returning 518 days later, aged 16.

CIRCUMNAVIGATING IN STYLE

Kevin van Luijn, captain of 70-metre expedition motor yacht *Sherakhan*, welcomed Laura Dekker on her record-breaking return to St Martin.



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Above: Dutch sailor Laura Dekker was just 14 years old when she set off on her 518-day solo circumnavigation on board 12m *Guppy* (right). Below: Dekker in Hiva Oa in the Marquesas Islands



"Her trip proves that any well-captained vessel can make a circumnavigation," says Van Luijn. "However, on our round-the-world voyage, which begins in the Caribbean in early 2022, we can ensure every moment is about enjoying yachting's ultimate adventure." The explorer yacht has space for 26 guests including specialist pilots, lecturers, naturalists and security. "In short, our guests will follow the journey of the greatest sailors, including Slocum and [16th-century Portuguese explorer] Magellan, but in seven-star luxury."

Among the rarer stops by Slocum was the lonely island of Rodrigues near Mauritius. Unfortunately, ship sightings were so rare that religious locals mistook the solo sailor for the coming of the Antichrist. "One elderly woman... barricaded her doors, and did not come out while I was on the island, a period of eight days," Slocum recalled.

"You'll notice that destinations like these are only really possible on a circumnavigation," concludes van Luijn. "That's because, although nowhere is unreachable on *Sherakhan*, it requires a big commitment to place a yacht and crew in such an isolated region."

ONCE IN A LIFETIME

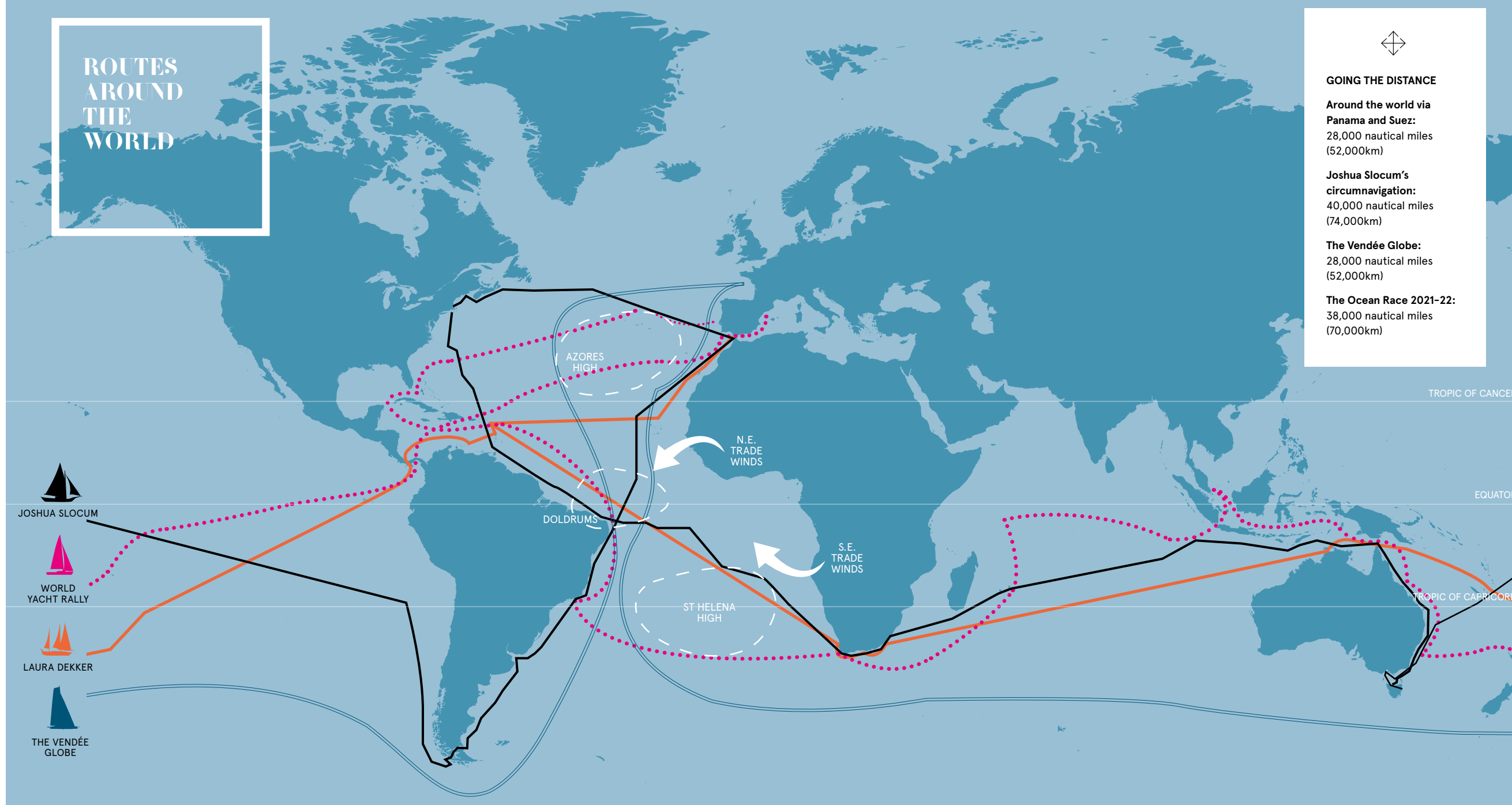
Jimmy Carroll, co-founder of yacht expeditions agency Pelorus, agrees. "It's the return on the investment that makes such an expedition attractive for the circumnavigators we're currently assisting," he explains. "A round-the-world trip allows for a dozen once-in-a-lifetime experiences in one voyage." The Pelorus planning team can take up to six months to create a full expedition, overseeing permits, provisioning, logistics and experiences. These could include using submersibles to join marine biologists in the new Ascension Island Marine Protected Area, where migrating species include humpback and Gervais' beaked whales, or a 4x4 tour of St Helena. Slocum was welcomed to both boat-only islands by the resident British governor - a reception still afforded to visiting yachtsmen today.

Pelorus is currently planning a two-year trip for a superyacht owner in 2021. "His action-packed circumnavigation is a gift to his children, although the family will fly in and out to avoid the longer ocean passages," says Carroll. "The



Above: Joshua Slocum reported that porpoises and dolphins followed him home from his final stop in Cape Town, a phenomenon experienced by others

ROUTES AROUND THE WORLD



GOING THE DISTANCE

Around the world via Panama and Suez:
28,000 nautical miles (52,000km)

Joshua Slocum's circumnavigation:
40,000 nautical miles (74,000km)

The Vendée Globe:
28,000 nautical miles (52,000km)

The Ocean Race 2021-22:
38,000 nautical miles (70,000km)

contacts an exploration agency has allowed our guests to dive untouched reefs in Eritrea, which have been off-limits since 1992." Other boasts could include visiting the islands of Juan Fernández or birdwatching on the Kerguelen Islands, an archipelago once visited by Captain James Cook and only reachable by sea.

ALL RALLY ROUND

Captain Cook (pictured below) was surely the ultimate circumnavigator. In 1769 he sailed through the Drake Passage, discovered by the world's second round-the-world sailor, Sir Francis Drake, and into the Pacific Ocean. Cook's voyage aboard HMS *Endeavour* recorded the first European landings on South Georgia, Hawaii and New Zealand, while the homeward passage explored the Torres Strait between Australia and Papua New Guinea. Slocum also sailed this route to avoid "a vast amount of ice drifting up from the Antarctic" towards Cape Leeuwin off Western Australia. Better still, the Torres Strait offered "water milky white and green and purple with... the phosphorescent light effect at night in its greatest splendour."

Next year the itineraries of both Slocum and

Cook will be more or less mirrored by some of the world's finest sailing yachts. In November 2021 the World Yacht Rally will depart from the Canary Islands en route to 25 stops specifically chosen for excitement.

"A maximum of 30 yachts will be invited to sail several once-in-a-lifetime destinations," says rally director Jack Lloyd. "These include the Kei Archipelago, the

easternmost port of entry in Indonesia," where 200 barely inhabited specks exude a Maldivian charm. "Our rally destinations also allow free cruising time if you arrive early or late," continues Lloyd, "such as Australia's

Whitsundays and Singapore, where guests, crew or owners may fly in to and out from. Our World Yacht Rally has a travelling 'boatyard'. It will be installed at several rallying stations, like an F1 team, so we can service your engines, check your rigging and [help you] prepare for the next leg." Calendar events and weather dictate the 30-month itinerary of the World Yacht Rally. That means Christmas in the Caribbean, summer in the Marquesas and Moorea and a New Year's party in Cape Town.

Unlike Cook, participants in the rally will be more concerned about sunscreen than scurvy. For a fee of €65,000 (£59,000) per boat, Lloyd's team will oversee permits, risk assessments, medical emergencies, ripped sails and almost

any eventuality for the yachts, crews and guests. Here Lloyd has form. He is the former director of the Volvo Ocean Race, a hardcore team circumnavigation with legs between 10 destinations over 10 months. The next edition, renamed The Ocean Race, begins in October 2021. There are 18 teams registered.

A final only-by-sea highlight on the World Yacht Rally is the Cocos Islands, midway between Australia and Sri Lanka. Aside from geckos and loggerhead turtles, only two of the 27 coral atolls are inhabited. Many islanders are descendants of Alexander Hare. In 1826 this eccentric Englishman set himself up as "king" with a harem of 40 Malay women. A decade later, HMS *Beagle* called at Cocos on its

circumnavigation with Charles Darwin aboard. The ship's log recalls an island chain where "crabs eat coconuts, fish eat coral, dogs catch fish, and shells are dangerous man-traps". Slocum carried one of these mammoth Tridacna clams on board *Spray* as a souvenir.

PERILS AND PITFALLS

World Yacht Rally guests might enjoy the tales of Darwin, Cook or Slocum in their spa pool. Not so Vendée Globe competitor Alex Thomson. "Sir Robin Knox-Johnston was my mentor," says Thomson, referring to the first sailor to make a single-handed non-stop circumnavigation. In 1968 Knox-Johnston performed the feat in a 10-metre Bermudan ketch in 10 months. Starting

on 8 November, Thomson hopes to circle our planet skippering *Hugo Boss*, an 18-metre carbon fibre racing yacht, in just over two months, solo and unassisted. Thirty-seven sailors are entered. "Although Sir Robin couldn't call his loved ones, I can send and receive photos and videos, which makes those days alone on the boat more manageable."

The Vendée Globe is called "the Everest of the Seas" for good reason. The race route passes under the three continental capes - the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Horn and Cape Leeuwin, rendering the Southern Ocean Thomson's biggest danger. "Rapid winds, furious seas, huge waves," recalls Thomson. "And of course you're in total darkness a lot of the time." On occasion



This year will see British sailor Alex Thomson's fifth participation in the Vendée Globe round-the-world race

PHOTOGRAPHY: GABRIEL LARMOUR; STOCK MONTAGE/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF PELOLUS; MAP: FREEVECTORMAPS



Left: Alex Thomson rejoices at the finishing line of the 2016-17 Vendée Globe race. Below: in 1969 Robin Knox-Johnston was the first person to race solo non-stop around the world

Hugo Boss will surf down 15-metre waves at 65 km/h. “Competitors call that the runway!”

A key part of circumnavigation is mental strength, attests Thomson. “It’s an exercise in self-discipline and self-management. You have to train your mind to separate isolation from loneliness by reminding yourself that you have friends, family and teammates thinking of you.”

Fellow circumnavigator Laura Dekker agrees. “You don’t have to be an expert at tuning and trimming sails to make a round-the-world voyage,” she explains, “because you’ll quickly learn those skills. However, if you’re sailing without support, you have to be clear-headed. My father taught me to constantly think about what could go wrong at any given time, and how you would fix that problem.”

Slocum, who had sailed across the Pacific many times as a captain of a cargo ship prior to his solo journey, said his greatest fear sailing alone was not loneliness but pirates. He addressed loneliness by “making companionship with what was around me”. In Patagonia he was chased by canoe-loads of Fuegian bandits and, when anchored at night, scattered tacks on his deck as a first line of defence. Now yacht owners might have beautiful Tierra de Fuego and Patagonia on their bucket lists.



In 1877 the first round-the-world yacht tourists sailed through the newly built Suez Canal. Britain’s aristocratic Brassey family owned the 48-metre schooner *Sunbeam*, which featured open fireplaces and mahogany furniture. Like a contemporary superyacht adventure, the Brassey’s 11-month tour (see sidebar, right) took in volcanic hikes in the Canaries, rainforest adventures in Rio, the Magellan Strait, Tahiti, Hong Kong and the Seychelles.

AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB

Anyone who circumnavigates the globe joins a sailing elite that ranks Slocum in their number. There’s a uniquely contented feeling on departure and completion, as Dekker found. “At first I felt a sense of freedom at having left everything behind. On a boat your life shrinks to a few really simple factors, like sailing in the right direction, whereas on land there’s always a thousand things to do.” On the final leg after Australia, Dekker “fell in love with the solitude and peace and harmony with nature,” as orcas and dolphins escorted her boat home.

Like Dekker and most early circumnavigators, Slocum’s final continental stop was Cape Town, where he fell for South Africa’s virgin beauty. On departure he was compelled to quote the great circumnavigator Drake who, “when he first saw this magnificent pile, sang: ‘Tis the fairest thing and the grandest cape I’ve seen in the whole circumference of the earth.’”

RIPPING ROUND- THE-WORLD YARNS

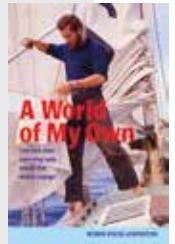
One Girl One Dream, Laura Dekker. Dekker was born on a boat during her parents’ own circumnavigation. Aged 14 she fought Dutch courts and British law to become the youngest person to sail alone around the world, via a dozen inspirational islands.



A Voyage in the Sunbeam, Annie Brassey. The Brasseys were moneyed aristocratic explorers. Their three-masted schooner *Sunbeam*, with its crew of 30, made the world’s first circumnavigation for pleasure. Their itinerary via Argentina, Japan and Sri Lanka would thrill adventurers today.



A World of My Own, Robin Knox-Johnston. In 1968 Knox-Johnston faced hell and high water as he sped around “all three capes” to become the first non-stop solo circumnavigator, in a precursor to the Vendée Globe race.



A Pirate of Exquisite Mind, Diana and Michael Preston. William Dampier, “the world’s first travel writer”, visited Australia before Cook, wrote about Galápagos wildlife before Darwin, and made three circumnavigations of thrilling colour. A must-pack for sailors.



In 1877, the Brassey family became the first round-the-world yacht tourists in their 48m schooner Sunbeam

Porpoises and dolphins “and such other fishes as did not mind making 150 miles a day” followed Slocum home across the Atlantic. The first solo circumnavigator returned home to belated acclaim and a White House welcome. Sadly, a settled life ashore never appealed. At the age of 65 in November 1909, he departed for the Caribbean aboard his beloved sloop *Spray*, intent on writing a book about Brazil. But the sailor never arrived... and never returned. ■