

United States of America – East Coast

Maine – November 2nd to 13th



Travelling in times of Covid has its own challenges. Each border crossing is complicated, the rules change while you travel and it's hard to get the right information. For the USA, after an enormous detour to St Pierre and Miquelon, on November 2nd we achieved to enter Maine in Eastport, a small busy fishing harbour on the border.

When entering the first bar/restaurant, wearing a face mask, the entire bar looked at us, we were laughed at, and jokingly asked if we wanted to rob the place... Welcome to the USA, where vaccination is a political issue, and wearing a face mask almost an insult to

some people.

With stops in Bar Harbour, Boothbay Harbor and Portland, we could savour what spring and summer would be like here, but all the holiday makers were gone, restaurants were closed for the season, marinas were empty and floating docks were removed. Instead of 500 boats in a harbour we were the only yacht, anchored amidst the local fishermen. At least we were able to integrate in the local community without being treated as a tourist.



From the Bold Coast in the North East, with its breath-taking sceneries, to the entertaining towns in the Mount Desert area, Penobscot Bay where one could cruise for a month, to Portland, our first sizeable city since Halifax, we would have loved to stay and spend more time. But temperatures were dropping day by day, and with Boston and New York on our schedule, we chose to proceed south west for some city adventures.



Maine is known for its rocky shores bordered by pine trees, the Acadia national park, holiday houses for the rich and famous and lobster fishing. Up to 60 miles offshore, one finds a ridiculous amount of lobster trap buoys, all with different colours and shapes, bobbing up and down on the swell. If they weren't that annoying for navigation, one would admire their beautiful colours in the cold dark blue water. On several occasions we would have to dive to get our props cleared from meters of rope and Styrofoam buoys. We kept one as a souvenir, to remind us to be vigilant. South of Portland the lobster pods disappeared almost completely. We reckon that the lobsters don't go that far south.



New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut- November 14th to 24th

The New England Coast, from Maine to Cape Cod, is dotted with cities reminding the early settlers of their home town. Places like Bath, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Essex, Ipswich, Gloucester and York carry a lot of their English heritage, but are adapted to the local building materials, different climate conditions, bigger cars, mainly pickups and crowded with the typical mix of nationalities that moved to the old colonies in the last two centuries.



When the skyline of Boston appeared on the horizon, we realised that for the last four months we had not seen any high rise buildings. We were about to leave the part of the world where people live off hunting, fishing and agriculture, into the part of the USA, between Boston and Washington, where lawyers, large corporations, world class



universities and influential world cities make the difference. We dropped anchor in view of downtown Boston, and were spoiled from early morning to late night with the always changing views of the glass skyscrapers.

The proud city of Boston oozes culture and history, its parks and harbour walks are a treat for pedestrians, the busy harbour creates a vibrant atmosphere, and restaurants and bars are very inviting. Unlike other big American cities, that are built in a grid pattern, Boston streets have a more European feeling, with twists and turns and lack of organisation and the feeling that one can find gems behind each corner.

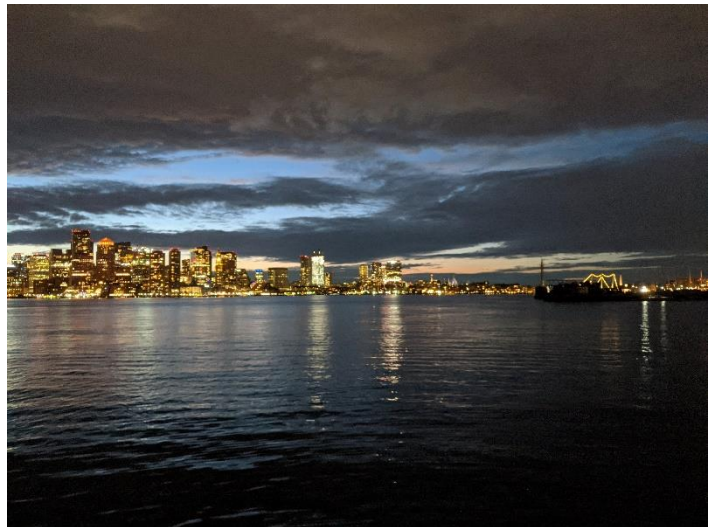
The Freedom Trail, marked by a red brick strip on the pave way, is a 2.5 mile walking path that guides you to 16 historic sites, that mark the most important places and events in the fight for independence of the USA, that originated here. The Boston Tea Party museum lets you re-enact the dramatic events that took place when a few hundred Bostonians decided to refuse to pay taxes to the British crown for imported tea, and tossed all the tea overboard into Boston Harbour.

The North End is Boston's Italian neighbourhood, where people still speak Italian in small coffee bars, where family run bakeries make the best pastries, where payment is preferably made cash only and where excellent restaurants remind you of Rome and Naples.



Across the river in Cambridge(!) we got a taste of Boston's student campuses, near Harvard and MIT, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, world famous universities. We found Boston to be a city that could easily be done by bicycle or on foot, with surprising parks, neighbourhoods, and shopping areas for all tastes.

For the Monara crew Boston is the town where we adopted Theo, our black Labrador/Australian Sheppard mix puppy. Theo and his sister puppies had been abandoned in Tennessee, and the



American Dog Rescue Organisation, a national network of volunteers, managed to save them and bring them to new caring homes. We suspect that Theo is the most travelled puppy of the gang, as in his first six weeks with us he has walked the parks of Boston, New York, Ocean City, Beaufort, Georgetown, Charleston, Palm Beach, Miami and Key West, from -5 to 35 degrees Celsius.

New York – November 25th to December 1st

As Sylvie was joining us on November 25th, we had to rush from Boston to New York to welcome her on board. We sped through the Cape Cod Canal, stopped for the night in Stonington Harbour and anchored behind Chimon Island in the Long Island Sound.

From our last anchorage, 40 nm from New York, we could see the first high rise buildings of Manhattan as a fata morgana above the water, and at night we could follow the nonstop line of landing lights of airplanes on their approach to the different NY airports.

Entering New York from the Long Island Sound, passing Hell Gate, underneath 5 bridges, and travelling along Manhattan at 5 knots, to end with Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridge, and crossing the busy Hudson River is an unforgettable experience. Finally dropping the anchor behind the Statue of Liberty, with the Manhattan skyline within reach, makes our whole journey complete.



Leaving Antwerp, we travelled for 4 months, a distance of 6519 nautical miles, to bring Monara, this old stubborn lady born in 1960, all the way to the gates of New York. The skeleton crew on board, with only Jeanne, Martha Luna and myself, managed to sail the last 2000 nm on our own. We were proud of Monara and ourselves, and humbled by the sheer size of the skyline towering over

us.





As a little reminder, we repeat The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy :

"For instance, on the planet Earth, man had always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins because he had achieved so much—the wheel, New York, wars and so on—whilst all the dolphins had ever done was muck about in the water having a good time. But conversely, the dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man—for precisely the same reasons."

Sylvie, who had been delaying her arrival due to a severe hernia, travelled first class due to her condition and was assisted by Leon and Charlotte to reach Monara. It was up to us on Monara to help her in the further recovery.

We booked the One15 Marina in Brooklyn, that was almost empty, apart from some small boats, Monara and superyacht Planet Nine, owned by Nat Rothschild...



From November 25th to 30th, we criss-crossed Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg, with the children working their bucket lists, Xmas shopping on 5th Avenue and in Chelsea, lunch in Central Park, visiting the



Met, sunset on Brooklyn Bridge (Tiktok), breakfast with bagels, walk the High Line, on the roof of the Rockefeller building, thrift shopping, trying to understand the New York Metro , a visit to the NBC studios for some Friends souvenirs, visit the World Trade Center memorial, hold the balls of the Wall Street Bull, followed by a New York hotdog, Times Square, Moma and walk, walk and walk, with Theo on the leash or in a carrier bag.

It was a marvellous family reunion, painted in autumn colours, as always too short, but the weather was on our heels, some mornings we had ice on the deck of Monara





in Brooklyn, so when Leon and Charlotte had to fly home, we said goodbye to Lady Liberty and pointed our bow South, in an attempt to outrun winter...

Go South – December 1st to 15th

From the middle of New Jersey, south of New York, there is the option to follow the Intercoastal Waterway (ICW), which runs just inland from the coast, through shallow bays, following the occasional river, or passing man made canals, for over 1000

nm all the way to South Florida. As shoaling and lack of maintenance have made large parts of the ICW too shallow

for Monara, we started on some overnight runs going south by the sea, stopping in Ocean City (Delaware) and Beaufort (North Carolina), where we hit the North going Gulfstream. Suddenly the seawater temperature went up to 25 degrees Celsius, we spotted turtles, plenty of dolphins and dark blue water.

The Gulf Stream, which originates in the Caribbean, runs North East at speeds of 2–4 knots along the East coast of the USA, to bend East towards Europe near the shores of Nova Scotia, influencing the water temperatures and the

climate of Western Europe. The warm waters of the

Gulf Stream are full of life, and sport fishing boats with huge tuna towers can be spotted in every harbour along the coast.





We had our first long beach walk in Cape Lookout Bight, off Beaufort NC. Theo ran his first miles on the beach, too young to temper his energy, and slept for a day afterwards. We visited the light house site, a natural park, and walked for hours without seeing anybody.

South of Wrightsville Beach North Carolina we joined the ICW, as our charts promised water depths of 3m and more. For 3 days we travelled through calm inland waters, passing from Northern vegetation to the occasional marshland, home to alligators and all kinds of birds, broken up by long stretches of holiday houses,



almost identical, in bright pastel colours, with a jetty in front of each house, containing a boat lift holding a sport fishing boat. Flags promoting Trump for President made clear that we were in a red state.



Once we crossed the border into South Carolina, following the Waccamaw River, the vegetation became subtropical, we spent half a day in these marshes and spotted



our first pelicans, who's goofy-yet-noble flights are so much fun to watch.

Charleston represents all things coastal South Carolina is about. It's fascinating history, charming neighbourhoods, good marina's and excellent restaurants make it the perfect stop for a few days. The port town dates back to 1600, and has over the centuries become a melting pot of religious and ethnic diversity, earning the name "Holy City", with over 180 churches at a certain time. It's wealth came from slave trading, cotton and rice cultivation.



The old houses in Charleston all have a porch on the south western side, the prevailing wind side. In the old days the owners would sleep on the porch in summer, when the climate is hot and humid. The wooden ceilings of all the porches would be painted a special color blue, called haint blue, that would deter insects.



The end of slavery meant the end of business for both the rice and cotton and the historic peninsula of Charleston was hit several times by earthquakes and hurricanes, with Hurricane Hugo striking hard in 1989, destroying three quarter of the historical buildings on the old peninsula. But Charleston rebuilt



itself, and although in a constant battle against the rising water, it is a proud city, conscious of its past, and confident of its future.

Florida – December 15th to January 6th.

As the ICW in the state of Georgia only promises depths of 1.5m, we waited for a weather window to make the offshore trip from Charleston to Saint Augustine, Florida. The marina staff in Saint Augustine welcomed us in Florida, as if saying: "it's time to slow down now, temperatures remain well above 20 degrees Celsius, so enjoy!" A night walk through the city revealed beautiful Xmas lights accentuating the historical Spanish buildings. Time for us to invest in a Christmas tree as well...



On December 18th, 2021, SpaceX would launch a Falcon 9 from Cape Canaveral at 23.00, so we anchored in Titusville, a few miles off the launching pad, to follow this unique event. In 8 minutes, the rocket is launched, the first stage separates from the second stage, and lands vertically on a droneship in the Atlantic Ocean, ready to be deployed again within months.

From Cape Canaveral we had to go offshore again, following the ocean route to Fort Pierce, and on the ICW to the anchorage in Palm Beach. We have never seen that many mega yachts in one place! At least a hundred multimillion dollar yachts, lying in the marina's, all being cleaned and polished from dusk till dawn. The anchorage was full of yachts waiting for a weather window to hop to the Bahama's for Christmas. As Theo is not old enough, we can't take him to the Bahama's, and will have to do with Cuba...

The Monara crew decided to go shopping in one of the most expensive shopping streets in North America, Worth Avenue, where exclusive cars are queuing up and celebrities walk by... Although most stores were way above our league, we did discover some exclusive outfits in the thrift store, run by the local church.

In Palm Beach, everything looks so much more beautiful... Even the sea has colors that we weren't expecting yet. To





continue in the bright tones, we visited the Frida Kahlo exhibition in Palm Beach, where we had our own little Instagram moment.

Theo had his first appointment with a real veterinary, in order to get his vaccines up to date and obtain an official health certificate, required for travelling to Cuba.

Xmas diner was very pleasant, with some small gifts for everyone, a huge T bone steak and pommes dauphinois, the girls favourite.

On December 25th we dropped off daughter Jeanne in Miami airport, on her way to some well-deserved weeks with her friends in

Belgium, and the next day Monara set sail to Coconut Grove, near Miami, where brother Carl and his daughter Sam joined us for a week's holiday.

Miami Beach, jetski, sunbathing, wakeboarding, shopping in Wynwood, amidst the wildest graffiti, a concert in the graffiti museum, nice lunches on Sunset



Boulevard. Carl did not loosen the leash until we had seen all of Miami and some more.



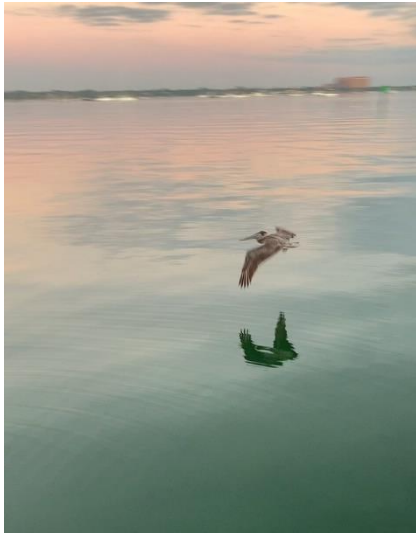
In the Coconut Grove marina we encountered our first Manatee, or sea cow, an impressive mammal that lives in shallow waters and feeds off sea grass.

For a few days we followed the reef of the Florida Keys in light blue waters, going south west, in search for the perfect white sand/light blue water beach, preferably bordered by palm trees.



In Marathon we chose a marina next to a supermarket, to stock up on non-perishable groceries for Cuba. We filled our diesel tanks to the rim, as fuel in Cuba is not to be trusted.

Key West, our last stop in the USA, is like the end of the world, the Overseas Highway, route No.1,



comes to an end, and people tend to party as if the end is near. We did hardly see any facemasks in the crowded bars, all the restaurants were fully booked, people were dancing, singing and drinking, as if Covid didn't travel that far West...

Carl treated us to the best restaurants, we gained some kilo's that would easily disappear once in Cuba. Flying out of Key West proved another drama for Carl and Sam, as snow storms were covering the East Coast of the USA, and his flight had to be rescheduled three times.

Thank you, Carl, for this lovely week at the Western end of the world. While you were waiting for your flight, and running for the connecting one, we saw a weather window that allowed us to leave the home of capitalism, heading for socialism in Cuba.

