

By Ship, Train, Bus, Plane & Sometimes Hitchhiking

The sea was choppy as a heavily loaded boat with nine people aboard left the beach and bounced through the surf at an island called Faraulep, heading for a ship drifting off the coast.

It was late afternoon. Rain made the water look gray and put a chill in the air.

As the driver gunned the outboard motor, the 14-foot boat was hammered by the waves. One man went flying overboard. Other passengers quickly pulled him in.

The swells were running four feet high as the small wooden boat drew alongside the ship. Grabbing the swinging rope ladder was tricky. One man trying to climb aboard lost his footing and fell into the sea. But he managed to get a grip on the ladder and pull himself up.

It was day 15 of a field trip through the outer islands of Yap in the western Pacific. People were returning to the ship at the end of a daylong stop at the island.

After the shore boat arrived for the final time and the last few passengers were scampering up the ladder, a big swell flipped it over. Drenched crewmen righted the boat and hooked a cable to the bow so it could be hoisted aboard.

I was the guy who slipped off the ladder.