





COLOMBIA TO RIO DULCE CRUISING GUIDE 1.0



WITH ROUTES AND STOPS ALONG THE WAY

BY
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and
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COLOMBIA TO RÍO DULCE CRUISING GUIDE

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OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDE, WITH SPECIAL NOTES

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This guide is a very special guide in that it does not cover only one country. It covers the coast of Colombia, The San Blas Islands, the off lying islands of Colombia (San Andres and Providencia), the Moskito coast, the Cape at Gracias a Dios and the Hobbies, the islands of Honduras and finally the Rio Dulce River (Guatemala). This is a large amount of cruising mileage and those that would cruise this area may use this guide to prepare but should also do as much additional research and preparation as time makes possible.

The guide is a compilation of my cruising notes and those of my co author, Amaia Aguirre.

The area west of the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao) and especially from Santa Marta west, I have always referred to as “the Hole”. I call it that because the body of water has a fetch that stretches to the southern Lesser Antilles; a distance of 1,200 nautical miles; a distance of unimpeded sea. Such fetch produces waves. Currents in the Caribbean normally run west at about 1 knot but this area can have currents that can run faster than the average as well as counter currents.

A review of the following chart in the area between Colombia and Nicaragua clearly indicates the presence of counter currents. Note also that the wind indicators demonstrate stronger than the average Trade Wind.

Early in the Trade Wind season, especially during the months of January and February, strong “northers” can come down from the States and reach as far as Colombia and areas throughout “the Hole”. When this happens, the Trade Wind, normally already stronger than average, becomes what is referred to as an “enhanced” Trade Wind. Think 35-40 knots. Try your best to avoid strong northers; dealing with the Trade Wind is enough of a challenge in this area.

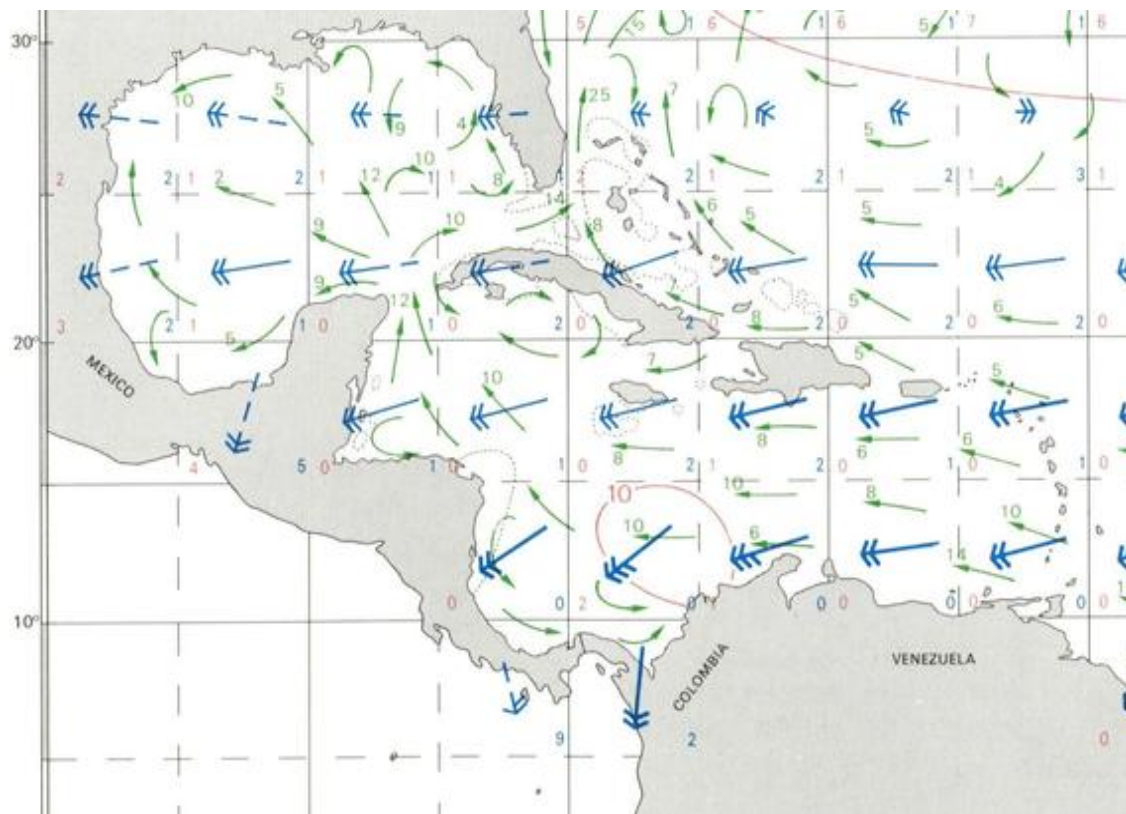


Figure . CURRENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

For most sailors circumnavigating the Caribbean Sea clockwise, after calling on the ABC islands, one will head west to Colombia. It is important to look at the chart just west of Aruba carefully as there is an area of extended shoals that you would be better off to avoid as they can raise large following seas. Tack off to the northwest; then come back to your course. Remember, “SAILING THE RHUMB LINE IS SAILING THE DUMB LINE”. Your route should always take all factors into consideration.

Once you enter the area of “the Hole”, there is no getting back out to the east. The only viable way out is to continue west or northwest. One of the challenges you may encounter

in this area as you sail west are larger than normal following seas; 5-10ft as compared to 3-5ft throughout the Caribbean. Most autopilots do not like following seas. It is best to tack downwind to avoid holding the helm hour after hour which can be tiresome. If conditions are "very fresh", say over 25 knots, it may be best for most to wait for a more temperate weather window. Winds over 25 knots and seas 10ft and higher are best left for only the most experienced cruiser and even then the risk of broaching, or an unplanned jibe is always present.

Most boats will call at Santa Marta and perhaps stop next at Puerto Velero before heading onto Cartagena. The Five Bays are beautiful but safety can be an issue. There are also regulations that require a permit to stop at the Five Bays which must be obtained before you stop there. If your *despacho* or *zarpe* or clearance papers say you are bound for Cartagena, you could technically stop for a rest, but the possible hassle with authorities and potential security concerns, it might be best to bypass the Five Bays and go directly to Cartagena.

While all the stops in Colombia will be very special, Cartagena is something magical. There you will find the old city, the forts, the color and culture, food, shopping, and so much more.

Vale la pena ¿

(worth the effort?)

Given the above, the stronger winds and larger seas, is it worth the effort to go to Colombia and environs? The answer for me is an unqualified YES. Plan your trip; watch the weather, and study the charts. Know what you are doing and why you are doing it **before** you set a course. It is VERY DOABLE; it just needs more planning than most passages up or down the Lesser Antilles.



EN ROUTE TO CARTAGENA -- SANTA MARTA BY NIGHT



PARKS IN CARTAGENA~TRULY LOVELY



COLORFUL OLD TOWN



WONDERFUL FRUIT BLESSED BY THE TROPIC SUN



DOMINOS... EVERYONE LOVES TO PLAY --.EVEN THE *TIN MEN*



ARCHITECTURE WITH ALL THE TRIMMINGS





THE MARINA IS VERY ACCOMMODATING AND THE MANAGER IS BILINGUAL



THE BOATYARD IS, TOO



THE MORE YOU LOOK, THE MORE THERE IS TO SEE... BEAUTY EVERYWHERE



A DAY IN THE PARK



When you are ready to depart from Cartagena, the question is how to route; where to go?



Figure . WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO ROUTE FROM CARTAGENA

Departing from Cartagena, one can route south and west to the San Blas Islands and Panama or go northwest to the islands of Colombia off the coast of Nicaragua. These two islands, San Andres and Providencia, are definitely worth your time and effort to visit. Tell the authorities in Cartagena that you want your *zarpe* to those islands. The sail from Cartagena in prevailing winds should be a broad reach and you will make good time. DO NOT depart Cartagena if the weather forecast includes any indication of a “norther” as sailing conditions would be rough. A strong norther can occur usually from December through the end of February and sometimes even into March. Such conditions are not frequent and most northers do not reach that far south.

Very occasionally, the wind will come out of the West. This occurs more frequently late in the trade wind season and during the summer season and often does not persist for more than a few days at most.

On departing from Providencia, follow the guide around the tip of the northeast point of Honduras at Cabo Gracias a Dios to the Cayos Cajones (Hobbie Islands) where a rest stop can be made if required.

Once you “turn the corner” you can head further west to the islands of Honduras and then onto the Rio Dulce in Guatemala.

The question of whether to route first to the San Blas Islands and Panama depends on how much time you have for this trip. The San Blas Islands are considered by many to be the “Pacific” in the Caribbean. They are self governing and their culture can be considered an anomaly in the Caribbean. There are more than 350 islands in the San Blas group of which 49 are inhabited. If you visit them, be sure to follow the protocol explained in this guide.

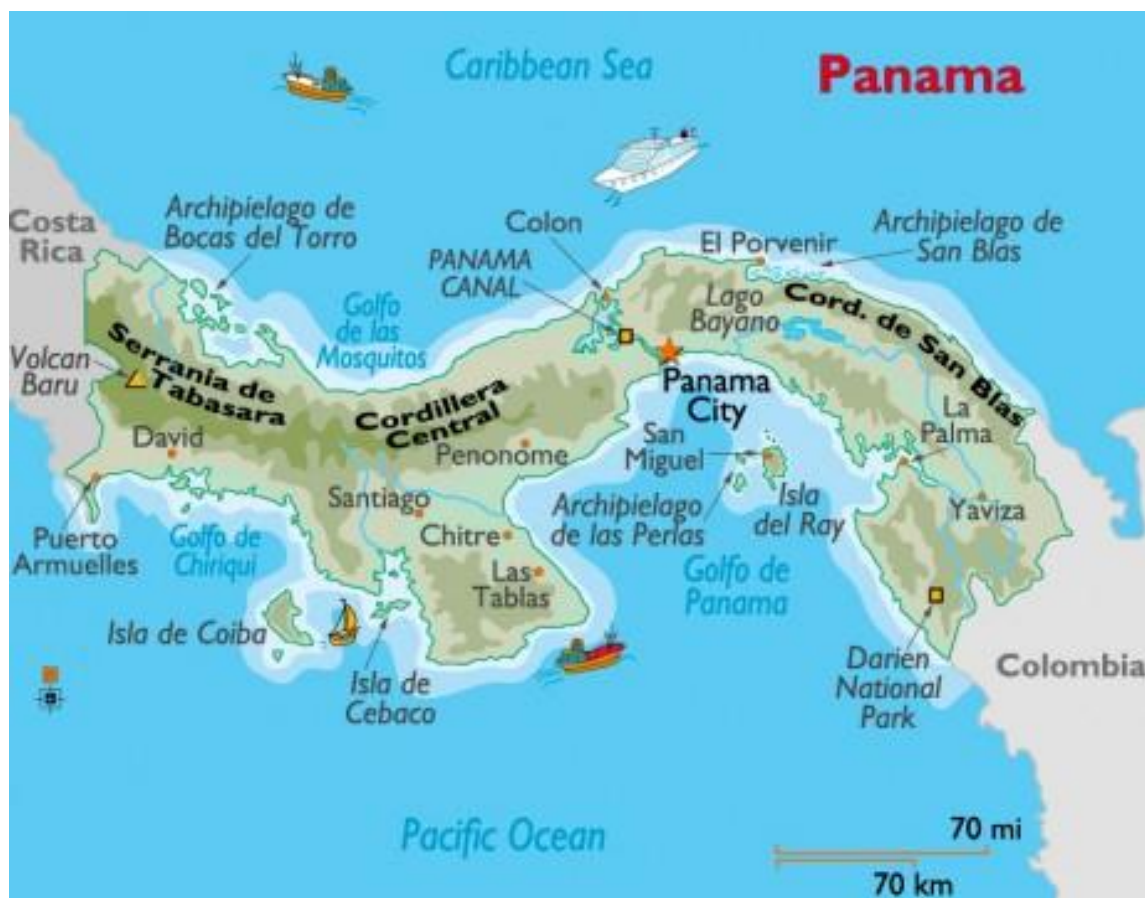


Figure . DETAILS OF PANAMA AND THE SAN BLAS ON THE CARIBBEAN SIDE

En route, you will pass through the islands of Honduras on the way to the Rio Dulce River in Guatemala. The islands include Roatan, Utila and Guanaja as well as the national park, the Cayos Cochinos.



THE WELCOME COMMITTEE



Figure . 350+ ISLANDS IN THE SAN BLAS



TO THE BAY ISLANDS

... AND ON



ROATAN IN LIVING COLOR

From the Honduran Islands you can route directly for the Rio Dulce in Guatemala which is a perfect place to pass hurricane season.



THE RIO DULCE IS A TRIP BACK IN TIME



GO ACROSS THE BAR AT HIGH TIDE... ALL SAND IN CASE YOU BUMP A BIT!



THE RUINS OF TIKAL - AN EASY DAY TRIP FROM THE RIO DULCE...

NOT TO BE MISSED!

No matter how much of the trip you choose to undertake, from Colombia through to the Rio Dulce, take your time as there really is so much to see.

Study the weather and the charts carefully. Don't push the boat or the crew.



RIO DULCE AT SUNSET ~LARGO DE IZABAL

EVERYTHING COMES TO AN END... BUT

WHEN YOU FINISH THIS TRIP

YOU WILL HAVE MEMORIES TO LAST FOR A LIFETIME

COLOMBIA PARTICULARS

COLOMBIA PARTICULARS

CURRENCY

The official currency is the Colombian Peso or COP. The street can pay a higher exchange rate than the banks as is the case in many Caribbean countries, but such transactions, aside from being illegal, can pose other risks.

ATM machines can be found almost everywhere. Credit cards are widely used as a payment method and it is usually safe as long as you do not lose sight of your card during the process. Nevertheless, you will always need to carry some cash on you, as many places will not accept plastic money.

When you are ready to leave the country, do not forget to reserve some pesos to use in the Rosario Islands, San Bernardo Archipelago, and Sapzurro on your way to Panama and the islands of Providencia and San Andres.

CLEARING

Failure to be in possession of a *zarpe* (mandatory departure document) issued by the Port Captain at your last port of departure prior to entering Colombian waters will result in serious and costly legal action. Make sure you obtain clearance documents before heading for Colombia.

It used to be possible to stop at leisure along the Colombian coast before reaching a port of entry. However, things have changed in recent years and, at present, all foreign vessels are required to make their first stop in the country at ports which have a Port Captain for clearing in. Nevertheless, the law can be overlooked in case of bad weather or some sort of distress or when it is just an overnight stop, leaving a margin to make some rest stops upon entering/leaving the country and before reaching the next authorized port of destination. There are six authorized ports for clearing in along the Caribbean coast of Colombia suitable for leisure boats, from East to West: Santa Marta, Barranquilla (Puerto Velero), Cartagena, Sapzurro (Turbo), San Andrés, and Providencia.

Colombia requires an agent to process papers. Port Captains do not deal with any yacht captain directly and will insist on the mediation of an agent which can be contacted either directly or through a marina. The fee includes both clearing in AND out. You will be required to present the following documents:

Passport

Boat registration document

zarpe

Name and address of owner OR in the absence of the owner, a letter of permission

The procedure goes as follows:

PORT CAPTAIN

First, vessel and crew will be registered with the **Capitanía de Puerto** (Port Captain) and an estimated date of departure recorded. If you wish to stay longer than the recorded date, your agent will need to ask the Port Captain for an extension of the departure date.

www.dimar.mil.co

IMMIGRATION

Then, Immigration (**DAS**) will stamp passports and will usually grant a 60 day visa free of charge, extendable on a monthly basis for another 120 days; it may vary with different nationalities. Maximum time allowed in the country is six months *in* a year. Time spent out of the country is added on to the original expiration date, it does not cancel out.

www.migracioncolombia.gov.co

CUSTOMS

If you are staying in the country for more than five days, your agent will need to apply for an “ **Importación Temporal de Vehículo Para Turista**”, a one year importation permit for your vessel which allows the avoidance of importation taxes. We understand that you can approach the Customs office (**DIAN**) directly and the permit has no cost, but it must be done within five days of arrival. This one year temporary importation permit can be extended for a further year in almost all cases. The permit usually takes a couple of weeks to be returned from Customs.

www.dian.gov.co

The “**Permiso de Pemanencia para Yates y Veleros de Bandera Extranjera**” or Stay Permit for Foreign Vessels (akin to a cruising permit but applicable to stored boats as well) is a new tax. It is valid for two months and applies to all vessels staying in the country for more than 15 days. It is issued by the Port Captain *only after* Customs has approved the temporary importation permit of your vessel. If you intend to remain in the country beyond the granted two month period, a further certificate will be issued valid for six months at an additional cost. Foreign vessels are allowed one year total stay in Colombia. The permit is cancelled when you depart Colombia, and, if you return, a new permit must be sought.

Every time you intend to leave a port, you will be required to acquire a

zarpe (compulsory departure document) of which there are three types to allow for different purposes:

Zarpe jurisdiccional

Permission issued by the local Port Captain allowing cruising in his jurisdictional area. You would need to apply for it through your agent to the Cartagena Port captain if you intended to cruise to the Rosario Islands, for example. The time granted and permit fee vary in different jurisdictions.

Zarpe nacional

Permission to transit to a different Port Captain jurisdiction. You would need it to sail from Santa Marta (under Magdalena jurisdiction) to Puerto Velero (in Atlántico), for instance.

Zarpe internacional

Clearance out of Colombia to your next destination port in a different country. Procedures include customs and immigration. Ask your agent to include *puntos intermedios* (intermediate stops) in your *zarpe internacional*. That will enable you to make as many stops as you wish along the Colombian coast on your way out of the country, as long as the location and the time spent on the journey are reasonable.

Your agent will charge a fee for each *zarpe* which varies depending on the kind of paperwork involved and the agency charges. Ask your agent for clarification when contacting him to avoid later misunderstandings.

In addition, cruising some protected areas, such as the Tayrona Park and its Five Bays, or San Andrés and Providencia, requires additional permits and fees.

Clearing formalities and procedures in Colombia can be complicated, lengthy, and costly. It should be noted that until recently, the Colombian authorities dealt mainly with cargo or fishing vessels. Thus their laws, regulations, and bureaucracy are tailored for commercial traffic and only lately are beginning to address the very different needs of cruising boats. Besides, they are seriously engaged in

fighting drug smuggling and determined to enforce security in their territorial waters by exercising a tight control over vessel traffic. However, it is undeniable that the small number of agents plays a key role in the high price of processing and oftentimes inconsistent fees. Nobody involved in the nautical business except the agents is happy about the tedious regulations or the role of the agents. Although there is a general feeling of being held hostage to their power, key people related to navigation and tourism, in both the public and private sectors, are increasingly vocal and cooperating to develop common strategies to attract nautical tourism to the country. This includes steps to overhaul the clearing process to simplify and reduce the costs of clearance. The decision of the owners of Marina Puerto Velero to set up their own agency, for example, is a good gauge of the changing atmosphere; it only deals with foreign boats visiting the marina and was set up in an effort to prevent visiting cruisers from being overcharged.

IMPORT TAXES

With the exception of the in-force duty exemption for yachts in transit, every imported item with a declared value will be charged the customary 28% import tax plus some additional fees, whether it is a personal item or a spare part for the boat. Considering that most marine parts are not available in Colombia, one might think that authorities would be willing to alleviate the cost-pressure facing visiting cruisers by extending the lawful tax exemption (to boats in transit) to marine parts, which in turn would boost business for boatyards and other nautical businesses. But they simply will not at this time.

In the light of the current situation, many cruisers resort to having their parts and equipment shipped to next door Panama where the yacht-in-transit status is acknowledged.

MARITIME AGENTS

The following agents are listed by port.

SANTA MARTA:

Anna Celilia Abello Lacouture

esolanoc@yahoo.com

Santa Marta Shipping Agency

Dino Alfonso Nelo Campo

csc-stm@hotmail.com

dino.shippingagent@gmail.com

Tel:(+57) 300 639 2640 / (+57) 301 430 8166 / Cell:(+57)
300 716 4689

Romovela

Édgar Romero

romovela_ltda@hotmail.com

Tel:(5) 421 23 11 / Cell: (+57) 312 659 9223

Agencia Víctor Abello

Rafael Segarra

trinales23@hotmail.com

Cell: (+57) 311 423 5356

PUERTO VELERO:

Marina Puerto Velero

puerto@marinasdecolombia.com

Cell: (+57) 310 632 9109

Playa Puerto Velero, Tubará – Atlántico

Vía al mar Barranquilla - Cartagena, kilómetro 30

CARTAGENA:

Cartagena De Indias Shipping Agency

comercial@cartagenadeindiasshiping.com

Tel:(+57) 5 643 3766

VHF Channels 13,14,16

Cruising Services Marine

Paola Matson & Gladis Ramos

glarase@hotmail.com

Tel:(+57) 313 894 4641 / 315 756 2818

Manga Cra 25 , Calle 25- 62, Cartagena

Romovela

Edgar Romero& David Arroyo

motoresyvelas@hotmail.com

catamarcaribe@hotmail.com

jesusarroyo79@yahoo.com

Cell:(+57) 312 659 9223 or 313 523 0742

Getsemaní Mall, Store 1A-62

White Light Agency

Manfred Alwarelt & William Arroyo

manfred.al@gmx.net

Tel: (+57) 5 666 3230 / Cell: (+57) 317 729 7367 or 301 222 1255

SAN ANDRÉS:

Agencia Serrana

René Cardona

serrana_agencia@hotmail.com

Tel:(+57) 8 512 4628 / Cell: (+57) 315 680 7980 or 321 761 9293

Av. Juan XXIII 6-78

VHF Channel 16

Agenport

Julian Watson

agenportltda@hotmail.com

Tel: 09 8 513 3481 / Cell: 320 489 9772

Barrio La Loma, Sector PerryHill , nº 9-93, Piso 1

VHF Channel 16

PROVIDENCIA:

Bush Agency

Bernardo B. Bush

bushagency2012@gmail.com

bushagency2001@yahoo.es

bushagency2006@hotmail.com

Tel.: (+57) 8 514 8050 / 8 514 8411

ON PETS

ICA (Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario) is the government agency which deals with prevention, surveillance and control of sanitary, biological and chemical risks concerning animal and plant species.

<http://www.ica.gov.co/Importacion-y-Exportacion/Otros-Procedimientos/Requisitos-para-importar-mascotas.aspx>

If entering the country with a pet dog or cat, you should visit the ICA desk in the Port Health office at the marina, accompanied by the pet, and produce the following documents:

Sanitary Certificate: Issued by the official health authority of the country of origin stating that the animal was subjected to a clinical examination by a veterinarian during the eight days prior to the trip, in which the animal was found free of contagious and parasitic diseases, without the presence of fresh or healing wounds, with a valid and current vaccination plan and suitable for transport. The certificate must specify: Species, ID, breed, gender, age and fur. Notification is required if the animal was treated with internal or external antiparasitic products whose use is duly authorized in the country of departure.



Vaccination Certificate: Must be valid according to age and species, indicating product name and date of administration.

Once the health condition and documentation of the animal has been verified, the ICA will issue the Sanitary Inspection Certificate (SIC) for a regulated fee.

It should be noted that under Article 108E of Bill 742 of 2000, given the level of perceived risk, the import of canine breeds such as Staffordshire Terrier, Pit Bull Terrier, American Pit Bull Terrier, and crosses or hybrids of these breeds is strictly prohibited.

When ready to leave the country, the owners should approach an ICA office on the day prior to departure with the following documents:

Animal Sanitary Certificate (original and copy) issued at least three days before travel by a practicing veterinarian which should include name, age, sex, breed and should state that the animal did not show any clinical signs of infectious or parasitic disease, did not have fresh or healing wounds, and had a valid and current vaccination plan.

If necessary, the certificate must state that the animal was treated against internal and external parasites with ICA registered products and that they were applied within the terms set by the country of destination.

Vaccination Certificate (original and copy) Must be valid according to age and species, indicating product name and date of administration. Once everything is in order, the ICA will issue the Sanitary Inspection Certificate (SIC) for a fixed fee.

The pet must be identified with a microchip meeting the standard ISO 11784 or ISO 11785. All pets over three months of age must be vaccinated against rabies.

The results of laboratory analysis of neutralizing antibodies against rabies (original and copy), must be performed by a laboratory approved by the European Union and the results should not be less than 0.5 IU / ml. The sample for the diagnosis should be taken and sent by a practicing

veterinarian *one month after vaccination against rabies and three months before the trip*, bearing in mind that the minimum age of the pet for it to be allowed entry to the European Union countries is seven months.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Background

For decades, Colombia has been riddled by violence and consequently has had one of the highest crime rates in South America. Drug smugglers, criminal gangs, guerrilla, paramilitary, and the military were powerful, heavily armed and inextricably linked. Social injustice and human rights were ignored, corruption was rampant, and extortion, murder, kidnapping, abuse, violence, and terror became the daily bread of Colombian society. The spiral of violence reached its peak during the 80s and 90s, when kidnappings were so profitable that illegal armed groups resorted to kidnapping to supplement their profits from drug dealing or harass their enemies. The situation in the country was so chaotic and violent that President Uribe asked the US government for assistance to fight drug cartels and the guerrillas; and to purge, train, and equip their own army and police force. After him, President Santos opened the way to negotiations with the guerrillas which have finally resulted in a peace agreement signed only recently. Colombians have lived the whole process with great expectation and high hopes for a much deserved social peace.

All those efforts have not been in vain; crime in the country has been significantly reduced and the activity of criminal gangs, guerrillas, and paramilitary has decreased dramatically while coca cultivation has similarly seen a significant reduction and been forced into more remote locations. Colombian citizens are retaking the streets of their villages, towns, and cities; and many places which had been off limits before are now vibrant with activity. Nevertheless,

important cities like Bogotá, Cali or Medellín and some rural areas still suffer high rates of criminality and violence. The advice in urban zones is to avoid depressed or isolated areas; be vigilant in crowded public places; do not carry large amounts of money or valuable jewels; avoid using your cell phone in the street; and use a taxi after dark. Any place where drugs (cocaine, marijuana or opium poppies) are cultivated, processed, or transported poses a serious risk to security, as armed groups and criminal gangs will be very active there. That is especially true in the areas bordering Panamá, Ecuador, and Venezuela. As to the guerrillas, although they have been dealt a hard blow in recent years, they are still alive and kicking in certain interior departments like Putumayo, Caquetá, or Valle del Cauca. The conflict is confined to specific well known areas and not rampant throughout the department so it does not mean they cannot be visited. However, before venturing into remote or isolated rural areas, seek local knowledge and professional advice. Colombia additionally is in sad third place after Cambodia and Afghanistan for density of landmines. Avoid driving at night as driving standards are not prize winning and accidents are common. **And do NOT hitch-hike.**

Coastal

Both the US Coast Guard and the Colombian Navy patrol heavily and exercise a 24/7 surveillance in Colombian territorial waters, especially on the Caribbean coast, making navigation very safe. The Colombian Coast Guard is eager to maintain and improve safety in their territorial waters and happy to assist cruisers. To that effect, they appeal to all captains for cooperation in providing better assistance by filing a voluntary float plan when applying for the *zarpe Internacional*. The itinerary can also be sent to the following email address: navesmcp05@dimar.mil.co . They also appreciate cruisers reporting their departure from Cartagena when ready to leave the bay and, needless to say, any suspicious activity or vessel. The *Guardacostas* (Coast Guard) is always reachable on VHF channel 16. They are friendly and professional, and usually speak some English.

Upland for Cruisers

A new police department has been created to deal specifically with tourists, called Policía Turística. Their presence is conspicuous in all tourist areas and their mission is to protect, help and inform the visitors. Do not be shy to use their services; they are young, friendly officers who often speak some basic English and are happy to be of any help.

Colombia has pulled out all the stops to ensure that visitors, whether on land or by sea, feel safe. Bad memories tend to linger longer. Although the troubles of the 1980s are history in most of the country, local people who experienced them recall that time vividly, and many visitors are apprehensive because of what they have heard. Tales of cruiser encounters with pirates can persist for years. In fact, security in marinas, yacht clubs, boatyards, and hotels is multi-layered. On the streets in cities like Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Bogota not only is the police presence very visible, but police kiosks double as tourist information centers. The throngs of people out enjoying a sunny afternoon testify to the effectiveness of that tactic. That said, situational awareness on land or water is the best preventive measure for cruisers to employ, and if one is told that a particular neighborhood should be avoided, that advice should be taken to heart.

**TRANSITING
COLOMBIA**

CARIBBEAN

TRANSITING CARIBBEAN COLOMBIA

ARUBA TO CABO DE LA VELA

The best months to make the passage from the ABCs to Colombia are October and November or May and June, the months between the wet and dry seasons in the Caribbean. That is when you are more likely to get a weather window of calm conditions which will lessen the rough navigational features typical of this area of the Caribbean labeled as one of the worst passages around the world.

The general perception of Colombia as a dangerous country riddled by the violence of drug cartels and ordinary crime, the guerrillas, the military, and the paramilitary has kept cruisers well off its coasts for decades. Until very recently, the main trend was to avoid the Colombian littoral at all costs even if it meant sailing in open waters subject to strong winds and heavy seas. Fortunately, both the situation in the country and its public image have changed dramatically in recent years; more and more cruisers opt to stop in Colombia on their way to and from Panama and the western Caribbean as sailing close to the Colombian coastline has obvious advantages.

When you are ready to leave Aruba, make sure there is a calm weather forecast at the time of departure, as you will have to add at least 5 to 10kn of wind. A forecast of 5 to 10kn of wind from the ENE and 3-6ft waves will allow a fast

safe passage tacking downwind. Nevertheless, expect to get heavy seas and strong winds at some point along the passage and prepare yourself and the boat for difficult conditions.

The bonus: You can happily use your fishing gear during the passage as there is an abundance of lemon fish and various kinds of tuna all along the way.

THE PASSAGE

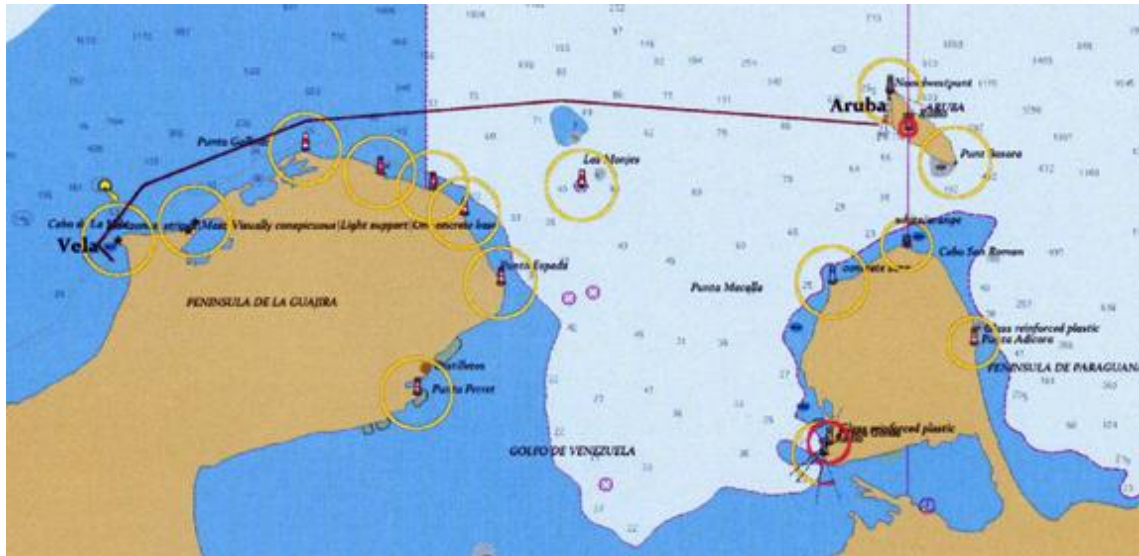


Figure . ARUBA TO CABO DE LA VELA, COLOMBIA

It is 135NM from Aruba to Cabo de La Vela so, if you leave Aruba in the early morning, you will arrive at Cabo de la Vela the following morning with plenty of time to inspect the bay and choose the anchoring spot which suits you best.

Nevertheless, there are some anchorages along the passage you could use in case of an emergency.

The first possible stop is **Los Monjes del Sur** at **12°22N - 70°54W**, 53NM downwind from Aruba and also known as “The Rock”. Los Monjes Archipelago is located at the border between Colombia and Venezuela, east of Guajira Peninsula in Venezuelan territory. It consists of three groups of rocky islands (Monjes del Norte, Monjes del Este and Monjes del Sur) spanning just 0.11NM altogether, uninhabited except for the latter, where the Venezuelan Navy maintains a base. Monjes del Sur contains the two largest islands of the archipelago, which are connected by an artificial causeway even if shown as two separate islands on many charts.



Figure . LOS MONJES DEL SUR

The islands have steep walls and no beaches or natural landing spots. However, a small bay and a fishing dock -- where you will have to tie because the bay is too deep to set anchor-- offer fair protection from E and NE winds. A lighthouse stands out on top of the higher of the two islands 230ft over the water. The island is mainly visited by Venezuelan fishing boats from the Paraguaná Peninsula in Venezuela. The Venezuelan Navy outpost monitors a far reaching area and they will make contact on the VHF as soon as any approaching vessel is spotted. If you intend to enter the port, call the Guarda Costa on VHF 16 and ask for permission to proceed, which is usually granted.

Another 55NM downwind from Monjes del Sur and 110NM from Aruba, just round Punta Gallinas, **Bahía Honda (12°23N--71°47W)**, a shallow deserted bay with maximum 30 feet depths in the center, offers refuge from the Trade Wind but it is wide open to north winds and the N/NE surge. The bay is huge -- 6.5 miles wide and 4 miles deep -- extremely arid and uninhabited, except for some local Guajiro Indians who use their temporary settlements for fishing.

We mention this anchorage only in case you need to take refuge in an emergency. If you need to make it in, approach the entrance of the bay from the east side to avoid the submerged rocks stretching out on the west bank. However, do not go too near any of the shores as they shoal rapidly far from the shore, especially on the east side.



Figure . BAHIA HONDA

Just 12NM west of Bahía Honda and 120NM from Aruba, Bahía Portete would offer excellent refuge in case of bad weather. Located just 30 miles from the Venezuelan border on the Península de La Guajira, this large pocket bay is 7NM long and 9NM wide and it is protected from all weather except northers. At the mouth of the bay lies **Puerto Bolívar**, a large and busy commercial port used mainly as a maritime shipping terminal for the coal coming from the

Cerrejón open-pit mine 90 miles away. The mine is connected to the terminal by a private railroad using a direct-loading system and the latest technology.

Puerto Bolívar and Bahía Honda are accessed through a very well marked channel over 700ft wide with 50ft depths on average. If you need to seek refuge in the bay from bad weather or due to an emergency, on approach, call the Port Captain for permission on VHF channel 16. If permission to stay is given -- and it usually is -- ask for instructions as to docking or anchoring and be prepared to remain on board during your stay as you will not be allowed to land. The entrance buoy is located at position **12° 17.46N--74° 58.73W** and the channel is straight forward and very well marked.



Figure . ENTRY TO BAHIA PORTETE AND PUERTO BOLIVAR

CABO DE LA VELA

Only another 3NM west of Puerto Bolívar and 135NM from Aruba lies Cabo de la Vela (**12°12N--72°11W**).

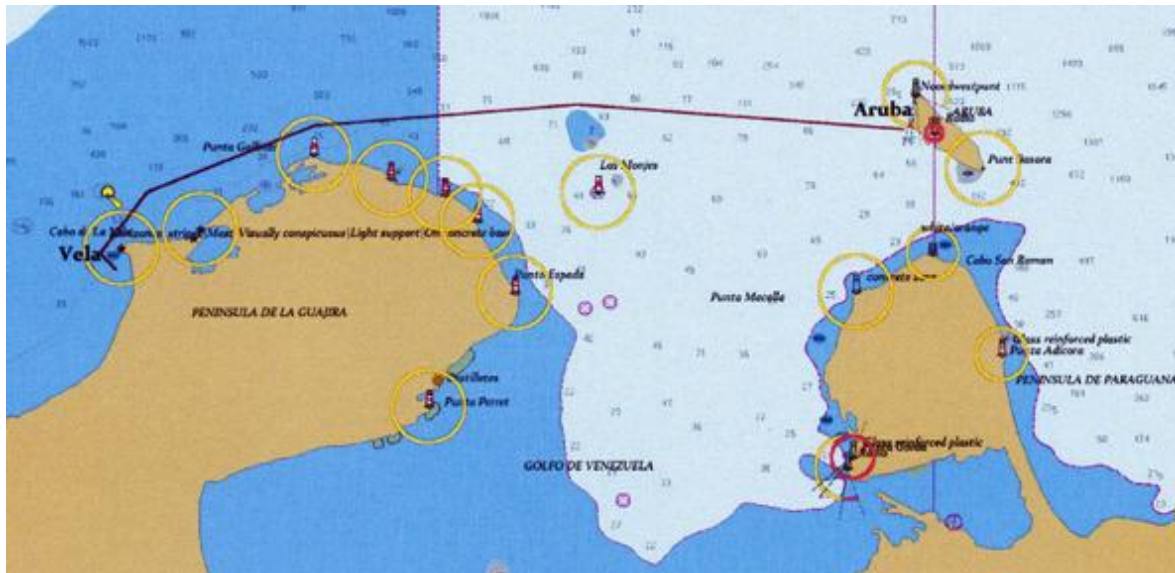


Figure . FROM ARUBA TO ENSENADA GUARITCHERU BEHIND CABO DE LA VELA

If you leave Aruba in the early morning around 7:00 am and sail non-stop, you will arrive at Cabo de la Vela next day in the morning.

From the approach WP at **12°14N--72°11W** you will be able to see the ample bay, Ensenada Guaritcheru. As you turn around the cape to enter the bay, there is an islet (circled in the map below) called Cayo El Morro. You can go around it or sail into the bay between the rock and mainland in 15ft of water.

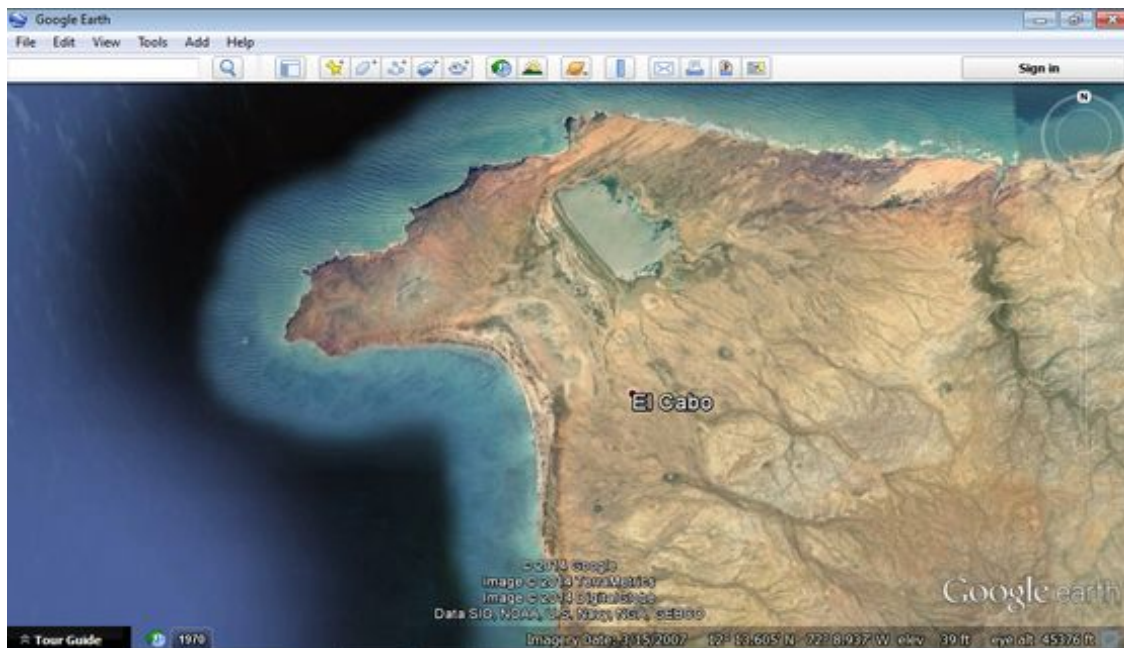


Figure . "EL CABO" -- CABO DE LA VELA

The best anchorage in winds from the ENE is on the NE side of the bay at WP **12°12.23N--72°10.69W** in 20ft of water and good holding sand, but it is far from the beach and, if the winds are strong from the southeast, you will get wind chop. Also, if the winds are from the north or west or south, this anchorage will be untenable. You can also anchor at WP **12°12'08N--72°09.27W** in 18ft of water and good holding sand, just in front of the local fishing boats and much closer to the village. This anchorage is fine in northeasterly winds,

but should the wind shift to east or southeast, the fetch could make things unpleasant. Should a shift occur, eyeball your way south for another mile or so and anchor at the end of the long beach in 10ft and a sand bottom. Be vigilant with the holding as the sand bottom is quite irregular and the wind can blow hard at times.

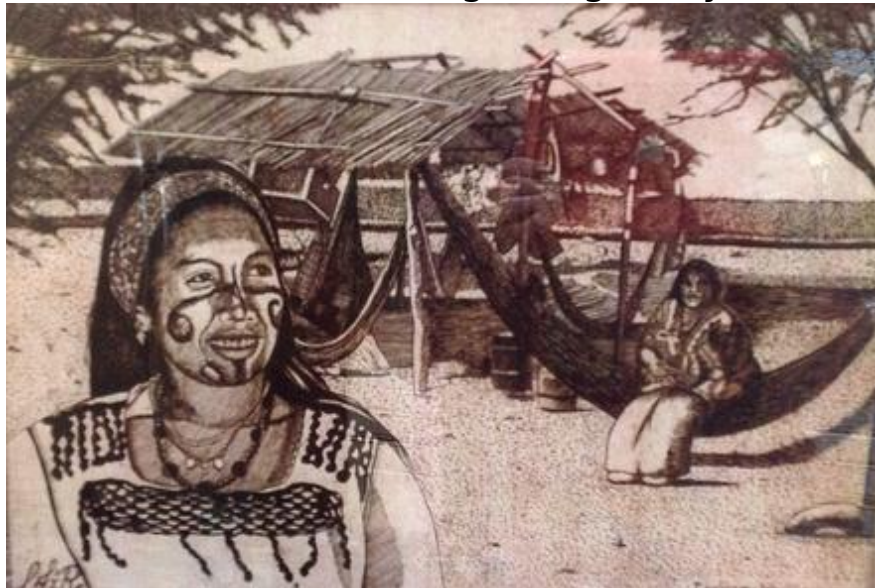
As you enter the bay, watch out for buoys or plastic bottles floating in the water; they indicate the presence of fishing nets that can extend as far as the beach. This is an open bay with plenty of wind but out of the swell. The wind usually begins to blow harder around 11 am. Wind gusts can blow as hard as 35-40kn from the ENE but they calm down at sunset. In the morning, with the first rays of light, you'll discover that the boat is bathed in a fine coat of orange sand blown from land. It may get a bit choppy in winds from the north, west, or south.

Cabo de la Vela owes its name to the Spanish Conquistador Alonso de Ojeda. When the Spanish fleet under his command was approaching the cape in 1499, he thought he could see the whiteness of a distant sail, hence he named it Cape Sail or Cabo de la Vela. Surrounded by the Guajira Desert, the terrain is flat and dry with hardly any vegetation in the arid ochre landscape. Its low hills and extensive plains exude a dreamy glow in the horizon under the relentless sun, bestowing a magic atmosphere to the landscape.

It is part of the Guajiro or Wayuu territory, located in the Guajira Peninsula. The Wayuu lands are divided in half by the Colombo-Venezuelan border. The only village in the ample

bay is Buenavista, popularly known as El Cabo. Deserted as it may look at first sight, it attracts many visitors for the stark beauty of its arid scenery. For that same reason, even if there are no groceries or food stalls, you will find more than 30 basic restaurants and lodging huts all along the beach. And, if you need fresh water or fuel, you will always find a local fisherman ready to get it and carry it to your boat for you.

The main Wayuu dish is goat on the grill or casserole and lobster, shrimps and fish, served with rice and "queques" or wholemeal buns. The typical local drink is "chirrinchi", a delicate spirited drink made of corn and similar to Italian grappa. A complete meal can coast something between 10.000 and 20.000 Colombian pesos, depending on the content. Obviously lobster will be more expensive than fish. The Wayuu are not familiar with dollars, so warn them beforehand you do not have local currency. Although they may seem a bit reluctant at the beginning, they will accept



your dollars.

WAYUU WOMAN IN TRADITIONAL DRESS

Wayuu Indians are very hospitable and friendly. Although in touch with modern civilization, they have managed to preserve their culture, language and traditions up to the present day. Wayuu women are excellent weavers and take great pride in it; the Wayuu saying "sütus o pacpas" means 'being a woman is being able to weave'. They make very colorful hammocks, bags, bracelets, "guareñas" or native sandals, and "taquiaras " --handmade colorful tunics worn by women on special occasions.

The main attractions on the Cape are "El Faro", the lighthouse; "El Pilón de Azúcar", the sugar pile; and "El Ojo de Agua", the water eye. These three spots are not far from each other, on a 30 minute walk along a sand trail bordering the north side of the bay. The views from the top are absolutely stunning; infinite tones of ochre contrast with the green, blue and turquoise of the sea. Both "El Ojo de Agua" and "El Pilón de Azúcar" are sacred spots for the Wayuu people where they communicate with the spirits of their ancestors. If you feel tempted by this short trek, do not forget to wear a hat, sunscreen, and stout shoes, and carry fresh water.

Now relax and rest up as the next leg is a good 120 miles.



RETURNING HOME AFTER A DAY OF FISHING, CABO DE LA VELA

THE FIVE BAYS TO SANTA MARTA

THE FIVE BAYS TO SANTA MARTA

THE FIVE BAYS IN GENERAL

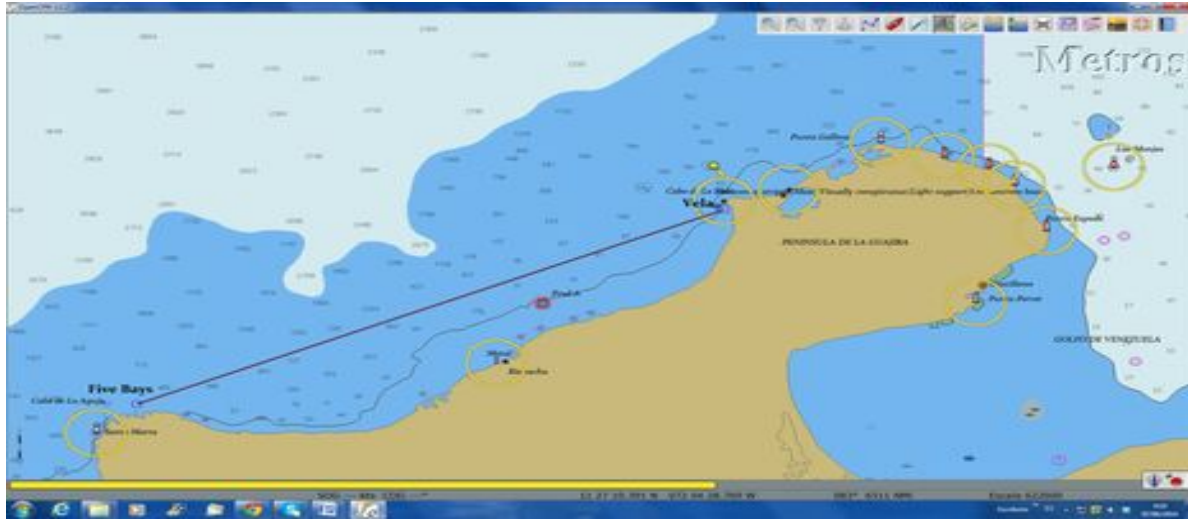


Figure . FROM CABO DE LA VELA TO THE FIVE BAYS

125NM southwest from Cabo de La Vela, a succession of inlets known as the Five Bays offers good protection from the prevailing trade winds. The bays are part of the Tayrona Natural National Park and lie in the following order from east to west: Bahía Cinto, Bahía Neguange, Bahía Gairaca, Bahía Chengue and Bahía Concha.



Figure . FIVE BAYS DETAIL

The 125NM straight lap from Cabo de La Vela to the Five Bays will probably be a comfortable passage tacking downwind in 20-25 knots of sustained wind from the ENE as long as it is carried out in the right season and weather conditions. However, you may experience periods of very light wind which will require motor sailing, as well as sudden wind gusts, especially as you approach Cabo San Juan del Guía. With or without much wind blowing, expect to navigate in moderate to rough seas and to encounter some mild counter current along this stretch. The continental shelf extends well offshore with 18-20ft depths as far as 8 NM from shore so the advice is to leave some 10 NM distance between the vessel and mainland until you get to Cabo San Juan de Guía. The only navigational hazards you will encounter along the passage are two offshore oil platforms northeast of Riohacha at position **11°49.60N--72°46.70W** and **11°47.20N--72°46.86W** respectively.

The coastline will gradually shift from the ochre plains of the Guajira peninsula to the green hills and sharp cliffs of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the highest *coastal* mountain range in the world, with snow-capped peaks reaching over 15,000ft. The main feature of the Five Bays coastline is the narrow continental shelf which drops to 600ft depths just 1.5 NM from the mainland. Look for the snow covered mountains as you approach Bahía Cinto, the first of the Five Bays; in the early morning of a clear day, you may enjoy the unique spectacle of a snowy Caribbean.



SNOW OVER THE CARIBBEAN



THE SIERRA NEVADA – FROM 600FT BELOW SEA LEVEL TO 15,000FT ABOVE, WHERE THE MOUNTAINS TOUCH THE SKY

The Five Bays are part of the **Tayrona Natural National Park**, which covers 70 square miles of land *and* sea only 21 miles from the city of Santa Marta.

The park is home to a rich biodiversity endemic to the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Thought to have been initially inhabited by small groups of hunters and gatherers, archeological explorations have revealed Tayrona Indian settlements dating back to the 6th through 16th centuries, after which they were decimated by the Spanish conquistadores. The proud Tayrona people were gifted

artisans excelling in gold crafting. To this day they consider themselves the guardians of the Sierra Nevada. Their present descendants (indigenous Koghis, Wiwas, Arhuacos and Cancuamos) still populate the mountains and maintain their traditions relatively unscathed.



LOOK, BUT DON'T TOUCH!

The most popular of the numerous archeological sites identified to date throughout the park is *Ciudad Perdida* (Lost City), paradoxically discovered by looters in 1975. It takes a beautiful but three day trek to reach, and it is increasingly popular among both local visitors and international backpackers.



Figure . CREATURES AND PLACES OF INTEREST IN TAYRONA NATIONAL PARK

The Five Bays are populated by an eclectic community that includes native settlers of different ethnic groups in remote yet geographically close locations as well as displaced

people from other parts of the country who arrived there fleeing violence elsewhere in the country.

The management of Tayrona National Park (as with most of Colombia's national parks) is being privatized and consequently, settlers whose families have inhabited the area for several generations are being expelled from the bays and their huts demolished.

Many people express fond memories of growing up on one of the bays in a home settled by their grandparents or great grandparents, and wistfully recall idyllic childhoods in nature. Today, though, they are likely to live in Santa Marta and “commute” by boat to the bay of their childhood. In fact, only Neguange, Gayraca and Concha are inhabited by permanent settlers and their population is minimal.



AT HOME ON A BAY

Or maybe they are all “permanently inhabited”, if we give credence to local tales of night lights (*bolas de candela*) guiding looters to alleged *huacas* (funerary burial sites rich in gold and emeralds) and the curse cast on the *huaqueros* (looters) as a toll for their material greed. Or stories about sounds in the night replicating events of the day: people talking, a round of dominoes, a cockfight... sheer magical realism!

As part of the Tayrona National Natural Park, the Five Bays are subject to special conditions and entering them is not permitted unless one is in possession of the required permit to cruise the park waters. The bad news is that, in order to obtain it, you first need to clear into the country. Only after having obtained the *Permiso de Pemanencia para Yates y*

Veleros de Bandera Extranjera (Stay Permit for Foreign Vessels) and a *Zarpe Jurisdiccional* in Santa Marta will you be able to apply for the permit to cruise the Tayrona Park. it is valid for 20 days and extendable for another 20 days at the same fee; and allows sailing and anchoring in the Five Bays. However, the cruising permit does not include the regular park fee that all foreign visitors by land must pay at the park gates. So, if you intend to visit the park by land while at anchor, bear in mind that you might be required to also pay the land access fee by a passing park warden. Tickets can be purchased at the Tayrona Park office in Santa Marta (Calle 17, N° 4-06).

The good news is that, if the *zarpe* issued by the last country visited prior to entering Colombian territorial waters states that *Cartagena* instead of Santa Marta is your port of arrival in Colombia, then overnight or short stops in the bays are permitted, provided the quarantine flag is flying.



THE BAYS ARE DEEP UNTIL VERY NEAR SHORE - AND THEN THERE IS THE CORAL

Surrounded by tall cliffs and steep green hills and open to the north, the Five Bays offer different degrees of protection from winds and swell but they all share some common features:

They are protected from the prevailing ENE winds.

They are subject to sudden SE wind gusts which come whirling all the way down from the majestic Sierra Nevada and can reach 30-35 knots. Check your holding, allow plenty of chain, and be alert at night.

The bottom is 60-70ft deep close to shore but shelves rapidly in a matter of yards.

There is extensive coral close to shore; always favor the center of the bay.

Avoid isolated anchorages at night and favor the populated areas of the bay instead.

Bahía Cinto

It is the first of the bays coming west from Cabo de La Vela. A waypoint at **11°20.55N-74°03.3W** will place you north of the bay, right in the middle of the entrance. From there you can easily eyeball your way in or bear 175° towards the shore of the bay. The bottom shoals rapidly near the shallow shore and there are innumerable rocks and coral patches all around. It has an ample entrance wide open to the northern swell so it is always rolly.

NOTE: Both Bahía Cinto and Bahía Chengue (4th bay) hold a special status in the park. ***They are both off-limits by sea as they are used as natural fish hatcheries.***



Figure . BAHIA CINTO -- 1st OF THE FIVE BAYS

Neguange

Playa Cristal

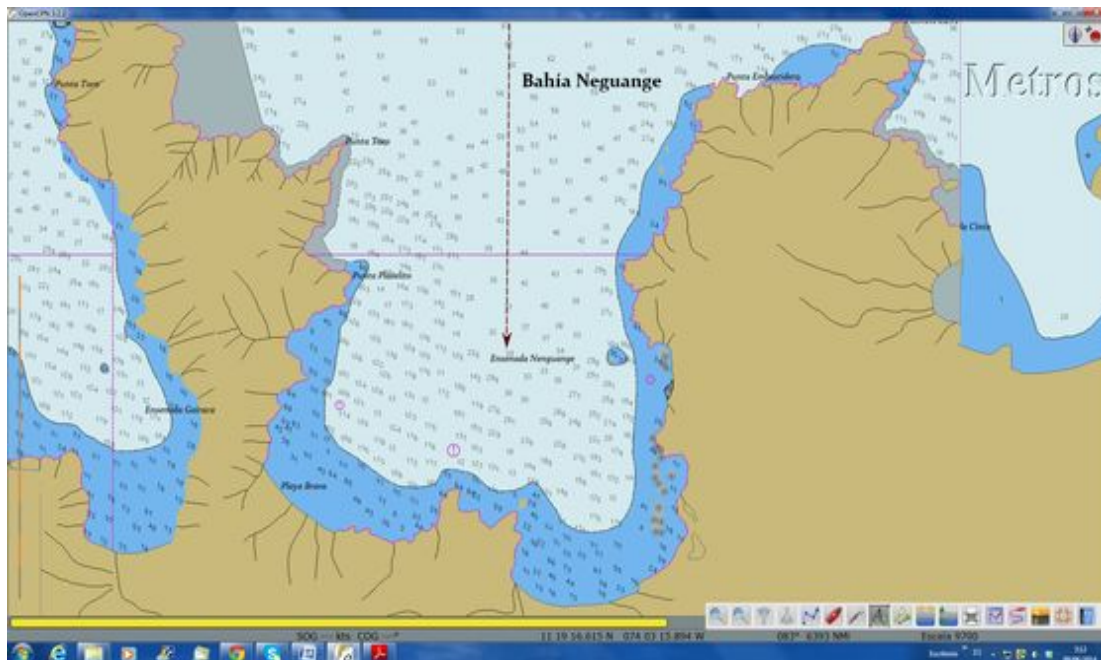


Figure . BAHIA NEGUANGE -- 2nd OF THE FIVE BAYS

From a position **11°20.55N-74°05.11W** in the middle of the entrance, you can make it safely into the bay by setting a straight course south along the center. Although protected from east winds, the two peninsulas enclosing it seem to form a funnel which attracts all the north and NE swell of the area into the bay, making the anchorage very uncomfortable

unless the sea is exceptionally calm outside. Numerous reefs, submerged rocks and coral patches extend all around the shores but more significantly on the east side. Although off the beaten path, Playa Cristal on the east side of the bay is very popular with daytrippers --vacationers and backpackers in the Santa Marta area out to enjoy a day on a secluded exotic beach. There are some restaurants along the beach and power boats carrying day passengers from nearby Taganga visit the bay now and then to drop off and pick up visitors.

BAHÍA GAYRACA

Going west, just round Punta Neguange, lies Bahía Gayraca, the third of the Five Bays. From a position at **11°20.31N-74°07.11W** right in front of the bay, you can easily eyeball your way in, sticking to the center to avoid all hazards. There is an unmarked underwater rock at **11°19.40N-74°06.50W** just off Playa del Amor (Love Beach), a lovely solitary beach with interesting snorkeling. But you will be better protected from swell and wind further down into the bay towards the center of the beach, in 18-25ft of water and good holding sand.

11°20.31'N - 74°07.11'W

Playa del Amor

Playa del Medio

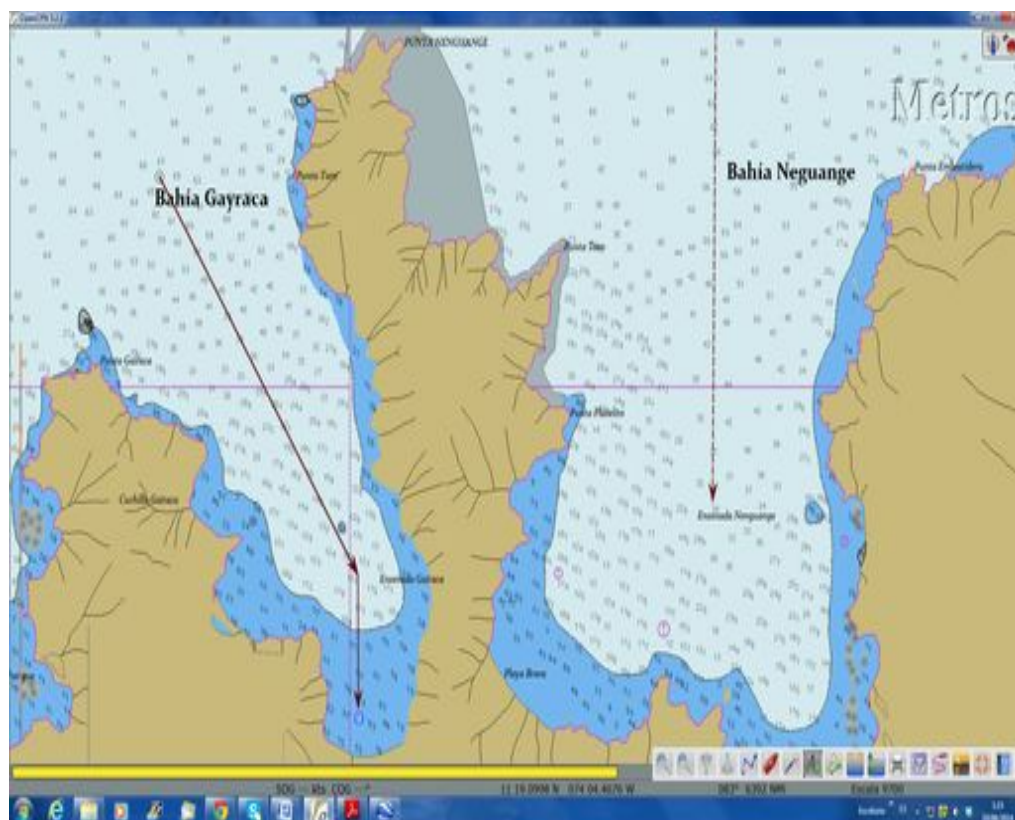


Figure . BAHIA GAYRACA -- 3rd OF THE FIVE BAYS

WP **11°19.19N--74°06.47W** can be a good anchoring spot in 18ft of water. The SE side of the bay is best protected from the strong SE wind gusts and the northern swell, but proceed with caution as the bottom shoals rapidly towards the shore. On the other hand, you might be asked to move by the fishermen that sometimes lay their nets there. The whole bay has a good sand bottom and is protected from all directions except north, but it is prone to abrupt SE wind gusts that can turn about in any direction as they whirl down into the bay. *Do not spare an inch of chain.*

Local settlers are mainly fishermen. They are friendly and used to dealing with visitors to the park. On the beach, you will find a mixture of fisherman's huts, vacation places and beach restaurants where you can enjoy deliciously fresh fish meals.

A daily car service to Santa Marta runs twice a day. The ride is inexpensive, it only takes an hour, and the scenery along the lane leading out of the park is stunning.

BAHIA CHENGUE

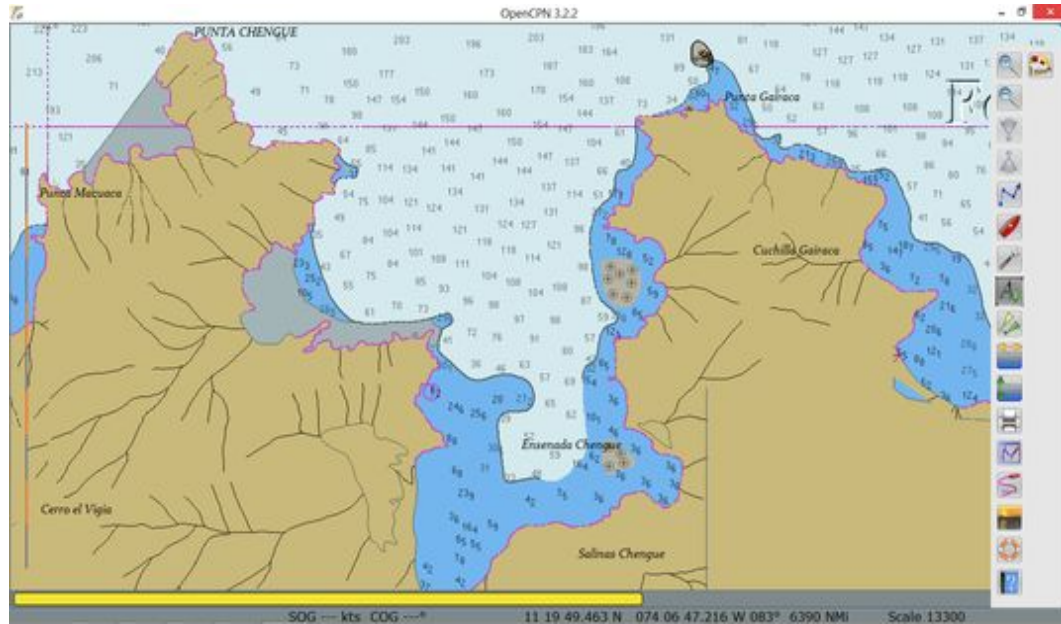


Figure . BAHIA CHENGUE -- 4th OF THE FIVE BAYS

Rounding Punta Gayraca westward, the next inlet is Bahía Chengue, a stunning bay surrounded by tropical dry forest. Considered of especial interest for its ecological wealth, it is strictly off-limits for vessels. The bay is unique for the quality and variety of its coral as well as its abundant and diverse flora and fauna. The lagoon on the south side and the salt pond on the southwest of the bay attract numerous species of birds and fish. There is a biological station where the bay's ecosystem is monitored and scientific research carried out. For years, the only inhabitants of the bay were a family of eight members who subsisted mainly on salt mining.



TYPICAL BAYSCAPE

Salt Pond



Figure . BAHIA CHENGUE AND ITS SPECIAL FEATURES

BAHÍA CONCHA



Figure . BAHIA CONCHA -- 5th OF THE FIVE BAYS

Even more protected than Gayraca is the fifth, westernmost bay, Bahía Concha. However, the anchoring area is deeper -- 45-60ft -- and as in all the Five Bays, the depth drops off rapidly as you approach the beach. The entrance is very ample and free of hazards, and the approach to the anchorage is straight forward. From a position at **11°19.14N--74°10.11W** right off the bay entrance you can easily eyeball your way along the center into the bay. Do not

go too close to the beach as it shoals abruptly from 50ft to 4ft, especially on the east corner. The west beach, Ensenada Bonito Gordo, is very shallow far from the shore and more exposed to the Trade Wind but it can be a nice day anchorage. The east side of the bay is better protected from trades but depths drop suddenly as you approach the shore. A yellow buoy marks the sensible limit beyond which your keeled vessel should not encroach. Anchor in 40-50ft on a sand bottom of variable holding and do not spare a link of chain as you will be exposed to the sudden gusts of wind common to the Five Bays.



Figure . ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON BAHIA CONCHA

This beautiful bay has lovely beaches, clear waters, great snorkeling, interesting trekking, beach restaurants, a regular

van service to Taganga and Santa Marta, a fast boat ride service to both places... and plenty of visitors all throughout the day due to its proximity to Santa Marta area.

ISLA AGUJA

When ready to leave Bahía Concha westbound, you have the choice to head north and give a berth to Isla de La Aguja or you can go west through the cut between Cabo de La Aguja and the island. The cut, known locally as *Pasa de La Barra*, is 45-50ft deep and almost a quarter of a mile wide. However, smack in the middle a group of rocks sticks out of the water, dividing the pass in half. A waypoint at **11°18.46N-074°11.50W** will set you in 45-50 ft of depth between the south jagged tip of the island and the exposed rocks in the middle. The cut is deep and wide enough to go through safely. Nevertheless, two counter currents clash in the narrow passage at times, making it a boiling cauldron locals call *el choque-choque*, the bump-bump. Unless the sea is flat calm (usually very early in the morning), it is better avoided. Giving a berth to the north side of the island means further exposition to wind and waves but it is safer and the gap between the north tip of Isla Aguja and the two isolated

rocks north of it is deep enough to make it through in calm



seas.

Figure . ISLA AGUJA



Figure . BAHIA CONCHA TO TAGANGA

Isla de La Aguja is a sparsely vegetated island inhabited by a few fishermen and their families settled on the east shore. Water being an issue on this stretch of coast, they are fortunate enough to have a water reservoir in the rare fresh water pond on the island. The fishing settlements scattered on the open coves along the east coast consist of a couple of huts near the shore and a lookout post up on the steep hills from where the watchmen scan the sea in search of fish. It can be a nice day stop in a peaceful anchorage and a good

opportunity to watch the local fishermen gather on the beach to spread their nets at the call of the watchman and then pull them onto the shore. We set anchor at **11°18.53N-74°11.40W** in 36ft on a sand bottom. Mind you, same as in the Five Bays, Isla Aguja is subject to the wind gusts coming down from Santa Marta. Dwellers call the phenomenon *la brisa loca*, the crazy breeze. It lives up to its name because the blasts of whirling wind are sudden and unpredictable.

TAGANGA



Figure . TAGANGA



8 NM south from Bahía Gairaca and 5NM from Bahía Concha, this little fishing village has a protected and charming bay only a ten minute ride from Santa Marta. The entrance to the bay is ample, straightforward and free of hazards.

From waypoint **11°15.52N--74°12.20W** in the middle of the bay entrance off Punta Las Minas, you will be able to see the anchorage and easily eyeball your way in, or bear 84° into the bay. Drop anchor wherever you feel comfortable in 18-24ft on good holding sand and try not to get in the way of the fishing boats. We anchored at **11°15.56N--74°11.33W** in 18ft and a good holding sand bottom. Fishermen bring in their catch early in the morning, when you can buy fresh fish, or arrange with them to keep an eye on your dinghy while you are away or even accompany them in their craft fishing tasks.

The new style of management of the Tairona Park has had an undeniable impact on the lives of the villagers, and Taganga has undergone a dramatic change in the last few years. The charming fishing village and hidden getaway for a few wealthy Colombians has become a popular base camp for tourists who want to visit the park and it is full of backpackers all year round.



THE SLEEPY VILLAGE OF TAGANGA – A SHORT WALK FROM THE BEACH

The once calm sleepy village is famous now for a nightlife that attracts tourists and locals alike. Dive shops have flourished with the increasing flow of visitors to the park to the point that Taganga has earned a reputation for being one of the most inexpensive places to get a PADI certification (US\$250-\$300). New hotels, restaurants and discos have opened their doors and there is a continuous flow of taxis and public and tourist vans to and from Santa Marta, only 3 miles away. The promising prospects brought by the increasing affluence of tourists and the severe limitations imposed on their traditional fishing grounds have pushed many fishermen to switch trades and work for tourist related businesses.

The village is safe during daytime thanks to the tourist police presence. However, it is advised not to carry conspicuous equipment or valuables on display at night to avoid tempting petty theft. The nature trail from Taganga to the Tairona Park makes a beautiful trek in the dry forest overlooking the sea and it is very popular with backpackers staying in Taganga. If you are considering it, make sure you gather in a group, as the long solitary path is the perfect ground for the light-fingered in search of unaware tourists.



ON ENTERING -- OR LEAVING -- TAGANGA



Figure . TAGANGA to SANTA MARTA

SANTA MARTA

Only 2NM further south from Taganga and 5NM from Isla Aguja lies Santa Marta, a charming touristic town full of life and a great spot for stocking, withdrawing money or simply enjoying its historical sites, museums, restaurants, and night life.

The port works 24 hours. Commercial traffic is halted at night but it is intense during the day, requiring that you keep your eyes wide open on approach and departure at Santa Marta. The bay is well marked making it a good spot to enter or leave at night. The beacon on Isla El Morro, originally a radar transponder now in disuse, serves as an approach mark to the bay. It beams a white flashing light every 15 seconds and can be seen 22 NM away. Be aware that currents around Isla El Morro can be up to 3 knots, especially on the southwest area, and do *not* go into the commercial port. Instead, enter the bay between Isla El Morro and Morro Chico and bear **120°-140°** into the bay. You can drop your anchor in 18-21ft and good holding sand between the red buoy (at position **11°14.50N--74°13.01W**) and the marina or follow the channel into Santa Marta. If you anchor, allow plenty of chain as you will have 35-40kn wind gusts from the east, especially at night. Never go further NE than the red buoy limit as it marks a shoal.



Figure . BAHÍA DE SANTA MARTA



SCHOOLDAY AT THE BEACH IN SANTA MARTA

The local fishermen land their *pangas* -- wooden fishing boats -- on the little beach by the *Terminal Maritimo* on the east side of the commercial port where you can land your dinghy as well. However, it is safer to use the marina premises for the purpose. You will have to pay a fee but will be entitled to use all the services of this brand new modern marina with all its amenities. At night, lift your dinghy out of the water or secure it and do not leave your boat or dinghy unattended.



ISLA EL MORRO TO STARBOARD AS YOU ENTER THE BAY



SANTA MARTA COMMERCIAL PORT



PLAYA DE LOS PESCADORES -- THE FISHERMEN'S BEACH



NORTH OF THE BAY FROM THE TOWN BEACH

Contact on VHF channel 16 or 72 (English is spoken by some staff). Approximate marina entrance was **11°14.67N-74°13.053W**. This varies from the waypoint advertised by the marina; theirs is possibly the location of the office! There is shallow water on the final approaches, around 2.5m close in, so you must head to starboard for the northern end of the wall (i.e., straight for the beach). Keep a buoy to starboard and then turn right to go through the entrance.

Night arrival is not recommended, but could be done. The outer breakwater wall running parallel with the beach has purple/blue lights (not very bright) along the top of it. If conditions are calm and your draft permits, you can anchor north of the marina entrance and before the small fishing port. You will find yourself in about 3m in depth. Give yourself swing room as sometimes a light breeze from the SW comes in overnight.

Marina Santa Marta is very much the brainchild of native son Manuel Dávila Abondano, executive president of a Colombian group of companies producing organic sugar and palm oil. Being in a location out of the hurricane belt and convenient as a staging point for boats heading for the Panama Canal were no doubt factors in his decision to create an international-standard marina in his home town, but Manuel says, “Really, I just love boats.” Although his family owns the commercial port, there were formerly no facilities at Santa Marta for recreational vessels. First inspired by the marina at Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic, Manuel proceeded to study marinas worldwide during his business travels and then worked closely with professionals to design this marina. When the banks wouldn’t provide a loan (“At that time, they didn’t know what a marina was”), he found investors, got planning permission (“They never thought I’d really do it”) and built the marina right in front of his parents’ shoreside house.

Downsides are occasional noisy parties at night (“but it’s happy noise”) and the fact that the water in the marina — in fact, in the whole city — is currently not potable, reportedly owing to problems at the filtration plant. Clearing in requires the use of an agent.

It is possible to anchor in the wide bay, outside the shipping lanes, but fierce winds can spring up.

If you choose the marina (located at **11°14.34N-74°13.05W** on the south side of Santa Marta Bay), contact their control tower on VHF channels 16, 68 or 72 and follow instructions into the Service Dock where a shipping agent will meet you to proceed with the clearance paperwork. It is recommended to e-mail the marina in advance to let them know about your arrival.

Marina Santa Marta is a brand new IGY marina complete with the latest equipment and all sorts of services you might expect from a marina plus some extra leisure opportunities. It is part of a complex which also includes a series of facilities open to the general public. The marina has 260 slips (five of them for yachts over 130 feet), American and European standard electricity service, water, fuel dock and lubricant products, on-site port authority, immigration and customs, shipping agent, 24 hour security, a boatyard under construction soon to be completed, immaculate modern bathrooms, a break room with a couple of computers for free use, WIFI, cable TV, a repair shop, a chandlery, a grocery store with the basics at fair prices, an ATM machine and a helipad.

Inside the marina complex but out of the gated premises, there is a variety of bars and restaurants for all tastes and a brand new gym overlooking the bay with the latest equipment where you may get special discounts as a marina client. You can even book guided visits to the town and its vicinity at the marina. The staff are very professional and friendly and always ready to assist in anything.

www.igy-marinasantamarta.com/en

operaciones@marinasantamarta.com.co

Tel.: +57 5 4215 037

The city center is within walking distance of the marina and beach area, and the busy colonial streets certainly deserve the walk. Walking the city center is safe during daytime, as long as you do not go into rundown looking streets -- which may be right next to a perfectly safe busy street -- due to the heavy presence of the tourist police. However, as soon as night falls and the officers' day shift is over it is always wiser to move by taxi from place to place. Fares are inexpensive (5.000 COP is the flat fare in the center) but, although they are regulated, it is prudent to agree on it with the driver before getting into the taxi.

You will find all kinds of stores, a colorful street market with excellent fresh fruit and veggies; well stocked supermarkets like Supermercado Olympica right behind the fruit market, and the biggest and closest to the beach area; and even two modern shopping malls, The Ocean Mall and Buenavista, in Avenida del Libertador opposite Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino.

The basic services are near at hand in the center of town: laundrettes, banks with international ATM machines, travel agencies, a big public library, and all sorts of stores. There are plenty of cyber cafes if needed and some public free WIFI spots in different locations of the city center like Parque

Bolívar and Parque Santander. A city map with the public WIFI spots marked is available at any of the information booths in the city center where friendly young policemen specializing in tourist matters will provide any information needed.

Santa Marta is well connected with the rest of the country by air and land. Simón Bolívar Airport, a 30 minute ride south of the city along the beach in Carrera 1, is a small airport mainly for frequent domestic flights to Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. It can be reached by taxi or private van at a similar fare (25.000-30.000 COP) and there is also a public bus service leaving from the bus terminal at Calle 16, Carrera 1.

Plenty of vivid minibuses locally known as *busetas* run regularly to the different neighborhoods and villages of the area, including the bus terminal, the airport and the Tairona Park. Busetas are usually quite crowded but the ride is inexpensive, the bus can be stopped anywhere along the way with a simple hand wave and it is an interesting -- and colorful -- experience.



TAXIS RUN ON FUEL AND NATURAL GAS



“ Busetas” run often but are crowded at peak times

Santa Marta’s main bus station (Terminal de Autobuses), a 30 minute ride from the city center, services destinations all around the country. Buses leave frequently to Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Bogotá and it is the cheapest way to travel long distance.

Two private lines with modern vans offer door-to-door service to Barranquilla and Cartagena at higher fares but more comfortable and safer trips. BERLINASTUR offices (http://www.berlinastur.com/Servicio_Especial) are located in Rodadero (Carretera 3ª, N°11-26) and MARSOL

(<http://www.transportesmarsol.net>) has its headquarters in Santa Marta in Calle 24, N°8, B-05.



ONE OF THE NUMEROUS BANKS WITH ATM MACHINES



LAUNDERETTE AT WALKING DISTANCE FROM THE ANCHORAGE



One of the first cities to be established in Colombia, Santa Marta or the "Magic City" as it is called by locals, is the capital of Magdalena Department which is home to natural parks, the snowy mountains of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and many a pristine beach.

Steeped in history and culture, Santa Marta enjoys a rich historical heritage and proximity to natural attractions such as Tairona Park. The city is a tourist Mecca with a full tourist infrastructure, including modern hotels, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Its economy is primarily based, not surprisingly, on tourism; plus coal and banana production.



HOMAGE TO THE TAIRONA INDIANS' TRADITIONS AT THE LOVELY PROMENADE ALONG SANTA MARTA BAY



Descendants of the Tairona Indians, the Koghis come down from their villages in the surrounding Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to sell their craftwork and buy things. They are very

proud people and do not like being treated as a tourist attraction.



Founded by the Spanish conquistador Rodrigo de Bastidas in 1525, Santa Marta was often sacked by pirates and corsairs in the 16th and 17th centuries. During colonial times the city was important as an outlet and port for the Magdalena River valley. It remained royalist during the independence revolution and was liberated in 1821.

South American liberator, Simon Bolivar took his dying breath in *La Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino* (<http://museobolivariano.org.co>) and his remains were held in the Cathedral until 1842. Today, La Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino, not far from the city center, stands as a museum celebrating Bolivar's life, and its Botanical Garden features many of Colombia's most representative tropical flora. It is also home to the Bolivarian Museum of Contemporary Art (*Museo Bolivariano de Arte*

Contemporaneo) where the work of contemporary plastic artists from Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Venezuela are on display.



QUINTA SAN PEDRO ALEJANDRINO

The Roman Renaissance-style Santa Marta Cathedral or *Catedral Basílica Menor de Santa Marta* was finished at the end of the 18th century and is said to be Colombia's oldest church. The ashes of the town's founder Rodrigo de Bastidas are interred in the interior and so was Simón Bolívar's corpse until it was returned to his birthplace, Caracas, in 1842. As a token of appreciation, the Venezuelan representatives left an urn containing his heart and viscera which is hidden somewhere within its walls.

ISLA DEL MORRO FROM SANTA MARTA



CATEDRAL BASÍLICA MENOR DE SANTA MARTA. SIMON BOLIVAR, "EL LIBERTADOR" WAS BURIED HERE



EN ESTE AUGUSTO LUGAR
FUE SEPULTADO
SIMON BOLIVAR
LIBERTADOR Y PADRE DE COLOMBIA
EL 20 DE DICIEMBRE DE 1830.
POSTERIORMENTE EL 24 DE
JULIO DE 1888 - SUS RESTOS
VENERABLES SE TRASLADARON
A LA BOVEDA, SITUADA FRENTE
AL ALTAR MAYOR, BAJO LA CUPULA
Y A LA ENTRADA DEL PRESBITERIO.
**SOCIEDAD BOLIVARIANA
DEL
MAGDALENA**
JULIO 24 DE 1875



Located on Carrera 1, Calle 22, close to the marina, *Hospital San Juan de Dios* was founded by two monks of the Order of San Juan de Dios in 1746 but it has been used for different purposes throughout its history and up to the present day. The building consists of five courtyards around which cloisters were formed completely or partially in an eclectic style with Republican influences. Nowadays it is home to the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Magdalena. On Saturdays, they offer a tour to El Morro which includes a visit to San Fernando and Betín colonial forts. As a bonus feature, the museum is said to harbor the ghost of a nurse but we did not have the chance to meet her during our visit, so cannot tell.

www.unimagdalena.edu.co

www.museobolivariano.org.co



Banco de la República in Parque de los Novios lodges an excellent public library. It used to be the site of a temporary exhibition of the Tairona Gold Museum (*Museo del Oro Tairona*), but that museum has been moved to *Casa de la Aduana*. Presumably the first architectural structure built by the Spanish in South America, the Casa was refurbished specifically to house the new *Museo del Oro Tairona - Casa de la Aduana*. <http://www.banrepcultural.org/santa-marta/museo-del-oro>

Primero e
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Se llamab
La Madre
y ella era
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museo del ORO TAIRONA



Los taironas eran uno entre los distintos grupos que habitaban la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta a la llegada de los conquistadores europeos, en 1500. Se destacaron de tal manera a los ojos de los españoles que pronto ellos designaron con este nombre a las diversas poblaciones que habitaban la Sierra Nevada, situación que perdura hasta nuestros días.

Mucho antes, hacia el 100 d.C., ya se encontraban en este literal poblaciones organizadas en pequeñas aldeas, con gente que sabía trabajar el oro, la arcilla y que tallaba piedras semipreciosas. Hoy los arqueólogos denominan ese periodo con el nombre de Nahuango. Alrededor del 700 d.C. estas sociedades experimentaron notorios cambios sociales y construyeron caminos, poblados y villas de alfarería con basamentos de piedra. Doscientos años más tarde ya ocupaban un considerable territorio y sus poblados se ubicaban hasta los 2.000 metros de altura, dirigidos por poderosos caciques, líderes políticos y religiosos. Esta época se conoce como periodo Tairona, y se prolongó hasta la llegada de los españoles.

La conquista produjo una considerable disminución de la población y el quiebre del sistema de cacicazgo. Muchos indígenas se refugiaron hacia las partes más altas para organizarse y vivir en nuevas sociedades. Hoy conviven en la Sierra legüí, líes o efuscos, whas y karibuenos, quienes hablan lenguas chichas como los taironas y están organizados en resguardos.

The Taironas were one of the many groups populating the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, when the European conquerors arrived in 1500. The Spaniards found them extremely interesting, and even the different populations in the Sierra Nevada were given the same name, and this is still the case.

Way back around 100 A.D., there already were small hamlets along the coastline, and the people there knew to shape gold and make clay and they also did semiprecious stones. The archeologists have called this the Nahuango period. Around 700 A.D., these experienced noticeable social changes, they built paths, settlements and offering pits, making an elite hierarchy.

Two hundred years later, they developed a large portion of land and they built towns up to a height of 2,000 meters, above sea level, controlled by powerful chiefs and powerful and religious leaders. This period is known as the Tairona period, and it lasted until the arrival of the Spaniards.

Conquest caused a considerable reduction in population and the rupture of the chiefdom system. Many indigenous people moved to the highest parts of the Sierra to re-organize and live in new societies. Today, the legüí, líes or efuscos, the whas and karibuenos, live in the mountain Sierras. They speak Chichas dialects as the Taironas, and they are organized in resguardos.

EL RODADERO



Figure . FROM SANTA MARTA AROUND THE POINT TO RODADERO

Only 3NM further south, turning Punta de Gaira, lies Rodadero by the northeast corner of the Bay of Gaira. The bay is sizeable; much better protected from easterlies than

Santa Marta and with an approach to the anchorage free of hazards. It is possible to pass between Isla Pelicano and Punta Cabeza de Negro on the mainland; depths are between 30ft near the mainland and 90ft of water around the island. You can easily eyeball your way into the north side of the bay where you will be best protected from the Trade Wind.

Position **11°12.20N--074°13.47W** in 30-40ft proved a good anchoring spot away from the hassle of curious visitors on pedal boats but you can, if you wish, go in closer to the swim buoys in 15-20ft. A sailing boat can become a curiosity for local vacationers unused to seeing them anchored in the bay, so do not get uneasy if you find your boat circled by rental pedal-boats checking it out; they do it out of sheer curiosity. You can leave your dinghy -- always locked -- on the fishermen's beach at the northern side of the bay. Agree with one of them to watch your dinghy while you are away.



VIEW OF EL RODADERO BETWEEN PUNTA CABEZA DE NEGRO AND ISLA PELÍCANO



Figure . CLOSEUP OF RODADERO

El Rodadero Beach is immensely popular with Colombian tourists and it can be rather crowded, even in the off season. This is a resort area of handsome high-rises, palm trees and beaches. There are good restaurants along the beach and an Olympia supermarket for fresh supplies within walking distance from the anchorage. Santa Marta is only a 5-minute ride away and there are plenty of taxis and frequent buses along the beach promenade.



BRIDGE TO THE MAIN BEACH



FISHERMEN'S BEACH ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE BAY

Tourist boats, inflatables, and even paddle boats take visitors to the nearby *Acuario y Museo del Mar* (Aquarium and Sea Museum) half a mile north at Bahía Inca. Part of the National Network of Museums of Colombia, this coastal aquarium features several exhibits and 13 pools directly connected to the Caribbean Sea. The tour usually includes a visit to *Playa Blanca*, a pristine beach of white sands, palm trees, water sports and beach bars.



VIEW OF THE BAY



A DAY OUT AT RODADERO BEACH

COLOMBIANS ENJOY MUSIC ANYTIME, ANYWHERE







BY DAY... AND BY NIGHT



ONWARD TO PUERTO VELERO AND CARTAGENA

ONWARD TO PUERTO VELERO AND CARTAGENA

SANTA MARTA TO PUERTO VELERO

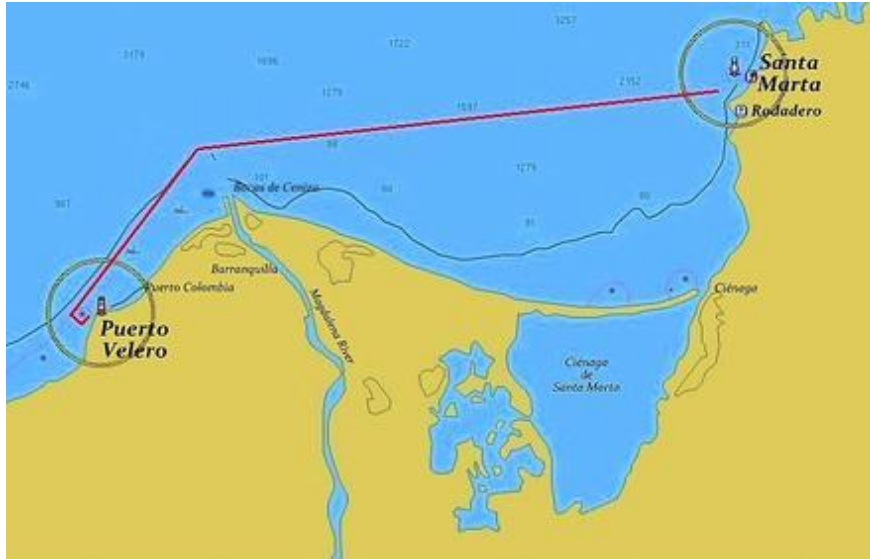


Figure . SANTA MARTA TO PUERTO VELORO

The regular state of the sea in this area is pretty rough in November-December when most cruisers head toward the western Caribbean, with 6-10ft waves and 25-30kn of sustained wind. Hopefully, both wind and waves will come from your aft so you will not notice them that much. May-June offers better chances of a nice weather window to sail this stretch, with milder winds and calmer seas -- and even no wind at all from time to time.

The Magdalena River

Magdalena River is about 36 NM distant from Rodadero so, if you leave Santa Marta or Rodadero around midnight, you will be crossing the river mouth in good daylight before mid-day. It is then that the winds get stronger and the seas kick up against the outgoing river current, mainly in the last 5 miles or so east of the river mouth. This area can be very rough in strong winds but conditions will get smoother once you cross the outflow of the river. However, watch for river debris -- lily pods and logs -- for the next 10 miles to the west. Some people like to cross this area 10-12 miles off-shore to avoid much of the debris and enjoy calmer seas. We have always crossed only a couple of miles out from shore in order to shorten the stretch of river-flowing water and thus never encountered even a single log. It should be said, however, that it was mid June, just into the dry season. Nevertheless, conditions can be trickier in November-December, at the end of the rainy season, when the river carries much more debris. You will know you are approaching the river mouth when you perceive an earthy smell and see a wide stretch of muddy brown water in the sea.

There are three potential stops in the area; Bocas de Ceniza, Barranquilla, and Puerto Colombia. None of them is recommended, but for different reasons.

Bocas de Ceniza, on the very tip of the river mouth, has no port and the depths vary incessantly due to the sediments carried by the river.

Puerto Colombia was an important commercial port in past times. In fact, the town was born around the port following its flourishing commercial activity. Both port and town knew better days but are quite in a state of decay at present.

Barranquilla is located 10 NM up the river and the access is well marked along a channel. However, the port area is said to be extremely dangerous and the moving shoals make it very uncomfortable for navigation. No sailing boats venture there. Nevertheless, Barranquilla is *the* place to get diesel engine spare parts as well as AB inflatables. Barranquilla is a very busy industrial city and AB's South American headquarters is located here.

Puerto Velero

Puerto Velero, another 16NM west of Magdalena River, makes a very convenient and lovely stop before heading to Cartagena, especially now that a brand new international marina has been built. Ensenada Trebal or Puerto Velero, as locals know it, is an inner bay well protected from the fetch by a long spit of land which is ever changing due to the river sediments brought down on the current. Precisely owing to its changing nature, it is not well charted. Nevertheless, the approach is easy as long as you **WATCH** your way -- *do not rely solely on electronics*. Keep at least a couple of miles off the shallow outer coastline all along the land spit and do not take shortcuts. Head well to the southwest of Punta Morro Hermoso towards a waypoint at **10°55.52N--75°03.44W** and bear east to a position at **10°55.46N--75°03.20W**. At that point, you will be in sight of the green approach buoy marking the marina entrance and comfortably out of the swell. From there, you can head straight to *Marina Puerto Velero* at **10°55.48N--75°03.32W** or choose the spot that suits you best in the big bay.



Figure . PUERTO VELERO

Do not approach the shores as the bottom shelves pretty far from them, especially on the east side. Greater depths and slightly better protection from prevailing easterlies will be found on the north side of the bay, where a string of buoys marks the bathing area of the public beach and limits the anchoring grounds. Although well protected from all seas -- except from south swells, which rarely happen -- the absence of natural barriers in the flat surrounding landscape leaves this bay open to trade winds, which gain force as the sun rises in the sky. Drop the anchor wherever you feel comfortable in 12-15ft of water in a muddy bottom with good holding. This is probably the safest anchorage on the whole north coast of Colombia and an idyllic spot to take a rest before setting off to cover the next 50NM to Cartagena.

Originally populated by the Arawak Indians, the Mokaaná people, their direct descendants, still dwell on these shores and are, in fact, the majority of the population in the area. This peaceful quiet bay is transformed on weekends when the entire east side swarms with people from the surrounding areas. Locals come to swim, wind and kite surf here or simply to relax under the shade of one of the numerous palm roof huts while enjoying a nice cold drink or a delicious fresh fish cooked on the grill.

Puerto Velero is an off-the-beaten-track secluded spot only known by wind sports lovers from Barranquilla and people from the neighboring villages. We were surprised to learn that most *Barranquilleros* had never heard about the place. The 20 mile distance by land from Barranquilla involves a 30 minute ride to *km 30 of vía al mar Barranquilla-Cartagena*, the coastal highway connecting both cities, and another 10 minute ride from *km 30* along a dirt track into the bay. Most local visitors access Puerto Velero in private vehicles. However, the van company *MARSOL* offers door-to-door



service to the bay.



THE TREACHEROUS END OF THE SPIT SEEN FROM THE INNER BAY



Figure . ANOTHER VIEW OF PUERTO VELERO

Marina Puerto Velero

<http://www.marinapuertovelero.co>

Playa Puerto Velero

Tubará - Atlántico

Vía al mar Barranquilla - Cartagena, kilómetro 30

puerto@marinasdecolombia.com

Cell: +57 310 632 91 09

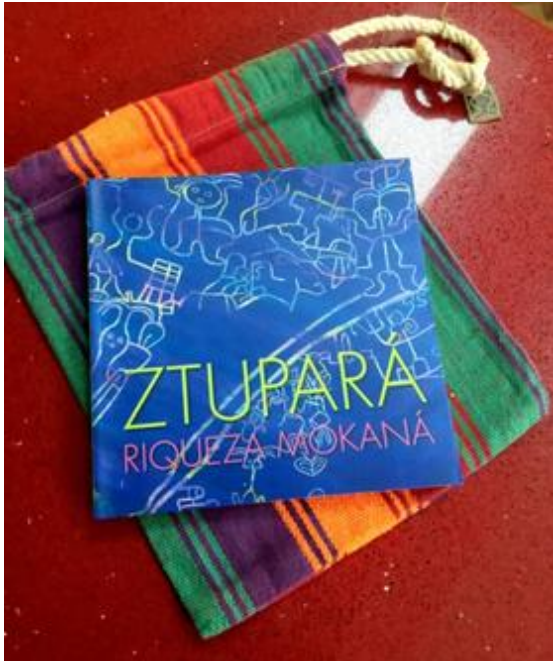


Marina Puerto Velero is a brand new state-of-the-art marina complex located on the north side of the bay and nearing completion. The marina itself -- as most of the premises in the complex -- is already finished and at work. It uses VHF channel 8 and has 208 slips for boats up to 60ft, fresh water, 110 and 220 volt electricity, fuel dock, a cozy modern bathroom area, WIFI and cable TV, 24 hour security, two

restaurants (one of them run by TV celebrity chef Franco Basile), a swimming pool and an excellent team of friendly, professional staff ready to assist in anything. They also rent attractive apartments over water and boats for fishing and touring; and offer brokerage service. This is an international marina where you can clear in and out of the country and the only place where cruisers will not be charged the shipping agent fee; in an effort to ease the paperwork and the expenses of the proceedings, the marina acts as agent on behalf of its foreign clients without any charge for its intermediary services.

For clearing matters contact María de los Angeles Torres on her cell phone +57 3106443610; email to puerto@marinasdecolombia.com.

By the end of the year, they expect to have completed a 79 acre boatyard equipped with all sorts of marine repairing and maintaining services, a capable travel lift, a big chandlery, and a 36 suite apartment hotel to lodge visiting cruisers.



This marina was born from love and it shows. It is a dream come true; the dream of a Spanish sailor and a Colombian anthropologist who fell in love at first sight with a beautiful solitary bay and fantasized about creating a port where sailors could find protection and comfort and interact with the local population; where the locals could apply and develop their skills and get dignified work; where the original family businesses were not pushed aside but treated as equals; where the development would not cause continuous irreparable damage to the environment; and from where to spread the passion for sailing among the local population. Not in vain they borrowed as their motto Bert Hellinger's words: "The foundations of peace lie on respecting and honouring the original dwellers". *Jwaeirruki*, or "among your people" in the Mokaná language, was the name chosen by the locals to christen the empowering project which encourages all members of the community to explore their identity and cultural background. A book edited in Spanish and English reflecting that experience is given to all visiting sailors.

PUERTO VELERO TO CARTAGENA

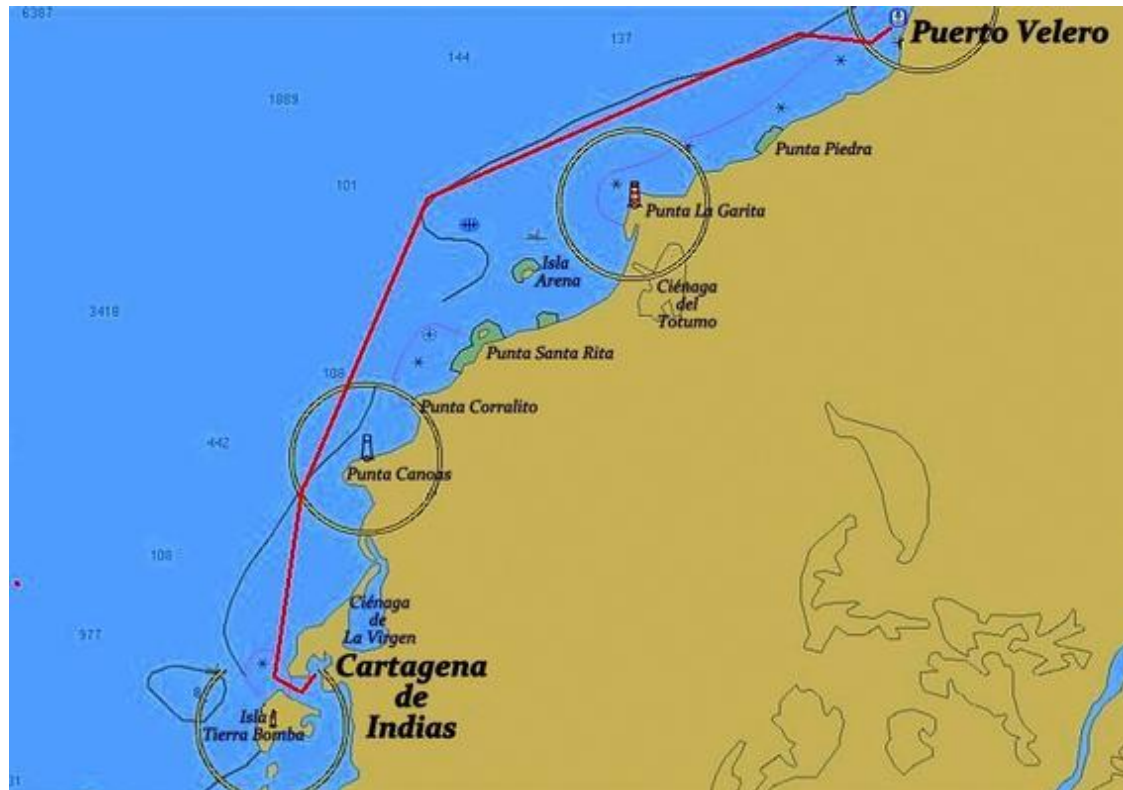


Figure . PUERTO VELERO TO CARTAGENA

It is 50 miles from Punta Hermosa, so if you leave at dawn, you will reach Cartagena before sunset. You will usually experience a slight counter-current and less wind along this stretch and may have to power at times. When leaving the anchorage, watch out for fishing boats abundant in the area.

You might like to sail near shore, in which case you will go over Zamba Bank, a sand bank stretching 11NM to the north and 7NM to the west of *Ciénaga del Totumo* area, midway between Puerto Velero and Cartagena. Except in bad weather, when the seas build up over the bank, crossing Zamba Bank, with its depths ranging from 15 to 30ft, poses no risks. Only watch out for a submerged wreck at **10°46.04N--75°24.34W** northwest of Isla Arena. We prefer to sail some 8 NM offshore, still within sight of shore but away from potential hazards. But there are some interesting onshore experiences as well.

Volcanic seascape and landscape

There is a long history of volcanic activity in this area extending even offshore. On shore, Ciénaga del Totumo is home to the *Volcán del Totumo*, a 50ft mud cone that looks for all the world like a steep-sided, 50ft giant ant hill. It is accessed by a rickety-looking but quite sturdy wooden stairway at the top of which you will be looking about 20ft down the throat of the cone to the surface of a thick gray mud that is reputed to originate over 2000ft deep in the earth. The surface is still except for a gas bubble distorts the surface to the tune of a “bluurrrp” about every 20 seconds. The bubbles don’t actually pop as the mud is so thick; but they are evidence that the mud really is more liquid than solid if only slightly. (Bet you can't wait to hear more about this!) There are a number of other mud “volcanoes” in the vicinity of El Totumo, but lacking cones, they are merely small pools or “pots” at the surface. El Totumo is a local tourist attraction. For a small fee one can climb to the top, be immersed in the viscous mud, dry to cracking, and then wash off in the swamp waters. And take pictures. And have lunch at one of the small restaurants at the base of this unique and little known natural attraction.



EL TOTUMO



x





Back at sea, at this point, if you have not been contacted before, you will be called by the Coast Guard on VHF channel 16. They just want to check on you and make sure everything is fine. They are very professional and friendly and always ready to help. The first time we visited Colombia, our engine broke down just off Punta Hermosa. When we were contacted by VHF on a coastguard routine check, we informed them about our situation. They were very helpful and called Cartagena Coastguard to ask them to be ready and tow us through the entrance channel and kept contact all the way to Cartagena to check everything was fine.

You will know you are approaching Cartagena when you see dozens of white high rise buildings on the shore line. The well sheltered bay of the city has two possible entrance channels: Boca Grande and Boca Chica. Ironically, Boca Chica, 5 NM further south from Boca Grande, is wider and deeper than Boca Grande and, as such, the main shipping

channel for the heavy commercial traffic. But, unless approaching Cartagena from the SW or drafting over 8ft (minimum official depth in Boca Grande channel), you will save a couple of hours by entering through Boca Grande. If you enter Cartagena Bay through Boca Chica (the main shipping channel), head to the approach buoy at **10°19.02N--75°35.58W** and follow the very well marked channel for the next 9 NM towards *Bahía de Las Ánimas*. Do not stop anywhere near Tierra Bomba Island; much as it looks like a quiet spot (particularly if you've had a long hard passage); this place is prone to break-ins, thefts, etc. You should continue to the north end of the bay and anchor off Club Nautico.



Figure . BOCA GRANDE ENTRANCE -- CHANNEL INTO CARTAGENA BAY

CARTAGENA

Cartagena is known for its defensive wall network, dating back to the 1600s, which extends right across the mouth of the Boca Grande entrance. The submerged wall is still depicted on charts but the wall is in fact deeper than shown in many of them and wider than what the lighted beacons show. We were towed by the Coast Guard through the outer limits of the green beacon and still sounded 20ft. You should contact "Cartagena Port Control" on VHF channel 16 before you enter and inform them about your intentions. They speak good English.



CARTAGENA'S SEAWARD WALL

A waypoint at **10°23.55N--75°34.44W** will set you right in front of the two beacons and the depth will never be less than 15ft along the channel, making it an easy entrance even at night. Once inside the bay, the channel is clearly marked and the depths well over 20ft. Nevertheless, stay away from the hotel beaches on your port, as the water will start to shoal quickly if you stray in that direction. There are many more buoys than those shown on the charts; however, the basic bearings are the same and the easiest route after you enter the channel is to follow the green buoys.

When you round the lighthouse at the inner end of Boca Grande to proceed into the harbor, you will encounter a Madonna and Child statue standing in the middle with buoyed channels circling it to starboard and port. The buoys can be confusing around this monument so, whichever way



you choose, be careful.

Continue towards the head of the bay until you see dozens of sailing boats anchored south, west or north of Club Nautico (located at **10°24.40N--75°32.30W**) in 10-40ft of muddy, filthy water. Forget about bathing in the bay and be prepared to clean the hull frequently. We have never experienced such a biological growth anywhere else in years of cruising the warm Caribbean waters. There is a designated anchorage area; and the Coast Guard may ask you to move for “security reasons” if you anchor too close to the naval base on the NW side of the bay, across from Club Nautico. Frigates, cruise liners, and tugs must be allowed maneuvering room around the area of the *Terminal Turístico* on the SE side of the anchorage, so keep some distance from it. Also, keep well inside the red buoys marking the channel leading to *Bahia de las Animas*.



HEADING TO THE ANCHORAGE

CARTAGENA BAY ANCHORAGE



CARTAGENA BAY ANCHORAGE



CARTAGENA BAY ANCHORAGE BY EVENING LIGHT

During the dry season (June, July, August, September, January and February) the winds blow normally from the NE at 10-20 knots. But during the wet season (March, April, May and October, November and December), although the winds are light from the SSW, from time to time squalls --- popularly known as *culo de pollo* -- will blow over 30 knots generating 3-4ft wind chop for the 9 mile fetch down the bay. So allow plenty of swing room and make sure that your anchor is well set because if it is not, your boat will drag. Better still, drop a second anchor a couple of meters behind the main anchor. During our stay in Cartagena we experienced such squalls even in July and August and saw plenty of boats drag and crash against their neighbors. There is heavy local water taxi traffic going through the anchorage so be careful when you dinghy into the marina area. DO NOT leave your dinghy in the water; always lift it up at night and lock the boat when on shore. The north side of the bay is quite safe and the Coast Guard patrols the anchorage -- although we cannot say so about Boca Chica and Tierra Bomba Island area - but dinghies and outboards are often stolen.

Marinas

Club Nautico Cartagena

10°24.40N--75°32.30W

<http://www.clubnauticocartagena.com>

Av.Miramar,No.19-50,Manga.Tel:(+57) 5 6604863.

www.clubnauticocartagena.com

Located in a very safe residential area a 20 minute walk from the city center, it is easily identifiable by the dozens of sailing boats anchored around. It has med-moor style docks for about 50 boats but no boatyard, travel lift or fuel dock. However, it offers many services to cruisers, including electricity (AC 110 or AC 220; 60 Hz), water, cold showers, laundry, irregular WiFi and secure dinghy dockage. Repair and maintenance works can be carried out at the dock and you will find there all sorts of professionals offering various marine services. It should be noted that there are many amateurs offering professional services so it is best to seek advice at the marina office for guaranteed professionals.

Club Nautico is in the final stages of a lengthy and major reconstruction of the entire facility.



Club Náutico is the cruisers' hangout and the port of departure for the flotilla of sailing boats carrying backpackers to and from Panama. It is a lively colorful marina where there is always something going on and the perfect spot to meet fellow cruisers and exchange information. If you are anchored in the bay, a reasonable weekly fee gives you access to dock your dinghy, use the showers, garbage and oil disposal, and fill your water tanks. If you plan to use the marina during your visit to Cartagena, make a reservation beforehand, as it is often full, and try to

get one of the inner docks where you will be better protected



from *culo de pollo* squalls.



DAMAGES AFTER A SQUALL



The marina is a 5 minute walk from a well stocked Carulla supermarket and an easy reach from the city center on foot or by taxi. The marina webpage has a link displaying information about all sorts of services the visiting cruiser may need. It has not been updated for a long time so some of the data may be obsolete but it is still a very useful service guide.

Club De Pesca

10°24.90N--75°32.70"W

gerencia@clubdepescadecartagena.com

www.clubdepescadecartagena.com

Fuerte de San Sebastian del Pastelillo

Phones:(+57) 5 660-5578 / 660-5569

Fax: 660-5576

VHF channels 71 and 86

SSB 8.240

Next door from *Club Náutico* and a 15 minute walk from the city center, *Club de Pesca* is located just behind the walls of the defensive Fort San Sebastian del Pastelillo which, in fact, the club members are in charge of preserving. Considered to be the premier marina in the city, Club de Pesca is not a public marina but a private club which reserves a few courtesy slips for visitors. Members belong to the elite of Cartagena society and the club is a gathering point where everybody knows each other and all sorts of social events are held. They take security very seriously and NO ONE is allowed inside the gates without prior approval or a special pass. The atmosphere is quite formal and etiquette is observed in behavior and attire. Built inside the well

preserved defensive walls of a 17th century fort, the setting adds to the beauty of this small lovely marina.

They have five bow or stern-to berths for visiting boats which should be reserved in advance. Their 30 ton travel lift will handle boats up to 50ft, but just for short term works as the boat stays in the sling. There is metered 110 and 220 volt electricity and water, a fuel dock and a holding tank. It should be noted that the maximum draft is 6.5ft. The marina also offers telephone and fax service, bathrooms with hot water, laundry service, a very elegant restaurant and a beautiful clubhouse and bar. Diana Paola Barboza is the office manager.

Some readers may know him as "Mr. Emerald", a descriptive and well earned sobriquet for his business, but all cruisers contemplating a voyage or en route to Cartagena should get to know Lee Miles as the Seven Seas Cruising Association (SSCA) Station Host for Cartagena. Perhaps a more accurate description would be ambassador on behalf of Cartagena, even all Colombia, to all cruisers, cruise ships, and visitors in general. Lee is generous with his time and knowledge in his ambassadorial role, and a visit to "Mr. Emerald" is a treat. To quote Glenn and Eddie Tuttle of the Cruisers Network Online, "Lee... has been a tremendous help in coordinating cruisers' needs with the Colombian Coast Guard for many years." Email ahead to: Leland@misteremerald.com .



CLUB DE PESCA



SAN SEBASTIAN DEL PASTELILLO FORT

Haulout facilities

Marinas and boatyards do not allow outside workers, unless they have received prior approval. Besides, they will need to have professional risk insurance and will have to pay a daily fee of around 30,000 pesos to work in the premises. The average rate for general repairs and maintenance is 50-70,000 pesos a day. However, it is always advisable to negotiate the price before the job is started and oversee the progress to insure your own satisfaction. There are several options when you require haulout facilities.

Manzanillo Marina Club

10°23.20N--75°31.33W

VHF Ch 78

gerentemmc@gmail.com

www.manzanillomarinaclub.com

Tel.: (+575) 669 4180

Cell: (57) 311 429 9436

Cell: (+57) 313 537 8723 (English)

Fax: (+575) 668 4070

Bosque, Calle Malaga N° 53-76 (Sector Zapatero)

Office Manager: Dianoris Agudelo.

It is located in El Bosque, southeast of the anchoring area, rounding Isla Manzanillo. To get there, you need to follow the marked channel leading from the entrance of Bahia de Las Ánimas to the south tip of Isla Manzanillo and then follow the waypoints provided in the marina webpage. The route is clearly marked on the chart and the precise waypoints provided. Nevertheless, because the approach is plagued with coral heads and mud shoals, it is advisable to hire a knowledgeable local to guide you into the marina or contact *Marina Manzanillo* for the purpose.

Wpt nr.	LAT	LON
W001	10°22.690' N	075°31.980' W
W002	10°22.565' N	075°30.975' W
W003	10°22.700' N	075°30.930' W
W004	10°23.095' N	075°31.240' W
W005	10°23.115' N	075°31.290' W
W006	10°23.125' N	075°31.595' W
Manzanillo Marina Club	10°23.350' N	075°31.525' W

Minimum Depth 3M (10 FT)
Homers ^sdysey - May 2010

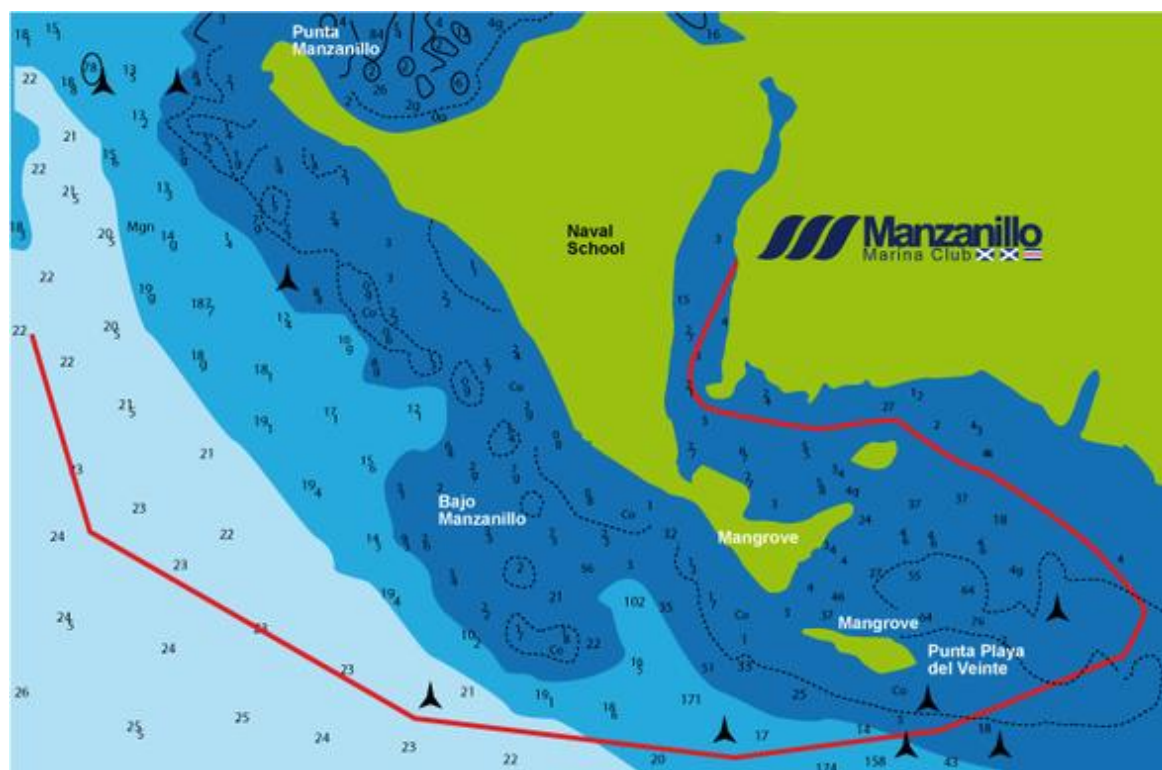


Figure . ENTRY TO MARINA MANZANILLO

Marina Manzanillo has good reason to boast of being a cruiser friendly marina and boatyard. Owned and operated by fellow sailor Maurice Lamarque and managed at present by his son Mauricio, they cater exclusively to pleasure craft and offer dry storage and a dozen in-water slips to live and work aboard, as well as a few moorings in their anchoring area. Docks and yard have water and electricity and there are newly refurbished bathrooms, a storage area, lockers, on site laundry service and local and international telephone and fax services. They also have a couple of rooms with private bathrooms for accommodation, one of them with its own kitchen, and a lounge area with satellite TV, a computer for free use with ADSL connection, WIFI, a microwave oven, a fridge, book exchange and air conditioning. There is 24 hour

security backed by cameras and the staff are friendly, experienced, and bilingual.

Marina Manzanillo is neither a beautiful marina in a suburban area nor close to the city center. In fact, it takes a 15 minute bus or taxi ride to get there. However, it is the perfect place for cruisers who need to carry out any sort of work on their boat. There is a fuel dock for gasoline, diesel and lubricants with max. 7.5ft depths and a 40 ton travel lift for boats up to 20ft wide and 7.5ft draft (a sloop must remove its forestay or backstay and a ketch may need to remove its mizzen mast). Their equipment includes power washers, orbital polishers, grinders, and orbital sanders, and they have their own team of reliable professional mechanics, painters, electricians, woodworkers, upholsters, and professionals in stainless steel, aluminum and chrome.



MANZANILLO FUEL DOCK BOATYARD, OFFICE, AND LODGINGS



MANZANILLO TRAVEL LIFT MANZANILLO BOAT YARD

Todomar Boatyard

10º 22.02N--75º 30.35W

Mamonal, Sector Albornoz, Cra 56 N° 5-77

Phone: (+57 5) 665 4177

Fax: (+57 5) 665 5118

Cel.: 311 651 2974 (Julio Murieles)

E-mail: jmurieles@todomarchl.com

Located in the Albornoz district of Cartagena, a 30 minute ride from the city center, *Todomar* is a professional shipping yard specialized in boat building, with 50 good flat-bottomed stands on the hard and 7 in-water slips equipped with water and electricity, for living and working onboard. Their travel lift can haul boats up to 50 tons and up to 20ft in width and there is also a 12,000 lb (6 ton) fork lift for smaller boats and auxiliary tasks. The depth in the hauling area is over 12ft.

It is fully equipped with all the necessary tools and machinery for all sorts of marine work, and complete with a chandlery offering accessories from all the main marine suppliers, as well as original parts for the brands they represent (Yanmar, Cummins, Dometic Environmental, Raymarine, Kohler, Mase, and Hamilton Jet). Their efficient onsite team of trained and certified technicians can carry out all sorts of marine works and servicing including painting, welding, fiberglass repairing, mechanical engineering, varnishing, upholstery, and carpentry, and they offer tool rental and special hauling services. They do not work with multihulls. Working materials should be purchased at their



store.

TODOMAR BOATYARD.1

Todomar is a busy, noisy and dusty boatyard with 24 hour security, perfect for carrying out marine works but not too comfy for living in, as the comforts are reduced to a toilet and a shower. Located southeast of the city center in the industrial port area of Albornoz, there are numerous *busetas* (private mini buses for public transport) reaching the area from the main stop at *Monumento de La India Catalina* in Avenida Venezuela for a 1,500 or 1,800COP fare, depending

on whether they are provided with air conditioning or natural breeze. Taxis should charge in the area of 10,000 pesos from the city center. TODOMAR BOATYARD.2



Ferroalquimar

10º 21.55N--75º 30.37W

Albornoz, Km 3 Via Mamonal

Tel.: (575) 668 5726 / 668 5590 / 668 5554

Fax: (575) 673 4145. USA Phone: 1-305-7353781

purarey@ferroalquimar.com

www.ferroalquimar.com

Located just next door from *Todomar*, *FERROALQUIMAR* is a professional naval shipyard with expertise in restoration, design, construction and maintenance of vessels, born from the merger of the shipyard FERROCEM, a leading constructor in Colombia, and the more traditional ALQUIMAR, a local crane rental company. It is the biggest private ship yard in Cartagena with headquarters in Barranquilla dealing mainly with crane rental. They work with all sorts of vessels -- from leisure yachts to military, passenger or cargo ships, rent specialized cranes and heavy machinery and also conduct rescue operations, some as impressive as the cargo plane rescue in Barranquilla airport. They have a huge yard with drydock space for 25 vessels up to 300 ton at a time that can also hold vessels up to 775 feet and 3,000 ton.

Complete with 24 hour security and assistance service and all sorts of modern marine equipment and machinery, they have a 40 ton travel lift for "small" boats. However, the most outstanding feature is their new 300 ton travel lift, unique in Colombia and able to handle multihulls, tugs, megayachts and any boat up to 30 metric tons and 36ft wide. Draft is not an issue in the 18ft deep shipyard area. There is a dock with water and electricity and a dozen stern-to moorings, for working and living on board. They have an onsite and outside team of highly skilled professionals dealing with quality mechanical, electronic and electric engineering, rigging, painting, varnishing, welding, fiberglass repairing, carpentry and upholstery. They also offer equipment rental service and special hauling slings.

Pura Rey is the knowledgeable and efficient shipyard manager in charge of coordinating the works carried on at the yard. Fluent in English, she has a good understanding of cruisers' needs and concerns and will provide reliable information and assistance.

Money

Numerous banks and “cajeros”, automatic cash machines, are conveniently located throughout the city. There are three ATM machines near the anchorage, all in a row one block east of Club Nautico: one is located inside Carulla Supermarket, another in Banco BBVA just next door and the third is to be found further down the street in Bancolombia. Most ATMs give only 300,000 pesos per withdrawal. Bancolombia gives 400,000, Davivienda 700,000 and the ATM at Citibank in Centro, near Exito supermarket in Avenida Venezuela gives up to 2,000,000. Colombian banks do not accept telegraphed transfers unless you have a checking account with them; Western Union at the Carulla supermarket can provide them but at a hefty fee.

DO NOT USE MONEY CHANGERS ON THE STREETS! Such operations are illegal and you will be most likely cheated. There are various money exchanges in the city center just around Puerta del RELOJ. As a general warning, be careful when withdrawing large sums of money and try to avoid outlying shopping malls for that purpose.

Transportation

There are plenty of car rentals in Cartagena but renting a car for the city is not recommended due to the narrow streets and heavy traffic. Locals say that city drivers consider traffic lights as mere Christmas decoration. Taking a taxi is a safer option and it is not expensive at all. Taxi drivers in Cartagena are for the most part friendly and honest, but check on the fare before you take off. The going rate from Manga to Centro is 6,000 pesos, 7,000 pesos at night. Manga to Bocagrande, 8,000COP. Centro to Bocagrande, 6,000COP. A taxi ride to or from the airport and the *Terminal de Transporte* (bus station) in Carrera de La Cordialidad is around 15,000 pesos. An average hourly rate if you'd like your cab to wait while you do your errands is 25,000 pesos.

For the more adventurous there is the local bus system which may appear chaotic, but is actually as efficient as it is colorful. Buses run continuously throughout the day along Av. Jimenez from Manga to Bocagrande for 1,200 to 1,800 pesos, depending on the bus, and whether or not it has air conditioning.

If you need to go to Barranquilla (where the American Consulate is located) in search of diesel engine parts -- especially Perkins, to pay a visit to the AB Inflables headquarters in South America, or for whatever reason, you can do it by coach from *Terminal de Transportes* or use a private door-to-door van service like *MARSOL* or *BERLINA*.

Cartagena airport, *Aeropuerto Internacional Rafael Núñez*, serves the following airlines and destinations: ADA (Montería), Avianca (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Miami and New York), Copa (Bogotá, San Andrés and Panama City), Easy Fly (Bucaramanga), JetBlue (New York and Fort Lauderdale), LAN (Bogotá), Spirit (Fort Lauderdale), Viva Colombia (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Pereira). Located in Calle 71, nº 7-3, by the coastal highway north of the city, the 10 minute ride to the center has a regulated taxi fare of 9,000 pesos but some taxi drivers may try to charge more. To avoid being overcharged, it is advisable to use the taxi booth at the main entrance, where you can book an approved taxi at regulated fares. Buses are again a cheaper and more colorful option. They run frequently between the airport and different areas of the city for a 1,700COP fare. To get to the airport from the city center, you should take any marked *Crespo* and tell the driver that you are going to the airport.

Provisioning

Stocking is not an issue in Cartagena; you will find plenty of stores of all kinds and sizes, from family run groceries with the basics to modern malls with well stocked supermarkets. Colorful *palenqueras* are first in the streets, graciously carrying a basket full of fresh fruit on their heads while hailing out their wares. It can make a healthy delicious breakfast, especially if accompanied by a *tinto*, a small cup of excellent sweetened Colombian coffee that vendors sell in the street for a mere 200 pesos.

Good quality produce, meats and poultry are available from the fine grocery stores throughout the city. Pork and beef are especially good here but there is not much variety in canned goods. Wines and liquors tend to be very expensive in the grocery stores, the best prices for alcohol in Cartagena being found at the import stores located in or near *Centro Comercial Turistico*, that runs between Calle Larga and Av. Arsenal near the Convention Center. Prices are substantially less than in the grocery stores and you will also find good prices on various other imported food items not otherwise available.

Mercado de Bazurto, the huge city market, is the place to go for inexpensive fresh fruit and vegetables and almost anything you can imagine. This colorful vibrant market is busy from the very early morning with vendors, buyers and

opportunistic pickpockets, so do not lose track of your wallet during your visit.

Exito is a large grocery and department store with three branches in the city (Av. Venezuela and Sector San Diego in the center and Paseo de La Castellana Shopping Mall in Avenida Pedro de Heredia) and good prices.



PALENQUERAS BALANCE THEIR WARES

Mega Tiendas Express in Calle 30, Sector Los Andes, not far from Mercado Bazurto, is another big grocery store with good prices. *Olímpica*, with two main branches (one in Carrera 9ª in the city center and another in Carrera 3, Calle 6, Bocagrande) is a well stocked supermarket with a nice selection of household goods.

Carulla is a very well stocked but more expensive supermarket chain that offers a variety of local and imported products, from groceries to clothing. Their main branch is just one block east of Club Náutico. It has a self service restaurant, a pharmacy, a stationary shop, a cyber cafe, and an ATM machine. They have a smaller "Express" branch not far from Club de Pesca which opens longer hours and a supermarket in Bocagrande, in Calle 14.

Carrefour, located in Caribe Plaza Mall in Pie de La Popa, is a large French chain store, well stocked with local and imported items albeit expensive.

Makro, in Carretera 59, is open seven days a week for bulk buying at retail prices.

Propane

SURTIGAS, the fill station, is in Pedro De Heredia, nº 47, a 30 minute taxi ride from the center. Marinas and boatyards will usually do the errands for you and will charge 20,000 to 25,000 pesos for the service. However, if stationed at Club Nautico or anchored in the bay, there is always someone hanging around the marina who is in charge of taking empty bottles for a refill on a regular weekly basis. Use the cruiser's net on VHF channel 68 or ask at the marina office for updates on gas fills.

Fuel

Mind you! Fuel served in most petrol stations and docks in Colombia is mixed with biodiesel at 10%. As it is not too clean, it is a good idea to filter it two or three times before it goes into the fuel tank. If you need to clean your fuel or your tank, Mauricio Pretel offers filtering, recycling and polishing services. You can contact him by phone at (0057) 5 665 7654 and 315 897 7351 (cell).

The average price of gasoline as of June 2014 was 8,300 pesos per gallon, while 8,200 pesos per gallon was the price for diesel or ACPM, as diesel is locally known. There are two other marinas with fuel docks, apart from *Club de Pesca* and *Marina Manzanillo*, but they can only be accessed by dinghy. *Todomar Marina* (the branch of *Todomar* dealing with power boats) is located in Bocagrande, on the dock just opposite the Convention Center. *Marina Santa Cruz* is located in

Manga, south of Club Nautico and next to the *Terminal Marítimo*, the container loading wharf.

The petrol station closest to the anchorage, if you need to jerry can your fuel, is located in Calle 25, next door to Club de Pesca.

Boat services

Cartagena offers a wide range of marine products, services, and stores. You will find all sorts of companies dealing in mechanical engineering; spare parts; marine electricity and electronics; stainless steel; aluminium and chrome plating and anodizing; glass and acrylic; galvanizing; batteries; wood and paint; chandleries... You name it. The list is too long to be included in this guide and you can find an extensive directory of marine products and services in the *Club Náutico* webpage. However, we would like to mention some well regarded professionals whose good skills we had the chance to verify.

Elvis Castro, *El Profe*, is an excellent mechanic, reliable, tidy and trustworthy. He is usually very busy so you might have problems to engage him. To contact him, ask at Club Náutico or call him on numbers (0057) 5 674 6422 / 661 9581 Cel:



313 523 7843.



ELVIS CASTRO, EL PROFE, AT WORK

Sven Zimmermman, from *Laboratorio Electrónico Aleman* (Manga Cl 26 18-21 L-5, Callejón de los Nísperos, Tel.: (0057) 5 6604222), is an excellent electronics engineer; one of those rare vocational romantics who love their work. He does radar installing and servicing, SSB and VHF radio repairing and auto pilot installing, servicing and repairing. He speaks German, English and Spanish.

SVEN ZIMMERMAN

For good quality economical flags, *Germán Contreras* is your man. Germán is a retired seaman who sews the flags himself and will make any design you request. His prices range from 20,000 to 35,000 pesos according to the size and the complexity of the design. He frequents *Club Náutico* and can be contacted by phone on numbers (0057) 5 690 2488 and 311 6914496 / 311 4218894 (cell).

For boat cleaning, varnishing, head overhaul, antifouling, running errands, piloting, underwater work, obtaining parts and general repairs, there are quite a number of workers, most of them to be found at or through Club Nautico.

Communications

The country code for Colombia is 0057 and, if calling from outside Cartagena, 5 must be added before a landline number. There are plenty of phone booths in the street and phone cards can be purchased in any grocery store or from the street vendors wearing advertisement aprons. If you plan to spend some time in Colombia, it can be worth purchasing a cell phone. The cheapest international calls are via Skype which you will find in the numerous Internet centers and cafes in the city. The closest to the anchorage and marina area is in Carulla supermarket. It is an internet café with knowledgeable staff (most times) and scanning and copying service. The average price is 2,000 to 3,000 pesos/hr.

If using the cell phone for international calls, dial 00 444 before the country code if using *Comce*; 00 414 if using *Tigo*; and 009 if using *Movistar*. But if you do not own a cell phone and need to call another cell phone, use one of the many street vendors who will hire their phones for 100-200 pesos/min.

The Post Office is located on the road leading from Plaza Telecom to the city walls. Do not use the post box outside but the services of the attendant inside instead.

Summa Avianca, a travel agency in the city center, in Avenida Venezuela, facing Citibank, handles airmail.

FedEx in Boca Grande, Av, San Martin, Carrera 2, nº 10-44, is a good choice for urgent or important documents.

Tourist information

The main tourist information office is located in Plaza de la Aduana and there is an information booth just past the gate of the Torre del Reloj. But all you will get there is a plan of the city and, if you are lucky, the free magazine *Donde* with maps and info on the main events; do not expect much more. Tourist maps and guides covering all of Cartagena can be purchased at the ticket office of Palacio de La Inquisición.

Cartagena is the most beautiful colonial city in the Caribbean. A defensive wall dating from the XV century and in perfect condition encircles all the perimeter of the Old Town, known as *Centro* to locals.

The old buildings are now small stores, restaurants, and museums. Mansions and convents have been transformed into hotels and inns which keep their colonial charm. The narrow, winding streets, flowered balconies, doors within doors, and Spanish colonial architecture are visual delights. Wear comfortable walking shoes and explore every street. Here are some of the historical highlights that should not be missed:

TORRE DEL RELOJ



CASA DE LA ADUANA



Museo Naval. Cartagena naval military and marine history. The building itself is lovely. It contains some exhibitions, maps of fortresses all over the Caribbean, models of the coast and dock building techniques, as well as numerous other displays. Located in Plaza Santa Teresa, just behind Iglesia San Pedro Claver, it is open Tuesdays to Sundays, 10.00am to 5.00pm.



MUSEO NAVAL DEL CARIBE

Museo de Oro in Plaza Bolivar. With more than just gold, the museum has interesting models of Indian communities and an historic overview of the Zenu society and culture, their amazing control of floods, their delicate gold crafting and weaving. Open Tuesday to Saturday from

10.00am to 1.00pm and 3.00pm to 7.00pm.



Palacio de la Inquisición y Museo Histórico. Plaza Bolivar. Fascinating and gruesome. Take some time; it is very interesting but can take long. Open Monday to Saturday from 8.00am to 6.00pm and Sundays from 10.00am to 4.00pm.

Fuerte de San Felipe de Barajas, located in Pie del Cerro, it is the largest fort in Cartagena and has a beautiful view of the city. Bring a flashlight -- it's riddled with tunnels! Open

Monday to Sunday from 8.00am to 6.00p.m.



SAN FELIPE DE BARAJAS FORT

DON BLAS DE LEZO...

...about whom Colombians are heard to say “Because of him, we don’t speak English”. This great Basque Spanish naval hero, after a long, storied career whose battles cost him an arm, a leg, and an eye, was appointed General Commander of the Spanish Fleet at Cartagena in 1737. When British Admiral Edward Vernon came gunning for Cartagena with a navy of ships and men many times the size of that under de Lezo’s command, de Lezo sank English ships and held off the attack until the start of the rainy season when tropical illnesses ran through the crews and Vernon slunk away with one tenth the men and far fewer ships than he started with. Today no one even knows where de Lezo is buried!



Museo de Arte Moderno. Plaza de San Pedro de Claver. Excellent Latin American collection from the 50s to present days, among others. Beautiful gift shop-*Tienda del Museo*-next door featuring fine quality Colombian craftwork. Open Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 12.00am and 3.00pm to 7.00pm.

Teatro Heredia. Built to celebrate the first centenary of the Colombian Republic in 1911, the Teatro Adolfo Mejia was constructed by Luis Felipe Jaspe, the architect responsible for many key local landmarks, most notably *La Torre del Reloj*. The church's chapel, left to fall into neglect after the wars of independence in the early 19th century, was converted into *Teatro Heredia* in honour of the city's founder. A luscious refurbishment by architect Alberto Samudio in 1988 restored the city's principal cultural venue to its former glory and Adolfo Mejia's theatre of dreams still hosts the city's most glittering events. Plazadela Merced.MondaytoFridayfrom 8.00am to

11.30am and from

2.00pm to

5.30pm.

Saturdays 8.00am to 12.00am.



Convento de La Popa has a long exciting history but it would be worth visiting only for its panoramic view of the city. Do not walk there; the barrio at the bottom of the hill is dangerous! Take a taxi and enjoy the views! Cerro de la Popa. Monday to Sunday from 8.45am to 5.30pm.

Iglesia de Santo Domingo in Plaza de Santo Domingo, is open Tuesdays to Sundays from 9.00am to 6.00pm. Just opposite its front door there is one of the few Botero's

sculptures displayed in the street, one of his fat girls,



Gertrudis.



Convento de San Pedro Claver y Museo Afrocaribeño.

It is worth the visit and you can walk all the way up to the tower. Plaza de San Pedro Claver. Monday to Friday 8.00am to 5.30pm. Saturdays and Sundays 8.00am to 4.00pm.





CATEDRAL SANTA CATALINA

Catedral Santa Catalina. Plaza de la Proclamacion. Next to Plaza Bolivar. Monday to Sunday 9.00am to 6.00pm. Audioguided visits in 5 languages.

Santa Clara Hotel. Built as a convent for the Claretian Sisters, it was later used as a military store house and a hospital. It has been beautifully restored and is a must. Do not stay on the ground floor; walk around the first and second floors. Calle del Torno.



Plaza Bolivar, near the cathedral and site of the Gold and Inquisition Museums, is a perfect place to rest under the shade of its trees while enjoying a *tinto* (black sweet coffee), a piece of fresh fruit or an ice cream from one of the

numerous street vendors in the area. **Las Bovedas** near Plaza San Diego and Santa Clara Hotel, is a busy arched alleyway where you can find all sorts of craft and souvenir



shops.





FROM THE SANTA TERESA -- ROOF WITH A VIEW

Santa Teresa Hotel Charleston on the Plaza de Santa Teresa is a beautifully restored convent turned hotel and a roof with a view. They have a swimming pool on the terrace which can be used while patronizing the bar.

Puerta del Reloj used to be the original and sole entrance to walled city. It gives way to the *Plaza de los Coches*, where you can hire a horse cart and enjoy a city tour for 30 to 60,000 pesos (depending on the route and time spent) or indulge yourself with the local sweets on sale on the *Portal*

de los Dulces. Visit Plaza de la Aduana site of the Casa de la Aduana, ancient city customs and royal treasury. Do not miss a walk all the way along the wall from Plaza Santa Teresa, both by day and night; the views are magnificent during daylight and, in the evening, the city lights add a magic



touch.

PLAZA DE LOS COCHES





PORTAL DE LOS DULCES

PLAZA DE LA ADUANA



SAN FERNANDO DE BOCA CHICA FORT



PLAZA DE LOS COCHES, ANOTHER VIEW









Cartagena is considered a safe city in the Caribbean. All the area from Club Nautico to the city center and Boca Grande is as safe as any place. The presence of the police patrolling on foot, or by car or motorbike will not go unobserved and is appreciated. Cartagena is a populous city that has been growing dramatically since the 80s.

Cartagena is very busy during the day with visitors, locals on errands, and street vendors. At night, take a taxi to see the sites and try all the wonderful restaurants. Check with other cruisers for their favorites. Some cruisers spend weeks or months in Cartagena and never cook a meal on their boat. One of the great delights of Cartagena is the restaurants. There is a variety on offer; Chinese, Mexican, Spanish, Lebanese ... although Italian seems to be the most popular. If you are a devoted carnivore, try D'Res, just a very short walk from Club de Pesca for a sample of Colombian gastronomy.

It is possible to have a set lunch (*comida corriente*) in numerous local restaurants all over town and the outskirts.

This includes a soup, and a plate of meat/chicken/fish with rice, fried plantain, a side salad accompanied by *panela*-similar to lemonade. And the price is right; very right!



ARCHIPIÉLAGO ISLAS DEL ROSARIO & ARCHIPIÉLAGO DE SAN BERNARDO

ARCHIPIÉLAGO ISLAS DEL ROSARIO & ARCHIPIÉLAGO DE SAN
BERNARDO



Figure . WILDLIFE OF THE ARCHIPELAGOS

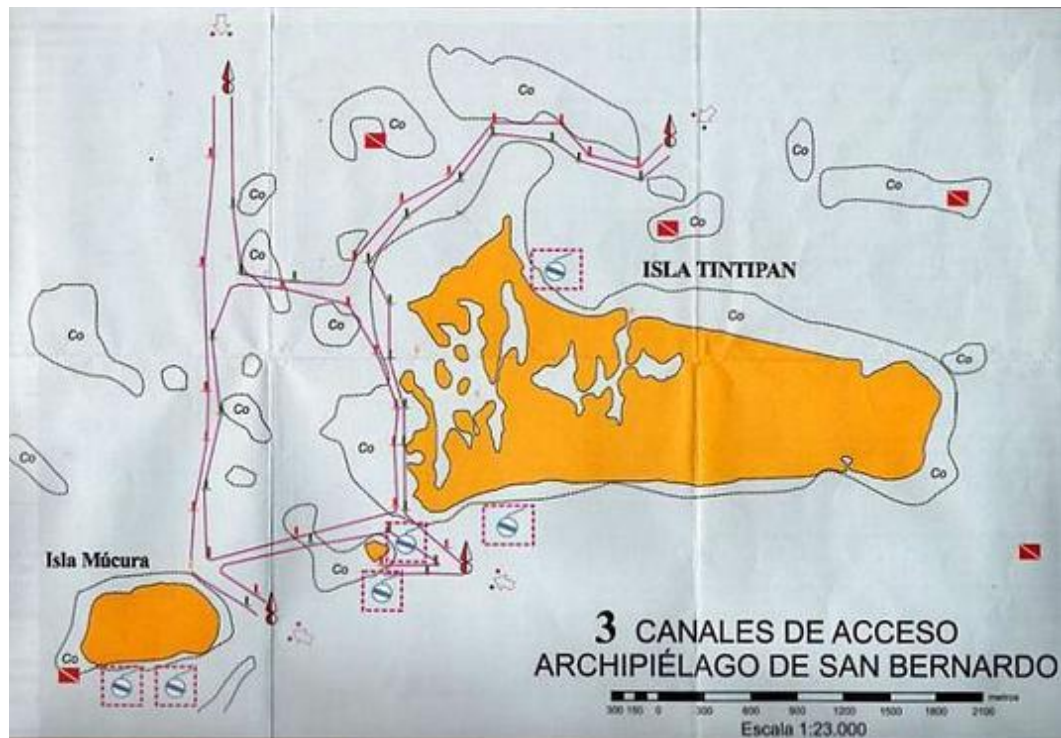
THE ARCHIPELAGOS

Nuestra Señora del Rosario and San Bernardo Archipelagos, together with the reef west of *Península de Barú* and another four submerged islands, are protected coralline areas included in the National Natural Park *Los Corales del Rosario y San Bernardo*. Except for *Isla Rosario* southwest of *Isla Grande*, which is off limits, the other islands on both archipelagos can be visited and anchoring is permitted, provided coral is not damaged in any way. However, both Rosario and San Bernardo Archipelago areas are shallow and surrounded by reefs and unmarked shoals. Charts of the area are generally far from accurate, with the remarkable exception of the paper charts published by the *Centro de Investigaciones Oceanográficas e Hidrográficas* (Hydrographic and Oceanographic Research Institute), a department of the Colombian Navy whose website <http://www.cioh.org.co> is full of useful, detailed and up to date weather info. Reduced copies of the original paper charts are included in the *Cruising Guide to Colombia* published in 2014 by the Colombian authorities. Detailed charts of the whole area from Cartagena to Isla Fuerte, like those shown below, can also be purchased at Club Nautico and Manzanillo Marina for some 25\$US.



Figure . CHARTS FOR SALE: CARTAGENA TO ISLA FUERTE

Unfortunately, many of the markers displayed on the charts are non-existent or in reality are represented by single sticks at best. If you want to explore the area in depth, seek advice from fellow cruisers who know it well and always enter in good daylight, when you can eyeball your way.



CHANNEL ACCESS , SAN BERNARDO ARCHIPELAGO

First, Península de Barú



Having reached Cartagena from the east, and perhaps settled in for a time to explore, you may wish to explore the nearby Península de Barú.

Sometimes called Baru Island or Isla de Barú, this peninsula just south of Cartagena is almost separated from the mainland by a branch of a canal which was built in the sixteenth century to better connect the Magdalena River with the city of Cartagena to facilitate trade, roads at the time being rather difficult.

PENÍNSULA DE BARÚ

Today, thanks to its white sand beaches, “Playa Blanca”, and its proximity to Cartagena, the peninsula is a popular daytrip tourist destination from Cartagena for land-bound vacationers and cruising sailors alike.

Playa Blanca (Península de Barú)



Figure . CARTAGENA TO PLAYA BLANCA

Only 14NM south from Cartagena Bay, *Playa Blanca*, on the northwest side of Península de Barú, is the perfect spot for a day trip from the city, away from the urban noise, the dirty waters of the bay and the wakes caused by the water taxis constantly running through the anchorage.



The approach is easy and straightforward; when leaving Cartagena, sail a route to a position at **10°14.95N--75°37.89W** off *Punta Gigante*. From there, turn east to a WP at **10°14.116N--75°37.106W** and eyeball your way toward the beach in search of an anchoring spot that suits you. In calm seas, you can anchor anywhere off the beach in 9-12ft and good holding sand but you will be better protected on the north side if the surge becomes uncomfortable.

Playa Blanca is a long beach with fine white sand and clear turquoise waters and a getaway for Cartagena dwellers and visitors to the city. Fast motorboats make frequent 20 minute rides between the Pegasus Dock in the city center and *Playa Blanca*, carrying visitors to and fro. It is a lovely place to spend the day swimming or snorkeling, kayaking, strolling on the beach, having lunch under the shade of the thatched roof of one of the beach restaurants or simply cleaning your hull off the Cartagena Bay barnacles -- they are a plague!



PLAYA BLANCA LIVES UP TO ITS NAME

Ciénaga de Cholón (Península de Barú)



Figure . ISLAS DEL ROSARIO AND CIÉNAGA DE CHOLÓN,
PENINSULA DE BARÚ

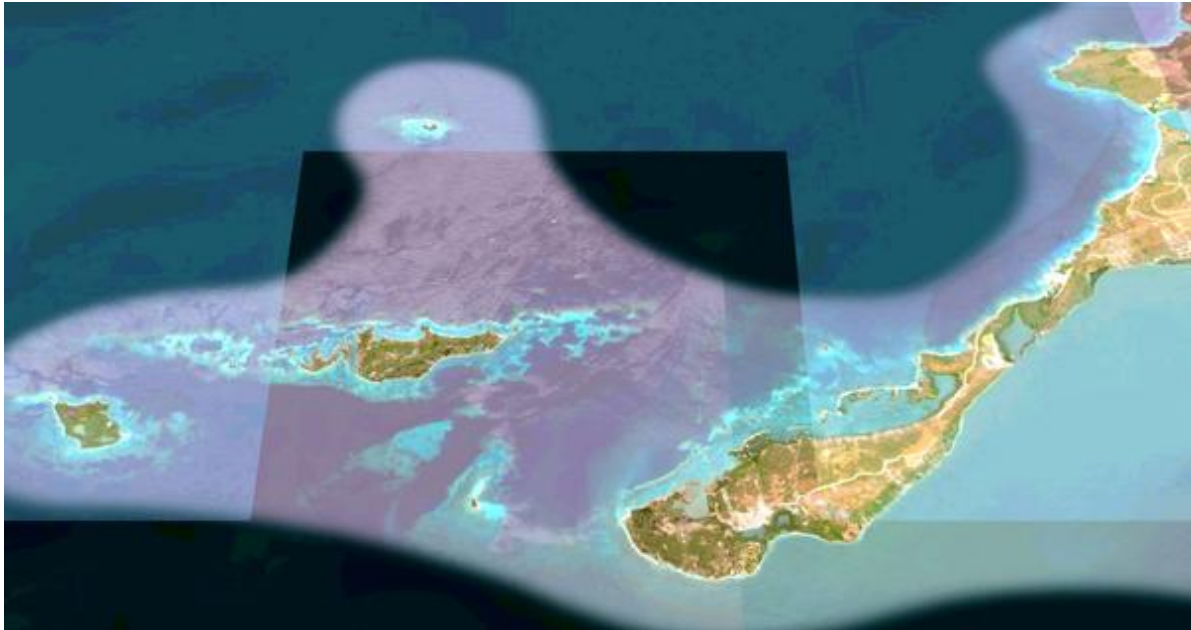


Figure . THE LAY OF LAND AND SEA, PLAYA BLANCA TO
CHOLÓN

Just 4.5NM south of *Playa Blanca*, 18NM from Cartagena and 4NM east of *Isla Grande*, Cholón on *Isla Baru* is another interesting spot for a day away from Cartagena or to rest on your way west. You can enter the lagoon (*Ciénaga de Cholón*), provided your boat drafts less than 5.5ft, or anchor outside in settled weather. If you are staying overnight, be sure to have company in the anchorage as a security measure. Because the area around Barú is very shallow and plagued with scattered coral patches, and the channel not properly marked, it is NOT recommended to pass between *Isla Periquito* and *Punta Mojaculo* on the Barú Peninsula

when approaching Cholón from Playa Blanca.

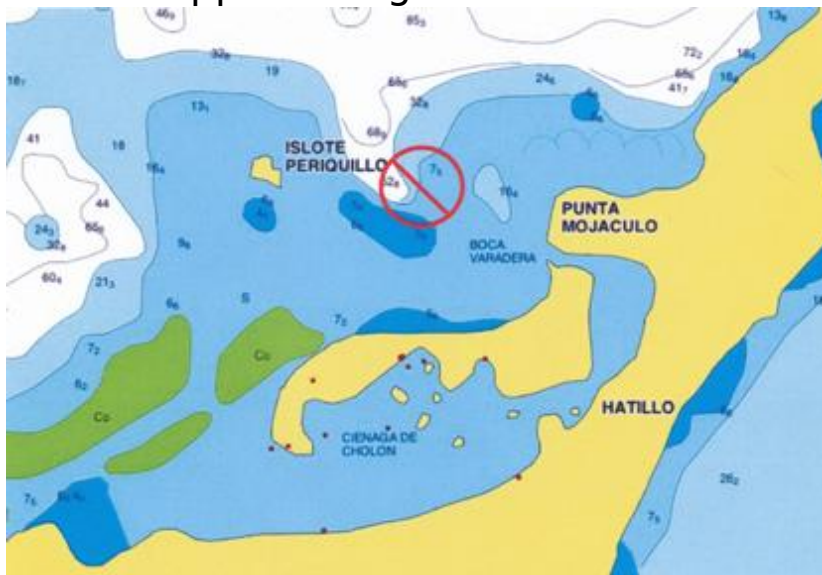


Figure . NO-GO ZONE OFF THE BARU PENINSULA

The approach is safer if done from a position at **10°11.479N--75° 41.487W**, NE of *Isla Grande*. *Ciénaga de Cholón* has only one accessible entrance for keel boats, between *Isla Mirador* and *La Isleta*. The channel entrance is marked with a pair of red and green beacons off *Isla Periquito* at about **10°10.59N--75°40.56W** but its course among reefs is barely marked, so do not rely solely on electronics and keep your eyes wide open. Depths vary between 9-12ft along the channel but a critical minimum 5.5ft depth will be encountered just between *Isla Mirador* and *La Isleta*.

The following waypoints will guide you safely among reefs through the channel:

- WP1: **10°10.41N--75°40.32W** (south of *Isla Periquito*)
- WP2: **10°10.06N--75°40.32W**
- WP3: **10°10.02N--75°40.26W**
- WP4: **10°9.934N--75°40.223W** (in the middle of entrance to lagoon)
- WP5: **10°9.84N--75°40.18W** (narrowest and shallowest point, between sand shoal to starboard and beach resort to port)
- WP6: **10°9.81N -- 75°40.17W** (inside the lagoon)

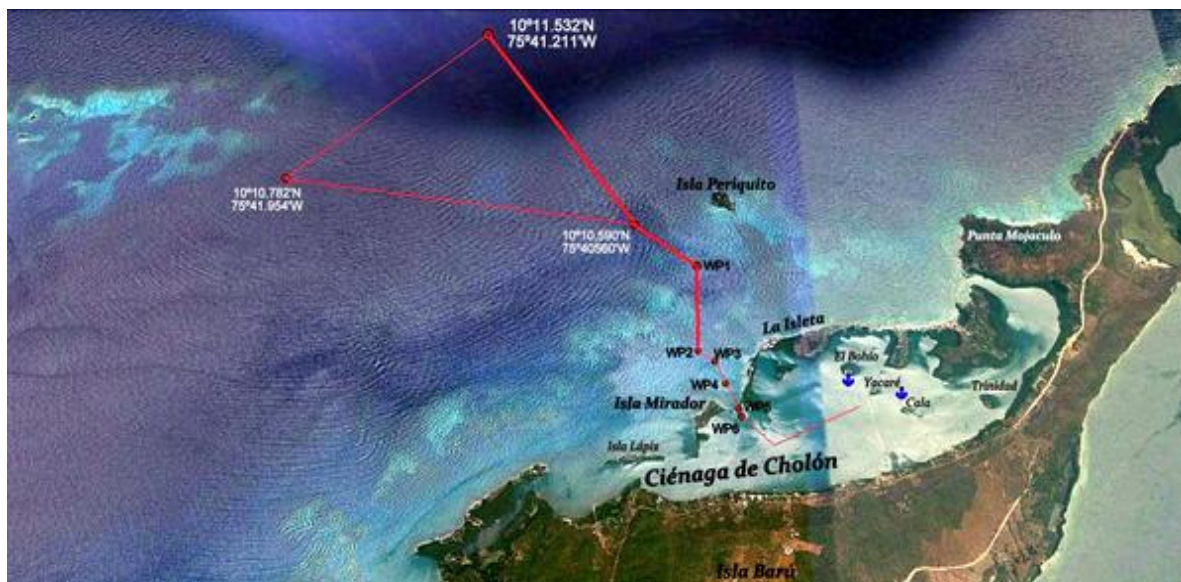


Figure . THREADING THE NEEDLE BETWEEN ISLA MIRADOR AND LA ISLETA INTO CIÉNAGA DE CHOLÓN

Once inside the lagoon, depths increase to 15-20ft and waters become flat calm. Drop the anchor on the east side of the inlet in 9-15ft of depth and a good holding sand bottom. The waters of the lagoon are calm and clear and the eastern islets have lovely little beaches. The surrounding landscape consists of a mangrove forest which hides several villas, four upscale resorts and the colorful fishing village of Barú, located on the south tip of *Isla Barú*. Most of the beaches and docks in the lagoon are privately owned but the friendly caretakers will usually grant permission to leave the dinghy there while ashore.

There are several channels among mangroves leading into the village but seek local knowledge to transit them with your dinghy for the first time, as the mangrove can become an unnerving labyrinth. Alternatively, there is a 2 mile path

leading from the anchorage into the village, where you will find fresh water, fuel, several grocery stores, a couple of stores selling household and hardware items and even an international ATM machine.

Barú was born as a *palenque*, a secluded settlement founded by fugitive slaves of African origin, and the population is mainly Afro-Colombian. The typical and delicious menu served at local restaurants consists of fish soup and a dish of fried fresh fish with a siding of *arroz con titoté* (rice with raisins and coconut) and *patacones* (fried mashed plantain). The trip by land from Barú to Cartagena is a colorful journey into the local way of life, which involves a motor-taxi ride to *El Dique*, a ship channel that one crosses by ferry to the town of Pasacaballos. From there, a public bus carries passengers to the city market or *Mercado Bazurto*. A real trip!

Islas del Rosario

(10°11.0N--75°45.0W)

18NM S from Cartagena, 7.5NM SW of Playa Blanca and 4.5NM west of Cholón lies Islas del Rosario Archipelago formed by a group of 27 small islands surrounded by intermittent reefs that extend up to 9.5 miles west through points lying 6.3 miles NW from Punta Baru. Isla Tesoro, marked by a light, is the outlier and northernmost island of the group. It is small, sandy, and surrounded by foul ground which extends to about 0.8 mile offshore. Another bank,

whose shallowest depth is 5.5m, lies about 1.8 miles NNE of Isla Tesoro.

Isla del Rosario is the southernmost island of the group. It lies 5 miles west of Punta Baru, is marked by a light, and is covered with palm trees. Isla Grande, the largest of the group, is low and lies 2.3 miles ENE of Isla del Rosario.

The depths between the islands are very irregular and there are many rocks and reefs. The outermost bank lies 3.3 miles west of Isla del Rosario and has a minimum depth of 11.6m.

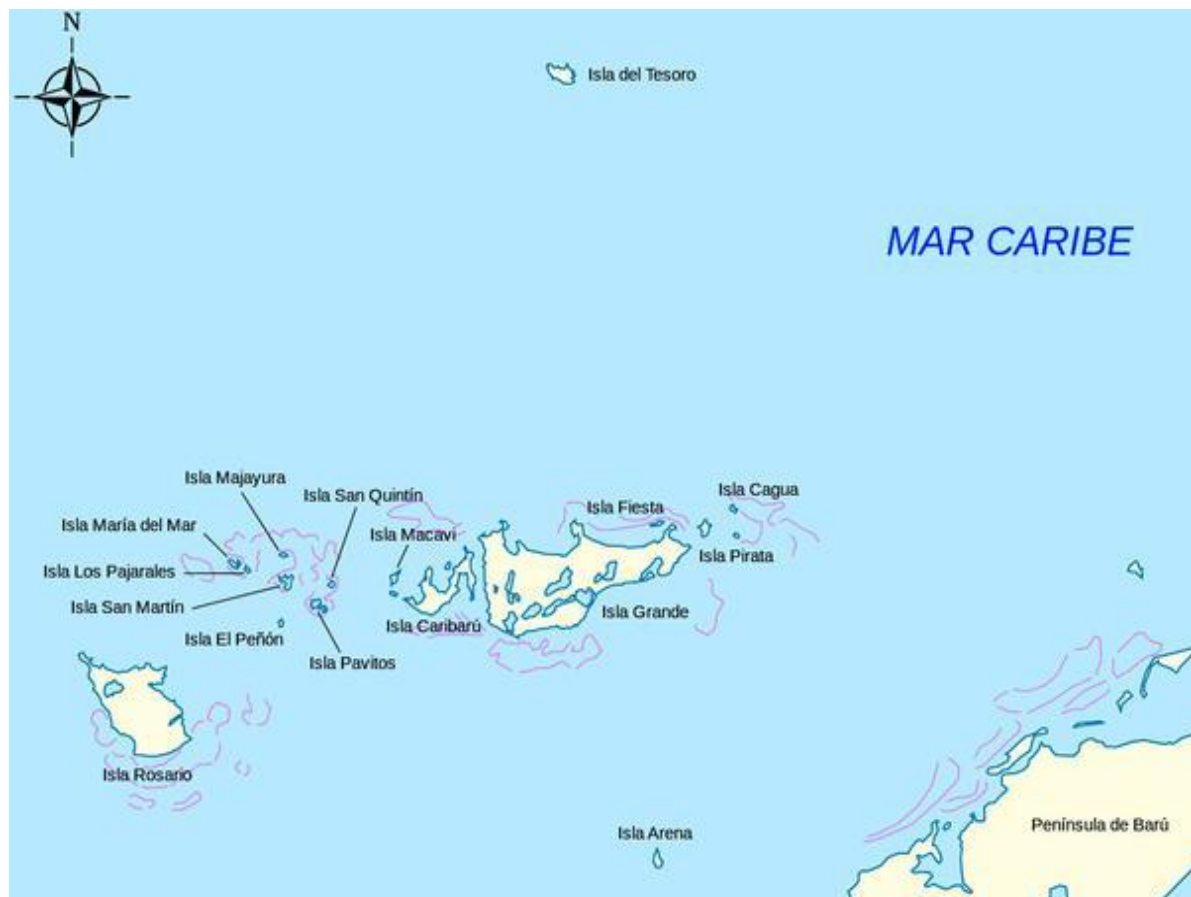


Figure . ISLAS DEL ROSARIO

A national marine park called Corales del Rosario encompasses the waters surrounding Islas del Rosario, Banjo Tortuguilla, Islas San Bernardo (the other mini archipelago), and the waters between them. Ships, barges, fishing vessels, and major coastal craft are forbidden to sail through the channels between Isla Arena, Punta Baru, and Isla Grande; a plus for cruising sailors.

Isla Grande (Islas del Rosario)

There are several appealing anchorages in the Islas del Rosario archipelago but the most popular are located on *Isla Grande* (Big Island) due to their easier accessibility.

During rainy season (roughly from April to November) the north shore offers better protection from the increasing Trade Wind. However, it is more exposed to northern swells and the surrounding reef running parallel to the shoreline makes transiting the poorly marked channel an unnerving experience in shallow waters. The south shore, on the other hand, offers poorer protection from the trades but the approach to the anchorage is easy and straightforward, and it is better protected from the swell. Unfortunately, there are very few beaches.

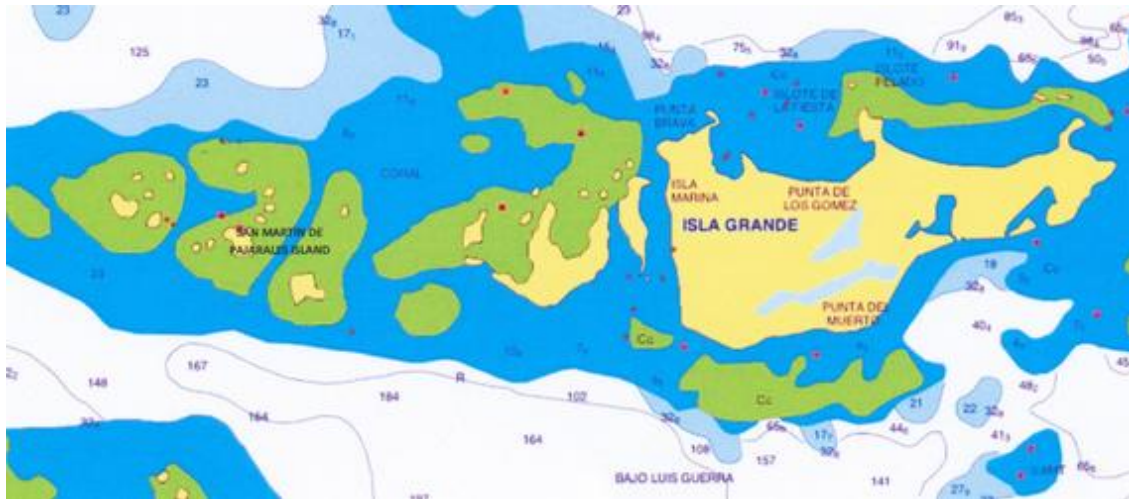


Figure . ISLA GRANDE

When coming from Cartagena, head to an approach WP at **10°11.532N--75°41.211W**. A second WP at **10°10.782N--75°41.954W** will place you between two shoals. Bear **240°** to the next WP at **10°10.11N--75°43.124W** and then steer west to position **10°10.06N--75°43.65W**. From that point, eyeball your way into the bay. Watch out for stakes and little buoys marking the shoals. We dropped the anchor at **10°10.45N--75°44.01W** in 12ft of good holding sand.



Figure . AROUND AND ABOUT ISLA GRANDE

To enter the north anchorage, head to a position at **10°11.41N--75°44.529W** from the approach waypoint and follow the waypoints given below along the winding channel:

WP1: **10°11.237N--75°44.562W** (off the channel entrance).

WP2: **10°11.088N--75°44.466W** (in the middle of the channel entrance).

WP3: **10°11.016N--75°44.586W** (between reefs)

WP4: **10°11.02N--75°44.683W** (minimum 6 feet depth)

WP5: **10°10.97N--75°44.723** (in front of the anchoring area)

Once inside the reef, there are a series of buoys marking the channel limits and the scattered shoals; do not trust them blindly and keep alert. Anchor in the middle of the bay in 5-6ft of depth and good holding sand.

On shore, all docks are private but you are usually granted permission to leave your dinghy. If you feel like stretching your legs, you can walk along one of the eco trails which allows you to explore the island flora and fauna and offers the chance to meet local residents as the trails cross various family settlements, the usual villas and some upscale resort or other. There is not a single road on Isla Grande. There are only footpaths under the shade of trees, and a small fishing village in the center of the island populated by an Afro-Colombian community who joined together to become communal landowners in an effort to counteract uncontrolled development on the island.

1.5NM west of Isla Grande lies San Martin de Pajarales Island, host of *Oceanario Islas del Rosario*, popularly known as San Martín Aquarium, open from Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 -- 15:00. The basic 20,000 pesos entrance fee must be paid in cash and it does not include access to the dolphin show, which costs another 50,000 pesos. A conspicuous weather-vane helps to locate it and the approach from the anchorage at Isla Grande is quite straightforward; just make your way back from the anchorage to its approach waypoint and head to position **10°9.954N--75°44.929W**. Then, sail parallel to the shoreline to a position at **10°10.368N--75°46.379W** off *San Martín de Pajarales* in about 60ft of water and eyeball your way north towards the islets. Drop the anchor in 20-30ft of water and good holding sand and make sure it does not land on a coral patch!

When leaving Isla Grande toward San Bernardo Archipelago, go to a position at **10°09.563N--75°43.181W** and proceed along the channel to a point between Isla Arena and Punta Barú at **10°08.827N--75°43.025W**. Then, head slightly west to a position at **10°07.964N--75°43.392W** and out of the channel into open waters.



Between Punta Baru and Punta San Bernardo, a low sandy point about 26 miles S, the coast opens out about 9 miles NE to form Bahia de Barbacoas, about 7 miles east. This bay has no commercial importance to shipping.

Islas San Bernardo

This mini archipelago lies at the northern edge of the Gulf of Morrosquillo. Its ten islands are a group of low rocks, wooded cays, and shoal banks that extend up to 13.5 miles west through about 14.5 miles NW from Punta San Bernardo



(9°42N --75°42W).

SURPRISE!!!

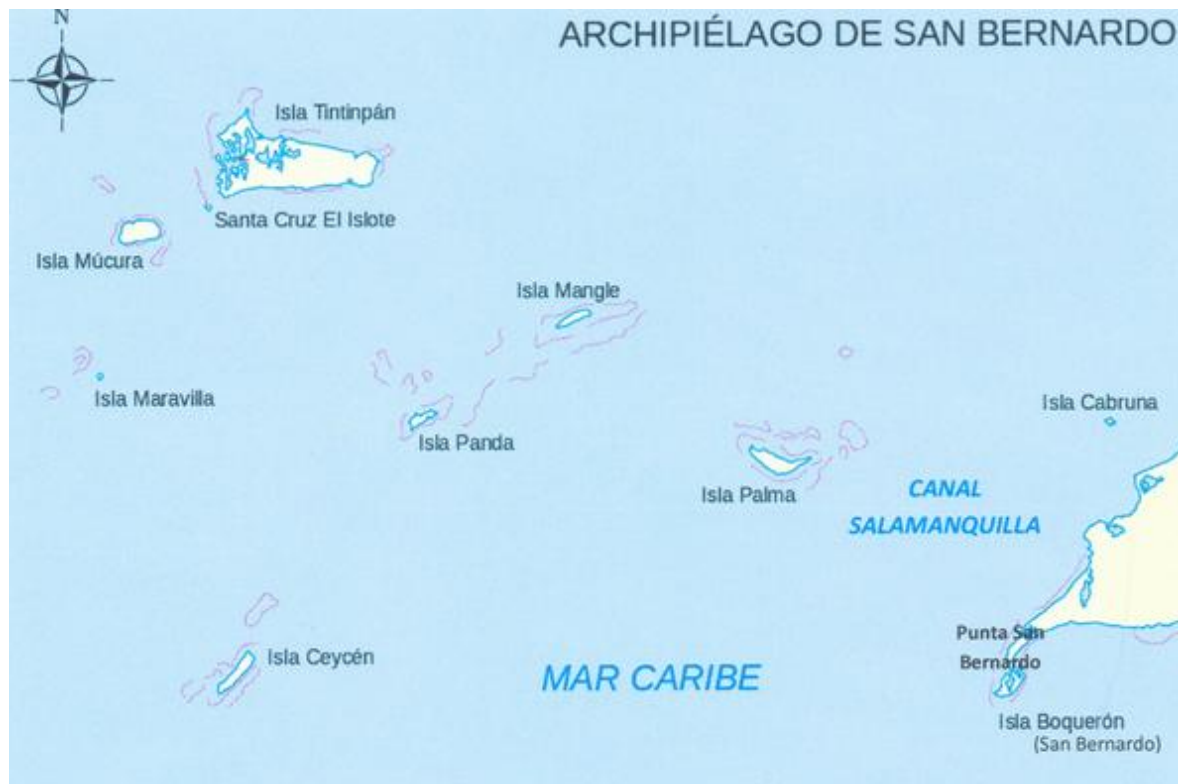


Figure . ISLAS DE SAN BERNARDO

Isla Tintipán, the northernmost cay of the group and the largest, lies 9.3 miles NW of Punta San Bernardo. The southernmost cay, Isla Ceycén, lies 9.8 miles west of the same point.

Canal Salamanquilla is a narrow navigable channel, with depths of 20.1m, between the coastal bank extending north from Punta San Bernardo and the bank surrounding the east cay of the group 3.3 miles NW of the point. Another channel, about 1 mile wide and with its shallowest depth being 29.3m, lies between the latter bank and the shoals surrounding the main group of cays.

Tintipán (Archipelago de San Bernardo)

The San Bernardo Archipelago encompasses 10 small islands plus an artificial islet built by fishermen. Located 25NM from Isla Grande, Tintipán, besides being the biggest of the islands, is the most visited in the archipelago, especially by recreational divers.

While the west and north coasts of Tintipán are full of reefs and shoals extending well off the island, the east and south coasts are clear of hazards except for some isolated shoals. There is a narrow channel running along its west side into a well protected lagoon. The channel is marked with buoys and sticks but the marking is confusing and both lagoon and channel are shallow.



Figure . ISLA GRANDE TO TINTIPAN

An approach WP at **09°47.92N--75°48.51W** will place you off the east shore of Tintipán. Aim at the next WP at **09°47.28N--75°49.18W** and from that point, eyeball your way along the coast to find an anchoring spot that suits you. While doing so, you may experience a mild current of 1-1.5kn from the west. You can anchor very near shore in 9-12ft of water and good holding sand. However, make sure your anchor falls on sand and not on coral, as there are plenty of coral patches around.

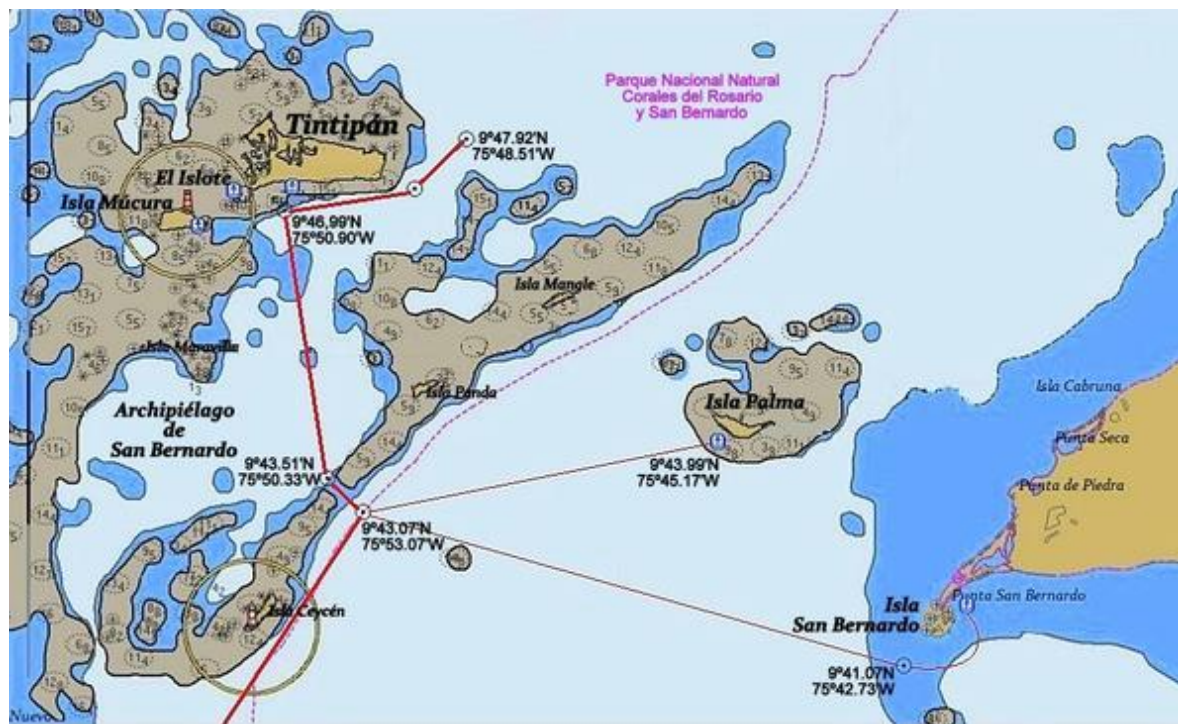


Figure . SAN BERNARDO ARCHIPELAGO



Figure . TINTIPÁN WITH EL ISLOTE AND ISLA MÚCURA



You can leave your dinghy at any of the numerous private docks that stick out of the shore. Most of the island is

occupied by private villas and hotel resorts. In fact, there is no village as such on Tintipán, since the local fishermen built their settlement on the tiny artificial island of *Santa Cruz del Islote*, off the SW tip of Tintipán.



SUNSET AT TINTIPÁN

El Islote

El Islote is the most densely populated location in Colombia, and placed high up in the world rank, with its 1,200 souls inhabiting 120 square yards. The island was built out of shells on shallow waters and its 97 houses are lined back to back along the narrow alleys. The settlement was founded 200 years ago by a group of Barú residents who came across the islet while in search of new fishing grounds and discovered with joy that a constant breeze kept mosquitoes away. All its inhabitants bear the same eight original family



names.

EL ISLOTE

There is no running water and the only source of artificial light comes from a generator which works five hours a day. In spite of the very limited space available, the friendly islanders have managed to build a couple of grocery stores, a school, a health center and an Evangelical church, and they would not change their home town for anything. They even boast of the absence of any law enforcement authority

in a village without crime. As one resident put it, "we don't need any police; we are all family here." Islanders live mainly off fishing, although many work at the dive resort of the adjacent Múcura Island or sail there to offer visitors diving and fishing trips.



The island is very shallow far from the shore and can only be reached by dinghy. There are two possible anchorages in El Islote: One is on the north side of the island, in the channel between the island and the reef west of Tintipán; the other is off the east shore of El Islote, only to be used in settled weather. To approach any of them, go first to a position at **9°46.988N--75°50.898W**, in order to avoid the shoal off the SW tip of Tintipán. Then head west towards El Islote till you are in sight of the red and green markers off the east side of the little island, at which point you will be in 15ft of water. Eyeball your way in between the markers and drop the anchor in 9ft of depth and a good holding sand bottom. If opting for the north anchorage, go from the initial waypoint to a position at **9°47.209N--75°51.439W**, past the red

marker with minimum 9ft depths, and into the channel north of the island; find a suitable place to drop anchor in 15-20ft of clear waters and good holding sand.

Isla Múcura

Located 0.5NM west of El Islote, Múcura is another private island with a dive resort and a few private villas. It has some beautiful sand beaches bathed by crystal clear waters but it is quite shallow all around. On the SE side of the island, the reef stretches towards the south and west. Whether approaching from the east or from Tintipán, proceed to the approach WP at **09°46.988N--75°50.898W** safely away from the shoals south of Tintipán. From there, head to a position at **09°46.798N--75°52.037W** off the SE tip of Múcura, just in the middle of the channel between the island and the south shoal. Drop anchor in front of the resort beach in 9-10ft of clear water and a good holding sand bottom.

Whether leaving from Múcura or Tintipán, follow the same track in the opposite direction and back to the approach waypoint at **09°46.988N--75°50.898W**. Aim at next WP at **09°43.51N--75°50.33W** in front of a pass in a long coral barrier that extends to the SW. Next WP at **09°43.07N-**

-75°49.87W will get you safely out.

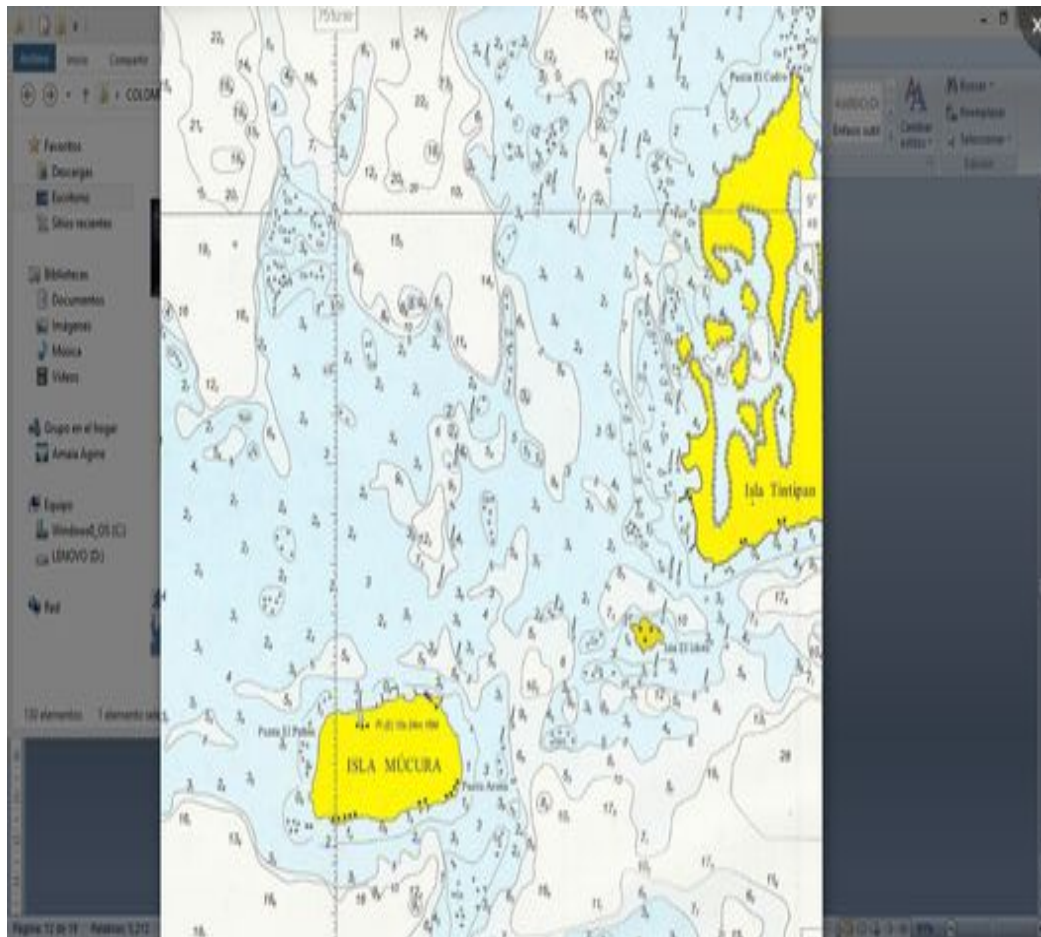


Figure . WHAT'S WHERE AROUND ISLA TINTIPÁN, EL ISOLDE, AND ISLA MÚCURA

Isla Palma & Isla San Bernardo

Although part of the San Bernardos Archipelago, Isla Palma and Isla San Bernardo, located east of the channel, are not included in the natural park. The approach to both is easy and especially so for Isla Palma. Although it is surrounded by reef on the north side and it is very shallow far from the shore all around, the approach to the anchorage on the SW coast of Isla Palma is straight forward and free of hazards. If coming from the NE, you can safely approach Isla Palma from either side, as both channels are deep and wide enough. If coming from Tintipán, just aim at the anchorage at **09°43.99N--75°45.71W** and drop anchor in 9ft of depth and good holding sand. The long dock to port receives the *pangas* (fast motor boats) carrying guests and provisions from mainland and it can be used as a dinghy dock. However, you might prefer to land on the lovely beach to starboard, where you can safely leave your dinghy while exploring the island.



Figure . ISLA PALMA AND ISLA SAN BERNARDO – THE OTHER PART OF THE ARCHIPELAGO

Isla Palma was home to pirates and privateers during the 16th and 17th centuries until it was largely abandoned. It remained uninhabited for centuries with the exception of a few hermits who sought peace and solitude on the island. When they returned to civilization, they would report hearing horrible screams at night during their stay on the island. Legend has it that the screams emanated from the haunted souls of dead pirates.

When ready to leave Isla Palma, all you need to do is set a straight course from the anchorage to Isla Fuerte.

Isla San Bernardo

Isla San Bernardo, locally known as Isla Boquerón, has two inlets on the north side, a humble health center, a destitute school, no electricity and a population of some 80 Afro-Colombian islanders who tend the 22 vacation villas owned by wealthy Colombians. The bizarre mixture of salt and fresh water of unknown origin in the lagoons attracts an amazing array of fauna, and nature flourishes in the area.

There is a very sheltered anchorage just round the island, in a cove called *Ensenada del Hoyo*. To approach the anchorage, go to a position at **09°41.07N--75°42.73W** south of the island in 12ft of depth and proceed north towards *Punta San Bernardo*, giving a wide berth to the island in order to avoid the shallow waters surrounding it. Drop the anchor in 9-15ft of depth and a good holding sand bottom. Another mile further east, at about **09°42.16N--75°40.88W**, there is an interesting anchoring spot in 12ft of depth and good holding sand in front of a series of lovely little beaches, where the headquarters of a private nature reserve are located. *Reserva Natural de Sanguaré* is managed by *El Golfo Buceo & Verano*, the only eco-hotel and research center allowed to operate in the premises. It is visited primarily by Colombian connoisseurs who wish to enjoy sea sports and nature related activities in a remote area at affordable prices and away from the massive



tourism.



SANGUARÉ NATURE RESERVE

When leaving, track your way back and feel free to set a straight course to Isla Fuerte as soon as you reach the approach waypoint south of Isla San Bernardo.

If leaving from Tintipán or Múcura, once you are out of the channel, steer to the SW bearing **217°** and follow that course for the next 5NM to a position at **09°39.01N-75°52.97W**. At that point, you will have left the last two

shoals, Bajo Nuevo and Bajo de Sotavento, behind. You are now ready to set sail for the next 23NM to Isla Fuerte. The only potential hazard on the way is Morrosquillo Rock at **09°35.48N--75°59.53W**, marked by a striped red and white tower lit at night. **Golfo De Morrosquillo (09°35N--75°40W)** lies about 8-10 miles to the E between Punta San Bernardo and Punta Mestizos, 7 miles SSW. The low coast is fringed by mangroves and wooded swamps. A conspicuous tank and a church stand in the town of Tolu, 12.5 miles SE of Punta San Bernardo. Several small jetty walls, which are clearly evident on radar, extend a short distance from the beach just in front of the town. **Roca Morrosquillo (09°36N--76°00W)**, a coral shoal consisting of two heads, one with a depth of 9.1m, the other, located 0.3 mile north, with a depth of 21m, is marked by a lighted buoy and a racon. The shoal lies in the approaches to the Covenas Offshore Oil Terminal.

The oil-loading port, Covenas (**09°25N--75°41W**), that stands on the south side of Golfo de Morrosquillo, is marked by a water tank in the village. One may moor only during daylight hours. There is an established quarantine area noted on charts for vessels waiting on customs and quarantine inspection. Once cleared in, vessels may proceed to the designated anchorage area where anchoring is in mud at depths of 30-36m. Be aware that strong SE winds prevail in the Golfo de Morrosquillo during December.



Figure . THE GOLFO DE MORROSQUILLO WITH COVENAS AND BAHIA DE CISPATA

Because of the Covenas Offshore Tanker Terminal at **9°31.7N--75°47.2W** about 9.8 mi NW of Covenas, a Tanker Loading Unit moored 6.5 miles NNW, and two additional units at 7.8 mi NW, anchoring and all other bottom activity is prohibited for about 10 mi to the NW of the pier head.

Although the straight course from San Bernardo to Isla Fuerte lies west of Covenas, it is well to remember that there can be tanker traffic day or night. Bahia Cispata (**09°25N-**

-75°47W) fed by the Rio Sinu, lies between Punta Mestizos and Punta Bello, about 3.4 miles east. The coast extending 18 miles WSW from Punta Mestizos to Punta Piedras is low-lying mangrove. Depths in the bay are reportedly less than charted.

ISLA FUERTE



Figure . SAN BERNARDO TO ISLA FUERTE

There is a low, wooded islet about 6.5 miles WNW of Punta Piedras, surrounded by foul ground that extends up to 2.5 miles from the south side and nearly 1.5 miles from its west side. The islet is hard to distinguish when approaching from the west although there is a village on its south side and a light marks the island.

32NM from Tintipan, this islet, Isla Fuerte owes its name to the fort (*fuerte*) built by the Spaniards to protect the island from attacks by pirates and privateers. The island is enclosed by reefs and the surrounding waters are very shallow far from shore, especially to the west. A long sand bank extends almost half a mile to the SE off the south tip of the island.

An approach WP at **09°23.16N--76°10.27W** will place you right in front of the anchorage. Eyeball your way into the bay and watch for stakes and little buoys marking a couple of shallow patches. Drop anchor in 9-12ft of water in good holding sand and mud. This bay is exposed to the north swell and it can get very roly at times. On shore, you can leave your dinghy at any of the private docks -- ask for permission -- but it will have to be lifted up on top of the dock to prevent it from hitting the rocks when pushed by the swell. From the anchorage there is a path leading to the fishing village and main settlement on the island, Caserio Puerto Limón.



Figure . ISLA FUERTE IN DETAIL

The anchorage further south in front of the village of Puerto Limón is better sheltered from the north swell, though unprotected from the wind, and the bottom shoals rapidly far from shore, which means one must anchor at least a quarter of a mile from the shoreline. You may experience a mild current (about 1.5kn) from the south all along the east coast. Midway between the two anchorages there are some conspicuous rocks; give them a wide berth as the scattered rocks stretch east just under the surface to a position at **9°22.98N--76°10.48W**. The bottom at Puerto Limón anchorage is sand and the holding is good. Your dinghy can be left safely on the beach.

There is a secluded spot, still close to the village and even better sheltered from the northern swell, on the southwest side of the island. When rounding Punta Arenas on approach, give it a wide berth so as to avoid the conspicuous sand bank stretching southeast. Bear in mind that the bottom is shallow far from shore in the anchorage. Drop anchor in 9ft of clear water and good holding sand. Your dinghy can be left safely on the beach from which there is a series of shady paths leading into Puerto Limón.

Isla Fuerte is a 1,150 square-mile island hosting a couple of dive resorts, some scattered upscale villas and the homes of the local dwellers, built of wood and bitter cane with roofs of thatched palm leaves. Although the island gets many local tourists during weekends and vacations, it keeps its native charm and makes a very nice stop in settled weather. Islanders are very friendly. There are plenty of small groceries where you can get the basics and which also serve as bars; various family restaurants; and many a lovely path along which to explore the island. It is a favorite spot among Colombian dive enthusiasts for the variety of its virgin coral and the numerous sites for observing nurse and white fin sharks, turtles, and brain and fire corals. Local visitors usually fly into Montería and then take a public bus or express taxi (taxis authorized to travel between different cities and departments on private commission) to Paso Nuevo, where local *pangas* await passengers to Isla Fuerte.

Exploring the island along its numerous trails, especially under shady trees, is a delightful experience not to be missed. You can visit the lighthouse in the center of the island, built by a US company more than 70 years ago; and

watch a community or “bed” of endearing sloths moving lazily along tree branches in San Diego area. Concerning trees, you can tightly embrace the *Tum Tum*, a hollow tree of the *Sterculiaceae* family (locally known as *camajón*) and make a wish while hearing your own heartbeats echo on the trunk; admire beautiful ceibas such as *La Bonga*, the tallest on the island at 72ft, whose canopy covers 6,393 square feet. Perhaps most remarkable among the tree species is the Walking Tree (*El Árbol Que Camina*), a *Ficus Moraceae* known locally as *matapalo* and a forest unto itself, whose aerial roots produce new vertical branches, giving the impression that the tree is walking!

Punta del Inglés on the north tip of the island is a little bit of heaven for birdwatchers with its over 80 different species of birds.



ANCHORAGE ON ISLA FUERTE



DONKEY POOL, ANYONE?



ANCHORAGE IN FRONT OF THE VILLAGE

VIEW OF THE BAY FROM THE VILLAGE



VILLAGE PORT



ONE OF THE NUMEROUS PATHS ACROSS THE ISLAND

Sapzurro



Figure . ISLA FUERTE TO SAPZURRO, LAST STOP IN CARIBBEAN COLOMBIA

The stretch of coast between Isla Fuerte and Sapzurro consists of tall cliffs covered by the exuberant rain forest vegetation which becomes increasingly dense as you approach Sapzurro and the Darién Mountain Range. From Punta La Rada, off Isla Fuerte, to Punta Arenas, on the northeast tip of the Gulf of Urabá, there is no sheltered port. The coast is completely open to wind and seas, and the bottom shoals rapidly a good couple of miles off the shore. It is a remote isolated area with very few inhabited spots like Arboletes or San Juan de Urabá, watered by various rivers which usually discharge a good amount of debris during the rainy season. Isla Tortuguilla, 22 NM south of Isla Fuerte, is a

privately owned small island enclosed in a coral reef that stretches from 0.5NM to 1NM all around.

Golfo de Urabá, on the other hand, is a huge inlet almost 50NM deep with minimum 63ft depths in the middle although shallow far from the shores; full of scattered rocks and reefs all around and fed by fourteen rivers. Turbo, located 32NM into the gulf on the east shore, has a small busy airport for domestic flights which deliver the bulk of eco tourists who visit the area. It is the main port of departure to the neighboring coastal villages and towns, some of them, like Sapzurro, isolated from land by the impenetrable Darién jungle. Acandí and Capurganá, on the northwest side of the Gulf of Urabá, are other connection points for different population centers in the area which also have small airports.



Figure . GOLFE DE URABA, CARIBBEAN LINK BETWEEN CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Landmarks Along The Way

Returning to the remote northeast coast of Golfo de Urabá, and starting from Punta Piedra opposite Isla Fuerte, following are landmarks, mostly low-lying, en route to Punta Caribana at the eastern entry point of the Gulf; or further from shore, en route to Sapzurro. Should you choose this variation on your route, it is necessary to study it carefully due to the often minimal, always variable depths and the scarcity of stand-out landmarks

Eight miles SW of Punta Piedra lies **Punta Broqueles**, a rocky projection fringed by a reef extending about 0.3 mile to seaward and the focal point of the following: Bajio Toro, with a minimum depth of only 1.2m, and 1.3 miles north of Broqueles; and Farallon, a group of rocks up to 5m (15ft) high, lying 1.8 miles SW of the point. Two isolated spots of at least 6m lie 6 miles SW of Punta Broqueles.



Figure . PUNTA PIEDRA TO PUNTA BROQUELES TO CERRO TORTUGON, INCLUDING FARALLON, YUCA, AND ISLA TORTUGUILLA

Thirteen miles SSW of Punta Broqueles lies **Isla Tortuguilla** at **9°02'N--76°20'W**. This small wooded islet is 5 miles west of Cerro Tortugon, which is a prominent, conical, 208m high hill standing close to the coast. The village of Yuca, marked by a noticeable white church, is located on the coast 2.5 miles north of Cerro Tortugon. Within 0.8 mile of the islet depths can be less than 9m. There is a light at the NW edge of the island.

Fourteen miles SW of Cerro Tortugon is **Punta Arboletes (8°53N--76°26W)**, a prominent but low-lying wooded point. Cerro Maconda is a prominent hill 5 miles east of Punta Arboletes.

Seven miles SW of Punta Arboletes is **Punta San Juan (8°48N--76°31W)**, conspicuous from the NE as well as SW. There is a village close by north of Punta San Juan.

15 miles SW of Punta Arboletes lies **Punta Sabanilla (8°44N--76°38W)** whose backdrop 2.5 miles SSE of the point is the Cerros de Sabanillas, a group of hills the highest of which rises to 248m. A bank with unknown depths lies about 5 miles west of Punta Sabanilla while Punta Giganton, a low and sandy point, lies 1.3 miles SSW of Punta Sabanilla.

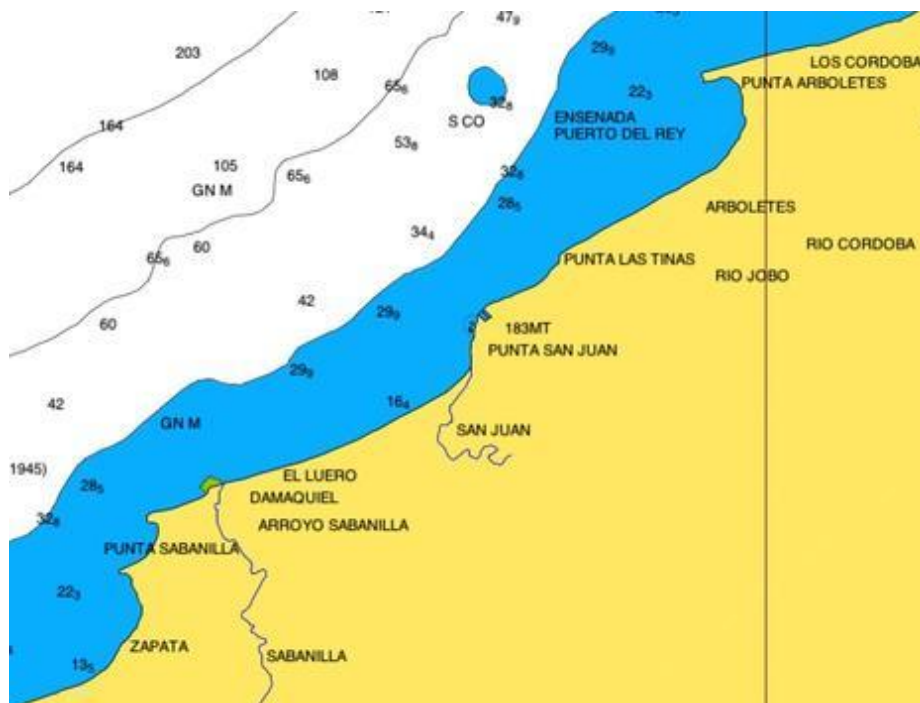


Figure . PUNTA ARBOLETES TO PUNTA SABANILLA

Finally we reach the east entrance point of Golfo de Urabá, **Punta Caribana** ($8^{\circ}37'N$ -- $76^{\circ}53'W$), which is low, wooded, and marked by a light. Cerro Aguila by the point is an excellent landmark. Foul ground, including some rocks awash, extends 3.8 miles NNW from the point.



Figure . PUNTA SABANILLA TO PUNTO CARIBANA AND THE EASTERN APPROACH TO THE GOLFO DE URABÁ

SAPZURRO

50 mi

28 mi



Figure . GOLFO DE URABÁ – SIDE TO SIDE, TOP TO BOTTOM

The distance from Punta Caribana to Cabo Tiburon is just 28 miles west across the mouth of the Gulf. However, the coastline falls away more nearly 50 miles to the south to

form the Golfo de Urabá and the distance along the elongated coast is far greater. The shores of the gulf are generally low, heavily-wooded, and swampy on the east, south, and southwest sides. The landscape on the northwest side is more interesting, and friendly to cruisers; it is hilly, with coves and sandy beaches. In general, the coastline is reported to have grown seaward on both shores of the gulf, especially between **8°00N** and **8°10N**, due to on-going sedimentation from the discharge of several of the rivers that flow into the gulf. The Serrania del Darien mountain range backs the coastal plain on the western side some 12-15 miles inland while the Rio Atrato delta fans out into the gulf from the SW side to form a bight at its head called Bahia Colombia.



Figure . RIO ATRATO DELTA

On the western shore of the gulf, between the north end of the Rio Atrato delta, and Cabo Tiburon, which is the western entry to Golfo de Urabá 35 miles to the northwest, the rocky and rugged coast offers numerous sandy beaches and coves below tall bluffs rising to heavily-wooded slopes. There are islets and rocks within 1.5 miles of the shore.

Entering the Golfo de Urabá from the west, the town of **Acandi (8°31N--77°16W)** lies at the mouth of the Rio Acandi, 11 miles SE of Cabo Tiburon (which is 24 mi NW of Punta Yerbasa). About midway between Cabo Tiburon and Acandi, Terron de Azucar is a steep dark rock at 1.3 miles offshore -- a helpful landmark in this generally low-lying landscape. While there is an area about 6.8m deep at 0.3 mile NNW of the rock, note that there is a rocky land link over which the sea breaks in heavy weather that connects Terron de Azucar with the coast.

Between Acandi and Punta de La Goleta, a steep rocky point 8 miles to the SE, there is a sandy beach broken by hills that extend to the shore nearly 2 miles SE of the town. Two large rocks, about 7m high, can be found 0.5 mile NNE of the

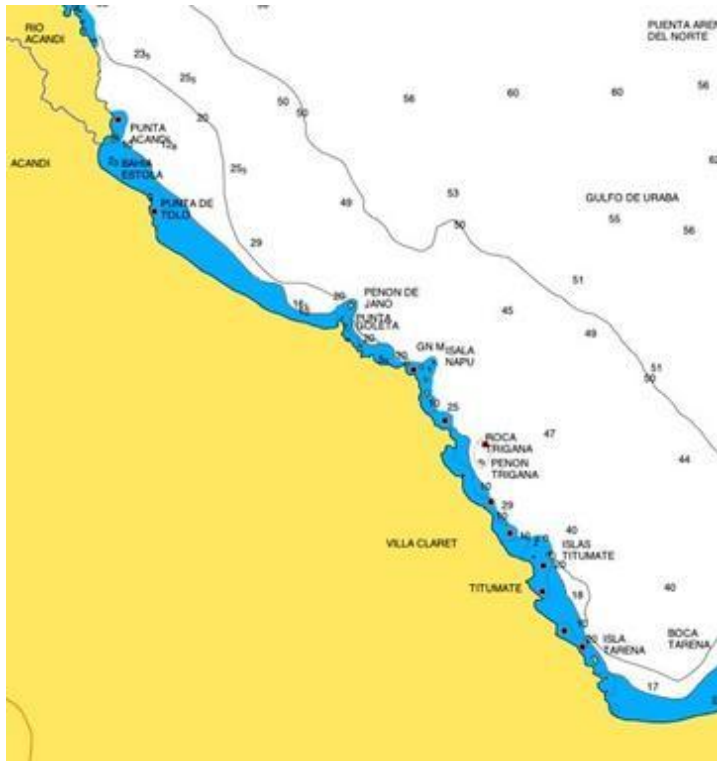


point.

After Punta de La Goleta the coast reverts to its rugged topography and continues 13.3 miles SE to Playa Tarena, from where a low sandy beach extends an additional 5.5 miles to Punta Yerbasal. True to form, there are several rocks and islets within 1 mile of this part of the coast.

Figure . CABO TIBURON SE TO ACANDI, WITH STRING OF ISLETS ALONG THE COAST

Figure . ACANDI TO PUNTA GOLETA AND ON TO PLAYA TARENA



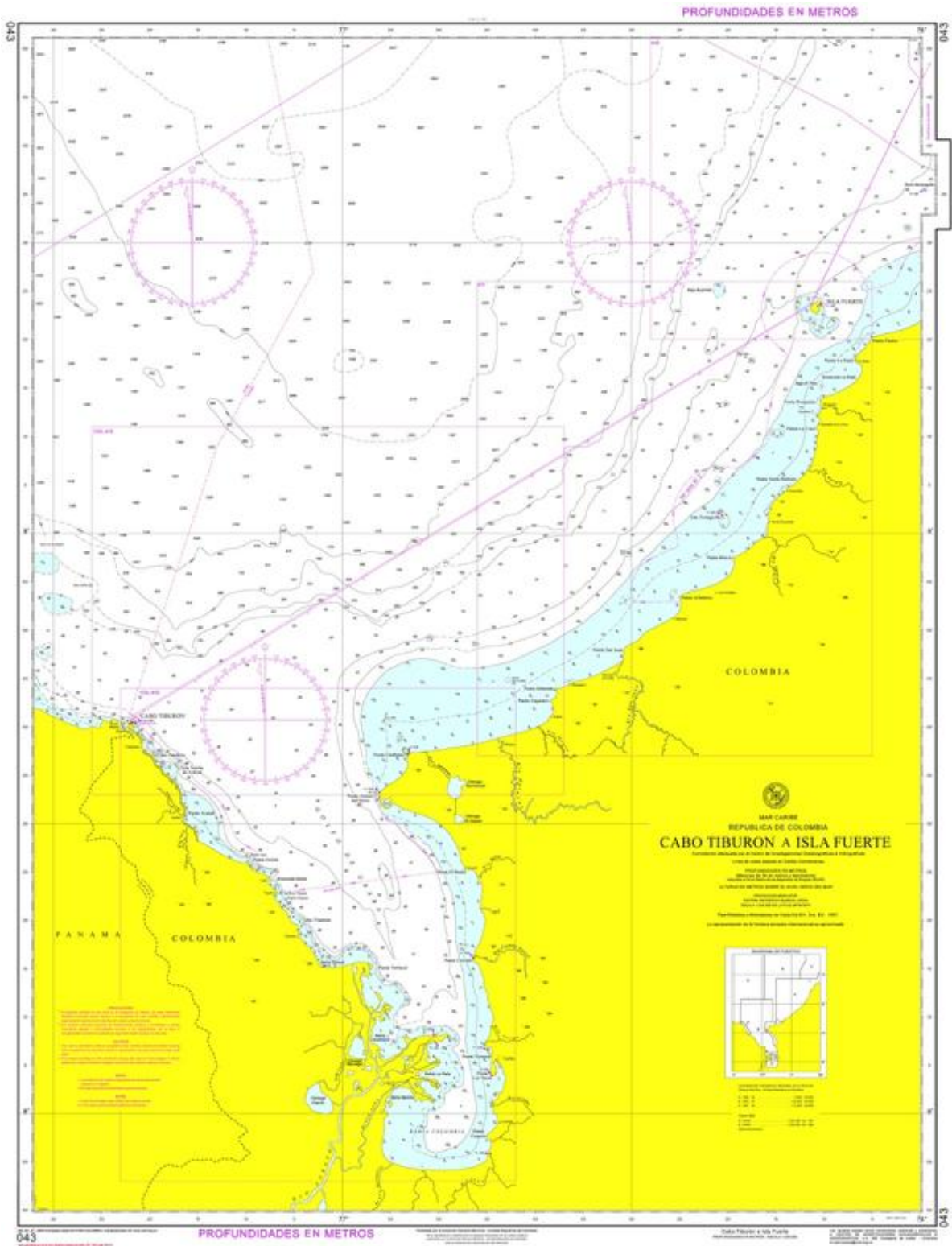


Figure . GOLFO DE URABÁ

This area has two distinct seasons in the year; the dry season lasting from December to April, which features an increasingly northerly Trade Wind and heavy seas; and the rainy season lasting from May into November, which features a shift towards the SE in the wind pattern and characteristic thunder and lightning storms during the months of August and September, followed by a period of calm seas and mild trades into the beginning of December.

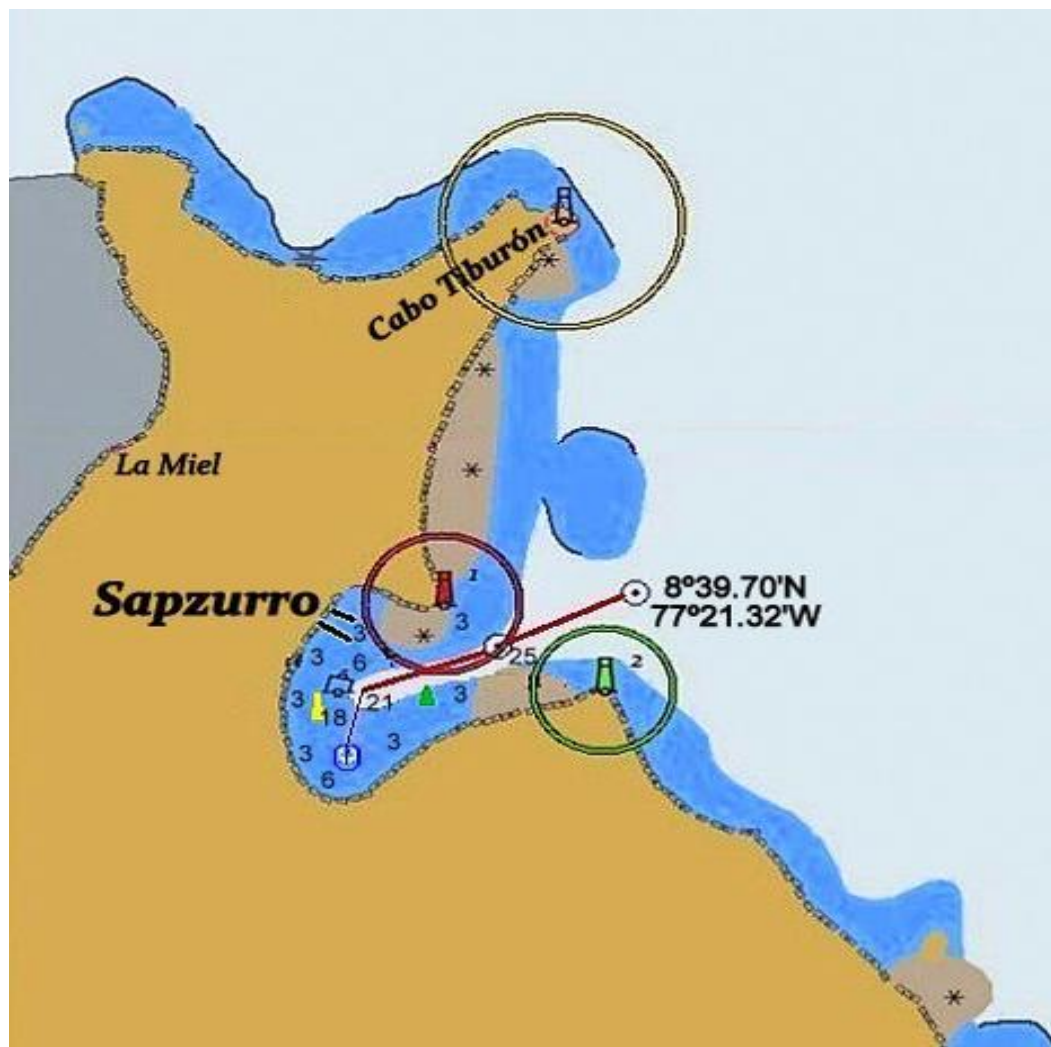


Figure . ENTERING SAPZURRO BAY

Covering the 82NM distance between Isla Fuerte and Sapzurro is best done at night, when the wind calms down as the sun sets. As you approach the Bay of Sapzurro, watch out for logs and debris afloat, dragged offshore by the numerous rivers flowing into the area, especially during the rainy season. The approach to Sapzurro Bay is straightforward and free of hazards, as long as you stick to the center of the bay to avoid the reef that stretches off both sides of the entrance. To enter the bay, go to an approach waypoint at **08°39.70N--77°21.32W** off the entrance channel and proceed to a position at **08°39.59N--77°12.57W** in the middle of the mouth of the bay between the red and green beacons, in 25ft of water. Aim at the yellow beacon at the head of the bay and steer south when close to it, to avoid the north side of the bay, which is very shallow far from shore and full of reefs and scattered coral heads. Eyeball your way toward shore and drop anchor in 12-15ft on a medium-holding sand bottom. It is a good idea to drop a line to shore and tie it to a palm tree in order to mitigate the effect of the NE swell and prevent the risk of dragging in unsettled weather.

Soon after you anchor, your boat will probably be approached by a man on a *panga* representing the "Junta de Acción Comunal", the local community board, who will request a 25,000 peso anchorage fee. Reportedly agreed to by the fishermen's cooperative, it entitles free access to fresh water and trash disposal service. However, your trash will never be disposed of and the fresh water is available free of charge at the village dock, anyway.

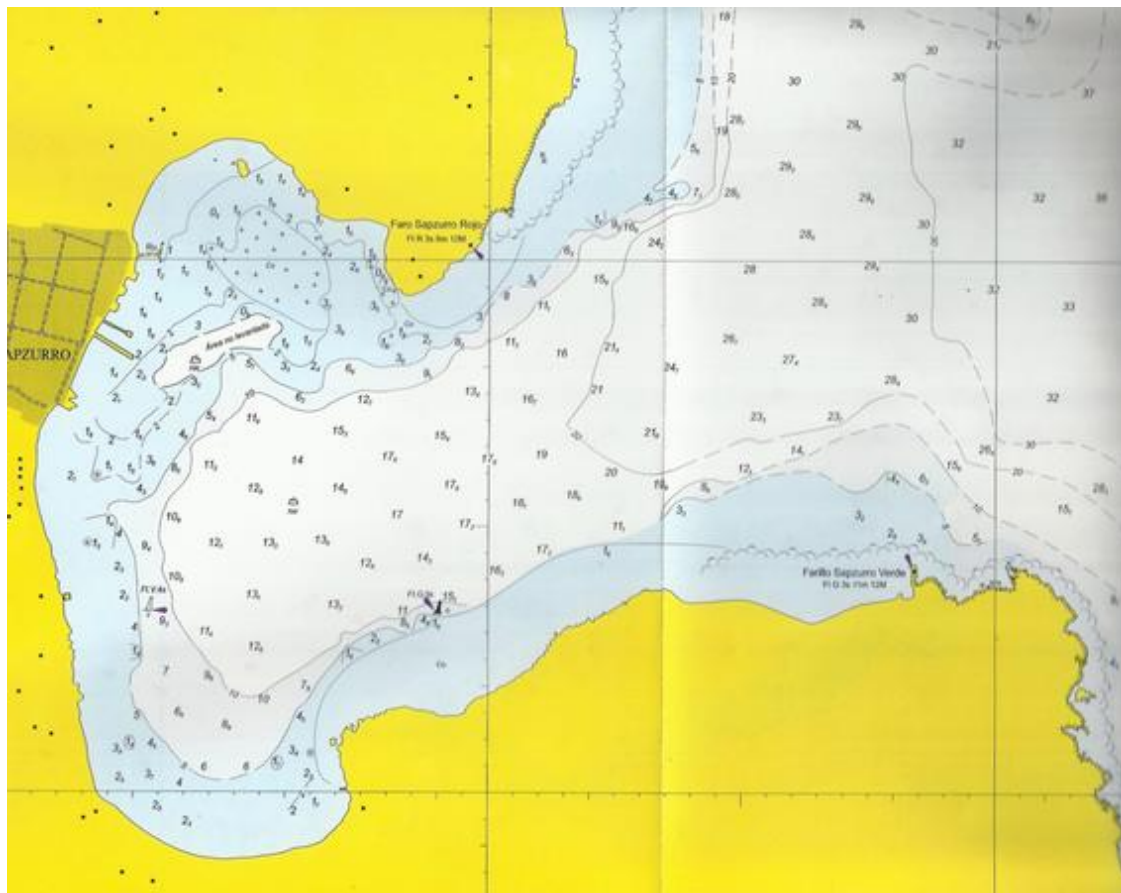


Figure . DETAILS OF SAPZURRO BAY

Sapzurro is a colorful fishing village, quiet and picturesque, and the very last Colombian settlement on the border with Panama. Originally Kuna Yala territory, the proud Kuna Indians who had resisted Spanish invasion for centuries were finally forced to retreat to Panama at the beginning of the 20th century under the pressure of Afro-Colombian colonizers. The present population of 420 doubles during vacation periods as Sapzurro's popularity is growing among eco tourists. There are some 20 guesthouses scattered in the village and new bungalows are being built to accommodate the increasing number of visitors, attracted by its unique

charm, the beauty of its wild landscape and its laidback atmosphere.

Sapzurro has a Catholic church, a school, a health center, a community center, five family restaurants, two discos, a craft shop, running water, and electricity serviced by a generator from 8 am to 2 am. There are a few small groceries with the basics and daily home baked buns for sale at a couple of private homes.

Local gastronomy is based on fish, usually the catch of the day, which is served deep fried with a side of rice and salad for about 20,000 pesos. Try the red snapper at *Doña Trini*, midway between the anchorage and the village center. Do not miss *Paraíso Sapzurro Resort*, on the beachfront not far from *Doña Trini's*, known locally as *El Chileno*. Mónica and Alberto, the resort managers, are a professional, friendly young couple who run this tranquil resort by the beach where you can have delicious meals for about 15,000 pesos and ridiculously inexpensive yummy *empanadas* (pasties stuffed with fish, meat or veggies). They have wash-and-dry laundry service and for-hire portable modems for internet connection, *Claro* being the only service provider in the area. Monica, a vocational biologist by training, organizes personalized treks along the numerous trails in the area to observe wild fauna, learn about medicinal plants, and explore the rain forest.

Trails and Transportation

There is no road access to Sapzurro. However, it is connected with neighboring Acandí (Colombia), and with Capurganá, Turbo and Puerto Obaldia in Panama, by a regular water-taxi service leaving from the municipal dock north of the bay. And Capurganá can also be reached by land from Sapzurro on a stunning trail through the rainforest, which takes a couple of hours to walk and begins near the anchorage south of the bay. If there were a road, this would be the end of it!

A trading boat loaded with fruit, vegetables, frozen meat, and groceries visits the village twice a week. If you intend to purchase anything from the boat, get up early in the morning and move fast when you see it approach; fresh items sell out rapidly!

West of the village, a trail of 180 steps with breathtaking views over Sapzurro Bay leads across the jungle to the top of a 250ft hill and the border with Panama. Two friendly officers stationed on the outpost on behalf of each country will check your passports and welcome you to both countries. Another 238 steps down slope will place you at *El Limón*, a tiny village with a few houses, a Panamanian army station, and a beautiful beach open to the Caribbean Sea. At *El Limón*, you drink Balboa beer, have a bath in *Playa Blanca*, sea conditions permitting, buy El Abuelo rum at duty-free prices and pay in dollars -- though Colombian pesos are also accepted.

Cabo Tiburón (Cape Shark), so called due to the enormous number of sharks that welcomed the Spanish conquistadores on their first visit, is an uninhabited isolated area at the

north tip of the village which can be reached via a beautiful trail bordering the sea amidst lush vegetation. It offers two white sand beaches all for oneself and is reputed for its snorkeling.



El Salto de La Diana is a 45ft waterfall set in the rainforest, just a 10 minute walk from the anchorage. On hot days, it is the perfect place for a refreshing bath under the shade of the surrounding vegetation, while trying to spot the squealing monkeys hidden among trees.



Water taxis connect to:

- **Capurgana** is 2.5NM further south at **08°38N--77°21W**. The trip takes 15 minutes and costs 6000 pesos all the way to the airport and is very popular among backpackers. There are hostels, restaurants, cybercafes, dive centers, banks with ATMs.

- **Puerto Baldia** is the first port of entry on the NE side of Panama, 5NM NW from Sapzurro at **08°41N--77°24W**. 20,000pesos = 10\$. 30 ride.

- **Turbo** is 50NM SE, in Bahia de Colombia at **08°05N--76°43W**. 50,000pesos = 25\$. 3 hour ride with a stop in Capurgana.

There are flights from Turbo or Capurgana to Medellin, Cali, Cartagena, Quibdo, and Bogota. There is a bus from Turbo to Medellin which takes 8 to 10 hours. There is a launch (7000 pesos) to Capurgana (an open bay around the corner) for clearing in. All crew members aboard the launch need to go to Immigration to complete the process. No fees have been reported. Many of the boats that ferry backpackers from Panama to Colombia bring them here and pick them up as you can also clear out of the country by land here, too.



SAN BLAS & PUERTO LINDO

SAN BLAS & PUERTO LINDO

The following is not intended to be a thorough description of the Caribbean coast of Panama but rather to offer, based on our passage, possible stops on the way to San Andrés and Providencia, the last two Colombian offshore islands which will be described in detail as part of Colombia.

THE SAN BLAS

The San Blas Islands offer an exceptional cruising ground worthy of further exploration for its uniqueness and beauty. For that reason, we chose a series of stops which provide the chance, if only superficially, to pop into the culture of the native Guna Indians and their traditional way of life; their transition into modern times accelerated by the increasing presence of tourism in the area.



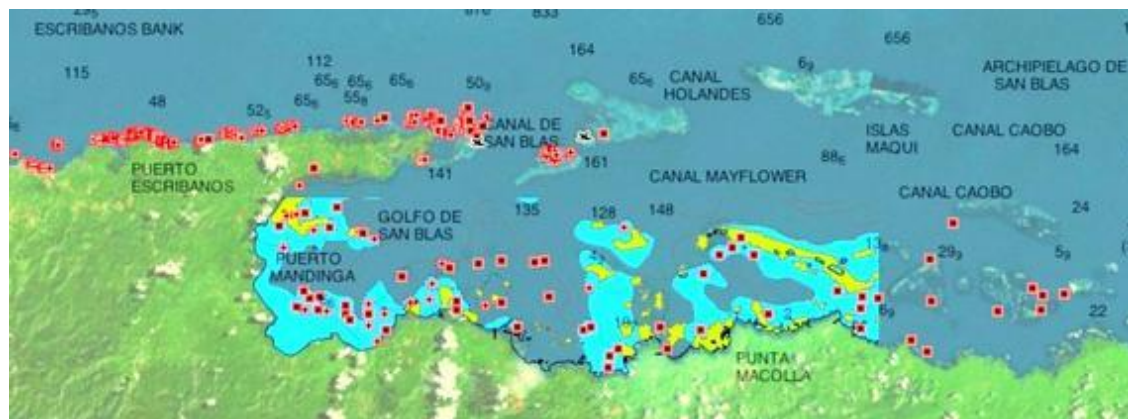
Figure . SAN BLAS (GUNA YALA) TERRITORY

Stretching about 170 miles along the north coast of Panama from *Cabo Tiburón* on the Colombian border, the chain of small islands named by the Spaniards as San Blas, was called Guna Yala by the original dwellers. Guna Yala is only one of the three *corregimientos* or departments that make up the autonomous Guna territory, inhabited by some 40,000 *Dule* -- which is how the Gunas call themselves -- scattered in 49 communities, both on the mainland and on the islands off the coast. Guna Yala, the most populated of the three departments, encompasses over 378 small sand islands, most of them uninhabited and ranging from a decent

size piece of wooded land to a tiny pile of sand with a few coconut trees gathered in the middle.



Figure . SAN BLAS ARCHIPELAGO AND THE ISTHMUS





TYPICAL TINY ISLAND IN THE SAN BLAS

The eastern stretch of Guna Yala, from *Cabo Tiburón* to *Cayos Diablo* consists of scattered distant islands, like *Isla Pinos*, *Ustupu* or *San Ignacio de Tupile*, closer to the mainland but rarely visited by tourists. Porvenir, *Cayos Limones*, *Cayos Holandeses*, *Cayos Coco Banderos* and *Cayos Chichimé*, located on the westernmost side of Guna

Yala, are the most visited islands, both by cruisers and earthbound tourists departing from Cartí on the mainland.

Navigation

Although fairly well protected from the sea by the surrounding reefs, the islands are located in shallow waters with no access for big vessels. They rise above the turquoise waters just enough not to be seen due to the waves in rough seas. Do not be fooled by the bucolic beauty of the landscape. The whole cruising area is full of reefs, shoals, and shifting sand banks. The area is not charted in detail and commonly used electronic local charts are far from accurate.

The numerous wrecks you will encounter along the way are a good reminder of the deceptive tranquility of these waters. We were impotent witnesses to the wreck of one of the



charter boats

carrying backpackers to and from Cartagena at the very entrance of Chichimé. Not long after, another sailing boat sank in the same spot when attempting to enter the anchorage at night, following a previous track on the plotter. Both captains were experienced cruisers who had done the trip numerous times and knew the area well.



Although not without errors, Erich Bauhaus' *The Panama Cruising Guide*, proved an invaluable navigational reference to cruise San Blas for the detail of its charts, the accuracy of the waypoints provided and the extended information offered. *However, safe navigation of the area requires eyeballing in good daylight to avoid unpleasant unexpected surprises.*

Weather

Weather-wise, the year can be divided into the usual two prevailing seasons: A dry season from January through April

and a longer rainy season from May into December. Although there is hardly any rain in the dry season, it is also the time when the Trade Wind gains force, especially towards the end, sometimes blowing at sustained 15-20kn in an extensive area with few anchorages sheltered from winds. **Note: Be sure you are well provisioned with fresh water during the dry season, as it is hard to get on the islands.**



The rainy season lives up to its name; sudden downpours happen frequently and thunderstorms are not rare, especially during the months of July and August. The good news is that mornings usually enjoy clear skies and calm seas and the trades are milder, making navigation more pleasant and eyeballing your way easier in clear waters. The most remarkable feature of the rainy season is the *Chocosana* southern whirlwinds -- similar to the infamous *culo de pollo* that lashes Cartagena Bay -- which appear suddenly, causing havoc in the anchorages, especially around September. The approaching thunderstorm is preceded by a sudden drop in pressure and temperature and a shift from prevailing mild easterlies to a light north wind, before breaking in full force accompanied by intense downpours and south winds which can reach up to 60kn.

Although *Chocosanas* last for a short period of time, it is important to secure the anchor well and keep watch during the storm to prevent dragging or to react promptly in the event.



As a general rule in whatever season, while at anchor in Guna Yala, always allow enough room to swing and secure your holding well.



Rainy days offer an excellent opportunity to fill your water tanks with fresh water and any container will do to collect it. But be watchful; the showers, though short, may be so heavy that dinghies can rapidly overflow.

Watch out for floating logs carried off shore by the numerous neighboring rivers during the rainy season





Panama uses US dollars and their own Panamanian dollar or *balboa* interchangeably, with the same design, denominations and value but different national heroes on display. You will need small denominations in Guna Yala, the smaller the better; bring as many one dollar bills as possible and some fivers, too.

Provisioning

Stocking is a tricky issue on Guna Yala islands due to their distance from the mainland and the lack of a systematic organized infrastructure. The islands closer to the mainland and with a steady population have, at least, some kind of family grocery with the basics and usually excellent home baked Guna buns for sale. In the larger settlements like San Ignacio de Tupile or Providencia where modern civilization is rapidly catching up, you will find more and better stocked groceries, stores and restaurants, will be able to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables which are hard to find on the distant western islands, make phone calls from public phone booths and even get internet connection.



However, the absence of substantial Guna settlements on the westernmost side of Gula Yala, the most popular among cruisers, makes provisioning a serious issue and the trending topic in the Panama Cruiser's Net, which is held every morning at 8.30 on the SSB frequency 8.107. VHF channel 72 is used as a hailing channel in English, whereas Italian speakers use VHF channel 68.

Fish, seafood, coconuts and plantains are relatively easy to get from the Gunas who will approach your boat on their *ulus* (wooden boats carved out of a single trunk, skillfully propelled with paddles and a rudimentary sail) to offer their catch, produce or crafts.





Circumstances of all sorts allowing, a power boat loaded with fresh fruit, vegetables, beer, wine, and previously ordered items visits the most popular western anchorages every week. Check the cruisers net for the latest info, as the service is very irregular.

In the case of a provisioning emergency, you can always resort to the *pangas* departing a couple of days a week from *Isla Elefante* in *Cayos Limones* to Cartí on the mainland and take an exhilarating 4x4 ride across the Darién jungle to Panama City's well stocked supermarkets. Mind you, the road may be blocked during the rainy season.





Clearing

Clearing into Panama in the San Blas Islands is presently complicated (April 2016) by an on-going disagreement between the Kuna Congress and the Panamanian Central Government. The result is the suspension of the Port Captain and the Immigration office services in both Puerto Obaldia at the eastern end of the San Blas and Porvenir (now named Gaigirgordub) at the western end, until further notice.

It is reported that the Porvenir Port Captain has relocated to Linton Bay Marina in the meantime. The office is open seven days a week.

Clearing in or out must be done in either Portobelo or Colon. The Immigration Office in Portobelo is a branch office of the office in Colon so that if you do check in at Portobelo, you must still go to Colon to buy your Cruising Permit. A one-year Panamanian Cruising Permit is required if one wishes to remain in territorial waters for more than 72 hours.

If the San Blas is your first Panamanian stop, it is strongly recommended that you have visited an Immigration office and gotten your passport stamped before proceeding, especially by vehicle, to Colon or Panama City to clear in, as a stop at a police check point may otherwise earn you a large fine and/or arrest. It is further recommended that the San Blas be listed on your exit *zarpe* from your previous port. It is reported that it is OK to anchor in Puerto Lindo, Portobelo, or Shelter Bay Marina and then take the bus or taxi to Colon to clear in.



Figure . THE PANAMA COAST GUARD PAYS OCCASIONAL VISITS TO GUNA YALA TO CHECK ON FOREIGN VESSELS

While clearing in Puerto Obaldia is not possible presently, it is nevertheless notable that it is completely open to northern swells and the holding is so poor that anchoring requires permanent watch and makes the stay very uncomfortable.

For up-to-date information on Panamanian clearance developments in this uncertain period, see **<http://www.noonsite.com/Countries/Panama/Countries/Panama/>** .



PORTOBELO

The Guna Congress charges a fee for a permit to cruise the autonomous territorial waters of Guna Yala, issued by the Guna Congress at Providencia. Nevertheless, this will not exempt you from paying the varying anchoring fees demanded by the local communities of the different islands.



BOCAS DEL TORO

In spite of submitting to the authority of the Guna General Congress (officially recognized by the government of Panama as the local political authority), each community, led by a Saila, applies its own regulations concerning their island or village. The Saila is the political, cultural and spiritual leader of the community and he is in charge of preserving and transmitting the cultural wealth of the Guna people to the members of his community. He is assisted by two or three *voceros* acting as counselors and interpreters during the daily meetings held in the *Onmaked Nega* or Congress House, attended by all members of the community to discuss day-to-day affairs.



Onmaked Nega or Congress House. During the meetings, the Saila and his assistants lie on their hammocks in the middle of the room while the rest of the community members sit around on wooden benches.

There are certain rules and codes of social etiquette that Gunas take seriously. On the one hand, it should be noted that ALL coconuts in Guna territory have a lawful owner, whether on the tree or the ground. So never help yourself to a coconut , as Gunas consider it a very serious offence. If you fancy one, buy it from them at a quarter a piece. Moreover, no boat works susceptible of damaging the local ecosystem, such as painting or sanding, are permitted in Guna Yala territory. The same applies to spear fishing, scuba diving and conch, lobster and crab collecting.



Additionally, nudity and public displays of affection between lovers are considered offensive in the Guna culture. Gunas are not allowed intermarriages with any other ethnic group under penalty of exclusion from the community and no foreigner is allowed permanent residence or ownership in their territory, either.







GOT TO GET ME A PAIR OF THESE!

ISLA PINOS

32NM from Sapzurro

AWP: **08°59.011 N -- 77°44.433 W**



Figure . 32 NM FROM SAPZURRO TO ISLA PINOS

Just 4 miles NW from *Cabo Tiburón*, *Puerto Obaldia*, the easternmost port of entry in Panama, is a small bay surrounded by steep wooded hills and wide open to the NW which hosts a small village, two jetties, a navy outpost, and a very rolly anchorage. There is nothing remarkable in the village, except for the heavy military presence, and the anchorage is really uncomfortable in prevailing northern

swells, with a sand bottom which offers very poor holding and has caused many a boat to drag.

On approach, watch out for a conspicuous rock almost a mile NE of the cove, at about **08°40.783N--77°25.147W**. The entrance into Puerto Obaldia, on the east side of the bay, is easy and straightforward. Drop anchor in 18-20ft of depth and allow some distance from shore to prevent accidents in NW winds. The dinghy can be left on the beach by the naval base.

The coast recedes about three miles in the 9NM stretch between *Puerto Obaldia* and *Puerto Perme*. From that point west, it is fronted by a discontinuous chain of small islands and reefs running parallel and close to the mainland. Save for some shallower patches posing no risk here and there, you will find 60ft depths just one mile off the coastline and no outstanding hazards for navigation on the 32 miles between Sapzurro and Isla Pinos.



TUPBAK, WHALE IN GUNA LANGUAGE, OWES ITS NAME TO ITS RESEMBLANCE TO A WHALE'S BACK



THREADING THE NEEDLE PAST ISLA PINOS

Isla Pinos is clear of reefs or any others hazards in its surrounding area, with the exception of a coral reef stretching west towards the channel from the NW tip of the island, just off the village. An approach waypoint at **08°59.011N--77°44.433W** will place you between *Isla Pinos* and *Punta Sasardi*. Proceed to a position **at 8°59.708N--77°45.374W**, off the SW side of the island, and into the channel that separates it from mainland, towards a position at **08°59.883N--77°45.669W**, just in the middle of the channel entrance. At that point, you will be in sight of an open cove surrounded by woodland and well sheltered from the NE swell on your starboard. Eyeball your way into the cove and drop the anchor in 8ft of water on a sand and turtle grass bottom with a good holding.



VIEW OF THE ANCHORAGE FROM THE ISLAND

There is a second cove further north, where the village of Tupbak is located. It has a long wooden dock where the Colombian trading ships usually stop on their way to and from Guna Yala but it is quite shallow far from the shore. Depths in the channel range from 12ft in the south end to minimum 8-9ft depths in the north entrance, off the shoal.



TUPBAK



COLOMBIAN TRADING BOAT DOCKED AT TUPBAK



REEF ALONG THE NORTH SIDE OF THE CHANNEL

As soon as your anchor is settled, David, the official translator and guide of the community, will approach the boat to demand the customary \$10 anchoring fee. It grants the right to stay at anchor for a flexible 10 day period, walk the village and take pictures. However, walking male pet dogs and picking coconuts and plantains is strictly forbidden and heavily fined. Purchasing local produce and crafts requires the Saila's previous permission and so does exploring the hill. For a \$2 fee per person, David will guide you through a breathtaking trek among lush tropical



vegetation.

ENTRANCE TO THE GROCERY STORE



HOUSE AT TUPBAK

The village of Tupbak on the NW tip of the island hosts about 300 people lodged in traditional Guna houses made of wood with palm-leaf thatched roofs. The only concrete buildings are the school and the Baptist church. There is a small poorly stocked grocery store, an unassuming restaurant and a couple of out-of-order phone booths. Apparently, the only source of electricity on the island consists of a diesel generator and a couple of private solar panels.



THE BAPTIST CHURCH SERVES AS A MEETING POINT WHERE THE MEN GATHER IN THE AFTERNOON TO PLAY SOCCER

GIRLS DO NOT WEAR THE TRADITIONAL GUNA DRESS UNTIL THEY REACH PUBERTY, AN IMPORTANT EVENT IN THE COMMUNITY AND A SACRED OCCASION CELEBRATED WITH SPECIAL RITUALS WHICH LAST FOR DAYS



Gunas keep a matrilinear family tradition, in which the bridegroom moves to the bride's family home and becomes part of her family. The new husband adopts his wife's last

name, coming under the control of his father-in-law. Guna women do have a say in the community affairs and take part in the daily congress as full members, with the same rights and duties as men.

Swimming would be nice in clear waters, were it not for the crocodile who visits the anchorage from time to time. Although there is a significant population of crocodiles in the areas closer to mainland swamps and rivers (as is the case here), they do not seem to be aggressive to humans and we never heard of a reported attack. Nevertheless, unless strictly necessary, we do not usually swim in those areas, as kids and small pets like ours could be an easy tasty bite for a saurian.

When ready to leave the island, backtrack your way into the channel and head towards a position at **09°00.466N-77°46.039W**, in its north entrance, off the west tip of the reef. From there, you can set a straight course to the next anchorage at Ustupu.

USTUPU

17NM from *Isla Pinos*

AWP: 9°07.624N -- 77°55.289W



Figure . ISLAS PINOS TO USTUPU

The 17 mile lap between Isla Pinos and Ustupu is relatively free of hazards and quite straightforward. Depths will vary from 40 to 60ft along the track marked on the chart above and will gradually decrease once past the approach waypoint (where you will find 38ft) and as you approach the anchorage, with a minimum 12ft depth between the islet to port and the SW tip of Ustupu. Do not stray north of the village dock, as the area between the island and the mainland is full of shoals. Drop anchor off the dock in 15-18ft of calm turbid water and good holding sand and mud.



Figure . APPROACHING USTUPU

When ready to leave, track all the way back to the approach waypoint before proceeding to the next anchorage.

Ustupu, Rabbit Island in *Dulegaya*, the Guna language, is the most populated of all islands in Guna Yala. It hosts two different villages, Ogobsukun on the north and Ustupu on the south, separated by a channel but connected by a wooden bridge. Each has different rules concerning visitors and, while pictures can be taken freely in Ustupu, permission is needed and a fee charged in Ogobsukun. A tax collector will approach your boat paddling on his *ulu* to demand the local US\$15 anchoring fee. You will find some grocery stores with the usual basics, a bakery with delicious Guna buns for sale, a couple of restaurants serving the customary fried fish with

a siding of rice and plantain, a few phone booths for international calls and a busy airstrip.



ONE OF THE RESTAURANTS, NOT FAR FROM THE DOCK



SOFT DRINKS AND BREAD FOR SALE



VIEW OF THE ANCHORAGE FROM THE VILLAGE DOCK



THE GREEN AND OCHRE BUILDING NEXT DOOR IS A PANAMANIAN POLICE POST TENDED BY NATIVE GUNAS

The Guna flag displays an ancient solar symbol -- which would in time be borrowed and renamed as "swastika" by the infamous Nazis -- over the Spanish flag, representing the Guna victory over the repressive Panamanian police forces during the 1925 rebellion.

The island's more than 2,000 inhabitants, including a large number of young children, dwell in small cane huts, wall to wall with each other. Gunas spend their days fishing, tending their household and lands, and handcrafting. They build amazingly resistant waterproof roofs made from the leaves of a special palm tree.





Memorial to the national hero Nele Kantule in Ustupu main square, just in front of the local Onmaked Nega, General Congress House. Born in Ustupu in 1868, Nele Kantule became an educated man with a profound knowledge of the Guna culture, folklore and traditions and was a respected shaman. He took part in Panamanian politics, organized the 1925 Guna rebellion and was *Cacique*

General (main leader of the Guna nation) during the last two



decades of his life.

CAYOS DIABLO

46NM from Ustupu

AWP: 09°25.50N--78°28.30W



Figure . USTUPU TO CAYOS DIABLO

Covering the 46-mile distance between Ustupu and *Cayos Diablo* (Devil Cays) requires some zigzagging among islands, reefs and shoals and daylight navigation. San Ignacio de Tupile (a very important village and probably the most developed in Guna Yala) or *Cayos Piedra* (Stone Cays), immediately to the east, can make good stops midway if you do not want to spend a long sailing day. The proposed track displayed in the above chart, follows a route far enough from the mainland to sail in deep waters, yet protected from the prevailing N-NE fetch by the outer reef.

- WP1: **09°07.624N--77°55.289W**, off the SE tip of Ustupu (49ft)

- WP2: **09°09.223N--77°55.434W**, off the north tip of Ustupu (33 ft)
- WP3: **09°09.932N--77 55.897W**
- WP4: **09°10.949N--77°56.861W**, between mainland and a coral reef (49ft)
- WP5: **09°12.500N--77°57.250W**, east of reef off Achutupu (105ft)
- WP6: **09°4.500N--78° 00.500W**, off Guariadup (95ft)
- WP7: **09°16.500N--78°03.500W** (27ft)
- WP8: **09°18.000N--78 05.400W**, off *Cayos Piedra* (52ft)

- WP9: **09°19.700N--78°07.000W**, north of a sand bank (27ft).
- WP10: **09°19.700N--78°10.400W**, between *Cayo Inglés* (English Cay) and San Ignacio de Tupile (42ft)
- WP11: **09°21.250N--78°15.000W**, between Ulardup and Snug Harbour (98 ft)
- WP12: **09°24.685N--78°22.500W**, between Spokeshaven Reef and a sand shoal (95ft)
- WP13: **09°25.700N--78°27.000W** (54 ft)
- WP14 (&AWP): **09°25.500N--78°28.300W**, between Tainya Island (the northernmost of the Devil Cays) and mainland (57ft)

Proceed towards the gap between the reefs stretching from Niadup and the mainland to round the south tip of the island, as indicated in the chart below. The three islands are shallow far from the shore and surrounded by coral reefs (marked

with thin sticks) all around, so keep away from the shores and drop anchor anywhere around the dock, in 18-20ft of water and a good holding muddy bottom.

The channel between the west side of the cays and the reef stretching north off the mainland is deep and wide enough to sail through, as long as the reef extending well NW from Tainya Island is given a wide berth.



Figure . MIND THE GAP – BETWEEN THE REEFS, THAT IS!

- WP1: **09°25.135N -- 78°28.839W** (off the south tip of Niadup)

- WP2: **09°25.238N --78°29.100W** (in the channel between Niadup and mainland)
- WP3: **09°25.500N --78°29.275W** (between reefs)
- WP4: **09°26.000N -- 78°29.500W** (off the end of the reef west of Tainya)



REEF ON THE SOUTH TIP OF NIADUP (TICANTIQUI). THE SHALLOW AREAS AROUND THE ANCHORAGE ARE MARKED WITH STICKS

There is also a pass between the mainland and the string of bigger islands beginning at Mamitupu, northwest of Ustupu, and ending at Snug Harbour, southeast of Cayos Diablos. However, it is a complicated area, densely populated and full of scattered unmarked shoals, reefs, and coral heads, that demands good light navigation and sticking to Bauhauss's

waypoints to the letter without ever attempting to deviate from the given route.

The *Cayos Diablo* encompass three small islands close to the mainland: Tainya, uninhabited, is the smallest and northernmost of the three; Sindup, in the middle, is also uninhabited and thickly wooded. A long wooden bridge connects it to Niadup (also known as Ticantiqui), the island closest to the mainland where the village is located. Ticantiqui hosts a small and traditional Guna community and a couple of grocery stores with the usual basics, a family restaurant and a cozy Catholic church devoted to *Virgen del Carmen* (Our Lady of Carmel), protector of seamen.



TICANTIQUI, ALSO KNOWN AS NIADUP





COMMUNAL LOOS STAND OVER THE WATER



PIGS ARE KEPT IN SELF CLEANING CAGES



WOMEN PADDLE TO THE MAINLAND EVERY MORNING TO TEND THEIR LANDS AND HARVEST THE PRODUCE OF THE DAY

Although they grow corn and different tubercles like yucca and manioc, collect fruit from the woods and keep some domestic animals for self consumption, the basic Guna diet

consists of plantain, coconut and fish. Traditionally based on agriculture, fishing, and crafting, the Guna economy has experienced a progressive shift towards tourism in recent years. However, the sale of coconuts and seafood to Colombian traders is still the main source of income in Guna Yala. Women are in charge of the household finances and contribute to the economy with the sale of their handcrafted *molas*, colorful pieces of cloth sewn in multiple layers, then cut to reveal intricate patterns.



CAYOS HOLANDÉS

18NM from *Cayos Diablo*

AWP: **09°34.091N--78°41.272W**

The 18 mile stretch between *Cayos Diablo* and *Cayos Holandés* (Dutchman Cays) is relatively free of hazards -- provided a good distance is maintained from the reefs surrounding the different islands along the way -- and the approach to *Cayos Holandés* is easy and straightforward, with 18ft minimum depths in areas neighboring the islands.



Figure . CAYOS DIABLOS TO CAYOS HOLANDÉS

- WP1: **09°25.238N--78°29.100W** (in the channel between Niadup in *Cayos Diablo* and mainland)

- WP2: **09°25.500N--78°29.275W** (between reefs west of *Cayos Diablo*)
- WP3: **09°26.000N-- 8°29.500W** (off the end of the reef west of Tainya in *Cayos Diablo*)
- WP4: **09°28.764N--78°32.264W** (between *Islas Iguana* and *Islas Puyadas*)
- WP5: **09°30.685N--78°33.457W**
- WP6: **09°32.513N--78°37.234W** (off the reef north of *Cayos Coco Bandero*)
- WP7: **09°33.440N--78° 40.681W** (in a gap of the submerged reef stretching SW from the SE tip of *Cayos Holandés*)

- WP8 & AWP: **09°34.091N--78°41.272W** (off a gap in the outer reef)

Cayos Holandés includes 21 islands and islets, most of them uninhabited, set on an east-to-west axis and protected by a 7 mile long coral reef surrounding them and stretching well off to the north side. They are divided in two groups: West Holandés Cays comprise the western islands of Acuakarganá, Waisaladup, Miriadup, Miriadiadup and Mordup, whereas East Holandes Cays is made up of Niakalubirdup, Ogoppokibdup, Sibadup, Ukupsuit, Kalugirdup, Ogoppiriadup, Quinquindup, Tiadup, Banedup and Barbeque Island. The plentiful choices of beautiful sheltered anchorages on both sides of *Cayos Holandés* makes it difficult to decide the best choice for a single stop. The easternmost islands stand out for their easy approach and the numerous protected neighboring anchorages in crystal clear waters, which makes them very popular among cruisers. The western islands, on the other hand, offer secluded peaceful anchorages set in postcard sceneries of white sand beaches, turquoise water, and palm trees.

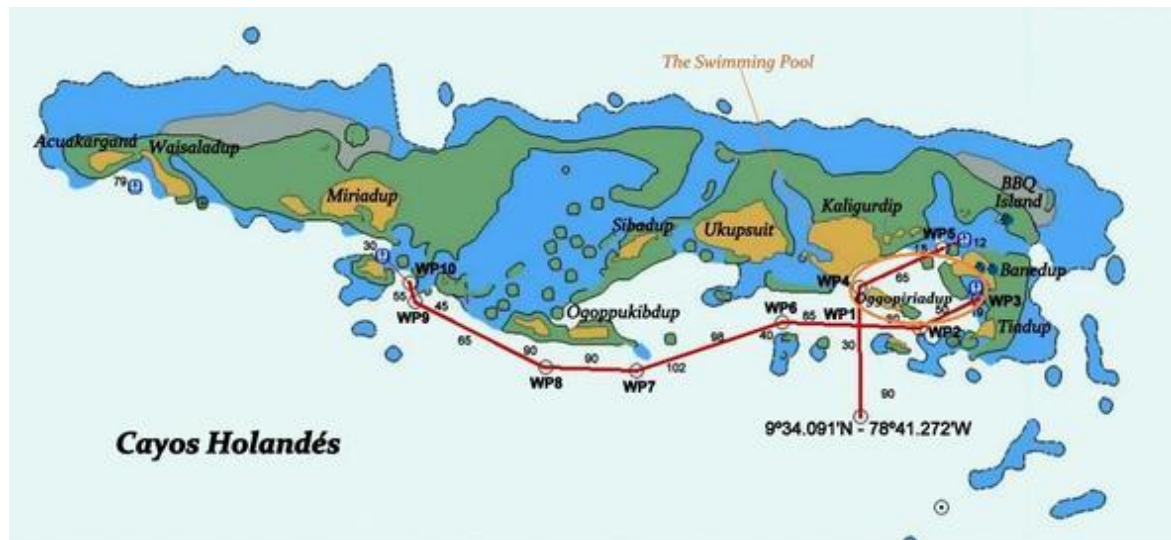


Figure . CAYOS HOLANDÉS

- WP1: **09°34.742N--78°41.277W** (in the channel between the outer reef and Kaligurdip)
- WP2: **09°34.721N--78°40.836W** (between reefs)
- WP3: **09°34.934N--78°40.410W** (between Banedup and Tiadup)
- WP4: **09°35.018N--78° 41.278W** (between Kaligurdip and Ogoppiriadup)

- WP5: **09°35.294N--78°40.676W** (between reefs off BBQ Island)
- WP6: **09°34.768N--78°41.841W** (between coral reefs)
- WP7: **09°34.416N--78°42.902W**
- WP8: **09°34.446N--78°43.561W**
- WP9: **09°34.918N--78°44.512W**
- **WP10: 09°35.050N--78°44.552W** (between the reef and an islet south of Miriadup)

Located in the outer limits of the Guna territory, *Cayos Holandés* are too far from the mainland to be reached by local tour boats and, anyway, inaccessible for them in rough seas (especially between December and February). For that reason, the only tourist presence on the cays is that of sailing boats cruising the area. The vegetable boat visits the

Swimming Pool every fortnight, weather allowing. At some point, you will get the visit of the local tax collector demanding the \$10 anchoring fee valid for a month, for which you will be handed your due receipt.



Protected by the surrounding reef, *Cayos Holandés* encloses a series of natural pools which are home to a rich colony of sponges and starfish that attract rays, sharks and a varied display of multi-colored reef fish -- a real treat for water



sports lovers.



The most popular anchorages are the eastern Swimming Pool and BBQ Island, both renamed by cruisers. The Swimming Pool is the name given to an area of calm clear waters between Kalugirdup and Banedup islands. In settled weather, you can anchor anywhere in the Swimming Pool in 9-10ft of crystal clear water with a sand and coral rubble bottom. However, in rough seas from the N-NE, waves can encroach on the reef, making the anchorage extremely rolly and the holding very unstable. In such circumstances, better protection will be found south of Banedup in 15-20ft of water and a good holding sand bottom. Leave some distance from the island in order to avoid the annoying mosquitoes and no-see-ʻems blown by the prevailing easterlies; not in vain is Banedup known as Bug Island.



THE SWIMMING POOL



KITE SURFING OFF BUG ISLAND

BBQ Island is a small neat sand island with palm trees and transparent turquoise waters, just north of Banedup, which hides a tiny natural pond of fresh water. As a matter of fact, its original Kuna name is Morrotupu or Turtle Island but cruisers started calling it Barbeque Island when it became a meeting point for boaties anchored in the area who would gather on the island to hold pot lucks and barbeques. At present, the caretaker family who intermittently dwells here charges a US\$3 fee per person to spend the day on BBQ Island. You can drop anchor south of the island in 10-13ft of transparent water and a good holding sand bottom, well away from the shallow shore.





VIEW OF THE ANCHORAGE FROM BBQ ISLAND



A CAPRICE OF NATURE AT MORROTUPU

The anchorage at Miriadup, a couple of miles west of the Swimming Pool, is very sheltered and peaceful and the approach is easy and straightforward. There is a good anchoring area between the reef off Miriadup and Miriadadup (the islet to its south) in 20m of crystal clear water and good holding sand.



CHICHIMÉ

11NM from Cayos Holandés

AWP: 09°33.150N--78°51.600W

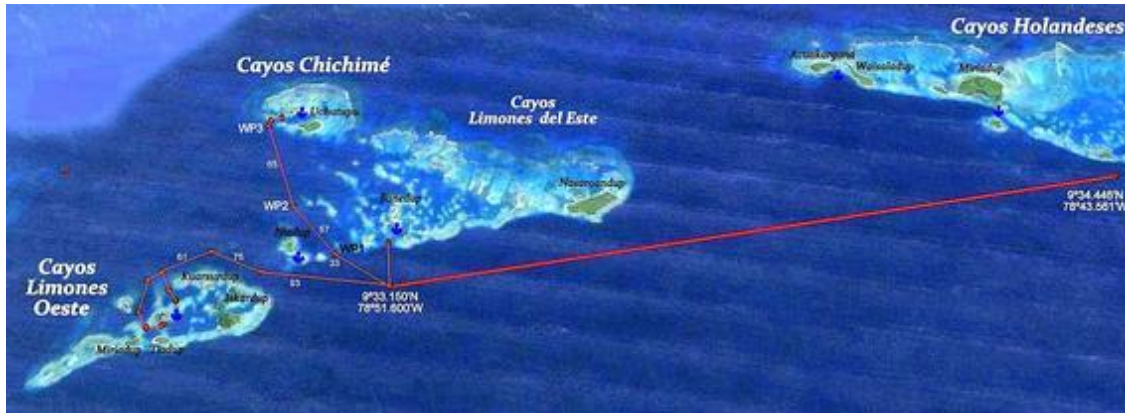


Figure . CAYOS HOLANDÉS TO CAYOS CHICHIMÉ

- AWP: 9°33.150N--78°51.600W (south west of *Cayos Limones del Este*)
- WP1: 9°33.530N--78°52.232W (between an islet and a sand shoal in 33ft)
- WP2: 9°34.097N--78°52.752W (between a sand shoal and a coral patch)
- WP3: 9°35.123N--78°53.175W (off the entrance channel)

Located 11 NM west of *Cayos Holandés*, *Cayos Chichimé* consists of two small islands (Uchutupu Pipigua and

Uchutupu Dummat) surrounded by a reef stretching well off north, which protects the water inlet between the islands from northern swells. The approach from *Cayos Holandés* is easy and quite straightforward and can be covered in a direct course from a position at **09°34.446N--78°43.561W** south of Ogoppukibdup in *Cayos Holandés* to the approach waypoint at **09°33.150N-- 8°51.600W**, between East and West Lemon Cays. Then, the passage runs in deep waters between the westernmost islands of *Cayos Limones del Este*. It is free of hazards once past them, on the last lap north towards the entrance channel.



Figure . APPROACH TO CAYOS CHICHIMÉ

When approaching the entrance channel, great caution must be exercised to avoid the submerged reef stretching west, well past the sand islet, west in turn, of Uchutupu Dummat, the bigger southern island. Do NOT take shortcuts; instead, give a wide berth to the inconspicuous reef before entering the anchorage and do not attempt entry unless in good daylight. It should be noted that this reef has been responsible for several shipwrecks in recent years, when seas built up over it hiding the danger from view.



THE SUBMERGED REEF EXTENDS WEST OF THIS ISLET. WE WERE UNWILLING WITNESSES OF THE WRECK OF THE SAILBOAT WHOSE MAST STANDS ABOVE THE WATER ON THE RIGHT

Once inside, although open to the west, the anchorage is well protected from northern swells and the waters in the inlet are calm. Anchor close to Uchutupu Dummat, the bigger of the two islands, in 33ft of clear water and good holding sand.



Chichimé has become a very popular cruising stop for its easy approach, convenient location, the beauty of its scenery and the vast exploration ground for snorkel lovers on the extensive coral reef surrounding Uchutupu Pipigua, the smallest of the two islands. None of the islands is permanently inhabited. However, the caretaker families in charge of them spend long periods of time on the islands tending them, fishing, and collecting coconuts. The family in charge of the southern Uchutupu Dummat has built a small hut on the northeast tip of the island that serves as a bar and restaurant, next to a bigger traditional cane and palm building used as a dorm by visiting backpackers. It is a very popular gathering point for boaties and backpackers and it can be surprisingly crowded at times.



ANCHORED AT CAYOS CHICHIMÉ



UCHUTUPU PIPIGUA



UCHUTUPU DUMMAT AFTER THE STORM

CAYOS LIMONES DEL OESTE

2 NM from Chichimé

12 NM from *Cayos Holandés*

AWP: 09°33.319N--78°53.000W



“WEST LEMON CAYS”

Cayos Limones is divided in two main groups of islands, *Cayos Limones del Este* and *Cayos Limones del Oeste*, or East and West Lemon Cays, comprising about thirty islands and islets. The east area of the cays offers secluded anchorages in clear waters, great snorkeling among colorful corals swarming with life and solitary white sand beaches. The west side, on the other hand, encircles a sheltered anchorage, well protected by the surrounding islands and reefs. And, it is only 2.5NM from Porvenir, just off mainland Punta San Blas.

- AWP: **09°33.319N -- 78°53.000W** (between Iskardup and Banedup)
- WP1: **09°33.552N -- 78°53.572W** (off the reef north of kuarsurdup)
- WP2: **09°33.320N -- 78°54.057W** (off the entrance of the NE channel)
- WP3: **09°33.023N -- 78°53.880W** (between reefs)
- WP4: **09°32.795N -- 78°53.812W** (off a sand bank)
- WP5: **09°32.726N -- 78°53.947W** (in the passage between *Isla Elefante* and Tiadup in 6ft of depth)
- WP6: **09°32.701N -- 78°54.103W** (between reefs)

- WP7: **09°32.869N -- 78°54.218W** (south of Kagandup)
- WP8: **09°33.232N -- 78°54.189W** (off the NW channel entrance)

If coming from Chichimé, the 2NM distance between the two cays is better sailed in a rhumb line from the channel entrance off Chichimé to the north channel entrance off Lemon Cays. If coming from *Cayos Holandés*, go from a previous position at **09°33.15--78°51.60W**, southwest of *Cayos Limones del Este*, to the approach waypoint at **09°33.319N--78°53.00W**, in the channel between East and West Lemon Cays, and proceed towards the north passage into the anchorage.



VIEW OF THE ANCHORAGE BEHIND THE REEF AT CAYOS LIMONES DEL OESTE, AS SEEN FROM THE SOUTH

The approach to the anchorage can be undertaken through a series of different channels running among reefs, sand shoals and islets from the north, west and south sides of the cays. However, the stretch between *Isla Elefante* and the sand bank extending north of Tiadup has 6ft minimum depths, whereas depths in the NE channel never go below 12ft. Once inside the deep waters of the lagoon, there are different anchoring choices; the north side is more secluded and peaceful but far from *Isla Elefante*, the heart of the anchorage and usual meeting point for cruisers. Whatever the choice, keep a good distance from the shores, as the sand bottom shelves rapidly around the islands and the boat can get blown into a sand shoal in a wind shift. Drop anchor in 20-30ft of clear water and a good holding sand bottom wherever you deem appropriate and avoid the shallow easternmost area of the anchorage.



ISLA ELEFANTE



THE ANCHORAGE AROUND ISLA ELEFANTE IS USUALLY QUITE POPULATED. THE CIRCULAR CONCRETE STRUCTURE IN THE PICTURE RISES ABOVE THE WATER NEAR THE SOUTH SHORE OF THE ISLAND, IN THE SHALLOWEST AREA OF THE CHANNEL.

Naguarchirdup, the Guna name for Elephant Island or *Isla Elefante*, is located in the center of the string of cays and permanently inhabited by various members of the caretaker family. The small island hosts a series of traditional huts, a beach volleyball court, an unattractive swamp and a beach bar with irregular internet plug-in connection at US\$3 per hour. It should be noted that, since the only source of electricity on the island comes from a generator and it is just enough to service the bar, there is no power source option and your laptop will need to be fully charged.



THE SWAMP ACCOUNTS FOR MOST OF THE ISLAND'S AREA



THE BAR IS A MEETING POINT FOR CRUISERS IN THE AREA, MANY OF WHOM GATHER HERE IN THE AFTERNOONS FOR A VOLLEYBALL MATCH WITH LOCALS, WITH THE FINAL SET AT THE BAR

Isla Elefante has become a service island for cruisers visiting and transiting Guna Yala. Beto, the family patriarch, can provide fresh water, gasoline and diesel; get propane bottles refilled for US\$16 a bottle; and will accept garbage for disposal at US\$1 per bag. He also offers a water-taxi service to Cartí twice a week for a US\$15 roundtrip fare and a roundtrip from Cartí to Panama City on board a 4x4 vehicle for a US\$25 fee. An uneventful journey takes about 3 hours to the capital across the amazing Darien jungle. Beto's door-to-door service will drop passengers at the well stocked supermarkets of the city for serious provisioning. The night will have to be spent in Panama City, as the journey is always undertaken in the morning, in order to return to the anchorage during daylight. There are about a dozen buoys for hire on the south area of Isla Elefante for a US\$10 daily fee. These are used mainly by cruisers who wish to leave their boats under surveillance while they are away.

Due to their proximity to the mainland, the West Lemon Cays attract numerous inland travelers visiting the area and the anchorage can get quite busy and noisy with passing water-taxis. Fortunately, the tour boats always leave before sunset. The anchorage is also popular among Gunas from neighboring areas, who sail and paddle all the way from the mainland to sell their daily catch, produce, and handcrafted *molas*.



THE VEGGIE BOAT VISITS THE ANCHORAGE EVERY WEEK



THE CAYS OFFER WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR GUNKHOLING AND SNORKELING, ESPECIALLY AROUND TIADUP, WHERE THE CORAL IS PROTECTED FROM THE IMPACT OF ROUGH SEAS

PORVENIR

2.5NM from *Cayos Limones*

3.5NM from *Cayos Chichimé*

AWP: 09°33.439N--78°56.280W

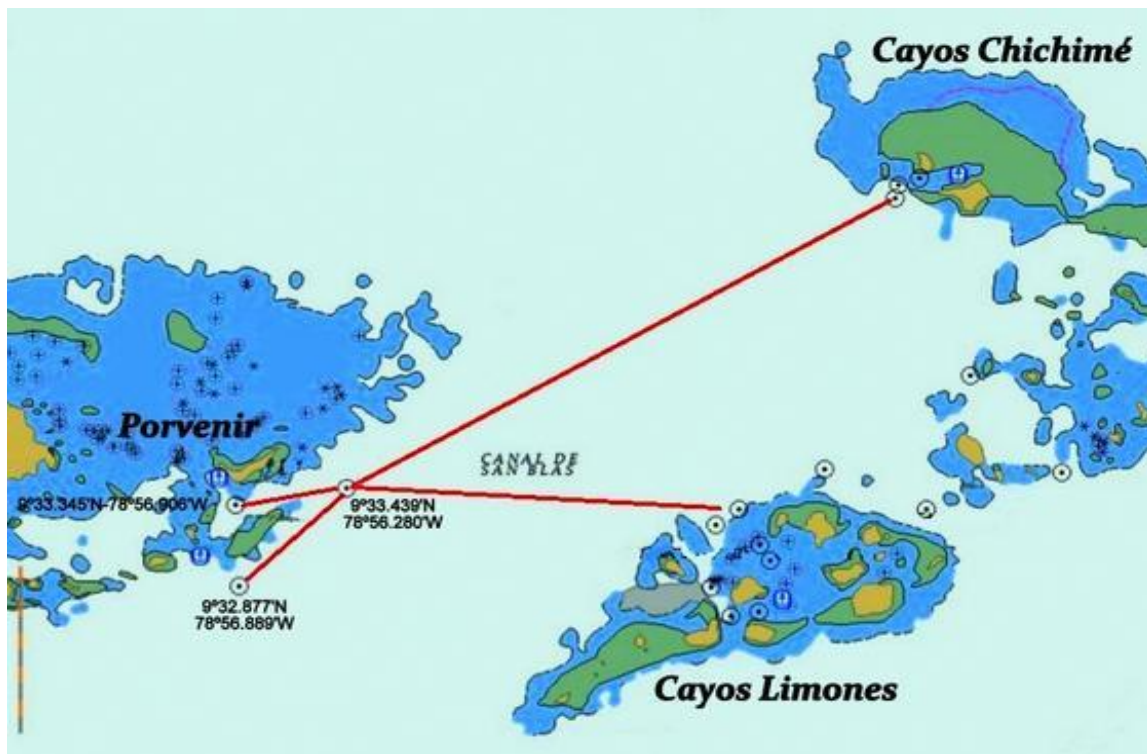


Figure . PORVENIR WITH CAYOS LIMONES AND CAYOS CHICHIMÉ

Only another 2.5 miles west of *Cayos Limones* and 3.5 miles from *Cayos Chichimé* lies the island of Porvenir, the administrative center of Guna Yala. The short laps between both departing cays and the approach waypoint at Porvenir warrant transit on a rhumb line, as they are both free of



hazards.



Figure . ALTERNATE APPROACHES TO PORVENIR

- AWP: **09°33.439'N--78°56.280'W** (off the passage between Porvenir and Sail Rock)
- WP1: **09°33.345N--78°56.906W** (between a sand shoal and the reef)
- WP2: **09°33.529N--78°57.053W** (between two reefs)

- WP3: **09°33.549N--78°57.198W** (south of a reef)
- WP4: **09°32.915N--78°57.320W** (south of Nalunega)
- WP5: **09°33.000N--78°57.452W** (between Nalunega and the reef)
- WP6: **09°33.577N--78°57.350W** (between reefs)
- WP7: **09°34.275N--78°57.445W** (between reefs)
- WP8: **09°34.830N--78°57.63'W** (between reefs)

The channel into the anchorage runs between reefs and shoals and carries 14ft minimum depths. Anchor between the concrete dock and the airstrip in 20ft of water and good holding sand. Surrounded by reefs and usually subject to swell, this is a roly anchorage which can become pretty uncomfortable in strong prevailing swells from the NE. In such conditions, better shelter can be found in the lee of Wichubhuala, the small island immediately south of Porvenir. Wichubhuala is a densely populated island, an easy reach

from Porvenir by dinghy. You will find a couple of grocery stores, one of them just by the dock, a bakery, and two phone booths for international calls.



THE GUNA NAME FOR PORVENIR IS GAIGIRGORDUP. THE RED ROOFED BUILDING AT RIGHT HOSTS THE OFFICES OF ALL THE AUTHORITIES INVOLVED IN CLEARING

Porvenir is a quiet island with little more than a small hotel and restaurant, an airstrip, a couple of phone booths for international calls and the joined offices of all the departments involved in clearing. In spite of being the administrative center of Guna Yala, there is no village or permanent settlement on the island. Nevertheless, flights to Panama City are frequent, there is a Guna Museum and the Guna National Congress (main authority of the Guna nation) has its headquarters here.



JOINT OFFICES OF ALL CLEARING DEPARTMENTS

NOTE: *Presently closed (as of April 2016)*



LOBSTERS GALORE BOUND TO PANAMA CITY

Dinghies can be landed on the beach while visiting the authorities at the twin red-roofed buildings by the airstrip to complete the clearing formalities. The Panamanian officers are also friendly local Gunas and the atmosphere during the process is more relaxed and informal than on mainland Panama. Immigration will grant a year visa for the boat, valid for all crew members, and charge a US\$100 fee; a cruising permit valid for a year will be issued for US\$193 fee; the Guna Congress will charge US\$30 for a permit to sail in Guna Yala waters. Whether in or outbound from the country, do not forget to request your *zarpe* (US\$16.50) to avoid being fined

on your next port of destination.



When ready to depart, backtrack your way to the approach waypoint and proceed in a NE direction, giving a berth to the reef stretching north of Porvenir, before heading westward.

NOTE: Trading boats and frequent visitors use a channel west of Porvenir, running north among shoals and reefs into open waters. Although we provide the track, it must be noted that this passage should be avoided by first timers and undertaken only in settled weather and good daylight.

PUERTO LINDO (ISLA LINTON)

37NM from Porvenir

AWP: 09°38.464N--79°31.307W



Figure . PORVENIR TO PUERTO LINDO, Part 1

Protected by a string of islands, the anchorage at Isla Linton is probably the most sheltered along *Costa Arriba*, which is how the locals call the stretch of coast between *Punta San Blas* and Colón. The approach from Providencia is quite straightforward and relatively free of hazards all the way up to the east entrance of the channel leading to Puerto Lindo. The only potential danger along the way may be posed by *Bajos Escribanos* (Escribanos Shoal), 11NM west of Porvenir, and Escribanos Bank, a few miles further NW.



Figure . PORVENIR TO PUERTO LINDO, Part 2

- AWP: **09°38.464N--79°31.307W**
- WP1: **09°38.115N--79°32.838W** (off the east entrance of the channel)
- WP2: **09°37.272N--79°34.555W** (between Isla Cabra and mainland)
- WP3: **09°36.970N--79°34.760W** (between Isla Linton and mainland)
- WP4: **09°36.896N--79°34.834W**
- WP5: **09°36.888N--79°34.892W** (north of the coral patch)

- WP6: **09°36.790N--79°35.017W** (between two mud shoals)
- WP7: **09°36.681N--79°35.311W** (between Isla Linton and Puerto Lindo)
- WP8: **09°36.800N--79°35.400W**
- WP9: **09°37.050N-- 9°35.655W** (between Pedro Pelao Rock and Isla Linton)
- WP10: **09°37.550N--79°35.650W** (south of Lavandera Reef)

The east side of the channel into Puerto Lindo is relatively narrow and full of scattered shoals, thus requiring a good daylight transit. However, it carries 24ft minimum depths and the water is usually calm inside. The main hazard in the passage is the submerged coral patch standing right in the middle of the channel, between Isla Linton and the mainland, clearly marked with wooden posts. It should be left to port on the way in, passing always north of it. Keep your eyes open in the stretch between *Isla Grande* and La Guaira on the mainland. *Isla Grande* is a very popular resort among local

vacationers and the water-taxi traffic between the island and La Guaira can be pretty intense at times.



WOODEN POSTS MARK THE CORAL PATCH WHICH DIVIDES THE TWO MAIN ANCHORING AREAS

The west side of the channel is deep and ample with hardly any navigational hazards, provided the reef stretching west from the NW tip of Isla Linton is given a wide berth.

There are two main anchoring areas on the south side of Isla Linton and a third one off Puerto Lindo, the village by the cove on the SW of the island. However, Puerto Lindo is open to the west and NW swells and the anchorage becomes so rolly in such conditions, that it makes it hard even to land the dinghy. A series of long wooden docks scattered along the mainland shore could be excellent landing places were it not for the fact that they are privately owned and the caretakers are usually reluctant to allow dinghies on their docks, even when the swell makes it hard to disembark at Puerto Lindo.





ANCHORAGE OFF PUERTO LINDO



PLYING THE WATERS OFF ISLA LINTON



DINGHY DOCK BY HANS' RESTAURANT, PUERTO LINDO

Linton Island is privately owned and uninhabited except for a group of monkeys of different breeds who have exclusive realm on this island. The boldest of all are a couple of spider monkeys who will rush to the island dock as soon as they spot an approaching dinghy. Do not be fooled by their friendly appearance; they will happily accept visitors' food but can get pretty violent when time to leave comes.



Puerto Lindo is a small fishing village populated by people of Afro-Caribbean descent. It has a couple of liquor and grocery stores, a bakery, and a little church. Just by the beach, Dutch sailor Hans and his local wife opened a bar and restaurant some years ago, which serves as a meeting point for the boaties in the anchorage. Together with the cruisers' net on VHF channel 72, it is an excellent source of useful

information for the newly arrived. Just behind the restaurant, you can catch the colorful public bus departing from La Guaira and running round trips to Colón several times a day with stops in Portobelo, Sabanita, and other locations along the way. Tito, a local resident, offers a taxi service, plus diesel and gasoline sales and delivery to the boat. Fuel can also be purchased at the petrol station next to the



restaurant.





PART OF THE PANAMANIAN FORTIFICATIONS BUILT BY THE SPANISH CROWN IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

Portobelo, just 8NM west of Puerto Lindo, can be an alternative anchorage for its charming historical port and reasonably well protected and ample bay. Nevertheless, it is open to western swells and the muddy bottom of the bay features a very irregular holding which causes many an anchored boat to drag in strong winds. Once the wealthiest city in the New World and nowadays a district capital, present day Portobelo is a small laid back town with a bakery, a basic chandlery, a health center, an ATM machine, a couple of cyber-cafes, a few restaurants, and various grocery stores, most of them located in the vicinity of the lovely San Felipe de Portobelo church, home of the Black Christ. The Chinese mini-market nearby is slightly better stocked than the other grocery stores in town. It also offers laundry service and has a couple of computers for internet

connection as well as fuel for sale -- a regular Chinese bazaar.

Sabanita, a busy dusty town by the Transisthmian Highway on the way to Colón, is another interesting stop for provisioning. There are plenty of small stores along the highway, offering all sorts of services and items for sale, a bank and a couple of ATM machines. This is a good chance to withdraw some US dollars, as you will not have such an opportunity again on your way west. But above all, there is Rey (The King), a well stocked supermarket just off the bus stop for your last provisioning before heading for San Blas and Providencia.





SAN ANDRÉS AND PROVIDENCIA

SAN ANDRÉS AND PROVIDENCIA

ONE ARCHIPELAGO, THREE ISLANDS

Located 385NM from Cartagena, the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina is an isolated Colombian department in the West Indies, more than 100NM offshore. It shares with the (Nicaraguan) Corn Islands a location, folklore, and history with strong ties to the West Indies and their cultural features. In fact, locals speak Bendé or Carbeau English (a Creole blend of English, Spanish, and African languages) as well as Spanish and English, in one of the regions with the highest rates of literacy in Colombia.

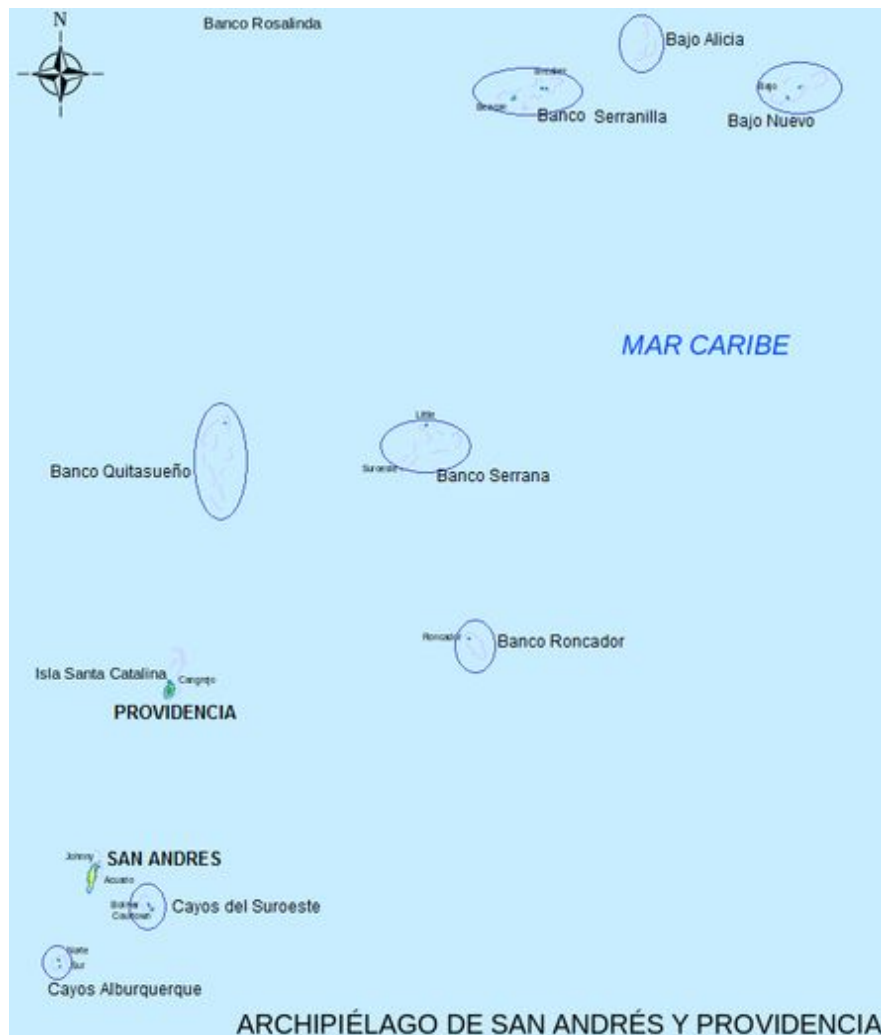


Figure . THE ARCHIPELAGO OF SAN ANDRES Y PROVIDENCIA

The archipelago covers a total land area of 36 square miles and includes 3 inhabited islands: San Andrés, Providencia -- or Old Providence, as the locals like to call it -- and Santa Catalina; plenty of cays, including Johnny Cay, Haynes Cay and Cotton Cay around San Andrés, Cayos de Albuquerque 18NM to its southwest and Cayos del Suroeste, located 15NM east-south-east of the island; and several outlying banks and shoals north of Providencia: Roncador, Serrana, Quitasueño, Serranilla, Bajo Nuevo, and the submerged Bajo Alicia. The

barrier reef off the islands of Old Providence and Santa Catalina alone is 19 miles long and covers an area of 159 square miles. The entire archipelago and surrounding sea – about 10 % of the Caribbean -- were declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve, the “Seaflower Biosphere Reserve”, in 2000.

Uninhabited until the arrival of Columbus’ expedition in 1510, the archipelago was frequently visited by Miskito Indians from the mainland to trap sea turtles and collect bird eggs. Although there is no record of the initial settlements in San Andrés, it is known that Santa Catalina and Providencia were first settled by British Puritans between 1630 and 1641. In 1670, English pirates led by Henry Morgan took over the islands, and Morgan's treasure trove is reportedly hidden in one of the island caves. In spite of Spaniards never having any permanent settlement on the islands during that period, the archipelago was alternately under Spanish and British rule for the following years until it became officially part of Colombia in 1822. Freed from slavery in 1832, the black slaves brought from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands to work under British landholders soon became sole owners of the properties on the islands after their masters abandoned



their lands.

The 1960s meant a turning point in the self-sufficient, laidback lives of the islanders after the Colombian dictator General Rojas Pinilla declared San Andrés a Free Port. Development boomed and new houses, hotels, and stores were built along with the airport and the commercial port, attracting a massive workforce from mainland Colombia which now outnumbers the original native population, locally known as *Raizales*. San Andrés became a flourishing port and a favorite tourist destination for wealthy Colombians in the following years. However, economic measures to ease restrictions on national trade taken by the government during the 1990s had a very negative impact on the island's economy whose effects last to the present day.

Meanwhile, the smaller Providencia and Santa Catalina sister islands were following a very different path. Due to their secluded location and their orographic features, they managed to maintain a self sufficient economy based on farming and fishing, thanks to the productive soil of their lands and their rich littoral waters, until recent years. Native Raizales, who claim their British ancestry and boast of being descendants of pirate Henry Morgan, proudly preserve their unique cultural traditions, promote eco tourism and are well aware of the value of their natural assets which they protect fiercely from uncontrolled development.

Although an expensive destination, snorkelers and divers come for the extensive coral reefs and clear water, the tropical weather, duty-free shopping and total relaxation.

The Mainland

This area of the western Caribbean is a remote area. The area requires careful study with emphasis on currents and winds.

The Central American coast from the Panama Canal all the way to Cabo Gracias a Dios 383 miles NNW is low lying. There are some significant geographic features on the mainland- promontories, big lagoons. But because the waters are less traveled, and the lands less populated, navigational aids are not as frequent.

The areas offshore of Honduras are strewn with banks, cays, and islands, many of which rise on steep-to, coralline banks. The entire Caribbean Sea contains about 9% of the world's coral reefs as well as the second largest barrier reef in the world, the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, which stretches 620 miles along the coasts of Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico. As beautiful as is this coral, and as attractive to divers, the banks must be approached cautiously by vessels, and definitely given a wide berth by night. Compounding the danger from the coralline banks are strong currents which are particularly unpredictable after storms.

IMPORTANT: During the year, the consistent offshore Equatorial Current sets WNW at a mean rate of 0.5-1 knot.

But as the current approaches Mosquito Bank, part of it is deflected NW at an increased mean rate of 1.5 knots. The main current sets through the off-lying islands south of Serranilla Bank in directions mostly between NW and SW at a mean rate of 1 knot -- and a maximum of 2-3 knots. The greater part then sets north to NW around Mosquito Bank but, in the vicinity of Isla de Providencia, a part of the original current is deflected SW toward San Juan del Norte, where it turns south and later rounds Golfo de Los Mosquito continuing east as a countercurrent at a mean rate of 1 knot. Over Mosquito Bank, inshore of these deflected currents, the currents tend to vary with the prevailing wind. Thus, a norther may cause a current of 0.5-1 knot to set south close inshore along the entire bank south of Cabo Gracias a Dios to join the countercurrent in the vicinity of San Juan del Norte.

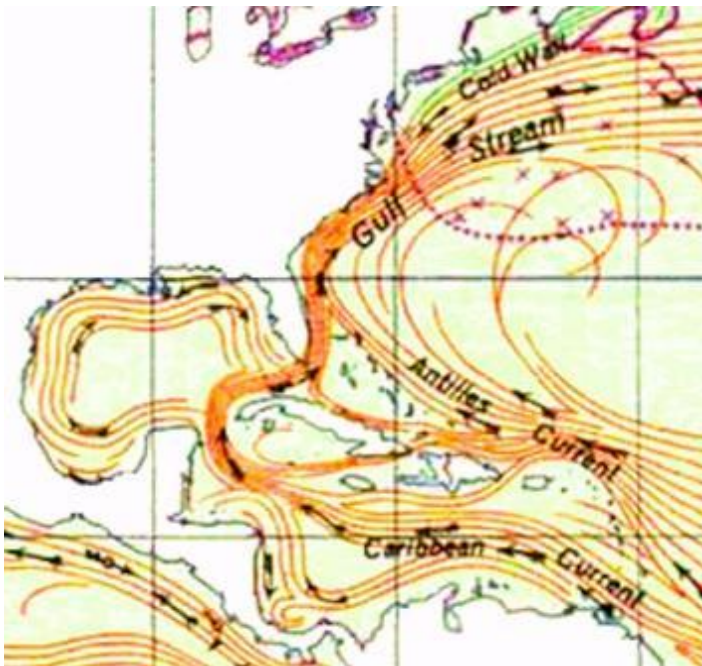


Figure . MAJOR CURRENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

NOAA research and monitoring, via drifting near surface buoys, from 1978-2003 reveal the incredible tangle of

currents flowing in the Caribbean and which vessels must contend with.

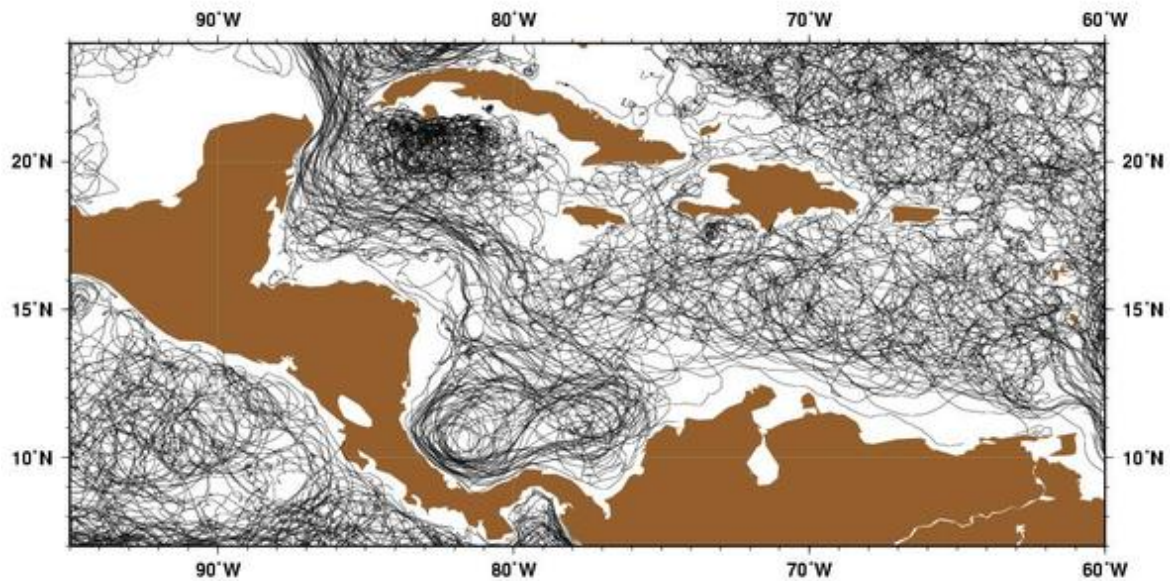


Figure . 25 YEAR HISTORY OF CURRENT OBSERVATIONS

Another view of the complexity of currents in the Caribbean highlights the hallmark of the frontal assault of the energy of the Trade Wind augmented by the long fetch against the Central American coast.

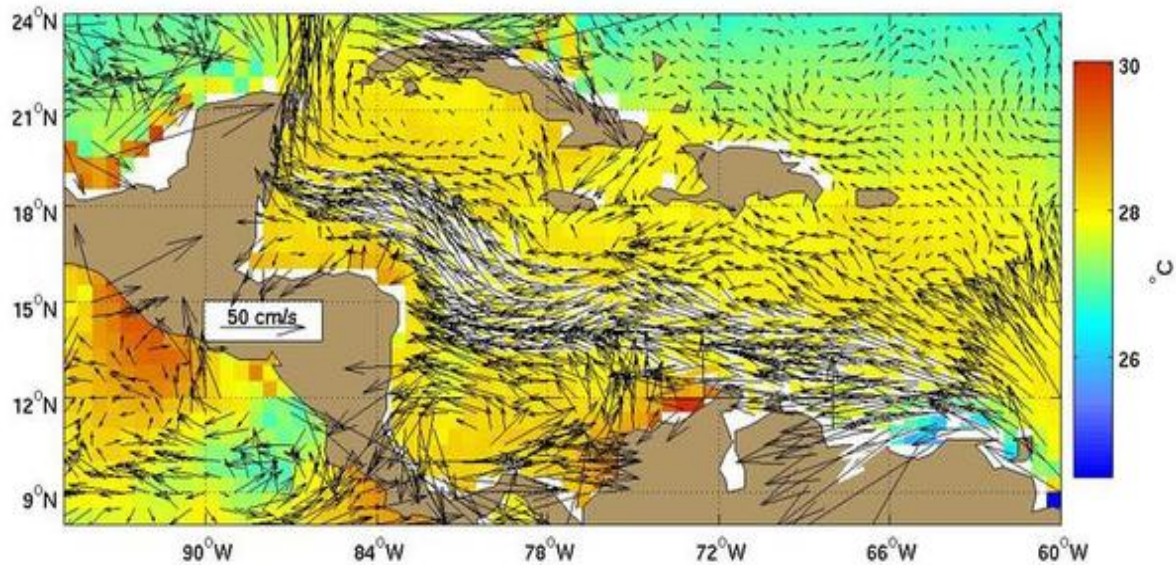


Figure . DIRECTION AND STRENGTH OF CURRENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

The fetch in this area from the eastern Caribbean affects the Trade Wind such that it is not the typical Trade Wind encountered in the eastern Caribbean.

Basically the Trade Wind seasons are defined by direction (N around to E) and by intensity; strongest, December to March and tapering off in July and August. Add in the effects of the dry season (November-December to April-May) when the climate is milder; and the hot and humid wet season (May-November), and the northers that can punctuate the dry season with heavy rain, high winds, and rough seas. "Weather window" takes on a new urgency as the northers, while usually short-lived, can produce winds to 30-40 knots in a 24 hour period. On the upside for cruisers, outside the wet season there is typically clear sunny weather.

Isla de San Andrés

AWP: 12° 32.279N--81° 41.448W

213NM from *Puerto Lindo*

San Andrés Island is a coralline formation about 7 miles long by 1.5 miles wide, or about ten square miles, crossed from north to south by a low mountain range, La Loma Park, whose highest point is La Loma Peak at 180ft. The area around the NE side of the island is very shallow and surrounded by a long reef about 1 mile off shore and stretching 4NM to the south. North seas break heavily over Blowing Rocks, which rise just above the water one mile north of North Point or *Punta Norte*. 0.7NM further east, Johnny Cay or *Cayo Sucre* lies on the NW end of the coastal reef. On the south end of the reef, a well marked channel with 20ft average depths runs 2.3NM north between shoals and coral patches into San Andrés Harbor. Haynes Cay or *Cayo Córdoba*, the small sand island on the east side of the channel next to the Aquarium at Rose Cay, conceals a popular beach bar among the palm trees which attracts numerous visitors during the day. Cotton Cay or *Cayo Santander* is a mangrove covered island lying close to the

shore in the middle of San Andrés Harbor.



Figure . SAN ANDRES WITH NORTHEASTERN REEF AND WESTERN CLIFFS

The west side of San Andrés, composed mainly of rocky cliffs, is steep-to and the waters free of dangers. About 2.5 miles N of *Punta Sur* (South End) -- marked by an orange light tower

flashing every 9 seconds -- lies *Rada El Cove*, a small shallow bay protected from the prevailing easterlies where the Colombian Navy maintains a post. The approach is straightforward but it sounds just 6ft at the very entrance and less than that inside. Nevertheless, one can anchor off

the mouth of the cove in 18ft of water and good holding



sand.

NOTE: It should be noted that this is *not* a recommended anchorage during northers when it can

become untenable.

Figure . ISLA SAN ANDRÉS

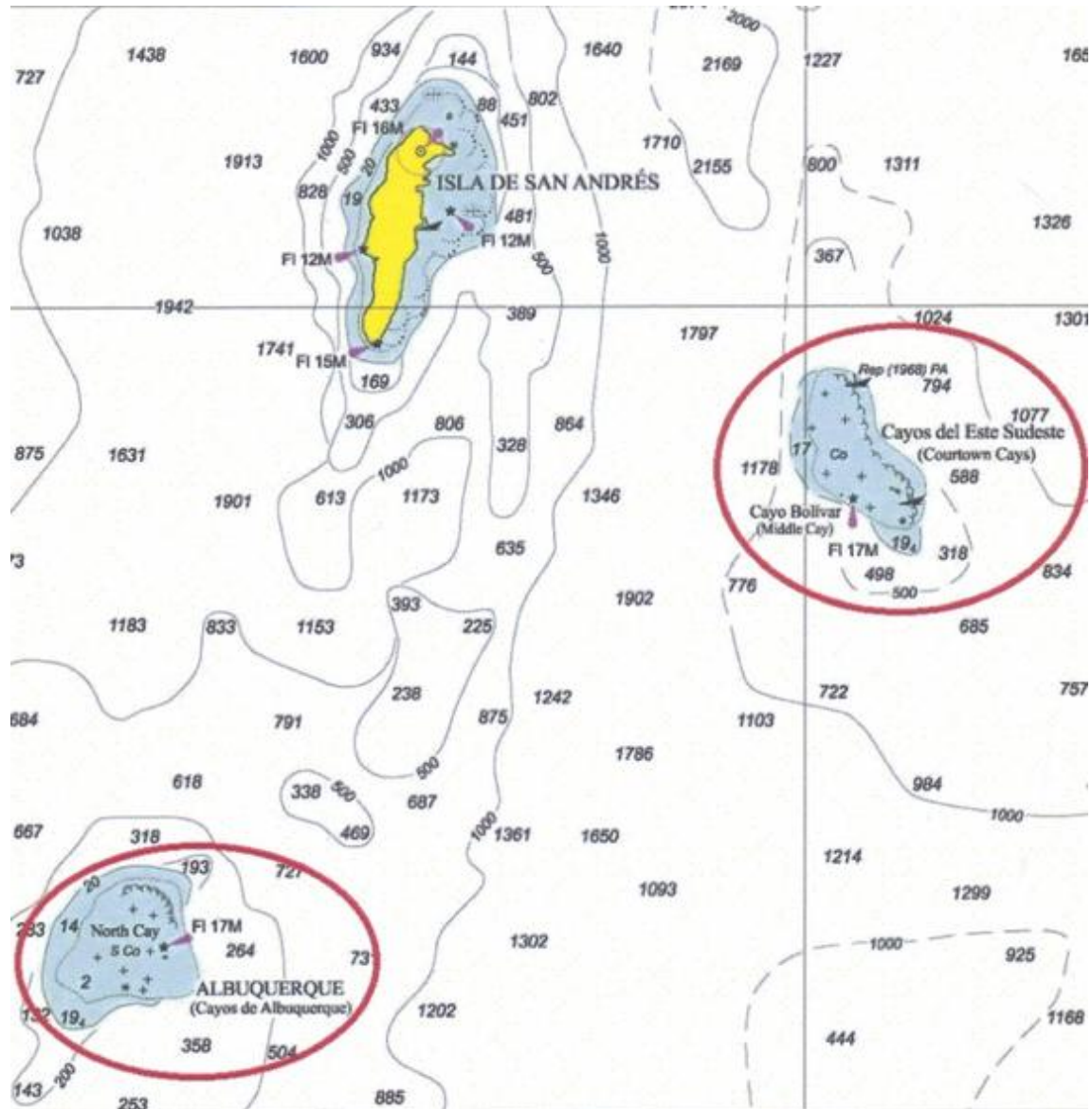


Figure . SAN ANDRÉS AND ENVIRONS: CAYOS DEL SUROEST AND CAYOS ALBURQUERQUE

San Andrés Harbor or *Bahía de San Andrés* is located on the north side of the island. Well protected from the swell by a coral reef, the bay is nevertheless exposed to the prevailing eastern winds. It can only be entered from the east, where a red and white approach buoy, located at **12°32.279N-81°41.448W**, marks the channel entrance. There are two potential hazards when approaching San Andrés from the south: *Cayos del Suroeste*, marked by a white light tower 16NM ESE from San Andrés and *Cayos Alburquerque*, 18NM south of the island and marked by a red and white metallic beacon.

The channel is well marked and lighted at night but the lights are not always reliable and it is usually busy with commercial traffic, so be alert at all times while transiting it. Depths range from 15-30ft along the channel and decrease rapidly going further north into the bay and all around Cotton Cay. On approach, the force of the surge may need to be counteracted at the mouth of the channel to avoid being pushed towards the SE tip of the reef.



Figure . SAN ANDRÉS HARBOR AND APPROACH

There are two anchoring areas in the bay. The most popular is off Nene's Marina --the only marina in the archipelago --

located opposite Cotton Cay. Because it faces east, while this anchorage offers good shelter from the swell, thanks to the outer reef; it is exposed to east winds, making it quite rolly when the Trade Wind blows hard. It is also the zone where fishing boats are moored and it can become quite busy in the afternoons with passing water taxis, tour boats, and jet skis. Anchorage can be taken off Nene's Marina, in 9ft of good holding sand and mud.



Figure . CLOSEUP OF BAY OF SAN ANDRÉS

The other anchoring spot is off *Club Náutico San Andrés*, a private club which welcomes visiting yachts on the north side of the bay. It must be noted that, although it is located a short distance further north in the bay from Nene's Marina,

Club Náutico must be approached through an unmarked side channel running by the south side of Cotton Cay into the north area of the bay. This side channel begins off the entrance to the commercial port, and carries 9ft minimum depths for the most part. Be cautious on approach as the bottom shoals to less than 6ft well off *Club Náutico*.

Nene's Marina

12°34.71N--81°41.86W

nenesmarina@hotmail.com

<http://www.nenesmarina.com>

Tel: (578) - 5126139

Cell: 315-3037643

Av Newball Diagonal a Gobernación

Located within walking distance of the commercial district downtown, this is a small marina which works mainly with local boats but saves a couple of slips for visiting yachts. Depth in the dock area is 12ft. They have 60Hz, 30A 120V single phase, 50A 220V single phase, fuel dock for diesel and gasoline, lubricants, fresh water, clearance agent, ice, WiFi in a 400ft range, and drop-off laundry service.

Owner Félix Palacio, nicknamed Nene, is a yacht captain and popular character who runs a small hotel and restaurant next door and is often away on fishing tours. His is a plain but

cozy marina with a bar and a tiny grocery store with the basics. The dinghy dock can be used for a daily US\$2 fee and another US\$2 allows the use of their basic showers. If you contact the marina on VHF channel 14 or 16 to announce your arrival, harbor master Gabriel Vasquez will get in touch with René Cardona, their clearance agent, so he can inform the proper authorities who will in turn visit the marina to complete the paperwork. René charges US\$50 for his services but the total clearing fees add up to some US\$80 after the visa and *zarpe* are issued. In addition, all non-residents visiting the islands are required to pay a US\$25 tourist tax, valid for 4 months, regardless of nationality.

Club Náutico San Andrés

12°34.78N -- 81°41.52W

Avenida Francisco Newball No. 3-121

Email: info@clubnauticosai.org

Phone: 57 8 512-3022 and 57 8 512-4022

Website: <http://www.clubnauticosai.org>

Located a short distance from Nene's Marina further north on the bay, it is in walking distance of downtown San Andrés. This is a private club that welcomes visiting yachts but has no spare dockage available. For a provisional membership fee, vessels can anchor off the club in 12-15ft of water, on sand and turtle grass, and use their dinghy dock, facilities and services. This upscale club has tennis courts, a swimming pool, a spa and various other amenities, as well as

two restaurants. There is 24-hour security, water, electricity, restrooms, fuel dock for gasoline, prepaid WiFi in the premises, and clearance service.

Clearance Agencies

There are numerous clearance agencies on the island which can be contacted in order to clear in without the intermediation of the marina. However, the authorities involved will carry out the strict procedures right at Nene's Marina or Club Náutico, a great convenience. Make sure you state clearly to the agent and the immigration authorities your wish to get the longest visa period granted (usually two months) even if you plan to stay for a shorter period; that way you will avoid having to pay again for a visa extension, if you choose to stay longer than planned. These are some of the agencies dealing with clearance:

- Agecia Marítima Serrana

René Cardona

Av. Costa Rica, Edif.Big Point, Oficina 208

Tel.: (098)5124628

rcardona@sol.net.co

- Agencia Marítima Sermar

Héctor Castellanos

Av. Francisco Newball, Edificio Cámara de Comercio, Oficina No.305

(098) 5123389

sermar@sol.net.co

- Agencia Marítima William Lever e Hijos

Elvis Lever Hudson

Av. Francisco Newball – Barrio Los Almendros

(098) 5126218

agelever@col1.telecom.com.co

The town of **San Andrés**, located in *Punta Norte* (North End), is the administrative and commercial center of the archipelago. Both the port and the airport, most hotels, the largest beach, and the commercial area are located in downtown San Andrés. It is a popular holiday destination for wealthy Colombians that swarms with activity and enjoys a vibrant nightlife. Being a Tax Free Port, the commercial streets in the area of Spratt Bight -- the long north beach crossed from east to west by a promenade called Spratt Bight Walkway -- feature numerous jewelry, perfume, liquor, clothes and electronics stores. Unfortunately, although it retains the label “tax free”, at present the tax benefits are

barely noticeable. Since quality often leaves much to be desired and counterfeit items are the order of the day, your best bets are the big long established stores such as *Riviera*, a little pricier but guaranteed. On the other hand, San Andrés is one of the few ports in Colombia, if not the only one, where the boat-in-transit status is acknowledged and that makes it a good spot to import foreign items.

Avenida Francisco Newball is a big avenue bordering San Andrés Harbor and stretching all the way from the NE side to the SE side of San Andrés. Nene's Marina and Club Náutico, as well as the main public buildings on the island are located along Newball Avenue: the **Coral Palace**, the local government headquarters; the **Training Center of the Caribbean**, a beautiful colonial building made of wood hosting an educational institution; and **Casa de la Cultura**, where the main cultural events of the island take place. There is a big Yamaha store in Avenida Providencia and several hardware stores dealing in fishing equipment along Avenida 20 de Julio, but no proper chandlery.

Provisioning

Provisioning is not an issue in San Andrés. You will find plenty of shops to fill your galley, from small grocery stores to well stocked supermarkets like Super Éxito in Avenida Colón, Surtimar in Avenida Las Américas or Supertodo, in Avenida 20 de Julio #3-42, a five minute walk from Nene's Marina. Faced with a scarcity of fresh water sources, locals resort to ground water sources, rainfall, and the desalination plant for fresh water. However, tap water is not fit for consumption and bottled water is recommended for *both* drinking and cooking.



Figure . SAN ANDRES TOWN CLOSE UP

Native cuisine is found downtown in El Cove and in San Luis but there are plenty of restaurants and snack bars offering international cuisine downtown as well as numerous street vendors selling tasty local snacks at ridiculous prices. The basic ingredients in local gastronomy include fish, crab and conch, and the most representative dish is *Rondón*, derived from English "round down", a delicious potluck of various ingredients like crab, conch, fish, pigtail, plantain, breadfruit... you name it! Traditionally a fisherman's dish, it used to be cooked exclusively by the men in the old times.

Both dollars and pesos are commonly accepted but local currency is the better choice in every day transactions. Currency can be exchanged at the airport or at one of the three exchange booths downtown, all at similar rates. Most hotels offer exchange service, too, and their rates are considerably lower. Better yet, ATMs provide the best rate of exchange and there are numerous ATM machines downtown, one of them located close to Nene's Marina in Avenida 20 de Julio, next to the Police Station (*Comandancia de Policía*).

Gustavo Rojas Pinilla International Airport offers flight services by Avianca, LAN Colombia, Copa Colombia, Viva Colombia, TACA, and Satena to Bogotá, Medellín, Barranquilla, Cali, Cartagena, San José (Costa Rica) and Providencia; Copa has flights from Panama City. There are also charter flights offered by Air Transat from Montreal during winter months.

Golf carts, quads, scooters, and bicycles make for very efficient transport on this 10 square mile island. They can be hired at any of the numerous businesses along Avenida Colombia and Avenida Newball by the hour (25,000 pesos/hour) or by the (full) day at some 100,000 pesos. It takes about two hours to circumnavigate the 20 mile long Avenida Circunvalar, the circle road running all around the island. Public transportation is very convenient, safe, and cheap, and offers the chance to get immersed in the local atmosphere. Buses run quite often to El Cove, La Loma and San Luis from Avenida 20 de Julio -- the regular fare being 1,600 pesos -- but they can be boarded anywhere along the way by simply waving at the driver. The final destination is displayed on the front window. To get off the bus, just call out *parada* (stop) and the driver will stop for you. Taxis are

privately owned cars and vans featuring a wild variety of makes and conditions. They are the more costly choice but the friendly native drivers are very helpful and many could double as tour guides. There is a fixed 11,000 peso fare from the center to the airport and prices range from 5,000 pesos downtown to 15,000-20,000 pesos for the ride to San Luis and La Loma. *Colectivos*, the name given to the taxis which are shared by other passengers along the way, are a more economical taxi choice.

Things to do and see on San Andrés

The islanders are warm, friendly, and fun loving people who live in a harmonious blend of religions, customs, and traditions. Outside downtown San Andrés a rural atmosphere prevails and small houses are spread along Avenida Circunvalar. **La Loma** (the Hill) is a traditional inland village with a lovely **Baptist church**, the first built on the island, which retains a genuine Afro-Caribbean character. Not far away on the west coast, **Casa Museo Isleña** features a display of native historical, cultural and ethnological artifacts and information about the island. Further south **La Cueva de Morgan** (Morgan's Cave) and its hidden treasure legend attract numerous visitors to the site, although the cave, which is partly submerged, cannot be entered. **El Hoyo Soplador**, the Blowing Hole, is another tourist attraction on the south tip of the Island where the sea water runs up through a submerged tunnel spouting geyser-like at high tide. **Laguna Big Pond**, a small salt lake in the center of the island close to **La Loma**, is a natural shelter where birds, alligators and other species take refuge; several tracks lead to **El Cove** among marshes and smaller ponds. **San Luis**, located on the east coast, is the other significant settlement on the island. It consists of a 2 mile long string of shacks,

traditional wooden houses and a couple of resorts along quiet white sand beaches protected by reefs and bathed by shallow turquoise waters, a favorite retreat for visiting



families.

Figure . SAN ANDRÉS DESTINATIONS

One mile north of Sprat Bight Beach lies **Johnny Cay**, a 10 acre protected coral islet inhabited by iguanas and covered by palm trees which hosts a lovely beach and a bar and restaurant. The islet is very popular among visitors and there is a heavy traffic of water taxis leaving from Sprat Bight Beach.

Haynes and **Rose Cays** are the two small sand cays located on the south east side of the channel. Popularly known as ***El Acuario***, Rose Cay hosts no man made aquarium but rather a natural aquarium in the shallow waters enclosed by the reef and containing an incredible variety of sea life. Haynes Cay shelters a popular beach bar and restaurant under the shade of its palm trees. The area is perfect for swimming and snorkeling and the short distance between the two cays can be walked in 1.5ft depths. One can anchor off Haynes Cay in settled weather and during daylight, but the area is subject to strong currents, especially in rough conditions. You need to eyeball your way between shoals towards Haynes Cay and keep well off the shores of both cays as they are very shallow. Drop anchor in 9-12ft of water and a good holding sand bottom.

When ready to leave towards Providencia, track your way back along the channel and make sure you give a wide berth to the SE tip of the reef before veering north. Be ready to motorsail and prepare for some uncomfortable sailing against the E-NE swell.



Providencia & Santa Catalina

50NM from San Andrés

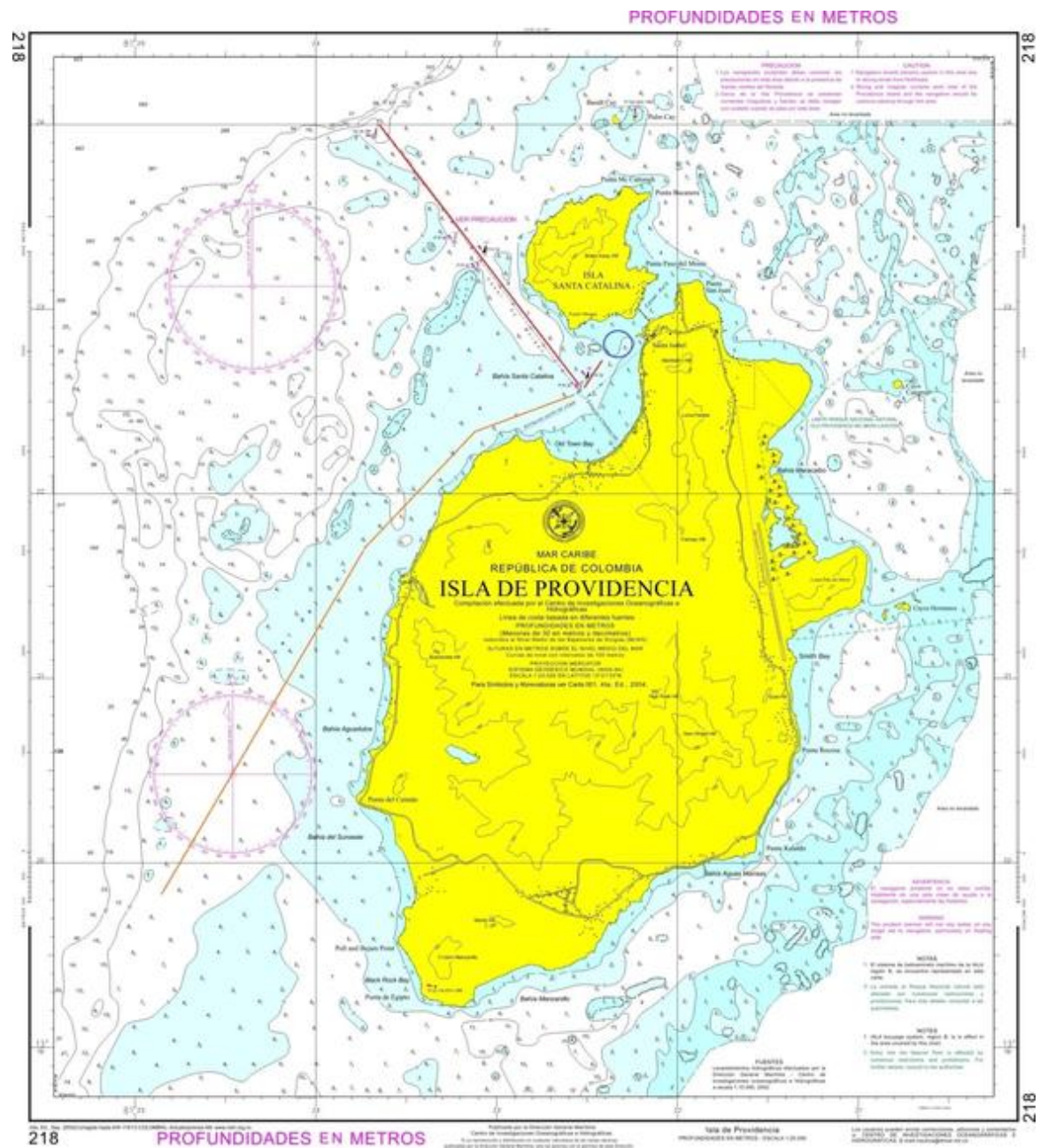


Figure . ISLA DE PROVIDENCIA AND APPROACHES TO SANTA CATALINA HARBOR

50 miles NNE of San Andrés, Providencia and its little sister island Santa Catalina, close off its north end, are the product of a volcanic eruption back in the Miocene Era. The islands extend 4.5 miles in a N-S direction and are surrounded by a reef stretching 2 miles along the east and south sides of the islands and some 8 miles north of their north side. The west side is foul ground, except for a stretch on the NW coast where the island port, Santa Catalina Harbor or *Bahía de Santa Catalina*, is located.

Providencia must be approached from the west, always keeping a prudent minimum distance of 2 NM from shore to avoid the surrounding reef and bearing in mind that strong irregular currents occur in the vicinity of the island. When approaching Providencia from the north, Low Cay (*Cayo Bajo*) Light Tower, 8 NM north of Santa Catalina Island, serves as a landmark but also as a warning sign which marks the outer limits of the dangerous reef stretching north of Santa Catalina Island, sometimes not easily seen in the distance. Palm Cay (*Cayo Palma*) is a rocky cay surrounded by reefs 0.3 NM north of Santa Catalina, topped by palm trees and a metallic light tower marking the north side of the neighboring islands.

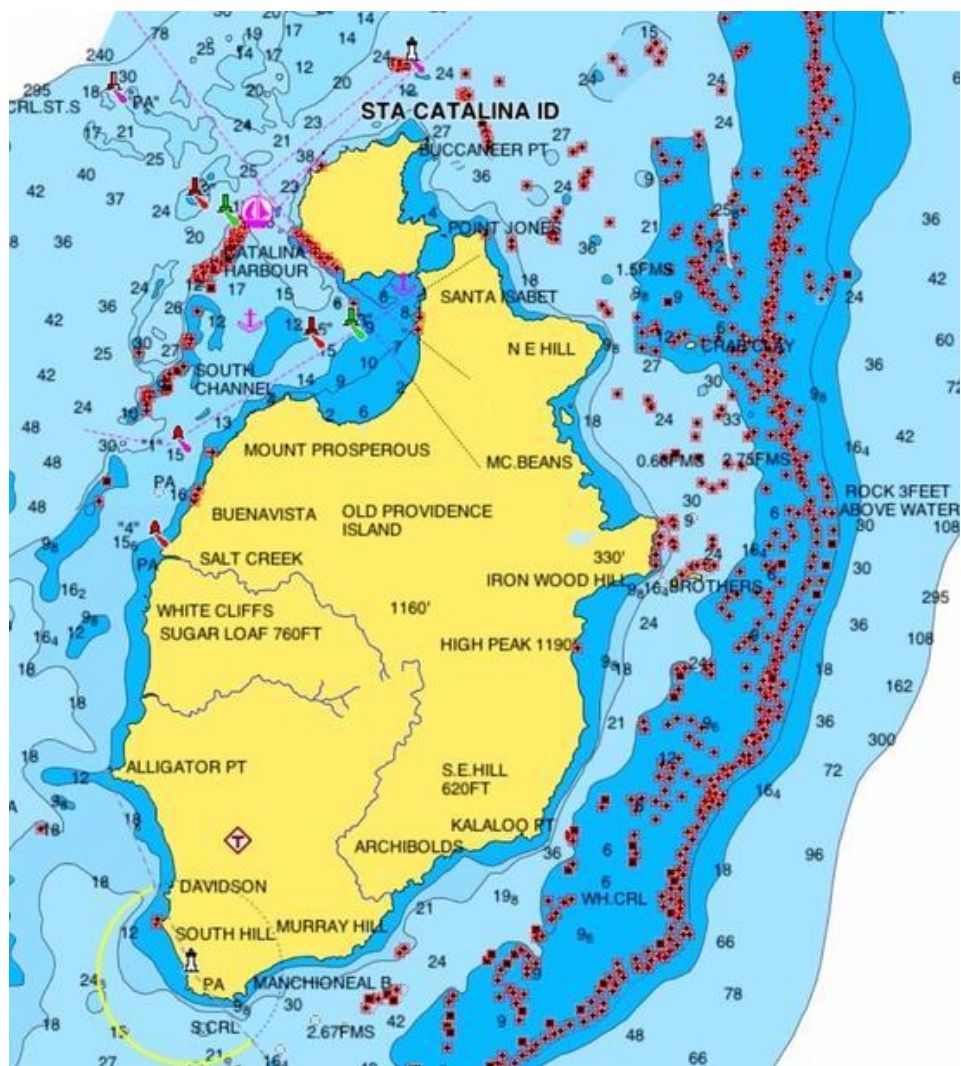


Figure . PROVIDENCIA

On approach from the south, Providencia Light Tower, a red and white metal structure located on the south tip of the island, is a good landmark with its 18 mile range. There are two channels into Santa Catalina Harbor; the North Channel or *Canal del Norte* and the South Channel or *Canal del Sur*. Although using the South Channel seems the sensible thing to do when approaching from San Andrés, it is **not** recommended as the whole area is plagued with reefs,

shoals and coral patches and the channel is long, relatively shallow, and unmarked.

The North Channel, also known as Morgan's Channel, is not only deeper but also straightforward, marked, and lighted at night. Nevertheless, the advice is to enter in good daylight, as this area is also full of scattered shoals and reefs. Two miles away from the anchorage at *Bahía de Santa Catalina*, a red and white approach buoy, located off a cut in the reef at **13°24.00N -- 81°23.67W** in 33ft of water, marks the channel entrance. Two green and three red buoys mark the way between reefs into the anchorage in a straight **143°** course from the approach buoy. In northerly winds, some distance should be left from buoy #4 (the second starboard red marker) which marks the north tip of a reef, to avoid being dragged towards it.

NORTH CHANNEL

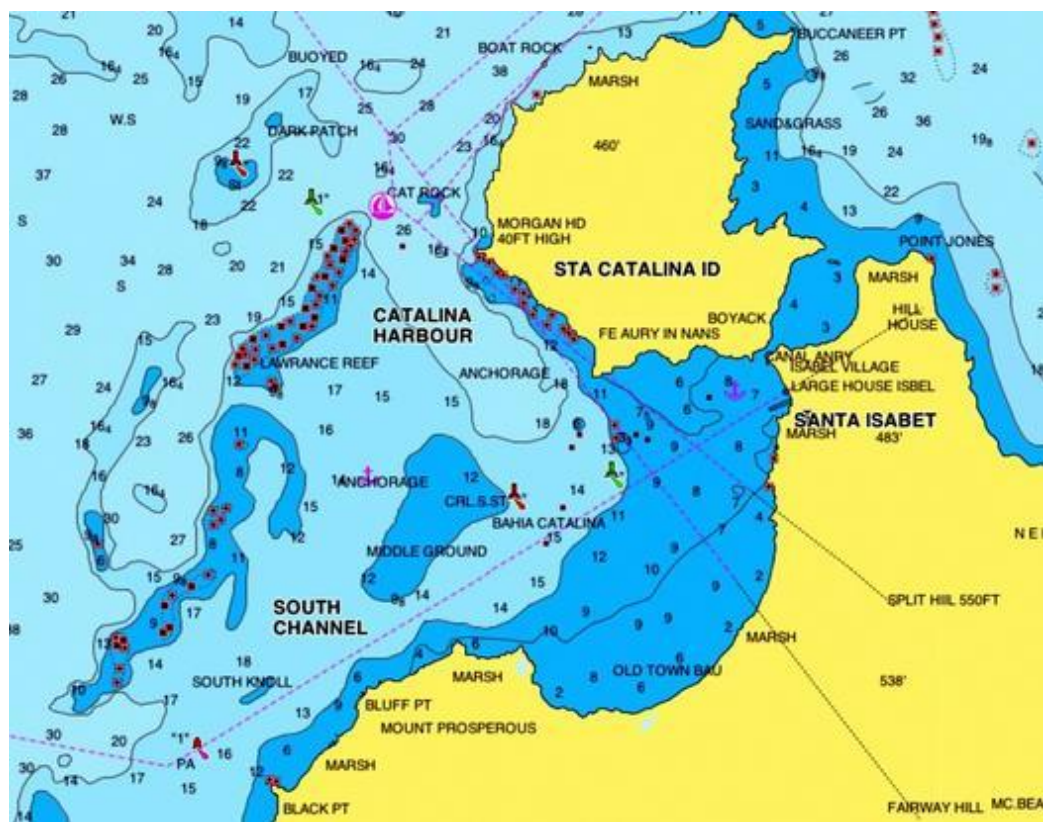


Figure . NORTHERN TIP OF PROVIDENCIA AND “LITTLE SISTER” ISLA SANTA CATALINA

The channel carries 20ft average depths all along, decreasing suddenly near the last two buoys marking the anchorage area to 9ft of water. Veer to the NE at this point, heading into the north side of the bay. Proceed slowly, as the bottom shoals far from the shores of both islands, and drop anchor in 7-8ft in sand and turtle grass. Make sure the anchor sets properly, since the holding is quite unstable and the risk of dragging is high, especially in northers. *Bahía de Santa Catalina* is a one mile long by half mile wide bay of calm clear waters, shallow far from the shores and exposed to prevailing NE winds. The municipal dock on the NE side of

the bay is mainly used by the local fishing boats, the trading boats supplying the island, and the ferry carrying passengers to and from San Andrés. If you need to approach the dock for whatever reason, use a high tide and proceed with caution; the unmarked approach surrounded by shallow waters has caused many a vessel to run aground.

If staying for more than 24 hours and notwithstanding previous **clearance** in San Andrés, you will need to clear in Providencia all over again. In spite of cruisers' complaints, the only progress in the matter so far has been a private agreement between local agents to charge half of the regular fare when clearing for the second time on either of the two sister islands. Bernardo B. Bush is the only agent in Providencia and usually reachable on VHF channels 16 and 24. He will handle the paperwork and deal with the immigration authorities and the rest of the departments involved. He can be located at his office in Santa Isabel, just round the corner from the main street, above a home equipment and electrical appliances store run by his wife. Mr. Bush also offers drop-in laundry service and can help with the most varied issues that may arise during your stay.

Agencia Marítima Bernardo B. Bush

Tel.: 578-098-5148050

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www.providenciaisla.com

Providencia and Santa Catalina are volcanic islands with a mountainous interior, covered with lush vegetation and surrounded by a 20 mile barrier reef, the world's third-largest. Rich in sea life and utterly unspoiled, the beautiful turquoise waters of the reef are astonishingly clear with visibility up to 60ft, a mesmerizing paradise for dive aficionados from all over the world. The steep center of Providencia is crowned by *El Pico* (The Peak), a 1,200ft tall hill with a breathtaking 360° panoramic view and the main source of fresh water on the island. There is a marked trail to the top, beginning at *Casabaja* on the south of the island, which can be covered in a 3 hour trek or in an hour on horseback and arranged by most hotels.

Providencia attracts and engages visitors for its crystal clear waters, the scuba diving, snorkeling and fishing; its beautiful unspoiled volcanic scenery and gorgeous undeveloped sand beaches; its laidback placid atmosphere reminiscent of times past; its friendly people, always wearing warm smiles and ready for a chat, and its unique cultural features and traditions which the *Raizales* have striven successfully to preserve and which they display in the streets during the island festival held in July.

With a blend of African, Spanish and English ancestry, the islanders speak Creole at home, English at primary school and Spanish when they leave the island for work or to further their education in mainland Colombia. They strongly identify with Afro-Caribbean culture and Reggae is the common

music on the island. The prevailing atmosphere is rural with no clubs or discos, and although there are frequent beach parties in the hotel areas on weekends, nightlife is limited on the island. There is a very low key feeling during the week. On Sundays, the local churches are crowded with congregants dressed up and ready to give praise while singing gospel music like angels. Heavily protected by Colombian legislation, only the 5,000 native inhabitants of the island are allowed to own property or operate a business there, and development is strongly controlled. While the island depends greatly on tourism, the majority of beaches are unspoiled and undeveloped. Except for the occasional basic bar selling drinks and seafood dishes, hotels resemble family guest houses more than upscale hotels and bars, and restaurants are pretty rudimentary in general.

Natives are master fishermen on an island that, for centuries, depended heavily on the sea for subsistence and to date still does. Varied species of fish, lobster, squid, fish, crab, and prawns are the basis of the **native cuisine**, accompanied by vegetables and tubers such as yucca and yam, and green plantains. *Rondón* is the favorite dish of the islanders and *sancocho de pescado*, a fish stew, is also very popular, but the common everyday dish, which costs some 13,000 pesos on average, consists of fresh fish -- grilled or fried in coconut oil -- served with coconut rice and *patacones* (fried mashed plaintain). For the sweet-toothed, there is a choice of delicious homemade sweets such as Johnny cake, banana cake, mango pie, coconut bread, and corn (yes, CORN!) ice-cream. Fishermen sell their catch in the port area and some offer fishing trips using their traditional gear (nets, hooks and free diving) in search of lobster, crab and different reef fish.

Unlike San Andrés, Providencia has many *seasonal* fresh water streams but despite that, the island is subject to drought during the dry season (January to August). Water can become very scarce and the island reservoir of *Bahía de Agua Fresca* cannot supply all households, forcing people to endure weeks without running water in their homes. Because the island tap water is not fit for consumption, all drinking water has to be shipped in. The rusty old trade boat *Miss Raziman* pays regular weekly visits to the town, weather permitting, loaded with fresh provisions and all kinds of goods, causing a frenzy of activity in the dock area. Most stores are located in Santa Isabel, the main settlement on the island where you will find a couple of grocery stores and two medium size supermarkets along the main road. Until recently, locals were happy to accept payment in dollars, but the twists and turns of the global economy have had an effect in these remote islands, too, and locals prefer their own currency to the US dollar these days.

Providencia can be reached by air from San Andrés on Satena Airline (<http://www.satena.com>) and the charter airline Searca, which has no website but is related to Decameron Hotel in San Andrés. Both offer a couple of daily 20 minute flights between the sister islands for a 250,000 peso return fare. There is also a catamaran service based on San Andrés (<http://www.catamaransanandresyprovidencia.com>), running a roundtrip on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays for a 210,000 peso return fare. The journey takes between three and six hours depending on weather and sea conditions and it is always shorter and smoother on the way back to San Andrés. Like San Andrés, Providencia has a 10

mile coastal road, crossed by a few secondary roads, that circles the island.

There is no public transportation so to speak, except for Don Orolde's *chiva*, an old artisan bus with a very informal schedule, which if you use it, is very inexpensive. Golf carts and motorbikes are a very convenient way to tour the island, as it only takes some 40 minutes to drive the loop around the whole island in a golf cart. They can be hired in the Santa Isabel or Aguadulce hotel areas by the hour or for a whole day. Even though motorbikes have replaced horses as the main means of transport for the islanders in recent years, many natives ride their horses regularly to move about the island.

Horse races, held every Saturday on Southwest Beach, are a popular occasion for natives and foreigners to gather and enjoy the colorful spectacle of bareback horse racing. In fact, horseback riding is one of the most delightful ways to visit the exquisite beaches and lush interior of the island. Late April and early May are busy months on the island as the Black Mountain crab migration takes place. Masses of black crabs descend from the mountains to lay their eggs in the sea, causing such havoc on the roads that military personnel need to be brought in to protect this incredible natural phenomenon and driving is forbidden during the night in certain areas.

Santa Isabel

Santa Isabel is the chief settlement of *Isla de Providencia* and the administrative center of the island. Having grown around the port, the town square is located by the municipal dock and flanked by a lovely wooden building hosting the library and various other public offices. The Tourist Office, tended by friendly helpful staff, can be found in the adjacent building, same as the two single banks on the island, located side by side next door and displaying their ATM machines that accept international cards. Along the main street by the port, there are a couple of cyber cafes for internet connection and phone calls with very irregular service, a variety of miscellaneous stores, and a few local bars. Santa Isabel has a good choice of economical places to eat, from restaurants serving local dishes or even pizzas to street vendors selling delicious homemade snacks on Sundays. The two largest supermarkets in town are relatively well stocked and located around the corner along the main road, not far from the café which is an inviting bakery serving fresh bread and pastries where you can have a delicious cup of coffee while reading a book from their open library. The town also has a post office, a hospital, and a school. There is no fuel dock in the village so it needs to be jerry canned from the

gas station at Pueblo Viejo, a couple of miles further south



on the bay.

Figure . PROVIDENCIA AND SANTA CATALINA

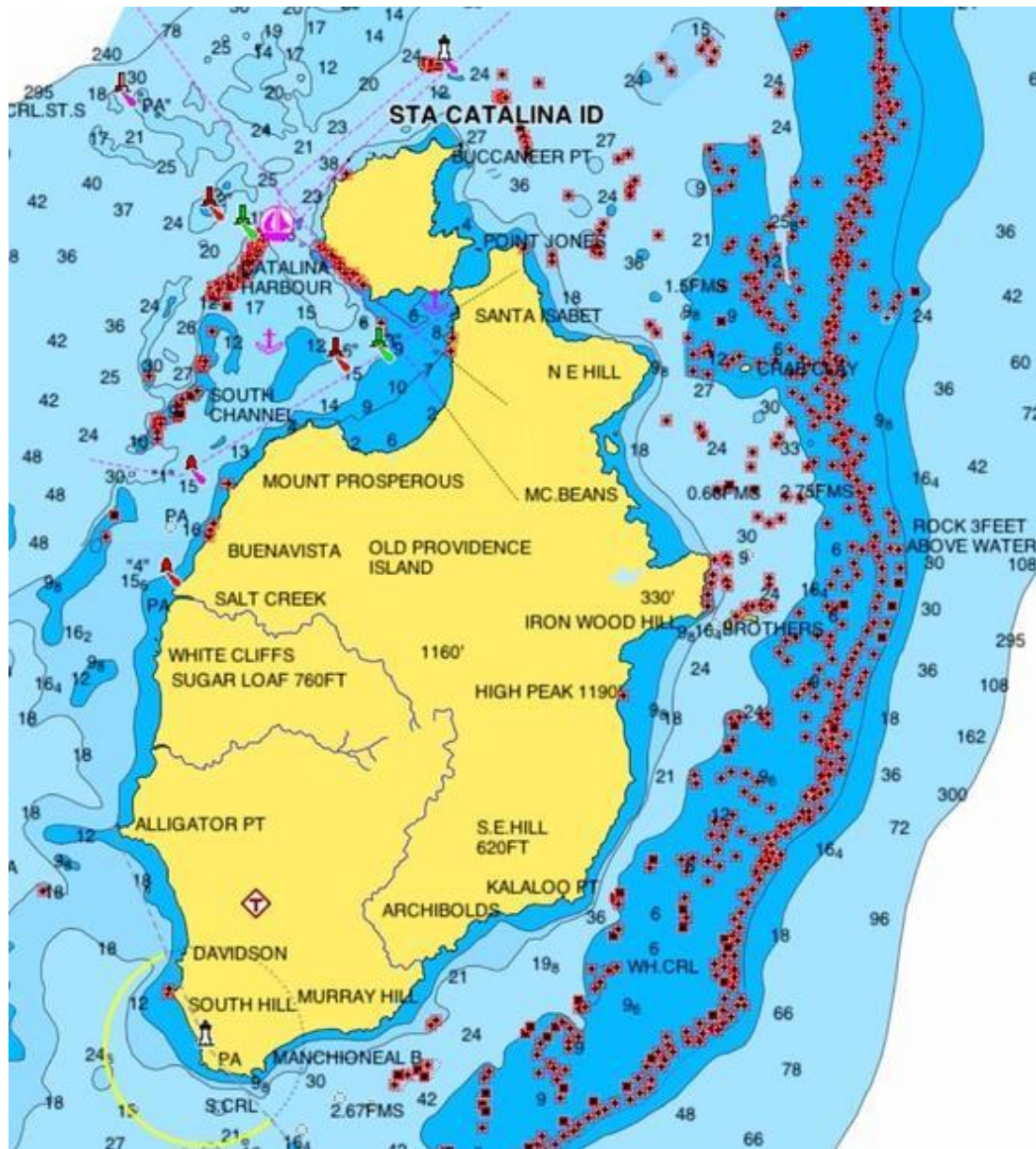


Figure . PROVIDENCIA

Isla de Santa Catalina

Isla de Santa Catalina, an historical haven of pirates and corsairs such as Henry Morgan and Louis Aury, is separated

from Providencia by the narrow *Canal Aury* (an artificial channel built by pirates for defensive purposes) and connected by the Lover's Lane or *Puente de Los Enamorados*, a brightly colored pedestrian bridge linking the islands, where lovers meet for romantic strolls at sunset. Some 200 people inhabit this hilly and green little island where there are no roads; only pedestrian paths. The main settlement is located on the south side of the island and features a handful of traditional wooden houses, a small grocery store, and a couple of local restaurants serving the catch of the day. Doña Bárbara, a local resident, offers laundry service at the orange house next door to *Posada Sunshine Paradise*, which can be reached by dinghy.

The Treasure Trail bordering the west side of Santa Catalina leads, thankfully under the shade of trees, to the unexcavated remains of Fort Aury, where the original cannons still seem to defend the bay. The fort was built in 1818 by the French corsair Louis Aury, who had fought in support of the independence movement in America. Down the hill, at the south tip of Fort Bay beach, is an underwater cave inhabited by huge barracudas and said to shelter pirate Morgan's treasure -- yet another. It still attracts many a treasure hunter. Santa Catalina is also called the Treasure Island, precisely because of the legend of treasure hidden by Henry Morgan somewhere on the island during one of his last visits. The beach is delightfully devoid of development and perfect for swimming and snorkeling. Local kids reach it by kayak to spend the last hours of the afternoon before the sun sets. Further along the marked trail, a large rock emerging from the sea and resembling a human head is named Morgan's Head after that infamous pirate. There is a series of lovely tiny beaches worth exploring by dinghy, spread

along the island's perimeter and only accessible by sea, including:

Parque Nacional McBean Lagoon is a 2,450-acre national park located on the northeast side of Providencia which includes an area of mangrove and steep dry forest topped by 492ft tall Iron Wood Hill, as well as a marine area enclosing the second largest barrier reef in the Caribbean and including two cays: *Cayo Cangrejo* (Crab Cay) and *Cayo Tres Hermanos* (Three Brothers Cay). The shallow, flawlessly beautiful waters of McBean Lagoon in Maracaibo Bay portray a wide range of different colors and shades from navy-blue to aquamarine, which give name to the stunningly beautiful sea in the area, known as the Sea of Seven Colors.

Cayo Cangrejo (Crab Cay) is a picture perfect rock formation covered by palm trees. It is surrounded by calm pristine waters and an extensive coral reef home to stingrays, turtles, lobsters, sponges, crabs, anemones, starfish, parrotfish, angelfish and plenty of other reef species; an exceptional place for snorkeling, scuba diving and kayaking. There is a 14,500 peso entrance fee to be paid at the ticket office located on the cay by the wooden dock, where a short trail leads visitors across the islet. The cay, which closes to the public at 5:00pm, can be reached by kayak or water taxi, available for hire at *Bahia Maracaibo*, a bay also reputed for its breathtaking landscape and considered the upmarket area of the island.

Bahía de Aguadulce (Freshwater Bay) is the main tourist center of Providencia where most hotels and restaurants are

located. There are about half a dozen hotels and as many restaurants spread along the 500ft long Freshwater Bay, as well as most vehicle rentals, dive companies, and tour agencies and even a small supermarket. *Arts & Crafts* is an attractive café and craft shop widely known for its local fruit popsicles and homemade tamarind wine.

Bahía Suroeste (Southwest Bay) is a 20 minute walk south from Aguadulce. It features Providencia's longest beach, which serves as a natural hippodrome where the Saturday horse races are held. While the north side of the bay is a solitary haven of coconut palms and fine white sand bathed by calm turquoise waters, the south side hosts a couple of hotels and a few local restaurants offering delicious fresh fish and seafood dishes, among them *El Divino Niño* --probably the most popular on the island -- or Café Estudio by the main road.

Bahía Manzanillo on the southeast tip of the island is an off-the-beaten-track spot with a large beautiful sand beach bathed by turquoise waters and surrounded by palm trees, where the only building is Roland Roots Reggae Bar, a rustic and colorful beach bar featuring bonfire parties and live music at weekends. Friendly Rastaman Roland serves cocktails and seafood dishes to the sound of reggae music, on rowboats which serve as dining tables, while people gather around the bonfire, stroll along the beach, or just sip

their cocktails lying on a hammock.



Figure . PROVIDENCIA AND ITS SOUTHERN BAYS



CAYOS CAJONES (HOBBIES)

CAYOS CAJONES (HOBBIES)

FROM PROVIDENCIA TO THE HOBBIES

200NM from Providencia

AWP: 15°56.62N--83°04.44W



Figure . PROVIDENCIA TO THE HOBBIES -- GONE WITH THE WIND

Following the westward trend in the Caribbean, the ENE Trade Wind with an average 15kn speed prevails most of the year in the stretch between Providencia and the Bay Islands and the skies are usually clear and sunny -- except during the wet season from May/June to November/December when heavy squalls and thunderstorms are frequent though short lived. The swell usually comes from an ESE direction but is influenced by the wind direction and, while waves will not usually raise over 3-4ft, rarely will you be blessed with flat calm seas. A constant Equatorial Current sets in a WNW direction at an average 0.7kn speed in the basin but coastal waters are subject to highly variable currents commonly running south at rates ranging from 0.5 to 3 knots which are largely influenced by the wind and may reverse abruptly.

October opens the season of the northers which extends into April. During the season of northers, the incidence of strong northerly winds is high and they may even reach gale force during the winter months. Northers come with choppy seas, rough swells and heavy rains affecting visibility, which makes navigation in this coastal area full of hazards and devoid of sheltered anchorages extremely risky. Fortunately, they tend to be short in time and hardly ever reach gale force. On the other hand, it should be noted that the area is lying on the southern boundaries of the hurricane belt and, in spite of being rarely hit by hurricanes, it certainly is affected by the rough seas and heavy swells that they cause further north. The last hurricane to hit the area was in 2001, and Felix is considered the southernmost (Atlantic) Category 5 hurricane ever to make landfall here.



Figure . PROVIDENCIA TO THE HOBBIES DIRECT, FAR EAST OF THE MOSKITOS

Coastal waters in the stretch between Providencia and the Hobbies are shallow and plagued with dangerous reefs, banks, islets, and cays lying off the coast, some as far as 60NM away from the mainland. Lights and general aids to navigation are scarce and unreliable and the currents around banks and cay areas quite unpredictable.

Cayos Miskitos and the Miskito Nation

26 NM east of Punta Gorda lie the Cayos Miskitos, a group of cays and reefs spreading in a 19 mile circumference, at the center of which lies Cayo Miskito, the largest of the cays at 2.5 miles in diameter. The great majority of the cays are

small coral formations and scarcely vegetated, except for the largest ones; surrounded by numerous detached reefs, shoals and banks in shallow depths. Though there are a handful of small settlements on the cays closer to the mainland, they are largely uninhabited but frequently visited by the Miskito Indians, descendants of the original indigenous settlers and excellent fishermen and divers. The largest of Nicaragua's indigenous groups, Miskitos inhabit the country's east coast and overlap into Honduran territory.

The Miskito nation boasts a blend of indigenous, European, and African blood, whose origins go back to the 17th century when French, Dutch, and British buccaneers, traders, and pirates started visiting the western Caribbean and finally settled as landowners in the area. Most African settlers would have been slaves dragged along by their English masters to be used to work on their lands and in their households. But many were survivors of shipwrecks and runaway slaves from British colonies in the West Indies, captured and assimilated by the local Ulwa, Sumu and Kukra tribes. Out of reach of the Spanish authorities who were far away and busy in their Portobelo headquarters, the Miskito nation grew and flourished for a few centuries, thanks to its commercial and social relationships with the English. So much so that a Miskito leader was crowned **King of the Mosquito Kingdom** in 1687 and the territory declared a British protectorate. Miskitos would raid Spanish-held areas and neighboring indigenous groups and trade captured prisoners with English merchants who would, in turn, sell them as slaves in the West Indies. The Miskito adopted English names and the European dress style, and their princes were sent to English colleges in Jamaica. The 1787 Treaty of Versailles, whereby the English relinquished their claims on the territory, meant the beginning of the decline of

the Mosquito Kingdom and the Miskito nation. By 1860, the Nicaraguan government had taken complete control over the whole territory and deprived the Miskitos of all their privileges, condemning them to poverty. Frustrated and still resenting the loss of their lands, privileges, and pride, coastal Miskitos have always had tense relationships with the central government that resulted in much violence in past decades and remains dormant to date.



Several streams and rivers discharge in the stretch of coast between Punta Gorda and Cabo Gracias a Dios, 39 miles further north, an area which is inhabited only by a few remote and scattered Miskito communities. Local settlers paddle their dugout canoes to the neighboring Cayos Miskitos to get their daily catch, which usually consists of reef fish, lobster and conch. Beyond the usual marine species, a much sought after prey in the Miskito Cays area is the odd solitary vessel passing by; piracy cases are frequent in this area and they can be violent. ***IT IS BEST TO AVOID THIS COAST UNLESS YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO DEAL***

WITH SUCH A SITUATION. Joshua Slocum, the famous American world cruiser, would put thumbtacks on his deck at night to foil the barefoot natives. Today, many of the “natives” wear topsiders! Several violent attacks on sailboats have been reported in recent years along this coast, some of which ended with fatal consequences. Stricken by political instability and endemic poverty, and pestered by gangs and street criminality, both violent and petty crime are prevalent throughout Honduras and only the main tourist destinations and the Bay Islands are considered “safe zones” in the country.

Adding to the challenges, aids to navigation are scarce and unreliable in the whole area and electronic charts are inaccurate; good for general navigation but little help in transiting an area full of cays, reefs and shoals lying well off the coast.

Considering all of the above, the sensible course of action is to avoid coastal waters and make a non-stop passage between Providencia and the Hobbies, following a track well away from coastal waters all along the 200 mile stretch. However, 25 miles north of *Cayos Miskitos*, *Arrecifes La media Luna*, an arch shaped reef protected from east and NE seas, is sometimes used as an overnight anchorage by transiting cruisers. Also known as Half-Moon Reef, this extensive and dangerous reef is largely awash along its 12 mile length from east to west and surrounded by numerous scattered reefs, cays and coral heads all around its southern edge. *Cayo La Media Luna*, 2 miles south of the western tip of *Arrecifes La media Luna*, features a mile long reef stretching northwards in a semicircle whose west side is sometimes used as a rest anchorage. Nevertheless, given

the numerous hazards in the area and the absence of detailed charts, navigation should not be attempted without local knowledge.



VERY LOW LYING

Cayos Cajones lie 55NM further NW in Honduran territorial waters, a group of small cays scattered along a reef extending 12 miles WNW to ESE. As they barely rise above the sea surface, you will need to be fairly close to spot them, absent electronic charts, on the horizon. The approach is quite clear of dangers and fairly easy in good light, provided a safe distance is kept from the different sets of cays along the way. The approach waypoint at **15°56.62N--83°04.44W** provides a good vantage point of the southernmost islets and the anchoring area behind them.

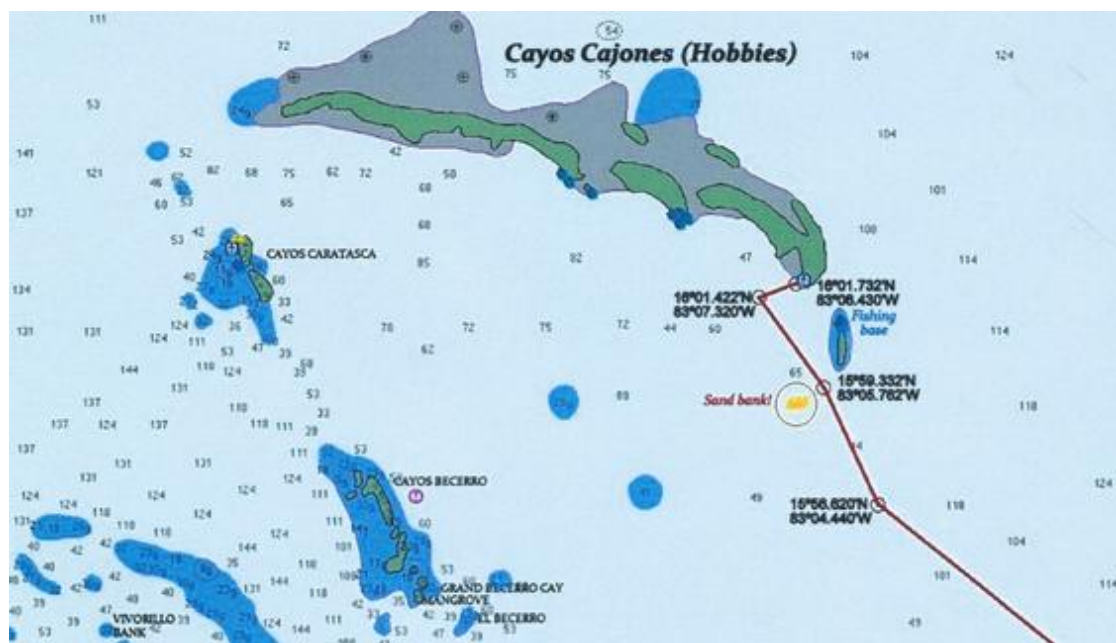


Figure . ARRIVING THE HOBBIES (CAYOS CAJONES)

The next WP at **15°59.332N--83°05.762W** is located between a sand shoal to port and a flat sandy islet occupied by a myriad of boobies, terns and frigate birds to starboard. A second islet vegetated with a few palm trees lies behind the first and features a deceiving pile of lobster traps which resemble a building from the distance. Anchorage can be taken between the island and the reef immediately to its north in 15-20ft of clear water and good holding sand. This anchorage is protected from the prevailing easterly ocean swells but wide open to all winds, due to the absence of natural barriers. And the same is true about the other cays in the area. On a positive note, a permanent cool breeze keeps bugs at bay and provides a pleasant atmosphere. But this is *not* a place where you want to be in a squall.

Located 60 miles off the coast of Honduras, the *Cayos Cajones* were known as the Hobbies by the fishermen from Belize and the Caymans who used to fish in the area. Secluded and peaceful, these beautiful cays are only visited by occasional transiting sail boats and the Honduran fishing boats working in the area. They use traps to catch lobster, shrimp, and fish, which can be purchased at ridiculous prices or traded for rum and cigarettes. In fact, the whole area is a rich fishing ground with superb diving and snorkeling opportunities. November marks the end of the shrimp season and the beginning of the lobster season, when the idle lobster traps stored on a handful of cays are put back to work. These cays are under the care of a few fishermen, often assisted by guard dogs, who watch over the stored fishing equipment off season.



FISHING BOAT PASSING TRANSITING SAILBOAT



ANCHORAGE AT THE HOBBIES

Cayos Vivorillos, located 15NM SW of the Hobbies, on the south tip of Vivorillos Bank, offer an alternative anchorage, popular among cruising dive lovers. *Cayos Vivorillos* comprise two cays a couple of miles apart and a series of sand islets along the reef stretching NNW to SSE in between. It is protected from easterly seas but open to northers and its eastward side should be avoided, as dangerous breakers and numerous shoals and patches of coral head are widespread throughout. *Cayo Vivorillo Grande* on the southernmost tip of the reef, also known as Boga's Cay, is a small sand island which can be safely approached from the SW. In fact, there are nice anchoring opportunities in the lee of the reef all along its western edge, in 12-15ft of crystal clear waters and good holding sand. Some cruisers use a passage running between Gran Becerro Cay and *El Becerro* rock, on the south tip of *Cayos Becerro*, to make a northern approach to *Cayos Vivorillos* from the Hobbies anchorage. *Cayos Becerro*, laying NE of Vivorillos, are surrounded by countless shoals, coral heads and scattered reefs, largely awash at high tide, all around their perimeter and are better avoided.

Anchorage can also be taken on the NW side of *Cayos Caratasca*, a few miles east of *Cayos Cajones*, in the lee of the sand shoal stretching off its north tip. The anchorage, which can become pretty roly at times, should preferably be approached from the north.



Figure . CAYOS CAJONES TO CAYOS VIVORILLOS

ROATAN

ROATÁN

ROATÁN

35NM from Guanaja.

AWP: 16°20.843N--86°26.980W

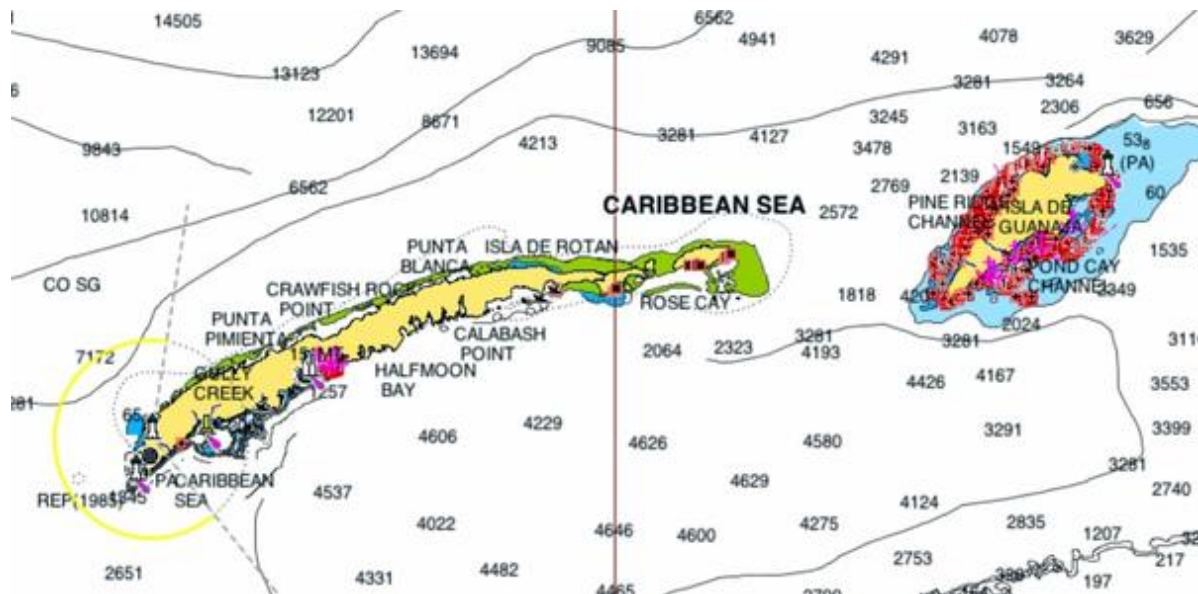


Figure . GUANAJA AND ROATÁN: TWO VIEWS

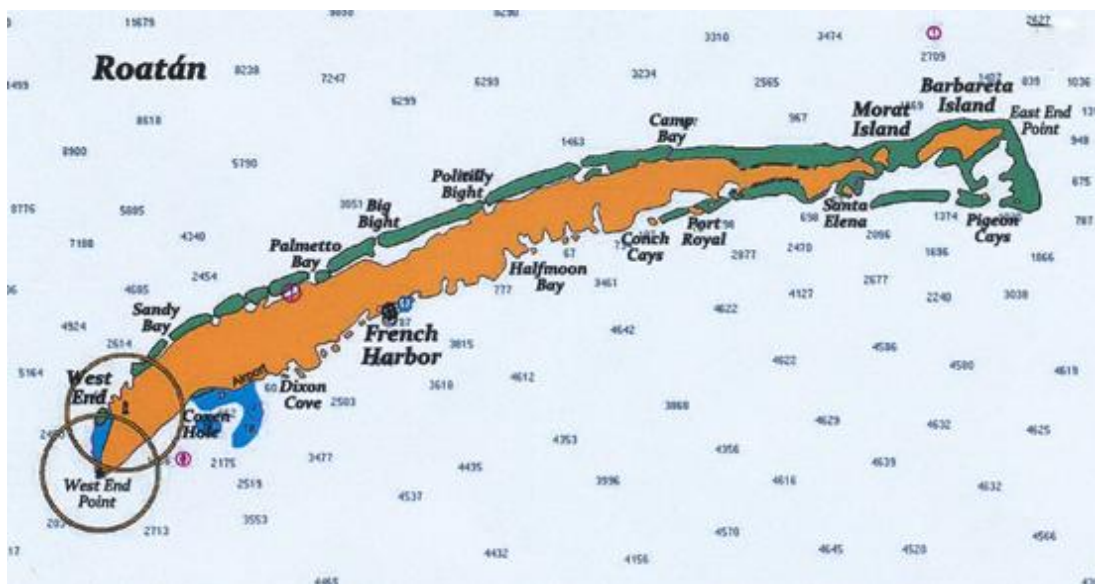


Figure . TWIN LIGHTS AT WEST END

Located about 15NM west of Guanaja, Roatán is the largest of the Bay Islands with a length of about 30 miles and a maximum width of about 3 miles at its widest point. Smaller

islands *Isla Morat* and *Isla Barbareta* stand close off its eastern edge, while *Isla Santa Elena* lays off its SE shore, separated from the mainland by a long stretch of mangrove swamp.



DENSELY WOODED ROATÁN

Roatán is a densely-wooded, hilly island, with a 735 foot peak about 7 miles from East End Point at the NE extremity of the island, and a "book end" mountain rising to similar heights some 6 miles from West End Point. The island is fringed by an extensive coral reef that extends up to one mile offshore all along its north and SE coasts, making the whole area largely inaccessible, except for a few spots which can be accessed through narrow passages. The west and SW sides, on the other hand, are steep-to and display numerous

deep ports and wide inlets protected by reefs and known locally as bights, which offer plenty of sheltered anchorages. The south coast features a number of salt-water lagoons forming a system of interior waterways and accommodates the vast majority of the population of the island, spread in numerous communities of varied sizes.

The main town on Roatán -- also the capital of the Bay Islands -- is Coxen Hole, named after a 17th century English pirate. Other substantial towns are French Harbor, Los Fuertes, Flowers Bay, West Bay and West End. The West End of Roatán is marked by a striped red and white beacon lighted at night. A conspicuous white church, with a red roof and a square bell tower rising about 2 miles ENE of West End Point, is also an excellent landmark in the area.

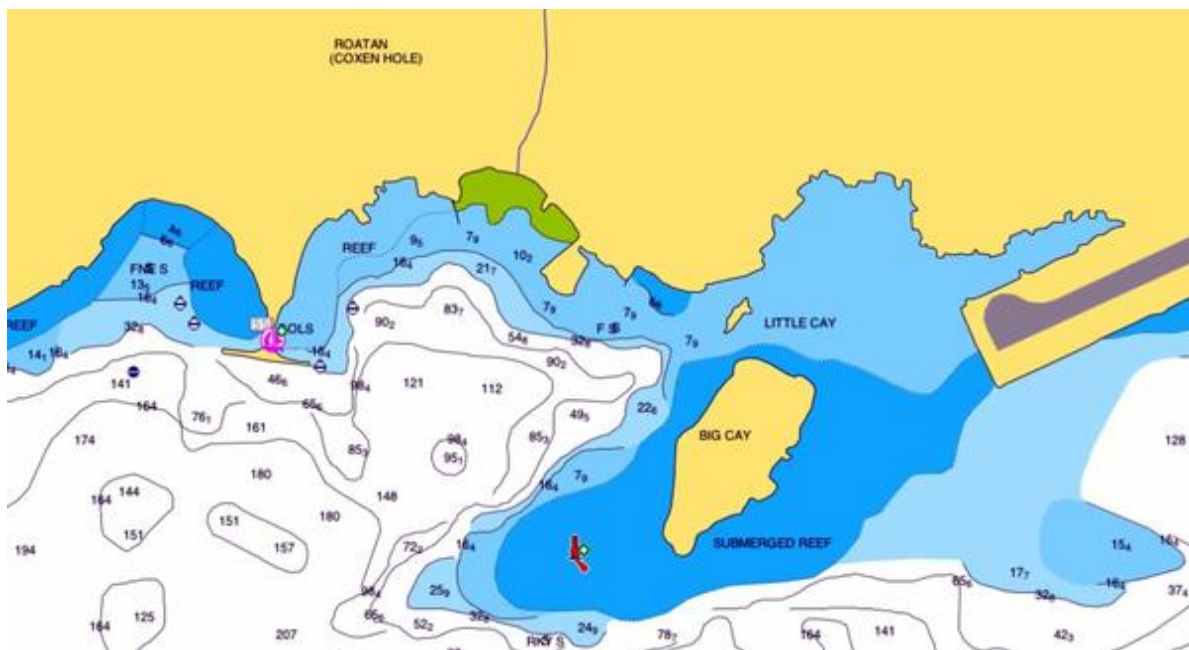


Figure . COXEN HOLE

The only off-lying dangers on the SW coast lie in the vicinity of Coxen Hole: *Banco Becerro*, just under water level near its center and with depths ranging from 7 to 19ft elsewhere, lies about 0.3 miles SW of Coxen Cay and is marked by a yellow pillar on its SW edge; some 0.5 miles further south lies *Banco Smith* ($16^{\circ}17'N$ -- $86^{\circ}35'W$), with minimum 15ft depths and also marked by a similar yellow pillar on its NW side; *Banco Cordelia*, located about one mile ESE of Coxen Cay, is over a mile long and partly awash and a popular spot for whale shark sightings.

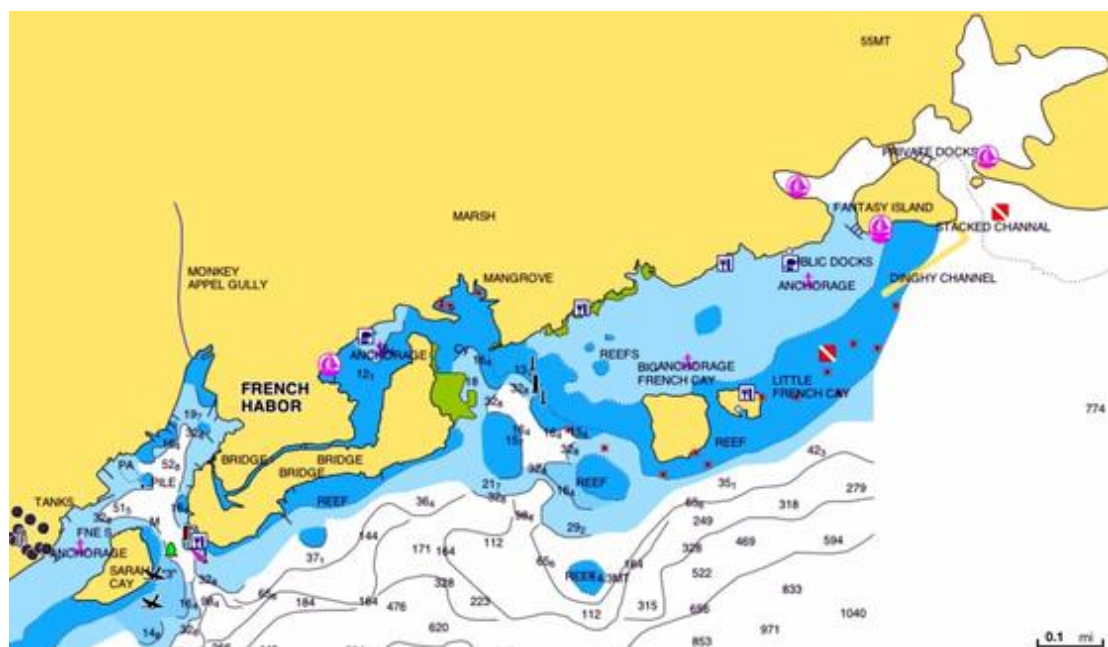


Figure . ANCHORAGES FROM FANTASY ISLAND WEST TO FRENCH HARBOR

In spite of the abundance of anchoring options along the south and west coast of Roatán, **French Cay Harbor** seems

the reasonable choice for a single stop on the island, given its sheltered, safe and convenient location. French Cay Harbor is located immediately east of French Harbor, in a well sheltered lagoon enclosed between the south shore of the island and a long reef running parallel to the shore line, with a few small cays rising on each extremity. Big and Little French Cay are set on the SW end, while *Cayo Ezequiel*, commonly known as Fantasy Island, limits the reef on the NE edge. Both Fantasy Island and Little French Cay are privately owned and host resorts open to the public.

To enter the lagoon, go to an approach waypoint at **16°20.843N--86°26.980W** off the entrance of the channel, marked by buoys, and eyeball your way north between the reef on the east side and a shoal on the west, up to a cut in the reef to starboard. Then, steer east from a position at **16°21.164N--88°26.977W** in the center of the cut, favoring the reef side to avoid the marked shoal in the area, and proceed NE towards the anchorage off Fantasy Island. Anchorage can be taken anywhere in 20-30ft and good holding sand, provided you avoid the shoal marked with a white buoy on the north side.



Figure . ENTERING FRENCH CAY HARBOR

Alternatively, vessels can also use the buoys provided by the **Roatan Marine Park** (<http://www.roatanmarinepark.com>) for a daily US\$10 mooring fee, which becomes \$40 weekly and \$100 monthly. In fact, as part of the park, French Cay Harbor is subject to a series of rules and regulations that visitors are expected to abide:



- It is forbidden to extract *ANY* living coral matter from the reef, including hard and soft coral, and any other organisms living on or around the reef, including conchs.
- Also strictly prohibited is the removal of dead coralline stone as well as sand and other reef material found adjacent to the reef and on the beach.
- *Anything* -- explosives, chemical products, and other materials -- that damages the coral system and that causes water contamination and general environmental contamination is prohibited.
- The use of nets, traps, or any other such means on the coral reef is prohibited, as are fishing with harpoons, capturing fish for aquaria, and the fishing of lobster and conchs in the Marine Reserve and in areas which have been declared a protected zone.
- *Line fishing is permitted throughout the Marine Reserve* and can be done from the shore, docks, and boats. However, line fishing from shore and within the lagoon is discouraged, as it removes both juvenile and adult reef dwelling species.

- All proprietors of fishing vessels, commercial vessels, and all other water vessels which are present in the seas are strictly prohibited from dumping combustibles, oil, grease, and all types of debris into the ocean as this affects the environment of the community. Anyone who disobeys this order will be fined severely (Lps. 50,000).

Monthly inspections of the moorings are reportedly carried out to clean lines and buoys, check shackles, and replace any damaged lines. However, it is highly advised to keep watch of the holding when the wind blows hard, as this is a popular anchorage with limited swing and drag space and accidents are not unusual. Park rangers patrol between Coxen Hole and Oak Ridge between 6am and 6pm, 7 days a week and make daily checks ensuring all boats display the proper sticker indicating payment for mooring use and date of expiration.



Together with West End, **French Cay Harbor** is one of the most popular anchorages on the island and it receives numerous visiting vessels during the hurricane off-season between November and May. But March is, beyond question, the peak of yachting season, when all mooring buoys seem to be in use and the anchorage crowded. A daily cruisers' net is conducted on VHS channel 72 at 9am every day except Sundays. Cruisers usually hang out at any of the two marinas in French Cay Harbor; the marina at *Fantasy Island Beach Resort, Dive and Marina*, and *Brooksy Point Yacht Club*, both located on the eastern edge of the harbor.

Fantasy Island Beach Resort, Dive and Marina is an all included upscale resort built on *Cayo Ezequiel* and connected to the mainland by a bridge. It has side-tie and Med-mooring slips with a berthing capacity for up to 35 yachts and offers a range of facilities and services for boat owners, including 220v/110v shore power, dockside water and cable TV, gasoline and diesel available upon request, free pickup and delivery of propane, vessel cleaning, etc. The berthing fee also includes full use of Fantasy Island resort facilities (bar and restaurant, discounts at the dive center, swimming pool, tennis courts, three private beaches, beach towels, free internet in the hotel lobby, trash disposal...).





<http://www.fantasyislandresort.com>

Dockmaster: William Mosher

dockmaster@fantasyislandresort.com

Phone: (504) 9855 6382

Brooksy Point Yacht Club (**16°21.50N--86°26.45W**) is a family owned and operated marina which opened to the public in 2011. Located in a well-protected cove not far from Fantasy Island, this is a laidback marina with a friendly atmosphere and reasonable rates. They have floating docks with 18 Med-mooring or side slips for boats up to 9ft draft. Their service offer includes water, electricity, Wi-Fi, laundry, transportation to the supermarket, trash disposal, fuel runs, dive packages, 24-hour security, Propane tank fills, and help with repairs/referrals to competent local businesses and boat storage services at no extra charge. All activities and events are open to anchor outs but require an inexpensive club membership.

<http://brooksypointyachtclub.com>

brooksy.pointyachtclub@gmail.com

Phone: (504) 3377 2246

VHF Channel 72

Next door to Brooksy Point Marina along the main paved road in French Cay you will find ***Sherman Arch's Iguana Farm***. While iguanas are a protected species on the island, they have long been --and still are -- the basic ingredient of a traditional Roatán stew. Sherman started his iguana hideout about 18 years ago as a shelter for local iguanas and today about 2700 iguanas roam freely about his property. The farm is family operated, with his four children and wife helping to feed and care for the iguanas. Feeding time is early afternoon and it is the best time to arrive if you want to handle the iguanas. Check this place out; it is only \$8/person admission and opens daily from 8 am to 4 pm.



<http://www.archsiguanaandmarinepark.com>

Info@ArchslguanaAndMarinePark.com

Phone (504) 2445 7743

There is hardly any locally grown produce on the island other than the few greens produced at the *Blue Harbour Plantation* hydroponic garden near Sandy Bay (www.blueharbortropicalarboretum.com) and a limited choice of seasonal fruits such as mangos, grapefruit, avocados, coconuts or oranges. Just about everything else comes from the mainland of Honduras or is shipped directly in from the US. Roatan has a variety of **grocery stores** ranging from the abundant small *pulperías* used by locals, to well equipped modern malls. And probably the best stocked supermarket on the island happens to be very conveniently located by the west side of French Cay Harbor.



Supermercado Heldon's, is a big modern supermarket with a warehouse appearance, offering a large selection of groceries and plenty of products from the US. It is located on French Harbor Road, near its intersection with the main road where a driveway connects it with the east side of the harbor, conveniently accessible by dinghy. **HELDON'S SUPERMARKET**

Dinghies are allowed to tie up to the private shrimp fleet dock during working hours, as a courtesy of the company. It should be noted that gates are locked and guard dogs freed by 5 pm. As an alternative, **Roatán Yacht Club**, a dive resort located a short distance south of Heldon's, along French Harbor Road, offers a 24 hour dinghy dock service for a daily 50Lmp fee. Just around the corner from the resort, *Carniagro* has fresh and frozen meat for sale, as well as pet food, gardening equipment and agricultural commodities.



"SHRIMP DOCK"

There are two **banks** within a short walking distance north of the supermarket; *Banco Atlantida*, featuring an international ATM machine, and *Banco Lafise*. Banks in Roatan operate weekdays from 8:00 am to 11:30 am, and from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm and mainly disburse the currency of the country, the Lempira. US Dollars are widely accepted across the island but change is usually returned in the national currency. If you have a debit or credit card, you can ask for a cash advance at any of the banking facilities on the island. Although ATM machines give an option for receiving US Dollars or Lempiras, they only dispense the local currency. It

is recommended to favor the use of foreign debit or credit cards to obtain cash advance at the banks over ATM withdrawals for security reasons.

French Harbor, a short drive from French Cay Harbor, is a thriving business center, where you will find all kinds of stores and service providers; several malls and numerous grocery stores, banks, hardware stores, internet providers, couriers and many other businesses. *The Bulk Gourmet*, a duty free wholesale food-importing company, has a great selection of duty free gourmet meats, wines, cheeses, beer, spirits and much more. It opens on weekdays from 9am to



5pm.



HARDWARE STORE NEAR THE SHRIMP DOCK



LOCAL RESTAURANTS SERVE DELICIOUS INEXPENSIVE MEALS

Island Transportation

Public transportation and taxis service all areas on Roatan. An inexpensive mini bus system with three different routes operates daily from Coxen Hole to various locations throughout the island, along the main road or *Carretera Principal*. The mini buses stop anywhere by waving at them, but service ends at 6 pm. Car rental is available from many agencies, mostly located in West End and the airport area, and most resorts, such as Fantasy Island Resort, offer a car rental service at their front desk. Most agencies will deliver a car to your lodging location but it must be returned at the airport. There are also mopeds and bicycles available for rent.

Taxis are an easy and affordable way to get around the island. Fees are regulated but one should ask about the fares and the currency preferred before entering the vehicle. A taxi ride from French Harbor to Coxen Hole costs some 45.00 Lmp. Rates should be negotiated if hiring the taxi by the hour or for tours, but as a reference, the regulated fare is 230 Lempiras per hour. During the day, taxi passengers can choose between a direct service trip called *privado* or sharing a cab called *colectivo*. Fees increase slightly when the night shift begins at 6 pm.

The Juan Manuel Galvez International Airport on Roatan (one of four international airports in Honduras, together with Tegucigalpa, La Ceiba and San Pedro de Sula) is located in Coxen Hole; it is served with direct flights from Houston, Atlanta, Miami, New York City, San Salvador and Milan. During the winter months, the island also receives flights from Montreal and Toronto. In addition, there is scheduled air service between Roatan and the three other airports in Honduras by Aerolineas Sosa and Isleña Airlines. Taxi service is readily available at the airport, as well as rental car options, including several international franchises.

Galaxy Wave (<http://www.roatanferry.com>), a state of the art 460 passenger water jet catamaran, operates two daily round trips between Roatan and La Ceiba. The ferry dock in Roatán is located in Dixon Cove, half way between Coxen Hole and French Harbor. In La Ceiba, the ferry departs from the *Muelle de Cabotaje* port, located a short taxi ride from

town. Taxi service is readily available both at the Roatán terminal and La Ceiba port facility.

Medical services

Roatán Public Hospital is the main hospital, but medical services are available on Roatan and at various other locations throughout the islands. RPH is located in Coxen Hole, where there is also a clinic, *Wood Medical Center*. However, *AKR Clinic Cornerstone Chamber and Medical Service* is probably the best place to go in a medical emergency. Located on the grounds of Anthony's Key Resort in Sandy Bay, they offer dependable hyperbaric healthcare to recreational and commercial divers, as well as general medical care for locals and visitors. The immaculate new premises feature an emergency room, an x-ray room, two consultation rooms, one observation room, a laboratory, and a pharmacy. It is staffed by three medical doctors, an EMT and a laboratory technician. Nonetheless, in case of serious injuries or severe condition, one should head to the mainland, as there are no advanced medical care services available on the island.

Most resorts are clustered on the west side of the island in two settlements named West Bay and West End. West End has a lively nightlife and a wide array of bars and restaurants and shops selling locally made jewelry, crafts, and souvenirs. In the main town of Coxen Hole, you will find banks, ATMs, all sorts of stores, a straw market, and even two cruise ship terminals nearby. Roatan has become an important port of call for cruise ships in the Western Caribbean since they started coming here in 2005. The island is also a hot spot for divers from all over the world (which is why hyperbaric

medical care is so critical) for the quality and extent of its coral reef and its crystal clear waters, rich in varied marine species. Snorkeling is also superb in clear waters with amazing visibility. There are numerous dive operators to suit all budgets and all-inclusive dive packages are available with many of the bigger resorts. Most dives range from US\$20 to \$30 per dive and person, while Open Water P.A.D.I. scuba diving certifications range from US\$200 to \$250.



ROATÁN – A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE



NATIVE ARTISTS SUCH AS CANDANCE HAMMOND AND VIRGINIA CASTILLO SELL THEIR ARTWORK AT THE LOCAL GIFT SHOPS



If you want to know about the **Garifunas** and their traditions and culture, do not miss *Yubu*, an off the beaten track Garifuna community center in Politilly Bight, located on the north shore of the island. The settlers of the Garifuna community of neighboring *Punta Gorda* gather there every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9am to 3pm to display a sample of their ancestral culture through music, songs, and dance. There is also an important Garifuna community in southern Oak Ridge, often called the “Venice of the

Caribbean” for its pastel colored houses on stilts scattered



along a net of canals.



MAGIC OVER ROATÁN

UTILA

UTILA

UTILA

Lying in a northeasterly-southwesterly position 18 miles southwest of Roatán and twenty miles NNW from La Ceiba, Utila is the smallest of the three Bay Islands, at 7.5 miles long and 2 miles wide, and the westernmost island of the group. Notwithstanding its volcanic origin and contrary to her sister islands, the majority of Utila stands at sea level, except for some low hills on its NE end. Pumpkin Hill is the highest peak on the island at under 300ft. The island features a low terrain of swamps and wetlands and it is thickly vegetated by mangrove, yet the soil is surprisingly fertile. With the exception of its southwest side, it is relatively steep-to. There are on average 100ft depths just 0.1 mile offshore, and deep water reaches the shore in many places. The north coast is indented by three shallow bays of considerable size: Rock Harbor, Turtle Harbor, and Carey Bay. On the southwest edge of Utila, in an area known as The Cays, the reef stretches some 5 miles in a southwest direction and numerous small cays lie scattered around, many unnamed.

The only settlement of substance on Utila, other than the odd secluded dive resort, is **East Harbor** or *Puerto Este*, located on an ample, well sheltered bay which gives name to the town. Lying on the southeast coast between two lagoons (the Upper Lagoon on the east and the Lower Lagoon on the west), East Harbor is the only deepwater harbor on the island. It extends almost a mile, with depths of 20-35ft and a coral sand bottom.



Figure . EAST HARBOR, UTILA

Approach is easy from a position at **16°05.07N-86°54.17W**, off the entrance into the harbor. The channel entrance is a 0.3 mile wide cut between reefs with depths of 18-35ft and shoaling progressively inside the bay to a depth of 18ft about 0.2 miles from the shore. From the waypoint above, the harbor can be safely entered by bearing a **35°** course towards the center of the bay, always keeping watch to avoid a few scattered coral heads. Sheltered anchorage can be taken anywhere on the east side of the harbor in 12-

15ft of good holding sand and turtle grass patches, away from the busy traffic area in the centre of the bay.



Figure . AERIAL OF UTILA

East Harbor presents an abundance of docks all along the shore from east to west, the great majority of which belong to the numerous dive centers and resorts of the island. In spite of being privately owned, permission is usually granted to tie visiting dinghies to their docks, provided they do not interfere with docking operations.

The easternmost edge of the harbor, known as "the Old Airport" for obvious reasons, is connected to the town by a bridge with spectacular views of the bay. The municipal dock is conveniently located in the central area of the harbor, next to the ferry dock, and it hosts the office of the immigration

authorities, the Port Captain headquarters, the Post Office and the Town Hall, all in a row. That particular location makes the hassle free process of clearing in and out of the country extremely easy; all you need to do is to visit the Port Captain's office with the customary documents, pop into the Immigration office next door to get the due stamps and return to the Port Captain for the final signatures and corresponding *zarpe*. As a matter of fact, just about everything you might need in Utila is within walking distance around the anchorage and along the main road or *Calle Principal*, which runs parallel to the shore all the way from The Point to Oyster Bed Lagoon.





Figure . ALONG THE CALLE PRINCIPAL IN EAST HARBOR, UTILA



You will find that Utila features a surprisingly diverse range of stores and *bodegas* (local grocery stores) where you can get your **supplies**, all gathered within walking distance. Local staples include beans, rice, chicken, and meats, but you can also find a full range of non-Honduran foods. A varied

selection of fresh fruit and vegetables can be purchased at *Bambino*, one of two ice cream parlors in town, as well as at *Paisano* (next to *Bundu Cafe*) and *Sandy Bay Bodega*, left of the ferry dock, in Sandy Bay. For general items, ***Bush's Supermarket*** is the largest and best stocked. Located close to the ferry dock, in a big stand-alone building, they also have a dock where cruisers can tie up their dinghies to do their shopping and fuel is for sale. *Riveras Supermarket*, a white building to the right of the ferry dock, is also a well stocked supermarket offering a wide range of imported products. For late shoppers, there is even a 7-11 in Sandy Bay, *Samantha's 7-11*, located in a blue building, just across from the fire station. ***JB's Carnicería***, offers a good selection of varied meat, along with general groceries at his store, not far from the ferry dock. For fresh fish, turn up at the Parrot's dock, behind *Bobby's Store*, at about 10am to meet Ray Bush, an honest and friendly local fisherman who sells the catch of the day at the dock and will clean and fillet it on request. *La Tienda del Pueblo* and *Archie's*, located just past the bank on the main street, are great for soft drinks, beer, wines, and spirits. *Archie's* is also deemed to be the best spot in town for exchanging US dollars or cashing travelers checks. There are also two bakeries, four hardware stores, a health clinic, a decompression chamber operated by professional staff, a series of internet cafes and computer stores, a few travel and shipping agencies, numerous gift shops, veterinary services (<http://www.utilaanimalrescue.org>) and a varied array of hotels, bars and restaurants, as well

as all kinds of different services.





But above all, there are some 17 scuba dive shops, centers and resorts on the island. Sitting on the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere, there are endless opportunities to dive and explore the island's rich and varied sea life, which includes over 500 species of fish, about 1,000 manatees, and an incredible number of dolphins. In addition, Utila is rated as one of the top snorkel destinations in the world and boasts of being one of the few places on the planet where the amazing whale shark can be spotted near shore all year round. Into the bargain, Utila is also known as the cheapest place in the world to obtain a scuba diving certification, with prices currently standing at US\$270 for an Open Water or Advanced Open Water course, including accommodations. Not surprisingly, the island has become a worldwide dive destination and the population has increased from a bare 1,500 inhabitants in the 80s to the present estimated 7,000. As a consequence, the once secluded quiet small settlement of East Harbor has become a thriving town, swarming with activity from early in the morning until late at night and there is always a partying atmosphere lying in the air. There is no shortage of lively bars and outdoor parties and the

varied dining options suit all tastes and budgets, ranging from the street side *baleadas* (tortilla snacks filled with beans, cheese and onion) for about 20 Lempiras to a nice American/European style meal averaging 200-250 Lempiras, while local restaurants charge in the region of 100-150 Lempiras for a regular menu.



Services -- ATMs, Communications, Transportation

The only bank on Utila is Banco Atlantida, located across the street from the municipal dock. Banco Atlantida will exchange dollars and offer cash withdrawals on your debit and credit cards. There are also two ATMs on the island but it is not unusual to find them out of order or cash during busy times. Alternatively, *Archie*, the beverage store on the main street, has become a popular spot to exchange money and get cash advances as a purchase at the store, given they charge no extra fees, work beyond banking hours and there is no need to wait at long bank lines. Almost all of the businesses on Utila will accept US dollars but they also offer a reduced exchange rate. Besides, cash is usually preferred, as many lack the necessary equipment to use credit cards.

While cell phones are becoming increasingly popular, most inhabitants and local businesses in Utila use land lines. Tigo, Claro, and Digicel are the main cell phone providers but they only work with 850 and 1900 MHz GSM frequencies and, unless your cell phone works with any of those frequencies, it will be no use on the island. However, that should not pose a problem, as inexpensive useful phones can be easily purchased in East Harbor. On the other hand, most internet cafes also offer local and international phone call services. The majority of dive centers and many other businesses around the bay have WiFi service that reaches the anchorage, so you will enjoy free internet connection on board -- with varied degrees of quality, needless to say.

The standard transportation on the island includes golf carts, scooters, 4 wheelers, bikes and *moto taxis*. There are very few cars, vans and trucks on the island and those are mainly for business vehicles, delivery companies, and taxis. In fact, there is no chance to rent a car in Utila. Not that it is needed; you can walk almost anywhere or use any of the alternative means of transport mentioned above to explore the island. They are great fun, suit all budgets and are readily available for rent at numerous spots along the main road. The *Utila Princess* offers a ferry service twice a day between La Ceiba and Utila and air service is available daily via *Sosa Airlines*. There are also some charter air services to Roatan and other locations on the mainland, which can be booked at *Worldwide Travel* (alicewwtravel@yahoo.com) and *Morgan's Travel* (UtilaMorgansTravel@yahoo.com), the two travel agencies on the island.

Things to do and see on Utila

In spite of the dramatic changes on the island in recent years, Utila retains its unique offbeat character and features a laidback, low key friendly atmosphere. East Harbor is a charming town, perfect for walking and biking, with easy access to great snorkeling and Scuba diving. Big Bight and Red Cliff beaches, on the east shore, host a variety of water sports such as kayaking, kite surfing, and windsurfing that attract many visitors. Locals prefer Chepes Beach, a neat lovely public beach, located on the western end of the main road. Another 15 minute walk past Chepes Beach lies Blue Bayou, a private beach located at the entrance to the Lower Lagoon. For a 40 Lempira entrance fee, you will have a beautiful unpopulated beach with a bar for drinks and bathrooms on site, all for yourself.



VIEW OF THE ANCHORAGE FROM THE BRIDGE AT THE POINT

Gunter's Driftwood Gallery is an art gallery located just off *Cola de Mico* Road where Gunter, an Austrian diver who settled on the island three decades ago, has driftwood carved wood items, coral jewelry, and a series of paintings on display. Gunter is always very friendly and a great source of local information and interesting experiences. Reputedly one of the most experienced divers in the world and now in his 70s, he still goes diving on his bicycle in full gear, scuba tank included, every single morning.

The **Iguana Research & Breeding Station**, founded in 1997, plays a crucial role in the conservation of the island's endemic iguana species *Ctenosaura Bakeri*, called "Swamper" or "Wishiwilli". Located a short walk away from the main road, visitors to the station are given a full tour, explaining the habits of this endangered species, as well as getting an overview of general Utilian wildlife and have the opportunity to see the Swamper at different ages, as well as the Highlander and Green Iguanas. Station guides also carry out a series of interesting fun tours to the black mangrove forest, the Dead Lagoon, the Fresh Water Caves and the Bat Caves in the airport area and Pumpkin Hill. The exhibition is open on weekdays from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm and 1:30 pm to 5:00 pm and there is a 60 Lempira entrance fee. All

donations go to the station upkeep and Swamper protection.



<http://www.utila-iguana.de>

Station@Utila-Iguana.de

The Cays, a series of small cays clustered on the southwest edge of the island, stand on foul ground but can be accessed by low draft vessels. They offer a totally different view of Utila, with pristine, secluded white sand beaches and amazing snorkeling opportunities on the surrounding reef. The largest of these cays, such as Pigeon and Jewel Cays, are actually populated and feature small restaurants and lodging facilities. Other cays, such as Bells, Southeast, Sandy, and Morgan Cay are all privately owned and host nice houses for rent. Uninhabited Water Cay is probably the nicest of all and there is superb snorkeling off the windward side of the cay. In spite of lacking any sort of facilities, it is a very popular place to camp out. There are plenty of options to reach the cays from different spots on the island but Mr. Donald, for one,

makes two daily trips from the municipal dock on board of his white dory.

CAYOS COCHINOS

CAYOS COCHINOS

CAYOS COCHINOS

22NM from Roatán

24NM from Utila

18NM from La Ceiba

AWP: 15°58.727N--86°29.893W



Figure . ALL THE LITTLE COCHINOS

The *Cayos Cochinos* or Hog Islands are located on a wide, shallow continental shelf, 8 miles north from mainland Honduras, 22NM from Roatán, 24NM from Utila and 18NM from La Ceiba. *Cayos Cochinos* is made up of two larger islands and thirteen small cays which are part of the greater Bay Islands archipelago. The larger islands are named *Cochino Grande* and *Cochino Pequeño* and both are hilly and densely wooded with tropical forest. *Cochino Grande* rises up to 469ft at its highest point and is close to one square mile in area. The north side of the island is steep-to, but a coral spit, with minimum 20ft depths, extends 1.3 miles from the east side and a string of cays and rocks lies a short distance off the south side. A 39ft tall steel lighthouse in disuse, painted with red and white horizontal bands, stands idle on the northern side of the island. *Cochino Pequeño*, lying 1 mile

farther SW, rises to a height of 459ft and has an area of 0.5 square mile.

While the ample channel between the two islands has average depths of 80ft, a steep-to coral ledge, with numerous cays and sandbanks, extends about 3 miles SW from the islands. From east to west, the cays are: *Cayo Balfate* (North East Cay), *Cayo Largo Arriba* (Upper Long Cay), *Cayo Cordero* (Lamb Cay), *Cayo Largo Abajo* (Lower Long Cay), *Cayo Redondo* (Round Cay), *Cayos Chachahuat* (Upper Monitor and Lower Monitor), *Cayo Gallo* (Chicken Cay), *Cayo Paloma* (Bubby Cay), *Cayo Culebra* (North West Cay), *Cayo Timón* (North Sandy Cay), *Cayo Pelón* (South Sandy Cay) and *Cayo Bolaños* (South West Cay). Most of the cays are uninhabited and have traditionally been used as shelters by Garífuna fishermen during their fishing trips at sea.

Cayos Cochinos form part of the MesoAmerican Barrier Reef System and have been identified by the Smithsonian Institution, The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and the World Bank as a key section of the Barrier Reef to preserve. In 1993, the Honduran government designated these cays and surrounding sea a Marine Biological Reserve. As a consequence, anchoring is prohibited within the park limits and anchorage is restricted to a sheltered bay on the west coast of *Cochino Grande* where park authorities have established a series of mooring buoys for visiting vessels.



Figure . APPROACH TO COCHINO GRANDE

Approaching Cayos Cochinos from the north is straightforward and free of hazards. From an approach waypoint at **15°58.727N--86°29.893W** off the entrance between the two Cochinos, set a SE course to a position at **15°58.157N--86°29.252W** off the mouth of the wide channel into the bay and eyeball your way in deep waters between two reefs towards the center of the bay until you are in sight of a series of red and white mooring buoys; the red buoys are meant for visiting vessels up to 45ft, while the white buoys are meant for diving purposes and should only be used by dinghies. Just help yourself to any of the red buoys and enjoy the views while you wait for the park

rangers visit, in 45ft of crystal clear water.



ANCHORED AT CAYOS COCHINOS

There is a daily fee of US\$10 per person charged to visit the **Cayos Cochinos National Marine Monument** and park rangers patrol regularly to ensure compliance with all regulations. Laws prohibit all commercial fishing, netting, and trapping within the marine park. Although local [Garifuna](#) are allowed to fish with hand lines and qualified Garifuna fishermen can catch lobster during certain seasons in designated areas, netting and spear fishing are also off-limits for them. *All* visitors to the Cayos Cochinos National Marine Monument must register and report their entrance at the research station located on *Cochino Pequeño*. Park rangers will provide information on the rules and regulations to stick to within the park limits, to ensure minimal visitor

impact on the environment during their stay.



SOME OF THE BUOYS ARE MERELY PLASTIC BOTTLES

Cayos Cochinos enjoy a rich biodiversity and contain critical habitats, such as sea grasses and mangroves, that serve as breeding, nesting, and foraging grounds for the vast array of species found in the cays. It is home to approximately 66 species of hard coral, 225 species of reef fish, over 160 species of plants, 70 species of birds, 22 species of reptiles and 11 species of mammals; and it is visited by whale sharks, sea turtles, bottlenose dolphins and other migratory species. Diving and snorkeling are excellent around the islands, with black coral reefs, wall diving, cave diving, seamounts even a plane wreck. But probably the most characteristic species on the cays is the **pink boa constrictor**. Also known as *Boa Constrictor Imperator*, it is endemic on the two bigger islands. The reduced melanin levels of these boas cause them to be more lightly colored and that unique feature makes them highly prized among collectors. Their popularity led to a very profitable illegal traffic to the US and Europe and the intensive smuggling has

pushed the species to the verge of extinction.



Cayos Cochinos are primarily inhabited by two Garifuna communities: Chachahuate, located on *Cayo Chachahuate* and East End on *Cochino Grande*. The Garifunas from the cays travel regularly to and from the mainland Garifuna settlements of Corozal, Sambo Creek, Nueva Armenia and Río Esteban to sell their fish at the market and visit family and friends. Local Garifunas are direct descendants of the original 2,248 Garifunas abandoned on Roatán by the English in 1797 and they still maintain their language, traditions, religion, social organization and folklore.

Most Garifunas not only speak Spanish, but also use the Igñeri dialect, a combination of Arahuaaco, French, Swahili and Bantu languages. Unfortunately, Garifunas are subject to poor sanitary conditions; lack any basic infrastructure from running water to electricity; and have a high illiteracy rate. They survive basically on subsistence farming and fishing and, only recently, an incipient service sector timidly growing around ecotourism. As a matter of fact, the rapid environmental degradation that occurred in recent decades

placed the population's livelihood and the ecological balance of the cays at great risk, and the authorities were forced to take urgent measures. As a result, the Marine National Monument of *Cayos Cochinos* was created to preserve and enhance the marine environment of the cays and promote the living conditions of the local Garifuna communities, focusing their efforts on generating sustainable economic growth based on ecological and scientific tourism. And that is why the Marine Monument is so fiercely protected by rules and regulations.



EAST END, COCHINO GRAND

Cayo Cochino Grande, also known as *Cayo Mayor*, is home to the community of East End, consisting of a cluster of small huts with walls made of royal palm, sugar cane; and cement blocks, which are gathered around a cozy beach surrounded by lush vegetation and strewn with *cayucos* (dugout canoes), and protected from the swell by a shallow reef. *Cabañas y Restaurante Laru Beya* is a community project run by locals

and one of the few hotels on the cays. It offers rustic but cozy lodgings and delicious Garifuna fare in a beautiful setting, and the opportunity to mingle with the locals and tour the island by land and sea with experienced local guides. The proceeds go directly to the local community and are used for the general welfare.

<http://cayoscochinoshonduras.webs.com>



jofravehn@yahoo.com

Phone: (504) 9489-6058 / (504) 99.18.89.31

Other than the settlement at East End, the island is largely deserted except for a few privately owned holiday homes and an upscale eco-resort on the north side of the island, not far from the anchorage. *Turtle Bay Eco Resort* is an all-inclusive dive resort located on a 10 acre site by the crystal clear waters off the coast of the island. The hotel restaurant has stunning views of the sea and is open to visitors, but they will only accept dinner reservations if called in advance.



<http://www.turtlebayecoresort.com>

info@turtlebayecoresort.com

Cell : (504) 9842 3231

Not a single road crosses the uneven terrain of the islands and consequently, there is a complete absence of cars, motorbikes, bicycles or any other means of ground transportation. Numerous trails connect different spots of *Cochino Grande*, providing excellent hiking opportunities and the chance to observe the fauna and flora of the tropical forest, the pink boa being only one the 22 species of non-venomous reptiles inhabiting the island. There is an interesting trail leading from the beach at the anchorage to the lighthouse on top of the hill, through uneven steep terrain in some stretches. Climbing to the top of the rocket shaped, out-of-service lighthouse is not permitted for safety reasons; the experience of climbing up a rusty ladder in the swinging narrow tower can be rather unnerving. But if you cannot resist the temptation and make it to the top, you will be rewarded with a breathtaking panoramic view of the cays. The trail is unmarked and can be confusing at times, so it is

advised to hire a local guide to undertake the enterprise. You can arrange for one of the guys who will most certainly approach your boat in dugout canoes selling fish and crafts to guide you along the way and point out the wild animals that will probably go unnoticed by you in the surrounding



landscape.

Cayo Cochino Pequeño, also known as *Cayo Menor*, has been preserved solely for research purposes and access is restricted to scientists and volunteers associated with the Honduran Coral Reef Foundation, which manages the park and has its headquarters in La Ceiba (fundcayos@caribe.hn). The only long term residents on the island are the park rangers, a handful of Navy guards, and visiting researchers. They all work and live at a small research base located on the south edge of the island, containing a dive center, laboratory facilities, several accommodation buildings, and catering facilities.



VIEW OF COCHINO PEQUEÑO FROM THE BEACH AT THE ANCHORAGE

Cayo Chachahuate, located over a mile south of *Cochino Grande*, is a tiny strip of white sand standing on a reef flat about 3ft deep, sloping gently to a 35ft wall with a sandy bottom. *Cayo Chachahuate* used to be larger but, thanks to 1998's Hurricane Mitch's devastating effects in the area, the cay lost about 150ft in length. The Garífuna fishermen from Sambo Creek, related to Chachahuate settlers by family bonds, use the cay as a temporary base during their fishing trips. Chachahuate is home to some 45 households and has an average population of 90 people, rising to 200 during the peak fishing season. The cay is crammed with tiny modest huts and there is no electricity or running water. Cooking is done at a shared outdoor kitchen and toilets are communal. The atmosphere is laidback and lively, and the friendly locals are happy to share their way of life, culture and folklore with visitors. Some small restaurants serving Garifuna cooking and an eco-lodge have been built in recent years with support from the Cayos Cochinos Foundation and the World Wildlife Fund, to provide basic tourist services to the new influx of visitors, and charter sail boats from Roatan and Utila

use Chachahuate as a stop off in their trips to *Cayos Cochinos*.



VIEW FROM THE LIGHTHOUSE AT COCHINO GRANDE



THE MOODS OF THE CAYOS COCHINOS



LA CEIBA



LA CEIBA

LA CEIBA

20 NM from Utila

21 NM from *Cayo Cochino Grande*

34 NM from Roatán

AWP: 15°48.239N--86°45.613W



Figure . ENTERING LA CEIBA

La Ceiba has an important commercial port with heavy cargo traffic and it is a port of entry. However, besides being an unsuitable place for small vessels, clearing procedures are far easier on Guanaja, Roatán or Utila, also ports of entry, where the necessary authorities are used to dealing with recreational vessels. In the face of the inadequacy of the commercial port facilities, a new port was built in 1993 a couple of miles further east, to service the fishing and commercial fleet of the Bay Islands. *Puerto de Cabotaje de La Ceiba*, popularly known as *Muelle de Cabotaje*, is located in the Cangrejal River Delta, very well protected by two solid breakwaters marked with lighted beacons at both ends.

The murky waters of *Río Cangrejal* spread some distance seaward, dyeing the seawaters off *Punta Cangrejal* a

brownish tone. Situated on lowland and surrounded by thick vegetation, the channel entrance is indiscernible from a distance, but an approach waypoint at **15°48.239N--86°45.613W** will place you a quarter of a mile north of the east breakwater, in some 30ft depths which decrease gradually toward the shores. Continue on a SSW course to a position at **15°48.093N--86°45.657W** off the channel entrance, in full sight of the breakwaters in barely 8ft of water, and proceed into the muddy waters of the channel in some 9ft depths on average, favoring the west bank to avoid the shoal on the east side of the channel, off the commercial port. The concrete commercial docks of the *Muelle Comercial* are located on the west bank of the shipping channel and the wooden docks on the northern side of the port would have been used by visiting sailboats in the past.

However, a series of security incidents in recent years has served as a deterrent for cruisers who now avoid that spot and head straight to *La Ceiba Shipyard*, the only available marina in the area, a little further south down the river. *Lagoon Marina*, located next door, had been a tropical haven for cruisers for almost a decade until recently. Unfortunately, the tragic murder of owner Toni Vorteler in 2007 marked a turning point and, although widow Rita still continued running the marina for some time, at present it is closed and

listed

for

sale.



La Ceiba Shipyard Astilleros y Marina

More a shipyard than a marina, it has available dockage for a few boats tied alongside a concrete dock equipped with electricity, fresh water (albeit with a high iron content that may leave a residue), WIFI, and cable TV. The premises have 24 hour security service and include some bare bathrooms and a small but fairly well stocked chandlery. There is no fuel dock, but the marina can arrange tanker delivery. All kinds of marine repairs and servicing are carried out by the resident team of professionals but boat owners are also allowed to work on their vessels. The yard has a 120-ton travelift suitable for multihulls with a beam of up to 25' 4" and offers safe long term storage on the hard. And, since it has been designated as a Marine Duty Free Zone, all parts imported through the yard are free of duties and taxes for foreign flag



vessels.



LA CEIBA MARINA DOCK MARINA OFFICE/ CHANDLERY



La Ceiba Shipyard Astilleros y Marina

Tel: (011) 504-508-9813/Cell: 504-3370-6442

Fax: (011) 504-406-7039

VHF Channel 69

<http://www.laceibashipyard.com>

laceibashipyard@gmail.com

La Ceiba Shipyard is located 8 miles east of La Ceiba, at the end of a 2 mile dirt path leading to the main road to the city. There is usually a taxi available at the premises, but in case there is not, the office staff will hire one for you. The ride to town is around 50 Lempiras per person, but *always agree on the fare before you get in the cab.*

Transportation and Other Services

Getting around La Ceiba is easy and cheap both by taxi and by bus. The standard taxi rate within the city limits is 30 Lempiras per person, rising to 35 Lempiras after dark, and higher, the later in the evening. Numerous buses serve almost every available route for a 13 Lempira fare within the city. Buses pick up passengers anywhere along the way until they reach full capacity and they will not stop if loaded. *Golosón International Airport*, located on the highway to Tela, 7 miles west of La Ceiba, offers domestic flights to Roatán, Guanaja, Utila, Puerto Lempira, San Pedro de Sula and Tegucigalpa, served by Aerocaribe, Sosa, Avianca and Lanhsa airlines and international flights to Grand Cayman and Canada served by Cayman, Air Transat and Sunwing airlines.

La Ceiba was officially founded on August 23, 1877 and named after a giant ceiba tree standing by the old dock, which ended up in the sea in late 2007. The tree was so big that the first Garifuna settlers thought of it as the ladder used by God to climb down from Heaven in His visits to Earth. The port city of La Ceiba developed rapidly with the expansion of the banana plantations in the area. The commerce of this fruit was so profitable that it caught the attention of big international companies that subsequently decided to establish bases in La Ceiba and so the city started to grow with the inflow of national migrants and foreigners.

SUPERMERCADO PAIZ

At present, La Ceiba has an estimated population of some 250,000 inhabitants, dispersed in 170 residential areas called *colonias* or *barrios*, over approximately 6,000 hectares (approximately 23 square miles). It is the capital of the

Honduran department of Atlántida and the third most important city in the country, as well as one of the main ports. The city has countless stores offering all kinds of items and services, plenty of hotels, banks, ATM machines, and internet cafes downtown. There is no shortage of grocery and liquor stores, or well stocked supermakets like *Supermercado Paiz* on Calle 7, across from Parque Swinford, or *Supermercado La Colonia*, in Plaza El Toronjal and *Maxi Despensa* on Avenida San Isidro. *Mall Megaplaza*, open from 10am to 9pm on the road to *Muelle de Cabotaje*, is a modern mall with a supermarket, a cinema, food court, internet cafes, banks and ATMs. But the best source of fresh dairy, local meat and seasonal fruit, vegetables, and legumes is to be found at the street market stalls and stores between San Isidro and Atlántida Avenues.



DOZING OFF IN THE HEAT OF NOON AT THE MARKET



Healthcare in Honduras is quite like everywhere else in the rest of the Caribbean. On the one hand, the government provides a basic albeit insufficient safety net system for those at the lower end of the economic ladder. On the other hand, a widespread private healthcare system provides modern, well-equipped facilities at prices a fraction of those in Western countries, and La Ceiba is no exception. While a visit to the doctor ranges between US\$5 and \$15, a private hospital room costs in the region of \$35 a day and complex surgery is performed for as little as \$1,000. Public *Hospital Atlántida* and private centers *Hospital Vincente Dantoni*, *Medicentro* and *Hospicentro* are among the top quality medical facilities with well-trained and attentive resident and visiting bilingual doctors, on-site laboratories, and up-to-the-minute diagnostic equipment. The above mentioned are only a few, as there are several other private clinics and practitioners dealing with most medical specialties, from dentistry to plastic surgery, readily available downtown.

Hospital Atántida. Boulevard Hospital Atlántida, Bº las Brisas.

Phone: (504) 2441-4627.

Hospital Vincente D'antoni, Barrio Solares Nuevos, Avenida Morazán. Phone:(504)2443-2264,

Emergencies: (504)2443-1335 Fax: (504)2443-2254

info@hvdantoni.com , <http://hospitalvicentedantoni.com>.

MediCentro, Barrio El Iman, Calle 13. Phone: (504) 2440-3737

Hospicentro, Avenida 14 de Julio, Phone: (504)2443

hospicentro_okens@okens.com ,
<http://hospicentrookens.com>.

The gastronomic offerings in La Ceiba are varied and abundant, and suit all tastes and budgets; ranging from small family businesses serving inexpensive local dishes to fancy restaurants offering international food. The following are only some of the restaurants popular among locals, visitors and ex-pats alike for their food and atmosphere: *Bar Restaurante Expatriados*, located on a rooftop at the end of Calle 12 in Barrio El Imán; *El mundo de Amelie*, also on Calle

12; *Downtown Grill* on Calle 16; or *The Mango Tango* on Calle 1 along the beach.

STREET FOOD STALLS ARE GREAT FOR A QUICK REFRESHING SNACK





LA CEIBA CITY HALL

The *Zona Viva*, in Barrio La Isla, is the hotspot of the dynamic nightlife in the city and, in spite of being considered a safe area, it is recommended to use a taxi at night. As a matter of fact, walking alone at night in certain areas of the city should be avoided altogether, as robberies, even murder, are not uncommon crimes. With some exceptions like the lovely *Parque Central* or the town hall, the downtown wears a tired rundown atmosphere and the city beaches are polluted and, frankly, insecure. In view of this situation, authorities finally intervened in order to polish the image of a city celebrated as the "Capitol of Ecotourism" and have just refurbished the old commercial pier for recreational purposes and beautifully rehabilitated the promenade.

As a matter of fact, La Ceiba has always been the tourist hub of Honduras due to its coastal location, its buzzing nightlife,

and the biodiversity of the natural parks and recreational areas around the city. Many people use it as a base to visit Pico Bonito National Park, the Cangrejal River and the Cuero and Salado Wildlife Refuge, or as a stop off on their way to the Bay Islands and the Cayos Cochinos.



Speaking of Pico Bonito, *Parque Nacional Pico Bonito* (Beautiful Peak) on the *Nombre de Dios* mountain range, is named after the highest peak *Pico Bonito*, rising abruptly 8,478 ft from sea level only 12 miles from the coast. The park's tropical rain forest features numerous rivers and creeks, breathtaking waterfalls, and turbulent currents. The largest, steepest and fastest flowing of these rivers is the 15.5 mile long *Río Cangrejal*, which borders the eastern edge of La Ceiba and divides the city in two before flowing into the Atlantic. *Río Cangrejal* owes its name to the abundance of crabs in its estuary - unfortunately, in times past. However, it boasts of crystal clear waters surrounded by lush tropical forest and spectacular scenery, and is popular for its Class III-IV river rafting.

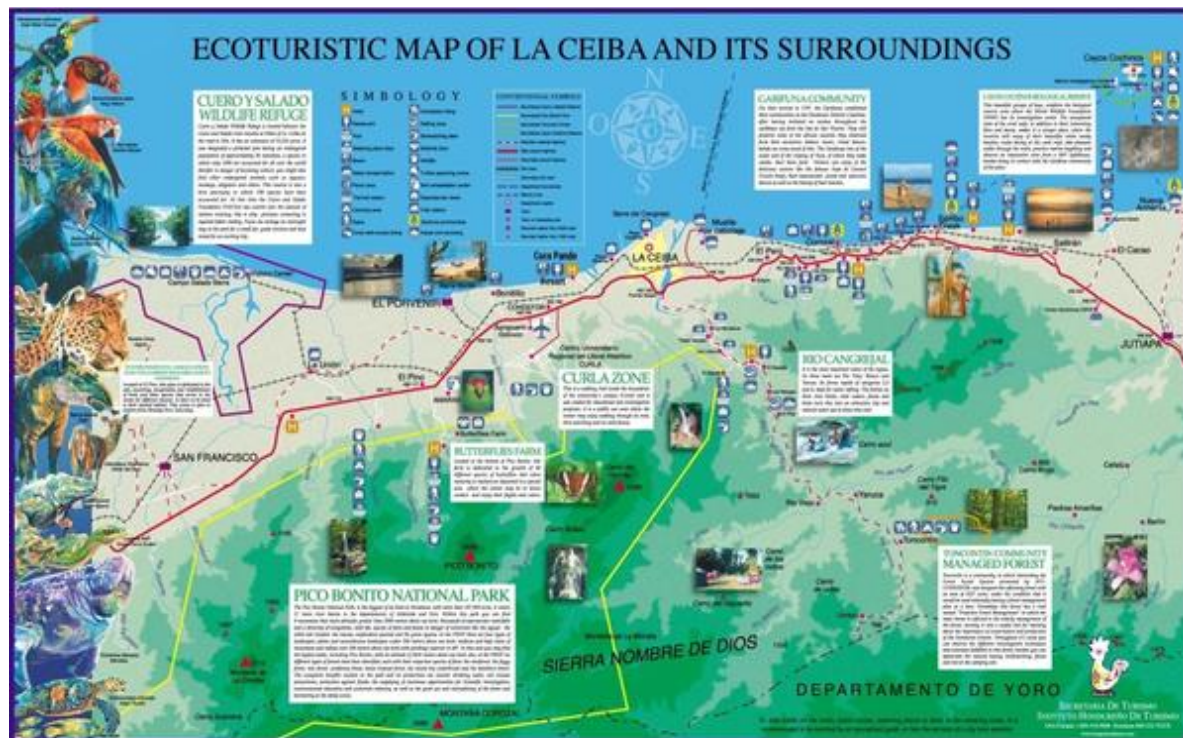


Figure . THE ECOLOGICAL ZONES OF LA CEIBA

The park is home to abundant wildlife, much of it endangered, including jaguars, armadillos, monkeys, wild peccaries, ocelots, giant anteaters, and porcupines. There is a series of hiking trails into the Pico Bonito National Park that can be accessed from the Cangrejal River through the Visitor's Center, located at km 8.5, just before *La Villa de Soledad B&B*. There is a second entrance at *El Pino* village, about 9 miles west of La Ceiba, on the highway to Tela. The entrance fee to the park is US\$8 for foreigners and the charge for guided treks is US\$20 -- worth every penny!

Fundación Parque Nacional Pico Bonito (FUPNAPIB)

Colonia Palmira, Carretera La Ceiba-Tela.

Phone:(504)2442-3044

fupnapib@gmail.com.

Refugio de Vida Silvestre Cuero y Salado is a wildlife refuge comprising 13,225 hectares (over fifty square miles) of wetlands and coastline, rich in biodiversity and home to a myriad of plants and animals endangered elsewhere in Honduras. There is a total of 15 rivers and watersheds that feed into a network of lagoons, creeks and canals, providing the ideal habitat for the greatly endangered manatee and other species such as turtles, crocodiles and caimans, as well as the 35 mammal species that have been identified within the reserve's boundaries. Toucans, aracarís, motmots, oropendolas, parrots, and hummingbirds are only some of the 196 bird species living in this park where the birdwatching is spectacular. Access to the refuge is from the community of La Unión, on the road to Tela, where a hand pushed railroad cart carries visitors to the park entrance. Once in the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, tours are basically done by boat through a series of aquatic trails leading to the most interesting spots. In addition to the US\$10 entrance fee, guided canoe and boat tours charge different fares ranging from US\$17 to US\$25.

Fundación Cuero y Salado (FUCSA)

Edificio Ferrocarril Nacional, Zona Mazapán.

Phone: (504) 2443 0329

fuksa@televisab.com



RÍO DULCE

Río Dulce

RÍO DULCE

IT IS ADVISED THAT YOU DO *NOT* ANCHOR OUT ON THE RIVER—IT IS *NOT SAFE*. The marinas are relatively inexpensive and have security guards. There have been boardings over the years on the river against anchored boats, some of which have resulted in death.

135 NM from Utila

140 NM from La Ceiba

AWP: 15°50.581N--88°43.776W



Figure . LA CEIBA TO RÍO DULCE

From La Ceiba to Rio Dulce

When ready to leave La Ceiba, backtrack to the approach waypoint at **15°48.239N--86°45.613W**, north of the east breakwater, and proceed on a NW course to leave some distance from the unsafe coastal waters before heading towards *Cabo Tres Puntas*, 10 miles NE from Livingston, the threshold to *Río Dulce*. As mentioned before, street crime is rampant on the impoverished mainland and a solitary recreational craft can be a tempting target for opportunistic pirates. Two incidents involving violent boarding to sailboats en route between Río Dulce and the Bay Islands have been reported recently not far off the mainland. The most recent took place west of Punta Sal (marked with a red circle on the chart), close enough to shore to be in range of the boats powered by outboards and regularly used by bad guys, often disguised as fishermen. The section of the coast between La Ceiba and *Cabo Tres Puntas* is remote and secluded, with a few scattered populated areas such as Tela or Puerto Cortés. The coast line consists mainly of low sandy terrain surrounded by thick vegetation and backed by a series of

mountain ranges. There are swamps and marshes a short distance inland and numerous streams discharge into the sea, among them *Rio Motagua*, on the west side of *Bahía de Omoa*, which marks the boundary between Honduras and Guatemala.

Bahia de Amatique lies between Guatemalan *Cabo Tres Puntas* and *Punta Gorda* (about 13.5 miles NW on Belizean soil), where a mild one knot current runs in an ENE direction around *Cabo Tres Puntas*. Many cruisers on their way to Río Dulce choose the area at the lee of the cape as a rest stop before heading to Livingstone, so they can be in time for the first high tide of the day. *Bahia de Amatique* receives the fresh waters of the *Río Dulce*, the largest of the rivers flowing into the bay, and is subject to a regular wind pattern, only altered by winter northers, where the sea breeze blows from the north quadrant during daylight hours, gradually diminishing by the evening, and the land breeze blows from the south quadrant from about midnight until sunrise. Prevailing NE winds are often strong from May to September, with frequent heavy thunder squalls at night and the highest levels of atmospheric humidity in the year – which levels are high at all seasons. Ox Tongue Shoal, marked by a white and orange metal beacon, is a narrow sand shoal with minimum depths of less than 15ft, stretching some 7 miles in a WNW direction from *Punta Manglar* on the east side of the bay.

Puerto Barrios, located at the entrance of *Bahía de Santo Tomás de Castilla*, on the south end of *Bahía de Amatique*, handles about 75 per cent of the import trade of Guatemala. It is the main commercial port of the country and the only one on the Atlantic coast. Just round the corner and 1.5NM NE of Puerto Barrios, lies *Amatique Bay Resort and Marina*, a

new upscale eco-resort with a small and well protected marina, built in a lagoon fed by the fresh waters of *Río Pichilingo*. Located at **15°44.82N--88°34.82W**, it is accessed through a dredged channel protected by a breakwater. It offers clearing services and has 35 slips, 18 hangars for dry storage, 110v and 220v electricity, Wi-Fi, fresh water, showers, minimarket, restaurant, swimming pool, and various other amenities. An approach waypoint at **15°44.910N--88°34.993W** will place you right at the mouth of the channel by the wooden building at the tip of the breakwater.

Amatique Bay Resort and Marina

Address: 14 Calle Final, Finca Pichilingo, Puerto Barrios

Telephone: (502) 79481836 / (502) 79310000

<http://www.amatiquebay.net>
marinaservices@amatiquebay.net

/



Figure . THE RÍO DULCE -- THE ENTIRE LENGTH, FROM LAGO IZABAL TO LIVINGSTON

The **Río Dulce** is a large river, navigable all along its course by moderate draft vessels; as well as part of a lake and river system fed by many smaller rivers and countless creeks and streams. It begins at Lake Izabal, the largest lake in the country, and ends 23NM downstream by the town of Livingston, at the Bay of Amatique. Just after the river flows from Lake Izabal, it is spanned by one of the biggest bridges in Central America, with the towns of Fronteras and El Relleno standing on either side of the bridge and numerous marinas spread along both banks of the river for the next couple of miles downstream. The river then widens into El Golfete, a 10 mile long by 2 mile wide shallow but navigable lake with 10ft average depths in the center, surrounded by

rain forest and home to amazing wildlife. On the NE edge of El Golfete, the river narrows again and continues downstream, winding through a spectacular steep walled canyon covered with jungle vegetation for the next 7 miles, before finally discharging into *Bahía de Amatique*. Known as *El Cañón*, this last stretch of the Río Dulce is where the river reaches its narrowest, 300ft width at the spot called *La Vaca*, not far from the tributary *Río Tatín*. On the other hand, *El Cañón* is also where the sounder marks the highest readings, with 50-60ft depths.

Livingston

Located on the west side of Amatique Bay 10NM from *Cabo Tres Puntas*, Livingston is a port of entry as well as an important port of reception and transit for passengers and goods up and downriver. But most important, Livingston is the gate and gatekeeping threshold to Río Dulce, as it features a shallow bar at the river mouth with 5.5ft minimum depths at lower tide, which blocks the way to vessels

drafting

over

7ft.



Figure . APPROACH TO LIVINGSTON

Navigating the threshold to Rio Dulce

A white metal beacon marks the approximate location of the tricky shifting bar, which begins a few hundred yards past the buoy and extends all the way into the anchorage off town. **15°50.29--88°43.71W** is the last reported position of

the approach buoy, after being recently moved by the Guatemalan Navy. Unfortunately, the exact location, both of the buoy and the bar, cannot be trusted, as they are subject to the influence of currents, tides, and winds. The common strategy is to cross the short but unnerving 0.5 mile lap between the beacon and Livingston at high tide (in fact, an hour or so before high tide would be the ideal time to set off), in order to gain some inches of water under the keel -- updated local tide tables are available at <http://www.mayaparaíso.com/tides> . The afternoon onshore wind and surge may also contribute to providing a few helpful extra inches of water.

An approach waypoint at **15°50.581N--88°43.776W**, will place you in sight of the white metal beacon in 16ft but with rapidly decreasing depths. The bar begins a few yards south of the beacon, which must be left to port on approach. At that point, an approximate **223°** course should be set before getting the engine at high speed and eyeballing your way across the bar. Do not panic if the boat starts bumping along; you can safely keep going, since the bottom is soft mud and sand and completely devoid of rocks. In the case it does not work and you get stuck, try spreading the genoa -- provided the wind is blowing -- in order to achieve enough slant to free the keel from the bottom, while motoring forward at full speed. In the event those extra inches gained at high tide are not enough for your draft, you will have to arrange for local assistance.

Local boat owners usually hang around the area when the transit is more intense, waiting for sailboats in trouble to offer their help. They use the same strategy, only more effectively, by pulling the top of the mast with the help of a

line attached to their boat, so as to attain a greater inclination. The towing fee should always be agreed beforehand, as self appointed "rescuers" may try to take advantage of a situation of distress and demand exorbitant prices for their service. As a reference, an average towing service is charged in the region of US\$60. Alternatively, guidance on entry can be arranged in advance by contacting Raul Morales, the local English speaking ship agent, who can also help with clearing procedures. He can be found at SERVAMAR, the shipping agency located just a block from the *Muelle Municipal* (Municipal Dock), or contacted on VHF channels 16 and 68, telephone numbers 502-7947-0888 / 502-5510-9104 or email address navieraservamar@gmail.com.



Figure . VIEW OF LIVINGSTONE FROM THE ANCHORAGE

Do not stray from the crossing track until off the fuel dock, past the shoal stretching from the north bank. Only then should you approach the town and set anchor in 8-9ft of murky water and a medium holding mud bottom. The traffic is intense during the day at the anchorage, with power boats, silent canoes and sailing vessels entering or leaving

the river. Although calmer at night, there is always some traffic going to and fro. Currents may be strong at times and the holding is quite irregular due to the sediments carried down by the river flow. Dinghies can be moored at any of the docks around the Municipal Dock downtown, but should not be left unattended. You can hire any of the kids who will probably be eager to look after your dinghy for a couple of dollars or a few Quetzales.



Clearing

Clearing in Livingston is straightforward and relatively fast, provided the paperwork is done during office hours (weekdays 8.00-13.00 and 15.00-17.00). All the premises that need to be visited are close by and local officials, many of whom speak some English, are familiar with the procedures involving recreational vessels. The quarantine flag should be raised at entry and captain and crew are expected to wait on board for the visit of the proper authorities. Customs will require the customary *zarpe* and

the boat's documents; the health inspector will carry out a light inspection; and Immigration will take the passports. After that, a visit must be paid to the bank located next door to the **Palacio Municipal (Town Hall)** on the main street or *Calle Principal*, to pay a US\$50 fee for the initial 3 month cruising permit granted on entry. Since additional minor fees will be charged by the different departments involved (Port Captain, Immigration, Customs and Health Authorities) to cover their expenses, which can only be paid in **Quetzales**, this is a good opportunity to withdraw some local currency. (The Quetzal is also the national bird, featured in the Guatemalan coat of arms.) The Immigration officer will then return the stamped passports for a fee per passport and person at his office located a few yards down the main street, and he will then direct you to the Customs office on the second floor of the Town Hall where another fee will have to be paid. The final paperwork will be carried out at *Capitanía de Puerto*, located by the beach a short distance up the street, to collect the cruising permit and a new *zarpe* for a fee at the Port Captain's office. If planning to stay for longer than 3 months, it is a good idea to ask for an additional 9 month permit extension at entry to avoid a return trip from Río Dulce later on. It should be noted that an additional fee will be charged, both by Customs and Immigration, on weekends and bank holidays.





LOCAL FLEET IN LIVINGSTON



Figure . MAP OF LIVINGSTON

Livingston Highlights For Cruisers

Livingston is a colorful port town and home to different ethnic groups with distinct cultures and languages cohabiting amicably: the Q'eqchi Indians, descendants of the ancient Mayas; the *Ladinos* of varied European but mostly Spanish descent; and the Garífuna, who were the first settlers and the founders of the town. They are direct descendants of the original group who left the island of Roatán where they had been abandoned, in search of a new life on the mainland. The first attempt to settle at the river mouth proved unsuccessful given the scarcity of resources in that area, and they were compelled to move to Punta Gorda in present-day Belize for some years. When they returned to stay in 1806 and established a permanent settlement, they named it *Labuga*, meaning "the mouth" in Garifuna.

Given the strategic and commercial potential of the port, it was officially recognized by the Guatemalan government in 1831 and renamed Livingston, in honour of US legislator, senator, and Secretary of State Edward Livingston. He drafted the Livingston Code, a new code of criminal law and procedure noted for its emphasis on remediation and abolition of the death penalty which was accepted in Europe and, indeed, in Central America. Livingston quickly became the main commercial port in the country, but only a century later, the construction of a railroad connecting large banana plantations with the shipping docks at better sheltered Puerto Barrios, signalled the beginning of the decline of the Port of Livingston. Surrounded by mountainous tropical forest, Livingston was never connected by road to the rest of the country and remains orphaned through lack of road in the present day. While it is still an important river port with

heavy river traffic and a busy ferry service to Puerto Barrios and Punta Gorda in Belize, business in the area has inevitably but fortunately shifted towards tourism.



MOST PUBLIC BUILDINGS, STORES, BARS AND RESTAURANTS ARE LOCATED ALONG THE MAIN STREET

At present, Livingston is a small colorful town with a vibrant life and a laidback atmosphere. There are numerous bars and restaurants, small hotels, gift shops, groceries, internet cafes, and other stores along *Calle Principal*, the main street running up the hill from the Municipal Dock, and on the neighboring streets.

A typical Garifuna dish served in most restaurants in town is *tapado*, a delicious soup made from fish, prawn and shellfish, cooked in coconut milk and served with crusty bread. Traditionally a fishing town, there is a good selection of fish and seafood and many places serve very cheap grilled shrimp. Coconut bread is a tasty and cheap local bread that can be purchased at some of the stores along the main street. Live music is commonplace in most bars and the drink of choice is often *coco-loco*, coconut water with a generous serving of local rum, sipped by the shell and dangerously delectable. Saturday is party night, often lasting till dawn. Although Livingston is a safe place generally speaking, and you can walk on the main street, the neighborhoods, and the beach without any problem, street lights are scarce and it is dark in the deserted streets at night, so exercise caution after sunset.

Museo Multicultural de Livingston, located in the park next to the Municipal Dock, explores the rich ethnic diversity present in the area, with excellent displays of the culture, history, traditions, and folklore of the Garifuna, Q'eqchi, Hindu, and Ladino cultures. The park is not especially appealing but it has a popular open-air alligator enclosure where a bunch of

old alligators laze around under the sun.



The town beach is not particularly impressive with buildings or vegetation coming right down to the water's edge in many places, and often contaminated by the plastic waste coming from Belize. However, it offers a great opportunity to interact with the friendly locals who come to swim or fly their kites at the end of the day. Better beaches can be found a few miles further north along the coast. *Playa Quehueche* is located near the mouth of Quehueche River, a couple of hours walk from the town or alternatively, a 10 minute taxi ride. It should be noted that the standard taxi fare is 30Q, regardless of the destination. As usual, it is highly recommended to agree on the price in advance. Privately owned *Playa Blanca*, reputedly the best beach in Livingston, is located about 10 miles away and can only be reached by boat. *Los Siete Altares* (The Seven Altars) is a series of beautiful freshwater pools and waterfalls set in the jungle, 3 miles northwest of Livingston. For trekking lovers, the pleasant walk takes about 30 minutes along the town beach plus one more hour through the jungle. *Los Siete Altares* can also be reached by boat and the 20Q entry fee is worth the last penny.

You can motor up the river as soon as your paperwork is completed. However, there are still another 23NM to cover before getting to the final destination, the village of Fronteras, popularly known as Río Dulce. Unless you manage to be all set early in the morning, night will probably fall before you reach Río Dulce and that will place you in a difficult situation. You will be in complete darkness in an unmarked area where traffic never stops; numerous power boats and silent dugout canoes travel up and down the river without lights; and local fishermen set their inconspicuous nets along the river. You are better advised to stay overnight at the Livingston anchorage and set off with the first lights of day, so as to sail in good daylight and enjoy the breathtaking scenery upriver. Alternatively, anchorage can be taken overnight at Texan Bay, 8NM upriver.



Figure . RÍO DULCE – THE FIRST SEVEN MILES

For the first 7 miles, the river meanders in a gorgeous canyon with average 600ft widths, known as *El Cañón* (The Canyon), into *Lago El Golfete*. The scenery is breathtaking, with spectacular 300ft tall limestone cliffs covered by lush tropical vegetation which includes teak, mahogany and palms, and home, among numerous other species, of howler monkeys, tapirs, jaguars, toucans, pelicans and a myriad of herons perched on the foliage along the river edge. Together with Lake *El Golfete*, it is part of the *Parque Nacional Río Dulce*, an 80 square mile protected area including the lake and the final stretch of the Río Dulce. With depths ranging 20-60ft in the middle of the river all along the gorge, transiting is easy and hazard free, provided you watch out for fishing nets and river traffic and stay in the center and on the inside of the curves, as only some of the shallow edges of the river are marked with stakes. About 5 miles into the passage, the tributary *Río Tatín* on the north bank of the river is popular for its low waterfalls and elusive freshwater dolphins. Further up the Río Dulce, not far from *Río Tatín*, the NGO *Asociación Ak' Tenamit* (<http://www.aktenamit.org>) works to improve conditions for the indigenous Mayan population from their outpost on the north bank, where they have a small dock, a school and a visitor's center with an interesting display of indigenous arts and crafts. Only half a mile away, as the river curls in a bend, a thermal spring forces sulphurous water out of the base of the cliff. A couple of miles further on, the canyon walls start falling away and the river widens into **El Golfete**, a 10 mile long by 2 mile

wide lake with an island (*Cayo Grande*) at its northeast edge.



Figure . RÍO DULCE -- EL GOLFETE END TO END

At this point, depths decrease to some 12ft between *Cayo Grande* and the mainland and there are numerous shoals around the shore where a few buildings line the water's edge. The number and range of resources available to cruisers begins to emerge. Just around the corner, in the first and better sheltered of the four inlets lying next to each other on the south shore, is *Burnt Key Marina*. Located in *Laguna de Los Duartes* or **Texan Bay**, it makes a very convenient stop on the way to and from Río Dulce, due to its proximity to Livingston. To approach Texan Bay, go to a position at **15°46.713N--88°49.358W**, at the entrance to El Golfete, to give a wide berth to the south edge, where a series of submerged concrete pilings lie beneath the water more than 200ft off shore. The next waypoint at **15°46.307N--88°50.077W** will place you directly in front of the bay entrance. Proceed towards the conspicuous sailboats at the head of the bay, sticking to the middle of the channel in 10-13ft of water, and berth at the marina dock. Or drop the anchor anywhere around in a good holding mud bottom, but avoid the shallow shores. It should be noted that the area to the east of the marina docks is visited regularly by the *lancheros* on sightseeing trips.

Burnt Key Marina was originally built by a couple of Texas cruisers as Texan Bay Marina and it became a popular spot among cruising visitors for its convenient location, beautiful wild surroundings and laidback atmosphere. Under new management, the name has been changed to *Burnt Key Marina* and the premises are in the final stages of a thorough refurbishment; new railings built, remodelled bungalows, brand new decor. It has an extensive number of side tie slips, stout docks with electricity and water, 24 hour security, and Wi-Fi internet connection. They offer cleaning and maintenance services and professional boat inspections.

There is a weekly *lancha* (launch) service to Livingston and Fronteras for supplies and errands and the marina restaurant offers a simple but tasty menu in a friendly easy-going atmosphere.

Burnt Key Marina

15°46.034N--88°49.644W

Phone: (502) 5747 9717

burntkeymarina@gmail.com

On the opposite side of the bay, a green roofed dock harbors *Cayo Quemado Sails and Rigging* workshop. Their services include sail repair, standing and running rigging, awnings and sail covers, and rig tuning and inspection.

Cayo Quemado Sails and Rigging

15°46.140N--88°49.720W

Phone: (502) 5776 5856

<http://www.quemadosails.com> / quemadosails@gmail.com

Gringo Bay, next door to Texan Bay, is home to the small village of *Cayo Quemado*, as well as to a series of private residences owned by an ever growing community of expats, a charming community restaurant run by the village women

and *The Crow's Nest*, a yacht storage for long term stays. The Crow's Nest has three yacht storage docks with onsite 24/7 security and regular revisions, cleaning and maintenance are included in the fee. Run by *Seakist Services*, they also offer electrical and mechanical repair and maintenance services and specialise in refrigeration.

The Crow's Nest

15°45.800N--88°50.120W

Phone: (502) 5057-2093 or 5723-4940

<http://www.seakistservices.com> / seakistservices@gmail.com

Numerous cays dot the surface of El Golfete and its shores hide countless quiet bays and lagoons and more than a few rivers, streams and creeks. *Cayo Grande*, on the NE edge on the lake, is an uninhabited thickly wooded island and a protected area swarming with wildlife and devoid of trails. The northern banks of El Golfete are part of the 17,790-acre *Biotopo Chocón Machacas*, covering the lower reaches of the Chocón Machacas River basin and integrated in the *Parque Nacional Río Dulce*. The protected biotope is densely forested and includes virgin rainforest and extensive mangrove swamps. It harbors 130 species of birds, 31 species of mammals, 31 species of reptiles and amphibians, 82 species of fish and numerous species of terrestrial and water plants. But above all, it is one of Guatemala's few remaining habitats for the endangered Caribbean manatee. There is a Manatee Preserve with a Visitor Center and a wooden dock to the northwest of *Cayo Grande*. *Laguna Salvador* is home to the only human settlement allowed

within the protected area. The community of La Lagunita, consisting of a handful of Q'eqchi' families, arrived in the area in 1970, fleeing from the bloody civil war which ravaged the country for 36 years. Considered an invasive settlement endangering the protected area when the park was opened, at present, they help the park rangers preserve the biotope and serve as knowledgeable experienced guides in the park. The Chocón Machacas Protected Biotope is managed by the Department of Conservationist Studies of the San Carlos University of Guatemala (for further information, contact CECON, biotoposcecon@gmail.com or *Comunidad Lagunita Salvador*, culturalqeqchi@gmail.com / ecoaldealagunita@gmail.com).

The southern banks of El Golfete are uninhabited for the most part, except for a bunch of scattered private villas and a few communities on the north edge, sheltered in Texan Bay, Gringo Bay and *Bahía Buenavista*. A handful of small cays off Gringo Bay give refuge to a myriad of varied species of noisy water birds crowding on the mangrove branches and the whole area provides exciting gunk holing grounds. The four bays bear average 10ft soundings in the center and are surrounded by lush rainforest. However, because they are secluded and sparsely inhabited, a solitary sailboat can become easy prey for the two legged river predators at night. The advice is to drop anchor in Texan Bay or dock at Burnt Key Marina for the night. As a matter of fact, due to a long history of past and recent incidents involving yacht boarding and theft, it is not recommended to anchor in lonely anchorages overnight anywhere along the Río Dulce.

Depths average 18ft in the center of El Golfete and the area is free of hazards all along to the southwest end of the lake,

where a wooden stake marks the edge of a shoal stretching in a southeasterly direction from *Cayo Largo*. Another stake west of *Cayo Largo* marks a shoal off the south shore, at the point where the edges of El Golfete narrow and the Río Dulce continues on a west course upstream.

Over a mile upriver from that point, a small bay on the south bank is home to *Casa Guatemala* (<http://www.casa-guatemala.org/index.php>), a self sufficient home and school caring for 250 orphaned, abandoned and abused children. Casa Guatemala is funded only by its own projects and by private donations, and is always looking for volunteers. To help finance the orphanage, the Casa built *Hotel Backpackers* near the bridge and runs a farm where they raise poultry, pigs, ducks, and turkeys, and grow vegetables and fruit for self consumption and sale.

Río Dulce continues its course west, passing by an increasing number of private residences, marinas and river houses on stilts, all the way into *Lago Izábal*. *Puente de Las Américas*, a long bridge soaring 85ft above the water, links the east and west shores of the river near the entrance of Lake Izábal. Built in 1980, it routes the busy CA-13 highway connecting the north side with the rest of the country. Literally at its feet, the towns of Fronteras and El Rellano lie on either bank of the river.

A mile further south, right at the entrance of Lake Izábal, stands a small Spanish colonial fort, *Castillo de San Felipe de Lara*, built in 1644 to defend the lake from pirate attacks. It was beautifully restored and opened to the public in 1956

and can be visited daily for a 20Q entrance fee. The final 3 mile stretch of the river is home to well over a dozen marinas spread along both banks. Big and small, close to town or secluded, fully equipped or bare, calm and peaceful or lively and eventful, specialized in repairs or storage, upscale or laidback... The choice of marinas is so extensive and varied that you can be sure to find the right marina for you whatever your tastes and needs. The frosting on the cake is that a number of them are INGUAT (Guatemalan Board of Tourism) registered marinas, thus entitled to process successive 12 month cruising permit extensions on behalf of a vessel's owner.

Although Río Dulce is considered a safe place in Guatemala, petty theft may happen in town, and yacht boardings and robberies happen from time to time against boats anchored out.

In emergencies or distress, the National Police can be hailed on VHF channel 16. However, given that they only speak Spanish, it is common practice among cruisers to use the assistance of fellow boaters on VHF channel 68 to contact the police. As a matter of fact, almost everyone on the Río Dulce monitors the local hailing frequency, VHF channel 68, for hailing, distress calls, or general announcements to the fleet. Additionally, a cruiser's net about events on the river is held each morning at 7:30 am on VHF channel 69. Notwithstanding minor security issues, Río Dulce locals -- and Guatemalans in general -- are honest and hardworking people with a strong community spirit, who will make you feel welcome with their warmth and friendliness. Proof of this is the fact that Río Dulce is a favorite vacation spot for wealthy Guatemalans and it attracts not only a multitude of

cruisers, but also backpackers and international travellers who use the Río Dulce as a jumping-off point for trips to the rest of Guatemala as well as Belize and Honduras.

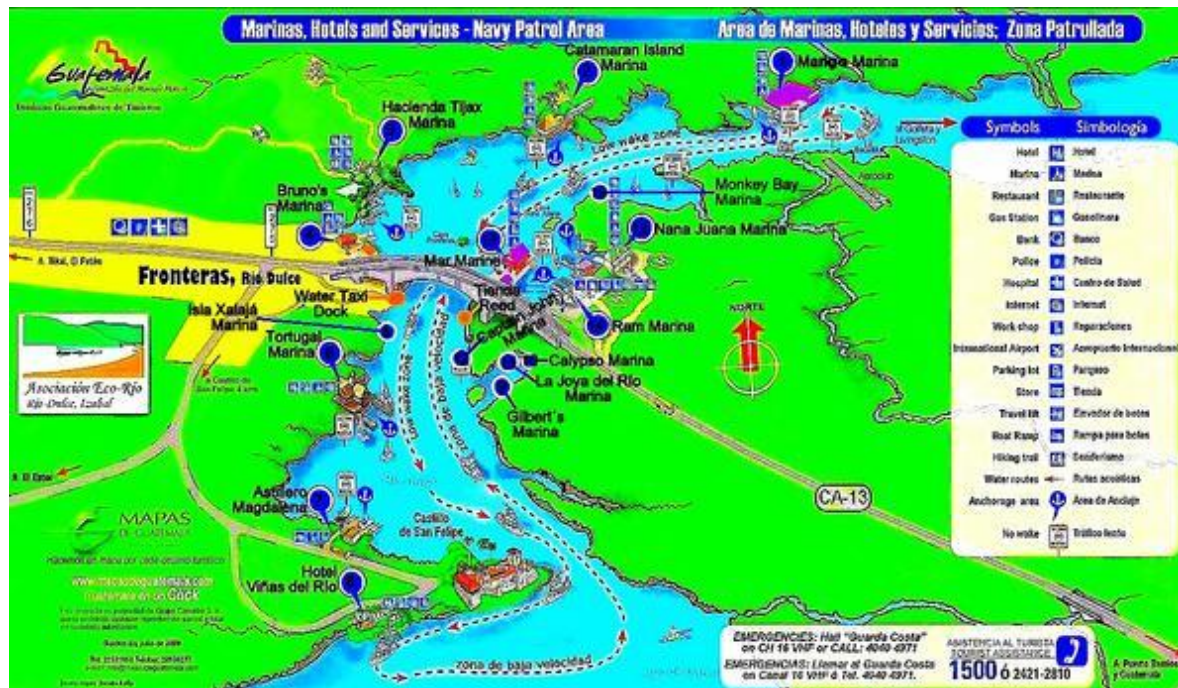


Figure . RÍO DULCE IN THE VICINITY OF FRONTERAS AND EL RELLANO

Mango Marina is the first marina to be found on the north bank when approaching Fronteras from El Golfete. This is a small quiet marina, neat, peaceful and secluded, surrounded by lush vegetation and unconnected by land. Located a 15 minute dinghy ride from Fronteras, it has been recently renovated and updated and is under new administration. It has alongside and med-type moorings, free potable water, metered electricity, high speed Wi-Fi, a swimming pool, a common kitchen, a restaurant serving typical Guatemalan cuisine, a laundry with washer and dryer, dinghy and motor

storage, and launch transportation to Fronteras. The marina also offers vessel, engine and sails maintenance, and repair services.

Mango Marina

15° 40.547N - 88° 58.843W

502-4032-4444

VHF Channel 68

<http://riodulcemangomarina.com>
mango@riodulcemangomarina.com

/

Mario's Marina (**15°40.496N--88° 58.959W**), next door from Mango Marina, with over 60 slips, used to be one of the largest marinas on the Río Dulce, and the popular Cayuco Club had become a regular gathering spot for cruiser patrons. Unfortunately, it has recently closed its doors after being in business for over 30 years and its future is uncertain right now.

Half a mile upstream lies *Catamaran Island Marina*, an exclusive resort where children and pets are *not* welcome. *Catamaran Island Hotel* was originally conceived as a charter base to visit Belize cays but grew over time into the present full service hotel and marina. The marina has dock space for 50 yachts, 110/220 volt 50 amp electric service, propane drop off and pick up service, WiFi at bar and lounge area and DSL wired to the boat, laundry service, 24/7 security service, free use of the hotel facilities, and a regular free launch

service to Fronteras. There are 36 bungalows surrounded by beautiful tropical gardens featuring macaws, green, white & blue herons, green parrots, turtles and huge iguanas. There is also a tennis court, a lively bar over the water and a big restaurant offering national and international cuisine. INGUAT registered.

Catamaran Island Hotel

15°40.337N--88°59.486W

(502) 7930-5494

VHF Channel 16

<http://www.catamaranisland.com>
hotelcatamaran@gmail.com

/

Hacienda Tijax Marina lies another half mile upstream from *Mario's Marina* on the north bank. Located on a 500 acre farm owned and managed by a Guatemalan family, the lovely *hacienda* includes teak and rubber plantations, a jungle reserve and a bird sanctuary. *Hacienda Tijax* was born as a project for the reforestation and conservation of the rainforest, but following the advent of tourism in the area, it became an eco-resort in 1990.

Tixaj has beautiful carved water forest ruins, private lagoons and rivers. Nature lovers will be pleasantly surprised by the trails and surroundings at Hacienda Tixaj and the surrounding area. The historical biologist and archaeologist have helped to design the trails in this great nature reserve. Flowers, orchids, bromeliads, butterflies and other insects are easy to see. We have over 15 tropical fruits and 500 bird species throughout 15 miles lakes, trails, and beautifully being most activities in our area.

Lo mejor de Hacienda Tixaj

DIRECTORIO

Restaurante
Hotel
Bar
Bodega
Bodega de bebidas
Bodega de frutas
Bodega de verduras
Bodega de especias
Bodega de aceites
Bodega de jabones
Bodega de cosméticos
Bodega de ropa
Bodega de calzado
Bodega de accesorios
Bodega de herramientas
Bodega de materiales
Bodega de maquinaria
Bodega de transporte
Bodega de servicios
Bodega de otros

15°39.772N--89°0.109W

(502) 79-30-5505 / 79-30-5506

VHF Channel 09

<http://tijax.com> / info@tijax.com

Bruno's Hotel and Marina, located right by the bridge in the heart of Fronteras, has been catering to the cruising community for over 20 years and it is a landmark in Río Dulce for its convenient location, in walking distance of the stores, bars and restaurants, the town market, and the bus station connecting Río Dulce with the rest of the country. The side tie wooden docks could do with some refurbishing but are equipped with 110/220 volt electricity, fresh water and Wi-Fi connection, trash disposal, and satellite TV. The premises include a laundry, a sports bar, a swimming pool, an internet cafe with international fax and phone-call service, a specialty grocery store, and a travel agency. Bruno's Restaurant is a local hangout serving good portions of tasty Guatemalan and international cuisine at affordable prices. The bare hotel lodgings range from low cost dormitories for backpackers to full air conditioned apartments perfectly suitable to stay while having work done to the boat. *Bruno's* is a laid-back busy marina and a popular gathering spot for Río Dulce boaties, who make free complementary use of the marina dinghy dock during their visits to town. It should be noted that, although there is 24/7 security service, dinghies should be secured at dock and lifted aboard at night to prevent opportunity thefts. INGUAT registered.

Bruno's Hotel and Marina

15°39.589N--89°0.097W

(502) 7930-5721

VHF Channel 68

<http://brunoshotel.com> / info@brunoshotel.com

Isla Xalajá Marina, located next to the *Muelle Principal* (the water taxi dock) in Fronteras, is a small family run hotel and marina, with berthing capacity for 10 boats docked alongside as well as med-moorings. The docks are lit at night and have 110V and 220V electricity, potable water, storage facilities, 24/7 security, and free Wi-Fi. The marina offers boat maintenance and water taxi service and a professional team of bilingual friendly staff. There is a laundry as well as new modern bathrooms with hot water, a BBQ area, and a restaurant offering delicious Caribbean and veggie food. *Isla Xalajá* is widely known in this area for its excellent Spanish school, where trained instructors offer private and group Spanish lessons. In spite of being next door to the town center, Xalajá is a quiet marina tucked away in the riverside jungle and it enjoys a secluded exotic atmosphere. Their lodgings have a rustic decor while offering all the conveniences and range from fully equipped houses on stilts to jungle bungalows for rent and sharing.

Isla Xalajá Marina

15° 39.355N--89° 00.033W

VHF Channel 71

<http://xalaja.com> / info@xalaja.com

Tortugal Hotel & Marina, less than half mile upriver is a full service marina offering comfort, tranquillity, and security in a beautiful jungle setting. *Tortugal* means "the place of the turtle" and with good reason, too, as turtles visit this spot every year to lay their eggs. In fact, preserving nature is one of the main purposes of *Tortugal Hotel & Marina*, located in an area inhabited by sloths, a huge variety of birds, sea otters, crocodiles, and alligator turtles. The marina has stout first class docks which are well illuminated at night and have 24/7 security, 110V and 220V up to 50 Amps electricity on the meter, pressurized fresh and potable water, and free Wi-Fi. General maintenance works are carried out and there are two workshops for guest use. The bathrooms are clean and comfortable and the water hot, and there is a drop off laundry service. The cozy restaurant over the water serves delicious homemade food ranging from hamburgers to veggie dishes and uses locally grown fruits and vegetables. Lodgings are elegantly simple, comfortable, clean and quiet, and they fit all budgets. INGUAT registered.

Tortugal Hotel & Marina

15°38.983N--89°0.076W

(502) 5306-6432

VHF Channel 68

<http://tortugal.com> / olatortugal@gmail.com

Right in front of *Tortugal Marina*, on the opposite bank of the river, there is an inlet known as Susana's Laguna. Located in a sheltered secluded lagoon surrounded by thick vegetation, yet a short dinghy ride from Fronteras, it houses three unpretentious marinas unaffected by wakes and waves: *Gilbert's Marina*, *Calypso Marina*, and *La Joya del Río*.

Gilbert's Marina is a small family marina, popular among francophone cruisers, with docking capacity for a dozen boats med-moored. The marina was built by French sailor Gilbert Dupré within the premises of his private home and it is managed by the Dupré family. The docks have 110V and 220V electricity, potable water, 24/7 security, and Wi-Fi. There is a drop off laundry service, simple bathrooms, a workshop, a barbeque area, and a storage room. A launch from Fronteras visits the marina twice a week with fresh produce, dairies, frozen food and beverages. The atmosphere in the marina is quiet and homely and the monthly rate includes boat cleaning and anti-mold treatment.

Gilbert's Marina

15°38.956N--88°59.771W

gilbertdupre@gmail.com

Calypso Marina is a small peaceful marina located in calm waters and offering secure dockage with 110/220v electricity, purified water, and a 24 hour security system, all included in the docking fee. The premises include a haul-out

facility for small crafts, dry dockage and lightning protection, storage facilities, bathrooms, a laundry, and a BBQ area. The marina offers on-site maintenance and repair services, direct road access, and ample parking space.

Calypso Marina

15°39.025N - 88°59.715W

502 5728 7829 or 507 6440 3585

<http://www.calypsomarina.com>

La Joya del Río, the largest of the three marinas located in the lagoon, was originally established in 1989 under the name of *Susana's Laguna* and for some years it was a lovely, popular marina with all the conveniences you would expect from a full service marina. It has 75 slips with individual fingers, fresh water and 110v and 220v electricity to the pontoons, garbage disposal, and laundry. The premises include a big roofed terrace with hammocks, a BBQ area, and a TV room. The bar and restaurant remain closed at present although there are bungalows for rent for the use of marina guests. Under new management for the last few years, the initial big plans of renovation and expansion of the new owners seem to have run into obstacles. At present, the marina displays a dilapidated atmosphere with run-down facilities and a ghostly air.

La Joya del Río

15°39.048N--88°59.745W

VHF Channel 68

[https://www.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/lajoyadelrio.marina) / lajoyadelrio.marina

Captain John's Marina is a small tranquil marina located at a private residence on the outer side of the lagoon by the river, a short dinghy ride from Fronteras. It has room for about 10 boats and many of the amenities present at big marinas. The docks have metered 30 amp 120 volt electricity, fresh water, and Wi-Fi; and can hold vessels up to 70ft with available side access. There is 24/7 security and laundry service, as well as a swimming pool, a bar, and a BBQ area with satellite TV. The marina offers cleaning, maintenance, and survey services, and provides fast and reliable ocean and air freight shipping services. In addition, they are West Marine suppliers and authorized dealers of Yanmar. There are also two fully furnished cabins available for rent on the property. INGUAT registered.

Captain John's Marina

15°39.046N--88°59.863W

502 3290-1588

<http://www.riodulcemarina.com> / john@riodulcemarina.com

Bahía de Nana Juana is a protected bay located on the south bank of the river, opposite *Hacienda Tijax Marina*, which harbors three cushy full service marinas: *Mar Marine Yacht*

Club Marina, Hotel & Restaurant, R.A.M. Marina and Yacht Club and Hotel Marina Nana Juana.

Mar Marine Yacht Club Marina is a full service marina located at the entrance of the bay, offering side-tie wet slips for vessels up to 70ft, with 120v and 220v electricity, fresh water, Wi-Fi, and 24/7 security. The marina premises contain restrooms with hot showers, a laundry with electric washer and dryer, and a business service centre for phone calls, copies, and use of computers with Internet access. There is also a covered boat storage facility, a mechanics' workshop, and a reasonably stocked chandlery which does catalogue orders from any marine manufacturer. The services offered include repair and preventive maintenance for boats and engines, and they have an onsite team of professionals dealing in diesel and gasoline motor repair, fiberglass repair, hull and bottom repair and maintenance, electrical repair and maintenance, carpentry, upholstery, and detailing. The restaurant serves local and international cuisine and mouth-watering home-baked cakes and pies. Marina guests have access to all of the resort's amenities, including the BBQ and picnic area, the sports bar, the lounge area, the children's playground and the gym; and they can take part in the activities available to hotel guests, like parasailing and kayaking. Accommodations consist of rustic rooms on the river shore, with private bathrooms, internet connection, and air conditioning; and fully furnished apartments on the top floor of the main building. As an official SSCA Cruising Station, it offers special discounts for all SSCA Members. INGUAT registered.

Mar Marine Yacht Club Marina, Hotel & Restaurant

15°39.407N--88°59.723W

502 7930 5090 / 5091

<http://marmarine.com> / [info@marmarine.com.gt](mailto:info@marmarine.com)

RAM Marina, next door to *Mar Marine*, features up-to-the-minute facilities and world-class equipment, amenities and service. Their floating and secure piers provide 25 wet slips with 110v and 220v metered electricity, free potable water, free Wi-Fi, 24/7 security, cable TV, and lockers. There is a boat haul-out facility with an 8000 lb. forklift and a 75-ton travel lift; and 280 covered dry dock spaces available equipped with water, electricity, and storage. Amenities include modern washrooms with hot water, a laundry, a waste treatment facility, a fast food restaurant and a convenience store, fax and international calling service, an ATM machine for all credit cards in local currency; and a fitness centre, a game room, a heliport, and gated parking. Their qualified team of technicians performs sail design and repair in a large, fully equipped sail-loft, as well as repair, servicing and rebuilding of diesel and outboard engines, fiberglass, welding (steel, iron, stainless and aluminium), painting and varnishing, refrigeration, electrical and electronic repair and installation and carpentry. The marine and sport fishing store offers accessories and nautical equipment and it is supervised and assisted by West Marine. *RAM Marina* also has a full service fueling station with 93 Octane Gas and Diesel and it is the only fuel dock to carry ULSD (Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel).

R.A.M. Marina and Yacht Club

15°39.397N--88°59.651W

502.7930-5408 / 502.7930-5681

VHF Channel 73

<http://www.rammarina.com> / richard@rammarina.com

Hotel Marina Nana Juana is a family friendly, beautiful luxury resort with a modern, fully equipped and comfortable marina offering 60 slips with 110 & 220V metered electricity, free fresh water, Wi-Fi, and 24/7 security. Secure long-term boat yard storage is available for over 400 boats and they can haul out catamarans up to 65 feet in length. Live-aboards are welcome at the marina and there is a work area for DIY repairs and service. In spite of having their own team of professional workers specialized in all sorts of marine repair and maintenance services, there are no restrictions on contractors; cruisers are free to employ outside workers without commissions or rent fees and allowed to work on their own boats. The marina premises include storage facilities, European standard washrooms, laundry, BBQ area, dishwashing and food preparation facilities, and community room. Propane refill service, dinghy dock and storage, and an oil dump facility are also available. Marina guests have access to all the resort facilities and services, including the bar, a restaurant serving delicious Caribbean food, a lovely swimming pool, a canopy, an ecological footpath and a heliport. Cruisers on the hard enjoy special accommodation rates at the hotel's first-rate fully equipped rooms and suites.

Hotel Marina Nana Juana

15°39.538N--88°59.562W

(502) 7930-5230/ (502) 7930-5453

VHF Channel 73

<http://hotelmarinananajuana.com>
info@hotelmarinananajuana.com

/

tracey@hotelmarinananajuana.com
scott@hotelmarinananajuana.com

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Monkey Bay Marina is a small, family owned marina with top facilities, located just across the river from *Catamaran Island Marina* and surrounded by jungle and howler monkeys. *Monkey Bay Marina* began as the weekend retreat of the owners and their children, and branched out into a small, highly reclusive, and very private marina. The marina is managed by experienced live-aboard English speaking cruisers and the staff is trained in boat care and maintenance. Their recently constructed, strong docks contain 22 slips with 110v&220v and 30& 50Amp electricity, potable water, 24/7 security, and Wi-Fi; and the premises include laundry and showers, workshop, a meeting pavilion, and an outdoor kitchen. There is no land access to the marina but boat rides to nearby towns are available and a coordinated shopping run is done every Saturday, free of charge. This is a tranquil family oriented marina with a strong sense of community, where kids and pets are more than welcome.

Monkey Bay Marina

15°39.944N--88°59.493W

(502) 5368 9604 / (502) 5334-6474

VHF Channel 68

<http://www.monkeybaymarina.com>
harbormaster@monkeybaymarina.com

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Astilleros Magdalena, half a mile further upriver from Marina Tortugal, lies at the mouth of Lake Izabal and is one of the two dockyards in Rio Dulce featuring a travel lift (the other being RAM Marina). With a stable workforce of 27 local employees, *Astilleros Magdalena* has been in the shipbuilding business on the Río Dulce for 25 years, first under the management of Abel Ramírez (presently retired at 78 but still running his tug Popeye up and down the river) and now under the management and administration of son Abel Castro, aka Abel Junior. Abel's shipyard has a 75 ton railway, two 150 ton railways, and a new 85 ton travel lift; and can handle catamarans up to 32ft wide. Services offered include engine repair, hull and topside repair and maintenance, long and short term storage; and all kinds of repairs and servicing, from machines, plastic, and weather protection to sails, woodworking, hydraulic, stainless, fibreglass, welding, transformations, and painting. Abel specializes in new bottoms and topside renewals, stripping old teak decks and applying new gel coat. Their haul out and dry storage yard presently can handle up to 15 boats but work is underway to clear another area behind the yard for even more storage.

Astilleros Magdalena

15°38.287N--88°59.991W

(502) 7930 5059 / 5200 7941

VHF Channel 73

astillerorio@yahoo.com

There are three fuel docks on the Río Dulce and all of them are located on the south bank of the river near the bridge. All three offer unleaded gas, pre-mix and diesel, but RAM Marina is the only fuel dock to carry ULSD (Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel). Fuel is also available in town, where local boys with wheelbarrows can carry your gas cans from the petrol station to the dinghy dock for a few Quetzales.

Tienda Reed, located on the south bank of the river, right across from the *Cooperativa de Lancheros*, the water taxi dock, deserves a mention of its own. Chiqui is a popular character who owns the oldest store on the river, well known in the area as a great place to find those hard to get items that cruisers cannot find anywhere else. *Tienda Reed* carries everything from American brand groceries to all sorts of nuts, bolts, lines, and countless marine parts. Chiqui also offers a varied assortment of waxes, polishes and cleaners, an excellent selection of beverages, medical supplies, propane refills... and what not!

Tienda Reed

15°39.313N--88°59.873W

(502) 79305072 / Fax: 79305430

<http://www.dongatoriodulce.com/chiquis.html>

Tienda.reed@yahoo.com / Tienda_reed@gmail.com

Once tourism came calling in the area, the Río Dulce responded with a veritable explosion in recent years with an abundance of marinas, hotels, restaurants, marine services, medical care, communication and transportation. **Fronteras**, commonly referred to by the name Río Dulce, is a shabby, noisy town, swarming with activity, which stretches hardly over a mile along highway CA-13 connecting the north with the rest of the country. It is a major thoroughfare and the local centre of commerce for the area, where small stores and street vendors offering all sorts of imaginable items and services line up along the sides of the dusty road which is always busy with heavy traffic. There is no shortage of stalls and stores where the basics can be bought at low prices and the open-air market is a melting pot of fresh produce and the most varied items, including organically grown fruits and vegetables, free-range chickens, local beef, river fish and shrimp.

There is a good supermarket with its own dinghy dock, and a couple of days each week a launch from *Casa Guatemala* makes a tour of the marinas selling dairy products, pork chops, eggs and other organic products. Food stalls are also abundant by the road, offering local snacks such as fried chicken and pork, fresh tortillas, steaming soups and ice cream.

There is a reasonably well stocked hardware store and a myriad of businesses offering all sorts of marine items and services, as well as bars and cyber cafes, restaurants serving local and international food, pharmacies, travel agencies, etc. Concerning health matters, a pharmacist can do the job in case of minor problems. For more serious cases, head to Morales, a 45 minute bus ride south, where there is a fairly new hospital and a choice of medical and dental practitioners.

Fronteras has a huge bus station with good connections to Flores, Tikal, Poptún, and Guatemala City, as well as such international destinations as San Salvador in El Salvador, San Pedro de Sula in Honduras, and Belize City. *Fuente del Norte*, *Litegua*, and *Línea Dorada* are the main bus companies serving national and international destinations from Río Dulce. Whereas both *Litegua* and *Línea Dorada* feature buses with AC and toilets and have their own terminals, *Litegua's* fees are more economical and their buses reflect that. Frequent minibuses leave for El Estor and Puerto Barrios and there are shuttle services to Cobán and Lanquín. As important a route as it may be in other directions, the CA-13 highway is, nonetheless, the only access by land to an area which sports neither roads nor footpaths outside the towns of Fronteras and El Relleno; other than the road leading to San Felipe and El Estor, that is.

Río Dulce is a truly aquatic community, perhaps on the order of a rustic Venice, where the only local transportation is by boat and all homes and businesses have a dock. There is an incessant traffic of dugout canoes and powerboats up and

down the river and a busy water taxi service offering regular trips to Livingston. All water taxis in Río Dulce consist of high speed launches with capacity for some dozen passengers; they are part of the workers' cooperative *Colectivo de Lancheros*. They have their own dock in Fronteras, right by the bridge, and offer regular scheduled trips to Livingston with stops along the way. The last departure from Fronteras is at 1.30pm and the ride takes about an hour, while fees range from 125Q one way to 200Q for a round trip.

Reputedly the best hurricane hole in the area, Río Dulce is an excellent place to leave the boat and venture into interior Guatemala with its abundant natural, historical, and archeological treasures in places such as Lake Atitlán, Antigua, and Tikal. For further knowledgeable information on Río Dulce, check out *Guatemala, A Cruiser's Guide To Río Dulce*, recently published by Italian cruisers Lilia Hartman and Roberto Trapani. It is an excellent source of updated, detailed, and extensive information on Río Dulce. You will also find much useful information in www.riodulcechisme.com and www.mayaparadise.com .

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Emilio De La Hoz is the “eye” that captured a number of the photos that enliven this guide. He is a great sailor and a good friend.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Amaia Agirre is Marketing Manager for the Caribbean, Free Cruising Guides.

A proud Basque from the province of Bizkaia on the Gulf of Biscay, she was a teacher and translator of English, Basque, and Spanish until she and her husband made the life changing decision to go to sea with their daughter and their dog.

They began their 14 year odyssey sailing around the Iberian Peninsula to the western Mediterranean where they took a two year break following the birth of their son. Then, after a year in Tenerife, the family left to cruise the north coast of South America from Natal, Brazil to Colombia, the Caribbean coast of Central America from Panama to Mexico, and the Greater and Lesser Antilles.

Home base today is Getaria, Spain.



Frank Virgintino is a native New Yorker. His sailing background of over forty years covers the Canadian Maritimes, all of the eastern seaboard of the United States and the entire Caribbean, many times over. Aside from cruising he has spent the better part of his career building and administering marinas.

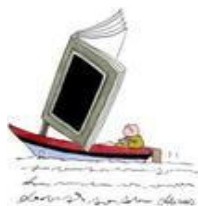
In the process of writing this guide all of the harbors listed were personally researched as was all of the information about, and knowledge of, the routing from easternmost Colombia to Rio Dulce, Guatemala, contained in the guide. It is hoped that this guide will make the rugged southwestern Caribbean easier to access, understand, and enjoy.

The authors believe that this guide should serve as an excellent source of information for this beautiful and remote part of the Caribbean although it should not be used for navigation at any time. *All charts, latitude and longitude positions given, and inserts exhibited should be used as a frame of reference only. Navigation should only be undertaken with appropriate charts of the area.*

Anchorage, harbors and facilities are dynamic and thus in a state of constant change. This cruising guide should be a tool that provides for insight and basis for your research, but it is a “guide” only.

You can make comments, ask questions or suggest changes on www.freecruisingguides.com or by writing to fvirgintino@gmail.com

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SPECIAL NOTE: It bears repeating: *Please keep in mind that cruising guides are not meant to be used for navigation. They are **GUIDES** to assist and enhance cruising and should be used for reference only.*

All of the latitudes and longitudes herein are given to the best of the author's ability. However, they should never be relied on. The skipper of the boat must remember that he/she is solely responsible for proper navigation.

Additionally, facts and circumstances related to statements made in the guide can change; sometimes facilities and services that existed during the writing of the guide may no longer be available.

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