

## **Subject/Area: Cocos Island**

Cocos Island: scuba divers, don't miss them!!!

After 7 days and 13 hours of challenging sailing into the wind (from Contadora), we made it to the Cocos! A few facts about this trip (made in August): we did around 720NM of actual distance because we had to tack in order to use the wind and not to bash head into the big swell; a direct trip would have been around 573NM; we had to run the engine for around 94 hours to motorsail closer to the wind to make better time; we had winds mostly from the South, SSW with 2 days of WSW that prevented us from going to Isla Malpelo (unless we wanted to beat our brains to get there to do some very challenging diving!); we had rainy and totally overcast days and few sunny days; winds went from <5 knots to 30 knots; seas were from flat to 6 ft high. Passages are certainly not the best part of cruising but being at anchor and enjoying the islands topside and underwater makes it all worth it! Our uncommon watch system worked great: Jackie is on watch from 0000 to 0800 (so I get my sleep as I cannot really rest during daylight or in short periods!) and Jackie sleeps from 2100 till 0000 and from 0800 till 1200 with naps in the afternoon (this system only if our 4th crew member, "auto" does his job and the wx is settled!); we eat something every 4 hours and take it easy whenever we can!

Best Anchorage> Chatham Bay: 05d33'N-87d02'W 4 moorings suitable for yachts + 2 moorings for big dive boats. Ranger sub-station in Chatham Bay monitors VHF CH16 (We made our entry into the bay on a pitch-black night, but thanks to GPS, radar, depth sounder and chart, we made it easily. Locals helped us find a mooring and we had a calm anchorage to rest. In the months of Dec-Feb, the winds can go north strongly and Chatham Bay can get dangerous (you have then to move to Bahia Yglesias).

For 12 days we enjoyed the scuba in the Cocos! Years after Cousteau and numerous other famous u/w photographers, we finally got to dive those waters teeming with hammerhead sharks, big stingrays, white tip sharks and huge schools of jacks and other species. If you like pelagics, this is one of our favorite places in the world! Not much of any coral life at all since El Nino (him again!) whipped it all! But the fish life is so prolific that we don't mind so much the quasi absence of corals. We have done 20 dives and I produced a great video.

Our favorite dive sites: 1) Dirty Rock 2) Submerged rock 3) Isla Manuelita (5 min. dinghy from the Chatham Bay anchorage) 4) Lobster Rock (same note).

Cocos is under the authority of the Costa Rican Park Rangers and it is part of the World's protected areas; no fishing or hunting allowed and fees are levied to all visitors: 15\$ for the boat/day + 15\$ per person/day + 4\$ per diver/day. Our first morning, we were visited by Felipe the Park manager at the time (they rotate every 3 months) and Christian, a Park volunteer that spoke English and we had to pay 45\$ for our first day (we didn't want to dive but clean up the boat and take it easy after our 8 day passage). We met Claudine, a scientist from Argentina and she helped us get into the Volunteer Program of the Park. If visitors are willing to help the Park with projects, working 8 hours/day, they have only to pay 10\$/day/pers and no boat fee (and you get 3 meals/day. Sounds not too great to

pay to work but we got a great deal worked out: we dive with Carlos, the marine biologist, make an U/W video for him and the Park, and design, fabricate, and install 2 boat moorings over a 10 day period. It was great to dive some dives with a guide and the Park boat! We declined on breakfasts and dinners as the dinghy ride to the other bay (Wafer Bay - main ranger's station) is too long and too difficult because of the tides, but we got local lunches (wild pig meat, venison, black beans and rice, ...).

Plenty of fresh water stream to fill your jugs. Showers at Chatham station.

We met the different live-aboard dive boats: the well-organized and nice people on SeaHunter and UnderSeaHunter and the Cocos Aggressor: Okeanos. You may be able to get them to fill your scuba tanks or to dive with them if they are not fully booked! Possibility to buy fuel and gas from them.

We had great contacts with the Park personnel. We even went hiking with 3 of them for 5 hours in the tropical forest and went to a nice waterfall. You can hike (not after rain as it gets too slippery!) to the wx station above the station in Chatham (30min.) You can hike from Chatham Bay to Wafer Bay. You can dinghy almost to the base of Wafer Bay waterfall with only a few minutes hiking to the pool.

So we really enjoyed the Cocos and we are glad that we made a stop despite the high fees we heard about beforehand, because it turned out that we were able to minimize them by helping the park as volunteers. And we had our own tour and dive guides! Could not have been better!

Now remember, you are in a Park: no spear fishing or line fishing allowed!

Don't get your scuba gear, dinghy + motor confiscated (plus a heavy fine!) for a few lobsters (like a fellow cruiser a few months ago)! Also no pets ashore! Watch out for dumb Boobies flying into your wind generator blades (like one did to us)! One thing we won't miss from the Cocos is the continual rain (lucky to get a few hours of sunshine in a day. You can spend your day in your wetsuit!

Is going to Cocos for you? If you're an experienced diver who wants excitement and non-stop big fish action and has someone who can stay in the dinghy while you drift dive... you MUST go. This is world class diving.

The island is beautiful and wild, teeming with bird and marine life, spectacular scenery, and dozens of waterfalls, each one different, tumbling directly into the sea. There are no hotels, stores, airplanes, or dive shops, only the Ranger Station and a sub-station. For the fees, all you get is Nature... you decide.

So now we are back crashing and bashing, sailing through confused seas to reach the famous Galapagos! Because of adverse winds and currents, we'll make about 600 NM instead of 420 NM bird's flight! Some French friends (ANAO) left from Panama a few days before we left Cocos and they are not having any more fun than us! Soon, we'll tell you about the nice Galapagos Islands where things are now much easier for cruisers than up to just a year ago!

September 1999

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche