

## Subject/Area: Galapagos

After reading about all the hassles encountered by fellow cruisers in the last 10 years, we were a little apprehensive as to the local authorities' welcome but things have changed for the better in the Galapagos!

After a 5 day-passage from Cocos (in August), we made our landfall at Tower Is. The trip was sort of a repeat of the one from Panama to Cocos with head winds plus, this time, a big current pushing us too far West (some boats gave the Galapagos a miss as they let themselves go too far West and couldn't fight their way against winds and currents!

Since we arrived at Tower Is. in the middle of the night, we hove-to a few miles away till dawn, when we then entered the narrow passage leading to the inside of this crater island. Waypoint entrance of channel: 00d17'5N - 89d57'6W ; go 20-30d mag. towards lighted range markers to cross the rim of the volcano and then steer towards anchorage: 00d19'N - 89d57'W (20-25ft sandy bottom, slightly roly). There, we rested for a day and fixed some of our broken gear! Passages like the last two are really hard on the boat and all it's equipment! No going ashore here as 97% of the Galapagos is under the rules of the Park and no one is allowed to go ashore (except in the 3%: the towns and surroundings) without a licensed guide and after having paid the 100\$pp fee to the Park!

No animals allowed ashore anywhere here so Zoetje has to wait till the Marquesas to smell the flowers! Poor guy!

The next day, we sailed to Santa Cruz to clear in and finally rest, fix gear, visit what we like and provision some! It took us 24 hours of motor sailing about 140 miles to cover the 67 NM that separates the 2 islands! As you guessed, we had to go against winds and currents again!

Now I bet, few of you know that it's pretty cold here this time of the year! We wear extra clothes with sweaters and windbreakers to protect us from the cold and the misty wet air! Even wore socks a few times! The cold currents passing by this time of the year really cools the place and that's why you can see penguins here! And at the same time, in the warm currents you see all warm water life!

This Aug.-Sept was very cool according to the natives: Day temps: 68-70 F, but seeming much colder when the winds cut through you. Water temp also 68F. Brrr! Days were mostly overcast with passing low clouds, haze, and drizzle, with occasional periods of weak sunshine.

When you show up without permit, you can now get up to 21 days for a moderate fee, based mostly on tonnage (small sailboats are light so it's not bad!). (If your papers say net tonnage, you win, displacement tonnage you lose.) For us, it was 12\$/pers for immigration, no visas needed prior to arrival, the international check-in/out is around 4,65\$/ton for the boat, you are only allowed to stop in 4 anchorages on 4 islands (Sta Cruz: Academy Bay, San Cristobal: Wreck Bay, Isabela: Pto. Villamil and Floreana) and every time you have to check-out (2\$ or double if on the WE!) and check-in (same fees). Beware that since a few months, in Sta Cruz, the port captain wants a "fumigation certificate" from your previous port of call! If you don't have one, you have to get fumigation done by the local company (about 50\$!). You do not need a local agent as you can go through

officialdom easily by yourself and take care on your own (at better prices) for any provisioning. Locals are very friendly and the place is small enough that you will find your way very quickly! The procedure can vary somewhat according to who you happened to fall upon in the Port Captain's office. Friends landed in Wreck Bay were required to pay in/out fees at the time of entry, and then national fees between islands. In Sta Cruz, we paid no Port fees on entry, and were required to leave our boat papers, sign a paper with rules listed (out of date rules), and give proof of fumigation. A young, probably new guy checked us in, and when asked the procedure, told us that payment of the fees was due at the LAST port before your Int'l departure. If visiting other ports, you pay only the Nat'l Zarpe, get you boat papers back, and take 'em to the next port, etc. until your last port. But when we went to check out to go to Isabela, another guy wanted us to pay the full fees, but backed down when told what we heard from the 1st guy.

If you want to visit the Park islands on your own boat, you have to apply a year in advance for that cruising permit that, by the way, still costs you 200\$/day per passenger plus payment to a local guide to accompany you on the tour! Heard that not long ago they had a big yacht that cruised for 10 days with 17 passengers on board. The rich owner considered it pocket money!

After our experience from Tower to Sta Cruz, and having talked to sailors who were beset by changing winds and currents between islands (one motorless sailor ended up being pushed back to the very same spot two days later! Aggg!), taking one of the dozens of variously priced and sized tour boats would be a much more economical and relaxing option. If you want to do any diving outside of the immediate vicinity of Academy bay or if you take boat tours, you have to go the Park office to obtain your Park Permit.

In Academy Bay, You CAN get some things fixed: Gallardo is an inventive machine shop doing all kinds of metal fabricating (we had our SS wind generator shaft welded since a red footed booby broke it in the Cocos!); a sail repairer working on WE fixed our sails at a most inexpensive price (cheap, if not beautiful, work he is located on an adjacent street 100 yds away from Gallardo!);

Electronautica does all electronic repairs (but be very patient as he is very busy and parts can take months to get here!!! Our Swiss friends on Galaxy 2 waited here for 4 months before their 3 autopilots got fixed!); a newly installed mechanic did repair our alternator (redone the 2 windings,...); you can find some outboard mechanics; good carpenters (we got battens made of teak at great prices) ...

Labor is cheap

so when you find skilled people, don't hesitate to give them your business!

Go speak with Jason (native, educated in the US) at Bodega Blanca for marine parts and hardware.

We met Henry, HC8KU, a German expat, who can steer you to the right places (VHF 06). More than 10,000 people live on this main island and the place is full of touristy businesses run by young Ecuadorians from the mainland here to make it. No foreigner is allowed to take up residence here since many years anymore to not compete with the locals! Souvenir shacks, restaurants, accommodations and tour boats abound to take care of the 2 planes/week of tourists coming mainly from the US and Europe. It's a real tourists trap with plenty of charter

boats: from old renovated fishing boats (economy class at 60\$/day, small motor yachts tourist class at 85\$/day to cruise ships at over 200\$/day.

You can jerry-jug diesel and gasoline from the sole gas station just outside town (when no shortage!!). Taxis are mostly pick-up truck and standard fare to anywhere in town is 10,000 sucre! (less than \$1). The Ecuadorian money is devaluating constantly, and the bank changes the exchange rate almost hourly. At the time we were there, the rate was +/- 10,850 sucre/\$1.

Good bakeries with inexpensive croissants, rolls and sandwich bread.

New frozen food store "El Frio" with great quality frozen meats, vegetables and great cheeses and more at excellent prices. Make sure you have some room available in your fridge/freezer!

Casa Blanca (entrance of Galapagos Hotel) sells silk-screen paints at most inexpensive prices if you want to design T-shirts or make your courtesy flags!

You can get antibiotics w/o prescription for reasonable prices here. (At Panama antibiotics need a prescription.) The most knowledgeable farmacia is the one next to the hospital/clinic upstairs, a less expensive one is up the street towards the mercado on the left as you ascend and is called Economica 1 and does not say farmacia tho it is evident that's what it is if you look in.

Yesterday, we visited the Darwin Center with the only giant turtles easily seen on the islands (others are hidden on islands where the guides are only allowed to go on small coastal areas!).

Did 2 great drift dives North of Santa Cruz: North Seymour and Mosquera: hammerhead sharks, turtles, white tip sharks, eagle rays, sea lions, and even a few manta rays! (Lucky day!)

Got some good local meals at great prices (1.5\$ for lunch: soup/dish/juice and 2.5\$ for dinner).

One thing about Santa Cruz is that, as nowhere before, I had to walk so often to go back and forth to places to get jobs finished or meet people: "come back manana, ... you can see so and so later this afternoon, ... it will be ready at 3 PM, ... sorry it's not ready yet but it will be in a few hours, ... the director is off island for a few days, ...etc."

### **Isla Isabela:**

We had a good sail (approx. 45 NM) from Sta Cruz to Isabela. Watch out when you enter the anchorage area that you do not go too close to the reefs or you may end up next to the wreck of the freighter that ended up there 4 months ago! There is quite an impressive swell behind you as you make the approach. Keep the small green islands well to your right, staying in at least 30-50 ft. You will see what appears to be a lighthouse or tower on the shore, left (west) of the town. Head straight towards that shoreline more or less in direction of the tower keeping your depth until you pass the small light signal on the reef to your right. At that point you will see the calmer water and your way in.

The anchorage here is not so roly because it is protected behind reefs. The bottom is fine, heavy sand, and will be about 8' at low tide. There is a breakwater, of sorts, in front of the Port Captain's where you can take the dink in calm conditions, otherwise, the surf still wraps around the breakwater. A better place

is the fisherman's landing, in protected waters of the anchorage. Follow the locals, as there are shoals and rocks to go around esp. at low tide.

The island is not to be missed as it is more interesting to visit with the volcanoes (some still active) and other attractions like the turtle breeding farm, local farms and a flamingo's pond! Plus fewer people living here and you don't feel much the touristic impact yet. Did some nice touring: went for a car>horseback>walking trip to the top of one of the 5 volcanoes: Sierra Negra. Great scenery, nice hike, very inexpensive (Bargained for: 40\$ for 4 pax!). Took close to 6 hours with stopping to pick fruits (passion and guavas) on the way back. We also walked over 3 hours looking for "the wall of tears" (built by prisoners a long time ago) but stopped 15 min. short of it (we learned later!) as we couldn't understand why we had not arrived yet (based on conflicting info by locals!); but we had a great time anyway!

We met Marita, very nice and helpful lady, who run a small bed and breakfast place (Casa de Marita) on the beach at very reasonable prices and clean, family style. That would be a great place to get off the boat for a few days if desired or to get friends visiting (hcmarita@ga.pro.ec)!

Did also explore the nearby volcanic islets hosting endemic birds, marine iguanas, sea lions, a small natural channel with many resting white tip sharks, and more! In the protected anchorage where we are (behind those islets), the sea lions use the local fishing boats as rest platforms to bask in the sun and it's fun to see them leap 5 feet in the air to land on those old wooden boats! So many animals so accessible from the anchorage!

Since I discovered last week that I lost 30 movies on 10 video tapes contaminated with fungus (I know, we should have vacuum sealed them!), I have been a good customer at the local video rental place: the movies are pirate copies of variable quality but some titles are good and the price is right (40c) and the Spanish sub-titles useful to learn an extra language!

Enjoy the Galapagos and if you only stay a short time, make sure you stop in Isabela as it is so nice and different than Sta Cruz! You can still stock up on good bread and rolls here, and there is a mercado of sorts with the basic veggies and local citrus fruits. There's also a photocopy place (\$.05ea). The paperwork at the Port Captain's office was much abbreviated compared to Sta Cruz. In fact, they'd run out of blank forms, so they gave us our zarpe from SC back and told us to get two copies made, then whited-out the arrival/departure info and wrote in the new stuff, then stamped it!

October 1999

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche