

Subject/ Area: Vanuatu

At the speed we cruise, it will take us more than one season to cover Vanuatu! During this past 4 months, we explored the Southern part of Vanuatu: Tanna, Aniwa, Erromango and Efate. The ultimate cruising guide for Vanuatu is the Rocket Guide (nicknamed Tusker guide, from the first sponsor - www.cruising-vanuatu.com). With charts, aerial photos and sailing directions to most anchorages, you will have no problem making landings. We also used Bob Tiews & Thalia Hearn's Vanuatu cruising guide and Miz Mae's Vanuatu guide. Those 3 reference guides and previous letters in the SSCA bulletins will help you planning a great time in Vanuatu! CM 93 electronic charts are slightly off so do not rely blindly on them! At time of writing, 100 vatu (vt) was about \$1 US.

Tanna:

Having an official port of entry, this island was our first landfall, as cruising NW to see the Northern islands will be easier than the other way around!

Port Resolution: We arrived in Port Resolution early on Lucky Thursday...lucky because that is the day of the week that the Customs and Immigration officials come the 2 1/2 hour, 4-wheel drive across from Lenakel. We checked in at no extra cost, and avoided the expense of hiring a transport (2000 vatu RT). We met Werry, the caretaker of the Port Resolution "yacht club", donated a weary Belgian flag for his collection, and found out about the volcano visit, tours, and activities. Stanley, the son of the Chief, is responsible for relations with the yachts, and he is the tour guide or coordinator of the tours that yachties decide to do.

Every letter covers the volcano, so we'll just say that it IS a fantastic experience, we went twice! The entrance fee for the volcano is up to 2250 Vatu now as the govt decided to tack on VAT! This area is beautiful, and a fitting introduction to the unique islands of Vanuatu. The principal village, Irepow, is almost entirely traditional thatched huts constructed of natural materials paneled with different weaves of bamboo or rush. The paths are lined with tropical flowers and trees like a botanical garden. Walk through the village to the beautiful white sand beach. There's a cute thatched "restaurant", where you can have a meal prepared by Lea, who makes some of the best food of local ingredients. Our meal was delicious, attractively presented, and certainly a good bargain. Lea loves talking to people. She is unusually bright and articulate, and strives always to improve and to help herself. Make prior arrangements with Lea or Werry. There are many more things to do than the volcano. Dinghy to the base of the cliff on the N side of the bay to see hot water churning and boiling up from the rocks, and a small hot water cascade steaming into the sea. You can swim close and chose your temperature for a hot soak! By arrangement, you can see Kastom (Custom, traditional) villagers who still wear the G-string penis shields called nambas do thundering chanting dances under the roots of an immense ancient banyan tree, see firewalking and "magic leaves", horseback ride to the volcanic plain or the cave at the base of Mt Melon, the highest mountain, or trek 3 hrs each way to the sacred Kefar waterfall, guarded by jungle villagers who believe this fall houses spirits and magical rocks, and who have opened this sacred cascade to visitors only since mid-2005.

A place we had never heard or read about that's very unique is Shark's Bay. From about June thru about Mar every year, this tiny rock strewn bay plays host to dozens of sharks that wallow around in the shallows and even come up on to the beach with the waves. We, unfortunately, were there in May, too early. The Waiwai family, who own the land, are guardians of the bay, and they will tell you the legends their ancestors had about the sharks, the sacred shark stones, and the tabu (taboo) beach. The newest thing at Shark's bay, is the Tree House bungalow built about 50ft high in a giant spreading banyan tree. We scrambled up the "staircase" to the really cute bungalow and saw the

smoke bellowing from Mt Yasur, and from another window, Mt Melon. Marie Pauline prepared us a beautiful lobster lunch accompanied by avocado in season and local fruits and roots. Stanley or Werry can, with a full day's notice, arrange for Richard to meet you on the beach near the anchorage and accompany you the 45-50 minutes walk to Shark's Bay. Lobster takes advanced notice and settled weather for them to catch them fresh. The family is really sweet, and anxious to please, someone there can speak English or French. Even without the sharks, the sea views are breathtaking.

The people of Port Resolution and volcano area are fairly new to tourism as a business and so are still working out some bugs. Shyer than Fijians, they hesitate to volunteer details, so be sure to ask many questions as to what the total charges are for tours. We found that the transport, the guide, the guardian of the attraction, and perhaps others each get something for their part in the activity, and sometimes you can be surprised to find out that the price quoted, did not include the cost for every element. Since their own language of Bislama does not always express things like past, present, and future tense, or connecting or specifying words, sometimes what they think they say is not what you think they said. This can lead to awkward situations, like thinking transportation is arranged already when in reality they are hoping that when it comes time, they will be able to find one of the few people with vehicles.

Black Sands: Locals told us that when the winds are too rough for boats coming to Lenakel wharf, local boats go up to Black Sand beach, on the northwest side, where it's calmer. The approach is hazard free, and except for the rock in the middle close to the beach, which is easily seen since waves break on it, the area is all pure black sand bottom until just before the beach. We anchored fairly far out in about 35ft, south of the rock, and saw later we could have gone in closer, as the depth stays over 20ft quite close to the beach. There is still the ubiquitous swell, but not bad for a multi-hull. Apart from the scenery and the good holding, there is not much to do, and only a very primitive road with almost no traffic.

Evergreen Resort Bay: While in Lenakel, we met Iaken, Chairman of the Tanna Tourism Association, and Merian (Maryann), also an active member. There is a small bay that they felt might be a good anchorage for yachts in front of Tanna Evergreen Bungalows, which they run in partnership. They were keen for us to come with the boat to give our opinion, as they would like to welcome yachts to the resort for drinks, meals, easy transport into Lenakel, and tours to attractions on this side of the island. We were interested too, thinking that this could be a good alternative to Lenakel Wharf area, which has a bad reputation as an anchorage. Merian and Sam, the active managers, are very gracious and welcoming. Since the bay is pretty small, we'll built 2 strong moorings for them. The small bay is protected by reef systems extending from the north and south points, and by some shallow reefs, which almost enclose the bay. There is still some swell that gets in, but a lot less than Lenakel. Swelly in strong S winds, good in SE, great in E (even in very strong trades), pretty good in NE. The safest way to enter the bay is to stay well off shore until just in front of the White Grass Resort, easily recognized by the bright pink bougainvillea flowers, and large thatched buildings on the white colored heights. Approach waypoint (S19d26'406-E169d12'979.). From there, proceed to waypoint (S19d26'485-E169d13'217.), which will bring you mid way between the shore reef and an isolated blind breaker reef marked by two hard red fishing buoys. From there proceed to the new yacht moorings, each with 3 yellow foam floats.(S19d26'589-E169d13'27.) - Complimentary for patrons. Please check the mooring to ascertain it is well maintained and safe for your vessel! They hope to add another if the response is good. The bay is otherwise pretty deep for anchoring, 60-70 ft. Dinghy landing can be tricky with the tidal difference and the uneven hard shore that dries, but they are hoping to make a dingy channel up to the high tide line.

It's only 15 min drive to Lenakel if you need to clear in/out or get basic foods, and the airport runway is just at the south end of the bay, making it convenient if people are flying in/out.

The resort has good basic facilities, good home-cooked meals, a beer and hard liquor bar. White Grass Resort, a short walk away, has a fancier restaurant and bar, more upscale landscaping, a small pool, and putting greens. There are many tours and activities on this side of Tanna too. The Yakel Kastom village, is a real village where the people have chosen to live traditionally, men wearing only numbas, and women, topless in grass skirts, without any amenities from the outside world. Another Kastom village, Ipai, is more colorful, and the "traditions" more modern, with emphasis on handicrafts, local dishes, and bush medicine. There's a waterfall/surfing beach tour, cultural tours of South Tanna, and one of the more unique tours, a boat trip up north to the Blue Cave pool, and a very interesting land cavern. This was our favorite. The shoreline all the way up is very scenic, and geologically intriguing. The Blue Cave pool is accessed by swimming to the rock wall, duck diving a mere half meter (or just swimming in at low tide), into a gigantic dome-shaped cavern with a small round opening in the top where you see the green forest overhead, beams of sunlight streaming down striking the water's surface, and aqua blue water below you illuminated, like a lighted a swimming pool, shimmering bright blue from the sun shining through the water from the outside. Magic! The land cave appears as a giant black hole in the white cliffs from a mile off. From the beach, you see it is an immense open cavern cut deep into the hillside, beautiful with the contrasting colors of light and dark, green vegetation and barren cliffs, bright flowers and somber shadows. You must do this on a sunny day for the best effect. Even with strong trade winds blowing, the shoreline is protected and the cave pool entrance was calm.

There is interesting snorkeling and scuba diving (if you have your own gear) right in front of Evergreen along the drop-off of the shore reef system, or on the towering formations that create the isolated shallow reefs a few hundred meters from shore.

Aniwa:

We had a period of windless weather, so came here to help update the Rocket Guide by taking GPS points requested and investigate the area. The anchorage indicated is 50ft or more deep, the bottom mostly hard rubble, any sand patches are tiny and superficial. Since the weather was flat calm, we anchored on a dead coral plateau area, also hard rubble, but only 10-20 ft deep, put out minimal chain, since the anchor and first part of the chain would catch in the rubble and hold, then buoyed the rest to keep it from sinking and tangling on the bottom. Landing the dingy is not easy any where along the coast from the anchorage to the lagoon entrance, as it is jagged rock with barrier reefs and rock. We did find a way to get on the beach nearest to the anchorage. There are some thatched shelters under the coconuts, and a sign in Bislama that you could figure out meant don't kilem totl (kill 'em turtle). We took the dinghy into the lagoon at high tide, where you can get over the barrier reef anywhere where it wasn't breaking. There is a small dinghy pass on the north side of the entrance for lower tides. The lagoon is very shallow inside; we thought we saw a native rowing to us in his dugout, but closer, saw he was walking across! Not much of interest in the lagoon waters. The man walking was Miak (Mike), the manager of the lagoon area, who told us that anyone doing any activity in the lagoon area were supposed to pay 1000 vatu/person. Money only, no gifts or barter. If this fee was not paid, there was a fine, or if refused, they would "come take things from the boat". What a nice welcome...such a contrast to Port Resolution. Why?? Because this is a Cruise Ship stop, and the ship pays the fee for its passengers. We agree that they should, since they impact resources, make money from using these resources, and they should pay the villagers to build facilities and groom the beaches. But because of this, the fee is imposed on everyone. Not only that,

but if Miak is not in the area to collect, you are supposed to walk 30 minutes to Isavai village (good luck to find the path) or go by boat on the outside (but the village is not visible from the sea!). We elected not to go back to the boat to get money to pay the fee. From what we could see, there was nothing special about the area. It may be worth to pay on a cruise ship day when the villagers put on entertainment and sell arts and crafts. The water clarity on the outside was great, 70-80ft, but the snorkeling was just so-so from the anchorage to the lagoon entrance.

Erromango: Made a good stop to break up the trip from Tanna to Port Vila. Dillon Bay harbors the largest of the villages on the island. The anchorage has constant swell, more or less exaggerated depending on wind and swell outside. There can be accelerated gusts sweeping down the river valley. The calmest place to anchor is on the south corner of the rocky beach, it's all black sand bottom, and at least 20ft deep close up to the beach. Those that anchored farther out and in front of the river mouth rolled a lot more. While the village doesn't seem to have much to offer, the people are nice, and two brothers especially, David and Joseph, welcome yachties, often coming out in the canoe to offer you some fruits and talk. Yachts are often their only visitors, and much of the time, a source of supplies. The Chief's son said that his father does not want the people to beg, or ask things or money without giving things in trade or services. We applauded this attitude. Trading goods for goods is a much better deal for both, as what is small value for each, can be great value to the other. David and his family showed us how to make lap-lap the Vanuatu traditional dish, and we showed them how to make poe, a Tahitian dessert using local ingredients. He, and others can organize a small meal or large "feasts", for small prices or trade items. Joseph, told us about a waterfall that he had never visited, but would like to make a tour for visitors to earn a little money. It turned out a very feasible tour: less than 2 hr walk over flat ground, some shallow river crossings, passed gardens and wild fruit trees with stops to sample, passed clear deep pools, and only the last 10 mins climbing up a small gorge to the fall and large pool. The fall isn't especially large, but is pleasant and a nice picnic setting. Joseph is a good storyteller who remembers a lot of history and legend. For the very adventurous, climbing to the top of the fall, there are more pools and falls. Joe, the chief's son, guided us, in our dinghy, to some burial caves up the coast about a mile and a half. After some incantations to ask the spirits' permission, we entered to see many human bones and skulls. One flat stone was used as the "death bed" for the dying. There are also "treasures", possessions that were buried with the owners. Joe and others are hoping for government funding or archeologists to come and carefully excavate and preserve these burial caves as museums. There are caves further up the coast with ancient handprints painted or stenciled on the walls.

A few General notes about cruising the islands:

Approach to Port Vila from south: The Pango Pt lighthouse is not operational; so don't expect to see it. There is now a giant wind generator with a red light for air traffic about halfway along the arm of land between Mele Bay and Devils Point that may confuse you if you don't know what it is. There is a leading light into Port Vila. If the light is white, it is clear to go straight for it. If you are off the line, the light will be red or green.

Lumpy sailing is generally the case between islands. There are often strong currents running around points of land and between islands. Can be very nasty in strong winds (may be even overfalls). Don't underestimate. One large catamaran trailing their dinghy for the short trip from Havannah Harbor to Vila broke the painter in big waves and the seas were so rough, they dared not try to recover it and just had to watch it drift away with the expensive outboard. Last season three boats went up on reefs

and were lost. Always ensure 360 deg. swinging room at anchor and do NOT navigate at night and stand way off if you heave to. The Charts are off in most places.

Efate:

Formalities: If you are entering the country for the first time, anchor in the Quarantine area (see guides for all navigational details). The bottom comes up sharply and there are some very shallow coral heads 200ft North (left on arrival) . DO NOT CALL HARBOR CONTROL, they will not answer, call YACHTING WORLD, 7:30-11:30AM and 1:00-4:30PM, (note: Vanuatu is 1 hr behind Fiji Time), the approved agency to arrange clearance. Call on CH16 or 12. They have a small yellow boat that may greet you and bring the Quarantine officials (Health & Agriculture). No one is supposed to disembark before that. Afterwards, you generally have to go ashore to Immigration to clear in (in town near the Alliance Francaise), and also Customs at the main wharf (Cruiseship wharf). When checking out of Vanuatu, you will be required to pay the harbor fees for the whole time you spent in Vanuatu (7,000 Vt/ 1st month + 100 Vt/day afterwards). You can land the dinghy at the floating dock of the Dive Center in front of the Nambawan Café, only long enough for you to get off and pull the dinghy out of the way and tie along the sea wall. Please don't block access for their boat or clients. We have some good news for boats with pets that have been in rabies free countries for 6 months or more. There is a Govt. Vet who, upon request, can approve your animal to go ashore on all islands without quarantine! You must have all paper work to prove the animal qualifies and that it has a microchip or tattoo to verify it is the animal in question. He will inspect the animal, give a parasite and worm treatment, and 24hrs (and 11,000vt) later it's free to go ashore! If you are on the fast track and you were in countries with rabies less than 6 months before, it will be confined aboard. Please do not raise a fuss or cheat because Vanuatu is right now in debate about not only confining animals aboard, but also confining the boat to certain harbors, as they do in NZ and AUZ. That, and/or requiring a bond. That means no visiting the unique out-islands. PLEASE! DO NOT ruin it for others by breaking the rules, and the faith of the officials. If you cleared in Tanna or other island, the animal stays on board til the Vet approves it. We were given this info by the present Govt. Vet, Dale Hamilton, who will give us info to post on www.noonsite.com.

Port Vila: LOTS of things to report about Port Vila, the Capital and principal town of Vanuatu. Port Vila was a total surprise to us. We were expecting something like Pago Pago: a WWII/Colonial village lost in time and left derelict with only some decrepit Chinese fishing boats listing at dock. How wrong we were! Port Vila is a modern bustling tourist town with a main street lined with Duty-Free shops, sidewalk cafes, a cosmopolitan collection of restaurants, and tourist activity centers. It's a compact town with most everything within walking distance of a dinghy dock or only a short bus ride away. The fruit and veggie market on the waterfront has beautiful produce, lots of choice, great prices, and is open 24 hrs a day M-F, and until ~2PM on Sat. afternoon. There are modern supermarkets, as well as the Chinese stores. The Bon Marche II, a 15 min walk up the hill has bakery, produce, deli, and meat counters and every food and non-food that you could want, but be prepared for Tahiti prices! The beef of Vanuatu is fantastic, and reasonably priced; don't buy in Fiji. It's possible to get vacuum-packed beef that is approved for tourists to take back to Australia; perhaps it would be accepted upon entering by boat...something to check out. There is a large and varied ex-patriot community, which is reflected in the wealth of restaurants of every type...more on that later. There are some very well organized tourist activities here too, many are culturally or environmentally oriented, but unfortunately, there are also noisy, gas-consuming, non-educational things which we feel is best left to countries that everyone is running to Vanuatu to get away from. It

feels like a boomtown that is right on the brink of falling into the excesses of modern society. The indigenous culture of these islands are so rich and rare, we hope they choose environmentally wise growth!

Restaurants: Although the prices to eat out are 40% higher than in Fiji, the variety and quality of the restaurants here are very good. We like to explore and find those places mostly unknown to visiting yachts, but recommended by locals, or offering cultural shows. Average price range for a restaurant with pleasant surroundings, tastefully presented food, and good service is between 1400vt-3000vt for the main course. 500vt-1000vt for first courses or desserts. Soft drinks: 250-300vt, Local beer: 300-450vt. These are some of the restaurants we visited:

Flaming Bull Steakhouse: The manager, Joe, as well as the Chefs and personnel are all ni-Vanuatu (Melanesians). Just past the Port Vila Yacht Club (not Yachting World) as you head out of town, the atmosphere is open-air, casual. You can watch the Chefs at work as they turn out thick, tender steaks, and hardy portions of healthy vegetables. My filet mignon, was an inch thick, and incredibly tender. Save room for the Mango Cheesecake!! (Picture perfect, and to-die-for delicious!)

Mangoes Resort: about 1 km from town center, overlooking the Erakor Lagoon, this is a small, quiet resort in a garden setting with 2 fresh water pools. Recently taken over by a young New Zealanders couple, Callum and Michelle. With advanced notice, they will pick-up restaurant patrons in town. The menu is what I call Nouvelle Eclectic Gourmet, the new trend of blending flavors and ideas from many classic ethnic dishes to create something entirely unique.

Breakas Resort: a mid-sized resort with individual thatched bungalows on a beach about 10 minutes bus ride on the Pango Point road, this is a great place to spend a day or half day by the infinity pool, snorkeling the reef, or lazing on the beach. Diners are welcome to use the beach and pool. And the dining is really worth it! Try the Twice Cooked Pork and Calamari, and the Local Smoked Marlin with Black Olive Tappenade....WOW! Be sure to meet Deco, an endemic brightly plumed lorikeet...What a character!

Iririki Island Resort: The whole island in the center of the harbor is an ambitious development conceived by a large Australian group. There is a free shuttle boat every 5 minutes. The dock is between the Waterfront Restaurant and the Public Market. They put on a very nice Melanesian Show and Buffet on Tuesdays. Kava Tasting starts about 6:30, then segues into the Buffet featuring many Melanesian foods cooked the traditional underground oven method. During dinner, Islanders from Futuna, Fatuana Bamboo Band, play tunes on their funny funky flotsam instruments accompanied by guitars. Really a great sound! The dance performance starts about ½ an hour after the buffet opens, which rushes the dinner, especially if you want to take photos up close to the stage. During the dance the hot food is replaced by the desserts, so one can't dally over the food, or start eating late. The dance and costumes are quite different to those of other islands. The cost of the evening is just over 3000vt. Mondays there is a native Snake Dance, which an ex-pat told us was the best on island. The dance represents the Sea Snake so dancers paint white stripes across the body. Afterwards is the welcome buffet; we only took a drink and watched the dance, but the menu sounded copious and varied. Again, somewhere in the 3000vt range.

La Pizzeria: A locals' secret, offers a lot more than pizza for very good prices. It's just across the roundabout from the big Bon Marche II supermarket.

Coco Palms Resort/Wild Pig Bar: Their Chef was awarded Best Chef for 2006. The meat dishes show the Euro influence: Beer Marinated Pork Chops, Garlic Stuffed Sirloin w/ Whisky sauce. Big portions. If you like Trivia Nights: every other Tues. at the WP Bar!

Kanpai: Japanese with a wide choice of cold and hot dishes. Mami Kiyofugi, Mgr, has a very pleasant terrace with a small, lighted swimming pool, overlooking the yachts and Iririki Island. Must be authentic, Japanese ex-pats took us there!

Café Deli: Deli style service, specialty foods pre-made by the house: quiches, lasagne, pizza, foccias, salads, savory and sweet tarts, cakes, baked cheese cakes, etc. Can buy their fresh curry sauces to take home. Occasionally do a theme dinner night (Curry, Roasts, Moroccan..).

Peche Mignon: Hidden behind wood blinds, across from the public market, this is a treasure trove of pastries, confections, rich and beautiful sundaes, and daily French-inspired lunch specials at around 1000vt.. Chocolates are made on the premises by a real French Chocolatier. Choose European pastries, or long lasting specialty breads (Sun.) We know many yachties that make this place a daily ritual!

Melanesian Dance shows and Feasts: offered at many resorts, different islands presented at different ones and different days.

Iririki Island Resort: Tuesdays, very nice Melanesian/Anglo Buffet, dance and entertainment by Futuna Islanders, indoors (3300vt)

Meridien Hotel: Thursdays, Large assortment Melanesian/Anglo Buffet, dancers from 2 Islands, Banks and Futuna, outdoors under tent on lagoon beach (4700vt)

Melanesian Hotel: Sun, Wed, Fri, Aussie BBQ buffet (nothing spectacular but the price is right), but great dance show: Malekula Is. Small Nambas (best) Sun and Wed, Futuna Island dance, Fri, poolside (1700vt)

Ekasup Cultural Village: Fridays, Best overall experience! Takes place in an actual custom village, traditional greeting with torches and weapons, many explanations about dancing, kava, food, and Futunans' heritage. Best kava drinking. Village-style underground oven buffet. Lots of traditional dances. Before and after show entertainment by funky flotsam bamboo band and everyone invited to dance. Very informative and Lots of fun! Very well done entirely by Futuna Islanders. (3100vt, 1550vt child) See also tour section.

Vanuatu Discovery Tours: Tanna Toka Dances and Lap Lap Dinner: We helped this community of very sweet people from Tanna to develop this program by giving ideas and gathering up yachties to serve as test audiences. They perform dances from Tanna including 2 exclusive dances (by special permission) that normally are only performed at the Toka Festival once in 2-4 years. Takes place in a beautiful natural lagoon setting, includes kava tasting, opening of the lap lap stone oven, the dances, and transport to/from dinghy dock. They will probably always keep a special price for yachties, be sure to ask.

Activities and Tours:

Cultural Experiences: if you don't have a chance to get to the out islands, at least do one of these:

Ekasup Cultural Village: Another worthwhile educational and fun experience from these islanders.

Our Guide, Zero was so cute, and as he guided us around to different stations in the forest, he explained ancient and current traditional skills, crafts and legends of their way of life. It's all done with humor and interaction. Zero was astounded that I hit the tree with the arrow. So was I!

Refreshments and fun entertainment afterwards. We highly recommend this experience. Phone: 24217 for direct booking.

Vanuatu Cultural Center & Museum: walking distance from Yachting World, it is worth visiting to get background info on Vanuatu. Don't miss the sand drawing demonstrations!

Vanuatu Discovery Tours: Run by Tanna Islander, Joseph, offers package tours to Tanna Island, or a round Efate island tour with a very well done cultural village experience, and interesting and varied stops with lots of stories and info given by the guides (ask for Aliks). (Yachtie prices)

Evergreen Tours and Mele Waterfalls: Offers a variety of sight-seeing tours, and have exclusive rights to the beautiful Mele Waterfalls and pools, which you can visit on a tour, or on your own (entrance fee 1000vt). Also run by Vanuatu islanders, buses are modern and air-conditioned. (10% off – direct booking)

Ecotours: Pascal, a Tri-lingual Frenchman, is energetic and enthusiastic about Vanuatu. Easy walks or more active hiking, kayaking, or mountain biking through forests and village land, not available to any other non-tribesman. Now a Vanuatu national, he promotes non-polluting, healthful activities that show you the natural Efate, seldom visited. The waterfall near the Catholic Seminary was beautiful, and the water had an incredible clarity!

Coongoola Cruises: If you don't plan to take the boat up to Havanna Harbor, but want to see this beautiful area, have a relaxed beach day, and learn some stories about the small islands around, this is a fun day cruise, A bus will take you to the HH area, then it's a short cruise to Tranquility Island and a great beach. Steak BBQ lunch, snorkeling.

Adrenaline Activities:

Aerochute: Motorized para-gliding! With pilot, you take off, fly around sight-seeing the island and the sea or lagoon, or spinning 360's if you like, or even take the controls as the pilot guides you through it! It's considered the safest of lightweight flying machines and one of the easiest to learn to fly. After all, the parachute is always deployed and ready to bring you safely down at any time!

Buggy Fun Rentals: We got a bunch of yachties together and went on the full day tour to Eton Beach via the old American WWII road. A very nice French couple offer several choices of tours using their off-road fun buggies to "get off the beaten path" and see the back roads of Efate and have fun driving these sporty vehicles following the guide through the "bush"! Older children were allowed to drive depending the conditions. They also have tours combined with horse riding, kayaking, or walking to swim at waterfalls.

Abeseiling down Mele Waterfall: For us fools who are not just content to swim under a 20 meter waterfall, we went with Edge adventure tours, and jumped over the edge of the falls! Of course, it's all done in perfect safety under the guidance of Troy and Zeak, and their assistants. There's an easy training session at a mini-fall, and when we all looked like experts, we did the "big one"! It's a lot easier than it looks, and doesn't take more than normal strength. Of course, all the prep and safety precautions by Edge made it so. Great feeling of achievement for us folks who don't even like going up the mast!

Services:

Yachting World: Besides arranging clearance for yachts, YW provides lots of services: see the always-happy Leimara to pick up your mail, drop laundry, arrange dockage at the wall or moorings, and more. She is a mine of info! There's a fuel dock as well.

Internet: Nambawan (#1)Café: wi-fi at the terrace and at the quarantine anchorage / Downtown Internet: quiet, air-conditioned / Cyber Village: across from Bon Marche II supermarket, best rates to call int'l via internet. Spim (Wireless Vanuatu) & Connect Café have the best wifi available in Port Vila harbor. Check all 3 for current prices and limitations as these vary.

Computer Sales and Service: e-Tech (opposite Waterfront Restaurant entrance).

Marine parts: Vila Marine: out of town, take bus, has basic marine stuff, or Port Vila Boat Yard chandlery has some supplies.

Shipping: If you need anything shipped in or out, air or sea, parts for boat in transit. See Chris, the manager of Reef Shipping on the corner as you turn to go to the main wharf. manager@reefvila.com
www.reefvila.com

Hauling out: Port Vila Boatyard : multihulls, and vessels up to 25 ton are pulled out by hydraulic trailer/tractor via a slipway. Medium yard, pleasant grassy environment, no security problems, prices comparables to NZ or New Caledonia, run by ex-NZ yachties, see their Silver listing on www.noonsite.com for services offered.

Adhesive Signs and Lettering: Top Signs, 100 meters from Bon Marche II, We had our boat name done here. They can also do adhesive flags that you can stick to plexiglass, which will last for years longer than cloth flags. Our commodore flag is always out and visible!

Misc: Printing: Colorite Graphics (ex-Gallimore)

Flags: Vanuatu Flags, all sizes: Paul's Religious Gift Shop

Hideaway Island:

If you want to get away from the crowds of other boats in Port Vila, but still be close to town, a great alternative is Hideaway Island (Mele Bay). It's only a 1-2 hr sail in protected waters to a black sand bay with great holding in 10-30 ft. Hideaway Island has some nice snorkeling along its reef, a marine sanctuary, and also home of the Underwater Post Office. The American owners like yachties, and waive the 1000vt entry fee if you arrive by yacht to visit the island, which has a dive center, gift shop, and beach bar and restaurant (copious plates of hearty food). From the beach landing on the main island, you can also catch a local bus back into town, if needed, for 200-300vt pp. It's also close to bus to Mele Golf Course, Mele Waterfalls, Benjor Beach Resort (good restaurant), and Island Dreams (kayak and good snorkeling). Free wifi at the Beach Bar off Hideaway island in Mele bay.

The complete upgrading of the road around the island is now almost completed and you can now enjoy a very comfortable and faster ride around!

EFATE: Tukutu bay: offers a convenient anchorage just West of the infamous Devil's Point. Waters there around can be very rough as strong trade winds and currents can make it quite choppy. If you want to take a rest before rounding Devil's point (going to Port Vila) this is a good spot. The whole bay is pastureland with a few new constructions going on. Anchor in about 25ft between coral heads (17d42'58S-168d10'67E) favoring the East side of the bay.. good light needed to see the coral plateau that stick out quite a bit from the shore in some places.

Havannah Harbour: While in Port Vila, visit the Cultural Center Museum and find out about the Chief Roi Mata Heritage site. It may be possible for a group of yachties to pre-arrange a guided tour of the Cave (Lelepa Island) and the burial Site (Hat Island) while in Havannah Harbor. **Ai Creek:** tricky anchorage in 50ft good sand with coral heads but the bottom slopes quickly to 70-80ft. Take your dinghy into the river estuary (at the point of land behind the moorings of Coongoola Cruises) and leave your dinghy at the bridge. Cross the road and walk in the riverbed for 30-45min. You will find several nice swimming holes and mini Jacuzzis in crystal clear water.

Matapu Bay: easy anchorage in good sand – stay in about 30-40 ft depth to not get too close to reefs ringing the shoreline. A short walk South on the main road will lead you to the American pool. It has finally been cleared after years of neglect. It is now beautiful blue and clear. Nice bath there! There's supposed to be a plane wreck you can see while snorkeling, but we did not find it. The Rocket Guide gives good descriptions of the other HH anchorages and activities.

Nguna / Pele Islands: Anchoring near the pass between Nguna (pronounced noo-nah) and Pele was very nice in white sand between widely scattered, easily-seen and deep-enough coral heads in around 25 ft depth. Even in moderate Northerly winds we didn't roll too much.

The snorkeling out from the guesthouse bungalows on Nguna was some of the most colorful and diverse that we've seen in Vanuatu. You can ride the current holding on to your dinghy in the pass between the two islands. Both have beautiful white sand beaches and swimming pool blue water. NW Nguna, Nawora Matua bay: We anchored here twice just for a rest stop without going ashore to the village. If you use this, go in carefully with good light, because the chart doesn't show there are some isolated bommies too shallow for comfort. Bottom is coral and hard plateau.

Sheperd Islands:

Tongoa : because of NW winds and heavy cross swells we were unable to dive the wall or to stay at Panita. We did hide from a SW blow on the SE corner on the small plateau (25-30ft) of **Ewose Island** – was swelly but protected. Very healthy corals – buoy your anchor chain if you anchor here.

Cooks Reef: we anchored (day) in the area described in the Rocket Guide in dead calm. Went by dinghy all around the outside of the reefs but did not find exceptional snorkeling or diving. Perhaps diving was better a long time ago; perhaps we were spoiled in other places?? So far we have not found any really exciting reef diving.

Epi:

Riveliu Bay: calm anchorage as described in Rocket guide, good holding in volcanic sand 10m. The young chief is welcoming cruisers with fruits & veggies. River where you can do your laundry, but not deep enough to swim.

Lamen Bay: most popular anchorage on the island. Meet Tasso at Paradise Sunset Bungalows. He is a very nice fellow that organizes lots of activities for his guests. He often organizes a bbq or pig roast. We did a nice but long day hike to a large high waterfall (about 3h one way for good hikers). The transport to the start point of the hike was itself an adventure, with some great views of the bay and Lamen Is. His son Douglas has a small boat to go deep-sea fishing or to take you to Lamen island where the dugongs are staying mostly now. We were lucky to be here for New Year 2008 and the celebrations were quite impressive with bonfires lining the whole bay at midnight! Our older flares made for extra fireworks! The village had a whole week of activities. After a few days, the winds veered to the NW-SW so it was time to move to a better-sheltered anchorage. We went around the north of Epi and first checked **Lamaru**, a beach anchorage between the 2 north tips of the island. It was not protected as the wind moved to the NW so we continued down on the East coast and stopped for 2 nights in **Mapouna Bay**. Anchorage around 16d35'85S-168d12'66E in about 40ft of corals with sand channels. Dugout canoes came shortly after our arrival to welcome us and ask if we needed any help getting in. The Chief Pharmacopee invited us to his village the next morning. Little did we expect a royal welcome with flower leis, fresh fruits and lots of smiles of his extended family! Very nice to be genuinely welcomed. We're glad we had some gifts with us to offer ☺
Having northerly winds for over 3 weeks, we also explored the South coast of Epi and found 2 anchorages in good black sand about 20-30ft: **Kambokia bay** 16d50'37S-168d28'20E and **Sakao village** 16d48'16S-168d23'06E. Both anchorages would be exposed in any southerlies.

Paama: Tahi anchorage: 20-35ft of good volcanic sand bottom. There is a wreck on the northern end of the beach (copra boat that caught fire in 2000). Small, shy, but welcoming community.

MALEKULA: We will start our counter-clockwise cruise of Malekula with a little bit more about **Masquelynes** (we covered a little of these islands in our 2nd letter). A caveat about the Masquelynes,

especially around the Pescarus anchorage: Many boats and land tourists complained about being “conned” or “ripped-off” by one or more young men who propose to act as guides to areas like the Giant Clam reserve, or to organize a custom dance and/or feast, and who later ask more money or more than the customary fee or even take you to the wrong area if they don’t feel they’re getting enough money for the effort. They are a well-known gang in the area, but the custom chiefs and villagers seem unable to control them. Two of the main guys are Jimmy and another name like Jeffery. Kalo runs the bungalows on the beach at Pescarus and can probably tell you who to avoid in any dealings. This situation is unfortunate because it gives all the Masquelynes a bad name. There are many very nice people who have been to legitimate workshops for tourist guides and have certificates, but yachties are suspicious that they may be forgeries. **Awai anchorage:** well protected anchorage behind the reef. The reef is high enough to break any waves so you are in a smooth pond while the wind generators are producing! Amazingly we were 13 boats here coming back from the SW Bay festival! At low tide, you can walk across the sand bar between the small island and the main island for nice coastal walks. **Gaspard Bay:** another good spot and a definite cyclone hole if you go all the way inside ... we checked the depth by dinghy and it is possible to go in with 6’ draft and we would even feel safer than inside Port Sandwich! One yacht reported being asked an anchoring fee here, but no one asked us. There is no village here; people come to fish or cut copra. The reefs noted in the RG were easy to discern even in cloudy conditions. This report bypasses Port Sandwich and Banon bay (see 2nd letter) and starts again at **Pankumu bay**. The anchorage was as described in the Rocket guide and a bit rolly due to strong SE winds. We did get into the river with our dinghy but we had to cross the shallow bar with breakers (very exhilarating!). Alas we were only able to navigate the first half a mile. Even tho this is the second largest river of Vanuatu, there are too many shallow rapids shortly after you get in. **Crab Bay:** We anchored in the first anchorage, just in front of the sand spit. Not a lot of room but each of the 3 anchorages mentioned in RG can accommodate a boat tho there is not much point weaving around reefs to get in further. It is also possible to anchor just inside behind the protection of the first reef, before you arrive in the anchorage area and still be protected from swell. Calm here in 20-25 kts E-SE! The mangrove area is now a protected park and thus no fishing, no collecting, ... but they might collect 500Vt/pers if you visit ... we didn’t see any native at all! **Nunbeken Bay:** We anchored at 16d07’44-167d29’48 in 22ft on foul ground but had a very calm anchorage despite the tradewinds. As at Crab Bay, you can just duck in behind the first reef and get out of the swell without going all the way in. It looked on the aerial photo that you could go all the way into the mangroves but when we explored by dinghy, we were happy we didn’t try as it was almost too shallow for the dinghy in some places. **Port Stanley** offers several anchorages. We anchored off the eastern end of **Uri Island** (see RG) where we were welcomed by the small community. We toured their clean village and snorkeled in the marine park where we took uw photos of very vibrant corals and the giant clam shells they protect there. We also anchored temporarily, on rubble, off the dock in **Lislits** in order for one of us to walk to **Lakatoro** to get bread. **Wala Island** is now a little spoiled by cruise ships so a 1,000 Vt/pers/village is asked to visit the 5 villages! Altho some negotiating is possible Twice a day you see an exodus of small paddling canoes going to the mainland to work in their garden or to go to school. **Vao Island:** we were lucky to meet Juliette, a very nice enterprising lady who gave us a tour of the island after we charged the batteries of her mobile phone! (the new request of islanders in the new millennium!). There is a large French Catholic school there. We took lots of photos/video of several *nasaras* (ceremonial dance areas) and local artists who do nice wood and coral carvings. We had a nice sail around the north side of Malekula to **Malua Bay**. We were welcomed by one of the 3 schoolteachers from the 7th Day Adventist primary school in the bay. The school (as all schools in Vanuatu) is always in need of any

materials. We had nothing left except scrap paper, and they were happy for that. After visiting the school, Fredrick, one of the teachers, guided us to a nice swim hole on the river that flows to the anchorage. There is also a nice swimming hole only about 100 yds from the beach just where the road crosses the river. Natives paddled in their canoes to speak to us and to offer us fruits. Chief Don came with the yachtie's gold book to sign. Comfortable anchorage, as you can anchor very close to shore to avoid any swell rolling in. We also walked with Rodrick and Alfred to the Lekhan Spirit Cave, described in the Lonely Planet. (about 45min OW). It is a big cavern where the top caved in letting the light thru. Some pictograms can be found on the walls and some bats inhabit part of the cave.

Willekh Bay: we checked it out in order to update the Rocket guide. Isolated you will be, as there's no village! Anchorage is protected from the wind but you get a swell ... amazing how swell rounds any point to get at you! Good snorkeling with lots of turtles at the reef around the isolated rock on the Southern part of this little bay. **Lamboumbu Bay:** The copra pier is now gone but you can still put your dinghy at the stone jetty and walk to the small settlement (Presbyterian church school). Some swell despite being tucked in! Met Amil Setla, a Chief of a small village in the "neck" of Malekula (where unfortunately there is no anchorage). He belongs to a tribe of the Middle Nambas. We had only heard of Small and Big Namba tribes. He showed us a fascinating area with many custom stories and tabus and spiritual power. He, as the eldest son of the paramount Chief of the area had been initiated to all the custom ways. We saw human bones, and an ancient overgrown ceremonial "nasara". In the afternoon he took us to a beautiful waterfall at the end of about 1 1/2 hr walk up the river passed crystal clear natural terraced pools. That's the beauty of Vanuatu: by talking to locals, you can just chance on fantastic spontaneous opportunities to get glimpses of an endangered ancient culture. **Tavendrua and Dixon Reefs:** We arrived here during a period of black and squally weather, and so did not dive on the reefs. Winds were very strong from the SE so we anchored just north of Lamendranga Pt (name in RG, name on chart is somewhat different) (16 20'.102S-167 22'.821W) near the mouth of a little river. Decided to walk to the Pt and look at the anchorage in the big bay. We found the village is not where the RG points it; it is actually on the north-facing side of the peninsula. (facing Dixon reef) There are no dwellings along the shore inside the bay itself. Villagers said that most yachts anchor in the north corner of the bay in front of a black sand beach. It looked calm. Next day we went into the bay and could easily see the channel around the reefs even in black cloudy wx. Keep a good watch for a few isolated reefs indicated on the charts inside the bay. We anchored on the south side behind the reefs, but found the holding only fair in the 20 ft depths. Walked along the shore southward all the way to the next bay, nice views. Took some GPS Points asked for by the RG so hopefully the next edition will give more detailed info. **South West bay:** We spent a week here waiting for the tradewinds to calm down so we could sail back to Port Vila and we were busy ashore the whole time! So many things to do here! We anchored at 16deg29'56S-167deg25'54 in 20 ft of good sand. No dangers anywhere around so we felt safe in strong winds. No swell in SE winds so we had restfull nights. First we visited **Loorwen** village and met Chief Esrom. We took him as our guide in our dinghy exploration of the inside lagoon. Our good friends Roger and Lucie on Catimini (fellow SSCAers) followed on in their dinghy. On hearing Luc's offer to help with tourism advice and promotion, we made a Custom ceremony on our floating nakamal (cockpit) where we exchanged gifts and he announced that we now belong to his nakamal and that he considers Luc his brother! Roger & Lucie were the witnesses. He invited us to his home with his brother (the Pastor) for dinner and that is when the South West Malekula Yacht Club (SWMYC) was born. We talked about a Yacht Club flag and Roger made a small model. The Pastor's wife painted 2 flags for the opening of the club. Once you enter the river mouth into the inland bay by dinghy, look for first flag to indicate the dinghy stop and the second one in front of the Yacht Club where you can get a guide for

the lagoon and maybe book a local meal for later. The village showed us custom dancing and other video/photo subjects. We also visited the small French community of **Bennorce** at the SW point of the bay in front of Ten Stick rock (that earned the natives 10 sticks of tobacco during WWII so US planes could use it for target practice.) After a nice visit of the community, we snorkeled with Chief Ronald on the reefs surrounding the rock. What a surprise for us to discover some of the nicest reefs we have seen in Vanuatu! 5 eagle rays, a small Napoleon wrasse, 2 huge grouper that would have fed 30 people and countless other fish amongst lively colorful corals of all kinds. We had a GREAT dive (during the 3 day festival) swimming through the numerous crevasses lined with the most colorful fans! Saw a HUGE tuna that liked our silvery bubbles, a school of giant parrots, and lots of action with good-sized fish. South of 10 Stick, there is a waterfall you can see from the sea. You can do most of the way by dinghy at medium tide up along the beach, inside the reefs. Half way, we met Kali, who sometimes lives isolated with his small family in a small valley. He is a Vanuatu boxing champion and has competed overseas. He wants to build a stone dam at the foot of the fall so visitors can bathe under the fall. Nice people! **Wintua** was very muddy and crowded.... Not the most impressive village! But it's close to the airstrip and has a bank and bigger stores. We went further north to **Labo**, a very nice community nestled on the hillside. They started a conservation project there in 2005 and have a beautiful site right along the beach that offers great photo opportunities. They will put on custom dances and other activities even for small number of visitors. There are several small waterfalls at easy walking distance. Worth a visit! You can anchor your boat closer to there if you wish. The community is very keen to get cruisers and were thinking to put on a monthly Nalawan Festival during the cruising season. That way, the whole community sets up the dance show and the village demonstrations for more than just a few visitors at any one time. When Luc offered to film and promote their effort, they showed us a fabulous dancing performance at a breath-taking site. We had a shower at a nice waterfall (where the men have their evening kava), we saw weaving, local vegetables growing and much more. That's when the idea of the 3 Day Malekula SW Bay Festival was born: Opening the Yacht club at the lagoon, a day of Custom Dance and activities at Labo, and a day of snorkeling and diving at 10 Stick reef.

Tomman Island/ Melip: We were due back in Port Vila in a few days, and a window opened, but before we took off, we gave a ride to Longlel, the principal chief of Tomman island, about 10-12 mi from SW Bay. In pre-missionary times, male children had their heads bound so that they developed elongated heads! The last one died some yrs back, but we saw photos. The Chief told us that the 3rd week in July there would be a 3 day Grade Taking Ceremony on the island, a very special event, the last one being in 1998! They would allow visitors to attend and take photos for a fee that would help off set the costs of the ceremony, which for them is quite expensive. They were so keen that they gave us the program and quickly organized a women's and a men's dance for Luc to film as a promotional preview. That same afternoon just about sunset, we pulled up anchor and 28 hrs, and a bunch of tacking later, we were in Port Vila, just making it in before the wx window closed! Later we returned to the Melip anchorage shown on the RG and took some GPS points requested. Moses, the chief of Melip, almost adopted fellow SSCAers, on "Catimini", as Roger repaired the HF telephone, their only way to communicate with the outside. Johnny, the French-speaking son of the Chief of Tomman, often comes greet yachts and can get fruit and veggies. It looks tricky, but you can get in close to the beach in front of the village in very good black sand bottom; otherwise, you'll be exposed to the swell rolling in. (16d 34'.694S/ 167d 29'.421E) You can dinghy up the river seen in the satellite photo in the RG quite a long way. Go at high tide as the bar at the mouth is very shallow, and you may have to walk the dinghy in, or time the swells for an exciting surf-riding entry. You can dinghy to

Tomman if you have a good motor. There is a small channel cut through the reefs, ask the islanders who paddle across daily to go to the gardens or the Catholic school. Very interesting island with complex ancient culture.

The water between Tomman and the main island as you travel to/from SW Bay is deep enough to pass without problem. With good light you will see the isolated reefs clearly.

Masquelyne Islands (SE corner of Malekula):

We did a direct overnight passage from Port Vila to **Pescarus**. We made sure we would arrive in good daylight, as the approach is tricky due to numerous reefs way off the low lying islands. With good waypoints (Rocket guide) it is no problem as long as you can eyeball for confirmation!

Well-protected anchorage off **Pescarus** and the other 2 villages. We did some bartering for fruits (grapefruits, papaya, lemons, mini-apples,...) and lobsters. Being spoiled by many cruisers they were quite demanding but with patience and good will you can have a good relation). Local music, kava drinking, small resort aspiring to develop tourism there, ... An unfortunate event over a year ago (the looting of a local yacht that went aground at night on the outside reefs) kept some cruisers away. Like often, villages are jealous of each other and each tries to lure yachties' money and goods their way! We are all the same on the planet! Ask Kalo to show you the best snorkeling spots around. There is also a giant clam and marine reserve they can show you.

We also anchored behind the reef (Mamu AB on Rocket guide) but did not find the good sand at 6m ... must have shifted away and left only coral rubble!

We had quite a washing machine sea just outside those reefs when rounding them to sail to Port Sandwich. By luck it only lasted for 2 miles (seas and currents) and we had an easy sail the rest of the way in 20kts ESE.

Malekula:

We decided to go up the East coast. Our first stop was **Port Sandwich**. Definitely a good hurricane hole if ever needed! Altho a 3-mile fetch if the winds are Northerly. Majestic views as you enter. You have the choice of several placid anchorages with occasional breezes. Across the bay opposite the Ballande dock, you can dinghy into the river for quite a ways at high tide. Ask locals how to find the river mouth. Too bad for the shallow bar at the mouth because inside would be the Perfect hurricane hole! Snorkeling in the bay is not recommended because of low visibility and past shark attacks but it is nice and ok, on the outside of the bay around the Lamap area. Bread available at Lamap a nice walk away. A little depressing to see remains of the French pre-independence time ... their level of life was better in the outer islands in those times with better communications, schools and health care. **Banon Bay** offers a great anchorage in normal trade winds with friendly natives. No fees, no begging. The Chief of the small community near the beach can organize some very interesting custom dances for a group of yachties (the dances involve the whole community). There's also a pleasant little waterfall where you can stand under the cascade in the fresh water...about 20 minute walk away.

Update on MALEKULA:

Masquelynes We went back to Pescarus village (Uliveo anchorage) and still found some demanding folks and our Peace Corps guide was attacked by the same dog that had bitten our friend commodore Jean on s/v Quest just 2 weeks before! Something about this particular village!! But the rest of the Masquelynes has no problems!

Port Sandwich: A new tourism and environmental association has been created and is led by willing young people from different tribes in the area. We were fortunate to be invited for their first island night! Kava tasting, local string band and delicious local buffet (plenty of big tasty oysters) was on the program! Some cruisers even sang and played guitar! That morning we had been invited in a custom area to see some traditional dancing. Since it was the first time we visited them, we brought a small pig (only 1,000Vt from the other village) as a gift. If you anchor close to the old Ballande wharf, don't miss a visit to Rock who welcomes cruisers at his house behind the beach. He created a book exchange - public library for the locals ☺ , you can do your laundry, fill water and he can organize a pig roast for cruisers. Nice guy!

South West bay: The second annual festival (12-14 Aug) was attended by only 12 yachts this year in part because the wx this season had not been that great! But the 3-day festival in 3 villages was well appreciated by all. It was good to see our brothers Esrom and Pastor Gilbert and families. We finally met Colin and his family, the NZ owner of the small farm in **Labinwen**. Some cruisers even went pig hunting with him. His dealings with the locals are sensible and their relations are good! The South West Malekula Yacht Club (SWMYC) got a new bigger thatch building for it's 1st anniversary and Esrom built us a bungalow on the lagoon (we had to name it and officially open it ☺ So if you are in the area do not hesitate to take a meal there or spend a night on the inner lagoon edge (no mosquitoes!) The small French community of **Bennorce (10 stick)** welcomed us well again but because of rainy wx, very few went snorkeling or diving. Day 3 of the festival happened in **Labo**. The Nalawan dancing was really good in the very nice setting along the beach. And this year, the lunch was great (with a reduced fee for the day). Just heard today (Jan31) that the Labo festival will be held on 2 days this 2010 season. So plan on visiting the area between the 10 and 14 August 2010 if you want to have a good time!

Ambrym:

We were lucky to anchor close enough to **Olal** to be able to walk to the new North Amvbrym Yacht Club and Bungalows. The anchorage is not mentioned in guides and is much more protected than the small exposed anchorage just North of Olal. We anchored with 6 other yachts at 16d06'6S-168d07'7E in **Nebul Bay** in 13-20 meters in black sand. From the beach there, it is an easy 45 min. walk past several villages to Olal, or a 5-mile dinghy trip best done only in mild conditions. Ask Chief Johnson from Nebul Bay village. Chief Sekor in Olal has now a hand-held VHF so you should be able to hail him from the anchorage if needed to arrange dinner or custom dances. We were lucky to be there for the inauguration of the first Rom Nakamal ... ask Chief Sekor to explain the difference to you. One young couple of Czech cruisers did even get a custom wedding while we were visiting. A memorable experience! Nice villagers here too ☺ It takes a little effort, but to witness one of their festivals and Rom Dance is definitely worth it. Unique to the Northern region of Ambrym, the Rom dancing truly gave us the feeling of stepping into a living National Geographic magazine. There's a long complicated cultural significance to the dance. The high Chief decides who can dance. Men pay high prices in pigs and goods for the privilege. Some of the dancers disguised themselves with layers and layers of dry banana leaves and wore elaborate tall conical masks, the design of which is closely guarded by each clan and passed along to initiates who pay. The masks are destroyed after the ceremony, which is why ancient masks that exist in collections are so rare. The other male dancers were clad only in "nambas", a woven sheath that covers only the penis and is attached to a wide bark belt holding it straight out or erect. Women danced in grass skirts only. The rhythm was primitive and compelling to the deep bass reverberation of a gigantic 3 meter "Tam-Tam" accented by the

energetic higher pitched beats of smaller tam-tams and hand-held bamboo models. The dancers sang and chanted and stamped, vibrating the ground around them. This was the first dancing we witnessed where we could believe they were actually dancing the dance for it's original spiritual purpose, not as a show to entertain tourists. Very powerful. Pigs were killed and the nakamal was revealed with its painted "tiki" guardian, and giant masks.

Back at the YC where burgees and flags donated by yachties gaily flitted on bamboo poles; everyone dived into the abundant "kai-kai" feast with the dancers and villagers. Chief Sekor and his village recognize the great resource that yachties can be to isolated islanders. Don't expect cold beer and watching the World Cup finals on the big screen at this YC, as there is no electricity yet. Do not miss the Festivals each year in July and Aug. In 2008: 22-24 July, the Magic Festival, and 20-22 Aug, the Back-to-Your-Roots Festival with Rom Dance.

We came back at the end of August to assist to the famous "back to my roots" festival. We anchored again at 16d06'6S-168d07'7E in **Nebul Bay** in 13-20 meters in black sand. From the beach there, it is an easy 45 min. walk past several villages to Olal, or a 5-mile dinghy trip best done only in mild conditions. Ask Chief Johnson from Nebul Bay village. Chief Sekor in Olal has now a hand-held VHF so you should be able to hail him from the anchorage if needed to arrange dinner or custom dances. We were lucky to be there for the inauguration of the first Rom Nakamal ... ask Chief Sekor to explain the difference to you. One young couple of Czech cruisers did even get a custom wedding while we were visiting. A memorable experience! Nice villagers here too J It takes a little effort, but to witness one of their festivals and Rom Dance is definitely worth it. Unique to the Northern region of Ambrym, the Rom dancing truly gave us the feeling of stepping into a living National Geographic magazine. There's a long complicated cultural significance to the dance. The high Chief decides who can dance. Men pay high prices in pigs and goods for the privilege. Some of the dancers disguised themselves with layers and layers of dry banana leaves and wore elaborate tall conical masks, the design of which is closely guarded by each clan and passed along to initiates who pay. The masks are destroyed after the ceremony, which is why ancient masks that exist in collections are so rare. The other male dancers were clad only in "nambas", a woven sheath that covers only the penis and is attached to a wide bark belt holding it straight out or erect. Women danced in grass skirts only. The rhythm was primitive and compelling to the deep bass reverberation of a gigantic 3 meter "Tam-Tam" accented by the energetic higher pitched beats of smaller tam-tams and hand-held bamboo models. The dancers sang and chanted and stamped, vibrating the ground around them. This was the first dancing we witnessed where we could believe they were actually dancing the dance for it's original spiritual purpose, not as a show to entertain tourists. Very powerful. Pigs were killed and the nakamal was revealed with its painted "tiki" guardian, and giant masks.

Back at the YC where burgees and flags donated by yachties gaily flitted on bamboo poles; everyone dived into the abundant "kai-kai" feast with the dancers and villagers. Chief Sekor and his village recognize the great resource that yachties can be to isolated islanders. Don't expect cold beer and watching the World Cup finals on the big screen at this YC, as there is no electricity yet. Do not miss the Festivals each year in July and Aug. In 2008: 22-24 July, the Magic Festival, and 20-22 Aug, the Back-to-My-Roots Festival with Rom Dance.

AMBAE: We anchored in majestically scenic **Vanihe bay**, as we wanted a little solitude. No village or easy access from shore so we saw no locals there. The bottom is perfect volcanic sand with no corals or rocks. Pick any spot, even very close to the cliffs or the beach in order to avoid the swell and waves created by the wind bursts coming from behind Lolowai point. The towering brown cliffs, about

150m high, form a dramatic backdrop as they rise out of the clear blue waters, and swallows and flying foxes flit and dive and soar passed the sheer walls. The scenery is more reminiscent of Sea of Cortez than Vanuatu. It is an easy and short dinghy ride into **Lalowai bay** where the village is located. You have 2 leading markers to get you inside the old crater bay but we decided to stay around the corner in the more isolated and less noisy anchorage. Nice people, as usual ... small limited stores ... bread and eggs available. It was probably an important center at some point, but now is sadly untidy and shabby. There are no doctors at the hospital, only volunteers that pass through. There is a bank and a post office, but no internet. There was one bright spot in this unappealing town, Lucky Joes Restaurant , which is run by Joe's sisiter, a very sweet lady, named Celia. There is no sign on the building; we found it by accident asking around if anyone with a garden would barter for fruits and veggies. The tiny resturant is clean and neat inside, and a plate is 200vt. The chicken curry and rice looked delicious. Too bad we'd just eaten! We were attracted by some good live pop music emanating from an old shed, where we discovered a very talented band jamming. They play reggae but also very good instrumental new age tunes. I recorded some of their songs to include in my professional video productions in Vanuatu and they were pleased to know that some outsiders found they had talent! Next year, they ask me to call them 1 month in advance so they can practice and prepare 5 new songs for recording! Not wanting to leave at 4 in the morning to sail to Santo (like some other cruisers), we decided to break the trip by stopping in **Loone bay**. We anchored at 15d21'594S-167d45'687E exposed to that eternal swell running along the island. Not a great stop for a monohull! And difficult access ashore as the coast is quite rugged and the surge makes even going up on the steep boulder beach difficult! There is an easier dinghy landing on sand in the tiny bay just east, (under a derelict turquoise building on the cliff). We moved about a mile north in front of Jerome Bani house (in Sarramundi,) as he guides people up the volcano crater lakes. But 5 hours going up with 2 hours return discouraged us to go up ... Like the crater in Ambrym, it's much harder to reach than the easy Tanna top! Always curious about out-of-the-way anchorages, we decided to check out **Devils Rock** at the West end of Ambae, as the description in the Rocket guide made the snorkeling there sound interesting and adventurous, and Lonely Plant's mention of sharks was intriguing. After RG's warning of swirling currents and "unsurveyed waters", what a surprise it was to discover a well-protected calm anchorage in a very dramatic picturesque bay with a RED sand beach! We anchored in 20 ft of good volcanic sand at 15d26'874S-167d40'610E. We might have been lucky that there were light wind conditions those 3 days and that the moon was in mid-phase, but can say that it was delightful. Easy access on the beach and nice reception from James, a son of the old chief. It appears the father has divided the "rights" to the sea front between his 2 sons. James has rights to the windward side, and his younger brother has the Devil's Rock and anchorage side. James ended up being our principal guide. He showed us his surprisingly beautiful and horticulturally rich garden. Along with a good variety of vegetables, he has bush medicine plants and a species of orchid endemic to one of Ambae's volcanic lakes. We hiked with him on the edge of the cliffs overlooking Devils Rock. We went twice snorkeling around Devil's rock and discovered an underwater arch that we could free-dive through!! And there's a "pancake ceiling" u/w cavern around the other side of the point. Visibility was incredible, and we even encountered a huge grouper and 7 dolphins while snorkeling! (But not one shark!)

Pentecost:

Homo Bay: good black sand, 25ft good holding just South of the old pier. Chief Luke (son of famed Chief Willy who passed away in 07') is as welcoming as his father. He believes in offering fruits to visitors instead of asking fees or begging! He knows that cruisers are helpful folks always ready to

assist when they can. We took a walk (90min 1 way) to Ratap cultural village. Alas the whole community, but one, was gone to Bunlap for 100 days of mourning. No custom dancing but a nice walk back following the river this time. Nice swimming holes and a pleasant hike with Chief Luke. Being here in April gave us the great opportunity to witness the famous Pentecost land diving. That traditional ceremony happens every year in April-May-June to start the yam harvest season and as an initiation ritual. Most of the ceremonies are only for the communities themselves but a few can be seen by visitors. They will put on a performance for a minimum cost of 30,000 Vt any day of the season, but for a group, or on a regular performance day (every Saturday), it will be about 8,500 Vt per person. Extra fees for video filming might be demanded. This year there are 3 different towers for public performances. The tallest is the one near Pangi Village at the north end of Homo bay. There is another near Wali Bay and one near the Airport of South Pentecost. The confusing thing was that Donald Wayback (ph:38107) lives in Pangi, but organized viewing the jump near Wali Bay, and Luke Fargo of Wali Bay organized viewing the jump at the tower near Pangi! Men, if you can, ask permission to go to the tower the day before the jump and see the jumpers preparing the vines and the platforms. Very interesting. Women are not allowed to go to the tower until the day of the jumps and cannot go near the base until the native women dancers go up there. Chief Luke will organize land dives at the tallest tower for yachties to view for 8000vt.

Wali Bay: We met Luke Fargo who organizes Land Diving shows for tourists (including cruiseships a few times in the season.) He is a great host running the Londot Garden Beach Resort (ph:38120/38444). With the first cruisers we saw this new season, we had garden visits, hikes to the hot springs and had a kava break (women allowed) and a meal. His whole family was very welcoming. We also were lucky to be invited to a double wedding in the village nearby with about 200 guests!

Martelli Bay: South Pentecost. We had to shelter from a NW that came up while in Homo, so we went into this south facing bay. It is very picturesque with wild tall cliffs and jungle on one side, and on the other, a beautiful gleaming green-blue church perched on a hill over looking a small inviting beach that is protected by giant rock outcroppings forested with trees and pandanus. Steep jungled hills form a backdrop and reminded us of the Marquesas. We anchored on the side near the church, not getting any closer than 30ft depth and found good black sand unencumbered by reef, any closer, and the reef rises to just under the surface. The bay is huge and there are many places to anchor. There looked to be a reef extending out from the rocky cliff area that separates the bay's 2 black sand beaches. Anchorage:(16d00'4S-168d13'5E) From the church, there is a beautiful view of your boat in the bay, and from the anchorage is a view of the beautiful bay and beaches, and seaward, a beautiful view of Ambrym and the cone shaped Lopevi Island. If the wind goes north or west, hope you have a chance to visit this lovely place.

Waterfall bay: You will see the waterfall as you approach the anchorage of the nice beach. We met Jeffrey who guides visitors to their two attractions: the Madiut waterfall (15min easy walk- bubble bath pool and big waterfall) and the worthwhile Rell Waterfall Cave (15min easy walk – waterfall inside a 2-chamber cave, bring a waterproof light). Jeffery and his community decided to clear a path and beautify those 2 areas for the pleasure of visitors. The 500 Vt fee can probably be negotiated for DVD or other trade items. A 20-min walk on the main road brings you to the High School (Wadi College) on the hill where you can buy bread loaves.

Loltong Bay: Protected from all direction but west. Calm anchorage in 15-20ft of good sand behind the reef seen in the Rocket Guide aerial photo. Follow the alignment of the 2 triangular markers on the beach (70T) as you approach the shore to anchor. We found the anchorage waypoint in the Rocket guide slightly off, putting you in the shallow corals to the South of the sandy anchoring area,

Beware. There's not much room for more than 2-3 boats, and the transport boat uses the channel and lands on the beach, If you need to use the phone, you can use the public phone at Chief Richard's. String bands can be heard by arrangement. No natural attractions were mentioned.

MAEWO:

Asanvari: Well protected anchorage with occasional frequent rainstorms. We met Chief Nelson and his son Nixon at the well-known yacht club. They are welcoming yachts here for a long time and are well organized in doing so. A small green light marks the dinghy landing at night! A hydro-generator powers the village with 220VAC-500W so several lights ashore at the Yacht Club (cold beer, DVD movies!) nearby houses, and in the nakamal where you will drink kava . We have been doing some hiking (with swimming in waterfalls and rivers) and snorkeling around the bay so we sleep well at night. The waterfall does not fall right into the sea, but is so close, we enjoyed seeing and hearing it from the anchorage, and swam in the refreshing water everyday. There's another smaller fall up above the main fall. But lots of rain as Maewo is the wettest island in Vanuatu with over 4500mm rainfall a year! Luckily, we had no rain during our all-day hike to the "tabu" bat cave. Be careful not to slip on the muddy tracks! The first hr of the hike is a lot of climbing on sometimes-slippery mud, the second hr follows the river itself and there are several nice swimming holes. Zenne, our 21/2 year Schipperke is getting used to hike, swim across river rapids, jumping from rock to rock in the riverbed! You enter a long and big chamber, quickly in the complete dark, with thousands of small bats and lots of smaller stalactites hanging in places where rain drips thru the ceilings. Take a strong light to get the full effect.

Nixon and his father are quite smart to realize the value of yachts visiting the otherwise very isolated village. The village is one of the prettiest we've seen in Vanuatu, all natural thatch and bamboo, flowers and colorful plants all around and lots of space between houses. They are welcoming, do many things, organize custom dances, hikes, dinners, laundry etc. for very reasonable fees. From the amount of help and complements showered on the Chief and village from yachties, we can see that there is a special bond formed on both sides. Unfortunately, their very welcoming nature is also the very thing that could bring big changes to their lives and create jealousies where before there were none. There will be some rallies going to Asanvari this 2008 season with 20 to 60 boats. Try to find out the dates and avoid if you don't like crowds. Also the anchorage is deep, 50ft dropping quickly to 70ft, on coral bottom.

Quite a difference from our first visit in Apr 08 as the only boat, Aug after the festivals found us with 14 others! The ICA Musket Cove to Asanvari Rally this 2008 season saw only 13 boats! ICA did install 3 moorings in that deep anchorage for which the YC charges a 500vt fee. (Always snorkel or dive moorings to check them) We all found a place, and despite the flukey intermittent gusts from all directions, and a giant barge that anchored and tied ashore at the waterfall at 3AM (!) one night, we all happily co-habited the bay. Rod's 75th Birthday (Saw Lee Ah) and some organizing by Yvonne on Providence in coordination with Nixon and Nelson of the YC resulted in a very nice dinner and fun farewell evening for 35 people, many of whom had been to the festivals together and were now heading their different ways. Nixon did a great job providing activities, bread delivery, fruit&veg&handicraft mkt, and the delicious dinner. The yachties once again trouble-shooted the ever-fickle hydro generator, which once again: works...for now!

Mbenavui Pt. (Moon Cave): A strong SE set up a good southerly swell. When we looked at the anchorage suggested in the RG, and looked with our own eyes, we decided to anchor instead in the most southern bay visible on the satellite photo (15d 14'.073/ 168d 06'.848) behind a rocky

outcropping. In fact, from where we anchored, we could see the big black opening to the Moon Cave, and were as close or closer to the other caves than RG's anchorage. We saw people on the beach near us, so asked to visit the caves. They said 2 children would go with us in the dinghy and guide us into the Moon Cave and then show us where to land to see the other caves and petroglyphs. In one cave they are making their own stalagmites! A fun game that actually could teach us about how long the process takes. Another cave serves as a tunnel for the actual coastal walking track. No one asked fees, how refreshing! We gave the children some gifts as a thank-you. At low tide, the swell was minimal, but in the night it increased with the tide. Therefore, we would suggest to visit the caves as a day stop and continue 3 nm more to **Narovorovo**, which is more calm. **Narovorovo**: anchorage at 15d11'039S-168d06'406E, if you anchor close to the beach it's better protected from the swell going up along the coast. We hiked with Winifa (one of the trained tour guides – they have workshops) across the island to see the other coast. It took us about 2 hours to get to a great spot overlooking the east side. We decided to not go down to the beaches as it would have added another 90min before taking the same path back. **Naone bay**: we totally agree with s/v Tamariki that the cascades and waterfalls here are the best we have seen in Vanuatu! Alas the swell along the coast cannot be avoided as there is no indentation in the coast line to protect you. We anchored at 15d00'718S-168d03'805E in good sandy bottom in front of the river. It was quite rolly. You can go with your dinghy up the creek and tie up at the first cascade that is the road. From there, after getting permission from the chief, Maurice took us up to, around, and through (!), the cascades. You walk in the running water that sheets over the rough textured rocks, above you, below you, around you, under you, and then plunges over the edge in a giddy roaring rush! Thanks digital cameras, as I did photos and video in all directions, it was so pretty all around us with waterfalls and sea views. There are at least 3 different complexes of cascades each with names and different custom stories. Elliot is not the chief anymore, after 7 yrs he gave the torch to his assistant chief. The normal fee is 1000vt, but they will also accept gifts. Since the tour takes you about 2 hours, you can easily plan to arrive here early morning and take off for a better-protected anchorage for the night. We left mid-day for Ambae, Lolowai and had a lively sail in winds gusting to 25-30 (acceleration in the channel).

SANTO: Petersen Bay/Oyster Island area: arrived at the pass south of Mavea Island around 4 pm with sun right in the eyes and intermittent clouds, but were able to go through a double set of red and green markers without problem and anchor inside. Piece of cake! After one yacht grounded earlier this season and spent the night on it's side, the yachties and Grant, the new manager of Oyster Island Resort put in the markers: long pieces of pvc pipe painted red and green and designed so that at low tide, the pipes fall over and lie on their sides, and at high, when water in the pass is deep enough, the pipes float upright clearly marking the safest way in. This channel is not where the Rocket Guide waypoints indicate the way in, but, if they are still there in future seasons, they take the uncertainties out of getting in to the inner bay. At at least 2/3s high tide, we never saw less than 9 ft. of depth. Once inside, you have a number of totally-flat-water areas to anchor, the most popular being near Oyster Bay Resort. It is being upgraded and at this writing, had free satellite wi-fi if you take your laptop to their covered table near the terrace. Future plans are for coverage in the anchorage. Though there are new owners, the food is still very good and good value at economical prices. Grant is keen to draw in yachties (the main owner of the resort is Colin, a NZ yachtsman himself!) and offer services that they often seek. The 2 rivers to the blue holes are easy to find and beautiful. The landowner of both is Orbet, which was confirmed by Grant. You can find him near the copra dryer on the main island. He may ask fees or not (it's nice to thank him with some small token). If you dinghy up, there may be people at the bridge that will ask a fee up to 1000vt, but they may not be the

landowner or a family member. As throughout Vanuatu, there's often more than one who may claim to be "landowner". The resort recently acquired a vast forest area where cascade and river tours will be organized in the future. Cave diving in uw river holes is already done occasionally by a local dive center. In a few months, a digger is going to excavate the pass leading into the lagoon so most yachts will be able to get in even at low water! **Sarunda Bay**: small bay with 2 private residences taking one side. Protected behind shallow areas **Palikulo Bay**: still deserted bay (for how long before developments?) Nice walk to the abandoned slipway all around the peninsula. Well protected in most wind. **Luganville, Beachfront anchorage**: just south of the Sarakata river. A little to very bumpy in tradewinds but closest to town. You can either land your dinghy at the Beachfront (yachties really welcome) or dinghy into the river (mid to high tide) and tie off just off the public market. We went with Santo Island Divers (77) dive the beautiful reefs off North of Tutuba island. Crystal clear water and healthy reefs were the order of the day! We also dove with Aquamarine on Million Dollar Point where you see the tons of WWII equipment dumped in a pile. Most of it is below 50ft so you won't see much in snorkeling. More interesting was the several dives we made on the famous Coolidge wreck with both Aquamarine and Alan Power Diving. They all pick you up at the Beachfront and offer special rates for yachties. When the tradewinds picked up and kicked a sea in the anchorage, we moved across the channel to **Aore Resort**. While the resort does not really seek to attract cruisers, it still offers over 10 moorings at 1200 Vt/night. We explored the area on both sides of the resort and found not suitable anchorage as the bottom drops so quickly to 80ft from shore. Meals, laundry, internet, garbage disposal are available at both resorts. It is too bad that Luganville does not have a well protected and convenient anchorage close to town as Port Vila offers! Two restaurants to recommend in town are the Nemo (French chef in 2008) and the Deco Stop Lodge ... both a 200Vt/taxi ride away. Coral Quay Resort: contrary to what stated in the RG, there are no moorings and the anchorage is as exposed than the Beachfront. Being further away from town we didn't see any reason to anchor there! One place that needs to be visited is the village of Vunaspef where they have the famous **Millenium Cave Tours**. If you like hiking, walk and swim in rivers, caves with rivers, you will be thrilled. It is possible to stay overnight there too. The best way to go there is to arrange your own transportation: hiring a taxi for the day (he waits while you tour) cost about 5,000 Vt for up to 3-4 people. The tours cost 2,000 Vt or less pp. If you go with a local tour operator, they will charge you 6,500Vt/pers! You can call Samuel direct at 547 0957.

We finally cruised the Banks in the northern part of Vanuatu after spending over 3 years continuously in Vanuatu. We kept some new areas to discover until the end of our stay here and we were not disappointed! The Banks are still unspoiled because of lack of communications and transports ... people are very pleased to see us visitors coming by yachts ... trading is welcome and life is more peaceful ... (but for how long?) Don't miss a visit here ...

VANUA LAVA: We had a nice overnight sail from North Ambrym (140nm) to arrive here before the 1st of September for the annual Vanua Lava Festival in **Vureas Bay (this year)**. We anchored along the black sand beach in 10m of good sand (S13d55'19-E167d26'80). During the Fest, it got very roly when the wind went more SE. Some mono-hulls found less rolling in the S end behind an arm of reef. Chief Godfrey's community is just inland of the beach. Men came on the beach to help haul our dinghies above high water line on the steep beach. This 4-day festival was well worth it at 1,000Vt/pers with last day lunch included! The 14 yachts attending were quite happy they came! All stayed for the 4 days despite the roly conditions. We were delighted with the variety of the program, which included very well rehearsed new and old custom dances, singing, traditional games,

demonstrations, handicrafts, historical tours, and stories. This year's organizing committee did an exceptional job, especially in looking after our needs. There were food booths and a very economical lunch offered by Christina in the cute "restaurant. One thing we noted about the dances and songs presented was a creativity and happy, almost mischievous, feeling to many, unlike the seriousness and rigid ritualistic feel of most other custom dances in the islands to the South. The women especially seemed to have a lot of fun and didn't seem repressed. The most magnificent dance with the most colorful pageantry and complex choreography was the Mag dance. **Twin Waterfall Bay:** Only a few miles north, a nice sail in the lee of the island. Much calmer anchorage! Meet Chief Kereley and his family at the small "yacht club". The twin falls are beautiful especially with the late afternoon light giving them a special glow. Do not miss a look at the Paintings cave, enjoy a good bush/garden tour with him. We were invited for one of his children's birthday: nicely presented food, like the food all the yachties had together when we first arrived. Happy trading with the locals for fruits, vegetables, lobster, fresh water prawns, and coconut crabs. **Single Waterfall bay:** Not mentioned in the RG (Rocket Guide) is another anchorage only a few miles north of Twin Waterfalls, just off a beautiful waterfall. Access ashore is not very easy as the shore is lined with shallow reefs but worth the effort if you like waterfalls like us! If you take your dinghy north from here following the shoreline, you will find a large cave carved in the high cliff rocks that you can drive the dinghy into. Take a light, as after you turn the corner, you'll be in the dark, and it's difficult to see how much farther you can actually go. **Sola:** the northernmost port of entry of Vanuatu. You can get your formalities done here as well as enjoy the hospitality of the Sola Yacht Club. Robert & Serah, gracious hosts welcome cruisers at their small restaurant and BBQ and provide services for trade like laundry, book swapping, water and trash burning. Land your dinghy on the beach or at the jetty and follow the road to the right to find the Govt buildings, then continue walking along the road to find "Lemerous" Bungalows (Sola YC). Walk up to the big white cross on the hill to get a magnificent view of the bay and surrounds. You can fly crew in/out from the nearby airport. (3 flights a week from Santo) A tour by boat to the crocodile river and mangrove is worth it for the tour itself even if you do not see any alligator (they are alligators and not crocodiles!).

UREPARAPARA: contrary to what we read, we had 2 quite comfortable nights in the anchorage without bullet winds or heavy swells. Outside there was 15-20 Kts from E-SE and inside we had 10-15kts steady from the N as the wind funneled thru this deep bay. Chief Nickelson advised us to anchor at 13d32'478S-167d20'516E as there is a lot less swell there. The Titinson Yacht Cultural Centre offers several tours and activities. We enjoyed the Megel and Qwat custom dances for the beautiful hats the dancers are wearing. We ordered bread from the baker and traded for more lobsters and fruits/veg. No airport here so if you look for really isolated people, this is one place where people are very friendly and hope for more visitors! They have to go about 20 miles by speed boat to get to Sola so you can guess they do not see many visitors at all except for a few yachties. Easy stop on your way to the Solomons and easy island to reach even if you only visit the Banks before going back down to Santo or Vila!

REEF ISLANDS: Another place much better than described in some guides. We found the anchorage quite good despite some swell (it was blowing 15-25 kts from E-SE). We anchored in 30ft of water at 13d37'636S-167d30'393E. The dinghy ride over the lagoon to reach the islands was a little long for our friends with a 5hp but was not a problem for our RIB 15hp. If you like pristine beaches, clear water ... enjoy the reef islands (some yachts spend over a week here!). We saw some fishing charters in this area.

MOTA LAVA: The RG is correct when mentioning deep water all the way to the fringing reef. Our solution was to temporarily anchor in 50ft and make up a mooring on a nearby 10ft coral/rock to limit our scope and to be really secured in any wind direction (13d41'582S-167d37'829). Access to the island anywhere is indeed difficult at low water since the fringing reef dries. The easiest seems to dinghy around the SE point before Ra island. Milli bay anchorage is about 4h walking from the villages but is very picturesque if you like solitude. In the South, on Rah Island, you can have a delicious meal at Seaside restaurant (ask a day before for lobsters or coconut crabs) and see some of the Banks dances like the Snake dance. Very welcoming and energetic people on Rah Island 😊

GAUA: Losalava protected anchorage. All yachts now are invited by chief Edgel and his small community as they arrive. After string band welcome songs, we were given flower leis and fruits and invited to sign the guest book. It was all fun for everyone and a good way to introduce each other for trade together and activities to do on the island. Plenty of hiking and cultural activities here! We made a day hike to the lake and volcano in activity (Robert and his son are great guides) and another day hike to the Siri waterfalls! Make sure you leave early (630am) as you otherwise risk to come back after dark! We had more traditional dancing and the famous watermusic. Chief Edgel also organized a Melanesian feast that was very nice!

In retrospect, to get the best sailing conditions, we recommend cruising the Banks in the following order: Gaua (Losalava), Vanua Lava (Sola), Mota Lava, Reef Islands, Ureparapara, Vanua Lava (Waterfall Bay then Vureas Bay for festival). We did it clockwise (and it was much easier that we would have guessed as we were lucky with the winds) as we arrived from Ambrym festival direct for the festival in Vureas bay but you could time your visit to finish with the festival! (That is if you don't mind missing the Malekula and Ambrym festivals in August!)

TORRES: I (Luc) flew to the Torres islands and visited all islands during one week of filming assignment. I did not see too many calm anchorages except for a few spots on the western coast. You are then quite isolated as for some reason, most villages are on the windward side. Even more remote than the Banks, you won't see any vehicle here at all. Metoma island is managed by a mini family. A visit of their coconut crabs & megapodes conservation area will be remembered! The fishing was excellent between the islands as we traveled by speedboat ... do not forget to troll! Sole airport is located on Linua Island. You can walk across from Loh Island. Do stop in the Torres on your way to the Solomons, you will enjoy the contact with the friendly islanders and you will have a good opportunity to taste some excellent coconut crabs as they still abound here!

THE FESTIVALS: So often in Vanuatu, we find out about things only after the fact. This cruising season, we were so excited that we had 5 different events in the islands to tell about and even better, most were scheduled one after the other so it was possible to attend 4 in a row if so desired. We had suggested dates to the SW Bay folks to make this possible, and Lamien Bay set their date accordingly. Only Tomin Island and the Ambrym Magic Festival dates were pre-set and unfortunately on the very same days in July. On the VHF net in Vila, we announced 2-3 times a week the events, programs, anchorage info, and encouraged yachties to go. The uniqueness of Vanuatu is the incredible traditional native customs (kastom) that are still practiced or remembered here; each island or tribal group has its unique culture. The "festivals" were a mix of contemporary and ancient

traditions. Will tell about the festivals in detail in a separate letter. Will only say that the turnout of yachts overwhelmed our expectations and totally awed and amazed the villagers! SSCA was well represented!

May 06 – Nov 10

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche