

Subject/Area: VENEZUELA: Margarita, Golfo de Cariaco, Puerto la Cruz, Los Roques, Aves + visit to Angel Falls & Gran Sabana & yard services for a wide multihull

The 97 Hurricane season we made a beeline from St. Maarten directly to Margarita (had to give Los Testigos a miss since we arrived there on a black night). There we stayed and stayed and stayed!!

The H-Season was thankfully a very mild one for not only weather, but also for security problems. After all the horror stories the year before about rampant and bold thievery in many of the popular anchorages around Venezuela, we were hesitant to visit this country. But we were not enamored of Trinidad and its stifling summer climate. To our delight, this year, our stay in Margarita was punctuated by cool nights, dry breezy days, and a friendly, secure anchorage off the Concorde Hotel at Porlamar.

We had major work to do epoxying and repainting our immense decks, and Porlamar proved to be a great place to do it. Being a popular provisioning stop for yachts, Porlamar has been well covered by past SSCA bulletins. Especially helpful was the letter from Steve, Sue, Will, and Rudder on SERENA;(Oct.96 issue) great people whom we had the fortune to meet this last summer. There have been some fairly recent changes, though, that we can add to the info pool: The Bolivar continues to decline and prices at the popular Pescadero restaurant and in the supermercados and the mercado were increased on 2 or 3 different occasions over the 5 months we were in the area. Local food, booze, and fuel continue to be a bargain compared to the Caribbean Island chain, but are no longer "dirt" cheap. A little thinking and comparing are required to find the best value. For instance, propane and diesel: if you put in the effort to go to Vengas or jerry jug fuel yourself, you could save 10 times the price or twice the price respectively in Porlamar.

VEMASCA falls somewhat short of its glorious advertising in guides and nautical publications as the largest chandlery, but the personnel are great and "mucho" helpful for clearance procedures and helping you locate any kind of services not just boat stuff. It's a great source for inexpensive tropical woods other than teak, cut to order, and on time!

New services aimed at meeting "yachtie" needs are a new (Nov 97) 2-machine do-it-yourself laundromat w/ HOT water, a mini-mart w/ duty-free liquor, take-out sandwiches, roast chicken, deli items, etc. and a pleasant, shady gathering area to stage swaps and other activities. Don & his Thai wife, Jac, who started WATERBABY, the boat-side potable water service, have worked hard w/ VEMASCA to get these things going. Don's rigging shop has also been upgraded w/ new welding and machining possibilities. At the moment, VEMASCA is also providing a security guard at their dinghy dock, which really cuts down on hiking and lugging stuff if going to/from VEMASCA or town. We hope folks do all they can to support these services especially through words and actions that help, not exploit, the efforts of these people.

We found another treasure yachties will love: a good meal at a great price, in a clean a/c-ed restaurant, with 1st class service! You can have a great lunch:

soup, juice, special-of-the-day, and coffee for less than \$3. This deal is found in the fashionable 4 de Mayo/Santiago Marino dist. inside the Flamingo City Hotel at the intersection of these two popular streets. In the same area one can find incredible clothes bargains at stores that went broke. Apparently there's a company that jumps on these locations and fill them w/ close-out clothes at 300Bs (<\$.80) any item. We bought clothes for wear-and-toss for our many work projects. Also on the same streets one can find a free English language "newspaper" called MIRA which calls itself the "independent traveler's alternative". It's great for us yachties because it not only tells you the classic tourist activities, but also how to find lowest costs in transportation, lodging, local food etc., and gives you a no-holds-barred insight into Margarita and Venezuela, its politics and pitfalls and such things as encroachment on the Yanomami Indians, and what may affect us in future visits. We really enjoy the paper's irreverent style.

If you have a good outboard, take a trip out to Farallon, or what we call the White Rock off Pampatar. On a calm day you can do some beautiful snorkeling and even gather enough Mussels for dinner (not in Aug!) Having a Belgian aboard, we had to have a couple meals of "Moules Frites" (mussels & fries)! Cook 'em well to avoid the gamy taste and any shellfish revenge.

BLANQUILLA- We had a great 3-wk get-away here...white sand beaches, blue water, and reefs full of critters. Contrary to Doyle's Guide's comment, the path to here seems quite well beaten in summer! Notes on anchorages:

1) Playa Carenton - S. side; Doyle's says nice little anchorage...it is little, but not too nice in prevailing conditions. The few "sand" patches are only 4"-6" over hard rock. Where you need to anchor is too deep, with too shallow reefs too close by if the wind shifts.

2) Americano Bay - Doyle says good visit by dinghy, but if you can be the first, one boat can tuck up iside by the beautiful beach in 10' over thick white sand. If winds may veer, it's best to set 2 anchors.

3) Our favorite anchorage was N. of Americano Bay as you go towards Punta Maglecito, the NW point. you'll see several white sand beaches. At 11°52.575N, 64°37.731W, you'll be in front of a PINK sand beach with wide, clear, sand bottom all around, no reefs near except almost on shore, a few easily seen rocks. There are fishermen's camps on the beaches to either side and they do net fish here, but never asked us to move. You'll really be their friend if you bring some candies, chocolates or cigarettes (not beer or rum), and will probably never lack for fish after! We were alone here for a week. It can be rolly for a monohull and awful in N. swell, but we felt secure when a few mild tropical waves passed over.

From this site we found some fun, shallow scuba just following fingers of reef out from the shore and trying it. In one area we saw some of the biggest stingrays sleeping in the sand, 4-5ft. big green morays, and beautiful scenery swimming through high relief boulders and many natural arches.

Another good snorkel and dive site for all levels of divers is on the SW side at the wash rock at Punta Bobos. North side of the rock is shallow w/ sand patches to anchor the dink in about 20'. Pick your dive depth: go clockwise around the

rock base and it goes gradually deeper; go counterclockwise to the SW side and you get a sheer drop into the black until +150'! There looked like there could be currents here at times. Buddy w/ another dinghy or take a non-diver for pick-up service if you get "carried away"! There was some great blue-water fish action on the seaward side as hunting packs of Jacks herded and picked off the weak and slow fry.

GOLFO DE CARIACO - Had a marvelous time cruising here. The Northern side is arid, barren, red & gray, cactus-covered hills w/ only small fishing villages or shacks. The Southern side is green, coconut palm-covered, lined w/ resorts, vacation homes and several small towns, back-dropped by towering green mountain ranges each taller than the first. Again, SERENA wrote a great letter (2/97) covering this area. We have only a few things to add to their thorough coverage.

General comments about the Golfo:

1) In the winter, at least, it can blow like STINK from an Easterly direction, much accelerated from the trades over the rest of the regions. Winds are lighter in the AM, increasing to through the day til nightfall, but we saw all variations. We saw brisk winds quite early and sometimes lasting all night or until just before dawn. Luckily anchorages are close to each other and you can get East by tacking back and forth across the Golfo.

2) A caveat to Doyle's Guide: where he shows anchorages and says there's plenty of swinging room, this means for one yacht (or 2 CLOSE friends). Small coves and bays ARE small.

3) Security was not a problem for us inside the Golfo. We of course always lifted the dinghy and locked up at night and when away. The locals were very nice and sometimes quite generous. Our fondest memory is of the folks of Muelle de Cariaco, at the very end of the Golfo. An earthquake hard hit this town last July and volunteer reconstruction crews of local residents were working to repair damages. One day they came to our aid by arguing our case with a rip-off taxi driver who misled us about the fare. When he said (thinking we couldn't understand), "Of course I charge them much more than I would you. They're [rich] [dumb] Americanos!", the villagers grabbed our things and helped us to the dock telling the driver he was a thief, and we were to give him "Nada!"

Muelle de Cariaco - From here we took a local bus to the Guacharo Caves, which is the largest cave system in the world (aren't they all?) and have an unique indigenous bird, the Guacharo. SERENA's letter alludes to the rumor that getting bus transport back could be a problem.

Here's the REAL story: Each day at 6AM, one bus departs Cumana for Caripe and one bus departs Caripe for Cumana; upon each reaching their destination, they spend about an hour before heading back to their home base. Thus, if you are in Muelle de Cariaco, the bus will pass the gas station at the x-roads described by Doyle at 9AM and arrive at the Nat'l Park w/ the caves about 1hr45mins later. This same bus will pass the Park on its return trip at 12:15 and is the only way back the same day. Otherwise, you need to overnight in Caripe (heard guest houses are not expensive (\$6-\$12)) and catch the 6AM bus the

next morning. If you're doing a same-day trip as we did, that gives you a mere 1hr30mins to visit the area. We were unable to visit Caripe or a waterfall that's about a 35-40 min

walk from the cave. If you overnight, you have until about 3:45PM till the other bus passes to Caripe. If you are not at the roadside when the bus roars passed, plan on camping out!! Voila! The cave visit was nice, not fantastic, and guides only speak Spanish, but the scenery on the bus ride and the panoramas and local color as you go higher and higher up the mountains are worth the whole trip...and for a mere \$2 bus fare!

Punta Elvira: This is as SERENA describes it. We found the 10' shelf in front of the coconut beach. To be sure you have hit good sand, check in snorkeling because there are hard spots and some rock/coral scattered around. We met 3 very sweet, polite boys out hunting with homemade slingshots, who climbed the trees and picked green coconuts for us. One even offered us his prize slingshot. An easy way to get gasoline is to take the dink and follow the coast back westward from the anchorage.

You'll pass a building w/ what looks like a public pool and a swim ladder into the sea, pass a villa with a green wall, and in the next "cove" you'll see a small, solitary, concrete dock with a lamppost and a path heading up to the gas station on the road.

Medregal Village Resort - We heard a few yachts talk about a "French" resort at the end of the Golfo where yachts were welcome and could use the pool, hot showers, and other facilities for free. We found this elusive resort, not at the end but on the N. side at 10°32'N, 64°48'W about 2 miles SE of Cachicotas. From the sea it's easily missed because there are no name panels on either of the 2 piers, and on shore, you see only some thatched roofs and a bit more greenery. If the Hobby Cats are

on the beach, that's a good landmark. The stories are true; they welcome yachts and also offer laundry service, hearty French country bread, and provisioning service. Jean-Marc, the manager, is half Belgian, and like the rest of the staff, happy to see new faces. It's definitely a beautiful oasis in a bleak countryside! The ample, deep swimming pool is the best part! They have a French chef and if you're tired of local cooking, you can treat yourself to French cooking at prices comparable to prices in the US. They do discount their bar prices for Yachties.

Cangrejo - This is actually one of the prettiest areas of the Golfo. We anchored in Cangrejo Bay and took the dinghy exploring the multitude of small coves and bays, each a little different than the next. The water here actually has some blue color to it and probably the best visibility of all the Golfo. We speared some fish and gathered shellfish here. The tiny, open-air resort of Cangrejo (actually in Juanacuna Bay) is quaint and blends well with it's surroundings. They have a dock you can Med Moor to if you'd like to stay in the tiny well-sheltered bay.

ISLANDS AROUND PUERTO LA CRUZ - So far, we are not very impressed with the cruising in this area, as many of the anchorages are too tight for the depth, and many had hard bottoms, which the anchor could not dig into. Winds can sweep down from the hills in different directions throughout the day, making the

first two conditions even more worrisome. By luck, most people get away with putting a lot of chain, and having light wind conditions.

La Borracha - the geology here is fascinating and unique. The sheer multi-colored rock dropping steeply to sea level then deeply undercut by the waves makes for dramatic scenery. If you're lucky enough to be the first in the anchorage described in Doyle's guide, you can anchor in good sand at reasonable depth but you should set 2 anchors because there are reefs all around and the winds turn in all directions finally settling into strong easterly gusts all night. The dive at the Cathedral on the NW corner of the "guardian" rock at the western approach to the anchorage is a good one. All along the coast you can find blowholes and caverns among the undercut ledges.

Chimana Grande - Doyle's descriptions are not always correct especially the Cienaga anchorage. Where he shows 25ft is around 60ft. There IS a shelf on the NE edge but very close to shore and is all hard rock. What he doesn't show is a 5ft rock shoal about right where the ring of his anchor symbol is on the chartlet! Most of the little anchorages have the problems we described above, and it's hard to find a place to stay unless you tie to shore. Sena Larga was a good anchorage in good sand but you gotta be the first there. We found an unmarked anchorage on the SE side of island. (10ø16N,64ø37W) Near the fishing camp, we anchored in 12ft but found 4-6ins of sand over hard. Closer to shore was rock and coral, but further E in front of the mangroves and before the next point, we found good sand in 20ft. (We checked in SCUBA).

Title: THE SAGA OF SLOEPMOUCHE'S HAUL OUT.

VOL. I: CAN A 46'X 25' TRI REALLY BE HAULED IN VENEZUELA?

Answer: Yes...No...yes..no...uh, maybe????

As all you multi-hull buffs know, there's always a price to be paid for having that spacious, stable, comfortable, platform. That price hits home when it comes time to find a locale to haul out that wide vessel... not only the cost, but the actual ability to do it.

We wanted to haul in Venezuela because we knew we had some extensive epoxy and paint work to do, and anticipated being out about 2 months or so. We'd been in Trinidad the '96 Hurricane season, and found the daily drenching and high humidity a great hindrance and not the best conditions for our work. But, on arrival in Margarita for the '97 H-season, we met a French trimaraneur who's lived there 12 yrs, who said NO place in Venezuela could take us! We found this hard to believe. True, the most known yards were out: NAVIMCA near Cumana could take only 21 ft. beam, CMO about the same. VARADERO CARIBE had a rail for big boats, but a major earthquake damaged it the same week we arrived! Since we had quite a bit of work on the deck, we stayed in Porlamar

and meanwhile researched some more. We didn't get away from there until late Nov.! We stopped in Cumana to see if Varadero Caribe had repaired their rail, and to visit another yard next door, ASTILLERO DE ORIENTE that we heard could take big boats since it mainly dealt with the fishing trawlers. Varadero was partly operational. The rail wasn't completely fixed, but they were managing to

drag boats out. The yard is cramped, and in pitiful condition, not paved or graveled. There is no restaurant, laundry, showers, or chandlery, yet their pricing is like Peakes or Power Boats in Trinidad. The yard requires you to use their workers, or you pay a commission based on the value of the work you do yourself!! Astillero de Oriente was slightly better, also squeezed between the fish packing plants, but at least paved, and having a 100-ton travel lift, a rail for BIG freighters, and a dry dock basin. They too, have no services, but the price was much less, with no restrictions on self-work.

Meanwhile, over an SSB net, we discovered that our friends, Paul and Glyn Frost, on SILVER ANK, had become Technical Advisor at CMO, and that in mid-Jan. a 65' catamaran was scheduled to hire a crane to haul out there. Since the crane charges for the full day, perhaps we could share costs and haul the same day. But on arrival in Puerto La Cruz (PLC), we found out that the cat backed out on the deal. Back to Square 1. Paul, determined to find a way, looked to modify the trailer that was used to launch big day-sail cats built by the yard. We took measurements of the center hull, keel, wing deck heights, etc. CMO hired the guy who used to launch the cats to do the modifications.

It looked feasible. After a 10-day wait for modifications, the yard was ready to try. We were to use the boat ramp at Puerto Viejo, next door, since CMO had no ramp. We waited for high tide. The trailer was backed into the water; Sloepmouche was aligned, the specialist dove into the filthy water to check the alignment; Paul and the CMO manager came by to witness the historic event, since they'd never hauled a tri of our size! After much discussion in Spanish, and arm waving and head scratching, it was determined that there was a problem: we needed either 50 more ft. of concrete ramp or 3 more feet of water to get our keel onto the trailer... even the highest tide of the vernal equinox wouldn't give us that!! Back to Square 1. We must give credit to CMO's efforts to accommodate us, though. They incurred expenses to modify the trailer and hire the specialist, and they refunded us our full deposit promptly. We felt this was very correct and wanted CMO to have our business, but the only way left was to hire a 100 ton crane which would cost over \$1000 each day of use!!

Guess it's back to Cumana. Just to be sure, Luc phoned Astillero de Oriente to confirm a date: "Si Senor, no problema, but the rail won't be available until the end of March. What about the travel lift??

How many meters wide did you say you were? Oh no, Senor, I'm afraid we can't take you. You say that one month ago we said it was possible? You must be mistaken, Senor." Back to Square 1.

This started Luc on a 2-week odyssey researching out every possibility in the area as well as west to Puerto Cabello and Curacao and east to Guiria and Trinidad. Faxes went out to all. Beau Buchanan, of Dockside Services at Bahia Redonda was very helpful in giving us leads and suggestions. Luc spent innumerable hours and bus trips speaking to people at Guanta, the commercial port and military base, to arrange to have a crane haul us out on the property and get permission to do our work there. One day our hopes would soar, the next day they'd crash.

Luc's motto for Venezuela is: "Everything is possible...until you try to do it!"
 Naval Base: the boat can go on the premises, but the crane must come from PLC (\$1000 /day). Coast Guard at Commercial Dock: Yes, we even have work shops here and good security, and there are cranes just next door... oh, but no, you must get special permission from the head honcho of the Coast Guard in Caracas, and why should he? The commercial dock at Guanta was the most promising: Huge crane on the premises, and the crane company agreed to charge only for the hours used; one guy at Guanta said we could put the boat in a corner somewhere for only \$6/day. OK! Let's do it! BUT, at the accounting office, the price suddenly was \$50 /day..no facilities, no security, no services. Back to Square 1.

Faxes came back. Here is the result we got. Prices are probably no longer valid, but it gives a point of comparison.

Yard	Haul	out/in	Layday	Extra	Self-work/Workers
Astillero de Or	\$200	T Lift	\$20	No restrictions	
Varadero Caribe	\$195	Rail	\$47	Commission on both	
CMO	\$500	Trailer	\$19	B	n/c
self;Labor	\$5/\$15				
Puerto Cabello	\$?	Crane	\$50	No info	
Guiria (Paria)	\$4/m	Synclift	\$60	B D E	30%
Comm on self work					
Crews Inn	\$370	T Lft	\$37	B L	n/c self;no laborers
Peake's	\$?	T Lft	\$?	B	No reply to our faxes,em
Curacao	\$1200	Crane	\$400/mo ?	No other info	

B: blocking, D:diver work, E: elect.& water, L: ladder & scaffolds

Power Wash & Shelling as an extra in all yards

Note: since then, Antillean Slipway opened in Curacao: they advertise hauling out up to 60 ft and 60 tons, but they have a lot of technical difficulties since they opened; soon problems may be fixed! There is also a construction company in Willemstad, Curacao with a 100 tons crane where they haul out boats but that is their last priority and you have to sign a form where you accept full responsibility for any damage during haul-out, take it or leave it!

Something kept nagging in Luc's mind about Astillero de Oriente. He was sure their travel lift was big enough; he'd seen a big Catamaran in the yard. Finally, he grabs his measuring tape, takes the 2 hr bus ride to Cumana, and measures the lift and slip himself. We CAN fit!! Talking to the yard manager, he confirms we can fit after all with a foot to spare! And, the price is reasonable! At last, we make it to Square 2!!

VOL. II: THE YARD AND CUMANA

ASTILLERO DE ORIENTE: This yard has a notorious reputation. For us there really was no choice. Here we give the positives and negatives:

POSITIVES:

- 1) They have a very hefty travel lift that will accommodate up to 25' beam. It has 8 straps to give support everywhere.
- 2) They have no restrictions about do-it-yourself work, and no charges if you hire outside labor. They may ask you to use their people for at least a little work. This is negotiable.
- 3) Prices: no matter what the size of boat, haul out was \$200 in/out, no charge for blocking or re blocking. \$20/day lay day, NO charge for weekend or holidays!
- 4) During Nov.-Feb. there is practically no rain.

NEGATIVES:

- 1) Do not cater to pleasure yachts. This is really a commercial yard with mainly steel and wood fishing boats (lots of sand blasting and dust). There is intermittent water and electricity and toilets (no showers). There's a small store/restaurant just outside the gate, and vendors of food and drinks visit the yard.
- 2) Security is haphazard. Although there is a gatekeeper and a security guard 24 hrs/day, there is no fence or barrier on the seaside. You must have someone aboard all the time and keep close watch on your power tools. Our yapping dog was probably a good deterrent, yet we did have once some petty theft by the children of the barrio.(note that the manager reimbursed us the cost of the 2 big garbage cans stolen! very correct from his part!)
- 3) The Yard is quite disorganized. It is in receivership and actually run by a bank officer who knows little about boatyards. There is a yard manager, but little to no co-ordination between different services. Priority goes to the commercial boats and sandblasting can go on all night at times. But, the chaos can work to your advantage to argue for lower prices or not pay lay days due to the yard's fault. We made the best of these difficulties and overall were satisfied.

WORKERS: The yard's laborers are nice and very friendly, but we do not recommend them for critical work. We were very lucky to meet 2 local guys who turned out to be a Godsend. Luis and Marcial became treasured friends. We have never met such gracious, industrious, resourceful, contentious, honest, and sincere people in Venez. or elsewhere. No work was too hard or disagreeable. Anything they could learn was eagerly acquired. They were never idle, always asked if they were working as we wanted, took as much care and pride in our boat and property as we did. They are amazing guys, each struggling to support 5 kids, wife, and parents. We started out paying them the going rate in Cumana (less than \$10/day) but gave them raises as they acquired skills. They received an additional bonus at the end. They'd never received raises or bonuses before and were thrilled. We'd never given bonuses related to performance before and were grateful for their work. When back in the water, we took their families for a cruise to Mochima. They loved it. Later, in Puerto la Cruz, the 2 guys stayed on the boat with our dog while we traveled inland. They not only finished the whole list of projects unsupervised, but they invented even more! Luis speaks good English, and Marcial understands a lot. Special guys! If you're in Cumana,(or even PLC), call them: Neighbor's phone: (093) 311957, ask to habla con Luis Manuel Rodriguez. We last saw them in PLC in April 98 at CMO where we found them work w/ Dave on DESTINY.

SERVICES IN CUAMANA: You can get a lot of things done here, but you gotta know the territory. The one man in town who's indispensable is a German guy, EWALD (eh-vald) who will provide transport and even run errands for you. He knows everyone around town and is cheaper than a regular taxi and does much more: translator, agent, taxi, shopper, telephone service, etc. He'll not only take you to the vendor you need, but will go in w/ you to make sure the guy understands, and will wait

for you if necessary. He'll co-ordinate w/ other yachties there to share costs. He's the ONLY person to provide such a service, so you must sometimes be patient and realize that he tries to do 1000 things at once w/o saying no to anyone. Ewald can take you to these services:

1) SS Welding and Prop Service: Antonio is by far the best and cheapest in Cumana; again, a busy man!

2) Marine Items: Check w/ NAUTI HOGAR and CASAMAR (The latter's the only one who will price match and talk business) If you need bottom paint, check w/ CASA DEL PINTOR, then get Casamar to price match, because the other will not refund or take back unused items.

3) IMRON PAINT: EL MERCADO DE LAS PINTURAS is the only store to sell it (cheaper than in PLC), but order ahead and over estimate because they can run out for a week!

4) Painter: An Independent contractor, Francisco Navarro, sprayed our boat and designed and painted our name and stripe for a very reasonable price. He can be contacted through the yard foreman, Freddy. Be sure to haggle, and agree that he pay the yard's commission himself from that amount.

5) Other odd Jobs: We had done: Straightening the anchor shank, fabrication of an in-line zinc holder for the engine, fabrication of pieces to repair the Force 10 BBQ, Small sewing jobs, repair of bimini frame, shower grate made from local wood. The metal working jobs were done well and at reasonable, sometimes dirt cheap, prices. The rest had varying results.

MEAT, BREAD, FRUIT & VEGGIES: Cumana had the best prices overall for these things vs. PLC or Porlamar. Big mercado - best bargains out back behind the main building; cheap bread and bakeries everywhere; found a poultry packing plant w/ best price on chicken breasts and even trimmed and packed like at home (but much more flavorful); meat market (frigorifico) w/ good prices and by far cheapest for deli-meats. A big modern CADA supermarket for groceries. **MONEY EXCHANGE:** We found a BANK that exchanges AMEX TC, even large denomination, at bank rates: CORP BANC. Sometimes quick, mostly slow. The CAMBIO house is faster and for small amounts, the rate difference doesn't hurt as much. There is also a CORP BANC in PLC (you do not HAVE to use only CAMBIOS). In Cumana, be sure Ewald takes you to the bank door and picks you up there. Do not wander the streets!

VOL. III: THE HAPPY ENDING!

As in all sagas and epic tales, there must be hardships and insurmountable odds to face, but in the end, our heroes prevail and all is well. We are very pleased

with the results of all our work and our paint job, top and bottom. It's not flawless, but what counts is done. We're happy.

To SUMMARIZE: Astillero de Oriente (as it is now) would be a good deal for a haul out such as a quick in and out where the owners have all the materials and tools and know how to do the work themselves. Or if the boat needs 2-3 months of work in a dry climate (Nov.-Feb.) and you accept the primitive conditions. OR, like us, you have a 25 ft. wide trimaran!

ANGEL FALLS & GRAN SABANA: After getting some info, we decided to organize our own tour. Not difficult to do and more adventurous than the all-inclusive tours. Our tour lasted 7 days and cost us 700 \$ for the 2 of us.

Day 1: We left our boat at anchor in the El Morro marina and took the bus to C.Bolivar in the morning, the afternoon and evening we visited the town and the view of the Orinico river + night in a hotel.

Day 2: early Avensa flight (1way) to Canaima then bargained with local tour operators in Canaima (you have to go with one): the most accommodating was Richard Chung of Kamaracoto Tours who gave us the best deal on his all inclusive 3 day-tour (48hours) for just the 3 of us (a backpacker joined us). Don't take the 1 day tour as you will rush to much, pay even more than for the 3 days and if it's rainy that day, you will have poor video opportunities! We really enjoyed Sapo falls and sleeping in hammocks is not as bad for the back as I tough it would be!

Day 4: mid-day Avensa flight (1way-reserve your seats on arrival in Canaima) to St. Elena de Uaren. There you find a room for the night and arrange a tour to Gran

Sabana: we took a guide with jeep for 2 days to explore most of the nice waterfalls along the road. We took our own food and camped in Indian settlements. How bigger the group you are, how lower will be your cost for the guide & jeep (we found another couple to go with us). At the end of the second day, we got off at MM88 late afternoon and got a bus from there to C.Guyana where we waited morning for a bus back to PLC.

We really went on a budget so you probably will spend more if you want more comfort. The trip was really worth it even if expensive because of plane tickets and necessity to hire tour guides. Too bad no roads lead to Canaima and no rental of camper vans to do Gran Sabana by yourself as the road is one of the best in Venezuela and you don't need a guide to find the falls!

ISLA TORTUGA: try night spear fishing and you may be surprised by how many Caribbean lobsters you may encounter!

LOS ROQUES: Easy entrance through Boca de Sebastopol and super nice sailing North to El Gran Roque with beautiful colors all along the way!

The check-in procedure is long since you have to visit 5 different offices, by luck, close to each other! Everybody was very nice; you pay all the dues at the Autoridad Uniqua at the airport on Gran Roques (50\$ for us). Pay the 4\$ extra per diver for the scuba permit (show dive card & logbook) as many very nice

dives can be made. Ask special permission to the Park manager to dive in the south areas.

Best dive sites we found:

1) "la guassa", seamount about 300 ft NW off NW point of El Gran Roque. Visibility varies with currents!, plenty of schools of fish, big groupers, worth to film in video, short dinghy trip from anchorage off town, sometimes a little plastic jug is on top of it as a marker, scuba shop at anchorage can fill your tanks and tell you how to find the site.

2) reef & wall South side of Dos Mosquises. Visibility varies a lot with tides, lots of small fish & great variety of corals, very close from anchorage. Visit the turtle farm and ask the location of good dives to Raphael.

3) long wall at Vespen de la Salina (anchorage 11d45'-66d51'). Follow the outside edge of the barrier reef till you approach 11d44'80-66d52' then with good light weave your way through (plenty of water and space). From the anchorage you go by dinghy to dive anywhere along the South wall: plenty of fish & corals, good visibility, minimum currents, drop-off, some caverns (see m/v AntaresIII, live-aboard dive boat, for exact location).

4) Boca de Cote. If you go East along Cayo Sal (on the inside!) with good light above you, you can find your way (7ft min.) to the passage between Cayo Sal & Cayo Nube Verde to anchorage 11d46'-66d42'. Similar diving than #3 with more coral life but less fish life. If you have more than 7ft draft or don't like the attention needed to navigate between shallows and coral heads, you don't need to make it here, as it's as nice in #3.

You should enjoy the Roques as the islands and watercolors are so beautiful and you should be able to spend here around 3 weeks by checking in after taking a few days to Gran Roque and by waiting for a good wx window when in the west Roques. The line fishing is permitted and you can spearfish all you want later in the Aves!

LAS AVES: Even if the spear fishing isn't as easy as it used to be 20 years ago (according to other cruisers), with enough time in the water and a little skill, you should have no problems keeping your fridge full of fresh fish! Groupers, snappers, lobsters, ... keep looking; check other places less frequented by other hunters. Plenty of nice anchorages: amazing how you can be so comfortable just behind breaking reefs!

If you like history, you may be interested to snorkel over anchors & ballast stones from the fleet of French pirates who met disaster on those reefs in the 17th cent. We found that the newspaper photos had been taken in 10 ft of water just on the outside of the barrier reef next to the big tanker wreck (North one of the 2) on the barrier reef of Sotavento. The Swan wreck mentioned in guides is no longer visible; supposedly some artifacts were there too but we didn't find anything!

A little note about disposing of your trash: don't try to burn glass, metal cans or other materials that do not burn! we burn paper and other inflammable materials on deserted islands close to the water edge so the ashes can disappear into the sea or be buried instead of leaving ugly fire pits full of non-burned trash on the islands! we dump glass & metal cans (without tops!) over deep water, far from

shore and only let food waste overboard in the anchorage if it has a good water flow and isn't in front of an inhabited area.

You can dive the wall of the South shore of Isla Larga, just off the Coast Guard station (after getting by VHF a temporary authorization to anchor off their beach, not a permissible anchorage as mentioned in Doyle).

February 1998

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche