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Galapagos Roundup – S/Y Visions of Johanna – January, 2010

We have now enjoyed the Galapagos for nearly 7 weeks. As one of the early birds this season, many boats have e-mailed us questions about harbors, autografos, fuel, and re-provisioning. Here is a cruiser directed summary of our 2009-2010 stay in Galapagos, with our comments and recommendations.

Galapagos Generalities:

Cash economy: It is sometimes possible to use your credit cards at high-end shops and restaurants, but it is not typical, and it will cost you something extra - as much as 10%. Bring plenty of cash. While there are ATM machines on San Cristobal and Santa Cruz, there are no ATM's on Floreana or Isabela.

Getting Boat Parts Shipped In: The customs office in Guayaquil is like quicksand. Expect a minimum of 14 or possibly 21 days or more for an express package. Claiming "yacht in transit" will save some duty costs, but will also slow the process further. Duty charges might run to 33% or more depending on the item.

The Fedex office on Santa Cruz is at agent Johnny Romero's YachtGala Yacht Services (phone +593 5 252 7403). Johnny, Carlos, and Javier speak English. DHL is located at ServiGalapagos, the office of agent Ricardo Arenas (cell + 593 9 948 0859) and he speaks English as well.

Island Harbors and Activities:

San Cristobal - We felt that our decision to clear in to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno (Wreck Bay) was a good choice for several reasons. Certainly it is the most easterly harbor, and shaves 40 nm or so off the journey from the mainland. It is also a relatively calm anchorage and amenable to restful sleep after a passage. Entry is straightforward and you will likely be requested to anchor in the NE quadrant of the harbor with the old cement cannery pier to your north and Playa Man to your east. Tour boats do come and go frequently so there might be occasional discussions with other vessels. Sea lions are problematic and they always win.

Galapagos activities are well described elsewhere (e.g. SSCA Nov. 2007, Aug. 2009, Oct. 2009, The Ecuador Cruiser's Handbook) and I will mention only highlights. Manolo Yopez and Martina Heibling-Yopez at Sharksky Adventure Tours (www.sharksky.com) are excellent resources. They (and Aline, based on Santa Cruz) assisted us with suggestions for independent (aka free) activities and arranged excellent land tours and diving excursions. We did take their day snorkel trip up to Kicker Rock, and it was well worth it. The educational/interpretive center above the pier is a worthy walk, as are the adjacent short hiking loops up to Las Tijeretas, with beach and snorkeling in the coves below. An inland tour to the tortoise center, El Junco Lagoon, and Playa Chino was worthy as well. We also took a dive excursion (\$160 pp due to distance) to the neighboring island of Espanola.

WIFI is usually available in the harbor, provided by gov't agency Ingala (look

for the REDGAL signal). This means it is also heavily filtered.

Santa Cruz – The hub of the Galapagos, Puerto Ayora (Admiralty Bay) is an exposed harbor that we used only as a stop to meet with guests and to re-provision. You have two choices to anchor. A minor amount of protection can be gained anchoring close in along the SW shore, but this is also the main channel in and out the harbor, and is where a remarkable number of tour boats anchor cheek by jowl. Stern anchors are mandatory, and there will certainly be some proximity negotiations along the way.

NOTE that our spring 2009 C-Map Max charts continued to show a SSW 0.25 nm offset at 207 deg. mag. in the harbor area, placing our anchor point well on terra firma. In other words, in your minds eye the chart needs to be shifted $\frac{1}{4}$ nm 207 deg SSW to place your boat appropriately. None the less, approach is relatively easy as the large amount of anchored vessels in and just outside the harbor reveals a proper entry route. The other option is to anchor more towards the middle of the harbor, basically just outside the 3 lines of bow and stern anchored boats. Anchor point is $00^{\circ} 44.897S$ $090^{\circ} 18.601W$. A stern anchor is not necessary and often it seems that the roll is no worse as long as the wind holds.

On Santa Cruz we did a day boat tour to North Seymour Island, walked to Las Grietas (so-so), and hiked and walked the boardwalk to Tortuga Bay. Friends hired a taxi/truck at \$10/hr to take them up to the highlands (Spanish-speaking driver). Much cheaper than a guided tour with an English guide, if your Spanish is sufficient.

WIFI is sometimes available in the harbor (REDGAL), but internet seemed to go down fairly often island wide. Again it is heavily filtered. We found good wifi at the restaurant El Penon, across from Banco Pacifico on the waterfront road, (Av. Charles Darwin).

Floreana – Floreana was a great experience and we were quite happy that we elected to visit. The approach is straightforward and we anchored in 45 ft depth outside the moored boats, south of the wharf and port captain's office, and near to Black Beach. Described as a reasonably protected harbor, Puerto Velasco Ibarra is open to the west and we had 3 very rolly nights there – as bad or worse than Santa Cruz. Around that time we had more than a week of winds in the 14-19 knot range which might have contributed to the motion. I do not know what the norm is.

Although we obtained a 5 port autografo, our agent initially stated that we could visit only the 4 ports on San Cristobal, Santa Cruz, Isabela, and Baltra - Floreana was conspicuously absent. When pressed however, he acquiesced, and we arranged passage with our promise that we would not venture anywhere outside the harbor in boat or dinghy. It is apparent that the privilege was frequently abused by previous generations of cruisers and agents seem to be self-restricting available ports, stating that they are the ones that get into trouble when transgressions occur. The autografo itself does not describe the number or names of ports of visitation, and it seems to be a somewhat nebulous and ill described rule. Soggy Paws, a boat anchored nearby us in Isabela, was told by Agent Bolivar Pesantes that they had a three port autografo, absent Baltra and Floreana.

Floreana was worth the visit as it is more of an out-island; it does not have scheduled ferry service and you must charter a boat, or go on your own to get

there. We spent 3 nights there and Manolo at Sharksky set us up with Max, an island resident, who guided us first on a day tour around the island and then a scuba/snorkel day. The history of the island of course is complex and fascinating, and diving at Champion Rock and the snorkel at Devils Crown were both excellent. Max can be reached by Manolo, by email (maxdilan_2006@yahoo.es or maxfreire@hotmail.es), or via his brother Peter who lives on Santa Cruz and speaks better English. Peter's cell phone numbers are +593 9 301 0715 or +593 9 265 6611.

No WIFI on Floreana.

Isabela – Puerto Vilamil can best be described as the jewel of the Galapagos harbors, and this is where we chose to spend most of our relaxing time. A large island with only 1800 inhabitants, Isabela is connected to the island group by daily "fast" ferries to Santa Cruz, which are 18 passenger boats departing Isabela at 0600 with return departure from Santa Cruz at 1400 (the trip takes 2 to 2 ½ hours and costs \$30-35). The harbor is protected by a southern string of low islands and reefs. While there is a small boat entry through these islands, sailboats will need to round to the south and west of the group, and enter through a buoyed channel.

NOTE: We found a chart plotter offset here similar to Santa Cruz on our most recent C-Map Charts. Interestingly, the 2002 C-Map Chart is more detailed and correctly referenced. Our entry points included

00 ° 59.81S 090 ° 57.40W;
00 ° 58.85S 090° 58.85W;
00 ° 58.03S 090 ° 58.76W.

The green entry buoy is at 00 ° 57.991S 090 ° 58.288W, and then one proceeds into the anchorage at 00 ° 57.902S 090 ° 57.766W, north of the second finger islet.

In good light, it is possible to proceed SE to the north of the third finger islet, anchoring in a small basin in 18 feet at low tide. Protection is excellent as is the scenery and wildlife.

There is snorkeling off your boat with the highlight being the colony of Penguins that live here and visit your boat to feed, as well as hiking or biking to a tortoise preserve outside town, and to the "Wall of Tears", about 6 miles out along the "beach road". We joined Soggy Paws on a two tank dive to nearby Tortuga Rock with Fabricio, a captain and dive master (cell 080927845). We all had our own equipment and cost was only \$50.00 pp (group of 5). He had also led us on a trip to Los Tunnels, with side trips to snorkel amongst sea horses, sharks and turtles (cost is \$300 for a 6 person boat). Los Tunnels was probably the best single excursion we did in all of the Galapagos. The hike to Volcan Negra was good and led by Luis Paredes Perez (can be found through Danielita's Tienda, cell 089842690), but the horse excursion up to the volcano was difficult due to wet muddy clay. It would be a better trip after a few days of sun. We also visited a set of volcanic caves with Luis on our way home, and cost was \$53.00/pp. for 5 people. Luis and his wife arranged an inland excursion to the hills and farm region, and her uncle's farm. Produce could not be fresher, and the trip was well worth the taxi cost of \$30 for 3 hours, plus fruit and veggies.

We were fortunate to meet Max Murray, a UK transplant and proprietor of the

Hotel Albemarle. Max was incredibly helpful with all aspects of island and procedural information. The Galapagos (and mainland Ecuador) is essentially a cash economy and he led us through the procedures of inter-island money transfers, and offered his hotel as a "ship to" address for a boat part. He can recommend guides and can contact Fabricio for water excursions if Fabricio does not find you first.

Rare WIFI. There are several internet options ashore. We went to Easynet, the island internet provider (\$1.50/hr air conditioned). They are open 8:30A – 12:30P and 3:00P – 6:30P Monday to Friday and 9:00A – 1:00P Saturdays. There are other internet options that are open at lunchtime, but all are \$2/hr.

Agents, Zarpes, and Fees:

Many cruisers will not have the "zarpe mindset". In all the Central and South American countries one must obtain clearance, or a zarpe, to move between ports. Likewise, in the Galapagos, one must obtain clearance to move between the harbors, and the services of an agent is required. Typically the agent requests several days notice, allowing them to file a "sail plan" by email 24-72 hours in advance. Only after the sail plan has been filed, may you visit the port captain to obtain your "zarpe". Longer passages, such as mainland Ecuador to Galapagos, will often require intermediate way points as well. Upon arrival, the process is reversed. You notify your agent of your arrival, they complete your sail plan, and then you or your agent contacts the port captain to clear in (this varies with islands and officialdom). You pay an entry fee and obtain a "factura" or receipt. Save your facturas as your initial entry into Ecuador or Galapagos will list payments you may want to refer to later such as arrival fee (national is less than international), anchor fee, lights and buoys fee, and contamination fee. We paid these fees only once upon entry, and then paid only entry/exit fees (despacho) for each harbor. We were initially charged a second fundeadaro (anchor fee) as we prepared our international exit zarpe, but conversations between our agent and Sargeant Seguero at the Port Captains office on Isabela erased the charge. We worked with Ricardo Arenas and found him to be very helpful throughout, especially when dealing with delays due to boat parts and visa extensions. His reasonable grasp of English was useful, but on two brief occasions he was maddeningly difficult to get hold of. Friends on Soggy Paws used Bolivar Pesantes and were very satisfied with his services. I have no direct experience with other agents.

Autografos and Itineraries:

There are 3 basic ways to enter the Galapagos. One can arrive without a pre-arranged autografo and request a one port stay, usually up to 21 days. You can also arrange your autografo before your arrival, and choose between a one port and 5 port autografo. Agent fees range from \$80-\$150 for one port, and \$300 to \$400 for a 5 port autografo. We were pleased with our decision to obtain a 5 port autografo, and recommend this choice for a stay longer than 10 days to 2 weeks. We found many advantages and enjoyed the ability to move from port to port.

It is likely that your agent will ask for your itinerary when you apply for a 5 port autografo, as professional and tour boats all come with exacting itineraries. We did not, and gave an arrival port and anticipated length of stay; our itinerary developed as we figured things out. Our stay and a suggested itinerary follows, but your mileage may vary.

We elected to enter at Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristobal Island and chose this for location and protection. We anticipated more than a months stay in the Galapagos, and spent 11 days in San Cristobal before beginning a mostly downwind island tour – with some close reaching allowed. We first sailed to Puerto Velasco Ibarra on Floreana and spent 3 nights at anchor before sailing to Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz to meet guests and to do a large re-provision. We spent 5 nights there but three would have been sufficient for provisioning only. We then sailed to Puerto Villamil, Isabella Island and spent 11 nights before sailing back to Santa Cruz for our pre-passage re-provision. The second visit to Santa Cruz was most efficient and 2 nights were satisfactory. Finally, we returned to Isabela to prepare for the passage to Easter Island. With all this in mind, a suggested one month itinerary might be:

Arrive San Cristobal - 7 nights
Floreana - 3 nights
Santa Cruz - 3 nights
Isabela - 10 nights
Santa Cruz - 2 nights
Isabella - 6 nights

Fuel:

Diesel fuel in Ecuador carries 2 prices - a national price of approximately \$1.04/gallon and an international price of approximately \$3.50/gallon (prices as of January, 2010). Diesel can be obtained in one manner or another at the 3 ports of Puerto Ayora, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, or Puerto Vilamil.

Your ships agent or a local will offer to deliver fuel to your boat at the international price plus a premium at all 3 ports. You can also on occasion buy fuel from trading boats at an advantageous price close to the national price. They might approach you, or if you keep your eyes open, you might become a 3rd party to local boats selling fuel to one another. At San Cristobal, local boats often went stern to the cement pier to receive a diesel delivery. Manolo at Sharksky offered to assist us in that fashion. Finally, Luis Parado Perez at Danielita's on Isabela can arrange for a taxi and assist you with jerry jugging fuel from the island gas station to the dock to your dinghy, at an advantageous price.

Gasoline seems to be mostly available, but Isabela did run dry because of pump problems. I would always have some gas on hand, and would not allow larders to get too low.

Boat Supplies:

San Cristobal has several hardware stores/ferreterias and a dive shop with some small boat supplies.

Santa Cruz clearly has the best options. Mecanica Gallarda on 18th de Febrero by Isla Plaza has mechanical and hardware supplies and an excellent machine and welding shop. Bodega Blanca (tel. 05 252 6338) is an extremely well stocked - in a 3rd world island kind of way - marine supply store located on a street that I cannot find on the maps. Walk down Ave. Charles Darwin (the Malecon) towards Darwin Center and turn left at Angermyer sign and Hotel Silberstein. Supplied by the Lewis Catalogue in USA, owner Luis and his son Jason are friendly and helpful. Jason speaks excellent English.

Isabela has a surprisingly good hardware store run by Lincoln and son, Ferreteria Ana Carolina. They have a good supply of general hardware needs, stainless fittings, and a large selection of engine belts. There is also a small and capable shop, Taller Peter, that does stainless welding and other types of metal and mechanical repair. Taller Peter is located on Via Municipal, one block from the big blue-roofed municipal equipment repair yard. Ask anyone in town for Jorge or Pachai, the owners of Taller Peter (tel. shop 02 539 436, cell 08 692 5177).

Provisioning:

San Cristobal has a Saturday market. Marialeta Tienda, one block before the market, (on your left as you are walking up from the harbor) will fill orders from the mainland for veggies and gets several shipments flown in each week. The fish monger across from Wreck Bay Divers always has Wahoo (\$1.85/lb.) and other fish on occasion. Isabella butcher shop around the corner from the market seemed best to us. We found bread (\$2.00/loaf) and rolls (50 cents each) to be expensive.

Santa Cruz has a large supermarket by the main docks/malecon and a Mega Primavera on Petrel and Duncan streets. A bag of romain or leafy lettuce is \$2.00, a pepino (cucumber) costs 50 cents, there is good bread, and rolls are 15-25 cents. We found 2 excellent sources for cheese and dairy products. El Galapaguito Productos Lacteos (Tel. 5 252 6347) on Petrel between Espanola and Isabela has 460 gm packages of queso fresca for \$2.00 and mozzarella for \$5.00/package. They sell a 1 gallon container of excellent plain yogurt for \$6.00, and even have low fat. Their flavored yogurts are good too. Galadistribution (tel 09 174 4367), located 3 streets down Calle Charles Binford from Ave. Baltra (on the road to Tortuga Bay), distributes hard and aged cheeses on the island. Those who have spent time in Ecuador know that Ecuadorians favor fresh cheese, and it is rare to find a source of aged cheeses. Galadistribution is owned by Chris, a Kiwi transplant who speaks English-- and we bought Manchego for 13.75/kg, Tilsits, Aged Cheddar, and Parmasean for \$13-15/kg, and sandwich type cheddar for \$8.75/kg. They also have a deli and wine selection. We found a wonderful laundress named Wendy about 6 blocks up Ave. Baltra, just one house down the left on Ave. 18th de Febrero (across from Ferriteria Roca). She washed, ironed, and folded well, and simply did the absolute best job we have come across between Cartagena, Panama, and Ecuador. Banco Pacifico is just past Ave. Indefatigable on Ave Charles Darwin (Malecon).

Provisioning on Isabela is a bit hit and miss. Supply boats are scheduled regularly every 15 days or so, and were here January 10th and January 24th. I suspect that this 15 day rotation will hold over the next several months; tienda Danielita told us that there are 5 boats that stop here, all with different products and schedules. The place for vegetables and produce is Danielita's, and there will usually be iceberg lettuce (\$2.00/head), tomatoes (\$1.00/lb), green peppers (3/\$1.00), and onions. Cucumbers can appear, and celery usually looks sad. Luis Parado Perez is Danielita's father and a naturalist guide who lives on the island. His English is passable (better than my Spanish!) and he was helpful in discerning supply boat schedules and produce availability. We also toured with him – see above. The grocery has a supply of commodities and some staples such as vegetable oil, pastas, and canned goods. We found an excellent, air conditioned, butcher shop run by Mercedes (just beyond Albatross Internet - on the right by the bus stop just past the triangle and grocery store) with nice beef tenderloin (\$5.50/lb) and chickens (\$2.00/lb). Boneless breasts take up

much less freezer space and we were able to get breast alone (still had to be boned and skinned) at \$2.30/lb. Mercedes also had the best cucumbers and nice pineapples. There is also a small market with produce stalls and a small artisans area behind Mercedes' store. The bakery Panaderia Frigata is open 6-9 AM, and 4-7 PM. A bread loaf is \$2.00, and rolls 20 cents each and they have wheat/integral bread, if you get there early enough. We enjoyed the `pan sal' rolls more than the typical sweeter dough that the Ecuadoreans seem to favor. Rum, wine, and beer are available at roughly double the price on the mainland. (\$8 for rum, \$8 boxed Clos wine).

More Info: Several generations of cruisers have been maintaining a document currently known as The Ecuador Cruiser's Handbook, which includes a section on cruising in the Galapagos. This guide is currently being updated by s/v Soggy Paws, and can be found on their website at <http://svsoggypaws.com/files/>, and also on the Pacific Puddlejump Yahoo Group.

In our opinion, a 2 week stay in the Galapagos is a minimum, and one can spend 4 to 8 weeks exploring, relaxing, and enjoying the wildlife and scenery. Stay and take pleasure!

Associates Bill and Joha