

## **CRUISING GUIDE FOR COAST OF COLOMBIA (updated December 2006)**

Lourae and Randy on PIZAZZ are pleased to provide this "guide", a collection of our personal experiences, to fill in the blanks between Bonaire and Panama. Please refer to Doyle's Guide to Venezuela & Bonaire, as well as the new (March 2006) Cruising Guide to the ABC Islands by Waterson/van der Reijden; and refer to Zydler's Guide to Panama. If you are going east from Panama, just reverse the sequence.

The information that follows is our personal opinion only. We provide the essentials of cruising; that means "where to find what you need when you are in new places". The information is sorted by category and we will give you data by location. PIZAZZ (a Beneteau 500) has day-sailed along the Colombia coast four times: twice going West in November 1997 and October 2000 and twice (doing the impossible) going East in early May 1999 and October 2005). Four trips have given us experience BUT we do not claim to be experts. Some people say "you shouldn't stop along that coast" including some guides that say your chances of survival aren't good. However, we believe there are more risks off-shore to your boat or your crew. This guide describes safe anchorages to rest and enjoy, wait for weather, and make repairs, if needed. You will see some beautiful spots along the coast and meet some very friendly people or you can by-pass all the wonderful anchorages and go direct to Cartagena or the San Blas Islands. You make your choice.

### **NOTES OF CAUTION (aka "CYA")**

All GPS readings vary slightly depending upon your equipment, selective availability of satellites, as well as input error. Also, the GPS waypoints given are listed in degrees and minutes with hundredths of minutes (not seconds). These are waypoints for places to head towards or near anchor spots; they are not designed for you to connect-the-dots (do not go from waypoint to waypoint without checking your charts). People, **USE YOUR CHARTS AND USE YOUR EYES!** Here are a few important factors to remember. One, be realistic and do not set a schedule that you cannot meet. Second, watch for the right weather windows (see WEATHER section below). Third, **PREPARE YOUR BOAT AND YOURSELF** for downwind sailing in heavy seas - tacking downwind is easier on the rig; it helps prevent accidental jibes, broken booms and poles; and is often faster and more comfortable. Be careful. Going east will be primarily a motor sail (if you use the right weather windows).

Another suggestion, check out Google Earth on the internet. You can zoom-in to all of your potential stops (except Monjes del Sur) to get a "picture" of the area. Great tool, but remember "not to be used for navigation".

### **WEATHER (the most important issue)**

The key to cruising the Colombia coast, safely and comfortably, is weather. This is especially important if you plan an off-shore passage but is also important for coastal cruising. You **MUST** check the weather patterns. The entire Caribbean has two seasons: Wet Season is June through November; Dry Season is December through May. If you travel in the months between the seasons -- April into May or late September through November -- you are likely to have calmer conditions. Generally, the farther south you go, the lighter the winds. These 400 miles between Aruba and Cartagena are known for the worst weather conditions in the Caribbean and among the top five worst passages around the world. Over the years, sea captains have learned that this Colombia coast is prone to strong winds and abnormally large waves. Look at the Pilot charts for each month and you will easily see the few times when the conditions are calmer. So plan ahead and watch for calm predictions; and, always add a minimum of 5 knots to any forecasted weather.

The "weather guru's" almost always say to stay at least 200 miles off-shore (they base this not on weather but upon a fear of the coast). We have heard that the conditions off-shore can be horrendous resulting in stories of boats getting pooped, torn sails, and scared crews. By staying close to shore (with 5-10 miles, or closer) you may experience some land effect on the weather, often beneficial for your cruising; at times it is possible to use the currents and counter-currents; and, as mentioned above, you can always stop for needed rest or repairs (not an option on an off-shore passage).

Our four passages have been completed during to so-called "change of seasons" and have used the coastal route. From our experiences, the best time is mid September through November. Why? Because during the hurricane season, the hurricanes are usually tracking northeast to north of the Caribbean which tend to "suck up" and "stop" the tradewinds. In fact, there are often light southwesterly winds and an easterly flowing current. These conditions, of course, are ideal for going east but also provide calmer than normal weather for the trip going west. But, don't wait too long as the conditions become worse from December into April as the trades strengthen with gales and big seas. The next best time for this passage, is late April to mid May - just as the Christmas winds die. You will have lighter tradewinds for good downwind sailing. But, don't wait too long as the winds are stronger in June, July, and August (Aruba has their annual Hi-Winds Windsurfing Contest in late June).

## **ANCHORAGES**

Here is a list of various anchorages along this route -- all are pleasant, some are excellent, others are just a rest stop. Check your pilot charts for currents. You will experience about a 1+ knot west-flowing current until you get to the Colombia coast (near the Venezuela Colombia border). At times, you may see 1/2 knot east-flowing current along the coast between Cabo de la Vela and Cartagena (great for those heading East). Beyond Cartagena, depending upon the time of year, there can be a slight west-flowing current but most times it is an east-flowing current. There is some great fishing along the entire route, so put your lines out. NOTE: When at anchor, use your anchor light.

### **BONAIRE**

You cannot anchor in Bonaire as the entire island is a marine park. Respect their guidelines and save the reefs. Moorings are available for rent; contact Harbour Village Marina on VHF 17. The moorings are "first-come, first-served". Make reservations if you plan to stay in the marina, particularly during the busy season of August through October.

### **CURACAO**

The trip between Bonaire and Curacao (approximately 35 miles) can be a nice downwind sail going West or a good beat to windward going East. Like Bonaire, the Curacao coast is very deep close to shore. You can sail close to the southern tip or stop for a visit at Klein Curacao. The primary "cruiser" anchorage is in Spanish Water which is a large, almost land-locked, lagoon. To enter Spanish Water, approaching from the southeast, stay close to the beach (estimated position of 12.03.50N & 068.51.00W) which is still 90 feet deep and you will easily see the shallow reef edge to the northwest; then zigzag through the channel. This channel is not lit or marked so you must arrive in good light and well before sundown. When you are ready to depart, take a sail along Curacao's west coast; the water is deep close-in, the current is favorable, and there's great sightseeing -- interesting cliffs, big fancy homes, and pretty beaches. Check with the port authorities to obtain the proper "anchoring permits" for places that you may wish to stay. There have been stories of the Curacao Coast Guard making boats leave various anchorages as they did not have the proper anchoring permit. We have gone to Santa Kruz Baai at 12.18.55N & 069.08.77W which is about 25 miles northwest of Spanish Water, an easy day-sail. You anchor in 10-12 feet of sand and coral at the mouth of the bay (avoid coral patches); it's a great area for snorkeling along the cliffs and an easy place to depart from in the dark. This anchorage provides protection only from the East so be careful using this spot when there is a chance of wind reversals. Aruba is now only 45 miles away, with wind and current behind you. There are also several other areas on Curacao's northwest coast that are pleasant stops -- Santa Marta (unsurveyed on the chart but 11 feet deep at entrance and mostly 10'+ on into bay -- a very nice and interesting place and the dive shop people are great and good food at their restaurant), Knip Baai and Westpunt are two other potential anchorages. The island of Curacao runs southeast to northwest with wind and current running primarily northwest. Those coming from Aruba should head for the northwest point of the island, spend a night or two or more before beating against the wind and current to get to Spanish Water. Another note for those going East -- go around the north end of Aruba; this may not sound right but you will spend less time bucking headwinds and current than you will if you motor or sail along the lee side of Aruba before trying for Curacao.

### **ARUBA**

There are several anchorages along the lee coast. Just like Curacao, the island of Aruba runs southeast to northwest with strong northwest-flowing current. The island also generates its own wind (the trade winds get heated by the land) so prepare for stronger winds the farther northwest up the coast. The first anchorage at the southeast end is Rogers Beach, just south of refinery in Sint Nicolas Baai. Enter between the buoys at 12.25.34N & 069.53.96W (BEWARE!! GREEN buoy is on STARBOARD), head 090 magnetic to next green buoy at 12.25.38N & 069.53.51W, then head 115

magnetic to anchor wherever you wish in 10-12 feet the sand and grass. This can be a little roly in SE winds and eerie at night with the lights and flames of the refinery (but you are upwind of the smoke and smells). As you sail up this coast, watch for stronger winds coming off-shore. Oranjestad harbor is well lit if it gets dark before you get there. An approach waypoint from the southeast is 12.30.50N & 070.02.50W; watch for the RED buoy on STARBOARD. (If entering the harbor from the northwest, GREEN is on STARBOARD). See notes below under CUSTOMS. After clearing in, go anchor. The airport anchorage is 12-16 feet deep either northwest of runway or into lagoon south of runway. There is good holding sand and it is close to downtown, but noisy. The alternative anchorage is about 3 miles north of Oranjestad near the high-rise hotels. Go to the unlit white float at 12.34.87N & 070.03.34W; leave buoy well to your port and head approximately 090 magnetic course-over-ground towards the Marriott Hotel/Condos (the farthest north two buildings along this stretch). Do not let the wind/current set you North. You anchor in 7-8 feet of sand and grass. This is away from downtown shopping but lots of beach sports and access to hotel services -- casinos, expensive shops, and expensive restaurants. There is easy access to buses (\$2 round trip) to downtown for anything you need. You can dinghy to the fishermen's jetty for shore access. After all this civilization, you are ready for some out-of-way coastal cruising.

Another reminder -- refer to the March 2006 Cruising Guide to the ABC Islands for the up-to-date information about all of the above mentioned anchorages as well as many others.

#### PUNTA MACOLLA

We mention this anchorage primarily for those going East. This open roadstead anchorage is located on the northwest side of Venezuela's Peninsula de Paraguana -- approximately 30 miles south-southwest of Aruba and 40+ miles southeast of Monjes del Sur. You can anchor as close in as you feel comfortable to get some relief from the west-flowing current and easterly head winds (similar to Cabo de la Vela). It is a good rest stop before heading north to Aruba or east to Curacao.

#### MONJES DEL SUR

The next stop is about 53 miles downwind from Aruba. A waypoint just to the NE of the island is 12.21.75N & 070.52.75W. (For those heading East, a good waypoint to the W of the anchorage is 12.21.65N & 070.55.00W) Charts show the southern two islands as separate; however, the two islands have been joined together by a large rock dam. This "rock" (there is nothing growing on this island) is part of Venezuela (get your courtesy flag out) -- call the Guarda Costa on VHF 16 for permission to anchor; "no problem" is the answer. In fact, they will probably contact you (when you are 15-20 miles out) to identify yourself and your intentions. The anchorage to the left of center is 65+ feet deep facing the rock dam in front of you. There's a huge dock with tires which maybe you can tie to; ask. In 2000 they added a rope (1-1/2 inch 3-strand) between the dock and their center-peninsula headquarters (which has a green light on it and a loud generator). The Navy prefers that you tie to the rope (there is room for about six boats along this rope and we heard about a fishing tournament when there were 36 boats on the rope). A very odd tie-up situation but it works as the winds are almost always from the East. If the winds are anywhere from North to West to South, this is an untenable anchorage. This is a good rest stop; we stayed a few days with fabulous snorkeling all around the "rock" (crowds of barracuda and large lobsters) and it is a wonderful hike to the lighthouse for a fantastic view. The guys stationed here are extremely friendly, polite, and professional and they love to have visitors and to share stories. They will want to see your passports & boat papers for their log book and to serve you a cold drink. This is also a very easy departure point in the dark which you will do as the next leg is 80 miles to the West (or Aruba is over 50 miles East). See our sketch chart for this anchorage. A suggestion -- take a plant with you to add some green to this rock.

#### CABO DE LA VELA

The next waypoint is 45 miles to Punta Gallinas at 12.28.80N & 071.40.00W in 50 feet of water about 2 miles off-shore. It is usually not rough as you are going downwind with favorable current. (But for those going East, this will be your toughest beat into the strong current.) Bahia Honda (another 12 miles from Gallinas -- at approximately 12.24.00N & 071.49.00W) is a possible stop but not recommended because there are no charts showing any depths; however in October 2001 several boats stopped and had no problems; and an east-bound vessel stopped here in July 2002 to wait for better weather. You can possibly stop at the commercial coaling port in Bahia Portete -- call the Port Captain on VHF 16 for permission -- enter through the marked channel then anchor to the east of buoy 9A in 12-17' of water at 12.15.53N & 71.57.19W. Ideally, you should continue on to Cabo de la Vela to a waypoint 12.14.00N & 072.10.00W to view the anchorage. There is a small island to go around, or it is 15 feet deep between coast and island, to get to an anchor waypoint



of 12.12.27N & 072.10.69W in 20 feet good holding sand. This is an open bay with plenty of wind (Cabo de la Vela means Cape Sail) but you are out of the swell and it is a good comfortable anchorage even with the wind blowing strong from the East. If the winds are strong from the southeast, you will get wind chop and you might want to move 1.5 miles to the southeast, closer to the village (although the holding is only fair to poor). Also, if the winds are from the North or West or South, this anchorage will be untenable. No one will bother you although fishermen will come by to "stare" at your big sailboat. And, the fishermen do put out nets at night. You may even see some tourists hiking to the light tower or around the wind generators; and there may be sheep searching for shrubs. Relax and rest up as the next leg is 120 miles. We left in the late afternoon or before sunset and arrived at the next anchorage before noon.

#### FIVE BAYS

As you head to the next waypoint at 11.22.00N & 074.03.50W sail downwind as comfortably as possible – again, tacking downwind is suggested. You may experience some counter current along this stretch (good for those going East). There are no obstructions along the coast (just an oil rig near Riohacha which should be south of your rhumb line). Look for the snow covered mountains as you approach – the only time you'll see snow in the tropics. These bays have been compared to the fjords of Norway. You can spot the various bays (easy eye-ball navigation) as you get close to the area. This waypoint gets you to the northeast of Bahia Cinto, the first of five wonderful little bays. There is good holding in 30'+ clear water. If there is a northerly swell, Bahia Cinto can get roly and you can get some very strong southeasterly williwaw winds off the Santa Marta Mountains. Two bays to the West is Bahia Guayraca (at 074.07.00W longitude) with more swell protection, <25' water in good sand, shore exploration with friendly people, and good snorkeling; this is our favorite spot. The fifth bay is Ancon Chica which has the most protection from swell, deeper water, and more shore side activities (however, some cruisers have been told "you do not want to stay here" – a hint of drug smuggling?). These bays are on DMA chart 24493A (which is no longer available). Please refer to our chart of these Bays which is a tracing of the DMA chart. Stay as long as you want in any bay that you feel comfortable.

#### RODADERO

When you are ready to move on to civilization (about 15 miles away), go through the cut between mainland and Aguja Island – go between the south jagged tip of island and the exposed rocks in the middle between the mainland and the island. It is 45+ feet deep at 11.18.46N & 074.11.60W. The current and waves from the east may seem scary but once in the middle and then to the west of the cut it is flat calm. Aguja means "needle" in Spanish. Continue south along the coast past the commercial port of Santa Marta (OK to go between Morro Grande and El Morro Chico) to Rodadero (which shows as Gaira on charts). Suddenly there are tall buildings, condos, and beaches (almost a small version of Puerto La Cruz); this is a resort area for Colombians. Anchor at 11.12.10N & 074.13.75W in 30-40 feet or go in closer to swim buoys in 20 feet. Rodadero is an easy spot to enter or exit in dark. Good restaurants along beach and Olympica supermarket for fresh supplies. Sometimes the Port Captain will come by and limit your stay but otherwise, no problems. The agent here wants \$100 to clear customs / immigration but you still have to pay \$60 to an agent in Cartagena to do it again or even get your zarpe later. So, save your money and do your clearance in Cartagena. You may also get a visit from the Guarda Costa, just to check on you. It is good to see civilization again but get prepared for the dreaded Rio Magdalena.

#### PUNTA HERMOSA

It is very easy to depart Rodadero in the dark. You may want to leave at "0 dark 30" (midnight to 0200) to cross the Rio Magdalena (about 40 miles) in early morning or before mid-day when the winds get stronger which kick up the seas against the outgoing river current – mostly the last 5+ miles east of the river mouth. This area can be very rough in strong winds. It is OK to stay in close to the river mouth (we were 2 miles out) but farther out is a little less rough. The conditions get smoother once you cross the outflow of the river. Watch for river debris – lily pods and logs – for the next 10+ miles to the west. The water is muddy, smells "earthy", and looks ugly. **NEVER, NEVER go into the entrance of the Rio Magdalena to the port of Baranguilla. People get robbed, shot at, etc. DO NOT go there!!** There is a good rest stop near Punta Hermosa (another 10 miles) which the charts do not show at all; but, we have been there and it is easy to get to with waypoints but **USE YOUR EYES.** Charts of this area show many shipwrecks and the water depths change (due to out flow from the Rio Magdalena) – so **BE CAREFUL!** Head well to the west (probably 8-10 miles) before heading to the southwest or south towards a waypoint at 10.58.00N & 075.03.10W (about 1 mile due West of lighthouse), then go to 10.56.20N & 075.03.00 (30 feet deep), then turn towards the red cliff with big house on upper left, then go to 10.56.98N & 075.01.98W (12 feet deep). You can anchor farther north

behind reef/land if you want but you are out of swell almost as soon as you reach south reef edge. See our GoogleEarth chart of this area. Enjoy the calm and the friendly people. This area is packed with people on the week-ends. The locals have renamed this area "Puerto Valero" (after all the sailboats that stop there). You are now only 50 miles from Cartagena. NOTE: be very careful navigating in this area. One sail boat was lost on the reef in 2002 because he was not watching where he was going.

#### CARTAGENA

Leave the anchorage and go WSW towards Zamba Bank (it is OK to go over this 30-foot bank) then towards Punta Canoas then to Boca Grande entrance to Cartagena Bay (which saves you about two hours rather than using the Boca Chica entrance). You will usually experience a slight counter-current and less wind along this stretch. You will be in 20 feet of water the last several miles til you get outside Boca Grande, use waypoint 10.23.45N & 075.34.47W which is approximately 100 yards from the entrance and you will easily spot the entrance markers for 11-foot depth over the underwater wall. NOTE: This entrance is marked by lighted buoys, so you can enter in the dark. Once you are across the wall, check your chart and stay out a ways from hotel beaches towards the monument (Madonna and Child which is not lit); follow red-right-returning buoys on either side of the monument and you will see Club Nautico with anchored boats. The buoys can be confusing around this monument, so be careful. If you do not like the 11-foot depth entrance at Boca Grande, go on to the Boca Chica main shipping channel entrance and follow channel markers. NOTE: There are many more buoys than those shown on the charts however the basic bearings are the same. (The easiest route after you enter the channel, is to follow the green buoys towards the monument.) NOTE: Do not anchor near Boca Chica entrance; you will be robbed. Also, you should contact "Cartagena Port Control" on VHF 16 to give them your intentions.

You can anchor south, west, or north of Club Nautico in filthy, sticky, smelly mud. (We seriously considered to abandon our anchor here rather than spend the time and effort to clean it!) The depths vary from 8-12 feet to over 40 feet. Make sure that your anchor is well set. We usually let the anchor sink into the mud for an hour or so and then back-down to set it. During the dry season, the winds are normally NE 10-20 knots. During the wet season, the winds are light from the SSW but watch for squalls containing 30+ knots which generate 3-4 foot wind chop for the 10+ mile fetch down the Bay. There is plenty of local water taxi traffic going through the anchorage; be careful when you dinghy into the marina area. Club Nautico offers med-moor space, when available. Club de Pesca is a more upscale (and expensive) marina which offers some limited transient space.

#### ROSARIOS

This group of islands is about 18 miles from Cartagena. Use them as a "get away" from Cartagena in-between the fun times and/or work. Go there to clean the boat bottom as the barnacles grow fast and big in the "hot" waters of Bahia Cartagena. Buy the Kit Kapp's chart from Club Nautico as it is the only detailed chart for this area; you will need it. We used a waypoint of 10.11.18N & 075.44.45W where you will spot a "guard tower" on shore and several cement posts to guide you through the reefs. Get there around noon for good light. Leave the first post (with red paint on it) to your starboard and turn right towards two more cement posts which you go between (painted red and green). Then swing left. Anchor anywhere along the shore in 15-20' water. Our favorite is the farthest "cove" to the east away from another cement post. Use your dinghy to explore other areas. There is a good aquarium at the west end of the island group. Go by dinghy. There will be lots of local boat traffic, mostly on Sundays.

#### SAN BERNARDOS

This island group is 25 miles south of Rosarios. Anchor to the south of Isla Tintipan. You can exit this island group to the south through a cut in the reef at 09.43.45N & 075.50.19W in 20' water. And, if approaching from the West, you could anchor west of the island with the lighthouse.

#### ISLA FUERTE

This island is off the path of many cruisers; so, when you visit you will find that the people are very nice, friendly, and helpful. Two boats visited here in March 2005 and two others were there in April 2005. There is an anchorage east of the lighthouse, just north of the dive center at approximately 09.23.13N & 076.10.48W - watch your depth. The island population is geared for "weekend" visitors and everyone wants to be your guide whether for an anchor spot or island tour. There is another anchorage south of the island at about 09.22.26N & 075.41.98W but watch the weather, as this would be untenable with south winds.

#### ISLA TORTUGUILLA

This small island at 09.01.45N & 076.20.25W was visited by two vessels in March 2005. They do not recommend this place as the holding is very questionable and the anchorage was rocky. As with most of the Colombia coast, the time of year and weather conditions will

dictate your visit.

### SAN BLAS ISLANDS

Cartagena to the San Blas is generally a fast passage with winds at your back quarter; so time your passage for daylight arrival. Follow the instructions in the green Zydler guide and only enter the San Blas at one of the three entrance channels. There are many uncharted reefs off-shore making other entrances dangerous without local knowledge.

## **CUSTOMS / IMMIGRATION**

### BONAIRE

The Customs building is on the waterfront; it is the turquoise-color building south of Karel's Bar and the Venezuelan fruit/veggie stand. The officials are very friendly and helpful. They are open 24/7. Ask for directions to Immigration. If you clear-in or out after-hours, go to the Police station. No costs. Depending upon your nationality, you must get an extension to stay beyond 30 days. Ask about their requirements when you clear-in with Immigration. For clearing out, go to Immigration first, then Customs. Your "zarpe" to wherever will cost you 25-cent florin (14-cents US). Everything in Bonaire is within walking distance.

### CURACAO

Spanish Waters, the main anchorage for cruisers, is a 20-minute bus ride to Wilhemsted. The bus stop is just to the north of the dinghy dock at the fishermen's marina (ask at Sarifundy's for a schedule and cost). From the bus station in town, walk along the river edge to the north; the Customs building is on the corner past all the Venezuelan veggie boats. As in Bonaire, the officials are very friendly and helpful. Easy paperwork; no cost. Ask them for directions to Immigration which is across the water (free ferry or walk across the Queen Emma floating bridge) then walk along the water-front to a yellow building just beyond the big overhead bridge. Immigration will ask you for your intended length of stay (90 days maximum). For clearing out, go to Customs and then Immigration. No cost. We suggest to clear for Cartagena whether you go to Aruba or not.

### ARUBA

This is where it gets a little frustrating. The hardest part is that Aruba Port Authority (on VHF 11) requires you to tie your vessel to the dock. They will not let you anchor and go by dinghy. They know how to deal with cruise ships with lots of passengers and crew, not cruising yachts with two crew and no passengers. The cruise ship dock has big black tires that leave smudge marks on your topsides, so use lots of fenders and try to get to the north part of the dock sheltered behind the terminal building. No one will be there to help take your lines so have someone ready to jump to the dock with a spring line and stern line. Once you've made it to the dock, Customs and Immigration will come to you. No cost. Complete their forms or provide a crew list. The drawback here is that they want you to return your vessel to the dock to clear out. Again, you cannot walk into their offices to clear out. If you plan to stop in Aruba for one or two nights, maybe (?) avoid the clear in/out. But, don't let the checking in/out hassle keep you from visiting this fun island.

Another reminder: refer to the March 2006 Cruising Guide to the ABC Islands for detailed information about "official" paperwork.

### CARTAGENA

Although you may cruise along the coast and stop several times for few or many days, we are not aware of problems of waiting until arrival in Cartagena to clear in. Do not stop in Santa Marta commercial port. Colombia requires an agent to process papers; you cannot do this by yourself. The cost is US\$60-70 which includes both clear in and out; but, if you plan to stay less than 30 days, it costs less. There are several agents to help you - "White Light" has an office at Club de Pesca; Romero or Manfred work from Club Nautico. All of the agents speak good English and are very helpful for any other assistance you may need. They will take care of Immigration. Just return to your agent a day or two before departure.

### PANAMA

Most cruisers visit the San Blas islands before passing through the Canal or heading to the Northwest Caribbean. When you clear out of Cartagena, ask for clearance to your next port (Panama or Honduras) with "puntas intermedios". We are not aware of anyone having problems with the length of time between clearing out and into the next country. Many cruisers stay in the San Blas anywhere from a few days to 3-4 months or even years before clearing into next port. Porvenir, the western most of the San Blas islands, is an official port for your cruising permit (90 days) for \$70 US plus \$10 US per passport. The maximum stay in Panama is six months and you must get an extension after the first 90 days. So spend your days, weeks, or months in the San Blas; avoid Porvenir and wait until you get to Colon to do all of your paperwork, including your Canal transit.

## **SECURITY (but what about?? pirates, drugs, sharks)**

As independent people, you need to remind yourselves why you went cruising. A few words of wisdom - "seek freedom, seek life, not fear, not security" or "virtually everything is dangerous if you are afraid".

Check with other cruisers for current security situations. Lower your anxiety level by setting up radio contacts or buddy boats. When you are at anchor, use your anchor light not only because the law requires that you do so but it also is helpful for the buddy boats to watch out for each other. Remember, it is not always the locals taking things; it could be other cruisers. For two of our trips, we set up a daily "SSB radio net" with the purpose of educating all cruisers about this coast. All it takes is someone to organize a time and frequency. It sure helps, particularly in September through November when most cruisers are traveling this coast.

### **BONARIE**

Occasionally, there are some petty theft problems; sometimes dinghies disappear. The main problem on this small island is break-ins into rental cars. This is a great island for diving and the nurse sharks are friendly.

### **CURACAO**

Spanish Waters can, sometimes, be a hot spot for dinghy thefts (pirates). Raise it or lock it! There have also been problems of muggings and pickpockets in town. Be very careful with your valuables.

### **ARUBA**

As so few vessels stay very long (although we've stayed for one-to-two weeks), we are not aware of problems. When in doubt, lock it. This is a tourist island so the land sharks are vicious (everything is expensive). And, we have heard stories of easy access to drugs.

### **COLOMBIA COAST**

Cruisers are now stopping at various anchorages which are secluded from populated cities, so generally there are no problems. We heard of one dinghy that was stolen in Cabo de la Vela in 2002 (not locked, the line was cut). In November 2006, there was a report of a stolen dinghy (which was in the water and locked). As mentioned above, NEVER stop in Baranguilla. There were two incidences near Punta Hermosa in 2002 and 2003. The Colombia Coast Guard is "out there", they are extremely helpful, very friendly, speak some English, and tell us to call VHF 16 if any problems occur or any help is needed. Do not hesitate to call them, they are great. Remember that it is the American public demanding drugs, so the Colombians grow it for them. Slow sailboats take too long to get drugs to the market. We have never seen anything curious or suspicious along this coast.

### **CARTAGENA**

As with all populated areas, there is petty theft. Occasionally there are dinghy thefts, so lock it and put things away. If you enter Cartagena Bay through Boca Chica (the main shipping channel), do not stop just inside the Bay which looks like the first quiet spot (particularly if you've had a long hard passage) as this place is a guaranteed break-in/theft/etc. You should continue to the north end of the Bay and anchor off of Club Nautico. Cartagena seems to be a demilitarized zone so the Colombians can take their families for vacation. BEWARE of the land sharks selling emeralds.

### **ROSARIOS**

There appears to be problems if you anchor along the south shores. Usually it is petty theft of items left on the deck; snorkels and fins taken from unattended dinghies; and there was a case of a stern anchor and chain removed from the stern (March 2005). Nothing has happened while anchored along the north shores or near the aquarium. Check at Club Nautico for the latest information.

### **PANAMA**

The San Blas Islands are generally theft free; however, there have been reports of clothing taken off lines or things disappearing from dinghies while on some islands (usually kids). Colon is a big city and another story -- no major problems while anchored on the Flats (but a rare dinghy theft) or while in Panama Canal Yacht Club. In town, be very careful; don't act like a victim; and always use a taxi at night. Taxis cost \$1. Ask others for current crime situations.

## **FUEL (diesel, gas, propane, water – US\$ per US gallon a/o late 2005)**

You won't find cheaper prices for diesel and gas than in Venezuela; so load up. PIZAZZ has a water maker; therefore we only can comment on availability, not price; but you can always catch some rain. For those with water makers, do not make water in Cartagena (it is filthy); in Colon, there is a lot of fresh water coming out the canal so lower your pressure.

### **BONAIRE**

Everything is available at Harbor Village Marina. DIESEL \$2.45; GAS