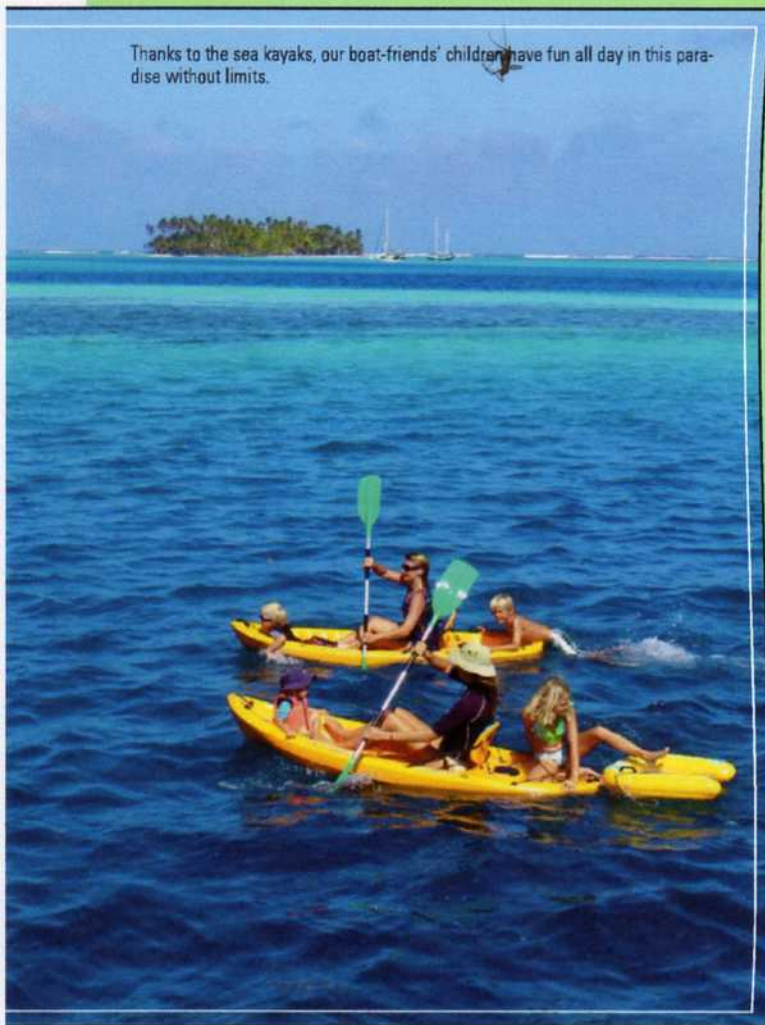


**W**e cruised within the San Blas Islands, all, except for a few days, to the west of Nargana (Rio Diablo) during the 'winter' months of February and March. This is traditionally the dry season. Unseasonably strong winds and some evening rain were with us for some of the time, however this caused no problems either with sailing or the anchorages. We had been concerned about Malaria, having spent a substantial sum on prophylactic medicines, this was unwarranted as we were, only on a couple of occasions, bitten by mosquitoes, though never while on the outlying islands. We had one serious occurrence of dysentery by the crew, particularly bad for BJ, which made us very wary of eating ashore, we also saw one case of bacterial skin infection which seems endemic on some islands. There is a good medical clinic on Nargana.

Thanks to the sea kayaks, our boat-friends' children have fun all day in this paradise without limits.



**F**resh fruits and vegetables were scarce and basically available at only Nargana and Carti along with the standard staples of flour biscuits and tinned tuna. At some of the more frequented anchorages a local 'panga' would appear irregularly with some carton wine, fruit and veg's though what was available depended on how many yachts

Usual end of the day in the San Blas, with the BBC and celebrations with friends...  
The dream!!

were visited before yours. Water was cheaply available at most large inhabited islands, from the rivers, and on many islands at man made wells, though once again we were very pleased to have a watermaker. The trades at around 15 knots and normally sunny afternoons provide ample power from our wind generators and solar panels. The Kuna people are not that far away from modern life as many islands were covered by GSM telephones, apparently Sim cards are cheap to purchase with local calls at a nominal cost.

**I**n our cruising area three local airports were available for flights to Panama city, Nargana, Carti and Porvenir, though the one at Porvenir was closed due to construction. On the mainland near Carti it was possible to arrange a 2-3 hour 4 wheel vehicle ride to Panama City, \$20 per person, in fact a day round trip could be made. The only port of entry in the area we cruised was at Porvenir, for around \$120 one obtained an 'in' stamp in the passport and a 'Zarpe' or cruising permit for 90 days, and a local Kuna tax receipt, upon leaving the San Blas one had to obtain another permit to travel to Colon. There was considerable uncertainty over the length of stay one could legally get – the yacht itself having more time than the crew. Also we were told by the port captain that we could extend for several extra months within the San Blas, whereas in Colon one would have to either make a complicated extension request or leave the country for 72 hours. As there was no coast guard to be seen many cruisers would take weeks or months to clear in, technically one would appear to have up to 72 hours within arrival in Panama. Our Columbian 'Zarpe,' when we left Cartagena permitted us 60 days in Columbian waters until we should leave without further clearance out which further confused matters.

**T**here are two good cruising guide books The Panama Guide by Nancy and Tom Zydler and The Panama Cruising Guide by Eric Bauhaus, they are both good though are quite different in format and approach. We satisfactorily used both and we were very thankful for the waypoint co-ordinates found in The Panama Cruising guide, as from Pino island well to the East the Navionic charts were unusable, due to lack of detail, until near Nargana, which provided a safe route amongst the many reefs. Of general interest I thoroughly enjoyed two books James A. Michener's 'Caribbean' and 'The Path Between the Seas' by David McCullough, a fascinating and detailed story of the construction of the Panama Canal and the birth of the Republic of Panama.

