

PRACTICAL COMMENTS:

While the actual cruising is idyllic there are several things to consider when visiting, chiefly in the hot summer months when 'weather reversals' can occur.

We found the Venezuelan officials courteous and helpful, and now with the new cruising permits quite innocuous. As we never visited the mainland we did not personally have any problems with security, we always brought the tender up at night and stayed to a well trodden path.

Most of the anchorages had mosquitoes and if close to the mangroves plenty of them. It is surprising how each individual has a different 'attraction' to these blood suckers, I am normally left alone (old and leather skin?) however my wife Melissa is always pounced upon. While screens will help they considerably reduce the air flow which can make the hot evenings almost unbearable. We had our fans on constantly, even during the day. Being on a catamaran helps, with the numerous vents and hatches plus one is not 'stuck below'. With our inverter we would also consider a couple of large domestic fans as even outside on a still night the heat can be rather oppressive.

The islands have very little rain or water facilities - we were always pleased to have our 12 volt Schenker watermaker onboard, at 25 amps it delivers some 50 litres an hour. As we swim several times a day, a fresh rinse off is a treat, toddlers can use a surprising amount of water plus normal domestic duties such as clothes washing can be attended to. Only in Isla de Margarita did we find well stocked supermarkets, Grand Roque was the only other reasonable place but with very limited supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables. One should provision for

several weeks for dry and staple foods. As in many areas fishing is restricted, principally with a spear gun one could not count on a regular fish meal. We did have good success trolling (from the tender also) but most of the time we caught Barracuda which we are not fond of due to possible Ciguatera poisoning and strong taste.

Good, strong all chain ground tackle is a must along with ensuring a secure 'digging in' of the anchor in deep sand. We use a 25 KG original CQR with 100 metres of 12mm chain for our Lagoon 440.

Naturally, the real pleasure was to find isolated anchorages which would normally mean cut off communications unless one resorts to expensive satellite connections. We have been extremely impressed with a Pactor modem connected to our ICOM IC-M802 SSB radio. Using Sailmail we regularly accessed our normal email accounts and sent text messages. While no attachments are allowed these can be picked up at a later date. We used Trinidad and found early mornings and early evenings to be reliable on 5005 KHz - transmissions up to 5Kb per minute.

Finally we were surprised to receive a VHF call from the Guardia Costa when approaching Aves de Sotavento. They requested that we anchor near their base for an inspection. While checking our documentation they also ticked off our safety equipment and use by dates. This is a first for us and we heard of one cruiser being fined for out of date equipment. Whether a local money making venture or official regulations is debatable - again the personnel were courteous and pleasant, even refusing a cold drink, be warned!

Los Testigos, Anchorage at Playa Real.



Watching a large leatherback turtle laying eggs!



The only footprints we normally saw...