

CRUISING

framed or sewn onto garments, prices range from \$10 to \$100 and make an excellent memory of the area. We found the Kuna a delight to deal with, though a dash of the Spanish language will make a big difference.

The Kuna culture has survived better than all the other native Central American cultures, in fact they are the only ones to have continued in a basically autonomous manner since the first arrival of the Spanish. Efforts by Panama to take control of

Along the mainland coast numerous fresh water rivers wander inland, having obtained the necessary permission and paying a small fee many can be navigated by tender, though as these rivers often provide a fresh water supply by long pipelines to the islands the use of outboards is not always permitted. The real immensity of the jungle, the abundance of animal and plant life become quickly apparent. It is easy to see why invading Europeans had such a difficult time trying and failing to conquer the land and the inha-



A traditional cooking. In the San Blas, life is not always easy.

« Within this area one could spend several months without visiting the same anchorage. »

the area early in the 20th century were seriously rebuffed by the Kuna ending in 'the Revolution' in 1925. In 1952 Kuna Yala was recognized as an independent territory of Panama with all administration being handled locally – non Kuna persons cannot own land or property in the area. While one is occasionally asked to pay a local anchoring tax of between \$5 to \$10, with a registered receipt being issued, it is up to the cruiser to decide how involved in the culture they wish to be. Many cruisers become close friends of a particular family while others make only fleeting contact to purchase the basic necessities that are available.

bitants. The rivers make inshore navigation tricky as the discolored water, poor charts and extensive coral patches can easily lead one astray. We much preferred the islands further offshore with the clear seas making 'eyeball' navigation straightforward. As is usual, within reefs, traveling with the sun well overhead and utilizing polarized sunglasses helps.

The reefs and beaches provide the snorkeler and beachcomber with hours of solitary wandering. Spear fishing is allowed and will generally be rewarded with a very tasty Mackerel, Snapper or Grouper while hiding away (in season) there are plenty of crayfish and the occasional large crab for the inquisitive, and if not, the local fisherman will readily supply at a reasonable price. Unfortunately as this is the South Western end of the Caribbean all the floating trash that has not washed up on the windward Caribbean islands finds its way ashore. While this huge collection of plastic garbage normally lies on the windward, sand less sides of the islands it is still a shame to see what the modern disposable society has to account for. That being said, we also found the sea to the

leeward side of the inhabited islands awash with refuse, though apart from burning, on many of the islands there is simply no room for a garbage dump.

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Being at the leeward extremity of the Caribbean the sailor basically has two options after leaving the San Blas Islands, to head through the Panama Canal to the Pacific or sail north onto Mexico and then continue the circuit around the Caribbean or North to the East Coast of the States. We found many of both categories so there was always

The San Blas Islands provide all that a sailor could look for in a tropical setting, within a culture far removed from normal Western Society, solitary safe anchorages, and exciting navigation plus the final cruising pit stop for most on their way to the longest single voyage they will ever make.



BJ's playmates, there are lots of hermit crabs on the beaches...

The Kunas continue using their traditional canoes: after a simple hollowed-out trunk!

