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To: [ssca - editor- nancy](#)

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Subject: Fw: Ecuador/Galapagos/Panama City

Ecuador/Galapagos/Panama City

Visiting the **Galápagos Islands** has been a dream of ours which we finally fulfilled during the fall of 2006. Having spent the southern winter (northern summer) in cool, tranquil, mainland Ecuador, we were surrounded by cruisers who had already made the trip and who readily shared their experiences, facilitating our own visit.

To facilitate our welcome, we purchased a Ecuadorian Galápagos cruising permit through Puerto Amistad at Bahía de Caráquez though the agent in fact was Nautagala in the Galapagos (Johnny Romero, nautigal@interactive.net.ec). The permit is \$50 from Johnny but through Puerto Amistad we paid \$110 for additional telephone, fax, copying and courier services. We had our permit in hand 30 days from when we supplied the copies of our passports and documentation and estimated date of arrival at the Galápagos.

Our October passage from mainland Ecuador to **Isla San Cristóbal** (Wreck Bay) Galápagos was a windward one. Seas were choppy near the mainland but were slowly transformed into ocean swell and mild wind waves as we pulled away from the coast. Being "garúa" season, we experienced days where a misty squall would come through about every half hour to hour, accelerate and shift the wind slightly to the west and drop a fine mist on us. These only lasted 5-10 minutes but they made staying on course or trimming our sails a challenge.

The north-setting Humboldt current influenced our passage; we didn't enjoy much westbound current as promised in the pilot charts. As the result, if winds diminished for even a short period, we rapidly lost southing and were set north of our rhumb line. Therefore we recommend staying well south of your rhumb line (we were six miles south of our line at one point) during the entire passage.

We anchored on the east side of the bay (south of a point labeled TANKS on charts). We had been advised by water taxis to keep the center and west clear for the ever-present parade of tour boats and freighters. Select a good sandy spot amongst rocky patches. Depending on the wind, the anchorage can roll a bit; generally the wind comes over the land offshore from the SW during this season.

Port Captain: end of malecon at beach de los Marineros, white building. We paid a total of \$82.29 in Port Captain fees (about five fees varying by tonnage). Migracion: at oficina de Policia Nacional on Malecon at Ave. Española. We arrived on an international zarpe and thus we were required to visit immigration. The cost was \$15 each for both an entrada and salida, though they do not stamp your exit until you are ready to leave the island. (NOTE: Isla Isabela has no Migracion office.)

After arriving in the Galápagos we were contacted by our agent, Naugala, who had been contacted by the Parque Nacional Galápagos to ensure our compliance with the \$100 per person park fee. Cruising boats generally have not had to pay since there was no procedure set up by officials to collect. But, since all other tourists pay this, we certainly understood why we should too. Payment necessitated a trip to the airport.

Water taxis (VHF 14) run most days, they run all day sun up to sun down and cost \$0.50 per person per trip (one way). Taxis are fairly adept at coming alongside but it's best to put out fenders. You are not prohibited from using your own tender but sea lions will occupy your dinghy if you leave it on the beach unattended.

Information: Camara de Turismo on malecón has island maps in English and Spanish.

Groceries: Saturday morning at a public mercado (ask a local for directions) for the best veggies. Dos Hermanos was the best tienda (Ave. Quito) and there seemed to be lots of good bakeries. A fish market on Theodora Wolf had slipper lobster for \$3.50/grande. **Water:** It is reported that much of the agua pura is not up to standards. It is expensive here, \$3 was what we contracted for but when it arrived we were charged \$3.50 (Fernando of Chalo Tours). **Fuel:** involves jerry-juggling by taxi to fueling station. **Souvenirs:** Nice selection in shops that line the malecón. **Money:** Banco del Pacifico on malecón took both MC and VISA ATM cards. **Internet:** Most were slow and prices high; \$2 per hour. **Laundry:** SuperWash on Av. Villamil. **Renting bikes:** Chalo Tours was asking \$10 per day but we never used them.

What to see:

Interpretive Center: go here first. Free. Explains islands' history, geology, biology.

Trails: all around Punta Carola, the beautiful beach at Cao de Horno and out to Las Tijeretas where you can snorkel with sea lions. Darwin statue here as this was his first landfall and anchorage. Wonderful and free.

Island Tour: Chalo Tours will hire a taxi for you for about \$100 per taxi. This includes almuerzo at Fernando's house. If we had to do it again, we would hire the taxi ourselves.

Diving/Snorkeling: Wreck Bay Dive Center (Ave Wolf) or Chalo Tours (Española).

Trip to Punta Pitt, etc. (areas of Park not accessible by road): FABULOUS! We used Manuel Yepez and his new speedboat Sharksky. We organized this through the Camara de Tourism but the American intern, Lauren, may not be volunteering anymore when you visit, so you may need to contact Manuel directly. He speaks English and is a very competent captain. We hiked with a National Park Guide to see tortoises IN THE WILD (Galapaguera Natural), visited Punta Pitt (boobies, tropicbirds) and snorkeled here. We wandered down the coast, exploring amazing nooks and crannies and had lunch and a walk at a beach at Bahía Stephens. We moved onto snorkeling at Leon Dormido (Kicker Rock) where there are Galápagos sharks and then on to hike and snorkel at Isla Lobos. Twelve hours. For a party of 10 it was \$50 each and worth every penny. Contact: Manuel Yepez tel: 09 95 40596 or ask at Wreck Bay Dive Center.

From San Cristobal we made an overnight passage to **Isla Isabela**. The trip is with the current and faster than we expected, causing us to have to slow down so as not to arrive before daybreak. The

approach is a bit trickier here than at San Cristbal; our incoming waypoints generated by the sailboat Isla Encanto and verified by us were:

S 01-04.78 / W 090-52.72

S 00-59.10 / W 090-59.04

S 00-58.58 / W 090-58.95

S 00-58.046 / W 090-58.315

There is a green buoy that corresponds to the approach range shown on charts; buoy marks turn to stbd before rocks. The last waypoint is between red and green entrance buoys that are not shown on many charts. (Red, Right, Returning, etc.) A yellow mooring buoy for large ships sits at the anchorage entrance; put this close to starboard coming in. Avoid anchoring too near the mooring as supply ships use it.

Anchorage: just inside behind Las Tintoreras inside bright yellow freighter mooring. Take great care as most of the anchorage is foul. Our anchorage: S 00-57.91 / W 090-57.75; there is a little space south and east of this location but not much.

Port Captain: near muelle; building is at beach front with a pavilion on top (downtown). They checked us in and out simultaneously, so when we stupidly returned to check out the clerk got confused and attempted to charge us \$60 once more. And again, there is no Immigration here.

Water taxi: only one, run by Ricardo; \$1 per person each way. No VHF so flag him down or call him on his cell phone: 085 564 064

You can launch your own dinghy. Watch which way the pangas and taxis approach and leave the commercial muelle (embarcadero); they generally circle the bay as the center is foul (rocks and shoal are evident at low tide). Beach your dinghy way to the left of the muelle and drag it up above high tide line near Club Nautico (Henry Segovia). We didn't lock our dinghy and had no problems except a few sandy munchkin footprints.

Groceries: The town is small and easy to walk around visiting various small tiendas. Fresh veggies varied in quality. Frozen chicken could be found but other meats were generally unrefrigerated. If you find something you like buy it then go on to the next store. **Water:** We bought locally produced agua desalinada in 5 gallon jugs from Francisco (cell phone: 086 214512) and had it delivered by Ricardo. \$1.50 per 5 gallons. Francisco assured us it was desalinated water but the jugs were not sealed so we treated the water with Microdyne. **Fuel:** We used jerry jugs and took a taxi to filling station (1-2 miles out of town) and a few other stops, taxi cost \$3. Diesel was \$1.03/gallon. **Souvenirs:** Rare, but on the block to the west of the plaza there was a shop with attractive t-shirts. **Money:** No banks and NO ATMs. **Internet:** Easy Net and Albatross Net. Both were SLOW and expensive. \$2 - \$2.50 per hour. Easy Net had a laptop station with LAN cable. **Laundry:** Concha de Perla Lavaderia; a hundred yards inland from the embarcadero, on the right. \$1.50/kg, one day turnaround, nicely done. **Bike Rentals:** \$4 for 3 hrs. at Bazar Veronica on main street just past hospital (heading west). Roads are all sand so traffic moves slowly.

What to see:

Las Tintoreras: Free. Watch where the pangas go to sea. Dinghy through this gap and look for a sign ahead. WEST of that sign is another sign at a set of steps in the mangroves. Pull your dinghy into deep water once you are ashore using a block attached to a stern anchor. The islands are composed of "a a" lava that is very sharp and apt to cut your inflatable dinghy if it rubs against it. We were told we needed a guide, but did not use one and when we encountered the person who told us that, he only advised us to stay on the trail. We encountered hundreds and hundreds of marine iguanas and a natural canal populated by white tipped sharks with a sea lion nipping at their tails.

Galápagos penguins: Watch where the dinghies off tour boats bring their guests. Their roost is on the anchorage side of Las Tintoreras; you'll also see them swimming around your boat. It's great to simply drift nearby in your dinghy and watch them.

Concha de Perla: Free. Just off the embarcadero is a raised walkway through ancient mangroves to a tranquil pool with a dock. Nice protected snorkeling or just a great place for a picnic.

Sierra Negra: The first or second largest caldera on earth and it is still active. We took a horseback tour to the crater rim and around for views south, east and north. Antonio Gil of the San Vicente Hotel (whose ancestors founded Puerto Villamil) can arrange for this for you (\$30 included guide and lunch). We had a group of 10 and a knowledgeable guide named Joseph who spoke excellent English. Two of our party did not rent horses but hiked and got to the stopping points the same time we did.

Tunnels near Cabo Rosa: Antonio Gil arranged for us to use a panguero nicknamed Cuarto de Hora (real name Dario, boat Isabela, cell 097 592 615, cuartodehora16@yahoo.es). We had been told he was the best and we were impressed with his skill. Grottos and lava landscape with amazing wildlife are reached through a narrow, rock strewn entrance that on the day we visited was engulfed in enormous waves. Once inside, it's like no other place you've ever seen. The panga was \$200 with a maximum of eight (\$25 each, snorkeling equipment extra, wet-suits \$5 from San Vicente Hotel. Bring your own lunch). Amazing.

Trail to Muro de Lagrimas (Wall of Tears): Free. We rented bikes as the trip one way is approx. eight kilometers. Continue west on main street and follow beach or beach road past the cemetery to park entrance. No one was manning the gate when we were there. The main trail and also many side trails to other sites (lava tubes, overlook from Cerro Orchilla, Estero) are beautifully maintained. Wall of Tears was a much bigger and a more powerful symbol than we expected and worth the trip.

Centro de Crianza: Free. Follow main road west to sign (at the Iguana Crossing). Follow beautiful trail and raised walkways to tortoise rescue and breeding center. Most of the endangered species endemic to Isabela are represented here. A small gift shop sells some souvenirs.

Flamingos: Free. We saw a solitary flamingo at mid-day in the small lagoon right in town and later a group at the bigger lagoon behind the beach. Shhh, they are shy.

Beach: Free. Watch wimbrels, plovers, sanderlings, thousands of silly looking orange crabs that skitter sideways or just the amazing turquoise blue waves crashing over offshore reefs.

We departed for Panamá City on November 11, 2006. Strong currents and inconsistent winds slowed our passage during the first two days until we sank the islands behind us and picked up SE tradewinds. Our passage plan included staying north of the rhumb line, running downwind with a north-setting current until we picked up the southeast setting coastal current which we would ride to Punta Mala, Panama. This would also keep us well west and north of Isla Malpelo. We enjoyed 15-20 knots consistently until reaching approximately 05 degrees north, when we began to get near the ITCZ with its light winds and squally conditions which stayed with us all the way into Panamá City. Also at this time a massive high pressure was entering the Caribbean basin and moving southeast, generating forecasts of strong northerlies and difficult seas in the shallow Gulf of Panamá. We stayed off Punta Mala by approximately 30 miles and then headed towards the city, putting most of the deep draft canal traffic to our west at a safe distance. We arrived in Panamá City after nearly 10 days and 978 miles (on the first day of these north winds) and in time for Thanksgiving dinner with friends on 5th Element and Mira!

There remain four options for moorage in Panamá City for (sail)boats. Expensive Flamenco Marina, anchorage on either side of Isla Flamenco or the mooring balls inside the breakwater at La Playita or at Balboa Yacht Club. We are staying at the latter where the location is fantastic but the facilities remain marginal though a new shower/laundry facility is expected to be completed "soon".

Commodores Leslie Linkkila & Philip DiNuovo
SV Carina
Balboa, Panamá, Rep. of Panamá