

**A CRUISING GUIDE TO
THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**
Ed. 6.0 (2014.07)

by
Frank Virgintino



Flag of the Dominican Republic

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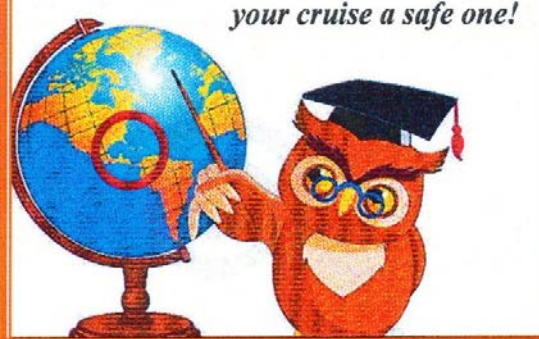
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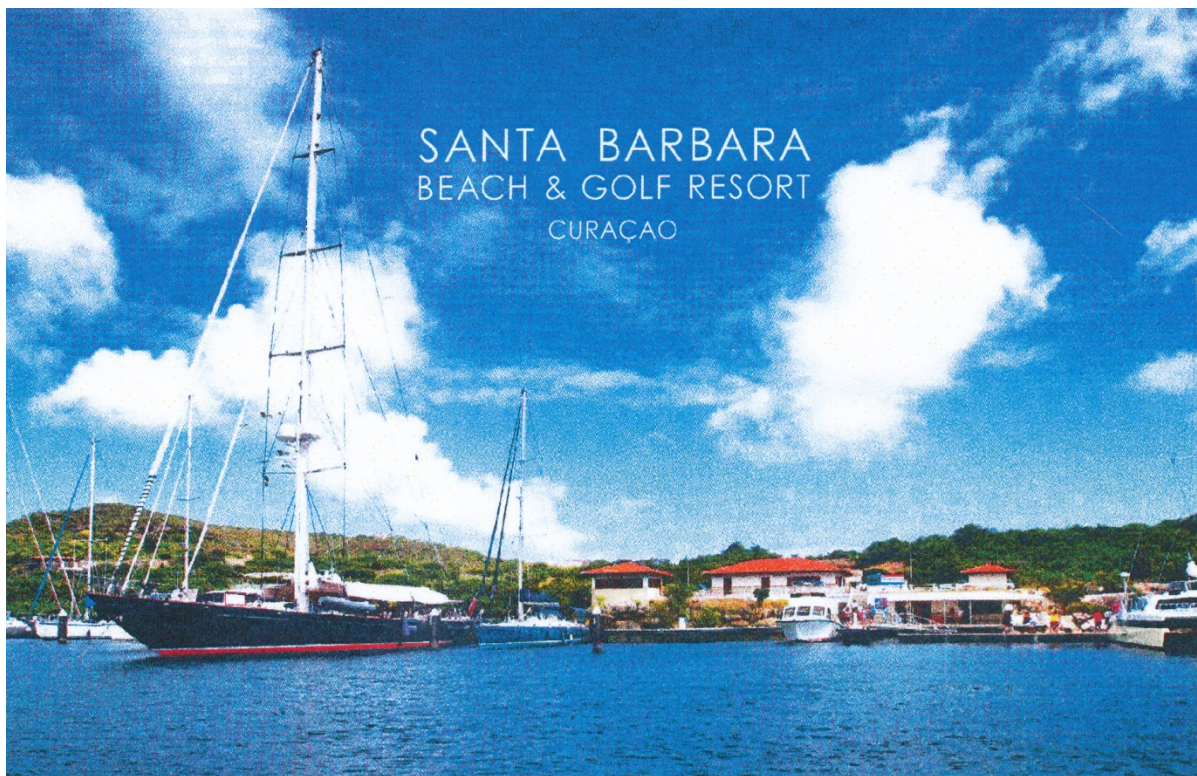
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Come visit the sail loft and be pleasantly surprised!



Table of Contents

SPONSORS	3
Billy Wray, Surveyor - Trinidad	4
Caribbean Compass	5
Majestic Coatings & Supplies--Trinidad	5
Marina Zar Par—Dominican Republic.....	6
Marine Refrigeration & Aircon Services --Trinidad.....	6
Members Only Maxi Taxi--Trinidad	7
Noonsite	7
Ocens	8
Orca Green Marine -- Annapolis	8
Santa Barbara Plantation Marina -- Curacao	9
Simpson Bay Medical Clinic – St Martin.....	10
Tropismes Gallery – St Martin	10
Ullman Sails--Trinidad.....	11
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	18
PREFACE AND PORT REFERENCES	22
SOUTH COAST (Caribbean side)	22
EAST COAST (Mona Passage).....	23
NORTH COAST (Atlantic Coast).....	24
COAST CHARACTERISTICS.....	25
<i>NORTH COAST</i>	25
<i>EAST COAST</i>	28
<i>SOUTH COAST</i>	29
INTRODUCTION.....	30
The TRADITIONAL way “SOUTH to the CARIBBEAN” is really a trip EAST	30
HEADING TO THE CARIBBEAN: AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY	32
<i>Why do many cruising boats NOT take this route?</i>	34
<i>Beyond the Windward Passage</i>	37

DOMINICAN CULTURE	40
DOMINICAN MUSIC.....	40
DOMINICAN ART	41
GETTING TO KNOW THE PEOPLE.....	44
<i>Dominican Food</i>	<i>46</i>
THE COUNTRY	48
TAXES TO KNOW	49
THINGS MEDICAL.....	49
MAIL SERVICE	50
ENJOYING YOUR TIME IN THE DR.....	50
<i>The concept of “gringo”</i>	<i>51</i>
WEATHER WISE.....	52
DOMINICAN ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AND OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION	54
ENTRY REQUIREMENTS	54
<i>Immigration</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Customs.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Agriculture.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Drug Enforcement.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>M-2.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Marina de Guerra.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Portuario (Ports).....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Private Marinas.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>“Corrupt Officials”.....</i>	<i>56</i>
GENERAL PROCEDURE.....	56
Dealing with the Authorities	57
A NOTE ON DRUGS, GUNS, PETS, AND SECURITY	58
<i>GUNS.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>PETS.....</i>	<i>58</i>
ANCHORAGE SECURITY	59
ONSHORE INFORMATION BASICS.....	59
<i>TRANSACTING BUSINESS.....</i>	<i>59</i>

<i>ATMs and BANKING</i>	60
<i>INTERNET</i>	60
SCUBA	60
PROVISIONING: A TALE OF TWO CITIES	61
<i>NAVIGATING ON LAND</i>	64
SOME OTHER TOWNS AND PLACES OF INTEREST	66
<i>IN THE MOUNTAINS</i>	66
<i>CARNIVALS</i>	67
<i>SOUTHEAST COAST</i>	69
CRUISING THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	72
PORTS AND HARBORS DETAIL.....	74
SOUTH COAST HISPANIOLA	74
<i>Ile à Vache</i>	74
<i>Bahía de las Aguilas</i>	81
<i>Isla Beata (Beata Island)</i>	84
<i>WHEN YOU ARE READY TO LEAVE ISLA BEATA (heading East)</i>	87
Weather	87
<i>STRATEGY FOR ROUNDING CAPE BEATA~HEADING EAST</i>	87
<i>Barahona (up bay— northwest side)</i>	88
Onshore Information	95
NOTE:	101
<i>Puerto Viejo de Azua (east side of the bay, north)</i>	102
NOTE:	103
<i>Palmar de Ocoa (east side of bay, north of Salinas)</i>	104
<i>Salinas (east side of the bay at the south tip)</i>	105
In Town	106
<i>Punta Palenque</i>	108
<i>Puerto de Haina</i>	110
<i>Santo Domingo</i>	111
Available in Santo Domingo.....	112
<i>La Caleta (Just N and W of airport)</i>	113
<i>Port of Andres (Boca Chica)</i>	115
Onshore Information	120
<i>San Pedro de Macoris</i>	123
Navigational Note	123
<i>Cumayasa River</i>	124
Onshore Information	125
<i>Catalina Island</i>	126
<i>Río Dulce (La Romana)</i>	127
Onshore Information	129
<i>Casa de Campo</i>	130

<i>Bayahibe</i>	133
<i>Saona Island (in Parque Nacional Del Este)</i>	136
Navigational Note.....	138
EAST COAST	140
<i>Boca de Yuma</i>	140
<i>Cap Cana Marina (Condo project with slips)</i>	142
<i>Punta Cana</i>	144
Navigation Note.....	145
Punta Macao	145
Samaná Bay	147
Whales.....	151
<i>Bahía Escondida (Hidden Bay) heading up bay -- west</i>	152
Anchorage.....	154
<i>Punta del Botado</i>	155
<i>Sánchez</i>	156
<i>Río Yuna</i>	157
<i>Bahía de San Lorenzo</i>	159
Los Haitises.....	159
<i>Miches</i>	162
<i>Cayo Levantado</i>	163
NORTH COAST	166
<i>Heading East</i>	166
<i>Bahía del Rincón</i>	167
<i>Puerto del Valle/Escondido</i>	168
<i>San Juan (Laguna Gri Gri)</i>	169
<i>Sosua</i>	170
<i>Puerto Plata (commercial port)</i>	172
<i>Ocean World (Puerto Plata)</i>	173
<i>Luperón</i>	174
<i>El Castillo</i>	177
<i>Punta Rucia</i>	178
<i>Monte Cristi</i>	180
<i>Cayos de Los Siete Hermanos (National Park)</i>	183
<i>Manzanillo Bay</i>	184
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	187
A WORD ABOUT THE AUTHOR	188
ALSO BY FRANK VIRGINTINO	190

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Map of the Dominican Republic.....	20
Figure 2. The cycle of daytime sea-breeze conditions.....	26
Figure 3. Anabatic and Katabatic Winds.....	26
Figure 4. The Puerto Rico Trench and the Mona Rift can create complex conditions through the Mona Passage.....	35
Figure 5. At the northeast corner of the Mona Passage, the "Mona Rift" is seismically active, which exacerbates conditions from time to time	36
Figure 6. Challenges of the Mona Passage.....	36
Figure 7. The Windward Passage	37
Figure 8. POINTE À GRAVOIS AND ILE À VACHE	74
Figure 9. Baía à Feret (Bay of Feret)	76
Figure 10. Cabo Rojo.....	80
Figure 11. BAHIA DE LAS AGUILAS.....	81
Figure 12. ISLA BEATA (depths in meters).....	84
Figure 13. Barahona	89
Figure 14. Lago Enriquillo in the western Dominican Republic.....	96
Figure 15. Puerto Viejo de Azua.....	102
Figure 16. Bahía de Ocoa: Puerto Viejo de Azua, Playa de Caracoles, and Palmar de Ocoa.....	103
Figure 17. Las Salinas on the Bay of Calderas.....	105
Figure 18. Las Salinas detail.....	106
Figure 19. Puerto Palenque	108
Figure 20. Puerto de Haina.....	110
Figure 21. Santo Domingo on the Rio Ozama	111
Figure 22. La Caleta	113
Figure 23. La Caleta Submarine Park.....	114
Figure 24. Port of Andres/Boca Chica, with depths	115
Figure 25. Marina ZarPar, protected by La Piedra Island and the reef.....	116
Figure 26. San Pedro de Macoris.....	123
Figure 27. Rio Cumayasa and entrance	124
Figure 28. Isla Catalina.....	126
Figure 29. Rio Dulce/La Romana	127
Figure 30. La Romana detail	128

Figure 31. Casa de Campo: Punta Minas to Rio Chavon	130
Figure 32. Casa de Campo Marina and environs.....	131
Figure 33. Casa de Campo Marina details	132
Figure 34. Bayahibe on Bahía de la Altagracia	133
Figure 35. Isla Saona	136
Figure 36. Isla Saona -- Punta Palmillas, Cayo Raton, and I. Catalinita	137
Figure 37. Isla Saona at the southeastern corner of the DR	139
Figure 38. Boca De Yuma on the Bahia De Yuma	140
Figure 39. Cap Cana Marina	143
Figure 40. Punta Cana.....	144
Figure 41. Punta Macao.....	145
Figure 42. Punta Macao -- long beach, short niche.....	146
Figure 43. Santa Barbara de Samaná	147
Figure 44. Bahía Escondida.....	152
Figure 45. Puerto Bahía -- residences and marina	153
Figure 46. Punta del Botado	155
Figure 47. The pier at Punta del Botado.....	155
Figure 48. Sánchez.....	156
Figure 49. Rio Yuna and environs	157
Figure 50. Rio Yuna detail.....	158
Figure 51. Bahía de San Lorenzo	159
Figure 52. Cayo Levantado	163
Figure 53. Cayo Levantado, from the east	165
Figure 54. Cayo Levantado relative to the north shore of Samaná Bay.....	165
Figure 55. Bahía del Rincon	167
Figure 56. Puerto dValle	168
Figure 57. Sosua	170
Figure 58. Sosua Detail	171
Figure 59. Puerto Plata (commercial port).....	172
Figure 60. Entering Puerto Plata	173
Figure 61. Luperón.....	174
Figure 62. Luperón detail	176
Figure 63. Baie de Monte Cristi	180
Figure 64. Manzanillo Bay	184

Dedicated to

All the cruising sailors who have a desire to sail far and wide. May this guide provide you with insights that will make your voyage to the Dominican Republic, an unforgettable experience.



Figure 1. Map of the Dominican Republic

A Cruising Guide to the Dominican Republic

Ed. 6.0

by

Frank Virgintino

PREFACE AND PORT REFERENCES

LISTING OF ANCHORAGES AND HARBORS

SOUTH COAST (Caribbean side)

Ile à Vache, Haiti to Isla Saona, DR -- HEADING EAST

- Ile à Vache (Haiti) Excellent and unique.
- Cabo Rojo (DR) Rest stop, anchorage only.
- Bahía las Águilas Excellent—pristine.
- Isla Beata Easy access/wonderful.
- Canal Beata Shortcut west to east or east to west.
- Barahona Good town for provisions, good inland exploration location.
- Puerto Viejo, Azua Old Commercial Port/avoid
- Palmar de Ocoa Don't miss it!
- Salinas Easy access; very nice-protected.
- Punta Palenque Palenque Anchorage –**Authorities will not let you stay overnight**
- Haina River is dirty and commercial.
- Santo Domingo River is dirty and commercial.
- La Caleta national underwater park, day stop only
Authorities will not let you stay overnight
- Boca Chica Excellent facilities; near airport, Santo Domingo.

- San Pedro de Macorís River is dirty and commercial-AVOID
- Cumayasa River A trip back in time
- Catalina Island Easy access, roly anchorage-Avoid unless you like to be with large groups of Cruise ship passengers.
- Rio Dulce (La Romana) Easy access to provisions/little anchoring space.
- Casa de Campo Excellent (Europe in the Caribbean).
- Bayahibe Small town - local color-congested anchorage.
- Isla Saona Excellent anchorage. Do not miss *national park*. Good jumping off point going east or west

EAST COAST (Mona Passage)

Boca de Yuma, DR to Samana, DR -- HEADING NORTH

- Boca de Yuma Good anchorage in N/NE wind.
- Punta Cana Difficult entry/risky channel-AVOID
- Cap Cana Condo project with slips.
- Punta Macao A “niche” on a hostile coast.
- Samaná Bay Santa Bárbara de Samaná. Excellent town.
- Cayo Levantado Excellent island, **day anchorage only**.
Authorities will not let you stay overnight.
- Puerto Bahia Condo project with slips.
- Bahía Escondida Condo project with slips
- Punta del Botado Very nice -- off the beaten track.
- Sanchez Very nice -- off the beaten track.
- Rio Yuna Very nice -- off the beaten track.
- Bahía de San Lorenzo Los Haitisis National Park – **DO NOT MISS IT!**
- Miches Big seaport town -- very difficult anchorage.

NORTH COAST (Atlantic Coast)

Bahía Rincón, DR to Manzanillo, DR -- WESTWARD

- Bahía Rincón World class beach/DAY STOP ONLY
- Puerto del Valle (Escondido) Risky.
- San Juan (Laguna Gri Gri) Risky.
- Sosua Risky.
- Puerto Plata Commercial -- AVOID.
- Puerto Plata (Ocean World) Excellent facilities but harbor subject to surge.
- Luperón Protected; foul water in bay; crowded anchorage. Good hurricane hole.
- El Castillo Anchorage; ruins of first new world settlement.
- Punta Rucia (Ensenada) Close to Cayo Arenas.
- Ensenada Town anchorage. Quaint.
- Cayo Arenas (Cayo Paraíso) Incredible!
- Monte Cristi Excellent/beautiful bay.
- Cayos Siete Hermanos Excellent – REMOTE-LONELY
- Manzanillo Bay (Pepillo Salcedo) Good provisions stop.
- Manzanillo Bay (Estero Balza) Protected anchorage.

For the north coast it is important to understand how a "norther" coming down from the States impacts the Trade Wind. How to use the Katabatic Wind on any of the DRs coasts is also worthy of your time.

COAST CHARACTERISTICS

The DR has three coasts: the north coast, the east coast and the south coast. The west side of the Dominican Republic is its border with Haiti and is not a coastline.

NORTH COAST

The north coast has wonderful harbors at the western end (Monte Cristi and Manzanillo). From Luperón heading east, the north coast is an extremely difficult coast. The waters of the Atlantic are rough and when the Trade Wind is blowing or a “norther” comes down from the United States, the north coast can be dangerous.

There really is no place to stop east of Luperón that is safe and when the wind is from the NE or from the E with seas from the NE, you will find yourself sailing big seas on a wind bound coast. To transit the north coast, you need to be an experienced sailor. If you rely on your motor, it must be in good condition and your tank and filters clean. Spare filters should be kept handy and all other precautions should be taken. A good understanding of weather and how to cope with it is essential.

Winds particular to land masses, specifically Anabatic and Katabatic Winds, can complicate the wind component of your weather preparation and timing of passages.

Figure 2 below illustrates the development of daytime sea breeze conditions wherein warm, or Anabatic, winds blow upward on a steep slope, typically in daytime in calm sunny weather. Further, the land mass which is heated by the sun in turn heats the air immediately above. This causes the heated air to rise convectively, creating a lower pressure area below into which the cooler, denser air off the sea can flow.

Katabatic Winds conversely are “down slope” winds that descend down a mountain or plateau or even a small hill as evening passes into night. The

heat accumulated during the day now radiates off the land mass, cooling the air above. As the air cools, it becomes more dense and therefore heavier (density is inversely proportional to temperature), and sinks or falls from a higher elevation down a slope thanks to the force of gravity.

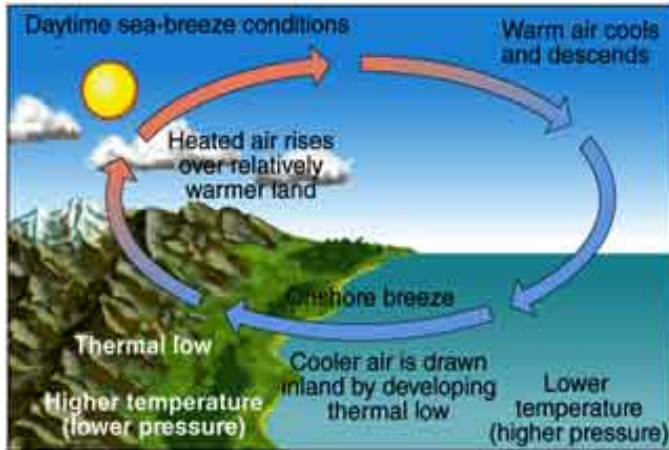
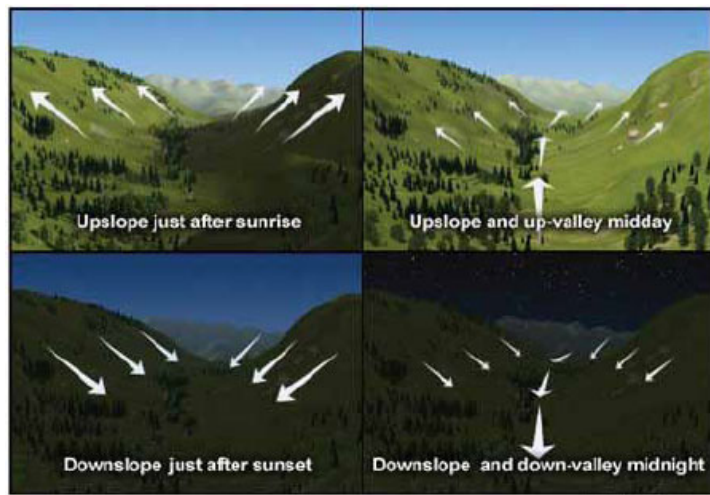
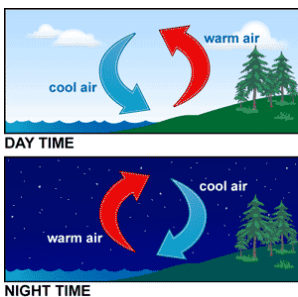


Figure 2. The cycle of daytime sea-breeze conditions



The COMET Program

Figure 3. Anabatic and Katabatic Winds



Very simply, one can think in terms of onshore winds during the day and offshore winds at night.

An understanding of the impact of a “norther” coming down from the US on the Trade Wind is very important. The Katabatic Wind that comes off shore at night and how it affects the Trade Wind are also important to understand.

All capes present a challenge and “Cabo Francés Viejo” is no exception. Heading east, care must be taken not to try to round this cape in heavy weather. From the cape to the west end of the Samana Peninsula is a distance of almost 30 nm. Easterly winds hit the cape and accelerate and sheer in such a way that you will find the wind heading you consistently. Try to round the cape after a day of light Trade Wind so that you can use the Katabatic Wind off the land after sunset. Or round it during the day just after a norther has passed and before the Trade Wind reinstates itself.



Cabo Frances Viejo

EAST COAST

The east coast has one grand and beautiful harbor at the NE end. It is the Bay of Samaná. In the bay are the wonderful town of Santa Bárbara and the incredible national park, Los Haitises. There are many other anchorages and quaint towns up bay. Additionally, at the entrance of the bay is Cayo Levantado; a wonderful day anchorage for swimming, fresh fish, enticing beach, etc.

The east coast of the Dominican Republic borders the Mona Passage. It can be very challenging!

The Bay of Samaná lies between Cabo Cabrón and Cabo Engaño. Translated they are Cape Fool and Cape Cheat. There is no question as to how these capes got their names: They are difficult and hard to predict as to wind and current and many times can be very challenging to negotiate. At one moment you are sailing southeast past Cabo Cabron in 15 knots of wind and the next moment it can accelerate to 35 knots in seconds. That is a real trick because you worked hard on the weather forecast which called for 15 knots wind and 3' seas and suddenly as if out of nowhere, the wind becomes strong and the seas big and confused. The weather forecast was not wrong; it is Cape Fool playing tricks! For Cape Cheat, Engano; the currents are so complex that you can literally be pushed onto the shoals and not realize it until you sense that you are getting thrashed.

Going south from Samaná, whether you go due south or southeast to Puerto Rico, requires careful planning. The east coast of the Dominican Republic and the Mona Passage can be violent and dangerous. It is not a place for novice sailors. It is a haunting coast of shifting sandbars and unpredictable currents. Winds can change direction as they *sheer* off the capes and can accelerate to double their velocity or more.

The marinas on the east coast, Punta Cana and Cap Cana have narrow shallow entrances that are difficult in settled weather and impossible if a sea is running from the NE or E. The small anchorage Punta Macao is not a viable anchorage in most conditions. It is a niche in the beach, and to use it, the weather has to be very settled and preferably from the SE, which is rare early in the season.

You cannot be too careful with the Mona Passage!

SOUTH COAST

Nothing in life is perfect, but the south coast of the DR is as good as it gets. You are in the lee of the big island of Hispaniola. You will find that the Caribbean Sea is more “user friendly” than the Atlantic Ocean. The biggest challenge you will have is the Cape at Beata and with a little planning it is very doable as will be explained later in this guide in the section on Cape Beata.

At the west end of the south coast of the Dominican Republic lies Bahía de las Águilas. It is a big remote bay that is easy to access and is absolutely stunning. Beata Island (Isla Beata) is just south of this bay and is easy to anchor behind, out of the Trade Wind. The Cape at Beata sets this island nearly 60 nm offshore. It is as close to idyllic as it gets. Going east and north from Isla Beata, there is a large bay, the northern part of which is referred to as Bahia Ocoa. On the west side of the bay is the town of Barahona, which is close to Lago Enriquillo (the only sub sea level lake in the Caribbean and a national park with live crocodiles -- very unexplored). On the east side of the “bay” is Palmar de Ocoa and Las Salinas; both beautiful and excellent stops.

From Salinas it is only a short distance to Santo Domingo and Boca Chica. Boca Chica is a wonderful Dominican tourist town. It is very close both to Las Americas International Airport and the capital, Santo Domingo, which is well worth seeing, particularly the “old city.”

East of Boca Chica is Rio Cumayasa, and still further east Isla Catalina, Casa de Campo and Isla Saona; each different and each interesting depending on your taste and desires.

While you must always be alert at sea, the south coast of the DR is truly user friendly and I believe you will agree that you will find wonderful cruising opportunities along its shores.

INTRODUCTION

The TRADITIONAL way “SOUTH to the CARIBBEAN” is really a trip EAST

The Dominican Republic is a beautiful country with numerous anchorages that are still virgin. They are well worth your time and expense to see. You will discover uncrowded anchorages; clear, clean water; breathtaking views; really wonderful people; and much more.

The south coast of the Dominican Republic is safer and more interesting than the north coast. This alternative makes for better and safer sailing as well as providing a host of beautiful harbors and anchorages.

Most boats that make the passage south come through the Bahamas, and then on to the Turks and Caicos Islands. From the Turks and Caicos, they head for the Dominican Republic, entering the north shore at Luperón. They then transit the north coast heading east until they reach the Bay of Samaná, before crossing the Mona Passage to make their easting to “the Caribbean.” This mindset causes sailors to beat to windward braving the **north coast** of the Dominican Republic, **which is a difficult and potentially dangerous coast.** They must then transit the Mona Passage, which is never easy, even when it is, given the amount of anxiety that most suffer quietly (and some loudly).

The “bible” for this passage, “harbor hopping,” was written by Bruce Van Sant and is called “The Gentleman’s Guide to Passages South.” What he suggests is valid except for two possible shortcomings. The first is that you must be able to “time” yourself going east with regard to the weather and can only move on that schedule; waiting for “weather windows.” You must

be able to not only understand the weather window but must also *time* it; the latter being extremely complicated.

The second shortcoming is that you are struggling to bypass Hispaniola and Puerto Rico which makes no sense as **they are in the Caribbean** and are wonderful places to visit. It makes no sense to fight to get to Luperon from the Turks and Caicos so that you can rush to the BVI. The passage to Luperon is a close reach and most arrive there somewhat beat up, licking their wounds. That is not cruising, that is fighting the elements, which is very different than the case for taking the south coast. Beyond Luperon is the hostile north coast of the DR all the way to Samaná.

Luperón is a very well protected harbor. It is a mangrove backwater, which was opened to the sea to provide cruising yachts an anchorage. Luperón has little else to offer aside from the friendship of the sailing community, albeit that it is a great hurricane hole. Access to the harbor is in shallow water and the water in the harbor is foul. You cannot swim in it or make water from it. The anchorage is often windless and humid. The water will foul your bottom and all your intakes with a hard calcium-like growth, which is very difficult to remove. The authorities have a reputation (well earned) of being hard to deal with; they most often do not follow the standard entry procedures and have been “inventive” when it comes to assessing charges.

Why do so many boats go to Luperón? They go there because they are heading east and Luperón is the first and really the only major **anchorage** for cruising boats headed east along the midpoint of the north shore of the Dominican Republic.

Puerto Plata (Ocean World), just east of Luperón, has the Ocean World complex for those looking for a marina rather than an anchorage. It has resident Immigration and Customs in the marina, as well as an aquarium, casino and restaurants.

Puerto Plata (commercial), still a little further east, is a commercial port and not suitable for cruising yachts.

Aside from Luperón and Puerto Plata (Ocean World), **the north coast for all of its distance has no other safe harbors or anchorages going east.** There are some stops you may make along the way such as Sosua, Rio Grande and Bahía Escondida but these are small anchorages that are not

always tenable. They are dangerous in northeasterly winds or even easterly winds with a northerly sea running. To transit the north coast east along the Dominican Republic requires really settled weather; “a weather window.” It is a very rough wind bound coast and if the stops are untenable then you must work a lee coast for the entire distance with a contrary Trade Wind and rough seas.

Van Sant recommends transiting the north coast if you get the right weather window; a window in which a norther stalls the trade winds. This strategy requires you to determine the strength and duration of a norther so that you “can ride its tail” while the Trade Wind is stalled. It is possible to do but much easier said than done.

You can also wait for a period when the Trade Wind is moderate and transit the coast at night by using the Katabatic Wind. This is a good strategy except that on the north coast you are on a lee shore. If the Trade Wind reinstates and the wind is strong from the northeast, an easy transit will become a very hard sail.

Eventually, when you make it to Samaná and take your well-deserved break, you have to start all over again with the necessity of crossing the Mona Passage.

HEADING TO THE CARIBBEAN: AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

There is an alternative, which will give a much more comfortable and rewarding passage.

When you arrive at the southern end of the Bahaman chain, instead of beating to the south and east to get to the Turks and Caicos, free your sheets and head south to Great Inagua Island. This island at the south end of the Bahaman chain is just north of the Windward Passage. Whether you stop at Great Inagua or decide to continue on through the passage, you will be sailing on a reach to broad reach in most conditions.

Going through the Windward Passage, leaving Haiti to port and Cuba to starboard is not the same as cruising either of these two countries. At the north end the Windward Passage is 50 nm wide and at the south end the passage is over 100 nm wide.

If you have a real desire to visit the Turks and Caicos, then after you depart the Turks, instead of beating to Luperón, free your sheets and head for the Bay of Monte Cristi at the NW end of the DR. Monte Cristi is west of Luperón. It is a large, beautiful, pristine bay protected from all but a NW wind, which is rare. For virtually total shelter you may choose to go into the canal (enter at east side of El Morro) and thence into the yacht club. The bay is set against a back drop of El Morro (Punta de la Granja), a beautiful mountain with bleached white sand beaches below.

There are miles of deep water canals to transit by boat or dingy and a hospitable yacht club which serves wonderful meals at Dominican prices (very inexpensive). Since the water is clean you can swim and you can make water if you have a water maker. Groceries, fuel and supplies are also readily available.

Beyond Monte Cristi are the Seven Brother Cays (Cayos de los Siete Hermanos) offering remote anchorages. They comprise a national park. To the west of the cays is the town of Manzanillo, the last town in the Dominican Republic before Haiti. After Manzanillo, you can set sail with your sheets free, all the while sailing either on a reach or broad reach heading towards the Windward Passage.

Why do many cruising boats NOT take this route?

Essentially it is because the cruising community has **defined the Caribbean as the Lesser Antilles**. Some also express concerns about transiting Haiti.

Going through the Windward Passage, leaving Haiti to port, is not the same as cruising Haiti. You will not be in Haitian waters if you stand off the Haitian coast. Once on the south side of the island you can set your course for Cabo Beata, which is the west end of the Dominican Republic. By employing the use of Katabatic Wind after sundown, you will be able to head east without too much difficulty. Moreover, the south coast is not a lee shore like the north shore of the Dominican Republic. There are more than a sufficient number of harbors and anchorages along the way, to allow you to stop and rest particularly if the weather is not cooperating.

People have asked me if the Windward Passage between Haiti and Cuba is dangerous. At the southeast corner of Cuba is the Guantánamo Naval Base. As you head southerly through the Windward Passage directly in front of you (on the Caribbean side) is the island of Navassa, which is owned by the United States (uninhabited island not suitable for cruising boats) and *at times* will have US drug interdiction boats in the area.

Between Guantánamo to starboard and Navassa off the bow, I feel very safe. I would much rather come through the Windward Passage -- a southwest heading -- with my sheets free, enjoying my sail, knowing that I have a US naval base within earshot and perhaps US ships off my bow, than transit the north coast of the DR with all of its hazards and no one in earshot. There is also no comparison between the Windward Passage and the Mona Passage. The Windward Passage is very “sailable” in either direction, whereas the Mona Passage is at the border of the Milwaukee Deep/Puerto Rico Trench; the deepest part of the Atlantic Ocean and as a result potentially very challenging.

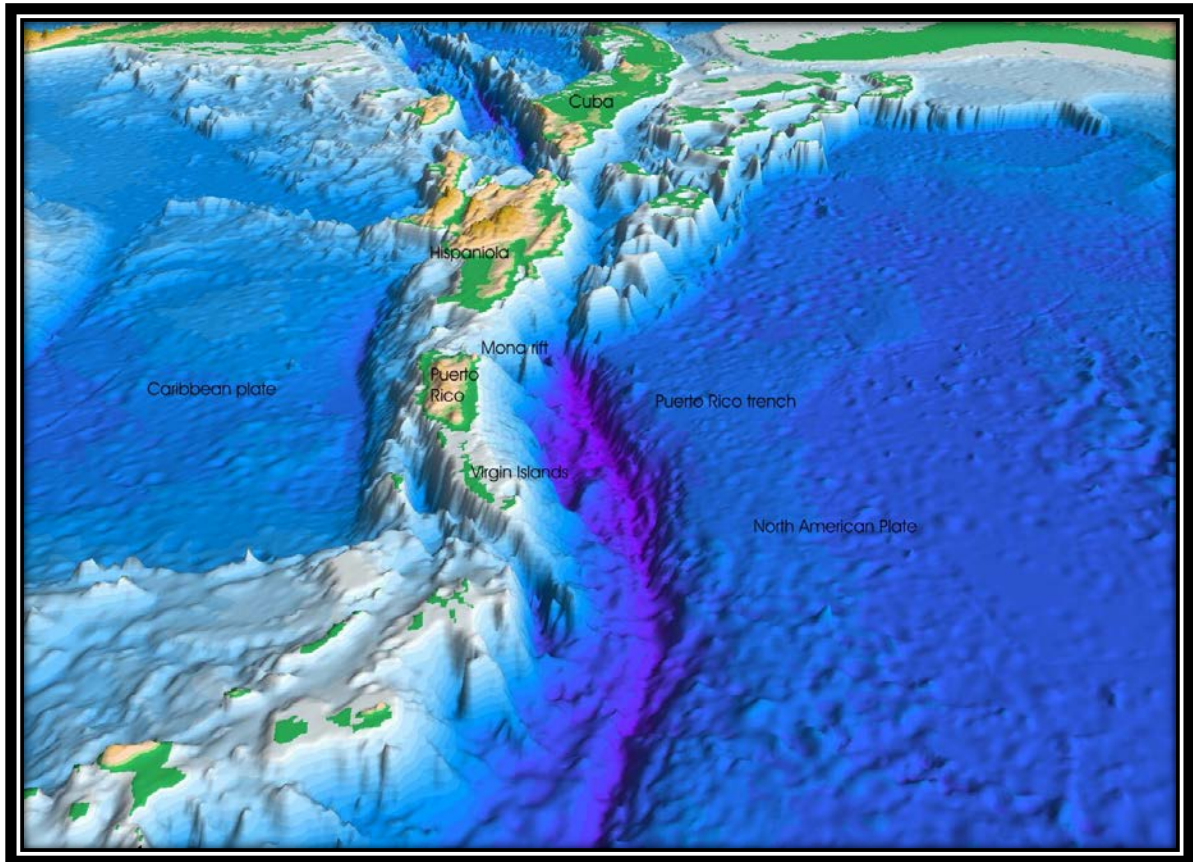


Figure 4. The Puerto Rico Trench and the Mona Rift can create complex conditions through the Mona Passage

The NE Trade Wind pushes enormous quantities of water into the northwest corner of the passage. When you sail through the area, it is as if you are standing “in the surf on a beach” as the depths move from 28,000 feet to 500 feet in a very short distance.

Study the charts below of the Mona Passage and look at the shoals at Cabo Engano (Cape Cheat). Then review the depths at the NE corner of Puerto Rico and the depths at the shoals. With the prevailing winds from the NE, it is not hard to understand why this passage has a bad reputation.



Figure 5. At the northeast corner of the Mona Passage, the "Mona Rift" is seismically active, which exacerbates conditions from time to time

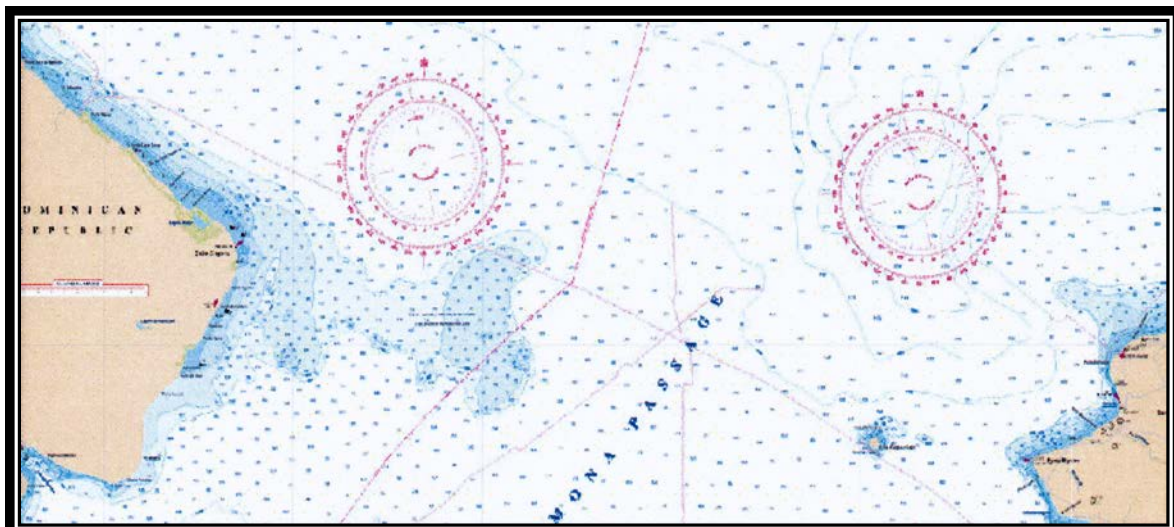


Figure 6. Challenges of the Mona Passage



Figure 7. The Windward Passage

Beyond the Windward Passage

If you enter the Caribbean through the Windward Passage, once around the south side of the island of Hispaniola there are two choices. Go directly toward Isla Beata, DR or call at Ile à Vache. This island is at the southwest corner of Haiti and is quite beautiful and very safe. (See *A Cruising Guide to Haiti* at www.freecruisingguide.com).

The anchorage is at Port Morgan (www.port-morgan.com) at the NW corner of the island in the Baie à Feret in front of the village of Caille Coq. The French owners of Port Morgan have been running the hotel for many years. There are no cars on the island and the people are gentle and welcoming. I have always found the island and its anchorage charming and very safe. Many of the local children who paddle out in their canoes have come aboard for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and to do drawings for us (we supply

the paper and crayons). In this way, we have come to know them and their families, which has made our time at the island even more enjoyable.



They loved the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and drew really great pictures! This picture was taken by me in 1998. All the boys are now young men. I know each of them and their families and it is truly a joy to be with them.

If you choose not to stop at Ile à Vache, continue on to Bahía Las Águilas and/or Isla Beata, in the Dominican Republic.

Bahía Las Águilas is just north and west of Isla Beata. If you choose to stop in this protected pristine bay, you will be amazed at what you will find; white sand beaches, rock formations, wildlife, and very few people, on land or in the water. The area is not developed and there are no roads into the Bay.

There are a number of rewards for taking the Windward Passage route into the Caribbean. The first is that you have sailed the Trade Wind rather than beaten into it. Having beaten your way through the Bahamas, this is a real treat.

The second is that once you arrive at Isla Beata (you can anchor at the NW corner) you have a whole range of wonderful anchorages in front of you.

Barahona is a great stop if you want to visit Lago Enriquillo, the sub sea level lake, which is a national park. Here you can visit the island of Cabritos with its many bird species as well as crocodiles. Barahona also offers good shops for restocking your galley.

Or you can just continue east, from Isla Beata, to Las Salinas and anchor in front of the restaurant/hotel. Las Salinas is easy to enter and a beautiful stop. If you have the time, go up bay (about 6 nm) to Palmar de Ocoa and anchor in front of a town in an anchorage whose beauty defies description.

From Las Salinas it's just sixty miles to Boca Chica, which has a modern up to date marina with clearance facilities, fuel, and haul out facilities.

Boca Chica is just fifteen minutes from the capital, Santo Domingo, where you can visit the first colonial city in the new world. Santo Domingo equals or surpasses other major cities in the Caribbean and has much to offer. Just five miles west of Boca Chica is Las Americas International Airport, the Dominican Republic's largest airport with flights to just about anywhere.

From Boca Chica heading east, there are harbors, rivers and islands to stop at, and most are beautiful and pristine. The southern coast of the Dominican Republic boasts miles of white sand beaches to rival any in the Caribbean.

Ultimately, when you are ready to leave the Dominican Republic, YOU ARE SOUTH of the Mona Passage and do not have to transit it to make your easting on your way to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

DOMINICAN CULTURE

The Dominican Republic is a democracy and has a stable government with strong ties to the United States and Canada.

Dominican people are most often easy to deal with and you will find that many will go out of their way to please you. They are extremely sociable.

We refer to the Dominican Republic as part of the “Spanish Caribbean.” Spanish *is* the spoken language but the Spanish spoken here is as different from that spoken in Spain as American English is from the English spoken in Great Britain. The language is spoken quickly, loudly and emphatically; sometimes it can sound almost commanding and thus intimidating. Despite the tone, watch the faces and more often than not you will see the smiles behind the words.

DOMINICAN MUSIC

Dominican music is generally influenced by an African rhythm. Meringue is basically a two-step. Rooted in the mid-19th century, it rose to prominence and respectability in the 1930s when it was made the official dance and music of the DR by Rafael Trujillo. Radio carried meringue throughout the country and the Americas. Today it is a music and dance of the people and of dance competitions. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNNHljRYDEo>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJL24w1n67s>

DOMINICAN ART

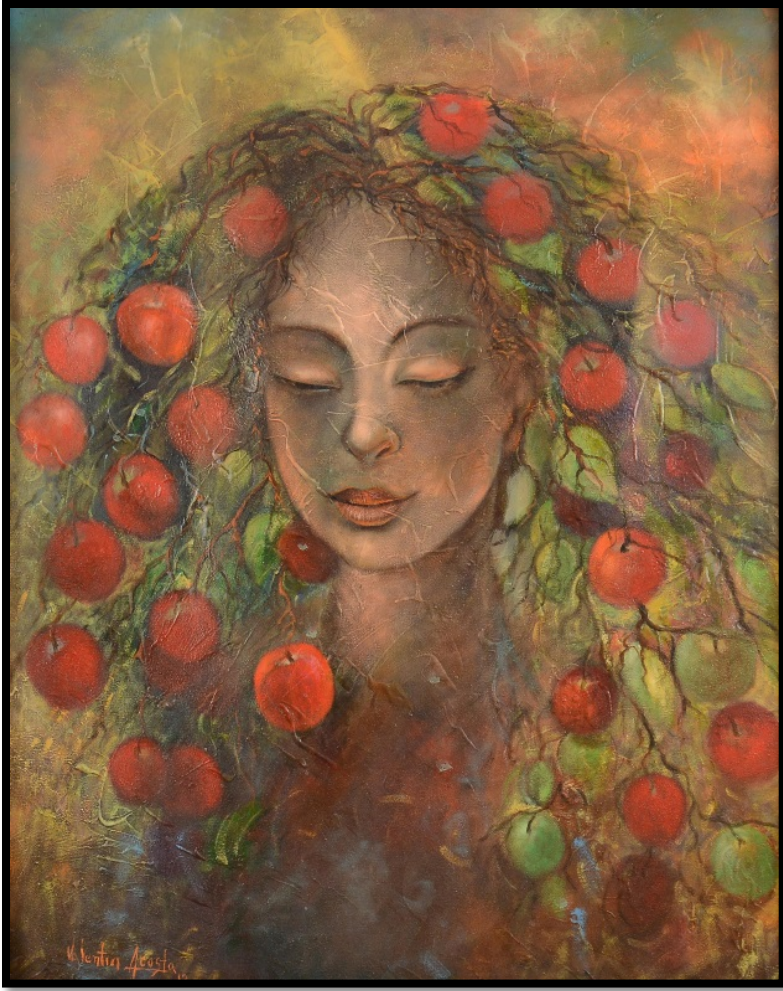
If you see or purchase a ceramic doll in the Dominican Republic, you will note that it has no facial features. It is said this is because Dominicans are so



racially diverse in color and features that it is difficult to choose an average representation. But there is one representation that always comes through; Dominicans are among the world's most hospitable people.

It is no secret that the Haitians and the Dominicans do not care to share in common anything more than the island of Hispaniola, to which they have no choice. However, there is something about the island of Hispaniola that draws artists. Like Haitian art, Dominican art is filled with color and addresses many of the elements of Dominican Life.

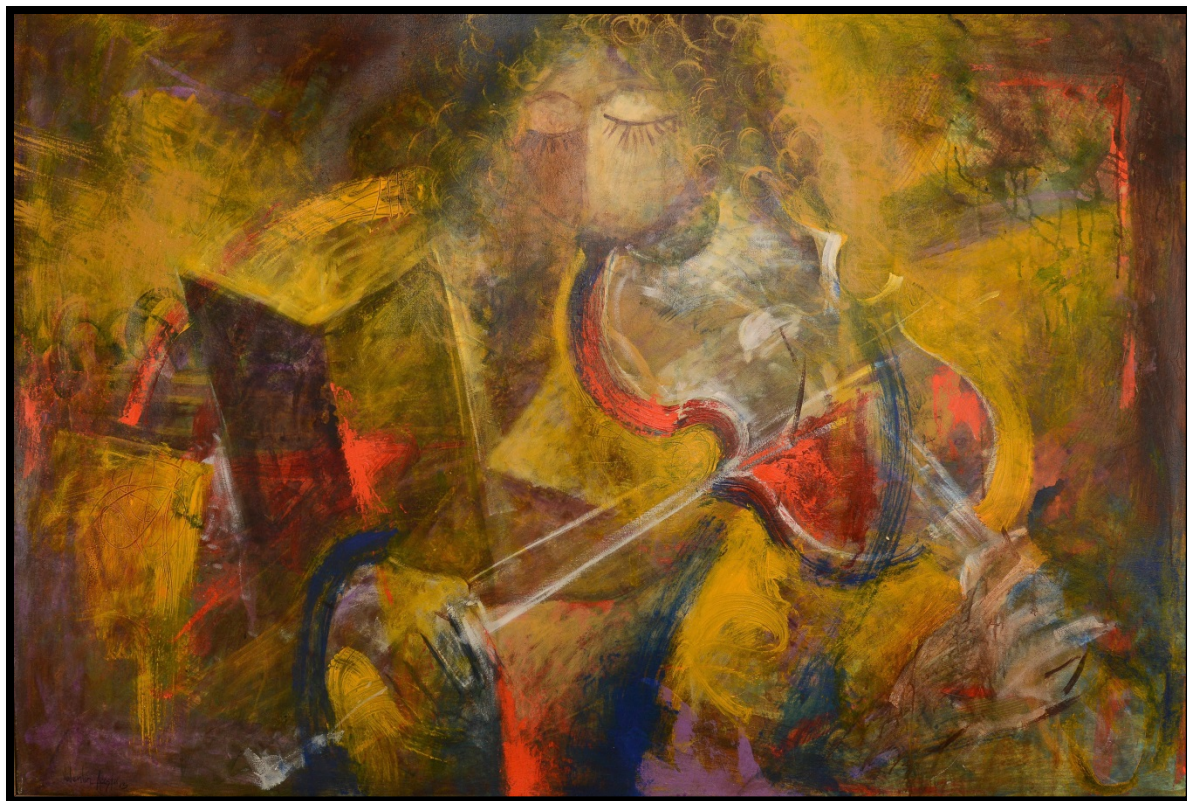
**“Dulcinea”
(Rafael Rodríguez)**



“Eve” (Valentin Acosta)



**“Still Life”
(Humberto Lugo)**



“Angel with violin” (Valentin Acosta)



**“Abuella”
(Eduardo Rodriguez)**

If you like art, Santo Domingo is filled with art galleries. The mountain town of Jarabacoa is a veritable artist colony and if you decide to visit, you will not be disappointed. If you like colorful art, one of the great bargains in the DR is how much is available and at very affordable prices. Many times, while cruising through the Caribbean, people often find that they are afraid to ask about a piece that they like as the normal range for a reasonable size piece seems to always be \$5,000 US and up. In the DR, you can find really nice good sized art in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range. In the galleries of Santo Domingo, older paintings from listed artists can be priced much higher, but if you want to purchase a piece of art to memorialize your cruise, the DR can accommodate all budgets with something well above the level of amateur.

GETTING TO KNOW THE PEOPLE

There are some prerequisites to a successful visit to the Dominican Republic and integrating with the people. You cannot be demanding and pressure tactics do not work. Neither do threats or loss of temper. In fact loss of temper in the Dominican culture is considered very poor form. Dominicans go out of their way to be sociable with each other, even if relations are stressed. They avoid confrontation whenever they can and rarely will you ever hear a voice raised in rage or anger. You will hear LOUD music; that is part of the culture. Dominicans like to sing, dance, listen to music -- and they love their Presidente beer.

No country or culture is perfect and like anywhere in the world you must exercise caution. Theft is always possible, especially in the tourist areas. The average salary in the Dominican Republic for unskilled labor is less than 400.00 USD *per month*.

I have found that more often than not, *in an effort to be helpful*, a Dominican may say he can do something that he may not be able to do. Be careful what you contract for as far as repairs go on your boat. Although Dominicans are excellent mechanics and their work can be a real bargain, be sure you know who you are dealing with and be sure the work together with the price is clearly defined. Varnish and general yacht work cost, at this printing, about \$70.00 US per hour in St. Maarten, about \$20.00 US per hour

in Trinidad and about \$20.00 US *per day* in the Dominican Republic. (Skilled labor is priced higher, but it is still lower than most other Caribbean islands).

Notwithstanding the cost, skill levels can vary a great deal. Take a look at a sample of the person's work before you start. If it is mechanical work, be sure the person is set up in business and has a good reputation before you hand over your starter or alternator. Avoid giving out highly specialized work, such as repairs to water makers and rigging repairs, as the Dominican Republic is not yet set up for such specialized work on yachts. Parts may not be readily available but can be sourced from the States; usually Miami. You will be required to pay import duty on the parts (approx. 30%)

"How do I cope with the language? I do not speak Spanish!" This is a frequent question. How will you communicate? Many Dominicans speak English or enough of it to understand what you are saying. Failing this, there will always be someone close by who will translate for you. Dominican language is filled with color and humor. They love humor and use it all the time in their speech. Being overly serious is not the Dominican way.

Dominicans believe that life can change very quickly and as a result are not apt to take many things overly serious. This includes appointments. Being late is part of the Dominican lifestyle and if the individual does not call or show up, relax and remember you are in a different culture. Dominicans do not get angry about tardiness or about the fact that the electricity or water can go off frequently. They accept life as being very unpredictable. You will frequently hear a Dominican say something and preface the statement or end it with "Si Dios quiere" (if God wants).

If when you are waiting for a service appointment the time comes and goes and the individual has not called or shown up; and if when the person finally arrives you are angry and upset, you will simply make your objective harder to achieve. Avoid confrontation and never raise your voice, even if you think you are being cheated.

Dominican Food

Many people who have visited me also often ask, “Doesn’t the spicy food bother you?” Dominicans are generally not keen on highly spiced food except, perhaps, for the addition of a little hot sauce from a bottle.

The mainstay is rice and beans, *arroz habichuela*. What comes with the rice and beans is called *la junta*, pronounced *la hunta*. Thus the main dish of rice and beans can be accompanied by chicken or beef and, in seaport towns, fish. Other side dishes may include fried plantains (*tostones*), *arepita de yucca* (fried yucca rolls or patties), avocado, and salad. Most restaurants are reasonably priced and the main meal is usually taken at about one in the afternoon. Full dinners usually cost less than \$10 US and in small towns even less.



Dominican breakfast -- fried eggs, mangu (mashed plantains with red onions in vinegar) and avocado.

The chicken is excellent. However, the beef is tough and therefore generally served stewed (*guisado*). If you do not like fried food (Dominicans love their food fried) you can order almost anything *guisado*, from chicken to beef or pork. Otherwise you can order your food either *a la plancha* or *a la parrilla* which is grilled. You can often find *Pollo Carbón* or barbecued chicken at major supermarkets and other food stores as well. It is really good!

You will also see street vendors selling *empanadas*, round dough pockets stuffed with meat or cheese and fried. And also “kipe” (*quipe*) which is bulgur fried and stuffed with chopped meat and sometimes raisins. Kipe is Middle Eastern in origin and a real treat. How exotic is that!

Always drink bottled water in the Dominican Republic. You can purchase purified water in five-gallon jugs for just over \$1 US. You must pay a \$3 deposit on the bottle. Water is also available in quart and smaller bottles. There are *bodegas* and *colmados* (small grocery stores) everywhere.

Some things in the Dominican Republic are downright cheap. Petroleum is not! Fuel prices run about 30% higher than in the US. Propane gas, on the other hand, is comparatively less expensive as it is government subsidized. Since most homes use it for cooking, it’s available virtually everywhere; US fittings.

Fruits and vegetables are abundant in the Dominican Republic and priced so inexpensively that I have a tendency to overbuy. Oranges, melons, bananas and all sorts of tropical fruits are readily available and of excellent quality.

Vegetables, including tomatoes, huge carrots, lettuce, sweet potatoes and white potatoes, and all types of root vegetables can be purchased everywhere. Some of the tastiest white potatoes I have ever eaten have been in the Dominican Republic. Sweet potatoes can be just short of the size of a soccer ball. Plantains from Barahona can literally be the size of a small baseball bat.

Many supermarkets (*supermercados*) in the capital (Santo Domingo) are huge, the size of a football field, stocked with everything you can think of, including many imported products. In Supermercado Nacional in Santo Domingo you can purchase beer, wine, liquor; virtually any foodstuffs, imported and native, including such things as fresh mozzarella, French butter, imported New Zealand mussels; and nearly anything else your heart (or stomach) desires.

While you are in the capital you can also visit such stores as Ferretería Americana, which is a giant hardware store with a good inventory of practically everything, and Price Smart, which is the equivalent of a Sam’s Club in the US.

THE COUNTRY

The capital, Santo Domingo, is home to about 4.5 million people or 35% of the total population of the Dominican Republic.

There are an additional 2 million or more Dominicans living outside the country, largely in the US and Canada, but also in some Caribbean islands such as St. Maarten. The Dominican Republic has a strong and growing economy and is considered an economic powerhouse in the Caribbean.

The United States invaded the Dominican Republic twice during the twentieth century, once just after the turn of the century and again in 1965 a few years after the dictator Trujillo was assassinated. Dominicans are very passionate about their politics and during election campaigns you will see gatherings that resemble street parties.

Dominicans like American culture and adore baseball. Many Dominicans play in the major leagues and some are superstars. Overall Dominicans are tourist friendly and very welcoming, regardless of what country you come from.

While Dominicans use the Peso as their currency, they are equally comfortable doing business in US dollars and Euros.

TAXES TO KNOW

One of the highest taxes in the Dominican Republic is the **import tax**. Property taxes are almost nonexistent and income tax modest. Money is generated from import taxes as well as tourist taxes for visas and on hotel rooms. The Dominican Republic has the largest inventory of hotel rooms in the Caribbean, ranging from very inexpensive to the level of the jet set.

Because of the high import taxes, it is best to avoid purchasing anything substantial in the Dominican Republic which has been imported. Local merchandise is comparatively inexpensive, including clothing, food and anything else manufactured within the country.

The country does not yet have a program for “boats in transit.” There is a law on the books under which one could file for exemption, but most customs agents will not honor it without extensive documentation, and even then it may be questionable.

The country does not yet have a program for “boats in transit.” Do not count on importing something you need for your boat without having to pay duty, which can average 30%. Sales tax, known as ITIBIS is 18% and assessed on virtually everything.

THINGS MEDICAL

Vaccines are really not necessary for most people. Dengue fever can sometimes occur like in the rest of the islands in the Caribbean; avoid areas of stagnant fresh water and protect against mosquitoes. Incidents of malaria and hepatitis are rare. Salads are safe to eat provided they have been very well cleaned in fresh bottled water. Eat only fruits that need to be peeled. Ice sold at stores around the island is made from purified water.

Dominican doctors are, *on average, very above average*. If they lack anything at all, it would be facilities and some equipment. Doctors are available almost everywhere and you will find them relatively inexpensive and very capable.

Medicinal drugs are available at the pharmacies (La Farmacia) and many times you will *not* need a prescription. Virtually all drugs which are available in the States or Canada are available in the Dominican Republic. Just show the pharmacist your empty bottle and say how many pills you want.

MAIL SERVICE

Mail service in the Dominican Republic exiting the country is quite good and inexpensive; arriving mail is less certain. DHL, Fed Ex and UPS are readily available.

ENJOYING YOUR TIME IN THE DR

During your time in the Dominican Republic, it is very important to understand that most Dominican families are law abiding, church going people, who are very family centered. While they may in many instances be poor, they are far from stupid; quite the contrary. Dominican life is not easy and yet they manage to dress and send their children off to school daily. They maintain their households, take care of their elderly and have hopes and aspirations just like everyone else.

Working for tips is a *very big part* of the Dominican culture. Sometimes cruising sailors complain about having to give a tip or refer to it as a request for a bribe. Getting one's *cielito* or *propinita*, a small reward, is part and parcel of Dominican culture, and most Latin cultures in the Caribbean as well. Learn how to give a small gift graciously or how to smile and say no. Avoid being dismissive or rude if you are asked. Respect and courtesy is highly valued at all levels of Dominican culture.

Giving handouts is not advised, even to those who solicit, and in particular to street urchins. It gives the wrong message and inculcates the wrong values. If you can't resist, be sure you get some service in return, no matter how small it is. I remember a number of years back when three boys each about seven years old or so asked me if I would buy them something to eat. I was eating at an open air restaurant and I agreed. However I stipulated that, in return for this, each boy must give me a drawing. I gave them some paper and a few pencils and they each drew a picture after they had eaten. They signed and dated the pictures and to this day I still have them.

With regard to dress, Americans, Canadians and Europeans sometimes wear very little or very provocative clothing. The Dominican Republic is still largely a male oriented culture. Dominican men have a keen eye and if you dress inappropriately you will have no one else but yourself to blame for any unwanted attention that may come your way. Dominican women can be very engaging, especially if they see a well-dressed man waving a wad of cash around. If you like to drink and dance you certainly won't have any trouble finding a member of the opposite sex to keep you company. Remember, though, that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

The concept of "gringo"

Dominicans refer to foreigners as *extranjeros*. *Gringo* is also used to denote a foreigner in a less formal way. It can be used pejoratively to refer to someone from outside the culture, who may be considered to be unaware of what they are doing or saying.

Keep in mind that the term is not used openly as no one likes to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

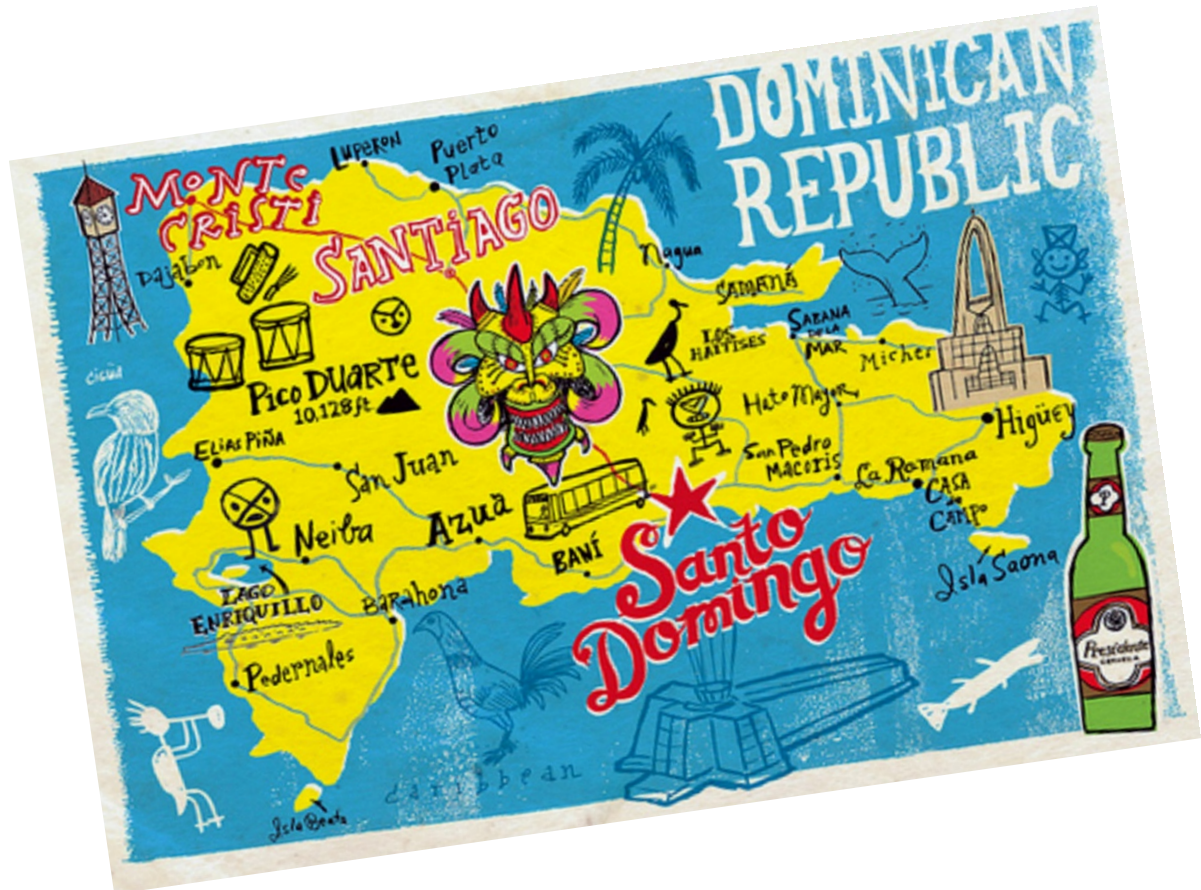
Perhaps the best route to take in the Dominican Republic, as well as many other "Latin American" countries, is a low profile with little or no opinions, at least those expressed loudly and publicly. Dominicans are acutely aware of the suffering they endured at the hands of the American supported dictator and murderer, Trujillo. They are also very aware that the United States has invaded their country twice. Even the most humble of them living

in the country knows that the United States considers the Caribbean, “their back yard.” They keep their political and economic feelings filed away when dealing with foreigners and very much prefer to share their music, beer and love of sports; in particular American baseball. If you decide to act like a *Gringo* and give a lecture on “how to live” and what to believe, they will listen to you intently and smile as you make your argument because offending you is considered bad form. They will even forgive you if you make remarks that are inappropriate because they understand that “*El es un Gringo que no sabe.*” (a foreigner that does not know)

WEATHER WISE

Regarding the weather, it should be noted that the Dominican Republic is sufficiently north in the Caribbean to be affected by winter northers coming down from the States. Additionally, the Dominican Republic has the highest mountain ranges in the Caribbean, over 10,500 feet high. As a result, nights in some areas can be cool, due to cold air masses coming down from the mountains. In the morning, as the sun comes up, the air heats up and rises again.

The Dominican Republic’s weather, on the whole, is wonderful. Sunshine is continuous throughout the day. Take the normal precautions against sunburn, especially while out on the water.



If you simply smile and allow the local population to share their culture with you, you are going to be in for a very big surprise. Comparatively inexpensive food and really good beer, plenty of sun and music and a population that loves tourists, all add up to the kind of environment that most cruisers like. There are some inconveniences. Clearing in and out can be tedious. Having a few officials ask you for tips seems to really bother some people. They simply do not know how to smile and beg off graciously. Latino culture revolves around tips. Their wages impute the custom of tipping. Go with the flow and have a great time; it is one of the main reasons we go cruising.

DOMINICAN ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AND OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

To enter the Dominican Republic, you have to clear Immigration and Customs and, in some harbors, there may be other formalities. The following is a list of agencies, most of which you will come in contact with during your visit.

Immigration

\$10.00 per visa good for 30 days and easily renewable. \$43.00 to clear your boat in. Both of the above fees are ONLY PAID ONCE, on arrival.

Customs

On arrival you *may* be asked to make a customs declaration.

Agriculture

In some harbors is an inspector who will ask to check your produce. There is a small charge for this; usually \$10 US.

Drug Enforcement

When you clear in you will be visited by Drug Enforcement who may request to inspect your boat including below decks. It is **unlikely** that they will remove their shoes. **It is likely** that their check will be very cursory. It is appropriate to have someone stay with them during their inspection.

M-2

This is the Dominican Intelligence Agency. They generally accompany Drug Enforcement.

Marina de Guerra

This is the Dominican Coast Guard; they are the controlling agency. At every harbor in the Dominican Republic there is a *Comandancia* or Coast Guard post. You must submit to them your papers from your last port of call. When you are ready to leave the harbor for your next port of call you will need a *despacho*, or written permission to go to your next destination. *Despachos* are only given to go to official ports of entry (*puertos habilitados*) and to leave the country; they are not given for intermediate stops (*puntos intermedios*). To stop along the way, see section on cruising the Dominican Republic.

The above three agencies normally show up together. **There is NO “official” charge under the law for their inspection.**

Portuario (Ports)

You will not deal with Ports unless you tie to a government dock. If you do, the current rate is \$0.70 US per foot per day.

Unless you use a government dock there is no charge to anchor in a harbor. In harbors such as Luperon and Samana, there have been attempts in the past to collect a charge. No matter what they may say, the charge is outside the law and does not have to be paid. *As of this printing there are NO ANCHORING charges in the Dominican Republic.*

Private Marinas

If you use a private marina to clear in, the marina will probably assess you a facilities charge. This can be \$50.00 to \$100.00 and these funds are used to pay for the facilities and the people who staff them to expedite your clearing in. Immigration and Coast Guard facilities located at private marinas are not paid for by the Dominican government and all costs of running the facility

and staffing are paid by the marina. You can avoid these costs by clearing in on your own; a process that in some ports can be very time consuming.

“Corrupt Officials”

I never understand why people get so upset about this. Some officials do not really push very hard for tips and will take whatever you give them. Some are more aggressive and a few are just “over the top”; fortunately very few. In each case you should tip as you see fit. **DO NOT TAKE IT PERSONALLY, DO NOT GET ANGRY.** Learn how to say NO nicely. No one is going to do anything bad to you; they would lose their jobs. No matter what they say, if you do not want to pay, say NO. That is all there is to it. And **ALWAYS** smile! Anger in Latino culture is considered very bad form. Avoid being self-righteous. If you want to lecture on how the state should run their affairs, go home and run for mayor or senator and share your opinions on your own turf. Acting appropriately makes a world of difference when you are in a “different world.”

GENERAL PROCEDURE

In most ports, the Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement and M-2 will be the first people who board your boat. Be polite and cooperate. If a tip or tips are requested, be very polite and indicate that you may provide a tip for good service. Do not be rude or dismissive; simply refuse politely and consistently. Once they get the message they will leave.

Immigration will probably show up next, and will ask for your passports. You will be required to purchase a visa for each crewmember and pay an entry fee for the boat. They will give you a receipt for your payments. Check the receipt to be sure it is correct.

Some harbors have other charges, which are not related to entry procedures. They can be for rubbish disposal, or for anchoring. Check any request for

such charges with other cruisers in the area before paying, and if you must pay, be sure to ask for a receipt indicating what the payment was for.

Dealing with the Authorities

In almost all instances, you will find the authorities friendly and courteous. The Dominican authorities know their business and want to get on with it. It is not wise to treat them as if they are the three stooges from a banana republic. Dominicans in these positions are educated and trained in their work. It is wise to show respect. Be properly dressed and be willing to cooperate. I saw one fellow scream at a Coast Guard captain because he came aboard with his boots on. Dominican military wear boots that are laced. Getting them off is not a simple task. Moreover, it is embarrassing for a military man to be seen as “taking orders” from a foreigner in front of his men. Sometimes we have to temper our standards while visiting other countries where things may be done differently. After all is it *really* that important that they take their shoes off?

I have heard many cruising sailors complain and ask “Why are there so many officials?” The answer to this is that the Dominican Republic has various agencies to cover a number of different tasks and objectives. Notwithstanding that you may believe you can run their country better, ultimately it is in your interest to go with the flow and cooperate. Most officials are happy just to be treated courteously and to finish their job.

I have heard others comment that they were ‘pushed for bribes’ by officials. Under the law, there are charges that have been established which must be abided by. If you are asked to pay charges different from those listed here, you should politely refuse.

A small tip is customary in this culture if you find the service to your liking. You may choose to give tips or not. Keep in mind however, that tips are very much part of Dominican tradition. Tips can come as a small amount of money or a bottle of wine or rum or whatever you deem appropriate.

Every harbor has a *Comandancia* (Coast Guard post) that knows you are in the harbor and definitely keeps an eye on things. They are not casual about their harbors. While no harbor anywhere in the world is 100% secure as to personal safety or theft, the Dominican Republic is in the top tier on the Caribbean list of safe places to cruise.

Be cooperative with authorities. Should you feel that you have met with a dishonest official, bear in mind that you can simply remain pleasant and not pay. Do not be concerned; you won't be shot or put in jail. The Dominican Republic is a very pro tourist country and no one is going to risk his job by carrying it too far. Never be rude and don't raise your voice; simply indicate that you do not understand. After all, you are the foreigner and you are not expected to fully understand. I always remark at how well French sailors handle requests that are inappropriate. They simply sit there and smile until the other side gives up and goes away. *C'est la vie*.

A NOTE ON DRUGS, GUNS, PETS, AND SECURITY

With the exception of prescription drugs, do not carry any other drugs on your boat in the Dominican Republic. The penalties are severe; you can lose your boat and be arrested.

GUNS

As to handguns and rifles, you must declare them and they will be held for you. To do anything else is to break the law.

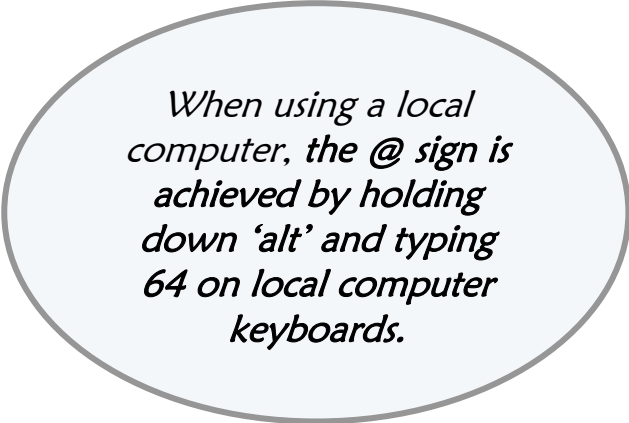
PETS

Pets are allowed into the Dominican Republic, although you may be asked to show vaccine papers at some of the harbors.

ANCHORAGE SECURITY

Take all normal precautions with your dingy and motor at night. In all the years I have cruised the Dominican Republic I have never had any problem whatsoever. The only people who will come to your boat, normally, are the authorities and sometimes a fisherman looking to sell you some fish. Nonetheless it is not wise to leave your boat unattended.

If you need to leave your boat without anyone aboard it is best to leave it at a marina, or, if no marinas are available, check with the *Comandancia* to see if they can give you someone to stay on your boat while you are gone. In most cases, one can arrange for someone trustworthy for a very reasonable price. In recent years the greatest loss of dinghies has occurred in Luperón and Samaná.



When using a local computer, the @ sign is achieved by holding down 'alt' and typing 64 on local computer keyboards.

ONSHORE INFORMATION BASICS

TRANSACTING BUSINESS

In the larger towns, especially Santo Domingo, where there is one store of a particular type you will usually find many. Businesses tend to cluster with others of their type, providing almost exactly the same product. One can find whole streets dedicated to batteries, for instance. Smaller towns understandably have less to offer in the way of goods and parts.

The quickest and most flexible public transportation around town is a *motorconcho*, which will take you from place to place very inexpensively.

Taxis also get the job done -- in more comfort, but at much more cost. Buses are safe, reliable and inexpensive and cover the entire country.

Many repair or supply businesses start work about 8 am with a two hour lunch between 12 midday and 2 pm. Keep in mind that while you may be told that the repair will be ready very soon; there are often delays due to electric outages, lack of parts and a long list of other factors that intervene.

ATMs and BANKING

Don't expect every machine to be working all the time and remember to remove your card promptly. Be prepared to queue even at an ATM. Avoid banks and machines around the first and the fifteenth of every month as this is pay-day and very busy. There is usually a numbered ticket queuing system.

INTERNET

Internet connections are available in most towns although the quality of the equipment and the speed varies. Most places will allow you to plug in your own computer, even if you have to ask to disconnect one of their machines to do so. *The @ sign is achieved by holding down 'alt' and typing 64 on local computer keyboards.*

SCUBA

The Dominican Republic has a number of excellent dive sites for those so inclined. A small book in color entitled "Project Nautilus: Official Diving Guide of the Dominican Republic" offers exceptional coverage of the diving areas. In addition there are a few websites dedicated to the diving community. Some of the best sources are:

<http://www.diveguide.com/domi-scuba.htm>

Another that includes a map of the country is:

http://www.dive-centers.net/diving-dominican_republic-22.html

The Dominican Republic has many interesting sites to dive, and the country is well equipped to assist those who have such interest.



PROVISIONING: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

The two largest cities in the Dominican Republic are Santo Domingo on the south coast and Santiago in the center of the country. Puerto Plata on the north coast is another large urban center with a variety of big stores.

Provisioning in the DR, especially for fresh fruits and vegetables and other fresh food stocks, is simple, straightforward, and easily accomplished in virtually any town. There are *bodegas* and *colmados* (small grocery stores) everywhere. You will find most storeowners friendly, anxious to help, and reasonably honest.

The price is usually the price, but if you are buying in sufficient quantity you may ask for *lañapa* (slang for a free little extra from the merchant in a local store, pronounced *LAN-YAP-PA*). Do not ask for this in large stores in the major cities as they will think of your request as inappropriate. But do ask

for it with local vendors to get the 13th banana or 13th *pan de agua* (small roll).



You can buy potable water in 5-gallon jugs very inexpensively; there is a deposit on the jug. However, when you return it to get more water, you pay only for the water by exchanging the jug. Or keep the jug for your next oil change and engine room waste.

You will find *ferreterias* or hardware stores everywhere. They carry a wide variety of “this and that”; the bigger the store, the wider the variety. You can also find propane refill stations throughout the DR. Propane is very reasonably priced in the DR because the government subsidizes it. It is universally used to cook. You can bring your tank and have it filled. Or you can find someone with a motor bike who can do it for you for a small tip.

If you have need of something in the way of parts, or something beyond the range of normal daily provisioning, Santo Domingo is where you need to go.

Specialty items for sailboats are not readily available and need to be imported, probably from the United States. Many engine parts, tools and the things that make life simple such as TVs, toasters, microwaves and other *electrodomésticos* are readily available.

The *ferreterias* in big cities are huge. In Santiago, Ferretería Ochoa comes to mind. In Santo Domingo (often referred to as *the capital* or *La Cap-E-tal*) Ferreteria Americana stands out.

There are Price Smarts in both Santiago and Santo Domingo if you want to provision in depth. If you do not have a member's card, you can buy a card for the day. They have it all, from fresh groceries and meats to television, computers and clothing.

Santo Domingo and Santiago have excellent medical facilities. You can get your blood work done without a prescription and you can see specialists of all types. While they will not accept your medical plan, you will not find them expensive and in most cases you will find them quite good.



Shopping in Santo Domingo

While you are in Santo Domingo or Santiago, you can also take in the cultural aspects of the cities. There are museums, theatres, art galleries and other stores of all types. Santo Domingo has its historic Colonial District, a major tourist attraction that should not be missed.

NAVIGATING ON LAND

There are private taxis and large buses (Caribe Tours and El Metro as well as others) for tours. For local and inexpensive travel there are *guaguas* (buses). In Santo Domingo there is the new underground subway (very high tech). And for the adventurous and frugal, there are the *carros publicos* and the *motorconchos*.

Carros publicos are small buses with routes throughout the city along major thoroughfares. They are crowded and cheap. Don't expect air conditioning and do not be surprised if the woman next to you is holding a live chicken.

The *motorconchos* are motor bikes. You sit on the back and the driver takes you to where you want to go. These are usually used for relatively short distances and they are quite cheap. They are dangerous in that if the driver has an accident you have no protection. If you decide to use one, watch out to not burn your leg on the muffler.



Colonial Santo Domingo



SOME OTHER TOWNS AND PLACES OF INTEREST

IN THE MOUNTAINS

There are many other towns of interest. Among them are Jarabacoa and Constanza in the mountains. Remember the DR has the highest mountain range in the Caribbean with Pico Duarte measuring over 10,000 feet. You can reach these two cities easily by major bus lines (Caribe Tours and some others). Once there, you will find river rafting, small mountain hotels, and excursions to the top of Pico Duarte, for those amongst us who like to climb. Just outside of Jarabacoa is the Salto Jimenoa; a really beautiful waterfall worth visiting.

Salto Jimenoa



CARNIVALS

Many of the towns in the DR have Carnivals during the month of February. The two largest and most famous are the one in La Vega, just south of Santiago and the one in Santo Domingo. Even though the one in La Vega is the most famous, I prefer the one in Santo Domingo as it runs along the Malecon (promenade along the sea) down the main avenue. Fanned by the sea breeze there is much to see, music to listen to, food to eat and great festivity.



The work that goes into the costumes, masks and floats is enormous and quite an experience to see.



SOUTHEAST COAST

Bayahibe is a small town on the SE coast, a tourist attraction for day trips on the way to Isla Saona. You can go with others on a large catamaran, or for those inclined to speed, in high speed boats, to visit the island of Saona, a short distance to the east. Saona is a national park, and for those that like nature in the wild it is a veritable feast.

At the Casa De Campo complex (just east of the town of La Romana) is Altos de Chavon, a re-creation of a medieval European village. It is frequently used for concerts and otherwise well worth visiting for its beauty, views, restaurants and quaint shops.



Concert setting at Casa De Campo



Altos De Chavon



The Dominican Republic is part of a very large island. Take your time as there is so much to see and to enjoy. The weather is normally excellent, the people friendly and the cost inexpensive to modest.

Last but not least, let us not forget the *nightlife*. If you like nightlife and you like to dance, you will think you died and went to heaven. Meringue, bachata and salsa until your legs fall off! And if you do not know how to do it, look up and smile, and you will be swept off your feet.



The biggest problem in the Dominican Republic is easily summed up by a saying that is often used in the town of Nagua. (NAGWA)

“Entre si tú quieres, sal si tu puedes!”

"Enter if you want, leave if you can!"

For more information on the DR, hotels and attractions, visit: www.Hispaniola.com.



CRUISING THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic does not have a long history with cruising boats. In the past, boats in the country have generally been power boats set up for fishing and kept at a yacht club by members of the upper class. In recent years this has changed, and now more middle class Dominicans own boats as well; the majority of which are power boats. However, there is a growing interest in sailboats and many of the clubs have fleets of one design sailboats.

As for cruising boats from foreign countries, the only real harbors that have had extensive exposure to them have been Luperón and Samaná. Cruising sailors have generally avoided cruising the Dominican Republic and have only used Luperón and Samaná as jumping off points for their route eastward.

Dominicans do not understand why anyone would take a boat and anchor between major harbors overnight. Culturally, the way they see it, is you leave one major harbor and its marina to go to another major harbor and its marina. This requires a *despacho* from the Coast Guard, whether you are a foreign boat or a local boat.

The mission to protect the coastline from drug smugglers and illegal immigration is a major part of the Coast Guard's purpose.

The despacho gives you the right to leave point A and go to point B. When you arrive at point B, you must show the papers you received from point A. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO CLEAR IN AGAIN; just renew your despacho when you are ready to depart.

The *despacho* gives you the right to leave point A and go to point B. When you arrive at point B, you must show the papers you received from point A. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO CLEAR IN AGAIN, and once you indicate that you have cleared in, only the Coast Guard will want to see your *despacho*. When you leave point B, the Coast Guard will issue you a new *despacho* to go to point C in the Dominican Republic or to leave the DR for another country.

Despachos are not issued for *puertos no habilitado* (ports that do not have clearance facilities). I would never recommend breaking the law in any country, and cruising the Dominican Republic is no exception. However, stopping to anchor in an anchorage between points A and B is not illegal if you have an explanation that is reasonable. That includes resting because the wind is too strong, or the need to make repairs, or the need to purchase groceries.

All ports will have a Coast Guard Station. They will try to get out to your boat by using a local fishing boat or perhaps in someone's dinghy. He will ask to see your *despacho*. In Dominican culture, courtesy is highly prized. If you are pleasant with him and take the time to smile and explain what you are doing, it is very unlikely he will ask you to leave. His salary is less than \$250.00 US per month, and the fisherman who brought him out gets paid nothing for his time and gasoline.

After a pleasant visit, a tip to him and the fisherman are appropriate. Give the Coast Guardsman \$5.00 US and the fisherman a small bottle of local rum. I always carry a case of Brugal Rum for such occasions with me. If the harbor is larger than a small anchorage, but not an official entry port, and the Coast Guardsman shows up with his boss, keep in mind that the boss always gets more. (Perhaps \$5.00 + a small bottle of rum to the boss).

If your graciousness is not well received, keep smiling and be patient. Everyone believes that something is better than nothing, and after a time of discussion and some confusion, everyone will leave. *Never lose your patience and always be gracious.*



PORTS AND HARBORS DETAIL

The following sections of the guide will describe the harbors and anchorages on all three coasts of the Dominican Republic.

SOUTH COAST HISPANIOLA

Ile à Vache, Haiti to Isla Saona, DR *EASTWARD*

Ile à Vache

18°07.30N 73°41.21W

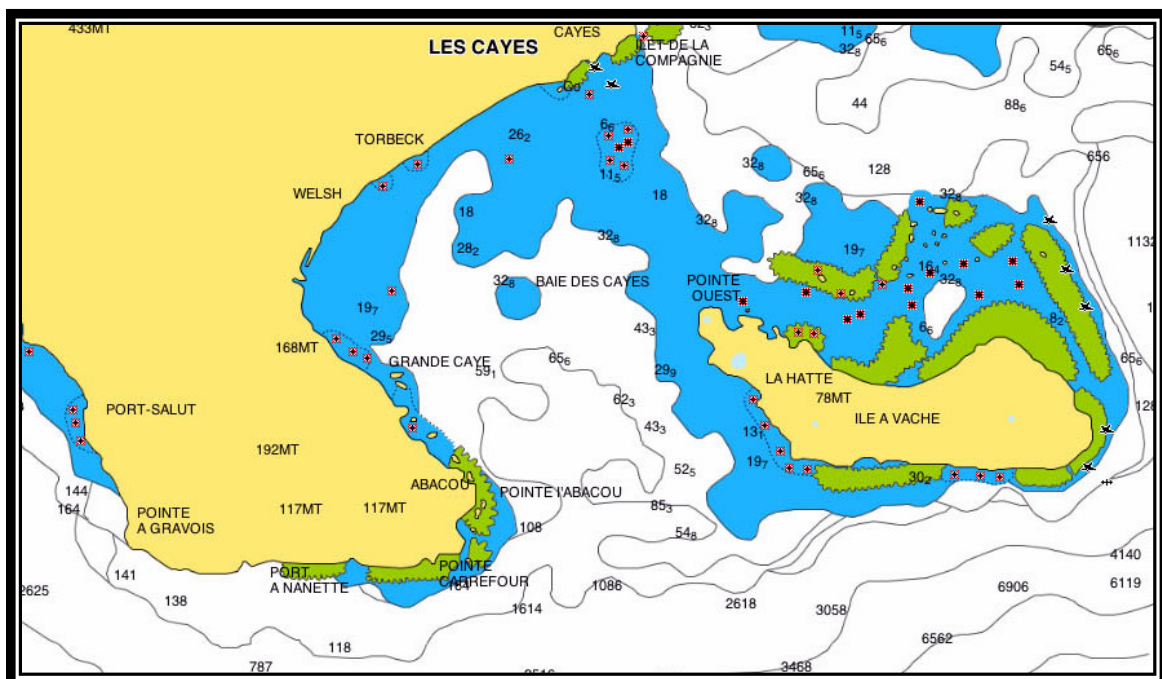


Figure 8. POINTE À GRAVOIS AND ILE À VACHE

Between the Haitian mainland and the island of La Vache you will almost certainly see *Bois-Fouilles*, the native dugout canoes.

You will also see local sailboats. They carry a disproportional amount of sail with the crew standing on boards to balance their fine craft. The smaller boats are used for fishing and the larger ones for moving cargo and people between the island and the mainland. Since they have no engines, when the wind drops they use long oars for propulsion. These boats are one of the few remaining examples of sailing craft whose design hasn't changed for generations.



A goose winged local sailboat

The Bay of Feret provides a wide entrance to this idyllic natural harbor. The anchorage is named ***Port Morgan*** after Henry Morgan who, amongst other pirates, is said to have sheltered there.

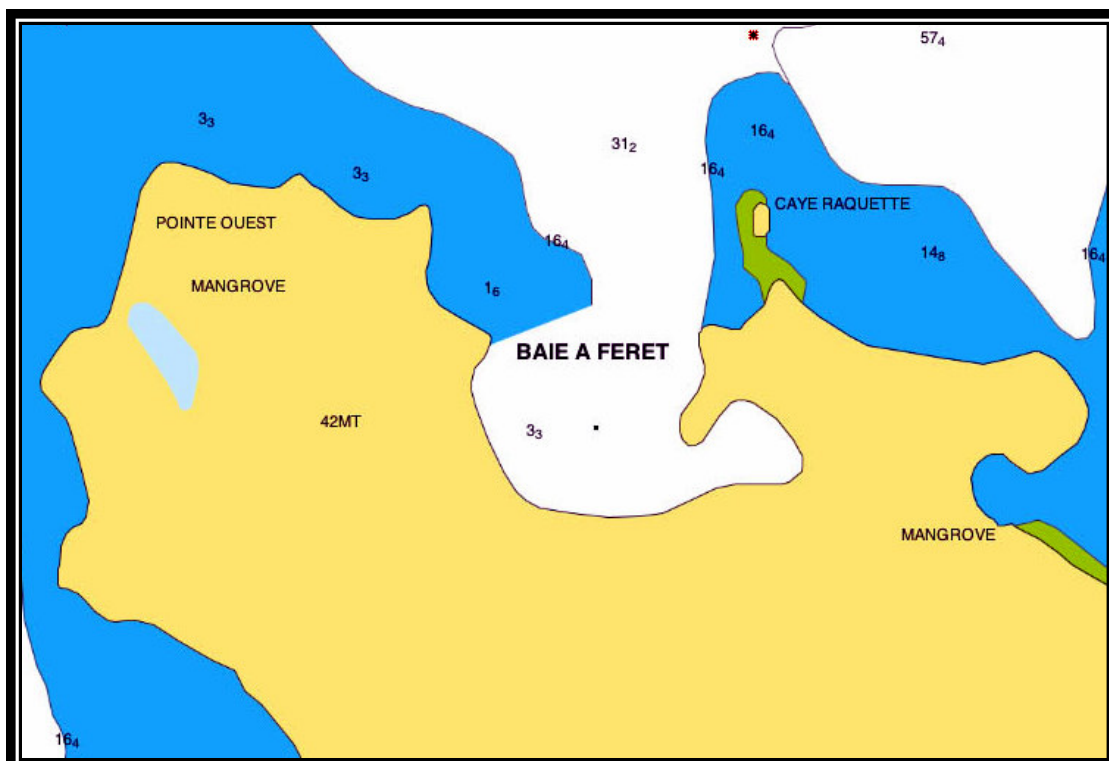


Figure 9. Baie à Feret (Bay of Feret)



Tranquil and protected anchorage

Should you want to clear in, hotel personnel take your documents to the mainland and return them to you for a small fee. Or you can take the trip across to Les Cayes and do it yourself. If you want excitement, take a “native ferry” across; hundreds of Haitians do it daily.

The land around the bay hosts the village of Caille Coq. It has no electric or running water. Take a walk through the village and meet the locals. They will welcome you to witness their uncomplicated lifestyle. There are no cars on the island; just horses and a few bicycles.



Anchored in the Bay of Feret

Provisions are brought in by the local craft from Les Cayes on the mainland to the village of Madame Bernard a couple of miles east of the anchorage where a market is held on Mondays and Thursdays. With its spicy smells and hustle and bustle, the market is something to see; a moment out of National Geographic. Anchoring is not difficult and you can dinghy in. Or if the weather is settled you can take your dinghy to Madame Bernard and leave your boat anchored at Port Morgan. You can have your dinghy watched by one of the youngsters for a small tip. Or you can go on foot; about 1 to 2 hours. Local youngsters, who can serve as a guide, will go with you should you like.



The anchorage from the village of Cai Coq



Conch lined path – Village of Cai Coq

Use your camera with discretion and get your guide to *ask permission to photograph* if you have any doubt. This is a place you will never forget, where the clock stopped many years ago.



Market day at Madame Bernard town

Mangoes are everywhere at the market and on the trees!



Cabo Rojo (DR)

17°55.77N 71°40.85W

116.0 nm from Ile à Vache

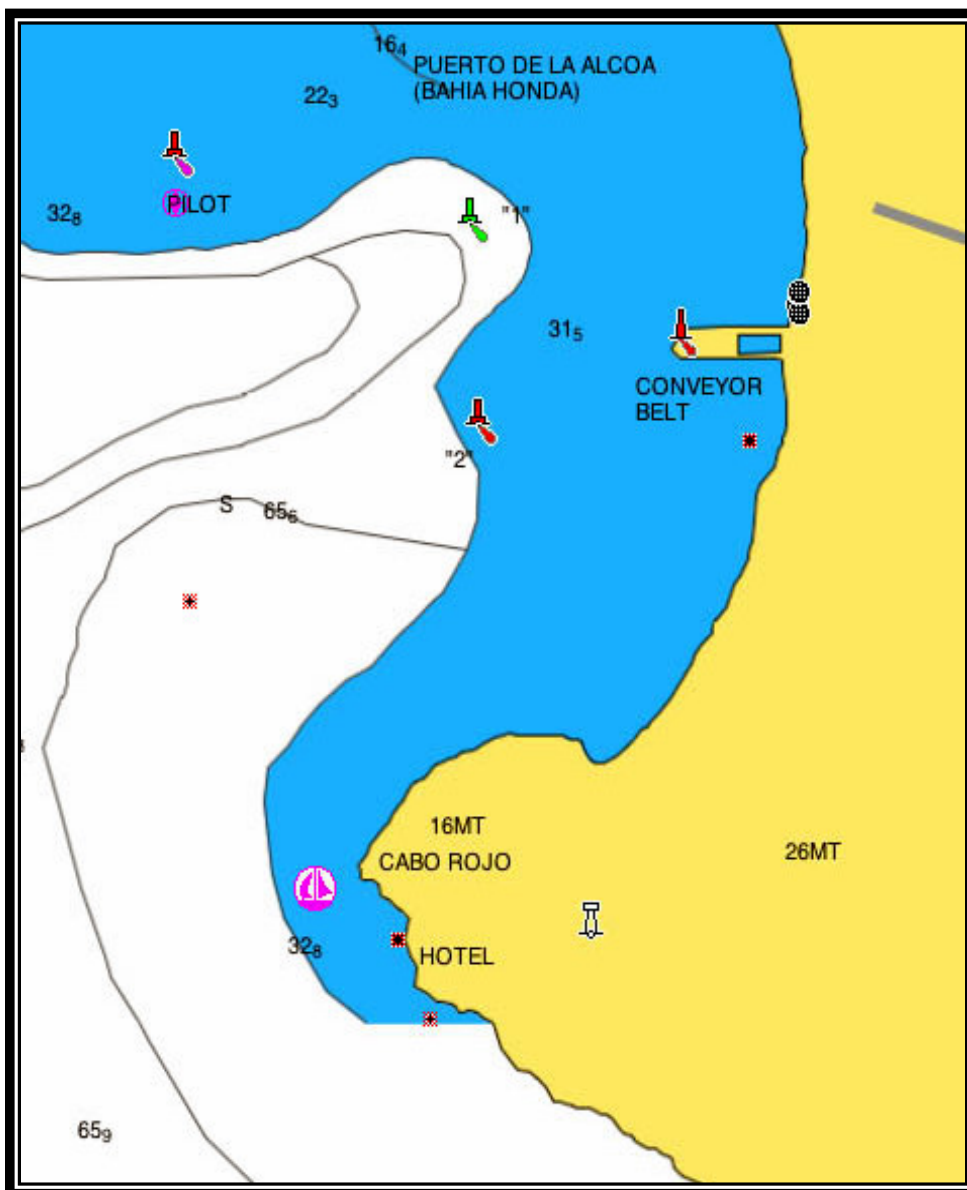


Figure 10. Cabo Rojo

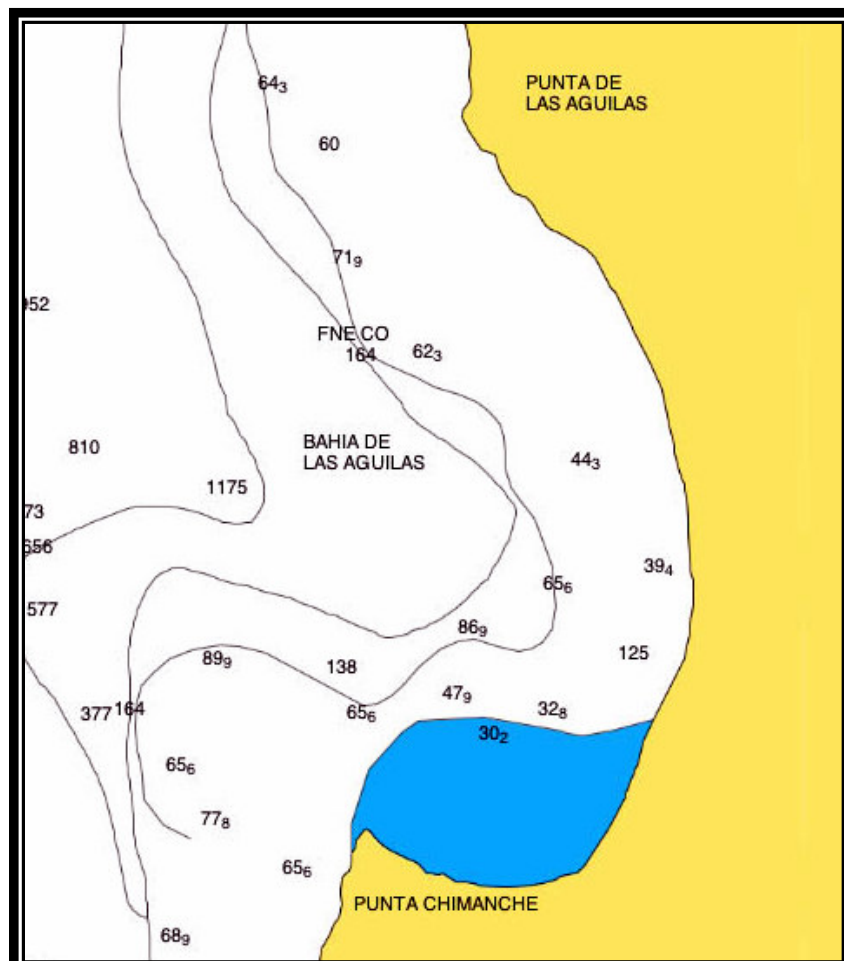
A good resting stop, especially in bad weather, is situated just north of Cabo Rojo. You will find protection from all points except the west or southwest. Low hills give shelter from the seas although the wind may well persist. Between a commercial building to the east and a bauxite mine to the west

lies a small beach with a building on the shoreline. You can anchor in twelve feet opposite the building although the bottom has many patches of rock.

Despite loading activities at the bauxite mine continuing throughout the night there is little else to stop one from getting a good night's rest. This anchorage is best if you are confronted with a strong SE wind coupled with a desire to come to a stop. It is *not* a pretty anchorage! **If you can make it to Bahía de las Águilas just a bit further east, it is a MUCH better choice.** Bahía de las Águilas is *extraordinary*. If you can go the extra 5 miles, you will have transformed an anchorage into a lifetime memorable event.

Bahía de las Águilas

17°50.59N 071°38.30 W (anchorage)



Five miles south of Cabo Rojo, you enter into the Bahía de las Águilas. (Bay of Eagles) The Bay is quite large. From the NE corner to the SE corner you will find great anchoring spots. I like to anchor in front of the “picnic building”, an observation tower in the NE corner (**17°50.246N 071°37.982W**).

The bay is not connected to the mainland by any major roads, so you will not find hotels, stores or restaurants. What you will find is nature at its best. An abundance of wildlife. White sand beaches and crystal water. There is nothing at all to do but walk on the beach, swim and dream. If you do not like isolation, do not come to this anchorage as most times you will be the only boat, perhaps the only person, there. You will see a few fishermen on land and in their boats, and they may come over to offer you fish and lobster. The sunsets are in a class of their own.

The Bay of Eagles is one of those rare spots that are increasingly hard to find in today’s world. This is cruising the way it was when I first started sailing. You drop the hook and you are in a world of your own. And if another boat comes in, unless otherwise indicated, you keep your distance. Call it what you like, sailing etiquette or common sense; everyone likes their privacy. And here the one thing you can find for sure *is privacy*.

Nothing stays the same forever and while the bay is still devoid of development, you can now follow the coast line in your dinghy about a mile north of the north part of the bay and you will see Rancho Tipico. This is a very nice beach restaurant that has some boats that bring tourists down to the bay to enjoy the beach. If you are anchored and see people on the beach and there are no other boats anchored, it is likely they came from this new establishment via “una lancha” (a small launch). The owner, Santiago Rodriguez is a nice fellow who will go out of his way to help you with meals in his restaurant, take out food that you can bring back to your boat, diving expeditions and local area information; he speaks English.



Bahia de Las Aguilas anchorage



**I like to anchor in the north corner of the bay within sight of this shed.
In prevailing wind, it is the most protected spot.**

Isla Beata (Beata Island)

17°36.512N 71°31.886W (anchorage)

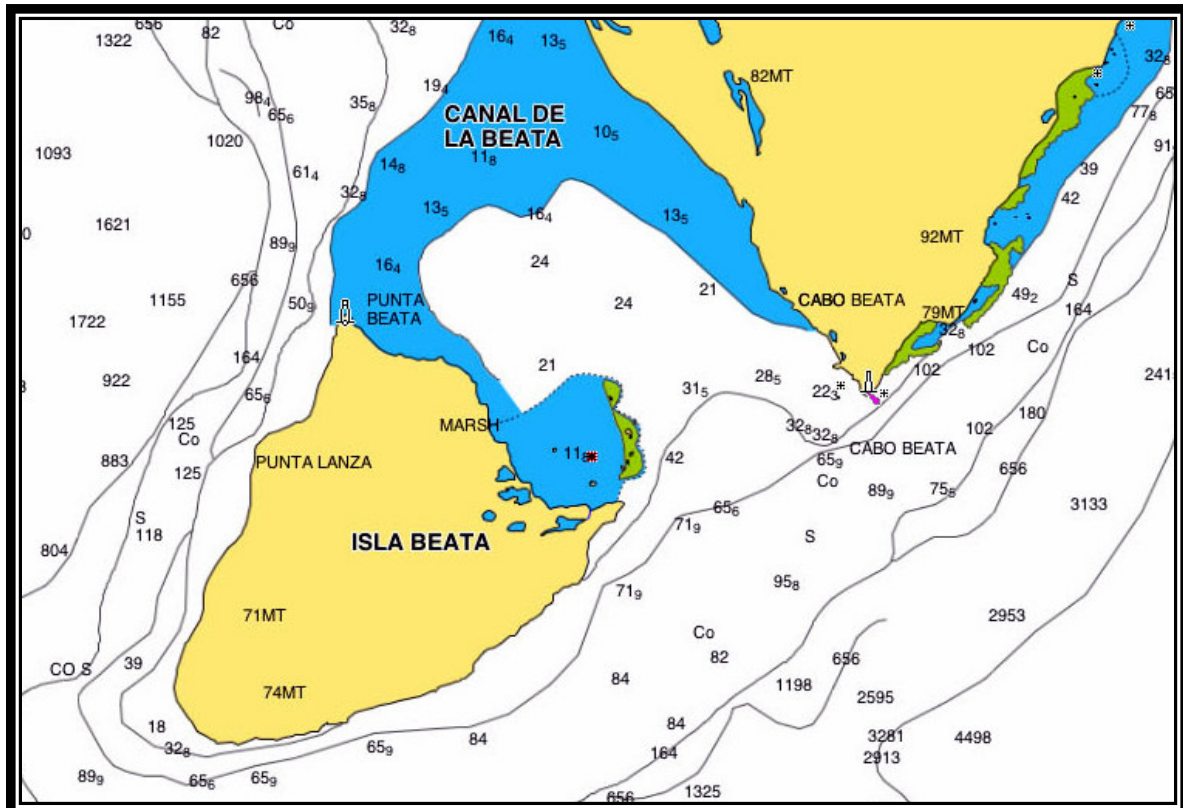


Figure 12. ISLA BEATA (depths in meters)

In the northwestern corner of this island, you can anchor in twelve feet of water. The bottom is hard sand with rocky patches; make sure you lay out plenty of scope in case the wind comes up. Position yourself in view of the Marina de Guerra post (look for the DR flag), midway along the sandy beach.

One of the nicest aspects of this anchorage is the combination of clear water and beautiful skies. It is beautiful here as the Cape at Beata sets this island 60 miles out to sea.



Anchorage at Isla Beata - the Comandancia

Along the palm fringed beach are fishermen's huts as well as many small fishing boats anchored off the steep shoreline. This is a comfortable anchorage, perhaps a place to enjoy walks along the beach, swimming and relaxing in the warm Caribbean air. In total silence at night, you can stare upward and count the stars. If you do go to shore, you will meet the fishermen who live here from time to time. They will sell you fish if you so desire.

The Coast Guardsmen will come out in a fishing boat to "visit" you. You cannot clear at Isla Beata and they will ask you where you are going. So many boats now stop at Beata that they have become accustomed to them. Invite them aboard and tell them what you want to do. Give them a small tip, plus a small bottle of rum for the fisherman who will be waiting in his craft alongside.



There are also a great number of Iguanas on the island.

You will see many of them. Please do not touch or feed; they are protected.



On this day, the fishermen were “wind bound” with winds over 30 knots. What they wanted to know most from me was what I thought the wind forecast might be for tomorrow. *Note: Do not shoot a photo like this without first asking permission!*

WHEN YOU ARE READY TO LEAVE ISLA BEATA (heading East)

You have a choice of either passing south of the island OR going through the **BEATA CANAL** (which separates Isla Beata from the mainland). Unless you want to spend more time at sea, use the canal as it is simple and direct. The canal has 9' of water at the west end and 24' at the east end. I spent a few hours poking around but could find no underwater obstacles that are not shown on the chart. On Figure 12 above, note that the canal depth is shown in *meters*.

Weather

The Cape at Beata is large enough, and reaches far enough out to sea, to create windy conditions. Even if the wind is from the northeast, the cape will shift it to the east. The wind accelerates at the cape and the normal 15 knot Trade Wind can become 20 to 25 knots.

The Katabatic Wind is of no help here as you are too far out at sea and off the coast for those winds to reach you.

STRATEGY FOR ROUNDING CAPE BEATA ~ HEADING EAST

It depends largely on the time of the year and your schedule. If it is early in the Trade Wind season, say from November through March, you can wait for a strong norther to come down from the states. As the norther passes and concludes for a day or so, depending on its strength, the norther will stall the Trade Wind and make for very light easterly winds, if there is wind at all. In a case like this, you can head to Barahona, Salinas or directly to Boca Chica; perhaps motor sailing.

The alternative is to use the accelerated winds to EITHER head on a port tack offshore or on a starboard tack along the Cape's eastern shore. If you head offshore on a port tack, keep heading out to sea until you are able to come back on a starboard tack with a heading for either Barahona or Salinas; whichever you prefer. Or you can go through the canal and take a port tack along the east coast of the Cape heading north to Barahona. In such a case, you can either call at Barahona OR as you reach a point just north of latitude 18 degrees north, which is directly across from Salinas, you can change course and head east. At this point, you will be far enough up bay and sufficiently close to the mainland that the Katabatic Wind at night will make for calm conditions (provided the Trade Wind did not blow higher than 20 knots true wind during the day). In other words, you go through the canal during the day, bear off to port on a starboard tack heading for Barahona in a close reach with apparent wind in the 20 to 30 knot range and when far enough up bay as the sun goes down, turn east towards Salinas using the Katabatic Wind on a port tack.

Barahona (up bay— northwest side)

18°09.21N 70°57.13W

51.0 nm from Isla Beata

Barahona is a wonderful town and from there you may choose to visit Lago Enriquillo and Isla Cabrito as well as other sites in that area such as Las Caritas, located at the southwest part of the Lake. The caves are not extensive but the Taino (Native American) drawings are nice to see.

This harbor is well protected and easy to visit. There are buoys marking the entrance channel to the starboard of a reef, which extends offshore. The safest approach is from the ENE. Once past the entrance buoys, there are numerous marker buoys leading the way to the anchorage basin. Take extra caution at night since many of the buoys are unlit. You may anchor tucked into the northeast corner of the small basin. You will also find a small marina located there that may be able to accommodate you.

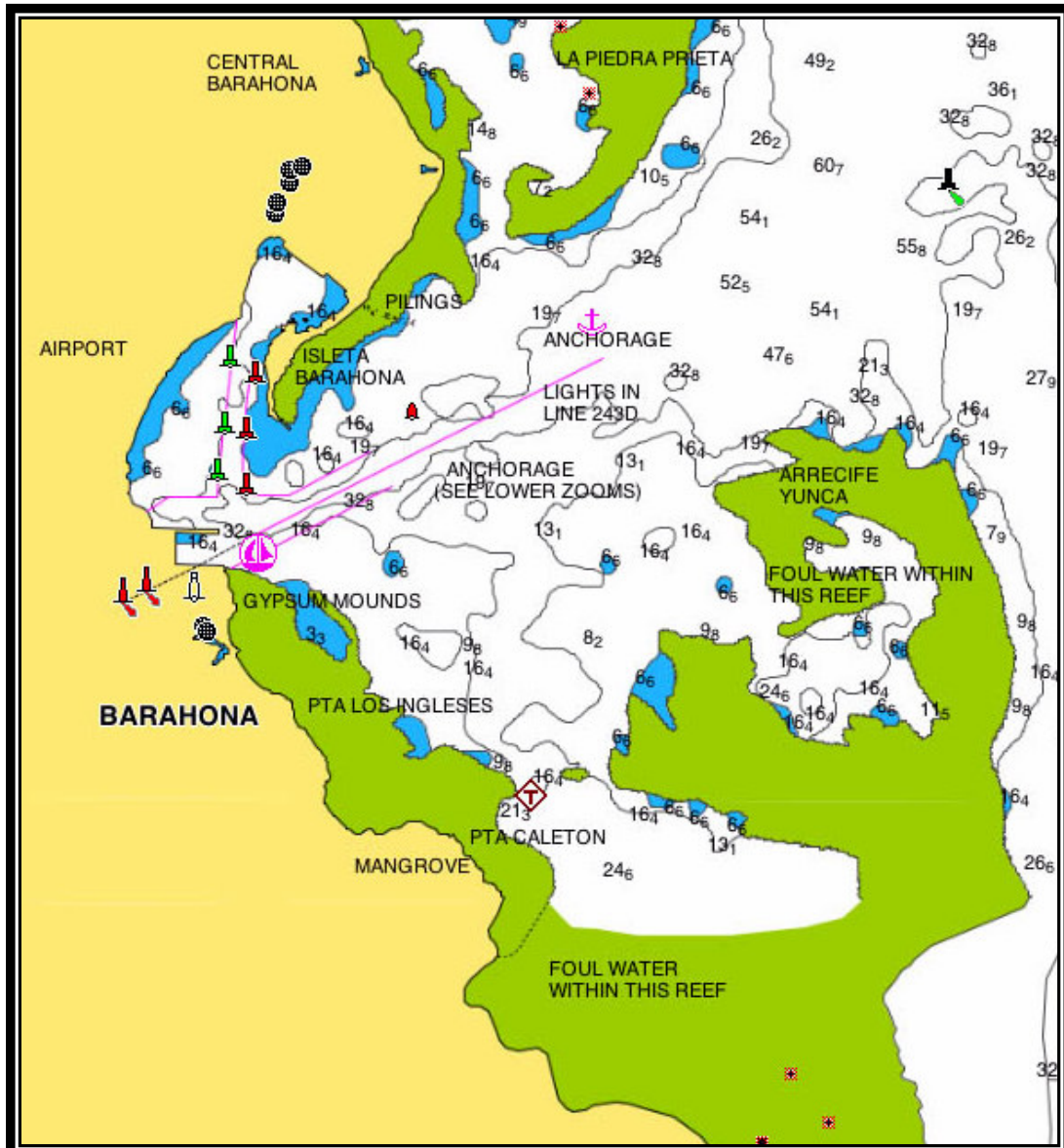


Figure 13. Barahona



Club Nautico “El Manati”

The anchorage is directly in front of the marina.

You may also tie up to the commercial pier jutting out from the town in the southwest corner. The fee is per foot per day or any part of a day and, at this writing, it was \$0.70 US per foot. This rate is standardized for all government wharfs in the country. The wharf or docks (*muelle*) are run by the *Portuario* agency, and if you tie up, they will require you to pay for 24 hours, even if it is for a short period of time.



Government wharf (muelle) at Barahona

The Coast Guard and Immigration facilities are a few feet from the wharf.

Although the harbor is not the prettiest, the town is well supplied for provisioning with a variety of supermarkets and a huge fruit and vegetable market, internet, banks, restaurants and cafes. The church near the city park is worthy of a photo or two. Barahona is a place that hums with activity and one which will get you suitably stocked up for your onward journey.



**Fruit and vegetable
produce at the
Barahona market**



The market is extensive; some parts of it open and other parts under the cover of tarps. It is colorful and safe.

I say hello to everyone and smile, and everyone has always been very nice to me over the many visits I have made. Do not wear jewelry and do not flash cash.

A little Spanish helps and goes a long way. However, if you do not speak the language, point out what you want. People will be very anxious to help you and it is rare that you will encounter someone who will look to overcharge you.



The sheer quantity and vivid colors will take you to another place and time.





Barahona is known for the quality and size of its plantains. They are the best in the country and available everywhere in the towns along the way.



I purchased 5 pounds of sweet potatoes from her (they were huge). She charged me \$.50 US (fifty cents).



If you get hungry walking through the market, there are vendors who sell fried food. She told me she makes the best “Johnny Cakes.” You can also see “Tostones” (fried plantains that are round) on the tray as well as other fried specialties from the area. The food is safe to eat, provided your stomach can handle fried food; **very fried.**

Onshore Information

If you dinghy to or moor your boat alongside the main jetty, the road heading uphill from the jetty is your most direct entry into town.

Just south of Barahona is the mine for the semi precious stone, Larimar. **Larimar**, also called “Stefilia's Stone”, is a rare blue variety of Pectolite found only in the Dominican Republic. Its coloration varies from white, light-blue, green-blue to deep blue, the range unique to the Dominican Republic. Larimar is one of two semi precious stones found in the DR; the other being amber, which is actually fossilized plant resin. However, amber is found only in the north and the east, while Larimar is found in the south.



As you shop in Barahona, you will see the stone normally mounted on silver at different places. It can also be found at Larimar shops where they polish the stone and mount it, along the highway going south from Barahona towards the beaches.

Larimar

There are a number of travel agencies that can offer you an excursion to Lago Enriquillo, home to abundant wildlife, including crocodiles!



Figure 14. Lago Enriquillo in the western Dominican Republic

Lake Enriquillo is one of only a few saltwater lakes in the world inhabited by crocodiles. It covers an area of 102 square miles (265 km²) and is the lowest point in the Caribbean lying 129 feet (39 m) below sea level.

There are 3 islands in the lake: *Isla Barbarita*, *Islita*, and *Isla Cabritos*. The last one is the largest of all and contains a National Park famous for its crocodiles and flamingos. If you get to the lake before 12PM, the park attendants can help you with a boat that will take you from the shore to the island for a tour.

The entrance to the park is on the road at the southwest side of the lake and is marked. It is east of Las Caritas.





These fellows wait around lazily in the sun for a nice tourist to come and give them something to eat.

When you arrive at the entrance, aside from the park ranger, you will meet many of these rather large iguanas (size of a large cat) walking around waiting for you to feed them. The authorities prefer that you do not give them anything as they then lose their motivation to hunt their own food sources.



You will find the Park Ranger at the entrance very friendly and anxious to assist. **HOWEVER**, he will probably speak only Spanish; if you do not, you will have to improvise. Point to the boat and say “ISLA CABRITO” (HICE LA CA BRITO). He will understand that. Tips are always appreciated by everyone as workers in this area are paid about \$10,000 pesos per month (just over \$200 US).

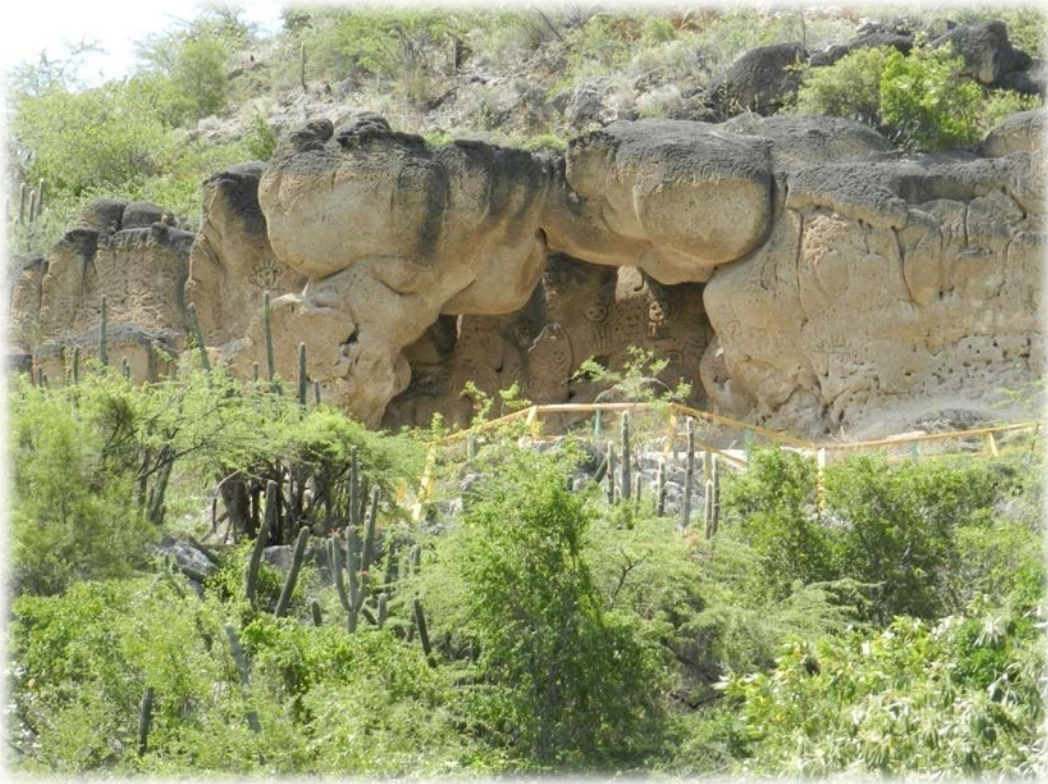


**View of Lago Enriquillo from the cave at “Las Caritas”;
dark area above the trees to far right is “Isla Cabrito”**

The lake is named after Enriquillo, a Taíno cacique who led a rebellion against the Spaniards in the early 16th century.

Lake Enriquillo, the largest lake in the Dominican Republic, has no surface outlet. The lake's water level varies due to a combination of storm-driven precipitation patterns and the region's high evaporation rate. However, in the last decade the water level has risen significantly, flooding farmland, roads, and towns. A great deal of farmland has been lost that will be unrecoverable if and when the lake recedes because of salt deposits left behind. Salinity in the lake can vary from 33 ppt (parts/trillion) to over 100 ppt. These concentrations are relatively low, but the range is significant and related to the cycles of precipitation and evaporation.

Scientists are studying the reason for the lake's rise. The lake area has increased from 164 square kilometers to more than double that amount.



Cave at Las Caritas



Las Caritas

Las Caritas ("The faces") is a collection of Native American inscriptions in a rock formation looking out at Lago Enriquillo. The place is also called **Trono de Enriquillo** or "Enriquillo's throne" because it is said the Taíno leader camped here during his rebellion.

NOTE:

If you have your boat in Barahona and want to visit Lago Enriquillo, it is **BEST** that you take a tour with a tour guide from Barahona. The lake can be reached by car, but signs along the way are sketchy, the terrain remote and many times without rest stops, etc. A guide knows his way and can take you there and back safely. Worth the cost!

The distance from Barahona to the lake as the crow flies is 40 to 60 miles depending on what part of the lake you go to. However, in a car or bus it is not a “highway run” and will take longer than you anticipate. If you want to get there before 12PM to be able to go to Isla Cabrito, be sure to depart early from Barahona.

The correct name for Barahona is SANTA CRUZ DE BARAHONA. Barahona city isn't the prettiest of Caribbean towns but it is good for shopping and, also, if you want to go south by car along the coast to visit some of the famous beaches. Founded in 1802, the city has fallen on hard times due to the local sugar mill closing. Still, the locals are friendly and the city does have a couple of good hotels, making it a useful base to explore the undeveloped coastline that stretches to the west of the city. If you decide to stick around, head to the Malecón, which is quite beautiful, or the parque central, a major hangout at night.

The township of Barahona is currently renovating the entire waterfront to include an open air theatre as well as other attractions.

Part of the waterfront will be dedicated to exhibits from the time of the height of the sugar industry including this restored steam locomotive that pulled the sugar cane train to the plant.



Puerto Viejo de Azua (east side of the bay, north)

18°19.634N 70°50.334W

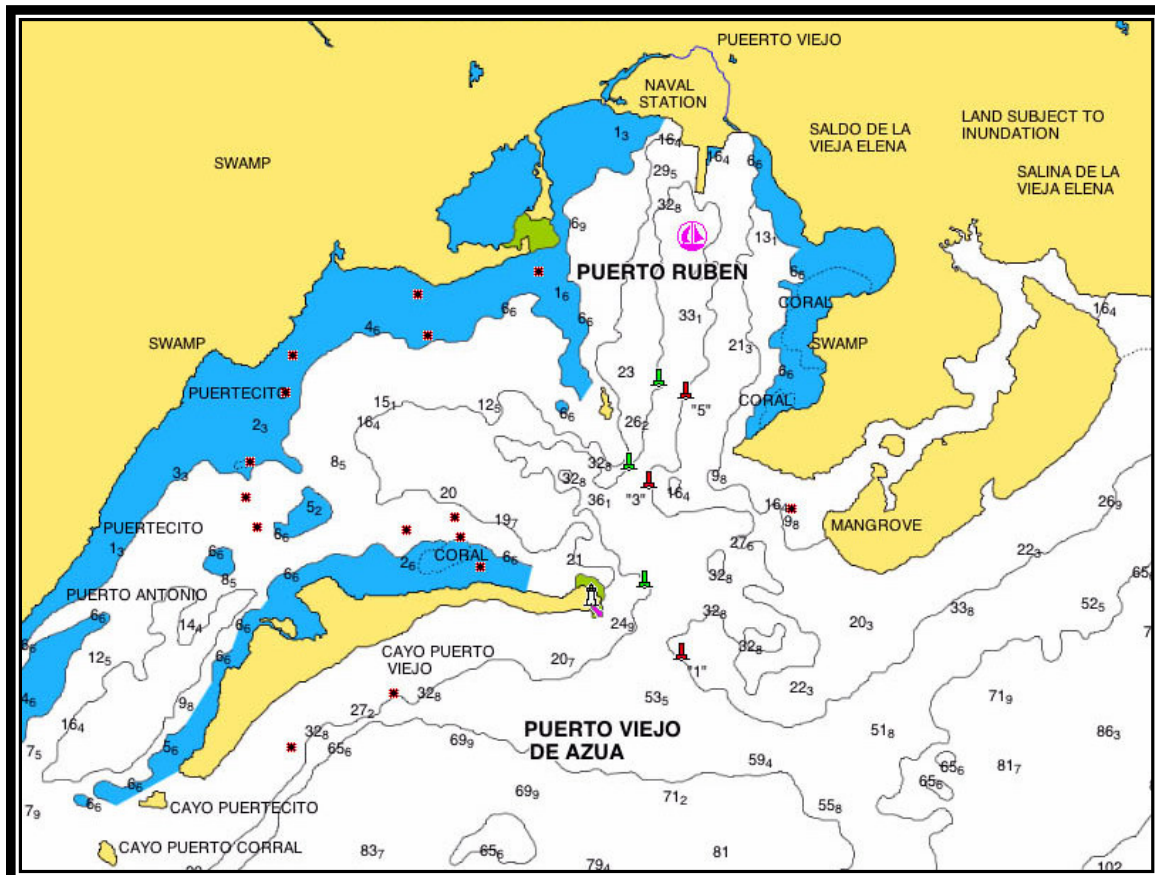


Figure 15. Puerto Viejo de Azua

This is a commercial facility and not set up for the cruising sailor. In addition, there is a naval base in the harbor. The entire northern bay is set up for drug interdiction and the base monitors heavily land and water traffic to and from Haiti. Should you choose to go up and enter the harbor, or anchor a few miles east at the northern part of the bay (Playa Caracoles), chances are you will be boarded by the Coast Guard as well as other agencies. And if you do not have a *despacho* to the area, matters can become complicated. Best you simply avoid this area. The chart shows a few anchorages near Playa Caracoles, but even if you anchored, there is no reasonable way to get to land and if you did make shore there is nothing of note to interest you.

Palmar de Ocoa (east side of bay, north of Salinas)

18°17.93N 70°35.16W

A beautiful anchorage with a quaint Dominican town. The houses along the beach are owned primarily by wealthy Dominicans who live in Santo Domingo. I anchor toward the north side of this anchorage as that is where the water shoals to 15' and less. Holding is good. Directly to the south of you is a beach and you will see local fishing boats up on the sand alongside the docks and gazebos. That is where you can land your dinghy. As you dock and walk up to town there is the local fish monger. She is a long time resident and really engaging to speak with (she speaks some English as she has children who live in the US). She will sell you freshly caught fish. The town itself is small and laid back (as is the entire south side of the DR). There are a few grocery stores and walking through the town is delightful.



Anchorage at Palmar de Ocoa

Salinas (east side of the bay at the south tip)

18°12.42N 70°35.01W

28.0 nm from Barahona

As you approach Las Salinas from the south, be careful of a “fish farm” or “fish trap” located at approximately **18°13N 70°33S**. The Bay of Calderas measures two miles by one mile with sandy beaches all along the northern shore. The mountain vistas as you approach the harbor are dramatic and inspiring. Once inside the wide entrance, having followed the red and green marker buoys, a channel will lead you to the southwestern part of the bay. This is an easy approach, well marked, with a sand bottom. You will anchor in front of the Salinas Hotel and Restaurant.

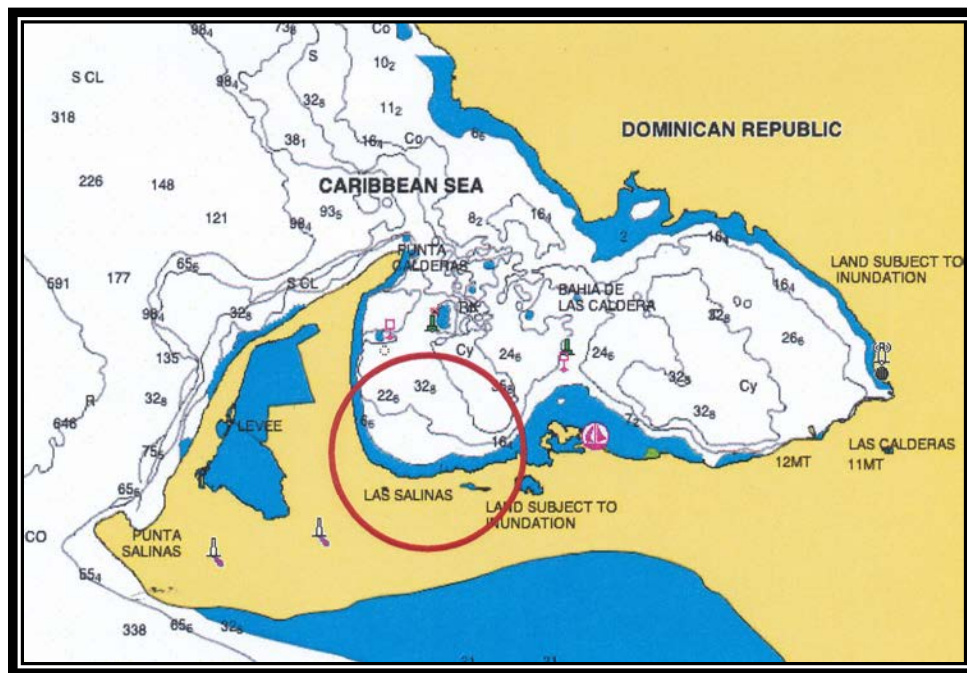


Figure 17. Las Salinas on the Bay of Calderas

The proprietor, Jorge Domenech, speaks perfect English and will help you in any way he can. The restaurant is excellent (breakfast, lunch and dinner); the prices moderate. Eat at the hotel and you can use their Wi-Fi at no charge, and perhaps they will let you take on fresh water. The hotel also sells diesel fuel and can be counted on to get you a repairman from the commercial wharf if you need mechanical repairs.

You may anchor almost anywhere in the bay although the most convenient area for getting ashore is outside the marina/hotel where the depth is twelve feet with good holding in sand. On the south shore is a large salt lake and buildings associated with salt production, from whence comes the name “Salinas.” Views within the anchorage are beautiful and the water in the bay is clear.

Walk through and behind the hotel to the village of Salinas, which is a very typical Dominican waterside village. The nightlife is bustling and loud.



Figure 18. Las Salinas detail

This is a good stopping off place before continuing onward to Boca Chica to the east or westward toward Haiti. You can clear in or out in Las Salinas with customs and immigration. If this is your first point of entry, you **must** clear in. The hotel can call the authorities for you.

In Town

You will find a few small supermarkets (*colmados* and *bodegas*) where you can buy essentials and fresh produce. Not much else as the town is very small.



Hotel/Restaurant Salinas



Looking north across the Bay of Calderas

Punta Palenque

18°14.082N 070°10.152W (anchorage)

Puerto Palenque, just west of Punta Palenque, is a wonderful stop and a great anchorage, *provided* the wind is out of the NE or E. Any wind from the south makes this anchorage untenable. Anchor west behind the small reef and as far north as you can in 6' to 10' of water. The further north you anchor, the better is the protection that the reef affords.

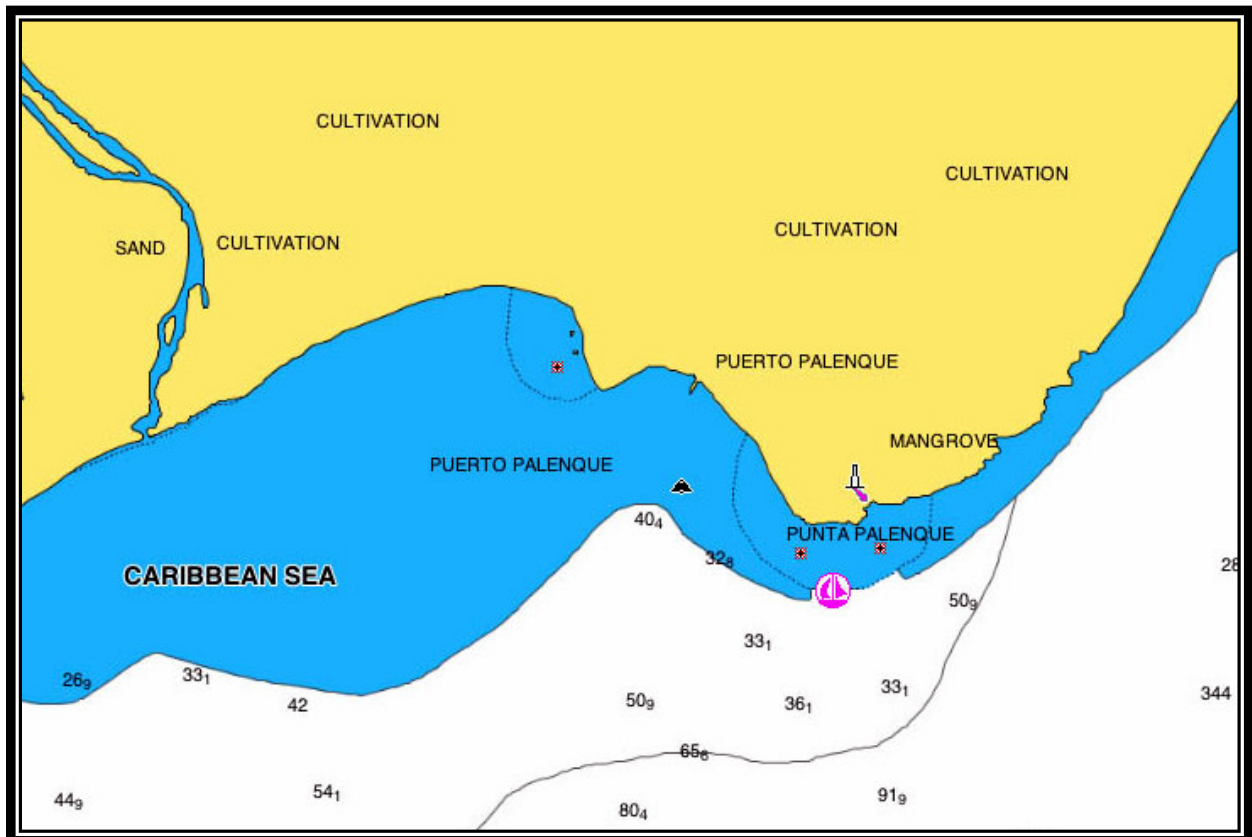


Figure 19. Puerto Palenque



Reef at Palenque

You will probably be visited by a Coast Guard (*Marina de Guerra*) officer. Show him your *despacho* going east or west. Explain that you are stopping to take a break. The fishermen will come out to offer you fresh fish and lobster. **YOU MAY NOT STAY ANCHORED HERE OVERNIGHT.**

I love stopping at Palenque when the wind is right. It is pretty, with panoramic views of the Caribbean and a nice little beach. Buy some fish, take a swim and relax! Just before the sun sets when you depart the anchorage, you can head east or west and once the sun is down, most nights will allow you to sail along the coast in light wind coming off the land; the Katabatic Wind.

Puerto de Haina

18°25.13N 70°01.80W

Just west of Santo Domingo



Figure 20. Puerto de Haina

This port is a commercial port with a reputation for theft from commercial ships. It is dirty and unattractive, and the river is polluted. There is a marina up the river for local boats. **Except in an emergency, you should avoid this port.**

Santo Domingo

18°27.61N 69°53.02W

50 nm from Salinas



Figure 21. Santo Domingo on the Rio Ozama

Santo Domingo is the capital of the Dominican Republic and a hive of activity. The port is well marked with a small marina on the starboard side of the channel entering. Unfortunately, the area gets fouled with floating vegetation, oil slicks and garbage. On the west side of the channel is a huge power plant and all around is the noise of the city. The river has a strong current and is dirty. Adjacent to the marina is the floating bridge with nonstop traffic. The authorities are really set up to handle clearance of commercial vessels.



Locals playing dominos at “El Conde” in Santo Domingo

El Conde is a major shopping street that is frequented largely by tourists. Be sure to hold onto your pocketbooks and wear no jewelry that can be “snatched” from you.

Unless you have a compelling reason for wanting to be here (there is only the small marina; no place to anchor) it is better to go east to Boca Chica (San Andrés). From there, it is only a short ride back to Santo Domingo by car or bus.

Available in Santo Domingo

There are well equipped hospitals and medical facilities in Santo Domingo. There are also numerous other stores that offer virtually anything you want, from clothespins to a new Mercedes Benz.

La Caleta (Just N and W of airport)
0.5 nm from Port of Andres (Boca Chica)

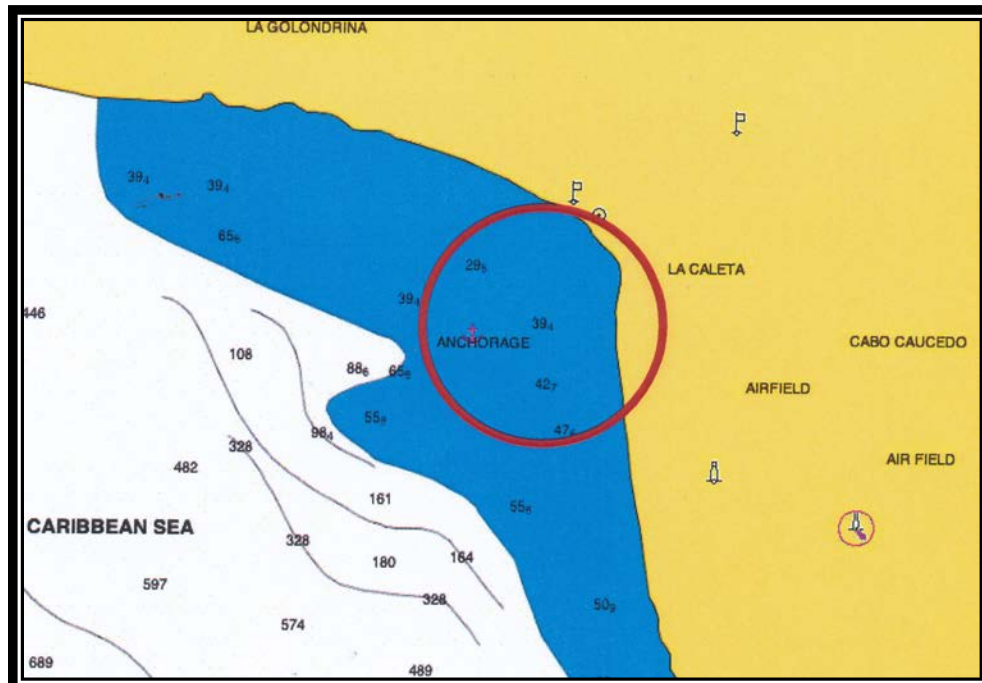


Figure 22. La Caleta

Just to the west of Boca Chica and before Santo Domingo is the anchorage of La Caleta. The area is a national park and you can scuba dive here.

For divers, La Caleta is a submarine national park where floats mark various wrecks. There are moorings to use so that you do not have to use your anchor. The park rangers can generally be reached on channel VHF 16. Call "LA CALETA NATIONAL PARK". The anchorage is at **18°26.52N 69°41.05W**.

YOU MAY NOT ANCHOR HERE OVERNIGHT.

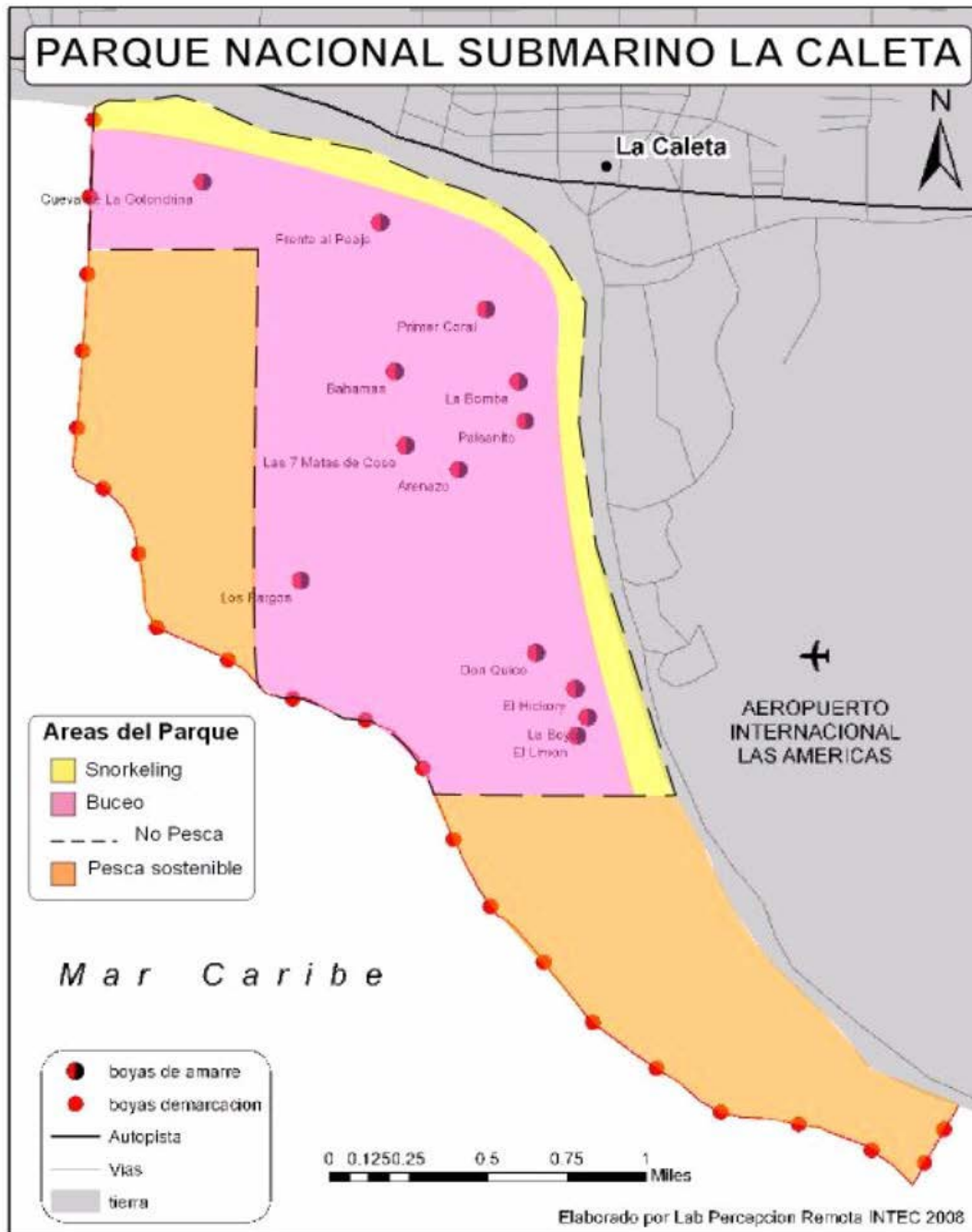


Figure 23. La Caleta Submarine Park

Port of Andres (Boca Chica)

18°25.50N 69°36.67W

18.0 nm from Santo Domingo

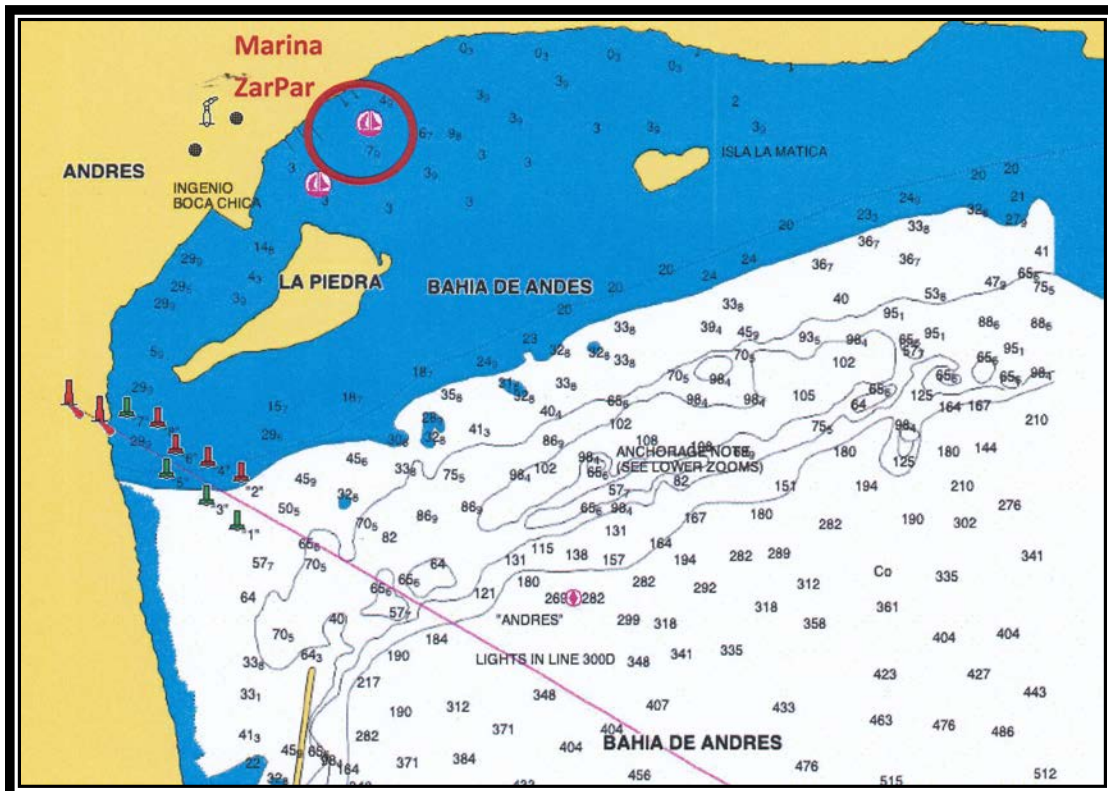


Figure 24. Port of Andres/Boca Chica, with depths

The Port of Boca Chica is clearly defined by its giraffe-like loading cranes, which are easily visible on the coastline. If you like, you can call Marina ZarPar on VHF Channel 5. The staff will assist your arrival and will often send out a pilot boat to guide you in.



Follow the red and green marker buoys into the channel and pass the entrance to the commercial area on the port side. Continue to starboard into the area behind La Piedra Island where shelter is assured due to the island and a continuous reef. Pass Club Nautico, a private yacht club, to the port side and continue on to Marina ZarPar (www.marinazarpar.com). **Favor port entering and stay as close to the yacht club facility as possible or you may touch bottom (sandy). Once you pass the yacht club continue to favor the port side, leaving the speed velocity buoy to starboard.**

Marina ZarPar is a fully equipped marina. They offer electricity at the slips, free water, free internet and Wi-Fi, laundromat, bathrooms with hot water showers, fuel dock, haulage to 70 tons, etc. There are slips for boats up to 100' as well as excellent moorings, which allow the user the full use of the marina facilities.



Figure 25. Marina ZarPar, protected by La Piedra Island and the reef



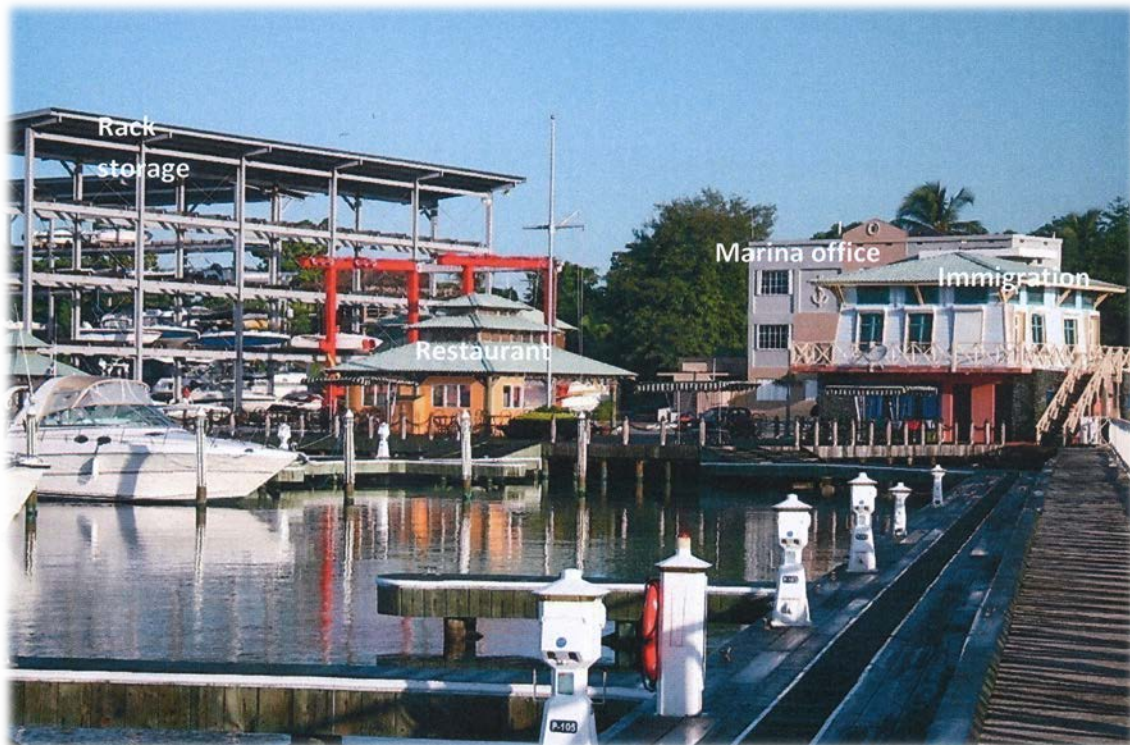
Marina ZarPar

Currently, you can anchor behind the island of La Piedra (just south of the yacht club), or pick up a mooring at Marina ZarPar.

Anchoring is not permitted east of the marina in front of the beach, or in front of the marina in the channel. The marina will rent you a mooring very inexpensively if you do not want a slip. The mooring will give you the right to use the marina facilities as well.

During the weekend local small boats and jet skis zoom around the anchorage and may speed close to your boat. Screaming at them will not deter them. In addition, at times, those on the public beach play very loud music. All of this is part and parcel of the culture. If you are not willing to accept it, plan not to be in this harbor over the weekend.





Marina ZarPar upland

The restaurant at the marina serves a variety of local dishes priced inexpensively. Orders to go can also be arranged. With the international airport just seven miles away and Santo Domingo just twelve, you will find this a convenient stop for maintenance projects and perhaps a long term stay. Security is excellent. Immigration authorities are conveniently located in the marina.

The marina will take you in their vehicle free to Boca Chica or to the new supermarket (Ole) a few miles west. The supermarket will bring you back free. The store is modern and very well stocked and accepts credit cards.

The harbor is situated adjacent to the town of Andrés to the west and Boca Chica to the east. Both towns have banks, pharmacies, and food stores. Boca Chica is more geared to the tourist and Andrés more geared to local Dominican life.



Banco Popular ATM machines can be found at the southwest corner of the park in Boca Chica. On the southeast corner is a small supermarket stocked with canned and packaged foods. Half a block from the park going east (enter the small mall) is a fine Italian delicatessen called Punta Italia which is very well stocked for those that have a desire for authentic Italian food.



While Boca Chica is a tourist town with a number of hotels, it is also a town with a near non-stop social scene and is **VERY WELL KNOWN** for the availability of the opposite sex if you want to party. Be careful!

Also, if you wonder why there are so many Italian restaurants, it is because there is a large Italian resident population in Boca Chica who arrived many years ago. They get along with the local Dominican population but exist side by side; each to their own cultures and language.



Beach at Boca Chica

Onshore Information

There is a yacht chandlery that is situated just half a block to the west of the marina. They speak English and will help you find what you need. If it isn't in stock they will order it in for you.

As you exit the marina, on your right side is a dirt road, which is a pleasant three-quarter mile walk between Andrés and Boca Chica along the beach.

Walk it ONLY during the day.



Boca Chica –main street



Along the path to Boca Chica...



Sit, relax, have a beer in the shade, buy a painting and some sea shells.



If you leave the marina and go west instead of east, you will be heading toward the Las Americas International Airport, which is about 7 miles, and the capital, Santo Domingo, which is about 12 miles. Also on the same road going toward the airport and on the right (westbound) side is the OLE supermarket. It is modern, safe, well stocked and accepts credit cards.

San Pedro de Macoris

18°25.00N 69°18.46W

17.5 nm from Port of Andres (Boca Chica)

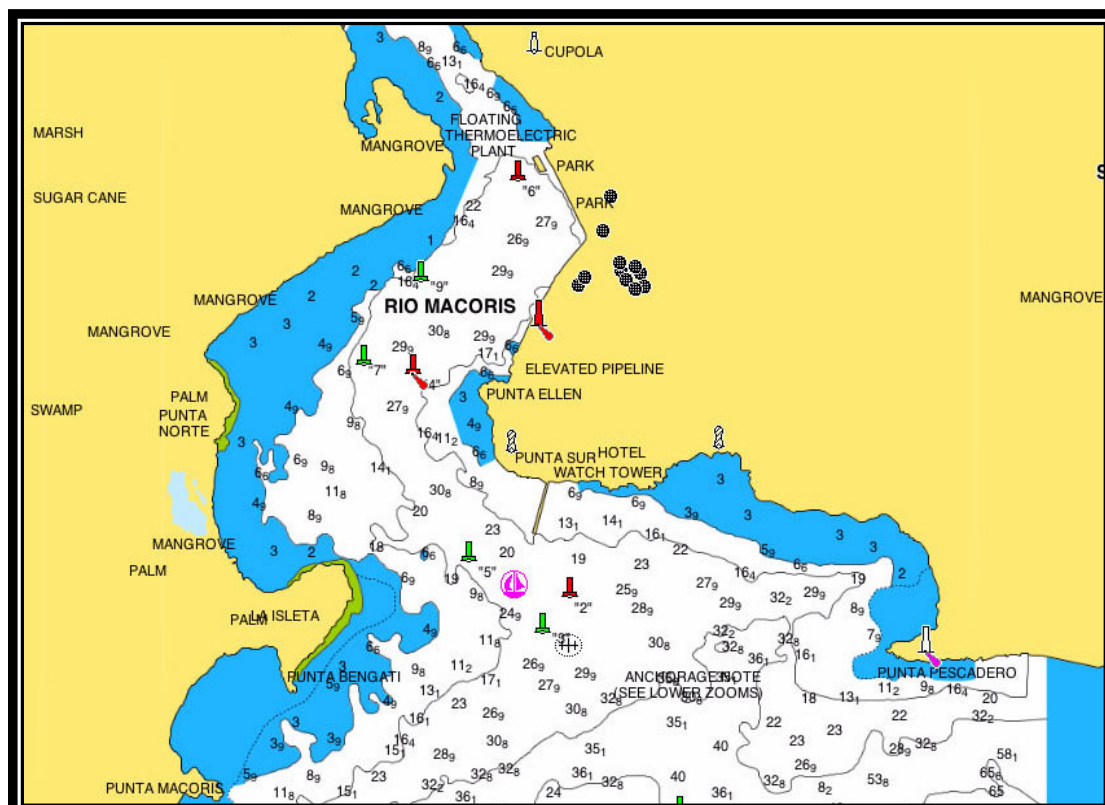


Figure 26. San Pedro de Macoris

Navigational Note

As you approach (going east) to the west of San Pedro de Macoris at **18°25'N 69°19'W** beware of mooring buoys for ships waiting to enter the port. They present a sizeable hazard, especially at night.

Entry into the river is well marked with buoys which need to be followed since there is a semi intact breakwater to the east side of entry and shallows along the east shore together with underwater debris. The mud bottom is churned up by the sugar refineries upstream and a floating power plant to the port side of the entry. These industrial facilities cause muddy water, poor air quality, and a bad smell. You may choose to anchor 200 yards short of the bridge, on the east side of the river.

AVOID THIS HARBOR except in an emergency.

Cumayasa River

18°22.97N 69°04.91W

13.0 nm from San Pedro de Macoris

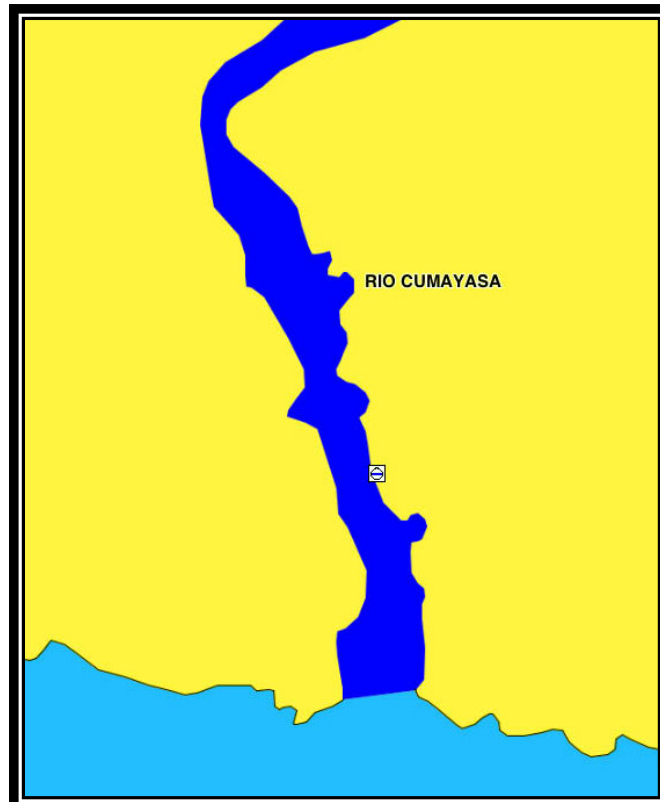


Figure 27. Rio Cumayasa and entrance

The entrance to the Cumayasa River is a quarter mile across but it blends into the shoreline, so look for the cement-block house on the west side and the large red and orange colored buildings of the Reina Hotel set back on the east side marking the entry point. There is 25' to 30' of water at the entrance with no bar or breaking water although one is advised to favor the port side going up river to avoid submerged debris and shallows to starboard. The depth is 7' to 11' in the river for a further 1.5 miles (in the shoal areas it can be as low as 5' to 6').

On the portside of the river, about a quarter mile up, is the Marina de Guerra post, which you may visit to announce your arrival. They always appreciate the fact that you have announced yourself, as many times they have to find a

fisherman and his boat to come out to your vessel. Next on the same side is the center of the village of Cumayasa dominated by boats and catamarans undergoing repair at the small yard. This facility does fiberglass repairs. There is no dock; only dinghy access to a rough slipway. The main Santo Domingo/La Romana road is four kilometers away with local transport available.



Mooring at the head of the Cumayasa River

Onshore Information

For all the local information visit the only *colmado* (general store) in this small community. Find Juana. If someone to help you isn't immediately available she will telephone them for you. Continue up river for 1.5 miles to find a developing facility on the starboard side, a low dock with up to 20 stern-to moorings. There is water from storage tanks but no drinking water or electricity. The inexpensive price to stay includes a night security guard. You may also access the main road from here. This is an interesting river to visit. It provides great protection from the elements and in the past has been used as a hurricane hole. The locals are always pleased to help and a friendly welcome can be expected. To travel up this river is to go back in time. Take your time.

Catalina Island

18°22.16N 69°01.40W

3.4nm from the entrance to the Cumayasa River.

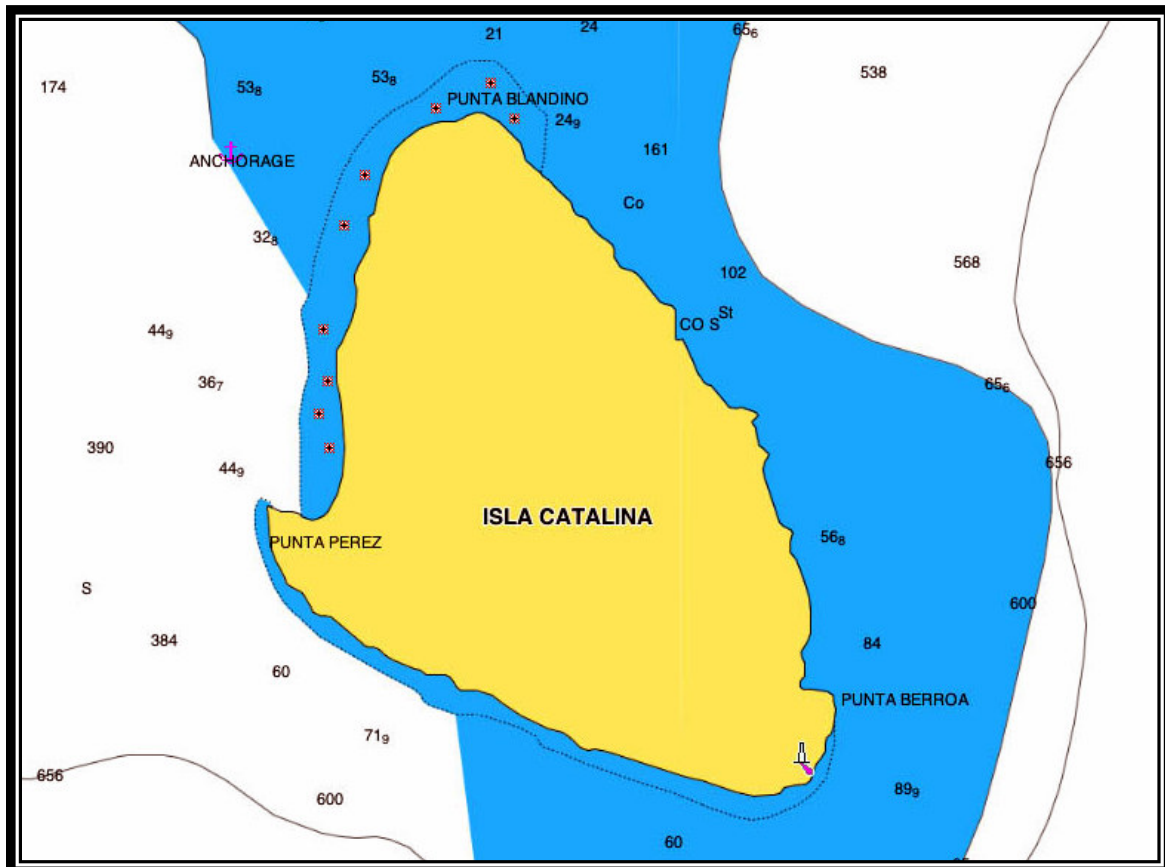


Figure 28. Isla Catalina

The island of Catalina can provide a small anchorage giving protection from the North through to the Southeast. There is 10 feet of water close in to the beach with a sandy bottom. This is a cruise ship stop. If you like mingling with cruise ship tourists, you will enjoy the beach, which looks like Times Square, NY on New Year's Eve anytime a cruise ship is in. You will not feel lonely here. **The anchorage tends to be roly with little to offer; as a result, I rarely stop here.**



Figure 30. La Romana detail

The town of La Romana and the Supermercado Jumbo are within walking distance to the east. This large supermarket is well stocked and provides a large variety of local and imported produce. Six blocks up from the front entrance of Jumbo is the main park of La Romana with a bandstand and metal sculptures built by local craftsmen; well worth a look. Behind the park is a magnificent church.



The bridge at La Romana

Onshore Information

You can get just about anything you may need in this vibrant town. The marker for your navigation around town is the Jumbo Supermarket. Continuing uphill all roads lead to the main road out of town going west towards the capital, Santo Domingo.

NOTE: While the town of La Romana is user friendly and has much to offer, I do not like anchoring on this river. The current is strong and the only place to anchor is close to the bridge. Unless you leave someone aboard your boat who is capable of moving the boat if the anchor drags, do not stop here. You can visit La Romana from the marina at Casa the Campo by taxi if you so desire much more safely.

Casa de Campo

18°23.47N 68°54.15W

2.13 nm from Catalina Island

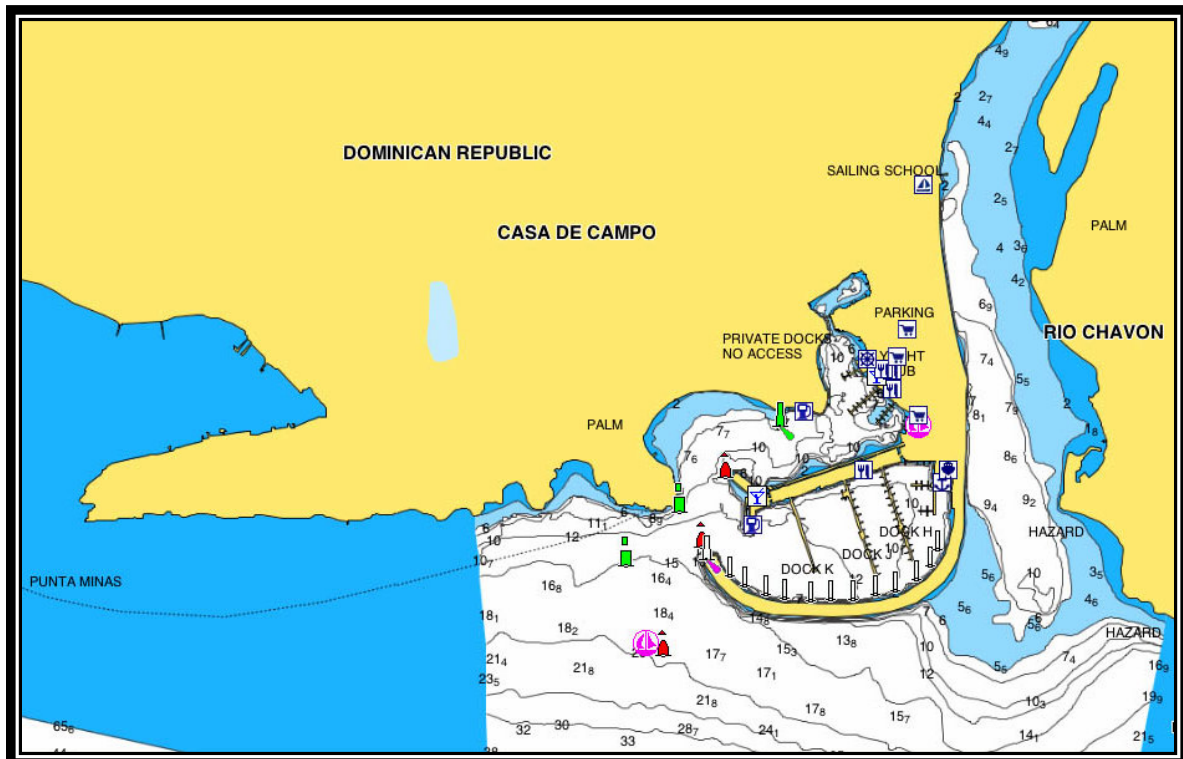


Figure 31. Casa de Campo: Punta Minas to Rio Chavon

The entrance to the marina is to the west of Rio Chavon and east of the small peninsula, Punta Minas. It is clearly marked with buoys. Offshore the marina can be contacted on VHF channel 16 or their working channel 68. They respond to Spanish, English, French and Italian.

Buoyage is good with depths of 11 to 15 feet throughout the marina. Pilot dinghies are sent to assist docking. There is an occasional slight swell with a tidal range of just 6 inches. Moor stern-to against static concrete quays with greenwood pilings.

There is water at each dock and 110v and 220v electricity is always available. Security is 24hrs with security cameras. Wi-Fi and internet (expensive at the dock, free in areas upland), restaurants, cafes, pharmacy and boatyard facilities are also available.



Figure 32. Casa de Campo Marina and environs

Casa de Campo Marina has every amenity the traveling yachtsman may need. Linked to the resort of Casa de Campo, which has golf, tennis, polo etc., the marina is situated six miles within the gated resort and eight miles from the town of La Romana. Restaurants and cafes are many and varied and should you crave some luxury there is a splendid hotel within the resort. It is worth visiting Altos de Chavón where international acts perform in the amphitheatre.

The whole area has been stylized as a medieval historic site with breathtaking views over the Chavón River. There are many fine restaurants and an art gallery, all accessible via cobbled walkways linking shady courtyards, and only three miles from the marina. The marina and the facilities of the complex are excellent, albeit not cheap.



Casa de Campo -- a marina resort with European style

The Marina at Casa de Campo is equipped with all of the modern services. It covers over 90,000 m² and it has 400 slips (ranging from 30' to 250'. both for private and transient boats), a shipyard, its very own yacht club and an exclusive shopping strip in the middle of a quaint setting.

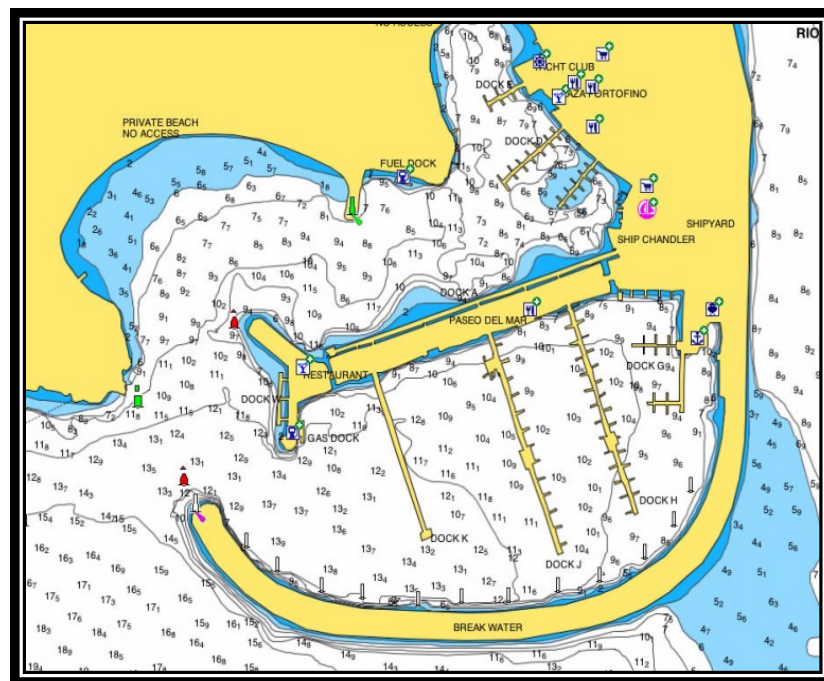


Figure 33. Casa de Campo Marina details

Bayahibe

18° 21.96N 68°51.13W

4.3 nm from Casa de Campo

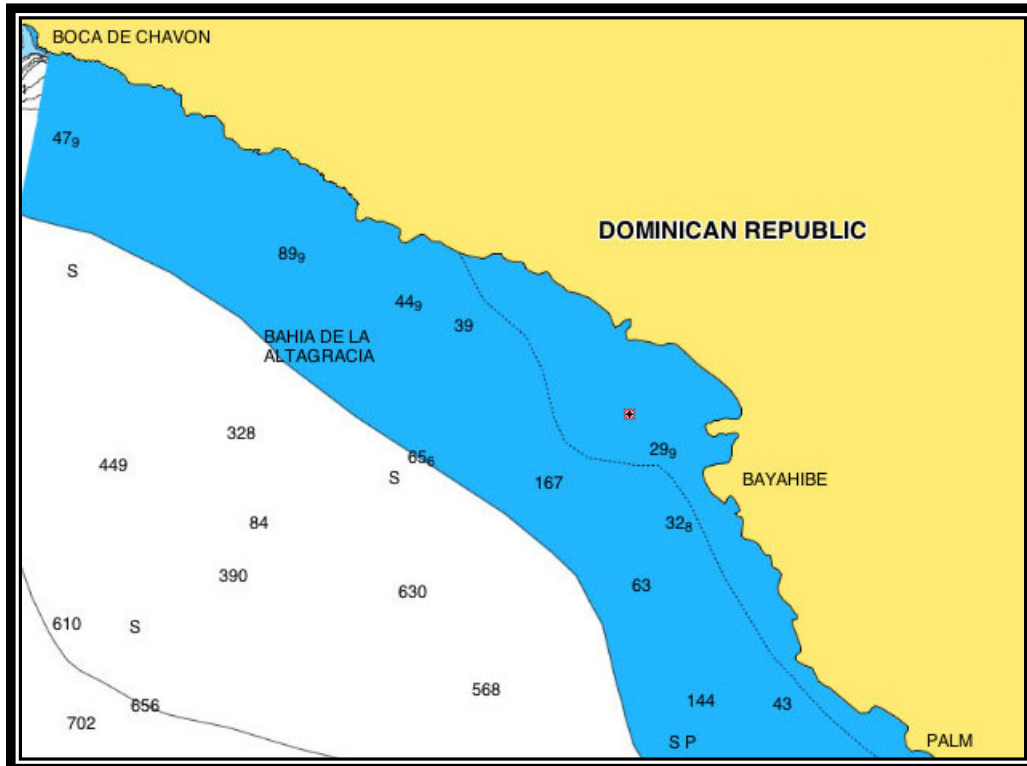


Figure 34. Bayahibe on Bahía de la Altagracia

Originally a small fishing port, this quaint quiet village has adapted well to its new role as a departure point for eco tourists taking the ten mile trip to Saona Island. Fortunately, the hubbub of activity occurs in the morning between nine and eleven and in the afternoon between three and six. Outside these times the village returns to its tranquil state offering the visitor a delightful place to explore.

Apart from the many gift shops, there are a variety of cafes, bars and restaurants along the waterfront. For local food there are many places tucked away in the backstreets for those who have a sense of adventure. There is a timeless air about this place, which can be best appreciated while watching the local boats bobbing up and down in the bay waiting for your dinner to be served, as the sun drops below the horizon.



Beach café at Bayahibe

There are two bays available in which to anchor. The bay to the northeast gets crowded out with tripper boats and is dominated by a coral reef. The other has many mooring buoys in constant use but places can be found amongst them. Moderate protection is afforded from the prevailing wind in the lee of the headland but there is often a small swell.

You cannot clear Immigration at Bayahibe but you may well want to make your acquaintance with the officials. At all times, it saves any suspicion and is accepted as a friendly gesture. Consider it a best practice for cruising sailors. They will then direct you to La Romana for clearing Immigration and Customs.

To the far northeast is the beach of the Wyndham Resorts Hotel which is strictly private, but just before the beginning of the village on the west side is the public beach where many families picnic for the day. At the beginning of this beach is the light brown building of the Marina de Guerra Comandancia.



Day tripper catamarans in Bayahibe Harbor

The fuel dock is at the southwestern end of Bayahibe. Caution must be taken as the depth shoals from six feet in the bay to four feet at the dock. There is very little water available although you may purchase five gallon bottles of purified drinking water at the *colmado*. You may also buy from a small selection of canned food, etc.

Saona Island (in Parque Nacional Del Este)

18°11.N 68°47W (anchorage)

15.6 nm from Casa de Campo



Figure 35. Isla Saona

Although there is a village on the island, there are no facilities for the visiting cruising yachtsman. The island is a nature reserve in a national park and the inhabitants mostly serve the needs of the tourists who are shuttled there daily from Bayahibe.

The anchorage at the northwest corner of the island (to the north of the anchor sign on the chart above) at Punta Catuan is excellent. In the lee of the channel between the mainland and the island, you are protected from the wind by the island and from the swell by the channel. There is ample depth with 12' within two hundred yards of the small sandy beach.

If the wind is from the NE, however, a better anchorage is about 3 miles north at Las Palmillas anchorage. (**18°14N 68°46W**) Most times you will see local boats anchored there in 7' to 10' of water. To access the anchorage, go west, before turning north and east to the anchorage. Give the sand bar a wide berth.



Saona Island Beach~ Pristine



Figure 36. Isla Saona -- Punta Palmillas, Cayo Raton, and I. Catalinita

Playa Palmillas is a popular picnic spot for local yacht owners. Further around the island to the southeast are numerous other beaches all backed by palm trees and providing some of the finest, whitest sand in the Caribbean. The water is crystal clear and the snorkeling excellent. It is worth setting aside a full day to explore the channel between the island and the mainland (Paso Catuan) which has a depth of no less than five feet all the way to the eastern end where the channel deepens at Cayo Raton, just behind the reef. The depth is really 6' but the channel is not marked and you have to "feel" your way. Favor the south side of the passage.

You can also use your dinghy to explore Cayo Catalinita as well as the NW corner, which has a mangrove "lake" called *La Bañera* (the baths). When you arrive at the east end of the passage, on the south side is Cayo Ratón, where the water will deepen to over 20.' Due east of Cayo Ratón, you can find a navigable exit. However, this should be avoided when a strong northeaster is blowing, and also when the sun is coming up, as you will not be able to see the reef, which runs north and south.

Navigational Note

Off the south coast of Saona, traveling eastward, there is a significant navigational hazard at **18°05.54N 68°39.66W** clearly marked and named on the chart, 'Bujos Del Caballo'. Breaking water over exposed rocks can be easily seen. The NW corner of Isla Saona is a wonderful anchorage. Swim, relax, and purchase some fresh fish from the local fisherman. This is cruising like it used to be, uncrowded and beautiful. Fishermen often come by to offer you fish and lobster. With a little bargaining, you should be able to set up a nice meal without breaking your budget.

EAST COAST

Boca de Yuma to Samaná Bay NORTHWARD

Boca de Yuma

18°18.83N 68°33.27W

33.4 nm from Saona Island

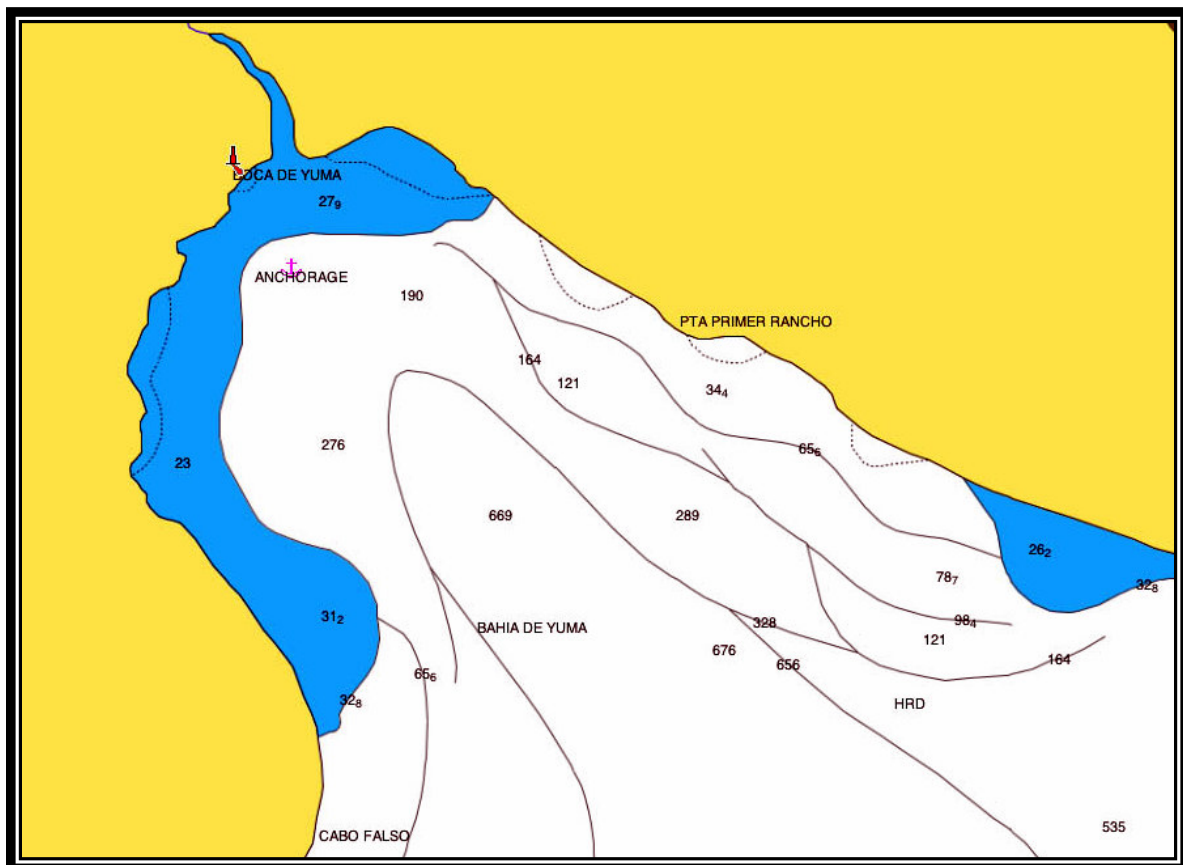


Figure 38. Boca De Yuma on the Bahia De Yuma

The entrance to Boca De Yuma is indicated on the west side by a large bluff of hillside and a red and white lighthouse, which is out of order. To the east is a sandy beach accessible only by dinghy. As you enter in seventeen feet

of water, just above the entrance to the river is an overhanging power cable. At 25 feet it prevents most cruising yachts access further upstream.

The small lagoon just after the river entrance is for the confident adventurous sailor and is not comfortable for yachts over forty feet as the swing room is restricted. Once anchored, there is no protection from bad weather coming from the southeast to the southwest. Given calm conditions the anchorage is comfortable enough for an overnight stay. Or you can anchor easily outside the entrance to the river to the west. Excellent in NE winds.

As you anchor, the local *comandante* will pay you a visit. He and his helpers are very hospitable and merely want to make sure they know who you are and that your *despacho* is in order. Bid them farewell with a bottle of rum and later in town they will greet you with a happy smile (perhaps because of the rum).

There is a slip at the water's edge on a stony beach but it is dangerously slippery with jagged rocks around it. One is best advised to leave the dinghy amongst the fishing boats.

The town is immediately accessible via a set of steps from the waterside up to the main street. The whole area is dominated by two large bars that on most weekdays have but a few visitors. Most Sundays, though, they are filled to capacity with visitors from Higüey and Santo Domingo, especially when a popular Dominican singer has been booked to play.

The town is very typical of Dominican Republic seaside towns with restaurants, cafés, and bars. There are no supermarkets but local produce and drinking water can be purchased at various *colmados*. There is no fuel dock but if you are desperate, there is a gas station two miles out of town past a very pretty church up the hill. Local taxis are available to help.

There is no mobile phone signal but there is a *centro de llamadas* with a landline at very reasonable charges. It is worthwhile walking out of town along the seashore heading west for stunning views out to sea. There are picturesque rocky coves and a natural swimming hole next to an abandoned hotel where the locals swim while their friends fish off the nearby rocks.

Once back at the anchorage you may well explore the river by dinghy, although it shoals after approximately one mile. The scenery is wild and uninhabited. Should you want local knowledge there are guides available who speak various languages. You may also choose to dinghy to the fine beach to the southeast, which is only accessible from the sea. Boca de Yuma can be an interesting stop, and a nice anchorage, but keep an eye out for a shift in the wind to the SE for which there would be no protection.

Cap Cana Marina (Condo project with slips)

18°29.78N 68°22.01W

21.0 nm from Boca de Yuma

Responds on both Vhf Ch. 16 and Vhf Ch. 72

Website www.capcana.com (Link 'Marina')

A pilot boat is readily available as is dockhand service between 8am and 6pm. The channel is well buoyed and currently maintains about 8 feet. There are berths for 80+ boats up to 200 feet with full and constant electricity supply. There is a good water supply. Drinking water is available as are a supermarket, Wi-Fi, cable TV and laundry. Inside the marina there is good protection from the weather, with no swell in all but the most severe of conditions. An international airport is close by.

Beyond the docks there are restaurants, delicatessen service, and all the services one can expect from a modern marina. The adjacent Cap Cana Resort provides facilities such as golf courses, horseback riding etc. Eco tours and excursions can be arranged at the marina.

Currently the channel has controlling depths of 7' to 8'. With strong prevailing winds from the east the entrance channel can be a challenge if a sea is running.

Cap Cana has a marina, which is part of a condominium project. The marina is an adjunct to attract those that want a condo and have an interest in fishing.

Facilities for clearing in or out are readily available.



There are restaurants in the marina area, all priced at resort rates. While the beach is beautiful and the grounds extensive, I cannot think of a compelling reason to make a stop here.



Figure 39. Cap Cana Marina

Punta Cana

18°33.18N 68°19.09W

2.0 nm from Cap Cana Marina

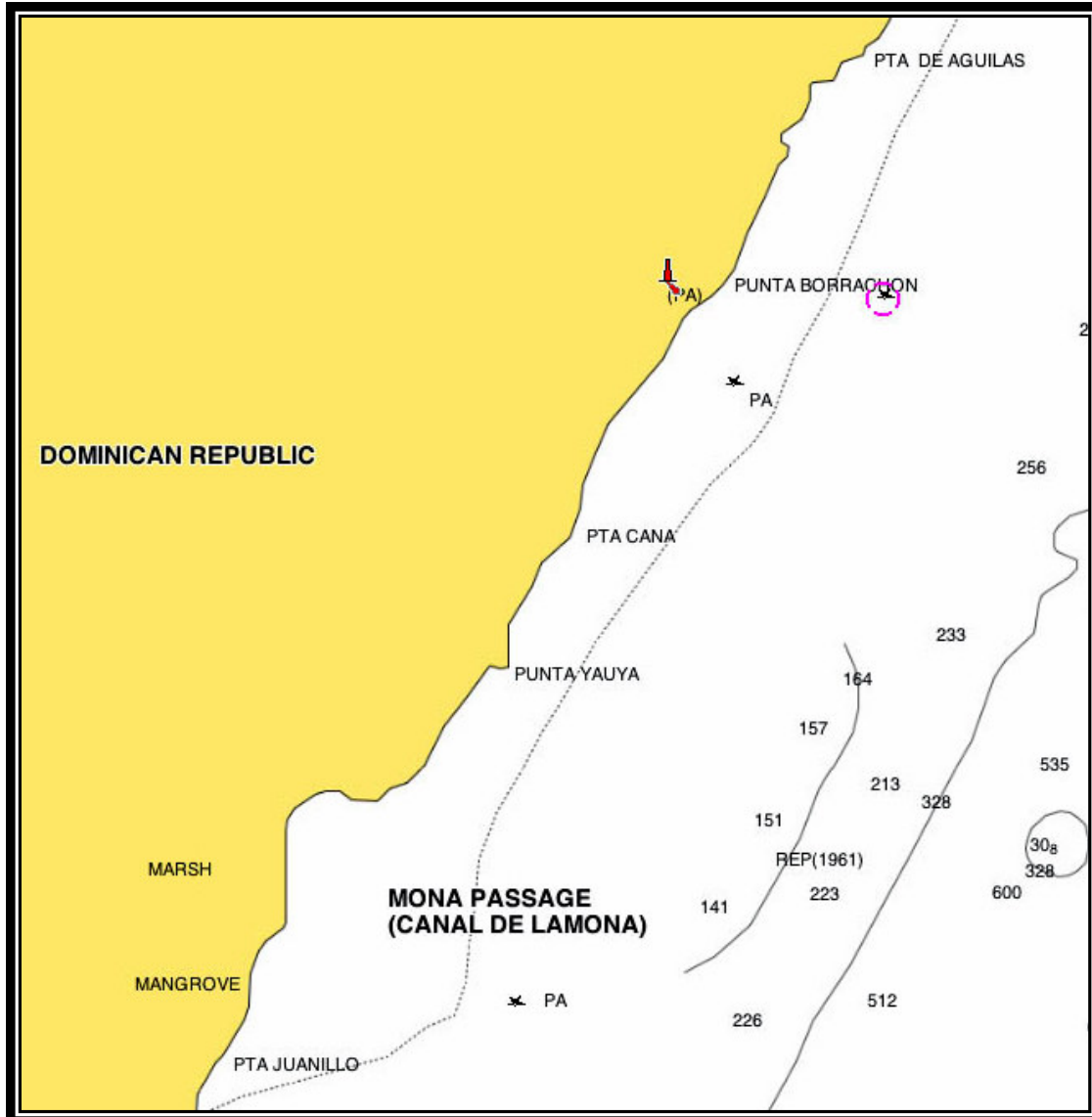


Figure 40. Punta Cana

Punta Cana Marina is situated with little natural protection from the weather or the sea. Breaking water clearly identifies the gap in the reef through which one must pass. The channel leading into this small marina is marked with an outer green buoy, which marks the beginning of red and green channel markers. The depth is 5' minimum, although the marina itself

carries seven feet at low tide throughout, with a tidal range of about one and a half feet. There is a fuel dock with a one foot high concrete edge above water at high tide. You may lie alongside. All other berths are stern-to with plastic covered pilings. There is little or no protection from the swell. Water and electricity are available; shopping is a twenty minute taxi ride away. The marina has an excellent restaurant.

Stopping at Punta Cana Marina **is not recommended**. The surge in the marina can be very strong resulting in constant movement. Unlike its neighbor, Cap Cana, the interior of the marina is not well sheltered.

Navigation Note

The coastline between Punta Cana and Samaná Bay is a lee shore with many reefs. One is best advised to lay off with a good safety margin. Keep in mind that winds and waves buffet the shoreline relentlessly. This IS the Mona Passage! Cabo Engaño is difficult when the Trade Wind is blowing. Wind sheer and increasing wind speeds are notable. In addition, the “Hourglass Shoals” off Cabo Engaño make for rough sea conditions once the Trade Wind get up. Regardless of your destination, it is best to check weather carefully before attempting passages in this area.

Punta Macao

18°47.20N 68°31.50W



Figure 41. Punta Macao

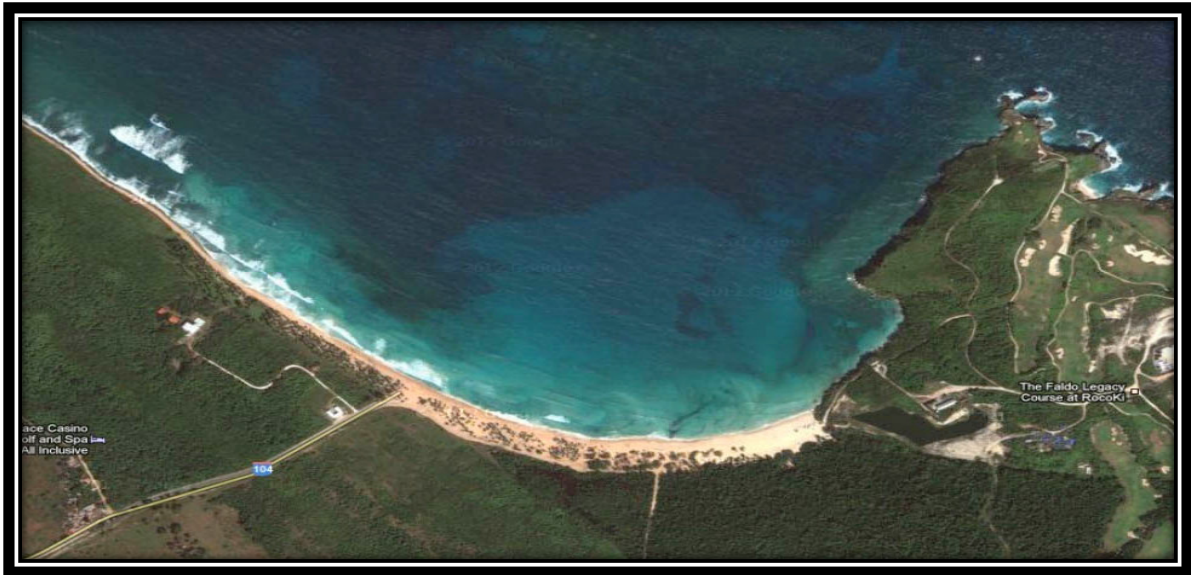


Figure 42. Punta Macao -- long beach, short niche

This is just a small niche in a long stretch of beautiful white sand. In ANY kind of weather from the North through the Northeast, this anchorage is **UNTENABLE** and should **NOT** be considered. However, if the weather is settled and winds light, or the winds are from East to South East, you can try anchoring here. It is very pretty and a good jumping off point if you are headed to the south shore of Puerto Rico.

DO NOT CONSIDER PUNTA MACAO TO BE A PROTECTED ANCHORAGE IN ANY WEATHER, as should the weather change you *will* have to leave. There is a rock awash on your port side entering.

This little anchorage has a reputation for the Coast Guard coming out for a tip. They look for \$25.00 US. Tell them you have stopped to rest and that you are not staying. Smile and say you do not carry cash. Give them a small bottle of rum and they will probably go away. *Speak no Spanish to them even if you can or they will stay longer.*

Samaná Bay

Santa Bárbara to Cayo Levantado

19°12.01N 69°18.96W
56.0 nm from Punta Cana

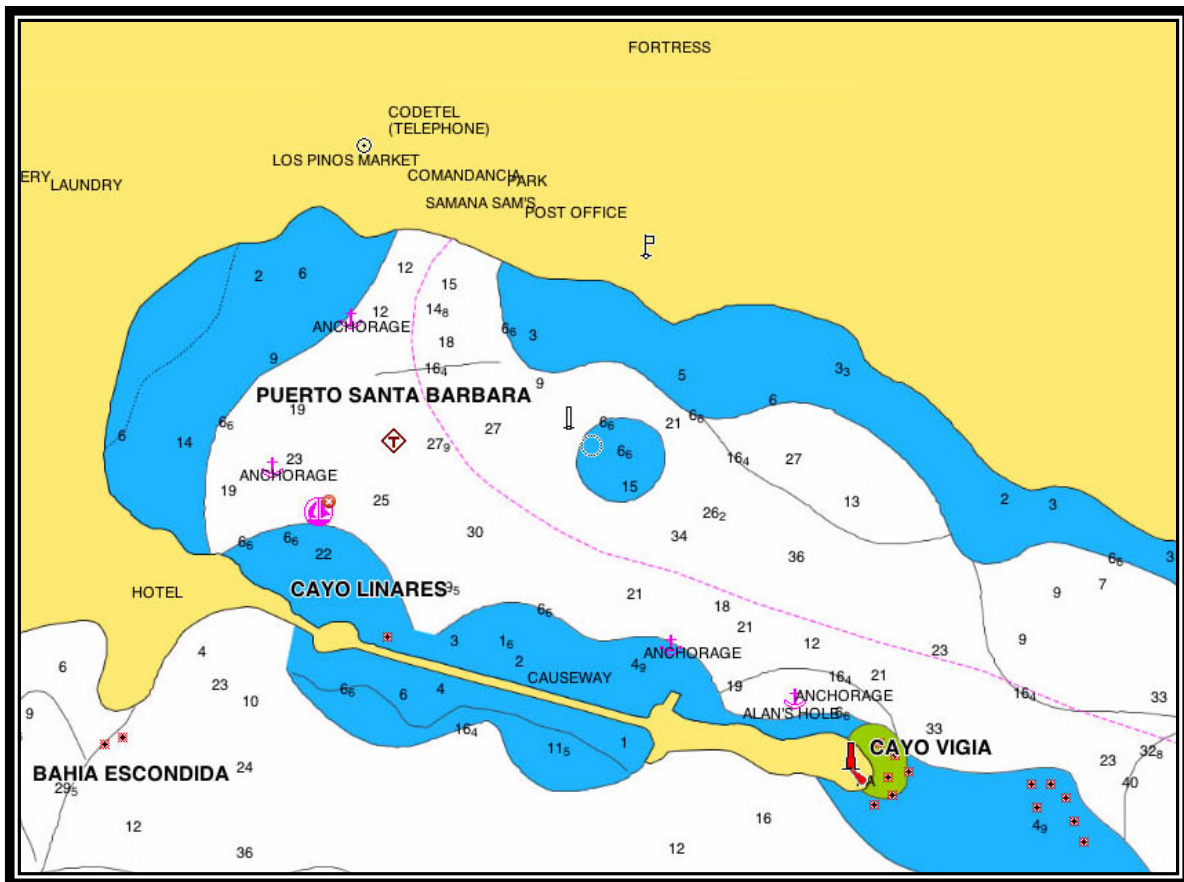


Figure 43. Santa Barbara de Samaná

The following description of Samaná Bay runs counter clockwise, going west along the north coast from Santa Barbara and coming around to east along the south coast to Cayo Levantado.

Once inside the Bay of Samaná the first port available to the cruising yachtsman on the *north coast* of the bay is Santa Bárbara de Samaná. Enter along the north coast, following a marked channel to the north of Cayo Levantado. Since the anchorage is a few miles into the bay and bordered by islands, there is reasonable protection from the sea. There is 17' of water to anchor in with good holding in a muddy bottom.

You may clear Customs and Immigration at Santa Barbara. You will be met by a boatload of officials after you anchor. Among them will be Marina de Guerra, M-2, Drugs, Ports, Immigration and Customs. They will all come aboard. Show Marina de Guerra your *despacho* from your prior port. M-2 and Drugs will do a cursory check of the boat. Immigration will check your passport.

The Department of Ports, which exists only in a few harbors, may ask you for \$0.70 US per foot for the privilege of anchoring. This is an inappropriate request as such a fee is for the use of a government dock or wharf.

If you are asked to pay Ports, you can pay it and forget it, or refuse to pay on the grounds that the charge is not applicable. If you choose the later remain polite. The law is DR 519-5. It says that Department of Ports may charge to use any dock of the federal government throughout the country. The current rate for such usage is 70 cents US/foot.

I know of no other harbor in the DR where Ports try to impose this charge, although from time to time a “daily anchoring charge” is requested in Luperón, which most cruisers refuse to pay to the Ports official.

After you have anchored and cleared, you may choose to take a long walk along the causeway that borders the southern side of the harbor. It leads out to a beautiful view of the eastern portion of the bay facing Cayo Levantado. At the end of the walkway, known locally as the “bridge to nowhere,” is Cayo Vigía.

NOTE: Do not leave your boat unattended at anchorage. This anchorage has a bad history of dinghy and dinghy motor theft.



Santa Bárbara de Samaná anchorage, bridge to nowhere in the background

During the day, the town dock is a hive of activity, especially during the whale watching season. Many boats are available for guided excursions. This dock also serves as a dinghy dock. At the quay across the street is a bank with ATM machines and one block behind this is an excellent internet café and a laundry. It is well worth walking or riding into town along the waterfront to the ‘rotonda’ (roundabout). This is the center of town with all



Getting around in Santa Bárbara de Samaná

the color and hubbub of a waterfront Dominican town. There is also the Dominican version of the rickshaw, which consists of a motorcycle attached to a covered passenger wagon, perfect for moving provisions. The fare *per person* is about a dollar around town.

A wide variety of provisions can be obtained at the supermarket and a truly vibrant vegetable and fruit open-air market operates across the street. All kinds of local fruits and vegetables are on display, as well as meats and fish. The vendors are highly animated and eager to do business with you. The prices relative to the United States or Canada are a real bargain. An entire stem of bananas (approx. 50) can be purchased for less than \$10 US. Tangerines, oranges, lettuce, tomatoes, plantains, mangos, papaya and many others follow suit.

Santa Bárbara has good facilities for the cruising yachtsman and it is a great place to recuperate from the rigors of the sea. Apart from the many sights and sounds of this truly Dominican town, there is access to breathtaking

waterfalls at El Limon twenty-four miles inland.



Rotonda or roundabout in Santa Bárbara de Samaná

ATM machines are available at the bank immediately opposite the main jetty where you may leave your dinghy.

The entrance to the Bay of Samaná teems with marine and bird life of all kinds, from whales to fish and seabirds. Anchor for the day behind Cayo Levantado and you will see local fishermen in small boats catching fish with nets as has been done for a millennium.

You will see pelicans (looking like small pterodactyls) dive into the water for lunch, over and over again. With the mountains and the sky as backdrop, there is so much color and so much to see that it is easy to lose three or four hours just being a spectator.



THAR SHE BLOWS!

Whales

December through to March they congregate at the approach to Samaná Bay. Stop your engine or drop your sails and lay hove to. Once you have spotted your first water spout at a distance, you will notice others so long as you are not in a hurry.

Bahía Escondida (Hidden Bay) heading up bay -- west

19°11.68N 69°20.32W

1.75 nm from Santa Bárbara

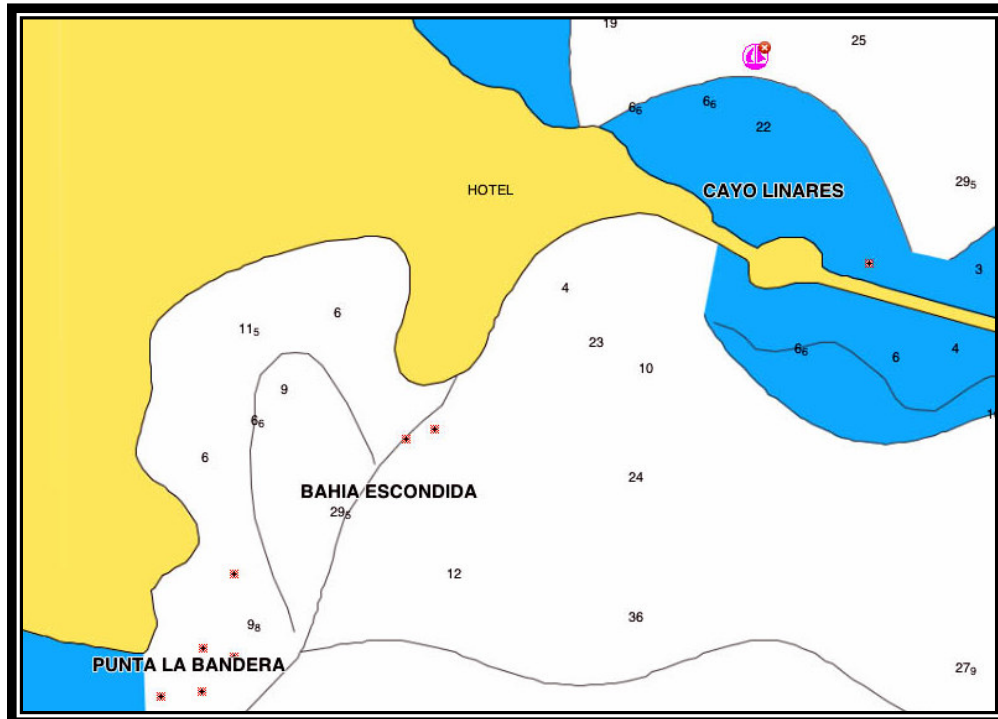


Figure 44. Bahía Escondida

Going westward along the north shoreline of Samaná Bay, the first of many anchorages is a small bay tucked behind and to the west of the long raised causeway to the island of Cayo Vigía. The bay has a private beach and two small hotels with access to Samaná town up a steep hill. Anchor in nine feet of water over a muddy bottom with some protection from the Trade Wind.



Bahía Escondida -- Hidden bay

One mile onward is Puerto Bahía, the site of private residences, a hotel, and marina facility. (19°11.613N 69°21.392W)



Figure 45. Puerto Bahía -- residences and marina

Puerto Bahía is a condo and town home development with a marina. It is close by land to Santa Bárbara de Samaná but is a bit of a walk. You might choose to stay here to visit the town of Samaná as opposed to anchoring in front of the town itself; however, it is a bit out of the way.

Anchorage

All along this coastline, there are numerous anchorages which all have their own sandy beaches fringed by coconut trees and framed by luscious green hills. Feel free to call any one of them your own as it is unlikely that you will have much company. You will find yourself sailing from one anchorage you describe as perfection, only to arrive at another which seems more perfect than all others. It is impossible to rank them in any order of merit as they are all quintessential Caribbean anchorages.



One of many anchorages going up Samaná Bay

Sánchez

19°13.12N 69°36.82W

18.0 miles from Santa Bárbara

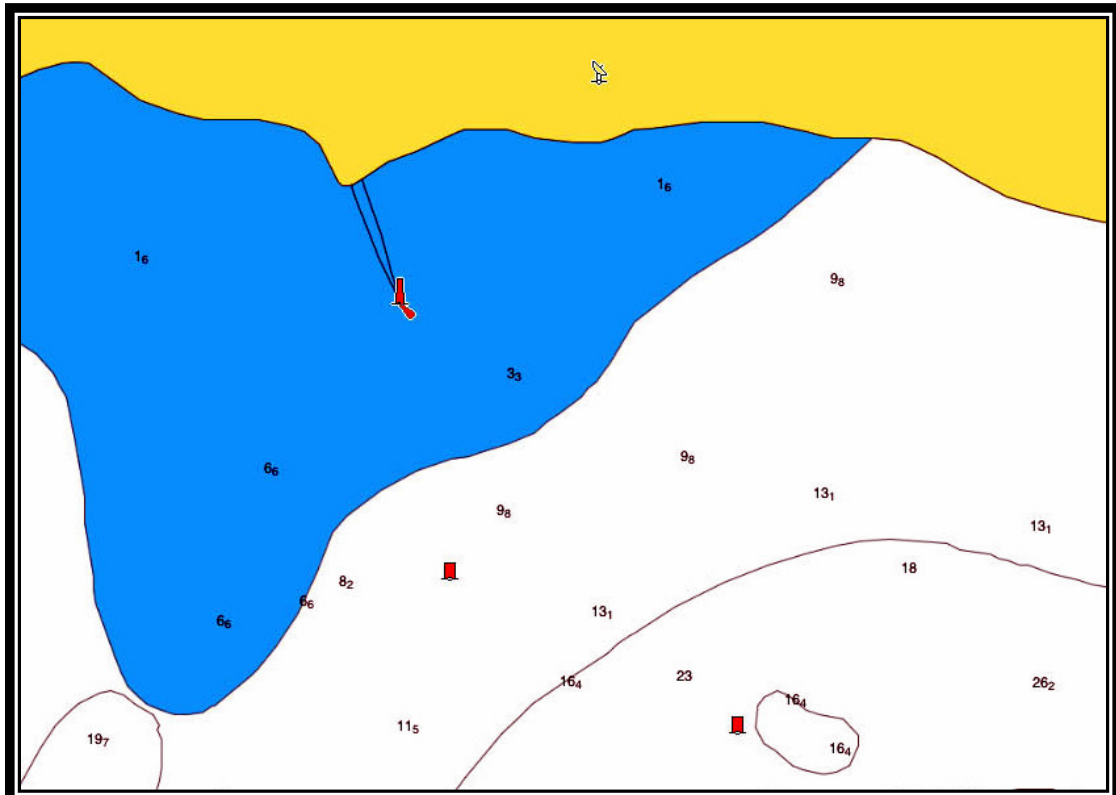


Figure 48. Sánchez

At the uppermost northwest corner of Samaná Bay is Sánchez, a commercial port conveniently tucked out of sight behind the fishing village, also named



El Spigón (dock) at Sánchez

Sánchez, which is the preferred anchorage. Since the jetty has fallen into disrepair, a better place for your dinghy is aground with the colorful fishing boats on the sandy beach immediately to starboard.

Here you will receive a warm welcome from the local fishing folk and the many children who play in the sand. Behind the fishing boats is where fishermen repair their nets and where there is also a small café. There is a kitchen where the womenfolk cook the fresh fish, crabs and crawfish that the children have helped to clean. Although this is not a restaurant, they are more than willing to sell you some of this freshly cooked fare.

Rio Yuna

19°11.61N 69°37.19W

2.0 nm from Sánchez

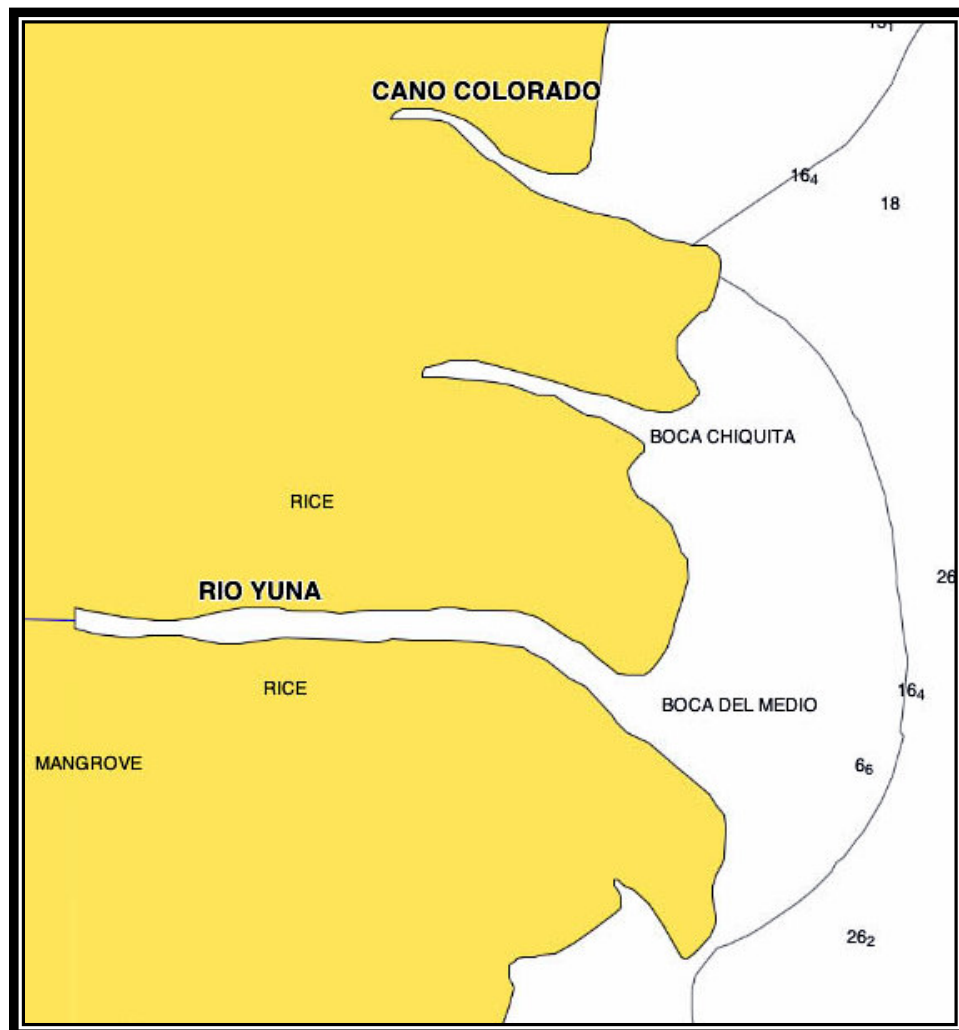


Figure 49. Rio Yuna and environs

Moving west there is a delta of four rivers, which feed Samaná Bay: Rio Yuna, Bochiquita, Cano and Colorado. The largest, Rio Yuna, shallows to 2' at the mouth with a partially submerged motorboat a little way into the river. Despite being less than 2' deep during dry spells, it invites the adventurous to gunk hole, a rare and unusual opportunity for cruising yachtsmen these days.

If you are not a fan of the degree of isolation and natural beauty exemplified in this area, then this is not the place for you. This is truly virgin territory against a backdrop of misty mountains in the near distance.

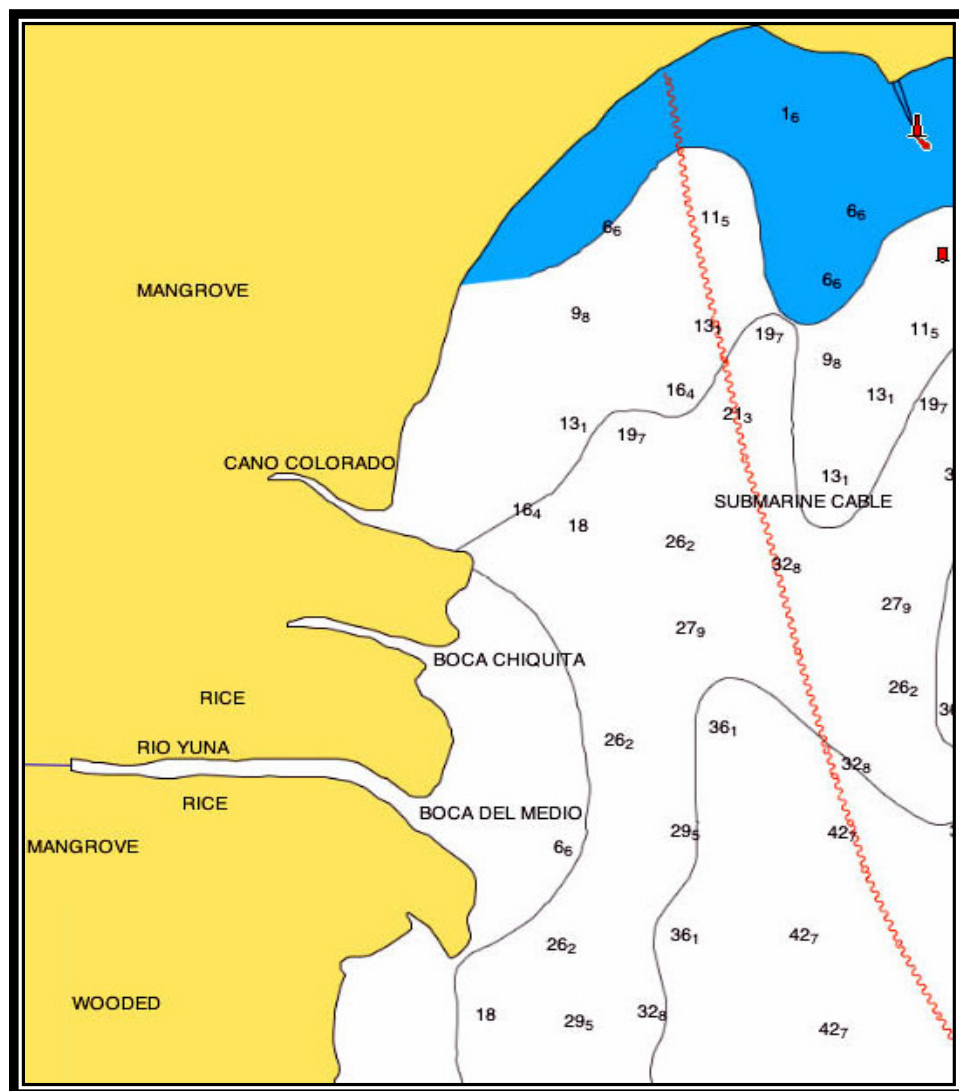


Figure 50. Rio Yuna detail

tucked amid the rocks to the left of some abandoned pier pilings within Bahía de San Lorenzo, although it is seldom manned.



Travel back in time in Los Haitises National Park

The park is administered by staff from the Environmental Agency (*Medio Ambiente*) and by park guides. If you traveled along the northern coast of Samaná Bay at all, you may be better prepared for your initial view of this scenery, since it will overwhelm your senses. It is in every way breathtaking and there are insufficient superlatives to do it justice.

If an artist were to visit, he or she would delight in the natural light. The hills, covered with dense deep green vegetation, rise majestically skyward. Behind them are misty blue/green mountains. Once the initial awe subsides, you can relax into thoughts of creation and indeed Mother Nature herself, for this is truly a work of art on her part.

Allow yourself plenty of time to explore, since there is so much to see. The edges of the rocks hover six inches above the water due to erosion over centuries as if to remind you of their age. All around there are birds; their lifestyle unchanged for generations.

You can imagine pterodactyls soaring above. Time stands still here. One of the markers of time is the ancient drawings inside the limestone caves.



Approaching the caves

At approximately 19°04.82N 69°28.06W, (to the west of the abandoned pier pilings) find the entrance to a creek leading to the caves. The water shallows to 2' with mangroves to one side so beware puncturing your inflatable. Paddle your craft to the end of the creek and capture the tranquility of the mangrove swamp as you walk along the path to the caves.

As of this writing, the park official will ask for \$100 Pesos (about \$3.00 US) per person to gain access. He will give you a receipt. Once inside there are information posters.

In the caves, you can clearly see ancient markings. Flash photography *is* allowed. Savor the damp tranquil atmosphere previously shared by native Americans, many generations ago.



Dinghy dock at the cave entrance

Capture the fresh smell of the salt air and vegetation. Breathe in deep the clean air. In the early morning, watch the sun burn off the mist and hear virtually nothing apart from the occasional bird or the splash of a fish. This is a truly remarkable anchorage. Most often you will be alone or perhaps with one other boat. This anchorage rates with the best in the Caribbean, if not the world. No description can do it justice... go see for yourself!

Miches

18°59.56N 69°03.95W

Miches is very much a typical Dominican seacoast town. It has a population of over 250,000 people. Just for the sake of comparison, the entire island of Grenada has fewer than 100,000 people.



Miches

Located on the southeast side of the Bay of Samaná, Miches would be a wonderful stop but for two reasons: First, there are reefs to the east and west entering the anchorage area and one must be very careful to avoid them; second, Miches is wide open to the North and the East. Any wind or sea

from the NE makes Miches **untenable**. In weather from the SE Miches can make an interesting stop for adventurous souls as you will have to feel your way through the reef.

Also, expect the local Coast Guard, who rarely, if ever, see a sailboat call at Miches, to be suspicious, as Miches is a Dominican Coast Guard interdiction port that works to prevent illegal immigration and drug traffic. If you have your *despacho* in hand and can speak a little Spanish, this is a town that is rarely touched by foreigners.

Cayo Levantado

19°09.92N 69°16.67W

12.2 nm from Los Haitis (Bahía de San Lorenzo)

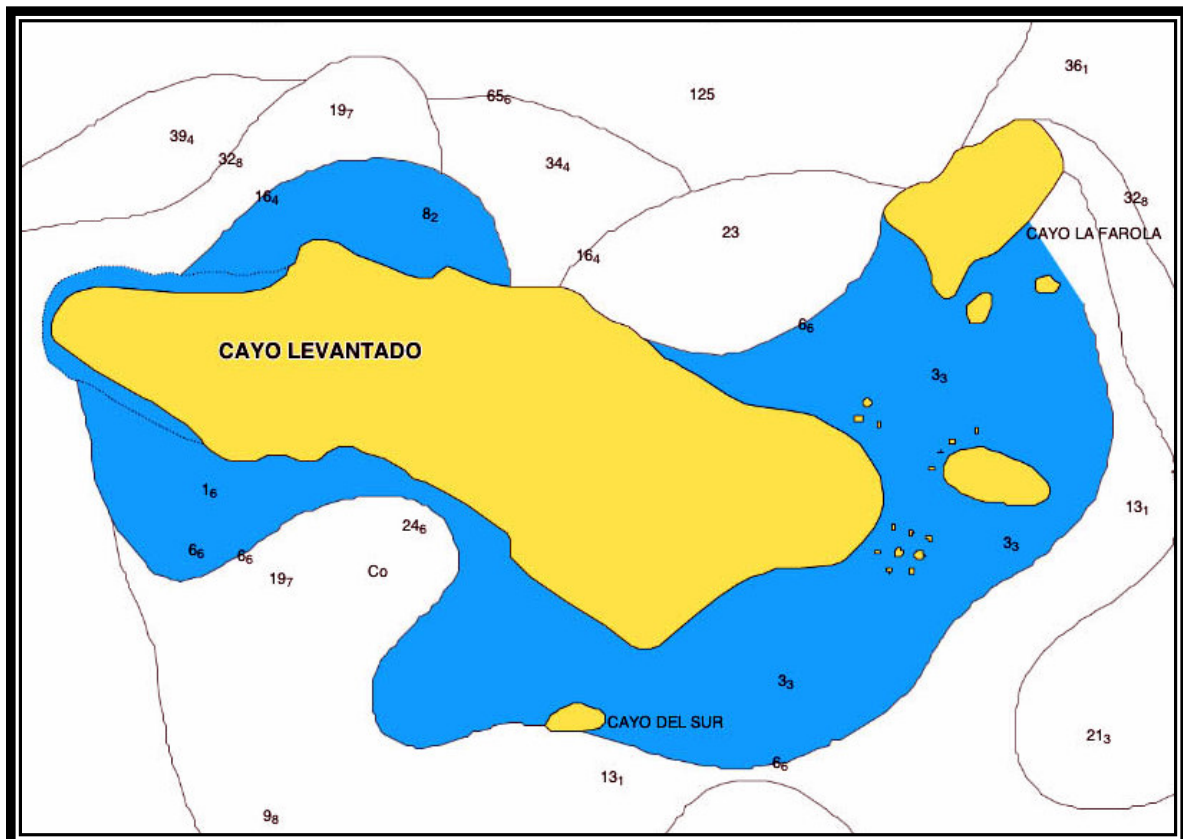


Figure 52. Cayo Levantado

At the mouth of Samaná Bay on the north side is the island of Levantado, a favorite stop for cruise ships with all the ingredients of a Caribbean island.

Bleached white sandy beaches, lush green grass and palm tree shade are all here. There are three jetties suitable for a dinghy; the most easterly is private to the Hotel Gran Bahía but you may use either of the other two, which are in constant use by tourist boats.

To cater for cruise ship guests there are plenty of gift shops and a round tropical cocktail bar on the beach. Two restaurants are open to the general public: One is a large covered area serving lobster and fish cafeteria style



and the other is Ballena Blanca, on the beach. Here you may sample truly traditional Dominican cuisine - all washed down with the local Presidente beer.

The easternmost half of the island is dominated by the Gran Bahía Hotel whose restaurant is for guests only.

While you may anchor during the day in the lee of the island off the sandy beach, you are required to up anchor by late afternoon. This is a Coast Guard (Marina de Guerra) requirement. You can return to Santa Bárbara, just a few miles westward to anchor for the night.





Figure 53. Cayo Levantado, from the east

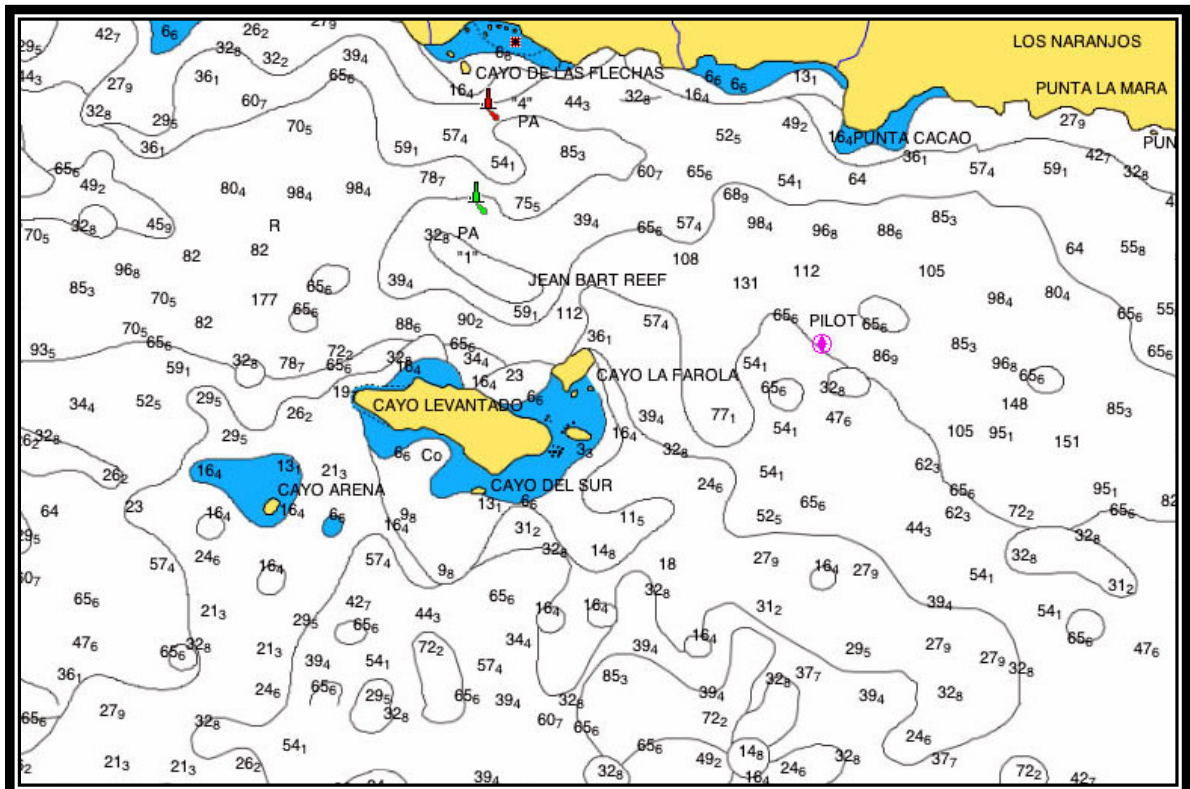


Figure 54. Cayo Levantado relative to the north shore of Samaná Bay

NORTH COAST

Puerto del Valle to Manzanillo Bay –WESTBOUND

Once you leave the Bay of Samaná heading north, you will have the wind in your face either from the east or northeast, until you turn the northeastern point of the Dominican Republic. Some like to make the passage at night when the wind is down but I have always found that you can find a morning lull for the short distance, which needs to be covered.

Once around the point, the Trade Wind will push you along on a broad reach. However until you reach Puerto Plata (Ocean world) or Luperon, over 100nm to the west, there are really no good anchorages. It should be emphasized that conditions must be favorable for you to anchor at either of the two anchorages at San Juan.

Heading East

If you are leaving Samaná Bay going east to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, you must plan your weather very carefully because you will be crossing the Mona Passage. This route, in any kind of wind or sea condition, can be difficult.

While some authors mention a possible stop at Mona Island, you should never plan on stopping here as entry is always uncertain and dependent on a very good sea conditions. There are many strategies to crossing the Mona Passage but, in the end, it always comes down to getting a weather window of light winds and moderate seas.

Bahía del Rincón

19°20.56N 69°10.48W

15.0 nm from Santa Bárbara

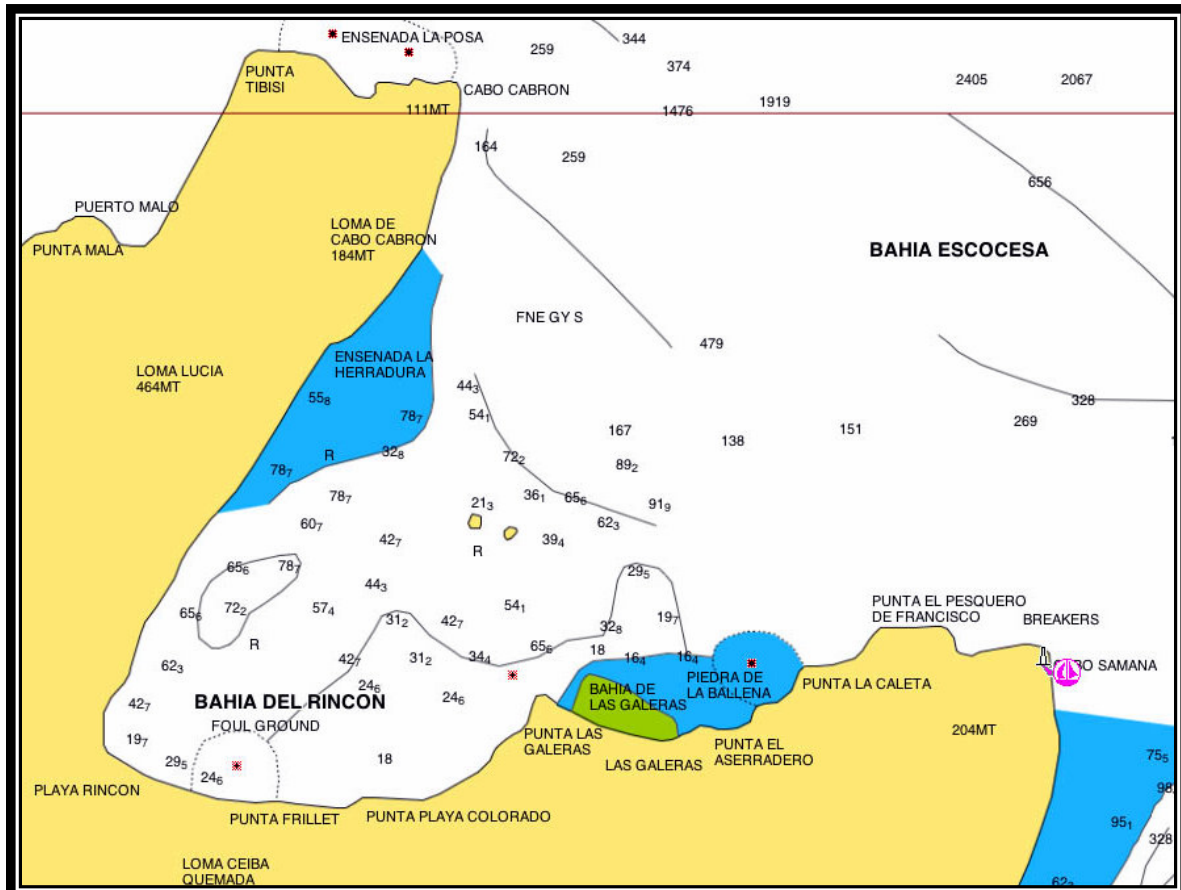


Figure 55. Bahía del Rincon

Going northwest of Santa Bárbara between Cabo Samaná and Cabo Cabrón is Bahía Rincón. The bay is 5 miles long and averages 3 miles wide. It is surrounded by mountains. **DO NOT ANCHOR HERE OTHER THAN AS A DAY STOP AS IT IS TOO OPEN TO WEATHER FROM THE EAST.**

The beach at Bahía del Rincón is known as one of the 10 best in the Caribbean. On one side, there is clear crystal water and on the other side, lush thick palms. They say that the view is reminiscent of heaven.

Puerto del Valle/Escondido

19°18.48N 69°20.31W

12.0 nm from Bahía del Rincón.

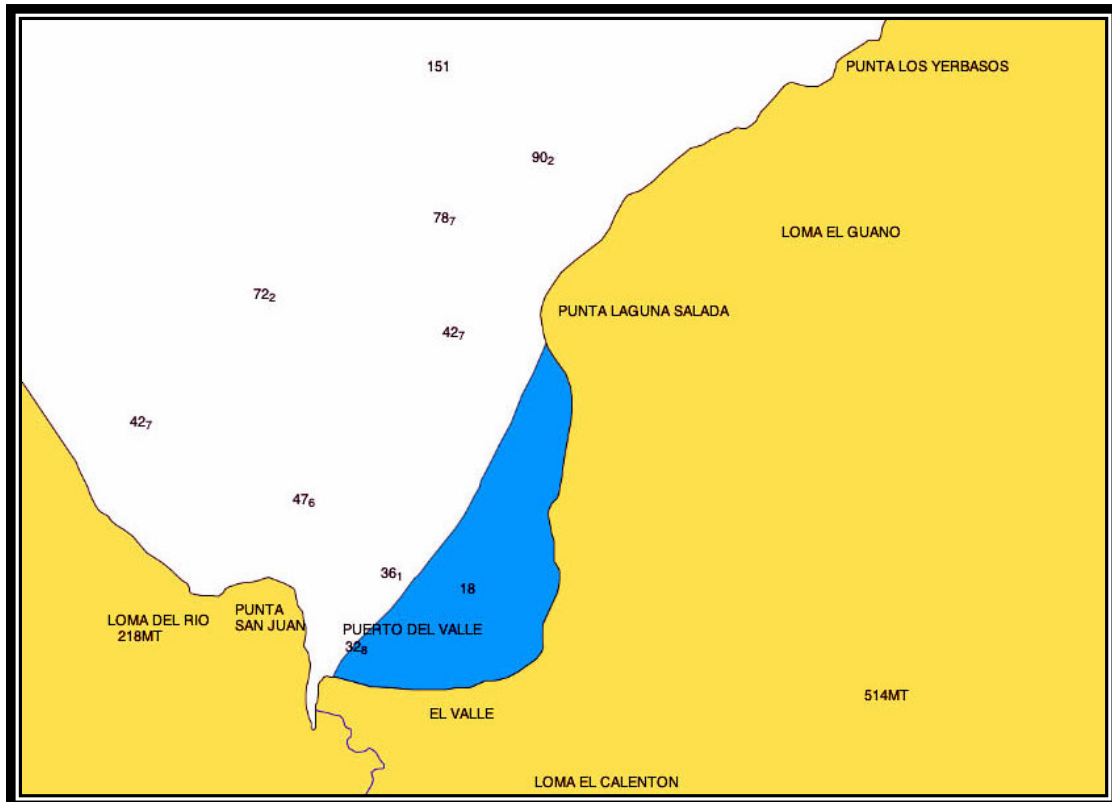


Figure 56. Puerto dValle

Puerto del Valle is a port in name only. It is, however, a possible anchorage between Punta Leche and Cabo Cabrón. Anchor in 25 feet of water. The bottom is hard sand with rock. It is unprotected from the northeast, so beware of swells driving in from the north and northeast. The area is surrounded by steep hills, which give shelter from the west and southeast. There are two beaches separated by a large cave begging to be explored. On the southwestern beach are a few rustic shacks, dugout canoes and fishing boats.

IF THERE IS ANY WIND OUT OF THE NORTHEAST OR EVEN AN EASTERLY WIND WITH NORTHEASTERLY SWELLS, FORGET THIS ANCHORAGE; IT WILL NOT BE TENABLE!

San Juan (Laguna Gri Gri)

19°39.00N 70°05.29W

51.0 nm from Puerto del Valle

It should be emphasized that conditions must be favorable for you to anchor at either of the two anchorages at San Juan. The first is at the northeastern tip of the continuous reef, which runs southwest to northeast in 15 feet of water over hard sand and rock. The second is inside the southwestern end with the fishing fleet. Beware of the many sandbars. This is a mangrove area where fishermen take locals and tourists through the canals by boat. Do NOT use this anchorage in NE or E winds with a sea coming from the NE.



Laguna Gri Gri

Sosua

19°45.90N 70°31.68W
28.0 nm from San Juan

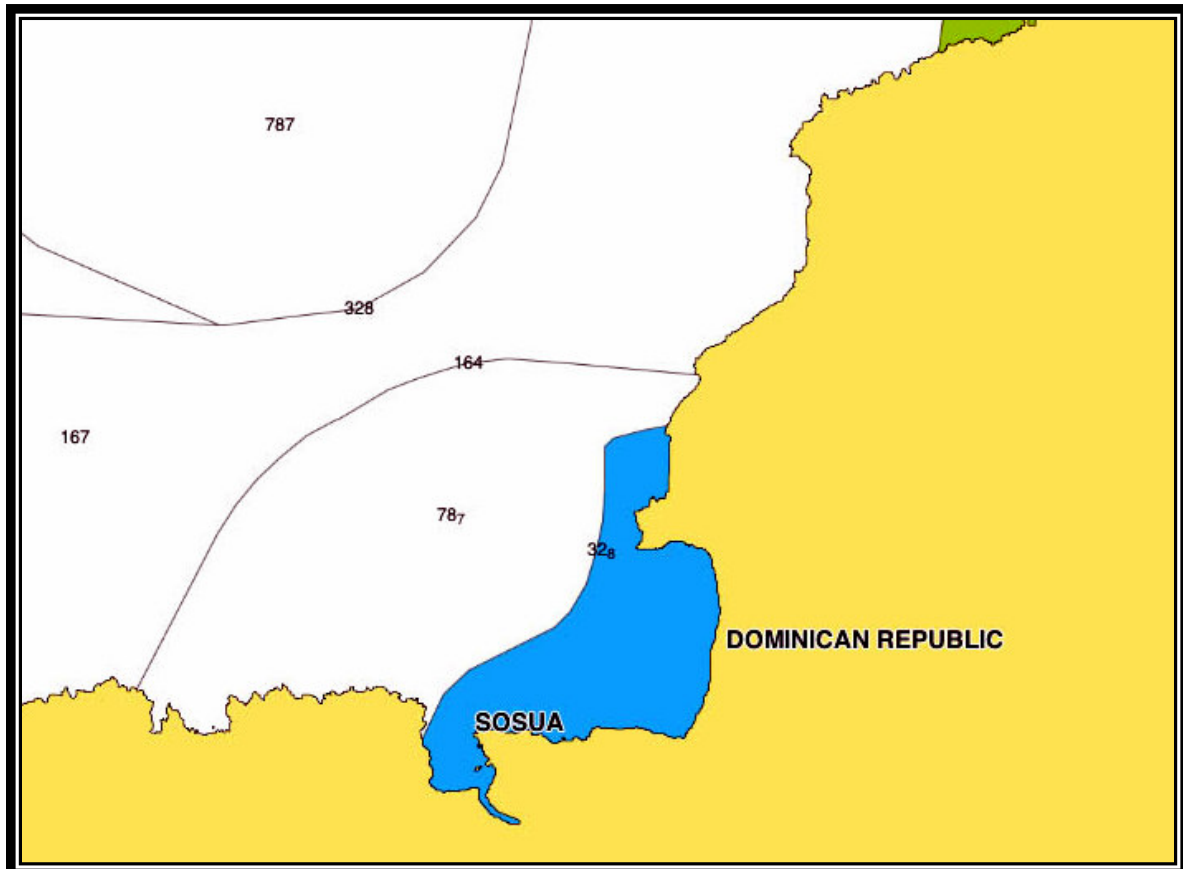


Figure 57. Sosua

If conditions are suitable, you may anchor in this small bay to the west of a coral reef off the public beach. There is twenty feet of water with sand over coral; the town is to the southeast. Sosua is a pretty tourist town and boasts its own synagogue, established by Jewish refugees during World War II.

Do not anchor here in NE winds or East winds with a NE sea running. If you do venture to stop at Sosua, remember that it is national park territory.

Look for the officials who will probably come to you by dinghy upon your arrival. They will show you a buoy to tie to since anchoring is prohibited. Do not attempt to anchor and always keep a watchful eye on the weather.



Figure 58. Sosua Detail

Puerto Plata (commercial port)

19°48.65N 70°41.48W

9.6 nm from Sosua

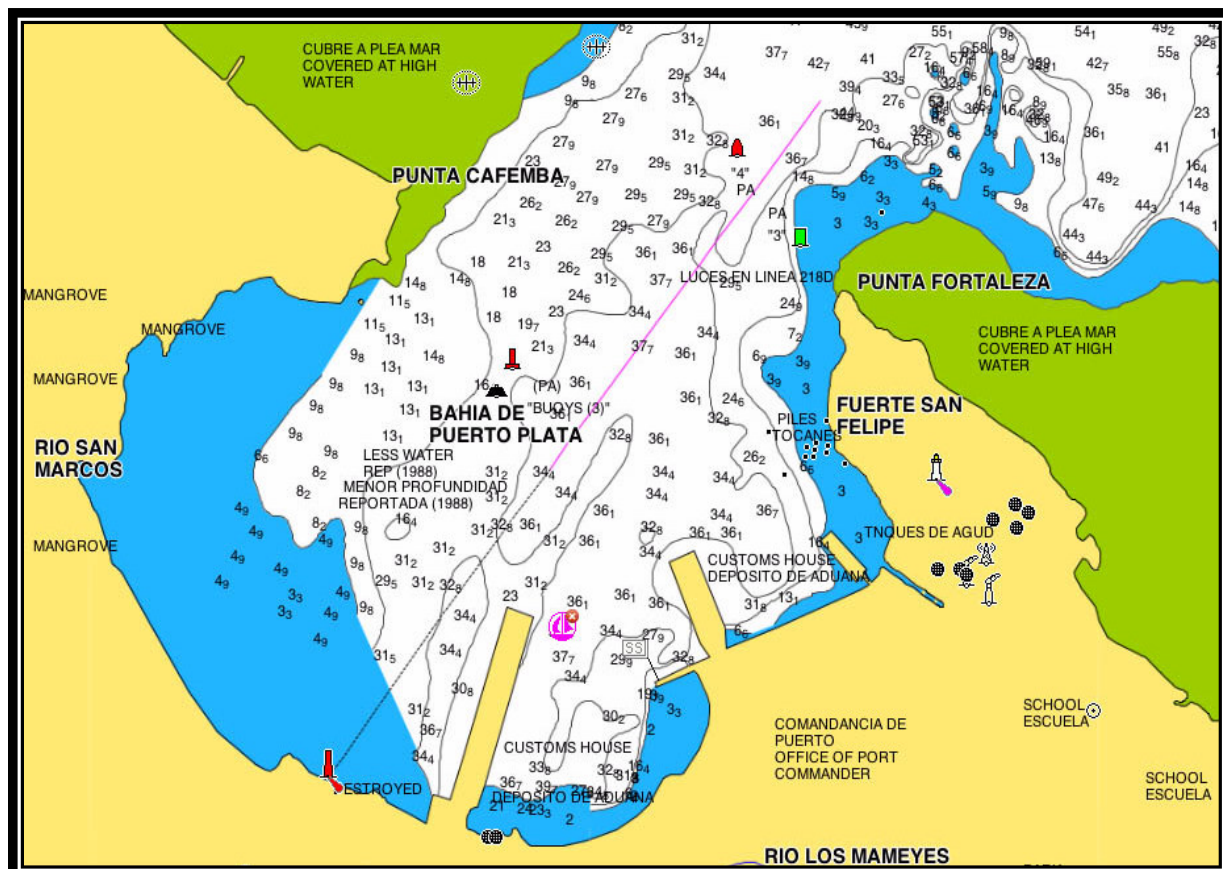


Figure 59. Puerto Plata (commercial port)

This commercial port, which is open to northeasterly weather, has little to offer a cruising yacht apart from an emergency stop. Preferential treatment is given to commercial traffic, and although it is a port of entry, the officials are likely to treat you as an inconvenience to their busy schedule.

Security is also an issue. Although you have access to large shops it is recommended that you bus in from elsewhere. Be prepared for a rough ride in this harbor in all senses of the word. **BEST AVOIDED.**

Ocean World (Puerto Plata)

19°50.09N 70°43.53W

2.1 nm from Puerto Plata (commercial port).

www.oceanworld.net

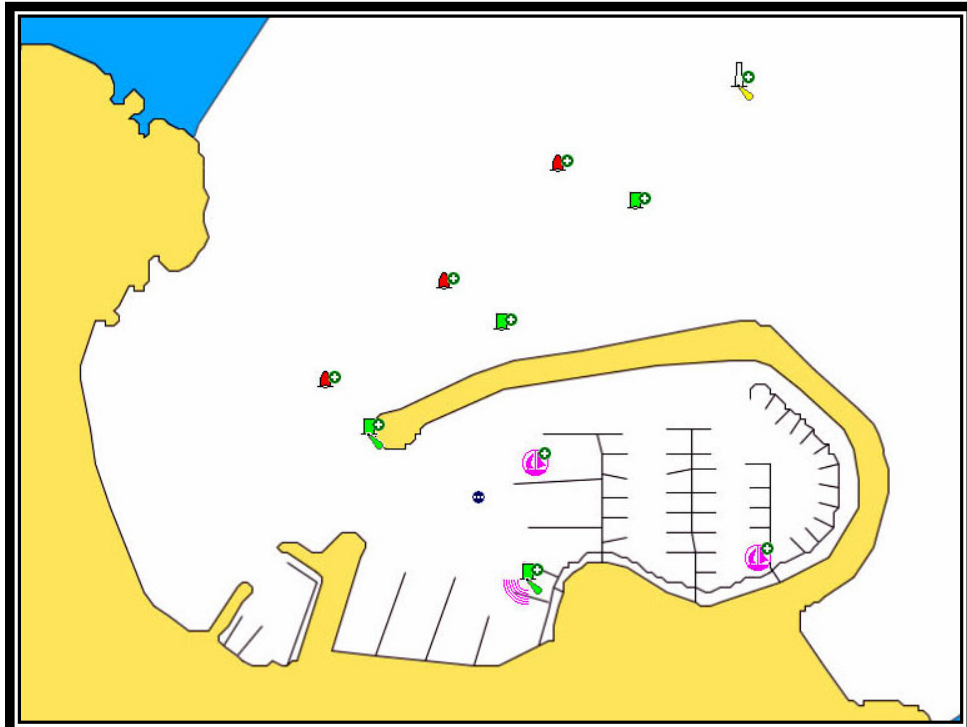


Figure 60. Entering Puerto Plata



Ocean World Marina

The entrance to Luperón anchorage can be challenging, since apart from one white buoy, there is no marked channel. Proceed with caution, preferably on a rising tide, and if you do hit the soft mud bottom, it should not be difficult to back off and get unstuck. Once inside, at the fork of the channel, take the fork to starboard to avoid the built-up silt and low water.

Inside this “hurricane hole” you will find many yachts dotted about the anchorage. There are many shallows. The area seldom gets “flushed” and so the water is muddy and brackish.

This harbor, a mangrove backwater, was opened to the sea. It is possible to take a draft of 5' all the way to the far end of the lagoon where there is a long concrete dock. There is also a dinghy dock at the town end to starboard. There is water at the dock and fuel can be bought from a small fuel barge, which also sells water.



The entrance to Luperón

The local officials in this harbor have a reputation for “inventing” fees. If the fees requested are not what are posted in this guide, unless they can show you that the law has been amended, politely refuse to pay -- with the emphasis on **POLITELY**. Any charge requested by Department of Ports to anchor is inappropriate and under the law (DR 519-5) does not have to be paid unless you are using a federal dock. This anchorage also has a history of dinghy motor theft; be careful.

Luperón, the town itself is a hive of activity with many small food shops, restaurants, laundry facilities, internet cafes and a disco.



Figure 62. Luperón detail

There are plenty of activities in the area, such as white water rafting and horseback riding. You can easily get to Mount Isabel and Puerto Plata town by local buses, which meander through the hillsides. The journey is worth the small fare for the scenery alone.

If you do not mind being anchored in an area ‘bumper to bumper’ with many other cruising boats, and do not mind the foul water, Luperon makes for a very protected anchorage.

El Castillo

19°54.50N 71°05.50W

The anchorage is in front of the Hotel Rancho del Sol, a quaint hotel with an excellent restaurant. Be careful of the reef that is just north of the anchorage. In prevailing winds the anchorage is acceptable; however, if the wind comes from the NE or a front is coming down from the states, it will be uncomfortable. El Castillo is just north of the anchorage and borders the Rio Bajabonico. It represents the ruins of the first settlement established by Columbus, which he had called La Isabela in honor of Queen Isabella.

If the Coast Guard comes out to see you, show him your *despacho* to your next harbor and tell him that you have stopped to see the ruins. A small tip is helpful. The ruins are easily accessible and make for a nice day outing.

Punta Rucia

Ensenada & Cayo Arenas (Cayo Paraiso)
19°53.00N 71°13.10W

These coordinates will take you to a point just off of Ensenada. Punta Rucia is a very remote Dominican village that is a base for reef snorkeling and fishing. Just to the west of Punta Rucia are the Cays, the most noted being Cayo Arenas (also called Cayo Paraíso). Local boat operators bring tourists for the day to anchor at Cayo Arenas. It is a beautiful place that is said to be reminiscent of the Bahamas. The water is crystal clear.

You can anchor at Ensenada harbor at **19°51.6N 71°12.7W**. To enter you must keep the boulders to port and the coral heads (awash) to starboard. Once inside, you will find a sandy patch to anchor in. The anchorage is very good in prevailing winds. Be sure to show the local Coast Guard your paperwork. If you want to stay a while, be polite and build a relationship.

Another anchorage just over 1 mile to the south is located at **19°50.60N 71°12.90W**. It is a small boat harbor that serves as the town anchorage. Cayo Arenas is a real joy, something out of a movie set. You can anchor and simply relax and enjoy. It is just a bit over 5 nm west from Ensenada to get to the Cay. Look for operator boats anchored for the day. The entrance and exit are not difficult but you must watch for coral heads. Many people fish, but do remember that reef fish are potentially dangerous.

“Captain Snappers” can contain ciguatera poisoning. Be careful what you eat!

Do remember that reef fish are potentially dangerous. Captain Snappers can contain ciguatera poisoning. Be very careful what fish you eat!



Cayo Arenas (Cayo Paraiso) – Two views



Monte Cristi

19°55.46N 71°37.97W

41.0 nm from Luperón

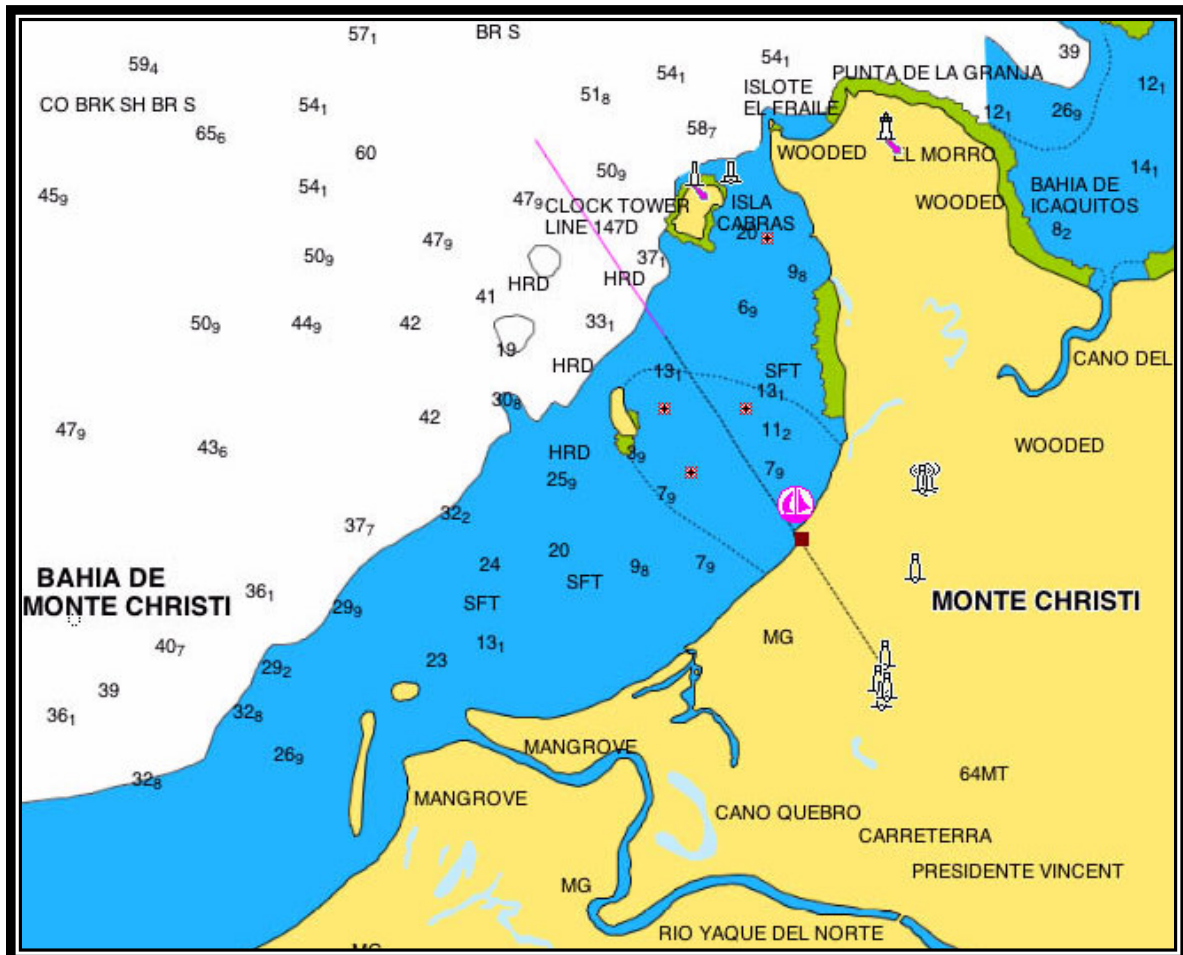


Figure 63. Baía de Monte Cristi

The bay at Monte Cristi is one mile across and one mile long. Apart from a small shallow patch in the middle, it has 9' of water in which to anchor most anywhere. Favor the southeast corner, which has dinghy access to land; keep about a quarter of a mile off. Take your dinghy along a marked channel and under a small bridge to the sport fishing club and you can be assured a warm welcome.

The restaurant serves a wide range of local dishes and the prices are reasonable. From here you can taxi to the town of Monte Cristi, which is two miles inland. Should you want to clear in, the club will taxi in the officials. The only extra you need pay is the taxi fare. Somebody with a car

will take you into town for a couple of dollars, driving past the Hotel Montechico, through salt flats, and into this quiet no fuss town. Many of those who live in Monte Cristi refer to the town as the town the Dominican Republic forgot, as by car it is quite remote.



Anchor in the bay beside the mountain El Morro

For a week in February each year the townsfolk hold a carnival to celebrate Independence Day (February 27th) with just as much enthusiasm and color as Rio or New Orleans.

Dressed in hooded robes and protective masks, jousters flail each other with homemade rope whips. The whole town collects outside a large dancehall in the center of town to view the scene. No matter the time of year, the dancehall is a mecca for socializing, at which Dominicans are expert.



Carnival in full swing

Eat at any of the many restaurants and share a beer with the locals. Nothing happens very quickly here. Modern services such as the internet are available although the equipment is due for an update. One might say the same about the town but thankfully this is unlikely to happen soon.

Take a picnic and ‘gunk hole’ the three miles of mangrove lined canal from the sports-fishing club to the glorious beach at the foot of El Morro; you may well have the place to yourself. The bay, river, and town are untouched and the whole area is what Caribbean cruising used to be, so enjoy this quiet gem. Well protected, clear clean water and great scenery make this a superb anchorage. This bay is one of the hidden secrets of the Dominican Republic.



Gunk hole through the canal to the beach at El Morro

Cayos de Los Siete Hermanos (National Park)

Leaving Monte Cristi and heading west you will encounter the islands, Cayos de Los Siete Hermanos (Seven Brother Cays). They are: Monte Chico, Monte Grande, Tororu, Ratas, Muertos, Arenas and Terrero. They are all beautiful and virtually unexplored.

At Tororu, on the south side of the island (approximate position: **19°49.57N 71°47.76W**) is one of many possible anchorages. Enter from the south, between a coral shoal extending out from the western corner and a natural breakwater of exposed rock and coral to the east. There is 10' of water to anchor in, with a hard sandy bottom. If you draw less than 6', you can anchor quite close to the beach. Take the dinghy to the narrow beach and shelter under the occasional tree, in total isolation. Anchor in the lee of the land, protected from the northwest through to the northeast.

This is an area renowned for lobster so you may well snorkel amongst the rocks and find your supper. The entire island group is part of the Cayos de Los Siete Hermanos National Park. Most often you will be the only boat around and you will feel like you have discovered your very own paradise.



**A taste of the intriguing landscapes in
the Seven Brothers**

Manzanillo Bay

19°46.76N 71°49.59W

17.0 nm from Monte Cristi



Figure 64. Manzanillo Bay

Closing Punto Manzanillo, you will see a large Canadian ferry stranded and abandoned. Give the point a wide berth and watch the depth increase to 40' immediately after. Round up behind the point and anchor on a weedy bottom. Here you can take the dinghy to the small beach and go gunk holing

amongst the mangrove festooned inlets. You may rest easy here, well protected and in total isolation. This area is part of the national park.



Abandoned Canadian ferry -- Manzanillo

The shoreline of this large bay has the commercial port of Manzanillo to the south. As you leave the mangroves, head SW to cross the bay. Behind a beach restaurant to the southeast of the commercial pier is a saltwater lagoon. Favor the eastern shoreline since a sandy shallow extends along the restaurant side; you should find 10' to 12' to navigate through to the lagoon. This is virtually undiscovered territory but you will have a few sailboats anchored about. There are two other cafés apart from the restaurant, and a small village two miles away.



Estero Balza -- Manzanillo Lagoon

Manzanillo is a dormitory town for workers in the banana plantations and various other food industries inland. The commercial dock also provides employment. A very neat and clean town, there are two large *colmados* (grocery stores), a pharmacy, a hardware store and several small shops. This is not a major shopping center but there is sufficient variety to top up one's larder.

Whether you are heading east or west, Manzanillo is a very decent stop although somewhat commercial. This is a good town in which to shop for basic foods and grocery supplies, or to use as an additional jumping off point to go through the Windward Passage to the Caribbean side of the island.

Heading west from Manzanillo, stand offshore a few miles from Isle de Tortue (Turtle Island) and let the Trade Wind give you a broad reach around to the Caribbean side of Hispaniola. If the Trade Wind is blowing like it most often does and you like to sail, this is Trade Wind sailing as good as it gets!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the time and talent **Catherine Hebson, Director of Free Cruising Guides**, brought to the formatting of this guide to make its presentation first rate.

A WORD ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Frank Virgintino is a native New Yorker who has spent over twenty years living and cruising in the Dominican Republic. His sailing background of over forty years covers the Canadian Maritimes, all of the eastern seaboard of the United States and the entire Caribbean, many times over. Aside from cruising, he has spent the better part of his career designing and building marinas. In the process of writing this guide, all of the harbors listed were visited and each and every town noted. All of the information in the guide is a result of first hand, personal research and knowledge of the Dominican Republic. It is hoped that the guide will make the Dominican Republic easier to access and understand.

The author believes that the guide should serve as an excellent source of information for this vast and beautiful island, although it should not be used for navigation at any time. All charts, latitude and longitude positions and inserts exhibited should be used for a frame of reference only. Navigation should be undertaken with the appropriate charts of the area.

You can make comments, ask questions or suggest changes right on the website or by writing to: fvirgintino@gmail.com

Fair Winds & Great Cruising!

SPECIAL NOTE:

*It bears repeating that cruising guides are not intended for navigation. They are **GUIDES** to be used for reference only. All the Latitudes and Longitudes here are given to the best of the author's ability. However, they should never be relied on and the skipper of the boat should remember that he/she has sole responsibility for proper navigation. Facts and circumstances related to statements made in this guide can change; sometimes facilities and services that existed during the writing of the guide may no longer be available.*

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