

M.V. SOLITA'S CRUISING NOTES



PALAWAN & CALAMIAN ISLANDS PHILIPPINES UPDATED AUGUST 2013

This is the third update of our cruising notes for Palawan Island and the Calamian Islands. We passed through the area again in July and August 2013, and we feel that Palawan and the Calamian islands offer some of the best cruising grounds we have found in the Philippines so far. While not promising to provide a comprehensive cruising guide, we hope these notes will be useful to those cruising through the area.

In this update we have made some additional notes about some areas not previously visited, added new anchorages that we have used and updated information as necessary. We also reduced some generalised information. Facts were also gained electronically from the following sources:

www.philippines360*.com on 15-5-12

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/philippines/weather#ixzz1qxfwxUoQ> on 3-3-12

Wikipedia, Internet on 30-3-12 and 15-7-13

Geoff Gentil on SY Arnak and Alan and Little Mama of Discovery Resort, Coron have also assisted with some of the following information in these notes.

Sue and John Woods

MV Solita



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BACKGROUND:

The **Republic of the Philippines** is a sovereign country in Southeast Asia, with 7,107 islands across its archipelago. To its north across the Luzon Strait lies Taiwan. West across the South China Sea sits Vietnam. The Sulu Sea to the southwest lies between the Philippines and the island of Borneo, and to the south the Celebes Sea separates it from other islands of Indonesia. It is bounded on the east by the Philippine Sea.

With an estimated population of about 94 million people, the Philippines is the world's 12th most populous country. An additional 11 million Filipinos live overseas. Multiple ethnicities and cultures are found throughout the islands. In prehistoric times, Negritos were some of the archipelago's earliest inhabitants. They were followed by successive waves of Austronesian peoples who brought with them influences from Malay, Hindu, and Islamic societies. Trade introduced Chinese cultural influences which remain to this day.

The Philippines has been part of several empires: the Spanish Empire during the age of Imperialism, the United States after the Spanish-American War of 1898, and the Japanese Empire during World War II, until the official Philippine independence in 1945. Since independence the Philippines has had an often tumultuous experience with democracy, with popular "people power" movements overthrowing a dictatorship in one instance but also underlining the institutional weaknesses of its constitutional republic in others.

Palawan Island is an island province of the Philippines and is located in the MIMAROPA region. Its capital is Puerto Princesa City. The province is named after its largest island, Palawan Island, which is 450 kms (280 mi) long, and 50 kms (31 mi) wide.

Palawan also includes the Cuyo Islands in the Sulu Sea. The disputed Spratly Islands, located a few hundred kilometres to the west, are considered part of Palawan by the Philippines.

In the 2010 census it was noted that the population of Palawan province is 994,340, and the main religion is Catholicism.

There are 52 languages and dialects in the province, with Tagalog being spoken by more than 50 percent of the people. Other languages are Cuyonon (26.27 percent), Palawano (4.0 percent), and Hiligaynon (9.6 percent). Most people speak some English as well.

The Calamian Islands lie to the north of Palawan and are included in the Palawan province. They consist of over 80 islands and islets, the main ones being Busuanga Island, Coron Island and Culion Island.

Busuanga Island hosts the largest town, Coron, as well as the only airport in the Calamian Islands. Some of the finest beaches, islands and tourist spots in the Philippines are found in this island group. It is also well renowned as one of the world's best diving destinations, with its beautiful coral reefs and WW2 wreck diving. Other tourist attractions in the Calamians are the Calauit Safari Park, the former leper colony at Culion and the clear water lakes and coves of Coron Island.



WEATHER

Weather patterns in the Philippines are dictated by the prevailing winds – the *habagat* (southwest monsoon), which runs from May to October/November, and the *amihan* (northeast monsoon), which prevails from November to April/May. For most of the country, the dry season is during the *amihan*. The wet season tends to start in June, peaks in July to September, and peters out in October. Patterns have been unpredictable lately, with the rains arriving later and lingering into December, and some areas have their own local variations to the usual patterns.

The southern part of the Palawan province is virtually free from tropical depressions but northern Palawan experiences torrential rains during the months of July and August. There are usually two transition periods of six to eight weeks between the two monsoon seasons (March/April to May and October to November) each year when the wind is light and variable. This is a great time for travelling for power boats or those not needing strong winds.

The Calamian Islands seem to experience a more moderated version of the two monsoon seasons. We found that even in the strong NE season the winds were less than in Palawan or the Visayas, and often they were quite light and variable. The SW monsoon does produce rain and some SW wind, but again it is not as strongly evident as in other areas. Tourism takes quite a downturn during the SW monsoon in the Calamian Islands, and many resorts close for two to three months around July, August and September.

The average maximum temperature is 31 degrees C with little variation all year.

Cyclones/typhoons:

Situated at the typhoon belt, the Philippines can endure the impact of more than 20 typhoons annually. The main typhoon season is said to run from June to November, though records show that tropical storms and typhoons can occur in the Philippines during any month of the year. Typhoons cross the country in a northwestern direction, so almost all parts of the Philippines experience the onslaught of typhoons.

Generally in the earlier part of the season, typhoons cross over from the Palau region and travel northwest, passing through the northern areas of the Philippines and eventually moving on to Hong Kong or Vietnam. However, later in the season typhoons can develop further south, cross the country through the Mindanao or Visayas areas and travel on westward to Palawan.

At times a small typhoon will only produce winds around 50 to 60 [knots](#) but they can also be very severe, and they can develop very quickly in the Philippines. Typhoons often cause devastating damage and loss of life in poorly developed areas where significant rain and wind may trigger floods, mud slides and severe damage to existing flimsy structures.

Weather forecasting will usually provide ample warning of an impending storm or typhoon and there are many protected bays and anchorages where cruising boats can seek shelter. The Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) keeps track of typhoons that enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility. PAGASA is likewise responsible for declaring the typhoon signal in a particular area or region.

PAGASA uses four typhoon signals:

- Signal No. 1 – winds of 30 to 60 kph, intermittent heavy rains
- Signal No. 2 – typhoon is likely to hit an area within 24 hours, winds of 60 to 100 kph, heavy floods may occur in low areas
- Signal No. 3 – typhoon is expected to hit within 18 hours, winds of 100 to 185 kph
- Signal No. 4 – typhoon is expected to hit within 12 hours, winds of more than 186 kph, heavy floods and rains

Note: The Philippines forecasting and typhoon warning service at www.pagasa.dost.gov.ph provides good information. Other forecasting services we have used include:

www.typhoon2000.com

www.predictwind.com

www.buoyweather.com

www.passageweather.com

Our experience with the weather in Palawan in 2011, 2012 and 2013:

In April 2011 during a year with a weakening La Nina effect, the wind on Palawan's east coast was predominately NE, with some small local variations. It veered more easterly when strong, northerly when easing and started from the W or NW in the morning. Generally the wind kicked in around 7 or 8 am, and reached its maximum strength of around 20 kts by 10 am. It tended to ease around 4 pm, but some days could still be quite strong at 7-8 pm. There seemed to be a consistent ENE swell, from 1-3 metres. The winds eased considerably in May, with very light variable breezes in the morning and increasing by late morning. They then calmed off in the afternoon/evening. Many afternoons heavy thunderclouds developed over the land, often with thunder and lightning, but very little rain at sea. In mid-May the light evening breeze was westerly or variable.

In 2012, the La Nina effect had passed and we experienced much less wind overall in this area. Most days in April there was a 5-10 kt NE breeze, but the direction was often variable. Occasionally the wind would increase to 15-18 kts, generally from the NE. There was no persistent swell.

Around Linapacan and the Calamians in April/May, we experienced mostly calm weather with variable light breezes. Some days a NE wind developed to 12-15 kts during the morning. It usually dropped off by evening and the nights were calm and cool.

When we returned to this area in January of 2013, the NE monsoon was well established, but within the Calamian Island group, the winds were much lighter, and we had days of very light and variable wind. We did have some short periods of strong NE winds, 20-25kts that lasted for a few days. As we travelled south to Linapacan and Palawan the NE wind tended to be more consistent. This weather pattern persisted until around late March, when it then settled into a calm transition period. There were some days of light S-SE winds which then became light NE or variable breezes. The days were often hazy with frequent afternoon thunderstorms over the land.

While typhoons can be a major problem while travelling in northern and eastern Philippines, they tend to be less frequent and less severe in the southern and western regions. However, in December 2011 and 2012 there were severe typhoons that struck initially in the southern Visayas but then travelled on to Palawan. It is sensible to keep a close watch on the weather forecast at all times. We found several very secure anchorages in the Palawan and Calamian Islands that would be appropriate to ride out a severe storm – see this section at the end of the Anchorages section.

WHEN TO GO?

There seems to be widely differing opinions about the best time to visit the south-western Philippines. Many people advised us to go between December and May to avoid the typhoon season but at this time you can encounter strong NE winds, especially from January to March. The SW monsoon in Borneo starts around May/June, and eases by October/ November - this may be a good time to travel north, using the SW winds. It is typhoon season but forecasting is good nowadays, there are numerous places to seek shelter and late-season typhoons do tend to weaken by the time they reach Palawan.

Travelling to the Philippines from Palau and other places to the east may best be done during the NE monsoon, around December to May. There is a transition period of relative calm between the end of the NE winds around April/May and the emergence of the SW monsoon, around June. This makes for calm seas and comfortable cruising, but perhaps not great sailing. Another possible period of calm is after the end of the SW monsoon, around October, but we did not experience this in 2012 – the SW monsoon swung to NE within a week in late October.

Predicted wind patterns will be affected by whether a La Nina or Le Nino influence is present, and local areas of the Philippines may have their own weather variations because of their geography. Locals in the Calamian Islands have told us they can get fierce storms in July.

ROUTE PLANNING

Balabac/Palawan: We elected to travel up the east coast of Palawan for three reasons – absence of the South China Sea's persistent NW swell, the location of Puerto Princessa as our first Immigration port, and the presence of obvious and frequent anchorages. Friends who travelled up the west coast in January 2011 complained about the swell, the long distances between good anchorages and the abundant reef and rocks that forced them to travel far offshore. They also experienced strong northerly winds. Even though we found it hard going travelling north along the east coast against the

NE winds in April/May 2011, there were many suitable anchorages to choose from. At the same time in 2012, the NE monsoon had dropped out and we travelled north over calm seas. Travelling down the west coast would probably be best done around February to April, catching the last of the NE monsoon and going with the NW swell of the South China Sea.

Linapacan/Calamian Islands: We expected stronger winds north of Palawan because the latitudes were closer to the trade wind belt and there is no significant land mass to moderate the prevailing winds, but we found the winds were less strong and more predictable there during April & May.

We explored the south and west sides of Linapacan Island because of the prevailing NE winds, and found plenty of stunning scenery and potential anchorages. Crossing the Linapacan Strait from the NW tip of Linapacan gave us good protection from the ENE winds most of the way. Travelling around the Calamian Islands was very easy – there are many good anchorages with relatively short distances between them, and good protection from any prevailing winds. The many bays, passages, harbours and islands also provided good protection for anchorages.

Coron is an obvious stepping-off point to travel across to Mindoro and then further east to the Visayas, or north to Puerto Galera and Luzon.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS

Philippines Entry and Exit ports in the Palawan region:

Only Puerto Princessa on Palawan Island.

Immigration:

You need to visit an Immigration office to apply for and extend visas. The only Immigration office in this area is in Puerto Princessa (on Rizal Ave, near the airport). There is a small Border Office in James Brooke Pt on the lower east coast of Palawan, but this does not deal with visas.

There is no immigration office in the Calamian Islands, though there is some talk of creating one soon. The options to renew your visa from Coron are:

- Fly to Manila – there are several flights daily.
- Take a local 2GO ferry from Coron to Puerto Princessa – it will take 12 hours, you will need to stay 3 days to visit Immigration then catch the next ferry back to Coron.
- Fly to Cebu – there are direct flights three times weekly, but this also means a 2 night stopover.
- Travel to Calapan or Puerto Galera on Mindoro or Batangas in SE Luzon by yacht – there is no direct flight or ferry.

There are 3 commercial airports in the Palawan-Calamian area – Puerto Princessa, El Nido and Coron/Busuanga, all connecting to Manila with direct flights daily.

If you overstay your visa, it will cost you 1,010 pesos to have it reinstated as well as any due visa costs.

Visa information:

You can obtain Philippines visa information by logging on to: www.immigration.gov.ph.

Philippines Customs Bureau:

There is no Custom Port Office in Palawan but they have an agency in Puerto Princessa. The address is Manola St, opposite the Pilot Elementary School.

We have discussed with many cruising folk whether, as a private non-commercial vessel, we need to visit Customs in the Philippines. Many people do not declare themselves and don't seem to have had a problem. On our 2011 visit we did not declare ourselves to Customs as we only intended to cruise the Palawan Island area for 2 months. We re-entered Malaysia in the company of two other yachts who had cleared in and out of the Philippines Customs, and we were all treated equally by Malaysian Customs and Immigration.

In 2012 we declared ourselves to Customs in Puerto Princessa. It was quite an effort to find the Customs building and they certainly were not aware of what vessels were in the harbour. They told us that we do need to clear in and out of major ports as we travelled through the Philippines. They gave us a clearance to Cebu, our next major port, and charged us 200 pesos to clear in.

Two months later, we arrived in Cebu. We spent 4 months on our boat refit before visiting Customs in Cebu City, to clear in and out on the one day. They were fine with this, charged us 150 pesos for the paperwork, and cleared us out to Palawan, even though we wouldn't be arriving there for many months. They also inferred that cruising boats should clear through major ports in the Philippines, but they didn't seem too rigid about this.

We cleared into PP, and then out of the country with the PP Customs Office, for a cost of 115 pesos for each clearance (a total of 230 pesos). They were helpful and courteous.

Note: If clearing in or out with Customs, visit Immigration first, as they need to sight your current visa or Immigration Clearance to leave the country.

Note: We found having a Customs Clearance form declaring the boat's entry into the Philippines very useful when we flew out of the country then re-entered. The airlines will ask that you have a return or on-going ticket when you enter the Philippines, but we were able to prove that we were returning to our boat, which had been cleared into the country, and would exit the Philippines in it.

GENERAL FACILITIES

Provisioning:

Most of the supplies and services you will need can be found in Puerto Princessa. There are 3 large western-style supermarkets there (NCCC and Unitop are in town but Robinsons is quite close to Abanico), all with some sort of department store upstairs. There are also several Filipino-style department stores/supermarkets along Rizal Ave in PP. The larger towns like Roxas, Coron and El Nido have basic grocery stores, specialty shops, computer/phone outlets and hardware shops. All the towns have public markets where you can buy fruit and vegetables, and a “wet” market that sells chicken, pork, fish and other seafood. Some markets are open every day but in the smaller places they have set “market days”.

There were quite a few items that were either hard to get or impossible to find in Puerto Princessa and the rest of the Palawan/Calamian region. Consider stocking up on items you can’t do without before leaving your last major port or country. We had problems locating:

- Specialised boat parts, stainless steel fittings, etc. The local engineering shops are often brilliant at repairing or fabricating parts. If you really need to order something, try Broadwater Marine in Cebu (Ph. +63 32 341 0474) or Marine Supplies Asia (+60 (0) 1437 40053).
- 2 Stroke outboard oil.
- Some foods – unsweetened bread, wholemeal flour, good margarine/butter, cheeses, salami, wine and spirits, beef, good crackers, muesli/cereal, orange juice, UHT milk, Coke Light, pulses like lentils and peas.
- Deep cycle batteries.
- Some basic household items like pegs and workable ice cube trays.
- Larger sized clothing, especially underwear and swimwear.

Banks and ATMS:

There are many banks in Puerto Princessa, most with affiliations to the major international banking systems. Most banks have ATMs where you can get a maximum of 10,000 pesos per day using your credit card. Some ATMs allow you to make two withdrawals of 10,000 pesos on the one day. Some larger stores and fuel stations have credit card facilities. There were ATMs and banks that we could access in the larger towns like Coron, but not in smaller places like El Nido or Culion. In most of the larger towns there are also Western Union agencies, pawnshops and moneychangers.

Phone and Internet:

Access is unpredictable and patchy but generally if you can see a communication tower (most are red and white) on shore you will get coverage. We found good coverage in some small outlying islands of Palawan yet patchy reception in bigger places like El Nido. Coverage in the Calamian Islands was less

available than Palawan Island. Internet coverage (IC) is indicated for the anchorages we used under Facilities in the Anchorages section.

We purchased a Philippines modem in Puerto Princessa (Smart Bro) for 1250 pesos, and paid for coverage “top ups” of 300 pesos each (these lasted us about 2 weeks of average internet use). A SIM card for our mobile phone, with a small amount of calls included, cost 40 pesos in Rio Tuba. “Top-ups” or recharges of 100 pesos lasted us quite a while, as we don’t use the phone much. There are many places to purchase reloads for your phone and internet.

Many of the local resorts and restaurants of the larger towns offer free wifi.

General Costs:

Generally food and drinks are much cheaper here than in Malaysia. In Puerto Princessa in 2013:

San Miguel Beer – 680- 730 pesos per carton of 24 cans, 500 pesos for 24 small bottles (+ deposit)

Local rum – 75 pesos per 750 ml bottle

Wine – from 130 pesos per bottle for Chilean or Spanish, 500 - 600 pesos for Australian.

Basic foods are very cheap eg 20 pesos for 300 gms salt, 20 pesos for 500 gms sugar, 2 pesos per banana, 60 pesos per kilo for mangoes, 40 pesos per kg for pumpkin, 15 pesos per kg for watermelon, 30 pesos for a can of tuna, 35 pesos for a loaf of bread.

Western food is more expensive – 45 pesos for a hamburger, 22 pesos for a doughnut, 200 pesos for a BBQ chicken.

Fuel is more expensive than in Malaysia – diesel was around 48 to 55 pesos per litre in PP in 2013.

NAVIGATION

We used CMap, raster charts on Open CPN and Navionics on our dedicated navigation laptop computer and the 2011 updated NT+ GPS card for our chart plotter. We also had genuine paper charts. Generally the NT+ card gave more detail than CMap for large scale, and was generally very accurate. It showed all shoals, rocks and reefs quite clearly. The raster electronic charts were also very accurate, depending on scale.

CMap appeared fairly accurate, except for some areas, for example:

- The NW tip of Rasa Island and just from south of Malanao Island to Puerto Princessa – it was about 0.5 to 1 NM out here.
- PP Harbour - It doesn’t show the small Cana Island that is about 1 NM west of the Abanico Yacht Club (9°45.8’N, 118°43.15’E), and the reef en route to the yacht club is actually more shallow than shown.

- It was particularly inaccurate around the Verde Islands, Green Islands Bay and Dumaran Passage and on north to Tay Tay Bay, where it missed small islands, showed channels where there were none, etc. it was also somewhat inaccurate around Coron.
- Accuracy improved on the north-western end of Palawan.

We found Navionics excellent for route planning but its charting was too “approximate” in many places. We had much better small detail using the plotter and other electronic systems.

FLAG

Good strong copies of the national flag can be purchased in Puerto Princessa at Emmers Military Store on Rizal Ave, about 1 km west of the Jollibee Fast Food outlet, at a cost of 150 pesos. You may also find flags in the stationery departments of the larger “department stores” in Puerto Princessa. NCCC has good ones for 68 pesos each.



LOCAL TRANSPORT

In the SW Philippines the local boats seem well made and maintained. They are often painted bright colours and have inspiring names painted at the front. Many of the larger villages have a small boat building industry. Places like Pt Carmen and Cebu have flourishing boat-building and repair yards which overseas yachts and motor boats access, as the costs are comparatively low. Local craft vary from small outrigger or single hull canoes propelled by sail, paddles, small outboard or inboard, to



larger fishing canoes with two outriggers (called bangkas or “water spiders”), huge bangkas with masts and often three or four sets of outrigger poles each side that work as inter-island ferries or long range fishing vessels, to sturdy and quite large motor boats. These will work as fishing boats, ferries or to transport cargo around the islands.

Tricycles are the main form of public transport in all villages and towns. Essentially these are motor bikes with a frame welded on, providing seats to the right of the bike for 2-3 people over the third wheel and an overhead cover. Another passenger or two may sit pillion on the bike. They either work as a taxi or for private hire. They are very cheap though not greatly comfortable. In Coron and Culion the tricycles are more upmarket and have more seats – a double in the back, single in the front and pillion behind the driver, potentially accommodating about or eight seven Filipinos. Long distance

buses are usually very beautifully decorated with chrome and colourful shiny duco, but are



consistently overloaded and frequently break down. The seats are uncomfortable, there is no air-con and the windows usually don't close.

Motor bikes are the main mode of private transport, and you often see whole families – dad, mum and kids – crowded onto one. Cars are less common but there seem to be many late model vehicles on the roads.

DIVING

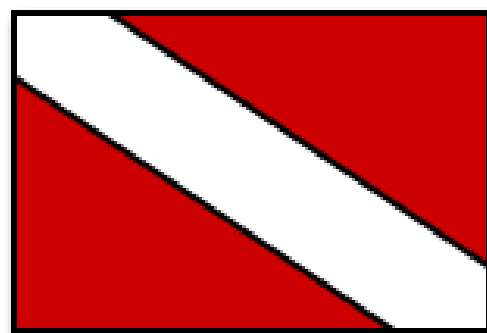
The main areas for diving are around El Nido and Coron.

El Nido has several dive shops and they provide dive trips as well as courses. Comments from another yachtee - "There is nice diving around here. I have chosen to use the local operators to dive at the main dive sights as I find their pricing fair, they are more than competent and always find turtles and other interesting critters. There are some great corals and a lot of schooling fish at the main sites. Not a lot of big fish, but some interesting corals and small coral fishes, a turtle every now and then as well as crayfish and par for the course here, evidence of blasting decimation in some locations."

Coron's main attraction is the wreck diving. In September 1944 there was a major air attack on part of the Imperial Japanese Fleet that was sheltering around the Busuanga area, and many ships were sunk. Some of these wrecks are easily accessible and most are remarkably well preserved. The wreck of the Japanese oil tanker just off Dipuyoi Bay is an excellent dive – it is relatively shallow at 12M to the deck, and covered with many soft and hard corals, small and mid-sized fish. Lionfish are present in great numbers! The wreck is well preserved and allows for partial penetration. Coron also has many dive resorts, shops and other facilities for divers.

We also found good snorkeling on many of the reefs around many of the islands in this region.

Note: Divers use the American dive flag here.



LANGUAGE

Filipino or Tagalog is the main official language. English is the second official language and it is taught in schools, so many people speak English quite well. The locals really appreciate visitors learning some Tagalog and will applaud your efforts and often help. We found the Lonely Planet phrasebook "Filipino" (ISBN 978 1 74104 581 9) excellent, and its size was perfect for keeping in a pocket or bag.

OBSERVATIONS OF GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

Balabac Strait:

It is only approximately 25 miles from the tip of Banggi or Balambangan Islands to the southern end of Balabac Island, so it is quite a short crossing. We found it easy enough except for the conflicting swells that make the seas confused at times, especially just off the Balabac Island south coast. The South China Sea usually produces a NW swell, often there can be a SW swell from the east coast of Borneo, and the prevailing NE wind may set up a short chop or swell. It can make for a rolly passage.

Watch for shipping at the bottom of Balabac Island – it is a well used route for ships en route to, or coming from, Singapore, Vietnam and China.

We felt that there was a northerly setting current, about 1 to 1.5 kts, with us as we travelled north across the strait.

Balabac and South-eastern Palawan Island:

- The southern end of Balabac Island is quite mountainous then becomes much flatter with mangrove areas in its north.
- There are dozens of picture-perfect islands off the east coast of this area, especially in the strait between Balabac and Palawan. It is well worth the navigational exercise of evading the many shoals, reefs and cays to travel from Candaraman to Rio Tuba via the strait. It is about 35 miles, fairly similar in distance to the outside route.
- In March, April and May we noted a gentle, southerly setting current all along the east coast here, at perhaps .5 to 1 knot.
- We found that in this area, the locals are not great wavers and visitors. The local boats, vehicles, houses, shops etc do not generally display their national flag.
- There is a higher percentage of Muslims in this area compared to the rest of Palawan.
- Balabac Town, Rio Tuba and James Brooke Pt. are small towns but with most facilities (local markets, phone and internet connection, shops selling SIM cards, limited groceries, beer). There is a permanent Coast Guard presence at all three towns. While not mandatory, they appreciate a VHF call or a visit to their office with a crew list as you pass through their area.

Clarendon Bay: This bay is very protected - the entrance has significant reef across its eastern side. Access is easy and once inside the bay there is fringing reef but the centre is deep (approx. 8 metres) and clear. People came to the boat to ask for things and to trade with their vegetables, coconuts, crabs and shells. They seem to need the most basic things here. They will ask for

sugar, coffee, biscuits, shirts, shorts, shoes, school things, glasses, paracetamol. We found them very friendly and grateful for anything you can give them. They did tell us that there are crocodiles in the bay, so don't be tempted to jump in.

It is possible to walk to the old Melville Pt lighthouse from Clarendon Bay, but you will need a guide. A



very enterprising 12 year old named Samsoden offered to take us. It was a quite strenuous walk across the island to the western coast then north and inland, crossing all sorts of terrain. We found the people living on the western side of the peninsula to be very shy and not overfriendly. They seemed to be mainly Christian (the people living around Clarendon Bay are Muslim). We met the lighthouse keeper and his wife, who walked us up the final leg to the lighthouse and showed us around the complex. She said the lighthouse dates back to 1892 and was erected by the Spanish. The tower and outbuildings were in poor repair, but still standing and very interesting to explore. Samsoden

then walked us back to the bay by an alternative route, through people's fields and yards. The whole trip took just under 4 hours and was well worth the effort.

Balabac Town: This is a very small town with limited supplies for purchase. The locals are friendly and welcoming. Dinghy access can be obtained at the main wharf or any of the small private piers – no-one seems to mind you using them.

Coboang Bay: This small bay is just north of Balabac Bay, and has a narrow entrance with a large reef in the centre, but with good charts it is easy to navigate. This bay provides great shelter from SE winds. We did see a large crocodile moving about the bay, so again, not a great place for a swim.

Candaraman Island: This beautiful island is to the east of the northern tip of Balabac Island. It is an excellent anchorage for NE winds – very protected by a significant island and extensive reefs, creating a large lagoon-like area on the west side of the island. We anchored in 15 M over sand and rubble. There are a few fishing and boat-building families living here. They are not over-friendly but don't seem to mind if you walk along the beach or swim in the lagoon, but "don't steal the coconuts" as the sign on the beach says. Beware of the isolated bommie on the SE corner of the southern reef around the lagoon. Watch for the large turtle that seems to live in the lagoon.

Cabugan Islands: These are small collection of mangrove islands close to the coast of Palawan Island. They offer good protection from the NE wind and amongst them is a good anchorage with almost all-round wind protection. We anchored in 15 M over mud.

Rio Tuba: There can be a lot of traffic at Rio Tuba and Pt Iglesia, as the copper/nickel mine here attracts many large ships transporting raw materials for the mine, and there are large tug and barge operations here as well.



The river entrance is easy to find from the north, between a port marker and 2 sand cays. The entrance is wide and we never had less than 4M at LWS under us. The shallowest part was around the old wharf. Past the port facilities on the north side there is a busy water village with several docks, and on the southern side a few stilt houses over the water. We motored past the village and the entrance to another creek on the right, and anchored in 8M. Beware of the mud bank on the right just past this small creek. There is 10M depth on the left hand side of the river.

There are many small shops in the main street and in the water village. It is possible to purchase SIM cards for phone and internet, and to reload current cards here. There are also several bakeries. Market days are Saturdays and Wednesdays, but some stalls in the market area open every day. They sell a great variety of fruit and vegetables, eggs, chicken, fresh pork on market days (go early – no refrigeration!).

Dinghy access is by tying up at one of the wharves of the water village. We tied up outside a shop, and purchased something from there on our way home. San Miguel beer is available from larger shops in the water village – 530 pesos for 24 stubbies, incl. bottle deposit in June 2013. All streets are unpaved and there are dogs, goats and fighting cocks everywhere.

There are no police/Immigration/Customs in the town, but there is a Coast Guard house. About one km away from the market area (50 pesos return trip in a tricycle) is a paved road provided by the mining company which goes from the main wharf to the mine. There are more shops, businesses and restaurants along this road.

This road connects to the “main highway” that continues on to Puerto Princessa. There are buses that travel there daily but it would probably be a long, dusty, uncomfortable trip.

We took our dinghy up the river and explored along the small creek for at least a kilometre (saw a macaque monkey in the mangroves) – there are a couple of options for “secure anchorages” close in to the mangroves if a storm developed while in Rio Tuba.

James Brooke: We anchored behind the break wall (which isn’t connected to the wharf!) in 3 M over sand/mud. It is a small anchorage, fairly open and passenger ferries, coastguard boats and coastal vessels use the wharf, so you need to leave them room.

Island Bay: There are several islands in this large bay which could provide a comfortable anchorage in fair weather, but you need to weave between some patches of reef and sand cay to get shelter and to be out of any swell. There are lots of fish traps here as well.

Mid East Palawan Island:

- We found quite a few islands north from PP to the top of Palawan had resorts on them, or they were developing them. Some were welcoming to boats (Reef Island), others not (Puerco Is., Flower Is. Arreciffe Is in Honda Bay).

- Keep an eye out for small fishing canoes out in the middle of nowhere. There can also be fish traps, bamboo poles and fish nets around. We also saw some large logs floating by.

Rasa Island: Because of its shape, Rasa Island offers good protection from both NE and SW winds. There are numerous bamboo stakes in the water around here which sometimes mark the edge of a reef or isolated bommie, or are used in very deep water as fish attractors. It can be a challenge to decide why they are there. It is possible to head north from the western side of the island but take care – there is an extensive reef out from the mainland, and another large reef off the NW tip of the island.

Narra Pier/Tando: This is the small town on the coast inside Rasa Island. There is a Coast Guard station here at the main wharf. There seems to be a large population here, and the town extends inland to a larger town (called Narra) on the road between Rio Tuba and Puerto Princessa. It is 30 pesos for two people, one way, from Narra Pier to Narra by tricycle, where there are bigger shops, a large wet market, bike shops and even a BBQ chicken shop!

Malanao Island: There is good anchorage to the west of this mangrove island in 6M over mud. There were lots of fish traps, huts and bamboo stick markers on the southern and SW side of the island but they were easy to evade. Our approach to the anchorage showed a consistent gradual shallowing towards the island – no bommies or reef.

Puerto Princessa (PP): This is the capital of Palawan Island and has all the facilities of a large town, including Immigration, Customs, an airport, manufacturing businesses, large department stores and supermarkets. Many of the shops and banks have armed security guards at their entrance, though the place has a safe feeling about it.

The seas at the entrance to PP harbour can be confused at times with varying tides, swell and sea conditions. Expect a bumpy ride for this area, and if the wind is up, probably don't tow the dinghy.

Most cruising yachts anchor off the Abanico Yacht Club at the NE corner of the harbour. It is a good secure anchorage, very protected, approx. 8-10M depth over sand/mud, and great scenery all about. John and Cissy at the Yacht Club will make you very welcome. Look for the blue roof as you approach the north-eastern section of the harbour. Beware of the reefs to the right of the small island, Cana Island, which is NOT shown on CMap, but is actually at



9°45.8'N, 118°43.15'E. The reefs to its east are shallower than shown on CMap - many yachts end up bumping them. If you transit a line from the main wharves in town to the large communication tower on the northern shore, you should stay in deep water until you reach



the anchorage. If unsure, call the yacht club on channel 72 VHF and they will send a dinghy out to guide you in. Membership at this private yacht club is 500 pesos per week. This provides access to the jetty, bar and restaurant, swap library, small workshop, a garbage bin, wifi and lots of local information. There is a small charge for potable water. The dingy wharf is accessible at all tides. Not to be missed is Cissy's Sunday Buffet Lunch for 350 pesos! Usual meals at the club are 220 to 300 pesos.

Note: Take care of your dinghy and outboard here in the anchorage – several have “gone missing” in the past couple of years.

Immigration is in a small office on Rizal Ave, near the airport, and Customs is opposite the Pilot Elementary School just off Manola St. Both are quite hard to find – it's worth getting a tricycle to visit these offices.

There are 3 big supermarkets – **NCCC** has great ham/bacon/pork/beef products, a good variety of groceries, some fruit and veg (though there is better quality at the local market), beer and wine (from Chile, Sth Africa, Australia, cheap – approx. AU\$3-10 per bottle). **Unitop** has a smaller food section but excellent homewares - both have department stores on their upper floors. These are both in town but NCCC also has a smaller supermarket quite close to Abanico, which is much less crowded. **Robinson's** - a western-style mall with supermarket, department store, many specialty shops and even a cinema! – opened in 2012 and is also quite close to Abanico – just a 30 minute walk or 40 peso tricycle ride away.

There are many banks spread out along the western part of Rizal Avenue in town. Metrobank and Bank of Philippines ATMs accepted our cards.

There are also excellent engineering workshops that will machine or manufacture at low cost - Hammerhead Engineering is quite close to Abanico YC.

The public markets in town are excellent – very fresh produce and good prices, but it is very busy. There are “new markets” much closer to Abanico, near Robinsons, but with less variety.

You can hail a tricycle just up the road from the club. It is a 20 minute, 60 -70 pesos for 2, tricycle ride into town. You can also rent a tricycle with driver for your exclusive use for 50 pesos per hour. Ask at the club for Rolan. He can also help you to buy fuel and transport it to the club's jetty.

There are several very good restaurants along the airport end of Rizal Ave. “Ka Lui” has a delightful ambience with great decorations, garden settings, excellent food and service. As well as the a la carte menu they offer a daily “set” with soup, tapas-style dishes of seafood, rice, vegetable and dessert for 395 pesos for two people. Other up-market restaurants are nearby. Fast food outlets are further down Rizal Ave near the NCCC supermarket.

An excellent day tour out of Puerto Princessa is to the Underground River at Sabang on the west coast. For 1,500 pesos per person, you are picked up in an air-conditioned van, have the services of an English-speaking guide within a small group, provided with lunch, beach time, transportation to the river by bangka, entry fees, etc. It is a great way to see the interior of the island and visit the underground river. Palawan Holidays is one tour company we used – Ph. 433-8868 or 723-2268.

We did some dinghy-touring while in PP. The large creek just north of Cana Island has several tributaries and a lot of bangkas anchor there. There are several excellent options for secure anchoring in typhoon weather in this inlet, and the entrance is easily navigated with a minimum depth of around 4M – see Maps section. The Iwahig River on the west coast of the harbour is deep and wide, navigable for several miles, with interesting scenery (huge old trees, the local prison, an old causeway) and great anchoring options. Unfortunately this waterway has a long shallow bar at its entrance, restricting entry to any vessel with a draft greater than 1.2 M, though locals may know of a deeper channel. We also took the dinghy into town, where we tied up to a small floating pontoon along the new esplanade.



Hunda Bay: This area is heavily promoted to local and overseas tourists. While it is worth poking around the islands for a couple of days, we felt it is a little over-rated. Many of the islands are mangrove sand spits with about 2 metres elevation above the high water mark, the water is not so clear and it is quite busy

with the hundreds of bangkas carrying tourists to the various resorts and day beaches. There are some lovely day resorts with sandy beaches and shaded foreshores – Makesi (aka Pandan) Island is perhaps the best. We anchored there as a lunch stop, but it may be a bit too open for an overnight anchorage. There are also a couple of up-market resorts where yachtees are not welcome – Arreciffe Island is one of these – and even a touristy turtle “sanctuary” not far from the Hunda Bay Pier.

Verde Islands: The waterway behind these low mangrove islands offers excellent protection from wind from all directions. The water looks clean and the people seem friendly, but there are many fish traps between the islands and the mainland. We accessed the bay via the passage between Nth and Sth Verde and the depths in this passage ranged from 6 to 18 M.

Green Islands Bay: There are several beautiful islands with good anchoring prospects in this large bay, but navigation can be hard work with all the reefs, rocks, sand cays and islands in this area. We stopped at Reinard, Flat, Puerco and Reef Islands.



Reef Island is really beautiful and has some good coral reefs and white sand beaches. The resort has been recently refurbished and welcomes cruising boats, but they ask that you anchor only over sand, to avoid damage to the reef. There is also a white visitor’s mooring buoy you can access for 500 pesos per night. They offer a good variety of meals for 300 pesos per head and they have a limited bar that opens around 5pm.

Flat Island is notable for the thousands of fruit bats that roost here, and take off “en masse” to the south at twilight. They return to their trees before dawn.

Dumaran Passage: This provides an easy way north without having to go around Dumaran Island, but it is the start of “pearl farm territory”. These farms are not easy to see until you are close. They use black or white buoys to hold the strings and sometimes floating triangular markers to show the corner

of a field of buoys. Just south of Dumarán Passage there is an extensive field of pearl farm buoys but the main area of them is to the east of the approach to the Passage, in the eastern side of the bay. The southern end of the passage between the two pearl fields was at 10°29.16'N, 119°43.57'E in March 2013 - there were only a few strings of buoys to the west of the main channel, much less than in 2012. There are some small passages cutting across the eastern fields, giving access to Dumarán Island without going all the way around the pearl farm.

We anchored overnight to the south and west of the passage, between the coast and a small reef. To reach the Passage from this anchorage we travelled to the north-west of this small reef, avoiding the pearl farm altogether, and this small passage was clear all the way from our anchorage to Dumarán Passage, with never less than 5 M depth. We also anchored on the west coast of Dumarán Island, between the island's coast and the eastern edge of the pearl farm, to gain protection from strong ENE winds.

North-eastern Palawan Island:

- Pearl farms start just south of Dumarán Passage, and are scattered in various bays north of there. Some are very extensive, and block off easy access to whole islands and bays. They all generally have a marked passage through them. The pearl farm security people don't like yachts near their farms, and will usually ask you to move on. Some of the pearl farms seem to move their strings about and either increase or decrease their pearl stings from year to year, so exact co-ordinates of the fields may not hold true.
- In the far north-eastern area of Palawan there are many beautiful tropical islands, white sandy beaches and spits, protected anchorages, etc, but there are also many rocks, marked and unmarked, which exist off island reefs and in the middle of deep water. Some are only just above water. Be very careful navigating this area, and probably don't travel at night or in poor weather.
- Many of the islands have small resorts on them, but they generally don't welcome drop-in boating visitors.

North Dumarán Passage: Through Dumarán Passage and around the Capsalon reefs and islands there are scattered strings of pearl buoys, without any corner markers, to both east and west of the main shipping channel north. These fields were much more extensive in 2011, with many corner markers and an obvious path through them. In March 2013 we found quite a few buoys not attached to strings, and some almost crossing the main passage way for shipping.

A good anchorage can be found here on the southern side of Sth Channel Island, a picturesque small coral island with sand spits and apparently some good snorkeling off the beach.

Bay Point Coves: Just north of Dumarán Passage there is a series of coves to the west of a promontory called Bay Point on some maps, and these coves are very protected and of good depth once you are in them. We stayed in the second cove at 10°39.2N, 119° 38.7'E which was very comfortable. The next cove to the west could be regarded as a very secure anchorage as it provides all-round protection.

Take care negotiating the reef between these coves and the main passage north from Dumaran Passage.

From Paly Island to just south of Icadambanuan Island there is another pearl farm, well marked with corner posts. If you cruise close to the eastern edge of the field you will avoid some off-lying reefs, though a couple of these are quite close to the edge of the pearl lease. The SE corner of the pearl farm is at 10°42.70'N, 119°39.33'E, the NE corner at 10°46.20'N, 119°38.24'E.

Icadambanuan Island: This island has several very good anchorage options in the bays on the western side, and we enjoyed the opportunity to explore this area by dinghy. We visited a beautiful beach on a small island just off the eastern edge of Icadambanuan, and also circumnavigated Castle Rock to the north. We have found the people on this island very friendly and likely to visit you if you anchor there. While anchored in the northern inlet we noticed a huge number of fruit bats taking off at twilight. It took about 25 minutes for the “flock” to pass overhead.

On the south-western coast of Icad. Island is a small resort. Friends called in there and reported the staff were very friendly and accommodating. They were included with the resort guests at dinner for a very reasonable price.

Tay Tay Bay: This huge bay has some spectacular limestone islands and islets. Castle Rock and Elephant Island are excellent examples. There are also many small islands, islets and reefs within the



bay, especially towards Tay Tay town. Several of the larger islands in the bay have resorts on them and they are generally not happy about cruising boats visiting. Apilut Island has a very upmarket resort and the security staff was quite clear with us that we were not welcome there. We did swim off the sand spit on Quimbalodan Island, and also snorkeled on the fringing reef on the SE corner of the island – this seems to be a day beach for Apilut Island.

There is a good anchorage in a deep bay at the northern end of Tay Tay Bay, at the SE corner of Maytiguid Island, but there are rocks and reefs within the bay to avoid. As you are crossing Tay Tay Bay look for the “Hollywood” style sign over the main town!

The coast of Tay Tay town is fairly open roadstead but in good weather you can weave between the reefs and anchor in front of the town. The anchorage there is tight and open to any NE swell, but dinghy access is easy and there are quite a few shops and a market to reprovision. The town is well-worth visiting – it has an interesting old Spanish fort – Santa Isabel Fort – dating back to 1667 and the Santa Monica Church has parts also dating back to that era.



In the north-west corner of Tay Tay Bay is a smaller bay called Silanga Bay. We found a great anchorage there in a calm inlet off the village of Maytiguid. The people there seemed quite friendly but did not bother us. At the head of Silanga Bay is the Tanguinui Channel, which is navigable by yacht, and leads to Shark Fin Bay. The channel was relatively easy to navigate, with depths of 5-12 M and just one rock to avoid, at around 11° 02.863'N, 119° 33.538'E. This rock is about mid-channel and lies approx. 1.5 M deep at mid neap tide. One section of this channel would make an excellent typhoon anchorage, as it is "closed off" from either end by the turns within it.

To the east of Tay Tay Bay and west of Init Island there is another huge pearl farm, which extends north up to Butacan (also called Flower) Island. There is a clear passage through it (southern entrance to the passage is at 11° 02.6'N, 119° 39.12'E, and the northern entrance is 11° 06.65'N, 119° 38.1'E) but the farm blocks easy access to several small bays on islands to its east. We did anchor at Butacan/Flower Island, which had an obviously up-market resort in the SW bay. Security staff from the nearby pearl farm visited and advised us we could not stay here (though other yachtees were welcomed just days later!). Around this area there are many up-market resorts on various islands.

Shark Fin Bay: This bay is to the west of Flower Island and north-west of the large pearl farm in this area. There are several small bays suitable as anchorages, but there are many isolated reefs and rocks within the bay, so care is needed (we motored over a 3 metre patch where the chart showed depths of 28-30 metres!). There are however no pearl or weed farms in the bay. The southern end of one of these bays connects to Silanga Bay and Tay Tay Bay via the Tanguinui Channel. There is another passage leading to the north-eastern tip of Palawan via Imorigue Bay, to the west of Imorigue and Talaotauan Islands. Imorigue Island – another spectacular limestone kaast island – has excellent anchorage options on its east and west sides.

Binulbulan Island: This is a pretty coastal island at the top of the east coast where we found a good anchorage in 7 M over sand and weed, with sandy beaches, nice fringing reef, but in July 2013 there was a small pearl farm along the west coast of the island! If there is a significant swell from the north-east, it will roll down both sides of this island.

Cabuli Passage: This channel between the tip of Palawan and Cabuli Island is easily navigated unless there is a heavy sea and significant swell. We found the shallowest depth – 7 m – at the eastern end of the passage.

Nacpan/Bucana Beach: Situated on the western coast, this beautiful long beach is in the northern part of a wide bay that extends down to Cape Crawford. If you motor over reef at about 5-6 M depth there is a wide corridor of sand close to the beach, at about 4-5 M depth, which provides a good anchorage in calm conditions.

El Nido, Corong Corong & Linapacan:

These twin towns on the far north western coast are not to be missed. The scenery here is spectacular. There are quite a few tourists here and the place



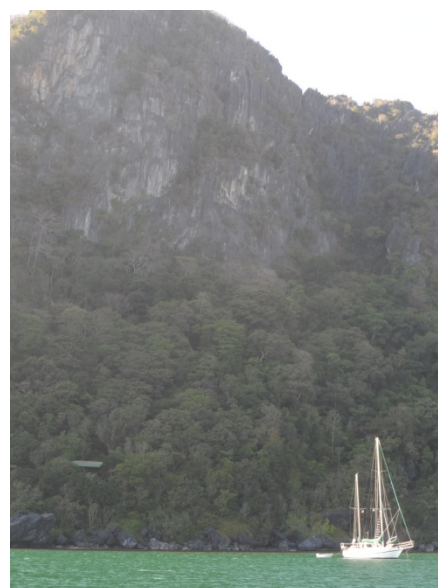
seems to be expanding quickly. We were surprised at the difference between our visits here in 2011 and 2013. However, with the increased building and tourist trade come great bars and restaurants, better access to Puerto Princesa by air and road, excellent local markets and good internet connection. It is also still possible to buy some nice pearls at good prices from local sellers on El Nido beach at sunset. Both towns have good anchorages for differing prevailing wind. The local markets are on the Corong Corong side of the saddle separating the two towns and the shops, bakery, hotels and tourist activities are in El Nido. It cost 20 pesos for two people to travel via tricycle from one to the other in 2013.

There are many tour companies offering tours of the surrounding area by bangka, which cost between 700 and 1000 pesos per person, lunch included. We found it easy enough to do our own tours by dinghy or with our boat Solita, using a local map (see El Nido Maps section at the end of this guide).

Corong Corong: Most yachts anchor here, in 5-12 M over sand/mud. Some people have found the holding is not good here, so take care when anchoring.

The local markets are an easy walk from the beach at the head of the bay. They are open every day but the main market days are Wednesday and Saturday.

The bus depot is by the markets, with buses heading south for most major towns at regular intervals during the day. An air-conditioned Roro bus to Puerto Princesa cost 483 pesos per person in 2013 and takes 6 hours. Local jeepneys are cheaper and slower. An interesting day excursion is to catch the bus to Tay Tay, just 60 kms and 90 minutes away, on the east coast of Palawan. The road is pretty rough, much of it unsealed, but the Roro bus cost just 100 pesos and a shuttle bus 150 pesos, one way. The old Spanish fort and the Santa Monica Church are well worth seeing and the drive gives you some nice views of parts of the Malampaya Sound en route.



In Corong Corong there is a village pump for non-potable water just east of the water village in the bay. A laundry service is very close to the pump – the Jodylyn Laundry. They charge 80 pesos per kilo, which was double the Coron rate, and it was not as well folded.



There are a few sari-sari stores and a fuel station (which sells diesel and petrol) in Corong Corong, but no decent grocery stores.

There is also a wonderful little beach with shady trees and a small sari-sari hut selling cool beer and soft drinks, just 2 beaches around the coast on the way to El Nido. The beach is great for swimming. The next beach along has a small day resort on it, but you are allowed to swim and snorkel free, and use the beach

up to the fence.

El Nido: You can anchor off the beach here in about 4-5 M, but it is very crowded with tourist bangkas. Access past the outlying fringing reef is via a marked buoy on the western edge of the bay. On the western edge of the beach by the wharf is a fuel depot with beach access, selling diesel and petrol. (Diesel cost 55 pesos per litre in March 2013.)

The main beach is lined with small pensions, cottages and bar/restaurants. The town is directly behind them, and is now about 3-4 blocks deep. With the recent growth there are now several large grocery stores, a few stores selling liquor, some boutiques with beachwear and beauty products, a couple of stalls selling crepes, as well as many restaurants and various types of accommodation.

Food shopping is surprisingly good here, with a couple of large and many small grocery stores with a reasonable variety of products. Even wine is plentiful and reasonably priced here.

The Tourist Office in the main street has maps of the local area, and the Art Café, a well-known café/restaurant one street back from the water, also has many brochures with local maps and a tour booking service. El Nido's Fiesta is usually held for 3 days in mid March, and includes many local sporting events, a parade, an Opening Ceremony, street markets and food stalls.

Note: We found no ATMs here in March 2013, though it is planned that a bank with ATM will open soon. So bring cash. There are moneychangers but the rates are not great. The Art Café and El Nido Fuel Station may provide cash advances with purchases.

Linapacan Island: This beautiful island is just NE of the tip of Palawan Island and has many bays and off-lying islands, islets and rocks, so care is needed while navigating around here.

West Bay offers a very protected anchorage and though it is not too scenic, there are stunning small islands and beaches within dinghy distance. On the southern approach to West Bay there is a narrow pearl farm with a passage through it and another small field along the western coast of Gentu Island. There were also some pearl strings at the entrance to West Bay in July 2013. There are two floating huts within West Bay - they seem to be associated with the pearl farm outside the bay.

South Bay also has a protected anchorage but there were seaweed farms close to the entrance in 2011 and we did not visit.



North Bay offers several good anchorages but there is a large pearl farm in the centre of the bay. We anchored past the pearl field in a cove at the eastern end of the bay, and the pearl farm people were OK with that. On the bay side of the eastern headland of North Bay there are some small caves well worth exploring by snorkel or kayak. Best time to explore is at half to three quarter tide, incoming.

It is a fairly level 10 m depth over sand and coral rubble just off the caves if you want to anchor there.

North West Bay is also very protected with several good anchoring options, and only a very small pearl farm near the entrance to the bay. There are several pretty beaches and a large town within the bay. A couple of the deep coves within North West Bay could be deemed “very secure anchorages”.

Calamian Islands:

- Be prepared to enjoy stunning scenery, friendly people, wonderful sunsets, great anchorages and no crowds every day.
- There are pearl farms and seaweed farms scattered about the island group but they seem to be better marked with wider and more obvious passages through them than those off Palawan Island.
- There are many dive sites, especially west of Coron and between Coron and Culion Islands. There are dive shops in the main town of Coron and attached to most resorts. There was a lot of military action here during WW2 and consequently now many underwater wrecks.
- The pearl farms, many fish traps and huts, partly submerged rocks and isolated shoals make navigation a challenge, and moving at night unwise.
- There are very many small bays and passages that could provide very secure anchorages if a big storm developed. They need to be explored initially, as often their depth or a reef will mean they are unsuitable. Some secure anchorages are listed in the Very Secure Anchorages section of this guide.
- We found that in July, August and September many of the resorts close down, as it is the rainy season and the tourist season is very quiet at this time.

Culion Island: This is the second largest island in the group – it is a large and hilly island with deep bays. On the south-eastern side there are many beautiful small islands, some with amazing sand spits on their western coasts. Some have resorts but the more southern islands do not. Ditaytayan Island – off the SE coast - is relatively uninhabited. It has a lovely bay on its western side with good options for anchoring during the NE monsoon season, and a large sand spit at its NW corner. There is also a beach on its NE coast – a possible anchorage during the SW monsoon. The island is said to be “owned” so the “security guard” may ask for a fee of 150 pesos per night to anchor there.

In the passage between Culion and Tambon Island there are many small pearl fields, but there is clear passage through them. This is a very scenic route.

The western coast of Culion Island is very attractive, but watch for small bangkas, fish traps and Bare Rock, barely breaking the surface at high tide! - off the southern tip of Galoc Is.

Culion Town: This is the main town of Culion Island, situated on its north-eastern coast. While there is very little tourist development the island has retained remnants of an old Spanish fort and a church from the late 1700's and more recently, buildings erected when it was a large leper colony that was initiated in 1906. There are numerous small information plaques erected around the town that give information about many of the buildings – a self-guided historic walking tour of the town is a must! We found no large stores here but there are many sari-sari stores which sell some vegetables, eggs, beer, fruit and bread, as well as basic groceries. There is also a small market at the western end of the waterfront. There are several small restaurants which we found shut on Sundays. The Maya Hotel, overlooking the waterfront, is probably the only “western-style” bar/restaurant here. The government is rebuilding the hospital next to the church on the hill, and friends who accessed it reported excellent service from the doctors and technicians there.



We anchored in the cove to the east of the town – there is good holding in 14 metres towards the end of the bay. Dinghies can be tied to one of several stone piers in front of the town or on a small beach in front of the Elementary School.

Just north of Culion Town is a series of interlocking bays, some with pearl farms but some are amazingly empty. There are definitely potential typhoon holes in this myriad of waterways – we anchored overnight at Kalalalingday Bay. While it does have some reef within the bay, it was quite easy to navigate and it is virtually landlocked. It would be a very secure anchorage in a serious storm.

Halsey Harbour: This is a huge harbour on the south-western side of Culion Island with many protected bays, scenic beaches and islets. When coming across the Linapacan Strait, the southern entrance is very obvious, with several huge jagged rocks off Alava Island on the left side. There is deep water through this passage on the southern side of Alava Island. The northern passage is also deep. The harbour is surrounded by tall hills and there does not seem to be much flat and arable land here. Unfortunately much of the harbour is very deep and finding a shallow anchorage can be difficult. We found a comfortable and very secure anchorage at the end of the northern arm of the bay in 15M over mud. This anchorage had another significant advantage – a local fisherman brought us about a kilo of huge live king prawns and 3 big mud crabs – all for 900 pesos.

We also anchored at the entrance of the southern arm, over rocks at 10-12 M, and this was a very comfortable anchorage even in high NE wind. We explored a long way down this arm by dinghy – it is very scenic and protected. We found a probable typhoon hole about .5Km in, on a stretch of flat mud bottom at 5-6 M (See Secure anchorage section). Past



this the arm became quite shallow, though a dinghy could continue for .5km or so. There are many protected bays within the harbour – there are 3 listed in the Very Secure Anchorages section.

Popototan Island: This island due north of Culion Island has a small resort in its southern bay called Coral Bay Resort. They are welcoming to yachtees but do have fees. If you use their mooring, it costs 200 pesos per day. It is free to anchor, and we found good holding in mud at 16M. There is an excellent home reef in front of the resort but in July 2013 they charged 300 pesos per person per day to snorkel, to use their wifi, bar/restaurant, toilets and showers. There is also a small souvenir shop and massage room, and they will give you a free map of the walking trails of the island at reception.

Busuanga Island: This is the largest of the Calamian Islands, and hosts Coron Town, the main town in this region. The regional airport is also on Busuanga Island. The southern side of the island appears drier than Coron and Culion – it seems to be in a rain shadow from Mindoro and Culion Islands. The road system is fairly basic and most of the roads are unsealed away from Coron Town. There are many smaller islands, beaches and bays around Busuanga suitable as anchorages for cruising boats in either of the two monsoon periods – take your pick! Several islands, both close to Coron and further afield, have resorts on them, and some are definitely yacht-friendly. Others may not welcome cruising boats. Many bays have pearl or seaweed farms in them, so you may need a back-up anchoring plan when heading off.

Calauit Safari Park: This is situated on the NW tip of Busuanga Island, on Calauit Island. The island is a huge natural reserve for African and local animals – an unlikely attraction, but one well worth visiting. The main attractions are the free-roaming giraffes and zebras, as well as the 800 or so cute little Calamian deer. Apparently the park was a President Marcos initiative, to help relocate and protect several species of African wildlife.

There is an excellent anchorage in the inlet between Calauit and Busuanga Islands, and entrance to the park is within this inlet in a small mangrove basin towards the western end, on the Calauit Island side. Entry fees in July 2013 were:

400 pesos entry fee per person, 1,000 pesos for the optional vehicle safari tour (around 2 hours) – the cost is shared between the number of participants, and 200 pesos optional giraffe food contribution. We toured both by vehicle and on foot, and preferred the latter.

There were also great options for dinghy-touring here. We travelled along the creek that separates Calauit from Busuanga through to the north-eastern end. The bay at the western end of Calauit Island has many sandy beaches to swim from, and Little Black Island, one of the larger kaast islands in the bay, has some small caves.

North Coast: The northern coast of Busuanga Island seems to be less visited by yachtees, perhaps because it is open to the NE winds, and during the SW monsoon there is a lot of rain on this coast. There are, however,



many protected coves, bays and inlets along this shore, and we found the only pearl farms were on the southern and eastern side of Cabilauan Island, at the bottom of Pt Caltom. They definitely did not welcome cruising boats there in July 2013.



There are many stunning offshore islets and small rocky islands, often with sandy spits and beaches.

The El Rio Y Mar Resort is yacht-friendly with reasonable fees, great amenities and is in a well-protected cove at the top of Pt Caltom. For a fee of 200 pesos per day (in July 2013) you can use their moorings, pool, games room (pool table, table tennis, volley ball, darts, etc) book swap library, bar/restaurant, spa and dive centre.

East Coast: While not spectacularly beautiful, this short coastline has some lovely islands and inlets along it. This area doesn't seem to be very populated, though the coast would only be 10 or 15 miles over unsealed road from Coron Town. Minangus Bay has two entrances but the northern one would be difficult to navigate, with the scattered shallow reefs and seaweed farms. We found a very protected anchorage in Minangus Bay after entering via the southern channel. Pt Borac is easily accessed and its bay provides an excellent secure anchorage.

Dupuyoi Bay: This is an amazing anchorage on the southern coast of Busuanga Island and due north of Culion Island. It is a natural river mouth and the anchorage in the bay is very protected. In July 2013 the entrance was well-marked with port & starboard markers. There are three boat-friendly resorts here.



The **Puerto Del Sol Resort** provides strong moorings for visiting yachts. The fee for the moorings is 300 pesos per day or free if you use the resort's bar and restaurant. There is even a pool! The food is good though some of the drink prices are a little expensive. To book for a meal there call on 0920 2961274. Puerto Del Sol has also installed 5 cyclone mooring buoys in the next bay, which are available for US\$130 per month. The river which empties into these bays is also navigable by dinghy or catamaran for quite a long way, with the shallowest draft of 0.5M at LWS at its entrance but greater depths inside.



Opposite Puerto Del Sol is another small resort – **Al Faro** - which offers about 8 cottages as accommodation, a horizon-style pool, bar and restaurant in an amazing setting, at relatively good prices. The buildings are interestingly quirky, the gardens lovely and the sunset

views are incredible! The owner Jimmy and his wife are also very welcoming to people from boats in the bay. It's best to pre-book meals there on Ph 0908 8658987 or 0920 2949138.

The newest resort, **Busuanga Bay Lodge**, opened mid 2013 and is very up market with European styling. Its accommodation includes 6 casitas, 4 deluxe casitas & 3 suites, with another 24 rooms due to be completed by February 2014. The bar/restaurant, with horizon pool area, is high on the hillside with great views. Prices here are more expensive than the other two but management welcomes visiting yachtees. They are planning to open a small marina with chandlery, dive shop and bulk fuel by October 2013.



Just 1km out off the entrance to Dupuyoi Bay is a WW2 wreck – a Japanese oil tanker sunk in 1944 - lying in 25M, with the top at 10M (marked with 1 black and 1 white buoy). In the first part of the bay there is also a post-war seaplane lying on a beach.

The only drawback with this great anchorage is the lack of internet and phone coverage (though wifi occasionally works at Puerto Del Sol).

Tanget Island is another limestone karst island just off the south coast of Busuanga, between Dupuyoi Bay and Coron. It has several wrecks around it and is popular with the dive boats, but we found a couple of quiet and reasonably shallow anchorages on the eastern side of the island (see Anchorages section). The fringing reef is excellent for snorkeling here, and there is a small shallow wreck of a Japanese gunboat at 11°58.47'N, 120°04.75'E. This wreck gets very busy during the day with many bangkas bringing tourists. There is a lovely beach on the SE corner of the island, with a mooring sited in a natural bay in the fringing reef, but this area is apparently private and connected to Tanget Island Resort.

Coron: This is the main town in the island group and is quite busy. Diving tourism is big here, with many resorts, dive shops and boats. Tour companies also offer a variety of day trips by bangka to places around the area. There are daily flights to Manila, flights three times weekly to Cebu and almost daily boat transfers to El Nido. There is a ferry service between Manila, Coron and Puerto Princessa twice weekly in July 2013. The town is well set out with many tricycles offering travel within the town for 10 pesos. There is a comfortable and safe feeling about the place and the locals are very friendly. Best of all, there was no karaoke booming out all night. The town bustles until about 9pm then it is pleasantly quiet.



Beware of the reefs within the harbour and in Coron Passage. There are also many moorings and some floating ropes – we caught one unbuoyed mooring line in our prop. The approach to Coron from the west via Port Usen has fewer obstacles than the southern approach.

Anchoring: You can anchor just off the town, behind the fringing reef in 9-10 M but watch for moorings, floating lines and small scattered reefs. There can be a lot of boat wash here while the tourist bangkas are working and it is open to southerly winds.

An alternative anchorage that provides more protection from most winds and that has less boat traffic is the bay to the north-west of the small island at the northern end of Coron Bay, where there are many concrete pilings for a future marina. There is good holding here in 6-8 M. The small resort on the island – Discovery Island – is very casual and their meals and drinks are fairly priced. Their wifi usually reaches to boats in the anchorage. Alan and Little Mama, the owners, welcome yacht crews into the bar/restaurant of the resort, where there is a small beach for dinghies. The downside is a longer dinghy ride to town. Alternatively park your dinghy along the nearby seawall and walk or catch a tricycle into town.

Dinghy access in town can be awkward with so many bangkas around. SeaDive Resort has a small water “alley” beside their building with steps up to their pathway – they seem to be happy for yacht crews to use this if you also use their bar/restaurant occasionally.

Provisioning: The “wet” market (fish, chicken, pork, etc) and fruit and vegetable markets are on either side of the central Gateway Hotel and



administration/tourism building, behind the plaza on Don Pedro St. There is no western-style supermarket, but many sari-sari stores and small groceries where you can buy odds and sods. There are two local “supermarkets” at the eastern end of Don Pedro St, where you can buy most basic items.

For more exotic items you can try Twiggy’s in Real St, which has a good selection of packaged and canned goods, wine, beer and spirits, though they are expensive. There is also Eurofoods Phils in Real St that offers European foods for quite reasonable prices (muesli, jars of various beans, peas and fruit, mashed potato mix, German beer, wine, etc) and Cima, on the National Highway, at the airport end of town (frozen sausages, ham, bacon, tinned vegetables & pickles, cheap wine).

There are at least three laundry services in the main street (Don Pedro St), four bakeries, numerous hardware stores and various other shops and services. There are also many restaurants offering good food at reasonable prices (we’d recommend SeaDive Resort on the waterfront, the Coron Bistro on the National Highway in town and Kookie’s, upstairs at the corner of San Pedro St and the plaza).

Coron has three banks with ATMs – BPI on the National Highway in town, Land Bank on the Highway east of town and Allied Savings on Don Pedro St.

Internet and cell phones both work well here. There are many places to reload your SIM cards. Sin Tech, on the National Highway, Sinamay, about 1 km east of town and opposite a fuel station, offers an excellent range of computer services, printing, laminating, book binding, fax and email.

Beer is readily available at most sari sari stores, but check prices as they differ greatly from store to store. Rum and other local spirits are also cheap and easy to find. Wine is more difficult to buy, and expensive. Twiggy's and some of the larger grocery stores sell Californian or Chilean wine. Red wine is more available than white for some reason.

Refueling: You can buy diesel and petrol at the port area behind the main wharf where there is an obvious but now defunct tank farm. There is a concrete ramp that offers easy access for dinghies at all tides. In January 2013 they charged around 50 pesos per litre for diesel, 40 pesos for petrol. Alternatively, you can take drums by tricycle to any of the three fuel stations in town, but we found using the dinghy was easier. You can arrange to come alongside the main wharf for a minimal fee, and organise a fuel company to bring 200 litre drums down to the wharf for you, but we rarely saw space on the wharf.

Coron Island: The northern coastline of Coron Island, just opposite the town, is quite spectacular with clear water, many protected and semi-enclosed lagoons, great coral reef, sandy beaches and freshwater lakes. The distances along this coast make it easy to explore via dinghy, or else rent a bangka. There are admission charges for the freshwater lakes (100 & 200 pesos pp) and a couple of the beaches, but the rest is easily accessible and free. Several of the small protected bays would make excellent storm refuges if the entrance allows enough draft. Most of the bays have a "bar" of reef across their entrances with a depth of around 1.5 to 2M, but there are some without this reef bar (eg. the bay in front of Kayangan Lake and behind the island which lies in front of the western part of Twin Lagoon). There is an anchorage in this area described in the Anchorages section of this guide.



It can be quite busy with tourist bangkas along this coastline but it is worth the effort to see this area. Barracuda and Kayangan Lakes are amazing (though it's quite a hike to Kayangan Lake), the snorkeling areas have some lovely coral (not many fish though), the water is usually crystal clear and the rock formations are spectacular.

At the northern end of the west coast there are several white sandy beaches that have been set up as "day beaches" for the tourist bangkas, but they will also welcome yachtees in dinghies, for a small fee. These beaches are very clean and usually have a good area for swimming and snorkeling.

The rest of the island is steep-to, with some small beaches along its western side and a large bay on its south-eastern tip, which may be accessible to shallow draft vessels. This island seems to be fairly unpopulated.

CORON TOWN MAP



The main anchorage is in front of the town, to the left of the public market area on the map. Please note there are many reefs throughout this area and two fringing reefs between this anchoring area and town access. An alternative anchorage – more protected – can be found to the NW of Discovery Island, where there is good holding in mud at 6-8 M.

Dinghies can be left safely in the waterway by Sea Dive (perhaps ask as a courtesy, and use their bar/restaurant occasionally) or by the public dock area, though this is generally full of tourist bangkas. Fuel can be bought in the port area behind the main wharf.

VERY SECURE ANCHORAGES IN CORON TOWN AREA

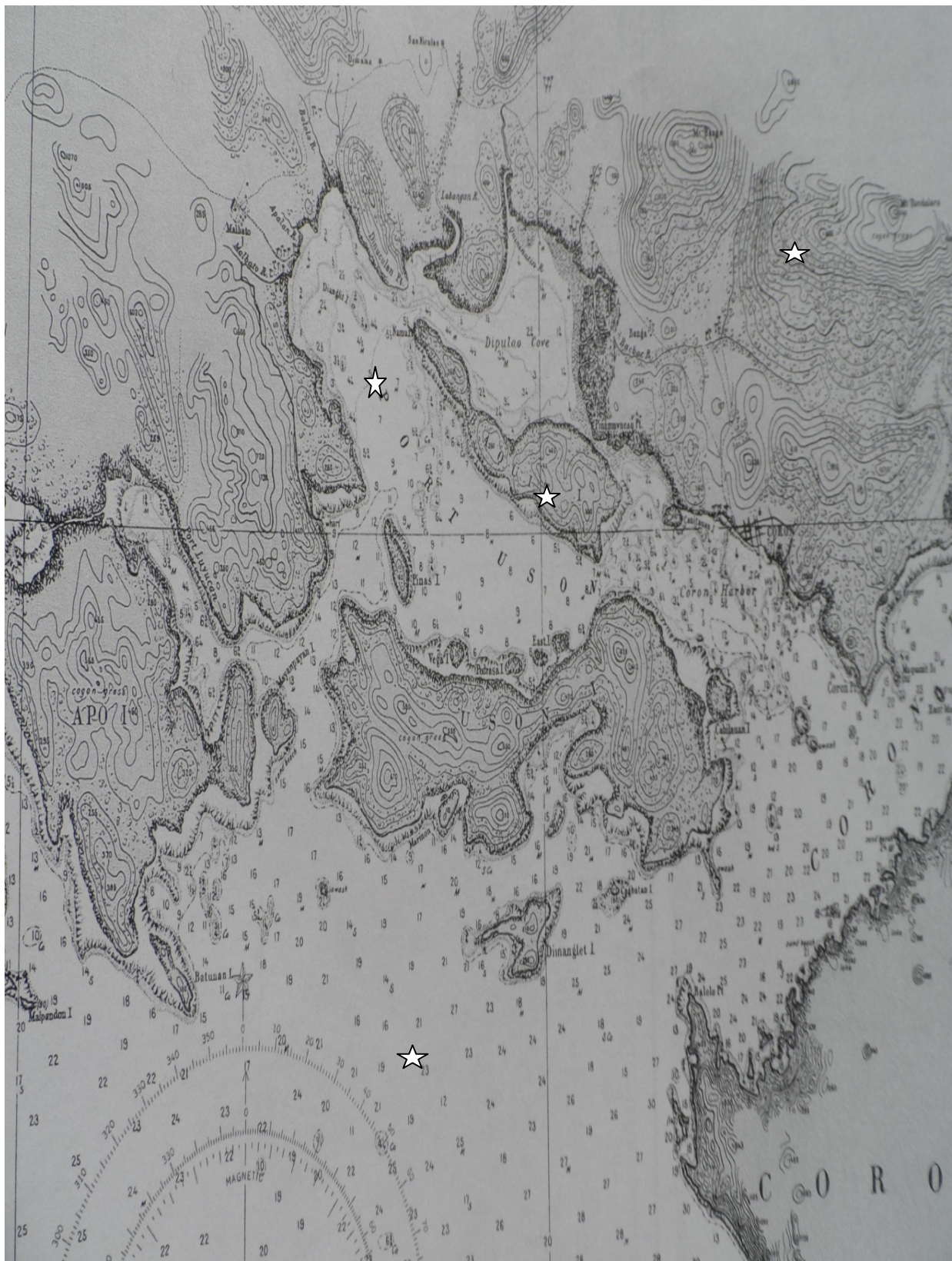
Note:

All anchorages have access to them at depths greater than 4M, though there may be reefs to

be negotiated around to reach them.

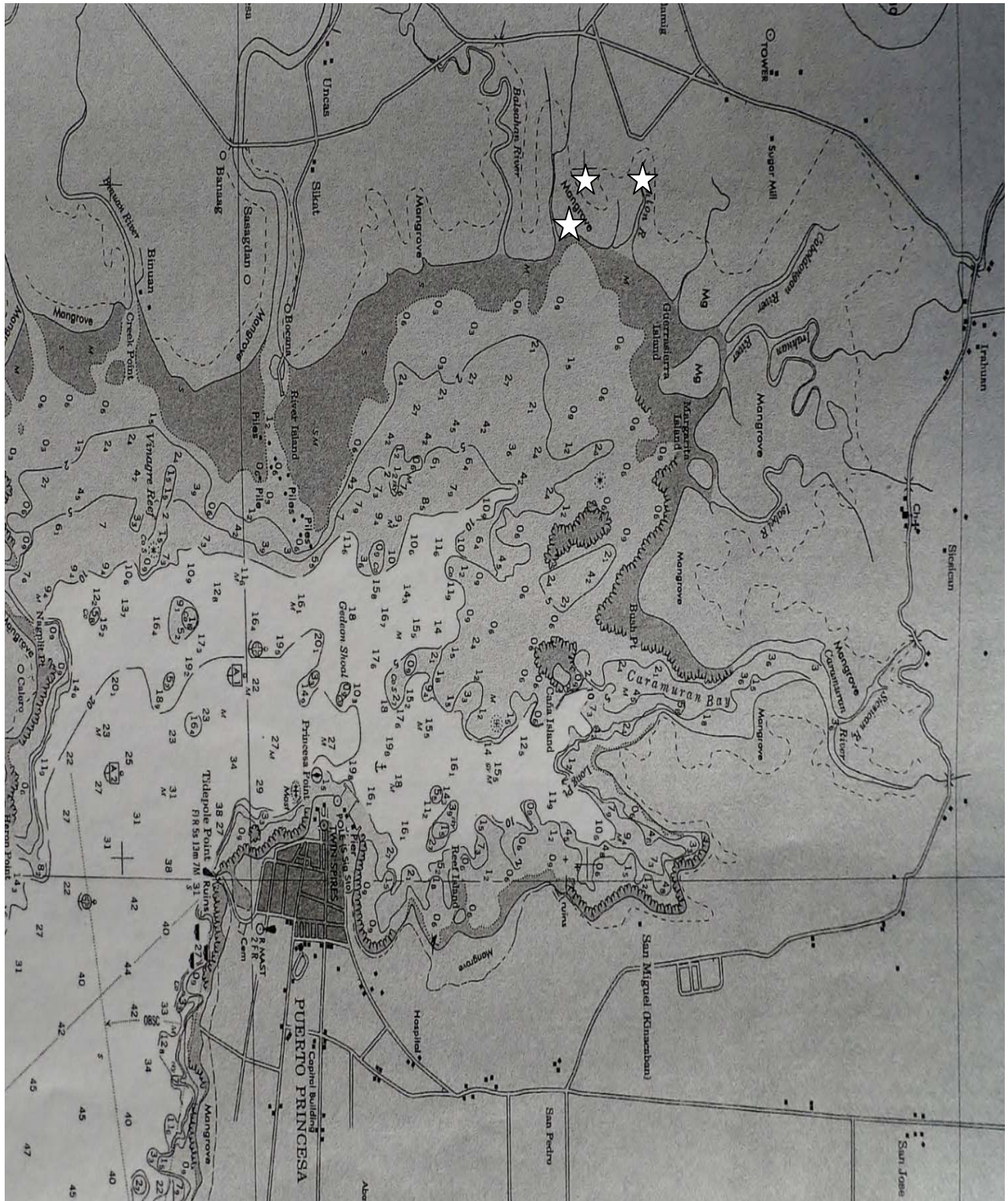
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ESSA TOWN MAP





VERY SECURE ANCHORAGES IN PUERTO PRINCESSA



Note: Iwahig River anchorage suitable for shallow draft vessels only - wide bar at entrance has greatest depth of 1.2 M at mid tide neaps. Curamuran Bay has access depths of at least 4M to all sites.

EL NIDO MAPS



Our Trips:
 Island hopping
 Beach trips
 Fishing
 Sunset Cruise
 Trekking tours
 Cliff Climbing

Rentals:
 Kayaks
 Mountain bikes
 Windsurf
 Snorkel Gear

Whole day Tours: 9.00—16.00h

Kayak Tour A: Kayak into the lagoons, Coves, to nearby Beaches and Snorkeling Areas of Miniloc & Simisu Island

OUR A Lagoons, Snorkeling Miniloc & Simisu Island

OUR B Snake Island, Caves, Snorkeling Inabuyutan Is.

OUR C Secret Beach, Snorkeling at Matinloc & Tapuitan Strait

Day Tours:

Cadlao Kayak Tour with Helicopter Is., Ubungon Lagoon, Cadlao Wall, Bocal Island

Island hopping Cadlao and Helicopter Is., Snorkeling




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 El Nido Boutique & Artcafé






Tour company map showing their day trips around the El Nido area. They are relatively inexpensive but we explored these areas in our own boat and by dinghy with no problems.



ANCHORAGES:

	Anchorage	Access	Holding/depth	Protection	Facilities
Balabac/South-Eastern Palawan area	Clarendon Bay 7*48.9'N 117*1.3'E	Easy – watch reefs both sides of entrance and conflicting currents out from entrance	Excellent – 6-8 M over mud	From all directions but SE to S	None but friendly villagers will probably visit, to trade or sell fish, veg & fruit. Take trade goods. No IC.
	Dalawan Bay 7*53.32'N 117*04.42'E	Easy	Very good – 9-10 M over sand/mud	From all directions but NE thru E to SE.	None. No IC. Sandy beach at back of bay, many local gardens.
	Balabac Town 7*59.5'N 117* 4.15'E	Easy	Excellent – 6m over mud	From all directions except NE-E	Town, shops, Ph & internet coverage (IC). Some submerged rocks against the shore to east of town jetty. IC.
	Coboang Bay 8*0.9'N 117*4.1'E	Easy but narrow passage thru fringing reef at entrance, watch for central reef within bay	Excellent but deep – 18 M over mud.	From all directions except E.	None, very few people living here, but there is an enormous crocodile living in this bay.
	Candaraman Is. 8*4.6' N, 117' 5.8' E	Easy – 1 small isolated bommie on SW corner	Excellent – 15M over sand/rubble	Excellent for N to SE wind & swell	Beautiful island, beaches, snorkeling, patchy IC. Locals are not overfriendly here.
	Cabugan Islands 8* 23.8'N, 117' 15.8'S	OK – circuit islands for depth wanted	Excellent – 15M over mud	Excellent for all wind & swell	None but good cyclone anchorage.
	Okayan River 8* 30.6'N, 117* 27.6'E	OK – negotiate around fish traps, watch depth – it is very shallow in river.	Excellent – 3M over mud	Fair from NW to NE wind, some swell	None but IC good.
	Rio Tuba/Tuba River 8* 30.5'N, 117* 25.5'E	Easy – enter between markers and sand cays. Least draft is 4-5 M at old wharf at river mouth.	Excellent – 8M over mud	Excellent for all directions of wind and swell	Town/market, able to buy SIM cards, reload phone & internet. Cyclone anchorage, IC. Access to PP via road .
	Sir James Brook 8* 46.2'N, 117* 49.5'E	Easy, but it is very shallow in anchorage behind rock wall.	Excellent – 3m over mud	V. good for SW to NE wind, some swell	Small town, IC, access to PP via road.
	Arrecife Island Island Bay 9* 5.5'N, 118* 9.4'E	Easy from the east, watch for reef to west of island	Very good – 18M over sand	V. good for SE to NW.	Beach, old resort now not functioning but security guards quite friendly.
	Bessie Island 9*4.23'N 118*8.13'E	Accessible from north and south but watch for reef patches	Very good – 12 M over sand/mud.	Good protection from NE to SE, extra protection from nearby islands.	Next to Arreciffe Island. Just a few village of fishermen living here – no facilities, no IC.
	NW corner of Island Bay	Difficult – should have detailed chart of area	Excellent – 3-4 M over mud	V. good for E through N to W	IC. ?Old Portuguese fort on promontory.

	Anchorage	Access	Facilities	Details
Balabac/Palawan Islands	Cabugan Islands 8* 23.8'N, 117' 15.8'S	Motor between 2 islands to anchor behind long mangrove strip.	None, no IC.	Surrounded by tall mangroves, min. fetch - excellent for all wind & swell.
	Rio Tuba 8*31.6'N 117*24.6'E	Stay L side of river after passing the town, take left turn at 3-way. Should have 3-4 M water at LWS	None, but town is 1km down river. Good IC.	Beware several mud banks on R side of river past the town. Some fetch from W. Hug to mangroves for wind protection.
	Puerto Princessa 9*47.12'N 118*43.8'E	Enter creek from N side of Cana Island at Nth end of harbour. Ask locals re best access at creek entrance.	None, but town 1 km away. Good IC.	Past first turn of creek is wide area – depth approx. 4M. Large mangrove creek system provides several anchoring options & variable protection
	Bay Point Coves 10*39.26'N 119*38.15'E	North of Dumaran Passage – then west - negotiate around reef to gain access to coves.	Small villages in first 2 coves. No IC.	Good depths within coves and all round mangroves offer good protection, esp in 3 rd cove.
	Tanguingui Channel between Shark Fin & Tay Tay Bays 11*03.07'N 119*33.52'E	Access via Salanga Bay (in Tay Tay Bay) or Shark Fin Bay. Watch for fringing reef & isolated rocks and reef.	None	Located in long mangrove-lined passage, approx. 300 metres wide and 1.0 kms long. Ends “close off” for excellent protection. Depth 5-10M Watch for rock in centre of channel.
Linapacan Island	North West Bay Linapacan Island 11*27.68'N 119*46.82'E	Easy access through the main bay – watch for rocky islets and fringing reef.	Large town on eastern shore of bay	Tight bay at end of North West Bay – protected from all directions. Reported depth of 16 M. Several other small coves nearby.
Calamian Islands	Halsey Harbour – Nth Arm: 11*47.5'N 119*57.8'E	Careful navigation around islands, reef and rocks thru harbour	None but village 1km away	Cove surrounded by small islands and hills within a huge harbour. 15 M over mud with good holding.
	Halsey Harbour – Sth Arm: 11*43.55'N 119*58.17'E	Careful navigation through narrow passages and around reef – generally stay to middle of tight passes.	None but village 1 km away. Small group of huts on northern shore.	Widening section of passage between tall hills, little fetch. Bottom sounded as flat & 5-6M in this section. 18-24M depth in centre of passage en route.
	Halsey Harbour – Sth Arm: 11*44.25'N 119*57.27'E	Careful navigation and sounding needed into this small bay & to find shallow patch of reef.	None but village 0.5km away	Fairly tight bay with 2 navigable entrances. Most depths here 22-24M but coral/rock patch at 10-12M. Good protection from virtually all directions.
	Calauit Inlet 12*16.15'N 119*53.07'E	Relatively easy – keep to right side of entrance. Watch for reefs at entrance & within bay.	None but unsealed road access to Coron from inlet.	Large bay surrounded by mangroves. Several anchoring options give excellent protection from all winds.
	Dipuyoi Bay	Easy access thru main bay then	Resort with bar,	Deep channel under mooring buoys

