

# **M.V. SOLITA'S CRUISING NOTES**



## **MINDORO ISLAND & PUERTO GALERA UPDATED OCTOBER 2013**



The following notes provide some information about the island of Mindoro, which we visited from August to October, 2013. Our notes have been supplemented by other yachtie's comments and notes. Many thanks to the following people for their contributions on the west coast:

Julie and Gareth, SY Pelangi  
 Alec and Cherry, SY Rainbow Gypsy

We have also included some general information about the area that we accessed from the internet and the Lonely Planet Guide to the Philippines (2006).

While not a comprehensive guide, we hope these notes are of help to people cruising around Mindoro.

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## MINDORO BACKGROUND:

Mindoro is a large island situated south of the main part of Luzon, north-west of the Visayan Islands and north-east of the Calamian Islands. It is bisected by a rugged mountain range called the High Rolling Mountains, dividing the island into Occidental (west) Mindoro and Oriental (east) Mindoro.

According to the Lonely Planet Guide (2006), Mindoro is one of least developed places in Philippines, with most of its roads unsealed. However, we found in 2013 there was fairly up-to-date infrastructure in place wherever we visited. There were good phone and internet connections available in most places and a relatively good road system with concrete roadways (albeit quite a lot of roadwork underway). The main town of Calapan has most government agencies represented there, a large ferry port, a small airport and the usual collection of small malls with modern supermarkets and department stores. The local transport systems (tricycles, jeepneys, air-conditioned vans, private bangkas and bangka ferries) were plentiful and efficient.

Mindoro's population in the 2000 census was noted as 1,062,000 people. The main religion here is Christian though the religion of the indigenous Mangyan population is animism. The principal language in Mindoro is Tagalog, although in some parts it has been greatly influenced by the native Visayan and Mangyan languages. Many people are conversant in basic English.

Mindoro has a long history of trade - commerce with China was first recorded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Its current economy depends mainly on agriculture – coconuts/copra, cereals and fruit, some fishing and livestock, as well as some logging. There are also marble and copper mines.

The main way people (other than yachtees) enter or leave Mindoro is by boat – via bangka ferry from Batangas to Puerto Galera or Supercat ferry from Batangas to Calapan. There are also ferries from Batangas to Roxas on the east coast, and ferries from Roxas to Cataclan/Boracay or to Tablas. There is also a ferry service from Roxas to Romblon. There is a small airfield at Calapan and a small commercial domestic airport at San Jose.

Mindoro is also home to the Tamaraw or Mindoro dwarf buffalo (*Bubalus mindorensis*), which is a bovine related to the water buffalo or carabao, and they are endemic to the island.

## Mindoro Oriental:

This is the more populous and wealthy of the 2 sections of Mindoro. Calapan on the north-east coast is the administrative capital, but most visitors head to the Puerto Galera area, 48 miles away. The area around Puerto Galera has a very busy tourist season from October to June, so the area is well catered for by inter-island ferries, tourist accommodation, markets, restaurants and bars, western-style deli's and grocery stores.

## Mindoro Occidental:

This is the more isolated, less populated section of Mindoro. Its main attraction is the diving areas of Sablayan and Pandan Islands, which are also the step-off points for Apo Reef, on the west coast. Hiking on Mt Halcon in the north-west of the island also attracts tourists. San Jose is the main town of this province with a population of around 112,000 people.

## Immigration:

The Immigration Office for Mindoro is based in Calapan, the main administrative town, at J. Luna St (Ph. (043) 288-2245). It is open Monday to Friday. There is also a sub-office in Puerto Galera, above the wet markets, which is open Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings.

Alternatively, you can catch a ferry to Batangas, which takes about 75 minutes and costs about 250 pesos one way, and visit the Immigration Office there at Diversion Rd, Barangay Bolbok (Ph (043) 723-3032). Apparently it is quite close to the harbour and port. An Immigration office in San Jose closed in 2012.

There is no Customs agency on Mindoro Island.

## Weather:

Mindoro's weather is governed by the north-east and south-west monsoon seasons. It is generally quite rainy during the SW season (June to October) and typhoons may affect the island, either directly or with high winds and swell generated by typhoons to the east or north. This is the off-tourist time, and many resorts and restaurants will be closed. The weather moderates by November, heralding the start of the NE trades and the tourist season, though typhoons may still occur at this time. It is usually quite dry during the NE monsoon, but the NE winds can get very fresh at times. The temperature only varies by degrees throughout the year.

## Navigation:

Most charts and electronic charting systems seem to be relatively accurate for this area. It would be advisable to obtain a large scale chart for Puerto Galera and San Jose, as there are several large reefs within these bays.

Moving about Mindoro at night may be unwise, as there are many unlit FADs and fishing boats working at night without lights along the coasts.

## South Coast of Mindoro:

**San Jose**, the largest town of Occidental Mindoro, is situated on the south west corner of the island, on the northern shore of a large bay. The beach in front of the town offers good anchorage, though it is very busy with local fishing and other vessels. The bay has several isolated reefs and shoals. The town offers most facilities, including an airport, but the Immigration Office here closed in 2012.

From San Jose there are two easily navigable channels south from the bay, along both sides of **Ilin Island**, leading to the southern coast of Mindoro. Both these channels have anchoring options along them.

**Pandarochan Bay** is a large bay to the east of Ilin Island and offers good protection from northerly winds close to the shore.

Further east, **Bulalacao Bay** is a large attractive bay with many small islands, small sheltered bays and sandy beaches. There is an excellent anchorage at the head of the bay, in front of a large town, which seems to host a significant fishing industry. It has been suggested that this area may eventually become another centre for diving, because of its clear water, many rocky islets and coral reef.

There is also a small but very protected cove – **Lagara Cove** – on the eastern side of the bay, which could be used as a very secure anchorage, but in August 2013 it was full of fish traps and seaweed farms. Anchorage could be found in this cove with local help if you were very needy.

There are two attractive and easily navigable passes from Bulalacao Bay to the east coast of Mindoro – Tambaron and Masin – but in August 2013 there were power lines across both passes. We fitted under both with no problem, but a yacht would need to be very cautious, and possibly just travel south of Masin Island to head east.

The **Semirara Island group** lies just off the south coast, and consists of 5 small islands which provide a pathway towards Borocay, Tablas and Panay. We found anchoring in this group difficult, especially in windy weather (Semirara Island is a restricted area because of its coal mine and many of the smaller islands have seaweed farms and fish traps throughout most of their coves and bays).

## East Coast of Mindoro:

Travelling further east, there is **Soguicay Bay**, a fairly deep bay with Soguicay Island in the centre. Between this island and the coast there would probably be a good protected anchorage. There is a large telecommunications tower at the edge of this bay.

At the eastern edge of Soguicay Bay is **Buyallao Passage**, a deep pass between **Buyallao Island** and Mindoro. To the west of this rugged little island there is good protected anchorage from south and westerly winds, but other anchoring sites in the passage and further west into the small **Pocanil Bay** may offer protection from winds other than south and west.

From this point on we noticed many FADs (fish attracting devices) anchored offshore, especially around **Roxas**. They appeared to be quite soft – not the hard metal type, but there are so many of them it would make navigation at night difficult. We also noticed quite a lot of telecommunication towers along this coast that provided phone and internet coverage when you get close enough.

Around Roxas the coastline flattens and becomes a low-lying coastal plain. It is open roadstead here but the coast would offer some protection from north to westerly winds. There is a large ferry terminal at Roxas, as the inter-island ferries hub out from here to Romblon, Caticlan/Boracay and Looc Bay on Tablas. In Roxas there are busy markets on Sunday and Wednesday mornings, where you may find handicrafts from the Mangyan people, the traditional people of the area.

**Maestro de Campo** is a circular island 10 miles off the east coast of Mindoro, and has three fairly deep bays on its southern side. The central bay hosts the main town of Concepcion, and offers very good protection from all wind except from the east to south-east. It is an interesting and very attractive island, and fairly remote from Mindoro and other major centres. The water is clear, there are several attractive beaches and the tall green hills provide a colourful background.



The coastline from Roxas to **Pt Dumal** is fairly low lying and unremarkable. Pt Dumal is a large rugged headland covered in coconut trees.



Around the point from Pt Dumal and Dayap Pt is **Pola Bay**, a large north-facing bay with the town of Pola in its south-western corner. Behind Pola Bay's south-western shore is Lake Naujan. There is good anchorage along Pola Bay's gently shoaling shoreline. We tried to enter a small cove on the eastern side of Pola Bay but its entrance had reef at 3 metres, and the locals waved us away towards the shoreline at the end of the main bay, which was fine for anchoring.

North-west from Pola Bay there were several smaller bays and inlets that may provide good anchoring, but we did not explore them. This section of Mindoro's coastline is very attractive and much more populated than the eastern and western coasts. We also noted a great increase in shipping – ferries, freighters, tug and barge sets, larger fishing bangkas.

**Calapan Pt** provides some shelter from SW winds in the bay, but could be rolly if there was swell. You also need to be clear of the ferry and fishing boat approaches to the port area. The town of **Calapan** is the administrative centre of Oriental Mindoro – there are large ferry terminals, tall buildings, large churches, a shipyard, small airport, several small hospitals, a couple of shopping malls with modern supermarkets and department stores. Robinson's Mall even has a small 2 cinema complex.

## North Coast of Mindoro:

From Calapan Pt the coastline turns more westerly and the waterways are much busier. We also noted more rubbish in the water. **Verde Island**, a couple of miles off the north coast, is popular with divers but doesn't offer much in the way of bad weather anchorages. **Puerto Galera**, just to the south-west of Verde Island, is the main attraction of the north coast, and a very popular stopover for yachtees.

Just west of Puerto Galera there is **Baletero Bay**, with a large concrete pier from the shore that seems to be unused most of the time. The next significant bay is **Monolo Bay**, a quite shallow bay used by many of the local fishing bangkas. Further west are the resort beaches of **White Beach, Aninuan and Talipanan**. At Talipanan the road along the north coast ends, and beyond is Occidental Mindoro. There are a few small bays to the west of here that could offer good anchorage in southerly winds, but make sure you have good charts of the coastline, as some may be full of reef.

## Puerto Galera:



**Puerto Galera**, just to the south of the town of Batangas on Luzon is a beautiful harbour named by the Spaniards in the late 1500's ("Port of Galleons"). The town of Puerto Galera is a major town on the north coast and the centre of a hugely popular tourist destination. The port of Puerto Galera, **Muelle**, is situated in a bay within the virtually enclosed harbour, providing a haven for boating folk, small ferries and the local fishing fleet, as well as stunning views and a myriad of waterways for the tourists. The

actual town of Puerto Galera is a 5 minute walk away from the harbour, over a small ridge and by the shore of an external bay. Most of the commerce for the area is based here.

Most tourists stay at **Sabang** and **White Beach**, both outside the harbour, just a few miles from Puerto Galera. These areas have busy villages of restobars, many diving resorts and other accommodation options, with some small sandy beach areas nestled between tall heavily vegetated hills. Further east and west of these villages are some secluded white sandy beaches, coves and upmarket resorts. There are diving locations scattered along the northern shores of this coast. These areas around Puerto Galera provide most of the tourist accommodation and activities for Mindoro Oriental. The season runs from October to June, though there are some tourists here year round. There is also a large ex-pat population living here.



There are two entrances into the harbour at PG – the **Manila** and the **Batangas Channels**. Both are wide and deep, but the more easterly channel, the Batangas Channel, has power lines overhead which are just about impossible to see until you are under them. We fitted, but yachts may have a problem. Most yachts use the Manila Channel. There are anchoring options in several of the small sheltered bays within the harbour, but some are quite crowded. **Boquette Beach**, by the sand spit, is probably the best option. Care is needed when travelling through the harbour, as there are some very shallow patches of reef and sand, and there is a lot of bangka and ferry traffic.

The **Puerto Galera Yacht Club** has approximately 20 moorings just off the waterfront at Muelle Bay. When arriving, contact the club on VHF channel 68 to ask about moorings. The moorings have size limits (maximum length 50 ft) and weight limits (maximum weight 20 tons).

In August 2013, their charges were:

336 pesos per day for visiting yachts

302 pesos per day for yachts belonging to an affiliated club

224 pesos per day for yacht club members

These charges include a free water taxi from your mooring to the waterfront or yacht club, and use of the yacht club's facilities. The club members are very welcoming to cruising folk.



In the waterfront area by the yacht club and moorings, known as Muelle port, there are many restobars, 2 minimarts with good stock, a tricycle terminal, meat market, laundry, a good hardware store and a tourist information office. There are also several large bangka operations that ferry people to Batangas many times a day. Unfortunately these ferries can sometimes produce a wash that affects boats moored here.

Most of the commercial facilities are based in the town of Puerto Galera, just a 5 minute walk over the hill by the church. There you will find a well-stocked supermarket (Candava Supermarket), two delis, "wet" markets, many small produce stalls and specialty shops. There is also a part-time Immigration Office above the markets, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday mornings.

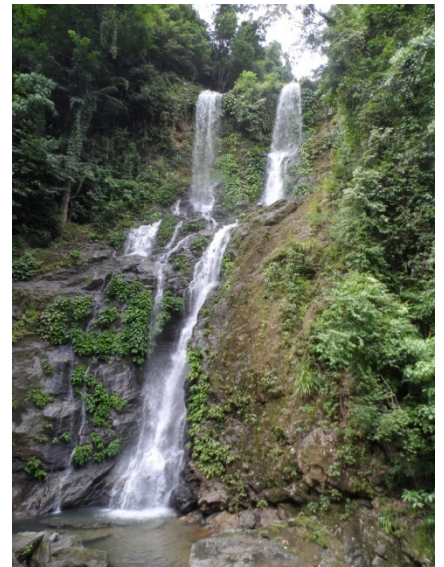
## Things to do in Puerto Galera:

- It is easy to travel to Calapan. Jeepneys leave from the Petron station every 30 minutes or so, take about 90 minutes and cost 80 pesos one way. Air-conditioned vans also leave from near the Petron station, take about an hour and cost 100 pesos one way.
- Visit Sabang or White Beach. Tricycles from PG to Sabang Beach take about 15 minutes and charge around 100 pesos. Tricycles to White Beach take around 25 minutes and charge approximately 140 pesos.
- Hire a motor bike (around 500 pesos for a half day – Aldy Bike Hire



Ph. 0908 1195828) and

explore the area. The road towards Calapan travels through beautiful scenery. The Tamaraw Falls, with its freshwater swimming hole, is on the roadside half way to Calapan and well worth a visit. Alternatively, motor west, past White Beach and on to Talipanan, where the road ends. Turn left at Minolo to the Ponderosa Golf Club and Viewing Tower for spectacular views of the coast and PG Harbour. There is also a challenging nine-hole golf course, zipline and walking trails at the top of the mountain.



- The Yacht Club is open every day but Monday. Facilities include the bar, restaurant, book swap and pool table. Tuesday night is Movie Night, Wednesday is Curry Buffet and Friday is BBQ Night.
- Explore the area by dinghy. The small bays within the harbour are easily accessed. On calm days, exit the bay via the Batangas Channel and turn right to visit Sabang and the Laguna beaches. Exit the Manila Channel and turn left to explore the several small beaches en route to Little Balatero and the outside edge of the sandspit.
- Snorkelling on the Coral Gardens, off Medio Island School, is very good.
- The Rusty Anchor Bar, on the Muelle waterfront, has live music every Saturday afternoon from 2pm.
- Reprovisioning here is easy – there is a great selection of local and western-style foods, and the Yacht Club service boat makes it easy to shift goods from shore to boat.
- Take a bangka ferry to Batangas. A trip in one of these is quite unique, and there is a moderately sized SM Mall in Batangas with four cinemas. A tricycle trip from the pier to SM Mall should be about 120 pesos – beware of touts quoting 250 pesos.
- Eat! There are some great meals to be enjoyed here! In Muelle, try the wet burritos at Badladz, the baby back pork ribs at the Yacht Club's BBQ Night, the bar snacks at the Rusty Anchor, the French-





Filipino cuisine at Le Bistro. In Puerto Galera, don't miss the Hungarian Goulash Soup at Bahay Pilopino Restaurant or the grilled fish at Grillo.

The 2006 Lonely Planet Guide states that Puerto Galera is now a haven for "foreign alcoholic retirees, who are frequently indistinguishable from the yachtees"! This comment has been edited from later editions – thank you Lonely Planet!

## West Coast:

At the north-west corner of Mindoro is the infamous **Cape Cavite** and the **Cavite Passage**, an area also known as "Hell Run" by yachtees. It is 25 miles to get around this cape, against wind, tide & currents that makes for very confused and high seas. It would be well worth waiting for good conditions before tackling this leg.

The west coast is open to the south-west monsoon, is subject to the fairly consistent South China Sea NW swell and doesn't have many protected anchorages, so this coastline is probably best explored during the North-east monsoon season or one of the calm transition periods.

Once round Cape Cavite there is a large and very protected bay just south - **Paluan Bay**. This is a popular anchorage though open to SW winds. The local villagers are very welcoming. It is generally repudiated to be a safe and comfortable anchorage but there was one incident in early 2013 when a yacht was boarded by 6 armed men. They originally asked for emergency fuel but then showed a gun and demanded money and electronic gear. No-one was physically harmed but the threat was very real. This incident was well-reported to local authorities and there was an investigation by Police and Coastguard. There has been no further trouble in this area. Yachtees should perhaps now exercise caution in this bay, though hopefully this was an isolated incident and the thieves were not local.

**Sablayan Point** offers an anchorage protected from NE winds by Mindoro itself and from the west and south to some extent by the Pandan Islands. Sablayan sits on the Bagong Sabang River and offers the facilities of a small town, including a good market up the river, which is said to be accessible by dinghy. This tends to be a stepping-off point for divers and backpackers visiting Apo Reef and North Pandan Island, so there is accommodation, restaurants and bars ashore. We did hear of one very loud karaoke bar by the anchorage so keep this in mind when anchoring.

**North Pandan Island** is a well-known dive area, and there is a yacht-friendly resort – Pandan Resort - on the island, just a short distance across from Sablayan. There is a lot of reef in front of the resort but they have two mooring buoys available at no cost. You are able to use the resort's bar and restaurant, and also book dive trips to Apo Reef through them. Their phone number is 0919 305 7821, and web site is [www.pandan.com](http://www.pandan.com).

**Apo Reef**, off the mid-west coast of Mindoro, is the largest atoll-like reef in the Philippines and is renowned for its wonderful snorkeling and diving. It is however obviously not protected from seas or wind. There are mooring buoys you may be able to pick up after the dive boats have left for the day.

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	ANCHORAGE	ACCESS	HOLDING/DEPTH	PROTECTION	INFORMATION
<b>SOUTHERN COAST</b>	San Jose 12°19.85'N 121°04.68'E	Easy access from southern channel. If coming from west, watch for isolated reef & shoals.	8-9 M over sand	Very protected from N to NE, some fetch in large bay in strong NE wind.	Large town with major facilities, airport. Many fishing bangkas anchored here off beach in front of town. Good IC.
	Ilin Island (E side) 12°11.9'N 121°0.4'E	Easy. Large reef across south-west end of island. Lighthouse on this island.	8M over sand	Good protection from NE to E. Deep inlet here may give some shelter.	Calm anchorage with clean clear water south of San Jose. IC.
	Ilin Island (W side) 12°14.05'N 121°2.0'E	Easy. Best access around north end of Ambulong Is. Watch for isolated reefs and large reef at south end of passage	8M, over coral and sand	Very good protection from NE to SE, & S to W, open to SSE but extensive reef at end reduces fetch	Anchorage off sandy beach with small jetty. A lot of passing local traffic – friendly people. IC.
	Northern shore Pandarochoan Bay 12°14.5'N 121°10.3'E	Easy access – whole of northern shore is gently shoaling – no reef/rocks seen.	4-5 M over sand	Very good protection from W thru N to NE. At end of large bay facing south.	Long shoreline, scattered small villages, patchy IC. Many bamboo stakes used as fish attractants.
	Bulalacau Bay 12°19.3'N 121°20.9'E	Easy – gently shoaling bay with no obvious obstructions.	5-6 M over sand	Very good protection from NW thru N to SE.	Modern-looking town at end of bay, good IC. Very scenic area, possibly good diving.
<b>SEMIRARA ISLANDS</b>	Sibaton Island (SW corner) 11°58.3'N 121°33.1'E	Easy. Gently shoals towards island in SW corner.	7M over sand and very low coral.	Very good from N thru E to S, but channel open to some SE, though reef reduces fetch.	Seaweed farms in most of bay. Anchor on right hand side of main beach, behind local bangkas. Crystal clear water. May get some swell from N. IC.
	Semirara Island 12°03.93'N 121°21.71'E	Restricted area in 2012. Army will ask you to leave but may relent in bad weather. Reef ++ in harbour, take great care.	10M over sand.	Protected from N to SE but can get bullets of wind over hill and roly when windy.	Active coal mine and wharf facility – many large vessels. Also weed farms at end of bay. When windy there is coal dust++ flying about from large mine. Not a good anchorage. Good IC.
<b>EAST COAST</b>	Buyallao Pass 12°22.82'N 121°25.96'E	Easy access from north or through passage from SE.	9-10 M over sand/coral rubble	Protected from NW thru W to S, but several other anchoring options for other winds nearby.	No facilities. Friendly family own huts along the beach. Roxas Town approx. 12 miles away. Patchy IC.
	Maestro de Campo Island 12°54.28'N 121°43.22'E	Easy access but bottom varies in depth – may need to hunt for shoaling shoreline or large bommie to anchor.	6-8 M over sand/low coral/rubble	Good anchorage – high hills & headlands protect from all but E to SE winds.	Circular island 10 miles off Mindoro east coast. Very scenic bay with 2 other smaller bays nearby. Small town – Conception - at head of bay, with busy wharf for local bangkas. Good IC.
	Pola Bay 13°08.6'N 121°27.5'E	Easy access but stay towards centre of bay – there may be shallow reef	7-8 M over sand/mud.	Large bay protected from SE thru S to NE.	Town of Pola 0.5 km away. Good IC. Locals seem very helpful.
	Calapan Bay 13°25.6'N 121°10.8'E	Easy access but watch for busy ferry traffic.	5-10 M over mud	Protection from E to S only in this bay, and swell will roll along the coast if windy.	Shallow, need to anchor far out in bay, can be too exposed if windy. Good IC. Large town with all facilities, incl. immig.
<b>NORTH COAST</b>	Puerto Galera Yacht Club moorings 13°30.37'N 120°57.23'E	Access PG bay through Manilla Channel – Batangas Channel has overhead power lines. Avoid shallow reefs in bay.	Moorings in 5-6 M	Yacht Club moorings in Muelle Bay very protected, though moorings affected by ferry wash. PG bay is virtually fully enclosed.	Excellent facilities, shopping at Muelle and PG Town 5 mins away. Good IC. Yacht Club in bay – provides free service boat transfers from moorings to club or town.
	Calimsungan Pt 13°25.0'N 120°18.85'E	Easy access	Around 9-10 M	Protection only from N to E.	Excellent anchorage but may be roly with N or S winds.
<b>WEST COAST</b>	Paluan Bay 13°21.5'N 120°28.0'E	Easy access – wide bay with several anchoring options	Around 12 M	Good protection from NE to SE and probably N unless the wind was strong.	Generally a well-used comfortable anchorage but a yacht was boarded by armed men here in early 2013.
	Sabluyan 12°49.7'N 120°46.4'E	Relatively easy access, between Pandan Is. and coast south of Sablayan Pt.	Around 20 M over mud.	Protection from NW to SE.	Scruffy fishing port and small town on a mangrove inlet but good markets.
	North Pandan Is. 12°51.3'N 120°45.2'E	Easy access.	Around 20 M over sand/coral	Protection from NW only.	Beautiful island & yacht-friendly resort, providing free mooring buoys at this position. Well protected and pretty bay.

