

INBOUND FROM THE NORTH/NORTHEAST

The following is a summary of advice and suggestions provided by a number of cruising yachtsmen who all wish you the very smoothest of sailing. Please note: the views and comments expressed in this document are offered in the interests of the pleasure, safety and security of all, and do not necessarily reflect the policy or opinion of Puerto Galera Yacht Club, Inc.

If you find anything in these notes that is not quite accurate or, if you wish to add new information, please contact the: webmaster@pgyc.org

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS

Entering the Philippines from the North and North East means you are following in the wake of Chinese, Japanese, British, Portuguese and Dutch pirates and merchantmen who have sailed these waters between the Philippines and what are known today as Vietnam, China and Japan for at least eight hundred years and probably longer. As a result the areas around landfalls and in particular the natural typhoon shelters are steeped in history and folklore. One of the most famous accounts of an early scholar visiting the islands describes Princess Urduja who commanded an army comprising mostly women who would ride into battle with their breasts bare and bronzed, astride stallions. The army was invincible while the Princess lived and its influence is said to have drawn together all of the northern tribes of Luzon Island into a largely peaceful era of shared prosperity. The Princess was not only a warrior but also a great linguist and diplomat and it is said that the Emperors of China would pay tributes to her for free passage through the waters off Northern Luzon.

WEATHER

The Philippine islands experience two distinct 'seasons' of weather: the NE monsoon, from November through April; and, the SW monsoon from May through October. The NE monsoon brings the 'Amihan' winds, which typically range from five and 20 knots, under mostly clear skies. The SW monsoon brings the 'Habagat' winds, which range from 10 to 25 knots, under variable skies. It is the SW monsoon season that drives most of the cyclonic storm systems -- Tropical Depressions that may turn into Typhoons (a.k.a. Hurricanes, Cyclones) in as little as 24 hours. Ahead of and behind a cyclonic storm system you can expect winds to be light or very light, and variable, for 24 hours or more. Typhoons can occur at any time of the year and it is recommended that you obtain weather bulletins at least once every two days, whatever the season. Check the weather links on the Cruising Info page of the PGYC website.

HAZARDS

Fishing boats are the main challenge when arriving off Northern Luzon, as they are throughout the coastal waters of the archipelago. In the daylight you can see them and they can see you – no problem. Arriving after dark, many of them are carrying no lights (except for the squid boats, which are so well lit as to appear to be a town on the horizon when first approached) and so they are obstacles that must be avoided. Also, day or night, even small fishing boats may be running a trawl line or net, so you should be observant of signals given by the boat's crew if passing close across the stern of a fishing boat – they will let you know if you are about to destroy the source of family income. Rule of thumb, if you must sail after dark stay at least five miles offshore and keep a lookout.

A second and increasing hazard, particularly off the northwest coast, are Fish Aggregating Devices

(FADs), which range from simple floating bundles of bamboos poles to large steel cylinders. FADs can be found up to 100 miles off-shore and in 1,000 metres of water. They are visible in light to moderate conditions but are not easy to spot in rough weather. The steel cylinder type will give a radar return of sorts but there is no substitute for a dedicated look-out. The Government department theoretically responsible for the registration of such devices is currently considering how to record and publish details of their deployment but this is a work in progress. So in the meantime keep your eyes peeled.

Navigation lights marked on charts are occasionally out-of-service, especially the secondary or least important ones.

Unattended fishing nets are typically not used away from very shallow water so you should not find these to be a hazard throughout much of the Philippines. However, around South-East Asia in general they are sometimes used up to two miles offshore. Best advice: stay clear; last year while racing our yacht was caught by an unmarked / unattended net one at night, about a mile and a half offshore.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Apart from the Puerto Galera Yacht Club website, which you already know about, there is an excellent HAM radio station at 14.323 MHz, on-air everyday at 00:00 Z/GMT/UTC. The South East Asian Maritime Net (formerly known as Rowdy's Net) is a friendly participation service where yachts cruising around the South China Sea and beyond can keep up to date on who, what and where. Richard is the facilitator on-air and all are welcome.

ANCHORAGES

Laoag - anchorage near 18 deg 10.5' N, 120 deg 30.5' E This northerly provincial capitol port is probably the best place to make your first port of call as it has road and air transport connections to the rest of the country and is a good place to restock the larder.

Vigan – anchorage near 17 deg 31.5' N, 120 deg 22' E This picturesque and historic town has some of the best preserved Spanish architecture in the whole country. Well worth a few days ashore for exploration and camera work.

Candon -- anchorage 17 deg 12' N, 120 deg 24.75' E There is not much here to see but it is a safe anchorage in a NE monsoon and the Filipino's ashore are reported to be very welcoming to visiting sailing yachts.

Poro Point – anchorage 16 deg 73' N, 120 deg 18' E Formerly a Spanish trading port, then an American naval base then Japanese then Filipino. With such a long maritime history you can imagine that this port has all of the infrastructure to satisfy a visiting seafarer . . . with patience and a little ingenuity this is true. After stocking up perhaps sail around the Point to Bauang Beach.

Or,

Bauang Beach -- anchorage 16 deg 34' N, 120 deg 18.75' E (enter reef from SW at high tide or ask a local fisherman to guide you in) This beach used to be the playground of U.S. Servicemen and their families from Clark Airbase before the U.S. Forces departed the country near the end of the last century. It still lives for that era although the volume of tourists today only supports a handful of resorts. Take a short ride South by road to Agoo – one of the prettiest historic towns in the area.

Bolinao -- anchorage near 16 deg 23' N, 119 deg, 55' E (must use chart for leading light bearing for

WNW approach; do not attempt to enter from East of Santiago Island) Such a beautiful location and a typhoon shelter. Bolinao was once the major port of entry to Northern Philippines for goods to and from Hong Kong and Macau. Legends of pirates and princesses lie in the shadows of every old building and the spirits of seafarers and maidens are caught in bird song under every tree. Take a trip South by road to the old, but still working, Bolinao lighthouse for one of those 'big-sky' sunset vistas.

Caiman Cove -- anchorage near 15 deg 55.5' N, 119 deg 47' E This anchorage is quiet and remote except for a few fishermen. Take care when entering and leaving the area because there the coral outcrops are not in exactly the same position as they appear on the charts.

Palauig Bay – anchorage near 15 deg 27' N, 119 deg 54' E Another peaceful anchorage with the same coral hazards as Caiman Cove but a little closer to civilization.

Unless you are a history buff then you can choose to pass Subic Bay (probably) and Manila Bay (almost certainly) and continue to head southerly. If you do choose to drop into Subic Bay then leave Grande Island to starboard upon entry to avoid becoming yet another scuba diving destination. If you want just a smattering of World War II history then anchor in the mouth of Manila Bay at Mariveles Port and take a day tour of the adjacent fortress island of Corregidor, the scene of some of the bloodiest exchanges between Japanese and American troops, as the former ousted the latter at the beginning of the war and the latter ousted the former two years later.

Hamilo Cove – anchorage near 14 deg 10.8' N, 120 deg 35.5' E and there is a buoy on the left side of the channel that is maintained by the landowner; if it is available then tie up. Further inside the Cove there is pretty good holding in a typhoon. It is shallow muddy sand on the North and East shores. The local fishermen in the village are reasonably friendly but as you are now so close to Puerto Galera best not to tarry.

Or,

Punta Fuego -- 14 deg 08.25' N, 120 deg 35' E a sheltered anchorage but not considered typhoon safe; the all new Punta Fuego Yacht Club has recently opened a marina pontoon facility on South side of the peninsular that is currently free for visiting yachts. Worth a visit but don't expect to find too many people around because it is really only for club members who own land upon Punta Fuego itself . . . but if you ask nicely then you may get a ground of golf in.

Or,

Maya Maya – anchor near 14 deg 06.87' N, 120 deg 37' E although there are mooring buoys sometimes available. Very hospitable to visiting yachts especially if you use the bar and restaurant facilities of the resort. Nothing much to do here except to chill-out and maybe relax in the Spa. The adjacent marina is considered typhoon safe and has fuel and a 50 ton travel hoist. Prices are a little higher here than in most resort areas.

After Maya Maya there is little to distract you until you reach Puerto Galera. It is approximately 42 miles or a good day-sail – night-sail is not recommended here because of the large numbers of fishermen using long nets strung perpendicular to the coast, if you want to night-sail from here then stay at least eight miles off-shore. Before you reach Cape Santiago stay at least two miles off-shore because the Calatagan Reef is very shallow and extends further today than when the charts were drawn. The last 22 miles up the Verde Passage is a beat in the NE Monsoon or a run in the SW monsoon. If you are beating then stay as high as you can on the port tack from Cape Santiago towards Maricaban Island; you will get knocked towards Mindoro at some point; take the knock and then tack up the Mindoro coast (ten minute tacks will usually keep you in a favourable back-eddy) until you can enter the Manila (West) Channel into Puerto Galera.

ENTERING PUERTO GALERA

We strongly recommend a daylight entry into Puerto Galera, especially if this is your first visit. If you arrive off Puerto Galera in the dark then we recommend that you anchor outside the bay until dawn. A good place to anchor is near 13° 31.20'N, 120° 56.60'E – you can safely anchor within 100 meters of the shore. The west, or Manila, channel is the best entry for first time visitors because it is consistently deep and wide; the north, or Batangas, channel is narrower and has a shallow coral outcrop at its inner end – even Club boats occasionally nudge this one. There are a number of coral reefs within the bay itself, with navigable channels separating them. If you have not already done so then check-out the modified Admiralty chart (A3559) on the Cruising Info/How To Get Here page of the PGYC website for a greater understanding of the inner bays.

Enter the Manila channel (near 13° 31.50'N, 120° 56.75'E) and stay in the center until you can clearly see the two, large white mooring buoys in Boquete Bay to your right – at this point you will also see the town of Muelle due, south of your position, with the Club moorings visible to the left of the town pier, DO NOT head straight for the Club moorings, as there is a reef in between you and the Club moorings. Instead, turn to starboard and head for the two, large white mooring buoys in Boquete Bay. When you are approximately two boat lengths from the first, large white buoy turn to port and head directly for the closest Club mooring buoy. You can pick up any of the vacant Club buoys while you wait for the service boat to direct you to the most appropriate one for your yacht. DO NOT pick up on either of the two, large white mooring buoys in Boquete Bay except in an absolute emergency.

Note: the Club can be contacted by radio on Marine VHF Channel 68. However, because of the geography of the area, your broadcast may not be heard by the Club immediately unless you are within the bay. If you are inside the bay and still can't obtain a response from the Club then try calling the "service boat" by name, on the same VHF Channel 68 – the service boat is usually somewhere in or around the mooring area and has a better line of sight to the Manila Channel entrance. If you have cellular or satellite telephone then contact the Club using +63 (0)43 4420136. The Club hours of operation are currently from 08:30 hrs to 22:00 hrs daily.

TRIVIA and TIPS:

- 1) Check-in with Immigration and Customs can be found at Laoag, Poro Point and Subic Bay.
- 2) Filipinos consider their children to be more worthy than themselves in almost all aspects of life. While you are anchored in a secluded spot, if a fishing boat should come along side with a child or two on board, giving a gift for the children is taken as a friendly sign and an acceptable gesture -- superior to offering a gift to the parents themselves. Tip: Before entering Philippines waters, buy a few writing books, pencils and ball pens (school supplies) as gifts for children – if fish are offered in return for your gift it is impolite to refuse, but accept only enough for one meal.
- 3) Rum, gin and beer are very inexpensive in the Philippines (In a store: US\$1+ for a bottle of rum, US\$2+ for a bottle of gin, US\$0.25+ for a bottle of beer) so do not stock up on these items before you arrive; stock up on these items before you leave the Philippines.
- 4) Whiskey and Brandy are considered expensive items in the Philippines – having a couple of spare bottles on board when you arrive will give you a currency tradable for favours and assistance. However, do not encourage people to drink to excess on board your boat – most Filipino's, by virtue of their religion, do not drink regularly and some have been reported to become intoxicated quickly.

Fair Winds!

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