

YACHT FRIENDLY MOORINGS: ROMBLON TOWN

As at September 2007

Romblon Island/town moorings: Barangay Capaclan 12° 34'956"N, 122° 16'234"E;
Barangay Benagong 12° 34'.815"N, 122° 15'.872"E

“Romblon” is a province, a group of islands, an island and a town. Confused? Don't worry, which ever part you arrive at, it is all beautiful and in many ways the most spectacular destination in Asia; it offers more natural wonder and diversity, within so small an area, than any other cruising destination.

The Romblon Island group comprises three main islands – Romblon, Sibuyan and Tablas – plus thirty small islets; Romblon has always been a difficult place to get to for conventional travellers because there are no scheduled commercial flights and the ferry services are few and slow. The benefit is that the attractions of Romblon have been spared the unrelenting and often haphazard tourism development evident in such destinations as Puerto Galera and Boracay; Romblon Province survives with its culture and way of life intact. For the cruising yachtsman the opportunity, to enjoy the special charms of a self-entertaining island community, is extensive and rich in rewards.

Sibuyan, less than ten miles southeast of Romblon Island, is nicknamed the *Galapagos of Asia*, and features flora & fauna found nowhere else on the planet. The island is proclaimed as the world's densest forest. In one survey the National Museum identified, in a single hectare, 1,551 trees comprising 123 species, of which 54 were endemic. Orchids abound as do other vascular plant species; *Nepenthes sibuyanensis*, a pitcher plant species, is endemic as its scientific name suggests. There are 131 species of birds that share the skies with ten species of fruit bat; the plethora (nobody knows quite how many) of land-dwelling mammals, reptiles, and rodents include at least five species of mammals that are endemic. Mount Guiting-guiting, rises over 2,000 metres and is the focus of the Sibuyan National Park.

East of Romblon Island lays Tablas Island, the largest geographically and the most populated island in Romblon Province. With its laid-back people and simple way of life, this lush and mountainous island also has a lot to offer. Lapus-Lapus Beach is a gorgeous place to anchor for the night if traveling along the west coast – surrounded by limestone cliffs and crystal clear waters, this area is accessible only by boat and guarantees a good night's rest. A few hours south is the commercial center of Odiangan – a good spot to re-supply and check your email (if you need to pop back into reality).

In the small group of islands of Banton, Maestro de Campo, and Simara, known to locals as *maghali* (relatives), you are certain to be welcomed with open arms. For self-supported divers, Maestro de Campo offers several wrecks and is teeming with large schools of snapper, trevally and tuna; dolphins regularly patrol and pods of 200 animals are not uncommon; the harbor at the Port of Concepcion is well sheltered for safe overnight anchorage.

To most people Romblon Island, and thus Romblon town, is synonymous with marble. Indeed the marble industry flourishes here and makes use of the abundant mineral resource. The combination of resource availability and indigenous artistic skills has spawned a world renowned and intrinsically exquisite craft industry.

Built by the Spanish in the 17th century, visitors can wander the narrow streets of Romblon town and take in the sights of St. Joseph Cathedral and Fort San Andres. The town's markets are abundant with fresh fish and meats; vegetables are plentiful. The most spectacular community event is the Romblon Ati-Atihan Fiesta, which occurs annually in the second week of January. A small expatriate community has fueled the demand for imported foods, which are now available in several local supermarkets. Home to several beach and mountain resorts, visitors are almost guaranteed their own personal piece of nature here.

For those staying on their boats, moorings have been strategically placed to offer protection from both the southwest and northwest monsoon, and have been situated close enough to the town so that a short dinghy ride will bring you to markets and other facilities. Mooring fees are extremely reasonable at Php50 per night (about US\$1); the proceeds benefit local communities. With an ample supply of the coldest beer in a 100-mile radius, visitors tend to get stuck here longer than planned!

Payment for mooring fees can be left at either, the Republica Restaurant or, the Romblon Deli, but it is essential to inform the staff it is "mooring fee money" otherwise it will end up in the tip jar. Each mooring is marked by a dark blue 20-litre drum.

There is no manned marine radio service in Romblon; local residents, Hank Baas (+63 920 248 5668) and Dennis Shepard (+63 918 247 9941), have offered their cell phone numbers if you want to make prior arrangements or ask for additional information. Note: the moorings are not considered to be typhoon safe; the nearest typhoon bolt-holes are at Port Batan (Panay Island), West Looc Bay (Tablas Island), North Balanakan Bay (Marinduque Island).

Romblon harbour is deep and good anchorages for yachts are few except in depths of 25 metres or more. There are three private moorings in the harbour and often one or more of these will be available.

If you are not aboard a cruising yacht but still want to discover this quiet and special group of islands then you can travel to Romblon from Batangas and Manila ports.

Getting here: Montenegro Shipping has regular trips on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, from Batangas at 17:00 hrs (5 pm), stopping in Odiangan, Tablas, then Romblon Island, returning the following day; MBRS Shipping from Manila direct to Romblon Island leaving Pier 8, North Harbor, Manila, Wednesday 17:00 hrs (5 pm), return leaves Romblon town on Friday, 20:00 hrs (8 pm).

For the current list of Yacht Friendly Moorings in the Philippines visit the our website's Cruising Information page at www.pgyc.org/cruising.html