

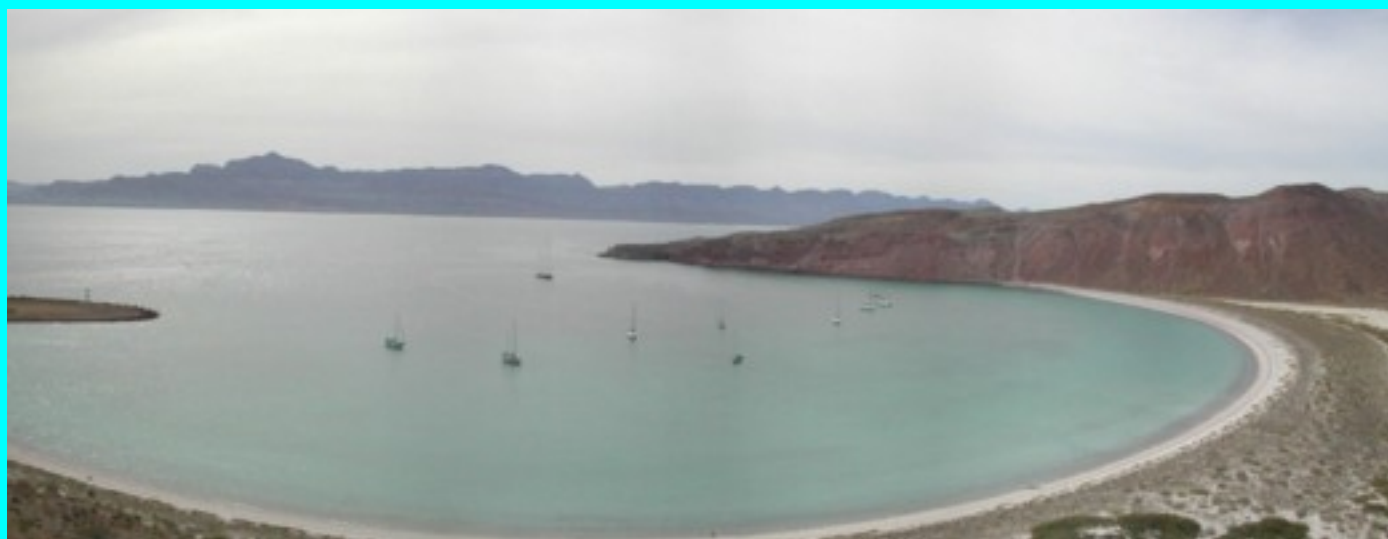
April 6, 2003

We are presently in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, after having spent a most enjoyable 2½ weeks in La Paz and various anchorages inside the Sea of Cortez. Cruising along the Baja side of the Sea of Cortez was like being in the middle of a “desert in the sea” with warm temperatures and little to no humidity. The water was very clear with many anchorages being either turquoise or emerald green in color. The brown pelican was the most prominent seabird, and we enjoyed immensely watching it.

Because of weather, we finally left La Paz on Thursday, March 20 – two days later than originally planned. We spent the next nine days enjoying the beautiful scenery as we cruised almost 100 miles north from La Paz before turning our boat southeast and sailing across the Sea of Cortez toward Puerto Vallarta. We never tired of the scenery along this coastline. The striking and colorful rock formations with their horizontal bands of mostly red, green, and yellow hues were dramatic to behold. We easily could have lingered here longer.

To quickly highlight our anchorages, we spent the first three nights at Isla Partida, about 26 miles north of La Paz. The first night we spent anchored in the cove of El Cardonel. Unfortunately, we lost our lee in the middle of the night – had good size waves coming into the cove making for very uncomfortable conditions – and so vacated that anchorage at first light. We went north to the next bay on the island, Ensenada Grande. Here we anchored for two nights waiting for the strong NW winds of 20 to 25 knots to subside in order to continue our travels north.

We spent the next two nights anchored about 18 miles further north at the southern end of Isla San Francisco, a most beautiful crescent shaped cove with a long white sand beach – basically what one thinks a desert island cove should look like. Besides the usual colorful red and green bands of rock, the red rocks at this island were most striking. We took a lovely hike to the top of the highest hill on the island and walked amongst the much diverse and colorful desert vegetation. This anchorage was truly one of the highlights of our nine days along this coastline! We were also treated to our first parrot fish which was most delicious. And, yes, just like at Isla Partida, we had to pull up our anchor after the first night and move across to the other side of the cove as the winds changed from NW to SW. This pulling up of our anchor a couple of times at almost every anchorage was becoming a ritual.



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The next two nights were spent at the protected anchorage of San Evaristo, 10 miles north of Isla San Francisco, as we waited for the strong NW winds to once again subside so that we could continue north. We had our break on Thursday, March 27, with a day of southerly winds. At first light we pulled up the anchor and sailed north 44 miles to Bahia Aqua Verde, making a quick stop at the anchorage of Puerto Los Gatos known for its dramatic reddish rocks and yellow sand dunes. Unfortunately we couldn't anchor there as we only had one good day to move before the strong northerlies once again kicked in, and Puerto Los Gatos was not a very protected anchorage. We spent two nights at the Bahia Aqua Verde anchorage with the first night at the beautiful southerly cove. Once again, the following day we had to move across the bay to the NW anchorage as the wind changed. Unfortunately, this anchorage came with refracted swells.

Because the strong northerly conditions were to continue for the next two to three days, we decided on Saturday, March 29, to take advantage of the winds and make a go for it south. We were planning to sail a distance of 350 miles from Bahia Aqua Verde to Isla Isabella, a bird sanctuary, about a 100 miles north of Puerto Vallarta. We set sail around 9 a.m. and headed southeast. The wind was NW 25 knots and the seas 8 feet – and KUHELA just “flew” – making great time. By Sunday, March 30, the winds had come down to 15-20 knots and the seas were 4-6 feet, but still so consistent that for two days we sailed without ever having to change the sails. It was like being on a “real” ocean passage. It was wonderful! During Sunday night we crossed the Tropic of Cancer and were officially once again in the tropics.

Unfortunately we lost our consistent winds on Monday morning, March 31, but it was a good run while it lasted. We sailed off and on the rest of the way to Isla Isabella, arriving there at first light on Tuesday, April 1. Hundreds of frigatebirds were flying high, encircling the island, like something out of a movie. This particular island was a major nesting colony for the frigatebird. It truly is a magnificent bird – a beautiful glider in motion – with a wingspan of 7 to 8 feet. But, not until we watched them at the bird sanctuary did we realize how “piratical” this bird was in flying off with the food of other seabirds. Memories that will linger with me always are watching a frigatebird aggressively go after a small seabird, picking it up by the tail and dropping it back into the water – and watching two pelicans trying to feed their young while a contentious frigatebird tried to steal the food whenever they opened their large pouches. In the afternoon we went ashore to observe closer the nesting of the frigatebird.

We pulled up anchor at 6:30 p.m. the same day, Tuesday, April 1, and motored most the rest of the way into Puerto Vallarta – except for about two to three hours on Wednesday morning where we enjoyed a most beautiful sail along the northern half of lovely Banderas Bay. At 12:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 2, we tied up to the dock at Paradise Village Marina in Nuevo Vallarta (just north of Puerto Vallarta). Many cruisers had recommended this marina. It's an amazing five star resort complex where all the amenities come with the moorage – truly “heaven on earth”. We'll be here until around April 15 as we need to wait for mail plus a boat part. Besides working on the boat, we will naturally enjoy some of the amenities at the resort and also explore Puerto Vallarta and the surrounding area. We have now moved our clocks one hour ahead as we are on Central Time, plus today we moved our clocks ahead another hour as we, too, changed to Daylight Savings Time. Like everyone, we are tuned in to the war. While cruising along the Sea of Cortez and at sea, we listened to VOA and BCC, and now while at Paradise Village Marina we have been watching CNN.



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