

HA KUNA MATATA



It's been 3 days since « Yo ! » is anchored at Shelter Bay Marina, by the entrance of the Panama Canal on the west shore of the Atlantic side.

Located across from Colon and the commercial port of Cristobal, north of the jungle, this marina was created on what remains of the old US military compound used for the GI's jungle training and abandoned after the retrocession in 1999 of the Canal administration by the United States to the Panama Republic.

Here, half of the crews wait for the completeness of all the papers needed to transit the canal and get ready to cross the Pacific Ocean. Others are on a logistic pause before returning to browse the 365 islands of the San Blas Archipelago.

Nobody ever talks about crossing the Caribbean Sea despite that some circumnavigators consider it one of the most difficult parts. In this dead end of the Atlantic Ocean and almost closed sea, waves resonance gets amplified on the South American continental shelf and tradewinds, dried over the West Indies, get stronger over the desert Colombian cape of Guarija and the Venezuelan peninsula of Paraguana which are both located around the Maracaibo Lake.

As a consequence, it is recommended to navigate at least 100 miles afar from the coast. This decision is all the more wise because of the piracy threat around Caracas. So it is with all lights off and under spinnaker that we went around potential human and nautical difficulties -the sea was rough-, sailed large from Venezuela, then along the Colombian coast, before a helicopter and a surveillance plane flew over when entering Panama waters. A few hours later, by night 2 planes were passing at low altitude without lights; yes, sometimes, tight wrapped parcels are found at sea...

Eight days later, on the 14th of March, we were anchored at West Hollandes Cays in the Kuna Yala kingdom or San Blas Archipelago, a coconut trees island paradise, protected by reefs and populated by Kuna Indians.

This autonomous region of Panama inhabited by 50 000 Indians (500 000 before Europeans came, oops, made a mistake?) is under a proper constitution. Since 2009, tourists arriving by land can use a trail suitable for motorized vehicles and reach highly populated villages on the border of the continent. One of them is located on Carti Island where Alan and Claire came aboard "Yo!" to explore the archipelago. The more you sail off, the more the islands are deserted. Inhabitants fish and go using a cayuco (a wood dugout canoe) with or without motor.

The economy relies on the export of coconuts (30 million a year) towards Colombia. Nobody possesses the land but each coconut tree belongs to an Indian. Picking up a coconut even when on the ground is considered as an offence.

A complementary resource is the sale of molas (traditional embroidery) to tourists. The isolation of this region is increased by the Darien Gap. You can drive from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego except for 150 km in the Darien Region in the far east of Panama. Close to the Colombian border, it is the land of cocaine trafficking and buffer of the FARC.

In an unusual style, you will find hereafter a mini picture report in Kuna Land. Ethnology enthusiasts will use wiki to find additional information on the peculiar habits and customs of this tribe.

Next post: silly plays with Panamax.

Best wishes, Sanity and Sobriety,

Stephanie / Christophe

Shelter Bay Marina – Colon – Panama

31 mars 2014

www.yodyssey.com



Mola. Embroideries of traditional animals or geometric patterns, sewn on fabrics folds.



Yo ! on anchor in the San Blas archipelago. 7000 nautical miles since Canet. Everything's fine on board.



Yo ! men.



Carti islands, some of the most inhabited and busy islands of the archipelago.



Lemon Cays



Isolated from the sea by the reef.



West Hollandes Cays.



Waste disposal remains a big problem in the archipelago.



Night life at Coco Banderos Cays.



Fishermen at Coco Banderos Cays.



Village El Diablo. The inhabitants refuse the traditional way of life. Many satellite dishes lay on the roofs. Electricity is provided by a noisy powerplant. But the aqueduct is out of service. People have to use Cayucos to go upstream and fetch water.



Sails are made out of political party's flags.



The shore of the continent is rimmed with mangroves, providing exceptional anchorages.



Rio El Diablo. Crocodiles patrol these waters, but only at night !!



Rio El Diablo. Day of laundry and cayuco towing.



El Diablo. Cemetery.



Rive du rio El Diablo. Ananas sauvage.



Rio El Diablo bank. Jungle.



Rio El Diablo. Water chore.



Esnasdup.



Red snappers in a cayuco.



The Kuna living in this artificial island own a mobile phone. Cruisers are kindly invited to stop and help him recharge batteries.