

Feb 2010 Second Timers Guide to the Revillagigedos (Socorro and San Benedicto)

Overview

Scott and Cindy on SV BeachHouse summed it up when they stated the Revillagigedos are one of the top 10 dive sites in the world. Dive boats make the trip down from Cabo every 2 weeks. You will see numerous giant manta ray sightings, sharks (White Tips, Silkie's, Hammers and possible Tigers), great coral formations and lots of BIG fish (Tunas, Wahoo's etc). Water visibility can be in excess of 110'. But this year was not so good. Best we saw was about 60' visibility

This is a remote spot and you are a long way from help. The weather maybe rough and the swells may make the anchorages very roly. We watched the weather very closely. This is unlike the Baja or mainland Mexico. You will feel like your out on the edge. There are no totally secure anchorages and you may have to run to sea if the weather changes.

The permit will NOT allow you to go ashore and there is no place to provision or obtain fuel, water, etc. So plan accordingly.

Submitting the application

The permit took about 1-2 weeks but can be processed sooner if requested to do so.

We always call first, introduce ourselves and mention that the information will be on the way.

Maria Navarro Sanchez
Calle El Pescado/Camino Viejo a San Jose
Building "D", second floor
Col. El Medano
Cabo San Lucas, B.C.S.
email: jnavarro@conanp.gob.mx
Telephone: 016241720210

Here is our list of scanned documents saved as pdf's.

1. Vessel documentation
2. Passport
3. Vessel insurance
4. Conectate con La Conseracion de Las Areas Protegidas. (Annual island permits purchased at Marina de La Paz). 1 for each person.
- 5 Letter in Spanish of why, when, where and the length you want to visit. Plus describing how much offshore experience you have and the vessel is offshore capable. Also state you understand there are no provisions available.
6. Tourist Permits
7. TIP (Temporary import permit) copy of first page only
- 8, Scanned boat card (optional)

Also supply contact information:

Email address

Address where permit can be sent. We used Marina de La Paz.

We sent Maria **4 emails** so it would be easier for her email system (numbered 1 of 4, 2 of 4, etc.)

We asked for a 90 day permit planning on staying 60 days. This would give us leeway if bad weather or a breakdown occurred.

Be sure to bring copies of your documentation, Tip and Revillagigedos Permit for the Armada personnel in Socorro when they board you for inspection. They will require these copies of each. We were asked to produce Jacaranda's log. They did review this in detail.

Departure from Baja or Mainland Mexico

We have only departed from La Paz in the past working our way up to Fralies and then heading to Benedicto from there. If there is a good northerly blowing in the Sea the chances of a good ride at least part of the way is possible. BEWARE you will be crossing a major shipping area and we saw numerous ships during each crossing.

Departure Paperwork

First time we departed we asked Marina de La Paz write a checkout paper outbound La Paz inbound Barra de Navidad. The paperwork did not mention Socorro. This past year we made a mistake of writing outbound La Paz inbound Puerto Vallarta via Socorro. BIG MISTAKE as we were forced to go to the Port Captain, Immigration, Port Captain and then pay a fee of 250 pesos. It reminded us of the old days of the paper works Cha Cha! All because the Port Captain in La Paz insisted since we had Socorro listed on our paperwork. This was a total waste of time and money.

The officials in Socorro could care less that your clearance does not list Socorro or Benedicto and if we were to do it again would NOT mention Socorro in our paper work. **It is critical to obtain a written clearance for the vessel.** In the Baja this was never necessary as we just signed out via one of the marinas. But having checkout paperwork is a must for mainland and Socorro. Remember these folks are not port captains but the Mexican Navy and rotate assignments every 6 months so many times they are not familiar with the paperwork.

Checking in with the Navy

The Navy holds down a small base on the island of Socorro. We called the Navy (Armada or Marina Socorro -CH16) in Socorro immediately upon arrival and asked them for permission to enter Navy cove. If there is activity underway in the cove we move around the corner 1/2 mile to anchor at Binner's Cove. First year we spent the afternoon and night in Navy cove and had the checkin done there. This year we had 3 boats needing checkin's and we asked the Navy to come over to Binner's Cove which they did with no problems. I suggest keeping a radio log of contact and calls to the Navy as they do not always answer VHF and if you can show them you tried to call them but no answer it will be a plus.

You are not in Baja anymore and the Navy takes their job very seriously.

You must check in with them upon arrival. A couple of boats that arrived before us did NOT check in with the Navy upon arrival and just went down the South side of the island to anchor. A few days later the navy had to go down the island and chase these folks down to process their paperwork. They were **NOT** happy about this and may cause new rules to be enforced next season. [Please remember the folks coming behind you and leave a clean wake.](#)

It was ok to stop in Benedicto before going to Socorro and if questioned by a naval vessel explain to them you have a permit and will clear in when you get to Socorro.

Charts

Our first season we used charts that were printed in 1874 and we so far off we couldn't believe it. This year we used a newer Mexican Naval Chart of Socorro #418. But only 1/2 the island was charted with soundings. At least the chart resembled the island. Beware you will be traveling in areas that are not charted so keep a close eye on your depth sounder and the water ahead of you. On San Benedicto we really didn't use a chart but relied on eyeball navigation.

We took screen shots of every bit of coastline from Google earth and saved them on our computer. These helped us compare where we were to the actual chart in hand.

Tides

We copied a few months worth of the Mexican tide tables for Socorro and found them very helpful in trying to figure out current flow and high/low tides

<http://oceanografia.cicese.mx/predmar/>

Weather

Most of the time the prevailing winds were from the N or NE. A few times we had the wind come from the NW. Stay on top of the weather as if a trough passes over the wind could come strong from a direction that you cannot gain shelter. Twice we prepared the boat in case we had to run to sea with SW or West winds as the trough passed over.

We used the following for weather sources.

Stan / Solemate ran special Socorro forecasts for us via saildocs. (Excellent reports.)

Don Anderson weather. (50% accurate the past 2 seasons)

Grib files (Good reports since we were so far offshore)

Bouyweather (we had a subscription given to us)

Weather Faxes via the SSB (Great for long range pictures)

Guides

Lewis Leyland Baja Cruising Guide (out of print-- The first cruising guide published for Mexico).

Containing a 6-7 page write up on the islands. The write-ups were interesting but the charts were way off from the Google maps

Fishing

This is a protected biosphere and all the Revillagigedos are a no fish zone. This past season the Navy re-boarded a sailboat days after the initial checkin and inspected their freezer looking for lobster or fish. The 2 dive boats have the authority to impound illegal vessels caught fishing and escort them back into Socorro.

Reporting any type of fishing in the Revillagigedos

1.Date & Time

2.Your Location including Lat/Long . For example Ballandra, Isla Carmen plus Lat / Long

3.Location of observed illegal fishing. For example 1/4 mile S of the anchorage

4.Type of illegal fishing:

5.Type, Color and Mexican ID number of vessel- Matricula- (located on the side of the Panga or vessel)

6.Number of people onboard

7.Any identifying characteristics.

8.Type of engine: Yamaha 150hp, etc

9.Photos of vessel (Critically important and can be submitted later when in wifi range)

10.Additional Info: Any other items that maybe helpful. Example: Hookah compressor is visible, etc

If you see any vessels fishing please report them using eyereports@gmail.com

Anchorage

We used a flopper stopper everyday in the islands This season was exceptionally roly and we blew the poor thing up three times. It now needs a major rebuild.

Most of the anchorages are very deep so make sure your anchor gear and retrieval method can handle these deep anchorages. We spent weeks anchored in 105' of water on Socorro and some boats had major problems anchoring this deep. One boat fried their windlass and another had it blowing breakers in anything greater than 60'.

Most of the anchorages are greater than 45' and almost all of them are anchor eaters. The lava pinnacles that are interspersed in many of the anchorages are MAJOR anchor eaters.

If after anchoring we heard growling or the anchor chain starts jerking and snapping we moved to another spot as soon as possible. Sometimes anchoring 3-4 times in a spot till we felt comfortable. If it was clear enough we always dove on the anchor but anything over 70' was tough to see.

One of our friends on a large power boat that have been going to these islands for 25 years has lost 4 anchors over that time frame.

San Benedicto

We anchored in the Lava delta both years. This anchorage has a depth of about 50' and has lava pinnacles scattered around the bottom. Last year we spent 3 weeks there. The gaint Manta Ray experience was the reason we spent so much time here. The Mantas would swim by the boat and almost everyday we would see them. They were very friendly and we were able to ride them and rub their bellies. This past year the anchorage was very roly much more than last year and it forced us to move onto Socorro earlier than planned.

Just a hundred yards off the anchorage is a serious of Bommies (pinnacles) that come within 25 feet of the surface and provide great place to dive and experience the Manta's. We would take the dink out and anchor on top and snorkel them. Just to the east of the anchorage we called it turtle point. Seeing turtles almost every time we dove there.

We would dingy up the island to the famous Boiler on a calm day. It usually took us about 20-25 minutes to get there and we would anchor on top of the Boiler with the dink

Another Beware: You are now anchored in an area of high pumice in the water especially if its windy. The pumice is suspended in the water and will get sucked up into your engine filter, toilet and salt water pumps. One vessel had both toilet pumps seize up and damaged their salt water pump. Not all of it floats on the surface and you will see the pumice suspended at various depths when diving.

Watermaker users take care!!

Socorro

Numerous anchorages are available most all of them are on the west coast.

Navy Cove – Well marked and easy to enter. Ask permission to enter for check in before you arrive. Channel 16 is not always monitored. Keep a radio log of when you tried to contact them to insure there are no issues. We anchored in about 45'. The Navy came out with a full crew and guns. The check in was very pleasant and the officers and men all had smiles of welcome.

If you want to spend the night in Navy Cove be sure to ask permission. Or just move around to Binnars, about 20 minutes away.

Binnars – This is the only anchorage that is all sand. Bottom is anywhere between 35-50 feet. You are right below some of the base so there is always Navy folks fishing from the cliffs. The reef inshore and to the west offered a fantastic snorkel with lots of fish and live coral.

Moving to the W from Binnars there is the Aquarium (100') Greyson or Palma Solas (45') Punta Tosca (105') Fantastic Humpback whale nursery and Cabo Henslow (45') sandy spot big enough for 2 boats

The diving at Punta Tosca was terrific. We were free diving and there is a cove on the western edge that was shallow and provided great fish, turtles, lobster viewing and even some sharks. The dive boats stop here for the night.

We did not dive O'Neil Rock, North end of Socorro or Cabo Pierce. But our buddies on Lady Lexi did and had great things to say about those spots. Beware some of these spots have bommies coming up very close to the surface and are uncharted.

Garbage

This is a big issue and we spent a lot of time separating out items that could be disposed of in deep water between Benedito and Socorro. Also we washed all our plastics, chopped them up into small pieces and stored them in Trash Compactor Bags. Linda brought some back with her. These Trash Compactor Bags outlasted regular trash bags 10X because they are so thick. Well worth the extra money.

When we saw the dive boats(Nautilus Explorer or Solmar V) we asked them if they would help us by taking our trash. Whew 2 months of trash is a huge amount!

Enjoy the islands.....

Chuck Houlihan
Linda Edeiken
Jacaranda

Version V4