

**PHILIPPINES – NAVIGATION NOTES, *PLAINSONG*, 2024-25**  
**v2, August 2025, updating v1, May 2024**

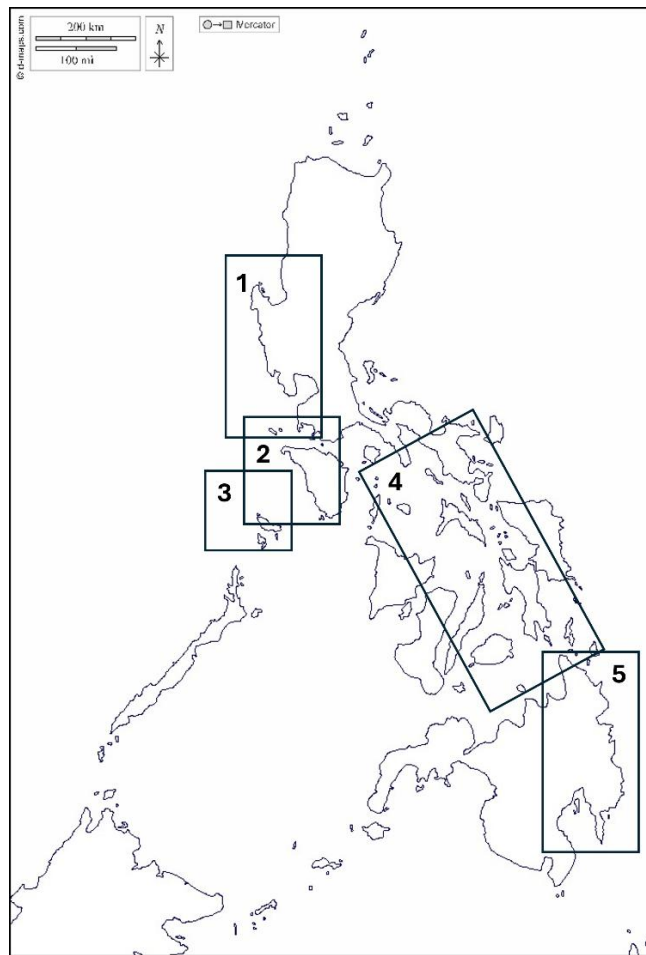
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Companion notes for South-west Japan: [here](#)

These notes cover the Philippines from NW (San Fernando, La Union, on Luzon) to SE (Samal Island, Davao, on Mindanao) via the W coast of Luzon, Mindoro and the N tip of Palawan province (but not the island of Palawan itself), NW-SE through the Visayas and finally the E coast of Mindanao. The passage notes from Japan and anchorages from San Fernando to Papaya Cove are from 2024; all the rest is from 2025.

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## GENERAL NOTES

Sailing in the Philippines is pretty fabulous. But it also has its idiosyncrasies. Fortunately, there is a good deal of cruising information for the area, which these notes will point you to and supplement.

## Sources

There are so many disparate sources of cruising information about the Philippines it is almost overwhelming (especially after the scarcity of information about Japan).

The most useful ones I came across are these, starting with properly published cruising guides:

- *South China Sea* by Jo Winter (RCC). This far surpasses all the other sources in its coverage, detail, accuracy and reliability: <https://rccpf.org.uk/pilots/178/South-China-Sea> It is available in both hard copy and electronically
- *Cruising the Coral Carpet* by Bruce Curran. This is a privately published guide which can be difficult, and expensive, to get hold of. It is a cross between a cruising guide and a coffee table book. It lacks detailed navigation information about specific anchorages but is somewhat useful as a pointer to which anchorages are feasible, with detail to be filled in from other sources. Plus it has some great stories and is lavishly illustrated. I don't regard it as a crucial source of cruising information, but if you are intrigued, try contacting Shauna Indra Salina Curran via Facebook Messenger (<https://www.facebook.com/shauna.curran>); Andy Alford can also get copies (see Sunset Moorings [below](#))
- The next most comprehensive source I used was the Soggy Paws Philippines Compendium. Free, downloadable and useful (as Soggy Paws Compendiums always are): <https://svsoggypaws.com/files/Philippines%20Compendium.pdf> There is also a great presentation and other useful links in the Philippines section of the Soggy Paws Files page: <https://svsoggypaws.com/files/>
- The Puerto Galera Yacht Club has useful information in the Cruising Info section of its website (and in general is an excellent place – see [below](#)): <https://www.pgyc.org/index.php>
- So does the Cruising Guide section of the Philippine Yacht Charter website: <https://www.philippineyachtcharter.com/>
- The Hackings' (s/v *Ocelot*) website has very useful anchorage and other information: [https://hackingfamily.com/Cruise\\_Info/Pacific/Cruising\\_Philippines.htm](https://hackingfamily.com/Cruise_Info/Pacific/Cruising_Philippines.htm)
- There are other useful RCC navigation notes on the RCC/RCCPF databases, for example from *Kokiri* and *Quicksilver*: <https://www.rccpf.org.uk/Pilotage-Notices>

There are very useful Facebook and WhatsApp groups for the Philippines

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/850891615499415>
- WhatsApp:
  - All Philippines: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/BsNfhUvJDQtA1R4Y3vVULz> (invitation link)
  - Smaller WhatsApp group for boats going to Sunset Moorings on Busuanga, Calamian Islands, N Palawan: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/EDoyW4fb6bTAui1cAUrogA> (invitation link)

- For boats going to Holiday Oceanview Marina on Samal Island, Davao: message Andy Alford on +639172719797 for an invitation to join the HOV group created during the 2025 Davao Customs problems (see [below](#))
- And there may well be others for places like Puerto Princesa, Subic, etc.

## Charts

Navionics and C-MAP have reasonable but not fully reliable coverage. I used Navionics. Mostly it was OK, sometimes it was 0.25nm or so off and had me anchoring on land, and quite often in the more out-of-the-way places its representation of the coral was more impressionistic than authoritative. I found some differences between the charts on my Navionics MFD card and those on the Navionics Boating app (mostly about IALA buoyage, for which the MFD card, surprisingly, was more up-to-date).

I carried paper charts (borrowed from RCC members plus a few NOAA charts I bought) but mostly relied on the more up-to-date electronic charts, supplementing them with satellite images. These can be extremely helpful in coral.

For satellite charting, I mostly used OpenCPN and All-in-One Offline Maps on a tablet. For OpenCPN, there is a marvelous source of ready-made images for the Philippines (and many other places) by Terry Sargent, formerly of *s/v Valhalla*, now ashore, hosted by Peter Petrik of *s/v Amazing Grace*: Terry's Topics, <https://sailingamazinggrace.com/charts/terrys-topics#contents> This is a treasure trove of information and links for many regions.

Bruce Balan's Chart Locker doesn't yet have a section for the Philippines, but he has excellent coverage of places on routes to and from the Philippines so it is worth checking out in any case; and maybe the Philippines will be added in due course: <https://chartlocker.brucebalan.com/>

All-in-One Offline Maps, however, has the advantage that it has complete coverage and, given a decent data link, you can download satellite images of the next place you are planning to visit as you go along. VentureFarther is another useful source for making satellite image files for OpenCPN more easily than some of the more complicated multi-step methods: <https://www.venturefarther.com> (I had difficulty accessing this when writing these notes in August 2025, but it loaded eventually).

## Crowdsourced pilotage information

The most widely-used crowdsourced apps in this region are Zulu Offshore, noforeignland, and Navionics users' contributions on the Navionics Boating app (maybe C-MAP too), but there is information on other apps as well, like Navily. Although these crowdsourced apps can all be useful from time to time, they suffer (in my opinion) from inconsistency, somewhat random coverage and lack of detail: often, you really don't know what the weather conditions were like when a reporting yacht visited a place (and hence whether it would be good for your conditions), what the vessel's draft was, how reliable/risk averse the contributor is, etc. So they are useful, but where possible I tried to use them as a supplement rather than a primary source.

This multiplicity of sources can be rather overwhelming, especially when route planning, when you have to skip from source to source to see what information they have for possible anchorages along the route. For this reason, I found myself defaulting a lot of the time to Jo Winter's *South China Sea* (SCS), which is so comprehensive and so authoritative that you could do fine only with this, if you wanted to.

## **Currents and tides**

The principal places where ocean currents matter in the Philippines are on the Pacific side of the archipelago, where the west-flowing North Equatorial Current reaches the Philippines and turns north and south from the center of the archipelago. The northern stream becomes the north-easterly Kuroshio Current to Japan and beyond. The southern stream becomes the Mindanao Current down the east side of Mindanao, which can be extremely helpful if heading south to Davao. On passage north from Davao, it can be significantly mitigated by staying close inshore (see accounts in the Philippines Compendium and anchorage notes on the Hacking Family website cited [above](#)).

Currents among the Philippine islands are more generally affected by the seasonal wind direction. Tidal ranges are generally not very great (no more than 1m in my experience – but this can make a huge visual difference in covering or exposing a reef). But there are some very strong tidal streams in the major channels where the Pacific enters the archipelago, such as the San Bernardino and Surigao Straits and the Hinatuan Passage, which have to be timed correctly, as well as at some choke points among the islands and across the N end of Luzon.

I never found a good source for local tide tables. I tended to use Imray, which seemed to be close enough, or other online sources; the sources rarely agreed but were generally no more than an hour or so off from one another.

## **Weather (adapted from my *Pacific Crossing Guide*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp. 250-251)**

Philippines weather is dominated by two main things: the seasonal swing between the dry and wet seasons; and typhoons.

The main north-east monsoon season runs from approximately November to April. The prevailing wind is north-easterly and often quite strong, particularly in acceleration zones at the tips of large islands, for example the N and S ends of Mindoro. In between islands the wind direction, as well as strength, is often affected by the topography, for example turning more E'ly in narrower gaps in the Visayas. In this season the weather is relatively dry, particularly in March and April. December through February are the coolest months, though there is still considerable typhoon risk in December.

The main south-west monsoon season is May or June to October. The prevailing wind is south-westerly and not so strong; there is a lot of rain, particularly in July through September and particularly in the northern Philippines. As these monsoon seasons change, there are transition months when winds are lighter and more variable and the weather more mixed.

Typhoons are a year-round risk, peaking in July through October. They generally form far to the east so there is usually a week or more warning of a strike. Cruising in the Philippines, at any

time of year, means keeping one eye on typhoon warnings and another on possible ports of refuge, of which there are many (see SCS). The central and northern Philippines are at greater risk than the south, however, and southern Mindanao, including the Gulf of Davao, is generally thought of as typhoon-free (though this is not strictly true historically and southern Mindanao can still be affected by tropical depressions; cyclone activity in the Mindanao region tends to come later in the year than further north, for example in November and December).

Combining typhoon frequency and the monsoon swing, January through March are the best months to cruise in the Philippines, especially if you are not trying to make a lot of ground to the north, though temperatures start to rise in March. However, even with the typhoon risk, many boats based there cruise throughout the year. Bottom line, though, at sea level for most of the year: it's hot!

Typhoon weather information is good:

- Philippines source: <https://www.pagasa.dost.gov.ph/tropical-cyclone/tropical-cyclone-warning-for-shipping>
- US source: <https://www.metoc.navy.mil/jtwc/jtwc.html>
- Japanese source: <https://www.jma.go.jp/bosai/map.html#4/30.411/88.857/&elem=root&typhoon=all&contents=typhoon&lang=en> This includes the Philippines and has a very convenient graphical summary

For daily weather predictions, I found the local Philippine weather forecasts available through <https://www.pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather> to be too general to be very helpful. I tended to rely on ECMWF/GFS through windy.com instead. But none of the forecasts does a particularly good job of predicting micro-local weather between the islands.

For a summary of options for protection against typhoons, see the *Pacific Crossing Guide* p.131 or, better still, go straight to the greater detail in SCS and the Philippines Compendium.

## Formalities

The theory is simple enough, the practice is a little less predictable. In a nutshell, the theory is:

- Make sure you have got the right visa or are eligible for a visa waiver on arrival (most European and North American countries are)
- Notify Immigration of your arrival in advance
- Check in with Immigration, Quarantine, Customs and the Coast Guard at your port of arrival.

See Noonsite for the latest information and more detail:

- [www.noonsite.com/place/philippines/view/clearance](http://www.noonsite.com/place/philippines/view/clearance)

For visa information:

- Overview of requirements: [philippineembassy-dc.org/visa](http://philippineembassy-dc.org/visa)
- Visa requirements by country can be checked through Philippine consulate websites; for example: [newyorkpcg.org/pcgny/consular-services/visa](http://newyorkpcg.org/pcgny/consular-services/visa)
- List of Philippine Consulates: [www.embassy-worldwide.com/country/philippines](http://www.embassy-worldwide.com/country/philippines)
- Visa application portal: [evisa.gov.ph](http://evisa.gov.ph)

Immigration advance notification form and email address:

- [www.cdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Facilitation/Documents/FAL%20FORM%201.docx](http://www.cdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Facilitation/Documents/FAL%20FORM%201.docx) (downloads automatically); [bi.bss.noa@gmail.com](mailto:bi.bss.noa@gmail.com)

For countries not required to get a visa in advance, you will get a visa for 30 days on arrival. This can be renewed for a further 29 days by a fairly easy online process after registering at:

- <https://e-services.immigration.gov.ph/Dashboard/Index?ReturnUrl=%2FVisaWaiver>

Note that you want 'Visa Waiver' (extension) not 'Tourist Visa Extension' on this page (it is easy to get tripped up by the terminology). You can extend the visa/waiver after this second period of 29 days by obtaining an ACR I-Card, but you have to go in person to an Immigration Office to do it.

Note also that if crew are flying in or out of the Philippines, they need to register their arrival or departure on a government eTravel app within 72 hours prior: <https://etravel.gov.ph/>

Where the theory gets more complicated with Customs, Immigration and Quarantine is once you arrive at your first port of entry and, particularly, when you want to clear out of it. Some ports have a reputation for being easier than others. Coming from the N, San Fernando was easy enough for us. Coming from the S or SE, Surigao has a good reputation. In 2025, Davao has become more difficult (see [below](#)). The complications are mainly just bureaucratic details, variable and unpredictable fees that the different offices charge and the gamble of onward clearance domestically in the Philippines (see [below](#)).

Some tips for arrival, departures and check-ins:

- Visit during normal weekday office hours if possible
- Dress respectably and conservatively when visiting the offices. In Davao, Immigration have a strict dress code and turn people away if they aren't within code (slippers are flip-flops):





- Take *all* your ships papers, however irrelevant they may seem to a particular agency
- Take all prior clearance documents, crew lists, etc.
- Ideally, have photocopies of key documents like your vessel registration, prior outbound clearance and crew list
- Have local money if possible
- Set your attitude to Patience mode
- Allow plenty of time

The trickiest question is how to deal with internal clearances within the Philippines. Your port of entry will ask you for your next port and will give you outward clearance to that port. In theory, foreign yachts do not need to clear in and out of domestic ports once they have free pratique from their port of entry. In practice, however, the authorities in larger ports will want to see your papers; some possible examples of this are Puerto Princesa, Palawan; Cebu; perhaps Manila; and definitely Davao and Subic (which is specially regulated – you need to check the pre-arrival requirements before going to Subic; see Noonsite and/or contact the Subic Bay Yacht Club, <https://subicbayyachtclub.ph/index.php>).

If you arrive at a major port and have to report to the authorities (either because they contact you or because a marina or yacht club automatically notifies them), things can get complicated if your outward clearance from your last port says somewhere different than where you have arrived. And if you have clearance to where you are now, you would want to go to the authorities anyway, in order to get clearance for your next one and not fall out of sync. 'Authorities' probably means each of Customs, Immigration and Quarantine, though this might vary from port to port.

None of this applies to small towns and tiny islands in between, only the major ports. There are lists of the Bureau of Immigration and Bureau of Customs offices here (and I think Quarantine follows suit):

- <https://immigration.gov.ph/contacts/>
- <https://customs.gov.ph/directory-of-the-bureau-of-customs/>

If I were doing this again, I wouldn't do as I did last time but would do the following. At my first port of entry:

- If I knew that I was definitely going to a major port next, I would get outward clearance to that port, bite the bullet and check in with the authorities there, repeating as necessary to the extent that I was definitely going to other major ports
- If I was not going to a major port next, I would ask for outward clearance to my final port of exit from the Philippines. Then you are completely free to sail wherever you want without having to check in again. But you have to avoid major ports. That is easy to do (and some of them, like Batangas, are not very attractive in any case, even if they might be convenient). Exceptions might be:
  - Subic (for its facilities)
  - Puerto Princesa (because it is a good base for gorgeous Palawan)
  - Surigao (because it is a convenient stopping point if it is on your route and you need to provision. But we arrived in Surigao, our only major port between San Fernando and Davao, in the dark and left the next mid-morning without having any contact with the authorities)

- Tacloban (handy on some routes)
- Cebu (transportation, facilities, sailmaker; two less-than-ideal marinas)

### *Davao Customs, 2025*

A final note on Customs. Although cruisers have to be careful about keeping their immigration status up to date, it has always been understood what once a foreign yacht is sailing in the Philippines, it can stay without limit (provided it remains a foreign yacht with valid registration overseas and doesn't engage in commercial activities).

In 2025, however, the Bureau of Customs in Davao (and only Davao as of August 2025) started to demand that all the yachts in Holiday Oceanview Marina, Samal Island submit the sort of Goods Declaration required of commercial ships, irrespective of how long the yachts had been in the Philippines and regardless of the fact that the yachts had already been cleared into the Philippines by the Bureau of Customs when they first arrived in the county. The Bureau gave no guidance on how to make the Declaration and could not make a form available, other than saying "send your documents" by email. The BOC threatened to treat the boats as abandoned (and therefore liable to sale by the Bureau) if owners did not make their Declarations.

The concern, apart from the inconvenience of making some complicated yet vague Declaration and the possible penalties for not doing so (up to forfeiture of the vessel), is that the Bureau would deem the yachts and their contents to have been formally imported into the Philippines and hence liable to pay import duty at some huge rate (as much as 50%). The Davao Bureau appears to be claiming that six months is the duty-free limit and has apparently tried to charge duty on boats that have wanted to leave recently.

Some cruisers are challenging the legality of the Bureau's attempt. Others are trying to submit Declarations as best they can. As of August 2025, it remains to be seen how the situation will play out. If duties and/or penalties are applied, it could be devastating for yacht owners in Davao and for the Holiday Oceanview Marina. If it were to spread to the rest of the Philippines, it would be devastating for cruising in the Philippines altogether.

In the meantime, Holiday Oceanview Marina has announced that they are not accepting new arrivals (so the BOC is already having a negative impact on their business). The most viable alternative in the south-eastern Philippines is Surigao, some 250nm north of Cape San Augustin, the SE tip of the Gulf of Davao (though it is more at risk of typhoons). The Mayor of Surigao has made a point of making the city cruiser-friendly, the authorities are well coordinated and the Bureau of Customs in Surigao has not yet followed Davao's example (in fact within the recent past they have confirmed the widespread understanding of the duty-free, no-time-limit status quo, as has the head office of the Bureau of Customs in Manila).

It is not clear whether the Davao Customs problem is a fast- or slow-moving situation. But there will certainly be updates. The best way to find out the latest situation would be to follow the Sailing Philippines WhatsApp and/Facebook groups (see [above](#)) or from the [Marina](#) itself.

### *Philippine Coast Guard*

And a final note on the Coast Guard. A new regulation from 2024 requires vessels to get permission from the Coast Guard to leave a port, and possibly to be inspected. It was



introduced after an incident in which a corrupt mayor in northern Luzon escaped the county on a yacht. The regulation doesn't seem to be being widely enforced on pleasure craft yet.

In the few minor ports where there were Coast Guard offices (but not Immigration, etc.) on our route in 2024-25, I generally didn't deal with the Coast Guard and didn't have any issues. On the few occasions when I had dealings with them, for example in San Fernando, Maasin and when passing Cape San Agustin at the SE tip of Mindanao, I found them very professional, very helpful, somewhat interested in national security but primarily interested in safety. I think of them as the cruiser's friend rather than as a troublesome authority. If there is a Coast Guard office where you are, a check-in over VHF probably isn't a bad idea; they may or may not reply.

When leaving the country, however, I will notify the Coast Guard in advance because of the new regulation and get permission to leave, with or without an inspection, just to be on the safe side.

## **Cruising life in the Philippines**

I've said it before and I will say it again:

The Philippines is a magnificent cruising ground and a great stop on a North Pacific circuit if you can afford the time to go that far west. The islands are beautiful, the water is warm, the people are very welcoming, the history and culture are interesting; the diving is great; and English is widely spoken. Although many more boats are now visiting the Philippines than in the past, it still remains relatively far off the main beaten paths of Pacific cruising; without great effort, you can find anchorages with few or no other cruising boats for weeks or months. (*Pacific Crossing Guide*, p. 248).

I won't try to cover *everything* in these notes, but will focus on the things that are particularly useful to know in advance when considering a cruise to the Philippines.

### *Facilities*

There are yachting services in the Philippines, but they are concentrated in only a few places, most notably (from N to S, marina (Ma), boatyard/haulout (B), moorings (Ms – excluding places with a short-term mooring or two like resorts)):

- Subic, Luzon (Ma, B, yacht club)
- Manila, Luzon (Ma, B, yacht club)
- Caylabne Bay, Luzon (Ma)
- Papaya Cove, Luzon (B)
- Punta Fuego, Luzon (Ma – but normally full; fuel; yacht club; can anchor off). Nearby Maya Maya Marina has closed
- Puerto Galera (Ms, yacht club)
- Busuanga Bay/Pearl Bay, Busuanga, Calamian Islands (Ms)
- Puerto Princesa, Palawan (Ms, yacht club)
- Port Carmen, Cebu (Ma, Ms, B (2))
- Cebu City/Mactan Island, Cebu (Ma (2), B)
- Port Bonbonon, Negros (Ms)
- Holiday Oceanview, Samal Island, Davao, Mindanao (Ma, B – but see previous page)

Most of these places are suitable for leaving a yacht for some period of time (some longer than others). I may have missed some additional ones. It is generally possible to find engineers and skilled trades at or through the locations that have boatyards; outside these it can be more challenging, although the Filipinos are tremendously good at repairing or replicating things that need fixing.

Almost all the time, then, you will be anchoring. Coral is common, especially from Mindoro south, so plenty of chain is a good thing. And you will be landing on beaches, harbor walls, etc., so a sturdy dinghy and a working outboard are very helpful as well.

### *Chandlers*

The largest chandler is Broadwater Marine, which has several locations:

<https://www.broadwatermarine.com/>

ALS, very close to Broadwater Marine's Makati, Manila location, is useful for Yamaha outboards:

<https://alsmarine.com.ph/>

### *Shipping etc.*

Both Amazon and Lazarda, a local equivalent, are said to work well. (I haven't used either yet.) For shipping in from abroad, the preferred carrier is shippingcart.com. See the Hacking Family site for more detail. Using DHL, Fedex or UPS leads to Customs delays and expenses, I have been told. Locally, LBC is everywhere and is handy for local packages, expensive for shipping overseas.

### *Sailmakers*

Hyde Sails, close to Cebu airport, are excellent. This is Hyde Sails' global manufacturing location; they do repairs as well. Contact: [markcijas@hydesails.com.ph](mailto:markcijas@hydesails.com.ph)

### *Propane*

Propane is a little difficult in the Philippines. Their thread size is unique and propane stores are either reluctant or not allowed to fill other people's bottles. If your locker will accommodate it, the simplest thing would be to buy a Philippine bottle from a larger supplier and swap it for full as you go along. The other solution is to have a local shop make up a special connector hose with the right fittings on either end and fill your bottle from a local bottle by gravity. There are many how-to's on this on the web, including on the Hacking Family site.

That said, it is sufficiently hot in the Philippines that we only cooked on a camping stove in the cockpit, in order not to heat up the cabin any further. Small camping gas bottles are easy to find in supermarkets and hardware stores, even in small towns.

### *Fuel*

The Philippines seems to have a huge number of gas stations! I think it might be because in the provinces, customers buy very small amounts at a time, mostly for motorcycles and scooters. So diesel is easy to come by from gas stations in cannisters.

Fuel docks, on the other hand, are hard to come by. I only found one (Punta Fuego, SW of Manila – see below), although there is also a fuel dock in Subic and maybe elsewhere that I haven't heard about.

### *Water*

For boats that don't have watermakers, getting good water in the Philippines is now quite easy. There are reverse osmosis stores selling filtered water in pretty much all towns and even some small villages. The challenge is that you need a huge number of the ubiquitous blue water cannisters to fill a large tank and borrowing them can be a challenge. The reason is that each local household has its own cannisters and simply takes them to the water store to be refilled. The store itself doesn't have spares. They will sell you new ones, but don't want to lend a new cannister for one-time use only.

We carried a couple of cannisters and managed, eventually, to borrow more whenever we needed it. The initial answer is usually No. It may take some shopping around to find a store entrepreneurial enough to lend someone else's cannisters before they come back to pick them up. But with some persuasion it can usually be done.

### *Provisions*

In larger towns and cities the supermarkets are very good, particularly the large chains like Robinson's and SM. In smaller towns, 'supermarket' usually turns out to be a disappointment: they generally only sell dry goods, including vast selections of snacks and cookies, lots of tins, decent cleaning supplies, etc., but very little fresh food and a pretty limited selection overall. Don't expect to find fancy Western products, low-fat variants, gluten-free, etc. And many local products are very sweet (peanut butter and tomato ketchup would be notorious examples).

For fresh food, the public markets are the solution. Every town has one and some larger villages do too. They are fantastic, and fun to shop in. In the wet market you will find excellent fruit and veg, fish and meat. If the town is large enough to have a dry market as well, it will have clothing, shoes, luggage, etc. The experience can be a bit overwhelming at first but the rewards are worth it – and they are the only option.

### *Banks*

ATMs are fairly widespread in the Philippines. Even small towns generally have at least one. But they aren't very reliable – for whatever reason, they often seem to be offline. Using the larger banks (e.g., BPI, BDO, Land Bank) is more likely to be successful. Withdrawals are typically limited to 10,000 PHP per withdrawal (about 200 USD).

### *Communications*

There is Starlink, of course. But the local mobile carriers – Smart and Globe – have pretty good coverage. It is relatively easy to get a SIM card from one of the little mobile phone stores of which there are many in every town. Technically, you need a Philippine address, but the more enterprising smaller stores will simply put their own address. Then you can top up your plan as you go along, by visiting another small store. There is a confusing array of plans, but they are not very expensive.

You can never tell which carrier will have a signal, or a stronger signal, in a given anchorage. One solution is to put a SIM from each into a dual-SIM phone. It is cheap to buy a burner phone locally if you don't want to use both slots in your normal phone.

Although some locals use WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook Messenger are more commonly used messaging services in the Philippines.

### *Security*

The Philippines still suffers from a bad reputation from past security problems that have subsided over time but whose impression lingers on. Many of these stem from separatist and kidnapping-for-ransom incidents in SW Mindanao; this is a region that should still be avoided.

In general, though, I don't think the bad reputation is warranted any more. You should take care in a big city like Manila, for sure. There are armed security guards all over the place, even in the provinces (which is probably good), and marinas, boatyards, etc. are well guarded. But day to day, we never encountered anything untoward (other than a few rascally taxi drivers and some instances of paying a privileged foreigners' price). More often the locals we met were concerned to make sure that we weren't overcharged.

When I first arrived, I used to lock up the boat when we went ashore in small anchorages. But I gave up after a while.

### *Health*

Although there is malaria in a few areas, cruisers are unlikely to encounter it. We did not take malaria prophylaxis and did not hear of any other cruisers doing so.

Pharmacies are very helpful for medical issues, and in general it shouldn't be too difficult to find a doctor if needed.

### *Bangkas, FADs and sailing at night*

Everywhere you sail in the Philippines you will see *bangkas*, the traditional canoe-shaped boats with bamboo outriggers that range from tiny to pretty big and are used for small ferries, dive boats, fishing (above all) and family transportation. They can be pretty hard to spot at sea but, fortunately, generally have air-cooled gasoline engines that are noisy (except the largest *bangkas*, which have diesel inboards). As many seem to fish at night as fish during the day; some are unlit, or only turn on a flashlight at the last minute.

The other common hazards are fish aggregation devices or FADs, which are moored buoys, often in the middle of nowhere and in great depths, around which fish collect, breed and wait to be caught. The largest ones can look like small boats with some sort of makeshift spar contraption for visibility; medium-size FADs may be made of oil drums; smaller ones closer inshore tend to be polystyrene blocks with old car tires lashed around them; and nearest to shore they may simply look like ungainly tangles of bamboo and palm. Sometimes they are lit, often not. You wouldn't want to hit the larger ones; nor the smaller ones, really, but the polystyrene-and-tire FADs would probably do more cosmetic damage than real. Finally, in some areas pearl farming, shrimp beds, fish pens, nets, pots and other aquaculture paraphernalia can provide further hazards.

For all these reasons, cruisers tend not to sail in the dark in the Philippines. But the ferries keep going at night and the sea is often lit up with *bangkas* fishing for squid with bright lights. Normally distances are short enough that sailing at night isn't very necessary, especially for faster yachts; but for some jumps, an overnight can be useful. We did three in 2025 without incident, keeping a very good lookout and staying fairly far offshore. I would do it again if necessary.

While we are on the subject of *bangkas*, buying fish directly from the fishermen in their boats is one of the more rewarding Philippine cruising pastimes. The going rate in 2025 was about 150 pesos per kilo (3 USD, approximately). You need to have small change and a way of swapping money for fish at a distance so that the *bangkas'* outriggers don't crash into your hull. We used to put the money into plastic bag and tie it, so that it would float if it fell in the sea, and hang it on the end of a boathook. The fisherman would put the fish on the boathook or just throw them on board.

## PASSAGE NOTES

This section has notes first on sailing between the Philippines and Japan and then other routes, particularly the more common routes from south to north.

### JAPAN TO THE PHILIPPINES

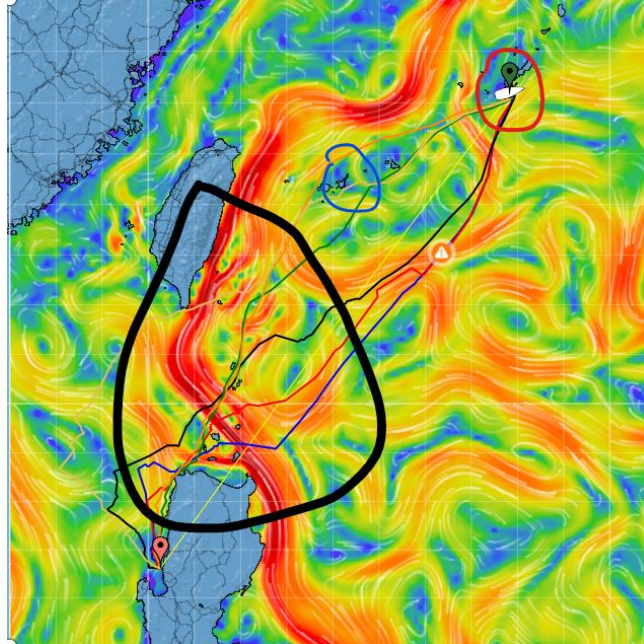
#### Sailing south

Besides the weather, the big questions for this passage are where to clear out of, whether to stop in Taiwan and how to deal with the Kuroshio Current. The simplest and closest checkout options are the main island of Okinawa (Yonabaru or Naha) and Ishigaki. Hirara on nearby Miyakojima is another option.

I gave serious thought to clearing out of Japan from Ishigaki, which would have set me up for Taiwan or shortened the direct passage to the Philippines by a couple of days, but in the end decided to clear out from Yonabaru, Okinawa instead. (We were already in the marina at Yonabaru, which is a very good place.) My logic, which wouldn't necessarily apply under all weather scenarios, was this:

- If we had stopped in Taiwan, we would have got more entangled in the Kuroshio, having to cross it at least twice and perhaps three times. And off the E coast of Taiwan the current was more contrary (NNE-flowing) than where we crossed it more or less at right angles in the Bashi Channel
- I found the officialdom for Taiwan difficult to overcome (I tried to set up just-in-case entry permission, got bogged down in difficult websites and gave up once I had decided not to go there anyway; but a friend recommends Houbihu Marina at Kenting, as does Jo Winter (RCC) in *South China Sea*)
- Although there is a lot of sense in waiting for the right weather window in Ishigaki, we got a good forecast from Okinawa and did not need/want to wait for a better one
- Kirk Patterson's Konpira Consulting (see my notes on Japan on the RCCPF website) colleague Akiko Honma in Yonabaru is fantastic and made the clearance process so easy it was hard (no, impossible) to resist. (Kirk does have another colleague in Ishigaki.)





Kuroshio considerations (black circle) from Okinawa (red circle, top right) or Ishigaki (blue circle) via Taiwan or not. Source: PredictWind's ocean data, May 15, 2024

The other question, given these decisions, was how to transit the Luzon Strait. Looking at weather forecasts over time in the spring, the NE and E'ly winds that prevail when we were making the passage (March) tended to accelerate through the Strait. What was usually a 'green' wind on Windy.com out in the Pacific generally became a 'yellow' or 'orange' wind in the Luzon Strait – i.e. it went from 10-20kts to 20-30 kts. So the weather window became especially important for this part of the passage.

As discussed above, the Kuroshio was another major factor here, along with shipping and the effect of current and tide among the various islands south of Taiwan and north of Luzon. The charts show all manner of tide rips and overfalls among the islands. Because of all this, I decided to take the central Bashi Channel, which worked out fine. There was shipping but it wasn't unduly heavy; the sea state was fine; we crossed the Kuroshio in pretty much the shortest way possible; and we always had the Batanes Islands nearby in case we needed a bolt hole (Basco in the Batanes is a possible port of refuge, though not an official port of entry).

### **Sailing north**

Sailing north from the Philippines, the answer might be completely different, because (whether one stopped in Taiwan or not) one could take the favorable Kuroshio for longer by staying closer to Taiwan and then clearing in at Ishigaki. Depending on the season, this might also give a better wind angle on NE or E'ly winds for the longer passage than heading direct to Okinawa, leaving just an overnight or two from Ishigaki or Miyakojima to Okinawa.

## OTHER ROUTES TO THE PHILIPPINES

We were sailing south. But it is more common for boats to be transiting through the Philippines from south to north, despite the challenges of doing so during the NE'ly monsoon (in order to arrive in Japan for their summer).

Boats coming from Malayasia, Singapore or western Indonesia tend to check in at Puerto Princesa on Palawan. Boats coming in from the Pacific (for example, from the Marianas, Palau, FSM or PNG) naturally go to east coast ports of entry in the Philippines, for example Surigao or Tacloban. Davao is an option from the south as well, and has the advantage of being less at risk from typhoons. But, quite apart from its Customs problems (see [above](#)), it is at the head of a deep gulf out of which one has to sail south again to head north, and it means slogging up the east coast of Mindanao against the current – doable, but harder work than coming in further north from further offshore. Boats generally do not transit the south coast of Mindanao, in order to avoid the Zamboanga area at its western end.

If I were coming from the SE, and subject to the typhoon situation, I would chose Surigao, because it leaves you maximum options for the Visayas and because the authorities make a big effort to be cruiser-friendly (though the anchorage is not very good in a NE'ly).

For more detail on routes and on the principal ports of entry not covered in my notes below, see the *Pacific Crossing Guide*, pp. 252-256.

## DESTINATION NOTES

This section should be read in tandem with SCS. In many cases my notes simply expand and sometimes update the entries in SCS. Significant updates, expansions or corrections to SCS, and places not in SCS, are shown **in red**. Unless otherwise shown, the coordinates are our anchoring position and will differ slightly from those in SCS. The notes run from NW to SE. Where no specific anchoring depth is shown, it is safe to assume that the depth is suitable for a yacht of at least 2m draught.

### LUZON (WEST COAST)

San Fernando, La Union (Filipinos usually add La Union, to distinguish it from the larger San Fernando in Pampanga)

South Poro anchorage: 16° 36'.2N 120° 17'.8E

There are two options at San Fernando: the main port anchorage on the north side of the Poro peninsula or the beach anchorage on the south side. We chose the beach anchorage because we expected more N wind than S and because we thought it would be quieter and prettier. We liked it and did not regret our choice.

Even though the bay is exposed to the south, if the wind is not very strong it is OK even if it is a lee shore. The holding is good, in sand.

The beach has changed a good deal from SCS and earlier RCC notes. The best place to go ashore is now near the posh Aureo resort in the E half of the beach. There is easy access to the road just E of Aureo where its flags stop. You can usually get a tricycle from here. If not, take the road away from the beach, turn left at a T-junction, follow the road to the right at a sharp bend and you will reach the main road, where there are always tricycles. On the way back, ask for Acapulco Beach for a drop-off at your starting point.

Customs is about half a mile to the left on the main road and Immigration is just beyond it (fork left immediately after the Customs building). There is a purified water store on the way to Customs and gas stations both behind Customs and about a mile in the opposite direction along the main road going into town. There is an excellent supermarket in Robinsons (see Google Maps) but for fresh fruit and vegetables the open market in the center of San Fernando is the place to go. There are many laundries and other services all over San Fernando (which is a nice little town).

Bolinao Harbor (SCS nomenclature)

16° 23'.1N 119° 54'.9E

There are various different anchoring options here. We went to the Bolinau Harbor anchorage listed in SCS, which is on the S side of Santiago Island. Navionics shows this spot to be E of power lines, but this is incorrect; the power lines are further E. Anchor out of the way of ferry and *bangka* traffic, which generally tracks pretty close inshore between the quay on Santiago Island and Binabalian Point. It's a nice anchorage, though the facilities are all over on the main Bolinao/Luciente side of the harbor to the W.

The town of Bolinao isn't huge but has decent facilities typical of towns of this size: public market, ATM (try Land Bank first), pharmacy, water, fuel, small and basic grocery store, good hardware, etc. Land at the public quay and walk or get a tricycle up to the town. Interesting church.

#### Caiman Cove

15° 55'.6N 119° 47'.1E

As SCS says, the bay is exposed to the S. But it's fine for E through N to W. Pleasant. It is a low-key resort beach, complete with the usual sound systems, jet skis, etc. But quiet at night.

Anchor in about 20-30' before the bottom shelves towards the beach. Sand. The E side of the bay seemed to be marked off for aquaculture.

#### Hermana Mayor Island

SE of sand spit: 15° 48'.1N 119° 48'.4E

A beautiful island with white sand. We anchored on the SE side of the sand spit, where the island's owners have a beach cabana.

#### Matalvi Bay (SCS nomenclature)

15° 30'.6N 119° 55'.1E

This is a nice anchorage on the Salvador Island side of the larger bay, with fine views of Luzon to the E. There are various shallow patches on the approach and in the anchorage. Sand. The red channel buoy shown on Navionics did not appear to be there.

#### Capon Grande Island

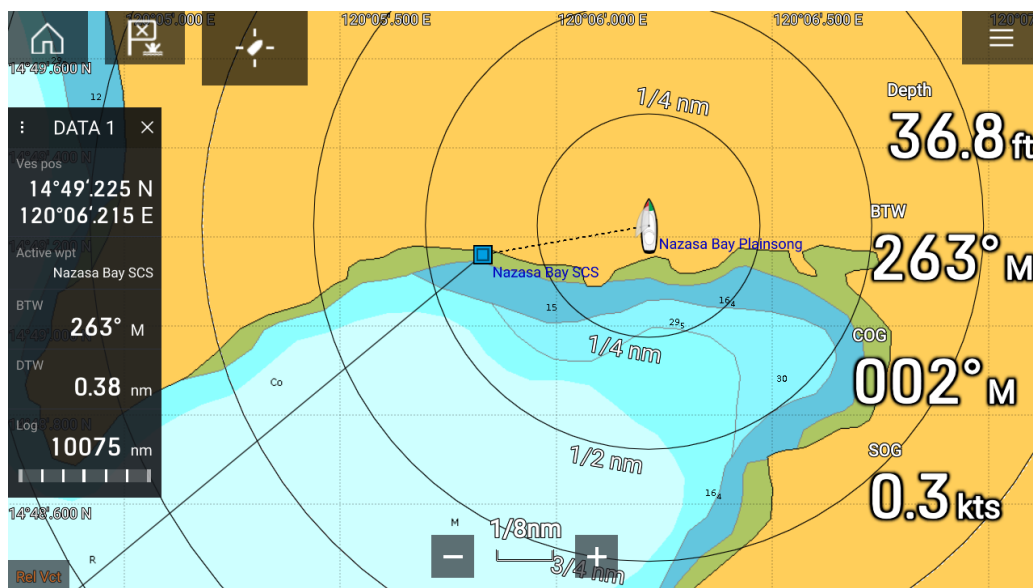
14° 54'.8N 120° 00'.9E

A lovely, isolated anchorage. Good protection from wind from W through N to E, but little protection from swell from probably any direction. Beware of rocks and shallows running south from both the SW and SE corners of the island. Anchor in about 45' off the beach. Sand. Intermittent cell phone reception.

#### Nazasa Bay

14° 49'.2N 120° 06'.2E

Easy approach provided you avoid the rocks at the entrance (!). Navionics is off by about 0.25nm S. The bottom is more uneven than Navionics shows, so be prepared for unexpected shallows. Many possible anchoring spots. Attractive in an open-glen kind of way. No cell phone reception.



Nazasa Bay on Navionics. Port Silanguin has a similar error.

### Port Silanguin

N side: 14° 46'.7N 120° 07'.3E

The SCS description of Port Silanguin as a former US bombing range does not do full justice to a bay that we liked more than Nazasa Bay, because it felt more enclosed and protected but was equally pretty.

There are various options for anchoring: a bay on the S side, two bays on the N side and the head of the bay itself. Uneven bottom. Good holding in sand (N side, big bay, E of the white house). Like Nazasa, the wind can be gusty down the glens here. No cell phone reception.

Between Port Silanguin and Mariveles, SE of a conspic green-roofed coal loading pier, there is a series of bays, most of which are mentioned in SCS. Porto Aplaya, however, is not.

### Porto Aplaya/Biaan Barangay

14° 26'.4N 120° 27'.1E

The first of the bays is the small village of Porto Aplaya, which is a useful stop for a trip into the town of Mariveles. Easy access through anchored coastal freighters. Anchor in about 10m outside the moored *bangkas*. Land at the NE corner of the beach, in front of a big tree just E of a water tower, where there is access to the road and a good place to find a tricycle. A pleasant spot, despite its proximity to the coal pier.

Mariveles itself has a good market, purified water, fuel, etc.

### W Mariveles Bay

14° 25'.4N 120° 27'.9E

This is the first bay described on page 208 of SCS. Easy access, pretty, quiet. Some fishing poles and floats to avoid but no navigational hazards that we became aware of. Sand. Open to the SW. No cell phone reception.

### Corregidor

14° 22'.9N 120° 35'.3E

The anchorage at the W end of the island, south side, just SW of the concrete pier, is a decent anchorage and very convenient for visiting the island. Land at the beach and walk the short distance across the island to the visitor office. 300 pesos per person plus a 200 pesos docking fee. No regular boats were running from Manila to Corregidor in April 2024 so the island was empty of visitors. No facilities – and strangely quiet, because unlike every other bay in the Philippines, Corregidor has no *bangkas* on the beach, no kids, no dogs, no roosters, no sound systems and no karaoke. But it has a moving history and is worth a visit.

The anchorage at the E end of the south side is somewhat better protected, especially from the SE. Both anchorages are open to the S.

### Kutad Cove

14° 11'.1N 120° 35'.7E

South of the mouth of Manila Bay and after the low-key bays to the north, it is a surprise to round the point before Kutad Cove and find a large resort condo complex at its head. That means jet skis, etc., but they are not too bad, it is quiet at night and it is pretty, despite the development.

There is a line of tiny buoys some way off the beach to keep boats away from the beach. Anchor outside these in the center of the bay or, for a quieter spot, in the bay on the E side. This bay shelves with coral towards the shore; 35' or so seems to be a safe anchoring depth. Sand and mud.

I heard of local sailors being turned away from the bay by the resort's security or just being visited by them; but we did not experience either.

### Papaya Cove

Close to boatyard and moorings: 14° 10'.7N 120° 36'.4E

Papaya Cove offers good shelter except from the W. The head of the bay, where the colorful floating cottages are, is shallow. There is a mooring field W of this, partly owned by the boatyard and partly owned by the barangay. One can anchor between the boatyard and the moorings, but closer to the moorings so as to avoid the normal path of *bangkas*. This is convenient for going ashore at the yard (the easiest place) but is very noisy (karaoke, basketball commentary). The holding is not particularly good here, a mix of soft mud and plastic bags. Or, given an outboard, one can go to the far side of the bay, which would be much quieter. Weak cell phone reception.



Papaya village is very basic – no facilities to speak of other than a purified water shop and sari sari stores. But the real point of Papaya Cove is the boatyard, Papaya Yacht Charters & Services (pycsi.com). If not for the yard itself or for easy road access via yard, and with so many other lovely coves nearby, you wouldn't really choose Papaya Cove.

I hauled out *Plainsong* at the boatyard and left her there for nine months. It is not a posh yard but it came well recommended by Filipino and American sailors whom I trust. My bottom line after my stay:

- If you simply want safe storage on land, this is a good place:
  - Good travel lift
  - Secure facility
  - Pretty well protected from typhoons
- If you want basic work done, then fine, but the more you can be there to supervise the better
- For more complex work, they have access to other trades of varying skill levels (who will typically come from Manila or Subic); again, you should be there to supervise yourself
- The people are very nice and want to be helpful
- Rates are reasonable by Philippine standards
- Communication from a distance can be a little challenging
- The distance from Manila and access to chandlery, etc, can also be a challenge
- The yard offers a couple of rooms where you can stay for a moderate (by not cheap) price if you don't want to be on your boat. They are pretty basic; one has decent A/C, the other has weak A/C.

For more specifics, please contact me directly.

Despite the noise, the poor holding, etc., I came to like Papaya village. Some more detail:

- Papaya
  - Small bakery selling pandesal
  - Occasional fish and meat in the sari sari stores in the morning, and some fruit, along with the usual sari sari fare of snacks, beer, etc. in small quantities
  - Propane (filled Philippine bottles)
  - Gasoline but not diesel
  - Purified water
  - Tricycles from the barangay basketball court area – difficult to get after dark
- Looc
  - The nearest (small) town, about 15 minutes by tricycle
  - Fruit and veg, meat and fish stalls
  - Dry goods (only) from Dali 'supermarket'; you could not do a serious provisioning run here
  - Laundry
- Nusugbu
  - The nearest larger town for real provisioning
  - About 45 minutes by car; I never went there
- Transportation to Manila
  - It is about 2-2.5 hours by car from Papaya to Manila

- You may be able to hitch a ride with Chito, the manager of the boatyard, particularly on Thursdays, perhaps for a fee
- Failing that, you can have a driver come out from Manila to pick you up (for example Anis Transport, <https://www.anistransport.com/>)
- Or try the bus (which I did not do)
  - San Gabriel Bus Express company runs buses from Nusugbu to PITX near Manila airport. They stop in Looc and maybe at the top of the Papaya road as well, where it meets the main road. Try:
    - [busterminal.ph](http://busterminal.ph)
    - [ph.commutetour.com](http://ph.commutetour.com)

#### Cayraang Cove

14° 09'.8N 120° 35'.6E

This is a small, very attractive cove at the entrance to the much larger Looc Cove. It has no resorts or houses, though *bangkas* bring visitors to enjoy the beach by day. It is well-protected except from W, +/-30°. I would choose it over Looc Cove (even though Looc Cove is also pleasant, but more open and more developed with small resorts).

The bottom shelves fairly rapidly beyond the 10m line and rocks/coral come out from the shore. But there is plenty of room to anchor in 10-15m. Lovely birdsong. Sand. A favorite place.

#### 'Fuegito Cove' (my invention)

14° 08'.4N 120° 35'.2E

If you don't want to go into the swanky Punta Fuego Yacht Club marina or anchor off it, this unnamed cove on the north side of the Fuego peninsula is a good option. It is exposed to the W-SW, like many of the bays on this coast, but is well protected from most other directions. An attractive little cove with just a hut on the beach, looking across to the beautiful houses on the N side of the Fuego peninsula. Fairly deep (around 15m), but good holding in sand and maybe rock/coral.

#### Punta Fuego marina

14° 07'.8N 120° 35'.4E

The marina is small and turning space is limited. The marina is normally full with boats from the private development on the peninsula around it. It is useful place to refuel (credit cards accepted); contact the supervisor, Ipoy, in advance: +63 927 799 2806.

There is a shallow patch to starboard as you approach the marina, but it is buoyed. You can anchor outside the entrance. Very attentive crew and a pleasant bar/restaurant. Resort facilities nearby. This is the Philippines at its fanciest. <https://www.clubpuntafuego.com.ph/>

#### Maya Maya/Nusugbu Bay

14° 06'.9N 120° 37'.0E

The Maya Maya Yacht Club marina and boatyard have closed down. Papaya Yacht Charters & Services bought their travel lift (which is ex-America's Cup from New Zealand).

But the bay outside is a pleasant place to anchor, though it is getting more built up onshore. Good shelter in NW-N-E. Easy anchoring pretty much anywhere. Sand and mud.

I don't know where to go ashore here (probably either on the beach or at the old marina facility on the W side of the bay), but this would probably be the most convenient base from which to get to Nasugbu versus Papaya and the coves further north (if you were afloat already). Nasugbu Bay itself, opposite the town, is an open roadstead but might be possible in settled conditions. Dinghy access might be possible at the pier inside the breakwater. But I am speculating.

## MINDORO AND LUBANG ISLANDS

### Lubang Islands

SCS says that they offer generally poor shelter and are not really worth the effort except in very settled weather. If coming from the S during the NE Monsoon then, yes, it would be a slog to get there; but this was not our experience when coming from N and E at this time of year. The islands are an easy run from Luzon or Puerto Galera and we found them fun and interesting.

### Golo Island, SE anchorage

13° 38'.4N 120° 22'.9E

This is about one-third of the way along the S coast of the island NW from Tanawan Point. It is an attractive, bucolic spot. Good shelter from N to E sectors, open to the S and SW. Anchor in about 30'. Some coral, so try to find a sandy spot. There is an islet, not shown on Navionics, at about 13° 38'.5N 120° 22'.8E. No cell phone reception.

### Tagbac, Lubang Island

13° 50'.1N 120° 05'.4E

Two reefs extend quite far from each shore on the approach. Then two more reefs extend to form an inner pool. There is room to anchor between these inner reefs or slightly inside the pool in 45-55'. Good shelter from NE. Good holding in sand. Pleasant anchorage. Land on the beach and walk to the road, from where it is easy to get a tricycle into town if needed, 150 PHP. There are sari-sari stores and fruit/veg stands close to the beach and a gas station nearby.

The island is reasonably prosperous and quite pleasant. Its principal interest is that Lt. Anoda of the Japanese army continued to fight for 20 years after the end of World War II, not believing that the war had ended. At the tourism office in the municipal building in town you can hire a guide and tricycle to take you to see the caves where Anoda and, to start with, his colleagues lived. It is a rough and steep hike in the hills, but worth it.

A visit to the tourist office, or any contact with them, will most likely trigger a 'docking fee' of 500 PHP per day.

Smart and Globe cell reception. Smart seemed to be stronger.

### Mindoro

On the N coast, we only sailed to Puerto Galera, and then continued down the W coast. There are anchorages on the E coast too (see SCS), but many of them looked exposed during our NE monsoon season.

Mindoro is a big, tall island. During the NE monsoon it creates vigorous wind acceleration zones at its N and S tips and a huge wind shadow on the W side of the island in between them. In the Verde Island Passage at the N end, the NE wind tends to bend E'ly. Between the acceleration zone and the tide/current, the Verde Island Passage deserves respect – it may be quite a surprise after the sheltered waters W of Luzon or, if coming N, in the lee of Mindoro.

### Puerto Galera

13° 30'.2N 120° 57'.2E

This is an excellent harbor and Yacht Club, worthy of their reputation. It is worth phoning ahead to the Yacht Club to book a mooring:

Email: [clubhouse@pgyc.org](mailto:clubhouse@pgyc.org)

Telephone: [+63 43 351-2035](tel:+63433512035)

Facsimile: +63 43 351-2035

Mobile Phone: [+63 917 520-5874](tel:+639175205874)

What'sApp: [+63 969 208-0859](tel:+639692080859)

To contact the Club once in the harbor, call 'Service Boat' on VHF Ch68. They will show you to a mooring to run you to shore and back. The main jetty for getting ashore is called the Muelle, which is pronounced Mo-ell-y-ay locally. It is short walk from here to downtown up the road to the left. ATM on the way. The Service Boat can also take you to the Club, where there are showers, bar, restaurant and a great welcome. A mooring was 503 PHP per day for a 35-footer in 2025.

There are now at least two laundries in town. The Immigration office has closed.

### Epaz Point

13° 25'.0N 120° 18'.8E

A pleasant anchorage in the right conditions. Rocky islets extend from the point, not shown on Navionics. When we passed by, there was also a boat anchored in the next bay to the N.

### Pamutusin Cove

13° 24'.5N 120° 23'.5E

A NE wind in Paluan Bay outside curls E down the shore and into the anchorage. But the land does a good job killing the waves and it is not uncomfortable. Pleasant spot. OK holding in mud.

### Paluan Bay

13° 24'.7N 120° 27'.7E

The Paluan Bay coordinates in SCS are pretty much the same as the coordinates for Marul Cove. For the town of Paluan itself and the NE corner of Paluan Bay, the coordinates above are better.

### Marul Cove

13° 23'.8N 120° 28'.2E

We took a look but didn't anchor. Shelter seemed good in NE'ly. Pleasant enough but not as nice as Pamutusin. Could probably get a tricycle from here into Paluan for supplies.

A note in Navionics (2021) says good holding in 5-8 meters, slightly further in than the SCS coordinates above. Mud bottom.

### Mamburao

13° 13'.1N 120° 35'.4E

These coordinates are about a half mile E and slightly S of the SCS position, off the beach rather than off the river mouth. The seabed here is pretty flat; at 20' it was still quite a long row to the beach. Good holding in sand.

The SCS anchoring spot is probably better, provided it is out of the *bangka* traffic, because one could take the dinghy into the E river and go ashore on the E quay, right by the public market and the gas stations.

A pleasant bay and an unpretentious town with a good public wet market, fuel, etc. (though Sablayan is better for provisioning).

### Sablayan

12° 49'.9N 120° 46'.3E (off the causeway)

Easy entrance to the bay, avoiding a reef off the SW point. There is an inner pool, further in than the coordinates above, but the narrow channel between two reefs is hard to see unless the light is right and on Navionics the depths are ambiguous.

This anchorage off the pier is fine; there is easy dinghy landing on the steps. 30-45', some coral.

Excellent market in town and all supplies (though San Jose is the best of all). Diesel. The office for Apo Reef is here, apparently, though we couldn't find it.

### Ligaya Beach

12° 43'.24N 120° 50'.88E

There is anchorage sheltered from the NE at Ligaya Beach. This is a lee shore in an afternoon sea breeze, or during the SW monsoon, and could be uncomfortable if the wind got brisk. We anchored in sand off the beach and the town at 12° 43'.0N 120° 51'.2E. Good cell signal.

A better solution has opened up subsequently, however, with two moorings at Captains Beach Resort just slightly NW up the beach from our spot, approximately at the coordinates above. The resort itself was under construction in 2025 but will have full resort facilities and some marine and diving services and supplies. Landing is on the beach. Contact Rob Leighton for the latest information:

- [rob@leightonyachts.com](mailto:rob@leightonyachts.com)
- +63 919 000 2472
- +63 927 354 2651
- <https://www.facebook.com/windrush2/>

### San Jose

12° 21'.0N 121° 03'.4E

San Jose is a significant town at the southern tip of Mindoro.



The anchorage is off the beach, among the *bangkas*. Our spot (above) is to the W of the main downtown area and you need to take a tricycle to get there (which is easy enough; it isn't far). This is about 250m W of a barangay hall with a blue roof and yellow pillars. There is a good landing spot in front of a green-roofed house with a big green tree to the right of it; we found a very helpful family here who helped us to find a trike, keep an eye on the dinghy, etc. It can be breezy in the NE'ly here but the holding is good, in sand.

San Jose isn't a glamorous place but it is good for provisioning, etc. There is a modern Robinson's supermarket, a good public market, purified water, diesel, laundry, ATMs, etc. Good cell signals.

The Ilin Channel, S of San Jose, is now IALA buoyed, with AIS (not shown on Navionics). The Liscum Reef buoy shown on Navionics was not there.

## CALAMIAN ISLANDS (N PALAWAN PROVINCE) AND APO REEF

W and SW of Mindoro is the beautiful cruising ground of Apo Reef and then the Calamian Islands, of which Busuanga is the largest. One could spend weeks exploring this little archipelago, without even moving on to the lovely Palawan to the south.

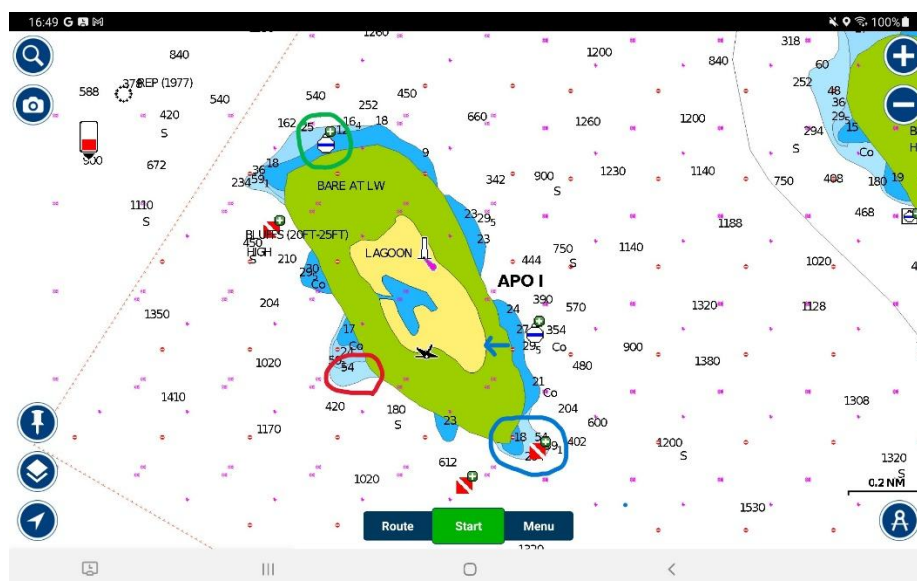
### Apo Reef

This is an amazing place – a huge reef in the middle of nowhere, with only two tiny islands and the rest almost entirely underwater. It is a National Park, with a permit required. We turned up twice without one and were able to complete formalities and pay there without a problem, but officially we could have been fined for doing so. The proper procedure is to email at least two days in advance; they send you a form which you complete and return.

- [booking.aporeef@gmail.com](mailto:booking.aporeef@gmail.com)

Permits are valid for 48 hours from arrival (but I imagine they could be extended for a further fee). The cost worked out at about 940 PHP per person and the same for the boat; it is more if you are going to scuba dive. Great snorkeling.

The ranger station is on Apo Island, the more W'ly of the islands, with a lighthouse on it. The shelf around the island is narrow and mostly coral, so anchoring here is difficult. However, there are mooring buoys, which are a much better solution.



Source: Navionics

The main moorings for Apo Island are at the SE corner (blue circle; 12° 39'.2N 120° 25'.2E), closest to the easiest/only landing spot (blue arrow); there are three moorings here. Can be roly. There are two more off the SW corner (red circle; 12° 39'.4N 120° 24'.7E), where there is one large Park buoy and one with a small float. It is a bit roly here too and you have to go all the way round the SE corner of the reef to get to the landing place (the nearest beach is a breeding site for sea turtles). The Park offices are in the trees by the landing spot. No cell reception or facilities.

There is also a large Park mooring buoy off the N coast (green circle and shown on Navionics), but this was very exposed when we were there in NE winds and is furthest from the Park offices. And there is another off the landing site, shown on Navionics, but this was used by *bangkas* on the two occasions we were at Apo Reef.

Inside the reef itself you can anchor, if you find a good spot, and according to the Park rangers there are further mooring buoys at approximately:

- 12° 40'.54N 120° 27'.13E
- 12° 40'.55N 120° 27'.65E
- 12° 40'.55N 120° 28'.2E

We found one at 12° 40'.821N 120° 27'.610E according to Navionics (small float in 34'). I am not sure whether this is one of the three above or not.

Finally, there is a big Park service buoy in open water SE of Apo Island at approximately 12° 38'.009N 120° 26'.721E (Navionics). You wouldn't want to stop here if you were going to the island and the main reef, but if you wanted an overnight mooring away from the island while on passage in calm conditions, it might be useful.

#### Nanga Islands

12° 20'.6N 120° 16'.0E

The anchorage described in SCS is very attractive, with a beach, a small village and lovely views SE to Tara and SW to Busuanga. Anchor outside a line of floats in 30-40', sand and coral patches. Very weak cell signal. Friendly village ashore.

#### Tara Island

12° 16'.6N 120° 21'.7E

I liked this anchorage a lot. Good shelter from NE. Exposed to W and SW (though perhaps you could tuck in behind the peninsula on the W side of the anchorage). Anchor outside the floats in about 45'. Sand. The reef off the beach, E and NE of the anchoring spot, comes out quite a long way. Intermittent cell reception.

#### Port Caltom, Busuanga

12° 11'.4N 120° 06'.1E (mooring at El Rio y El Mar Resort)

Port Caltom is a lovely natural harbor with, as SCS says, a number of anchoring possibilities. We went the expensive (but good) way: a mooring off the El Rio y El Mar Resort in the most N'ly of the fingers of the bay. Bar and restaurant, trash disposal, water, fuel on request – not cheap, but good. Moorings are 900 PHP per vessel, irrespective of size. The Resort's launch will guide you to a mooring. Good cell reception.

#### Calauit Inlet, Illultuk Bay

12° 16'.2N 119° 53'.1E

The entrance to this narrow inlet might be tricky if there was a big sea running, but in normal conditions it is fine. Navionics is accurate as you go up the channel. Inside, the inlet is very well protected, almost like a river. It's pleasant but perhaps slightly dull. We anchored off the entrance to the safari park, but there are other possibilities. Mud. Good cell reception.

#### Gotub Bay, Salvacion and Babac Island

12° 08'.2N 119° 55'.3E (off Salvacion)

12° 10'.5N 119° 52'.4E (off Babac Island)

This is a lovely micro-area with a variety of possibilities. There is a lot of aquaculture off the S end of Capare Island.

For Salvacion, we anchored in mud off a large pier, went ashore there (easy access) and walked to the town (15 minutes; easy to get a tricycle in town for the return trip). Salvacion has the normal (but rather limited) facilities: ATM, small public market, small grocery and sari-sari stores, etc.

Our Babac Island anchor spot was just a quiet bay with no facilities. Sand/mud. Good cell reception.

There are other options further S in this channel, or at the anchorage shown in SCS at the N end of Gotub Bay (SCS #3).

#### Popototan Island

11° 59'.6N 119° 51'.4E (SCS coordinates)

We sailed past but did not anchor. The channel is attractive. The central bay on the S side of Popototan Island looked well sheltered but the resort and other buildings looked abandoned. It didn't look tempting.

#### Galoc Island

11° 58'.3N 119° 51'.3E

The channel S of Galoc Island is lovely. Navionics is only partially accurate, especially at the narrowest point, so eyeball navigation is important. The bay we chose was good. Anchor in 45-50'; any further in than this gets very close to the reef. No cell reception.

#### Pearl Farms

SCS comments that you emerge at the E end of the Galoc channel into a world of holiday resorts. True, but first you encounter pearl farms, which are very extensive throughout the bay formed by the islands E of Galoc Island and in the channel between Busuanga and Lajo/Lamud Islands, as far SE as about Marilyn Island, plus the SE corner of Chindonan Island. It can be quite difficult to find your way through and they would be a major obstacle at night. Generally the buoys at the end of the rows are larger or more obvious than the floats along the rows.

The general areas are shown on this diagram, but there may well be more.



Source: Navionics

### Dipuyai River Bay (local nomenclature)

12° 01'.2N 119° 58'.8E (one of the Sunset Moorings)

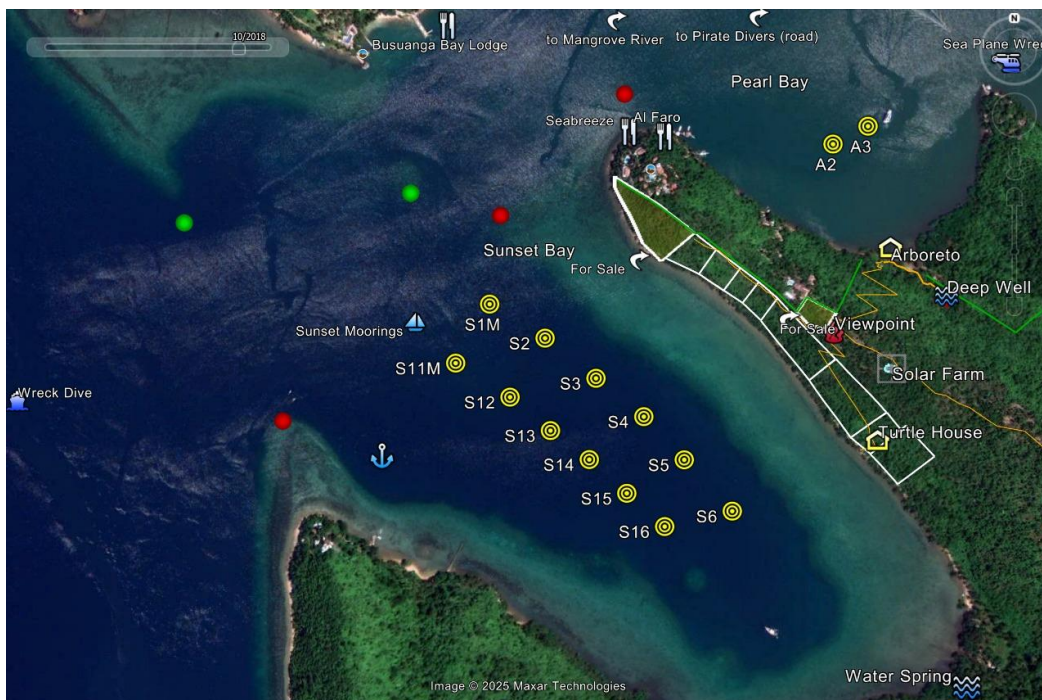
This bay is known by several names: Dipuyoy River Bay (SCS) or Busuanga Bay, with inner areas known as Sunset Bay and Pearl Bay. The proper local spelling is Dipuyai Bay. It has changed considerably since SCS was published. The area is very popular for diving; there are several Japanese World War II wreck sites between here and Coron. Pirate Divers (see below) offers dive services to the wrecks.

The entrance to the inlet is straightforward. There are reefs on either side, but they are now buoyed and lit (see image below). Shelter from the N and NE is excellent. The outer part of the bay would be more exposed to the SW, but Pearl Bay and further up the inlet would provide more protection.

The most significant development is a field of high-quality moorings installed and operated by the enterprising and extremely helpful Andy Alford; he and his partner Mel have a house overlooking the moorings. These are in Sunset Bay, the first bay on the S side as you enter the Dipuyai River inlet. They are very reasonably priced and have become very popular with cruisers; transitory communities can develop as boats pass through or stay.

Andy also has strong moorings which are designed for unattended storage of yachts in a typhoon-safe location in Pearl Bay, the next bay to the N on the S side of the inlet, just over the peninsula from the main Sunset Moorings (12° 01'.310N 119° 58'.979E). I left *Plainsong* on one of these Pearl Bay moorings for three weeks and would have felt comfortable leaving her for longer. This image shows the main Sunset Moorings field in the center and the Pearl Bay moorings in the top right corner.





Source: Google Earth/Andy Alford

- Andy Alford: +63 917 271 5757
- Sunset Moorings: <https://www.facebook.com/sunsetmoorings>  
[mail@sunsetmoorings.com](mailto:mail@sunsetmoorings.com)
- Sunset Moorings WhatsApp group:  
<https://chat.whatsapp.com/EDoyW4fb6bTAui1cAUrogA>

Water is available from a spring at the head of this bay. There is a French bakery near the bay (details from Andy Alford).

There are several resorts in the inlet: Busuanga Bay Lodge on the N side of the entrance; Al Faro and Pearl Bay Villas on the S side of the entrance (Al Faro above, Sea Breeze Bistro & Wine Bar in Pearl Bay Villas lower down); further up the inlet, Marina del Sol Resort and Yacht Club, which has some stern-to moorings; and some smaller guest houses.

- Al Faro: This is small and intimate, with idiosyncratic and rather charming architecture. The people are friendly and helpful; the food is good. They run a launch over to the Busuanga side of the bay and a van to the airport. This is a good option for getting either way between a boat and the airport, since the launch can pick you up or take you back to your boat.
- Busuanga Bay Lodge: A fairly large resort which is also beautiful but at the same time rather commercial. They have a dock which you can use if you join their pricey Marina Club for a month or more (which also gives you access to the swimming pool, etc.). Water is available at the dock and from a hose run out to a short-stay mooring off the dock (which does not actually belong to the Lodge). Fuel is available in small quantities by jerry can; it needs to be pre-arranged and is about twice the price of a regular gas station (which is not altogether unreasonable, since it comes from the hotel's private supply). The hotel can do laundry and the restaurant is quite nice. But it is all pretty expensive. The hotel runs a van to the airport.



- Pearl Bay Villas/Sea Breeze Bistro & Wine Bar: We did not visit, but were told that the food at this new restaurant is even better than Al Faro's.

The nearest provisions are in Coron (for details on this, see the Coron section below). The cheapest way to get into Coron is the shared Q Vans. They pick up from Pirate Divers dive shop and café on a schedule (approximately) and drop off near the public market in town. Pre-arrange the van because it only stops on request and if it is full, you are out of luck. Q Vans has private vans as well and does runs to the airport and elsewhere.

- <https://www.facebook.com/qtransportservice>
  - +63 917 888 7993
  - +63 918 959 1818
- <https://piratediverscoron.com>

The hotel vans can also be arranged for runs into town, but would be more expensive.

It is useful to have a decent outboard to get around this inlet, since the distances from Sunset Moorings to anywhere else are quite long for rowing. The easiest landing spot for access to the Coron main road is below Pirate Divers at the N tip of the inlet.

South Bay, Uson Island  
11° 58'.3N 120° 10'.6E

This is a pleasant anchorage just S of Coron. We found that the NE wind tends to bend E as it comes round the corner of Uson Island, so we found the anchorage not as sheltered as SCS suggests. Uneven bottom, broken coral. The reef at the W end of the anchorage comes a long way S. I wouldn't strongly recommend this one.

Coron Town  
11° 59'.4N 120° 13'.0E

SCS has useful notes on the approaches to Coron, though I found the channels less daunting than the notes might suggest, especially from the S and E where the channel is wide and there is now IALA buoyage.

There are three principal options for anchoring off Coron. Navionics shows many notes from boats who have anchored in the channel just S of the main part of town, for example around 11° 59'.7N 120° 11'.9E.

Our anchor spot (coordinates above) is tucked into the little bay just N of the Coron Point anchor spot shown in SCS, close to *bangka* moorings, S of Paula Fresh Fish Buyer (see Google Maps). The only difference is that SCS is slightly further out into the channel: 11° 59'.31N 120° 12'.88E. It is worth buoying the anchor in this bay as the bottom may well be foul and you wouldn't want to have to dive in this water. Mud. Shore access is in the N corner of the bay on a little beach inside the breakwater. It is worth getting a tricycle into town from here, but the distance is quite short. There is a gas station and purified water store nearby on the route into town.

The more distant option is to anchor off Discovery Bay/Bacuit Bay and get a tricycle into town from the resort: 12° 01'.1N 120° 11'.3E (SCS).

Coron has all facilities, though the supermarket is a bit underwhelming for the principal town on Busuanga.

Coron Island NW, Kayangan Lake

11° 57'.8N 120° 13'.7E

This is well written-up in SCS. It's an amazing place. There is almost no detail on the Navionics charts. You just have to navigate to the coordinates and then eyeball your way in. Depths in the entrance are fine – keep slightly closer to the small island to starboard on the way in. The holding can be tricky, but it is very well protected inside. There is a landing charge to walk up to the lake and you may also be asked for an 'entrance fee' from enterprising but unofficial freelancers who come by in tiny *bangkas*.

Port Culion

11° 53'.35N 120° 01'.48E (town side)

11° 53'.17N 120° 01'.50E (E side)

A very attractive town-on-a-hill, dominated by its colonial church on a promontory above the bay. There are now various IALA channel/isolated danger buoys on the approach, which are shown on the Navionics MFD card but not on the Boating app chart. The concrete entrance pillars referred to in SCS are still in place.

The E side of the harbor is quieter and better sheltered than the town side, but not so convenient. Mud and coral among the *bangka* moorings (more coral on the town side). Land at the town steps. Simple supplies. The museum is open M-F 8-5, except on public holidays. A walk up to the vista point and Culion sign is worth it. Good cell reception.

## VISAYAS

This section covers waters E and SE from Mindoro to the Hinatuan Passage out into the Pacific at the NE end of Mindanao, much of which (S of about 12°N) falls under the definition of the Visayas, the central mass of islands within the Philippine archipelago.

### Romblon

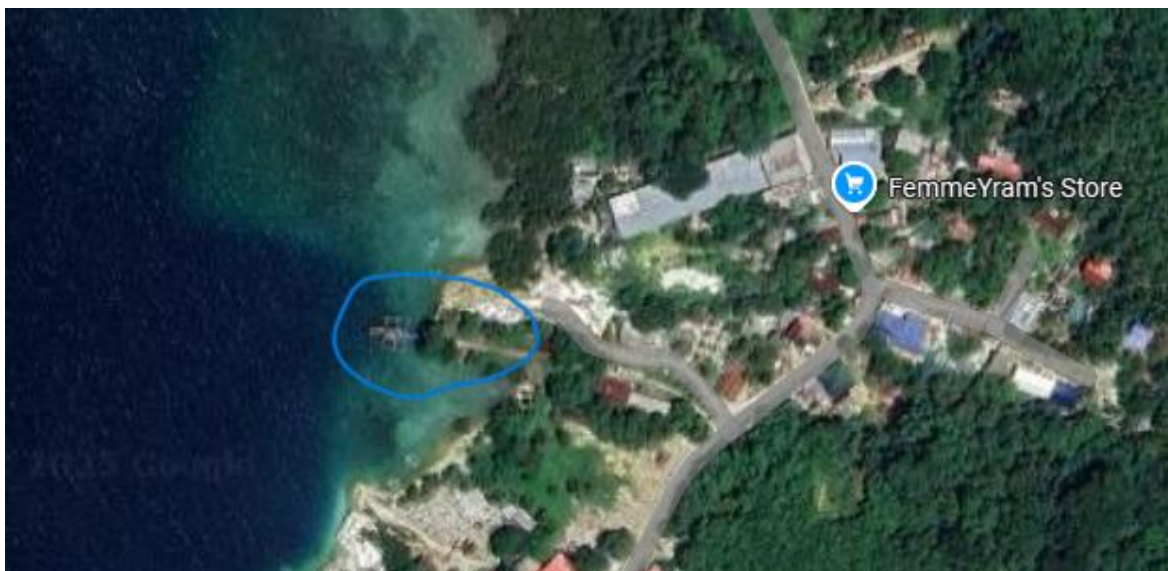
12° 35'.5N 122° 16'.4E (NE arm)

Romblon is a very attractive island, now more touristed than in the past, and worth a visit. Unfortunately, the Yacht Club seems to have collapsed and there was no sign of a mooring when we were there in March 2025. The Club still has a Facebook page but its most recent post (April 2024) isn't encouraging:

[https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100068959496124&locale=uk\\_UA#](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100068959496124&locale=uk_UA#)

The main harbor is convenient but not very attractive, and deep. The NE arm is quieter and more attractive (though not completely quiet during working hours because of the marble factories that line the E shore in Barangay Cajimos). The bay in the NW corner of this arm might be quieter, but we didn't explore it.

We found an anchor spot in about 35', good holding, not far from the N-most stone pier in this corner of the bay (blue circle on the image below). The pier gives easy access to the road. It was used by a large fishing *bangka* while we were there, but they didn't mind our coming and going in a dinghy. The reef N of where are anchored shelves very steeply, so be careful when circling around looking for your spot.



Source: Google Maps

There are a number of other anchoring possibilities around Romblon but further from the town. See crowdsourced entries on Zulu Offshore, noforeignland, Navionics, etc. The Bon Bon Beach anchorage would be attractive. Although it is quite a way out of town, transportation would be easy enough to find because the beach is much frequented by tourists.

The town is walking distance from our anchorage, but not with heavy bags. It is easy enough to get a tricycle into town (start walking S because there are more in that direction) and very easy to get one back – tell the driver you want Cajimos and remember what the blue gates to the marble factory at the landing stage look like.

There is a purified water store nearby and all the facilities of a small town in the center of Romblon. The Tourist Office in the main square is very helpful and can arrange various different tours of the island and walking tours of the town. The cell signal at our anchorage was weak but reception in town is good.

#### Cresta de Gallo

12° 10'.7N 122° 41'.5E (SCS)

When SCS says 'in fine weather', it means it: the S anchorage was too exposed for us to anchor in 15-20kts NE'ly.

#### South Bay, S Gigante Island

11° 35'.2N 123° 20'.9E

The reefs appear to be well charted and access to the bay from the E is easy by day or night. The NE wind tends to curl around the SE tip of the bay, but it is a very attractive anchorage and the shelter is fine. Good holding in sand. Snorkeling, food and drink available at the small resort on the E side of the bay (prop: Jessica). No cell signal.

#### Malapascua Island

11° 20'.5N 124° 06'.6E (lighthouse anchorage)

This island has become popular with tourists and divers and is now very developed at its S end. The lighthouse anchorage at the NW corner of the island is quieter, although there is what sounds like a generator ashore. Easy access. Anchor off the lighthouse, avoiding a red mooring buoy on which dive *bangkas* raft up. Good shelter in NE. Good cell signal.

#### Palompon, Leyte

11° 02'.8N 124° 22'.9E

This anchor spot is close in to the town quay, much nearer town than the anchor spots shown in SCS and on the *Ocelot* (Hacking Family) website. The channel into the inlet is IALA buoyed and lit. There is a third possible anchoring spot in the N corner of the bay shown by a Navionics user, 12° 03'.45N 124° 22'.71E, which looked shallow and sandy, in among fishing paraphernalia.

Our anchor spot was a bit noisy (it is a town, after all), but convenient. Easy landing on the floating pontoon in front of the plaza. The town is pleasant and we found people extremely helpful. All services for a medium-size provincial town. Purified water very close to the plaza and Petron gasoline a short tricycle ride away. Very cheap pedal tricycles. Food, drink and live music (some nights) at Destino restaurant (among others). Surprisingly patchy cell service.

### Santiago Bay, Pacijan Island

10° 35'.1N 124° 18'.2E

Easy approach. The bay is now divided by a line of buoys that run S from the beach. Yacht anchorage is on the W side of the buoys (as shown by Navionics users; the SCS spot is now on the wrong side).

This is more of a bay than appears on the chart. There is some swell but it is comfortable in calm conditions (exposed to the S). Sand and coral. Dugong. Pleasant, with resorts (give or take some heavy metal from the beach). Good cell reception.

### Hilongos

10° 22'.9N 124° 43'.6E

This is NW of the Hilongos pier, about 1.33nm NW of the SCS anchorage. It is a reasonable alternative to the main anchorage if you don't need the town. Anchor outside moored fishing *bangkas*. Fairly strong tidal stream. Mud. Good cell reception.

The channel to the main pier and commercial port is IALA buoyed, shown on the Navionics MFD card but not on the Boating app chart.

### Canigao Channel

In the W half of the channel, we experienced mostly 1.5kts of tide, 2kts at the maximum, no overfalls.

### Aguining Point, Lapinig Island (NE Bohol; following Google Maps nomenclature)

10° 05'.0N 124° 35'.9E

This is the bay immediately E of the SCS coordinates, with a village. It is not particularly well protected from NE-E and a bit rolly. You cannot go in too far because there is a reef about level with the end of the stone breakwater. Pleasant place and friendly people ashore. Cell reception OK but not great.

The larger SCS bay to the W may well be a better bet but seemed quite encumbered with fish traps.

### Maasin

10° 07'.8N 124° 50'.7E

The channel to the commercial port is now IALA buoyed and lit, shown on the Navionics MFD card but not on the Boating app chart. As SCS says, the approach is straightforward. If arriving at night, though, note that there is one unlit red buoy closest SE of the commercial pier which is not on either Navionics chart, under the Madonna. Anchor under the Madonna between the inner red buoy and the white bridge, but beware of rapid shelving inshore. Sand.

A new by-pass on a concrete tripod causeway to seaward of the old shoreline has been built since SCS. To go ashore, go under the white bridge, turn immediately left (but don't cut the

corner), then keep mid-channel to stairs at the end of the channel. This is fairly shallow so beware of your outboard grounding.

Maasin has a good market and all services.

Triana, Limasawa Island

09° 55'.5N 125° 04'.3E

The approach to the ferry pier at the N end of the anchorage is buoyed; the outer green and inner red buoys are lit. Shelter would be fine in settled weather but we found it to be not particularly good in a strong NE'ly. There is coral close inshore so a satellite image is helpful here. Good cell reception.

## MINDANAO

This section covers a N-S passage along the E coast of Mindanao, plus the approaches from the Visayas through the Hinatuan Passage and some off-lying islands. Then it turns N'wards up the Gulf of Davao to Samal Island.

Most of the cruising guides cover this passage from S to N, when the considerations are quite different because of a strong S'y current down the coast of Mindanao (and possibly NE headwinds as well, in that season). S-N considerations and additional anchorages are well covered in the Soggy Paws Philippines Compendium and on the Hacking Family website. Combining these with the crowdsourced apps gives plenty of pilotage information. SCS is, uncharacteristically, not the most comprehensive for the E Mindanao coast.

Going S in late March, we were sailing with the current and supposedly with the wind (though there wasn't enough). It is an odd feeling to be back in ocean swell again after months among the islands.

The current was quite variable. Generally S-flowing, typically 1-1.5kts, but sometimes up to 2kts or better, sometimes less than 1kt and occasionally contrary for short stretches especially if we got too close inshore (for example off Manaol Point, Manay Bay). The strongest section was between Barcelona and Manay Bay, where we had mostly 2.0-2.5kts and occasionally 2.5-3.0kts, keeping at least 3nm offshore. Overall, it was a big help.

### Hinatuan Passage

Vessels transiting between the southern Visayas and the Pacific coast of Mindanao will normally use the Hinatuan Passage (rather than the other passages to the Pacific further north). Although the Passage is relatively straightforward, because of the tidal current it is probably advisable to do it in daylight. But a quirk of the tides in the area is that (as far as I could tell from a number of sources) Surigao, the tidal station for the Passage, has only one high and one low tide per day. So your transit of the Passage needs some planning in advance to be sure that you arrive on a day when the slack water you are looking for falls in daylight and not in the middle of the night.

### The tide floods NW and ebbs SE. SCS's instructions are:

Tides for Hinatuan Passage are best predicted on Surigao, but it is an uncertain business. The Admiralty Pilot advises that off Rasa Island, HW slack in 40 minutes before HW Surigao, and LW slack is 50 minutes before LW Surigao. These times can vary by 45 minutes either way.

The tides run fiercely at 7 knots or more, and there are rips, whirlpools and eddies off the points...

Add to this the fact that Surigao tide times according to Navionics and Imray Tide Planner differ by 45 to 75 minutes (and Tideschart didn't agree with either of them) and you have a pretty wide window; an uncertain business indeed.

Our experience (one day before neaps) was that HW slack close to Rasa Island lasted for about 30 minutes and, vs. HW Surigao from various sources, was:

- Navionics -2 hours
- Imray -1.25 hours
- Tideschart -2.5 hours

Before HW slack we experienced a contrary tide of 2-3kts between the entrance to Bilanbilan Bay (Surigao) and Rasa Island (sailing E) and a maximum of 1-1.5kts favorable tide after slack water for the rest of the passage from NW to SE.

We passed:

- S of Rasa Island
- N of Bayagnan Island
- W of Hinatuan Island
- E of Banug and Talavera Islands
- Note: from a distance there appeared to be a power line between Sagasae Island and W side of Talavera Island

It was attractive sailing among the islands in calm water and, perhaps because it was neaps, not nearly as intimidating as I had expected.

A less welcome surprise the day before was the tidal current in the W approaches to the Hinatuan Passage between Benit Point (the SE tip of Leyte), Hikdop Island, Nonoc Island and the port of Surigao, where we experienced a strong SW-flowing tide from -2 hours HW Surigao until +4 hours HW Surigao (these were the hours we happened to be making the passage, expecting a favorable tide after HW Surigao). What at Benit Point had been a fetch to Hikdop Island turned into a crabwise leg SE towards Mindanao such that we were not even able to clear Bilaa Point at Mindanao's N-most point. We also experienced a strong W-flowing tide off Bilaa Point when we expected, according to the tidal information above, the SE ebb to be in full swing. I have no systematic explanation for all this but the possibility of tidal surprises in this area needs to be taken into account when route planning.

#### Port Surigao/Bilanbilan Bay

09° 46'.7N 125° 30'.1E

The approach is well-buoyed and accessible by night. The inner corner of the harbor nearer to the SCS anchor spot seems to be too crowded with ferries and *bangkas* to be practical anymore. The normal spot (coordinates above) for yachts now seems to be between two cardinal buoys opposite the main port building (blue, welcome sign). The reef shelves suddenly to the S of here.

The anchorage is exposed to the NE and noisy. But the Mayor of Surigao has made a point of making Surigao a convenient port of entry for yachts first entering the Philippines and, subject to typhoon risk, in 2025 it would be administratively easier and less risky than Davao (see above). Surigao has the facilities of a city and good cell reception.

#### Talavera Island

09° 44'.5N 125° 41'.4E (but see below)



The reef on the SE corner of this inlet comes out much further than the sketchy Navionics chart shows. There is fishing paraphernalia on the end, but it needs a wide berth beyond this. A/the reef also extends W just S of the village on the E side of the bay.

The inlet is deep and it isn't easy to find a place to anchor in reasonable depths. The logical place is at the SCS coordinates at the head of the bay where one can anchor in about 60-75' in thick mud (09° 44'.69N 125° 41'.39E). But we were asked by the villagers to move, because this is a protected fishing area. We ended up off the village at the spot above in 65' but found coral. It wasn't a particularly good place. Moderate cell signal.

If I were going there again, I would first explore off the beach of the village on the SW corner of the outer bay, which would be very approximately 09° 44'.5N 125° 40'.9E.

#### Kanin Bay, Bucas Grande Island

09° 34'.7N 125° 55'.7E

This is a beautiful place with good shelter, tucked in just to the E behind the NE point of Bobon Island. It is fairly intricate to reach and the Navionics chart is very sketchy; use a satellite image instead. The anchorage is deep (60-70') but the edges shelf quickly so you cannot go too close to the island or too far S along the E side of Bobon Island because there is a reef. Good snorkeling. No cell reception. Mick & Sheila run a local resort.

#### Cortes Bay

09° 17'.1N 126° 12'.1E (E-W channel)

Enter between the reefs. Depths in the outer part of the bay are greater than Navionics shows. There are two anchoring options: the main E-W channel; or a more NE-SW channel towards the village on the S shore. We stayed in the main channel because the NE-SW channel looked too much of a lee shore. But in the main channel you can't continue as far W as Navionics suggests because there is a reef; and it was rolly. Again, satellite imagery would be a help. I am not sure that this was a better choice than the NE-SW channel, which might provide better protection from the swell. Poor cell reception.

#### St Augustin Bay

08° 44'.2N 126° 13'.6E

A wide bay; not surprisingly, some swell creeps in, so it is a bit rolly. But fundamentally the shelter was fine in a NE'ly. Entrance is straightforward. Sand. Good cell reception.

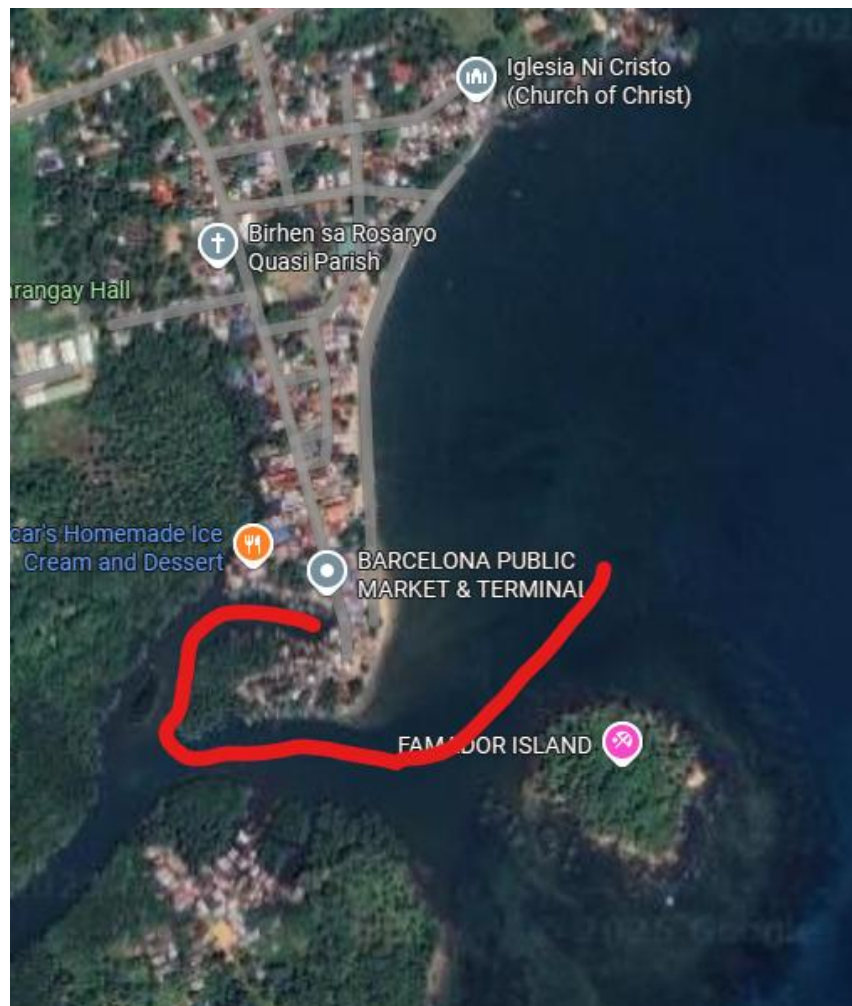
#### Barcelona

08° 09'.5N 126° 26'.5E

The entrance is fairly straightforward, taking care to avoid the reefs, and particularly the reef in the center of the actual anchorage (which often breaks). Good shelter in NE'ly and no swell to speak of. Good holding in sand/mud.

We anchored in the NE arm of the bay, but knowing what I now know about landing, I would check out the W side of the bay first. This is because the easiest way to go ashore is to take the

dinghy up a little channel immediately S of the S-most house in the village on the W of the bay. Keep close to the mangroves on the starboard side and do a U-turn around them to starboard as soon as you can; this takes you into another little channel at the head of which there are steps right in the heart of the village. Not only is this convenient, but it means that you don't have to land through the waves on the beach.



Dinghy landing in Barcelona. Source: Google Maps

Barcelona is a very simple village, with little more than sari-sari stores and a tiny market (not enough for reprovisioning in any significant way). It does have a purified water store, though. But we found the people extremely welcoming and helpful, particularly Kristina and Reniel, Jeffrey and Mary-Jean (contact me for introductions if you need help in Barcelona). However, it is only a (rough) motorcycle or tricycle ride to the town of Bislig, where there is fuel, markets and all services. There is a hike to a waterfall above the village of Barcelona and various other sightseeing options in the area. Poor cell reception; Globe was better than Smart.

All in all, both because of the people and the absence of swell, this was a very good stop for us.

### Manay Bay

07° 12'.5N 126° 32'.9E

Easy access but the challenge here is swell. We anchored on the N shore, slightly W of the s/v *Mokisha* spot (Philippines Compendium) because it seemed to offer a little better protection behind a submerged reef. Arriving just as it got dark, we did not explore the head of the bay W from our anchorage. Globe reception but no Smart.

### Lavigan

06° 18'.4N 126° 11'.1E (outer anchorage)

This is a very open roadstead at the SE tip of the Gulf of Davao. Nearby Lavigan Inlet (see the Hacking Family website) or Tagbanao Cove to the N would provide better shelter. But it is a useful utility anchorage if you simply want the nearest anchorage before or after Cape San Agustin.

Access is easy day or night. Arriving in the dark, we anchored as close as we could to the *Mokisha* coordinates (06° 18'.387N 126° 11'.0634E; Compendium), which were on a patch of sand. Good cell reception.

### Abag Bay

06° 26'.2N 126° 07'.9E

This is a short distance further N up the Gulf. The approach is straightforward. There are two bays. I aimed for a sandy patch shown on the Terry's Topics/OpenCPN satellite image in the W bay. I anchored not far from it among mooring buoys, sand and coral, minimum depth about 33'. OK shelter. Friendly villagers.

The E bay would be worth exploring too, but the reef between the two bays dries out a long way so beware if arriving at HW.

### Holiday Oceanview Marina, Samal Island (see [above](#) for – hopefully – temporary situation in 2025)

07° 12'.1N 125° 42'.7E (mooring buoy at entrance)

07° 11'.9N 125° 42'.7E (marina)

This is a well-sheltered and well-guarded marina with an active boatyard and storage facilities, now recovered from a tragic kidnapping in 2015 (albeit slightly in need of investment). The entrance to the marina is closed unless a boat requests to come in or go out, so your arrival needs to be pre-planned with the marina office. There is a mooring buoy just N of the entrance if you need to wait (though it did not have a pick-up float in April 2025, so beware of your topsides). Inside, the marina has most facilities and a nice bar. The marina manager is very helpful and there is quite a community of resident, semi-resident and transitory boats.

Yachts can be hauled out, subject to tide, via a cradle and a backhoe. It appears to be a good place to leave a boat unattended ashore, especially since Davao is generally below the typhoon zone (though not necessarily safe from all tropical depressions).

The marina is in a fairly rural spot on the N coast of Samal Island. It is easy to get a tricycle (called *bao bao* here) to the nearest small town, or to the ferry to cross over to Davao which, being a big city, has everything, including an airport. There is a hotel with a restaurant right next to the marina.

In 2025, the Bureau of Customs became a problem here (see [above](#)). If this is not resolved satisfactorily, the effect will be devastating for the marina.

Contact:

- Marina manager: Dina
- [holidaygroup.oceanviewmarina@gmail.com](mailto:holidaygroup.oceanviewmarina@gmail.com)
- Cellphone: +63 917 326 2003

WhatsApp group for boats at/going to Holiday Oceanview Marina:

- Message Andy Alford on +639172719797 for an invitation to join the HOV group created during the 2025 Davao Customs problems (which may or may not persist once the problems are resolved).