

06/04/03

After spending most of the morning on Monday, May 12, checking out of Zihuatanejo with immigration and the port captain, we finally pushed off for Acapulco at 4:15 p.m., much latter than planned. Lacking wind, we motored the entire distance to Acapulco, about 115 miles. Although it had been hot in Zihuatanejo, especially during the mid-afternoon hours, that night motoring from Zihuatanejo to Acapulco was the hottest and most humid night we had experienced so far on this cruise. We put down our anchor around 2 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13, in front of the Acapulco Marina, located in the southwest corner of the bay near the cruise ship pier. Unfortunately, the docks at the Acapulco Marina were quite damaged in the 1997 hurricane and are still in disrepair. When we arrived, a cruise ship was in port, but it departed early that evening. Being at the end of the tourist season, no other cruise ships came in while we were there.

Acapulco is a large bustling city with lots of traffic. As we took the bus into the Old Acapulco Town Square our first evening, the colorfully painted buses and the large number of blue and white "VW Bug" taxicabs were the first thing we noticed. The designs on many of the buses were quite colorful with their different landscapes and themes. For example, one bus was decorated as Spiderman. Another was decorated as Halloween. One had a whole line of stuffed animals hanging from the top of the inside front window. Some had music blaring. At night, many would have neon lights going. As for the VW taxicabs, we have never seen so many VW Bugs congregated in one spot ever. It was a sight to behold! A few were even decorated with lights at night. We certainly had quite a few laughs that first night into town.

On Wednesday evening we went to see the cliff divers at La Quebrada and stayed through two performances. Not only did they dive off the cliffs from about 100 feet up into the gorge below; they first climbed up the cliffs at the beginning of the performance. What strength and endurance they exhibited, besides some excellent diving!

In Acapulco, we started our water maker going for the first time as we had been unable to obtain potable water since Barra de Navidad. For a big city, it was amazing how clear the water was in Acapulco Bay. We also filled our fuel tanks on Thursday morning. Of the few days that we were in Acapulco, Thursday was the most humid day, being almost unbearable at times.

We departed Acapulco on Friday, May 16, at 10:15 a.m. We were heading down the coastline to Huatulco, 238 miles away, where we planned to check out of Mexico. Friday was a beautiful day at sea. We put up our drifter in the early afternoon, catching the afternoon thermals, and sailed on a reach. About 8 to 10 dolphins swam for a short time in front of our boat guiding us on our way. We saw a couple of marine turtles. In the evening it was not humid like it had been in Acapulco, and we were guided by a full moon. By late evening, though, we were once more motoring. About 12 hours later we started sailing again, but this time sailing downwind. We were able to sail until the early hours of Sunday morning, when we once again started our engine. We anchored in Huatulco around 11:30 a.m. that same morning, May 18, in clear green water.



Volkswagen Taxis Are Alive And Well



Acapulco Cliff Divers

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No sooner had we anchored in the bay then the Mexican Navy approached us requesting to board our boat for inspection. We had been forewarned due to the problem of drug traffic between Mexico and Central America. The Navy person who came aboard was young and most polite. He had to fill out about four pages of paperwork on our boat. Between his English and my little Spanish we were successful in filling out all the paperwork with only having to look up just a few words in our Spanish-English dictionary onboard. With his dark uniform, heavy boots, and black T-shirt, he was so hot. He truly looked uncomfortable!

Huatulco and the nearby town of La Crucecita quite pleasantly surprised us. Nothing special had ever been written about them in our cruising guide. What we found were two beautiful, charming, clean small Mexican towns with newly paved roads and landscaping. The Mexican government for tourism had promoted all. We easily could have lingered here longer. Unfortunately, though, there was quite a bit of surge in the bay at times. Sunday night was so uncomfortable that we were ready to depart immediately after checking out of the country on Monday. Luckily, though, there was much less surge Monday night, and we were able to get a good night's sleep before departing on Tuesday.

Ever since we departed Puerto Vallarta, there have been just a few cruising boats at each of our anchorages. It was clear that we were at the end of the cruising season for this area. We finally met our first cruising boat going south in Acapulco. Until then, all boats we met had been heading north. In Huatulco we met our second cruising boat, a beautiful 52-ft. catamaran, and we ended up spending most of Monday with John and Dodie as we all were checking out of the country at the same time.

When we were amongst the desert scenery in the Sea of Cortez and would look at all the lush, green pictures of the Mexico mainland in our cruising books, we imagined ourselves being immersed in that same setting once we arrived on the mainland side. Naturally this wasn't the case as we were cruising in the dry season. The hills were mostly brown from Puerto Vallarta to Zihuatanejo, with Acapulco and Huatulco being only slightly greener. Sunday night in Huatulco we had our first drizzle since departing San Diego the end of February. On Monday, May 19, while we were traveling to the airport to go to immigration and customs, the scenery reminded me of the beginning of springtime in the Pacific Northwest with small leaves forming on many of the barren trees due to the rainfall. Only the temperature was different!

We have had a most a wonderful 11½ weeks in Mexico - full of wonderful people, great memories, and terrific food. We, especially, enjoyed the Mexican bus system. It is so easy and inexpensive to travel around by bus, never having to wait more than 15 minutes at any time. One thing, though, that we won't miss is the very time-consuming check-in and checkout procedures that cruisers have to follow when they enter a port with a port captain. For example, in Zihuatanejo when we checked in, we had to go first to the immigration office, a mile's walk from the port captain's office. Then, it was back to the port captain's office with our papers. Next, we went to the bank to pay our port fees (for us a charge of about \$15 in and \$15 out) and, more often than not, we usually had to wait in line at the bank close to an hour. Finally, it was back to the port captain's office. When we checked out of Zihuatanejo, we had to do the same procedure all over again, thus the reason for our departing later than planned from Zihuatanejo. Because of this very time-consuming procedure, we found ourselves not stopping at a few places because of the hassle and stopping more at anchorages without port captains.



Huatulco Inner Harbor



Huatulco Beach



Mexican Navy

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On Tuesday morning, May 20, at 9:45 a.m., after listening to the latest weather forecast, we departed Huatulco, Mexico, for Barillas, El Salvador - approximately 480 miles away, located near the city of Usulutan in the southern part of El Salvador. During this passage we saw more dolphins and a few more turtles. We sailed, motorsailed, and motored our way across the Gulf of Tehuantepec - staying about 30 miles off the beach. Our first night at sea, the entire Mexican mainland was one huge lightning show! We, ourselves, experienced rain showers that evening.

The next night, though, the entire Gulf of Tehuantepec was lit up with sheet lightning - pulsating like Morse code - lighting up the entire sky as if it were almost daylight. It was an amazing fireworks show put on by Mother Nature, and it lasted a long time with very loud thunder and bolts of lightning toward the end. Around midnight we got caught in a squall and our roller reefing became jammed (a first for us). Phil had to manually take down the roller-reefing jib, and the top of the jib was slightly torn in the process. Phil set the staysail to take the place of the roller-reefing jib, and we continued on with staysail and reefed main.

By Thursday morning, May 22, we had lost all wind and were once again motoring. Late that morning we were officially in Guatemalan waters and south of the Gulf of Tehuantepec. While in Guatemala we stayed about 10 miles offshore. Keeping a sharp lookout for fishing pangas with their black flags floating in the water was our major priority. At night, most had a light hung, but a few didn't, and if you got too close they would definitely let you know by shining their flashlight. Around San Jose, Guatemala, there were so many fishing pangas and larger fishing boats that we felt like we were driving through an obstacle course. Our radar was definitely going all night long. It was a clear night out, and upon looking back at the Tehuantepec we could see the nightly lightning show taking place. My, was it wonderful to be south of the Gulf of Tehuantepec!

On Friday morning, May 23, with the wind coming straight down the nose at 25 knots and seas building, we had to tack for almost 2 hours. As the staysail wouldn't allow us to point as close into the wind as our roller-reefing jib, we motorsailed so as to head closer into the wind. After the wind dropped down, the seas were still confused. It was another 3 hours before we could resume our track. By early afternoon we had entered the waters off El Salvador.

Saturday morning, May 24, even though we once again had a head wind, the seas never built, and so we were able to head straight to our waypoint. At 10:30 a.m. the panga guide from the Barillas Marina Club met us at the waypoint and guided us through the channel entrance and into the Bahia de Jiquilisco. It took us almost 2 hours to get to Barillas. It felt like we were going up a river, but in reality, we actually went up a few of the many narrow fingers in the bay. We tied up to a mooring at Barillas around 12:15 p.m. Five minutes later, Heriberto, the operations manager for Barillas, came out with customs to officially welcome us to El Salvador. After clearing customs, we went ashore and were cleared soon afterwards by immigration. The cost was just \$10 per person to check into the country. What a quick and efficient check-in!

Often when you are at sea, you feel at times like you are the only boat in transit. Believe it or not, we were the third of three boats that actually arrived that morning. Thus, we all checked in with immigration at the same time. Crossing the Tehuantepec was the biggest topic of conversation. Now, being south of the Gulf of Tehuantepec, "time is definitely on our side." Most the afternoon was spent socializing with the other cruisers at Barillas and visiting with John and Dodie whom we met in Huatulco. They had arrived a day earlier on their catamaran. On our first evening at Barillas, there were eight other cruising boats at Barillas beside ourselves, and we were all headed south.



Pilot Boat Guiding Us in to Barillas



Barillas Marina Landing

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The scenery here in El Salvador is very lush and green. Mangroves surround us, and two volcanoes are off in the distance. As El Salvador is on Central Standard Time, not Daylight Savings Time like in Mexico, we have moved our clocks back one hour. Also, we are now at approximately the same longitude as Chicago.

We plan to be at Barillas for about a month. It will be wonderful to have a calm anchorage for a while as we didn't have too many of them in Mexico. The day after arriving, Phil mended the tear in the jib, and we once again put up our roller-reefing jib. While at Barillas, we plan to visit Mayan ruins and travel inland to Guatemala visiting Antigua, the old Spanish colonial capital, and the area surrounding Lake Atitlan where populations of indigenous Mayans still live with their Mayan culture intact.



Barillas Marina

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