

Thursday, December 22, 2011

### Planning for the Pacific

The route, more or less. All books about sailing tell you that you should spend as many days planning a trip as you expect to be under way. It sounds like overkill, but it actually makes a lot of sense. First of all there is so much to consider ... likely wind and weather, currents, route, likely stops, emergency stops, provisions, spare parts, navigational hazards, paperwork and customs, etc. Figuring all that out takes time. And then you have to make up your mind what you want to see on the way, and who you want to meet. The world is beautiful and has so much to offer, but there is only so much time. I've been thinking and reading about the Pacific crossing since I arrived in the Caribbean in March, and this month we've started planning in earnest. For background information we're mostly relying on World Cruising Routes, The Pacific Crossing Guide, South Pacific Anchorages, [www.noonsite.com](http://www.noonsite.com), Storm Tactics, How to Sail Around the world, Around the world sailing guide, and of course navigational charts. A lot of reading, and useful background information and reference when approaching a new location. But all the reading doesn't replace first-hand knowledge of a longer passage, and many hours talking with other sailors who are planning as well or have already done it. Like my friend Henk, who left Sint Maartin March 3rd in his 26ft Midget and arrived in Durban, South Africa, November 25th. Insane. You're my hero Henk, and thanks for all the information! When you plan a passage there are three things you should think of first: Where do you want to go, when is the best time for it, and when is the worst time for it. For short passages of a few days that is normally easy enough to figure out, and there are usually good weather windows spread out over the year. For a long distance trip of many thousand miles with multiple longer stops in between it's a little trickier. A good strategy is to look at the longest or most dangerous leg, and then plan backwards and forwards from there. For the Pacific crossing this is the leg from the Galapagos to Marquesas: 3000nm. Pilot charts and accounts from other sailors tell me that the best time to sail this leg should be in May. And for a trip that long you really want to sail with the best possible weather forecast if you want to have a pleasant memory of it. But the weather is nothing but unreliable, and therefore I plan to arrive in the Galapagos at the end of February. With a 90 day visa we'll have enough time to recover from the trip from Panama, see the islands, prepare the boat, and wait for a good weather window to sail the 3000nm to the Marquesas. Planning to arrive early also adds a good buffer in case something doesn't work out as expected on the way and you get delayed. Tracing further back, the trip from Panama to the Galapagos via Islas Perlas will be about two weeks, including a short stop on the Islas Perlas. That means leaving Panama City in the middle of February. In order to get to Panama City we have to pass through the Canal (2 days), and before that we have to haul out the boat in Shelter Bay Marina to check the hull and repaint the anti fouling. Add waiting time for the Canal that will be another two weeks ... start of February. The trip from Santa Marta to Shelter Bay Marina is three days, but on the way lie the beautiful San Blas Islands, where we want to stay for a week. Adding all together we should leave Santa Marta around January 15th, four months before we hope to arrive at the Marquesas islands, 4500nm away. From there onward it's relatively easy. The legs are never more than 1000nm, about a week of sailing, and there is time until November before you run the risk of encountering tropical cyclones. But since we're having our wedding in NZ in January 2013, we would like to arrive earlier than that.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:25

Hey! How cool! Now that's a great plan!  
Sailing to your own wedding

Merry Christmas to you lovely people down there in BA.

Inge  
Anonymous on Dec 24 2011, 10:29