

Monday, January 16. 2012

San Blas islands

Waisaladup, Gudrun V Monday, 16.01.2012, 04:00 local, 9:28.21N, 78:38.18W, at anchor

It's beautiful here in the San Blas. Hundreds of tiny little islands covered in one to many coconut palm trees. But don't go picking one! All the coconuts belong to a Kunda indian, and they get royally pissed if you just harvest their source of income for free. Reminds me of the "Obstbauern vom Bodensee", the orchard farmers from around lake Constanz. They also get quite angry when you pick an apple from their trees while cycling along. But quite unlike their south German counterparts the Kunda indians travel with dug-out kanus from islands to island, to catch coconuts and fish and lobster. Then they travel from boat to boat trying to sell them. A few have outboard engines, but most simply paddle, or use a sail downwind. So every day, depending on the weather, you can expect a knock or two or hey! hey! calls and visitors grinning up at you.

In the eastern caribbean that is often a hassle, since the locals don't leave you alone unless you buy something. And then they come back the more for it. Here it's more relaxed. No gracias and off they go. Since we arrived the wind has been blowing quite a lot and the sky is overcast. Without a working wind generator that is less than ideal, and it looks like tomorrow we'll have to turn off the fridge. When we wanted to dinghy over to Irie for dinner on Saturday the outboard engine failed to start, so we rowed. Rowing back against the wind was especially funny, and a little alcohol and the fact that Liz and I each wanted our own paddle had a lot to do with that. But we made it, eventually, guided by Mark and his powerful flashlight because we had forgotten to turn on the anchor light on Gudrun and it was pitch dark.

Kuna indians in an ulu Sunday Mark and I took the outboard engine apart and found that the air intake flap of the carburetor was corroded in place. On a one year old outboard, great. I'm also less than impressed with the maintenance friendliness of the Mercury engine. Should have bought a Yamaha. Unable to make it rotate freely we've twisted it into a semi-open position so that the engine still starts and runs reasonably well. But the output seems only about half of the nominal 15hp.

The next few days we'll hang around here some more. Hopefully the weather clears up and we can go swimming and snorkeling. Despite the wind the water is very calm because we're anchored between shoals. So the boat doesn't roll. But with only a few boat lengths of depth around us we're always worrying whether the anchor holds, because if it doesn't we'll end up on a reef very quickly. Navigating the reefs is tricky work, especially because the charts are hopelessly wrong. On the way to our current anchorage we had to run over three charted shoals and two islands in order to not end up on the reefs. And now we're anchored right on top of one - only it's 12m deep here. Two boats that came in Saturday trusted their charts more than their eyes and ran aground. And yesterday a big katamaran came straight at us (and a reef), then last minute realized that something must be wrong because of all the breakers and stopped. So between meals and drinks with Irie, the islands, the Kunas, fixing things on the boat, and crazy navigation action around us we have our entertainment here

Posted by Axel Busch at 03:59