

The Los Roques Archipelago:

Lies at the bottom of the Caribbean, 24 hours east of Aruba and a two day sail west of Grenada.

Activities include fishing (bonefish, barracuda, tarpon, jack, and Spanish mackerel), birding, snorkeling, diving, paddling, windsurfing, and kitesurfing, and there is a sea turtle research center (loose term but well worth the time) located on Dos Mosquises. Accommodations include Pez Raton Lodge, a property primarily used to host fishing guests, Posada Mediterraneo, a five-room inn which accommodates non-fishing guests, and dozens more like El Canto de la Ballena and Posada La Terraza. Trip advisor lists all of them: http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotels-g316064-c2-Isla_El_Gran_Roque_Los_Roques_National_Park_Coastal_Islands_Insular_Region-Hotels.html



Los Roques archipelago is a federal dependency of Venezuela consisting of approximately 50 islands, cays, and islets in a total area of 40.61 square kilometers. The archipelago is located 128 kilometers (80 mi) directly north of the port of La Guaira. The islands' pristine coral reef attracts many wealthy visitors, especially from Europe, some of whom come in their own yachts (really!) and anchor in the inner, protected shallow waters. Development and tourism are controlled.

Because of the wide variety of seabirds and rich aquatic life, the Venezuelan government declared Los Roques a National Park in 1972



The islands were sighted by early European navigators, and in 1589 the governor of the Venezuelan province ordered the formal takeover of these islands on behalf of the colony. The Dutch considered Los Roques to belong to their island territory of Curacao because of its proximity to Bonaire which also belonged to the Dutch. The author M.D. Teenstra in 1836 still writes (in his book *The Dutch West Indies*): "The Government of Curacao also includes the uninhabited islets and rocks Little Curacao, Aves, Roques and Orchilla." In 1871 the Venezuelan president Antonio Guzmán Blanco created by decree the *Territorio Colón* (Columbus Territory) which included Los Roques and other adjacent islands. The island of Gran Roque was named as the center of territorial government.

A week's worth of dive sites (20 noted on park's published map):



Security Protocol:

We locked the yacht at the end of the day, just as we do anywhere. We did not cable lock the tenders as we have in many places of the south Pacific. I never saw nor felt the slightest security or petty theft threat. The people are very friendly and fully understand the importance of tourism to their local economy. Except for a small fishing fleet it is apparent that the whole community survives on tourism.

Charts:

NGA (NOAA-US) chart 24444 I found the best detail. It is not reprinted by British Admiralty. However the BA plans on chart 1629 does show Gran Roque and detail for about a 4 mile diameter around this epicenter of Los Roques. The source is obviously the same at the NGA chart since the error/offset was the same. It should be noted that we found the offset on the electronic charts (CMAP is our source) to be different in different areas of the park. Daytime "eye of sight" navigation is really the only way to go, with the sun in favor. We ran very few ranges and bearings since during our short time cruising the archipelago there was no need to run at night.

Cash

It should be noted that cash is somewhat of an issue. European and American credit cards are not accepted, only a few places can accept credit cards anyway. You cannot exchange USD or Euro for the local currency (the Bolivar). If your stay

in short just run everything through the agent, this is easier than you think. If you are fortunate enough to spend more time then ask him to prepare a “cash to master” on arrival so you have some pocket money. This isn’t a huge ordeal but trinket/gift shopping and just having a beer on the beach is obviously not as simple and straightforward as it should be.

A few cruising notes:

First anchorage for access to **Gran Roque**, customs, and airport:

Anchor: 11°56.377’N by 066° 40.042’W

Holding is excellent in soft sand but it can be roly and windy at times, plus a current is present through the pass off the airstrip.

Good holding but can also be windy and choppy as it is exposed to the east a bit.

Noonsite says: Beware of eastern side of town due to low flying aircraft, flights are possible between 0600-1800 hrs.

Photo shows position:



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- Close to Gran Roque at western of end of town in 8 meters is:
11°56.820'N X 066°40.914'W

Photo shows position:



Francisqui has a beautiful and large anchorage that is well protected. There are many tourists out there for a day on the beach as the day boats take them out in the morning and return them in the evening. There is a nice restaurant in the NE corner with good food and cold drinks.

Approach to the anchorage is:

1. 11°56.976'N X 066°39.321'W
2. 11°57.102'N X 066°39.242'W
3. 11°57.157'N X 066°39.222'W
4. 11°57.195'N X 066°39.208'W
5. 11°57.231'N X 066°39.176'W

Photo of Francisqui Anchorage from the Lighthouse:



Safe route to South East corner of archipelago and access to SE dives and kite-boarding area of **Buchiyaco**, this gets you through the labyrinth of shallow flats in the north-eastern inside passage.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. 11°53.914'N X 066°39.449'W | 10. 11°52.205'N X 066°36.687'W |
| 2. 11°53.843'N X 066°39.315'W | 11. 11°52.061'N X 066°36.411'W |
| 3. 11°53.830'N X 066°38.891'W | 12. 11°51.905'N X 066°36.231'W |
| 4. 11°53.801'N X 066°38.732'W | 13. 11°51.717'N X 066°36.129'W |
| 5. 11°53.596'N X 066°38.280'W | 14. 11°51.559'N X 066°36.042'W |
| 6. 11°53.442'N X 066°38.033'W | 15. 11°51.501'N X 066°35.900'W |
| 7. 11°52.674'N X 066°37.082'W | 16. 11°51.345'N X 066°35.779'W |
| 8. 11°52.437'N X 066°36.902'W | 17. 11°51.143'N X 066°35.722'W |
| 9. 11°52.306'N X 066°36.813'W | 18. 11°50.523'N X 066°35.364'W |

We anchored overnight about 0.5 nm north of Buchiyaco (11°48.913'N X 066°34.253'W) to avoid the threat of the No-see-ums if the winds lightened overnight. The anchorage was calm and pleasant in an 18 knot easterly, our guests enjoyed cards all evening on the upper deck.

Eastern Side, inside of the reef is a stunning **sand spit** for watersports and lunch “beach set-up” BBQ, located at: 11°53.877’N X 066°36.417’W and the yacht can anchor 30 meters from the beach....awesome.

Isla Pelona (western side of atoll) anchorage is calm at 11°47.349’N X 066°53.209’W. This is a perfect anchorage to access the Turtle Research Center. Albeit somewhat casual it is very much worth the time and a small donation to the marine biologist who are helping the local turtle population. Don’t miss the albino turtles they have and will allow a photo op.

Albino Loggerhead Turtle:



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Photo of Isla Pelona Anchorage:



Anchorage to access diving at **Vespen de la Salina** and **Cayo de Sol**. This is a lunch hook spot as I would not suggest staying overnight. It did a bit choppy and currents change from the west shoving you towards the shallows, which was fine during the day in soft white sand bottom with the holding of concrete. This location provides a short panga ride to the dive sites, longest one (furthest east) being about 25 minutes in a 20 knot easterly. These Southwest dive sites are the best in Los Roques, no question.

11°45.089'N X 066°52.047'W host best protection from wind chop and in 8-9 meters of water with plenty of room to swing east with one shot of chain out.

Photo of Vespen de la Salina Anchorage:



Shore side Briefs:

- Aquarena is beach bar that was great for sunset drinks.
- Aquarela is an upper scale “posada” (Venezuela bed & breakfast) where we had a lovely crew dinner. The Chef/Owner then organized a 5 course tasting dinner for our guests during their cruise, they all praised the experience, except that the portions were too large. Alejandro (our agent) handled all these details for us and suggested the venue. Some (most) posadas will only serve their own guests and do offer dinners to people who are not their guests. I think it’s mostly a matter of provisions and organizing service, with only a local population of 2000 total there are limited service sources. Our meal was very memorable and outstanding there.
- Hike to the lighthouse, its well worth the short 30 minute jaunt.
- Stop at the fruit/smoothie/breakfast counter for incredible Venezuelan breakfast of Araepas (sp?), with afresh smoothie to go with it. Our guests were able to enjoy this as well. Go early it gets busy and quite hot out on the street.

Yacht Assistance: “Yacht Services Los Roques”:

Agent, Guide, Provisioner, et-al, **Alejandro Linares**, is a great, trustworthy contact and makes things very easy. He can organize all tours and watersports activities within the park, which is needed. Los Roques is impossible to do right without assistance as there are no guides with information being quite limited, yet there are many things to see and do. It’s a watersports “park” in a natural, low-key, relaxed setting.....and it’s absolutely beautiful with welcoming and friendly people.

He even handled the domestic charter aircraft for my guests working for our pilots. The airstrip is too short for larger private aircraft and the tire rating of the surface is inferior. He organized a medium sized order of fresh veggies from the mainland, of course availability and quality changes regularly, a plan for the worst and hope for the best protocol is suggested and I think the Chef will be somewhat surprised. Alejandro also printed up t-shirts for my guests to commemorate the dive trip with only a 3 day notice for a nice souvenir.



*It should be recognized that **Alejandro lives in Los Roques** and has for 15 years. He does not come out there at great expense and hassle as the only other option for super-yacht assistance that is available in Venezuela must do. I am also positive Alejandro could be of great assistance in cruising other ports in Venezuela as he is very fluent in handling the officials, making things happen quickly, and within the scope of the local laws, avoiding any monetary hassles or delays.*

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