

1. Puerto Lucia Cruising Information – SV Dreamer

In January 2019 we sailed from Las Perlas to Puerto Lucia where we planned to stay while processing long stay visas for French Polynesia and prepared for our visit to the Galapagos. This document provides information which we hope will be useful to others considering Puerto Lucia for either of these purposes.

1.1. Navigation

The passage from Las Perlas was straightforward. The only challenge is to monitor the weather so that the width of the ITCZ is as small as possible when you will reach it. In our case, we were able to sail for all but 8 hours of the passage and we completed the 793 NM in almost exactly 5 days, arriving in the morning at Puerto Lucia, average speed 6.6kn.

Once we reached the southerly winds we sailed in a south westerly direction to get further south before heading inland and then when we tacked, at first we sailed directly towards the coast, but as we got closer to the coast the wind veered and we were able to sail South East, towards Puerto Lucia.

Approaching Puerto Lucia from deep water rather than running down the coastline has the benefit that we avoided a lot of fishing lines. Every other boat I spoke to while staying in Puerto Lucia got caught on lines (as much as four times) approaching Puerto Lucia.

As you approach Puerto Lucia, call or email the Puerto Lucia yacht club to advise them of your arrival time; best to arrive between 8am and 5pm. As you approach they will send out a launch to tie you up to a mooring ball just outside the harbor where you have to wait until your immigration clearance is processed.

1.2. Immigration and Clearance

After mooring on the waiting ball, the captain will be taken ashore to the marina office where some paperwork is completed, and you pay the \$150 fee for the marina to act as your agent. The lady who operates the office, Diana, knows the system well and can answer your questions. Bring Google Translate on your phone if you don't speak good Spanish as her English is limited.

If you arrive in the afternoon, they will make you wait on the mooring ball until the next morning and you should not leave the vessel, and if you arrive on a Friday afternoon or weekend day then you will be processed on Monday morning. I know many who went ashore by dinghy while waiting.

In our case, we arrived at about 8am and at 11am a group of about seven officials arrived at our boat to process our clearance. There seem to be a number of departments involved in this process and the marina office rounds them all up so that you complete the immigration process in one step, which is nice. They all come on board, fill out their forms, ask a few questions, take pictures and get the captain to sign all the forms (a boat stamp is much appreciated).

1.3. Docking

After your clearance is complete the marina staff (marineros) will help you dock. There are a number of docking lines and buoys floating in the middle of the small harbor, so take care not to get your prop snagged on one of them. Their standard approach is to tie the bow of the boat to one of the mooring buoys in the middle of the harbor and then you reverse into your dock where you are tied up med style.

If, like us, you have a catamaran then you need to explain to them if you want to tie up stern first and attach the bow lines afterwards.

There is a North dock and a South dock. The North costs twice as much, is a little better maintained but otherwise, as far as I could see, offered no real benefit for the extra cost. The docks in general are not in great shape and the South dock is probably the worst I have ever used. The cleats are unreliable and you will see that many loops of line have been tied to the frame of the dock; use these instead of the cleats.

A notable feature of this harbor is that it is quite open and exposed to northerly swell. This creates quite a powerful surge and although the northerly swell only happens for a few days every 3 or 4 weeks, when it happens you will want to be prepared for it.

Generally, the conditions in the harbor are benign, so docking should be easy, but if, as happened to us, the swell is coming out of the North, then the surge will make docking more challenging.

You should tie up so that your bow lines prevent your stern from hitting the dock at low tide. Obviously, you may have to wait to ensure that the setup is correct depending on the tide. I would recommend at least 3-4 feet between your stern and the dock. This makes getting on and off the boat more challenging, especially at high tide, as your docking lines will be stretched tighter, making it harder to pull your stern towards the dock. I tried setting up my passarelle but gave up with this as it would not handle the swell, if you have the ability to setup a passarelle so that it is suspended above the dock, then this is an ideal setup and you will see some of the local boats with this arrangement. Otherwise, as we did for almost 3 months, you just have to haul on your docking lines when the boat is moving towards the dock and jump.

I highly recommend that you setup long stern lines to the harbor wall where there are strong cleats that can be relied upon. A 30m line should be long enough. Walking along the dock is like an obstacle course as the whole dock sways with the swell and the long docking lines from the boats rise and fall like some kind of video game.

1.4. Docking Lines

There is naturally occurring oil and gas that rises to the surface all around the harbor. The oil will build up on your docking lines and create a brown ring around your hull on your anti-fouling. By the time I realized what this was doing to my docking lines it was too late to do anything about it and before I left the port I had to clean the lines with diesel to get the thick black sticky oil deposits out of my lines. A better approach is to head to Artipesca (on Calle 15 in La libertad), which is walking distance away from the yacht club, where you can buy cheap green nylon line for about \$1 per metre or you might be able to use the lines that I left behind. Only use your docking lines if they will not touch the water.

1.5. Services

The water is not potable but low cost. We just used it for washing on board and we bought large 5L containers of drinking water from the local supermarket, which are very cheap. As a side note, if you have a cat then these empty bottles can make an excellent protection from the sea lions in Cristobal, Galapagos, who will otherwise be all over your boat within minutes of anchoring.

The electricity seemed to be quite unreliable and not available in all locations on the dock. We didn't use it, relying on solar, which works very well with the sun directly overhead.

The WiFi in the marina is usable but quite slow during the day while the office is open, but once they close up and go home it is fast enough to stream Netflix.

If you have any work to do on your boat, then Stewart Yates & Servicios S.A, operated by Marisol provide excellent assistance with all kinds of work. Parts are a major issue, as many are simply unavailable. I have Volvo engines and needed to get some parts which I could not locate anywhere in Ecuador (I ended up having to get them from the US). You can ship to your boat using Fedex and Diana in the marina office will act as the receiving address. When your parts reach customs in Ecuador (in Guayaquil), the local Fedex agent called Entregas Especiales S.A will send you an email and let you know if you need to pay any import fees. Again, Google Translate helps a lot. If you have to pay a fee, then head to Banco del Pacifico in La Libertad and pay the fee then email your receipt to them. A couple of days later they should release your shipment and it should arrive the next day. All in all, it takes about 3 weeks to get something from the US to your boat.

The Puerto Lucia Yacht Club is a very nice facility adjacent to the marina. There are swimming pools, tennis courts, a gym, showers, several bars, a private beach and a restaurant. You can also take laundry to the reception and they will arrange to have it cleaned – as I recall, it's about \$1 per kilo.

2. The Local Towns

Puerto Lucia sits between La Libertad and Salinas. Salinas is a kind of holiday beach town and lots of people from inland Ecuador come here for vacations. There is a nice Malecon where you can find lots of restaurants and bars. Walking along the Malecon on Friday or Saturday night is a great way to enjoy the local scene. Make sure you agree the price with the taxi drivers in Salinas before you set off as they will try to rip you off otherwise. Should be \$3-5 to get to Puerto Lucia.

La Libertad is a fishing town with much more interesting shopping. This includes an excellent fresh market. The Mercado de Mariscos is a great place to buy very fresh fish and seafood, straight from the fishing boats which you will see anchored in front of the town – don't think of anchoring among them, apparently that is not welcome. You can get excellent fresh Mahi Mahi and Tuna and some swordfish. You can buy a whole mahi mahi for about \$3 per pound. Watching them skin and filet it for you is something you have to see. There are lots of very fresh shrimp as well (a major export item for Ecuador) which are about \$4-5 per pound depending on size. The Malecon in La libertad is also worth a visit.

The best chandlery is located in La Libertad, called SEATEC. Perniacero is the best source for steel bolts and some tools.

The Paseo Shopping mall is the major mall of the area and is walking distance from Puerto Lucia. There is a large hypermarket there selling foods, clothing, hardware and homewares. The fresh fruit and vegetables in Ecuador are mostly grown locally and are excellent, very fresh and very cheap. If you are buying a lot (or hauling drinking water back to the boat) it costs \$2 for a taxi. The other major supermarket is SuperMaxi which is a little more upscale and has some items you can't find in the mall. SuperMaxi is in Salinas and about \$3 in a taxi.

3. Leaving Puerto Lucia

When you are ready to leave you need to start the documentation process several days ahead of time. Go to the marina office and make a plan with Diana.

When you arrive in Ecuador, you and your boat are given 90 days. If you want to stay longer, then you must extend for both your boat and each person. It takes a few days so do this in good time.

If you overstay you will be fined, and they will also fine your boat (\$400 per day!) and threaten to seize your boat and take it to Guayaquil – which I think means that you'll never see it again.

When you are ready to leave you must ask for a Zarpe and this takes a few days. If you are headed to Galapagos then you must have an Autografo or they will not issue a Zarpe. If you are going to another country, then this will not be an issue. You will be required to have a safety inspection to get your Zarpe, which takes a few days to organize and once again involves a bunch of guys coming aboard and asking a bunch of question – Diana has the form that they will complete and you should read it. For instance, they will want to know that you have a paper chart to your destination and will not accept electronic charts.

Once you have the Zarpe, you have 24 hours to leave. I suggest you get the Zarpe the day before you want to leave as they are usually late, then leave at your leisure the next morning, otherwise you'll be trying to spot fishing lines in the dark as you exit the bay – sometimes they even put fishing lines across the entrance to the harbor at night.

4. Long Stay Visas for French Polynesia

We applied for and received long stay visas for French Polynesia while we were staying in Puerto Lucia. This was the most frustrating part of our stay in Ecuador. You should plan at least 10 weeks. It can be faster (as little as 6 weeks I have been told) but it's best not to plan for that.

You apply for an appointment online – I did this before leaving Panama as you may have to wait a month to get one, so do this in advance in order to start your application as soon as possible after you arrive in Ecuador. The 'interview' is just a guy organizing your application papers and printing you a receipt which you need to collect your passports. They will keep your passports while they process the visas. If you need to leave Ecuador for any reason, you can go there are ask to get them back but I think that will terminate your visa application.

They send the application to Tahiti for processing. As I learned, in Tahiti they only review the applications once a month, hence the long lead time. If there is anything wrong with your application it may get stuck and the consulate in Quito won't tell you anything – they are very non-responsive. I advise that get an agent in Tahiti (I used Tahiti Crew) who spoke to the High Commission in Tahiti and found an issue with my application and helped me get it fixed.

After the visa is approved in Tahiti then they have to send them to Paris for final approval – who knows why?!?

They get very upset if you try and call them at the consulate. They basically don't want to speak to you. There is a link on the website that tells you that you can track your application progress – it doesn't work for French Polynesia visas. There is also a way to send a message on the consulate website and

usually they will answer if you are persistent, but don't expect any information about the processing time, they just tell you that they don't know anything.

5. Summary

Ecuador is a fascinating and very inexpensive place to visit. The food is great, the people are generally very friendly, the landscape is very interesting, especially the mountains. The government bureaucracy is grinding and endless, but as long as you plan ahead its ok. There are also many interesting places to visit – Quito and Cuenca were both very nice and provide welcome relief if you are staying in Puerto Lucia in February, when the weather is hot and humid.

The climate in Puerto Lucia is generally very nice and there are nice beaches to visit (which don't have oil in the water). There are some surfing beaches south of Salinas. The climate is technically desert due to the low rainfall, but in February/March it is the rainy season and it can get hot and humid and the insects go crazy. It's a good idea to get a mosquito net for your bed onboard. You can buy them in La Libertad for \$10.