



and from Isabel, a paved road circles most of the island.

Approaches: The south end of the 30-n.m. N-S Quito Sueño Banks (about 14°29.2'N, 81°08.2'W) lies about 50 n.m. north of Providencia. Quito Sueño means Quit Dreaming – translated as “set your depth sounder alarm.”

Seranna Banks are about 100 n.m. NE of Providencia. About 90 n.m. east of Providencia is Roncador Bank. A “roncador” is someone who snores – signifying that these shallow coral banks gurgle and spout.

All three of these broad offshore banks are owned by Colombia and patrolled by naval gunships. However, rumors of drug smuggling persist, so we

suggest yatistas use caution or avoid these banks.

Providencia’s 1,200’ central peak makes a good radar target. Providencia’s entire north, east and south sides are shielded in breaking coral reefs, and its west side is mostly foul with shoals and isolated corals. The only approach to the harbor and anchorage is a narrow natural channel coming in from the NW side.

If your approaching from the north, you’ll see 15-mile Cayo Palma Light (13°24.0'N, 81°22.1'W) on a coral cluster about 7 n.m. inside the north reef, which extends 8 n.m. north of the island. Cayo Palma (close off Isla Santa Catalina) is about 1.4 n.m. due east of the Providencia sea buoy. (See below.)

If you’re arriving from the south or SW, an 18-

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mile nav light on Manchancel Hill on the island's SW point is visible from 157° to 318°. But the safer approach is to stay well off until you can approach the island's NW corner.

Providencia sea buoy rides at GPS 13°23.95'N, 18°23.75'W.

From there, come to a heading of 143°M and pass between the pairs of buoys that take you close aboard of Santa Catalina Island and Morgan's Head, the rocky prominence that looks like a profile of the infamous pirate who raided from this island.

On the bow, you'll see a prominent cleft in the ridgeline of the main island; the charts call this Split Hill, but the locals call it Morgan's Ass. After the last set of buoys you may anchor anywhere in the harbor not blocking the channel, but watch your depths.

Port Clearance: Use of a ship's agent is mandatory. Call the English-speaking Bush Agency (Mr. Bush) on your approach on VHF 16. If you're unsure about your approach, Bush can talk you in over

VHF. His phone is (6) 334-8050 Bush will inform the Port Captain of your arrival and give you instructions as to whether to anchor (smaller boats) and dinghy ashore north of the pier, or (for larger boats) to bring your vessel alongside the town's municipal pier.

If you're instructed to come to the pier (9' alongside), it requires a turn to port. Because of a shoal, you need to keep slightly right of a straight line between the pier and the last set of buoys.

The Port Captain monitors VHF 16 and 24, and he has a repeater on the island's highest peak with a range of 60 n.m., enabling him to communicate with Isla San Andrés. Port clearance is easy and inexpensive, and the officials are very friendly.

Local Services: You can fuel at Providencia, but you can't be in a hurry. All supplies come into the island by barge or boat from Isla San Andrés, 55 n.m. to the south, so you might have to wait a couple of days. They will bring it down to the pier by tank truck or you can jerry jug smaller quantities.

At the head of the pier is a bank, but it doesn't exchange US dollars, and traveler's checks are not accepted anywhere on the island. The bank's cash machine accepts Visa/MC for cash advances. We have exchanged US dollars for Colombian pesos with various merchants.

The island's few grocery stores have limited supplies, but by visiting all the stores you can get by just fine. Fresh fruits and veggies arrive by boat from Costa Rica once a week. A handful of restaurants dot the harbor – none of them great but the price is right.

Providencia's paved airstrip is only 1,500 meters in length, but it has daily flights in small planes to and from Isla San Andrés, where you can connect to Miami once a week.

Rented motor scooters are a quick and easy way to tour the whole island of Providencia in a couple hours.

Take a walk for about a mile and visit the ruins of the old fort that protected the harbor. Cross the low wooden footbridge

Bush is the yacht agent on Isla Providencia, here waiting at the dinghy dock with VHF to talk you in.



Johnny Cay on north approach to Isla San Andrés is inside the reef.



to Santa Catalina Island and head SW along the waterfront to the end of the path. Then climb the hill through the jungle. Old canon still overlook the entrance channel.

Free Town is the village SW of Isabel, cut through by Bowdon Gully. The half-mile wide bay off Free Town is sheltered but less than 6' deep. If a marina ever were to be built at Providencia, this probably would be the spot.

Continuing around the island counter clockwise you'll encounter the low-lying village of Agua Dulce, where galleons once anchored to row in for fresh water from the mountain streams. Bottom House is the good sized settlement on the SE end, then the small communities of Smooth Water Bay, Rocky Point and Smith Bay. These four clusters of homes also have about a dozen Mom-and-Pop hotels for scuba divers who fly in to explore the western reef. Pangas launch from small boat houses on the beach. Boxon is the village just east of Isabel, facing Cayo Congrejo and a series of close-in reef segments.

Diving: The 15-n.m. of coral reef that circle Providencia provide snorkeling and scuba diving that are absolutely superb – lots of colorful reef fish and exotic fauna not found elsewhere. Providencia's reefs have recently been declared an Underwater Nature Preserve, so look and take photos, but don't hunt. Only locals may take the delicious native conk (*strombus gigas*), lobsters (*panulirus argus*), and only during certain seasons.

Local Pirates: “*Piratas en Santa Catalina*” is a short historical novel about Providencia's pirate history and racial mixtures, by local author Jaime Vasquez M. Providencia has been populated by various Caribe tribes, English pirates, Spanish colonists and freed African slaves. Several gift shops in Isabel have this interesting little book, and the Spanish version is good practice.

Isla San Andrés

The larger island sister, San Andrés (pronounced “AHN-drayz”) also lies directly on the Western Caribbean route, making it another logical stop for

rest, fuel and refuge – but you probably won't need to stop at both. A ship's agent is required for a stop here, but pilotage into the harbor is optional for recreational boats.

San Andrés is as beautiful an island as will be found anywhere in the world. Its low palm-covered plateau and transparent blue-green waters are surrounded by coral reefs and isolated cays fringed with tall coconut palms swaying in the Trade Winds.

Like Providencia, San Andrés is owned by Colombia and has friendly locals, but here tourism is much more developed. San Andrés is to mainland

