

CHANGES

IN LATITUDES

With things slowly returning to normal here at home, we're encouraged to report that many cruisers' COVID-delayed plans are also back on track — or will be soon. We have reports this month from **Minnie** on a different way to see *The Sea: Flite Deck's* post-Nada Ha-Ha activities; **Element's** ongoing adventures in the South Seas; and a seabag full of **Cruise Notes**.

Minnie — Catalina 22 Erin Quinn and Roderick Treece Confessions of a Trailer Sailor Leucadia

"If it were lush and rich, one could understand the pull, but it is fierce and hostile and sullen. The stone mountains pile up to the sky and there is little fresh water.



Erin and Rod have done 'Minnie' mini cruises to Mexico before, as well as to the Channel Islands.

But we know we must go back if we live, and we don't know why."

—John Steinbeck, from *The Log* from the Sea of Cortez

The Sea of Cortez first appears glimmering like a mirage from the desert floor abutting the eastern edge of the Sierra. With sailboat *Minnie* in tow, we made our way south, appreciating the wide shoulders of the new road through San Felipe. Although the highways of Baja California can sometimes be narrow and rough, for trailer sailors willing to make the journey, the experience of sailing the Sea of Cortez, with its hundreds of islands, deserted beaches, abundant wildlife, and challenging sailing, is unforgettable.

The 'Minnie' rig. The cruise in this story covered about 120 miles in eight days on the water, and two days driving each way.

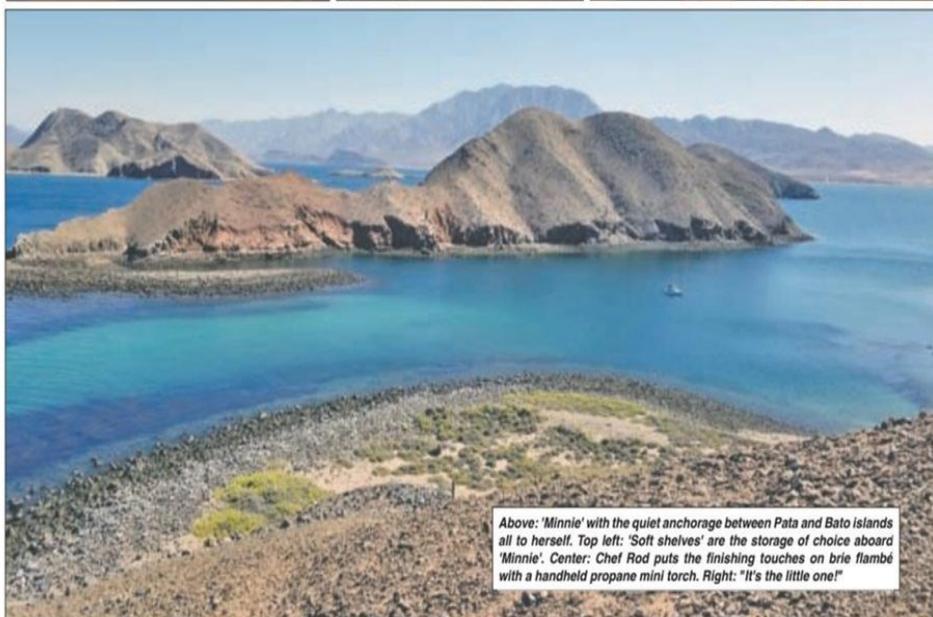


The essentials: a secure place to park our van and trailer, and a boat ramp sufficient to launch *Minnie*, a Catalina 22 with a 32-inch wing keel. Both were available thanks to "Chubasco" Diaz of Bahia de los Angeles. The long days and evening high tides of late May gave us time to rig, step the mast and launch during a quiet time at the ramp as the last of the local fishermen were returning home with the day's catch. The second night after leaving home we were anchored off the town of Bahia de los Angeles, surrounded by diving pelicans, being serenaded from shore by a solo guitarist whose song crossed the water to us from somewhere among the lights of town, glittering against the mountains.

In the morning we sailed south to La Mona, an expat enclave where we had a friend with local knowledge, Wi-Fi and a weather report. The only address we had to find him was "The Dome." Sailing straight to La Mona on a beam reach, we could see the dome from miles away.

Bahia de los Angeles is infamous for its sudden, strong westerly winds known as *elefantes*. I had heard enough about them to know I did not want to be caught in one, so I asked every local I could if there was a way to predict their arrival. People mostly responded with a similar look: raised eyebrows, wide eyes looking to the side, tight jaw with corners of the mouth slightly downturned as they inhaled. Most people mentioned clouds creeping over the mountains.

After a sunset kayak, we anchored for the night at La Mona under crimson skies as clouds snuck over the mountains from the west. At 3 a.m., after a very calm night, we were jolted awake by short-interval swell. By 5 a.m., the waves were accompanied by the approaching 18-kt winds. Since a significant wind event was predicted for the following night, we decided to seek shelter at a hurricane hole, Puerto Don Juan, a very protected



Above: 'Minnie' with the quiet anchorage between Pata and Bato islands all to herself. Top left: 'Soft shelves' are the storage of choice aboard 'Minnie'. Center: Chef Rod puts the finishing touches on brie flambé with a handheld propane mini torch. Right: "It's the little one!"

anchorage that is popular with cruisers. We had a beautiful sail to the east around the points, passing islands known as The Twins, reefing the headsail, and for a while, even putting the second reef in the main. (The Boomkicker worked great and made reefing so much easier.)

Later, in the shelter of Puerto Don Juan — which looks like a sunken volcanic crater with a shallow careening beach on one end — we met a shaken cruiser couple on a Pearson 39 who said that they had endured 50-kt winds the previous night at Bahia de los Angeles, while we had experienced only

slight bumpiness a few miles away at La Mona. I remembered our friends from La Mona telling us that the Bahia de los Angeles anchorage is always the windiest, and when you see the clouds creeping over the mountains, "Beware!"

During the day, a few cruisers came to Don Juan anchorage as high-altitude lenticular clouds transited across the mountain tops. By nightfall, the calm was almost surreal; the moon illuminated large, swirling crescent clouds over an unnaturally still bay. The calm broke suddenly at 11 p.m., and the wind blew 20-30 kts all night. I was very grateful to be in this protected place where little

Minnie scarcely rolled. We spent the next day exploring the beaches to the south and enjoying the dramatic clearing sky.

After the storm passed, we made our way north to Coronado and Mitlán islands. Close-hauled, by 8 a.m. we were reefing the sails again. I was grateful for the second reef added to the already-small Catalina 22 mainsail. After three hours of glorious sailing between islands, and barely halfway to our destination, we sounded our way over a small shoal to a sweet anchorage between two tiny islets, Pata and Bato, which offered a calm place to lunch, swim and nap while we waited for the conditions to mellow.

Passing *pangueros* assured us that the wind would lighten by afternoon. Right on schedule, we departed past the headland of La Gringa, close-hauled under full sail toward the volcanic cone of Coronado Island.

Las Rocas is a spectacularly beautiful anchorage off a steep beach tucked behind Mitlán Island and its volcanic reef. Clouds of tiny fish sparked in the aquarium water under *Minnie* as she settled in, protected from the chop. The days in Baja can merge together, with mornings spent kayaking, hiking and snorkeling, and, midday, sheltering from the sun.

During calm periods we watched small fish eating smaller fish, and pelicans, seagulls, ospreys, cormorants, and frigates hunting — not realizing until too late that we had also entered the food chain, falling victim to the no-see-ums!

With each new day I watched the high cirrus clouds dancing over the mountains, and buttermilk-sky clouds announcing themselves with fanfare. No "creeping" clouds sneaking in here, I reassured myself. But perhaps it was Chubasco's sister Prieta who said it best when I asked her about predicting the arrival of the *elefante* winds; "Hay que preguntar Dios," — "You must ask God."

—Erin 6/30/21

www.instagram.com/erinleucadianp/

Flite Deck — Seawind 1160 cat Bill Edwards and Katie Smith Notes from the Nada San Diego

Today finds us in Puerto Vallarta, at the end of Day One of doing our open-water diving certification. We hadn't planned on being in this part of Mexico, but during a Nada Ha-Ha gathering, we

'Flite Deck' boogies south. The Nada Ha-Ha was the first time Bill and Katie had been farther into Mexico than Ensenada.



ALL PHOTOS MINNIE FLITE DECK