

CAPE VERDE ISLANDS

By: Donald M. Street

Forget about Christmas in the Caribbean, and crossing the Atlantic in late november and early december when the trades have not well and truly in and there is a danger of a late season hurricane.

Spend Christmas cruising the Cape Verdes and cross in late december or early January when the "christmas winds, " the trades have well and truly filled in guaranteeing a passage of 14 days or less.

see Street's new guide to the Cape Verdes orders@seaworthy.com or contact streetiolaire@hotmail.com

The hurricane season has changed. When I first arrived in the Caribbean in November 1956, there was a rime about the hurricane season with a different line for each month. The final line was "October all over"

This is definitely not so as there have been more November December hurricanes in the last 20 years than there have been in the previous 120 years.

If a hurricane builds up or a bad low forms north of the track from the Canaries to the Caribbean, if you are near the hurricane or deep low you get your ears blow off by a strong southwester, if you are clear of the hurricane or the deep low, they have sucked the wind out of the Atlantic The southwester drives boats down to the Cape Verdes as happened in 2002, 5 , and 10, so why not plan to cruise the Cape Verdes?

In years gone buy sailors stopped at Mindelo, St. Vincent to pick up fuel water and try to top off supplies. They did not realize there is excellent cruising and interesting islands to explore. If you are looking for well equipped marinas, surrounded by the concrete jungle with dozens of good restraint and tourist, good night life , good infrastructure to support yachting, forget about the Cape Verdes.

But if you are looking for quiet anchorages were you will be completely alone, no habitation at all, or a small fishing village, with a few little basic rum shops that usually can produce cold beer, a place to meet locals rather than tourist, islands that are varied the Cape Verdes are for you.

The eastern islands that are low flat , with miles of beaches. The western islands are high and completely different. On San Anto the ridge line is 5,000, with big pine trees and the most spectacular cobblestone ridge road in the entire Atlantic islands. Fogo 9,000' with a village inside the volcano where one finds blonde haired blue eyed Cape Verdians. Santiago with its booming economy and 23 separate anchorages, Brava with its main Village Nova Sintra, at 1,200 'in the hills connected to the harbor by a road with 99 switch backs, Minelo with its modern marina opened 2008 and its restored market building that is the most beautiful market building in the entire Atlantic basin, if you are adventurous and willing to explore, the Cape Verdes are for you.

On the Imray Iolaire charts there are insets for nine major harbors(forget about BA or Portuguese charts they are numerous, not up to date and have less harbor charts than the single

Imray Iolaire chart) Street's new guide has 53 sketch harbor charts that should be used only in good light, and with extreme caution by competent sailors.

For any boats heading across the Atlantic it must be remembered that the most essential piece of navigation equipment in the world is EYE BALL MARK 1 given to all of us by god at birth. When sailing in tropical waters harbor, anchorages should be approached with a crew member in the bow pulpit or better on the lower spreaders. From the lower spreaders every thing is crystal clear.

In days gone by when boats had external halyard going up to the lower spreaders was no problem. Even at age 70 I had no problem going up Iolaire's mast to the lower spreaders. But when I started sailing L'll Iolaire the 28' sloop (that I converted to a yawl) that had internal halyards, I discovered that climbing to the lower spreaders was a major effort. Thus I installed steps to the lower spreaders. This is something that I feel ALL boats that have internal halyards that intend to cruise the Caribbean should do.

If this is done then when entering strange harbors it is easy to send a crew member to the lower spreaders as lookout/pilot and as long as you enter harbors when the light is good there will be no surprises no problems.

An examination of the Hurricane book shows that you should not arrive in the Cape Verdes until mid or late November. Lows that sometimes eventually become hurricanes form around and sometimes in the Cape Verdes right up until mid November.

The winds will be generally easterly so the best landfall is Isle Sal, port of entry. The harbor will be crowded, shore horn your way in. Do not approach at night the leading lights have not worked for years, the pier is being extended but we have not been able to obtain any information, and there is a steel wreck very poorly buoyed in the middle of the harbor with 7' or water over it. We found it by hitting it with Sincerity, luckily going dead slowly.

It is a good place to stop as there is an international air port so it is a good place to do a crew change.

A few miles south there is an excellent anchorage in the north east corner of Bahia Modeira with good surfing in the North West corner. On the south end of the island off Santa Maria there are excellent surfing, wind and kite surfing. Here a concrete jungle is springing up.

It is only a short 34 mile sail south to Boa Vista to Sal Rei which, like Palmeria is not too good but there is mile after mile of white sand beach and some good diving.

From Isle Sal to San Nicolau is a glorious beam or broad reach, 73 miles. The reason I recommend sailing to Boa Vista Sal Rei before heading to San Nicolau is if you sail from Palmeria, Isle Sal to San Nicolau it will be dead or almost dead down wind.

In San Nicolau do not anchor in Carrical rather anchor in Bahia Gombeza the first anchorage to the west. Visit Carrical via dinghy and in the dinghy explore the coves and anchorages to the west.

In Australia there is a famous song "the bar with n beer" a man in the outback travels 200 miles to the nearest town to discover the bar hand no beer.

I had the same experience in San Nicolau, 3 ½ hours in a small fishing boat exploring the coves on the south coast of San Nicolau. We finally arrived in Carrical, to discover all three rum shops were closed and no one could find the keys for any of them!!!!

The main port of Tarrafal in on the south west side of the island. Here you will find a small village, where you can either rent a car, taxi or Aluguer a pick up truck with a lid on it and benches.

Explore the island, it is interesting. The main town Ribeira Brava is high in the hills, only 4 miles direct line from Tarrafal but via road it takes 40 minutes. It is an interesting little town with cobble stone roads that are so steep you need 4 wheel drive to climb the steep sections of the roads in the town.

Do not hire a car unless you are a really good “bush” driver accustomed to bad roads cut into the side of a cliff, but find a taxi or Aluguer with a driver that speaks English, enjoy the scenery and listen to the driver as he tells you of the island.

From Tarrafal it is only 25 miles on an easy reach to Santa Luzia an uninhabited island with a beautiful 3 mile long white sand beach. But remember if there is a white sand beach something must have put the sand there, the ocean swell. The ocean swell may make dinghy landing difficult and some times it is impossible.

From Santa Luzia is only 15 miles on a broad or beam reach to Mindelo St. Vincent.

Occasionally if the wind goes well into the north so you may be almost hard on the wind the first ten miles. St. Vincent and Santa Luzia are connected by a relatively shallow ridge with water on both sides thousands of feet deep. Thus, especially with a flood tide, wind against the sea it can be rather lumpy. Take your licks and push on. Do not be tempted to ease sheets, pass to leeward of St. Vincent and beat to windward the six miles from the south west point of St. Vincent to the harbor of Mindelo. Those six miles might be the longest and toughest six miles you ever sail.

The current runs to the south west thru this channel, plus the high mountains of San Anto 5 000’ to 6,000’ plus the mountain of St. Vincent 2,500 ‘funnels the wind. This increases the velocity so the in the channel 20 kts is normal and it frequently will be blowing 30 plus.



Marina Mindelo.. Photo

courtesy Marina Mindelo

Marina Mindelo, Sao Vicente

Mindelo is the best harbor in all of the Cape Verdes, as San Anto keeps out the worst of the northwest ground swell. It has a modern marina which can handle boats to about 150’. The manager Kai Brossman who served 11 years in the German navy as an electronic specialist, and has lived in the Cape Verdes for years knows how to get things done.

He states that if a yacht has problems there is practically nothing that in two weeks can not be repaired well enough to get the boat across the Atlantic.

He has earned his degree of MBLU(master of the bastard lash up) running a bare boat charter fleet off a 120' Baltic trader anchored in Mindelo harbor.

This is a degree I also have. I started earning it while serving on a US navy submarine during the Korean War. I finished earning it running Iolaire in the Caribbean in the 50's thru the 70's. When we first visited Mindelo on Iolaire in 1985 there was a communist/socialist/single party government whose officials were almost impossible to deal with, the town was run down, the market place was so derelict they were planning to demolish it.

In 1991 they had a free election, the government changed and things started improving. The islands are now on a roll.

Mindelo had its heyday from the middle of the 19th century till the end of World War 1 as it was a major coaling port and cable exchange station. When ships changed from coal to oil Mindelo went downhill.

Now the magnificent 19th century buildings are rapidly being restored, the Market building is without doubt the most beautiful market building in the entire Atlantic basin. Other market buildings have better produce for sale but none are as beautiful.

If the restoration of the center of the old town continues, and they do not knock down the magnificent old building and replace it with modern ones, in years to come Mindelo will be the most beautiful town in the entire Atlantic basin.

San Anto is only 9 miles away, an easy reach both ways, wind surfers use to do it in 20 minutes!!! But San Anto is best visited via the Ferry. Take the ferry over. Organize to stay for a couple of days, DO NOT, rent a u drive it, hire an Aluguer, one of the pickup trucks with a lid on top and ask him to drive you from Porto Nova to Riberia Grande and Porto do Sol via the ridge road NOT the new coast road.

The ridge road is the most spectacular drive in the entire Atlantic basin. In Madeira, Hierro, Gomera you may find hair raising roads cut into the side of a cliff with the cliff rising hundreds of feet on one side of the road and dropping away hundreds of feet on the other side. However on the San Anto ridge road you find places where on one side of the road it drops away 1,000 feet and on the other side of the narrow ridge it drops 800'!

Be sure you bring along a sweater, wool hat and if not wearing long trousers at least wear heavy wool socks. Those that like to hike, buy one of the walking maps that have a GPS grid on them, your hand bearing compass, have the aluguer drive up to the top of the valley that leads down to Porto do Paul, walk down the valley to Vila da Pornbas, find a run shop call the taxi on your mobile. Have a few cold beers while you wait for him to pick you up.

Despite what the RCC and Kai's German guides say about anchoring in San Anto I strongly advise against it.

Porto do Paul is a lee shore that is steep too almost impossible to anchor.

The west coast of San Anto is open to the ground swell.

Mar Tranquilliad a guest house on the west coast at Tarrafal de Monte Trigo. Suzi who with her partner runs the guest house tells the story of a charter boat that arranged for their charter party to have dinner ashore. During dinner the ground swell started coming in.

It was impossible to launch the dinghy, the skipper swam out to the boat picked up the anchor and headed to Porto Nova on the east side of the island. The charter party ended up sleeping on the floor in the dining room. The next day a 4 wheel drive aluguer drove them to Porto Nova to meet up with the boat. The dinghy was left at Tarrafal for a week until the ground swell went down and the charter skipper was able to come back to retrieve it..

From San Anto is a fast overnight 117 mile sail to Tarrafal on the North West coast of Santiago. When you arrive at Tarrafal you think you have arrived in the Caribbean, a big grove of coconut palms on a white sand beach. Again what put the sand there? The ocean swell, but it is not as exposed as the west coast of San Anto.

Take the dinghy ashore and visit the restaurant on the cliff overlooking the harbor. I usually do not in any of my guides recommend bars and restaurants as if staff or ownership changes the excellent bar or restaurant can become a disaster.

However I have visited this restaurant in 85, 89, 02, 05, and 09 and had an excellent Cape Verdian meal and drinks each time sooooo

Here a decision must be made. Do you sail north a few miles, a short beat over the top of Santiago and visit the fourteen anchorages on the east coast, or the eight anchorages on the west coast?



Photo by Indira

Dom
Donald M Street with fishermen in Santiago.

If the ground swell is running forget about stopping on the west coast except for Calheta de Sao Martinho, all the way down on the south coast.

Simarly if it is blowing like hell forget about the east coast.



Photo by Donald M

Street Jr.

Porto Pinha on the east coast of Santiago

Here is the time to hire a car, either self drive or aluguer and explore the island of Santiago via car. Inspect as many anchorages as are accessible by car, then make your decision as to which ones you want to visit.

If you go over the top of Santiago, especially if the wind is north of east, it may be good to sail miles 32 miles south east to Maio, the island where nothing happens.

In 2002 when I was touring the Cape Verdes by air and ferry I met a young German who came to the Cape Verdes every year. He said was going to stay in Maio for a week. Having visited Maio in 89 on Iolaire I asked "Why Maio?"

He said he was in a very high stressed business, so he always went to Maio to unwind as nothing happens in Maio.

"so little happens in Maio that if a chicken runs across the road the topic of conversation for the next 24 hours is, were there three or four chicks following the chicken!!!"

I arrived in Maio in 2009, and saw a sign on a bar facing the sea "music and dancing". I asked the manager of the small hotel I was staying at about the sign.

He roared with laughter and said "the sign has been there for years but there has never been music or dancing, nothing happens on Maio!!!"

There is a passable anchorage off town. For multihulls or shoal draft boats off 5 miles north off Calheta, there is a shelf with excellent diving. In years gone by there were plenty of lobsters, but today all the shoal water lobsters have been cleaned out.

The anchorage is easy to spot as a German has built as his retirement home, a very distinctive Beau Geste type fort painted white.

Praia the capitol of the Cape Verdes and major harbor is the best place in the Cape Verdes to restock for the transatlantic. There is available on the road side an adequate supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. There are also two large modern supermarkets that are well stocked with frozen meat and chicken imported from Argentina, plus local meat, including some strange cuts like pig's ears, nose, tail, and feet!!!! Fine if know how to cook them.

If the fuel float has been repaired(is broken down when I was there in 2009)water and fuel are available alongside, If it has not been repaired it is alongside with the fishing boats and a bit of chasing around to load fuel and water.

From Santiago it is west 63 miles to the anchorage in Fogo, a good stop if you can organized it. Like the west coast of San Anto, Fogo's west coast where the port is, is open to the North West ground swell. Thus the ferry schedule frequently gets interrupted November thru April by the North West ground swell.

Do not visit Fogo unless you have enough crew to leave some on board to move the boat if the ground swell come in.

If you crew is not big enough to do this, sail on to Brava,, 67 miles from Praia. Once securely moored in Furna make arrangements for a watchman to keep an eye on the boat, take the ferry to Fogo. In Fogo do two things, contact Domingo de Silva who runs a bus service to Cha Das Calvadeiras the village inside the Volcano. He leaves San Filipe about 1230 for a two hour rather hair raising ride up the mountain to the village where he will arrange for you to stay in a small guest house managed by her daughter. It is very nice, interesting, but basic. Bring a flashlight as electricity goes off at 2200 and does not return till 0600. Also you are high, cold at night bring long trousers sweaters, wool hat and wool socks.#

The area is famous for it grapes, coffee and the blue eyed blond hair decedents of Duc du Montrond who arrived from France in 1872 to cultivate grapes. He evidently cultivated the local

ladies as well. One of his descendants has evidently followed his footsteps as he has fathered 72 children which must be a record of some sort.

The next day spoil yourself as I did.

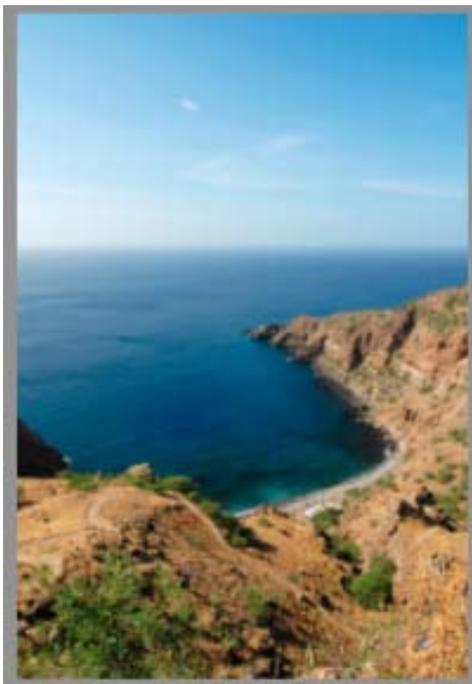
I decided to stay in the best hotel in Sao Filipe, the Colonial Hotel, and a rebuilt old merchant's house dating back to the late 19th century. There were nine huge rooms with 18' ceilings magnificent antique furniture, nothing en suite, beautiful bathrooms down the hall, a small swimming pool, or perhaps I should say a gigantic bath. Each room with a separate balcony looking down on the village of San Filipe and off to the west to Fogo.

At sundown time as I sat on the balcony wearing my pareau, with my feet up on the railing, note book on my lap, a scotch and water on the table next to me, I felt if I looked on the balcony next to me I would see Somerset Maugham sitting there doing the same thing.

True luxury yet bed, dinner, breakfast and a few drinks total bill euro 57!!!!

Fogo is like Saba in the Caribbean in that for generations the men have gone to sea at a very young age, spent their life at sea earned money, came home to retire, married a sweet young thing raise children and sent the sons to sea at a young age to continue the cycle. Like Saba the major village is up in the hills.

However Brava unlike Saba has an excellent harbor.



Reitmaier ID: 2257

D_2006_12030001w.jpg Photo by Pitt Reitmaier

Porto dos Ferreiros, Brava. Recommended last harbor before sailing transatlantic.

Looking at it on the chart one would think it was an impossible harbor as it faces out into the north east trades but the land is so high around the harbor that the harbor is in a back eddy. You approach the harbor dead down wind, 20 knots is blowing you into the harbor. As you approach the entrance the wind drops to 10 kts and by the time you pass the dock it is only blowing 5 kts. You drop the hook, pivot around and run stern lines to ring bolts in the rocks.

The harbor looks small but I have seen a picture with 14 boats moored stern too, 13 schooners varying in size from about 80 to 100 ' and one barkentine of about 180'1

It is always cool in the harbor as the sun does not rise over the eastern hills till 0930 and sets behind the western hills about 1600.

In 2005 we found Francisco Gonzales, a wonderful contact. He had gone to sea as a boy, worked on Norwegian ships and ashore in Norway so was a man of many languages and happy to meet visiting yachtsmen.

As previously mentioned Nova Sintra is up in the center of the island. It is a most attractive small village square, some small restaurants, small un super supermarket, nice houses, clean and well planted streets all in all a wonderful place to relax before heading off across the Atlantic.

But as a jump off point, leave Furna, head south then west and anchor in Porto de Ferreios. The harbor is perfectly sheltered, good holding on sand bottom. When we were there on Sincerety in 05 we counted 24 fishing boats pulled up on the beach.

Three of the crew followed the path up the 400' cliff to find a small run shop, friendly clientele and friendly owner that allowed them to use his land line phone to call Norway.

Porto de Ferreios is a perfect jump off spot as 30 minutes after leaving port you are out it the trades. That is if you are sensible enough to spend Christmas in the Cape Verdes rather than trying to cross in late November, early December when the trades have not well and truly filled in.