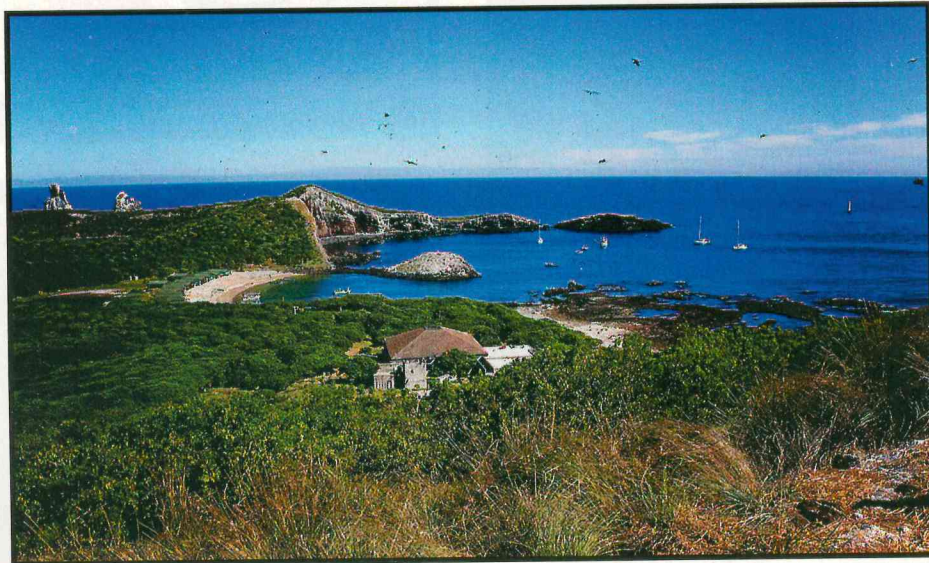


This Must Be The Place - This Must Be The Place - This Must Be The Place -

*There Is No Place
Anywhere Near This Place That
Looks Anything Like This Place,
So This Must Be The Place!*

Isla Isabel - The Galapagos of Mexico By Jessie Mackelprang-Carter

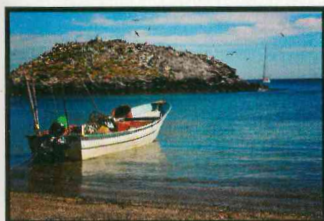


Isla Isabela ranked highly on our list of anchorages to visit along Pacific Mexico. However, at the end of a 90-mile overnight sail from Mazatlán, just hours from our destination, we were acutely torn about whether to stay our course. Ultimately, our curiosity for the island nicknamed the “Galapagos of Mexico” superseded our trepidation. We were less than 10 miles from the island, and we needed to see the anchorage and make a decision for ourselves.

Isla Isabela, a Parque Nacional and World Heritage Site, is a tiny gem 18 miles off the mainland coast. There are two

anchorages, both safe only in fair weather. One anchorage lies off the eastern shore; the other to the south. Prevailing northwesterly winds and swell that wrap around the island made the latter option our obvious choice. We sailed along the easterly shore of the mile-long island where two enormous twisted rocks, Las Monas, stand 200 feet tall, like contorted guardians of the tiny volcanic paradise.

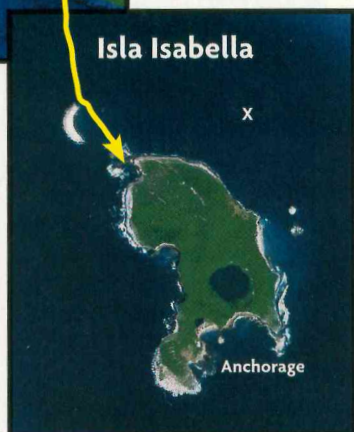
Two boats were settled in the southern anchorage when we arrived. As we dropped our mainsail and tucked into the lee of the island, two men from M/V *Andante* swam toward our boat. They were snorkeling and offered to locate a sandy



spot for our hook amid the minefield of rocks. We attached a trip line to the crest of our anchor and were fortunate to set on our first attempt.

The following morning we awoke feeling invigorated and eager to explore. We landed our dinghy in calm waters in front of the small fish camp, alongside several worn pangas that were med-moored to the beach. It was early, but the sun was already scorching the pebble-ridden sand. Neil equated our visit to the island with stepping onto the set of the film Jurassic Park, and aptly so. An abandoned research station,

overgrown and crumbling, is occupied by reptiles, bird nests, and squatting fishermen. Thousands of frigate birds glided through



the air, their hooked beaks resembling those of pterodactyls.

We hiked the trail that winds from the tattered fish camp toward the apex of the southern bluff. Iguanas sauntered across the



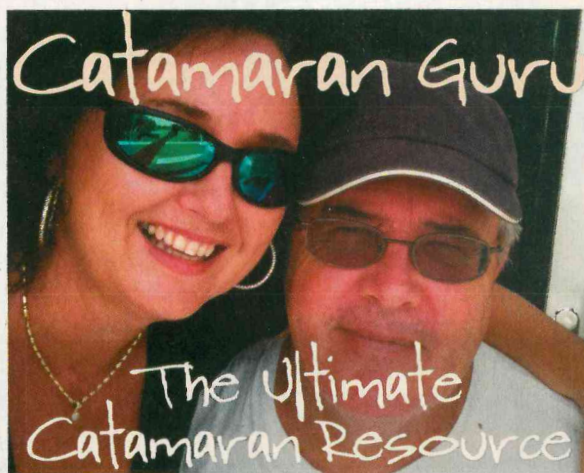
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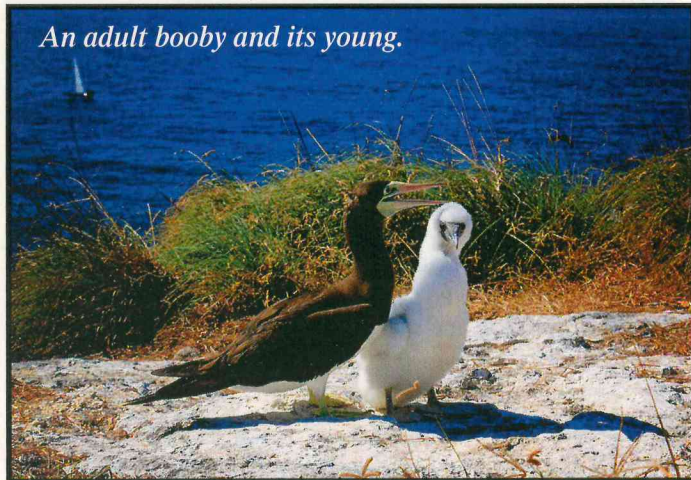
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An adult booby and its young.



The frigate inflates its gular sac for mating



trail and stretched across rocks, basking beneath the heat of the sun. Tiny green lizards darted through the grass. Tree branches were weighed down by masses of frigates busily building nests, incubating eggs, or nurturing hatchling chicks. Males drummed their beaks upon their vibrant, red gular pouches with bravado, a display that was both fascinating and bizarre. Hundreds of birds swooped and dove though the air. The cacophony of sounds from the canopy was overwhelming.

The booby rookery is situated atop the bluff, where blue-footed and brown boobies scatter their nests on the ground. Our short, steep hike to the summit was rewarded with stunning vistas of the island! At the island's center is a glistening still water lake, perhaps a remnant of the caldera that formed the remote paradise. Rolling foliage blankets the island and ends abruptly

at the edges of vertical cliffs, whose precipitous walls are mottled in reds and blacks, further evidence of the island's volcanic birth. It was impossible to look in any direction without spying a dozen or more parents-to-be diligently looking over their modest nests. Dark or light feathers framed the blue and green faces of brown boobies, shielding gentle brown eyes like a bonnet. Most birds were incubating a single egg, but some were protecting two. Decades without natural predators had cultivated a mild-mannered, unassuming flock, and the brown boobies followed us calmly with their gazes. Blue-footed boobies were fewer and generally more vocal and skittish. We were told that blue-footed boobies were more prevalent on the rocky southeastern bluffs. Our midwinter visit meant that few chicks had hatched, but those who had were a sight to see! Their size belied their immaturity (they were nearly as large

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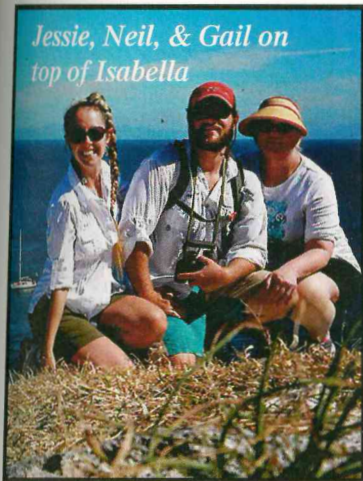
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Jessie, Neil, & Gail on top of Isabella

as their parents!), but they were downed in pristine white, cotton candy plumage that revealed with certainty that they were juveniles.

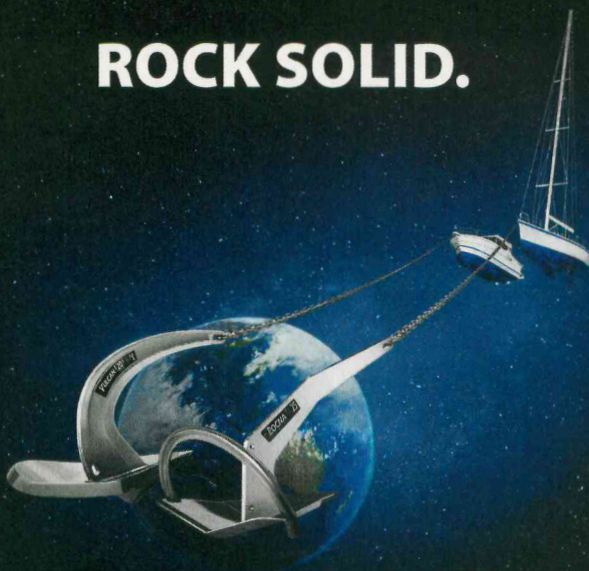
We spent two memorable days anchored in the lee of Isla Isabela. We explored the bay on our inflatable stand-up paddleboard, snorkeled in some of

the clearest water we'd seen in our 2,500 miles of sailing, and reconnected with friends on S/V *Sarita* whom we'd met 16 months prior during our sailing honeymoon on the west coast of British Columbia, Canada. From the comfort of the anchorage, we watched the continuous vortex of birds circling like a halo above the island, and Neil dove into the water and snorkeled for another incoming boat, paying forward the kindness we'd been shown upon our own arrival. A humpback whale spouted less than 100 yards from the entrance to the cove, and she and her calf surfaced repeatedly before our eyes. Fishermen zipped out to sea in pangas, their smiling faces leathered from years of hard work beneath the tropical sun. 



One of many iguana on Isabella


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