

Nine of Cups – Liberty 458 Cutter – 7' draft

Subject Area: Islas Juan Fernandez

The volcanic Islas Juan Fernandez are a group of three islands (Robinson Crusoe, Santa Clara and Alejandro Selkirk) and a spattering of islets that lie about 400 miles west of Santiago, Chile in the South Pacific Ocean. The island group has an area of 56 square miles. The only industry is fishing and lobstering and the islands' waters are well known for the lobsters caught there. The largest island, Robinson Crusoe, named after its most famous celebrity, has a population of about 600 Spanish-speaking people, mostly located in the little town of San Juan Bautista. The islands were discovered in 1563 by the Spanish navigator Juan Fernandez who originally named them Mas a Tierra (closer to land) and Mas Afuera (further away).

In case you're unfamiliar with the Robinson Crusoe legend, it was immortalized in 1719 by Daniel Defoe after reading the true account of Alexander Selkirk, marooned on the island for four years and four months by the British privateer *Cinque Ports* after irreconcilable differences with its captain.

On three separate occasions in the past, we had intended to stop at Robinson Crusoe, but for one reason or another, we never managed it. This time we were intent on stopping. We arrived in Bahia Cumberland on the north side of the island and hailed Juan Fernandez Radio on Channel 16 with an immediate response from the Chilean Armada and permission to tie up to one of the two moorings provided free of charge to visiting yachts due to the generosity of the Higuerillas Yacht Club (Chile).

Most of the island was declared a Chilean national park in 1935 and is maintained by CONAF (Cooperacion Nacional Forestal), the Chilean equivalent to the US National Parks and Forestry Service. The island is a botanist's heaven: of 140 island plant species native to Juan Fernandez, 101 grow nowhere else on Earth. Additionally, there are several endemic birds (Juan Fernandez hummingbird and the Juan Fernandez Tit-Tyrant that we saw) and the Juan Fernandez Fur Seal (thought to have been extinct) is now thriving, though still considered endangered. It is also a hiker's paradise with several well-marked, well-maintained trails criss-crossing the island and offering scenic vistas from many vantage points.

If you go (and we highly recommend that you do):

On arrival: Contact Juan Fernandez Radio (channel 16) to announce your arrival and intention to anchor or moor. The Chilean Armada is cordial, helpful and efficient and answers in English.

Anchorage: 33S38.38 / 078W49.53 If the moorings are available, you'll be invited to pick one up. Do so if you can. They are well maintained, safe and free. Violent williwaws have a tendency to sweep down through the valley through the mountains. We saw 40+ knots one night when we were there. If no moorings are available, anchor between the two moorings in 45-50 feet with good holding. The moorings are maintained by Pedro (Peter) Niada (he answers to both names and speaks excellent English). Be sure to stop

by and say hello and sign his guest book. Be prepared for the williwaws! We removed our bimini to save it from being torn to shreds.

Check-in: The Capitanía's office (Port Captain) is located at the end of the pier. There is no Customs or Immigration offices here. We paid no fees having come from mainland Chile. Checkout is done here as well.

Dinghy Tie-up: A long pier extends from the town with several sets of stairs and ladders for unloading and loading. You can safely tie up the dinghy under the pier by the stairs closest to shore. An aft line may be necessary to keep the dinghy off the pier pilings.

Amenities & Services:

- Several small mini-marts offer basic supplies, eggs, some freshies, wine, beer, soda.
- Fresh bread is available along the main street.
- Fresh water is available on the pier
- Fuel is limited, but can be purchased. Contact Pedro.
- Laundry services are available thru Pedro.
- Correos Chile (post office) is on the main street across from the park.
- Internet is available on the main street and in several of the small guesthouses and hostals in town. Average price is 1.000 CLP/hour. (About \$1.75 US)
- Several small restaurants offer local fare including lobster, but the prices are dear. We lunched at Restaurante De Baron Rodt opposite the Catholic church and tried their specialty “vidrialasso”...a huge yellow amberjack filet sandwich. For two sandwiches and two bottled beers, we paid about \$18US.
- Crafts – black coral jewelry (from coral that has washed ashore or come up with lobster traps, we’re told) seems to be the most common offering. Otherwise t-shirts, postcards and the usual souvenir fare is available.
- Trash disposal in bins opposite the Capitanía and throughout town; separate organic and non-organic matter.

Things to Do:

- Visit the CONAF information office opposite the square. There you can pay your park fees (3.000 CLP/pp). You can also buy an island map (2.000 CLP) or just ask for a free photocopy of the trails. CONAF also has a larger administration office with an interpretive center outside of town about a 15 minute walk.
- Hiking: Several hikes are available. A can’t miss is “Mirador de Selkirk” (Selkirk’s Lookout) where he supposedly climbed each day to check for passing ships. It is an easy-moderate hike on a switch-backed trail leading to a saddle between mountains and affords a great view of both sides of the island. (4 hours up and down including a picnic lunch at the top). At the top is a commemorative plaque to Selkirk. We also did Plazoleta del Yunque, an easy hike to a campground with a self-guided tour through endemic flora at the top. We opted to go it alone, but you can hire a guide if you wish. Ask Pedro, Marcelo or Carlos.
- Buy a lobster and steam it yourself; ask on the pier. Going rate was about 6000 CLP/ each.
- Identify as many of the endemic species as you can on the island. We especially enjoyed the hummingbirds (Juan Fernandez Firecrows). They are sexually dimorphic (males are red and females are green and blue with white spots) and

- feed on the blossoms of the endemic cabbage tree which line the main street. There are a huge number of endemic ferns, trees and other flora.
- Swim with the Juan Fernandez fur seals - Either SCUBA or snorkeling. Ask Pedro.
 - Visit the tiny museum...free entrance.
 - Visit the “Dresden” memorial...WWI German ship which was cornered by the British and intentionally sunk in Cumberland Bay by her captain to avoid capture. Memorabilia at the museum and a memorial in the tiny cemetery.

All in all, this was an outstanding place to visit. We stayed nearly a week instead of the three days we had originally intended. The people are friendly and the island is unique and interesting to explore.

We had intended to stop at Alejandro Selkirk island as well...about 90 nm west. It is an open roadstead anchorage and southerly winds at 25 knots were not favorable for a stop. There is a seasonal lobstering community there (November-April) of about 40 people. If you plan to go, bring the mail from Robinson Crusoe. They monitor channels 16 and 61 and will offer you a mooring if available. Otherwise, the fishermen advise that the anchorage is rocky with poor holding.

For more photos and information about Islas Juan Fernandez, visit our website at www.nineofcups.com.

Commodores Marcie (AA1ZM) and David Lynn (AA1ZL)