

CSI UPDATE

December 31, 2016

Introduction

The **Caribbean Security Index (CSI)** at freecruisingguides.com helps cruisers assess *risk* of crime at ports of call in the Caribbean. It provides a straightforward means of assessing the odds in a given area and tracking changes in probability.

CSI ratings are derived from an examination of the relationship between crime and socio-demographic factors such as unemployment, education level, and literacy; as well as the presence (or absence) of security, infrastructure, and history of crime in a country/island. Probabilities affect us in everything we do. The **CSI** does not list crimes committed in an area; it helps identify the odds going forward. Responsible skippers play close attention to weather forecasts and take advantage of weather windows; the **CSI** allows skippers to assess crime windows. Some background for the **CSI** follows.

The **Index** is presented on a scale of 1 to 10 with notation. We can assess only *reported* incidents, a subset of all crimes against cruisers. There is little consistency in crime reporting and/or official recording either within one country or across all countries in the Caribbean. Violent crimes (assault, frequently with robbery; or piracy) always shock the cruising community and the news travels far and fast. So we are more confident of the core accuracy of these reports than of the multitude of property crimes which in many places have become a more or less tolerated nuisance, like mosquitoes. They're there; they're not going away; so you use an insect repellent and sail on. However, these lesser crimes can be expensive and time consuming; and there are changes over time.

The geographic framework for **CSI** analysis is the Caribbean sector layout pioneered in *A Thinking Man's Guide to Voyages South* (Virgintino). These divisions and destinations make navigational and cruising sense, and **CSI** analysis applies as well. (See following map.)

NORTH sector -- the Greater Antilles plus Jamaica and the Cayman Islands;

EAST sector -- the Lesser Antilles plus Trinidad and Tobago);

SOUTHEAST sector -- the ABCs plus the Venezuelan mainland and islands;

SOUTHWEST sector -- coastal countries from Colombia to Mexico.

It is worth noting that the majority of cruisers to the Caribbean start their journey from the east coast of North America and, depending on route and point of entrance into the Caribbean, many cruise through the Bahamas and so **CSI** keeps tabs on the Bahamas.

In addition to the **CSI**, Noonsite and the Safety and Security Net offer cruisers the best Caribbean-wide crime reporting structure. They vet incidents reported to them very carefully. The crimes reported fit into six categories:

Theft – Involves *neither weapons nor violence*, but possibly boat boarding.
Burglary – Breaking into and entering a locked yacht *while crew is away*.
Robbery – Boarding of a yacht by one or more intruders, *with weapons*.
Assault – Injuries to and/or physical restraint of crew in the course of a robbery.
Piracy -- Assault and robbery at sea.
Vandalism/Bad Behavior --

Assault and robbery go together. Boarders armed with even a primitive knife or machete when crew is aboard can be a deadly mix. To these categories we add *attempts*, crimes that are unsuccessful for a variety of reasons. In the case of attempted theft or burglary (which do not involve weapons), getting scared off by on-board crew (ideally including a canine companion) or third parties has proved the most effective deterrent. The most recent addition is *piracy*, which is assault and robbery at sea.



Fig. 1. THE FOUR SECTORS OF THE CARIBBEAN BASIN PLUS THE BAHAMAS

The **Caribbean Security Index** is designed to assist cruisers in planning successful adventures while minimizing risks of falling victim to crime. The more incidents that are reported rather than whispered about, the sharper the picture will be. You can help fellow (and sister) cruisers by reporting incidents that you reliably know about to Noonsite or to Safety and Security Net (CSSN) or to Catherine@freecruisingguides.com.

Dr. Catherine Helson, Director
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Overview

For all the notoriety attached to crime, and especially violent crime, in the Caribbean, the total number of *reported* incidents in 2016 is not significantly different from 2015. In fact, if a particular cluster of robberies (same place, same time frame) were reported as one crime, the total number of *reported* crimes would be about even. (Fig. 1) Another way of looking at the total number is to list the countries from which the reports emanate. Over the past four years, the number of countries has risen, but there only five countries are consistently listed: Grenada, Martinique, Panama, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent. (Fig. 2)

Year	# reported incidents
2008	89
2009	66
2010	114
2011	79
2012	46
2013	36
2014	89
2015	78
2016*	88

Fig. 2

Of the five consistent entries, four are in the eastern Caribbean; only Panama is in the west, the frontier as it were. The eastern Caribbean is the Leeward and the Windward Islands, the most popular, quintessentially “Caribbean”, cruising waters. The density of cruising boats in these islands means that they comprise a target-rich environment for deliberate and/or opportunistic bad actors. The crimes reported here are for the most part property crimes and they make up the bulk of total reported crimes throughout the Caribbean no matter the year.

Because of the insurance proscription against boat storage north of 12°N in hurricane season and cruisers’ preference to sit out hurricane season at home, even with boat minders engaged, untenanted boats on moorings or in yards present a special low-risk opportunity for thieves. (Fig. 3)

We turn now to violent crimes, namely assaults (with or without robbery involved), and in the past two years after a welcome hiatus, piracy.

After a half dozen years of *no* piracy reports anywhere in the Caribbean, there were 2 in 2015 and 5 in 2016. While it may be fun to pretend at “pirates of the Caribbean”, it is no laughing matter to be menaced and/or boarded at sea. The two locations of four of the five incidents are no surprise: Two of the incidents occurred along the passage between Trinidad and Grenada, most probably perpetrated by Venezuelan thugs; two off the coast of Nicaragua, a generally isolated and lawless region. The

Reported crime by country, by year			
2013	2014	2015	2016
		Anguilla	
			Antigua
	Barbados		Barbados
Belize			Belize
	Bonaire		Bonaire
	BVI		BVI
	Caymans		
Colombia		Colombia	Colombia
			Cuba
		Curacao	Curacao
	Dominica	Dominica	
DR	DR		DR
Grenada	Grenada	Grenada	Grenada
		Gren-Trin Pass	Gren-Trin Pass
Guadeloupe	Guadeloupe	Guadeloupe	
		Guatemala	Guatemala
Haiti		Haiti	
		Honduras	Honduras
Martinique	Martinique	Martinique	Martinique
	Nicaragua	Nicaragua	Nicaragua
Panama	Panama	Panama	Panama
PR	PR		PR
			St Barts
St Kitts			
St Lucia	St Lucia	St Lucia	St Lucia
St Maarten	St Maarten		
	St Martin	St Martin	
SVG	SVG	SVG	SVG
USVI			USVI
Venezuela	Venezuela	Venezuela	
15	17	17	19

Fig. 3

fifth and last (of 2016) act of piracy occurred in a more unlikely place, quite near the coast of St Croix in the USVI. It was also perhaps the worst in terms of the treatment of the solo sailor.

	A&R + A + P	Total
2011	11	79
2012	7	46
2013	5	36
2014	8	88
2015	15	78
2016	13	88

Fig. 4

To put violent crime further into perspective, Figure 5 shows all categories of crimes against cruisers from 2008 on. Theft certainly, and burglary in most years, are the most frequent crimes.

However, if we add together assaults and robberies, outright assaults, and acts of piracy, we see that the relative *percentages* have been a fairly consistent segment of total reported crimes.

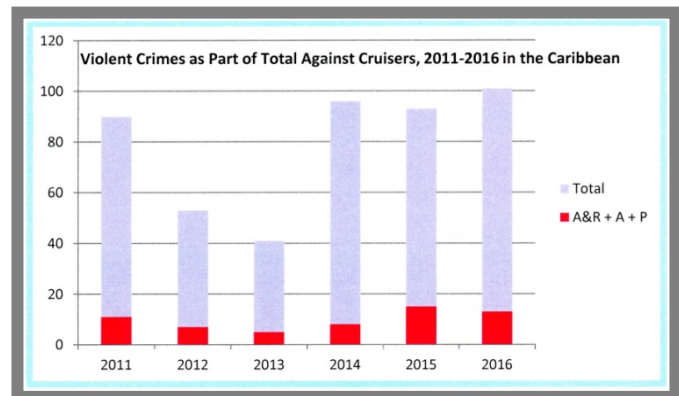


Fig. 5

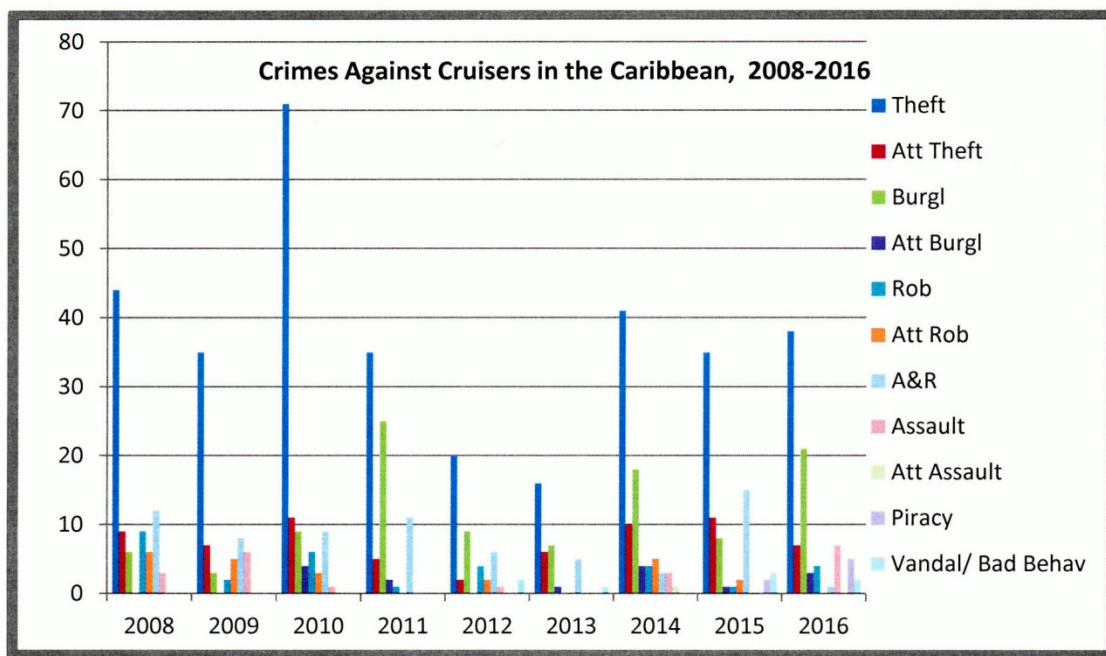


Fig. 6

Figure 7 (below) shows the distribution of reported crimes during 2016 among the countries where they were reported, of the 44 island and coastal countries enumerated in the four sectors of the Caribbean.

	Theft	Att Theft	Burgl	Att Burgl	Rob	Att Rob	Assault & Rob	Assault	Att Assault	Piracy	Vandal/ Bad Behav
NORTH											
Cuba	2										
DR		1	1								
PR	1	1	1								
EAST-Leewards											
Antigua		1	2								
BVI	1										
St Barts	1										
St Martin	3				1						
USVI										1	
EAST-Windwards											
Barbados	1										1
Grenada	6	2	12	2			1	1			
Martinique	2										
St Lucia	8	1	2	1							
SVG	4		1		2			4			1
Trinidad					1					2	
SOUTHEAST											
Bonaire			1								
Curacao	1										
SOUTHWEST											
Belize	1	1						1			
Colombia	1							1			
Guatemala	2										
Honduras	1										
Nicaragua										2	
Panama	3		1								

Fig. 7

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN: MAINTAINING PERSPECTIVE and EXERCISING CAUTION

To repeat a quote from Departures Magazine, “30 times more people are killed by falling coconuts than by shark attacks, but the sharks get all the attention while the coconuts get off scot free.” The Caribbean Sea covers approximately 1 million square miles while the total surface area of the earth is nearly 200 million square miles. We’re talking about an area that is one half of one percent of the earth’s surface. The islands alone comprise less than 90,000 square miles. It comes as no surprise that cruisers encounter property crime given their “nesting” habits in clusters in harbors and mooring fields, frequenting the near upland for restaurants and provisioning. Or that as cruisers become more inventive in their efforts to thwart theft, the perpetrators adapt. The challenge is akin to squirrel-proofing a birdfeeder -- it works for a while, until some wily squirrel figures out a way to defeat the tactic.

The remaining 910,000 square miles of the sea represents a different type of hunting ground for predators (in this case pirates) who target (mostly lone) cruising boats. Technological change has benefited pirates as well as cruisers. Bigger boats, bigger outboard engines (perhaps yours), bigger guns, and cellphones.

The fact is that the record of reported crimes against cruisers in the Caribbean has largely been comprised of property crimes. But with 5 acts of piracy and 8 other violent crimes in 2016, only the myopic would fail to see that the Caribbean is not immune to the violence directed against travelers spreading around the globe. The big difference between cruising sailors in the Caribbean or -- on any of the more than seven seas -- and other kinds of tourists is that other tourists are more protected. From airport shuttles to all-inclusive resorts where visitors are locked in and locals are locked out to safaris where the cost of armed guards is part of the safari package cost.

Cruisers, on the other hand, regularly exercise their sense of adventure and their independence so it behooves them to understand their "personal maximum" of risk taking and then plan all aspects of their routing accordingly.

Minimize risk. Preparing a float plan and "filing" it with friends and fellow cruisers is basic common sense. Preparing an emergency defense plan is prudent. However, execution of the emergency plan depends on acute situational awareness, something that is difficult to maintain when one is woken in the middle of the night by small sounds and forgets in the fog of sleep the defensive measures that had previously been agreed to. Or when one wakes in the morning, having slept through an intruder on board.

Minimizing risk at sea is more problematic, as pirates in fast boats usually have big guns – and do not hesitate to use them. There has also been the unsettling fact that they are beginning to hunt in packs. Situational awareness here is all well and good, but standard land-based "active shooter" responses are of little use at sea for many reasons: there is no place to escape to; it is well-nigh impossible for the average cruiser to match the firepower of pirates; and language incompatibility may make it impossible to defuse the situation.

A standard ruse to get alongside your boat is to ask for water. This raises an existential question for cruisers who have embraced the fellowship of the seas and whose first reaction is to help: How do you – or should you – overcome the growing need for suspicion and vigilance?

Avoidance. Avoiding those places where officialdom and the local communities will not or cannot assure some level of safety of property or far more important, persons, is the surest way to protect crew and vessel. But then where would we adventure?

Some countries and communities are more attentive to the negative impact of crime and either work hard to prevent it and provide security; or to assist victims in the aftermath; or both. In other places there is more effort to protect image by either sweeping details under the rug altogether or minimizing the severity. Thanks to the extensive cruiser grapevine this is not possible in the case of violent crime.

It does not help cruisers' perceptions of a place when inquiries to police and other officials go unanswered and unacknowledged. Both CSSN and Noonsite make a point of vetting reports and publishing follow-up reports, including about the responsiveness, or not, of local officials.

Cruisers have choices, but choices come with the responsibility for risk management. When we perceive the risk to be greater than the reward, we can unfurl our sails and move ahead.

To conclude:

- Crimes against cruisers were reported from 21, almost half, of the Caribbean countries.
- Crimes against property (theft, burglary, robbery) vastly outnumbered violent crimes against cruisers.

- Crimes against property have become more daring, and inventive.
- Piracy and attempts have increased in number and violence from the year before.
- The highest numbers of crimes continue to be reported from the locations with the greatest numbers of boats.
- Violence is escalating during crimes against persons.

Country by Country

NORTH QUADRANT

GRAND CAYMAN

Ratings: In harbor 9.8 Anchored out 9.8
Mitigating factors... Grand Cayman continues to score high in all stability factors.

SISTER ISLANDS (CAYMAN)

Ratings: In harbor 9.8 Anchored out 9.8
Mitigating factors... Like Grand Cayman, the Sisters score high in all stability factors.

CUBA

Ratings: At marinas...9.8 Anchored out...9.8
Mitigating factors... Cuba had significant yacht traffic even before the rapprochement with the US and until this year there was not even minor crime against yachtsmen. Work continues on improving the physical infrastructure for cruisers. However, there are still unmapped physical challenges such as random, unmarked, submerged, obsolete structures. Exercise navigational caution. Commodore Escritch of the Hemingway International Yacht Club has worked hard to make Cuba hospitable to marine recreation, e.g., cruising, bill fishing, and tournaments, etc., and graciously welcomes US cruisers to Cuban waters.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Ratings: At marinas...9.6 Anchored out....8.8
Mitigating factors... Luperon and Samana harbors have been troubled by theft.

HAITI

Ratings:

HAITI	In harbor	5.8	Anchored out	N/A
Ile à Vache	In harbor	9.6	Anchored out	N/A

***Mitigating factors...** Large concentrations of people in conditions of poverty are especially prone not just to crime, but to violent crime. There were safe stops in Haiti vetted in *A Cruising Guide to Haiti* which are nowhere near PaP. However, Hurricane Matthew passed directly over Haiti in October and the poorest country in the Western hemisphere is still recovering.

Ile à Vache values visits by cruising boats and their patronage of local businesses, as evidenced by its history of policing itself. Unfortunately IaV was devastated by Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. It will take time to recover.

JAMAICA

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6 Anchored out 7.8

Mitigating factors... If anchored out in less heavily trafficked areas, consider the rating to drop to 6.6. **Do NOT anchor immediately E or W of Kingston.**

PUERTO RICO

Ratings:

At marinas 9.4 Anchored out 9.0

Mitigating factors... Take care if anchored out in less heavily trafficked areas.

EAST QUADRANT (LESSER ANTILLES)

VIRGIN ISLANDS

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Ratings:

At marinas...9.4 Anchored out 9.8

Mitigating factors... Reported crime is very low; take extra care in marinas on Tortola.

US VIRGIN ISLANDS

Ratings:

At marinas 9.2 Anchored out 7.6

Mitigating factors... If St Thomas, St Croix, and St John's were rated separately, St John's would rate higher, in part due to its extensive national park with its rangers and staff. St Croix would rate lower in light of the near shore vicious act of piracy in January 2016.

EAST QUADRANT – LEEWARD ISLANDS

ANGUILLA

Ratings: At marinas N/A Anchored out 9.8

Mitigating factors... No reported crime in past 7 years.

ANTIGUA

Ratings: At marinas 9.6 Anchored out 9.6

Mitigating factors... Marine infrastructure. There have been incidents of violent crime upland that warrant caution on shore and every few years a single reported theft or attempt. But 2016 saw three reports.

BARBUDA

Ratings: At marinas N/A Anchored out...9.8

Mitigating factors... Laid back environment, safe.

DOMINICA

Ratings: At marinas N/A Anchored out 8.6 

Mitigating factors... No marine infrastructure, a couple of anchorages. Tourists/cruisers are valued.

GUADELOUPE

Ratings: At marinas 9.8 Anchored out 9.6

Mitigating factors... Marine infrastructure is anchored by a government marina with 500 slips at Pointe a Piedre. Ile des Saints continues to be a safe Mecca for cruising yachts in search of a French Mediterranean experience.

MONTSERRAT

Ratings: At marinas N/A Anchored out N/A

Mitigating factors... Yacht facilities are under development on the west side away from the emerald isle's active and growing volcano. No reported incidents.

SABA ●

Ratings:

On moorings 9.8

Anchored out 9.8

Mitigating factors... Yachts visit infrequently; no reported crime.

ST BARTHELMY (ST BART'S) ●

Ratings:

In harbor 9.8

Anchored out 9.8

Mitigating factors... This "jewel of France" has a strong but invisible police presence that usually discourages so much as a criminal thought.

ST KITTS ●

Ratings:

In harbor N/A

Anchored out 9.2

Mitigating factors... Old plantation island with light cruiser traffic. A 6 year string of "no reported crime" was broken in 2013 with an assault & robbery. Nothing reported since.

NEVIS ●

Ratings:

In harbor N/A

Anchored out 9.6

Mitigating factors... Old plantation island with light cruiser traffic. No reported crime.

ST MARTIN/SINT MAARTEN ●

Ratings:

At marinas 8.4

Anchored out 8.4

Mitigating factors... Lots of yachting activity in this yachting hub. The presence of mega yachts makes for added security in one respect, but dinghies and their outboards are perennial targets, although reports are likely the tip of the iceberg. Reported thefts peaked in 2014 and declined in 2015 and again in 2016, most on French side. **NOTE: Probably best to avoid anchoring in the isolated area of Simpson Bay near airport.**

STATIA ●

Ratings:

In harbor N/A

Anchored out 9.6

Mitigating factors... Mainly commercial harbor activity. Yachts visit infrequently; no reported crime.

EAST QUADRANT - WINDWARD ISLANDS

BARBADOS ●

Ratings:

At marinas N/A

Anchored out 9.4

Mitigating factors... Light cruiser activity. Intermittent reported small crime.

GRENADA

Ratings:

At marinas 8.7

Anchored out 7.8

Mitigating factors... Grenada has a small population with a high literacy rate and a long and profitable history of catering to many cruisers which invites property crimes..

GRENADA—TRINIDAD PASSAGE

Rating:

On passage—6.0

Mitigating factors... This stretch of water is popular with cruisers and therefore with pirates from the nearby coast of Venezuela in their big skiffs with significant horsepower as shown in two acts of piracy in 2016.. Plan your passage sensibly.

MARTINIQUE

Ratings:

At marinas 9.4 

Anchored out 9.4

Mitigating factors... Extensive marine infrastructure.

ST LUCIA

Ratings:

At marinas 9.0

Anchored out 7.0

Mitigating factors... In harbor at marinas reasonably safe; anchoring out *increasingly less safe*. The country has been ill managed in recent years, although response time to crime and effort by local authorities have improved somewhat. Rodney Bay Marina management is a good example of proactive business response to problems. Take care south of Marigot Bay..

ST VINCENT

Ratings:

At marinas N/A

Anchored out 5.6

Mitigating factors... Land and seascape beautiful and popular with cruisers. Crimes against cruisers are well documented, although reports declined in 2016.

GRENADINES

Ratings:

At marinas N/A

Anchored out 7.8

Mitigating factors... Land and seascape beautiful and popular with cruisers, but crimes against cruisers are well documented.

TRINIDAD

Ratings:

At marinas 9.4
TTSA 7.0

Anchored out 8.2

Mitigating factors... Trinidad is Chagauramas. The sheer number of boats and concentrated service infrastructure make for a target rich environment for 3 major reasons: TTSA where mooring area is dark and extensive; hurricane season, when most boats are untenanted; and upland. Inverse relationship between quality/cost of marine facilities and the amount of crime. That said, *a dedicated public-private effort over several years has reduced reported crime.*

TOBAGO

Ratings:

At marinas N/A

Anchored out 9.0

Mitigating factors... Consistent history of safety for cruisers.

SOUTHEAST QUADRANT

ARUBA

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6


Anchored out 9.6

Mitigating factors... Country's investment in tourist industry, specifically big cruise ship traffic, translates into greater security and sense of same that spills over to cruisers.

BONAIRE

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6

Anchored out 9.4 

Mitigating factors... Crime is rare in this naturalist's paradise.

CURACAO

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6

Anchored out 9.2



Mitigating factors... Curacao safe for cruisers, but be alert for theft if anchored in Spanish Waters.

VENEZUELA

Ratings:

Mainland
Islands

At marinas 5.0 
At marinas 5.4 

Anchored out 4.0 
Anchored out 4.0 

RECOMMENDATION: CONTINUE TO AVOID!


Mitigating factors... Venezuela persists in its descent into chaos with neither rule of law nor a process for redress in the event of a crime. Escalating political and economic turmoil including high unemployment and food and medical shortages exacerbate violence and criminal activity. Cruisers have largely abandoned Venezuelan waters, causing a counter intuitive drop in crime along the Caribbean coast, but two A&Rs in the Orinoco delta area so far this year signals that the target area has shifted.

SOUTHWEST QUADRANT

BELIZE

Ratings:

At marinas 9.4


Anchored out 7.0 

Mitigating factors... Light cruising traffic, mostly there for SCUBA diving. A violent assault and robbery of cruisers early in 2016 accompanies an uptick in other violent crimes lately.

COLOMBIA

Ratings:

At marinas 9.8

Anchored out 8.2 

Mitigating factors... Strong Coast Guard as well as upland police presence and expansion of marine infrastructure have resulted in cruisers returning to this county; significantly reduced crime. **Extra vigilance always warranted**, especially in remote locations such as the Rosarios Islands where there have been several violent assaults with robbery, recently one each in 2015 and 2016.

COSTA RICA

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6

Anchored out 9.6

RECOMMENDATION: Very safe.

Mitigating factors... Light cruiser traffic.

GUATEMALA

Ratings:

At marinas 9.4

Anchored out 5.8

Mitigating factors... **VERY dangerous if anchoring out.** Marinas lack sufficient security measures for a sure sense of safety.

HONDURAS ●

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6

Anchored out N/A

Mitigating factors... Cruiser traffic is light along this coast. The few reported incidents of crime include a violent attack resulting in murder. Lack of infrastructure is the basis for recommending continued avoidance of this coast at this time. **Exercise great caution.**

HONDURAN ISLANDS ●

Ratings:

At marinas N/A

Anchored out 5.4

Mitigating factors... Magnet for cruisers and divers; also, increasingly, for violent assault. **Exercise great caution.**

MEXICO ●

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6

Anchored out 9.0

Mitigating factors... Marinas on Isla Mujeres have been the preference of the cruising community for ease of entrance into and exit from the western end of the Caribbean.

NICARAGUA ●

Ratings:

At marinas N/A

Anchored out N/A

Mitigating factors... Light cruiser traffic on Miskito coast and lack of marine infrastructure. Two acts of piracy on record in 2016 follow an assault and robbery in 2014 and a chase by pirates in 2015, know that it can be dangerous. Unless weather dictates otherwise, safer to transit off shore.

PANAMA ●

Ratings:

At marinas 9.6

Anchored out 6.0

Mitigating factors... New marina infrastructure. Most cruisers choose marina berthage for greater safety.

SAN BLAS ISLANDS ●

Ratings:

At marinas N/A

Anchored out 9.2

Mitigating factors... Local chieftains keep anchorages safe.

