

## Sunny Spray's travels episode 5

**September 13, 2015, Isla Graciosa, Chinigo Archipel, Canary Islands (North of Lanzarote)**

Dear all,

It is now Sunday afternoon, and as usual, we just made our Sunday morning walk. Well, not entirely; where possible we cycled, and if not possible we walked and clambered.

Because that is mostly what one can do on Isla Graciosa: walking or cycling, or booking a 4x4, get yourself dropped off somewhere and walk back. This is one of the few places in Europe without any asphalt at all, so transport is by way of tracks over rocks or on fine Sahara sand. No roads at all.

This morning we left by bicycle, but after approx. 3 kms we got stuck in the sand, left the bikes behind and did the remaining kilometers walking, on terrain pictured below (it actually features some sort of path, so you cannot get lost). Also, the sea is on the right hand side, so you can't go wrong.



Isla Graciosa, together with 3 other, smaller islands, forms a very large nature reserve North of Lanzarote, and the group goes by the beautiful name Chinigo Archipel. They are all volcanic, so volcanic cones and old craters are determining features of otherwise flat islands. The colours are black and red, yellow, white, grey and grey-green. I did not know a desert (because that is what this is, no water at all)

can be this beautiful. This morning we saw our first wild canary (the bird, *Serinus serinus*). In short, we are enjoying ourselves to the full and are extremely happy we choose this island as our first stopping place following the crossing from mainland Spain. The more so since our destination was by no means fixed when we left Puerto Sherry in the Bay of Cadiz.

So, let's go back a bit in time. The last travel report (episode 4) dated from August 27, when we were in Puerto Sherry, waiting to be taken out of the water on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August to address the problem with the rudder and the wind self-steering gear.

While waiting for the 31<sup>st</sup> to arrive, we spent our days doing small jobs on the boat, and shopping for the crossing to Madeira or the Canary Islands. To break the monotony we visited 'El Poblado Fenicio del Castillo de Doña Blanca', an archeological site. To get there we had to cycle quite a distance, since this site, with findings from the Stone Age, the Phoenician eras, the Roman empire, the Islamic period and the Middle Ages, used to border the sea but now lies more than 12 km inland. And although there is a road nearby, and although there is even the occasional bus, the bus does not stop! near the site, so we had to cycle. The lone employee we met was grumbling about the Andalusian government's neglect of this cultural heritage: "all they are interested in is Flamenco, wine and horses"! We could not agree more, and what a pity for all those tourists not even knowing it exists. Together with another elderly couple, we were that morning's only visitors!

The picture below shows the foundations of many different time periods and cultures, one above the other. The total being some 9 meters deep and covering nearly three thousand years of history.



Monday the 31<sup>st</sup> the boat was lifted out of the water, we cleaned her and the mechanic came to dismount the rudder and see what needed to be done. First of all, the way the rudder was attached appeared to be wrong; the rudder was supported on the top side, instead of on the bottom side, which created one source of friction. In addition, the rudder was badly aligned. Using filling rings of 0.2 mm between the connecting parts, the additional friction could be erased partially, but the available equipment did not allow a proper alignment of the rudder. Hence, with a repair only half done, we went back into the water. Nevertheless, at that point in time, we had good hope that the improvements had been sufficient to allow the windvane to pull through the additional resistance.

While the boat was out off the water, we stayed in quite a nice bungalow (for 6 persons) at the nearby campsite. However, it felt so strange to be away from the boat that we totally forgot to take any pictures.

Wednesday September 2 we were back at our spot in the marina and started preparations for the crossing to either Madeira or the Canary Islands. We removed all clutter from the deck, deflated and stored the dinghy, and made a last trip to the Mercadona supermarket. It is amazing how much we can nowadays load onto the bikes: we manage to get a full shopping cart home that way!



Our preparations also involved a review of our safety measures. We found a new spot to secure the liferaft (close to the railing on the aft deck). We also dug out the sea anchor (our 139 cone Jordan drogue) and stored it, ready for deployment from the aft deck.

The drogue or sea anchor is a very big and heavy construction. It consists of several parts. First come two bridles (20 m of 22 mm rope), which attach to two bolders aft on the poop. They meet in the middle, where they are attached to an equally heavy long line. The first 22 m is just line, but the following 29 meters are equipped with tiny parachutes, one every 60 cm. After the 29 m comes 40 m of another, slightly thinner line, also equipped with parachutes. At the end comes an anchor chain of 10 m, to make sure that the entire contraption will not start flying out of the water. Thus, in total we have 111 m line to which are attached 139 (!! ) small parachutes.

Maybe some of you will remember that I made this contraption during the 2014 winter Olympics. It was extremely time consuming, tedious and at times boring work to splice all these parachutes onto the lines, so I did this work with half an eye glued to the television. Thus, I saw nearly every winter event that was aired.



The principle of the drogue is the following: in case the weather turns really bad, the waves are getting higher and higher, the wind stronger, and the boat's speed too high (it could start surfing off the face of the waves), you want to reduce speed and "anchor". To do so we open the storage area on deck you see in the picture, open the blue bag, take out the two bridles (to be seen lying on deck), attach these to the bolders, then take out the anchor chain (which is the end of the drogue), throw it overboard and make sure that the lines with the parachutes follow. The parachutes give a lot of resistance and create so much drag that the boat's speed will be reduced to 1-1,5 knots. These type of drogues have reportedly saved boats and their crew through hurricanes.

So far, we have not yet tested the drogue, since you need quite deep water to test it properly and getting it back on board seems to be very cumbersome, to say the least (one owner did not manage to get it back on board, so after hours of trying and becoming increasingly frustrated, he had to cut the line). Of course we will have to practice getting it overboard and retrieving it, but in the meantime it is ready for use, should we need it, and we'll see afterwards how to get it back.

Friday September 4 found us and Sunny Spray ready to leave, so at 10.00 h we filled up the water and fuel tanks (yes, with the correct liquid!), paid a heavy bill (mooring fee, wharf fee, travel lift to get us out of the water, travel lift to get us back into the water, costs mechanic, costs various parts, not counting having to rent the bungalow on the camping), ... and cast off.



The first day we encountered a strong wind much more westerly than expected, which made it difficult to sail southwest to get out of the Strait of Gibraltar. Unfortunately, we soon noticed that all the improvements to the rudder attachments had had not much effect; the windvane installation still did not manage to pull the rudder through the remaining resistance. What a disappointment. Thus, instead of our silent windvane autopilot, we had to engage the very noisy electrohydraulic pump of the electrical autopilot. The noise was terrible and very irritating: a loud and continuous squaking and clicking. On top of this, the thing consumes a lot of electricity, so regularly you have to run the engine to keep the battery full.

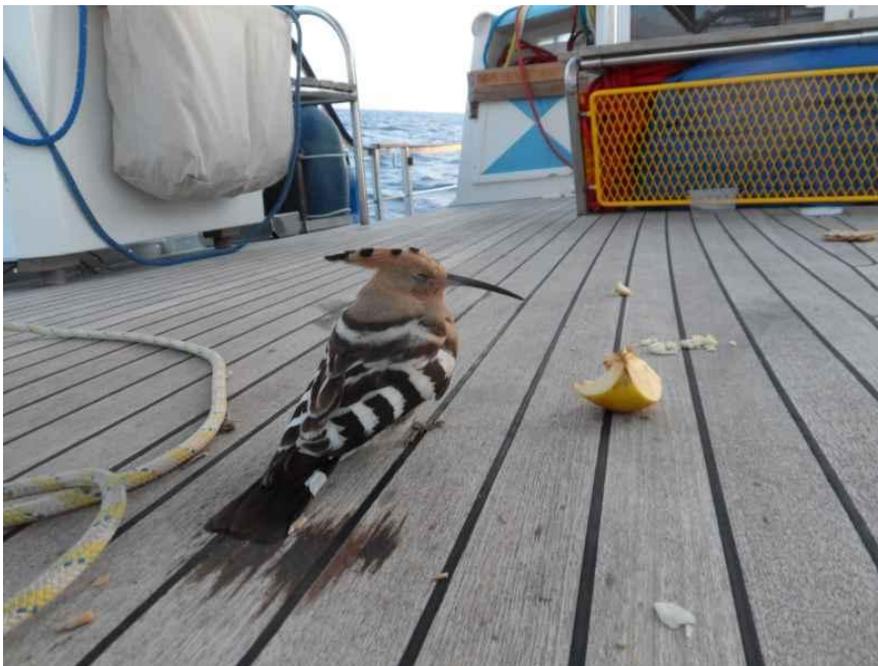
The only advantage of having to run the engine was that we could steer higher to the wind. Nevertheless, we soon abandoned the plan to sail to Madeira, such a trip would have been too uncomfortable given the strong westerly wind. So Canary Islands it was to be, and we set course accordingly.

The first 2-3 days we had plenty of visitors. Nearly daily we saw various types of dolphins, including porpoises, bottle nose dolphins and white bellied dolphins. And we saw (for us) uncommon birds.

The first bird we did not know was a big black bird, as big as a seagull (zilvermeeuw), but with striking white lines on its wings. Our Bird Guide identified it as the Great Skua, (*Stercorarius skua*, 58 cm), not to be confused with the Small Skua (46 cm), de Middle Sized Skua (51 cm), en yes, the Smallest Skua (a surprising 51-56 cm). We always have a good laugh on how these birds are described or the type of names they are given.

The second bird making a surprise visit was a Hoopoe, a bird familiar to us: although it is tropical, it is a recurring visitor to our garden in Pedreguer. Our Bird Guide gives a hilarious description of the Hoopoe: “ the Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), resembles a giant black-and-white nocturnal butterfly (sorry, I wouldn't know), its sound a loud and far reaching hoop-ooop-ooop”. Well, can you just imagine!!

Anyway, this hoop-ooop-oooping Hoopoe really came on board; first it sat on the railing, then moved up front to the prow, sitting next to the anchor, and finally arriving at the aft deck. The poor little fellow was clearly exhausted. It also had a bit of a lame right leg.



While my Bird Guide is very knowledgeable about sounds, it says not much about feeding habits. Of the Hoopoe's family (Kingfishers, Alcedinidae), it only says: "not all members of this family eat fish". Well, that surely helps! Since we do not have mobile reception at sea, we also could not consult the Internet about Hoopoe's food. So I tried everything in the hope to find something the bird could eat: a piece of apple, some lettuce, raw minced meat, spaghetti, bread, a great variety of nuts and seeds (pineapple kernels, sun flower seeds, peanuts, sesame seeds, dates, prunes), we searched in every drawer. Hoopoe did not want to eat anything, although it became tamer and tamer, touching with its beak my hand to try out what I was offering.

When night fell, Hoopoe had advanced to the bench in front of the pilot house. During the night I could not find him anymore, and next morning, with first daylight, we searched every nook and cranny, but Hoopoe was definitely gone. What a pity, I would have loved to report to you that we had a new pet on board (provided we had managed to find food for it).

Poor Hoopoe, we hope he safely reached the Moroccan coast (100 km away) or Southern Spain (at that moment 250 km away). But we fear the worst.

*After writing this I searched the Internet: a Hoopoe eats insects and spiders.*

The next animal visiting us was also very welcome, but for a different reason: Monday September 7 Bob caught his first fish! Quite a feat, given that only that morning Bob had thought to trail a fishing line behind us, had never noticed anything, and only found the fish when he was reeling in the line in preparation for the night.

When the fish came out of the water it was shiny golden, with a black dorsal fin running uninterrupted from his head to its tail. Also, its lateral line had a bend above its ventral fin.



We searched every page of our Fishing Guide, and the only one found with these characteristics was a Dolphinfish (*Coryphaena hippurus*). We are not quite sure about the correct identification, since these fish can grow to 1,2 meter, with a big knob on their head. The fish we had caught was only 30 cm, and no knob to be seen. Therefore, it might have been a juvenile one. The Fishing Guide did say they were very tasty, and boy, were they right!! The fish tasted delicious, had firm white flesh, and big bones that were easy to remove. We had a super dinner, eaten at a super location (see photo).



And on top of all these unexpected animal visits, also the nearly daily visits of a variety of dolphins.

I sincerely hope that none of you ever thinks again that life on board at sea must be boring and primitive! And by the way, for the non-sailors among you: you cannot stop the boat or sleep late, sailing continues day and night, with three hour shifts to keep watch, so you sleep often but short.

By now we had advanced a bit over halfway, and finally the wind shifted to the corner we wanted: the Northern sector. Until Lanzarote the wind stayed there, and we had the fairest sailing weather you can imagine. Downwind, blowing between 6-12 knots, meaning we made speeds between 4,5 and 7 knots. Accordingly, we made great progress.

In fact, it was ideal, apart from the squaking and clicking of the electric autopilot. Occasionally we had really had it with the noise, turned it off and steered by hand, but downwind with a bit of a sea running steering by hand is a bit awkward with Sunny Spray, so after a couple of hours we usually gave up and re-engaged the autopilot.

At this point in the story it is a good moment to explain a bit about the rigging and the sails, as promised last time.

Sunny Spray is rigged as a ketch, meaning the forward mast (main mast) is larger than the back mast (called the mizzen mast). Our sails are Chinese junk sails, meaning large, nearly square sails with a gaff at the top. Under the gaff you find a series of horizontal tubes, called battens. Because of the gaff and the battens, the entire sail consists of several sections. The main sail contains 8 sections, the mizzen sail contains 7 sections.

From the third section downwards each and every section has its own point where the sheet can be attached. This is a significant difference as compared to a Bermuda rig, where the sail is only attached to a sheet at the bottom part of the boom. The advantage of the sheet attachment to every section is that every section can be controlled separately. For example, reefing becomes quite easy: all you need to do is loosen the halyard and the entire sail, with the cloth and battens and all, starts coming down. The bottom-most section will fall between the lazy jacks, and if you decide to leave it at that, you have reefed one section, with respectively 7 (main sail) or 6 (mizzen sail) sections remaining. When you release the halyard again, the entire sail will lower itself, until the then bottom most section falls between the lazyjacks. You will then have left respectively 6 (main sail) or 5 (mizzen sail) sections. The weight of the gaff and all the battens above will help to keep the lower panels down. This way, you can continue to reef.

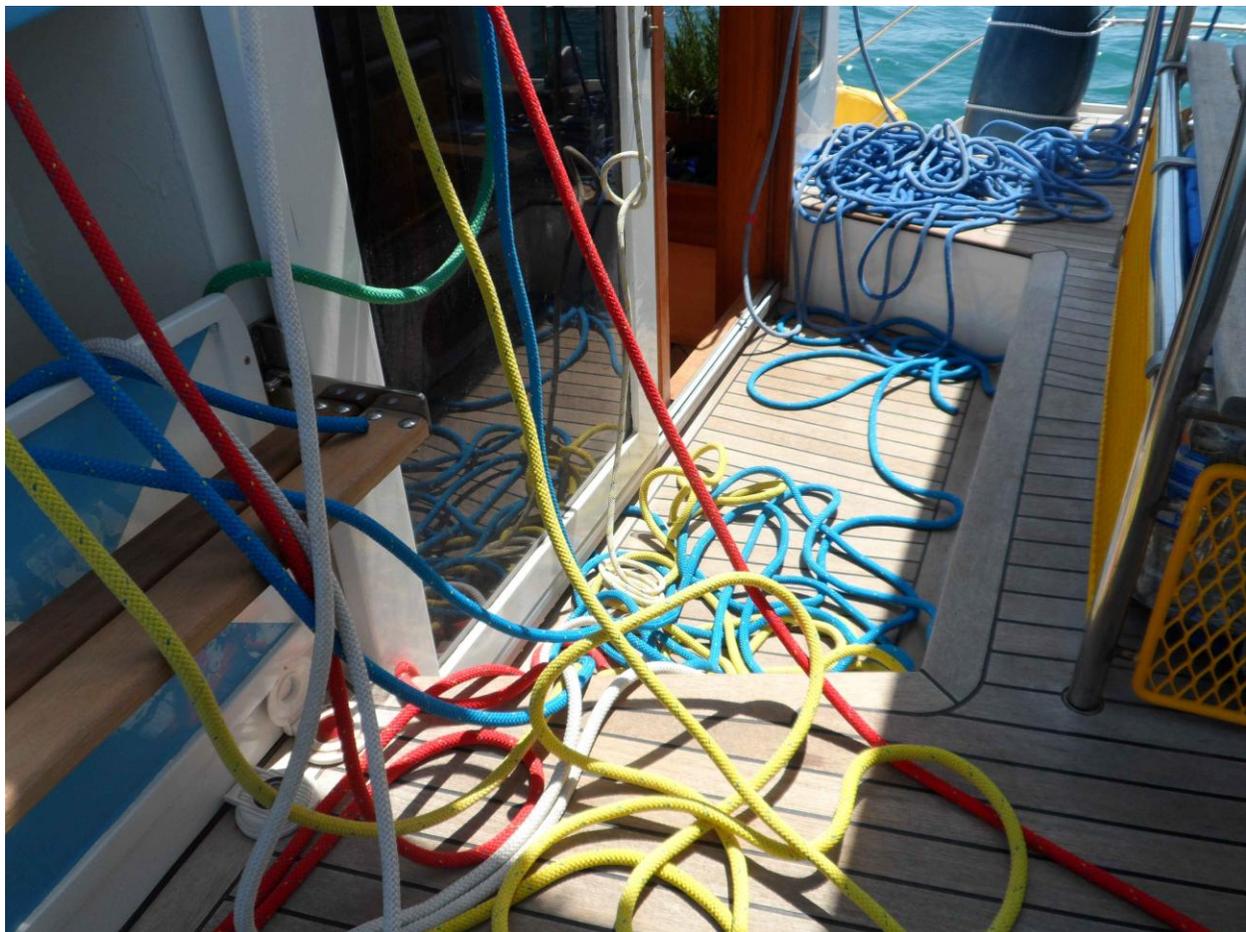
In the photo below you see the main sail, with the gaff at the top, then a curve, and at the third section starts the point where every section is connected to the sheet. The sheet is the blue rope on the left.



This all sounds quite ideal, but of course reality is different. First of all our inexperience with this rig means we still make many mistakes, and mistakes are immediately punished by dozens of meters of rope getting entangled, or one rope seizing another so that nothing moves anymore etc.

The main culprit is the amount of rope you are dealing with. First there is the sheet, which we have cut in two for easier handling, one of 40 meters for the top sections of the sail, and one of 30 m for the bottom sections of the sail.

Second, the problems arise when, for instance while reefing, you have to gather in a lot of rope at the same time you are lowering a section. Because the sheet goes up and down to every section, you might, for instance, have to gather in 12 m of rope for a 2 meter drop of the sail (I never measured this exactly, but it gives you an idea). If you do not gather in the sheet completely, it will, without fail, wrap itself around one or more of the 5 or 6 remaining battens. A nightmare! Thus, you have to execute this manoeuvre with a lot of care and the one hauling in the sheet has to pull like mad. On the picture below you see the mess created by all the ropes when lowering a sail. In the top right hand corner you see one part of the blue mainsheet.



The photo also shows that the sheet is only a small part of the enormous amount of rope you are dealing with. Per sail we also have: a green line, which holds up a boom sling. The boom sling holds up the entire mass of battens and sail and prevents it from falling on the deck. Fortunately, you seldom have to touch the green line; the yellow-white lines are of the lazyjacks. These are an essential part of the rigging, and hold up the sail and battens when you are sailing, or lower the sail and battens so it can rest on a cradle. If you forget to lower the lazyjacks, the result will be a wildly swinging mass, which is likely to hurt you badly (my fingers are still smarting from one such mistake); then we still have another blue line (to keep the middle of the gaff close to the mast), a yellow line (used to trim the forward end of the gaff so that the back part of the sail is set tight, important when sailing close hauled); and a white line (at the bottom of the lowest battens, used to trim the entire mass more to the front or more to the back of the boat. And finally there is the red line, which is the halyard, to raise or lower the sail.

The picture below shows the mizzen sail with various of the coloured trim lines: you can see the red halyard, the green boom sling lifter, and the blue and yellow trimlines. The white line is visible at the bottom right hand corner. You can also see we have reefed three sections. The thick white bands are webbing lines, used to hold a section close to the mast.



And all this double!!! Once for the main sail, and once for the mizzen. Fortunately, when you are lowering a sail, you do not need to regulate the trim lines (you only do that when the sail is set or after reefing), but while you are already hauling like mad to gather in the sheet, there are meters and meters of trim lines coming down as well.

Fortunately it is not too much work to clear away the mass of lines. After 15 minutes or so our aft deck usually looks like the picture below. On the right hand side you see the lines coming from the main sail, on the left hand side the lines from the mizzen sail. We use one (electrical) winch for both sails, seen in the middle.



As said before, we are still very inexperienced with these type of sails and rigging. Thus we cannot say whether a junk rig really is that ideal as it is sometimes described, or that bad as is said equally often. We still make a lot of mistakes, we still need a lot of routines to avoid ending up with a big mass of tangled ropes. So far, we give the rig the benefit of the doubt: let's first gain experience. But we should not forget that a Bermuda rig can also present a lot of problems, in particular when sailing downwind. Bob, by the way, is much more positive than I am.

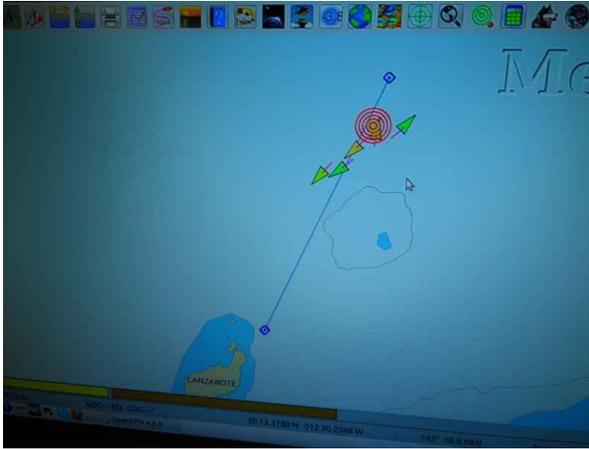
*Note: all the trim lines have very fancy names in English, parrels etc. In an early stage we decided to do away with these (for us confusing) names, and use the colour scheme instead. It works perfect for us. Added advantage: we find all these colours very beautiful, and they fit perfectly with the overall colour scheme of Sunny Spray (being white, yellow and blue with touches of red and dark green)*

Back to our voyage.

Wednesday September 9, at dawn, we spotted our first glimpse of Lanzarote. That was perfect timing and entirely according to plan: close to the island lies an unlit rock, Roque del Este, so during the night we controlled our speed carefully to not arrive too early, we needed daylight to safely pass between the rock and Lanzarote. The picture below shows first sighting of land, beneath the curve on the right hand side.



Unexpectedly, the last two days we had seen a lot of commercial shipping. In fact, we saw more big ships than in the strait of Gibraltar! In the picture below you see how this shipping is shown on our ship's computer: we are the red circle in the middle. If you see a pattern like this, you are not likely wito doze off during your night watch!



Anyway, the islands North of Lanzarote came into view, we passed them quite close, and we decided to try to go to the marina on Isla Graciosa. That sounds logical, but the cruising guide we have spoke very negatively about this marine: “ unfriendly, aggressive armed security guards, very full, need to reserve 10 days ahead of time, no water, no electricity, no shops, hot”. We decided to enter anyway and should need arise, to move 30 miles further south, to Arrecife.

Luckily that was not necessary. Sneakily we only called the harbor authorities once Sunny Spray’s red nose was already between the piers, counting on the fact that it is more difficult to send a boat away once it already is inside the harbor as compared to sending a boat away when it is still some distance off. We were quickly shown an excellent spot.

The security guards are indeed heavily armed, but not aggressive, in fact, they are very friendly and we are on first-name terms with them.

The marina of Caleta de Sebo, as the village is called, is one of the nicest we have ever been to. It is quite cheap, but then, there are no facilities, no electricity, and water only occasionally. Mobile reception is good, so Internet is good as well. According to our cruising guide no shops, but since we are here we have already discovered two tiny supermarkets, one butcher, one bakery, and a very well stocked hardware store. A few bars, one or two restaurants.

When I look to my left, I see a 500 m tall, vertically rising cliff that forms the north part of Lanzarote. It is called Famara. Looking to my right is the village, with a beach. There are 800 inhabitants, complimented each day by 200-300 day tourists who arrive by hourly ferries from Lanzarote proper. Some tourists stay for a couple of days. Most leave with the last ferry, at 8. Behind the village we see the slopes and cones of two of the three vulcanoes.

The picture shows the harbor with Famara in the background. Sunny Spray is on the right hand side, see the two wooden masts.



Life down here is very easy going. A bit like the sixties, Ibiza style. The inhabitants are friendly, and look more north African than Spanish. The tourists are surfers (recognizable by blue tinted sun glasses and low hanging trousers), divers (loud when they enter the harbor after a dive, otherwise very friendly), and yachties (us and a couple of other boats, with whom we have a nice contact). The local variant of the beach-lounge bar on top location looks as follows:



Enjoy, until the next time!

Love, Helma

PS: Marine Traffic ([www.marinetraffic.com](http://www.marinetraffic.com)) was having trouble following us. My sister Ineke contacted them and they fixed it. Thus, we can be found and followed again. Start at the north side of Lanzarote. Sunny Spray (or Sunnys Pray). MMSI 244780434.