

Sunny Spray's travels, Episode 15

Baganara Island/Bartica, Essequibo River, Guyana, September 29 - October 4, 2016

Translated and edited October 6-9, 2016

Dear All,

I wrote episode 14 on August 21st, which ended with a fantastic stay on the tributaries and creeks of the Maroni River. In the meantime we have sailed to Surinam, stayed there for 4 weeks, of which two were spent together with my sister Ineke, and we were making plans to leave for Tobago on September 27. As it happens more often than not with sailing trips, one needs to drastically change plans occasionally. That happened to us with our planned trip to Tobago. On the morning we wanted to leave, Bob made a final check on the 7-day weather forecast for our trip to Tobago. To his dismay he saw a tropical storm developing which, according to predictions, would track over Barbados, the Grenadines, Granada and Tobago, with wind speeds reaching 52 miles an hour! Of course you do not want to be caught out in such a storm, so we changed plans and headed for Guyana instead, the last of the three Guyana countries sandwiched between Brazil in the South and West and Venezuela to the North. Fortunately we had downloaded in St. Laurent a cruising guide covering Guyana. We are very happy that fate brought us here, because the country is beautiful and the River Essequibo is stunning. The first week we were the one and only sailing boat in the country. By now, three more (all Americans) have arrived, and the four of us are all at anchor close to an island resort called Baganara. We have not been with that many sailing boats since the Canary Islands!



On September 20 the NOAS, an American station specialised in the prediction of hurricanes, issued a red alert for a tropical low developing over the Caribbean for the 27th of September (last Wednesday). The colour red is used when there is more than 70% chance that the low pressure area will develop into a hurricane. Tobago was just inside the potential danger zone. In the end this low became hurricane Matthew, which just passed north of Grenada and Tobago, but violently hit Haiti, Cuba and the USA. We are very glad we missed Matthew!!

If you look at the map above, the three Guyana's (from right to left French Guyane, Surinam and Guyana) seem to occupy a rather small area. This is perception. In reality there are quite some distances apart: from St. Laurent de Maroni to Paramaribo in Surinam and up and down the rivers was 271 miles (502 kms), and last week we sailed from New Amsterdam on the Commewine River (just above Paramaribo) to our current anchorage in Bartica, Guyana, a distance of 264 miles (489 kms). Together some 1000 kms, or nearly the distance Amsterdam-Marseille!

More nautical issues: the coast is very shallow and littered with sandbanks. As a consequence you need to be very careful in locating the river entrance. Both the Marowine River (when leaving French Guyane) and the Surinam River (when arriving at Surinam) are very well buoyed, although the navigation channels leading to the river mouth are quite long, some 10-15 miles. These 10-15 miles and the rest of the rivers have to be sailed with the tide; if not, you end up beating against the strong current and spending hours and hours. If you go with the flow of the tide, you are done in half the time (and spend half the amount of fuel).

According to the maps we had, the entrance to the Essequibo River should be buoyed, but all we could find was the outer buoy (vertical red and white stripes). All the other navigational marks that should have been there were missing! Fortunately the downloaded cruising guide gave waypoints with their coordinates, and following those we managed to keep to the channel. It was a bit unnerving, because the channel is very shallow and there was a lot of fishing on stakes to be avoided.



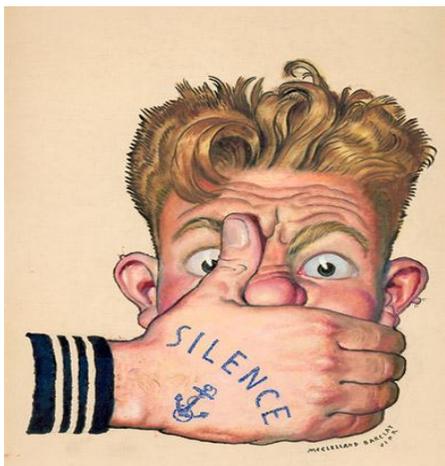
On September 20 we made an overnight stop near New Amsterdam on the Commewine River, so that we could pick up a favourable outgoing tide the next morning. On the horizon you can just about see the lights indicating the navigation channel.



On September 23 we arrived, exactly as planned, at sunrise at the mouth of the Essequibo River. After passing the outer buoy, all we could find were fishing stakes, no other buoys to be seen. Fortunately we had waypoints from a cruising guide to help us find the channel.

By the way, we are very happy with the sailing behavior of *Sunny Spray* after all the changes to the sails and rigging we made in French Guyane. The problems with the bending battens seem to be over, we mainly use the mainsail, leaving the mizzen in its covering, we only hoist the mizzen when sailing half wind or close to the wind (what we do not need to do for the next 300-400 miles). Sailing on only the main sail is a much more relaxed affair, because when the mizzen sail is up we have to be constantly checking that the mizzen sheet does not entangle itself around the vane of Olivia, our wind self-steering device. As for speed, forgetting the mizzen does not make much of a difference, on the main only we still make 5-6 knots with a 10-14 knots wind speed. That is quite good for such a heavy boat, and makes for a ship with an easy movement. Underway Bob even managed to sleep in the big bed inside the stern, instead of propped in between pillows on the sofa in the salon!

Last nautical item: the more we approach the Venezuelan coast, the more we have to be aware of criminally minded people willing to take our money or yacht. We have a cruising guide covering Trinidad and Tobago, which gives the following advice:



Loose lips sink ships

This cartoon and heading in (bold) are accompanied by the following advice:

“Regarding VHF, do not broadcast your position (unless in case of an emergency), nor, for that matter, make any other transmission that might alert people to where you are or are going.”

As a precaution we sailed with the AIS off, and only when well inside the Essequibo River did we turn the AIS back on again.

So much for the nautical news from the past five weeks. Let me now turn to the visiting part, starting with our arrival in Surinam.

On Tuesday August 23 we arrived early morning at the outer channel leading to the Surinam River, only to notice that a strong tide was running against us. As on the Marowine River, we decided to anchor out at sea (depth is less than 4 meters), to sleep a bit and have a leisurely breakfast. In the afternoon, when the tide had turned, we continued our way into the navigable channel. At 18.00 we dropped anchor just at the start of the Surinam River, about 5 miles north of Paramaribo, the capital. We are always glad to arrive just before dark!

The next morning we had risen real early, and were ready for departure at 06.30. Bob started the engine, only to notice that the temperature was rising really fast! We did not see any cooling water coming out of the exhaust pipe. Quick inspection revealed that the V-belt was off the pulley, and since Bob is not familiar with Mercedes engines, we needed help to get a spare V-belt fitted (we had plenty of spares with us). We called MAS (Maritime Authority Surinam) over the VHF, who promised to pass on our request for help. At 10.30 we still had heard nor seen anyone, so we decided to call Noel, our contact person at Marina Resort Waterland, our chosen destination on the river.

That turned out to be a good action: within an hour a canoe turned up, containing two men to assess the problem. They returned at 4 pm, with a faster boat and a team of five: (1) the mechanical assessor of that morning, (2) the assistant assessor (he did absolutely nothing); (3) the son of the boss (only there to call his father about costs); (4) the real mechanic (very capable) and (5) the mechanic's assistant, who was there to carry the mechanic's tools. At 5 pm a new V-belt spanner had been installed and the belt was on again. Not for long, because when the engine was started it jumped off again. But now they had seen what caused the problem: a defect bearing on the water pump! Since they had promised us to get our engine repaired within the day, they organised a quick trip by boat to Paramaribo, taking along the water pump to get the bearing changed. At 8.30 pm the pump was back on again and everything was functioning fine. We had just spent €600, but were very glad that everything had been solved within one day. The five-man strong team was absolutely not in a hurry to leave. After finishing the job they stayed on board, sitting here, looking there, everyone having a great time. At 9.30 pm I managed to get them off the boat, we still had to eat! Welcome to Surinam!



The team of five thought our anchorage was quite a special spot: the white house with the red roof was not a church (as I thought after hearing some singing), but the local high-class brothel. One hundred meters to our right was a very bright search light which kept us from sleeping. That turned out to be the president's private residence (Desi Bouterse).

Thursday August 25 we hoisted anchor and sailed further upriver, to Waterland. First we passed Paramaribo, with Fort Zeelandia quite visible against a backdrop of (restored) colonial houses. Very noticeable was the large amount of maritime activity on the river. Wherever you looked, you saw canoes, small and larger boats, and a lot of industry, such as an oil refinery and a Korean fishing fleet. There was also quite a number of abandoned or half sunk ships.



Paramaribo's waterfront is quite beautiful, with many restored colonial houses.

Just before the Wijdenbosch bridge is the wreck of a German merchant vessel, sunk by its captain and crew at the beginning of World War II. Their motive: preventing the ship from being seized and used by the allies against Germany. This act probably took place with the permission of the then governor of Surinam, who had German sympathies. The wreck is still there.



Just after the Wijdenbosch bridge much commercial maritime activity. To the right a Korean fishing fleet.



The Wijdenbosch Bridge links Paramaribo to the east of the country and is impressively high, allowing tall ships to pass under it. In total, we crossed under this bridge four times. The current is very strong and tends to push a ship to the western pillars. Whenever you pass under the bridge, you have to be really careful, since large commercial vessels are also sailing upriver.

Alongside the Western shore the building is dense. The further upriver, the more expensive and posh the houses.



After sailing with the tide for approximately 4 hours, we arrived at the Marina Resort Waterland: a resort for day recreation (one can rent canoe's, water bikes and small boats, but also sign up for a large buffet on Sunday afternoons), or for weekend or even week recreation (against a stiff fee one could rent beautiful bungalows for 4, 6, 8 or 12 persons). The terrain was excellently maintained, and featured a Buddha pond, a lotus pond, a palm tree lined driveway, a restaurant with bar and many easy chairs under really tall jungle trees, left by Noel to provide much needed shade. There was also a pontoon with space for 10 or 12 yachts. All with slots with sufficient depth, own electricity and own water.



Marina Resort Waterland, a beautifully laid out resort with ponds, terrace annex restaurant, lots of shade and a tiny beach for swimming (only at high tide, with low tides one enjoys a muddy river bottom).

If viewed with Northern European eyes, we had a cheap mooring; if viewed with long distance sailing eyes, it was very expensive. The mooring fee excluded €10 per day for a rental car, absolutely necessary, because the resort was very far away from anything. All in all we spent €30 per day, the highest paid by us since visiting the South Spanish coast last year summer. But it was worth it, both the location and realisation were top class, and frankly speaking, after Kourou and St. Laurent we were in for a bit of luxury.

This more so since Bob was being plagued by a persistent cold, occasionally with a fever, and overall tiredness. In addition he suffered psychologically, because every day he needed to be ready for smaller or larger jobs or repairs. More often than not he exclaimed, “does it ever stop!” (No, it does not). Whilst in Surinam, we suffered problems with the V-belt, the V-belt suspender, the water pump, and also with a defect toilet pump. To repair the latter we did have a spare one with us, but it was a second hand spare, still from our old boat “Fint”. In total Bob needed to take the pump apart 6 times and had to replace all the tubing, membranes and valves before it finally worked again without leakages! Because of this we had to use the bucket instead of the toilet for nearly two weeks.

As if that was not enough, we also suffered a broken starter motor. This came to light after a trip to the Commewine River (see later on), when the engine did not start once it had been running for a while and was hot. Needless to say it had to be removed, and was taken away for repairs, since this brand of starter motor was not to be found in Surinam. After 5 days it came back, and they had repaired a short circuitry, put new coils around the anchor and some more specialised jobs. In addition we decided to have our Jabsco pump (the one that failed to empty the grey water tank when we left Senegal) checked, to see if it would be worthwhile to have it repaired (answer yes, but the parts we need are not available around here).

Fortunately we could avail ourselves of the help of Aat, a Dutch friend of Noel, the resort owner. It all took time, and it all cost money, but thanks to Aat it all ended well.



Marina Resort Waterland took very good care of its guests. It even delivered gas oil! The procedure was that one of the help took a pickup truck to the gas station in Domburg, while we went along to pay for the gas. We tanked 325 liters in two drums of 200 liters each. Back in Waterland the drums were transferred to a wheelbarrow, wheeled alongside the boat, a large hand pump was procured and within a blink of an eye, our on board tanks were filled. Costs: gas was €0.45 per liter, and we paid 15% of the costs of the gas to Waterland for the service.

Being very enthusiastic about Marina Resort Waterland, I had emailed my sister Ineke, giving an outline of the resort and its facilities, and suggested that maybe she would like it if she came to visit us for 10-14 days. I sent the email off on Saturday, and had a reply on Sunday: would it be all right if she came next Thursday, that is, in 4 days' time? Of course that was all right, we replied!

On Wednesday Bob ran a 39 degrees fever, so we went to Paramaribo to visit a medical doctor. The same day they organised blood tests (I was afraid he might have contracted some creepy tropical disease), and we received, per email, the results on Thursday morning. They had not found scary viruses or the like, his fever was possibly due to flu, with some complications, but for sure he suffered from high blood pressure and a vitamin B12 deficiency. For the latter two he needed prescription medication and to return a few times for injections. But first we needed to collect Ineke from Zanderij airport!

Meanwhile, Ineke, all alone, made her first ever long air trip in a large Boeing. The plane was completely full, but fortunately she had an aisle seat. Being of a very cheerful nature, time flew, because she met nice people left and right and chatted with all of them. Apparently she made quite an impression on some, witness the fact that in Atjoni (see later on) a complete stranger got out of a canoe, approached her and asked how she was doing, “don’t you remember madam, we met in the plane!”

Unfortunately we had to wait more than 2.5 hours after the plane had landed before Ineke finally appeared; the Surinamese customs and immigration people had decided to really do a good job and inspect every tiny bit and piece of the traveller’s belongings. In addition she had to acquire, like most other travellers, a visa, because Surinam demands a visa from every tourist or traveller, even from its own Surinamese people with a Dutch passport (which is 80% of the plane – Surinam used to be a Dutch colony, and Dutch is still the official language). A worthwhile money spinner!

By the way, getting customs and immigration clearance for ourselves and *Sunny Spray* also took some time, with three visits to three different offices. Having been warned not to wear flip-flops on your feet, no shorts, no skimpy T-shirts or blouses, we had dressed for the occasion. Apparently our dress code was acceptable, because we received the necessary papers and passport stamps without any problems.



Dealing with officials is not as clear cut as it seems and is subject to arbitrariness: our Dutch boat neighbor Gijs visited the same offices we did, filled in the same amount of paperwork, but was sent back from one place to the other a couple of times before the officials were satisfied. Gijs, like us, had dressed nicely. His Ecuadorian crew member Nico thought it was because he had forgotten to knock on the door of one of the offices. Or maybe it was Nico’s presence that spoiled their mood!

Gijs sailed the “13 Beaufort”, and, as evidenced by the ship’s name, he was looking for adventure. He had just completed a round the world trip, in the opposite direction (that is all the capes and routes against the regular route and favorable winds). He also sailed to Antarctica, and took along as crew three hitch-hikers, who thus got a free ride to Antarctica!! (Normally one has to pay thousands of Euros to join a ship going to Antarctica). He was now heading for colder climes as sick and tired of the heat.

Back at Zanderij Airport, Ineke finally passed the exit doors after 5 pm (having arrived at 3 pm). We drove slowly back to Marina Resort Waterland, not only because of Bob having a fever, or having just crossed the Atlantic, but also because the Surinamese highways are littered with very large potholes. It is absolutely not do-able to avoid these whilst trying to make some speed. And not to mention the very

sharp thresholds that are littering secondary roads. These thresholds are so abrupt and high that even at a complete standstill, one still bonks and scrapes the bottom of the car. Welcome to Surinam!!



Large potholes on the highways. Cars are zig-zagging between the potholes, making for a very strange road view indeed!

We decided to take it easy for the first couple of days. Ineke had to get used to the tropics and recover from her long flight, whilst Bob needed to get rid of his fever. Apart from trips to the doctor or pharmacy (which in fact took hours, given the distance to Paramaribo, heavy traffic and the condition of the roads), we spent many very pleasant hours on the comfortable beach chairs in Resort Waterland.



During weekdays Waterland was all ours; on Sundays there were many local visitors, who came for the buffet and after-lunch water entertainment.

On Saturday we visited the large indoor fresh produce market of Paramaribo, close to Waterside, a famous area. We bought chadeks (a kind of giant grapefruit) and fresh vegetables, in particular “kousenband” (a very long green bean, resembling a women’s stocking, hence the name). I was very fond of “kousenband”; it tasted just like green beans, but was much easier to clean or prepare. We also bought dried shrimps (very nice and handy) and fresh fish.

To our surprise/consternation/dismay there was a lot of bush meat for sale. Monkey's claws were easily recognisable, but we also spotted a skinned armadillo. We were told it all tasted very fine. Once someone told me that nearly all bush meat tastes like chicken, so whenever we saw something unrecognizable, we cried "it will probably taste like chicken". We were "chicken", however, and did not buy any meat, but restricted ourselves to fish.

After a couple of days of peace and resting, we started to draft a sort of programme. In this order we visited Fort Zeelandia, plantation Peperpot, a Butterfly Garden, the Paramaribo Zoo, botanical garden Paraflor and the historical centre of Paramaribo.



Fort Zeelandia (above) borders the Surinam River, and is recognisable from afar by being the only complex of buildings made of bricks (instead of wood). In the old days, those bricks were brought to Surinam as ballast in ships plying the route Surinam to the Netherlands (Surinam then being a colony of the Netherlands).

The first remnants of the fort date from 1613, but the fort as we know it today dates from 1667. This also happens to be the year when Surinam was ceded to The Netherlands, in exchange for New Amsterdam (later New York). In the 19th Century the fort was extended by the building of houses for the officers and barracks for the soldiers.

As was common in those days, Fort Zeelandia was originally built in the form of a pentagon with a bastion on every corner. Two of these have remained: bastion Middelburg and Bastion Veere. The fort and barracks were abandoned in 1872. Until 1967 the buildings served as a prison.



One of the remaining buildings has been restored and now houses a museum, which tells the history of Fort Zeelandia and Paramaribo, and of the original inhabitants, the Amerindians. It exhibits beautiful Indian artifacts. After a morning full of culture we had a nice lunch on the outside terrace, overlooking the river. Ineke and Bob ordered a sandwich, Helma tried the national dish, Pom (which was served in the form of tiny fried balls, very nice!).



On December 8, 1982, Fort Zeelandia was the scene of one of Surinam’s blackest days: the December killings, in which 15 prominent Surinamese professionals were dragged from their beds, tortured and shot dead without any form of trial by members of the military regime, at that time having the power in the country. Among the military was the leader of the regime, Desi Bouterse, currently serving as the elected President. The military men involved claim the men were shot dead “whilst running”. Our guide showed us the bullet holes in the outer wall of the Fort, facing the river. No way to run.

It is extremely bizarre to see the memorial plaque depicted above on the place where the men were shot, which is a stone's throw of the Presidential Palace, where Desi Bouterse now resides as democratically elected President.

Intermezzo: some info about Desi Bouterse

Desi Bouterse was Suriname's de facto leader from 1980-1987 after conducting a military coup of the country and establishing military rule. He was elected President of Suriname in 2010, getting 36 out of 50 Parliamentary votes. He still serves as President.

Bouterse is a controversial figure, held responsible by some for the numerous human rights violations committed during the military rule in the 1980s. Most notable were the 1982 December murders of fifteen leading opposition figures. He is also suspected of having directed the Moiwana massacre during the civil war by the Maroons. The Netherlands has suspended monetary aid since the Surinamese Parliament pushed through an amnesty law for those responsible for the December murders.

In 2000, Bouterse was sentenced in absentia in the Netherlands to 11 years imprisonment because he was convicted of trafficking 474 kilos of cocaine. According to WikiLeaks cables released in 2011, Bouterse was active in the drug trade until 2006. Europol has issued an arrest warrant for him. His son Dino serves a 15 year prison sentence in the USA for drug trafficking.

In Surinam it is impossible to hear, solicited or unsolicited, opinions about Desi Bouterse and his role in the country. While we were in Surinam, times were tough, with the Surinamese dollar dropping in value nearly daily. Within weeks life had become nearly three times as expensive for the average guy in the street. Every conversation with the locals turned into a lament on the falling currency and the weak economy and who to blame. A taxi driver: "Well, what do you expect, when you allow criminals to lead the country?" Us: "But Bouterse was elected President democratically by the people"! Taxi driver: "Yes madam, thanks to corruption. Bouterse has bought public votes on an unprecedented scale".



Equally enlightening was a conversation in a tiny bar along the Commewine River. A man of about 65 years of age (in the picture wearing a white cap): “Yes, things are going very badly in the country. But that is not the fault of the President. He is a good guy. He just has bad advisors”! Us: “A good leader sends bad advisors home”! Man: “....silence...”

It is hard to find someone who wants to talk about the underlying political situation which is quite bizarre, to say the least: even before independence (which occurred in the late 1970s), political parties were organised strictly according to ethnicity. Every member of a certain ethnicity only votes for “his” or “her” politicians. Such a political party has only one goal: taking care that your “own” people benefits as much as possible as allowed by the system, which means, they are given jobs, assignments, contracts, etc. In practice this system means that a government can only be formed by coalitions (no one group is large enough to have an absolute majority), and that people are not awarded on basis of merit, but on the basis of ethnic background, or loyalty to their own political party. Short term thinking and squandering are the order of the day.



Paramaribo’s historical center is beautiful, but also untidy. Many buildings are badly maintained. A tropical rain shower immediately causes flooding in the street (here is the main street). To the right South America’s largest wooden cathedral.

No one wants to spend the money to invest in the infrastructure, so gradually everything starts to decay. The American bauxite companies have left. The state oil refinery is on the brink of bankruptcy. There are no investments in knowledge or technology. With major employers leaving, there is no fall back economy. There is bad maintenance of roads and public buildings. The famous historical centre of Paramaribo is marred by many badly maintained (in former days lovingly restored) buildings. And so on...

Really annoying was the monetary situation. The country was in the midst of a financial crisis. They tried to borrow money from the IMF, and day to day goods rose in price nearly daily. Instead of stimulating tourism to bring in hard currency, such as Euros or US dollars, the financial life of a tourist was made very miserable.

The possibility to pay by debit card or credit card was practically non-existent. Even at major gas stations (i.e. Shell), one had to pay in cash, that is, in Surinamese dollars. At most supermarkets it was not possible to pay by credit card. Even in Marina Resort Waterland we had to pay in cash, or by international bank transfer. ATM machines were available, but there were not many, if you found one it was often vandalised, and even worse, if you found a working one, the maximum amount per transaction was 1000 Surinamese dollars, which equates to approximately €110. Don't ask me why, everywhere in the world the maximum amount per foreign transaction is the equivalent of €300, but not so in Surinam.

As a consequence every visit to Domburg, Paramaribo or other small towns was marred by the hunt for a working ATM machine. We traveled with a host of debit and credit cards, you never knew which card would be accepted by which machine (even machines that advertised they accepted Master, Visa, Cirrus or Maestro cards sometimes refused payment for unknown reasons). Occasionally we were lucky and got the equivalent of €110 out of a machine. That amount does not last long for three persons and a thirsty boat. So instead of spending freely, we hoarded the cash we had managed to obtain!

We were not the only ones experiencing these problems. Gijs of "*13 Beaufort*" spent two days to obtain sufficient cash in order to pay his bill at Waterland. The crew of *Rusalka* (Marc and Daniela and kids) had found a supermarket that said it could accept credit cards. For two hours they shopped in preparation for going to Tobago, so they had gathered two shopping trolleys heaped with groceries and fruits and vegetables. Only to discover at the cash register that their Mexican Visa Card was not acceptable after all. Daniela burst into tears. The children burst into tears. The supermarket staff could not help them further, but was kind enough to give them a voucher for the equivalent of €10, so that they could pay for at least something! When we met them we donated €20 for the buying of fruit and vegetables. Next day they left; it is impossible to stay in a country if you cannot access your own bank account or credit card. We were lucky: since Surinam people have a lot of ties with the Netherlands, we found a place where we could withdraw more than €100 using a Dutch debit card. And Ineke donated all her remaining Euros, so that we could continue our travels with at least some Euros on board.

All this led to our conclusion that Surinam, whilst being a beautiful country which obviously had prospered in the past, was now heading downhill because of bad governments, lawlessness, financial mismanagement and lack of vision and planning. What a pity.

Nevertheless, together with Ineke, we have enjoyed ourselves and made a number of really nice outings.

After our visit to Fort Zeelandia we wanted to visit the Tropical Butterfly Garden. We checked the website, which clearly stated it was open 7 days a week. So we went on a Monday, only to discover upon arrival that it was closed. A handwritten note on the gate announced “we are closed because of the situation in the country”. We never found out what the situation in the country had to do with being open or not.



Restored plantation building, the Director’s house. In the back of the plantation we found a gathering of simple huts where the former contract laborers used to live. The current owners were creative in trying to make them pleasant to look at, such as by creating this tiny garden with potted plants.

So we decided to turn east instead and headed for “The Pepper Jar”, an old coffee plantation in the Commewine district. The plantation was private property and the former Director’s house was beautifully restored, but being a private home, could not be visited. Next to the former Director’s house was the unrestored, rather ramshackle building of the former supervisors, now housing staff.

We were allowed to wander around a bit and also found a walking trail, where Ineke met her one and only wild monkey. We had a pleasant afternoon.

Next day we made another attempt to visit the Tropical Butterfly Garden, this time together with the crew of the *Rusalka*, who had just arrived in Domburg. Again, we had an easy, pleasant day. The garden was not spectacular. The garden happens to be a commercial undertaking; they are exporting butterfly pupae worldwide, as well as young turtles and snakes (Anacondas). In addition, they have tourist and

educational activities, as witnessed by an insect museum (showing many different kinds of cockroaches), and an art gallery with nature as the theme (full of rather simple but very expensive paintings),



The export story was rather interesting; we had never realised that butterflies are plant specific, so if you want to ship pupae, you have to feed the caterpillars on a specific plant, and grow these plants in abundance! We also never realised that the pupae of a particular butterfly species are different from other pupae, and that a trained person can hear whether the pupa is in the right stage and condition for transport. Daily the ones ready for transport are collected by hand and carefully packed.



Raising turtles is a long and slow process (would you expect it to be different with such a slow animal!). The section with the snakes was not to my liking. I found it creepy and sad; the snakes were housed in bare cages, not a sliver of green to be seen.

Next day Bob needed to visit the doctor in Paramaribo, so we took advantage and visited both a large supermarket with Dutch products (later on we found that it was the last place where we could buy decent wine), as well as the Paramaribo Zoo.

The zoo's collection of only animals that occur in Surinam was started as a private collection by a former President, Josef Pengel. He held the animals in cages in the back garden of the Presidential Palace. Compared to the zoo in French Guyane (where you walk through a tropical forest and occasionally find a very large and green living area or cage) this was a very old fashioned and rather small zoo. But still nice, being exclusively for animals found in Surinam.



Unfortunately, quite a number of cages need renovating and modernising. That is an on-going process, and invariably these projects are supported financially by a Dutch zoo, such as Artis (Amsterdam) or Blijdorp (Rotterdam). If all the Dutch zoos would adopt a renovation project in the zoo of Paramaribo, it could become quite a nice, small zoo in the middle of a capital city!

The giant otter is endemic to Surinam.



With the bird on the left it was quite difficult to spot which side was front or back. But he surely was colourful



The zoo had a very tiny terrace and a closed bar. The offer was limited to “schaafijis”, sold from a street cart.

“Schaafijis” is plain ice broken into slivers, and syrup poured over it. The ice melts gradually, so for quite a while you can enjoy a really refreshing, cold drink. All three of us were hooked!

Also the following day was nature oriented: we visited ParaFlor, which advertises itself as a botanical hiking resort. Which it was. It was clearly a botanical garden, with many different exotic and domestic plants, fruit trees and medicinal plants. The garden is specialised in the large family of the ginger-like plants (Zingiberaceae, which includes the bananas (Musa), Strelitzia, Heliconia and Costas). These often have plastic-like flowers, with numerous false, brightly colored bracts. The real flowers are tiny and insignificant and to be found at the inner basis of the bracts. They are very decorative in flower ornaments together with palm leaves! The walk around the garden lasted two hours, under guidance of a Creole woman, who was extremely knowledgeable. After the walk we were given a fruit cocktail, made with fruits found in the garden. Refreshing and really nice!





So far we and Ineke had not yet visited the real jungle. In Marina Resort Waterland it was jungle-like, with nice tall trees, but the jungle was being nibbled away gradually by developments: close by they were building a new village, at 200 m there was a timber yard, as well as a refinery. Noel, the owner, showed us pictures of a sloth, a big anteater and some monkeys. Early in the morning we heard the specific howling of the Howler monkeys, but it was coming from the other side of the river, off concession Paranam, prohibited terrain. No matter how often we looked and searched, there were no wild animals to be seen (until the very last day, when we saw one yellow-pawed monkey jumping from tree to tree crossing the entrance road).

Since we wanted to show Ineke some real jungle, we decided to make a trip to Atjoni, on advice of locals who lived there a long time. Atjoni is the last settlement which can be reached over land in a southerly direction from Paramaribo. Nearly 200 km down, and 200 km up. We were advised to charter a canoe in Atjoni for a river trip to KwaiKwai and Sulah. I had no idea what these were.



On our way to Atjoni the huts alongside the road became ever simpler. First they were of stone, then of wood, and then covered by corrugated iron, and finally they were African-like with thatched roofs.

We left at 7.00 am and it took us one hour to cover 30 kms, the road being in a very sorry state, in particular in the neighborhood of Paranam, the old bauxite processing site. Bob looked at me in despair, was this a good idea with still 170 kms to go? Fortunately the road condition improved after the Paranam site, allowing speeds of some 70 kms per hour. To the right jungle, to the left jungle, but no entrance roads or paths. We think the Surinamese people do not like walking, they only like cars. Nevertheless it was very beautiful.

And suddenly, after 3.5 hours, the road stopped, there were some buildings, and in front of us a fast flowing river. And moored on its shore, dozens and dozens of brightly colored canoes!



Soon after parking the car various boatmen came to us, where did we want to go? Upon the words KwaiKwai and Sulah we received many negative shakes of the head, maybe so and so could help us. Finally we found a so and so who could bring us to KwaiKwai. He was very reluctant regarding Sulah.

We got in, and had a wonderful trip to KwaiKwai, which turned out to be a small island with an even smaller beach and bar. And Sulah? I asked.



“Well, was the answer, that’s a bit difficult, there is not enough water in the river, and then the Sulah is dry”. I still did not know what the Sulah was. What to do? We decided to stubbornly stay sitting in the canoe.

On our way upriver to KwaiKwai a guide had been sitting at the bow of the canoe, who had given hand signals to the helmsman to avoid shallows and banks. All of a sudden this man returned (he had already disembarked in KwaiKwai), got back into the canoe and took over the helmsman’s position. And off we went, soon making it clear what the Sulah was: a series of big stones and plateaus in the water, normally creating rapids, now mostly high and dry above the water. We accelerated past, the helmsman sometimes making a detour, gauging depths and possibilities, lifting the engine out of the water to avoid it hitting the rocks. Left and right we could practically touch the rocks. So this was The Sulah! It was exciting, it was scary, and it was mostly adventure!



Breathless but in one piece we arrived at a place to land, where we got out, had a swim in the turbulent waters and ate our home-made picnic. Our boatsman and the “guide” were waiting for us a bit further down. After an hour we decided to go back, the “guide” once more steering, which guaranteed a very fast and spectacular ride back to Atjoni. ‘Chapeau’ for these very knowledgeable boat men!!

Once back in Atjoni we bought something to drink (there was no bar, terrace or restaurant) and sat down (on the street) near a kind of departure building. We needed some rest to prepare for the 200 kms back by car.

In the meantime it was 1 pm, and hundreds of people were mingling about the canoes, waiting for the latter to depart. We moved to a sitting position in a bit of shade, this was too good to be missed.

So, how to describe this spectacle? Wherever we looked, something was happening. Canoes with life jacket-wearing tourists arriving. Canoes with no life jacket-wearing locals, seemingly overloaded, waiting for departure in the burning sun. Vans arriving, unloading sofas, large refrigerators, iceboxes, crates. Vans with 8 meter long plates of corrugated iron. And all this to be transported in already overloaded canoes. Passengers getting out again, searching in their luggage for something to create a shade against the sun: umbrellas, hats and caps, but also pieces of cloth or blankets, anything would do. Some of the trips would take at least 4-5 hours.





After enjoying the view for about an hour, we started on our way back, stopping in Brownsberg, where we found a tiny supermarket with cold drinks and a walking path around the village, to stretch the legs. Just before dark we arrived back in Waterland, having had an absolutely super day!



Next day, Saturday, we cast off and left for a trip to the Commewine River. Downstream to Paramaribo, then to the junction with the Commewine and to the right, onto the river. It was lovely to sail again, also for Ineke, who had been on *Sunny Spray* before (in 2012 she joined us for 10 days sailing through Belgium and France). However, being at anchor in South America and sailing on one of the Amazonian rivers is quite different!

We stayed on the Commewine until Tuesday morning, when we headed back to Waterland. Bob had a doctor's appointment on Wednesday, and we wanted to combine that with a trip to the historic centre of Paramaribo.



Wednesday morning we arrived in Paramaribo amidst a tropical rain shower, causing the main roads to flood. We did as the Surinamese, gathered our pants and slogged through the water. We walked through the historic part, had a coffee in hotel Krasnapolsky and paid a visit to “ReadyTex Art Gallery”, which was housed in a beautifully restored colonial house located on one of the town’s main streets. It had more the feel of a museum than an art gallery, which made no difference, all three of us enjoyed the beautiful art exhibited (yes, even Bob liked the art!)



In the art gallery’s attic was an exhibition of ceramics, and Ineke and I both fell in love with an abstract sculpture which looked a bit like a sailing boat. Bob came to see this as well; he thought it resembled a very nice boat, so we decided to buy it. We asked for a quote covering both the sculpture, packaging and transport to Spain. Everything was possible, yes, they would make sure we had the quote before the weekend. We still have not heard from them, what a pity, in particular since it does not happen often that Bob and I like the same paintings or sculptures!!



Ineke had to leave Thursday afternoon, so in the morning we made a canoe trip, courtesy of Marina Resort Waterland. It was a really nice way to celebrate Ineke's last day in Surinam.

With a schedule delivering her four hours before departure time (that was the recommendation, still the same sloth-like officials), we delivered Ineke at Zanderij Airport. It had been two fantastic weeks, in particular because of her flexibility and good humour. What guest uses the bucket instead of the toilet for half of her holiday without any complaint? What guest joins without complaints in the search for working ATM's? And waits at the military police (we still had to clear out ourselves)? And waits at the doctor's office? And at the pharmacy? Fortunately we had interspersed all that waiting with sufficient sightseeing outings!

After seeing Ineke off to the airport, we started to prepare ourselves and *Sunny Spray* for the trip to Tobago. On Saturday we broke the preparations for a trip by car to Jewish Savannah. That was much further than anticipated, nearly halfway to Atjoni and also to the East. According to the maps we had to cross the Carolina Bridge, but once there we found the bridge had collapsed some years ago, following a collision with a barge. Locals told us a new bridge had been built, but once more, neither it nor the accompanying roads were on any of the maps we had. Once more we "sailed in the blind", but now over land.



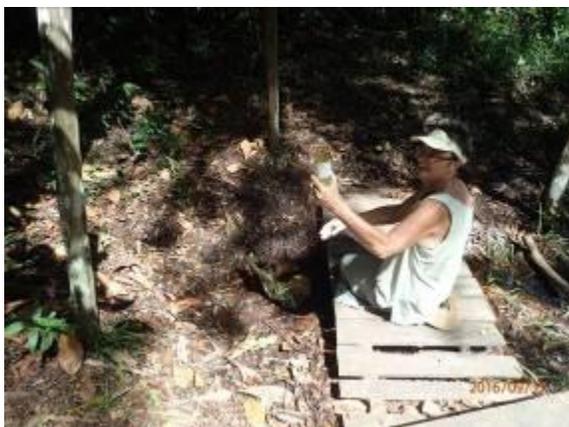
The Carolina Bridge, collapsed several years ago. A new bridge had been built further south, reachable by a new gravel road. Neither the new bridge nor the roads were given on any of the recent maps (not on paper charts, not on Google maps, nor on maps.me).

Fortunately we found the new bridge, and arrived timely at Jewish Savannah. It was an interesting outing, but there was not much to be seen, apart from some ruins of the synagogue and the cemeteries. They had not even taken the trouble to open a hiking trail in the surrounding woods. Nevertheless it felt special to be on the spot where, in the 17th and 18th century, a large Jewish community had flourished, surrounded by some 40 plantations.



The ruins of the synagogue. Next picture shows the gravestones at the Jewish cemetery. The synagogue was not only a place for religious worship, but also an educational and judicial centre.

Close by was a medicinal spring. A historic sketch shows a spacious area with a pastoral feel. Nowadays there is a miserly trickle of water, but at least the water is still running!



On Tuesday September 20 we left Marina Resort Waterland, where we had received a warm welcome and had had a very good time. On Friday September 23 we entered the Essequibo River in Guyana, and anchored at Fort Island, just at the mouth of the river. Once again, a new phase, a new country!

Lots of love, and hasta la Proxima!

Helma.

We can be followed on www.marinetraffic.com. Ships name: *Sunny Spray*; MMSI: 244780434.

Please note, if we pass Venezuela, the AIS will be turned off, so you cannot follow us then.

Animal of the month: the tapir

This time I had wanted to choose the swallow as animal of the month, because they are circling our boat daily, in search of a nice nesting spot underneath the canvas sail covers. Sometimes they followed us for miles, and actively defend their chosen nest spot against others. But they are difficult to photograph.

Therefore a somewhat larger and easier to photograph animal: the tapir! We never met it in the wild, although it is native to all the Guyanas. We only saw it in the zoo, and there it approached us like a tame sheep. If anything it is typically South American, it is the tapir!!



That thought must have inspired a painter who is known for his colorful paintings of Surinamese wild animals. He exhibited this beautiful painting of a tapir, and its young, in ReadyTex, the art gallery in Paramaribo. The painting reminded me strongly of the paintings by the Cobra group, housed in the Cobra museum in Amstelveen (Amsterdam), the Netherlands. This tapir could rightly have been hanging between Karel Appel, Henning Pedersen and Lucebert!

