



Reading through all the leaflets we got from Gaby as well as the book "Specials in Surinam" gave us tremendous opportunities of where to go. Quite a lot of the trips went inland to visit the original people of Surinam.

Where to go

To villages of the Indian tribes or to descendants of the runaway slaves both far inland into the rainforest. Some could be reached by car but most only by korjaal (a pirogue) up-river. It sounded nice at first glance but we were imagining in what way these Indians and Negroes must feel;

"when some white, equivalent to rich people came to their villages to see how they were living far out into the bush with a minimum of modern comfort".

We could not do that, it just did not feel right. Imagine or suppose some total strangers would step on our deck walk into the cockpit to see how we were living on a boat. That's not what we would appreciate so we did not do the "looking at Indians and Creoles" tours.



Instead we made a trip to the famous (at least in Holland) in 1955 build Brokopondo Hydroelectric Power Station and the huge storage lake behind it. We both learned at school about this impressive project, so we were eager to see it with our own eyes now we have the opportunity.

The

Power station and storage lake were developed on behalf of the bauxite mining company Alcoa for their need of electricity. The agreement of the Surinam Government to mine the bauxite by Alcoa was on 2 conditions; 1. Build the factories for processing the raw bauxite 2. Distribute electricity from the power station to the Government at cost price.

They approved and Alcoa got a 75-year mining permission. The mining of bauxite has stopped in 2015 due to the worldwide low market prices for it is no longer profitable but the Hydroelectric Power Station is still in use.

There were several other specialties we liked to see or do so we rented a comfy 4WD for 4 days. It costs us the huge amount of €18,=/day. The car was really luxury; it had a facility to cool 2 water bottles by the AC-unit, a bit extreme to be honest but well appreciated in the tropical temperatures.



Exploration further afield

The first day we drove south to the Brokopondo storage lake. Along the very quiet road we passed the large area of the Alcoa (Billiton) mining company. The buildings and equipment were in a very bad condition after 1 year of inoperativeness, sad to see. After an hour of 2 we reached the Brokopondo area.





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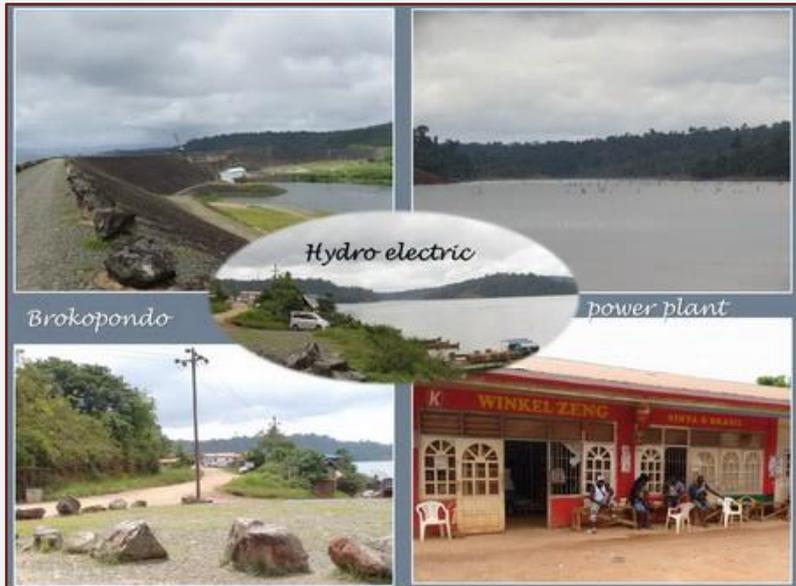
It was a HUGH barrage, even the Hydroelectric Power station was dwarfed by it! It's much larger as we had expected.

To get close to the barrage was not allowed but a small dirt road brought us at the top of a hill next to the barrage. From there we had a stunning view of the wide topside as well as over the storage lake. It's difficult to describe that a barrage is able to stop so much water that only could go further by the pipes into the Hydroelectric Power Station or via the bypass back into the Surinam River.

Upstream of the dam many villages were flooded due to this project. These village people (descendants of the runaway slaves) were not too pleased when they were forced to leave their houses where they were born-in. Once the barrage was finished and the river filled and formed the lake, the trees were still there. We could see in the far distance of the lake the sad remains of many bare tree tops.

At the shore of the lake where we were looking, one of those "new" villages was built for those people who were relocated by the Surinam Government. Driving through this village showed us what we thought was a sad and poor community. No proper roads, only a dirt road with large and deep potholes, no factories and only 1 or two shops. The road became eventually so bad, that we turned around to drive back the road we came.

Due to the fact that there are not too many roads in Surinam we had to drive back from Brokopondo the same road for a couple of kilometres before we were able to pick up the road to Brownsweg.



Just beyond Brownsweg in a mountainous area where they mine (illegally) gold are also several hiking trails. One of the short trails would end at a beautiful waterfall and that's our second goal for today.

As we drove through Brownsweg, the gates of heaven opened to give us an awful downpour. The rainfall was so dense that we had to stop along the road till it eased a bit. As soon as it was possible, we drove the last kilometres to reach the road into the mountains.

But unfortunately this was a dirt road and after the downpour it had become more or less a mud slide!!! No way had we dared to drive up this steep road for

about 13km, although we were driving a 4WD.



If we would do in these conditions, we might even discover the trail had become dangerous too after the rain. And at that point we had to drive or slide back the way we came. No discussion at all between us, today no hiking or swimming in the waterfall!

We drove back again through Brownsweg which is a pretty village mostly inhabited by Creoles and descendants of runaway slaves. Now the sun was out again we could have a better look at the nicely painted houses (and the rare shack) many shops and a few small businesses with laughing people and playing children around. From Brownsweg we drove back to Domburg.

History



As you may know, Surinam was until 1975 part of The Kingdom of the Netherlands. The history up to their independence can still be found in and around Paramaribo. Especially the forts to protect the city against invaders had our interest. Fort Zeelandia we visited already (see Zeezwaluw Post number 3) So our 2nd car-day we drove to Fort Nieuw-Amsterdam.

This Fort built in 1740, is also situated at the shoreline of the Suriname River but at the opposite site from Fort Zeelandia where the Commewijne River joins the Suriname River. While Zeelandia had mostly been used by the military or as a prison, Nieuw-Amsterdam had in his early years a more gruesome history. In the era of slavery, this fort was used as holding place for the in Africa captured slaves who had just arrived on slave runner boats. They were cleaned up a bit after their awful sailing ordeal, before they were transported to the slave market in Paramaribo.



The Fort, an open air museum nowadays, which had the shape of a 5-starpointed bastion is hardly recognizable as so. Due to the building material for they used mostly wood in those days therefor hardly any building survived. Only the prison, 2 store houses for ammunition and the commanders house, because they were built of stone.

We walked around in the beautiful park within the earthen walls while we learned more about the history of the Fort in the exhibitions in the few renovated buildings. The use of this Fort by our ancestors is nothing to be proud of, you may be sure of that.



After our visit of Fort Nieuw-Amsterdam we drove along small roads through a few other villages which originated from former slave plantations the same way as Domburg did. This side of the Suriname River was less populated and more rural.

Culture

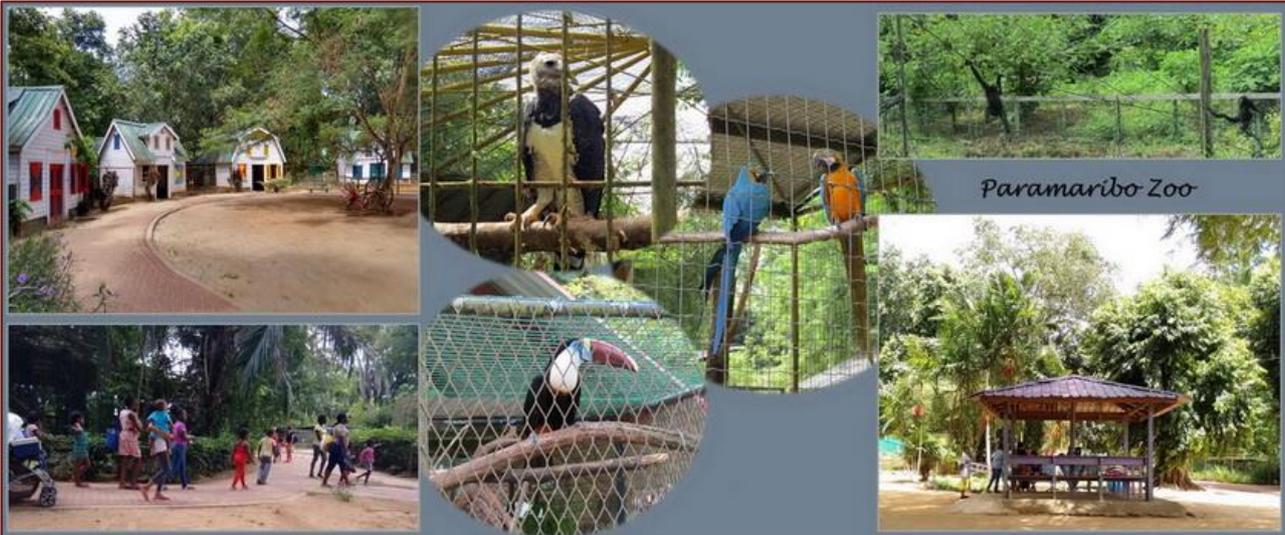
Once again in Paramaribo city we drove to the north side of town to the Paramaribo Zoo. This Zoo was initiated by one of the former presidents of Surinam.



He could not keep the many wild animal-presents given by foreign country's heads of state, next to his estate. Therefore they had built a home for these special gifts, in a park-area in the city. The chosen set-up for the little Zoo had the intention to be especially attractive for children.

After entering we saw 4 little houses where goats, sheep and other friendly 4-legged animals lived behind a low picket fence. Behind the little houses was an area where monkeys were jumping on and off trees or hanging on special ropes looking at the visitors.

The many varieties of parrots, eagles, cockatoo and toucans were kept in high and roomy cages, one for each kind. The children (and we) could not stick our arms or fingers in those cages for you had to stand behind a steel bar at a safe distance off the cage.



We also saw (and smelled) wild dogs, a jaguar and a leopard as well as a crocodile each one in a small but own habitat. The more common animals to us were peacocks, ducks and geese happily living together in a large area with a small pond.

A group of little children were visiting and teachers were answering their questions about the animals. Later on they had lunch in one of the special shaded pick-nick sheds. We liked this Zoo very much although it is tiny but it is very organized, clean and child friendly.

After a short walk through the Palm garden behind the Presidential Palace we left the city of Paramaribo. We had seen and walked enough for a day and drove back home to Zeezwaluw.



Farmer's community

About 200 years ago the Dutch government promised land for free to Dutch farmers when they came to start farming in Surinam. A community of approximately 200 Dutch farmers from the province of Groningen took the bait and sailed to Surinam. Once arrived in their new country the promised land turned out to be a swamp! Only 10% of the group survived the hard labour and malaria while they turned the swamp into proper farmland. The descendants of these farmers (the boeroes) are still farmers and live north east of Paramaribo.



In this agricultural area is the town called "Groningen". Ineke is born and raised in Groningen in Holland so she likes to have a look around the Surinam Groningen as well.



It is not a real town but a village built along the road. The produce of the land is mostly unfamiliar to us, but we do recognize potatoes and red and white cabbage. Driving through this beautiful area it is almost impossible to comprehend the farmland had been a swamp long ago. We also enjoy the scenery of cows and sheep grazing in the fields. The other villages we drive through have all Dutch names, the same as in Holland.



Repairs & shopping

The last day we have wheels needs to be used for repairs and shopping. The outboard needs her 20 hours check-up as well as a minor oil leak repair. As the engine is still under warranty we want to look for an official Yamaha dealer. Luckily there is a Yamaha dealer and repair shop in Paramaribo. To be sure the repair will be finished in 1 day, we have to bring the outboard early, and around 8 o'clock we were told. So we are up and running very, very early to be able to get to the dinghy pontoon.



We have to take the outboard off the dinghy and walk the heavy engine to the car. Luckily a nice young man saw us and took the outboard from our hands to walk with ease to our car. We appreciated his help very much but felt old at the same time.....

We dropped the engine at the repair shop and Riens discussed the problems with the mechanic. He promised to call us as soon as the engine was fixed. It would be around 3p.m. The mechanic was aware that we needed the engine back today otherwise getting back to Zeezwaluw without the engine would be almost impossible. Rowing against the strong current in our 21-year old floppy bottom dinghy would take forever.



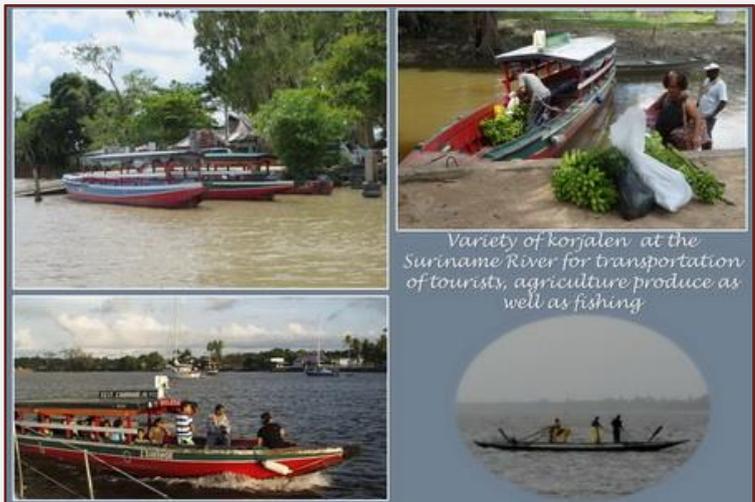
We had enough time to go shopping for bulky and heavy goods as for the desired Dutch goodies we favour.

As promised we got a call and could pick up the engine at 4p.m. The repair of the oil leak and the 20-hour service cost only €45,- so not too bad we thought. Back to the dinghy again, attach the engine to test it. She ran smooth again, perfect!

Finally at 7p.m. we brought our 4WD back to Richie. We told him we were very pleased with the car and had 4 great days with it.

River delight

From our settee in the cockpit we see many different kind of korjalen (canoes) sailing on the river. Most are narrow open boats but for tourists they have wider boats with a roof and removable canvas flaps to shelter for rain. Some are used as a taxi to transfer people across the river or on day tours. The children who are living at the other side of the river use the boats to go to school in Domburg or even farther in Paramaribo.



Others are owned by farmers to transport their goods to the market, which is faster than by road. Often we see 4 men in a korjaal fishing all day long, even after dark. Only once they brought in a high fish (not a piranha) to one of the restaurants at "het Pleintje" in Domburg. It is nice to see these attractively painted boats passing Zeezwaluw in the river.



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But we are not too pleased of the speeding jet skis. Every weekend and often during the week there are 4 2-seat jet skis who are making loops or drive in circles around the boats at the moorings. They seem to think it is funny to let the sailing boats rock, we do not. Luckily it is not every night and if they are having fun they stay only for an hour or so, which makes it endurable though.



How we experienced Surinam

The country is very large (I think 5 times the size of Holland) with only 750.000 people. Most of them live and work in Paramaribo city, along the Suriname River or in the northern part of the country. The people are very friendly, kind and helpful even to "white" foreigners. No discrimination at all. Surinam is a melting pot of people; descendants of runaway slaves, Creoles, Chinese, Brazilians, Dutch, people from Indonesia and India. Also many religions live happily next to each other like Jews & Muslims as their churches, synagogues, mosques and Indian or Hindustan sanctuaries do.



Synagogue and Mosque next to each other



We felt welcomed and at home in this country and had not left jet if the rainy season had not started early. But living on a boat in the tropics (33°C) with grey overcasts every day, rain for 4 days in a row followed by a few hours of sunshine for a day and then thick overcast and rain again, is not feasible. You cannot have the hatches open, everything is getting wet due to the high humidity and there is no way to dry clothes in those poor conditions. To be honest, Suriname is a lovely country with kind and friendly people but the rain can be very overwhelming.

Almost forgotten to tell you what the special sound was/is we are hearing every morning and evening. That's from the howler monkeys protecting their territories or warning each other for intruders. The picture (thanks to Google) is the Red howler monkey we heard but never saw.



Departure Surinam

We are a bit sad to leave Surinam nevertheless we slipped our lines from the mooring buoy April, 24 early in the morning. This morning we have sunshine for a change and we love it as it makes our departure a little less depressed. It is high water and sailing on the engine and the current of 4-5kn takes us swiftly downriver.



Departing Surinam

Before we know, we are underneath the high bridge of Paramaribo in the narrowest part of the river. There the current is running extremely fast.

At top speed, 9kn we pass the Fort of Zeelandia standing guard at the port side and a moment later Fort Nieuw-Amsterdam is passing on starboard.

The sand dunes and coastline replace the town scenery before Zeezwaluw is heading through the 3nm long and

narrow buoyed channel out to sea. Slowly the colour of the water turns from dark brown into ocean blue while the blue sky is dotted with a few white clouds.



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The wind is 15kn and the sails go up while Mr. Perkins may have a well-earned rest.
Grenada, here we come!



Riens en Ineke Elswijk

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