

Caribbean Cruise Notes

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About three weeks ago my friend Patty and I decided to look for a short western Caribbean cruise over the Thanksgiving holiday. We found one out of Miami on Carnival that still had room. Left on Thursday and I brought my new DX398 to do some surveillance. Also a portable TV. Can you believe I forgot my hand held scanner. I had a few AM DX sessions along the way and here are some random notes I am doing from memory. If you try this, make sure you bring headphones. We went to Key West and Cozumel, Q.R. (Mex.) and back. On Thursday (holiday) outbound I shadowed WKIZ-1500 who sounded like they were programmed from a CD changer. Punk signal, punk audio and not any voice hrd all afternoon, all salsa, merengue latin flavor. WKWF-1600 has ESPN sports and a much better operation and signal. That night at sunset, I had Anguilla-1610 extremely well for about 10 minutes, then gone. X-band was strange with KCJJ-1630 and KWHN-1650 hrd quite well. This was north of Havana as, due to an exclusion zone, we went close to Havana and then hug the coast of Pinar, could see lighthouses etc. Watched some Cuban TV on my hand held. They had news at midnight with a 10-minute piece with Fidel touring some farm, was showing it to others on the top deck and they were just flipping out. Naturally they had little idea of where we were, thanks to GPS I solved that problem.

I did some checking while within view of Cozumel (we took a side trip to Tulum, the ancient Mayan site so had little DX time), and DXed daytime the next day on the return trip. The locals were on 740, 860, I believe 990 and of course Pirata-1050 was twice as loud as any others. 860 and 1050 are clear daytimes all the way back to north of Havana and easily readable. Florida stations hrd while at Cozumel are 620 St Pete fairly good, 970 Tampa fair, 770 Ft Myers quite good (the best), 1580 Punta Gorda weak to fair, maybe a couple others weakly, and Key West-1600 vry weak. I tried for WWL-870 but came up empty. Interestingly Marti-1180 was loud and alone while at Cozumel. I paid a lot of attention to 650 as there has been a report of Merida here, but 650 was empty. What is here is a low power Cuban locally-programmed stn in far western Pinar, sounded like Radio Pantorino, hrd as we came eastward past Pinar with mountains clearly visible to the south about 15 miles distant. Reloj-870 good in that area, and Progreso-880 (no 890 until later). The big mystery was very loud carriers on 820, 1020 and 1030 hrd while passing Pinar. There was very weak audio hrd, probably 40 dB down and I couldn't tell if this was just very bad modulation, or from a different station way down. These carriers were full-scale on the bar graph and on-channel. The 820 probably is related to a past report of 'jamming against WMGG' in some fashion. It was interesting to see how Marti and Progreso played against each other as we headed east, and they are some 20 to 25 Hz apart by my estimate.

Most unusual log from Cozumel was on 1320, said "HRNT" and gave a slogan I missed, I'd call it a s-6. Probably others as well but not enough time to work them. Except for 1450 the GY's were all empty, lots of open fqs. I did not hear Belize, but did not think to check at night. Watched more Cuban TV, had 4 VHF channels and zero UHF. It is all old European movies with Eng voice and Sp. subtitling, or interviews, cartoons or sports, saw some basketball where the Centrales played the Cosmopolitanas (? forgot already). Cubans have little idea of on-hour IDs on TV as far as I could tell but then this was Sunday so who knows, maybe no one on duty. But success! as I heard ONE ID!! from WKIZ-1500, a kid, and canned. And not at the TOH either. This seems a worthy DX target indeed.

Ship DXing is actually easier now as I never heard any HF QRM and the radar was no problem, could easily get to the noise floor, such as it is on a DX398 with no external antenna. I was able to hear WFLF-540 somewhat south of Key West about s-4, which I suppose is a decent daytime test. It would not be too hard to bring and set up a small loop, but usually you want to be on the top fantail and it is still so windy there the acoustic buffeting in the headphones drowns out the really weak stuff. And then the bar and buffet beckons...