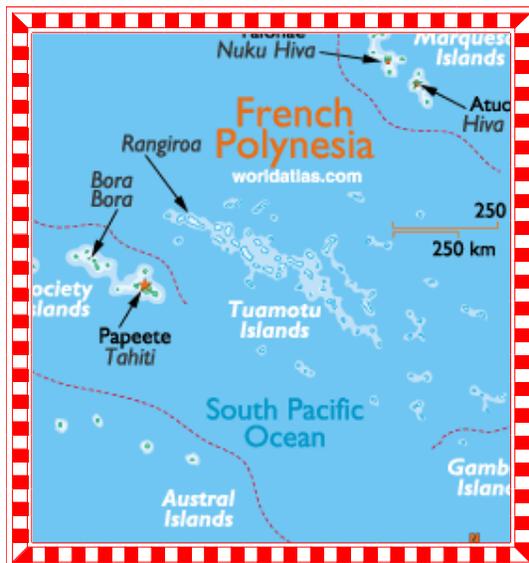


FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti

Moorea

Bora Bora



March 2 - 9, 2007

Jan & Martin Oakes.

Mar 2nd ~ Arrive in Tahiti.

It was nice to be met. I feel so very important seeing our name on a board. We both receive real leis.

"We need your voucher before you get on the bus."

I think "I'm sure you do, but I have no idea where it is." I open the suitcases and grovel through them in the terminal. Our driver wants to roll.

"Find them and hand them in tomorrow."

Of course our room is not ready at 8:30am. "Come back after noon."

A light breakfast and Jan finds a different lady who is much more sympathetic. We get a room around 10:30am.

"How do we get down town?"

"Catch the local bus, it stops outside the hotel."

It is a truck with low roof and lightly padded bench seats down either sides. I lean through the drivers side window, pay our 1.60F, jump on the bus as it starts moving, and tread on a lady's foot. "Pardon."

The driver travels at one speed, *fast*. We lurch and bump around. We think we are headed for Papeete, pronounced 'pap-ea-ate-ay'. If you pronounce it "Pap eat" it means Dad is in the bathroom. After about 15 miles Jan and I are getting nervous. I ask the young lady whose foot I attacked, if this is Papeete, but have to resort to school French. I gather we are not there yet. Finally she waves us off.

"Where do we get the bus back?" The driver waves his arm and mutters something, but we get a proper answer at a tourist information booth. The Bus Station, of course....

Few people speak English in the stores. The market sells every piece of stuff you don't need as well as fruit, vegetables, meat and fish.

The bus back was less eventful, we are now old hands.

The hotel seems deserted. It is enormous with extensive manicured grounds. Several pools with a lagoon connected to the sea, stocked with large fish. You can snorkel here. An hour or so in the shade and a swim in the infinity pool followed by siesta.

The hotel is hosting a Polynesian show. Our reservations an hour before, allow us ample time to enjoy the enormous buffet. It starts raining, so to shelter us a mechanically operated awning spreads out 25ft.

No one is speaking English.

The show is spectacular lasting 1-3/4hr. The girls and guys are energetic and graceful. I have never seen hula hips move like that before. The fire dancer won second place in the World Championships held in Hawaii.

Mar 3rd ~ Tahiti, Circle Island Tour.

We don't want a big breakfast, so instead of the buffet, we order a la carte, but two fried eggs which I ordered comes with fixings. Sausages, bacon, onions, & potato. Oh well, my intentions were good.

Moorea can clearly be seen from the beach.

I notice that when greeting, ladies kiss each other on both cheeks.

The driver for the island circle tour is a lady named Angel. Her English is adequate. Our bus is small with seats for 20, but there are only 6 of us and two little girls, who Angel is baby sitting.

There are 2,060 islands in French Polynesia. 121 are inhabited with a population of 280,000. 180,000 live on Tahiti. This part of the island is named Faa'a or Deep Valley. Having the most employment opportunities, the population here is 48,000. 65% of the businesses are Chinese owned.

Tahiti means water basket. Angel observes that the top of Mt. Diadem is cloud covered, which signals rain, though we have only a few light sprinkles on our journey. Parts of Tahiti receive up to 260 in/yr.

Gasoline is 1.60F/L

The Colonial House is the oldest home on the island and now a City Hall. Tahiti boasts a One Tree Hill. Robert Louis Stephenson wrote 'Treasure Island' after visiting this area.

Most islands have white sand beaches derived from corral. The majority of Tahiti's beaches are of volcanic origin and black.

The vegetation is lush and tropical with masses of flowers like Alamanda and Hibiscus. Trees with pink flowers and gaudy red ginger abound. A fresh stream has water cress for picking. Angel encourages us to lean out the window and pick fruit as we pass.

Mt. Orohena is so named for its flat top. It is raining up there, so waterfalls are plentiful. We pause to view one of the more spectacular. The path is rocky and very slippery. Many small rivers provide safe swimming holes where they join the sea.

A group of scantily clad men are practicing for a religious celebration by running with staves at each end of which is a bunch of bananas.

Freshly caught fish are hawked along the roadside. 1000F, about \$12US buys a complete string of 12 fish.

Rats, introduced inadvertently by early traders, are a problem. They climb coconut trees and spoil the fruit, so trees are metal banded.

There are no snakes or wild animals.

There is a mixture of shanties and modest homes. You must be a citizen to own property. Tahitians own much of the land which is passed down through generations. To retain ownership they may build a shanty, then, as they prosper, it is torn down and replaced with a nicer home.

Tahiti Iti (Little Tahiti) is the smaller island which we glimpse as we cross the narrow strip of land which joins the two islands.

The Gauguin restaurant looks like a series of huts built on stilts over the water. After barging in on a wedding reception by mistake, we enjoy a buffet lunch, included in the tour, but otherwise 4,250F. Outside in the sea, a series of enclosures retains large fish, some up to a meter in length.

Gauguin lived part of his life on Tahiti in the mid 1800's, and created some of his most important paintings here. The museum documents his life and exhibits reproductions of his work.

At the Grotto de Mara we follow a stream which meanders in an out of caves cut into the cliff side. Small water falls feed the stream. Ferns everywhere. A pretty setting if you discount the bathers.

Back at the hotel we play hide and seek with sprinkles of rain, but it is nice by the pool. A wind gust tumbles our umbrella, tied to my deck chair.

We have seen no waiters, so I go for drinks. The towel keeper says "That's my job."
Are you serious. I think?

A Tahitian wedding begins on the far side of the pool. The groom arrives by canoe. Lots of drums and dancing.

Enough of big buffets, so we dine a la carte. The cost about half of last night. Everything except fish and local fruits must be brought in and is expensive.

The show is shorter than last nights and with a different theme.



Tahiti & Moorea.



Hotel Intercontinental.

Tahiti.



Tahiti Intercontinental Resort.

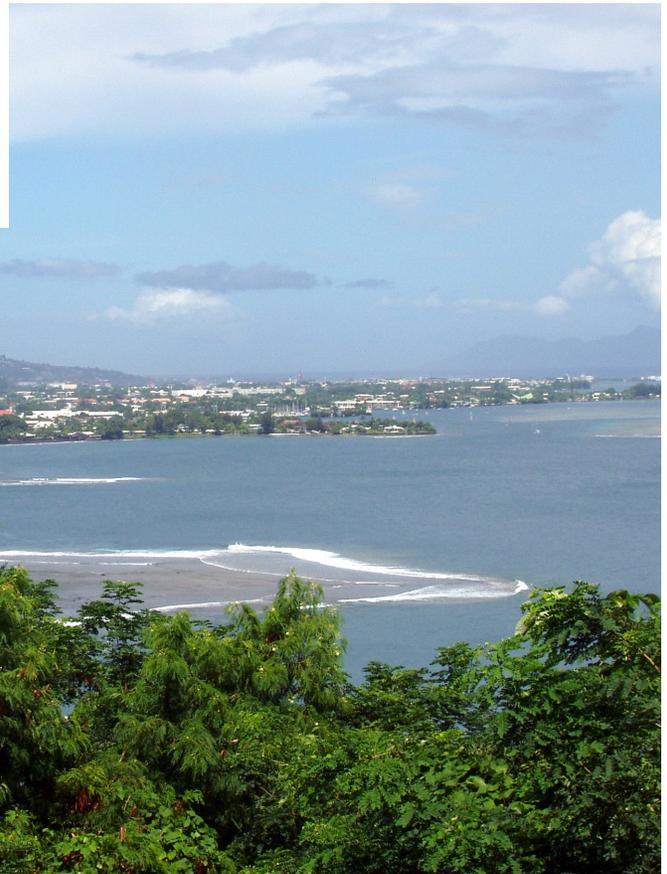
Tahiti.



Intercontinental Pool.



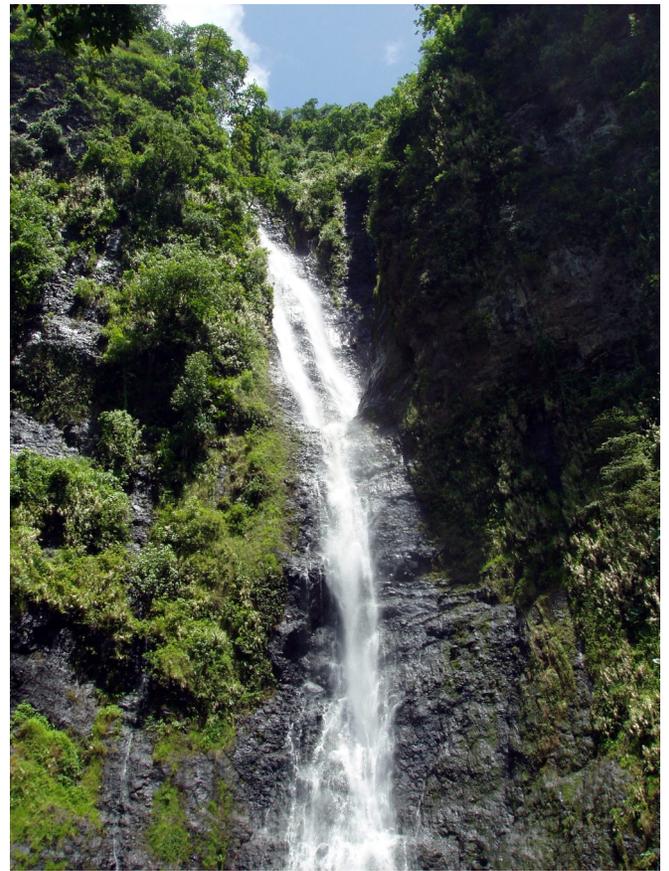
The Market.



Papeete.



Running Bananas in celebration of the first Pilgrims.



Ginger Flower.



Black Beaches.





Grottos.



Gauguin.





More waterfalls.



Check out.



Security.....



Puddle Jumper to Moorea.

Mar 4th ~ Moorea.

Angel told us we would be picked up 2½ hr before our flight time, which sounded very early; it is. Having checked out I ask for our room key back.

We were in the airport by 11:00am "You have an earlier flight, please check your bags."

Our luggage is lifted onto a trolley the other side of a rope and by definition is now "checked."

Air Moorea is a high wing, twin engine, 20 seater. There is no security. We wait on a bench, behind us an open door to the street. A sliding door between us and the tarmac. The cleaning crew just walked to the plane carrying a broom.

We find two adjacent seats in the tube.

Moorea is an island of 53 sq.mi surrounded by a reef, 20miles from Tahiti and clearly visible. The flight is all of ten minutes at 600ft above the water.

"Jan, let go my arm, you are pinching."

Albert Transport wants his vouchers. This time we are prepared. A 20 min drive follows the winding coastline to another Intercontinental Resort.

"Please take a seat in the bar while I prepare your paperwork." We fill out the usual life history. The French like to know a lot. We receive a nice greeting drink, fruit juice, no alcohol.

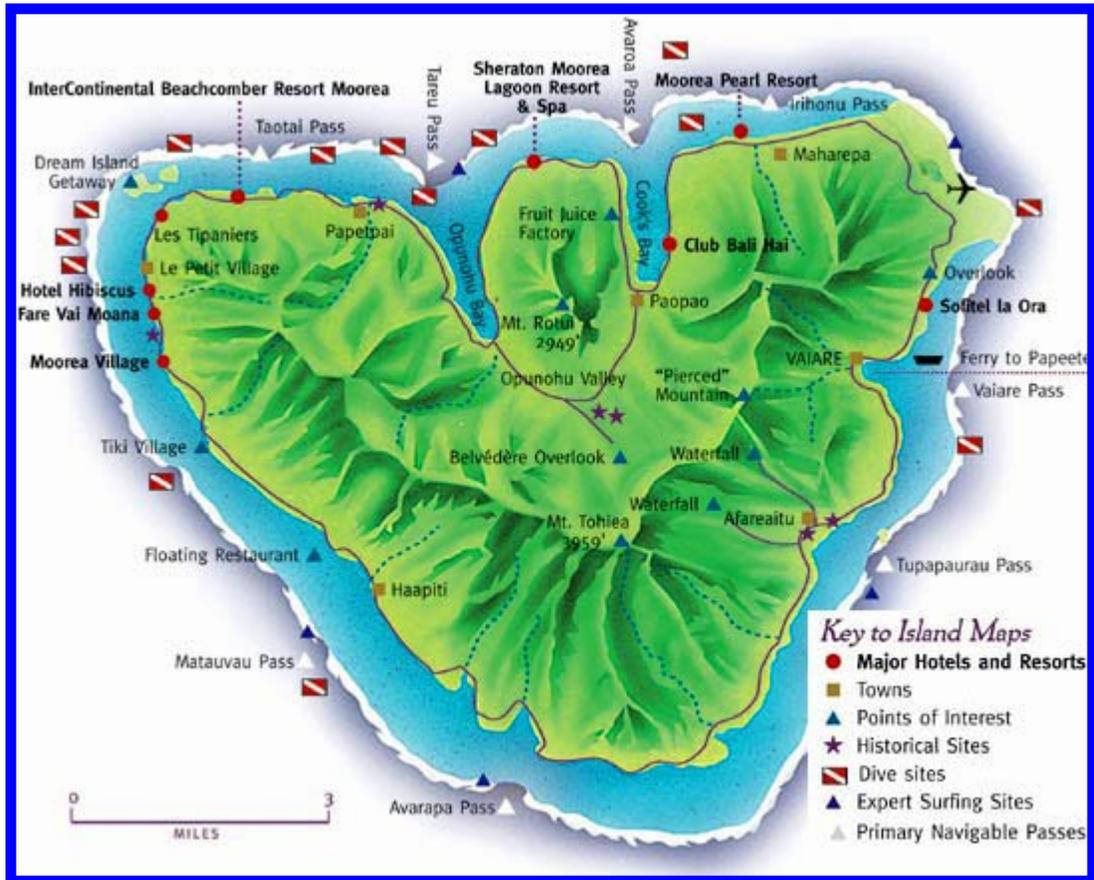
A golf cart takes us to our garden bungalow, a stand alone thatched cottage. In addition to garden rooms, there are similar huts built along the beach and on a series of small islands reached by bridges. Very pretty.

We decide to relax instead of chasing the local department stores. A leisurely lunch on an open terrace overlooking the gardens and sea, followed by a poolside siesta.

As we follow a winding walk in the dark from our room to dinner, it is hard to see the path and we are buzzed by some throaty night birds who object to our presence.

A relaxing dinner in the lesser of two restaurants occupying the same space. We are surprised how many young families there are.

Moorea 4WD Safari.





Moorea Intercontinental.



Our Hut.



Reception.



Over water huts.



Opunohu Bay, Rotui Mountain, Cook's Bay.



Hotel Intercontinental.

Mar 5th ~ Moorea 4WD Safari.

The ladies waiting breakfast all wear white figure hugging long dresses flared below the knee. Jan thinks they look like night dresses.

After breakfast we wait for a 4WD tour. Ring, ring. "Can you be in the foyer at 8:15pm we depart early." No problem.

Our vehicle is a long bed pickup truck fitted with bench seats down the sides for eight, roll bars and a tarp for a roof. Bone shaking.

This is the real Cook's Bay. The one now bearing the captains name is not. A hotel grabbed the original name for tourist value.

Moorea is one huge extinct volcano. Around the perimeter a series of towering peaks like Rotui and Tohivea (1027m). Mouaroa the peak filmed as Bali Hi in South Pacific, and Pluta which looks like a ladies face with a hole through it for the eye.

Our route follows the coast road then a dirt track into the crater, now a very fertile area. Wild chickens scuttle out of our path.

A temple dating from the 1500's is marked by a low wall of stones. The Tahitians only placed roofs over burial sites. At one end a platform of stones formed an alter. Two large stones in the middle of the floor provided seating for chieftains. Tahitians were cannibals, they only devoured male prisoners after decapitation.

Christianity was introduced, but so was disease. The population declined from 50k to 2k and is only now recovered to 15k.

Captain Cook is credited with discovering Moorea in the 1700's but the Spanish were here in the 1500's. Eight sailors left a Spanish ship. One of the drivers introduces us to a little boy descended from one of these men.

Inside the crater is an Agricultural School. We tour the grounds.

The view of the coast is stunning. The light blue water being only two meters deep. Beyond, the white breakers of the reef, and deep blue of deeper water. At our feet, holes dug by land crabs.

We make various stops for shopping opportunities. A lady is making tie dyed body drapes like a sari. After coloring, the cloths are laid out in the sun with designs cut in linoleum resting on them. The result, superimposed bleached designs. Then of course the black pearl store....

The TV in our room is advertising a theme evening on the beach, but when I enquire, it is not available tonight. This is the *off* season.

Hinano (Tahiti) beer is 5% alcohol; the name means young lady.

There are no restaurants close by, so we dine again in the hotel. We both order T-bones and don't expect anything exceptional. Jan a medium and mine a rare. Mine won't cut, but it turns out the knife is blunt, the meat superb. Half way through dinner, I notice Jan's wiggling, they were reversed, so we swap what is left.

All the ladies wear slender patterned evening dresses with flowers in their hair. They seem happy and laugh a lot.



Don't push that tree over!



This mountain was the mythical Bali Hi in South Pacific.





Dolphin Pens.





Pareo.

The Pareo are tie-dyed, dried in the sun, then laid out on the ground and covered with linoleum cut-outs. The sun bleaches the patterns onto the cloth.



Mar 6th ~ Bora Bora

Food and drinks are expensive. When we received our bill at check out, I was agreeably surprised. It seemed to be substantially less than I expected. So I am wondering if we received some kind of discount.

Our suit cases are getting heavier, although we have not purchased anything. It is hot and sweaty waiting in the airport.

We stand about five feet from the gate. Two couples come and stand rudely in front of us. The plane, an AR72, comfortable and modern, seats about 80. The cabin crew serves pineapple juice. There are two island stops just a few minutes before Bora Bora, Huahine and Raiatea.

The airport, built by the US Military in 1941, is on an island, part of the outer reef.

"You want Hotel Bora Bora? Follow me." We are decorated with leis made from Tahitian Cherry.

Our personal launch, which could seat a dozen, takes Jan & I on a 20min cruise down one side of the island. At the hotel dock, after cold towels and Champaign, we are greeted by Beatrice, the Visitor Relations Manager. She is, as her position befits, charming, talkative and escorts us to our room to complete check-in.

A bucket of ice, chilling a bottle of Champaign, and a fruit bowl, sit on a coffee table. This thatched cottage is spacious with large bathroom, changing area, bedroom and separate sitting room and office. We are 50ft from golden sand and the bluest sea I have ever seen.

Beatrice gestures to the large colored scarves on the bed, "The Pareo are yours to keep. This is your CD player."

This whole first experience is designed to create a 'WOW' factor.

We lunch at the thatched beach bar. Knives and forks come hung on a little metal stand. The club sandwich we share is interesting. Between the slices, a quartered hard boiled egg. About a mile away, we watch huge waves break incessantly on the reef. Along the bar top, a bird is feasting on half a bread bun. I ask in my best French what it is called. In reply, "Bird!" Oh, well.

The name of the hotel does not do justice to this beautiful spot.

With only one full day on Bora Bora, we want to make the most of our time, and select a half day 4WD Tour. The rest of the afternoon is spent on the beach.

The Managers Cocktail Party starts at 6:00pm on the beach. We make small talk with other guests. I try to talk to a young Japanese couple, but their English is no better than my Japanese.

The restaurant is on a balcony overlooking the beach. We dine outside and take another look at the Southern Cross. The local cat with his spots, looks like lynx.

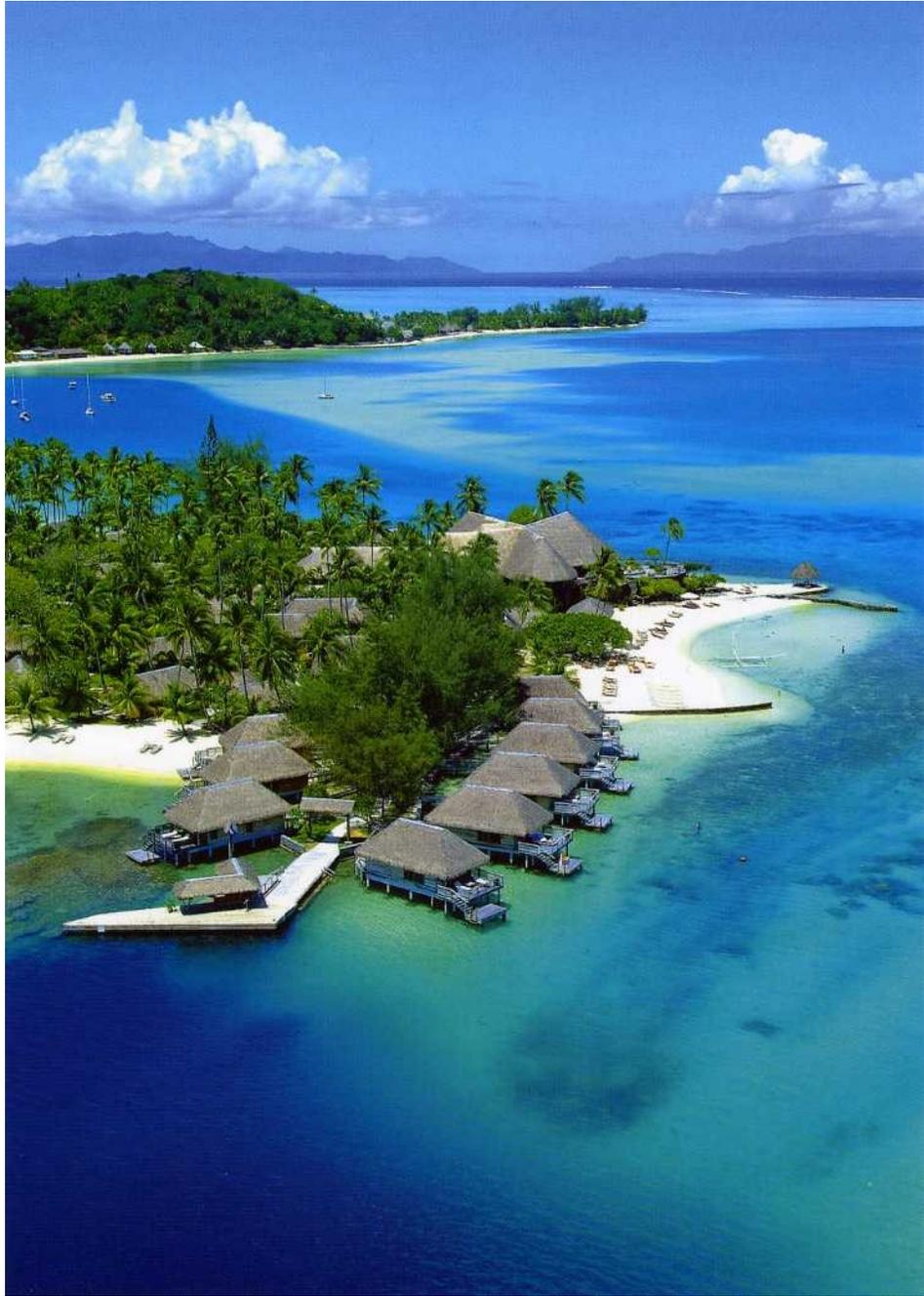
It is dark. A table has been set up at the waters edge so the diners can paddle their toes.



Views of Bora Bora.



Hotel Bora Bora.



Hotel Bora Bora.

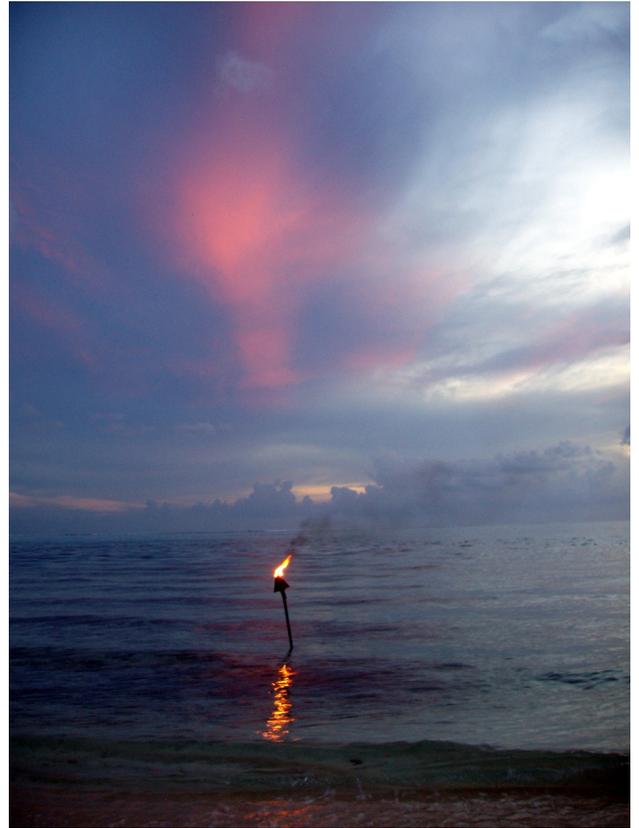


Bora Bora Accommodation.





Party time.



Any time.



Show time.



At dinner in Bora Bora.

Mar 7th ~ Bora Bora bump.

The restaurant is nice but its menu is limited. We are told there are a couple of other decent restaurants on the island, but not close by. We enjoy our time here, but I could not see spending a week. Jan I think many of the Caribbean islands like Antigua and St. Lucia compare favorably.

The features which set Bora Bora apart are its beautiful lagoon, with supposedly 24 shades of blue. The towering crags and mixed vegetation, creating a variety of textures and shades of green.

There are three villages. The population, now 8,000 has increased by 4,000 in six years. Tourist amenities and resorts are being built everywhere. Useable, flat land is confined to a shelf following the shore. Already tracks are appearing up the steep hillsides with accompanying power lines, so one must wonder how much longer the island can retain its charm.

Our 4WD was the usual pickup with bench seats for six. We follow the coast road and make two excursions up rutted, boulder strewn dirt tracks to viewing points. At the first we look down on a beautiful bay and across the lagoon to the airport. The second takes us back to WWII. Two 7" guns are still mounted on a strategic hill top, but were never fired in anger. The Japanese never came to Bora Bora.

Everyone plants fruit trees and flowers in their modest gardens. Breadfruit, which must be cooked, mangos, pineapple, avocado and coconuts. Flowers like red and pink ginger, hibiscus in all colors and bright yellow Allamanda.

At the Pearl Factory, we learn how they are cultivated using a seed and implantation method pioneered by the Japanese. A lengthy process, requiring a substantial investment, and years of patience.

This afternoon Jan swims in the sea while I snorkel. Two parrot fish follow my hands. They must have previously been fed. The water is so clear.

Packing is a pain. We try to separate the things we will need from now until we get home, from the other holiday stuff.

At 7:00pm we go for a buffet and sit at a table on the beach. There is a wide variety of food. Most of the meat is barbecued. A pig, duck, ribs, beef and Mahi Mahi.

The Polynesian show starts at 8:30pm and is unlike the others we have seen. The men put on a show of strength lifting huge stones, the largest 190kg. A spear throwing contest and a group fire dancing. The ladies danced but their moves were slow and graceful. A pleasant evening under the stars.

Bora Bora Bump...







Never fired in anger.



Oyster farm.



Mature oysters, in the net, shed eggs which adhere to the rope below. After two years, these have developed into new oysters which are implanted with a seed at left, then hung on ropes for transfer back to the sea.





Our private launch.



Assistant and Beatrice.



Who knows what this is?



Moving dredged sand.



Too much building.

Mar 8th ~ Tahiti encore.

A last breakfast on the balcony. The suitcases are packed with our clothes separated for 'in transit' and 'home'. A free Email home to confirm our expected arrival. It is already hot, and more overcast than yesterday. We are glad to wait in the comfort of our room before departure from the dock.

Beatrice and an assistant are on the dock to see us off. I can't believe the attention we are getting. Fifteen minutes on our private launch and we are returned to the airport at the north end of the lagoon. On the way we can clearly see the inroads construction is making on the hills.

Air conditioning at the airport is open doors. We walk across the tarmac, up the steps and board. Every seat is filled, so the plane pulls out early.

"Please turn off all electronic devices." Across the aisle a man text messages throughout the flight, but we don't crash.

We eat lunch at the same Intercontinental in Tahiti, while waiting for our room. Since our departure is just after midnight, we will only be here a few hours, but it is nice to have a room.

We have no plans and just sit around the pool until dinner, and after, sleep for a few hours.



Goodbye.....

Mar 9th ~ To LA.

Marama tours insist on picking us up at 12:20am for a 2:20am flight. We thought that rather tight timing; it was. We were almost the last in line to check in, and stood one hour in line. The temperature is 85°F. Travel is not for the weak!

Security is not too bad, we don't have to show our dirty socks. We want to exchange the last of our South Pacific Francs, but find the bank is outside security.

"The Captain has delayed seating. We will tell you more in 15min."

"We are still waiting for the Engineer to report to us."

Without warning, the heard rushes toward the gate, there never was an announcement.

Although late in the check in line, we are fortunate. Our seats are in the middle, three across, but there is just Jan and I; we share an empty seat.

Captain, "Sorry for the delay, we had a few engineering issues. The second pilots seat collapsed, but it is fixed now."

And Home.....