

French Polynesia: The Marquesas Islands, Tahiti, Bora Bora



General

Crossing the Pacific proved to be less daunting than we expected. Seas were generally 3-5 feet with the largest more toward 7 feet but the ship, equipped with state-of-art stabilizers, seems to cut through the waves effortlessly. Interesting to watch rain showers move across the ocean, envelop the ship, and then move on. The main pool deck has a fully retractable,

segmented roof which they can quickly close or open depending on the weather. Also, the sun is very direct and hot so they extend the roof to provide shade when needed.

Lorraine is taking two different exercise classes; one is yoga but the other is a more physical workout. With a fear of gaining weight (almost a guarantee), Lorraine has been consistent on her classes while I have been in the gym each day at sea. Now up to running 1.8 miles at a decent pace and working toward two miles. Lorraine is also joining other ladies in making a "journey quilt." At each port the ladies buy material representative of the culture and work on individual quilts during sea days.

Entertainment continues to be a cruise highlight. In our first island stop (more on that to follow) we picked up several new acts from Australia. Quiz: who was the lead guitar on the studio albums for the Joe Cocker, Barbra Streisand, Boz Scaggs, Lionel Richie, The Jackson Five, The Carpenters, Neil Diamond, Marvin Gaye, Glen Campbell, and many other super stars? The answer is Louie Shelton (I had never heard of him.) He played medleys from the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s where he was the solo guitarist. Incredible performance from a member of the Musicians Hall of Fame.

Other entertainers were comedian Jeff Green from Australia and O Tahiti E, and award winning ensemble group of musicians and dancers from Tahiti. They were so popular that they gave a second show. We did not know that body parts could move so quickly!

Excursions

1. **Marquesas Islands (French Polynesia).** First stop after 8 sea days and yes, good to get our feet on dry land. We did an included walking tour of the capital which is Taiohae. A small island of approximately 6,000, we walked the inner harbor area from the tender landing area to a cathedral and back. Very warm, 85 degrees, and humid so we could feel the effects quickly. Very friendly population but an island totally dependent on tourism and funding from the French government. All supplies come from Tahiti and children past middle school further their education off island. They fly to high school and come home on weekends. Medical support on Taiohae is basic and serious illnesses are likewise flown off island. Not a lot to see on this walking tour but a good introduction to Polynesia and for the next islands.



2. **Tahiti (French Polynesia).** Two-day trip to the capital which is Papeete. Large island with a population of 200,000. The ship actually docked today at a modern pier. The ship next to us was something we had never seen. It is designed to carry yachts! The stern opens up, yachts pull in, and then the water is drained out. The process is reversed when they are delivering ships. Talk about the Top 1% of wealth, worldwide! We took a walking tour of Papeete with an excellent guide who spoke of the indigenous population, the colonization by the French, the competing European-based religions, and the revival of Tahitian culture. We visited the former queen's palace and bathing pools. The latter was a public spot for natives to see and talk to the queen and draw water from a "royal" source. They carried the water away in baskets. Thus, Papeete means "water basket." There is a French governor who administers French funding to the islands but the Tahitians have their own assembly and President. Once again, even with such a large population, older children are schooled off island and medical support is also provided elsewhere. The welfare system is still very dependent on French support but the port is large and there is some industry. We had a second excursion which involved snorkeling in a lagoon. The current was surprisingly swift and while we had our own masks, they did not provide fins or floatation vests. They ended up passing

out foam “noodles” which helped. Lorraine and I both struggled a bit and would bring our own fins next time. Visibility was very good but not a lot of fish. We snorkeled in two different locations and the second, shallower one was frankly more fun. The boat operators were very good and very helpful but need more equipment to enhance the experience.

3. **Bora Bora (French Polynesia).** One day sail to the capital of Vaitape with a population of 9,000. The island is simply stunning with the remains of a large volcano in middle of the island. Rising to 2,379 feet, Mt. Otemanu is prehistoric looking and a favorite subject of the author, James Michener. No roads go up to the highest elevations. Only one road circumnavigates the four mile by 2 ½ miles of the island. We took a well narrated included bus tour and noted the famous multiple resorts all with bungalows on stilts out in the lagoons. Many of these resorts offer lodging at \$1,000 per night. We went on an optional snorkeling tour in the afternoon. This tour was much smaller (two boats each carrying ten) and we went out to an area close to the natural reef that protects Bora Bora and completely encircles the island. A large number of fish visible and a safety line out the back of the boat which made for a safer experience. Still no fins or floatation devices. A second swimming site had us in 4-5 feet of water like a bathtub. We were three hundred feet offshore yet in super shallow water. The two boat operators hopped in the water and served us mango cocktails and fresh fruit. Best described as surreal. Just a great, great time.

We are currently sailing to Rarotonga in The Cook Islands. It is a day’s sailing so new adventures await. We hope you can vicariously join us on this journey and we will file more reports as the nautical miles slip by. We know you are focusing on going to Florida but French Polynesia should be on your bucket list.