

Rarotonga, Tonga & Fiji

Time to provide an update as we leave the Pacific Islands and head toward New Zealand.

General:

We continue to have very good weather and relatively calm seas. As mentioned before the ship's stabilizers do a wonderful job underway. At anchor is a different issue and we will cover that later. Temperatures are consistently in the 80s with mild breezes. Humidity is variable but we seem to be acclimatizing well so we seem to have more stamina. Time zone challenges are still evident as we continue to turn our clocks back. However, we crossed the International Date Line and lost a whole day. Then, in Fiji we moved back one hour only to add the hour back after we left Fiji. Time zones and the International Date Line are not straight lines in the Pacific.

Lorraine continues yoga and has added a Tai Chi class. Her quilting project flourishes as we have been successful in finding representative material in all of the ports. Over a dozen women are making quilts so it has become popular onboard. My gym sessions continue as an antidote to the incredible meals. Running two miles whenever we are at sea. Not my favorite activity but I am sticking with it ... so far.

Entertainment continues to be excellent and varied. We had the guitarist Louie Shelton back for a second show and he continued to wow the audience with all of the classic hits in which he played for the legends of rock, Motown, and even country and western. Rock violin artist, Katei, played a second show and further dazzled with contemporary music. "You have to see him to believe him." Two Australians, Chris Powley, singer and Martin Ralph, a singer/comedian performed and were well received. We saw Chris but not Martin as we had to make hard decisions about attending shows and other activities. We missed a "mentalist" named Anthony Lane because we were at a birthday party but did hear Divalicious, two opera singers who were finalists on Australia's Got Talent. They were excellent and actually had some funny comic bits in their performance. Most recently, we had Andy Joy, an Australian, perform. He plays six instruments (piano, flute, clarinet, saxophone, accordion, and a carrot!) On the last instrument, he took a carrot and a power drill and hollowed out the vegetable and drilled holes like a recorder. He then played an Irish jig that was very, very good. His final number was a Jerry Lee Lewis number, "Great Balls of Fire" which he played standing on the piano bench and later using his right foot to play the upper keys. Hysterically good.

Excursions:

- 1. Rarotonga.** We were scheduled for two tours, one an included walking tour of the capital, Avatiu and a 4x4 adventure into the hills and jungle. It did not happen. Rarotonga is a shallow water port so we were to anchor off the island and take tenders ashore. The sea swells were too great (4-6 feet) to allow for safe boarding. The captain

moved the ship around the other side of the island where the conditions were no better. So, we had to cancel the visit. The ship's staff immediately revised our daily port schedule to add other lectures and activities. A new Viking Daily (ship's newspaper) was produced within two hours and we sailed away. Everyone a bit disappointed but at the same time we all recognized that the passenger demographics really influence what happens afloat and no one wants to see any injuries. It really was the correct decision.

2. **Tonga.** The largest of the 36 inhabited Tonga Islands is Tongatapu whose capital is Nuku'alofa. The island is relatively flat with a population of 109,000. Certainly one of the larger islands in terms of geography (99 square miles) and population size that we have visited. It is the only constitutional monarchy in the Pacific dating back to 1875. All the kings are named George and George VI is the current monarch. We saw, but not open to the public, his wooden Royal Palace. Our included tour was called Majestic Nature of Tonga. We would make that a small "m" in terms of "majestic" but still nice overall. We visited the famous Huma blowholes which feature underground caves at the water's edge. When waves come in they are forced into the caves and then up holes in the top of the caves. Impressive but it was low tide so it would be better at high tide. We saw a famous three-headed coconut tree and a tree full of fruit bats which are at least 12" long with a good size wing span. Again, interesting, nice weather, excellent local guides but not "majestic."
3. **Fiji.** There are 330 islands in the Fijian archipelago. The capital of Fiji is Suva, a large, modern city/town. Population of Suva with its three bordering towns is 330,000. The city proper is 790 square miles. Suva is really industrialized so that the nearest beaches are 25 miles away. Lastly, Suva is home to the University of the South Pacific which attracts students from all over the region. We took the Navua Village River Tour. Not sure what we originally expected but this tour was OUTSTANDING. An air-conditioned bus took us 50 minutes from the capital where we boarded traditional Fijian long boats. These are about 24 feet long, hold 8-10 people sitting in rows of two, and are powered by 40 HP outboard motors with shallow shafts – a key feature. We had life vests and plastic bags for our backpacks which should have warned us about the trip ahead. We then motored up river at a fairly good clip through initially calm waters which became category 1-2 rapids. At one point we literally got out of the boats so that they could take the lightened craft up an especially rough patch of water, and then we re-boarded to continue our journey to a waterfall. It rained on us three times! Total trip on the water was 40 minutes and we were deep in the island. We landed at the waterfall site and climbed out and started the hike to the waterfall. Lorraine and I were grateful that we had been exercising fairly seriously because the climb was about 20 minutes each way and yes, it rained briefly thus wetting the narrow stone steps. The waterfall is about 80 feet high and pristine. We reluctantly returned to the boats and headed down river to a local village. There, we were welcomed by the population with drums, a dancing demonstration, and buffet lunch and a "Kava" ceremony to make us members of the tribe. Kava is a locally produced drink used for ceremonies, weddings, funerals, etc. It is

used to relieve anxiety. We had three volunteer “tourist chiefs” selected to drink the Kava rather than all of us. Once again, my training to “never volunteer” paid off. We had a great time on this excursion. The local guides and especially the boat driver were fantastic. Did not lose a single tourist!



Thus far, Fiji would be a place to return and spend some time. There were rain forest tours, fire walking demonstrations, history museums (to include the rudder from the HMS Bounty), snorkeling, and many other activities. Fijians are very warm and friendly.

As a sort of an out of the box comment we have noted the strong, and increasing presence of a formal and informal influence of the Chinese in the Pacific Islands. Locals tell us that Chinese immigration has accelerated and that they own many of the small to mid-size businesses. Electronics, merchandizing, restaurants, small engine repair, etc., are all owned by the Chinese. On the formal side the Chinese have made major investments in the Islands, especially the port facilities. There are dedication plaques referencing the Chinese prominently in Tonga and Fiji.

Ironically, the Chinese are major investors in Viking Cruises and the godmother of the Viking Sun is Chinese.

Should be in The Bay of Islands (Russell, New Zealand) on the 28th of the month. Not sure what time zone 😊.