



Welcome to Rott's Manor

Pete & Mary Clukey

French Polynesia 2017 Trip Report

Saturday, July 15

Fly to Papeete, Tahiti

We traveled all day, with a quick stop and change of plane in Los Angeles. Upon arriving in Tahiti at 9:45 pm, we transferred to Hotel Sarah Nui. Our room at the Hotel Sara Nui was large with a huge bathroom. The room itself was dimly lit and didn't have enough convenient outlets for charging phones and cameras.

Sunday, July 16

Papeete, Tahiti

We slept in and totally missed the included continental breakfast this morning. Unfortunately, this meant that we also missed seeing the Papeete Market.

The really nice thing about our hotel was its location downtown. We easily walked (less than 10 minutes) to Les 3 Brasseurs restaurant where we shared some pizza for lunch.

We had just a little time to stroll the waterfront area of Papeete before our afternoon tour.

At 2pm, we had a "Discover Papeete via a Segway tour" booked; described as exploring Papeete city center and over 20 of the top attractions in the area including the beautiful Notre Dame Cathedral, the Papeete Market (Marché de Papeete), the bust of Pouvanaa a Oopa and the Territorial Assembly Gardens. Several of these attractions were closed on Sunday

afternoon. Even so, we enjoyed this easy way to see Papeete (we still were fighting a bit of “jet lag”).

After our tour, we went back to Les 3 Brasseurs restaurant for a couple of beers and some snacks that were big enough for dinner.

We had an early morning scheduled for the next day. So, we called it an early night.

Monday, July 17

Moorea, Tahiti

No time for our continental breakfast today, as we boarded an early morning (6:40am) ferry for a 30-minute scenic cruise to the beautiful island of Moorea...but that is OK the ferry has an air-conditioned cabin, with food, snacks, and drinks available. We really enjoyed their chocolate croissants!

It was a short ride from the ferry dock to the boat dock location for today’s great adventure, as we discovered Moorea's best attractions with Moorea Miti Tours (www.mooreamititours.com).

In a beautiful motorized outrigger canoe, we motored around Moorea as Captain Wilfred serenaded us with his voice and his ukulele. Along the way we cruised into Cook’s Bay with its magnificent mountains.

Then we cruised through Moorea's lagoon to a sand bar where we met friendly stingrays and black-tip sharks in shallow water.

After that, we enjoyed some very fresh and sweet Moorea pineapple on our way to a beautiful sand-bar at the motu (islet) where we enjoyed a cold beer while we waded in the crystal clear warm water and enjoyed the amazing scenery around us.

Then of course, we went snorkeling, admired amazing fish and coral reefs.

Moorea Miti then served us a delicious lunch on a quiet white sand beach, with our feet in the water. BBQ chicken and fresh poisson cru were the stars of the meal. How fresh was the poisson cru? Well, Captain Wilfred cracked open the coconuts, shredded them, and squeezed the coconut to

get the coconut milk which he then blended with fresh squeezed lime juice and cubed fresh tuna.

After lunch, we motored back to the boat dock past all the amazing Moorea scenery where a comfortable van brought us back to the ferry dock...ending an amazing excursion/tour.

We caught the 14:45 ferry back to Papeete. After a full packed day, we walked back to our hotel where we cleaned up and relaxed until later when we ventured out to dinner.

Tonight, we finally made our way to Les Roulottes. Les Roulottes are Tahiti's food trucks that set up nightly by the waterfront in Papeete. We choose steak and fries from the Pirate food truck. The plates were huge (even with our appetites, we could have shared one).

Tuesday, July 18

Depart Papeete, Tahiti

After enjoying our continental breakfast, we boarded the Aranui 5 for our 14-day cruise to the Marquesas. Today before departing Tahiti, we enjoyed a Marquesan dance show by the pool. Then there was the mandatory safety meeting and life boat drill we had to attend.

And all of that happened before lunch. Oh, and lunch... well, the food is plentiful and tasty onboard the Aranui 5; three courses and wine included.

We spent the afternoon organizing our cabin and enjoying our balcony. We skipped the Polynesian language and dance courses that were offered today... we just couldn't leave our balcony. We brought along a Bluetooth speaker and played our favorite music while enjoying the view.

We left our balcony briefly only to attend the daily afternoon meeting presenting the next day's activities and to meet with the chef about our special dietary requirements.

And, we had to leave the balcony for dinner (there is no room service onboard). Dinner was wonderful; three courses and wine included.

We still were catching up from the jet lag and skipped the "Lost Continent" presentation that was given at 9pm.

Wednesday, July 19

Fakarava atoll (Rotoava), Tuamotu Archipelago

At our first port of call, the ship anchored inside the lagoon. The hard-working crew safely shuttled us to shore by tender.

A 15-minute walk took us to a white sand beach where we went swimming to cool off.

Then we walked quite a bit further down the road to checked out a bed and breakfast on Fakarava. About now, we were thinking perhaps renting a bicycle would have been a good idea...there was a lot of walking.

On our way back, we found a little bar (La Pailote) which we wish we had stumbled upon earlier. It had a beautiful beach for swimming, the staff understood English, it had cool beverages and it even had WiFi. Unfortunately, the Aranui is only here until noon, and we needed to walk back...so, we headed back, stopping into the beautiful coral church for a look around.

Arriving back in the main town, we heard music coming from the athletic center. July is the month of Heiva (hei meaning to assemble, and va meaning community places) activities. We listen to the musicians, watch some palm weaving, and rooted for our favorite Copra harvesting team (more about copra later). And Mary even did a little shopping. Later in the trip, Mary wish she had bought more here as the pearls were better and cheaper here than on the other islands later.

Lunch was another amazing three course feast. And we spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying the view from our balcony.

Thursday, July 20

At Sea crossing from Tuamotu to Marquesas

Time to explore the ship, meet other passengers, and enjoy various activities hosted by the talented crew. On this sailing the passengers are surprisingly almost evenly divided between the French-speaking and the English-speaking passengers. There are also a few German speaking passengers. And we spent a lot of time on our balcony.

Friday, July 21

Nuku Hiva (Taiohae) – Marquesas Archipelago

We sailed into Taiohae's spectacular bay, a giant volcanic amphitheater dominated by towering cliffs. The Aranui was docked which is a lot more convenient for passenger coming and going. As the Aranui unloads its cargo, we loaded into vehicles that took us exploring all over Nuku Hiva where Herman Melville, then a 23 year old sailor, and a shipmate jumped a whaling ship in 1842, which he later recounted in his novel Typee.

First, we have a tour of the magnificent cathedral, then we travel along winding mountain roads to the village of Hatiheu to visit the archaeological site of Kamuihei where dancers greet us (doing the pig dance) at the base of a huge ancient banyan tree. The tree is about 150 tall, 40 feet in diameter and estimated to be 600 years old. After the dancing, we continue to explore the archeological site seeing its paepae, immense stone platforms on which houses were build, and some huge boulders in the area that are carved with petroglyphs of sacred turtles and fish.

Lunch today was at Chez Mamie Yvonne's Restaurant, one of the best in the Marquesas, where the specialty is Hima'a, pig cooked in a traditional underground oven. The food here was served family style and plate after plate just kept arriving... 8...9...10 courses (I don't know really we lost count)!

After lunch, we were taken back to town where we did a little shopping, got a cold drink, and attempted to use the very slow WiFi near the handicraft center. Later in the trip when we returned to Nuku Hiva, we found a place closer towards the waterfront that had amazing fresh squeezed grapefruit juice and faster WiFi. The WiFi on these islands is slow and the more people on it, the slower it is.

We enjoyed a leisurely stroll back to the ship.

Tonight, after another wonderful three-course meal, we spent a little time in the bar listening to the Aranui Band. The staff when finished with their "duties" onboard gather in the Veranda Bar, playing various instruments and singing to entertain themselves and us passengers.

Saturday, July 22

Ua Pou (Hakahau)

As we arrived, we enjoyed the view of the soaring mountain spires of Ua Pou from our balcony. The crew began to unloaded supplies — from cement to sugar — and later in the day loaded sacks of copra (dried coconut meat).

We joined a hike up to the cross that is high on a hilltop looking down at the bay where we are docked. The hike wasn't too strenuous. All the available hikes on the Aranui itinerary are detailed in the daily meetings and rated for difficulty. Today's hike was rate 5 on a scale to 10. The views were worth the effort.

After our hike, we walk to the tiny town of Hakahau. Our first stop in town was into a little store where the crew told us delicious hand churned ginger ice cream was sold. The chocolate ice cream looked amazing, so we got a scoop of ginger and a scoop of chocolate (good decision).

Next, we shopped at the craft center looking for a small carving/trinket in the flower stone which is unique to this island.

Also, in the central town gazebo, the locals set up a sampling of delicious fruit grown on Ua Pou. This was very nice and something that was done on another island later in the itinerary as well.

A short walk took us to an excellent dance performance including the Bird Dance, traditional to Ua Pou.

At Rosalie's Restaurant, we enjoy an amazing Marquesan lunch buffet: breadfruit, an island staple, along with curried goat, poisson cru (raw fish marinated in lime and coconut milk), fei (red mountain bananas) and fruit poe.

It was a busy day on the island! By 3pm, all were back on board and we sailed away.

Back on board this afternoon, there was a presentation on the Mutiny of the Bounty (we chose to enjoy the view from our balcony).

This evening was “Plancha Night”. A wonderful buffet was served on the pool deck. Around 9pm, the crew entertained us with their musical and dancing skills under the starry skies.

Sunday, July 23

Hiva Oa (Puamau) & Tahuata (Vaitahu)

The Aranui is anchored in another beautiful bay. After we took a barge to shore, we were loaded up into 4WD pickups. We were driven to the most incredible archaeological site for “tikis” (ancient, human-like religious stone sculptures) outside of Easter Island. Once we reached Mea’e lipona, our knowledgeable guide (John) told us the stories of these haunting statues of ancient times. Surrounded by beautifully lush grounds, the site is impressive and has a lot of what Polynesians call “mana” (spiritual power). Only a small part of the site has been restored and most of it is still buried under massive trees and rocks.

After exploring Mea’e lipona, we enjoyed a leisurely walk down paved roads snapping pictures of beautiful flowers, fruit, and birds. In about 30-45 minutes we reached the dock and took a barge back to the Aranui.

While we enjoy another wonderful three-course lunch, the ship sailed to Vaitahu, Tahuata.

The barges took us to shore where we visit this island's craft center which features the intricate carvings in bone and shell for which Tahuata is famous.

Next on the schedule is a tour of the Church of Vaitahu, Tahuata. This huge church, built by the Vatican, is decorated with beautiful carvings and a stained-glass window featuring the Marquesan cross.

All too soon, we depart this beautiful island. Of course, we are on our balcony enjoying the view as we go.

Tonight, we decided to skip the three-course dinner and opted for some cheeseburgers from the snack bar. Unfortunately, the snack bar does not have fries or chips, but the onboard gift shop does have Pringles potato chips, so the meal is completed with those and a couple of cold beers!

Monday, July 24

Hiva Oa (Atuona)

The Aranui was docked today at the pier making it somewhat easier to come and go as we please...I say "somewhat" because the pier is a bit of a walk from town (3km).

To give us more time in town, we have chosen to ride Le Truc (free of charge) versus walk up the hill to the cemetery, where under a large frangipani tree, a tombstone with the simple words "Paul Gauguin 1903" marks his burial site. Nearby sits the grave of another European seduced by Hiva Oa, Belgian singer-composer Jacques Brel. After visiting the graves, we catch Le Truc (free transport for Aranui passengers) to take us to town.

We spent a little time visiting the Gauguin Cultural Center, a museum dedicated to his paintings (there was a scheduled tour for Aranui passengers which we did not join). Then we visited the Jacques Brel performance center to see his Beechcraft twin bonanza model D50.

We had some free time to explore Atuona, the second largest village in the Marquesas, where Paul Gauguin lived and created some of his best work. We decided to maximize this time by not returning to the ship for lunch. Instead we went to the Snack Bar, the chalk menu is written in French (as it should be). We should have asked for suggestions from the staff, but instead go with the familiar cheeseburger. It was OK, but when other customers arrived, the things they ordered looked so much better.

While on the island, we went to the craft center at the far end of the village and the General Store to get in our shopping fix. We had time to take a stroll to the waterfront, before finally catching Le Truc back to the Aranui.

Dinner is another tasty three-course meal. After dinner tonight karaoke is the entertainment available in the Veranda Bar (we skipped it).

Tuesday, July 25

Fatu Hiva (Omoa / Hanavave)

The most lush and remote island of the Marquesas, Fatu Hiva, is also a center of Marquesan crafts.

What was supposed to be a 15 minutes' walk to the village athletic center of Omoa was made longer by a brief torrential rain shower...remember Fatu Hiva is the lushest island for a reason...we waited out the shower in the islands beautiful Catholic church.

The village athletic center was set up as a massive craft center (the best shopping yet on this trip). The arts and crafts center offers excellent tapa and carvings, and the monoi coconut oil from Fatu Hiva is one of the finest. Pete found his ukulele and Mary found several tapa pieces that she liked.

Villagers have even set up a table with fruits from the island for us to enjoy while we shopped. Village women demonstrated the making of tapa by hammering mulberry, banyan or breadfruit bark on a log. After it is pounded flat, it is dried and then painted with ancient traditional designs. Another demonstration shows the making of the kumuhei, an herbal bundle unique to this island used by the local women to perfume their hair.

By noon the Aranui set sail to the next bay - Hanavave. Some athletic passengers have chosen to hike from Omoa to Hanavave, a 10 mile (16 km) trek offering spectacular views of towering cliffs and waterfalls (scale of difficulty: 9/10). The hikers were given a sandwich boxed lunch served at the summit.

Non-hikers (like us) sailed on the Aranui to Hanavave into the Bay of Virgins, considered one of the most beautiful bays in the world. Lunch onboard is a magnificent buffet.

The arrival into Hanavave is amazing. So, glad that we have a balcony to enjoy this view.

Pete remained onboard for an ukulele lesson. And Mary ventured into the village with a few other passengers to welcome the hikers. Few villagers have set up some tables displaying their handicrafts for sale. We are only here for a few hours, so there is little time for in-depth exploration. Mary and another passenger ventured up to the village cemetery where the views were something to see.

Passengers enjoy a dance lesson on the pool deck as we leave this gorgeous bay.

Another tasty three-course meal is served for dinner. Afterwards, the Aranui band entertains in the Veranda bar.

Wednesday, July 26

Ua Huka (Vaipae /Hane)

In early morning, the ship executes a point-to-point turn in the notable “Invisible Bay” of Vaipae — we were told it is not to be missed and it seems that everyone was up on the deck to witness it.

The Aranui had a busy schedule for us this morning. We went zipping around the island (Mary wisely took her motion sickness medication before we left the ship) making various stops along the way.

First, we had a guided tour of a botanical garden. The Pupua-keiha Arboretum was born out of the passion of the island’s former mayor, Leon Lichtle. John our guide from the Aranui had a difficult time pulling us away from Mr. Leon Lichtle as he enthusiastically showed us fruit after fruit for us to taste. The biggest grapefruits that we have ever seen grew here.

Next on the schedule was a stop at a handicraft center and a small museum with exquisite replicas of Marquesan artifacts. Under some shade trees out front a lady was selling some delicious sweet Marquesan treats made with fresh coconut, cocoa, and local honey.

Soon, we were once again loaded up in our vehicles and whisked away to our next destination. Along the way we stopped at a scenic overlook to take photos. We stopped at a handicraft shop in Hane. Mary bought a beautiful flower headpiece to wear tonight onboard. And we found a small store nearby selling ice-cream!

It’s still not lunchtime and we had one more stop to make. We were welcomed by music and dance at the small Sea Museum of Hane (Museum de La Mer). This museum shows the evolution of traditional pirogues (outrigger canoes).

Finally, it was lunchtime! A delicious buffet lunch was served at a local family restaurant, Celine Fournier.

After lunch, we choose the “hike” back to the ship option. The hike started at the Arboretum, briefly went up hill before descending downhill to the bay. It was an easy 3-mile walk on a paved road with beautiful scenery (difficulty scale 5/10). We stopped briefly to admire the wood carvings at the little village church.

Back on board, it was Polynesian Night. Almost everyone was dressed island style, wearing flowers purchased on shore today. A superb buffet dinner by the pool was followed by music and dancing.

Thursday, July 27

Nuku Hiva (Taiohae) & Ua Pou (Hakahau)

The ship docked in the morning at Taiohae. We took the truck in to town. Mary, unfortunately, had some bad information that we could get our passports stamped at the Post Office (showing “officially” that we had been in the Marquesas). The nice lady at the post office stamped a notepad to give us a unique souvenir.

We hiked to a park up on the hill where a warrior statue overlooks the town. The views were spectacular from the park. We had a little time to visit the Arts and Crafts center, before we found a small shop/restaurant on the waterfront, near the local farmers market, selling delicious fresh squeezed grapefruit juice. Their WiFi seemed to be working pretty good...so we could post a few more gorgeous pictures from the trip.

Soon, it was time to return to the ship...

At noon, the ship sailed to Ua Pou, docking at Hakahau. First on our “to do” is to get another delicious chocolate ice cream. This is our last opportunity to buy Marquesan souvenirs and Mary is still looking for something small made from the flower stone... and she finds it, a small Marquesan cross necklace. With our “must do’s” accomplished, we spend a little time relaxing on and swimming from the beautiful black sand beach.

The Aranui set sail around 5pm when all passengers were back onboard.

After another delicious three-course dinner, the Aranui band entertains in the Veranda bar.

Friday, July 28

At Sea crossing from Marquesas back to Tuamotu

So much to do onboard today...lectures and a workshop to create bracelets and earrings... and later there was the Happy Hour. We spent a good part of the day enjoying music and the view on our balcony...the rest of it, I think we spent eating the delicious food served onboard.

Saturday, July 29

Rangiroa atoll (Ohutu) – Tuamotu Archipelago

On lovely Rangiroa, the second largest atoll in the world, we stormed the shore using our barges like Normandy landing crafts.

We were among the first group to be whisked off to visit one of the finest pearl farms in the Tuamotus where we learned about these rare gems and saw how they are grown. The pearl farm had its own gorgeous and pricey gift shop, but we preferred to buy our pearls from the “mamas” on the beach where prices were much more reasonable and we knew our money would feed someone on the island and not go back to the big off-shore businesses that now own many of the larger pearl farms on these islands.

While beautiful, the beaches here are quite rocky, water shoes were definitely required for getting into and out of the water comfortably. Once in the water, the coral and fish made it worth the effort.

This was such a short stop, we came back onboard around noon because we wanted a lighter lunch today. We had hoped for sandwiches from the onboard Snack Bar... We were very disappointed when we stopped by the snack bar to grab some sandwiches for lunch and found them closed at 12:15 (no one at all around)... they were supposed to be open until 12:30.

So, at 1pm we went for our lunch at our normal seating in the dining room, and enjoyed another three-course lunch as we sailed to our final island of this voyage – Bora Bora (it is said that it is so beautiful that you have to say its name twice).

While I am sure that there were plenty of things going on this afternoon...you know where we were...on our balcony!

Sunday, July 30

Bora Bora (Vaitape) – Leeward Group of the Society Islands

The Aranui 5 anchored in the magnificent lagoon of Bora Bora. Bora Bora is best known for the palette of blue and green lagoon studded by the ring of islets that make up its reef.

Today there were several optional excursions: scuba diving; island tours by outrigger or bus; swimming with the sharks and manta rays; and even a helicopter joy ride over the lagoon. As tempting as those were, we chose our own path this morning. We scurried over to Avis and rented a small electric car known locally as a Bugster. And then we took our time exploring Bora Bora. We stopped at the world famous Bloody Mary's Restaurant & Bar which unfortunately was closed on Sundays, but it is an open-air restaurant so we went in and took a look around. We found some wonderful overlooks where we stopped to take some pictures. Generally, we just had a great time exploring on our own.

Soon, we were back in Vaitape where we returned our little rental car. Although very touristy (compared to the Marquesas), we enjoyed shopping at one of the duty-free shops where the owner was quite the dog lover. He and Mary hit it off right away and soon we were going to his house to meet his dogs. That was really nice and unexpected.

This afternoon, we joined everyone from the Aranui on a small Motu (island) where the Aranui crew had prepared an amazing picnic lunch buffet.

After lunch, we relaxed under a pavilion while a shower passed over the island. Once the rain had moved on we ventured over to a beautiful white sand beach on the Motu and enjoyed a relaxing swim.

We attempted to sign up (too late) for an afternoon tour. What was describe as an "Island Tour by Outrigger", we found out was so much more than just motoring around the island... there were snorkeling and swimming stops. If we had known, we would have planned to sign up for this one.

Tonight back onboard the Aranui, the crew and passengers provided the entertainment after dinner in the dining room. Some of the passengers had done really well learning all those Marquesan dances!

Monday, July 31

Disembark the Aranui

Arrival in **Tahiti (Port of Papeete)**

This morning... we left the Aranui 5 (insert frowny face here).

But the fun is not over yet! Our flight does not leave until midnight and we planned to pack as much into today as we could. Our guide Tracey Thomas of Unique Tahiti (www.uniquetahiti.com) had a full day of activities planned for us. We explored the East Coast and West Coast of the “Big” island of Tahiti.

First Tracey had to pick up two more guests for today’s adventure. When we told her that we were sad that we couldn’t see the Papeete Market before boarding the Aranui, she said how about I drop you off to see the market while I go get the other guests. Awesome! We had about 30 minutes to explore and shop. The Papeete Market is the place in Papeete, the capital of Tahiti, to buy fruit, vegetables, fish, oils, handicrafts (including hats, handbags and ukuleles), and various souvenir items.

Tracey planned to take us on a fascinating East Coast tour of Tahiti Nui which would take us to the most historically rich corner of Tahiti Nui. This part of the tour is described as: “breath taking natural sites on the coast, scenic view points and local encounters are just a few of this tour's spectacular features”. And it did not disappoint.

First, we stopped briefly at the view point of Tahara, or Squirmish Hill as it was named by Captain Wallis, which provided a breathtaking view of Papeete and spectacular views of Moorea in the distance.

Next, we visited the bay of Matavai where Tahiti was discovered by Captain Wallis. On the beach, we walked in the footsteps of Captains Cook, Bougainville and Bligh, the mutineers of HMS Bounty, the first Protestant missionaries and more recently Marlon Brando. The 1962 version of Mutiny

on the Bounty was filmed from this Bay. There are several monuments here and Tracey told us a little about each one.

We stopped next at Arahoho Blowhole, on the East Coast, which is one of Tahiti's most popular roadside attractions and has stunning views down the East Coast.

The furthest stop on the East Coast portion of the tour was the wonderful waterfall of Vaimahuta in the Tiare valley.

Tracey then took us to the best restaurant, La Plage de Maui, for lunch. This wonderful little beach restaurant, offering beautiful water views, is famous for its fresh seafood. YUM!

After lunch was the West Coast portion of our tour.

First, we strolled through the grounds of the Vaipahi botanical garden which has a picturesque waterfall.

Briefly we stopped at a freshwater swimming hole to see if we could entice the eels to come out. They made a brief appearance, but there was just too much activity for them.

Up next was a little time on a spectacular black volcanic sandy beach watching the surfers as they rode the waves. We really enjoyed wandering along the beach and taking photographs of the spectacular scenery.

Not only beautiful but our next stop had historical significance too! The stunning fern Caves of Maraa, a local wonder, where the artist Paul Gauguin swam in the cool fresh waters with the local population.

Our next stop took us even further back in time (historically speaking). The ancient religious site, Marae of Arahuru, is surrounded by rich tropical vegetation and trees with flowers and/or tropical fruit. Tracey told us about how this place was and still is an important place where people learn about and celebrate Polynesian culture, lifestyle and values.

After our great day of touring, we checked into Le Meridien where we had time to clean up, relax and enjoy the amenities (like its fabulous pool) this afternoon.

Tonight, for dinner we walked down the street just a bit from the resort to the popular Chez Remey where we had our last wonderful meal of the trip.