

Wednesday: 15° 40' south, 147° 31' west

Tahiti was fine but the port was like all ports with the city, Papeete, beyond; some good bits, a lovely market and some good shops, including a fabric shop where I wished I'd bought some fabric . . . and the ever necessary industrial/commercial areas. In fact, as we cruised in, we saw a 'traffic jam' of sorts; it seems that the business of the island starts early and finishes early as shops were shutting up before four. Like the other islands, many people survive on the fish and fruits the environment provides with its two seasons, winter (hot, humid with regular rain, don't we know!) and summer (hot)



I did the island tour which was good. As previous islands there were lots of flowers to be seen, including some I'd never seen before. No photo-record ... Nick was reluctant to lend me his camera (don't blame him!) and I've *not* bought a cheap one on board and really, really wished I had done so. First stop, a blow-hole, where the sea gathers force in a cave beneath the road and 'blows' a towering geyser/fountain on the seaward side of the road, while a smaller hole on the other side emits a booming hoot, rather like a ship's horn, at frequent intervals. Because the weather was wild, with tendency to rain, the natural wonders *performed* particularly well. We travelled on to a waterfall, walking a few hundred metres through rain forest to a towering fall into a pool which had ancient cultural significance. Then we stopped at the Gaugin Museum for a drink, on a deck built over the water which sloshed up through the flooring now and then. We also saw some colourful tropical fish corralled in ponds beyond. Then, on to some particularly lovely tropical gardens, and finally to a beach where we saw some of the most spectacular surf and surfing; stunts I'd only seen previously on film.



This is an island struggling into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century;

there is concern that most tourists come for the day, or for a short holiday, and that few return.

Not surprising, as much of the island's shore is rocky and many of the beaches have black sand (not too many palm-fringed beaches!) and the tour of the island's 'wonders' can be done in a day!



But it is a little surprising when you see the very beautiful women who came aboard and danced for us last evening. In fact both men and women enjoyed performing their dances as much as we enjoyed watching them, in grass skirts and wonderful garlands and crowns of real flowers. The girls, yes every one of them, are *amazingly* nubile, far more, it seems, than belly dancers; their grass skirts fly out and remain horizontal as they gyrate! (not quite like my hula hoop!)



And finally, the ship's band performed out on the rear deck as we sailed away under a starry sky, spirits high from the dancing and also from other sorts of spirit. We finally made our way to our cabin at a quarter past midnight ....just as well we both had had a zizz in the afternoon as we'd been up for'ard to watch our entry at seven in the morning.

Nick did his regular gym this morning and has just gone off to learn to play the ukulele!!!! He's always said he wanted to learn to play a musical instrument, and now has no excuse! He even has my cousin Mervyn to continue the tuition when we get home! Perhaps there's a local ukulele orchestra near Hungerford!

**Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March: 8° 56' south, 140° 06' west: Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Island**



Tonight just after sunset I sat in the Jacuzzi on Deck 9, having done 15 minutes of hydrotherapy exercise and watched Nuku Hiva fast disappearing to the north and Niva Oa disappearing in the south. This is the last landfall we shall see for nine whole days and was the first group of islands not protected by a coral reef; consequently no turquoise blue seas but a brief encounter with a couple of dolphins. The island looked formidable initially as the sun rose starboard and then we saw the folds of the mountains and then the green vegetation. We sailed directly into Taiohae Bay and dropped anchor, an hour before our scheduled arrival time.

After breakfast we took the tender ashore.

It was more challenging for the crew getting us on and off; in spite of the still, warm day there was a real swell and there were three crew to help you safely from the ship's ladder and onto the boat. We were greeted by drummers and women in grass skirts who, banged sticks together and called out a song-like 'haloa' greeting and presented us all with sweet smelling gardenia, their children at their feet imitating them. Every one of the tenders were greeted in a similar fashion so they must have been exhausted by midday. We wandered along the shore slowly as it was extremely hot and humid. As the business of getting ashore and back took quite a while we retraced our footsteps as we had to return to the boat for an early lunch before our excursion, disappointed that we had not found the cathedral. We were enchanted by what we thought was a wonderful laburnum in full flower, both flowers and leaves two or three times as big. Later, a gardener friend who travelled with us thought it might have been a laburnum.





In the afternoon we took Car No18 – a four wheel drive, sharing it with David and Margaret, in convoy with twenty other similar vehicles, on an excursion around this lovely island. Shades of new Zealand as we climbed up out of Taihae on crazy hairpins, where we stopped to admire the view south to Niva Oa and The Black Watch below us in the bay, matchbox size (see header on previous page). Onwards we went to look down on Taipivai Bay, just beautiful! On the uplands, we visited Paeke where there are some archaeological remains, along with newer buildings, built in the traditional style with

beautiful wood and stone tikis(carvings). It is here that the Marquesans from the six inhabited islands come periodically for their arts festival. We drove on to visit Taipivai, the most fertile of valleys, where Herman Melville once stayed. I was surprised to see the number of horses (and the odd foal) running free and where there were homes, there were also chicken with an equal number of cockerel. Finally we visited the very lovely cathedral (local style and local materials) with its beautifully warm red/brown wooden roof(inside) and doors. The talent of the native sculptors was put to good effect in the Stations of the Cross, and in an especially wonderful Polynesian Madonna and Child in a rich satiny wood.



Having been dropped off at the quayside, a tour of the two or three local shops was inevitable and a small purchase was made – in fact the second of the day because Jackie had bought something to take home whilst we were at Taipival. Back on board, after enjoying a sunset departure, we slipped into what is becoming a fairly standard evening, gym for Nick, pre-dinner drinks at the bar, dinner at 2030, by invitation

joining a quiz team at ten (though we don't really contribute much of value), a show once or twice a week, and then bed – needing no rocking.



**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> March: 9° 14' south, 134° 48' west at midday**

Today dawned at ten past six but neither of us was aware of it until about 0830; from here thru to Peru our clocks go forward three hours.(there will be a gentile cruise-style jet-lag) Jackie shot off to her line dancing session before breakfast and I wandered through to have a coffee and croissant intending to meet her as arranged for a late breakfast. Unfortunately for our

domestic arrangement I wandered on to Deck 7 for a stroll and some air whilst waiting for her and got talking to a couple I have promised to show the Southern Cross. Time flies when one is enjoying oneself and the appointed hour was well past when I finally met up with Jackie .....Too bloody true – I walked round the dining room twice, feeling like a lemon, (and looking like a peach) then spent the next hour and fifteen minutes chasing round the boat to tell him of the birthday arrangements for 11.30 and him, oblivious, in a lecture which he never generally attends. I was **not** a happy bunny!!!!

Today is David's Birthday, and we were invited to share, along with our other table partners, Ray and Carol, a bottle of champagne. David is 80 today and, judging by experience in the restaurant on several nights previous, we can look forward to his being serenaded at our table by the waiters this evening. (tambourine and cha-cha rhythm) Most appropriately, tonight's dress code is Formal so it's best bibs and tuckers all round.

### Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March: 9° 33' south, 127° 33' west

Alone on a wide, wide sea – yes, along with 700/800 other souls but one still feels the loneliness in the vastness of this ocean.

I went to the Sunday morning service, the gospel reading about the rich man and Lazarus; the pastor spoke on the theme and I considered the congregation (including us), who, having paid vast sums for this cruise were 'the rich', and the Lazarus's were the crew doing the menial tasks, keeping us happy (and earning money). Jonathon, our evening waiter has eight months on board, then two months back in the Philippines with his family –wife and two daughters. Just some folk on board think the native islanders and the crew are getting a wonderful deal by our dropping by (the islanders) or by having our every need (well, almost!) attended to! Towards the end of the service when people were going up for the Eucharist, others arrive for the lecture, which follows this slot, and wonder what is going on: this includes a deaf Chinese lady who is totally bemused. For the most part, I see endless kindnesses and pleasantries aboard, between passengers and crew, especially towards the stumblers, the shaky, and the learning or physically challenged. One gentleman is constantly and lovingly at the side of his wife; together they go ashore to sample the delights, negotiating uncharted terrain, intrepid but cautious. (Guess who?)



Yesterday afternoon, just by chance I saw a shoal of flying fish, not the isolated few I had previously seen. I was the only one who saw them – by the time I had exclaimed loudly, all those sitting around had missed them!

And in the evening there was splendid entertainment by 'Beyond the Barricade', four singers who had all been soloists in 'Les Mis': they were excellent, performing songs from various musicals with a finale from (naturally!) *Les Mis*. We also have an excellent classical guitarist aboard and a classical trio – all to ensure there is no mutiny during this extended period at sea.

### Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March: 9° 52' south, 120° 34' west

This afternoon I was admonished by fellow boater/member of evening quiz team. Yesterday Nick left to go to his ukulele class, leaving me alone for the beginners Tango. Now, there are dancing 'escorts' aboard (three of them) and the singles have to share them! As I have a partner, I was, it seems, not allowed to take advantage of the escorts! Oh dear! Boat politics!

And there was a touch of aggro in the cinema, the report goes, where the half-dozen who had arrived, chose to watch a film which wasn't scheduled and a late-comer was exceedingly upset; two gents became quite aggressive in their exchange of words! The film was stopped and the scheduled film started, at which point the few who had chosen the earlier film marched out to consult with the powers that be! Five minutes later the scheduled film was stopped and the first started again! OH dear!! How sad!

### Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March: 10° 12' south, 113° 10' west

Not quite so alone on a wide, wide sea – I saw a passing ship today at breakfast, along with a group of flying fish.

That was before line dancing, which is going quite well.

As I type this Nick is earnestly strumming on the (legitimately) borrowed ukulele – *I Wanna Go Home* – I might want to go elsewhere!

It was a 'tech' rehearsal for shanty singing at tea time today, and a performance in a few more days!

We are performing 12 shanties, and our shanty men are from Finland, Norway, Scotland and England(Gerry, fellow live-aboard narrow-boater)

