

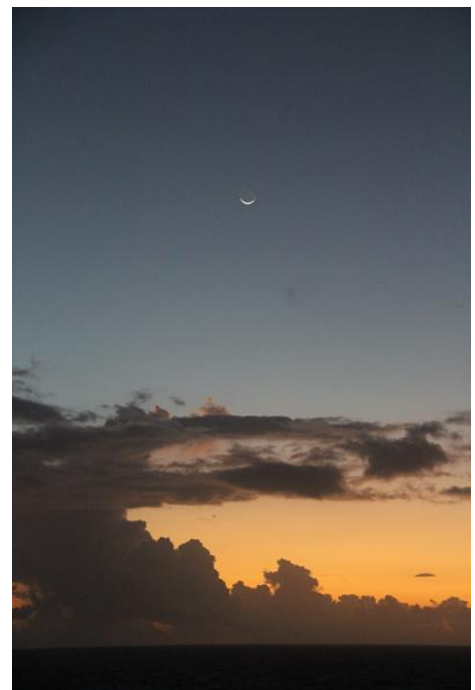
March 20, 2012 Nuku Hiva Afoot and Afar



Taiohae Bay, Nuku Hiva

I arose before the sun, just in time to take a photo of the very old crescent moon grinning above clouds in the morning twilight. I did not wait for further photos of the sunrise; an early breakfast and day on Nuku Hiva awaited. Islands appeared on the northern horizon, and grew in size as we approached. We watched as the boat entered the mountain-rimmed Taiohae Bay and tied to the dock. They had unloaded considerable cargo by the time we walked down the gangplank to the waiting Le Truk to take us to town of Taiohae.

A short time later we gathered in a parking lot across from the visitor's center to claim one of 40 taxis driven by "te kua o te hakati," the people of the cars. After laying claim to a silver SUV, number 26, Fairy and I headed to the post office to mail the thumb drive with dolphin photos to Dr Michael Poole. The lady at the post office was very kind and helpful





and provided an envelope and paper so I could write a note. The address area was incredibly small, but she said that she could read the address that I had carefully written to try and fit.

Next we stopped to check merchants' wares before boarding the taxi to continue our adventure. Royal had stepped in a grass-camouflaged hole in the gravel

parking lot and had the ship doctor wrap it prior to setting out. We wondered if he and Wanda would be able to make the upcoming hike in Fatu Hiva in his condition.

A shy young vahini (woman) drove us to the Catholic Cathedral of Taiohae, and we roamed the grounds of the open-air sanctuary. A twin-spired arch stood over the entrance to the paved grounds in front of the church. Statues and stone carvings marked the opposite end. To the right of the courtyard, buildings with open sides faced the church building. At the opening to the church, a great wooden door was guarded by life-sized statues from gospel themes with Polynesian appearance. Inside further great carvings depicted other gospel scenes with liberties taken to reflect the local culture. For example, no local caver knew what an olive tree was, so a breadfruit tree was used instead.

The wall of the church stopped below the ceiling to allow the tropical breezes to cool the interior. The wall behind the pulpit was of red tuff stone and was considered to have sacred "mana" or power and ordinary people were forbidden to touch it, either in the chapel or where found in its natural surroundings.

After the cathedral tour, we returned to the vehicle and journeyed up a steep, winding road into the mountains and over a pass. Houses soon disappeared in the tropical jungle, but pigs, chickens, and horses were seen here and there. In the distance a slivery, double cascade of water tumbled down hundreds of feet of dark basalt and disappeared into the verdure below.



Beyond the top of the ridge the Taipivai valley, the setting of Herman Melville's classic novel *Typee*, appeared and we marveled of the places he had trod and the people he had met, whose descendants have occupied the valley to this very day.

We meandered around sharp turns down the winding, steep passage, over scattered paved patches between rutted earthen sections of road. The car turned at the intersection to go over the ridge away from Taipivai towards the valley of Hatiheu. Near the mouth of the valley, we stopped to view the restored Maewa Kamuihei, where years ago, perhaps 10,000 Marquesans had lived, danced, paid homage to their gods, and offered human sacrifices from people captured in battle with other tribes.



Some of their bodies were hoisted high into the giant banyan tree, the largest one in the Marquesas. Over time their remains were engulfed into the tree, others were cast into a large pit at the foot of the tree. During the restoration of the site, another banyan tree accidentally burned down, and in the residual ash scattered human bones and skulls that had been covered by growth of the tree, confirmed the truth of the tales. It reminded me of similar ways that their contemporaries in other parts of the world, including Europe and the Americas had dealt with pirates, criminals and other undesirables.

When we first arrived, natives of the area danced the pig dance, wearing skirts and decoration of pandanus leaves. The drums, sounds of songs and chants on a large stone marae in front of the giant banyan that still contained bones of conquered warriors was both inspiring and frightening

at the same time. Later we were guided on a tour of the extensive grounds to see petroglyphs, maea, restored homes and structures, as well as other features of the grounds.



Petroglyphs on Rock Resembling a Turtle



Tohua

More photos from Kamuihei Ceremonial Center:



Tohua Table



Tohua Tiki



Tohua Cupules

Lunch at Chez Yvonne



After the tour we rode to the shore to be treated to lunch at Chez Yvonne, with native staples including breadfruit, roasted pig, shrimp, and popoi for dessert. A local band played Marquesan and other songs on guitar, ukuleles, and a large drum in the hot, humid, open-air restaurant. After dining, it was time to choose which activity we wanted to do prior to returning to Taipivai where the Aranui 3 had anchored after leaving Taiohae.

We chose the hike up the hillside to the viewpoint overlooking Anaho Bay. True to advertising the paved road started off very steeply, before turning off onto a slightly less steep, rutted jungle trail. Onward and upward we plodded over rocks, roots and mud. Royal and Wanda fell further and further behind, and we wondered if they would make the trip. Finally up a long, steep stretch, the path turned and then crested at the top of the ridge. Below broad leafy trees and palms lined the valley to the deep blue waters that rivaled the sky for beauty. A solitary sailboat lay at anchor a couple hundred yards from a house by the beach far below, and we felt as isolated as we could possibly imagine.

After 15 or more minutes at the overlook, I started back to look for Royal and Wanda. They were plodding steadily upward, just a couple hundred yards from the summit. I joined them for the remainder of the hike and all made it to the overlook which was breathtaking in more ways than one.

After ambling back down the trail, we gladly accepted fresh water from the drivers, then loaded into our ride back to Taipivai. Our driver spoke good English, and had lived on Maui for four years. We



reminisced about places and people of Hawaii. He had known Willie K, and knew of the group, Hapa. We were sad to hear that the performer of the Hawaiian chants had passed away a few months ago. He was also well familiar with the Aloha Mixed Plate, and had performed with the Old Lahaina luau.

Over the ridge, the Taipivai valley appeared with its beautiful waterfalls, horses, jungle and wild pigs. We swayed around steep corners, and bounced over ruts when the pavement ran out, and soon arrived at the mouth of the valley where gentle swells lapped on the black sand beach. In the far corner the river that once carried Melville out to sea emptied into the quiet bay. Tall ridges extended well beyond the black sand beach and curved to obscure the entrance of the bay. Several sailboats lay at anchor and beyond them the bright white Aranui 3 gleamed against the green background in the late afternoon sun.



Our tender approached the beach and lowered its front end to create a ramp, and we timed the waves to step from the sand onto the craft without getting wet. The barge surged forward and backward as waves advanced and retreated, but skillful throttle control by the pilot kept it from moving too far forward or back while the remainder of the guests boarded. As the boat returned to the Aranui and docked at the gangplank platform, a stern looking Mahalo, the giant Polynesian crane operator, gave hand signals to direct the crew for retrieving the landing craft on the boat.

With tattoos over his visible upper body, including half of his face, most of the forehead and back of his head, and earrings of steel chain link, the large dark man looked quite sinister, yet intriguing. He skillfully handled the giant crane with great finesse, making the delicate job of loading cargo look easy. Later in the evening we stopped by the bar where he stood in the corner. Though he did not speak English, he pleasantly obliged our request for autograph in our Aranui book. When I thanked him with “mauru’uru roa,” he smiled broadly and gave me a soft pat on the shoulder as if I were a long lost friend. It was a moment deeply treasured.

Dinner was another delight as we visited with Paul, Wanda and Royal, and a gentleman from Australia. On the end of the table, two French couples joined the group, and a good time was had by all. After the meal ended, a brief Polynesian fashion show kept us giggling and applauding as various passengers and staff displayed their wares. What a fun way to end the day.

We made our way to our respective rooms get some much-needed rest after the day’s vigorous activities, quite satisfied with what we had seen and the friends made so far during this unforgettable cruise.



Aranui 3 in Taipivai Bay

More Photos from Nuku Hiva:



Taiohae Bay



Taiohae Visitors' Center



Notre Dame Cathederal Entrance, Taiohae



Stone Masonry Notre Dame Cathedral



Kamuihei Cultural Center



Giant Banyan Tree Maea Kamuihei



En Route to Petroglyphs and Tohua



Petroglyphs



Tohua Table at Kamuihei Cultural Center



Tohua Table at Kamuihei Cultural Center



Shelter at Tohua



Tohua at Kamuihei Cultural Center



Church of the Sacred Heart at Hatiheu



Hatiheu Bay



Hike to Teaviamaoaoa Pass Overlooking Anaho Bay



View of Anaho Bay from Teaviamaoaoa Pass



Home Along Path from Teaviamaoaoa Pass to Hatiheu



Ridge above Hatiheu



Barge to Aranui in Taipivai Bay



Departure from Taipivai to Aranui



Farewell to Taipivai