

March 22, 2012 Hiva Oa Celebrities and School Children



We awoke refreshed to face another day on the Marquesas Islands. The boat lay at dock and deck hands worked steadily unloading freight on the cement wharf as townspeople of Atuona arrived with pickups, trucks, and vans to gather the off-loaded cargo. Orange cones led passengers to safe exit from the bustling scene towards a gas station with cars lined up for a fill. Beyond, two red and white Le Trucks awaited passengers for a relatively long trip around the right side of the bay to town.

We found our spot on one of the bench seats running on either side of the truck bed, and true to form, I banged my head on the ceiling as did nearly everyone else who boarded. The truck rumbled up the hill, around a bend and then past the head of the bay. Then it turned upwards toward the cemetery, grinding through several tight switchbacks, before coming to a rest below the crest of the ridge and the cemetery.





Stone retaining walls supported terraces by the front of the cemetery; crosses and monuments gleamed white in the morning sun, in contrast to the verdant green hills rising to rough mountain crests in the background. Among the gravesites, famous Europeans were also buried. Renown French painter Paul Gauguin lay interred in a corner, and Belgian singer-songwriter Jacques Brel

was also entombed there. But primarily it was the resting place of those born of the island, lovingly watched over by their descendants.

After touring the bright white cemetery, we meandered back down the winding road to the town below. A few vendors offered wares for sale, and a few stores lined the narrow street. Beyond the stores a large, stone-walled tohua was filled with laughing children engaged in various sports and sack races. On the other side youngsters tossed spears at coconuts held high on a stick.

Near the tohua on the seaward side, a sign by a wooded lane announced the Paul Gauguin and Jacques Brel tour sites. We wandered past coconut palms, across a bridge over a small creek to the manicured grounds with several thatched-walled and thatched-roofed buildings. For a nominal fee we wandered the buildings and grounds, and viewed replicas of paintings by Gauguin. Strangely, not a single original of his works remains in the Marquesas.



Beside the gallery and museum, the rebuilt Gauguin “house of pleasure” lay in a grassy clearing. Stairs led to the main quarters on the upper level. Inside a few replica paintings and a model of one of the great Polynesian sailing vessels decorated the entry way. In the main, large room,

various other pictures adorned the walls, and an opening between an outer wall and ceiling revealed fine views of the distant mountains.

Further into the compound, the Jacques Brel exhibit showed posters from his singing career, and his twin Bonanza aircraft, Jojo, nicely restored and mounted on a piling in simulated flight. He had moved to Hiva Oa to escape celebrity that had made his life difficult in the so-called modern world. He had contributed to the wellbeing of the local residents, and had often flown ailing inhabitants in the twin Bonanza for medical care in the surrounding islands.



After visiting the museum, we waited to be transported by the head-banger Le Truck to lunch at the restaurant Hoanui. Some locals fetched coconuts and with machete hacked away the husk on one end and inserted straws so tourists could try the coconut juice inside. Then we spotted the truck and with permission of a perplexed driver, climbed aboard.



He drove to the other end of the tohua and we waited in the shade of the bus's assaultive roof in a cool breeze that flowed through its open windows. In a little while, he started the engine and stopped by the tohua to load up children who had been playing games on the grounds. He assured us that we could stay on the bus, so we grinned as a couple dozen of the wide-eyed youngsters followed

their instructor onto the bus and lined themselves on the seats. They sang energetically as the bus rolled on to their primary school. Many grinned and said au revior to the remaining tourists aboard.

The driver went a couple more blocks, turned around, then retraced his steps about a block and dropped us off in front of the restaurant. The tables were ready and we chose one near the back of the room where open sides allowed air to flow freely. Some dogs watched curiously from the shade of nearby bushes. In singles and pairs, our group materialized at our table, and the rest of the group settled in through the restaurant.



They sent us table by table to the food tables, buffet style, and as luck would have it, we were the second table to go. Multiple dishes on the buffet tables featured Chinese, Japanese, and Polynesian fare, and we sampled freely from the abundance. It was by far the best meal so far that had been provided off the boat; even the dogs seemed to agree. Several poked their heads over the low wall and gazed expectantly at the guests. A few were rewarded by morsels handed or tossed to them by sympathetic souls.

We then loaded back into Le Truck, with fewer heads dented on entrance; experience seemed to prove an effective teacher. We rumbled back around the head of the bay to the dock and returned to the



Aranui 3. The boat weighed anchor, then set out for the island of Tahuata, separated by only a couple of miles from Hiva Oa.

As the boat came to a stop in the harbor of Vaitahu, Tahuata, the deck came alive with merchant marines lowering boats and cargo barges and then carefully balancing the off-loaded cargo on the barges. The cargo went to shore, but we did not, due to time limits. As we watched the work conclude and the day slowly fade, a full rainbow arched over the Aranui 3 in brilliant color. After taking photos, we moved to the aft deck to watch the sky glow, as the sun slowly sank below the horizon. Venus and Jupiter came into



view, then it was time to attend our lecture for the upcoming day's events, followed by dinner; not just the usual dining, but this one was special.

Both Paul and Kathy had birthdays that day, and the dining crew had been notified well in advance. We all sat at the large table in the far right corner of the dining room, and after a lovely meal, that included a rich chocolate dessert,

over came the crew with not one, but three cakes. Apparently Paul had told them of an anniversary celebration as well. Fairy and I and Royal and Wanda were on the cruise to celebrate our 40th anniversaries, but neither anniversary was on that day. No matter, the candles

were quickly blown out as the crew serenaded our table and finally sang Happy Birthday. However stuffed we all were, we did manage to down the cake as well.

After dinner we all went to bed early in anticipation of the great hike we would take from Omoa to Hanavave the next day that we had regarded as the high point of our trip. We had been walking nearly daily for the past year, with a couple of 10 mile treks thrown in, to prepare for this rugged event. But our preparation had been on level ground and for the past several months in cool weather. Would we be able to make the 10 mile hike that climbed over 1800 feet in the warm, humid weather? Tomorrow would tell.



Photo Gallery



Atuona Harbor, Hiva Oa



Atuona Harbor, Hiva Oa



Atuona, Hiva Oa



Atuona, Hiva Oa



Dock at Atuona



Aranui Gangway



Atuona from cemetery



Atuona cemetery Hiva Oa



School children at tohua in Atuona, Hiva Oa



Abandoned paepae at Atuona



Gauguin memorial and House of Pleasure



Upper level House of Pleasure



Entry Gauguin's House of Pleasure



View from inside House of Pleasure



Children of Hiva Oa



Aboard le truck



Aboard le truck



On the road again



Atuona harbor and bay



Departure from Hiva Oa



Last look Hiva Oa



First view of Tahuata



Vaitahu, Tahuata



Vaitahu, Tahuata



Sunset off Tahuata



Days end from anchorage in Tahuata