

## March 11, 2012 Magical Moorea



We awoke before our call from the lobby, and prepared for the morning travel to Moorea, a gorgeous green island within view of Papeete. We had to take the Marama Tours van back the 8 miles or so to the airport in Faaa (pronounced Fa-Ah-ah) at 8:45 AM and you would think that arising at 6 AM would allow plenty of time to get ready. It all depends on how many times you weight the luggage. There was question of how much of what was to go where to make sure that no one had more than the allowed 44 pounds (20 kg per person) in their luggage. Needless to say we were just about done with the 17<sup>th</sup> baggage weighing when a call from the lobby terminated the festivities, much to our relief.

The casual reception at the airport turned our efforts into much ado about nothing, and we should have been spared any further baggage angst from there on out. Should have been.

Our driver got us back in a holiday mood with casual recommendations about the islands and what to see. When he discovered that we were flying to Moorea,



he curiously queried why not take the ferry instead, after all he noted, it was only five minutes by air, 20 minutes by boat, and four hours if you swim! After a good laugh he dropped us off at the airport and we checked in and cleared security with the least amount of hassle we could have imagined.



We boarded the propeller-driven craft with so much extra space, that everyone in our group sat by a window. We had barely taken off when they announced preparation for landing. The plane glided down over breakers, palm trees, and a multicolored lagoon, then bounced to a stop on the short Moorea runway. We had barely deplaned when people started pointing to the sky. Two tandem-jumper parachutes gracefully descended

to the grass between the runway and airport apron. Apparently they could only afford halfway tickets...

We shared a ride with two New Yorkers who entertained us with their remarks and antics along the way. Neither was into the nature scene, but after a few jokes and laughs, they thought we could have made good drinking buddies. We were dropped at the lobby of Hotel Kaveka and were led to our beloved bungalows, the picture of which had been hanging on a wall in our home since our cruise here in 2003. We checked in to the quaint little tropical huts that just had room for one double and one single bed, a closet, and a bathroom. Not space to hide away in, but this part of the world the outdoors is your living room.

Cool breezes fanned our front porch where we gazed over Cook Bay to steep rugged mountains covered in green. Royal and Wanda's cabin lay to our right, and a tidy, brown wooden deck stretched from the hotel lobby and restaurant immediately to the left of our bungalow. Doves called in the distance while free-range chickens grazed the grounds between the bungalows.

After a snack and shared bottle of wine, we gathered our snorkeling gear and headed for the dock. We entered the water via the stairs at the end of the dock. Brightly colored fish swam about with little regard of our presence as we slowly drifted along the margin of the reef. Towards shore the water was too shallow to swim, so we



stayed at the margin of the drop off and could see many fish from the shallows to the depths. All colors of the rainbows reflected from the many, brightly colored ones while black fish with white accents occasionally drifted by. Numerous sea slugs oozed their way along the water's bottom and various shells hiding hermit crabs sported stalks of eyes and antennae that waved warily about.

After nearly an hour in the water, we reluctantly made our way back across the dock towards the shore. Bright yellow fish around coral heads gleamed from the water by the dock as we headed towards shore and made us linger a bit longer before returning to our lodging and cleaning up. The remainder of the day we spent lazily watching the afternoon mature, then cloud over and veil the mountains in at the head of the bay.



Towards late afternoon the clouds lessened somewhat with gaps that cast bands of light across the surrounding mountainous verdure. Our little group of huts were spotlighted, along with the rising background. Over time a shadow appeared at their base then rose up the ridge as the sun slowly sank out of sight. Clouds turned from gold to pale pink from the fading rays and day turned to night while we made our way to dinner.

Under the thatched roof of the open air restaurant at the edge of the pier we settled into our seats at a table over the water. Fish below scrambled about, sometimes stirring the wavelets with a whoosh as they chased about to survive in their various levels of the food chain. Perhaps the mahi mahi on our plates made them nervous. After a lovely, leisurely meal we strolled onto the pier. A couple dined in the open air, nicely dressed with the lady wearing a flowery tiara. They smiled as Royal complimented how nice they looked together under the stars.

Overhead the clouds had parted revealing a blaze of starlight. Mighty Orion stood on his head at this southern location while Sirius, the dog star barked behind. The trail of the Milky Way traced further south and east through the False Cross, to the glorious star cloud of Carina, and onward through the Southern Cross. Just below the False Cross a distinct faint glow or the Greater Magellanic Cloud brightened the dark.

I hurried to the hut to get the binoculars, then shared the glorious sights with the rest of the group. The spectacular star cloud of Eta Carina region resolved into countless points of light

sprinkled through clumps of star clusters and nebulae for which the region is so famous and so desperately sought by northern star gazers.

Finally fatigue accumulated during the past few days forced us back to our huts for much-needed sleep. Though tired, we were reluctant to close our eyes for all there was to behold, and were eager for the morning to awaken to another day of our dreams.

**Photo Gallery:**



Cook's Bay



Looking south along eastern Cook's Bay



Mouaputa, "Pierced Mountain" above Cook's Bay



Reef at Cook's Bay



Salty dog on reef at Cook's Bay



Our hut at Hotel Kaveka



Dock from our hut at Hotel Kaveka