

## March 12, 2012: Dancing With Dolphins



The day dawned with shades of expectation and uncertainty. We were to meet Dr Michael Poole and his crew for a morning dolphin watching tour, but preferred to pay him in the local currency. Since we had not enough local XPF francs we needed to exchange our American cash. The hotel had agreed to provide exchange, but did not have enough for the balance due. I borrowed a bicycle and rode into town, but nothing was open in time to do the exchange. US dollars would have to do. I also needed sunglasses, since in the dark at the Orlando airport I had left them in the car. Failed again. I stopped at the grocery store and purchased three bottles of drinking water, so the trip was not a total waste.

The tour boat arrived on time at the docks near our hotel. Dr Poole greeted us, asked our names and a little of our background, then collected the fare. A tall, dark Tahitian piloted the craft like it was an extension of his own body, gracefully and in full control. Another tall, slender Tahitian wearing only shorts, sandals and ocean-themed tattoos assisted us on the boat; his sly grin and quick wit made us quickly feel at home in the craft.

We motored through clear, turquoise water to some bungalows over the water that were in the lagoon around the corner from Cook Bay. Several more couples joined us there including a pair of brothers and their wives, who were from South Dakota, and another couple from San Antonio. We all introduced ourselves then marveled about our Midwestern background. All felt quite at ease as we bantered back and forth throughout the cruise. With all aboard we set out in earnest in search of the dolphins and whatever else might grace our travels.

The boat glided gracefully through the turquoise lagoon between breakers on the reefs to the right, and mountainous scenery to the left that arose through scattered sunlight in green glory. Through the pass at Cook's Bay our boat met the rising ocean swells as the boat left the tranquility of the lagoon. Sharp eyes scanned the water to the horizon, but no dolphins in that locale were found.



The boat continued onward towards the pass at Opunohu Bay. Schools of slender, pale blue flying fish were flushed from the water and glided dozens of yards before skipping back into the water. An occasional sea turtle appeared momentarily to breathe and expose their great shells before diving again beneath the waves. No dolphins appeared at the inlet, so we proceeded into Opunohu Bay to continue the search.

Great, sharp spires bounded the inner reaches of the bay and valley and small buildings lay scattered here and there along the shoreline. Were it not for the glaring white hull of the cruise





ship Paul Gauguin, it would have seemed that we had been transported into an earlier, simpler time. The dolphins, too, seemed to have been transported as well, for none appeared there as either. But there was a reason.

Back through the inlet and into the ocean swells, the boat rose and fell through the watery valleys and troughs. Near the final inlet on that side of the island, dark, finned forms appeared in the



deep blue waters at the 10 o'clock side of the boat, then crossed under the bow to rise and blow on the other side of the boat. The engines slowed and the boat motored slowly onward as the spinner dolphins swam and played about. Near the inlet other dolphins could be seen swimming about, sometimes leaping, spinning, and splashing. Appearing playful, but with

motives known only to them, they kept us entertained and awed. Cameras snapped wildly in attempts to capture moments that we wished could last forever. Later we could treasure those moments turned to memories, but more awaited at the pass.

At times we seemed surrounded by our finned friends as we traversed from the deep blue of the ocean to azure and turquoise of the lagoon. At least three groups of dolphins were moving and mingling through the changing waters. By the breakers, surfers bobbed with the waves while dolphins rose, then submerged; both creatures, bound by a common element, seemed for the moment as siblings of the sea.

The boat slowly motored through the lagoon, and along with kayakers there, we watched the show unfold. A mother and her calf appeared. Several dolphins with tattered dorsal fins, the work of sharks, were identified by Dr Poole and his assistant. Here and there, spinning leaps and tail slaps sent gasps of amazement through the tour group.

When we left the pass to head back the numbers thinned and the rising and blowing slowly faded into the distance. Along the way a turtle rose occasionally, and more flying fish kept our



attention at the water as we tried to grasp the wonders of what we had witnessed. The boat stopped for a few minutes to allow several of us to swim alongside the boat and gaze into the deep, deep blue waters of the open ocean before continuing back. Once inside the lagoon by Cook Inlet the boat stopped and Dr Poole



gave a briefing of his work in the Pacific and conservation efforts for the great finned mammals that ply its waters. We longed for more when he had finished, but it was time to go.

Back on shore we chatted excitedly about the events of the day, and I was eager to check the photos I had taken. Several persons on the boat had asked if I would email some of my photos to them, and as soon as I had selected and processed the images, I would oblige. But it was time to eat and after that we were determined to enter the water at the end of the dock for our last snorkeling adventure in Moorea.

Pizza pacified our hunger as we dined under thatch over gently rippled water. Watchful myna's stood nearby hoping for an unguarded parcel to snatch. Below, multicolored fish sorted out their own pecking order as to who was fed and who was food. Before long we were among them.



With a gentle splash we dropped from the deck ladder into the waters at the edge of a coral wall. White snowflakes seemed to swirl in the bright blue water down the face of the wall, but closer inspection revealed the white to be the aft end of small dark fish schooling about through different depths. Through the shallows over the coral, brightly colored fish looked anything but camouflaged as they darted about and nibbled on coral. Occasionally two seemed to vie for space or whatever as one sent the other darting away. Other fish truly were camouflaged as they perched on pectoral and tail fins on the coral. Drab spots of brown, olive, and gray made them difficult to see, and something told us that they were best left alone.

We swam very little and just drifted with the gentle current, taking in as much as our eyes could grasp. Fairy spotted a small, snake-like pipefish with a snout resembling a seahorse. Some gastropod shells sported eyes on stalks with feelers waving in the water; hermit crabs that had inhabited the vacant shells of their former owners. We drifted about for nearly an hour, then slowly made our way back to the dock and reluctantly rose from the sea.

Finally it was time to start on the photos from the dolphin cruise. I had set the camera to rapidly expose multiple images as long as I pressed the button. I knew there had been a lot, but was surprised to find over 600 images on the memory chip. Fairy and Wanda went to Ron Hall's



Island Fashion Black Pearls, while I spent the next couple of hours sorting through the “keepers” and discarding the rest. Then I selected the best, processed about 50 of the “keepers” with Photoshop Elements to sharpen, adjust tone and contrast, then crop and size to 4” X 6” at 300 dpi resolution. Finally, I created small files for email of 11 of the best of the best to be sent to my comrades from the cruise.

Day faded to dusk, and it was time for dinner by the time I finished, so again we made our way to the Kaveka restaurant for more mahi-mahi, wine and ice cream. Together we relived the day that had turned our fantasies into reality, and we felt we had danced with creatures of the sea, both above and below the waters. It was a perfect end to a perfect day.



## Aquatic Acrobats













**Parting Shot:**



Farewell, friend.