

French Polynesia - 2009 - Sailing Trip of the Year

View our pictures at <http://datasmitty.com/gallery/tahiti>. Slideshow is the best option (upper right).

The best parts were:

Compatible people - French captain (Pascal), French chef (Stephanie), Annick and Alain (French couple) from Mont St. Michel and us. Jeni (Auckland, NZ) joined us on the third day. We spoke French and English (sometimes better than others, depending on the wine).



60 foot catamaran - roomy and well maintained (Stephanie and Pascal were always cleaning, keeping sand and dirt off the deck).

The food - excellent fish! Stephanie is an excellent chef.

The sea life - we saw 4 whales the first day and got to swim with 2 of them! Snorkeling got better every day - clear water, LOTS of fish, coral, some rays, sharks, and 1 huge Moray eel (2 meters long) swimming around in the warm, clear, turquoise water.



The finish of the Hawaiki Nui Va'a - We were in the lagoon with the locals cheering all the paddlers from the yearly 3-day outrigger canoe race in French Polynesia. . What fun!



Tuesday - 27 Oct 2009 - a long, sleepless day, but ... Finally our vacation was here !! We flew Virgin Airlines to LAX - terminal was under construction. Air Tahiti Nui's plane was just as beautiful as its picture - blue with a white tiare flower on the tail. Brian wasn't too happy with the plane (smells). I, however, was happy with my Bose earphones, lots of books to read, champagne, Bordeaux red wine, an open bar, and food! We had only a couple of casualties - a broken champagne glass at home before we left and 1 lost pair of reading glasses that are replaceable.

The flight didn't take too long and it was even a little early into Paradise (officially known as

Papeete, Tahiti). We went through customs, nothing to declare, no fruit, and then - met by the Tahiti Nui representatives with our vouchers, etc. It's always good to see that what you've planned works out.



We were taken to Hotel Tahiti Nui - nice and new - Virgin Atlantic comes to Tahiti hotels. Too bad it's on a busy street. We had a huge room with living room and kitchen. First order of business - fruit juice w/Appleton rhum (duty free). It was almost like St. Martin. A little street noise woke us up, but the ambulance claxon told us it was a French sound, not San Francisco.

28 Oct 2009 - Got up, fell out of bed, made coffee and struck out in search of an ATM. Success! **Our Credit Union ATM card Worked!** Then we were off to find a pareo. That took a while, but I got a nice one with tropical fish instead of flowers. The Market was interesting - lots of fish and veggies. For nourishment we had to have an espresso followed by a Hinano beer and a jambon (ham) sandwich.

Very French town.

At 11:25 we were taken to Archipels at a Marina south of town. Nice marina. Our instructions were "**Ask at the Pink Coconut about Archipels.**" Swell. Two other people were in the same taxi with us also looking for Archipels. We remembered enough French to introduce ourselves and look around for Archipels. Pascal showed up at noon, took us to the boat where we had lunch, got the security briefing out of the way and began on the itinerary. Mostly we spoke French "lentement et simplement" (slowly and simply). Lots of fun. The French practiced their English on us. Pascal - le capitain, Stephanie - le chef, Alain & Annick from Mont Saint Michel.

Lunch - poisson cru (yummy). After lunch - cast off for Moorea. Before we could get out of the pass, we saw 1 or 2 whales jumping around in the water - one totally breached! We sailed most of the way and motored when the wind died down. Cook's Bay was the destination. At the entry of CB, Pascal or Stephanie saw a whale partly submerged with a couple of boats around. Stephanie organized a "swim with the whales" party. Brian and I

jumped in after. Without flippers we couldn't keep up with the whale. We weren't fast enough. One was a large whale, the other smaller - probably a mother and calf. One guy in a small boat had been swimming with the 2 whales much of the day. Pretty neat! The whales were awesome! We were so close to them and they were flipping their tails in the air.

Dinner was grilled but the charcoal was slow to start.

29 Oct 2009 - sunshine in Cooks Bay - did some yoga - coffee - went in the tender to do a drift snorkel. Best snorkel ever. The coral had small and medium-sized clams with colored lips. Keep watching and you could see them open and close. Lots of fish - ones we'd never seen before - little blue neon ones - trigger fish - little bitty black fish with blue spots - some angel fish, mostly small but really nice. Then we did a small tour of the lagoon in the tender. **Lunch** was superb - red tuna carpaccio with parsley and potato salad w/capers, shallots. Then off on our Moorea Expedition 4 x 4. 1st stop was Magic Mountain - view over the Intercontinental Hotel, the barrier reef. High above Opunohu Bay we saw Pascal and Stephanie sailing the boat (Fanotea) into the bay. Lots of sites - Agricultural School, many plants, marae, pineapple plantation, Belvedere, fighting pigs, vanilla. **Dinner** - chicken curry & couscous, tarte tatin l'ananas (pineapple - superbe).



Wine wasn't included in the price of the sailing trip, but one can't have French food without some wine to go along.

30 Oct 2009 - not so early rising, but yoga w/3 ! Class is growing. Raised anchor and moved to just outside Cooks Bay. The plan was to snorkel, then barbeque on the beach. Alain kayacked. Pascal took us to the snorkeling. At first the fish weren't as good as yesterday, but we ended up seeing more. Black w/white tail, flounder, new kinds of angel fish, lots of color. You always see more fish just when you decide it's time to get out, so you stay a little longer. The barbeque got rained out so we donned plastic ponchos and went off to see the dolphins! We got so close Brian could have touched them from the dinghy. Stephanie got into the water to swim with them, but they were too fast and got away. Jeni from NZ joined us on the boat at lunch. **Lunch** - poisson cru with salad. Dessert optional - ice cream. After the rain, we went off around the island to swim w/the sting rays and the black tipped reef sharks. Sun was out, water clear, turquoise, sandy bottom. Beautiful - sharks all around. At one time there were 8 rays around and underneath the boat. Lots of

raccoon angel fish too and pilot fish near the sharks. On the way over we stopped near the Hilton's porpoise area. On the way back we saw a cow fish in the water (so clear) and stopped to swim to Tiki statues sunken in the water. Interesting. Another terrific trip. One of the velvety-soft rays snuggled up to Brian's leg and rubbed it.

17 29.08S 149 51.32W - Around 5:30pm we started off for an overnight passage to Huahine - 80km - should take about 10 hours. An adventure in the dark! It didn't rain too much and the stars came out! Southern Cross - le croix du Sud - we all took turns keeping Pascal awake, but mostly Auto (sounds like Otto) drove. A little rough. I napped in the saloon. BJ slept in the cabin but stood a couple of watches. Around 4am we could see Huanine in the distance; near 5am the sky started to lighten.

31 Oct 2009 - Halloween - it is SO beautiful here! A record of **6 people for Yoga in Paradise** - everyone but Pascal. Jeni proclaimed herself the photographer. Terrific! We went into Fare, where the Hawaiki Nui Vaa race starts. Canoists were already practising. After le shopping we met up and had beverages while waiting for Stephanie. She had fruit delivered - a stalk of killer bananas, star fruit, breadfruit, etc. We raised anchor and went off to a bay, had **lunch** (shrimp, mango salsa, salad, fish bread (pain de poisson - like meatloaf but made with fish). We were stuffed and then forced to eat le gateau de l'ananas (pineapple cake), papaya with lime juice. Afterwards, le napping, then we took the dingy to a nice beach and then off to a drift snorkel. Lots of colorful coral, some new little fish - Moorish Idol, very small black and white ones, sea anenome, a little cloudy, medium blue and bright blue fish. After snorkeling, showers, and the gateau. **Vitamins** from fruit juice cocktail - orange-mango, guava nectar, water, and a little medicinal Appleton's rum. **Dinner** was a choice - oeufs plat (fried eggs) or beef (rumpsteak). We chose the rumpsteak fried in butter and shallots. How nice to have a French cook! Not too many stars that night. Cloudy and a little rain.

1 Nov - les Toussaint - All Saints Day (20 years earlier on this day we were in Paris, had lunch in Chartres at the Michelin 2 star Louis XIV) - yoga w/Alain - Brian went swimming - water temp perfect - several hundred meters - breakfast - laundry - dry out the wet towels - off to a motu (small island) w/beach. Tia Moana (Bora Bora cruise ship) was already docked there. After breakfast - to snorkel or not to snorkel. Brian thought he had had too much sun. I pouted and said "you nevah know how good it will be, so let's go for a little while." Wow! It was the best ever. There were SO many fish and they came swimming up - expecting to be fed. We're smarter than that - so they just swam all around me - since I have a reputation for feeding fish. Really nice fish, very clean water, good coral. Saw parrot fish (small), Moorish Idols, trumpet fish. Amazing feeding frenzy- many brown fish and lots of others. Then back to the boat, shower and off to the motu for a **Barbeque**. A local guy cut some coconut fronds and showed us how to weave our own plates - no plate, no eat. One person was having some problems and was very sad that her plate might not get finished. No problem. It got finished.

Before lunch we took "a little walk" to an overlook spot. The walk began in a jungle and shortly went straight up. Stephanie led the tour and told us we were about to start the "only hard part" with a few missing steps. Then she took roll - could we make it? Oui or Non? Of course we could. My goodness! The first part was straight up in the dirt, holding on to the roots and climbing over the rocks. Then we got to the rickety wooden steps with a few missing, but "stay close to the edge" and don't look down. We all made it! Those in the lead graciously helped the slower ones. And what a view of the reef, the bay, the boats (ours and a 30 person passenger cruiser were anchored near by). Wow! The way back was a lot easier - down a road, through a lower garden. Nice flowers. Then we stuffed ourselves on the **Barbeque** - breadfruit, coconut, grilled tuna, and some sort of grilled

bananas (not plantains). Breadfruit is similar to baked potato, the bananas were similar to yams and bananas together. Dessert was a ripe pineapple. Wow!



Back at the boat we weighed anchor and went off for Raiatea. First we sailed, then we motored, and now we're sailing again. We made Raiatea before dark - went between 2 motus and anchored. Very pretty motu - many coconut palms. Picture perfect. On the way over we celebrated Annick's birthday the past June with Taittinger champagne. Merveilleux! We also sang Bonne Anniversaire in French. **Dinner** - mahi mahi with sauce vanille and French green beans. Very nice! But after we stuffed ourselves - more to come - tiramisu - one piece or two?

2 Nov - yoga 2 times - 1st w/Alain and 2nd w/Stephanie and Jeni. Then breakfast and off to town. Alain, Annick, Brian, and I went on an adventure w/Eric from Gabon. We hiked for about 3 hours through a forest and covered only 1.5 miles. Saw lots of trees, plants, pig tracks and had a strenuous hike - lots of up and down. Fortunately there were no mosquitos (not many) and it was mostly shade. Very rugged. We are exhausted. Saw the river and a flower garden. Pascal and Jeni picked us up with the dingy and we went down the river to the bay where the boat was now anchored. The riverside was really nice - green plants and blue sky. Then it was off to a motu for a picnic.

Lunch on a motu - chicken, couscous, starfruit. At 3pm it was off to the town for a little ATM visit and shopping. Nice waterfront - beautiful breeze. Then off to another motu near Tahaa. With sails up and a good broad reach (9-11 kt) we got up to 5 and sometimes 6kt. Pascal left the wheel and Brian steered us in all the way! We followed between the green and red markers - green toward the water and red toward the land (rouge vers l'ile et vert a l'eau). We first furled the genoa, then dropped the main, then dropped the anchor. No engine on! More **dinner** choices - entrecote with soy sauce marinade or not. Either way you couldn't lose - w/o was w/garlic, shallots, and sauteed in butter. 1/2 potato grilled with parsley and creme brulee - we were stuffed.

3 Nov - everyone slept well - a little cloudy - yoga w/Alain & Jeni - breakfast - laundry - Brian and I kayaked to a private motu; everyone else came in the dinghy - **lunch** on the motu - chicken, poisson cru, lots of Polynesian vegetables (mostly dry), coconut bread -

interesting food but we didn't want to stuff ourselves in preparation for the Tahitian dinner show that evening. We were all pretty tired and didn't feel like snorkeling - water so clear. You could see the fish by wading in the water. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer and had to put my snorkel on. Nice! Bigger fish than before - parrot, trigger, tang, neon blues. Stephanie and Annick fed yams to the fish who swam at their feet. What fun! After lunch we slept, stayed out of the sun or went swimming. Pascal gave Annick her first swimming lesson. What a brave lady - especially since she was afraid of the water!

Back at the boat we said goodbye to the Appleton and considered putting a note in the bottle and then throwing it overboard. Before dinner we went to a Pearl Farm and ended up with a pearl bracelet - beautiful peacock-colored pearl. The show/**dinner** that evening was quite good - chicken w/taro leaves (tastes like cooked spinach but better), poisson cru, rice, vegetables, sashimi and sauce - yummy. Dancing was a good show - 1st pareo typing, 2nd dancing, 3rd dancing with the audience, 4th fire dancing - flames at both ends of the baton, 5th - let's give the headdress and leis to the guests! We got the best assortment and I got the queen of the dance floor's headdress. Then it was photos and more photos. Really good show. Better than in Hawaii.



4 Nov - up early (not so bright) for a trip to the vanilla farm. Exhausting since I didn't wear good shoes. Alain (the 2nd Alain), our guide, knew a lot about all the local plants. For example, he and Christine built their house from bamboo walls, coconut palm ceiling woven by hand. So many plants in his garden. Quite a nice property - lots of work to create and maintain. End of the season for the vanilla blossoms, so Alain had to make a reservation for the one flower to pollinate. At the belvedere, an interloper from another tour bus tried to eat our delicious fruit, but we formed a barrier and kept him out. Strange guy - black socks, black shoes. We saw kapock, candle nut trees, bamboo strips that you could use for string or dental floss. **Lunch** - tuna carpaccio w/rose berries and oil. Nap. Go to motu near Relais and Chateau hotel. Strong current. Saw lots of fish - parrot, trumpet, and colorful coral. But the water was a little cloudy and not great conditions. Some big fish, some little fish. **Sunset:** Wow! Kir: Creme de Cassis & Chardonnay Pays d'Oc. **Dinner** - shrimp cilantro w/ginger and smashed sweet potatoes. A few stars.

5 Nov - awoke at 7am - yoga w/Alain (I think he likes it), breakfast, raise the Anchor for Bora - what a silhouette on the horizon. Stephanie gave me a blue tank top (just my color). Motored to the pass, left Tahaa, motor sailed and sailed to Bora Bora. Brian sailed us through the pass and then inside the lagoon. We anchored near the south side of the lagoon. **Lunch** - Pissaladier (onion pizza-like tart), salad, fromage, pain (bread), and banana-mango split. Yummy. More photos. After a brief siesta and seeing a HUGE box

fish next to our boat, Pascal took us snorkeling between 2 motus.

WOW! Does it get any better? Well yes, sunny and 100% clear instead of 95%. So many fish, so many varieties - just like the pictures. Pascal did feed them a little bread, but he didn't have to. They tend to bite the hand that feeds them. It was deep enough - no worries about the coral - and beautiful coral - lots of blue-lipped clams - many new fish - Napoleon, blues of all kinds, brown and white, Moorish Idol. We were overwhelmed. On the way back we saw 2 rays - sting and eagle. And now it's cocktail hour. Vin rouge.

Dinner - mahi mahi - broccoli - broiled tomatoes & fondants au chocolat (molten chocolate cake).



6 Nov - the last yoga class w/Alain - breakfast - off to drop anchor by the dock of Bloody Marys. Then into town for a little shopping. Monoi oil. Back to boat. Alain and Annick left to return to Paris and then Mont St. Michel. Pascal, Stephanie, Brian, and I took off in the dinghy with a **picnic** to see the end of the Hawaiki Nui Vaa - a 3-day canoe race: Huahine - Raiatea - Tahaa - Bora. It was better/worse than fleet week - so many motor boats rushing off to see the canoes - lots of waves - bumpy ride - no one fell out. Finally we could see the first boat - OPT (the post office), I believe. The race ended near the public beach park and we were right near the finish! What a good location. It was hot - we all went in the water and waded waist or armpit deep. Team Brazil, Tahiti Nui, etc. 40 canoes all together. Team Germany was last (or so we heard). What a big party! The way back, it was quite calm and we were following the police dinghy. Suddenly they swerved and hoopla! Brian overboard. He was O.K. I lost my balance and fell against the fiberglass seat. Now I'm icing a big goose egg on my leg. Arnica cream is supposed to do the trick. Pascal is feeding us ice cream. Yum!

Too bad we have to pack and go home tomorrow. Afternoon - snorkeling around 3pm - another good day - clear, lots of fish all over - no bread this time - a trumpet fish swam 4"

away from my head (woohoo!) - lots of different kinds of angel fish. When we first got in the water, Brian saw an eel swimming by - not at all afraid. Moray eel - 2 meters long - fat. He swam away and we kept our distance. Later we learned he was someone's pet.

Shower. Bloody Mary's mai tai, rum punch, Pastis, bloody Mary (piquant) (each person had a different drink). Nice stone waterfall in the bathroom. **Dinner** - lamb, minestrone vegetables - Kir before and no dessert after.

7 Nov - our last morning :(Last yoga on boat. Dinghy into town to get Francs to pay our Bar Bill (13,600 CFP). Fortunately, the ATMs worked! Credit cards too. Back to boat - hugs and kisses for everyone. Then we were off to Vaitape to be picked up by Dora the taxi driver. Pascal had arranged that she pick us up and take us to a hotel where we could stay for the day. Dora kept our luggage. Good idea. We went Sofitel - just past Matira Point where the canoe race ended. Beautiful place - gardens, fish ponds, beach, swimming pool, bar, restaurant, comfy chairs. View of Tahaa across the ocean. Very relaxing - cause our plane didn't leave until midnight for LA. Airport in Bora is on a motu, so you take a ferry to the airport. Early as always, we sat around the airport and listened to the canoers singing. They had finished the race and were returning home - mostly with empty beer coolers. They really were having a good time!



Bora - Papeete - Los Angeles. Pretty good flight - 2 meals and an open bar. Then off to see Jenn for the day! Fabulous trip!



Marilyn and Brian Smith

Archipels: <http://www.archipels.com>

Ellen Clark at www.valuevacation.com