

Tahiti February 2007

When I came back from my last trip in October, I said I had no idea where I would be going next, but I did not want to be traveling alone again. Well, life is funny that way, because I met a wonderful lady named KL, who is a widow and has sons about the same age as mine. We have been seeing each other for some time, and one day I happened to mention that I had been to Tahiti. She said she had always wanted to go to Tahiti since she was 17, and I said, "Would you like to go to Tahiti?"

She said yes, and I said, "OK pick a date". She looked at me in disbelief, and I told her I was serious. I had credits from a previous trip with Vantage Travel, so that made it even easier to arrange. A few days later, I called her with my famous phrase, "Pack your bags" - you are going to Tahiti.

Once the trip was booked, I gave her my login and password for the cruise so she could look at the shore excursions and pick which ones interested her. The website had complete descriptions of each excursion and how difficult they would be. We selected a number of tours including a helicopter ride in Bora Bora., and sunset sails in both Bora Bora and Moorea.

We will fly from LA to Tahiti; spend 2 nights at the beautiful Radisson Hotel, then board the Paul Gauguin for a 7 night cruise of the islands.

I put in a half day at work to save on my vacation, and then we met at the Airport shuttle terminal and headed down to LAX. After checking our bags, we had lunch and browsed the duty free store. The flight was very uncomfortable, as it was full and the seat pitch was such that our knees were up against the seat in front of us. We both had BOSE noise canceling headsets which made the trip a little more enjoyable.

PAPAEETE

We landed at Papaeete at about 10:30 PM and were taken to the hotel and settled in for the night. When we got up in the morning and opened the drapes KL just stood there in a trance!



The hotel itself had beautiful grounds and we looked out on an infinity pool, palm trees, and a beautiful black sand beach. I went down to the beach with a little bottle and poured some of the sand in it for KL to have as a souvenir. That morning we had breakfast and attended a Welcome Briefing and a lecture on the *Mutiny on the Bounty*

It was quite warm, and to cool off we took our first shower together-now, before anyone gets the wrong idea, we both sat on the side of the tub and KL ran cold water over our legs and feet to cool off. The room was very comfortable and has a sliding door between the bathroom and bedroom area, which was kind of unusual.

The next morning, we opted for an optional tour of Tahiti that included lunch. Our first stop was at the house of James Norman Hall, who wrote *Mutiny on the Bounty* and many other screen credits. He was also a WW I aviator and flew with the Lafayette Escadrille.

From there we were taken to lunch at a restaurant called IA Orana. The food was quite good, afterward we walked out onto the pier to the lagoon. It was set up so we could walk out to the lagoon and go down below the water, sort of like an aquarium. One of the pens held some black tipped reef sharks, and I was able to get a picture of it.



From there we were taken to the Maraa Grotto, where there was a cave and a water fall.



That evening, I headed for the restaurant for dinner while KL freshened up, and when she came in she asked me if she had taken too long. For once in my life, I came up with the right answer. "No woman takes too long" After dinner, the hotel had a Tahitian show scheduled, so we had dinner and watched the show, which was really great





The next day prior to being taken to the ship, we were taken on a tour of the other part of Tahiti. The view of the bay was beautiful, and we were taken to a viewpoint near some tikis that marked the entrance to a defunct hotel. The hotel had several owners, but the taxes were so high the last owner is letting it go to rack and ruin. In the picture between the tikis is my favorite wahine.



From there we were taken to a place where there were the 3 waterfalls of Faaruami. There was a neat bridge we had to cross to see the waterfall that reminded me of ones in Japanese gardens. The name of the waterfall we saw was Vaimahuta.





Our last stop was at Venus Point, which was the site of the first landing by Europeans on Tahiti. There is a lighthouse there that was designed by the father of Robert Louis Stevenson, and the lighthouse was completed in 1867.



After our tour, we were taken to the ship, where we were greeted with the usual champagne, and shown to our suite. There was enough storage space for all our things, and a nice sitting area that featured a love seat, TV and stocked bar.

On our first night on the ship, KL was getting dressed for dinner. In all the time we were seeing each other, she normally wore slacks and a blouse. This would be the first time I saw her in a dress! KL was absolutely stunning in a dress.

That night we were looking through the room service menu, and saw a listing for bourbon pecan pie! Well, we JUST had to try it. So we ordered it from room service, and it came with a scoop of ice cream! Just what we needed before we went to sleep!

#### RAITATEA

We arrived at the island the next morning, and were docked, so we did not have to use the ship's tenders. We took a sightseeing trip around the island, stopping at a large marae, which is an open air temple the ancient Tahitians used. There was an altar made of volcanic stones and another large area with an upright stone in the middle. This was used to measure the height of the warriors. It is the same concept as the signs they have at amusement parks. But instead of "You must be this tall to ride this attraction" it was "you must be this tall to fight the enemy".







That evening, before the ship left, a troupe of local dancers came on board to perform. The part that was the most fun was watching the children perform the dances.



Just before we left, there was a rainbow behind us, which is a good omen. We looked over the port side of the ship, and there next to the dock, were a group of islanders practicing the local dances. These were being done for their own enjoyment, not for a show.





## TAHA

Taha is a small motu or low island this is a private island for our ship's passengers. We first went snorkeling in a nearby lagoon, which was great as the water was only 3 feet or so deep. I never realized what a water baby KL was until she took to snorkeling as if she did it all her life. We were warned about the sea urchins, as they have long spines that can cause a painful injury.

I took some pictures with my disposable underwater camera, but was hard to get a good shot. After getting back on the boat, I saw something floating past that looked like a disposable camera. I went after it, and it was a Kodak camera just like the one I lost the previous year on Moorea. I told KL the story, and she asked if it had my name on it, and being the joker I was, I said yes. I knew it was not mine because this one did not have the wrist strap on it that mine did. It had a number of shots left on it, so I planned to use it on our next snorkel.

After we finished snorkeling, we were taken to the private island for lunch. There was a huge spread and an open bar, plus we could swim or kayak. The neatest thing, though, as the bartender in the water towing a floating bar!



After lunch, while KL went to find some shade and breezes, I took a kayak out and kayaked completely around the motu. It was really fun to do something like that, instead of puttering around a marina somewhere.

## BORA BORA

One of the highlights of the trip was the helicopter ride around Bora Bora. The helicopter seats 4, 3 in the back, and one in front next to the pilot. Being the gentleman I am, I let everyone get in the back first, and I sat up with the pilot. The flight around the island was spectacular. We could see the different shades of water, depending on the depth, and the hotels that are built out over the water.



We flew around the 2 mountains, Pahia, and Otemanu, which was higher. The pilot got us close enough to show us the sacred cave in the side of Otemanu.





I also got a picture of a WW2 gun emplacement almost covered by foliage (in the center of the picture), and of the lagoon.

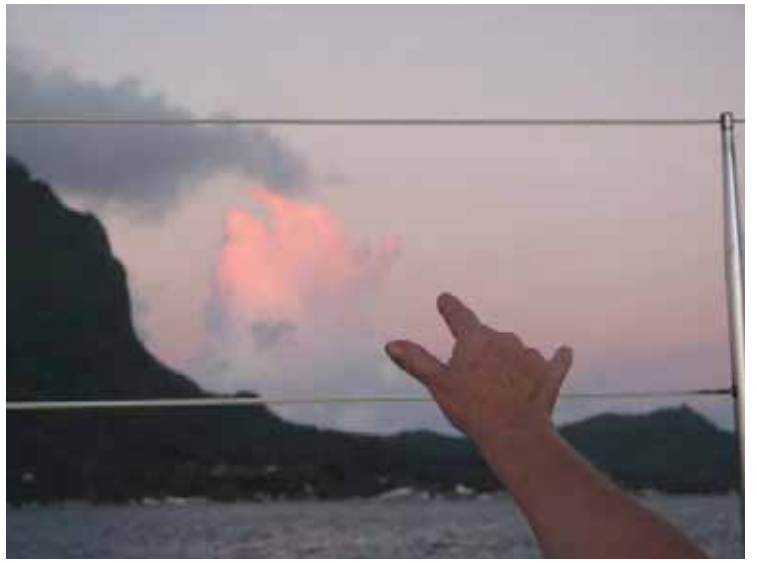


That evening we took the first of two sunset sailings on catamarans. KL showed me how to get all the way up in the bow on the trampoline (netting between the hulls) and it was really a lot of fun. The problem was there was not much wind, but we enjoyed it anyhow. The pictures I took speak for themselves.





Here is another picture of my favorite wahine, plus there was an odd cloud formation that looking like the Hawaiian “hang loose” sign made with the thumb, index finger, and pinkie. So KL suggested I take a picture with her hand in the frame doing the same thing!



The next morning, we went snorkeling again, but this was in a lagoon with different pens holding different fish and turtles.





We were taken to another larger pen that held some 6 foot black tipped sharks! I went in the water, but KL was really not anxious to. I double dog dared her, and that did the trick- she finally got in the water with them. Apparently they were well fed, as they just swam around minding their own business.



#### MOOREA

We arrived at Moorea and went in to do some shopping. For some reason the T-shirts here were half the prices of those in Bora Bora, so KL got some for her sons and grandchildren. There is a spectacular view of one mountain that was supposed to represent Bali Hai, from Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*



That evening we went on the second of two sunset sails. This was on a slightly larger catamaran, and the wind was up. We were crashing through the waves and the spray was coming over us, but the water was warm so it did not matter. There was another beautiful sunset, and we were taken back to the dock to catch the ship's tender. This was the night of the past passenger's party, but we did not have time to get cleaned up to really participate. It was almost over, so I went in and "hunted and gathered" a couple ounces of caviar with all the trimmings for each of us.

On our last day in Moorea, we went out to see some dolphins. Our guide was a professor who was studying the dolphins for a number of years. His talks were very interesting, and we learned a number of things about their social activities.



## PAPAEETE

I really messed up. For some reason I thought we were leaving Tahiti the day we got off the ship, but after talking to a few people, I checked our documents, and Surprise! We were to spend the night in the hotel in Papeete.

We were able to eat lunch on the ship, and went to the pool bar for a last drink. KL had a Mai Tai, and I said I want something tropical-give me a double Glenmorangie (scotch) and put an umbrella in it- and that is exactly what the bartender did! The funny thing was that KL tried to put in my hat through one of the vent holes, and I told her she was trying to stick it in my head!

We spent the last day relaxing, and decompressing from the cruise, went down to the beach and walked on the really fine black sand beach. We had lunch in the restaurant, and at about 9:30 PM were taken to the airport. The airport was not air conditioned, but KL found a place that had fans, so it was not too bad. When we boarded the plane, it was obvious that it was about a third full, so the minute the doors closed we split up and KL took the 4 center seats so she could stretch out. We both did get some sleep on the plane, but it was not a restful sleep. We whizzed through customs and immigration in Los Angeles, and caught the shuttle bus up to the San Fernando Valley where my car was parked.

Unfortunately, KL had some pressing things to take care of at home, so she did not stay in the Valley too long, but headed back to her house.

In summary, the trip was fantastic for both of us, it fulfilled a lifelong dream of hers and I was thrilled to be there with her to share it.