

CRUISING IN THE 'LAND OF MEN' —

Longtime cruisers Linda Edeiken and Chuck Houlihan of the San Diego-based Allied 39 Jacaranda are respectful travelers who love to immerse themselves in the cultures they visit. As a new fleet of Pacific Puddle Jumpers prepares to cross to French Polynesia, we'll share the couple's insightful report from their visit last summer.

The remote Marquesas Islands — *Te Henua Enana* ("Land of Men") as they are called by the islanders — are at the edge of a new world for Chuck and me: the South Pacific, with its storybook allure and resemblance to paradise. We are awed by the magical landscapes and exotic culture, and intoxicated by the colors and fragrances that bombard our senses, but it is the people who have seduced us most of all. The proud Marquesans laugh so easily; they are always ready with a smile and wear *tiare* (gardenia) flowers in their hair. These distinctive people, who almost vanished from the face of the earth not so very long ago, eagerly welcome you and take you home with them, all the while generously showering you with gifts of tropical fruits.

Since the 1800s, when Captain Cook's journals were widely read, Polynesia has served as the definition of paradise for many outsiders. Its 117 islands are contained within an area of the South Pacific Ocean that is larger than Western Europe. Certainly, the most well-known of its five archipelagos is the Society Islands, with Tahiti, Moorea and Bora Bora at its heart. To the northeast lies the isolated Marquesas archipelago. Says a website, "Happily, the islands are not flooded by tourists — this place is very remote and the beauty of Marquesas is not much known in the world." Out of 12 islands, six are inhabited: three southern islands — Hiva Oa, Tahuata and Fatu

A favorite Marquesan anchorage is the idyllic Bay of Virgins in Fatu Hiva.

Hiva, and three northern islands — Ua Pou, Ua Huka and Nuku Hiva (where the administrative capital of Taiohae is located).

The Marquesan allure of romance

has remained strong in the Western imagination, initiated by the literary celebrity of Herman Melville's *Typee* — until the 20th century, he was better known for this book than for *Moby Dick* — and reinforced by other such notables as Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, Thor Heyerdahl and Jacques Brel. But perhaps the South Pacific's most renowned devotee was Paul Gauguin, who escaped from France to search for a "simple, savage life" and captured it in his art for all the world to see. He found it in Tahiti and then the Marquesas, where he died in 1903 on the island of Hiva Oa. We made the pilgrimage to visit his grave in the Atuona cemetery, near the grave of French singer Brel, and also visited Gauguin's museum and an exhibition dedicated to Brel.

Although a Spaniard stumbled upon the Marquesas in 1595, the remote archipelago wasn't visited again until 1774 by Captain Cook. The French tinkered with them a bit early on as did American Captain Joseph Ingraham who tried to claim the islands in the name of an uninterested US. Finally, in 1848, they were claimed by France, which supports them today as a French overseas territory. The Marquesas archipelago flies three flags: French, Polynesian and



Flower artistry and tattoos are ubiquitous in these islands.

Marquesan. French and Tahitian are the official languages of French Polynesia, but the revived Marquesan language is also spoken here.

Of the two types of island landforms found in French Polynesia — low-lying coral atolls and high, craggy, lush volcanic mountains, the Marquesas are characterized by the latter, and are geographically reminiscent of Hawaii. Imagine a crumpled piece of paper in the shape of a green pyramid: from the main peak of formidable cliffs, rock pillars and spires dotted with tall waterfalls, radiate lush canyons and valleys that slope toward the sea, and terminate in rocky outcroppings, boulder shores, or white- or black-sand beaches.

Once upon a time in the days before Western contact, each isolated valley, separated by nearly impassable, knife-like ridges, was occupied by its own settlement and chief. They were a strong and proud people who adhered to a resilient Polynesian culture and belief system that included a strict hierarchical society, intertribal warfare, tattoos, ritualistic cannibalism, tiki symbolism, and polytheistic worship, as well as expert carvers, dancers, drummers and

Contact with navigators, trade ships, whalers and missionaries nearly brought about the total demise of the people.

musicians.

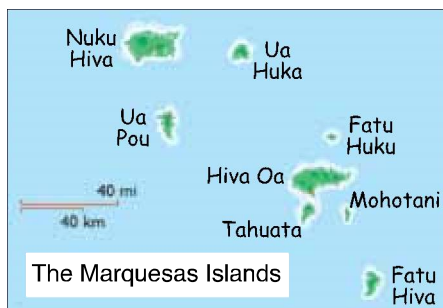
Discovery by the Western world was devastating, and contact with navigators, trade ships, whalers and missionaries nearly brought about the total demise of the people themselves, as well as their culture. Foreign diseases and epidemics decimated their numbers. The population was estimated to be 80,000 at the time of European arrival, shrinking to 15,000 in 1848, and then to a mere 2,000 by 1926. Today, there are only 9,000 Marquesans.

Marquesan culture and traditional ways largely disappeared through colonization and Catholic conversion, which was almost complete by 1860. Their ancient societal foundations crumbled, oral traditions were lost, and the archipelago became a largely vanished world. What little survived was transformed. Even now, many valleys remain empty where great communities once lived — archaeological remains are found everywhere.



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Today, traditional art forms such as tattooing and some aspects of culture are experiencing a strong renaissance. Ironically enough, it is the journals and documentation of some early western visitors that form the basis of reconstruction. Archaeological sites are being excavated and restored, major inter-island cultural festivals are held, and traditional dance, music and handicrafts are showcased. The fine decorative arts traditions of Marquesan ancestors



are finally getting their due. The first museum exhibition took place in 2005 — only 11 years ago — at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

For four centuries these islands have served as a preserve of explorers, adventurers and artists. Arrived on June 10 after our three-week voyage from the Ecuador's Galapagos Islands, we were thrilled to take our place among the collection of dreamers who have made the effort to see the Marquesas Islands for themselves firsthand.

The following are notes from some of the islands we visited.

Tahuata Island — This is the smallest inhabited island, with a population of 671. There are no tourists here. It has a stormy history of first Polynesian contact with Europeans in 1595.

Hanamoenoa Bay — Making landfall on Tahuata Island, in picture-perfect Hanamoenoa Bay, was a smart decision guided by Chuck's memory from a previous trip in 1991. We chose to hang here and rest, catch up on our sleep, clean the bottom of sludge and barnacles, swim, beach-walk, visit with cruiser friends, and just recuperate. This is a beautiful bay with turquoise water and a palm-fringed white-sand beach backed by green mountains. Best of all, it is flat — a treasure here, as the Marquesas have a well-deserved reputation for roly, uncomfortable anchorages. Manta rays glide around the boats, dolphins come

to feed, and wild horses and goats dot the hillsides. Hanamoenoa became one of our favorite anchorages, and we returned several times within the first months.

When we went ashore we met Steven, who we realized later is an atypically typical Marquesan. A handsome young man of 33, he is tall with bronzed skin, long dark hair and a beautiful smile, looking rather like an unpretentious Johnny Depp/Jack Sparrow sans make-up and foppery. Steven is a modern-day Robinson Crusoe who is cultivating his ancestral property, existing hand-to-mouth off the land and sea.

Although he had a house across the Bordelais Channel on Hiva Oa, he claims he swam across the channel to settle on the beach where he grew up with his grandfather rather than stay in Atuona as his parents wished. His shelter is a small shack at the edge of the beach, surrounded by his garden of coconut palms, *pamplemousse* (grapefruit), oranges, limes and bananas. We often saw him fishing at night with a light. Inland, all the islands are teeming with wild pigs and goats, free for the taking and hunting. This is done daily, with the help of a handful of skinny dogs. 'Rustic' is too elegant a word for Steven's lifestyle.

Steven is a gentle and soft-spoken soul who gave us our first lesson in Marquesan values of respect for nature and love of self-sufficiency and independence. He was the first, but not the last, to rail against Tahiti saying, "If you are in Papeete and you have no money, you will not eat. Here in the Marquesas you can always eat. But we only take what we need and nothing more." Steven enjoys befriending those cruisers who come ashore and who are considerate not to enter his garden or pick his fruit without permission; however, he has nothing but disdain for trespassers. He often takes cruisers fishing — he knows which fish have the ciguatera toxin and which are safe to eat — and invites them to have dinner, cooking goat, pork or octopus in coconut milk, which he rasps from the



Young and old take great pride in performing traditional dances in handmade costumes.

fresh coconut meat himself. In return, cruisers often support him in innumerable ways — giving him food, water or supplies; charging his phone; transporting him to the next bay — whatever they can do to help.

On a sunny afternoon that suddenly turned gray with characteristic tropical fickleness, Steven and I sat on the beach together in a robust but ephemeral downpour, exchanging stories of our love of the sea. Steven had brought out a half coconut shell filled with sweet, grated coconut meat for us to snack on. He told me about the bay: "Lots of dolphins come in here and push the fish to the rocks," he said motioning to the north shore. "Then they fish until they are full and go, leaving the mothers behind with their babies so they can teach them how to do it. Manta rays swim over the reef," he continued, pointing to a spot beyond where *Jacaranda* was anchored. "Some cruisers chase the dolphins and manta rays in their dinghies, and come and kill sea animals only for their shells, not for food," he said, shaking his head sadly. I spoke of whale nurseries and riding the giant manta rays of Socorro Island, of shark-finning, octopus hunting with bleach, and the overfishing I had witnessed elsewhere. Steven spoke of his

'Jacaranda' makes landfall after a three-week crossing from the Galapagos Islands.



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ALL PHOTOS JACARANDA



Needless to say, Marquesans take their tattooing tradition very seriously.

grandfather. I spoke of my sons. Then he got up, went into his garden, and returned with three cowrie shells as a gift and a flowering sprig of basil for me to wear behind my ear (any fragrant flower will do). When I asked him if I could take his picture, he declined, gently touching my head and then my heart, and told me to remember him that way.

Our admiration and friendship deepened with each subsequent visit to Hanamoenoa Bay. Steven joined us for lunch one afternoon on *Jacaranda* and we joked that all he needed now was a good *pirogue* (outrigger canoe) and a pretty woman (*vahine po 'otu*) or a pretty *pirogue* and a good woman. He laughed and said his grandfather was building him a canoe.

Other wonderful memories of Hanamoenoa Bay included: swimming for hours with manta rays, joined by the girls from the sailboat *Muneera*, an evening on *Space* and *Orion*, two catamarans rafted up together, both owned by the same intrepid and crazy young Australian named Jeff and his French girlfriend, and crewed by a changing international gang of six to eight youth. We shared fresh sashimi with them and

The underwater realm here remains unspoiled, and is abundant with wildlife.



had a look at the goat that was going to be the guest of honor at an imminent beach barbecue.

Hapitoni — Two days after our initial stop in Hanamoenoa we got sidetracked by the enticement of a church festival in the small nearby village of Hapitoni, and joined an exodus of a dozen sailboats to relocate five miles down-island to Hana Tefau, so we could attend the celebration. This beautiful anchorage is at the base of a high, steep cliff wall that has several small waterfalls trickling down it. A large pod of dolphins was feeding in the bay among the group of sailboats. Steven had told us it was a dolphin nursery.

If Steven was our first introduction to the Marquesan persona, Hapitoni was our first exposure to Marquesan society. We took the dinghy to the wharf where several young boys hung out to help us with our line, yelling "*KaOha!*" in greeting. Chuck was delighted to see that since he was last here in 1991 the town had built a protective riprap breakwater, which made our landing easy, and no longer made it a necessity to anchor the dinghy and swim ashore. Colorful outrigger canoes called *vakas* were pulled up on shore.

This was a picturesque village with the unique feature of Queen Vaekehu's 'royal road' paralleling the seafront, overhung by an arbor of large, gnarled, century-old tamanu trees. We walked down this distinctive 19th-century dirt road past houses with woven palm-frond fences, an ancient religious site (*me 'ae*), copra-drying sheds, community artisan space and a cemetery, then finally reached a small church and adjacent school in the center of an open, grassy field, the epicenter of activity on this Saturday.

Spirited teams of men and women played *pétanque*, a French game of lawn bowling similar to *boules* or *boce*.

Elsewhere, young children were engaged in 'fishing' for prizes, similar to our familiar carnival games. Perched along steps leading up to the field were a dozen women with boxes of flowers in their laps, weaving traditional garlands called



The jagged remains of ancient volcanoes give Marquesan peaks their tooth-like appearance.

hei to wear on their heads at the evening's dance and at the next morning's church service. The sweet fragrance of the *tiare*, a gardenia that is the national flower of the Marquesas, can knock you off your feet. We ogled a display of carvings of wood, bone, swordfish bills and shells by the famously expert Hapitoni artisans.

We people-watched, captivated by our observations — and frustrated by the communication gap we suddenly found ourselves in. We felt like fish out of water not knowing French. So many wonderful new people and things we were seeing with no way to actively participate, get adequate explanations, or carry on conversations! Envious of our French cruising friends who helped us with translations, we relied on them and contented ourselves with quietly taking it all in. Eventually, we began to pick up a few Marquesan words and phrases here and there.

At 6 o'clock, a free dinner was served to all in attendance (roughly 300 people). It was a delicious plate of pork and lentil stew over rice with a piece of buttered bread and a sweet finger banana for dessert. The evening performance of religious dramas enacting Bible stories commenced an hour later, incorporating a modest sampling of Marquesan dance, music and song.

One thing that really delighted us was watching the Marquesans with their babies and toddlers. The phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" could have been coined here. The little ones are so loved and shared by everyone. They are picked up, held and kissed, played with and cooed at. There was one adorable little girl in particular who was with a different woman each time we saw her, and we never did figure out who her mother was, although we kept asking.

In church the next morning, small children were handed up and over from one pew to the next, passed from one person to another, until they made

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the rounds of the entire congregation during the service.

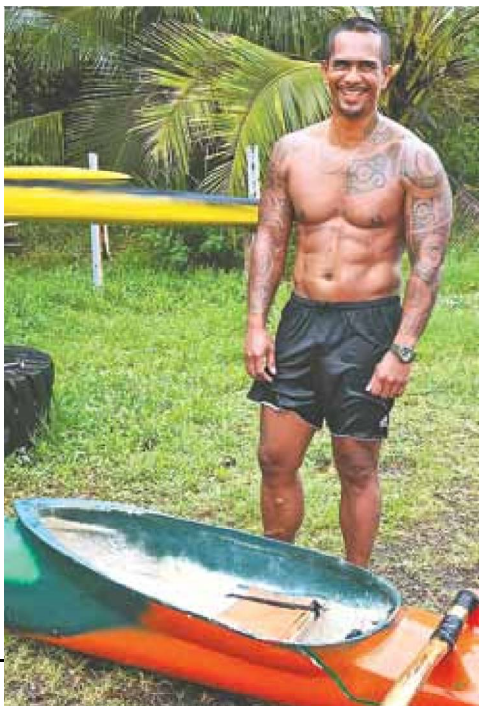
Sunday morning we returned to the village early to attend the church service and listen to the acapella singing in complex harmonies that the Marquesans are renowned for. This is now

our Sunday routine no matter where we are, as we enjoy the superb harmonizing, drumming, family interaction, and women dressed in their finery with flower crowns.

As we were sitting outside waiting for the service to begin, a woman and her family sat next to us and she introduced herself. She wanted to practice her English and we were excited to connect with her and spend time together both before and after the singing. Her name was Tahia, meaning "princess" in Marquesan, and she was the school teacher at a village called Motope. School teachers are the people to seek out in each village if you are looking for someone who speaks English!

Vaitahu — After several more weeks of exploring, we returned to Hanamoenoa Bay on July 2 yet again to welcome our friends David and Kim Wegesend to the Marquesas after their tiring 18-day Puddle Jump from the Galapagos. Having had to hand-steer their Hawaii-based

Wanna build some upper-body strength? Try paddling every day of your life.



Catana 42 *Maluhia* for eight days due to autopilot malfunction, they were a bit weary, but in great spirits! We had a fun combination birthday/happy landfall dinner on *Jacaranda* complete with crowns and 'hand-steering awards' that I made out of aluminum foil.

Two days later Kim and David joined us to take *Jacaranda* down-island for the day to the main village of Vaitahu, known for its beautiful Catholic church and great carvings. Very significantly, Vaitahu is where Europeans first arrived in the South Pacific. In 1595 the Spanish navigator, Álvaro de Mendaña, made a most murderous entrance, shooting inhabitants on sight. Captain Cook arrived 200 years later in 1774, but was shunned. Admiral Abel Dupetit-Thouars took possession for France here in 1842 despite strong resistance.

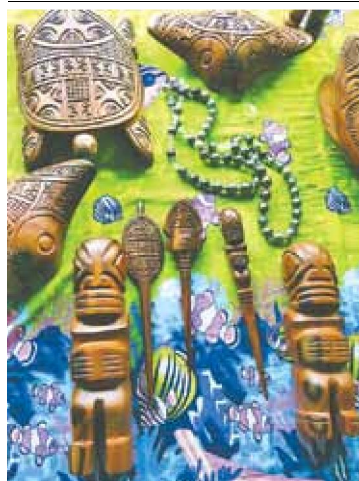
Less than an hour after leaving Hanamoenoa, we entered the large open bay and anchored next to the *Aranui*, a working supply ship that serves as a delivery lifeline between Tahiti and the Marquesas. Built as a cargo ship in the front, it doubles as a cruise ship in the back with cabins, decks and a swimming pool. It accommodates 200 passengers and offers tourists an iconic 8- to 14-day cruise to the islands that is supposed to be one of the world's best adventure cruises.

The *Aranui's* appearance at each Marquesan Island is a major event and the whole village/town mobilizes around it. Cars queue up to meet it at the dock for offloaded goods, or small boats ferry out to pick up goods and deliver copra or fruit. Artisan markets are brimming with articles for sale, traditional dances are performed, and special meals are offered. We used to run away when the cruise ships came to Mexican towns, in order to avoid the crass commercialization and hordes of tourists. But here in the Marquesas, it is the best time to see a sleepy town show its stuff.

A big swell was running this day and Chuck and David did a reconnaissance in the dinghy to determine the best place to get ashore. The northern concrete loading dock and several rough beach



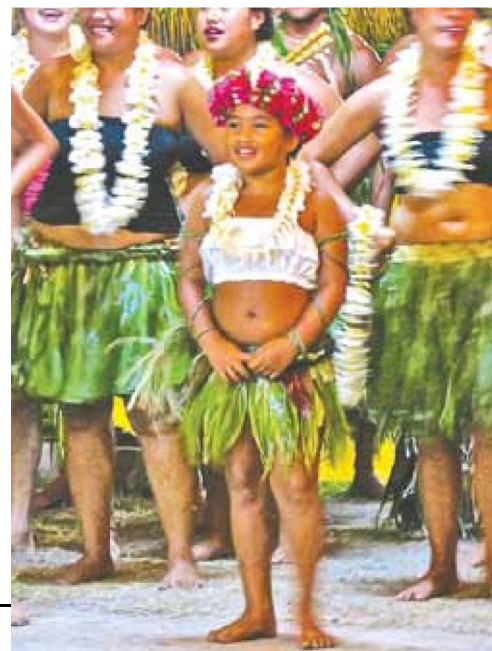
Master carvers shape both bone and hardwood.



areas were untenable, so we decided to try the rocky shore in the southern part of the bay. Chuck skillfully maneuvered the dinghy as Kim and I disembarked on the rocks and scooted higher to safety. David got out of the dinghy next, but the timing was bad, and he almost got swept away by some big swells, suffering some scrapes and barely recovering his hat and backpack. The only choice for Chuck now was to anchor the dinghy 30 meters beyond the breaking waves and swim over to us. What a gnarly landing! We all scrambled over the rocks to reach the shore, watching the dinghy over our shoulders as it lifted and fell with the incoming swells, but it seemed secure enough.

By the time we walked around to see the village, the tourists had returned to the *Aranui*, the artisans had packed up their wares and departed, and the town

A young dancer watches the moves of a competing troupe, as she waits to perform.



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was deserted and still.

We explored the waterfront, entered the beautiful church to see the wood carvings and stained-glass windows, and climbed the hill from the creek to reach a famous artisan's house and workshop.

Teiki Barsinas is considered one of the best bone and shell carvers in the Marquesas. His work is in the British Museum, a French museum, and several other impressive collections around the world. A big, shy man with large hands, Teiki led us into his small, dark and cluttered studio. We all had to duck down as we entered the dark recesses of the shed that led to his work area. His worktable faced an open window that let some natural light into the dark space. It was filled with an array of materials and tools, bones were piled high in one corner, and animal skulls hung from the ceiling. Mother-of-pearl shells lay in a heap in another corner. There were also whale teeth, helmet shells and swordfish bills. Under a lamp and next to a Dremel tool, some carving rasps, and files lay some intricately carved pendants and tikis. He modestly showed us his work:



CHUCK HOULIHAN

By the time Linda left Teiki's studio with her hand-carved pendant, she'd made a friend.

available items he had completed that were for sale, a few things in progress, an extensive looseleaf notebook filled with previously purchased works, letters of customer appreciation, and business cards from various museum curators. He was justly proud.

David and I each picked out a favorite bone pendant and asked Teiki if he would trade for some cash and some large *tagua* nuts which I had brought

from Ecuador. This was a new material he was interested in and he showed us some recent carvings he had done in *tagua* that had been obtained from other cruisers. The exchange happily made, we left the cramped semi-darkness and emerged into his sunny open yard. Teiki summoned his 12-year-old twin daughters, "Thelma and Louise" (as he called them, with a broad smile), to help him pick some fruit for us. Adorned with our new treasures around our necks, David and I posed for photos with Teiki before we all shared a juicy *pamplemousse*, followed by an orange and a new type of mango. We left with armfuls of fruit and a lot of pleasure from meeting such a talented master and his wonderful family.

— linda edeiken

Readers — We'll have to end here, but we encourage you to read more of Linda's insightful reporting on the Marquesas and elsewhere by visiting the couple's blog-site: www.jacarandajourney.com (Select Passage Notes in the main menu.)

— Ed.

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