

SLOEPMOUCHE - 46' Norman Cross trimaran - 5' draft – June 2015
Subject/ Area: French Polynesia update

What a pleasure to come back to French Polynesia after 12 years! From 1999 to 2003 we explored French Polynesia (see past letters) and sailed thru lots of islands both in the South Pacific and Micronesia. Since 2012, we have been in Philippines/Indonesia. How could we resist Jimmy Cornell's offer to fly back to the Marquesas to welcome and take care of the fleet of Blue Planet Odyssey, a unique kind of rally? (www.cornellsailing.com) French Polynesia and Vanuatu are our 2 favorite cruising grounds so far ... but we wondered how would we find Polynesia after 12 years of absence and experience of many other areas since then? We are pleased to report that we have not been disappointed at all! A few things did actually improve in that period of time, like Internet connection and officialdom for yachts!

A new and good resource for yachts planning to cruise thru French Polynesia is the Yellow Flag Guides publication: "Stopover Handbook in French Polynesia". This, and other guides, are available for download. www.archipelagoes.net Contact Stephanie Betz, a former solo sailor who has turned advocate for cruising yachts, working with govt. tourism and the Marine vendors in French Polynesia to increase awareness of both visitor and visited, as to what is needed or offered, for and by, visiting yachts. The Guide points out that French Polynesia has implemented many marine and cultural protected areas throughout the territory. Be aware of complying with restrictions.

Here's an update on what has and hasn't changed for boats visiting FP.:

According to Yellow Page Guide, boats are now permitted to stay 18 months (3 years??) w/o being subjected to customs duties (not just 6 months of any 12 month period anymore). This has been a major incentive for Europeans to spend a longer time here as we can see a much bigger number of yachts moored in Papeete. Non-Europeans are still subject to the famous bond (guarantee of repatriation if needed). This very old rule still applies to any foreigner, except EU citizens, entering French Polynesia air or by boat. The spirit of the law is to insure that no foreigner should be deported out of French Polynesia at the gvt expense. People arriving by boat have 3 options.

First option: you show a valid air ticket out of Fr.Pol.(you either fly out later or you get your return refunded later) Second option: Post a bond: you go to the Banque Socredo (only this particular bank) and pay them to issue you a bank guarantee. The fixed fee for this is 3,500 CPF (about 35USD). They will charge your cc (they did not accept cash for this in the Marquesas) for an amount related to your country of origin (US, Canadian, Brazilian citizen about 1,600USD, NZ citizen about 1,300 USD. The bank will charge your card in cfp (Polynesian francs) and return your bond money back in cfp cash when you check out of French Polynesia.

Third option: you hire a licensed customs agent to himself guarantee your exit expenses. There are a few agents offering this service at various costs, typically about 125USD

Another change of rule is that boats can sail from Marquesas directly to the Leewards (Huahine, Bora Bora etc) without registering with the Bureau of Yachts of Papeete. However yachts going to Tahiti, are required to register on arrival (even if they do not go into any marina) and before departing to the Leeward Islands. Two days before you depart from Taiti-Moorea area, contact the Bureau des Yachts so they can get you a cruising permit (you should get it by email).

As before, you can get duty free fuel throughout your voyage in French Polynesia but if you want this privilege before arriving in Tahiti, you must use an agent who will transmit the necessary papers to the Customs in Papeete for you, and get the duty-free fuel form to you to present to the fuel station when you fuel up. Agent reps are in Hiva Oa and Nuku Hiva. You'll save on fuel costs even after paying the agent fee if you need more than 125-150lts of fuel.

One big change that we've noticed, not just here, but around the world, is that technology has allowed authorities to track yacht movement remotely, as never before. Gone are the days of yachts sneaking in and out of countries w/o prior notification and official clearance. Those that try may end up detained and fined. Another change is that increasingly, authorities expect yachts to have email capabilities aboard.

Do not rely on some imprecise or incorrect information sometimes published ... it only leads to stress and unhappiness. And while this procedure could be easily argued as unnecessary, cumbersome and expensive, one should look at the big picture and appreciate the fact that all other entry procedures like immigration, customs, quarantine are free and officials normally do not even board your vessel! French formalities are better than most other places.

Clearing in details in Atuona Harbor, Hiva-Oa

Outside of Papeete, the Gendarmes are still the local authorities to contact for yacht movement. You need to give advance notice before arriving into French Polynesia. We gave the required advance paperwork about the BPO fleet at the local gendarmerie and accompanied each crew to fill the entry declaration as they came in. Altho the Gendarmes are on duty 24/7, formalities cannot be completed for those who post a bond until you go to the bank and get the paperwork to show the gendarmes. If you choose to use an agent to vouch for you in lieu of the bond or to get duty free fuel, contact Sandra, an agent representative for PYS. Ph: 87-23-22-47, or contact PYS, at pys@mail.pf before arrival in Hiva Oa.

FYI: If your sailing brings you right by Fatu Hiva first, you might be interested to know that some independent boats landed in Hanavave (Bay of Virgins) lately,

went to see the local policeman and he gave them a few days to rest and repair before proceeding to Hiva-Oa, they reported no problem when they cleared in Atuona a few days later.

There is a volunteer rescue association in Hiva Oa. You can call Sea Rescue on channel 16 / 9 ... they have a long distance antenna set up and may be able to assist you in an emergency.

It is strongly advised to arrive during daylight hours (you might reduce your speed to adjust your ETA) in order to enter the small harbor and anchor safely amongst the other vessels (anchoring fore and aft necessary). Should you arrive in insufficient light or at night, we advise to anchor outside of the harbor proper and wait for good light to enter. Be advised that the first part of the harbor is reserved for maneuvering of cargo ships. Look for the yellow markers with an X on top (near the end of the main pier). They form a range line that you should anchor behind. For your comfort and as a courtesy, set a stern anchor to orient you into the swell and avoid swinging into others. With the longer local Aranui coming into the harbor now, the area to anchor has now been reduced ☹

One place we really recommend you visit in Hiva Oa, is the Snack Make Make. Hugh and Marilyn and their family offer not only great food at good value.(for Fr Polynesia), much of it locally sourced, but also rent-a-car services, and tattooing, by contentious and serious people. They are all also so nice and welcoming.

Festival in Ua Pou

One island often passed over by yachts is Ua Pou, even tho it is also an entry port. The BPO was very lucky that their schedule coincided with Ua Pou Sailors Days, a newly developed festival created by the island tourism council to attract sailors to discover their island. In 2015, the 2-day fest took place on 10-11 April in Hakahau bay and Hakahetau bay, respectively. There was cultural food, arts and crafts, and excursions by 4x4 to the famous beach of the “flowery rocks”, a waterfall, chocolate maker, and cultural sites. The highlight of the festival was the interaction with the locals, the feasting, and the amazing Marquesian dance performance, full of raw energy and magnetic force. The spectators were awestruck. Sailors Days will probably become an annual event. The President of the Tourism is Heato (Hey-ah Toh). He has a restaurant in the town of Hakahau. Just ask anyone for his restaurant. Or email him at heato@mail.pf; he is fluent in English. If you will be in the Marquesas around that time of year, do not miss this event. The number of yachts that attend, directly influences what activities can be offered at the fest.

Nuku Hiva- Changes for the Better

The biggest changes in the Marquesas that we saw in the 15 years since we were here happened in Nuku Hiva. There have been a lot of enhancements for visitors in tourism and in yachting. There’s a nice quay for landing the dinghy. On the quay is an outdoor snack restaurant that the locals call Henri’s, (after the owner). He offers free wifi for customers. Also on the quay, is Yacht Services Nuku Hiva, run by a very energetic and responsive American, Kevin Ellis, and his wife Anabella (ysnukuhiva@hotmail.com). Kevin was a great deal of help to one

of the BPO yachts that had a transmission problem on a very old engine, Kevin helped them to get a part and got the transmission operational again, so they could rejoin the fleet. He offers other services too, like laundry, and agent services for clearing in w/o bond, and to get d-taxed fuel before arriving in Tahiti. Kevin stands by on ch 72.

Emmanuel Taupotini (emmanuel.taupotini@mail.pf), President of Tourism, was very responsive and helpful to us, as coordinators for the Blue Planet Odyssey. He was always prompt to answer our emails and, on short notice, organized a welcome cocktail, arts and crafts workshop, cocktail, and Marquesian Dance performance for our group, sponsored by the Mayor. He put us in contact with people, and even went beyond his duty as tourism President to do things like set up appointments with the hospital, and make school contacts for our participants that wanted it. Always gracious and unruffled, "Manu" would be a great resource to anyone having general questions about Nuku Hiva, not just about tourism. Find him at the Fare Tourism, a short walk from the quay. At the Tourism Center there's now a veggie market, an arts and crafts center, and a snack restaurant, all very clean and airy. Much of the sea front has been turned into pleasing public places with tiki rock carvings and greenery.

With so many amenities at the quay, it's easy to miss one of the icons of yacht welcome for over 40 yrs in Nuku Hiva, Rose Corser, of Lonely Planet fame. Rose owns the He'e Tai Inn, Restaurant, and an impressive personal Museum of Marquisian Culture. At the opposite end of the beach from the quay, it's a pleasant walk, or you can beach land the dinghy near by. Many of the BPO fleet took delicious meals there, toured the Museum, enjoyed wi-fi, and even took advantage of the very good special rate that Rose extends to yachties. (marquesasrose@gmail.com)

Even after 15yrs away, the Marquesas are a special group of islands and never fail to leave a lasting impression. There IS magic there, and all our participants, even the most jaded, could not stop marveling about them and their people. This year is a special one. It's the year of the famous Matavaa Festival of the Marquesas, which only takes place every 2 yrs. The festival is 4 days of cultural dance, crafts, folklore, traditional canoes, and feasts. Do not miss if you have the chance!! December 16-19, 2015

Tuamotus

Fakarava- and 6 neighboring atolls including Toau, Kauehi, and Raraka, have been declared Protected Marine areas with restrictions on anchoring and activities. In the North, stop at the town hall (mairie) for further info. In the S, ask at the dive centers. In Toau, Anse Amiot, yachts are welcome as always on the 8 moorings of Gaston and Valentine. Go see them after you pick up a mooring.

There's now, in Rotoava, the main town, Fakarava Yacht Services run by Aldric and Stephanie. (fakayachtservices@gmail.com) They monitor ch 77. You will

find some mooring buoys there, but they are privately owned. FYS may let you use their mooring. Note that there is a project to install public moorings soon ...

Apataki- there is now a Yacht haul out facility in the SE corner (Tamaro) run by the family Asam, who have been welcoming yachts for over a decade with veggie and fresh products. Call 72 or 16.

Rangiroa- has always been the most developed of the atolls, especially for diving. Now there is even more infrastructure for yachts at Avatoru and Tiputa. Six Passengers Dive Center got good reviews from our yachts who dove with them. Rangiroa Plongee quoted the best rates and were most responsive by email and promotes marine mammal research.

Tahiti

New Marina at Port

The freshest news from Tahiti is that the new Marina de Papeete is open. The official ceremony was 23 April, 2015. The old "Seawall" on the Papeete seafront has been totally transformed into a very modern marina with floating piers, security, and berthing for 80 yachts. The floating finger piers have metered water and electricity. Yachts are buffered from the public street by a "moat" of water and locked security gates. The marina office complex features an air-conditioned guest lounge and patio with free wifi, washing machines, and ample men's and women's toilette/shower facilities. The Marina de Papeete is run by the Port Autonome de Papeete, responsible for all activities in the port.

Rates are slightly lower than Marina Taina for short stays, but may be higher for long stays. (For long stays, the monthly rate for a mooring outside the Marina Taina seems to be the best value, especially for monohulls. Multihulls pay double)

Bureaucracy in Tahiti: When you arrive in Tahiti, whether direct or from an outer island, you need to register with the Port Autonome in Papeete whether you stay in the port marina or not. Call Vhf ch 12 for instructions on how and where to register. You also need to inform the Port 48 hrs before you leave either for the Leeward Islands or check out of French Polynesia. If you go to Leewards, you need to get a permit (will be emailed to you) for the outer islands, which you will present to Gendarmes on clearing out. If you check out in Tahiti, you need to go to Customs at the Port and Immigration at the airport. Conclusion, it's more convenient to clear out in the Leewards.

Getting Parts: The 4 main stores are: Nautisport and Sing Tun Hing Marine in Fare Ute, Ocean 2000 nearby and Tahiti Yacht Accessories in Marina Taina. They all offer good selection, best to check all of them when you arrive so you have a good idea of their stock and prices. Anything they order for you will take several weeks because of Custom delays and other time lost here and there. You might be better ordering the parts directly yourself and stay on top of the courier company so you get them as fast as possible if you are planning to leave asap. Getting parts in duty-free for yachts in transit is possible but you will still have agent fees to pay since Customs will not deal with you directly!

Rental Cars: Eco Cars had the best rate and were the most efficient and delivered cars to the marina. They may even give a better rate if you fly their banner during your stay. Stephane or Delphine at ph: 87 50-44-77, or contact@ecocar-tahiti.com

A tour of Tahiti self-driving is worth it! The renovated Jardins de Vahipahi and Maraa Caves are very nice to visit. Lunch at the Restaurant du Musee Gauguin is a nice mid-day stop. On Sundays and public holidays they have a big Maa Tahiti buffet (mob 40571888 / 40571380). Roger, the owner since over 40 years, arrived here on his small sailboat from England. If you ask his wife, Juliet, she might take you to their gorgeous home overlooking Port Phaeton! There you will have a great visit with Roger and plenty of interesting stories of old Tahiti. The Gauguin Museum is now closed for renovations (since a few years). The Musee de Tahiti is interesting to visit,

Black Pearls: The Pearl Museum has now been relocated to the front de mer, just opposite of place Toata (where they have the big amphitheatre for Heiva festival and other public events). A visit to the museum (free entry) is interesting as it makes you understand the whole process of pearl culture. If the pearls there are pricey, you might want to check Pearly Shell of Tahiti, near the Pharmacie du Port (rue Gauguin). Guy, the owner has been a friend of sailors since many years (Noonsite sponsor) and he offers special prices for yachties (just tell him you are friends of ours ☺ He also x-ray each pearl so you can see the thickness of the coating ... something very important if you want the black pearl to last!

Public transport: the new 47seater buses are infrequent so you might be lucky to hitch a ride before a bus pass by!

Bora Bora

You will be welcomed by Teiva at the Maikai Marina. You have the choice of moorings and spaces at the dock, all for very reasonable rates. Free wi-fi, showers & garbage disposal. Enjoy cocktail hour, a swim in the pool and great meals .. Teiva is a great chef too ☺

Rainui from the tourism association can organize tours for you (mob 87783068).

Conclusions:

French Polynesia is a fantastic cruising destination and is worth a lot of your time. Now that boats can stay long, you can easily spend a whole year here before continuing across the Pacific. If you are EEC citizen, you don't even need a visa .. if you are not, best is to contact any French Consulate abroad and apply (in advance) for a 1 year stay permit. If you just come in without any visa, you will only get 3-month, non-renewable. But again, you could fly to Easter Island, NZ or back home to restart your 3-month clock! It is probably only until you reach SE Asia that you will truly understand how French Polynesia is truly a unique destination with welcoming people!