

## **Subject/ Area: Futuna Island (as in Wallis & Futuna)**

After a 3-day passage from Savusavu, Fiji, we landed in Leava, Futuna. If you need to get out of Fiji because your visa is expiring, but you want to do more in Fiji, one option is to sail up to Futuna and/or Wallis, check in, check out and return to Fiji as a new entry. We had read that you were required to stay out 3 months before you could return and do this, but Curly, the yacht info person said that this was no longer true, and he had just returned without problem from a round-trip check-in/check-out delivery of a boat to avoid the importation tax. This is a good option, especially since we wanted to stay the cyclone season in Fiji. The trip, though, was close-hauled going up, and both ways we had washing machine, seas and currents between the reefs and small islands of the north of Fiji. We anchored very carefully in the middle of the harbor as some unprepared have ended up on the reefs because of strong winds and swell ... good sand bottom but deep (50-60ft) and not a lot of room! There is a fine line between anchoring too far inside to have enough swinging room, and out too close to the wharf, which has surprisingly large container ships every 2 weeks. This anchorage is mostly protected from tradewinds but tends to have constant swell, making it sometimes uncomfortable. We were there in October, and winds were mild, so it was tolerable.

Shore landing can be made either at the wharf or by pulling the dinghy ashore on the ramp at the head of the bay.

As with most French islands, check-in was painless and free. You have to visit the Customs office first (in the Delegation Francaise complex – 5 min walk East on the main road. You then go another 10 min further East on the road to the Gendarmerie (Immigration). If you arrive outside business hours (Mon-Fri 8am-130pm) go visit the gendarmerie and see the Customs when they open next. You are allowed to go ashore in the meantime and no overtime charges apply; some complain about the French check-in procedures! What a change from the British influenced islands! Our dog went ashore without problem either. One of the harbor people said that there were plans to move the clearance office to the building at the harbor by the end of 2005, simplifying things.

The road around the island is well worth doing by bicycle or car as you will have many good views and photo opportunities. People are very friendly and not as shy as other islands. French is the language taught in schools, but you might find a rare person who can speak English since the schools also have English and Spanish classes. In the valley at the head of Leava harbor, one can walk along the river to small waterfalls, natural pools, and water catchments pools. Ask permission of the family in the house on the right side of the bridge (as you look up the river). We were well guided by Adrian (Paulo), one of the young sons and even got plenty of mangoes to eat and for marmalade (gave them some later). If you go w/o guide, walk right up the river keeping to the right when the river forks. If you want to get to the best pools, it's best to get a guide because there is some scrambling and precarious walking on the water pipeline. The island is divided into 2 kingdoms and the island looks quite different from one side to the other as topography is quite in contrast! Small supermarkets offer quite a good choice of products from France, US and NZ at prices comparable to French Polynesia, and some items even cheaper than Fiji! Last chance to get baguettes and those delicious French foods! (until you get to New Caledonia). The local hospital is so much more impressive than in Tonga or Fiji, with 3 French doctors and a dentist in attendance! And treatment and medicines are free of charge even to visitors. Diesel and gasoline are available at higher prices than in Samoa, Tonga or Fiji ( no duty-free L) If you were looking for an island without tourists, you will be pleased to see none, as the isolated position of the island, high airfares, unreliable flights + a lack of infrastructure and interest in developing tourism prevents it. About a hundred French people (teachers, gendarmes, medical personnel, ...) share this beautiful small island. The islanders are

very culturally close to Samoans and quite religious and traditional, but French influence is evident, as you see islanders wearing many more flowers and leis like French Polynesians. Though fully clad like Samoans, Polynesian sensuousness has been allowed to peek through. Refreshing!

**Alofi island.** An alternate anchorage in front of the White Cross on the rock on the reef if it gets too uncomfortable in Leava. Good sand (20 m) but the bottom drops rather quickly from the barrier reef so careful anchoring is important. Always swell here too, alas! It's better to be here in a strong SE than in the harbor, and even E wind wasn't too bad. Locals come here several days a week to tend their fields and French residents come here on WE to enjoy the sand beaches and hiking. You can also snorkel around the reefs and spearfish (no ciguatera here). The incredible blue color of the water attests to the total lack of pollution or sediments in the water. Features of the reef are clearly seen even 20 m down. Lots of coral canyons and grottos on the drop-off of the fringing reef, make for fun, and picturesque free diving.

There are several hikes of from 1 ½ to 2 hrs each way to different beaches around Alofi. The most intriguing was the 2 hr hike across the interior through forests and cultivated lands to the place called Loka (Lo-Kah). There are open-air thatched shelters, but no one lives there. After arriving at the beach, follow it to the left, and you'll find a path that takes you up, then down to another beach, and in the cliff side, there is a natural cavern where fresh water drips out of the "ceiling", and the natives have built a catch basin and an altar with a statue of the Virgin Mary, and funky, tacky banners and ribbons and plastic flowers to "adorn" and honor the Virgin and this once-ancient sacred area. The coastline here is quite interesting and picturesque, as the black volcanic rocks have been beaten and carved into natural sculptures and rock pools and arches. And after the long hike and maybe some playing in the ocean, there is a long pipe with a faucet just at showering height bringing fresh, sweet water from the Virgin's basin to refresh the weary traveler! Other hikes to nice beaches are: Vaika (Vye-KA), 1 ½ hr one-way, and Savaka, (Sah-VAH-ka) another ½ hr to 40 mins further.

The wind stayed too far to the east to lay Wallis, so we ended up staying in Futuna a Month!

Probably a record for a yacht. But we were treated to the big Communion Festivities at the end of October, which is one of the biggest events of the year. Hundreds of pigs were killed, and 3 days of church-going, kava-drinking (called tawasu (tah-wah-soo)), dancing, feasting and presentation of food gifts to family and village chiefs took place while the young children taking communion, were clad with sparkling costumes and festoons of fragrant flower leis.

One of the several teachers who we befriended (they are starving for interesting company!) was Belgian! He was delighted to find a compatriot sailed to the island. His son was taking his 1<sup>st</sup> communion, and so we were invited to all the fun. We took photos and video and Luc put together a DVD with music and special effects, which we gave as a gift to him and the Futunian family that put on the big feast and celebration.

March 2006

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche