

French Polynesia

Not really a guide but an update to what has already been written



Photo: "Mr John IV" anchored off Bay of Virgins 1987



Photo: "Mr John VI" anchored Hakahetau, Ua Pou 2008

From the British Yacht 'Mr John VI'
In transit 2008 season.

THIS DOCUMENT IS NO GOOD UNLESS PRINTED!!

THE MARQUESAS

CLEARANCE.

For Europeans it's very quick and painless for others it gets much more difficult. Without going into too much detail it would seem that the easiest way forward for none Europeans is to get an Agent.... The agent will then take care of the bond; you don't have to worry about putting money on the line, they do the paperwork (well, some of it!) AND you can get Duty Free Fuel right away. If you are arriving in the Marquesas with empty tanks this is an added bonus and could almost cover your agent's fees!

(PYS Polynesia Yacht Services.... pys@mail.pf .. www.polynesiayachtservices.com)

There is quite a good Wi-Fi system available now in Nuku Hiva and Rangiroa as well as the main islands further south. Even if you do not pay for it you can access weather information from this site through WINDGURU. This proved to be a very good source of information. This system is called Iaoranet and we used it quite a lot. (www.iaoranet.easyforum.fr) You can buy time on line or at offices ashore where they have an antennae. Also, when you get on line, check out www.metvuw.com and if you speak a little French www.meteo.pf

What ever you do, every day, from here to Tonga, take NOAA from Hawaii as they are the only people who tell you the whole story.

FATU HIVA and the famous Bay of Virgins....said to be one of the most beautiful anchorages in the world.....Maybe... but maybe not. Some friends of ours said it was so good it was worth paying the fine they got for not checking in properly before going there!!! If this is your first anchorage, you may well get fined too... Best to go to Hiva Oa first and avoid problems!

The famous walk to the Waterfall and Pool.... More of a scramble than a walk and watch out for eels in the Pool... They bite...Maybe not the best place for skinny dipping!

HIVA OA

The logical arrival point for boats coming from Galapagos, Not much of a harbour at Atuona, it can get a bit full at the height of the season even if everyone uses two anchors and few seem to be able or willing to do that these days.

It can also be swelly, roly and buggy! Apart from that it's quite nice and the small town is a pleasant walk away.

Four nice anchorages on the North side of the island, these may be less roly.



NUKU HIVA

The logical arrival point for boats coming from Mexico and the NW U.S.. Easy harbour to get into and plenty of room at Taiohae Bay. Leading marks in blue, not quite as per chart but C-map was spot on. (Anchor posn. 08 54.946S 140 05.981W). Do not take FW here, they have problems. (go to Hanga Haa, its easier than Daniels Bay).

Couple of small supermarkets, vegetable stalls every day and a fresh produce market on a Sunday morning at 0500. Often roly in the anchorage so best to get in quite close and use two anchors. Fuel available, Good low cost medical treatment at the Hospital.

Check out Taipivai in Anse Hanga Haa (Anchor posn: 08 52.82S 140 02.873W) and Anse Hooumi (Anchor Posn. 08 53.538S 140 01.560W).

Best anchorage to relax in (least chance of rolling) in the whole of the Marquesas is Daniels Bay ... Hakatea Bay...(Anchor posn: 08 56.638S 140 09.766W). However if you go ashore to do the walk take Mosquito repellent. If you go anywhere in the Marquesas take the Mosquito repellent!

Also a couple of nice and less roly anchorages on the north coast of the island.

UA POU

Only made it to Hakahetau this year (Anchor posn: 09 21.442S 140 06.251W). Found a nice little breakwater with protection for dinghy and steps ashore. Good quality R.O. FW available from R.O. building next to dock. Nice spot, easy walk to waterfall, couple of roads to walk on. Not much there but you may barter for fresh provisions. This anchorage can get very roly.



Main Anchorage is Hakahau and although this is up on the NE coast it can be quite sheltered if you can tuck up under the lee of the breakwater. From here you can do the 'Kings Valley' walk and get some great photos.



TAHUATA

Couple of nice anchorages, good place to stop on the Fatu Hiva run. There are a couple of small stores, an infirmary and a Post Office on the island. The North Western bays can be far more relaxing than Atuona Harbour on nearby Hiva Oa; Bay de Hamoenoa was my favourite.

MARQUEAS TO TUAMOTU'S

Try and get a good wind to carry you down, but try not to have rain or overcast on arrival, this will be your first eye-ball navigation for quite a while and you need a good day to get back into it!

Where to aim for is debatable....you should do at least two to get the flavour and if you are really into snorkelling and diving then you will need more time and more islands. Some of the islands have been well brought up to date on C-map and all reports say that it is 'spot on' (well, at least as far as you dare trust GPS and Electronic Charts).

Some observations:

HAO: if you have gone down to Fatu Hiva for departure then this is not so difficult to reach so long as the wind stays east of southeast. Anyway, this is about as far East as you want to go without getting involved with the Moruroa Test area problems....There is a small boat harbour, not much used and you could get in with less than 6ft draft... check it out first.

MAKEMO: Not a great deal going on here and the anchorage off the town was exposed. The main pass is well marked and strait forward, not bad with the old BA charts but not updated on the C-Maps

KAUEHI: For many yachts this was their first island this year (2008) and it was very popular, the pass is very strait forward and then there is a clear reach across to the town where you can anchor off. You have to exit the same way as you came in. Said to be very friendly and nice ashore. Some yachts anchored close inside the pass and said the snorkelling was very good and the anchorage quite easy.

TAHANEA : More of a side trip for the divers, said to be really exquisite under the water and got high marks from all that went there; however there were abundant amounts of Sharks and the anchorages were more challenging (to deep for me with no anchor windlass!).

FAKARAVA : Classified by UNESCO as a Biosphere Natural Reserve, some rules on where you can and can not anchor. As soon as you arrive you should check in with the Town Hall and get the regulations.

Has two passes one in the SE and other in NW, both are good but both are equally as bad in a strong wind against tide situation. Many yachts came in the SE pass (from Kauehi) and exited through the NW pass (to Toau).

The "drift-dive" or snorkel up the SE pass got some of the best reviews from anywhere!

TOAU : : AMYOT 15 48S 146 09W

North end of Tauo, good harbour entered from OUTSIDE the fringing reef.

Said to be flat in almost all conditions, Easy to enter with ranges (lights) and marks

Mooring balls available but plenty of room to anchor

you cannot go into the lagoon through this hole... it is a blind pass with a coral bar at the inner end.

Gaston and Valentine are most welcoming to yachts, they run a Pearl Farm.... They provide a "Feast"...said to be good value for money...You can work alongside Gaston and learn about Pearl Farming in this area.

There is a dinghy dock. Check with other boats by radio before going as they sometimes need supplies from other islands which you can pick up for them (payment in full on arrival). This would then make you very popular!

MANIHI : Much improved in way of navigational marks since my first visit, when it was 'heart in mouth' as we charged in with 6 ½ feet draft and a full tide under us. A lot of pearl farms here and anchoring can be difficult. Apart from a tour of the Pearl Farms (and they were charging) there didn't really seem a lot to do.

AHE : Much the same as Manihi except that there is a somewhat more secure anchorage off the main town. Very easy in and out with a well marked channel all the way to the basin. DO NOT charge around inside the basin as there are many Coral Heads and seeing some of them is difficult. It may be better to anchor outside the basin if in any doubt. Whatever; do not block the channel as there is regular freighter service to main wharf. There are a couple of small stores, a little hardware, sometimes fresh bread and not much else. My anchor position was : 14 32.210S 146 21.439W

RANGIROA: Two passes on the north coast, both can be very bad with wind against tide. The Eastern pass is most handy for the main yacht anchorage however, when its blowing the western pass seems to me to be far easier and shorter. However once through you then have to go five miles east on the inside. Under ideal conditions it would be best to enter through the east pass and exit through the west.

Nice anchorage but open if the wind clocks round, we had a good swell even in a strong SEly as the waves built up a swell inside the lagoon and this worked its way into the bay.

Had a Free Pearl Farm Tour here organised through the local hotel it was very good and the drift dive on the pass can be rewarding in settled conditions.

If you get the weather right, you can do Papeete from here in just one overnight.

There are other islands which are visited so do not feel limited to the above.... You can find your own bit of Paradise here but be aware, the rapidly changing weather patterns call for a degree of flexibility and some good navigational skills.

TAHITI

First anchorage was Maeva Beach, we were a little late arriving and it was dusk when we reached the anchorage so Maeva Beach was an 'easy in' and being shallow it was just up our street. The entry at Papeete is easy, even at night however the channel to Maeva Beach should be done in good visibility, so if you arrive after dark best to anchor just to starboard when inside the fairway buoys or go to the Down Town Papeete Marina, known as Quai de Yachts. They have put some pontoons in here and added some security, it is also very handy for doing your clearance paperwork and checking out the town.

COST: 240 FP per mtr per day + 165 for water (not an option). +10% Tax

If anyone mention garbage say you don't have any or they may add on 1000FP to your bill.....Elect 288FP per day optional.

Discovered later that they are running a water ski school at Meava Beach and even if you are not in their way, it tends to get a little chaotic so we shifted to the outer reef.... There are a few spots available but we found a good area at 17 34.912S 149 37.346W; I got one anchor just over the drop off and the other a hundred yards onto the sandy plateau, there was about twelve foot of water and the way the anchors set, we weren't going anywhere no matter how it blew. Note. In normal Trades this whole anchorage is calm however when it goes over 35kts and the wind is S of SE, it hooks around the bottom of the island and shrieks up through the anchorage. There is a good dinghy dock with FW at the Marina, their fuel dock isn't that easy to use and they wouldn't fill containers with 'duty free'(for that you had to take your boat alongside). Handy Supermarket (BIG) and hardware store, easy transportation to the airport or downtown.

The Marina Taina can get lumpy in any westerly conditions and wouldn't last five minutes in even a glancing blow from a small hurricane. I didn't find any place I'd feel safe leaving a boat in French Polynesia during the Hurricane season (and that includes Rairatea!).

The Marina Tiana was 100FP per foot per day +10% incl. Water

The bus (Le Truck)... turn left out of the marina walk towards Papeete about 1400mtrs, you come to a foot bridge across the road....Carrafour is on your left and the Le Truck is just over the road. 130FP per person into town.... (200FP after 1800hrs)... they run till 2300hrs. You can get an A/C bus right out side the marina but they are 200FP.

Don't miss going into town for eats on late Saturday afternoon /early evening.... Great entertainment and you should be arriving in time for some good dance displays (program at Tourist Office).

Maxsea was out in Papeete Pass, not Long but Lat by about 200mtrs..... you still go through between the buoys but you are inside by 200mtrs whilst the maxsea shows you still between the buoys....not that it matters as you have leading lights and buoys like crazy..... when you turn right to go down to Maeva beach you shift on to another chart and suddenly it is all spot on.....if you look at the charts on maxsea in advance you can see this anomaly quite clearly.....

The downtown pontoons at 'Quay de Yachts' have a security guard.... Helps you tie up and point's you at the office.... Which is the port office where you do your paperwork with customs and immigration.....

You come out onto the promenade turn left go down to the corner of the dock...go left by the car 'lift up barrier' and you are walking between the dock and the Tourist Office on your right, the clearance building is a blue portacabin about 150 mtrs beyond the Tourist office..... they close at 12 and open again at 1400hrs (for one hour?). If you need it there is a big chandlery about 400mtrs further on down the road (jig left after the navy building) NAUTISPORT.

MOOREA:

Our first anchorage was in the entrance to Cooks Bay 17 28.875S 149 48.885W in 10feet and sand.... Nice place, Landed ashore and found supermarkets etc only a short walk east... walked down into Cooks Bay but didn't like the road....not nice for walking due traffic.

We fell out of love with the anchorage as the wind died and the noise of the traffic on the road reached out to us.....

Both bays have a perimeter road and the noise of the traffic is worse inside the bays....

Nice little Harbour at Papetoai Bay Moorea

Moved to Papetoai Bay, very busy in the 'internet anchorage' eastern side... didn't fancy that so went west and followed the marks to 17 29.224S 149 52.735W.. now this was perfect paradise....



There is just a little passing water traffic but we had no problem with it.... Found the nearest three coral heads were in fact TIKI's ... in good condition don't know how they got there!

This is also the best anchorage for doing the Stingrays as they are about a mile or so west of this position.... You follow the marked dinghy channel west, past the Intercontinental Hotel (with its huts over the water) and half way between that and the Motu on the west end of the island you will find a shallow sand bank on the north edge of the channel where they do their thing.....usually there are tourist boats there... they have fish etc and don't mind you joining in.... ITS GREAT..... we went twice. Tinned SQUID would work as well if you have some....

To do the walk up to Belvedere.... The look out.. we shifted down to Robinsons Cove
Wow but that location has gone down hill!

We opted to anchor off17 30.802S 149 51.041W 27feet mud.....dinghy in to the cove where there is a suitable tree that acts as a dock.

Walk to head of bay and take road up to lookout.... Weekdays is best.. there is an agricultural school on the way and you can stop in to taste local products and buy a cold drink etc.....

About 40min walk to the top, 1 hr if you keep stopping to take photos... this is a VERY beautiful valley to walk up.

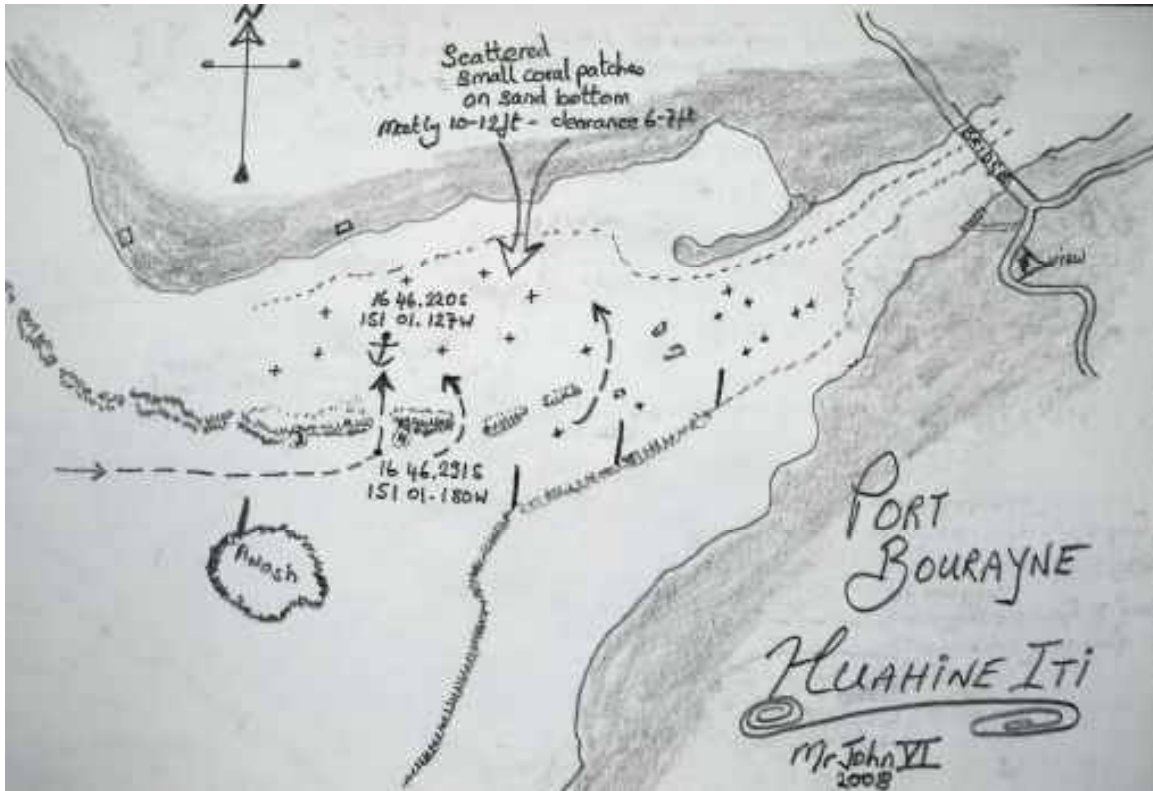
HUAHINE

Anchorage off the Main Town, FARE.
Best spot 16 43.080S 151 02.264W, this is to the east of the middle ground that lies to the south of the town. Here was a 12-14 ft plateau of sand, further south on this plateau there are some coral heads so you should stay north of the first starboard marker. I found the anchorage most commonly used, off the town beach, scoured out and with dubious holding unless you were in over 30ft of water where it got better. However this is also too near the pass and the swell finds its way in and sets you rocking.

Fare: has a very good supermarket and stores were available. Good hardware store and repair facilities for small problems. Dinghy dock (stern anchor) FW close by at public shower (take hose length). Fuel a short walk from dock. Internet Café's.



Port Bourayne:



There is a mooring for charter boats but most of the harbour seems deep. Don't however believe the pilot books, there is plenty of room in 10-12 ft of water with sand bottom provided you are prepared for some good eyeball navigation. We found a good spot for two or more boats at 16 46.220S 151 01.127W however six feet draft would be max for getting in this anchorage which requires you find a small gap in the reef and come across a shelf onto the sand plateau.

The gap was located at 16 46.291S 151 01.180W and may not be wide enough for a Cat. There were however other areas available further down the marked channel towards the bridge and over to the Port side (or north shore). Walks available ashore, dinghy through to lagoon on East side of island, Nice dive / snorkelling on the 'wall' / drop off just near the anchorage.

RAIATEA

Utaroa Harbour... Free dock space for about 7 good size boats, very close to town for easy shopping, four good supermarkets, Banks, ATM's, Post Office, Hardware stores, Camera shops and plenty of Boutiques... there was even a paint supplier with Americoat and Jotun paints. Fuel dock at service station. Watch it as you can get pinned on some of the berths when the normal trade wind is blowing hard. Also found some of the berths noisy as water splashes around under the dock.

Anchorage off the Carenage on NW sideit's all deep round here but on the offshore reef there is a nice spot near the Airport Runway Sign.... The spit will hold about three boats and you are still in range of the IORA net....16 43.888S 151 29.375W, 15feet sand and broken coral... there are a few small heads on the bottom but getting the chain off them was not a problem in the clear water.... There is a tide which runs both N & S here but not strong....

Ashore there are two haul out yards, one with a travel lift and the other with a hydraulic lift trailer. They pull out large Cat's here. They offer different services and price scales so should be compared before any choice is made.

Bottled Gas refills can be had here but we heard that it may be better to organise through The Moorings at the Marina one mile north. The moorings marina has a guest berth, available at a reasonable rate.. could be very useful if you have people flying in or off!!!

TAHAA

Baie de Haamene on the west side of Tahaa..lots of deep stuff until you get close to the village, anchored in 20feet mud and clay...(Can be mucky)

Ashore Bank, two supermarkets (bread 1000hrs not before) F.W. tap by yellow building on shore next to restaurant...18feet from dinghy...moor dinghy in front of restaurant as the ferry comes in to use the concrete bit with the fenders....There is a Public Market with a fair deal on Bananas (especially when they get to know you) and a craft shop next door with reasonable prices....

We anchored 16 38.175S 151 29.310W but maybe we should have been a little more up to the NE to be further away from the ferry track.....we took steady 20 with gusts to 35+ here and were fine but it does probably funnel/ gust into the day in E – SE winds, our blow was more SSE and it was fine....

Nice walks to two bays (South and West) by road not track....you could visit the vanilla plantation from here.... Also a 4X4 trail goes north over the mountains to the N coast, great walk with great views.....



West coast Pass at north side has I. Mahaea (Private Island)... Nice anchorage with 8 – 15ft (you pick) sand... not just a day anchorage as in the book....could stay a week but not much there except some really BIG Eels around the Coral Heads we looked at... Plenty of old fishing gear wrapped around the coral heads to explain why this area is so fished out and why so much of the coral has been destroyed.....no it's not the yachts anchors!!!!

We were at 16 38.523S 151 25.755W and could have taken a strong E or SE blow there without problem.

Sailed round the north end of the island... Nice but nothing great, the NW corner looked worth exploring (next visit?) as the barrier coral seemed interesting and the Motu's looked inviting.....maybe not Tabu?

Coral Garden. Northwest of I. Tautau (Private Island Resort and Spar)
16 36.195S 151 33.447W 12feet sand scattered coral heads easily seen.. DO NOT approach this anchorage from the north...There is a nice shelf here for anchoring, mainly sand with scattered coral heads in 8-18 feet. HOWEVER, at the north end there is a string of Coral Heads (nice snorkel) with only 2feet clearance.. they are not clearly marked on the chart and you will sail right over them if you go north out of this anchorage. There is something like a pearl farm with buoys just offshore of this reef so if you go around the buoys you'll be fine.

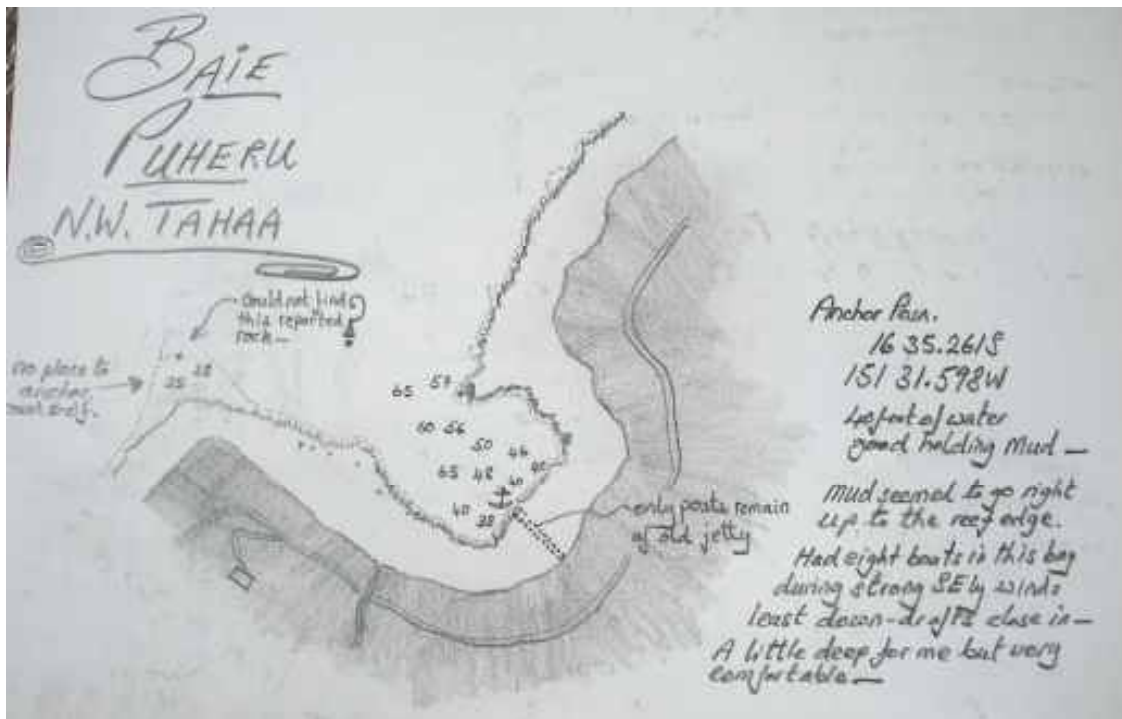


To the south of the position given... close up against the shallower water (6-4ft) are three stumps of an old sign post... these are VERY nasty if you don't see them and get in too far... you are safe however if you always keep in 12feet or more.....

The Coral Garden runs between I. Tautau and the island north of it... most people go ashore on this islands south side on a little sandy beach, walk up and then drift down the garden from the top.... I thought it just as easy to anchor in the middle in a sand patch, swim up and then drift down.....

Consider a wet-suit as you'll want to float high and you want to be in the water for quite a while, the water is shallow and there is plenty of coral to touch....gloves are a must...really quite nice - not to be missed...lots of colourful fish and beautiful coral....maybe best at high tide.... Early morning calm gave us some nice shots from the dinghy without even getting in the water (Polaroid filter) however you can't take your dinghy right up, it's Tabu. This is well worth a visit or two....

Baie Puheru on the NW of Tahaa offered a tranquil anchorage when strong SE winds came in, the further out you were the more bullets you got. Right in the bay the coral shelf drops off to 40 feet and there is a mud bottom almost immediately. We anchored close off the remains of the old jetty in 43ft Posn: 16 35.261S 151 31.598W and did not venture ashore although it looked possible.



Baie Hurepiti on SW Tahaa, attractive deep bay but with limited spots to get ashore; however we managed it and walked across to Haamene to get bread etc (1.1hrs each way on road, lt. Traffic, some views). The reef out-crops were easy to see even in poor light. We went right up to the head of the bay passing the dive centre and large (rusting) yacht on moorings, Vanilla Tours Dock plus 2 moorings, Sophie's Boutique Dock and almost to the furthest mooring ball in the bay... right after this ball the bottom comes up from 12 feet to 4.3 feet fast....

We anchored in 18ft Posn: 16 38.523S 151 30.867W in thick, good holding, Mud.

BORA BORA:

Off the town... Vaitape....78-85 feet good holding, mud. Unless you want a long dinghy ride this is the only place to get provisions etc. Water was not available.

You can go alongside for a short period on the southern face of the dock, maybe an overnight if you like that sort of thing



This is a new dock and is actually the south face of a little harbour they have built for ferries... you can safely leave your dinghy in this harbour when visiting town.

There are two large supermarkets going north out of town also a well stocked chandlery.

The hardware store across from the chandlery stocked many marine items at cheaper prices



Dinghies are tied in the near corner of the small boat harbour

West of Topua, two good anchorages close up under the island, 30feet sand. We preferred to be out a little and found a nice spot between the coral patches at 16 31.266S 151 46.693W 16feet sand.

This was a great place to be for the Stingray and Shark feeding thing.... We were close enough to row to this event which takes place about 0900 / 1000hrs (but not as good as Moorea)...

We went then round the south end of Topua.... The buoyage in Bora Bora is so good you really have to try to go wrong.....

Next spot was 16 31.982S 151 45.148W 10-12 feet on sand shelf....Great anchorage, can't understand people taking anchorage or moorings off Bloody Mary's when this is so close.....

Due west of here, over towards the Easterly Mark (that you just came round if coming from the last anchorage) there are some buoys where the locals do fish feeding over some fairly good coral.... The fish come to you as soon as you get in the water..... Stale bread works well (never throw your old bread, always keep it for the fish), they will swarm around and take it from your hand. Good photo's

Also, just to the south of this anchorage there are two more 'dive' buoys... this is where they come to do fish feeding / underwater adventure, about a dozen tourists wearing 'hooker' type breathing gear..... this is well worth watching as they use a big fish head to bring in all the fish and Ray's etc.....When they go the fish are still very active and you get the place to yourself..... Found two large Peacock Flounder right under the boat..plenty about over the sand.....

From here went ashore at Bloody Mary's dock.....Free moorings and or water on dock if you patronise the place. Internet area for IORA net.

Walked north.... Nothing much till you get to Vaitape.... Long walk 1.25hrs

Walked south....nearest shop about 45min (on other side of island)

Just down the road is "The Farm" pearl shop, nice people.... Pointed out track opposite their "farm" going up to antennas on hill... nice uphill slog... nice view good pictures (bench.. take water and something to eat....enjoy the moment)

Y.C. Can't see much point in being here.... There are moorings (too few) and anchoring is still 85feet.... Walk into town long and not safe due to traffic and no pavements.... Water on dock 1500FP 300trs...!!!!

IORA net.... We just went in real close each time passing and did our mail exchange.

EAST LAGOON.... Not to be missed, very nice, dead easy..... was one boat did it all with 8.5ft draft no problem. We went round the outside loop and stayed up close to the hotels... you'll see what I mean....It you do ground its very gentle shelving soft sand.

Lots of good anchorages all the way round.. had a few days at 16 32.033S 151 42.236W... very nice ..very restful .. managed to get some of the fish tamed on the local coral heads by feeding them bread (always keep your old Baguettes for fish feeding). Found a nice Cowrie Shell not too far from the boat....Not much ashore.

FROM BORA BORA YOU GO WEST.....

MY TAKE ON THIS NEXT LEG IS CONTAINED IN "THE DANGEROUS MIDDLE"
BY NOW YOU SHOULD BE UP TO SPEED WITH THE WEATHER AND HAVE A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPCZ.

Many will tell you that this next leg, here to Tonga, is the worst part of the trip..... if you get it wrong, they may be right!

Cheers, good sailing and fair winds

John Wolstenholme.

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British Yacht "Mr John VI"

Bay of Islands

New Zealand

Dec 29th 2008