

BORA BORA

We were impressed with Bora Bora when we first visited this island on the inaugural World Cruise in February. Then, the weather was so hot we were fighting for shade, now it is cooler and dark clouds are gathering over the mountains.

The island is almost entirely surrounded by a barrier reef, with just a small break in the coral where cruise liners can enter the lagoon. This sheltered area inside the reef makes tendering much easier, and it only takes just over an hour to transport all passengers from the Van Gogh to the quayside.

We arrive at the small jetty just as the rain starts - and boy does it rain! We get soaked through to our underclothes simply walking from the covered quayside to a waiting taxi, a distance of about 50 yards. A number of passengers have decided to take a "free ride" to a local pearl farm, and as we are interested in buying some more black pearls we join them.



Our guide shows us the oyster beds out to sea, and also the many different stages in the lengthy process of culturing the famous Tahitian black pearls. He shows us the original small pearls which are inserted into the oyster shells to encourage them to lay down further layers. These original pearls are, in fact, taken from freshwater Mississippi mussels.

It takes at least 2 years to "grow" these pearls on to a decent size, and of course the bigger pearls fetch the most money. It is possible to harvest pearls a number of times from each oyster, but eventually the oysters get old and the quality of their pearls is not as good.

We are also shown how the pearls are polished, graded and mounted, before we are taken through to the shop, where we are invited to try on the many beautiful necklaces on show. Of course, they start by showing us the most expensive

Grade A pearls! They quickly work out, however, that we are not rich Americans, and then they start quoting us more reasonable prices for Grade C pearls.

Back outside the shop the weather is, if anything, worse than before, and a number of Van Gogh passengers are disappointed because their organised excursions for today have been cancelled. We cannot see the mountains any more because of the low cloud, and the sand roads are a river of yellow water.

We decide to have a late lunch in a Creperie, before a quick visit to the local supermarket for some basic supplies - a bottle of Vodka and some shower gel! Next on the list is to see if we can get an internet signal so that we can deal with our emails. No joy here, and the only internet café in this small village charges the equivalent of £2.50 for 10 minutes. We decide that we can wait for the next port of call which is to be Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands.

After Nuku Hiva we have 9 days at sea before we reach Ecuador, so we may be incommunicado for some time

