

TIAOHAE, NUKU HIVA, MARQUESAS ISLANDS

We arrive at anchor off Tiaohae, the capital of the island of Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands. We are in a sheltered bay, with tall sheer cliffs on both sides rising out of the deep blue sea. The cliffs are covered in dense vegetation, and in places this is parched and brown.



The tender boats have no trouble in negotiating the calm waters in the bay, and in no time at all, we arrive at the quayside to a welcome banner for the many passengers in town today. There is another cruise boat in the bay today, an American ship called the Paul Gauguin.

The capital is little more than a village, which extends for about 2 miles along the narrow coast road. The houses are well cared for, and are made of a variety of materials including volcanic stone, concrete and wood. There are a number of small shops and bars, a post office and a tourist information centre which, bizarrely is closed until tomorrow! We wonder why this is so, when there are 2 cruise ships in town today.

The local inhabitants are polite and laid back; in fact other Van Gogh passengers talk about walking in the middle of the road, without a care in the world and quite oblivious to the queue of patient drivers following behind them! Most of the cars on the island are new 4x4s, and looking at the terrain we can well see why.

We have a beer in a local bar with many other passengers, but when we try to order food, we are told that they are "ferme" and now it is too late to return to the Van Gogh for lunch. We will certainly enjoy our dinner tonight!

We visit a cathedral, which is made of the local black stone; it has a teak roof and carved teak statues at the entrance. Inside it is cool, and a welcome refuge from the intense heat outside.

Further down the village street we find some ancient carved stone figures and receptacles, which are protected under canopies. They show people with huge eyes,



manic grins and pot bellies which look more like Hollywood style Martians. The inhabitants of these islands used to practice cannibalism and human sacrifices, and we can only wonder at the purpose of some of these strange stone artefacts.



Returning to the quayside, we decide to set off in the other direction, where we find a beautiful sandy beach with a number of Van Gogh staff and crew relaxing. We all have a great time, sitting on the beach and swimming in the water. The sea is so warm, that it feels just like walking into a hot bath.

We have been unable to receive an internet signal on our laptop for a week or more now, and remember the same situation existed the last time that we visited French Polynesia. As we will be at sea for 9 days before we reach Ecuador, we decide to visit an internet café on the quayside before returning to the Van Gogh.

When we embark, there is a performance by a local dance group on the rear pool deck, and afterwards, burgers and soup on deck. Having missed lunch we were ready for some food, and we realised we could eat earlier on deck than if we waited for our dinner, in the restaurant, at 9.30pm.

All in all, it has been a fantastic day, and has showed us a snapshot of the lives of the friendly Polynesian people who inhabit these remote islands.

