

## NUKU HIVA, THE MARQUESAS ISLANDS

We now have 9 days at sea before our next port of call, the island of Nuku Hiva in the isolated Marquesas. We anchor off shore and are tendered to the small jetty at one end of the village of Taiohae. As we came here on the last cruise, around 8 weeks ago, we have decided to do something different today.

Tony, Sheila and ourselves take a private taxi for the afternoon, in order to visit the interior of the island, with its ancient pagan temples, waterfalls and sheer rocks. Our transport is a Land Rover Discovery with plenty of power under the bonnet, driven by a local guide who speaks good English.



Firstly, we travel out of Taiohae on tarmac roads, which wind their way up into the mountains. Our driver stops regularly at the many view points, for us to take some stunning aerial shots of the bay, and of course the Van Gogh anchored off shore. The ship certainly seems very small from up here!



The village of Taipivae is sleepy, with pigs, chickens, goats and horses feeding on the grassy verges. The road has now become quite poor, with many pot holes and ramps. Our driver obviously knows the road well, and manages to weave his way around the worst of the holes.

There is another photo opportunity when we stop to see the high waterfalls that create the electricity for the island. A little further on we see an ancient

tohua, or plaza, where human sacrifices were carried out. A large banyan tree



nearby would have been the place where the bones of the tribal heroes were hung. Tony spots a rare bird in the trees which is only found on this island. Apparently, there are only around 100 of these birds left.

Our driver then turns off the road and drives across 2 fields, in order to view another tohua, which is surrounded by carved stone statues called tikis. The statues all have frightening faces with huge eyes.

We now start our descent to the village of Hatihue, where Robert Louis Stevenson lived for a while. The village - just one street wide, is on the windward side of the island and has a black sand and boulder beach. Jagged spires of rock look down on the village, and one of them has a statue of the Madonna on it.



After a trip to a local shop to buy some food and drink, we sit on a stone bench overlooking the beach and eat our lunch. A dog waits patiently for some scraps, and is rewarded when several biscuits fall out of the packet!

Apparently there are less than 2,000 inhabitants on this island, and our driver appears to know most of them. He chats happily with them while we eat our lunch, and when we return to Taiohae, he waves at, and tells us the names of all the vehicle drivers coming to meet us.

Our last stop is at a small museum on the outskirts of Taiohae, where we see some Stone Age artefacts and some information boards, in English and French, describing the lives of the ancient people who originally populated these islands.

We have thoroughly enjoyed our trip around the island of Nuku Hiva; the journey (total cost £100), has taken us over 4 hours and we have been to some amazing places and taken lots of photos.

We are back in time to have a short swim on one of the black sand beaches, and to buy a hand carved souvenir. In the market, we can see a number of the local women playing Bingo. They all sit on the floor, with a large board in front of them. When a number is called, they place a coloured glass bead over the number on the board, so these boards can all be re-used when the game is won!

The Van Gogh leaves Nuku Hiva at 6 pm, on its way to Rangiroa. This island is one that we have visited before, and we are looking forward to the planned beach party there the day after tomorrow.

