

Cruising the Coconut Milk Run

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S/V Felicity

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Introduction

About Felicity and her crew

We are Ken and Cathy from Seattle, Washington and left our home in August of 2000. We sailed down the West Coast of the US and participated in the Baja Ha Ha sponsored by Latitude 38 that fall. After cruising Mexico for five months, we jumped off for our first ocean crossing with plans to follow the traditional Milk Run and set our sights on getting to Bora Bora, a dream destination for many years.

Felicity is a 1987 Tashiba 31 designed by Bob Perry and built by the Ta Shing yard in Taiwan. She is a heavy double-ender which we have extensively outfitted for long-distance cruising. She makes about 5-6 knots and on an average day can make 120 miles though on our voyage we had many 135-150 mile days and some 60-80 mile days.

Along our voyage, Cathy keeps a running log and we've taken lots of pictures. We share this with our family and friends on the web at www.svfelicity.com and would invite you to visit the site if you want more info on our travels. Updated versions of this guide, as well as future guides (including one for New Zealand later this year), will be made available as we continue our journey. Please let us know if you would like anything added or changed in this guide for future cruisers.

About this guide

Like many others we met at the Puddle Jump meetings in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, we had the dream of doing this trip for a long time but didn't have much more than our accumulated book knowledge to go on. At the urging of friends Jan and Signe on *Raven* who plan to make the crossing this year, we decided to write this guide to help the class of 2002 answer questions that we ourselves had before setting off.

This guide has been prepared based on our own first-hand experience and is intended to provide insight for first-timers on how things worked for us during our 2001 Milk Run. Your experiences will differ from ours. The officials you meet may be different. The rules may change. Technology and services may improve or degrade – or even disappear. This guide is simply a resource that provides somewhat recent opinions based on our own experiences.

Special note regarding opinions

While attending the Puddle Jump meetings, we were reminded of an important lesson by experienced Pacific cruisers Debbie and Al on the *Valiant 40 Different Worlds*. They provided great insight to what to expect from their own trip but insisted that as we listen that we consider our wants and needs may differ greatly from theirs. For instance, they chose to go to the Gambiers instead of the Marquesas like most of the herd and didn't regret it – in fact, they are planning to go back there and skip the Marquesas again. We went to the Marquesas and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

We had two experienced cruisers at one meeting and one thought Tahiti was their best port during their 7-year circumnavigation and the other thought that Fiji was the best place in the world – and they both insisted that the other was completely wrong in their assessment. Our opinion after being in Tahiti and hearing lots about Fiji from friends that went this year is that they both have qualities to enjoy and both beat rush-hour traffic back home.

So read this guide and enjoy. It's OK to have a different opinion than we have and some experienced crews in Mexico probably will. Listen to their viewpoints and share your own. Wherever you go, whatever you do, it'll be the adventure of a lifetime filled with highs and lows.

Provisioning in Mexico – By Cathy

A cruising axiom you often hear, and I will reiterate is, people eat all over the world and even if you do not provision for any time longer than your passages, you will not starve. With that said, I will provide what I have learned about provisioning. There are several good books written on provisioning that I would recommend. One is Lin and Larry Pardey's *Care and Feeding of the Sailing Crew*. The Pardey's go fairly minimalist with no refrigeration, and are very budget conscious. Lin's meal plans were not to our liking, but I still found the book helpful. Another of my favorite authors is Beth Leonard. I found her book *The Voyager's Handbook: The Essential Guide to Blue Water Cruising* great for provisioning tips and other cruising information.

Provisioning is as personal and as specific to your boat, budget, and lifestyle as the rest of cruising. The following provisioning and meal planning recommendations are specific to our tastes, but I hope this section will help you in your provisioning and save you from making some of the mistakes I did.

The advantages and disadvantages we had to work with while provisioning

Advantages:

- A reliable refrigeration system.
- A freezer
- Although we tried not to break the bank, we did not have to worry too much about a budget while provisioning
- A reliable 2-burner stove and oven
- A heavy monohull, which is less affected by weight than our friends in multihulls or lighter displacement boats.
- We had some of our favorite US provisions on board (some remained from provisioning on our way to Mexico, and some I and our family brought to Mexico.)
- We did our final provisioning in Puerto Vallarta, which has well stocked supermarkets.
- Neither Ken nor I have any special dietary needs. We like most foods.

Disadvantages:

- We have a very small freezer
- I was not an experienced cook; I can't really say I was a bad cook, because before I went cruising, I didn't cook at all. I guess I was a non-cook.
- No microwave
- A small boat, with limited space
- We do not have a large well ventilated area where we can stow fresh produce

Provisioning Steps

With your own advantages and disadvantages in mind, you may want to consider the following steps:

Step 1: Inventory what you have

I started my provisioning by inventorying what we had on the boat and entering the list in a searchable spreadsheet on our laptop. Other friends used a sheet of paper; use whatever will work for you. [See appendix for sample](#). I organized the food by location on the boat. As I completed provisioning and as we used provisions I was careful to maintain the spreadsheet. As I was inventorying, I removed everything from the lockers, under the floor and in the fridge. I cleaned everything out with a mild bleach solution and fortunately did not have to worry about getting rid of any pests, bugs, etc.

Step 2: Make a list of what you need

I used Beth Leonard's sample provisioning list from her book. I liked the way she organized the provisioning categories and used her quantities as guidelines. [See appendix for my list.](#) I, like almost every person I talked to who was responsible for provisioning, probably bought too much. I have thrown canned food out, and probably still have enough cans of certain items to last us through another season in the tropics. However, with that said when you head out into the unknown it is an understandable mistake, and usually not one with serious repercussions. When you are leaving Mexico, if you are taking our route through the Marquesas, the Tuamotus, and the Societies, you will be about 3 months before you see a well stocked grocery store. You will have 20-30 days on passage where you will only have what's on your boat. You will have access to small stores (magasins) in the Marquesas. The Tuamotus range from no stores to small shops. When you reach Tahiti you are rewarded with a wonderful supermarket, the Continent. It is as nice as any you'd find in the US or Canada.

Step 3: Determine how much is enough

In the end, it will be what you're comfortable with; but remember you can buy food even on some fairly small atolls. Don't buy what you haven't been eating. Canned meat isn't going to taste any different in the Tuamotus then it does in your hometown. Take into account how much you will eat out. Your restaurant choices will be fairly limited until you reach the Societies, but if you eat out every week, you can lighten your provisions some.

Step 4: Buy your provisions

After making my list, I went on several reconnaissance missions around PV. The stores I used were the following:

Sam's Club

I joined Sam's Club. I shopped there during our 6 week stay in PV and used it for provisioning. It was \$40 US to join, and I felt it was worth it. Some people split membership fees, as you can take guests like at a Costco. Other people got day passes, although sometimes you had to talk your way into that. I shopped at Sams for my fresh meat as it seemed to be of US quality, some specialty items, cereal, juice, milk, etc. Pretty much all of the shopping I could do at Sam's, I did. I also bought brown eggs here. I kept them un-refrigerated for over 5 weeks without having them go bad.

Commercial: I liked the store by Marina Vallarta. Here I bought items I couldn't find elsewhere, or items that Sam's only carried in jumbo sizes.

Gutierrez Rizzo: I'm not sure of the spelling; I think it is known as GR. However, the store is in Old Town in PV. It is has loads of specialty and US imported foods. It was the only place in Mexico I found brown sugar. You won't see brown sugar again until you reach the Cook Islands.

Paradise Village Grocery: This was very expensive, but did have some US products I wanted to take with me. I bought some pasta sauces and canned fruit in its own juice, which I had problems finding elsewhere.

Market Shopping: I shopped at Bucerias. I bought fresh produce I could there. What I couldn't buy there, I bought at other supermarkets; however, I stored those items in the fridge, as I wasn't sure if it had already been refrigerated.

Things to buy in Mexico

- Any Mexican food you have learned to love as part of your diet. You won't see much Mexican food probably until you return to Mexico. There is some Old El Paso stuff in Tahiti, but it is terribly expensive. If you don't know how, learn to make tortillas. They're easier than you'd think.
- If you have a freezer, you may want to stock up on fresh meats. I chose to fill our freezer with a few steaks, lean ground beef, and boneless skinless chicken breasts. If I had had more room, I would have also stocked up on frozen veggies, frozen fruits, and some prepared foods in that order. You will probably not see boneless skinless chicken breasts until Papeete. You will find frozen chicken legs, whole chickens, NZ beef and lamb in many of the medium to large stores in the Marquesas and Tuamotus.
- Paper products are expensive in French Polynesia and not of the quality we're used to in North America or even Mexico. While we were at anchor (if you do this at the marina, you'll find you use a lot less), we tracked our weekly usage of paper towels and toilet paper over a month period. I then had a good guess how much I would need to get us to the Cook Islands. I stocked up on Bounty paper towels and toilet paper. The paper towels lasted until the Cook Islands, and we still have toilet paper I bought in Mexico. OK, I might have gone a little nuts on the toilet paper.
- Canned fruit in its own juice is hard to find until we got to Tahiti. As I recall, it was even hard to find in Mexico, but I did stock up at the Paradise Village market. We liked canned fruit for smoothies and it's a comfort food for me when I feel seasick. The Marquesas has some fresh fruit and veggies, but not as much as you'd think. Everyone grows fruit in their back yards, so it's rarely in the stores. What you can find in the Marquesas is in a later section of the guide
- Buy enough dairy to get you over the passage. If you have plenty of room, buy more but the dairy products are good in French Polynesia. Even in the smaller Marquesan markets they have decent cheese, butter, yogurt and milk selections.
- Any specialty food items, favorite pre-prepared items, condiments, canned/jarred sauces, heat and serve foods you like. The variety of these, if you can find them at all, will be limited until you reach Papeete.
- Hot chocolate that only requires you to add water
- Pancake syrup
- Pancake mix where you only have to add water
- Staples. Buy as much flour, rice, pasta, sugar as you want to carry. Buy enough for your passage. I had enough to get me to Tahiti and beyond. You can buy flour, rice, sugar and spaghetti everywhere. Look for the Barilla (Italian) sauces and pastas. They are very good and are carried in French Polynesia
- Brown Sugar. I had a hard time finding that in Mexico. I finally did at Gutierrez Rizzo. You will not find brown sugar anywhere in French Polynesia. We finally found it in the Cook Islands. If you get desperate, you can mix white granulated sugar with a little molasses, and come close.
- Off or bug spray of choice. I had purchased a number of bottles of Jungle Juice, and insect repellent lotion, before we left the US. The bugs are a real problem for many people in the Marquesas, and even after you leave the biting no-no's of the Marquesas you have to deal with the Dengue Fever carrying mosquitoes of the Tuamotus and Society islands. In these very hot climates, I found the lotions were really too heavy, and felt like every pore I had was clogged. I preferred sprays, like Off. Both worked equally well for us.

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- Batteries. I stocked up at Sam's Club on AA's and AAA's for cameras, alarm clocks, walkman, flashlights, etc. We started out trying to be ecologically responsible with rechargeables, but they just wouldn't hold a charge that we felt was acceptable.
 - Not being a baker, I stocked up on bread mixes, muffin mixes, scone mixes, other desert mixes. These saved time and worked very well. Baked items will mold in a matter of a few days in the tropics. Baking fresh things, although it heats up the boat, was always a welcome treat. You will be treated to wonderful baked goods in French Polynesia. However, for passages and times at deserted atolls or motus, I was glad to have the provisions.
 - Canned meats you like. Try them first. I bought tuna, white meat chicken and turkey, shrimp, crab and oysters, and a Mexican spiced turkey. I used a number of these, but only when fresh or frozen was unavailable. Buy these sparingly, almost everyone I know has arrived in NZ with canned meat.
 - Fresh food. Use your fridge and freezer as applicable to store your fresh foods. I found some produce kept several weeks in the fridge. However, with the exception of onions, I found most of my un-refrigerated food items were bad in about 1 week.
 - Liquor. This again is very personal. I only know of one very large power boat that was questioned in French Polynesia about the liquor amounts they were carrying. We had about 10 bottles of wine, a few beers, and probably 8 – 10 bottles of hard liquor. You can buy most liquor in French Polynesia but it is rather expensive, especially in the smaller stores. Many of the liquor bottles had plastic anti-theft sensors on the necks – like what you'd find in a clothing store. With that said, we did buy a couple bottles in French Polynesia. If you're going to Rarotonga, you can stock up and even buy Duty Free when you leave. Same sort of rules in Tonga.

Stowing food

Organization

Our friends on larger boats had the luxury to store similar food stuffs in certain lockers. One locker for beverages, one for dairy, one for canned meat, canned fruit, etc. We did not have that luxury. We have a fair amount of storage in the galley. I try to keep a little bit of everything in the galley, or at least a week's or so supply of things I use frequently. A few cans of soup, meat, veggies, fruit, flour, sauces/condiments, cereal, etc; although, I keep larger quantities elsewhere on the boat. I then transfer items from my more remote stowage locations to the galley as I need them. This allows me to usually stay in the galley while cooking.

Most of our lockers are stocked with every variety of provision. Because the location of food is based on where it fits, and is therefore, random, it is even more important for me to keep a very careful record of where items are and what we're using. Otherwise, I can be scouring the whole boat for over an hour looking for one particular food item.

Dry goods

I microwaved (used a friend's or the one in the Paradise Village lounge) my flour for 90 seconds to kill any critters that might have lain eggs in it and then stored it plastic bags and in Tupperware. I put bay leaves in my rice and pasta. In those food items, I never had weevils. I did get weevils in some flavored rice packets I bought in Mexico. However, as I stored everything in separate plastic bags and/or Tupperware the weevils never spread to other foods and never reached epidemic proportions. By keeping my dry goods in bags and Tupperware, I also never had a mold problem with my dry goods, even when the lockers got wet.

Fresh Food

I found our produce went bad very quickly on our passage to the Marquesas. I thought I had followed all the rules, but learned some new ones in the process.

What I did:

- I bought from a Market (Bucerias)
- I only rinsed the citrus, which I dipped in a mild bleach solution.
- I thoroughly dried all the produce that was wet or damp.
- I tried to buy items that were not yet ripe
- The produce I did not store in the fridge, I stored in milk crates that had been washed with bleach solution and thoroughly dried. The only place I had room for these was in our v-berth; I secured them to avoid bruising.
- I stored some produce in the green long life bags

What went wrong:

- I bought more produce than we could eat before it went bad
- As the non-cook I learned apples cannot be near anything. Citrus cannot be near anything other than other citrus. Onions cannot be near potatoes. I broke most of these rules, although only for 1-2 days. But the damage was done. Most of my fruit went bad in less than a week, except the apples, onions, garlic, jicama, and what I stored in the fridge. Bell peppers seemed to last a bit longer.
- The potatoes liquefied and created what had to be the worst smell known to man. This happened to a few other cruisers I knew. After battling with the pungent liquid spuds, I and several other cruisers who experienced the same thing have been fully converted to freeze dried potato options unless we're in port. I have been very happy with instant mashed potatoes and a friend found some really wonderful dried hash browns at Costco in the US.
- I think my biggest problem with my produce was a lack of ventilation. Most of our produce was in our v-berth. It was very hot and had almost no air movement. We had a very boisterous passage, and therefore had the boat shut up tight as a drum most of the time to keep salt water out.

What went right:

- I stored my eggs without refrigeration. I didn't shellac or Vaseline them. I simply turned the egg cartons over every other day, and they kept wonderfully for 5 ½ weeks.
- I had bread molding very quickly, except Mexican *Bimbo* bread which kept for 25 days un-refrigerated on the way to the Marquesas. I had some experienced cruisers from Europe swear to me that if you painted a loaf of bread with vinegar and then securely wrapped the loaf in foil and put it in a plastic bag that it would keep for weeks. I did not try this.

Meal plans

I had used a meal plan on the Baja Ha Ha. I did this for two reasons: first, we had a third crew member on board, and second, I wanted to experiment with a meal plan. My experience was positive, but we had very benign weather and as the trip was only about 8 days and I had fresh food in the fridge for the entire passage. I have not made a day-by-day meal plan since our participation in the rally. However, I have found it helpful to make a list of favorite passage recipes which utilize the food I've purchased for that trip including some heavy weather meals.

Pre-passage planning

I have become a very big fan of pre-passage cooking before we leave port. As I always feel queasy the first 3 or so days out, I find having some hearty meals Ken can just heat up really helps. Here are some of my favorites:

- Pre-cooked rice. I like it heated up and plain when I'm feeling sick. It also can beef up soups and shorten the prep time on any dish served over rice when I'm not feeling like cooking or it's too rough or too hot to want to heat a pot of water
- Quiche. It is easy and can be reheated for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.
- Lasagna and/or spaghetti sauce
- Muffins or bread for quick breakfasts
- Snacks: Crackers, cookies, beef jerky granola bars, etc.

Helpful hints

We used UHT milk and juice all across the pacific, it was easy to store. We kept both refrigerated after opening. We usually drank the juice in a few days after opening. Neither of us are big milk drinkers, and the UHT milk goes bad very quickly after it is opened, even if kept refrigerated. I found the small single serving boxes of UHT were better for us. We could usually use them before they spoiled, and were handy for recipes. Many of the UHT containers cannot be re-closed after they are opened. It is therefore helpful to have containers with secure lids to store the juice and milk in after you remove it from the cartons.

I am paranoid about bugs. I remove all cardboard and packaging before provisions come on the boat, this is also is a huge space-saver on our small boat. I have also started removing labels from cans; we had friends who think that is how they brought cockroaches onto their boat in the Marquesas (they still have them in New Zealand).

My favorite kitchen tools

- Good set of knives
- Deep pot for one pot meals underway
- Braun hand blender with whisk and grinder attachments.
- Blender for smoothies, a great treat in the hot weather
- Nice set of non-stick pots and pans. Easy to clean and therefore uses less water
- 9 x 9 Pyrex dish with lid. Can bake in it, put the lid on, store in the fridge and then put it back in the oven to reheat. It also makes it easier to take dishes to potlucks via the dinghy.
- Good 9x12 nonstick pan. Use for everything from lasagna to pizza to cookies.
- Good collection of spices, in a handy spice rack over the galley

Officialdom: Clearing Mexico

As we were berthed in Paradise Village, we checked out from the Customs location right across the bay. We needed to fill in a form there and leave it with them to prepare our Zarpe.

While that was in progress, we went to the Immigration office by Marina Vallarta to have our passports stamped. Note that they had a special line set up for yachts and that we didn't have to stand in the normal line (which we did!). The lady took our passports, verified that we had checked into the country correctly (as Immigration in Cabo hadn't stamped our passports) and that we were within our visa timeframe and then told us we were now checked out. However, we needed to request that she stamp our passports. We wanted the stamp both as a record of our trip and to be sure to avoid any issues when checking into French Polynesia (nobody has ever looked for this though). Amazing that we could have come to Mexico and left without having our passports stamped!

We returned to Customs and provided them with our passports to check and they provided us with a completed Zarpe. The Zarpe is a document that clears you from the country and you are required to provide this when checking into the next country. We didn't receive one before leaving the US for Mexico, but this seems to be an exception. If we were leaving the US for anywhere but Mexico, we would have requested a Zarpe before leaving.

The Passage

When to leave

Cruisers following the seasons and heading to the Marquesas or Gambiers leave Mexico in mid-March to mid-May. Perhaps half of the PV crew left during the last couple weeks of March, most of the other half were more scattered throughout April and a few were in early-May. Leaving earlier is a good strategy for those headed for Fiji as it maximizes time in the tropics. Leaving later provides an opportunity to meet new friends from Europe that come from the Galapagos and often have tens of thousands of miles and years of experience.

Those headed for the Galapagos typically worked their way down the coast and kept going to Panama. Rules had changed in 2001 allowing up to a 30-day stay in the Galapagos without a visa. Many of those that went said they spent 1-3 weeks there. These cruisers started arriving in the Marquesas in late April and May.

Weather

Weather, of course, is an important element in choosing when to leave as well as where to leave from. However, on a passage that we had planned would take the better part of a month, we figured that we would take it as it came.

In hindsight, we should have chosen better winds for escaping the coast as our slowest days were also our first two (60 and 80 miles). Tradewinds in 2001 didn't start until at least 110W which is about 300 miles from PV and twice that from Acapulco. We're glad we left from PV as had we faced light winds for 600 miles, that would have lengthened our trip significantly – and the trip was long enough! Furthermore, leaving from points further south puts one closer to the ITCZ and doesn't give you as much opportunity to vary your course as you head for the equator.

The tradewinds north of the equator on our passage were mostly N to NE and generally in the 20-25 knot range. This made for a boisterous ride, though fast. We were prepared for "tradewind sailing" as the books describe but only found it for a couple of days around the equator where winds lightened to a pleasing 10-15. We had hoped to motor in flat seas for a break!

The ITCZ is a nasty place that we spent the first 2/3 of the voyage discussing and worrying over. It is a place of light and variable winds sporting lightening and rain. We'll cover the ITCZ more in the route section.

After crossing the equator, we found winds from E to S and our last week was spent with 6-8' beam seas with 20-25 knot winds.

The following are weather resources we used during the crossing:

Weather faxes

We used weather faxes from both Pt. Reyes and Hawaii. If you have weather fax on board (computer or dedicated), pull down the latest schedule before leaving and decide which ones you want to receive. We found both the wind/wave reports and the surface analysis/prognosis reports to be the most helpful. We would receive our email forecast and compare them with the surface forecasts and used this as a learning tool. As we were not experienced in 500mb forecasting, we didn't pull these.

To access the latest NOAA schedule and/or faxes via the Internet, visit:

<http://weather.noaa.gov/fax/ptreyes.shtml> for the Pt. Reyes station

<http://weather.noaa.gov/fax/hawaii.shtml> for Hawaii

High seas text forecasts

There are high seas text forecasts available via the HAM Winlink system and are regularly broadcast via HF radio. We didn't find them particularly helpful in normal weather but they would be useful for tracking storms and/or would be a good base set of information for those boats with only a HF radio receiver.

Volunteer weather routers

Perhaps the best resource we were afforded was through Don on *Summer Passage* who also currently (early 2002) provides weather for the Baja California weather net. Unfortunately he doesn't plan to continue what he did for us for the class of 2002 as he will be actively cruising himself. However, there may be another land-based volunteer that will step forward.

Route

When we asked a friend of ours who had circumnavigated as a kid and was now out doing it again with his wife what his route would be he said, "I figured I'd head towards the Marquesas and somewhere around the equator I'll jibe."

If we were to recommend a passage strategy, it would be to leave Mexico with a pressure system to drive you offshore, heading for a waypoint of 5N 130W. Continually monitor the ITCZ via weather fax or high seas radio and a few days before reaching the waypoint, make a decision on where to cross the equator. This will likely be between 125W and 135W. Then get across the equator on a due south course until reaching the edge of the tradewinds and gradually shift to your destination waypoint while making sure you make enough southing to ensure the ITCZ doesn't re-capture you.

On our passage we were fortunate to receive daily weather reports from Don on *Summer Passage* (who in early 2002 was still doing the weather for the Baja California net on weekdays). He provided us with some insight to include in this guide:

"As far as the passage Mexico to Marquesas is concerned, yours was near perfect in terms of time of year and track. April through May is the best window, and the optimum track is an S-shaped curve similar to yours. The reason for the S-shaped curve rather than a straight rhumb line track is to minimize the time spent in the doldrums and the ITCZ. It's important to resist the temptation to sail the shortest distance.

"The route Galapagos to Marquesas is an easy ride in the SE trades that are usually stronger than the NE trades. Passage from Mexico or Central America to the Galapagos is a slow one in light winds unless one happens to ride a Tehuantepecer with strong winds between 93W and 97W. Most boats sail the rhumb line from the Galapagos to the Marquesas. This turns in the slowest passages: light and variable winds for the first 500 miles followed by nasty squalls in the secondary ITCZ. Optimum track is to motor sail SW. Winds will begin to increase at about 05S. Continue on SW track until about 9 to 10S where the SE trades will be strong and steady except for the occasional squall. From there sail the 9 to 10th parallel all the way to the Marquesas. There will be occasional squalls from the S and SE. This can sometimes be a rather rolly passage if the SE trades back to a more easterly direction."

The following sections provide more detailed info about each leg of our own trip and some things that we learned:

Escaping the coast

This was the hardest part of the trip for us. We only carry enough fuel for 3.5 days of motoring and we didn't want to burn it in sight of land! We had a nice sail out of Banderas Bay on a sea breeze and then the wind practically died on us.

We would recommend leaving when a pressure system is in the area driving the near-shore winds instead of relying on the daily thermals. Tradewinds picked up somewhere between 108W and 112W for boats that left near us.

Trade winds

Once we reached the tradewinds, we had N winds that veered to the NE the farther from Mexico we got. While the books talk about 10-20 knots with nice following seas, we saw 20-25 gusting 30 with seas on the quarter. A boat just a week ahead of us often saw winds 5-10 knots less than we did. Friends that went the year before could only dream of winds like we saw – on their 35-day passage they mostly had winds less than 15 knots.

This sailing was the most challenging for us as we hadn't spent time offshore before; our longest non-stop passage to date had been four days. We explored many sail combinations and trim. Having not used our whisker pole for much more than an afternoon before the crossing, we were hesitant to use it. In the end, our best moderate-wind downwind rig turned out to be a poled out yankee with the clew held high to spill wind at the top and drive the boat with minimal heel.

This rig had many advantages:

- Allowed us to furl the sail a bit if winds grew to a steady 25 knots or a squall came through
- Eliminated the main which had a tendency to round the boat up
- Quieted the boat down from a slatting full-batten main as the boat rolled
- Eliminated chafe on the main from our lower stays

We kept in regular contact with two of our good friends from Seattle on the same passage and they found the same sail combo beneficial, though one preferred to have a double-reefed main up to help reduce roll. One had an older pole that provided a constant chafe problem where the jaw of the pole met the jib line, so we would recommend you check this during your daily rig check.

ITCZ & equator crossing

As mentioned in the weather section, the ITCZ occupied a fair amount of mind share during our passage. The ITCZ changes constantly, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly. It is readily apparent on a weather fax and is worth watching. Many boats that tried for a rhumb line got bit by a higher percentage of light winds, lightening and generally not-fun weather.

If there was an intermediate waypoint that generally made sense for us to head for, it was 5N 130W. The majority of experienced speakers at our Puddle Jump meetings agreed that often crossing the equator east of 130W would turn in slower passages. Though sometimes the ITCZ will allow it, cutting the corner doesn't often cut a passage time or distance appreciably.

We got bit by the ITCZ at 9N 123W and had a full night of lightening all around us and winds from 10-30 knots and confused cross-seas. We could have been in a rock concert with the show going on outside! Not fun. We were in an area of 'convection' on the edge of the ITCZ, which had bloated. It shrunk back down to 05N within 36 hours and is certainly something that we would not like to see again.

We kept our intermediate waypoint of 5N 130W throughout our passage as when you only move 120-150 miles a day it didn't make sense to weave our way to whatever the waypoint of the day

was. The weather reports we received from Don via email gave waypoints between 03-05N and between 125-134W. Staying above 5N was important to us as if we needed to get in more westing, it would be easy enough to shoot west for a day or two once we reached 130W rather than get our westing in early and miss an opportunity to shoot across earlier.

When we got close to our intermediate waypoint, the crossing point could have been 125W so we went for it at 129.5W on a due south course. Due south doesn't give you the best VMG towards your destination, but it does get you through the ITCZ the fastest. We were looking forward to the doldrums and motoring a bit in flat seas but we finally got trade wind sailing on the equator! Go figure. But if you get light winds, motor and get to the SE trades as quickly as you can to avoid the ITCZ squalls and lightening.

And don't forget your equator crossing party!

Final approach

After two weeks of looking forward to the equator, we had made it. But now we had *another* waypoint to shoot for, still a week or more away. That was the hardest week for us; we had made a fast passage so far and were ready to *be there*.

After escaping the ITCZ, we had a nice easterly fill in and gradually veered to the SE. That put the wind and building seas on our beam and we raced towards Hiva Oa with a double-reefed main and yankee driving us hard. Comfort factor went out the window as speed replaced it on the priority list.

Our destination was Hiva Oa, where the majority of Mexico cruisers made landfall. This gave us the opportunity to go to most of the other islands in the group without beating. And we had heard that we shouldn't go to Fatu Hiva first as the Gendarmes would give you a tongue-lashing. Not! Virtually all the boats coming from the Galapagos stopped there first as well as Tahauata before checking in at Hiva Oa. We didn't hear of a single boat having trouble doing this. Would we recommend it? Yes – but make it to Hiva Oa to check in within a reasonable timeframe as we were told that the Gendarme did take notes of what boats were there and they do communicate with each other.

Charts

We used a small-scale paper chart to track our DR plot during the passage once a day. When we left Mexico, we were using Visual Navigation Suite along with Maptech charts. We'd boot the computer every day or two and update our DR plot to also keep a record of our progress electronically.

First Mate's Perspective on Passage Making

Passage-making is not my favorite part of cruising. I think my sentiments are common to the female population of cruisers. With that said, it has become less stressful and less dreaded as we made our way across the Pacific. The longest passage we had made when we left for the Marquesas had been four days. I had a good attitude when leaving for the Marquesas and had expected a passage time of about 30 days. The following are some of the things about the passage that I found tough.

Watch Schedules:

On our trip to the Marquesas, we had a set watch schedule of 4-on 4-off. This was the only schedule we had ever used and felt it worked OK for us. We had selected this schedule, because we felt that although 4 hours was a long time to be on watch, if we went to 3-on, 3-off that we wouldn't be able to get enough sleep off watch. The first 3 days we were exhausted, as we

always had been on a passage. By the fourth day, we started to feel better. However, as a person that really needs 8 hours of sleep a night, I think the constant sleep deprivation is one of the things that makes passage-making tough. Most of our friends did a 3-on 3-off watch schedule on the trip to the Marquesas. We tried 3-hour watches on our passage from the Marquesas to the Tuamotus; we liked them much better. We've used 3 hour watches since. We seem to get used to the passage routine at least a day faster. We also don't feel any less rested after our off watches and in the middle of the night a 3-hour watch is a lot easier to handle.

Sea Sickness

The first few days, I always feel seasick. Ken is one of those lucky few who never suffer from the unfortunate malady. Stugeron, however, is the miracle drug for me. As far as I know Stugeron can only be purchased in the UK and Mexico. You'll know by now if you suffer from seasickness. Take whatever works best for you. With the exception of a few days around the equator, we did not see the blissful trade wind sailing I had read about. We had a boisterous, and after the first 2 days, a fast trip. That meant a lot of queasiness for me.

Dehydration

It will be terribly hot out there. From about 5 degrees north of the equator throughout our stay in the Marquesas it was in the 90's in the cabin almost every day. I did not drink enough water one day. I got so dehydrated, sick, and weak I couldn't take a watch for over a day. You will be amazed at how hot it is; for us this was exacerbated by the boisterousness of our passage requiring that we kept all ports and hatches closed. Drink lots of water!

Cooking:

I do most of the cooking on passage, and in port. Since I will feel sick for the first few days, I try to leave with at least 3 days of pre-cooked or very easy-to-cook meals. I and almost every other cook I talked to agree that cooking at sea can be one of the most frustrating aspects of cruising. There are a great number of stories that go around at anchorage potlucks about someone being reduced to tears over sesame oil shooting off the counter and hitting the cabin floor, a bowl of uncooked quiche flying off the counter and spilling beyond the stove, or mine was a bowl of apple crisp flying around the galley getting sugar in the fridge, on the floor, and through the louvered doors into the cupboards.

Having other crew members giving the cook a night off is a help. If you do have a meltdown in the galley while on passage, which you likely will, try not to let it get you down too much. Remember, when you reach French Polynesia you'll have people to commiserate with you, and restaurants to patronize.

Expectations

I thought I had set my expectations well for the passage. I maintained a fair attitude until we got to the equator. However, both Ken and I experienced a little bit of a let down after the equator crossing. We were ready to be in the Marquesas. However, the boisterous squally weather continued, the cabin was like a sauna, and we still had a week to go. Celebrate the equator crossing; but don't forget you've still quite a way to go.

Scary Moments

Although we had boisterous sailing, we didn't have any really scary weather. I had not before experienced the kind of squalls we saw on the passage to the Marquesas. We were lucky to only see squall winds a bit over 30, but the way the squalls would come up and run you down was

disarming. Both Ken and I were late to shorten sail a couple of times, and then had to rudely awaken the other person in a fire drill as the boat was laid on her side. We soon came up with a sail configuration that I was comfortable quickly shortening when we were going through a quill line (see above).

The only other time I found quite scary was one night we spent in thunderstorms, with about 9 hours of lightning all around us. We unplugged all the electronics we could, put the GPS and laptop in the oven, and crossed our fingers. I don't know if there is much else you can do. However, we were lucky to only see lightning a couple of other times all the way to New Zealand, and none of those were during a passage.

Overall, I would not call the passage fun; Ken would likely disagree, but he likes the passages. There are a few days here and there where the wind and seas are perfect, or we see a pod of dolphin, or we have a beautiful moonlit night that I enjoy. I didn't find "being out in the middle of a huge ocean" all that disarming. I was bothered far more by me and whatever I was trying to cook flying around the galley. This isn't to say I didn't have a few meltdowns, but I would attribute most of those to being hot and tired for a few too many days in a row.

However, remember passage-making is a small percentage of your total time cruising. Would I make the passage again? Yes. I think the cruising in the South Pacific is so fantastic that it would be worth the trip.

SSB/HAM Radio Nets

At our Puddle Jump meetings, Jim on *A/so II* volunteered to run the passage net. This is not a light undertaking as the time and electrical power necessary to do this every day is demanding. *A/so II* was one of the first boats out of the gate and ran this informal net for the first 30 or so boats that left. This allowed boats in proximity of each other to determine what the conditions were around them.

At our meetings we didn't anticipate that the number of boats leaving would overwhelm one net but they did. The solution became to start another net that used a different net controller for each day of the week.

Someone may volunteer to run a net for 2002. If so, we would recommend contacting Jim on *A/so II* (who is in Fiji for Cyclone season) to pick his brain regarding his experience.

Our recommendation, however, would be to use a different net controller for each day – this spreads the load and gives participants the opportunity to get to know several personalities. The Galapagos boats formed three nets for the crossing (to keep check-ins reasonable) which merged back to one net once in the tropics. Their "Flying Fish" net lasted all the way to New Zealand and became our favorite one. Our recommendations for a net would also include:

- Shifting net time aimed at being around 8-9am once in the tropics. For the passage, Jim started at 11am in Mexico (6am in the Marquesas). The second-wave net was similar.
- Select an appropriate frequency for the time of day. Jim's net hopped over several frequencies at the beginning. Both nets settled in on 8mhz which worked well before 9am. Participants that were farther east would get cut off if their time was much past 9am. Both nets picked the transmit side of a duplex SSB frequency and used it as a simplex frequency. In line with what FCC rules say? No. What experienced cruisers the world over do? Yes. The standard simplex frequencies are simply used too much to dominate with a group net every day.
- Optional world news headlines by one boat five minutes before the official net starts
- Start with emergency/medical/priority traffic request, then read the preferred weather report for the area, then roll-call for boats on passage, then close the net and open the frequency for boat-to-boat traffic. Roll call would re-call boats that missed their check-in at the end and also call for new boats.

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- Roll call would provide lat/lon, course, speed, wind direction/speed, swell direction/height, cloud cover percentage and barometer/trend.
 - Jim's net was more like a radio call-in show. Several boats who knew Jim and each other well from Mexico preferred this. We had a small net of our own friends that we met on to talk anyway, so the efficient roll-call for the large net was more to our liking.

For HAMS, there is also the option of calling in to the Pacific Seafarer's Net on 14.313 at 0325 UTC. There is a warm-up session for about 30-60 minutes before the net. Call in during the warm-up to get signed up. You must be a US General Class HAM or equivalent to use this service and they do confirm this. This net is well-done.

We also had our own daily personal net with friends that we left Seattle with and friends that we made along the way. This came and went depending on whether we were in different places or on passage but gave us a good chance to chat with friends on a semi-private basis. Other groups of boats with SSB/HAM radios had similar arrangements.

The most important note we'll put in this section of recommendations is that if someone is volunteering to run a net, he/she really does have final say on how the net is run. The time and power commitment that this person makes is valuable and it's not cool if he/she is bombarded with lots of folks telling him/her how to do it. If you don't like the net, don't participate.

General Notes

Books we recommend

We loaded up on books before leaving and found some more useful than others:

- Exploring the Marquesas was given to us as a gift just before leaving Mexico. Great book and worth carrying though info was a bit outdated.
- Charlie's Charts provided decent coverage through popular stops in French Polynesia. Quality isn't as good as we got used to on the West coast, but things change so much and the area is so vast that it is quite hard to prepare a quality cruising guide.
- Landfalls of Paradise was a good book to read before arriving at (or even leaving for) a destination. The chapters are short and you get a good briefing before actually arriving. Content is obviously limited by necessity.
- South Pacific Anchorages was almost never used. It does provide better coverage of less-visited areas than other books though. Good as a cross-check of information.
- World Cruising Handbook was duplicative of Landfalls of Paradise in many ways – but this book covers the world. Again, good to read the appropriate chapter before going somewhere.
- World Cruising Routes is a great planning guide to use while dreaming of going somewhere. Essential resource, but limited use.
- Passport to World Band Radio provides excellent coverage of what frequencies to use throughout the world for listening to programs over your HF radio. The guide was invaluable during the September 11 incident but otherwise has gone unused as we're not big news junkies. If you're into NPR, this guide will be your best friend.
- We have several Dashew books. Offshore Cruising Encyclopedia was useful during outfitting but doesn't get much use now. Mariner's Weather Handbook is a good teaching aid and was helpful for learning about squalls and teaching us basic forecasting. I'd like to read the rest of the book but for now is reference text. Surviving the Storm hasn't been opened yet.
- Bowditch and Chapmans rarely see daylight.
- Storm Tactics and the Drag Device Database are the most tactical books for heavy weather we've found and learning gleaned from these two books make up 90% of our storm survival strategy.
- In addition to your engine manual, look into getting a shop manual and a parts manual.

Spare equipment we recommend

Choosing spares is as highly of personal choice as choosing what gear to install and we wouldn't presume to tell anyone what they should or should not carry. We were fortunate to have carried almost every spare we needed. The following covers some items that some boats overlooked:

- **Zincs:** Max Prop and plate zincs were virtually non-existent once we left Mexico.
- **Watermaker:** Pickling solution should be carried in case you need to fly home for an emergency. We carry a Spectra and were affected by the old SC-1 solution problem. If you don't know about this and your system is more than a year old, contact Spectra to learn more. If you are affected, spare end caps for the Clark pump and membrane as well as the stainless fittings would be recommended.
- **Water filter:** If you don't use a watermaker for all your water needs and sometimes fill from shore sources, carry a hose/filter contraption and a spare charcoal 5-micron filter or two. This will take out sediment as well as taste from the varying water supplies you'll find. There is a good water filter store just outside of Marina Vallarta on the main road.
- **Pumps:** We used both of our complete spare kits to rebuild our Flojet fresh water pump in 1.5 years of cruising.

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- **Windlass:** This piece of gear gets a major workout. Many anchorages in the South Pacific are very deep. We anchored in 80-90 feet of water quite frequently and in over 100 feet more than a few times. Our Lofrans didn't have a problem but before leaving next time we'll carry a spare bearing set as we know of others who have had problems.
 - **Engine:** Other than Papeete, engine/transmission spares were non-existent, including oil filters. Oil is available but if you like to use the same kind, buy it before leaving. We use Chevron Delo and haven't seen it since Mexico.
 - **Alternator:** We rebuilt the Balmar alternator once and replaced it with our spare once. Carrying spare high temp/voltage diodes and a spare alternator kept our energy production working.
 - **Dinghy:** Dinghies get beat up and spare fabric/glue is hard to find. We'll have a 12"x36" piece of Hypalon and glue when we leave next time.
 - **Sealant:** Boats leak. Rebedding deck hardware isn't fun but helps calm tempers. Silicone is useful for temporarily sealing hardware that is otherwise hard to repair (ie. Stanchions).

The good news is that whatever you're missing, someone else probably has. Our 31' boat is overstocked with spares but we're happy to be self-sufficient. When you reach Papeete you'll have at least two decent marine stores to peruse and they can order virtually anything for you.

Money and mail management

Money and mail management is one of the not-so-happy chores of cruising. Banks and credit card companies have a hard time understanding the needs of a customer who is so far from home. And in our experience, mail always arrives just after you leave.

For mail, we use a service in our home state that collects our mail from a PO Box and will forward to wherever we want in a consolidated package. We are able to communicate via email and this provides us with an easy and reliable way of keeping in touch with our financial institutions. Our cost is \$30/month plus postage. It is worth every penny and more.

For finances, we tried to simplify as much as possible before leaving. For us, this meant paying off the boat loan, eliminating all but two credit cards (a MasterCard and American Express) and consolidating our investments. Less companies=Less paperwork=Less stress.

Here are some tips to make your life less stressful:

- Pay off the boat loan. As the financial markets have shown recently, it doesn't always go up. Our boat has turned into one of our better investments! Having a large payment due each month would have added stress to our lives.
- Eliminate all but one credit card. Choose one existing Visa or MasterCard that has good international support (ie. International toll-free access numbers or a number to call collect, 24-hour customer support and online statement and payment options).
- Carry a cash/Debit card. When we made it to New Zealand, we found that when we took a large cash advance against our credit card, both the authorization amount and the actual cash advance were deducted from our available balance. This was due to the changing exchange rates and the fact that the US dollar amount didn't exactly match. Nobody else has mentioned this as a problem to us, however friends that use the same bank as us that used their cash account did not have this problem.
- Optionally, carry an American Express card. Card holders can send mail to any Amex office worldwide. We used the Amex office in Papeete for our extension paperwork. Otherwise, American Express was useless as they only recently added the ability to pay over the web and pay-by-phone was US only. Also, not many places take Amex in the tropics.
- Have mail carried by visitors rather than sending. We had mail sent to us in Mexico, Bora Bora and Tonga. We missed Mexico mail by a day and waited another couple weeks for it to catch up to us. We haven't seen our Tonga mail yet and it was sent several months ago.

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- Reduce mail to the point that you can afford to lose it. We have bank statements and magazines coming to us. Bank statements can all be retrieved online and the most important documents we have our service photocopy before sending. If you need something in a hurry, fax is great. Boating magazines other than SSCA and Latitude 38 have ceased to be as interesting as they once were.

Email across the Pacific

Sailmail (SSB)

We never failed to connect to Sailmail from anywhere we went. WRD719 in California was a strong station throughout French Polynesia. Surprisingly KUZ533 in Hawaii was a constant average connection – never max speed, but acceptable. In Tonga we switched to VZX1 in Australia and again had good connections.

We recommend Sailmail highly though the 10-minute per day limitation was not sufficient for us and we were stepped on more regularly during transmission than on the Winlink system. We chose to keep our subscription though as it was helpful for important emails and was always reliable.

Winlink (HAM)

Before leaving the US, I (Ken) got my Tech license but ran out of time to get the General. Mistake. However, I was able to get my General license in PV a couple of weeks before leaving for the Marquesas. Lucky! If the Volunteer Examiners convene again and someone on board doesn't already have a license, GET IT!! The Winlink system is worth it as was participation in the Pacific Seafarer's Net.

We used W6IM (San Diego Yacht Club) on 14073.9 most of the way across the Pacific. On busy days, we moved to WD8DHF (Texas) and from Raratonga onwards used ZL1MA (Auckland, NZ). W6IM was nice and extended our time limit to 60 minutes (though we rarely used more than 20).

Overall, we praise the Winlink system. However, it is a volunteer organization and service is not as reliable as Sailmail. Sysops have lives and take vacation. They also have kids who play games on the host computer and reboot it. W6IM had their Internet connection down for a couple of weeks and mail was uploading to them but not getting out. But are we complaining, *not at all!* The service is generally fantastic and will continue to be our primary method of staying in touch with the world.

Inmarsat

A few friends have Inmarsat Mini-M installations but at costs over \$2/minute our budget does not justify it. One friend uses this as their primary email connection and makes occasional calls to family. Service has been almost perfect with the only glitch one friend has mentioned being the Sept. 11 terrorist attack which took out the computers hosting their Internet gateway. Prices are coming down as competition increases.

Iridium

When we arrived in Raratonga, Iridium was going strong and pushing for new customers with hardware around \$500 US and connection costs at \$1.50/minute. These costs will likely keep going down. At that time email connection was possible but nobody was able to get it configured properly. Many cruisers have expressed interest but we have no first-hand knowledge of reliability or performance.

Electronic Chart Options

Before leaving, we explored the various electronic chart options. We carry all the paper charts for the places we're going but find the electronic charts more useful for coastal navigation. The system we left the US with was Visual Navigation Suite 4.1.400 and despite two major upgrades, we've stayed on this version as it works well for us. We had purchased MapTech charts from Seattle to Mexico (including "The World") before leaving but were a bit more up-in-the-air as to what we would do for the South Pacific and New Zealand.

MapTech used to sell a French Polynesia CD containing the French charts but lost their licensing and stopped selling it. Many cruisers share this CD in Mexico. Charts are OK but not as good as the new French paper charts. Charts are available for Raratonga, Tonga and New Zealand and are good quality.

We were introduced to CMAP computer charts in the Tuamotus. We passed over the CMAP cartridges in the US because we didn't want to refit our radar or add a chartplotter (though we later replaced our radar in Mexico... another story). The computer charts are identical to the CMAP cartridge charts and display in full-color. These charts are now available for purchase and work with MaxSea and a limited number of other software packages. They do NOT work with Visual Navigation Suite.

The version of CMAP that we have worked with has all worldwide charts in vector format, which fit on two CDs. The charts are of excellent quality and (provided all the normal caveats of aids to navigation) can be used as the primary electronic charting tool onboard. There is a basic GPS-integrated viewer that won't win any awards but did a fantastic job of the basic functions. However, the system that we tried out appears to be copied from a commercial shipping operator and isn't available for resale.

We have discontinued use of the CMAP system as we are now parked in New Zealand. We don't condone software piracy and will consider commercially available products before leaving again. CMAP-compatible chart products will be at the top of our list.

Gifts and trading

We did not trade, except for pearls, as much as we had thought we would. Part of our problem was we didn't speak French and therefore were limited in interactions with locals in French Polynesia. However, we heard of lots of trading for fruits and veggies in Fatu Hiva. Make up, watches, music CDs (reggae), sandals, diving or snorkeling gear and/or spares, t-shirts, baseball hats, and liquor are popular. For any clothing items, remember, the Polynesians are big people. We received a question about trading intimate apparel with the local woman. On the whole the Polynesian people are very modest, especially the Tongans. Unless you really got to be good friends with someone, discussing intimate apparel would probably not be appropriate. If you get to know families well, children's items (cloths, school supplies) are good gifts.

Tonga is the least well-off country we visited. Tonga has always been self-ruled and they are very proud of this fact. However due to this, they do not receive the subsidy that French Polynesia or the Cook Islands receive from France and New Zealand respectively. You therefore may want to save some trading items for Tonga. When we return to Tonga, we will take school supplies to give to the local schools.

Art and Gifts

We watch the budget and don't have much room on board, however, we believe if we find a piece of art or souvenir we really like, we buy it. We've found if we wait, we usually can't find it later, or if we do it is at least 3 times the price and kick ourselves for not buying it.

Marquesas

Don't miss the Tapas in Fatu Hiva (we had friend pick one up for us). Wood carving is an integral part of all of Polynesian cultures. However, in our opinion the Marquesan carving is the very best we've seen. If you want a wood carving buy one there. They are of the best quality you'll see and up to a 10th the cost of what you'll pay for the same quality in Tahiti. We had friends who got beautiful pieces in Fatu Hiva. We bought a piece in Ua Pou and several on Nuka Hiva.

Tuamotus

Pearls, pearls, pearls. Discussed in later section

Society Islands

The Society Islands are expensive. However, many of the galleries have art from the Marquesas. For less expensive souvenirs, check out the main market in downtown Papeete. Cathy bought several pareos and some small souvenirs from a large market they had set up for Fete. Papeete also has jewelry store after jewelry store of beautiful black pearls, but they are extremely expensive. Looking in the stores, although fun, did make us glad we had bought and traded for pearls in the Tuamotus. We did have some pearls set in Papeete which wasn't too unreasonable.

Rarotonga, Cook Islands

Rarotonga, has similar things to what you will have seen in the Societies, but is cheaper. Rarotonga is known for their weaving. They make beautiful fans, purses, etc. There are carvings and Cook Island black pearls that are reasonable in price, but we thought the pearls and carving in French Polynesia were much nicer.

Niue

There isn't much shopping on "The Rock." There is some nice basket work, but if you're going to Tonga, you may want to wait until you get there.

Tonga

Tonga is known for its beautiful basket work. In Vava'u, you'll have locals come out to your boat in boats full of crafts. There's also a market and several shops. The baskets are really wonderful. They also have carvings which are not as refined as what we saw in the Marquesas, but were still interesting. They also have a lot of Tapas which are quite different from those in the Societies. They have some unique 3-dimensional tapas often featuring turtles or whales.

Black Pearls

Save some money for black pearls in the Tuamotus. You may see some in the market in the Marquesas. One woman we talked to in Nuka Hiva, whose parents had a pearl farm in the Tuamotus, had a nice set of pearls at reasonable prices.

However, you will most likely acquire your pearls in the Tuamotus. Most of the atolls in the Tuamotus will have pearl farms. However, if you want to trade and/or buy some pearls you can't be shy. Some people may come to you, but if not don't be shy. Ask around. On Makemo, Cathy talked to five different people (men and women) and traded with three of them. You may want to look around some and not buy from the first person you talk to. The prices were not that different, but the quality was.

There are two types of pearl farms in the Tuamotus. There are large corporate owned farms, and smaller family owned farms. Your best luck for trading for reasonably priced pearls will be with the smaller family-owned farms. The larger farms often will not talk to individuals as the pearls are not owned by the locals.

Cath bought the nicer pearls that she would up with. Black pearls are rated A, B, C, D; A's being the nicest quality. Black pearls are rated based on roundness, imperfections or flaws, and color. She bought some very nice B pearls which were round with good color and only had one small flaw which could easily be hidden in a setting. These were \$20-\$35 per pearl. In addition to the round pearls, there are a wide variety of Keshis (pronounced key-she). These are the irregular pearls. Cath found that she began to like these as much or even more than the round ones. She only traded for these and did not buy any. We were also introduced to carved pearls. She traded for one already carved, and also picked out a pearl and had it carved. These are really unique and beautiful. Ask to see if there are any pearl carvers on the atoll where you're looking at pearls.

What to trade. The pearl farmers may live on remote atolls, but they are not poor. They make a very respectable living from pearl farming. The sorts of things they want to trade are items that are hard to find. However, for large trades for nice pearls you need to have high-end items or just pay cash. Whatever you pay or trade, you will be paying a fraction of what you'd pay in the Society Islands. They wanted DVDs, DVD players, CD Discmans, Music CDs (reggae, particularly Bob Marley will make you very popular), liquor, and VHF handheld radios. Some of the women who trade may be interested in small gold or gemstone earrings for their grand kids. For lesser quality pearls, you may be able to trade sandals, watches, make-up, etc. What they want to trade will depend on the atoll and what sorts of items they have access to on a regular basis.

When you're trading, ask to look at the pearls, pick out what you'd like and then start to offer one trading item at a time. Whatever you pull out of your bag, they will assume is part of the deal. If you dump everything out and ask them to select what they like to add to the trade, they may assume you are offering everything in your bag. In hindsight, it was just as easy to pay cash for the round pearls. The prices seemed really consistent. Have some fun trading for the Keshis.

Enjoy, and whatever you do, don't wait until you get to the Society Islands, unless you expect to spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

French Polynesia

French Language notes

If you can, learn some French. We had planned to use a language course during our passage but didn't succeed at that. Neither of us speaks French and we felt rather cut off from the locals. It was very frustrating to meet locals on small islands, and be frustrated by our language barrier. We got by without it, but I am sure if we spoke French we would have had a richer experience with the French Polynesians.

In addition, learn basic phrases in the language of where you are. Hello, goodbye, thank you... these are phrases the locals will appreciate and they'll be glad to teach you.

Marquesas

Clearing in to French Polynesia

When we arrived in Hiva Oa, we made our way into town and checked in with the Gendarme. We were asked for our boat documentation, passports and clearance from our last port (Zarpe). We also filled out a customs declaration form. On this form, it was acceptable to answer "stores for personal use only" for the inventory. Before completing the check-in process we also needed to visit the post office to buy our visa stamps and visit the bank to pay our bond.

Bond

This was one of the top discussion points in Mexico before leaving. We've read of some people getting around paying the bond, but they are the exception and what works for one boat may not work for another. Having an outbound airline ticket seems to be the one thing that does work. We paid the bond along with everyone else we know. The money we lost (and you may actually gain) in converting between currencies twice was less than \$100 US. This is a lot less than you'll pay in other parts of the world in harbor fees (which unless you tie to the quay in Papeete you won't pay in French Polynesia). We considered that a good deal for four months of cruising in such a beautiful country. One more note: think ahead to where you plan to check out of the country and when. This will be put on your bond paperwork. This isn't set in stone, but do think about it as it helps later (see Societies).

Visa extension

Our initial visa was for three months. While we were in the Marquesas we applied for our visa extension via mail, which upon granting provides an additional three months. You can also fax a request form in at the immigration office in Nuka Hiva.

We wanted to allow at least a month for the approval process as the committee only meets once a month. If you plan to spend two or more months in the Marquesas and Tuamotus or you don't want to have to be committed to staying in Papeete for a month waiting for the extension, we recommend applying via mail. We've provided a copy of the letter we used (courtesy of our friends on Layla) in the appendix. You'll need to have an address to send it to and options include the American Express office, general delivery at the post office or addressed to the harbor master.

Don't spend time worrying about whether you've been approved. If the letter gets "lost" they'll work with you. If your approval gets lost, the High Commissioner will provide a copy. But if you don't apply in time to get approved before your three months is up they'll probably give you trouble. In any event, if you do worry about this, the Gendarme on the larger islands/atolls can probably phone/email the High Commissioner to find out for you.

Facilities

Fuel was available in Hiva Oa and Nuka Hiva from the wharfs. It is possible to tie stern-to in Hiva Oa, but it can be a little dicey if there's much wind. Nuka Hiva is a breeze, again stern-to. Both are also the best place to get gasoline but all of the islands have cars and you can find gasoline for your outboard if you run out.

Water (and a shower!) is available at the wharf in Hiva Oa. If it has rained recently there may be sediment in the water supply so use a filter.

Internet is available at the French restaurant on the right as you come down the final hill leading to town. You'll need to buy a phone card (available there) and pay the restaurant for the computer time. Speed is ok given that you're going through a satellite link to Tahiti then to France and then to the US.

Provisioning

If your first stop is going to be Fatu Hiva, we heard from our friends that there was very limited supplies, but you could trade with the locals for lots of fruit and limited veggies. Cruisers that went to Fatu Hiva reported that the locals are very cruiser savvy and can be a bit aggressive in their bartering. It sounded like Mexico.

Hiva Oa and Ua Pou were comparable in their stores. There were a few small shops with the basics. Every town will have baguettes, but you may have to go in the morning before they run out. Nuka Hiva, the largest island, had several better stocked stores.

What is good and easy to find:

- Fantastic bread. Baguettes are everywhere and cheap. About \$0.40. You can also order wonderful loaves of bread for sandwiches, etc.
- Fresh fish and lobster at the larger markets. Particularly Nuka Hiva. There is a great Saturday market at the main pier, but take your bug spray and a flash light – it starts at about 4:30am
- Great baked goods: quiche, cookies, éclairs, etc.
- Every store had a decent selection of milk, yogurt, and cheese

What you can find with some persistence:

- Veggies, check if there are days when produce trucks will be available
- Fresh fruit, but you may have to trade for it, as all the locals grow it, there isn't that much in the stores
- Canned goods and frozen meat: check the stores. They may be empty when you first check, however, find out when the supply ship arrives. After the supply ship comes, some of the magasins look like different stores.

What you may have to live without:

- Much selection of fresh veggies
- Any specialty items

Laundry

We (ok, Cath) did all of our laundry by hand in the Marquesas. We only saw one place that did laundry in Nuka Hiva and their washing machine was broken when we were there.

Don't Miss

- Church service for the wonderful singing or at least a practice session with the choir
- At least one group island tour
- Tapas on Fatu Hiva

-
- Wood carvings on most islands

Navigation Notes

There's not much to say. The charts are good but even so, you rarely need them. Charlie's Charts is all we really used for harbors. Entrances are straight-forward, just pay attention to the bottom type indicated when choosing an anchorage. Your stern anchor will get a workout here. Just set the bow into the incoming swell and you'll minimize your roll.

Tuamotus

Facilities

Small quantities of fuel may be available from the larger atolls but don't count on it. Gasoline can usually be found. Provision as though you won't find either as locals have priority and if supply ships have missed shipments then there may not be any available for yachts.

Water is limited to what the islanders catch and friends without a watermaker were frugal. If you need water, the best source is probably a big boat with a large-capacity watermaker.

We found four Internet terminals in the Makemo post office and evidently this is not unusual on the larger atolls.

Provisioning

We only went to two atolls, Raroia and Makemo. Raroia only has a population of 50. There was no store, during the five days or so that we were there we also did not see any type of supply ship though locals say it comes once a month. Makemo, which is a larger atoll, had several stores. The following notes are regarding Makemo.

What is good and easy to find:

- Fantastic bread. There was a wonderful bakery where you could find both baguettes and loaves of bread.
- The stores had staple dry goods, some frozen meats, and canned goods.

What you can find with some persistence:

- Some people fished in the atolls, but ask the locals before you do. Ciguatera is a real problem in the Tuamotus, we know several people who got sick
- You may be able to get some basic produce: garlic, onions, potatoes, or carrots if a supply ship has been in recently

What you may have to live without:

- Any specialty foods
- Most fresh fruit and veggies.

Laundry

I did all of my laundry by hand in the Tuamotus. I did not see any place that did laundry.

Don't Miss

- Drift snorkel through a pass. Be sure to time the tide right (incoming), keep the dinghy close and keep survival gear in the dinghy (VHF, blanket, oars, etc)
- For divers, a pass dive

-
- More snorkeling in the lagoon
 - Visit an uninhabited motu on the other side of the lagoon and do a beach fire. There are two motus at Makemo across from town that do not have any rats and are totally uninhabited.
 - Trade for black pearls

Navigation Notes

Before we left Seattle we knew that the Tuamotus would be some of the most challenging navigation we would do. As we left the Marquesas we were no less apprehensive.

For the good news, we always found more markers and nav aids than the chart showed. We used our eyes more than anywhere else and didn't trust any chart source, electronic or paper. Tide times were difficult to gauge and no popular tide program was completely accurate.

We only did two pass entrances. The one on Raroia was difficult as there were more markers than on the charts and it was our first one. It wasn't until we were just outside the entrance that we could reliably tell where we were. The waypoint in Charlie's Charts was correct, but we didn't trust it. Makemo was like a highway and the directions in Charlie's Charts were very helpful.

Some tips for navigating passes in the Tuamotus:

- It's *very* important to time entrances for between 10am-2pm as the sun is high and helps you spot coral heads.
- Make sure you know where you are, what the state of the tide is and what bearing to follow as you head in the pass.
- Some passes have range markers, some have markers that you might assume are ranges but aren't. Don't assume.
- We used Pangolin's TideComp program and found it to be pretty good. However, you'll need to interpolate for various islands as there are only two tide stations represented.
- The ideal tide is to go either at slack or at the start of an ebb for an entrance or the start of a flood for an exit. Some passes reputedly can see 8 knots or more of current. The most we saw was three knots and it seemed rare to hear of a tide that an engine couldn't overcome. It would be ill-advised to enter a pass for the first time on a flood as you may not have the control necessary to navigate the channel.
- If you have electronic navigation, it is helpful to have that running so you can keep a track of your entrance – if you need to leave in a hurry, this can be an invaluable nav aid in a cloud-covered day. We used our track to exit Raroia on a completely cloudy day.

Once inside the lagoon, keep an eye out for coral heads. There's usually a town near the pass where the freighters come, so this channel is often well marked. Some tips for navigating inside the lagoon:

- Stick to 10am-2pm for moving the boat. It's possible to extend those times an hour in either direction as long as the sun is behind you, but remember that you'll make as much as 90 degree turns so it won't always be to your rear.
- Coral is very visible at midday with clear skies. Standing on the bow is sufficient.
- When clouds cover the sun, coral can disappear before your eyes. Consider standing on the bow pulpit or somewhere a bit above deck if you're navigating in overcast conditions. Better yet, don't move the boat.
- When moving to the "other" side of the lagoon to visit the motus, remember you don't have to go where everyone else goes. It is usually safe to go anywhere within the lagoon.
- Don't be on the "wrong" side of the lagoon when strong winds are forecast. Conditions can get nasty fast and it is not uncommon to have 3' waves inside the lagoon. Once the bad weather moves in, moving the boat is out of the question. Be on the side of the lagoon that the wind is going to come from and you'll have lots of wind and flat seas – the closer to shore you are the better.

Societies

Tahiti

You'll most likely make your first landfall in the Societies in Papeete, Tahiti. Welcome to the big town! The first thing you'll need to do is park the boat. The two most popular options are:

- **Quay:** The quay you see in the pictures probably isn't where you'll tie up. It seems to be filled with semi-permanent liveaboards. However, to the west of the quay you can bow anchor and take two lines to shore from your boat. There are bollards and/or trees to tie to. They were in the process of building a second quay when we were there and you might also be able to tie up there. The plus with this option is that you're right downtown. The downside is the constant noise and polluted water plus a modest fee.
- **Maeva Beach:** Around the corner from downtown is Maeva Beach. You can anchor in some smaller bays or out on the reef. There is generally room for two to three rows of boats on the sand shelf inside the reef in depths from 7' to 25'. Note that there is some tide and certainly current. The closer you are to the reef, the more you'll point at the reef with the current that results from the waves coming over the reef. The closer you are to the channel, the more you'll swing with the tides. The upside here is that the water is clean, the noise low, the price free, the excellent grocery store close and the view of Moorea breathtaking. The downside is that you'll get wet during dinghy rides to shore with wind blowing, you need to take a bus to town (not a big deal) and you need to watch for boats (cruise and charter alike) anchoring too close for tidal shift.

There are also several more options including marinas, so consult your cruising guides. But to get checked in, we would recommend choosing one of the above.

Checking in is quite easy. Immigration, Customs and the Port Captain are in the same building! If you applied for an extension, consider getting your mail first as it will save an extra visit to Immigration. You'll also need an additional stamp from the post office for each passport. Visit Immigration, then Customs, then the Port Captain.

- At Immigration you'll need to provide all your boat paperwork, passports and your bond receipt. If you have your approval letter for your extension, provide that and the stamps too. For extensions you might need to leave your passports there for a day. You'll be asked where and when you plan to check out of the country. Think about this as your clearance is sent to that location.
- After you're done with Immigration, the officer will send you next door to Customs. Customs stamps a form and sends you to the Port Captain. Note that this form is your ticket to duty free fuel. Make copies of it as you'll need to provide a copy when you buy fuel to get the duty-free price.
- At the Port Captain, you'll be assessed the daily fee if you are anchored off the quay. Otherwise, it's simply a check-in. If you move your boat, they ask you to check back in with them so they know where your boat is located.

Before moving on to other islands, be sure to check out of Papeete. Some people were told to check in at each island they visited, others were told just to check into their last island. We checked in where there was a port office (Huahine and Bora Bora – none in Moorea).

Fete

Fete is a month-long celebration throughout French Polynesia but is particularly celebrated in Papeete. If you plan to be in Papeete for Fete, consider arriving a week or two before the celebration starts to take care of officialdom and get settled in. If you will be on the quay, the earlier the better as boats really get packed in.

Facilities

Fuel is available throughout the Societies. However, you'll want to use a fuel provider that can provide you the duty-free price. The dock in the Maeva Beach marina worked great as did Bora Bora. We did hear a rumor that the Bora Bora tanks can sometimes take in seawater so we were very careful to use our Baja Filter – but we didn't find any water in the fuel. Many boats go to Raiatea for both provisioning and fuel on their way out of the country but once we were in Bora Bora we didn't want to backtrack.

Water is also quite available and clean.

Internet service is everywhere. In Papeete, E-Six was the café of choice for cruisers as they had US keyboards and fast service.

Provisioning

We spent time in Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine, and Bora Bora. After the Tuamotus, you will be delighted to see Papeete. We got rather stuck there, but the Continent (located by Maeva Beach) is like a top notch grocery store in the North America. You should also check out the central market downtown. After you leave Papeete you will not see anything like The Continent grocery store, but there are plenty of places to buy what you need.

The Societies are expensive. We would recommend stocking up at the Continent in Papeete for the rest of your stay in the Societies, as the quality, variety and prices on the other islands will be less favorable. You won't starve, but on most islands you're back to frozen meat, and once we did end up paying over \$1/egg and \$4 for a cucumber. However, if you are planning to stop in Rarotonga, don't provision any farther than that. It's cheap, Kiwi prices, and they too have a several fantastic grocery stores, similar to what you'd find in the US or Canada.

What is good and easy to find

- Anything in Papeete
- Great fruit
- French cheeses
- Great baked goods are still the standard all through the Society islands
- Try eating out at the Snack Shacks (aka Roach Coach). Most have good burgers and chow mien.

What you can find with some persistence:

- Fresh meats are more challenging once you leave Papeete, so we filled my freezer with boneless skinless chicken breasts when we left Tahiti, and was glad we did.

What you may have to live without:

- Nothing, but watch the prices; stuff can be expensive.

Laundry

There are no places to do your own laundry. However, though a little expensive, there are several places where you can send it out. We were anchored off Maeva beach and the marina office at Maeva Beach sends out laundry. We used the service, and happily paid for it after nearly 3 months of doing it by hand. Then Cath was back to doing laundry by hand in Huahine, Moorea, and Bora Bora. We didn't look very hard for a laundry service on those islands though we know friends had laundry done in Raiatea.

Navigation Notes

The recent French charts are very good as are the C-MAP charts. The Moorings charter guide is helpful and can be purchased in Papeete. If you're not familiar with them yet, learn about cardinal markers and remember the nav aids are green, right, returning.

Don't Miss

- Fete in Tahiti including the great dancing and the javelin throwing, fruit carrier and stone lifting competitions
- Scooters on Moorea
- Diving: sharks on Moorea, Manta rays on Bora Bora. Maybe you'll see a Napoleon fish, a giant wrasse – very cool!
- Feed the stingrays on the NE corner of Moorea – take the dinghy though as that anchorage is tiny and shallow with a narrow pass (and is also next to Club Med). Go next to the final green marker closest to the resort and stand in 3' of water with chunks of fresh fish and the stingrays will eat out of your hand. Don't step on them! If you can't find the place, go to the resort and have a drink and watch for the tour boats to come.
- Dinner at Bloody Mary's and the Bora Bora Yacht Club on Bora Bora. Note that the Bora Bora Yacht Club has just changed ownership at the close of this cruising season. Bring a burgee to hang in the club.
- Buy some pareos

Clearing out of French Polynesia

A week before you're ready to leave, visit the bank where you obtained your bond (Socredo if you came in at Hiva Oa) and ensure they have all the paperwork necessary to process your exit. Even better, you can get your bond back as soon as you make it to your final island. Immigration doesn't need to see your bond to check out, only to check in. And the bank is happy to give you your money back whenever you ask. But they need to have received your clearance from Papeete and that is only forwarded to the location that you told them you would leave from. They won't credit your credit card if you took a cash advance, so know how you want your money back. US cash was no problem and neither were New Zealand travelers checks. We opted for the travelers checks which we could cash without another currency conversion in Raratonga.

To check out with Immigration, follow the now-familiar drill. They will issue you clearance papers and stamp your passports. It is ok to check out several days before leaving – they will ask you when you plan to leave and we found that if it's within a few days "depending on weather" they were ok. More than a week is pushing it. We do know of at least two boats that told them a few days and then stayed on for a few weeks but this just irritates the officials, so don't do it.

Rarotonga, Cook Islands

Perhaps our favorite stop, Rarotonga was a place we hadn't even thought of until we were preparing to leave Bora Bora. The island is small but very different in culture from the French. Read through our web site for detailed information on this stop.

Harbor

When you enter the tiny harbor, you'll either med-moor or bow/stern anchor depending on how crowded it is. Crossing anchors seems to be the norm, so it is common courtesy to ask your neighbors where their anchor is and to dive on your own anchor after you are secured. Once you're secured, check in with Don the harbormaster. It will be the easiest check-in you may ever have.

Facilities (Fuel, water, laundry, internet, provisions)

Fuel is available on the wharf. Don will arrange to have the fuel truck come down if there is a need for more than 100 gallons (between multiple boats). For small quantities you can jerry jug it to a nearby gas station.

Water is available right on the quay. A free private shower is also in a building on the quay.

Internet is available in town. Town is a ten-minute walk away. Scooters can be rented for the week for the same price you pay in the Societies for a day.

Provisioning

We felt like we had died and gone to heaven when we reached Rarotonga. Everyone spoke English, and was so friendly and helpful, both the Cook Islanders and the Kiwis. The quay where you med-moor is close to a huge high-quality and very cheap grocery store. There are also several nice stores on the other side of the island, but you'll need to take the bus or go on a scooter. Don't miss the Friday and Saturday markets, which have loads of fresh produce, food stalls, art and cultural activities. If you provisioned at all in the Societies, you'll wish you waited. You can also get duty free liquor when you leave but note that there are import limits for New Zealand and the prices in New Zealand aren't that much different.

What is good and easy to find

- Everything

What you can find with some persistence:

- No persistence is needed

What you may have to live without:

- Nothing, go wild.

Laundry

There is a VERY cheap laundry service across the street from the quay. There is no self-service laundry.

Don't Miss

- Friday/Saturday markets
- Fish and chips (or “fush and chups” as they say here) and a good beer
- Scooters
- Hike over the island – read and follow the signs (see our web site for our wrong turn)
- Windsurfing rentals and the sailing club
- Movies and popcorn!!

Niue

Niue was a unique and educational stop for us and is a cool place to visit. One boat had been there for four months when we arrived – they had come at the end of the previous season and loved it so much they came back for an entire season.

Harbor

There were 14 well-maintained moorings in the harbor this year and that number may increase or decrease from season to season. Mary with Alofi Rentals runs the “Niue Yacht Club” and maintains the moorings. You pay a harbor fee of \$5/day whether or not you use a mooring so if one is available use it and protect the seabed. Call Niue Yacht Club on 16 to ask for a mooring assignment appropriate for your length and weight of boat.

This is an open roadstead anchorage but is quite well protected from the prevailing wind and swell. If the wind is shifting to the west and bad weather is predicted, leave. Period. If you want to see what the harbor looks like in a severe westerly see Annie at Niue Dive who will show you a picture of waves crashing over the crane on the wharf. You don't want to be on a lee shore here during bad weather.

Checking in is easy. The Customs/Immigration office is behind the bank to the left of the liquor store.

Facilities

Fuel is not readily available at the dock though you may be able to arrange small quantities if needed. We don't recall water being on the dock but the island is large enough that you can probably jerry jug it from somewhere.

Internet is available for free on the island but is painfully slow.

Provisioning

You are still in the land of English which is nice. However, the plight of Niue (quickly dropping populations as the islanders move to NZ and Australia for more opportunity) affects the stores. Once a month there is a fair/market which is wonderful. We missed it, but we had friends that had a great time at it, and you could buy local seafood and produce. There are a couple small stores, which are fair. You will find fresh produce after the supply ship arrives. We didn't really need everything after leaving Rarotonga.

What is good and easy to find

- Most staples
- Frozen meats
- Canned goods
- Duty free liquor
- Good bakery
- Excellent Kiwi ice cream
- Patronize some of the very reasonable restaurants

What you can find with some persistence:

- Nothing. No trading or bartering is needed, just check all the stores in the main town

What you may have to live without:

- Perhaps fresh produce, right before the supply ship arrives

Laundry

There is a reasonably priced laundry service up the hill from the wharf. There is no self-service laundry.

Don't Miss

- Tali's cave tour
- Rent a car from Mary at Alofi Rentals and go on the hikes. The tourist trails and hikes are in superb shape and the scenery looks like something out of a movie.
- For divers, scuba diving should not be missed. The visibility is out of this world and sea snakes are cool.
- Visit the Niue Yacht Club and meet Mary

Tonga Islands

Vava'u will likely be your first stop. We liken it to a combination of a La Paz community (several regulars) with a Caribbean atmosphere (at least with the waterfront bars and charter operations) in a Pacific Northwest setting (islands are similar to the San Juans). It's none of these and all of these. It was laid-back, fun and friendly and we're looking forward to going back and exploring anchorages we didn't get to the first time.

Facilities

Fuel is available in Vava'u at Sailing Safaris but was the first place that we had a serious water problem. We couldn't get more than a gallon through the Baja filter without the water filter backing up. So we bypassed fuel here though many other boats that had foregone the Baja filter filled up and didn't have a problem.

In Nuku a'lofa you can purchase duty free fuel from either BP or Shell. You need to have a form authorized by Customs with an amount you are requesting filled out. *Make this more than you need* as you are then limited to that amount from the fuel company. BP brings a truck down and will fill jerry jugs or if you move to the concrete wharf can fill directly to the boat. Shell is on the wharf and can fill from there.

No problem with obtaining water in the main ports of either Vava'u or Nuku a'lofa.

In Vava'u we had a huge surprise. Internet access was available but at \$60/hour US. That's not a typo. There are two phone systems in Tonga – the local one is very expensive and is necessary to connect Vava'u and Nuku a'lofa, thus the high cost. Beluga Diving will receive emails at a special address and print them for boats. In Nuku a'lofa Internet access is about \$9/hour US and is plenty fast.

Provisioning

Vava'u:

Tongan is the official language, but almost everyone speaks English. The stores are more like what you'll see in French Polynesia as far as quality and variety. The prices are however very inexpensive – more like Rarotonga. Neiafu has some excellent restaurants, so you may be eating out fairly often if the budget permits. Vava'u has about four small stores with staples, canned goods and frozen meats. There is a daily market that has a good selection of fruit, but a limited supply of veggies.

What is good and easy to find

- Most staples
- Frozen meats
- Canned goods
- Duty free liquor
- Good bakery, with fantastic cinnamon rolls
- Pineapple from the market that is fantastic!

What you can find with some persistence:

- Fresh veggies. The market consistently has cabbage and tomatoes. We found carrots and tiny green peppers, but not every day.
- I had to look very hard for onions and potatoes as the supply ship had not been to the island in a while

What you may have to live without:

- Some fresh veggies

Nuku a'lofa

Nuku a'lofa is the largest city in Tonga. There are several good grocery stores with everything you'll need, including fresh meats, good Kiwi dairy selections and canned goods. There is also a great bakery, and a top notch market with all sorts of wonderful fruits and veggies at very cheap prices. You probably will not be taking advantages of these however, as you're probably on your way to New Zealand, where you'll have to give up all your fresh produce and meats, cheese, and dairy.

Laundry

Vava'u

Assuming the 2001 cyclone didn't destroy it, Sailing Safaris (which provides a number of tourist activities) has two washers and dryers where you can do your own laundry. You can also take the laundry up the hill from the waterfront restaurants and have it done for you for the same price.

Nuku a'lofa

You'll be able to have your laundry done for you in town. We didn't do this, but we had friends that did.

Navigation Notes

The Moorings charter guide is THE guide for Vava'u. Anchorages are known by number. Get both the book and the chart and you're set. C-MAP and Maptech electronic charts are quite good, especially in Nuku a'lofa.

Don't Miss

- Diving in Vava'u
- Snorkeling with the humpbacks
- Snorkeling on the west side of anchorage #16
- Friday night racing in Neiafu harbor
- Cinnamon roles and burgers at Anna's Café
- Remote-controlled AC boats and theme party nights at Mermaids
- According to our friends, try some of the restaurants away from the waterfront, we heard they were excellent

Passage to New Zealand

When to leave

The longest range weather faxes available from New Zealand are 72 hours and even MetService admits that trying to predict weather more than about a week out is quite difficult and often inaccurate. Most cruising boats can't make it from Nuku a'lofa to Opuia in less than nine days so determining when to leave is a not a question of missing a pressure system but of timing it.

After much debate around the bar, consensus seems to say leave when you're ready. Have a decent three-day forecast so you have good sailing when leaving the tropics and be prepared to stop at Minerva Reef if conditions and forecast in the higher latitudes warrant it.

Weather

As a gross generalization, pressure systems move through the area around New Zealand every seven to nine days. Most of New Zealand's weather comes across the Tasman from Australia, though systems also move southeast from Asia. We are not weather experts and as this is a complex area that we have limited experience with we would recommend that review and consult with the resources listed below. At a minimum, we would recommend reading the Metservice Yacht Pack.

Resources

Weather Faxes

Weather faxes are available from Metservice in New Zealand. Surface analysis charts are prepared four times a day and prognosis charts for 24, 48 and 72 hours are prepared twice a day. You can download the latest broadcast schedule from ZKLF at 0430 or 1630 on 5807KHZ, 9459KHZ, 13550.5KHZ, or 16340.1KHZ. The latest faxes and schedule are also available on the web at http://www.metservice.co.nz/services/radiofax_schedule.asp.

Metservice

Bob McDavitt at Metservice provides weather resources for voyages to/from New Zealand. Bob publishes a booklet called the Metservice Yacht Pack which is an *excellent* resource that provides a concise guide to weather in this region. Email Bob at mcdavitt@met.co.nz to find out how to get a copy.

He'll also provide a customized forecast with daily predictions for a seven-day period for a set fee (\$50 NZ in 2001). If you receive the forecast via fax, he'll include the weather faxes he used to prepare the forecast. He'll also forward the forecast via email which is quite convenient. Contact Bob a week before you plan to leave to provide billing details and ensure he's available.

We used Bob twice. Before leaving Tonga, one boat received an email with a 7-day forecast and we shared that. We decided to stop in Minerva Reef and joined about 30 other boats. We ordered another forecast there and asked him to send it when the outlook was good. He sent three forecasts to the fleet based on estimated boat speeds and these were shared. Our forecast was perhaps the most accurate of the three and we were quite happy with Bob's service and will use his service in the future.

Russell Radio

Russell Radio based in Opuia provides a daily check-in service for cruisers. This is a non-profit service and it is expected that if you use the service you provide a donation to help keep the service running for future cruisers. The marina in Opuia had a donation box and Des welcomed us

to visit him in Pahia. You can see pictures of him and his office on our web site. Read more about Russell Radio below.

Passage nets

In addition to the nets you have checked into during your crossing, many boats check in with Des at Russell Radio. This year Des used 4.445 and 13.137 for frequencies which was a change from the past. Check with other cruisers to get the latest times and frequencies for his net and like other nets, listen in to a couple check-ins to get a feel for what he's looking for from you. We started checking in with him from Rarotonga and had a good rapport by the time we started our passage.

Des has been around for many years and knows what can happen out there. He won't tell you what to do, but will provide you with a 24-hour synopsis of what to expect at your exact area based on the weather faxes and reports from other cruisers.

The Pacific Seafarer's Net is also still accessible. If you have a weaker radio, a NZ station should be able to relay for you when the band is open.

Route

Your route will depend on the expected weather. We'd recommend following a course slightly west of the rhumb line from Tonga to bring you close to Minerva Reef. This provides an opportunity to stop a wait for conditions to change.

For an ideal passage we were looking for the following:

- Good sailing conditions from Tonga to Minerva Reef
- Leave/bypass Minerva with a low pressure system around New Zealand but forecast not to be blocked. Sail comfortably and optimized for VMG towards Opuia.
- As the high pressure system moves in, fall off to the west. 30 south, 175 east is often a good intermediate waypoint but conditions may change this.
- Optimize course to Opuia but plan for conditions as you close the island. Anticipate landfall conditions and get your westing or easting in before closing the coast. If you don't you may be faced with local wind-driven currents and short seas.

If you talk with cruisers who have the trip twenty times, they'll tell you that most of them have been fine but none the same. Weather can change fast – we went from flat seas and 10 knots aft of the beam to 30 knots on the nose inside of 18 hours.

Minerva Reef

Stopping at Minerva Reef wasn't in our cruising plans but we felt it prudent to leave that option open as we are a smaller and slower boat. Once there, we decided to stop as the longer-range forecast did not sound appealing for the end of our trip.

North Minerva is easily big enough for the entire fleet, so don't worry about space. Conditions were generally good even with over 35 knots blowing at times. Twice a day when high tide arrives it gets a more bumpy as seas come over the top of the reef. Both the CMAP and Maptech charts were dead-on accurate for the entrance and you can safely use a waypoint in the center of the pass for your approach. Eyeball navigation can be used once through the pass.

As a bonus, lobsters are plentiful and large. Those that visited South Minerva found even bigger and more lobsters.

Charts

New Zealand charts are of excellent quality and as already mentioned, the charts of North Minerva Reef from Maptech and CMAP were very accurate. There is now a marina in Opuā which isn't shown on the charts we used.

Checking In to New Zealand

For all the current rules and regulations, pick up a check-in packet in Tonga or Fiji before leaving. We found the packets at Sailing Safaris in Tonga. In this excellent packet you'll find Customs and Immigration information and forms. You'll need to provide Customs with a 48-hour notice of your arrival. Des can do this for you if you're checking in to his net. There are also several forms to fill in and doing these before you arrive can save you time.

Most cruisers arriving in New Zealand check in at Opuā as it is the closest port to the tropics, though if conditions permit, some carry on to their final destination. We arrived in the middle of the night and Des provided excellent directions and waypoints for the entrance to Opuā. We had no problems. The marina in Opuā was not on our charts but was easy to find – it is where the Yacht Club is indicated.

During business hours, contact Customs on VHF 16 for directions. After hours, there are three good options. The Customs dock is a side-tie on your starboard coming in and has room for one boat. If that is occupied, the long breakwater dock on your port side is also marked for quarantine. Lastly, you may anchor out – ensure your quarantine flag is flying. Customs will contact you.

Quarantine

Try to arrive in NZ with no fresh food if you can. The MAF (quarantine officers) were very nice. They were very reasonable on liquor, we had to pull all of ours out but we had over 8 full bottles of liquor and it was no big deal.

They will take:

- all cheese
- fresh and frozen meats
- canned meat from the UK and some other European countries
- all fresh produce
- milk (US dried milk and canned milk was OK)
- opened butter
- all eggs, fresh and dried.
- Nuts only in their shells
- Popcorn
- Honey, unless unopened and made in NZ
- Your trash and vacuum bags – yeah
- They may ask to see your hiking boots to check for dirt – they would clean them not take them
- Bottom paint, unless approved in NZ
- Asked about bug spray, but let us keep our one can of Raid as long as we promised to only use it on the boat.

They did not take

- Canned meat from the any place we had been
- Canned cheese from the US
- Peanut butter
- Tapas, wood carvings and baskets (they asked if we had them, but didn't take or even ask to see them.

First-Timer's Guide to New Zealand

If you've found this guide helpful, look on www.svfelicity.com for our new First-Timer's Guide to New Zealand. We hope to have this available for you in mid-2002. If there are questions you have that we can answer in this guide please forward to us at ken@svfelicity.com or cathy@svfelicity.com.

Our impressions with 20/20 hindsight

Favorite places

It's hard to pick just one favorite place because we liked different places for different reasons. But our three favorite places would have to be:

- **Ua Pou:** The Marquesas in general were one of our favorite locations to explore. The landscapes are dramatic, the culture rich and the people friendly. Unlike elsewhere in French Polynesia, the French influence was felt less and people seemed happier. Ua Pou has to be the prettiest spot we visited (we skipped Fatu Hiva though) and its small-town atmosphere was pleasant to be around.
- **Moorea:** Yes, even with a Club Med and honeymooners galore, Moorea was our favorite "tourist" spot. We raced around the island on scooters, enjoyed two spectacular dives, took a dinghy excursion to feed stingrays and generally relaxed. After a hectic six weeks in Papeete (why?), Moorea was a nice change of pace. In fact, we liked Moorea better than Bora Bora.
- **Rarotonga:** Our most favorite spot is Rarotonga. After bleeding cash in French Polynesia and living with the French attitudes, Rarotonga was a blessing. Prices for *everything* were cheaper than reasonable, the people were the friendliest we've encountered to date and hiking across the island was spectacular. We visited just after the Sept 11 terrorist attack and were overwhelmed with the caring and generosity the locals provided. At the weekend market, locals were even taking donations for the American Red Cross. There's a special place in our heart for Rarotonga. Say hi to Don if you visit!

What we'll do different next time

Our trip was wonderful and like everything else in life, we learn as we go. Some things we'll do if we do this again are:

- Lose the spinnaker. It's a pretty sail but unless we were in a light- to medium-weight boat, the wind speed ranges don't justify the storage space. Wind often varies too much with squalls to leave it up overnight. And we had lots of 15+ knot wind. Now that we have it, it's staying, but on the next boat we'll be tempted to put something else in that storage spot. If we continue around the world, we have heard that there is quite a bit of very light air sailing as you work your way up through Asia towards the Indian Ocean so we may learn to like this sail.
- Shorten the time in the Societies. We look forward to exploring more of the Marquesas and Tuamotus as well as the Gambiers. But we'll limit our time in the Societies to boat repairs, a little diving and officialdom. It's just a bit too crowded and, well, French for us. And more importantly, there's a lot more stuff to see that we had to skip. We know a number of boats who opted to leave their boats in Tahiti or Raietea for the cyclone season. It is a risk, and insurance carriers may not cover it. However, it does allow you to take your time in French Polynesia, and then begin your next season heading to the Cook Islands. Once you get to New Zealand, it is very tough to get back any farther east than Tonga, unless you relish a trip through the roaring forties.
- More solar panels. The sun shines a lot and solar panels are quiet and have no moving parts to break. We'll focus more on solar production next time.
- Wind generator. We have an AquaAir wind/towing generator but usually only use it for towing. It takes an hour or so to get it rigged as a wind generator and the power production is low. We'll opt for an AirMarine or whatever model focuses most on power production and mount it permanently. From talking with several owners, sound is much

less of a concern than how many amps it'll put out in a given wind speed (5-15 knots is most common where we've been).

- Carry fewer provisions. Our limited storage space was stocked full with provisions. Next time, we'd prefer to spend a little more on buying along the way and use that space for more day-to-day storage, more toys, souvenirs, etc
- Visit Fatu Hiva. We regret not visiting there for the scenery and would like to see this wonderful spot.

Appendix

We've included the following resources in this appendix for your reference:

- French Polynesia extension request letter
- Sample food storage spreadsheet
- Our Provisioning List: Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

French Polynesia Extension Request Letter

le 30 avril, 2001

Haut Commissariat / DRCL
Rue Jeanne d'Arc
BP 115
Papeete, Tahiti

Monsieur ou Madame,

Nous vous ecrivons parce-que nous voudrions vous demander d'avoir une extension de 90 jours additionel de notre visas pour la Polynésie Française. Maintenant, nous avons 90 jour visas. Nous voudrions avoir **180 jours visas en total**. La raison est de que nous voudrions étendre notre visite dans les Îles Marquises, Archipel des Tuamotu et aux Îles de la Société par bateau.

Nous sommes:

LE NOM	LA NATIONALITÉ	LES NUMÉROS DES PASSEPORTS	CAPACITÉ À BORD	L'ÂGE
xx	États-Unis	xx	Capitaine	xx
	États-Unis		l'equipage	

Nous sommes arrivés en Polynésie Française aux Îles Marquises, Hiva Oa au **30 avril 2001** sur notre yacht s'appelle Layla. Actuellement, notre visa **expirera le 1 août 2001**. Attendant une response l'adresse:

CAPTAIN NAME
S/V YACHT NAME, Yacht en Transition
American Express
c/o Tahiti Tours
B.P. 627
Papeete, Tahiti

Nous ne savons pas la date exactement du jour que nous arriverons a Papeete, mais il sera après la fin du mois de juin ou le commencement du mois de juillet. Si il est nessescessaire pour de vous communiquer avec nous, voici notre adresse e-mail:

EMAIL ADDRESS

Merci beaucoup pour votre temp et consideration.

Veuillez agréer l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.

CAPTAIN et FIRST MATE

Ce-inclus les copies de:

- Notre passeports (les pages des photos)
- Notre visas des Polynésie Française
- Papiers de bord pour S/V YACHT NAME
- Notre bonds

Sample Food Storage Spreadsheet

Food Storage	Quantity	Used
Main Salon - Starboard		
Top Starboard Forward Settee Cupboard		
<i>lower shelf forward</i>		
Pasta Sauce	0	1
Chicken Broth	0	1
Beans - Black	1	
Jerk Seasoning	1	
Hot Mustard	1	
Chicken -Canned	4	
Bamboo Shoots	1	
Turkey - Canned	1	
Artichoke Hearts - Marinated	0	2
Tomatoes - Sun - Dried, Jar	1	
Milk - Mini Sweetened Condensed	1	
Milk - Media Crema	0	1
Tuna	1	
Sweet Pickles	1	
Nuts - Large Slivered Almonds	1	
Tomatoes - Sun-Dried tomatoes - Tube	1	
Pesto - Tube	1	
Sauce - Satay stir fry	2	
Coconut milk	1	1
<i>lower shelf aft</i>		
Chun King Chicken	0	1
Chicken - Canned	6	
Tuna	1	
Salmon	1	
Carrots	2	
Pizza Sauce	0	1
Mustard - Grey Poupon	1	
Sauce - Fish	1	
Artichoke Hearts Marinated	1	
Sauce Oyster	0	1
Sauce - Stir Fry	1	
Garlic - Tube	1	
Milk - Evaporated	1	
B-Day candles	2	
Green peppercorns	3	
Coconut milk	1	
<i>Top shelf aft</i>		
Bacos	5	
Turkey - Large Can	2	
Oil - Olive	1	
Peaches - snow	0	3
Applesauce	0	5
Pears - Small Cans	0	4
Water Chestnuts	0	1
Pineapple small can	0	1
Evaporated milk	2	
Coconut Milk	0	1
Chicken - Canned	4	
Corn	0	1
Bacos	0	1
Oil - Sesame	0	1
Tomatoes - Stewed	1	
Salsa	1	
Water Chestnuts - Large	1	1

Top shelf forward

Sweetened condensed milk	1	
Peas/Carrots	1	
whipping cream	3	
Soy sauce	1	1
Tuna	8	2
Salmon	3	
Bell Peppers - Roasted	0	1
Tomatoes - Sun Dried	3	
Pesto	1	1
Mayo	0	2
Hot Mustard	1	
Hearts of Palm	1	
Jerk Seasoning	1	
Salsa - Peach	0	3
Beans - Refried	1	
Chicken Broth	0	1
Sauce - BBQ	1	
Salad Dressing - Caesar	0	1
Pesto - Tube	3	
Garlic - Tube	3	
Tomato Paste	1	

Food Storage

Quantity

Main Salon - Starboard

Lower Forward Storage, Behind Settee

Cornstarch	3	
Salt - Rock	2	
Nuts - mixed	0	1
Nuts - Cashews mixed nuts	0	1
Drink Mix - Mango	1	
Drink Mix - Jamaica	1	
Drink Mix - Limonada	0	1
Pasta - Gnocchi	2	
Rice Sticks	1	
Wine - White Cooking	0	1
Bacon	0	2
Pine Nuts	0	1
Pam	1	
Spiced Cider	1	
Drink Mix - Fruit Punch Kool-Aid	1	
Equal	1	
Drink Mix - Horchata	2	2
Cookies - Milano	0	1
Oil - Sesame - large	1	
Tonic - large	0	1
Nuts - almonds	0	2
Cheese - Kraft parmesan	2	4
Wasabi - small dry mix	1	1
Salsa - peach	2	3
Syrup - pancake	0	1
Coffee drink mix	0	3
Pancake syrup	1	1

Our Provisioning List: Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

Category	Products	Specific Item	Quantities		
Non Food Items	Paper Products	Paper Towels	18 Rolls	Sams	
		Toilet Paper	48 rolls	Sams	
	Misc Kitchen products	Batteries		Commercial	
		Trash Bags	1 large box - sams		
		Butane Lighter	2		
	Pharmacy	Stugeron	5	Sams	
	Misc	Tennis Balls		Commercial	
	Cleaning Supplies	Vinegar	Vinegar	2 Large	
			Bucket	4 small bottles	
			Joy	2 small bottles	
			Laundry Detergent	1 bottle	
			Antibacterial Soap	1 large, 1 small	
			Airfreshener		
			windex or 409 surfase cleaner	1	
			Bucket	1	Commercial
	Bottle Brush	1			
	Meat/Eggs	Canned Meat	Canned Chorizo	2	
Spam			3		
Mexican Turkey			7		
Shrimp			3		
Oysters			4		
Clams			2 large		
Salmon			2 large		
Crab			2		
Dried Meat		Prosciutto	5 large		
Fresh Meat		Steaks	3	Sams	
		Ground Beef	2 large sams packs	Sams	
		Lunch Meat (Turkey)	2 packs: 1 ham, 1 turkey	Sams	
		Roasted Chicken	2	Sams	
Eggs	Fresh, unwashed	5 dozen	Market		
Prepared/ packaged Meals	Canned	Canned Ravioli	7		
	Frozen/Refrigerated	Fresh Pasta	4 large packets	Sams	
Fresh Pasta Sauce		2 tomato, 1 pesto	Sams		
Vegetables	Canned	Hearts of Palm	7		
		Water Chestnuts	10		

		Whole Tomatos	1	
		Stewed Tomatoes	7	
		Tomato Sauce	4 small	
		Tomato Paste	4 large	
		Chiles	2	
		Corn	16 small	
		Artichoke Hearts	8	
		Peas & Carrots	4 small	
	<i>Fresh</i>	Broccoli	1 head	Market
		Potatoes	30	Market
		Onions	10 lbs ~ 5 kilos	Market
		Garlic	12 heads	Market
		Carrots	3 lbs ~ 2 kilos	Market
		Red Peppers	10	Market
		Green Peppers	10	Market
		Lettuce	3 heads	Market
		Tomatoes	4	Market
		Cabbage	6 heads	Market
		Ginger	6 roots	Market
		Cilantro	bunch	Market
		Basil	bunch	Market
		Cucumber	8	Market
		Zucchini	8	Market
		Jicama	2 dozen	Market
		<hr/>		
Fruits	<i>Canned</i>	Fruit Cocktail	4	
		Apple/sauce	20 small cups	
		Pineapple	8 large sliced, 7 crushed own juice	
		Blackberries	3	
		Pears	10	
		Mangos	2 large	
	<i>Fresh</i>	Grapefruit	10	Market
		Lemons/Limes	2 dozen	Market
		Melon	4 cantalope	Market
		Oranges	2 dozen	Market
		Apples	3 dozen	Market
		Mangos	6	Market
		Pears	3	Market
		Plums	3	Market
	<i>Dried</i>	Cherries		
		Raisens		
Dry Goods	<i>Cereals</i>	Breakfast Cereals	5 bags	Sams
		Instant Oatmeal		
		granola/cereal bars	8 boxes	
	<i>Flour</i>	White		
		Whole wheat		
	<i>Breads</i>	Muffins	1 6 pack	Sams
		Bread	2 loaves	Sams
		Tortillas	2 large packs	Sams

	<i>Baking Supplies</i>	Granulated Sugar	3 bags	
		Brown Sugar	2 bags	Commercial
	<i>Rice</i>	White rice	4 bags	Commercial
	<i>Pasta</i>	Lasagna	2 boxes	
		Angel Hair/Linquinni	2 angle hair	
		Random shapes	1 bow tie, 1 penne	
		Macaroni	1 large - sams	
	Snacks			
	<i>Cookies</i>	Butter Cookies	3 tins	
		Milanos		
		Pecan cookies	2 boxes	
		Peanut Butter Cookie Mix		
	<i>Desert</i>	Jello - assorted	13	
		Brownie Mix	4	
	<i>Crackers</i>	Saltines		
		Ritz	1 large	
		Wheat Thins	3	
		Graham Crackers	1	
	<i>Candy</i>	Bakers Chocolate	4	
		M&Ms	1	
		hard candy	2 large boxes	
	<i>Nuts</i>	Cashews	1 large jar	
		japones	6	
		almonds	4	
	<i>Chips</i>	Pringles	2	
		Chips	2	
	Beverages			
	<i>Pop</i>	Ginger ale	12 cans	Paradise Village
		Coke	6 cans	Paradise Village
		Diet Coke	6 cans	Paradise Village
		Manzana	6 cans	
		Tonic	3 bottles	Paradise Village
	<i>Drink Mix</i>	Coffee/Moka mix	5	
	<i>Juice</i>	Long Life Juice	26 Boxes	
	<i>Alcohol</i>	Beer	1 6-pack bottles	
		Rum	1	
	Dairy			
	<i>Milk</i>	Long Life Milk	12	

	small boxes milk	10	
<i>Butter</i>	NZ butter	10	
	Sams Butter	4	
<i>Cheese</i>	Kraft grated parmesan	4	
	Philly Cream Cheese	4	
	Ricotta	3	
	Jack	1	
	Mozerella	1	
<i>Yogurt</i>	Assorted Flavors	2 large	
condiments	<i>Oils</i>		
	<i>Misc</i>		
	Vinegar	4 - white	
	pina jam	1	
	Mole	6	
	Bacos	5	
	Soy Sauce	2	
	Syrup	2	
	Salad Dressing	Thousand Island	3
		Cesar	1
		roquefort	1
		Ranch	1