

South Pacific Cruise Ralph & Marilyn Fidler

My wife, Marilyn, and I started our 53-day cruise to the South Pacific in Seattle aboard the Holland America ship, the Amsterdam, a 1450 passenger vessel. We made our arrangements for this cruise through a travel agent in Seattle called "Travel With Alan" at a fare less than the price offered elsewhere, and even included our airfare back to Seattle. We have traveled with this agent in the past and always find his fare to be less than any other and they have always made our journey easy by taking care of problems that may arise.

Our first stop was in Vancouver, B.C. where we spent our day touring Stanley Park on foot and observing the scenic beauty the park has to offer, such as the city of Vancouver, beautiful shorelines, the Lions gate bridge, and many sailing and other water vessels.

From Vancouver, we cruised to Catalina Island where we spent an enjoyable day touring the town and stopping in a funky bar for an afternoon delight and fun time. We had been there before and golf carted around the island on 2 other occasions, a lot of fun and adventure.

After Catalina, we left for San Diego where we spent the day walking the city and spending time with our granddaughter. Our next destination was a trip across the Pacific to the Hawaiian Islands with stops in Oahu, Maui, Kauai, and the big island, Hawaii, with stops at Kona and Hilo. On the journey across the Pacific we had instructions on how to play the ukulele, so while in Lahaina, Maui, several of us purchased ukuleles at a reduced price so that we could practice on the rest of our journey. Our group played and sang before the passengers several times with the instructor thankfully having the louder sounding ukulele, drowning some of us out that were making mistakes. I found myself getting up between 3:30 and 5 each morning and going on a 3-mile walk around the deck and then meeting up with a few new friends from the ukulele class and playing a note or 2 and then sharing stories. Our group grew to about 10 people each day.

Our next stop before crossing the equator was at quaint Fanning Island, where the people sleep in open huts on a raised mat platform and live a very basic life. The children love to see the cruise ship arrive each year and know only a few English words. Memories of children hula dancing at about 3 years old, dancing in a classroom to the delight of many of us, and climbing in a tree, smiling and asking us our names and posing for a picture with us for \$1.00. We left the ship with about 30 \$1.00 bills and came back with nothing, having disbursed them among the children and buying a \$5.00 souvenir. I find it fascinating to observe people so happy living with basically no possessions.

We proceeded across the equator and the international dateline to the islands of the South Pacific, waiting to celebrate the King Neptune crossing celebration until our return to San Diego. We would visit the islands of American Samoa; Samoa; 4 stops on Fiji; 2 stops on Tonga; Cook Island; and 9 stops in French Polynesia before heading back to San Diego for our flight home.

All the islands offered the clearest of water and plenty of snorkel opportunities for fish viewing. One of our favorite stops was Rarotonga on the Cook Islands where we took an excursion and we went out in the ocean to an area where we were swimming with the stingrays and white sharks. The fish viewing was the greatest I have seen. We were also cleansed with white sand mud that smelled like sulfur, and a stop at a small island for snacks and fun. Marilyn and I spent a great deal of time walking on each island in humid warm conditions. This helped us in maintaining our weight despite eating too much.

Each evening we were treated to fabulous entertainment including comedians, singers, magicians, dancers, illusionists, and renowned musicians. The days were filled with how-to-workshops, guest lecturers, entertainment, movies, meeting new friends, and eating food.