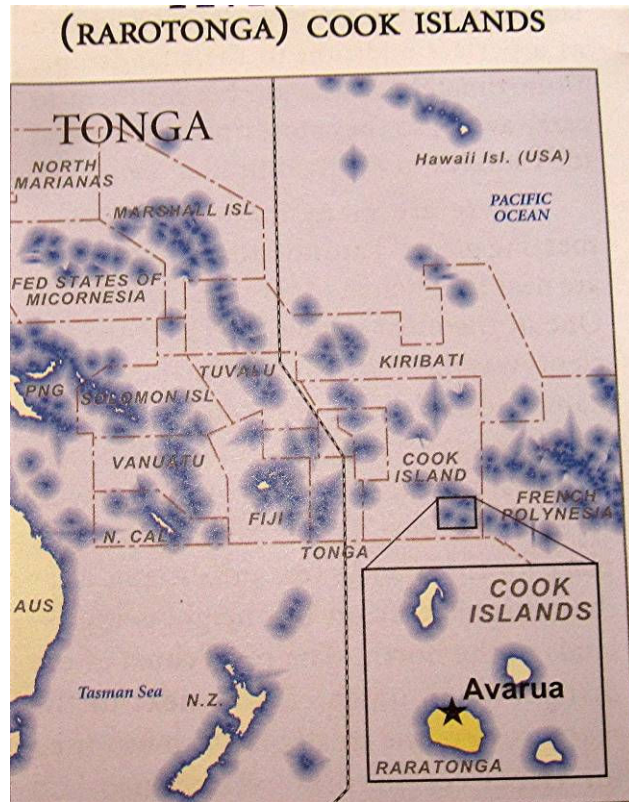
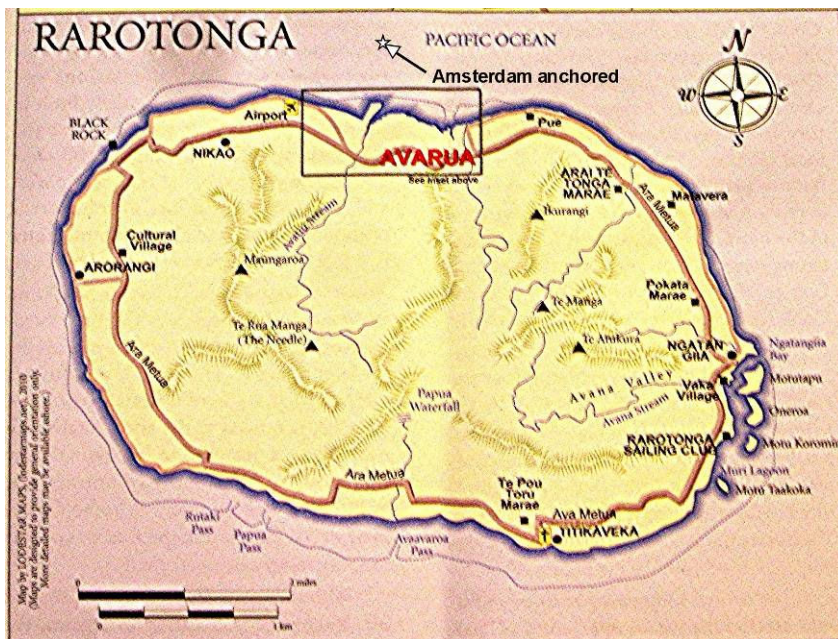


**Day 20–Rarotonga, the Cook Islands – The Streets of Avarua - 15 Oct 09:** The day started with sunshine, a moderate swell in the sea and comfortable shirtsleeve temperature. We were approaching the town of Avarua on the island of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands archipelago. The map on the right shows where the Cook Islands and Rarotonga are located among the South Sea Islands.



About 7am the Amsterdam dropped anchor in the wide open harbor of Avarua about 1 mile off the north coast of Rarotonga Island, as shown on the map below. As per the usual routine we made a quick tour around the open

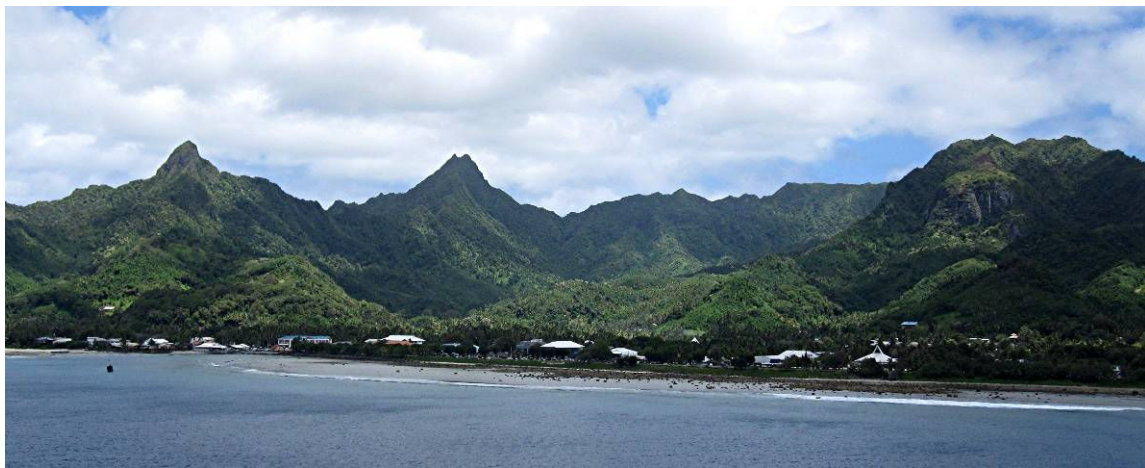


vista provided on Deck 9 to get an overall view of the scenery along the local shoreline.

Looking up at the flags being flown by the Amsterdam we got the clue that Rarotonga has ties to New Zealand because the New Zealand flag with four stars of the Southern Cross was flying from the ship's halyard.



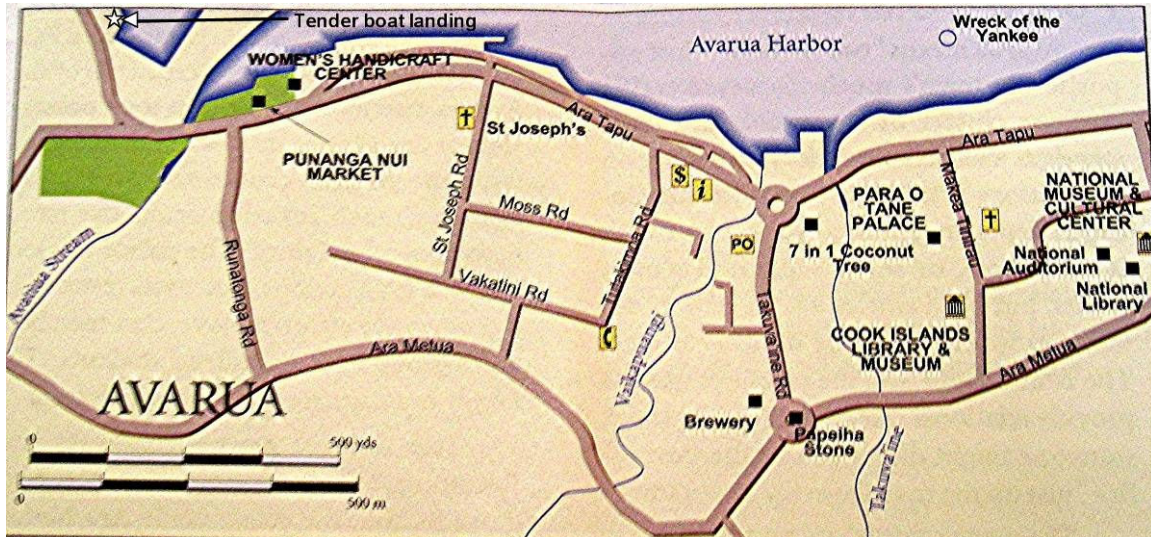
Gazing at this volcanic island from the Amsterdam the beauty we had been promised was everywhere, as shown in the following pictures.



We had breakfast and then proceeded to the gangway where Captain Fred Eversen, shown on the right, was wishing everyone a good visit in Rarotonga. We climbed aboard one of the 4 tender boats that were operating. The large ocean swell rolling past the Amsterdam caused the tender boats to rise and fall 5 feet or more when they were along side at the passenger loading platform. The stewards were very skilled and helpful in getting all of us old folks loaded without injury. A sudden shift caused Barbara to be pitched into the tender boat but she caught herself before falling down. The unprotected anchorage of Avarua makes actually getting ashore a crap shoot for passengers on large cruise ships visiting Rarotonga. We heard of cruise ship experiences where the arrival at Rarotonga coincided with ocean swells so large that it was not possible to load tender boats and send passengers ashore. In that case the passengers just take souvenir pictures from the deck and then the ship moves on. The swells were significant today but fortunately not large enough to shut down tender operations.



The tender boat let us off at the landing which was at the west end of Avarua as shown on the map below.



The scene around the Tender Boat Landing was much like that in the rest of the South Sea Islands that we have visited. It was clean and neat with plenty of souvenir vendor stalls which immediately attracted the passengers getting off the tenders. At a booth

selling black pearls there was a clerk who was eager to give us a crash course about the Island of Rarotonga. Here are some tidbits. The Cook Islands are an independent country consisting of 15 islands with an elected parliament that meets in Avarua on Rarotonga. The Cook Islands have worked out a deal with New Zealand, about 2000 miles to the southwest. Although the Cook Islands are an independent nation the Cook Island people are considered New Zealand citizens when traveling abroad and they carry New Zealand passports.



Consistent with this close tie to New Zealand, the official currency of the Cook Islands is the New Zealand dollar. The price of goods for tourists may be a little less here than in French Polynesia, which we just left, because French Polynesia employs a sales tax with little or no income tax while in the Cook Islands there is an income tax but no sales tax. Our friendly and informative clerk also mentioned that there is a single 20 mile road that encircles the island as shown above in the map of the entire island. It takes less than an hour to drive around the island. One downside compared with French Polynesia is that here we would have to be extra watchful for the vehicle traffic which, like Australia and New Zealand, travels on the left side of the road.

We continued on to browse the souvenir booths which were well stocked. Even Orlin got into the mood and bought a tropical shirt off of one of the racks.

Part of the fun of cruising is that the experiences of the trip can be shared with



friends you have bonded with over the years. Today we met up with Dick and Ann, shown on the left, whom we have known for several years both from Cruise Critic contacts and as neighbors on prior cruises. Like us, they were busy sampling the local shopping opportunities before walking into town.

The temperature and humidity level was comfortable today and it was perfectly enjoyable as we strolled along Ara Tapu Road into Avarua. The following are some scenes we encountered along the way.

Many Amsterdam passengers took the public bus transportation which could take you around the island in about an hour. After talking to some people who had made the trip we opted to just keep walking around Avarua.



The Cook Islands Navy, represented by this patrol boat on the left, was tied up at the pier. The Amsterdam can be seen in the distance.

Barbara was attracted to some pretty fans that were woven from some natural fiber and attached to a shell

covered with polished mother of pearl. She found a nice selection at this little booth and made a purchase. Barbara Haenni, the port tour guide on the Amsterdam, had mentioned that these fans were a unique product of Rarortonga. The sales ladies were very friendly and posed with Barbara displaying her new purchase.



Barbara was so proud of this new acquisition that we had to take another picture of it later after getting back to the ship, as shown on the right.

It was at this shop that we met Doug and Jean who had already explored the downtown area of Avarua and had the good news that an ATM machine was not too much further down the street. Doug and Jean are good friends and practically neighbors back home in East Tennessee. They made a jaunty pair today with Jean sporting her dainty parasol.



We found the ATM machine at the WestPac Bank. Using our trusty ATM card Orlin was able to quickly replenish our supply of New Zealand Dollars (NZD).



We had noticed that there were many more motor cycles and motor scooters in use in Rarotonga than we had seen while in the islands of French Polynesia. This observation

of more energy efficient vehicles reminded us of our ongoing interest in the price of gasoline at the places we visit on the cruise. We stopped at a service station along the road to check out the gas price situation.

This Pandanus Gasoline service station, shown on the right, was appropriately named in view of the pandanus tree leaves used for the roof. The roof also supported a solar heated water tank indicating the owner's interest in energy conservation.



The price of unleaded gasoline was \$2.33 NZD per liter, as shown in the picture of the gas pump on the left. At the current exchange rate of \$1.26 NZD per \$1 USD and about 4 liters per gallon that works out to \$7.40 USD per gallon. This gas price is not significantly different from what we found in French Polynesia so the increased motor cycle population, like those parked at the service station above, is probably the result of some different cultural or economic pressure. Incidentally, from the small size of the last sale on this gas pump (1.72 liters) it would appear that the gas went into a motor cycle or scooter.



Since we had been reminded of the subject of the pandanus tree leaves and their use in the authentic South Sea Island roof covering it was time to check out some of the local roofs along the main street of Avarua.

We found that some of the roofs were using the pandanus leaf but, like all natural fibers, after a few years they start to show wear and tear of the elements, like this roof shown on the right.



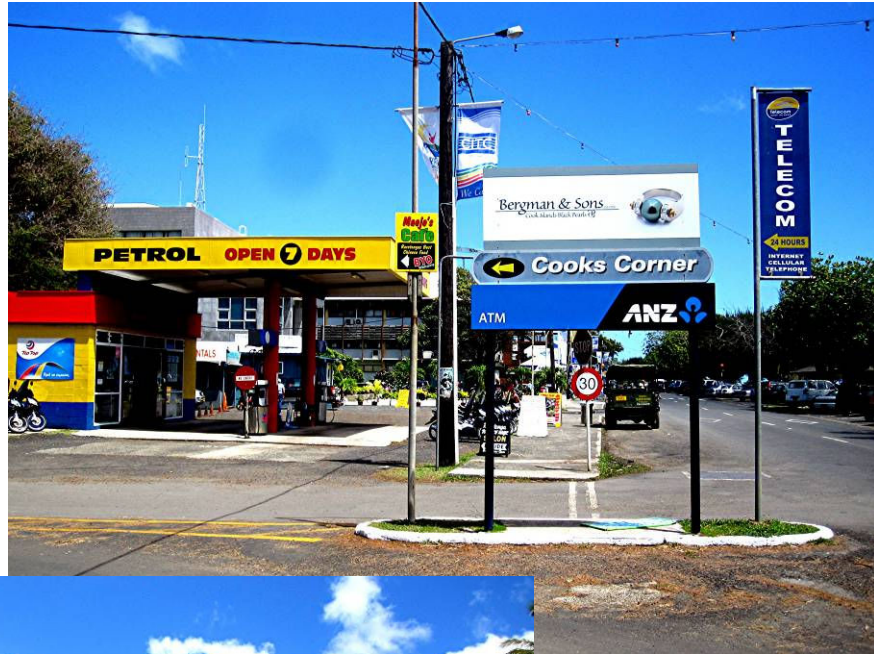
Some buildings used an attractive leaf with a much finer texture than the pandanus. We didn't have enough time to check out the economics of this leaf relative to the pandanus but from the appearance standpoint it got high marks.

Of course, there were numerous examples of alternative roofs. Here on the right, to Orlin's dismay, the owners had succumbed to the forces of economics and maintenance issues leading to the installation of the dreaded plastic artificial leaf.





We continued down the main street of Avarua past a major intersection called Cooks Corner.



Nearby was a broad open field area with a magnificent view of the volcanic peaks that border the town to the south.

Along the way we spotted Barbara Haenni, our Amsterdam tour guide, sampling the local cuisine. No doubt

this was research for her next talk describing the attractions of Rarotonga. She's a very friendly person so we stopped and chatted with her about how much we were enjoying the day.



At this point we turned around and started to retrace our steps back toward the tender boat landing.

We ran across several examples of the beautiful flowers we had seen along the way as shown below.



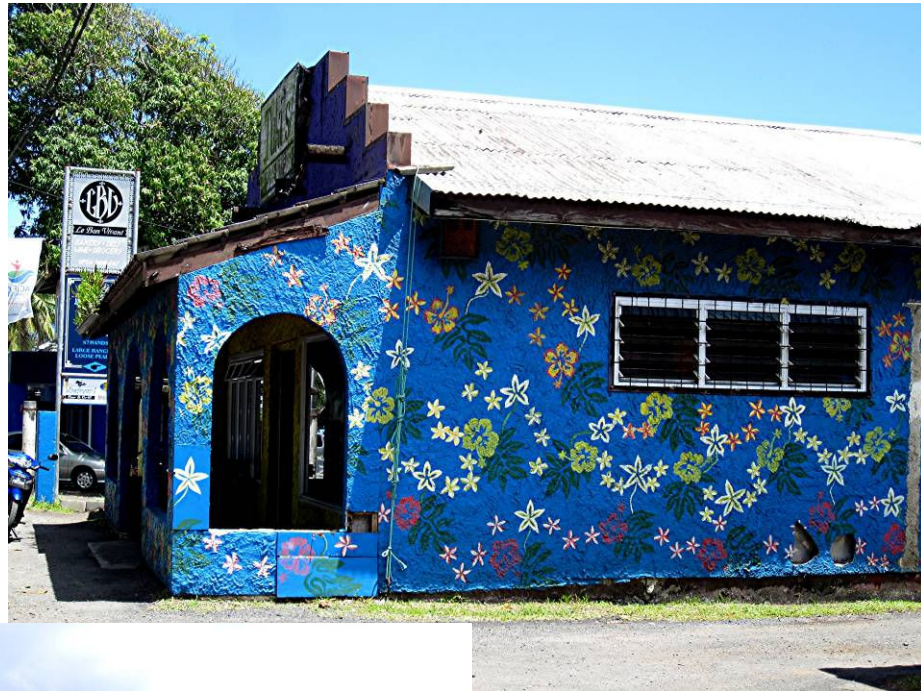
These flowers shown on the left were on a palm tree. They were not very colorful but for us they were both unusual and pretty.

In addition to the flowers, a fruit and vegetable stand along the road added to the color that met our eyes.



We were also fascinated by all the colorful houses along the street.

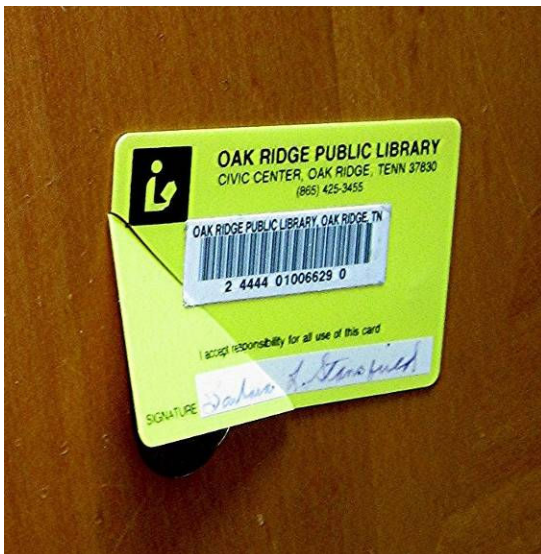
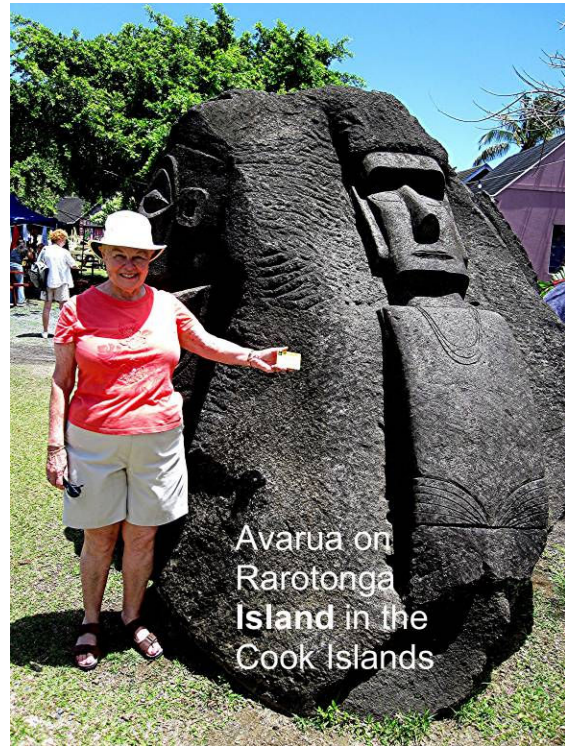
The people of Rarotonga are not hesitant to use vivid colors and designs on their homes and business establishments. Here are some examples.





The local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was represented along with other businesses along the main street, as shown on the left.

We had been searching for a public sign that prominently displayed the name of Avarua and Rarotonga Island. We needed this for the obligatory picture showing Barbara's library card visiting a new place. Alas, we finally gave up on the search for a sign and settled for this Tiki-like sculpture on the right that we thought was a good representation of this Cook Islands visit of the library card.



As Barbara was putting her card back in the holder she heard an ominous cracking sound. It turned out the poor card had suffered travel fatigue and fractured across one corner, as shown on the left.

Fortunately, once back in our stateroom, it was possible to perform some emergency first aid with clear duct tape to repair our faithful travel companion.

Before reaching the tender boats for return to the Amsterdam there was one last shop that got our attention with a beautiful display of quilts. The quilting artist had managed to create some extremely attractive designs in the quilts. For our quilting friend, Jan, some of artwork on display is shown on the right.



It was still early afternoon but we decided to return to the Amsterdam to avoid the rush as the 5pm sail-away time approached.

We came away from this visit with much the same impression we got when visiting islands in French Polynesia. The cities and people are not wealthy but they appear to be reasonably prosperous and happy with their circumstances. The weather is tropical with cities and countryside clean and comfortable for tourists to visit. So far, it has been a very enjoyable tour through the South Pacific.

The ship got underway about 5pm bound for Pago Pago in American Samoa. Later in the evening we went down and joined our tablemates for dinner.

The menu tonight had a couple items to bring joy to a foodie's heart (and stomach). Karen's dish was called Salmon Wellington, with a pastry covering of the salmon fillet, as shown in this photo on the right.



Another dish was Sweet and Sour Chicken which was Barbara's special delight, as shown on the left.

After dinner the entertainment tonight was provided by the comedian, Jeff Nease.

He had a funny act but the best part came at the end when he went into the audience and engaged in direct interaction. After some bantering with several people he focused on our table mate, Karen who was seated near the front. He asked her to join him on stage and after some hesitation she threw caution to the wind and made her entry into the entertainment business. She ended up acting as a credible partner for a little stunt he carried out on stage. We were seated too far back in the audience to get a good picture with our camera but our photographic record of Karen's debut is on the right.



This was a good way to end an enjoyable day. Tomorrow will be a day at sea while we make our way to American Samoa. While parts of Samoa have been damaged by the recent tsunami we were told that the places we will visit have not been significantly affected.