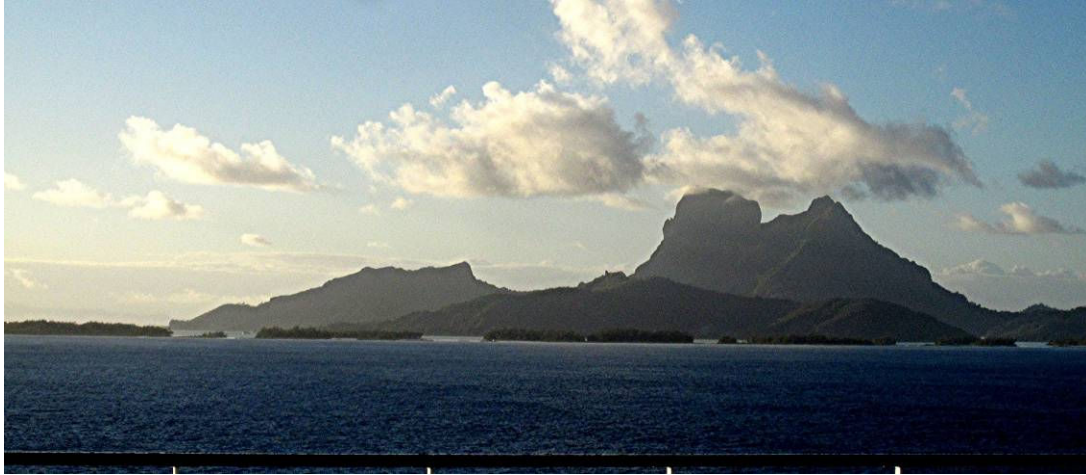


Day 16 – Bora Bora, French Polynesia – Vaitape - Black Pearl Farm – 11 Oct 09:

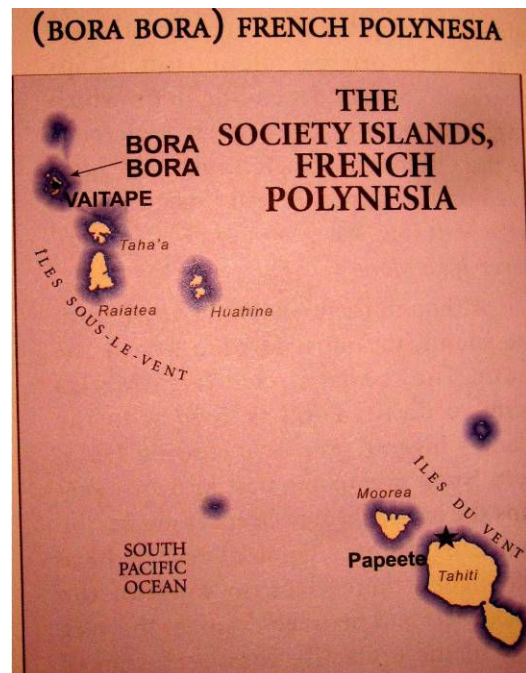
The day started for us about 7am as the Amsterdam approached Bora Bora. We took a picture of the iconic profile of the island with Mount Otemanu near the center.



The island of Bora Bora is part of the Society Islands Group within the archipelago of French Polynesia. It is located about 100 miles northwest of Moorea Island where we visited yesterday. Of the islands we have visited this one has the most distinctive outer reef. Many luxury resort hotels along with the International Airport have been located on portions of the outer reef.

Novelist James Michener loved and wrote about this island dominated by the towering (2,385 foot high) Mt. Otemanu. The island is the remains of a seven million year old volcano. Alternately, the ancient Polynesians believed the God Ta'aroa created the island with a sweep of his hand.

By 8am we had anchored in the harbor near the main town of Vaitape and the tender boats were taking passengers ashore. The location of Bora Bora in French Polynesia and details of the island's sights of interest are shown in the maps below.





Here are a couple photographs from around the anchorage that we took from the Amsterdam. We were very close to the Bora Bora Lagoon Resort that was built on the island of Toopua in the lagoon. It has individual rooms located out over the lagoon, as shown in the picture on the right.



Turning toward the main island nearly the whole town of Viatape including Mount Otemanu could be captured in one photograph as shown below.



The Tourist Center is located at the pier near the center of the photo.

The Amsterdam had scheduled an overnight stay in Bora Bora so that two full days of sight seeing were possible. The passengers with plans for snorkeling and checking out the marine life on the coral reef were really looking forward to this port. However, we didn't have any tours or special events scheduled in Bora Bora so we had a leisurely breakfast and about 9am we caught a tender boat and went ashore.

The boat ride was only a few minutes long. We soon got off near the Tourist Center Building at the pier used by tenders for the resort hotels and cruise ships. We were pleased to see that “The Dogs of Bora Bora” shown on the right were setting the pace for our leisurely day on the island.



We didn't have to look far for a nice Bora Bora sign to photograph with Barbara's library card.

A company called the Black Pearl Farm had a booth at the pier and they were offering free rides out to the pearl farm where tours were given. This seemed to fit into our unplanned agenda so we met Steve and climbed aboard his chariot. We traveled south out of Viatape along Popai Bay. The scenery on both sides of the road was the idyllic tropical variety with tall palm trees backed by the bay on one side and steep jungled hillsides on the other. We passed by Bloody Mary's which is the famous Bora Bora nightspot capitalizing on the name taken from the play and film story of "South Pacific".



After a most pleasant 3 mile ride in the back of the open jeep we arrived at the Pearl Farm.



As soon as Steve dropped us off we were met by a very pleasant lady named Hikari. She was our tour guide for the Pearl Farm and started off by offering to take our picture with Bora Bora Lagoon in the background.



She then took us in to a building that had been set up to demonstrate how pearls are grown. She explained how oyster larvae are first captured from the open water of a lagoon and then nurtured through the various stages of oyster life. A small piece of shell is implanted into the oysters at about 1 year of age to form the nucleus for a pearl. The individual oysters are then monitored through the years to see how the pearl is developing. The pearl is usually harvested before 7 years of age because the longer it is in the oyster the higher the probability it will become misshapen. However, the size of the pearl increases with each year so there is a tradeoff on when the pearl is harvested. Here is a photo of Hikari, on the left. Shown below is her untrained assistant doing her best.



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Hikari actually had an assistant who showed how to clean marine growth off the oyster shell from time to time to keep the oyster healthy.

He also showed how the oyster is gently pried open so that the progress of pearl growth can be checked.



At the end of the oyster farming demonstration we were ushered into the sales room and shown pearl jewelry with prices ranging from that of a real nice house down to a typical airline ticket. It was tempting but we have recently instituted a “Just

say No!” policy on luxury items and we were able to stand firm. In spite of not buying any pearls the sales person was courteous and there were no high pressure tactics. In fact, Hikari called Steve to come back and pick us up and while we waited they offered us cool water to drink. Steve showed up in a few minutes and took us back to the Visitor’s Center in Vaitape.

We had taken the “Round the Island” type tour a couple years ago and in view of the hot and rather humid conditions we didn’t want to do it again. We spent a few hours



wandering along the main street of Vaitape and checking out the souvenir shops. We walked past the Catholic Church and got this photo on the right.



A protestant church is nearby so we also took the photo on the left for balance.

Jewelry shops prominently featuring black Tahitian pearls were numerous and they looked more prosperous than the other businesses along the main street. We stopped at the one shown on the right and Barbara had to be reminded of the “Just say NO” policy again.



Suddenly some pigs showed up wandering along the street and up an alley. They provided a nice distraction from the more sophisticated thoughts of jewelry and we moved on.

We had been looking for a place to use our notebook computer for Internet connection when we come ashore. There were none of the familiar coffee shop Internet set-ups like you might find in the US. However, there was a Deli type restaurant that offered a 45 minute Internet connection for \$13 USD. That works out to \$0.29 USD per minute which is cheaper than the \$0.35 rate we are getting on the Amsterdam. However, it didn't seem worth the hassle of bringing the notebook over for an Internet session.

We worked our way back to the Tourist Center and the wide array of souvenir shops that were there. Finally we found some pearls and mother-of-pearl costume jewelry that fit the bill for our souvenir needs. After making a few purchases we caught the Amsterdam's tender boat and returned to the ship.

As the day had progressed, Barbara had been feeling the effects of an oncoming head cold. Many of our fellow passengers on the Amsterdam have been suffering this affliction for the last several days and it was probably inevitable that we would pick it up. We retreated to the air conditioned comfort of the Amsterdam but the cold symptoms grew worse toward evening. We decided to have room service bring the evening meal to our room. We had never used room service in the past so this was a new experience. When the smartly dressed steward brought our meals we had to take a picture of him and our inaugural room service dinner.



The ship's entertainment tonight was a big screen remake of the 1958 epic movie "South Pacific" which was shown in the Queens Lounge.

However, Barbara was not feeling like going to the movies and by this time Orlin was starting to feel a little marginal so we just turned in early and hoped that tomorrow we would both be in better shape for our second day in Bora Bora.