

Breezy Bora Bora comings, goings

By Hillary Hauser

A bright pareu with a school of gray dolphins painted across its field of blue moved in the breeze by the road, and the sight of it stopped me dead in my tracks. I parked my Jeep underneath a nearby palm tree and went up for a closer look.

The cloth was for sale, from a little shop called Alain and Linda's Boutique, near the Hotel Bora Bora. The woman who greeted me in breezy French was Linda, and she listened to my admiring remarks about the dolphins. She said everyone who had stopped that day had thought the figures on the pareu were sharks.

Standing nearby, a white-haired Italian named Lorenzo heard us talk.

"You know," he said, "it's just like people either seeing things half full or half empty. The optimists see them as dolphins, the pessimists see them as sharks."

After Lorenzo left on his bicycle, I asked Linda about him.

"Oh, he played Jesus in 'Ben Hur,'" she answered. "Imagine! What do you play after that — God?"

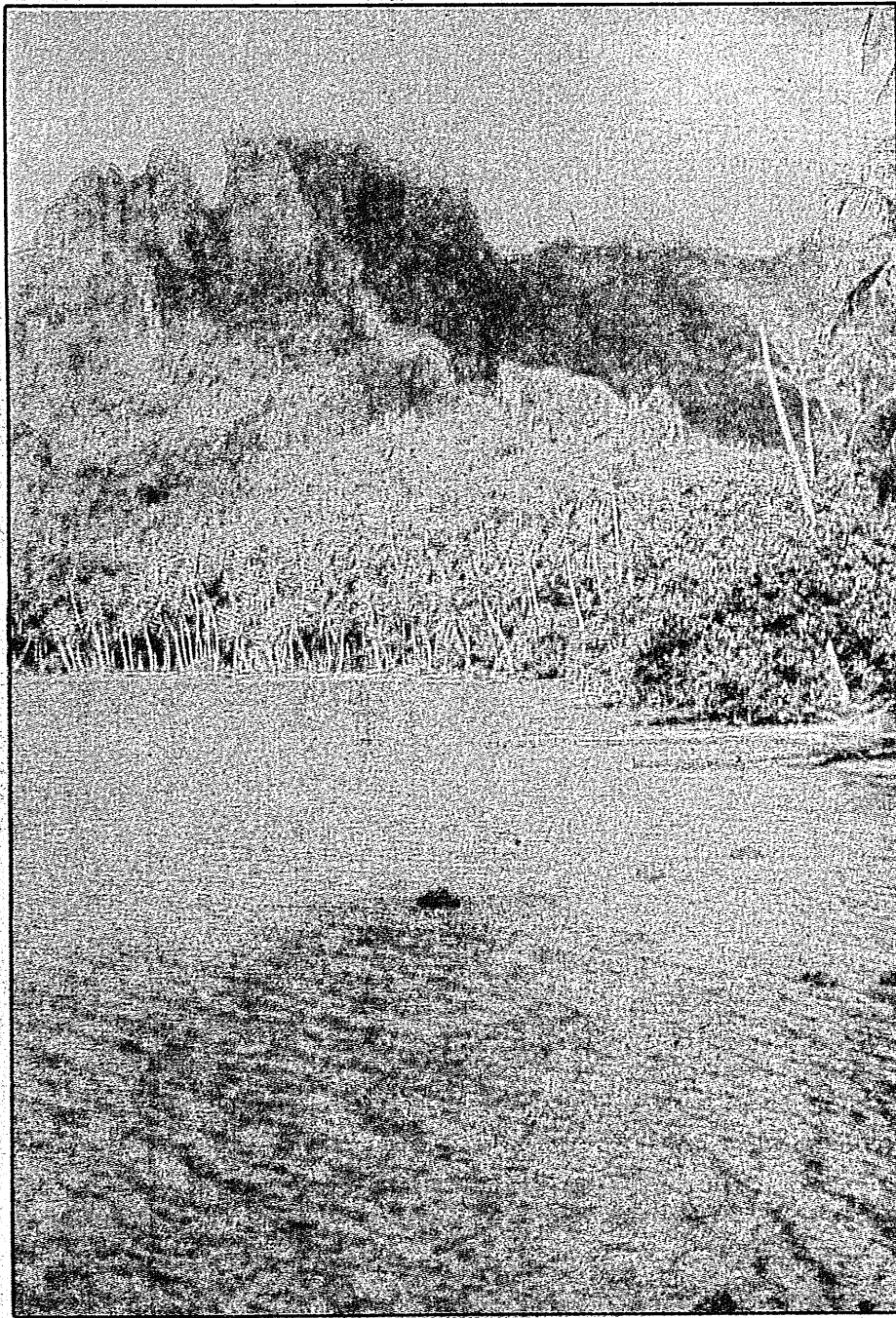
No one forgets their first view of Bora Bora. Even if you've traveled all night and would just as soon sleep your whole arrival off in a hammock somewhere, you can't help but be overwhelmed by the beauty of this tropical, South Pacific otherworld.

From the tiny airport on an outer atoll, or motu, passengers and luggage are jumbled into a putt-putt boat that proceeds past Motu Manini, Tevairoa and out across Faanui Bay toward the main village of Viatape. It is a ride into a mythical Bali Hai.

Bora Bora, with its towering volcanic monuments of Mount O'Temanu and Mount Pahia, is perched like a magnificent emerald in a field of water so ethereally turquoise the only reason for it, one figures, is that an errant painter in a frenzy has dumped all his blues and greens into the sea.

Driving the 32-kilometer loop of the island, I proceeded from Alain and Linda's Boutique, past the Hotel Bora Bora and around Matira Point. Across the blue lagoon, enormous breakers smashed on a barrier reef far out to sea.

It is difficult to imagine that the tranquility on the island is created because millions upon millions of



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Mounts O'Temanu and Pahia poke the sky in a vista from the hotel's over-the-water bungalow.

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Bora Bora

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slow-growing coral animals have spun tiny calcium cocoons to make up the protective reefs.

The eastern side of Bora Bora is primitive and relatively untouched. A lot of Bora Bora is like that — except for the village of Viatape, which is on the western side and which serves as the business center of the island. From my Jeep, I could see no development at all, except for the remnants of abandoned tin shacks that had not withstood hurricane-force winds.

Somehow, an abandoned tin shack seems out of place in paradise. However, Bora Bora is not a movie set, but a place where a few thousand inhabitants go about their livelihoods — and these livelihoods are often quite meager.

Approaching Anau on the eastern side of the island, the towering mounts of O'Temanu and Pahia loomed large and close. O'Temanu, at 2,300 feet, and Pahia, at 1,980 feet, are soaring volcanic wonders that pierce the soft tropical clouds with their distinctive sharp crags — one sharp and jagged, the other cut off like a thick, tilted mesa.

The road was now deserted and bumpy. As I looked to the sea, I was surprised to see so much deserted beach that had escaped development — an unusual sight for any Californian. The beaches, however, are not the white sand

kind you see in travel advertisements as a place to get lost with your lover. They are jungly and unstable.

For many people, the most jungly, unstable and romantic memories of Bora Bora have emanated from Bloody Mary's — a thatched restaurant/hang-out on the south side of Pofai Bay, with its dirt floor, open barbecue in the middle of the room and wooden logs standing on end in case you want to sit down. George, the owner everyone called "Baron," had been an American actor working on the film, "Mutiny on the Bounty," but when the filming was over he jumped ship to stay on Bora Bora forever.

Bloody Mary's, along with "Mutiny on the Bounty," is etched into Bora Bora history forever.

One afternoon I arranged to go for a scuba dive on the outer reef. The following morning, Noel, a trim Frenchman, met me at the hotel dock, and the two of us motored in his small boat out to a schooner anchored offshore.

The schooner was the Roscop, a 46-foot ketch out of Huahine. To see it moored in the backdrop of Bora Bora was like looking at a proverbial "Adventures in Paradise" scene. We pulled up to the schooner, and two Arizonans, Ed and Scott, transferred themselves and their diving gear into our boat.

We had a nice dive on the outer reef that circles the island. The tropical fish of Bora Bora are as bright and inquisitive as the natives — the yellow, white and blue-

striped angelfishes swam cautiously at a distance, always watching, while the aggressive black, yellow and white butterfly fishes rushed in for handouts. Everywhere else were brightly colored wrasses, which glided along like floating cigars.

Later, when we returned to the Roscop, the Belgian couple who sailed the ketch, Rein and Marie-Louise Mortier, said they would be dropping the Arizonans off on the island the next day — did I want to come out to the boat for a visit?, they asked.

That morning, I sat on the Roscop with the Mortiers, who told me the stories of their lives. Rein showed me his paintings — wild, turbulent scenes like those Van Gogh did in his later, emotionally storm-tossed years. He painted mainly Tahitian scenes, including one particularly fiery one called "Carnival" — all reflections of his view of the ports and people he had seen during his voyages.

Marie-Louise brought out her writings. In one particularly sentimental magazine portraiture of her life, she had painted the tragedy of how she and her first husband had built Roscop to sail the world, but how, when they were harboring in Brisbane, Australia, he had drowned while trying to free the mooring.

"That was the end of my world," Marie-Louise wrote, but then she shipped Roscop back to Belgium on a cargo freighter, returned home, and later met Rein and began again.

One Sunday, I bicycled into Viatape to go to a Catholic church service — and this turned out to be an unforgettable experience. The natives sang a capella chants in Tahitian, answering the priest, who speaks to the congregation in French. The ever-happy children play in the aisles.

"Nos yeux et notre coeur se fixent aujourd'hui sur le Sacrement du Corps et du sang du Christ . . ."

E te raie e te fenua'toa a haere mai tatou e amui . . .

"Comme l'encens ma priere monte vers toi Seigneur, ecoute et prends pietie . . ."

Ietu pane vavahi hia, no te ao api, ei tura ei hanahana, ia haamaitai hia oe . . .

The Tahitian singing seemed to emanate from the heights of Mount O'Temanu, coming down to the sea on the trade winds through the towering palms.

The Tahitian language is in itself a song. One worker at the Hotel Bora Bora came out on the dock one afternoon and taught me the Tahitian farewell song. I still sing it all the time to myself, no matter where I am, whether I'm coming or going.

As I think of it now, it's remained my most wonderful souvenir of Bora Bora.

Farewell for just a while,
We're parting with a smile —
Dreams will keep you near me,
Farewell for just a while.

Aim a ru ru a vau (ai ke tare Tahiti)

Aim a ru ru a vau (ai ke Nuenue ai)

*Aim a ru ru a vau —
Farewell for just a while.*

Hilary Hauser is an author of adventure books and a free-lance writer who lives in Summerland.

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