

The Gambier Islands

Clairette, le 28 juillet 2011 à 01:22

How challenging it is to summarize two months in Paradise in one post, and what's more in English ! We have already written ten or more posts about the Gambier Islands in French and we could write, as some french people say : "Iou arre in Ffrench Polynesia, so iou ave to spik Ffrench" - or in our case to read French. Lucky you, non-French speaking reader, we do not approve such a behaviour and we will therefore offer you to read an English (it might be approximative English from time to time, we don't have any native English speaker available to correct our mistakes !) post about the Gambier Islands.



Schnaps in Paradise

Well, in fact, that's not really Paradise.

First, to go there, you face strong winds and seas that **break your rigging**.

If ever you manage to keep your mast up until there, there are absolutely no ways of having it fixed, except if you are willing to wait a very long time... There are no facilities at all there, but you can order parts from Tahiti... But the tahitian riggers do not reply to your e-mails until you phone them at least twice. But even then, they do not answer properly to your questions, their quotations are awfully high and in fact, you discover quickly - after having lost one week - that it is cheaper and faster to deal directly with the rigging manufacturer, for example with **SeaRig** in New-Zealand. How marvellous it is to discover then efficient people who are willing to help you to fix your boat !

Then, you have to wait for your parts to arrive. You can wait a very long time, if you are not aware that even for a yacht in transit, whose owners are not supposed to pay taxes, the customs make it complicated and ask you to hire a "transitaire" for the customs procedure. Welcome back in French administration, or maybe in a Corsican mafia ?

But finally everything arrives, by boat or by plane, and you can plan a do-it-yourself week, dismounting your shrouds, cutting cables ashore, going back to fit them on the boat, dismounting them because they are a little bit too long, going back ashore to cut them again, etc...



The new rigging

Another reason for not calling this place "Paradise" is that you have to be ready to be poor if you get there. There is absolutely no ATM on shore, and only one shop takes the credit card. The post office can "change" dollars or euros if you buy a stamp or something like that, but the rates are not really interesting... The solution we chose was to make a bank transfer to someone who lived there. But the OPT (Polynesian Post Office, which tries to work like a bank sometimes) diligence carrying our money arrived only 3 weeks later, during which we almost emptied Schnaps' food bilges, being unable to buy eggs, butter, cream, fresh vegetables...

Last but not least, by night, you can face a thunderstorm that changes the anchorage in hell. Gusts about 50 knots coming from nowhere and everywhere, boats dragging very close to others, hurricane-proof roofs flying, a perl farm destroyed... We won't detail too much, but almost all the sailors who were in the anchorage said that this night was their worst sailing experience. It was not ours, ~~as we are heroes~~ as one night like that is still less than 4 weeks with a dancing mast above your heads.

So... Do you still want to know more about the Gambier ?

Well, we assume that if you read this line, the answer is yes. And you are completely right. The Gambier islands are out of the main sailing roads and are forgotten by "normal" tourists. Let's hope that it remains like that.

The islands are lovely : green, mountainous, you can cycle around the main island and discover charming bays, you can hike up to the Mokoto or the Duff, you can also anchor in the *motus* (the small islands of the archipelago), try to catch fish (but ask before to the locals, almost none is eatable !), or even visit a pearl farm and understand how these black spheres are made and why they cost that much...

We did that, as we would have done it on every island. But as we had plenty of time there, and as the locals are absolutely welcoming, we met them. This was our best discovery there... Of course it was easier for us than for the english speaking sailors, because the locals speak *Mangarévien* and French with a nice singing accent, but we were very happy to see that at least two women, Denise and Valérie, on Taravaï (one of the other islands), speak English. Denise learnt English at school, her English is far from being perfect, but she makes herself understood and her kindness and simplicity cross any language barrier. As the locals are the most wonderful part of these islands, we were delighted to see that thanks to Denise, this part could also be available for the English speaking sailors...

How to explain that ? When you arrive on shore, all the people you see say "Bonjour !", smiling, meaning *welcome*, they offer you fruits from their gardens (let them offer, do not pick up without asking !), they discuss with you about everything, as if you were living there with them, they are absolutely charming... They do not try to sell you anything, this is a big difference from the Carribean, they will try to help you if you need anything, they will give, give, give, always more... And you have to change your habits, to enjoy the way they are and to try to find a way to thank them... Giving lessons in the schools, making cakes (only once you get some money to buy butter and eggs !), inviting them to share some typical meals... But you will never reach their goodness.

That's why it was so hard for us to leave : we love the people there. We left because we had fixed the rigging and we had appointments for the following of our trip : we had to leave. But we left thinking of the time we will come back...



The Va'as leaving Rikitea for the evening training

Adresse de cet article :

<http://www.lesbaleinesetlescoquillages.com/2011/07/28/the-gambier-islands/>

1 commentaire(s) :

isa - 2 août 2011 @ 12:33

De loin on dirait des avironneurs en mode repos au large de la bouée du Treho avec des cailloux qui ont poussé dans la nuit

(mais où va mon imagination !!!!!!!)

Superbe !!!! bande de veinards