

# delivering PARADISE

by Christina Turrini



provisions to the outer islands of the Marquesas. The Aranui is the only vessel to touch upon each of the 6 inhabited Marquesas' islands, many of which do not have an airstrip. As a result, the ship's visit to these islands is eagerly anticipated by the locals who are waiting and lined up to receive cargo, as well as welcome guests with flowers, dances and smiles. That is how one feels in these islands as well as on the ship, truly as a guest who is transported back in time. Passengers immediately feel at home as the crew function as a family. The seamen that are aiding you to the whale ships to go to shore will be playing ukuleles and spoons at night in the cozy bar on board in flip flops and panama hats. Some of the simplest, yet best entertainment, I have ever witnessed on a ship!

While the ship is in port and cargo and freight are exchanging, guests are treated to amazing

excursions. All of the excursions are included, and each night there are extensive briefings explaining the ports with escorted options on shore. These range from 10 mile hikes to horseback riding, visiting Paul Gauguin and Jacque Brel's tomb and more. Each port has a visit to a village and a tour of the local "marae" where the local culture is explained in depth.

Watching from the dining room, the crew and cranes operating is both mesmerizing and unbelievable. How can one be dining on delicious, gourmet entrees and delicacies and sipping wine while all of this work and action is taking place just outside the dining room window? This is the experience of the Aranui, which leads me to what I found to be the crowning jewel of this experience. The Polynesian crew, mostly Marquesan, are some of the best people around. There is a magic in these stunning, untouched islands that is shared onboard with the staff and guests.

The cabins are surprisingly spacious and rival that of any of the major cruise lines in comfort. There is a swimming pool onboard as well as wonderful dance classes, lectures and classes -- that is, if you can tear yourself away from the stunning landscape you will be cruising through.

This is an amazing adventure, though I would caution that the Aranui 3 is not for everyone. The



gangway is steep, and the steps are freighter worthy. Transferring from the Aranui to the whale boats taking you ashore is not for the faint of heart. The crew take excellent care of you, and you are always in good hands, arms and limbs at times. They are transferring cargo, boats, animals and helicopters at times so you are in good hands, but you need to know that it is not a typical walk to shore experience. I even witnessed a crewman carrying a woman off in his arms and throwing her cane to the smaller ship. Of course, this adds to the experience, the Marquesan crew know the tides, the current, and the waters intimately; they will grab you and throw you (gently) to the ship and keep you from harm's way.

If you are looking for 5 star hotel services and amenities, the Aranui 3 may not be for you. If you are looking for breathtaking and untouched vistas and bays, unspoiled beaches and an authentic Polynesian cultural experience where smiles are genuine, the Aranui 3 definitely fits the bill. The Aranui 5 is in the works and while the freighter / cruise concept will remain, it will have more luxurious cabins and amenities, so I highly recommend experiencing this once in a lifetime trip while you can. →

If you have any desire to visit French Polynesia and experience the heart of the culture, the Aranui is the way to go. Sailing on the Aranui throughout the Marquesas is a full immersion of the Polynesian spirit. The minute you board the freighter's gangway, you can feel

that this is more than a cruise. It's for good reason that *Men's Journal* named the Aranui "the World's Best Adventure Cruise" in their February 2014 issue.

The Aranui's primary function is as a fully functioning freighter that delivers and transports