

## Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March

At sea all day. We both did sun, swimming (of sorts) and gym (a gentle start for me, Nick getting into it seriously) There are all sorts to fill the day – talks on forthcoming ports and related subjects, watercolour classes, dance tuition . . . all sorts. As far as sun is concerned it's a question of putting factor 50 on our faces and let the rest of our bodies catch up. Of course all the 'round the world-ers' are bronzed, whereas we have white stripes down our sides! Because of the average age, no one seems to care about bulging tums and bums – there are not a lot of 'body-beautifuls' aboard! (unless one goes up to deck 10 at midday when the female crew are on leisure time! Sorry guys, I don't carry my camera all the time) I wish I had a bikini instead of two cossies! Saw a whale, or an extremely overgrown albino dolphin, today, which was great, and yesterday, I forgot to mention, we saw flying fish – the distance they cover is amazing. I was told that sometimes you see birds taking them. It is an absorbing pastime watching them from the bow as the boat, spearing thro' the water, encourages them to take flight!



Tonight we've booked for an Indian buffet instead of the regular dinner – there is an Indian Chef in the kitchen. Talk on our regular dinner table regularly revolves around the dietary needs of a delightful chap, David, who is a strict vegetarian (by choice) and coeliac. That is indeed quite a challenge for the kitchen; there are just so many omelettes and vegetarian curries and pastas one can take. It is made more amusing because he is quite 'chilled' and it's his wife who has to negotiate and fight his corner with the *least* affable of the waiters in the dining room.



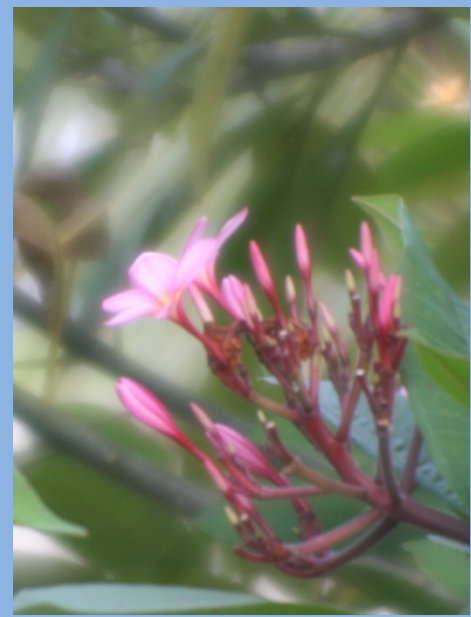
## Tuesday: Port Vila, Vanuatu

We somehow managed to wake early this morning, probably because, last night, we took the option of an early dinner and had an earlier than usual bedtime. It was just after six-thirty when we hit the for'ard viewing deck, and already the island was quite close, the distant hills cloud covered. As we were approaching the entrance to the harbour the pilot came aboard and Black Watch edged her way in and surprisingly came alongside the quay so we didn't have to tender-off as we had anticipated.

Our excursion wasn't till pm, so we each did different things before lunch. I was quite entertained by a man-overboard (with broken arm) exercise, which the crew appeared to take quite seriously, with nurses and medics in attendance. Shame the engine of the small boat that was lowered kept stalling, particularly as the body was face down! The heat was oppressive so I was pleased our tour bus was air-conditioned. Our Vila City highlights tour seemed to me quite fitting for this, the third biggest of the eighty islands making up this country which was once called The New Hebrides, and was under both English and French rule (Nick was less impressed!) First we visited a village where we were entertained by a group of ladies in colourful dress playing instruments (including an impressive single-stringed double bass, shades of the fifties) and singing gospel songs. We were given coconut milk to drink and offered local fruits. Lots of colourful bags, beads and sarongs, were set out on stalls for sale.



We then travelled on to another village where we were greeted by a delightful trio of girls with painted faces in traditional garb, along with one bashful young boy, and were escorted to hear a talk by one of the 10,000 chiefs here, to learn how the small village communities function. We were disappointed that he too, was not dressed in his finery. He told us how the eldest son inherits the title and how the role is one of leader, overseer, peacemaker and his word is law! The chief is, he insisted, not a politician and there **is** an elected government tho' the chief (whose word is law!) tells his village how to vote!! He told us women were respected just as the important spare tyre is an essential for a vehicle! Huh! Our bus guide told us later that in many of the northern islands, the chiefs are chosen according to how many pigs they can kill and present to the present incumbent. Our final journey took us to a viewing point, following which we travelled back to the boat via the low-key town centre. Most of the people of these islands seem to live very simple lives, supporting themselves with the fruits of this rich volcanic island: fish from the sea and fruits from the forest, coconuts providing milk, flesh and oil. Families are lucky if they can afford to send just one child to school and the most



common criminal act is wife beating. Visitors, we were told, were entirely safe walking in the street or forest. Tho' some of the first missionaries were eaten, enough survived to introduce Christianity to the islands, Catholics, Presbyterians, and Seventh Day Adventists accounting for most congregations. How Christianity melds with the traditional way of life, which I guess had its own belief system, I don't know, tho' we do know they are unlikely to eat us anymore! (last tasty 'uman on the menu de dia , 1985!)

This evening we sailed out to the sound of live music on the stern, the sun beginning its descent, and The Black Watch Orchestra, playing us out with, guess what, 'We are Sailing' and 'Beautiful Day'.



It is truly an amazing privilege to be doing this....how lucky we are tho' I think Nick thought the enforced cheeriness and arm waving a tad naff!!

### **Wednesday**

Again, a day with nothing to see but the sea-sky horizon in all directions. But still keeping occupied and content tho' not exactly looking forward to the 9 days at sea, later on this leg of the cruise...

### **Thursday 7.30am, approaching Fiji**

We have just come back inboard after an amazing early morning start. As I went out onto the deck on the port side we had just passed an island and Suva. On the island of Fiji, i lay ahead, but out over the sea there was the full arc of a rainbow. I went up to the very top deck to watch our approach to this very lovely island with its volcanic profile and, surprisingly, entirely tree-clad, (no sandy beaches and palm trees yet!) passing through the channel between shallow reefs.

Exhilarating!

