

Pacific Puddle Jump 2025

Fleet Letter #5

Making Landfall — What to Expect

Although it's possible for arriving yachts to clear in at any of the harbors listed below, the vast majority of cruisers choose to complete their initial clearance in the Marquesas, at either Nuku Hiva or Hiva Oa.

If you've heard veteran Puddle Jumpers talk about making landfall in the Marquesas, you know that it's usually a joyful, uplifting experience. The dramatic volcanic peaks of the larger islands can often be spotted from offshore a day or more before arrival. And during the final hours of approach, it's not unusual to smell the sweet fragrance of tropical flowers wafting in the breeze.

Hiva Oa or Nuku Hiva?

The main argument for clearing in at Hiva Oa is that it lies farther to the east than most of its sister isles, which means your travels from there to other islands within the archipelago will normally be off the wind. Conversely, Nuku Hiva has a much larger main anchorage, Taiohae Bay, and more services, but if you choose to go there first, you'll eventually have to do a stint of upwind sailing in order to visit the other islands in this archipelago.

What about famously beautiful Fatu Hiva, the easternmost isle of the Marquesas? Despite what you may have heard from veteran cruisers or read in older cruising guides, it is now illegal to make your initial

landfall at Fatu Hiva. You can incur substantial fines if you do.

About Nuku Hiva

The broad anchorage of Taiohae Bay is well protected on almost all sides, as it was formed from an ancient volcano's caldera. With plenty of room for 100 boats or more, the bay's mud bottom offers good holding, with depths of roughly 35–50 feet deep.

While most prudent skippers lay offshore until daylight to enter, nighttime entry into the outer bay is possible, especially with substantial moonlight. Most sailors find Taiohae to be a fine refuge in which to rest, recuperate and resupply, despite the common complaint (particularly from monohullers) that it's often a bit rolly.

The administrative center (including the Gendarmerie) is located near the NE corner of the Bay, a three-minute walk from the town quay, where local fishing boats Med-moor behind a concrete sea wall. Adjacent is a small-boat launch ramp, beyond which is a busy dinghy docking area along the quay, that's equipped with two steel ladders. When the harbor is churned up by a strong breeze or ground swell, it can be a bit dicey to scramble ashore here, but normally it's relatively easy — especially if you plan your arrival with a high tide in settled weather. Note: Always tie up with a long dinghy painter to accommodate the swell and allow room for other dinghies.

For most new arrivals, the first stop ashore will probably be at Yacht Services Nuku Hiva, located less than 30 yards (meters) from the dinghy dock. YSNH

Less-Used Clear-In Options

In addition to Marquesas arrivals, every year a small number of cruisers clear in at Rikitea, in the remote Gambier Archipelago.

Meanwhile, some mega-yachts travel directly to Tahiti and clear in at the Port de Papeete.

Other less-used options in the Society Islands are: Afareaitu on Moorea, Uturoa on Raiatea, Fare on Huahine, and Vaitape on Bora Bora.

Surveying the ancient cliffs of Hiva Oa's south coast while ghosting along, soon to make landfall.





California-based 'Rapture' seen a few years ago, smoking along in mid-ocean, en route to the Marquesas.

is run by American expat Kevin Ellis, who arrived here on a sailboat, fell in love with a lovely Polynesian girl named Annabella, and eventually decided to fill a much-needed niche. His shop offers a wide range of services for cruisers. Phone: 689 40 92 07 50

YSNH is an independently operated company, but Kevin and his crew also function as sub-agents for the TahitiCrew yacht agency, located in Papeete. As such, Kevin can assist you with clearing in, obtaining a duty-free fuel certificate (which saves you a 25-40% savings), plus a range of other local services including organizing and turning in paperwork to the local High Commissioner's office in order to complete your Long Stay Visa (Carte de Séjour) process.

Even if you're operating without an agent, you'll probably want to check in with Kevin to learn about local regulations and procedures. He is basically the go-to guy for a wide range of services for which he charges on an à la carte basis. (And no, as we reiterate every year, you cannot get the duty-free fuel certificate in the Marquesas without the help of an agent. In Tahiti you can, but not in the outer archipelagos.)

Be sure to ask Kevin for your official PPJ burgee if you didn't get one from us already at our events in

Mexico and Panama. YSNH used to operate the local VHF net, but with so many boats now using satellite email (Starlink) for virtually all of their communications, we are told that the local VHF net has been abandoned.

At the quayside snack stand be sure to sample the favorite local dish, poisson cru. It's fresh tuna, diced up and marinated in coconut milk – sort of a Marquesan ceviche. It's awesome! And if you're thirsty, try a glass of fresh-squeezed pamplemousse juice (from king-sized local grapefruit).

Within a few minutes' walk from the quay, you'll find a bank with ATM machines, an Air Tahiti ticket office, an excellent tattoo parlor, a pharmacy, a public trash bin, a recycling center, a post office, a (reservations-only) pizza restaurant, at least two pensions, two small hardware stores, a marine store and a fuel station (behind the commercial wharf, on the east side of the entry channel).

After first coming ashore, kissing the ground, and clearing in, you'll probably be most interested in reprovisioning. There are five food stores (magasins), three along the waterfront, and two a short walk uphill. If the word uphill sounds like a deal-breaker, know that most food shops will give you a ride back to the dock if you make substantial purchases. And, as we discovered during the initial COVID lockdown here in 2020, some will actually allow you to email in an order, then they'll deliver it to the dinghy dock the same afternoon. (Generally, cash only.) *****See contact details for these markets at the end of this Fleet Letter.**

Please note also, that new arrivals are requested

Almost every morning fishermen clean and sell their catch on the Tiahoe quay. Fish doesn't get any fresher than that.



to stop at the City Hall and pay a fee of 1500 XPF (about \$US 15) for garbage collection and water access.

About Hiva Oa

Hiva Oa's main anchorage, Tahauku Bay, is well protected, but it can get pretty full during the peak 'arrival' season —May through July— requiring most boats to anchor bow and stern. If the anchorage is too crowded, you can anchor outside the seawall when the weather is mild or moderate. (Nighttime entry to the inner harbor is not recommended.)

A lovely Marquesan woman named Sandra Wul-laert is a great resource here. Like Kevin, she operates independently, and when called upon, as a sub-agent for TahitiCrew. She will also do your laundry, provide you with Wi-Fi, deliver fresh produce to you, and give you a ride to Atuona, the Island's administrative center, where you can clear in at the Gendarmerie.

In this small town you'll also find a bank with an outdoor ATM, a post office, several grocery stores, a couple of restaurants and other services.

Because the Marquesas Islands are located so close to the equator, scientists tell us it is virtually impossible for them to experience hurricane-force storms, which is why some cruisers choose to leave their boats on the hook and unattended in Taiohae



Fatu Hiva is renowned for its unspoiled beauty and serenity. But you cannot clear in there.

Bay or on the hard at Hiva Oa's boatyard, Maintenance Marqueses Service, located adjacent to Tahauku anchorage. Phone 689 87 20 99 49.

Access to PredictWind's Recent PPJ Webinar

If you want to learn more about PredictWind's cutting-edge weather forecasting and route-planning capabilities, but you were unable to attend the com-

pany's recent Zoom webinar, you'll be happy to learn that presenter Nick Olson recorded the entire program, and it's available at the link below.

Olson explains: "This webinar for PPJ participants covers using PredictWind Departure Planning and Weather Routing Tools. The main focus is on setting up Polars and using the Weather routing tool. There is a small section on the Offshore App."

Use this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALDgL6NIg9k>

Parlez-vous Français?

Even if you've been dreaming about making the Puddle Jump passage for decades, we wouldn't be at all surprised if your pre-departure checklist is still a mile long, even shortly before your anticipated jumping-off date.

Knowing this, we apologize for pointing out one additional task that can enhance the richness of your French Polynesian cruise like no other factor. That is, making at least a minimal effort to learn to speak a little French, the national language of this French Overseas Territory.

Yes, you can get by without it, as many kids have been learning English in school for decades (along with French and local dialects). But we think you'll find that making an effort to speak some basic French will earn you an extra measure of respect from the locals you meet — perhaps even sparking the beginnings of lasting friendships.

There are many approaches to learning a foreign language, and any of them can bring you some measure of success. From our personal experiences we suggest you try the extremely popular (and inexpensive) Duolingo software available via WiFi for use on smartphones, tablets or computers. Or sample one of the long-established audio courses such as Babbel or Rosetta Stone. We can also recommend the Instant Immersion audiobook courses, which are inexpensive but effective.



Throughout the islands, Polynesians revere their cultural traditions

Two final favorites are *Learn French with Paul Noble*, which is lighthearted, entertaining and available as audiobook downloads, and finally *French for Cruisers* by Kathy Parsons. It features the French names for many common boat parts, maintenance procedures, and sailing maneuvers.

Hot Off the Press: “Marquesan for All”

We are also thrilled to introduce you to the newly published “Marquesan for All,” which was tirelessly researched by Emily C. Donaldson, Ph.d., and is now available as a downloadable Kindle edition.

A review explains, “Marquesan for All” offers a concise, current and dependable beginner’s guide to the Marquesan language that is accessible to both French and English speakers.” We have no doubt that it would be a valuable resource for sailors who are truly interested in the fascinating Marquesan culture.

Check Out the Chart Locker

Here’s another resource that we highly recommend. Bruce and Alene Balan of the Cross 48 Migration are longtime cruisers who strongly believe in

sharing their knowledge and insights with the wider cruising community.

One way they do that is by administering The Chart Locker, an online resource meant to enhance the navigational safety of all who use its materials.

Bruce writes: “All charting sources — whether on a chartplotter, your laptop, your tablet, or your chart table have errors. That’s why a prudent mariner uses multiple sources for charts. You can download free charts for French Polynesia at TheChartLocker.com where you’ll find mbTile satellite and nautical charts for use with OpenCPN. The resolution of many of the charts is so good that you can see the individual coral heads in the Tuamotus – a true game-changer for navigating the atolls.

You can also download charts for all the other island groups of the South Pacific plus New Zealand and Australia. There’s also a video tutorial on how to use the charts in the free OpenCPN charting software.”

See: <https://chartlocker.brucebalan.com/>

— Andy Turpin,
PPJ, 2025

A long view of the Tiohae Bay anchorage. After three or four weeks at sea it's great to get your feet on dry land and stretch out your sea legs. There are plenty of hiking trails accessible to cruisers, but the highest peaks of this ancient caldera are virtually unreachable.

