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TAHITI Jump ship here? Why not?

Both the scenery and the people in French Polynesia are beautiful

By AL LEWIS

Special to The Okanagan Sunday

From the moment we took possession of our rusted-out rental bicycles with questionable brakes, you could sense this could be something more than just a casual neighbourhood ride.

Starting at the far end of the aquamarine bay named after Captain James Cook, it's a couple of miles to the end of the road where it meets with an inland-side track heading straight up.

Through fields of lush pineapple plantations and colourful small villages, the tropical fragrances are everywhere.

Our objective for the afternoon is to go where cars can't go and rental bicycles usually don't go.

The backroads and winding trails eventually lead to the scenic Belvedere lookout on the island of Moorea's north coast.

There's an undeniable magnetic pull about a journey that takes you to one of the best views in all of Tahiti.

Uphill peddling through fields and forests is accompanied by periods of steep essential walking through unmarked trails.



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Tahiti is full of little picture-perfect atolls. One visit to these islands and it's easy to see how a ship full of sailors might decide to stay ashore for the next 40 years.

After three labourious, but rewarding hours, we reach the lookout, the vista punctuated by drool-worthy views of Moorea's north shore.

Against a backdrop of what is seemingly 50 shades of blue, it's hard to tell where the sea ends and the sky begins.

Below, deep forested valleys give way to majestic pillars and

peaks that seem to reach for the sky.

In the distance lie two translucent bays separated by a rugged mountainous region.

On the right is Cooks Bay where the legendary British explorer landed in 1769.

On the left, Opunohu Bay holds centuries of stories and secrets as it marks the spot where Captain

William Bligh would anchor the ill-fated HMS Bounty.

It didn't take long for the disciplinarian captain to be deserted by his mutinous and rather randy crew in favour of the seduction of the amorous Tahitian islanders.

From that moment in time, the legend and mystic of Tahitian maeva was born.

The next day, our journey would land us to what has been deemed by many to be the most beautiful island on the planet, Bora Bora.

It doesn't take long to accept passage with a local gentleman named Marona aboard his long-tailed boat and assume a five-hour circumnavigation of the island.

Other than one obligatory deep channel to accommodate cruise ships, Bora Bora is completely encircled by a massive multi-coloured coral reef.

A rainbow assortment of hard and soft corals are home to thousands of fish as they cling to the walled drop offs.

In the middle of one shallow, emerald green lagoon, we stop and wade into bath-tub warm water, about four-and-a-half feet deep but home to the most unique sandy bottom I've ever experienced.

Soft, like a pasty flour, the white sand of Bora Bora is world renowned for its special exfoliating and body scrub characteristics.

Centuries of erosion from the

pounding waves hitting the encircling reef has resulted in pulverized-coral sand sought by high-end spas the world over.

Today, world market values approach \$100 for a five pound bag.

Like over-aged children our group frolics in the lagoon, the sandy goo squishing between our toes as we cover our bodies and faces in marine mud.

Marona couldn't be more hospitable, continually strumming his ukulele while unabashedly singing his heart out as we motor our way around the islands.

"My friends, I want to share with you my home," he says as we make our way to the coconut-treed, coral-reefed atoll of unimaginable beauty. After a long career with the government, he was granted this small piece of paradise to build his home.

Together with his gracious Tahitian wife, Amelie, our charismatic host prepares a festive display of fresh papaya, mango and pineapple as well as assorted sweet breads.

All the while, the smiles never disappear.

The genuine happiness and hospitality of the Tahitian islanders, which was the catalyst for the most famous mutiny in naval history, continues to work its magic on romantics to this day.

Maeva, which means welcome in Tahitian, has never been so warm.

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The pasty mud bottom of Bora Bora lagoon is fun to play in and is sought after by exclusive spas around the world.

Former Hawaii internment camp dedicated as national monument

WAIPAHU, Hawaii (AP) — Hawaii's largest internment camp where Japanese-Americans and others were held during the Second World War is now a national monument.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell joined Hawaii Gov. David Ige, Hawaii's congressional delegation and other officials for a dedication ceremony this week of the Honouliuli National Monument.

President Barack Obama established the new monument in February. The 155-acre site opened in March 1943, and interned Japanese and European Americans and others, eventually holding 400 civilian internees and 4,000 prisoners of war.

Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell says preservation of the camp as a national monument is a proud but bittersweet moment. He says it's an important part of history that should be remembered and learned from.