

FRENCH POLYNESIA: CRUISERS GAIN MORE TIME TO EXPLORE

"THERE IS ONE MORE REQUIREMENT." THESE are words that you never want to hear from officialdom. My wife, son, and I were in the gendarmerie in Taiohae, on Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas, making our preliminary clearance into French Polynesia after the 21-day crossing from La Paz, Mexico, on *Pelagic*, our Crealock 37. I thought I knew to what the gendarme was referring, and I dreaded it.

"You must obtain a visa to remain for three months."

That was it. I prepared for the worst.

"Go to the post office and pay 3,000 francs each." That was about US\$42 at the time of our visit. "Then you return here, and we give you the visa."

That was it? We left the building before the gendarme could change his mind.

Standing outside in the tropical sunshine, we contemplated our good fortune. Non-E.U. nationals arriving in the Marquesas

had been obtaining a one-month visa that could only be extended in Tahiti.

This regulation was enforced with different degrees of strictness in different years, but the upshot was that we

expected to have only a month of time to cruise in the Marquesas and Tuamotus, the best of French Polynesia's island groups. We even met the crew of one American boat, weeks later, who'd acted on advice from friends who made the crossing the

year before and skipped the Marquesas entirely to have more time in the Tuamotus.

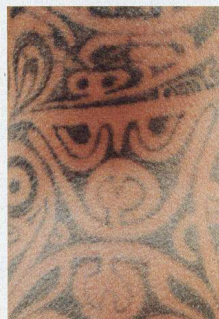
But now three-month stays can be

Cruising boats lie at anchor in Baie d'Anaho (above), at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas. This detail (left) is from a Marquesan tattoo.

obtained in the Marquesas, meaning that cruisers are free to linger on the way to Tahiti. For us, this change meant that the Marquesas, instead of being merely the first stopover on a Pacific crossing, instead became an incredible place in which to linger and discover. We

spent 42 days there, anchoring beneath towering volcanic mountains, interacting with the amicable Marquesans, and enjoying one of the most culturally intact regions of the Pacific.

Mike Litzow



USEFUL GADGET: BLUE SEA SYSTEMS' VESSEL SYSTEMS MONITOR



At only 4.5 inches wide and \$500 retail, the new VSM 422 from Blue Sea Systems (www.blueseasystems.com) packs in a remarkable portfolio of system-monitoring abilities. Its three configurable screens can help you mind a bilge pump, shore power, three tank levels, and two batteries—or two tanks and three batteries—and the DC monitoring includes critical amps-in-use and amps-remaining values.

The VSM also lets you set up audible alarms based on multiple factors, such as bilge-pump run time per hour and/or cycles per day. Needed electrical sensors are included in the system, many types of tank-level sensors are supported, and the VSM 422 even offers three alternate methods for configuring tank sizes. Blue Sea plans to develop additional VSM models for more boats with more complex systems as well as a VSM/NMEA 2000 interface that's able to pass the data and alarms to a vessel's other screens.

Ben Ellison