



We started and ended the year living temporarily in two different cities: [Waikiki](#) from January through March and now [Whangarei](#), New Zealand from October through December. The photo above was taken at [Whangarei Falls](#), just outside of town. Between Hawaii and New Zealand, we travelled across the South Pacific, visiting Palmyra Atoll, Kiribati, French Polynesia, Beveridge Reef, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu.



[At Palmyra Atoll, population 18 at the time](#)

We arrived at [Palmyra Atoll](#) in early March after a 6-night 950-mile run south from Hawaii. Palmyra, a former World War II US military base, is now a National Wildlife Reserve. The atoll also is infamous as the site of the [Sea Wind](#) murders. The Nature Conservancy manages one island there, while the Department of Fish and Wildlife is responsible for the rest of the reserve.

Palmyra is absolutely beautiful. Palm trees crowd the shore above lush vegetation. Around the atoll, the sea color varies from deep aquamarine to pale turquoise inside a white frothy edge of breaking

surf. But you can hardly hear the surf above the calls of the thousands of seabirds that wheel in the sky above. We spent an amazing ten days there, [exploring the island](#) and the military ruins. But the real standout was the incredible [diving](#), with huge schools of colorful fish and extensive stands of healthy, vibrant coral. We saw Parrotfish and Surgeonfish over a foot long--much larger than we've seen in the past. Black-tip reef sharks also were exciting to see. Fortunately they avoided us underwater and didn't approach too closely. Most impressive of all, however, were the Manta Rays. We never tired of watching their graceful passage.



[Manta Ray at Palmyra Atoll](#)



[Fanning Island](#)

From Palmyra Atoll, we travelled 200 miles southeast to [Fanning Island](#), another atoll in the Northern Line Group of the Line Islands. Fanning Island is part of the Republic of Kiribati, so this was our first exit from the U.S. into another country since leaving Seattle in September of 2012, over 4,000 miles earlier.

Fanning Island, so close to Palmyra, was at the other end of the spectrum. We actually had WiFi in Palmyra, from the Nature Conservancy camp, but not one of Fanning's 2,000 residents even had power, let alone any connectivity. At night, the shoreline twinkled with flashlights and headlamps.

We spent an enjoyable few days there, exploring the island by bike and also did an excellent dive, before continuing another 1,400 miles southeast over 11 nights to the [Marquesas Islands](#) in French Polynesia. This was the longest run we'd made so far without refueling—2,600 nautical miles since Hawaii.

We arrived at Nuku Hiva in the northern Marquesas and spent the next two weeks island-hopping to the southern extreme at Fatu Hiva. The scenery, impressive in Nuku Hiva, became even more dramatic as we worked south: sheer mountain cliffs with almost impossible formations, mountain ridges so narrow that holes have formed from one side to the other, and incredible views into the anchorages below for those willing to climb. Fatu Hiva was our last stop in the islands and typifies Marquesan geology. We particularly enjoyed the diving there as well. We love exploring, and usually move frequently, but ended up staying at Fatu Hiva for five nights. If the rest of the South Pacific weren't waiting, we'd probably still be there.



[Fatu Hiva, Marquesas Islands](#)



[Tahania Atoll, Tuamotus Archipelago](#)

From the soaring peaks of the Marquesas Islands, we travelled 465 miles west to the barely-above sea level Tuamotu Archipelago. Of the seventy-eight islands that make up this French-Polynesian archipelago, all but two are coral atolls. The islands are known for amazing diving with excellent visibility and abundant fish, creature and coral life. Besides the excellent diving, we loved exploring the atolls and especially walking out to the edge of the fringing reef and watching the waves pounding over.

The [Society Islands](#) were the third and final major island group we visited in French Polynesia. With mountainous shorelines and fringing reefs, these islands felt somewhat like a combination of the previous two groups. Our first stop was in Papeete, the capitol of French Polynesia. Here we did our first major provisioning stop since leaving Hawaii. The Society



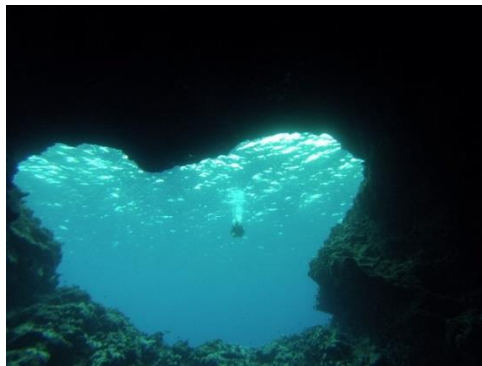
[Papeete, Society Islands](#)

Islands are more populated, and had greater diversity and infrastructure than the other two groups. We used pretty much all our recreational equipment there: hiking, kayaking, biking, diving and touring by dinghy.

We next stopped off for a few days at [Beveridge Reef](#) en route to Tonga. Beveridge Reef is an uninhabited, but anchorable atoll, about 130 miles southeast of Niue. Perhaps one reason the atoll is uninhabited is there is no land--the entire reef is underwater, giving the feeling that you are anchored in the middle of the ocean. Beveridge Reef was amazing: the color and clarity of the water over the sand made it look like a swimming pool.



[Beveridge Reef](#)



[Mariner's Cave, Tonga](#)

After Beveridge Reef, we ran three nights to reach Tonga and spent two weeks there touring the [Vava'u Group](#). We enjoyed the more relaxed pace in Tonga, where the anchorages are only an hour or two's run apart, and we weren't going to sea every time we moved the boat. The real standout for us, however, were the caves that could be explored both above and below the water.

From Tonga, we continued 450 miles west to Fiji and moored at [Port Denarau](#) for three weeks in late July while James returned to the US to work. We then spent four weeks cruising and diving in the [Mamanuca and Yasawa Groups](#) and eastward. The scenery in Fiji was fabulous, and we particularly enjoyed the diving at [Namena Reserve](#) and [Yadua Island](#).



[Navadra Island, Mamanuca Group, Fiji](#)



[Mount Yasur, Vanuatu](#)

Perhaps the most exciting part of our trip was to [Vanuatu](#), 475 miles west of Fiji and home to the world's most accessible active volcano. Mount Yasur regularly erupts in a fire show that is amazing to experience firsthand. Standing on the edge of a caldera of molten lava that every minute or so explodes and shoots lava hundreds of feet over your head is incredible—it's hard to imagine being much closer to one and living to tell about it. We thought seeing the lava flows close-up on the Big Island in Hawaii was impressive, but this completely topped it.

We arrived in New Zealand late September and are loving it: although we went to some pretty cool places in the South Pacific, New Zealand is the first we've felt we could stay permanently. We had a great time touring the [Bay of Islands](#) on the north island, and have been getting a ton of boat projects complete in Whangarei, including [lifting the boat](#) for bottom paint and zincs. We expect to leave Whangarei in a few days and travel south to circumnavigate the south island and in particular to visit Fiordland.

We're still working on our plans for next year, but currently expect to leave New Zealand next April or May for Australia. A live map of our current route and recent log entries is always available at <http://www.mvdirona.com/maps/locationcurrent.html>.



[Duke's Nose, Whangaroa Harbor, New Zealand](#)

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- [2012](#)