

Wednesday, May 23, 2012

Aranui 3

We're still in Hakatau, Ua Pou. Today the "Aranui 3", part supply-ship part cruise-ship, is expected to arrive. I wake up at 5am, hearing her engines from afar through the water and the hull of our boat. I look outside. It is still dark, and the Aranui 3 a small speck of light in the distance. I grab my camera, climb into the dinghy, and drive ashore.

A few people have already started gathering on the breakwater. A Landrover and Toyota SUV are parked on the edge, reflected in the puddles on the muddy ground. I walk over and watch Aranui 3 approach. She's going slowly, timing her approach with the sunrise. A little boy sits down on a stone and looks out over the sea. We wait.

Every three weeks the Aranui 3 comes to Ua Pou, bringing important supplies for the 2000 inhabitants of the small island. And a few tourists. She can carry up to 200 passengers, and all the island artists gather in the communal building on the beach to display their pendants, tikis, and other carvings. The visit of the Aranui 3 is probably the most exciting thing that happens all month.

She's now entering the breakwater. A small boat is launched into the water with one of her two cranes. The launch runs ahead, checking the anchorage. As I follow the launch with my eyes I see that it heads straight for Gudrun V. Oh, not good. I run to the dinghy and jump inside. Full throttle. I can see Liz standing on the deck, talking to a guy in the launch. As I approach he signals me to move Gudrun closer to the beach. I jump on board, ask Liz to start the engine, and start pulling up the anchor chain. Then I ask him how far we have to move. He shouts "Cinq metres". Five meters? Are you kidding me? I stop pulling in the anchor chain and instead let it all out. Then I go to the cockpit, and pull in the stern anchor line instead. Five meters, no problem.

After the little exercise I stand with Liz on the bow, watching Aranui 3 come into the anchorage and tie to the dock. Two launches run back and forth between ship and dock, carrying heavy mooring lines. Everything looks fast and efficient, very professional.

I scan the decks, looking for my friends. On the way from the Galapagos I've learned that Joachim and Rosi will be passengers on this trip. What a coincidence! We met first on a hike up Kilimanjaro, and three years later we meet again in the Marquesas, one of the remotest places on the planet. I spot Rosi on the aft deck, step into the dinghy and drive over. We greet and arrange to meet on the beach after breakfast.

We meet and start walking through the town, catching up on what happened in the last three years. Later we visit Gudrun, then they show us around Aranui 3.

At eleven we head back into town for a marquesan dance show. We like it a lot. Then the crew invites us to join our friends for lunch, which we accept gratefully.

After lunch it's already time to head back to the Aranui 3 and say our good-byes. Unloading and loading is completed, and departure is only a few minutes away. The mooring lines are cast off one by one, and the local kids swarm the one remaining line. Then the Aranui 3 pulls out of port. The dock empties, and life returns to normal. Tomorrow there will be fresh vegetables in the little supermarkets, we can't wait!

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Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:56