

* TRIP FAVORITES *

Close to the end of our Pacific adventures, Joan, Yolanda and I enjoyed reminiscing about the good (and sometimes not-so-good) details from the past month and came up with a list of personal bests:

HOTELS

BEST HOTEL: Coral Sea Resort, Honiara, Solomon Islands

(excerpt from my tripadvisor post)...

...In 27 days of traveling in the Pacific this is the best designed room I encountered. Everything about it is perfect -- linens, lighting, bathroom amenities and most important, a comfortable bed. Be sure to look in all the drawers, as additional supplies are located in them (like slippers, bathrobes, etc). The bathroom amenities (shampoo, lotions, coconut oil) are high quality and the only ones on the entire trip that I took home with me. Reception staff are helpful and I enjoyed the hotel restaurant very much, especially the Octopus Salad and spring rolls starter...

LEAST FAVORITE HOTEL:

Joan: Palms Hotel, Pohnpei - for room issues, others encountered leaking windows.

Esther: Tabon Te Kee Kee Eco Lodge
in Kiribati: for safety issues

Look idyllic? Look again: huts are wide open to passersby so safety is an issue, the property is not very "eco" as it is strewn with garbage and water is a problem.



FOOD



FAVORITE DISHES

* Esther: Octopus and Fish Chowder (Tu's Restaurant in Nadi, Fiji) and Seafood Chowder (Utirerei Hotel, Kiribati)

* Joan: Rotary Sushi - Pohnpei, Micronesia



Photo by Joan

* Yolanda: Blackened Fish and the Fish Burger (Tu's Restaurant)

For best overall restaurant, we all agreed that Tu's Place in Nadi Fiji was a trip favorite -- we ate there three times!

BEST HOTEL BREAKFAST BUFFET: Holiday Inn Resort, Vanuatu
The restaurant opens up early and has a wide array of cold and hot dishes, with lots of protein. We love their fresh coconut juice served in the coconut!

BEST HOTEL CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST:

La Lagon Hotel in New Caledonia.

No boxed breakfast here! Since we had early departure, staff set up a nice continental breakfast in our room's kitchenette including a bread basket, juice, cut fruit, jams/jellies, butter, cereal and milk.

BEST LUNCH:

Dreamers Guest House and Restaurant in Kiribati. We had a lovely meal in their garden overlooking the shore-line. Dish after dish came out of the kitchen, each tastier than the last. Dreamers is also a well-

respected guest-house owned and run by a British couple who have lived in Kiribati for over 30 years.



FAVORITE SNACKS:
Breadfruit Chips - especially when home-made. They are salty and crunchy and go with everything - even the Chinese food we enjoyed at the George Hotel in Kiribati! We looked everywhere for packages to bring home with us, with no luck.

BEST MEAL OVERALL:

Faimafili Village Resort and Restaurant, Samoa

This is the kind of meal you think about again and again!

(Excerpt from my tripadvisor post...)

This is a truly an off-the-grid-place. This lovely property is family owned and the Sunday seafood buffet lunch is excellent. Included are several fish dishes, several seafood dishes (including lobster and crab claws), several salads, soup, oka (cerviche), and vegetable dishes. The beach is perfect for swimming and there is a shower and changing room available.

In the 26 days of visiting visiting various island nations, and this was the meal of the trip.

Here is the buffet just before we swooped down on it. The cups in front are filled with cerviche, followed by several salads, trays of grilled fish, lobsters, crab, eel, vegetables and all kinds of interesting sauces



CITIES AND COUNTRIES

FAVORITE COUNTRY: We could not reach a consensus so the top three are:

- * Vanuatu for the island of Tanna
- * Samoa
- * Micronesia

COUNTRY WE'D LIKE TO GO BACK TO:

- * Samoa
- * Vanuatu (for Tanna) and Micronesia (tie)

And honorable mention: Fiji (especially Octopus Resort which we visited prior to the group trip)

COOLEST COUNTRY: Bula! It has to be Fiji

BEST REPRESENTATIVES OF THE “OLD SOUTH PACIFIC”:
Samoa

and

Tanna Island in Vanuatu (as people still live in traditional ways here)

LEAST FAVORITE COUNTRY:

Again, we could not reach a consensus, so there is a tie:

* Solomon Islands (not a whole lot to see apart from a few WWII sites)

* Kiribati - especially the stay at Tabon Te Kee Kee Eco-Lodge (lack of organization, strewn with rubbish and security issues)

CULTURE AND MUSEUMS

BEST CULTURAL SHOW:



We enjoyed several during the trip, but the most authentic was at a family home in Pohnpei, Micronesia. One man has dedicated himself to documenting and teaching traditional songs and dances from his mountain village. His goal is that the younger generation carry on the traditions. He lamented that there are songs and dances that already have been forgotten.

Our next favorite is the special performance by Kiribati's award winning dance troupe. They came to the Utirerei Hotel and entertained us during dinner, Such energy!

Photo by Joan





Raw kava plant



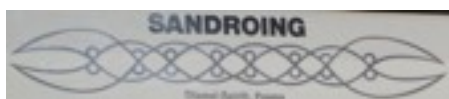
Photo by Joan

Of special note, in Pohnpei, a kava (called saku) ceremony was included where men pound the roots of a pepper plant in rhythm using small stones. It is an amazing “musical” performance on its own.

BEST MUSEUMS

- National Museum in Port Villa, Vanuatu.

We were especially taken with the storyteller and his sand drawings



- And the Maritime Museum in Noumea, New Caledonia

BEST AQUARIUM



Noumea, New Caledonia with its fantastic displays of fish and sea-life including several wall sized tanks with seating where one can sit and watch the display - including rays, sharks, and the behemoth Napoleon fish. We visited in lieu of lunch as we each had enjoyed a substantial breakfast at the La Lagon Hotel.

MISC.

FAVORITE SHOPPING:

* Esther: Jacks in Fiji (main store and branches in Denarau, Sigatoka, Lautoka and Nadi Airport's Departure Lounge)

* Joan and Yolanda: Handicraft Store in Micronesia

BEST ENCOUNTER WITH FLIGHT ATTENDANTS: Nauru Airlines (more on this later)

ZANIEST AIRLINE: Nauru Airlines

BEST AIRPLANE: Air Niugini

BEST LOOKING MONEY:

Solomon Islands and Samoa (so colorful!)



BEST SNORKELING:

- * Octopus Resort
- * Tanna Evergreen Resort (in Tanna, Vanuatu)

AND FINALLY...



BEST GUIDES: A tie!

Kenny Omura in Micronesia (at left) and Tai Fiti in Samoa (at right).



Each is knowledgeable, personable, helpful, made sure everyone enjoyed themselves and stopped where they wanted (store, market, etc).

This is not to say that other guides were not good - many were. But these two men are outstanding and delivered the itinerary in a professional, yet friendly manner and represented their countries well.

- Kenny Omura - Kenny's Inc. Pohnpei, FSM
connect with Kenny on facebook

- Tai - Tai's Native Experience, Samoa
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Table decoration at
Faimafili Village Resort
and Restaurant, Samoa

