

Kingdom of Tonga - or welcome in Administrative Kingdom

Clairette, le 27 septembre 2011 à 03:22

Foreword by Tomtom : Please accept our apologies for the harsh words sometime used in the following article to describe the slight disappointments we encountered during our stay in Tonga, but it seems that Clairette remembers them quite well and did not appreciate them ... at all !

After a pleasant passage from the Society Islands with a stop in Beveridge Reef to let two big fronts pass over us, we decided to make landfall in Tongatapu, the capital of the Kingdom of Tonga, to meet our friends Ange and Bo who were joining us by plane for 15 days sailing in the Pacific. As our friends are in charge of a few posts in French on our blog, we will only write ours in English.

First, we met the customs, immigration, health and environment skirt-wearing officers (this is the 'Sulu', the traditional outfit), who came aboard to fill many forms and to make us pay : 25 T\$ for the environment quarantine – a paper meaning that we declared to have no fresh food on board (the officer did not even have a look in the fridge) – and 100 T\$ for a health quarantine, but for this one the only question of the officer was : « what's the name of the boat ? ». We do not like the authorities to take all this money from us this way, but I won't say too much about that here as we plan to write a unwinding letter to these authorities in an other post.

A first walk in the town did not convince us, but as it was a few days before our friends arrived, we decided to cycle round the island to discover more of the landscapes and also probably some nice places.

Well... I had never been bored cycling before, but there, I was. To pass the time along the long strait unlovely roads, I tried to understand why I did not feel well in this island. The houses, all unfinished (except the royal palace, the only place where we found a wall painted completely), made me wonder if the poverty was the disturbing thing. But it was not, otherwise I would not have loved Dominica, for example. Maybe it was the fact that no place at all was left wild : there were houses (more precisly parts of unfinished houses) everywhere, even 10 km away from the city, there was some garbage everywhere, everything looked dirty... Maybe it was the fact that the people were not smiling, never a « Hello ! », even between locals – so far from the welcoming people we left in French Polynesia !! I must admit that the children gave me some hope, as they were surprised to see white people, they were all smiling and saying « Bye ! » (a sort of « hello », apparently), laughing at their daring.



Then we received an SOS from our friends, because Air Pacific (a company they would not recommend) tried to prevent them from flying to Tonga because they did not have a return ticket. Indeed, we had planned to sail from Tonga to Fiji with them and to leave them there, where they were to take a plane to go back to France. Maybe they could have managed to deal with their one-way ticket problem if they had had the time to buy a refundable return ticket, but they could not do that. So, thanks to an emailed declaration of the captain saying that they would leave the country on our board, they could fly to Tonga, where they were « welcomed » by another officer (also wearing a skirt) who made them pay 460 T\$ to allow them to enter the country. Honestly, they shouldn't be afraid of any stranger staying illegally in this island, it is really one of the worse we have visited : any sane person should try to leave it by any means.



To end with this description of paradise, the weather was awful and we were obliged to stay in the boat two days before leaving – no : before visiting two more administrative officers, paying one more fee for the « harbour » and getting stamps and papers authorising us to go to other islands.

We did not want to leave Tonga with these bad experiences, particularly for our friends who were on holidays, so we sailed to the Ha'apai group. Tiny islands, clear water, funny fishes, nice coral reefs, few people but smiling and friendly ones, clean houses and villages, funny children with whom we played in the sand, even if they did not speak english : this was a very nice trip. In between the islands, we saw our firsts humpback whales, becoming 4 children looking at these enormous animals dancing and playing in the ocean : « Waaaa... Oh look at this one !! Wonderful ! Splash. Waow... »



Even the main island of Ha'apai group, Lifuka, was full of nice surprises : we could get some drinkable water, some internet (just 2 minutes but we needed them to send a advanced notice of arrival to the Fiji authorities), a few vegetables, and we cleared out without being asked any money !! (in Tongatapu, we would have been asked 40T\$ for each passport stamped by the immigration officer).

Finally, if ever we come back to the kingdom of Tonga, we will only go to the Ha'apai group. Never again in Tongatapu...



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