



ARTICLE: 1

HEADING:

What's Up Down Under

The Pacific Ocean is the largest geographical feature on earth, larger than the combined area of all the land in the world. The South Pacific Ocean stretches from the West Coast of Chile to the East Coast of Australia and lies below the equator. Inside this area, excluding Australia and New Zealand, there are thirteen island nations and their total population is almost two million people. The key stops on a cruise in the South Pacific are generally Tahiti, Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia, with the main Super Yacht ports being Auckland, Sydney and Cairns. The cruising seasons for the Islands of the South Pacific and Australia are May to October. This is when the weather is more stable and the days are clear and calm. The summer months, from November to April are great for visiting New Zealand to cruise both the Northern Islands and the Southern Fiords. New Zealand is also an ideal destination for refit and maintenance work. For crew who have entered super yachting for international travel and socializing opportunities in the ports of the Mediterranean, USA and Caribbean, the South Pacific is quite different. It could be easy to think 'oh no I am going to be at my most eligible and most inaccessible while in the South Pacific' but there is something enchanting and captivating about cruising remotely and engaging with the natural environment. The island nations of the South Pacific are so alluring because visitors can cruise with a sense of adventure to explore remote islands with stunning diving, empty surf breaks, footprint free beaches and lively locals. The lifestyles of the South Pacific Islands revolve not around shopping and fine dining but native cultures which live on in traditions of dance, dress, dining and diving.

Moving on to New Zealand and Australia many yachts visit to cruise both nations as well as for refit and yard work. Over the years New Zealand has been known for the fine yachts produced by shipyards as well as being a great place for getting work done hot spots for yard work are Auckland, Nelson and Whangarei. Australia has enclaves popular for cruising such as the Great Barrier Reef and the Whitsunday's, with the likes of Cairns, Brisbane and Newcastle showing growth for yard and maintenance work.

Here is a little look at what is happening in the most visited spots in the South Pacific.

French Polynesia

French Polynesia is made up of five distinct different island groups which are scattered over an area the size of Europe. The influence of the French is evident in the sophisticated infrastructure, French restaurants and French people who have businesses in Tahiti to enjoy the tropical lifestyle. The more remote island groups are the Marqueses, Austral and Gambier Islands. The Tuamotus are a group of atolls where the highest point is a palm tree and charter guests have been known to tag team kite surf with crew for up to 40 miles. The most visited part of French Polynesia is the Society Islands which are home to many well known resorts and the main island of Tahiti. Tahiti's marina, Marina Taina has been recently refurbished. The marina can now accommodate up to 27 large yachts up to 60m on their new paved quay; mooring stern to. Power is available up to 200 Amps in 220/380V 60Hz. Fresh water is available. Fuel is delivered by pipe. In the complex there are three beautiful restaurants and bars which are attracting a great crowd at happy hour. Marina Taina is close to both Papeete Township and the international airport. Yachts moored at the marina get the privilege of seeing the sun set over Moorea Island. When docked here or beside the cruise ships in Papeete with a weekend off crew can enjoy visits to Moorea and stay at backpackers or resorts another option is to rent a car and to cruise around Tahiti visiting locals and surf breaks.

Fiji

Fiji offers yacht crew and guests an opportunity for unique interaction with local cultures which have preserved traditional modes of operation and warmly welcome visitors to their home territory. Fiji begins each new day 12 hours ahead of GMT (Tahiti is the other side of the date line). Fiji comprises over 300 islands with only one third inhabited. Upon entering Fiji there are four proclaimed ports of entry; Suva, Lautoka, Levuka and Savusavu, and yachts intending to cruise the outer islands must obtain a cruising permit. When cruising Fiji the main base for

super yachts is Denarau Island, which is attached to the main island by bridge, here yachts can dock in the marina catering for yachts up to 55m in length and with a 3.5m draft, or they can anchor off the Sheraton. Either way this is a great base for provisioning and accessing marine tradesmen, it is also ideal for crew after hours because the small island has five resorts within walking distance of the marina.

In terms of cruising Fiji can be divided into four main regions; The Yasawa Island Group, Vanua Levu, Kandavu Region and the Lau Group. The Yasawas are the closest to the main island of Vanua Levu and have a range of resorts dotted throughout with highlights such as the filming site of the Blue Lagoon movie. Vanua Levu region including Taveuni is a little more remote and can be quite an eco-tourism experience with Taveuni and its rain forest. In Kandavu Island, is where islands are a lot less inhabited with exquisite diving all enclosed within the vast Astralobe Reef. The Most remote and culturally traditional area of Fiji is the Lau Group; this little visited area has the most spectacular scenery of all Fiji's 300 islands.

Although the main centers of Fiji show signs of development the outer islands still very much preserve their local cultures and customs. One of the main traditions in Fiji is the *Sevusevu* or welcome ceremony, and when a yacht arrives at an anchorage it is important for some representatives to go ashore and participate in a *Sevusevu* with villagers before engaging in other local activities because the bays beaches and reefs are all owned by the local village. This ceremony involves the gift and drinking of Kava. Kava is a root which can be purchased at markets and when processed becomes a mud colored and mud tasting drink. Kava is drunk widely across the South Pacific and it is certain that any yacht in this region will encounter Kava. A *Sevusevu* involves sitting in a circle with villages with the drink in a wooden bowl in the middle. A half coconut shell cup is used to serve the brew as it is shared within the group. In some place the ceremony is quiet and people are expected to sip down their brew, and in other locations the ceremony involves loud gulping and clapping. Kava has a rather numbing affect on the mouth lips and brain even if it is a mild brew and drinkers will just want to relax. Should you wish to take some Kava home the drink can be bought in a powdered formula to be prepared with water. The *Sevusevu* and drinking of Kava ensures guests and crew can taste some of the traditional Fijian ways of life as well as enjoying the bays and beaches.

Beyond French Polynesia and Fiji the South Pacific has a huge selection of other island nations yachts can visit like Samoa, Tonga, Kermadec Kiribati and New Caledonia. These can have more or less services for yachts, on the main islands there are generally docks to tie up to but at the outer islands yachts are at anchor. It is not unusual for yachts to fly in provisions from Australia or New Zealand due to the lack of variety in fresh produce and meats in the more remote corners of the South Pacific. But this is made up for in the amazing fishing; crew

and guests can have a diet of sushi and sashimi when catching fresh yellow fin tuna, mahi-mahi and wahoo while cruising between islands. In these remote destinations some highlights for guests and crew can be the captivating diving and snorkeling opportunities in stunning clear blue water full of fish and coral as well as the odd shark. The uninhabited islands mean empty beaches for bonfires, picnics and shell collecting. There is something about connecting with nature in these islands that is more romantic than sitting in a bar ever will be!

New Zealand

New Zealand has cooler waters and lusher pastures than the other South Pacific Destinations and Yachts come here to cruise the islands and fiords as well as have yard and maintenance work done. The New Zealand marine industry is known worldwide for grand prix race yacht and super yacht design and construction. There are always exciting and innovative developments in our marine industry and yards such as Alloy Yachts embrace opportunities for new creations. Late last year Alloy Yachts launched SY Janice of Wyoming and MY Ad Lib this year is SY Kokomo and next year there will be SY Red Dragon and MY VVS1. Two other local builds have been SY Vesper from Yachting Developments and SY Zulu from Fitzroy Yachts. Fitzroy Yachts is based in New Plymouth and is now working on SY Salperton for launch early in 2007.

Auckland's main Super Yacht Marina is the Viaduct Harbor, this is centrally located in a great district for drinking, dining and night life. The new builds from local yards all grace the Viaduct Harbour marina for a period of time before taking off. In March the Viaduct Harbour hosted the International Auckland Boat Show, for this show 10% of visitors were from outside New Zealand and a further 25% from out of Auckland. The Viaduct Harbour Marina can cater for vessels of various shapes and sizes and currently has the 62m Ulysses docked in a berth. Larger vessels can tie up along side Princess Wharf. This wharf is home to some of the best night life in Auckland and is where MY Le Grand Blue was berthed. A stroll away, away from downtown is Orams Marine which specializes in refit and haul outs for vessels up to 600 ton with a beam of under 12.5m and a length under 54m. Some recent visitors to Orams are SY Andromeda, SY Morning Glory, MY Surprise, SY Foftein, MY Tatu and SY Galileo. Just beyond Orams and beside the Harbor bridge is Westhaven Marina. Westhaven Marina is one of the largest marinas in the Southern Hemisphere with over 1400 berths for vessels up to 30m as well as swing and pile moorings. A new development in the central city marine environment is the Westhaven Yacht Refit Group; a series of companies who have banded together to service yachts visiting Auckland for refit work. There are long term plans afoot to upgrade a section of the city between the Viaduct Harbour and Westhaven, this will involve the relocation of bulk liquid storage tanks to create space for parks and maritime events and service centers. The crew scene in Auckland is central and lively. There are a couple of bars which yachties may

frequent. Swashbucklers is on the water by Westhaven with a balcony over the water, Orams marine has a lounge which is open on Friday nights, this is ideal for sunsets, and HQ has been the traditional hangout for yachties after hours.

Other Marina hubs in Auckland are Gulf Harbour and Orakei Marinas. Gulf Harbour is set at the end of a peninsular in the Hauraki Gulf about an hours drive from Auckland and is a residential and lifestyle marina development with over 1000 berths. The latest local marina development is Orakei Marina; this is five minutes from the central city along the water front. The Orakei Marina is set to open in December and will have berths for yachts up to 40m.

Further a field Nelson and Whangarei are up and coming refit destinations. Nelson is at the top of the South Island and a key resting and provisioning point for vessels visiting both the Marlborough Sounds and Fiordland. SY Charlatan and SY Adix have both been in Nelson with Dickson Marine. Whangarei is the home of New Zealand Yachts, Northport and Specialist Marine Interiors. This city is 2 hours north of Auckland with a deep water harbour and slipways. The marine industry here is beginning to thrive as a one stop refit shop.

Australia

The various Australian super yacht industry groups are working collaboratively to promote the country's cruising, charter, build and refit capabilities to the international super yacht market. With Cairns and Sydney leading the charge, the industry has been actively lobbying government to create a more favorable regulatory environment for international super yachts and this is certainly showing great benefits, with a dramatic increase in superyacht visitation over recent years.

Sydney in New South Wales, has traditionally been a super yacht port for vessels wanting to visit the city and cruise locally. For super yachts visiting the dock of choice is Rozelle Bay under the Anzac Bridge. To get here requires yachts to be able to pass under the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which is possible if your mast is not over 52m from sea level. The Lucky boats that cannot pass though get to dock down town in Campbell Cove, Circular Quay between the bridge and the Opera House. This is ideal for crew to get out and about. Up the coast is Newcastle which has a growing reputation as a refit and maintenance destination. Sovereign Yachts and Azzura are both here. Newcastle is also the gateway to the Hunter Valley wine region, a great day trip for crew. Just beyond Newcastle is Port Stephens where there is the new Soldiers Point Marina with 90 berths for yachts up to 30 meters; this marina has a high standard of berthing facilities and supporting operations as well as an award winning restaurant.

Brisbane, Queensland, is home to the new Rivergate Marina and Shipyard on the Brisbane River, six nautical miles from Moreton Bay. This deepwater floating marina will have 104 berths and cater for yachts up to 60m, there is also a 75 ton travel lift. The Yard and Refit Complex will be able to cater for yachts up to 70m and provide full service refit and repair. Later this year a 300 – ton travel lift will become operational and dry storage, retail and leisure facilities will open. Much further north is Cairns, the most popular super yacht hub in Australia. Cairns Marlin Marina is custom designed for super yachts with floating docks, main wharf berthing, security and services. The marina is situated downtown by the Esplanade and central dining district. Cairns Slipways is the refit base here, just five minutes drive from town or a ten minute cycle for crew. Being a tourist hub, Cairns has plenty of bars and activities to offer crew after hours or with a few days down time. The city also has the Great Barrier Reef and the World Heritage Daintree Rainforest on its doorstep. Cairns is now home to Australia's first crew house. North of Cairns is Port Douglas which has the marina closest to the Marlin Fishing grounds of the Great Barrier Reef. Marina Mirage is part of the Mirage Port Douglas Resort with 122 berths for yachts up to 45m and a selection of five star activities. 650kms south of Cairns is the Whitsunday Islands and Abel Point Marina which is the base for super yachts cruising the Islands, this marina offers berths for vessels up to 60m in length and deep-water access.

Chartering in Australia has just got easier with the introduction of the National Marine Safety Committee's (NMSC) super yacht charter policy. This policy opens the door for the undertaking of commercial charter operations by international super yachts. Along the Queensland coast yachts may operate with a short term alternative to registration in Queensland by coming under the authority of a Restricted Use Flag (RUF). Offshore crew qualifications will be comparable to Uniform Shipping Laws (USL) Code qualifications whilst chartering in Australia. Temporary permits similar to this would be required for intra state voyages between other States.

The ports in Australia and New Zealand offer great night life and after hour's activities for crew. Many ports also have excellent facilities for provisioning, maintenance and refit work. In terms of cruising the highlights of Australia are the Great Barrier Reef and Whitsunday's. New Zealand excels in yacht building and refit work, with amazing cruising in more temperate climates. But the romance is in the Pacific Islands, get off the beaten track, lay the anchor off an atoll and take a break escaping into the under water world, naked beaches and star studded skies.

By sarahmeek.com

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2,800 words

Captions for Photos

Figure 1: Auckland SY Vesper and SY Galileo docked at Orams Marine with Westhaven in the back ground.

Figure 2: Auckland: Le Grand Bleu docked at Princess Wharf.

Figure 3: Sydney: looking from Circular Quay into the Harbour with the Harbour Bridge and Opera House.

Figure 4: Sydney: Rozelle Bay Super Yacht Marina with Anzac bridge in the background.

Figure 5: Port Douglas, Queensland: a view of the beach.

Figure 6: Fresh tuna

Figure 7: Tropical flowers

Figure 8: Isle of Pines, New Caledonia: local children hanging out at sunset

Figure 9: View from Amede Lighthouse, New Caledonia: super yacht at anchor

Figure 10: Tuamotus, French Polynesia: picnic in paradise.

Figure 11: Tuamotus, French Polynesia: looking ashore.

Figure 12: Moorea, French Polynesia: crew diving.

Figure 13: Atoll in Fiji: the sea floor.

Figure 14: Atoll in Fiji: crew break. (actually me!)