

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Cruising Oahu, The Big Island, Fanning Island, Maui and Kauai

February 19, 10:20 AM (Wednesday): We're about three hours out from Seattle on *Northwest* flight 925. A few patches of blue down there now. It was raining when we took off and it's been mostly cloudy below, though it's sunny up here at 36000 feet. I mention to Carol that the ocean out here is a good two miles deep- which gets me a dirty look. Our DC-10 is all alone in the blue-gray sky- for a thousand miles in all directions... nothing but water.

Flights to Hawaii seem always to be full, like cattle cars in the sky. Ours includes a cross-section of Puget Sounders young and old, a coughing kid across the isle, and quite a few nearly bald men with their remaining hair cut short- like mine. Walking back to the restroom, I pass by an older woman with silver hair reading a paperback book. Her (downright beautiful) legs are draped over her husband's knees. Lots of lines in that face though- which looks older than Laveta's or Carol's. What a strange dichotomy- that face and the rest of her. It sure would be nice to acquire life's mileage without some of your body parts giving out before others- you know, everything in great shape until bam, lights out! It's kind'a like the numbers in your life's ledger have to balance. If your face is beautiful, you're doomed to walk with a limp; a great personality gets you an expanded waistline; a moron inherits a fortune... Karma.

The air is redolent with the sent of flowers as we leave the jetway in Honolulu. Its 12:10 PM local time. Everything is organized and our tour bus takes us to the "Outrigger Islander Waikiki", where we're situated on the tenth floor. Shopping, followed by dinner at the "Lewers Street Fish Co." Great meal- then on to the Sheraton Waikiki's outside patio for drinks and music.

February 20 (Thursday): Walked all the way down to the Aloha Tower for breakfast and more shopping.



Raindrop? Laveta and Carol in Honolulu

Must have been about five miles each way, making a total of ten miles. Laveta's and Carol's feet hurt and Jim twisted an ankle. We rest up a few hours at the hotel before venturing out for an early dinner- outdoor dining again, followed by a walk in the park behind the Military Museum, where we locate a picnic table from which to view the sunset. "Sunset" is perhaps too ordinary a term to describe what follows.



Waikiki Sunset

As the time approaches, beach activities on Waikiki stop and the now hushed crowd waits expectantly. When the last sliver of sun disappears, the appreciative crowd responds with applause and a standing ovation! Wow!



Waikiki Sunset

February 21 (Friday): An easy morning. We have breakfast near the hotel, then Laveta and Carol do a load of laundry, followed by a walk on the beach, a light lunch and a nap. Laveta and I stop by the US Army museum, later meeting Jim and Carol in the hotel to finish packing. At four thirty in the afternoon, a bus takes us to the “Norwegian Wind” which turns out to be berthed in downtown Honolulu adjacent to the Aloha Tower. Our ship departs around 8:30 PM as the sky darkens and city lights adorn the skyline. A couple of hours later, leaning on the forward deck railing, we marvel at the stars and Milky Way filling the sky. Our ship’s course holds Orion just off our starboard quarter as we journey Southeast.



Aloha Tower at Sunset

February 22 (Saturday) Kailua-Kona: I’m up at 6:30, just as the sky lightens enough to

distinguish *Mauna Kea* and *Mauna Loa* making their appearance above the horizon. Breakfast, then morning in Kailua. The Palace Museum is particularly interesting, then back to the boat for lunch and a rest in our staterooms. Tonight, Jim and I stand outside above the bow on deck number ten. The wind howls and a light salt spray covers everything. The sky is dark and clear, Orion high overhead. Below, just clearing the horizon shines the Southern Cross.



Carol and Laveta with the Norwegian Wind at Kailua-Kona

February 23, (Sunday) At Sea: As of 9:30 AM: Steaming South at 17 knots. Wind is 40 Knots from the Northeast (brisk!). Air temperature: 76 degrees F. Seas: 17 to 19 feet! We’re about 250 miles South of Kona and 750 miles North of Fanning Island. The ship rolls enough to make walking down the hallways take up a lot of room. I manage to get up early and work out on the weight machines, then Laveta and I walk six laps around the promenade deck (at 3.5 laps/mile). Also sent some email. Never saw so many old people outside of an assisted living center. Wished I had a *T-shirt* that said “I See Old People”. This ship seems more like an AARP convention than a cruise- and I turn sixty next month! Formal dinner tonight, so we get dressed up. It was a good dinner, though none of us are particularly hungry and we all go to bed early.

February 24. (Monday) At Sea: As of 9:00 AM: Steaming South at 17 knots. Wind down to

30 knots from the Northeast. The Air temp is 77 deg. Partly cloudy. We are about 325 miles from Fanning. The Captain announced that the depth below the keel is sixteen thousand feet. Nice easy day. Pretty much did nothing. Noticed that ship's crew is from all over; Bulgaria, Hungry, Ukraine, Romania (cutest girls) Philip-pines, India, Lithuania, Indonesia. Our ship is a little United Nations.



Laveta on Deck 7

Standing on the deck this afternoon looking out, it seems like the whole earth is water. Hard to imagine what it must have been like to venture such a crossing without maps, in small wooden boats, dependent on wind, weather... and luck. Island waypoints are so small and the sea so large. Combine such distances with spoiled food, rotten canvas, worm eaten hulls- these adventurer's were either very brave, or very crazy.

It is now Tuesday- since we crossed the International Date Line (which was moved in 1995 to include all the Kiribati islands). Enjoyed another great dinner this evening in the aft, Terrace Dinning Room, where we were shown to our table by another one of those cute Romanians.

After dinner (which usually lasts at least two hours) we retire, as is now our custom, to the forward railing on the number ten deck at the bow of the ship. The bow is unlit, shielded navigation lights providing the only illumination. "Our" deck is one below and a little forward of the bridge. The sky at this hour is turning black,

and holding on to the railing in the darkness adds security to our movements. Orion is now at its zenith- directly overhead. The stiff breeze on our faces, made possible by the ship's 26000 shaft horsepower, is warm, humid and salty. It whistles in the wires running down from the communications mast. Standing there, one can almost feel the presence of the dark, wet emptiness surrounding us. Wouldn't want to be out there *alone*. Not tonight - not ever. Similar feelings, I think, make Carol uneasy. Both Carol and Laveta return to our staterooms. Jim and I stay out a little longer. The *Norwegian Wind* rides effortlessly over the swells. Standing there, I'm infused with the sensation that our ship is stationary, and the great watery world is turning beneath our hull- drawing Fanning Island ever closer.

February 25 (Tuesday) Fanning Island: I'm up early, peeking out our cabin window as our destination materializes out of the dawn. Putting on some clothes I venture out onto the forward deck to take it all in. A few Frigate birds with their large distinctive wings and forked tails, circle not far away. Out past our bow, Fanning (also known as Tabuaeran) looms low and wide, covered in palm trees. I can see "English Harbor" about 600 yards ahead. The harbor is maybe 250 yards wide and leads into a light, blue-green lagoon beyond.



Looking out through English Harbor

Fanning Island is only about 10 x 6 miles, in the rough shape of a footprint and most of its

area is lagoon. The outer, enclosing band of land looks to be only a half mile across at it's widest, and the highest point is about 16 feet. Can't be more than half that at English Harbor, We take the first tender off the ship, motor through the passage and into the lagoon.

The humidity is extraordinary- a nearly solid presence that almost knocks one over! Nothing it seems, could ever be truly dry in this climate. Our tender, with it's load of a hundred and fifty or so passengers disembarks us at a new pier, where we're promptly greeted by the singing welcome of a dozen or so islanders in native dress. Rather than going to the beach with everyone else, we decide to take a guided tour of the village and its surroundings. Sure enough, we notice eight or ten men standing under a bare flagpole below a rough wooden sign reading, "Tours" and another one saying "Free".



Carol and Laveta giving out "presents"

Our male guide said he was 34 years old, though he looked older. Born on Fanning, he worked for a while on Christmas Island as a diver, then, since his English was reasonable, returned to Fanning so he could make money shepherding tourists like us. He was friendly, as were all the islanders. He provided the four of us with a great tour of the local surroundings. Norwegian Cruise Lines (NCL) has only been coming to Fanning since December 2001 and the subsistence economy (if you can call it an economy at all) is quickly changing as a result. Nevertheless it was a chance to see what it's like to live in one of the world's poorest countries

(Kiribati islands). Homes here are sometimes nothing more than four poles and a roof, though most had walls of sorts. The norm is just openings for windows and doors. No one seems to clean up anything and the island is littered with junk both old and new. Chickens roam everywhere, pigs are tethered in "front yards," and we see lots of dogs, that tend to ignore us as they go about their doggy business.

There are children in abundance- most well groomed, shy and very polite- like all the islanders. There are no roads per se, but unpaved, narrow and wide paths connect their lives. No electricity, no running water, no sewers. Privies are just rock lined holes with low walls. We are shown water wells, though the water must be boiled before drinking. No electricity means no Internet, but much more serious, it means no refrigerators. Whatever is killed, caught or gathered, must be eaten within a day or two.



Fanning "hospital dispensary"

Laveta and Carol had researched the island on the Internet before the trip and discovered that small gifts for the children would really be appreciated- though chocolate and sweets were verboten, since there's no dental care on the island. Actually there are no doctors either. So, on our walking tour the girls give out toothbrushes and toys (whistles, crayons, pads of notepaper and yo-yo's) to the children we passed. These little gifts are shyly accepted with bright eyes and thank-you's. Our guide took us to a cemetery near the shore and showed

us where his grandparents were buried. The graves are marked with naturally flat, coral headstones and with coral pebbles outlining the edge of each grave. As you might expect, there are no mortuaries here either. On Fanning- you bury your own.

This island *is a great place to visit*, but like they say, ‘you wouldn’t want to live here”. Life is short enough anyway- but in this place, you’re born, live and die, without leaving a trace- except perhaps for a rock outline in the dirt and a coral headstone.

On Fanning, there are no world class musical performances, certainly no symphony. No philosophical discourse, or reports of the latest scientific discoveries. Far better, I believe, to be part of a civilization that’s “going somewhere” (hopefully) and to partake in the stimulating environment of a modern society with its rich assemblage of knowledge and experiences. Once intoxicated by the richness of modern life, it would be exceedingly difficult to return to a life on Fanning, even with its forlorn, idyllic beauty and the environmental clemency of its unchanging tropical climate. That said, Fanning residents seemed quite happy, even in the absence of health care- as evidenced by children with facial skin lesions, and signs of (healed) but poorly set fractures. But hey- life *is* short, and you can die in loneliness and despair... even in Seattle.



Dinning in the amidships dining room

February 26 & 27 At Sea: Steaming North against the Trade winds blowing from the Northeast; down from 40 knots last night to

maybe 25 now. Added to our 17 knots ships speed, it makes for a blustery walk on the promenade deck

Had another great dinner last night, served by our favorite Romanian waitress who has a degree in Journalism (Budapest). Carol wanted to bring her home for Jason but it turns out that her fiancé is on board and works with her.

February 28, (Friday) Hilo: Got up about 6:00 AM and went out portside, where I was greeted by the lights of Hilo and a cool pleasant breeze from windward. The *Norwegian Wind* approaches slowly and finally docks about 8:00 AM. Weather is mostly cloudy. Had to clear US customs since we returned from Fanning. The lines move quickly. We disembark into a large warehouse type structure, empty except for some cars and, the now ubiquitous stalls filled with trinkets. While waiting, we’re entertained by hula dancing grandmas- who are actually quite good and obviously enjoy performing before visitors. We leave as soon as the Arnott Lodge’s, Mauna Kea summit sightseeing van arrives. We are ushered into 12 passenger vans and promptly set off through the waterfront park in downtown Hilo.



Keck One on Mauna Kea

We stop first at the “Boiling Pots” a series of small waterfalls, then we head West and upward. By five thousand feet most trees have dwarfed or been left behind and the land is cov-

ered with grass. The grass and stunted plants yield finally to rock and snow- snow that has been so eviscerated by the sun that only sun-cups remain- their long sharp interstices point skyward. The road above 9,000 becomes steeper and more difficult. It's clear on the summit and we can see the Pacific Ocean 13,780 feet below. Coming here straight from sea level with only a 45 minute stop at the 9,000 ft. level, we feel light headed. The silver and white domes of some of the worlds largest observatories ring the summit like a forest of giant, silver-white mushrooms. The air up here is thin, only about 60 percent that of sea level. Trying to move about normally inures nature's reprimand of dizziness, headache and cognitive fuzziness. We see incredible views of Mauna Loa to the south, and to the ocean all around.



Laveta and Me- Rainbow Falls

On our return we stop at Rainbow falls to the West and a little above Hilo, beautiful little park- and one of the highlights of the day. By now we are recovered from our altitude problems and return to our ship, Another formal dinner tonight. We choose the aft dinning room on the port side so we can watch Hilo recede slowly into the distance while we eat and drink our way through another delicious but pound accumulating meal. We then proceed to the stardust theater (which must hold near a thousand people) for some ships entertainment.

After the show, Jim and Carol come over to our cabin and we share our last bottle of champagne. I was preparing to go to bed when Jim

knocks on our door and asks us to follow him to the forward deck. Laveta and I follow. There in the darkness, the *Norwegian Wind* plies her way Northward towards the passage between the Big Island and Maui. Lights from a small town appear on the Big Island's Northeast coast, perhaps 6 to 10 miles distant, though low clouds and darkness shroud much of the coast to the South. The sky above and forward is reasonably clear and the Big Dipper hangs low on the Horizon. The temperature is indescribably *perfect*. Exquisite. A light breeze washes over us, and caressed by its idyllic softness, we return to our cabins under the enchantment of environmental perfection.

March 1st Saturday- Lahaina: The silhouette of Haleakala dominates the early morning, skyline as we make our way West towards Lahaina. We drop anchor at what seems like a half mille out, then go down to breakfast before taking a ship's tender into town. Boarding our bus at about 9:00 we arrive at our first stop: the *Maui Ocean Center*, which turns out to have the best aquarium any of us have ever seen!



Bent out of shape in Lahaina

No other aquarium even comes close; a very enjoyable stop. We proceed next to the windward (Northern) side of the island for breakfast in a beautiful little town before continuing upward to the *Haleakala National Park* entrance at 7000 feet. There are great views from innumerable switchbacks as we journey up the moun-

tainside. It is cold with a 40 mile an hour wind at the 10,200 foot crater summit. It's beautiful even so, with the Big Island's *Mauna Kea* on the horizon to the Southeast.

The return trip was accompanied by a non-stop discourse from Jerry (our driver) on Hawaiian legends, flora and fauna, language, pineapples and sugar cane. Spent about an hour shopping (again) and walking through Old Lahiana Town before boarding a tender back to the ship. Tonight we enjoy a "two bottle" dinner (Cabernet Sauvignon) before retiring to our forward observation deck around 8:00 PM. About the time we weigh-anchor, and with the lights of Lahaina twinkling on the shore, four dolphins appear, attracted perhaps to the lights and activity of the ship. Overhearing us, an officer on the bridge orders a searchlight turned on to these beautiful, playful mammals, who reward us with their tail slapping antics. It's a wonderful show of power and grace in the marvelously clear water of the harbor.



Waimea Canyon

There is no question in any of our minds that these dolphins *know* they are performing for us. Wow- what a show! "Mahalo"- We call out our Hawaiian thanks for the searchlight. The bridge returns with "your welcome". The *Norwegian Wind* then turns westward and gathering speed, slices through the darkening sea, leaving the playful dolphins and the lights of Maui, in her wake.

March 2nd Sunday- Lihue, Kauai: We arrive at the dock in Nawiliwili bay, just South of Lihue about 8:00 AM. Lots of clouds with some clear patches of sky. We disembark, then board our bus. Damn- back of the bus again! An hour and a half later we arrive at Waimea canyon. More busses. Well, that's what happens when you cruise. Still, the weather's beautiful. We eat in Kapaa on the East side of the island and have a reasonable buffet at a hotel there. Then onward to *Fern Grotto*. The boats that go upriver are almost like barges and hold two busloads of people. Going upriver is pleasant- except for the entertainment. Isn't that its bad- its just that one tires of *constant* story telling and singing. The peace and quiet of the river would have been better. After a few miles we depart our "barge" and walk, probably a quarter of a mile to the grotto, through some of the densest jungle I have ever seen. Very beautiful, as was the grotto itself. Shame to have to do it in a crowd, but worth it all the same. On the way back our bus driver stops us by Opaekaa Falls. Lots of chickens at the falls (and everywhere else it seems) on Kauai- the "Chicken Island".



Jim and Carol in "Fern Grotto"

Back onboard we had another 'two wine bottle dinner' with our favorite Romanian waitress- "Mihaela". On top of that, the sunset, especially *after* the sun dips below the horizon, establishes a new standard of excellence. Draining the second bottle of Cabernet, we look out through the "floor to ceiling" glass windows of the dining room as the sun sinks slowly into the

acific. We retire to *our* forward deck on the bow as the *Norwegian Wind* heads due East towards Honolulu. Looking back, we watch as Kawai dissolves unhurriedly into the twilight.

We fly out tomorrow.

March 3rd Monday- Homeward bound: Up at 6:30 AM. I glance out the window as an early morning Honolulu glides past, city lights having not yet surrendered to the dawn. Another beautiful morning in paradise. First breakfast, then we disembark and clam our luggage.



Laveta and Carol in the Honolulu airport

We board a bus for Honolulu International Airport, where we discover that our checked bags must be submitted to an agricultural inspection. Problem is, the inspection station is closed and won't open until 10:30. Yet It's only 9 o'clock. Crazy! I guess the Department of Agriculture hasn't been absorbed by the Department of Homeland Security- yet. More checks, x-rays and searches. The girls kill time shopping while we wait for our 2:15 PM flight. Later we're told by *Northwest* that flight 924 has "electrical problems", an airline euphemism for any significant, undetermined difficulty. Later again, we're told that a navigational instrument isn't working, followed by "they're fixing it", then by "it still doesn't work", followed again by "they're are trying to borrow another part from Hawaiian Airlines", followed by "they will scrounge the part from the next incoming

flight". So, we leave the plane to have a bite. After an hour or so, we re-board and finally manage to take off- three and a half hours late.

Later, halfway to Seattle, Laveta's watching a movie in the darkened cabin, Jim's listening to some Mp3's and Carol's sleeping. Glancing out the window at the stars shining above the right wing I find my thoughts returning to Fanning Island. It will be night there and the islander's, (more southerly) stars will be shining also. Its residents will need only the lightest coverlet to ward off the evening coolness. If it wasn't for *Norwegian Cruse Line* visits, Fanning's inhabitants would go on living their lives of unchanging tomorrows, much as it has been throughout human history, where changes occurred at a pace so slow, as to be imperceptible. Only in the last few hundred years has the pace of change been obvious. In the last century that rate has exploded, though not on Fanning Island- not until December 2001, with the first NCL visits.

We'll be landing at SEATAC in about 3 hours and it'll be good to be home. For the swift passage (and for other things), I silently thank the innovation and courage of Wilber and Orville Wright, and the other scientists, engineer's artists and visionaries who have made our lives richer- Galileo, Columbus, Newton, Pasteur, Fermi, Lister, Edison, Ford, Beethoven, Little Richard, J.R.R Tolken and, ah yes, Donald Douglas and Bill Boeing.

The cabin's quiet now, our flight as smooth as midnight satin. "On earth as it is in heaven." Staring out the window in the dimly lit cabin, that phrase keeps repeating inside my head. "On earth as it is in heaven"... Yah, sometimes it is.

Our DC-10 speeds home at 33000 feet, dynamically suspended between an ocean of night and a sky of stars.

February 19th /March 3rd
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