2018 World Cruise Log: Rangiroa

January 21, Sunday, Day 17: We were up early for the sunrise and sail-in through Rangiroa atoll’s pass. Rangiroa is a very flat and vast atoll made up of over 415 motus and sand bars. A local pilot came aboard as we were a few miles from Tiputa Pass, one of only two entry points into the lagoon for large ships. Fierce winds were blowing at 32 knots across the mouth of the pass, making the entry a bit more tricky. As we entered, we were met by a pod of large bottlenose dolphins playing in the pressure wave of the bow, and leaping high out of the water. Fun to see. With this strong east wind, it became evident as we turned into the lagoon that there was a new, unannounced, plan for tendering. Originally, we were scheduled to tender to the town of Avatoru on the far west end of the motu. But that tender dock is very exposed to this kind of wind so, much to my delight, the captain anchored the ship toward the eastern end of the motu, and we tendered to the dive school dock on the far east end, in the wind shadow of a hook-spit formed by the currents through the pass. Had we docked at the west end, Ginny & I would have had about a 5-mile hike to Dolphin Viewpoint, so the change put us within a half-mile of our desired destination. BONUS. At any rate we got tickets for the first tender ashore, and landed at about 8:30am.

At the tender dock, we were greeted by Rangiroan drummers and dancers, so we lingered a while to watch and photograph their performance. Then we left the sheltered waters of the tender pier in the lagoon and headed off to dolphin point, which is on the Pacific Ocean side of the atoll. The sea over there was churning like a washing machine with the big, wind-driven waves meeting a very strong out-flowing current. Even in those conditions, there were several small zodiac dive boats out. Interestingly, as the dive boats came through the pass, the dolphins would jump around them. We walked westward a mile or so along the ocean side, which is made up of broken coral (not much sand on that side) parallel to the main road. The wind was at our back, but it was strong and relentless, so we decided cut over to the lagoon. We crossed over the main road at the next intersection, and followed a dirt road to the lagoon, where we found a tranquil spot under a palm tree with a narrow, white sand strip of sand. We were wearing our swim suits, so we just dropped our bags and put on our water shoes (to protect against sharp coral shards), and waded right in… aaaaaahhhhhh… refreshing. The water in the lagoon seemed to be extra salty, so we were very buoyant as we laid back in the water, a bit like the Dead Sea. We puttered around in that idyllic setting for a while, then continued to the west on the lagoon shore another half mile until we were stopped by the private beach of a resort that had the stilted thatched guest rooms out over the water. So at that point we turned around and, waded along the lagoon shore back toward the tender dock. We met some interesting locals along the way—ukulele player, hat weavers, and such. Eventually, we got back to our starting point, and noticed it was lunchtime. So we again found a sheltered, private little spot under a palm tree facing Tiputa Pass. We made a mat of some fallen palm fronds, sat down and, as we so often do, enjoyed our leisurely and simple picnic. We stayed there, undisturbed, for almost an hour, watching the dolphins continue their jumping show in the pass. It was wonderful. We also photographed a type of tern we hadn’t seen before, that we’ll have to look up. We also had an interesting floral surprise, when Ginny found that this atoll has a type of wild poinsettia, growing in great profusion. So, as the 1pm hour approached, we packed our picnic up and headed back to the tender dock, and were back aboard the Amsterdam by 1:30pm. After showers we headed to the Lido deck for iced tea and time to download and cull the many photos we had taken. The captain weighed anchor at about 4:45pm and we were headed for Papeete, Tahiti. Once again, as we drove back through the pass, dolphins played around the bow pressure wave.

We attended the evening entertainment which was the second show of magician, Fred Moore. More laughs and amazement, and then bedtime. The pedometer showed over 7.5 miles of walking today. So long, Rangiroa, we hardly knew ye…