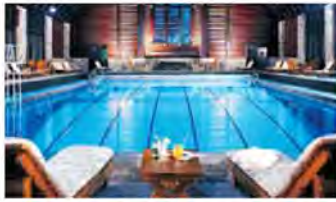


TRAVEL

Go ahead ... dive right in

Enjoy a great brunch, then laze by the pool, only an hour away, H6



Where to stay in Tuscany

With a winery, a pool and tasteful rooms, this place is perfect, H7



Sweet home Alabama

Why the Gulf Coast is a wonderful place to spend winter, H8

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THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION H



Herman Melville was held captive by cannibals on Nuku Hiva, one of 20 islands that make up the Marquesas.

Unplugging in Chicago

It was time for a digital detox vacation

BY NANCY TREJOS

I recently came to a sad realization: One of my longest, most stable relationships over the past three years has not been with a boyfriend. It's been with my BlackBerry.

Sure, my BlackBerry Bold can be slow, occasionally runs out of energy, disappears from time to time and wakes me up with an annoyingly loud beep. But it is, without fail, the last thing I look at when I go to sleep and the first thing I look at when I wake up. Yes folks, I sleep with my BlackBerry.

And why not? I do everything on it. I use it to communicate with bosses, friends and family; to get directions to wherever I'm going; to read the news; to store phone numbers and other important information; to schedule appointments, listen to music and even play Sudoku.

But most importantly, my BlackBerry connects me to Facebook, Twitter, Skype and Gchat so that I know what my friends are thinking, doing and eating at any given moment. I admit it: I'm that annoying person who nearly knocks you down in the street because she's too busy looking at her phone to notice you. I'm the diner who keeps her BlackBerry on the table next to the cutlery. I'm the runner who checks her e-mail while waiting for the crosswalk light to change.

I'm that annoying person who nearly knocks you down in the street because she's too busy looking at her phone to notice you.

In my defence, I'm not the only one with a digital addiction. A recent study found that 72 per cent of North Americans check their e-mail while on vacation, on weekends or on other non-work days. And in another study last year, 200 University of Maryland students who were asked to abstain from social media for 24 hours and then describe how they felt used words such as miserable, anxious, jittery and crazy.

I could identify. Lately, I'd gotten to the point where I couldn't even go to the water fountain at work without my BlackBerry. This was alarming enough to force me to take drastic action: It was time for a digital detox vacation.

"Think of it as exploring the Land of Silence," one of my friends said when I told her of my plan.

As Facebook and Twitter increasingly take over the world, many hotels and resorts are starting to offer travellers an escape from the digital world. Yoga retreat company Via Yoga offers digital detox retreats to Mexico. At Petit St. Vincent, an island resort in the Grenadines, the only way to communicate with the staff is to hoist a flag on a flagpole in front of your cottage: Yellow is for service, red for "Do Not Disturb."

For my three-day detox, I chose the Hotel Monaco in Chicago, which has a one-bedroom "Tranquility Suite" that seemed like the perfect place to unplug. At check-in, you can have your electronic devices locked in a safe in the office. And in your room, you can relax with heating pads, sleep masks and a sound machine.

See DETOX on page H2

Seduced by the South Seas

Take a
freighter in
the wake of
Melville and
Gauguin to
the remote
Marquesas
islands

BY GLEN PETRIE

*Keep true to the dreams
of thy youth.*

Herman Melville kept this line from German poet Schiller on his desk, and I too adopted it as a leitmotif. So I guess it's not totally surprising that I found myself standing cliff-edge on one of the remotest islands in the world, staring into the very jungle chasm where the *Moby Dick* author was held captive by cannibals.

We both shared youthful fancies of sailing to south sea islands on working ships, mine fuelled by the writings of Melville himself. In 1842, a young Melville impetuously signed on to a whaling ship headed for the South Pacific. I came on a little freighter out of Papeete, Tahiti. I quite liked my vessel but Melville hated his and jumped ship here in Nuku Hiva, one of 20 islands of the Marquesas. Rugged, lush volcanic humps 1,300 kilometres north of Tahiti, les Iles Marquises lay smack dab in the middle of the Pacific, thousands of miles in any direction from ... anywhere.

Melville was captured by the reportedly vicious Taipées in the namesake valley at my feet, but he escaped to tell the tale in his first book, *Typee*, which became an instant sensation and



Horrified missionaries changed the name of this scenic spot from Bay of Penises to Bay of Virgins.

launched his career.

"From the spot where I lay transfixed with surprise and delight," he wrote, "I looked straight down into the bosom of a valley, which swept away in long way undulations to the blue waters in the distance ... an abrupt and semicircular termination of grassy cliffs and precipices hundreds of feet in height, over which flowed numberless small cascades." Right on.

"Like *Jurassic Park*," remarked one of my fellow travellers, more prosaically, but he was right. It

looks primordial, as if the deep, dark valleys could indeed be patrolled by dinosaurs.

Mine was not a unique dream of thy youth, apparently. More than 100 others had signed on to the *Aranui 3* for one of her regular runs supplying the islands of the Marquesas with everything they need (and many things they don't), and taking away to market their meagre agricultural output (copra, the dried kernel of the coconut).

See MARQUESAS on page H3

TRAVEL



PHOTOS BY GLEN PETRIE

Marquesans are reviving aspects of their traditional culture, such as ancient dances.

Marquesas: Visit on a freighter from Tahiti

Continued from page H1

A sturdy and well-kept vessel, she's two ships in one. The front end of her is all business, a pair of massive cranes capable of lifting everything imaginable: bulldozers, soda crackers, trucks, cars, beer, boats, cows, cheese puffs, paint, soap, windows, roofing, brake pads — literally everything that a well-supplied little village can use on a normal day. With costly French support, the minute settlements of the Marquesas want for little.

The rear end of *Aranui 3* is an unpretentious little hotel, with comfortable if unadorned cabins for as many as 216 people, lounges, a restaurant, bar and small swimming pool. The company does an admirable job of laying on a cruise-like experience. There is good French food and bad (but free!) French wine, lessons in Polynesian dance, live music, parties and lectures on relevant topics. The staff members speak a spattering of languages to accommodate the mixed stew of nationalities that fly in from around the world to follow the freight to its enigmatic destination.

Wherever the ship docked I found locals waiting in their own vehicles — every truck, van and SUV on the island, if necessary — to take passengers on island tours while the tattooed stevedores muscled cargo about. Guides went along to help us understand what we explored. All of this was included in the fare, making the freighter a good travel deal in one of the most expensive corners of the world.

The jungles hide dozens of ancient archaeological sites — the Marquesas are known as an outdoor museum — and after winding through the Taipivai Valley we stopped at Kamuihei to explore one of the best, a large complex of temples and altars (*marae*), stone foundations (*pae pae*), sacred statues (*tikis*) and petroglyphs. Surrounding a 600-year-old banyan trees whose tangled roots contain the skulls of ancient noble-



Noni fruit is used to make nutritional juices.

men, the site is profoundly mystical. I was startled from my contemplations by a burst of chanting and clapping, and discovered a group of men and women wearing only grass skirts performing an ancient dance upon the *marae*. It was like a scene from a thousand years ago, but not one you'd have seen 50 years ago. Only recently have Marquesans loosened the yoke of Christianity enough to foster a renewed appreciation of their ancient culture.

Christian missionaries had been appalled at the natural expression of human sexuality in Polynesian dances and banned their practice — as well as making taboo (from the Polynesian word *tapu*) their language, culture and religious beliefs.

Yet, being so remote, the Marquesas are the best islands on which to catch authentic glimpses of traditional Polynesian culture. At the pretty village of Hatiheu, nestled at the base of a jagged mountain like a gloved hand, I lunched on pork baked in the ancient way — buried in an oven of hot rocks in the ground. And breadfruit, the starchy, nutritious staple that Captain Bligh was seeking as a source of food for Caribbean slaves when he was set adrift by his mutinous crew.

Then I took the advice of a local to climb to a look-off called the saddleback that afforded views of neighbouring Anaho Bay. It was worth the hike: this perfect rectangle of blue-green waters is the spot that seduced another famous adventure writer,



Paul Gauguin, who was buried in a Marquesan cemetery, above, scandalized Europe with his sensuous paintings of naked girls.

Robert Louis Stevenson, in 1888. Apparently even his recalcitrant mother-in-law liked it (and how could she not?)

Ever since the first European landed here (Spanish navigator de Mandaña, naming the islands Las Marquesas de Mendoza after the then-vice-roy of Peru), foreigners have pursued the ideal of dropping out in a sybaritic paradise. I was only more in a long procession.

On the island of Hiva Oa, I stopped by the grave of Paul Gauguin, who died here of syphilis (a disease imported by Europeans) after both scandalizing and tempting Europe with his sensuous paintings of naked girls in a Garden of Eden. The island's tiny town sports an impressive complex, The Paul Gauguin Cultural Center, housing Gauguin artifacts, copies of his paintings and his stilt home, the House of Pleasure.

And still they come. As our ship slipped into the harbour of Hiva Oa, she impatiently tooted aside an arriving catamaran. In town I ran into its owners, a wholesome young couple



from San Diego.

"Eight days from Panama to the Galapagos, and then 22 days to here," they said, still aglow from the achievement. On the route between North American and Australia, the Marquesas see many intrepid yachts-

The beauty of the bizarre landscapes is one of the key draws. Surging vertically from the sea in all array of fantastic shapes, thrown up abruptly by volcanic eruptions and eroded by time, they are like no other islands I've ever seen. On neighbouring Ua Pou, thick fingers of rock reach

If you go

When: The *Aranui 3* leaves Tahiti a couple of times a month, year round.
Cost: Per-person/double-occupancy fares for 13-day roundtrip voyages start at \$3,593 for a twin cabin with private facilities. Shared dormitory accommodations (10 to a co-ed room) are available for \$2,079 per person.
More: www.aranui.com

skyward like missile silos or, in Robert Louis Stevenson's words, "volcanic needles like the pinnacles of some ornate church."

And at Fatu Hiva, the most remote and undeveloped island of all, bizarre pillars of basalt form a stunning backdrop to one of the world's most picturesque bays, seen by few outsiders. The French called it *Baie des Verges* (Bay of Penises), but horrified missionaries inserted an "i" to make it *Virgins*, or Bay of Virgins.

A group of us set out on a steep 16-kilometre mountain hike, a sweaty challenge that rewarded us with some of the most beautiful vistas in the Pacific.

It was hard to finally watch these islands shrink in the ship's wake as we headed back to Tahiti. But *Aranui 3* is itself a Marquesan island, staffed mostly by friendly and multi-talented Marquesans who, when they weren't loading cargo, entertained us with food, music and laughter.

Perhaps because life was so good on board, it had never crossed my mind to jump ship.

Glen Petrie is a Toronto-based writer and photographer.

TO SEE Glen Petrie's video about the Marquesas Islands go to

OTTAWACITIZEN.COM



The island Ua Pou has thick fingers of rock that almost look like missile silos. Robert Louis Stevenson described them as 'volcanic needles like the pinnacles of some ornate church.'