

Ahoy Puddle Jumpers,

As the prime season for crossing to French Polynesia approaches, our fleet of westbound cruisers continues to grow. This year's 'early bird', singlehander Mike Jacoby of the Oregon-based Ingrid 38 Easy, is about to make landfall in the Marquesas. We're not sure why Mike made the crossing so early, or why he decided to leave from Colombia, but his daily reports tell us he's had a pretty good trip. This year we ask that all boats check in daily while passage-making. (More on this below.)

LONG STAY VISA UPDATES

As noted in our previous fleet letter, European Union citizens can stay in French Polynesia as long as they like, without being required to obtain a special visa in advance. (All visiting yachts may stay for three years without being officially imported.)

Americans and Canadians will get 90-day visas on arrival at their first landfall. These CANNOT be extended in the islands. Long Stay Visas for 6 to 12 months can be obtained IN ADVANCE of departure, but as most of you probably know, the procedure has changed dramatically this year.

Now outsourced to a non-governmental agency called VFS Global, the biggest change has been that you are now required to surrender your passport while your application is being processed, which can take between 3 and 8 weeks. (You need to begin the process online at https://france-visas.gouv.fr/en_US/web/france-visas)

Implementation of the new procedures varies from one place to another. Embassies often handle such issues differently from Consulates. A few related notes:

- The French Embassy in Panama is probably the easiest place to apply for and obtain a LSV. They are very efficient and do not require you to return to your home country to apply, as is the general rule elsewhere.
- Bruce and Alene on Migration, as well as several other cruisers, have reported that the French Embassy in Mexico City will accept LS Visa applications on site, rather than making you go through VFS. A related note is that several PPJers have reported that the US Embassy in Mexico City will issue second American passports in a day or two, in order to assist Americans in the French visa application process. (You can obtain one in the US also, but the process can take up to 8 weeks, unless you pay for expedited service.)
- The VFS website seems to have some glitches. (For example, to make an appointment you must begin by clicking on Washington DC, regardless of where you live.) If the site freezes on you, try switching to a different browser. The phone number on the site for help is: 1-347-252-3055, hours 9 to 4 Atlantic time. We talked with a very patient VFS employee who was helpful.
- After submitting LS Visa applications at a US consulate, Americans who have official Passport Cards could use them to cross the Mexican border by land, then return to their boats while awaiting completion of their visas.

If all this seems like too big a headache, consider leaving your boat in French Polynesia for a few months while you return home. Again, boats can stay up to three years. So you could leave your boat: hauled out in Apataki, Tuamotus; in Raiatea; or in Nuka Hiva, Marquesas; or on Tahiti in the Papeete Marina or Marina Taina. Although it is possible for cyclones to develop in French Polynesia,

major storms are very rare in these islands, so many boat owners simply 'roll the dice' and leave their boats during the November-to-April cyclone season.

PPJ SENDOFF EVENTS

If you are anywhere close, we hope you'll make a special effort to attend one of our annual PPJ Sendoff Parties:

Feb 28 - South Pacific Bon Voyage at Pacific side, Panama

10am-2pm Country Inn and Suites, Amador. Co-hosted by the Balboa YC, the Pacific Puddle Jump and the South Pacific Sailing Network.

Mar 1 - South Pacific Bon Voyage at Caribbean side, Panama

10am-2pm at Shelter Bay Marina. Co-hosted by Shelter Bay, the Pacific Puddle Jump and the South Pacific Sailing Network.

Mar 4 - South Pacific Bon Voyage and Pacific Puddle Jump Sendoff, Nuevo Vallarta, Mexico

2-6 pm at the Vallarta YC, Nuevo Vallarta. Co-hosted by the Vallarta YC, the Pacific Puddle Jump and Latitude 38 and the South Pacific Sailing Network.

Email andyturpinatlarge@gmail.com for additional info.

PLEASE JOIN THE SPECIAL PPJ NET

As mentioned earlier, without sacrificing the loosely structured nature of the Puddle Jump, we are taking steps to improve both fleet safety and fleetwide camaraderie during your crossing to French Polynesia. With this in mind, we invite you to join the special Pacific Puddle Jump net and become familiar with it prior to beginning your passage to French Polynesia. Attached BELOW are detailed instructions.

Please let us know via email us (andyturpinatlarge@gmail.com) when you are about to begin your passages to the Marquesas, the Tuamotus and the Societies, then check in daily via satellite text or email with your position and status daily.

During your crossing you can opt in or out of having your position displayed on the fleet tracking page, but fleet monitors will always see it.

In addition to the general PPJ fleet net, a separate net has been set up for PPJ kids. While underway, you will also be able to request the locations of any PPJ vessels within 200 miles of you.

WORKING WITH TAHITI CREW

Attached to our Fleet Letter #1 you should have been sent a letter explaining this year's offer of services from the Tahitian yacht agency, Tahiti Crew. tahiticrew@mail.com

By registering with the PPJ, you will receive a \$50 discount on their clearance/bond/duty free fuel package, although you are under no obligation to do so. We have been told by many of the agency's customers that the savings on fuel alone will cover the cost of this package — especially for larger boats.

Tahiti Crew is a small business, so please do not wait until the last minute to complete your paperwork and payment to them. And don't expect them to make expedited arrangements for you once you are underway — this is possible, but creates problems.

We'll be back to you soon with more fleet info, including some special discounts from South Pacific businesses.

Thanks,

— Andy Turpin
Director, Pacific Puddle Jump
andyturpinatlarge@gmail.com

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Cuttlefish (Stowaway Enterprises), Downwind Marine, Hydrovane, Marina El Cid, Marina Riviera Nayarit, Mariner's General Insurance Group, Novamar Insurance Group, OCENS, Pantaenius America, Paradise Village Marina, Satellite Phone Store, South Pacific Sailing Network