

Bragg 20th Wedding Anniversary Trip to the Philippines & Hawaii April 2015

This trip all began with the extremely generous offer by Jo Marie & George Dancik to stay at their Kauai condo in honor of our 20th wedding anniversary. Jo Marie was the “mistress of ceremonies” at our wedding on March 4, 1995 (and our former boss at Ernst & Young). It just so happens that we became engaged in Kauai, twenty-one years ago, in April 1994. We accepted their offer with delight and set about doing some trip planning. After considering various options, we decided to travel first to the Philippines for a dive trip and then stopover in Hawaii on the return leg. We decided to travel in April instead of March (the actual anniversary date) so we wouldn’t miss out on March skiing!



Us with Jo Marie Dancik on 3/4/95

Philippines Dive Trip

Since we are both big fans of live-aboard dive trips, we booked a week’s trip on the *Atlantis Azores*. Our destination area would be the *Tubbataha Reef* which sits in the middle of the *Sulu Sea*, the body of water in the southwestern area of the Philippines.



In order to meet up with the *Atlantis Azores*, we needed to get ourselves to the Filipino city of *Puerto Princesa*. To do this, we first flew direct from Denver, CO to Narita, Japan (i.e., Tokyo’s airport city) on a Boeing 787, “The Dreamliner.” The nearly 12 hour flight, although long, was much preferable to what would have been a 2-flight endeavor just a few years ago. The digital personal entertainment systems helped us pass the time having a huge selection of movies, TV shows, and such – they even had a games menu and I was able to play some bridge!

We left Denver mid-day on Thursday, April 2 and arrived in Narita mid-afternoon on Friday, April 3 – yes, we crossed



the International Date Line. We were greeted in Narita by the unexpected site of a long line of cherry trees in full pink flower blossom alongside the runway – a lovely contrast to the otherwise gray, drizzly skies. After a relatively short layover of less than 2 hours, our next flight took us from Narita to Manila, the 4 ½ hour journey had us landing at about 9pm Friday night (which was Friday, 7am in Denver). After collecting our bags, it was a quick taxi ride to the Manila Marriott for some much needed sleep.

Note: Security is extremely tight getting onto the hotel property. There is a security checkpoint at the border of the property where our taxi had to stop and have its undercarriage checked with mirrors. Before entering the actual hotel building, our bags were put through an x-ray machine like those at airports and we were screened by walking through the same sort of screening device found at airports.

The Manila Marriott is a beautiful hotel located very near the airport in an area called “Resort World Manila” which encompasses several hotels, a large casino, a theater, and a luxury shopping complex (think high end jewelry and clothing brands from around the world). Our room included a *bathing room* which contained both a separate bathtub and a shower area with both wall & rain shower fixtures (the bathing room was sided on two walls by glass with the other two walls, floor, and ceiling being completely tiled).

As breakfast was included in our overnight stay, we enjoyed a leisurely meal Saturday morning. The meal was served buffet style with an outrageous selection of items from around the world – think “typical” breakfast and even brunch items from the US, Europe, Asia, and South America and what that means, and you’ll have some idea of the vast number of items offered. Lots of tropical fruits were offered including full coconuts with straws and I enjoyed dried papaya, jackfruit and coconut with my oatmeal! One item in particular caught my attention: a piece of honeycomb, approx. 10” x 18” x 1.5” which was positioned over a slanted metal trough that “caught” the dripping honey and deposited it into a bowl from which you could retrieve it for use. Needless to say, we enjoyed a very filling breakfast!

We had hoped to do a ½ day tour of Manila but unfortunately the timing didn’t work out. We did enjoy the nice view of the city’s skyline from our hotel room. The city certainly seems to have grown up since my last visits in 1980 and 1974!



Manila Skyline



Filipino “Jeepney”

One aspect of the city that hadn’t changed was the presence of the very colorful and often kitchy decorated “Jeepney’s” that roam the city’s roadways and serve as a very popular mode of public transportation (the vehicles are privately owned/operated). The original Jeepney’s came about in the post WWII era when thousands of used jeeps were sold to Filipinos. They then modified them –

extended the rear to accommodate more passengers, added metal roofs, etc. and began to personalize/customize them with paint and ornamentation. These original Jeepneys have long since been replaced by Filipino-manufactured vehicles.

We noticed at the Marriot, and subsequently throughout our trip, the seemingly “over-staffed” nature of the place (at least in comparison to what we’re used to). It turns out that the minimum wage for those working in Manila is only about \$10 per day which likely explains things a bit, including the 8 or so “gate agents” at the gate of our next flight!

Puerto Princesa

Saturday afternoon we returned to the Manila airport, this time to the Domestic Terminal, for our one hour flight to Puerto Princesa. We were met at the airport by reps of the Atlantis Azores who shepherded us and our bags through the check-in process. As this was Easter weekend, a popular travel time for Filipinos, the plane was quite crowded with family groups on the move. Nearly all appeared to be carrying gifts to awaiting family/friends with bags chock full of boxed *Crispy Cream* donuts being a very popular choice -- there is a Crispy Cream located in the Domestic Terminal along with such other brands as *Shakey's Pizza*, *Wendy's*, *Seattle's Best Coffee*, and more – and we saw 3 different McDonalds on the short ride from the Marriott to the airport.



Upon arrival in Puerto Princesa we were greeted on the tarmac by the land manager for the Atlantis Azores and whisked into the airport's VIP Waiting Room. There we were given bottles of chilled water and a bag of freshly baked cookies. Such service and pampering was definitely an indication of what we would continue to experience throughout our week!

An interesting note: Puerto Princesa's small airport means that you deplane the old-fashioned way via stairs rolled up to the plane (i.e., no jet-ways). We noticed that it seemed to be a somewhat standard practice for the arriving Filipinos to take photos of themselves/their group upon debarking, with the plane in the background – either as *selfies* or someone else sporting the camera. We observed this practice happening over and over again both upon our arrival and when we were waiting to depart a week later and could watch various flights deplane.

While our luggage was collected for us, we had the chance to meet most of our fellow guests. We then loaded ourselves into a van for a short ride through Puerto Princesa to where the Atlantis Azores was docked. Puerto Princesa is the seat of government for the western provincial island of *Palawan, Philippines*. With a population of around a quarter of a million, it is an urban city known as the Eco-Tourism capital of the Philippines. It is also the jumping off point for the Tubbataha Reef, our dive destination.



The Atlantis Azores

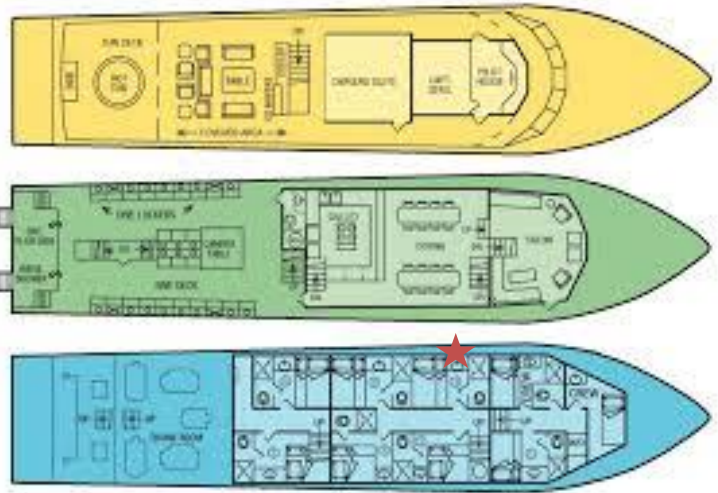
Once aboard the Atlantis Azores, we set-up/stored our dive gear on the dive deck, settled the rest of our stuff in our cabin, and then joined our fellow guests in the main cabin for introductions and orientation before enjoying our first of many outstanding dinners aboard. After dinner we took in the total lunar eclipse from the boat's upper sun deck – a sight we don't often get to see! Turns out it was the shortest "totality" in almost five centuries – the totality only lasted 4 minutes, 43 seconds.



The Atlantis Azores Live-aboard Dive Boat

While the Atlantis Azores can accommodate up to 16 guests in its 7 state rooms and 1 owner's suite, we had a total of 11 guests from around the world for our week aboard: 2 from the UK, 2 from Australia, 1 from Japan, 1 from China, 1 Frenchman now living in Hong Kong, and 4 Americans (2 from California plus us) – 5 males and 6 females ranging in age from about late 30's to mid-60's (that's my best guess). All were experienced divers, so the discussion of various dive sites around the globe was a common topic of conversation.

The boat is 107' long and 18' wide with 3 main levels. The state rooms are “below decks” (i.e., on the lowest level). Our “state room” is marked with the red star. It consisted of a double bed over a single bed bunked overhead (we used it for storage). A cabinet with sink (with some drawers) completed the main area of the room -- doored bathroom with shower and toilet completed the layout. Since the room is basically used only for sleeping and changing between dives, its small size is not a concern.



The boat’s main deck area consists of the dive deck and the main saloon/dining area, including the extremely important kitchen – we are always amazed at how much we seem to need to eat while diving. The saloon includes comfy seating areas and a large screen TV for watching movies if desired. The “sun deck” sits over the main deck and includes the owner’s suite, the captain’s room and adjoining “wheel house” as well as both covered and non-covered lounging areas, complete with beverage refrigerators, BBQ grill and hot tub!

There was a crew of 11 on board to meet our every need: Captain, Co-Captain, 1st mate, 2nd mate, Engineer, Chef, Sous Chef, Purser, 2 Dive Masters, and 2 Zodiac Drivers. Each crew member wore many hats and someone was always at hand to help as needed on the dive deck, serving meals, etc.

The Tubbataha Reef

The *Tubbataha Reef* (too-bah-tah-hah') sits roughly 85 nautical miles from Puerto Princesa in the middle of the Sulu Sea. Our boat left Puerto Princesa about 8pm for the 10+ hour crossing to the reef. So as we cruised through the waters of the Sulu Sea, we turned in early and slept well to the gentle rolling of the boat – calm seas made for a pleasant crossing that apparently can get quite rough.

Since divers discovered the reef in the 1970’s, it is considered one of the most extraordinary dive sites in the world – it was ranked 8th best dive site in the world on a recent CNN travel website. In 1988, the



Tubbataha Reefs Marine Park became the Philippines’ first national marine park. In 1993 it was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site is described by UNESCO as follows:



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

The Tubbataha Reef Marine Park covers 130,028 ha, including the North and South Reefs. It is a unique example of an atoll reef with a very high density of marine species; the North Islet serving as a nesting site for birds and marine turtles. The site is an excellent example of a pristine coral reef with a spectacular 100-m perpendicular wall, extensive lagoons and two coral islands.

The name “Tubbataha” comes from the local Samal language meaning “long reef exposed at low tide”. Tubbataha’s dive season is just three months long, running from mid-March until mid-June. During this window, diving conditions usually involve clear skies, air temperatures around 82 degrees, calm seas, visibility between 95 and 145 feet, and water temperatures around 82 degrees. Outside this relatively short diving season, the sea conditions are considered too rough as the diving period is bracketed by the area’s 2 typhoon seasons. Between the short diving season and the relatively isolated location, the number of divers annually visiting Tubbataha Reef is only about 1500 – we feel quite privileged to be among that small group!



The Tubbataha National Marine Park was enlarged in 2006 to include the *Jessie Beazley Reef*, which increased the boundaries of the park by 200% to 970.30 square kilometers (239,770 acres). The national park was also reclassified as a *natural park* at this time. Before leaving Puerto Princesa, employees of the park came on board to talk about the park's rules, which are extensive. Enforcement of these rules is the responsibility of the onsite park rangers with backup from an armed Filipino Coast Guard ship!

The Tubbataha Reef is made up of two coral atolls or reefs called the *North Atoll* and the *South Atoll*. They are separated by a deep 5 mile wide channel. Each atoll has a lagoon in the middle and small sandy islets. The North Atoll, the larger of the two, is approximately 9.9 miles long and 3.1 miles wide. The ranger station is located on an islet on the Southeast edge of North Atoll. A small islet called North Islet lies in the northern edge of the reef's lagoon. Amos Rocks is located near the southwestern tip of the reef. South Rock is at the southern tip of the atoll on a sandy cay. The South Reef is approximately 3.1 miles in length and 1.9 miles in width. The Tubbataha Lighthouse is located near the southern tip of South Atoll on a small low islet called South islet. A rock called *Black Rock* lies on the northern edge of South Atoll. The smaller *Jessie Beazley Reef* is located about 12 miles north of the two atolls.



Diving the Tubbataha Reef aboard the Atlantis Azores

Our Tubbataha diving began on Easter morning, Sunday, April 5, 2015 on the dive site called "Malayan Wreck" located on the western side of the North Atoll. Not much remains of the actual wreck but that's fine with me – we were there for the sea life which we saw plenty of! On that first checkout dive, we quickly discovered two things that held fairly constant throughout the week: 1) the abundance of fish, other sea creatures, and hard & soft corals was astounding in both quantity and quality; and 2) the currents were often quite strong which meant you just "went along for the ride"! On that first dive we saw everything from sharks to turtles to baby anemone fish.

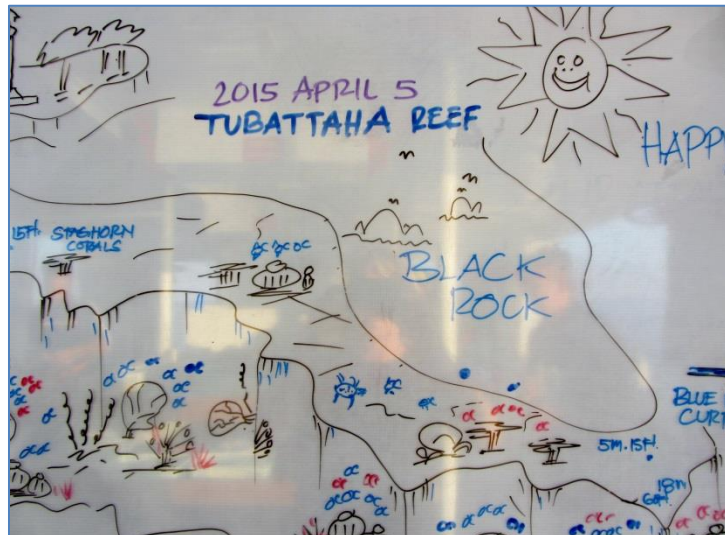
Diving from the Atlantis Azores involves first suiting up on the dive deck. Given the water temp of roughly 82 degrees both Steve and I chose to wear both a "core warmer" (a sleeveless, shorty wet suit) and a full length 3mm wetsuit, plus neoprene booties. While 82 degrees might seem like relatively warm water, it doesn't seem so after multiple dives a day for several days. Plus, we quickly discovered that diving Tubbataha means often encountering cold water "up swells" from the deep – we'd be tooling along quite comfortably when up-ahead we'd



see the water “shimmering” and know we were about to pass through water which was 10 to 15 degrees colder (think heat waves shimmering off black top but with cold instead!). By the end of the week I also added my hooded, long-sleeved *shark skin* top to my dive ensemble for the last couple of dives. Being comfortable temperature-wise is critical to my dive enjoyment level.

Once suited up, it would be time for the *dive briefing*: we were briefed by one of the dive masters on the layout and type of dive area, expected current conditions, what to look for in terms of sea life, and anticipated dive profile (how deep we’d be at various stages of the dive).

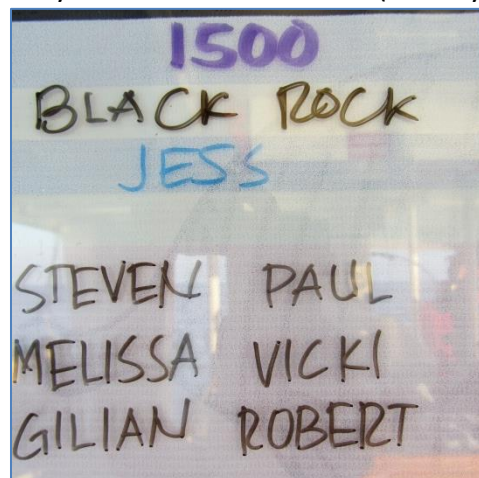
Following the dive briefing it would be time to head to the *Zodiacs* – the rigid inflatable rubber boats used to ferry the divers to/from the mother ship to the actual dive sites. Our group of 11 divers was divided into 2 groups: we were part of a group of 6 divers assigned to the starboard side Zodiac while the remaining 5 divers had the port side Zodiac. We were joined in our group by the Australian couple (Vicki and Robert) and the English pair (Paul and Gilian). All our diving equipment/gear (with the exception of our masks) would be loaded onto the Zodiac by the crew and then we’d climb down a ladder into the Zodiac.



Dive Briefing Board

Joining the divers in each Zodiac were a dive master plus a driver. The Zodiac “assignments” were written on a whiteboard for each dive and IF you chose to sit out a dive you simply erased your name on the board (so they wouldn’t come looking for you when it was time to dive!).

We would sit along the Zodiac’s pontoons and head out for the designated dive site – at most a 10 minute ride. Once at the dive site we’d pop on our fins, be helped on with our gear (tanks & BCD’s – buoyancy control devices), place our masks on our faces (and hold them there with one hand) and as a group do a simultaneous back roll into the water on the dive master’s count of “3.” Upon surfacing, we’d give the “OK” signal and then grab our cameras from the boat driver. Upon the dive master’s signal we’d begin our descent and thus our dive.



At the conclusion of a dive (when we started our 3 minutes safety stop at 15ft below the surface), the dive master would inflate and raise his safety sausage to alert the Zodiac driver of our exact location. Thus the Zodiac would be there awaiting us once we surfaced. Before climbing back into the Zodiac, we'd pass our cameras up the driver, then give him our fins before removing our BCDs/tanks which would be lifted into the boat as well. We then used a ladder to get ourselves into the Zodiac before the return trip to the Atlantis Azores. Once back aboard, we'd remove our wetsuits, give them a quick rinse and hang them up to "dry" before we ourselves would enjoy a hot water shower on the back deck (with natural coconut oil shampoo no less) and then dry ourselves off with a freshly laundered and *heated* towel!

Over the course of the week, we dove all around the various parts of the reef. Some observations from various dives/sites:

- There were hard and soft corals in every color of the rainbow including my favorite's lavender and periwinkle blue! While diving *Black Rock* we saw large areas of "acid green" colored coral teeming with acid-green fish (camouflage is a common survival mechanism).
- Speaking of camouflage, our dive master Jess showed us a *Pygmy Seahorse* who was hanging out on a beautiful coral sea fan. How he found it is amazing considering that the pygmy seahorse is the same color as the sea fan and ONLY about 3/8" long when swimming (when measured from the tip of their snout to the tip of the tail they are usually between 1/2" and 1"). While I could "see" the sea horse, I had to look up its picture in the fish book to actually make out its distinguishing features.
- At *Shark Airport* we did indeed see many, many sharks resting on the sand as if they had just come in for a landing (white and black tips as well as gray reef sharks). The group of divers on the other Zodiac were a bit behind our group and they saw a 15ft Tiger Shark – a sight I was happy to miss.
- The current wasn't too strong for our dive at *Washing Machine* but we still enjoyed a few twists, turns and tumbles
- We spotted 2 beautiful marble rays while diving along the wall at *Wall Street* while the shallower reef top was home to several *Granulated Sea Stars* (they look like they are puffed up with air) and lots of anemones filled with anemone fish (i.e., "Nemo")
- The wall at *South Park* can only be described as a nearly vertical garden of coral with ribbons of flora and fauna and florets of soft corals in dazzling colors.
- Per our Captain Jon, we had "lumpy" conditions on a couple of dives (i.e., strong currents and bigger swells). During our first dive on Tuesday, April 7 we aborted the dive after just 6 minutes due to a very strong current. We climbed into the Zodiac and tried a different area for part 2 of dive 1. On the post-dive Zodiac ride back to the boat we ended up "surfing" on the crest of the waves at times – what fun!



Pygmy Seahorse



Granulated Sea Star



Clown Anemone Fish - S Bragg Photo



Sunset at Black Rocks Tubbataha Reef

The general rhythm of life aboard the Atlantis Azores revolved around diving and eating with some rest thrown in and *roughly* followed this schedule ...

- 6am Continental, self-serve breakfast available
- 7am Dive 1
- 8:30am Full breakfast with made-to-order eggs
- 10am Dive 2
Post-dive "sweet snack"
- 12:30pm Lunch served family style with soup starter and multiple choices of dishes
- 2:30pm Dive 3
Post-dive "savory snack"
- 4:30pm Dive 4
- 6:30pm Dinner, served by crew with soup and green

salad courses followed by main entrée and dessert (at lunch we each selected our evening's main entrée from a choice of at least four gourmet options)

In between dives and eating, most of us retreated to the sun deck (usually the covered area) -- re-hydrating and napping were favorite activities here!

The Atlantis Azores prides itself on its culinary capabilities and rightly so! We ate extremely well prepared, well-seasoned, and well-presented food.

One day after lunch we had the opportunity to take a trip, via the zodiacs, to the Tubbataha Ranger Station. The ranger station sits near the edge of North Atoll and is built over-the-water. It is manned by rangers who work onsite for 8 weeks then rotate off for 4 weeks. The accommodations are quite rustic and rather crowded. The rangers have a special license to fish in the area and we were told they basically live on a diet of fresh fish and rice and whatever visiting groups from live-aboards such as ourselves "share" (our chef was with us on the visit and he handed over a package of goodies he had prepared).



Steve catching a few zzz's between dives



Inside Ranger Station



View from Tubbataha Ranger Station



On the board the Atlantis Azores

On our final day of diving, Friday, we had the “pleasure” of getting up for a 6am dive followed by our final dive of the trip at 8am. Afterwards, it was time to break down our gear, get it rinsed and hang it to dry so it would be ready to be packed up later (our rinsed wet suits were hung near the engine room so the room’s heat could assist in the drying process). We then settled down for the 10 hr return crossing to Puerto Princesa – again, we were fortunate to have calm seas for the crossing. We were back at the dock in time for a final dinner on board.

After dinner, I joined three others to explore Puerto Princesa a bit; crew member Felix came along as our “minder”! At the dock gates, the 5 of us all piled into/on a Filipino *Tricycle* (a motorbike with a sidecar)

for a short “taxi” ride to Puerto Princesa’s *Baywalk Park*. The Baywalk area is a very popular place with the locals as it is filled with lots of places to get food and drink, especially fresh seafood (including lots of varieties that we had admired while diving) and various BBQ items. Several vendors were selling the popular street food items such as boiled peanuts (OK but rather bland) and *balut*, which is a fertilized duck egg that is boiled and eaten in the shell (i.e., with a developing duck embryo inside) – I didn’t try one! The park also has a small amusement area with a few rides for the kids, various game stalls, and an area where various gambling-type stall games were obviously quite popular.



Filipino Motorized Tricycle



Puerto Princesa's Baywalk Park



Food Stall in Baywalk Park

After strolling along the Baywalk (wishing for a nice breeze given the extremely high humidity, but no luck) we headed up the hill to the main town area. Given the number of dogs on the loose there are obviously no leash laws! We did a nice loop through town, including a visit to the city’s Immaculate Conception Cathedral (completed in 1872) before returning to the boat for a much needed shower and a final night’s rest on board.



Immaculate Conception Cathedral

Saturday morning, after a continental breakfast, it was time to return to Manila via a mid-morning 1 hour flight from Puerto Princesa. Since our next flight was not until late in the evening, we had arranged for a hotel 'day room' at a nearby hotel (just around the corner from the Manila Marriott). We spent the rest of the day strolling the shopping Resort World Shopping Mall, enjoying a fresh crepe lunch, resting, and freshening up before heading back to the airport for our overnight flight to Guam. We caught the free shuttle to the airport and got another taste of Manila traffic (some due to construction) – the approximately 3 mile trip took about 40 minutes!

While standing in the check-in line at the Manila International Terminal, the man behind us asked where we were from ... turns out he went to Colorado College with our friends Jeff and Sharon Moulton (it is a small world!). He then introduced us to his much younger Filipino fiancé who was traveling with him back to his home in Portland, OR on a 90-day "fiancé visa" (they have 90 days to get married once back in the states or she must return to the Philippines) – it certainly looked like a "mail order bride" like situation to us.

We arrived in Guam early Sunday morning and caught our next flight from Guam to Honolulu, arriving there Saturday afternoon. The International Date Line does result in a version of *time travel* -- we arrived in Honolulu before we had left Manila – crazy.

Since Steve had never been to the island of Oahu, and I hadn't been there since 1970, we decided to spend a few days there before heading over to the island of Kauai. With over 70% of Hawaii's population, the island of Oahu is a mixture of big city (Honolulu) and Tropical Island. Consequently, it has elements of both -- horrendous traffic jams and gorgeous beaches and stunning scenery.

Some fun facts and trivia about Hawaii:

1. The state of Hawaii consists of eight main islands: Niihau, Kauai, Oahu, Maui, Molokai, Lanai, Kahoolawe and the Big Island of Hawaii.
2. Hawaii is the most isolated population center on the face of the earth. Hawaii is 2,390 miles from California; 3,850 miles from Japan; 4,900 miles from China; and 5,280 miles from the Philippines.
3. Hawaii is the only state that grows coffee.
4. More than one-third of the world's commercial supply of pineapples comes from Hawaii.
5. There are only 12 letters in the Hawaiian alphabet. Vowels: A, E, I, O, U Consonants: H, K, L, M, N, P, W
6. From east to west Hawaii is the widest state in the United States.
7. The Hawaiian Islands are the projecting tops of the biggest mountain range in the world. Under-sea volcanoes that erupted thousands of years ago formed the islands of Hawaii.
8. The Hawaiian Archipelago consists of over 130 scattered points of land stretching some 1,600 miles in length from the Kure Atoll in the north to the Island of Hawaii in the south.

In order to get the "full" Honolulu experience, we stayed at the Honolulu Marriott which overlooks the world famous *Waikiki Beach*. The area is teeming with tourists from around the world and is an excellent people watching spot. We enjoyed some very civilized people watching while sipping a cold beverage at the historic Moana Hotel's *Beach Bar* which abuts Waikiki Beach. The Waikiki area is also stuffed full of high-end shops featuring designer goods – not particularly a *Hawaiian* cultural experience!



Some of our Oahu experiences also included:

- Waikiki Aquarium – a small but nicely presented aquarium but nothing beats seeing fish and creatures in their own environment like we had just been doing in the Philippines
- Waimea Valley & Falls – located on the north shore of Oahu this area provides botanical, ecological and cultural elements in a beautiful setting
- Kahuku Sugar Mill – there isn't much left of the actual sugar mill but we enjoyed the classic Hawaiian treat of *Shave Ice* (think snow cone with your choice of syrup flavors) and the very Hawaiian scene of chickens underfoot
- Dole Pineapple Plantation – we learned a bit about the cultivation and variety of pineapples but were happy to skip the over-priced gift shop featuring pineapple-related trinkets



Along the eastern coast of Oahu



Passion Fruit Shave Ice
of course!



Red pineapples - Who Knew?



USS Bowfin: before the days of digital technology

We spent our last day on Oahu visiting the Pearl Harbor area – we literally spent a full day here at the *WWII Valor in the Pacific National Monument*. In addition to the moving *USS Arizona* Memorial, we explored the *USS Bowfin*, a WWII era submarine, (I would not have wanted to be the crew members who had to sleep atop a missile) and the very informative accompanying submarine museum. It was fascinating to explore the many decks and areas of the battleship *USS Missouri*. The ship was used in WWII (the Japanese signed the WWII surrender documents on board) and it was last used in 1992 in the *Desert Storm* operation so it is an interesting mix of eras and technologies. The *Pacific Aviation Museum* was our last, but certainly not least, stop of the day. Part of the museum is housed in Ford Island's *Hanger 79* where you can still see bullet holes in the glass windows from the day Pearl Harbor was attacked, Dec. 7, 1941. While the focus is on WWII-era aviation, there are planes and helicopters from throughout the history of aviation on display.

On Wednesday, April 15 we said goodbye to Honolulu and Oahu and hopped over (via plane) to the island of Kauai, known as *The Garden Island* for its green lushness. The last time Steve and I were in Kauai was April 1994 – we spent a week camping around the island and backpacked the Napali Coast Trail. At the end of that trail was where Steve proposed marriage to me --I had to say “yes” or he would have left me to fend for myself on the 11 miles of trail back to civilization!

This time around we wouldn’t be camping but staying in a luxurious condo thanks to the generosity of Jo Marie and George Dancik! Their condo is located in the Princeville community, on the north shore of Kauai. It sits on the bluffs with unobstructed and expansive views of the Pacific Ocean and nightly sunsets! We quickly settled into a “new” daily routine for the next week and a half:

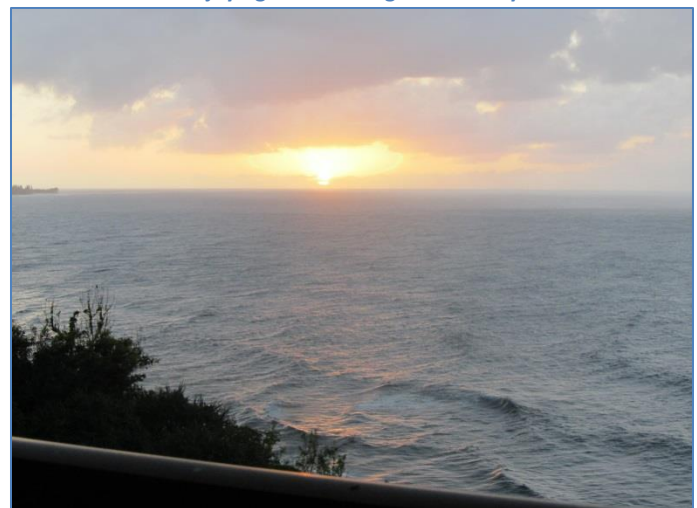
- 5am: Steve would rise at his usual early morning time and get in a couple of hours of work (yes, he brought his laptop with him) and have breakfast
- 7:30am: After a minimal breakfast for me, we would head out for a morning hike/walk somewhere on the island
- Mid-to-late morning: After our walk/hike we’d “treat” ourselves to some sort of goodie or two (e.g., a fruit smoothie from one of the numerous juice bars or a freshly baked item from one of the many bakeries)
- Return to the condo to hide-out from the mid-day sun and heat – Steve would then usually work while I often hung out pool side (in the shade) and read
- Late afternoon: We might take a walk in the local area (if it wasn’t raining) or perhaps make a run to the grocery store for some dinner components. Note: It rains a lot on Kauai. Kauai's Mt. Waialeale is in the center of a rain forest (swamp) and is the "wettest spot on Earth," with measured rainfall at over 450 inches a year! Kauai is the northern most major Hawaiian island and has slightly more rain than the other major islands, an average annual rainfall of about 50” on the windward, northeastern side and 20” on the leeward, southwestern side.
- Sunset: Enjoyed it from the condo’s lanai (i.e., deck)
- Dinner: I cooked most nights but kept it simple (lots of green salads with a protein element) and ALWAYS fresh fruit ...
 - We loved the petite and delicious “Sweet Gold Babies” pineapples
 - The 4 huge papayas we picked up at a farmer’s market (at total cost of \$5) were divine, especially with a squeeze of fresh lime from the lime tree not far from the condo’s front door



View from Dancik's Condo in Princeville



Enjoying a walk along Hanalei Bay

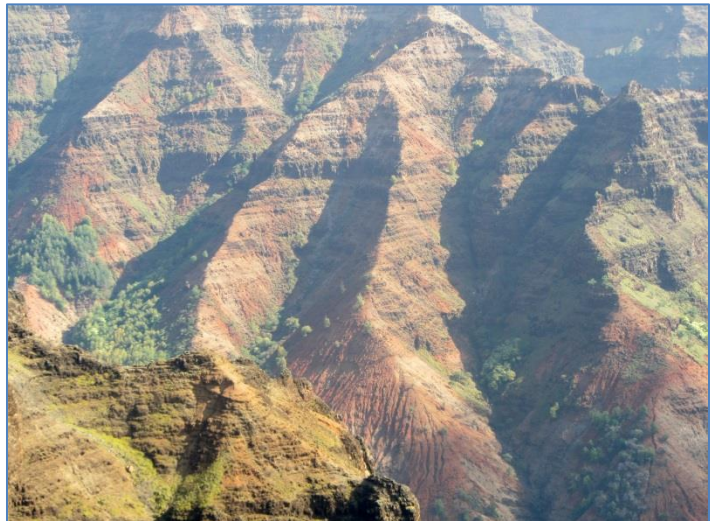


Kauai Sunset

- Mangos from a local's fruit stand were also huge and yummy -- you see many small fruit stands in front of homes; they are selling fruit and veggies right from their yards
- Falling asleep to the sounds of the waves crashing on the rocks below us

Jo Marie had provided us with an extensive set of "notes" about the island of Kauai with suggestions for things to do and places to go so we used that to help guide our activity choices which included:

- A visit to Waimea Canyon, the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific"
- Various hikes/walks around the island including the Hanalei Okelehao trail, the Sleeping Giant trail (east side), the Kuilau Ridge trail, and the trail at the end of Waimea Canyon Drive (here it was fun to have the sightseeing helicopters zoom overhead as they headed out to the Napali Coast)



Waimea Canyon



Steve is standing in the middle of the "trail" – a stairway of tree roots!



- A visit to the Kilauea Lighthouse and Wildlife Refuge – home to a large colony of Red-footed Boobies and other birds
- A couple of the best massages we have ever had
- Beachside strolls along the beautiful shoreline of Kauai watching the waves roll in and admiring the skills and daring of the surfers
- A post-dinner visit to the exceedingly swank Princeville St. Regis hotel for a drink and to listen to the nightly live music (and do some good people watching)
- Visiting the *Bamboo Store* and seeing the wide variety of things that can be made out of bamboo, including a bicycle!



Endangered Hawaiian Nene goose on the grounds of the Kilauea Lighthouse

- Checking out the very popular and very built up Poipu Beach area (lots of high-rise hotels) and were glad to be staying in the more laid back Princeville area
- A visit to the “start” of the Napali Coast Trail (we didn’t feel the need to do it again and this time around we would have needed a *permit*, something not needed 21 years ago).



Looking down on the Napali Coast via Kalalau Valley

Twenty-one years ago we spent our last night in Kauai first in a tent, and then in our rental car when the tent flooded due to torrential rains – it wasn’t a particularly comfortable night but certainly a memorable one! Since then we had many more memorable nights (and days) over the last 20 years of marriage and we look forward to the next 20!

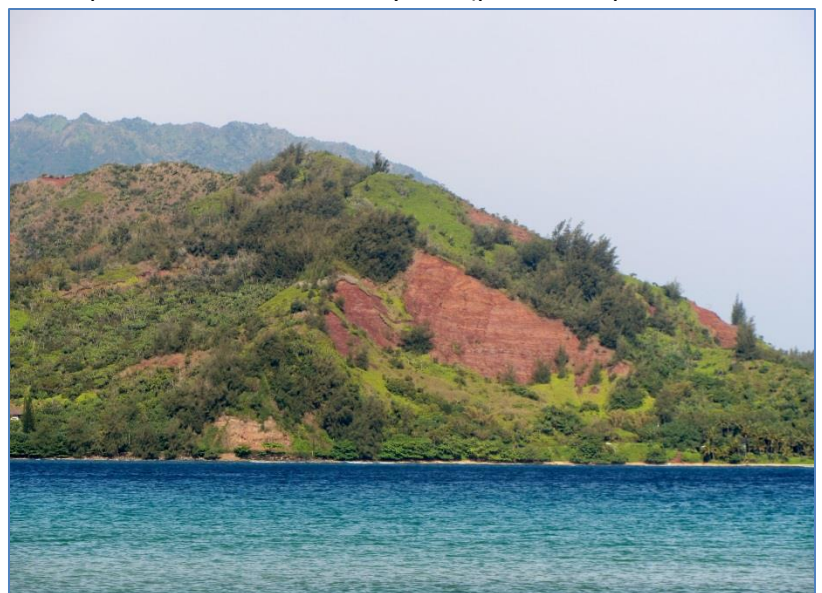
On Saturday, April 26 we took the last flight of the trip: a direct plane from Lihue, Kauai back home to Denver, CO. Over the course of the past 25 days we had ...

- Traveled 16,965 nautical miles by air and a couple of hundred more by sea (plus a couple of hundred more miles by car)
- Crossed 14 time zones and the International Date Line
- Enjoyed both below- and above sea level sights

and, most importantly, we are looking forward to our next adventure together!



Start of the Napali Coast Trail (we don’t remember all the warning signs being there 21 years ago)



Aloha from beautiful Kauai