

# TRIPS

## We Go to Nouméa, 2007

by Leonie Beer, Southland Girls' High

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It all started when my present year 13 class were in year 11 – they were keen to experience the French way of life and practise their French as well! We discussed travelling to France but decided it would cost too much and they would have left school before such a trip could be organised! So Noumea seemed to be the more realistic alternative. But how much would that cost and when would we go? I asked a couple of nearby schools who had recently been to Noumea and enquired at local travel agents and it seemed feasible as long as I was willing to take on the organisation! That part was quite daunting for a start, but with students willing to carry on their study of French into the senior years, it had to be done. I received much helpful advice from other teachers after my initial request on the French teachers listserve. Merci beaucoup! What a wonderful way of communicating.

After gaining the blessing of the Principal, it was necessary to have permission for the trip from the Board of Trustees who thought that two weeks would be a better option as an immersion exercise, but we did not think that the finances would stretch that far, so opted instead for 10 days, which stretched to 11 when the airline changed its schedule. The cost also rose from the original \$2,500 to \$3,700 covering 5 days at homestays, 12 hours of French lessons at Creipac (a government school especially for teaching French to foreigners), all meals (except breakfast), 6 nights at le Pacifique, travel and entry fees! We did not do any group fund raising but most of the girls worked to pay their expenses.

Having obtained quotes from local travel agents we chose an educational travel broker based in Hamilton, Edventuretours, recommended by our tourism teachers. The company offered me a familiarisation trip to Noumea, which although only for 3 hectic days, was a wonderful experience as I hadn't been there for 30 years, nor was I familiar with organising a school trip – this being my first! We stayed at the same hotel that the group would use and did some of the same trips and the experience certainly helped my confidence.

After more than two years of planning, 24 year 11, 12 and 13 eager students from Southland Girls High School, accompanied by 4 staff and my husband, finally left Invercargill on a frosty June morning bound for 11 days in the warmer atmosphere of Noumea. They weren't prepared for the blast of very warm air that met them on arrival at Tontouta airport, and were soon

peeling off layer after layer of clothing, and were quite keen to try out the swimming pool at our hotel, le Pacifique at Anse Vata.

Finding somewhere for dinner was our priority after checking into the hotel, so we tried a couple of the nearby restaurants, only to realise that our group of 29 was too big with no reservation, thus necessitating a split in half. For our later meals we negotiated with the restaurants and were able to obtain set menus for the whole group, costing between 1500 and 1800xpf per head – at one restaurant a 3-course meal, and the others two courses and juice or Orangina. In June 2007 the conversion rate was approximately \$NZ1 = 65 pacific francs, so we thought this was good value.



The happy group eating croissants  
in New Caledonia

An early night was called for after such an early start to the day coupled with the need to be up early again the next morning ready for an 8am start to the first French lesson at Creipac. We hired a bus to make sure we would be on time, but afterwards caught the local buses once we found out where to buy tickets which cost more to buy on the bus. The vending machines were a bit tricky to operate 29 times in succession, so in the town centre we bought some multiuse rechargeable tickets, as well as several single tickets to cover our expected trips from Creipac to town or beach.

The French lessons were for 3 hours each morning, so we met the girls at the half hour interval, and then took them to town afterwards. Creipac is located in a historic building at Nouville, the site of a former convict settlement. Our first afternoon was spent exploring central Noumea and then it was back to the hotel to

meet the home stay parents, organised by Creipac. The adults stayed on at the same hotel.

Day 2 at Creipac started off with comparing home stays, then after lessons and lunch in town, we spent the afternoon at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre. We combined with another school that had Creipac lessons at the same time, to hire a bus to and from the Centre and also shared guides with them. It pays to let the Tjibaou staff know ahead of time so they can organise English-speaking guides, although it is free for students if no guide is required. It is certainly worth a visit to find out about Melanesian art and culture. We had reserved only the previous day, as the weather was too wet then for our planned outing to the beach, so had one French-speaking guide, which was quite a challenge for the senior students.

After the visit to the Tjibaou Centre the girls met their host parents in central Noumea near the markets and we didn't see them again until after the weekend during which most of them were taken to various parts of the island. The girls all agreed that the home stays were an invaluable part of the experience as they had to speak French there and also had a taste of the way of life in Noumea which would not have been possible while just staying at a hotel. The host families took the girls to Creipac every morning for lessons and provided them with breakfast and dinner on weekdays and all meals at the weekend. Although apprehensive at first, they thought that after 5 days they were only just getting to know the host families and found it hard to leave them.

After lessons on Monday we bought a picnic lunch and took the girls to the beach at the Baie des Citrons for an afternoon of swimming and sunbathing, the temperature being on average 22 degrees during our stay. Tuesday was the final Creipac lesson and all girls received a certificate graded according to the EU standard. After taking all their luggage back to the hotel, we again had a picnic lunch, this time on Anse Vata beach, just across the road from the hotel before taking the taxi boat across to Ilot Canard for a wonderful experience of snorkelling amongst the multicoloured coral and fish of all sizes.

Wednesday saw us visiting a professional high school, Lycée Jean XXIII, at Paita about 40 minutes north of

Noumea, near the international airport. There we were treated to some dancing from Vanuata and Tahiti by students, morning tea made by the catering students, a tour around the school and then a delicious three course lunch also by the catering students, very good value at 1200xpf per person. After travelling back to Noumea the afternoon was free so many of the girls again hit the shops while others just relaxed on the beach or by the hotel pool. They made their own dinner arrangements - having been given 500xpf each for this, they were able to supplement from their own funds if they wanted to eat at a restaurant, or just buy something from the supermarket. Several of them pooled their money and managed quite a feast back at the hotel, which had a microwave and fridge in each unit and basic crockery and cutlery, but no toaster, much to my husband's regret.

On Thursday we did a tour of Noumea on le Petit Train, with a stop at the markets and the Musée de la Ville, then on Friday came the highlight of the trip – a full day outing to le Phare Amédée on a tiny island at the edge of the reef. There was plenty to do to fill in the time there: swim, snorkel, view the coral and fish from the glass bottom boat, feed sharks on the edge of the reef from the main boat, walk around the island, climb the light house, a tropical buffet lunch with entertainment, pareo tying, coconut tree climbing, or just relaxing on the white sand.

Our final day had no fixed plans besides a group breakfast and dinner, so most of the girls headed off to the shops or beach. They were quite familiar with catching buses and finding their way around by then and also at communicating in French, and wanted to stay a little longer, but unfortunately it would be home the next day, with a very early start, as we needed to be at the airport by 6am, and it is an hour away by coach! Some of the year 11 girls are already planning a place on the next trip, which we hope will take place in 2009, as they enjoyed the French immersion experience so much. They didn't anticipate that they would be so surrounded by French there, and their French has definitely improved even in the short time we had in Noumea.

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