

# Report on the Trip to New Caledonia

by Meredith Paterson

from Sylvia Decra Teacher of French Wanganui High School

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In April, 13 Wanganui High School students, two teachers and one parent got the chance to see France outremer on a trip to New Caledonia. The fantastic 11 days had us experiencing Kanak/Melanesian culture, eating strange foods and speaking French with the locals.

Our first five nights were spent in Thio, a small village on the east coast, with our host families. We attended Collège la Colline, Thio's tiny High School, for the first day and a half, and then visited the Nickel Mine. The area around Thio is famous for its rich nickel deposits and the mine is the village's number one industry. The chef d'exploitation -the head honcho of the mine- was very nice and went out of his way to explain the workings of the mine to us. If you're wearing a Casio watch, chances are the nickel in it comes from Thio! We were all surprised when he told Abby, one of our number, that her car was coming. Then around the corner came rolling a 100 tonne dump truck! The wheels were almost twice our height! We watched in awe (and jealousy) as Abby was taken for a spin in the monster. Well, she won't be driving that to school. One cultural highlight of Thio was going en tribu when we drove to a tribal village outside Thio. We were graciously welcomed with exquisite shell necklaces and then shared a Pacific banquet. It was amazing! We ate octopus, lobster, fish, and vegetables native to New Caledonia.

Being completely surrounded by French speakers in Thio was an amazing opportunity to practise and improve our grasp on the language. I went from being clueless on what was going on, to sharing jokes in French with my host grandmother. Our hosts were lovely, generous people who did anything to make us feel welcome. Tears were shed when we thanked and kissed them goodbye.



We spent the last six nights in Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia, having fun sightseeing. This included le Petit Train tour of the city, visiting the market, the aquarium, visiting Le Centre Tjibaou and taking a taxi boat to Ile Canard (Duck Island). A highlight of our stay was the day trip to Phare Amédée lighthouse island. There we snorkelled with spectacular fish off the glass bottomed boat before having a huge buffet feast. Pacific dancers performed for us while we ate and six of us got a chance to try the dances out. After lunch came more snorkelling, exploration of the island, the climbing of coconut trees and photos from the top of the lighthouse. We even got to see shark feeding at the edge of the reef. It was a beautiful day and the islands catch phrase: Il fait toujours plus beau au phare Amédée rang true.

We finished our adventure with shopping at the hyper-market before we awoke at four in the morning to catch our plane home. It was a fantastic trip, one that will stay with me always. A big thank you to all the teachers and helpers who made it possible. C'était génial! Merci beaucoup!

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