



Looking at Moorea; from "Tahiti," by Barnaby Conrad (Viking).

—Fred Lyon, Rapho-Guillumette

WHO'S SPOILING THE \$OUTH \$EAS?

By JAMES RAMSEY ULLMAN

A FEW weeks ago the Sunday New York Times, always just barely liftable, was a few ounces heavier even than usual. The cause of the extra weight was a twenty-page multicolored advertisement section prepared by the Pacific Area Travel Association (known as PATA), and its title and theme were "Discover the Pacific." In its pages geography was pushed around a bit, to the point where the "Pacific Area" wandered as far afield as India. But for the most part the focus was on those bits of land in the tropic ocean which are known collectively as the South Seas.

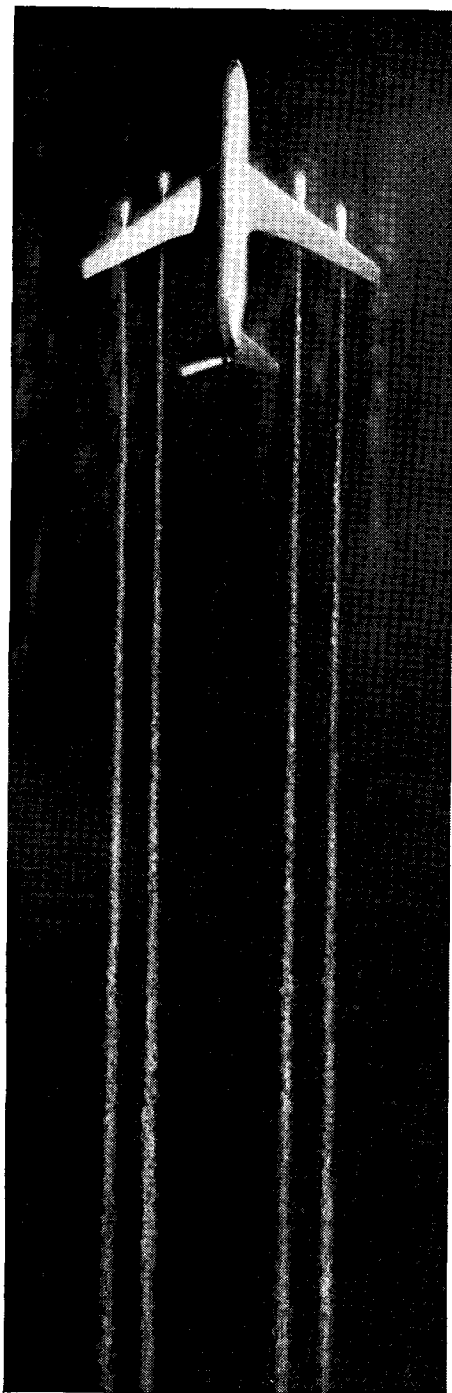
Big stir in the Pacific, the text and ads informed us. *A gay, festive world, a new playground, a whirlwind of fun.*

. . . Lovely hotels, pampering service, air conditioning, they said. . . Unspoiled, they said. And, of course, paradise.

Turning the pages, I found myself thinking of a good friend, whom I shall call Raoul, with whom I spent much time not long ago in Tahiti. Not long ago, by the calendar at least, but well in the past as things are moving in the South Pacific, for then Tahiti could be reached by air only in slow and ancient flying boats on a round-about course, whereas now you breeze down in hours from Hawaii or California. Raoul was a true twentieth-century Polynesian: meaning that, by blood, he was one-quarter Polynesian, one-quarter French, and one-quarter English, with the fourth quarter a blend of Chinese, Portuguese, and American

sea captain. But he had been born in the islands. He loved the islands. He loved their beauty, their peace, their remoteness from the toil and trouble of a fouled-up world. And he hated the great airstrip that was then being thrown across Tahiti's lagoon to accommodate the jets that would soon be roaring in.

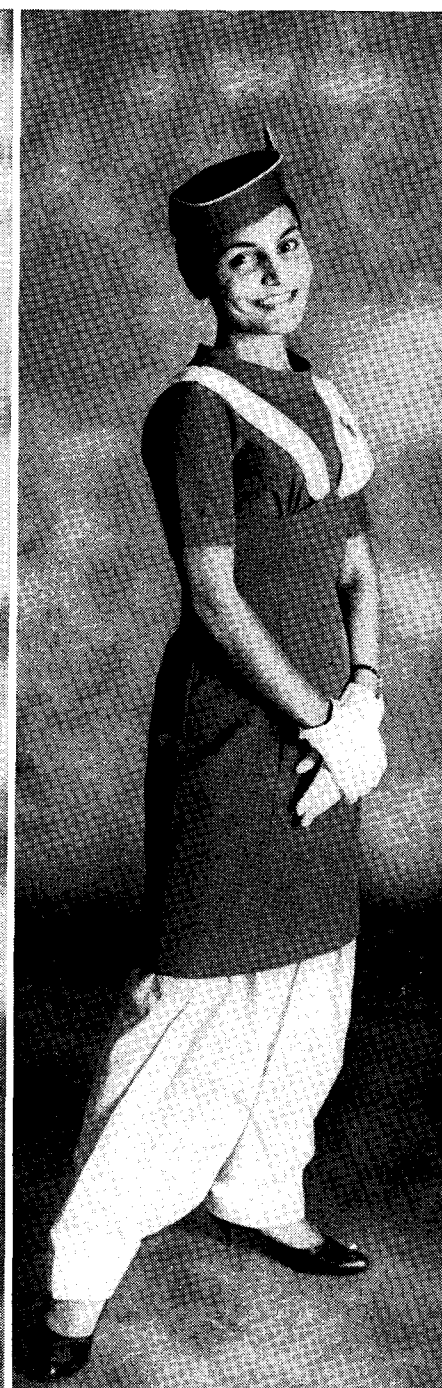
One day he was talking of this as we drove along the coast road. A procession of trucks rumbled past, bulging with gravel and blasted rock. Then we passed close to the strip, and from behind palm and hibiscus came the clatter of drills and the rasp of steam shovels. Raoul scowled. "This will be the end of Tahiti," he said. "The end of the South Seas. Soon we will be like the Riviera, like your Miami Beach—" He sighed and shook his head. He



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seemed a sad, almost a broken, man.

Then, a little farther on, we turned off the road and came to our destination. It was a large tract of land facing the beach and the lagoon, and, shaking off his gloom, Raoul led me around it. "Here is where the main building will be," he said. "With kitchen, restaurant, terrace bar. Over here, the bungalows. Beyond, the tennis court, the swimming pool." Pausing, he surveyed the scene. "When my partners and I bought this land three years ago," he told me, "it was for a few thousand francs, almost nothing. Now already it is worth five times what we paid, even before the hotel is built." He rubbed his hands together. The erstwhile gloom had somehow dissipated in the tropic sunlight. "Did I tell you?" he said—"we will have cabanas by the pool. Italian style. They will be extra, of course, above the charge for the bungalows. And for the kitchen we will have a Cordon Bleu chef from Paris—"

He talked on. We moved on. Then we sat for a bit on the beach, and during a pause in the talk we could hear the sound of the shovels and drills up the coast. "Damned machines," Raoul muttered. "Damned planes with their tourists. They will kill the old Tahiti." We rose. "Ah well," he said, as we recrossed the hotel site. He shook his head. Then he rubbed his hands.

It is not only tourists in planes who are sounding the death knell of the old Tahiti—the old South Seas. Nor PATA, with its ads. Nor Raoul, with his lament—and his hotel. It is also the young man of Fiji learning law or medicine or taxi driving. It is the young girl of Papeete drinking a Coke as she goes to the shop to buy a \$3.99 Dior copy and an ounce of Hong Kong perfume. It is the chief of a Samoan village who

has moved to Pago Pago, where the beer is cold and the water comes from faucets. All this has nothing to do with tourists and it is nothing new under the Pacific sun. The beat—like the beat of everything everywhere—may be accelerating; but the bell has been tolling for a long time.

The lament rises. Tahiti is not what it used to be. Fiji, Samoa, the island of Kapukafuti are not what they used to be. And it is true enough; for nothing, anywhere, is ever what it used to be. The Pacific was not the same after Magellan and his men had sailed through, strewing it first with their garbage and then their corpses. The islands were not the same the day after Cook and Wallis and La Pérouse and Bougainville had set foot on their distant shores. Certainly they were not the same after the whalers, the slavers, the traders, the missionaries, the planters, the governors, the beachcombers, the anthropologists. Nor after a small disturbance called World War II.

Outward change is not all of it. In a subtler but no less potent way the islands have, from the beginning, been molded by what the Western world has thought and felt about them. Through the years they have been symbols of Beauty, Peace, Romance, Escape—and the capitals are not there fortuitously. True enough, they are beautiful. The people (especially with cannibalism, infant murder, and human sacrifice well behind them) are charming. The South Seas are, on all the earth, the place par excellence to eat lotus—or drink squareface gin. But their very attractions have, in the world's perverse way, worked against them. Generations of travelers, writers, painters, movie makers, and Tin Pan Alley tunesters have, by sheer number

and enthusiasm, turned them into a vast and encompassing cliché. Go out to the islands, and there it is all around you: tune, moon, and lagoon—plus that little brown girl in that little grass shack wriggling her bottom. About the best the Johnny-come-lately can do, struggling for an unhackneyed back-home report, is to swear not to use *paradise* more than once per sentence.

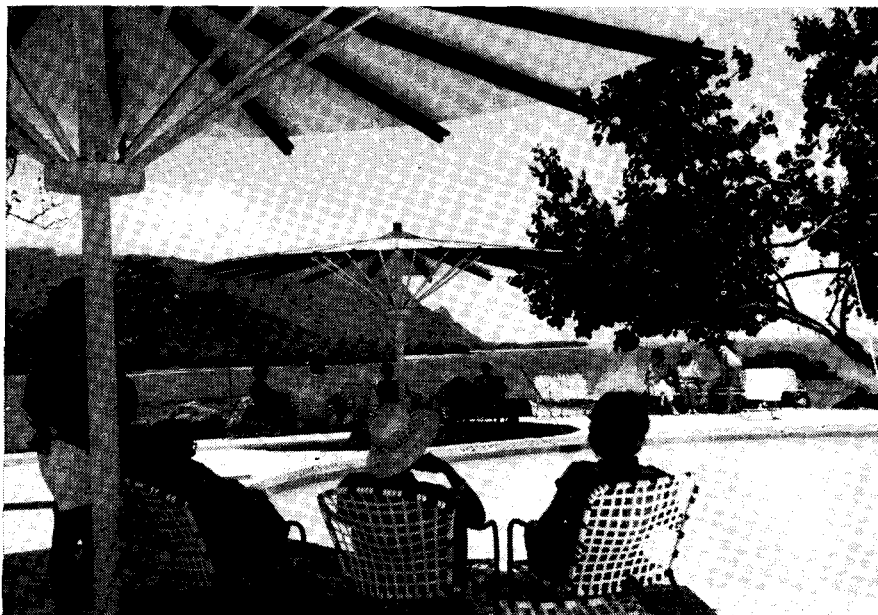
IN my own trip through (new sentence) paradise, I was, as a writer, perhaps more conscious of this than most. For the ghosts of my predecessors hovered close about me. "Little man, what now?" asked Stevenson and Jack London. Behind every siren smile lurked Melville's Fayaway and Loti's Rarahu. Whenever it rained (which was often) Mr. Maugham eyed me sardonically. Worst of all was the very live and ubiquitous ghost of Mr. Michener. After I had been greeted for the hundredth time by an "Ah, you're writing about the Pacific—like Michener," my most heartfelt wish in life was that he would go away somewhere—to a nice high and icy mountain.

Explorer, trader, writer, whatever—men of the West have now been coming to the Pacific for centuries. And they have left their mark. With dream and cliché, with Christianity and tuberculosis, with plantation and school and nuclear fallout. Now by sheer numbers, they are making other marks. Mr. and Mrs. Smith are coming. With the Joneses behind them.

The ocean world, to be sure, is not yet all of a piece. In tourism as in other aspects, some islands have been far more developed—or, if you prefer, more ruined—than others. The leader in all departments is, of course, Hawaii, known in the rest of the Pacific as "Pasteurized Polynesia," which is the pride exhibit in what might be called the new South Seas. It is very beautiful. It is prosperous. It is, by and large, a happy example of how men of many races and cultures can meet, mingle and live in reasonable harmony. But as for old days and old ways, they are gone, dead, *pau*. And they will no more return than the skyscraper hotel and Cadillac convertibles will sink into the sea, or than Henry Kaiser will tattoo his thighs and brandish a war club.

From Hawaii down—or up—there is a big jump. Fiji lies smack upon major air and sea routes, and the coastal belt of its main island, Viti Levu, is fast becoming "resorty." But the British move more slowly than we do. The Fijians and Indians (the latter totaling more than half the population) are still deeply rooted in their old, and vastly different, ways. On the smaller out-islands, you could—barring churches,

(Continued on page 68)



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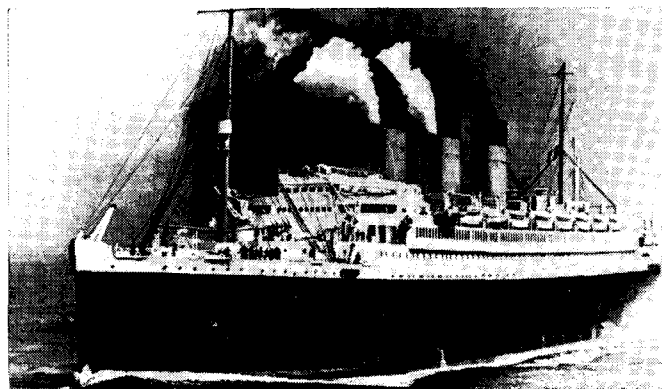
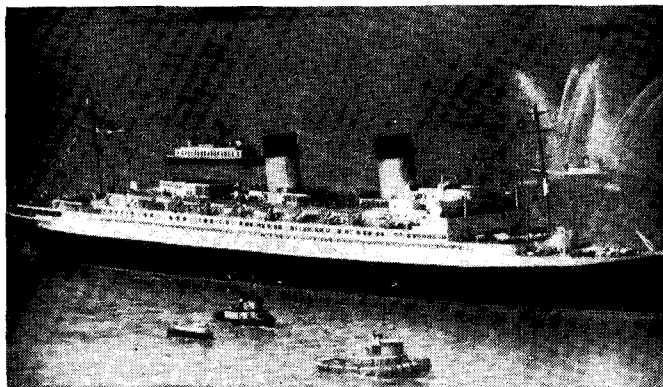
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A Launch for the Label Pasters



*a lady of fashion
reports on the maiden
voyage of
the S.S. France*

By EUGENIA SHEPPARD



PARIS fashion has been catering successfully to the American mass market for a long time, and it looks as if the new \$80 million luxury liner, S.S. *France*, has the same receptive audience in mind.

The beautiful ship, which received an ovation as she slid slowly up the North River February 8 after her maiden Atlantic crossing, ushers in a whole new era of ocean travel, the Democratic Age. That rarified class of traveler, the Hectic Rich, has been quitting the leisurely liners in droves to get to Europe in a hurry by air. The S.S. *France* is in no mood to wait for their occasional favors or even for the chic comeback of ocean travel. The new ship is designed, first and foremost, as a happy hunting ground for the tripper—

the camera-slung, sightseeing, label-pasting tourist.

This breed of voyager gets a break on the S.S. *France* in money, comfort, and fun. Though the first class salons and cabins occupy the upper decks, the tourist class space is by far bigger and it is better laid out. Because the decorating is simpler and more functional than in first class, tourist quarters are more attractive.

The tourist class salon is bigger and jollier and has a bigger, gayer, more smoke-filled bar than the chilly, elegant first class salon. Tourist class gets the entire main floor of the ship's full-size movie theatre, while first class is jammed into a small mezzanine balcony. Though tourist class has a far less pretentious dining room than first, the

Ships above, in descending order: the Paris (1921-39), the Ile de France (1927-58), and the France (1962-).

menu is not second class at all. The kitchen is the first in transatlantic crossing history to serve both classes from different areas of the same basic operation. Tourist class has a magnificent afterdeck and an enormous outdoor swimming pool on its premises, two decks below first class, but with ever so much more room and sunshine. First class has its own little swimming pool, but forward and way below. Even the tourist shop is bigger and better stocked than first class.

Though the initial crossing carried