

New Caledonia Report – March 2014

By Georgie Menke Somers

Hi all,

As I have many pictures to share with you from New Caledonia, I thought I'd send them via a few emails. This was a trip I won via New Caledonia Tourism so we stayed in 3 Hotels/Resorts whilst we were there, so I have done 4 reports - 1 on New Cal in general & the others on the separate Resorts.

As a destination I love New Caledonia! When all those clients that ring for Fiji that want to stay in Denarau close to shops & activities but they want the white sand beach and coral - then send them to Noumea. This is exactly what it is like. Many people call into Noumea on cruise ships, but just stay in the CBD on Noumea for the day, and especially when it's a weekend and the shops are closed, they don't get such a great impression. But once you're out of the CBD it is an amazing place.

I particularly like it as it is the equivalent of going to France but it is only 2 hours away from Brisbane! It is very different from the other South Pacific Islands where everything operates on Island time. Noumea is the equivalent of any town on the French Riviera. As the Island is a French colony, the national language is French but English & Japanese are widely spoken. The majority of visitors that come and stay in New Cal are either French or Japanese. The Australians that do go there usually go for business (lots of fly in/out for Mining). As a tourist destination it is a beautiful tropical Island that is warm all year round, has some fantastic shopping for good quality French products - fashions, jewellery & shoes. But it is definitely in favour for the amazing French food. All the amazing cheeses & French cuisine is flown in from France, along with all the traditionally made Baguettes made locally (yummo!).



All the Major Resorts are located on Anste Vata Beach - picture above. The locals use the bay here as well for swimming and water sports. Kite surfing is HUGE here. There are hundreds of them out every day and on the weekends it would be thousands. There is always a wind blowing but it is always warm. Straight off the beach in front of the Hotels is coral reef and the water is beautiful and warm too! Just in the bay of

Anste Vata there is Duck Island. You can catch a water taxi out to the Island for a day of snorkeling. You can't stay here but on a weekend the locals come and spend all day here. The snorkeling was amazing! The variety of coral & fish species, not even a meter off the shore, is amazing. After snorkeling for an hour, the kids and I sat on the shore with our heads in the water and there was angel & parrot fish not a meter in front of us.

Just around the corner from Anste Vata is Bay de Citron. This is all restaurants & bars. Thu to Sun this place is pumping. The locals live the life. They are very social and are always out in big groups enjoying themselves. The locals are a mix of French and native Islanders. It is more the French that are out partying all the time in the restaurants.

For Tourists there is lots to do. There is the 'Le Petit train' which is a sightseeing trolley that does a circuit around the main parts of Noumea showing you all the sights. The Aquarium is fantastic! It is really cheap for entry but their displays are fabulous including their display of live Nautilus'.

They are found in the deep ocean off New Cal. This is the only Aquarium to have them. There is also a Rainforest zip line, Bird Park, golf, World War 2 Museum, snorkeling, diving, kite surfing, windsurfing, Amadee Island lighthouse day tour. Or you can just laze by the pool at the Resort and snorkel off the beach in front. Getting around town is easy on the local busses as there are only a few it is difficult to get lost.

The prices in New Caledonia are based on the South Pacific Franc, which is rationed to the Euro so everything is Paris prices. But by the time you have a big brekky at the Resort, we just got a baguette with cheese & pate for lunch, then went out for dinner every day, thing worked out to be not so bad. There is a fantastic Burger & milk bar on the main strip in Anste Vate which has awesome food at a great reasonable cost. The cheaper food in New Cal costs a lot more than here but the cost of amazing 5 star cuisines is much cheaper than you would pay here, and the quality is superb!

New Caledonia is an all-round destination for the young 20 something's for the party scene, to the honeymooners, and the families, there is plenty for everyone.

Le Meridien was the first resort we stayed in and the one I loved best. It was quite relaxed and more of a Resort feel to it compared to the others. They only have twin/double room so we have to have 2 rooms for our family of 4. The rooms are beautifully furnished and we had an amazing view out over the water. Unfortunately this Hotel is undergoing renovations for the next 2 years. I don't think it need it but they obviously think it does. The breakfast buffet was fantastic with everything from the fresh local fruits, to western hot dishes and Asian hot dishes, fresh baguettes and cheeses and even hot carvery roast some mornings.

The Hotel is on the point between 2 bays so you get amazing water views from most rooms. They have 4 restaurants in the Resort, one which is a very famous Japanese. They also have the water side restaurant which is only open for lunches. The pool here is huge and the kids spent plenty of time swimming around the island in the middle. They also have a toddler's pool.

The resort is on Ansta Vata Beach and has a large grassy area with lounges along the beach under the Coconut palms....aarrhhh! So you can sit on your lounge, with a drink in hand and watch the kids snorkeling (or goggling and my son Hunter calls it), on the beach in front of you.



This is one of my favourite resorts but it is also one of the most expensive in Noumea.



The second Resort we stayed in was the **Chateau Royal**. It is located on Ansta Vata bay next door to the le Meridien on the beachfront. This is only recently built in the last 5 years. It is an Apartment Hotel with Studios, 1 & 2 bedroom apartments. This is the better option for families travelling to Noumea. We stayed in a 2 bedroom apartment which had a full kitchen, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, doors that close between the bedrooms and lounge room. There is a TV in the lounge and master bedroom but not the twin room.

They have laundry facilities onsite. They are free, you just need laundry powder. There is a shop in the lobby where you can purchase this along with food (snacks, frozen dinners), souvenirs and book your day tours.

The Foyer is lovely with multiple TV's showing wildlife doco's, which the kids loved and wanted to stay there all day to watch.

There is a restaurant on the lobby floor where breakfast is served everyday (not as good a brekky as the Le Meridien), and then downstairs they have a bar with live music, a cafe for lunches, coffee & lighter snacks, and a restaurant. The food is expensive but delicious! The deserts were amazing and that's a big statement coming from me who live by the rule "Life's short – eat dessert first". They were something like Chef Hester would create.

The Hotel pool has a swim up pool bar, which no other Hotel has, but it is not a too flash pool. They have an inside Aqua pool where they do Aqua circuit. It's all the rage in Europe & US, where you do your gym circuit class but in the water! Looked very flash but super, super expensive!! The pool is on the beachfront and there is a grassy area next to it but no lounges on the grass.

A great option for families as it's on the beach, snorkeling out the front, apartment style, with all the facilities you need.



The third hotel we stayed at was the **Hilton**. We had a 2 bedroom apartment to stay in, which was bigger than my house. This property has permanent residents as well as holiday travellers. The apartment is huge with a huge balcony. It is still located in Anste Vata bay but down in the middle of the bay. It is across the road from the beach, but has lots of shops and restaurants downstairs on ground level around the complex along with a big grassy area for the kids to run around on. This is a great location for those that don't want to walk too far to anywhere and also have complete separate rooms.

The pool here is very, very small, probably about the size of a normal backyard pool. Not too inviting. They have their own restaurant on the premises but it was cheaper to go downstairs to the bakery for brekky as they don't include breakfast in their rates. We only stayed here 1 night, which was a Friday night. Unfortunately for us the locals come out to play on Friday nights and park their cars along the main road next to the beach in front of the hotel, so we had lovely duf duf music until about 4am. So my recommendation would be mid-week stay but not a weekend THU to sun. The rooms are great but the pool and the noise let is down in my books. I would book the Le Meridien or Chateau Royal first.



Anything you need to know about New Cal, please let me know.

Cheers,
Georgie Menke Somers