

Checking into French Polynesia.

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This worked for us, it may not work for you. There is currently an agent in Hiva Oa (who is very nice by the way). She will handle all the checking in formalities including clearance, bond exemption, visa and visa extensions, and can obtain a duty-free fuel exemption for your boat. She monitors VHF Ch 11. Each item is approximately US\$100 and the total can be \$400 to \$600 depending on the size of your crew. On checkout from the Societies, the same company will assist with that.

We chose not to use the agent and we were able to complete the check-in within an hour and a half. This included vessel entry and 90-day visa extensions. We saved very little time and a lot of money. The only thing you cannot get on your own is the 30% fuel discount. Only the agent can do that in the Marqueses and they will only do it for you if you purchase the full package. They will not allow you to purchase just the bond exemption or the fuel exemption.

The following is based on our experience. It may not turn out to be your experience.

1. Make an online airline reservation for each person from Tahiti to your country of origin (you can cancel it at any time). With this you DO NOT NEED A BOND. The Post Office in Hiva Oa has Internet if you can not organize this earlier.
2. Go to the Post Office. Buy a 3000 CFP (South Pacific franc) visa extension stamp (one for each person). Also buy a 55 CFP stamp which the gendarmes will use to mail documents to Papeete. The PO is open 0700 to 1200 and 1230 to 1600 weekdays. Be first in line if you can. They close early on Friday.
3. Bring the whole crew, all passports, boat documents and printout of your online air reservations to the Gendarmerie (I had them on a PDF file and the gendarme was nice enough to take my "thumb drive" and print them out for me). They open at 0700 to 1100 and then open again in the afternoon at 1400 to 1700, by memory. Sometimes they do not keep strict hours as the gendarmes may be needed elsewhere. The French gendarmes speak English. The Polynesian gendarmes may not speak English. They all treated us very nicely. We were even offered a cup of coffee in Nuka Hiva. Be polite, shake hands, wear a clean shirt.
4. On the customs form, where it asks for a list of drugs, alcohol, etc. we were told to write "Personal use" or "Ship Stores for Personal Use". When we were later boarded by Customs (Douanes) they told us we should have itemized our things. They came aboard, looked over our beer supply, but gave us no trouble about our alcohol stores and we had no guns or illegal substances aboard.
5. The gendarmes do all the rest. *C'est une gateau!* (Piece of cake).
6. As you travel about the islands and motus you are supposed to report in whenever there is a gendarmerie. This is not strictly enforced, but I think you should do it where practicable.. When leaving Nuka Hiva for the Tuamotu we had to go by the gendarmerie because of crew changes and were checked-in/checked-out on the same day.
7. In Papeete you will check in again. This is done at the small blue building on the *front de mer* near the Tourist Information Office. You will need to show your airline reservations once more at this time, they will give you the paper for duty-free fuel. I have no idea why this simple process could not be done in

Nuka Hiva, but that's bureaucracy for you.