

Dream Time, the Hockleys' Cabo Rico 38, is hauled out of the water on Apataki in an unconventional way — on a trailer attached to a digger.

CRUISE



A cruising couple find sanctuary in a blissfully remote South Pacific boatyard.

By Neville Hockley

In the middle of the South Pacific, scattered over half a million square nautical miles of open ocean, lies a remote chain of hidden reefs and shallow atolls in a hazardous region avoided by early mariners. Yet today, ironically, a small but growing fleet of adventurous cruisers visit this area each year to seek comfort and refuge.



Neville (left) has Dream Time lined up and ready for an overdue haulout. With a view like this (above), sometimes boat work takes a back seat.

Far away from the busy marinas and boatyards of New Zealand and Australia, where South Pacific cruisers typically seek shelter during the tumultuous cyclone season, is Apataki, a tiny atoll lost within the constellation of thousands of reefs and islands that form the Tuamotus. Blissfully remote, Apataki is a haven where the busy world almost ceases to exist, where there is no tourism, and where the few hundred Polynesians who reside there make a quiet living fishing, harvesting copra or cultivating black pearls inside a sheltered lagoon.

But a few years ago an enterprising family did something quite extraordinary — they built a haulout facility, one that put Apataki on the charts, at least for a handful of cruisers. And it's here, nestled away amid a clearing of rustling palms on a small island

in the southeastern corner of a shimmering turquoise lagoon, that you'll find the Apataki Carénage, which could very well be the most unique, welcoming and picturesque boatyard in the world.

Hauling out, even the prospect of hauling out, is not something that most cruisers relish. It's a mildly depressing and disruptive routine in which dust, noise and the inconvenience are tolerated only because it allows us to continue living a life of freedom at sea. But from the moment we arrived at the Carénage (a French word meaning a place where sailing vessels are careened for repairs), it felt more like an exclusive retreat, a rejuvenating tropical spa for both crew and vessels, rather than a working boatyard. And when *Dream Time*, our 1981 Cabo Rico, was carefully hauled out of the lagoon by a digger, up a boat

ramp, and over hundreds of gleaming pearls embedded into the concrete that were arranged to spell APATAKI, we knew that we had arrived somewhere special — a boatyard that, for the first time

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in seven years of cruising, we would be in no hurry to leave.

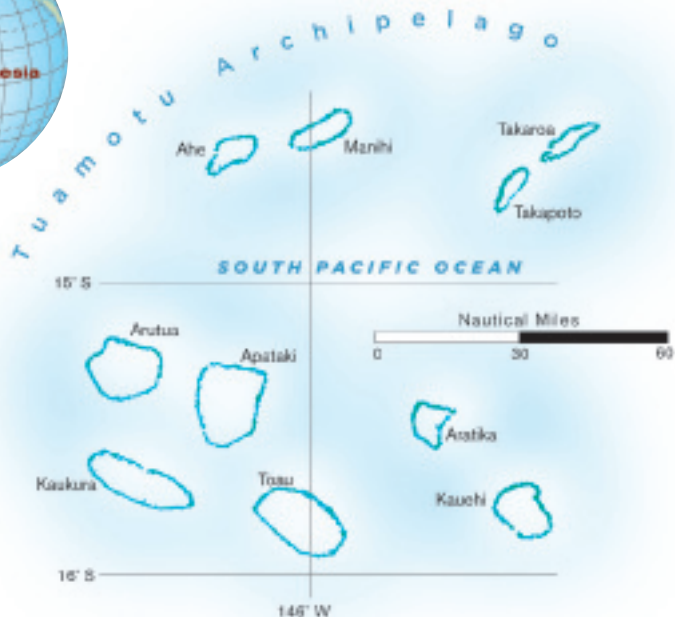
The Lau family, who have owned and operated the yard since 2009, take care of you from the moment you arrive. Alfred, the father, negotiates the digger and trailer while Tony, his son, and Nini, the only yard worker, meticulously position your boat on stands. Pauline, the mother, acts as your agent and handles billing and customs paperwork. Meanwhile Poppy,

the grandfather, radiating a calm and gentle energy, follows every move with smiling eyes, and seems to take immense pride in the business his family has created.

To toast our haulout, Alfred opened the sweetest coconuts and told us to help ourselves to more, sweeping his arm in a gesture across the thousands of coconut palms

that blanket their island. Tony delivered a 50-gallon drum of sun-warmed rainwater, which, in a moment of pure exuberance, we used as a bath. And in the early evening, when the insects began to stir, Nini arrived pushing a wheelbarrow full of coconut husks and quietly built a small fire to keep the mosquitoes at bay.

The Apataki Carénage is indeed an enchanting hideaway, one where the



Hospitality rules at the family-run Apataki Carénage. The menu at Chez Pauline has a decidedly French twist (middle). Neville (above) takes a bath in a 50-gallon drum of warm rainwater, enjoying a moment of pure indulgence.

distractions are so numerous and the setting so idyllic, it's a challenge just thinking about boat projects, let alone actually accomplishing any of them. The lagoon twinkles at you at the bottom of the ramp, inviting you to take a break, to cool off and snorkel with colorful reef fish. Goats curl up under your keel for a shady midday snooze that seems to set the pace for the afternoon. On calm days uninhabited neighboring islands are waiting to be explored by kayak, and if the trade winds blow over 20 knots Tony scrambles to get his kite-surfing gear rigged on the beach, and with an enthusiasm that's infectious, recruits as many as he can manage.

Most evenings cruisers gather at "Chez Pauline" to share a few Hinanos and discuss the projects they've yet even to begin. And at night, when the diesel generator splutters to a stop and the yard settles down to sleep, hermit crabs can be heard rustling over dry palm fronds as they make their way toward the copra rack.

For those on a tight schedule or who have significant boat projects, the Carénage may not be for you. If you're in need of fancy travel lifts, a full-service marina, facilities

and conveniences, even basic ones, you've sailed into the wrong atoll (although more services are in the works). The Apataki Carénage is delightfully unsophisticated and resources are limited, so the cruisers who stay here arrive prepared, carrying whatever materials they need, or with enough time and patience to wait for the weekly cargo vessel, the *Cobia*, to deliver supplies from Tahiti.

Some cruisers store their boats here for cyclone season, while others, reluctant to leave the warm embrace of the tropics behind, haul out for routine maintenance before disappearing again deeper into the Tuamotus. But most come simply to relax, socialize and anchor off a boatyard reminiscent of another era, one where the simple pleasures are cherished, and where a peaceful harmony permeates everything. An island removed from a cluttered, complicated modern world, this little sanctuary with a pearl-studded boat ramp rests in the heart of paradise.

Read more about the sailing adventures of Neville and Catherine Hockley aboard Dream Time at their website (www.zeroXTE.com).