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ICONIC DRINKS IN IRONIC PLACES

Finding a mango in Nova Scotia wouldn't be a huge surprise — unless you found out it was grown there. That's the point with these drinks. Not that they were on the local menu, but that they wore local labels. — Karen Asp



LOCAL BREW
IN: TURKS AND CAICOS
FAR FROM: IRELAND

I arrive for a late lunch at Regent Palms' Plunge poolside restaurant. As a beer lover, I'm intrigued by this, what is it, Turk's Head Amber? I'm told it and its stout sibling are from a brewery on Providenciales. Can't say it's Guinness-good, but it was probably brewed yesterday.



ORGANIC COFFEE
IN: HANA, MAUI
FAR FROM: KONA, HAWAII

During a tasting at Ono Organic Farms, I sample soursop and abiu, fruits I never knew existed here. Then comes a cup of Kipahulu Estate Coffee. Abiu and Hana-grown coffee? They belong together.



GREEN TEA
IN: VICTORIA ISLAND (B.C.)
FAR FROM: SRI LANKA

When visiting Silk Road Tea in Victoria's Chinatown, I'm expecting a carryout tea store, not a total tea experience. The place has a tea bar, pairings of teas and chocolates, and, in a nod to its Northwest roots, Sour Cherry Tea groupies — I'm now one of them.



WATCH

A DISTANT MATCH

BY BRIANNA RANDALL

WHERE: COOK ISLANDS
THE DISCOVERY: FAMILIAR SPORT

The invitation comes from out of the blue, before we even set our bare feet on the dot of land alleged to be here among the Cook Islands.

"Do you play volley?" our host, Simon, asks as we pile into his aluminum dinghy. Volley? Could he possibly mean volleyball? Out here on a little atoll? We're 560 miles from the nearest U.S. homeland (American Samoa) and, to the east, 750 miles from Bora Bora. And that mileage doesn't begin to explain how remote Palmerston Atoll is, even to world sailors like us.

My husband, Rob, is a lifelong volleyball player. He lights up when Simon confirms our suspicion.

"We play every day at 4 o'clock."
"Every day?" Rob asks.

Simon looks at the water and nods. The Palmerston we're about to step on is not only distant. Even among the dreamy Cooks it stands out as beautiful and bizarre. Only 62 people live here.

There are no roads. No stores. No banks. You can walk the island's perimeter in under 20 minutes. The only access is by boat, and even that's sketchy — we had to drop anchor on a steep coral shelf — poor holding for our sailboat — and call for a ride the rest of the way with Simon.

As we approach the isle, the place is postcard perfect, with blinding beaches, a turquoise lagoon and humpback whales spouting offshore. And, apparently, a volleyball court. Rob starts peppering Simon with questions. "Does everyone play volleyball?"

"Not everyone," Simon says, his speech slow and concise. "But it is our favorite sport. Good exercise."

The residents form an incomprehensible array of nephews, aunts, brothers and cousins. They're so tight-knit that the details of how they're related through a common forefather, William Marsters, is never discussed. I do find two people who are not family. One is the nurse who is on a one-year rotation from Fiji. The other is the British schoolteacher (yes,

Every afternoon is like a family reunion on Palmerston's only court (above).

THE CAYMAN ISLANDS HAD A TEAM COMPETE IN THE WORLD POND HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIPS IN 2005 (YES, ICE HOCKEY).

BRIANNA RANDALL: SIDEBAR (FROM TOP); ZACH STOVALL; ISTOCK; COURTESY SILK ROAD TEA

there's a school, called Lucky School because of all the supplies visitors have donated to it). The teacher came to learn about the place where her own father shipwrecked in the 1950s.

A supply ship stops in Palmerston three to four times each year. Other than hitching a ride on a passing sailboat, this vessel is the only means the locals have of 1) leaving or returning to the island, 2) receiving supplies of any sort, and 3) making money with exports (the No. 1 export being refrigerators full of Palmerston's delicious parrotfish).

Perhaps because visitors are so rare, the Palmerston residents don't allow anyone ashore without a host. Hence, our shuttle to shore from Simon. All visitors are "adopted" while they're here — the first person to contact a visitor gets to adopt him or her. And, boy, do the locals race each other for first contact. Partly this is due to boredom. It's also because visitors usually give gifts.

Case in point: The volleyball we're about to play with was a gift from a passing sailboat a while back. The ball is in decent shape, but the net sags in a few spots,

giving it the appearance of an EKG readout. Simon wasn't lying: Locals begin trickling toward the court at 4:15 p.m.

We walk onto the sand with no idea what to expect. A real game with actual scorekeeping? Or a free-for-all with makeshift rules?

It's a real game, all right. There are taunts and grunts. The scorekeeper keeps a stone face. Players dive in the sand and set up plays.

"Where did you all learn to play?" I ask my teammate, a 300-pound Polynesian wearing bright board shorts.

"A coach came up from Rangiroa a few years back," he says. "We're fast learners."

Turns out that Palmerston represented the Cook Islands in last year's South Pacific Games. This from a stock of 62 people, including women and children.

Across the net from me, Rob adjusts his red jersey after a particularly athletic block. He's 6-foot-3 and weighs 165 pounds soaking wet. His waist is smaller

WHY THE ESCORT

A keeled-over sailboat from Philadelphia is the first thing you see when landing on the white shore. It warns visitors that the sea, though gorgeous, is fickle.

than most of the powerful thighs on the palm-shaded court. After I struggle through a half-dozen points, a swarm of kids scoops me up, co-opting me into their game of "hit, bat, run." Most of them are more interested in touching my pale hair and skin than continuing their version of baseball. By the time they lose interest in the novelty that is me, the volleyball game has also ended. Sweaty bodies shuffle off the court,

families wander home, and the net seems to sag a little lower.

Simon's niece, a strong volleyball player in her 20s who seems to be the island's captain, tucks the ball under her arm and strolls with us back to the dinghy that will take us to our moored sailboat.

"Will you come play again tomorrow?" she asks.

"Make sure Simon picks us up at 3," Rob says. "We don't want to be late."

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