I embarked on a trip to the Cook Islands to volunteer with the organization Vets Beyond Borders for a week during the month of May.

Vets Beyond Borders is an international animal charity that works with volunteer vets and vet nurses to help improve the lives of animals in developing communities. They have many projects around the world in various communities. At Vet HQ we have been supporting our veterinarians on trips with the organization and my recent experience was truly unforgettable.

Nested in the heart of Rarotonga, the main islands of the Cook Islands is the Te Are Manu Veterinary clinic. They are the only veterinary clinic in the Cook Islands and they run 100% on a donation basis. During my week long volunteer trip, I had the privilege of working alongside Dr Rose who typically serves as the sole veterinarian on the island. During my time there, there were also two lovely volunteer nurses from Australia, Nicola and Stacey. Together, we ran spay and neuter clinics, to reduce the feline and canine stray population, attended to animals in the consultation basis and performed various trauma-related surgeries. Unfortunately, one of the main accidents that happen involving animals on the island are hit by car cases.

While some of the island dogs have individual owners, many belong to local villages. The main breed of dog on the island are referred to as the Polynesian Island dogs. Their lineage goes back hundreds of years to the Polynesian migrants who brought the dogs with them. Majority of them are very friendly to all the tourist and will come up to you for pats by the beach. Notably, the Te Are Manu clinic had a clinic dog called Sonny, who dutifully escorted the volunteers to and from the clinic and the volunteer house. He was also an avid swimmer and would go swimming with all of us on lunch breaks and after clinic hours.

How can you help?

1. Donate: Contributions of any size can make a significant difference. Financial donations will go towards medical supplies, sponsoring desexing and other surgical procedures, medications, and educational materials.
2. Spread the Word: Share our mission with your friends and family. Raising awareness can help garner more support and volunteers for future trips. Here is the veterinary clinic's website: https://www.tearemanu.com/
3. Volunteer Locally: Consider volunteering your time and skills to local shelters and rescue organizations. If you have a veterinary background, feel free to reach out the clinic for volunteering as well! Every bit helps!

Dr Geoff will also be heading to the Cook Islands in July, wish him good luck if you see him!

Warm regards,

Dr Vanessa