

Royal Tour by TEAL Solent.

The Commonwealth Royal Tour of 1953/54 was notable for being the first time the monarch had travelled on a non-British airline. Until the 1953 tour, when the new Queen flew from Fiji to Tonga by TEAL, the monarch had travelled only by British Overseas Airways (BOAC).

The tour of South Pacific nations began when the Royal Yacht *Gothic* berthed at Suva, Fiji, on 17 December 1953.

According to contemporary reports, the yacht dropped anchor in Suva Harbour at **8:15 a.m.** on that day, where it was greeted by Fijian artillery with a 21-gun salute. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh were met by the Governor of Fiji, Sir Ronald Garvey, and Fijian chiefs shortly after 9 a.m., and the Queen stepped ashore at **10:30 a.m.**

During their stay, Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh made **two recorded flights** in Fiji and Tonga, both in the Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) Solent flying boat *Aotearoa II*

1. Suva → Lautoka, Fiji (18 December 1953)

On the morning of **Friday, 18 December 1953**, the Queen and Duke flew from **Suva** on the south coast of Viti Levu to **Lautoka** on the northern coast. They returned to Suva the same day.

- **Departure:** Suva, in the TEAL flying boat *Aotearoa II*, accompanied by Governor Sir Ronald Garvey and Lady Garvey
- **Flight time:** About one hour.
- **Arrival:** Lautoka, where they were greeted by large crowds and then travelled by Royal New Zealand Air Force tender to the town centre. This was a “flying visit” and part of the Queen’s main engagements in Fiji that day.

2. Suva - Tonga (19 December 1953)

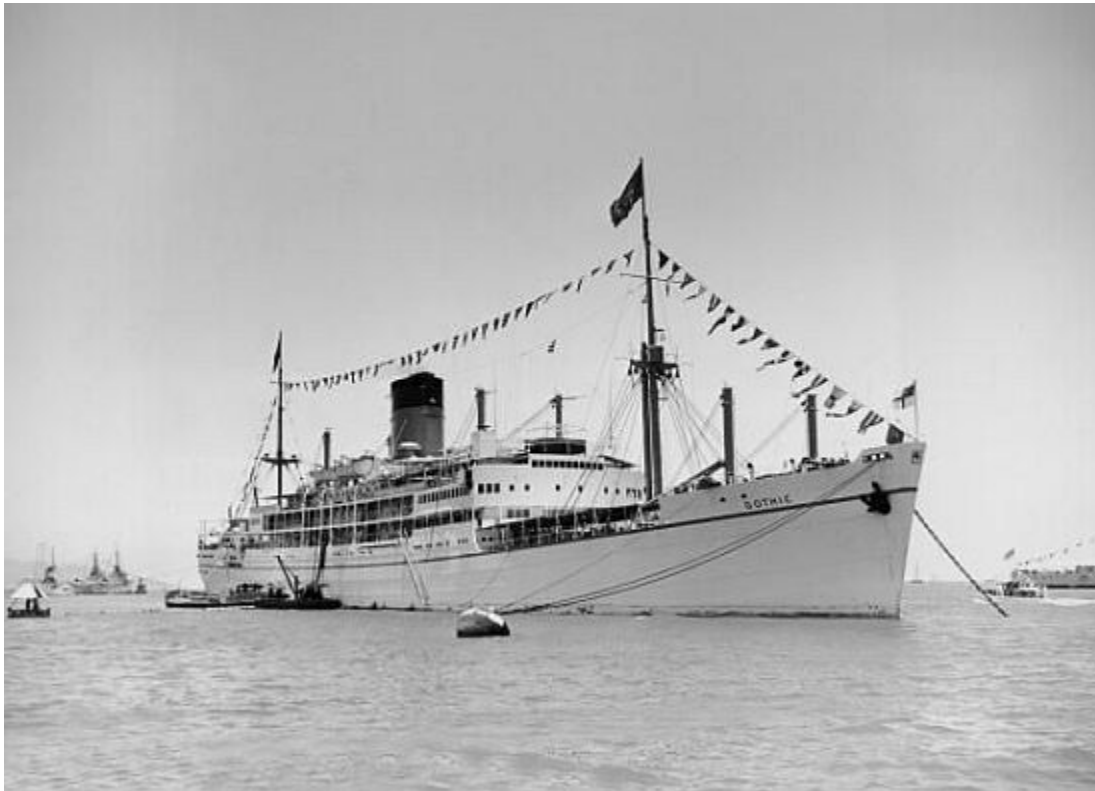
On **Saturday, 19 December 1953**, the Queen and Duke left **Suva** for **Tonga**.

- **Departure:** 8:30 am, leaving the Royal Yacht *Gothic* berthed in Suva by car, the couple then boarded the TEAL Solent flying boat *Aotearoa II* at Laucala Bay for the five hour flight to Tonga. This flight marked the end of their Fiji stay and the start of their visit to Tonga, where they were guests of Queen Salóte.

Summary of flights:

- **18 Dec 1953:** Suva → Lautoka, Fiji (*Aotearoa II*)
- **19 Dec 1953:** Suva → Tonga (*Aotearoa II*)

Following their visit to Tonga the Royal couple reboarded the Royal Yacht *Gothic* which had earlier travelled from Fiji to Tonga. The *Gothic* then sailed for Auckland, New Zealand, where she arrived on 23 December 1953. This marked the first visit by a reigning monarch to New Zealand, and the *Gothic* had been specially chartered from her owners, Shaw Savill & Albion, for the occasion.



The Royal Yacht *Gothic* adorned with bunting and flying the Royal Standard, during the 1953/54 Royal Commonwealth Tour.



AIRHISTORY.NET

PHOTO FROM Ed COATES COLLECTION / CAHS

The TEAL Solent IV Aotearoa II in flight during her flight trials in 1949.

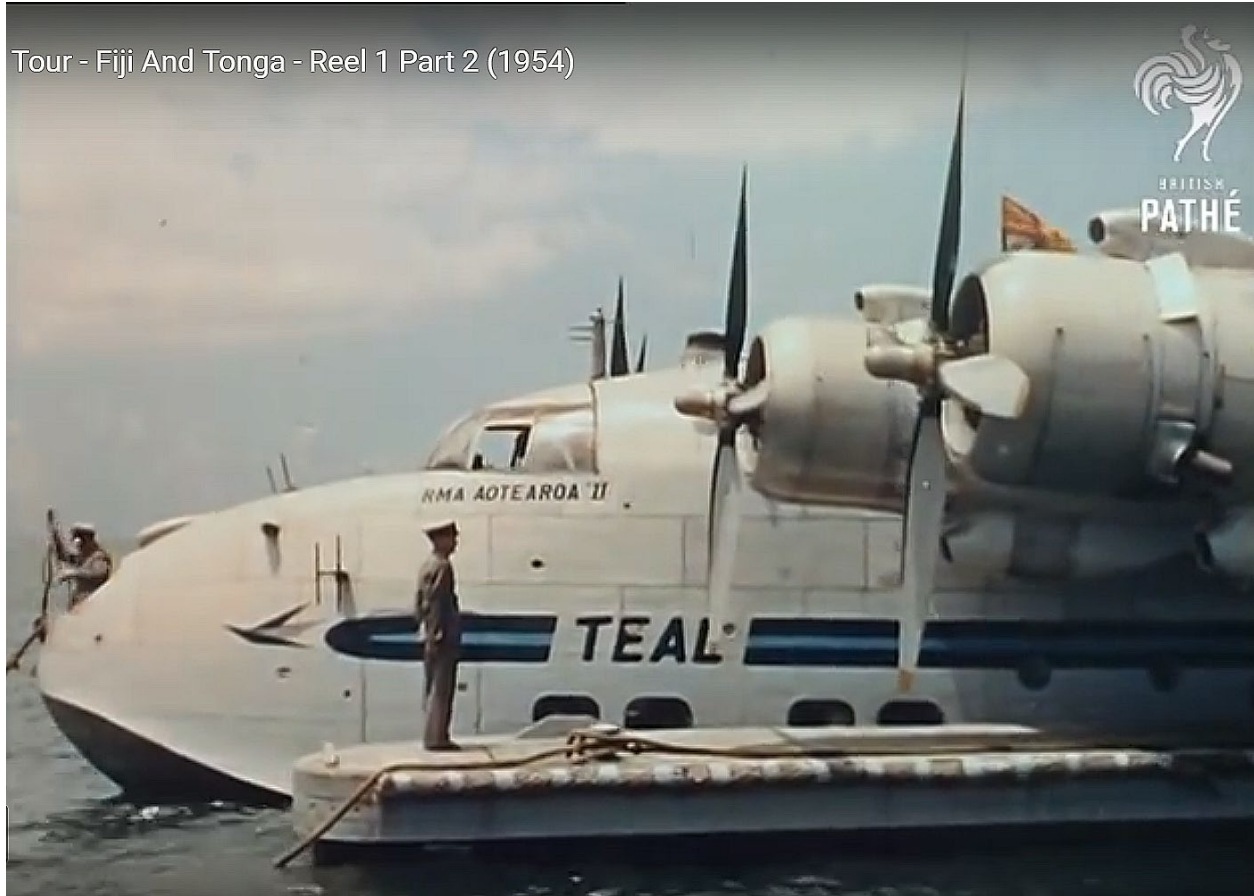


TEAL Solent IV *Aotearoa II* on the hard at Mechanics Bay in June 1953.



HM The Queen boarding the TEAL Solent *Aotearoa II* in preparation for the short flight from Suva to Lautoka and return. The man in the dark suit is HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

Tour - Fiji And Tonga - Reel 1 Part 2 (1954)

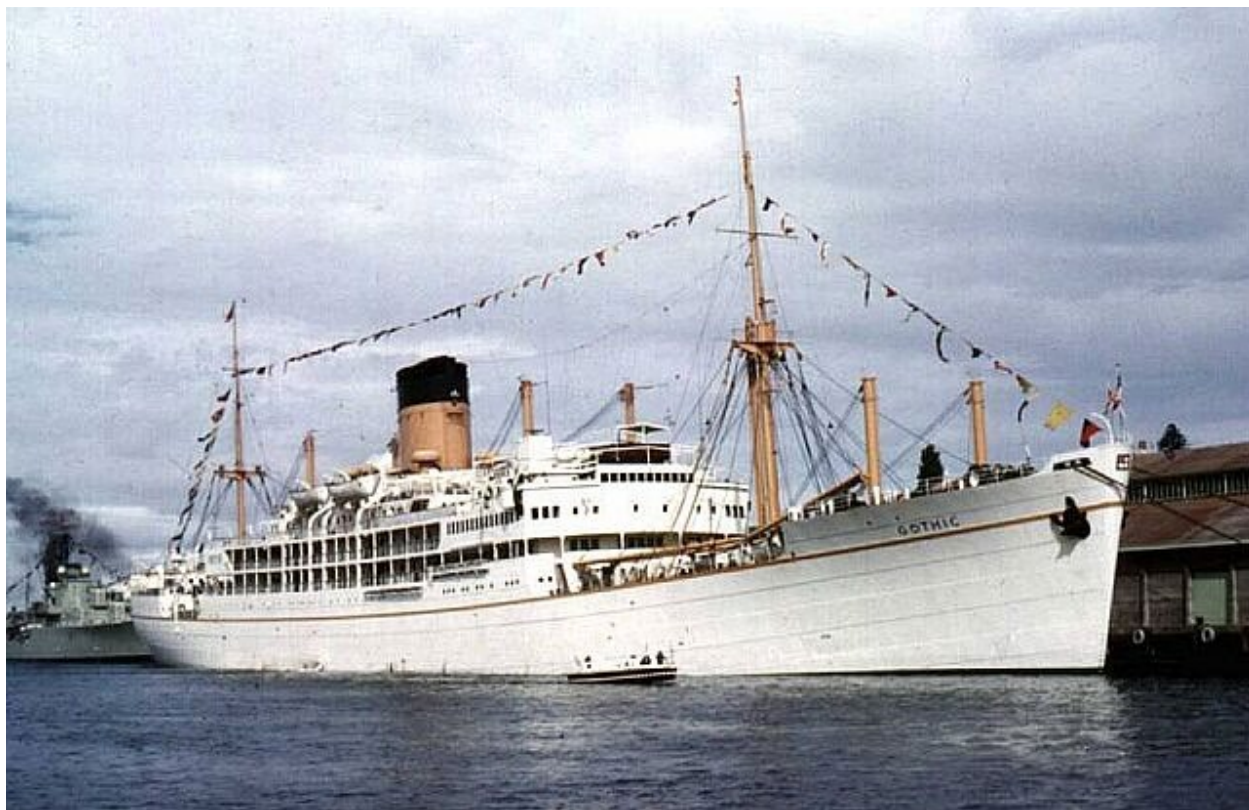


An RNZAF officer standing guard at Laucala Bay, Fiji, prior to the Solent's departure for Lautoka.

Tour - Fiji And Tonga - Reel 1 Part 2 (1954)



The Solent carrying the royal party taxiing out for take-off. Note it is flying the Royal Standard.



The Royal Yacht *Gothic* was adorned with flags but no Royal Ensign, meaning the Queen was not on board at the time.