

Awesome Adventures - Sailing the South Pacific. Tahiti and her islands, French Polynesia.

Located in the Pacific Ocean, the islands of Tahiti are a mythical destination. The entry Tahiti conjures up visions of an idyllic island paradise and once you visit you will discover that your fantasy is not at all strange. Remote, tropical and lush, these island-gems are a universe where dreams come true.

Bora Bora could easily be described as the hub for romantic souls, where luxury, beach resorts and spas dot the island with overwater bungalows, thatched-roof villas and legendary ambiance. Simply put, Bora Bora is one of the most beautiful islands in the world. Since the past 35 years of exploring the planet, my most memorable trip by far has been the first Full Circle tour around the world which included an extensive stop in French Polynesia.

What an experience ! If paradise exists, it is undoubtedly here in Tahiti. Feel like Robinson Crusoe, lying on the fine sand dotted with beautiful palm trees, overlooking the Taha'a motu. The scenery in and out of the crystal clear waters is perfect. Enjoying the lush coral gardens all day long, I felt like a kid in a candy store where the candies are fishes. This is the ultimate live aquarium experience! Just a meter below the water's surface lives a world teeming with all kinds of corals and an extensive array of fish call this reef home. Sea anemones, octopuses, moray eels, stingrays, butterflyfish and blacktip sharks are just the beginning. Not only is it beautiful, it's relaxing. The current moving from the ocean to the inner lagoon does the work for you, so you can focus on enjoying the dazzling view. You simply let the drift glide over the beautiful underwater world. Immediately upon arrival at Tahaa I had already pulled my snorkel mask over my olfactory organ. As if he came to say welcome, a stingray gracefully swam towards me among the corals. A true shock at first encounter, but the slippery creatures are very peaceful and wouldn't hurt a fly.

Moorea and the other islands of the Society Archipelago are undoubtedly the world's ultimate bucket list destination. Raiatea is the best hunting location in the islands of Tahiti. Most charter companies and marinas have chosen to base themselves around Raiatea. The island is home to a large number of moorings, coves (deep and calm) in a pristine

and amazing environment (volcano craters, waterfalls). Perched on top of a hill, my stay at the Villa Tonoï offered a view that I can still picture in my mind to this day. I can best describe the accommodation in one word: WOW.

In addition to the impressive view of Motu Ofetaru and the azure waters around it, Villa Tonoï offers a private swimming pool, barbecue, etc. The sailing conditions are excellent on Raiatea. It is a pleasure to sail to the other peaceful Leeward Islands, all equally beautiful inside or outside the lagoon. It is not surprising that I made a multi-day sailing trip between the islands of Raiatea, Tahaa and Bora Bora, aboard the Fanotea, a beautiful yacht that I had all to myself in addition to the boatswain and the female captain/cook.

French Polynesia, it won't let me go. It's a shame that for us Europeans it's pretty much the most remote destination, and what's more, it's filthy expensive. I regularly get asked what the most beautiful place on earth is. I don't have to think long. In all honesty, Tahiti and its islands! While Bora Bora is the most famous, the other islands and atolls are just as beautiful, if not even more attractive. Personally I prefer Tahaa, and apparently quite a few locals share the same opinion. That is why I solemnly promise myself to set foot a fifth time in the near future. I still want to go to Tikehau, Makatea, Fakarava and again to Rangiroa. Remote atolls which unfortunately I didn't have the time and budget for this time but it's high on my bucket list.

Thus French Polynesia is blessed with some of the most incredible coral reefs in the world, colorful schools of tropical fish frolic through the crystal clear waters and corals. Admittedly the best snorkeling is from Tahaa in Tau Tau Lagoon (from my personal point of view). Moorea isn't bad either. Many of the great hotels have conquered the island's most pristine stretches of reef. As a result, the options for budget travelers looking for a DIY underwater adventure can be a bit limited. For example, without blushing, the Hilton charges \$100 for a day pass. Lunch is then included. At one point I ended up in Hotel Les Tipaniers, which I can still remember when Vricine and I came here almost 20 years ago today to taste Poisson Cru. The typical Tahiti meal consists mainly of raw tuna and coconut milk, but that aside. The hotel has the privilege of offering direct access to a huge coral garden blessed with all kinds of fish. In addition to snorkeling, you can practice all kinds of water sports. Kayaking, diving,

etc. You can rent a motor boat without a license. On the beach you will find the best bounty style low-rise palm trees to make your perfect instagrammable photos.

Tahiti's vahines are known to be stunning. Just ask one Captain Cook when the man arrived onboard the Endeavor in April 1769, met in the azure waters by a number of sensuous ladies with dark-black hair down to their shapely derrière, topless, wearing only a grass skirt that barely reached their mound of Venus.