

Untouched paradise

A sprawling region made up of five well-separated archipelagos, French Polynesia provides some of the most remote and spectacular cruising grounds on earth

—
by Miriam Cain





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Bungalows on Bora Bora

THE DENSELY VEGETATED MOUNTAIN OF BORA BORA IS AS CLOSE TO THE TROPICAL IDEAL AS IT GETS

Created by volcanic activity over the past millennia, the vast and scattered islands of French Polynesia are located in the world's largest ocean. Made up of hundreds of islands in several different archipelagos, their landscapes range from rainforest-carpeted volcanic mountain peaks to white-sand beaches, cascading waterfalls, sheer cliffs, blue lagoons and coral reefs. From the Society Islands to the Tuamotu Atolls, and the lesser-known Marquesas, Austral Islands and Gambier Islands, no other cruising destination is quite as varied and remote.

Planning a cruise here is something of a balancing act; you will need to decide which of the main island groups you want to focus on, and within each you then have a choice of key islands. It is not always a simple task to narrow down favourites as there are thousands to explore in this part of the world and many are situated far apart, so itineraries need to be carefully and realistically planned. But for those with the time and inclination to visit, the rewards are many – the ocean in this part of the world is unparalleled for cruising. This is a region that invites you to make the most of the water, with snorkelling, diving, swimming and kayaking vying for your time.

Below are the main island groups and some of the highlights of each to give you a taste of what to expect, along with a recommended itinerary encompassing the Tuamotu Islands and the Society Islands. Getting to the Tuamotus from the Society Islands can be difficult as the prevailing winds are against you, so it is generally better to begin your cruise in the Tuamotu Atolls and sail downwind to Tahiti and her Society Islands. Alternatively, your Camper & Nicholson's International charter broker can weave a select handful of islands from the alternative archipelagos into a bespoke cruise.

The Society Islands

One of the principal island groups, the Society Islands are at the cultural heart of French Polynesia. From Tahiti and the atolls of Bora Bora, to the islands of Raiatea, Taha'a and Huahine, the archipelago is best discovered by yacht. The 50m (164') sailing yacht *Silencio* is an ideal choice as she is a fast and stable cruiser with a spacious sun deck with shaded al-fresco dining areas. She also carries an array of toys and tenders including paddle-boards, sea bobs, and has a swim and diving platform for easy access to the water.

Tahiti is the largest island in the group and



From top left

— The famous Teahupoo wave in Tahiti; the lagoon of Taha'a; a tamuré dancer at the Heiva I Tahiti; the Avera Pass in Raiatea; Huahine island

Best for...

— Beach life, romance, family fun, culture, scuba diving and snorkelling

Don't miss...

— Hiking on Raiatea – the formidable Mount Tapioi rises out of the morning mist and makes for an energetic hike to discover a spectacular view over Raiatea and her neighbouring islands

is the usual gateway to the Society Islands and neighbouring Tuamotu Atolls. Here you will find many of the world's top resorts amid countless monuments and ruins and natural landscapes that remain relatively unspoilt. From the capital of Papeete, with its restaurants, bars and markets, to beautiful beaches, and cultural hot spots, spend a few days ashore and immerse yourself in Polynesian culture before setting sail to discover her Society Islands or taking an internal flight to board your yacht in the Tuamotu Atolls.

The densely vegetated mountain of Bora Bora is as close to the tropical ideal as it gets. The island rises out of a lagoon that is surrounded by reef and clusters of tiny islands, known locally as motus. The islands are connected through passes that link the lagoons in which they sit. The neighbouring islands of Taha'a and Raiatea share a lagoon and, with their rugged interiors and stunning beaches, they are equally impressive. Huahine, the final island in the archipelago, is formed of two islands separated by a narrow isthmus, which according to legend, was carved out by the canoe of Hiro. The island is the perfect place to absorb some local culture.



SILENCIO

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Length 50m (164')**Beam** 10.3m (33'8)**Guests** 12**Crew** 9**Prices from**

€150,000 per week

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ITINERARY

—

Days 01 + 02

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Fakarava

32 nautical miles

Meet Silencio in the north of the island, known as the North Pass. Spend the first day acclimatising to the gentle pace of life on board and ashore and meet the friendly locals in their quaint villages. Settle on board and cruise down to the South Pass. The area remains virtually untouched and the pristine wilderness is home to an incredible variety of plants and animals. Ecotourism activities include rainforest walks, picnics, moonlit coconut crab walks, village visits and turtle tagging with rangers.

Day 03

—

Fakarava to Toau

12 nautical miles

Certainly worth a visit is the UNESCO-classified biosphere reserve in the coral atoll of Toau. Surrounded by a lagoon, water is a way of life here so you can snorkel, swim, scuba dive and sail to your heart's content. For the more beach-minded among your group the gorgeous lagoon is home to great stretches of perfect white sand on which to spend a lazy afternoon.



MANY OF THE ISLANDS REMAIN VIRTUALLY UNTOUCHED AND THE RICH ECOSYSTEM IS HOME TO RARE BIRDS, PLANTS AND UNDERWATER LIFE WITH DIVE SITES THAT ARE ALMOST UNDISCOVERED

The Tuamotu Atolls

The Tuamotu Atolls are the central archipelago, comprising more than 70 low-lying islands and coral atolls. They are originally volcanic islands like the Society Islands to the west, but their volcanic cones collapsed over the millennia and coral reefs began forming around the edge of the ancient craters creating the lagoons that are there today. A world-renowned Scuba diving destination, these UNESCO islands include the world's second largest atoll, Rangiroa. The Tuamotus are best for diving enthusiasts, though guests can also enjoy snorkelling in the calm waters of the lagoons. Many of the islands remain virtually untouched and the rich ecosystem is home to rare birds, plants and underwater life with dive sites that are almost undiscovered. From quaint villages and welcoming locals to the UNESCO-classified biosphere reserve in the Toau atoll, spend your days in the water and step ashore to visit the main villages of Avatoru and Tiputa where you will witness everyday life infused with culture and tradition.

From top left

— Traditional Polynesian tattoos; a Rangiroa beach; marine life in the Tuamotu; aerial view of Mataiva; a deserted pontoon in Fakarava

Best for...

— Culture, scuba diving and snorkelling

Don't miss...

— Diving with silver tip sharks around the Avatoru Pass





Days 04 + 05

— Toau to Apataki

70 nautical miles

One of the biggest islands in the archipelago, Apataki hosts the largest population of grey reef sharks in the Tuamotu. The island's economy is based on pearl farming and you can visit one of the many farms and watch the masters in action as they cultivate the pearls.

Days 06, 07 + 08

— Apataki to Rangiroa

70 nautical miles

The atoll of Rangiroa is the second largest in the world and provides one of the world's greatest dive destinations. 240 tiny islets stretch for more than 110 miles in a circle around a deep lagoon that is home to huge stingrays and manta rays. Around the Avatoru Pass you will find silver tip sharks, while in the waters of the Tiputa Pass you can dive with bottlenose dolphins and turtles, and spot hammerhead sharks, eagle rays and barracudas.

Days 09 + 10

— Rangiroa to Bora Bora

240 nautical miles

Cruise through the open water and through the Te Ava Nui Pass into the lagoon of Bora Bora in the Society Islands. The reef around the lagoon is clustered with cartoon-like desert islands, and the shallow waters are home to more stunning marine life. To the south of the island you will find Matira Beach, said to be the best beach in all of French Polynesia.

Day 10

— Bora Bora to Taha'a

16 nautical miles

Sail back through the open water and through the Pai Pai Pass to the lagoon that surrounds





Left

—
Virgins Bay in
Nuku Hiva

Right

—
Waterfall in Ua Pou
(Marquesas)

Below right

—
Stone-carved tikis
on Hiva Oa
(Marquesas)



The Marquesas

Lying to the northeast of Tuamotu, the Marquesas are comprised of 12 volcanic islands and abound with dense jungle terrain. They are the farthest group of islands from a continental landfall in the world. Half of the islands have roads and buildings, but ancient cultures remain prevalent and ruins and stone-carved tikis are tucked away in the vegetation.

The Austral Islands

Straddling the Tropic of Capricorn to the southwest of the Society Islands, the Australs are made up of limestone and volcanic rock. Inhabited by local tribes living in rural villages, houses and churches are built out of coral limestone.

The Gambier Islands

The lesser-known Gambier Islands to the east of the Austral Islands remain in isolation and are largely untouched. Composed of 14 mountainous landscapes, the island's natives were harshly affected by the crusades of the Catholic Church, which left its mark with stone buildings dotted around the landscape.

For more information on cruising in French Polynesia, as well as details on yachts that cruise in this region, please contact your Camper & Nicholsons charter broker, see page 8.

The Marquesas

Best for...

—
Culture

Don't miss...

—
Lose yourself amidst the heady scent of ylang-ylang, jasmine, plumeria and ginger

The Austral Islands

Best for...

—
Culture and hiking

Don't miss...

—
Numerous waterfalls and mysterious grottos

The Gambier Islands

Best for...

—
Adventure, exploration

Don't miss...

—
Hundreds of pearl farms

Left

— Grotto and beach on the Austral island of Rurutu

Below

— Mangareva beach and the Rikitea cathedral in the Gambier Islands

the island of Taha'a. Take the tender to discover the lagoon's underwater world as your crew prepare a traditional feast in an ahimoa - a traditional Polynesian cooking pit dug into the ground.

Day 11

Taha'a to Raiatea

15 nautical miles

Lying in the same lagoon as Taha'a, neighbouring Raiatea's rugged interior is as impressive as its beaches. Step ashore and discover French Polynesia's most sacred temple, Marae Taputapuatea, the focal point of religious ceremonies. Active guests can keep busy hiking up Mount Tapioi to the peak where they will be rewarded with spectacular views.

Day 12

Raiatea to Huahine

25 nautical miles

Formed of two islands, Huahine Nui and Huahine Iti, Huahine is the perfect place to absorb some local culture. Experience Tahitian dance and music around a campfire, organised by your crew with locals.

Days 13 + 14

Huahine to Tahiti

88 nautical miles

Steer a course to the island of Tahiti for your final few nights aboard. From doing nothing on Tahiti's beautiful beaches to immersing yourself in Polynesian culture, spending a few days ashore in Tahiti is a must. The best beaches are occupied by luxury resorts, but they are still accessible. Discover the islands' history at the Museum of Tahiti, visit the Gauguin Museum and shop the pearl shops where you can pick your own pearls to be threaded on site.

