

Bora Bora Cruises

Ti'a Moana

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A Cruise Through Paradise - A New Way to Voyage Aboard the Tia Moana

French Polynesia - Bora Bora, Tahaa, Raiatea and Huahine

Bora Bora Cruises

Tia Moana Luxury Yacht Cruise

Bora Bora, French Polynesia

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If you were to step inside of a dream, which took place in the shadow of the peaks of Bora Bora, a tropical paradise, and a luxury yacht, which a crew at your beckon call, then you'd be stepping aboard the Tia Moana yacht.

Spending a week aboard the Bora Bora Cruises, Tia Moana is not only a dream, but a new way to cruise. It's like having your own superyacht. While our cruise may have been the exception (there was only one other couple and a crew of 36), what is not the exception is the incredible service and amenities which are the best I've ever had, and I doubt can be rivaled by chartering your own personal luxury yacht.

This cruise line is going after a niche market, termed boutique cruising. I'm used to a large ship, with a casino, disco, lots of people, which is the norm in the cruising world. Step outside of that world, and into another, because the Bora Bora Cruise experience is like no other you've had before. It's a once in a lifetime cruise, and French Polynesia is your playground. It's a new way to cruise the undoubtedly, you'll make the standard to which all others are compared. Best of all, you don't miss the big ship casino, crowds, or hurried pace. Instead of you conforming to the cruise ship, this cruise surrounds you and is more tailored to your needs and wishes.

When I was researching this cruise line, and the concept, I wasn't sure what to expect. There are no reviews on this cruise line, nor on the ship or its itinerary. The past two years, I was on the Radisson Paul Gauguin cruise ship in these same waters, but wanted to try something different. What I got, has completely changed my attitude towards cruising. What Bora Bora Cruises does, is turn a cruise into an adventure and into voyaging - something that I have never done before (and something you can never get on a larger ship). It's the personalized service and eloquent delivery that make this cruise so alluring.

I started this vacation about a month before, and booked my airline tickets online with Northwest, and Air Tahiti through Travelocity. I used my frequent flyer miles for NWA and booked economy on Air Tahiti Nui, in hopes to upgrade to business class at the airport. With some persistence, I was lucky to get upgrades for about \$600 per person at the airport, at the last minute.

The balance of the vacation was booked through a local (Tahitian) travel firm, Tahiti Nui Travel. Radisson Seven Seas uses Tahiti Nui to handle all their local hotel, pre-cruise and transportation, so I decided to use them as well. After landing in Papeete, Tahiti after a 8.5 hour flight from LAX, I was greeted at the airport from a representative of Tahiti Nui Travel, handed travel documents for the balance of the trip, and transferred to the Intercontinental Beachcomber Resort nearby for an overnight stay. Air Tahiti flights arrive in the evening, so you need a stay over in Papeete regardless.

The next morning, we were transferred to the airport for a 45 minute commuter flight to Raiatea, where we boarded a tender for a 30 minute ride across the lagoon to a motu off of the vanilla spice island of Tahaa which is a few kilometers away.

As we stepped of the tender, we were greeted with some delicious drinks in coconuts as we gazed upon the beautiful resort of Le Tahaa. Le Tahaa is situated on a private motu (tropical sand island) which has spectacular views of the island of Tahaa, and Bora Bora in the distance. The resort has the signature beach bungalows and the over-the-water huts which adorn many South Pacific brochures.

For the first half of our stay, we stayed in a beach bungalow, which is really a small piece of paradise all to your own. The modern Polynesian thatched hut has a large living room, with desk, TV and minibar, a huge bedroom, a exquisite bathroom with double bowl sinks, an inside shower, an outside tube and shower, a deck on the beach, and a separate enclosed deck with eating area and our favorite, a private pool. The pool is a great place to hangout with a chilled glass of champagne which gazing at the incredible night sky above. Since there are very few lights, you get beautiful vistas of the Southern sky, including a dazzling display of the Milky Way and shooting stars.

Le Tahaa is one of the most exclusive resorts in French Polynesia and is part of the same chain of resorts which also owns the Pearl Beach, Bora Bora resort where I stayed last year. This resort is newer, and is immaculate. The white sand, swaying palm trees, and clear water tell you that you're in a tropical paradise.

The resort has a signature reservations-only restaurant (Ohira) and a open-air, treetop level restaurant, Vanille. The resort infinity pool is skirted by an amazing view of the shallow lagoon on one end, and a swim-up bar under a palapa on the other. Next to the pool area is the lunch restaurant, La Plage (which has a salad buffet). The food is decidedly French, but you can order a pizza for lunch, or try your own requests pool side from the fantastic bartender, Eric, who will keep you entertained all day, and teach you some Polynesian.

The second half of our stay, we moved into the over-the-water huts, which are my favorite. They have glass coffee tables which have a fold-up top that allows you to feed the fish at night, or just enjoy the shadows of the water dance across the thatched hut ceiling at night, since the lights below the hut illuminate the shallow lagoon below. The huts have a two sink bathroom, along with a tub and shower. All of the huts have a generous deck area outside with lounge chairs that are equally great for daytime sunbathing, or nighttime stargazing. The decks also have a lower section with a swim ladder and outside shower so you can swim in the shallow lagoon right from your hut.

I highly recommend staying at a resort prior to your cruise, so you have time to adjust to jet lag, as well as change into vacation mode (relaxation). Luxury resorts in this part of the world come at a price-- a room service hamburger at night is \$33 and bottled water (no, it's not included) is around \$8. The dinner prices at Vanille are reasonable, and the presentation is wonderful, however the quality of food is lacking, which surprised me for such an upscale resort. Your best meal may quite possibly be breakfast, where omelets are made to order a-la-minute and you have a small buffet to select fresh fruit and pastries from. The service at the resort is excellent, however don't expect the same service you receive on cruise ships, with a European trained staff. That's why it's best to stay at a resort before your cruise, not after.

At the end of our stay at the resort, we were shuttled to Bora Bora airport by helicopter, and that's when the real adventure started.

Welcome to paradise...

I first knew we were in for a surprise, when we stepped off the helicopter and were greeted by some of the crew of Tia Moana, and offered a wet towel and tropical drinks. Even though there were only two of us, a small tent was set up at the airport, with refreshments, including fruit juices and champagne. After some short introductions, we boarded the yacht tender right at the airport in Bora Bora (which is located on a small motu just off the main island and originally was built during W.W.II). As we passed the airport breakwater, the smiles on our faces grew as we caught our first glimpse of our yacht, the Tia Moana. The smiles grew proportionally, when the hotel director commented, "It's your lucky week, there's only one other couple on the ship !" I couldn't believe it.

As the tender nudged against the back of the yacht (it's about 240 feet in length), we were greeted by the captain and some of the staff. The back of the yacht has two garage doors, where water toys and the two 20 ft. tenders are kept. The back of the yacht is also a small deck which you can fish off of at night and is where you always board the yacht when at anchor.

After we were offered more refreshments from the bar staff, we headed up through the first deck dining room (both aft deck and inside) to reception, which is adorned by some huge beautiful Tiki carvings (6 feet tall) from the Marquesas. After a credit account is setup and some administrative items that take only a few minutes, the rest of the cruise is yours. Our reception person, Malika was wonderful and very helpful. As we were to learn, the crew was to become more like friends than staff. It only took a few hours before everyone aboard was calling us by our first names - which is the hallmark of a very classy crew.

Our late morning arrival was refreshing compared to most cruise line embarkation, which is generally in the mid to late afternoon. This was relaxed and very personalized.

After reception, we headed up the glass spiral staircase two floors to the bridge deck, where our stateroom 142 was located. We were the aft cabin, and had a generous vista of the starboard side of the ship and the aft outside lounge through huge panoramic windows.

The stateroom was elegant and very compact. There's a generous closet with safe, Aquos flat screen TV with DVD/CD player and 220V outlets. Since travel with a Macintosh Powerbook, I made my own music CD which we played in the DVD and Aquos throughout the cruise. In the ships library, there's a limited library of DVD titles which you can checkout at the reception desk. There's a minibar (liquor and snacks have an additional fee) but you'll find yourself eating and drinking at the dining room or lounges, since its all too convenient. I didn't see any room service menu, but then again, it's not needed. I'm sure if we had wanted something, we'd just call reception, and it would be provided.

The queen sized bed was very comfortable, with a douve' and several pillows. The bathroom was the most compact I've ever experienced, with a shower and bowl sink (which I just love). Then entire cabin is sleek, comfortable and elegant. It's more functional than anything else, since you have the entire ship as your living room, dining room, and lounges.

Within five minutes of arriving in our stateroom, we were once again greeted by Sebastian, our bartender, with more tropical drinks and our stewardess, Jess, who did a spectacular job of keeping our stateroom organized and clean all week.

After a nice lunch on the aft deck dining area, we headed over for the afternoons activities at the motu. The tender pulled up to the beach, and before us was our own private staff, with beach blankets set out, a massage tent, refreshments and food table, and water activities table (with snorkeling gear). We took out a kayak and snorkeled amongst some of the coral heads just a few feet offshore. After a massage on the beach from Melanie, the ships spa person, we just relaxed the rest of the afternoon while we were served drinks and food under the South Pacific Sun.

That evening we had some sunset cocktails with the captain and his staff, and then at dinner around 7:30 p.m. Sunset this time of year is around 6:45 p.m. Since it's summer in Polynesia in January, it can get very hot and rainy. Rain showers are very temporary, and usually last 30-45 minutes, followed by sunny weather.

During dinner, our hotel director, Victor, described the next days activities and we indicated we wanted to try the ray and shark feeding excursion.

That evening the ship hoisted anchor and made the short hop, outside of the reef to the island of Tahaa. The ships movement is quite pronounced at sea, due to the ships shallow draft (7.5 feet). Even with stabilizers, the roll is very noticeable, so if are affected by seasickness, I suggest a cabin in the middle of the ship, where you will not notice it. Personally, I love the motion at sea, and find it quite relaxing. Since island hops are short in duration, the ship is almost always completely stable. The ship always anchors within the reefs in lagoons, where the water is perfectly flat.

Our Tuesday began with breakfast on the aft deck, with the peaks of Bora Bora in the background. We were anchored off of our resort, Le Tahaa. Midmorning our excursion guide, Stephen picked us up for our Stingray and shark feeding encounter. I was a bit apprehensive about both, but it turned out to be a wonderful experience. We anchored in waist-deep water for both the rays and sharks, but in different areas. A mask and snorkel are optional, but give you a great underwater view of both. Be sure to bring and wear your surf shoes.

The shark-feeding portion was really exciting. Stephen brought out a bucket of fish guts, and started chumming while slapping the water. Within about five minutes, a number of three foot black-tipped reef sharks showed up for their feeding. Stephen was about 10 feet away from us, and the sharks ate their snacks without and erratic behavior. I have some excellent photos of the experience on my cruising review site.

After the morning excursion, we headed to a nearby sandbar where the bar staff had set up the floating bar-- a complete bar including champagne and just about and mixed drink you could think of. After that, we had a authentic Polynesian lunch at Stephen's motu, with traditional roasted pork and a freshly prepared tuna ceviche, which was just incredible.

Later in the afternoon, we picked up anchor and circled the island of Tahaa on a sunset cruise. A local tattoo artist came aboard and gave us free tattoo's (with magic markers). The sunset cruise around Tahaa was accompanied with the relaxing music of ENYA on the top sun deck. Sipping on a glass of champagne and watching the South Pacific sunset is an image which stays with you forever. The cruise was off to an amazing start.

Wednesday, we anchored off of Raiatea, at the mouth of the Faroe River, where a river kayak excursion is offered. I opted to stay onboard and have a relaxing massage and leisurely breakfast.

In the afternoon, we motored a short distance to the reef edge, just off a motu, where once again, the motu was prepared with a massage tent, bar, and water activities area. That evening, we were in store for the most amazing dinner I've ever had in Polynesia. The crew spent the afternoon preparing the motu for a evening under the stars, complete with a full bar, barbecue, and open-air theatre. The dinner, under the stars and some Tiki-torches, was shrimp and lobster. The tables were set up on the beach, and the mood was incredible. In the distance, the ship lay at anchor. The faint glow of some coconuts burning on the beach made shadows dance on the palms above. After a delicious dinner, prepared on the motu, we watched the silent film, Taboo, which was filmed in Polynesia. The entire evening had been prepared for four guests-- a testament to the commitment of Bora Bora Cruises.

Thursday we headed for Huahine, one of the more remote islands in the Society Island chain. For breakfast, we had a breakfast buffet ready for us just off the beach in about a foot of water. The entire buffet and two separate tables were set up for us, while the staff catered to our individual requests. I had fresh omelets prepared, while fruit, pastries and cereal were available on the buffet in the water, adorned by local flowers and plants. This secluded bay once was home to a luxury resort, that had since been overgrown by the tropical foliage after a large storm destroyed the resort years ago. It was almost impossible to tell a resort even existed there, except for a few remnants of buildings. There are opportunities to explore everywhere the ship goes, which makes this vacation feel like your the first explorer to the region. You simply don't get this on larger ships.

That afternoon, we raised anchor for a short cruise in the reef to the port town at Huahine. Because of the ships shallow draft and length, we docked right downtown of the small port. After lunch, we took a 4x4 tour of the island from Paul of Island Eco Tours. An American expatriate, Paul married a Polynesian woman and with his degree in Polynesian history, started a small tour business in Huahine. His cultural experience, and knowledge of the local plants, animals and people, made this a very educational tour. His rave of the local Tamanu fruit as a cure-all for the skin (similar to Aloe) had us scrambling at the local store to buy some Tamanu oil-- which I use to this day and just love.

That evening at sunset, a local singing group gave us a wonderful taste of traditional Polynesian songs and chants.

The rest of the cruise had similar days, with each day bringing wonderful new surprises, and experiences that leave a smile on your face that never seems to go away.

Anchoring under the peaks of Bora Bora on Sunday signaled the end of our cruise. Unlike traditional cruises, we had a leisurely breakfast and lunch, then were tendered to Bora Bora airport. We were, quite frankly, sad to leave. The captain and entire staff said their goodbyes as we left the ship on the tender.

Words can't express how wonderful this cruise was. It's unfair to Bora Bora Cruises to even try to compare it to a traditional cruise experience, since this is unlike any other.

If you want a incredible lifetime experience in Bora Bora, and the surrounding islands, I recommend the Tia Moana, and the experience that's offered by Bora Bora Cruises.

Fair winds, and calm seas...

Greg "Pepe" Giese

Note: A full review, including thousands of photos and video clips are available at <http://www.cruisingreview.com>

