

3/22/2023

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Cruising Review

Conrad Bora Bora



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Conrad Bora Bora resort review.

PDF Version of the webpage (first pages)

**Conrad Bora Bora Nui - French Polynesia
Presidential Villa (Over the water suite)**

Presidential Villa 1001 (March 2018 and 2019)

Over Water Villa with Pool: August 2020

Over Water Villa with Pool: January 2021 (Villa 332)

Mountainside Villa with Pool: February 2021 (Villa 411)

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Summary - Snapshot Review:

Resort: Bora Bora Conrad Hilton located on a motu surrounding the island of Bora Bora.

Suite: Presidential Overwater Villa. Was fantastic. Equal quality to The Brando located on Tetiaroa

Views of Sunrise and Sunset: Best in Bora Bora. Perfect view of sunset. Sunrise over Bora Bora.

Sunset Bar: Yes. Perfect full view of sunset. Also great for viewing storms. Glass floor for viewing fish.

Service: Amazing. Staff is excellent. Very responsive.

Dining: A great array of dining options. Chinese, French, Beach Bar, Wine Bar, and Lounge.

Dress Code: Resort casual. More upscale than most resorts, which you would assume.

Breakfast: Usually included. Pastries/danish cart, then a la carte cooked items ordering.

Food Quality: Best in Bora Bora (for resorts).

Lagoon Water Quality: Amazingly clear. Lots of fish to see, and snorkel right off your villa.

How to get around resort: Bikes and golf cart pickup are provided at no charge for select villas.

Over-the-water Villa: Yes. Best villas face west and with a plunge-pool.

Details

Booking: Book through website or directly via email to reservations at the resort. Pay up-front for stay and receive a substantial discount. Confirm pricing by checking Expedia.

Didn't Work in Villa: sauna, hottub, bathroom charge outlets (110V/220V), only 4 internet access point connections.

Bikes had mostly rusted chains and hard to adjust seats (a pretty common problem for the tropics due to corrosion of sea air). Bluetooth could only be turned off by staff, and beeped when not in use.

Needed as part of Presidential Villa Experience: Sink for bar area. Kitchen. Hammock. Firepit.

Website: Cluttered and busy, full of distractions instead of what the traveler is looking for. Needs work. Get rid of black background. Needs better user experience.

Full Review:

The Conrad Hilton Resort is a world-class resort located on a motu surrounding Bora Bora, and in my opinion, ranks higher than the Four Season's Bora Bora. The location, staff, and feel, is magical. The location in the crystal clear blue water, hilly terrain, and over-the-water villas put you immediately into pure bliss. As if were not enough to be in the magical Bora Bora, this resort will confirm you are indeed in paradise. Has the best resort sunset views anywhere Bora Bora of the lagoon, colors of water, sky, and sunsets.

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Overall Impressions from 2018:

This is my first stay at the Conrad Hilton. I've been coming to Bora Bora since 2002, and have somehow missed this pearl of the islands. I've been so enamored by the Four Season's, that I have forgot to try new things. The Conrad resort has undergone extensive renovations recently, and it shows.

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Side Track - Large Group Travel is promoted by the Four Season's:

The problem with the Four Season's resort , is that they cater to large travel and corporate groups, which unfortunately spoil the experience for their traditional luxury traveler. I experienced this first at the Four Season's in Punta Mita, then in Costa Rica. It's tarnished their reputation, and quite frankly, I'll just avoid them. Why ? Because incentive and large corporate group travel brings people to the resort, which are more accustomed to a binge-drinking Holiday Inn or all-inclusive resort, without respecting other guests. For them, rules are optional, including respect. It's what I expect on a Carnival Cruise, but not at a top-end property. For the Four Season's, it's like shooting fish out of a barrel, since corporate travel spenders don't mind spending huge amounts of money. Someone needs to coach the corporate guests on proper behavior, so it doesn't interfere with the other guests. Ok, back to the review...

Best Stay in French Polynesia:

The best luxury (very high end) traveler, will be well taken care of at The Brando and the Conrad Hilton.

The perfect vacation would be a 3 day stay at The Brando, and 3-4 days at the Conrad Hilton.

Just an amazing resort. Relatively seamless transitions for check-in, activities planning, dining, and just pure relaxation.

Check-in (2018)

The still antiquated check-in still exists. Even though I had already provided my credit card (paid for stay in advance) and had emailed passports, they were still requested at time of check-in. I don't know about you, but when I arrive, I want to get right into relaxation. The Four Season's and The Brando are the only top-end resorts which take you directly to your villa. This is one lesson the Conrad Hilton could learn, for a better guest experience. A better process would be to have the guest complete that information via email, prior to arrival. It would organize the check-in, and provide a seamless experience. Our butler took us for a short tour of the resort on a electric golfcart, before we were shown to our Overwater Presidential Villa. This resort is unique in that it has a spa and beautiful overlook vantage point a few hundred feet above sea-level on a hill. The colors of the lagoon and coral really pop from this viewpoint, and the view is spectacular. The best of any resort in Bora Bora.

Overwater Presidential Villa (2018):

We had four in our group, which was perfect for the large Villa. There was a master bedroom with huge bathroom and a view from the vanity and bath which are to die for. The second large master had two double beds.

There is a second story level, which has a third area that can be made into a bed for another two people, for a total of six. There are two master baths on the first level, then a third bathroom with shower on the top.

The top level also includes a TV, living room, bathroom, sauna (didn't work) outdoor patio deck with hottub (didn't work), outdoor lounging area, large dining table and bar. The first level has the master bedrooms, and a living room with TV, bluetooth speakers, and bar area with fridge. The bar fridge had a selection of small airline-type liquor bottles, snacks, and mixers.

For this level Villa, the contents were provided at no charge, and refilled once per day. The outdoor deck was amazing. Divided into two levels, the upper level had an outdoor lounge with cushions and a plunge pool. The deck extended to each of the master bedrooms, with chairs and access from each bedroom suite.

Below the plunge pool deck level is the swim deck, which had two lounge chairs for soaking up the wonderful South Pacific sunshine, and then a swim ladder which went down about six feet to reach the water. The depth is 6-8 feet, and crystal clear.

Resort Details

For Couples and Families: The resort is great for couples and for families. There were plenty of activities for all ages.

Feeding the Fish: While it's probably not the best for fish food, bread worked pretty good. They do sell small bags of proper fish-food (which smelled just awful - so I suppose the fish like it) for \$10 Euro per small bag. I recommend you just buy a bag at the Chinese market in Viatape for better value.

Sea Life: While not as good as the Pearl Beach Resort (one of the best for viewing rays during the day, and small fish and sharks at night), the water at the resort was very clear and great for snorkeling. The water is much clearer than the Four Season's (which is a murky clarity below the over-the-water villas).

Dining and Food Options

Dining: You have multiple options:

- Iriatai French Restaurant: Not being a big fan of French cuisine, I did not try this venue. This is also where they serve breakfast (which is excellent). 7:00am-11:00am breakfast. 6:30-9:30pm dinner.
- Banyan Chinese Restaurant: Excellent Chinese food. 6:30-9:30pm dinner.
- Tamure Beach Grill: Wonderful lunch and snacks. 11:30am-3:30pm lunch. This is where they have the Polynesian night (on a Tuesday when we were there).
- Upa Upa Lounge Bar: Features a glass floor deck to reflect the beautiful crystal green/blue water where you can watch the fish. We had some cocktails there and watched the sunset and a storm roll in. One of the most perfect views of all resorts in the South Pacific.
- Iriatai Wine Bar: Next to the French Restaurant. Didn't have time to sample the bar.
- Tarava Pool Bar: Swim-up bar, and cocktails for the pool and beach area.
- Room Service: Since our villa was located at the end of the pontoon, it takes a bit longer for food to get there. But the food was excellent. Well prepared, and presented by our butler.

Skip the Buffet Night with Show (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

Buffet Night with Lu'au Show: Skip the buffet dinner (it isn't up to par with the wonderful lunch and dinner restaurant options). They force you to go, but if you don't want to, just get room service instead. The price is a rip-off for bland food (even worse if you are a vegetarian or whole food plant based). I experienced something similar at the Conrad Maldives (where it's is \$500 a person). Drinks are not included. For two people expect to pay around \$280. If you want to just go to the show, let staff know what you want to do and they will accommodate. Note: During the pandemic period the show was two guys playing ukuleles, and the buffet was vastly diminished (less options). Skip eating, and just order room service.

SPA:

The resort spa is located near the top of the hill, with commanding (and relaxing) views of the lagoon and ocean. The facility is sparkling clean, fresh, and new. The mens changing room was good, except that the automated sensor lights turned off within a few minutes, leaving you in the dark. Recommend a simple light switch, and use LED lights if you want to save on energy consumption, without interfering with the guest experience (if you are relaxing, you're in no rush to beat the motion sensor to keep the lights on).

Wifi and Activities

Wifi: The Wifi connections throughout the resort are good, and good bandwidth, but the device limitations are poor. We were only offered four device connections for our stay, albeit our butler offered work-arounds by using other in-use villas and taking their connection.

Cell Signal: Excellent. There was also good 3G data. Save the roaming and just use the resort Wifi.

Activities: Lots of activities, which can be found on the website. We opted for the half day of shark and ray experience, which was wonderful. The sharks are docile, and just graceful to photograph. I use a Olympus TG-4 underwater camera, that provides photos with amazing clarity.

Resort and Staff

Amazing Staff: The staff was friendly, helpful, and timely. Equal to the Four Season's and The Brando.

The Beach: Clean, groomed, and inviting.

Front Desk: Efficient and very courteous.

Housekeeping: Usually there is morning service, and then a evening turndown service. Housing keeping was excellent.

Transportation: To and from the airport (more than \$100 per person), there is a power cat to transport you and your luggage dock-to-dock. There is another shuttle boat that goes to and from Viatape, the main village and port on the mainland of Bora Bora (free).

Tipping: While it is not customary to tip in French Polynesia, I find it a nice gesture to tip those who impress you the most (housekeeping).

Privacy: The resort is relatively exclusive. But since it is on the water, boats can go right by your villa. Villas have good separation for privacy. I find that it was more private and intimate than the Four Season's. The ultimate privacy (for those of you who are rich and famous) then I suggest The Brando. Oddly enough, the dining and food choices at the Conrad were far better. The Brando food options are limited, and you'll find yourself craving more variety, which is offered at the Conrad.

Buying Suggestions (extras):

There is a resort store, that is expensive. When you land in PPT there is also a store you can buy suntan lotion for about \$35 Euro a bottle (yes, it's that expensive). If you're going to buy anything, go into Viatape on the main island of Bora Bora, and go to the Chinese owned market, where you can buy suntan lotion for \$5 Euro, and buy any type of more expensive items for 1/5th the price. The main market is Chin Lee's Market located a few blocks from the main shuttle drop-off dock, which sells fresh vegetables, soda, bottles of wine, sundries, and just about anything you want for a small store. For suntan lotion, there are two large SPF dispensers at the pool. Just bring a small empty container and fill up for free there.

Suggestions:

While this resort ranks at the top of my list, there is always room for improvement.

- Broom. Would be nice to have a broom to sweep up any sand, before housekeeping can take care of it.
- Towel hanging line or bar outside for pool towels.
- Telescope and/or Binoculars: Have a telescope at the top floor of the villas, for stargazing at night. Have binoculars.
- Hammock: On the villa balcony.
- Wifi: Eliminate the device limitation for the Villa from 4, to unlimited.
- Firepits: A really nice feature would be gas or wood firepits.
- Villa Kitchen: Provide a basic kitchen or at least a sink for the bar area (to make it a wet bar).
- Solar or Wind Power: They did have solar hot water for all the villas, which is great. Would like to see solar PV as well.
- Villa Review: Before a guest checks in, do a villa review to make sure everything is working. In our case, at the top of the line villa (Presidential Villa), the sauna did not work, the hot tub did not work, the electrical outlets for 110/220V did not work, and the bluetooth had issues. Not something you expect when paying over \$4,500 Euro a day.
- Helipad (as of February 2021, I was informed that a mobile floating helipad is under construction in Australian)

Greetings in Polynesian:

Good Morning: la ora na (pronounced ur honor)

Thank You: Mauruuru (pronounced ma ru ru)

Thank You Very Much: Mauruuru roa (pronounced ma ru ru rowa)

Good-bye / Until We Meet Again: Nana (pronounced nana)

Cheers: manuia (pronounced manueea)

Note: The resort staff speaks English, French, Polynesian, German, Japanese and possibly other languages.

Getting There (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021):

SFO-PPT: United has flights on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday (non-pandemic period). Buy economy tickets and upgrade at the airport to Business Class for \$800 per person.

LAX-PPT: I used to exclusively fly on Air Tahiti Nui, but their service has fallen recently, and I suggest trying Air France, which has more comfortable (and newer) aircraft, and better on-time service. If you've ever had to wait three or more hours at the Papeete terminal in Tahiti, you'll understand. Air France has a app which makes booking easy, allows seat selection, buying upgrades, etc. Air Tahiti is very old school, and really needs to invest in better on-time flight management, and convenient booking. Make it easy, and you'll get more customers. United now has weekly flights from San Francisco (SFO) into PPT.

PPT-BOB: You basically only have two flight options, Air Tahiti (local commuter turboprop) or private charter. For private charter, expect to be price gauged. There used to be helicopter service, but now there is only a KingAir Turboprop, and a soon to start service using a Cessna Caravan seaplane. Updated: now Air Tahiti has helicopter service.

Waiting in PPT for your next flight: If you get stuck on a later flight, take a quick 5 minute taxi to the Intercontinental for some breakfast or lunch. The taxi takes US cash, and Euro (but expect any change in French Polynesian Francs or just leave as a tip).

Charter Options:

Private Charter KingAir:

Sample Charter Fare:

09 mars 2018 ar 07.15AM LT

Papeete to Bora-Bora

Beechcraft 200

720kgs (220kgs maximum for the luggage)

Price One Way: \$7200 (all taxes inclusive and the use of our VIP lounge for the passengers)

15 mars 2018 at 2.30PM LT

Bora-Bora to Papeete

Beechcraft 200

720kgs (220kgs maximum for the luggages)

Price One Way: \$7200 (all taxes inclusive and the use of our VIP lounge for the passengers)

COVID Notes:

Traveling to French Polynesia: As of February 2021, French Polynesia requires a negative Covid PCR test 72 hours prior departure flight. You will also need to fill out a online form to get into the country (see links below for more information and website).

After four days, you will be required to do a Covid self-test.

Traveling back to USA: The CDC now requires a negative Covid test (Antigen or PCR) to return to the USA. Fortunately, at the airport in Papeete, Tahiti, you can now get a Antigen test at the airport. The price is about \$55 (yes, you can use credit card for payment). The process is to show your passport (for ID), get documents, make payment, then have the nasal swab done. You are texted the link for test results and directed to a website, where you enter your testing number, and date of birth. You are then provided a online page with the test result in about 30 minutes. You can show this to the agent at your airline check-in. Was fast and accurate.

February 2021: France has closed its borders. Conrad Bora Bora is closed until May 1st, 2021 (pending updates).

What is travel like during a pandemic ? I was lucky enough to travel to French Polynesia at the end of August 2020 and just returned from another trip February 2, 2021. While nervous to present negative PCR test at check-in for my United flight (they have weekly service on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from SFO to PPT).

With all the proper documentation, there were no problems. The check-in staff at SFO and the flight crew were very professional. Keep in mind that everyone that goes has to have a negative test, and French Polynesia has one of the lowest Covid infection rates in the world, so you are traveling from a high risk area (i.e. USA) to a very low risk area (Tahiti and her islands). Also keep in mind that the resorts are only about half occupied in August 2020 (only 30 people there in February 2021), there is plenty of ventilation (most venues are outdoors), good people spacing, and lots of Vitamin D streaming down from the wonderful sunshine (for more information on how Vitamin D prevents and mitigates Covid please see link below).

Because the flights are less than half full, you never feel like there are too many people. This is especially true at the main airport in Papeete, Tahiti. Note: the commuter flight on Air Tahiti from PPT to BOB was completely full.

The staff at the Conrad Bora Bora are very professional, and take their job very seriously. It's comforting to know you are in good hands.

For the February 2021 visit, some of the services at the resort were diminished, and restaurant selection is minimal. The Polynesian buffet was very limited (food average to not that great). Suggest getting room service instead of eating at the \$145 per person Polynesian buffet offered on Tuesday and Friday night. The Banyan Asian Bistro was amazing !

