

# HONEYMOONING IN THE ISLANDS OF

# TAHITI

Experience overwater luxury at Le Taha'a.

By JEN O'BRIEN

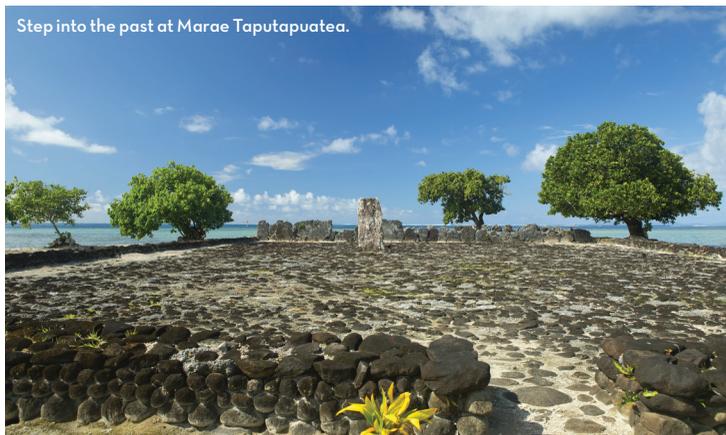
**A**NYONE WHO HAS VISITED the Islands of Tahiti will tell you it was love at first sight. This group of 118 idyllic islands surrounded by the South Pacific have long enchanted visitors with dramatic mountain peaks, impossibly blue seas and tropical landscapes bursting with exotic flowers—but the beauty extends far beyond these obvious physical attributes.

Look below the surface and you'll discover a place where unity is intrinsic: from the way land and water work together to support daily life to the way man and nature collaborate to create the islands' prized vanilla and pearls.

Even the culture is a marriage, blending **French and Polynesian sensibilities**. And then there's mana, a complex concept Tahitians hold dear, that has unity at its core. It's the energy in the land, the sea and the air that envelops the soul and connects people to this place and one another in an indescribably beautiful way. Think of it as the elusive nirvana of French Polynesia—your first visit may only provide you with a glimpse, but it will be enough to serve as the first step toward travel enlightenment helping you deepen your connection to the destination and each other.

Get to the heart of the islands and discover the mana that lies **beyond the iconic overwater bungalows of Bora Bora** using this curated honeymoon itinerary.

Step into the past at Marae Taputapuetea.



## GET IMMERSSED IN POLYNESIAN CULTURE IN RAIATEA

For a primer on the history of the islands, make Raiatea your first stop. A quick 45-minute flight from Tahiti's capital, **Papeete**, this wild island sits at the heart of the Polynesian Triangle and is considered by many to be a place of great spiritual significance. The island's most important site, **Marae Taputapuetea**, is a traditional temple and sprawling seaside plaza where some of the most important ceremonies in Polynesian history took place. The marae (sacred place) garnered international recognition in 2017 when it was declared a UNESCO world heritage site. Book a tour with Polynesian Escape's Taharii Pariente, one of the area's foremost scholars, who will walk you through the site and explain why Marae Taputapuetea remains a **place of pilgrimage for Polynesians** from as far away as New Zealand, Hawaii and Easter Island.

OVERWATER SUITE PHOTO COURTESY OF LE TAHA'A ISLAND RESORT & SPA. MARAE PHOTO COURTESY OF TAHITI TOURISME.

OVERWATER SUITE PHOTO COURTESY OF LE TAHA'A ISLAND RESORT & SPA. SHARK PHOTO COURTESY OF TAHITI TOURISME. POOL BUNGALOW AND STINGRAY PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM MCKENNA FOR INTERCONTINENTAL MOOREA RESORT & SPA.



**“WATER HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF LIFE IN THE ISLANDS OF TAHITI.”**

Few travel experiences can compare to watching the sun set over a South Pacific lagoon.

## BECOME ONE WITH NATURE IN TAHA'A

Raiatea's neighbouring island, **Taha'a**, shares a common lagoon but the vibe is entirely different. In fact, Taha'a is about as laid-back as it gets, making it the perfect place to shack up during your time exploring these two Society Islands. As far as accommodations go, you're spoiled for choice. Splash out on an overwater suite at **Le Taha'a Island Resort and Spa**, the only Relais and Chateaux property in French Polynesia, where five-star service meets traditional design. Or book one of the nine villas at **Vahine Island Resort & Spa**, a family-owned luxury property on a private island.

Each resort has its own coral garden with world-class snorkelling and both are a short boat ride away from the main island of Taha'a.

In addition to its fabulous accommodations, Taha'a is also the biggest producer of vanilla in all of French Polynesia. Pay a visit to one of the island's farms and you'll learn about the magic that sprouts from the soil on “the vanilla island.” In fact, the process of cultivating French Polynesia's unique strain of vanilla involves hand-pollination or “marrying” the plants to produce the treasured crops.

## HAVE AN OTHERWORLDLY EXPERIENCE ON THE WATER IN MOOREA

Water has always been an integral part of life in the Islands of Tahiti. Emerging from the sea after great volcanic eruptions, these islands and atolls were originally settled by ocean-going people who navigated their way to paradise using the stars as their guide. These days, the area is considered home to the **most majestic swath of sea on earth** and its crystalline waters are one of the biggest draws for visitors. The island of Moorea, in particular, provides once-in-a-lifetime experiences at sea for modern-day explorers.

Settle in at the **Intercontinental Moorea Resort and Spa**, a luxe property nestled between striking mountain peaks and a tropical lagoon, then get out and explore the ocean. For adventurous honeymooners, Moorea Jet Surf, a company owned by veteran waterman Denis Grosmaire, offers a unique way to explore the lagoon on a motorized surfboard, while Corallina Tours operates excursions that will have you heading out past Cook's Bay and Opunohu Bay, while spinner dolphins swim alongside your boat. You'll drop anchor in a playground for stingrays and black tip reef sharks where you can hop in the water and come face to face with these fascinating sea creatures.



Snorkel with black tip reef sharks.



Kick back in seclusion at the Intercontinental Moorea.



Check swimming with stingrays off your bucket list.



Head out in search of waterfalls on Moorea.



Make it official by adding a lock of love to the Belvedere Lookout.

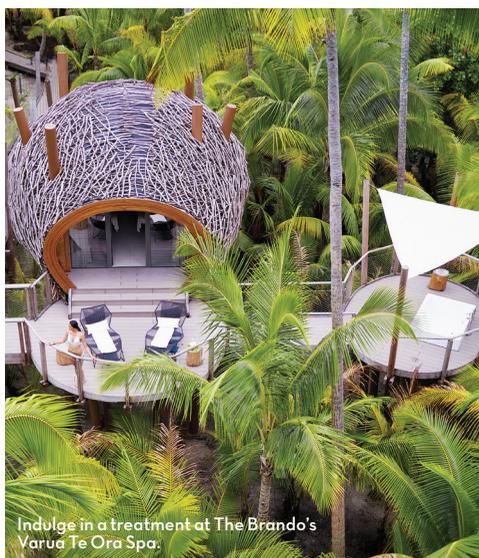
**CONNECT WITH THE LAND IN MOOREA, TOO**

Moorea’s dramatic, mountainous landscape also begs to be explored, and a day trip with Enjoy Moorea is just the ticket. A typical tour of the island with this company begins with an exhilarating 4x4 climb up Magic Mountain, where bewitching panoramic views are par for the course. A visit to the Belvedere Lookout provides a different (though equally stunning) perspective of the island and the famed volcanic peak of Mount Rotui. You can commemorate your visit, and your recent nuptials, by adding a personalized “**lock of love**” to the site. After a lunch of local delicacy *poisson cru* on a secluded beach, you’ll cap off the day with a hike through tropical forest to a remote waterfall where you can take a dip in fresh mountain water and truly revel in the lush natural beauty of the island.

**PLANNING YOUR TRIP**

Air Tahiti Nui offers direct flights from Los Angeles to Papeete that start your island experience the moment you step on board—the cabin crew even distribute tiare flowers to welcome you! After landing, plan to spend at least one night on the main island relaxing at a luxurious property like Tahiti Pearl Beach Resort.

Island-hopping is half the fun of honeymooning in the the Islands of Tahiti and internal flights can be arranged with Air Tahiti. Once you’re ready to get out and explore, everything from car rentals to diving excursions can be booked through Tahiti Tours.



Indulge in a treatment at The Brando’s Varua Te Ora Spa.



Vacation like an A-lister with a honeymoon stay at The Brando.

**EXPERIENCE UNIQUELY TAHITIAN LUXURY IN TETIAROA**

Few places in the world can compete with the Islands of Tahiti when it comes to luxury accommodations, and The Brando is the best of the best. Located on **Marlon Brando’s private atoll**, Tetiaroa, and serviced by its own private airline, this ultra-refined retreat has been consistently listed among the best resorts in the world since opening in 2014. Designed to blend seamlessly with its pristine surroundings and run on renewable energy, The Brando is also home to the Tetiaroa Society, a non-profit organization that simultaneously carries out conservation efforts and educational programs for guests. With impeccable

service, Polynesian-inspired cuisine created by famed French chef Guy Martin and a beautiful spa sanctuary built into a series of wooden nests cocooned in tropical greenery, it’s no wonder this property is a favourite hideaway of celebrities like Leonardo DiCaprio and Barack Obama.

Regardless of how you fill your days, the Islands of Tahiti will send you off with a souvenir you just can’t find anywhere else: **Mana, and the connection it inspires**, will undoubtedly enhance your first few weeks of wedded bliss and fuel your desire for a return trip to this magical slice of paradise.

FOREST AND FISH PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAHITI TOURISME. LOOKOUT PHOTO BY JEN O'BRIEN. SPA AND VILLA PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BRANDO.