

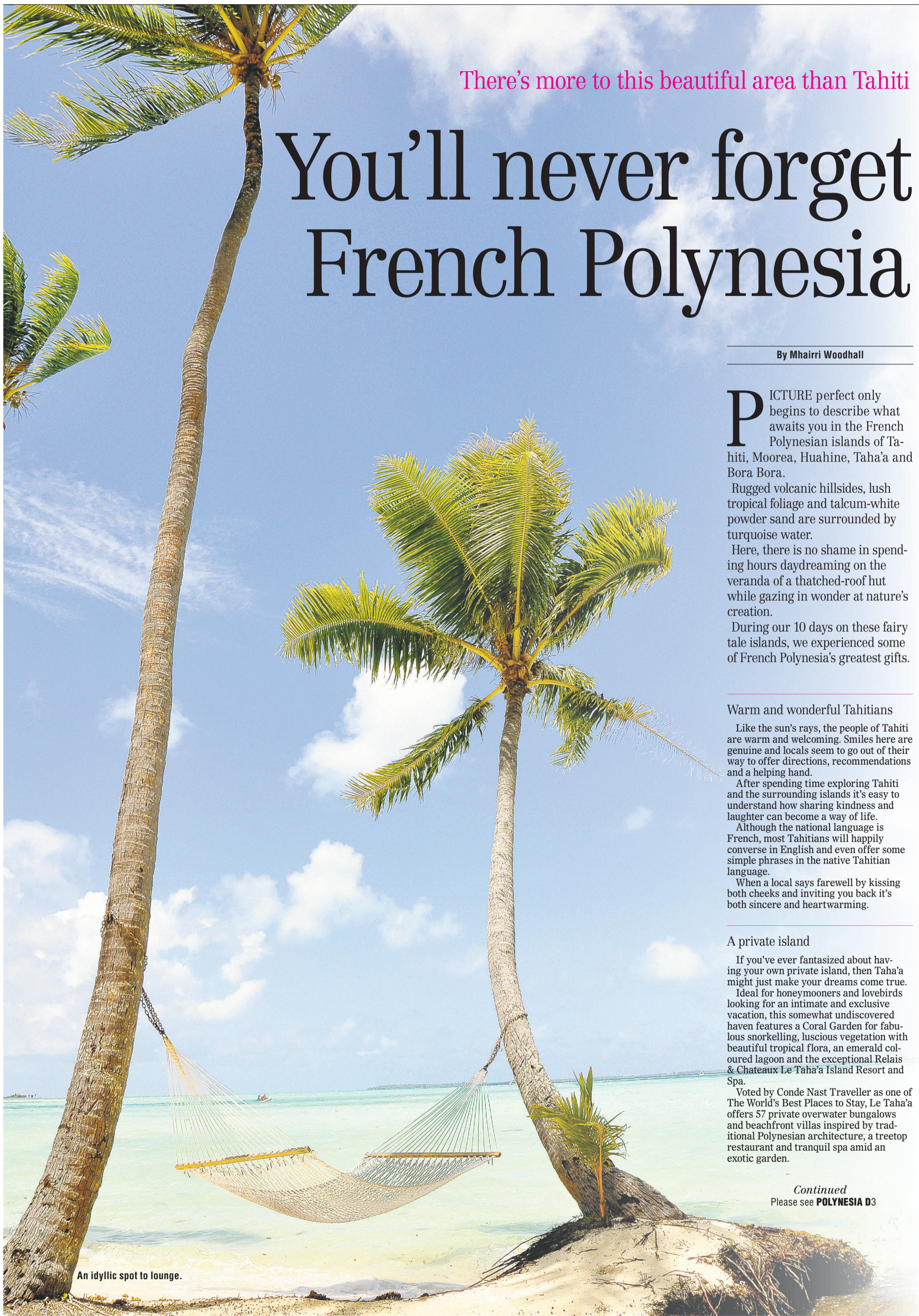


TRAVEL

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D1



There's more to this beautiful area than Tahiti

You'll never forget French Polynesia

By Mhairri Woodhall

PICTURE perfect only begins to describe what awaits you in the French Polynesian islands of Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine, Taha'a and Bora Bora.

Rugged volcanic hillsides, lush tropical foliage and talcum-white powder sand are surrounded by turquoise water.

Here, there is no shame in spending hours daydreaming on the veranda of a thatched-roof hut while gazing in wonder at nature's creation.

During our 10 days on these fairy tale islands, we experienced some of French Polynesia's greatest gifts.

Warm and wonderful Tahitians

Like the sun's rays, the people of Tahiti are warm and welcoming. Smiles here are genuine and locals seem to go out of their way to offer directions, recommendations and a helping hand.

After spending time exploring Tahiti and the surrounding islands it's easy to understand how sharing kindness and laughter can become a way of life.

Although the national language is French, most Tahitians will happily converse in English and even offer some simple phrases in the native Tahitian language.

When a local says farewell by kissing both cheeks and inviting you back it's both sincere and heartwarming.

A private island

If you've ever fantasized about having your own private island, then Taha'a might just make your dreams come true.

Ideal for honeymooners and lovebirds looking for an intimate and exclusive vacation, this somewhat undiscovered haven features a Coral Garden for fabulous snorkelling, luscious vegetation with beautiful tropical flora, an emerald coloured lagoon and the exceptional Relais & Chateaux Le Taha'a Island Resort and Spa.

Voted by Conde Nast Traveller as one of The World's Best Places to Stay, Le Taha'a offers 57 private overwater bungalows and beachfront villas inspired by traditional Polynesian architecture, a treetop restaurant and tranquil spa amid an exotic garden.

Continued

Please see **POLYNESIA D3**

An idyllic spot to lounge.

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The dock and entrance to Le Taha'a Resort & Spa showcases the magnificent scenery in Tahiti.

IF YOU GO

The Tahiti Tourism website is a fabulous resource for planning a trip to French Polynesia: tahiti-tourisme.com
If you overnight in Papeete before or after travelling to the outer islands, the Manava Suite Resort or Intercontinental Tahiti Resort are great options and only minutes from the airport: spmhotels.com, tahiti.interconti.com
On Moorea, we loved our garden bungalow with private plunge pool at the boutique Moorea Pearl Resort and Spa: spmhotels.com
For a secluded island hideaway nothing compares to Le Taha'a Island Resort and Spa: letaha.com
The ultimate in luxury and service awaits you at the Four Seasons Bora Bora: fourseasons.com/borabora
An incredible three-day sporting event: hawai-kinuivaa.pf
Anyone interested in learning more about the Tahiti Cultured Pearl can visit the Robert WAN Pearl Museum: robert-wan.com

PHOTOS BY POSTMEDIA NEWS

Polynesia
Continued from D1

Romance abounds

It is difficult to imagine a setting more romantic than French Polynesia, and it's no surprise that this is the top honeymoon destination in the world. If the idyllic scenery isn't enough to spark flames of passion, the selection of activities for two offered throughout Tahiti's islands will have your heart melting.
Start your morning with a gourmet breakfast of tropical fruit, freshly squeezed juice, French pastries, artisan cheeses and quiche delivered by Polynesian Canoe to your private over-water bungalow.
Dine waterfront with a Polynesian picnic for two in the warm shallow waters of a secluded Motu (island), or on a private sunset dinner cruise.
Or, simply pamper each other with a couple's spa service inspired by the rituals and natural ingredients of the South Pacific.

Hawaiki Nui Va'a

Va'a (canoe racing) is one of the traditional sports of Tahiti. It is said that a Tahitian's umbilical cord is cut with a rock and a canoe paddle, which is apparent in their dedication to, and appreciation of, the sport.
Every year, upwards of 7,000 spectators and fans take to the waters in a myriad of small and large craft boats to support their favourite team in a three-day, 124.5-kilometre paddling race between the islands of Huahine, Raiatea, Taha'a and Bora Bora.
Each day, in the blistering hot sun, we were in the heart of the action as our fishing boat navigated rough waters and large swells to cheer on the rapidly paddling teams.



Four Seasons Bora Bora is one of the top hotels, with views of Mount Otemanu.

The favourite to win, Shell Va'a, did not disappoint with a record-breaking 3 hour 11 minute time in the first leg, and first place finishes in the second and third legs. The finish line, at Matira Point in Bora Bora was a spectacle in itself.
The waist-deep, bathwater-warm turquoise water became the world's largest pool-party as fans and athletes celebrated together.
Music blared, champagne and beer flowed and exhausted athletes and elated fans danced aboard boats and in the calm shallow water.

Sharks, stingrays and coral reefs

One of the most popular excursions in French Polynesia is the Shark & Stingray tour.
Depending on the outfit you book with, an outrigger canoe or powerboat will take you to the beautiful outer reef.
From there your experienced guide will feed the Black-tip Reef Sharks while you snorkel or watch from the safety of the boat.
On our excursion in Bora Bora, more than 20 sharks ranging from one to two metres in length surrounded us, which caused my heart rate to soar and had me back in the boat within a few minutes.
After our great shark encounter we went to the shallow blue lagoon to



swim with stingrays.
If you choose to book this excursion from Bora Bora or Taha'a you'll likely also have the opportunity to visit the Coral Garden, an amazing natural underwater park teeming with colourful tropical fish.
Pretty pearls
The warm lagoon waters that surround French Polynesia's island and atolls are the perfect setting to create the Tahitian Cultured Pearl. Often referred to as Black Pearls, these fine gems range widely in size, shape and colour. Dark black and grey with a shimmering palette of tints and hues

The water colour and views at Le Taha'a Island Resort & Spa are truly unforgettable. At left, the Hawaiki Nui Va'a race is held over three days and racers paddle over 124 kilometres between the islands.

which range from green, blue, bronze, aubergine and even pink. Pearl oysters are nurtured and carefully monitored from birth through their pearl harvest five years later.
Better conditions and care produce higher quality pearls with brilliant lustre. Shopping for pearls can be done at galleries or hotels on Tahiti, Bora Bora and Moorea, or at family pearl farms on Taha'a and Huahine. To learn more about the history and legend of the Tahitian Pearl visit the Robert WAN Pearl Museum in Papeete.

Unparalleled accommodations

We experienced some unique and spectacular properties in French Polynesia, and given the amount of time you'll spend at your hotel selecting the right accommodation is critical. Of course the ultimate in luxury, service and ambience is found at the Four Seasons Bora Bora. Our traditional thatched roof overwater bungalow with hardwood floors and panoramic views of the lagoon and towering Mount Otemanu was one of the trip highlights. The sprawling yet intimate property includes four restaurants, a full-service spa with open-air treatment decks overlooking a private lagoon, beachfront pool with cabanas and an abundance of smiling and accommodating staff. With unwavering perfection in every last detail this true tropical paradise is what dreams are made of.
When it was time to say goodbye, the lifetime memory of pool-warm azure lagoons, gently swaying palms and bright-breasted birds chirping in the breeze remained as French Polynesia's parting gift to us.

— Postmedia News

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