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38 SPRING GETAWAYS

From Friday Harbor's First Friday to French Polynesia, it's time to wander into the season of sunshine and spontaneous adventures.

BY GREG FREITAS AND
NATALIE COMPAGNO

58 TRAILBLAZING WOMEN

In their own words, 10 successful women discuss habits that make them happy, healthy and resilient.

ON THE COVER

Melinda French Gates shares some of her life's most pivotal moments.

Photograph by Jason Bell



OOH LA LA! TAHITI IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Tahiti is a tropical paradise that combines natural beauty,
rich culture, and luxurious experiences

BY GREG FREITAS AND NATALIE COMPAGNO



from the

Bounty to Brando, French Polynesia stirs our most primal escapism. Lush, verdant peaks teetering above gin-clear lagoons, filled with a brilliant, sapphire menagerie — it only begins to describe the allure, as does the scent of gardenias drifting through the air like a persistent opiate. With the same ancient Polynesian culture firmly rooted in place, it's Hawaii's cousin — but more sultry, slightly wilder, and far more vast. French Polynesia is larger than Western Europe, and contains at least 75 inhabited islands and atolls. Notably, there is the unmistakable French flair.

Although they seem worlds away, floating dreamily in the South Pacific, the islands sit closer to the West Coast than one might think. In 2022, **Air Tahiti Nui** became the first airline with direct flights linking Seattle and Tahiti. Tahiti is just east of Hawaii, albeit below the equator, and thus has the same two-hour standard time zone difference, making vacation jet lag minimal.

Tahiti is the name of the most populated island and home to **Papeete**, where the journey begins. There's a bustling pulse to Papeete — its central market spills over with intricate shell necklaces, famous local pearls, the aroma of spices, and decadent pastries. The locals have a warmth that feels effortless, like they've cracked the secret to living well and are more than willing to share. Young Tahitians meet for after-work drinks with flowers in their hair.

The travelers convene around the comfy, eco-friendly **InterContinental Tahiti Resort & Spa**, where the excitement of tropical adventure lends each morning the atmosphere of holiday gifts waiting to be unwrapped. Swimming in the pool alongside rescued injured sea turtles educates guests about marine conservation, and foreshadows the aquatic delights that await.

Moorea, just a short ferry ride from Tahiti, rises like an emerald fortress from the sea. Its craggy peaks and lush valleys make it feel untouched, ancient. A word about the famous overwater bungalows — you're going to want to do it. There are a plethora of options. We adored **Manava Beach Resort & Spa** because it is small, intimate, and approachable. Mornings begin with a refreshing swim among the honu, with these gentle green sea turtles gliding through the lagoon. In the afternoons, a black-tipped reef shark shows up at the same time every day, majestic, harmless, though we keep our distance all the same. Floating among these graceful creatures, we feel completely enveloped by the ecosystem around us.

HELLO WORLD!

Start your day with a tropical breakfast in your overwater bungalow at the eco-friendly InterContinental Tahiti Resort & Spa.



COURTESY OF IHG HOTELS

Evenings come alive with Polynesian dance, where the performers move with hypnotic fluidity and the on-site restaurant serves up locally caught seafood with a tropical twist. Poisson cru is the national dish. It means “raw fish” in French, technically correct but also sorely lacking in poetry. The freshest sashimi you can imagine, bathed in equally fresh coconut milk, gets a little closer. We ate poisson cru with fries almost every day, and the experience felt as fresh as the fish every single time.

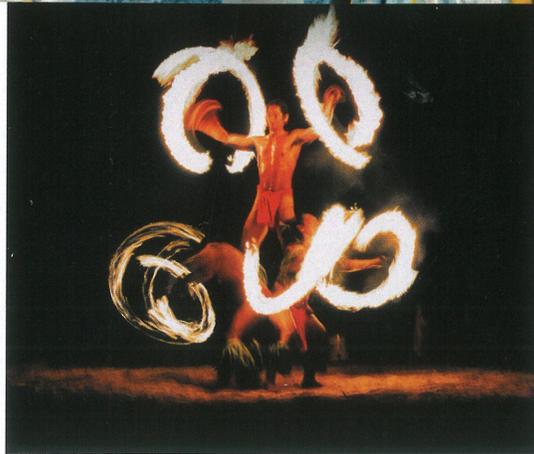
To see the island up close, rent a scooter and trace the coastal road. Stop at **Ta’ahiamanu Beach** for a swim, then complete the circuit at **Temae Beach**, where palms sway lazily over a pristine coral reef. Make time for a stop at the **Manutea Tahiti** distillery, where rum agricole awaits tasting. Support more local artisans at **Ma Robe À Moi**, where they create beautiful hand-painted *pareos* (beach wraps). Then join the locals across the street at **Snack Mahana**, a beloved roadside eatery where you’ll savor grilled tuna with coconut rice while the sun sets in a blaze of color.

It’s one thing to daydream about French Polynesia, but it’s another to see it unfold before you from the deck of a Windstar ship. **Windstar** specializes in intimate, small-ship cruising, where the crew knows your name, and there’s never a sense of being herded from one place to another. This is travel at its most thoughtful, where the itinerary feels curated rather than scripted. Days on board drift by like a perfectly tuned melody.

Bora Bora is, frankly, absurd in its beauty. The lagoon is a kaleidoscope of iridescent blues, and **Mount Otemanu** looms overhead like a silent guardian. If there’s a way to be anything other than blissfully content here, it hasn’t been discovered yet. Snorkeling with manta rays and reef sharks at **The Aquarium** is a rite of passage, and somehow even that feels serene rather than adrenaline-fueled. If you love the water as much as we do, it might be the best day of your life.

Going ashore in Bora Bora is by no means mandatory. Most of the fancier bungalow hotels lie on the coral atolls that ring the island. But there is great food to be discovered on the island. Hit **Restaurant Saint James** for a French splurge, and the locals-friendly roulottes (food trucks) of **Matira Beach**.

Taha’a is quieter, known for its vanilla plantations that scent



WONDER AND DISCOVERY

Fun is everywhere, including swimming with tropical fish, manta rays and sharks, and cultural immersions.

the air with a sweetness that lingers even after you’ve left. **Raiatea**, the spiritual heart of Polynesia, invites exploration with its ancient temples and wild rivers. Then there’s **Huahine**, where traditional Polynesian life still hums along unhurried and undisturbed.

Windstar’s onboard experience is luxurious without being pretentious. The dining leans local, with fresh fish prepared to highlight its natural flavors and tropical fruit that practically glows on the plate. Excursions range from snorkeling safaris to cultural immersions where you can learn about traditional Polynesian navigation techniques, or take part in a vanilla-scented cooking class. You’re never rushed and there’s room to choose your own adventure, whether that’s diving deep into local culture or finding a secluded beach and letting the afternoon drift by.

Back on board, evenings are quiet in the best way possible. The stars are outrageous — clear, bright, and scattered across the sky like someone upended a box of diamonds. Maybe you’ll take a nightcap on deck, listening to the soft lap of waves against the hull, or join newfound friends to share stories of the day’s discoveries.

When it’s time to head back to Papeete and eventually the mainland, you’ll carry that easy rhythm with you — a sense that life can be simpler and sweeter, that beauty can be found in the gentle sway of a ship and the endless horizon ahead. Windstar was the first cruise line to explore Tahiti, and it takes that honor seriously. It does more than just take you to French Polynesia. It brings you into its heart, letting you experience a place where time slows, and wonder never quite leaves your side. ■