

**FRENCH POLYNESIA****Tahiti, Moorea, Bora Bora & MV Aranui 5 Cruise****19 days**

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**Day 1      *Arrival in Papeete, Tahiti***

French Polynesia, an overseas collectivity of the French Republic, sometimes unofficially referred to as an overseas country, is composed of 118 geographically dispersed islands and atolls stretching over an expanse of more than 2000 kilometres (1,200 mi) in the South Pacific Ocean. French Polynesia was one of the last places on Earth to be settled by humans. The majority of the population is of Eastern Polynesian descent, and closely related to the New Zealand Maoris (but quite distinct from the closer Western Polynesian Samoans & Tongans). Although we commonly refer to the entire group of islands as Tahiti, it's actually only one of the many islands that make up French Polynesia.

For many travellers these islands are a mythical destination. The mention of Tahiti calls to mind visions of an idyllic island paradise and once you visit, you'll discover that your imagination isn't too off the mark. Secluded, tropical and lush, these islands are a place where dreams meet reality.

Tahiti is the largest island of the Îles du Vent (Windward Islands) of the Society Islands. The island consists of two ancient eroded volcanic cones, Tahiti Nui and Tahiti Iti connected by a narrow Isthmus. The island, with an area 403 square miles (1043 square km), accounts for almost 1/3 of the total land area of French Polynesia. Papeete, on Tahiti's northwestern coast, is the capital and administrative centre of French Polynesia.

Overnight in Papeete.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

**Day 2      *Tahiti: Full Day Circle Island Tour***

A 'Circle Island Tour', or a drive around Tahiti, is the best way to spend a day seeing the island's outlying sights and a bit of old Polynesia away from Papeete's bustle. The road around Tahiti Nui is 114km (72 miles) long.

We will start our day with a visit to downtown Papeete. Here we will visit the traditional market where the Tahitians sell fish, fruit and vegetables, arts & crafts. After some time to explore the market we will continue around the island. One of our stops along the coast will be at Venus Point. This was the location of successive landings of European navigators, and James Cook gave the name Venus in memory of his scientific trip to observe the planet.

Along the wild east coast we will pass several black sand beaches, and we will stop at one of the many waterfalls. It is here that the big island is joined to its peninsula.

After a break for lunch we will go for a stroll in the Spring Garden of Vaipahi, a lovely haven on the mountainside of the road at Mataiea. Here one finds over 75 different species of plants, including the giant elephant ears. One of the last stops along our island tour will be at the Arahurahu Marae, situated in a pretty valley. This is a sacred place which served both religious and social purposes in pre-Christian Polynesian societies. There is a short walk to reach this quiet sacred site, and the only marae (ancient temple or meeting place) in all of Polynesia that has been fully restored.

Overnight in Papeete.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 3      *Tahiti to Moorea / Moorea Island Tour***

This morning we travel to Moorea by ferry (less than one hour).

Upon arrival to Moorea Island in the heart of French Polynesia, you will immediately be awestruck by its natural beauty. Its jagged peaks are cloaked in lush greenery and encircled by the deep blue of the ocean and sky. Located a mere 19 km (12 mi) west of the island of Tahiti, Moorea is a triangular shaped island encircled by a lagoon of translucent green, fringed by an azure blue sea. The physical beauty of the island makes an island tour a highlight of any visit, and upon arrival we will enjoy a circle island tour of Moorea by 4x4 vehicle. We will explore the natural and human sides of this French and Polynesian island; emerald green pastures with the volcanic mountains of Mouaputa and Rotui as their backdrop.

The distance around this idyllic island is approximately 38 miles, or 62 kilometers, and offers many spectacular sites and photo opportunities. In Paopao Valley we will travel past pineapple fields where we learn about the famous and most important resource of Moorea. We will visit an ancient Tahitian stone temple en route to Belvedere viewpoint. We will also take in magnificent views of Cook's Bay, Opunohu Bay and Mt. Rotui.

Cook's Bay is a finger-like body of water virtually surrounded on three sides by the jagged peaks lining the semicircular "wall" of Moorea. The tall 'thumb' with a small hole in its top is Mount Tohiea. Coming into view as we drive farther along the bay is Mount Mauaroa, Moorea's trademark cathedral-like "Shark's Tooth" mountain buttressed on its right by a serrated ridge. Towering over us is the jagged Mount Rotui, the huge green-and-black rock separating Moorea's two great bays. Unlike Cook's Bay, Opunohu is virtually devoid of development, a testament to efforts by local residents to maintain the natural beauty of their island.

We will stop at the Toatea view point where we will have a magnificent view of the green lagoon flecked with brown coral heads, the white line of the surf breaking on the reef, and all of Tahiti rising magnificently from the horizon. The district of Haapiti boasts one of the prettiest churches on the island. When the first Europeans arrived, the lovely, mountain-backed village of Haapiti was home to the powerful Marama family. This region became a center of Catholic missionary work after the French took over the territory, and it is one of the few villages with a Catholic church as large as its Protestant counterpart.

Overnight in Moorea.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### **Day 4      *Dolphin & Whale Watching Expedition***

This morning we will join marine biologist Dr. Michael Poole (or his assistant) for this combination eco-tour and research expedition focusing on wild, free-ranging dolphins. Dr Poole has been studying dolphins in French Polynesia since 1987.

We will depart from the pier aboard a covered boat for the scenic ride to Moorea's reef. Spinner dolphins, the slightly larger rough-tooth dolphins and pilot whales can be seen around Moorea, with spinner dolphins regularly swimming inside the reef. Dolphins are found on 95% of the tours, but the engaging narrative and sheer magnificence of Moorea's coastline will ensure a rewarding time. We may even have an opportunity to view the humpback whales perform their annual mating and calving rituals. (As with all creatures in their natural environment, one cannot guarantee the presence of animals). This is an educational experience and observation tour and is not a swim opportunity with the dolphins.

Today's lagoon discovery will allow you to enjoy from the water incredible views of the mountains of Moorea and their luxuriant vegetation.

Your afternoon will be free (dinner on your own this evening).

Overnight in Moorea.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

#### **Day 5      *Moorea to Tahiti / MV Aranui 5 Embarkation***

This morning we depart from Moorea and head to Papeete where we board the Aranui 5 – our home for the next 11 nights! Late this afternoon the Aranui 5 will depart from the Papeete dock.

**Aranui 5 Details:**

The MV Aranui 5 is a new (2015) custom-built, dual-purpose passenger/freighter that sails from Tahiti to the Marquesas, Tuamotu and Society Islands in French Polynesia. This all-inclusive cruise is designed to offer all of the comforts of a cruise liner (while operating as a supply ship), and the Aranui 5 represents the crowning jewel of a 30 year long pursuit of the ultimate passenger-freighter. Classified as a small vessel, the ship has only 103 cabins, with 8 different guest decks, and the interior décor reflects the Polynesian heritage of her owners and crew. There is a restaurant on board where all of the meals are served in a casual setting. As well, you will discover 2 lounges and 2 conference rooms where guests will enjoy presentations on various topics related to the Marquesas. There is also a small outdoor pool; a boutique; a massage room; a gym and a Sky Bar with panoramic views. This upscale vessel, part passenger, part freighter, is the main supply line to this archipelago, providing passage in great comfort, to areas inaccessible by conventional methods.

Our selected cabin class for this voyage is the 'Superior Deluxe', though some travellers will be accommodated in Deluxe Cabins or Premium Suites. All cabins are spacious with a private balcony. As the Aranui 5 is a working ship, all visits ashore are limited to the time required by port authorities and cargo operators. The time in port may range from a few hours to a day or more. Excursions are available at many ports of call, at no cost to the passengers. These ship-wide (ie not exclusive to just our group) excursions include meals, tours of villages and archaeological sites, and snorkeling. Any excursions not included in the tour cost are noted in the itinerary. Due to reef formations, lack of docking facilities, or wind and sea conditions at many ports in French Polynesia, it is frequently necessary to use a small craft or tender to transport passengers between ship and shore.

Designed and custom built with passenger comfort in mind, we will embark on a voyage of discovery following the paths of Paul Gauguin, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Thor Heyerdahl. The Polynesian staff and crew on board will welcome you to the exotic, captivating islands of French Polynesia that they call home.

PLEASE NOTE that, as is typical of 'expedition' style cruising, the following cruise itinerary can change at any time. Should we be made aware of any such changes affecting our journey, we will try to advise either pre-trip or upon arrival on tour.

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 6      *Tuamotu Archipelago - Kauehi***

Part of the commune of Fakarava, Kauehi is generally overlooked for her better known sister to the south. Yet, this seldom visited atoll offers an unspoiled scenery of white sand beaches and a beautiful clear lagoon in varying shades of turquoise and blues, with a feel of old traditional Polynesia. With fewer than 600 inhabitants, living mainly in the village of Tearavero, and the scarcity of tourists, has allowed their Paumotu culture to remain unaffected. Designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve due to its association with Fakarava, Kauehi is also a nesting place for turtles.

After sailing through the pass of Arikitamiro, the Aranui will be anchored in the lagoon of Kauehi, across the village of Tearavero. This will be a time for relaxation before a full day at sea to the Marquesas, with the opportunity to visit the village and its church, or lounge, swim and snorkel at a white sand beach.

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 7      *At Sea***

Today is a day to unwind and relax on one of the sun decks or in the comfort of an air-conditioned lounge. Perhaps you may want to simply enjoy the views of the endless South Pacific Ocean as we make our way to the captivating Marquesas Islands.

Talks on Marquesan culture and/or history will send you back in time and give you some insight into this ancient civilization. Your evening can be spent socializing at the bar with your fellow group members and other adventurers from around the world. The spirited

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Polynesian crew will proudly introduce you to their way of life and entertain you with Polynesian songs and rhythms.

Tonight, before you go to bed, set your watch 30 minutes ahead for Marquesan time!!

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 8      *The Marquesas Archipelago - Nuku Hiva (Taiohae)***

Be sure to head out on deck to fully appreciate Taiohae’s spectacular bay, a giant volcanic amphitheatre dominated by towering cliffs streaked with waterfalls. As the Aranui unloads, we can explore Taiohae, the tiny administrative capital of the Marquesas. The village of Taiohae stretches along the beach of a magnificent amphitheater created by the successive eruptions of three concentric volcanoes and dominated by towering cliffs streaked with waterfalls. Taiohae Bay is where Herman Melville, then a 23-year-old sailor, and a buddy jumped a whaling ship in 1842.

Following breakfast, we will disembark to meet the awaiting 4X4’s that will take us on the day’s excursion.

Our first stop will be a visit of the Cathedral of Taiohae. You can visit the cathedral or go the market to see the arts & crafts on offer. We then travel north to the archaeological site of Mea’e Kamuihei with its giant banyans and petroglyphs. Hike to the nearby Paeke site, featuring paepae, immense stone platforms, where the Taipi built their houses. This will include a performance of the traditional Marquesan Pig Dance. Your first introduction to traditional Marquesan cuisine will be served for lunch. Here, the specialty is the “Umu”, an underground oven where food is cooked for hours. Local music during the meal will provide a great ambiance.

In the small village of Hatiheu, you may visit a museum that displays copies of petroglyphs from unexplored valleys. Our excursion will return south to Taiohae with its spectacular bay, a giant volcanic amphitheatre dominated by towering cliffs streaked with waterfalls. Back to Taiohae village, you will also find banks, boutiques and an internet café. You may return to the vessel from the village on foot or by car.

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 9      *Ua Pou (Hakahau)***

Today, from the decks, you’ll see the soaring mountain spires unique to Ua Pou. Legend refers to Ua Pou as the “pillars of the archipelago” and it is often called “The Cathedral Island”. These names become clear as the ship docks at Hakahau Bay surrounded by 12 basalt summits soaring as high as 3,745 feet.

While the crew unloads supplies, from cement to sugar, and loads sacks of copra (dried coconut meat) and fruit, we can explore the quaint village of Hakahau and its church which features a hand-carved wooden dais. We may have the chance to meet the island’s talented woodcarvers and artists, and hike up the hill to the Cross for breathtaking views of the mountains, the lush valleys and the main village.

Today on shore we’ll enjoy another delicious Marquesan lunch: we will likely include: breadfruit (a Marquesan staple), along with curried goat (one of the Marquesas Islands’ specialties), poisson cru (raw fish marinated in lime juice and coconut milk), taro and sweet red bananas. Here we will enjoy an excellent dance performance including the Bird Dance, traditional to Ua Pou.

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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**Day 10**      ***Ua Huka (Vaipae - Hane - Hokatu)***

In the early morning light, the Aranui will arrive in Ua Huka. This is one arrival not-to-be-missed! The manoeuvre entering the small bay and positioning the vessel for departure is truly impressive. On the dry lands of Ua Huka we travel by 4WD to explore the island, stopping for stunning views of the Pacific, visit to the arboretum and botanical garden born from the passion of the island's former mayor; the cultural center Te Tumu, featuring a small museum with exquisite replicas of Marquesan artifacts, before reaching the beautiful village of Hane and its Marine Museum. Today lunch will be served at a local family restaurant. This island, where the Marquesas' first airstrip was built in 1972, is largely arid and the least inhabited.

After lunch we will continue discovering the island in the fishing village of Hokatu with its petroglyph museum and local woodcarvers' studios. You may opt to hike up to one of Hane's viewpoints escorted by the ship's guides to visit an ancient mea'e, a Marquesan open air temple featuring red tuff tikis. Or, perhaps you will want to just relax on the beach. Back on board be sure to be out on deck for some more gorgeous views as the Aranui sails along the coast of Ua Huka.

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 11**      ***Hiva Oa (Atuona) & Tahuata (Koku'u Beach)***

This morning the Aranui will arrive in Hiva Oa where you will have plenty of time to explore Atuona - the island's principal village and the second largest village in Marquesas. This was once the capital of the archipelago, and the location where Paul Gauguin lived and created some of his best work. We can visit the colonial store where he shopped, as well as a replica of his infamous "House of Pleasure" and the adjoining museum. As you walk up the hill to the cemetery, you'll have sweeping views of the harbor. Beneath a huge frangipani tree is a tombstone with the simple words: Paul Gauguin 1903. Nearby is the grave of another famous European who also was seduced by Hiva Oa: Belgian singer-composer Jacques Brel, who died in 1978.

During lunch, which will be served on board, Aranui will sail to Koku'u Beach in Tahuata, a small protected cove of white sand and clear waters where you can enjoy a lazy afternoon relaxing or taking a refreshing dip in the Pacific Ocean.

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 12**      ***Hiva Oa (Puamau) & Tahuata (Vaitahu)***

In Puamau we travel by 4WD to the most incredible archaeological site for "tikis" (ancient, human-like religious stone sculptures) outside of Easter Island. Once we reach Mea'e Ipona, our knowledgeable guides will tell us the stories of these haunting statues of ancient times. Surrounded by beautifully lush grounds, the site is overwhelming and has a lot of what Polynesians call "mana" (spiritual power). Only a small part of the site has been restored and most of it is still buried under massive trees and rocks.

After lunch on board, Aranui will set sail for Tahuata, where we will enjoy the afternoon in the small village of Vaitahu.

The Aranui will anchor off the small island of Tahuata. On this leaf-shaped island, the air is thick with the fragrant scent of tiare, frangipani and history. Tahuata may be the smallest of the inhabited Marquesan islands, but historically it is the richest. Tahuata has experienced it all – as the first island in the archipelago to be discovered by Spanish explorers in 1595, to the arrival of missionaries in 1797, to the first French settlement in the Marquesas in 1842. The large church built by the Vatican, is decorated with beautiful Marquesan carvings and a stunning stained glass window. Tahuata is famous for its exquisite bone and helmet shell carvings, and there will be many to choose from in the village.

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 13      *Fatu Hiva (Omoa & Hanavave)***

Fata Hiva is perhaps the most lush and remote island of the Marquesas! The only access is by sea, since there is no airport on Fatu Hiva. This is also the island of “tapa”, and you will discover all about this traditional cloth.

In the tranquil village of Omoa we will see women pounding mulberry, banyan or breadfruit tree bark on logs. The bark is then dried and used as a canvas where the locals will paint ancient Marquesan designs. Fatu Hiva is also well-known for its hand-painted pareos (sarongs) and monoi, coconut oil infused with “Tiare Tahiti” blossoms, vanilla or sandalwood. You may have the chance to meet some of the local skilled woodcarvers in the large handicraft center. This will be another great opportunity to purchase Marquesan art and souvenirs.

Before lunch the Aranui will sail to the other side of the island, to jaw-dropping Hanavave Bay, also known as the Bay of Virgins. Athletic passengers may choose to make the trip on foot. On this optional unforgettable ten-mile hike you will take in breathtaking views of towering cliffs and picturesque bays. For hikers, a delicious lunch will be served at the top of a mountain. (Scale of difficulty 8/10)

Witnessing the sunset in Hanavave Bay is a moment of pure bliss.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 14      *At Sea***

Today you can unwind after an enchanting and enriching journey to the heart of Polynesia!

Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 15      *Tuamotu Archipelago - Rangiroa***

Surrounded by spectacular cliffs, rising 260 feet above sea level, Makatea is second largest raised atoll in French Polynesia and a sharp contrast from the typical low-lying corral-reef formation with a lagoon in the middle. Makatea is 80 kilometers away from its closest neighbor in the Tuamotus, a group of low-lying coral atolls.

Until about two million years ago, Makatea looked much like the other Tuamotus - a ring of coral with a stunning turquoise lagoon. Then, Tahiti and Moorea in the Society Islands, which are 245 kilometers to the southwest, began to form. The weight of those volcanic islands depressed the seafloor and created a bulge that lifted Makatea straight out of the water. Over the past two million years and concurrent with the uplift, erosion slowly shaped the coast into an almost continuous band of sedimentary cliffs averaging 40 to 75 meters in height. On approach by boat, Makatea seems to sit on the ocean like one layer of a wedding cake. The top is quite level (though full of holes), and the sides are straight and white.

This is also the only atoll in the Tuamotus with potable water which comes from its underground caves. Once a thriving island due to phosphate mining in the first half of the 20th century, it was mostly deserted with only a few families remaining to keep watch. Today, the fewer than 100 inhabitants live from the culture of copra, fishing and the trade of coconut crabs. As we approach the old port of Temoa, remnants of the loading dyke are still visible. Open pits from phosphate extraction dot the island and the only railroad built in French Polynesia can still be seen. Here you will have the chance to visit the abandoned village of Vaitepaua and mining plant, hike to higher grounds for spectacular views of the island or take a refreshing dip in an underground cave.

The Aranui will depart late in the afternoon and sail back to Tahiti.

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Overnight on board the MV Aranui 5.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 16      *Society Islands - Papeete / Disembark from Aranui 5 & Fly to Bora Bora***

This morning we arrive back in Papeete, Tahiti. This is the end of our journey on board the Aranui 5 so it's time to say goodbye to the Polynesian staff and Aranui guides.

From Papeete we take a short flight to what is perhaps the best known of the Society Islands – Bora Bora. Bora Bora is best known for its world famous lagoon of opalescent blues and greens, and we will be greeted by majestic Mount Otemanu, the island's highest peak. Measuring 718 m (2,300 feet), the mountain summit is often crowned with a gentle wreath of clouds. Located 240 km (150 mi) from Tahiti and accessible by plane or ship, Bora Bora consists of a main island, two smaller volcanic isles (Toopua and Toopuaiti) and numerous flat coral islets (also known as motus) that fashion a semi-circular wreath around half of the main island.

The Bora Bora airport is located on Motu Mute, a small islet to the north of Bora Bora. So, upon arrival at the Bora Bora airport we will take a shuttle boat over to the main island where we meet our transport that will take us to our hotel. Arrival at the hotel will be in time for a late lunch and then the balance of your afternoon will be free.

Overnight on Bora Bora.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 17      *Bora Bora Island Tour***

This morning we will board "Le Truck", a form of local transportation, and begin our drive around this island of paradise. We will pass the district of Fa'anui, small villages and fields where we will see the everyday life of the people of Bora Bora. We will pass the ancient ceremonial site Fa'anui Marae and the former location of the bunkers constructed by American GI's during World War II.

There are only a handful of marae (traditional temple) ruins on Bora Bora, including Marae Fare-Opu, which is squeezed between the roadside and the water's edge. Two of the slabs are clearly marked with the turtle petroglyphs seen incised in stones at numerous other sites in the Society Islands.

We will travel along the east coast of Bora Bora, sight of the famous resorts, before reaching Matira point that boasts the prettiest beach of the main island. We will make a stop at the famous Bloody Mary's restaurant where you can sit on a palm trunk stool to sip a cold drink and soak up the tropical setting.

The remainder of your afternoon will be free.

Overnight on Bora Bora.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

**Day 18      *Bora Bora: Ultimate Shark & Ray Watching / Polynesian Beach BBQ***

Today we will board our lagoon cruisers for an amazing excursion across the Blue lagoon of Bora Bora. The lagoon of Bora Bora is three times larger than its land mass (80 km<sup>2</sup>), and it offers to the eyes an incomparable range of light and blue colours. We will make a complete circle island cruise, enjoying a superb view of the Bora Bora Mountains.

On our first stop near the reef, where the water is clear, we can enter the waist-deep water. Here you will have the chance to touch and even feed the rays with the assistance of our guide. Rays are one of nature's most elegant swimmers; watch as they glide in an

effortless ballet in and around the swimmers. At our next stop black-tipped lagoon sharks can be spotted – a thrilling experience. Do not worry, the show can be seen from the boat or under the water, in a completely safe environment. Along with the sharks, you can snorkel with a great variety of tropical reef fish at a coral garden.

We then continue to a private “motu” (islet) for a delicious island lunch. A local BBQ lunch will be served; fish marinated in coconut milk & lime, grilled fish, meat & chicken, sweet potatoes salad, rice and/or pasta salad, bread fruit, taro root, fresh fruits, “poe” fruit cream & coconut bread. Soft drinks, juice, water & beer is included. After some time to relax on the motu we then head back to the hotel.

Overnight on Bora Bora.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 19      *Bora Bora - Fly to Papeete - Departure***

Today we depart Bora Bora\* and return to Tahiti in order to connect with the international flights back to North America (your flight back to Tahiti is included in the cost of the tour).

\* Once your onward flight departure time is known (most are late in the evening), we will be able to book your flight from Bora Bora accordingly (there are several flights a day).

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast