Tour Code
MCPI

ADVENTURESABROAD

Pitcairn & French Polynesia Expedition

Including the Society, Tuamotu & Gambier Islands

18 days

Created on: 12 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrival in Papeete, Tahiti

Welcome to French Polynesia, an overseas collectivity of France composed of 118 islands and atolls scattered across more than 2,000 kilometres of the South Pacific Ocean. These islands were among the last places on Earth to be settled by humans, and today the majority of the population is of Eastern Polynesian descent, closely related to New Zealand's Mori.

While we often refer to the entire region as Tahiti, this is actually just one island among many that make up French Polynesia. For countless travellers, these islands represent a mythical destination—and once you arrive, you'll discover your imagination isn't far from reality. Secluded, tropical, and lush, this is a place where dreams meet reality.

Tahiti is the largest of the Windward Islands in the Society archipelago. Formed by two ancient volcanic cones—Tahiti Nui and Tahiti Iti—connected by a narrow isthmus, the island accounts for almost one-third of French Polynesia's total land area. Its capital, Papeete, nestled on the northwestern coast, serves as the administrative heart of the territory and your base for tonight.

Overnight in Papeete.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Tahiti: Full Day Circle Island Tour

A circle island tour is the best way to experience Tahiti's outlying sights and glimpse traditional Polynesia beyond Papeete's bustling center. The road around Tahiti Nui stretches 114 kilometres, offering coastal vistas and cultural insights at every turn.
We'll begin our day in downtown Papeete, visiting the traditional market where Tahitians sell fresh fish, tropical fruits and vegetables, and local arts and crafts. After time to explore the vibrant stalls, we'll set off around the island.

Our first coastal stop is Venus Point, named by Captain James Cook who landed here in 1769 to observe the transit of Venus—a rare astronomical phenomenon crucial for calculating the distance between Earth and the Sun. This historic bay has witnessed the arrival of many notable European explorers, including Captain Samuel Wallis, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, and perhaps most famously, Captain William Bligh aboard HMS Bounty in 1788. The connection between Tahiti and the Bounty mutiny story will resonate throughout our journey, particularly when we reach Pitcairn Island later in our voyage.

Continuing along the dramatic east coast, we'll pass several black sand beaches and stop at one of the island's many waterfalls near the narrow isthmus where Tahiti Nui meets its smaller peninsula, Tahiti Iti.

After lunch, we'll stroll through the Vaipahi Spring Garden, a tranquil haven on the mountainside at Mataiea. This lush sanctuary is home to over 75 plant species, including giant elephant ear plants.

Our final stop takes us to Arahurahu Marae, nestled in a peaceful valley. This sacred site served both religious and social purposes in pre-Christian Polynesian society and is the only fully restored marae (ancient temple and meeting place) in all of French Polynesia—a short walk leads to this remarkable cultural treasure.

Overnight in Papeete.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Moorea Exploration

This morning we travel to Moorea by ferry, a scenic crossing of less than one hour.

Upon arrival, you'll immediately understand why Moorea captivates all who visit. This triangular-shaped island, located just 19 kilometers west of Tahiti, is encircled by a translucent green lagoon fringed by azure seas. Jagged volcanic peaks cloaked in lush greenery rise

dramatically against the deep blue sky, creating a landscape of extraordinary natural beauty.

Morning: Circle Island Tour by 4x4: We'll explore both the natural splendor and cultural heritage of this French Polynesian gem by 4x4 vehicle. This excursion offers spectacular photo opportunities at every turn, from emerald pastures backed by the volcanic peaks of Mount Mouaputa and Mount Rotui to sweeping coastal vistas.

In Paopao Valley, we'll pass through pineapple fields and learn about Moorea's most important agricultural resource. We'll visit an ancient Tahitian stone temple before ascending to Belvedere Viewpoint, where magnificent panoramas of Cook's Bay, Opunohu Bay, and Mount Rotui unfold before us.

Cook's Bay is a finger-like inlet virtually surrounded by jagged peaks. The tall "thumb" with a small hole near its top is Mount Tohiea, while the cathedral-like "Shark's Tooth" of Mount Mauaroa—Moorea's trademark mountain—rises nearby, buttressed by a serrated ridge. Towering above is Mount Rotui, the massive green-and-black sentinel separating Moorea's two great bays. Unlike the developed shores of Cook's Bay, Opunohu Bay remains virtually pristine, a testament to local residents' commitment to preserving their island's natural beauty.

At Toatea Viewpoint, we'll take in the sweeping vista: the green lagoon flecked with brown coral heads, the white line of surf breaking on the distant reef, and Tahiti rising magnificently on the horizon. We'll also visit the district of Haapiti, home to one of the island's prettiest churches. This mountain-backed village was once the seat of the powerful Marama family and became a center of Catholic missionary work after the French takeover—one of the few villages where the Catholic church rivals its Protestant counterpart in size.

Afternoon: Dolphin Research Eco-Tour: This afternoon, we join marine biologist Dr. Michael Poole (or his research assistant) for a unique combination eco-tour and research expedition focusing on wild, free-ranging dolphins. Dr. Poole has been studying dolphins in French Polynesian waters since 1987.

Departing from the pier aboard a covered boat, we'll cruise along Moorea's spectacular coastline and reef. Spinner dolphins, rough-toothed dolphins, and pilot whales inhabit these waters, with spinner dolphins regularly swimming inside the reef. Dolphins are encountered on 95% of tours, though as with all wildlife in their natural habitat, sightings cannot be guaranteed. The engaging narrative and magnificent coastal scenery ensure a rewarding experience regardless.

This is an educational observation tour designed to respect the dolphins' natural behaviour—it is not a swim-with-dolphins experience. The lagoon cruise also provides stunning water-level views of Moorea's mountains and luxuriant vegetation.

At day's end, we return by ferry to Papeete.

Overnight in Papeete.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 Departure from Papeete / MV Aranoa Embarkation

This morning we depart from Papeete on board the Aranoa – our home for the next 11 nights!

Aranoa Ship Details:
With each successive ship, from the Aranui 1, a converted freighter with a dozen passenger cabins, to the Aranui 5, a custom-built passenger-freighter and 103 cabins, Aranui Cruises has consistently reimagined and refined the concept from its aesthetics, comfort and quality without sacrificing its most important asset, its authentic Polynesian charm and atmosphere led by its Polynesian crew.

In its newest and latest vessel, the Aranoa represents an accumulation of more than 40 years of know-how. Set to launch in 2027, and with only 93 cabins accommodating up to 196 passengers, this custom-built vessel will focus on a small ship experience, warm, intimate and inclusive in the Polynesian tradition. Two restaurants, two bars, a lounge, a spa and fitness room, a boutique, two whirlpools and two elevators will round out the public spaces on board. The onboard experience, unique to Aranui Cruises, will be a continuation of the island tradition, warm, hospitable, shared and inclusive.

This dual-purpose passenger/freighter will offer an all-inclusive expedition cruise designed to offer all of the comforts of a cruise liner (while still operating as a supply ship). Classified as a small vessel, the interior décor reflects the Polynesian heritage of her owners and crew.

Our selected cabin class for this voyage is 'Deluxe' and ‘Superior Deluxe’. All cabins are modern and spacious, with a private balcony. The time at each island stop may range from a few hours to a day or more (Pitcairn = 2 days). Included excursions are available at most of our stops. These ship-wide (i.e. not exclusive to just our group) excursions include tours of villages and archaeological sites, and snorkeling. Due to reef formations, lack of docking facilities, or wind and sea conditions at many ports, 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 and the Polynesian staff and crew on board will welcome you to the exotic, captivating islands of French Polynesia and Pitcairn Island.

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 Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Tuamoru Islands - AnaaÂ

The Tuamotu Islands are a paradise on earth—76 atolls spread across more than 1.2 million square miles, constituting the largest chain of atolls in the world, roughly the size of Western Europe.

Sea-voyaging Polynesians settled these islands around 1400 AD. French colonists arrived in the 17th century, followed by Catholic missionaries who converted the local population and built churches on Anaa's shores. The island's population has declined from around 2,000 in 1960 to approximately 500 residents today.

Located 437 km from Tahiti, Anaa is a small atoll best known for its luminous jade lagoon—the sun's rays reflecting off the shallow, translucent water create ethereal green clouds above. The magnificent coral ring forms one of the most perfect atolls in the Pacific, dotted with eleven picturesque white sand motus with no passes.

A former stronghold of the Pomare family, most residents today are involved in copra production or fishing, contributing to the island's landmark sustainable fishing program.

Activities: Explore the village of Tukuhora and look out for 'feo'—giant fossilized blocks of coral that emerge up to 3 meters high, characteristic of this atoll. Swim at the 'Ogogo' pito, or join an excursion to the motus of Temarie and Putuahara.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Tuamotu Islands - Amanu

Amanu is a hidden gem of French Polynesia—a remote and untouched atoll with palm-fringed crystal-clear lagoons, picturesque motus, and the charming village of Ikitake. It offers visitors authentic island life, rich marine beauty, and a peaceful escape.

After a short walk through the village, we'll be welcomed by a traditional dance performance featuring local children. Explore the village's ancient lighthouse, visit a large fish park, and admire the historic 19th-century building constructed with coral stone walls that serves as both the town hall and a cyclone shelter.

In the plaza, beneath a century-old 'tau' tree, a buffet lunch of island specialties will be served.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 At Sea

Today is a day to unwind and relax on the pool deck 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 towards Magareva and Pitcairn.

Lectures on Pitcairn Island culture reveal the fascinating history of the descendants of the Bounty mutineers. In the evening, enjoy a convivial evening in the bar with your fellow passengers. The Polynesian crew proudly share their way of life to the sound of ukuleles, guitars and drums.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Gambier Islands - Mangareva

Nearly 1,000 miles southeast of Tahiti, the Gambier Islands are the most remote archipelago in French Polynesia—and one of the most beautiful. According to Polynesian mythology, Mangareva, the principal island, was raised from the ocean floor by the demi-god Maui.

Mangareva is a hidden treasure where rich Polynesian history merges with serene spirituality against a backdrop of idyllic natural beauty. The island boasts an extraordinary lagoon—perhaps the most spectacular in all of Polynesia—with striking turquoise and blue hues that contrast beautifully with lush green mountains. The lagoon is also renowned for its Tahitian black pearl farms, cultivated in these pristine waters.

Upon arrival at Karorua quay in Rikitea, the capital of the Gambier archipelago, enjoy a flowery welcome and tasting of local specialties.

Must-See: St. Michael's Cathedral, built from coral blocks in 1848, is the largest and oldest religious monument in The Islands of Tahiti. This beautifully renovated edifice features a magnificent altar inlaid with iridescent mother-of-pearl shell—a stunning symbol of Polynesian Catholicism. Between 1840 and 1870, missionaries and converted islanders built hundreds of religious structures throughout the archipelago, many still beautifully preserved on the islands of Mangareva, Akamaru, Aukena, and Taravai.

After exploring the tranquil village and its remarkable architecture, enjoy lunch served on board before departure for Pitcairn.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Pitcairn IslandÂ - The Last British Outpost in the Pacific

Today we reach one of the most remote inhabited places on Earth—a legendary island that exists at the very edge of the known world. Lying halfway between New Zealand and the Americas, Pitcairn Island is surrounded by 4,800 km of open ocean. A few archipelagos scatter to the north; to the south, only empty seas stretch to Antarctica's ice caps.

This is home to one of history's most extraordinary tales of survival and redemption. In 1790, mutineer Fletcher Christian and his band of rebels aboard HMS Bounty sought refuge on this tiny volcanic island, deliberately burning their ship in what is now Bounty Bay to escape detection. What followed was a dramatic saga of murder, chaos, and ultimately remarkable resilience as the settlement transformed under the guidance of John Adams, the last surviving mutineer.

Two centuries later, the MV Aranoa drops anchor in Bounty Bay, and you'll walk in the footsteps of those Bounty settlers—from the aptly named Hill of Difficulty, where provisions were once hauled ashore, to the coastal pools where the entire population was baptized in 1890.

Your Day: Discover Adamstown, home to fewer than 50 residents who are direct descendants of the mutineers. Meet them at the local market where English and Polynesian cultures blend in splendid isolation. Visit the Bounty Museum to view artifacts from the infamous ship and pay respects at the grave of John Adams. Share a picnic lunch in the village with these authentic inhabitants, keepers of a living legend.

But Pitcairn's story extends even deeper into the past. Early European visitors found relics of an earlier Polynesian civilization—likely from Mangareva, 490 km to the northwest. Roughly hewn stone gods still guard sacred sites; cliff faces bear carvings of animals and men; burial sites, earth ovens, and stone adzes reveal the island's ancient inhabitants.

With its rugged cliffs, dramatic vistas, and unspoiled natural beauty, Pitcairn offers something rare: a journey to a place where history refused to fade away, where isolation has preserved both legend and tradition, and where every corner tells a story of human courage and enduring independence.

This isn't just a visit—it's an encounter with one of the world's last true frontiers.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Pitcairn - A Second Day in Isolation

A rare gift: a second day on one of the world's most isolated inhabited islands—a place with no airport, no harbour, and a population that can gather in a single room.

Today offers free time to fully immerse yourself in Adamstown, Pitcairn's only settlement and one of the world's smallest capital communities. The village clings to a northerly slope 120-150 meters above sea level, accessed via the notorious Hill of Difficulty—the same steep 70-meter track the mutineers climbed in 1790, hauling Bounty's provisions on their backs.

Explore the Village: Modern homes with corrugated iron roofs (capturing precious rainwater in a place with no streams) scatter along the main road. The compact village center reveals fascinating layers of island life: the Pamai Centre housing the General Store and Post Office, where you can purchase the island's famous stamps; the Public Square dominated by the community hall, where Bounty's original anchor rests on a plinth (recovered from the wreck in 1957); and the Seventh Day Adventist Church that replaced Anglican traditions in 1887, marking a profound spiritual shift in the community's history.

The island's small museum offers tangible connections to both worlds—pre-European Polynesian stone tools alongside Bounty relics salvaged from the seafloor, bridging the ancient inhabitants and the mutineers who made this their refuge.

Venture Further: Beyond Adamstown, narrow roads wind past the working sugarcane mill and the cemetery where generations of Christians, Youngs, and McCoys rest beneath simple headstones bearing those famous surnames. Continue to Pulau, where the currently empty schoolhouse sits below Christian's Cave—Fletcher Christian's supposed lookout point, where he watched the horizon for British ships that never came.

For the Adventurous: The walk to Pitcairn's Highest Point rewards with sweeping panoramic views across this isolated speck in the Pacific. From this vantage, the island's dramatic geography reveals itself—rugged volcanic cliffs plunging into endless ocean, a landscape both beautiful and unforgiving that has shaped the character of everyone who has called it home.

Life here remains remarkably unchanged from the self-sufficient existence the mutineers established over two centuries ago. Gardens still yield breadfruit and taro; fishing sustains families; and the rhythm of island life follows the seasons and the sea. This is living history at its most authentic—remote, resilient, and utterly unlike anywhere else on Earth.

Lunch will be served back on board before we begin our return voyage to the village of Rikitea in Mangareva.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Gambier Islands - Mangareva

Returning to the stunning turquoise lagoon of Mangareva, we're welcomed in Karorua with a vibrant "PE'I" dance performance—a colourful introduction to the day's exploration.

By truck or on foot, discover key sites around the island: visit the Collège Saint-Raphaël, where young artisans learn the delicate art of mother-of-pearl engraving, continuing a craft tradition that has defined the Gambier Islands for generations.

For the adventurous, hike to the belvedere for panoramic views over the lagoon and surrounding islands, then continue to the tomb of the kings—a poignant reminder of Mangareva's royal Polynesian heritage.

After lunch on board, the afternoon is yours to relax and swim in the crystal-clear waters at Teauopapa, soaking in the serene beauty of one of French Polynesia's most remote and pristine lagoons.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Day At Sea

After the intensity of Pitcairn and the treasures of the Gambier Islands, today offers a welcome chance to reflect and recharge as we voyage across the vast South Pacific.

Settle into the rhythm of a day at sea: relax on the Pool Deck with endless ocean views, or retreat to the air-conditioned Lounge with a book and a cool drink. Enriching talks delve deeper into the region's history, culture, and marine environment, while onboard activities bring fellow travelers together to share stories of the journey so far.

As the MV Aranoa cuts through these remote waters toward Hikueru, there's time to simply be—to watch the play of light on the waves, spot seabirds wheeling overhead, and appreciate the profound isolation of the South Pacific, where days can pass without sight of land or another vessel.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Tuamotu Islands - Hikueru

Located in the Central Tuamotu Archipelago, Hikueru is a coral atoll known for its vast lagoon, coconut groves, and storied pearl diving tradition. Once a major natural pearl oyster reserve, the atoll was devastated by a catastrophic cyclone in 1903—an event immortalized by Jack London in his South Sea Tales. The first pearl farm to produce high-quality Tahitian pearls was established here in the 1960s, though today the population relies primarily on copra production.

We arrive at the marina to the sound of music and wreaths of flowers—a warm Polynesian welcome. Following a tasting of fresh local fruits, explore the village by truck or on foot. Discover the island at your own pace. Visit the abandoned church of Saint-Michel, built entirely of coral and the tallest church in the Tuamotus—a striking monument to the island's spiritual heritage.

Chat with the local population and learn of the island's legends and stories passed down through generations, offering insight into authentic Polynesian island life in this remote and peaceful corner of the Pacific.

A beach barbecue will be served for lunch, with time to swim and snorkel in the crystal-clear lagoon before we begin our return voyage to the Society Islands.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Day At Sea - Tahiti Bound

As the MV Aranoa makes her final passage back to Tahiti, today offers time to process an extraordinary journey—from the remote legend of Pitcairn to the pearl atolls of the Tuamotus, from ancient Polynesian heritage to living island communities that exist at the very edges of the map.

Attend onboard talks that tie together the threads of what you've experienced, participate in activities with fellow travelers, or simply spend quiet hours on deck watching the familiar silhouette of Tahiti's mountains emerge on the horizon.

Overnight on board the MV Aranoa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Tahiti (Papeete) / Disembarkation and Overnight

Our cruising continues through the day, and later this afternoon we will arrive back in Papeete, Tahiti.

This is the end of our journey on board the Aranoa so it's time to say goodbye to the Polynesian staff and Aranoa guides. After we disembark we will transfer to our Papeete hotel.

Overnight in Papeete.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Fly to Bora Bora â€“ Island Exploration by 4x4

This morning we take a short flight to perhaps the most famous of the Society Islands—Bora Bora. We'll be greeted by the island's world-renowned lagoon of opalescent blues and greens, dominated by majestic Mount Otemanu rising 718 meters above the water; its summit often crowned with a gentle wreath of clouds. Located 240 kilometers from Tahiti, Bora Bora consists of a main volcanic island, two smaller volcanic isles (Toopua and Toopuaiti), and numerous flat coral motus that form a semi-circular necklace around the spectacular lagoon.

The airport is situated on Motu Mute, a small islet north of the main island. Upon arrival, we'll transfer by shuttle boat to the main island and continue to our hotel.

Circle Island Tour by 4x4 (Please note: The timing of today's island tour will be determined by our flight arrival schedule).
Our 4x4 exploration takes us around Bora Bora with stops highlighting the island's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. We'll visit Marae Fare Opu, the island's largest ancient temple reserved for royalty, where petroglyphs of sacred turtles are carved into coral stone slabs. From a hilltop vantage point, we'll see World War II relics—cannons and bunkers still overlooking the lagoon and the island's only pass—while enjoying superb panoramic views.

We'll stop at Mama Ruta's pareo workshop to learn how these beautiful hand-dyed fabrics are created and printed. At Matira Beach, we'll pause at what is arguably the island's finest white sand beach to admire the extraordinary colors of Bora Bora's lagoon. Our guide will also share the legend of Hiro's Rock, an imposing stone that rises dramatically from the landscape, near which two additional WWII-era cannons can be accessed via a short path leading to another spectacular viewpoint.

Throughout the tour, our guide will share stories of Bora Bora's history, culture, and traditions as we explore the island's many hidden treasures.

Overnight on Bora Bora.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Bora Bora: Ultimate Shark & Ray Watching / Polynesian Beach BBQ

Today we will board our private covered 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^2), 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 are 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 18 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). For those looking to spend longer on Bora Bora, please remember that it is possible to book extra nights with us and extend your stay.

* 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