

A vibrant tropical scene featuring two white sailboats with dark masts on clear turquoise water. A dark, craggy cliff face is visible on the left side of the frame. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall atmosphere is serene and scenic.

ESSENTIAL SAILING DESTINATIONS

THE WORLD'S MOST SPECTACULAR CRUISING AREAS

Foreword by Sir Robin Knox-Johnston



POLYNESIA'S 120 Society Islands lie between South America and New Zealand.

French Polynesia The Society Islands

CHART 4607, 1382, 1436, 1107

BEST FOR CRUISING April – November (tropical storms November – May)

AVERAGE TEMPERATURE 26°C 79°F

PREVAILING WIND SE

TIME ZONE GMT – 10

LANGUAGE French and Polynesian

CURRENCY Cour de Franc Pacifique/Pacific Franc (CFP)

NAVIGATIONAL DIFFICULTY ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

FAMILY FRIENDLY 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

DIVING/SNORKELLING 🤿 🤿 🤿 🤿

SHORE-SIDE EATING 🍴 🍴 🍴

SIGHTSEEING 🏰 🏰 🏰 🏰

No printer's ink can capture the iridescent shades of indigo and emerald that greet sailors in the palm-fringed lagoons of the South Pacific, one of the world's most exotic cruising grounds. We were sailing from Tahiti, Pearl of the Pacific, to the outer islands. On the horizon, 17 miles away, lay the jagged mountain spires of Moorea, where Hollywood filmed *Mutiny on the Bounty* and Captain Cook gave his name to one of the bays.

BLUE AND GREEN, the dominant colours of the South Seas, come in an unforgettable, seemingly impossible, variety of shades – from the lustrous turquoise of the lagoons, encircled by a deadly necklace of coral, to the deep ocean blue beyond.

A day or two later our 42ft (12.8m) catamaran *Kokiri* (Triggerfish) swung to her anchor in the mirror-calm, picture-postcard blue lagoon of Raiatea. Known as "Sacred Island", Raiatea is the cultural heart of the Tahiti Polynesian group and home to the main yachting base in French Polynesia. Here, the majority of yacht charter companies sailing these islands have their home bases and many offer charters with professional skippers. The rainy season lasts from December to April, the dry season – during which the evenings are cooler – is from July to October and the temperature year-round a comfortable 24–28°C (75–82°F).

Less than half a mile away from our anchorage the thunder of surf pounding on the reef was like an express train...but I'd long forgotten the commuter crush on the 0732 from Havant to Waterloo. The only reminders of civilization were two tiny triangles of white sail on the horizon and a tiny house nestling amongst the



CORAL REEF



PALM-FRINGED LAGOON

TIARE TAHITI



THE TIARE TAHITI is the emblem of French Polynesia. A blossom is traditionally presented to travellers upon arrival in Tahiti and is worn behind the ear. How it is worn denotes a person's marital status.



Picture-perfect paradise amid the shimmering pearls of the Pacific. Fragrant flowers and heady vanilla scent the air. Smile and, here, the world smiles with you.

MOOREA, with its jagged peaks swathed in lush greenery and surrounded by crystalline lagoons, is everyone's dream of Polynesia.

swaying coconut palms on the island astern. Above, fluffy white clouds were airbrushed powder blue by the reflected ocean beneath. This is what the brochures mean by "blue water sailing".

For more than 200 years, Tahiti and her islands have represented the tropical paradise myth for Europeans. They inspired Paul Gauguin to paint and the crew of Captain Bligh's ship, HMS *Bounty*, to mutiny and sell the ship's nails for native girls. Girls in grass skirts and coconut-shell bras are still swinging their hips to a drum beating out the provocative, rhythmic "tamare" dance, which has entranced visitors since Fletcher Christian first set eyes on the scene. It's a scene better witnessed on a beach in moonlight than at a five-star hotel floorshow. From the deck of a sailing yacht you can still discover the unadulterated romance of these islands.

Polynesia's 120 Society Islands lie 17 degrees south of the Equator, between South America and New Zealand. Captain Cook first sailed here in 1769 and in his wake followed writer-



TAHITIAN DANCERS, in their famous coconut-shell bras, are part of the South Sea legend.

TAHITI ISLAND, known as the Pearl of the Pacific, is where the artist Paul Gauguin spent the last few years of his life.



sailors as diverse as Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson and Eric and Susan Hiscock.

Now that the globe has shrunk, paradise is yours for the price of two ten-hour flights from London, plus a four-hour stopover in Los Angeles – indeed, flights to Tahiti operate from most countries. Any excess baggage will be under your eyes as you are greeted at Tahiti's Faa Airport by a three-piece band serenading you with a ukulele and putting a flower, a Tahitian gardenia (Tiare Tahiti), behind your ear.

There's a "language of flowers" in the islands. If you wear the flower behind your right ear, it means you are single and available. Worn behind your left ear it denotes you are married, engaged or otherwise taken. Worn behind both ears you are married but still available. Worn backward behind your ear you are available immediately!

RANGIROA'S lagoon supports an astounding assortment of marine life, which makes it a prime spot for snorkelling.

THE SUN SETS in a blaze of colours over Tahitian houses on stilts, which are a common sight on the larger islands.





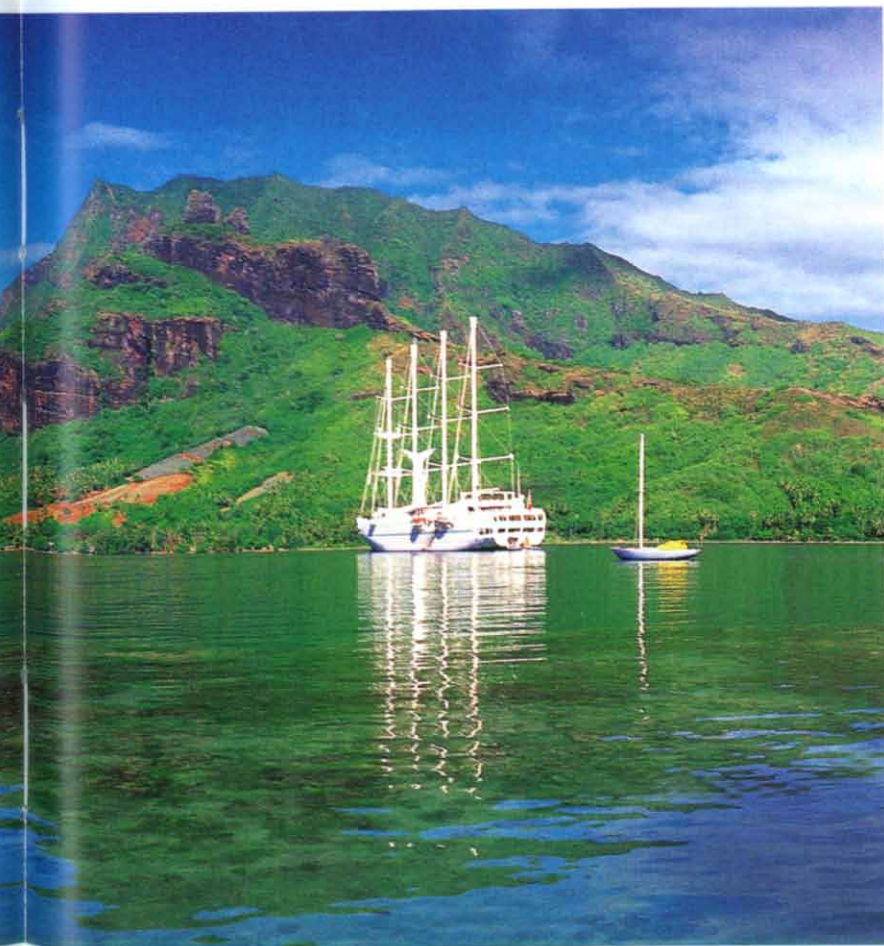
FAAROA RIVER (above), with its magnificent jungle-like setting, is the only navigable river in the French Polynesian Islands.

Pape'ete, the administrative capital of Tahiti and port of entry of French Polynesia, is vibrant and noisy. "By Pacific standards it's a humming metropolis," says the sailors' *Pacific Crossing Guide*. The island's coastal road is the closest Polynesia comes to a motorway. An international community of cruisers moor to the downtown quayside beside the four-lane highway, flags of the world fluttering from their rigging. Tahiti is a place to get things fixed. It's also the first place for crew changes on the coconut milk run from Panama.

Here, too, is the biggest supermarket between America and New Zealand for re-provisioning. But you would be wiser, and richer, if you were to arrive in Tahiti well stocked. For not only is French Polynesia one of the most exotic, beautiful places to cruise, it's also one of the most expensive. Rumour had it that the

MOOREA (below) is where Hollywood filmed *Mutiny on the Bounty* and Captain Cook gave his name to one of the bays.





HUAHINE, also referred to as the “Garden Island” for its rich and varied vegetation, is relatively unspoilt.

laundry charges by natives in the Marquesas were so expensive that one sailor left his washing behind because the clothes were cheaper than the laundry bill. Chartering in this region you should, anyway, make sure to take plenty of cash or travellers’ cheques, and it’s worth noting that cash machines don’t accept MasterCard so take VISA.

Most charter sailors have an overnight stopover at Tahiti, before flying another 125 miles (200km) north-west to Raiatea, the largest of the Leeward Islands. Here you’ll discover the unspoilt beauty of French Polynesia – a balmy scent of vanilla and frangipani instead of diesel fumes. Choose between Bora-Bora, Tahaa, Raiatea, Huahine and Moorea – island pearls of the Pacific.

From Raiatea’s tiny airport we were driven to Apooiti Marina to board our charter yacht. After a quick sortie into Uturoa town for fresh provisions, we set sail for Isle Mahea, a motu – a small, flat island on the barrier reef – where we would anchor for the night. The tidal range in these waters is less than one foot (0.3m), but the currents running through the lagoon passes (gaps in the barrier reef) can be up to four knots or more. This may be a sailors’ paradise, but treacherous, low-lying coral reefs can test the skills of the most experienced yachtsman.

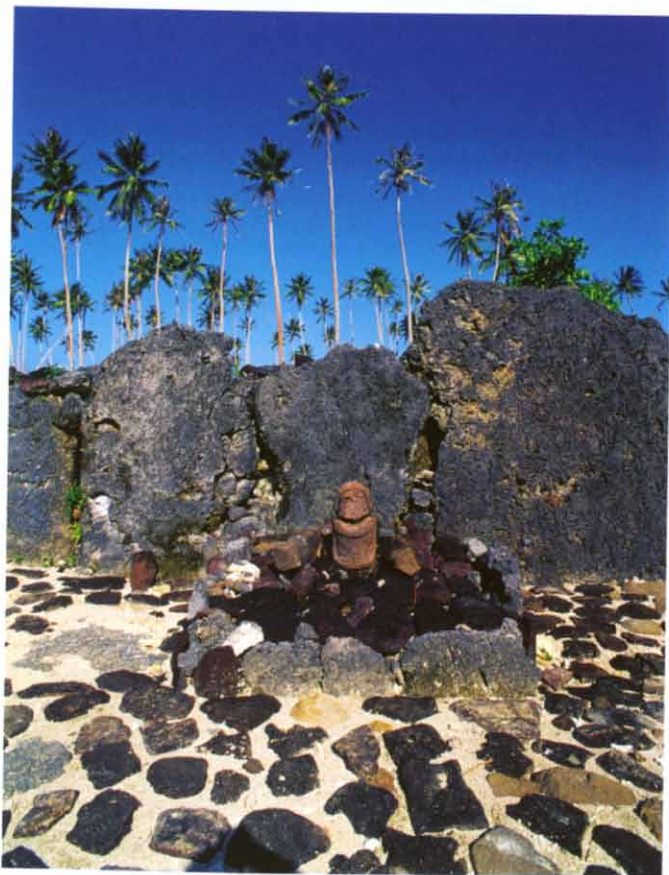
Our first stop, 23 miles west, was the island of Huahine, also known as the “Garden Island” for its lush green jungle-like scenery

Unspoiled by tourists or hotel chains, Huahine is quiet and peaceful. We anchored off Bali Hai for lunch and relaxed in the cockpit watching life pass by. Just as the British go jogging, or walk their dogs, the Tahitians paddle pirogues, the local outrigger canoes. Families were also out in boats, spear-fishing for their supper off the reef. We took the dinghy ashore and walked into Fare village. A young girl cycled past in the afternoon rain, her hair garlanded with flowers. She flashed a friendly smile and I wished my camera hadn't been in its case. Everyone on Huahine is friendly.

At night you can count the stars, invisible to big-city folk, and you'll find yourself talking in hushed tones, so you don't break the spell. We motor-sailed south next morning, inside the barrier reef, past a backdrop that hasn't changed in 500 years.

Later, we returned to Raiatea and Baie Faaroa, which has the only river in French Polynesia. We took the yacht's dinghy into the interior, like intrepid jungle explorers. You can safely walk barefoot in Polynesia's jungles. There are no poisonous snakes or spiders. At the navigable head of the river we found a native girl cutting banana stalks. We followed a footpath to the botanical gardens where you could pick oranges, bananas, breadfruit and the nono fruit.

The centrepiece of these islands, with their flat coastal strip, is the spectacular jagged peaks and spires of the volcanic



MARAE TAPUTAPUĀTEA on Raiatea, is the most famous of many religious sites scattered across the island.

TAHAA, close to the island of Raiatea, supports large populations of turtles in and around its lagoons.

mountains covered in luxuriant green vegetation. Later we sailed to Baie Opoa to visit the ancient sacred site of Taputapuātea's marae temple. A marae is a terrace paved with stones that served religious and ceremonial purposes; you will find marae sites on various of the French Polynesian islands.

Bora-Bora, apart from Tahiti, is the most developed of the Society islands, with lots of top-class hotels and

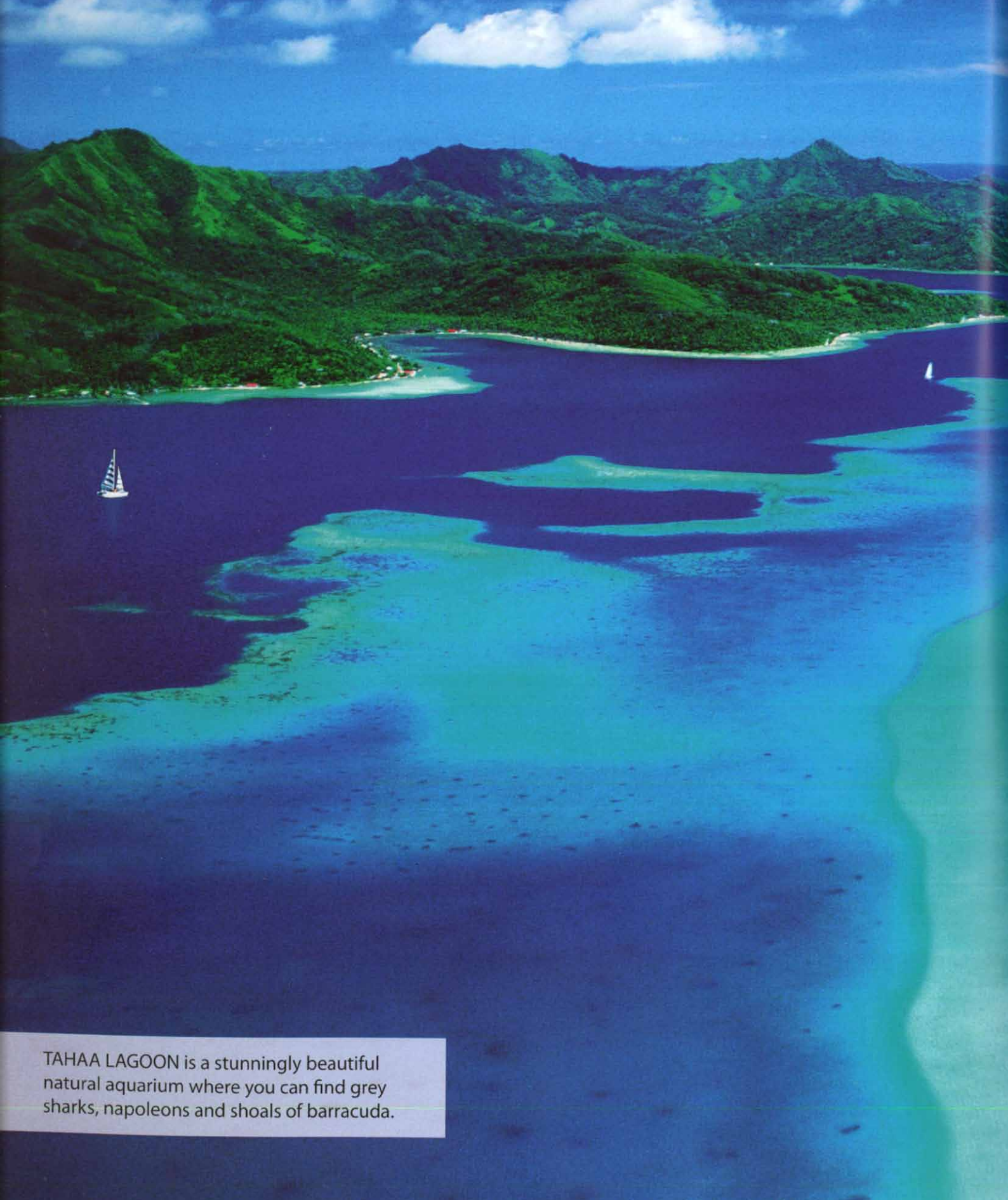




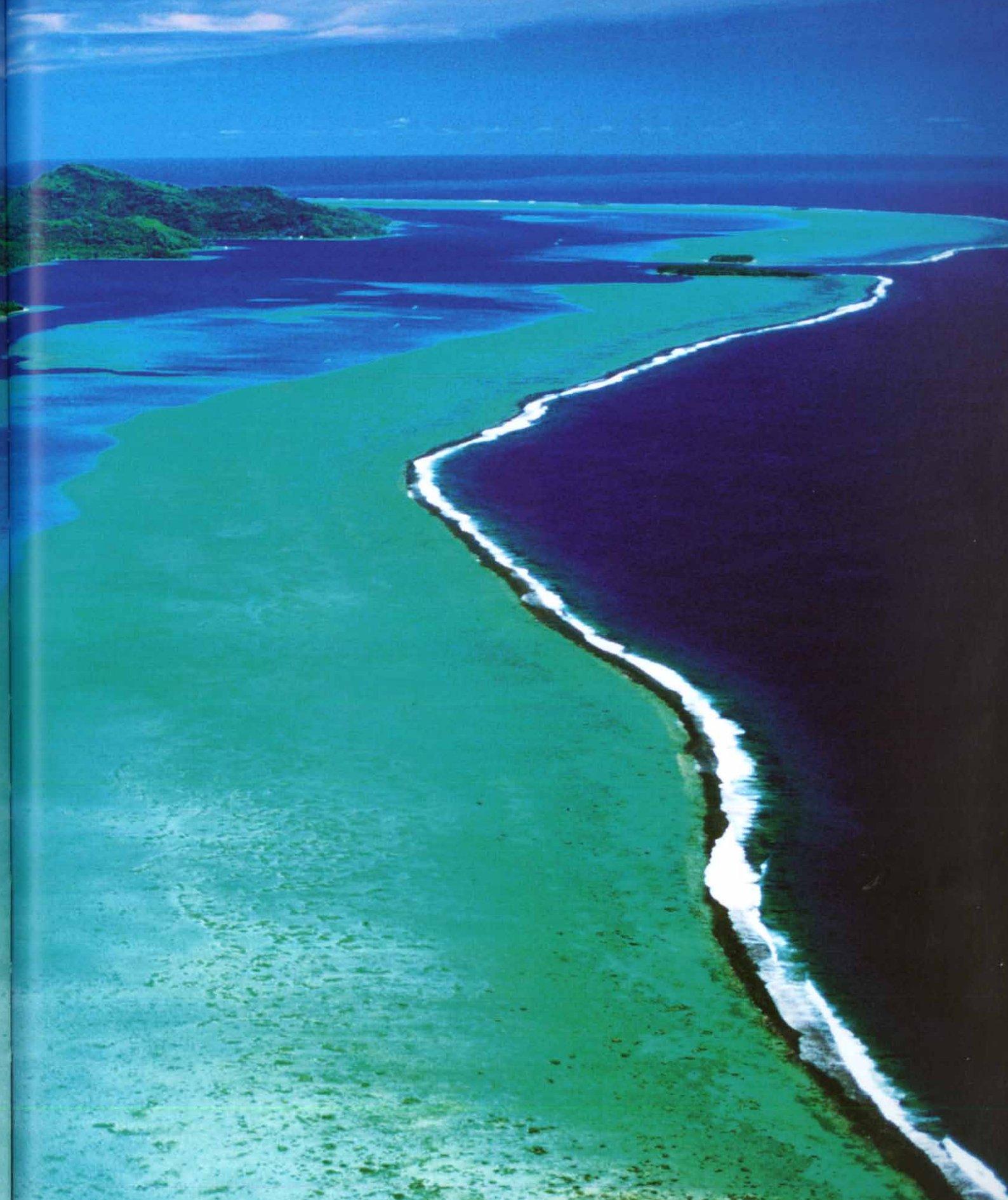
MOUNT OTEMANU creates a splendid backdrop to the lagoon at Bora Bora.

fabulous restaurant haunts of the rich and famous: places such as Bloody Mary's, where you might bump into a Hollywood A-lister, or the Lagoonarium where you can swim with sharks, turtles and manta rays. This is the ultimate French chic mixed with a good helping of South Pacific charm.

BORA-BORA, despite its popularity, retains its charm.

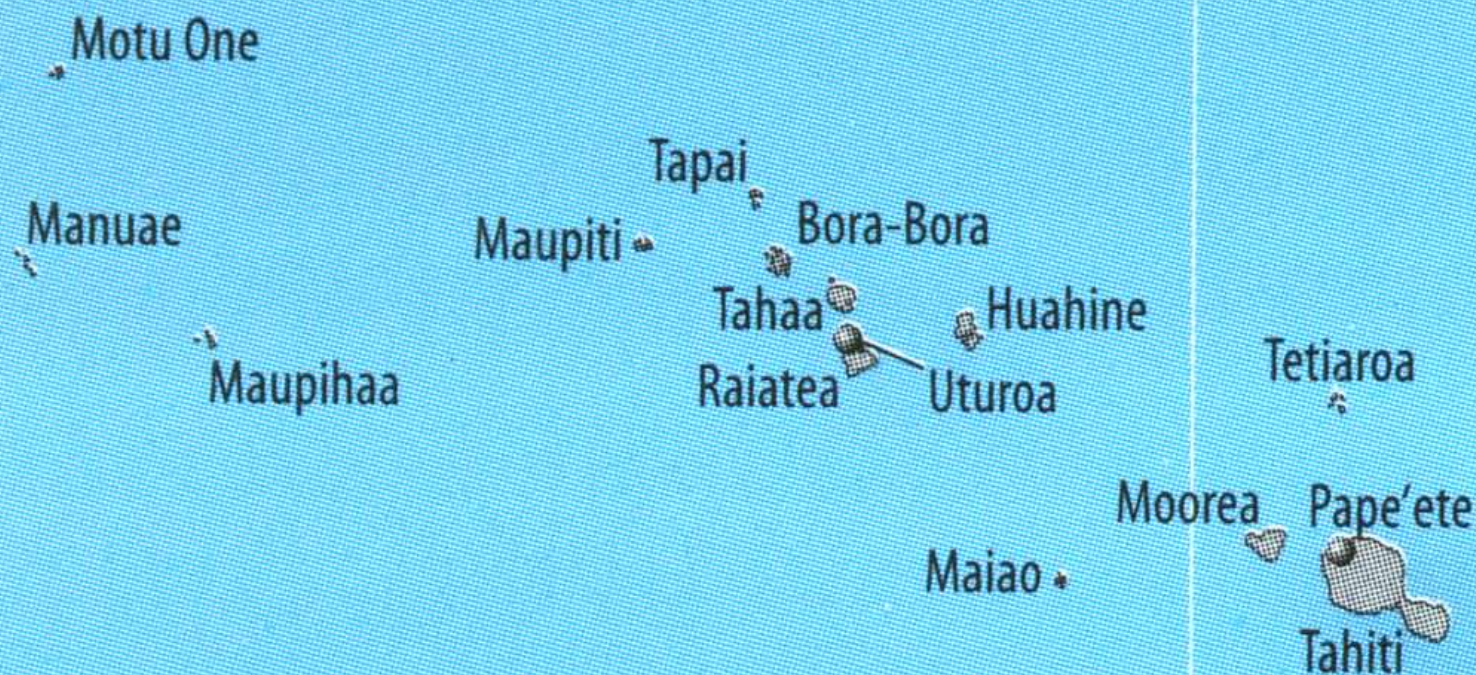


TAHAA LAGOON is a stunningly beautiful natural aquarium where you can find grey sharks, napoleons and shoals of barracuda.



150°

15°



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