

## Love in the Wind

*A tall-ship cruise gave us an easy, breezy, beautiful French Polynesia honeymoon.*

BY KRISTIN VOLK







TRENDING NOW

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### Welcomed Aboard

Intrigued by what was to come, the first steps into our cabin gave us a taste — a complimentary bottle of champagne upon our arrival — a perk for all honeymoon couples on *Paul Gauguin*.

From the beginning, we reveled in the romanticism of being at sea — the stunning scenery, lovely staterooms, friendly service staff, and top-notch food aboard a floating boutique resort.

Our stateroom's private balcony quickly became our favorite spot. Here we spent leisurely mornings and afternoons gazing at the endless shades of blue and green, from the deep water to the mountain tops. "A balcony in Tahiti is worth every penny," said Jonna Boersma, a fellow honeymooner. Our balcony is where we enjoyed complimentary appetizers delivered daily to our room, along with a fresh bucket of ice to keep our complimentary champagne chilled.

Surprisingly good wines and excellent entrées awaited us in the ship's restaurants — foie gras, lobster tails, beef tenderloin, scallops, sushi, fresh fish, and a variety of vegetarian options. Le Grill, located on the ship's top deck, was especially romantic, with dining in the warm, open air under the stars and moon.

The all-inclusive aspect of our cruise made a huge difference in our enjoyment. We never had to reach for our wallets or even our key card for a single sip of alcohol throughout the trip.

The ship's spa was a spot to splurge. We found that 90 heavenly minutes of a "honeymooner's delight" massage was well worth our time. Two well-trained therapists greeted us when we arrived and led us to two neighboring rooms (unfortunately, they didn't have a room that included two massage tables). A full-body massage with an added foot and scalp massage was expensive — \$250 per person — but oh-so-wonderful.

**Just like a couple of eager kids, we grabbed each other's hands and carefully stepped barefoot from the soft netting of our catamaran to the smooth metal edge of the bow. The lush, green mountains of Bora Bora were before us, turquoise water below. At that moment, our newlywed bond intensified. We gleefully jumped into the air together, plunging into the warm, crystal-clear salt water. Then, we did it again. And again. It was joy on repeat, creating beautiful honeymoon memories.**

It was my husband's idea to set sail for our honeymoon. I'm a fast-paced 37-year-old with a very Type-A personality. I needed adventure, and I didn't think a cruise would satisfy that need. But my husband, who had done a cruise vacation before, offered up a 7-day cruise through French Polynesia with such enthusiasm that I felt compelled to reconsider.

The 338-passenger *Paul Gauguin* had what we were looking for: an all-inclusive experience in a tropical, remote destination, where we could relax in paradise.

A comfortable eight-hour flight from Los Angeles to Tahiti's capital city of Papeete on Air Tahiti Nui made the start of our trip smooth and seamless.

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**Explore Ashore**

Shore excursions offered a wealth of opportunities to experience adventure on land. We marveled at the views of the mountains of Moorea via WaveRunner before hopping off to swim with sharks and stingrays in the open water. We hiked through a tropical forest, stopping to look at ceremonial grounds with an archaeologist who had excavated and restored ancient Polynesian temples. We snorkeled in Huahine with a handful of other cruise guests against a backdrop of the South Pacific that left us speechless.

We enjoyed meeting other honeymooners at a traditional Polynesian blessing ceremony aboard the ship. Open to all newlyweds and anniversary couples, the complimentary ceremony included a traditional blessing as the two of us were wrapped in a special blanket passing onto us health, wealth, and happiness.

Polynesian night aboard the ship was one of our favorites. A group of local women came on board to make complimentary leis and *heis* for cruise guests. It was a treat to watch as the women sat surrounded by thousands of fragrant fresh flowers, intricately weaving them, piece by piece, into lovely creations that we felt honored to wear. With new accessories around our necks and on our heads, we dined on lobster and filet mignon.

In Papeete, the bustling capital of Tahiti, we wrapped up our seven days. We loved the open-air market of food and goods; the rainbow of colors in the fresh fish counters are a sight. An afternoon at the InterContinental Resort of Papeete was extra special, as the cruise line included a complimentary room for the day ahead of our late-night flight back to Los Angeles. We gratefully soaked in the serenity of the scenery and the luxuries around us – the infinity pools, the swim-up bar, the tiny lagoons full of tropical fish, and the expansive grounds right at the water’s edge.

Looking back, our favorite moments were spent on Paul Gauguin’s private island. It was just a 10-minute water shuttle from the ship to the tiny, palm-covered Motu Mahana. We stepped off the boat into another level of paradise. A floating bar to the left, lounge chairs around the water’s edge, and fresh coconut water ahead left us giggling like teenagers. Hand-in-hand, we explored the precious piece of land, sipping sweetness from coconuts while taking in the warmth of the sun and the South Pacific. The photos from that day were Insta-fabulous. The palm trees, the ocean, the love of my life – they capture some of our favorite memories as we start our new lives together. ■



*Tips For Newlyweds*

- Be flexible in your honeymoon plans. You may be able to save on your cruise by going in a shoulder season. For instance, we were married in July, but cruised in mid-December.
- Book a stateroom with a balcony. It’s worth every penny.
- Choose an all-inclusive cruise line so you’ll never have to worry about paying for extras on the trip. Every morsel of food and every sip of alcohol were included.
- Read the details of each shore excursion and carefully check costs. We saved a little dough by booking a WaveRunner excursion that included swimming with sharks and stingrays. There’s no need to book a separate marine mammal experience.
- The Polynesian blessing ceremony is a great photo op. Ask a fellow passenger to snap a pic when they bundle you and your spouse in the blanket of love.
- Take the 2 1/2- hour Papeete tour offered as a transport to the InterContinental resort by Paul Gauguin Cruises. You’ll get to see much more of the main island of Tahiti, and it doesn’t cost extra.
- For underwater photos and video, nothing beats a GoPro. We brought our own but you can rent one on board. And don’t worry about bringing your own travel guide books. You can check those out on board as well.

