

Anniversary & Holiday Issue

WESTLAKE

MAGAZINE
ESTABLISHED 1992

HOWIE MANDEL

"DON'T TOUCH ME"
Cover Story

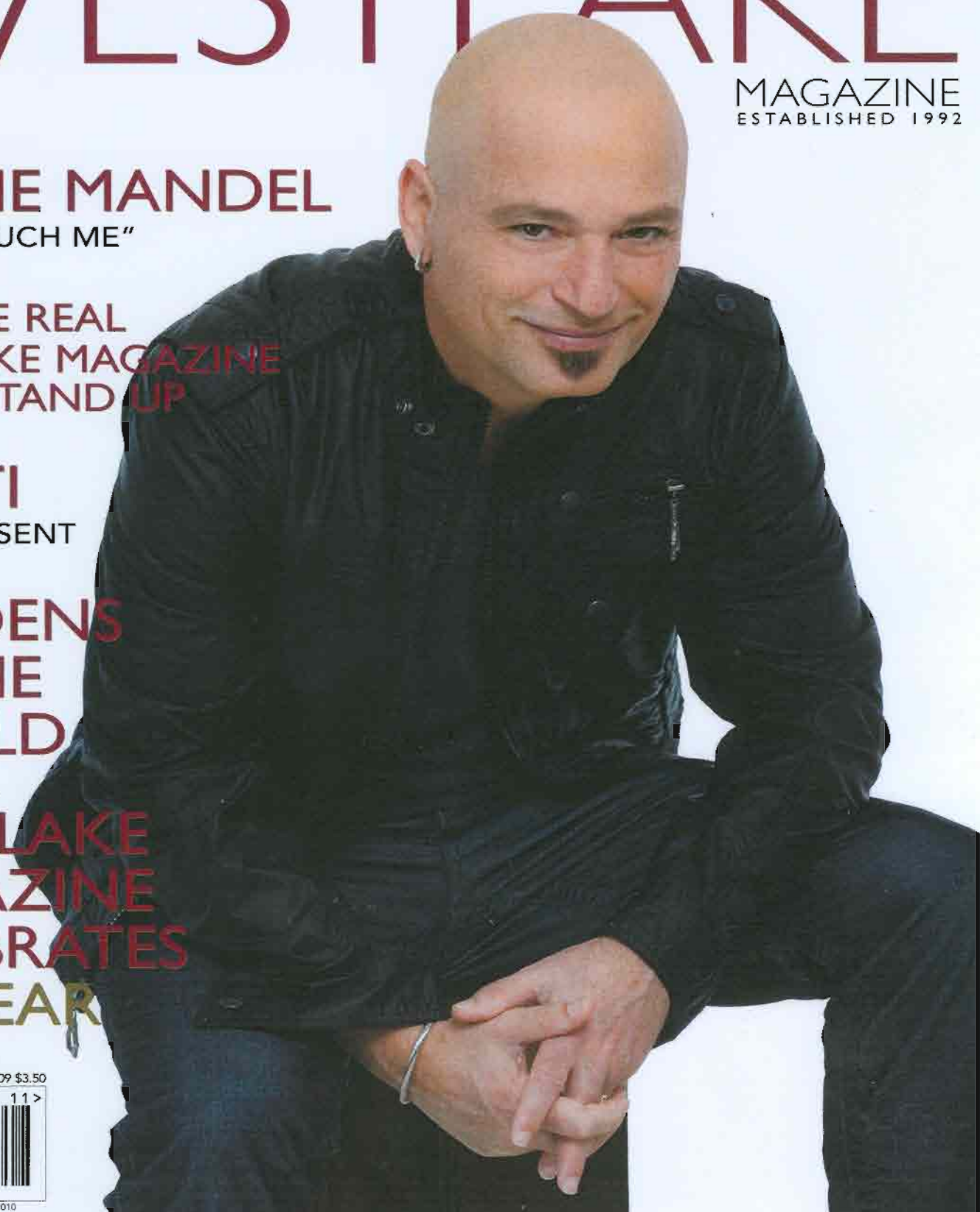
WILL THE REAL
WESTLAKE MAGAZINE
PLEASE STAND UP

TAHITI

PAST & PRESENT

GARDENS
OF THE
WORLD

WESTLAKE
MAGAZINE
CELEBRATES
17TH YEAR



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2009 \$3.50



DISPLAY UNTIL JANUARY 15TH 2010

RETURN TO

Tahiti Then and Now



*T*he magic islands of Moorea and Bora Bora surrounded by tranquil lagoons jealously protected by ancient coral reefs... powder-white sand beaches warmed by the sun and bathed with floral-scented breezes... translucent turquoise waters teeming with colorful marine life ... days devoted to the perfect tan, water skiing, swimming and snorkeling... Yes, we are talking about a South Seas paradise long celebrated in literature, art, film and memories. Now, add one more magic isle to the mix - a small, private motu off the island of Taha'a with but one idyllic resort where hedonism rules and time ceases to exist.

O PARADISE

By Linda Lang



A 7-minute helicopter ride from Bora Bora, silhouetted in the distance, the luxurious Le Taha'a Island & Spa is a virtual paradise suspended in time

Tahiti Then

The first time I saw Tahiti was in the early 1970s shortly after jet travel made possible the 8-hour, non-stop flight from Los Angeles to Papeete. Tourism to the relatively undeveloped islands comprising French Polynesia was just beginning. International flights were few, and most vacationers were from France. The island of Tahiti boasted three major hotels (only two were air conditioned) and a weathered South Seas waterfront. Nearby stood the public market providing the locals with everything from fresh fish and food stuffs to brightly-colored tapa cloth and *pareos* worn as sarongs, skirts and swimwear.

Aside from the beaches, handful of rustic restaurants and a few historical sites including a small Gauguin Museum, there was not that much to do or see. Then, as now, the island of Tahiti served more as a gateway to the outer islands than a destination in itself... albeit today there is much more to do than 40 years ago.

In the mid 20th century, the Tahitians, in their childlike innocence, had little use for money. They owned their homes, their land and lived mainly off the sea and fruits of the earth. Tapa cloth of colorful floral design hung in the windows and doorways in lieu of glass and wooden doors. Most homes were of white cement block painted in pastels with corrugated sheet metal roofing, with dogs, chickens and goats freely lazing



The sculptured beauty of Moorea's mountain peaks pose a dramatic backdrop for Cook's Bay where the M.S. Bounty once anchored. Photo courtesy of www.Tahiti-Tourisme.com

around the white, powdered-coral grounds. Everywhere was an abundance of lush, tropical foliage including all shades of bougainvillea, hibiscus and the fragrant *tiare* (Tahiti's version of the gardenia) – all shaded by towering coconut palms.

Life centered around family activities, *tamaaraas* or feasts with friends and relatives often prepared in *himaas* or earth ovens. There was singing, dancing, story telling, schools, swimming in the lagoons, and adorning themselves as well as their surroundings with items made of flowers, fronds and shells. What more could money buy?

Well, there was one thing. Because their diet consisted almost exclusively of soft foods such as fish and breadfruit, the Tahitians tended to develop tooth loss at an early age. To help alleviate the problem, the French had introduced baguettes, assuming that the hard crust would be beneficial. Well, the Tahitians liked the doughy center well enough, but not the crust which they fed to the animals. Or so goes the story.

Then came Marlon Brando and the film crew for the 1962 remake of

"Mutiny on the Bounty". Extras were needed for numerous scenes, but money did not provide enough incentive for them to show up on schedule, if at all. Discovering that many wanted a pretty smile, the film crew found its solution. Each extra, who was in need, was fitted with a set of dentures which they would pick up upon checking in for their scenes and return after each day's wrap. When filming concluded, all the extras who showed up faithfully got to keep their dentures. The crew got its scenes and each extra got his or her perfect smile. Again – so the story goes.

Inter-island air travel was also in its infancy. Our first flight from Papeete to Moorea was aboard a small twin-engine propeller aircraft piloted by a tanned, muscular, blond chap dressed in a short-sleeved shirt, cut off shorts, and flip flops. In the co-pilot's seat sat his 10-year-old son in similar attire. Prior to take-off, the passenger in front of me leaned back in his seat and found himself prone in my lap, his startled eyes looking directly up into mine. The pilot came back and with a screwdriver and wrench and repaired his seat. If memory serves correctly,



The Moorea Pearl Resort & Spa offers total luxury in an ideal South Pacific setting.

there may also have been a bit of rope involved.

The 20-minute flight to Moorea was noisy but, thankfully, otherwise uneventful. After landing in a grass field and bumping our way to the end, we disembarked by terminal -- a *fare* (hut made of woven palm fronds), with the top half of the side facing the field propped open by two poles. We were greeted by our hosts from Club Med, our home for the next few days, then seated on slat boards in the bed of a jeep truck while our luggage rode in front.

“The ride along the coral dirt road circling the island and Cook’s Bay offered endless scenes right out of South Pacific.”

We gave up trying to capture them on film and just marveled at it all. Where were Nellie Forbush and Emile de

Becque?

En route, we passed the island’s other three hotels, including the legendary Bali Hai hotel built by Hugh Kelley, Jay Carlisle and Muk McCallum -- three bachelors from Newport Beach. After being discovered by a *Life* photographer in 1962, they gained international fame for their business acumen as well as infamous partying. They began with four rustic beach bungalows and a party boat, *Liki Tiki*, which could disappear for days, and developed not only that property but similar activity-filled resorts on two other islands. Along with the Hotel Bora Bora, the Bali Hai Boys created a new era of tourism for the islands that lasted some 40 years.

Our flight to Bora Bora in a prop engine seaplane was equally memorable but for quite a different reason. Mesmerizing aerial views as you approach this idyllic island are legendary for good reason. The imposing, jagged volcanic peaks of Mount Otemanu and Mount Pahia, encircled by wisps of clouds, rise high out of the dark emerald land edged in

white sand. All is surrounded by a clear turquoise lagoon dotted with dark green *motus* (small, sand islands) and rimmed by white foam splashing against the reef separating the lagoon from the royal blue sea.

After our plane descended for a perfect landing in the lagoon, we disembarked into a motor launch and sped away to the legendary Hotel Bora Bora which featured Tahiti’s first overwater bungalows. Here we looked out over one of the world’s largest, most spectacular lagoons where we could see, but not hear, the waves breaking against the distant reef and snorkel for hours amid of endless schools of multi-colored tropical fish. It was but one of three hotels on the island -- one other being a small Club Med (which still exists today) and a third small property catering to the locals.

“Life was simple. Time stood still in paradise.”

Tahiti Today

The essence of French Polynesia has not changed that much over the years. Today, as then, every part of everything grown is used for a purpose i.e. banana plant leaves serve as dishware, coconut shells as bowls, room and table décor are fashioned from the abundance of tropical flowers and foliage, fronds are instantly woven into everything from placemats and hats to roofs and siding for *fares*, and plant oils have endless purposes ranging from hair treatments to sunburn relief and other medicinal uses. Leftover food is fed to the animals. Recycling is practiced by all the resorts as well as residents. What cannot be reused is incinerated and the ashes spread to enrich the soil. This well-controlled waste disposal goes a long way in maintaining the purity of the islands and surrounding waters.

Since the early '70s, the island of Tahiti and capital city of Papeete have grown significantly as an international business mecca. During your stop to and/or from the outer islands, you'll find a nice variety of good restaurants, nightclubs, pearl shops, excellent spas and a handful of major brand resorts such as InterContinental, Meridien, Sofitel and Hilton which offer island ambience with all the air-conditioned amenities. Manava, a modern, all-suite resort convenient to the airport, just opened in June and features beachside accommodations with kitchenettes for families. Alas, there is also a McDonald's.

Air Tahiti's modern fleet of twin-engine jets serves 48 of the 130 islands in French Polynesia's five archipelagos. Grass fields with *fare* terminals have long given way to modern air strips complete with control towers and small, open-air concrete terminals.

Cuttings from the coral nursery garden in the lagoon of the Bora Bora Pearl help replenish the coral reefs which have been damaged over time.



A tall palm tree stands on a sandy beach, its trunk leaning slightly to the left. In the background, three thatched huts with conical roofs are situated on a wooden pier extending into the clear, turquoise water. The sky is a deep, vibrant blue with a few wispy clouds near the horizon. The overall scene is a classic tropical beach setting.

Moorea

The ambience of Moorea has changed little over the years. A golf course has appeared for islanders and resort guests, and its coral dirt circle-island road, now paved, is lined with a more boutiques, good restaurants – even a several tropical mini-malls. Club Med closed years ago. There are still just four major resorts – their size, design, services and creature comforts far surpassing anything remotely imagined in the old days. The Ball Hai, sold in 1998, was ceremoniously leveled.

From its ashes rose the spectacular Moorea Pearl Resort & Spa. Under the dedicated direction of General Manager Alain Druet, who has been with the property from the beginning, the Moorea Pearl has become one of French Polynesia's finest, most popular hideaways. Our spacious, well-furnished overwater bungalow, complete with a large seating area and floor window to view the marine life beneath, featured every possible amenity including air conditioning, flat screen TV, and lounge chairs on a shaded balcony affording marvelous views of the sea. The resort's several dining spots include Le Matiehani, which blends the flavors of France and tastes of Polynesia into some of the most exquisite gourmet experiences in the islands. The informal, open-air dining area and bar behind the large pool look out over the lagoon and activities beyond. An excellent menu of the latest treatments and products await you at the Manea Spa. Moorea is definitely a tropical retreat those looking for lots of activity – shopping, golf, dining, biking, all water sports -- as well as quiet moments sunning by the pool and snorkeling in the lagoon.

The Moorea Pearl Resort & Spa, built on the site of the legendary Ball Hai, has become one of French Polynesia's most popular escapes.

Bora Bora

Vacationers to Bora Bora now land on the air strip built on its own motu during World War II when the island was a military R&R locale for the troops including young U.S. Navy Lieutenant James Albert Michener. Today, covered launches pick you up at the airport pier and speed you across the lagoon to one of 13 luxury resorts. Unfortunately, Hotel Bora Bora, which has remained closed since being recently sold, isn't one of them. The future of this famed legend is sadly doubtful.

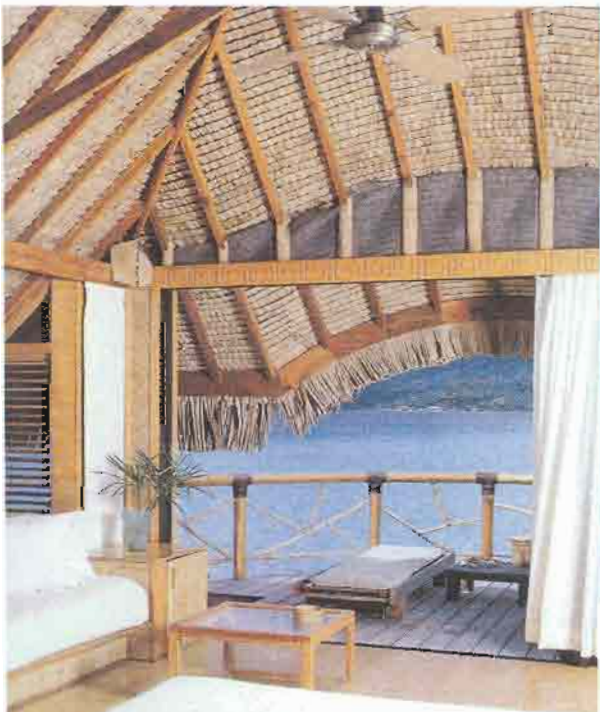
Our stay this time was in lovely garden bungalow at the Bora Bora Pearl Resort & Spa on Motu Tevairoa. In a lovely, isolated part of the lagoon far removed from "resort row," the property is built entirely of Polynesian materials and, like its sister property on Moorea, its spacious overwater, beach and garden bungalows are fully air

conditioned and complete with all the comforts including flat screen TVs, CD/DVD players, phones and hair dryers.

In the main building is a cozy bar overlooking the lagoon and Tevairoa Restaurant which offers a fine gourmet menu and wine list as well as breakfast buffet. Lunch is usually enjoyed at the poolside restaurant. Away from the activity in a tranquil tropical garden surrounded by a pond of colorful marine life, is the Manea Spa which affords total escape, relaxation and variety of treatments. The resort's many accolades, which include the *Condé Nast* 2009 Gold List, are well deserved.

When not lounging or snorkeling in the lagoon, you can request a launch to take you to the main island for a bit of shopping and dining in the village of Vaitape or, as we did, request a picnic

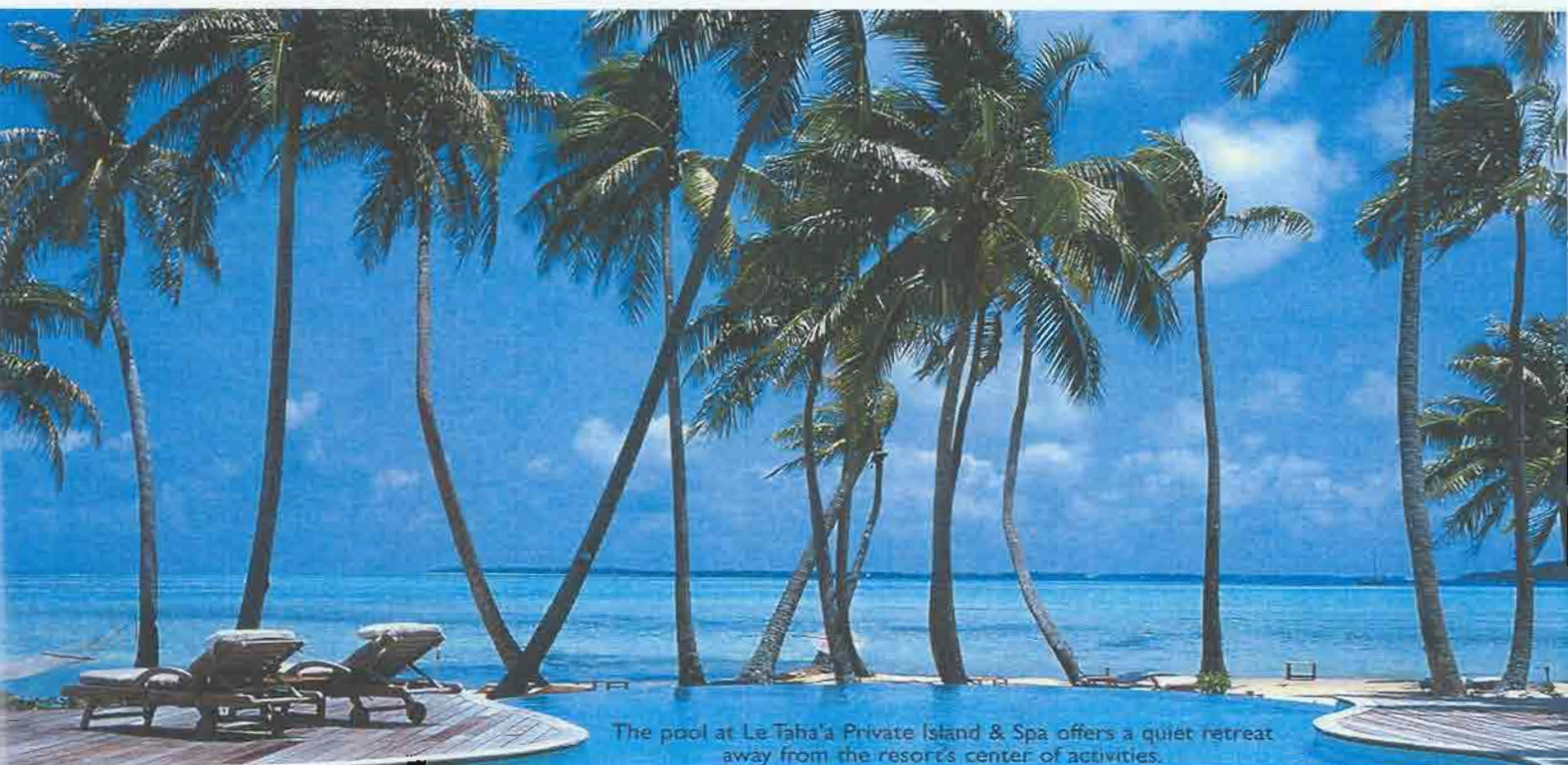
on a private motu. We sped across the lagoon to the Hilton Bora Bora Nui Resort set on a spectacular point of the main island with views of the lagoon and sea that reach to infinity. From there, we were taken to the Hilton's private motu which can be reserved for catered picnics, receptions and other special events. Our table was placed at the edge of the sand where we could wiggle our toes in the warm lagoon waters as we enjoyed a sumptuous four-course gourmet picnic complete with champagne and fine wines. Afterwards, we lingered, some wading and swimming, all mesmerized by the unspoiled tranquil setting, warmth of the sun, clearest of blue skies and limitless views interrupted only by the distant silhouette of an occasional island.



Picnics, complete with gourmet cuisine and champagne, can be arranged on a private motu for guests of the Bora Bora Pearl Resort & Spa. Photo by Jared Rodriguez

LEFT: Air conditioned overwater bungalows at the luxurious Bora Bora Pearl Resort & Spa feature all the modern amenities including flat screen TV.

Le Taha'a



The pool at Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa offers a quiet retreat away from the resort's center of activities.

A new property entering the mix is Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa on the Tautau motu in a lagoon shared with the island of Taha'a. Opened in 2002, this exquisite paradise has consistently earned top honors in all major publications including *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Andrew Harper's Hideaway* and *Robb Report* – the latest being *Condé Nast Traveler's 2009 Gold List*. It is also the only Relais & Châteaux property in French Polynesia.

Accessible only by boat from the airport on nearby Raiatea or helicopter from Bora Bora, Le Taha'a is a South Seas utopia. Created entirely in authentic Polynesian style, its long, winding expanse of white beach, clear lagoon waters, tropical sunsets, and distant silhouettes of Bora Bora and other neighboring islands create the ultimate escape from all things civilized – other than the hedonistic pleasures, of course. Beach villas with private pools and enclosed gardens and overwater bungalows with steps leading down to the lagoon waters provide every luxury. Lavish buffets and gourmet dining are offered in the restaurant, or you can lunch around the pool or arrange for catered picnic on the resort's private motu.

One morning, we opted for a full breakfast delivered by canoe to the deck of our overwater bungalow and ceremoniously laid out before us. Afterwards, we took our snorkeling gear and descended the stairs that lead from the deck to the small, floating dock and still waters of the lagoon below where, day or night, we could swim, snorkel or just walk around.

Visits to the islands of Taha'a and Raiatea are a must, for there you are immersed in the unspoiled natural beauty of the land and gentle Tahitian lifestyle which, until recently, has changed little here with the years. Taha'a, known, for its vanilla plantations and black pearl farms, retains a mystical simplicity reminiscent of centuries past. Raiatea, seat of ancient Polynesia culture and religion, still evokes images of early 20th century island plantation life. We seldom recommend guided tours, but the knowledge of local lore and legend is necessary to fully appreciate these very special places.

For further information on all three resorts, go to www.pearlresorts.com.

A delectable breakfast delivered by canoe to the deck of your overwater bungalow is a delightful way to start the day at Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa.
Photo courtesy of www.Tahiti-Tourisme.com





Watching the sun set in the islands is a spectacular ritual preceding each balmy evening of good camaraderie and fine dining.
Photo courtesy of www.Tahiti-Tourisme.com

Paradise Today

Change is not always easy to accept. It was sad to learn that TV and cell phones have invaded the outer islands, changing forever the innocence, interests and goals of younger generations. About five years ago, the tapa cloth traditionally hung in the windows and doorways of Tahitian homes began to give way to louvered glass windows and sliding glass or wooden doors. TV antennas, bringing some 15 channels into the Tahitian home, recently began exposing the young people to "Sex & the City" hairstyles, fashions and behaviors never before seen in paradise. Junk food and other influences are also becoming common place, and the once useless franc is becoming a necessary asset.

For us, Tahiti still remains an unspoiled paradise where time is measured by sunrise, sunset and meal times... where we can feel suspended in the moment and indulge in the pure pleasures of life without guilt. Service at all of the above resorts caters to your slightest whim. They have even added tech toys including wireless Internet for those compelled to check their daily email or do a Google search.

Maururu! Enjoy your return to paradise.