



AN ISLAND

# UTOPIA

**Daniel Cappello** experiences life in the Pacific Ocean surrounded by pristine white beaches, calm turquoise waters and an unparalleled service from Four Seasons Bora Bora



Upon checking into a hotel, especially on the first night, there's nothing I look forward to more than drawing the blackout curtains, crawling into a crisp, neatly made bed, and falling into a deep, recuperative sleep. It's one of the greatest upsides to travelling, especially when the hotel's a luxurious one and the bed is better than the one at home.

A curious thing happened to me on a recent vacation. On this trip, which took approximately 24 hours and transported me halfway around the world, it came as a great and welcome surprise to

be woken by an effervescent bright light. It was sparkling and dancing on the thatched-roof ceiling above me – a gentle wake-up call to my new surroundings: a spacious Four Seasons Bora Bora bungalow perched over bright blue waters.

The rooms, as I'd read about but didn't realise until then, have glass bottoms throughout – a nice touch, it must be said, as you shower and feel at one with the lagoon beneath you. In the daylight, even with the curtains drawn, brilliant rays bounce up through the floor, illuminating every room of the spacious 100-square-metre suite. ➔



→ Whoever complains that the glamour of travel is a thing of the past certainly hasn't been greeted by the Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora. Yes, it might involve a change of plane or three to get there, but on arrival at the small, faraway airport, new meaning is given to the phrase 'worth the wait'. I am greeted with leis of Tahitian gardenia – *Gardenia taitensis*, or 'tiare' to be technical, as I learned later when I casually professed a love of flowers and was whisked away by the groundskeeper for an impromptu tour of the gardens. Then my luggage is taken to the swanky bi-level catamaran at the dock, which is there in its polished-wood glory to sweep me off on a 15-minute journey to the resort. I'm told the vessel is available for private stargazing cruises at night with Champagne, dessert, and live music, or a three-hour island tour with snorkeling stops and a private barbecue lunch on a deserted motu.

Docking at the open reception lounge, neatly dressed staff greet me by name and introduce me

## Tucked away from the mainland, the Four Seasons is a vast tropical grove

to this cultural paradise. Set on a coral atoll, and tucked privately away from the bustle of the mainland, the Four Seasons is a vast tropical grove. There are views at almost every turn to the water and sky, capped by the towering monolithic peak of Mount Otemanu and the domed summit of Mount Pahia. Coconut palms, Pandanus trees, teeming *Russelia* plants with their firecracker-red flowers, and meandering channels of azure water lead you on naturally landscaped or wood-planked

passageways to the overwater bungalows.

Conceived in quintessential Tahitian style by architects Didier Lefort and Pierre-Jean Picart, with interior designs by BAMO, traditional teak wood abounds, along with high ceilings and thatched roofs on the structures. This is all part and parcel of the eco-friendly resort design, meant to capitalise on natural resources. There's a main beach, smaller alcoves, and the inner lagoon sanctuary, nestled within the grounds and alive with exotic marine life. Oliver Martin is the resident marine biologist who completed a three-year survey of reef ecosystems and spent six years travelling the world to research the

anthropogenic impacts on our vulnerable planet. He fashioned the picturesque lagoon and oversees its ecosystem. I can't pass up a tour by Martin, whose passion for the sanctuary is infectious and will make you want to jump in the warm water on a snorkelling adventure to witness more than 100 colourful species, including octopus, eagle ray, Picasso trumpet fish, soldier fish, fire fish, spotted puffer fish, peacock damselfish and many more.

A true Eden dropped in the Pacific Ocean, Bora Bora is famous for its call simply to relax, which is why this is a favorite honeymoon location, but the Four Seasons, with its exceptional offerings of mostly inclusive on-site activities, has made this a destination for any traveller wanting a hint of the adventurous South Pacific life. You can try kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding, windsurfing and scuba diving, helicopter tours on a Squirrel Mono Turbine, and a 4x4 Land Rover jeep excursion to ancient temples and World War II artillery canon sites.

French Polynesian hospitality is remarkable, and it's the small touches that go a long way, like when my boat stops on a day-long shark and ray tour and the captain pulls out a small stringed



instrument to serenade his passengers with native songs before opening up a feast of a lunchbox.

Speaking of eating, 23-year industry veteran Edgar Kano was recently appointed executive chef, overseeing the locally inspired fare at the four on-site restaurants (though a 'canoe breakfast', arriving by water to your overwater bungalow, is an exceptional way to ring in the morning). A taste I won't forget is local Tahitian raw tuna in a medley of coconut milk, cucumber, tomato, carrot, and lime.

And, since part of the draw for me to Bora Bora was ultimate relaxation, I can't resist calling into the spa, situated on the high summit of the resort's motu where two divergent energies collide – the raw, surging power of the ocean's waves and the still tranquility of the lagoon. Here, in the private Kahaia Spa Suite, I begin to let go as soothing coconut-scented oil is massaged into my skin, reminding me of lunch back on the beach. As I look down through the glass floor, a familiar turquoise light shimmers back at me – a reminder of the paradise outside like I have never experienced before. ☐

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