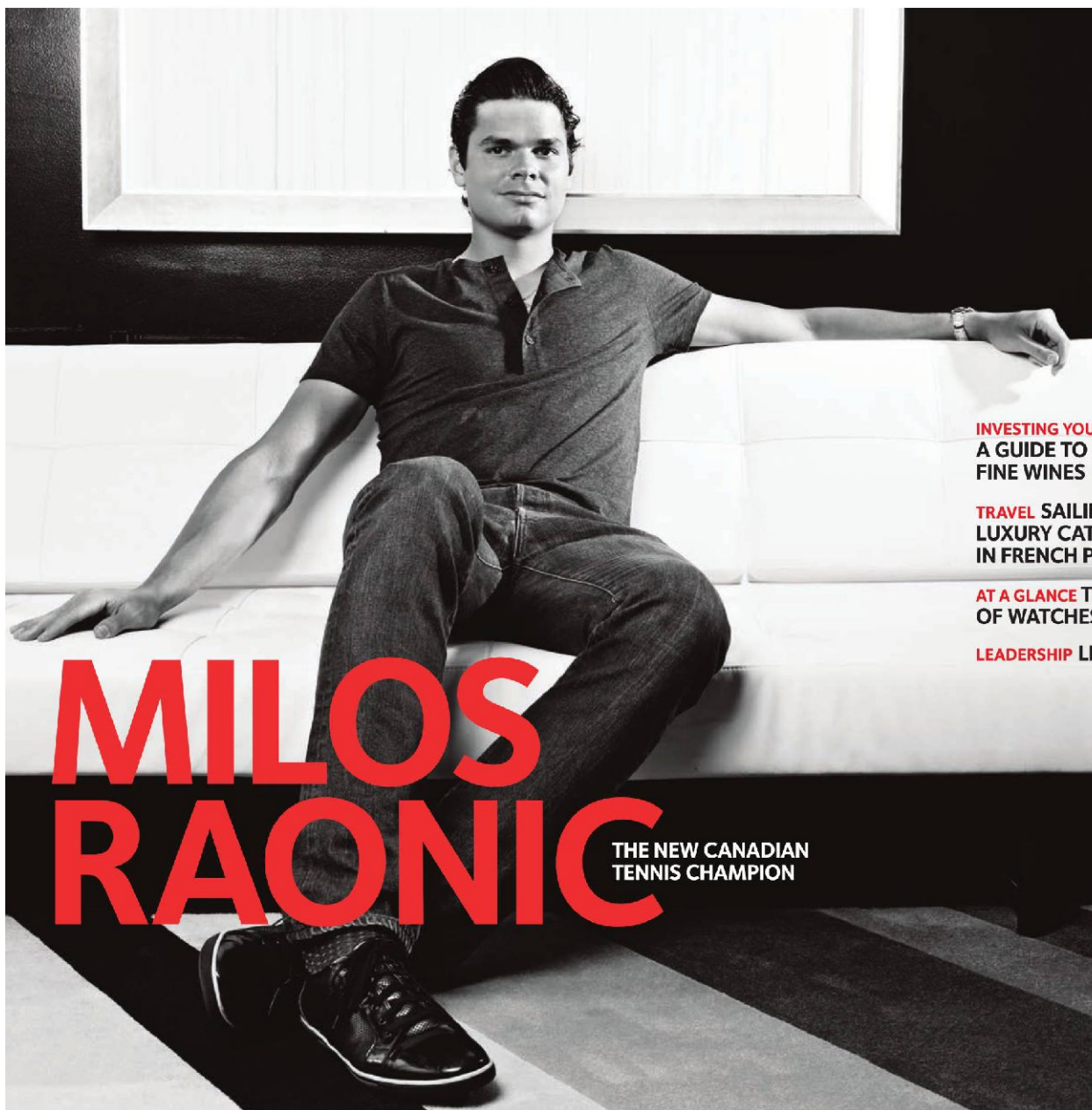


present

FALL 2013



INVESTING YOUR MONEY
A GUIDE TO BUYING
FINE WINES

TRAVEL SAILING ON A
LUXURY CATAMARAN
IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

AT A GLANCE THE WORLD
OF WATCHES

LEADERSHIP LISE WATIER

MILOS RAONIC

THE NEW CANADIAN
TENNIS CHAMPION

travel

BY MARK SISSONS

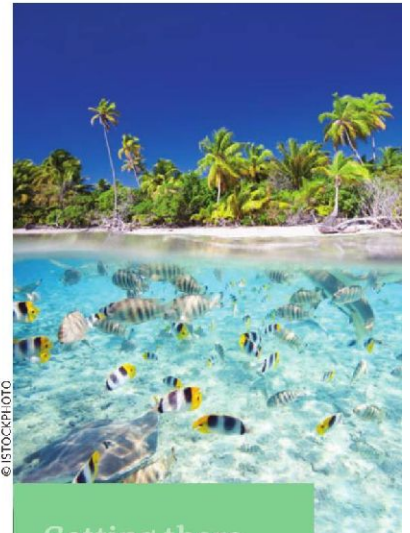
Sailing the South Seas in Style

Island hopping aboard a luxury private catamaran in French Polynesia



© PHOTONOSTOP

Year-round temperatures ranging from 25°C to 26°C and easterly trade winds averaging between 15 and 20 knots.



Getting there

Air Tahiti Nui offers daily non-stop flights from Los Angeles to Tahiti. The domestic airline, Air Tahiti, offers inter-island flights.

[/ airtahitiniui.com](http://airtahitiniui.com)

Lounging on deck under a nocturnal canopy of twinkling constellations, I consider the unimaginable hardships that Captain Bligh and the mutinous crew of the *HMS Bounty* endured navigating these then uncharted waters over two centuries ago.

Then I take a long sip of champagne and silently salute the infamous English naval tyrant for knowing a good thing when he sailed it.

Cruising amid the lush emerald-green islands and fragile coral atolls of French Polynesia has become immeasurably more comfortable since the *Bounty's* days of weevil-infested hardtack, rat-infested holds and gut-rotting navy rum. I may feel the same crack of the sail, feel the same warm wind on my face and smell the same salty spray in the air that sailors have tasted for centuries. But aboard this sleek, luxurious, 55-foot, state-of-the-art carbon infusion catamaran, with its air-conditioned cabins and gourmet French cuisine—sailing the southern seas is anything but a hardship.

Truth be told, navigating the neon blue waters of French Polynesia is about as good as it gets. Tahiti and many of the other islands that make up this string

of archipelagos spanning an area the size of Europe have well-formed atolls and surrounding volcanic peaks that offer sheltered anchorages. Year-round temperatures ranging from 25°C to 26°C and easterly trade winds averaging between 15 and 20 knots virtually guarantee warm calm waters behind the reefs and generally smooth sailing on open-water passages between the islands.

Factor in the unique opportunity that a private boat affords you to experience—the most unchanged parts of these fairy-tale islands with their lush green peaks, sheltered bays and sweeping white beaches—and this paradisiacal patch of Pacific offers the ultimate pleasure cruise.

My three-day all-inclusive excursion aboard a yacht aptly named *Tahiti Dream* starts at the Uturoa marina on the island of Raiatea, the second largest of the Society Islands after Tahiti. Raiatea (which translates as “faraway heaven”) is traditionally considered to be the South Pacific’s most sacred island and the cultural epicentre of French Polynesia.

Among Raiatea’s many archaeological sites is Marae Taputapuatea, Polynesia’s most revered and

travel



© MARK SISSONS

CATAMARAN CRUISES

You can rent a fully crewed **55-foot, six-cabin catamaran** that sleeps up to 12 passengers from Tahiti Dream Yacht Charter for around US\$2,000 per day, including meals and drinks. Customized itineraries are also available.

dreamyachtcharter.com

well-preserved religious site. A thousand years ago, Polynesian priests and navigators gathered here to offer sacrifices to the gods and share their considerable knowledge of topics as diverse as the origins of the universe and ocean navigation.

I ask our veteran skipper, Gilles Crespo, if he plans on sacrificing any fowl to ensure a safe trip. But after he mentions having twice delivered new catamarans to French Polynesia from France, and that each tempestuous crossing had lasted more than three months, I'm assured that our 72-hour trip through the turquoise lagoon linking Raiatea and Taha'a—and then across 40 kilometres of open ocean to Bora Bora—will be comparatively serene.

Also welcoming us aboard is chef Noeline Mauri, a Raiatea native who has been cooking on private yachts for years. She shows us to our double cabins, each with its own ensuite, then begins preparing dinner as we stow our belongings. Meanwhile, Captain Crespo sets course for Motu Ceran, a tiny patch of white-sand beaches and lush coconut groves on the southeastern edge of the neighbouring island of Taha'a.

Famed as the Vanilla Isle, Taha'a produces over 70 percent of all the vanilla grown in French Polynesia. As we drop anchor off Motu Ceran for the night, and feast on grilled marlin drizzled with vanilla sauce, served with fresh green beans and rum fried bananas, and washed down with chilled French Sauvignon Blanc, I can almost smell that sweet

scent of tropical romance wafting from the nearby shoreline.

Taha'a's other famous export is the exquisite pearl harvested from within the black-lipped oyster. During a shore excursion to a family-owned pearl farm the next morning, I learn about the meticulous technique of mother-of-pearl grafting, as well as the many qualities and grades of these prized gems that are considered unique because of their naturally dark colours.

A spectrum of an entirely more luminous calibre spans the shallow waters of our next stop, one of the world's most spectacular snorkelling sites, the fabled Coral Gardens off Motu Tao Tao, home of the ultra-luxurious Le Taha'a Island Resort & Spa. Propelled by a brisk current along a shallow, winding, coral-lined corridor, I float just feet (and sometimes mere inches) above this kaleidoscopic undersea maze of whimsically shaped formations—home to scores of intensely hued tropical fish and otherworldly sea creatures.

As the sun dips beneath the postcard-perfect backdrop of nearby Bora Bora's Mount Oteman, we say adieu to the tranquillity of our enormous inter-island aquarium. Widely praised in luxury sailing circles for its comfort and performance, our Catana 55 catamaran skims effortlessly across the open blue water to Bora Bora, where we anchor just off the Bora Bora Yacht Club in time to make last call for Mai Tais at its legendary thatched-roof bar.



© MARK SISSONS



THE BLACK PEARL

Colour: Though called the black pearl, it is usually a mix of several shades: grey, green, bronze and purple.

Size: It ranges from 8 to 16 mm in diameter.

Trade: In 2010, 10.2 million raw pearls were exported from Polynesia.



Where to stay

Most hotels and resorts have only online booking forms, not toll-free phone numbers. It's best to make inquiries and book through the Tahiti Tourism website. www.tahiti-tourisme.com

That's when the grand style of this aquatic adventure starts to really hit home: here I am floating around the fabled South Pacific in my own private fully equipped yacht, with my own skipper and chef dedicated to fulfilling my every whim. I can snorkel and swim off the stern with rays and black-tipped sharks whenever I want, dine on sumptuous fare like tuna sashimi, and (of course) fresh baguettes, sunbathe on the bow—and never worry about anything more than keeping my glass of champagne topped up.

The decadence reaches a whole new level the next morning. After a breakfast of fresh kiwi fruit and

warm croissants, we set off to circumnavigate French Polynesia's most fabled island, cruising past row upon row of the signature overwater bungalows that have made Bora Bora synonymous with once-in-a-lifetime romantic escapes.

As we dock at our final destination, the ultra-luxurious St. Regis Bora Bora Resort, my thoughts again drift back to those early European sailors, such as the crew of the *Bounty*, who traded a harsh life in England for high adventure on oceans unknown. For them, as for me, navigating the world's most beautiful collection of far-flung exotic islands must have felt like paradise found.