

An aerial view of Moorea shows off its waves, flat water and amazing downwinder potential.



partially paralyzed.

“Hey guys!” says our friend Tamatoa Gillot, with a wide grin. “Ready for another day of kiting in paradise?” Sure, he’s a pro kiter and Tahitian, but we’re puzzled by how he can maintain such a pace every windy day of the year — often 200-plus days — and still be able to walk.

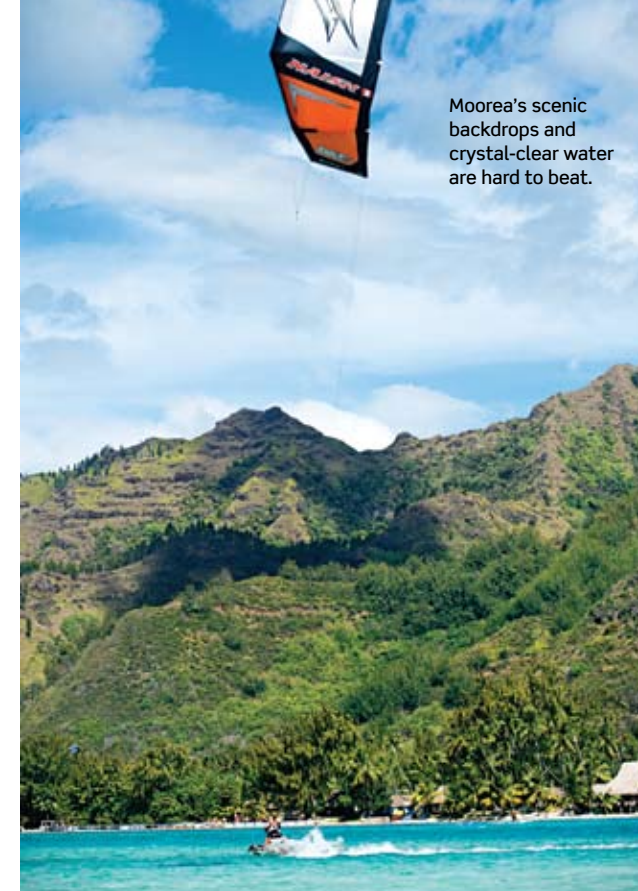
“Want to do a 10-mile downwinder, then go spear fishing and have a barbecue on the beach for lunch?” Tamatoa asks. A slight whimper escapes John’s chapped lips. The mere mention of more kiting and food makes my stomach hurt. I’m still stuffed from our dinner at Tamatoa’s house last night, where we gorged on the freshest of fish and

fine French wine while enjoying ukulele music and being showered with gifts. Our hosts only let us leave after loaning us their car and giving us the paintings from their walls and the necklaces from their chests. Tamatoa’s family’s Polynesian-style kindness overwhelmed me even more than the sharp pains that now accompany my every move.

Sensing our hesitation, Tamatoa says: “Or we could go kite with the stingrays and sharks right here. They hang out about 100 meters off the beach.” We laugh, which makes me wince. But Tamatoa swears he’s not joking and tells us we can even pet the rays if we want.

Almost instantly, our aches

Moorea’s scenic backdrops and crystal-clear water are hard to beat.



PHOTOS: TIM MCKENNA (HEADSHOT); JOHN MORRISSEY (3)



My Trip: Moorea

SPARKLING WATER, FRIENDLY AQUATIC CREATURES AND WORLD-CLASS WAVES — IT’S ENOUGH TO GIVE KITERS THE SHAKES. **BY CIMERON MORRISSEY**

➔ **Watching the sunrise** in Moorea while massaging my sore legs, I wonder: When it comes to kiting, is it possible to have too much of a good thing?

Lobster Man (my husband, John Morrissey) sits his red self down beside me on the white sand, collapses against the trunk of a palm tree and stares forlornly at the frothy turquoise ocean. “I’m so sunburned that my lips are swollen,” says John. His big, blue, bloodshot eyes plead

with the whitecaps to stop beckoning him. I swallow a chuckle, since laughing would hurt too much. “But the wind is so good, the water is so clear and the waves are huge,” he sighs. “What am I going to do?”

Such is the dilemma of kiting in French Polynesia, where the conditions are so idyllic you can’t help but binge-kite. We’re not the only ones who’ve become addicted to its tropical indulgences. Legendary artists like Paul Gauguin, Mark Twain and Herman Melville found the South Seas so intoxicating they would get downright drunk on the region’s endless hedonistic pleasures: flower-scented air, unblemished volcanic peaks and friendly locals who treat you

like family.

More than 100 years later, those same irresistible lures still exist, along with several kiter-specific temptations: consistently strong winds; waist-deep water on the inside that’s flat, toasty warm and aqua blue; and epic, world-class waves breaking over colorful coral reefs on the outside. No matter if you’re a beginner or Ben Wilson, there’s something to make every rider salivate, from empty, consequence-free shallows to the infamous barrels of Teahupoo.

But after kiting marathon sessions over the past three days and ravenously consuming the dreamy conditions in massive quantities, we’ve been rendered charred and

4 REASONS TO VISIT MOOREA

1 Your significant other will want to learn how to kite: With shallow water, consistent wind and a sandy sea floor, Moorea will inspire your mate to kite, especially after meeting Tamatoa Gillot and witnessing his fun, safe teaching style (tahitikitesurf.com).

2 It’s perfect for a family vacation: Travelers let their kids loose in the waist-deep, crystal-clear water to explore the safe, aquariumlike sea (conveniently, leaving them free to ride).

3 There are fun no-wind activities: Surf and dive world-class sites, kayak around nearby islands or hike in the jungle to waterfalls and ancient Polynesian ruins.

4 There are practically zero dangers: Besides the blazing tropical sun, sharp coral and French dudes in banana hammocks.

SESSION STATS

- **Conditions:** 15 to 22 knots
- **Kite:** 2010 Ozone Instinct Edge
- **Board:** 2008 Nobile 555
- **Distance From Home:** 4,193 miles

MOOREA LOGISTICS

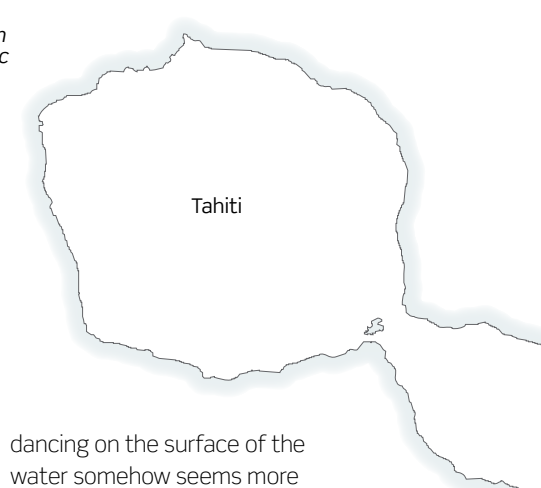
• **When it’s windiest:** April through October; peak winds blow June to August.

• **Getting there:** Fly from Los Angeles to Tahiti (an eight-hour flight with airtahitinui-usa.com), then hop aboard the ferry for a ride to Moorea.

• **Accommodations:** Stay at the Hotel Les Tipaniers next to

Moorea’s kite beach (from \$75 per night, lestipaniers.com), or splurge on an over-the-water bungalow at the Moorea Pearl Resort and Spa (from \$275 per night), where you can also launch and kite.

• **Bring along:** A durable board that can withstand possible coral dings, rash guards and a vat of sunscreen.



vanish. John and I whip ourselves into a rigging and zinc-sparkling frenzy. We launch our kites and head out, scanning the clear water beneath our boards or, as I like to call it, “snorkel-kiting.” We skim, jump and kite loop over groups of sunny yellow tangs, rainbow-color wrasse and hundreds of small peacock-blue fish — it’s like kiting in a massive aquarium. Within a couple of reaches, we spot what looks like giant boulders flying underwater, followed by long, harmless reef sharks.

We bob in the water as the rays float up to greet us. Three of them vacuum my bikini strings as I pet their silky-smooth wings. Tamatoa chuckles and asks me if I’m ready to learn how to do the Jesus walk — doing the board-off transition while

dancing on the surface of the water somehow seems more feasible now than it did 10 minutes ago.

A 5-foot-wide stingray sticks his face out of the water to get a closer look at John, who puckers up to kiss the giant fish. Behind him, Tamatoa demonstrates how to walk on water. I laugh so hard it scares the reef sharks away, and suddenly I realize it doesn’t hurt to laugh anymore.

At that point I realize, when it comes to kiting, especially in Moorea, you can never get too much of a good thing.



Moorea’s top kiteboarder, Tamatoa Gillot, guides his guests to his favorite riding spots, like this one.