

Bucket list trip to Bora Bora: It's not just for celebrities

By JENNIFER MCDERMOTT
Associated Press

BORA BORA, French Polynesia — Somehow I convinced my husband that the fifth wedding anniversary is the Tahitian anniversary. The traditional gift, actually, is wood.

For years, I had dreamed of going to Bora Bora in French Polynesia. The lagoon's glimmering turquoise, jade and cobalt blue waters, the overwater bungalows, the seclusion— for me, it was the ultimate bucket list destination.

Some of the world's most famous celebrities vacation in Bora Bora. Jennifer Aniston honeymooned there. Pictures of Justin Bieber swimming naked in Bora Bora circulated far and wide online last year. Usain Bolt celebrated his Olympic victories there in September.

That doesn't mean normal couples can't go too — if they can afford it, of course. Our trip for a week, including flights and our hotel stay (with breakfast), cost just under \$10,000.

My husband and I spent a week lounging on the deck of our bungalow at Le Meridien Bora Bora. We woke early to catch brilliant orange and pink sunrises. We got up close and personal with sea creatures, from moray eels and trumpetfish to sea turtles, sharks and stingrays. We discovered that the saying heard in pearl shops, "You don't choose the pearl, the pearl chooses you," is surprisingly true. Most of all, we tried to relax and take it all in.

Bora Bora, located about 160 miles northwest of Tahiti, was formed by volcanic eruptions millions of years ago. Mount Otemanu, a remnant of the volcano, rises nearly 2,400 feet on the island and serves as the backdrop of many photos.

About 9,000 people live in Bora Bora. The temperature is a relatively consistent 80 F.

The island is set in a lagoon and surrounded by a string of motus, or small islets, where luxury resorts are located. The colors are stunning. A friend said my photo looked like a watercolor painting.

We flew to Los Angeles, where many U.S. flights to Tahiti converge. From Los Angeles, it's about an eight-hour overnight flight to Papeete, Tahiti. It's less than an hour by plane from there to Bora Bora. Then it's a short boat ride to the main city, Vaitape, or to one of the luxury resorts. We didn't need vaccinations or a visa.

Our overwater bungalow faced outward to the lagoon, which we requested when booking. Others are turned in, toward the resort. It featured a glass floor for fish watching and a spiral staircase for climbing into the lagoon.

We splurged on massages early in the week, before our pale skin



AP Photo/Jennifer McDermott

In this Nov. 2015 photo, kayakers head out on the water from Le Meridien resort in Bora Bora.



AP Photo/Jennifer McDermott

In this Nov. 1 photo a couple strolls along the sidewalk next to the beach at Le Meridien resort in Bora Bora. Bora Bora is located 160 miles from Tahiti with a balmy and relatively consistent temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

turned a reddish hue, and we fed baby sea turtles at the Turtle Center established at Le Meridien. We took the hotel's boat to The St. Regis Bora Bora Resort to dine at the exclusive Lagoon restaurant by acclaimed French chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten and to check out the lavish bungalows with private swimming pools over the lagoon.

We tried paddle boarding. Then we tried snorkeling to find the sunglasses we lost while paddle boarding. Adventurous couples buzzed around the island on jet skis.

Feeling adventurous ourselves,

we signed up for a snorkeling trip to swim with stingrays and sharks. There are so many stingrays there, you feel their slick, rubbery bodies hitting your legs. One is an older, docile stingray the guides call "grandma." Our guide from Teiva Georges Vongerichten and to check out the lavish bungalows with private swimming pools over the lagoon.

But when the guides started "chumming" the waters with fish parts to draw blacktip sharks, we climbed back into the boat. The sharks were much more interested in the fish than in us, but we weren't taking any chances of a misdirected chomp. In deeper waters, we snorkeled at the surface as 9-foot lemon



Courtesy of Jennifer McDermott via AP

In this 2015 photo Associated Press writer Jennifer McDermott holds an older, docile stingray with help from a tour guide in Bora Bora.

sharks glided along the bottom.

We also spent a day in Vaitape. There's a center where locals sell their crafts, a small marketplace to stock up on sunscreen, juice and inexpensive French wine, and a cafe. The mountainside is home to cannons left behind by U.S. forces during World War II.

The main thing we did though, was shop for Tahitian pearls. We were leaving one of the stores when I caught a glimpse of a pair of green pearl earrings. I walked away but no other pearl could compare, so we returned at the end of the day to buy the pearl that chose me.

There's a must-visit spot along

the coastline, about 3 miles from the city center: Bloody Mary's, a funky restaurant known for its seafood and celebrity visits. I enjoyed the restaurant's signature plate of teriyaki wahoo and the house drink, a Bloody Mary of course, while my husband loved trying meka, a broadbill swordfish found in the South Pacific. By the entrance there's a long list of famous people who have dined there.

At the hotel, we ended the week as we began. We lounged on the deck, telling each other how unbelievable it was that we got to see such beauty in person and check Bora Bora off the bucket list.



Lucy Beni via AP

Fresh citrus, cranberry and arugula salad.

Thanksgiving salad with arugula, citrus

By KATIE WORKMAN
Associated Press

Almost any big meal could use a green salad to round things out (and balance the heavier items on the table). But not just any old pile of lettuce.

This salad is simply gorgeous, and a great way to bring color, flavor and

oomph to a holiday meal. The combination of tartness from the citrus, sweetness from the pomegranate seeds, sharpness from the onion, and a bit of herby bitterness from the arugula — plus a bright vinaigrette — makes this a salad that isn't just a placeholder on a plate. And the colors are amazing.

You can buy pre-shelled pomegranate seeds in little containers in the produce section of the supermarket, or if you're feeling industrious, buy a whole pomegranate, split it apart and remove the seeds yourself. It's messy but slightly therapeutic work. If you have kids, lay out lots of paper on the table, put them in big

T-shirts that can get messy and let them take on this project.

Katie Workman has written two cookbooks focused on easy, family-friendly cooking, "Dinner Solved!" and "The Mom 100 Cookbook." She blogs at <http://www.themom100.com/about-katie-workman/>

ARUGULA, RED ONION, ORANGE AND POMEGRANATE SEED SALAD WITH LEMON VINAIGRETTE

Start to finish: 20 minutes

Servings: 6

Lemon Vinaigrette:

- 1 large shallot, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Kosher or coarse salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Salad:

- 8 cups baby arugula
- 1 small red onion, halved and very thinly sliced
- 2 cara cara or blood oranges
- Seeds from one pomegranate (about ¾ cup)

Make the vinaigrette. In a small container, combine the shallots, lemon juice, rice vinegar, olive oil, salt and pepper. Shake to blend.

Place the arugula in a large serving bowl with the onion. Peel the oranges, and use a paring knife to remove all the white pith from the outside of the fruit. Cut the oranges crosswise into slices, and cut those slices into 4 pieces. Add these to the bowl. Pour the dressing on the salad, and toss to combine. Scatter the pomegranate seeds over the top and serve.

Nutritional information per serving:

Lemon Vinaigrette: 63 calories; 60 calories from fat; 7 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 161 mg sodium; 1 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 0 g sugar; 0 g protein.

Salad: 37 calories; 5 calories from fat; 1 g fat (0 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 12 mg sodium; 7 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 1 g protein.

Salad with dressing: 100 calories; 65 calories from fat; 7 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 172 mg sodium; 8 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 1 g protein.