



THE CORAL LAGOONS OF FRENCH POLYNESIA

HALFWAY BETWEEN THE AMERICAS AND ASIA, FRENCH POLYNESIA IS AS FAR AWAY AS YOU CAN POSSIBLY SAIL. THESE HUNDREDS OF TINY ISLANDS DOTTED THROUGHOUT THE PACIFIC OCEAN ARE A TROPICAL PARADISE SURROUNDED BY A DEEP BLUE SEA.

At first glance, the South Pacific appears to be the largest stretch of unbroken ocean on the planet. A closer look and you'll notice strings of unlikely islands sitting in depths of water where land seems improbable. Upon further inspection, some of these islands are fringed by perfect coral lagoons allowing for boats to sit safely in their harbors while the vast ocean throws gigantic waves barreling onto reefs. You have stumbled on French Polynesia, a cluster of some 118 dispersed islands and atolls that spans over 1,200 miles and that is part of the larger constellation of islands stretching from Hawaii to New Zealand that makeup Polynesia as a whole. You could spend a lifetime exploring this region and there would still be more to see. If time is limited, consider narrowing your sailing itinerary to the Leeward Islands, and, more specifically, to Raiatea, Taha'a, Huahine, Bora Bora, and Maupiti.

Geography and culture come together in the Leeward Islands to create a remarkably wonderful sailing destination. These dramatic mountainous islands are blessed with very pleasant anchorages along pristine reefs, and the majesty of this place continues well beyond the ancient volcanic and coral geography that created them. Historically, the people who live here are part of one of the planet's most advanced seafaring cultures, spread across thousands of miles of ocean but sharing a mother language that proves that

the art of navigation here was far beyond what Europeans had conceived of.

Most of the Leeward Islands consist of tall formerly volcanic peaks that have eroded enough that the coral that once grew on the outer banks of the island now makes up a ring around an inner lagoon. There are small low-lying islands called *motus* where the reef supports a sandy landmass. Some of the *motus* are large enough to be inhabited and, in the case of both Maupiti and Bora Bora, the island's airport is actually out on a *motu* where some of the only land flat enough to land a plane is. Most of the nice beaches are on *motus* rather than the islands proper, and the good snorkeling and diving along the reef tends to be closer to the *motus* than the main islands.

