Of the 118 Islands and Atolls in French Polynesia, only 67 are inhabited. The more populated islands have all the creature comforts you could ever want including 5 star hotels and resorts, impressive restaurants, excellent shopping, and transportation infrastructure with tours to take you through the jungles to the mountain tops. The lowly populated Islands are less developed. Some have no hotels and are reminiscent of Jurassic Park or a pristine, Garden of Eden. The Atolls have a small, narrow land mass across a long section of ocean i.e. “an infinite beach”. The beach might not be beautiful, but it’s ideal for scuba diving and water activities. This guide describes the top ten Islands and Atolls so that you can see the range of experiences to pick the Islands and Atolls for your dream vacation. I have also included details for exploring the island of Moorea.
1) Where cruise ship tenders dock, 2) Main Tourist Sites = Magic Mountain, Belvedere Lookout, Marae Titiroa, Tiki Parc, Pineapple Road, Fruit Juice Factory & Tropical Garden. 3) The first section of this guide describes the location of French Polynesian Islands and Atolls, and the broad range of vacation possibilities at the top ten islands and atolls; namely, Tahiti, Moorea, Raiatea, Bora Bora, Huahine, Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa, Maupiti, Rangiroa Atoll & Fakarava Atoll. 4) The second section of this guide describes Moorea climate, travel options, currency, and a detailed description of the top eleven Moorea tourist attractions.

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Section of Guide: An Introduction to French Polynesia</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location of French Polynesia Islands and Atolls, A broad range of possibilities for your “Dream Vacation”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two popular atolls = Rangiroa Atoll &amp; Fakarava Atoll, Things to consider when planning your vacation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most popular Developed Islands: Tahiti, Moorea, Raiatea, Bora Bora,</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most Popular Undeveloped Islands: Huahine, Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa, Maupiti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Section of Guide: Moorea Island</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moorea weather, Why Visit Moorea, Currency &amp; Language, Travel options to/from Moorea</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferry boat travel between Tahiti and Moorea, Where cruise ships tender passengers ashore on Moorea</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moorea Island Map: cruise ship tender docks, popular tourist sites, private road entrance to Magic Mountain</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of the road/trail to Magic Mountain Overlook, our 4WD Truck Tour, Photos from Magic Mountain</td>
<td>9-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map showing Belvedere Lookout is in a caldera surrounded by mountains</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo from Belvedere Lookout</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marae Titiroa – an ancient sacred site</td>
<td>12-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of Major Tourist Sites North of Belvedere Lookout</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lycée Agricole Opunohu (Agricultural School)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiki Parc, Farm with pineapples, bananas, etc</td>
<td>14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit Juice Factory</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tropical Garden – my favorite tourist stop</td>
<td>17-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos: Where tour vehicles park, Shopping at the cruise ship tender dock, The catholic church</td>
<td>21-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Feedback, Copyright Notice, Terms and Conditions for use of Toms Port Guides</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAVEAT
Information contained herein is believed to be accurate. PLEASE verify the information you use for your travel plans. Opinions expressed are my own. This port guide is protected by copyright law - see the last page of this guide for legal notices.

Tom Sheridan
French Polynesia is in the South Pacific Ocean midway between Australia on the West and South America on the East as shown on the map below.

There are 118 Islands and Atolls divided into five groups: 1) Windward and Leeward Islands in the Society Islands Archipelago 2) the Tuamotu Archipelago, 3) Gambier Islands, 4) Marquesas Islands, and 5) the Austral Islands. **Only 67 of the 118 Islands and Atolls are inhabited.**

The islands and atolls have a total land area of 1,359 sq. miles (521 sq. kilometers) scattered over more than 1,200 miles (2,000 km) in the South Pacific Ocean. (Wikipedia)

Definition: An atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef, island, or series of islets. An atoll surrounds a body of water called a lagoon. Sometimes, atolls and lagoons protect a central island. Channels between islets connect a lagoon to the open ocean or sea. (Wikipedia)

**GPS Coordinates**
I provide GPS coordinates for use with Microsoft or Google maps and GPS enabled devices. The GPS format is Degrees, Minutes, and Seconds ddd° mm' ss.ss" N ddd° mm' ss.ss" E. **Copy and paste** GPS coordinates from this guide into Google or Microsoft Bing maps **Or type** GPS coordinate numbers, periods and letters into the map search box replacing the symbols for degrees, minutes, and seconds with spaces.

For example, coordinates for the cruise ship dock in Tahiti are 17°32'14.9"S 149°34'09.0"W
You can type this into Google or Bing Maps as 17 32 14.9 S 149 34 09.0 W
Then press the enter key to see this location on the map.

See [https://www.tomsportguides.com/map-user-guide.html](https://www.tomsportguides.com/map-user-guide.html) for info on GPS coordinates with Google maps,

**A broad range of possibilities for your “Dream Vacation”**.
- All French Polynesian islands have beautiful lagoons, beaches, vegetation, forests, mountains, and hiking trails. Coral reefs around the islands and atolls have abundant sea life making it ideal for snorkeling and scuba diving. Check with tour companies, resorts, the web, etc. to find reefs with the species you are interested in e. g. small colorful fish, manta rays, sharks, dolphins, whales, etc.
- The more heavily populated islands have cities and towns with top rated hotels, resorts, restaurants, shops, good roads, and tour companies to take you through the jungles to the mountain tops. There are services for all the creature comforts you may desire.
- The low population islands are often described as “untouched, undisturbed, undeveloped, a pristine Garden of Eden, or Jurassic Park.” You stay overnight in family pensions in villages with the locals where you can enjoy local food, pristine, uncrowded beaches, and hike or ride horses along the jungle trails to ancient temples and scenic vistas.
Many visitors begin their vacation at one of the more populated Polynesian Islands and then spend a day or two at a more remote, low population island to experience the “undeveloped, pristine locations”.

**Atolls offer a different type of “vacation experience.”**

Definition: An atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef, island, or series of islets. An atoll surrounds a body of water called a lagoon. Sometimes, atolls and lagoons protect a central island. Channels between islets connect a lagoon to the open ocean or sea. (Wikipedia)

Two of the most popular Atolls in French Polynesia do not have an island. These atolls have a narrow band of land partially surrounding a lagoon. The MAIN reason to visit these atolls is to scuba dive to see the incredible sea life.

**Rangiroa Atoll - ‘The Infinite Lagoon’**

in French Polynesia

Land Area = 558 sq. mi.

GPS = 14°58’18.2"S 147°37’34.2"W

There is no island at this atoll.

Rangiroa is the second largest coral atoll in the world surrounding a huge lagoon.

It’s a popular destination for divers from around the world to see sharks, dolphins, and other sea creatures.

The narrow track of land that surrounds the lagoon is only 1200 to 2000 feet wide shown as the white line on the Google map at right.

**Fakarava Atoll - ‘Perfect for scuba diving’**

Land Area = 429 sq. mi.

GPS Location = 16°26’37.8"S 152°15’24.7"W

This atoll is shaped like an upside down letter V. There is no island at this atoll! See the Google map at right

**When planning a vacation consider”**

1. Whether you want a highly populated island for top rated hotels/resorts, shopping, restaurants, and all the creature comforts and options for exploring the island, or

2. A less populated, less developed island that will take you back in time to explore an undeveloped, pristine island and get to know the locals in their villages, or

3. An Atoll to experience some of the best scuba diving in the world!

On the following pages, I list the top eight, most popular Polynesian Islands ranging from the highly populated, developed islands to the “untouched”, pristine, low populated islands with a brief description of each. This is followed by a highly detailed, comprehensive vacation and cruise port guide for Moorea island.
The Most Popular, Developed Polynesian Islands

Tahiti Island has 70% of the population of the 118 French Polynesia Islands and atolls.

Population = 279,287, Land Area = 403 sq. mi. GPS Location = 17°32'14.9"S 149°34'09.0"W

Cruise ships dock overnight in Papeete, the largest city in French Polynesia. You can walk to many shops, restaurants, bars, etc. There’s a huge park where locals set up food trucks, music, bars, for a festive event in the evening next to the cruise ship!!!

A popular tour to the interior of the island is by 4x4 and/or hiking. We took a bus tour around the island past black sand beaches to visit important tourist sites in the morning and a private sunset cruise on a 30 foot boat. During our sunset cruise we saw a humpback whale breach near the reefs.

Moorea - A beautiful “Magical Island” only ten miles from Tahiti.

Population = 16,191, Land Area = 51.7 sq. mi. GPS Tender Dock Location = 17°29'30.2"S 149°52'17.2"W

Cruise ships dock overnight in Tahiti and sail ten miles early in the morning to Moorea where passengers are tendered ashore. The island has a rugged silhouette with eight tall volcanic mountain peaks, scenic views from the mountain tops, beautiful rain forests, bays, and gorgeous sandy beaches. It’s a great place to explore in a 4WD vehicle and/or hiking the trails through the rain forest and farms growing a number of products including pineapple, bananas, vanilla, visit the Fruit Juice Factory, and taste jam and vanilla at the Tropical Gardens.

Moorea is “shaped like a heart”. It’s a top honeymoon destination, second only to Bora Bora,

Raiatea - A Sacred Island with ancient temples (marae) is a UNESCO Site.

Population = 12,024, Land Area = 64.7 sq. mi. GPS Location = 16°48'53.2"S 151°27'20.2"W

It’s a UNESCO site located in the center of the “Polynesian Triangle,” the last part of the globe settled by humans. It forms an outstanding relic and cultural landscape/seascape.

Marae are sacred ceremonial and social spaces throughout Polynesia. Taputapuātea marae is a 1000 year old political, ceremonial, funerary and religious center. The complex is between the land and sea on the end of a peninsula that juts into the lagoon surrounding the island. The marae looks out to Te Ava Mo’a, a sacred pass through the reef for ships.

In addition to visiting the ancient temples and viewing the huge statues, activities include hiking into the rain forest to see waterfalls and searching for Tiare Apetahi, a rare five-petaled flower endemic to Mount Temehani of Raiatea. (Source= UNESCO)

Bora Bora - “The Romantic Island – an internationally acclaimed honeymoon destination.”

Population = 10,605, Land Area = 11.8 sq. mi. GPS Location = 16°29’57.0”S 151°44'29.6”W

It’s a beautiful island with a gorgeous lagoon, white sandy beaches and luxury resorts with some bungalows on stilts over the water. The common objective of visitors is relaxation. Popular activities are swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving, sunset cruises, dolphin and whale watching, and 4WD tours.

Bora Bora is a private oasis for newlyweds to celebrate so they will never forget their visit.

The Most Popular Undeveloped Islands

Huahine - “A slow paced life style representative of old Polynesia”

Population = 6,075, Land Area = 29.6 sq. mi. GPS Location = 16°44’55.7”S 151°00'01.2”W

Huahine was a center of Polynesian culture. It’s an important archaeological site with statues and ancient ruins similar to those of Easter Island. The island has been unchanged with time so you can “live like a local” visiting the small villages and explore the sandy beaches, feed sharks at the lagoon and explore the sites.
Nuku Hiva - ‘A gorgeous, unspoiled, island paradise with ancient temples, waterfalls, beaches’
Population = 2,660,  Land Area = 130.9 sq. mi.  GPS Location = 8°51'30.3"S 140°08'33.6"W
Nicknamed “Jurassic Park”, Nuku Hiva remains in it’s native state. Relax as you explore the forests, waterfalls, temples, beautiful beaches, and villages.

Hiva Oa - ‘A remote, undisturbed, scenic landscape with the largest tiki statues in Polynesia’
Population = 2,243,  Land Area = 122 sq. mi.  GPS Location = 9°45'08.2"S 139°01'14.9"W
It’s an unspoiled island with lush vegetation due to it’s fertile soil. It has ancient archaeological sites with the largest tiki statues in French Polynesia. Hiva Oa was made famous by artists and poets including Paul Gaugin and Jacques Brel.

Maupiti - A small coral atoll with a tiny volcanic island in the center’
Population = 1,200,  Land Area = 4.2 sq. mi.  GPS Location = 16°26'37.8"S 152°15'24.7"W
Maupiti is a tiny 4.2 sq. mi. undeveloped volcanic island. There are no resorts, just family pensions where you can stay overnight and enjoy the food, flower filled gardens, uncrowded beaches, and swim with manta rays.

An outstanding resource with information to plan your vacation

An excellent vacation planning resource for French Polynesia is the PDF file from the official tourism website. It’s extremely well-written and illustrated. This 84 page PDF file is the “Gold Standard” for information about French Polynesia. It’s FREE to download at https://fr.calameo.com/read/0034615039344627da1a2
I highly recommend you download it and read it.

Moorea French Polynesia

Weather: Average temperatures
The average high temperature year round is 28 to 31 degrees Celsius = 82.4 to 87.8 degrees Fahrenheit.
The average low temperature year round is 22 to 25 degrees Celsius = 71.6 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit.
March is the warmest month. The coolest months are June through October.

Weather: Average days of rain
Day time hours: Average days of rain per month = 18-20 days.
Night time hours: Average days of rain per month = 10-12 days.
When we were there, it rained on the other side of the mountains. The rain did not affect us but it affected our photos by concealing the tops of the mountains in cloud cover.

Why Visit Moorea?
It’s a “heart shaped” island that’s one of the most beautiful islands in the world with gorgeous mountain peaks, lush vegetation, hiking trails, stunning beaches, crystal clear water, and coral that attracts all forms of sea life.
For details on marine life, see https://moorea-ocean-adventures.com/species/
There are many top rated hotels and resorts with all the creature comforts you might desire. Your vacation can include hiking the forests, or you can tour historic sites, shopping, enjoy the food, sailing, scuba diving, swimming, or relaxing on the beaches.

Currency & Language: The currency is the Pacific Franc. 100 F.CFP = 0.838 Euros or 0.93 US Dollars. All international currencies & credit cards are accepted. The official languages are French and Tahitian. Many people speak English.

Travel to and from Moorea

Travel by Airplane to/from Moorea
Moorea Temae Airport is on the northeast corner of the island.  GPS Location = 17°29'25.0"S 149°45'50.0"W
The IATA code is MOZ.  The ICAO code is NTTM.  For flight information, see https://www.flightradar24.com/data-airports/moz/arrivals
The main carrier is Air Tahiti
Ferry Boat travel between Moorea and Tahiti (see map at left)

“Moorea’s main port on the east coast in Vaiare, where you can easily sail across to Papeete on Tahiti. With numerous sailings to choose from every day, traveling by ferry is the most convenient way to explore these gorgeous French Polynesian islands. Multiple sailings are provided every day to Papeete on the northwest coast, lasting just half an hour.”

See https://www.directferries.com/ferries_from_moorea_to_tahiti.htm

Where cruise ships anchor to tender passengers ashore on Moorea Island

1-Opunohu Bay Tender Dock
GPS Location = 17°29'30.2"S 149°52'17.3"W
I believe this is the best tender dock location because it’s near the city of Papetō'ai, one of the largest cities in French Polynesia. There are many restaurants, shops, top rated hotels, resorts, and all the touring resources you might want to explore the island.

Most important, this tender dock is close to the popular tourist sites on Moorea Island. The map at right shows where the tenders dock, the gift and souvenir shops, the meeting point for tours, and the parking lot for tour vehicles. It’s a short walk from the tender boats to meet your tour company’s guide and board your tour vehicle. It’s a comfortable place to relax before or after your tour by checking out the items for sale, enjoying a drink or a snack.

2-Cook’s Bay Tender Dock is near Hotel Kaveka
GPS Location = 17°29'19.9"S 149°49'06.7"W
The dock for tenders is in a beautiful location next to the hotel. But it’s in a more remote area of the island and not as close to the popular tourist sites as the tender dock in Opunohu Bay.
This Google photo of the dock at right was taken by Bern Olds-Hilsenberg.
The closest city to this dock is Paopao.

3. The Vaiare Ferry Boat Terminal on Moorea Island has a GPS Location = 17°31'11.3"S 149°46'47.2"W
The Google map at right shows there are rental cars, taxis, ATM’s, etc. for ferry boat travelers.
This is the dock for ferry boats, Cruise ship tenders dock nearby. My understanding is that it’s rarely used as a location for cruise ships to tender passengers ashore because it’s not close to the major tourist sites on Moorea island.
Map of Moorea Island showing tender docks and the most popular tourist sites

Note that Moorea Island is surrounded by Coral Reefs shown as the light blue color on this map. The reefs are filled with all kinds of sea creatures. Spaces in the reefs allow boats to reach the shore.

PRIVATE Road entrance to the road/trail to Magic Mountain Overlook  GPS =17°29'55.5"S 149°51'48.9"W

The house on the left in the Google map photo above is where you stop to pay $ 2 USD or 200 XPF per
person to use the private road through private property to Magic Mountain Overlook. You can hike or use an ATV vehicle. Plan on a 45 minute to an hour hike from an elevation of 26 feet above sea level at the RTE 91 entrance (as shown in the photo above) to reach the top at 510 feet above sea level. Some parts of the route are very steep. The road is ~ 5700 feet = 1.08 miles = 1.7 km long. Bring plenty of water and it’s best to hike in the morning when temperatures are cooler. There are hiking websites that show alternate trails to the top. The road is partially paved with two, narrow strips of concrete. There are many potholes, a few sharp turns, and some very steep sections. It’s a bumpy ride in an ATV.

4-Magic Mountain Overlook  GPS location = 17°29'55.0"S 149°52'05.9"W

Our 4WD tour truck was able to get close to the top. It was only a short walk to the mountain top for breathtaking 360° degree views of the area. Fortunately, it was a clear day for good photos.
We took a 4-hour Safari Mario Moorea tour and loved it! See [https://www.safarimario.com/en/](https://www.safarimario.com/en/)

The tour is in a 4WD truck with open sides. Seven people sat crosswise in the back and one sat next to the driver.

The driver proceeds at a reasonable speed, but the large potholes and bumps in the road cause the truck to move from side to side as it goes up and down thru the deep ruts.

I felt the movement in my back, but there’s not much you can about the jungle roads.

If you have severe back problems this might not be the tour for you.

We were extremely impressed with our driver. He’s an expert on Moorea and can point out everything we need to see with frequent stops to learn about the sites. Our tour was enjoyable and highly informative about the history, the sites, and the lifestyle in French Polynesia.

**View from Magic Mountain Overlook**

There are handrails, ropes, and railings along the walkways. The top of the mountain is like a rounded small hill so there is minimal risk of falling. It’s safe, it’s not like standing on a cliff and looking down.
This photo shows the Cruise Ship Tender Dock on the right side of the photo.

5-Belvedere Lookout GPS location = 17°32'25.1"S 149°49'36.7"W

Belvedere Lookout is in a caldera, a volcanic crater caused by collapse of volcanoes. It's not obvious when you are standing at the lookout, but you are surrounded by high mountain peaks as shown in this Google map. If you stand at Belvedere Lookout on a clear day and look north, you'll see the top of Mount Ratui at 899 meters (2949 ft) flanked by Opunoho Bay on the West and Cooks Bay on the East.
This is the view of Mount Ratui with Opunohu Bay on the left and Cook’s Bay on the right. Unfortunately, the cloud cover and lighting were not ideal. You’ll get the best photos when the sky is blue with few clouds.

6-Marae Titiroa  GPS location = 17°32’10.9”S 149°49’46.3”W

Marae are ancient stone platforms in the jungle that were used for religious ceremonies and to communicate with the gods. These sites were used to make important decisions. Researchers have uncovered over 100 marae in this area.
Titiroa is the largest marae in this area, 36 meters long. It’s overgrown by chestnut trees and Miconia shrub. When you visit marae, be aware of the fact that these are ancient, sacred, sacrosanct, religious sites that must be respected. Do not enter or climb into these sites, just take your photos and leave the site undisturbed as you found it.

The Map Below Shows the Major Tourist Sites North of Belvedere Lookout

7-Lycée Agricole Opunohu (Agricultural School)  GPS location = 17°31'58.4"S 149°50'03.1"W
Lycée Agricole d'Opunohu is the only agricultural school in French Polynesia. It’s located in a large private farm area. Visitors can see and learn about cultivation of pineapples, lemons, grapefruits, bananas, vanilla beans and other fruits. Some island tours include a stop at the Agricultural School. We did not stop because our driver was an expert on crops and cultivation. He drove us through the private farm area and made several stops so we could see and photograph the crops as he explained the plant growth and cultivation process.
Tiki Park is a popular amusement center for walking and climbing among the tall trees using ropes, poles, wooden bridges, zip lines, and more. See the photo at left of a family on a wood bridge between the trees. We drove by the park on our tour of the agricultural area.

9-Farm with Pineapples, Bananas, etc.  GPS location = 17°31'11.7"S 149°50'12.0"W
We drove around a large private farm where our guide stopped to show the crops and explain their growth habit.
Fields with pineapple

Bananas
10-Moorea Fruit Juice Factory  GPS location = 17°29'23.9"S 149°49'43.9"W

It’s located at the northwest corner of Cook’s Bay.

Moorea Fruit Juice Factory website =  http://www.rotui.pf/le-fruit-de-la-passion/#.XgJkRudKiiw

When the website opens in French, this screen appears with the question about translating the language.

Choose English as the language and the page below appears as the English version of the website.

I highly recommend that you click on and read the section “Discover the best of our fruits”

Read the description of each of the fruits BEFORE you visit the Fruit Juice Factory so you’ll know what’s available, it’s characteristics, and have an idea of which of the fruits you are interested in tasting and buying.

Taste samples of juices, jams, brandies, liquors, and wine available for purchase include papaya, pineapple, star fruit, ginger, coconut and grapefruit.
**11-Tropical Garden**  GPS location = 17°30'05.6"S 149°50'55.0"W

It’s located on the northeast corner of Opunohu Bay as shown on the map below.

I liked all the stops on our tour, but the Tropical Garden was my favorite because:

1. Gorgeous views looking down the mountain at our ship anchored in the bay.
2. There were a number of beautiful flowers in bloom = a great opportunity for photos.
3. There’s a bar where you taste samples of local products and purchase your favorite libation.

4. You’ll see vanilla beans (photo at left) and learn how they are cultivated in French Polynesia to produce vanilla.

Producing vanilla is an incredibly complex, lengthy, labor intensive process that requires attention to detail, precise timing, and a great deal of precision.

Our driver/guide showed us the process in detail. It was interesting and informative. We learned a lot. The only thing that was missing from our tour is that the tour company did not give us a diploma for learning about vanilla production.

BEFORE you visit the Tropical Garden greenhouse, use your home computer to view these videos and the web-page below.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RdoTcDD2EU  This video shows the process demonstrated by our driver/guide using a toothpick to pollinate the vanilla flower/orchid to grow beans. Timing is critical, each orchid is ONLY open for a few hours on ONE DAY. AND, orchids open on different days. This means the workers have to inspect the vanilla plants every day to see which orchids are open for pollination!!! In French Polynesia, there are no bees or insects to pollinate vanilla flowers so the process is done manually. Vanilla pollinating bees only live in Mexico and Central America.

The second step in the process is to dry the vanilla beans. See this web-page for a detailed description of the curing/drying process https://www.cooksvanilla.com/the-art-of-curing-vanilla-beans/

The third part of the process is splitting a vanilla pod to remove the seeds. See this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cuVFnEszDcs
5. There are comfortable benches and tables in the shade, where you can sit, take in the views, taste free samples of local products, or purchase your favorite libation.

6. And, there’s a friendly cat to give you a purr-fect welcome to this Tropical Garden Paradise!

The Tropical Garden was my favorite stop on our tour. At most stops, you wander around and take photos. If there are samples to taste, you stand in line and wait your turn to taste and or buy products.

The tropical garden is different. It’s the only site we visited where we could sit down, enjoy the views, relax in the shade, and enjoy a light, comfortable breeze. It’s the only site where we were surrounded by gorgeous flowers and plants. It’s the only site where we had such a fascinating, educational introduction to the process of cultivating vanilla.

Belvedere Lookout had a lot of chickens wandering around. I prefer to have a friendly cat such as the one at the Tropical Garden.

I highly recommend including the Tropical Garden in your tour!!!
Our 4-Hour Tour Began in the Morning and Ended Mid-Afternoon at the Cruise Ship Tender Dock
This is the area where you meet your tour company, board your vehicle, and return at the end of the tour.

In the afternoon, we had time to explore the shops at the tender dock.
There’s a Catholic church at the tender dock. It was closed the day we visited the area.
Goal

My guides are designed to help you plan a great cruise vacation by providing information such as where the ship docks, location of tourist sites, public transit, walking tour maps, things to see and do, travel issues unique to the port, etc. Knowledge of ports is important when planning self-guiding touring and booking shore excursions because you have to make many decisions and commitments long before your ship docks.

NOTE: I believe the information in this guide is accurate, however you are responsible to verify accuracy of the information you use to plan your vacation. Information on cruise ports frequently changes such as bus routes, admission fees to sites, rental car locations, etc.

Cruise Critic is the best source for up-to-date, detailed, accurate information on travel details for shore excursions, reviews of cruise ships, etc. There are many knowledgeable people on Cruise Critic willing to share their knowledge, expertise, and travel experience. I highly recommend www.CruiseCritic.com, it's free to join.

Why feedback is important

User feedback helps me improve the format and content in my quest to produce the “ultimate” port guides. I welcome offers to collaborate with me or provide materials for use in my guides.

PLEASE Help “spread the word” about my website and port guides.

The only negative feedback I get is, “I wish I knew about your port guides before my vacation”. Please tell your friends and post a link to my guides and website on the blogs.

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- Post a link to my website e.g. https://www.tomsportguides.com or

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Tom Sheridan