Tuamotu Archipelago - French Polynesia

Itinerary

The following is a description of the dive sites we may visit during your liveaboard safari on board M/V French Polynesia Master. We will explore Fakarava Atoll in depth, however, your dive team will also provide for dives at the numerous smaller islands in the area including Toau, Kauehi, Faaite, Niau and Raraka, which make up the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. We wish to show you the very best diving possible but a number of factors can determine where we visit. Weather, tides, currents and other factors play a part in the Cruise Director’s decision of which route the yacht takes. Whilst we attempt to ensure the number of dives we have scheduled is fulfilled, bad weather can hinder the yacht’s ability to reach a specified dive site in good time. The safety of all on board is paramount and we always do our best in offering diving at alternate locations should we be unable to visit those sites listed below.

Your Cruise Director will schedule up to 3 dives per day, or alternatively 2 day dives and 1 sunset or night dive. The diving day has a typical schedule as follows:

- Light Breakfast followed by a briefing & Dive 1
- Full Breakfast, relaxation period, briefing & Dive 2
- Lunch, relaxation period, briefing & Dive 3
- Snack relaxation period,
- Dinner - if we offer a night/sunset dive, the schedule will be slightly amended

Important information about diving in French Polynesia

The diving regulations aboard French Polynesia Master vary slightly from our other vessels due to a combination of the challenging nature of the diving and specific French Polynesian local governmental diving rules and regulations:

- Maximum of 3 dives per day for all divers whether diving on air or nitrox.
- PADI Open Water divers, or equivalent, are limited to a maximum depth of 18m (60ft) on all dives. If you only carry this certification then we advise that you complete the Advanced Open Water course before joining to enjoy the diving to the full, as the structure of dive groups will not always accommodate for shallow divers. If this is not possible or you do not wish to take the course prior to joining then we can also provide the PADI Advanced Open Water and/or Nitrox course on board, please just let us know in advance and we can organise this for you to ensure you can join all dives. CMAS* divers are limited to 20m.
- Advanced Open Water divers and above can dive to 30 metres maximum depth (98ft), This is irrespective of whether you carry a Deep Diver certification.
- All divers must complete a medical declaration and submit it on the boat. You can find this form here. Any divers submitting a form on board that has 'yes' as the response to any medical question will also require a doctor’s certificate if
they wish to dive. This is mandatory and so we ask that you complete this form in advance and obtain the required medical clearance if circumstances dictate it.

Diving in French Polynesia can be challenging, even for the experienced diver. To get the most out of your trip, we highly recommend our guests be:

- qualified to a minimum of Advanced Open Water, or equivalent
- minimum of 50 logged dives
- Nitrox certified
- preferably with some experience in diving in current

Due to French Polynesian law restrictions, we do not offer unguided diving from the boat.

***Please ensure that you bring all your certification cards, including any certifications that you currently hold for diving on Nitrox.

Kindly note that there are regular checks by the authorities that these limits are being maintained, so our guides will be very strict with them.

**Rangiroa Atoll**

**Tiputa Pass** - Dropping in at the outer edge divers can hook in to the reef wall and watch the amazing shark display. Hammerheads, tiger sharks and huge schools of blackfin sharks are the main draw. Drift on the incoming tide through the Canyons, where schools of big-eyes hang out and mantas can be seen swooping across the current. End the dive at Shark Cave where white tips typically come to rest. Other common fish species are grouper and Napoleon wrasse.

**Tiputa Reef** - On the ocean side of the pass the reef plateaus out at 20m into a magnificent coral garden. Schools of barracuda, turtles, white tip reef sharks, small wrasse and many colourful reef fish species can be seen. Mantas put in an occasional appearance, bottlenose dolphins too.

**Deep Blue** - Or simply “The Blue” is the deep water on the ocean side of Tiputa Pass. Here we drop divers directly from the boat to descend to 20m and hang in the blue as the sharks are tempted up to the shallower depths to check out the divers. Expect to see grey reef, silky and silver tip sharks as well as bottlenose dolphins.

**Nuhi Nuhi** - A shallow coral garden where angel fish, butterfly fish, anthias and all manner of small creatures can be spotted. Look out for leaf fish.

**Mypristis** - The coral reef acts as a nursery for grey reef sharks in season. Typically, divers can see large numbers of marbled groupers and many anemones with resident clown fish.

**Avatuoro Pass** - Strong currents are to be expected but bring forth a wide range of pelagic species from reef sharks to tuna and the occasional sailfish.
Apataki Atoll

Tehere Pass - Drift along with the strong currents through the pass and enjoy the hundreds of blackfin grey reef sharks hunting fusiliers. Tuna, dolphins and swordfish can also be seen. The seabed and wall consist more of rubble than coral reef so simply drift in the current and enjoy the spectacle of the large pelagics.

Pakaka Pass - A more gentle drift than the Tehere Pass brings you through a pristine coral garden with table and staghorn corals. Silver tip and black tip reef sharks are seen darting in about the shallow corals, whilst numerous eagle rays are frequently sighted.

Toau Island

Otugi Pass - The 400m wide channel is best dived on an incoming tide for the schools of blackfin sharks and silvertips.

Teahuroa - The outer reef wall is where huge schools of snapper congregate. Reef sharks, Napoleon wrasse, barracuda, surgeon fish and big-eyes join them, whilst manta ray sightings are possible too.

Fakarava North

Garue Pass - The northernmost channel of Fakarava Atoll is one of the best sites in the region for consistent shark sightings. The pass itself is 1600m wide and should only be dived at slack water due to the very strong currents. Starting at the outer wall we encounter the huge “wall of sharks” where hundreds of blackfins congregate. Black tip, white tip, hammerhead, tiger, silky and oceanic white tip are amongst the other species seen.

Napoleon wrasse, surgeon fish and the typical schools of big-eyes and yellow snapper swarm over the reefs, joined by turtles, morays and lionfish. In June and July, large numbers of grouper aggregate to spawn, a truly spectacular sight. Manta rays also visit.

Maiuru - A submerged plateau on the outer edge of the pass, levels out at 18m into a lovely hard coral garden. At the ‘drop off’ you can encounter shark activity, while over the reef paddletail snapper and barracuda form large schools. Manta rays and eagle rays come by for cleaning and a quick meal and there are plenty of smaller creatures including nudibranchs and crabs to spot amongst the corals and sponges.

Ohutu - The second plateau starts at 12m and drops to 30m with vibrant corals this is a superb place to watch manta rays.

Restaurant Pier - This shallow site is perfect for an afternoon dive where schools of snapper, black tip reef sharks and Napoleon wrasse are common with a stunning atmosphere for photography.
**Fakarava South**

**Tumakohua** - The southern pass of Fakarava is just as dramatic as the north, though only 200m across, it can be dived with both incoming and outgoing tides. Big schools of blackfin sharks can be seen in the deeper water while along the shallower reef black tips dart about. Manta rays and eagle rays are also frequently seen.

Guests taking our 10-night itineraries will also have the option to dive the following areas:

**Tikehau Island**

In 1987 Jacques-Yves Cousteau dubbed Tikehau as “the richest atoll on the face of the earth”, and it is easy to understand why with schools of sharks, manta rays and lovely corals.

**Tuheiava Pass** - A channel dive that provides predictable encounters with grey reef and white tip reef sharks, schooling snappers in huge numbers and dolphins. Turtles and solitary barracudas are also seen.

**The Shark Hole** - Diving down a vertical break in the reef brings you through schooling sharks onto even bigger schools of snapper. The archway at 50m is adorned with anemones. The Old Pearl Farm - is THE place for watching mantas as they come to the reef for cleaning.

**Kauehi Island**

**Outer Wall** - The sloping outer wall of Kauehi Island is encrusted with huge hard coral formations and sponges. Butterfly fish, surgeon fish, banner fish and snappers all form large schools over the reef. Puffer fish, morays, tuna, barracuda, wrasse and lionfish are a common sight, while mantas, blackfin sharks, eagle rays and the occasional hammerhead make up the larger visitors. Great for spotting leaf fish and nudibranchs.

Water temperatures in French Polynesia range from 24-28°C (75-82°F) with June-October being the coldest months. For most guests a 3mm long wetsuit will be sufficient, however those who feel the cold easily may wish to bring thicker exposure protection.

Should you have any questions or queries concerning the dive sites or whether this itinerary is suitable for your experience level, please contact our reservations team info@masterliveaboards.com who will be pleased to assist and advise you.