



The main island of Tikehau isn't much to look at – it's a remote coral atoll whose flat surface never rises more than a few inches above sea level. But don't be fooled by appearances: it's worth coming here for the diving alone. What's more, just a fifteen-minute boat ride away is the small private motu that is home to the luxurious Pearl Beach Resort.

tikehau



HOTEL pearl beach tikehau

Established in 1990, this oasis of a resort was substantially remodelled and expanded in 2001. Built in the traditional Polynesian style, with palm-thatched roofs and woven bamboo walls, it now boasts thirty-eight rooms. Virtually all have air-conditioning, but the island's constant wind and efficient ceiling fans mean you probably won't need it. Leave doors and windows open and you will be lulled to sleep by the sound of lapping water, as that is all there is to hear.

You can choose to stay on the beach or over the water. The beach bungalows are set amid waving palms on a thin strip of pinkish sand, which is not exactly powdery but does offer good shallow swimming and snorkelling; these rooms are all the same size and feature raised decks and internal-external bathrooms. The overwater rooms come as standard bungalows, most of which enjoy views over the lagoon, and premium bungalows, which have the added plus of direct access to the lagoon.

For the best and biggest rooms, make a beeline for the newest overwater suites. These are reached via a 300ft timber walkway stretching over the transparent lagoon, and are even more tranquil; for the ultimate in seclusion, opt for room 45 at the very end of the resort.

at a glance

Airport	Tikehau via Papeete
Airlines	Air Tahiti Nui, Air New Zealand, Air France, Lan Chile
Transfer time	15 mins by boat
Rooms	38 (most air-conditioned)
Staff ratio	3+
Activities	Bird island trip, village trip, desert island picnics, kayaking, pool, volleyball, pétanque
Services	Telephone, television, CD player, room service
Children	12+
Power type	2-pin round
Currency	French Pacific franc, US dollar
GMT	-10
Telephone	+689 962300
Website	www.pearlresorts.com/tikehau
Booking	www.diveinstyle.com





Visible from space and stretching halfway up the eastern coast of Australia, the Great Barrier Reef is home to an incredible diversity of marine life. From the cooler waters in the south to the more temperate waters in the north, you'll find some fifteen hundred species of fish alone, as well as over four hundred kinds of coral.

This colossus of a barrier reef has not been immune to the effects of El Niño and global warming, but somehow the north seems to have escaped – most notably around Ribbon Reef 10, a few miles from Lizard Island. Remote enough for you to escape the hordes of day-trippers, Lizard Island gives you access to the kind of diving that is normally the exclusive preserve of live-aboards.

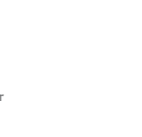
A three-hour flight from Sydney takes you to Cairns, the jumping-off spot for Lizard Island. While Cairns itself is nothing special, it's worth exploring the coast running north towards Cape Tribulation, which is unique for having more than two million acres of rainforest running directly into the ocean.

While the Great Barrier Reef is protected as a World Heritage site, Lizard Island enjoys the status of a marine park. It seems almost contradictory for such a pristine natural environment to be paired with a world-class hotel, yet that's exactly what makes this the perfect place to discover the world's largest reef system.

australia



ABOVE
Clouds of butterflyfish congregate at Tapu and can literally envelop divers, especially when there is a lemon shark feeding.



ABOVE
A wary peregrinefish, which can balloon to several times its normal size when frightened.

RIGHT
A feeding frenzy of grey reef shark at Muri Muri, doing really doesn't get better than this.



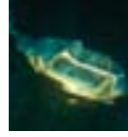
ABOVE
A feeding manta ray, seen on an afternoon snorkel.

RIGHT
Snorkelling from the hotel dock, you can swim with families of beautiful spotted eagle ray.



BELOW
A night-time snorkel at the hotel dock guarantees you a close encounter with a manta ray.

ABOVE
An inquisitive grey reef shark.



It's quite simple: if you don't enjoy diving with sharks and manta rays, Bora Bora is not for you; if you do, then this is world-class diving for all levels of experience, with more guaranteed pelagic action than virtually anywhere in the world. Add what may be the best snorkelling on the planet, and you have a very special result. 'Awesome', for once, is no exaggeration.

DIVING

Tapu is probably the island's most famous site: as the only pass to the ocean, it is literally thick with life, most of which wants to be your friend. So good is the diving here that if you were allowed just one dive in Bora Bora, this should be it; non-divers can equally enjoy the sights from a yellow eight-seater submarine. Black-tip reef shark, Napoleon wrasse and lemon shark prowl the drop-off at about sooft, while large moray eels, turtles and dense clouds of butterflyfish swim along the gently sloping walls of the massive plate and cabbage corals.

The trip to Muri Muri outside the reef can treat you to spinner dolphins or humpback whales even before you get wet. Then a backward roll drops you straight into a scene out of a James Bond movie, with tens of black-tip and grey reef sharks circling beneath you. It's best to descend quickly – you'll need little encouragement – to explore the sloping wall of coral, where there's a good chance of spotting hawksbill turtle before the reef descends into the abyss; afterwards drift with the current and you're back in the movie. While you hang onto the mooring line for your safety stop, look up to see all hell breaking loose; a tuna head thrown overboard creates a feeding frenzy and a shower of broken sharks' teeth, which you can catch in your hand as they float down.

at a glance

- Sites** 100
- Level** Easy to advanced
- Visibility** 100ft outside reef; 40ft inside reef
- Must-dive** Muri Muri, Tapu
- Snorkelling** Superb on house reef, very good from dive boat
- Wetsuits** 3mm
- Coral** Excellent
- Marine life** Grey reef shark, lemon shark, black-tip reef shark, manta ray, eagle ray, cutback of humpnose, humpback whale, tuna, Napoleon wrasse, Anguill
- Other** Hypobaric chamber on Tahiti (in hrs, night dives)

DIVE
GO
STYLE french polynesia



The brainchild of architect Jean Louis Moreno, Hotel Maroma is nestled within a five-hundred acre coconut plantation blessed with a full bay and the finest white-sugar sand beach on the Riviera Maya. Although the property has since changed hands, the hotel remains true to Moreno's vision. What's more, tight architectural controls mean Maroma still enjoys the best and least-developed strip of real estate on Mexico's Caribbean coast.

yucatán peninsula



HOTEL hotel maroma

The road leading to Maroma is typically low-key. Leaving behind the manicured lawns and palm-lined avenues of other hotels, you turn off onto a mile-long track of sand and gravel through an ecological reserve of natural jungle. Finally you arrive at the oasis that is Maroma, and from the moment you enter the grounds you are made to feel welcome by warm, genuine smiles of the staff.

Maroma itself covers some twenty acres and unfolds as a series of intimate spaces. At its core is the beachside dining room, beyond which lies the tranquil main pool. The southern end of the resort hosts more recent additions to the complex, including a fitness room, spa and dive shop; the only minor downside is a nearby resort but there's so much space you'll hardly notice.

The most private of Maroma's fifty-eight rooms are above ground-level – rooms 1 to 4 front the beach and are particularly recommended, with rooms 2 and 4 offering the utmost in seclusion. The architectural style is a blend of both Mayan and Moorish, with soaring roofs in local palapa wood; rough white-plaster walls, bamboo-strip shutters and tiled floors define the interiors. Each room gives onto its own spacious terrace, where a traditional Mexican hammock hangs ready to lull you into a siesta.

at a glance

- Airport** Cancún
- Airlines** Air Mexico, American Airlines, Continental Airlines, Delta Airlines, US Air, United Airways
- Transfer time** 45 mins by car
- Rooms** 58 (all air-conditioned)
- Staff ratio** 3
- Activities** Mobile carts, kayaking, rain excursions, windsurfing, sunset cruises, fishing, golf, horse-riding, tennis, gym, pool, spa
- Services** Internet, shared television, room service
- Other** Mobile phones allowed
- Children** 16+
- Power type** 2-pin flat
- Currency** Mexican peso (US dollar widely accepted)
- GMT** -6
- Telephone** +986 8746000
- Website** www.maromahotel.com
- Booking** www.diveintyle.com



Located in Little Palm Island's sheltered harbour, where the Hollywood version of the PT 109 used to dock, this dive centre is just behind the spa and a short walk from any of the rooms. It may be small, but it has an excellent range of equipment that is regularly replaced. The whole operation is designed to make diving as painless as possible.



DIVE CENTER



The immaculate 28ft Island Girl can carry up to fourteen people, but given the size of the resort its full capacity is rarely put to the test; in any case, dive groups are kept to a maximum of six. It's quite a wet boat, so it's a good idea to carry a dry bag.

Since sites such as Looe Key and Adolphus Busch are very close, there is no need for catered day trips. Nonetheless, the boat always carries cold drinks and plenty of towels. If you feel chilly after a long dive (you can easily spend ninety minutes underwater at Looe Key), you even get to wear a long, lined waterproof overcoat that is guaranteed to keep you warm. This is one boat you will never get cold on, regardless of conditions – all eventualities have been covered.

The centre also makes it easy for you to dive further afield. If you have time to take in the Thunderbolt wreck up in Marathon, you will be driven thirty minutes or so north to the small but perfectly organized Deep Blue Dive Center. This runs you out to the site some twenty minutes away, and then to a second, shallower dive. If you want to make a day of it, on your way back you can stop for lunch at one of the many restaurants overlooking the ocean. In short, this is a quality set-up and a seamless extension to the resort.

at a glance

- Boats** 28ft (wet, covered)
- Group size** 6
- Instructors** 2
- Languages** English
- Courses** All PADI
- Children** 16+
- Other** Nitrox rebreathers, dinks, wash down, private charters, underwater scooter hire



EGYPT

HOTEL amanpuri

The hotel may be small in room numbers with only 40 villas perched on the hillside, but as always with an Aman, there is endless space. For those wanting their own pools or just more space for a family, just around the corner, invisible from the resort are a further 30 larger Villas.

The rooms are basically all identical, 'simply luxurious', a generous bedroom with enormous double bed opening into an equally generous bathroom with twin separate hand basins, shower and bath. Copious quantities of towels and Aman toiletries abound. Built in a traditional style with soaring roofs, all the rooms are hung off the hillside and suspended on stilts accessed by raised walkways and steep stairs, a modern interpretation of a traditional local village successfully evoking a Thai-Buddhist ambience, and executed without the slightest hint of a Disneyesque parody. It is simply incredibly stylish.

The rooms themselves, whilst wonderful, are not long on views. They are cool, timber dominated retreats away from the heat, and casually air conditioned so that you can still hear the birdsong. What they all also share is a stylish raised terrace dominated by a shady chill zone or 'sala', and it here where you find your view; and that is also where the price differential comes into play. The very best rooms, 103/105, with a full on sea view will set you back twice that of a garden room, surrounded by lush bamboos and other mature tropical plants providing a screen of privacy; Partial Ocean view comes at a more modest premium; simply put, the more of the ocean you want to see, the more it will cost you; in effect you exchange the bamboo for the beach.

This is not really a resort for the infirm and would unquestionably give Building control a fit over disabled access. Stairs are the order of the day, although if you cannot face it, then a smiling Thai will drive you up and down the hill in an Amanised Golf buggy. The Hotel itself is perched some 80 wide amphitheatre - like steps.





EGYPT

The top of the reef is always only a meter or feet beneath the surface, ensuring that not a second of any of your dives is wasted. Corals, both hard and soft abound and the variety of sea life is amazing. Squirrelfish, Archfish are everywhere and even more numerous are the Lion fish, in every size and colour.



Go now whilst you can. Apparently these will be amongst the first islands to disappear as a result of our best efforts to pollute the planet, and they will be the greatest loss, both to divers, holiday makers, and most importantly, the Maldivians. (An aside here; apparently Australia has done a deal with the Maldivian Government to accept all their citizens in return for supposed oil riches that lie beneath.) These islands are unique. Stretching in a north-south ribbon, strung out like a necklace of aquamarines over some 500 miles of the Indian Ocean, well off the west coast of Sri Lanka, these 1,190 islands are still totally unspoilt and offer a breathtaking sight from the plane even before you get there. This is primarily courtesy of the fact that only about 15% of the islands are inhabited and that virtually all the hotels occupy an entire single island, and none of them are over two stories high. Consequently, there are more than enough islands to go around between locals and tourist leaving local culture and life relatively unscathed.

In addition, the Government can easily see that their entire economy is dependent on Tourism, and have sensibly rationed the islands that they are opening to development. Consequently, tourism is pretty evenly spread between the North and South Atolls with

maldives



Tucked behind its own private beach on a small granite headland, Pitrizza occupies a prime position on Sardinia's wild but exclusive shoreline. First opened in 1963 and substantially refurbished in 1990, its design is in keeping with the rest of the Costa Smeralda: nature has been respected, and the grounds and architecture are in perfect harmony with the rugged landscape of Sardinia's northeastern coast.

sardinia



HOTEL pitrizza

The rustic, mostly single-storey stone buildings blend into the background so well that they look almost like hobbit-dwellings, albeit very stylish ones. The swathes of green grass that link them to the beach also run up and over them – it's common to see gardeners mowing the lawn, perched on the roof.

Pitrizza's fifty-five rooms are scattered across the grounds in small clusters. Understated in design, they feature white-plastered walls accented by local tiles and local Sardinian furniture, including a king-sized bed. A panoramic sheet of glass separates your bedroom from the terrace, so you can enjoy the view even with the windows closed. But would you want to? The air is saturated with the sweet, gentle scent of jasmine, a welcome perfume that wafts into your room. If this isn't reason enough to switch off the air-conditioning, most people leave their windows open just for the sound of the lapping sea, which you can hear from anywhere in the resort.

The rooms are connected by a network of terracotta brick-tiled paths that wind through the hotel's olive trees, bougainvillea, roses, hibiscus and oleander. Many of them overlook the Med, which naturally command a premium; if you want the very best, go for a room west of the main clubhouse. Even more upscale (and with

at a glance

- Airport** Olbia
- Airlines** EasyJet, Meridiana
- Transfer time** 30 mins by taxi
- Rooms** 55 villas (all air-conditioned)
- Staff ratio** 2:1
- Activities** Watersports, golf, tennis, squash, horse-riding, fishing, go-karting, SPA, pool, gym
- Services** Internet, telephone, television, DVD player, room service
- Children** All ages
- Power type** 2-pin round
- Currency** Euro
- GMT** +1 (Standard), +2 (Summer)
- Telephone** +39 070 932111
- Website** www.sonevafushi.com
- Booking** www.divestyle.com



If you have just bought a suitcase full of new Manolos specially to show off on holiday, don't bother to read on. The very first thing you are handed on arrival at Sonevafushi is a 'No News, No Shoes' bag to put them in, and from then on, you will only have the sand between your toes. This sets the tone for your experience of this truly exceptional resort – it is simple luxury, or rather, luxuriously simple. Every aspect nudges perfection, starting with the location.

sonevafushi



HOTEL sonevafushi

85 Miles North West of the capital Male, on the edge of the Baa atoll, Soma and Eva Shivadashani bought a 100 year lease on a small island, just 1,400 by 400 meters, ringed by perfect fine white sand with waving palms, and now home to some 65 rooms. For a boutique hotel, this seems a large number, but the beauty of Sonevafushi is that they have managed to make it feel like 6 rather than 60. It is incredibly intimate and individual and is designed with literally unbelievable attention to detail, utterly original flair and style, and meticulous care for the environment. Their strict eco credentials are seemingly an avenue of endless inspiration for the Shivadashanis.

A thirty five minute seaplane ride from the immaculate private Soneva Lounge at Male airport (massages available if you have a longer than normal wait) transports you onto a turquoise lagoon adjacent to a pure white sandbank and a small floating dock, the 'airport'. From here a three minute ride in a Dhoni, a local style of boat, and your feet touch the sand. The long timber dock is regularly watered to cool it, and is lined with numerous terracotta water pots with coconut ladles. First impressions of a few low, white plastered structures set amongst palms and simple tables and chairs give way to the realisation that true luxury comes in many forms.

at a glance

- Location** Point Ratti, B.P. 1, Noonu, Bora Bora, 98731, French Polynesia
- Languages** French, English
- Currency** Central Pacific franc and US dollar
- GMT** +10
- Airport** Tahiti Faa'a International Airport (Papeete)
- Airlines** Air New Zealand, Air Tahiti Nui, Qantas
- Transfer time** 45 mins. by plane, then 20 mins. by boat
- Activities** Island tour, fishing, sailing, aqua safari, desert island picnics, helicopter tours, tennis, 50-room massage, private plunge pools (some rooms)
- Telephone** +686 914 416
- Fax** +686 914 416
- E-mail** hotel@sonevafushi.com
- Web site** www.sonevafushi.com
- Rates from** US\$200





AUSTRALIA

LEFT

The colours and details found on a giant clam would inspire any designer.

RIGHT

The beautiful Napoleon wrasse is under threat; in the Far East, it is prized for its Mick Jagger lips.

