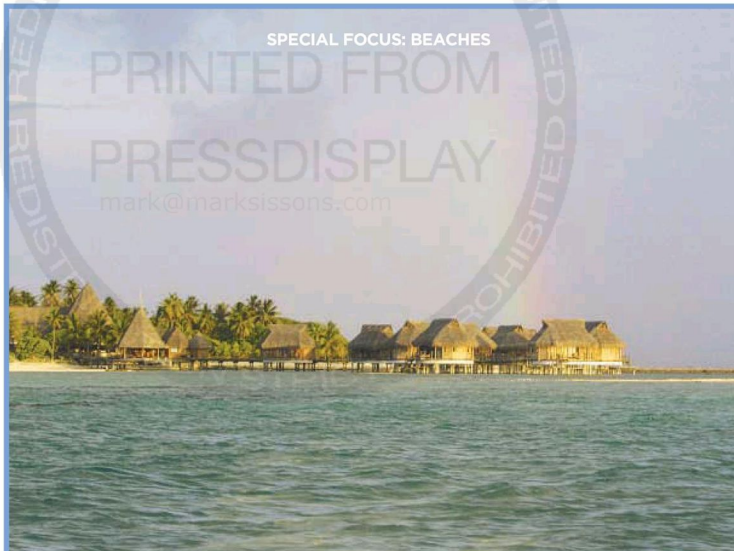




INSIDE

FAMILY TRAVEL: Living the lake life 2K
TROUBLESHOOTER: Credit card drama 2K
NEW MEXICO: Advice for treasure hunters 3K
FLORIDA: 5 freebies in the Panhandle 5K



A rainbow greets visitors arriving by boat to Tikehau.

Atoll tale

Stunning yet fragile, Tuamotu Archipelago hangs in the balance

Story and photos by SHANNON MELNYK
 Special Contributor

I am approaching a rainbow. It's perhaps an auspicious nod to my much-anticipated odyssey to the world's largest and most isolated chains of coral atolls in the world.

I've journeyed to the Tuamotu Archipelago in French Polynesia, where the atolls and islands sit dubiously close to sea level. My boat points toward Tikehau, whose name when translated implies a peaceful landing. Hues of blush and amethyst crown the thatched huts in the distance.

A wicked flash storm greets us as I arrive, but it doesn't detract from the overall peace of what is often considered one of the most stunning yet least-traveled gems in all of Polynesia. I am staying at the Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort, a small collection of over-the-water bungalows that stays true to the South Pacific aesthetic of woven *niau*, teak, *koahu* and coconut.

Tikehau is known for its ecological wonder: pink sand beaches, azure waters and what Jacques Cousteau called one of the highest concentrations of fish on the planet. Visitors here experience a natural beauty rarely seen.

The next day we take an excursion by sea to Bird Island with Bichou Raufan, our charming Tuamotu host. We whirl past an abandoned pearl farm built on stilts and dock at an avian utopia. Thousands of birds are circling.



A red-footed booby chick awaits its meal. Beware the dive-bombing mama birds.



Locals take an afternoon break in Tikehau's pristine waters.

Much of the Tuamotu Archipelago sits dubiously close to sea level.



GULF COAST



Grand Bear Golf Course
 The par-4 17th hole on Jack Nicklaus' Grand Bear Golf Course is a sharp dogleg next to the Big Biloxi River.

Golfing among magnolias

Mississippi's 'golf coast' an unexpected top spot for value

By DALE LEATHERMAN
 Special Contributor

Mississippi's tourism literature urges visitors, "Find your true South." For golfers, the compass needle might equate over fine layouts in the state's Hills and Pines regions, or along the eponymous river defining its western border. But the compass will have good reason to settle literally on true South — the foot of the state that meets the Gulf of Mexico.

Golf Digest ranks the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the country's top 10 golf destinations for value. Layouts by Davis Love III, Tom Fazio, Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Jerry Pate consistently earn high ratings from *Golf Digest*, *Golfweek* and *Golf*. *Forbes* magazine has called the region one of the best-kept secrets in golf vacations.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast package is enticing: beaches, barbecue, fresh seafood, Southern hospitality, great hotels and casinos — and some of the country's best golf venues. If you're a golf purist, the courses are reason enough to visit, but who doesn't like icing on the cake?

Last month I played with PGA Champions' Tour pro Rocco Mediate in the Mississippi Gulf Resort Classic Pro-Am at Fallen Oak, a Fazio design. Mediate said the course, one of the toughest on the tour, was intriguing. I must add stunning, not only for its perfect condition but for its scope and variety.

Fallen Oak, reserved for use by guests at Biloxi's Beau Rivage Casino Resort, is 20 minutes from the beachfront hotel. Fazio chose the remote location wisely, then worked magic with marshes, lakes, streams, mixed forest and hilly terrain.

His deep, scalloped bunkers intimidate, and his sculpted greens confound the putting, but the layout is very easy on the eye.

Another remote location near Biloxi is home to the Preserve Golf Club. The Jerry Pate creation borders the 1,500-acre Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. The setting is serene, with isolated holes and native grasses and wetlands accenting smoothly rolling fairways and white-sand bunkers.

Arnold Palmer's contribution to the Magnolia State is the Bridges Golf Club in Bay St. Louis. It's a tribute to the master, ranked in the state's top 10 and the country's top 50 casino courses. The layout has more than 21 bridges spanning natural areas. It was the world's first resort course to open. Arnold's

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MISSISSIPPI GOLF COAST
 COURTESY OF MISSISSIPPI GOLF COAST
 COURTESY OF MISSISSIPPI GOLF COAST
 COURTESY OF MISSISSIPPI GOLF COAST



Photos by Shannon Melnyk/Special Contributor

The Tuamotu Archipelago's concentration of fish is irresistible to snorkelers.

Nearly pristine paradise awaits Tuamotu visitors

Continued from Page 1K

snorkeling and nesting here. Bachou points out a smattering of species — many of which are near enough to touch — too near, it soon becomes clear. “Too close, too close!” Bachou yells, when out of nowhere I am dive-bombed by a protective matron who has decided I am a threat to her nest. I then see that her babies are in full view. Nearby, an egg of a white stern sits cozily alone on a tree branch. Red-footed boobies and brown noddies make themselves known.

Later, while leisurely snorkeling at Bird Island's dock, we spy a variety of exotic fish, including reef sharks and napoleons. One lucky explorer discovers a shiny salmon-hued conch on the ocean floor.

Bachou has another treasure in store as we fit off to a tiny *motu*, where two traditionally dressed Tahitian women have prepared a meal of

Polynesian picnic cuisine.

This is my auntie and my friend,” Bachou smiles, eager to have everyone behave as family. We all sit together and dine on barbecue chicken on banana leaves, seasoned rice, coconut bread and *tu oia*, the must-have South Pacific twist on ceviche: raw red tuna marinated in an aromatic blend of lime juice and coconut milk, also known as *poisson cru*.

The rest of the afternoon is enjoyed snorkeling, exploring and napping on this tiny, remote locale on the map. We return to the resort in time for another spectacular storm that makes us so excited, we jump in the water rather than retreating to our bungalows.

Night brings fine cuisine of lobster *en croûte* with coral butter and *macaire* sauce with *uru*. Then I retreat to my Robinson Crusoe-esque abode, where each night a printed story is left on my bed.

Tikehau offers other simple

ways to unwind. One can wander through Tuberahera village and chat with the locals or visit the Manea spa to succumb to a scented-ritual that primes the body to relax and the mind for reflection.

Days later, I reemerge with a scientist friend on the island of Moorea, where much South Pacific environmental research is assessed and the Pearl Beach Resort has an idyllic but more contemporary sister property. Pleased that I had a chance to visit the atoll, my friend says climate scientists predict the Tuamotu Archipelago will disappear in the coming years.

Water levels are rising faster around the islands of the South Pacific than anywhere else on the planet, and at the rate that we continue to experience climate change, it is said Tikehau is in danger of being submerged.

If globally we cannot become more accountable, it's



A local guide waves goodbye after a playful traditional blow of the conch.

possible we may see it disappear within 10 or 20 years,” he says.

I ponder on the preciousness of what I have seen and wonder if, from the spirit world, the Polynesian warriors that once lived here will be able to defend Tikehau one more time.

Shannon Melnyk is a freelance writer in Vancouver, British Columbia.

When you go

To reach Tikehau, take Air Tahiti Nui from Los Angeles to Papeete, on the island of Tahiti. From there, take a short connecting flight on Air Tahiti to Tikehau, where a Pearl Beach Resort shuttle will deliver you to your resort via boat. Lodgings: smnhotels.com/resort/tikehau. Currency: French Pacific Franc (XPF or CFP)

dfw
travel, stay, discover

AAA
Travel

SAVE UP TO \$1,060* DURING THE
AAA TRAVEL SPRING SALE
APRIL 15 - 27, 2013

Receive exclusive sale offers and Member Benefits on cruises, guided vacations and more!

Limited-time Offers May Include:

- Up to \$1,060* per couple savings
- Onboard Value Booklet valued at over \$350**
- \$200 per couple discount on all-inclusive Europe vacations*
- And more!

AAA Members may also receive:

- Onboard credits of up to \$1,000 per couple on select sailings!†
- Complimentary Regent Choice shore excursion!††
- And more!

HURRY! OFFERS ARE ONLY VALID WHEN YOU BOOK BY APRIL 27, 2013!
CONTACT YOUR AAA TRAVEL AGENT FOR MORE INFORMATION!
Call: 888-467-4957 • Press 2 • Visit any of the 14 AAA Locations in the Metroplex

ON 2013 EUROPE & BRITAIN ITINERARIES BY APRIL 30TH TO SAVE UP TO \$1,280* PER COUPLE! HURRY!
*Savings may be reduced or withdrawn as demand for your selected tour increases.

INSIGHT VACATIONS
The Art of Discovery

Contact ARTA TRAVEL
Today to book your next vacation!
972-422-4000
Intelligent Solutions for Travel Since 1980.

GLENN ROSE, TEXAS
“Dinosaur Capital of Texas”

Fossil Rim Wildlife Center
Dinosaur Valley State Park
Brazos & Palmyra Rivers – The Promises
More than 25 Bed & Breakfasts
Historic Downtown
254-897-3081
www.glenrose.texas.net

To advertise in
Travel, Stay, Discover
contact David Ferster at
214-977-7931 or
dferster@dmmedia.com

EUROPE SPECIAL
15-day HEART OF EUROPE Circle Tour of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, France, Belgium & Holland by Image Tours

\$3890
\$300 SAVINGS

You Could Win a Trip to Universal Orlando® Resort!

Now in High Def 3-D!

UNIVERSAL Orlando RESORT

Vacation Like You Mean It

Join the battle on the thrilling new TRANSFORMERS™: The Ride-3D, opening this summer; enjoy the heartwarming and hilarious Despicable Me Minion Mayhems; experience the magic and excitement of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter™; swing into action on The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man™, and more. With two spectacular theme parks, non-stop nightlife, and world-class on-site hotels, Universal Orlando® Resort takes places you never thought you'd go.

ENTER FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN A
UNIVERSAL ORLANDO® FAMILY VACATION FOR FOUR INCLUDING:

- Admission to both Universal Studios® and Universal's Islands of Adventure® theme parks
- Tickets to Blue Man Group
- One Day at Wet 'n Wild® Orlando waterpark
- Accommodations in the heart of it all at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando®
- Airfare courtesy of VISITFLORIDA.COM

CONTEST ENDS ON MAY 25, 2013
REGISTER TO WIN AT: www.dallasnews.com/universalorlando

briefing @DallasMorningNews dallasnews VISITFLORIDA.COM

HARRY POTTER, characters, names and related indicia are trademarks of and © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Harry Potter Publishing Rights © J.K. Rowling. All Rights Reserved.