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TROPICAL WONDER: AirTahiti Nui's best roundtrip fare

By Anne Z. Cooke, Photos by SteveHaggerty/ColorWorld

Have you seen some of the deep-discount fares that airlines advertised lately, hoping to entice travelers able to go on a moment's notice? LAN, Ecuador's national airline, recently advertised a roundtrip ticket from the U.S. to Peru for \$529. Alaska Airlines listed a roundtrip flight from Los Angeles to Vancouver for \$226. South African Airways offered a flight Johannesburg for \$869 roundtrip. And airTahiti Nui posted a ticket to New Zealand at \$1148 roundtrip, the same price as a ticket to Tahiti, with a three night stopover on that most famous of South Pacific islands.



Kayaking for two in the world's bluest lagoon, Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort, Tuamotu Islands.

Then airTahiti Nui dug deeper, offering an even lower fare to Tahiti, one that was hard to ignore. Round trip fares from the U.S. are now \$998 per person, available for purchase and ticketing through October 30. The price includes taxes, fees and related surcharges and you can travel between now and February 28 (excluding holidays). Whether you can find a ticket on the day you want to travel will depend, of course, on the number of seats available.

Why now? Some experts say that the drop in gas prices has finally worked its way down to consumers, enabling cheaper fares. Others note that with summer holidays over and travelers back at work or in school, the airlines hope to fill empty seats likely between now and the holidays. But there's a hitch with these super-discount fares. In most cases, travelers have to purchase tickets right away and travel within a few weeks. That's a restriction that doesn't work for 80 percent of the traveling public, including me.



Bird Island's residents, nesting, feeding and flying, are unafraid of visitors, on Tikehau, Tuamotu Archipelago.

And there's the weather to consider. Though Tahiti and its neighbor islands (together they're known as the Society Islands) are always tropical and warm, with temperatures that vary only two or three degrees in any month, November through April is the rainy season. Occasional showers, a mix of sun and clouds and lots of rainbows will be the daily fare, bringing the world's most spectacular and fiery sunsets.

Unlike airTahiti's previous discount the \$998 fare doesn't include lodging. But the hotels in the earlier package, the Manava Hotel and the Pearl Beach Resort, both of which I've stayed in, are worth considering anyway. The Manava Hotel, on the highway overlooking the harbor, is a 15-minute taxi ride from the center of Papeete, the capital city. After a day shopping, the Manava's infinity pool, overlooking the harbor, is a perfect place for a refreshing dip and an enchanted evening watching the sun set behind Moorea, across the channel. Old timers complain that Papeete has become too busy and much too modern. But newcomers are delighted by this small South Pacific outpost's bustle, color and maritime atmosphere, ideal for sightseeing, shopping and of course, for its French-Polynesian restaurants.



A classic South Pacific sunset illuminates the sky, in Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands.

The other lodging choice is the Pearl Beach Resort, on Tahiti's north coast a bit farther from town. Tucked into a secluded garden setting overlooking a black sand beach, with an infinity pool with a view, this is a classic South Seas hideaway. It feels far from the hurly burly but is still close enough to Papeete for a day in town. Neither the Manava nor the Pearl Beach is directly on the sand but beaches are close by. Two other resort choices are Le Meridien Tahiti and the InterContinental Resort Tahiti. I haven't seen either one of these, but you can view the location and rooms online. Like most resorts, rates for all four include a full buffet breakfast with hot and cold dishes, hard boiled eggs, omelets, bacon, sliced meats, fresh fruit, bread, pastries, cereal, coffee and tea.

For more, tweet the author at @anneontheroad. Call airTahiti at [\(877\) 824-4846](tel:877-824-4846), or go to www.airtahitinui.com.

Photos courtesy of Steve Haggerty/Color World.