

Chartering in French Polynesia V1
Some Items not included in the Charter Guides
9-2019

<https://www.jacarandajourney.com/other-good-stuff>

We have received a number of questions on chartering in French Polynesia. I have taken the info that I passed on and put them into this document. Last year Linda and I put Jacaranda on a mooring and did a 2 week charter with our cousins. Currently we are year 5 in French Polynesia and have cruised extensively thru out the archipelago on Jacaranda. The following is based on questions for a 2 month charter that includes the Tuamotus but can equally be applied to one or two week charters in the Societies.

Navigation

General Info

We use a number of navigation systems. Ipad with iNavx (Navionics) is good in FP and for the most part accurate. The French have done a very good job with matching the old charts up with actual data. In most cases the electronic charts are very accurate on surveyed areas. Somewhat lacking inside the lagoons. But there is no accurate information in the (Tuamotus) lagoons of the atolls except maybe from the pass to the village. Navigating becomes all eyeball navigation.

We use Google Earth chartlets that we created and use them in OpenCPN for most all of our navigation. We look at the Navionics charts then switch to GE and back again. GE charts (see example below) are incredibly helpful as it shows bottom contour and based on color you can quickly determine safe depth.

Beware some of the interior of the atolls appear to be charted accurately by Navionics but the numbers for depth are just that random numbers with no accuracy at all!!

OpenCPN - Download the latest version of OpenCPN for your laptop if you haven't already done so. <https://opencpn.org/OpenCPN/info/downloadopencpn.html>

We use CM93 charts - Not great but adequate for FP.

Google Earth - We use Google earth (GE) charts we created. I have most all the GE charts of FP that I created located on our website in "Other Good Stuff" . See examples below of what the GE images look like in OpenCPN and the amount of data that can be viewed.

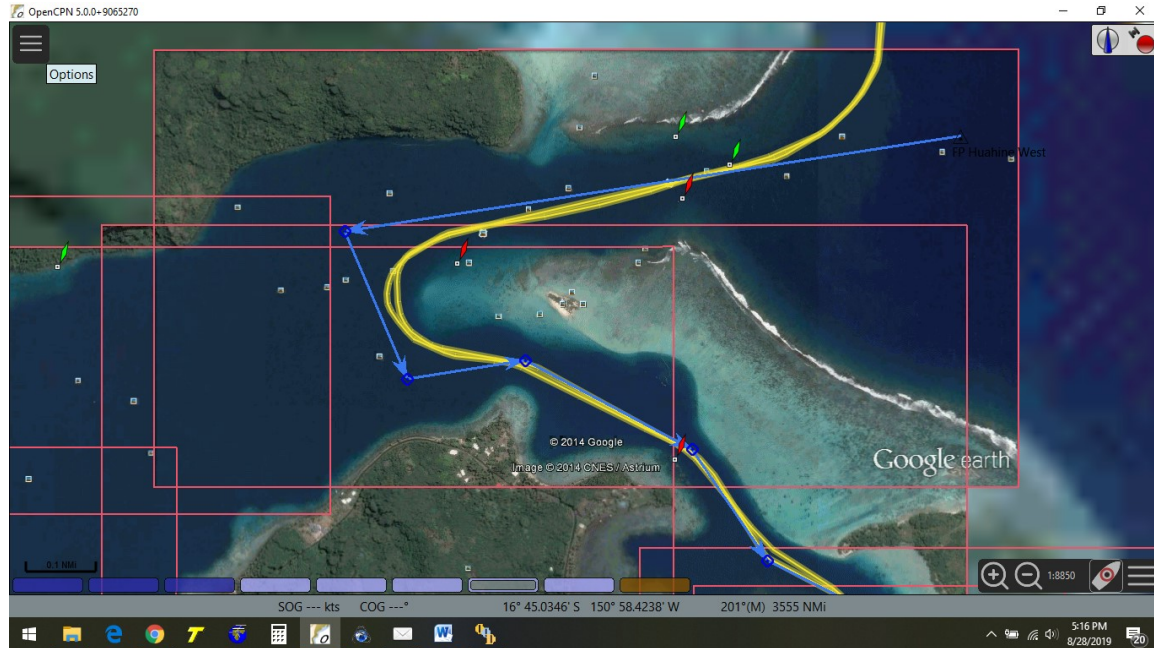
>>>You can download the Tuamotus and Societies GE chartlets from our website "Other Good Stuff" and then load them into OpenCPN. <<<<

Remember to have a gps plug in for your laptop. We use a small usb puck gps.
https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008200LHW/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o08_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1

See the GE example of the pass from the atoll of Ahe with our track in yellow using one of the chartlets created while online. Each of the red squares is a more magnified view that can be zoomed in for a closer look. The yellow box on the very bottom of the screen is clicked to show chart. Blue box is clicked to show GE images and as you zoom in more blue boxes will appear as a choice.



Another example : Pass Farerea, Huahine. Blue line is an established track. Yellow line is actual course.



SASPlanet a Russian program that uses and stores satellite shots. Google Earth, Bing, etc. It includes Navionics charts as well. You zoom in on an area that you want to see and the satellite image is saved in cache for offline use. You can also connect a gps to this program and it will show the boat, track etc.

Download SASPlanet: <http://gdayii.ca/Downloads/Sasplanet.zip>

Ovital Maps & MotionX

At first we thought these apps which run on our Ipad where perfect method that was fast to use and very portable. Using satellite images from GE or Bing it was easy to zoom in and images were automatically saved for offline use. After spending a number of hours collecting GE images for a couple of the Leewards we later learned while using them offline that images were deleted. WTF after doing the work to save them they disappeared. Contacting Ovital Maps for help was a waste of time. MotionX has a finite limit on the number of images saved and oldest one gets deleted when more current ones are saved. So we can not recommend buying either of these two products

Societies - Straight forward navigation using Navionics and GE. Most of the lagoons are well marked. BUT you still need to keep an eye out while in the lagoons for bommies (coral heads). Good info from charter companies - See our website "[Other Good Stuff](#)" for charts and sailing directions for the leewards (Raiatea, Tahaa, Huahine, Bora Bora etc. We still rely on the GE charts in OpenCPN to spot bottom for anchoring, depth and bommies.

Tuamotus - The only thing that we use in the lagoons is GE chartlets and keeping a watch often from the bow. In the lagoons we move only between 9am and 3pm and keep the sun is behind you. Some atolls from the pass to the village are marked and charted so using Navonics is ok but still keep a sharp lookout!

Every year numerous boats hit coral bommies in the lagoons of the Tuamotus so a good watch is critical! GE does NOT show every bommie so beware!

You may also know that the passes into the lagoon can have very strong currents. Sometimes the current can reach 8+ knots and if wind is against the tide you will get very large standing waves resulting very rough pass conditions. If the trades are blowing hard more water is being pushed over the reef into the lagoon and the only way for the water to exit is thru these passes. Imagine a plastic bottle full of water being squeezed empty.

SV TaB entering the atoll of Tahanea during a strong ebb. There is wind against current causing standing waves. Standing on shore watching this approach we were both aghast that they would try and enter at this time. It took them about 20 minutes sometimes with speeds as slow as .3 knot!



The other very important issue is timing. Going from atoll to atoll may require an overnight due to timing the pass, good light and needing to traverse the lagoon to get to a safe anchorage. Even if the distance is say 50 miles. It makes timing critical planning to arrive at slack, good light and picking a spot that is protected where you will anchor.

We have spent a year sailing the Tuamotus and visiting 10 atolls. Still every entry and exit is a bit stressful since we have seen first hand what a rowdy pass looks like and it's not pretty. Most often by waiting for slack water it's an easy entry or exit.

If you arrive at the pass and you see breaking waves on the inside of the pass the tide is flooding (incoming). If you see breaking waves on the outside of the pass the tide is ebbing (outgoing).

If your vessel has a strong engine you should be able to stretch the window for entering and exiting the lagoon. By staying to the side of the pass often lessens the current .

Weather

Starting around early July and extending thru Sept the trades occasionally get re-enforced and they are called Maramuu. They are almost always from the SE or ESE and blow solid 20-30+ knts. This causes issues in the passes of the Tuamotus as the lagoon overfills with water and changes the timing of slack water. .

Normal winter trade winds are from the ENE - SE. The SP convergence zone which moves like a snake across the SP usually strongest in the western pacific but does influence FP. Or low pressure / High pressure systems that pass south of FP when the troughs or fronts reach up and extend into FP. This brings squalls and rain to the area.

If you are in the Societies there are lots of places to safely position yourself for weather changes but the Tuamotus require careful attention to the weather as depending on what atoll you are in it could be 20-30 miles to reach the other side to find protection. These weather changes may require you to change anchorages to find shelter. 20+ miles of fetch can be tough.

See our website "Other Good Stuff" for weather sources we use in FP. The saildocs are free and can be used by anyone. If you are not familiar with this let me know and I will show you how it works.

For example from the weather document change : **Subscribe** pf.preiso36 (French Weather fax surface analysis 36 hour) to **send** pf.preiso36 and it will bring back the most current report

Cruising guides

1. See our website "Other Good Stuff" There are a number of older cruising guides that you may find helpful and navigation wise are still very good. "French Polynesia Cruising Guides out of print"

2. Download the following free guides.

Tuamotus: <http://www.svsoggypaws.com/files/The%20Tuamotus%20Compendium.pdf>

Societies: <http://www.svsoggypaws.com/files/The%20Societies%20Compendium.pdf>

3. Charter guides and charts from Tahiti yacht Charter located on our website "Other Good Stuff"

4. Huahine free tourist guide: <https://xdaysiny.com/huahine-travel-guide-french-polynesia/3/?fbclid=IwAR0nUWBEyIvdD8ILHxB6Wxq9JN4Zu0JNtrQm1IircHI9Exkze8oVeIsSFYw>

Internet

LOL this is something we often cry over. It's really terrible outside of Tahiti and very expensive. But for short term visitors there is <https://www.facebook.com/Tahitiwifi/> A company that rents you a small modem and you connect your device to it via cell towers and gain access to internet. Works well in the Societies but not so fast in the Tuamotus. Tahitiwifi is expensive but for less than a couple of months is better than setting up an account with Vini and getting a sim card etc. I think you can pick it up near the airport. Google Fi phones work well in FP and we both have one. Using them as a hotspot is an option.

In the Tuamotus almost every village has cell coverage. Just in some places it's not very strong others better. Rangiroa and Fakarava have decent internet others atolls not so good. If you cannot obtain weather - dinghy over and ask the local cruisers you see what reports they have available and are willing to share. Most all of the cruisers use Iridium or SSB radio to obtain weather

We use the following internet sites in addition to our daily reports listed above

<https://www.windy.com/?-16.750,-151.044,12>

Note the best choice is the ECMWF models as they are more accurate in FP

<https://meteo.pf/fr/isofronts?carte=preiso36>

<https://meteo.pf/fr/meteo-tuamotu-ouest?zone=21>

Predict Wind also works well

For FP forecasts see our weather list on "Other Good Stuff"

Anchoring

The Societies are a bit deeper in places especially Raiatea and Tahaa often 50' + is common. Where as Bora, Huahine, Tahiti are 20-40' or less

Tuamotus can be as shallow as 7' and in some places due to the coral you may have to anchor further out in 50' but that is uncommon

On our charter cat the chain was NOT marked so we had no clue how much chain we were using. Luckily we parked Jacaranda at the charter base in Raiatea and brought our tape measure and plastic zip ties from the boat so we could mark the chain. It made a huge difference in our anchoring ability to know how much chain we had out versus the depth. Now we know why the charter boats have such a poor track record of dragging everywhere. Bring a tape measure and zip ties with you to mark the chain.

In the Tuamotus we always anchored using floats on the chain to keep from getting the anchor fouled and protect the coral. We used pearl floats but you could use fenders until you find pearl floats on the reef. See Soggy Paws Tuamotus guide for pictures and a write up on how to do this. Bring a few carabiners with you as it makes it easy to hook to the chain



Fish Poisoning

Be sure to read our Ciguatera write up that Linda did on our website "Other Good Stuff" We never eat reef fish but some yachties do. It is like gambling with your health. The choice is yours but at least be educated about the issues.

Potable Water

It's not required to have a watermaker but it makes life MUCH easier and we highly recommend it. Having unlimited water for showers, washing clothes and rinsing gear off sure makes life more enjoyable. If you are staying in the leewards you can make do

without a watermaker as a few islands have public water available. If you venture to the Tuamotus it's a whole different story.

Leewards – there are a couple islands that have water available.

- Huahine it has been reported that water is available from the small wood dock near the yacht club in Fare. Not sure if this is potable water. Charter companies mention this in their write up. Also water is available on the main dock with a spigot close to the edge of the wharf. See dive shop for key.
- Bora Bora – Potable water is available from the large wood dock in front of Bloody Mary's restaurant. Be sure to ask permission and obtain the key from the bar

Tuamotus – All water is collected rain water.

- Fakarava – Water is available in limited amounts near the main dock in Rotava. Contact and pay at city council office near dock. This water is collected rain water and if its been a dry season may not be available. Bring your own jugs.
- The other 10 atolls that we have been to do not have public water for yachties. They can certainly provide small amounts of water in emergencies. In the atoll of Amanu it had not rained there for 2 months and the locals cisterns were very very low.

Suggested Itinerary for 2 months

Heading from the Societies (Raiatea -Tahiti) to the Tuamotus is almost 100% upwind. So adjust your schedule if you see a wind shift coming that you can make Tuamotus on one tack. Huahine to Fakarava is 311 miles at 069 magnetic

Tikehau is often a close reach from the leewards and from there you can jump further east as weather permits. From Raiatea to Tikehau is about 210 miles at 048 magnetic

My suggestion is to get as far east as you can - maybe shoot for Fakarava or Tahanea and then everything should be off the wind from there back to Tahiti.

Huahine is our favorite in the leewards. Especially the eastern side which does not get many boats. Least favorite is Bora Bora especially with the new anchoring regulations requiring you to use moorings that are unsafe!

Favorite Tuamotu Atoll - Tahanea No villages you will share the place with a few other yachts. Great pristine place.

By using the free Soggy Paws Compendium cruising guides(mentioned above) you can read ahead and see what interests you and make plans from there.

All the Societies have airports for family to fly in.

In the Tuamotus most atolls have airports but some are only serviced weekly. Fakarava and Rangiroa are serviced daily or sometimes 2x a day. Both are good for offloading and loading guests. In Fakarava both Fakarava Yacht Services and Pakakota Yacht Services can be contracted to pick up your guests. Or weather permitting you can anchor right in front of the airport and guests can walk about 40 meters from the airport to the dock – How cool is that!

Suggested Itinerary for 1-2 weeks

If you can swing two weeks you will be much happier as you will not be so rushed and able to hang out if the weather turns crummy.

Pickup the boat in Raiatea and anchor near the Passe Toahotu Tahaa. Go for a swim and snorkel. Plan on departing early next morning for Huahine. Spend a few days exploring Huahine maybe even traveling over to the eastern side. This is our favorite island in the Leewards. Bypass the main town and use this as a stopping point the day before departing Huahine. Do a tour of the island with Island Echo Tour

Plan on exploring Raiatea and Tahaa before you are due to depart. This way if the weather gets crappy you will be inside the lagoon and sheltered but still able to easily move around. If you are in Bora or Huahine then you will be forced to make an open ocean passage when the weather could be unsettled and sea state rough.

Another suggestion is to arrange the charter yacht pick up in Raiatea but depart(leave the boat) from Bora Bora and fly out from there. This will give you an extra day on the boat versus having to sail it back to Raiatea. We know a number of folks that have done this and they all said it worked out great. Especially if you charter for 1 week. Having the extra day on the boat in Bora works out better.

Tips from Previous Charter

1. The chain was NOT marked so we had no clue how much chain we were using. Luckily we parked Jacaranda at the charter base in Raiatea. We brought a tape measure and plastic zip ties so we could mark the chain. It made a huge difference. The charter office was amazed that we marked the chain!

2. The charter cat -- boat hook was way too short for the boat. We bought a piece of PVC pipe at a hardware store and hose clamped it onto the boat hook. Used for picking up moorings.
3. Make sure the boat comes with a dinghy anchor
4. Bring your own snorkel gear. That way you get a mask that fits your face.
5. Winter time can be a little cool at night - bring a sweat shirt and a light rain jacket.
6. Check your OB carefully before you depart we did not and found that it was on its last legs.
7. **LOCK** your boat every time you leave it. There is theft in FP and taking an extra 2 minutes to lock the boat and maybe even put your snorkel gear away before going ashore could save you grief. Also your dinghy comes with a cable and lock – Lock it ashore.

Lift your dinghy every night no matter where you are!!

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