

Windstar – Dreams of Tahiti on Wind Spirit

Famil Report by Katarina Rookes, National Sales Manager for Francis Travel Marketing

Introduction

In the first week of August 2019 I finally experienced my first Windstar cruise. It was better than I could have ever imagined – on the stunning 148-passenger motorised sailing yacht Wind Spirit around some French Polynesian Islands. Our cruise started in Papeete and visited some beautiful islands including Moorea and Bora Bora.

ABOUT WIND SPIRIT

Wind Spirit is one of Windstar's smallest 4-masted sailing ships with 74 cabins and 4 decks. All of the cabins have ocean views but there are no balcony cabins on board. All of the cabins are the same size and there is one Owners Suite on board. One thing I noticed very quickly was that even though there were no balcony cabins they really weren't needed as there are so many beautiful areas to relax on the outdoor decks and you often find a private little area. There are no lifts on board and most of the ports are tender ports so worth keeping that in mind for older clients.

The first two decks are where the cabins are. On the second deck is also the Watersports platform – a big platform that drops down with free Watersports equipment to use in some of the ports from Paddleboards to Snorkelling gear and kayaks there is something for everyone!



Next to the Watersports platform on Deck 2 is the Gym as well which has cardio and weights equipment.

On Deck Three are the indoor public areas. The lounge is at the aft which has a bar, the Yacht Club (which serves coffee, tea and cakes all day) and this is also where there was entertainment in the evening. The entertainment varied from talks about the ports to a lovely duet from Argentina who were amazingly talented to a crew show which was very funny!



Next to the Lounge is also the Spa. Towards the mid of the ship there is a little library with books, DVDs and games to borrow. Next to this is the shop which has nice little gifts, merchandise etc. The reception area is mid ship and from there you enter the stunning main dining room Amphora!



The dining is as you wish from 7-9pm every evening. The menu changed every night but was always beautiful and the waiters were great at giving recommendations.

The dress code for dining in the evening is casual elegance – no jandals, jeans or caps but in general it was pretty relaxed. During the day there is no dress code throughout the ship.

Deck Four is where all the outdoor public areas are. The pool, spa pool and pool bar are at the aft – this area also turns into “Candles” in the evening which is a beautiful dining option (completely free of charge but requires a reservation) that offers lovely steaks and seafood.

On Deck Four is also Veranda which is the Breakfast and Lunch dining option – it has a buffet with lots of fresh foods but also an A la carte option if this is what is preferred. At Veranda you can dine inside and outside.

There is one small smoking area on board to the left on the pool deck when you come up the stairs.

You can go up to the Flying Bridge up some stairs by the pool as well which is the best spot for the famous Sail away!

We had the all-in package which was US\$89.00 per person per day and included unlimited alcohol (including mini bar), wifi and laundry as well as your daily gratuities. This does need to be pre-booked. It was so worth it and the only thing to note is the wifi is very slow (but a good excuse to not use it much!).



THE CABIN

Our cabin was absolutely amazing. It was on Deck 2 - Room 203 – and was located just by the gym so towards the aft of the ship. The bed was queen sized but it can be made into twin if that's preferred. There was plenty of storage space for luggage under the bed and also for all our clothes and shoes in the wardrobe and under the seats in the little dining area. The minibar was fully stocked and was always restocked by the next afternoon as well as fresh water and ice cubes every morning and evening.



The bathroom was really spacious and also had lots of storage and the shower pressure was great! There was no bath but I prefer just having a stand-alone shower rather than a shower over a bath. The amenities were L'occitane and smelt amazing and were restocked as they were used as well.

The room was serviced twice a day; in the morning and in the evening and our room steward was amazing!

DAY ONE – Departing Papeete

The check in process was so easy – this is where I first noticed how it does make a difference being on a small ship. We got to the port, dropped off our bags, showed our passports and waited in line for about 10 minutes where we were offered iced tea and iced water and then went on board where we had to fill out a form with our details and give our credit cards and passports and within a total of about half an hour we were in our cabin. We dropped our bags off and went exploring straight away – which didn't take too long as it isn't a big ship so we decided to have lunch (with a local beer) which was being served at Veranda.



The safety briefing was very quick and easy as well – we just went to the lounge and were shown how to put on our lifejackets and what to do in case of an emergency. All in all it probably took 15 minutes.

After a relaxing afternoon we got ready for the evening and went to the pool deck for Wind Spirits Signature Sail away and a beautiful Tahitian sunset. This was such an amazing experience and most people came up to the pool deck to watch the ship sail away from Papeete with a cocktail. This was also a great opportunity to meet some of the other travellers. As it is a smaller ship you definitely get to know people easier than on bigger ships.



The average age on board was about 45. There were a couple of honeymooners in their late 20s/ early 30s and also a few families with children ranging from 17-23 but mostly couples.

After a couple of drinks we went back to get ready for dinner in the main dining room Amphora. The menu was absolutely beautiful with something for everything including meat, seafood and vegetarian options each evening.



DAY TWO - Moorea

This morning we arrived in Moorea around 8AM. We had a nice breakfast at Veranda before deciding we were just going to have a walk around and maybe try go on a little hike. The ship anchored and tenders went from 8AM til 4.30PM. There wasn't much in the town where the tenders dropped us off so we just explored and went on a little walk where we found a beautiful Pineapple field and a great view over Moorea.



After this we decided to head back to the ship as it was a little rainy and extremely hot (29 degrees). Once we got back to the ship it was really sunny and hot again so we enjoyed a cocktail in the sun and relaxed by the pool before watching the sail away and having dinner at Amphora.

I would recommend to organise a shore excursion in Moorea or have a plan on how you're going to get around the island. It was nice to have a relaxed first day but it would have been nice to explore the island a bit more.

DAY THREE - Raiatea

Today's Port was Raiatea. We docked alongside at 8am and had an overnight stay.

We learned from not having transport in Moorea that we wanted to have a better look around this island so we got off after breakfast and went to the information centre to enquire about hiring bikes. The woman there was extremely helpful and we were recommended a company that specialises in Electric bike rentals called Esland Bikes. We rented a bike each for the day and had an amazing time exploring the island! We went to the Marae which is a holy place in French Polynesia; Raiatea used to be the centre of religion and culture in the Society Islands. Just next to the Marae is also a great small hike up to a beautiful lookout point which looks over the marae and the reefs! We had a fantastic day and I would recommend hiring a bike on this island.

When we got back on board we got ready for the Deck BBQ under the stars where the dress code was Tropical Casual. The BBQ was absolutely amazing with Pork, Lobster, Steak, salads and amazing desserts!



After the BBQ dinner the amazing Crew did line dancing and had a deck party by the pool where everyone joined in and it was such a lovely way to end the evening!

DAY FOUR - Motu Mahaea, Taha'a



This morning we departed Raiatea early and went to Windstar's Private Island off Taha. The Zodiacs ran continuously from 9am to 4.30pm to the island. We got on one of the first tenders after an amazing breakfast (French Toast!) at Veranda.

Once you get the first glimpse of the Motu you immediately think of a typical deserted island. It was absolute paradise and almost looked fake it was so beautiful! After you get off the tender the Hotel Manager (Jeffrey Jack) welcomed you to paradise and one of the crew handed us a glass of punch (and offered us to go to the bar to top it up with a spirit if we wanted). It was actually like we were in a dream. The staff from the ship were on the island and had the bar set up, loungers, a big BBQ set up for lunch and even the water sports instructors were there with paddleboards, kayaks and snorkelling equipment. The water was crystal clear and it was a beautifully warm sunny day.



We spent all day here and had so much fun snorkelling, sunbathing and trying a couple of different cocktails. It was a dreamy day and I was very sad to leave!

In the evening we enjoyed the sail away and sunset by the pool again and had some stunning views over Raiatea which you sail back past and Wind Spirit made her way to Bora Bora.

After this we went to an information talk on the next port which was Bora Bora, just to learn a bit more about the island and some must-sees. We then went to dinner in Amphora followed by the Crew Show in the Lounge which was a really fun way to end the evening – all the crew took part and some were really talented and others just had a bit of a laugh. 😊

DAY FIVE -Bora Bora

This morning we got to Bora Bora around 7.30am. We woke up early and watched the beautiful waters and islands on our way in. The day was perfect – not a cloud in the sky and about 30 degrees!

After another delicious breakfast we went ashore. The tenders take you into Vaitape, the main town in Bora Bora. We knew the main island wasn't too big but there was still a lot we wanted to explore and do so we decided to hire a little 3-wheeled scooter which was such a great way to explore the island and was only about NZ\$140 for the day!

Bora Bora is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been! There is so much to see, the colours of the water are amazing, the sand is stunningly white and the people are very friendly! This is one thing I noticed about French Polynesia in general – the people are so lovely and welcoming and helpful.

We drove around the whole island and stopped a few times to go on little walks and explore and take photos. We had lunch at the famous Bloody Mary's restaurant and finished the day with a few hours relaxing on the only public beach on the island which was absolutely incredible. This was one of my favourite days and if you wanted a day of exploring on your own I think a scooter is a great way to do this at your own pace 😊

When we got back on the ship we had a very relaxed evening with drinks and dinner!



DAY SIX - Bora Bora

Today was our last day in Bora Bora but we had a full day here. We had an early breakfast and then went to the lounge to wait for our shore excursion – the tender to take us to the start of our shore excursion left at 8.30am. We chose the “Shark and Stingray Snorkel Encounter” excursion that Windstar offer and it really exceeded our expectations! We went on a catamaran to some beautiful reefs where we snorkelled amongst way more stingrays and sharks than I thought! At one point I think there were 30+ black tip reef sharks surrounding us! After this we went to a different little area where a different type of stingray were but they were very deep so we only saw them from the top but they were ginormous and it was a great experience. To finish off our 3-hour excursion we went to a massive and stunning coral reef where we snorkelled amongst tropical fish and lovely coral!

It was such a unique and great experience that I would really recommend.

In the afternoon after some lunch we relaxed by the pool, had some cocktails and got ready for a departure from the ship to take us to a private Motu in the evening. There were three catamarans that went to the little private island and



you had a note in your room the evening before telling you which time your catamaran would depart. Our catamaran left at 4.45pm and we got to another breathtaking private island. We could see another delicious BBQ spread being prepared so we sat down, had a drink and then went for a stroll around to watch the sunset. The BBQ dinner was amazing again with lots of traditional Tahitian foods like ceviche, fresh salmon and tuna sashimi, sweet potato cake and much more.

After the dinner we had a performance by some local dancers who finished off with fire dancing before going



back to the ship.

This included experience was so special and it was also really nice to share it with the rest of the guests on board. Seeing the ship beautifully lit up on the way back was a very memorable experience as well and a lovely way to finish the evening.

DAY SEVEN - Huahine

This was our last full day on board Wind Spirit. It was a rainy morning and we decided we wanted to have a very relaxed day. After breakfast we took the tender to the island of Huahine, had a quick walk around and went back to the ship after a couple of hours. The sun came out once we got back so we made the most of the water sports platform. We kayaked, swam and relaxed in the water. After this we spent the rest of the afternoon very relaxed by the pool. We enjoyed the final sail away with some of the friends we made and then got ready for dinner. We had our last meal at Candles – the outdoor restaurant under the stars.



The food was absolutely incredible - we had perfectly cooked steak and some great wine to accompany it. It was the perfect way to end the cruise.

DAY EIGHT – Papeete

We got up early to put our bags outside of our rooms with the luggage tags that were in our cabin the night before. We had an early breakfast, picked our passport back up and then disembarked as one of the first groups at around 8.30am. It was sad to leave but the disembarkation process was so easy. We had booked a transfer to the Tahiti Pearl Beach Resort where we had a day room booked before our flight. The transfer was about 30 minutes and then the check in process at the resort was seamless as well. The rooms at the Tahiti Pearl Beach Resort are spacious and lovely and the pool facilities and beach were great as well! We had the room til 7pm which was perfect as we then had dinner before our transfer to the airport (also booked by Windstar) picked us up just before 11pm to take us to the airport.

It was an incredible experience and I will always treasure this trip!