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Sure, over-water huts are a large part of Tahiti's allure. But beyond them, amid rivers, lush hills and vibrant locals, these islands radiate a welcome unlike any other.

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COVER: Hoi An, Vietnam, by Mark Daffey/Lonely Planet Images. More, p. 16

ABOVE: Tahiti by Cedric Angeles. More, p. 32.

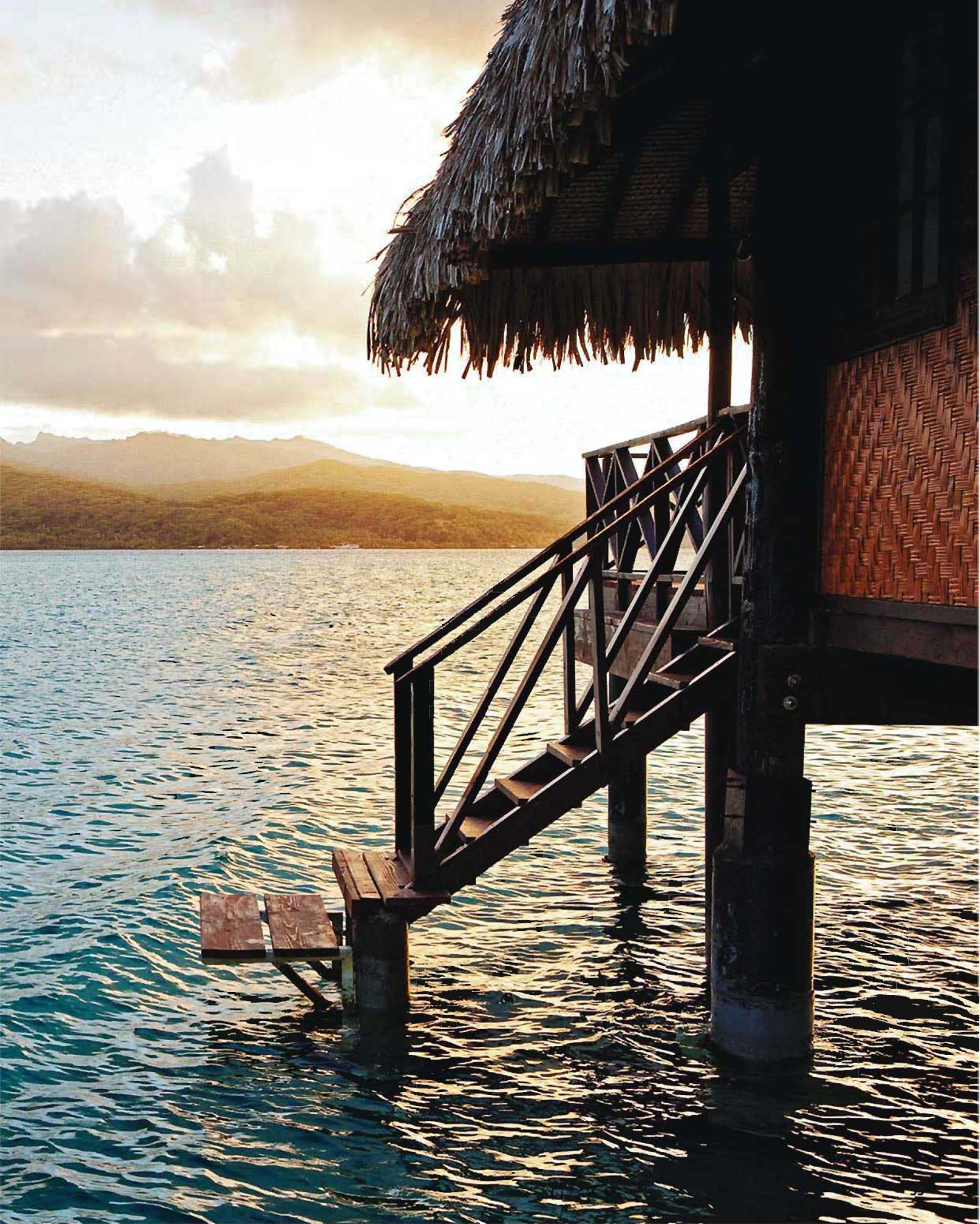
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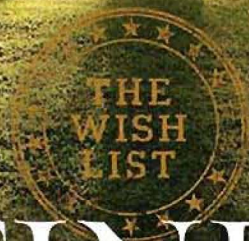
CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: TY SAWYER; WARREN BOLSTER/GETTY IMAGES; LORI BARBELY



50 DREAMS COME TRUE

It's ironic, isn't it, how being surrounded by water will set you free? Free to chase, try, discover and live your most remote wishes. We chose 50 to pursue, starting with a well-traveled photographer's dream assignment, and the four wishes that unfolded before his eyes.





FIND, TAHITI'S SECRET BEAUTY

PHOTO ESSAY BY CEDRIC ANGELES



Tahiti

"You can't avoid sand and palms. Come on, it's Tahiti. Just don't avoid the people. Eat with them. Swim with them. Drink beer with them. You'll get to the beach. Make sure you see the real Tahiti first." — CEDRIC ANGELES, *photographer*

DAY 1

Hungry? Find a Truck

It's an eight-hour flight from Los Angeles to Tahiti, and you land pretty late in the evening. As tempting as it is to eat a convenient dinner at a hotel or chain restaurant, don't. Instead, go into the city of Papeete, near the bay, where you can smell the food being served from food trucks, called "roulettes," along the streets. Eat fresh fish, rice and vegetables under the stars with local families. Not only are the meals cheaper from the backs of the trucks, but they're more authentic and simply better.

DAY 2

Up for the Dawn Patrol

The stores usually close early in the evening, and they sell out of fresh goods (like bread) by midmorning the next day. So stocking up is one good reason to get up early. (Don't forget the mosquito repellent.) Another good reason is the local scene at Papenoo Beach. It isn't what you might expect. The shoreline is predominantly pebbly and rocky. Instead of tourists you'll find

local Tahitians surfing, kayaking and swimming shortly after sunrise. Get to know them and you'll wind up with a board or paddle. Probably a cold Hinano and a sandwich too. Later, go to the food stalls at Papeete Market and eat rice and salmon while standing with new friends.

DAY 3

Get Wet

Life in Tahiti is all about the water, so you'd better drive the loop around the main island while wearing your swimsuit and flip-flops. Soak in the views, and stop to swim at Plage de Toaroto and off the black sand of Point Venus, and then continue to the airport — it's officially in Fa'a, the only place we've seen spelled with back-to-back-to-back a's. Take an Air Tahiti flight to Raiatea, still wearing the swimsuit under your clothes. From there, hop on a shuttle boat over to Vahine Island near Tahaa, and check into one of the three over-water bungalows at the Private Island Resort. Put your bags down and step off your porch into the ocean water you've seen in classic Tahiti paintings.

Stay Wet

DAY 4

Rent a little outboard-powered boat (you can even have your lunch packed for the ride), and putter to the lagoon hidden among barrier islets (called motus). This is where you'll find the beaches and shallow-water snorkeling worthy of your best camera. Eat picnic-style on the beach, and on the way back use the boat to explore more of the little islands. The bigger island of Tahaa is known as Vanilla Island because its ground produces more vanilla than any other in Tahiti. Take a jeep through the hills and back roads to find the farms that produce the world-famous beans. These will be among your most authentic Tahitian souvenirs. Get back to the bungalow in time to take an evening swim and to see the fish — including sharks — swimming under the glass-top coffee table that sits over a viewing hole in your floor.

DAY 5

Go Home Damp

Take an outrigger canoe, or pirogue, to the coral garden near Vahine early in the morning. Always bring snorkel gear when you're on the water. Afterward, take the shuttle boat and short flight back to the main island. Grab a tuna burger at a café like Lagon Bleu. You might have time for one more swim before your late flight. Take some of that Tahitian water home with you, even if it's just in your ears.

U.S. Virgin Islands



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