

WHAT IT'S
LIKE TO...

SAIL TO PARADISE

THIS IS THE SIGHT. BUT YOU HAVE TO BE
HERE FOR THE SOUNDS (AND SMELLS).

BY BRIANNA RANDALL

SLAP! THE SOUND OF FLESH HITTING WATER reverberates through our 40-foot sailboat. My husband, Rob, and I have sailed empty waters from Canada to Australia, and strange sounds have become familiar. But not this one. In a panic, I hustle up from the cabin, thinking the splash might be my husband falling overboard.

"It's a manta!" he shouts from on deck. "A giant one!" Its 6-foot wing slaps the water again, as if waving "hello" toward our boat as we enter Bora Bora's lagoon (pictured).

We've seemingly seen it all during our world excursions. Ukulele jam sessions. Mangoes falling like manna in the jungle. But the manta's wave is a gift of mystical proportion, heralding the surreal scene in front of our bow: white sand, swaying coconut trees, wooden bungalows and sailboats dotting the turquoise water like festive ornaments.

As the manta starts to swim away from us, my husband turns to me and casually utters a line as memorable as the scene: "I like Bora Bora's welcoming committee."

PROBLEMS IN PARADISE

Just 14 hours after we anchor in paradise, a horrific stench suddenly mingles with the smell of fresh-brewed coffee on deck. Rob's curse rings through the still morning air. "The head is clogged!" We won't be snorkeling with manta rays today. But that's sailing. An alternative? Fly to paradise and use someone else's boat.

WHERE TO CHARTER

SAN BLAS (Panama)

The least confusing way to sail is to rent a sailor with the boat. Here, captained charters sail through Guna Yala, a territory of tropical islands and river-filled rainforests. It's a mix of awes and ahs. **DO IT:** sanblassailing.com

VAVA'U (Tonga)

Sailing in Vava'u is a snap, I mean once you get here. The seas are calm and anchorages sandy. Swim with humpbacks July to November. **DO IT:** sunsail-tonga.com



SAN JUANS (Wash.)

These pine forests are just as spectacular as swaying palm trees. And the water? We've sailed alongside orcas, dolphins and salmon. Just don't lose the chart — there are 450 islands out here. **DO IT:** sanjuansailing.com



BVI

There's a reason Tortola is known for catamaran cruises. The conditions are easy, like Tonga. Plus, the islands are an easy flight, unlike Tonga. **DO IT:** horizonyachtcharters.com/bvi

WHITSUNDAYS

Bring good sunglasses. Few places can rival the blinding white beaches that back up to the Great Barrier Reef. For the most stunning views, board a boat, any boat (yacht, sailboat, pontoon, kayak). **DO IT:** rentayacht.com.au