



**T**he entrance to Maupiti, even less than a mile away, appears to be awash in white water. We've just sailed our 38-foot ketch, *Wondertime*, from Bora Bora; 25 fast downwind miles in 20 knots of wind.

Each mile closer brought our nerves up another hitch and by the time we were peering through binoculars at the skinny pass, our hearts were pounding and palms damp.

"Let's go," Michael says, and we furl in the genoa and power forward

towards the entrance to Maupiti's calm turquoise lagoon. With the knowledge that this is a no-fail situation—we either make it through or are dashed to bits upon the reef—we are suddenly calm. We'll make it. We have to.

Most boats skip right by little



## Maupiti Pass, French Polynesia

A hair-raising entrance  
gives way to an  
unblemished island  
paradise

By Sara D. Johnson

swells and strong currents.” When your Lonely Planet alerts you to navigational hazards, it’s best to take heed. The sailing guidebooks concurred, with typical warnings of the number of boats that have come to grief here in the last 50 years. It’s true, Maupiti’s pass is tricky: the channel is winding and narrow, less than 100 feet wide in some spots, with a swift outgoing current, and standing whitewater in certain conditions.

Thankfully, the day we arrived at the pass into Maupiti we had nearly ideal conditions: a low swell from the south and moderate wind from the NE. Plus, it was midday so we could see underwater obstructions more clearly. As Michael steered toward the pass he kept his eyes on the well-marked channel, which turned out to be calm. Keeping the range markers perfectly aligned, we entered the deep, dead center of the pass between the shallow reefs on either side of us that were covered in whitewater from the breaking swell.

I was below with my eyes on our nav computer, yelling up encouraging

Maupiti on their way to Suwarrow, Rarotonga or Palmerston having had their fill of French Polynesia by the time they clear out at Bora Bora. But our travel guidebook raved about this little island and its surrounding reef, with words such as “ravishing,”

“unblemished,” and “complete relaxation.” We just had to see this place for ourselves.

Our favorite travel guide also featured a warning about the only entry into Maupiti’s lagoon: “Yachties, beware, as this pass is exposed to big



words to him: “We’re right on track! Excellent!” Our two young daughters were in the forward cabin keeping quiet, as they know by now to stay out of our way when there is sweat beading on our brows. Even below, I could hear the huge breakers on the reef to either side of us, but was too nervous to look out the porthole above the computer. I asked Michael later how big the white water was and he said he had no idea; he was simply looking straight ahead, eyes on the

guiding markers only.

There is a dogleg turn in the pass where you line up another set of range markers, then continue on down the channel keeping red markers to port, green to starboard. Before we knew it, the lagoon opened up and we were in shimmering, calm aqua water with the brilliantly green island-mountain of Maupiti towering to the sky in the middle. We motored for another mile, keeping in the deep turquoise channel, then

dropped our hook in the sand under 15 feet of water amongst a handful of other sailboats. A light breeze ruffled the water and we stood gazing around at one of the most beautiful places we’ve ever seen. We were floating between the small village tucked up against the side of the green mountain and the brilliant white sands of Motu Tuanai, striking hues of turquoise varying with the water depths around us. Ravishing, indeed. **BWS**

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