

Tackling Tahiti



JAMES IHEDIGBO PHOTO
Ravens safety James Ihedigbo with his wife, Brittany, on their honeymoon at the St. Regis Bora Bora resort. Below, a view of the lagoon and nearby mountain.



Ravens safety James Ihedigbo enjoys island honeymoon in French Polynesia's Bora Bora

By STEPHANIE CITRON | For The Baltimore Sun

Baltimore Ravens strong safety James Ihedigbo harbors no fears, especially when it comes to going face to face with his opponents. Ihedigbo's teammates get a kick out of his focus and intensity. Ihedigbo was so deeply immersed "in the zone" after forcing a near-interception (it was later called back) against the Miami Dolphins, he completely missed coach John Harbaugh's congratulatory chest bump—cameras caught him trotting past his leaping coach.

But Ihedigbo clearly likes to celebrate. His triumphant "gravedigger" dance after successful tackles has become legendary. Off the field, his spunky heroics are no less impressive. Born in Nigeria, he immigrated to the United States as a child, along with his parents and siblings, and launched HOPE, a foundation that provides U.S. scholarships to enterprising but impoverished African students. And over the summer, he found time to marry to his college sweetheart.

With all that, we wondered whether Ihedigbo ever takes a breather and where he goes when he does. And we learned that even on vacation, he's still a gutsy hotshot, staring down sharks in the ocean.

Where is your favorite travel destination?
Bora Bora with my wife [Brittany]. We were just there for our honeymoon. It's a place where we've never been, but it See **CELEBRITY**, page 4



ST. REGIS BORA BORA PHOTO
A bedroom in one of the villas at the St. Regis Bora Bora resort; prices start at around \$1,146 a night.

TAHITI TOURISM PHOTO

Raven Ihedigbo tackles paradise

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really allows for that peaceful, relaxing environment. Beautiful scenery. We didn't know until we got there, but it's the same place where [the 2009 feature film] "Couples Retreat" was shot.

How did you choose it?

We've been to the Bahamas ... to the Virgin Islands ... and wanted to do something different. Somewhere we wouldn't have the time to go to around football season.

From where did you fly and how long did it take?

We got married in New York, so we flew from New York to L.A., which is a five-hour flight. We flew all night from L.A. to Bora Bora, which is an eight-hour flight.

Need I ask how the weather was?

Ohhhh. In the high 80s. Beautiful!

Where did you stay?

We stayed at the St. Regis [Bora Bora Resort]. It was just beautiful. In our room there were glass floors so we could see the fish swimming underneath us. It had these very open spaces to lie out. The showers had doors that slid open so you felt like you were outside. You had the option to have your own private swimming pool on your patio with a private wall, blocking off the outside. There's a fence around the entire hut where the wood was pyramided so you can see out, but people can't see in.

What type of activities did you do?

The resort offered these jetski tours of the entire island. It was weird to be out in the middle of the ocean. They had these sand bars. I'd be skiing and then get out and stand there and see stingrays and sharks in the distance, but literally be in the middle of the ocean. The ocean was sky blue. We also went fishing and kayaking.

What kind of land adventures?

They had everything. [There was a] 4x4 Mountain Trip where you could go over the entire mountain [Mount Otemanu].

What was unique to Bora Bora that you hadn't experienced on other islands?

Everything was such a surprise — we went on a "feed the sharks trip." I literally jumped in with like 10 sharks around me — I was like shark bait! And to see them circling you, but also disregarding you ... whoa.

Why were they disregarding you and not eating you?

They [the tour operators] put food out so the sharks don't pay any attention to you. So there I was right there in the water with them.

Sounds like good training for a football player on defense!

[Laughs.] Yeah — you know, handle your fears.

How was the food?

The food was amazing. Everything ... from the freshwater sushi ... and fruits! Watermelon, mangos, pineapple. Amazing drinks. Really good restaurants. That's what made it so great — the food was so great.

What did you bring back with you?

I got my mom and sisters necklaces that were handmade. My wife got some summer wraps that were handmade — multicolored, really beautiful.

How often do you travel?

We try to travel in the offseason as much as possible because football season is so long, and you're so focused on that, and your family priorities, that once the season's done, we try to take a break. We're having a baby in March, but we're planning to go somewhere in the summertime — someplace beautiful.

What is the one item you will not travel without?

I don't bring any electronics with me. When I'm away, I like to relax, but I do have my cellphone because I want to be in touch with my family, to let them know how the trip's going and stuff.



The St. Regis Bora Bora Resort features bungalows perched above the water with glass floors.

ST. REGIS BORA BORA PHOTO



Guided tours and experienced dive experts offer visitors a look at the island's reefs.

TAHITI TOURISM PHOTO

If you go

GETTING THERE

Bora Bora is part of the Leeward Island cluster within the Society Islands of French Polynesia. It's renowned as one of the most beautiful islands, with scenic vistas and a lagoon often described as an artist's palette of green and blue hues. Of course, beauty comes at a price. Bora Bora is about 13 hours from Baltimore by plane and can take up to 18 hours of travel time, including layovers. Travelers fly to Los Angeles and transfer to a flight into Papeete, Tahiti, where they switch for a 50-minute flight to Bora Bora. It's best to plan your visit for at least 10 days, longer if possible. Round-trip fares from BWI-Marshall Airport begin at about \$1,350. Go to airtahiti-usa.com.

LODGING

St. Regis Bora Bora: James Ihedigbo and his bride stayed at this resort, accessible from the island by boat. Along with standard hotel accommodations, the St. Regis Bora Bora offers villas with glass floors perched above the ocean, gardens, plunge pools and private beach access. From \$1,146 per night. Go to stregisborabora.com.

The Sofitel Bora Bora Marara Beach Resort: Offers private bungalows and private access to one of the island's most spectacular beaches from \$350 per night. Go to sofitel.com

DINING

Restaurant Le St. James: Considered one of the finest dining spots on the island, this eatery serves French/Pacific Rim fusion cuisine and is known for its sunsets and homemade ice cream. Go to boraborastjames.com. Visitors can also try the local fare at the Matira Beach Restaurant, whose fresh sushi is said to surpass anything in the U.S.

DON'T MISS

Water adventures: Immerse yourself in all of the spectacular aquatic activities around the island. Visitors can snorkel the crystal-clear ocean right off the beach, but there are many guided trips and dive experts who know the best reefs. Try touring the island by personal watercraft and, stopping for tanning breaks on remote sandbars and viewing seals in their native habitat. Moana Jetboat Tours start at \$85. Go to moanajetboat.com

Land tours: Check out the island itself on a 4x4 that takes you through jungles, mountainous terrain and beaches to see wildlife, rare flora and fauna indigenous to Bora Bora. Vavau 4x4 Adventures offers a half-day tour that begins at \$75. Go to vavau4x4adventures.com

Massage treatments: Schedule a sea-view massage. Intercontinental Resort's Deep Ocean Spa offers treatment rooms perched above the ocean, with multisensory outdoor spas and hydrotherapy treatments. Go to boraboraspa.intercontinental.com.



Check out jungles, mountainous terrain and beaches by taking one of the 4x4 safari excursions in Bora Bora.

TAHITI TOURISM PHOTO