



TRAVEL GUIDE
FRENCH POLYNESIA

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Introduction Tahiti



Queen of the Pacific

The heart and soul of the South Pacific, Tahiti is the largest in a chain of islands that make up French Polynesia. The name can either refer to the main island or the entire destination. Commonly referred to as The Islands of Tahiti, French Polynesia is a collection of 118 islands and atolls scattered across an impressive nautical surface area the size of Western Europe. Still, these tiny islands—many of which remain uninhabited—make up a total landmass of only 1,600 square miles (4,100 sq. km).

The Locale

You may be wondering, where is Tahiti? The islands are situated halfway between Los Angeles, California and Sydney, Australia. They are in the same time zone as Hawaii and located just as far south of the equator as Hawaii is north. Since the word often conjures up visions of a distant, unspoiled paradise, many assume them to be far away; but in all reality, Tahiti is only eight hours from Los Angeles.

The island of Tahiti is divided into two parts: The larger portion to the northwest is known as Tahiti Nui, while the smaller, southeastern peninsula is known as Tahiti Iti. Tahiti Nui is dominated by three extinct volcanic mountains including Mount Orohena, the tallest in French Polynesia; Mount Aorai, known for its incredible views; and Le Diadème, which appears to crown the island as the rightful queen.

Home to the capital city of Papeete, Tahiti is the economic center of French Polynesia. Since all flights arrive through Faa'a International Airport, your tailored Tahiti vacation will begin and end in Papeete. While you may be tempted to jet off immediately to the other islands, we recommend staying at least a day or two. Tahiti strikes an interesting contrast to some of the more quiet, secluded islands in the region; and with a selection of wonderful and convenient Tahiti resorts available, you will never regret staying.

The Allure

Papeete is a vibrant and multicultural city with busy boulevards and a bustling harbor. The downtown municipal market, Le Marché, is an exciting place to purchase all things Tahiti including vanilla beans, monoi oil and colorful pareos. Just down the street at Le Centre Vaima is the Robert Wan Pearl Museum, which is a great place to start if you're hoping to purchase a Tahitian black pearl during your stay. To live like a local, head to Vai'ete Square after sunset. This waterfront promenade comes to life at night when gourmet food trucks, Les Roulottes, open their windows to serve a range of affordable meals including Chinese food, French crêpes, steak frites, fresh fish and pizza.

Recreation

Beyond the city atmosphere, Tahiti is also a scenic island with lush landscapes and large abounding waterfalls. Leave the more developed areas behind and you will find shady hiking trails, pleasant beaches and calm waters. This unique juxtaposition makes Tahiti one of the most diverse islands in French Polynesia. We recommend exploring these interior peaks and valleys on a guided hike or Jeep Safari tour.

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Other popular activities include snorkeling, Jet Skiing and surfing. Experienced surfers should visit the famed Teahupo'o and bear witness to one of the world's most intense waves. Beginners can surf or take lessons at some of the more mellow beaches around the island. You can also enjoy a day of golfing at the Olivier Bréaud Golf Course, one of only two courses in French Polynesia.

Celebration

Tahiti really is the hub of all cultural activity. Every July, the annual Heiva I Tahiti transforms the island into a spectacular celebration of Polynesian culture and dance. Year round, you can also catch an authentic Tahitian dance show at the InterContinental Resort every Friday and Saturday night. Permanent historical fixtures include the house of James Norman Hall, Point Venus, the Museum of Tahiti and Her Islands, the Paul Gauguin Museum, and the Harrison Smith Botanical Gardens. These can all be seen on a guided Circle Island Tour, or you can rent a car and explore the island at your leisure.

Final Impression

Often overlooked by travelers eager to experience the outer islands, Tahiti is more than just a means to an end. How much time you choose to spend here is up to you, but give yourself a chance to see everything the island has to offer—beyond the initial view from the plane.



Introduction Bora Bora



Jewel of the South Seas

Undoubtedly the most celebrated island in the South Pacific, Bora Bora is French Polynesia's leading lady. Her beauty is unrivaled and her fame, unwavering. Bora Bora is one of the few places on earth that everyone hopes to witness in their lifetime—and once you see it, you are forever enamored.

The Allure

More than just a romantic ideal, Bora Bora is a romantic reality. It comes as no surprise that the island is an internationally acclaimed honeymoon destination. Our newlyweds who decide on a Bora Bora honeymoon often feel as though they have escaped to a private oasis tailored entirely to their special moment of marital bliss—and anyone in the midst of planning a wedding can relate to just how enticing that sounds.

The Locale

Bora Bora may feel worlds away, but this South Seas splendor is well within reach. Where is Bora Bora, exactly? The island lies just northwest of Tahiti, less than an hour away by plane from Papeete. The airport is located on a small, separate part of the island known as Motu Mete. Upon arrival, you will be greeted with a warm smile and fragrant flower lei and transferred by boat to your Bora Bora resort, meaning you hardly have to wait for your first encounter with the island's famously translucent lagoon. The inevitable love affair with this island begins right before you touch down. The view from the plane window is a moment you will not soon forget. Have your camera in hand as you begin your descent and prepare for the moment when iconic Mount Otemanu comes into view. From that point on, each experience will only continue to exceed even your highest expectations.

Accommodation

Bora Bora has become synonymous with overwater bungalows. Many of these lavish floating villas have glass floors that supply a window to the lagoon life below. This locale is unique in the fact that most Bora Bora resort hotels are built on their own tiny island, or motu, and visits elsewhere must be arranged by boat transfer. Not to worry, though, you will hardly need to leave your bungalow let alone the resort. From lounging on your own private deck and receiving room service via outrigger canoe, to indulging in a rejuvenating spa treatment, you will pass the time in quiet seclusion and opulent luxury.

Recreation

The wonderful thing about Bora Bora is that you can be as active or inactive as you wish to be. Should you decide to venture away from the resort, you can visit the main village of Vaitape and shop at the local boutiques or dine at one of Bora Bora's restaurants including Mai Kai Bora Bora, or the legendary Bloody Mary's. You can also explore Mount Pahia and Mount Otemanu on a guided hike or Jeep Safari tour. Since water is a way of life on the island, popular lagoon excursions include snorkeling, diving, cruising, fishing, paddle boarding, kitesurfing, Jet Skiing, and of course, shark and ray feeding. You can also take your experience to new heights by parasailing, skydiving, or touring the island by helicopter.

Introduction
Moorea



The Magical Island

Believed to have inspired the mythical Bali Hai from James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, Moorea is one of the most scenically striking islands in French Polynesia. Despite her immaculate beauty, she is far from unapproachable. Possessing a relaxed vibe and welcoming spirit, Moorea is just as warm and inviting as the Tahitians lucky enough to call this island home.

The Locale

Located only ten nautical miles from Tahiti, Moorea is easily accessible by ferry or plane from Papeete. This proximity, coupled with the island's receptive and neighborly nature, makes Moorea a favorite destination for couples, families and locals. Still, Moorea has managed to maintain its small island feel despite this popularity and the presence of a few internationally branded resorts.

The Allure

The attraction toward Moorea comes as no surprise: the island is a geographical marvel. Eight voluminous mountain peaks rise from its translucent lagoon, creating a distinctive and rugged silhouette visible from the western coast of Tahiti. Splitting the northern shore are two symmetrical bays: Cook's (Paopao) and Opunohu Bay. The island is roughly shaped like a heart from overhead; and in the theme of love and romance, Moorea is one of the top honeymoon destinations in Tahiti—second only to Bora Bora.

Recreation

This unique landscape gives Moorea a reputation for being one of the best islands for adventure and activity—both on land and on the water. This means that, newlyweds aside, a Moorea vacation is ideal for families, too. Many resorts on the island offer kids programs and amenities, free meals and fun activities suited for children of all ages. Popular lagoon excursions include snorkeling and ray feeding, Jet Skiing and motu picnics. During mating season, August to October, we highly recommend a whale watching tour with resident marine biologist Dr. Michael Poole. Another incredible experience is an encounter at the Moorea Dolphin Center, the only natural refuge where you can swim and play with dolphins. For complete exhilaration, try a helmet dive or skydiving and enjoy unforgettable panoramic views of the island.



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On land, you can discover quaint villages and beaches along the waterfront, or abundant pineapple plantations at the interior. It's very easy to rent a car and drive or even bike around the island in a day. You can also explore the scenic hillsides by 4x4 Jeep, ATV or on foot. There are a variety of hiking trails suitable for everyone from the casual walker to the high intensity hiker. Regardless of how you prefer to get there, plan to see the view from Belvedere Lookout.

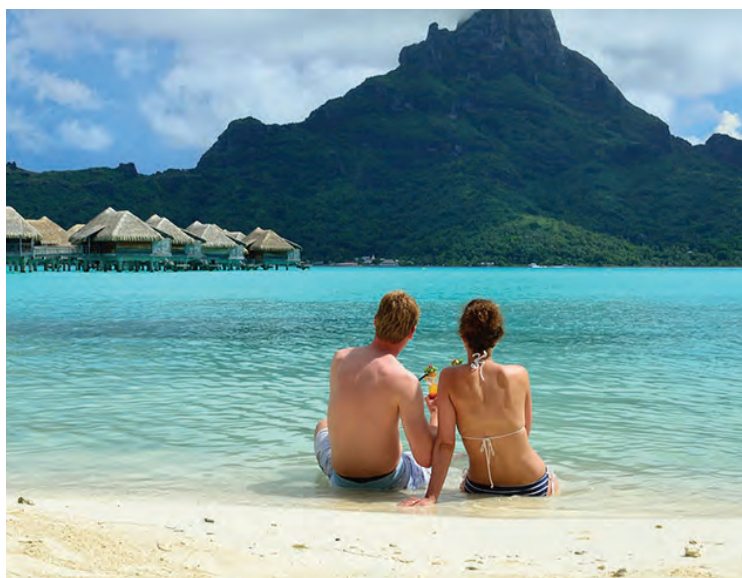
Other activities include golfing at the Moorea Green Pearl Golf Course, the only course in French Polynesia next to the Olivier Bréaud Golf Course in Tahiti; or visiting Moorea's Tiki Village for a traditional feast and authentic Polynesian dance show.

Accommodation

Moorea resorts offer a diverse selection of overwater bungalows and garden villas. These four- and five-star accommodations include everything from the world-class Hilton, InterContinental, and Sofitel, to the more boutique Moorea Manava Beach Resort. There are also a few small hotels and private guesthouses known as pensions available throughout the island.

Final Impression

Moorea is the pride and joy of French Polynesia. She may be considered Tahiti's little sister, but she steals the spotlight every time. The island is a true reflection of the laidback Tahitian lifestyle and the warm, welcoming character of French Polynesia and its people.



Weather - Best Time to Visit

French Polynesia is a tropical destination blessed with continuous sunshine and just enough rain to keep everything lush. The air temperature, which can vary from one archipelago to another, typically stays between 75° and 85° Fahrenheit (24° and 30° Celsius), and the water temperature ranges from 73° to 79° Fahrenheit (22° to 26° Celsius). In general, the high volcanic islands are more humid than the low coral atolls because the islands are dense with vegetation and the atolls are more exposed to trade winds.

There are only two main seasons. Summer is from November to March, when the climate is slightly warmer and more humid. It can rain more frequently during this time, but the islands hardly see a rainy season. Winter, which is considered the dry season, is from April to October, when the climate is slightly cooler and less humid. During this period, the underwater visibility is ideal for scuba diving and whale watching. Winter is also the best season for hiking and sailing. July and August are the coolest months of the year due to southeast trade winds known as maraamu.

Language

French is the official language but the locals also speak Tahitian. English is widely spoken and understood in most hotels, restaurants and shops. Still, learning a little Tahitian is always encouraged and appreciated. Below are some commonly used words and phrases. There are only thirteen letters in the Tahitian alphabet, including vowels a (ah) as in spa, e (ay) as in hey, i (ee) as in ski, o (oh) as in low, and u (oo) as in due; and consonants f, h, m, n, p, r, t and v, which are pronounced the same in English.

hello: ia orana (yo-rah-nah)

goodbye: nana (nah-nah)

welcome: maeva (mah-ay-vah)

thank you: mauruuru (mah-roo-roo)

cheers: manuia (mah-new-yah)

Electricity - Voltage

The power supply in French Polynesia is 220 Volts (60 Hz). Hotels use either 110 or 220V, depending on the location. The outlet, which accepts Type E and C plugs primarily used in Europe, has two round prong holes and an outward grounding pin. Be sure to check compatibility before plugging in any electrical appliance. Some hotels may have an adapter or converter on hand, but we recommend traveling with your own. You can purchase one at most hardware or department stores. Look for the product marked Europe/Asia. In most cases, you will only need an adapter. In some cases, like when using certain single-voltage devices, you may need a converter.



Clothing

The climate and lifestyle call for casual and comfortable clothing. Pack breathable, natural fabrics and plenty of shorts. Swimwear is ideal for lounging around the resort, while casual shirts and shorts provide the most comfort during excursions. For dinner, casual slacks and sport shirts are the best choice for men, and stylish sundresses are appropriate for women.

Essentials

You will want to pack sunscreen, brimmed hats, sunglasses, swimsuits, light clothing, a sweater or windbreaker, reef shoes, sandals, bug repellent and prescription medicine. You may want to bring your own snorkeling mask. For diving, bring your own regulator and dive certification card if you are already certified. Most importantly, bring a camera to capture every moment. Make sure you have plenty of batteries, memory cards and/or film.

Visas

Everyone needs a passport to visit French Polynesia. The regulations are much the same as for France: if you need a visa to visit France, you'll need one to visit French Polynesia. Anyone from an EU country can stay for up to three months without a visa, as can citizens of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand and Switzerland. Other nationalities need a visa, which can be applied for at French embassies. Apart from permanent residents and French citizens, all visitors to French Polynesia need to have an onward or return ticket.

Visa Extensions

Stays by foreign visitors may not exceed three months. For longer periods, you must apply to the French consular authorities in your own country for a residence permit; you cannot lodge your application from French Polynesia unless you have a sponsor or get married to a permanent resident.



Water

The municipal water supply in Pape'ete and other large towns can be trusted, but elsewhere avoid untreated tap water. In some areas the only fresh water available may be rainwater collected in tanks, and this should be boiled or otherwise treated. Water at restaurants, particularly resort restaurants, is safe.

Bites & Stings

Poisonous jellyfish and sea snakes are virtually unheard of in French Polynesia. More of a worry are extremely well-camouflaged stonefish, prolific on coral reefs and rocky areas – they are nearly impossible to see and have poison-injecting spines along their backs. If you do get stung, apply heat immediately and head for the hospital. Wearing plastic, waterproof sandals provides the best protection.

Poisonous cone shells abound along shallow coral reefs. Stings can be avoided by handling the shell at its blunt end only and preferably using gloves. Stings mainly cause local reactions; nausea, faintness, palpitations or difficulty in breathing flag the need for medical attention. Also watch out for sea urchins, as the spines are long and sharp, break off easily and once embedded in your flesh are very difficult to remove.

On land, mosquitoes and noseums will be your biggest concern. Although there is no malaria in French Polynesia, there are occasional dengue-fever and chikungunya outbreaks spread by mosquitoes. Noseums (nonos in French Polynesia) aren't disease carriers but be careful not to over-scratch the bites or you'll risk severe infection.

Heat

Sunburn is an obvious issue so use sunscreen liberally. It's also important to stay hydrated; heat exhaustion is a state of dehydration associated to a greater or lesser extent with salt loss. Heat stroke is more dangerous and happens when the cooling effect of sweating fails. This condition is characterised by muscle weakness and mental confusion. Skin will be hot and dry. If this occurs, 'put the fire out' by cooling the body with water on the outside and cold drinks for the inside. Seek medical help.

Coral Cuts

Coral is sharp stuff and brushing up against it is likely to cause a cut or abrasion. Most corals contain poisons and you're likely to get some in any wound, along with tiny grains of broken coral. The result is that a small cut can take a long time to heal. As soon as you can, cleanse the wound thoroughly (getting out all the little bits of coral or dirt if needed), apply an antiseptic and cover with a dressing. You can get back in the water but healing time will be prolonged if you do. Change the dressing regularly, never let it sit wet and check often for signs of infection.

Source: tahiti.com, Lomelyplanet.com