

Tahiti & French Polynesia

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Best Places to Stay

- » Ninamu Resort (p404)
- » Tevahine Dream (p398)
- » Sunset Beach Motel (p380)
- » Vahine Island Private Island Resort (p383)

Best Places to Eat

- » Bora Kaina Hut (p390)
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Why Go?

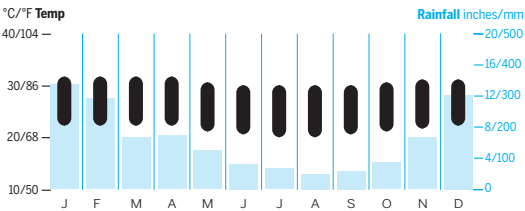
Just the name Tahiti conjures up centuries of legend and lifetimes of daydreams. Its 18th-century reputation as a wanton playground of flower-bedecked Polynesians in an Eden-like setting has morphed into a 21st-century image of a chic honeymoon haven. But there's more to the country than cocktails on the terrace of your over-water bungalow.

When you're not idling in the scent of gardenias, warm damp breezes and ukulele riffs by starlight, try hiking up a waterfall valley, paddling out on a turquoise lagoon or diving through sharky passes. While the resorts make headlines, the country's unsung heroes are the impressive collection of family pensions that range from rickety rooms in someone's home to luxurious boutique-style bungalows on private islets.

From the vast lagoons of the Tuamotu atolls, to the culturally intense Marquesas Islands and the scenic mountainscapes of the Society Islands (Tahiti, Mo'orea, Ra'iatea, Taha'a, Bora Bora and Maupiti), French Polynesia's 118 islands provide enough diversity and surprises for several voyages.

When to Go

Pape'ete



May–Jun & Sep–Nov Excellent times to visit. It's cool, dry and less windy than in July and August.

Jul–Aug Peak tourist season. Can be windy. The region comes to life for Heiva festival in July.

Dec–Apr The summer rainy season. It's often humid, cloudy and very wet.

Connections

Short of sailing your own boat, air travel is the most practical way to connect from Tahiti to other islands. Pape'ete is the transport hub for French Polynesia with regular flights to all archipelagos. Boat travel is a reliable option within the Society group. A number of boats shuttle back and forth between Tahiti and Mo'orea each day, and one catamaran serves the Society Islands. Island hopping on the cargo boats that sail between Tahiti and the other archipelagos is an adventurous and inexpensive way to travel but you'll need plenty of time.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Start on **Tahiti**. Spend day one driving around the island. Devote day two and three to **Mo'orea**, (considered by many to be the most beautiful isle in the Societies). Splash around in the lagoon or go on a whale- or dolphin-watching tour. Fly to **Bora Bora**, where cool hikes, boat tours on the vast turquoise lagoon and fancy restaurants await. Live it up for a couple of nights in an over-water bungalow. From Bora Bora, you can day trip to **Maupiti**, one of French Polynesia's hidden gems.

Two Weeks

Start with two days on **Tahiti** and the same on **Mo'orea** before flying to **Huahine** for a taste of Polynesian culture. Push on from here to **Bora Bora** where you can spend a few days. Then it's time to change scene. Fly to **Rangiroa**, the largest coral atoll in the country. You'll need three days to do the atoll justice. Next, hop to **Fakarava** or **Tikehau**, where you can dive, snorkel and relax for a few days before returning to Tahiti.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Ma'a Tahiti** Traditional Tahitian food. It's a mix of starchy taro and *uru* (breadfruit), raw or cooked fish, fatty pork, coconut milk and a few scattered vegetables.
- » **Fish** Features prominently in Tahitian cuisine. *Poisson cru* (raw fish in coconut milk) is the most popular local dish. It can also be served grilled, fried or poached. It's usually tuna, bonito, wahoo, mahi mahi, parrotfish or jackfish.
- » **Steaks** Hmm, lamb and beef from New Zealand!
- » **Chow mein** This fried noodle dish is one of numerous Chinese specialities available.
- » **Po'e** Baked, mashed fruit mixed with starch and doused with coconut milk.
- » **Beer** Wash everything down with a cold Hinano.
- » **Cocktails** Try mai tai, made with rum, fruit juices and coconut liqueur.
- » **Wine** Good French wines and one local wine, Vin de Tahiti.

AT A GLANCE

Currency Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)

Language Tahitian, French

Mobile phones Local SIM cards are available and can be used with unlocked GSM phones. Roaming agreements with most operators.

Money ATMs on most islands; credit cards accepted on major islands

Visas Not required for most Western countries

Fast Facts

- » **Capital** Pape'ete
- » **Country code** 2689
- » **Land area** 3500 sq km
- » **Population** 270,000

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	96 CFP
Canada	C\$1	92 CFP
Europe	€1	119 CFP
Japan	¥100	119 CFP
New Zealand	NZ\$1	75 CFP
UK	UK£1	148 CFP
USA	US\$1	95 CFP

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com.

Set Your Budget

- » **Pension** 8000 CFP
- » **Two-course dinner** 3600 CFP
- » **Boat excursion** 8500 CFP
- » **Bottle of Hinano beer** 400 CFP
- » **Car rental** 10,000 CFP