

Tahiti & French Polynesia

📍 689 / POP 280,000

Includes ➔

Tahiti	349
Pape'ete	349
Mo'orea	364
Huahine	373
Ra'iatea & Taha'a	378
Bora Bora	385
Maupiti	393
Tuamotu Islands	397
Marquesas Islands	408
Nuku Hiva	408

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ninamu (p407)
- ➔ Vanira Lodge (p363)
- ➔ Opoa Beach Hotel (p382)
- ➔ Intercontinental Bora Bora Resort & Thalasso Spa (p390)

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Snack Mahana (p371)
- ➔ Chez Tara (p377)
- ➔ Maikai Bora Bora (p391)
- ➔ Restaurant Matira Beach (p392)

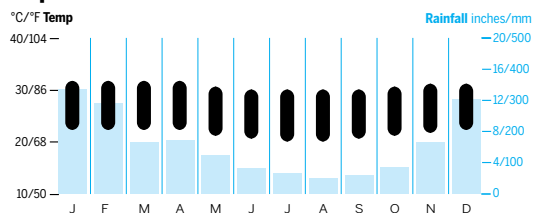
Why Go?

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 overwater bungalow. Try hiking up a waterfall valley, paddling out on a turquoise lagoon or diving through sharky passes. This paradise is more affordable than you think. On top of ultraluxurious options, French Polynesia has plenty of family-run pensions that are easier on the wallet and offer local colour.

From the vast lagoons of the Tuamotu atolls to the culturally intense Marquesas Islands and the scenic mountain-scapes of the Society Islands, 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. Plenty of sun and cooling showers.

TAHITI

POP 186,909

What Tahiti lacks in wide, white-sand beaches, it makes up for in waterfall-laden, shadowy mountains, unpretentiously beautiful black-sand beaches, sheltered blue lagoons and a distinctly Polynesian, modern buzz. This is the heart of the islands, where the cultures from all the archipelagos are mixed in the cacophonous, dusty, yet smiling and energetic capital of Pape'ete. Outside the city explore the majestic, mountainous interior on a 4WD tour, learn to dive in the translucent lagoon, wander amid mystical archaeological sites, and from July to October go whale watching. In July catch the country's most spectacular festival, the percussion- and dance-heavy Heiva. Head to Tahiti Iti to experience a more traditional pace of life.

Getting There & Away

Pape'ete is the hub of all French Polynesian transport.

AIR

Faa'a (fa-ah-ah) airport is the aviation centre of French Polynesia. All international flights arrive here, and Air Tahiti flights to the other islands leave from here. Flights within each archipelago hop from one island to the next, but most connections between archipelagos are via Faa'a.

In Pape'ete, **Air Tahiti** (Map p358; ☎ 87 86 42 42, 40 47 44 00; www.airtahiti.pf; Rue du Maréchal Foch; ☉ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) is at the intersection with Rue Edouard Ahnne. It also has an office (☉ 6am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) at the airport.

BOAT

All passenger boats to other islands moor at the **Gare Maritime** (Map p357; Blvd Pomare). The numerous cargo ships to the different archipelagos work from the Motu Uta port zone, to the north of the city.

Getting Around

Public transport in Tahiti is limited so you're best off renting a car.

CAR

Driving on Tahiti is quite straightforward and, although accident statistics are not encouraging, the traffic is fairly light once you get away from Pape'ete.

Rates start at about 4000 CFP per day with local companies but expect 8000 CFP or more per day from internationally run places. Prices drop after three days.

Most car-hire companies on Tahiti are based at Faa'a airport and stay open until the last departure. They can deliver vehicles to hotels and pensions on the west coast. Some companies also have desks at the bigger hotels.

Avis Pacificar (☎ 40 85 02 84; www.avis-tahiti.com; Faa'a International Airport) Also has a branch in Taravao.

Daniel Rent-a-Car (☎ 40 82 30 04, 40 81 96 32; www.daniel-location.com/en/; Faa'a International Airport) Old standby with a desk at the airport and good rates.

Ecocar Tahiti (Map p357; ☎ 89 50 44 77; www.ecocar-tahiti.com) Had the least expensive cars at the time of writing, starting from 4000 CFP. Reserve in advance for the best deals. Also rents scooters. Located across from Faa'a International Airport.

Europcar (☎ 40 86 61 96; www.europcarpolynesie.com; Faa'a International Airport)

Hertz (☎ 40 82 55 86; Faa'a International Airport)

Tahiti Auto Center (Map p354; ☎ 40 82 33 33; www.tahitiautocenter.pf; Pa'ea, PK20.2; ☉ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8-11.30am Sat) Cheaper vehicles need to be booked well in advance. No delivery to the airport.

Pape'ete

Metropolis this is not. Pape'ete is really just a medium-sized town (by Western standards) of moulding architecture with a lively port, lots of traffic, plenty of smiling faces and maybe a guy or two playing ukulele on the kerb. You'll either get its compact chaos and colourful clutter or you'll run quickly from its grimy edges and lack of gorgeous vistas. Sip an espresso at a Parisian-style pavement cafe, shop the vibrant market for everything and anything (from pearls to bright *pareu* – sarongs) or dine at a *roulotte* (mobile food van) in the balmy evening.

Sights

★ Marché de Pape'ete

MARKET

(Pape'ete Market; Map p358; cnr Rue Colette & Rue du 22 Septembre; ☉ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 4-9am Sun) A Pape'ete institution. If you see one sight in town, make it this market, which fills an entire city block. Shop for colourful *pareu*, shell necklaces, woven hats and local produce in the main hall. Dotted among the meat and fish sellers are lunchtime hawkers selling takeaway *Ma'a Tahiti* (traditional Tahitian food), fresh fruit juices and local ice cream.