

The Marquesas

POP 8600

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Best Places to Stay

- » Temetiu Village (p195)
- » Keikahanui Nuku Hiva Pearl Lodge (p180)
- » Hotel Hanakée Hiva Oa Pearl Lodge (p196)

Best Archaeological Sites

- » Iipona (p198)
- » Kamuihei, Tahakia & Teipoka (p183)
- » Tohua Koueva (p178)

Why Go?

Grand, brooding, powerful and charismatic: that pretty much sums up the Marquesas. Here, nature's fingers have sculpted intricate jewels that jut up dramatically from the cobalt-blue ocean. Waterfalls taller than skyscrapers trickle down vertical canyons, the ocean thrashes towering sea cliffs, sharp basalt pinnacles project from emerald forests, and scalloped bays are blanketed with desert arcs of white or black sand.

Some of the most inspirational hikes and rides in French Polynesia are found here, allowing walkers and horse riders the opportunity to explore the islands' rugged interiors. Here the past is almost palpable, thanks to a wealth of archaeological remains dating from pre-European times.

Another highlight is the culture. In everything from cuisine and dances to language and crafts, the Marquesas do feel different from the rest of French Polynesia. But don't expect turquoise lagoons, swanky resorts and an electric nightlife – the Marquesas are an ecotourist's dream, not a beach-holiday destination.

When to Go

Closer to the Equator than the rest of French Polynesia, the Marquesas' climate is a bit different. Temperatures and humidity tend to be slightly higher than in Tahiti. There is no bad time to visit: in theory, June to September sees heavier rain while November to March is drier (exactly opposite to the rest of French Polynesia) and experiences calmer seas (better for boat excursions and diving). An absolute minimum of 10 days is required if you plan to visit the two main islands (Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa) plus one secondary island.

History

Among the first islands to be settled by the Polynesians during the great South Pacific migrations, the Marquesas served as a dispersal point for the whole Polynesian triangle from Hawaii to Easter Island and New Zealand. Estimates of the islands' colonisation vary from prehistory to between AD 900 and 1100.

The Marquesas' isolation was broken in 1595 when Spanish navigator Alvaro de Mendaña y Neira sighted Fatu Hiva by pure chance. Mendaña's fleet then sailed along past Motane and Hiva Oa, and anchored for around 10 days in Vaitahu Bay on Tahuata. Mendaña christened these four islands Las Marquesas de Mendoza in honour of his sponsor, the viceroy of Peru, García Hurtado de Mendoza.

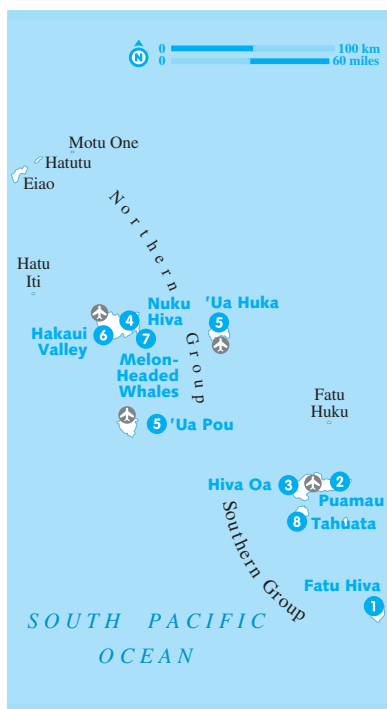
In 1774 James Cook lingered for four days on Tahuata during his second voyage. Ingraham, the American commander of the *Hope*, 'discovered' the northern group of the Marquesas in 1791, arriving slightly ahead of Frenchman Étienne Marchand, whose merchant vessel took on fresh supplies at Tahuata and then landed on 'Ua Pou. In 1797 William Crook, a young Protestant pastor with the London Missionary Society (LMS), landed on Tahuata, but his attempts at evangelism were unsuccessful.

French interest in the region grew as a means of countering English expansion in the Pacific. After a reconnaissance voyage in 1838, Rear Admiral Abel Dupetit-Thouars took possession of Tahuata in 1842 in the name of French King Louis-Philippe.

Under the French yoke, the Marquesas almost fell into oblivion – the French administration preferred to develop Pape'ete on Tahiti, which they thought had a more strategic value. Only the Catholic missionaries, who had been active since their arrival on Tahuata in 1838, persevered, and Catholicism became, and still is, firmly entrenched in the Marquesas.

Upon contact with Western influences, the foundations of Marquesan society collapsed. Whaling crews brought alcohol, firearms and syphilis. In a stunning decline, the population plummeted from around 18,000 in 1842 to 2096 in 1926.

In the 20th century the Marquesas were made famous by Hiva Oa residents Paul Gauguin and Belgian singer Jacques Brel. Slow but sure development of infrastructure has helped lessen the archipelago's isolation,



The Marquesas Highlights

- 1 Forgetting what day it is on hard-to-reach **Fatu Hiva** (p201)
- 2 Wandering flabbergasted amid *tiki* (sacred statues) at **Puamau** (p198)
- 3 Clip-clopping across the fecund interior of **Hiva Oa** (p194)
- 4 Gazing down impenetrable valleys while hiking across the **Nuku Hiva** heartland (p180)
- 5 Experiencing timeless traditional village life on **'Ua Huka** (p185) or **'Ua Pou** (p189), lodging in homestays and meeting master carvers
- 6 Exploring on foot the spectacular **Hakaui Valley** (p182) on Nuku Hiva
- 7 Spotting (and maybe snorkelling with) **melon-headed whales** (p178) off Nuku Hiva's east coast
- 8 Enjoying a picnic in a secluded bay on **Tahuata** (p199)