



Understand Tahiti & French Polynesia

TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA TODAY 214

Polynesian culture makes a comeback while the economy takes a nosedive amid motions for independence.

HISTORY 216

From prehistoric voyages across oceans to warring missionaries and nuclear explosions, French Polynesia's past reads like an adventure novel.

ENVIRONMENT 226

Beyond blue water and white sands are fragile coral reefs, a plethora of marine species and a nuclear footprint.

ISLANDER LIFE 229

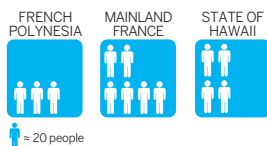
Take it slow, tuck a *tiare* flower behind your ear and get your boogie on, and you'll fit right in.

FRENCH POLYNESIA IN POPULAR CULTURE . . . 233

Since the mid-1800s French Polynesia has attracted some of the world's greatest writers and artists.



population per sq km



Tahiti & French Polynesia Today

Cultural Renaissance

Culturally, French Polynesia is rediscovering itself. In the last 20 years, the Tahitian language has been reclaimed as a subject now required in schools and as a university-level discipline. Tahitian dance is flourishing, tattoos have become the norm and *ma'a Tahiti* (traditional Tahitian food) has been transformed into haute cuisine. Even a few pre-European Tahitian events are being resuscitated, such as the Matariki i Ni'a in November, marking the beginning of the 'season of abundance' – Westerners more pessimistically call this the 'wet season'.

Government Gymnastics

While technically a part of France, French Polynesia is, for the most part, self-governing. Since 2004 the government has been in turmoil as the main political parties battle it out and try to woo members of the assembly to flip-flop the balance of power. While democratic elections decide how many assembly seats go to each party, once there the members can switch allegiances. When it's a fragile majority, which is usually the case, one or two changes can overturn the entire government. From 2004 to 2009 this happened eight times, but since 2010 things have stabilised a bit; Oscar Temaru has been in power since April 2011.

Motions of Independence

Now that Temaru has seemingly secured his presidential seat, he has begun to work on his lifelong goal: independence from France. He has gained little international backing aside from some Pacific island nations, though, and his support at home is oft-criticised. With the country's top

- » Population: 270,000
- » Land-mass area: 3500 sq km
- » Total area: 2.5 million sq km
- » Number of islands: 118
- » Tourists in 2011: 150,000

Documentaries

The Ultimate Wave Tahiti

(2010) The Teahupoo monster.

The Last Reef (2012) Gorgeous underwater footage.

Blood & Ink (2012) Exploration of tattoos.

Les Possédés de Faaité (2009) Real-life witch hunts.

Fruity Faux Pas

It's illegal and highly discouraged to bring local fruit and vegetables from Tahiti to islands in other archipelagos, since you might also be bringing unwanted insect pests that could disrupt the balance of these fragile ecosystems.

Greeting People

» Greet women with a kiss on each cheek, or a handshake if professional.

» Men greet men with a handshake.

» Men can greet with cheek kisses if good friends or relatives.