

Maupiti

Close your eyes. And just imagine. You land on a strip of coral by the sea, you are garlanded at the traditional welcome with *tiare* by a smiling-eyed islander. There's a small, white-sand beach lapped by luxuriously warm waters, a shimmering lagoon with every hue from lapis lazuli to turquoise, white clouds billowing in a deep-blue sky, a perfect ring of islets girdled with sandbars, palm trees leaning over the shore and large coral gardens packed with rainbow-coloured species. Brochure material? No, just routine in Maupiti. Bora Bora's little sister, this impossibly scenic creation of basalt and coconut trees has all you need to throw your cares away.

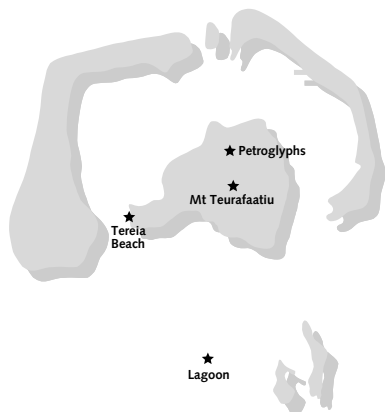
Unlike its glamorous neighbour, Maupiti has managed to hold on to that slow-down-it's-the-South-Pacific feeling, and that's why it's gaining in popularity. There's only one road and virtually no cars, just bikes; there are no showy resorts, just a smattering of family-run *pensions*, which ensures your money goes straight into local pockets. In this *Bounty*-licious paradise, everything is small and personable, and that's the beauty of it.

Many visitors come here simply to relax, but if working your suntan ceases to do it for you, there are walks, lagoon excursions and snorkelling to keep you buzzing. And divers get spoiled too, with almost daily appearances of a corps de ballet of manta rays in the lagoon.

Try to visit both Bora Bora and Maupiti, because they perfectly complement each other. Thus, you'll get the full Polynesian picture – a subtle combination of glamour, sea-scented sensuality and barefoot tranquillity.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring Maupiti's gin-clear lagoon while **snorkelling** (p169) with manta rays the size of a small car!
- Taking it real easy basking lizardlike on heavenly **Tereia Beach** (p168)
- Scaling up **Mt Teurafaatui** (p169) and feasting your eyes on the 360-degree views of the translucent lagoon
- Reflecting on Maupiti's bizarre past while spotting well-preserved **petroglyphs** (p168)
- Finding your own paradise in a delightful guesthouse on a deserted islet (p170)



■ POPULATION: 1191

■ AREA: 11 SQ KM

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO...

- Maupiti has no ATMs and credit cards are only accepted at a couple of *pensions*, so you'll need to bring enough cash to cover your entire bill, plus a little extra for surprise add-ons.
- Beware of tricky currents when snorkelling or kayaking near Onoiau Pass (where a few of the *pensions* are).
- The most enjoyable way to get around on the main island is by bicycle.
- Maupiti has no resorts; digs are in simple family guesthouses.
- Restaurants are also pretty much nonexistent, so unless you're the completely self-sufficient type, opt for *demi-pension* (half board) or *pension complète* (full board) at your guesthouse. It costs extra but the food is usually delicious and served family-style.
- Although you might be offered beverages throughout the day, don't expect these to be free, even if you're on a meal plan.

HISTORY

Dutch explorer Roggeveen is credited with the European 'discovery' of Maupiti in 1722, nearly 50 years before Wallis, Bougainville and Cook made their important landfalls on Tahiti. European missionaries were quick to follow, eventually succeeding in installing Protestantism as the major religion.

Bora Bora began to assert influence over Maupiti in the early 19th century; the power struggles continued throughout the century. French influence also reached the island during this period; missionaries and local chiefs continued to wield the most power until after WWII, when the French took over.

Maupiti has changed little over the last century; fruit crops grown on the *motu* (islets) are still major sources of income for the islanders. Copra production, heavily subsidised by the government, also remains important.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

From the air, Maupiti resembles a miniature Bora Bora – a *motu*-fringed aqua lagoon with a rocky, mountainous interior. A 10km road encircles the island. The main settlement is on the east coast. The primary shipping quay is on the southeastern corner of the island.

The high island mass is surrounded by a wide but shallow lagoon fringed with five *motu*, including Motu Tuanai, where the airport is located. There's only one pass, Onoiau, to the south.

To the north of the centre of the village the *mairie* (town hall), post office and Air Tahiti office are grouped together. There's no bank and no ATM, so bring a wad of cash.

THE MOTU

Maupiti's star attractions are its five idyllic *motu*, spits of sand and crushed coral dotted with swaying palms, and floating in the jade lagoon that surrounds the main island. Most travellers choose to stay on these fabulous islets, but the mainland *pensions* will happily organise day trips for around 3000 CFP per person if you're staying on the island. Besides acting as quiet retreats (perfect for sunbathing, swimming or simply reading a trashy novel), the *motu* also boast Maupiti's best beaches (though Tereia Beach, on the main island, is a very serious competitor).

Motu Paeao, at the northern end of the lagoon, is ideal for swimming and snorkelling.

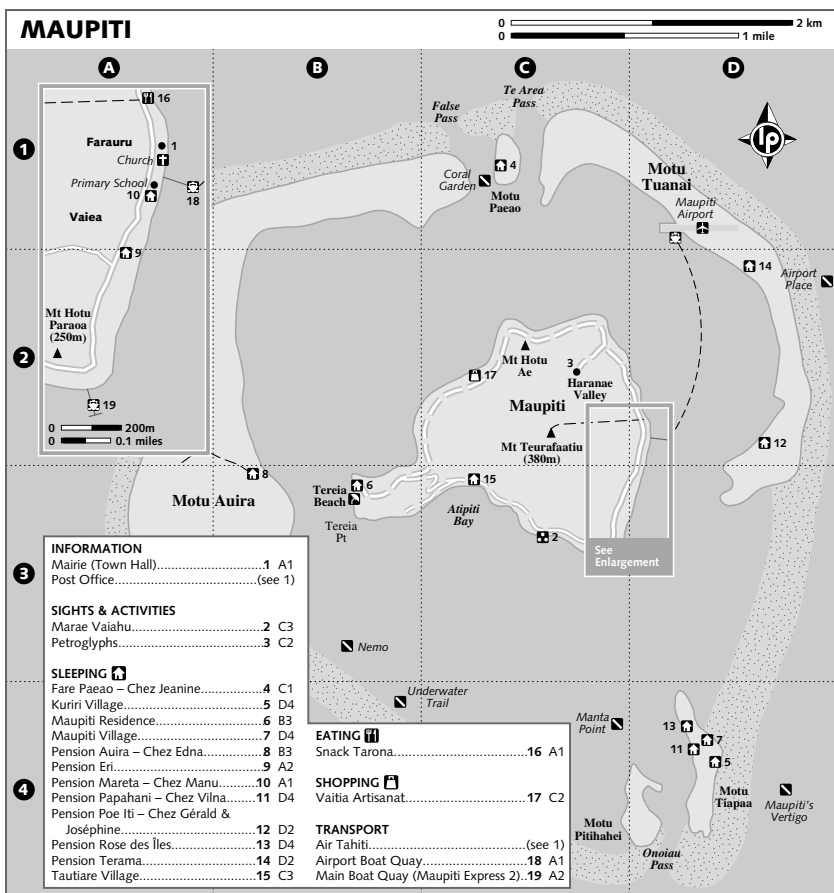
There's an important melon-production plantation on **Motu Auira**. At low tide you can reach it from the mainland by wading across the lagoon – the water is warm and only waist high, but keep an eye out for rays.

Motu Tiapaa has beautiful, sandy, white beaches and good snorkelling on its ocean and lagoon sides. It's also the most developed *motu*, with several *pensions*, so it can seem crowded by Maupiti standards. If you have a kayak, however, you can paddle across to the completely isolated **Motu Pitihahai**, but be sure to steer way to the north of Onoiau Pass, which is very dangerous due to strong currents near the pass.

The airport and a few *pensions* are found on **Motu Tuanai**, another picture-friendly islet. However, the lagoon is shallow along this *motu*, which doesn't make it good for swimming.

THE MAIN ISLAND

The village spreads along the east coast and is dominated by a sharp ridge line running from



north to south. Neat houses, brightened with hibiscus, are strung along the road and they often have *uru* (breadfruit) trees shading the family tombs fronting many of them. Inland, the terrain climbs steeply up to the summit of Mt Teurafaatiu (380m).

The following tour starts in the village and proceeds around the island in an anticlockwise direction. It's a good idea to rent a bike as there's only one road and no traffic, plus the terrain is flat and distances are short (10km maximum for the complete loop around the island).

Petroglyphs

Maupiti has some interesting and easily viewed petroglyphs etched into boulders in a rocky

riverbed. The biggest and most impressive is a turtle image on a flat boulder to the right of a placid spring. To reach the petroglyphs, head north out of the village and round the point before passing the basketball court near the church. You're now in the Haranae Valley; on the mountainside and just after a green house is a track heading inland. Follow it for 200m to a small pumping station, and then follow the rocky riverbed. After only 100m, on the left, you'll find the petroglyphs.

Tereia Beach

A more enchanting spot you'd be hard pressed to find. Fringed by a sparkling turquoise lagoon and backed by willowy palm trees, Tereia Beach is undisputedly the most beautiful spot

on the island. The lagoon is shallow, warm and crystal clear, and the bone-white beach is nearly all sand (no smashed coral or broken rock). There are no facilities or vendors here, just sand and sun. If you're with your sweetheart, come here at sunset; as the sunset sky deepens to orange, the spot becomes downright romantic.

From Tereia Beach it's easy to wade across the lagoon to Motu Auirā during low tide.

Marae Vaiahu

History buffs will enjoy visiting Marae Vaiahu, Maupiti's most important *marae*, which features a large coastal site covered with coral slabs and a fish box. Made of four coral blocks set edgewise in the form of a rectangle, with a fifth serving as a lid, the box was used for ceremonial purposes to ensure successful fishing. Four fish kings are represented on the sides of the box. It's signposted, northwest of the main quay.

ACTIVITIES

For such a small island, there's quite a lot of options to keep you active on land and at sea.

Hiking

It's a fairly tough climb to reach **Mt Hotu Paraoa** (250m), the impressive rocky wall that looms above the village. On a clear day you can see all the way to Bora Bora. The trail begins near Pension Eri and is marked with painted arrows (although sometimes they can be a bit hard to find). There's one steep section where you'll need to use your hands to clamber up, and nearly the entire route is shaded. Count on one hour.

The ascent of **Mt Teurafaatui** (380m) is even more vigorous, but the 360-degree panorama at the summit worth the effort. Ribbons of deep blue water flecked with turquoise and sapphire, islets girdled with brilliant scimitars of white sand, lagoons mottled with coral formations, and Bora Bora in the background... hallucinogenic. The track starts virtually opposite Snack Taronā and the climb is shaded for most of the way. The most difficult part is towards the end, with a climb up steep rock required to get to the ridge. Allow three hours for the return trip and be sure to bring plenty of drinking water.

It's best to go with a guide – contact your *pension* for securing one (about 3000 CFP).

ECO-SNORKELLING – THE 'UNDERWATER TRAIL'

The *sentier sous-marin* (underwater trail) set up in 2008 by **Maupiti Nautique** (☎ 67 83 80; www.maupiti-nautique.com) is an eco-friendly and informative approach to the lagoon. It consists of five buoys that were installed in an area to the south of the island. Each buoy is equipped with interpretative panels focusing on the lagoon ecosystem. You swim from one buoy to another under the guidance of the instructor, who'll be happy to answer your questions. It's a great chance to get really well acquainted with marine life. It costs 3000 CFP (snorkelling gear included) and lasts 1½ hours. Children over six are welcome.

Snorkelling, Kayaking & Lagoon Excursions

Maupiti's magnificent lagoon is gin-clear, bath-warm and filled with all manner of tropical marine life, from schools of butterflyfish and parrotfish to manta rays and banks of flame-coloured coral. The best **snorkelling** sites are the reefs stretching north of Onoiaū Pass (but beware of the currents) and Motu Paeao. Most guesthouses have masks and snorkels you can borrow. The *pensions* also run lagoon tours that include stops for snorkelling. These trips cost between 3000 CFP and 5500 CFP, depending on their duration and whether a picnic is offered.

Sea kayaking is another popular activity of the DIY variety. Paddling around the quiet lagoon offers the chance to discover hidden coves, search for leopard and manta rays or just put down the oar, lie back and sunbathe. Most places to stay either rent or offer free sea kayaks for guests' use.

Maupiti Nautique (see below) also offers snorkelling trips to the manta rays' cleaning station.

Diving

At last, there's diving in Maupiti! There's one professional diving operator on the island, **Maupiti Nautique** (☎ 67 83 80; www.maupiti-nautique.com), which opened in 2008. And what diving: there aren't many places in the world where you can dive on a manta rays' cleaning station, where cleaner wrasses feed on parasites from the mantas' wings, in less than 6m of water.

'In principle, they're here every morning, but sightings can't be guaranteed,' advised the dive instructor. There are also outstanding dive sites outside the lagoon, but they aren't always accessible due to the strong currents and swell in the pass. See p69 for more information on diving on Maupiti.

Single dive trips or introductory dives cost 6000 CFP including gear and two-tank trips are 11,500 CFP. An open-water course costs 40,000 CFP. The dive-and-whale-watch combination is great value at 11,000 CFP. Cash only.

Whale & Dolphin Watching

Apparently, humpback whales find Maupiti attractive too. Every year during the austral winter, from mid-July to October, they frolic off Maupiti's barrier reef. Whale-watching trips are available through the local dive operator, **Maupiti Nautique** (☎ 67 83 80; www.maupiti-nautique.com). You may have the privilege of swimming right alongside these graceful giants, but don't stress them and follow the guide's instructions. Dolphins can be spotted all year round along the reef. A three-hour excursion costs 7000 CFP.

MAUPITI FOR CHILDREN

Bring the kids! Just focus on the outdoors: snorkelling and swimming (there are some really shallow waters, especially near Tereia Beach and Motu Tiapaa). The *sentier sous-marin* (p169) is accessible to children over six. Better yet, whale-watching trips are thrilling for all ages.

SLEEPING

Your biggest decision: staying on a *motu* or on the main island? For the full Robinson Crusoe experience, places on the *motu* are hard to beat. Be prepared to feel a bit captive, though, except if you're ready to paddle to the village or pay anything from 500 CFP to 1500 CFP for a transfer by boat. If island life is your top priority, stay on the main island. Better yet: combine the two options!

The Main Island

Guesthouses are all either right on the lagoon or very close to it, but only Maupiti Residence has a beach.

Pension Mareta – Chez Manu (☎ 67 82 32; chezmanu@mail.pf; r per person without bathroom 3000 CFP) In this family-run venture in the centre of

the village you won't pay very much and you won't get very much – a sort of win-win. The three rooms are threadbare and share a cold-water bathroom. Guests may use the cooking facilities for an extra 300 CFP or order a meal (about 2000 CFP). It might be noisy at weekends if a *bringué* (local party) is organised on the premises.

Pension Eri (☎ 67 81 29; r per person incl breakfast/half board 3000/5000 CFP) Just a place to lay your head, with four smallish, no-frills rooms. A fan and a bed (alas, saggy mattress), and that's about it.

Tautiare Village (☎ 67 83 58; www.maupitiisland.com/tautiare/index.html; r per person incl breakfast/half board 6000/8500 CFP) An unfussy *pension* with an unpretentious appeal. Its dual attractions are its affordable rates and the spotlessness of the five adjoining rooms, equipped with big, hot-water bathrooms. They are set on grassy garden areas and face the lagoon, but don't get too excited: swimming is not *that* tempting here due to shallow (and sometimes murky) waters, but Tereia beach is just a 10-minute walk away.

Maupiti Residence (☎ 67 82 61; maupiti.residence@mail.pf; bungalows 12,000-16,000 CFP; 📶 📺) To all wannabe artists reading this: set your creative retreat here, because the location, right on Tereia Beach, is to die for. While hardly glitzy, the two villas (one more should have been built by the time you read this) contain enough room to accommodate a small troupe and exemplify functional simplicity with a living room, two bedrooms, a terrace that delivers full frontal lagoon views and a fully equipped kitchen. Perks include free bicycles and kayaks, hot water, DVD player, daily cleaning service, air-con (add 500 CFP), TV and washing machine, making this one of the best-value stays you'll have. You can order breakfast (1100 CFP) and have your lunch or dinner delivered to your bungalow. There's a 15% drop in price if you stay more than three nights. The secret's out, so book early. Credit cards are accepted.

The Motu

Places listed here offer plenty of remote and tropical tranquillity, but you'll need to arrange a trip to the mainland to visit a shop of any kind.

Pension Auira – Chez Edna (☎ /fax 67 80 26; Motu Auira; campsites per person 2000 CFP, bungalows with half board per person 7500-9000 CFP) This place has a split

personality. Ramshackle and dusty are the words for the beach and garden bungalows; fabulous is the adjective that springs to mind when you see the location, right by a sandy beach lapped by topaz waters. Our verdict: a good bargain for those who have a tent, not so much so for those who bunk down in a bungalow.

Pension Rose des Îles (☎ 67 82 00, 70 50 70; Motu Tiapaa; campsites per person 2000 CFP, bungalows with half board per person 10,000-12,000 CFP) Run by a friendly French Polynesian couple, this *pension* offers two rustic bungalows made from woven palm fronds in a lovely location on the lagoon. They're not especially good value, given that mattresses are lumpy and bathrooms are shared, but the camping option is a good deal. The outdoor setting features small tables, hammocks and a profusion of plants and trees, as well as a few dogs that stick like leeches. Kayaks are available (it's an extra 500 CFP for campers).

Maupiti Village (☎ 67 80 08; Motu Tiapaa; dm/r/ bungalows with full board per person 6000/7000/12,000 CFP) According to most travellers, the best part of staying here is the food, which is copious, varied and flavoursome, as well as the tip-top location on the ocean side of Motu Tiapaa. The charm ends there. Accommodation is clean but stark, with three particle-board rooms with a shared outside bathroom, a bare-bones six-bed dorm and two teensy cabins, all with flimsy mattresses. But if you can live with that, it's not a bad deal at these prices, especially given that kayaks are free and you won't be inside much anyway.

Pension Terama (☎ 67 81 96, 71 03 33; <http://maupiti.terama.over-blog.com>; Motu Tuanai; r with half board per person 7000 CFP) An acceptable option if you want to base yourself on a *motu* without paying the hefty price tag. Run by an affable French-Tahitian couple, it exudes low-key vibes and features three basic rooms in the family home, with two communal bathrooms (one with bucket). There's also a very simple bungalow right on a little stretch of sand; lying on your bed you can see the glinting waters of the lagoon and the majestic silhouette of the main island. One drawback: the water's not deep enough for swimming, although free kayaks offer adequate compensation. Airport transfers are free.

Pension Poe Ite – Chez Gérard & Joséphine (☎ 74 58 76; maupitiexpress@mail.pf; Motu Tuanai; bungalows s/d 7500/8500 CFP; 🍷) This desirable guesthouse

ticks all the right boxes, with a spiffing lagoon frontage, a small strip of beach, lofty views and four well-proportioned bungalows (with hot water) scattered in a well-tended property – not to mention green credentials (power is supplied by two windmills). Sunbathing is top-notch but swimming is not that enthralling, with very shallow waters; paddling to more idyllic swimming grounds expands your possibilities. When it comes to preparing Polynesian dishes for dinner, Joséphine, your gracious host, knows her stuff. Airport transfers, kayaks and snorkels are free.

Pension Papahani – Chez Vilna (☎ 60 15 35; pensionpapahani@hotmail.fr; Motu Tiapaa; bungalows with half board per person 9500-12,500 CFP) An atmosphere of dreamlike tranquillity characterises this well-run *pension* with a fab lagoon frontage. Your biggest quandary here: a bout of snorkelling (or kayaking) or a snooze on the white-sand beach under the swaying palms? The five bungalows blend perfectly into the tropical gardens. Try for one of the newer, slightly more expensive bungalows as the two units at the rear are a bit long in the tooth.

Kuriri Village (☎ 67 82 23, 74 54 54; www.maupiti-kuriri.com; Motu Tiapaa; bungalows with half board per person 12,500 CFP) Watch dolphins frolicking in the waves from a little wooden deck (with Bora Bora looming on the horizon), take a dip in the lagoon, read a book from the well-stocked library – it's a tough life at Kuriri Village, isn't it? A series of simply designed yet tastefully arranged bungalows is scattered amid lovely gardens and coconut palms. It's intimate and laid-back, and appeals to couples looking for a bit of style without an exorbitant price tag. The property opens onto the lagoon and the ocean – two different settings, two different atmospheres. As befits a French-run outfit, you can expect to eat divinely. Free kayaks and fishing rods.

Fare Paeao – Chez Jeanine (☎ 67 81 01; fare.pae.ao@mail.pf; Motu Paeao; s/d bungalows with half board 17,500/22,500 CFP) The inner real-estate agent in you will be crying out 'position, position, position' upon seeing the fabulous coral gardens and jade waters onto which this property edges – not to mention the soul-stirring sunsets. The six luminous and functional bungalows are sprinkled through gardens replete with fragrant shrubs of *tiare*. Guests can make use of the kayaks to explore the lagoon. Shame that it's significantly overpriced, especially considering what's available on the island.

EATING

Most visitors opt for the half- or full-board options with their accommodation, and we'd highly recommend you do as well. In the village, several small shops sell basic supplies and soft drinks, but otherwise your options are limited to just one place.

Snack Tarona (☎ 67 82 46; dishes 900-1200 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Just north of the village, this place comes recommended for its hearty portions of traditional French Polynesian dishes such as raw fish, tuna sashimi, braised beef, and pork with taro.

SHOPPING

You can find some quality souvenirs made from oyster shells, urchins and seashells as well as pearls at **Vaitia Artisanat** (☎ 67 83 23; ☺ daily), in the north of the main island (it's signposted).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Maupiti is 320km west of Tahiti and 40km west of Bora Bora.

Air

Air Tahiti flies from Maupiti to Tahiti (15,500 CFP, 1½ hours, five flights weekly), Ra'iatea (7500 CFP, 25 minutes, three flights weekly) and Bora Bora (7000 CFP, 20 minutes, one or two flights weekly). The **Air Tahiti office**

(☎ 67 15 05, 67 81 24; ☺ 8am-noon Mon-Fri) is in the village.

Boat

Because of strong currents and a tricky sand bar in the Onoiau Pass, the lagoon can only be navigated by smaller ships, which are often forced to wait for appropriate tidal conditions.

The **Maupiti Express 2** (☎ 67 66 69, 78 27 11; www.maupitiexpress.com) runs between Maupiti and Bora Bora on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (3000/4000 CFP one way/return). Leaving Vaitape (Bora Bora) at 8.30am, it arrives at Maupiti at 10.15am then departs for the return trip at 4pm, arriving back at Bora Bora at 5.45pm.

GETTING AROUND

If you've booked accommodation you'll be met at the airport, although some places charge for the trip (around 2500 CFP return).

It's simple to arrange a boat out to the *motu* from the village and vice versa. It costs 500 CFP to 1500 CFP to go from the main island to the *motu* and 3000 CFP to 5000 CFP for a lagoon excursion. All the *pensions* on the mainland or *motu* can arrange these transfers.

Most *pensions* rent bikes for about 1000 CFP per day. Operators also wait on the quay when the *Maupiti Express 2* arrives at Maupiti.