

# Tahiti & French Polynesia

Better known by the name of its main island, Tahiti, French Polynesia is a mesmerising wonderland of reef-fringed islands and translucent aqua lagoons. Shamelessly chic and seductive, it's the kind of place where the rich and famous come to play and hedonistic honeymoon fantasies are realised. The epitome of the Pacific dream, this is one Garden of Eden so damn beautiful it's hard to believe it really exists.

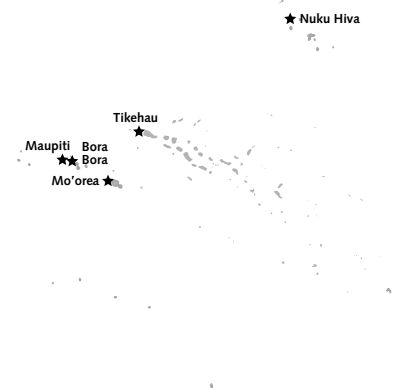
French Polynesia is more than just some souped up, sexy honeymoon destination, however. Those seeking something stronger than a pina colada in the sand will find salvation never more than a boat ride away. Adventures are plentiful in these archipelagos scattered over an area as big as Europe. Take an old school pirate romp through the mysterious and danger-tinged Tuamotus, where the breathtaking turquoise sea is home not only to flawless black pearls, but also hundreds of toothy sharks. Travel to the ends of the earth, destination Australs, a place so remote centuries slide by without anyone batting an eye. Check out the magnificent Gambier Archipelago: an armchair destination for most, it's also a must for wannabe National Geographic explorers. Those searching for a little less swashbuckling and a lot more room service will delight in Bora Bora's luxurious pampering and lush good looks; in Maupiti's picture-perfect views and old-fashioned French hospitality.

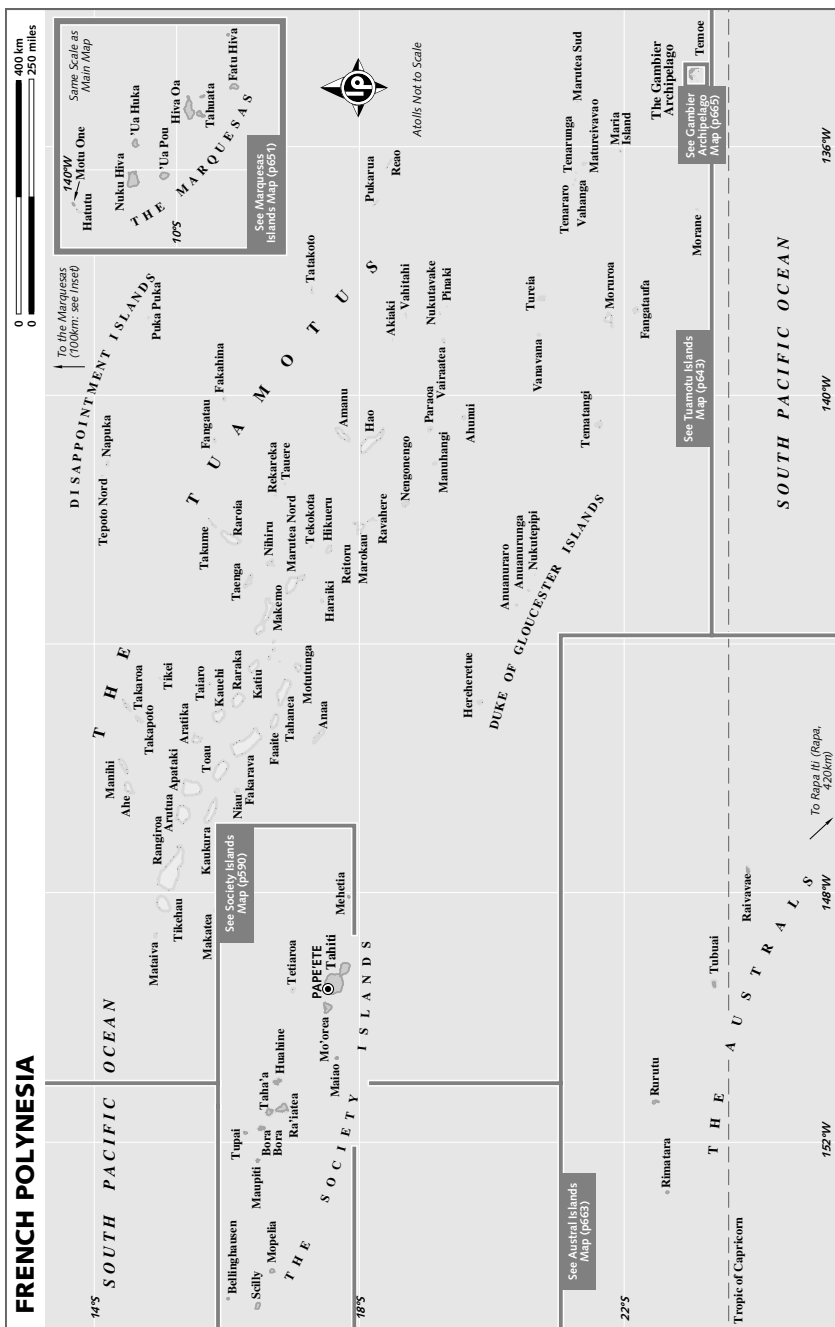
The truth is, whether you've secretly fantasised about splitting coconuts with your bare hands in a Rambo meets Robinson Crusoe scenario or daydreamed about playing heroine in a mushy Hollywood movie, French Polynesia tempts you to dream your wildest of fantasies right into punch-drunk reality.

French Polynesia comprises five main island groups – the Society Islands, the Tuamotus, the Marquesas, the Australs and the Gambier Archipelago. Tahiti is in the Society Islands.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Pamper yourself on ultra gorgeous and over-the-top luxurious **Bora Bora** (p631), a temple to high-octane hedonism
- Relax on beautiful **Maupiti** (p639), the Society Islands' most unspoilt natural phenomenon
- Get lost in **Mo'orea's** (p604) entrancing history and luscious scenery
- Meander along postcard perfect empty beaches and snorkel in the translucent waters of **Tikehau** (p647) in the Tuamotus
- Hike the desert coasts and fecund valleys of **Nuku Hiva** (p652) in the wild and rugged Marquesas





### CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The dry winter period from May to October is the best time to visit; the weather is cooler and there is much less rainfall. Temperatures rise during the November to April summer rainy season when it's humid, cloudy and very wet. Three-quarters of the annual rainfall occurs during this period, generally in the form of brief, violent storms, although torrential rains lasting several days are not uncommon.

French Polynesia is south of the equator, but school holidays fall in line with those of the northern hemisphere. This means the peak season is July and August, and during this period it's no mean feat getting flights and accommodation. Christmas to early January, late February and early March, the Easter period, early May and early October are also quite busy times. The peak July–August season coincides with the Heiva festival (see p670), held throughout July, when the region comes to life.

Diving is popular year-round, and each season brings its share of discoveries. Surfing is also a year-round activity, but if you are sailing, it's best if you avoid the November to March tropical depressions. Walking is best in the dry season, as some of the trails are simply impassable when it's wet. Check out p827 to see French Polynesian climate charts.

### HISTORY

No-one really knows why early peoples migrated here or even where they came from. Modern theories have Polynesian voyages originating from the Philippines or Indonesia, spurred on by territorial disputes or

overpopulation. Whatever the reason, ancient Polynesians packed up their outriggers with coconuts, *uru* (breadfruit), taro, sugar cane, dogs, pigs and chickens and headed out into the blue. These were feats of maritime prowess, not to be matched by Europeans for more than 1000 years.

### European Arrival

European explorers first ventured into the region in 1595, although major expeditions didn't really get underway until the late 18th century. Lacking the navigation methods that Polynesians had developed over millennia of Pacific travel, the Europeans searched for islands in the Pacific by means of a rather random needle-in-a-haystack method.

### MENDAÑA & QUIRÓS

In 1595 Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra came upon the Marquesas Islands on his second search for Terra Australis Incognita, the nonexistent great southern continent. Mendaña named the islands after his patron, Marquesas de Mendoza, but his visit resulted in open warfare and 200 islanders were killed.

Mendaña's pilot, Pedro Fernández de Quirós, returned in 1606 and discovered the Tuamotus before sailing to Vanuatu.

### WALLIS

The *Dolphin* anchored at Matavai Bay in Tahiti's lagoon in late June of 1767. A quarter of the crew was down with scurvy and Samuel Wallis himself was incapacitated during most of his visit. Initially, the arrival was greeted with fascination as hundreds of canoes surrounded the ship, including canoes carrying young women 'who played a great many droll wanton tricks'. When the locals' fascination turned to fear, Wallis began by firing grapeshot at the Tahitians and finished by sending a party ashore to destroy homes and canoes. The natives suddenly became more friendly and a trade relationship developed: the crew was desperate for fresh supplies and the Tahitians, who had not yet discovered metals, were delighted to receive knives, hatchets and nails in exchange.

Wallis only stayed in Matavai Bay for a few weeks, just long enough to name the island King George's Land and to claim it for Britain.

### TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Pape'ete (Tahiti)
- **Population:** 245,405
- **Land area:** 3500 sq km
- **Number of islands:** 118
- **International telephone code:** 689
- **Currency:** Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)
- **Languages:** Tahitian, French and English
- **Greeting:** *la ora na* (Tahitian), *Bonjour* (French)
- **Website:** www.tahiti-tourisme.com

## BOUGAINVILLE

With his ships *La Boudeuse* and *L'Étoile*, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville arrived on Tahiti in April 1768, less than a year after Wallis. At this time Wallis was still home-ward bound, so Bougainville was completely unaware he was not the first European to set eyes on the island. His visit only lasted nine days, but Bougainville was a more cultured, considered man than Wallis and had no unfriendly clashes with the Tahitians.

Bougainville explained that the Tahitians 'pressed us to choose a woman and come on shore with her; and their gestures, which were not ambiguous, denoted in what manner we should form an acquaintance with her'. Bougainville's reports of Venuslike women with 'the celestial form of that goddess', and of the people's uninhibited attitude towards matters sexual, swept through Paris like wildfire.

Unaware that the Union Jack had already flown over the island, Bougainville took time out to claim Tahiti for France but, like Wallis, he was soon overshadowed when the greatest Pacific explorer of them all, James Cook, arrived on the scene.

## COOK

In three great expeditions between 1769 and 1779, James Cook filled the map of the Pacific so comprehensively that future expeditions were reduced to joining the dots. Cook was sent to the Pacific with two ambitious tasks. One, which was for the Royal Society, was to observe the transit of Venus as it passed across the face of the sun. By timing the transit from three very distant places it was hoped that the distance from the earth to the sun could be calculated. Tahiti was selected as one of the three measuring points (the other two were in Norway and Canada). Cook's second objective was to hunt for the mythical great continent of the south. The instruments of the time proved to be insufficiently accurate to achieve Cook's first objective, but Cook's expeditions did yield impressive scientific work.

## BOENECHEA

Already firmly established in South America, the Spanish looked upon the Pacific as their back yard and were less than happy to hear about other European navigators' visits. In 1772 Don Domingo de Boenechea sailed the

*Aguilla* from Peru and anchored in the lagoon off Tautira on Tahiti Iti (Small Tahiti). For the third time, the island was claimed by a European nation. Boenechea installed two inept missionaries and established Tautira as the first long-term European settlement on the island.

In 1775 the *Aguilla* again returned from Peru. The two Spanish missionaries, who had been spectacularly unsuccessful at converting 'the heathen', and who from all reports were terrified of the islanders, were more than happy to scuttle back to Peru. Boenechea died on Tahiti during this visit, and thus ended Spanish rule on Tahiti.

## Bounty Mutineers

In 1789 the infamous mutiny on the *Bounty* occurred after Bligh's crew had spent six long comfortable months on Tahiti. See p424 for more about the *Bounty*.

After the mutiny the mutineers returned to Tahiti and Tubuai in the Australs before sailing to a more remote hideaway on Pitcairn Island. Sixteen stayed behind on Tahiti, a move that changed the course of history.

Before the Europeans arrived power had been a local affair. No ruler was strong enough to control more than a patch of land, and Tahiti was divided into a number of squabbling groups. However, once they realised the persuasive power of European weaponry, Tahitians pressed the *Bounty* mutineers to take sides in local conflicts. The mutineers became mercenaries to the highest bidder, the Pomare family.

That deal was the beginning of the Pomares' metamorphosis into a ruling dynasty. Pomare I, known as Tu, controlled most of Tahiti by the time he died in 1803; his son Pomare II took over.

## Whalers, Missionaries & Depopulation

The London Missionary Society (LMS) landed at Tahiti's Point Vénus in March 1797 and did its best to rid the islanders of their wicked ways. Dancing, 'indecent' songs, tattoos, nudity, indiscriminate sex and even wearing flowers in the hair were banned once the missionaries got their patron, Pomare II, on their side.

Whalers and traders arrived in Polynesia in the 1790s, spreading diseases, encouraging prostitution and introducing alcohol and more weapons.

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

French Polynesia is ridiculously expensive by anyone's standards, so it's only fair to know what you're getting into before shelling out the big bucks.

While never cheap, French Polynesia can be done on a budget and backpackers who've travelled here find they can scrape by on a slightly fat shoestring (expect to shell out about 5000 CFP per person per day) if they're willing to camp and cook. Some of the large islands also offer hostel-style digs with communal kitchens and bunk-bed dorms. Even if you don't consider yourself a starving student, French Polynesia may seem a little too expensive for anyone other than the world's wealthiest. But while it is possible to blow US\$10,000 in one night on an over-water suite, mere mortals can find cosy family *pensions* (guesthouses) and affordable hotels on even the ritziest islands. Midrange travellers staying in more comfortable digs and wanting to take in a few restaurant meals and perhaps an organised excursion can count on about US\$200 per couple per day. For top-end visitors the sky's the limit – with endless imaginative ways to lighten your wallet.

To score the best deals, you'll need to plan in advance. Start thinking about your trip around three to six months out and definitely devote some serious hours to Web research. From complete honeymoon packages to discounts on budget-oriented family guesthouses to Internet-only deals on luxury resorts, there are loads of Internet sites offering everything Tahiti on sale.

Whatever your budget, however, sadly you'll find taxation is another bugbear here: a TVA (*taxe sur la valeur ajoutée*; value-added tax), which was introduced in 1998, currently adds 6% to your hotel bill (and that's not including the 5% government tax and the *taxe de séjour*, accommodation tax or daily tax, which top off the bill). The prices quoted in this chapter include taxes.

## Best Over-the-Top Lux Resorts

If you're going to really splurge, French Polynesia just might be the best place in the world to do it. The following places are the best of the best.

- Intercontinental Moana Beach Bora Bora (p636)
- Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort (p608)
- Hotel Bora Bora (p636)
- Bora Bora Lagoon Resort (p636)
- Mo'orea Pearl Resort & Spa (p608)
- Bora Bora Nui Resort & Spa (p637)
- Bora Bora Pearl Beach Resort (p637)
- Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort, Tuamotus (p647)
- Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa (p630)
- Intercontinental Resort Tahiti (p600)

## Best Value Accommodation

The following are our top picks for good value; they are not necessarily the cheapest places, they simply have the best cost to worth ratio.

- Fare ie Huahine (p622)
- Pension Mauarii, Huahine (p622)
- Vanira Lodge, Tahiti (p601)
- Pension Poe Iti, Maupiti (p641)
- Pension Henri, Rangiroa (p645)
- Village Pauline, Bora Bora (p635)
- Mark's Place Paradise, Mo'orea (p609)
- Pension Kanahau, Hiva Oa (p660)
- Tarariki Village, Mo'orea (p609)
- Novatel Bora Bora Hotel & Beach Resort (p636)

Plagued by diseases against which they had no natural immunity, the population plummeted. When Cook first visited, Tahiti's population was about 40,000. In 1800 it was less than 20,000 and by the 1820s it was down to around 6000. In the Marquesas the situation was even worse – the population dropped from 80,000 to only 2000 in one century.

## Pomares & the Missionaries

After 1815 the Pomares ruled Tahiti, with Protestant missionaries advising them on government and laws and trying to keep whalers and Australian traders at arm's length. Pomare II died in 1821 leaving his son Pomare III to rule until his death six years later in 1827, at which point the

young Queen Pomare IV assumed the throne.

The queen's missionary advisers, seeing her only as an interim ruler until the next king arrived, turned a blind eye to some of her youthful excesses. She wasn't averse to a little singing and dancing, and even visited passing ships. Queen Pomare IV made the most of her leeway and ruled Tahiti for 50 years.

English Protestant missionaries were the major advisers to chiefs in the Society, Austral and Tuamotu Islands. But in the Gambier Archipelago and the Marquesas Islands French Catholic missionaries were in control. In 1836 two French missionaries, Laval and Caret, visiting Pape'ete from the Gambier Archipelago were caught up in this rivalry when the British promptly arrested and deported them.

### French Takeover

The French saw the deportation of Laval and Caret as a national insult. Demands, claims, counterclaims, payments and apologies shuttled back and forth. In 1842 Admiral Dupetit-Thouars settled matters by turning up in *La Reine Blanche* and pointing the ship's guns at Pape'ete, forcing Queen Pomare to yield. French soldiers promptly landed, along with Catholic missionaries.

The French arrested and deported George Pritchard, the British missionary who was the queen's consul and unofficial chief adviser. Queen Pomare, still hoping for British intervention, fled to Ra'iatea in 1844 and a guerrilla rebellion broke out on several islands. The rebels were subdued and by 1846 France controlled Tahiti and Mo'orea. The queen returned to Tahiti in 1847 as a mere figurehead.

Queen Pomare died in 1877; her son, Pomare V, had little interest in the position and abdicated in 1881. French power extended to include most of the other Society Islands in 1888, although rebellions continued to rumble on Ra'iatea until almost the end of the century. The Gambier Archipelago was annexed in 1881 and the Austral Islands in 1900/01.

### 20th Century

Soon after the turn of the century an economic boom attracted colonists, mostly French. By 1911 there were about 3500 Europeans in the islands, adding to Chinese

immigration, which had begun in 1864 with cotton production at Atimaono on Tahiti. The foundations of a multiethnic society were in place.

French Polynesia was directly involved in both world wars. In WWI almost 1000 Tahitian soldiers fought in Europe, and on 22 September 1914 two German cruisers patrolling the Pacific sank the French cruiser *Zélée* and shelled the Pape'ete market. In WWII 5000 US soldiers were based on Bora Bora, and a 2km runway was built in 1943. Tahitian volunteers in the Pacific Battalion fought in North Africa and Europe.

In 1946 the islands became an overseas territory within the French Republic, sparking agitation for independence. A political party, the Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes (RDPT; Democratic Assembly of Tahitian Populations) took centre stage on the political scene for about 10 years.

On 22 July 1957 the territory officially became French Polynesia. The 1960s were a real turning point. In 1961 Faa'a airport was built, opening French Polynesia to the world. Shortly after, the filming of *Mutiny on the Bounty* on Tahiti poured millions of dollars into the economy. In 1963 the nuclear-testing Centre Expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP; Pacific Experimentation Centre) was established at Moruroa and Fangataufa.

From 1977 to 1996 French Polynesia took over internal management and autonomy. The nuclear testing of the era shook Polynesia physically, socially and economically: violent protests rocked Pape'ete in 1987 and 1995 and the CEP made French Polynesia economically dependent on France. The end to nuclear testing in 1996 also meant the end of the prosperity of the previous 30 years.

### French Polynesia Today

Over the last few decades, French Polynesia's control over its own government and resources has been widened. Although independence from France is a possibility in the future, it is unlikely to happen anytime soon. Funds sent from France to help French Polynesia develop its own industries to work towards economic independence were mostly squandered by the self-serving Flosse regime. Oscar Temaru's new politic to actually help his country's independent economy, receives little support from France

and Flosse's cronies are constantly setting road blocks to make the new regime look incompetent. At the time of writing, Temaru's chance of remaining in office was shaky.

The standard of living in the region is relatively high, and access to adequate health care and fresh water is improving, but French Polynesia is in a vulnerable economic situation, with very few natural resources to draw upon and a system based on imports. The impact of El Niño, felt strongly in French Polynesia as in other parts of the Pacific in 2000–01, serves as a reminder of how small Pacific nations are at the mercy of the large industrialised and polluting nations.

## THE CULTURE

### The National Psyche

If French Polynesia had a national slogan it might be *haere maru* (take it slow) words that often fall off the lips of Tahitians when addressing their busy French and Chinese cohabitants. It's hard not to take it slow in the islands. With one road encircling the main island of Tahiti, it's easy to get caught driving behind an old pick-up truck at 40km/h with no chance of passing; national holidays seem to close up the shops and banks once every week or so and getting served in a restaurant can take an eternity. This can be frustrating to anyone in a hurry, but somehow it all works out: you make it to wherever you were going even if it did take twice as long, the bank can wait till tomorrow and your food arrives once you are really, really hungry. The Tahitian people know this and always seem slightly amused by anyone who tries to break the rhythm of calm.

Regardless of 'Tahiti time', Pape'ete manages to move at a pace fitting for a capital: there are traffic jams, everyone is on a mobile phone (cellphone) and the nightlife shakes on till 5am. The modern world is quickly infiltrating the slow pace of life and this is most evident in the younger generations.

### Lifestyle

The traditional Tahitian family is a fluid, open-armed force that is the country's backbone. Although modern girls are increasingly less likely to stay home and have baby after baby, an accidental pregnancy is considered more of a blessing than a hindrance and babies are passed along to another eager, infant-loving family member. This

unattached attitude to allow a child to be raised by whoever will provide the most love has brought many hopeful adoptive parents to Tahiti from France and few leave empty handed. *Faamu* (adopted children) are not thought of as different from blood brothers and sisters to either the parents or siblings although the real mother, and occasionally the father, sometimes remain a peripheral part of the child's life.

This family web is vitally important to an individual. When people first meet, the conversation usually starts with questions about family and most people are able to find a common relative between themselves within minutes. This accomplished, they are 'cousins' and fast friends. The flip side is many new couples find out too late they are *tapu* (taboo), too closely related for the family to accept.

It's not all roses in what appears to be such a warm, fuzzy family framework. Domestic violence and incest are prevalent. This is closely connected with high rates of alcoholism. The government has launched numerous programmes addressing these issues but little progress has been made.

Despite these domestic problems, women do hold a strong position in French Polynesian society. Wallis' first encounter with

### GENDER BENDER *Celeste Brash*

You'll find that some women serving food in restaurants, working at hotels or in boutiques, aren't actually women at all. *Mahu*, males who are raised as girls and continue to live their lives as women, were present when the first Europeans arrived in the islands. Although the missionaries did their hardest to halt this 'unnatural crime', *mahu* are still an accepted part of the community today.

According to François Bauer, author of *Raerae de Tahiti*, popular belief has it that among a family with eight children, one will inevitably be a *mahu*. It remains unclear, however, whether this practice has a sexual or a social origin, but it is generally assumed to be the latter as *mahu* don't necessarily have sex with men. Even so, anyone seeking the mythical notion of a sexually free Tahiti should note that most of French Polynesia's modern day prostitutes are (very convincing) transvestites.

someone he believed to be a Tahitian chief turned out to be a woman. Today Nicole Bou-teau, one of Tahiti's newest political stars, has started her own centrist political party that is rapidly gaining popularity. In the household, women are most often the homemakers, but they don't wear this hat lightly. They radiate a strength and dignity that sees them in charge of everything domestic and sometimes more. Men (particularly those who don't drink) often share in the chores of cooking, cleaning and baby rearing; it's not uncommon to see massive, muscular, tattooed men nuzzling with an infant or holding hands with a toddler to cross the road.

Although religion has been teaching people to think otherwise, homosexuality is generally viewed as a natural part of human existence. This tolerance is displayed most strongly by the presence of *mahu* (sometimes called *raerae*) men who dress and live their lives as women (see p585). Lesbians are more rare and generally live in or around Pape'ete.

*Pakalolo* (marijuana), and the Bob Marley lifestyle, have been thoroughly embraced in French Polynesia but harder drugs are rare. The exception is Ice, a highly addictive meta-amphetamine that has rapidly gained popularity in the upper classes of Pape'ete. The government has responded with an impressive effort that will hopefully curb the problem before it becomes too serious.

## Population

Paralleling worldwide patterns of urbanisation, French Polynesia's people have migrated towards the city and main island; 69% of the population currently make their home on Tahiti and 75% of those on Tahiti live in Pape'ete or its suburbs. While a few atolls in the Tuamotus continue to pull in new residents for work in the Tahitian pearl industry, most islands in the Tuamotus, Gambier, Marquesas and the Australs have dismal growth rates below 1%. The Society Islands' Leeward Islands – especially ones with a bigger tourist industry such as Bora Bora, Huahine and Ra'iatea – are growing at the same steady rate as the Windward Islands (which include Tahiti and Mo'orea). Island birth rates are dropping steadily, although are still relatively high at 17.7 per 1000 (it's around 13 per 1000 in Australia and France), down from 20.4 in 2001.

On all the islands the majority of the population lives in coastal zones. The rugged interior is virtually uninhabited but archaeological evidence indicates that this wasn't always the case. Only in the Marquesas do people live mostly in the valleys; this is a habit left over from times when living near the beach left them more vulnerable to warring neighbouring tribes.

## ARTS

The zealous missionaries endeavoured to wipe out all forms of 'primitive' Polynesian art and culture. They destroyed temples and carvings, banned tattooing and dancing, and generally took a lot of the joy out of life. Fortunately some traditions survived this period of cultural censorship, and in recent years there has been a revival of Polynesian culture, particularly in music, dance and tattooing.

## Cinema

There's a dearth of films made about or set in French Polynesia. Tahiti's role as a movie backdrop is almost exclusively tied up with the film *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The story has been told three times on the silver screen. Starring Anthony Hopkins and Mel Gibson, the 1980s third remake was the best of the bunch and was filmed almost entirely on Mo'orea. Anthony Hopkins plays the not-quite-so-bad-and-mad Bligh and Mel Gibson is the more-handsome-than-ever Christian. The scenery on Mo'orea looks fantastic.

James Michener's *South Pacific* may have been about Polynesia, but it certainly wasn't filmed there. *Tabu*, released in 1931, was filmed on Bora Bora. This work of fiction explores the notions of *tapu*, and when one of the directors was killed in an accident shortly after finishing filming, there was plenty of speculation that his death may have been the result of including taboo parts of the island in the film.

In 1979 a big-budget remake of *Hurricane*, the 1937 classic based on a Nordhoff & Hall novel, was filmed on Bora Bora. The film was a major flop, despite an all-star cast; for TV it was retitled *Forbidden Paradise*.

## Dance

The dances visitors see in French Polynesia are not created for tourists; they are authentic performances and play a major part in

spreading the influence of Tahitian culture abroad. In this land of oral traditions, dance is not merely an aesthetic medium but also a way to preserve the memory of the past.

There are five types of dance. They are seldom performed on their own but instead are integrated into a programme where each is performed in turn.

Impressive and highly physical, the *otea* dance is accompanied by percussion instruments. Originally a male-only war dance, today's dancers include females, but the 'manly' character is still preserved in the body language, the rhythm and the sudden loud cries of the dancers. Volcanoes, sharks, historical events or legends, all of which may be suggested by the use of props, are the underlying themes dictating choreography.

The free-flowing and graceful *aparima* dance is a mixed-gender performance that tells a story using hand movement and song. The story may be a legend, a love song or a scene from everyday life. Guitar and ukulele provide the musical accompaniment. The dancers follow every hand movement with their eyes and faces.

In the *hivinau* dance, men and women form a double circle surrounding an orchestra (drums only) and male vocal soloist known as the *ra'atira hivinau*. The soloist recites a few words and the dancers reply with a chorus. During the chorus, the dancers in each circle turn and face a partner and dance as a couple. Performance of the *hivinau* is becoming something of a rare occurrence since it requires such a large number of participants.

The *paoa* dance features a male and female choir seated on the ground in a semicircle around a male vocal soloist who recites a few words, often based on legend. The members

of the choir respond and keep time by slapping their thighs with both hands. The orchestra (drums only) maintains a position next to the soloist. One couple then comes into the centre and improvises a dance. As in the *hivinau*, it is the dialogue between the leader and the choir that is the key element of the *paoa*.

The fire dance, which is thought to have originated in Samoa, is frequently put on as part of shows in hotels because it is so impressive. The performer, always a man, juggles a flaming torch alight at both ends, against a background of drums.

## Literature

Polynesia has been getting the Western pen flowing since the first European explorers returned with accounts of paradise islands and beautiful people. But oral recitation was the first fountain pen of the Pacific, and the written word only came into being after the missionaries began producing texts in Tahitian in the 19th century. This dependence on the spoken word has meant that Polynesia's history has been re-created out of European observations, and the Polynesian experience constructed out of European suppositions. It also means that literature written by Polynesians has only recently begun to grace the bookshelves.

There are a number of interesting Polynesian writers who are slowly changing the literary landscape, but few have been translated into English. If you read French, writers such as Henri Hiro, Turo Raapoto, Hubert Bremond, Charles Manutahi, Michou Chaze, Chanter Spitz and Louise Peltzer are all interesting.

*Breadfruit* by Celestine Hitiura Vaite (2000), a Tahitian living in Australia, is a

### RECOMMENDED LISTENING *Celeste Brash*

**Angelo Neuffer** Highly political and poetic lyrics have made Angelo one of the most popular Tahitian artists of all time. One of his best albums is *Te Nuna'a no Ananahi*.

**Bobby** Very listenable, almost dreamy Polynesian music. His album with Angelo, titled *Bobby and Angelo*, is one of the most listened-to albums in Tahiti.

**Ester Tefana** For old-fashioned, ukulele-accompanied, Tahitian mood music, Ester is your best bet.

**Fenua** Bringing Tahitian music into the future, this group fuses the traditional with techno for an explosive sound.

**Tapuariri Laughlin** Most modern classics are written by 'Tapu' who mixes surfer-cool with traditional.

**Te Ava Piti** This is your classic Polynesian music with plenty of fast ukulele riffs.

**Trio Kikiriri** Perhaps a bit cheesy to Western ears, this syntho/ukulele group is an all-time favourite for weddings and parties where people dance the Tahitian foxtrot.

novel set in contemporary Tahiti. The poverty and social problems facing many Tahitians are not glossed over, and the dialogue is evocatively garnished with Tahitian and French (don't worry, a glossary is provided).

## Music

Traditional Polynesian music, usually performed as an accompaniment to dance, is heard reverberating through the islands. Ukuleles and percussion instruments dominate this style of music, which is structured by a hypnotic and an often quite complex drum beat. Song, both traditional and religious, is also popular and important.

Modern Polynesian music by local artists is the blaring soundtrack to everyday life, whether it's in a bus, at a café or on the radio. Some groups also perform in hotels and bars.

## Painting & Sculpture

Even today, well over a hundred years after his arrival on Tahiti, painting in the South Pacific is synonymous with Paul Gauguin, the French postimpressionist painter. Gauguin spent much of his later life in Polynesia, and presented Europe with images of the islands that moulded the way Europeans viewed (and, arguably, continue to view) Polynesia. In his wake a number of predominantly European artists – working in media ranging from watercolour to line drawing – have also sought inspiration in the region. These artists have contributed to the very characteristic painting style of the region, which is largely representational.

Matisse made a short visit to Tahiti, but his Polynesian work is eclipsed by the work of Jacques Boullaire. Boullaire, a French artist who first travelled to Tahiti in the 1930s, produced many magnificent watercolours; reproductions of his work are readily available today.

Traditionally the best sculpture and woodcarvings have come out of the Marquesas, where fine *tiki* (sacred statues), bowls, mortars and pestles, spears and clubs are carved from rosewood, *tou* wood or in stone. The best-known contemporary sculptor is the potter Peter Owen, who lives on Huahine, but the work of the appropriately named Woody on Mo'orea is also well known.

## Tattoos

Since the early 1980s, tattooing has enjoyed a strong revival, becoming one of the most expressive and vibrant vehicles of Polynesian culture. With encouragement from the great Samoan masters, young Tahitians have delved into their ancient traditions and have brought this ancestral form of bodily adornment, with its undisputed artistic qualities, completely up to date. Today many Polynesian men and women sport magnificent tattoos as symbols of their identity.

Modern tattooing is completely for the sake of style or beautification; in ancient times it was a highly socially significant and sophisticated art. Firstly, it was a symbol of community or clan membership and geographic origin. Each island group had their own style of tattoo: the Tuamotu islands used simple, geometric shapes; the Marquesans' designs were the most intricate and elaborately designed and are the inspiration for contemporary tattoos. It was also an initiation rite: in the Marquesas, the onset of adulthood was marked by a ceremony during which young men would display their tattoos as symbols of bravery; women were not allowed to help with the cooking until they passed a rite of having their hands tattooed. Social status was also displayed through tattooing: as people progressed through different stages of life, they covered their bodies with more tattoos. This aesthetic adornment played a part in the seduction process as well. Finally, tattooing served to intimidate: in the Marquesas warriors tattooed their faces to make themselves look terrifying to enemies.

## LANGUAGE

Tahitian and French are the official languages of French Polynesia, although Tahitian is spoken much more than it is written. Much of the tourist industry uses English, but if you venture to the more remote and less touristy islands it's useful to know some French. On all islands, at least trying a few words in French will win you friends – fortunately, bad French is readily accepted.

Tahitian, known as Maohi, is a Polynesian language very similar to Hawaiian and Cook Islands Maori. Other languages in the islands include Austral, Marquesan and Tuamotuan.

In Tahitian, a glottal stop replaces the consonants 'k' and 'ng'. The Polynesian word *vaka* (canoe) is *va'a* in Tahitian. It's important to use the glottal stop, as the break can change the meaning of the word. For example, the Tahitian word *hoe* means 'paddle' or 'row', but *ho'e* is the word for 'one'.

## Tahitian basics

Hello.	<i>la ora na, nana.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Parahi, nana.</i>
Welcome.	<i>Maeva, manava.</i>
How are you?	<i>E aha te huru?</i>
Thanks.	<i>Maururu roa.</i>
Yes.	<i>E, 'oia.</i>
No.	<i>Aita.</i>
My name is...	<i>To'u i'ooa 'o...</i>
I don't understand.	<i>Aita i ta'a ia'u.</i>

## ENVIRONMENT

The environmental repercussions of French nuclear testing are still hotly debated. The view that Moruroa and Fangataufa were fissured by tests and that radioactivity has escaped was confirmed in 1999 when the French government admitted for the first time that cracks existed in the atolls' coral cones.

Atolls are ecologically fragile places, but French Polynesia has been slow to do much to protect them. It's a catch-22: the islands' mainstay, tourism, depends on the idyll of an unspoiled natural environment, but increased development is tarnishing that image.

Rubbish is perhaps the most visible environmental problem. The Pacific islands don't have remote landfills to send their rubbish to, so it's not unusual to see garbage dumps spoiling the natural setting. The garbage pollutes the watercourses, which pollute the lagoons.

## Geography

French Polynesia is a vast, scattered collection of 118 islands and atolls that stretch across five million square kilometres of ocean. However, most of these volcanic blips are small and the five archipelagos have a total land area of barely 3500 sq km.

The Society Islands (see the map, p590), the westernmost archipelago, have mountains and lagoons protected by barrier reefs, sometimes dotted with small fringing islets known as *motu*. Subdivided into the Wind-

ward and Leeward Islands, the Societies are home to more than three-quarters of French Polynesia's population. Polynesia's administrative capital, Pape'ete, is on Tahiti.

The Tuamotus, east of the Society Islands, are classic low-lying coral atolls. The remote Marquesas, north of the Tuamotus and not far from the equator, are rugged high islands but lack barrier reefs or lagoons. Finally, there are the even more remote and scattered Australs, also high islands, and the tiny Gambier Archipelago.

## Ecology

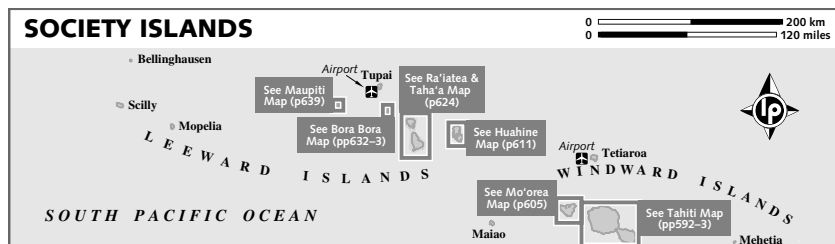
French Polynesia's flora and fauna is limited compared with that of the west Pacific. There are no snakes but plenty of insects. Mosquitoes are annoying, as are the Marquesan *nono* (sandflies). French Polynesia boasts about 100 species of *manu* (birds). On the low islands many nest on the ground or in bushes. Sea birds include terns, petrels, noddies, frigate birds, boobies and tropicbirds. It's thought that up to one million *kaveka* (sooty terns) nest on 'Ua Huka in the Marquesas, while the Tuamotus have numerous islands inhabited only by birds.

The coral reefs provide a rich environment for marine life. Sea creatures include *rori* (sea cucumber), sharks, *ono* (barracuda),

## BEST EATING

Polynesians like to eat and they like it when you eat. Luckily, the food on offer is a pleasure on the palate. The following are Lonely Planet's top five restaurant choices.

- Coco's (p602) serves the finest of French cuisine with a fabulous view of Mo'orea.
- It's worth the effort to find local-style Snack Tavana (p603), which serves the tastiest snack fare anywhere.
- 'Live entertainment' from the local ray population and gourmet dining are on offer at Restaurant Te Honu Iti (p609).
- Lagon Burger (p646) is a little shack with the best salads and sashimi in French Polynesia.
- Restaurant Mauarii (p623) seduces with scrumptious traditional Tahitian food, white sand and sunsets.



manta rays, moray eels, dolphins and the endangered *honu* (turtle). In Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas, electra dolphins, also known as pygmy orcas or melon-headed whales, gather in their hundreds in a unique phenomenon; in the Australs whales are the attraction, and it's possible to swim with them.

The luxuriant flora of French Polynesia, particularly on the high islands, is recent and introduced. Ancient Polynesian navigators brought plants and fruits that flourished. In the 19th century missionaries and settlers imported other ornamental and commercial plants. Vegetation varies significantly from one archipelago to another. On the atolls, where the soil is poor and winds constant, bushy vegetation and coconut palms predominate. On the high islands, plant cover is more diverse and changes according to the altitude.

## TAHITI

pop 169,624 / area 1045 sq km

You'll have to forget about stereotypical fantasies of tantalizing blue lagoons and porcelain sand beaches, and look for a different take on paradise to really get Tahiti's beauty. The problem is its name is so synonymous with the cliché that many visitors feel so duped upon arriving they head straight for more classically dreamy shores. But don't dismiss Tahiti upon first glance – the largest and most industrialised of the Polynesian islands is more than just a required arrival point, it's a destination on its own. A crazy cacophony of colour and sound, the capital, Pape'ete, oozes humidity and teems with outdoor cafés, pulsating nightlife and vibrant markets. Beyond city limits you'll discover exotic black-sand beaches, whimsical velvet-green mountains and lush valleys dripping tropical foliage.

From fabulous dance performances and swanky (and usually cheaper) luxury resorts to big-time surfing, it may take a little while to catch Tahiti's urban groove, but once you get *it* you just might find yourself in love.

### ORIENTATION

The *pointe kilométrique* (PK; kilometre point) markers start at zero in Pape'ete and increase in both a clockwise and an anti-clockwise direction around Tahiti Nui (Big Tahiti) until they meet at Taravao, the town at the isthmus that connects Tahiti Nui with Tahiti Iti. The counting starts again on Tahiti

#### TAHITI IN...

##### Two Days

Spend the first day exploring colourful Pape'ete, making sure to stop and shop at the famous **Marché de Pape'ete** (p595). Have dinner at a chic French restaurant like **La Corbeille d'Eau** (p602), then catch a dance performance and cocktail at one of the posh resorts or opt for a night dancing in Pape'ete's cacophonous **bars and clubs** (p603). Head out of town on day two, and follow the road south to the smaller Tahiti Iti. Spend the night at the fantastic **Vanira Lodge** (p601), the most creative *pension* on Tahiti.

##### Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, but spend an extra day on Tahiti Iti. Try a **surf lesson** (p597) or devote some time to jungle tramping in the **interior** (p597). You can also spend an extra night on Tahiti Nui's lively west coast, perhaps treating yourself to a night at the lux **Intercontinental Resort Tahiti** (p600) – one of the swankiest resorts in the world.

Iti, where the markers only go as far as the sealed road – remarkably the easternmost coast is still not paved. Pape'ete and the surrounding suburbs dominate the north-western coast of the island.

### INFORMATION

The visitor information centre, main post office, the majority of the banks and the best bookshops are all clustered in Pape'ete.

### Bookshops

Pape'ete has a few good bookshops, but the range in English is limited.

**La Maison de la Presse** (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare) Good selection of newspapers and magazines.

**Librairie du Vaima** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 57 57; Vaima Centre; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) The best bookshop.

### Internet Access

Pape'ete has a few places to surf the Web.

**La Maison de la Presse** (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare; per hr 1000 CFP)

**Tiki Soft C@fé** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 88 93 98; Pont de l'Est; per hr 1000 CFP)

### Medical Services

For police, phone ☎ 17; for an ambulance, phone ☎ 15.

**Clinique Cardella** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 81 90; Rue Anne-Marie Javouhey, Pape'ete; ☎ 24hr) Private clinic behind the cathedral.

**Mamao Hospital** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 46 62 62, 24hr emergencies 42 01 01; Av Georges Clémenceau, Pape'ete) The biggest hospital in French Polynesia, with good facilities and a range of medical specialities.

### Money

There are banks (Banque Socredo, Banque de Tahiti and Banque de Polynésie) and ATMs scattered around the island. Banque Socredo and Banque de Polynésie have branches at Faa'a airport, where there's also an ATM. Most banks in Pape'ete change money and travellers cheques.

### Post

**Post office** (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare) Pape'ete's main post office is next to the Parc Bougainville.

### Tourist Information

**Gie Haere Mai visitor information centre**

(Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 88 99; Fare Manihini Vaieite Sq; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) In central

Pape'ete, this tourist office has loads of information and does bookings for small hotels and family *pensions* (guesthouses).

**Gie Tahiti Manava visitor information centre** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 50 57 10; www.tahiti-manava.pf; Fare Manihini, Blvd Pomare; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Near Gie Haere Mai, it has information on all of French Polynesia. Although Mo'orea and Bora Bora have helpful tourist offices, the more remote islands don't, so if you have any queries, make the most of this tourist office while in Pape'ete.

### TRANSPORT

All international arrivals land at Pape'ete's Faa'a International Airport, although it is possible to head almost directly to another island after your plane lands.

### Getting There & Away

Pape'ete is the flight and shipping hub for all of French Polynesia.

### AIR

All international flights arrive at Faa'a airport, and Air Tahiti and Air Moorea flights to the other islands leave from here. Flights within each archipelago hop from one island to the next, but many connections between archipelagos are via Faa'a.

International check-in desks are at the east end of the terminal. Air Tahiti's domestic check-in is at the west end; Air Moorea is in a separate small terminal slightly to the east of the main terminal.

For international flights to/from Tahiti, see p673; for general information about air travel within French Polynesia, see p675.

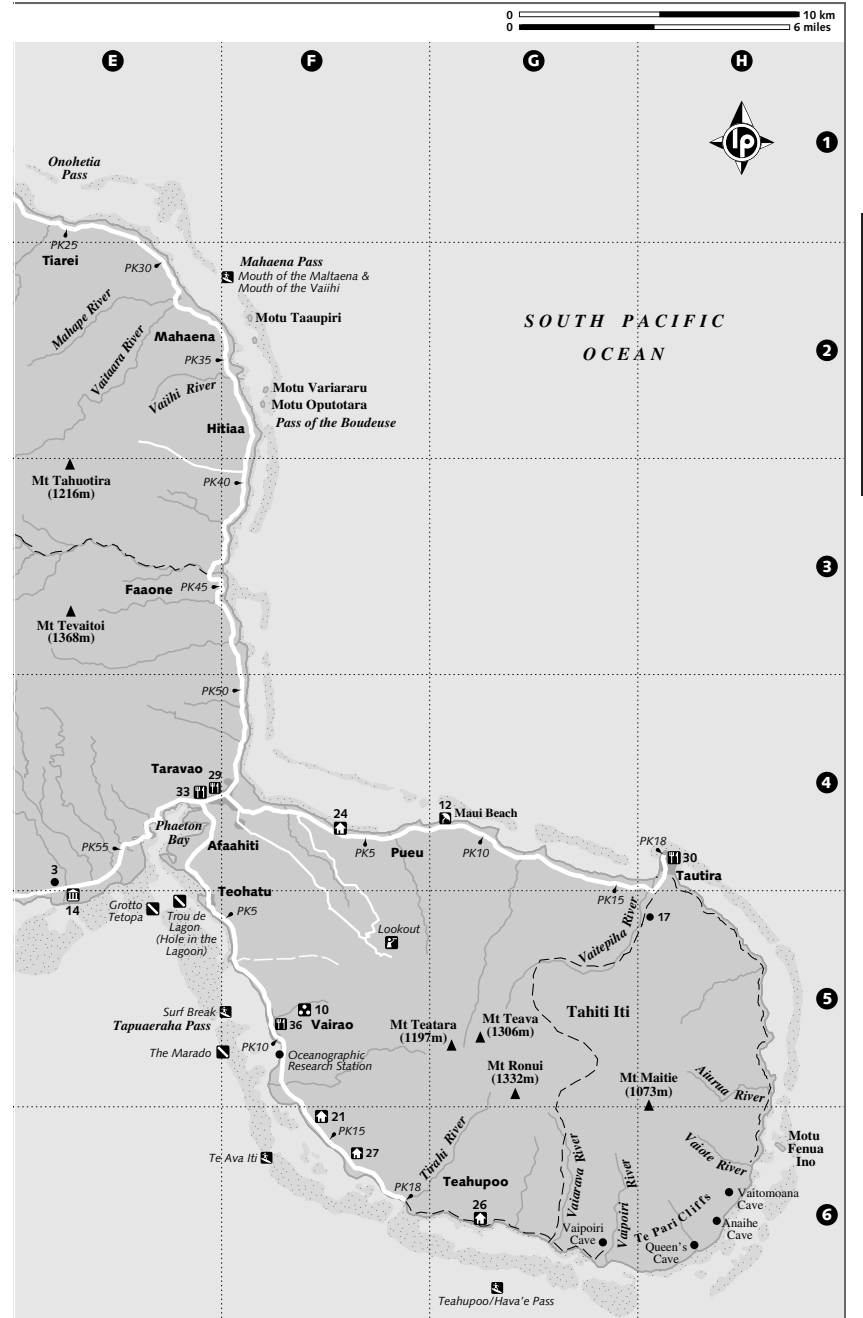
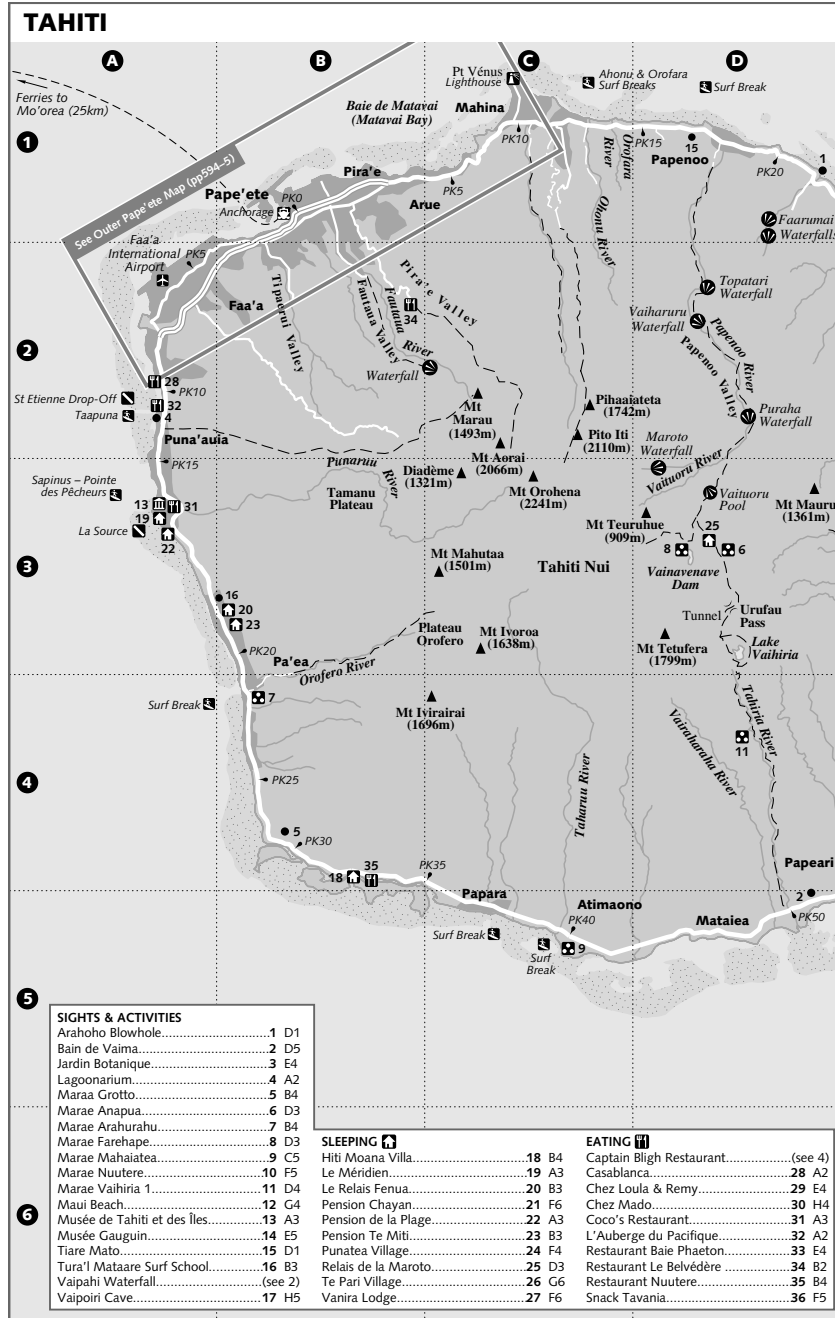
In Pape'ete, **Air Tahiti** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 86 42 42; Rue du Maréchal Foch; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11am Sat) is at the intersection with Rue Edouard Ahnne.

On Tahiti, **Air Moorea** (☎ 86 41 41) is based at Faa'a airport.

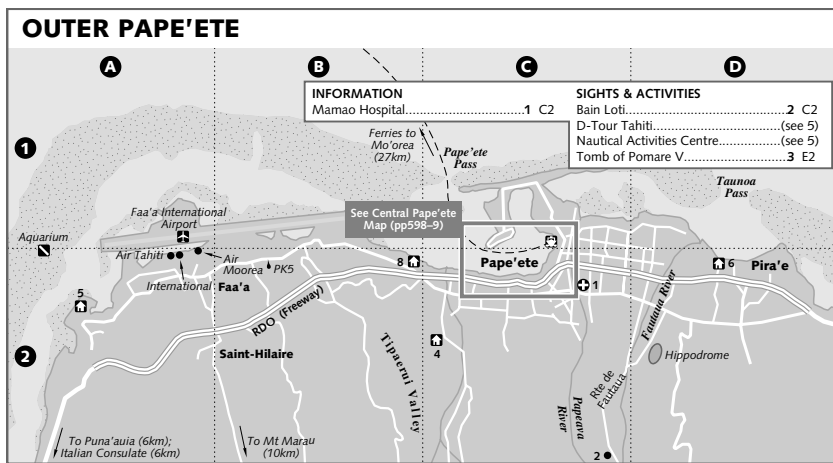
### BOAT

All boats to other islands moor at the ferry quay at the northern end of Blvd Pomare in Pape'ete. The numerous cargo ships to the different archipelagos work from the Motu Uta port zone, to the north of the city.

See p676 for general information on inter-island ships, and the individual island sections for specific information on travel to/from those destinations.







## Getting Around

Getting around Tahiti is very easy if you have a car. Outside of Pape'ete and its suburbs public transport is limited and sometimes unreliable.

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxis are expensive, so if your hotel offers to collect you from the airport, jump at the chance. Otherwise the short drive to central Pape'ete will set you back 2000 CFP during the day and 2500 CFP at night (8pm to 6am).

If you arrive at a reasonable time of the day, you will be able to catch any bus going towards town from the airport (northeast bound or to your left as you leave the airport), which will take you straight to the centre of Pape'ete in about 15 minutes for a flat fare of 130 CFP during the day and 250 CFP after 6pm (children cost 65 CFP; it's an extra 100 CFP for your baggage). Walk straight across the car park outside the airport, up the steps to street level and across the road to hail a city-bound *le truck* (trucks with bench seats in the back for passengers). From Pape'ete, take a bus heading to Faa'a and Outumaoro – the destination will be clearly posted on the front – from along Rue du Général de Gaulle.

### BUS

On weekdays buses operate roughly every 15 minutes (though this varies) from dawn

until about 5.30pm except for the Pape'ete–Faa'a–Outumaoro line, which runs until around 10pm. The service is less frequent on weekends. Fares start from 150 CFP (65 CFP for children and students).

Tahiti's buses have their route number and the final destination clearly marked. There are official bus stops, but drivers often stop if you hail them.

### 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. Watch for children and dogs on the road.

Many of the following car-hire companies on Tahiti also have desks at the bigger hotels:

**Avis** Faa'a airport (☎ 85 02 84); Pape'ete (Map pp598-9;

☎ 54 10 10; cnr Rue des Remparts & Av Georges Clémenceau); Pape'ete (☎ 43 88 99; Quai des Ferries)

**Daniel Rent-a-Car** (☎ 82 30 04; Faa'a airport)

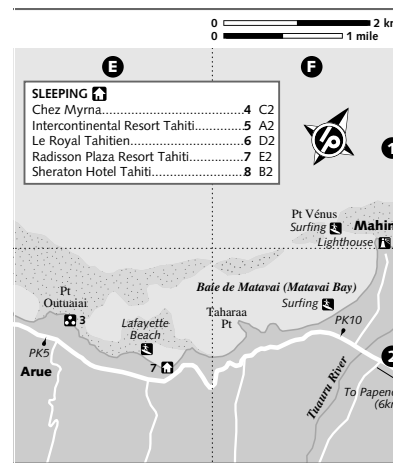
**Europcar** Faa'a airport (☎ 86 60 61); Pape'ete (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 24 24; cnr Av du Prince Hinoi & Rue des Remparts)

**Hertz** (☎ 82 55 86; Faa'a airport)

**Tahiti Rent-a-Car** (☎ 81 94 00; Faa'a airport)

### HITCHING

Hitching on Tahiti is relatively easy and usually quite safe, and you'll see both locals and *popaa* (Europeans) standing on the tarmac with their thumbs in the air. Avoid hitching on Friday and Saturday



nights, when the roads are filled with alarmingly intoxicated drivers.

### TAXI

Taxis are so expensive that most visitors choose to ignore them. All the big hotels have taxi ranks, and there are plenty of taxis in central Pape'ete.

## PAPE'ETE

Dreamy beach town this is not, nor does this smouldering metropolis resemble the glittery Las Vegas image tourism boosters like to tout. No, the region's 'Big Smoke' is a sweaty, concrete jungle bursting with bright lights and grimy edges. Pape'ete quickly divides its guests – you'll either *get* its chaotic passion and colourful clutter or run quickly from its pushy crowds and lack of gorgeous vistas. If you can stomach it, stick around a bit. The place just might start to grow on you. That said, even the city's biggest fans probably won't need much more than a day to poke around.

Between Rue du 22 Septembre and Rue F Cardella is the deliciously appealing **Marché de Pape'ete** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 6am-6pm). Colourful, chaotic and oh-so Polynesian, it's bursting with flowers, food, tropical fruit, pâtisseries, art and souvenirs. If you're in town, you should be checking it out. The food is downstairs and the rest, upstairs.

The bustling **waterfront** is another big attraction; although beyond watching the yachts, cargo ships and inter-island ferries

toing and froing with their cargos of people and goods there's not much to see. Photographers will find the place interesting in the afternoon when fishing boats unload their glistening catch.

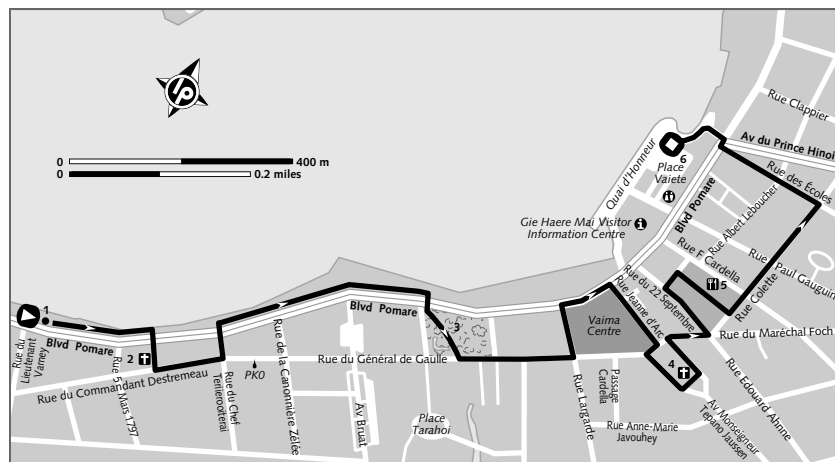
**Bain Loti** (Map pp594-5), 2.5km inland, was where the beautiful maiden Rarahu met her hero in Pierre Loti's 1880 novel *The Marriage of Loti*. The pool is no longer the same pleasantly rural scene, but it remains a favourite local meeting place and great swimming hole, and a bust of Loti overlooks the scene.

## Pape'ete Walking Tour

Pape'ete doesn't have that many must-see sights, but strolling its chaotic streets, bustling waterfront area and grimy, darker alleys allows you to experience a side, and cultural aspect, of French Polynesia's largest city that you just can't score from the back seat of a car. See the map, p596.

This walking tour begins on the pleasant four-lane Blvd Pomare, shaded by overhanging trees and brightened by hibiscuses, heading in the direction of **To'ata Sq (1)**. Popular with locals on weekends, it has loads of little alfresco cafés. During the Heiva, this is where you'll see most dance and music performances. From the square head towards the imposing pink church, **Église Évangélique de Polynésie Française (2)**. It makes for a good picture and is packed on Sunday mornings. On the inland side of the road is the **Parc Bougainville (3)**; Bougainville Park), which is a shady, green oasis in the city. From the park head toward Rue Jeanne d'Arc. You'll pass the slightly bland, but useful, Vaima Centre along the way – it's full of shops and airline offices. Next up is the **Cathédrale de l'Immaculée (4)**, built in 1875. It's a lovely cool spot for a quiet moment.

Following Rue du Général de Gaulle, turn left into Rue du 22 Septembre to the **Marché de Pape'ete (5)**; left). Here you can buy almost any produce that is available in French Polynesia, and wandering around is loads of fun. When you've finished shopping stroll back towards Blvd Pomare and look for the **Place Vaiete (6)** on the harbour side. It's home to multiple *roulottes* (food vans or mobile diners) and lots of free, locally produced outdoor music and dance performances and vendors selling local crafts.



### WALK FACTS

**Start** To'ata Sq  
**Finish** Place Vaiete  
**Distance** 3km  
**Duration** Two to four hours

## AROUND TAHITI NUI

Try to do a day trip around Tahiti Nui if you possibly can. It's a great way to enjoy the island's lush vegetation.

### Coast Road

The following is an 114km clockwise circuit around Tahiti Nui.

Located on Point Outuaia in Arue, the **Tomb of Pomare V** (Map pp594-5; PK4.7) is the final resting place of the last member of the Pomare dynasty. It was actually constructed for Queen Pomare IV, but her ungrateful son Pomare V had her remains evicted and when he died in 1891 the place became his tomb.

The **Baie de Matavai** (Matavai Bay; Map pp594-5) was the favourite locale of early European explorers. On its western boundary, **Taharaa Point** (Map pp594-5; PK8.1) offers fine views towards Pape'ete. **Point Vénus** (Map pp594-5; PK10), the promontory that marks the bay's eastern end, was the site of Cook's observatory, built to record the transit of Venus across the face of the sun to try to calculate the distance between the sun and the earth. Today it's a popular, shaded black-sand

beach overlooked by an impressive lighthouse. It's unsigned; just turn off when you see shops and activity at PK10.

In the right swell the **Arahoho Blowhole** (Map pp592-3; PK22), just before Tiarei, puts on a good show. The fine sliver of black-sand beach just beyond makes a good picnic stop.

Once you reach **Taravao** (Map pp592-3; PK54) you're at the narrow isthmus where Tahiti Nui joins Tahiti Iti. Don't take the turn-off for Tahiti Iti, but continue along the road you're on and you'll come to the **Jardin Botanique** (Botanic Gardens; Map pp592-3; PK51.2; admission 500 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm), where walking paths wind their way through 137 hectares of ponds, palms and a superb thicket of bamboo. Nearby is the interesting **Musée Gauguin** (Gauguin Museum; Map pp592-3; admission 600 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm). Don't expect too many original works but do wander the gardens.

From the **Bain de Vaima** (Vaima Pool; Map pp592-3; PK49) walk a few minutes inland to **Vaipahi Waterfall** (Map pp592-3), which drops from pool to pool through a stand of stately *mape* trees to a great viewpoint. A number of short walks continue; a one-hour walk (about 1km) brings you back to the road at PK50.2.

On the outskirts of Papara village, **Marae Mahaiatea** (Map pp592-3; PK39.2) was the most magnificent on Tahiti when Cook first visited; he wrote that it measured 80m by 27m at its base, rising in 11 great steps to a height of 13m. Today the densely vegetated crumbling remains are still impressive for their

size. The site is unmarked; take the first turn towards the sea past the PK39 sign.

At PK28.5 wander the manicured path that runs beside the road and through **Maraa Grotto** (Map pp592-3), a series of overhanging, ferny caverns with crystal-clear pools set in a fairytale park.

In the Pa'ea district tranquil **Marae Ararahu** (Map pp592-3; PK22.5) is the best-looking *marae* (traditional temple) on the island. The **Orofero River** (Map pp592-3; PK20) is a popular surfing break.

The excellent **Musée de Tahiti et des Îles** (Museum of Tahiti & its Islands; Map pp592-3; PK15.1; ☎ 58 34 76; admission 1000 CFP; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) in Puna'auia has one of the best collections in the Pacific. Outside is one of Tahiti's most popular surf breaks.

Stop for a swim and a laze at any of the good beaches between PK15 and PK10 through **Puna'auia** (Map pp592-3).

### Inland

It's a wonderful but quite rugged 39km road across Tahiti from Papenoo in the north to Mataiea in the south, via the Relais de la Maroto hotel and Lake Vaihiria. Do this excursion for a completely different look at Tahiti: mountains, waterfalls, a lake and mysterious archaeological sites.

From Papenoo the track follows the wide **Papenoo Valley** (Map pp592-3), the only valley to cut right through the ancient crater, passing the **Topatari**, **Vaiharuru** and **Puraha Waterfalls** (Map pp592-3). The track passes the **Vaituoru Pool** and finally reaches the Relais de la Maroto.

From here tracks fan out to several hydro dams and the *marae* that were restored during the dam's construction. The extensive **Marae Farehape** (Map pp592-3) site is almost directly below the ridge on which the Relais de la Maroto perches. The beautifully restored **Marae Anapua** (Map pp592-3) perches above **Vainavenave Dam** (Map pp592-3). There are some fine natural swimming pools and striking waterfalls nearby.

If you're starting the route from the south coast, turn off at PK47.5. The track then turns left and follows the river upstream to a small catchment lake and the extensive remains of **Marae Vaihiria I** (Map pp592-3). The road climbs quickly to **Lake Vaihiria** (Map pp592-3) then descends steeply to a road junction; turn left to the Relais de la Maroto.

## TAHITI ITI

Often overlooked, Tahiti Iti (Small Tahiti), also known as the Presqu'île (Peninsula), is where you get into wild country. Unpretentious, untamed and stunning, the smaller loop of Tahiti's figure of eight quietly attracts independent, outdoorsy folk looking for a more authentic glimpse of Polynesia. In recent years, Tahiti Iti has also made a bit of a name for itself thanks to promotions of its famous wave at Teahupoo – one of the world's most powerful. Even if you're not on a surf pilgrimage, Tahiti Iti is well worth visiting for its peaceful vibe and unmarred beauty.

You cannot drive around the whole island. The road only goes as far as Teahupoo to the south and Tautira in the north. The north-coast road from Taravao runs through Pueu, past steep hills and numerous waterfalls, to Tautira. The south-coast road runs past beaches and bays to Vairao and the small settlement of Teahupoo, passing a turn-off at PK9.5, which leads a short distance inland to the **Marae Nuutere** (Map pp592-3). The size of the waves at **Teahupoo** (Map pp592-3) have earned the site the name 'Jaws of Water'. The road stops abruptly at the Tiara'i River at PK18; from here it is an easy two-hour walk to **Vaipouri Cave**.

## ACTIVITIES

### Hiking

Those looking for a good hike could try conquering Tahiti's highest peak, 2241m **Mt Orohena** (Map pp592-3). The ascent is a tough two-day mission and you'll need a guide; contact **Tiare Mato** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 92 76; www.tiaremato.free.fr) on the east coast.

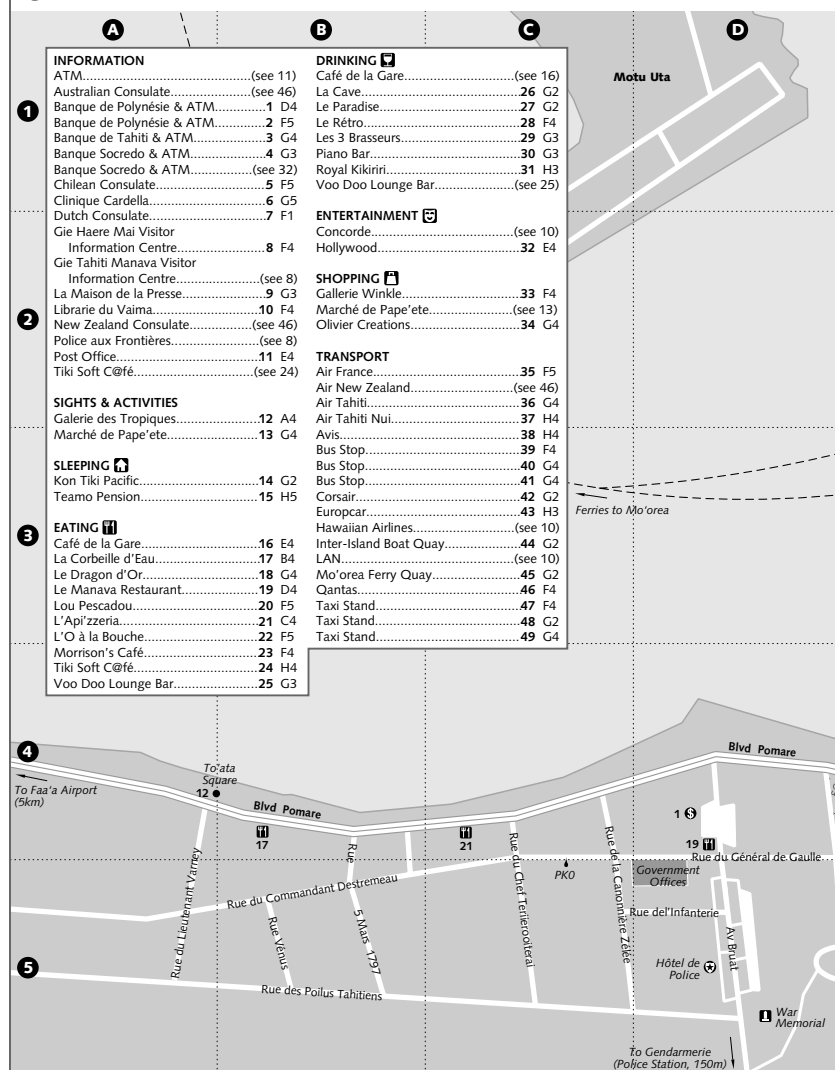
### Quad Biking

To explore Tahiti's interior, join a quad-bike tour with **D-Tour Tahiti** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 82 97 76; www.tahiti-dtour.com; trips from 7500 CFP). The company, based out of the Intercontinental Resort Tahiti, offers excursions including half- and full-day all-terrain vehicle (ATV) adventures and jet-ski lagoon tours.

### Surfing

Tahiti is the birthplace of surfing, and the island offers some fabulous beginner breaks. To hone your skills, visit the **Tura'i Mataare Surf School** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 41 91 37; surfschool@mail.pf; PK18.3; ☎ Wed, Sat & Sun)

## CENTRAL PAPE'ETE



in Pae'a. The school offers 10 half-day lessons for 27,000 CFP, and single full-day lessons for 4500 CFP. The courses are run by a qualified instructor, and they include equipment, transportation to the different surfing spots and insurance. The hours for the different types of lessons vary.

The monster wave at **Hava'e pass** – also known as Teahupoo – instils fear even in the most seasoned surfers. **Te Ava Iti** and **Vairao** passes are less intense, but get dangerous and are recommended for experienced surfers only. To brush up on your surfing skills or try a first lesson, contact **Ecole de Surf Iti Nui** (☎ 73 14 21; half-day lesson 3500 CFP).



### Swimming

On Tahiti Iti, **Maui Beach** (Map pp592-3; PK8) is a picturesque strip of inviting white sand offering shallow swimming that's perfect for children, as well as deeper swimming and snorkelling off the reef. The black-sand beaches located at PK18 in Teahupoo and PK6 in Paeu are good for body board-

ing, but note that they can be rough for swimming.

### Water Sports

At the Intercontinental, the **Nautical Activities Centre** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 53 34 96; www.aquatic-dive.com) has a long menu of watery activities.

## TAHITI FOR CHILDREN

Any kid that loves the beach will love French Polynesia, and Polynesians absolutely love children. In Pape'ete, there are special child-oriented cultural and artistic shows in Parc Bougainville, along with a big playground.

**Jardin Botanique** (Map pp592-3; admission 500 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm) Kids will dig the huge Galapagos tortoises at these 137-hectare gardens, on the far south coast of Tahiti Nui.

**Lagoonarium** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 62 90; PK11; adult/child 500/300 CFP; ☎ 9am-6pm) Within Pape'ete's urban sprawl, this is a pleasant tourist trap popular with the little ones. A meshed-in area of lagoon with a very modest underwater viewing room is reached through a giant concrete shark's mouth, and you can watch the small sharks and other creatures.

**Maui Beach** (Map pp592-3; PK8) On Tahiti Iti, this is a picturesque strip of white sand with shallow swimming that's perfect for children.

## TOURS

It seems that almost every hotel and travel agency offers an island-circuit tour by minibus. You'll pay around 7500 CFP for a full day and around 5000 CFP for a half-day. In the high season it's wise to book several days in advance. Try the following:

**Natura Exploration** (☎ 43 03 83)

**Patrick Adventure** (☎ 83 29 29)

**Tahiti Safari Expedition** (☎ 42 14 15)

## SLEEPING

The best places to stay on Tahiti are outside Pape'ete. The west coast of Tahiti Nui has the greatest concentration of sleeping options, while Tahiti Iti has some fabulous *pensions*. Be sure to make reservations during the Heiva festivities in July, when many hotels are booked out.

## Pape'ete

There's a cluster of midrange places to stay right in the heart of Pape'ete, while most of the top-end and budget places tend to be on the edges of town.

**Le Royal Tahitien** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 50 40 40; www.hotelroyaltahitien.com; r 17,000 CFP; ☎) A private black-sand beach, stylish digs and a waterfront restaurant enhance the appeal at this charming, excellent-value hotel. Local musicians perform on Friday and Saturday evenings. Le Royal Tahitien is about 3km east of Pape'ete in Pira'e.

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Intercontinental Resort Tahiti** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 86 51 10; www.tahiti.interconti.com; r/over-water bungalows from 40,000/55,000 CFP; ☎) The Intercontinental is as posh as the island of Tahiti gets. Rooms are fabulous, kitted out with marble bathrooms, plush canopies and Mo'orea views from private balconies. The two swimming pools are also standout (one features a slick, cascading horizon), the restaurant has a great reputation and the water-sports centre is the best on the island. On the downside, the beach is artificial (made from heaps of imported white sand) and the lagoon not nearly as dreamy as those on other islands. The resort is on the outskirts of Pape'ete, just west of the airport on the beach.

**Chez Myrna** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 42 64 11; dammyer.family@mail.pf; r incl breakfast 7000 CFP) This friendly place does airport transfers for 1000 CFP any time of day or night, making it a good option if you have an early plane to catch. It's also the best budget bet around town, with two sparkling rooms. Chez Myrna is on the outskirts of Pape'ete, a little east of Faa'a airport.

**Radisson Plaza Resort Tahiti** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 48 88 39; www.radisson.com/aruefrp; r from 18,000 CFP; ☎) It's brash looking from the outside, but tasteful and artistic within. Rooms are spacious and modern; the open-air bar, black-sand beach and on-site activities centre provide reasons to stay. The Radisson is east of Pape'ete.

**Sheraton Hotel Tahiti** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 86 48 48; www.starwoodtahiti.com; r from 33,000 CFP; ☎) Despite its complete lack of beach, the Sheraton is a lovely place for a short stay. The lagoon-side pool is fantastic, the hot tub (placed creatively on top a pile of rocks) has awesome Mo'orea views and there's an over-water restaurant and bar.

**Kon Tiki Pacific** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 16 16; kontiki@mail.pf; 271 Blvd Pomare; r from 12,000 CFP; ☎) The Kon Tiki Pacific is a bit of a party place appealing to the boozing backpacker crowd more interested in partaking in the nightlife than sleeping. The bar gets rowdy at happy hour while the on-site nightclub keeps things buzzing late. The 20 sea-facing rooms have fantastic views, but the noise is

less than appealing. The hotel is in central Pape'ete.

**Teamo Pension** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 00 35; Rue du Pont-Neuf; dm/d 2500/5000 CFP) Far from flash, this is the cheapest place to stay in central Pape'ete. Hot water is only available from 6pm to 9pm. The shared kitchen is a plus. Only consider it if you're on a serious budget or other places are full.

## Around Tahiti Nui

There are a number of places to stay along the west coast, particularly around Puna'auia.

**Hiti Moana Villa** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 93 93; hitimoanavilla@mail.pf; PK32; bungalows from 9000 CFP; ☎) Impeccably clean bungalows set around a well-tended garden make this lagoon-side spot in Papara a great option. There is no beach, but you can swim from the pontoon. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP.

**Relais de la Maroto** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 90 29; maroto@mail.pf; r 7000 CFP, bungalows from 9500 CFP) In a lovely location smack in the lush heart of the island, this place is popular with hikers. The wine cellar at the on-site restaurant is exceptional, the French cuisine quite tasty. Book ahead.

**Le Méridien** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 47 07 07; www.lemeridien.com; r from 40,000 CFP, over-water bungalows 56,000 CFP; ☎) Rivalling the Intercontinental in the luxury department, Le Méridien's over-water bungalows are ultra-spacious and exquisitely outfitted. Look for the resort in Puna'auia.

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Vanira Lodge** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 70 18; www.vaniralodge.com; Teahupoo; bungalows 14,000 CFP; ☎) Perched high on a hillside with fabulous lagoon views, this unique place is our favourite *pension* on Tahiti. The four bungalows are eclectic (although not really designed with security in mind – nothing locks or shuts) and blend perfectly into the environment. Each is different, but all are architecturally stimulating and made from some combination of bamboo, thatch, reed, stained glass, adobe, coral and rock. Cosy nooks, hand-carved furniture, airy mezzanines and alfresco kitchens are unique touches. When we stopped by the owners were constructing an open-air bar and swimming pool. Meals can be arranged.

**Pension Te Miti** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 58 48 61; www.pensiontemiti.com; PK18.6; dm 2500 CFP, r from 6500 CFP; ☎) Young backpackers dig this friendly, low-key place, which can have tons of atmosphere when it's crowded. Pluses include 24-hour airport transfers (1500 CFP per person), easy access to a white-sand beach and a well-equipped communal kitchen.

**Le Relais Fenua** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 45 01 98; www.relais-fenua.pf; PK18.25; r from 9000 CFP; ☎) A great option in Pa'ea, the clean, spacious rooms are stumbling distance from the lagoon and there's a snack place just around the corner. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP; children under 12 can stay for free.

**Pension de la Plage** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 45 56 12; www.pensiondelaplage.com; PK15.4; r from 8000 CFP; ☎) The giant windows in the comfortable-sized rooms and the easy access to Puna'auia's white-sand beach were just two of the reasons why we liked this place. It's also impeccably maintained. Meals can be arranged.

## Tahiti Iti

Tahiti Iti has a few great choices.

**Te Pari Village** (Map pp592-3; ☎ /fax 42 59 12; bungalows with full board per person 9500 CFP) This place is pretty damn good value considering rates include meals and excursions. It's a perfect choice for couples looking to escape – it can only be reached by boat. The atmosphere is quiet, the location, in the middle of a magnificent coconut grove beside the lagoon, fabulous.

**Pension Chayan** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 46 00; www.pensionchayan.pf; PK14 Vairao, r from 15,000 CFP) Locals recommend this place to friends, raving about the peaceful atmosphere, sparkling bungalows and magnificent tropical garden. A small black-sand swimming beach across the road is another plus.

**Punatea Village** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 71 00; www.punatea.com; PK4.7; d 5500 CFP, bungalows 9000 CFP) The bungalows and small rooms overlook a rocky beach. Shaitsu massage and an infrared sauna are the real reasons to stay. Half board adds another 3000 CFP per person.

## EATING

Pape'ete's restaurants span cuisines from around the globe. Most places are closed on Sunday. Outside Pape'ete options are limited, although a few exceptional restaurants are found around the island.

## Pape'ete

**L'O à la Bouche** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 29 76; Passage Cardella; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) At this, one of the best restaurants in this town, the owner clearly revels in his customers' gastronomic delight. The beautifully presented French appetisers and mains are as fabulous as the desserts. There's always one veggie option.

**Le Manava Restaurant** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 02 91; Av Bruat; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This extremely French place is painted a slick, bright turquoise and oozes a 1970s party vibe. It's very trendy, and the food comes highly recommended.

**Café de la Gare** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 75 95; Rue du Général de Gaulle; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Chic, smoky and always packed, this heavenly place has the feel of a true Parisian bistro. The menu is loaded with grilled meats and salads. At night the tables are cleared away, and DJs spin House for a trendy, young crowd.

**Lou Pescadore** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 74 26; Rue Anne-Marie Javouhey; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) A Pape'ete institution, this cheery Italian restaurant's hearty pizza and pasta dishes taste as delicious as they smell. Service is superfast and there are lots of veggie options – a rarity in this part of the world.

**Morrison's Café** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 78 61; Vaima Centre; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) A funky-kitsch place that takes its name from Jim (not Van), which is abundantly clear as soon as you step inside. It's cheesy, but popular, with rooftop seating and a French and Tahitian menu. There's live music some nights.

**L'Apizzeria** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 98 30; Blvd Pomare; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This denlike haven is always pretty packed and locals say the service is good. The ambience is

rough-hewn cosy; the menu features lots of pasta and salad.

**Le Dragon d'Or** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 96 12; Rue Colette; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) A classic Chinese restaurant, it offers a quiet escape from Pape'ete's sweaty bustle and has a reputation for good food.

**Tiki Soft Café** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 88 93 98; Pont de l'Est; dishes 500-1500 CFP; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A hip spot for a quick coffee or snack during the day, it's also a gathering place for the city's gay and lesbian community – especially at night when the bar gets rocking.

**La Corbeille d'Eau** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 77 14; Blvd Pomare; dishes 2500-5000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Locals rave about this intimate country-style French restaurant with modern-art adorned walls and crisp white tablecloths. It's a bit out of the way, but a good choice for a romantic meal.

**Voo Doo Lounge Bar** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 48 08 48; Rue du Commandant Jean Gilbert; dishes from 1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Drink or dine on faux leopard print at this stylish, intimate and very cool joint. The progressive French-Pacific rim fusion menu is fabulous and worth the price.

**Restaurant Le Belvédère** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 42 73 44; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) The views over Pape'ete are fantastic, particularly at sunset. Fondues are the speciality, and quite delicious, at this fine-dining restaurant perched 600m above the city in Pira'e. Le Belvédère provides free transport from some hotels in Pape'ete at 11.45am, 4.30pm and 7pm. If you drive, take the first right after the Hamuta Total fuel station.

## Around Tahiti Nui

Lots of little stalls are set up along the road around Tahiti Nui, and restaurants dot the coastal road, particularly around Taravao.

**L'Auberge du Pacifique** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 98 30; PK11.2; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) We love how the roof of the main dining room retracts at this Tahiti institution. As cheesy as it sounds, it's heavenly romantic. Plus the food is as good as the ambience; you get to feast on innovative French dishes and fine wine. Reservations recommended.

**Chez Loula & Remy** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 74 99; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Stop by this family-run place in Taravo, one of Tahiti's better French restaurants, for an

array of delicious grilled meats and fish. The atmosphere is congenial too.

**Restaurant Nuutere** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 41 15; PK32.5; dishes 2000-3500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) French specialities, cooked with local ingredients, are served in an intimate dining room at this great little restaurant in Papara. The wine list is a sight to behold.

**Restaurant Baie Phaeton** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 08 96; Taravao; dishes 1000-2000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Grab a terrace table at this delightful little place serving French and Tahitian food. The restaurant turns into a lively bar and dance club around 10pm on Friday and Saturday nights.

**Captain Bligh Restaurant** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 62 90; PK11.4; appetisers 1300-2000 CFP, mains 2000-3500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This family-oriented place at the Lagoonarium is perfect if you're travelling with young ones – there's plenty of space to run around. Adults might find it a bit cheesy, but the Friday- and Saturday-evening dance performances are well worth attending; they're put on by O Tahiti E, one of the island's best dance groups.

**Casablanca** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 91 35; PK9; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Come to this unpretentious local favourite on a Friday or Saturday night, when live music rocks the place and the vibe is rowdy. Otherwise it's a pleasant place to sit outside and dine on fine French food.

## Tahiti Iti

**Snack Tavana** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 67 72 35; PK9.8; dishes 800-1200 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) The best snack place on Tahiti, the very popular Snack Tavana across from the Vairao mayor's office dishes up hearty portions of Tahitian, French and Chinese food that never fail to satisfy.

**Chez Mado** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 32 77; PK18 Tautira; dishes 800 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Homemade crab fritters, hot, greasy French fries and hangover-curing chow mein are served to you right on the beach at this open-air, impromptu joint. It's about as relaxed as you can get, and the food isn't bad either.

## DRINKING

After a stay on other islands where nightlife is nonexistent, Pape'ete could almost pass for wild, although actually it only gets busy on weekends. Away from Pape'ete, however, nightlife is pretty nonexistent.

## Bars & Pubs

Many of the places along Blvd Pomare, the noisy nightlife strip, look pretty seedy, but they are frequented by local women and families, and are generally safe for single female travellers. The snazzy top-end hotels, such as the Sheraton Hotel Tahiti (p600) and the Intercontinental Resort Tahiti (p600), all have bars where you can enjoy the ocean breezes and nibble the free peanuts; 'unchaperoned' women are much less likely to be under the spotlight in these bars.

**Café de la Gare** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 75 95; Rue du Général de Gaulle) Terribly chic, terribly French, terribly smoky – it's an intimate spot for a classy cocktail. After dinner, DJs spin House for the young and trendy crowd well into the night.

**Le Rétro** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 86 83; Blvd Pomare) Full of attitude and atmosphere, this is a good spot to booze it up with new friends or spend a quiet hour people watching – it has a fabulously central location. Skip the food; it's overpriced and only so-so.

**Les 3 Brasseurs** (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare) This place feels just like the cosy pubs back home. Down a few pints of its excellent microbrewed beer and you'll be kicking the homesick blues in no time. Cover bands perform on weekends.

**Voo Doo Lounge Bar** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 48 08 48; Rue du Commandant Jean Gilbert) With a great low-key music scene and much more style than most Pape'ete watering holes, we like stopping at this sophisticated spot for a quiet bottle of fine French wine.

## Clubs

Boulevard Pomare is the main drag for nightclubs and discos. Some establishments open only on the weekend, when you will need your elbows to force an entrance

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Coco's Restaurant** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 58 21 08; PK13; dishes 2000-4500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of the best choices on the island, this fabulous and romantic place offers the chance to dine in a tropical garden framed by coconut trees to a soundtrack of crashing waves. The menu is French, with lots of seafood options. Food is well presented, although service can be a bit slow.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**La Cave** (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare; admission men 2000 CFP; ☎ Fri & Sat) Head here if you're looking for a more *kaina* (local) atmosphere. The attraction is the music: the Royal Band has a local repertoire including the Tahitian waltz, zouk and foxtro. It really gets going after midnight. The entry price includes a drink.

(although women tend to be more than welcome). They typically close around 3am or 4am.

**Le Paradise** (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare; admission men 2000 CFP; ☎ Fri & Sat) A classic Pape'ete bar, it attracts a mixed crowd of Polynesians and French and is everybody's favourite stand-by discotheque.

**Royal Kikiriri** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 58 64; Rue Colette; admission Fri & Sat 1500 CFP) A local favourite for Tahitian bands; the inside is nothing special but the place showcases live music every night. The admission fee includes a drink on the weekend; entry is free other nights.

**Piano Bar** (Map pp598-9; Rue de Écoles; admission Fri & Sat 2000 CFP) The clientele range from love-lorn sailors to passing tourists – the whole world seems to come and go from here. The music (techno, dance, local) isn't as important as the general atmosphere. There's a drag show on Friday and Saturday nights around 1am.

## ENTERTAINMENT

### Cinemas

Pape'ete has a few small cinemas. Admission costs 950 CFP.

**Concorde** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 63 60; Vaima Centre, Rue du Général de Gaulle)

**Hollywood** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 65 79; Fare Tony, Rue Largarde)

### Dance Performances

Superb, colourful Polynesian dance performances are held several times a week in the big hotels. Brush aside images of cheesy tourist performances; these groups are professional and are enjoyed every bit as much by locals as by wide-eyed visitors. The 45-minute performances generally start at about 8pm. They are often accompanied by a sumptuous buffet (around 7500 CFP), although a drink at the bar will sometimes get you in.

## SHOPPING

You practically trip over Pape'ete's jewellery shops and pearl specialists. If you want to shop around, there are also numerous pearl shops and pearl farms on the outer islands.

As well as pearls, pearls and more pearls, you can buy handicrafts from all over French Polynesia here: Marquesan woodcarvings,

hats and baskets woven in the Australs, and colourful *pareu* (sarong-type garments).

**Marché de Pape'ete** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 6am-6pm)

For reasonably priced gifts start at the market, where you'll find wooden salad servers, bright fabric, the wonderful *monoi* oil (coconut oil refined with the fragrance of tropical flowers), jewellery and even mother-of-pearl love-heart key rings!

Several art galleries show the work of Polynesian artists including:

**Galerie des Tropiques** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 41 05 00; cnr Blvd Pomare & Rue Cook)

**Gallerie Winkle** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 81 77; Rue Jeanne d'Arc)

**Olivier Creations** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 48 29 36; Rue Paul Gauguin)

# MO'OREA

pop 14,230 / area 53 sq km

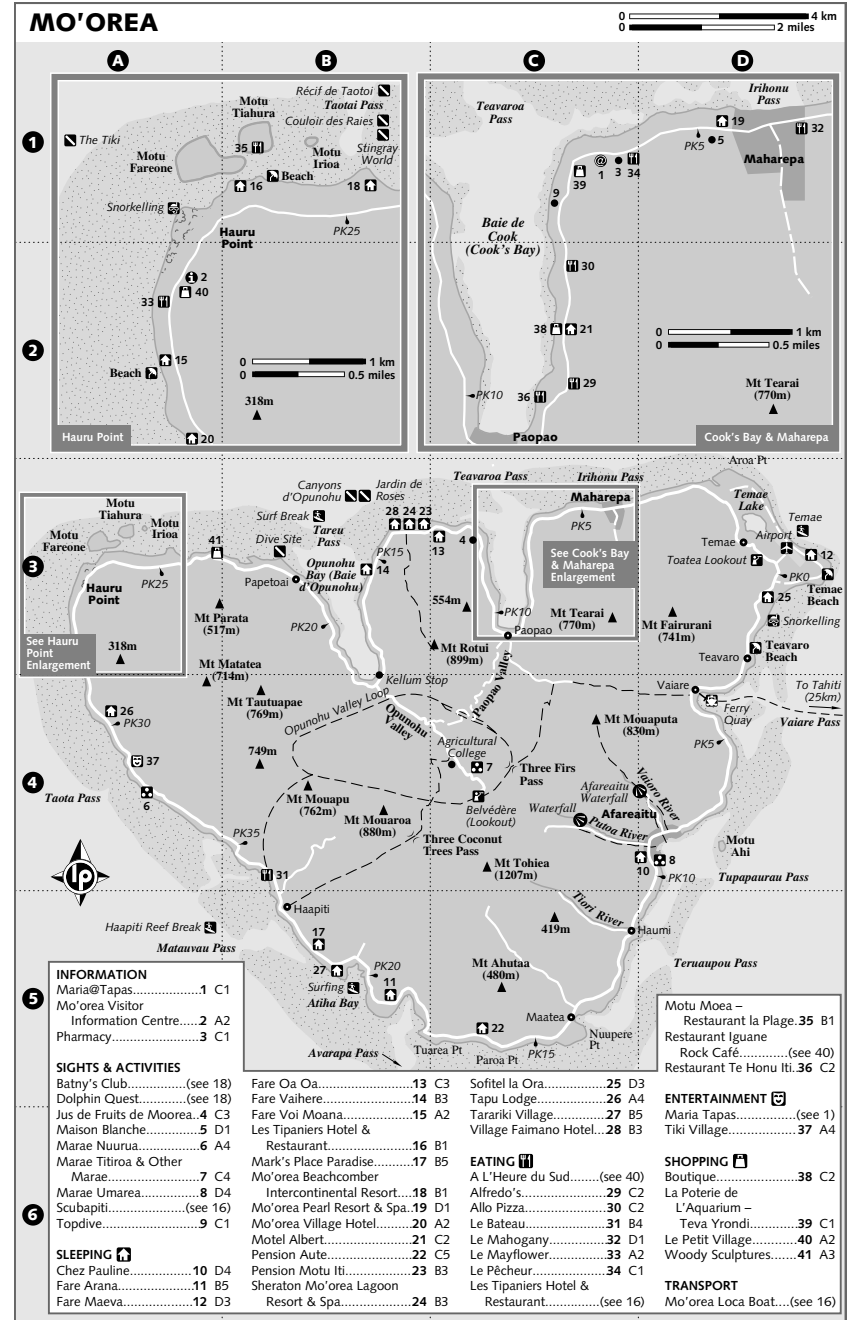
With mountains leaping almost vertically out of the clear lagoon, lush vegetation, restaurants dripping fresh fish, stylish accommodation and a languid pace of life, it's little wonder many visitors experience a sense of déjà vu upon arriving on Mo'orea – this is the island paradise you've been dreaming about all winter. Transport from Tahiti is absurdly easy, so you've no excuse but to spend, at the very least, a day or two on this veritable gem. If idling away the days ceases to do it for you, there are challenging walks, scuba diving, snorkelling, and interesting *marae* to keep you entertained.

## ORIENTATION

A road runs around the coast and two roads run into the interior; they meet and climb to the *belvédère* (lookout). Most people live in coastal villages; with its frenetic quay, Vaïare is the busiest centre, but Afareaitu is the administrative centre. Tourist development is concentrated in two strips: from Maharepa down the east side of Cook's Bay (Baie de Cook) to Paopao, and around Hauru Point on the northwest corner of the island. The airport is at the northeast corner.

Beaches are rare; good ones are at Hauru Point and at Temae, near the airport.

The *pointe kilométrique* markers start at zero at the airport and meet at Haapiti,



which is at PK24 in a clockwise direction and PK35 anticlockwise.

## INFORMATION

Banque Socredo, Banque de Tahiti and Banque de Polynésie have ATMs and are clustered around the small shopping centre at Maharepa at PK6.3. The rates are generally not as good here as on Tahiti.

In medical emergencies your hotel should be your first port of call.

**Banque Socredo** Across from the quay at Vaiare; has an ATM.

**Maria@Tapas** (☎ 55 01 70; PK5; per hr 1000 CFP)

Internet access in the Centre Kikipa, Cook's Bay.

**Mo'orea Hospital** (☎ 56 23 23; Afareaitu)

**Mo'orea visitor information centre** (☎ 56 29 09; Hauru Point) This office is at Le Petit Village shopping centre.

**Pharmacy** (☎ 56 10 51; PK6.5, Maharepa; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 3.30-6pm Sat, 8am-11am Sun) There's another pharmacy shortly after Tiki Village at PK31.

**Post offices** At Maharepa and Papetoai (east of Hauru Point).

**Restaurant Iguane Rock Café** (☎ 56 17 16; Le Petit Village, Hauru Point; per hr 1000 CFP ☎ 10am-midnight) Internet access.

## TRANSPORT

Crossing the 20km separating Mo'orea from Tahiti is dead easy. It takes less than 10 minutes by plane, or half an hour by high-speed ferry. Once you arrive, there are plenty of taxis to pick up a car or scooter.

## Getting There & Away

**Air Moorea** (Tahiti ☎ 86 41 41, Mo'orea 56 10 34) flies from Faa'a airport on Tahiti to Mo'orea (from 2600 CFP) at least every half-hour. There's no need to book, just turn up. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 86 42 42) also flies to Mo'orea, but chiefly for passengers connecting to other islands in the Society group. There's usually only one to three flights a day from Bora Bora (from 18,000 CFP), Huahine (from 13,000 CFP) and Raiatea (from 13,000 CFP).

The **Aremiti 5** (Pape'ete ☎ 42 88 88, Mo'orea 56 31 10) and the **Moorea Express** (Pape'ete ☎ 82 47 47, Mo'orea 56 43 43) jet between Tahiti and Mo'orea six or more times daily between 6am and 4.30pm. The trip takes about 30 minutes; fares are 900 CFP. You can buy tickets at the ticket counter on the quay just a few minutes before departure.

## Getting Around

It's best to rent a scooter, car or bicycle to get around Mo'orea: distances are long and there is no public transport. Hitching is another option. It's generally very safe and if you have a little patience you'll likely get picked up.

Air Moorea offers a 500 CFP minibus service to any of the island's hotels after each flight. Most hotels, even budget places, offer airport transfers. Mo'orea **taxis** (☎ 56 10 18) are horribly expensive: from the airport to the Beachcomber Intercontinental, at the very start of Hauru Point, will cost approximately 3500 CFP.

A shuttle bus meets some of the boat arrivals (200 CFP) and runs to or from any of the Cook's Bay or Hauru Point hotels.

Car-hire operators can be found at the Vaiare boat quay, the airport, some of the major hotels and around Cook's Bay and Hauru Point. The main operators include **Europcar** (☎ 56 34 00), which also rents scooters; **Avis** (☎ 56 32 61); and **Albert Transport & Activities** (☎ 56 19 28), which generally has the lowest prices. You'll pay from around 8000 CFP per day including insurance and unlimited mileage.

**Mo'orea Loca Boat** (☎ 78 13 39; 2/8hr hire 7000/1100 CFP), at Les Tipaniers Hotel, rents boats, an ideal way to explore the lagoon.

## COASTAL ROAD

The early-20th-century **Maison Blanche** (PK5) is a fine example of a *fare vanira* (vanilla house), a plantation house from Mo'orea's vanilla-boom era.

Spectacular **Cook's Bay**, with Mt Rotui (899m) as a backdrop, is a lovely stretch of water and one of Mo'orea's two tourist strips. The road passes **Galerie van der Heyde**, which has a collection of Oceanic art. At the base of Cook's Bay the village of **Paopao** has an interesting mural in its former fish market.

**Jus de Fruits de Mo'orea** (Fruit Juices of Mo'orea; ☎ 56 11 33; PK11; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) is a perfect thirst-quenching stop. The various fruit liqueurs are delicious, but a bottle of 100% pineapple juice (320 CFP) is the perfect tonic.

**Opunohu Bay** (Baie d'Opunohu) still feels wonderfully fresh and isolated. Almost at the top of the bay, **Kellum Stop** (☎ 56 18 52; PK17.5; garden tours 500 CFP) was the home of

the wealthy Medford Kellum. In 1925 he brought six scientists to the region and kick-started some of the pioneering Polynesian archaeological studies; call ahead for tours. At the northwest corner of the island is **Hauru Point**, Mo'orea's other main tourist strip. It has a 5km sandy **beach**, one of Mo'orea's best; you have to walk through the grounds of a hotel to reach it.

The evocative **Marae Nuurua**, on the water's edge at the end of a football field, marks the start of the less developed side of Mo'orea. **Haapiti** and **Atiha Bay** are popular with surfers.

**Marae Umarea**, about 100m south of Chez Pauline in Afareaitu, is worth exploring. This long wall of coral boulders along the waterfront is thought to date from about 900 AD and is Mo'orea's oldest. Afareaitu's two **waterfalls** are a major attraction.

**Vaiare** has a bustling port and is the start of the walk across the ridge to Paopao and Cook's Bay. Nearby, the best beaches on the east coast stretch from Teavaro to the airport. **Teavaro Beach** has good snorkelling.

The island road climbs away from the coast to the **Toatea Lookout**, which has great Tahiti views. A road on the lagoon side of the runway extends around **Temae Lake**, one of the few breeding grounds for the only species of duck found in French Polynesia.

## PAOPOA & OPUNOHU VALLEYS

In the pre-European era the Opunohu Valley was dotted with *marae* – the largest number in French Polynesia – some of which have been restored and maintained. The oldest structures date from the 13th century. From the car park beside the huge **Marae Titiroa** a walking track leads through dense forest to **Marae Ahu-o-Mahine**, with an imposing three-stepped *ahu* (altar). A short way up the road from Marae Titiroa is **Marae Afareaito** and an adjacent **archery platform**.

Beyond Marae Afareaito the road continues to climb steeply, winding up to the excellent **belvédère** on the slopes of Mt Tohia (1207m).

## ACTIVITIES

Your guesthouse can suggest a lagoon tour operator; a six-hour tour visiting the two bays, feeding the sharks, swimming with the rays and having a *motu* picnic costs around 6000 CFP.

## Cycling

This is a great way to see Mo'orea's sights. Doing the 60km circuit in a day is possible (depending on the state of those thighs!), although tiring, particularly given the rather sorry state of the bikes available. Many of the hotels rent bikes for around 2000 CFP per day.

## Diving & Snorkelling

You'll probably spend as much time in the water as out of it on Mo'orea. For the best snorkelling join a lagoon tour or head to Hauru Point.

For diving, contact **Bathy's Club** (☎ 56 31 44), in the Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort; **Mo'orea Fun Dive** (☎ 56 40 38; www.moorea-fundive.com; PK26.7), at the Mo'orea Beach Club; **Scubapiti** (☎ 56 20 38; www.scubapiti.com), the one centre that doesn't believe in fish feeding, at Les Tipaniers; and **Topdive – MUST** (☎ 56 17 32), on Cook's Bay. See p71 for further details about diving in French Polynesia.

## Dolphin-Watching

**Dolphin Quest** (☎ 55 19 48; adult/child 17,000/10,000 CFP) allows kids (and adults) to get up close and personal with captive dolphins in an enclosure at the Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort.

## Hiking

Good hikes include the two-hour stretch from the ferry quay at Vaiare, over the crater ridge into the central valley, emerging at Cook's Bay. The climb from near the agricultural school in the Opunohu Valley to Three Coconut Trees Pass is spectacular but the trail can be hard to follow – consider a guide. **Tiare Mato** (☎ 43 92 76), **Polynesian Adventure** (☎ 43 25 95) and **Derek Grell of Chez Tefaarahi Safari Tours** (☎ 56 41 24) organise guided walks and climbs.

## Horse Riding

**Ranch Opunohu Valley** (☎ 56 28 55; trips 5000 CFP; ☎ closed Mon) offers two-hour guided horse rides into the island's interior. Call to arrange a trip.

## Quad Biking

All-terrain-vehicle tours are the new rage on Mo'orea. These 4WD buggies built for two are a fun way to see some rugged interior

areas. Two-hour tours are available from **ATV Mo'orea Tour** (☎ 56 16 60; 14,000 CFP) and **Mahana ATV Tours** (☎ 55 10 19; 14,500 CFP).

## SLEEPING

Most accommodation is concentrated on the east side of Cook's Bay and around Hauru Point. Mo'orea has superb over-water bungalows, but it also has the best selection (by local standards!) of budget *pensions* in French Polynesia.

### Cook's Bay

This magnificent bay doesn't have a beach but is quieter than Hauru Point.

**Mo'orea Pearl Resort & Spa** (☎ 50 84 52; / bungalows from 27,000/37,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) We loved the infinity pool and the atmospheric bar and restaurant at this intimate luxury resort. The small white-sand beach and artistic bungalows are added perks. Choose from beach, garden or over-water bungalows.

**Motel Albert** (☎ 56 12 76; fax 56 58 58; units from 6500 CFP) A great-value option in a hilly setting with fabulous views. The minihouses are more than spacious with full kitchen facilities, covered porches and giant windows. If you're preparing your own food, there are several places to shop nearby and free grapefruit on offer in season.

### Cook's Bay to Hauru Point

**Fare Oa Oa** (☎ 56 25 17; www.fareoaoa.com; dm/s/d 2500/3500/4500 CFP) There's not much privacy, but this charming place has as much character and style as you could hope for. There are four rooms that share a clean bathroom (with hot water) and lovely kitchen.

**Sheraton Mo'orea Lagoon Resort & Spa** (☎ 86 48 49; bungalows from 42,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The resort is on one of the few bits of beach along this strip. Digs are exceptionally luxurious and filled with extra details such as claw-footed baths. The over-water bungalows feature glass panels in the floor for private fish viewing.

**Fare Vaihere** (☎ 56 19 19; www.farevaihere.com; bungalows from 15,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This new place offers small but tastefully decorated bungalows in an open garden facing the sea. There is a communal kitchen, free kayaks, snorkelling equipment and bikes.

**Village Faimano Hotel** (☎ 56 10 20; www.faimano.village.com; bungalows from 10,000 CFP) Old dartboards and woodcarvings hang haphazardly

about at this place with a hippy-eclectic vibe. It's quiet, on a lovely beach and the owners will be more than happy to leave you alone.

**Pension Motu Iti** (☎ 55 05 20; www.pensionmotu.it.com; dm 1700 CFP, bungalows from 11,000 CFP; 🍷) Mo'orea's airiest and most pleasant dorms and great-value rooms. The beach-facing ones are worth the extra cash – they have both sunrise and sunset views!

### Hauru Point

Unlike Cook's Bay, Hauru Point has a very pleasant beach.

**Les Tipaniers Hotel Restaurant** (☎ 56 12 67; tipaniersresa@mail.pf; bungalows from 9000 CFP) Comfortable, easy ambience and a great beach make this an excellent choice for couples and families. The bungalows are extremely clean and spacious, just about any activity can be organised and the restaurant is one of Mo'orea's best (see p610).

**Hotel Fare Voi Moana** (☎ 56 17 14; garden/beach bungalows 14,000/18,000 CFP) This fair-value option on the beach has 13 very comfortable bungalows with refrigerator, mezzanine and bathroom with hot water; each accommodates up to four people. The restaurant overlooks the water and has a good reputation.

**Mo'orea Village Hotel** (☎ 56 10 02; fax 56 22 11; bungalows from 12,000 CFP; 🍷) This place was switching ownership at the time of writing and could go through big changes before re-opening in late 2006. The site is superb, with a white beach and a little *motu* in front. You'll find a tennis court, swimming pool, bar and restaurant.

**Tapu Lodge** (☎ 55 20 55; www.tapulodge.com; houses from 25,000 CFP) In a quiet locale, these modern, immaculate, enigmatic units with ocean views are a great deal. The welcoming management offer free trips out to the *motu*.

**Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort** (☎ 55 19 19; www.moorea.interconti.com; d 46,000 CFP, bungalows from 52,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) One of the most luxurious and expensive hotels on the island – an over-water bungalow will set you back about 90,000 CFP! Every activity you can imagine is offered, as well as a few you probably couldn't (such as walking along the sea bed with a weighted helmet). The spa here is the most respected in French Polynesia, the grounds amazing.

**Dream Island** (☎ 56 38 81; www.dream-island.com; bungalows from 35,000 CFP) A three-minute boat ride brings you to this superbly located exclusive island paradise. Three house/bungalows are built from local materials in authentic Polynesian style. All activities are offered. There is a four-night minimum.

**Camping Chez Nelson** (☎ 56 15 18; www.camping-nelson.pf; camping per person 1000 CFP, dm 1600 CFP, d 4500-6000 CFP, bungalows 5000 CFP) This place on a nice strip of beach is very popular with backpackers. Prices drop if you stay more than one night. Accommodation is very basic, and the welcome is sometimes rather cool.

### Haapiti to Afareaitu

**Mark's Place Paradise** (☎ 56 43 02; www.marks-place-paradise.com; Haapiti; dm 2000 CFP, bungalows from 6000 CFP, per person camping 1100 CFP; 🍷) Mo'orea's best camping option is sadly not on the beach, but the dorms and bungalows are architecturally pleasing and tastefully decorated, so everything kind of evens out. Plus, Mark, the American owner, really goes out of his way to ensure guests are offered a myriad of activities at affordable prices.

**Tarariki Village** (☎ 55 21 05; pensiontarariki@mail.pf; dm/d per person 2000/2500 CFP, bungalows 5500-7500 CFP) A friendly, family atmosphere and quiet, green location make this a budget favourite. Choose from miniature cabins, Spartan dorms or a thatched bungalow perched about 3m up in a tree. Its proximity to Haapiti's Matauvau Pass makes it popular with surfers.

**Chez Pauline** (☎ 56 11 26; d incl breakfast 6000 CFP) Opened by Pauline Teariki's mother in 1918, this was for many years the only hotel on the island. Although it most definitely lacks the comforts of a modern hotel, it has a historic charm and offers a real opportunity to sample local life. There are seven rooms, sharing two bathrooms with cold water. The restaurant specialises in Tahitian cuisine.

**Fare Arana** (☎ 56 44 03; www.farearana.com; d 17,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) Up on a hill, this place is quite stylish. The gardens have a Southeast Asian flavour while the two-storey rooms are comfortable, homely and French. There are magnificent views, loads of flowers and a convivial staff.

**Pension Aute** (☎ 56 45 19; www.pensionaute.com; bungalows 11,000-15,000 CFP) This *pension* has an amazing position on the wild southern

side of the island and a variety of spacious bungalows for three to six people. All bungalows are very well equipped (they even have washing machines and TVs).

## Temae

**Sofitel la Ora** (☎ 55 03 55; bungalows from 25,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) Looking across to Tahiti from Temae Beach, just 2km south of Mo'orea's airport, this place sits pretty on one of the island's best beaches. It was planning to close for extensive renovations at the time of writing. All the activities you could dream of are offered.

**Fare Maeva** (☎ 56 18 10; faremaevamoorea@mail.pf; bungalows 7000 CFP) A charming, isolated place dominated by coconut trees and coral gravel. All the tidy, well-decorated bungalows have kitchens and the beach is about 200m away. Follow the signs to the Golden Nugget; Fare Maeva is about 150m further on.

## EATING

Cook's Bay and Hauru Point are the dining epicentres. Most places close towards 9pm Monday to Saturday, and on Sunday the options can be surprisingly bleak.

### Maharepa & Cook's Bay

**Restaurant Te Honu Iti** (☎ 56 19 84; dishes 1600-3500 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The terrace of this place sits over the water, and at night the water is lit up so you can watch rays and fish pottering about below you. The food is stylish and tasty.

**Le Pêcheur** (☎ 56 36 12; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Known for its steak and seafood, here you can splurge on giant French-style shellfish platters for two people (8200 to 13,000 CFP). Wafts of salty air mingle with the great food.

**Alfredo's** (☎ 56 17 71; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Alfredo's is a lively little Italian restaurant that serves hearty portions of consistently good comfort food. Transport is offered from as far as the Mo'orea Pearl Resort.

**Le Mahogany** (☎ 56 39 73; dishes 1500-4000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Reliably good French and Chinese food (meat dishes are the speciality); call for a pickup from your hotel. Credit cards are accepted.

**Allo Pizza** (☎ 56 18 22; pizzas 1100-1500 CFP; 🍷 lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Just about any kind of pizza you could think of is available



at this excellent place. It will even deliver in this area.

### Papetoai & Hauru Point

The strip along Hauru Point is teeming with places to eat.

**Les Tipaniers Hotel Restaurant** (☎ 56 12 67; lunch 1000-1500 CFP, dinner 980-2500 CFP; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This well-respected restaurant, at the hotel of the same name, combines French-Italian food with a Tahitian flavour. It's a movable feast, with breakfast and lunch served at the beach, while dinner is served up near the main road. Transport can be arranged.

**AL'Heure du Sud** (sandwiches 450-600 CFP; 🍷 lunch) A great variety of stuffed sandwiches are served at this dark blue *roulotte* in front of Petit Village shopping centre.

**Le Mayflower** (☎ 56 53 59; dishes 1500-3500 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Next to the Hotel Hibiscus, this recommended French place is famous for its lobster ravioli.

### Motu Tiahura

**Motu Moea – Restaurant la Plage** (☎ 74 96 96; dishes 1000-2000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This place has an idyllic setting on Motu Tiahura (also known as Motu Moea). The food is simple, fresh and reasonably priced. Take a dip once you've digested your meal – this is the life! You can get a boat over to the *motu* from Les Tipaniers Hotel Restaurant (500 CFP).

### Haapiti

**Le Bateau** (☎ 55 05 65; dishes 1600-3800 CFP) A floating restaurant in a boat at the end of the quay, the food here is essentially French but has many local twists. There are cocktails at the bar, and transport from Hauru Point can be arranged for 500 CFP. Reservations are recommended.

### DRINKING

The big hotels have bars where all are welcome to enjoy a predinner drink, and many of the restaurants listed earlier, such as Les Tipaniers and Le Bateau are good spots for a sunset tippie.

**Maria@Tapas** (☎ 55 01 70; 🍷 8am-11pm Mon-Wed, to 1am Thu-Sat; 📺) Order a burrito, grab a beer and enjoy the music at this funky little Tex-Mex joint. Yes, it's a little weird living it up Latin style in a Polynesian paradise but this is often the only nightlife option

on Mo'orea. Half-price happy hour beer is available Thursday and Fridays from 6pm to 7pm. Reserve well in advance on nights when there is music (entry fee 500 CFP).

### ENTERTAINMENT

A couple of times a week (usually Wednesday and Saturday evening) the bigger hotels organise excellent Polynesian music and dance performances by local groups.

**Tiki Village** (☎ 55 02 50; Tue-Sat night without/dinner 4000/8000 CFP) A Tahitian cultural village where tourists can watch local people 'living' in the traditional way. The 60-person dance performances here are the biggest on the island. A ticket with dinner and the evening dance performance lets you in free for activities during the day also.

### SHOPPING

The coastal road is littered with souvenir places. For *pareu*, T-shirts and other curios, try the Lili Shop, Maison Blanche and Vaimiti, between the airport and Cook's Bay. At Cook's Bay stop at Honu Iti Boutique and the boutique in the Club Bali Hai. Mo'orea has a number of art galleries, such as Galerie van der Heyde (p606) at Cook's Bay and La Poterie de L'Aquarium – Teva Yrondy close to the Kaveka Hotel.

The major black-pearl specialists have outlets on Mo'orea.

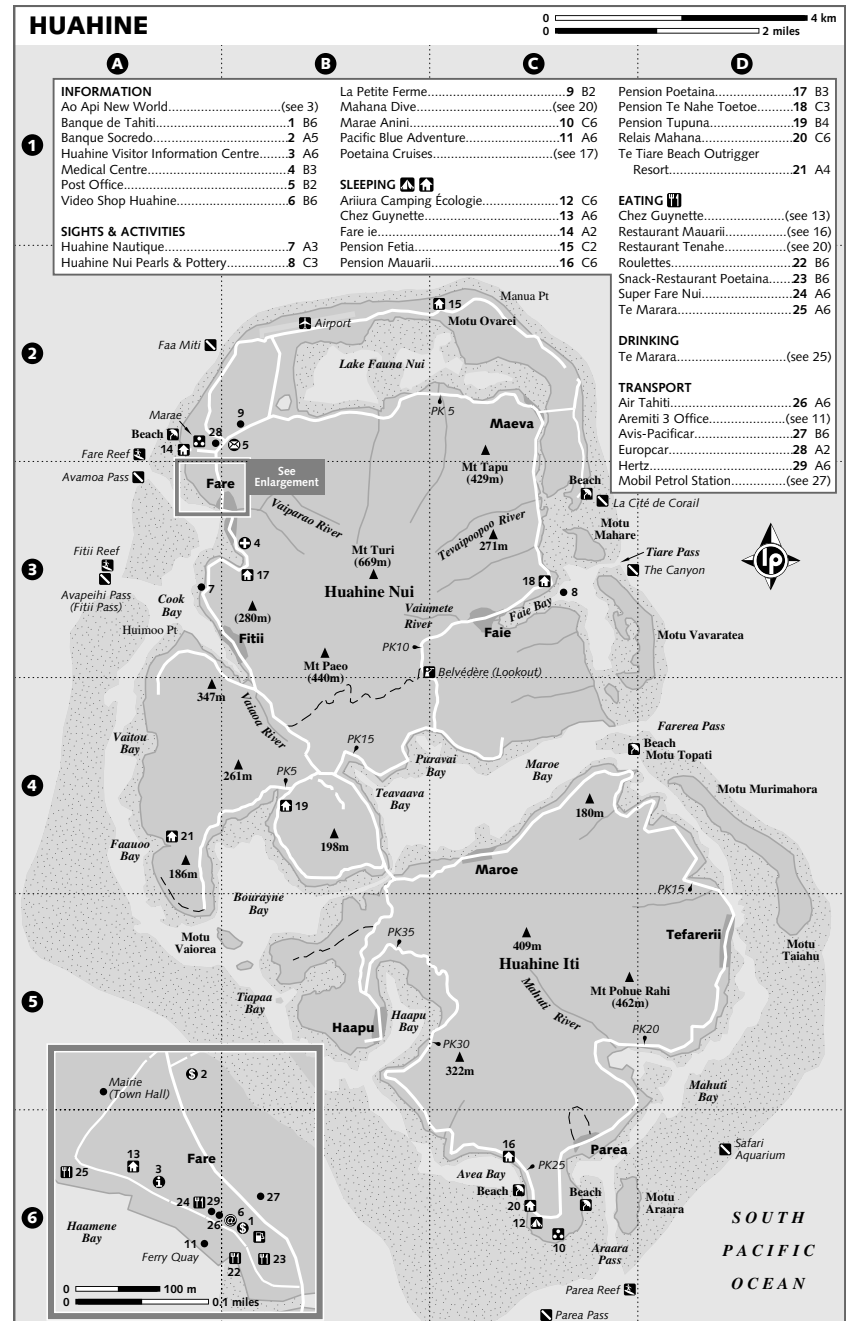
**Maison du Tiki** (Le Petit Village, Hauru Point) Offers sculptures and Polynesian art.

**Woody Sculptures** (☎ 56 37 00; Papetoai) This place, just before the Hauru Point enclave, has woodcarvings by the well-respected Woody.

## HUAHINE

pop 5741 / area 75 sq km

Relatively secret, unpretentious and authentically Polynesian, Huahine is a place to just kick back and watch the world float by. Although some find its sleepy vibe and lack of posh pampering boring, others, especially surfer and backpacker types (and us), fall hard for Huahine's savage beauty, lower prices and 'take it slooowww' attitude. This island has it all. Blessed with untouched beaches, isolated coves, enchanted lagoons, killer reef-breaks and the most extensive complex of pre-European *marae* in



French Polynesia, Huahine's also managed to escape the rampant overdevelopment afflicting her sister isles. There's only one real luxury resort, and locals aren't keen on seeing any more. They'd rather keep their island just as it is – mellow.

Huahine is comprised of two islands of fairly similar size: Huahine Nui (Big Huahine) to the north and Huahine Iti (Little Huahine) to the south. Huahine Nui is more developed and noisy, home to the bustling little village of Fare and most of the main tourist and administrative facilities. Huahine Iti offers the island's best beaches, most azure lagoons and a serene, get-away-from-it-all atmosphere.

## ORIENTATION

A 60km, mostly sealed, road follows the coast most of the way around both islands. A series of *motu* stretches along the east coast of the two islands, while around the north coast of Huahine Nui is Lake Fauna Nui. It almost cuts off the northern peninsula, where the airport is, from the rest of Huahine Nui. There are only a few beaches.

Fare, the principal town, is on the west coast of Huahine Nui. Faie and Maeva, on the east coast, and Fiti, on the west, are the other main settlements on Huahine Nui. Huahine Iti has four villages: Haapu, Parea, Tefarerii and Maroe.

## INFORMATION

There's a bank opposite the quay in Fare and another on the bypass road parallel to Fare's main street. Both have ATMs. Visiting yachts can get water from Pacific Blue Adventure, on the quay. The *capitainerie* (harbour master's office) is also on the quay.

**Ao Api New World** (☎ 68 70 99; per hr 900 CFP) Look for this Internet café in the same building as the visitor information centre.

**Huahine visitor information centre** (☎ 68 78 81; ☎ 7.30-11.30am Mon-Sat) On Fare's main street.

**Medical Centre** (☎ 68 82 20; ☎ 24hr) On the bypass road in Fare; it handles minor emergencies.

**Post office** To the north of Fare towards the airport.

**Video Shop Huahine** (☎ 60 67 40; per hr 900 CFP; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 5-8pm Sun) Internet access.

## TRANSPORT

There are regular flights to Huahine from surrounding islands.

## Getting There & Away

Huahine's airport is 2.5km from Fare. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 68 77 02; ☎ 7.30-11.45am & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.30am Sat) runs all flights and has an office on Fare's main street. Destinations include Pape'ete (from 10,000 CFP, three to five times daily), Ra'iatea (from 5500 CFP, daily) and Bora Bora (from 7500 CFP, daily).

The **Aremiti 3** links Pape'ete, Huahine and Ra'iatea twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday. It departs Pape'ete at 7am and arrives at Huahine at 10.45am. From Pape'ete to Huahine costs 4500/2500 CFP per adult/child; from Huahine to Ra'iatea costs 2000/800 CFP per adult/child (the boat leaves at around 11am). The **Aremiti 3 office** (☎ 74 39 40, 73 52 73, 68 75 16; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-3pm) is on the quay in the centre of Fare.

Inter-island cargo ships are another option, although less reliable. The *Vaeanu* and *Hawaiki Nui* depart from Pape'ete and stop at Huahine. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.

## Getting Around

From the airport a taxi costs 750 CFP to go to Fare and 1500 CFP to go to the south of the island.

To rent a car check out one of the three operators on the island. **Hertz** (☎ 66 76 85) is right on the main strip in Fare and has the best deal. Cars cost only 5500 CFP per 24 hours with unlimited mileage. They're a little junky looking, and most lack air-con, but are well worth it for the price. **Avis-Pacificar** (☎ 68 73 34; per 24hr 8500 CFP) is next to the Mobil petrol station in Fare, it also has a counter at the airport. **Europcar** (☎ 68 82 59; per 24hr 9500 CFP) is near the post office, at the airport and the Relais Mahana.

Public transport on Huahine doesn't really exist. If you need a taxi, call **Moe's Taxi** (☎ 72 80 60). Moe speaks perfect English and will take you anywhere on the island at any time. Prices are reasonable.

For scooters, check with Europcar.

## HUAHINE NUI

This 60km clockwise circuit of the larger island starts at **Fare**, the image of a sleepy South Seas port. The smells of hamburger grease and freshly caught fish linger in the sticky air and the place vibrates with the

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(Continued from page 612)

pumping bass of Tahitian reggae. There's not a lot to do, but that's part of Fare's appeal. Check out the colourful little waterside **market** and the few creative boutiques, sign up for a dive or rent a ramshackle bicycle and just pedal around.

The most extensive complex of pre-European *marae* in French Polynesia is on Huahine. **Maeva** village was the seat of royal power on the island and nearly 30 *marae* are scattered along the shoreline among the village's modern buildings, and up Matairea (Pleasant Wind) Hill; this area is well worth exploring. It takes about two hours to explore the *marae* around Maeva village. Start at the defence wall on the Fare side of Maeva. From here a trail goes uphill through forest and vanilla plantations; a side path leads to the multitiered **Te Ana** or Matairea Huiarii. This complex has *marae*, houses and agricultural terraces dating from 1300 to 1800, with signs of an earlier settlement from 900 AD. A side path winds through the forest to **Marae Tefano**, where a banyan tree overwhelms one end of the *ahu*. Further on, a trail branches left to **Marae Matairea Rahi**. Return to the main trail and continue to the steep side path to **Marae Paepae Ofata**. It's worth the effort: the *marae* is perched on the edge of the hill and has fine views. Return to the main path, which winds around the hillside to **Marae Tamata Uporu** before dropping steeply to the road.

From Maeva the coast road turns inland beside narrow Faie Bay to the village of **Faie**. While you're in the area, don't miss a visit to **Huahine Nui Pearls & Pottery** (☎ 78 30 20; www.huahinepearlfarm.com; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm). Peter Owen, the owner, is a potter as well as a pearl farmer and his work is shown in Pape'ete galleries. Peter's studio is on his pearl farm in the middle of the lagoon. From Faie a ferry departs for the studio every 15 minutes between 10am and 3pm.

Huahine's famous blue-eyed eels can be seen in the river immediately downstream of the bridge. It's a steep climb to the **belvédère** on the slopes of Mt Turi. The road weaves through farms before returning to Fare.

## HUAHINE ITI

Start at the village of Maroe, on the south side of Maroe Bay, and head clockwise to **Marae Anini**, the community *marae* on the

island's southern tip. Made of massive coral blocks, this large coastal *marae* was dedicated to 'Oro (the god of war) and Hiro (the god of thieves and sailors) but is now sadly neglected. Some of the best **beaches** around Huahine are found on the southern peninsula and along its western shore around Avea Bay.

## ACTIVITIES

### Diving & Snorkelling

Huahine has some great dive spots, including a canyon where you can see barracuda, jackfish, rays and trey sharks. The island's two dive companies both charge around 6000 CFP for a single tank dive, 7000 CFP for an introductory dive. **Mahana Dive** (☎ 68 76 32; www.mahanadive.com; Avea Bay), run by the exuberant, English-speaking Annie, is an excellent dive shop offering a hands-on experience. On the quay in Fare, **Pacific Blue Adventure** (☎ 68 87 21; www.divehuahine.com) is another friendly centre.

Fare has a pretty, sandy **beach** just north of the town. The wide, superclear lagoon drops off quickly here providing some fabulous snorkelling amid stunning coral and dense fish populations. Just south of Maeva, near the visitor car park at the now defunct Sofitel, you'll find **La Cité de Corail**, which offers more superb snorkelling.

### Horse Riding

**La Petite Ferme** (☎ 68 82 98; 2hr/day trip 4500/10,000 CFP), just north of Fare, offers guided horse-riding trips.

### Surfing

Huahine has some of the best and most consistent surf in French Polynesia: left and right reef-breaks best tackled by experienced surfers. Local surfers can be very possessive, however, so be sure to respect their domain.

### Swimming

Around the hotel and guesthouse area of southwestern Huahine Iti, there's a beautiful white-sand **beach** and the lagoon here is very wide and good for swimming.

### Walking

Walking opportunities are limited to the *marae* walk at Maeva, the 3km trail inland to the *belvédère* and a one-hour circuit from

Parea on Huahine Iti; you need a guide to climb Mt Turi (669m) from Fare.

## TOURS

The Huahine lagoon is superb and includes many untouched *motu* accessible only by boat. A variety of **lagoon tours** (per person around 7500 CFP) are offered, with stops for snorkelling, swimming, fish feeding and a *motu*. Try the following outfits, both just south of Fare:

**Huahine Nautique** (☎ 68 83 15)

**Poetania Cruises** (☎ 68 89 49)

Several operators run three-hour island tours for about 4500 CFP per person; try the following:

**Felix Tours** (☎ 68 81 69)

**Huahine Explorer** (☎ 69 87 33)

**Huahine Land** (☎ 68 89 21)

## SLEEPING

Most of Huahine Nui's accommodation options are in and around Fare, and staying near the main village means easy access to shops, restaurants, banks and car-hire facilities. There's no question Huahine Iti's beaches put Huahine Nui's to shame, but if you choose to stay on the smaller island, and don't have a car, you'll have to rely on hitchhiking to get around – though it's not really all that difficult, plus all three places to stay on Huahine Iti serve some type of food.

## Fare & Around

**Fare ie** (☎ 60 63 77; www.tahitisafari.com; luxury tents US\$150) A unique choice, it offers digs in two African-themed luxury safari tents right on the beach. The fabulous tents feature high ceilings, wooden floors, creative artwork and large beds with fluffy duvets. There is a funky, gnarled-wood self-catering kitchen, and free snorkels, kayaks and bicycles.

**Chez Guynette** (☎ 68 83 75; chezguynette@mail.pf; dm/s/d 2000/4500/5500 CFP) The seven rooms with en-suite hot water baths and fans are good value; dorms are spacious and clean and there's a big communal kitchen – if there are enough guests, it can turn into a bit of an impromptu party venue. Book ahead. The on-site shady terrace restaurant is perfect for people watching.

**Pension Fetia** (☎ 72 09 50; bungalows from 7000 CFP) This totally mellow place is in an isolated location right on the beach. It offers thatched

bungalows nestled amid grooves of coconut palms. The sunsets are awesome! Meals can be arranged.

**Pension Poetaina** (☎ 68 89 49; www.poetaina.com; d from 8000 CFP; ♿ ♻️) An immaculately kept place with generously sized rooms done up in pastel colours. The cheapest rooms share bathrooms and don't have air-con, but are still large and really inviting. A giant self-catering kitchen and lovely upper-level dining terrace are perks. Sadly, it can get a bit noisy.

## Around Huahine Nui

**Pension Te Nahe Toetoe** (☎ 68 71 43; s/d 3000/4500 CFP) Popular with surfers, backpackers or anyone looking for an authentic Polynesian homestay, this place is fabulous value and quite unique. Digs are in the owner's house, and somewhat lacking in privacy, but you're paying for experience more than comfort. There's a communal kitchen, free airport transfers and meals can be arranged. It's near Faie.

**Pension Tupuna** (☎ 68 70 21; bungalows 6500 CFP) Travellers give this guesthouse rave reviews. The three Polynesian-style bungalows are set in a lush tropical garden bursting with exotic trees. The friendly owner is an amateur horticulturist, and happy to dish about the local ecology. Meals (2000 CFP) are served family-style; free airport transfers.

**Te Tiare Beach Outrigger Resort** (☎ 60 60 50; www.tetiarebeachresort.com; bungalows 36,000-80,000 CFP; ♿ ♻️ ♻️) Huahine's one true luxury resort satiates the white-sand beach, coconut-palm, azure-lagoon fantasy. The 41 bungalows (11 of which are perched over the shimmering lagoon) are not just posh; they also blend into the environment beautifully. Te Tiare can only be reached by boat; airport transfers cost 5500 CFP return, shuttles to the mainland 500 CFP one way.

## Huahine Iti

The (marginally) smaller island has several ideally situated places as well as the most beautiful beaches and widest lagoon. Shops are limited, however.

**Pension Mauarii** (☎ 68 86 49; www.mauarii.com; Avea Bay; r/bungalows from 7500/10,000 CFP; ♻️) With a variety of rooms and bungalows constructed from local materials, this guesthouse is full of character and is our favourite place to stay on Huahine Iti. Polished oyster shell

shingles and knobby wood coffee tables add funky touches. The locale, right on the beach, is fabulous and there are loads of water activities offered.

**Ariura Camping Écologie** (☎ 52 26 32; Avea Bay; camp sites/bungalows 1500/4500 CFP) Backpackers give this place great reviews for its location, price and tranquillity. In a junglelike setting right on the beach, and near prime surfing spots, you can either pitch a tent or stay in the simple local-style dwellings. There's a communal kitchen and a small grocery shop just 300m away.

**Relais Mahana** (☎ 68 81 54; Avea Bay; www.relaismahana.com; bungalows from 20,000 CFP; ♻️ ♻️) It's got a great beachside location and a restaurant serving delicious food (see Restaurant Tenahe, right) but we can't help feeling the Polynesian-styled bungalows are just a tad overpriced. Sure they have all the modern amenities, but they lack the sex appeal of similarly priced places. Airport transfers are 1500 CFP one way.

## EATING

Most of Huahine's places to eat are found near Fare. The quayside *roulettes* in Fare are Huahine's best bargain for cheap eats. They operate from early morning until late at night. Fish, chicken, burgers, steaks and chips are the order of the day, and a meal typically costs around 800 CFP to 1200 CFP. Fare has several well-stocked food shops, including Super Fare Nui, opposite the waterfront.

**Restaurant Mauarii** (☎ 68 86 49; Avea Bay; dishes 1500-4500 CFP; ♻️ lunch & dinner) In a traditional reed hut overlooking the sea at Pension Mauarii on Huahine Iti, it serves some of the best food on the island. The Polynesian

menu features local delicacies and the ambience is so chill, you could kick your feet up on the chair and pull out a novel and no-one would blink. Don't miss out on the house speciality drink, *pau ti punch* – it has a serious kick!

**Chez Guynette** (☎ 68 83 75; Fare; dishes 500-1000 CFP; ♻️ breakfast & lunch) Locals are apt to arrive at breakfast and stay through cocktail hour, reading the paper, chatting with the owners or just watching Fare's world go by from the open-air terrace. The menu is simple, offering breakfast dishes, burgers and the best fruit smoothies on the island.

**Restaurant Tenahe** (☎ 68 81 54; dishes 1000-3000 CFP, set menu 3000 CFP; ♻️ lunch & dinner) This eatery, at Relais Mahana, gets favourable word-of-mouth reviews along with our stamp of approval. The dinner menu features well-presented local specialities with a welcome original twist. At lunch choose from giant thin-crust pizzas, salads, curries or fresh fish.

**Snack-Restaurant Poetaina** (☎ 68 80 50; dishes 1000-1500 CFP; ♻️ lunch & dinner) Run by the same friendly folks that own Pension Poetaina down the street, the Chinese food served here is quite good – if you order right. The appetiser *nam* (similar to fried egg rolls) is a must and the chow mein is also yummy. Skip the lemon chicken.

## DRINKING

There are three ways to entertain yourself at night on Huahine: curl up in bed with a bottle of Bordeaux and a trashy novel; cruise the Fare strip with your pals (a blaring radio is mandatory) then park by the quay and spend a while shooting the shit over bottles of Hinano; or head to Huahine's only bar.

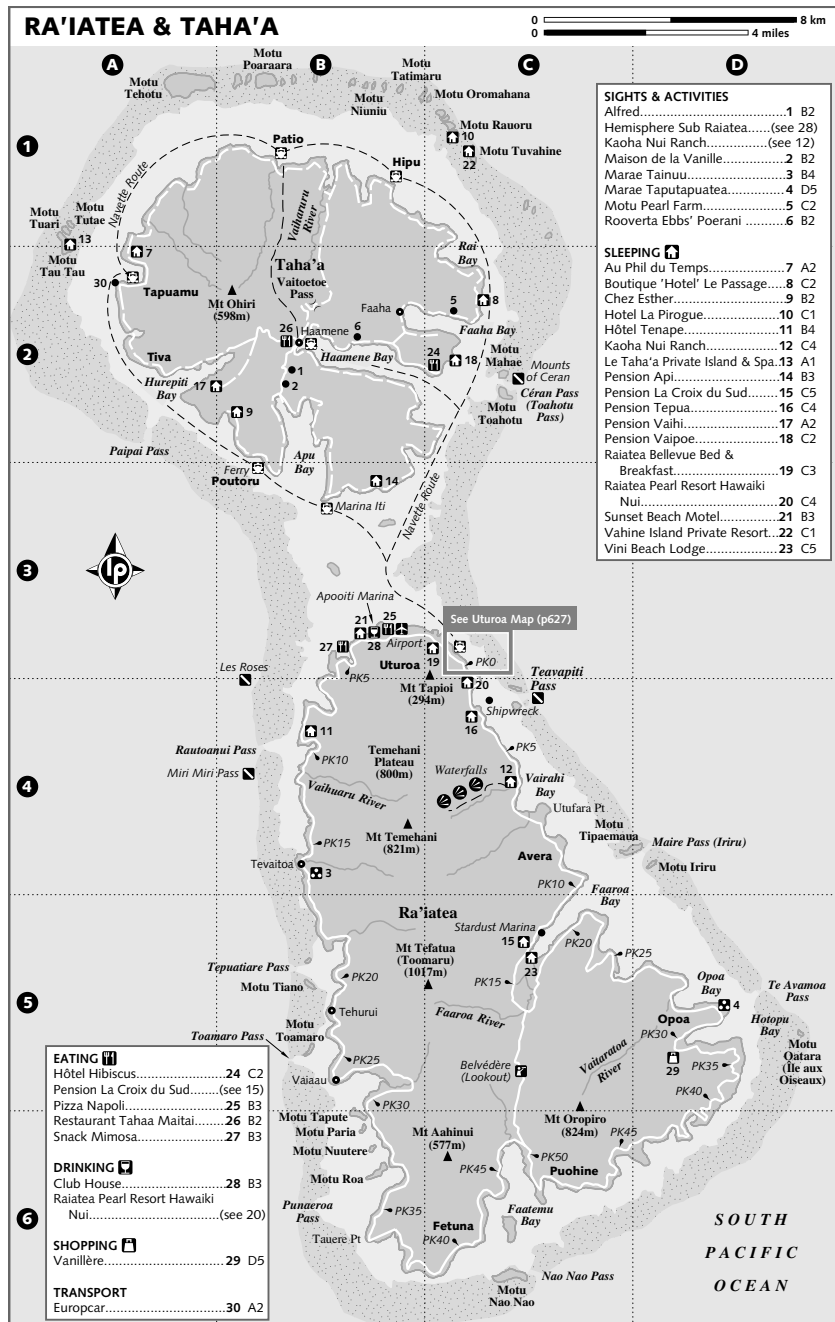
**Te Marara** (☎ 68 70 81) This beach shack bar in Fare stays open until midnight and is *the* place to party on Huahine. Linger over a fruity cocktail as the sun sinks low on the horizon or get rowdy over a few jugs with friends after the dinner crowd heads home.

## RA'ATEA & TAHA'A

The twin islands of Ra'iatea and Taha'a feel a world removed from their Society Island sisters. Decidedly less touristy, these two allow you to experience a sophisticated yet old-fashioned face of Polynesia usually

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Te Marara** (☎ 68 70 81; dishes 1500-2000 CFP; ♻️ lunch & dinner) A lively restaurant right on the lagoon, this favourite local water hole is the best place to eat around Fare. With polished oyster shells nailed to the walls and coloured lights strewn from the thatched ceiling, it has a beach-bar vibe and cooks a mean shrimp curry. The menu is meat and seafood based, the portions are generous and mains come with a choice of starch and vegetable on the side.



ved from visitors. Away from the roaring jet skis, unabashedly extravagant resorts and endless souvenir shops found on other islands, this is a place where locals still live life on their own terms: slowly, traditionally and with a profound respect for both their heritage and history. It's not that the islands don't embrace tourism, they do, it's just not their only means of survival; agriculture and governmental posts are the primary industries here. Home to some of Polynesia's most important ancient places of worship, Ra'iātea and Taha'a emanate a magical, mythical, mysterious vibe.

## Transport

The airport is on Ra'iātea, so most visitors arrive here first. Transport between the islands is easy.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Air Tahiti** (☎ 60 04 44; ✈ 7.30am-noon & 2-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.15am Sat, 2.30-5.15pm Sun) has an office at the airport. The airline offers direct flights from Tahiti (from 12,000 CFP, eight daily) with connections via Mo'orea (from 13,000 CFP) and Huahine (from 5500 CFP). There are also direct flights to Bora Bora (from 6500 CFP, daily) and Maupiti (from 6500 CFP, three times weekly).

Some Taha'a hotels will collect their guests on Ra'iātea (sometimes free, or for 2000 to 4000 CFP).

### Boat

A couple of *navette* (shuttle boat) services (1000 CFP) between Uturoa, on Ra'iātea, and various stops on Taha'a – Iti Marina, Poutoru, Tiva, Tapuamu, Amaru quay and Haamene – are operated by **Enota Transport** (☎ 65 67 10). Services operate Monday to Friday and Saturday morning.

There is also a **taxi-boat service** (☎ 65 65 29) between the two islands, which operates daily between 6am and 6pm. It costs 2000 CFP to go to southern Taha'a and 4000 CFP to go to northern Taha'a (prices are per person, with a minimum of two people). You can be picked up at the airport or any of the accessible pontoons. Advance booking (24 hours) is required.

The **Aremiti 3** (☎ 74 39 40) departs from Pape'ete stopping at Huahine and Ra'iātea

on Monday and Friday. It departs Pape'ete at 7am and arrives at Ra'iātea towards noon; from Ra'iātea it departs at 12.30pm and arrives at Pape'ete at 6pm. From Pape'ete to Ra'iātea costs 5500/3000 CFP per adult/child; from Huahine to Ra'iātea costs 2000/900 CFP per adult/child.

The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 69) travels between Bora Bora, Taha'a and Ra'iātea. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday it leaves Vaitape (Bora Bora) at 7am, arrives at Taha'a at 8.15am and at Uturoa, Ra'iātea, at 8.45am. The same days it leaves Uturoa at 4pm, stops at Taha'a and arrives back at Bora Bora at 5.45pm. The one-way/return fare is 2500/3500 CFP; it costs 500 CFP to go from Ra'iātea to Taha'a.

The cargo ships *Vaeanu*, *Taporo*, *Hawaiki Nui* and *Maupiti Tou Ai'a* also make a stop at Ra'iātea. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.

The **Tamarii Taha'a** (☎ 65 65 29) goes to the west coast of Taha'a twice daily from the Uturoa *navette* quay, at around 10.30am and 4.30pm. The one-hour trip to Patio on Taha'a costs 900 CFP.

## GETTING AROUND Ra'iātea

If you've booked accommodation, most places will meet you at the airport (for a fee). Otherwise, the 3km taxi trip into Uturoa costs about 1000 CFP. There's a **taxi stand** (Map p627; ☎ 66 20 60) by the market but the taxis are very expensive.

Around the island you can rent a car or hitchhike: hitching appears to be fairly acceptable as a result of the low-key tourism and lack of public transport. Don't count on *le trucks*.

**Europcar** (Map p627; ☎ 66 34 06; europcar-loc@mail.pf; Uturoa) and **Hertz** (Map p627; ☎ 66 44 88; Uturoa) hire cars for around \$100 per day.

Europcar has scooters for 6500 CFP for 24 hours; some guesthouses hire bicycles. Europcar rents boats with outboards.

### Taha'a

There is no public transport system on Taha'a. **Europcar** (Map p624; ☎ 65 67 00; fax 65 68 08) charges 8600 CFP for 24 hours including unlimited mileage and insurance. It also rents bikes. You can rent a scooter on Ra'iātea and bring it across on the *navette*.

## RA'IAATEA

pop 3568 / area 170 sq km

Ra'iatea has no beaches (although there are many fine strips of sand on its outlying *motu*), but does have some very popular marinas. Best known as French Polynesia's sailing and yachting centre, it attracts hundreds of luxury water rats each year. Also regarded as French Polynesia's most sacred isle, Ra'iatea played an integral role in ancient Polynesian religious beliefs and is home to Marae Taputapuataea, the most important traditional temple in Polynesia. Spirituality is still a fundamental component of island life today, with many places of worship scattered across the island.

We'll be honest though, if you're short on time, and envisioning dreamy blue lagoons and white-sand beaches, this probably isn't the island for you. The outlying *motu* have some fabulous beaches, but none of these are inhabited (meaning you won't be staying next to that gorgeous water). If you're an archaeology buff, or interested in a cultural rather than beach experience, you'll love this place.

### Orientation

Ra'iatea's road hugs the coast.

The mountainous interior includes the 800m-high Temehani Plateau and 1017m Mt Tefatua (Toomaru).

The airport is at the northern tip of the island. Uturoa extends southeast of the airport. Small villages are scattered across the rest of the island.

### Information

The three French Polynesian banks have branches with ATMs in Uturoa.

**Hospital** (Map p627; ☎ 60 08 01) Opposite the post office in Uturoa, it offers emergency services.

**ITS Multimedia** (Map p627; ☎ 60 25 25; per hr 900 CFP) Internet access in Uturoa; look for it inside an electronics store.

**Post office** (Map p627) North of the centre of Uturoa towards the airport.

**Raiatea visitor information centre** (Map p627; ☎ 60 07 77; info@raiatea@mail.pf; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat, 9.30am-3pm Sun) In the *gare maritime* (boat terminal) in Uturoa.

### Sights

We'd recommend renting a vehicle (or if you are in really good shape, a bicycle) and driving the entire the 98km sealed circuit

around Ra'iatea. Exploring the island this way gives a taste of its wild natural beauty (think mossy mountains and shimmering lagoons). Take a picnic, as there's nowhere to buy lunch.

**Uturoa** (Map p627), Ra'iatea's busy port, is the second-largest town in French Polynesia, and is one of those places where its utter lack of charm is actually charming. Take some time to wander around: the place provides a sample of the local flavour, plus there's some funky little shops and great deals on black pearls. The Protestant church on the north side of the town centre has a memorial stone to pioneer missionary John Williams. Mt Tapioi (294m) overlooks Uturoa.

Soon after passing the Stardust Marina (Map p624) a turn-off heads to the south coast. Turn right here to climb to a **belvédère** (Map p624) with great views of Faaroa Bay.

Or turn left to reach **Marae Taputapuataea** (Map p624), which had immense importance to the ancient Polynesians. Any *marae* built on another island had to incorporate one of Taputapuataea's stones as a symbol of allegiance – even one in the Cook Islands or Hawai'i! At the very end of the cape is the smaller **Marae Tauraa**, a *tapu* enclosure with the tall 'stone of investiture' where young *ari'i* (chiefs) were enthroned.

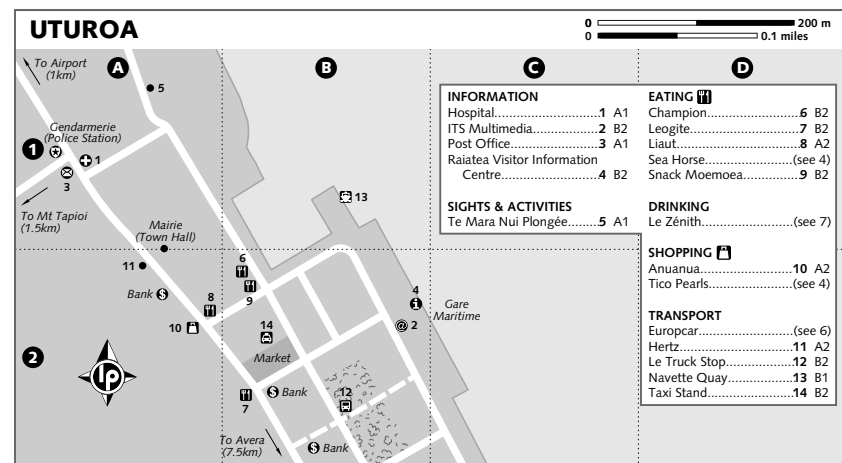
At Tevaitoa village, on the northwestern side of the island, massive stone slabs stand in the 50m-long wall of **Marae Tainuu** (Map p624), behind the church (the church was built on the *marae*). Turn-offs lead to the Temehani Plateau on the stretch to the Apooiti Marina (Map p624) then the road passes the airport and returns to Uturoa.

### Activities

#### DIVING & SNORKELLING

Ra'iatea has two diving centres: **Hemisphere Sub Raiatea** (Map p624; ☎ 66 12 49; www.diveraiatea.com), at the Apooiti Marina, and **Te Mara Nui Plongee** (Map p627; ☎ 66 11 88; www.temaranui.pf), at the marina at Uturoa. Both companies charge around 5500 CFP for a one-tank excursion, 6000 CFP for an introductory dive, and provide transport from your hotel. There are about 10 dive sites along the east and west coasts and around Taha'a. A highlight is the superb Teavapiti Pass.

Ra'iatea has no beaches – a hotel or guest-house pontoon is the most you can expect – but some of the reef *motu* are splendid, and



perfect for swimming or snorkelling. Ask at your accommodation about renting a boat or joining a lagoon tour.

### HORSE RIDING

The respected **Kaoha Nui Ranch** (Map p624; ☎ 66 25 46; trips from 4500 CFP), 6km south of Uturoa, offers a variety of riding trips lasting from two hours to half a day.

### WALKING

Good walking opportunities include the walk up to the **Temehani Plateau** (Map p624; you need a guide); the short climb up **Mt Tapioi** (Map p624); the **Three Waterfalls walk** behind Kaoha Nui Ranch; and Hotopu, Opoa and Faeratai Valleys in the southwest.

### YACHTING

Ra'iatea is the yacht-charter centre of French Polynesia. Bareboat charter rates vary seasonally (July to August is the high season). Cruises on a crewed yacht usually include tour programmes at the stops en route. It takes eight to 10 days to explore the Leeward Islands from Ra'iatea. For info on charter companies, see p669.

### Tours

Most tours actually spend the majority of their time on Taha'a, but all companies listed here pick up from the pier in Uturoa. Tours generally involve travel by *pirogue* (local outrigger canoes) and 4WD minibus, dividing their time between Taha'a's rugged

interior and splendid lagoon. Unless stated otherwise, all visit a pearl and vanilla plantation, stop for snorkelling and include lunch on a *motu*.

**Almost Paradise Tours** (☎ 66 23 64; tours 6000 CFP)

Recommended archaeology tours in English; focus on Polynesian culture and history. Three hours.

**Dave's Tours** (☎ 65 62 42; tours 8000 CFP)

**L'excursion Bleue** (☎ 66 10 90; www.tahaa.net; tours 9500 CFP)

**Tahaa Tour Excursions** (☎ 65 62 18; tours 6500 CFP)

### Sleeping

Places to stay on Ra'iatea are generally in or close to Uturoa.

### UTUROA

**Raiatea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui** (Map p624; ☎ 60 05 00; www.pearlresorts.com; r from 20,000 CFP, bungalows 26,000-50,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) The over-water bungalows, extending over a clifflike reef face, more than compensate for the lack of stunning views at Ra'iatea's swankiest resort. Snorkelling from your balcony is a real rush – you get the sensation of soaring thanks to a superquick drop off. Kayaks, bikes and snorkels are available; the bar and restaurant is very popular. *Motu* transfers cost 1000 CFP return.

**Pension Tupua** (Map p624; ☎ 66 33 00; www.raia.tea.com/tupua; dm/s/d/bungalows 2500/5000/7500/10,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This friendly guesthouse offers quality accommodation at reasonable prices. The owner speaks five languages, including perfect English, and is very friendly.

Rooms and bungalows are simple, but very clean; dorms are spacious. The on-site bar and restaurant, communal kitchen, and afroscopio TV lounge add lively ambience.

**Raiatea Bellevue Bed & Breakfast** (Map p624; ☎ 66 15 15; s/d incl breakfast 4000/8000 CFP; 🚗) Extraordinary views and a lush jungle-like setting are top qualities at this quiet and relaxing place perched high above the northern side of Uturoa. The five rooms are small but tidy. Airport transfers cost 1400 CFP per person return. To get here, take the first sealed road on the left after PK1 and follow it for 800m.

## EAST COAST

There are quite a few places to choose from along the east coast.

**Vini Beach Lodge** (Map p624; ☎ 60 22 45; www.raiatea.com/vinibeach; bungalows 11,000-14,000 CFP; 🚗) Vini Beach is a very classy-looking place. Brand new, it offers a collection of soothing two-storey whitewashed bungalows and an alfresco restaurant and bar. The bungalows are spacious and elegant, featuring porches overlooking the marina, kitchenettes and lovely cast-iron beds. Try for a sea-facing bungalow; not only are the views better, they're also cooler. Return airport transfers are 800 CFP per person.

**Pension La Croix du Sud** (Southern Cross; Map p624; ☎ 66 27 55; s/d incl breakfast 7500/8500 CFP, half board per person 9500/14,000 CFP) High on top a steep hill, this *pension* offers three rooms with seriously fabulous views. The place is a bit isolated but there are free bicycles for getting around. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP per carload.

**Kaoha Nui Ranch** (Map p624; ☎ 66 25 46; kaoha.nui@mail.pf; r/bungalow 3500/6500 CFP) An excellent-value laid-back establishment where horses graze on the front lawn and travellers lounge in the open-air sitting area. Rooms are simple and share bathrooms, but are also impeccably clean. There's a fully equipped kitchen and meals can be arranged. Airport and dock transfers are free.

## WEST COAST

**Sunset Beach Motel** (Map p624; ☎ 66 33 47; www.raiatea.com/sunsetbeach; camping per person 1200 CFP, s/d/tr bungalows 9000/10,000/11,000 CFP) Set amid coconut palms and right on the water, Sunset Beach has some of the best bungalows on the island: they're giant with separate kitchen,

sleeping and lounge areas. Huge windows and creaky porches are extra perks. *Pirogues*, bikes and airport transfers are free. There's a snack place just down the road.

**Hôtel Tenape** (Map p624; ☎ 60 01 00; www.hoteltenape.com; r from 21,000 CFP; 🚗 🚗 🚗) The island's second-poshest place, this two-storey colonial-style establishment offers comfortable and modern rooms with large terraces and good views. The restaurant has a solid reputation and the bar can get lively. Add 5500 CFP for half board.

## Eating

Uturoa has several well-stocked supermarkets including Champion (Map p627) on the seafront and Leogite (Map p627) and Liaut (Map p627) on the main street.

**Pizza Napoli** (Map p624; ☎ 66 10 77; dishes 1100-1600 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) We loved the hearty food and *tiki*-bar atmosphere at this congenial pizzeria in a reed hut with loads of flowers. It's just outside Uturoa. The pasta dishes are quite good.

**Pension La Croix du Sud** (Map p624; ☎ 66 27 55; set menu 3000 CFP; 🍷 dinner) You'll need to book in advance to eat here, but it's worth the hassle. The views from the terrace tables are unbeatable, the fusion cuisine tasty and inventive. The menu always changes, so ask what's available when you ring.

**Snack Moemoea** (Map p627; ☎ 66 39 84; dishes 500-1500 CFP; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) On the waterfront in Uturoa, this funky little place offers a big menu with a huge choice of *poisson cru* (a popular raw fish dish) options. It's particularly good for budget travellers.

**Sea Horse** (Map p627; ☎ 66 16 34; dishes 900-1800 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner, closed Sun dinner) In Uturoa's *gare maritime*, Sea Horse is a popular Chinese restaurant with a reputation for good service and consistent food. The menu features lots of seafood and coconut milk-infused options.

**Snack Mimosa** (Map p624; ☎ 66 26 74; dishes from 9000 CFP; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Within easy walking distance of the Sunset Beach Motel, this typical snack place offers the usual assortment of simple Tahitian- and French-influenced dishes: *poisson cru*, burgers, steaks and omelettes are all on the menu.

## Drinking

It's difficult to find a reason for a late night on Ra'iatea.

**Le Zénith** (Map p627; admission female/male free/1000 CFP) On weekends Restaurant Moana, above Leogite in Uturoa, metamorphoses into this disco. It's popular mainly with young locals.

**Club House** (Map p624; ☎ 66 11 66; dishes 1500-3000 CFP) A sunset drink at this place in the Apooiti Marina is mandatory. The restaurant may not serve the best food, but the mellow ambience – think at alfresco wooden benches set on grassy lawns and scarred tables under a traditional thatched roof – is as fantastic as the sunset views.

## Entertainment

**Raiatea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui** (Map p624; ☎ 60 05 00) The bar at this resort also offers great lagoon views, and stages weekly Polynesian dance performances – call about prices.

## Shopping

Women sell crafts including shellwork, woodwork and *pareu* next to the *gare maritime*.

**Anuanua gallery** (Map p627; Uturoa) This gallery in Uturoa features works by island craftspeople, including sculptures, pottery, paintings and mother-of-pearl objects. It has also sells rather unique pieces of jewellery, including black pearl, shell and coconut rope bracelets and necklaces.

**Tico Pearls** (Map p627; ☎ 60 06 88) In the *gare maritime*. The owner of this shop speaks excellent English and offers black pearls for all budgets. Bracelets made from imperfect pearls are particularly good value. Ask about discounts.

**Vanillère** (Map p624; ☎ 66 15 61) One of the best places to buy all sorts vanilla products; it's located at Hotopu Bay.

## TAHA'A

pop 4845 / area 90 sq km

Quieter and even lusier than Ra'iatea, Taha'a is little known by tourist operators and accessible only by boat. It has a raw, untouched feel, and the island's verdant velvet hills are home to exotic fruit trees, forests of bamboo and palm, steep dirt hiking paths and sweetly scented vanilla plantations. A dip into the tepid lagoon reveals all the usual tropical wonders: fiery corral and colourful fish. There are no beaches to speak of on Taha'a. There are plenty of fine stretches of sand on the outlying *motu*, and

unlike those off Ra'iatea you can actually sleep there.

A coast road encircles most of the island but traffic is very light and there is no public transport. Vanilla cultivation and pearl farming dominate the island's economy. The main tourist attraction is the string of beautiful *motu* along the northern reef edge. Taha'a's easily navigable lagoon and safe yacht anchorages make it a favourite for visiting yachties.

The population is concentrated in eight main villages on the coast. The main quay is at Tapuamu; Patio is the main town. The roads around the south and north part of the island meet at Haamene.

Taha'a's only bank is the Banque Socredo in Patio, where there's also a post office.

## Around the Island

The 70km circuit of the island is quite possible as a bicycle day trip, although most of the route is unsealed crushed coral and there are some steep sections. Starting from the Marina Iti, the first *navette* stop from Ra'iatea and the best place to hire bicycles; the road hugs the coast around Apu Bay. At the top of the bay the route leaves the coast and climbs up and over to **Haamene** (Map p624) village. The **Maison de la Vanille** (Map p624; ☎ 65 67 27) and **Alfred** (Map p624; ☎ 65 61 16) are vanilla producers worth a visit. Pause for pictures just after **Tapuamu** (Map p624), when a chain of *motu* fringing the northern coast of the island comes into view – it's quite stunning. You'll pass through copra plantations on the way to Faaha Bay on the island's eastern side; stop on the north side of the bay and pay a visit **Motu Pearl Farm** (Map p624; ☎ 65 66 67). You can take a tour and purchase loose pearls (often cheaper than from a shop). There are more pearl farms along the coast road closer to Haamene, including **Rooverta Ebbs' Poerani** (Map p624; ☎ 65 60 25; admission 100 CFP), where you can watch pearl grafting. The road then winds around seemingly endless small bays before returning to the Marina Iti.

## Activities

### DIVING & SNORKELLING

Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa (p630) has the only dive centre on Taha'a. The dive centres on Ra'iatea, however, regularly use the dive sites to the east of the island by

Céran Pass and will collect you from hotels in the south of Taha'a.

There are no beaches on Taha'a, and you have to go to the *motu* for swimming and snorkelling. Ask at your guesthouse about options for getting to the *motu*.

## HIKING

Taha'a's interior is so dense, it caters more to bushwalkers than hikers. The only hiking trail into the interior follows a little-used 7km track across the centre of the island from Patio to Haamene, and offers some dazzling views of Haamene Bay.

## Tours

**Vanilla Tours** (☎ 65 62 46) and **Tahaa Tour Excursion** (☎ 65 62 18) have good reputations for their island tours (6500 CFP per person). Ask at your accommodation about lagoon tours (6500 to 8000 CFP per person).

## Sleeping

It's wise to make reservations so that you're collected from the appropriate village quay or even the airport on Ra'iatea.

## THE ISLAND

Most of the following places either provide or rent bicycles to guests.

**Pension Vaipoe** (Chez Patricia et Daniel; Map p624; ☎ 65 60 83; v.p@mail.pf; bungalows 8500 CFP) This popular place on the eastern side of Taha'a has a buzzing atmosphere. We liked its easy access to the lagoon and the availability of activities. Digs are no frills, but they have kitchenettes. Add 3500 CFP per person for half board (recommended). Airport transfers cost 3000 CFP per person return.

**Chez Esther** (Map p624; ☎ 65 62 60; bungalows from 8500 CFP; 🍷) The three bungalows are quite endearing. Chez Esther is a simple and quiet place where relaxation seems to be the top priority. Look for it just beyond Poutoru, on the inland side of the road. Add 3500 CFP per person for half board. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP per person one way. You can hire a boat for 7000 CFP per half-day.

**Au Phil du Temps** (Map p624; ☎ 65 64 19; www.pension-au-phil-du-temps.iframe.com; bungalows per person incl breakfast/half board/full board 5500/9500/12,500 CFP) Kitted out with TVs, mosquito nets and private outside bathrooms, the well-kept, local-style bungalows are just metres from

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Boutique 'Hotel' Le Passage** (Map p624; ☎ 65 66 75; residencelepassage@mail.pf; bungalows with half/full board per person 12,000/15,000 CFP; 🍷) Cosy and family-run, this relative newcomer is excellent value. The three peaceful seafaring bungalows are surrounded by lush gardens; the pontoon dock is the perfect place to catch a spectacular sunset. The friendly hosts offer guests free 4WD island tours. Transfers from Ra'iatea cost 6000 CFP per boatload.

the lagoon on the island's western side. Transfers to the airport cost 2000 CFP. No credit cards.

**Pension Vaihi** (Map p624; ☎ 65 62 02; bungalows 7000 CFP) Head to this family guesthouse on the southern side of Hurepiti Bay for real isolation and tranquillity. The three bungalows are spotless and you can chill out by the lagoon. Half/full board adds 3000/4500 CFP per person. To get there, ask the *navette* to drop you at the quay at Tiva, where the owners will pick you up.

**Pension Api** (Map p624; ☎ 65 69 88; www.pension.api.com; r 8000 CFP) Near the sea, it offers two comfortable bungalow-style rooms. Each has a private bathroom, mosquito net and a terrace. To get here, take a *navette* or taxi-boat to the quay and call the owners, who will come and pick you up. Kayaks and bikes are available for guests.

## THE MOTU

**Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa** (Map p624; ☎ 50 84 54; www.letahaa.com; bungalows from 80,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Privacy is paramount at this ultraluxurious, creatively designed resort. The over-water bungalows are as posh as they are roomy; the beachside villas are multiroom affairs with personal plunge pools. Le Tahaa is definitely a destination resort and access to the mainland is limited; luckily the restaurants here are sumptuous. It's a good choice for honeymoons and romantic getaways.

**Hotel La Pirogue** (Map p624; ☎ 60 81 45; bungalows 22,000 CFP) Intimate, friendly and rustic, this new place appeals to couples and families looking for a bit of luxury at a less exorbitant price. The restaurant has a varied menu and good reputation (we'd suggest

opting for half board, an extra 6500 CFP per person).

**Vahine Island Private Island Resort** (Map p624; ☎ 65 67 38; www.vahine-island.com; beach bungalows 36,000-55,000 CFP; 🍷) In a picturesque location, this intimate resort has just nine Polynesian-style bungalows, three of which are perched over the lagoon. The digs are not ultraposh but are lovingly decorated, featuring comfy hammocks on wooden terraces. Add 7000 CFP per person per day for half board (recommended as you are literally in the middle of nowhere). Airport transfers cost 6000 CFP per person return.

## Eating & Drinking

Dining options are very limited.

**Restaurant Tahaa Maitai** (Map p624; ☎ 65 70 85; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Right on Haamene Bay, this restaurant is recommended by travellers not only for its fabulous views but also its delicious cuisine: the menu features lots of fresh seafood. There's also a long cocktail list, making it a popular local watering hole.

**Hôtel Hibiscus** (☎ 65 61 06; dishes 1200-3000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Crab and *mahimahi* (dolphin fish) dishes are good choices from the seafood-heavy menu at this hotel/restaurant with a solid reputation. Its bar can be crowded and fun, especially during the Saturday night dance performances. It's on the eastern side of the island.

## BORA BORA

pop 5757 / area 47 sq km

James Cook once declared Bora Bora the 'pearl of the Pacific.' His critique made a lasting impression: more than two centuries later this island still symbolises paradise at its most lusty, frivolous and ideal. Legendary for its lush beauty and hedonistic decadence, Bora Bora is a fairy-tale creation of jagged volcanic peaks and crystal-clear aqua lagoons. One of the world's most famous dream destinations, the island lures Louis Vuitton-toting honeymooners, heiresses and movie stars by the plane loads. Of course all this glitter doesn't come free, and some argue Bora Bora is as overhyped and overdeveloped as its stratospheric prices. There's no doubt Bora Bora is overpriced (true luxury here

costs as much as the flawless black pearls). There's also something so souped up and sexy about the place you can't help wanting to throw caution to the wind and live like money is no object.

## ORIENTATION

A road circles the island, which is about 9km north to south and 4km across. Vaitape, on the western side, is the main settlement, looking directly out to Teavanui Pass, the only entry to the lagoon.

## INFORMATION

If you need medical assistance, inquire at your hotel. There are branches of Banque de Tahiti and Banque Socredo in Vaitape, where you can exchange money or use the ATM.

**Bora Bora visitor information centre** (☎ 67 76 36; 🕒 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Office on the quay at Vaitape; it has loads of pamphlets and other info.

**L'Appetisserie** (☎ 67 78 88; Centre Le Pahia; per hr 2500 CFP) Internet access in Vaitape.

**Medical centre** (☎ 67 70 77; Vaitape)

**Pharmacy** (☎ 67 70 30; 🕒 8am-noon & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 5-6pm Sat, 9-9.30am Sun) In Vaitape just near Le Cocotier restaurant.

**Post office** (☎ 67 70 74) In the middle of Vaitape.

## TRANSPORT

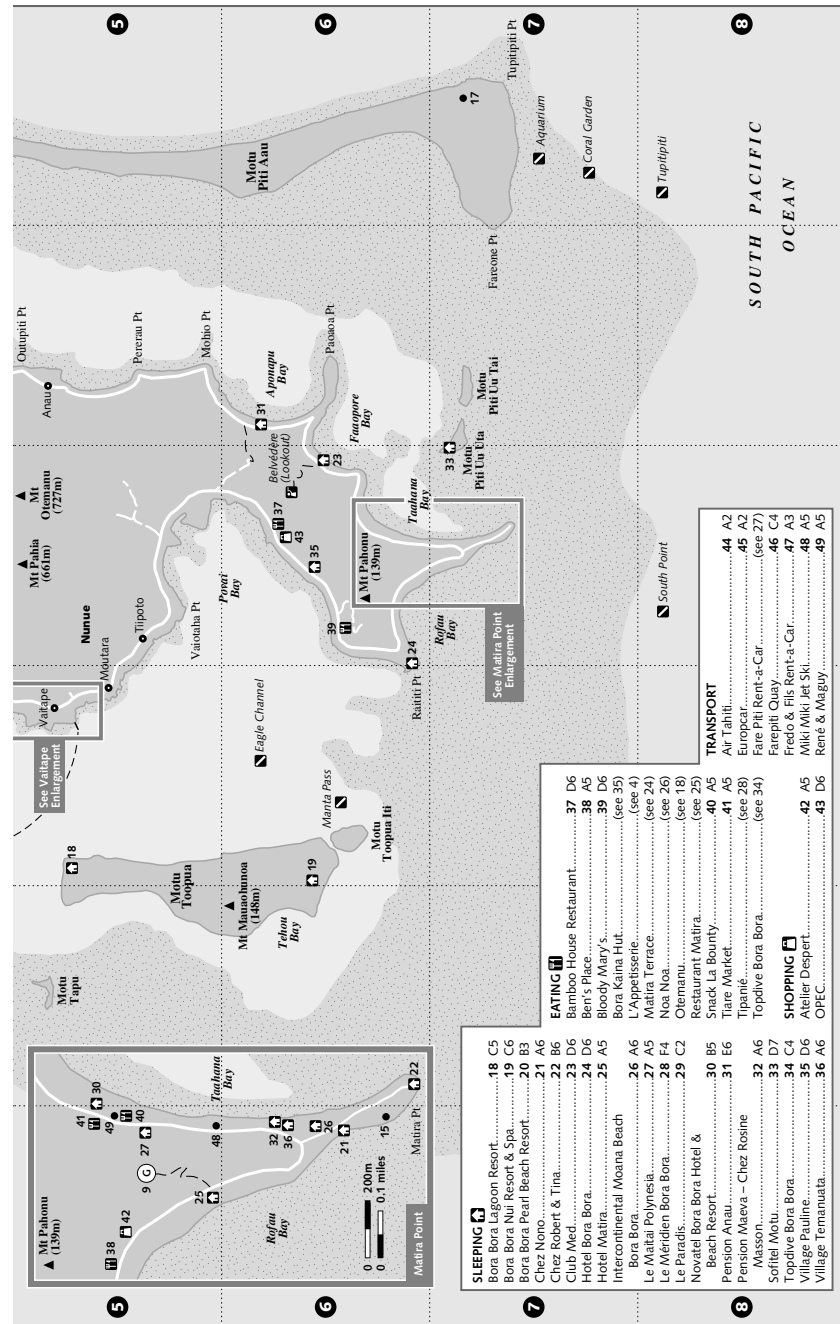
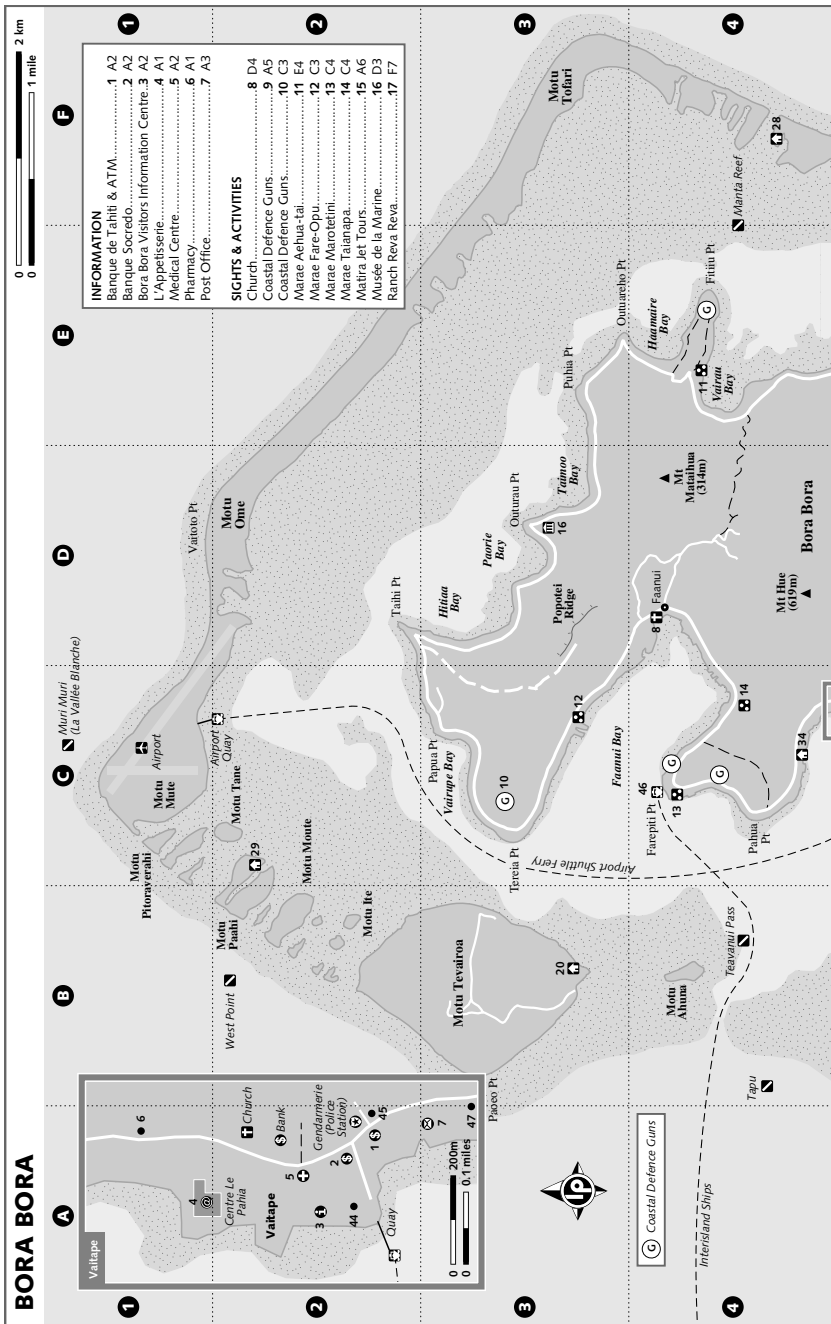
Numerous flights head to Bora Bora on a daily basis.

## Getting There & Away

**Air Tahiti** (☎ 67 70 35; Vaitape; 🕒 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) flies between Bora Bora and Tahiti (from 14,000 CFP, six daily), Huahine (from 7500 CFP, daily), Mo'orea (from 18,000 CFP, daily) and Ra'iatea (from 6500 CFP, daily). Air Tahiti also has direct flights from Bora Bora to the Tuamotus, with a very handy flight to Rangiroa (from 23,000 CFP, daily) and an onward connection to Manihi (from 26,000 CFP, twice weekly). Flights operate to Rangiroa daily, but only twice a week in the reverse direction.

Flying into Bora Bora, the left side of the aircraft offers the best views of the spectacular scenery.

Inter-island boats dock at the Farepiti quay, 3km north of Vaitape. The cargo ship **Vaeau** (☎ 41 25 35) makes three trips a week between Pape'ete and Bora Bora. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.





The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 69) runs between Bora Bora and Maupiti (2500 CFP, three times weekly) and Ra'iatea/Taha'a (2500 CFP, four times weekly). The boat departs the Vaitape quay for Maupiti at 8.30am Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; the return trip leaves Maupiti at 4pm the same day. The boat departs for Ra'iatea and Taha'a at 7am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and at 4pm on Sunday.

## Getting Around

Arriving on Bora Bora is quite dramatic. The airport is on Motu Mute at the northern edge of the lagoon; two large catamaran ferries then transfer you to the Vaitape quay (free). A regular bus service from the quay goes to the hotels at Matira Point (500 CFP).

You need to be at the quay at least 1½ hours before your flight leaves. The top hotels transfer their guests directly to/from the airport, other places collect you at the quay.

There is no real public transport on Bora Bora. Car-hire agencies include: **Europcar** (☎ 67 70 15), with an agency opposite the quay in central Vaitape plus desks in several hotels; **Fredo & Fils Rent-a-Car** (☎ 67 70 31), in Vaitape and at several hotels; and **Fare Piti Rent-a-Car** (☎ 67 65 28), in Le Maitai Polynesia. Rates are around 8500 CFP for eight hours and 10,000 CFP for 24 hours.

Bora Bora's back roads cry out for a mountain bike but you're unlikely to be able to hire one. You will find basic bikes for rent at Europcar, Fredo and Fare Piti, and at many hotels. Fare Piti rents scooters.

Hiring a boat is a heavenly way to explore the lagoon. **René & Maguy** (☎ 67 60 61), next to Snack La Bounty at Matira Point, hires outboard-powered boats. **Miki Miki Jet Ski** (☎ 67 76 44), shortly after Les Maitai Polynesia from Vaitape, hires jet skis for 15,000 CFP for two hours.

## SIGHTS

Bora Bora's 32km coast road hugs the shoreline almost all the way around the island and is dotted with *marae* and WWII remnants. We describe an anticlockwise tour that starts in Vaitape; as it's flat except for the decent hill around Fitiuu Point it makes a good bicycle ride.

At PK6, Hotel Bora Bora at Raititi Point marks the start of the pleasant sandy stretch of **Matira Beach**. From the eastern edge of

the Hotel Matira property a walking trail (10 minutes) runs up the hill to a battery of WWII **coastal defence guns**.

The Intercontinental Moana Beach Bora Bora Resort is on a side road that runs out to **Matira Point** and a great public beach. The annual Hawaiki Nui inter-island canoe race ends on this beach. Club Med (PK9) has its own **belvédère** atop the ridge above the bay.

At Fitiuu Point (PK15) the road climbs briefly away from the coast. Just as the road starts to climb, a track peels off to **Marae Aehua-tai** at the water's edge.

The small, private **Musée de la Marine** (Marine Museum; ☎ 67 75 24; admission by donation; ☎ call for hrs) has an interesting collection of model ships. Just after **Taihi Point** a steep and often-muddy track climbs to a WWII radar station atop Popotei Ridge and on to a lookout above the village of Faanui.

At the end of Tereia Point a rectangular concrete water tank marks the position of another **coastal gun**. There's no path; just clamber straight up the hill for a couple of minutes. **Marae Fare-Opu** is squeezed between the road and water's edge. Two of the slabs are clearly marked with turtle petroglyphs.

**Faanui Bay** was the site of the main US military base during WWII and there is still much evidence of the wartime operations there. From the picturesque **church** at the head of the bay an often-muddy road runs directly inland and over the ridge to drop into Vairau Bay just south of Fitiuu Point. **Marae Taianapa** (PK28) is a fairly large *marae* on the inland side of the road located past Faanui village.

**Marae Marotetini**, a fine 50m-long royal *marae*, is just beyond the quay.

## ACTIVITIES

Quite a few of the hotels and guesthouses offer lagoon tours that include snorkelling, reef walking, a *motu* barbecue and both swimming and snorkelling stops; they cost approximately 5000/7500 CFP for a half/full day.

## Diving & Snorkelling

Sharks, rays and other marine life abound in Bora Bora, making diving a very popular activity. **Anau**, with its visits by black-tip reef sharks and manta rays, is one of the most popular lagoon sites. **Motu Toopua** and

**Motu Toopua Iti** are magnificent lagoon dives. Outside the reef, to the north, **Muri Muri** (La Vallée Blanche) is known for sharks. Single-tank dives cost around 6500 CFP, and most places also offer introductory dives for around 7000 CFP. **Topdive Bora Bora** (☎ 60 50 50; www.topdive.com) and **Bora Bora Blue Nui** (☎ 67 79 07; www.bluenui.com), based at the Bora Bora Pearl Resort, are just two of many good dive shops.

Matira Point is the best stretch of **beach** on the main island; many *motu* have superb sand but ask permission before exploring them. The marine reserve off Hotel Bora Bora (p636) has excellent snorkelling.

## Horse Riding

**Ranch Reva Reva** (☎ 67 63 63; trips from 4000 CFP; ☎ 8am-4pm) offers horse-riding excursions for all levels on Motu Piti Aau. The typical beach ride lasts about an hour, but the company's best adventure is its 2½-hour moonlight ride (8500 CFP) that departs nightly at 8pm. Transfers included.

## Jet-Skiing

For a crazy adrenalin rush, you can't beat the two-hour jet-ski tours run by **Matira Jet Tours** (☎ 67 62 73; www.boraborawaverunnner.com; ☎ tours depart 10am & 2pm). Trips cost US\$150 for two people. The company also offers two-hour combination jet-ski and ATV tours for US\$180 for two people.

## Walking

Bora Bora offers plenty of good walking; a guide is recommended. Allow at least five hours (return) for the tough but rewarding ascent of **Mt Pahia** (661m).

## SLEEPING

You could easily whittle away your life savings on deluxe hotels on Bora Bora, which are as sumptuous as the hype leads you to believe. However, you can also benefit from staying at cheaper *pensions* and even camping. Most accommodation is on the southern coast.

## West Coast

There are a few fine places to stay dotted along the west coast.

**Village Pauline** (☎ 67 72 16; vpauline@38mail.pf; camping per person 2500 CFP, dm 3500 CFP, bungalows 7500-13,000 CFP) Backpackers will appreciate

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Topdive Bora Bora** (☎ 60 50 50; www.topdive.com; garden/over-water bungalows 40,000/50,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ) Travellers rave about the friendly, personalised service at this small resort catering to divers. Set amid lush communal areas, the standout bungalows feature cathedral ceilings, palm-thatched roofs and marble floors. There's no beach, but the lagoon-facing swimming pool is fabulous enough to compensate for any lack of sand. Book well in advance.

this beautifully maintained place in a Polynesian-style village amid a tropical garden. Dorms are a simple but solid option, and the most expensive bungalow rivals those at the top hotels for a fraction of the price. Transfers from Vaitape quay cost 300 CFP.

## Matira Point

With the best beach on Bora Bora, Matira Point is packed with accommodation.

## BUDGET

They may lack the luxury of the top hotels, but there are a number of little *pensions* around Matira Point that lay claim to the best sweep of beach on the main island.

**Chez Nono** (☎ 67 71 38; nono.leverd@mail.pf; r 7500 CFP, bungalows 10,000-13,000 CFP) If you can secure the big bungalow, then this place is fantastic value: the spacious and breezy affair features giant windows, high-quality linens and comfortable beds. The smaller bungalows are less plush, though still adequate. The rooms are tiny, hot and over-priced, but Chez Nono's fabulous location, on Bora Bora's best beach, makes it hard to resist.

**Pension Maeva – Chez Rosine Masson** (☎ 67 72 04; dm/r 3500/7500 CFP) Right on the water's edge, this *pension* has loads of charm and character. The house creaks and the walls are paper thin, but the lagoonside setting is a delight. There's a shared lounge room, kitchen and two bathrooms (one with hot water). Transfers from Vaitape cost 500 CFP.

**Chez Robert & Tina** (☎ 67 63 55; r 8000 CFP) Get a room with a lovely balcony overlooking the sea at this often fully booked place in a tranquil location. Rooms are in simple,

whitewashed, fan-cooled homes right on the point. A lowlight is the lack of beach access. Transfers from Vaitape cost 500 CFP.

### MIDRANGE

As you saunter into the midrange category, you can safely expect private bathrooms with hot water.

**Novatel Bora Bora Hotel & Beach Resort** (☎ 60 59 50; www.accorhotels.com; r from 13,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) This place receives favourable value-for-money reviews. The site is slightly cramped, but the pool will blow you away – a dazzling and hip mirage that melts into the sea. Digs are in 80 modern rooms, four of which have disabled access.

**Village Temanuata** (☎ 67 75 61; www.temanuata.com; bungalows from 14,000 CFP) Features a variety of local-style bungalows with lots of Tahitian wall art. Skip the ‘superior bungalows’, they’re not worth the extra price. Look for Temanuata just after the Matira Point turn-off and the Intercontinental. Book ahead, it’s popular.

**Hotel Matira** (☎ 67 78 58; bungalows 22,000-40,000 CFP) Offers simple, spacious and tastefully decorated thatched-roof bungalows on the beach. The service is friendly and helpful and the place has a fabulous restaurant. Half board adds 5000 CFP per person, while full board costs an additional 8000 CFP. Return transfers from Vaitape cost 1500 CFP per person.

### TOP END

**Intercontinental Moana Beach Bora Bora** (☎ 60 49 00; www.borabora.interconti.com; bungalows from 70,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) A jet-set favourite and one of Bora Bora’s most lush delights, the over-water bungalows here exude romance: vanilla plants in the bathroom perfume the air, a glass window in the floor reveals a myriad of tropical fish swimming in the crystal-clear lagoon below. The outdoor areas, tropical jungles great for wandering, are as dreamy as they are perfect. Ideal for the honeymoon.

**Hotel Bora Bora** (☎ 60 44 60; www.amanresorts.com; bungalows from 75,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) Consistently regarded as one of the best hotels in the world, the Hotel Bora Bora has long been the domain of the rich and famous – Pierce Brosnan is a regular. Exuding the most gracious and exotic kind of South Pacific charm, this masterpiece rules Bora’s

best real estate, but manages to be incredibly luxurious without feeling ostentatious.

**Le Maitai Polynésie** (☎ 60 30 00; www.hotelmaitai.com; r/bungalows from 30,000/45,500 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) It’s not as isolated or glamorous as its competitors, but this sprawling resort offers slightly lower prices without compromising too much in the luxury department. Rooms are comfortable and modern; the over-water bungalows feature token glass windows cut into the floor.

### East Coast

The east coast is less built-up than the rest of the island, with only a few places to choose from here.

**Club Med** (☎ 60 46 04; www.clubmed.com; 2-person all inclusive packages from US\$375; 🏠 🚿) Sure it feels a little cheesy, but this is one of the best deals on Bora Bora (book over the Internet). Club Med doesn’t have the all out luxurious finesse of Bora’s ritziest resorts, but it’s hardly shabby. On a fine stretch of private beach, the bungalows are spacious with fabulous bathrooms. Rates include meals and all the booze you can drink (and not just the cheap stuff) as well as evening shows, *motu* excursions and snorkelling trips. Skip the paid excursions, it’s cheaper to organise them on your own.

**Pension Anau** (☎ 67 78 17; fax 67 73 24; s/d bungalows 7000/9500 CFP) One of the best budget places on the island, the bungalows here are well equipped with big bathrooms and kitchen facilities. Free transfers from the Vaitape quay are offered, and bikes are available. There’s no beach, but there’s a nice decked area.

### The Motu

Staying on a *motu* ensures unrivalled tranquillity, a complete escape and great views of Bora Bora.

**Le Paradis** (☎ 67 75 53; bungalows from 13,000 CFP) On Motu Paahi is this perfectly affordable *motu pension* (well, affordable for a *motu* on Bora Bora) with a relaxed atmosphere. There are five simple bungalows in a lagoonside coconut plantation. Airport transfers are free; transport to Vaitape costs 1000 CFP per person. Credit cards are not accepted.

**Bora Bora Lagoon Resort** (☎ 60 40 00; www.borabolagoonresort.com; bungalows from 60,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) Another award winner, Bora Bora Lagoon gets consistently high marks from

### THE AUTHOR’S CHOICE

**Bora Bora Nui Resort & Spa** (☎ 60 33 00; www.boraboranui.com; bungalows 75,000-300,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) Destined to become a hot new favourite, this recently opened resort on Motu Toopua oozes swanky charm. Bungalows are unusually spacious, with slick features such as Italian marble bathrooms and Indonesian canopy beds. Over-water bungalows feature the token glass-floor viewing panel. The spa is perched on a lava hill overlooking the resort; it offers the usual pampering with extraordinary 360-degree panoramic views.

returning travellers. It has an idyllic and secluded feel (although with more than 75 bungalows it isn’t exactly small). A shuttle runs between the resort and the main island (from just in front of the tourist office) every half-hour from 8am to midnight.

**Bora Bora Pearl Beach Resort** (☎ 60 52 00; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows from 55,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) With a magnificent swimming pool and over-water restaurant, this sexy resort on Motu Tevairoa boasts a variety of luxurious bungalows constructed from natural materials – including some special over-water ones. Traditional dance performances are generally held three times weekly. Add an extra 7500/10,000 CFP for half/full board. There’s a shuttle to the mainland every 45 minutes between 8.15am and 10pm.

**Le Méridien Bora Bora** (☎ 60 51 51; www.lemeridien-borabora.com; bungalows from 70,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿 🚿) On the eastern side of the lagoon, this place almost defies description. The glass floors in the over-water bungalows are mesmerising, the boat-shaped bar fabulous and the hotel is involved in sea-turtle protection work, so guests have the bonus of watching the rehabilitating turtles. There’s a shuttle boat to and from Anau on the main island from 8am to midnight.

**Sofitel Motu** (☎ 60 56 00; www.sofitel.com; bungalows from 75,000 CFP; 🏠 🚿) On tiny Motu Piti Uu Uta, this quiet retreat has environmentally pleasing Polynesian-style bungalows perched on a hillside and scattered among the coconut trees. You can choose from beach or over-water digs, there’s a restaurant with a panoramic view, a sunset bar and regular shuttle boats to the mainland.

### EATING

Most restaurants firmly shut the door at 9pm, so don’t wait until then or you may go hungry. Nearly all the independent restaurants (excluding snack places) as well as some of the resort restaurants offer free transport to and from your hotel.

All of the luxury hotels have dance performances with buffet dinners several times a week. Expect to pay around 7500 to 9000 CFP.

### West Coast

Vaitape has a few good places for breakfast, a snack or a cheap meal. There’s a string of stalls along the main road that sell sandwiches and cool drinks. In the evening several *roulottes* (dishes 1000-1500 CFP) take up position along the main road and serve simple dishes.

**Bloody Mary’s** (☎ 67 72 86; appetisers 1200-1500 CFP, mains 2500-2800 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Bloody Mary’s is a Bora Bora institution and deserves to be visited on that merit alone. OK, so the food – fresh fish, seafood and meat cooked American barbecue style – is not always consistently excellent, but the ambience is unbeatable. Coconut-tree stools, coloured lights, a thatched roof and a floor of sand all heighten the beach bum appeal. Free transport is provided from anywhere between Vaitape and Club Med during dinner hours.

**Bora Kaina Hut** (☎ 67 72 16; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Travellers rave about the food at this funky restaurant serving global cuisine inside Village Pauline. The Saturday night Pacific buffet (a feast of grilled meats, fish and local fruits and vegetables) includes live music and dance performances.

**Topdive Bora Bora** (☎ 60 50 50; dishes 2000-3600 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Fabulous cathedral ceilings, stylish décor and an outdoor terrace overlooking the lagoon make this restaurant at the hotel by the same name a good place to grab a meal. The menu is French and Polynesian; transport is offered.

**Bamboo House Restaurant** (☎ 67 76 24; dishes 1200-5500 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The long-standing Bamboo House is a fairly unpretentious joint constructed entirely from local bamboo. The French cuisine gets consistently good reviews and the snack menu at lunch is reasonably priced. The restaurant provides free transport.

**L'Appetisserie** (☎ 67 78 88; pastries 130-400 CFP, toasted sandwiches 500-900 CFP; ☺ breakfast & lunch; ☑) The most sophisticated place in town for breakfast or a snack, it serves excellent coffee along with a delicious range of fresh baked pastries and light sandwiches. This is also the place to check your email.

### Matira Point & Around

**Noa Noa** (☎ 60 49 00; breakfast buffet 2500 CFP, dishes 1500-3000 CFP; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Noa Noa at the Intercontinental Moana Beach has an especially attractive setting right on the beach and a reputation for excellent food. At lunch there are loads of nongreasy salads and sandwiches to choose from. The resort's dinner and dance performance (around 9000 CFP) is well respected.

**Matira Terrace** (☎ 60 44 60; dishes 1500-6000 CFP; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This highly regarded restaurant in the Hotel Bora Bora offers excellent international cuisine with an emphasis on French and Polynesian, along with professional service and a romantic, open-air setting. The attached bar serves frothy tropical cocktails and light meals at funky wooden tables under a thatched roof.

**Ben's Place** (☎ 67 74 54; dishes 300-2000 CFP; ☺ breakfast & lunch) A local and tourist favourite for decades, this ramshackle beach shack across from the water is as popular for its energetic ambience as it is for its varied home-cooked meals. The menu features everything from spicy *poisson cru* to fajitas, pizza, pasta and eggy breakfast options.

**Snack La Bounty** (☎ 67 70 43; dishes 800-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Funky little Snack La Bounty is festively decorated with loads

of bright yellow lights and dense foliage in an open-air thatched-roof building. It's popular for its tasty thin-crust pizzas, delicious pastas and house specialities such as *mahimahi* with vanilla sauce and raspberry vinegar.

**Restaurant Matira** (☎ 67 70 51; dishes 1200-2000 CFP; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Part of the Hotel Matira, this restaurant emits a breezy, unpretentious vibe with worn wooden tables, creaky floorboards and big plate-glass windows looking out onto the sea. The menu has loads of Chinese dishes along with a few lighter snack options. If you're on a budget order a burger and fries, a steal at 600 CFP. Free transport is offered anywhere between Hotel Bora Bora and Anau.

**Tiare Market** (☺ 6.30am-1.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 6.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Sun) Across from the Novatel Bora Bora is a well-stocked supermarket.

### The Motu

Free shuttles, which generally operate until midnight, allow you to enjoy the restaurants at the luxury *motu* hotels. It's best to reserve.

**Tipanié** (☎ 60 51 51; dishes from 2000 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) In Le Méridien Bora Bora, this is a superb surfboard-shaped restaurant right by the lagoon – the views are fabulous. There's a different set menu each night or you can choose from a variety of French and Tahitian à la carte offerings. The shuttle operates from the Anau quay.

### DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Dinner and a show in one of the big hotels is about the limit of nightlife on Bora Bora; make the most of the daytime activities and have an early night.

Any of the luxury hotels will provide a cold beer or cocktail and a pleasant snack by the lagoon. The *motu* hotels run free shuttles until about midnight. The bar at Bloody Mary's (p637) is popular.

Don't miss a traditional dance performance by a local group in one of the luxury hotels. Some places allow you in for the price of a drink at the bar; others charge up to 2000 CFP entry. For 6500 CFP to 10,000 CFP you can combine the performance with a sumptuous buffet dinner. Performances take place two or three times weekly.

### SHOPPING

Shopping on Bora Bora tends to mean gallery hopping, buying (or dreaming about buying) pearls, wrapping yourself in various brightly coloured *pareu* or perhaps getting a traditional Marquesean-designed tattoo.

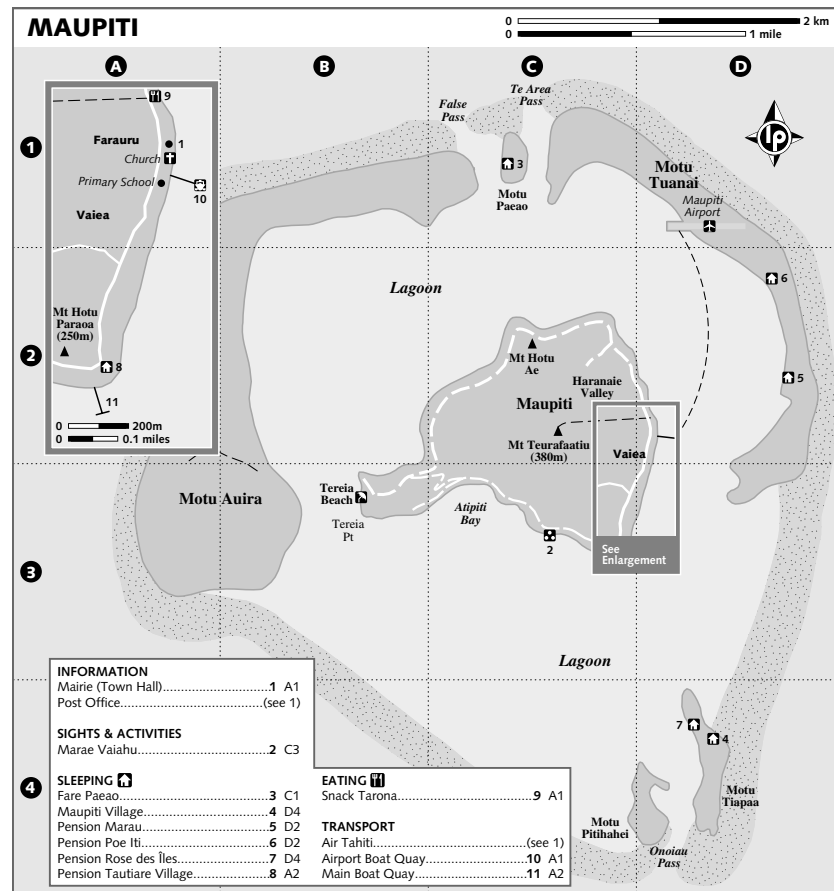
**Atelier Despert** (☎ 60 48 15; www.despert.com) Even if you can't afford to purchase the original paintings, it's worth stopping by this lovely little studio at Matira Point to chat with the charming artist and check out his latest pieces. Alain Despert only does originals (no prints), and his work has gained worldwide recognition for its bold and bright patterns.

**Office Polynésien d'Expertise et de Commercialisation** (OPEC; ☎ 67 61 62) An impeccably run

rare-pearl company, this is the only place that puts your pearl in a machine so you can see its quality. If you're serious about purchasing fine pearls, stop here first, if only for a quick lesson on cultured pearls.

## MAUPITI

The smallest and most isolated of the Society Islands, Maupiti is an unblemished tropical playground where tranquillity trumps everything else and romantic stories of deserted sparkling white-sand *motu* come alive. Serving up a Robinson Crusoe version of paradise, Maupiti seduces lovers



### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Otemanu** (☎ 60 40 02; dishes from 2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Perhaps the most romantic restaurant on the island, Otemanu, in the Bora Bora Lagoon Resort, defies superlatives. You can sample a fine bottle of wine at a table overlooking the lagoon, and enjoy a wonderful candlelit dinner as you watch the sunset over Bora Bora's most sacred peak. The gourmet cuisine is fresh and exquisitely presented, the service polite and professional. There are shuttles from the Vaitape quay.

and adventurers on a quest for the heavenly, erotic Polynesia of lore. It's not for everyone, however. If you're searching for beauty in its most basic form, void of luxury trappings and the crowds they attract, you'll definitely dig this island's slow-motion ambience. But if your idea of a great holiday includes plush digs, decadent restaurants, slick boutiques or even just a few rowdy bars, Maupiti's not for you. Accommodation is in *pensions*, places meant for sleeping and little else: think watching the sun set over the lagoon from the comfort of your slightly saggy mattress. While hardly glitzy, these family-run places usually boast loads of old-fashioned hospitality, gracious charm and stunning *motu* locales.

## ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

A 10km road circles the island. The string of buildings along the southeast coast technically constitutes two villages, Farauru and Vaiea, though they're difficult to separate. The church in the middle of the village strip is the most notable landmark. The *mairie*, post office and Air Tahiti office are in one neat little group immediately north of the church.

## TRANSPORT

There is no public transport on Maupiti, and most folks reserve their *pension* and transport from the airport in advance.

## Getting There & Away

Air Tahiti flies from Maupiti to Tahiti (from 14,500 CFP, five weekly) and Ra'iatea (from 6500 CFP, three weekly). The **Air Tahiti office** (☎ 67 80 20; ☎ 8am-11am Mon-Thu, 9.30am-11am Fri) is in the village beside the *mairie* (town hall).

The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 69) runs between Maupiti and Bora Bora on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for 2500/3500 CFP one way/return. Departing Vaitape (Bora Bora) at 8.30am, it arrives at Maupiti at 10.15am, then departs for the return trip at 4pm and arrives 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. Otherwise, there's a boat that takes Air Tahiti staff and any hangers-on to the main island after the flight has

### IMPORTANT! READ THIS...

Maupiti has no banks or ATMs, and none of the island's sleeping options take credit cards or even travellers cheques, so it's imperative you bring enough cash with you to pay for your entire stay; plan ahead, as most banks have a limit on how much cash you can get out of the ATM in one day. Half board usually includes free water, coffee and tea, but rarely beer and soft drinks. Although beer is usually available, remember each one will probably cost around 400 CFP, so budget in some extra cash if you're planning to imbibe.

arrived. The one-way fare for the 15-minute trip is 400 CFP (children 200 CFP). The Air Tahiti boat also goes out to the airport *motu* for departing flights. Boat departure times, usually one to 1½ hours prior to flights, are posted at the Air Tahiti office.

It's relatively simple to arrange a boat out to the *motu* from the villages and vice versa. It costs between 500 and 1000 CFP to go from the main island to the *motu* and between 2000 and 5000 CFP for a lagoon excursion. Every *pension* on the mainland or *motu* can arrange these transfers.

## SIGHTS

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 if you don't the mainland *pensions* will happily organise day trips for around 2000 CFP per person. Besides acting as quiet retreats (perfect for sunbathing, swimming or simply reading a trashy novel), the *motu* also boast Maupiti's best beaches. **Motu Paeao**, at the northern end of the lagoon, is the site of an important archaeological discovery: a series of thousand-year-old burial sites. The lagoon drops off quickly here, so it's also good for swimming. At low tide you can reach **Motu Auira** 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 either its ocean or lagoon side. It also is the most

developed *motu*, with four *pensions*. If you have a kayak you can paddle across to the completely isolated **Motu Pitihahei**, but steer way to the north of Onoiau Pass, which is very dangerous. The Airport and a few *pensions* are found on **Motu Tuanai**, which also has decent kite-boarding and surf spots.

You can walk around the island in just a few hours. The west coast, from Pohiva Point to Puoroo and Tereia Points, is dotted with **coastal marae**. On this coast, **Tereia Beach** is the finest on the island for white sand and swimming. It's easy to walk across the lagoon to Motu Auira, particularly at low tide.

In Atipiti Bay on the south side of the island, just northeast of the main quay, is the area known as Tefarearii, the 'House of Kings'. The island's nobility once lived here and **Marae Vaiahu** is a large coastal site.

## ACTIVITIES

### Snorkelling

Snorkelling is particularly good in the area south of Onoiau Pass, but make sure you don't get too close to the pass itself (you'll start to notice the current getting stronger; when it does it's time to head towards shore). The *pensions* will organise lagoon tours with snorkelling stops (2000 to 5000 CFP) and most also offer free snorkels and masks if you want to explore on your own.

### Walking

Maupiti has some good walking, including the one-hour clamber up **Mt Motu Paraoa** (250m), which looms high above the villages; the track is unmarked, so take a guide (about 2000 CFP per person; ask at your *pension*). It's a superb climb to the summit of **Mt Teurafaatiu** (380m), the island's highest point. Allow three hours for the return trip. The walk starts from the high point where the road crosses the ridge above Tereia Point and generally sticks to the ridgeline.

## SLEEPING & EATING

The *motu* are by far the best places to sleep. Not only are the guesthouses a bit more sophisticated, but you also get to laze on Maupiti's best beaches and wade into its most beautiful water. The villages will appeal to those looking for a cultural, rather than beach, experience. Most people opt for half or full board at their accommodation;

if you're staying on the *motu* this will likely be your only option. Several small village shops sell basic supplies.

**Pension Rose des Îles** (☎ /fax 67 82 00; bungalows with half board per person from 10,000 CFP) It's worth staying here for the food alone – think lobster feasts and fine French cooking. In a lovely location on the lagoon side of Motu Tiapaa, it offers two simple but charming bungalows made from woven palm fronds. The mattresses are a little lumpy, but the French hostess makes such an effort it's hard to get upset.

**Pension Marau** (☎ 70 56 09; www.pension-marau.com; bungalows 6000 CFP) Surfers and backpackers will dig the ultrachill atmosphere at this oceanside guesthouse on Motu Tuanai. The young owner is happy to teach you how to surf or kite board – he won't charge for his time, just the fuel to get there. Bungalows are spacious with breezy porches and large bathrooms.

**Maupiti Village** (☎ 67 80 08; dm/r/bungalows with full board per person 5500/6500/8000 CFP) This beautiful property on Motu Tiapaa is by no means ritzy but offers the best-value budget accommodation in Maupiti. Digs are in small, basic bungalows, matchbox-sized rooms or a six-bed dorm. Airport/village transfers are 1800/1300 CFP per person return.

**Fare Paeao** (☎ 76 81 01; d/tr bungalows 10,600/12,100 CFP) The only *pension* on Motu Paeao; come here for total isolation. The location is exceptional with great swimming spots. The six bungalows, while hardly posh, are clean and comfortable and feature huge glass windows, lovely terraces and electric antimosquito devices. There are free kayaks and an on-site café serves a mean rum punch. Airport transfers are 1100 CFP per person return.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Pension Poe Ite** (☎ 74 58 76; maupitiexpress@mail.pf; bungalows 7000 CFP; 📶) The swankiest place in Maupiti is also the best value. The brand-new bungalows are very spacious and come with TVs, DVD players and fridges. The location, on a small strip of beach on Motu Tuanai, offers blue-green lagoon vistas amid rows of swaying palms. Airport transfers, kayaks and snorkels are available free.

**Pension Tautiare Village** (☎ 67 83 58; [www.tautiarevillage.com](http://www.tautiarevillage.com); r with breakfast/half/full board per person 5500/7000/8500 CFP) With colourful bedspreads, grassy garden areas and a lovely location against the mountains, this is the best guesthouse on the mainland. Rooms are spotless, the service personal and the ambience intimate. The only drawback is it's a 1.5km walk from the nearest beach. Airport transfers are 1700 CFP.

**Snack Tarona** (☎ 67 82 46; dishes 900-1200 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) This place, to the north of the villages, serves simple dishes in bland environs.

## TUAMOTU ISLANDS

Strung like white-sand jewels across the Pacific, the Tuamotus (too-ah-moh-toos) are a world apart. These rings of coral are the posthumous witnesses to what was once, according to Darwin's theory of atoll formation, an archipelago of high islands as mountainous and grand as perhaps the Marquesas or Society Islands are today. The 77 atolls, scattered like confetti on an ocean of ink, stretch 1500km northwest to southeast and 500km east to west. The closest islands are about 300km from Tahiti.

The Tuamotus have always been a dangerous place for navigators and they long remained in the shadow of the Society Islands. That has changed thanks to pearl cultivation, which has become a central pillar of the Polynesian economy. The growth of pearl cultivation has reversed the outward migration of the population, which has grown from 11,793 to 15,846 people since 1983. There are 45 inhabited islands, ranging from those with a mere handful of transient occupants to Rangiroa, with a total population of 3016. With this economic development and increase in population, infrastructure has been dramatically improved.

### Transport

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The archipelago is accessible by plane; 29 atolls have airstrips and are served by Air Tahiti. Most of the traffic is to and from Pape'ete, but there are also connections with Bora Bora, the Marquesas and the Gambier Archipelago. Within the archipelago, Rangiroa and Hao are the principal flight hubs.

If you're visiting an island, always give the Air Tahiti representative a contact address or phone number, as schedules are subject to change.

The *Dory, Corbia, Mareva Nui, Taporo V* and *VI, Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella, Kura Ora II and III, Hotu Maru, Vai-Aito, Nuku Hau* and *Aranui* all serve the archipelago from Pape'ete and most take passengers. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.

### GETTING AROUND

Outboard motorboat is the most common method of transport in the Tuamotus. Road networks are often just crushed-coral or sand tracks, perhaps a few kilometres long, linking the village to the airport or to the areas where copra is produced. Public transport usually does not exist. Ask at your hotel or *pension* about transport as they will usually be able to set you up with whatever you need.

Airports are sometimes near the villages, sometimes on remote *motu* on the other side of the lagoon. If you have booked accommodation, your hosts will come and meet you but transfers are not necessarily free. If there is a charge it will depend on the distance travelled and the means of transport. Hitching (by car or boat) is possible as many islanders go to the airports for arrivals and departures, although there may not be room for you by the time all the freight is loaded! If you do get given a ride, offer to help pay for petrol as it is quite expensive.

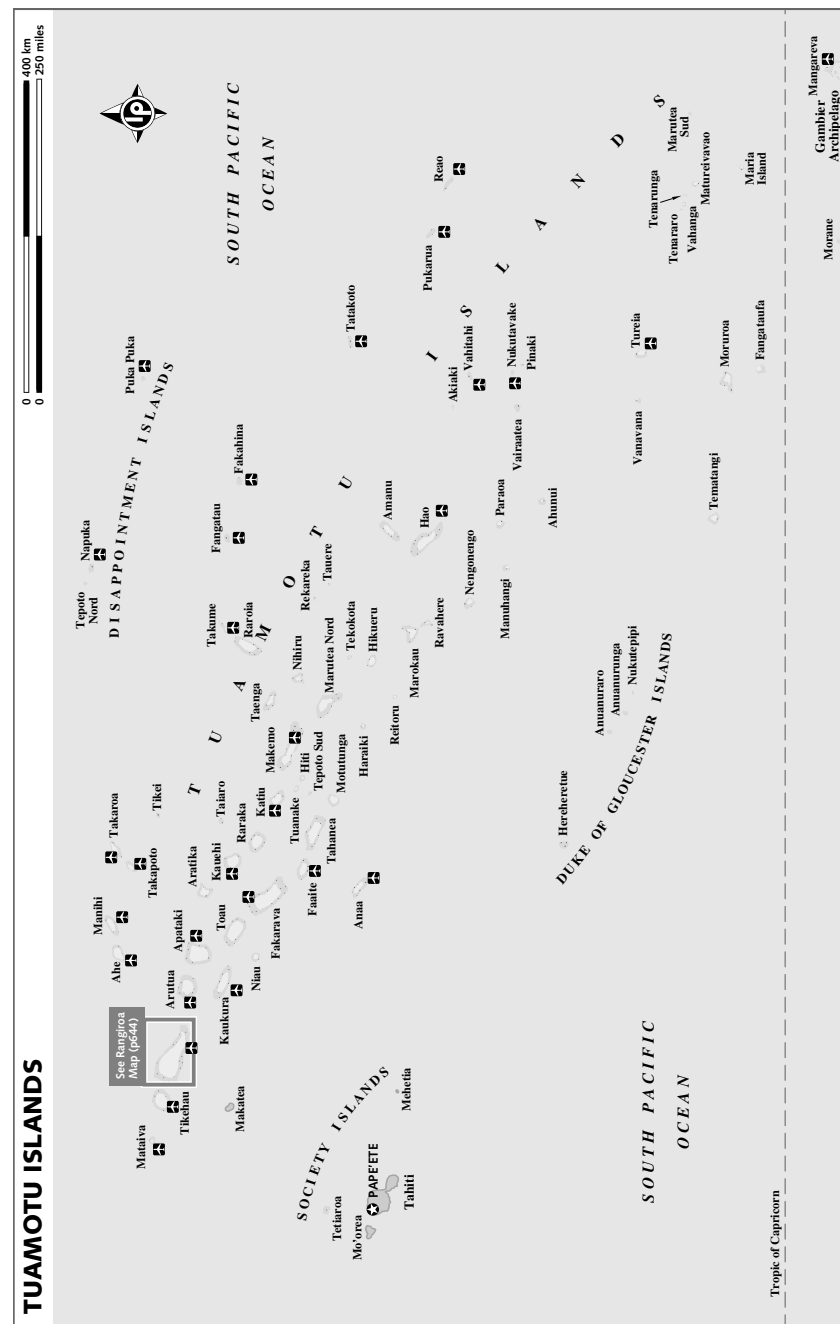
Bicycles and scooters are often used in the villages; some *pensions* rent them out or they can be hired from islanders.

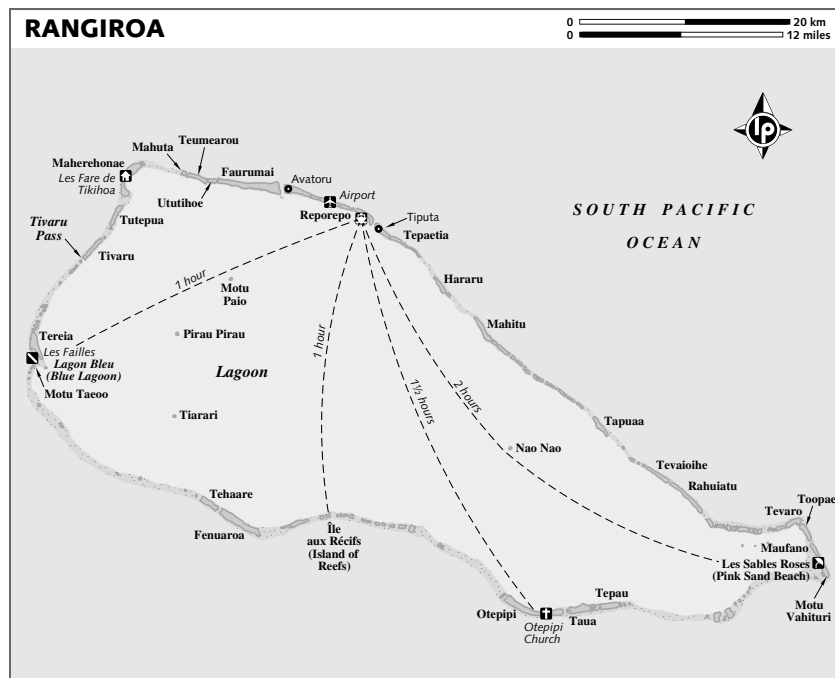
### RANGIROA

pop 3016 / lagoon area 1640 sq km

Rangiroa (rung-ee-roh-ah) takes a silver medal for being the second-biggest atoll in the world, but comes with a gold medal as far as wonderfully languorous, remote places to explore go – although don't expect the kind of high style you'd find on Bora Bora.

Diving attracts the majority of visitors to Rangiroa, but there's something for everyone. From wine tasting at one of the world's most unusual wineries and exploring the vast lagoon to just lying on the beach, Rangi, as it is affectionately known by the locals, has justly earned its reputation as the tourist centre of the Tuamotus.





A series of large swells has menaced the atoll's lagoon over the last several years and many white-sand beaches have been reduced to gravel-sand beaches. Even so, the stark whiteness of the bleached coral against the turquoise lagoon creates a bright, nearly Grecian cocktail for the eyes. Life in the lagoon has sprung back from much of the damage and is as blue and inviting as ever.

Rangiroa (from 'Rairoa', literally 'long sky') is home to more than 10% of the total population of the Tuamotus.

## Information

**Centre Médical Avatoru** (☎ 96 03 75) East of Avatoru.

**Le Kai Kai Restaurant** (☎ 96 03 39; Tevaiohe; per hr 1500 CFP) Internet access.

**Pharmacie de Rangiroa** (☎ 93 12 30; ☎ 7am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm Sun) In Avatoru centre near the Catholic church.

**Post offices** In Avatoru and Tiputa.

## Sights

### AVATORU & TIPUTA

Somniferous as it may be, Avatoru is modern and bustling by Tuamotu standards.

There is a post office, a few banks and a supermarket with hopeless opening hours (but a decent selection of groceries). There are two churches, one Catholic and one Mormon, and a few little places to eat. A small site overlooking Tiputa Pass has been cleared so that visitors can watch the daily performances of dolphins that dance in the waves created by the outgoing current.

To visit a pearl farm, try **Gauguin's Pearl** (☎ 96 05 39), about 1km west of the airport, or the small operations run by Pension Martine – contact **L'Atelier Corinne** (☎ 96 03 13), opposite the guesthouse – and **Heipoe Ura** (☎ 96 04 35).

Around the middle of the day, you could pretty safely fire a gun along the main street in Tiputa and not hit anyone. It's a charming little village, and there are fewer *popa'a* here.

## AROUND THE ISLAND

**Lagon Bleu** (Blue Lagoon) is one hour away by boat on the western edge of the atoll, close to Motu Taeoo. A string of *motu* and coral reefs have formed a beautiful natural

pool on the edge of the main reef, a lagoon within a lagoon. Less touristy **Lagon Vert** (Green Lagoon) is only five minutes from Avatoru by boat.

The magnificent **Les Sables Roses** (Pink Sand Beach) is on the southeast edge of Rangiroa's lagoon near Motu Vahituri, 1½ to two hours from Avatoru by boat. Trips are expensive but worth it.

On the south side of the atoll, an hour by boat from Avatoru, **Île aux Récifs** (Reef Island), also known as Motu Ai Ai, lies in water dotted with *feo* (coral outcrops) that have weathered into strange petrified silhouettes; it's a great day trip.

Organised tours tend to be the best way to see the sights, though they rely on the weather and the number of takers. Lagoon and *motu* trips typically cost 7500 to 10,000 CFP and can be arranged through your hotel.

## Activities

### DIVING

Rangiroa is one of the best-known dive sites in the Pacific because of its sharks. Divers enter on the ocean side and drift with the strong current into the lagoon. Contact **Paradive** (☎ 96 05 55), the **Raie Manta Club** (☎ 96 84 80; www.raiemantaclub.free.fr), **Six Passengers** (☎ 96 02 60) or **Dream Dive** (☎ 96 03 72). For more on diving in French Polynesia, see p71.

### Sleeping

Rangiroa has lots of simple, family-run *pensions* (only a sample is listed here) and a few more luxurious places.

### BUDGET

All prices quoted here include half board and are per person unless otherwise noted.

**Pension Teina & Marie** (☎ 96 03 94; rangiroa@mail.pf; Reporepo; r from 6500 CFP, camping 1000 CFP) Views right over Tiputa Pass and a friendly, laid-back atmosphere make this *pension* one of Rangiroa's best. Watch the dolphins jump in the waves of Tiputa Pass right from the sun-drenched communal deck.

**Pension Loyna** (☎ 96 82 09; www.pensionloyna.fr.st; Avatoru; r 6000-7500 CFP) A lovely, clean place oozing homeliness. Choose from cheaper rooms with shared bathroom or a two-bedroom family bungalow with bathroom out the back. The ocean is 300m away, but

the warm welcome and high standards make up for everything.

**Pension Henri** (☎ 96 82 67; pensionhenri@mail.pf; Avatoru; s/d/t 6500/11,000/15,000 CFP, half-board add per person from 2000 CFP, hot water add 4000 CFP) The rustic-chic bungalows and French-Tahitian owners give this place a young, hip vibe different from other options. All rooms are large, with a terrace, and the hot-water bungalow has an exceptionally nice coral floor bathroom. This is the only *pension* facing the ocean side of the atoll.

**Rangiroa Lodge** (☎ 96 82 13; Avatoru; dm 2000 CFP, d from 5500/4500 CFP) Revitalised by new ownership, this spotless, lively backpacker's lodge is the cheapest place on Rangiroa. Prices do not include half board.

**Chez Glorine** (☎ 96 04 05; Reporepo; bungalows 7500 CFP) On the lagoon corner of Tiputa Pass, Chez Glorine is well situated for divers and snorkellers. Bungalows are set back from the lagoon, but are cool and shady. Lovers of fine food will enjoy the cooking here (Glorine has made a name as an adept chef, and can often be seen wielding a knife and some freshly caught fish).

### MIDRANGE

You can pay with a credit card in most of these places.

**Les Fare de Tikihoa** (☎ 73 80 13; www.fare-tikihoa.pf; s/d 12,000/16,000 CFP) All alone on a white-sand *motu*, a 45-minute boat ride from the airport, the artistic, local-style architecture of this place makes you really feel away from it all – and you are! The meals here, a mixture of French and Polynesian, are divine. Add 6500 CFP per person for full board.

**Le Merou Bleu** (☎ 79 16 82; http://Le-Merou-Bleu.france.com; Avatoru; half board 22,000 CFP) Beautifully decorated in an eclectic Polynesian style. The spacious bungalows are nestled in a lush, flowery garden and the French-inspired food is fabulous. Note that prices are per double, not per person. No credit cards are accepted.

**Pension Tuanake** (☎ 96 04 45; tuanake@mail.pf; Vaimate; half board 10,500 CFP) This *pension* feels like a cross between a family-run place and a hotel. It has two small bungalows with room for three people and two bungalows for six people. It's extremely clean, organised and is set in a coconut plantation near the lagoon. The food is very good.

## TOP END

**Hotel Kia Ora** (☎ 96 03 84; www.hotelkiaora.com; Reporepo; garden/beach/over-water bungalows 35,000/50,000/75,000 CFP) The biggest resort in the Tuamotus and the priciest option on Rangiroa, the Kia Ora is undeniably plush. It has an old-school feel to it: the lounge looks like someplace your grandpa liked to smoke cigars. Bungalows are dotted around a magnificent coconut plantation on the edge of the lagoon. There's a white-sand beach, a restaurant and bar on stilts and a few little craft stalls. All sorts of activities can be arranged.

**Novotel Rangiroa Beach Resort** (☎ 86 66 66; www.novotel.com; Tevaiohie; r/bungalow 28,000/34,000 CFP) Part of the Sofitel chain, the Novotel is a step down from the luxury of the Kia Ora but is a notch above the midrange group. Bungalows are large although a bit dull but there is nice little pond filled with lily flowers and there is a good swimming beach. The food has not received rave reviews. Transfers cost 1700 CFP return.

## Eating

Most people take half board at their *pension*; however, if you don't eat fish, be prepared to cater for yourself. Avatoru and Tiputa have a few supermarkets.

**Lagon Burger** (☎ 96 04 12; dishes 400-1100 CFP; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) It looks like nothing from the outside but this economical snack place has a French chef serving succulent fish and burgers as well as some of the best salads in French Polynesia. Everything is well presented and the owner plays an interesting mix of international music.

**Vaimario** (☎ 96 05 96; dishes 2000-2900 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) You can feast on anything from pizza to grilled fish at this very good restaurant. Free transfers are offered from anywhere in Avatoru.

**Hotel Kia Ora** (☎ 96 03 84; dishes 1500-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is about as fancy as Rangiroan cuisine gets. There's a lovely over-water restaurant and bar, and the lunch menu is much cheaper than the evening version. On Wednesday and Sunday there's a buffet and Polynesian dance performance (5000 CFP).

**Pizzeria Filipo** (☎ 73 76 20; Avatoru; appetisers 650-1200 CFP, pizzas 1000-1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Here's a great little place right near Rangiroa Lodge backpackers. The food is delicious

(try the daily specials for around 1200 CFP); the large pizzas are huge, and come served on wonderful plates.

**Le Kai Kai Restaurant** (☎ 96 03 39; Tevaiohie; dishes 1200-2000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is a French garden restaurant that has a simple lunch menu and a more elaborate dinner menu including a set option (there's a set menu for children too). Evening cocktails are the lowest priced on the island. Transfers from your Avatoru *pension* or hotel are available free.

## Getting There &amp; Away

The airport is smack in between Avatoru (to the west) and Tiputa (to the east). **Air Tahiti** (☎ 93 11 00; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) has an office inside the airport *fare* (house).

Rangiroa is an important link for air and sea communication and is connected by air to Tahiti, Bora Bora, the Marquesas and other atolls in the Tuamotus. There are several flights daily between Rangiroa and Pape'ete (from 15,000 CFP). It's also possible to fly directly from Bora Bora (from 23,000 CFP).

The *Dory*, *Mareva Nui*, *Vai-Aito*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella* and *Rairoa Nui* all serve Rangiroa; the *Aranui* stops on Rangiroa on its way back from the Marquesas. For details, see p676.

## Getting Around

Getting around Rangiroa is a fairly haphazard affair. There's no public transport, and there's not really enough traffic to rely on hitchhiking.

A sealed road runs the 10km from Avatoru village at the western end of the string of islets to the Tiputa Pass at the eastern extremity. The road is not lit at night, which makes getting around without a car in the evenings virtually impossible. Hire a bicycle or a scooter (it's hardly worth getting a car) for getting around during the day, or resign yourself to not moving much!

There are regular boats (1000 CFP return) that cross the pass separating the Avatoru islets from Tiputa village; taking a bicycle over costs 500 CFP extra.

If you have booked accommodation, your hosts will be at the airport to welcome you. If your *pension* is near the airport, transfers will probably be free; places further away tend to charge (ask when you book).

**Europcar** (☎ 96 03 28; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) is east of Avatoru and rents cars from 6300/7350 CFP for a half-/full day. **Chez Hélène** (☎ 96 82 84; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) rents out bicycles for 600/1200 CFP a half-/full day; prices drop to 900 CFP a day after the first day.

**Location Arenahio** (☎ 96 82 45; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat), about 800m east of Avatoru village, hires out cars for 6200/8400 CFP for a half-/full day; scooters are 4200/5200 CFP and bicycles 700/1500 CFP. Credit cards are accepted.

## TIKEHAU

pop 406 / lagoon area 461 sq km

Tikehau is almost too good to be true. Time has eroded it away into sweeping, twisting *motu* of white and pink sands that engulf little bays and forgotten nooks. The lagoon is as blue as you'll find anywhere in French Polynesia and the pass houses an exceptional abundance of fish.

The islanders are grouped in the village of Tuherahera, in the southwest of the atoll, leaving the majority of the *paradisical motu* untouched. The people's livelihood is copra production, fishing and, increasingly, tourism. Frequent connections by plane and boat to Tahiti allow the transport of fresh fish to the markets of Pape'ete.

The roughly oval-shaped atoll is 26km on its longest axis. It's cut by Tuheiva Pass in the west and by more than 100 *hoa* (channels). A number of islandlike *motu* dot the lagoon.

There is no bank on Tikehau but there is a post office.

## Sights &amp; Activities

**Scuba diving** in the magnificent **Tuheiva Pass** is excellent; you're likely to see manta rays and sharks. Rangiroa's Raie Manta Club has an offshoot at **Tikehau Village** (☎ 96 22 86); other dive centres are in the village and at Hôtel Tikehau.

**Lagoon excursions** allow visitors to explore the magnificent waters. Regular stops include a visit to the rocky **Motu Puarua** (Île aux Oiseaux or Bird Island) where several species of ground-nesting birds are easily spotted. A less common but interesting stop is at **Île de Eden**, an establishment of the Church of the New Testament, who have done a commendable job of creating a vibrant, organic garden in the infertile

sands of their superb *motu*; they also have a fish park filled with blue jacks and *ulua*. A last stop is usually a barbecue picnic on one of many idyllic *motu*. *Pensions* generally organise excursions, and trips cost from 6500 to 7500 CFP per person.

## Sleeping &amp; Eating

All *pensions* on Tikehau are on white-sand beaches on the lagoon side of the atoll. Every option, except the top-end resort, is near the village and airport. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are per person per day and include transfers to the airport.

**Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort** (☎ 96 23 00; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows 48,000-83,000 CFP; ☎) This majestic luxury resort in a dreamy fantasy location has 16 over-water bungalows and 14 beach bungalows. The more expensive bungalows, the furthest east, may get noise from the generator if the wind blows in the wrong direction. There are shuttle boats to the village. Prices are per bungalow.

**Pension Panau** (☎ 96 22 99; no/half/full board 4000/6000/7000 CFP) One of the best-value places on Tikehau. It's a simple, immaculate place with a welcoming atmosphere and a band of happy dogs. Bungalows on the shady beach are equipped with fan and mosquito nets.

**Pension Hotu** (☎ 96 22 89; no/half/full board 4000/7000/8500 CFP) On one of the nicest stretches of beach, this friendly, family-run place has five spacious and clean bungalows all with bathroom, fan and thatched roof. Kayaks and mineral water are free.

**Tikehau Village** (☎ 96 22 86; half/full board 7000/8600 CFP) The beach here is the most spacious on the *motu* but you'll have to share it with the other guests of this popular place. Meals featuring local specialities are served in a large *fare potee* (an open *fare*, usually hosing a restaurant) with a bar and occasionally there is live music at night.

**Pension Tematie** (☎ /fax 96 22 65; no/half/full board 5500/8500/10,700 CFP) Tastefully designed hexagonal bungalows sit in a shady garden on a small beach. All have attached bathroom, mosquito nets and are very clean. This place is right next to the airport.

**Snack Chez Cindy** (☎ 96 22 67; mains 700-1200 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) The only snack place in town, this is a busy place serving good *poisson cru*, steak, chow mein and burgers.

## Getting There & Away

The airport is about 1km east of the village entrance. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 96 22 66) flies seven times a week between Pape'ete and Tikehau (from 15,000 CFP), direct or via Rangiroa (from 5500 CFP); several flights a week go to Bora Bora (from 23,000 CFP).

The *Mareva Nui*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Dory* and *Vai Ato* stop at Tikehau.

## Getting Around

The 10km track around the *motu* on which Tuherahera is situated passes the airport. Bicycles can be borrowed or hired from your hosts.

## MATAIVA

pop 235 / lagoon area 25 sq km

Despite the limited tourist infrastructure, this tiny atoll offers a delightful escape. There are superb and easily accessible beaches, numerous snorkelling spots, lots of fish and one of the few noteworthy archaeological sites in the Tuamotus. Air Tahiti flights make it possible to spend a pleasant weekend here.

The structure of the Mataiva lagoon gives it a particular appearance: the coral constructions at the surface of the water create dividing walls 50m to 300m wide, forming about 70 basins with a maximum depth of 10m. Seen from a plane, the play of light on this underwater tessellation forms a mosaic of green.

## Sights & Activities

**Marae Papiro** is a well-kept *marae* on the edge of a *hoa*, about 14km from the village. In the centre of this *marae*, you can see the stone seat from which, according to legend, the giant Tu guarded the pass against invasion. In the south, along the edge of the lagoon, there are many fine **beaches**. Take your mask and fins along.

**Île aux Oiseaux** (Bird Island), to the east of the lagoon, is a crescent-shaped coral spit covered in small shrubs. It is a favourite nesting place for *oio*, *tara* and red-footed boobies.

Don't miss the chance to accompany fishermen to trap fish in one of the numerous **fish parks** around the lagoon and the pass. It's exciting to watch the clever way the Paumotu people manage the parks. Sorted, scaled and gutted, the fish are sold in the village.

## Sleeping & Eating

The two *pensions* are very similar; only the locations differ. Prices are per person per day and include airport transfers.

**Mataiva Village** (☎ 96 32 33; bungalows with half board 6200 CFP, camping 1200 CFP) This option has five clean and comfortable two-person bungalows with bathroom (cold water only). It's also one of the few places in the Tuamotus where you can camp.

**Super Mataiva Cool** (☎ 96 32 53; bungalows with half board 6500 CFP) Run by the friendly Huri family, there are four basic but inviting units with bathroom (cold water only). It offers light meals.

Apart from the *pensions* there's really nowhere to eat, although there are several small shops with basic food supplies.

## Getting There & Away

The proprietor of the Mataiva Village *pension* is the local representative of **Air Tahiti** (☎ 96 32 48). There are two Pape'ete-Mataiva flights (from 16,000 CFP) a week, usually on Thursday and Sunday. Return flights depart on the same days.

Mataiva is on the routes of the *Mareva Nui* and *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*.

## Getting Around

A track goes almost all the way around the island, in the middle of the coconut plantation. The northern track finishes at Maraé Papiro, about 14km away. The southern track is about 10km long. The *pensions* rent bicycles for about 1000 CFP per day and organise trips to the various sites for about 3000 CFP.

## MANIHI

pop 793 / lagoon area 192 sq km

The most accessible and developed atoll in the northern Tuamotus, Manihi once had an international reputation for pearl production. After pearl prices crashed around 2003, a large number of farms went out of business but the lagoon is still scattered with a few family-run and industrial operations. Manihi is now eclipsed by its quiet neighbour Ahe in terms of numbers of pearls produced but it's still a great place to look for the pearl of your dreams.

Shaped like an ellipse, the atoll is 28km long and 8km wide, with only one opening, the Tairapa Pass in the southwest. The

dreamlike beauty of the lagoon and its fecund pass were recognised early on and an international hotel was built in 1977. The best beaches and picnic spots are at the south of the lagoon, where white sand, ruffled palms and sapphire waters make for the perfect escape.

There is no bank on the atoll, though the Manihi Pearl Beach Resort may be able to change money in emergencies. The post office is in Paeua village, opposite the marina. Paeua has a hospital.

## Sights & Activities

Don't waste your time in charmless Paeua; instead head straight to the **pearl farms**. Try to visit a small family farm and a larger industrial farm, but avoid holiday periods, particularly Christmas, when the workers may be away. Prices tend to be lower than in Pape'ete or abroad.

All the *pensions* (except Motel Chez Jeanne) and the hotel organise pearl-farm visits, usually combined with a picnic and village excursion from around 3500 CFP. Nothing stops you from contacting the small firms directly. All you have to do is go to the village and ask; you may even find the pearl of your dreams at a very reasonable price.

You can dive with **Manihi Blue Nui** (☎ 96 42 17; www.bluenui.com); there's a great wall dive with excellent marine life.

## Sleeping

Manihi offers four distinct options, each on private *motu*. All are great places for families and all accept credit cards.

**Pension Vainui** (☎ 96 42 89; www.pensionvainui.com; full board per person 8900 CFP) East of the village and about a half an hour boat ride from the airport, this all-inclusive *pension* has eight very funky rooms with shared bathroom. There is not much privacy here but the site is one of the best on the atoll, the welcome is friendly and the food copious and well prepared. Rates include well-organised daily excursions but airport transfers cost 1000 CFP return.

**Manihi Pearl Beach Resort** (☎ 96 42 73, in Pape'ete 43 16 10; fax 96 42 72, in Pape'ete 43 17 86; beach/over-water bungalows 31,000/67,000 CFP; 🚗) A small and intimate top-end resort two minutes from the airport, the development sits in an airy coconut grove with white-sand beaches, seawater swimming pool

and the magnificent lagoon. The restaurant has a beachfront terrace and there is a bar overlooking the pool, the lagoon and the beach.

**Motel Nanihi Paradise** (☎ 96 41 54; www.nanihi.paradise.com; bungalows from 13,000 CFP) On a tiny *motu*, this place has two clean, flower bedecked two-bedroom bungalows with fully equipped kitchens and luminous, well-designed bathrooms. Excursions to pearl farms (2300 CFP) are offered as well as lagoon tours (3500 CFP), and diving can be organised through Manihi Blue Nui dive centre. Meals can be arranged.

**Motel Chez Jeanne** (☎ 96 42 90; motel.chez.jeanne@caramail.com; beach/over-water bungalows 10,000/14,000 CFP) This place is situated on a crescent of white sand, about 9km north-east of the airport. One very private over-the-water bungalow for two people and two beachside bungalows for up to four people have attached bathrooms and fully equipped kitchens. It's possible to order breakfast (300 CFP) or dinner (1800 CFP) but self-catering is encouraged.

## Eating

Apart from the *pensions* and hotel, there are hardly any places to eat. In Paeua, there is a well-stocked shop, Libre Service Jean-Marie, near the marina and another smaller shop at the quay on the pass.

**Poe Rava Restaurant** (☎ 96 42 73; dishes 1400-2800 CFP; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) At Manihi Pearl Beach Resort, this restaurant has extremely reasonable prices, especially for lunch. The setting by the swimming pool and lagoon is delightful.

## Getting There & Away

The **Air Tahiti office** (☎ 96 43 34) is in Paeua. On flight days the representative goes to the airport. There are almost daily flights between Pape'ete and Manihi (from 19,000 CFP).

The *Mareva Nui*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Dory* and *Vai-Aito* service Manihi. Loading and unloading takes place at the Paeua quay in the pass.

## Getting Around

The only track on Manihi links Motu Taugaraufara to the airport, covering a total distance of only about 9km. Getting around the atoll requires some ingenuity and, for



the most part, a boat. The Manihi Pearl Beach Resort rents bicycles for around 1000 CFP per day but you can't get too far and the road is barren and shadeless.

The airport is at the southwest end of the atoll, two minutes away from Manihi Pearl Beach Resort. To get to the village you have no choice but to hitch a boat ride from the quay, right next to the airport fare.

To get to the dive centre from the village, you can use the Manihi Pearl Beach Resort staff shuttle boat, which generally leaves the Paoua marina at about 6am and returns around 4pm. It'll take you for free. If they're going to the airport or the village, resort owners will generally take you across to the dive centre. For other points around the atoll, talk to boat owners in the village.

## AHE

pop 377 / lagoon area 170 sq km

Until recently, Ahe, 15km west of Manihi, was only known to pearl farmers and to yachties, who often pull in when sailing from the Marquesas. Those who want to head off the beaten track will appreciate this atoll's quietness, idyllic scenery and gentle pace of life.

Ahe is 20km long by 10km wide. The dusty, flower-filled village of Tenukupara is on the southwest side. Most of the island's economy is based on pearl farming and Ahe has quietly become the largest pearl-producing atoll in the Tuamotus.

Tourist facilities are still very limited. In a coconut plantation facing the lagoon, **Coco Perles** (☎ 96 44 08; www.cocoperle.com; bungalow per person with half/full board from 10,000/15,000 CFP) has six well-decorated local-style bungalows. Excellent meals are served in a fare by the lagoon. Activities include snorkelling, kayaking and lounging. Excursions to the nearby bird motu or to a pearl farm cost 1000 CFP. Bring plenty of mosquito repellent.

**Chez Raita** (☎ 96 44 53; pension.raita@mail.pf; bungalows with half board per person 7500 CFP, picnic lunch 1000 CFP) is owned by the local fireman and his family. It's a friendly and charming place on a white-sand motu on the east side of the atoll.

Air Tahiti flies to Ahe five times weekly, departing from Pape'ete (from 17,000 CFP); flights are direct or via Manihi.

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Mareva Nui*, *Dory* and *Vai-Aito* service Ahe.

## TAKAROA & TAKAPOTO

Takaroa pop 490 / lagoon area 113 sq km;

Takapoto pop 612 / lagoon area 102 sq km

The atolls of Takaroa (Long Chin) and Takapoto (Short Chin) are labelled the King George Islands on marine maps.

Rectangular Takaroa Atoll is 27km long by 6km wide and has only one pass, in the southeast, into the lagoon. Ninety percent of the 488 residents are Mormons and alcohol is prohibited. There is no bank but there is a post office, a shop and two *pen-sions*. Takaroa's lagoon has numerous coral formations, which are wonderful for snorkelling. At least four flights a week go to Pape'ete (from 18,000 CFP) and Takapoto (from 4400 CFP).

Takapoto is 9km south. It is 20km long and 6km across at its widest point and doesn't have a pass. With its pearl farms, white-sand beaches and archaeological remains, Takapoto could one day become a popular tourist destination. The atoll has no bank but there is a post office.

The interesting **Marae Takai** archaeological site is worth the long walk northeast of Fakatopater. Follow the track that goes past the cemetery at the village exit for 15km. You will see a channel spanned by a stone bridge. Cross this bridge and, immediately on the right, walk 60m along the channel towards the lagoon. Turn left and clear your way through bush for about 30m to reach the three *marae* in a little clearing.

**Takapoto Village** (☎ 98 65 44; bungalow with half board per person 7000 CFP), on a small yellow-sand beach beside the lagoon, southeast of the village, has a comfortable bungalow and a room.

The airport is a stone's throw southeast of the village. Air Tahiti flies three times a week to Pape'ete (from 17,200 CFP).

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella* and *Mareva Nui* serve Takapoto. *Taporo IV* and *Aranui*, en route to the Marquesas Islands, also stop there.

Bicycle is the best way to discover the atoll's few short tracks. Most guesthouses organise picnics on deserted motu, reached by speedboat (about 2000 CFP per person).

## FAKARAVA

pop 712 / lagoon area 1121 sq km

Magnificent Fakarava is the second-largest atoll in the Tuamotus. The pass through

the reef offers amazing diving and several dive cruise operators visit the atoll. Most people live in Rotoava village at the north-eastern end, 4km east of the airport. About 1km from the village centre, **Havaiki Pearl Guesthouse** (☎ 93 40 16; www.havaiki.com; s/d with half board 13,000/19,000 CFP, 3 night minimum) offers four bungalows on a small but magnificent beach. The food is tasty and plentiful and masks, snorkels and bikes are available for guests' use. The owner here offers an interesting activity he calls 'pearl fishing'; for 2500 CFP you can dive down and pick a grafted oyster, open it then keep the pearl you find inside. On the ocean side of the motu at Rotoava, **Relais Marama** (☎ /fax 98 42 51; camping per person 1800 CFP, s/d 3800/5600 CFP, s/d bungalow 4400/6800 CFP) is a good-value option with four functional rooms and two bungalows with shared bathroom (cold water only). All prices include breakfast and half board is available for an extra 1800 CFP, or you can use the communal kitchen.

A beautiful garden, comfortable bungalows and a pretty beach make **Tokerau Village** (☎ 98 41 09; s/d bungalows with half board 12,000/22,000 CFP) another excellent choice.

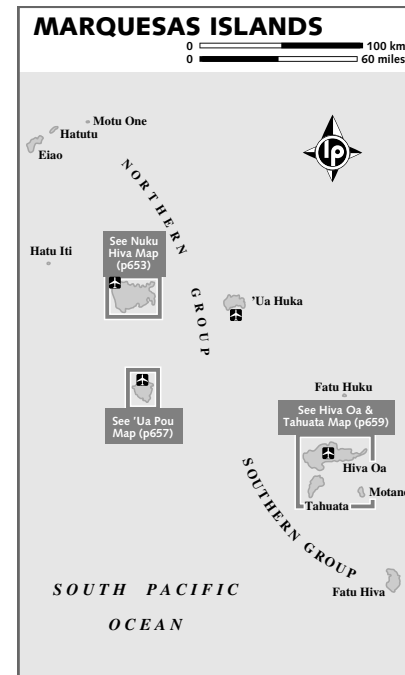
The airport is about 4km west of Rotoava. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 67 70 35/85; www.airtahiti.pf) flies Pape'ete-Fakarava every day from 16,500 CFP one way and Rangiroa-Fakarava every Tuesday and Friday from 5200 CFP.

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Vai-Aito* and *Mareva Nui* stop at Fakarava.

From Rotoava a track goes to the southwest of the atoll for about 40km. The guesthouses arrange boat excursions.

## MARQUESAS ISLANDS

Paul Gauguin, Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stephenson, Jack London... Over the last 170 years the Marquesas have been an escape for artists, writers, adventurers and musicians. And it's no wonder! What could be more inspiring than a land opulent in ripe fruit, smiling, strong people and green summits? A trip to the Marquesas is a journey that tickles the heart, questions the mind and tests the muscles. After laughing with the locals, learning about ancient traditions and hiking through the jungle to the desert of the interior, you too could return home on a creative high.



The Marquesas' dramatic coastline of cliffs, needles and peaks towering to more than 1000m is the result of waves smashing against the rock, unmitigated by any sheltering reefs or lagoons. This rugged landscape is ridged with deep valleys draped in luxuriant tropical vegetation.

The small numbers of visitors who do come here are privileged to experience the mysterious ambience and warm welcome of a place yet to be discovered by mass tourism.

The archipelago is half an hour ahead of Tahiti time.

## Transport

The Marquesas stretch over 350km and are divided into northern and southern groups. Only six of the 15 islands are inhabited and travelling within the archipelago can be difficult.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air Tahiti flies direct between Pape'ete and the Marquesas and, once weekly, from Rangiroa, in the Tuamotus, to Nuku Hiva. Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa, Ua Huka and Ua Pou have

**IMPORTANT! READ THIS...**

The Marquesas are *not* a beach destination, although there are a few enticing beaches. As appealing as these beaches may look, the reality is they are invariably infested with *nono* – a small, aggressive biting fly that locals will tell you is ‘fiercer than lions.’ Even the hardiest of adventurers can be brought to their knees (and the edges of their fingernails) by the nearly invisible, but undeniably hostile *nono*. Cover yourself in lightweight trousers and long-sleeve shirts and whip out the jungle juice. The bites of this little fly can leave welts that itch like no other. Fortunately they are found almost exclusively on beaches and do not carry diseases. Best to stay in the mountains and valleys where there are endless opportunities for hiking, horse riding, exploring the almost overwhelming number of archaeological sites or simply discovering this mysteriously wonderful culture.

airports. Three flights a week go from Nuku Hiva to 'Ua Pou, and one to 'Ua Huka.

The *Taporo IV* and *Aranui* serve the Marquesas, travelling from Pape'ete via the Tuamotus (Rangiroa and/or Takapoto). Taiohae, Hakahau and Atuona are the only places with quays where the ships can dock; at other ports unloading is done with *bonitiers* (whaleboats). For more on travelling by cargo ship, see p676.

**GETTING AROUND**

Getting around the Marquesas is difficult. The valleys are isolated, making it virtually impossible to tour by road, and only the main settlements have sealed roads. Some settlements have no landing stage and rough seas make landings challenging to say the least. The introduction of helicopter shuttles within the northern and southern groups has improved inter-island transport. **Héli Inter Marquises** (☎ 92 02 17; helico-nuku@mail.pf; Taiohae, Nuku Hiva) does convenient but costly charters on Nuku Hiva and flies three times a week to 'Ua Pou, and to 'Ua Huka on demand.

Inter-island travel is via Air Tahiti, helicopters, *bonitiers* and the cargo ships *Taporo IV* and *Aranui*. Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa are the hub islands; travel between these two is regular and reliable, but further afield can be more difficult. Don't expect things to go to schedule.

**NUKU HIVA**

pop 2632 / area 340 sq km

This huge (the second-largest in French Polynesia after Tahiti) sparsely populated island offers an astonishing range of terrain, from wind-swept cliffs to lush river valleys and deep bays to barren desert. The

main town of Taiohae has an enticing atmosphere that's part colonial port, part stone-age art hub.

With several flights a week from Pape'ete, Nuku Hiva is an easily accessible, active destination for hiking, horse riding and diving that's yet to be overrun with luxury resorts. The archaeological sites are some of the most impressive in French Polynesia and local art and culture is alive and well.

**Information**

The following are in Taiohae.

**Banque Socredo** (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 63; 🕒 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri) Currency exchange and ATM. Next to the Kovivi restaurant on the waterfront.

**Hospital** (Map p654; ☎ 91 20 00) Down a side road at the eastern end of the bay.

**Nuku Hiva visitor information centre** (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 73; marquises@mail.pf; 🕒 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Currently next to the Heli-Inter Marquise office and soon to move to a new building at the marina, this friendly office can help organise activities throughout the Marquesas.

**Post office** (Map p654; 🕒 7am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 2pm Fri) On the eastern side of the bay.

**Sights**

**Taiohae** (Map p654), the main centre, hugs Taiohae Bay for nearly 3.5km. Climb the Meau Valley for less than 1km to reach a restored **me'ae** (Marquesan equivalent of *marae*, where religious ceremonies were performed), with a small contemporary *tiki*. The **Herman Melville memorial** is west of the town; the *Moby Dick* author made nearby Taipivai famous in his book *Typee*. The restored **Tohua Koueva**, a sacred place venerated by the ancient Marquesans, is 1.5km up the Pakiu Valley on the road to Taipivai.

**NUKU HIVA**

Walk or drive along a picturesque track to the summit of 864m **Mt Muake** (Map p653). The cool **Toovii Plateau** (Map p653), crossed by the Taiohae–Terre Déserte (airport) track and nestled among mountains, looks surprisingly like the mountains of Bavaria.

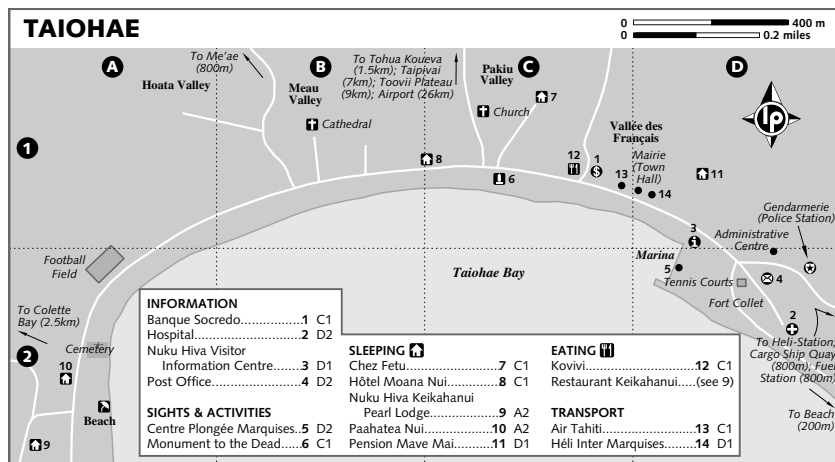
About 8km west of Taiohae, the **Hakau Valley** is one of the island's most imposing sights. The river has cut vertical walls of nearly 800m into the basalt and after rain the **Vaipo Waterfall** (Map p653), at 350m one of the highest in the world, thunders into a basin. From Taiohae, the valley can be reached by speedboat (the journey takes around 20 minutes), or on foot (two hours).

Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson succumbed to the charm of **Hatiheu** (Map p653) in the north of the island, 12km from Taipivai and 28km from Taiohae. The town's focal point is the wooden **church**, and the tiny seafront *mairie* houses a small **museum** with a collection of traditional Marquesan artefacts. From Taipivai, follow the main road inland and

west. The track tends to deteriorate as it climbs to the 490m **Teavaitapuhiva Pass** (Map p653), where you can enjoy some magnificent views. Shortly before Hatiheu is the **Hikokua archaeological site** (Map p653), where modern *tiki* have been added to the old ones, and the vast **Kamuihei & Tahakia archaeological site** (Map p653).

Peaceful **Anaho** (Map p653) can be reached by speedboat from Hatiheu (10 minutes) or on foot (45 minutes) along a picturesque track. The descent from Teavaimaooa Pass (218m), through a huge coconut plantation, is quite steep. A long white-sand beach runs beside one of the Marquesas best, sheltered anchorages. On the north coast, **Aakapa** (Map p653) is in a superb setting below high peaks; it can be reached on foot from Hatiheu or by speedboat.

Charming **Houmii** (Map p653), surrounded by luxuriant vegetation, is about 4km east of Taipivai. The hamlet has a picturesque small timber church and a stunning, but *nono*-plagued, white-sand beach.



## Activities

### DIVING

**Centre Plongée Marquises** (Map p654; ☎ 92 00 88), in Taiohae, is the Marquesas' dive centre. Encounters with dolphins, hammerhead sharks and many other species make up for less-than-amazing visibility (only about 20m).

### WALKING

There are good walking tracks all over the island. **Marquises Rando** (☎ 92 07 13; www.marquisesrando.com; trips from 5000 CFP) offers some amazing guided hikes ranging from half-day walks along the coast to three-day adventures across the island; it also offers a chance to observe some of Nuku Hiva's unique endemic bird species.

### HORSE RIDING

From Taiohae, it is easy to reach Colette Bay on horseback. Other popular rides are to the Vaipo waterfall, along the track between Hatiheu and Aakapa and on the Taiohae ridgeline. To hire horses, contact **Sabine Teikiteitini** (☎ 92 01 56; per day 7000 CFP) in Hatiheu.

## Sleeping

### TAIOHAE

**Hôtel Moana Nui** (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 30; pension moananui@mail.pf; s/d incl breakfast 7100/7800 CFP; 🚽) On the seafront in the centre of Taiohae, the seven spotless rooms have attached bathrooms (with hot water) and

lovely carved wooden doors opening onto minuscule terraces. Half board can be arranged.

**Pension Mave Mai** (Map p654; ☎ 92 08 10; pension-mavemai@mail.pf; s/d/t 7000/8000/9000 CFP; 🚽) A clean and inviting pension. All rooms have views over Taiohae Bay. Excursions by boat and 4WD to the main sights are offered. Half board adds 2500 CFP per person.

**Nuku Hiva Keikahanui Pearl Lodge** (Map p654; ☎ 92 07 10; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows 20,000-39,000 CFP; 🚽 🚿) Nuku Hiva's swankiest option comprises 20 bungalows overlooking the western edge of Taiohae Bay. The ambience is intimate and there's a tiny swimming pool.

**Chez Fetu** (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 66; r per person 2000 CFP) The single bungalow is rustic but clean and the elderly owners make you feel right at home. It's about 200m up a small dirt path that starts at the west side of the Kamake shop.

**Paahatea Nui** (Chez Justin et Julienne; Map p654; ☎ 92 00 97; paahateanui@mail.pf; bungalows per person 4400 CFP) Next to Hôtel Nuku Hiva Village, this option has a cluster of basic but large bungalows with bathroom in a garden full of pamplemousse trees. There's no restaurant but you can use the kitchen.

### AROUND THE ISLAND

**Ferme-auberge de Toovii** (☎ 79 07 49; ferme-auberge@mail.pf; Toovii Plateau; bungalow with half board per person 6000 CFP) In the heart of the island's main crater, this ferme-auberge (farmhouse

hotel) is completely isolated. There are five plain, clean bungalows with bathroom and terrace, and there is a dining room and a bar. Meals are prepared using meat from animals raised on the farm and vegetables from the farm's market garden.

**Chez Yvonne** (☎ 92 02 97; hinakonui@mail.pf; s/d 5000/7000 CFP, half board per person 8000 CFP) Nuku Hiva's first pension, run by Yvonne Katupa, the mayor of Hatiheu, is as clean and well managed as her village. At the time of writing, construction of new bungalows was underway. Meals are taken in the excellent Restaurant Hinakonui a few hundred metres down the road. Airport transfers for 4000 CFP one way need to be arranged in advance. All sorts of activities are available.

## Eating

**Kovivi** (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 85; set lunch 1400 CFP, dishes 1300-1800 CFP; 🚽 closed Sun & Mon evening) An excellent restaurant in Taiohae with friendly service and very reasonable prices. Dishes are mostly classic French with tropical influences but there is usually a sprinkling of local dishes on the menu as well. There is a decent wine list.

**Restaurant Hinakonui** (☎ 92 02 97; dishes 1600-2500 CFP; 🚽 lunch & dinner) In Hatiheu, this restaurant has a magnificent terrace that opens directly onto the seafront. The menu includes poisson cru, lobster and shrimp. To try the excellent Marquesan oven (pork and fish, cooked in an oven hollowed out of the ground), you need at least 12 people, so contact Chez Yvonne to see if a group will be visiting. Reservations are essential.

**Restaurant Keikahanui** (Map p654; ☎ 92 07 10; set lunch 1700 CFP, dinner 1200-3500 CFP; 🚽 breakfast, lunch & dinner) At the Nuku Hiva Keikahanui Pearl Lodge, this place in a lovely terraced area overlooking the bay has a varied menu with fish, meat and pasta dishes.

## Getting There & Away

**Air Tahiti** (☎ 92 03 41) is on the eastern side of the cove at Tahiohae and at the **Nuku Ataha airport** (☎ 92 01 45).

There are daily flights between Pape'ete and Nuku Hiva (from 28,000 CFP). There is also one direct flight per week from Rangiroa to Nuku Hiva (from 28,000 CFP) but no service going back to Rangiroa.

Within the Marquesas there are flights from Nuku Hiva to Hiva Oa (from 10,000

CFP), 'Ua Huka and 'Ua Pou (both from 6000 CFP). There are three Nuku Hiva-'Ua Huka return flights a week, and there are four Nuku Hiva-'Ua Pou return flights weekly.

**Héli Inter Marquises** (☎ 92 02 17) has regular helicopter shuttle services to 'Ua Pou (from 12,500 CFP one way) on Tuesdays or you can charter a flight to any of the other inhabited islands of the archipelago.

The *Aranui* and the *Taporo VI* stop at Nuku Hiva, as well as several cruise ships including the *Gauguin* and the *Tahitian Princess*, and dock at the end of the bay in Taiohae. The *Aranui* goes to Taipivai and Hatiheu as well as Taiohae.

## Getting Around

A network of tracks links the airport, Taiohae, Taipivai, Hooumi, Hatiheu and Aakapa.

It's only 18km from Taiohae to Nuku Ataha Airport at Terre Déserte but it takes at least two hours along the bumping, winding track. Approved 4WD taxis generally wait for each flight. It is nevertheless wise to book, either through your hotel or pension, or directly by contacting the taxi drivers: **Marie-Jeanne Ah-Scha** (☎ 92 01 84), **Rose Utia** (☎ 92 00 56), **Magalie Kimitete** (☎ 27 47 56) or **Leonard Hokaupoko** (☎ 74 44 60). It's also possible to hitch.

**Héli Inter Marquises** (☎ 92 02 17) provides a helicopter shuttle service coinciding with each Pape'ete-Nuku Hiva flight, going to Taiohae, Hatiheu and Taipivai. The trip costs 7500 CFP per person (half-fare for children under 11) and takes eight minutes. Reservations are essential.

You can rent 4WDs with or without a driver. From Taiohae, the whole vehicle (which will take four passengers) with a driver costs around 12,000 CFP to Taipivai, 20,000 CFP to Hatiheu and 25,000 CFP to Aakapa. The hotels in Taiohae will try to group their customers.

**Nuku Rent a Car** (☎ 92 08 87; 4WDs half/full day 8000/12,000 CFP, scooter half/full day 4000/5500 CFP, bikes per day 1500 CFP) is located on the Taiohae quay. Prices include insurance.

## 'UA HUKA

pop 582 / area 83 sq km

It's been dubbed the 'Island of Horses', and there are about as many horses on the island as people, but 'Ua Huka could just as

easily be called the island of sculptors. The island's only three villages: Vaipae, Hane and Hokatu, are filled with small workshops where rosewood, *tou* and coconut are fashioned into *tikis*, plates, bowls and the like. Besides being a fantastic place to buy carvings, 'Ua Huka's small size makes it easy to meet the artists themselves and to delve right in to Marquesan life. After a day or two the community seems to absorb you like a giant, friendly sponge; this is the kind of place that tempts you to do like Gauguin and devote your life to love, art and nature.

Amazingly, aside from *Aranui* passengers, most travellers bypass 'Ua Huka's charms for those of its more developed neighbours: Nuku Hiva and 'Ua Pou.

## Sights

The island's main town, **Vaipae**, is at the end of the very narrow, deep and aptly named Invisible Bay. When the *Aranui* comes in, it manoeuvres in a space the size of a handkerchief and ties up to the rock face. The **museum** (admission free, donations appreciated) in the town centre has great symbolic value for heritage-proud Marquesans and displays pestles, *tiki*, sculptures, *pahu* (drums), jewellery and period photos as well as a *ha'e* (traditional house). The **arboretum**, halfway between Vaipae and Hane, offers a striking contrast between the wealth of plants and the relative aridity of the island. Inside the gates of the arboretum is the small **wood museum** (admission free), which displays different types of wood from around the world and those indigenous to 'Ua Huka. Each village also has a *fare artisanal* (craft centre). **Hane** was said to be the first Polynesian settlement in the Marquesas and has a small marine museum. Less than 30 minutes' walk from the village, the **Meiaute archaeological site** is one of 'Ua Huka's major attractions, with *tiki*, *pae pae* (ancient house structures) and *me'ae*.

Peaceful **Hokatu** is about 3km east of Hane in a sheltered bay. *Tupapau* (ghosts) are said to haunt **Grotte aux Pas** (Footstep Cave), slightly west of Point Tekeho, between Vaipae and Haavei Bay.

Thousands of *kaveka* have taken up residence on the *motu* of **Hemeni** and **Teuaua**, near the southwestern point of 'Ua Huka.

'Ua Huka has the Marquesas' most beautiful beaches, although you still can't

escape the *nono*. Accessible by speedboat or 4WD, **Manihina Beach**, between Vaipae and the airport, is fringed with fine white sand. **Hatuana Beach** is in the west of the island; there are petroglyphs nearby. **Haavei Beach** is a beautiful inlet that belongs to the Lichtlé family; ask them (they live on the coconut plantation) for permission before plunging in. **Motu Papa**, a popular picnic and snorkelling spot, is just offshore from the airport, between Vaipae and Hane. A speedboat drops you about 50m offshore and you have to swim ashore.

## Activities

It's a beautiful three-hour **walk** inland from Vaipae or Hane to the **Vaikivi petroglyphs**. The path climbs the long face of the ancient volcano caldera. Take a guide (3000 CFP to 5000 CFP), as it's a long way and the trail isn't marked; ask about guides at your *pension*. The coastal route between Haavei and Hokatu offers spectacular views and is worth doing.

The most popular **horse ride** is from Vaipae to Hane, passing the arboretum, airport and windswept arid plateaus before reaching the cliff road, which plunges towards Hane. A ride typically costs 6500 CFP, with guide (ask at your accommodation).

## Sleeping & Eating

'Ua Huka has a surprising number of guest-houses; all offer half board, with good food and Marquesan specialities.

**Mana Tupuna Village** (☎ 92 61 01; manatupuna@mail.pf; s/d 5000/9000 CFP, with half board 7000/13,000 CFP) Perched on the side of a flowery hill, this place has three local-style bungalows on stilts, elegantly arranged with covered veranda, mezzanine and bathroom. There are beautiful views over the valley below. The restaurant is airy, colourful and inviting.

**Le Reve Marquisienne** (☎ 92 61 84; revemarquisienne@mail.pf; s/d 9500/11,500 CFP) Tucked away in the valley of Vaipae, the bungalows here are the newest and most comfortable (although remote) option on 'Ua Huka. Owner Marie-France really goes out of her way to take care of her guests. Meals can be arranged.

**Chez Maurice & Delphine** (☎ 92 60 55; bungalows per person with half board 6000 CFP) With wonderful views of Motu Hane, this place has three bungalows with verandas, one of which

can accommodate six people. Owner Maurice is also one of the best sculptors on the island.

**Auberge Hitikau** (☎ /fax 92 61 74; s/d 2500/3500 CFP, with half board 6000/10,500 CFP) This place has four basic but clean double rooms with shared bathroom (cold water only). The grandmotherly owner will try to fatten you up on her exceptionally good Marquesan cooking: the guesthouse has the only real restaurant on the island. Local specialities have pride of place: goat, pork, fish in coconut milk, *kaveka*-egg omelettes (in the right season) and some delicious cakes. Bookings are essential.

**Snack Christelle** (☎ 92 60 34) The industrious Christelle, Air Tahiti representative and *pension* owner, also runs a little snack place in Vaipae. Most of what she makes (*poisson cru*, chow mein, sandwiches) is delivered around the island and can be found in the local shops from around 10am. Otherwise you can call in advance to order a meal there.

## Getting There & Away

There are three flights a week to Nuku Hiva (from 6000 CFP) and Pape'ete (from 30,400 CFP). Contact the **Air Tahiti representative** (☎ 92 60 85) in Vaipae.

You can organise transfers to 'Ua Pou or Nuku Hiva by speedboat through Maurice Rootuehine at **Chez Maurice & Delphine** (☎ 92 60 55). The *Aranui* and the *Taporo VI* stop at 'Ua Huka.

## Getting Around

A 13km track links Vaipae to Hokatu via Hane; the stretch from Vaipae to Hane is surfaced. Hane is also accessible by the track from Vaipae. The airport is midway between Vaipae and Hane. Transfers are usually included in *pension* prices.

The *pension* owners can take you by 4WD to visit the villages (10,000 CFP per day).

## 'UA POU

pop 2110 / area 125 sq km

'Ua Pou is a paradox: a dry, desert island with oasis-like valleys bursting with enough tropical fruit to feed 10 times its population. Twelve obelisk-like niches of basalt, once the cores of 12 now defunct volcanoes create an unforgettable skyline that is often photographed for the classic postcard shot



of the Marquesas. It's only 45km south of Nuku Hiva, but it feels a world away.

Tourism has gone a little backwards on 'Ua Pou: archaeological sites that were once cleared and maintained are blocked by barbed wire and marked as private property; a museum constructed in the centre of the main village of Hakahau is now used as a temporary office for the mayor. With the Marquesas Festival of 2007 being hosted by 'Ua Pou, one can only hope the island will put its cultural richness back to full value and properly welcome the rest of the archipelago.

## Information

**Banque Socredo** (Hakahau) In the Hakahau *mairie*. It changes notes and travellers cheques and does credit-card cash advances.

**Medical centre** In the south of Hakahau.

**Post office** To the west of the bay.

## Sights

The admirably restored **Tenei pae pae** in the middle of Hakahau is a platform of massive stone blocks supporting a shelter

of plant material. The stone-and-timber **Catholic church** in the south of town displays noteworthy sculptures by local artisans.

In the Hakamoui Valley the **Mataautea archaeological site** includes *pae pae*, bas reliefs and *tiki*. From Hakahau take the road to Hohoi for about 3km, take the left fork descending eastwards towards the ocean and 1km further on, on the right and set back from the track, is a *pae pae*.

Time seems to have stood still in picturesque little **Hohoi** in the southeast of the island, 13km from Hakahau. It has two *pae pae* and a curious pagoda-shaped church. The famous flowering pebbles of Hohoi, pieces of phonolite that have crystallised to form amber-coloured flower shapes, can be found on the beach. The **Hakaohoka Valley archaeological site** stretches back 2km from Hohoi Bay. There's a map of the site on Hohoi's pebbly beach, where you should pay 1000 CFP to the site custodian.

Charming **Hakahetau** in the island's northwest is noted for its red church tower near the waterfront. A 15km track snakes between the bare plateaus of the island's northeast, and along the section running between Hakahau and Aneou airport you will see wild horses and goats on either side of the road.

Minute **Hakatao** is the most remote place on the island and is accessible by boat or by the track from Hohoi. **Hakamaii**, with its one street and pretty, bright stone church, is only accessible by boat. The tiny end-of-the-world village of **Haakuti** is at the end of the 22km track from Hakahau.

'Ua Pou has some good beaches (complete with *nono*). White-sand **Anahoa Beach** is a 25-minute scenic walk east of Hakahau. **Hakanai Bay** is a popular picnic spot; it's known as Plage aux Requins (Shark Beach). The black-sand **Puamau Beach** is popular with young surfers.

There are many hiking possibilities, including simply following the tracks from one village to another. If you intend to go off-track it's best to take a guide. For **horse riding** contact any of the pensions.

## Sleeping & Eating

All places to stay and eat are in Hakahau.

**Restaurant-Pension Pukué** (☎/fax 92 50 83; r with half board per person 6000 CFP; 🍷) This is an airy, artistically designed place with views

over Hakahau Bay. The restaurant serves exceptionally good food and the owners, well versed in Marquesan history and culture, organise excursions for 15,000 CFP per person.

**Pension Vehine** (☎/fax 92 53 21; r/bungalows per person 3500/4500 CFP) The most centrally located 'Ua Pou pension, this place has two simple rooms in a house and two newer bungalows. The owner is the president of the Federation of Marquesan culture and the family can organise a variety of guided hiking excursions for around 1000 CFP per person. The place has an attached restaurant. Half board costs an additional 2000 CFP per person.

## Getting There & Away

The **Air Tahiti office** (Hakahau ☎92 53 41, Aneou airport 92 51 08) is in Hakahau, or at Aneou airport on flight days. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday a flight goes to Nuku Hiva (from 6000 CFP) with connections to Pape'ete (from 31,000 CFP). Two flights a week go to Atuona on Hiva Oa via Nuku Hiva (from 7500 CFP).

Héli Inter Marquises, based in Nuku Hiva, flies between Taiohae and Hakahau (12,500 CFP) on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

The **Aranui** and **Taporo IV** serve 'Ua Pou; the **Aranui** stops at Hakahau and Hakahetau.

## Getting Around

On the east coast, a track connects Hakahau with Hohoi (13km) and continues to Hakatao on the west coast. On the west coast, Hakahau is connected to Hakahetau (15km), Haakuti (22km) and Hakamaii. The track doesn't make a complete circuit. Aneou airport is about 10km west of Hakahau, and if you've booked accommodation your hosts will collect you. Transfers cost about 2000 CFP per person return.

Ask at your pension about transport by car. Expect to pay 10,000 CFP to go to Hakamoui and Hohoi, and 15,000 CFP to go to Hakahetau and Haakuti.

## HIVA OA

pop 1991 / area 320 sq km

Once home to Gauguin's *Maison du Jour* (House of Pleasure), Hiva Oa – carpeted in lavish flora, cut by crystal-clear rivers and



framed by lofty peaks – is so enchanting it could entice even the most artistically challenged to paint a masterpiece. This island is the definition of abundance. Wild pigs and goats are hunted in the mountains, tuna and swordfish are caught in the fertile waters and fruit is so plentiful that most of it falls to the ground, bursting with ripeness.

As is the case in the rest of the Marquesas, it's a hot and bumpy ride to get anywhere. A ridge forms a spine across the length of the island and has an average height of 800m. The only road weaves up and around this spine and leads to the most striking archaeological sites in French Polynesia.

## Information

Most services are in Atuona.  
**Hiva Oa visitor information centre** (☎ 7.30-11.30am Mon-Fri) In a small roadside office next to the museum.  
**Hospital** (☎ 92 73 75) Behind the mayor's office.  
**Post office** (☎ 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-3.30pm Fri, 7.30-8.30am Sat) Next to the mayor's office, it has a fax and Internet service and sells phonecards.

## Sights ATUONA

This tidy town has the antiquated air of a tropical subprefecture. It's a place of pilgrimage for fans of Gauguin, who lived here from 1901 to 1903, and Jacques Brel, who was a resident until 1978. At the north of Taaoa

Bay, at the mouth of the Vaioa River, the town stretches up the valley for about 1.5km. The **Cultural Centre** (adult/child 600/300 CFP; ☎ 8am-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11am Sat), which follows the life of Paul Gauguin through his letters and, of course, his art, is well worth a visit. Once you've made a full round of the paintings, timeline and literature, head outside and down a small path to the **Maison du Jouis**, a replica of Gauguin's house with some works of local artists displayed inside.

Gauguin and Brel are buried in the small **Calvaire Cemetery**, which dominates Atuona Bay.

It's a pleasant walk into the Faakua Valley to see the **Tehueto petroglyphs**, where stylised, horizontal human figures have been carved into an enormous basalt block. Near the village of Taaoa, 7km southwest of Atuona, another site, **Tohua Upeke**, has more than 1000 *pae pae*, some of which are restored.

#### AROUND THE ISLAND

The village of **Puamau**, a 2½-hour drive east from Atuona, has an elegant seafront with a black-sand beach and is close to the most beautiful archaeological site in the Marquesas. In the village, **Tohua Pehe Kua** is the tomb of the valley's last chief.

Tiny **Hanapaaoa** is in an area of wild beauty two hours' drive northwest from Atuona. Walk 15 minutes southeast to the strange **Tiki Moe One**, adorned with a carved crown of flowers; you'll probably need a guide to find it.

There are **beaches** at Atuona, Puamau, Hanamenu and Hanatekuua.

#### Activities

Around Atuona there are relatively easy **walks** to the Tehueto petroglyphs and to the Jacques Brel Memorial. For hiking contact **Hiva Oa Rando-Trek** (☎ 20 40 90; hikes from 5000 CFP), which leads more interesting hikes than you'll find offered through the *pensions*. If you'd rather go **horse riding**, contact **Hamau Ranch** (☎ 92 70 57; per 2½hr 7000 CFP), which is the most professional ranch in the Marquesas. The guide, Paco, is knowledgeable about local flora and legends and can also take adventurous, confirmed riders on a pig hunt.

#### Sleeping

Accommodation is mainly concentrated in Atuona and its surrounding area. Unless otherwise noted, credit cards are accepted.

**Pension Tahauku** (☎ 72 34 73; s/d 6000/8000 CFP) Nestled in a garden of lemon trees, hibiscus and roaming horses, the bungalows here are large and tastefully decorated. It's a friendly, family atmosphere. Meals can be taken at the very good snack bar on the premises (breakfast 1000 CFP). No credit cards.

**Pension Gauguin** (☎ 92 73 51; pens.gauguin@mail.pf; s/d with half board 7000/13,000 CFP) The spotless rooms at this centrally located *pension* feature big, bright windows. There is a relaxed ambience, a breezy communal area and reasonably priced excursions on offer.

**Hankeré Pearl Lodge** (☎ 92 75 87; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows from 24,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) Even though it's the most luxurious hotel in the Marquesas, it still feels intimate and unpretentious. The 20 bungalows have unforgettable bay views. Excursions here are more expensive than elsewhere, so you're better off organizing activities through the visitor information centre in Atuona or through other *pensions*.

**Pension Moehau** (☎ 92 72 69; moehaupension@mail.pf; s/d 5500/7500 CFP, with half board 9000/15,000 CFP) Four modern, agreeable rooms face an ocean-view terrace while four more face the dark hill behind. Ask for an oceanside room!

#### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Pension Kanahau** (☎ 91 71 31; pensionkanahau@mail.pf; s/d 9500/11,500 CFP, with half board 14,000/20,000 CFP) 'Kanahau' means good, beautiful and delicious in Marquesan and this pension is all these things and more. There are superb views from the elegant, spacious bungalows and the food (served under a mango tree) is gourmet. The owners do such an all-out job of taking care of their guests you begin to wonder if the Tahiti Tourism Bureau isn't experimenting with some secret new drug that turns them into superhosts. No credit cards.

#### Eating

In Atuona, you will find several well-stocked grocery stores including the colonial-style, picture-worthy Magazine Gauguin. There are two small grocery shops in Puamau.

**Snack Tahuaku** (☎ 72 34 73; dishes 800-1000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Great food, good ambience

and even better prices! You have no excuse (except maybe the 2km walk from town) not to eat here.

**Hoa Nui** (☎ 92 73 63; set meal 2500 CFP; ☎ by reservation only) This restaurant specialises in Marquesan cuisine and you need to reserve about a day in advance. Make sure the food will be Marquesan when you book because the Chinese cuisine is considerably less tasty.

**Restaurant Moehau** (☎ 92 72 69; pizzas 1100-1700 CFP, dishes 1500-2800 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's worth stopping in one night for a pizza at this terrace restaurant. There are also good fish and meat dishes available as well as wine (from 1800 CFP a bottle) and cocktails.

#### Getting There & Away

**Air Tahiti** (☎ 92 73 41; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) is in Atuona next to Banque Socredo. It offers flights (not always direct) to Pape'ete (from 31,000 CFP), Nuku Hiva (from 10,000 CFP), 'Ua Pou (from 7500 CFP) and 'Ua Huka (from 7500 CFP).

The **Aranui** and **Taporo IV** stop at Hiva Oa. **Leo Rohi** (☎ /fax 92 76 57) has a fast, comfortable and secure *bonitier* that can be chartered. It costs 20,000 to 25,000 CFP for an Atuona-Vaitahu/Hapatoni (Tahuata) return trip, around 15,000 CFP for the Atuona-Motopu (Tahuata) return trip and 45,000 CFP for an Atuona-Hanavave (Fatu Hiva) return trip. Find out which charters are being organised during your stay and you may be able to share the costs.

#### Getting Around

The airport is 13km from Atuona. If you have booked accommodation your host will collect you. It's also possible to hitch.

**David Location** (☎ 92 72 87), **Atuona Rent-a-Car** (☎ 92 76 07, 72 17 17) and **Hiva Oa Location** (☎ 73 83 83, 91 70 60) all rent 4WDs for 15,000 CFP a day, with unlimited kilometres and insurance included. There's a petrol station at the cargo-ship quay at Tahauku Bay.

Excursions by 4WD cost about 10,000 CFP to Taaoa, 12,000 CFP to Hanaiapa, 20,000 CFP to Hanapaaoa and 20,000 CFP to Puamau: these prices are for the whole car so it's cheaper to go with a bigger group. For information contact your *pension*.

#### TAHUATA

pop 671 / area 70 sq km

Just as lush but not as steep, Tahuata (meaning 'sunrise' in Marquesan) is Hiva Oa's shy little sister. Separated from Hiva Oa by the 4km-wide Bordelais Channel, it is the smallest inhabited island in the archipelago. With more and more day tours being conducted from Hiva Oa, Tahuata's accessibility is increasing, bringing in the possibility of more *pensions* in the near future.

For tourist information, contact the Vaitahu **mairie** (☎ 92 92 19) on the seafront. There is no bank. The post office and infirmary are in Vaitahu.

On the hill that dominates tiny Vaitahu village are a few remains of the **French fort**. The seafront stone **Catholic church** includes a wooden statue which is a masterpiece of modern Marquesan art. A small Polynesian art and history **museum** is in the *mairie*. Copra-drying sheds are dotted here and there, and brightly coloured traditional *vaka* (outrigger canoes) are lined up on the shore. Some top-rate Marquesan sculptors work in Vaitahu.

**Hapatoni** curves around a wide bay several kilometres south of Vaitahu by boat (15 minutes) or bridleway. It has a 19th-century royal road and a magnificent **me'ae**.

**Motopu**, to the north of Vaitahu, has a few dozen inhabitants and is accessible by 4WD by the track that crosses the island's interior.

**Hanamoenoa Bay** is a favourite anchorage for yachts between March and August.

The 17km track that joins Vaitahu and Motopu is ideal for **horse riding**; ask the locals about hiring horses.

Every village has one or two small shops. A clean and friendly establishment, **Pension Amatea** (☎ 92 92 84; r per person 4000 CFP, with half board 6500 CFP) is also the only place on Tahuata that serves food (although you'll have to reserve in advance). Marguerite, the owner, can help arrange any activity as well as transportation.

The **Te Pua O Mioi** (☎ 92 92 19), the communal *bonitier*, runs a Vaitahu-Atuona (Hiva Oa) ferry service on Tuesday and Friday (4000 CFP return). It departs at about 6.30am from Tahuata and usually returns at around noon on Tuesdays and 3.30pm on Fridays from Atuona. **Pension Amatea**

(☎ 92 92 84) can help arrange passage with private *bonitiers*.

It costs between 22,000 and 28,000 CFP to charter a boat between Vaitahu or Hapatoni and Atuona (Hiva Oa). The *Aranui* and *Taporo VI* stop at Tahuata.

A 17km track, accessible by 4WD vehicles, crosses the island's interior to link Vaitahu with Motopu. It costs 15,000 CFP for one day's hire with driver. Hapatoni is less than 15 minutes from Vaitahu by speedboat. It costs about 6000 CFP to hire a boat between Vaitahu and Hapatoni return, and 7000 to 10,000 CFP between Vaitahu and Hanahevane Bay.

## FATU HIVA

pop 631 / area 80 sq km

Fatu Hiva is the island of superlatives: the most remote, the furthest south, the wettest, the lushest and the most authentic. It was also the first in the archipelago to be seen by the Spanish navigator Mendaña, in 1595. He christened it Santa Magdalena after the saint whose day it was.

With no landing strip and only poorly serviced by the *bonitiers* from Hiva Oa (75km), Fatu Hiva's untouched paradise remains, well, untouched. The phallic skyline of Hanavave Bay caused it to be named Baie des Verges (Bay of Penises). Outraged, the missionaries hastened to add a redeeming 'i' to make the name Baie des Vierges (Bay of Virgins). At sunset, it is drenched in purple and the surrounding peaks give off bronze reflections; an entrancing spectacle that has intoxicated hundreds of international yachties.

There is a post office in Omoa and an infirmary or first-aid post in both Omoa and Hanavave. There is no bank.

## Sights

The red-roofed, white church with its slender spire dominates **Omoa**. Ask someone to take you to the giant **petroglyph** at the edge of the village: it's an enormous fish carved on a block of rock.

**Hanavave** is on the seashore, at the mouth of a steep-sided valley leading into the **Baie des Vierges**, a favourite of passing yachties. You can walk (four hours) or ride to the bay from Omoa along the island's only track. It's not particularly difficult except for the climb to the pass separating the two valleys.

## Sleeping & Eating

Apart from the *pensions*, eating options on Fatu Hiva are limited to a few small grocers' shops. The following *pensions* are in Omoa.

**Chez Lionel Cantois** (☎ /fax 92 81 84; s/d/bungalow 4500/6000/8500 CFP) Beside the river in the middle of a beautiful tropical garden it has one well-equipped bungalow with bathroom (hot water) or rooms in the owner's house. Meals can be arranged.

**Pension Heimata** (☎ 92 80 58; half/full board per person 4000/5500 CFP) This place has two well-kept rooms with shared bathroom (with cold water).

## Getting There & Away

Fatu Hiva is the most difficult island to get to in the Marquesas. Try the *Aranui* and the *Taporo VI*. In Atuona on Hiva Oa it's possible to charter a private *bonitier* or to hop on the one that takes the school children home during school holidays; inquire at the **mayor's office** (☎ 92 73 32) in Atuona. To charter a *bonitier*, call **Leo Rohi** (☎ 92 76 57) in Atuona or on Fatu Hiva contact **Joel Coulom** (☎ 92 81 17) or **Xavier Gilmore** (☎ 92 81 38). Expect to pay at least 45,000 CFP for the whole boat return trip (including the boat's return even if you are not on it).

## Getting Around

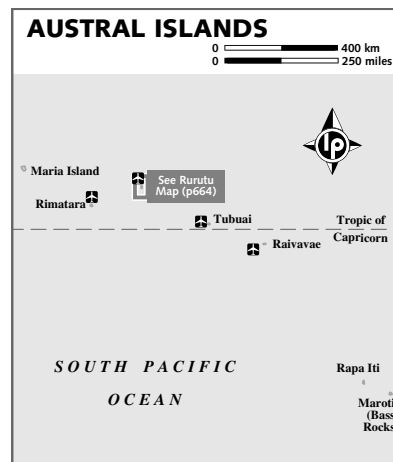
The only dirt road is 17km long and links Hanavave with Omoa. As it is impassable in wet weather, journeys between villages are often by motorised *piroque*.

Ask at your *pension* about renting a 4WD; expect to pay 12,000 CFP a day with driver.

On Fatu Hiva, speedboats have not yet ousted the traditional outrigger canoes, which take three to four passengers. The lone concession to modernity is the low-powered outboards. Expect to pay 6000 to 7000 CFP between Omoa and Hanavave; ask your *pension* for information.

# AUSTRAL ISLANDS

The Australs are like tropical island impostors; they do *look* warm. Coconut palms line the turquoise coasts and bananas flourish alongside vast taro fields. Don't let it fool you. Unless you arrive here in



the months between December and April, you'd better have a couple of sweaters and some warm socks in your bag. You won't need any air-con down here and the climate is perfect for activities such as hiking and cycling.

Polynesian culture is alive and well in this remote corner and this is a great place to meet local people, eat healthy meals and settle into a quiet, yet sometimes chilly, island rhythm. The archipelago is remarkably varied, from the limestone caverns of Rurutu to the Bora Bora-like lagoon of Raivavae to the fertile slopes and windy bays of Tubuai. Tourism is developing, but at a pace that is well managed by the proud inhabitants.

## Transport

Air Tahiti flies to Rurutu and Tubuai about four times weekly in the low season and five times weekly in the high season. One-way fares are Tahiti-Rurutu from 19,000 CFP, Tahiti-Tubuai from 21,000 CFP, Tahiti-Raivavae from 24,000 CFP, Rurutu-Tubuai from 9500 CFP and Tubuai-Raivavae from 9500 CFP. Rimatara had completed building an airstrip at the time of writing but no flights had yet been scheduled. Getting to Rapa Iti, over 1000km south of Tahiti, is a real adventure.

The cargo ship *Tuhaa Pae II* does three trips a month to the Australs and accepts passengers. For more on travelling by cargo ship, see p676.

## RURUTU

pop 2015 / area 36 sq km

A magical island of migrating whales, abundant vegetation, limestone caves and smiling faces, Rurutu is the gem of the Australs. It's unlike the high islands of other archipelagos of French Polynesia in that it is not an extinct volcanic cone but a *makatea*, a massive chunk of coral reef that was lifted up to form an island. Because of this, the topography is startlingly different: sheer cliffs of pockmarked coral rise up around the coast, sometimes housing giant caverns filled with ferns and stalactites. There is a handful of ancient *marae*, some well preserved, and the locals will proudly tell you about their myths and history. A continuous reef that is rarely more than a stone's throw from the shoreline fringes the island, so there's no lagoon as such. Even so, there are more beaches here than most islands in French Polynesia, and the sand is not the yellow-white of Bora Bora's or Mo'orea's beaches, but a bright white of bleached coral.

## Orientation & Information

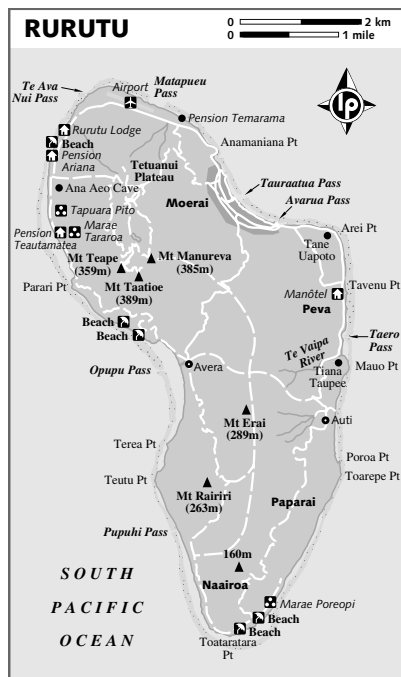
Of the three main villages, Moeraï is the largest. It is 4km south of the airport and has the cargo-ship dock, a post office with an Internet connection (220 CFP for 15 minutes), a Banque Socredo and a few small shops. About one-third of the scenic 36km road around the island is sealed.

## Sights & Activities

Moeraï has a picturesque little **Protestant church** dating from between 1865 and 1872. French Administrator Éric de Bisschop, the island's most famous resident, who dedicated himself to perilous voyages in unsuitable craft, is remembered by a simple **gravestone** in the cemetery.

Migrating whales come close to shore between July and October. Watch from the roadside observation platforms or swim with the whales on a diving trip with the **Raie Manta Club** (☎ 96 84 80; half-day per person 10,000 CFP).

Drive or cycle (it's *very* hilly) around the island to see the evidence that Rurutu began life as an upthrust reef. Going clockwise from Moeraï, pass the whale-watching tower near **Arei Point**, which has one of Rurutu's impressive elevated reef cliffs, then



climb inland and drop back to the coast at the village of **Auti**. The road then runs along what was once the ancient lagoon bottom; the range of hills to the west is the old barrier reef. Near **Toataratara Point**, the southern tip of the island, are some lovely **beaches** and the small **Marae Poreopi**.

After climbing north then dropping into pretty **Avera** village the road passes the remnants of once-extensive **Marae Vitaria**. About 1km further, the huge **Ana Aeo Cave** has abundant stalactites and stalagmites. The road passes **Are Taofe**, a coffee house where you can taste and buy the local distinctive coffee. A **whale-watching tower** is on the outskirts of Moerai.

The gentle slopes of the island's interior are perfect for **walking**; it's easy to climb the three highest peaks, Taatioe (389m), Manureva (385m) and Teape (359m).

### Sleeping & Eating

You can't go wrong on Rurutu; every option has something special. Airport transfers are free for guests and, unless otherwise mentioned, credit cards are not accepted.

**Manôtel** (☎ 93 02 26; manotel@mail.pf; s/d/tr bungalows 6000/6500/7000 CFP, half/full board per person 3000/5500 CFP) This place is in the Peva area on the east coast, near Moerai. There are four clean, very pretty bungalows with fan, bathroom and terrace, across the road from a long stretch of beach. The garden is blooming with colours and the welcome is charming.

**Rurutu Lodge** (☎ 94 02 15; rurutulodge@mail.pf; s/d bungalows 8500/14,000 CFP; 📺 📶) This place in the northeast of the island is the biggest and most upmarket on Rurutu, recently acquired and given a complete remodel by the owners of the Raie Manta Dive club. You won't find as much of a connection with the locals here but it is beautifully designed with authentic Polynesian detail, has a swimming pool, tennis courts, flower-filled gardens and a decent beach. Credit cards are accepted. There's a two-night minimum.

**Pension Ariana** (☎ 94 06 69; pensionariana@hotmail.com; s/d/bungalows 4000/5000/5500 CFP, half/full board per person 3500/5500 CFP) In a labyrinth of lush gardens and coconut palms, descending to a private beach of white sand, this *pension* has four rooms with shared bathroom in its main building, and seven rustic, colourful bungalows with private bathroom. Cackling Ariana is a likable character who keeps her staff and her guests in good order. It's also in the northeast of the island.

**Pension Teautamatea** (☎ 93 02 93; pension.teautamatea@free.fr; s/d with half board 7500/12,000 CFP) There are six extremely clean rooms at this excellent *pension*, four with bathroom. The setting is enchanting: a coconut plantation (in which Marae Tararoa is located) stretches behind the building and you only have to cross a track to get to the beach. It's in the island's west.

**Snack Chez Paulette** (dishes 1000 CFP) The only snack place on the island, but it's a good one. It has no sign and is hidden behind a gate right across from the boat quay in Moerai. Regular snack fare is offered plus a few extras such as stuffed bell peppers and a luscious chocolate cake.

### Getting Around

Most pensions rent bicycles for about 1000 to 1600 CFP a day. Pension Temarama also rents a 4WD for 9000 CFP for eight hours.

### RAIVAVAE

Often cited as one of the most beautiful islands in the Pacific, Raivavae (rye-vie-vie) has a lagoon that rivals that of Bora Bora's, a mountainous interior dominated by square-topped Mt Hiro (437m) and five quiet, colourful villages full of flowers. The airstrip opened in 2001 and this somniferous paradise has yet to be discovered or exploited in any way by the tourist industry. That said, there really isn't that much to do once you've been around the island and visited the lagoon. The quay is at Rairua as is a post office, infirmary and gendarmerie. There are little stores everywhere along the coast road: these are well stocked with canned goods but there is little produce available. For fish you'll need to contact the local fisherman.

Most of Raivavae's *marae* have been destroyed to create taro fields, used as foundations for houses or simply been forgotten in the bush. **Marae Paomaovao**, across the street from the airport, gets periodically cleared but it's not always visible if it hasn't been.

Raivavae is most famous for its two giant stone *tiki*, now in museums on Tahiti. Legend states that a third *tiki*, the son of the two giant ones, leapt from the boat when it was being taken away with its parents and now lies on the bottom of the lagoon near the boat quay. So far there is no solid evidence as to whether this third *tiki* really exists. The only verifiable remaining *tiki* stands neglected and overgrown in a private garden just to the west of Mahanatoa.

All *pensions* offer excursions to *motu* (2000 to 6000 CFP), Mt Hiro (2000 CFP) plus a free tour of the island by car and free bikes for stays of more than three days. You'll get laughed at if you ask about credit cards. Offering two clean coconut-thatched bungalows on one of Raivavae's best beaches, **Tama Resort** (☎ 95 42 52; r or bungalow with half/full board per person 8000/10,000 CFP) is a solid option. The owners at well-kept **Chez Linda & Nelson** (☎ /fax 95 44 25; s/d with half-board 7000/13,000 CFP) just might be the friendliest in the world. At the time of research the place had just three rooms with shared bathroom, but four Polynesian-style bungalows were under construction. **Pension Moana** (☎ /fax 95 42 66; s/d/t 2500/4000/5000 CFP, half/full board per person 3000/5000 CFP) sits on a fantastic and secluded peninsula. It has three simple rooms.

Grandma cooks up plenty of local treats for guests and is a respected hat weaver.

*Tuhaa Pae II* sails by about twice a month.

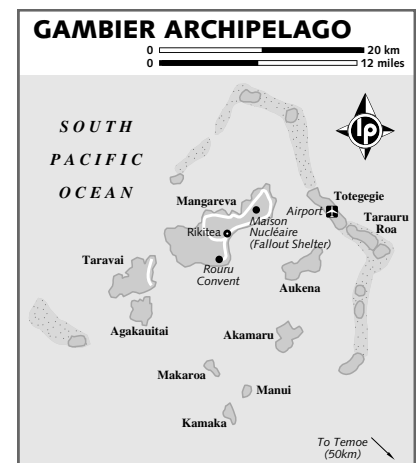
## THE GAMBIER ARCHIPELAGO

Yep, this is about as close as you can get to the ends of the earth. The most remote of the French Polynesian island groups, the Gambier Archipelago lies at the extreme southeast end of the long arc of the Tuamotus. On a map the islands appear to be a part of the Tuamotu atolls, but in fact these are high islands that are entirely different from their neighbours. Well to the south, the islands' climate is relatively mild and in winter it can actually get cool.

The few tourists that make it out this way rarely leave disappointed. The surprising landscapes of the archipelago offer a condensed version of the entire country: rocky peaks, a lagoon clear as glass, white-sand islets and beaches, thriving coral, not to mention a fascinating history and plenty of interesting monuments. If only it wasn't so darned expensive to get here...

### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

A 90km coral barrier protects the wide lagoon. Twenty-five *motu* are dotted along its northern edge and three passes lead into





the lagoon. Ten volcanic high islands are scattered in the lagoon but all but a handful of people live on Mangareva, the largest island.

Gambier Islands time is one hour ahead of Tahiti time. Rikitea, the town on Mangareva, has shops and a post office.

## TRANSPORT

**Air Tahiti** (☎ 97 82 65) flies to the Gambier Archipelago from Pape'ete (from 56,000 CFP return) about once a week.

From Tahiti, the cargo ships *Nuku Hau* and *Taporo V* sail via the eastern Tuamotus to the Gambier Archipelago about every three weeks. For more on travelling by cargo ship, see p676.

The airport is on Motu Totegegie, on the northeastern side of the lagoon. A communal ferry from Mangareva meets every flight; the journey takes 45 minutes and costs 500 CFP.

*Pension* owners can organise island tours by boat and visits to the major sites. On Mangareva there is a small network of walking tracks. It's possible to bike the 23km around the island but parts are very steep.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At the upper part of Rikitea, on the slopes of Mt Duff (441m), the **Cathedral of St Michael**, built between 1839 and 1848, is the ultimate symbol of Laval's single-minded obsession (see p583 for more about Laval). It can accommodate 1200 people – several times today's population! Built on the site of Mangareva's greatest *marae*, the cathedral has twin blue-trimmed towers and an altar decorated with mother-of-pearl.

Other Laval constructions include the coastal **watchtowers & turret**, the sole remains of the 'palace' he built for the island's last king. **Rouru Convent** once housed 60 Mangarevan nuns, although it's said Laval would hide every woman on the island in the convent whenever a whaling ship docked. An overgrown path leads uphill to the convent, passing a hollowed-out rock pool known as the **Queen's Bath**.

On the north coast is the rusting ruin of the **maison nucléaire**, a fallout shelter from the 1966–74 atmospheric testing period at Moruroa, 400km away. Islanders were squeezed into this windowless tomb for up to three days at a time; it's no wonder *'faaore*

*te atomi'* (no nuclear testing) is painted on Mangarevan walls.

## SLEEPING & EATING

No-one takes credit cards on Mangareva so you'll need to bring plenty of cash.

**Chez Bianca & Benoît** (☎/fax 97 83 76; Rikitea; s/d with half board 9500/15,000 CFP, s/d bungalows with half board 15,000/20,000 CFP) This place is 1km from the quay and offers fine views across the bay. The owners are dynamic and helpful and the food has a good reputation. There are three rooms with shared bathroom (with hot water) and four comfortable bungalows with attached bathroom. It is closed every year during the month of June.

**Chez Jojo** (☎ 97 82 61; r with half board per person 7000 CFP, s/d bungalows with half board 11,000/18,000 CFP) In an enchanting, lagoonside setting, 5km from the quay, this place has two Nordic-looking bungalows and one clean but economical room with shared bathroom in the owner's house. The local-style food is excellent and there are bikes and kayaks for hire.

**Tara Etu Kura** (☎ 97 83 25; Rikitea; bungalows 6000 CFP) It has a family atmosphere and has one bungalow for one or two people. Breakfast costs 1000 CFP, lunch or dinner 2000 CFP.

**Snack Jojo** (☎ 97 82 61; Rikitea; dishes 900–1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Serves reasonably priced fare east of the village.

# TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATION

Although the brochures show exotic over-water bungalows, French Polynesia actually has everything from camping and hostel dormitories to five-star accommodation. However, in all categories the balance between price and quality can be discouraging. Expect it to be expensive (for details, see the boxed text, p583), don't necessarily expect to get what you've paid for, and enjoy the other aspects of French Polynesia.

Air-conditioning's often not supplied, even in some quite expensive places, but the night breeze means you can usually live without it. Many cheaper places don't supply towels or soap.

## PRACTICALITIES

- *Tahiti Beach Press* is the weekly English-language tourist paper that includes some local news coverage. If you read French, there are two Tahitian dailies, *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti* and *La Dépêche de Tahiti*.
- There are about 10 independent radio stations that broadcast music programmes with news flashes in French and Tahitian along with the occasional interview. Among the best-known stations are Tiare FM (the pioneer nongovernmental radio station), Radio Bleue, Radio Maohi, Te Reo o Tefana (a pro-independence station), Radio 1, NRJ and RFO-Radio Polynésie.
- The video format in French Polynesia is Secam, but videos made for tourists are generally also available in PAL and NTSC.
- French Polynesia uses 220V, 60Hz electricity, although some deluxe hotels may have 110V supply for electric shavers. Sockets are French-style, requiring a plug with two round pins.
- French Polynesia follows the international metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

Credit cards are welcome at luxury resorts, but many midrange places take cash only; budget places rarely take credit cards. The prices quoted in this chapter include taxes, but many places will quote you pre-tax prices and the add-ons might horrify you. We have rounded prices to the nearest 100 CFP, so use quoted prices as a guide only and be ready for an increase in taxes (which seems to happen every few years). The *taxe de séjour* (accommodation tax) is charged per person per night and can really add up for families.

## Camping & Hostels

There are camping options springing up around French Polynesia, but generally it's a matter of guesthouses having areas where you can pitch your tent and allowing use of the facilities; you'll pay anywhere from around 1000 CFP to 2500 CFP per person.

Camping is possible on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea, Bora Bora, Maupiti, Rangiroa, Tikehau and Mataiva. You may need to rethink camping if it's raining too hard. Also make sure your tent is mosquito-proof or lather yourself in repellent. Some guesthouses have dorm beds ranging from 2000 CFP to 3500 CFP per person per night.

## Hotels

There is a glut of midrange hotels on the more touristy islands, but on the more remote islands it's sometimes all (five-star glamour) or nothing (rudimentary *pensions*). Most midrange places are well situated and more comfortable than the *pensions*, and there's usually a restaurant on site. You'll typically pay from around 10,000 to 40,000 CFP per night for a bungalow.

## Pensions

*Pensions* are a godsend for travellers who balk at the prices (and gloss) of the big hotels. These little establishments, which are generally family affairs, are a great way to meet locals and other travellers. Brace yourself for cold showers, lumpy pillows and thin walls, but lap up the charm, interesting discussions and artistic touches that are often part and parcel of the *pension* experience. Many *pensions* have local-style bungalows, which usually have a quaint homemade feel to them (generally because they are homemade!); some of the more upmarket *pensions* have very comfortable versions of the bungalow.

Many *pensions* offer (and sometimes insist upon) half board (or  *demi-pension*), which usually means breakfast and dinner. It can cost anything from 4500 to 9000 CFP per person per day, although prices vary widely from island to island. Young children are often allowed to stay for free, and children up to about 12 usually pay half price.

Think ahead in terms of money, as most *pensions* do not take credit cards.

## Resorts

If you are ever going to pamper yourself silly, French Polynesia is a great place to do it. The sumptuous luxury hotels often manage to blend their opulent bungalows into the natural setting. Some of the top hotels are on isolated *motu*, and can only be reached by boat. Four- and five-star hotels

are found on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Bora Bora, Huahine, Ra'iatea, Taha'a, Rangiroa, Hiva Oa Manihi and Nuku Hiva. You can expect restaurants, bars, a swimming pool, a shop or two and a well-organised activities desk. Most of the bigger hotels put on a Polynesian dance performance, often with buffet meal, a few times a week. Glass-bottomed coffee tables, which look straight down into the lagoon, have become standard features of the over-water bungalows. The prices are just as dazzling: expect to pay from 45,000 to 150,000 CFP a night, not including meals.

## ACTIVITIES

French Polynesia's exceptional natural heritage lends itself to a range of leisure activities. Scuba diving and snorkelling are the main activities, but sailing is also very popular. Increasing numbers of surfers are sampling the islands' excellent reef-breaks, while the jagged relief of the high islands makes for some superb walking and horse riding.

### Cycling

On many islands it is possible to rent bicycles, which is the perfect way to get around. The rough roads leading into the interior are great for mountain biking, should you decide to bring one with you from home.

### Diving & Snorkelling

French Polynesia is a diver's wet dream. The warm, bright waters, the lack of plankton (which ensures water clarity) and the myriad tropical fish will entice you from the shore. Conditions are close to perfect: visibility often reaches 40m and the water's a bathlike 29°C in summer and 26°C in winter, with only 1°C of variation down to 45m. You don't need a wetsuit; unencumbered by neoprene, diving in Tahiti is like sex without a condom. Most dives are only a five- to 15-minute boat trip from the shore.

There are about 25 professional dive centres in French Polynesia. They open year-round, usually daily. All are at least level 1 on the French CMAS scale and most have at least one Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI) instructor. Operators are listed under Activities in island sections earlier in this chapter. A single dive typically costs 5500 to 6500 CFP (more for beginners), usually including equipment rental but not necessarily the 8% VAT.

An excellent website to drool over is [www.diving-tahiti.com](http://www.diving-tahiti.com). For more on diving in Tahiti and French Polynesia, see p71.

The coral reefs and coral outcrops that are dotted around the lagoons are perfect for snorkelling. You can join a lagoon tour by boat, hire an outboard-powered boat or just grab your gear and head out to explore the lagoon yourself.

### Hiking

The high islands offer superb walks, but the tracks are sometimes unmarked and are hard to follow: a guide is often necessary. Tahiti and Mo'orea are the main islands for walking, but there are also good walks on Ra'iatea, Bora Bora and Maupiti. The Marquesas has huge untapped potential; currently the only popular walking trail is on Nuku Hiva. The ideal time for hiking is May to October. During the rainy season (November to April), the paths can be dangerous and even impassable.

### Horse Riding

There are equestrian centres on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Ra'iatea, Huahine and Bora Bora in the Society Islands. Most places offer short jaunts and longer excursions that explore the island interiors. Horses are an important part of life in the Marquesas, and there are various places to rent them, with or without a guide; you can also horse ride on Rurutu in the Australs.

### Surfing

Polynesia was the birthplace of *horue* (surfing), and in recent years there has been a major resurgence of local interest. Tahiti in particular has surf shops, board shapers and a local surfing scene. The island is home to Teahupoo, one of the most powerful waves in the world and the home of the Billabong pro competition each year. Tahiti, Mo'orea and Huahine are the three main islands for surfing, but Rangiroa and Tikehau in the Tuamotus also have good surfing spots.

In general, there are good conditions on the north and east coasts from November to April and on the west and south coasts for the other half of the year – but these distinctions are really theoretical. In practice it is the direction of the swells that makes a spot good at any given time.

Access to the shore breaks is generally easy from the coast roads. You may need to find a boat to take you out to the reef-breaks, or resign yourself to a lot of paddling.

For more information on surfing in French Polynesia, check out [www.surfing-tahiti.com](http://www.surfing-tahiti.com).

Always check the weather reports and ask the locals about the conditions. Like surfers anywhere else, French Polynesians can be very possessive of *their* waves. If you want to enjoy the surf, observe all the usual surfing etiquette and give way to local surfers.

There are several surf shops in Pape'ete. You certainly don't need a wetsuit in the warm waters of French Polynesia, but a T-shirt or Lycra vest will protect you from the sun. The local surf shops all have body-board equipment as well as shortboards and traditional surfboards.

On Tahiti, the **Tura'1 Mataare Surf School** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 41 91 37; [surfschool@mail.pf](mailto:surfschool@mail.pf); PK18.3) offers 10 half-day lessons for 27,000 CFP. The courses are run by a qualified instructor and include equipment, transport to the different surfing spots and insurance. They will also do a single lesson for 4500 CFP.

### Yachting

Hiring a yacht can be a fine way to explore French Polynesia, and you can choose from a bareboat charter (which you sail yourself) or a cabin on a fully crewed luxury boat. Ra'iatea is the main yachting base in French Polynesia, although there are a number of yacht-charter operations around the islands, with a flotilla of modern monohulls and catamarans. Cruises on a crewed yacht will usually include tour programmes at the stops en route. Dive cruises are also possible. It takes eight to 10 days to explore the Leeward Islands from Ra'iatea.

The following companies offer cruises and charter boats:

**Aqua Polynésie** (☎ 73 47 31; [aquapol@club-internet.fr](http://aquapol@club-internet.fr)) Luxurious 14m catamarans with crewed cruises around the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus. Boat specially equipped for dive cruises. Departures are from Bora Bora, Huahine or Fakarava (Tuamotus).

**Bisou Futé** (☎ 65 64 97; [www.multimania.com/tahiti](http://www.multimania.com/tahiti)) This Taha'a-based operation charters boats by the day and offers cruises.

**Blue Lagoon Charter** (☎ 67 73 48; [bluelagoonchart@mail.pf](http://bluelagoonchart@mail.pf)) Based on Bora Bora, this operation offers cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

**Moorings** (☎ 66 35 93; [www.moorings.com](http://www.moorings.com)) Twenty different options, including bareboat charters, hire with skipper and host or cabin charters. It's based at Apooiti Marina on Ra'iatea and offers cruises to the Leeward Islands.

**Sailing Huahine Voile** (☎ 68 72 49; [www.sailing-huahine.com](http://www.sailing-huahine.com)) This operation, based at Huahine, has monohulls and offers cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

**Stardust Marine** (☎ 60 04 85; [www.sunsail.com](http://www.sunsail.com)) Based at the Stardust Marina at Ra'iatea, this operation offers bareboat charters, hire with skipper and/or host, and cabin charter. Cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

**Tahiti Yacht Charter** (☎ 45 04 00; [www.vpm.fr](http://www.vpm.fr)) Catamarans and monohulls; bareboat charter, or hire with skipper and host. Cruises are possible in all the archipelagos. Departs from Ra'iatea and Tahiti.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Banks are usually open between 9am and noon and 2pm and 5pm Monday to Friday. Shops and offices normally open around 7.30am, close for lunch between 11.30am and 1.30pm and then shut around 5pm Monday through Friday. On Saturday, shops are typically open between 7.30am and 11.30am; almost everything (except a few grocery stores and boutiques on more touristy islands) is closed on Sunday. Restaurant hours vary according to the type of food served and the clientele. Most places open around 10.30am, however, and stay open until about 11pm. We have not listed business hours in our reviews unless they differ from these standards. See p829 for public holidays in the region.

## CHILDREN

Fire the baby-sitter and bring the kids: French Polynesia is a great destination to explore with children. There are no major health concerns, the climate is good and the food is easy to navigate. Most locals have a number of children themselves and will not be troubled by a screaming child at the next table, should the treasure be throwing a tantrum over dinner. Children are very much a part of public life in Polynesia.

## Practicalities

Total-block sunscreen is readily available in French Polynesia, but is very expensive; nappies (diapers) are also available but pricey (1700 CFP for 38 nappies!). The drinking water is completely safe in Pape'ete, on Bora Bora and on Tubuai, but

you may like to buy bottled water anyway, particularly if your child has a delicate stomach; on the other islands you will all be dependent on bottled water.

There are medical facilities everywhere in Polynesia. Mamao Hospital in Pape'ete has a modern paediatric department.

You will have priority when boarding Air Tahiti aircraft. A Carte Famille (Family Card), which costs 2000 CFP, entitles you to significant reductions on some flights (see p676 for details). At hotels and guesthouses, children under 12 generally pay only 50% of the adult rate; very young children usually stay for free.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### French Embassies & Consulates

You will find French diplomatic representation in the following countries:

**Australia** (☎ 02-6216 0100; www.ambafrance-au.org; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

**Canada** (☎ 613-789 1795; www.ambafrance-ca.org; 42 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, ON K1M 2C9)

**Chile** (☎ 02-470 8000; www.france.cl; Av Condell 65, Casilla 38-D, Providencia, Santiago)

**Fiji** (☎ 331 2233; Dominion House, Scott St, Suva)

**Germany** (☎ 69-2063 9000; An der Kochstrasse 6/7, D-10969 Berlin)

**Ireland** (☎ 01-260 1666; www.ambafrance-ie.org; 36 Ailesbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

**Israel** (☎ 03-520 8300; www.ambafrance-il.org; 112 Promenade Herbert-Samuel, 61033 Tel Aviv)

**New Zealand** (☎ 04-384 2555; www.ambafrance-nz.org; Rural Bank Bldg, 13th fl, 34-42 Manners St, PO Box 11-343, Wellington)

**UK** (☎ 020-7073 1200; www.ambafrance-uk.org; 21 Cromwell Rd, London SW7 2EN)

**USA** (☎ 202-944 6000; www.ambafrance-us.org; 4101 Reservoir Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

### Consulates in French Polynesia

Given that French Polynesia is not an independent country, there are no foreign embassies, only consulates. Canada, the USA and Japan are without diplomatic representation in French Polynesia. If you need a US visa the nearest place to inquire about it is Fiji. If you're a Canadian and you lose your passport, the Australian consulate may be able to help.

The following consulates and diplomatic representatives are all on Tahiti.

**Australia** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 88 38; fax 41 05 19; c/- Qantas, Vaima Centre, Pape'ete BP 1695, Pape'ete)

**Chile** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 89 19; fax 43 61 62; Passage Cardella, Pape'ete BP 952, Pape'ete)

**Germany** (☎ 42 99 94, 42 80 84; fax 42 96 89; Rue Gadiot, Pira'e BP 452, Pira'e)

**Italy** (☎ 43 45 01; fax 43 45 07; Puna'auia, Punaruu Valley BP 380 412, Tamanu)

**Netherlands** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 49 37, 43 06 86; fax 43 56 92; Mobil Bldg, Fare Ute, Pape'ete BP 2804, Pape'ete)

**New Zealand** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 07 47/40; fax 42 45 44; c/- Air New Zealand, Vaima Centre, Pape'ete BP 73, Pape'ete)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

### January

**Chinese New Year** Usually falling between late January and mid-February, the New Year is ushered in with dancing, martial arts displays and fireworks.

### February

**Tahiti Nui Marathon** One thousand runners gather on Mo'orea for this long-established fund-raising event along a flat course past spectacular scenery.

### March

**Arrival of the First Missionaries** On 5 March the landing of the first LMS missionaries is re-enacted at Point Vénus on Tahiti Nui. Celebrations are held at Protestant churches on Tahiti and Mo'orea and in Tipaerui and Afareaitu.

### April/May

**Beauty Contests** Many contests are held ahead of the Miss Tahiti and Miss Heiva i Tahiti contests in June (Mr Tahiti contests are also held).

**Billabong Tahiti Pro Surfing Tournament** Three days of international-level surfing in the big waves of Teahupoo (Tahiti).

### June/July

**Miss Tahiti & Miss Heiva i Tahiti contests** Winners of beauty contests around the archipelago in the last 12 months gather in Pape'ete to vie for the chance to represent French Polynesia around the world. Miss Heiva reigns for the month-long Heiva celebrations.

**Tahiti International Golf Open** This four-day event is held on Tahiti in late June or early July.

### July/August

**Heiva i Tahiti** (www.tahiti-heiva.org) This major Polynesian festival, held in Pape'ete, includes traditional demonstrations throughout July. Mini-Heiva events take place on other islands in August.

### September

**Annual Flower Show** In Parc Bougainville, Pape'ete.

## October

**Carnival** Late in the month there are parades throughout the islands with floats decked with flowers.

## November

**Hawaiki Nui Canoe Race** The major sporting event of the year.

**All Saints' Day** Graves are cleaned and decorated in an explosion of flowers; families sing hymns in candlelit cemeteries on 1 November.

## December

**Tiare Tahiti Days** The national flower is celebrated on 1 and 2 December.

**Marquesas Festival** A major arts festival at 'Ua Pou, celebrating Marquesan identity.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

French laws concerning homosexuality prevail in French Polynesia, which means there is no legal discrimination against homosexual activity. Homophobia in French Polynesia is uncommon, although open displays of affection in public should be avoided. French Polynesia does feel remarkably heterosexual, given the preponderation of honeymooning couples, but you will meet lots of very camp *mahu* working in restaurants and hotels.

The Tiki Soft C@fé (p602) in Pape'ete is a popular and hip spot for *popaa* gays, as well as those on the straight and narrow.

**Te Anuanua o Te Fenua** (Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Association of French Polynesia; ☎ 77 31 11) was formed in 1997, and is based on Tahiti.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés are getting more popular each year – although the ones on the smaller islands often boast only ancient computers. Most top-end hotels offer Internet access to their guests, and access is fairly straightforward on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Bora Bora, Huahine, Rangiroa and Ra'iatea. You'll generally pay around 1000 CFP per hour.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Useful generalist English-language sites include the following:

**la Orana** (www.iaorana.com) Off-beat site with information on everything Tahitian.

**Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) Provides summaries on travelling to most places on earth, including the all-important Thorn Three bulletin board, where you can ask questions of travellers who've been to Tahiti recently.

**Tahiti Explorer** (www.tahitiexplorer.com) Discounts on lodging, customised honeymoon packages and destination descriptions.

**Tahiti Nui Travel** (www.tahiti-nui.com) Aimed at travel agents, but packed with loads of useful info.

**Tahiti Planet** (www.tahitiplanet.pf) List of companies, educational institutions and government departments.

**Tahiti Tourisme** (www.tahiti-tourisme.com) Official Tahiti tourism website in English.

## MONEY

The unit of currency in French Polynesia is the Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP), referred to simply as 'the franc'. There are coins of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 CFP, and notes of 500, 1000, 5000 and 10,000 CFP. The CFP was pegged to the French franc, and so is now pegged to the euro. For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page.

There are fairly hefty bank charges for changing money and travellers cheques in French Polynesia. You generally pay at least 500 CFP commission on travellers cheques and to exchange cash, although exchange rates do vary from bank to bank, so if you have time, shop around to find the best rate. Given the cost of living in French Polynesia, and the low crime rate, you are better off exchanging larger sums of money (ie, fewer transactions) than smaller amounts. Rates offered on Tahiti tend to be better than those offered on the other islands.

### HOW MUCH?

- **Night on a private island:** US\$10,000
- **Burger, fries and a Coke at a roulette:** 1500 CFP
- **Five-island airpass:** 25,000 CFP
- **Dinner for two at a midrange restaurant:** 6000 CFP
- **Simple bungalow with fan:** 60,000 to 80,000 CFP per night

### LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** 1.50 CFP
- **1L bottled water:** 100 CFP
- **Bottle of Hinano:** 200 CFP
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** 2000 CFP
- **Plate of poisson cru:** 1000 CFP

## TELEPHONE

Public phone boxes are found even in surprisingly remote locations, and all use the same phonecards. Phonecards can be bought from post offices, newsagencies, shops and some supermarkets. Phonecards are available in 1000, 2000 and 5000 CFP denominations.

There are no area codes in French Polynesia. Local phone calls cost 33 CFP for four minutes at normal tariff rates. The rates for inter-island or inter-archipelago calls are more expensive (33 CFP a minute inter-archipelago).

Most phone boxes have an information panel that explains, in French and English, how to make overseas calls. If you have any difficulty, call **information** (☎ 3612).

If you want to make a reverse-charge call, ask for *un appel payable à l'arrivée*.

## TIME

Tahiti (and neighbouring islands) is 10 hours behind GMT. The Marquesas are half an hour ahead of the rest of French Polynesia (noon on Tahiti is 12.30pm in the Marquesas) but check flight schedules carefully: Air Tahiti departures and arrivals for the Marquesas may run to Tahiti time. Gambier Archipelago time is one hour ahead of Tahiti time; when it's noon on Tahiti, it's 1pm in the Gambiers.

## TOURIST INFORMATION IN TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA

The main tourist office is the **Gie Tahiti Manava visitor information centre** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 50 57 10; www.tahiti-manava.pf; Fare Manihini, Blvd Pomare; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & public holidays) in the centre of Pape'ete. This office has information about the whole of French Polynesia, and has a helpful staff. The more touristy islands generally have some sort of tourist office or counter, but they vary widely in usefulness and dependability.

For information before you leave home, contact **Tahiti Tourisme** (☎ 50 57 00; www.tahiti-tourisme.com; Immeuble Paofai, Batiment D, Blvd Pomare, Pape'ete).

Overseas representatives of Tahiti Tourisme include the following:

**Australia** (☎ 02-9281 6020; www.traveltotahiti.com.au; 12 Ann St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010)

**Chile** (☎ 02-251 2826; tahiti@cmet.net; Av 11 de Septiembre 2214, OF-116, Casilla 16057, Santiago)

**France** (☎ 01 55 42 64 34; tahititourisme@voyagetahiti.com; 28 Blvd Saint-Germain, 75005 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 69-97 14 84; fax 69-72 92 75; Bockenheimer Landstr 45, 60325 Frankfurt/Main)

**Italy** (☎ 02-66 980317; fax 02-66 92648; Piazza Caiazzo 3, 20 124 Milan)

**New Zealand** (☎ 09-368 5362; www.tahiti-tourisme.co.nz; Lvl 1, Studio 2A, 200 Victoria St West, Auckland)

**Singapore** (☎ 6733 4295; pl\_holdings@pacific.net.sg; c/- Pacific Leisure Holdings Pte Ltd, 321 Orchard Rd, 09-01 Orchard Shopping Centre, Singapore 238 866)

**USA** (☎ 310-414 8484; tahitilax@earthlink.net; 300 Continental Blvd, Suite 160, El Segundo, CA 90 245)

## VISAS

Everyone needs a passport to visit French Polynesia. The regulations are much the same as for France: if you need a visa to visit France then you'll need one to visit French Polynesia. Anyone from an EU country can stay for up to three months without a visa, as can Australians and citizens of a number of other European countries, including Switzerland.

Citizens of Argentina, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand (NZ), the USA and some European countries can stay for up to one month without a visa. Other nationalities need a visa, which can be applied for at French diplomatic missions. Visa regulations for French Polynesia can change at short notice, so check with a travel agent shortly before departing.

Apart from permanent residents and French citizens, all visitors to French Polynesia need to have an onward or return ticket.

## Visa Extensions

Travellers who must have a visa, or those who have a one-month exemption and wish to extend their stay, should contact the **Police aux Frontières** (Frontier Police; Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 40 74; pafport@mail.pf; Fa'a airport ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri; Pape'ete ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), at Faa'a airport and next to the Gie Tahiti Manava visitor information centre in Pape'ete, at least one week before the visa or exemption expires. An extension is for a maximum of two months, and incurs a fee of 3000 CFP.

Stays by foreign visitors may not exceed three months. For longer periods, you must apply to the French consular authorities in your own country for a residence permit;

you cannot lodge your application from French Polynesia.

## Yacht Formalities

In addition to presenting the certificate of ownership of the vessel, sailors are subject to the same passport and visa requirements as travellers arriving by air or by cruise ship. Unless you have a return air ticket, you are required to provide a banking guarantee of repatriation equivalent to the price of an airline ticket to your country of origin.

Yachties must advise the **Police aux Frontières** (Map pp598-9; Frontier Police; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), next to the visitor information centre in Pape'ete, of their final departure. If your first port of call is not Pape'ete, it must be a port with a gendarmerie (police station): Afareaitu (Mo'orea), Uturoa (Ra'iatea), Fare (Huahine), Vaitape (Bora Bora), Taiohae (Nuku Hiva, Marquesas), Hakahau ('Ua Pou, Marquesas), Atuona (Hiva Oa, Marquesas), Mataura (Tubuai, Australs), Moera (Rurutu, Australs), Rairua (Raivavae, Australs), Avatoru (Rangiroa, Tuamotus) or Rikitea (Mangareva, Gambiers). The gendarmerie must be advised of each arrival and departure, and of any change of crew.

Before arriving at the port of Pape'ete, announce your arrival on channel 12. You

can anchor at the quay or the beach, but there are no reserved places. Next, you'll need to report to the **Capitainerie** (Harbour Master's Office; ☎ 7-11.30am & 1-4pm Mon-Thu, 7-11.30am & 1-3pm Fri), in the same building as the Police aux Frontières, and complete an arrival declaration.

## WOMEN TRAVELLERS

French Polynesia is a great place for solo women to explore. Local women are very much a part of public life in the region, and it's not unusual to see Polynesian women out drinking beer together, or walking alone, so you'll probably feel pretty comfortable following suit.

# TRANSPORT IN TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Faa'a International Airport** (PPT; ☎ 86 60 61; www.tahiti-aeroport.pf), on Tahiti, is the only international airport in French Polynesia. It's on the outskirts of Pape'ete, about 5km west of the capital. International check-in desks are at the east end of the terminal.

## PACKAGE TOUR PARADISE

French Polynesia lends itself to the package tour. Given the high price of flights to the region, and the often-times astronomical price of accommodation once there, a package tour can work out to be a financial godsend. On the downside, package tours don't leave much leeway to explore at will. Although most tours offer the opportunity to visit more than one island, you will have to prebook one hotel for each destination before departure (meaning do your homework in advance – you can't swap resorts halfway through if you're not happy).

There is a variety of tour packages available from travel agents in all Western countries, and a number of online booking agents also offer special flight-and-hotel deals. If you want more than just a straightforward combo package, then a good travel agent is essential: he or she can negotiate better prices at the larger hotels, handle Air Tahiti bookings for your domestic flights once in French Polynesia, and have your schedule finalised before you arrive. In addition to the traditional travel operators, there are agencies that specialise in diving tours. These packages typically include flights, accommodation, diving fee and diving tours.

Tahiti specialists in the USA include **Tahiti Legends** (☎ 800-200 1214; www.tahitilegends.com), **Tahiti Vacations** (☎ 800-553 3477; www.tahitivacation.com) and **Tahiti Explorer** (☎ 800-781 9356; www.airtahiti.com). Packages for seven nights start at US\$1200 on Mo'orea and US\$2000 on Bora Bora.

In Australia, **Hideaway Holidays** (☎ 02-9743 0253; www.hideawayholidays.com.au) is a respected South Pacific specialist that offers heaps of flight-and-accommodation deals to Tahiti. Seven-night packages from Sydney to Tahiti start at AS2000.

In the UK, **Sunset Faraway Holidays** (☎ 020-7498 9922; www.sunsetfaraway.co.uk) arranges packages to French Polynesia. Ten-night packages start at £1900 to Tahiti and £2300 to Bora Bora.

A number of international airlines serve French Polynesia. Airline offices in Pape'ete include the following:

**Air France** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 47 47 47; www.airfrance.com; Rue Largarde)

**Air New Zealand** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 07 47; www.airnz.com; Vaima Centre)

**Air Tahiti Nui** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 55 55; www.airtahitinui.com; Rue Paul Gauguin)

**Aircalin** (Air Caledonie International; ☎ 85 09 04; www.aircalin.nc)

**Corsair** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 28 28; www.corsair.fr; Blvd Pomare)

**Hawaiian Airlines** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 15 00; www.hawaiianair.com; Vaima Centre)

**LAN** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 64 55; www.lan.com; Vaima Centre)

**Qantas** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 06 65; www.qantas.com; Vaima Centre)

Flights go to Tahiti direct from Los Angeles (LA), Honolulu and Auckland (with onward connections to Australia) and to a number of other Pacific islands. Tahiti is a popular stop on round-the-world (RTW) tickets (see p836) and is included in several air passes (see p837).

There is no departure tax within French Polynesia.

#### ASIA

Air Tahiti Nui operates flights between Japan (Tokyo and Osaka) and Pape'ete. Return flights from Tokyo start at US\$1500. From other parts of Asia, the simplest connection is via Australia or NZ.

A good travel agent in Japan is **No. 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com).

#### AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

All flights from Australia to Pape'ete are via Auckland. In Auckland, Qantas flights connect with either Air Tahiti Nui or Polynesian Airlines for the Auckland-Pape'ete leg. Fares increase considerably in the high season (June to September and over Christmas). From Sydney expect to pay from A\$1200/1550 for a return trip in the low/high season with either Qantas or Air New Zealand.

As in Australia, fares from NZ increase during the high season. From Auckland, return fares start at NZ\$1000/1300 in the low/high season. Both Air New Zealand and Qantas/Air Tahiti Nui offer connecting flights from Pape'ete to LA.

Many Australians choose to travel to French Polynesia on a package tour, for more on this see p673.

#### OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDS

There are regular connections between French Polynesia and NZ, Fiji, New Caledonia, the Cook Islands, Wallis and Futuna, and Hawai'i. Island hopping around the Pacific is not difficult, but because some flights only operate once a week or every few days you may be faced with some scheduling problems if your time is limited.

#### SOUTH AMERICA

LAN operates flights between Santiago and Pape'ete; one flight a week has a stopover on Easter Island. Return fares cost from US\$1500.

#### UK & CONTINENTAL EUROPE

Air New Zealand (from London and Frankfurt) and Air France, Air Tahiti Nui and Corsair (all from Paris) have flights to Pape'ete via LA. Return fares from Paris and Frankfurt start at around €1500; return fares from London start at around £1200 in the low season. From other destinations in Europe the easiest option is to travel to one of these cities and connect with flights to Pape'ete. Discount air-travel ads appear in the UK in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free magazine *TNT*.

Recommended travel agencies:

**Anyway** (☎ 08 92 89 38 92; www.anyway.fr) France.

**Expedia** (www.expedia.com) Germany.

**Flightbookers** (☎ 0870 010 7000; www.ebookers.com) UK.

**Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) France.

**STA Travel** (☎ 01805 456; www.statravel.de) Germany.

**Traillfinders** (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk) UK.

**Travel Bag** (☎ 0870 890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk) UK.

#### USA & CANADA

Coming from the USA, you can either fly direct from LA to Pape'ete, or go via Honolulu (there's no difference in the fare). Air New Zealand and Air Tahiti Nui serve this route, and Air France and Corsair flights from Paris to Pape'ete go via LA (Corsair flights are also available via San Francisco). Return fares from LA to Pape'ete range from around US\$800 to US\$1500. If you

are starting your trip in Honolulu, return fares from Honolulu to Pape'ete start from US\$700 in the low season (January to May) and US\$900 in the high season (November to December).

If you are interested in exploring other parts of the Pacific, Air New Zealand also offers an excellent deal that allows for stopovers – Honolulu, Nadi (Fiji), Pape'ete and Rarotonga (Cook Islands) – en route to Auckland. Check with Air New Zealand or your travel agent for ticket options and fares.

There are no direct flights from Canada, so you will need to go via Honolulu or the west coast of the USA. Return fares from Vancouver via LA start from C\$2200 in the low season.

If you want to book your flight and hotel as a package, see p673 for more information. **Tahiti Explorer** (☎ 800-781 9356; www.airtahiti.com) concentrates exclusively on French Polynesian travel, and has loads of information. **Avia Travel** (☎ 800-950 AVIA; www.aviatravel.com) is another respected travel agent that specialises in custom-designed RTW fares.

The following agencies are recommended for online bookings:

**Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com)

**Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com)

#### Sea

Travelling to French Polynesia by yacht is entirely feasible: you can often pick up crewing positions from North America, Australia or NZ, or in the islands; ask at yacht clubs in San Diego, LA, San Francisco, Honolulu, Sydney, Cairns or Auckland.

It takes about a month to sail from the US west coast to Hawai'i and another month south from there to the Marquesas; with stops, another month takes you west to Tahiti and the Society Islands. Then it's another long leg southwest to Australia or NZ.

For yacht formalities while in French Polynesian waters, see p673.

#### GETTING AROUND

Getting around French Polynesia is half the fun. Travelling between islands involves flights or boat travel and, thanks to French government financial support, travel to the larger and more densely populated islands is relatively easy and reasonably priced, though getting to the remote islands can be harder.

#### Air

With the exception of a few charter operations, flying within French Polynesia means **Air Tahiti** (☎ 86 42 42; www.airtahiti.pf) and its associate, **Air Moorea** (☎ 86 41 41; www.airmoorea.com). Air Tahiti flies to 38 islands in all five of the major island groups. Window seats on its modern fleet of high-wing turboprop aircraft offer great views, but for the nervous flyer these flights can be rather hair-raising. Air Moorea is the secondary airline, operating smaller aircraft between Tahiti and Mo'orea and Tetiaroa.

Flight frequencies ebb and flow with the seasons, and in the July–August peak season, extra flights are scheduled. Air Tahiti publishes a useful flight schedule booklet, which is essential reading for anyone planning a complex trip around the islands. If you are making reservations from afar, you can email or call; see the individual island sections for Air Tahiti's island-specific phone numbers. You can pay for flights by credit card at all Air Tahiti offices or agencies.

Note that Air Tahiti and Air Tahiti Nui are different airlines; Air Tahiti Nui is the international carrier, while Air Tahiti operates domestic flights only.

#### AIR PASSES

Several passes allow you to save on visiting multiple islands: all require you begin your trip in Pape'ete and limit the number of transits through Pape'ete. You are only allowed one stopover on each island but you can transit an island as long as the flight number does not change. Stopping at an island to change flights counts as a stopover.

Passes are valid for 28 days and all flights (except between Pape'ete and Mo'orea) must be booked at the beginning. You can fly either Air Tahiti or Air Moorea on the Pape'ete to Mo'orea sector. Once you've taken the first flight the routing cannot be changed and the fare is nonrefundable. There may be restrictions on which 'colour' flights you can use.

The passes include *Passe Découverte* (Discovery Pass: four Society Islands; adult/child 25,000/15,000 CFP); *Passe Bora Bora* (all six Society Islands; 37,000/21,000 CFP); *Passe Bora Tuamotu* (add three islands in the Tuamotus; 55,000/29,000 CFP); and

*Passe Lagons* (Lagoons Pass: Mo'orea, Rangiroa, Tikehau, Manihi and Fakarava; 41,000/22,000 CFP). Add the Marquesas (Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa) to any other pass for 51,000/29,000 CFP or the Australs (Rurutu and Tubuai) for 26,000/17,000 CFP. A Marquesas and Australs extension to cover all four islands costs 71,000/40,000 CFP.

Limited flights (blue or white) are offered through a *Passe Bleu Découverte* (Blue Discovery Pass: Mo'orea, Huahine and Ra'iatea; 16,000 CFP) and a *Passe Bleu* (Blue Pass: add Bora Bora; 22,000 CFP). There are no children's fares and Mo'orea must be your last visit.

#### REDUCED-FARE CARDS

Air Tahiti offers several cards that let you buy tickets at reduced prices, depending on whether the flight is classified as blue, white or red.

If you're under 25 a *Carte Jeunes* (Youth Card) and if you're over 60 a *Carte Marama* (Third Age Card) gives you up to 50% reductions (depending on the colour of the flight) and costs 1000 CFP. A *Carte Famille* (Family Card) gives adults up to 50% and children up to 75% discount. It costs 2000 CFP. You need a passport and photos and for the Family Card the kids' birth certificates.

These cards are issued on the spot, only in French Polynesia.

#### Bicycle

French Polynesia is an ideal region to explore by bike. Distances are manageable, the coast roads are generally flat, traffic is light (outside Pape'ete) and you can travel at your own pace. You can ride around many of the islands in a morning or afternoon. Bicycles can often be rented for about 1500 CFP per day, and many guesthouses have bicycles for their guests, sometimes for free, though you might be riding an old rattler. A mountain bike is ideal for some of the rougher roads and it's even worth bringing your trusty steed with you; they're accepted on all the inter-island ships.

#### Boat

It's no problem getting from one island to another in the Society group. Between Tahiti and Mo'orea, a number of companies shuttle back and forth daily; the other islands are served at least twice a week.

In the other archipelagos the situation is much more difficult as there are no passenger ships; if time is limited it's best you fly.

You can generally catch a ride on one of the cargo ships, known as *goëlettes* (schooners), that transport goods between islands. Island hopping by cargo ship is likely to be memorable, to say the least. You mostly have to travel deck class and provide your own bedding, which you simply unroll on the deck. You're likely to get wet and cold, and possibly seasick. Plus, the ships run to uncertain schedules. But then again, if you wanted to get off the beaten track, you were looking for adventure anyway!

*Bonitiers* do many of the runs around islands or to nearby islands in the Tuamotus and the Marquesas.

#### CRUISE SHIP

At the other end of the spectrum from rudimentary cargo ships are luxury cruise ships operating in the Society Islands. These vessels are incredibly stylish and comfortable and offer shore excursions at each stop.

Managed by **Bora Bora Pearl Cruises** (☎ 43 43 03; www.boraborapearlcruiises.com), the *Haumana* is a magnificent 36m catamaran that accommodates up to 60 people and does three- or four-day cruises between Bora Bora, Ra'iatea, and Taha'a. The *Tia Moana* and the *Tu Moana*, both also managed by Bora Bora Pearl Cruises, offer seven-day cruises in the Society Islands.

You may see the enormous *Paul Gauguin*, a 320-passenger ship, anchored in Pape'ete. It departs Pape'ete every week for a one-week cruise that includes Ra'iatea, Taha'a, Bora Bora and Mo'orea. Contact **Tahiti Nui Travel** (☎ 54 02 00; www.tahitiniui.travel.pf) for information.

#### FERRY & CARGO SHIP

It takes between half an hour and an hour to travel between Tahiti and Mo'orea, depending on which company you go with. The car ferries, such as those run by Mo'orea Ferry, are slower than the high-speed ferries, which take only passengers, motorcycles and bicycles. The **Ono-Ono** (Pape'ete ☎ 45 35 35; 1 way/return 1050/2200 CFP) has at least four crossings daily and docks at Cook's Bay rather than Vaiare, which is handy if you are staying nearby. See the Mo'orea section

(p606) for more information about ferries to/from Mo'orea.

The **Maupiti Express** (Bora Bora ☎ 67 66 69; 1 way/return 2500/3500 CFP) runs a high-speed service between Bora Bora, Taha'a, Ra'iatea and Maupiti.

**Vaeanu** (☎ 41 25 35) operates the Pape'ete-Huahine-Ra'iatea-Taha'a-Bora Bora return trip, leaving Pape'ete on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5pm (the Wednesday trip does not stop at Taha'a). It sets out from Bora Bora on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. The Huahine and Ra'iatea arrivals are in the middle of the night (most guesthouse owners will not pick you up). Reservations are advisable. The office is at Motu Uta, near the *Aranui* office. Take *le truck* 3 from the *mairie*.

**Hawaiki Nui** (☎ 45 23 24) also travels the Society Islands circuit, and has two departures a week (Tuesday and Thursday at 4pm; per person deck/cabin 2000/5500 CFP); **Aremiti 3** (☎ 74 39 40) sails from Pape'ete on Monday and Friday for Huahine (one-way adult/child 4500/2500 CFP) and Ra'iatea (one-way adult/child 6500/3000 CFP). Tickets can be bought at the quay in Pape'ete.

The small cargo ship **Maupiti Tou Ai'a** (☎ 50 66 71) goes to Maupiti from Pape'ete once a week, with an occasional stop at Ra'iatea and Mopelia. The ship leaves on Wednesday evening, arrives at Maupiti the following morning, and returns to Pape'ete on Friday. The one-way fare is 2500 CFP.

About 10 ships operate through the Tuamotus; routes and fares vary, so it's best to check with the offices for the individual ships. They include the **Dory** (☎ 42 30 55), **Cobia I** (☎ 43 36 43), **Rairoa Nui** (☎ 48 35 78), **Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella** (☎ 42 23 58), **Nuku Hau** (☎ 45 23 24), **Mareva Nui** (☎ 42 25 53), **Vai-Aito** (☎ 43 99 96) and the **Kura Ora** (☎ 45 55 45).

The **Aranui** (☎ 42 62 40; www.aranui.com) and the **Taporo IV** (☎ 42 63 93) go to the Marquesas, stopping in the Tuamotus en route. The *Aranui*, a veritable institution in French Polynesia, does 16 trips a year. The *Taporo IV* runs every 15 days.

Services to the Australs are limited; the **Tuhaa Pae II** (☎ 50 96 09/06; snathp@mail.pf) goes three times a month, stopping at Rurutu and Tubuai on every trip and other islands less regularly. From Pape'ete to Rurutu, Rimatara or Tubuai costs 4046/5664/7789 CFP for deck/berth/air-con cabin; to Raivavae

costs 5832/8164/11,226 CFP. Add another 2800 CFP per day for three meals a day.

All the ships listed as going to the Tuamotus, bar the *Dory*, go to the Gambier Archipelago. The **Nuku Hau** (☎ 45 23 24) sails to the Gambier Archipelago via the Tuamotus (7900 CFP per person deck class, plus 1950 CFP for three meals a day). The **Taporo V** (☎ 42 63 93) sails through the eastern Tuamotus and the Gambier Archipelago once or twice a month.

#### YACHT

French Polynesia is an enormously popular yachting destination, see p669 for more information.

#### Bus

French Polynesia doesn't have much of a public transportation system, and Tahiti is the only island where public transport is even an option. The colourful, old *le trucks* (trucks with bench seats in the back for passengers) have been almost entirely replaced now by a less personable, but more modern fleet of proper air-con buses. Buses stop at designated spots (marked with a blue clock) and supposedly run on a schedule – although times are hardly regular.

#### Car & Scooter

If you want to explore the larger islands of the Society group at your own pace, it is well worth renting a car.

#### DRIVING LICENCE

Car-hire agencies in French Polynesia only ask to see your national driving licence, so an international driving licence is unnecessary.

#### HIRE

There are many different car-hire agencies on the more touristy islands, but the prices really don't vary much. For a small car expect to pay between 7500 CFP and 10,000 CFP per day including unlimited kilometres and insurance. Most places also rent vehicles for four- and eight-hour periods at reduced rates. If you only plan to hire a car for one day, eight hours is more than enough time to check out even the largest islands.

At certain times of year (July, August and New Year's Eve), it's wise to book vehicles a few days in advance; on the smaller islands it's best to always book ahead as the number

of cars are limited. You'll need a credit card, of course.

On Tahiti you will find the major international car-hire agencies such as Avis, Budget, Europcar and Hertz. On other islands such as Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea and Bora Bora, as well as on Rangiroa in the Tuamotus, the market is divided up between Avis and Europcar. Smaller local agencies exist on some islands, but the rates are almost as high.

You can hire a car on Rurutu in the Australis, but on the Marquesas, rental vehicles are mainly 4WDs complete with a driver. Rental without a driver is possible only on Atuona (Hiva Oa) and Taiohae (Nuku Hiva).

Avis and Europcar hire scooters on a number of islands. It's a good way of getting

around the small islands, but bear in mind you won't be wearing protective gear, so this is probably not the place to learn to drive a scooter. You'll pay around 6500 CFP a day. After numerous accidents there are no scooters for hire on Tahiti.

#### ROAD RULES

Driving is on the right-hand side in French Polynesia. Although the accident statistics are pretty grim, driving in French Polynesia is not difficult, and the traffic is light almost everywhere apart from the busy coastal strip around Pape'ete on Tahiti. However, the overtaking habits of locals can sometimes get the heart rate up. Beware of drunk drivers at night, and of pedestrians and children who may not be used to traffic, particularly in more remote locations.