

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Glossy brochures focus on the idyllic over-water bungalows but French Polynesia actually has a pretty wide range of accommodation options – from camping to extreme luxury. Whatever the category, however, the price-to-quality ratio is invariably discouraging. It's not necessarily that standards are low; it's just that the prices visitors are charged are so damn high they have a right to expect much more. The most basic, ramshackle room in a family home (you know, the one with the calendar pictures of wild horses plastered on the walls, the saggy mattress and shared bathroom) can cost as much as a three-star, amenity-packed hotel in London or Los Angeles. Then again, you're not paying to

be pampered; French Polynesia is all about the oh-so-irresistible real estate. So if you're in the market to rent a slice of paradise, you might as well stop fingering those worry beads. Throw common sense to the wind and deal with the credit-card damage when you get home.

Most hotels and resorts, and all *pensions* (guesthouses), quote their rates in French Polynesian francs, although the high-end places will usually also list the price in euros and US dollars.

French Polynesia's high season runs between June and September, and during the Christmas holidays; prices jump and many favourite places are booked out well in advance at these times. The majority of French Polynesia's accommodation is in bungalows. Unless otherwise stated, the prices listed in this book are for two-person bungalows. Many bungalows can actually sleep between four and six, and extra guests are generally charged a per-person supplement of between 1000 and 2000 CFP. Children under 12 almost always stay for half-price. Some places offer half- and full-board options; in these cases the prices quoted will usually be per person. Prices in this book include the relevant taxes, but be aware that many places will quote you before-tax prices, only to surprise you with a rather hefty list of add-ons at the end of your stay. The most frustrating aspect of the taxation system is the *taxe de séjour* (accommodation tax), which is charged per person per night: if you are travelling as a family, this can really add up.

In this guide we place accommodation costing less than 8000 CFP a night in the budget category, 8000 to 20,000 CFP in the midrange category and over 20,000 CFP in the top end.

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 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 to 3500 CFP per person per night.

Hotels

There is a glut of midrange hotels on the more touristy islands, but on remote islands it's sometimes all (five-star glamour) or nothing (rudimentary *pensions*). Most mid-range 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; almost all places in this category accept credit cards.

Pensions

Pensions are a godsend for travellers who balk at the prices (and gloss) of the big hotels. These little establishments, generally family affairs, are great places 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. Full board means all meals are included. 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* (islets), 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.

PRACTICALITIES

- The weekly English-language tourist paper *Tahiti Beach Press* includes some local news coverage. If you read French, there are two Tahitian dailies, *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti* and *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.
- Radio France Outre-Mer (RFO) has two television channels: Télépolynésie and Tempo. On the bigger islands, many places have CNN.
- 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.

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 absolutely superb walking and horse-riding.

Cycling

On many islands it is possible to rent bicycles, which are the perfect means to get around. The rough roads leading into the interior are great for mountain bikes, 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.

All dive certifications are recognised, including CMAS, PADI and NAUI, and there are professional dive centres on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Ra'iatea, Huahine, Bora Bora, Rangiroa, Tikehau, Manihi, Ahe, Nuku Hiva and, from July to September, Rurutu. Bring your certification card and dive log. For more on diving see the Diving chapter, p54.

The coral reefs and outcrops that are dotted around the lagoons are perfect for snorkelling. You can join a lagoon tour, rent 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: it's often necessary to hire a guide. 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 have huge, untapped potential; currently the only popular walking trail is on Nuku Hiva. The ideal time for hiking is April to October. During the rainy season (November to April) the paths can be dangerous and even impassable.

Horse-Riding

There are equestrian centres in the Society Islands on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Ra'iatea, Huahine and Bora Bora. 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 site of the Tahiti 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 doing a lot of paddling. For more information on surfing in French Polynesia, check out www.surfingtahiti.com.

Always check the weather reports and ask the locals about the conditions. Like surfers anywhere in the world, French Polynesians can be very possessive of *their* waves. If you want to enjoy the surf, observe all the usual rules of surfing etiquette and give way to local surfers.

There are several surf shops in Pape'ete. Elsewhere, the local surf shops all have boogie-board equipment as well as short boards and traditional surfboards. 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.

On Tahiti, the **Tura'i Mataare Surf School** (☎ 41 91 37; surfschool@mail.pf; PK 18.3) 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. The school will also do a single lesson for 4500 CFP.

For more info on Tahiti's best surfing spots, see the boxed text, p102. For Mo'orea see p119 and for the top surfing spots in Huahine see p135.

Yachting

Renting a yacht can be a fine way to explore French Polynesia, and you can choose from a bare-boat 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, and 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) Luxurious 14m catamarans with crewed cruises around the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus, and a boat specially equipped for dive cruises. Departures are from Bora Bora, Huahine or Fakarava (Tuamotus).

Archipels Croisières (☎ 56 36 39; www.archipels.com) Crewed cruises to the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus on deluxe 18m catamarans. Departures are from Rangiroa (Tuamotus) or Pape'ete. It also has day cruises aboard a 32m schooner, departing from Mo'orea.

Bisou Futé (☎ 65 64 97; www.multimania.com /tahitcharter) This Taha'a-based operation charters boats by the day and offers cruises.

Blue Lagoon Charter (☎ 67 73 48; bluelagoonchart@mail.pf) Based on Bora Bora, this operation offers cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

Catamaran Tane Charter (☎ 66 16 87; www.raiatea.com/tane) Based at Ra'iatea, this operation offers catamaran cruises in the Leeward Islands.

Croisières Danae (☎ 66 12 50; www.raiatea.com /danaefishing) This operation offers a variety of crewed cruises from one to seven days, departing from Ra'iatea.

Faimanu (☎ 65 62 52; www.multimania.com /tahitivoile) Based on Ra'iatea, this operation organises cruises by the day.

Moorings (☎ 66 35 93; www.moorings.com) Twenty different options, including bare-boat charters, hire with skipper and host, or cabin charters. It's based at Apooiti Marina at Ra'iatea and offers cruises to the Leeward Islands.

Pacific Dream Charter (☎ 43 23 12) Catamarans based at the Taina Marina at Puna'auia on Tahiti.

Sailing Huahine Voile (☎ 68 72 49; 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) Based at the Stardust Marina at Ra'iatea, this operation offers bare-boat charters, hire with skipper and/or host, and cabin charter. About 20 boats of a variety of types are available for hire. Cruises are in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

Tahiti Yacht Charter (☎ 45 04 00; www.vpm.fr) Catamarans and monohulls; bare-boat charter or hire with skipper and host. Cruises are possible in all the archipelagos. Vessels depart from Ra'iatea and Tahiti.

Titaina (☎ 67 11 75; cruisepolynesia@mail.pf) Based at Ra'iatea, this operation offers cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

It's often possible to pick up crewing positions on yachts, particularly if you have had some relevant sailing experience. Check notice boards in popular restaurants and at the yacht clubs on Tahiti, Ra'iatea, Bora Bora and other popular yachting stops. Yacht owners have to complete complex paperwork when making crew changes, so make sure your own papers are in order.

The yacht owner will want to vet potential crew members, but it's equally important to check the boat and crew you are considering joining. Make sure the boat is safe and the crew is compatible. Readers have suggested that the Marquesas is probably not the ideal place to join a boat; it's the first arrival point for yachts from North America so it makes little sense for a crew member to leave his or her boat there – unless there is something seriously wrong with it!

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 from 11.30am to 1.30pm and shut around 5pm, Monday to Friday. On Saturday, shops are typically open between 7.30am and 11.30am; almost everything (except a few grocery stores and boutiques on the 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.

CHILDREN

Fire the baby-sitter and bring the kids: French Polynesia is a fantastic 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 your little treasure throw a tantrum over dinner. Children are very much a part of public life in Polynesia.

Practicalities

Ensure vaccinations are up to date before you leave and that you have health records with you. Make sure that your repatriation insurance also covers your child.

Consider bringing a baby carrier, and pack light clothes that cover the whole body. Total-block sunscreen is almost as important as your passport and tickets (it is readily available in French Polynesia, but is very expensive); nappies (diapers) are also available but are pricey (1700 CFP for 38 nappies!).

The water is completely safe to drink 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. Remember to encourage your child to drink frequently.

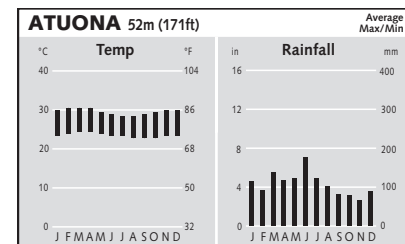
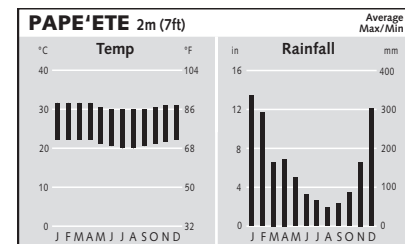
There are medical facilities located everywhere in French Polynesia. Mamao Hospital in Pape'ete has a modern paediatric department.

You will have priority when boarding Air Tahiti aircraft. The Carte Famille (Family Card), which costs 2000 CFP, entitles you to significant reductions on some flights (see p262 for details). At hotels and guesthouses, children under 12 generally pay only 50% of the adult rate; very young children usually stay for free.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* is an excellent before-you-go resource containing general tips on vacationing with the kiddies.

CLIMATE CHARTS

For further information on choosing the best time of the year for visiting French Polynesia, see p13.



CUSTOMS

The duty-free allowance for visitors entering French Polynesia includes 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars, 2L of spirits or wine, two cameras and 10 rolls of unexposed film, one video camera and 50mL of perfume. No live animals can be imported (if they're on a yacht they must stay on board) and certification is required for plants. For information on customs regulations for yachts, see p256.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

French Polynesia is not a particularly dangerous or annoying destination, which is all the more reason to go there.

Although it's rarely a problem for travellers, French Polynesian men like their beer, particularly at festivals and feasts. There are two points to remember: some French Polynesians are not good drunks and most of them are probably bigger than you. The locally grown marijuana, known as *pakalolo*, is very prevalent, but while locals will often offer to share a joint with you, they'll rarely sell the drug to foreigners.

You're unlikely to be kept awake by late-night revelry anywhere except in the heart of Pape'ete, but the roosters are another matter. A nonstop symphony can 'entertain' you until the early hours (when roosters are supposed to make a racket) and then some of them duly begin all over again.

French Polynesia may not have malaria, but the mosquitoes are hellbent on sucking blood anyway. They are tolerable during the cooler season from May to October but can be a real bother in the hotter, wetter months. For some reason, *marae* (sacred sites) seem to attract them in swarms, and standing to read an explanatory notice board when visiting a historic *marae* can be a real test of any visitor's enthusiasm. If anything, the tiny *nono* (black flies) of the Marquesas are even worse (see the boxed text, p210).

Swimming in French Polynesia usually means staying within the calm, protected waters of a lagoon, but swimmers should always be aware of tides and currents, and particularly of the swift movement of water out of a lagoon and through a pass into the open sea.

Although early explorers all complained about the French Polynesian propensity for theft, it is not a problem today. This is not to say that your camera won't disappear if you leave it lying around on the beach, but even busy Pape'ete is relatively safe compared with cities in the USA and Europe. There is the odd pickpocket and occasional robberies do occur. If you have valuables and you are staying in a more expensive hotel, it's probably wise to use the hotel safe. Don't leave anything of value in a rental car.

Violence is also rarely a problem in French Polynesia. Intoxicated youths or cranked-out crystal-meth junkies are the most likely troublemakers – they might address you as a *titoi* (wanker), but this is unlikely to ruin your holiday!

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Travellers with restricted mobility will find French Polynesia full of hindrances. With narrow flights of steps on boats, high steps on *le trucks* (public buses) and difficult boarding facilities on Air Tahiti aircraft, French Polynesia resembles a tropical obstacle course. What is more, hotels and guesthouses are not used to receiving disabled guests, and nautical and open-air activities are geared for the 'able-bodied'. However, all new hotels and public buildings must conform to certain standards, and so a gradual change can be expected.

Those who are not put off by these obstacles can contact **Te Nui o Te Huma, La Fédération des Handicapés de Polynésie** (Polynesian Federation for the Handicapped; ☎ 43 30 62) for more information.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Older travellers qualify for travel discounts in French Polynesia. If you are over 60, Air Tahiti offers a Carte Marama (Third Age Card), which costs 1000 CFP and allows substantial reductions on Air Tahiti flights (see p262 for details). Younger travellers will find their youth or student cards pretty useless here.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

French Embassies & Consulates

Australia (☎ 02-6216 0100; www.ambafrance-au.org; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Belgium (☎ 02-548 8711; www.ambafrance-be.org; 65 rue Ducale, 1000 Brussels)

Canada (☎ 613-789 1795; www.ambafrance-ca.org; 42 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, ON K1M 2C9)

Chile (☎ 02-470 80 00; www.france.cl in French & Spanish; Av Condell 65, Casilla 38-D, Providencia, Santiago)

Fiji (☎ 331 22 33; Dominion House, Scott St, Suva)

Germany (☎ 69-2063 9000; An der Kochstrasse 6/7, D-10969 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 01-260 16 66; 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)

Singapore (☎ 6880 7800; www.france.org.sg; 101-103 Cluny Park Rd, Singapore 259595)

Switzerland (☎ 031-359 2111; www.ambafrance-ch.org; Schosshaldenstrasse 46, 3006 Berne)

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, and many countries are represented in Pape'ete by honorary consuls. 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 pp90-1; ☎ 43 88 38; fax 41 05 19; c/- Qantas Airways, Vaima Centre, Pape'ete BP 1695, Pape'ete)

Austria (Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 91 14; fax 43 21 22; Rue Canonnière Zélée, Pape'ete BP 4560, Pape'ete) Also represents Swiss and Liechtensteiner residents.

Belgium (☎ 82 54 44, 83 75 09; fax 83 55 34; École Notre-Dame des Anges, Faa'a BP 6003, Faa'a)

Chile (Map pp90-1; ☎ 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'a'ua, Punaruu Valley BP 380 412, Tamanu)

Netherlands (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 49 37, 43 06 86; fax 43 56 92; Mobil Bldg, Fare Ute, Pape'ete BP 2804, Pape'ete)

New Zealand (Map pp90-1; ☎ 54 07 47/40; fax 42 45 44; c/- Air New Zealand, Vaima Centre, Pape'ete BP 73, Pape'ete)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

French Polynesia has festivals for all occasions, with a few pretty bizarre offerings.

Late January to Mid-February

Chinese New Year The date changes each year (it's based on the Chinese lunar calendar) but the celebrations always include dancing, martial-arts displays and fireworks.

Mo'orea Marathon This race around most of the island draws big international crowds.

March

Arrival of the First Missionaries Commemorated on 5 March, the landing is re-enacted at Point Vénus on Tahiti; there are celebrations on Tahiti and Mo'orea. The missionaries actually arrived on 4 March but didn't know about the International Date Line.

April & May

Beauty Contests The Tahitians love a beauty contest and there are lots of them held around the Society Islands in April and May, leading up to the Miss Tahiti and Miss Heiva i Tahiti contests in June and July (inquire at a tourist office). There are also Mr Tahiti contests.

May

Tahiti Billabong Pro Held at Teahupoo on Tahiti Iiti, the famous surfing contest attracts the industry's best riders and draws surf fans and media from around the world.

Late June to Early July

Tahiti International Golf Open A four-day championship held at the Olivier Bréaud Golf Course on Tahiti.

July

Heiva i Tahiti Held in Pape'ete, French Polynesia's most important festival lasts an entire month and is so impressive it's almost worth timing your trip around it. See p46 for details.

October

Stone-Fishing Contest This traditional contest takes place on Bora Bora during the first half of October.

Carnival Held in Pape'ete in late October, this features parades of floats decked with flowers.

Hawaiki Nui Canoe Race French Polynesia's major sporting event of the year, this is a three-day *piroque* (canoe) race from Huahine to Ra'iatea, Taha'a and Bora Bora. For more info, see the boxed text, p36.

December

Tiare Tahiti Days A festival celebrating the national flower – the ubiquitous but delightful *tiare*. Events take place all around French Polynesia on 1 December.

Marquesas Festival This arts festival celebrating Marquesan identity is held at least every four years.

FOOD

With the exception of Tahiti and Mo'orea, restaurants are so few and far between in French Polynesia that we have listed them by location rather than price. However, where we do use price breakdowns we've placed dishes costing less than 1000 CFP in the budget category, 1000 to 2500 CFP in the midrange category and over 2500 CFP in the top end. See the Food & Drink chapter (p67) for thorough descriptions of the cuisine and the types of restaurants you'll find in French Polynesia.

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 preponderance of honeymooning couples, but you will meet lots of very camp *mahu* (men living as women) working in restaurants and hotels.

The Tiki Soft C@fé (p98) in Pape'ete is a popular, hip spot for *popaa* (Western) 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.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays, when all businesses and government offices close, include the following.

New Year's Day 1 January

Arrival of the First Missionaries 5 March

Easter March/April

May Day 1 May

VE Day 8 May

Ascension Late May

Pentecost & Pentecost Monday Early June

Internal Autonomy Day 29 June

Bastille Day 14 July

Assumption 15 August

All Saints' Day 1 November

Armistice Day 11 November

Christmas Day 25 December

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is vital. There is a wide variety of policies available and your travel agent will have recommendations. Some policies offer different medical-expense options, but the higher ones are chiefly for countries such as the USA, which has extremely high medical costs.

Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking. If such activities are on your agenda, you obviously don't want that sort of policy.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than requiring you to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call (reverse charges) a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

Check the small print: for example, does the policy cover ambulances and an emergency flight home? If you have to stretch out you will need two seats and somebody has to pay for them!

INTERNET ACCESS

Surfing in French Polynesia has always been something you do with a surfboard, but the Internet is finally starting to take hold. Internet cafés are becoming more popular each year – although the ones on the smaller islands often have only ancient computers. Most of the 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 900 CFP per hour.

LEGAL MATTERS

French Polynesia is a part of France, and is thus subject to that country's penal system. The police rarely hassle foreigners, especially tourists. On the smaller islands, the police presence is usually limited to one or two officers, who close up shop around 6pm. Drink driving is a real problem on the larger islands, and police sometimes set up checkpoints on Tahiti, Ra'iatea and Mo'orea.

MAPS

The map *Tahiti Archipel de la Société* (IGN No 3615), at a scale of 1:100,000, is readily available in Pape'ete and from map specialists abroad. It covers the Society Archipelago and is the one really useful map for travellers. IGN also publishes maps at 1:50,000 for each island in the archipelago, although these are harder to track down. The SHOM navy maps of the Tuamotus are the best available; for the Marquesas there are SHOM maps and IGN maps at 1:50,000 for Hiva Oa, Nuku Hiva and 'Ua Pou.

MONEY

The unit of currency in French Polynesia is the *franc cours 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.

There are fairly hefty bank charges for changing money and travellers cheques in French Polynesia. You generally pay at least a 500 CFP commission on travellers cheques and to exchange cash, although exchange rates do vary from bank to bank; 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 making fewer transactions) than smaller amounts. Rates offered on Tahiti tend to be better than those offered on the other islands.

See the inside front cover for an exchange-rate table and p14 for info on costs.

ATMs

Known as *distributeurs automatiques de billets* or DABs in French, ATMs will give you cash advances on your Visa or MasterCard; and if they are linked to the international Cirrus or Maestro networks they will let you withdraw money straight from your home bank account. International cards generally appear to work only at ATMs associated with Banque Socredo; luckily most islands have at least one of these, although you might have to hike a bit to reach them.

The exchange rate on these transactions is usually better than what you get with travellers cheques, and the charge your own bank makes on these withdrawals (typically about US\$5) is far less than you'll be charged by banks in French Polynesia for changing money or travellers cheques.

ATMs can be found dotted around Tahiti, but they're less common on other islands. Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea, Bora Bora and Rangiroa have ATMs (there are no ATMs in Maupiti, and Rangiroa has the only ATM in the Tuamotus). On Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa in the Marquesas, and on Rurutu and Tubuai in the Australs there are ATMs inside the Socredo agencies.

Banks

There are three major banks operating in French Polynesia: Banque de Tahiti, Banque de Polynésie and Banque Socredo.

Most banks are concentrated in Pape'ete and the more populous islands of Mo'orea, Ra'iatea and Bora Bora. All the main islands in the Society group, apart from Maupiti, have at least one banking agency. In the Tuamotus, only Rangiroa has a permanent banking service. In the Marquesas there are Socredo agencies on 'Ua Pou, Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa. In the Australs group, Rurutu and Tubuai have some banking services.

Banking hours vary from branch to branch but are typically from 8am to noon and 1pm to 4pm Monday to Thursday, and 8am to noon and 1pm to 3pm on Friday. Some branches in Pape'ete do not close for the traditional French Polynesian lunch break, and a handful of Tahitian branches open on Saturday morning. The Banque de Polynésie has banking facilities at Pape'ete's Faa'a airport for flight arrivals.

Credit Cards

All top-end and midrange hotels, restaurants, jewellery shops, dive centres and the bigger supermarkets accept credit cards, preferably (and sometimes exclusively) Visa or MasterCard, but they require a 2000 CFP minimum purchase. You can also pay for Air Tahiti flights with a card. Most budget guesthouses and many tour operators don't accept credit cards, so you can get caught out on the weekends if there's no ATM on the island.

Tippling

Tippling is not a part of life in French Polynesia. The price quoted is the price you are expected to pay, which certainly simplifies things and goes some way towards recompense for the extraordinary expense of the region.

POST

The postal system in French Polynesia is generally quite efficient, and there are modern post offices on all the main islands. Mail to Europe, the USA and Australia takes about a week. Postcards or letters weighing up to 20g cost 85 CFP to France, 120 CFP to anywhere else.

French Polynesian stamps are quite often beautiful, and even more often, they are massive. Put the stamps on your postcard first so you know how much space is left to squeeze in the address. If you're lucky there may still be room for a message.

Post offices are generally open from around 7.30am to 3pm Monday to Friday, although the main post office in Pape'ete has longer opening hours and the post office at Faa'a airport is also open from 6.30am to 10am Saturday and Sunday.

There is no door-to-door mail delivery in French Polynesia, so mail is usually addressed to a *boîte postale* (BP; post office box). If you want to receive mail, ask for it to be addressed to you care of poste restante at the appropriate place (eg James Cook, c/- Poste Restante, Vaitape, Bora Bora, French Polynesia).

SHOPPING

There are plenty of art-and-craft shops waiting to lure you in but beware of local souvenirs that aren't local at all – many colourful woodcarvings, even those with Bora

Bora neatly painted on them, come from Bali or Colombia. Nevertheless, French Polynesia does have some excellent local crafts, many of which can be found on Tahiti, especially in the Marché de Pape'ete.

There are duty-free shopping facilities in Pape'ete and at Faa'a airport, with the usual liquor, tobacco and perfume discounts, but the prices are not very exciting by international standards.

Stamp collectors will be excited by the interesting and very colourful stamps on sale. The Centre Philatelique is next door to the main post office in Pape'ete.

Bargaining

Bargaining is not a part of life in French Polynesia; once again, the price quoted is the price you are expected to pay. The only exception to this is for black pearls, for which some discounts may be offered; you may also be able to bargain when buying craft work directly from an artist (Marquesan sculptures, for example).

Black Pearls

Black pearls – surely a gal's second-best friend – are cultivated in the Tuamotus and are an important industry in French Polynesia. You can visit the pearl farms in the Tuamotus, particularly on Rangiroa, and there are jewellery shops and black-pearl specialists all over Pape'ete and on other touristy islands – we found some of the best deals for quality pieces in Ra'iatea. The pearls can be bought both mounted and unmounted. Allow anywhere from 1500 to 200,000 CFP and more for a single pearl.

Clothing & Decoration

Hats, bags and mats of woven pandanus are among the best examples of a true local craft. The best work is said to come from the Australs. *Tapa* is a traditional nonwoven fabric made from the bark of *uru*, banyan or paper mulberry trees. Fabric from Europe is gradually superseding *tapa*, but it is still made on Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas and can be bought in Pape'ete.

Tifaijai are large, brilliantly coloured patchwork cloths, usually decorated with stylised flower or fruit designs. Produced on a number of islands, including Rurutu, *tifaijai* are often sold as tablecloths, bedspreads and curtains.

The *pareu* is a single piece of cloth, colourfully decorated and usually worn by women – although it's equally appropriate for men. It costs about 1500 to 2500 CFP, but beware that *pareu* are often imported from Asia.

French Polynesia's favourite beauty product, *mono* (fragrant oil), is used as moisturising oil, soap, shampoo, sunscreen and perfume. You'll pay around 600 CFP for a bottle, and this blend of coconut oil perfumed with flowers makes a great present.

Music

French Polynesian song has developed into a sort of island country-and-western music, with melancholic tales of lost love and day-to-day life set to the accompaniment of guitar and ukulele. It's easy on the ear and very catchy – and if you stay at any of the luxury resorts you'll usually hear so much of it you'll likely be inclined to purchase a CD or two. Traditional dance music, based around drums, has strong, complex rhythms. There are a number of music shops in and around Pape'ete where you can find local and international music.

Painting & Sculpture

A number of interesting Polynesian and European artists work in French Polynesia, and their work is on display in galleries and little studios on Tahiti, Mo'orea and Bora Bora. Originals and high-quality prints and posters are available.

Sculpture and woodcarving, in fine wood and in stone or bone, are particularly renowned in the Marquesas. Many settlements in that archipelago have craft centres where you can see local artists' work, although you can also approach the artists directly. *Tiki* (sacred sculpture), *umete* (traditional wooden bowls), trunks, spears and personal adornments are the most popular items.

Specialist galleries in Pape'ete also sell sculptors' work, but at higher prices. Twice a year Marquesan sculptors have an exhibition and sale in the Territorial Assembly in Pape'ete, usually in June and November.

Tattoos

Tattooed flesh abounds in French Polynesia, on locals and travellers alike. Given that everyone is so tanned, and nobody wears

much clothing, they usually look great. Before you launch in and get one though, have a think about how it will look in 20 years' time, in winter. If you're still keen, there are plenty of places to choose from. See p40 for more information.

TELEPHONE

The public telephone system in French Polynesia is modern, easy to use, widespread and, when it comes to international calls, rather expensive. Public phone boxes can be found even in surprisingly remote locations, and all use the same phonecards. You are able to buy phonecards from post offices, newsagencies, shops and even some supermarkets. They can also be purchased from vending machines at Faa'a airport. 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).

If you want to call a phone number in French Polynesia from overseas, dial the international access number, then ☎ 689 (Tahiti's international dialling code), then the local number.

To call overseas from French Polynesia dial ☎ 00, then your country code, the area code (dropping any leading 0) and the local number. 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 a l'arrivée*.

TIME

French Polynesia is 10 hours behind London, three hours behind Los Angeles and three hours ahead of Sydney; the region is just two hours east of the International Date Line. The Marquesas are a half-hour ahead of the rest of French Polynesia (noon on Tahiti is 12.30pm in the Marquesas). Make sure that you check your flight schedules carefully: Air Tahiti departures and arrivals in the Marquesas may run on Tahiti time. See also the World Time Zone map (p289).

TOURIST INFORMATION

The main tourist office is the **Manava Visitors Bureau** (☎ 50 57 10; tahiti-manava@mail.microtech.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 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; Level 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, the USA and some other European countries are able to 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; ☎ 42 40 74; pafport@mail.pf; ✉ airport office 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, Pape'ete office 7.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), at Faa'a airport and next to the Manava Visitors Bureau 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 (see right for information on work permits).

Formalities for Yachts

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** (Frontier Police; ✉ 7.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), next to the tourist office 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), Moerai (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 will probably feel pretty comfortable following suit.

It is a sad reality that women are still required to exercise care, particularly at night, but this is the case worldwide. Some women have commented on being the object of unwanted interest in parts of French Polynesia, but this attention is on the whole harmless, although annoying. As with anywhere in the world, give drunks and their beer breath a wide berth.

Perhaps it's the locals' getting their own back after centuries of leering European men ogling Polynesian women, but there is reportedly a 'tradition' of Peeping Toms in French Polynesia, mainly in the outer islands. Take special care in places that seem to offer opportunities for spying on guests, particularly in the showers, and make sure your room can be securely locked.

WORK

French citizens are not required to comply with any formalities but for everyone else, even other EU citizens (with the exception of those with very specialised skills), it is difficult to work in French Polynesia. Unless you are a Japanese pearl grafter, a tourist guide, a Chinese chef or a banking executive, you stand little chance. Authorisation to take up paid employment is subject to the granting of a temporary-residence permit, issued by the French state, and a work permit, issued by the territory.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Entry procedures for French Polynesia are straightforward. You'll have to show your passport of course, with any visa (see p255) you may have obtained beforehand. You'll also need to present completed arrival and departure cards, usually distributed on the incoming flight. You may also be asked to show proof of a return airline ticket – Polynesians don't want to share their paradise with you forever.

You do not have to fill in a customs declaration on arrival unless you have imported goods to declare, in which case you can get the proper form from customs officials at the point of entry.

AIR

Most visitors arrive by air. Faa'a airport, on Tahiti, is the only international airport in French Polynesia. There is no departure tax within French Polynesia.

Airports & Airlines

The **Faa'a International Airport** (PPT; ☎ 86 60 61; www.tahiti-aeroport.pf) is on Pape'ete's outskirts, 5km west of the capital. International check-in desks are at the terminal's eastern end.

A number of international airlines serve French Polynesia from different parts of the world. The following airlines have offices in Pape'ete.

Aircalin (Air Caledonie International, airline code SB; ☎ 85 09 04; www.aircalin.nc; hub Noumea International Airport, New Caledonia)
Air France (airline code AF; ☎ 47 47 47; www.airfrance.com; hub Orly Airport, Paris)
Air New Zealand (airline code NZ; ☎ 54 07 47; www.airnz.com; hub Auckland International Airport, Auckland)
Air Tahiti Nui (airline code TN; ☎ 45 55 55; www.airtahiti.com; hub Faa'a International Airport, Tahiti)
Corsair (airline code SS; ☎ 42 28 28; www.corsair.fr; hub Orly Airport, Paris)
Hawaiian Airlines (airline code HA; ☎ 42 15 00; www.hawaiianair.com; hub Honolulu International Airport, Honolulu)
LanChile (airline code LA; ☎ 42 64 55; www.lan.com; hub Santiago International Airport, Santiago)
Qantas Airways (airline code QF; ☎ 43 06 65; www.qantas.com; hub Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney)

Tickets

Tickets can be purchased cheaply on the Internet and many airlines offer excellent fares to Web surfers. Online ticket sales work well if you're doing a simple one-way or return trip on specified dates. However, online fare generators are no substitute for a travel agent who knows all about special deals, has strategies for avoiding layovers (very helpful for French Polynesia, which

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change: prices for international travel are volatile, routes are introduced and cancelled, schedules change, special deals come and go, and rules and visa requirements are amended. You should check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel.

The upshot of this is that you should get opinions, quotes and advice from as many airlines and travel agents as possible before you part with your hard-earned cash. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

is so far away from *anywhere*) and can offer advice on everything from which airline has the best vegetarian food to the best travel insurance to bundle with your ticket.

You may find the cheapest flights are advertised by obscure agencies. Most such firms are honest and solvent, but there are some rogue fly-by-night outfits around. Paying by credit card generally offers protection, as most card issuers provide refunds if you can prove you didn't get what you paid for. Agents who accept only cash should hand over the tickets straight away and not tell you to 'come back tomorrow'. After you've made a booking or paid your deposit, call the airline and confirm that the booking was made.

If you purchase a ticket and then later would like to make changes to your route or get a refund, you will actually need to contact the original travel agent. Airlines issue refunds only to the purchaser of a ticket, which is usually the travel agent or online booking site that bought your ticket on your behalf. Many travellers change their routes halfway through their trips, so make sure that you think carefully before you buy a ticket that is not easily refunded or changed.

Booking flights in and out of Tahiti during the high season (June to September and over Christmas) can be difficult and more expensive – book well in advance.

Good online booking agencies for Tahiti:

- www.expedia.com
- www.orbitz.com
- www.travelocity.com

INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

If you're travelling to multiple countries, a round-the-world (RTW) ticket – where you pay a single discounted price for several connections – may be the most economical way to go.

A Circle Pacific ticket is similar to a RTW ticket but is cheaper and covers a more limited region. This ticket uses a combination of airlines to connect Australia, New Zealand, North America and Asia, with a variety of stopover options in the Pacific islands. Generally, Circle Pacific fares are a better deal from the USA and Asia than from Australia.

Online companies that can arrange RTW and Circle Pacific tickets:

- www.airbrokers.com
- www.airstop.be
- www.airtreks.com
- www.aroundtheworlds.com

PACKAGE TOUR PARADISE

French Polynesia lends itself to the package tour. Given the high price of flights to the region, and the often astronomical price of accommodation once there, a package tour can work out to be a financial godsend. On the downside, package tours don't give 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, a good travel agent is essential – they 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 A\$2000.

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.

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 New Zealand.

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 Airways 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 about A\$1200/1550 for a return trip in the low/high season with either Qantas or Air New Zealand.

As in Australia, fares from New Zealand increase during high season. From Auckland return fares start at NZ\$1000/1300 in low/high season. Both Air New Zealand and Qantas/Air Tahiti Nui offer connecting flights from Pape'ete to Los Angeles.

Many Australians choose to travel to French Polynesia on a package tour; see the boxed text, opposite.

Other Pacific Islands

There are regular connections between French Polynesia and New Zealand, Fiji, New Caledonia, the Cook Islands, Wallis and Fortuna, and Hawaii. 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

LanChile operates flights between Santiago and Pape'ete; one flight a week has a stopover on Easter Island. Return fares cost around 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 Los Angeles. 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. Some recommended agencies across Europe are listed following.

FRANCE

Anyway (☎ 0892 893 892; www.anyway.fr)
Lastminute (☎ 0892 705 000; www.lastminute.fr)
Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

GERMANY

Expedia (www.expedia.com)
Just Travel (☎ 089 747 3330; www.justtravel.de)
STA Travel (☎ 01805 456; www.statravel.de)

UK

Discount air-travel ads appear in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and the free magazine *TNT*.

Bridge the World (☎ 0870 444 7474; www/b-t-w.co.uk)
Flightbookers (☎ 0870 010 7000; www.ebookers.com)
Traifinders (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.traifinders.co.uk)
Travel Bag (☎ 0870 890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA & Canada

Coming from the USA you can either fly direct from Los Angeles 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 Los Angeles (Corsair flights are also available via San Francisco). Return fares from Los Angeles 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 four stopovers – Honolulu, Nadi (Fiji), Pape'ete and Rarotonga – 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 US West Coast. Return fares from Vancouver via Los Angeles start from C\$2200 in the low season.

If you would like to book your flight and hotel as a package (see opposite), **Tahiti**

Explorer (☎ 800 781 9356; www.airtahiti.com) concentrates exclusively on French Polynesian travel and has loads of information. **Avia Travel** (☎ 800 950 2842; www.aviatravel.com) is another respected travel agent that specialises in custom-designed RTW fares.

SEA Cruise Ships

Getting to French Polynesia by sea can be a real challenge, although cruise ships from the USA and Australia do occasionally pass through for a day or so. Another possibility by sea is to travel with the US-based **Society Expeditions** (☎ 206-728 9400, 800 548 8669; www.societyexpeditions.com), which has regular sailings aboard the *World Discoverer* between Tahiti, Pitcairn and Easter Islands. Departures are from Los Angeles and fares start at US\$7000 per person.

Yacht

Travelling to French Polynesia by yacht is eminently feasible. Yachts heading across the Pacific from North America, Australia or New Zealand are often looking for crew and, if you're in the right place at the right time, it's often possible to pick up a ride. It's also possible to pick up crewing positions once in French Polynesia. Sailing experience will definitely score extra points, but so will the ability to cook soup when the boat's keeled over and waves are crashing through the hatch.

On the eastern side of the Pacific, try the yacht clubs in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Honolulu. On the western side, Auckland, Sydney and Cairns are good places to try. Look for notices pinned to bulletin boards in yacht clubs and yachting-equipment shops, and post your own notice offering to crew.

Ideally you should do some sailing with the boat before you actually set off. A month from the next landfall is not the time to discover that you can't bear the crew or that the ogre of seasickness is always by your side.

It takes about a month to sail from the US West Coast to Hawaii 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 New Zealand.

There are distinct seasons for sailing across the Pacific in order to avoid cyclones. Late September to October and January to March are the usual departure times from the USA. Yachts tend to set off from Australia and New Zealand after the cyclone season, around March and April.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around French Polynesia is half the fun. There are regular and affordable connections between the larger islands by boat (wonderfully languorous) and aeroplane (dramatic and scenic). Getting to the remote islands can be time-consuming and difficult, but never boring.

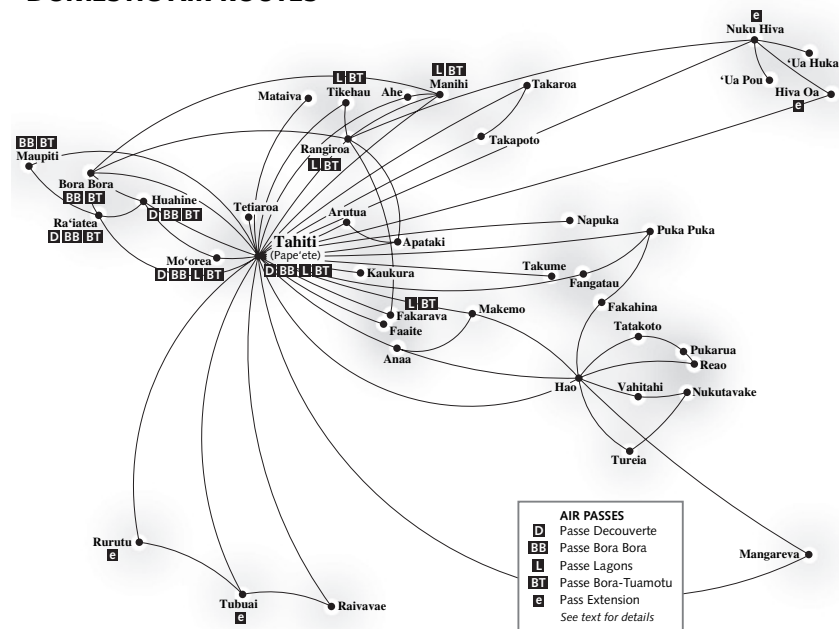
On some islands there are paved roads, *le truck* (bus) services and myriad car-rental companies; on others there are rough dirt tracks and public transport is unheard of. Generally, your best bet is to rent a car or, even better, a bicycle and be controller of your own destiny.

AIR

There are some (expensive) charter operators with small aircraft and helicopters, but essentially 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. Note that Pape'ete is very much the hub for flights within French Polynesia and, with only a few exceptions, you'll generally have to pass through Pape'ete between island groups.

Flight frequencies ebb and flow with the seasons, and extra flights are scheduled in the July–August peak season. 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 chapters for Air Tahiti's island-specific phone numbers. You can pay for flights by credit card at all Air Tahiti offices or agencies.

DOMESTIC AIR ROUTES



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 Routes in French Polynesia

See the specific chapters for information on fares between the various islands of French Polynesia – we've listed only general routes in this section. Because distances to the remote islands are so great, some of the full fares are quite high and the cheapest way to visit a number of islands by air is to buy one of Air Tahiti's air passes (see p262).

THE SOCIETY ISLANDS

From Pape'ete there are direct flights every half-hour or so to Mo'orea and several times a day to other major islands in the group, except for Maupiti, where connections are less frequent (about four a week). There are daily connections on most routes between Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea and Bora Bora. On some routes, such as the busy Pape'ete–Bora Bora connection, there are up to eight flights a day in the high

season. The Society Islands are quite close together and the longest nonstop flight (between Pape'ete and Bora Bora) takes only 45 minutes. Other flights, such as the speedy trip between Pape'ete and Mo'orea, may be as short as seven minutes.

THE TUAMOTUS

Air Tahiti divides the Tuamotus into the busier, touristy northern Tuamotus (Ahe, Apataki, Arutua, Faaite, Fakarava, Kauehi, Manihi, Mataiva, Napuka, Rangiroa, Tikehau, Takapoto, Takarua) and the much less frequented eastern Tuamotus (Anaa, Fakahina, Fangatau, Hao, Makemo, Nukutavake, Puka Puka, Pukarua, Reao, Takume, Tatakoto, Tureia, Vahitahi). The Gambier Archipelago is reached via the eastern Tuamotus.

Rangiroa is the main flight centre in the Tuamotus, with between one and five flights to/from Pape'ete daily (one hour). On most days at least one flight continues on to Manihi. Other flights from Pape'ete, either direct or via Rangiroa, include Apataki, Arutua, Faaite, Fakarava, Ahe, Kaukura, Mataiva, Takarua, Takapoto and Tikehau.

Apart from Tahiti the only Society Island with a direct connection to the Tuamotus is Bora Bora. There's one daily Bora Bora-Rangiroa flight and a weekly flight from Rangiroa to Nuku Hiva (and on to Atuona on Hiva Oa) in the Marquesas.

THE MARQUESAS

Flights to the Marquesas are usually direct from Pape'ete (about three hours), but some are via Rangiroa and a few are via Bora Bora. There are seven or eight flights weekly to Nuku Hiva, some of which continue on to Hiva Oa. From Nuku Hiva there are five flights weekly to 'Ua Pou, and three flights weekly to 'Ua Huka.

THE AUSTRALS

Air Tahiti has five flights weekly from Pape'ete to Rurutu (1½ hours) and Tubuai. One flight travels Pape'ete-Rurutu-Tubuai-Pape'ete, the other one travels Pape'ete-Tubuai-Rurutu-Pape'ete. There are also flights to Raivavae.

THE GAMBIER ARCHIPELAGO

There is one flight weekly to Mangareva from Pape'ete (about 3½ hours with a half-hour stop at Hao).

CHARTER FLIGHTS

Both based at Faa'a airport, **Wan Air** (☎ 86 61 63) and **Air Archipels** (☎ 81 30 30) can arrange charter flights with small aircraft to any destination in French Polynesia. **Héli-Inter Polynésie** (☎ 81 99 00, in Bora Bora 67 62 59; helico-tahiti@mail.pf) and **Héli Pacifique** (☎ 85 68 00) are also at the airport and organise helicopter charters (around 18,000 CFP for 20 minutes; minimum of four people required). In the Marquesas, **Héli-Inter Marquises** (☎ 92 02 17) operates regular shuttle services (see p214).

Air Passes

There are four island-hopping air passes offering inclusive fares to a number of islands.

Travel must commence in Pape'ete and there are restrictions on the number of transits allowed through Pape'ete. You are only allowed one stopover on each island, but you can transit an island if the flight number does not change. If you stop at an island to change flights, it counts as a stopover.

Passes are valid for a maximum of 28 days and all flights (except Pape'ete-Mo'orea or

DISCOUNT CARDS

Air Tahiti has several cards available that let you buy tickets at reduced prices, depending on whether the flight is blue, white or red. If you're under 25, the *Carte Jeune* (Youth Card) gives you a 50% reduction on blue flights and 30% on white flights. If you're over 60, a *Carte Marama* (Third Age Card) gives you 50% and 30% reductions respectively. A *Carte Famille* (Family Card) provides family members with a 50% (adult) and 75% (child) discount on blue flights, 30% and 50% on white flights and 10% and 50% on red flights.

The *Carte Jeune* and *Carte Marama* cost 1000 CFP and require a passport-type photo and your passport or other form of identification; the *Carte Famille* costs 2000 CFP and requires photos of the parents and birth certificates or equivalent for the children – just having them listed in your passport isn't enough.

These cards are issued on the spot, but are only available in French Polynesia.

Mo'orea-Pape'ete) must be booked when you buy your pass, though dates can be changed at any time. You can use either Air Tahiti or Air Moorea on the Pape'ete-Mo'orea sector. Once you have taken the first flight on the pass the routing cannot be changed and the fare is nonrefundable. The five-island pass costs 37,000 CFP for adults and 21,000 CFP for children 12 and under.

You can extend any of the following passes to include the Marquesas (Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa) for 51,000/29,000 CFP per adult/child fare. An extension to the Australs (Rurutu and Tubuai) costs 26,000/17,000 CFP. A Marquesas and Australs extension to cover all four islands costs 71,000/40,000 CFP.

PASSE DECOUVERTE

The *Passé Decouverte* (Discovery Pass; adult/child 25,000/15,000 CFP) is the most basic pass and allows visits to Mo'orea, Ra'iatea and Huahine from Pape'ete.

PASSE BORA BORA

The *Passé Bora Bora* (Bora Bora Pass; adult/child 37,000/21,000 CFP) allows you to visit the six main islands in the Society group:

Tahiti, Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea, Bora Bora and Maupiti.

PASSE LAGONS

The *Passé Lagon* (Lagoons Pass; adult/child 41,000/22,000 CFP) allows you to visit Mo'orea, Rangiroa, Tikehau, Manihi and Fakarava.

PASSE BORA-TUAMOTU

This pass (adult/child 55,000/29,000 CFP) allows you to visit Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea, Bora Bora, Maupiti, Rangiroa, Tikehau, Manihi and Fakarava.

BICYCLE

Cycling around the islands of French Polynesia is a sheer pleasure. The distances are rarely great, the traffic is rarely heavy (except in Tahiti) and the roads are rarely hilly. Bikes can be rented on many of the islands for about 1500 CFP a day, but you may find yourself riding an antique. Consider bringing your own bike if you are a really keen cyclist. Bicycles are accepted on all the inter-island boats.

BOAT

Boat travel within the Society group is a delight. A number of companies shuttle back and forth between Tahiti and Mo'orea each day; other routes between the islands are less frequent but served at least twice a week.

In the other archipelagos travel by boat is more difficult. If you are short on time and keen to travel beyond the Society Islands you may need to consider flying at least some of the way.

Cargo ships, also known as *goëlettes* or schooners, are principally involved in freight transport. They take passengers, however, and for those who want to get off the beaten trail such a voyage can, depending on the circumstances, be anything from a memorable experience to an outright nightmare. The level of comfort is rudimentary: some ships don't have passenger cabins and you have to travel 'deck class', providing your own bedding to unroll on the deck and all your own meals. You will get wet and cold. And then there's seasickness...

A notice posted at Chez Guynette in Huahine sums up the cargo-ship schedules: 'The boats arrive when they are here and leave when they are ready.'

Cruise Ship

At the other end of the spectrum from rudimentary cargo ships are the luxury cruise ships that operate in the Society Islands. These ships are incredibly stylish and comfortable, and offer shore excursions at each stop – this is a long way from the leaky copra boats of traditional inter-island travel.

Managed by **Bora Bora Pearl Cruises** (☎ 43 43 03; www.boraborapearlcruises.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 *Tu Moana*, both also managed by Bora Bora 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.tahitituitravel.com) for information.

Ferry & Cargo Ship

THE SOCIETY ISLANDS

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 Moorea Ferry, are slower than the high-speed ferries, which take only passengers, motorcycles and bicycles. The **Aremiti 5** (Pape'ete ☎ 42 88 88 in Mo'orea 56 31 10) and the **Moorea Express** (☎ 82 47 47 (in Pape'ete); in 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.

Vaeanu (☎ 41 25 35) operates the Pape'ete-Huahine-Ra'iatea-Taha'a-Bora Bora round 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 the Motu Uta port area in Pape'ete, near the *Aranui* office; take *le truck* No 3 from the *mairie* (town hall).

Hawaiki Nui (☎ 45 23 24) also travels the Society Islands circuit and has two departures a week (Tuesday and Thursday at 4pm; deck/cabin per person 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). Get tickets at the quay in Pape'ete.

The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 6669) makes regular trips between Bora Bora and Maupiti (one way 2500 CFP) and Taha'a and Ra'iatea (one way 2500 CFP). The boat departs the Vaitape quay in Bora Bora for Maupiti at 8.30am on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; the return trip leaves Maupiti at 4pm on the same day. Tickets can be purchased at the quay.

The small cargo ship **Maupiti Tou A'i'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, arriving at Maupiti the following morning and returning to Pape'ete on Friday. The one-way fare is 2500 CFP.

THE TUAMOTUS

The small cargo vessels that serve the Tuamotus, *golettes*, are true lifelines between Tahiti and the atolls of the archipelago. They take passengers but their main purpose is to transport freight and the standard of comfort is generally basic.

The routes and fares mentioned here are purely an indication and are subject to change. It's best to check with the shipowners in the Motu Uta port area in Pape'ete (take *le truck* No 3 from the *mairie*). The offices are generally open from Monday to Friday 7.30am to 11am and from 1.30pm to 5pm. Some offices also open on Saturday morning.

The **Dory** (☎ 42 30 55; ☎ office 7.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Thu) runs Pape'ete-Tikehau-Rangiroa-Ahe-Manihi-Apataki-Arutua-Kaukura-Pape'ete, departing Pape'ete on Monday and returning on Friday. There's deck and berth accommodation available, but no meals for passengers, so you must buy food at each stop. A single trip costs around 4000/5500 CFP deck/cabin class (children travel half-price).

The **Corbia** (☎ 43 36 43; ☎ office 7.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) travels Pape'ete-Kaukura-Arutua-Apataki-Aratika-Toau-Pape'ete

once a week; there are no cabins and no meals are served. The fare is about 3150 CFP.

Rairoa Nui (☎ 48 35 78; fax 48 22 86) runs the Pape'ete-Rangiroa-Arutua-Apataki-Kaukura-Pape'ete loop once a week. There are no cabins and no meals are available; the cost is around 3000 CFP.

The **Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella** (☎ 42 23 58; ☎ office 7.30-11am & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri) travels a circuit from Pape'ete every 15 days, taking in Mataiva, Tikehau, Rangiroa, Ahe, Manihi, Takarua, Takapoto, Arutua, Apataki, Kaukura, Toau, Fakarava, Kauehi, Raraka and Niau. Departing from Pape'ete, allow 5500 CFP to Rangiroa, 6500 CFP to Manihi and 8000 CFP to Fakarava. Prices are for deck class, but meals are included.

The **Nuku Hau** (☎ 45 23 24; ☎ office 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) travels Pape'ete-Hao-Nego-Nego-Tureia-Vanavana-Marutea-Rikitea-Tematangi-Aruanuraro-Nukitepipi-Hereheretue-Pape'ete every 25 days. It costs around 8000 CFP on the deck; it's an extra 2000 CFP per person per day for meals.

The **Mareva Nui** (☎ 42 25 53; ☎ office 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-5pm Mon-Thu) runs a circuit from Pape'ete taking in Makatea, Mataiva, Tikehau, Rangiroa, Ahe, Manihi, Takarua, Takapoto, Raraka, Kauehi, Aratika, Taiaro, Fakarava, Arutua, Apataki, Niau, Toau and Kaukura. Fares vary from 3000 to 6000 CFP for a part-journey (add 2500 CFP per person per day for meals) on deck and from 4000 to 8500 CFP in a sleeper; the complete trip takes eight days.

The **Vai-Aito** (☎ 43 99 96; ☎ office 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) travels along a Pape'ete-Tikehau-Rangiroa-Ahe-Manihi-Aratika-Kauehi-Toau-Fakarava-Pape'ete trip two to three times a month. From Pape'ete it's 5500 CFP to Rangiroa, 8500 CFP to Manihi and 19,000 CFP to Fakarava on deck, meals included; the trip takes seven to eight days.

The **Kura Ora II** and **Kura Ora III** (☎ 45 55 45; ☎ office 7.30am-3pm Mon-Thu) do a trip every 15 days to the remote atolls of the central and eastern Tuamotus, including Anaa, Hao and Makemo. Deck-class prices cost from around 6000 CFP, depending on the distance travelled, plus around 2300 CFP per person per day for meals. The complete trip takes about three weeks.

The **Hotu Maru**, **Taporo V** and **Taporo VI** also visit the Tuamotus. The **Taporo VI** and **Aranui** serve certain atolls in the Tuamotus

en route to the Marquesas, as does the **Nuku Hau** on its way to the Gambier Archipelago.

THE MARQUESAS

The **Aranui** and the **Taporo VI** both go to the Marquesas. The **Aranui** (☎ 42 62 40; www.aranui.com) is a veritable institution, taking freight and passengers on 16 trips a year from Pape'ete. The **Taporo VI** (☎ 42 63 93; fax 42 06 17) takes a maximum of 12 passengers on its 10-day trip around the Marquesas; the boat runs every 15 days. The shipowner, **Compagnie Française Maritime de Tahiti** (☎ 43 89 66), has its office at Fare Ute, just before the entrance to Pape'ete's Motu Uta port area.

THE AUSTRALS

Services between the Society Islands and the Australs are limited, so make sure you plan ahead.

The 60m **Tuhaa Pae II** leaves Pape'ete for the Australs three times a month. It stops at Rurutu and Tubuai on every trip, Rimatara and Raivavae twice a month, Rapa once every two months and Maria Island in the Gambiers very occasionally.

You can choose between deck class, berths and air-con cabins. From Pape'ete to Rurutu, Rimatara or Tubuai a deck/berth/air-con cabin costs 4500/6000/8000 CFP; to Raivavae it costs 6000/8500/12,000 CFP. Three meals add another 3000 CFP per day. The **Tuhaa Pae II office** (☎ 50 96 09, 50 96 06; snathp@mail.pf) is in Pape'ete's Motu Uta, between the **Kura Ora** and **Mareva Nui** offices.

THE GAMBIE ARCHIPELAGO

Every three weeks, the **Nuku Hau** does a 15-day circuit to Rikitea on Mangareva in the Gambier Archipelago via several remote atolls in the eastern Tuamotus. One-way places on the deck cost 8000 CFP, plus 2000 CFP per day for meals. The **Nuku Hau office** (☎ 45 23 24) is in Pape'ete's Motu Uta port area, close to the warehouses of the other ship operators.

Once or twice a month the **Taporo V** does a 16-day trip through the eastern Tuamotus and the Gambier Archipelago. One-way places on the deck to Rikitea cost around 33,500 CFP, meals included. The **Taporo V office** (☎ 42 63 93) is at Fare Ute, in the same building as the **Taporo VI** office.

Tuhaa Pae II occasionally stops at Maria Island (see The Australs, above).

Yacht

French Polynesia is an enormously popular yachting destination, as the international line-up of yachts along the Pape'ete waterfront testifies. It's also possible to rent a yacht in French Polynesia (see p248).

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Most islands in the Society group have one road that hugs the coast all the way around. Tahiti (where there is even a stretch of freeway), Mo'orea, Bora Bora, Ra'iatea and Huahine have paved and reasonably well-maintained roads. On Taha'a and Maupiti there are only limited stretches of sealed road. On all of these islands, tracks leading inland are often rough-and-ready and almost always require a 4WD.

There are far more boats than land vehicles in the Tuamotus, although there is a sealed road running the length of Rangiroa's major island – all 10km of it!

Outside the towns there are hardly any sealed roads in the Marquesas. Tracks, suitable for 4WDs only, connect the villages.

Sealed roads encircle both Tubuai and Raivavae in the Australs, and there are reasonable stretches of sealed road on Rurutu. Otherwise, roads in the Australs archipelago are fairly limited and little transport is available.

Bus

French Polynesia doesn't have much of a public transportation system; 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 now been almost entirely replaced by a more modern fleet of air-con buses. Buses stop at designated spots (marked with a blue sign) and supposedly run on a schedule – although times are hardly regular. Although there are official *le truck* stops, complete with blue signs, they are rather difficult to spot, and *le trucks* will generally stop anywhere sensible for anybody who hails them. Note that you pay at the end of your trip and that for many routes there is a set fare, irrespective of distance.

Car & Scooter

If you want to explore the larger islands of the Society group at your own pace, it may be worth renting a car or scooter, particu-

larly given the price of taxis and the dismal state of public transport outside Pape'ete.

DRIVING LICENCE

Car-rental 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-rental agencies on the more touristy islands, but the prices really don't vary much: compared with rental costs in the rest of the world, prices are high. For a small car expect to pay from 2000 CFP a day, plus 40 CFP per kilometre and 1400 CFP a day for a collision-damage waiver – and that's not even including petrol! A daily rate with unlimited mileage will probably work out cheaper (from around 10,000 CFP a day, including insurance). Rates drop slightly from the third day onwards.

Fortunately, the cars available are pretty economical and you won't cover too many kilometres, no matter how hard you try. Off-road excursions into the interior are usually off limits to anything other than a 4WD.

Most places offer four-, eight- and 24-hour rates, as well as two- and three-day rentals. At certain times of the year (July, August and New Year's Eve) it's wise to book vehicles a few days in advance. You'll need a credit card, of course.

On Tahiti you will find the major international car-rental 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 with a driver. Rental without a driver is possible only on Atuona (Hiva Oa) and Taiohae (Nuku Hiva).

Avis and Europcar rent 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 ride a scooter. You'll pay around 6500 CFP a day. After numerous accidents there are no rental scooters 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.

Hitching

Hitching (*auto-stop* in French) is a widely accepted – and generally safe – way of getting around the islands in French Polynesia, and you'll see locals and travellers alike standing with their thumbs out on the roadside. Of course, hitching is never entirely safe, but if you're going to hitch, French Polynesia is an easy place to start – usually you'll never have to wait more than 15 or 20 minutes for a ride, plus you'll get a chance to meet some interesting folks. Of course, always take the necessary precautions and use your judgement before jumping into a car; drunk drivers are probably your biggest problem.

Health

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There is no malaria in French Polynesia, which is a huge health plus. Rabies is no danger on any of the islands, and there are no crocodiles. Mosquitoes do exist, however, and the main danger from them is dengue fever. Health facilities are of a generally good standard in French Polynesia, however there is a limited health budget so 'good' does not necessarily equate with the facilities you might expect in a developed country.

BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while overseas. A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save you a lot of trouble later. Make sure you see your dentist before a long trip, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician, describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

If your health insurance does not cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider supplemental insurance. (Check the Travel Links section of LonelyPlanet.com at www.lonelyplanet.com for more information.) Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. (In French Polynesia doctors will often expect payment in cash; see p269 for details.)

If you are a European Union citizen you have the same rights in French Polynesia as you do in France; remember to fill in the EU Form E111 before leaving home. It is still best to have private health insurance cover. Serious illness or injury may require evacuation, eg from an outer island to Tahiti or even from Tahiti to a major city such as Los Angeles or Auckland; make sure that health insurance has provision for evacuation. Under these circumstances hospitals accept direct payment from major international insurers but for all other health costs cash up front is usually required.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Vaccinations are recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid fever.

Side-effects of Vaccinations

All injected vaccinations can produce slight soreness and redness at the inoculation site, and a mild fever with muscle aches over the first 24 hours. These are least likely with hepatitis A and a little more common with hepatitis B and typhoid inoculations. Typhoid inoculation can cause a sensation of nausea within 24 hours and hepatitis B vaccine can produce temporary joint pains.

their destination. Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, make sure you visit a physician at least six weeks before departure. A recent influenza vaccination is always a good idea when travelling. If you have not had chicken pox (varicella) consider being vaccinated.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

It is a very good idea to carry a medical and first-aid kit with you, to help yourself in the case of minor illness or injury. Following is a list of items you should consider packing.

- antibiotics (prescription only), eg ciprofloxacin (Ciproxin) or norfloxacin (Utinor; Noroxin)
- antibiotic plus steroid eardrops (prescription only), eg Sofradex, Kenacort Otic
- anti-diarrhoeal drugs, eg loperamide
- acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin
- anti-inflammatory drugs, eg ibuprofen
- antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- antibacterial ointment, eg Bactroban for cuts and abrasions (prescription only)
- anti-giardia tablets such as tinidazole (prescription only)
- steroid cream or hydrocortisone cream (for allergic rashes)
- bandages, gauze, gauze rolls, waterproof dressings
- adhesive or paper tape
- scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- thermometer
- pocket knife
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- sun block
- oral rehydration salts, eg Gastrolyte, Diarolyte, Repllyte
- iodine tablets (for water purification)
- syringes and sterile needles, and intravenous fluids if travelling in very remote areas

Note that aspirin should not be used for fever because it can cause bleeding in dengue fever. Also, don't take the scissors, tweezers or pocket knife in your carry-on luggage.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the Internet. For further information, **LonelyPlanet.com** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The World Health Organization (WHO) produces a superb text called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually. It is no longer published in book form but is available online at no cost at www.who.int/ith.

Other websites of general interest:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Fit for Travel (www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk) Up-to-date information about outbreaks, very user-friendly.

MD Travel Health (www.mdtravelhealth.com) Provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, at no cost.

Travel Doctor (www.traveldoctor.com.au) An Australian site, similar to Fit for Travel.

It's also a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before your departure.

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspst/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel)

FURTHER READING

Good options for further reading include: *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan; *Healthy Travel Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* by Dr Isabelle Young; and *Your Child's Health Abroad: A Manual for Travelling Parents* by Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth and Matthew Ellis.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots may form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. And the longer the flight, the greater the risk. The chief symptom of DVT is swelling of or pain in the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, contract the leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

To avoid jet lag (common when crossing more than five time zones) try drinking plenty of nonalcoholic fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep and so on) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. A herbal alternative is ginger.

IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

French Polynesia has doctors in private practice, and standard hospital and laboratory facilities with consultants in the major specialities – internal medicine, obstetrics/gynaecology, orthopaedics, ophthalmology, paediatrics, pathology, psychiatry and general surgery. Private dentists, opticians and pharmacies are also available. French Polynesia has good military medical facilities but the private sector is so well developed that civilians will not normally have access to these. The outer islands, of course, have more basic services.

Private consultation and private hospital fees are approximately equivalent to Australian costs. It costs about 3500 CFP to see a GP; specialists are more expensive. Government-provided service fees vary from modest to negligible but waiting times can be very long. Direct payment is required everywhere except where a specific arrangement is made, eg in the case of evacuation or where prolonged hospital stay is necessary; your insurer will need to be contacted by you. Although most of the larger hospitals are coming into line in accepting credit cards, there will be difficulty with the more remote small hospitals. Doctors will accept credit cards but prefer cash, and not all credit cards are acceptable – check with the relevant company beforehand. If

a credit card is not accepted you should be able to arrange cash on credit through the local banking system.

Most commonly used medications are available. Private pharmacies are not allowed by law to dispense listed drugs without a prescription from a locally registered practitioner, but many will do so for travellers if shown the container. While the container should preferably specify the generic name of the drug, this has become much less of a problem with the use of Internet search engines. Asthma inhalers and most anti-inflammatories are available over the counter.

It's best to have a sufficient supply of a regularly taken drug as a particular brand may not be available and sometimes quantities can be limited. This applies particularly to psychotropic drugs like antidepressants, antipsychotics, anti-epileptics or mood elevators. Insulin is available even in smaller centres, but you cannot guarantee getting a particular brand, combination or preferred administration method. If you have been prescribed 'the very latest' oral antidiabetic or antihypertensive make sure you have enough for the duration of your travel.

Except in the remote, poorly staffed clinics, the standard of medical and dental care is generally quite good even if facilities are not sophisticated. The overall risk of illness for a normally healthy person is low. The most common problems are diarrhoeal upsets, viral sore throats, and ear and skin infections, all of which can mostly be treated with self-medication. For serious symptoms, eg sustained fever, or chest or abdominal pains, it is best to go to the nearest clinic or private practitioner in the first instance.

Tampons and pads are readily available in main centres but do not rely on getting them if you travel to one of the outer islands. Dengue fever, especially in the first three months of pregnancy, poses a hazard because of fever but otherwise there is no reason why a normal pregnancy should prevent travel to the region. However, on general principles immunisation in the first three months of pregnancy is not recommended.

For young children, it is again dengue fever that could be a problem. The disease tends to come in epidemics, mainly in the hotter, wetter months, so it should be possible to plan holidays accordingly.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Despite the long list, the realistic risks to visitors from infectious diseases are very low with the exception of dengue fever.

Dengue Fever

Dengue fever is a viral disease spread by the bite of a day-biting mosquito. It causes a feverish illness with headache and severe muscle pains similar to those experienced with a bad, prolonged attack of influenza. Another name is 'break bone fever' and that's what it feels like. Danger signs include prolonged vomiting, blood in the vomit and a blotchy rash. There is no preventive vaccine and mosquito bites should be avoided whenever possible. Self-treatment involves paracetamol, fluids and rest. Do not use aspirin. Haemorrhagic dengue has been reported only occasionally, manifested by signs of bleeding and shock, and it requires medical care.

Eosinophilic Meningitis

A strange illness manifested by scattered abnormal skin sensations, fever and sometimes by the meningitis (headache, vomiting, confusion, neck and spine stiffness) which gives it its name, eosinophilic meningitis is caused by a microscopic parasite – the rat lungworm – that contaminates raw food. There is no proven specific treatment, but symptoms may require hospitalisation. For prevention pay strict attention to advice on food and drink.

Hepatitis A

This is a viral disease, causing liver inflammation and spread by contaminated food or water. Fever, nausea, debility and jaundice (yellow coloration of the skin, eyes and urine) occur and recovery is slow. Most people recover completely but it can be dangerous to people with other forms of liver disease, the elderly and sometimes to pregnant women towards the end of pregnancy. Food is easily contaminated by food preparers, handlers or servers, and by flies. There is no specific treatment. The vaccine is close to 100% protective.

Hepatitis B

This is a viral disease causing liver inflammation, but it is much more serious than hepatitis A and frequently goes on to cause

chronic liver disease and even cancer. It is spread, like HIV, by mixing body fluids, ie by sexual intercourse, contaminated needles or accidental blood contamination. Treatment is complex and specialised but vaccination is highly effective.

Hepatitis C

A viral disease similar to hepatitis B, and causing liver inflammation, which can go on to chronic liver disease or result in a symptomless carrier state. It's spread almost entirely by blood contamination from shared needles or contaminated needles used for tattooing or body piercing. Treatment is complex and specialised. There is no vaccine available.

HIV/AIDS

The incidence of HIV infection is on the rise in the whole region. It is fast becoming a major problem in French Polynesia. Safe sex practice is essential at all times. If an injection is needed in a smaller clinic it is best to provide your own needles. Blood-transfusion laboratories do tests for HIV.

Leptospirosis

Also known as Weil's disease, leptospirosis produces fever, headache, jaundice and, later, kidney failure. It is caused by a spirochaete organism found in water contaminated by rat urine. The organism penetrates skin, so swimming in flooded areas is a risk practice. If diagnosed early it is cured with penicillin.

Typhoid Fever

A bacterial infection acquired from contaminated food or water. The germ can be transmitted by food handlers or flies, and can be present in inadequately cooked shellfish. It causes fever, debility and late-onset diarrhoea. Untreated it can produce delirium and is occasionally fatal, but the infection is curable with antibiotics. Vaccination is moderately effective, but care with eating and drinking is equally important.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Diarrhoea is caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites present in contaminated food or water. In temperate climates the cause is usually viral, but in the tropics bacteria or parasites are more usual. If you develop

diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution (eg Dioralyte, Gastrolyte, Repllyte). A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an antidiarrhoeal agent (such as Loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain you should seek medical attention. Giardiasis is a particular form of persistent, although not 'explosive', diarrhoea caused by a parasite present in contaminated water. One dose (four tablets) of tinidazole usually cures the infection.

To prevent diarrhoea pay strict attention to the precautions regarding food and water as described on p272.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Threats to health from animals and insects are rare indeed but you need to be aware of them.

Bites & Stings

JELLYFISH

The notorious box jellyfish (seawasp) has not been recorded in these waters, but the blue-coloured Indo-Pacific 'Man o' War' is found in all waters. If you see these floating in the water or stranded on the beach it is wiser not to go in. The sting is very painful. Treatment involves ice packs and vinegar; do not use alcohol. Smaller cubo-medusae are abundant and are found particularly on still, overcast days. They usually produce only uncomfortably irritating stings but rarely can cause generalised symptoms, especially in someone with poorly controlled heart disease.

POISONOUS CONE SHELLS

Poisonous cone shells abound along shallow coral reefs. Stings can be avoided by handling the shell at its blunt end only and preferably using gloves. Stings mainly cause local reactions; nausea, faintness, palpitations or difficulty in breathing flag the need for medical attention.

SEA SNAKES

As in all tropical waters, sea snakes may be seen around coral reefs. Unprovoked, sea snakes are extremely unlikely to attack

and their fangs will not penetrate a wetsuit. First-aid treatment consists of compression bandaging and splinting of the affected limb. Antivenin is effective, but may have to be flown in. Only about 10% of sea-snake bites cause serious poisoning.

STONE FISH

These are very well camouflaged and are quite prolific on coral reefs and rocky areas. If you do get stung apply heat immediately and head for the hospital. Wearing plastic, waterproof sandals provides the best protection.

Coral Ear

This is a commonly used name for inflammation of the ear canal. It has nothing to do with coral but is caused by water entering the canal, activating fungal spores resulting in secondary bacterial infection and inflammation. It usually starts after swimming, but can be reactivated by water dripping into the ear canal after a shower, especially if long, wet hair lies over the ear opening. Apparently trivial, it can be very, very painful and can spoil a holiday. Apart from diarrhoea it is the most common reason for tourists to consult a doctor. Self-treatment with an antibiotic-plus-steroid eardrop preparation (eg Sofradex, Kenacort Otic) is very effective. Stay out of the water until the pain and itch have gone.

Coral Cuts

Cuts and abrasions from dead coral cause no more trouble than similar injuries from any other sort of rock, but live coral can cause prolonged infection. If you injure yourself on live coral don't wait until later to treat it. Get out of the water as soon as possible, cleanse the wound thoroughly (getting out all the little bits of coral), apply an antiseptic and cover with a waterproof dressing. Then get back in the water if you want to.

Diving Hazards

Because the region has wonderful opportunities for scuba diving, it is easy to get overexcited and neglect strict depth and time precautions. The temptation to spend longer-than-safe times at relatively shallow depths is great and is probably the main cause of decompression illness (the

'bends'). Early pains may not be severe and may be attributed to other causes, but any muscle or joint pain after scuba diving must be suspect. Privately run compression chambers are available on Tahiti but transport to a chamber can be difficult. Supply of oxygen to the chambers is sometimes a problem. Even experienced divers should check with organisations like **DAN** (Divers' Alert Network; www.diversdalertnetwork.org) about the current site and status of compression chambers, and insurance to cover costs both for local treatment and evacuation. Novice divers must be especially careful. If you have not taken out insurance before leaving home you may be able to do so online with DAN.

Food & Water

The municipal water supply in Pape'ete and other large towns can be trusted, but elsewhere avoid untreated tap water. In some areas the only fresh water available may be rainwater collected in tanks, and this should be boiled. Food in restaurants, particularly resort restaurants, is safe. Be adventurous by all means, but expect to suffer the consequences if you succumb to adventurous temptation by trying raw fish or crustaceans as eaten by some locals.

FISH POISONING

Ciguatera is a form of poisoning that affects otherwise safe and edible fish unpredictably. Poisoning is characterised by stomach upsets, itching, faintness, slow pulse and bizarre inverted sensations, eg cold feeling hot and vice versa. Ciguatera has been reported in many carnivorous reef fish, especially barracuda but also red snapper, Spanish mackerel and moray eels; in French Polynesia it is quite frequent in the smaller reef fish. There is no safe test to determine whether a fish is poisonous or not. Although local knowledge is not entirely reliable, it is reasonable to eat what the locals are eating. However, fish caught after times of reef destruction, eg after a major hurricane, are more likely to be poisonous. Treatment consists of rehydration and if the pulse is very slow, medication may be needed. Healthy adults will make a complete recovery, although disturbed sensation may persist for some weeks.

HEAT

French Polynesia lies within the tropics, so it is hot and frequently humid.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is actually a state of dehydration associated to a greater or lesser extent with salt loss. Salt is lost through sweating, making it easy to become dehydrated without realising it. Thirst is a late sign. Small children and old people are especially vulnerable. For adults, heat exhaustion is prevented by drinking at least 3L of water per day, and more if actively exercising. Children need about 1.5L to 2.5L per day. Salt-replacement solutions are useful since muscle weakness and cramps are due to salt as well as water loss and can be made worse by drinking water alone. The powders used for treating dehydration due to diarrhoea are just as effective when it is due to heat exhaustion. Apart from commercial solutions, a reasonable drink consists of a good pinch of salt to a pint (0.5L) of water. Salt tablets can result in too much salt being taken in, causing headaches and confusion.

Heat Stroke

When the cooling effect of sweating fails, heat stroke ensues. This is a dangerous and emergency condition characterised not only by muscle weakness and exhaustion, but by mental confusion. Skin will be hot and dry. If this occurs, 'put the fire out' by cooling the body with water on the outside and cold drinks for the inside. Seek medical help as a follow-up anyway, but urgently if the person can't drink.

Sunburn

It should go without saying that exposure to the ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun causes burning of the skin with accompanying pain, dehydration and misery (together with the long-term danger of skin cancer), but experience shows reminders are necessary. The time of highest risk is between 11am and 3pm, and remember that cloud cover does not block out UV rays. The Australian 'slip, slop, slap' slogan is a useful mantra – slip on a T-shirt or blouse, slop on a sunscreen lotion of at least 15-plus rating, and slap on a hat. Treat sunburn like any other burn – cool, wet dressings are best. Severe swelling may respond to a cortisone cream.

Language

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TAHITIAN & FRENCH

Tahitian and French are the official languages of French Polynesia, but Tahitian is spoken more than it is written. Although French dominates, many of those working in the tourist industry can speak some English; once you venture to the more remote and less touristy islands where the Tahitian dialects are spoken, it's definitely useful to know some French. The Polynesians have given their French a wonderful island lilt. Fortunately, bad French is readily accepted in French Polynesia – wheel out that old school French and see how you go. For more extensive Tahitian-language tips, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *South Pacific Phrasebook*, which also includes a useful section on Pacific French.

TAHITIAN

Tahitian (also known as Maohi) belongs to the group of Polynesian languages that includes Samoan, Maori, Hawaiian, Rarotongan and Tongan. There are several dialects of Tahitian, including the Tuamotan or Paumotan dialect of the Tuamotus, the Marquesan dialect of the Marquesas and the Mangarevan dialect of the Gambier Archipelago. It was the spread of Christianity through French Polynesia that helped to make Tahitian, the variety spoken on Tahiti, the most widespread dialect.

Few Tahitian words have managed to make their way into English or any other languages. The two familiar exceptions are 'tattoo', from the Tahitian *tatau* and 'taboo' from the Tahitian *tabu* (or *tapu*).

Tahitian grammar is pleasantly uncomplicated. There are no genders, declensions,

conjugations or auxiliaries, and plural forms are denoted solely by the article: the definite article (the) is *te* in the singular and *te mau* in the plural. The notions of past, present and future are expressed by using prefixes or suffixes with the verb. A single word in Tahitian can be a verb, adjective or noun, eg *inu* can mean 'to drink', 'a drink' or 'drinkable', according to the context.

Tahitian & the Modern World

Although Tahitian borrowed a number of terms from English during the earlier years, it was not simply content to borrow or adopt terms for items new or unknown to Tahitian culture. Tahitians are a most resourceful people who use their own rich language to derive terms for words generated by modern technology. Some of the terms that have come into being are very colourful and expressive. (The word *ra'a* in some terms listed below is used as a grammatical marker)

accelerator	<i>ha'a pūai ra'a pere'o'o</i> (make-power-vehicle)
aeroplane	<i>manu reva</i> (bird-space)
airport	<i>tahua manu reva</i> (field-bird-space)
ambulance	<i>pere'o'o ma'i</i> (vehicle-sick)
bank	<i>fare moni</i> (house-money)
bar	<i>fare inu ra'a</i> (house-drink)
battery	<i>'ōfa'i mōri pata</i> (stone-light-switch on)
bedroom	<i>piha ta'oto</i> (room-sleep)
bicycle	<i>pere'o'o tāta'ahi</i> (vehicle-pedal)
bra	<i>tāpe'a tītī</i> (hold-breast)
camera	<i>pata hoho'a</i> (click-image)
can-opener	<i>pātia punu</i> (stab-container)
car	<i>pere'o'o uira</i> (vehicle-lightning)
cathedral	<i>fare pure ra'a rahi</i> (house-pray-big)
cheese	<i>pata-pa'ari</i> (butter-hard)
dentist	<i>taote niho</i> (doctor-tooth)
drawer	<i>'āfata 'ume</i> (box-pull)
fork	<i>pātia mā'a</i> (spear-food)
glasses	<i>titi'a mata</i> (filter-eye)
goat	<i>pu'a niho</i> (pig-tooth)
horse	<i>pu'a'a horo fenua</i> (pig-run-ground)
hose	<i>uaua pipi tiare</i> (rubber-water-flower)
hospital	<i>fare ma'i</i> (house-sick)
motorcycle	<i>pere'o'o tāta'ahi uira</i> (vehicle-pedal-lightning)
office	<i>piha pāpā'i ra'a parau</i> (room-write-word)
post office	<i>fare rata</i> (house-letter)
refrigerator	<i>'āfata fa'a to'eto'e ra'a</i> (box-make-cold)
submarine	<i>pahi hopu moana</i> (ship-dive-ocean)

telephone *niuniu paraparau* (wire-speak)
television *'āfata teata na'ina'i* (box-cinema-small)
toilet *fate iti* (house-small)

Pronunciation

Tahitian isn't a difficult language for English speakers to pronounce, as most Tahitian sounds are also found in English. Likewise, the Tahitian alphabet, devised in the 19th century, is fairly simple to use.

As with all other Polynesian languages, there are five vowels, pronounced much as they are in Italian or Spanish:

a as in 'father'
e between the 'e' in 'bet' and in 'they'
i as in 'marine'
o as the 'o' in 'more'
u as the 'oo' in 'zoo'

Tahitian and most other Pacific languages have a second series of long vowels. The 'shape' of these is the same as their shorter counterparts, but they are held for approximately twice as long. You can get an idea of this concept by comparing the pronunciation of English 'icy' and 'I see' – both are distinguished only by the length of the final vowel sound. Long vowels are indicated in this language guide by a macron over the vowel (**ā**, **ē**, **ī**, **ō** and **ū**).

Consonants are pronounced much as they are in English, with a few modifications.

h as in 'house' or as the 'sh' in 'shoe' when preceded by **i** and followed by **o**, eg *iho* (only/just)
p as in 'sponge', not as the 'p' in 'path' (ie not followed by a puff of breath)
r often rolled as is common in Scottish or Spanish
t as in 'stand', not as the 't' in 'talk' (ie not followed by a puff of breath)
' glottal stop. This sound occurs between two vowels and is like the sound you hear between the words 'uh-oh'. In Tahitian, this sound isn't indicated in the normal spelling (with a few minor exceptions), since native speakers know where they occur. Foreigners, however, aren't so lucky. In this language guide the glottal stop is indicated by the apostrophe (').

FRENCH

All French nouns are either masculine or feminine, and adjectives change their form to agree with the noun. In the following list of words and phrases, only the singular version of nouns and adjectives is given.

Basic French vowels are pronounced the same way they are in Tahitian, but there are a few other rules of pronunciation worth remembering:

ai as the 'e' in 'pet'. Any following single consonant is usually silent.
eau/au as the 'au' in 'caught' but shorter
ll as 'y', eg *billet* (ticket), pronounced 'bee-yeh'
ch always pronounced as 'sh'
qu as 'k'
r pronounced from the back of the throat

There is a distinction between **u** (as in *tu*) and **ou** (as in *tout*). For both sounds, the lips are rounded and pushed forward, but for the 'u' sound try to say 'ee' while keeping the lips pursed. The 'ou' sound is pronounced as the 'oo' in 'cook'.

For nasal vowels the breath escapes partly through the nose. They occur where a syllable ends in a single **n** or **m**; the **n** or **m** is silent but indicates the nasalisation of the preceding vowel.

USEFUL WORDS & PHRASES

English	Tahitian
French	
Hello/Good morning.	
<i>Bonjour.</i>	<i>la ora na, nana.</i>
Goodbye.	
<i>Au revoir.</i>	<i>Pārahi, nana.</i>
Welcome.	
<i>Bienvenue.</i>	<i>Maeva, mānava.</i>
How are you?	
<i>Ça va?</i>	<i>E aha te huru?</i>
My name is ...	
<i>Je m'appelle ...</i>	<i>To'u i'oa 'o ...</i>
Thank you.	
<i>Merci.</i>	<i>Māuruuru.</i>
Pardon?	
<i>Comment?</i>	<i>E aha?</i>
Excuse me/Sorry.	
<i>Pardon.</i>	<i>E'e, aue ho'i e.</i>
No problem/Don't worry.	
<i>Pas de problème.</i>	<i>Aita pe'ape'a.</i>

Yes.

Oui. *E, 'oia.*

No.

Non. *Aita.*

Good luck!

Bon courage! *Fa'aitoito!*

I don't understand.

Je ne comprends pas. *Aita i ta'a ia'u.*

How much?

Combien? *E hia moni?*

How many?

Combien? *E hia?*

Where is ...?

Où est ...? *Tei hea ...?*

When?

Quand? *Afea?*

What time is it?

Quelle heure est-il? *E aha te hora i teie nei?*

Cheers! (for drinking)

Santé! *Manuia!*

I'm ill.

Je suis malade. *E ma'i to'u.*

In the following nouns, the French definite article ('the' in English) is included for reference purposes.

address

l'adresse *vahi nohooa*

bank

la banque *fare moni*

bathroom

la salle de bain *piha pape*

beach

la plage *tahatai*

bed

le lit *ro'i*

beer

la bière *pia*

bicycle

le vélo *pereo'o tāta'ahi*

boat

le bateau *poti*

breakfast

le petit déjeuner *tafe poipoi*

bus

l'autobus *pereo'o mata'eina'a*

car

la voiture *pereo'o uira*

chemist/pharmacy

la pharmacie *fare ra'au*

coffee

le café *taofe*

country

le pays *fenua*

day

le jour *ao*

embassy

l'ambassade *fare tonitera rahi*

film (camera)

la pellicule *firimu*

food

la nourriture *ma'a*

map

le plan *hoho'a fenua*

menu

la carte *tāpura mā'a*

money

l'argent *moni*

now

maintenant *i teie nei*

parents (extended family)

les parents *fēti'i*

plantation

la plantation *fa'a'apu*

police station

la gendarmerie *fare mūto'i*

restaurant

le restaurant *fare tamā'ara'a*

room

la chambre *piha*

shop

le magasin *fare toa*

telephone

le téléphone *niuniu paraparau*

that

cela *terā*

today

aujourd'hui *j teie nei mahana*

tomorrow

demain *ānānahi*

tonight

ce soir *i teie pō*

water

l'eau *pape*

1	<i>un</i>	<i>hō'ē</i>
2	<i>deux</i>	<i>piti</i>
3	<i>trois</i>	<i>toru</i>
4	<i>quatre</i>	<i>māha</i>
5	<i>cinq</i>	<i>pae</i>
6	<i>six</i>	<i>ono</i>
7	<i>sept</i>	<i>hitu</i>
8	<i>huit</i>	<i>va'u</i>
9	<i>neuf</i>	<i>iva</i>
10	<i>dix</i>	<i>'ahuru</i>
20	<i>vingt</i>	<i>piti 'ahuru</i>
100	<i>cent</i>	<i>hō'ē hānere</i>
1000	<i>mille</i>	<i>hō'ē tauatini</i>
10,000	<i>dix mille</i>	<i>hō'ē 'ahuru tauatini</i>
1,000,000	<i>un million</i>	<i>hō'ē mirioni</i>

Glossary

ahi – sandalwood
ahu – altar in a *marae*; in the *marae* of French Polynesia the *ahu* was generally a pyramid shape
aito – ironwood tree
anuhe – fern
aparima – dance with hand gestures
ari'i – high chief of the ancient Polynesian aristocracy; literally, 'king'
ario'i – priest caste or religious society of the pre-European Society Islands
Assemblée de Polynésie Française – Assembly of French Polynesia
atoll – type of low island created by *coral* rising above sea level as an island gradually sinks; postcard atolls consist of a chain of small islands and reef enclosing a *lagoon*; see also *low island*
atua – god or gods
aute – hibiscus; plant with strongly scented flowers of varying colours, usually orange-yellow
autostop – hitching

barrier reef – *coral* reef forming a barrier between the shoreline and the open sea but separated from the land by a *lagoon*
belvédère – lookout
bonitier – whaleboat; used for fishing and for transferring passengers and cargo from ship to shore on islands that have no wharf or quay
boules – see *pétanque*
BP – *boîte postale*; post-office box
breadfruit – see *uru*
bringue – local festival or party, generally accompanied by lots of beer

capitainerie – harbourmaster's office
caldera – volcano crater
CEP – Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique; the French nuclear-testing programme
CESC – Conseil Économique, Social et Culturel (Economic and Social Committee)
CETAD – Centre d'Études des Techniques Adaptés au Développement; technical and vocational college
CFP – Cour de Franc Pacifique, usually known as *franc cour pacifique*; currency of French Polynesia
ciguatera – malady caused by eating infected reef fish
CMAS – Confédération Mondiale des Activités Sub-aquatiques; scuba-diving qualification; the Francophile equivalent of *PADI*
copra – dried coconut meat, used to make an oil
coral – animal of the coelenterate group which, given the

right conditions of water clarity, depth and temperature, grows to form a reef
croque-madame – toasted ham-and-cheese sandwich with a fried egg on top; also known as *croque-vahine*
croque-monsieur – toasted ham-and-cheese sandwich
cyclone – tropical storm rotating around a low-pressure 'eye'; 'typhoon' in the Pacific, 'hurricane' in the Caribbean

demi-pension – see *half board*
demi – person of Polynesian-European or Polynesian-Chinese descent
DOM-TOM – Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer; French overseas departments and territories

EFO – Établissements Français d'Océanie; official acronym for French Polynesia from 1903 to 1946
emergence – geological activity that pushes land up above sea level
ÉVAAM – Établissement pour la Valorisation des Activités Aquacoles et Maritimes; marine research organisation

faapu – small cultivated field
fafa piti – ray
fara – pandanus; tree with strong leaves that are dried to make traditional roofing, wickerwork and woven articles
fare – traditional Polynesian house; hotel bungalow
fare atua – house for the gods on *marae*; actually a small chest in the form of a statue
fare potee – chief's house or community meeting place; open dining-room of a restaurant or hotel
fare tamoa – dining house
fare tupapau – shelter where dead bodies were laid out to decompose in pre-European Polynesia
fei – a type of banana
fenua – country or region of origin
feo – coral outcrop
fetii – extended family
fetue – pencil urchin
flamboyant – majestic, umbrella-shaped plant with vivid crimson flowers
fringing reef – *coral* reef immediately alongside the shoreline, not separated from the shore by a lagoon as with a *barrier reef*
full board – bed and all meals (French: *pension complète*); see also *half board*

gaufres – waffles
gendarmérie – police station
goélette – cargo ship or schooner

ha'e – traditional Marquesan house
hakaiki – chief
half board – bed, breakfast and lunch or dinner (French: *demi-pension*); see also *full board*
hei – garland of flowers
heiva – celebration or festival; the Heiva is a huge festival of Polynesian culture (mainly dance) that takes place on Tahiti in July
high island – island created by volcanic action or geological upheaval; see also *low island*
hima'a – underground oven used for cooking traditional Polynesian food
himene – Tahitian-language hymn
Hiro – god of thieves who features in many Polynesian legends
hoa – shallow channel across the outer reef of an atoll, normally carrying water into or out of the central lagoon only at unusually high tides or when large swells are running; see also *pass*
honu – turtle
huaka – clan
hupe – pleasant morning breeze

kaikai enana – Marquesan food; see also *maa*
kaina – Polynesian; Polynesian person; local; see also *popaa*
kava – traditional mildly intoxicating drink made from the root of *Piper methysticum* (the pepper plant)
kaveka – sooty tern
kaveu – coconut crab
keetu – characteristic red volcanic stone of the Marquesas
keshi – Japanese term for pearl formed from pure *nacre* (mother-of-pearl), when the *nucleus* has been expelled from the oyster

lagoon – calm waters enclosed by a reef; may be an enclosed area encircled by a *barrier reef* (eg Rangiroa and Tetiaroa) with or without *motu*, or may surround a *high island* (eg Bora Bora and Tahiti)
lagoon side – on the lagoon side of the coast road (not necessarily right by the lagoon); see also *mountain side*
LDS – Mormon; follower of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints
le truck – public 'bus'; a truck with bench seats that operates a bus-like service
leeward – downwind; sheltered from the prevailing winds; see also *windward*
LMS – London Missionary Society; pioneering Protestant missionary organisation in Polynesia
low island – island created by the growth and erosion of *coral* or by the complete erosion of a *high island*; see also *atoll*

maa – food
maa tahiti – Tahitian or Polynesian food; Tahitian buffet
maa tinito – Chinese food

mabe – hollow cultured pearl
mahi mahi – dorado; one of the most popular eating fish in French Polynesia
mahu – transvestite or female impersonator; see also *rae rae*
mairie – town hall
maitai – local cocktail made with rum, pineapple, grenadine and lime juices, coconut liqueur and, sometimes, Grand Marnier or Cointreau
maito – surgeonfish
makatea – *coral* island that has been thrust above sea level by a geological disturbance (eg Rurutu, and Makatea in the Tuamotus)
mana – spiritual or supernatural power
manahune – peasant class or common people of pre-European Polynesia
manu – bird
ma'o – shark (French: *requin*)
Maohi – Polynesian
mape – Polynesian 'chestnut' tree
maraaamu – southeast trade wind that blows from June to August
marae – traditional Polynesian sacred site generally constructed with an *ahu* at one end; see also *me'ae*
marae tupuna – ancestor or family *marae*
maro ura – feather belt worn by a chief as a symbol of his dynasty
me'ae – Marquesan word for *marae*
meia – banana
meie – common people
Melanesia – islands of the western Pacific; Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji
Micronesia – islands of the northwest Pacific including the Mariana, Caroline and Marshall groups, Kiribati and Nauru
miro – *Thespesia populnea*; rosewood
monoi – coconut oil perfumed with the *tiare* flower and/or other substances
motoi – ylang-ylang; plant with strongly scented flowers
motu – small inlet in a lagoon, either along the outer reef of an *atoll* or on a reef around a *high island*
mountain side – on the mountain side of the coast road (not necessarily up in the mountains); see also *lagoon side*
mupe – skirt made from natural fibres and used in traditional dances

nacre – mother-of-pearl; iridescent substance secreted by pearl oysters to form the inner layer of the shell; shell of a pearl oyster
navette – shuttle boat
niau – sheets of plaited coconut-palm leaves, used for roof thatching
noni – yellowish fruit with therapeutic properties, grown in the Marquesas and popular in the USA; also known as *nono*

nono – very annoying biting gnat found on some beaches and particularly prevalent in the Marquesas
nucleus – small sphere, made from shells found in the Mississippi River in the USA, which is introduced into the gonads of the pearl oyster to produce a cultured pearl

ono – barracuda
ora – banyan; sacred tree often seen near religious buildings
’orero – orator
’Oro – god of war; the cult that was superseding the Ta’aroa cult when the first Europeans arrived

pa – hilltop fortress
PADI – Professional Association of Dive Instructors; the most popular international scuba-diving qualification
pae pae – paved floor of a pre-European house; traditional meeting platform
pahu – drum
pahua – giant clam
pamplemousse – grapefruit
pandanus – palm tree with aerial roots; the leaves are used for weaving hats, mats and bags
pareu – traditional sarong-like garment
pass – channel allowing passage into the lagoon through the outer reef of an atoll or the barrier reef around a high island; see also *hoa*
pastèque – watermelon
Paumoto – the Tuamotus; people from the Tuamotus
pension – guesthouse
pension complète – see *full board*
pétanque – French game in which metal balls are thrown to land as near as possible to a target ball; also known as *boules*
petroglyph – carving on a stone or rock
peue – mat; braided palm used for basketwork
phonolite – type of volcanic rock
pirogue – outrigger canoe (Tahitian: *va’a*)
pitate – jasmine
PK – *pointe kilométrique*; distance markers found along the roads of some French Polynesian islands
plat du jour – daily special; literally ‘plate of the day’
poe – pieces of crushed banana or papaya mixed with starch, wrapped in a banana leaf, baked with a vanilla bean and sprinkled with coconut milk
poisson cru – popular raw-fish dish
Polynesia – islands of the central and southeastern Pacific, including French Polynesia, Samoa, Tonga, New Zealand and the Cook Islands
popaa – European or Westerner; see also *kaina*
poti marara – motorboat; used for fishing in the *lagoon*
pu – conch shell
purau – hibiscus

ra’atira – middle rank of pre-European Polynesian society, above the lower class but below the *ari’i*
rae rae – *mahu*; sometimes applied to *mahu* who are transsexual or homosexual, rather than just cross-dressers
RDPT – Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes (Democratic Assembly of Tahitian Populations)
requin – shark (Tahitian: *ma’o*)
roi – groper
roulotte – mobile diner; a food van operating as a snack bar

Sanito – branch of the Mormon religion
scaphandre – weighted dive helmet
seamount – underwater volcano that rises more than 1000m above the ocean floor but does not break the surface
seaward – side of an atoll, island or *motu* that faces the sea rather than the *lagoon*
sennit – string or material woven from coconut-husk fibre
snack – snack bar

Ta’aroa – supreme Polynesian god whose cult was being superseded by worship of ’Oro, god of war, at the time of the European arrival
tabu – alternative spelling of *tapu*
tahua – faith healer; priest of the ancient Polynesian religion
tamaaraa – family meal; traditional-style feast
tamure – hip-jiggling version of traditional Polynesian dance
tane – man
tapa – cloth made from beaten bark and decorated with traditional designs; worn by the people of pre-European Polynesia
tapu – sacred or forbidden; the English word ‘taboo’ comes from *tapu* or *tabu*
taro – root vegetable; a Polynesian staple food
tatau – tattoo; although tattoos were also known in Japan, it was on Tahiti that European sailors first discovered them and added the word to European vocabularies
tavana – mayor
taxe de séjour – accommodation tax
tiare – fragrant white gardenia endemic to the Pacific; the flower has become symbolic of Tahiti
tifaifai – colourful appliqué or patchwork material used as blankets, bedspreads or cushion covers
ti’i – Society Islands term for the Marquesan word *tiki*
tiki – human-like sacred sculpture usually made of wood or stone and sometimes standing more than 2m high; once found on many *marae*
Tinito – Chinese
tipanie – frangipani; a plant with strongly scented flowers used to make crowns and flower lei (wreaths)
tiputa – *tapa* poncho; traditional attire in pre-European Polynesia

toa – chief warrior
toerau – north-northeast wind
tohua – meeting place or a place for festival gathering in pre-European Polynesia but especially in the Marquesas
tou – *Cordia subcordata*; tree, common in the Marquesas, that produces a dark, hard, grained wood popular with carvers
tuff – volcanic rock of Polynesia
tupa – land crab
tupapau – irritating spirit ghosts of the ancient Polynesian religion, still much feared
TVA – *taxe sur la valeur ajoutée*; a tax added to accommodation rates
tuu – ceremonial activities centre in the Marquesas

ua ma – Marquesan food pit
uaau – red-footed booby

ume – unicornfish
umete – traditional Tahitian wooden dish or bowl
umu hei – Marquesan *monoi*; packet of fragrant natural vegetable essences
uru – breadfruit; starchy staple food of Polynesia that grows on a tree as a football-sized fruit (French: *arbre à pain*)
uruti – scad, a type of fish

va’a – outrigger canoe (French: *pirogue*)
vahine – woman
vana – sea urchin
vanira – vanilla
varua ino – malevolent spirit
vivo – nasal flute
VTT – *vélo à tout terrain*; mountain bike

windward – facing prevailing winds; see also *leeward*

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