

# Maupiti



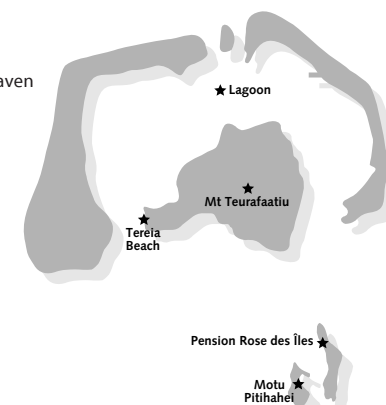
Serving up a Robinsone–version of paradise, Maupiti seduces lovers and adventurers on a quest for the romantic Polynesia of lore. The smallest and most isolated of the Society Islands is an unblemished tropical playground; tranquillity reigns supreme on quiet *motu* and translucent lagoons resemble watery magic carpets, threaded with shimmering ribbons of emerald, turquoise and jade. A place to just get lost, where time moves at a crawl and days slide by in lazy hazes, Maupiti will easily satiate any fantasies about being marooned on a deserted island. Sunbathe in seclusion on silky beds of sand, snorkel amid rainbow-coloured fish and feast on coconuts, split open with a jagged rock, sucking out the sticky-sweet nectar.

The vibe here is exotica stripped naked, so if you're searching for paradise in its most basic form, void of luxury trappings and the crowds they attract, you'll definitely get into this island's slow-motion ambience. But if your idea of a great holiday includes plush digs, restaurants, boutiques or a few rowdy bars, Maupiti's not for you. Accommodation is in *pensions*, places meant for sleeping and little else – think places to watch the sun set over the water from the comfort of a slightly saggy mattress. While hardly glitzy, these family-run places usually boast loads of old-fashioned hospitality, gracious charm and stunning *motu* locales.

Maybe it's Maupiti's lack of souped-up sex appeal that has allowed it to remain so forgotten by the tourist hordes. Swanky resorts are not welcome here, and on more than one occasion locals have voted down hotel-chain requests to open luxury properties. Whatever the reason, the time to visit is now, before this shabby-chic creation's secret is let out of the bag and Maupiti becomes the new Bora Bora, a place on everyone's itinerary.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Splashing around in the Society Islands' most beautiful **lagoon** (p173) – absolute heaven
- Feeling like a part of the family when staying at a personable beach-side *pension* such as **Pension Rose des îles** (p175)
- Living out that stranded-on-a-desert-island fantasy on secluded **Motu Pitihahai** (p173)
- Climbing **Mt Teurafaatiu** (p174) for fabulous lagoon views
- Reading and sunbathing on tranquil **Tereia Beach** (p174)



■ POPULATION: 1191

■ AREA: 11 SQ KM

## HISTORY

Maupiti played a culturally important role in ancient Polynesian traditions, with chiefs from other islands coming here for ceremonial purposes. Archaeological investigations on Motu Paeao, one of the oldest archaeological sites in the Society Islands, have revealed fish-hooks and other items that date back to around AD 850. The similarity between these objects and others discovered in New Zealand has played a factor in theories about the great Polynesian migration.

Dutch explorer Roggeveen is credited with the European 'discovery' of Maupiti in 1722, nearly 50 years before Wallis, Bougainville and Cook made their important landfalls on Tahiti. European missionaries

were quick to follow, eventually succeeding in installing Protestantism as the major religion. Today the church still plays an important role in local life. On Sunday the village roads are clogged with men in pressed but faded suits, gaily dressed families and women in broad straw hats all making their way to the village church.

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

Maupiti has changed little over the last century; watermelons grown on the *motu* or

pearl oysters produced on Mopelia are still major sources of income for the islanders. Copra production, heavily subsidised by the government, also remains important.

The devastating cyclone Oséa ravaged the island in late 1997 and many houses have been replaced by new buildings, which, although dull to look at, have the virtue of being built to withstand winds of 200km/h.

## ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

From the air Maupiti resembles a miniature Bora Bora – a *motu*-fringed aqua lagoon with a rocky, mountainous interior. A 10km road encircles the island, only deviating from the coastline for a short stretch where it climbs over the ridge line near Tereia Point. On the east coast there are technically two villages: Farauru to the north and Vaiea to the south, but in practice they form a single village with just one long main street. The primary shipping quay is on the southeastern corner of the island. The small airport quay is half-way up the eastern side of the island, south of the church.

Inland the terrain climbs steeply up to the summit of Mt Teurafaatiu (380m), also known as Mt Nuupure. Maupiti's most conspicuous feature, however, is its sharp ridge line running from north to south and overlooking the village centre. The high island mass is surrounded by a wide but shallow lagoon fringed with five *motu* equal in size to the main island's landmass. To the north are Motu Auira, Motu Paeao and Motu Tuanai, where the airport is located. To the south, the smaller Motu Tiapaa and Motu Pitihahai flank Maupiti's single accessible pass. The island's only beach is at Tereia Point, but the *motu* have many fine white-sand beaches.

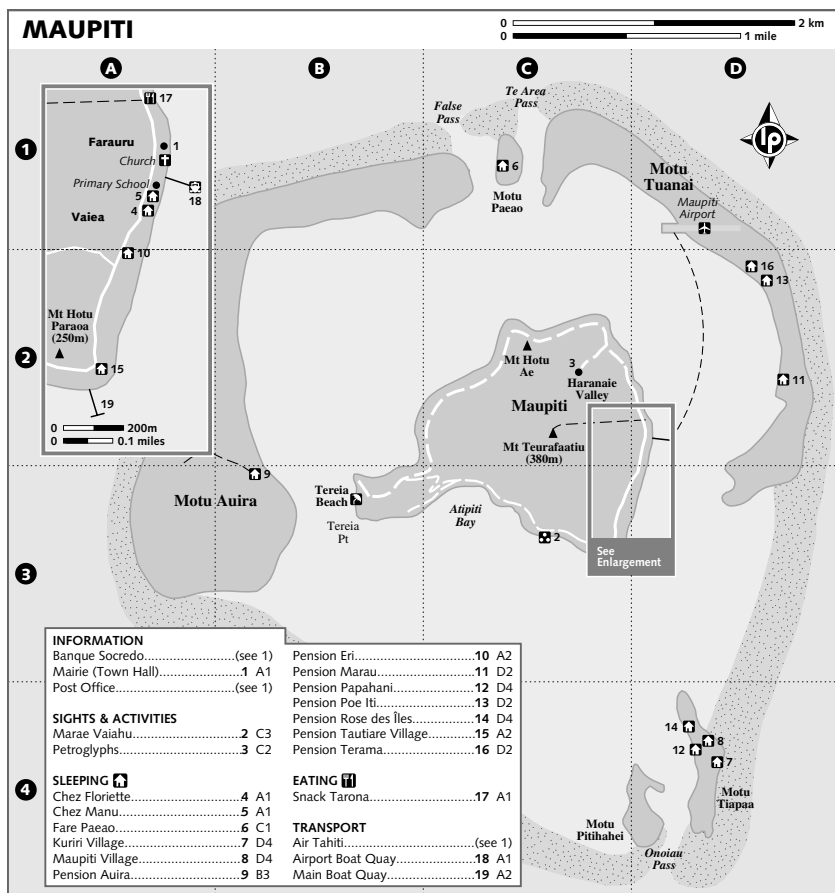
To the north of the village centre the *mairie* (town hall), post office, Air Tahiti office and Banque Socredo are grouped together. The bank is open only when a representative comes to the island, so don't plan to change money here; bring enough cash with you.

## THE MOTU

Maupiti's star attractions are its five idyllic *motu*, spits of sand and crushed coral dotted with swaying palms, and floating in the jade lagoon that surrounds the main island. Most travellers choose to stay on these fabulous islets, but the mainland *pensions* will happily organise day trips for around

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO...

- Maupiti has no ATMs and credit cards are not accepted anywhere, so you'll need to bring enough cash to cover your entire bill, plus a little extra for surprise add-ons.
- Maupiti has no resorts; digs are in simple family guesthouses.
- Restaurants are also pretty much nonexistent, so unless you're the completely self-sufficient type, opt for *demi-pension* (half board – a room plus breakfast and dinner) or *pension complète* (full board – all meals) at your guesthouse. It costs a little extra but the food is usually delicious and served family-style.
- Although you might be offered beers throughout the day, don't expect these to be free, even if you're on a meal plan. Factor an extra 300 CFP into your budget for every beer you expect to drink; the same rules apply to beverages other than water, coffee and tea.



## THE MAIN ISLAND

You can walk around the entire island circuit in a couple of hours. Neat houses, brightened with hibiscus, are strung along the road and they often have *uru* (breadfruit) trees shading the family tombs fronting many of them. The following tour starts in the village and proceeds around the island in an anticlockwise direction.

See opposite for places to stay.

### Petroglyphs

Maupiti has some interesting and easily viewed petroglyphs etched into boulders in a rocky riverbed. The biggest and most impressive is a turtle image on a flat boulder to the right of a placid spring. To reach the petroglyphs, head north out of the village and round the point before passing the basketball court near the church. You're now in the Haranaie Valley; on the mountain side and just after a green house is a track heading inland. Follow it for 200m to a small pumping station, and then follow the rocky riverbed, which may have water in it during the wet season. After only 100m, on the left, you'll find the petroglyphs.

### Tereia Beach

Mainland Maupiti's single beach is at the western end of the island. A long stretch of white sand set against willow palms and the crystal-clear waters of the island's beautiful lagoon, Tereia Beach is wonderfully relaxing and usually uncrowded – during the slow season you might just have it all to yourself. There are no facilities or vendors here, just sand and sun. It's easy to walk right across the lagoon to **Motu Auira** from here during low tide. Beware of rays lying in the sand, although they usually shoot away when they sense your approach.

### Marae Vaiahu

Northwest of the main quay you'll find an area known as **Tefarerii** (House of the Kings), once home to the island's nobility. Marae Vaiahu, Maupiti's most important *marae*, is a large coastal site covered with flagstones, featuring a **fish box**. Made of four coral blocks set edgewise in the form of a rectangle, with a fifth serving as a lid, the box was used for ceremonial purposes to ensure successful fishing. Four fish kings were represented on the sides of the box. Traditionally the *marae*

guards would put a stone fish in the box to invoke the god of fishing before canoes set out on expeditions.

Just beyond the *marae* a sheer rock face rises up beside the road, overlooking the shipping quay. There are traces of a *pa* (fortification) atop this imposing outcrop.

### ACTIVITIES

Maupiti's activities are generally of the do-it-yourself variety.

### Hiking

If you are feeling stir-crazy, take a hike. An impressive rocky wall looming above the village, **Mt Hotu Paraoa** (250m) is a great short hike. The climb is relatively easy, except for one steep section you'll need to use your hands to clamber up, and nearly the entire route is shaded. The view from the top is truly stunning, perhaps the best in the Society Islands. When the weather is good you can see all the way to Bora Bora in the east and, beyond, Ra'iatea and Taha'a. The trail begins near Pension Eri and is marked with painted arrows (although sometimes they can be a bit hard to find).

For something a bit more strenuous, try to climb **Mt Teurafaatiu** (380m). Allow three hours for the return trip and be sure to bring plenty of drinking water. You'll need to be relatively fit to do this hike, as there are some particularly steep parts. The track starts virtually opposite Snack Tarona and the climb is shaded for most of the way. The most difficult part is towards the end, with a climb up steep rock required to get to the ridge. At the summit there's a small platform from which you can enjoy a 360-degree panorama encompassing all the *motu* of the lagoon and, in good weather, Bora Bora, Taha'a and Ra'iatea.

### Water Activities

Maupiti has a magnificent lagoon with many coral pinnacles and dense fish populations, particularly around Onoia Pass – the island's only navigable pass. Most guesthouses have masks and snorkels you can borrow and will point you in the direction of good **snorkelling sites**. All the *pensions* also run lagoon tours that include stops for snorkelling. These trips cost between 2500 and 5000 CFP, depending on their duration and whether a meal is served.

**Sea kayaking** is another popular activity. Paddling around the quiet lagoon offers chances to discover hidden coves, search for leopard and manta rays or just put down the oar, lie back and sunbathe. Most hotels either rent or offer free sea kayaks to guests.

### SLEEPING

The *motu* are by far the best places to sleep. Not only are the guesthouses a bit more sophisticated, but you also get to laze on Maupiti's best beaches and wade into its most beautiful water. The village will appeal to those looking for a cultural, rather than beachy, experience: you'll experience island life from a less touristy angle.

### The Main Island

None of the village guesthouses has any signage, but anybody from the island can easily point them out. They're all either right on the lagoon or very close to it. The rates listed here include all taxes.

**Pension Tautiare Village** (☎ 678358; www.maupiti.island.com/tautiare/index.html; r with breakfast per person 5500 CFP, with half/full board 7000/8500 CFP) With colourful bedspreads, grassy garden areas and a lovely location against the mountains, this is the best guesthouse on the mainland. Rooms are spotless with big tiled hot-water bathrooms, the service is personal and the ambience intimate. The only drawback is that it's a 1.5km walk from the nearest beach. Airport transfers are 1700 CFP.

**Chez Manu** (☎ 67 82 32; r with breakfast per person 2500 CFP, with half/full board 5000/6500 CFP) Right next to the primary school, this is the cheapest

place on the island. The three rooms share a bathroom and are very basic but spotless. A communal kitchen and kayaks are pluses. Airport transfers cost 1000 CFP, island tours can be arranged for 5000 CFP and you can even take a ride in a private plane for 10,000 CFP per half-hour – ask at reception.

**Chez Floriette** (☎ 67 80 85; r with half/full board per person 6000/8000 CFP) In a strange location against a basketball court. Has very colourful bungalows with sheets made from local fabrics, fans and shared baths. Prices include airport transfers. *Motu* excursions with a picnic lunch are 1000 CFP per person.

**Pension Eri** (☎ 67 81 29; r with breakfast per person 3000 CFP, with half/full board 5000/6500 CFP) Eri offers four small but brightly painted rooms, simply adorned with a bed and fan. A no-frills option, but it's friendly and well run. Airport transfers and *motu* trips cost 1000 CFP.

### The Motu

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

**Pension Poe Ite** (☎ 74 58 76; maupitiexpress@mail.pf; bungalows 7000 CFP; 🍷) The swankiest place on the island is also the best value. The brand-new bungalows are very spacious and come with TVs, DVD players and fridges. On a small strip of beach on Motu Tuanai, it offers blue-green lagoon vistas amid rows of swaying palms. Airport transfers, kayaks and snorkels are free; an island tour with a *motu* BBQ costs 2500 CFP per person.

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

**Pension Terama** (☎ 67 81 96; pensmarau@mail.pf; r with half board per person 6500 CFP) The owner speaks English well at this cheery new guesthouse that boasts lagoon and ocean views. It offers three decent-sized rooms in the family home, complete with fans and mozzie nets. The communal bathrooms are plentiful and spotless. Ask for the room with the two double beds – it's the nicest.

**Maupiti Village** (☎ 67 80 08; dm/r/bungalows with full board per person 5500/6500/8000 CFP) On the ocean

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Pension Rose des Îles** (☎/fax 67 82 00; bungalows with half-board per person from 10,000 CFP) Run by a friendly French Polynesian couple, it's worth staying here for the food alone – think lobster feasts and the finest French cooking. In a lovely location on the lagoon, this *pension* offers two simple but charming bungalows made from woven palm fronds. The mattresses are a little lumpy but the hostess makes such an effort, it's hard to quibble. The outdoor setting features small tables, hammocks and a profusion of plants and trees. Kayaks are available; prices include airport transfers.

side of Motu Tiapaa, this beautiful property offers the best-value budget accommodation on the island. Digs are in two small, basic bungalows with bathrooms; three matchbox-sized rooms with a shared outside bathroom; and a six-bed dorm. Airport/village transfers are 1800/1300 CFP per person return.

**Pension Auira** (Chez Edna; ☎ /fax 67 80 26; bungalows with half board per person from 8500 CFP, camp sites per person 1500 CFP) Laid-back; features whitewashed bungalows set back from the water on a fabulous sandy beach. The beach bungalows are a better deal than the garden digs – they are slightly hipper and have loads of space that’s spread over two floors. Airport transfers cost 2000 CFP; lagoon tours are 5000 CFP.

**Fare Paeao** (☎ 76 81 01; bungalow d/tr 11,000/13,000 CFP) This is the only *pension* on Motu Paeao, so come here for total isolation. The location is exceptional, with great swimming spots. The six bungalows, while hardly posh, are clean and comfortable and feature huge windows, lovely terraces and electric antimosquito devices. There are free kayaks and an onsite café serves rum punch, beer, coffee and tea. Airport transfers are 1100 CFP per person return; lagoon tours are 3000 CFP.

**Kuriri Village** (☎ 67 82 23; www.maupiti-kuriri.com; bungalows with half/full board per person 12,000/14,000 CFP) The five bungalows here are artistically decorated, spacious and situated in a tropical garden. On the tip of Motu Tiapaa, you’ll have your pick between an ocean- or lagoon-side beach. The food has an excellent reputation and the place has an upmarket vibe. Lagoon tours cost 4000 CFP per person and airport transfers are 1000 CFP.

**Pension Papahani** (Chez Vilna; ☎ 67 81 58; bungalows with full board per person from 9500 CFP) On a pretty beach at the northern end of Motu Tiapaa. Try for one of the newer, slightly more expensive, better-value bungalows. Airport transfers are included; village transfers are 1000 CFP return. Island tours cost 2000 CFP; kayaks and snorkels available.

## EATING

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

**Snack Taronā** (☎ 67 82 46; dishes 900-1200 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) is just north of the village.

Serves hearty portions of traditional French Polynesian dishes such as raw fish, tuna sashimi, braised beef, and pork with taro.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

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

### Air

Air Tahiti flies from Maupiti to Tahiti (14,500 CFP, 1½ hours, five weekly) and Ra’iatea (6500 CFP, 25 minutes, three weekly). The **Air Tahiti office** (☎ 67 80 20; ☺ 8-11am Mon-Thu, 9.30-11am Fri) is in the village beside the *mairie*.

### Boat

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

The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 69) runs between Maupiti and Bora Bora on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (2500/3500 CFP one way/return). Leaving Vaitape (Bora Bora) at 8.30am, it arrives at Maupiti at 10.15am then departs for the return trip at 4pm and arrives at Bora Bora at 5.45pm. There’s enough time to have a good look around Maupiti and return to Bora Bora on the same day, although the crossing can be quite rough at times.

The rustic little *Maupiti Tou Ai’a* makes a once-weekly Pape’ete–Maupiti trip, occasionally via Ra’iatea. It departs on Wednesday evening and arrives on Thursday morning, returning on Friday. A berth on the deck costs 2500 CFP; bring bedding.

## GETTING AROUND

If you’ve booked accommodation you’ll be met at the airport, although some places charge for the trip. Otherwise, there’s a boat that takes Air Tahiti staff and any hangers-on to the main island after the flight has departed. The one-way fare for the 15-minute trip is 400 CFP (children 200 CFP). The Air Tahiti boat also goes out to the airport *motu* for departing flights. Boat departure times, usually one to 1½ hours prior to flights, are posted at the Air Tahiti office.

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

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