

# Ra'iatea & Taha'a

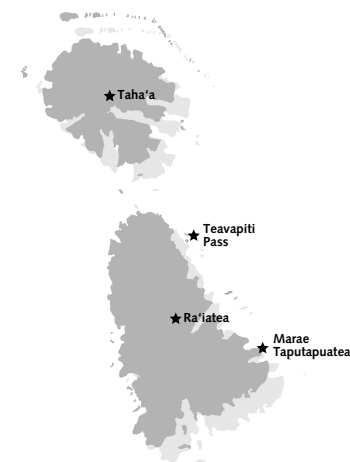


Sandwiched between Huahine and Bora Bora, the twin islands of Ra'iatea and Taha'a are possibly the region's best-kept secret. They offer travellers the opportunity to experience French Polynesia's most idiosyncratic alter ego – the old-fashioned side, stripped bare of all the candy-coated gloss. Locals here live life on their own terms: slowly, traditionally and with a profound respect for their heritage and history. And although both islands embrace tourism, unlike their neighbours they don't need it to survive – agriculture and governmental posts are the primary industries here.

Home to some of French Polynesia's most important ancient places of worship, Ra'iatea and Taha'a emanate a magical, mythical, mysterious vibe. While you won't find a single beach on either island, they exhibit such savage beauty that you'll quickly forget about the lack of sand. Untamed, wild and raw, this is the part of French Polynesia where mossy green hills tumble past coconut-strewn jungles before sliding gently into translucent ribbons of aqua and turquoise blue. Fairly quiet, the islands are perfect for exploring French Polynesia's secrets, away from the crowds. Ride a scooter around Ra'iatea's ragged coast, tour a vanilla plantation in Taha'a's lush and rugged interior, snorkel in the shallow waters off white-sand *motu* (islet), stay in a private island fantasy resort or in a small family *pension* – whatever you desire, these islands can usually provide.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvelling at **Marae Taputapuatea** (p144), the Leeward Islands' most famous archaeological site
- Riding a **scooter** (p151) around Ra'iatea's ragged coast, gasping at the scenery
- Diving through the technicolour underwater wonderland of **Teavapiti Pass** (p59)
- Exploring the lush interior, beautiful lagoon, pearl farms and vanilla plantations on an **island tour** (p146) of Taha'a
- Spending a few days soaking up the solitude at one of Taha'a's quiet **pensions** or ritzy **resorts** (p153)



## RA'ITEA

pop 3568 / area 170 sq km

Regarded as French Polynesia's most sacred isle, Ra'iatea played an integral role in ancient Polynesian religious beliefs. According to local oral history the great migration voyages to Hawaii and New Zealand commenced from Ra'iatea's Faaroa River, the only navigable river in French Polynesia. Ra'iatea was also home to Marae Taputa-puatea, the most important traditional temple in Polynesia, and spirituality remains a fundamental component of life today, with many places of worship spread across the island.

The largest of the Leeward Islands, and the second largest in the Society group after Tahiti, Ra'iatea is also French Polynesia's second most important economic centre – although you'd never guess it from the sleepy little fishing village that is its largest town. Ra'iatea has no beaches (although there are many fine strips of sand on its outlying *motu*), which may account for its comparatively untouristy flavour. It is best known as French Polynesia's sailing and yachting centre, attracting hundreds of luxury water rats to its plentiful marinas each year.

## HISTORY

Ra'iatea, known as Havai'i in ancient times, is the cultural, religious and historic centre of the Society Islands. According to legend, Ra'iatea and Taha'a were the first islands far to the northwest to be settled, probably by people from Samoa. It is said that Ra'iatea's first king was the legendary Hiro, who with his companions built the great canoes that sailed to Rarotonga and New Zealand.

Later, Ra'iatea was a centre for the 'Oro (God of War) cult, which was in the process of replacing the earlier Ta'aroa (God of Creation) cult when Europeans turned up and disrupted the entire Polynesian religious structure. At the time of James Cook's first Polynesian visit, Ra'iatea was probably under Bora Bora's control, and its chiefs were scattered far and wide.

Cook first came to the island on the *Endeavour* in 1769, when he anchored off Opoa. He returned in 1774 during his second Pacific voyage, and in 1777 he made a

prolonged visit before sailing to Hawaii on his last voyage.

The English missionary John Williams came to Ra'iatea in 1818 and the island remained under British missionary influence long after Tahiti came under French control. It was from Ra'iatea that missionaries continued to Rarotonga in the Cook Islands in 1823 and to Samoa in 1830. Following the French takeover of Tahiti in 1842 was a long period of instability and fierce Ra'iatean resistance. It was not until 1888 that the French attempted a real takeover of the island and 1897 that troops were sent to put down the final Polynesian rebellion. Teraupoo, the last Ra'iatean chief, was exiled to New Caledonia.

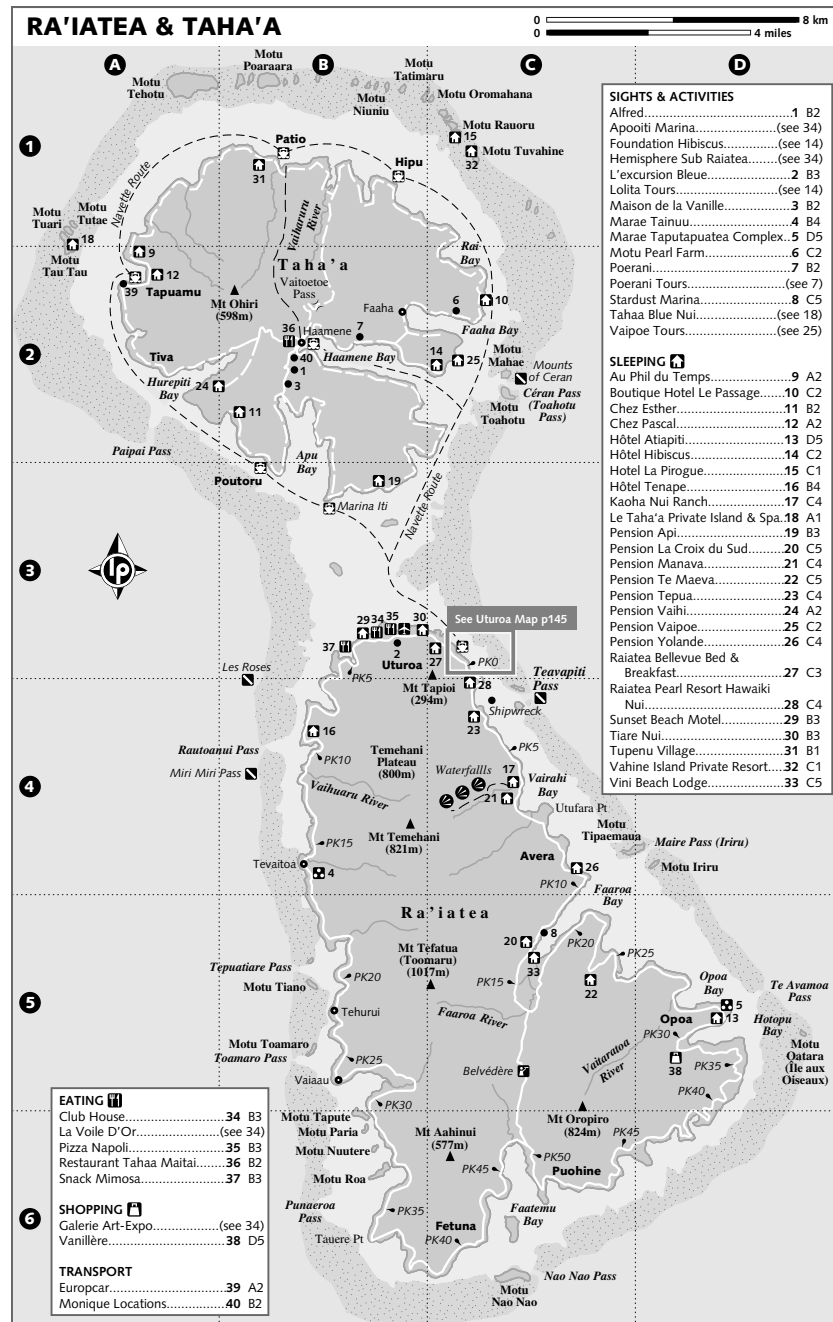
## ORIENTATION

Ra'iatea is vaguely triangular in shape. A sealed road hugs the coast all the way around the island. *Pointe kilométrique* (PK) distances start in Uturoa near the *gendarmerie* (police station) and then run south to Faatemu Bay. The mountainous interior of the island includes the 800m-high Temehani Plateau and Mt Tefatua (1017m). The main range runs north to south for most of the length of the island, and the smaller ranges in the south are separated by a valley through which a road runs from Faaroa Bay to Faatemu Bay.

The airport, which also serves Taha'a, is on the northern tip of the island. The town of Uturoa extends southeast of the airport, and small villages are scattered across the rest of the island.

### RA'ITEA'S EMBLEM

Ra'iatea is home to one of the world's rarest flowers, the *tiare apetahi*. The endemic species is found on the Temehani Plateau. According to French Polynesian legend, the white flower's delicate petals represent the five fingers of a beautiful Tahitian girl who fell in love with a prince then died of a broken heart when she realised he'd never marry her. The petals close at night then open at dawn with a whisper of a crackle – the sound of the girl's heart breaking. You should be able to see the flower while hiking on the mountain – but note that it is strictly protected, so no picking.



## INFORMATION

The three French Polynesian banks have branches with ATMs in Uturoa. The following places are all found within Uturoa.

**Bleu des Iles Laundry** (per load 1500 CFP) Self-service laundry in the Tahina shopping centre; price includes washing and drying.

**Hospital** (☎ 60 08 01) Opposite the post office; offers emergency services.

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

**Post office** North of the centre, towards the airport.

**Raiatea visitors information centre** (☎ 60 07 77; inforaiatea@mail.pf; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri, 8am–3pm Sat, 9.30am–3pm Sun) In the *gare maritime* (boat terminal) in Uturoa.

## SIGHTS

We'd recommend hiring a vehicle (or if you are in really good shape a bicycle) and driving the entire 98km sealed-road circuit around Ra'iatea. Exploring the island this way not only gives you the opportunity to experience its wild natural beauty (think mossy mountains and shimmering lagoons), but also gives a feel for its relaxed atmosphere.

In the south of the island, a short stretch of fine mountain road between Faaroa and Faatemu Bays takes you away from the coast and past an excellent lookout. Adding this road to your itinerary only adds an extra 13km to your route, but rewards you handsomely with fabulous views. Apart from places on the outskirts of Uturoa there is virtually nowhere along the way to buy lunch, so take a picnic.

The following sights are listed clockwise around the island.

### Uturoa

Upon first glance you'd never guess this sleepy little place is French Polynesia's second-largest town (after Pape'ete), but spend a few hours wandering around and you'll start to catch its feisty buzz. Overlooked by Mt Tapioi (294m), Uturoa is an old-fashioned sort of place where young men spend lazy Saturdays sipping Hinano beer on the quay, impeccably dressed local women get together to chat and herds of tourists, fresh off the big cruise ships, scope out the fancy pearl shops and colourful boutiques. Uturoa has a strong Chinese community, evidenced by the many Chinese

shops and restaurants and the Kuo Min Tang building. The Protestant church on the northern side of the town centre has a **memorial stone** to pioneer missionary John Williams. Queen Pomare, exiled from Tahiti in 1844 by the French takeover, took refuge in Vairahi, now swallowed up by the southward expansion of Uturoa. She remained there for three years before returning to Tahiti.

For places to stay and eat in Uturoa and around, see p147 and p149.

### Uturoa to Faatemu Bay

Bustling Uturoa blends seamlessly into **Avera**, the site of the final battle between the French and local rebels. From here the road follows the contours of the narrow and magnificent **Faaroa Bay** before passing the **Stardust Marina**, one of Ra'iatea's two main yachting marinas (the other is Apooiti Marina). Soon after, you reach the inland turn-off to the south coast. The Faaroa River also leads inland from the bay.

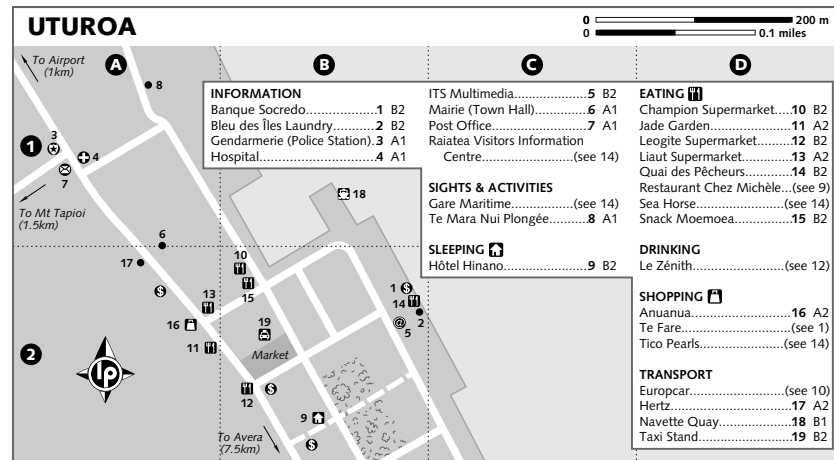
From the turn-off, the road runs to a **belvédère** (lookout), with great views of Faaroa Bay, the coast and the surrounding mountains, before dropping down to the south-coast road.

### Faatemu Bay to Marae Taputapuatea

The road splits at the coast near Faatemu Bay. Turn left and follow the bottom half of the figure-eight circuit around the coast in an anticlockwise direction. Near the village of **Puohine** the road runs on the embankments, which cut off shallow ponds used for farming oysters and mussels. If the lighting's right, it can make for an interesting picture. There's a long stretch of tar past the village where the steep green mountain sides are streaked with **waterfalls** during the wetter months of the year – another dramatic stopping point.

**Marae Taputapuatea**, the most important *marae* (traditional temple) in French Polynesia, looks out to the Te Avamo'a (Sacred) Pass. Dedicated to 'Oro, the god of war who dominated 18th-century Polynesian religious beliefs, the *marae* sprawls extensively across Cape Matahira. It dates from the 17th century, when it replaced nearby **Marae Vaearai**, which was dedicated to Ta'aroa, the god of creation.

Despite its relatively short history, this *marae* assumed great importance in the



Polynesian religion. Any *marae* constructed on another island had to incorporate one of Taputapuatea's stones as a symbol of allegiance and spiritual lineage. This was the centre of spiritual power in Polynesia when the first Europeans arrived, and its influence was international: *ari'i* (chiefs) from all over the Maohi world, including the Australs, the Cook Islands and New Zealand, came here for important ceremonies.

The site encompasses a domestic, district and international *marae*. The main part of the site is a large paved platform with a long *ahu* (altar) stretching down one side. At the very end of the cape is the smaller **Marae Tauraa**, a *tapu* (taboo) enclosure with a tall 'stone of investiture', where young *ari'i* were enthroned. The lagoon-side **Marae Hauviri** also has an upright stone, and the whole site is made of pieces of coral. The huge double canoes of royal pilgrims used to sail through the Te Avamo'a Pass en route to the *marae*.

The well-restored *marae* complex is an imposing sight, but unfortunately there is little explanation for visitors.

### Marae Taputapuatea to Tevaitoa

The road follows the coast, sometimes running over causeways across shallow, stagnant inlets, before reaching the village of **Fetuna**. During WWII, when the US military occupied Bora Bora, a landing strip was constructed here. **Motu Nao Nao**, just across from Fetuna, has a pleasant beach.

In the middle of the village of **Tevaitoa** you'll find the island's oldest Protestant church, an architectural curiosity built (in one of those heart-warming displays of Christian respect for other beliefs) smack on top of the magnificent **Marae Tainuu**. Behind the church the walls of the *marae* stretch for just over 50m, with some of the massive upright stones standing at over 4m high.

### Tevaitoa to Uturoa

You'll find the mega-bucks **Apooiti Marina** between Tevaitoa and Uturoa. With shops, a restaurant, bar and diving centre, it's a pleasant place to stop for a sunset cocktail or early dinner – especially appealing if you've been touring Ra'iatea via scooter. From the marina the road passes by the airport before circling back to Uturoa.

## ACTIVITIES

Ra'iatea has the usual assortment of water-based activities, but it also offers plenty of great hiking and horse-riding opportunities in its mountainous interior.

### Diving & Snorkelling

Ra'iatea has no beaches – a hotel or guest-house pontoon is the most you can expect – but some of the splendid reef *motu* are just perfect for swimming or snorkelling. Ask at your accommodation about hiring a boat or joining a lagoon tour.

Ra'iatea has two diving centres. **Hemiphère Sub** (☎ 66 12 49; www.diveraiatea.com), based

at the Apooiti Marina, offers dives on the east and west coasts as well as around Taha'a; snorkelling trips to Teavapiti Pass are also possible. The centre also has a base at Raiatea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui. **Te Mara Nui** (☎ 66 11 88; www.temaranui.pf) is a small, locally recommended centre at the marina at Uturoa; it accepts cash payments only.

Both companies charge around 5500 CFP for a one-tank excursion and 6000 CFP for an introductory dive; they both provide transport from your hotel. There are about 10 dive sites along the east and west coasts and around Taha'a. Highlights include the superb Teavapiti Pass and the *Nordby*, the only real wreck dive in French Polynesia. For more information, see p58.

## Yachting

Ra'iatea's central position in the Society Islands, and its fine lagoon, have helped make it the yacht-charter centre of French Polynesia. Most operations will offer whatever a customer demands and prepare fully stocked and equipped boats. Bare-boat charter rates vary seasonally (July to August is the high season). The following Ra'iatea-based companies are recommended: **Catamaran Tane Charter** (☎ 66 16 87; www.raiatea.com/tane) Offers catamaran cruises in the Leeward Islands.

**Croisières Danae** (☎ 66 12 50; www.raiatea.com/dan) (aefishing) Operates a variety of crewed cruises lasting from one to seven days.

**Faimanu** (☎ 65 62 52; www.faimanu.pf)

**Moorings** (☎ 66 35 93; www.moorings.com) Has about 20 different boats; options include bare-boat charters, boat hire with skipper and host, or cabin charter to the Leeward Islands.

## Horse-Riding

The respected **Kaoha Nui Ranch** (☎ 66 25 46; trips from 4500 CFP), 6km south of Uturoa, offers a variety of riding trips lasting from two hours to half a day. Trips are generally gentle affairs, following routes along ridge lines or valley bottoms, and experienced riders can also hire a horse for a few hours and ride English-style in the arena. Simple accommodation is offered here; see p148.

## Hiking

There are some good, though largely under-utilised, walking opportunities on Ra'iatea. Our favourite hike departs from Kaoha Nui

Ranch and takes you past three **waterfalls**. You don't need to be staying at the ranch to do this beautiful 4km hike, although you will need to be in relatively good shape as the trail gets strenuous at points. It's an easy stroll to the first waterfall (the smallest), which has a great swimming hole, but the trail climbs steeply from here, with some tricky scrambles (grab hold of the ropes to keep from falling). After passing the second waterfall the trail follows the riverbed through a bamboo forest. The third waterfall is the most splendid – a 60m beauty with a fabulous swimming hole at its basin.

There are some interesting walks around **Temehani Plateau** (800m) at the northern end of the island. Accessible only by 4WD, the plateau is home to the *tiare apetahi*, a white gardenia endemic to Ra'iatea (see the boxed text, p142). You'll need a guide for these walks; inquire at your hotel.

## TOURS

Guided excursions are very popular in Ra'iatea (it must have something to do with the lack of beaches) and we'd definitely recommend doing one during your stay. Tours allow you to get out to those sandy *motu*, have a guide to point out fish when you snorkel, and provide easy access to local pearl farms and vanilla plantations. Most tours actually spend the majority of their time on the island of Taha'a, but all the companies listed here pick up from the pier in Uturoa (to which your hotel will usually transport you for free). Tours generally involve travel by *pirogue* (outrigger canoe) and 4WD minibus, dividing their time between Taha'a's rugged interior and splendid lagoon.

Fruit tasting, snorkelling, pearl- and vanilla-farm visits, and a fabulous home-cooked lunch on a secluded *motu* are highlights of the recommended tour run by **Tahaa Tour Excursions** (☎ 65 62 18; tours 6500 CFP). You'll also get a chance to swim with sharks and rays in the enclosed 'lagoonarium'.

Dave of **Dave's Tours** (☎ 65 62 42; tours 8000 CFP) speaks a variety of languages and offers full-day tours of Ra'iatea and Taha'a that include pearl farm and vanilla plantation visits and stop for local-fruit tasting. Lunch is served on a *motu*, and you'll also have a chance to snorkel in Taha'a's beautiful coral garden.

Another good company, **L'excursion Bleue** (☎ 66 10 90; www.tahaa.net; tours 9500 CFP) offers full-day tours of Taha'a that include drinks and lunch on a *motu*, snorkelling in the coral garden and pearl- and vanilla-farm visits. English guides.

Run by an incredibly knowledgeable 83-year-old American man who has lived in French Polynesia for the last 25 years, the archaeological tours run by **Almost Paradise Tours** (☎ 66 23 64; tours 6000 CFP) are very popular with those wanting to learn about Polynesian culture and history. Highlights of the three-hour tours are a visit to Ra'iatea's sacred *marae* and a trip to a lush inland crater.

**Tane Charter** (☎ 66 16 87; http://chartertane.free.fr; tours from 8500 CFP) runs full-day catamaran tours and also offers the option of spending the night on the boat. Travellers interested in boating give this company good reviews.

## SLEEPING

Places to stay on Ra'iatea are generally in or close to Uturoa. None are on a beach, although some have pontoons anchored in the lagoon. There are three places where you can camp.

Prices include the 11% TVA in certified hotels (6% in hostels and *pensions*), plus the 150 CFP daily tax (50 CFP in hostels and *pensions*).

## Uturoa & Around

Some of the island's most appealing options are found near the village of Uturoa.

**Raiatea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui** (☎ 60 05 00; www.pearlresorts.com; r from 20,000 CFP, bungalows 26,000-50,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) Ra'iatea's swankiest hotel has a very French feel but sadly its location, wedged between the road and the lagoon, isn't exactly stunning. The over-water bungalows, extending over a clifflike reef face, are pretty fantastic though. Snorkelling from your balcony is a unique (and adrenaline-pumping) experience – you get the sensation of soaring, thanks to a super-quick drop-off. Kayaks, bikes and snorkels are available, and the bar and restaurant are very popular. *Motu* transfers cost 1000 CFP return.

**Raiatea Bellevue Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 66 15 15; s/d 4000/8000 CFP; ☎) Quiet and relaxing, this place is perched high above the northern side of Uturoa in a lush jungle-like setting and features extraordinary views. The five small but tidy rooms have a bathroom

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Pension Tepua** (☎ 66 33 00; www.raiatea.com/tepua/index.html; dm/s/d 2500/5000/7500 CFP, bungalows 10,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) Relaxed and very friendly, this place offers quality accommodation at very reasonable prices. The owner speaks five languages, including perfect English, and has a wealth of island information. Rooms are simple but very clean, the dorms are spacious, and the bungalows sleep between four and six people and come with colourful Tahitian bedspreads, fridges, sinks and bathrooms. The on-site bar and restaurant (as well as a communal kitchen), an alfresco TV lounge and a small pool add a lively ambience. Our favourite for budget travellers.

(with hot water), TV, refrigerator and fan, and open onto a terrace beside a small swimming pool; rates include breakfast. Airport transfers cost 1400 CFP per person return. To get here, take the first sealed road on the left after PK1 and follow it for 800m.

**Tiare Nui** (☎ 66 34 06; bungalow s/d 5500/6000 CFP)

In the Europcar compound shortly before the airport, Tiare Nui is worth checking out if you're planning to hire a car or boat during your stay and you're tight on cash. The place offers a bungalow-and-car deal for 11,000 CFP per night for two people, or a bungalow, car and outboard motorboat package for 18,000 CFP. The bungalows are small, neat, no-frills affairs with bathroom, fan, TV and refrigerator. The location is rather noisy.

**Hôtel Hinano** (☎ 66 13 13; www.hotel-hinano-tahiti.com in French; s/d from 6500/7500 CFP; ☎) The only hotel right in the centre of Uturoa, this place seems a tad overpriced. Rooms are spacious and clean with tiled floors and cable TV, but they feel quite bare. Breakfast costs 600 CFP, airport transfers 1600 CFP.

## East Coast

There are five establishments to choose from at Avera, on the east coast of Ra'iatea, south of Uturoa between PK6 and PK10. There are also several places between Faaroa Bay and Opoa.

**Vini Beach Lodge** (☎ 60 22 45; www.raiatea.com/vinibeach; bungalows 11,000-14,000 CFP; ☎) A brand-new place near the Stardust Marina,

Vini Beach offers a soothing collection of two-storey whitewashed bungalows, a tiled pool and an alfresco restaurant and bar. The bungalows are spacious and classy, featuring kitchenettes, lovely cast-iron beds and porches overlooking the marina. Try and get a sea-facing bungalow if you can – not only are the views better, they're also cooler. Airport transfers are 800 CFP per person return.

**Pension La Croix du Sud** (Southern Cross; ☎ 66 27 55; s/d 7500/8500 CFP, with half board 9500/14,000 CFP) Set high atop a steep hill, this *pension* offers some pretty amazing views of the northern side of Faaroa Bay. There are three rooms, two are in the same *fare* (traditional-style house), with bathrooms (with hot water). Prices include breakfast, and meals are served on a pleasant terrace overlooking the bay. The place is a bit isolated (although if you're arriving by boat it's just opposite the Stardust Marina) but there are free bicycles for getting around. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP per car load.

**Hôtel Atiapiti** (☎ 66 16 65; bungalows from 10,000 CFP) If you just can't stand the thought of vacationing without sand, then head to this relaxing place near Marae Taputapuata. Beside the lagoon, it has a small beach and the spacious, comfortable, fan-cooled bungalows come with lounge areas and terraces. Breakfast costs 1500 CFP; add 4500 CFP for half board. *Motu* drop-offs cost 2000 CFP to 2500 CFP per person. Airport transfers are 2500 CFP per person return.

**Pension Te Maeva** (☎ 66 37 28; www.temaeva.com; camp sites 2500 CFP, bungalow s/d 6500/7500 CFP) The two comfortable bungalows perched on the mountain flank at this tranquil option 7km north of Marae Taputapuata have a hot-water bathroom, fan, fridge and terrace. Prices include breakfast and transfers. A shower and toilet are reserved for campers. There are no kitchen facilities, but you can buy fresh supplies from the vans that pass twice daily and meals can be provided for 2000 CFP. Bicycles are available for guests and you can also do your washing for 500 CFP.

**Kaoha Nui Ranch** (☎ 66 25 46; kaoha.nui@mail.pf; r/bungalows 3500/6500 CFP) This place is a laid-back establishment where horses graze on the front lawn and travellers lounge in the alfresco sitting area. Kaoha Nui Ranch is excellent value: the rooms are simple and

share bathrooms, but they are also impeccably clean. This place has a fully equipped kitchen, and bicycle hire costs 1200 CFP per day. Breakfast is 700 CFP, lunch 2300 CFP. Airport and dock transfers are free. Credit cards are accepted.

**Pension Manava** (☎ 66 28 26; manava@free.fr; r 5000 CFP, bungalows from 6000 CFP) This friendly place has rooms in a *fare* with private hot-water baths and a fully equipped communal kitchen. The tidy, spacious bungalows are set in a leafy garden; two are equipped with kitchens. The place offers free airport transfers; trips to Marae Taputapuata (3500 CFP) and lagoon *piroque* tours (6500 CFP) are also offered.

**Pension Yolande** (☎ 66 35 28; s/d 6000/7000 CFP, with half board 9500/11,000 CFP) A breezy location right on the water. This family guesthouse has four functional rooms with kitchen facilities and hot-water bathrooms. Although the walls are paper thin, the *pension* is clean and well kept. The owner is very friendly (although not much English is spoken); meals are available in a small *fare* facing the sea. Airport transfers cost 2000 CFP per group one way.

## West Coast

**Sunset Beach Motel** (☎ 66 33 47; www.raiatea.com/sunsetbeach; camp sites per person 1500 CFP, bungalow s/d/tr 9000/10,000/11,000 CFP) On an extensive coconut plantation right on the waterfront, Sunset Beach has some of the best bungalows on the island. Absolutely huge, these wooden digs feel like private homes – there are separate bathing, kitchen, sleeping and lounge areas. Giant windows and airy porches are extra perks. *Pirogues* and pedal boats, bikes and airport transfers are free. There's a snack joint just down the road.

**Hôtel Tenape** (☎ 60 01 00; www.raiatea.com/tenape; r/ste 21,000/32,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) The island's second-poshest place (after the Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui), this two-storey colonial-style establishment is 4km from the airport. From its mountainside location there are great views of the lagoon and across to Bora Bora. Rooms are comfortable and modern with big terraces; the restaurant has a good reputation and the bar can get lively. Add 5500 CFP for half-board and 1500 CFP for return airport transfers.

## EATING

Ra'iatea has a sizeable Chinese population, and most restaurants serve at least one Chinese dish.

## Uturoa

Uturoa has several well-stocked supermarkets, open Monday to Saturday and some on Sunday morning. They include the Champion on the seafront and Leogite and Liaut on the main street.

**Snack Moemoea** (☎ 66 39 84; dishes 500-1500 CFP; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Located on the waterfront, this funky little blue-walled place offers a large menu with a variety of different *poisson cru* (raw fish) options, as well as Chinese and French dishes. Those on a budget can also eat well – burgers, hot dogs and *croque monsieur* sandwiches are all less than 1000 CFP.

**Jade Garden** (☎ 66 34 40; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Fri, dinner Sat) On the main street, this Chinese restaurant has a good reputation and a large menu that features a little bit of everything. It's a popular place and usually draws a steady dinner crowd.

**Sea Horse** (☎ 66 16 34; dishes 900-2000 CFP; ☎ closed dinner Sun) In the *gare maritime*, Sea Horse is another popular Chinese restaurant with a reputation for good service and consistent food. The menu features lots of seafood and coconut milk-infused options. The ambience isn't bad either.

**Restaurant Chez Michèle** (☎ 66 14 66; dishes 1000-2000 CFP) Inside the Hôtel Hinano, this eatery features decent Chinese, Tahitian and French dishes; omelettes and toast are staples on the breakfast menu.

**Quai des Pêcheurs** (☎ 66 43 19; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) A simple café in the *gare maritime*; the setting is more functional than inspiring, although the outdoor terrace is attractive. The menu features fish and meat dishes.

## Around Uturoa

There are several options towards the airport and Apooiti Marina.

**Pizza Napoli** (☎ 66 10 77; dishes 1100-1600 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) In a reed hut decorated with loads of flowers, this congenial pizzeria near the Europcar agency offers a long list of Italian dishes including pasta, wood-fired pizzas and meat and fish specials. The pasta dishes are quite good.

**Club House** (☎ 66 11 66; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) In Apooiti Marina, the setting for this place is striking – a large, airy room overlooking the marina – but its French Polynesian cuisine doesn't quite live up to its inventive and stylish ambitions. Patrons can be picked up and dropped off for free as far as Sunset Beach Motel and Pension Manava.

**La Voile D'Or** (☎ 66 12 97; dishes 1500-2500 CFP, set menu 3500 CFP; ☎ closed dinner Sun & lunch Mon) At the end of Apooiti Marina, this average seafood place occupies a great setting – the alfresco tables overlook the lagoon, with good views of Taha'a. The set three-course menu changes often and is probably the best-value choice.

## East Coast

Bring a picnic if you're travelling around the island as there aren't many opportunities to find a meal, although some places do stay open for food.

**Raiatea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui** (☎ 60 05 00; dishes 1500-3000 CFP) This resort has an attractively situated restaurant, but the food is only ordinary. The bar serves good cocktails for about 800 CFP.

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

**Hôtel Atiapiti** (☎ 66 16 65; dishes 1000-2000 CFP; ☎ lunch) If you're a little peckish after visiting Marae Taputapuata, head for the restaurant at this nearby hotel. The setting, facing the lagoon, is calm and pleasant. Stand-out dishes include sea crabs and shrimps in curry or saffron sauce.

## West Coast

**Hôtel Tenape** (☎ 60 01 00; dishes 1600-3000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This rather posh restaurant is a tablecloths-and-starched-napkins sort of place offering classic French specialties at reasonable prices. You can get foie gras and other pâtés, fish and meat dishes. The wine list is good.

**Snack Mimosa** (☎ 66 26 74; dishes from 900 CFP) Within easy walking distance of the Sunset Beach Motel, Snack Mimosa offers the usual

assortment of simple Tahitian and French-influenced dishes – *poisson cru*, burgers, steaks and omelettes are all on the menu.

## DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

It's difficult to find a reason to stay up late on Ra'iatea but try the following places.

**Le Zénith** (women/men free/1000 CFP) On weekends Restaurant Moana, located above the Leogite Supermarket in Uturoa, metamorphoses into this disco. It's mainly popular with young locals.

**Club House** (☎ 66 11 66) A sunset drink at this place in the Apooiti Marina is mandatory. The restaurant may not serve the best food, but the mellow ambience – alfresco wooden benches set on lawns, or tables under a traditional thatched roof – is as fantastic as the sunset views.

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

## SHOPPING

Uturoa has several well-stocked souvenir outlets, as well as some unique boutiques and excellent-value pearl shops. Next to the *gare maritime*, women sell their crafts, particularly shell work, woodwork and *pareu* (sarong-type garments).

The Anuanua gallery features works by island craftspeople, including sculptures, pottery, paintings and mother-of-pearl objects. It also sells rather interesting pieces of jewellery, including black-pearl, shell and coconut-rope bracelets and necklaces.

**Te Fare** (☎ 66 17 17) In the Banque Socredo building behind the *gare maritime*. Sells fabrics, paintings, jewellery, basketwork, sculptures and, of course, black pearls.

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

**Galerie Art-Expo** (☎ 66 11 83) Art-Expo, at Apooiti Marina, sells a wide variety of reasonably priced jewellery, clothes, decorative trinkets and wooden handicrafts – from mother-of-pearl belts to souvenir T-shirts.

**Vanillère** (☎ 66 15 61) One of the best places to buy all sorts of vanilla products, located at Hotopu Bay.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ra'iatea is 220km northwest of Tahiti and 40km southeast of Bora Bora.

### Air

**Air Tahiti** (☎ 60 04 44; ✈ 7.30am-noon & 2-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.15am Sat, 2.30-5.15pm Sun) has an airport office. The airline operates direct flights from Tahiti (12,000 CFP, 40 minutes, eight daily) with connections via Mo'orea (13,000 CFP) and Huahine (5000 CFP). There are also direct flights to Bora Bora (6500 CFP, 20 minutes, daily) and Maupiti (6500 CFP, 20 minutes, three weekly).

### Boat

Ra'iatea is separated from Taha'a by a 3km-wide channel.

## TAHA'A

There are two *navette* (shuttle boat) services between Uturoa and various stops on Taha'a – Marina Iti, Poutoru, Tapuamu, Patio, Hipu and Haamene – operated by **Enota Transport** (☎ 65 67 10). You can buy tickets on board. There is no service on Saturday afternoon or Sunday. It takes less than 15 minutes to get from Uturoa to Marina Iti, the closest stop on Taha'a. The one-way fare is 1000 CFP and there are one to two services a day, depending on the destination.

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

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

## OTHER ISLANDS

The **Aremiti 3** (☎ 74 39 40) departs Pape'ete, stopping at Huahine and Ra'iatea, on Monday and Friday. It departs Pape'ete at 7am and arrives at Ra'iatea towards noon; from Ra'iatea it departs at 12.30pm and arrives at Pape'ete at 6pm. From Pape'ete to Ra'iatea

costs 6500/3000 CFP adult/child; from Huahine to Ra'iatea costs 1800/900 CFP adult/child.

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

The cargo ships *Vaeanu*, *Taporo*, *Hawaiki Nui* and *Maupiti Tou Ai'a* also make a stop at Ra'iatea; see p263.

## GETTING AROUND

The options for getting around are to hire a car or hitchhike. Hitchhiking appears to be fairly accepted here because of the low-key tourism and lack of public transport. However, remember that there are always dangers associated with hitching.

## To/From the Airport

There are taxis at the airport; the 3km trip into Uturoa costs 1000 CFP. Most island accommodation will pick you up if you have booked (although there may be a charge).

## Bicycle & Scooter

Europcar hires out scooters for 6500 CFP for 24 hours. Some hotels and guesthouses hire out bicycles.

## Boat

Europcar hires out boats with outboard motors for 9000/10,000 CFP for eight/24 hours; they're the perfect way to explore the lagoon.

## Car

The head office of **Europcar** (☎ 66 34 06; www.europcar.pf) is on the edge of Uturoa towards the airport; it also has desks at the airport and in the Raiatea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui. An economy car costs 7000 CFP for four hours and 11,000 CFP for 24 hours. Call to arrange a pick-up from your hotel.

**Avis** (☎ 66 20 00) has a desk at the airport and charges 9000 CFP per day for a similar model. **Hertz** (☎ 66 44 88), opposite the town hall in Uturoa, also charges 9000 CFP and will deliver cars to the airport.

## Taxi

There's a **taxi stand** (☎ 66 20 60) by the market, and taxis can also be found at the airport, but even the shortest trips don't cost less than 1000 CFP.

# TAHA'A

pop 4845 / area 90 sq km

Little known by tourist operators and accessible only by boat, Taha'a is quieter than Ra'iatea and even more beautiful. Resembling from afar a lush, impenetrable green jungle surrounded by a sparkling lagoon, a closer inspection reveals verdant velvet hills home to exotic fruit, forests of bamboo and palm, steep hiking paths, and sweetly scented vanilla plantations. The atmosphere is chilled-out to the max, but don't let the island's low-key attitude fool you – Taha'a also boasts one pretty amazing luxury resort. Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa aside, however, the place is more a back-to-nature than a jet-set-tourist kind of haven. There are no beaches to speak of on the main island, although there are plenty of fine sandy stretches on the outlying *motu*.

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

## HISTORY

Taha'a was once known as Kuporu (Upuru). Since this traditional name also pops up in other Polynesian centres, historians have long speculated about a migratory connection between Taha'a and other Polynesian islands. For many years Taha'a lived in the shadow of Ra'iatea, its larger, stronger and more important neighbour, and at times it played pawn in the struggles between Ra'iatea and the rulers of Bora Bora.

The first missionaries arrived from neighbouring Ra'iatea in 1822 and the island came under French control at the same time as Ra'iatea. Taha'a was once a centre for fire-walking ceremonies, but this practice has now died out.

## ORIENTATION

The northern coastline undulates gently, while deep and impressive bays punctuate the south of the island. A 70km road winds around the coast; the northern part is sealed, while the southern part is mostly crushed coral. The road is in reasonable condition; there are sealed sections through the main towns and where the road leaves the coast and climbs over the hills, like the nicely sweeping road up and over the centre from Haamene to Tiva.

The population is concentrated in eight villages on the coast. Tapuamu has the main quay, Patio is the main town and Haamene is where the roads around the southern and northern parts of the island meet, forming a figure eight. Apu Bay to the south, Haamene Bay to the east and Hurepiti Bay to the west offer sheltered anchorages.

## INFORMATION

There is no tourist office on Taha'a, but you can get information from the tourist office on Ra'iatea. Taha'a's only bank branch is the Banque Socredo in Patio.

## SIGHTS

It's quite possible to do the 70km circuit of the island as a bicycle day trip, although most of the route is unsealed crushed coral and there are some steep sections. PK markers start at Haamene and go anticlockwise around the northern half of the island, terminating at Patio at around PK25.

Starting from the Apu Marina (the first *navette* stop if you're coming from Ra'iatea, and the best place to hire bicycles), the road follows the coast around Apu Bay. At the top of the bay there's a turn-off south to Poutoru; the main road leaves the coast and climbs up and over to the larger village of Haamene.

On the right of the road into Haamene is the **Maison de la Vanille** (☎ 65 67 27), a small family-run operation where you can see vanilla preparation and drying processes and also purchase vanilla pods. A small donation is requested. A little further along, a right turn leads to the red-and-green house of another vanilla producer, **Alfred** (☎ 65 61 16). For more about vanilla cultivation, see the boxed text, right.

From Alfred's the road climbs again, making a long sweeping ascent and descent

to beautiful Hurepiti Bay and the village of **Tiva**, where you'll find several **pearl farms** by the coast. As you round the end of the bay, keep an eye out for Bora Bora – it looks surprisingly close beyond the lagoon edge.

The island's main quay is located at **Tapuamu**. From here the chain of *motu* that fringes the northern coast of the island comes into view. **Patio** is the administrative centre of the island, with offices, a post office, a bank, shops and a small artisans centre. Beyond Patio more of the 60-odd *motu* around the north of the island are visible as the road winds along the coast. Continuing around the coast, the road passes copra plantations before reaching **Faaha** and **Faaha Bay**. On the northern side of the bay you can visit **Motu Pearl Farm** (☎ 65 66 67), which has a small shop.

From the bay the road climbs over a headland and drops down to Haamene Bay. Alternatively, a rougher track turns off the coast road just beyond Patio and takes a direct route over the hills and down to Haamene. This track starts shortly after the village but although the first part is drivable, the second section needs a 4WD. It's really better as a walk or mountain-bike ride.

### TAHA'A – THE VANILLA ISLAND

Taha'a is accurately nicknamed 'the vanilla island', since three quarters of French Polynesian vanilla (about 25 tons annually) is produced here. This is a far cry from the 150 to 200 tons produced a century ago, when vanilla cultivation flourished in the Society Islands.

Several vanilla farms are open to the public; at these small family-run operations you can buy vanilla pods at reasonable prices, about 1000 CFP for a dozen. You can also find out about the technique of 'marrying' the vanilla, a delicate operation in which the flowers are fertilised by hand because the insects that do the job in other regions are not found in French Polynesia. Nine months later the pods are put out to dry, and they turn brown over four to five months. They are then sorted and boxed in sachets or bamboo tubes before being sold in Pape'ete or exported.

Where the coast road meets Haamene Bay, turn east to Hôtel Hibiscus and visit the **Foundation Hibiscus** (☎ 65 61 06), dedicated to saving turtles that have become entangled in local fishing nets. The hotel owner Léo buys the trapped turtles and keeps them in pens beside the hotel's pier. The turtles are fed every morning until they've grown large enough to be released. Since the project started, the hotel has saved more than 1200 endangered turtles.

From Hôtel Hibiscus the coast road goes around the northern side of the bay to Haamene, passing the pearl farms of **Pension Vaipoe** (☎ 65 60 83; admission 100 CFP) and **Rooverta Ebbs' Poerani** (☎ 65 60 25; admission 100 CFP), where you can check out pearl grafting first-hand. Mounted and unmounted pearls and mother-of-pearl are sold, as well as vanilla pods. The road then continues along the southern side of the bay and, on the final long stretch back to the starting point, winds in and out of small bays before coming back to Marina Iti.

## ACTIVITIES

**Tahaa Blue Nui** (☎ 65 67 78, 60 84 00; www.blunui.com), the dive centre at Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa (p154), is the only dive centre on Taha'a. The dive centres on Ra'iatea regularly use the dive sites to the east of the island by Céran Pass, and will collect you from hotels in the south of Taha'a. See p58 for more details.

Like Ra'iatea, there are no beaches on Taha'a and you have to go to the *motu* for swimming and snorkelling. Some guesthouses will drop you on a *motu* for the day or you can join an organised *pirogue* tour.

To organise a bit of game fishing, visit **Hôtel Hibiscus** (☎ 65 61 06). Prices vary, so ask when you ring.

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

## TOURS

Many tour operators are based in Taha'a but they also offer to pick up from Ra'iatea. Since Ra'iatea sees more tourists than Taha'a, we've listed the companies offering tours from both islands in the Ra'iatea

section of this chapter (see p146). The places listed here are exclusive to Taha'a. Tours start at about 6500 CFP.

**Hainanui Tours** (☎ 65 61 90) 4WD island tours.

**Lolita Tours** (☎ 65 61 06; Hôtel Hibiscus)

**Poerani Tours** (☎ 65 60 25)

**Vaipoe Tours** (☎ 65 60 83; Pension Vaipoe) Full-day lagoon tours.

## SLEEPING

Taha'a's places to stay are dotted around the coast. It's wise to make reservations so you'll be collected from the appropriate village quay, or even the airport on Ra'iatea.

## The Island

**Boutique Hotel Le Passage** (☎ 65 66 75; residencelepassage@mail.pf; bungalows with half/full board per person 12,000/15,000 CFP; ☎) A cosy, family-run place, this relative newcomer is an excellent-value option. There are three peaceful seaside bungalows that are surrounded by lush gardens, and the pontoon dock is the perfect place to catch a spectacular sunset. The friendly hosts offer guests free 4WD island tours, with stops at a pearl farm and vanilla plantation, and also provide free kayaks and bikes. Transfers from Ra'iatea cost 6000 CFP per boatload.

**Chez Esther** (☎ 65 62 60; bungalows from 8500 CFP; ☎) Three charming bungalows with hot-water bathrooms are available at this quiet place just beyond Poutoru on the inland side of the road. There is a swimming pool and the lagoon is across the road. Add 3500 CFP per person for half board. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP per person one way. You can hire a boat for 7000 CFP per half day. No credit cards.

**Hôtel Hibiscus** (☎ 65 61 06; hibiscus@tahaa-tahiti.com; bungalows from 9500 CFP) This hotel is big on variety – choose from bungalows with hot-water bathroom, terrace, mezzanine, fan and refrigerator or simpler digs that share cold-water bathrooms. Add 4500 CFP per person for half board. Transfers from Ra'iatea depart from Snack Moemoea and cost 1400 CFP per person each way. Island tours, traditional fishing trips, *motu* picnics and even a *motu* wedding can be organised. Bicycle hire costs 1000 CFP per day.

**Pension Vaihi** (☎ 65 62 02; bungalows 7000 CFP) Head to this family guesthouse on the southern side of Hurepiti Bay for real isolation and tranquillity. The three spotless

lagoon-side bungalows come with bathrooms. Half/full board adds 3000/4500 CFP per person. To get there, ask the *navette* to drop you at the quay at Tiva, where the owners will pick you up. Bicycles can be hired for 1500 CFP.

**Pension Api** (☎ 65 69 88; www.pensionapi.com; r 8000 CFP) Near the sea, this *pension* offers two comfortable, well-maintained bungalow-style rooms. Each has a private bathroom, mosquito net and a terrace. Breakfast is available for 600 CFP; add 4000 CFP for half board. To get here, take a *navette* or taxi-boat to the quay and call the owners, who will come and pick you up. Free kayaks and bicycles are available for guests' use.

**Au Phil du Temps** (☎ 65 64 19; http://pension-auphil-du-temps.iffance.com in French; bungalows with breakfast per person 5500 CFP, with half/full board per person 10,000/13,000 CFP) Kitted out with TVs, mosquito nets and private outside bathrooms, the local-style bungalows here are just a few metres from the lagoon. The place is well kept and very quiet. Look for it on the outskirts of Tapuamu, heading towards Patio on the inland side of the road. Transfers to the airport cost 2000 CFP per person one way. No credit cards.

**Pension Vaipoe** (Chez Patricia et Daniel; ☎ 65 60 83; v.p@mail.pf; bungalows 8500 CFP) On the inland side of the road, but with easy access to the lagoon, this popular place has no-frills bungalows with hot-water bathroom, kitchenette and terrace; add 3500 CFP for half board. Activities include a *motu* picnic and swimming stop (1000 CFP), island tours (3500 CFP) and game fishing. Airport transfers cost 3000 CFP per person return.

**Chez Pascal** (☎ 65 60 42; bungalows per person 3000 CFP, with breakfast/half board 3500/5500 CFP) Spartan but clean, this very basic place exudes a Polynesian family atmosphere. The small bungalows can feel a bit cramped, and they share a toilet and shower, but they're the cheapest on the island. Bicycles cost 1500 CFP and *motu* excursions are 4000 CFP. To get here, head past Tapuamu and take the first inland turn-off after the bridge. Transfers to/from the quay at Tapuamu are free.

**Tupenu Village** (☎ 65 62 01; d 6500 CFP) The only place on the north shore of the island, Tupenu Village is on the lagoon about 1.5km west of Patio. There's a big two-level *fare* with five rooms sharing two bathrooms (with hot water). Breakfast is 600 CFP and lunch or

dinner is 1800 CFP; cheaper meals are also available. *Motu* drop-offs including a picnic cost 2500 CFP per person. Transfers to/from Patio are free. Credit cards are not accepted.

### The Motu

**Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa** (☎ 50 84 54; www.letahaa.com; bungalows from 80,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) Privacy is paramount at this ultra-luxurious, creatively designed resort in an exceptional setting on Motu Tau Tau. The over-water bungalows are as posh as they are roomy; the beach-side villas are enormous, many-room affairs complete with personal plunge pools. Stairs cut into a tree in the main building lead up to a gourmet restaurant and cocktail bar, offering indoor and outdoor seating amid fabulous views. Le Taha'a is definitely a destination resort (it's very isolated and access to the mainland is expensive and inconsistent) but the place offers enough activities to keep most guests entertained for days. Reach the resort by boat (9000 CFP per person) or via private helicopter from Bora Bora (17,000 CFP per person).

**Hotel La Pirogue** (☎ 60 81 45; www.hotellapirogue.com; bungalows 22,000 CFP) Small and rustic, this new place offers eight spotless thatched-roof bungalows in a secluded *motu* location. It's intimate and friendly, and appeals to couples looking for a bit of luxury without an exorbitant price tag – although it also caters to families. The restaurant has a varied menu and good reputation (we'd suggest opting for half board – an extra 6500 CFP per person). All sorts of activities can be arranged.

**Vahine Island Private Island Resort** (☎ 65 67 38; www.vahine-island.com; beach bungalows 36,000-55,000 CFP; ☎) In a picturesque location (think white-sand beaches and translucent water), this intimate resort has just nine French Polynesian-style bungalows – three of which are perched over the lagoon. Personable and homely, the digs are not ultraposh (there's no air-con or swimming pool) but they are lovingly decorated with bright Tahitian bedspreads, coral and shell adornments, and comfy hammocks on spacious wooden terraces. Add 7000 CFP per person per day for half-board (recommended as you are literally in the middle of nowhere). *Pirogues* and snorkelling equipment are available for free; lagoon tours and mountain-bike trips are organised. Airport transfers cost 6000 CFP per person return.

### EATING & DRINKING

There are shops in each village but the dining options are very limited. Taha'a is not the island for night owls. The *motu* resorts all have their own bars, but otherwise your dining options are limited to the following two restaurants.

**Restaurant Tahaa Maitai** (☎ 65 70 85; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Travellers recommend this restaurant right on Haamene Bay not only for its fabulous views but also for its delicious cuisine. The menu features lots of fresh seafood, local fruits and vegetables and delicious French desserts. There's also a long cocktail list, making this a popular local watering hole.

**Hôtel Hibiscus** (☎ 65 61 06; dishes 1200-3000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This hotel restaurant has a solid reputation. A couple of good choices on the seafood-heavy menu include *mahi mahi* (dorado) and crab dishes. The bar gets busy at night, especially during the Saturday-night dance performances.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

There is no airport on Taha'a. The airport on Ra'iataea is only 15 minutes across the lagoon and some hotels will pick up guests from the airport or from the ferry quay at Uturoa on Ra'iataea.

See p150 for information on the *navette* service between Ra'iataea and Taha'a.

The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 99) operates on Monday, Wednesday and Friday between Bora Bora, Taha'a and Ra'iataea.

Interisland ships stop at Tapuamu on Taha'a en route from Ra'iataea to Bora Bora, but not on every voyage. If your trip doesn't stop at Taha'a it's easy enough to disembark at Uturoa and then take the *navette* across.

### GETTING AROUND

There is no public transport on Taha'a. If you are contemplating hitching, remember that traffic is very light. Hiring a car or a mountain bike are the only ways to see the island independently. The coast road, not all of which is sealed, is quite OK to use. If you do decide to tackle it by bicycle keep in mind that there are some steep stretches on the south of the island that can be heavy-going.

### Car & Bicycle

**Monique Locations** (☎ 65 62 48), near the church in Haamene, hires out Citroën Saxos for 9000/11,000 CFP for eight/24 hours plus 1200 CFP for petrol, and bicycles for 1500 CFP for 24 hours.

**Europcar** (☎ 65 67 00; fax 65 68 08), at the Total petrol station at Tapuamu, has Fiat Pandas for 6500 CFP for four hours and 9000 CFP for 24 hours. Rates include unlimited mileage and insurance.

You can hire a scooter on Ra'iataea (see p151) and bring it across on the *navette*. There are petrol stations located in Patio and Tapuamu, which are open Monday to Saturday.

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