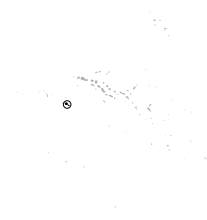


Tahiti



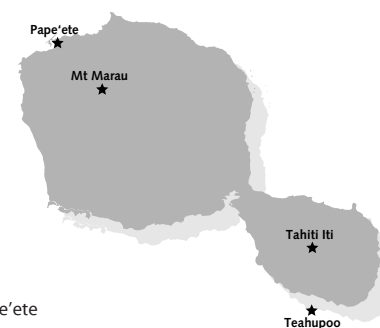
Tahiti's name is so synonymous with paradise that many visitors feel duped upon stepping off the plane and not finding themselves immediately immersed in that postcard-perfect vision of blue lagoons and palm-fringed beaches. But even though the disparity between the alluring hype and dusty reality of Tahiti can feel disappointing, don't dismiss this place upon first glance. The largest and most industrialised of the French Polynesian islands is more than just an international arrival point; it's also a destination on its own. The capital, Pape'ete, is a chaotic whirl of colour and sound, reeking with humidity and strange new smells, teeming with outdoor cafés, pulsating nightlife and vibrant markets. Outside the city limits you'll discover exotic black-sand beaches, green velvet mountains cloaked in layers of wispy cloud, secret valleys dripping with tropical foliage and quiet villages where locals all know each other.

Tahiti's water may not be that exact shade of aqua you dreamed about, but dive beneath the surface and you'll find the fantasy world of brightly coloured fish and mesmerising coral the region is known for. Home to one of the world's most powerful and legendary waves, Teahupoo, Tahiti is a pro surfer's wet dream; but it's also one of the only places in Polynesia where beginners can catch a gentle beach break.

Although it takes a bit of getting used to, if you can save those preconceived notions of paradise for another island, you will likely find yourself growing rather fond of Tahiti's subtle charm.

HIGHLIGHTS

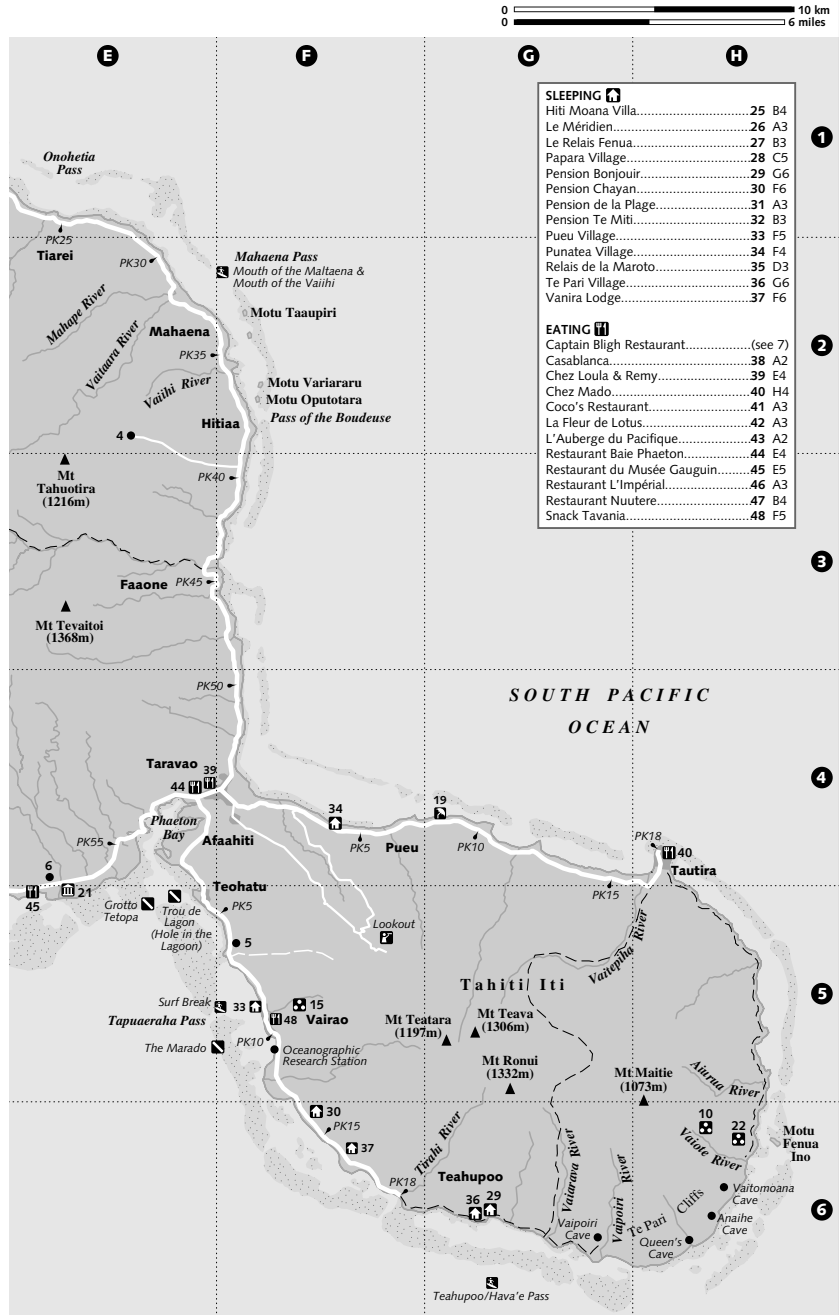
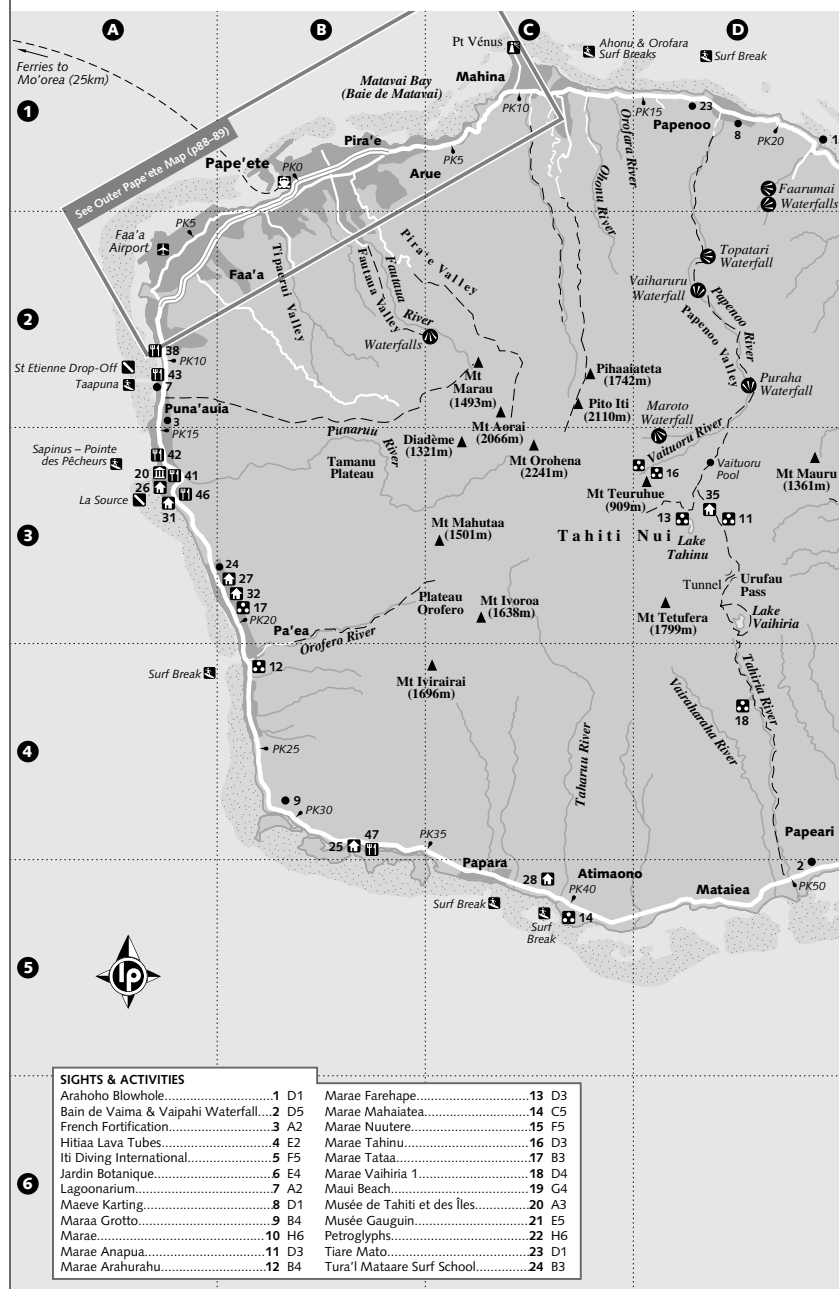
- Soaking up the sound and colours of the **Marché de Pape'ete** (p88)
- Hiking through dense tropical foliage around **Mt Marau** (p106) in the island's rugged interior
- Checking out the world's best surfers competing at the Billabong Pro competition at **Teahupoo** (p110)
- Watching the sunset over a black-sand beach on quiet **Tahiti Iti** (p109)
- Marvelling at the agility of local dancers at a **traditional dance performance** (p99) in Pape'ete



■ POPULATION: 169,624

■ AREA: 1045 SQ KM

TAHITI



History

Like other islands in the Society group, Tahiti is the creation of volcanic eruptions. The larger circle of Tahiti, Tahiti Nui, came into existence around two-and-a-half to three million years ago; the smaller circle, Tahiti Iti, was created less than a million years ago.

Tahiti was not the first of the Society group to be populated in the great Polynesian migrations. Legends have the first settlers arriving in Tahiti from Ra'iatea, which was the most politically important island despite being much smaller than Tahiti.

Tahiti's importance increased as more and more European visitors chose to make the island their preferred base and the island soon became a minor pawn in the European colonial game.

Tahiti's population is currently about 170,000, which constitutes more than 60% of French Polynesia's entire population. Tahiti is the economic, cultural and political centre of French Polynesia.

Geography & Geology

Tahiti is neatly divided into two circles connected by an isthmus: the larger and more populated Tahiti Nui (Big Tahiti) to the northwest and the smaller Tahiti Iti (Little Tahiti) to the southeast. The narrow coastal fringe of Tahiti Nui, where the vast majority of the population is concentrated, sweeps rapidly inwards and upwards to a jumble of soaring, green-clad mountain peaks.

A fringing reef encloses a narrow lagoon around much of the island, but parts of the coast, particularly along the north coast from Mahina through Papenoo to Tiarei, are unprotected. There are 33 passes through the reef, the most important of which is the Pape'ete Pass into Pape'ete's harbour. Less than 10km east is Matavai Bay (Baie de Matavai), the favourite anchorage point of many early explorers.

The mountainous centre of Tahiti Nui is effectively one huge crater, with the highest peak being Mt Orohena (2241m). A ridge runs northwest from the summit to Mt Aorai (2066m), and continues south to the spectacular rocky Diadème (1321m) then north to Mt Marau (1493m). A number of valleys run down to the coast from the mountains, the most impressive being the wide Papenoo Valley to the north. Tahiti Iti has its highest point at Mt Ronui (1332m).

Orientation

The *pointe kilométrique* (PK; kilometre point) markers start at zero in Pape'ete and increase in both a clockwise and an anticlockwise direction around Tahiti Nui until they meet at Taravao, the town at the isthmus that connects Tahiti Nui with Tahiti Iti. Taravao is 54km from Pape'ete clockwise (via the east coast) and 60km anticlockwise (via the west coast). The counting starts again on Tahiti Iti, where the markers only go as far as the sealed road – remarkably, the easternmost coast is still not paved. Pape'ete and the surrounding suburbs dominate the northwestern coast of the island.

Activities

To explore Tahiti's rugged interior, join a quad bike tour with **D-Tour Tahiti** (☎ 82 97 76; www.tahiti-dtour.com; trips from 7500 CFP). The company, based out of the Intercontinental Resort Tahiti in Pape'ete, offers a variety of excursions including half- and full-day ATV adventures and jet-ski lagoon tours. Also at the Intercontinental, the **Aquatica Dive Centre** (☎ 53 34 96; www.aquatica-dive.com) has a long menu of watery activities – from swimming with whales and dolphins to sunset catamaran cruises.

For water activities in Pape'ete, see p92.

There are some excellent diving opportunities to be had in Tahiti. For details about sites see p54. In addition to the Aquatica, dive centres on Tahiti include the following:

Eleuthera Plongée (☎ 42 49 29; www.dive-tahiti.com; Taina Marina, PK9, Punaauia)

Fluid (☎ 85 41 46, 70 83 75; Taina Marina)

Iti Diving International (☎ /fax 57 77 93; www.iti-diving.pf; PK6, Vairao) The only centre on Tahiti Iti.

Scuba Tek Tahiti (☎ /fax 42 23 55; www.chez.com/scubatek; PK4, Arue; ☒ closed Mon & afternoon Sun)

Tahiti Plongée (☎ 41 00 62, 43 62 51; www.tahitiplongee.pf; PK7.5, Punaauia; ☒ closed Mon) CMAS affiliation only.

Topdive (☎ 86 49 06; www.topdive.com; Sheraton)

Tahiti for Children

Travelling with children is extremely easy in Tahiti. Any kid who loves the beach will love French Polynesia, and Polynesians absolutely love children. Within Pape'ete's urban sprawl, the **Lagoonarium** (Map pp82-3; ☎ 43 62 90; PK11; adult/child 500/300 CFP; ☒ 9am-6pm) is a pleasant tourist trap that's always popular with the little ones. A meshed-in

TAHITI IN...

Three Days

Spend the first day exploring colourful Pape'ete, making sure to spend some time shopping for pearls or *parae* in the famous **Marché de Pape'ete** (Pape'ete Market; p88). Have dinner at a chic French restaurant like **L'O à la Bouche** (p97). After dinner, catch a dance performance and cocktail at one of the posh resorts, or opt for a night dancing in Pape'ete's cacophonous **bars and clubs** (p98). Head out of town on day two, and follow the road south to **Tahiti Iti** (p109). Spend the night at the fantastic **Vanira Lodge** (p110), the most creative *pension* in Tahiti. On day three, explore the big island, **Tahiti Nui** (p101), spending the night at one of the plush resorts outside Pape'ete.

Five Days

Follow the three-day itinerary, but spend an extra day in Tahiti Iti, take a **surf lesson** (p102) or devote some time to jungle tramping in the **interior** (p108). You can also spend an extra night on Tahiti Nui's lively west coast; try treating yourself to a night at the lux **Intercontinental Resort Tahiti** (p95) – one of the swankiest in the world.

area of lagoon with a very modest underwater viewing room is reached through a giant concrete shark's mouth, where you can watch the small sharks and other creatures. The entrance to the Lagoonarium is part of the Captain Bligh Restaurant, a very popular stop for tour groups. If you eat at the Captain Bligh Restaurant, there's no charge to visit the Lagoonarium.

In Pape'ete, special child-oriented cultural and artistic shows take place in Parc Bougainville (p89), along with a big playground. East of Pape'ete you'll find **Maeva Karting** (Map pp82-3; ☎ 82 87 36; maevakarting@mail.pf; ☒ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), where children seven years and older can race around two tracks on go-carts.

Kids will also dig the huge Galapagos tortoises at the 137-hectare Jardin Botanique (p105), on the far south coast of Tahiti Nui. Older children will enjoy exploring the walking paths winding through the garden, past ponds and palms and a superb thicket of bamboo.

Getting Around

BUS

French Polynesia's once-famous *le trucks* have now, unfortunately, mostly gone to bus heaven. The 'real' air-con buses now, in theory, only stop at designated stops (with blue signs) and run to a timetable, but in reality the routes haven't changed and the drivers will usually stop if you wave them down. Just make sure you are on the

correct side of the road for the direction you want to go!

Weekdays, buses operate roughly every 15 minutes (though this varies) from dawn until about 5.30pm except for the Pape'ete-Faa'a-Outumaoro line, which supposedly operates 24 hours but in reality gets very quiet after 10pm. At the weekend, particularly on Sunday, services are less frequent. Fares for the shortest trips, from Pape'ete to a little beyond the airport, for example, start from 150 CFP (80 CFP for children and students); this fare rises to 250 CFP after 6pm. Outside this area, the prices are less clear. Out to about 20km from Pape'ete the fare will go up in stages to around 200 CFP; getting to the other side of the island might cost 450 CFP. Once the new bus system is up and running, these fares may well rise.

Tahiti's buses have their route number and the final destination clearly marked.

There are basically three routes: greater Pape'ete, which is handy for the Pape'ete-Faa'a airport trip (catch this along Rue du Général de Gaulle); the east coast, which is also handy for Tahiti Iti (catch this along Blvd Pomare); and the west coast (catch this along Rue du Maréchal Foch and Rue du Général de Gaulle).

CAR

Driving on Tahiti is quite straightforward and, although accident statistics are not encouraging, the traffic is fairly light once you

get away from Pape'ete. Apart from on the RDO out of Pape'ete to the west, the traffic doesn't travel too fast. As always, beware of children wandering on the road, and prepare yourself for a rather casual approach to overtaking. Don't leave anything on view in your car, and even consider making it clear there's nothing to steal – leave the glove box open, for example.

Remember to check the car over carefully before accepting it. For the price you'll be paying, you may be unpleasantly surprised by the standard of the hire cars.

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

Avis Faa'a airport (Map pp88-9; ☎ 85 02 84; Faa'a airport); Quai des Ferries (☎ 43 88 99; Quai des Ferries); Rue des Remparts (Map pp90-1; ☎ 54 10 10; cnr Rue des Remparts & Av Georges Clémenceau)

Centre Auto Paea (☎ 53 33 33; PK20.2, Pa'ea)

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

Europcar Faa'a airport (☎ 86 60 61; Faa'a airport); Pape'ete (Map pp90-1; ☎ 45 24 24; cnr Av du Prince Hinoi & Rue des Remparts)

Hertz (☎ 82 55 86; Faa'a airport)

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

HITCHING

Hitching in Tahiti is relatively easy and usually quite safe, and you'll see both locals and *popaa* (Westerners) standing on the tarmac with their thumbs in the air. French Polynesia has low crime levels, but solo women should always use common sense. Avoid hitching on Friday and Saturday nights, when the roads are filled with alarmingly intoxicated drivers.

PAPE'ETE

French Polynesia's answer to Las Vegas (or so the tourism booster says), pulsating Pape'ete is not always the easiest pill to swallow. Dreamy beach town this is not. No, the region's 'big smoke' is full of harder truths and fragile promises, luring the hopeful and the helpless from around French Polynesia. A sweaty concrete jungle bursting with bright lights and grimy edges, oozing strange sounds and foreign smells, Pape'ete quickly divides its guests – you'll either *get* its chaotic passion and colourful clutter or you'll run quickly from its

TAHITI'S BEST DEALS

Sleeping Le Royal Tahitien (p94), Pape'ete; Vanira Lodge (p110), Tahiti Iiti

Eating Pasta dishes (they're huge, delicious and filling) at Lou Pescadou (p96) in Pape'ete; the *roulottes* around the island

For kids Lagoonarium (p84)

Sight Hitiaa Lava Tubes (p104)

Activity Surf lesson at Tura'i Mataare Surf School (p102)

Dance performance The performances during the July Heiva festival (p46)

pushy crowds and lack of gorgeous vistas. If you can stomach it, stick around a bit and the place just might start to grow on you. Sip a cappuccino at a chic sidewalk café listening to a soundtrack of rapid-fire French, shop the vibrant market for everything and anything (from flawless pearls to bright *parae*), catch a world-class dance and music performance or drink the night away at a funky bar. All roads in French Polynesia eventually lead to Pape'ete, so you might as well at least scope it out.

HISTORY

Translated from Tahitian, Pape'ete's name literally means 'basket of water'. Historians theorise that this name is probably a reference to the springs where water was once collected.

In 1769, when Cook anchored in Matavai Bay (Baie de Matavai), there was no settlement in Pape'ete. Towards the end of the century European visitors realised the value of its sheltered bay and easy access through the reef. London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries arrived in Pape'ete in 1824 and the young Queen Pomare became a regular visitor to the growing town, which gradually swelled to become a religious and political centre.

Visiting whaling ships made Pape'ete an increasingly important port, and it was selected as the administrative headquarters for the new French protectorate in 1843. By 1860 the town had taken its present form, with a straggling European settlement between the waterfront and the street known as the Broom (now Rue du Commandant Destremeau, Rue du Général de Gaulle and Rue du Maréchal Foch).

Chinese merchants and shopkeepers also started to trickle into Pape'ete, but at the beginning of the 20th century the population was still less than 5000. A disastrous cyclone in 1906 and a German naval bombardment in 1914 took a toll, but during WWII the population reached 10,000 and by the early 1960s it was over 20,000.

The opening of Faa'a airport in the 1960s kick-started the tourist industry, while French nuclear testing brought in basketfuls of money. The huge expansion of administrative and government jobs lured a flood of people from other islands. This type of rapid expansion usually has its flipside, and the last few decades have seen the almost total destruction of the charming old colonial heart of Pape'ete.

ORIENTATION

The backbone (albeit a bent one) of central Pape'ete is Blvd Pomare, which curves around an almost enclosed bay. This central district is easily covered on foot. Clustered around here and on the blocks back from Blvd Pomare are most of the central businesses, banks and restaurants, and some hotels. The Vaima Centre marks the centre of Pape'ete, but it's along the waterfront that the city throbs with life. The port zone, comprising Fare Ute and Motu Uta, is easily visible across the harbour to the north.

Greater Pape'ete forms a vast conurbation, squeezed between the mountains and the lagoon along the north coast of Tahiti. The westward sprawl of Pape'ete extends beyond the airport in the drab suburb of Faa'a (yes that is three consecutive vowels) and on to Puna'auia. The coastal road westwards is complemented by the Route de Dégagement Ouest (RDO) freeway, which runs slightly inland, starting on the western edge of central Pape'ete and extending to just beyond Faa'a airport before rejoining the coastal road.

On the other side of Pape'ete, Av du Prince Hinoi and Av Georges Clémenceau run east through the suburb of Pira'e then join at Arue.

INFORMATION

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

Bookshops

Pape'ete has a few good bookshops, but the range in English is always poor compared to the French texts and newspapers on offer. You can find all the French newspapers (from *Le Monde* to *Libération*) and the French-language Tahitian newspapers and magazines, such as *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti* and *Tahiti Pacifique*.

Le Kiosque (Map pp90-1; Blvd Pomare) At the front of the Vaima Centre, this is a good place.

Librarie Archipels (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 47 30; 68 Rue des Remparts; ☎ Mon-Sat) A good bookshop, but, again, there's very little in English.

Librarie du Vaima (Map pp90-1; ☎ 45 57 57; Vaima Centre; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) The best bookshop.

Maison de la Presse (Map pp90-1; Blvd Pomare)

Has a good selection of newspapers and magazines.

Prince Hinoi Centre (Map pp90-1; Av du Prince Hinoi; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat)

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 15)

Hôtel de Police (Av Bruat)

Police (☎ 17)

Police Aux Frontières (Pl Vaiete)

SOS Infirmières (☎ 43 56 00)

SOS Médecins (☎ 42 34 56)

Internet Access

Maison de la Presse (Map pp90-1; Blvd Pomare; per hr 1000 CFP) Snazzy place; listen to local music while surfing the Web.

Tiki Soft C@fé (Map pp90-1; ☎ 88 93 98; per hr 1000 CFP) A funky place run by glamorous French women; frequented by a chic clientele.

Medical Services

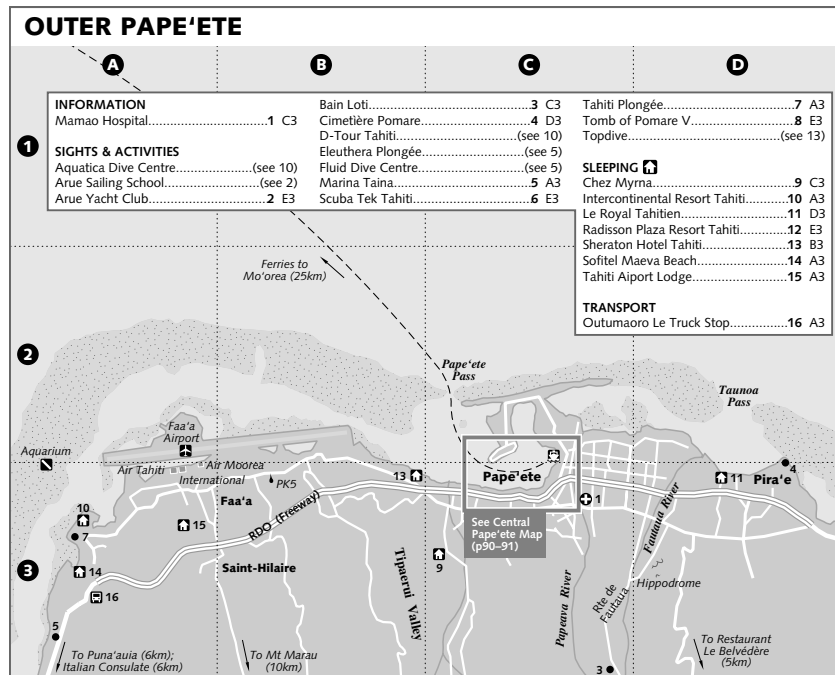
Clinique Cardella (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 81 90; Rue Anne-Marie Javouhey; ☎ 24hr) Private clinic behind the cathedral.

Clinique Paofai (Map pp90-1; ☎ 46 18 18; cnr Blvd Pomare & Rue du Lieutenant Varney; ☎ 24hr) Private clinic.

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

Money

There are banks (Banque Socredo, Banque de Tahiti and Banque de Polynésie) and ATMs scattered around Pape'ete and its suburbs. Banque Socredo and Banque de



Polynésie have branches at Faa'a airport, where there's also an ATM. See p252 for general information on banks and changing money.

Most banks in Pape'ete change money and travellers cheques; the ATMs accept Visa and MasterCard for cash advances and let you withdraw money from your home account. The following branches have ATMs.

Banque de Tahiti (Map pp90-1; Rue Colette)

Banque Polynésie (Map pp90-1; Av Bruat; Rue du Général de Gaulle)

Banque Socredo (Map pp90-1; Blvd Pomare; Fare Tony)

Post

Post Office (Blvd Pomare) Pape'ete's main post office is next to the Parc Bougainville. For stamps and general postal services go upstairs from the Blvd Pomare entrance.

Tourist Information

In addition to the offices listed here, there is an information desk at Faa'a airport.

Gie Haere Mai visitors information centre (Map pp90-1; ☎ 54 88 99; haere-mai@mail.pf; Fare Manihini, Vaïete Sq; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

In central Pape'ete, this tourist office has loads of information about, and does booking for, small hotels and family pensions.

Gie Tahiti Manava visitors information centre

(Map pp90-1; ☎ 50 57 12; www.tahiti-manava.pf; Fare Manihini, Blvd Pomare; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Near Gie Haere Mai; has information on all of French Polynesia. Although Mo'orea and Bora Bora have helpful tourist offices, the more remote islands don't, so if you have any queries, make the most of this tourist office while in Pape'ete.

SIGHTS

To truly understand Pape'ete's eclectic charm, you'll have to spend a few hours getting under her skin. Sometimes the best way to do this is simply to stroll the crowded streets at random. Of course when you do stumble across them, the following sights are pretty worthy.

Marché de Pape'ete

Load up on gaudy fabrics, vintage jewellery and local produce at the famed Marché de Pape'ete (Pape'ete Market; Map pp90-1) – a Pape'ete must. It covers the whole block



between Rue du 22 Septembre and Rue F Cardella, just one block back from Blvd Pomare. The most fun time to visit is early Saturday morning when local residents flock in from all around town. Dotted among the fruit, vegetables, meat and fish downstairs are cake stalls, pizza places and little patisseries. Wander and munch, and then stroll upstairs to the clothes, jewellery and knick-knacks. Fish from other islands is on sale early in the day but the Tahitian catch does not appear until late afternoon. The place has lived through a tumultuous 250 years of cyclone damage and rebuilding and was even destroyed by German cruisers in WWII. Today's airy structure was built in 1987.

Robert Wan Musée de la Perle

In the Vaima Centre on the Rue Jeanne d'Arc side, the **Robert Wan Musée de la Perle** (Pearl Museum; Map pp90-1; ☎ 45 21 22; admission 1000 CFP; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun) was created by pearl magnate Robert Wan. It's a small, modern and well-presented museum that covers all facets of the pearl-cultivating

business including its history, cultivation techniques, economics and art. There are explanations of the displays in English. Of course, at the end of the visit you magically find yourself in one of Monsieur Wan's pearl boutiques.

Parc Bougainville

A great spot to just chill out, the Parc Bougainville (Bougainville Park; Map pp90-1) is a tropical oasis in the middle of the city's concrete jungle. Lush and cool, it stretches from Blvd Pomare to Rue du Général de Gaulle and, not surprisingly, is fronted by a 1909 bust of the great French navigator. Frequent floral, cultural and artistic shows add to the appeal, and there's a children's playground.

Cathédrale de l'Immaculée

Taking pride of place is the centre of town is the Cathédrale de l'Immaculée Conception (Cathédrale de Notre Dame; Map pp90-1). The cathedral's story began in 1856, when plans were hatched for it to be built of stone imported from Australia, with a doorway carved out of granite from Mangareva in the Gambier Archipelago. Construction began, but money soon ran out; the original edifice was demolished in 1867, and a smaller cathedral was completed in 1875.

Mission Quarter

From Cathédrale de l'Immaculée Conception leads into the Mission district, the site of Catholic colleges and Protestant schools. Jausen, the Catholic bishop of Tahiti from 1848, acquired the mission lands in 1855 and turned them into a local **botanical garden**. He is buried in the mission's cemetery, beside Father Honoré Laval, the controversial apostle of the Gambier Archipelago. The road from the cathedral crosses the Papeava River on a small stone bridge and leads into the gardens of the fine **bishop's palace** (1875). The gardens also contain a pretty Gothic-style chapel.

Église Évangélique de Polynésie Française

Although the Catholic cathedral is placed squarely in the town centre, Tahiti remains predominantly Protestant, a lasting legacy of the LMS missionaries. The large pink

Église Évangélique de Polynésie Française (Map pp90–1) makes a colourful scene on Sunday morning, when it is bursting at the seams with a devout congregation dressed in white and belting out rousing *himene* (hymns). The church is on the site of the first Protestant church in Pape'ete, which was built in 1818.

Bain Loti

From east of the centre, the Route de Fautau runs 2.5km inland to Bain Loti (Loti's Bath; Map pp88–9). It was here in Pierre Loti's 1880 novel *Le Mariage de Loti* (The Marriage of Loti) that the beautiful Rarahu, a 14-year-old Polynesian girl, met Loti (Frenchman Julien Viaud's pen name). This

pool once supplied the town with drinking water, but now it's led through a concrete channel and surrounded by development. Nevertheless, it remains a favourite meeting place and swimming hole for locals. A bust of Pierre Loti overlooks the scene.

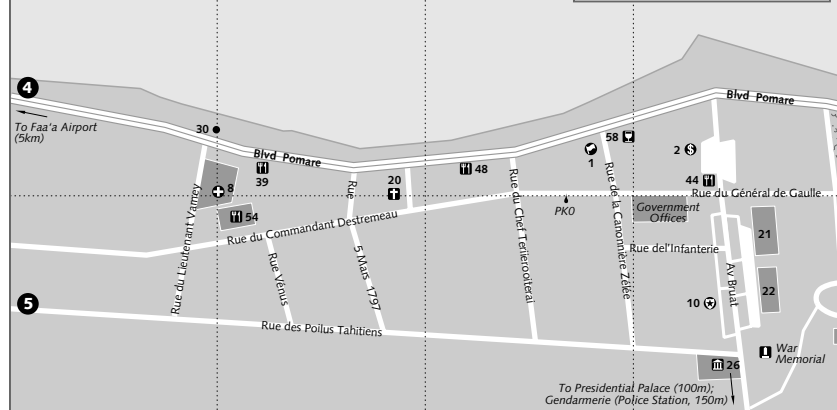
See p108 for details of the walk that leads inland from Bain Loti.

Administrative Buildings

The Territorial Assembly and other government buildings occupy **PI Tarahoi** (Map pp90–1), the former site of the Pomare palace. It's named after Marae Tarahoi, the royal *marae* (traditional temple) of the Pomare family. The termite-riddled 1883 palace was razed in 1960, but you can get

CENTRAL PAPE'ETE

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Qantas Airways..... 81 F4				
Taxi Stand..... 82 F4				
Taxi Stand..... 83 G2				
Taxis Stand..... 84 G4				



an idea of what it looked like from the modern *mairie* (town hall), a few blocks east, which is built in a similar style. On Rue du Général de Gaulle, the assembly building is fronted by a **statue of Pouvana'a a Oopa**, the late pro-independence figure of heroic proportions. The **High Commissioner's Residence** that stands to one side of the assembly building replaced the 1843 Palace of the Governor (those pesky termites again). The earlier building arrived on Tahiti in pieces and was intended to be assembled on Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas, but was sidetracked to become the governor's residence! Behind and between the two buildings is a freshwater spring. The pool is still known as the Bain de la Reine (Queen's Bathing Place), as the young Queen Pomare used to visit it. A more recent addition is the **Presidential Palace**, an imposing building used by the president.

To the west, along Av Bruat, is the brand-spanking-new **Ministère de la Culture** (☎ 50 15 01). There's an **exhibition space** (admission free; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm) here that is worth a peek. There were some amazing car tyres incised with traditional Polynesian tattoo markings when we visited.

Pape'ete's **mairie** (town hall) is two blocks back from Blvd Pomare and a block north of Marché de Pape'ete. It was completed in 1990, in vague imitation of the old queen's palace.

Tomb of Pomare V

On Point Outuaiai in Arue, on the water's edge, signposted and just a short detour off the coastal road, is the tomb of the last of the Pomare family. The Tomb of Pomare V (Map pp88-9) looks like a stubby lighthouse made of coral boulders. It was actually built in 1879 for Queen Pomare, who died in 1877 after 50 years in power. Her ungrateful son, Pomare V, had her remains exhumed a few years later and when he died in 1891 it became his tomb. It's said that he drank himself to death and that the Grecian urn replica atop the structure should be a liquor bottle. Gauguin witnessed the funeral and described it in his book *Noa Noa*.

Other Pomares are buried (or may be buried – their tombs are unmarked) in the **Cimetière Pomare** (Map pp88-9; PK5.4). A board at the cemetery indicates where Pomare I, II, III and IV are apparently interred.

To'ata Square

Tourism officials are putting on a hell of an ad campaign promoting To'ata Sq (Map pp90-1), an evolving multi-use development project on Pape'ete's western edge. You can take the toddlers out for a stroller jaunt on paved walking paths through tropical floral gardens or visit on a romantic evening trip, sharing a quiet moment bathed in an artificial lantern's glow. One end of the square is filled with a variety of pleasant, well-priced outdoor eateries on the water. The other side is home to a 5000-seat pavilion, which is the scene of the July Heiva festivities (p46); it also hosts rock concerts throughout the year.

Beaches

Tahiti is not really a beach destination, but if you just want to get into the water there are a few places where you can do so. Tahiti's beaches are black sand, which makes the sand particularly hot underfoot but rather beautiful under sunlight. Eight kilometres west of the centre, just beyond Faa'a airport, there's a bit of beach by the Sofitel Maeva Beach. The Outumaoro *le truck* stop is just across the main road from the hotel, so getting here is very easy.

On the other side of town, 3km to the east in Pira'e, there's a stretch of black-sand beach by Le Royal Tahitien hotel. There's also a nicer stretch of beach at PK7, and further along again at Point Vénus (PK10). Unhappily, beaches within Pape'ete's urban sprawl can be subject to the same problems as city beaches in many modern countries, such as pollution from badly treated (or even untreated) sewage and industrial waste, so ask around before diving in.

ACTIVITIES

For details about Tahiti-wide activities such as biking and water activities, see p84. For diving information see p54.

Based in the outskirts of Pape'ete, **Tahiti Water Skiing Club** (☎ 45 39 36; www.tahitskiclub.com) has introductory and advanced water-skiing and wakeboarding lessons. When you are finished tearing up the lagoon, you can sunbathe on their pontoon float. To try your hand at windsurfing, take a lesson at **Arue Sailing School** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 42 23 54), which is located in the Pape'ete suburbs. Call for prices.

WALKING TOUR

Central Pape'ete is compact, and lends itself to strolling. Ideally head off in the freshness of the early morning, or wait until the cool of the early evening.

Start a waterfront stroll from the west along the four-lane Blvd Pomare, shaded by overhanging trees and brightened by hibiscuses. **To'ata Square** (1; opposite), marking the westerly point of Pape'ete, has been nicely paved and jazzed up in recent times. During the Heiva, this is where you'll see most dance and music performances. The little restaurants and *snacks* along here stay open late.

You can't miss Central Pape'ete's imposing pink church, the **Église Évangélique de Polynésie Française** (2; p89); the missionaries would be rapt to see how busy the church is on a Sunday morning.

Across the road is a memorial to the great double canoe *Hokule'a*, which sailed from Hawaii to Tahiti in 1967. As you walk east there are racing *pirogues* (outrigger canoes) lined up under the trees like tadpoles. Local teams can be seen practising some afternoons and every Saturday morning.

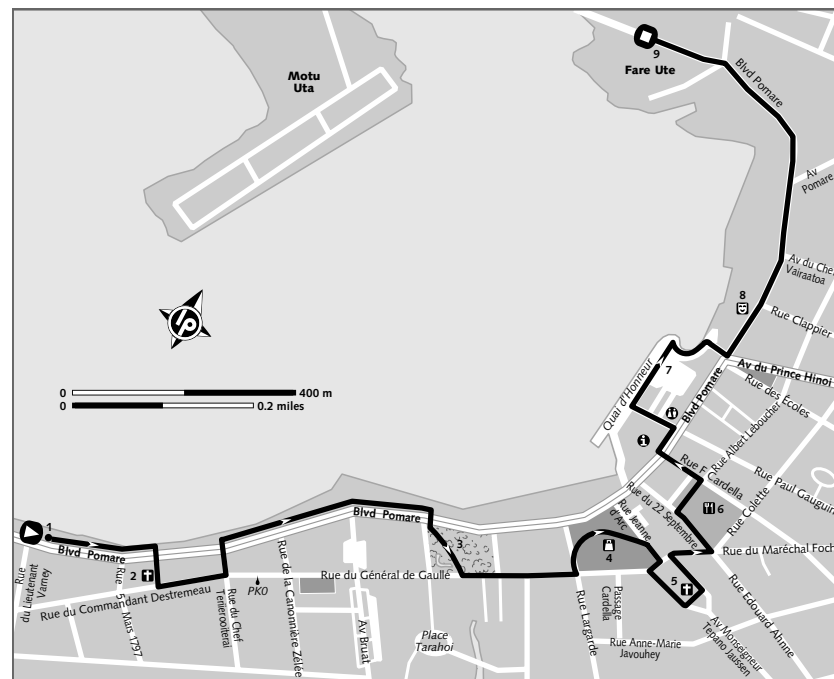
On the inland side of the road is the **Parc Bougainville** (3; p89), which was undergoing work at the time of writing but will hopefully again be a shady, green haven in among the dust and bustle.

On the island side is the useful but rather drab **Vaima Centre** (4), with shops, a few restaurants and most of the airline offices.

From here head down Rue Jeanne d'Arc to the **Cathédrale de l'Immaculée** (5; p89), built in 1875. This is a lovely cool spot for a quiet moment or two.

Following Rue du Général de Gaulle, turn left into Rue du 22 Septembre to the **Marché de Pape'ete** (6; p88). Here you can buy almost any produce that is available in French Polynesia, and you get the feeling you might even see Jack buying some magic beans in a dark corner.

Distance 3km
Duration Two to four hours



If you stroll back towards Blvd Pomare, on the harbour side is the **Place Vaïete (7)**, which has been given a facelift recently and is now home to multiple *roulottes* (food vans) and lots of free, locally produced outdoor music and dance performances, as well as vendors selling local crafts. There are plenty of public benches along here where you can sit and watch the world. On the inland side of Blvd Pomare, the sometimes seedy but always noisy and energetic **entertainment district (8)** starts just south of Av du Prince Hinoi and extends north past Av du Chef Vairataoa.

Tourism and entertainment fades out further along the waterfront as the road continues through the docks and industrial zone of **Fare Ute (9)**, which becomes Motu Uta after the bridge. This is the sweaty working part of the harbour where the copra boats unload their cargoes from the islands and the sweetish smell of coconut hangs in the air. Pallets of everything, from building materials to crates of Hinano beer, drums and shiny new Taiwanese bicycles are loaded onto ships bound for the outer islands.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Heiva** festival in July is Pape'ete's biggest event. For details, see p46. For other festivals and events see p251.

SLEEPING

There's a cluster of midrange places to stay right in the heart of Pape'ete, while most of the top-end and budget places tend to be on the edges of town. Although there's a fair range of places to choose from, bargains are rare and the price-to-quality ratio is dispiriting. You won't find stylish places with that mythical Polynesian feel unless you're paying an arm and a leg for it to be re-created by an international hotel chain.

It's wise to reserve ahead during the Heiva festivities in July, when many hotels are completely booked out. Most international flights arrive at ungodly hours of the night, so you may decide it's easier to book your first night before leaving for Pape'ete so as to avoid traipsing around with your luggage looking for somewhere to stay.

As elsewhere in French Polynesia, there are hefty taxes on top of accommodation costs; for the full story, see p14. Even

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Le Royal Tahitien (Map pp88-9; ☎ 50 40 40; www.hotelroyaltahitien.com; r 17,000 CFP; 🏠 🚗) Definitely the best-value place in Tahiti, the Le Royal is a charming small hotel set amid tropical gardens, cascading waterfall and exotic trees. It's American-owned and Australian-managed; the staff are not only friendly and helpful, but English speaking. It's also the only hotel in its price range to have its own beach – a stretch of deep black sand. The motel-like rooms are stylish, comfortable and very colourful. The waterfront restaurant and bar, with a deck looking over the beach, is popular with guests and locals. Local musicians perform on Friday and Saturday evenings and the place can really rock. Le Royal Tahitien is about 3km east of Pape'ete in Pira'e.

though you will often be quoted prices that do not include these weighty taxes, prices quoted here do include them. When you get a quote, make sure you clarify exactly what little additions you should expect on your bill at the end of your stay.

Budget

The budget places to stay on the outskirts of Pape'ete are better value than those in the centre of town.

Chez Myrna (Map pp88-9; ☎ 42 64 11; dammyer.family@mail.pf; r 7000 CFP) Sparkling clean and friendly, Chez Myrna is the best budget bet around town. It only has two rooms, which are quite simple, but breakfast is included and there's an onsite *snack*, and laundry services. The guesthouse is on the outskirts of Pape'ete. Airport transfers cost 1000 CFP and the German owner will even take you super early or late at night. A good choice if you have an early plane to catch. No credit cards.

Teamo Pension (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 00 35; Rue du Pont-Neuf; dm/d 2500/5000 CFP) Far from flash, but this is the cheapest place to stay in central Pape'ete. Hot water is only available from 6pm to 9pm. The shared kitchen is a plus. Credit cards are accepted.

Tahiti Airport Lodge (Map pp88-9; ☎ 82 23 68; fax 82 25 00; r from 6000 CFP; 🏠) Rooms come in a variety of sizes, but are all rather dark. On the upside, the place has a lovely garden and

lounge area with fabulous views of Mo'orea. The owners speak French and English, offer free daytime airport transfers (trips at night cost 1000 CFP) and provide breakfast.

Midrange

Hotels in this price range, either in central Pape'ete or on the outskirts, all have private bathrooms and TVs, and they accept credit cards.

Radisson Plaza Resort Tahiti (Map pp88-9; ☎ 48 88 39; www.radisson.com/aruefrp; r from 18,000 CFP; 🏠 🚗 🚗) East of Pape'ete, this brand-new place looks rather ugly and ostentatious from the outside, but is much classier once you step in. In an airy, exquisitely decorated complex, rooms are spacious and modern, and public areas include an open-air bar, boutiques, salons and restaurant. It also has a small black-sand beach with decent views of Mo'orea and onsite activities centre. Maybe because it had just opened, rates seem remarkably low for such a fashionable place – hopefully they'll stay this way.

Hôtel Le Mandarin (Map pp90-1; ☎ 50 33 50; www.hotelmandarin.com; Rue Colette; r from 15,000 CFP; 🏠) Clean and quiet, this is one of the city's better midrange bets. The rooms have great wooden furniture and the bathrooms are good. Central to the quay and market, it also has a reader-recommended café attached.

Kon Tiki Pacific (Map pp90-1; ☎ 54 16 16; kontiki@mail.pf; 271 Blvd Pomare; r from 12,000 CFP; 🏠) With an almost seedy charm, the Kon Tiki Pacific offers fantastic sea views from its 20 front-facing rooms – definitely ask for one. A bit of a party place, it has an oft-rowdy bar with happy hour and an onsite nightclub.

Hotel Prince Hinoi (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 32 77; www.hotel-princehinoi.com; cnr Blvd Pomare & Av du Prince Hinoi; s/d/tr 15,000/16,000/17,000 CFP; 🏠) Those looking to party in Pape'ete might be happy here – the hotel is positioned in the heart of the nightlife quarter. Management is sometimes willing to offer reduced rates. The rooms are comfortable, with bright bedspreads, but far from dazzling.

Tiare Tahiti Hotel (Map pp90-1; ☎ 50 01 00; fax 43 68 47; Blvd Pomare; d 20,000 CFP; 🏠) This hotel overlooks the water in the hub of Pape'ete, but sadly is afflicted by the noise of traffic and late-night revellers. A favourite with tour groups, it has a restaurant and excursion desk.

Sofitel Maeva Beach (Map pp88-9; ☎ 42 80 42; www.accor.com; Maeva Beach; r 20,000 CFP; 🏠 🚗 🚗)

We are only devoting so much space to this hotel because it is one of the more prominent offerings on cheap Tahiti package tours, and we think that you should know the deal. The Sofitel is on one of the best beaches in this area, but sadly it's far from good value. Despite recent renovations, rooms are small and lack the amenities (and charm) of Tahiti's other luxury resorts. Travellers have complained about surly service, although we (staying undercover) didn't have a bad experience. The lagoon out the front is murky, however, and not great for swimming. On the plus side the garden area is decent.

Top End

Luxury reigns supreme at these hotels, which are both located slightly outside Pape'ete by the lagoon. Several times a week these places offer Polynesian dance performances by the best groups on the island, as well as *tamaaraa* (traditional-style feasts) at the weekend. These establishments accept credit cards.

Intercontinental Resort Tahiti (Map pp88-9; ☎ 86 51 10; www.tahiti.interconti.com; r/bungalows from 40,000/55,000 CFP; 🏠 🚗 🚗) Hands down, this is the best luxury resort on the island. The Intercontinental (formerly Beachcomber) is as posh as Tahiti gets. Marble bathrooms, plush canopies and Mo'orea views from private balconies come standard in the rooms and romantic over-water bungalows, which range from smallish to quite spacious. The two swimming pools are quite fabulous (one features a slick, cascading horizon), the restaurant has a great reputation and the watersports centre is the best on the island. On the down side, the beach here is artificial (it's made from heaps of imported white sand) and the lagoon is not nearly as translucent, aqua or dreamy as ones that you'll find on other islands.

Sheraton Hotel Tahiti (Map pp88-9; ☎ 86 48 48; www.starwoodtahiti.com; r from 33,000 CFP; 🏠 🚗 🚗) Despite its complete lack of any sort of beach, the Sheraton is a lovely place for a short stay (perhaps on your way home). The lagoonside pool is fantastic, the hot tub (creatively placed on top of a pile of rocks) has awesome Mo'orea views and there's an over-water restaurant and bar. Rooms are spacious and comfortable, but not super-swank.

EATING

Oh to have a few more hours in the day to squeeze in more meals! Whatever you think of the capital, you are sure to have memorable eating experiences here. You can skip cuisines from French to Polynesian to Chinese and back again via Italian and Vietnamese – you couldn't possibly tire of dining in Pape'ete. On the whole, service is quick and friendly, and the food is fresh.

The centre of Pape'ete yields most epicurean delights imaginable. There is often not much difference between the 'cheap' places (not very cheap by the rest of the world's standards!) and the really special restaurants, which could be an argument for throwing caution to the wind and worrying about the finances later. Unless otherwise noted, the following places all accept credit cards.

Budget & Midrange

Le Manava Restaurant (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 02 91; Av Bruat; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Very French, this place is painted a slick, bright turquoise and oozes a 1970s party vibe. It's very trendy, and the food comes highly recommended by locals.

Café de la Gare (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 75 95; Rue du Général de Gaulle; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) This heavenly place has the feel of a true

Parisian bistro – chic, smoky and packed. Ultra-tiny, it serves a menu of grilled meats and salads. At night the tables are cleared away, and DJ's spin house music for a trendy, young crowd well into the night.

Lou Pescadou (Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 74 26; Rue Anne-Marie Javouhey; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) A Pape'ete institution, this cheery restaurant has hearty pizza and pasta dishes that taste as rich and delicious as they smell. It's authentic Italian, right down to the red check tablecloths and carafes of rough red wine. Service is super fast and there are lots of veggie options – a rarity in this part of the world.

Morrison's Café (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 78 61; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Atop the Vaima Centre, this funky-kitsch place takes its name from Jim (not Van), which is abundantly clear as soon as you step inside. It's a cheesy but popular place with rooftop and open-air sections, and it serves a mainly French and Tahitian menu.

L'Api'zeria (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 98 30; Blvd Pomare; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) This denlike haven is always pretty packed, and locals say the service is good. The ambience is rough-hewn cosy; the menu features lots of pasta and salad.

Le Dragon d'Or (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 96 12; Rue Colette; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) A classic Chinese restaurant, this place

offers a quiet escape from Pape'ete's sweaty bustle and has a reputation for good food. It's cool and dark; look for it next to Hôtel Le Mandarin.

La Restaurant Saïgonnaise (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 05 35; Av du Prince Hinoi; dishes 1200-3000 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) The location, on a traffic-clogged road, is horrendous, but this restaurant compensates with excellent, and very authentic, Vietnamese food. The menu includes a little bit of everything.

La Squadra (Map pp90-1; ☎ 41 32 14; Passage Cardella; dishes from 1500 CFP; ☺ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sun) A solid Italian restaurant; it has a long menu, with some less-traditional offerings and the usual assortment of hearty pasta dishes.

Tiki Soft Cofé (Map pp90-1; ☎ 88 93 98; dishes 500-1500 CFP; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A hip spot for a quick coffee or snack during the day. It's also the place to check your email. At night it has a bit of a bar scene (see p98).

Big Burger (Au Rendez-Vous des Amis; Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 01 98; Rue Largarde; dishes 600-2300 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Women from the outer islands sit next to chic French expats and local families at this busy no-frills eatery. Meals are generous; the burgers and omelettes are real bargains.

Snack Raunéa (Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 69 11; dishes 1200 CFP; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A very popular *snack* that serves delicious helpings of Tahitian food, including lots of fish and steak. It's no-frills dining on plastic tables inside or out, but always packed and buzzing.

Aux Délices Chez Louise (Map pp90-1; Passage Cardella; dishes from 300 CFP; ☺ breakfast & lunch; ☒) Aside from marble tables, there's not much in the way of décor at this genteel little patisserie. The food stands alone, however – the pastries, mini quiches and toasted sandwiches are divine.

Sushi Bar (Map pp90-1; ☎ 45 35 25; Vaima Centre; sushi 300-500 CFP; ☺ lunch Mon-Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) Grab your meal as it passes by at this rotating sushi bar with great views, chic wooden interior and orange-clad waiters. The sushi is fresh and tender (this is a country known for its raw-fish specialities), and the atmosphere is casual and fun.

Restaurant Tehoa (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 99 27; Rue du Maréchal Foch; dishes 1000-2000 CFP; ☺ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) It's got a real rough-and-ready vibe, but this Chinese joint is popular with locals. The servings are large, the food is fresh and the prices are low.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

L'Ô à la Bouche (Map pp90-1; ☎ 45 29 76; Passage Cardella; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Dress to impress at this ultra-posh French joint, the place to go for gourmet people-watching and cuisine. It's one of the best restaurants in this town, and *le patron* clearly revels in his customers' gastronomic delight. You could lose yourself just in the gooey handmade chocolates that arrive at the end of the meal. The beautifully presented French appetisers and mains are just as yummy though, so don't worry too much about saving room for dessert. There's always one veggie option for non-carnivorous types.

L'Épi d'Or (Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 07 13; dishes 300-1500 CFP; ☺ Mon-Sat) This simple *snack* has a take-away window, handy for a meal on the run. It also has a clean little restaurant, with the same shore menu – salads, burgers, steaks and fish.

Top End

La Corbeille d'Eau (Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 77 14; Blvd Pomare; appetisers & dishes 2500-5000 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Locals rave about this intimate country-style French restaurant with burnt-orange, modern-art-adorned walls and crisp white tablecloths. It's a bit out of the way, but a good choice for a romantic meal.

Voo Doo Lounge Bar (Map pp90-1; ☎ 48 08 48; Rue du Commandant Jean Gilbert; tapas 1000-10,000 CFP, appetisers from 1500 CFP, dishes from 2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Stylish, intimate and cool, this is the spot to drink or dine on faux leopard print. The progressive French-Pacific Rim fusion menu is fabulous and worth the price. Look for Voo Doo on a narrow street leading from Blvd Pomare to Rue Albert Leboucher.

Restaurant Le Belvédère (☎ 42 73 44; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) The views over Pape'ete are fantastic, particularly at this fine-dining restaurant, which is perched 600m above the city in Pira'e, outside Pape'ete. Le Belvédère provides free transport from some hotels in Pape'ete at 11.45am, 4.30pm and 7pm. If you drive, take the first right after the Hamuta Total fuel station. The 7km road to the restaurant is steep, winding and rugged towards the top.

EATING CHEAP IN PAPE'ETE

Even if you're not counting your pennies, eating cheap in Pape'ete is still a real treat (and not just to your wallet). The country's famous *routottes* (literally 'caravans' in French, these are food vans or mobile diners) are a wondrous gastronomic pleasure where it rarely costs more than 1500 CFP per person for a main, side and soft drink. These little stalls sizzle, fry and grill up a storm every evening from around 6pm; things don't quiet down until well into the night (the public toilets stay open late, too). If you decide to eat elsewhere, consider dropping by for dessert or a spot of people-watching. The *routottes* area, which has recently been paved and generally jazzed up, is in Vaïete Sq (Map pp90-1) – you can't miss it.

There are dozens of *routottes* to choose from. Hong Kong is one of the most popular – squeeze in next to that guy devouring his steak and chips and that woman relishing her chow mein. Pizza Napoli has good thin-crust pizzas with appropriately delicious toppings. Crêperie du Port somehow manages to serve everything from hamburgers to crepes, while Glacier du Port whips up outrageous combinations such as Nutella-and-banana waffles.

If you're staying somewhere with cooking facilities, self-catering is easy in Pape'ete. The market (Map pp90-1) has wonderful fresh fish, fruit and veggies (you'll miss this on the islands, so make the most of it while you are on Tahiti), and Pape'ete has a few large, well-stocked supermarkets (generally open Monday to Saturday from 7am to 7.30pm or 8pm, and Sunday morning). If you are staying in the centre, **Supermarché Champion** (Map pp90-1; Rue du Commandant Destremeau), close to the Paofai Church, is handy.

Le Rubis (Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 25 55; Rue Jeanne d'Arc; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; 🍷 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sun) An impeccable French restaurant right in the middle of it all, near the Vaïma Centre. The menu is extensive, the service very professional, the clientele terribly glamorous and the walls very red.

La Petite Auberge (☎ 42 86 13; dishes 2500-4500 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Close to the Pont de l'Est roundabout, this is one of the oldest restaurants in Pape'ete. It indulges French-cuisine enthusiasts with its very fine cooking. It's an intimate little restaurant, despite its busy location.

DRINKING

After a stay on other islands, where nightlife is, frankly, nonexistent, Pape'ete could almost pass itself off as a city of wild abandon, though it only gets super crazy on weekends.

On a balmy tropical evening the first question is where to go for a cold Hinano or a well-poured *maitai* (local cocktail). Many of the places along Blvd Pomare, the noisy nightlife strip, look pretty seedy, but they are frequented by local women and families, and are generally safe for single female travellers (although you may be bothered by harmless suitors). The best thing about most of the places listed here is that they are filled with as many locals as tourists.

Bars & Pubs

The snazzy top-end hotels, such as the Sheraton Hotel Tahiti and the Tahiti Intercontinental Resort, all have bars where you can enjoy the ocean breezes and nibble the free peanuts; 'unchaperoned' women are much less likely to be under the spotlight in these bars.

Café de la Gare (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 75 95; Rue du Général de Gaulle) Terribly chic, terribly French, terribly smoky, it's an intimate spot for a classy cocktail with a popular happy hour that attracts the beautiful people and professional crowd.

Le Rétro (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 86 83; Blvd Pomare; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Locals say this place is overpriced with only so-so food (dishes 1500 to 3000 CFP), but they can't argue with the location, smack in the centre of Pape'ete in the Vaïma Centre, which means it's a great place to go for a drink. It's full of attitude and atmosphere; booze it up with

new friends or spend a quiet hour alone, people-watching.

Les 3 Brasseurs (Map pp90-1; Blvd Pomare) This congenial brewpub has excellent micro-brewed beer on tap and a constant stream of locals and tourists wanting to sample it. Cover bands perform here at the weekend, when local hips swing to the beat.

Voo Doo Lounge Bar (Map pp90-1; ☎ 48 08 48; Rue du Commandant Jean Gilbert) This place has a great low-key music scene, languid atmosphere and much more style than many of Pape'ete's other watering holes. It's a sophisticated, ultra-trendy spot for a quiet bottle of fine French wine.

Morrison's Café (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 78 61) Upstairs in the Vaïma Centre is this popular spot to drink, and rock and blues groups play several times a week.

Tiki Soft Café (Map pp90-1; ☎ 88 93 98) DJs spin here on weekends; during the week it's a chilled-out Internet café and coffee shop turned bar, where couples make small talk over the paper, fresh fruit juice or a strong *maitai*.

Nightclubs

Blvd Pomare is the main drag for nightclubs and discos. From the Tahitian waltz to European electronic music, it's all here. Some establishments open only at the weekend, when you will need your elbows to force an entrance (although women tend to be more than welcome). They typically close around 3am or 4am.

Le Paradise (Map pp90-1; Blvd Pomare; men Fri & Sat 2000 CFP) This is a classic Pape'ete bar that attracts a mixed crowd of Polynesians and French. The heart of the city's club scene, Le Paradise is everybody's favourite standby discotheque.

Royal Kikiriri (Map pp90-1; ☎ 43 58 64; Rue Colette; admission Fri & Sat 1500 CFP) A local favourite for Tahitian bands, Royal Kikiriri showcases live music every night. The admission fee includes a drink at the weekend; entry is free other nights.

La Cave (Map pp90-1; Blvd Pomare; men 2000 CFP; 🍷 Fri & Sat) La Cave, beside the Royal Papete, is the place to head if you want a more *kaina* (local) atmosphere. The attraction is the music – the Royal Band has a local repertoire including the Tahitian waltz, zouk and foxtrot. It really gets going after midnight. The plain décor is there to remind

you that dancing is first and foremost – the setting is secondary. The entry price includes a drink.

Piano Bar (Map pp90-1; Rue des Ecoles; admission Fri & Sat 2000 CFP) A few steps back from the waterfront, this bar has a reputation that precedes it: the Piano Bar isn't a place for prudes. The clientele ranges from lovelorn sailors to passing tourists – the whole world seems to come and go from the Piano Bar. The music (techno, dance, local) isn't as important as the general atmosphere. There's a drag show on Friday and Saturday nights around 1am. The weekend entry price includes a drink.

Club 106 (Map pp90-1; men 2000 CFP; 🍷 Thu-Sat) On the waterfront, near Av Bruat. The crowd is mostly on the other side of 30. The admission price includes a drink.

ENTERTAINMENT

From dance performances to French cinema, Pape'ete offers plenty of choices for those not interested in a night of bar hopping.

Cinemas

There are a few very small cinemas in town, including **Concorde** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 63 60; Rue du Général de Gaulle) in the Vaïma Centre; **Hollywood** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 65 79; Rue Lergarde) in the Fare Tony; and **Liberty** (☎ 42 08 20; Rue du Maréchal Foch). They tend to screen average Hollywood blockbusters and the occasional French film. *Version originale* (VO; original version) indicates that the film will be shown in its original language; *version Française* (VF; French version) tends to dominate, which means you'll have to put up with the dubbing of well-known actors – *quelle horreur!* Admission costs 1200 CFP.

Dance Performances

Tahiti is a good island to tap your toes along to some of the best Polynesian dance and music groups, many of which appear several times a week in the big hotels. Those worried about cheesy, touristy performances can rest assured these groups are very professional and are enjoyed every bit as much by locals as by wide-eyed visitors. If you are in the region during the Heiva you'll be spoilt for choice (there are performances most nights); otherwise, don't miss these excellent performers in their extravagant costumes perform the *ote'a* (when dancers

are arranged in a row) and the furious and sensual *aparima* (a dance with hand gestures; see p44). The performances generally last about 45 minutes – any longer and spectators and dancers alike would be exhausted! When held in the luxury hotels, these performances are often accompanied by a sumptuous buffet (which usually costs around 9000 CFP), although parking yourself at the bar and ordering a drink will sometimes suffice. Check with the hotel reception desks at the Sheraton Hotel Tahiti, Intercontinental Resort Tahiti and Sofitel Maeva Beach about their programmes and entrance policies.

SHOPPING

Although you didn't come to French Polynesia for the shopping, you may find yourself shopping anyway. In Pape'ete you can buy products from all over French Polynesia, including clothes, pearls and more pearls.

Art

Pape'ete is home to a number of art galleries. **Galerie des Tropiques** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 41 05 00; To'ata Sq) and **Olivier Creations** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 48 29 36; Rue Paul Gauguin) are recommended. **Galerie Winkle** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 42 81 77; Rue Jeanne d'Arc) has an interesting mix of etchings, paintings and crockery.

Handicrafts

Upstairs in the Marché de Pape'ete (p88) you can wander for ages among the handicrafts. If you are after reasonably priced gifts for jealous friends back home, start here. Wooden salad servers, fabric (it may look good in this context but think about how bright it will look when you get it home), the wonderful *monoi* (fragranced coconut oil), *pareu* (sarong-type garment), jewellery and even mother-of-pearl love-heart key-rings can be purchased here. You can also get a quick tattoo done, as there are a few artists based upstairs (follow that buzzing on the Blvd Pomare side of the building).

There are heaps of craft and souvenir shops (of varying quality) along Blvd Pomare and Rue du Général de Gaulle and in the Fare Tony and Vaïma Centre. **Horizons Lointains** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 82 93 93; Rue Lergarde), next to Air France, has beautiful local, Chinese and Japanese bits and bobs.

Music

Music shops where you can find local and Western music are dotted around Pape'ete. Try Tahiti Music, diagonally opposite the cathedral, which has a decent selection of CDs by local artists for around 3500 CFP; you can listen before you buy.

Pearls

There are so many jewellery shops and pearl specialists in Pape'ete that you have to be careful not to trip over them. Look around before buying, and consider purchasing a pearl here and getting it set at home (this will probably work out cheaper and ensures you get exactly what you want). Depending on the quality, you can buy a single pearl for around 15,000 CFP (cheaper if you don't mind imperfections); for a decent-quality ring you are looking at anywhere from 140,000 CFP. Also bear in mind that there are numerous pearl shops and pearl farms on the outer islands, so don't rush into purchasing a pearl.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Faa'a airport (Map pp88–9; pronounced fa-ha-ha) is the aviation centre of French Polynesia. All international flights arrive here, and Air Tahiti and Air Moorea flights to the other islands leave from here. Flights within each archipelago hop from one island to the next, but many connections between archipelagos are via Faa'a.

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

For international flights to and from Tahiti, see p257; for general information about air travel within French Polynesia, see p260; and for connections to/from an island group or an individual island, see the relevant chapter or section.

AIRLINES

In Pape'ete, **Air Tahiti** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 86 42 42; Rue du Maréchal Foch; ✈ 7am–5pm Mon–Fri, 8–11am Sat) is at the intersection with Rue Edouard Ahnne. It also has an **office** (✈ 5am–5:30pm) in the domestic area of the airport.

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

For international airline offices, see p257.

The following charter operators and helicopter services are available on Tahiti and are based at Faa'a airport:

Air Archipels (☎ 81 30 30)

Héli Pacific (☎ 85 68 00)

Héli-Inter Polynésie (☎ 81 99 00)

Wan Air (☎ 80 05 59)

Boat

All boats to other islands moor at the ferry quay at the northern end of Blvd Pomare. Cruise ships and other interesting visitors moor at the Quai d'Honneur close to the tourist office and the *capitainerie* (harbour master's office). The numerous cargo ships to the different archipelagos work from the Motu Uta port zone, to the north of the city (*le truck* route 3 from the *mairie*).

See p263 for general information on inter-island ships, and the individual island chapters or sections for specific information on travel to/from those destinations.

GETTING AROUND

See p85 for information about car hire, buses and hitching in Tahiti.

To/From the Airport

Given that most flights into Faa'a arrive at an ungodly hour of the morning, and public transport stops around 10pm, Pape'ete joins that long list of places in the world where travellers pay exorbitant fees to get from the airport into town.

Taxis are expensive everywhere in French Polynesia, so if your hotel offers to collect you from the airport, jump at the chance. Otherwise the short drive to central Pape'ete will set you back 2000 CFP during the day and 2500 CFP at night (8pm to 6am). Officially the taxis also charge an extra 100 CFP for baggage, but this is sometimes waived. At least drivers don't expect to be tipped.

If you arrive at a reasonable time of the day, you'll be able to catch any bus going towards town from the airport (northeast bound or to your left as you leave the airport), which will take you straight to the centre of Pape'ete in about 15 minutes for a flat fare of 130 CFP during the day and 250 CFP after 6pm (children cost 65 CFP; it's an extra 100 CFP for your baggage). Walk straight across the car park outside the airport, up the steps to street level and across the road to hail a city-bound *le truck*. From Pape'ete to

the airport, take a bus heading to Faa'a and Outumaoro – the destination will be clearly posted on the front – from along Rue du Général de Gaulle.

Taxi

Taxis are so expensive that most visitors choose to ignore them (except when arriving at the airport late at night, when many people have no choice but to fork out for one). Apart from the official government-established flat fares from the airport to most hotels, taxis are metered. Any trip of a reasonable length will approximate a day's car rental, so if you want wheels you may as well rent them (see p85).

All the big hotels have taxi ranks, and there are plenty of taxis in central Pape'ete.

AROUND TAHITI NUI

Try to do a day trip around Tahiti Nui. It is a great way to get a feel for life outside Pape'ete and enjoy the island's lush vegetation. There are pockets of poverty, especially in the valleys, where the water is undrinkable and unemployment is high – if you are finding French Polynesia financially crippling, imagine how difficult an unemployed local would find it. However, you will find plenty of churches, kids on bikes and little stalls along the way. Tahiti Nui also offers loads of activities to keep you buzzing. Some favourites include quad-biking adventures, hiking, waterfall abseiling and surfing.

WEST COAST

Tahiti Nui's west coast is busier and much more touristy than the island's eastern side. It also has the greatest concentration of places to stay outside Pape'ete.

Sights & Activities

Tahiti Nui has some interesting attractions; for more on regional activities, see p84.

MARAA GROTTO

Lush gardens, overhung caverns, crystal-clear pools and ferny grottoes are all standard features at gorgeous **Maraa Grotto** (PK28.5). The fairytale park is found along the coastal road, and a manicured path runs throughout. It's a popular stop on round-the-island circuits, but also well worth visiting on your own.

MARAE ARAHURAHU & AROUND

Whether or not you believe in the powers of the *tiki*, it's hard to deny there is an amazing energy radiating from **Marae Arahuru** (PK22.5) in the Pa'ea district. Tranquil and beautifully maintained, the *marae* is undoubtedly the best-looking one on the island. Nearby, **Marae Tataa** (PK19) may have been quite important in its time, but is now on private land and hard to get to. If you speak French, locals may be able to point you in the right direction.

The **Orofero River** (PK20), now a popular surfing site, was the spot where Pomare II fought the 1815 battle that reinstated him as ruler of Tahiti.

MUSÉE DE TAHITI ET DES ÎLES

Only 15km from Pape'ete along the west coast, the excellent **Musée de Tahiti et des Îles** (Museum of Tahiti & its Islands; ☎ 58 34 76; admission 1000 CFP; ✈ 9.30am–5.30pm Tue–Sun) is in Puna'auia (below). This is a great place to get your head around the geology and history of the area. The museum is divided into four sections: geography and natural history; pre-European culture; the European era; and outdoor exhibits. It's in a large garden and if you get tired of history, culture and art, you can wander out to the water's edge to watch the surfers at one of Tahiti's most popular breaks.

The museum is several hundred metres from the coastal road after the Punaruu bridge. From Pape'ete, a Puna'auia *le truck* will drop you at the road junction. Check the last return trip time (usually 4.30pm or so).

PUNA'AUIA

There are good **beaches** between PK15 and PK10, in and around Puna'auia. Puna'auia also has an excellent restaurant scene (see p103). The most expensive homes on Tahiti are found along this stretch of coast and are often set high above the coast to better enjoy the breathtaking views of Mo'orea. For divers, the St Etienne Drop-Off just outside the Puna'auia reef is a perfect wall dive.

Above the bridge at PK14.8 in Punaruu Valley is the site of a **French fortification** from the 1842–46 conflict when France took over Tahiti. It's now a TV relay station. A walking trail leads up to the Tamanu Plateau (600m), known for its wild orange trees, escapees from the citrus plantations once here.

For places to stay in Puna'auia, see p103.

SURFING

Tahiti is the birthplace of surfing, and offers some fabulous beginner breaks. To hone your skills, visit **Tura'i Mataare Surf School** (☎ 41 91 37; surfschool@mail.pf; PK 18.3; ☎ Wed, Sat & Sun) on the mountain side of the road in Pae'a (for places to stay in Pae'a see opposite). Ten

half-day lessons are 27,000 CFP, and single-day lessons are 4500 CFP. Courses are run by a qualified instructor and include equipment, transport to the different surfing spots and insurance. Hours vary. If you're already experienced and just need to know where the waves are, check out below.

TAHITI'S KILLER SURF SPOTS

As the birthplace of surfing, Tahiti has some awesome surf spots for beginners and experts alike.

East Coast

- **Lafayette Beach** (PK7) Easily accessed from the coast road, this is a fairly radical shore break with powerful waves and a shallow bottom. The best spot is towards the river mouth. Ride it from November to April.
- **Matavai Bay (Baie de Matavai) & Point Vénus** (PK10) Shore break with access from the coast road; best between November and April. Reef break, although year-round is possible depending on the swell. The right-hand reef break at Point Vénus reef is one of the most spectacular on the island.
- **Ahonu & Orofara** (PK12.5–13) These shore breaks are good when there's a northern swell and the waves are rather easy. There's access from the coast road.
- **The Right Line at Papenoo: La Source (the Spring) – Les Sapins (the Firs)** (PK13–14) Shore break; best between November and April. The waves are more hollow and powerful. Beware of occasional strong currents. Easy access.
- **Papenoo: The Bay** (PK14.5) An ideal spot for beginners, with long and not very hollow waves. November-to-April shore break.
- **Papenoo: L'Embouchure (the Mouth)** (PK15.5) The waves here are difficult and are best in the early morning. It's a November-to-April shore break.
- **Faone: Mouth of the Mahaena & Mouth of the Vaiiha** (PK33.5) Fairly difficult waves at the mouth of the river. November to April.

West Coast

- **Papara** (PK38.7) A very popular shore break with easy access from the coast road, it has moderately challenging waves. Beware of strong currents if there's a heavy swell. Best between May and October.
- **Pa'ea** (PK21.5) In front of the Pa'ea *mairie*, this shore break is rarely good, but when it is the waves are powerful. May to October.
- **Sapinus – Pointe des Pêcheurs (Fisherman's Point)** (PK15) A fairly radical shore break with fast hollow waves, it's best between May and October.
- **Taapuna** (PK12) A classic, with a very beautiful left that attracts lots of surfers. Year-round reef break.

Tahiti Iti

- **Big & Small Vairao Passes** (PK8) A year-round reef break, it has magnificent lefts and rights for experienced surfers. Ask the locals for the best way to get to these breaks.
- **Teahupoo, Hava'e Pass** (PK18) At the end of the coast road, this is Tahiti's most famous wave, best between April and October. This reef break is the tremendous left, reserved strictly for the best surfers. A guaranteed rush.

Sleeping

There are a number of places to stay along the west coast, particularly around Puna'auia. Compared with Pape'ete these places are tranquil, and they are close to some black-sand beaches. During the day there are regular buses into Pape'ete, but these dry up towards 4pm or 5pm.

Le Méridien (☎ 47 07 07; www.lemeridien.com; r from 40,000 CFP, bungalows 56,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Located in the town of Puna'auia, Le Méridien rivals the Intercontinental in the luxury department. The over-water bungalows are exquisitely outfitted and ultra-spacious. The grounds are lush and are beautifully maintained.

Pension Te Miti (☎ 58 48 61; www.pensiontemiti.com; PK18.6; dm 2500 CFP, r from 6500 CFP; 🍷) Run by a young, friendly French couple, this lively place has a low-key backpacker vibe and is deservedly popular with young travellers. It's on the mountain side of the main road in Pa'ea, about 200m from the white-sand beach. Prices include breakfast. There's an equipped communal kitchen, a few bicycles for guests' use and a laundry service (500 CFP); 24-hour airport transfers are available for 1500 CFP per person. Credit cards accepted.

Pension de la Plage (☎ 45 56 12; www.pensiondelaplage.com; PK15.4; r from 8000 CFP; 🍷) Just across the road from Puna'auia's white-sand beach, this impeccably maintained place offers comfortable motel-style rooms in several garden-side buildings. Each has tile floors and giant windows; some have kitchenettes. Breakfast is available for 900 CFP, dinner for 2500 CFP.

Le Relais Fenua (☎ 45 01 98; www.relais-fenua.pf; PK18.25; r from 9000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A great option in Pa'ea, with clean and spacious rooms with TVs set around a lovely swimming pool. The lagoon is stumbling distance away, and there's a small *snack* just around the corner. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP and breakfast costs 1000 CFP per person; children under 12 can stay for free.

Eating

The chic suburb of Puna'auia, on the western edge of the Pape'ete coastal strip, has some great places to eat.

Casablanca (☎ 43 91 35; PK9; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Another local favourite, this unpretentious restaurant at the Taina

Marina can get rowdy on Friday and Saturday nights, when live music rocks the place. The French menu is seafood oriented. There are plenty of outdoor tables overlooking the moored yachts, and there are fresh flowers and superb views.

La Fleur de Lotus (☎ 41 97 20; PK16; dishes 1500-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Locals bring big bowls to cart away their takeaway – if you are staying nearby and have wheels, consider following suit; otherwise order less, as portions are huge! There's a games area for kids, and live music on Saturday at this popular Chinese restaurant.

Coco's Restaurant (☎ 58 21 08; PK16; dishes 2000-4500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Dine in a tropical garden, framed by coconut trees, to a soundtrack of crashing waves at this popular and romantic choice. The menu is French, with lots of seafood options. Food is well presented, although service can be a bit slow.

Captain Bligh Restaurant (☎ 43 62 90; PK11.4; appetisers 1300-2000 CFP, mains 2000-3500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) A touristy, cavernous place at the Lagoonarium, it's an especially great choice if you're dining with the kids (it's very family oriented). Adults will dig the main attraction, however: the Friday and Saturday evening dance performance by O Tahiti E, one of the island's best dance groups.

Restaurant L'Impérial (☎ 45 18 19; PK18; appetisers 1000-1200 CFP, dishes 1500-3300 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This well-respected Chinese restaurant with a huge menu and congenial ambiance is another option. It's not far from Le Méridien.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

L'Auberge du Pacifique (☎ 43 98 30; PK11.2; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; 🍷) Beside the lagoon, L'Auberge du Pacifique has been a Tahiti institution since it opened in 1974. It's heavenly romantic; the roof in the main dining room retracts, revealing a starry night-sky tableau. When it's light out, Mo'orea smiles at you from across the water. The food is as good as the ambience – feast on mouthwatering, innovative French dishes and fine French vintages from the air-conditioned cellar. Reservations recommended on weekends.

EAST COAST

The east coast is the quietest and most isolated section of Tahiti Nui. The road winds between cliffs and sea, with some spectacular views. Sleeping and eating options are limited on this coast, but even if you're not staying, it's worth visiting on a day trip.

Sights & Activities

From lava tubes to a blowhole, the east coast has some seriously good attractions.

HITIAA LAVA TUBES

Lava tubes are formed as a result of cooling and more rapid hardening of the surface of lava flows. As they solidified, the deepest layers of lava contracted, creating tubular spaces between the layers closest to the surface and the deeper ones. It is possible to walk through the Hitiaa Lava Tubes, but this fascinating walk can only be attempted when there is no danger of a sudden downpour.

From the turn-off at PK39.9, a 4WD track runs 6km inland past a dam at 500m altitude, 1km before the start of the walk at 630m. A powerful and (most importantly) reliable torch (flashlight) is essential for investigating the lava tubes. A walk through all three takes about three hours.

It is less than 15 minutes' walk to the first tube, at 750m. This tube is around 100m long and only about 200m from the second tube (300m long), with two waterfalls just before the entry. Between the second and third tube, the trail goes under a stone bridge, which is the remains of a collapsed lava tube. The third tube is longer, darker and more complex. About 100m in, it divides: the left fork continues about 300m to an exit, while the right fork leads to a large cave, complete with lake and waterfall.

The east coast's one-stop adventure shop, **Tiare Mato** (☎ 43 92 76; Papeenoo; trips from 7000 CFP) runs canyoning trips that visit these lava tubes, and also include abseiling the waterfalls of Tiki (Papeenoo). The company also specialises in guided treks in other parts of Tahiti.

ARAHOHO BLOWHOLE

Appropriate swell conditions produce a geyser-like fountain of water from the *trou du souffleur* (blowhole) by the road just

before Tiarei at PK22. If you're coming from Pape'ete, the blowhole is on the corner and there's a car park just beyond it; take care walking to the blowhole as there's a blind corner here. When the waves are right, the blow can be very dramatic – so dramatic that people have been swept right off the rock and out to sea. Take care.

Just past the blowhole is a fine sliver of black-sand beach, ideal for a picnic pause. There are sometimes vendors here with fruit for sale.

FAARUMAI WATERFALLS

Just 100m past the blowhole, a signposted road heads inland for a bit over 1km to the car park for the three Faarumai waterfalls. Bring a swimsuit if you want to stand under the cooling shower, and mosquito repellent if you simply want to stand still and enjoy the view in peace. It's a couple of hundred metres through a forest of *mape* (chestnut) trees to **Vaimahutu**, the first of the waterfalls. Another 20-minute stroll leads to the other two falls, **Haamarere Iti** and **Haamarere Rahi**, which stand almost side-by-side.

POINT VÉNUM & BAIE DE MATAVAI

Part of Cook's mission on his three-month sojourn in 1769 was to record the transit of Venus across the face of the sun in an attempt to calculate the distance between the sun and the earth. Point Vénus, the promontory that marks the eastern end of Matavai Bay (Bai de Matavai), was the site of Cook's observatory. Mahina marks the eastern end of Pape'ete's coastal sprawl.

Today Point Vénus is a popular beach excursion. There are shady trees, a stretch of lawn, a black-sand beach, a couple of souvenir shops and an impressive **lighthouse** (1867). There is no sign to Point Vénus from the main road; just turn off when you see shops and activity at the PK10 point. It's about a kilometre from the road to the car park near the end of the point.

There is a **memorial** here to the first LMS Protestant missionaries, who made their landfall at Point Vénus on 4 March 1797.

PAPENOO

At PK17, there's a popular **surf break** just before the headland that signals the start of the small village of Papeenoo. A long bridge crosses the Papeenoo River at the far end of

the village, and the 4WD route up the Papeenoo Valley, cutting through the ancient crater rim to Relais de la Maroto, starts up the west side of the river. See p106 for more information about this interesting route.

TARAVAO

Strategically situated at the narrow isthmus connecting Tahiti Nui with Tahiti Iti, the town of **Taravao** (PK 54) has been a military base on and off since 1844, when the first French fort was established. The original fort was intended to forestall Tahitian guerrilla forces opposed to the French takeover from mounting operations against Tahiti Nui from Tahiti Iti.

From Taravao, roads run along the north and south coasts of Tahiti Iti. The central road into the Tahiti Iti highlands commences a short distance along the north-coast road. Although there is little of interest in the town, it does have shops, banks, petrol stations and a number of small restaurants (see below), and so is a good place for a pit stop on a round-the-island circuit.

Sleeping & Eating

There is nowhere to stay on the east coast. Heading east out of Pape'ete, there are not many restaurants until you reach Taravao, although there are a number of excellent snack bars.

Chez Loula and Remy (☎ 57 74 99; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) One of the better French restaurants in Tahiti, this family run place in Taravao serves an excellent array of grilled meats and fish in congenial environs.

Restaurant Baie Phaeton (☎ 57 08 96; dishes 1000-2000 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Grab a terrace table at this delightful little place, serving French and Tahitian food, for lagoon views over both Tahiti Nui and Tahiti Iti. The restaurant turns into a lively bar and dance club around 10pm on Friday and Saturday nights, packed with teenagers, transvestites, young professionals and everyone in between. Credit cards are accepted.

SOUTH COAST

Still quiet and untouristy when compared to the west coast or Pape'ete, the south coast has a few interesting sights and some breathtaking diving (for details see p54), as well as some decent places to sleep and eat.

Sights

We've listed the following sights in a clockwise direction.

JARDIN BOTANIQUE & MUSÉE GAUGUIN

Tahiti's Jardin Botanique and the interesting Musée Gauguin share an entrance road and car park at PK 51.2

The 137-hectare **Jardin Botanique** (Botanical Gardens; admission 500 CFP; ☺ 9am-5pm) has walking paths that wind their way through the garden past ponds, palms and a superb thicket of bamboo. The gardens were founded in 1919 by an American, Harrison Smith, who introduced many plants to Tahiti including the large, thick-skinned Southeast Asian citrus fruit known on Tahiti as *pamplemousse*, the French word for grapefruit. Unfortunately, Smith also introduced one or two botanical disasters that Tahiti could well have done without. Look out for the huge Galápagos tortoises. Mosquitoes in the gardens can be fierce.

The Restaurant du Jardin Botanique, near the entrance building to the gardens, is cheaper and less touristy than the Restaurant du Musée Gauguin, which is 500m further west (see p106).

The **Musée Gauguin** (Gauguin Museum; ☎ 57 10 58; admission 600 CFP; ☺ 9am-5pm) is definitely worth a visit. Much of the well-written text about Gauguin and his particularly difficult life is in English. And although the museum is dimly lit and there is a conspicuous lack of original works by Gauguin, there's a lovely natural setting. The museum gardens are home to three superb *tiki* from Raivavae in the Australs. *Tiki* do not like to be moved, and there are colourful stories about what happened to the men that moved these *tiki* here (they apparently died 'mysteriously' within weeks of the move). The huge *tiki* figure beside the walkway stands 2.2m high and weighs 900kg; it's a baby compared with the figure towards the waterfront, which stands 2.7m high and weighs 2110kg. You'll find a third, smaller figure beside the giant.

BAIN DE VAIMA & VAIPAHU WATERFALL

Beyond the botanical gardens, just after PK50, there are more gardens along the mountain side of the road. Just past these gardens is the Bain de Vaima (Vaima Pool). The Vaipahi Waterfall is a few minutes'

walk inland and drops from pool to pool through a stand of stately *mape* trees. There are great views from a small plateau beyond the falls and there are a number of short walks you can take from here. A 1km walk brings you back to the road at PK50.2.

MATAIEA

Between 1891 and 1893, Gauguin lived in Mataiea. Although he was sick and impoverished, this was a good period in his rather depressed life. He produced works including *Two Women on the Beach*, *Woman with a Mango* and *Ia Orana Maria – Hail Mary* during this time.

The **Church of St John the Baptist** (1857) is just outside the town. The curious Protestant **chapel** by the road in the village looks vaguely like a Hindu temple.

To the east of the Mataiea district is the golf course at Atimaono at PK42, the site of the 1860s Terre Eugénie cotton plantation. Chinese workers were shipped in to supplant unwilling Polynesians, and descendants of the Chinese immigrants still live on the island today. The cotton plantation and other land devoted to coffee and sugar production played an enormously important role in the Tahitian economy for some years.

To the east of Mataiea, at PK47.5, is the turn-off for the rough track up to Lake Vaihiria, the Relais de la Maroto hotel and the north coast.

MARAE MAHAITEA

Just east of the village of Papara, the Marae Mahaiatea was the most magnificent *marae* on Tahiti at the time of Cook's first visit (according to Cook it measured 80m by 27m at its base, rising in 11 great steps to a height of 13m). It was the *marae* of Obarea, an ancestor of the Pomare dynasty. Today the crumbling remains of the *marae* are still impressive for their sheer size – only as you clamber up the tree-covered 'hill' does it become clear that this is no natural feature.

Coming from Pape'ete, take the first turn towards the sea past the PK39 sign. Follow the road about half a kilometre all the way towards the coast. In the middle of the car park area, what looks like a densely vegetated hill is, on closer inspection, the massive remains of the stone *marae*.

Sleeping & Eating

There are a few places to stay and dine on the south coast.

Hiti Moana Villa (☎ 57 93 93; hitimoanavilla@mail.pf; PK32; bungalows from 9000 CFP; 🍷) Impeccably clean bungalows set around a well-tended garden make this lagoon-side spot in Papara a great option. There is no beach, but there is a pontoon for swimming and a small swimming pool. Bicycles, *pirogues* and kayaks can be rented, and bus tours (5000 CFP per person) are offered. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP per person each way. Credit cards accepted.

Papara Village (☎ 57 41 41; fax 57 45 74; PK38.1; bungalows 10,000 CFP; 🍷) This place is perched on the hillside in a garden 800m off the coastal road. The small Marae Tetaumatai is on the site, and has fantastic views of the lagoon and the mountains. There are two basic bungalows with kitchen, and there's a nice little swimming pool. Airport transfers cost 5000 CFP for two, round trip.

Restaurant Nuutere (☎ 57 41 15; PK32.5; dishes 2000-3500 CFP; 🍷 Wed-Mon) You won't be able to miss the extravagantly painted façade at this great little restaurant in Papara. French specialities, cooked with local ingredients, are served in an intimate and refined dining room and bar. The wine list is a sight to behold. Outside there's a garden with play equipment for children. Credit cards are accepted.

Restaurant du Musée Gauguin (☎ 57 13 80; PK50.5; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; 🍷 lunch) This place is firmly targeted at tourist groups visiting the museum, and is unfortunately rather closed in. The Sunday buffet costs 3500 CFP. Wander out onto the pier and look at the fish – you might see a shark or two. The food is OK, but nothing too special.

INLAND

Archaeological remains, mossy, velvet-green mountains and fabulous hikes await you in Tahiti Nui's lush interior.

Sights

The best sights are reached on foot. This is a place to lace up the shoes and go for a hike.

MT MARAU

Across from Faa'a airport, a road signposted as Saint-Hilaire runs inland, under the RDO and up towards the summit of Mt

Marau (1493m). It's possible to drive 10km to a height of 1441m, although the rough road requires a 4WD. The route passes through varied vegetation before emerging among the damp ferns above 800m. It reaches a *belyvédère* (lookout) at 1241m. From the end of the road it is only a half-hour walk to the top of Mt Marau, from where there are superb views of the peaks around Tahiti Nui's central crater, the Tamanu Plateau to the south and the ridgeline running from Mt Marau to the Diadème (1321m), Mt Aorai (2066m) and Mt Orohena (2241m). The Fautaua River and its waterfalls, reached by the walk from Bain Loti, can be seen to the north. There are also walking paths up Mt Marau from Puna'auia that take about 3½ hours.

PAPENOO TO PAPEARI

Although there are a few tracks that climb some distance into the central highlands of Tahiti, there is only one route that extends right across the island. This 39km route is wonderful and rugged, and runs from Papenoo in the north to Papeari in the south, via the Relais de la Maroto hotel and Lake Vaihiria. The crossing makes a great day trip and presents a unique, 'lagoonless' view of Tahiti.

These central valleys once sheltered a dense population, and it was around here that the *Bounty* mutineers took refuge. When Christianity began to spread along the coastal regions, the Papenoo Valley became a last refuge for those faithful to the ancient Polynesian religion, and until 1846 it was also a shelter for the Tahitian rebel forces that opposed the French takeover. Archaeologist Kenneth Emory started the first systematic study of the valley's historic sites in 1925.

Some parts of the track are quite perilous, so don't attempt it on your own without a 4WD. Specialised operators do this route regularly and safely. From the Relais de la Maroto, there are heaps of walking tracks and the cross-island route is a fine two-day walk.

See p108 for info about staying at the Relais de la Moto.

Papenoo to the Relais de la Maroto

The 18km route from Papenoo on the north coast to the Relais de la Maroto follows the wide Papenoo Valley, the only valley to

cut right through the ancient crater. The Papenoo River is the largest on Tahiti. In Papenoo, the turn-off is just past PK17; the track has its own PK markers. After an ugly garbage dump and signs warning of the dangers of the track, the **Topatari Waterfall**, located at PK5, cascades down to the river. A little further up the valley the **Vaiharuru Waterfall** comes down from the west side and, further, the **Puraha Waterfall** from the east. At PK16 the track passes the **Vaituoru Pool** (Bassin Vaituoru) before reaching the Relais de la Maroto just past PK18.

Papeari to the Relais de la Maroto

Coming from the west, the turn-off on the south coast is at PK47.5, just beyond the Seventh-Day Adventist church and just before the Tahiria River bridge and a settlement of modern, prefab-style buildings. Close to the ancient crater rim the rough track goes through a tunnel and then emerges inside the crater.

From the turn-off the road runs directly inland for about 200m before taking a signposted sharp-left turn. From there the track follows the Tahiria River upstream to a small catchment lake (6.7km, 145m) and **Marae Vaihiria I** (7.5km). The extensive remains of the *marae* include an artificial canal, used to carry water through the site, which stretches up the hillside. The *marae* was in use from the 16th to the 19th century, and there are several informative noticeboards by the roadside and up the hill. Another *marae* is being restored further down the valley, about 4km from the start of the cross-island road.

Continuing uphill, there is a second small catchment lake (10km, 270m) before the road makes a very steep and winding (but paved) climb to Lake Vaihiria (11.3km, 450m), the 200m-long tunnel (14.9km, 770m) and finally the Relais de la Maroto (20.7km). The 4WD track runs up the west side of Lake Vaihiria to the tunnel, but there is a walking track that runs around the east shore of the lake and then climbs up to meet the vehicle track at the tunnel, just below the Urufau Pass.

Around the Relais de la Maroto

The Relais de la Maroto was originally built as accommodation quarters for workers on the hydroelectricity project that began in

1980. From the Relais de la Maroto, tracks fan out to the various hydropower dams, but you really need a guide to navigate these tracks, some of which are 4WD tracks and some of which are walking tracks only. The restored **Marae Farehape** site is almost directly below the ridgeline on which the Relais de la Maroto perches; you can see an archery platform from where arrows were shot up the valley.

From the *marae*, a track climbs up to the Tahinu dam. A walking track skirts around the edge of the lake behind the dam to the **Marae Tahinu** archaeological sites, which are on both sides of the river. Another 4WD track starts from the dam and climbs up the Maroto Valley. A rough track turns off this route and leads to the top of the spectacular **Maroto Waterfall**. There are great swimming pools above and below the falls, but getting to the bottom of the falls entails an hour or so of rock hopping up the river, starting from Marae Farehape.

The **Marae Anapua**, perched up above the Vainavenave dam, has been beautifully restored. The **Anapua Caves** are directly below the *marae* site, and can be reached on foot around the side of the dam or by the track around the valley side.

Activities

Tahiti's interior is home to some of the most exquisite, and challenging, **hikes** in French Polynesia.

One of the most pleasant and accessible walks on Tahiti, the **Fautaua Valley trail** doesn't require a guide, but you will need an access permit (adult/child 600/150 CFP). You can obtain one at the Pape'ete *mairie* (town hall) at the **Service des Régies des Recettes** (☎ 41 58 36); enter the building from Rue des Écoles.

To get to Fautaua Valley, follow Av du Prince Hinoi from the Pape'ete seafont for about 2km. At the third set of traffic lights, at the Total petrol station, turn right towards the mountains. You will pass in front of the Bain Loti (Loti Bath). Go straight ahead, as far as the Service de l'Hydraulique, where you hand in your access permit. The easy 4km walk to the Fachoda (Tearape) Bridge takes about an hour. After the bridge there's a rather steep climb, and after about 45 minutes you reach a superb viewpoint over Fautaua Waterfall. Another half an hour

takes you to the summit of the waterfall, a prime swimming spot.

A bit further inland, **Mt Aorai** (2066m) is the third-highest peak on Tahiti and its ascent is one of the island's classic climbs. The path is clearly visible and well maintained, so you don't need a guide. Signposts at trail junctions prevent confusion. It takes at least 4½ hours of steady walking to reach the top. Its possible to summit the peak and return in a day, but start at dawn because the summit tends to be covered in cloud after 11am. A better option is to spend the night in one of two simple shelters on the route. Each accommodates about 20 walkers, has electricity and is equipped with aluminium cisterns that are usually filled with drinkable rainwater.

The Mt Aorai hike starts at Le Belvédère restaurant. From central Pape'ete take Av Georges Clémenceau and turn right at the intersection located 200m after the Total petrol station. Turn right again at the sign for Le Belvédère, which is 7km from the coast road.

Tahiti's highest peak, the ascent of **Mt Orohena** (2241m) is a tough two-day mission. You will have to contend with dense undergrowth, a crumbling ridgeline and sometimes fierce winds. You will need to hire a guide to do this trek. Contact **Tiare Mato** (☎ 43 92 76) on the east coast about guide services.

Tours

There are a few companies that specialise in 4WD island crossings. You'll pay around 7500 CFP for a full day and around 5000 CFP for a half day. In the high season it's worth to book several days in advance.

Natura Exploration (☎ 43 03 83)

Patrick Adventure (☎ 83 29 29)

Tahiti Safari Expedition (☎ 42 14 15)

Sleeping & Eating

The only place to stay and eat is **Relais de la Maroto** (☎ 57 90 29; maroto@mail.pf; r 7000 CFP, bungalows from 9500 CFP), smack in the lush heart of the island. It has been renovated motel-style rooms and a few lovely bungalows to choose from. The wine cellar at the restaurant here is exceptional, and the French cuisine is also quite tasty. The location is so lovely, it fills quickly, so book ahead particularly at the weekend.

Getting There & Away

A few companies organise trips across the island (see opposite); you can also walk it in a few days or ride across on a mountain bike, if you've brought one. You can rent 4WDs; check the conditions of the track and the dangers before you start out. In the rainy season this route can be truly perilous.

TAHITI ITI

Traditional Polynesian villages, beaches, archaeological sites and caves are all part of the alluring charm of Tahiti Iti (Little Tahiti). Unpretentious and beautiful, the smaller loop of Tahiti's figure eight quietly attracts independent, outdoorsy folk looking for a more authentic glimpse of Polynesia. More commonly called the Presqu'île ('almost island' in French), Tahiti Iti has made a bit of a name for itself in recent years thanks to the promotion of its famous wave at Teahupoo. The steady flow of surf pilgrims has allowed the opening of new small family hotels. But even though it has become famous because of surfing, there's much more to do in Tahiti Iti than ride the waves. Exceptional walks, a diving centre and abundant lack of commercialism are all perks.

SIGHTS

The best way to explore Tahiti Iti is to drive the loop around the island. The following are listed in a clockwise direction.

North-Coast Road

The coastal road from Taravao runs through Pueue, past steep hills and numerous waterfalls, to Tautira. This stretch of coast has the highest rainfall on Tahiti. It's easy to walk beyond Tautira for a further 12km.

The north coast of Tahiti Iti has had some interesting European visitors. In 1772 the Spanish captain Boenechea anchored his ship *Aguilla* off the Aiurua River, about 10km beyond Tautira; Cook landed here in 1774; and many years later, in 1886, the writer Robert Louis Stevenson spent two months here. The landings of Catholic missionaries at Tautira eventually led to the French takeover of Tahiti and the end of the Protestant monopoly.

The sealed road ends at Tautira, but you can bump along for another kilometre or

two before the road becomes impassable to vehicles. A good **walking track** leads round the coast for another 12km or so before reaching the Te Pari Cliffs, which make walking all the way to Teahupoo difficult.

Near the Vaitoe River are some interesting **petroglyphs** inscribed on coastal boulders and a series of *marae* inland in the valley. See p110 for information about walking in the area.

Offshore is **Motu Fenua Ino**, a popular picnic spot.

Inland

There are two routes that climb to an inland **lookout**. Both start from the north-coast road and can be combined to make a loop. In Afaahiti, at PK0.6, the first turn-off is signposted shortly before a school. The 7km road climbs through green fields, some home to very un-Tahitian-looking herds of cows, to the car park just before the lookout. The alternative route turns off the north-coast road at PK2.5 and is rougher and more potholed. It meets the first route just before the car park, from where it's a short walk to the viewpoint. There are superb vistas across the isthmus of Taravao to the towering bulk of Tahiti Nui. It's possible to walk for about an hour towards **Mt Teatara** (1197m).

South-Coast Road

The south-coast road runs by beaches and bays to Vairao and the small settlement of Teahupoo before abruptly stopping at the Tirahi River at PK18. From the end of the road it is possible to walk about another 10km before the steep Te Pari Cliffs cut off the path. Zane Grey, an American author who spent time here in the 1920s, described the beauty of this area in *Tales of Tahitian Waters*. The Tapuaeraha Pass through the reef is the widest and deepest around Tahiti, but because of its remote position it's rarely used.

A turn-off at PK9.5 leads a short distance inland to the scant remains of **Marae Nuutere**, restored in 1994. There are three paved yards known as *tohua* (meeting places) with *ahu* (altars) at the end of them and large *turui* (seats) for priests or *ari'i* (chiefs). The south-coast road ends very decisively at Teahupoo, where the Tirahi River is only crossable by footbridge.

ACTIVITIES

There are loads of activities to keep you occupied here.

Water Activities

A picturesque strip of white sand, **Maui Beach** (PK 8) gets packed and noisy on weekends, but is peaceful during the week. It's right on the road but has shallow swimming, perfect for children, as well as deeper swimming and snorkelling off the reef. The black-sand beaches at PK18 in Teahupoo and PK6 in Pueu are good for body-boarding but can be rough for swimming.

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

There is some breathtaking wall diving on the south coast of Tahiti Iti, including the **Marado**, the **Tetopa Grotto** and the **Hole in the Lagoon**.

Iti Diving International (☎/fax 57 77 93; www.itidiving.pf; PK6, Vairao) is the only centre on Tahiti Iti.

Hiking & Horse-Riding

A soggy 2.5km walk along the coast from the Teahupoo footbridge through several rivers brings you to **Vaipoiri cave**. After about 2km signs direct you towards the mountain, through a *mape* forest then up a hibiscus-covered hill to the cave. Inside, your eyes will adjust to the darkness and it's possible to swim to the back through the icy water.

From Tautira, a 1km climb up the Vaitepiha river leads to three *marae* that were restored in the 1960s but are now crumbling and a little hard to find in the overgrowth. The river rocks are slippery and you might end up walking some of it on your hands and knees.

If the road is open, you can continue up from the Taravao plateau viewpoint for about an hour. The air up here is cooler and on clear days you can see a good part of Tahiti Nui. Look for wild raspberries on low spiny bushes along the trail.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Vanira Lodge (☎ 57 70 18; www.vaniralodge.com; bungalows 14,000 CFP; 🏠) Our favourite *pension* in Tahiti, this place is on the mountain side of the road, up a very steep driveway. The idyllic location provides terrific lagoon views, with colours you can't see elsewhere. The four bungalows are eclectic and fabulous (although not really designed with security in mind – nothing locks or shuts) and blend perfectly into the environment. Each is different, but all are architecturally stimulating and made from some combination of bamboo, thatch, reed, stained glass, adobe, coral and rock. Cosy nooks, hand-carved furniture, airy mezzanines and al fresco kitchens are unique touches. When we stopped by the owners were constructing an open-air bar amid their lush garden as well as a swimming pool. Breakfast costs 1200 CFP, lunch or dinner 2500 CFP.

For horse-riding, try **Le Ranch du Plateau** (☎ 73 84 43; rides from 2000 CFP). It offers guided rides to rarely visited points on the plateau with stunning views. It's best to reserve a few days in advance; there are no set hours.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Tahiti Billabong Pro** is held at Teahupoo every May. The famous surfing contest attracts the industry's best riders and draws surf fans and media from around the world.

SLEEPING & EATING

Tahiti Iti has a few good places to stay, although eating options are much more limited.

Pension Chayan (☎ 57 46 00; www.pensionchayan.tahiti.pf; PK14, Vairao; r from 15,000 CFP) Has four sparkling bungalows nestled in a magnificent tropical garden; comes highly recommended. Across the road there is a small black-sand beach for swimming and a boat dock where the friendly owner Yann offers taxi rides to the surf (1500 CFP per person) and picnic excursions (from 3500 CFP).

Punatea Village (☎ 57 71 00; www.punatea.com; PK4.7; d 5500 CFP, bungalows 9000 CFP) Situated by the sea, Punatea Village is the only place in Tahiti Iti with a real 'hotel' feel. Bungalows overlook a rocky beach, and there are five

small rooms with double bed and shared bath. Shiatsu massage and an infrared sauna are extra perks. Half board adds another 3000 CFP per person.

Te Pari Village (☎/fax 42 59 12; bungalows with full board per person 9500 CFP) Ten minutes by boat from the Teahupoo pier, this option is in the middle of a magnificent coconut grove beside the lagoon. It's a place for a complete escape. Various expeditions to the end of the island can be organised and daily excursions are included in the price.

Pueu Village (☎ 57 57 87; PK9.8; bungalows from 9000 CFP) Bungalows at this laid-back place face a quay that's good for snorkelling. Excursions, including local-style net fishing, are organised haphazardly by whichever family member feels like going. Meals can be arranged.

Pension Bonjour (☎ 77 89 69; www.bonjour.com; camp sites per person 1200 CFP, dm 2500 CFP, r/bungalows from 5000/9500 CFP) Accessible only by boat, Bonjour has lost some of its sparkle in

past years (it's looking a little worn these days), although it still retains its 'lost-on-a-desert-island' charm. You'll need to take the shuttle boat from the dock at PK17 in Teahupoo (1500 CFP) or walk about 40 minutes to get to this remote spot. There is an assortment of colourful, dusty bungalows, a communal kitchen and a very grimy camp site. Kayaks and canoes are free and surfers can be shuttled to breaks for 900 CFP. Half board is 4000 CFP.

Snack Tavanaia (☎ 67 72 35; PK9.8; dishes 800-1200 CFP; 🍴 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Hearty portions of Tahitian, French and Chinese food such as stuffed eggplant and grilled *mahi mahi* are served at this popular *snack* across from the Vairao Mayor's office.

Chez Mado (☎ 57 32 77; PK18, Tautira; mains 800 CFP; 🍴 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Mado has two picnic tables on the beach where she serves chow mien, steak and French fries or delicious crab fritters from her home kitchen. Look for her in Tautira.

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