

## **Sunsational Vacations Your Tahiti Specialist**



### ***Travel Tips and Facts for Tahiti and Her Islands***

#### **The Islands**

The islands collectively known as "Tahiti" and officially known as French Polynesia, actually consist of 118 spectacular islands located in five island groups: the Society Islands, the Tuamotus, the Marquesas, the Austral and the Gambier archipelago. The Society Islands are the most popular island group including the main island of Tahiti and its capital city of Papeete, as well as popular vacation islands of Moorea, Bora Bora, Huahine, Raiatea, and Tahaa. The Tuamotu Islands are known for their outstanding diving and snorkeling including the islands of Manihi, Tikehau, Rangiroa, and Fakarava. The Marquesas Islands are historically significant with their ancient stone tikis, as well as the final resting place of poet Jacques Brel and painter Paul Gauguin. The ocean waters around the Austral Islands are famous for their humpback whale migration from July to November.

#### **Location and Time Zone**

Tahiti is in the same time zone as Hawaii, and is two hours behind the West Coast during Pacific Standard Time, and is located south of the Equator. The islands are approximately mid way between Los Angeles, California and Sydney, Australia.

#### **Weather and Climate**

French Polynesia enjoys warm, tropical weather year-round and rain can occur at any time. Sunshine is abundant year round and most rain showers are brief and isolated. Cooled by the gentle breezes of the Pacific, the climate of these islands is sunny and pleasant. Because Tahiti and her islands are below the Equator, the seasons are the reverse of those in the Northern Hemisphere. Roughly speaking, there are two seasons: from November through May the climate is warmer and humid, with daily temperatures of about 85 degrees F and from June through October the climate is cooler and drier with daily temperatures of about 82 degrees F. The year-round low is about 70 degrees F. Most of the rain falls during the warmer season, but there are also many lovely sunny days with refreshing trade-winds during these months. Tropical rain showers are usually short in duration. The average ocean water temperature is in the low 80's.

#### **Language**

Tahitian and French are the main languages spoken throughout French Polynesia. English is spoken in most major hotels, shops and restaurants. Tahitians are very friendly and courteous, but they are generally shy and their limited English language skills may prevent them from engaging in a lengthy conversation with you. Therefore, it can also be helpful, but not mandatory, to brush up on a few basic French phrases and Tahitian greetings.

#### **Getting to Tahiti**

French Polynesia is easily accessible by air from most parts of the world including the United States, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Easter Island. Air Tahiti Nui is the primary flight carrier servicing Tahiti from North America, including daily flights from Los Angeles and weekly flights from New York. Weekly flights are also available from Los Angeles on Air France and from Honolulu on Hawaiian Airlines. All international air traffic pass through Faaa Airport in Papeete on Tahiti. Flying time is approximately 8 hours from Los Angeles, 13 hours from New York, and 5 hours from Hawaii.

#### **Entry Requirements for Tahiti**

All travelers must present a valid passport to board a flight to French Polynesia. Your first and last name on your passport must match your international air tickets. You will also be asked to present your passport to clear "Customs" in French Polynesia and upon return from French Polynesia. Your passport must be valid for 180 days beyond your return date. U.S. and Canadian citizens only need a valid passport and do not need a VISA to enter French Polynesia. Citizens of all other countries may need a VISA in addition to a valid passport and should consult the nearest French Consulate or French Embassy as early as possible. It can take several weeks to obtain a VISA. It is solely the passenger's responsibility to ensure that all needed documents are complete and up to date for valid entry into the country.

## Transportation Between the Islands of Tahiti

Air Tahiti, a sister company to Air Tahiti Nui, offers the primary mode of service between the islands, including regular inter-island flight service to 46 islands from Tahiti. Inter-island travel by boat is less common and frequent. The islands of Moorea and Huahine can be reached by ferry or catamaran service from Tahiti. Weekly departures are offered to Huahine and daily service is offered between Tahiti and Moorea. Travel time between Tahiti and Moorea by ferry is approximately 30 minutes one way. If your trip will include a stop in Moorea, try to plan your itinerary with a visit to Moorea first since it's the closest island to Tahiti.

## Transportation on the Islands of Tahiti

Tahiti and the developed islands operate a local-bus service known as Le Truck which is inexpensive and reliable. Taxis are available for hire, but can be expensive. Rental cars and motor scooters can be rented to easily navigate the islands of Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine, Bora Bora, Raiatea and Tahaa. Rental cars are not needed on the Tuamotu Islands. On the Marquesas, four wheel drive vehicles are available for rent and needed to get around on the island. Rental car inventories include some cars with air-conditioning and automatic transmission. Due to the limited number of rental cars on each island, it is recommended to reserve the car prior to arrival in Tahiti.

Resorts on motus offer shuttles to the main islands for guest transportation. Each resort offers a different schedule, and some require a fee, so be sure to check with your resort to make sure you make your scheduled excursions or restaurant reservations. All excursions and reservations can be made through the hotel's activities desk, so they will tell you the appropriate shuttle time when you make those reservations.

## Booking Excursions

Booking excursions ahead of time is not recommended because it forces you to stick with a particular day and time. Booking spa treatments ahead of time at some of the more intimate, exclusive resorts is recommended for the high season.

## Health Certification / Medical Care

As a French protectorate, health standards in Tahiti are on par with those found in Western Europe. For U.S. and Canadian citizens arriving from North America there are no special shots or inoculations needed for entry into Tahiti. Visitors arriving from other countries that have infections of cholera, yellow fever, and/or the plague as defined by the World Health Organization may be asked to present certificates of inoculations to gain entry.

French Polynesia enjoys a high standard of health, with excellent medical and dental services, pharmacies, private clinics and a large government hospital in Tahiti. The outer islands have hospitals or dispensaries, and a few private practitioners. All the islands maintain hygienic controls to combat potential epidemics of tropical diseases, such as the dengue fever.

There are no snakes, poisonous spiders or fearsome animals in these islands, and hotels and dispensaries on each tourist island and atoll keep first aid supplies on hand to treat coral cuts, sunburn and the extremely rare case of poisoning, when the barefoot swimmer steps on the toxic spines of the stonefish.

A good sun screen is essential (sun block is suggested for the first few days) to prevent burning. As in all tropical locales, French Polynesia has its share of mosquitoes; the hotels do their part to keep this problem to a minimum, but it is still wise to pack an insect repellent. Medications, even aspirin, should be brought from home, as pharmacies are not always convenient to the hotels.

## Water

Tap water in hotels and restaurants is generally safe to drink. A local mineral water "Eau Royale" and all sorts of French mineral waters are available.

## Currency and Exchange

The Pacific French Franc (CFP) is the currency used in French Polynesia. It is not valued the same as the EURO. The average value of the CFP in relation to the US Dollar has been ranging from 75-90 CFP per \$1 US.

Normally, the best exchange rates are received when you pay by credit card. Most major credit cards including American Express, Visa and Master Card are accepted at hotels and most restaurants and shops on the larger islands. It is always best to confirm current policy directly with each establishment. Traveler checks are widely accepted. Generally, a better exchange rate is given for traveler checks than for cash. Banks will provide the best rate for currency or traveler's check exchange. Banks are located at Faaa Airport and on most islands. Hotels also exchange currency and traveler checks but may give a less favorable rate. U.S. currency *may* be accepted as direct payment in hotels, restaurants and large shops, but will get a low rate of exchange. There are a few ATM machines available on the main islands of Tahiti, Moorea and Bora Bora, which you may use with your debit or major credit cards.

**Please note that some credit card issuers may charge a fee for any transactions outside of the U.S.,** so you should contact your credit card company to verify any charges you may incur for using your credit card in French Polynesia.

## Credit Cards or Cash?

Bring both. You will often get a better exchange rate paying by credit card than paying by cash or traveler check. Major credit cards (American Express, Visa and MasterCard) are accepted at hotels, most restaurants and shops on larger islands. However, you may find that credit cards are not widely accepted on smaller islands such as Huahine, Rangiroa, Tikehau, and Manihi.

Foreign Exchange counters are available at Faaa International Airport and Los Angeles International Airport. Alternatively, you may exchange cash at the bank on the major islands. It is recommended that you exchange your money at the airport once you arrive in Papeete. There is a bank at the airport, along with an automated currency exchange machine and an ATM. You'll usually receive a better exchange rate with the ATMs than the currency exchange booth located in the airport in Los Angeles.

As for food, activities, and souvenirs, expect to pay more than normal since much of their goods are imported from New Zealand. On an average 10 day trip, a conservative amount of spending money would be around \$2K. Some resorts, such as the Tuamotus and Le Taha'a have very few options for food outside of the resorts, and therefore, it's harder to be more budget minded with meals.

## Tipping

Historically, tipping has been contrary to the Tahitian custom of hospitality. While tipping is still not a common practice, it is beginning to be seen in some restaurants and hotels on the larger islands of Moorea, Bora Bora, and Tahiti. Still, there are no hidden service charges, prices quoted on menus, hotels, or shops are all inclusive, and you need not tip.

Although not expected, tipping is appreciated and accepted if you receive service above and beyond your normal expectations. Additionally, we would recommend tipping if you use the services of a hotel butler or concierge for special requests during your stay on the islands.

## Electrical Equipment

Most hotels have 220v systems. You will find some hotels accommodations with one 110v plug for your use. The majority of hotels offer complimentary hair dryers for guest use. For appliances such as curling irons, iPod, camera or laptop chargers, a combination electrical converter **and** adapter kit will usually be needed. French Plugs are used and have two round prongs. It's wise to always inquire at the hotel desk about the compatibility of your appliances before you attempt to use them.

## What to Bring: Clothing, Toiletries and Accessories

Casual, informal dress is standard in Tahiti and her islands. Clothing should be light, even in the evenings which remain pleasantly mild.

You will also want to pack lightly to avoid being charged for overweight baggage on the inter-island flights.

Men are most often dressed in shorts (possibly slacks for dinner), sport shirts or T-shirts, sandals or tennis shoes. Woman can wear everything from shorts to skirts to sun dresses to pareos (wrap-around cloth garment). Pareus or pareos are brightly colored and versatile hand blocked or painted fabrics 2 yards long by 1 yard wide, and are worn at home, at the beach or around the hotel pools. Some are elegantly tied for eveningwear. Pareus are not recommended for downtown Papeete, as the city is rather cosmopolitan in dress code. Bathing suits and short shorts are also out of place in Papeete.

You will also find that outside of Papeete, shoes are seldom worn by the locals or visitors. Instead, sandals and "flip flops" tend to be the "norm" for this casual environment. If you plan on hiking, some walking shoes or closed sandals are advisable.

We recommend taking along a couple of swimsuits each, a hat or sun visor, rubber-soled shoes for walking on coral (reef shoes) hat, sunglasses, and a waterproof bag. You may need a light plastic rain-coat or an umbrella for the odd tropical downpour.

Sunscreen, oils and lotions tend to be very expensive in French Polynesia. A bottle of sunscreen can easily cost \$25+ in a store. We suggest you be sure to bring plenty of sunscreen with you. It is also suggested you bring insect repellent as a precaution against mosquitoes, which can occasionally be annoying in the interior sections of the islands. Aspirin, band-aids, other personal medications, as well as a driver's license (if you decide to rent a car) are also handy to have with you.

You may want to purchase a disposable underwater camera to take pictures while snorkeling or during a shark feeding excursion. These disposable underwater cameras can be purchased for around \$8 in most chain stores in the United States or Canada. However, these cameras cost as much as \$40+ in French Polynesia. It is also a good idea to bring plenty of extra batteries, memory cards or film for your camera, which is expensive to purchase locally. Reef or water shoes, mask and snorkel equipment (most hotels and cruise ships will have loaner masks and fins) can also be handy to have along.

## Accommodations

Which resorts and islands you choose are a big factor in determining price. Bora Bora and Taha'a are considered the most expensive islands, and the Tuamotu atolls are, for the most part, the most affordable. Moorea and Huahine tend to be in the middle of the budget scale. Of course, all of this depends on what accommodations you choose at what resorts. For example, a horizon OWB at the Hilton in Moorea is around \$950/night rack rate, which is the same as the lowest category room at the InterContinental Thalasso Resort. Also, in

Bora Bora, you can get an overwater bungalow at the 3 star Le MaiTai Polynesia for around \$600/night, but an overwater bungalow at the Bora Bora Nui runs over \$1200/night for their rack rates. A lot also depends on the current exchange rate, which can be found on [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com). Finding the right resort/budget combo can be frustrating, but remember you are in paradise, so do what you can afford and you'll be guaranteed to get a lot for your money. Also, to get an overall experience of the islands, try mixing up your accommodations on each island. You may want to get an overwater bungalow in Bora Bora and a garden bungalow or beach bungalow in Moorea. The overwater bungalows are unique, but some of the beach bungalows are incredible too.

## Beaches

While there are beautiful beaches in French Polynesia, they are very different from what you'll find in the Caribbean. If you're looking for long stretches of white, soft sand, islands like Barbados and Anguilla in the Caribbean are probably a better bet. The Tuamotu islands offer the best chance to see long stretches of beach, but this is more uncommon in the more popular Society Islands (Bora Bora, Moorea, Taha'a, and Huahine). Most resorts, especially in Moorea, do not have much of a beach at all, but resorts like Le Meridien Bora Bora, the Bora Bora Nui, and the St. Regis Bora Bora do have decent beach areas. The sand is mostly broken up coral (except on the side of Bora Bora with Le Meridien or the Four Seasons), so it isn't finely grained and soft. Bora Bora has the famed Matira Beach between the Moana Beach Resort and Hotel Bora Bora, however, Matira Beach is public and not affiliated with any resort.

## Dining / Food

Dining in French Polynesia does not mean to have a quick meal, it is considered an experience that must be savored and enjoyed. Therefore the service in most restaurants in French Polynesia slower paced than in the US.

With the exception of a more cosmopolitan Papeete, you won't find much in the way of fast foods on the islands. However, you will discover a palate-pleasing variety of native dishes including Chinese, French, Polynesian, European and American cuisine. There is an abundance of seafood, fish, tropical fruits, and fresh vegetables. You can eat at fine restaurants or outdoor cafes, partake of Polynesian feasts and beach barbecues, or even arrange for a gourmet picnic on a secluded motu. Food tends to be a bit expensive in French Polynesia (on par with New York, London, Los Angeles or Honolulu prices) and the hotels tend to charge higher prices than local establishments.

On Manihi, Rangiroa, Tahaa/Raiatea, and Huahine there are virtually no restaurants outside the hotels. Therefore, we would recommend including a full or partial meal plan from your hotel during your stay.

Moorea, Bora Bora and Tahiti each have several good restaurants located outside the hotels. These restaurants range in service from small, simple, family owned businesses to large, elegant dining. In many cases the restaurants outside the hotels tend to be less expensive than hotel restaurants and offer excellent food selections. Meal plans are offered by most travel agents, but not recommended for the more popular and developed islands because there are a lot of local eateries worth trying. Also, meal plans do not include soft drinks or alcoholic beverages.

Breakfast can range from \$5 per person for croissant and coffee to \$25 per person for a large buffet breakfast. A nice dinner for two persons, each having appetizer, entree, glass of wine, coffee and sharing a dessert will cost about \$75 on Moorea or Tahiti and about \$85 on Bora Bora. The price includes tax and there is no tipping, although tipping is becoming more popular on the bigger islands with American resorts. You may even see some resorts leaving a sign out on the table to remind you to tip. There are many less expensive options available for dinner, but these prices will serve as a guideline when going for a good dinner at a "popular" restaurant.

There are small grocery stores on each island. You can purchase soft drinks, fresh baguettes, cheeses, croissants, pastries, snack foods, juices, etc. at prices that are not much higher than in North America. After a few days of expensive hotel breakfasts and paying \$5 for bottled water at your hotel, you may wish to visit these stores to stock up on items that would allow you to prepare your own simple "in room" breakfast or lunches and help spare your wallet.

## Tourism and Information Center in Tahiti

The main tourist office is in the center of Papeete, on the waterfront opposite the Vaima Shopping Center. The tourist office offers complimentary maps, brochures, and accommodation information for most islands and are staffed by very helpful English speaking employees. Please refer to the Islands page of our web site for information regarding the local tourist office of each particular island.

The address of the Tahiti Tourist Office is Fare Manihini ( 689 / 42-96-26), Boulevard Pomare, BP 65, Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia. For their US (LA) office, call : (310) 414 - 84 84.

## Business Hours

Generally, offices and shops are open Monday – Friday from 8am-12pm and from 1 pm to 5 or 6 pm. In the suburbs, smaller family corner stores may not close until 10 pm. Shops close at 11 am on Saturdays. Most stores and shops are closed on Sunday including many restaurants, except for the Papeete marketplace.

Banking hours are 7:45 am to 3:30 pm Monday to Friday, and some banks (ie., the Bank of Tahiti) are open on Saturday from 7:45 to 11:30 am.

## Papeete Luggage Storage Facility and Layovers

There is a luggage storage facility located along the front sidewalk of the main airport terminal. When exiting the terminal, the luggage storage facility will be to your right. You may wish to use this facility if you have a long layover period in Papeete. In addition, you may wish to catch the public transport "Le Truck" right in front of the airport and head downtown or perhaps to the nearby InterContinental Hotel for dinner. As you walk out of the front of the airport and up to the main road: the Le Truck heading to your left (as you face the road from the front of the airport) will go downtown and the Le Trucks heading to your right will go toward the InterContinental.

## Post Office

The French Polynesian postal system is on par with any standards. The mail delivery is efficient, but count on one week to ten days for mail to and from the US. The main post office is very modern and located on the waterfront boulevard. It offers all types of services including photocopying, fax and telegrams as well as "poste restante" where you can have your mail delivered. They also sell sets of beautiful collector's stamps. Hours are 7am to 6 pm on weekdays and 8am to 11am on Saturdays.

## Personal Safety

Tahiti is very safe by any standard, and violent crime is a rarity. Theft and petty crime theft can happen. As with any travel destination, don't leave valuables unattended in your room, bungalow or car. Nearly all hotels have in-room safes for you to store valuables, jewelry, cash, cameras, passports and wallets. Always use a hotel safe or in-room safe for added security. Be careful not to leave your valuables unattended while at the beach, pool, or other public places.

## Laundry and Dry-Cleaning

All the first-class hotels in Tahiti and her Islands have laundry service, and there is dry-cleaning service on the major islands.

## Local and Mobile Phone Service

The local telephone system in Tahiti is excellent and very easy. There are many public phones in Papeete and on most islands. Most of them are operated with phone cards (telecarte) which can be purchased at the airport coffee shop, in some bars (bar- tabacs), at some magazine stands, gift shops, the Post Office and from the duty free shop on most Air Tahiti Nui international flights. You will find these phones everywhere in French Polynesia, even in the most remote atolls.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT MANY HOTELS CHARGE VERY HIGH RATES FOR LONG DISTANCE CALLS TO THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA. HOTEL LONG DISTANCE RATES CAN BE AS HIGH AS \$16 A MINUTE!**

When using the local telephone system you should consider using a calling card, public phone, or a prepaid phone card that can be purchased in many places in the islands.

In addition to the local service, there is also a mobile alternative. As part of Tikiphone, a whole subsidiary of the Office des Postes et des Telecommunications, there is a GSM mobile network in Tahiti which is known as "Vini". The Vini network is a Uni band 900 MHz GSM network which provides coverage in 97% of the most populated areas. This coverage includes all of the districts in the main island of Tahiti and districts and villages in the major islands of French Polynesia. To use your mobile phone in Tahiti you will need to know if your mobile operator is one of the Roaming Partners: USA - T-Mobile and Cingular; Canada - Microcell and AT&T Wireless.

## Internet Service

Internet service is normally available at most major hotels on Tahiti, Moorea, and Bora Bora. Some hotels offer a business center where guests can purchase an access card for usage by the minute or in blocks of minutes. Alternatively, some hotels offer wireless internet connections in your room or WiFi throughout the resort. We do not recommend using dial up internet service from your room as the per-minute rates are extremely expensive and service is not reliable. In lieu, internet cafes may be found on the major islands.

To plan your trip to Tahiti and Her Islands, contact:

Sunsational Vacations, LLC  
Cathy Jackson, Certified Travel Associate  
Toll-Free: (888) 431-8567  
[www.njtahitisspecialist.com](http://www.njtahitisspecialist.com)  
[cathy@njtahitisspecialist.com](mailto:cathy@njtahitisspecialist.com)