



COUNTRY FACTS FRENCH POLYNESIA



Officially known as French Polynesia, **Tahiti and her Islands** are comprised of more than a hundred volcanic islands and atolls sprinkled over four million square kilometres of ocean in the South Pacific. By visiting even a select few you, too, can experience the allure and the inspiration that these islands have had for a wide range of visitors over the centuries. Bask in its warm sunshine, breathe deeply its fragrant scents fill your vision with verdant hillsides, turquoise lagoons or fiery sunsets.

The Islands

The main international gateway and commercial

centre is the capital, Papeete, on the island of Tahiti. Other islands which the visitor will likely want to discover are Moorea, Bora Bora and Huahine. Depending on time and interests, you can “island-hop” by plane or take luxury cruises in order to explore their beauty at a more leisurely pace.

Population and Language

The official languages of Tahiti are French and Tahitian but English is frequently spoken in most hotels and shops. Of the approximately 220,000 inhabitants 74% live in the Windward Islands group of which Tahiti is the main one.

Money

The Pacific French franc (CFP) is the currency used in French Polynesia. It is different from the French franc. As a general rule 1000 CFP = 10USD.

Electricity

Most of the hotels use 110 or 220 volts AC 60 hertz. A converter/adaptor is usually available upon request.

Time Zones

Tahiti is 10hours behind Greenwich Mean Time or two hours behind Pacific Standard Time

**Climate**

Cooled by the gentle breezes of the Pacific, the climate of these islands is sunny and pleasant. Roughly speaking there are two seasons: from November through March the climate is warmer and humid about 30C, with most of the rain falling during these months, along with refreshing trade-winds. From April through October the climate is cooler and drier with temperatures about 28C. The year round low is about 21C. The average water temperature is in the mid 20's.

Passport and visa

Visitors to French Polynesia must have a valid passport valid for six months past the departure date. No visa is required for Canadians staying one month or less.

Clothing

Comfortable and cool, natural fabrics such as cotton sundresses or t-shirts are perfect for daytime wear. The standard attire for men even at dinner parties is simply slacks and shirt. Women usually wear comfortable dresses in the evenings and normal resort wear around the hotels. 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 evening wear. 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.

Tipping

Tipping is contrary to Tahitian custom. There are no sales taxes, no hotel service charges and no other hidden charges in French Polynesia. There is however a communal hotel tax of approximately \$2.00CAD per person per night payable directly to the hotel

Food

Whether it is French cuisine in an elegant restaurant, a simple picnic on a small "motu" islet or something in between, you won't be disappointed in the food in Tahiti. You'll be interested in the different cooking techniques as well whether the traditional ground oven, marinated "poisson cru" or beach barbecues. Don't forget to sample from Tahiti's "fruit basket" with its wide range of tropical fruit or from among the many varieties of seafood.

Shopping

It's worth a visit to the colourful Papeete market to buy colourful pareos or perhaps some coconut products for health and beauty care. Black pearls or mother-of-pearl shells are worth looking into at for a memorable souvenir. Offices and shops are usually open from 8:00 am to 12 noon and from 1:30pm to 5:30 pm Monday to Friday as well as during the morning hours on Saturday. Small shopping centres in the suburbs may remain open later. There are no sales taxes.

Banking

Banks are located at Tahiti's International Airport and on each island. Generally a higher exchange rate is given for traveler's cheques than for cash. Most major credit cards are accepted at featured hotels and most restaurants and shops. It is always best to confirm current policy direct with each establishment. Banking hours are from 8:00am to 3:30 pm with some branch offices remaining open later.

Customs and Quarantine

There are strict restrictions about bringing plant and animal matter. Prohibited items include narcotics, weapons, imitation brand names and cultured pearls originating in Tahiti. Certain types of animal life and flora are protected by customs regulations.

**Departure Tax**

Departure tax is prepaid with airline tickets.

Vaccinations

Yellow fever and cholera vaccinations are only required if coming from an infected area as designated by the World Health Organisation.

Medical and Health

Tap water in hotels and restaurants is safe to drink. It is a good idea to wear sandals or running shoes when walking on the reefs. It is recommended that comprehensive medical insurance be purchased prior to your departure.

Transportation

In Tahiti, the famous “ le truck “ runs a bus service between Papeete and the outlying districts. Taxis and buses are available everywhere and fares are controlled by the government. Ferries operate from Tahiti to Moorea several times a day and there are numerous daily flights to the outer islands.

Duty Free Allowances

The following items may be imported into Tahiti by passengers 18 years and over without incurring customs duty:

- 200 cigarettes or 100 cigarillos or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco.
- 2L of wine, sparkling wine, beer and cider and 2L of other alcoholic drinks.
- Goods up to a value of XPF30,000 (XPF15,000 for passengers up to 15 years of age).