

Tahiti & French Polynesia

Better known by the name of its main island, Tahiti, French Polynesia is a mesmerising wonderland of reef-fringed islands and translucent aqua lagoons. Shamelessly chic and seductive, it's the kind of place where the rich and famous come to play and hedonistic honeymoon fantasies are realised. The epitome of the Pacific dream, this is one Garden of Eden so damn beautiful it's hard to believe it really exists.

French Polynesia is more than just some souped up, sexy honeymoon destination, however. Those seeking something stronger than a pina colada in the sand will find salvation never more than a boat ride away. Adventures are plentiful in these archipelagos scattered over an area as big as Europe. Take an old school pirate romp through the mysterious and danger-tinged Tuamotus, where the breathtaking turquoise sea is home not only to flawless black pearls, but also hundreds of toothy sharks. Travel to the ends of the earth, destination Australs, a place so remote centuries slide by without anyone batting an eye. Check out the magnificent Gambier Archipelago: an armchair destination for most, it's also a must for wannabe National Geographic explorers. Those searching for a little less swashbuckling and a lot more room service will delight in Bora Bora's luxurious pampering and lush good looks; in Maupiti's picture-perfect views and old-fashioned French hospitality.

The truth is, whether you've secretly fantasised about splitting coconuts with your bare hands in a Rambo meets Robinson Crusoe scenario or daydreamed about playing heroine in a mushy Hollywood movie, French Polynesia tempts you to dream your wildest of fantasies right into punch-drunk reality.

French Polynesia comprises five main island groups – the Society Islands, the Tuamotus, the Marquesas, the Australs and the Gambier Archipelago. Tahiti is in the Society Islands.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Pamper yourself on ultra gorgeous and over-the-top luxurious **Bora Bora** (p631), a temple to high-octane hedonism
- Relax on beautiful **Maupiti** (p639), the Society Islands' most unspoilt natural phenomenon
- Get lost in **Mo'orea's** (p604) entrancing history and luscious scenery
- Meander along postcard perfect empty beaches and snorkel in the translucent waters of **Tikehau** (p647) in the Tuamotus
- Hike the desert coasts and fecund valleys of **Nuku Hiva** (p652) in the wild and rugged Marquesas



