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# TAHITI

## TOURISME

### Tahitian Experiences Fact Sheet

#### Culture

How are the Tahitians keeping their culture alive? Although 75 percent of the population is of Polynesian descent, the French influence is also prominent. In the past few years, Tahitians have made a dedicated effort to keep their culture alive by teaching the Tahitian language in school, encouraging traditional sports, arts, and crafts, and passing on Tahitian dance and music to the next generation.

**Marae**, or religious stone temples, are found throughout *The Islands of Tahiti*. These sites were sacred and very important places of political and social gathering in ancient Polynesia and remain sacred throughout the islands. Experts are learning more and more about the early Polynesians as they restore and uncover the marae.

**Tamure** means “dance” in Tahitian, and it’s done with an energy and passion that is unsurpassed. From slow, graceful dances to fast, rhythmic movement, visitors must see this demonstration of native culture. Even years after visiting, travelers find that the mere sound of Tahitian music evokes powerful memories of the fervent tamure.

**Tattoo** is one of the few Polynesian words that has worked its way into the English language (taboo is another). This ancient Polynesian custom dates back to the days of warring between neighboring tribes. Full of symbolism, and often done without anesthetic and using traditional instruments, tattoos remain an important part of Tahitian culture that was almost lost when outlawed during the years of missionaries and colonialization. It has only resurged within the last few decades.

**Traditional Tahitian wedding ceremonies** are deep and meaningful, and more couples are getting married or renewing their marriage vows in these rituals. Couples are adorned in *pareus*, flowers, shells, and feathers. The groom approaches the beach in an outrigger canoe. His bride, who was carried in on a rattan throne, awaits him on the white-sand beach. A spectacular sunset and lapping lagoon create a stunning backdrop. Tahitian music and dancers add to the ambiance. A Tahitian priest “marries” the couple and gives them their Tahitian names and the Tahitian name of their first-born.

**Celestial navigation** is tied to the ancient Polynesians who settled the South Pacific islands. These early settlers were adept at guiding their way using only the stars, waves, currents, bird flights, sun, and wind. A visit to the Museum of Tahiti and Her Islands on the island of Tahiti is a good way to explore this amazing bit of history.

**Tiare apetahi flower** is a rare and endangered flower that can only be found in one place in the entire world, on a mountain peak on the sacred island of Raiatea. Botanists have tried to grow it elsewhere without luck. Legend says the delicate petals of the tiare apetahi represent the five fingers of a lovely Tahitian girl who fell in love with the son of a king and died of a broken heart because she could not hope to marry him. The petals close at night, and at daybreak they open with a slight crackling sound – thought to be the sound of her heart breaking. Reaching the peak is a couple hours hike up the mountain, but worth every minute.

**Pareus or Pareu** are seen just about everywhere. These colorful pieces of fabric are worn as a cover-up, a dress, shorts, a shawl, or can be spread out as a picnic cloth or beach towel. Created with traditional designs and bright tropical colors, pareus are inexpensive and make the perfect souvenir. Visitors can find pareus throughout the islands, but the largest selection is at Le Marché, the downtown market in Papeete. Many are hand-painted by local artists. Men and women alike consider cool and colorful pareus to be the ultimate island garb.

**Tahitian Cultured Pearls** are *The Islands of Tahiti's* largest export and a local specialty only in French Polynesia. Visitors can explore Tahitian cultured pearl farms in the Tuamotu atolls Manihi and Rangiroa and on the islands of Raiatea, Taha'a, and Huahine, and can watch the grafting of the blacked-lipped oysters that create these exotic and highly prized pearls. Before buying pearls, stop by the Tahiti Black Pearl Museum in Papeete to learn how to judge the value of a pearl based on size, color, luster, and shape.

### **Distinctive Lodging**

**Overwater bungalows** were first invented in *The Islands of Tahiti* more than 50 years ago, in 1967 and are now the quintessential icon of paradise. From direct access from a private deck into the world-renowned Tahitian lagoons or lounging on the balcony of a thatched-roof hideaway with all the amenities and service of a first-class hotel room, the overwater bungalow is the symbol of the ultimate private getaway.

**Tahitian Guesthouses**, sometimes called *pensions*, are family-operated accommodations located throughout *The Islands of Tahiti*. Tahitian Guesthouses feature furnished rooms or separate bungalows and villas, and charming communal areas for reception, dining, and relaxation. They offer a unique glimpse into authentic Tahitian culture and an opportunity to connect with the locals.

### **Sporting & Activities**

**Tahitian sporting events** include stone lifting, fruit carrying, grueling canoe races between the islands, and javelin throwing, where contestants aim at a single coconut, 60 feet away. Visitors can see these events during the seven-week long Heiva I Tahiti celebration in June and July.

**Hawaiki Nui Va'a** could best be described as the Super Bowl of outrigger canoe races. It's the world's largest, longest, and most exhilarating international open ocean outrigger canoe event, and is the ultimate test of strength and endurance for both men and women. Six-person crews race 72 miles from the island of Huahine to Raiatea, then to Taha'a and finally to Bora Bora. Entourages of avid fans follow by canoes and boats, creating a colorful regatta throughout the late fall.

**Stone fishing tournaments** are an exciting spectacle on the island of Taha'a. In the footsteps of their ancestors, the villagers wade into the lagoon, beating the water with stones tied to ropes. The frenzy frightens schools of fish, driving them ashore, where they are easily collected with nets for a feast.

### **About Tahiti Tourisme United States**

Tahiti Tourisme United States (TTUS) is the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the country of French Polynesia, more commonly known as *The Islands of Tahiti*. As the DMO for *The Islands of Tahiti*, TTUS liaises with airline, cruise line, hotel, resort, tour operator, travel advisor and consortia partners to develop product, launch marketing initiatives, and generate robust tourism trade within French Polynesia.

### **About *The Islands of Tahiti***

Located in the South Pacific, *The Islands of Tahiti* are just eight hours by air from California. Surrounded by pristine, crystal clear blue waters, the 118 islands and atolls offer natural beauty, authentic island culture, and unique French Polynesian style. *The Islands of Tahiti* are world-renowned for their white-sand beaches, stunning turquoise lagoons and varied landscapes ranging from coral atolls to volcanic mountain peaks. Each island offers a variety of accommodation experiences from luxurious resorts with overwater villas, to family guesthouses, to sailing via private charter or scheduled cruise. Privacy comes naturally in *The Islands of Tahiti* and offers visitors the space to relax and reconnect and to be *Embraced By Mana*. *Mana* is the life force and spirit that connects all things in *The Islands of Tahiti*. Tahiti is halfway between California and Australia, on the same side of the International Date Line as North America and in the same time zone as Hawaii. For further information, [www.tahititourisme.com](http://www.tahititourisme.com) or call (310) 414-8484.

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