

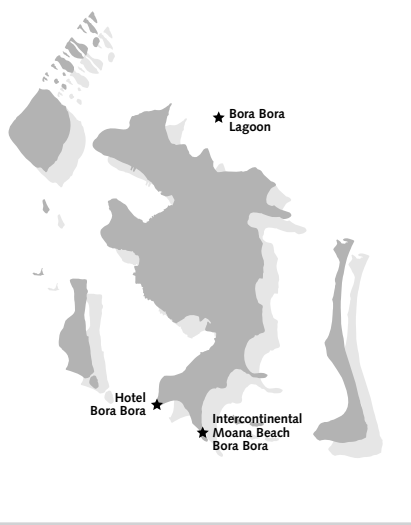
# Bora Bora

Bora Bora will seduce you into buying the Cadillac of paradises, the one loaded with all the luxury trappings you know you don't need but just can't live without. Legendary not only for its lush beauty but also its hedonistic decadence, this island is a fairy-tale creation of jagged volcanic peaks juxtaposed against crystal-clear aqua lagoons. One of the world's most famous dream destinations, Bora Bora lures honeymooners, heiresses and movie stars by the plane load with a potent potion of ostentatiously hip, oh-so-romantic, slightly naughty exotica. A wicked seductress, this island tempts with a Pandora's box of guilty pleasures: but you'll have to decide if they're worth the hefty price attached.

There's no doubt Bora Bora is overpriced – both top-end and basic accommodation cost more here than anywhere else in French Polynesia, and some say this is one paradise not worth purchasing, that it's overpriced, overdeveloped and overhyped. Others argue that the island James Cook baptised as the 'pearl of the Pacific' is worth every penny of the *très cher* entrance fee. If you're looking to seriously indulge, Bora Bora has plenty of five-star resorts to pamper your every whim – the kinds of places where the glass-floored bungalows hover over turquoise seas, dinner is a multicourse candle-lit affair and breakfast is served from an outrigger canoe. If money's any object, Bora Bora has plenty of quaint family *penions* (guesthouses), often situated on some of the best real estate, in which to rest your head.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Living like royalty at the **Intercontinental Moana Beach Bora Bora** (p165), one of the world's swankiest and most dreamy luxury resorts
- Admiring the lush scenery, lagoon and idyllic *motu* (islet) on a **boat tour** (p162)
- Ogling the fish, coral and translucent water on a **snorkelling** or jet-skiing trip across the **lagoon** (p161)
- Embarking on a romantic, gastronomic and visually stimulating evening adventure by feasting on traditional food then sipping heavenly cocktails during a traditional dance performance at the swish **Hotel Bora Bora** (p165)
- Hiring a boat and spending a day stranded on a secluded, sandy **motu** (p170)



■ POPULATION: 5757

■ AREA: 47 SQ KM

## HISTORY

In ancient times, the island was known as Vava'u, perhaps supporting the theory that it was colonised by inhabitants from the Tongan island of the same name. 'Bora Bora' roughly translates as 'first-born', indicating that this may have been the most important island after Ra'iatea. According to local myth, the legendary Hiro, the first king of Ra'iatea, sent his son Ohatatama to rule Bora Bora.

Due to the shortage of level ground on Bora Bora, land pressures created an unusually defensive population of fierce warriors. Only Huahine managed to resist the warriors of Bora Bora at their most expansive.

James Cook sighted Bora Bora in 1769 on his first voyage to French Polynesia, and a London Missionary Society (LMS) base was established on the island in 1820. Bora Bora supported Pomare in his push for supreme power over Tahiti, but resisted a French protectorate (established over Tahiti in 1842) until the island was annexed in 1888.

During WWII a US supply base was established here, prompted by the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. From early 1942 to mid-1946 Operation Bobcat transformed the island and, at its peak, up to 6000 men were stationed on Bora Bora. Today the runway on Motu Mute is the clearest (and most useful) reminder of those frenetic days. Until Faa'a airport on Tahiti opened in 1961, this was French Polynesia's international airport. Eight massive seven-inch naval cannons were installed around the island during the war; all but one are still in place.

Reports of a discoloured lagoon and bleached coral (the result of El Niño) spread like Chinese whispers in 2001. Although the entire Pacific was affected, Bora Bora was particularly vulnerable as it has only one pass into its lagoon. The water is a sparkling aqua once again, but the damage to the coral is irreversible.

There has been a general effort to clean up Bora Bora in recent years, and local children on cleaning bees are a fairly common sight. But you'll still see and smell more rubbish than you'd hope to, particularly in the remote northern parts of the island. It's a fragile situation: the island is dependent on tourism but is at risk of

deterring visitors because of overdevelopment, while at the same time its major drawcard – marine life – is seriously under threat. Let's hope the juggling act can be managed, because this is a truly beautiful part of the world.

## ORIENTATION

Bora Bora was created by volcanic activity around three or four million years ago. The rim of the ancient volcano can be easily traced; the sea has broken into the crater to form Povai Bay at the southern tip of the island, and Motu Toopua and Motu Toopua Iti are fragments of the old crater rim. Bora Bora is spectacularly mountainous, rising to Mt Hue (619m), Mt Pahia (661m) and Mt Otemanu (727m).

The main island stretches for about 9km from north to south and is about 4km in width at the widest point. A 32km road runs around the coast.

A wide, sheltered and navigable lagoon encircles the island, with sandy *motu* (islets) edging most of the outer reef. The Teavanui Pass on Bora Bora's western side is the only pass into the lagoon.

Dusty Vaitape, south of the pass, is the main town, but Matira Point is the anchor for tourists. The quay for inter-island ships is at Farepiti, between Vaitape and Faanui. The airport is on Motu Mute at the northern extremity of the outer reef edge.

## INFORMATION

There are branches of Banque de Polynésie and Banque Socredo in Vaitape, where you can exchange money or use the ATM.

If you need medical assistance, it's a good idea to inquire first at your hotel. There's a **medical centre** (☎ 67 70 77) in Vaitape, or you can contact **Dr Juen** (☎ 67 70 62) or **Dr Rousanally & Dr Boutry** (☎ 67 77 95).

There are public telephones all around the island; phonecards can be bought at a number of shops, hotels and supermarkets. **Bora Bora visitor information centre** (☎ 67 76 36; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) The office is on the quay at Vaitape and has loads of pamphlets and other info.

**L'Appetisserie** (☎ 67 78 88; Centre Le Pahia; per hr 2500 CFP) Internet access in Vaitape.

**Pharmacy** (☎ 67 70 30; ☎ 8am-noon & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 5-6pm Sat, 9-9.30am Sun) In Vaitape, just near Le Cocotier restaurant.

**Post office** (☎ 67 70 74) In the middle of Vaitape.

