

Bora Bora

This is it, this is the one. The arrival by plane says it all. From above, the promise of a wonderland is instantly made good: glinting turquoise sea and dazzlingly white sandy stretches of beach. Add sumptuous resorts in a sensational lagoon setting and indulgent gourmet dining in fancy restaurants and it's small wonder Bora Bora stakes a convincing claim to being a piece of paradise. This diva of an island is not only for unbridled pampering and romance, though; when you've finished sipping your *maitai*, check out diving, snorkelling, parasailing, walking under the sea and even hiking in the spectacular mountainous interior.

It's not all that rosy (well, turquoise), though. With, at the latest count, almost 700 over-water bungalows (compared with a few dozen 15 years ago) dotted over a fairly compact area, the sense of exclusivity is somewhat toned down now, and hedonists in search of a real escape have started turning their eyes to nearby Maupiti (but you didn't hear it from us). But so superior are its proportions that Bora Bora remains the stuff of legend, and nothing can beat a few days here to make the most of its pleasures and charms. And don't fret if your budget isn't in the four-figures-a-day category. A handful of quaint *pensions* and affordable midrange hotels beckon. They're not as ritzy, but you'll enjoy a slice of paradise nonetheless. Check in and chill out.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering all the perks of a world-class resort on secluded **Motu Piti Aau** (p159) and recreating the *From Here to Eternity* kiss on your sundeck
- Hearing yourself scream 'Darling, it's magical' while ogling the stunning cerulean blue lagoon on a **boat tour** (p155)
- Seeing a bird's-eye view of the island on a scenic helicopter flight (p157) – pricey, but you deserve it
- Enjoying a romantic dinner with your partner in a gourmet **restaurant** (p162) on Matira Point
- **Diving** (p155) among harmless sharks at amazing sites such as Tapu and Muri Muri



■ POPULATION: 5757

■ AREA: 47 SQ KM

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Try to make your trip coincide with the Heiva Bora Bora (p163) in July or the Hawaiki Nui canoe race (p45) in November – two highly engaging events.
- The lagoon doesn't *always* look like a turquoise-backed mirror, especially from June to August, when the *ma-araamu* (southeast trade wind) blows.
- Bora Bora is much more a lagoon destination than a beach destination. There's only one 'real' beach.
- Though Bora Bora is an expensive destination, there are a few affordable *pensions*.

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. 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 flat 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 becoming 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. Eight massive 7in naval cannons were installed around the island during the war; all but one are still in place.

ORIENTATION

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.

Vaitape is the main town, but Matira Point is the most developed spot. 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

All services are in Vaitape. There's a medical centre in Vaitape as well as numerous private doctors and a pharmacy.

Aloe Cafe (per hr 1600 CFP; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Sat) Internet access. Wi-fi is also available (same rates). At the back of a small shopping centre.

Banque de Polynésie (☎ 7.45-11.45am & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Has an ATM and a 24-hour automatic exchange machine.

Banque de Tahiti (☎ 7.45-11.45am & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Currency exchange, and has an ATM.

Banque Socredo (☎ 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Currency exchange, and has an ATM.

Bora Bora visitor information centre (☎ 67 76 36; info-bora-bora@mail.pf; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) The office is on the quay at Vaitape and has pamphlets and other info. Mildly helpful.

Post office (☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8-10am Sat) Internet access (with the Manaspot card, on sale at the counter).

SIGHTS

Bora Bora's 32km coast road hugs the shoreline almost all the way around the island and rarely rises above sea level. There aren't any overwhelming sights along the route bar Matira Beach, but it's great for a challenging day's bike ride (mere mortals may find themselves walking their bikes up the hill around Fitiuu Point on the east coast). Cars can also be easily hired, or you can join a 4WD tour. The following tour starts in Vaitape, going anticlockwise around the island.

Vaitape

If arriving by air you'll be transported from the Motu Mute airport to Vaitape, the island's main settlement. It's not the most evocative town, but it's the only place on Bora Bora that doesn't feel as if it were built exclusively for