

# The Tuamotus

Strung like white-sand jewels across the Pacific, the Tuamotus (too-ah-moh-toos) are a world apart. These rings of coral were witnesses to what was once, according to Darwin's theory of atoll formation, an archipelago of high islands as mountainous and grand as perhaps the Marquesas or Society Islands are today. The 77 atolls, scattered like confetti on an ocean of ink, stretch 1500km northwest to southeast and 500km east to west. The closest islands are about 300km from Tahiti.

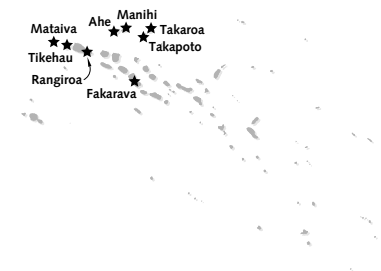
The atolls, coral crowns not reaching more than a few metres above the water, surround a central lagoon. No atoll is like another. For 30 islands, the outer ring is cut by one or more deep passes, while others are completely enclosed. Some are huge (Rangiroa is 75km long), while others are minute (Nukutepipi is about 4km across). With a total land area of about 700 sq km, the narrow chains of low-lying *motu* that make up the islands encircle an astonishing 6000 sq km of sheltered lagoons – more than 1000 sq km in the vast Rangiroa lagoon alone.

The Tuamotus have always been a dangerous place for navigators and they long remained in the shadow of the Society Islands. That has changed thanks to pearl cultivation, which has become a central pillar of the Polynesian economy. The growth of pearl cultivation has reversed the outward migration of the population, which has grown from 11,793 to 15,846 people since 1983. There are 45 inhabited islands, ranging from those with a mere handful of transient occupants to Rangiroa, with a total population of 3016. With this economic development and increase in population, infrastructure has been dramatically improved.

Places such as Rangiroa, Ahe and Manihi, which placed their bets on pearls and/or tourism, have profited the most from modernisation. Many other atolls, such as Hereheretue and Tematangi, remain connected to the outside world only by infrequent cargo ships.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Feeling like part of the food chain amid technicolour fish frenzies in the reef passes of **Rangiroa** (p185)
- Watching a lustrous dark pearl being 'birthed' from an oyster while visiting a pearl farm at **Manihi** (p194), **Ahe** (p196), **Takaroa** (p196) or **Fakarava** (p199)
- Lounging on the deserted, 'Blue Lagoon' beaches of **Tikehau** (p190), **Mataiva** (p192) and **Takapoto** (p197)
- Living like Robinson Crusoe on **Fakarava** (p198)





## Activities

You don't go to the Tuamotus for monuments, museums or food – activities are in the lagoons. **Scuba diving** is the number-one activity. Rangiroa, Tikehau, Manihi, Fakarava, and Makemo have dive centres, and dive cruises are a pricier but practical way to dive the Tuamotus – see the boxed text, p258.

You can visit the ubiquitous **pearl farms**, where you may see the grafting operation. Some places to stay also have pearl farms.

Both spear and line fishing are available and you can also see fish parks, snorkel, explore archaeological sites and visit bird reserves on remote *motu*. Definitely bring a mask and snorkel.

There are numerous tourist operators, although hotels and *pensions* often organise trips for guests. The best beaches are often on remote *motu*. Operators will take you on picnic trips to these *motu*, or arrange to leave you there and collect you later. Try not to leave yourself at the mercy of one hotel, *pension* or operator. If you ask around you'll find many other possibilities.

## Getting There & Away

The archipelago is accessible by plane; 29 atolls have airstrips and are served by Air Tahiti. Most of the traffic is to and from Pape'ete, but there are also connections with Bora Bora, the Marquesas and the Gambier Archipelago. Within the archipelago,

Rangiroa and Hao are the principal flight hubs. If you're visiting an island, always give the Air Tahiti representative a contact address or phone number, as schedules are subject to change.

The *Dory*, *Corbia*, *Mareva Nui*, *Taporo V* and *VI*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Kura Ora II* and *III*, *Hotu Maru*, *Vai-Aito*, *Nuku Hau* and *Aranui* all serve the archipelago from Pape'ete and most take passengers. See p263 for details. On those islands without quays or passes, loading and unloading of cargo and passengers is done by whaleboat.

See p248 for info on cruising yachts.

## Getting Around

Outboard motor boat is the most common method of transport. Road networks are often just crushed-coral or sand tracks, perhaps a few kilometres long, linking the village to the airport or to the areas where copra is produced. Public transport usually does not exist. Ask at your hotel or *pension* about transport as they will usually be able to set you up with whatever you need.

Airports are sometimes near the villages, sometimes on remote *motu* on the other side of the lagoon. If you have booked accommodation, your hosts will come and meet you but transfers are not necessarily free. If there is a charge it will depend on the distance travelled and the means of transport. Hitching (by car or boat) is possible as

many islanders go to the airports for arrivals and departures, although there may not be room for you by the time all the freight is loaded! If you do get given a ride, offer to help pay for petrol as it is quite expensive.

Bicycles and scooters are often used in the villages; some *pensions* rent them out or they can be hired from islanders.

# RANGIROA

pop 3016 / lagoon area 1640 sq km

Rangiroa (rung-ee-roh-ah) is the second-biggest atoll in the world, but is a wonderfully languorous, remote place to explore; a far cry from the glamour and pace of Bora Bora and Mo'orea in the Society Islands.

Diving attracts the majority of visitors to Rangiroa but there's plenty to do for everyone. From wine tasting at one of the world's most unusual wineries to exploring the sites of the vast lagoon to simply just lying on the beach, Rangiroa, as it is affectionately known by the locals, has justly earned its reputation as the tourist centre of the Tuamotus.

A series of large swells have menaced the atoll's lagoon over the last several years and many of the white-sand beaches have been reduced to gravel-sand beaches. Even so, the stark whiteness of bleached coral against turquoise lagoon creates a bright, almost Grecian cocktail for the eyes. Life in the lagoon has sprung back from much of the damage and it's as blue and inviting as ever.

Rangiroa (from Rairoa, literally 'long sky') is home to nearly 20% of the total population of the Tuamotus.

## HISTORY

Historically, Rangiroa has had to contend with two equally destructive threats: pirates and cyclones. Rangiroa's inhabitants sought refuge close to Motu Taeoo (Lagon Bleu), on the southwestern side of the atoll, until a cataclysm, probably a tsunami, destroyed these settlements around 1560.

Two centuries later, the population was settled around the three passes – Tivaru, Avatoru and Tiputa. Strong relations were established with the inhabitants of the other atolls of the northern Tuamotus.

## FROM COCONUT TO COPRA

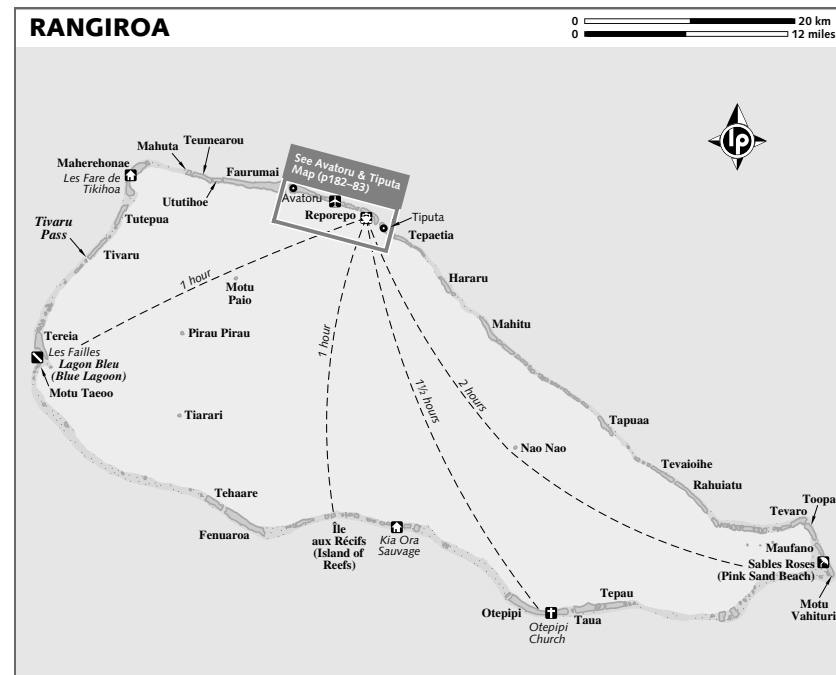
Copra is found everywhere in the Tuamotus and Marquesas, and you can recognise it by the unmistakable, rancid-sweet smell emanating from coconut plantations, rack dryers and warehouses near the wharves.

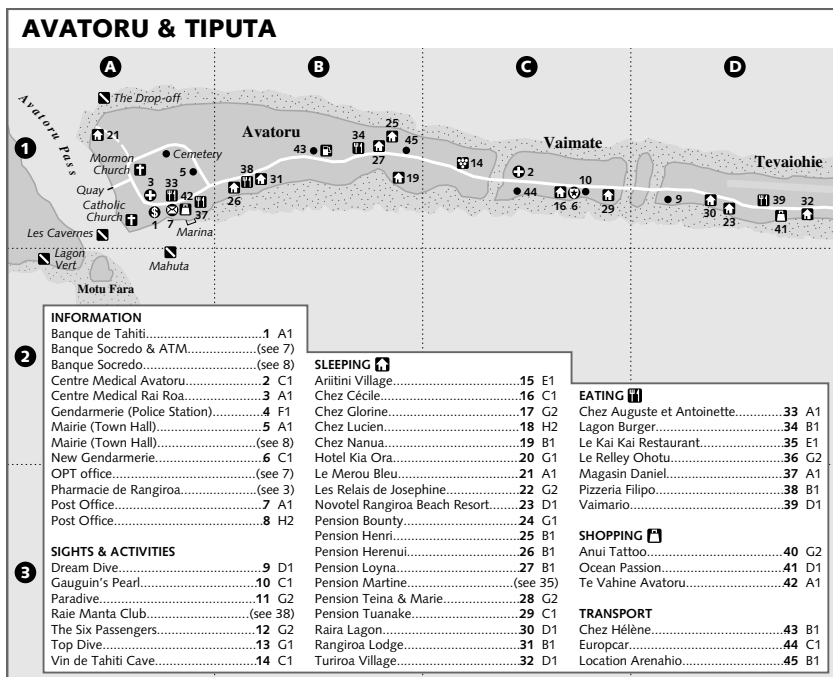
Copra (from the Tamil word *kopparah*) is the dry residue of coconut meat. Rich in vegetable fat (palmitin), it is regularly collected by schooners and taken to Pape'ete. Crushed, heated, pressed and refined as oil, it is then sold to the food and cosmetics industries.

Copra production is relatively recent. Introduced by the missionaries in the 1870s, it has continued to develop and is still an essential economic activity on numerous islands and atolls in French Polynesia.

The copra producers gather the fallen coconuts from the coconut plantations. The coconuts are split with a blow from a machete. The half-nuts are then turned over and left in the sun for a few days. The coconut is scooped out with a *pana* (implement with a short handle and a curved, narrow metal blade) to separate the dried meat from the shell. The shavings are then placed on copra dryers (raised racks topped with a movable roof to protect them from rain) until completely desiccated.

They are then packed in hessian bags, weighed and put in a hangar until a schooner arrives to collect them. The copra producer is paid directly by the inspector at the time of weighing, or by the supercargo when loading the ship.





Anaa warriors pillaged Rangiroa at the end of the 1770s; survivors were forced into exile on Tikehau and Tahiti. They returned to Rangiroa in the early 1820s and repopulated the atoll.

It was sighted in April 1616 by Dutchman Le Maire, but Rangiroa didn't receive European settlers, missionaries, until 1851.

Copra production played a vital economic role until it was overtaken by fishing, still an important industry. There are a handful of pearl farms on Rangiroa as well as an oyster hatchery and a school for hopeful pearl farmers and technicians. The opening of the airport in 1965 boosted tourism, which has been big business since the 1980s.

## ORIENTATION

Rangiroa measures 75km from east to west and 25km from north to south. From the edge of the lagoon, it is impossible to see the opposite bank. The atoll's coral belt is no more than 300m wide, but the long circuit of islands, *motu* and *hoa* (channels) stretches for more than 200km. The lagoon opens to the ocean via three passes: Tivaru, Avatoru

and Tiputa. The Tivaru Pass is narrow and shallow; the Avatoru and Tiputa Passes are each more than 200m wide. About 10km separates the Avatoru and Tiputa Passes.

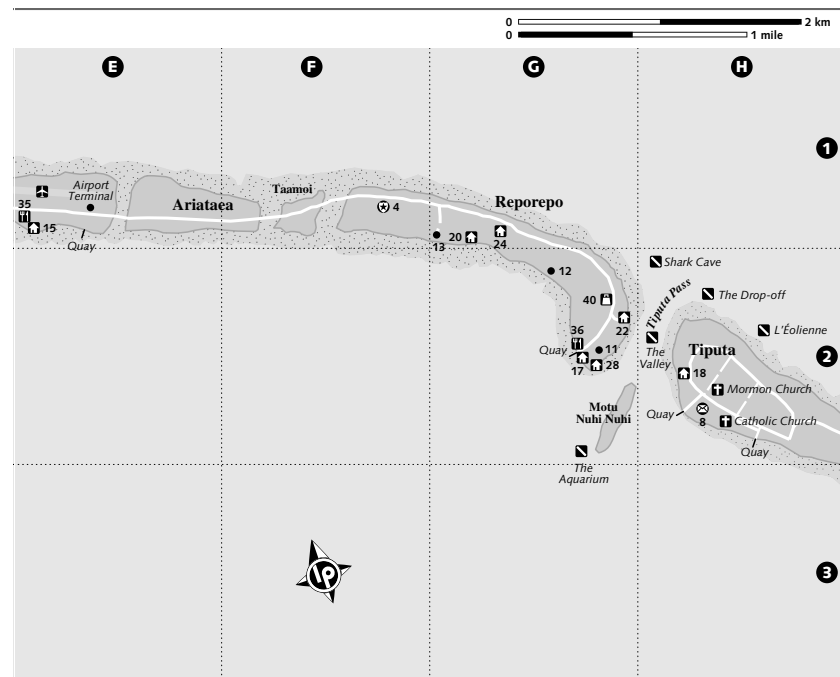
Rangiroa has two villages. Avatoru is on a string of islets between Avatoru and Tiputa Passes. At the eastern end, beyond the Tiputa Pass, is the village of Tiputa. Most places to stay and eat are dotted along the string of islets east of Avatoru.

## INFORMATION

You can buy telephone cards at the post offices, at some supermarkets and at a few souvenir boutiques. Internet connections are available at Le Kai Kai restaurant (p188) and at the OPT office in Avatoru.

**Banque de Tahiti** (☎ 96 85 52; Avatoru; ☎ 8-11am & 2-4pm Mon, Wed & Fri; 8-11.30am Tue & Thu) You can exchange currency and travellers cheques or withdraw cash with your credit card.

**Banque Socredo** Avatoru (☎ 96 85 63; ☎ 7am-3.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-2.30pm Fri); Tiputa (☎ 96 75 57; ☎ 1.30-4pm Mon & Thu) Only the Avatoru office (next to the post office) has an ATM. Don't expect to change currency at the Tiputa branch.



**Centre Médical Avatoru** (☎ 96 03 75) On Vaimaite, 2km east of Avatoru.

**Centre Médical Rai Roa** (☎ 96 04 44, 96 04 43; Avatoru) A private clinic operated by Dr Thirouard, who apparently likes to prescribe lots of antibiotics.

**Gendarmerie** (police station; ☎ 96 73 61) Currently towards the eastern end of the Avatoru islets, not far from Hotel Kia Ora; a new location was under construction at the time of writing, next door to Chez Cecile.

**Pharmacie de Rangiroa** (☎ 93 12 30; fax 93 12 36; ☎ 7am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm Sun) In Avatoru, near the Catholic church.

**Post office** Avatoru (☎ 7am-noon & 1-3pm Mon-Thu, 7am-noon & 1-2pm Fri); Tiputa (☎ 7am-12.30pm Mon-Thu, 7-11.30am Fri)

## SIGHTS

### Avatoru

Avatoru is a modern and bustling place by Tuamotu standards. There is a post office, a few banks and a supermarket with hopeless opening hours (it does have a decent selection of groceries though). There are two churches, one Catholic and one Mormon, and a few little places to eat. A small site overlooking Tiputa pass has been cleared

so that visitors can watch the daily performances of dolphins that dance in the waves created by the outgoing current.

### Tiputa

Around the middle of the day, you could pretty safely fire a gun along the main street in Tiputa and not hit anyone. It's a charming little village, and there are fewer *popaa* (Westerners) here; getting a boat across the Tiputa pass adds to the whole experience. Tiputa is the administrative centre serving Rangiroa, Makatea, Tikehau and Mataiva. It has a *gendarmerie* with authority over several atolls. The village is also home to the Centre d'Études des Techniques Adaptées au Développement (Cetad), which trains young people for catering and hotel jobs.

After the village the track continues east through coconut plantations until it's halted by the next *hoa* (shallow channel).

### Lagon Vert

Lagon Vert (Green Lagoon) is only five minutes away from Avatoru by boat. It's a small area, but attracts fewer visitors than

its blue counterpart, and so can make for a less touristy adventure.

### Lagon Bleu

Lagon Bleu (Blue Lagoon) is a popular spot about an hour away from Avatoru by boat on the western edge of the atoll, close to Motu Taeco. A string of *motu* and coral reefs have formed a natural pool on the edge of the main reef, a lagoon within a lagoon. Visitors go in large groups, but this only detracts slightly from the white sand, ruffled coconut trees, and lapis lazuli water. The lagoon isn't deep and offers safe snorkelling among the myriad little fish, but don't expect much from the coral. Feasting on freshly barbecued fish and feeding the sharks are usually on the itinerary.

### Sables Roses

Sables Roses (Pink Sand Beach), on the edge of the lagoon near Motu Vahituri, is two hours from Avatoru by boat. The sands contain foraminiferal deposits and coral residues that glow with reflected pink light in sunlight. Unfortunately much of the sand has eroded away due to large swells that have travelled through the lagoon. Still, this remote, less-visited site could be worth a visit for the voyage and isolation alone.

### Île aux Recifs

South of the atoll, an hour by boat from Avatoru, Île aux Recifs (Island of Reefs), also known as Motu Ai Ai, lies in water dotted with raised *feo* (coral outcrops), weathered shapes chiselled by erosion into petrified silhouettes. They're on the ocean side so you don't immediately see them when arriving by boat. They stretch for several hundred metres, with basins and channels that make superb natural swimming pools. There's a good *hoa* for swimming and a picturesque coconut grove by the beach, an ideal picnic spot. This is a great day trip, although it's quite popular so expect to see other groups.

### Otepipi

Otepipi is a *motu* on the southeastern side of the atoll, about 1½ hours away from Avatoru by boat. It once had a village, but some say a contagious illness forced the inhabitants to leave; others maintain that cyclones and the demands of copra production caused the inhabitants to abandon the area and regroup

closer to Avatoru and Tiputa. Only a church remains; religious retreats and pilgrimages are still made to the church periodically.

### ACTIVITIES

The main activity on Rangiroa is **diving** and sharks are the big attraction. The dive centres provides equipment, and are happy to have two of you share a 10-dive pass; you'll pay around 6000/53,000 CFP for one/10 dives. For beginners, 'the aquarium' is an ideal spot to take a first dive: it's shallow, right in Tiputa Pass and thick with fish. Other sites include Nuhi Nuhi, Avatoru Pass, Mahuta and the stunning Les Faïlles; see p59 for details. Dive centres include:

**Blue Dolphins** (☎ /fax 96 03 01; www.bluedolphins.com; Hotel Kia Ora)

**Paradive** (☎ 96 05 55; www.chez.com/paradive)

**Raie Manta Club** (☎ 96 84 80; http://raiemantaclub.free.fr; Avatoru)

**Six Passengers** (☎ /fax 96 02 60; www.the6passengers.com) About 500m east of Hotel Kia Ora.

**Topdive** (☎ /fax 96 05 60; www.topdive.com) About 300m from Hotel Kia Ora.

**Snorkelling**, with a guide or independently, is a great way to visit the lagoon. You can just grab a snorkel and splash around near your hotel or guesthouse (many of which provide snorkelling gear for guests). For guides, expect to pay around 4500 CFP for a three-hour snorkelling trip through the passes.

### TOURS

The lagoon tour used to be all there was to do in Rangiroa – if you weren't diving, that is. It's no longer the case. With the variety of options you can easily choose to stay busy on this atoll if that's what you are after.

The huge Rangiroa atoll contains sights well worth a day's excursion by boat. Organised tours tend to be the easiest and cheapest way of exploring the area and, if you happen upon a nice group, make for a wonderful day. Most tours are to the opposite side of the lagoon from Avatoru, which takes at least an hour to cross; uncomfortable if you don't have sea legs and the sea is rough. Usually a minimum of four to six people is required, but in July and August it can be so busy that you're either in an uncomfortably large group or have trouble getting a place at all.

Bring sunscreen, sunglasses, waterproof sandals, a swimsuit and a change of clothes;

snorkelling gear can be arranged, although you may have to pay for this. Full-day tours generally depart at 8.30am and return at 4pm and include a picnic or barbecue. It's worth trying to bargain for a reduced price for the kids, although many operators will not budge on this. In cases of bad weather or heavy winds, excursions may be cancelled.

Trips to the Lagon Bleu and Île aux Recifs cost around 7500 CFP, including a picnic lunch. An excursion to Sables Roses usually costs a rather hefty 10,000 CFP. Companies are heading less and less to the Lagon Vert but if you ask around, you'll surely find someone willing to take you.

**Gauguin's Pearl** (☎ 93 11 30; Vaimaité) Free tours are offered of the pearl farm directly next to the boutique. You can be picked up for free from your place of lodging.

**Moerani Excursions** (☎ 96 84 48; tours 2500 CFP)

Experience the lagoon without getting your feet wet on this glass-bottomed boat tour.

**Pa'ati Excursion** (☎ 96 02 57) This is the same trip as Tereve Tane et Vahine, without the coconuts but with dolphin-watching or shark-feeding.

**Tatahi Rangiroa** (☎ 96 02 27, 23 69 52; tatahi.fishing@mail.pf) Fishing of every sort is available here, from the adrenalin pumped chase of *mahi mahi* to fly fishing for the elusive bone fish.

**Tereve Tane et Vahine** (☎ 96 82 51) Take a boat trip to the Île aux Recifs along with a barbecue picnic and a lesson in weaving palm fronds and making coconut milk.

**Vin de Tahiti** (☎ 96 04 70; www.vindetahiti.pf; tours per half/full day per person 6000/9600 CFP) This new and unusual option offers tours of striking vineyards, lunch and swimming in the emerald lagoon at Les Fare de Tikihoa and tastings back at the wine cave. Take home a bottle of wine from 4000 CFP. Without lunch and lagoon visit this is only a half-day tour. Children are half price.

### SLEEPING

There's plenty of charm among the *pensions* scattered along the edge of the lagoon, on the Avatoru string of islets. The few more sumptuous places tend to be less personal and more in the Bora Bora mould. Staying in a *pension* is a nice way to get a glimpse into Paumotu culture, eat some delicious local food and meet other travellers. Speaking a little French will greatly enhance the whole experience (assuming you haven't mastered Tahitian, which would be even better!).

Prices quoted here include all the relevant taxes; these taxes seem to rise fairly regularly, and many hotels and *pensions* quote their prices *hors taxe* (not including

### ALL ABOARD

There are sharks aplenty in this region, and they are an obvious tourist attraction. Some tour operators even haul sharks up on board for visitors to see up close.

The feeding of sharks and rays, which is a tourist ploy across French Polynesia, is concerning because it disrupts the delicate balance of the food chain. In simple terms, it creates an association between humans and food which creates dangers for local fisherman as well as anyone diving or snorkelling away from a group. Dragging a shark aboard for a closer look, before chucking the poor brute back into the ocean, is disruptive and cruel to say the least.

Expressing your distaste for this practice is the only way to curb it: as long as visitors are interested in stroking jaws, there'll be operators willing to facilitate this.

tax), so clarify exactly what the price (including all taxes) is when you book.

### Budget

Budget prices a *la Rangiroa* are still steep but most are with half or full board. Bungalows usually sleep two to three people, but a mattress or single bed can be added and there's generally at least one family bungalow available; children under 12 usually stay half price. Prices are usually calculated per person and may drop after a few days. Most places don't take credit cards. Budget places rarely have hot water, so brace yourself for refreshing showers. Although most places don't officially take campers, many are happy to offer up a site when asked. Except where noted, prices here are per person.

**Pension Teina & Marie** (☎ 96 03 94; rangiroa@mail.pf; Reporepo; r with half board 6500-7500 CFP, camp sites 1000 CFP) Great views and a friendly, laid-back atmosphere make this one of the best options. You can watch the dolphins jump in the waves of Tiputa pass from the sun-drenched communal deck. Campers have use of kitchen and bathroom facilities.

**Pension Loyna** (☎ /fax 96 82 09; www.pensionloyna.fr.st; Avatoru; r with half board 6000-7500 CFP) Lovely, clean *pension*. Cheaper rooms are in the owner's home (shared bathroom); three rooms with bathroom and one two-bedroom family bungalow with bathroom are out back. The



ocean is 300m away, but the warm welcome and high standards make up for this.

**Pension Henri** (☎ /fax 96 82 67; pensionhenri@mail.pf; Avatoru; s/d/tr 6500/11000/14500 CFP) The rustic-chic bungalows and French-Tahitian owners give this place a uniquely young, hip vibe. All rooms are large, with a terrace, and the hot-water bungalow has an exceptionally nice coral-floor bathroom. This is the only pension facing the ocean side of the atoll. Half board is from 2000 CFP per person; hot water is 4000 CFP per person.

**Turiroa Village** (☎ /fax 96 04 27; pension.turiroa@mail.pf; Tevaiohie; bungalows with/without bathroom 8500/6500 CFP) Cheery, candy-pink pension. Family bungalows sleep four; there's one bungalow for two, with bathroom. There are equipped kitchens in some of the bungalows or a communal kitchen for guest use. Olga, who keeps the place shipshape, is a delight and a great cook if she's up to it. Half board is 2500 CFP per person.

**Rangiroa Lodge** (☎ 96 82 13; Avatoru; dm 2000 CFP, d with/without bathroom 5500/4500 CFP) Revitalised by new ownership, this spotless, lively backpackers is Rangiroa's cheapest option.

**Chez Glorine** (☎ 96 04 05; fax 96 03 58; http://glorine.dite.voila.fr; Reporepo; bungalows with half board 7500 CFP) On the lagoon corner of Tiputa pass, Chez Glorine is well situated for divers and snorkellers. The bungalows are a good 50m back from the lagoon but they are cool and shady. Lovers of fine food will enjoy the cooking here – Glorine has made a name as an adept chef, and can often be seen wielding a knife and some freshly caught fish. The meals are taken in a *fare potee* (open dining area) on the edge of the lagoon.

**Chez Lucien** (☎ 96 73 55; pensionlucien@mail.pf; bungalows with half board 7000 CFP) Run by grandma and grandpa, Chez Lucien eases you right into the tranquil lifestyle of Tiputa village. It's the only place to stay on the Tiputa side of the pass and graces a little white beach with a huge, 100-year-old tree that creates a perfect balance of shade and light. There are three spacious bungalows, one accommodating up to seven people, with mezzanine and bathroom. Return transfers to the airport cost 1000 CFP per person. If you stay for a minimum of three nights, Lucien will take you for a free picnic on a *motu*.

**Pension Herenui** (☎ 96 84 71; Avatoru; bungalows with half board 7000 CFP) Has only one spacious, light-filled bungalow that survived the swell

of 2003. At the time of writing, Victorine, the contagiously calm owner, was waiting for government aid to reconstruct her other two bungalows and build a breakerwater.

**Pension Bounty** (☎ /fax 96 05 22; www.pension-bounty.com; Reporepo; s/d per person 8000/6000 CFP) In a sun-scorched residential area about 300m from the water. Rooms are immaculate and have cooking facilities; there is access to Kia Ora beach. The newly planted, colourful garden will hopefully grow up to add a little shade. Half board is 3000 CFP per person.

**Chez Nanua** (☎ 96 83 88; Avatoru; bungalows with half board 4500-5500 CFP) A cheap, relaxed place with a handful of tiny thatched bungalows on stilts right on the beach. The communal bathrooms are rudimentary. You'll have to warm up to the guard dogs here but the family is charming.

**Aritini Village** (☎ 96 04 41; Tevaiohie; bungalows with half board 8000 CFP) Next door to Pension Martine, this place has nine comfortable but aging bungalows with thatched roofs. There is an unsightly empty swimming pool on the lagoon's edge but other than that the garden is shady and pleasant.

**Chez Cécile** (☎ 96 05 06; Vaimate; s/d with half board 7000/8500 CFP) Next to the new *gendarmierie*, in a lovely garden setting. Large bungalows have spacious terraces. Credit cards accepted.

**Pension Martine** (☎ 96 02 53; pension.martine@mail.pf; Tevaiohie; r with half board 7500-8500 CFP) Needs a coat of paint but retains a real Paumotu charm. The owners also run a pearl farm and have a small pearl boutique across the street from the pension. Credit cards accepted.

### Midrange

You can pay with a credit card in most of the midrange bracket.

**Les Fare de Tikihoa** (☎ 73 80 13, 73 63 10; www.fare-tikihoa.pf; s/d 12,000/16,000 CFP) All alone on a white-sand *motu*, a 45-minute boat ride from the airport, the artistic, local-style architecture of this place makes you really feel away from it all – and you are! Full board per person is 6500 CFP. The meals here, a mixture of French and Polynesian, are divine. The only trouble with all the isolation? You'll need plenty of mosquito repellent.

**Le Merou Bleu** (☎ 79 16 82; http://le-merou-bleu.france.com in French; Avatoru; d with half board 22,000-26,000 CFP) Le Merou Bleu is the only option overlooking Avatoru pass, and facing views of perfect sunsets. This place is beautifully

decorated with Polynesian eclectic style. The spacious bungalows are nestled in a lush, flowery garden and the French-inspired food is fabulous. Prices are per double, not per person. No credit cards are accepted.

**Pension Tuanake** (☎ 96 04 45; tuanake@mail.pf; Vaimate; s/d/tr with half board 10,500/16,000/21,000 CFP) A cross between a family-run place and a hotel. Two small bungalows are for three people and two bungalows for six people. Clean, organised, and set in a coconut plantation near the lagoon. The food is great.

**Raira Lagon** (☎ 96 04 23; rairalag@mail.pf; Tevaiohie; bungalows with half board per person 11,000 CFP) Feeling even less family-run than Pension Tuanake but still retaining a friendly vibe, this place has 10 fan-cooled bungalows with bathroom. The restaurant balcony faces the lagoon and serves large, buffet-style breakfasts in lieu of the usual bread and coffee and has reasonably priced cocktails in the evening.

**Les Relais de Josephine** (☎ /fax 96 02 00; relais.josephine@mail.pf; Reporepo; s/d with half board per person 15,000/19,000 CFP) So luxurious that it could just about squeeze into the top-end listings. Les Relais is a very French interpretation of the Polynesian *pension*, and is excellent value for money by local standards. We have received mixed reports about the welcome English-speaking guests have received here.

### Top End

**Hotel Kia Ora** (☎ 96 03 84; www.hotelkiaora.com; Reporepo; bungalows 35,000-72,000 CFP; 🚗) The biggest resort in the Tuamotus and the priciest option on Rangiroa; undeniably plush. It has an old-school feel to it: the lounge looks like someplace your grandpa liked to smoke cigars and the small pool is lined with '80s-style blue tiles. Bungalows are dotted around a magnificent coconut plantation situated on the edge of the lagoon. There's a white-sand beach, a restaurant and bar on stilts and a few little craft stalls. Any activity available on the island can be arranged.

**Kia Ora Sauvage** (☎ 96 03 84; www.hotelkiaora.com; bungalows with full board per person 45,000 CFP) This is Hotel Kia Ora's 'savage' sister, on Motu Avearahi, about an hour by boat. The setting is stunning and there's a maximum of 10 guests at any time. Price includes return boat transfers and full board, which is compulsory; minimum stay of two nights.

**Novotel Rangiroa Beach Resort** (☎ 86 66 66; www.novotel.com; Tevaiohie; r 28,000 CFP, bungalows

32,000-34,000 CFP) Part of the Sofitel chain; a step down from the luxury of the Kia Ora but a notch above the midrange group. Bungalows are dull but large, there is nice little pond filled with lily flowers and there's also a good swimming beach. The food has not received rave reviews. Round-trip airport transfers are 1700 CFP per person.

### EATING

Given the lack of restaurants on Rangiroa, most visitors opt for half board at their *pension*. Meals are invariably based around freshly caught fish, so those who don't eat fish should come prepared to look after themselves! A standard evening meal at a pension would normally be *poisson cru* (raw fish), usually served with carrot, cucumber and onion, and fresh bread, or grilled or fried fish served with rice. The meal is finished off with a light cake or fresh fruit if it's available. Breakfast tends to be French-style, with fresh bread, butter and jam and a bowl of coffee or tea as the dipping agent.

Even when the food is very good it can become monotonous when you're eating at the same place with the same people every day; full board is even more constricting.

Some guesthouses are renowned for their excellent cooking and accept casual diners, provided there is space and you have booked in advance. (However, transport is not always available, which may render the whole thing impossible; the streets are not lit at night, so even the smallest distances can be unmanageable.) This is true for Chez Glorine, Pension Teina & Marie, Raira Lagon, Pension Tuanake, Relais de Josephine and Chez Lucien. Most pensions charge 2500 CFP for a set menu of fish, rice, bread and a light dessert, without drinks.

All restaurants and *snacks* are open lunch and dinner unless otherwise noted; hotel restaurants are open for breakfast as well.

### Restaurants

**Vaimario** (☎ 96 05 96; Tevaiohie; mains 2000-2900 CFP) Feast on anything from pizza to grilled fish. Free transfers are offered from anywhere in the village of Avatoru, which runs from Avatoru to Tiputa pass.

**Hotel Kia Ora** (☎ 96 03 84; Reporepo; appetisers 900-1500 CFP, mains 2500-4000 CFP) As fancy as Rangiroan cuisine gets. The over-water restaurant and bar is lovely. Lunch (appetisers 1300

to 1600 CFP, mains 1400 to 2400 CFP) is cheaper than the evening version. Wednesday and Sunday there's a buffet and Polynesian dance performance (5000 CFP).

**Le Kai Kai Restaurant** (☎ 96 03 39; Tevaiohie; appetisers 700-1400 CFP, mains 1200-2000 CFP) French garden restaurant, with simple lunch and more elaborate dinner menus including a set option (there's a set menu for children). Evening cocktails are the cheapest on the island; there's an Internet café. Transfers from your Avatoru *pension* or hotel are free.

**Novotel Rangiroa Beach Resort** (☎ /86 66 66; set lunch/dinner 2900/4300 CFP, mains 1900-2600 CFP) French cooking using local products creates an appetising menu, although for the price the meals are a bit disappointing.

### Cafés & Snack Bars

Each village has a few *snacks*; you can eat in or order takeaway. There's also a café at the airport that opens before every flight.

**Lagon Burger** (☎ 96 04 12; Avatoru; salads & mains 400-1100 CFP) Looks like nothing from outside but this economical *snack* has a French chef serving succulent fish and burgers as well as fantastic salads. Try the *Salade Lagon* with grilled fish or the *mahi mahi* sashimi with cream sauce. Everything is well presented and the owner (who had a blue mohawk at the time of writing) plays an interesting variety of international music.

**Pizzeria Filipo** (☎ 73 76 20; Avatoru; appetisers 650-1200 CFP, pizzas 1000-1500 CFP) Here's a great little place right near Rangiroa Lodge. The food is delicious (try the daily specials for around 1200 CFP); the large pizzas are huge, and come served on wonderful plates.

**Chez Auguste et Antoinette** (☎ 96 85 01; Avatoru; sandwiches 300-450 CFP, mains 900-1200 CFP) Doesn't have the most glamorous of settings, but does have great, fresh food. The *poisson cru* is prepared in the Chinese style with lots of lime and vinegar dressing, and it is delicious; the other Chinese dishes, such as chow mein (vegetarian on request), are also very good.

**Le Relley Ohotu** (Reporepo; burgers 400-800 CFP, mains 800-1100 CFP) A buzzing *snack* opposite Chez Glorine, overlooking the water. The servings are generous.

### Self-Catering

Self-catering on Rangiroa is quite possible, although if you try to buy fish people will laugh and tell you to go fishing; good luck

also to anyone trying to track down fresh fruit and veggies (the range is remarkably limited). Avatoru has a few supermarkets, the best being **Magasin Daniel** (☎ closed 11.45am-2.30pm), which is near the post office. There are a few little grocery stores in sleepy Tiputa where you can buy provisions. Supermarkets are generally open Monday to Saturday, and close for lunch.

### DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The roosters might make a racket all night long, but most people are well and truly slumbering by 10.30pm.

Unless you count chatting to locals over an early, simple dinner, the only island entertainment is the twice-weekly buffet with traditional dance organised by Hotel Kia Ora. It's possible to skip the buffet and just have a drink in the bar if you want to catch the entertainment. The bar here, Bar Te Miki Miki, closes at 11pm.

### SHOPPING

Shopaholics be warned: you won't get much of a fix on Rangiroa. There is an assortment of pearl boutiques and souvenir shops scattered along the road between Avatoru and Tiputa pass, which sell more or less the same things. The following establishments offer goods or services that are unique.

*Pret a porter* or made-to-order hand-painted *pareu* depict underwater scenes of turtles, dolphins and other marine life at Ocean Passion's little shack across from Vaimario restaurant. Prices range from 4000 to 10000 CFP and special orders take 24 hours.

Rene Vaiaanu, who is half Marquesan and half German, is a true professional with an immaculate, well-ventilated salon for tattoos and piercings, **Anui Tattoo** (☎ 27 27 55; www.anuitattoo.com). He specialises in both traditional Marquesan and Western-style designs that start from 5000 CFP.

Te Vahine Avatoru is a little co-operative market of the women artisans of Avatoru and sells shells, *pareu* (sarong-like garments) and sewn items. It's right on the quay.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

The airport is smack in between Avatoru (to the west) and Tiputa (to the east). **Air Tahiti** (☎ 93 11 00, 96 05 77; ✈ 7.30am-12.30pm &

1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) has an office inside the airport *fare*. Tickets can be purchased (with credit cards) and flights can be reconfirmed here (but don't expect to find anyone here over lunch).

Rangiroa is an important link for air and sea communication and is connected by air to Tahiti, Bora Bora, the Marquesas and other atolls in the Tuamotus. There are several flights daily between Pape'ete and Rangiroa (one hour). There is also a weekly flight from Rangiroa to Nuku Hiva (Marquesas).

One-way fares on offer include Pape'ete-Rangiroa 15,300 CFP, Bora Bora-Rangiroa 23,000 CFP, Rangiroa-Tikehau 5200 CFP, Rangiroa-Manihi 1000 CFP (see p260 for more details).

#### Boat

The *Dory*, *Mareva Nui*, *Vai-Aito*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella* and *Rairoa Nui* all serve Rangiroa; the *Aranui* stops on Rangiroa on its way back from the Marquesas.

For details, see p263.

### GETTING AROUND

Getting around Rangiroa is a fairly haphazard affair. There's no public transport, and there's not really enough traffic to rely on hitchhiking (which is never entirely safe, although you'd be unlikely to run into problems on Rangiroa).

A sealed road runs the 10km from Avatoru village at the western end of the string of islets to the Tiputa Pass, located at the eastern extremity. The road is not lit at night, which makes getting around without a car in the evenings virtually impossible. Hire a bicycle or a scooter (as it's hardly worth getting a car) for getting around during the day, or resign yourself to not moving much!

There are regular boats (1000 CFP return) that cross the pass separating the Avatoru islets from Tiputa village; taking a bicycle over costs 500 CFP extra.

### To/From the Airport

If you have booked accommodation, your hosts will be at the airport to welcome you. If your *pension* is near the hotel, transfers will probably be free; places further away tend to charge (ask when you book). Your only other option is to hitch.

### Rentals

**Europcar** (☎ 96 03 28; Vaimate; ✈ 7.30am-6pm) is east of Avatoru and rents cars from 6300/7350 CFP for a half/full day; 'fun cars', those curious little three-wheeler devices, rent for 5500/6500 CFP; and scooters cost 4350/5350 CFP. Credit cards are accepted. Several guesthouses work with Europcar and have bicycles and scooters at the same rates.

**Chez Hélène** (☎ 96 82 84; Avatoru; ✈ 7.30am-6pm) rents out bicycles for 600/1200 CFP per half/full day; prices drop to 900 CFP a day after the first day.

**Location Arenahio** (☎ 96 82 45; ✈ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat), about 800m east of Avatoru village, hires out cars for 6200/8400 CFP for a half/full day; scooters are 4200/5200 CFP and bicycles 700/1300 CFP. Credit cards are accepted.

Hotel Kia Ora also rents out bicycles and scooters.

## NORTHERN TUAMOTUS

Rangiroa might be the main tourist destination in the Tuamotus, but other atolls in the north and centre of the archipelago are developing a tourist infrastructure that makes visiting them relatively easy. Expect a more wild and authentic experience in this group.

The northern group includes Makatea, southwest of Rangiroa; Tikehau and Mataiva in the west; and Manihi and Ahe in the northeast.

To the east are Takaroa and Takapoto, and to the southeast the giant Fakarava competes in size with Rangiroa. Anaa is a small atoll further south and Makemo is just east from here.

### MAKATEA

pop 84 / area 30 sq km

The only high island in the Tuamotus, Makatea is a bean-shaped plateau with 80m-high cliffs forming its outer edge. These cliffs used to be a barrier reef and the plateau was once the basin of a lagoon, where vast amounts of phosphate accumulated (for more information see the boxed text, p190). The atoll may have emerged as an indirect consequence of the uplifting of Tahiti.

## THE RISE & FALL OF MAKATEA

It's difficult to imagine an island in the Tuamotus covered in mining installations with more than 100 workers, but for 50 years Makatea made French Polynesia an industrial centre.

The presence of phosphate was noted at the end of the 19th century and the Compagnie Française des Phosphates d'Océanie (CFPO) was created in 1908 to exploit the deposit. Infrastructure appeared from nowhere. It included industrial equipment (including a rail network), houses, schools, a cinema, places of worship and shops. Until the early 1950s labour came largely from Asia.

With 3071 inhabitants in 1962, Makatea was the most populated island in the Tuamotus. The main town, Vaitepaua, mushroomed like a boomtown in a gold rush. Makatea phosphate became the core of the French Polynesian economy. From 12,000 tonnes in 1911, the extraction rate rose to 251,000 tonnes in 1929 and 400,000 tonnes in 1960, a record year. Until WWII, exports were mainly to Japan, New Zealand and Australia.

By 1966, when the reserves were depleted, nearly 11 million tonnes of phosphate had been torn from the island. In the space of a few weeks, the workers packed everything up and Vaitepaua became a ghost town. Today only a few people live in Moumu, making their living from copra production and the sale of *kaveu* (coconut crabs) to passing tuna boats.

## TIKEHAU

pop 406 / lagoon area 461 sq km

Tikehau is almost too good to be true. Time has eroded it away into sweeping, twisting *motu* of white and pink sands that engulf little bays and forgotten nooks. The lagoon is as blue as any you'll find in French Polynesia and the pass houses an exceptional abundance of fish.

The islanders are grouped in the village of Tuherahera, in the southwest of the atoll, leaving the majority of the paradisaical *motu* untouched. The people's livelihood is copra production, fishing and, increasingly, tourism. Frequent connections by plane

and boat to Tahiti allow the transport of fresh fish to the markets of Pape'ete.

The roughly oval-shaped atoll is 26km on its longest axis. It's cut by Tuheiva Pass in the west and by more than 100 *hoa*. A number of island-like *motu* dot Tikehau's lagoon.

## Information

There is no bank on Tikehau. The Tuherahera post office has fax facilities and sells phonecards. There is a card-operated telephone booth in front of the post office. The infirmary in Tuherahera adjoins the *mairie* (town hall).

## Sights & Activities

Tuherahera is a pretty and prosperous village, made colourful by rows of *uru* (breadfruit), coconut trees, bougainvillea and hibiscus. The village has several places of worship including Catholic, Sanito, Seventh-Day Adventist and Protestant churches.

**Lagoon excursions** allow visitors to explore the magnificent lagoon and its isolated *motu*. Regular stops include a visit to the rocky **Motu Puarua** (Île aux Oiseaux or Bird Island) where several species of ground-nesting birds including brown noddies and *uaau* (red-footed boobies) are easily spotted. A less common but interesting stop is at **Île de Eden**, an establishment of the Church of the New Testament, which has done a commendable job of creating a vibrant, organic garden in the infertile sands

of its superb *motu* – they also have a fish park filled with blue jacks and *uluu*. A last stop is usually a barbecue picnic on one of many idyllic *motu*. **Pensions** generally organise excursions, sometimes through an outside operator, and trips cost from 6500 to 7500 CFP per person.

**Tuheiva Pass**, to the west of the atoll, about 30 minutes by boat from Tuherahera village, is another fantastic site that is worth a visit. There is a small village of fishermen who have fish parks that you can visit with a mask and snorkel. Ask at your *pension* about trips, which cost 3500 to 5000 CFP.

**Scuba diving** in the magnificent Tuheiva Pass is a great reason for a visit to Tikehau. There are also great drop-offs at Le Trou aux Requins and Maama; see p60 for details about sites. Dive centres include **Raie Manta Club** (☎/fax 96 22 53; <http://raiemantaclub.free.fr>) at Tikehau Village, and **Tikehau Blue Nui** (☎/fax 96 22 40, ☎ 96 23 00; [www.blunui.com](http://www.blunui.com)) at Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort.

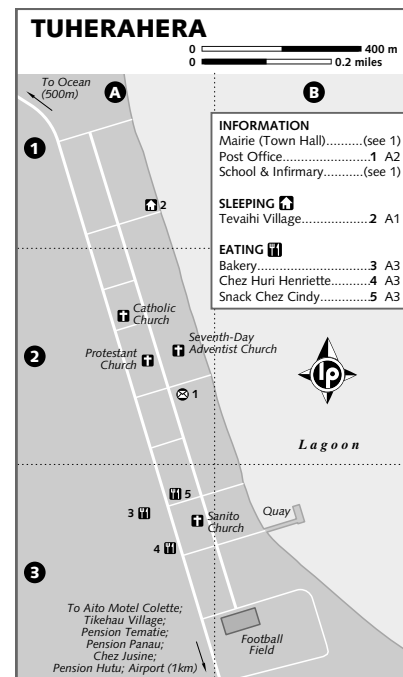
## Sleeping

All *pensions* on Tikehau are on white-sand beaches on the lagoon side of the atoll. Every option except the only top-end establishment, are near the village and airport. Prices quoted are per person per day and include transfers to the airport as well as taxes.

**Pension Panau** (☎/fax 96 22 99; bungalows 4000 CFP, with half/full board 6000/7000 CFP) This is one of the best-value places on Tikehau. It's simple and immaculate, with a welcoming atmosphere and a band of happy dogs. Bungalows on the shady beach are equipped with fan and mosquito nets.

**Pension Hotu** (☎/fax 96 22 89; bungalows 4000 CFP, with half/full board 7000/8500 CFP) On one of the nicest stretches of beach, this friendly, family-run place has five spacious and clean bungalows all with bathroom, fan and thatched roof. Kayaks and mineral water are free.

**Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort** (☎ 96 23 00; [www.pearlresorts.com](http://www.pearlresorts.com); bungalows 48,000-83,000 CFP; 🏖️) This majestic resort is the perfect place for a luxury version of Robinson Crusoe, with white-sand beaches, coconut palms, hammocks and crystal-clear waters. The hotel has 16 over-water bungalows and 14 beach bungalows, a small pool, a restaurant and a bar. The more expensive bungalows, the



furthest east, may get noise from the generator if the wind blows in the wrong direction. There are shuttle boats to the village.

**Tikehau Village** (☎ 96 22 86; bungalows with half/full board 7500/9000 CFP) Tikehau's biggest *pension* has six double and three four-to-six-person bungalows all with bathroom and fans. The beach here is the most spacious on the *motu* but you'll have to share it with the other guests of this popular place. Meals featuring local specialties are served in a large *fare potee* with a bar and occasionally there is live music at night. There are kayaks for guests' use. This place accepts credit cards.

**Pension Tematie** (☎/fax 96 22 65; bungalows 5500 CFP, with half/full board 8500/11,000 CFP) Tastefully designed hexagonal bungalows sit in a shady garden on a small beach, and are very clean. This place is right next to the airport.

**Kahaia Beach** (☎ 96 22 77; fax 96 22 81; bungalows with half board 7500 CFP) Kahaia Beach has the most private, idyllic setting (it's on its own *motu*) but the overpriced bungalows are in



serious need of repair. It's a local atmosphere; ask Peta to get out his guitar one night and you might end up with a free ukulele lesson. You can camp here but there are no real facilities.

**Tevaihi Village** (☎/fax 96 22 04; bungalows with half board 8500 CFP) This is the only *pension* in the village and Tikehau's newest addition. The four plain bungalows have attached bathroom and TV (RFO only). The beach isn't as nice here as at the other options. Credit cards are accepted.

**Chez Justine** (☎ 96 22 87, 72 02 44; bungalows 4000 CFP, with half/full board 7000/8500 CFP) Large, aging bungalows with bathroom, mosquito screens, fan and terrace are in a spartan garden and look out onto a sunny beach. Credit cards are accepted.

**Aito Motel Colette** (☎ 96 22 47, 74 85 77; fax 96 23 07; bungalows with half/full board 8000/10,000 CFP) Stylish, wooden bungalows on stilts grace an attractive beach with a shady sitting area. All have an attached bathroom and the eating area is in a larger house also overlooking the beach. The welcome here is quite cool and the dogs are unfriendlier still.

## Eating

Chez Huri Henriette is a general supply and grocery store, and on certain days of the week you can get coconut pastries from the village's only *boulangerie* a few doors down. **Snack Chez Cindy** (☎ 96 22 67; mains 700-1200 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner), the only snack bar in town, is a busy place serving good *poisson cru*, steak frites, chow mein and burgers.

## Getting There & Away

The airport is about 1km east of the village entrance. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 96 22 66) has seven flights a week between Pape'ete and Tikehau, direct or via Rangiroa. There are also several flights between Bora Bora and Tikehau, direct or via Rangiroa. Pape'ete-Tikehau costs 15,300 CFP, Tikehau-Rangiroa 5200 CFP and Bora Bora-Tikehau 23,000 CFP.

The *Mareva Nui*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Dory* and *Vai-Aito* stop at Tikehau.

## Getting Around

A 10km track goes around Tuherahera, and passes by the airport. Bicycles are sometimes free at your *pension* or they can be hired (500/1000 CFP per half/full day) from Pension Justine (nonguests welcome).

## MATAIVA

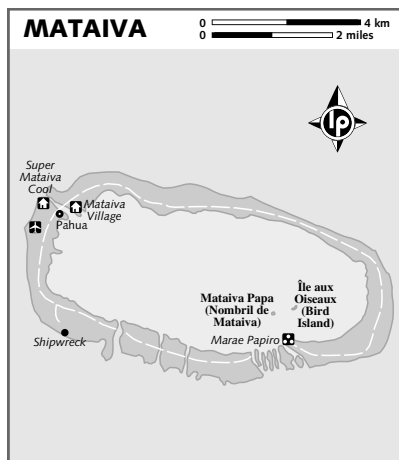
pop 235 / lagoon area 25 sq km

Despite the limited tourist infrastructure, this tiny atoll provides a delightful escape. There are superb and easily accessible beaches, numerous snorkelling spots, lots of fish and one of the few noteworthy archaeological sites in the Tuamotus. Air Tahiti flights make it possible to spend a pleasant weekend here.

The structure of the Mataiva lagoon gives it a particular appearance: the coral constructions at the surface of the water create dividing walls 50m to 300m wide, forming about 70 basins with a maximum depth of 10m. Seen from a plane, the play of light on this underwater tessellation forms a mosaic of green.

Plans to mine the lagoon substratum, which contains about 70 separate phosphate deposits, have been halted due to the community's determined opposition. The accessible part is estimated to contain 12 million tonnes, enough for 10 to 15 years of mining. Large-scale industrial activity in such a restricted space would undoubtedly cause ecological problems but that may not be enough reason for the Tahitian government to stop pushing for mining rights.

The village of Pahua is divided by a pass a few metres wide and no deeper than 1.5m, suitable only for very small boats. A bridge spans the pass and links the two parts of the village.



## Information

There is no bank on the atoll. Pahua has two shops and a post office, south of the bridge. The post office has a fax service and sells phonecards. There are card-operated telephone booths next to the post office and at the airport.

## Sights & Activities

**Marae Papiro** is a well-kept *marae* on the edge of a *hoa*, about 14km from the village. In the centre of this *marae*, you can see the stone seat from which, according to legend, the giant Tu guarded the pass against invasion. In the south, along the edge of the lagoon, there are many fine **beaches**. Take your mask and fins along.

**Île aux Oiseaux** (Bird Island), to the east of the lagoon, is a crescent-shaped coral spit covered in small shrubs. It is a favourite nesting place for *oio*, *tara* and red-footed boobies.

Don't miss the chance to accompany fishermen to trap fish in one of the numerous **fish parks** around the lagoon and the pass. It's exciting to watch the clever way the Paumotu people manage the parks. Sorted, scaled and gutted, the fish are sold in the village.

## Sleeping & Eating

The people of Pahua hope that an increasing number of tourists will dissuade the government from setting up drilling sites on the lagoon. The two *pensions* are very similar; only the locations differ. Prices are per person per day and include taxes and airport transfers.

**Mataiva Village** (☎ 96 32 33; fax 96 32 95; camp sites 1200 CFP, bungalows with half/full board 6200/8200 CFP) This option is north of the pass, 150m from the bridge and by the lagoon. There are five clean and comfortable two-person bungalows with bathroom (cold water only). This is one of the few places in the Tuamotus where you can camp; there are bathroom facilities for campers.

**Super Mataiva Cool** (☎ 96 32 53; bungalows with half board 6500 CFP) South of the bridge and on the edge of the pass, this place is run by the friendly Huri family. There are four basic but inviting units with bathroom (cold water only). Sandwiches are available for 250 CFP.

Apart from the *pensions* there's really nowhere to eat, although there are several small shops with basic food supplies.

## Getting There & Away

Mataiva is 350km northeast of Tahiti and 100km west of Rangiroa.

The proprietor of the Mataiva Village pension is the local representative of **Air Tahiti** (☎ 96 32 48). There are two Pape'ete-Mataiva flights (15,300 CFP one way) a week, usually on Thursday and Sunday. Return flights depart on the same days.

Mataiva is on the routes of the *Mareva Nui* and *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*.

## Getting Around

A track goes almost all the way around the island, in the middle of the coconut plantation. The northern track finishes at Marae Papiro, about 14km away. The southern track is about 10km long.

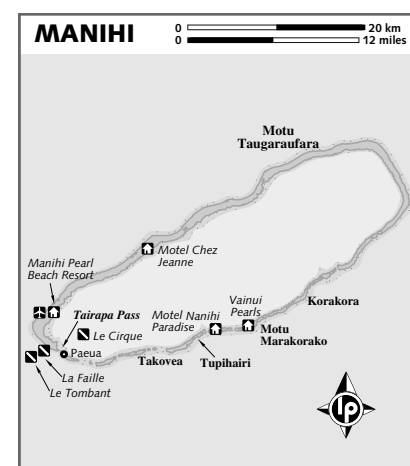
Cycling is an excellent way of getting to Marae Papiro. The *pensions* rent bicycles for about 1000 CFP per day.

The *pensions* organise trips to the various sites by motor boat and by car, costing about 3000 CFP for the day, including a picnic.

## MANIHI

pop 793 / lagoon area 192 sq km

The most accessible and developed atoll in the northern Tuamotus, Manihi once had an international reputation for pearl production. After pearl prices crashed around 2003, a large number of farms went out of business but the lagoon is still scattered with a few family-run and industrial pearl farms. Manihi is now eclipsed by its quiet



neighbour Ahe in terms of numbers of pearls produced but it's still a great place to look for the pearl of your dreams.

Shaped like an ellipse, the atoll is 28km long and 8km wide, with only one opening, the Tairapa Pass in the southwest. The dream-like beauty of the lagoon and its fecund pass were recognised early on and an international hotel was built in 1977. The best beaches and picnic spots are at the south of the lagoon where white sand, ruffled palms and sapphire waters make for the perfect escape.

### Information

There is no bank on the atoll, but the Manihi Pearl Beach Resort (right) and Libre Service Jean-Marie (opposite) may be able to change money in emergencies. The post office is in Paeua village opposite the marina. There are card-operated telephone booths at the post office, the airport, Manihi Pearl Beach Resort and scattered throughout the village. Paeua also has an infirmary.

### Sights & Activities

At some point, someone went overboard with the concrete and now Paeua village feels as if it's perched on a cement block. A few splashes of colour from bougainvillea and hibiscus add some charm and there is an airy, shaded sitting area where the pass meets the village.

The first **pearl farm** was set up on Manihi in 1968 and the atoll established itself early on as a principal centre for black pearls in the South Pacific (see the boxed text, opposite). It is interesting to visit a small family-run farm and a larger industrial farm if you get the chance. Avoid holiday periods, particularly Christmas, when the workers may be away.

All the *pensions* (except Chez Jeanne) and the hotel organise pearl-farm visits, usually combined with a picnic and village excursion, from around 3500 CFP. Nothing stops you from contacting the small farms directly. All you have to do is go to the village and ask; you may even find the pearl of your dreams at a very reasonable price.

There are a number of magnificent diving sites near the pass, including Tairapa Pass and Le Tombant. See p60 for details. The dive centre **Manihi Blue Nui** (☎/fax 96 42 17, ☎ 96 42 73; www.bluenui.com) operates from the Manihi Pearl Beach Resort.

### Sleeping

Manihi offers four distinct options, each on private *motu*, which cater to different levels of independence. All are great places for families and accept credit cards.

**Manihi Pearl Beach Resort** (☎ 96 42 73, in Pape'ete ☎ 43 16 10; fax 96 42 72, in Pape'ete fax 43 17 86; beach/over-water bungalows 31,000/67,000 CFP; 📶) This is a small and intimate top-end resort situated two minutes from the airport. The development sits in an airy coconut grove with white-sand beaches, a sea-water swimming pool and the magnificent lagoon. The restaurant has a beachfront terrace and there is also a bar overlooking the pool, the lagoon and the beach. Credit cards are accepted.

**Motel Nanihi Paradise** (☎ 96 41 54; www.nanihi.paradise.com; 1/2 rooms in bungalow without meals 13,000/19,500 CFP, whole bungalow with full board per person 13,000 CFP) On a tiny *motu*, this place has two clean, flower-bedecked two-bedroom bungalows with fully equipped kitchen and luminous, well-designed bathrooms. Excursions are offered to pearl farms (2300 CFP), there are lagoon tours (3500 CFP) and diving can be organised through Manihi Blue Nui dive centre. Round-trip airport transfers for stays under three nights are 2000 CFP.

**Motel Chez Jeanne** (☎ 96 42 90; motel.chez.jeanne@caramail.com; bungalows 10,000-14,000 CFP) Motel Chez Jeanne is situated on a crescent of white sand, about 9km northeast of the airport. One very private over-water bungalow for two people and two beachside bungalows for up to four people have attached bathrooms as well as fully equipped kitchens. It's possible to order breakfast (300 CFP) or dinner (1800 CFP); however, self-catering is encouraged. Prices include airport transfers, and diving and excursions can be organised through the nearby Manihi Pearl Beach Resort.

**Pension Vainui** (☎ 96 42 89; www.pensionvainui.com; r with full board per person 9000 CFP) East of the village and about a half-hour boat ride from the airport, this all-inclusive *pension* has eight very funky rooms with shared bath. There is not much privacy here but the site is one of the best on the atoll, the welcome is friendly and the food is copious and well prepared. Rates include well-organised daily excursions but airport transfers cost 1000 CFP round trip.

### Eating

Apart from the *pensions* and hotels, there are hardly any places to eat. In Paeua, there is a well-stocked shop, Libre Service Jean-Marie, near the marina and another smaller shop at the quay on the pass.

**Poe Rava Restaurant** (appetisers 900-2200 CFP, mains 1400-2800 CFP, desserts around 900 CFP), at Manihi Pearl Beach Resort, has extremely reasonable prices, especially for lunch. The setting by the swimming pool and lagoon is delightful.

### Getting There & Away

The representative of **Air Tahiti** (☎ 96 43 34, flight days ☎ 96 42 71) is in Paeua. On flight days the representative goes to the airport. There are almost daily flights between Pape'ete and Manihi, direct or via Ahe or Rangiroa. Pape'ete-Manihi costs 18500 CFP return and Rangiroa-Manihi 10000 CFP one way.

The *Mareva Nui*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Dory* and *Vai-Aito* service Manihi. Loading and unloading takes place at the Paeua quay in the pass.

### BLACK PEARL, JEWEL OF THE TUAMOTUS

The trump card of the Polynesian economy, the *poe rava* (black pearl) is the result of natural phenomena and complex human intervention. With rare exceptions, the Tahitian pearls of today's market are cultured. Humans have intervened in the natural process to create larger, rounder and higher-quality pearls than an oyster could create on its own. This culturing process takes approximately four years from the time the first oyster spawn are collected to the harvest of those oysters' first pearls. As well as time, pearl farming demands manual skill, technical know-how and hard work.

A cultured pearl is created by an operation called a graft. This is a highly specialised procedure in which a 6mm or larger shell ball (called a nucleus) is surgically inserted into the gonad of a host oyster. In the same incision, a small piece of mantle tissue from a different oyster is inserted so that it touches the nucleus. The mantle is the organ of an oyster that produces mother-of-pearl (nacre) to create an oyster's shell, allowing the animal to grow. In the gonad it activates a physiological process, and secretes mother-of-pearl around the shell nucleus. Because of nucleus rejection and mortality rates, a grafting operation typically has a 40% chance of creating a sellable pearl.

When a pearl is removed from an oyster at harvest time it is replaced by another, larger nucleus which will have approximately a 70% chance of becoming a pearl. Although an oyster could theoretically produce several pearls during its lifetime, lustre and skin quality are lowered with each graft, making it not lucrative for most farmers to graft more than a second or third time in the same oyster.

The captivating array of hues of the Tahitian black pearl are due to its host oyster, the *Pinctada margaritifera* or black-lipped oyster. The mother-of-pearl of this oyster's shell spreads from pearly white into an iridescent rainbow that ends in black at the shell's edge. A skilled grafter uses only the part of the mantle tissue that produces the most intense colours. The white pearls of Japan and Australia come from different species of oysters, incapable of producing such a wide range of colours.

Several factors determine a pearl's value: the diameter, shape, quality (absence of flaws or marks) and colour. The orient (the pearl's iridescent reflection) and lustre (mirror effect) also enter into the equation. Jewellers generally classify pearls by using two letters followed by a figure: a pearl classed as RB 12 is perfectly round (R), has a few pits or surface flaws, has good orient (B) and measures 12mm in diameter.

Less well known are keshi, which are pearls without a nucleus that are often formed like misshapen grains of rice. Usually keshi are the result of a faulty grafting operation where the nucleus is rejected but the graft tissue continues to produce mother-of-pearl. A keshi is what a natural, non-grafted Tahitian pearl would look like.

The shells of *Pinctada margaritifera* were used in ancient times to make ceremonial jewellery, fish hooks and lures, and were once much sought after by the European button industry. The overexploitation of natural beds and the decline of the button industry sounded the death knell in the 1960s, and the culture of oysters for pearl production took over, initially on Manihi. Nowadays pearl farms are found throughout the Tuamotu and Gambier archipelagos as well as on Ra'iatea, Taha'a and Huahine in the Society Islands.

## Getting Around

The only track on Manihi links Motu Taugaraufara to the airport – covering a total distance of only about 9km. Getting around the atoll requires some ingenuity and, for the most part, a boat. The Manihi Pearl Beach Resort rents bicycles for around 1000 CFP per day but you can't get too far and the road is barren and shadeless.

The airport is at the southwestern end of the atoll, two minutes away from Manihi Pearl Beach Resort. To get to the village you have no choice but to hitch a boat ride from the quay, right next to the airport fare.

To get to the dive centre from the village, you can use the Manihi Pearl Beach Resort staff shuttle boat, which generally leaves the Paeua marina at about 6am and returns around 4pm. It'll take you for free. If they're going to the airport or the village, resort owners will generally take you across to the dive centre. For other points around the atoll, talk to boat owners in the village.

## AHE

pop 377 / lagoon area 170 sq km

Until recently, Ahe, 15km west of Manihi, was only known to pearl farmers and to yachties, who often pull in when sailing from the Marquesas. Those who want to head off the beaten track will appreciate this atoll's quietness, idyllic scenery and gentle pace of life.

Ahe is 20km long by 10km wide and is entered by the Tiareroa (Long Flower) Pass in the west. The dusty, flower-filled village of Tenukupara is on the southwestern side. Most of the island's economy is based on pearl farming and today Ahe has quietly become the largest pearl-producing atoll in the Tuamotus.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Coco Perles** (☎/fax 96 44 08; www.cocoperle.com in French; bungalows with half/full board per person from 11,000/13,000 CFP) In a coconut plantation facing the lagoon, six well-decorated bungalows made with local materials are equipped with bathroom (cold water only), fan and mosquito screens. Excellent meals are served in a *fare* by the lagoon. Activities include snorkelling, kayaking and lounging. Excursions to the nearby bird *motu* or to a pearl farm cost 1000 CFP. Bring plenty of mosquito repellent.

**Chez Raita** (☎/fax 96 44 53; pension.raita@mail.pf; bungalows with half board per person 7500 CFP) Owned by the local fireman and his family, this friendly and charming pension is on a white-sand *motu* on the east side of the atoll. Picnic excursions to several other *motu* are offered from 2900 to 4700 CFP per person. Picnic lunch is 1000 CFP.

## Getting There & Away

Air Tahiti flies to Ahe five times weekly, departing from Pape'ete; flights are direct or via Manihi. From Pape'ete to Ahe costs 17,200 CFP.

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella, Mareva Nui, Dory* and *Vai-Aito* service Ahe.

## TAKAROA

pop 993 / lagoon area 113 sq km

First seen by European eyes in 1616 by Le Maire, Takaraoa (literally, Long Chin) and its close neighbour, Takapoto, form a pair. Marine maps have persisted in calling them the King George Islands ever since Byron's visit in 1765.

Takaraoa is, along with Manihi and Tepoto, one of the northernmost islands in the Tuamotus. The atoll is 27km long by 6km wide and has only one pass, Teauonae, in the southwest. The only village, Teavaroa, is on the edge of the pass. Takaraoa's most singular feature is that the population is 90% Mormon; consequently alcohol is prohibited.

## Information

There is no bank on Takaraoa. The post office, near the bridge at the end of the village and next to the hospital, has fax facilities and phonocards. There's a card-operated public telephone in front of the *mairie* and a first-aid room beside the post office.

## Sights & Activities

Sleepy quietness emanates from the village of **Teavaroa**. Life takes a gently monotonous course, punctuated by fishing, copra production and work at the pearl farms. In the evening, young Paumotu gather near the pass and fish with long wooden rods to the sound of *kaina* (Polynesian) music. A meteorological station, the largest in the northern Tuamotus, is near the *mairie*.

Several major pearl producers have **pearl farms** on Takaraoa; there is also a host of small family businesses. Your hosts will

probably be delighted to show you their own pearl-grafting operation or will direct you towards other operators.

Takaraoa's lagoon has numerous coral formations near the beach that are wonderful for **snorkelling**. Ask village kids about accompanying them when they go **spear fishing**.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Pension Poe Rangī** (☎ 98 23 82; bungalows with full board per person 8000-9500 CFP) literally means 'pearls of heaven' and guests may think it's a good description. It's on the south side of the pass, 10 minutes by boat from the village. There are three bungalows with bathroom (cold water only), one with a kitchenette. Rates include airport transfers. Meals including local specialities are served in the *fare potee*, where there's also a bar. Various activities are offered, including kayaking (free), snorkelling, fishing trips, visits to pearl farms and various excursions on the atoll (3000 to 5000 CFP).

Apart from the *pension* there's really nowhere to eat. You will have to make do with basic supplies and canned food from the shop in the village.

## Getting There & Away

Takaraoa is 575km northeast of Pape'ete and less than 100km east of Manihi.

The airport is 2.5km northeast of the village. The office of the Air Tahiti representative is in the village. There are at least four weekly flights from Pape'ete to

Takaraoa (20100 CFP); the trip takes just over 1½ hours.

The *Mareva Nui* and *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella* stop at the atoll, drawing up to the quay in the pass.

## Getting Around

The only track goes from the village to Paul Yu's pearl farm, through the airport – about 10km.

## TAKAPOTO

pop 525 / lagoon area 102 sq km

Takapoto (literally, Short Chin) Atoll, 9km south of Takaraoa, was 'discovered' in 1616 by Le Maire. It's 20km long and 6km across at its widest point and doesn't have a pass. This atoll has been the subject of multidisciplinary studies since 1974 under the auspices of Unesco's Man & Biosphere (MAB) programme.

The second pearl farm in the Tuamotus was built on this atoll in the late 1960s. As this activity flourished in the beginning of the 1970s, the characteristic huts on stilts mushroomed along the shore. Apart from pearl production, the traditional practice of collecting young oysters in the protected lagoon continues. Copra production and fishing are a further source of income. With its pearl farms, beaches and archaeological remains, Takapoto could one day become a popular tourist attraction.

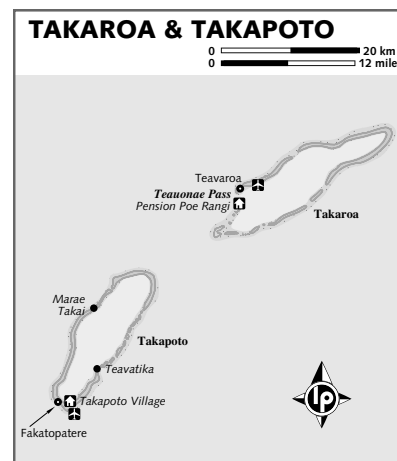
## Information

There is no bank on the atoll. The Fakatopere post office, next to the *mairie*, offers fax facilities and phonocards. There is a card-operated telephone in front of the *mairie*. The community clinic is also next to the post office.

## Sights & Activities

The little village of **Fakatopere**, on the southwest of the atoll and next to the airport, has a surprising appearance; it spreads across the entire width of the reef crown, and its streets (sand tracks, in fact) create a criss-cross pattern, with a Catholic church in the middle.

**Pearl farm** visits enable you to see the whole process of pearl production. You'll have to make an appointment with the pearl producers, from whom you can also buy pearls directly.





Takapoto has many idyllic and unspoiled spots, including quite a few white-sand beaches around the lagoon, which are easily accessible via the track. In the village itself, there is a small beach close to Takapoto Village (below).

**Marae Takai** is worth the long walk (approximately 15km). It consists of three small marae surrounded by vertical coral slabs. According to the owner of the land it could be a funeral site containing bones. Northwest of Fakatopatero, the marae is well hidden behind bushy vegetation. The walk will take you through magnificent coconut plantations and the lagoon shore is festooned with pearl farms and white-sand beaches.

To get to **Teavatika**, a fish park built of coral blocks in a *hoa*, follow the northeastern track to the end, about 9km. This public park is a rare example of its kind.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Takapoto Village** (☎ 98 65 44; bungalows with half board 6700 CFP) is a welcoming place on a small beach beside the lagoon, southeast of the village. There are two well-kept bungalows for two people with bathroom (cold water only). Mr Toti, the owner, is mayor of Takapoto. He has a thorough knowledge of the history of the Tuamotus and can tell you stories about the frightening raids of the Anaa warriors.

Apart from this *pension*, the options for food are limited to some modest shops.

## Getting There & Away

Takapoto is 560km northeast of Pape'ete and less than 100km east of Manihi.

The airfield is just a stone's throw to the southeast of the village. Air Tahiti has four weekly flights, connecting Pape'ete, Takarua and Takapoto. The Pape'ete–Takapoto flight costs 18,500 CFP and takes 1½ hours.

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella* and *Mareva Nui* stop at Takapoto. *Taporo IV* and *Aranui*, en route to the Marquesas, also stop here. Transfers of passengers and freight by *bonitier* (whaleboat) take place at the landing stage next to the shop called Magazine Nadine.

## Getting Around

There are two tracks from the village. The first one goes in a northeasterly direction for about 9km, to the fish park. The other goes

in a northwesterly direction. It's fine as far as Maraé Takai, 15km out, but then reaches a few *hoa* that are impossible to cross.

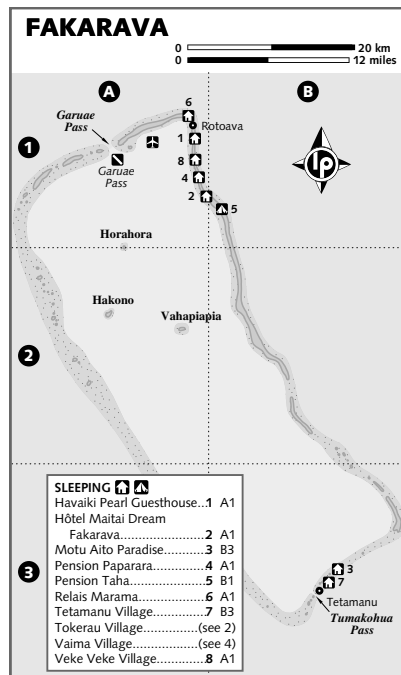
The ideal way to explore the atoll is by bicycle (500 CFP per day). Picnics on deserted *motu*, reached by speedboat, cost about 2000 CFP; ask at the *pension*.

## FAKARAVA

pop 712 / lagoon area 1121 sq km

Fakarava might be the second-largest atoll in the Tuamotus (after Rangiroa) but it can claim Garuae pass, in the north of the atoll, as the widest pass in all of French Polynesia. It also has a second pass, Tumakohua in the far south, that the locals reckon is the most beautiful in the Tuamotus. The atoll's particularly diverse ecosystem has made it a Unesco-protected area. The opening of a permanent airstrip in 1995, near the northern pass, has helped to open up this magnificent, very wild-feeling atoll.

Most of the population is gathered in **Rotoava** village at the northeastern end, 4km east of the airport. A handful of inhabitants also live in **Tetamanu** village, on the edge of



the southern pass. On the eastern edge, an uninterrupted reef strip stretches for 40km. The western side, on the other hand, has a few scattered *motu*.

## Activities

Visits to pearl farms and picnics on idyllic *motu* are the order of the day.

Fakarava has amazing diving in the Garuae and Tumakohua passes (see p61 for details) and dive operators here can organise day trips to pristine Toau. **Te Ava Nui** (☎ 98 42 50, 98 43 50, 79 69 50; www.divingfakarava.com; Rotoava) offers dives in the Garuae Pass, day trips to Toau and three-day packages to Tumakohua Pass. **Topdive** (☎ 98 43 23, 73 38 22; www.fakarava-diving-center.com), at Maitai Dream Fakarava, offers dives in the Garuae Pass, day trips to Toau and to Tumakohua Pass.

Fakarava is also on the programme for several dive-cruise operators and the *Aranui 3* (see the boxed text, p208).

## Sleeping

The following places are near or relatively near the northern pass.

**Havaiki Pearl Guesthouse** (☎ 93 40 16; www.havaiki.com; s/d with half board 13,000/19,000 CFP) About 1km from the village centre, this *pension* offers four bungalows on a small but magnificent beach. Each decorated bungalow has a double and single bed with mosquito nets. The food is tasty and plentiful and masks, snorkels and bikes are available for guests' use. The owner here offers an interesting activity he calls 'pearl fishing'; for 2500 CFP you can dive down and pick a grafted oyster, open it then keep the pearl you find inside. Airport transfers are free and credit cards are accepted. There's a three-night minimum stay.

**Relais Marama** (☎ /fax 98 42 51; camp sites per person 1800 CFP, s/d 4000/6000 CFP, bungalow s/d 4500/7000 CFP) On the ocean side of the *motu* at Rotoava, behind the *mairie*, this good-value option has four functional rooms with fan and two bungalows with shared bathroom (cold water only). All prices include breakfast, and half board is available for an extra 1800 CFP – or you can use the communal kitchen. There are bikes for guests' use and airport transfers are free.

**Tokerau Village** (☎ 98 41 09, 71 30 46; bungalow s/d with half board 12,000/22,000 CFP) Beautiful garden, comfy bungalows and pretty beach make

this a good choice. Kayaks, bikes and airport transfers are free. Credit cards accepted.

**Veke Veke Village** (☎ 98 42 80; bungalows with full board per person 8500 CFP) This family-run place, 3km south of Rotoava, has four bungalows right over the lagoon's edge with bathroom (cold water only). Kayaks and bicycles are available for hire. Airport transfers are free.

**Pension Paparara** (☎ /fax 98 42 66; s with half board 9000-11700 CFP, d with half board 15000-19000 CFP) Friendly option, 7km south of the village, beside the lagoon. There are five original, nicely decorated bungalows with mosquito nets. Three units have shared bathroom (cold water only). The food has a good reputation and airport transfers are free.

**Vaima Village** (☎ /fax 98 41 13; bungalow s/d with half board 11,000/18,000 CFP) Pretty but rustic; has four little bungalows, two of which have attached bathroom. Kayaks and bikes are free but airport transfers cost 1000 CFP return.

**Hôtel Maitai Dream Fakarava** (☎ 43 08 83; maitaifa@mail.pf; bungalows 27,000-38,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) With 27 classy wooden bungalows, a restaurant and numerous activities on offer, this is the most luxurious option on Fakarava. The beach is a bit rocky but the staff are friendly and helpful. Add 7000 CFP per person for half board. Credit cards accepted.

**Camping-Pension Taha** (☎ 24 87 49; camp sites per person 1100 CFP) About 1km beyond the Maitai Dream, this camping spot is idyllic. There's a communal kitchen or meals can be ordered for about 1000 CFP. Village transfers are 700 CFP return, airport transfers free.

At the other end of Fakarava, near Tumakohua Pass and a two-hour boat ride from the airport, is the village of Tetamanu, population six. The two options here can both easily fulfil any fantasies of being stranded, alone, on a desert island.

**Motu Aito Paradise** (☎ /fax 41 29 00; www.fakarava.org; r with full board per person 14,000 CFP) The ultimate in Polynesian architectural design, this *pension* is a feat of artistic ingenuity. The *motu* is really nothing special, but the owners have constructed a paradise that makes guests feel like Polynesian royalty (with cold water, that is!). Tasty meals, taken with the other guests, are served in a large, interior communal area or in a covered area at the lagoon's edge. At the time of writing a second *motu*, linked to the first by a wooden bridge, was being prepared to build several *fare poti* (gazebo-like rest areas) for hammocks and



lounge space. Prices are for a three-night minimum stay and include daily excursions and airport transfers.

**Tetamanu Village** (☎ 43 92 40; tetamanuvillage@mail.pf; r with full board per person per 3/4/5 days 48,000/58,000/61,000 CFP) This place is a real heart-breaker. It is in a superb setting on a white-sand beach overlooking the stunning Tumakohua pass. Unfortunately the management has made such a bad name for itself that it seemed on the verge of closure at the time of writing.

## Eating

The two *snacks* in Rotoava are open for lunch and dinner every day but Sunday.

**Snack Te Anuanua** (☎ 98 41 58; mains 600-2000 CFP) This is a happy little place run by charming Cecile and her husband. The menu is varied, the food great and the ambiance a pleasure.

**Snack Chez Elda** (☎ 98 41 33; mains 1000-1300 CFP) Simple meals are served at this lagoon-side place. Call ahead to make sure it's open.

## Getting There & Away

The atoll is 488km east-northeast of Tahiti and southeast of Rangiroa.

The airport is 4km west of Rotoava. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 67 70 35, 67 70 85; www.airtahiti.pf) flies from Pape'ete to Fakarava every day (16,500 CFP one way) and from Rangiroa to Fakarava every Tuesday and Friday (5200 CFP).

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Vai-Aito* and *Mareva Nui* stop at Fakarava.

## Getting Around

A scheduled visit by French President Jacques Chirac (he never actually showed up) brought funding to pave a beautiful, 40km road from Garuae pass to the southeast side of the atoll (and conveniently right to the door of a house owned by ex-president Gaston Flosse). It's a long haul cycling this in the hot sun; some *pensions* will drop you off at the far end so you can pedal back to town.

## MAKEMO

pop 720 / lagoon area 620 sq km

Spectacular undersea landscapes, pristine *motu* and an off-the-beaten-track charm make Makemo an ideal destination for anyone looking for an authentic Paumotu experience. The opening of the very professionally run dive centre **Scubamakemo**

(☎/fax 98 03 08, ☎ 78 49 13; makemodive@hotmail.com) will surely attract visitors, but for now it's a sleepy and lightly visited escape.

**Pouheva** village is an administrative and school centre for the central Tuamotus. Still, there is no bank, just a little post office near the quay. All the *pensions* organise lagoon excursions (from 6000 CFP per person) that visit the old village site and the two passes.

See p61 for details about dive sites, including the pristine Arikamiro Pass.

## Sleeping & Eating

Don't expect anything glamorous in Makemo but the welcome is friendly and Polynesian style. No-one takes credit cards.

**Scuba Lodge** (☎/fax 98 03 08, 78 49 13; bungalows with full board per person 7500 CFP) Ludovic, who is the manager of the dive centre Scubamakemo and the local fireman, also rents out two bungalows with attached bathroom. The bungalows are about 25m from the lagoon and are simple but clean. Meals are local-style and tasty.

**Teanuanua Beach Pearls** (☎ 78 23 23, 78 99 10; fax 98 02 19; s/d with full board 13,000/19,500 CFP) This place, 24km from the village, is completely isolated. Owned by French Tahitian pearl farmers, it has nine cement bungalows on stilts on a pretty beach – bathrooms are communal. The food here is exceptional considering the isolation, and is served in a simple dining area. There are mountain bikes for hire as well as a car, and kayaks are free.

**Chez Alice et Tutea** (☎/fax 98 03 07; r with half board per person 7800 CFP) Next to the Scuba Lodge, the three matchbox-sized rooms are a bit expensive for what is offered.

## Getting There & Around

The airport is 9km by a paved road from the village – if you have reserved at a pension they will collect you free of charge.

Air Tahiti flies to Makemo three times a week from Pape'ete (38000 CFP return) or the cargo ships *Hotu Maru* and *Kura Ora* serve the atoll.

## ANAA

pop 435 / lagoon area 184 sq km

Anaa, which used to be densely populated, became known for its ferocious warring inhabitants, who extended their domination over the northern part of the archipelago, pillaging the atolls they conquered. Today,

the calmness and tranquillity of the atoll and its people make this hard to imagine! Anaa Atoll is just 28km long and 5km wide and it doesn't have a pass.

Cyclones have cost Anaa dearly. Tuku-hora village, razed by a tidal wave in 1906 that left 100 people dead, was devastated again in the 1982–83 cyclone season. The inhabitants live off fishing and copra production and it is gaining note from tourists for its saltwater fly-fishing opportunities.

## Sleeping

**Pension Toku Kaiga** (☎ 98 32 69; bungalow or r with half/full board per person 7000/9000 CFP) offers a choice between a bungalow and a fully-equipped 'chalet' in the village or a room in a house near the airport. Bicycles are available and airport transfers are included. There are several fishing tours that use this place for a base.

## Getting There & Away

Anaa is 450km east of Pape'ete. There are Pape'ete–Anaa flights twice a week (16800 CFP, 1½ hours) and Hao–Anaa flights every Monday for 16400 CFP. It's also on the shipping routes of the *Auura'Nui 3*, *Kura Ora II* and *Kura Ora III*.

# SOUTHERN & EASTERN TUAMOTUS

If not for the presence of the infamous Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP) conducting nuclear-testing operations, this totally isolated region would have remained forgotten.

Cultured-pearl and copra production and fishing are the major industries of these islands. Hao is the regional centre. The smallest atolls in the archipelago are in this region; some, such as Nukutavake, Pinaki and Akiaki, are barely 5 sq km. Tourist facilities are rare and so are visitors.

## HAO

pop 1465 / lagoon area 609 sq km

Affected by the unfortunate destiny of Moruroa and Fangataufa, Hao experienced great demographic growth from the 1960s onwards as an administrative and transit centre for the CEP. For a short time the French

agents convicted of sinking the *Rainbow Warrior* served here (see the boxed text, p30). Its state-of-the-art infrastructure includes a 3300m runway built to handle the military transport planes carrying highly sensitive material destined for Moruroa. When atmospheric tests were conducted, there were up to 5000 people busy on the atoll. With the switch to underground testing, most military staff was moved to Moruroa and Fangataufa. Hao has a college and a medical centre. Most inhabitants earn their living from cultured-pearl production in Otepa, in the northeast.

**Chez Amélie** (☎ 97 03 42; fax 97 02 41; r per person 8500 CFP; ☺), in Otepa, is owned by Amélie Danzer, the Air Tahiti representative. It has four rooms with air-con, in a house with attached bathroom (with hot water).

Air Tahiti flies from Pape'ete to Hao (2½ hours) four times a week for 24,500 CFP. There are flights once a week to Makemo (12,300 CFP), Anaa (16,400 CFP) and Mangareva (23,400 CFP). There are connections from Hao to Takume, Fangatau, Fakahina, Takakoto, Tureia, Vahitahi, Nukutavake, Pukarua and Reao. Inquire at Air Tahiti about flight schedules.

The *Auura'Nui 3*, *Nuku Hau*, *Kura Ora II* and *Kura Ora III* stop at Hao.

## MORUROA

pop 20 / lagoon area 324 sq km

Ill-fated Moruroa, 1250km southeast of Tahiti, will forever be synonymous with nuclear testing and the catastrophe of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* (see p30). 'Discovered' in 1792 by the Englishman Weatherhead, it is 28km long and 11km wide, and has only one pass.

Moruroa was chosen for the tests because of its isolation from inhabited zones and its suitability for the necessary infrastructure. It was equipped with ultramodern electricity-production installations, a desalination plant and an airport for large aircraft. Entertainment facilities and an internal radio and TV channels were established for military staff. The atoll was ceded to the French state in 1964. With the final tests, jurisdiction was returned to the French Polynesian government and the installations were dismantled. Today there's just a small contingent of un-health-conscious French legionnaires.

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