

Beautiful Pacific

<http://www.beautifulpacific.com>

Tahiti Travel Guide

Bora Bora Island

The Lagoon island of Bora Bora is recognised by many as one of the most beautiful spots on earth. Others, let down by its rather false and commercial aspect, claim it is polluted and vastly over rated. The truth lies somewhere in between and depends entirely what you are looking for: if its a luxury resort with stunning views, a tranquil lagoon, snorkelling and lots of marine life then Bora Bora may seem perfect. However, if you are expecting the Bora of old, of fishing villages and simple lifestyles, of a quiet retreat away from the fast pace of modern life, then you may well be disappointed.

The main island of Bora Bora rises sharply from the turquoise lagoon with its recognisable flat top peak and craggy points covered in tropical forest. Visually, the setting is nothing but spectacular. Around the outer edge of the lagoon is a fringing reef with a string of low lying coral atolls (motu) protecting the north and west side of the island. The main island can be easily explored from the 32km coastal road that circumnavigates the island.

Matira Point on the southern tip of Bora is the main centre of tourism and has the only stretch of picturesque white sand beaches on the main island. The most elegant accommodation is the Intercontinental Hotel which has private beach access at the very southern point of Matira. However, the lagoon is too shallow for swimming from the beach although there's reasonable snorkelling further out. The beach extends along the east coast of Matira Point for a kilometre with the excellent value Maitai Polynesia being one of several resorts along the beachfront. Behind Hotel Matira you can climb the hill to the American Guns for a good view of the lagoon and hills.

The beauty of Bora Bora is best viewed from afar or from the air, and for this reason the most spectacular views with the nicest palm fringed beaches is on the offshore islands. There are plenty of day cruises taking in the stunning scenery around the lagoon which invariably include a lunch on one of the motu and a snorkel amongst thousands of colourful reef fish. If you don't see reef sharks, manta rays and mooray eels you are unlucky. Dolphins can also be spotted around Te Ava Nui Pass on the west coast of the lagoon. There are also several

exceptional dive sites on the outer reef making Bora Bora one of the best scuba diving destinations in the South Pacific.

The largest of the offshore islands is Toopua which in fact marks the western side of the collapsed crater attached to the main island. Here are some of the best snorkelling reefs in Tahiti. On the northern tip of the island is the lovely setting of Bora Bora Lagoon Resort which has unparalleled views from its restaurant and overwater bungalows looking back to the mountains of Bora Bora. Off the southern tip of the island is Motu Toopua I ti which boasts one of the finest white sandy beaches in French Polynesia - you can stay at the luxury Bora Bora Nui Resort in overwater bungalows or splendid hillside villas with exceptional views looking out to the open ocean.

Anau Reef in Bora Bora Lagoon is renowned as the most prolific Manta Ray Sanctuary in the South Pacific. Whilst there's a good chance of seeing Manta Rays all over French Polynesia, at Bora Bora you'll see hordes of them, particularly at Teavanui Pass. It's also great for sharks: lemon tips, black tips. There are also lots of snorkelling trips into the lagoon to see sharks, rays and moray eels and loads of colourful tropical reef fish, including the Lagoonarium, where Manta Rays, Sting Rays, Eagle Rays and Sea Turtles are rescued, bred, reared and released back into the ocean at maturity. You can swim with the Rays, and even touch them.

Off the north side of Bora are a string of tiny islands. These islands are popular amongst day trippers and there's good snorkelling off Pearl Beach Resort. Extending south from the airport along Bora's eastern reef is an almost continuous stretch of long thin and flat islands that flank the entire east side of the island. Here you'll find the longest stretches of beaches where you can walk for miles alongside the sandy shoreline backed by palm trees. There are several large resorts on these islands including the delightful Le Meridien Resort which sits on a small bay surrounded by beach front and looking out onto almost 100 over-the-water bungalows.

The picturesque lagoon island of Maupiti in the western end of the Society Islands is a mini version of Bora Bora. At 11 sq. km it is about a third of the size of Bora, its highest peak of 380 metres is about half as high as Bora and its population of 1,271 is less than a quarter that of Bora. More importantly for tourism though, is that there are just a handful of guesthouses on the islands, no resorts and no organized tours. For some, this is paradise and there are a couple of lovely guesthouses where tourists can escape mass tourism.