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Tahiti Travel Guide

Moorea Island

Moorea Island lies just 18km west from Papeete and is clearly visible from the west coast of Tahiti. This ancient volcanic island covered in rich tropical rainforest with deep bays and razor back mountains offers some of the best sightseeing opportunities in the South Pacific. Getting to Moorea is easy - there are 10 ferry crossings from Papeete every day, taking under one hour with departures commencing from 6am. There are also hourly flights from Faa'a Airport which take less than 10 minutes. With such easy access, nice beaches and beautiful scenery, it is no wonder that Moorea is the most popular holiday destination in Tahiti.

All tourists arrive on the north east coast of Moorea, the side facing Tahiti Island. The ferry terminal is at Vaiare Bay, opposite the large marina, the busiest of Moorea's towns and close to the islands longest stretch of beach that starts at Teavaro and extends all the way along the north east coast beyond the airport. The large I a Orana Resort sits in the heart of the beach, set in wonderful landscaped gardens with bungalows well spaced apart. North of I a Orana is the public access beach which has good swimming.

The north coast of Moorea is punctuated by two deep and spectacular bays: Cooks Bay and Opunohu Bay (the latter is where Captain Cook actually anchored). The panoramas of both bays are exceptional and should be viewed not only along the coastal road, but from the water as well as from above. The 900 metre high Mt. Rotui separates the two bays and the steep trail to the summit can be climbed for stunning views but most tourists opt for the easy option - by taking the winding road to the Belvedere Lookout in the heart of Moorea and overlooking not only Mt. Rotui but the two bays as well. Along the way are several interesting marae with many ancient temple foundations.

The north coast has several fishing villages including Papetoai which boasts the oldest building in the South Pacific - the Protestant church here was built in 1822 by one of the first missionaries to settle in the South Seas. Three luxury resorts are found along the coast: The Pearl Resort is located on a small beach front between the airport and Cooks Bay; The

Sheraton Resort sits on a lovely beach between Cooks Bay and Opunohu Bay; and Hotel Intercontinental, with its man made lagoonarium and Dolphin Quest is located west of Opunohu Bay close to Hauru Beach on the north west tip of the island. There are also a few guesthouses which offer good value for money.

The north west coast of Moorea has the most concentrated tourist strip alongside Hauru Beach. The beach is pretty but is very narrow and at high tide the sea reaches the sea wall that protects the line of hotels and guesthouses here. The beach at Hauru is public access but because the coast here is so built up it can be difficult to get to. Of the accommodation, Fare Vai Moana has the most spacious grounds and offers 13 thatch bungalows. Hauru has a small modern shopping area with supermarket, bank and several restaurants. There are also several backpacker hostels at the southern end of Hauru with camping.

Offshore from Hauru are three small islands within the shallow lagoon. This is a good place for water activities including kite surfing, kayaking and snorkelling. There is also abundant shark populations along the Moorea coast, sometimes in packs of 50 or more. Opunohu Canyons off the north coast and Tiki Point off the West Coast are the best shark feed dives in Tahiti.

South of Hauru Beach is the popular Tiki Village cultural centre, with replica temples and houses, handicraft displays, tattooing demonstrations and traditional dances. All good fun for a light half day outing. Heading south along the quiet south western coast, the mountain scenery once again becomes spectacular and culminates in the gorgeous coastal setting of Atiha bay. There are several guesthouses here including as well as the small settlement of Haapiti which has an attractive Catholic Church built in 1891.

The south east coast is also very quiet with virtually no beaches and no tourist accommodation. At Afareaitu, the administrative centre of Moorea, a walking tracks leads inland to pretty Atiraa Waterfall and takes about 30 minutes. Uninhabited Motu Ahi lies offshore from town. There's lots of activities around Moorea from cruises around the bays and coast to 4WD tours of the interior. Moorea has a well developed tourist infrastructure - there are plenty of car hire companies at the wharf and airport, lots of restaurants around the coast, shopping centres and gift and boutique shops for browsing.