

BORA BORA PARADISE ON EARTH

Travel
Bora Bora



A little slice of tropical paradise nestled in the Pacific Waters, Bora Bora's economy rests on a successful tourist industry, yet it never feels overcrowded or commercialised. There's no fighting over sunbeds or queueing up for dinner – Bora Bora moves at its own pace, making it a tranquil holiday gem.

GETTING TO BORA BORA

There are 118 islands that make up the French Polynesia and they receive the same number of tourists in a year that Hawaii gets in a week, so you know you are in for a more tailored, luxury experience. And around 80% of those visitors will stop at Bora Bora at some point in their stay, unable to resist the 'Pearl of the Pacific'.

There's no international airport on the island, just a small aerodrome set up in the Second World War, so the only way on to Bora Bora is by private plane or boat. To get to your hotel, you have to fly to Tahiti and get a private transfer. And limited flights to Tahiti from the UK, with one or more stop-overs, make this a much more exclusive destination. You'll need to plan properly to make the journey.

Once you finally make it to your final stop though, the benefits are more than worth it. This could be one of the most beautiful places in the world, with swaying palm trees, bright white sands and sparkling blue lagoon waters, you'll never want to leave. And despite tourism being at the forefront of the communities' minds, protecting the environment is also close to their hearts, making for an island that is beautifully clean and unspoiled. It's as close to perfection as you can get.

WHERE TO STAY

There are plenty of hotels along the coasts of Bora Bora, including the Hilton, Intercontinental, Pearl Beach, Sofitel and The Westin Bora Bora Resort and Spa (previously The Meridien). Many of the hotels offer overwater bungalows. These are huts you can stay in that give you direct access to the azure blue waters of the lagoons, with glass floors that let you see the underwater world below you. There is nothing more peaceful than watching the natural coral reef drift from side-to-side underneath you as you soak up some rays. And you can even have breakfast delivered each morning by outrigger canoes.

The roofs of these huts are covered in pandanus leaves. This unique part of the architecture provides jobs for 50 families on the island, who work on harvesting and processing these leaves. It is a nod towards the ancient culture of the island, when huts were made from bamboo and leaves, and helps preserve that tradition.

Each hotel has a focus on guest comfort with a sustainable slant – you'll find programmes dedicated to protecting the coral gardens and turtles, as well as fish nurseries. They encourage you to learn more about the environment of the island and show you how to respect nature while enjoying a luxury stay.

For example, the Westin Bora Bora is home to The Ecology Centre of Sea Turtles. The underwater observatory gets you up close to sea turtles, without having to get wet. Or you can go to the touch pool, where you can gently stroke these incredible creatures. This is a must-visit attraction, even if you don't stay at the hotel.

HAVING FUN ON BORA BORA

And there's plenty more to enjoy too. This is a mecca for scuba divers as there is so much to see in the pristine waters, or you can head off on a helicopter tour of the island, go for a guided hike up the extinct volcano, or hop aboard a glass bottomed boat for the day. Adrenaline junkies will love parasailing, jet skiing or shark feeding. And you must go to at least one of the many art galleries displaying traditional Maohi art.

If you visit at the right time, you could even find yourself in the middle of one of the many annual festivals. Heiva I Bora Bora is in July and is all about feasting and dancing, with the entire community coming together to decorate huts and enter competitions.

And the country is big on sports such as canoe racing, javelin throwing, triathlons and fishing. Maybe you'd like to get involved with one of those at the large community sports centre?



Photograph: © Tahiti Fly Shoot



Photograph: © Overpeek Studio

TRUSTED PAMPER SPOTS

The luxurious island is well set-up for wellness and pampering, with some of the world's best spas at your disposal. The Intercontinental Bora Bora and Thalasso Spa hosted Beyonce when she was pregnant with her twins, so you know you can expect the very best treatments here. The spa is the first sea-water spa in the South Pacific, using the local waters in a variety of pamper sessions, harnessing the natural healing power within them. This little slice of heaven is set in the most picturesque area, in the tropical gardens of Motu Piti Aau and waters either side.

And when it comes to food, you're spoilt for choice. The Lagoon at the St Regis Bora Bora Resort is a celebrity hot-spot, or you can enjoy a very private and exclusive meal on one of the islets. Expect local sea food and tropical fruit – sometimes the simplest meals are the most delicious.

KEY TRAVEL TIPS

The most-spoken language of Bora Bora is French, but Tahitian is still learnt in school as a key link to the heritage of the island. There are only two seasons – the wet season and the dry season. If you want to avoid monsoon rains, then May to October is the best time to go. The temperature is pretty stable year-round, hovering around the 30°C mark most of the time, so stock up on your reef-friendly sunscreen!

Want to find out more about Bora Bora? Head to:

www.tahititourisme.uk

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