

**MISSIONS ATLAS PROJECT
AREA OF THE WORLD
COUNTRY**

Snapshots Section

Country Name: French Polynesia

Country Founded in: There is no official date for independence since France administrates the islands. A constitution was put into effect in 1958.

Population: 287,032

Government Type: It is an overseas territory of France.

Geography/location in the world: French Polynesia is a series of archipelagos located in the South Pacific Ocean. The geographic coordinates are 15 00 S, 140 00 W.

Number of people groups: 16

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot

Major Religion and % of population: Protestant 54%

All religions and % for each: Protestant 54%, Roman Catholic 30%, other 10%, no religion 6%

Government interaction with religion: The government provides for religious freedom.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fp.html>

Country Profile

Basic Facts

Country Name: Overseas Lands of French Polynesia

Demographics:

The estimated population of French Polynesia is 287,032. Children up to fourteen years of age account for 24.3% of the population. Adults between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four years of age account for 68.9% of the population. In the last age category, sixty-five years and above, this group accounts for 6.8% of the population. The median age for males is 29.4 years, and the median age for females is 28.8 years. The population growth rate is 1.391%.

The birth rate is 15.91 births for every 1,000 people. There are an estimated 1.92 children born to every woman. The infant mortality rate is 7.55 deaths for every 1,000 live births. The death rate is 4.73 deaths for every 1,000 people. The life expectancy for the total population is 76.71 years.

There are many different ethnic groups. About 78% of the population are Polynesian while 12% are of Chinese descent. Another 6% are local French while 4% are metropolitan French.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fp.html>

Language: French and Polynesian are the two official languages. The most common dialect of the Polynesian language is Tahitian. There are also various other types of Asian languages like Chinese which are spoken.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fp.html>

<http://www.polynesianislands.com/fp/>

Society/Culture:

Traditional Polynesian society changed greatly with the coming of the missionaries. The people were once polytheistic worshippers of local gods who were related to the weather. There were elaborate taboos, which had to be followed, or curses would occur. For example, a person would not be able to touch the head of a firstborn child because the Polynesians thought this might harm the child in some manner. Today, most families are monotheistic. They believe in the importance of going to church, although this belief often does not extend to a true relationship with Jesus Christ. Rather, the church serves as the local social gathering place.

Traditionally, parents taught children the necessary survival skills needed in order to fish and to grow their crops. Adults with special skills would take apprentices to insure that the younger generation did not lose the knowledge of how to build canoes or how to tattoo. Missionaries built schools to teach the children how to read and write. Today most children attend school until the eighth grade. At that time, they must take an entrance exam to enter high school. Children are still taught to respect their elders.

In the polytheistic pre-Christian society, boys and girls would undergo rites of passage before they entered adulthood. These rites of passages usually included a tattooing ceremony. Different islands would use tattoos as a means of signifying important information about their culture. The application of tattoos was thought to be a sign of beauty. On some islands, the boys and girls would be secluded for a time. During their seclusion, they would be given rich foods in order to make them gain weight and appear to be healthy so that they would be more attractive. Most of these rituals are no longer practiced. Boys and girls will seek to find work after high school if they cannot afford to attend college. They will also prepare for marriage.

Traditional practices regarding sexuality and marriage were quite different than modern ones. Premarital relationships could occur and were not necessarily frowned upon. Once an official marriage took place, however, extra-marital relations were prohibited. Many islands permitted polygamy, and the Marquesas Islanders even allowed polyandry (the practice of a woman having several husbands).

A very strict hierarchy of social classes forbade people from different classes from marrying. In fact, children from such unions were often killed. In order to avoid such issues, families generally arranged marriages between cousins. European missionaries did not want cousins to marry and encouraged people to be monogamous. As a result, most marriages today are monogamous. Adults will choose their own marriage partner based upon affection or necessity.

Families traditionally lived in small close-knit communities. Houses were built of natural materials and were usually positioned so that there were one or more central structures. All important religious and social rituals occurred here. Today, houses are built from materials introduced by Westerners. In rural areas houses will still be built so that social gathering places are at the center of town.

As has been mentioned, there were very distinct social classes in the past. Royal families and their close associates dictated the flow of life in villages. They would have special luxuries such as footstools and mattresses for sleeping. Today, the aristocracy no longer holds the same power as in the past; however, the descendents of the royal families still tend to value their social prominence.

Islanders usually eat three times a day. For breakfast they may only eat bread and sip some type of warm beverage. They eat a large meal at noon. When they return home from work, they will usually have another light repast. Breadfruit, rice, and local fruits like mangos and pineapples are popular side dishes which accompany some type of fish, chicken, or pork entrée. Traditionally, people would eat daintily with their fingers. Today, they will use chopsticks if they are eating Chinese food or forks for all other types of food.

For special occasions, people may go to restaurants or might invite guests into their homes. Hospitality is highly valued. Offers of food should not be refused as the host will feel insulted by a denial of his kindness. If a guest is full and does not want to be offered more food, he or she should simply leave some food on the plate. This gesture assures the host that the meal has been enjoyed and that the food was tasty. Sometimes islanders will actually watch guests eat without eating themselves. In all cases, praise is welcome, but no specific item should be singled out for praise. Rather, the guest can simply praise the entire meal.

There are many different types of national holidays. Christian holidays such as Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Feast of the Assumption, All Saint's Day, and Christmas are all important times for families to socialize together. Bastille Day on July 14th is also an important holiday. Armistice Day is celebrated on November 11th.

Gall, Timothy L. *Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Cultures and Daily Life: Americas*, Vol 2. Detroit: Gale Research, 1998.

http://www.pacificislandtravel.com/fr_polynesia/about_destin/lifestyle.html

Gall, Timothy. *Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Americas*. 12th edition. Farmington: Thomas Gale, 2007.

Government:

French Polynesia is officially considered overseas lands of France. It was a territory from 1946 until 2004 when it was elevated to full collectivity status. Suffrage is universal for all people over the age of 18. People are considered to have all the rights and privileges of French citizens.

The French government has allowed a certain amount of internal autonomy while retaining control in such matters as the police and justice system, monetary policy, tertiary education, immigration, and defense and foreign affairs. All laws are based upon French practice and law. A constitution was written on October 4, 1958.

The capital is located at Papeete. There are five administrative divisions which are located on major islands. They are Archipel des Marquises, Archipel des Tuamotu, Archipel des Tubuai, Iles du Vent, and Iles Sous-le-Vent.

The executive branch has several different parts. The chief of state is the French President. However, locally, the High Commissioner of the Republic represents the French president. The French president, who generally follows the advice of the French Ministry of the Interior, selects this official. Since 2008, Adolphe Colrat has served in this capacity.

The head of the government is the territorial president. The members of the territorial assembly elect the person holding this office. The president usually serves for five years, but has an unlimited amount of renewable terms. Since 2009, Oscar Temaru has held this office. A council of ministers helps to accomplish the functions of the executive branch. The current president gives a list of names of people he would like to have serve on the council to the members of the Territorial Assembly. The assembly decides who will actually serve as ministers on the council.

The legislative branch consists of a unicameral body known as the Territorial Assembly (Assemblée Territoriale). The area representatives serve as members of this body. Each person serves for five years after having been elected by popular vote. The last elections were held in 2008. The French Senate decides upon one seat in the Assembly. The President of the Assembly is elected by its members to serve a five year term.

<http://www.presidence.pf/> (in French)

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fp.html>

French Polynesia. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2009. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 09 Dec. 2009

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/219285/French-Polynesia>

Economy:

Beginning in 1962, the French stationed military personnel on various islands. Many of the islanders left their lifestyle of subsistence agriculturalists and began to work for the military. Since the development of the tourism industry, many islanders have found jobs in that sector. Since the 1990's, the French government has withdrawn a portion of their military personnel, causing a decline in revenue for islanders. Tourism remains a major contributor to the GDP.

In 2004, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$4.718 billion. The real growth rate in 2005 was 2.7%. The GDP per capita was \$18,000. In 2007, about 116,000 participated in the labor force. The unemployment rate stood at 11.7% in 2005.

About 3.5% of the GDP came from agriculture. About 13% of the labor force works in this sector. People harvest and sell vanilla beans. They use the beans to get oil to sell. The first plants were introduced to the area in 1848 by a sea captain. At one point, over 200 tons were harvested yearly. However, this industry began to decline somewhat during the 1970's and 1980's. Coconuts are processed for their copra. Coffee and certain types of vegetables are grown locally.

Industry accounts for about 20.4% of the GDP. About 19% of the labor force works in this sector. The primary employer is the tourism industry. Other industries include the processing of pearls and agricultural products.

About 76.1% of the GDP came from the Services sector. About 68% of the labor force worked here.

In 2005, exports equaled about \$211 million. Commodities for export included cultured pearls, coconut products, mother-of-pearl, vanilla, and shark meat.

In 2005, imports equaled \$1.706 billion. Fuels and different types of machinery and equipment had to be brought into the islands since it was not locally produced. Also, since the decline of subsistence agriculture, more food has had to be brought into the country. This has driven the price of food up.

The official currency is the Comptoirs Francais du Pacifique francs (XPF). In 2007, the exchange rate per US dollar was 87.59. The exchange rate to the Euro was 119.25 XPF.

<http://www.polynesianislands.com/fp/>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fp.html>

Literacy: About 98% of the people can read and write.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fp.html>

Land/Geography:

French Polynesia is a series of archipelagos located in the South Pacific Ocean. The geographic coordinates are 15 00 S, 140 00 W. The total area is about 4,167 square kilometers. This includes 118 islands and atolls along with an exclusive economic zone.

The climate is tropical. There are two main seasons. The winter season usually lasts from May to October. During this time, temperatures range from the 60's to the 80's. Rainfall is slightly less abundant at this time but the humidity factor is still around 75%. The summer season extends from April to November. Temperatures will fall between the 70's and the 90's. Rainfall during these months is plentiful. Sometimes, the islands can receive as much as 15 inches within the space of one month. Cyclonic storms during January are threats at times.

The largest island is Tahiti. Most of the population lives here. The capital, Papeete, is also located here. The interior is a mountainous area, which is intersected by deep valleys with high waterfalls. There are clear streams, which provide a good source of water. The mountains slowly descend to a coastal area, which has abundant beaches and has been highly developed by the tourist industry.

Moorea is about 30 minutes away from Tahiti when one travels by boat. It lies 12 nautical miles to the northwest of Tahiti. Its total area is about 37.3 miles. The island has a wide but shallow lagoon, which is surrounded by strips of beach. There are eight major mountain peaks, which extend sharply from the beach area. Interspersing the mountains are low meadows, which are arable. The island is volcanic in origin and well-known for its many variety of flowers and trees. Coconut palms are abundant.

The two islands discussed above are examples of the other 118 members of French Polynesia. Most are volcanic in origin and have lush vegetation. The sea around the islands teems with different species of fish and marine life. Narrow strips of beach provide access to the sea while most of the interior parts of the islands are mountainous.

<http://www.tahiti-tourisme.com/islands/tahiti/tahiti.asp>

<http://www.polynesianislands.com/fp/>

<http://www.tahitiguide.com/~gomoorea/@en-us/sites/2/article.asp>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fp.html>

History

Polynesians began to come to the islands around 300 A.D. They traveled by canoes across long distances of ocean to form largely agrarian societies. These settlers grew what food they could, but also harvested breadfruits to sustain themselves and their families. They were expert seamen so various types of fish were important to their diets. Most of the settlers congregated into small villages with elders making the decisions for the clan. Later, on some islands, a system of aristocracy would develop. Aristocrats and the rulers they served would be given special treatment.

Beginning in the 1700's European sailors began to visit various islands. Sailors would trade for needed supplies. They sometimes formed close relationships with the islanders. The French eventually would begin to claim the islands as possessions when French missionaries went there.

In 1842, the French took control of the Marquesa and Society Islands. Tahiti was added to the colony in 1844 and eventually all of the islands currently considered to be French Polynesia were dominated by the French.

In 1946, the French government gave the islands the status of "overseas territory." This gave islanders some representation within the French government and some autonomy. During the 1960's, France used some of the islands to perform a series of nuclear tests, an act which did not meet with the approval of islanders. After a time, the French government suspended tests until 1996 when they resumed for a short time before stopping altogether.

In 1984, the French elevated the status of the islands to "overseas lands" which gave the local government increased autonomy. In 2004, this state of autonomy was again increased. In May of 2004, Oscar Temaru, who was in favor of complete independence from France, won the office of territorial president. He lost that position in October of 2004 through a vote of no confidence by the Territorial Assembly. For a short time Gaston Flosse, who did not favor independence, gained the position, but he lost it to Temaru in February of 2005. In December of 2005, Temaru was again forced to leave office because of a vote of no confidence. Gaston Tong Sang became territorial president until a vote of no confidence put him out of office in September 2007. Temaru again became president due to his wise political alliances. In 2009, Temaru continued to serve as territorial president.

<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0935638.html>

<http://www.polynesianislands.com/fp/>

Christian History

The London Missionary Society began to send Protestant missionaries in 1797. At first, the missionaries saw little progress, but then some converts were made. Later, the Basel Mission and the Paris Mission sent representatives. Out of the church planting efforts of these early missionaries, the Evangelical Church of Polynesia was formed. It became autonomous in 1963.

Catholics began to send emissaries to the islands in the mid 1600's, but no permanent stations were built. Franciscans from Peru landed in 1772, but were also not successful. French priests finally began to convert people on the Gambier Islands in 1831. They later built stations on the Marquesas in 1838 and Tahiti in 1842.

<http://polynesia.com/1850s-mission/introduction.html>

http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/member-churches/regions/pacific/french-polynesia.html?tx_wecdiscussion%5Bsub%5D=1

<http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/document1118.html>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tahiti-and-french-polynesia/history>

http://books.google.com/books?id=4aEmQUhZpFOC&pg=PT30&lpg=PT30&dq=christianity+french+polynesia&source=bl&ots=Iuas6i5fy1&sig=ivNUAUXPRKwhhtN5uauvBU3qLGs&hl=en&ei=pA4oS9yuMNSFnAeAl0iiDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBsQ6AEwBjge#v=onepage&q=christianity%20french%20polynesia&f=false

World Christian Encyclopedia Volume I.

Religion

All information unless otherwise noted is gleaned from *World Christian Encyclopedia Vol. 1* and *Operation World*.

Non Christian

Baha'i-- About 0.25% of the population is affiliated with this group.

<http://news.bahai.org/story/277>

Buddhism—About 0.6% of the people are Buddhists. Buddhism was first introduced when Chinese laborers were imported to work on plantations during the French colonial days.

Catholic—Efforts first began between 1659 and 1667. Peruvian priests arrived in 1772 to expand efforts, and later in 1831 French priests went to the Gambier Islands. In 2005 there were 85 congregations and 41,667 people attending mass.

Eglise Sanito (Saints)—This group left the Mormon Church around 1884 and reorganized itself. Locally members may be known as Sanitos or Kanitos. In 2005 there were 42 churches and 4,250 members.

Jehovah's Witness—This group arrived in 1932. In 2005 there were 34 congregations and 1,874 members.

Non-religious/Other—About 13.8% of the population are non-religious or follow other types of religious teachings.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons)—This denomination came around 1844. In 2005 there were 46 congregations and 9,317 members.

Traditional Ethnic Religions—The traditional religions focus on a supreme being named Ta'aroa. It is polytheistic, though, and has a pantheon of other gods. The Ariori Society, which venerates a god of war named Oro, uses erotic dances and music as part of their festivities. Spirit possession and divination are part of religious observances. The overt practice of traditional religions faded after the arrival of missionaries. Today only about 0.3% of the population claim to be traditional worshippers. However, as in many other countries, traditional religious practices are often mixed within Christian groups.

Christian/Evangelical

Assemblies of God (France)—French representatives of this denomination arrived around 1978. In 2005 there were 6 congregations and 509 congregants.

Assemblies of God (U.S.)—American missionaries came in 1977. In 2005 there was 1 congregation with about 75 people.

Christianisme—This group started as a result of a schism which occurred with the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia in 1950. In 2001 there was 1 church with around 75 members.

Confederation of Reformed Churches—This denomination formed around 1982 after it left the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia. In 2001 there were 10 congregations and 500 members.

Eglise Alleluia (Hallelujah Church)—This group was started primarily by Chinese believers around 1967. In 2001 there was 1 church with 45 members.

Eglise Autonome (Autonomous Church)—This group was founded in 1954 by a pastor who left the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia. In 2001 there were 5 congregations with about 500 members.

Eglise Evangelique de Polynesie (Evangelical Church of French Polynesia)—Missionaries started this church in 1787. In 2005 there were 81 congregations and 32,000 members.

Eglise Libre de Polynesie (Free Church of Polynesia)—This group began around 1980 as a result of a schism from the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia. In 2001 there were 5 congregations and 200 members.

Eglise Neo-Apostolique (New Apostolic)—This denomination sent representatives around 1990. In 2001 there was 1 church with 30 members.

Eglises Pentecostales Polynesiennes—This denomination sent representatives in 1968. In 2001 there were 5 churches and 900 members.

Seventh Day Adventists—Missionaries arrived in 1892. In 2005 there were 29 churches and 4,111 members.

People Groups

All information unless otherwise noted is taken from www.peoplegroups.org and www.joshuaproject.net

00000

British (50)

The British living in the islands may have moved there for business purposes. They speak English and thus have easy access to the complete Bible and the *Jesus* film. About 70% of the people are affiliated with some type of religious group. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

18407

Chinese-Tahitian Creole (235)

The Chinese-Tahitian Creoles speak a language called Assamese. They may be familiar with Tahitian as well. They are predominantly ethno-religionists. Fifty percent have some other type of religious preference. Approximately 3.91% are evangelical Christians. The complete Bible and the *Jesus* film have been translated into their language.

20283

Cook Island Maori (1,469)

The Cook Island Maori speak a language called Rarotongan. About 90% of the people are associated with some type of religious group. About 19% are evangelical Christians. The complete Bible and the *Jesus* film are available to them.

18408**Euronesian (39,960)**

The Euronesians are the offspring or descendants of Polynesians who had relationships with Europeans. They primarily speak French so the complete Bible is available to them. Eighty percent have some type of religious affiliation with many being Roman Catholic. About 20% of the population is evangelical Christian.

8245**French (25,939)**

The French living on the islands could be descendants of earlier settlers or more recent émigrés. They speak French and thus have easy access to the complete Bible and the *Jesus* film. Sixty percent belong to some type of religious organization. Many attend Roman Catholic mass. Only about .3% is evangelical Christian.

8246**Han Chinese (26,562)**

The Han Chinese speak a dialect of Chinese known as Hakka. The people practice ethnic religions. About 24.6% claim to have some other type of religious belief system. Only 1.17% is evangelical Christian. The Bible and the *Jesus* film are available to them.

8247**Mangarevan (2,210)**

The Mangarevans primarily live within the Gambier Islands. They speak a language called Mangareva which has about a 50% lexical similarity to Tahitian. About 82.99% of the people belong to a religious organization. Many are Protestant. Approximately 13% of the Mangarevan are evangelical Christians. Portions of the Bible were translated by 1908. The *Jesus* film is inaccessible.

8249**North Marquesan (51,888)**

The North Marquesans speak a language called Marquesan, which has a 50% lexical similarity to Tahitian. They primarily live on the islands of Hatutu, Nuku Hiva, Ua Huka, and Ua Pou. Ninety-seven percent of the islanders profess to have some type of religious beliefs. Many are Protestants. About 17% are evangelical Christians. Portions of the Bible are available in their language. The *Jesus* film is not accessible.

8250

Pitcairn Islander (235)

The Pitcairn Islanders speak a dialect of British English known as Norfolk Pitcairn. They are the descendents of Tahitians and English mutineers that settled on Pitcairn Island. In the 1800's, at the request of the islanders, settlers were moved to the island of Norfolk when their numbers became too numerous for Pitcairn Island. The people living in French Polynesia decided at some point to travel there in search of work. About 99% of the people belong to some type of religious group. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. They have access to the complete Bible and the *Jesus* film.

8251

Pukapukan (1,474)

The people speak a language called Pukapuka. Ninety percent have some type of religious beliefs. Approximately 11.42% are evangelical Christians. They may also speak Tahitian or French. There are no religious materials available in their heart language, but many are available in French or Tahitian.

8252

Rapa (677)

The Rapa people speak a language called Rapa, which is spoken on the Austral Islands. Many also speak Tahitian. Ninety percent of the people are affiliated with a religious entity. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. The Bible and the *Jesus* film are not available in their language, but are in Tahitian.

00000

Rapa Nui, Easter Islander (500)

The Rapa Nui people speak a dialect called Rapa Nui. About 85% are affiliated with a religious organization with many attending Roman Catholic mass. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. The Bible and the *Jesus* film are not available in their language, but are in Tahitian.

8255

South Marquesan (3,206)

The South Marquesans speak a language known as South Marquesan. They live primarily on the islands of Hiva Oa, Tahuta, and Fatu Hiva. Seventy percent claim to belong to a religious group. Many are Protestant. About 12.56% are evangelical Christians. Portions of the Bible have been translated and the *Jesus* film is available in their language.

8256

Tahitian (117,000)

The Tahitians are the predominant cultural group in French Polynesia. They speak Tahitian which is the main Polynesian dialect of the area. Ninety-five percent are affiliated with a religious group. Many are Protestant. About 2.77% are evangelical Christians. The complete Bible and the *Jesus* film are accessible to them.

8257

Tuamotuan (19,912)

The Tuamotuans speak a language called Tuamotuan, which has an 83% lexical similarity with Rarotongan and 77% with Hawaiian. Eighty percent of the population is affiliated with a religious entity. About 12.68% are evangelical Christians.

8259

Tubuaian (11,048)

The Tubuaian people live on the Austral Islands and speak a language called Austral although many may be switching to Tahitian. Eighty-four percent belong to a religious organization. About 13.64% are evangelical Christians. There are no religious materials available in their own language, but the complete Bible and the *Jesus* film exist in Tahitian.

Missiological Implications

(Gleaned from *Operation World*)

1. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek ways to share materials concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the peoples of Polynesia.
2. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek ways to help the believers in Polynesia to evangelize and provide churches for peoples among the Han Chinese (over 26,900 population) and French (over 25,900 population) among whom only small groups of Christians exist.
3. Evangelical Christians and churches should provide help for the local believers in withstanding the Mormon Church. The Mormon group has over 9,500 members in more than 40 congregations. These peoples need to comprehend the true biblical teachings.
4. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek ways to introduce the Gospel to the Tahitian peoples. Less than three of every 100 of these people are believers.
5. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek to guide the peoples of Polynesian in the directions of biblical morality. Tahiti has a problem with prostitution and drug use. Other moral problems plague the society.
6. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek to help in economic development in the islands.
7. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek ways to aid the local believers in reaching the non-religious on the islands.

Pictures



Links

<http://www.tahiti-tourisme.com/>

<http://www.polynesianislands.com/fp/>

http://www.pacificislandtravel.com/fr_polynesia/about_destin/history.html