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General

French Polynesia, formerly called the French Settlements in Oceania, is an Overseas Territory within the French Community. It consists of four distinct island groups containing some 130 islands in the South Pacific Ocean. The island groups extend from 7°S to 29°S, and from 131°W to 156°W.

The archipelagoes forming French Polynesia are scattered across 3,941 square kilometers of ocean.

The four islands groups constituting French Polynesia are: Marquesas Islands, Tuamotu Archipelago, Society Islands, Austral Islands.

Marquesas Islands

The Marquesas Islands, consisting of ten volcanic islands and a few small islets, extend in a NW and SE direction, between the parallels 7°S and 11°S, and the meridians 138°W and 141°W.

The five principal inhabited islands are Nuku Hiva, Ua Pu, Hiva Oa, Tahuata, and Fatu Hiva. The best known of the islands is Hiva Oa, a fertile and heavily wooded high island.

Tuamotu Archipelago

The Tuamotu Archipelago, consisting of 78 islands, almost all of them atolls, is divided into two groups for administrative purposes, Gambier Islands and their dependencies forming the E group, and the Tuamotu Islands forming the W group. The archipelago extends for about 950 miles in a NW and SE direction, between the parallels 14°S and 24°S, and the meridians 135°W and 149°W.

The archipelago is also called the Paumotu, Low or Dangerous Archipelago. With a few exceptions all the islands are low-lying coral atolls or rings of coral enclosing salt-water lagoons. The chief exception is the upraised island of Makatea, formerly noted for its phosphate deposits, now exhausted. It has a copra economy. Some of the atolls have their income augmented by the pearls found in the extensive lagoon areas.

Society Islands

The Society group contains 12 major islands divided into a windward cluster of five and a leeward section of seven islands. They extend for about 400 miles in a WNW and ESE direction between the parallels 15°S and 18°S, and the meridians 148°W and 155°W.

The Windward Islands consist of Tahiti, Moorea, and the smaller islands of Mehetia, Tetiaroa, and Maiao.

The Leeward Islands consist of the volcanic islands of Huahine, Raiatea, Tahaa, Bora Bora, and Maupiti, together with the four small atolls of Tupai, Mopelia, Manuae, and Motu One. The latter three atolls are uninhabited.

Tahiti is the largest island of the group. It is formed of volcanoes with an isthmus and appears like a figure-eight.

Austral Islands

The Austral Islands consist of the five inhabited islands of Rurutu, Tubuai, Rimatara, Raivavae, and Rapa, as well as the uninhabited Marotiri Rocks and Maria Islands. Mataura on Tubuai Island is the chief settlement.

The chain extends for about 800 miles in a WNW and ESE direction between the parallels 21°S and 24°S, and the meridians 147°W and 155°W.

The island of Tubuai is a high volcanic island measuring about 5 miles long and 3 miles wide. It is oval in shape with Mount Taita, 400m high, its highest point. A barrier reef encircles the island. There is an airstrip for light planes.

Tubuai is a very fertile island and coffee, copra, bananas, manioc (arrowroot), and oranges are grown here.

The climate is tropical but moderate.

The terrain is a mixture of rugged high islands and low islands with reefs.

Buoyage System

The IALA Buoyage System (Region B) is in effect. See Chart No. 1 for further IALA Buoyage System information.

Currency

The official unit of currency is the 1 CFP franc, consisting of 100 centimes.

Fishing Areas

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADS) may be encountered in the waters throughout French Polynesia. These devices consist of a float of various descriptions, usually moored in deep water. The floats may not be lighted and are not usually charted.

Caution is advised as FADS are not maintained as aids to navigation; the lights, if fitted, are prone to failure, as are the float moorings. Concentrations of fishing vessels may also be found in the vicinity of FADS.

Government

French Polynesia, a French territory since 1843, opted in November 1958, for the status of an Overseas Territory within the French Community.

Under the 1977 Constitution, the territory is administered by a High Commissioner, a Council of Government of 8 members, and a Territorial Assembly of 30 members elected every 5 years.

The capital is Papeete.

Holidays

The following holidays are observed:

January 1, New Year's Day; March 5, Gospel Day; Good Friday; Easter Monday; May 1, Labor Day; Ascension Day (39 days after Easter Sunday); Pentecost (about 10 days after Ascension Day); July 14, Bastille Day; August 15,

Assumption; November 1, All Saint's Day; November 11, Armistice Day; and December 25, Christmas Day.

Industries

The main industries are based on tourism, pearls, agricultural processing, and handicrafts.

Copra is the main agricultural product. The copra output is processed into coconut oil for export, and into coconut meal for use as cattle feed by the local beef industry, although some is also exported. Coffee, vegetables, and fruits are grown only for local consumption.

Other island industries include textile fashion goods, handicrafts, foodstuffs, and a brewery. Tourism is very important to the island's economy.

Languages

The official language of French Polynesia is French. Tahitian is widely used among the islanders.

Pilotage

Pilotage is compulsory for the port of Papeete. Movements of naval vessels are normally carried out by military pilots, although it is customary for a civilian pilot to be engaged for the first entry and last departure of such vessels.

Licensed pilots are available at Papeete and may be obtained by displaying the customary signals or, preferably, by giving 24 hours notice by radio. Pilots board about 2 miles outside Passe de Papeete.

Regulations

The territorial waters of the Tuamotu Archipelago situated S of 17°20'S and E of 145°45'W, form a restricted area.

No vessel or aircraft may enter this area without the prior permission of the Chief Territorial Governor of French Polynesia.

Time Zone

The Time Zone description for Tuamotu Archipelago, Society Islands, and Austral Islands is WHISKEY (+10).

The standard time of the Marquesas Islands is UT (GMT) +9 hours 30 minutes.

U.S. Embassy

There are no U.S. diplomatic offices in French Polynesia. French Polynesia is an overseas territory of France.