

## **MODERNITY AND OPENING UP TO THE WORLD**

### **Strengthened ties with mainland France**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Papeete conurbation transformed into an attractive centre welcoming migrants from all over the Polynesian archipelagos. The population thus began to be schooled younger while its proportion of mixed race inhabitants increased. Ties with mainland France also started to strengthen. As such, 300 soldiers of Tahitian origin would die on the European battlefields, during the First World War. In September 1940, during the Second World War, Tahiti would also be one of the very first French territories to join General de Gaulle's Free French Forces (Forces Françaises Libres). In the Pacific Battalion, 300 Tahitian volunteers would later leave for the European battlefields. The presence of a significant base supporting the American armed forces in Bora Bora, from February 1942 until the end of 1945, further served to contribute towards the consolidation of the opening up of the Polynesian islands to the world. More than 5,000 American soldiers were stationed there, significantly contributing to the international awareness of the "Pearl of the Pacific".

### **Political awakening and "decolonisation"**

At the end of the Second World War and with the return of the Polynesian soldiers, attitudes started to change once again. A real political awakening began to take place in certain parts of the population under the driving force of Pouvanaa a Oopa, a politician from the island of Huahine and a key proponent in the development of a true Tahitian nationalism. Having contributed in their own way in the fight to defend Republican values, in 1946, the French Establishments in Oceania (Établissements français d'Océanie) were accorded the status of "Overseas Territories" (Territoires d'Outre-Mer or TOM). As such, all inhabitants thus became citizens of the Republic marking the end of the colonial period.

### **Establishment of the CEP (Pacific Experimentation Centre)**

In the 1960s, French Polynesia - and more specifically the island of Tahiti - was able to fully enter the world trade circuits with the opening of an international airport (1961). The key evolution, however, lay in the establishment of the Pacific Experimentation Centre (Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique or CEP), upon the orders of General de Gaulle. In 1963 installation of the necessary infrastructures for the development of atomic bombs began on the atolls of Moruroa and Fagataufa, situated approximately 1,200 km to the South-East of the island of Tahiti, in the Tuamotu Archipelago. Although initially atmospheric, from 1974 onwards, nuclear testing would be conducted underground before being finally drawn to a close in 1996.

### **Fast and dramatic changes**

As of 1968, there were 25,000 people working under the CEP, of which 10,000 were Polynesians. Half of the active Polynesian population were therefore employed by the Ministry of Defence. Paid jobs increased exponentially, especially in the public service, thus creating a "modern" service economy. A development, which was to the detriment of traditional activities such as farming and fishing. Many of the island populations also migrated to the island of Tahiti. In just a few years, the presence of and activity generated by

the CEP literally catapulted the Polynesians into the world economy as well as consumer society.

### **Autonomy**

In 1977, under the decisive impetus of the politician Francis Sanford, French Polynesia acquired a status that would considerably increase the powers of its Territorial Assembly, which thus benefited from a so-called "management" autonomy. At that time, this autonomy represented a pioneering approach and a major institutional innovation within the Republic. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, this search for an ever larger slice of autonomy was pursued vigorously by Gaston Flosse. The key reform of 6 September 1984, proclaiming the "internal autonomy" of French Polynesia even allowed the Territory to freely run its own administration.

Through its various statuses, the last of which was declared in 2004, French Polynesia has thus benefited from a considerable amount of freedom in its political, economic and social choices. It also benefits from strong political symbols like that of its national flag and song, "Ia Ora Tahiti Nui", (Long live Tahiti Nui!).

## **RESSOURCES AND VALUES**

### **A young population**

In 2007, French Polynesia counted a population of 259,596 inhabitants with 75% concentrated on the islands of Tahiti and Mo'orea in the Society Islands. The Leeward Islands groups a population of 33,200 inhabitants; the Tuamotu and Gambier Islands, 16,800; the Austral Islands, 6,300; and the Marquesas, 8,600.

One particularly striking feature of the French Polynesian population is its youth, with 38% of the total population being under 20 years of age, compared to 25.4% in France, for example. This youthfulness is largely due to a strong demographic dynamism with approximately 4,500 births in the country each year.

### **Cosmopolitanism and mixed race unions**

According to the 1996 census of ethnic and religious characteristics for a population of 219,512 inhabitants, there were 78% Polynesians (and assimilated persons), 12% Asians (mainly descended from Chinese immigrants at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries) and 10% Europeans, still referred to as *pōpa'a* whether or not they are "local" (6%) or from mainland France (4%). Straddling these three ethnic groups, "half-casts", that is to say those of mixed race, should also be included. Polynesian society has thus been marked by extensive racial mixing both on a biological and cultural level.

### **Strong religious values**

As for religion, there were 57% protestant members of the Evangelical Church (today the Mā'ohi Protestant Church), 30% Catholics, 6% Mormons, 2% Adventists and 2% Buddhists and Confucianists. Despite the fact that Christianity has been relatively recent - less than two centuries old - its religious values are firmly embedded in the country with the various churches benefiting both from social power and a strong influence.

### **A developed country**

Within the Pacific, French Polynesia is regarded as both a modern and developed society. In 2004, its GNP proportional to number of inhabitants, ranked it 36th worldwide out of 227, putting it on a level with countries such as New Zealand and Australia.

Positive changes to key indicators such as extended life expectancy, reduction in child mortality and level of equipment of households with various goods are demonstrative of this development, being not only economic but also social.

The country also has a comprehensive educational system, which includes a large network of nursery and primary schools (205), middle schools, high schools (lycées) and a university.

With 75,000 students enrolled, almost one in three Polynesians is in education.

Employed in over 49,000 businesses, today there are roughly 68,000 active Polynesians.

### **Modern infrastructures**

Of the 76 inhabited islands that constitute French Polynesia, 47 are equipped with regularly served aerodromes. Indeed, the country is served almost daily by inter-continental flights coming from or going to Europe, the Americas, Oceania and Asia. A large proportion of these flights is provided by the country's international company, Air Tahiti Nui, which has a fleet of five long-haul aircraft.

The announced installation of an underwater telecommunications cable linking Tahiti to Hawaii, and so to the global information "highways", will strengthen the already well-served electronic communication channels (ADSL internet access, GSM "2G" and soon to be "3G" networks).

A modern health care infrastructure network also ensures a high level of health services. By way of comparison, the medical density per 100,000 inhabitants is 242 doctors in French Polynesia against 247 in Australia and 237 in New Zealand.

### **Tourism development**

Despite its isolation, French Polynesia receives some 220,000 tourists every year, almost the equivalent of its population.

The Europeans, and particularly the French, were the first to visit, followed by the North Americans and Japanese. A modest tourism development, focused on high-end rather than mass tourism, has enabled the beauty of the Polynesian landscapes and sites to be conserved.

The tourist industry is today supported by a significant infrastructure with 52 classified hotels, 258 guest houses and small family-run hotels, over 300 tourism service providers, 7 cruise ships and 42 underwater diving centres.

Accounting for roughly 40 billion CFP Francs flowing into the local economy (335 million Euros/ 531 million USD), tourism plays a key role in the modern Polynesian economy. It is the country's first resource, providing approximately 11,000 jobs.

Certainly with the diversity of its landscapes and authenticity of its welcome, tourism has been a natural industry for Tahiti and its islands. Today, its ambition is to expand its offer into newer niche markets such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, golf, spa and well-being, nonetheless trying to maintain a balance between the development of tourism and sustainable development; a necessity if the delicate environmental and social harmony of the Polynesian territory, characterised by its significant isolation, is to be conserved.

### **Valued natural resources**

With, by way of example, a flora constituted of 62% so-called endemic species, that is to say specific to the country, French Polynesia features among the world's areas most rich in biodiversity. The country has therefore undertaken to promote this significant natural heritage.

Tahitian vanilla and Tahitian monoi oil (benefiting, since 1992, from the French AOC certification, Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, literally "controlled designation of origin") are already top earners in terms of export revenue. Other plants also have real potential in this area, including the Tahitian tiaré and tamanu oil (*calophyllum inophyllum*) or even the noni (*Morinda citrifolia* L.), from which many cosmetic products and phyto-pharmaceuticals or pharmafoods have been derived.

The economic exploitation of the rich marine resources is also key to the Polynesian economy. At the fore is of course the Tahitian cultured pearl, developed almost exclusively in the lagoons and atolls of the Tuamotu Archipelago. Internationally recognised, the cultured pearl is the country's number one export, representing an annual amount of approximately 10 billion CFP Francs (88.8 million Euros/ 140 million USD). The industry also provides over 5,000 jobs with 669 documented pearl farms.

Fishing, both on the high seas and in the lagoons, is also one of the country's fundamental resources and more specifically tuna fishing.

## **A CULTURE IN MOTION**

### **Cultural renewal and reinvention**

Since the end of the 70s, a strong trend for the renewal and renaissance of traditional Polynesian practices has been growing. Far from the return of some folklore, however, practices, including dance, tattooing, traditional sports, song and arts and crafts, have all been reinvented and adapted to fit the modern context. Extensive racial mixing has also played a part in their transformation. Having become mass phenomena, they are now a part of the everyday life of Polynesians of all origins and ethnicities. Today, we are seeing a resurgence of ancient ceremonies relating to the changing of the seasons, the rising and setting of the Pleiades constellation, the *Matāri'i i raro* from May to October and the *Matāri'i i ni'a* from November to April, with a view to the reappropriation of traditional cultural practices.

### **Dance and song**

Although repressed during the 19th century, today the desire to dance may now be expressed and is even officially encouraged. At the beginning of the century, and particularly in the 1950s, we saw a renaissance in Polynesian dance, *'ori tahiti*, under the initiative of leading figures such as Mémé de Montluc and Madeleine Moua. Now taught in over twenty schools boasting approximately 5,000 Polynesians, *'ori tahiti* is a lively and very popular practice, regardless of age. Dance is featured in all festivities whether public or private, serving as a strong indicator of the power of the bond that connects Polynesians not only to dance but also to song and music. It would not be an exaggeration to say that every Polynesian family has at least one musician, so widespread is the playing of instruments across all sections of the population, such as the ukulele or other more modern instruments like the guitar. Dance and song indeed play an integral part in the love of the Polynesian culture for parties and conviviality.

### **Heivā i Tāhiti**

Every year, from mid-June to mid-July, the festivities of Heivā i Tāhiti are the esteemed celebration of Polynesian culture and affirmation of its difference through sports, dance and song. During the prestigious Song and Dance competitions, the best *'ori tahiti* dance troops are pitted one against another. Accompanied by musicians playing traditional percussion instruments, especially the *tō'ere* or *pahu*, a type of large drum, as well as more modern European instruments, the troops animatedly contend for the various prizes. Traditional songs, reclaimed and adapted by the missionaries for use in religious ceremonies, along with the *hīmene*, are also used on such festive occasions. Traditional sports competitions (stone lifting, fruit-carrying races, etc.) are similarly incorporated into the Heivā festivities. Not to mention the performance of "Firewalking" ceremonies or *umu tī*, and reconstitutions of ancient religious ceremonies during this period.

### **Polynesian sports**

Among the sports activities of the pre-European society outrigger canoeing or *va'a* stands out from the rest. Since the start of the 70s, *va'a* has experienced a spectacular revival. Today, the Tahitian *va'a* federation boasts over 5,000 Polynesians. More broadly speaking, it is practised en masse with roughly 30,000 regular participants. The "Hawaiki Nui Va'a", a stages race between the Leeward Islands in a *va'a ono* (six-person crew), has thus become the country's main sports event, taking place every year towards the end of October. Surfing, a practice which the Polynesians were first observed doing by European explorers in the 18th century, is also very popular.

### **Richness and diversity of the arts and crafts**

Often a collective expression, the arts and crafts of Polynesia have appropriated and adapted certain ancient techniques like weaving. It is an art and craft inspired by ancient creations, particularly objects made from pearl and mother-of-pearl.

As in other domains, it has also been heavily influenced by racial mixing with its process of design being largely based on the introduction of new materials and unknown influences to the early Polynesians.

*Tifaifai*, for example, a type of patchwork introduced by the missionaries, involving pieces of coloured fabric being stitched together in a specific style, has replaced the art of making *tapa*, that is fabric made from beaten bark.

While hats, unknown to the early Polynesians (feather headdresses had a ceremonial role), have become a speciality of the Austral islands. These hats are based on the European models but made from woven plant fibres. Sculpture (from stone, wood or coral) has also experienced a renaissance, after having been repressed under the influence of the Christian missionaries. Sacred or blessed vessels like the *ti'i/tiki*, are no longer produced in the spirit of ancient times, but have nonetheless remained objects of a certain manual dexterity, especially in the Marquesas where they are a speciality.

Each archipelago, indeed each island has developed its own unique form of arts and crafts, often closely linked to its natural resources.

Generating over 11,000 jobs in hundreds of associations, the practice of arts and crafts is far from being the expression of some "folklore" long since passed. It occupies an important position in the country's economy. A leading local industry has also developed with an array of pearl and mother-of-pearl jewellery designs available. Due to the high quality of their creations, Polynesian designers have even gained a certain international acclaim.

### **New practices and new generations**

Fundamentally oral in nature, it was only through the Christian missionaries, themselves followers of the religion of the "Book" par excellence, the Bible, that Polynesian culture first came into contact with the art of writing. The creation of a literature, in the Western sense of the term, had long been accrued from Anglo-Saxon and particularly French writers inspired by their knowledge of Polynesian life. This had given rise to quite a plentiful production, more or less unrivalled in quality, of novels and essays, for which certain names have come to the fore including Melville, Stevenson, Loti, Ségalen, Hall and London. We are nonetheless seeing the birth of "local" writers, somewhere in between the spoken word and literature, who are describing the reality of the Polynesia of today.

Modern Polynesian music, popular entertainment music for the most part, has been inspired by traditional rhythms and melodies. While the first exogenous instruments to have been adopted were the guitar and ukulele, we are also seeing the emergence of an even more modern type of music in the advent of synthesizers and drums with some groups attempting a kind of "fusion" music, sometimes associated with danced expression.

### **Polynesian spirit**

Developed, modern and open to the world, Polynesian society is also rich in strong cultural specificities.

Aside from French, the official language of the country, the five languages, which are *Reo 'enata* and *'Enana*, *Reo ma'areva*, *Reo tahiti* and *Reo pa'umotu*, are also still spoken. In the audiovisual media, numerous broadcasts are made in these languages, a sign of their ongoing vitality.

Having resisted the strong rise in individualism, which has characterised Western societies, French Polynesia continues to preserve its equally strong sense of family and community solidarity. One further differentiation of the country is its peaceful cohabitation of various religions and ethnicities. Open-minded, generous and welcoming, the Polynesians would like to maintain a balance between any future development and the preservation of their traditions and roots. Such is the Polynesian art of living today.

## **SNAPSHOT OF TAHITI AND ITS ISLANDS**

### **OFFICIAL NAME**

French Polynesia

### **STATUS**

Overseas country (Pays d'Outre Mer - POM) under the French Republic.

### **POLITICAL SYSTEM**

The French Polynesian political system includes a president, a government and an assembly of 57 representatives.

Forty-eight municipalities.

French Polynesia is represented at the national level by 4 elected representatives: two members of the National Assembly and two senators from the Senate.

### **OFFICIAL LANGUAGE**

French

## **LANGUAGES SPOKEN**

*Reo 'enata/ 'Enana* (Marquesan), *Reo ma'areva* (Gambier), *Reo tahiti* (Society), *Reo pa'umotu* (Tuamotu), *Reo tūha'a pae* (Austral), Cantonese and Mandarin.

## **MARITIME DOMAIN**

5.5 million km<sup>2</sup>

## **LAND MASS**

3,521 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 0.01% of the country's total surface area)

Island of Tahiti (1,042 km<sup>2</sup>, or one third of the country's land mass)

5 Archipelagos: Society, Tuamotu, Gambier, Austral and Marquesas - 121 islands of which 77 are atolls

## **LENGTH OF LONGEST FLIGHTS WITHIN FRENCH POLYNESIA**

Island of Tahiti - Marquesas Islands (3 hours 30 mins)

Island of Tahiti - Gambier Islands (4 hours 40 mins)

Island of Tahiti - Austral Islands (1 hours 30 mins)

## **POPULATION**

260,000 inhabitants in 2007, of which 100,000 were under 20 years of age

4,500 births per year

## **ECONOMY**

GDP in 2004: 512 billion CFP Francs (4.3 billion Euros/ 6.8 billion USD)

GDP per inhabitant in 2004: 2 million CFP Francs (16,760 Euros/ 26,578 USD)

Tourist Resources

**ANNUAL NATIONAL REVENUE GENERATED:**

44.6 billion CFP Francs (373 million Euros/ 592 million USD) (2006)

**NUMBER AND ORIGIN OF TOURISTS IN 2007**

218,241 tourists

85,205 Europeans of which: 43,161 French, 65,549 Americans,

23,240 Japanese, 14,400 Italians and 11,746 Australians.

**TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE**

52 classified hotels (3,436 units); 258 guest houses and small family-run hotels (1,301 units);

300 tourism service providers; 42 diving centres; 7 cruise ships and 77 nautical charters.

(2008 figures)

**PEARL INDUSTRY**

“Tahitian cultured pearl” exports in 2007: 10 billion CFP Francs (88.8 million Euros/ 140 million USD) (2007)