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**Ia ora na I te matahiti api!**

Happy New Year!

Welcome to the January edition of the Te Parau Api, where the islands of Tahiti come alive with fun facts, mystique, and even a little history! In this issue, we are pleased to highlight the recently nominated atoll of Fakarava as part of a UNESCO reserve, historical sites and hikes on Huahine, Tahiti's Garden of Eden, Tahitian Wedding Ceremonies, as well as the latest book highlighting the destination of Tahiti, Cocktails in Tahiti.

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Mauru'uru roa!

Tahiti Tourisme North America

**The Commune de Fakarava - Living in Harmony**

In October, 2006, UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, officially recognized a group of atolls in French Polynesia known as the Commune of Fakarava, as one of 25 newly designated UNESCO Reserve sites. As part of the organization's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, the Commune of Fakarava Biosphere Reserve joins an elite chapter of newly designated ecologically sound territories, including: Shatskyi Biosphere Reserve, Ukraine; Lake Chilwa Biosphere Reserve, Malawi; and Kien Giang, Vietnam.



Encompassing the atolls of Aratika, Fakarava, Kauehi, Niau, Raraka, Taiaro and Toau, the Commune de Fakarava is located in French Polynesia's remote Tuamotu archipelago. Sitting northeast of the Society Islands archipelago (which includes Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine, Raiatea, Taha'a, Bora Bora and Maupiti), the Tuamotu archipelago is a group of low lying atolls stretching for hundreds of miles towards the Gambiers Archipelago.

UNESCO established the MAB Programme in 1970 to preserve, protect, and enhance different ecosystem types around the world. The program's goal is to reduce biodiversity loss, improve livelihoods, and enhance social, economic and cultural conditions for environmental sustainability.

Fakarava, the largest, and most populated of the Commune of Fakarava atolls, and the second largest atoll in the islands of Tahiti (after Rangiroa), is home to unexplored "motu" (islets) and rare crustaceans, including squills and sea cicadas. Fakarava is one of the newest territories in French Polynesia to begin developing a tourism infrastructure. Home to 400 residents, Fakarava is considered the first populated center of the entire destination and the ancient capital of the region.

As part of the ongoing UNESCO Reserve designation, the Commune of Fakarava will be actively involved in the protection and socio-economic development that the MAB Program is set to initiate in the region. The designation requires that development plans comply with the traditions, rules, and laws of the region, with a long-term goal of sustaining the ecosystem, preserving the native culture, and enhancing the economy of the region.

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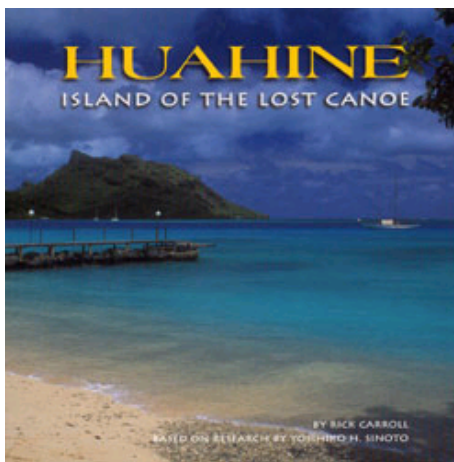
### A Walk Through History in The Garden of Eden

Huahine, known as Tahiti's "Garden of Eden," has a rich spiritual history and cultural significance for all of Polynesia. The island itself is comprised of two isthmuses – Huahine Nui ("big") and Huahine Iti ("small"), which are actually connected by a small bridge. The historical and religious significance of the island, and many of its rich traditions, have been documented in a book by author Rick Carroll titled *Huahine – Island of the Lost Canoe*. The book is based on research by acclaimed Bishop Museum archeologist and one of Polynesia's most renowned historians, Dr. Yoshiko Sinoto.

Many of Huahine's historical sites and marae (ancient stone temples) can be seen via spectacular hikes through the island's lush interior. The most popular hike on Huahine is a 2.5 mile winding trek that loops around Mata'ire'a Hill on Huahine Nui. On this particular path, hikers can see many ancient marae, the historical Te Ana complex, and a temple at the top of the hill which offers a spectacular panorama encompassing breathtaking vistas from Huahine's reef runway, to Lake Fauna Nui, the town of Maeva, and of the Pacific Ocean.

The trailhead starts just beyond Fare Pote'e, (which translates as "the oval house"), an ancient meeting house that has been restored as a museum and interpretive center. Fare Pote'e sits on the ocean side of the road to Maeva. The start of the hike leads into a lush jungle area past vanilla pines and breadfruit trees, which were once used to carve canoe hulls. Just before climbing Mata'ire'a Hill, a small wall made of marae stones built in 1846 to defend the island from the French can be seen as well as stone structures dating from 1600 to 1800 A.D. .

Next on the hike is the ancient Te Ana Complex



site, where 35 marae and hundreds of ancient residential and agricultural structures once stood. After passing a grove with pale green vanilla vines and breadfruit trees, a 43-foot long coral and basalt rectangle marae site, the Marae Tefano, sprawls under the shadow of a giant banyan tree with extensive roots.

Just past the Marae Tefano is Marae Mata'ire'arahi, a religious site dedicated to the powerful god, Tane, once reverently worshipped on Huahine. This site was the most important temple in the Society Islands prior to the building of Taputapuatea on the island of Raiatea. According to oral tradition, when Taputapuatea was about to be built, stones from Mata'ire'arahi were transported to the Taputapuatea building site to ensure that the new temple would retain the old temple's power.

The next point of interest on the hike is Marae Paepae Ofata, a site offering a panoramic view of Huahine Nui, Lake Fauna Nui, the Pacific Ocean and island reef, and Huahine Iiti. From there, a dirt road descends to join the main road near Marae Te Ava, which leads to the lagoon where Marae Fare Miro, a beautiful example of Polynesian stonework, sits. Near the village in the lagoon, V-shaped stone fish traps are visible, still used today by the islands local residents.

From there, crossing the lagoon bridge in the town of Maeva, a large rectangle building dedicated to the god Tane, known as Marae Manunu, is visible. An expansive coastal marae sits on the south shore of Huahine Iiti. Known as Marais Anini, this is a place where, historically sacrifices (including human) to the god of war, Oro, took place.

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### Saying "I Do" Again in Tahiti

Getting married in paradise may be a dream for many North Americans, but it's still not a reality yet for travelers to Tahiti. As a French territory, Tahitian wedding ceremonies for North American citizens aren't legally binding in the U.S. However, that hasn't stopped those such as golfing legend Phil Mickelson and actor Dustin Hoffman from participating with their spouse in a traditional Tahitian Wedding Ceremony.

On a break in his hectic playing schedule recently, Mickelson vacationed in Bora Bora, where he and his wife reinforced their commitment to one another via a traditional Tahitian wedding vow renewal ceremony.

Since the ceremonies are not legally binding (and as a result, not officially "recorded"), an accurate number of how many each year are performed is elusive. However, many of Tahiti's resorts, who traditionally offer and arrange the ceremonies, are reporting a steady increase.



Although there are many different types of ceremonies, they traditionally begin with the bride being treated to a soothing massage by her Tahitian “bridesmaid” using soothing monoi oil, while being sung to and adorned with fragrant flowers like a Tahitian princess. Meanwhile, the groom is taken to a motu (small islet) via outrigger canoe, painted with tattoos and given a crown of tropical leaves. The bride wears a traditional Tahitian wedding pareu and a flowered headpiece.

The wedding vow renewal ceremony is conducted in Tahitian by a priest and each couple is given a Tahitian name and a name for their first born child. A Tahitian marriage certificate made of tapa cloth parchment, is presented while village women sing hymns. The ceremony is often followed by a romantic sunset cruise where the bride and groom continue to be serenaded by soft Tahitian music.

The traditional Tahitian wedding ceremonies can easily be arranged through many of Tahiti’s tour operators, hotels, and cruise lines throughout the destination. Although not legally binding, these ceremonies are popular for people on their honeymoons and those celebrating their anniversaries.

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#### A Taste of Tahiti

Need to unwind, but just can't find the time to get away? How about a “Tahitian Midnight Rendezvous”? It's just one of many tasty and colorful cocktails highlighted in Cocktails in Tahiti, a newly released book by author Richard Bondurant. Equal parts Tahiti travel guide, party planner, and coffee-table keepsake, Cocktails in Tahiti features stunning photos - of both the destination and its drinks - as well as information about islands like Bora Bora, Moorea, and Tahiti and cocktail recipes from some of the islands' signature resorts.



From the familiar “Maitai,” to the playful “Tahiti Bikini” (Tahitian rum and pineapple juice), to the tempting “Toe To Toe,” Cocktails in Tahiti quenches readers' thirst for Tahiti travel information, while offering a taste of Tahiti that can be enjoyed at home. Featuring over 50 delicious drinks as well as a number of resort profiles, Cocktails in Tahiti may just be the next best thing to visiting the Tahitian islands on holiday. The book is available now at Amazon.com, Target.com, and other leading book retailers. For more information, visit [www.CocktailsInTahiti.com](http://www.CocktailsInTahiti.com).

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