

TAHITIAN LEXICON and PHRASES

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Polynesian languages are in the Austronesian language family, and glottochronologic linguistic analysis has been used to chart the dispersal of seafaring peoples throughout the Pacific (the linguistic migration data are now strongly supported by DNA haplotype analysis). Languages from indigenous Taiwanese to Malay and Tagalog to the Polynesian languages of Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, the Marquesas, Tahiti, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Easter Island all share some common root words. Tahitian today is spoken throughout the Society Islands. It uses only 16 letters, with 5 vowels (a, e, i, o, u) and 11 consonants (b, f, g, h, k, m, n, p, r, t, v). An apostrophe indicates a short pause - the famous Polynesian 'glottal stop'. The glottal stop apostrophe in Tahitian writing is formally recommended by the Tahitian Academy and makes pronunciation easier, but in general practice it is not always used in writing.

ahi ahi	evening
aita	no (pronounced eye-tah)
aita pe'a pe'a	No problem/ no worries. Also used to say 'You're welcome' (Pronounced eye-tah paya paya)
aku aku	ancestral protector ghosts
E	Yes (pronounced Ay)
fare	house, building (bank: fare moni , store: fare toa bathroom/toilet facility fare iti)
fatia	star
fenua	land (also see Te fenua ma'ohi - a native pride movement name for 'the Tahitian homeland')
Haere tatou	Let's go! (ha-ay-ray tah-tow)
Havai'i	traditional term for a sacred homeland island. Sometimes applied to Raiatea based on both Polynesian myth and the very real Taputapuatea Marae. The big island of Hawaii gets its name from the mythical fisherman-mariner who discovered it, Hawai'iloa. Hawai'iloa's children - Maui, Kaua'i and Oahu - settled nearby islands which bear their names.
hei	a flower garland necklace, classically made of Tahitian gardenias (tiare) [Hawaiian equivalent = lei]
himaa	earth oven commonly used in a tamaaraa feast
himene	song
hoa	friend
la Orana	Greetings (pronounced Yo-rah-nah)
iti	little, small (example: Tahiti Iti is the smaller portion of the bi-lobed island of Tahiti)
ma'a	food
maeva	Welcome (pronounced mah-yeh-vah)
mahana	sun
mana	sociospiritual 'power' or 'energy', derived from ancestors and/or one's abilities & achievements. It is a chiefly quality and there are various definitions of this hard-to-translate and important concept
manuia	Tahitian toast: Cheers!/To Your Health (pronounced mahn-wee-ah!)
Maita'i oe?	How are you? (may-tay oh-ay)
Maita'i (roa)	I'm good (very good). (may-tay ro-ah)
ma'ohi	indigenous, authentic - importantly this ancient word has been used increasingly since the 1940s to mean native Tahitian, with ethnic and cultural pride as well as political and nationalistic implications
marae	ancient religious site, outdoor temple
maramat	moon
maururu	Thank you [Thank you very much : maururu roa ; No Thank You: aita maururu]
moana	ocean
Mo'o re'a	lizard (mo'o) yellow (re'a) - origin of the name of the beautiful island of Moorea, based on an odd and sad myth (a giant yellow lizard, offspring of a human couple, was abandoned and died there)
motu	small island
nana	Goodbye, See you later (pronounced nah-nah)
niu	coconut
nui	big (example: Tahiti Nui is the larger portion of the bi-lobed island of Tahiti)
oe	you (plural: ōrua - two, outou - three or more)

(continued)

O'tahiti	native name for Tahiti at time of first European arrivals (1767-69) - Cook called the island Otaheite , changing it from Wallis' prior chosen name of 'King George's Island'. The O' is an honorific or focus marker. The meaning and etymologic provenance of the word Tahiti is unknown to this day.
pape	water (as in Pape'ete - 'water basket' - in reference to its long renown as a freshwater basin catching flow down from the mountains)
pareu	cloth wrap worn by men and women (Tahitian sarong)
pia	beer
po'e	pearl (black pearl: po'e rava)
po'po	Well done!
poipoi	morning
Porapora	Tahitian name for Bora Bora, meaning 'first born' - in Tahitian myth it was the first child of Raiatea
ra'i	sky, heaven - as in Raiatea, variously translated as 'far away heaven', 'bright sky'
rangi	another word for sky stemming from Polynesian or god of the sky or 'Father Sky'
roa	suffix meaning big or very (such as Maita'i roa - 'I'm very good') or long, vast (such as Rangiroa - vast sky) - also note the Maori name for New Zealand: Aotearoa - 'Land of the Long White Sky'
tahatai	beach
tahu'a	high priest/shaman in Tahitian polytheistic religion (kahuna in Hawaii, tohunga in Marquesas)
tamaa	Bon Appetit!
tamaaraa	Tahitian feast (Hawaiian equivalent: luau) (pronounced tah-mah-rah)
tamarii	child
tamure	traditional Tahitian dance
tane	man (pronounced tah-nay)
tapu	ritualistic code surrounding what is sacred and a set of behavioral rules related to same - this includes restrictions and implied or expressed prohibitions - hence the English word 'taboo'
tapa	painted cloth made from tree bark tata'u bodily decoration - tattooing
tauturu	help 'A tauturu ' makes it a request/ command- 'Please help'.
Te Fenua Ma'ohi	(see ma'ohi above) - An increasingly used native pride term for Tahiti, the homeland
tiare	the Tahitian gardenia, <i>gardenia taitensis</i> ; also can be used generically for flower
tiki	carved statue, usually of an ancestor or deity
va'a	outrigger canoe
vahine	woman (pronounced vah-hee-nay)

NUMBERS:

1 - hō'ē	6- ono
2 - piti	7- hitu
3 - toru	8- va'u
4 - maha	9- iva
5 - pae	10- ahuru

DAYS:

Mon	Monire	Fri	Mahana Pae
Tues	Mahana Piti	Sat	Mahana Ma'a
Wed	Mahana Toru	Sun	Tapati
Thurs	Mahana Maha		

NOTES:

- There is no real word for 'please' in Tahitian, but adding the suffix **na** can soften a request.
- Likewise there is no phrase for 'Excuse me', but again saying **na** is a rough equivalent, to 'soften' things.
- Marquesan, Pa'umotu (the language of the Tuamotus), and dialects of the Australs and Gambiers are distinct from Tahitian but share many similarities.
- There was no written language in Tahiti before the European arrivals. Captain Cook, Peter Heywood of the *Bounty* crew, and other early visitors recorded transliterations of Tahitian words in the 18th century. The London Missionary Society was the first to systematically render Tahitian words into the Roman alphabet in the early 1800s, with the help and support of Tahitian King Pomare II.
- Surprisingly, French is the sole official language of French Polynesia today, though the law does expressly allow Tahitian and other Polynesian languages to be used 'without restriction'. 95% of Tahitian residents read and write French. 75% speak primarily French at home, while 20% speak primarily Tahitian at home.