

# FRENCH POLYNESIA: Marae Taputapuatea becomes a UNESCO world heritage site, from in 2017.

By Corinne Raybaud

TAHITI, FRENCH POLYNESIA, August 16, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Raiatea is located in the Leeward islands at a 45 minute flight from Papeete, Tahiti.

Raiatea, meaning "faraway heaven" and "sky with soft light", was first named Havai'i after the homeland of the ancient Polynesians and is the most sacred island in the South Pacific.

Raiatea which is the second largest Tahitian isle, was the center of religion and culture over 1000 years ago and still lends enchantment to ancient legends told to this day. The green-carpeted mountains include the celebrated Mt. Temehani, a sort of Polynesian Mt. Olympus.

Formerly named Hava'i, Raiatea is known as the Gods' cradle and hosts archeological treasures (marae, petroglyphs...) witnessing an ever present epic history and culture. As the first Polynesian island to be populated, Raiatea shelters the most spectacular and first international marae of the Polynesian triangle, called Taputapuatea, where inauguration ceremonies, political alliances and international meetings took place. The site was prohibited (taboo) and was the headquarters of religious and political powers in the Polynesian region. Nowadays, communities of Hawai'i, New Zealand and Cook Islands still meet at this pilgrimage venue, which they consider as the home of their sacred culture. The large ceremonial area includes marae Taputapuatea which has just been inscribed as a UNESCO world heritage site. However, this island is also exceptionally rich in natural land and sea resources, which make it a tourist



destination worth discovering. Deep bays cut into the coastline, evidence of the island's volcanic history. On land, these turbulent origins did not leave Raiatea unscathed. Several peaks and collapsed craters are highly visible. The main summit, Mount Tafatua has an altitude of 1,017 meters (3337ft). Peaks, cliffs, and waterfalls are interspersed with densely lush landscapes through which several rivers flow. Among them is the Apomau river of Faaroa valley, the only navigable river of French Polynesia. Temehani's plateaus contain exceptional indigenous flora, including the famous tiare apetahi. This protected endemic flower is only found in the heart of this ecosystem. A hike along the Temehani plateau is available to explore this island whose mountains have so much to offer.



In comparison to other archeological sites on Raiatea, access to the Taputapuātea marae is easy since it is located right off the road and is clearly marked. A marae is a platform of dry rocks where pre-European Polynesian societies held their religious, social, or political ceremonies. Constructed next to the sea, Taputapuātea marae was part of a vast ceremonial and archeological network that includes other structures such as archery platforms and various paepae, which are also dry stone foundations.

Taputapuātea is one of the largest marae in French Polynesia. The site is at the heart of ancient Eastern Polynesian religion and mythology. It is remarkable as a symbol as well as for its international notoriety. After the 16th century, Raiatea had become the spiritual, cultural, political, and religious center for all of eastern Polynesia. According to oral tradition, Taputapuātea was the “seat of consciousness,” the “cradle of (ancient) Polynesian gods.”

According to oral tradition, Raiatea was the first occupied island in the central Pacific, and it is from this island that the rest of the Polynesian triangle was populated. This triangle starts at the northern tip of the Hawaiian Islands, moves southeast to Aotearoa (the Polynesian name for New Zealand), then shifts southwest across the ocean to Rapa Nui (Easter Island). Raiatea is also called Hava'i, the name of a mythical island where Polynesian people situate and identify their origins. The Maori people of New Zealand relate their origins to ancestors arriving from Raiatea in seven waka (outriggers/pirogues/va'a in Tahitian). For several centuries, the island played an important religious and political role between all these different island groups, notably to allow inter-island gatherings on the “international” Taputapuātea marae.

The ancient Polynesians believed the marae was a sacred place where they could communicate with the gods. Kings and priests would gather here for important tribal meetings, ceremonies and even human sacrifices.

It used to be a mythical place and even today the place feels special and intense. It's easy to understand why Raiatea was once the most sacred island in the South Pacific. The setting of course is wonderful with view over the lagoon and the site is well-preserved, peaceful and very mystic...

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Her first book published in 1996 is dedicated to Easter Island. Since 2008, she wrote books based on her university works on Easter Island and polynesian laws and the Oceanic French Establishments during WWI (1914-1918). She is the co-author of two biographies on John Brander and Dutrou Bornier two influent people during the 19th century in the Pacific. In 2011, she published a historical novel today known as Cornelia which relates the story of a great tahitian family from the 19th century to nowadays. In 2012 and 2013 she wrote short stories about women in Tahiti where she narrated their brave and moving lives.

Her last book named " Wallis discovered Tahiti, 250 years ago in 1767" relates the circumnavigation of Captain Samuel Wallis on the Dolphin, the discovery of Tahiti then called "Island of King George III" and the first meeting between European navigators and Tahitian people. She had the project to make small movies about the arrival of the first navigators.

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