

CROWDED FRENCH POLYNESIA



These Pacific islands are adored as Paradise. Nevertheless, last National Geographic's report on the world's most famous travel destinations did not speak about French Polynesia in very positive terms. The reason is tourism that has had a big impact on the islands as well as the local culture. The local tourism industry was quite hurt by overdevelopment and tourism mismanagement that detracted from the region's natural beauty. Simply said, there are too many visitors traveling to these islands. One of the most endangered islands is Bora Bora. Thirty years ago it has become one of the world's most prized luxury destinations and since then the number of resorts and tourism has been rising. The island is in the middle of the Pacific Ocean but nowadays the connectivity is very good. Bora Bora can not be considered a remote destination any longer. There are 23 nonstop flights a week from the US to Tahiti and 16 hotel resorts on Bora Bora alone.

According to a tourism sustainability expert, professor Brian King, French Polynesia has gained in popularity in the post-September 11 tourism industry, which has led to more investment by hotel groups. Last year, the St Regis Resort which occupies some 18 hectares on the edge of the lagoon, opened its facilities. They provide 100 villas and a spa that sits on its own islet.

The tourism industry players realize that a continuous harm to the environment would eventually result in loss to their business. They try to take measures that could improve the negative situation caused by overdevelopment in the destination. For example the InterContinental has one-of-a-kind eco-friendly air-conditioning system. The system pipes ice-cold deep sea water through a titanium heat exchanger that transfers the cold water into the freshwater circuit that powers the hotel's air-con. The system saves 90 per cent of the hotel's electricity consumption. Other environmentally-friendly procedures are discussed as well.

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