



NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
Manatū Aorere

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French Polynesia: trade and economic update

MARKET INTELLIGENCE REPORT



Summary

- French Polynesia enters 2026 with steady economic momentum driven by strong tourism performance, resilient household consumption, and solid public finances.
- The Government is progressing long term ambitions in sustainable tourism, the development of a Pacific data hub, and the expansion of the blue economy and energy transition sectors. These developments create timely opportunities in training, digital services, renewable energy, and education partnerships.

Report

French Polynesia political and economic outlook

The territory is midway through its five year political cycle, led since May 2023 by President Moetai Brotherson of the Tavini Huira'atira party. Although elections are due in 2028, no significant changes in economic strategy or trajectory are expected.

French Polynesia has enjoyed year-on-year positive GDP growth since the post-pandemic period, but the rate has eased off since 2024 (+1.1%). Unemployment and inflation are stable, and business confidence has stayed positive for four consecutive years, though cost of living remains a subject of debate. Public finances are strong, supported by ongoing transfers from the French state, which account for roughly one third of GDP, and robust tax revenues.

For New Zealand companies, these conditions provide a predictable investment climate, a reliable consumer base and government capacity to fund major infrastructure and sectoral development.

French Polynesia and New Zealand's trade relationship

New Zealand maintains a modest trading relationship with French Polynesia. It is New Zealand's third-highest value Pacific export market behind Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The bilateral trade balance is weighted in New Zealand's favour. In the year ended September 2025, imports from New Zealand reached NZ\$368 million, mostly in travel services, agri food products, and electrical machinery and equipment. Exports to New Zealand, primarily scrap metals, were valued at NZ\$59 million. (French Polynesia's primary trading partners are France, the European Union, China, South Korea, and the United States.)

Air connectivity is a strength in the relationship, with several weekly flights operated by Air New Zealand and Air Tahiti Nui between Auckland and Papeete. New Zealand is the third most popular tourist destination for French Polynesians (after the United States and France), while New Zealanders account for only 3-5% of arrivals to French Polynesia each year. For businesses, this indicates untapped potential in tourism partnerships, services exports, and higher value goods where reliability and proximity matter.

Key growth sectors

Tourism

Tourism remains central to French Polynesia's economy, providing around 18% of salaried employment and significant business revenue. The territory recorded 264,000 visitors in 2024, with the United States and France as the leading markets.

French Polynesia welcomed a record number of visitors in the third trimester of 2025 (84,000), almost 15% higher than the previous year. This increase has been supported by expanding accommodation capacity, although supply still falls short of demand.

French Polynesia's sustainable tourism strategy Fa'ari'ira'a manihini 2027 (FM27), meaning 'hospitality that reflects who we are and brings us together', aims to revive and modernise the industry while developing inclusive and sustainable tourism practices. An official review in late 2025 confirmed the strategy is progressing well, supported by hotel capacity expansion and wharf upgrades on outer islands.

The upcoming Pacific Games in 2027 will further stimulate investment, with around NZ\$220 million allocated to sports infrastructure and additional spending expected in logistics, accommodation and related services. 4,500 athletes and 12,500 accredited officials, volunteers and technicians are expected to attend this regional sporting event, not counting visitors and spectators.

Digital Infrastructure & Data Hub Ambitions

French Polynesia has an ambition to become a Pacific digital hub. The Government aims to leverage "follow the sun" workflows by improving infrastructure, attracting digital sector investment, and building local skills. Central to this vision is the Google-led Humboldt Subsea Cable project, connecting Chile, French Polynesia and Australia, expected to be operational by 2027. Equally important is developing a skilled workforce, and French Polynesia is establishing local training courses and schools for digital professions to address this shortage.

Blue Economy & Marine Innovation

The Sustainable Blue Economy Roadmap introduced in late 2024 sets out 176 actions across ocean related sectors with the goal of positioning the territory as a regional leader in sustainable marine development by 2030. The blue economy generated around NZ\$270 million in 2024 and accounted for 13% of employment. Growth areas include maritime infrastructure, sustainable fisheries, aquaculture systems, and marine environmental services.

Energy Transition

French Polynesia continues to depend heavily on imported fossil fuels for power generation and transport, but renewable energy capacity – mainly hydro and solar – is expanding. The French Polynesian Climate Plan 2030, implemented at the end of 2024, aims to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 by promoting renewable energy and low carbon transport. This transition is supported by NZ\$130 million from the territory's 2021–2023 recovery plan and a NZ\$120 million Energy Transition Fund established by the French state, resulting in investment in renewable facilities, grid upgrades, and energy storage, and hybrid power systems for both public and private operators.

Comment

French Polynesia's economic outlook for 2026 is positive, buttressed by government strategies across tourism, digital services, and the blue and green economies. The territory's development priorities offer practical entry points for New Zealand businesses that can deliver skills development, technical expertise and sector specific innovation. The combination of rising visitor numbers, upcoming infrastructure requirements, new subsea connectivity, and available climate finance, makes the next one to two years particularly strategic for engagement. There are also tertiary education opportunities for New Zealand in these sectors, including joint degrees, student exchanges, and vocational training.

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