**Visas for French Polynesia**

New Zealand passport holders are entitled to a 90 day visa on entry into French Polynesia. This visa cannot be renewed within a 180 day period except in extreme circumstances, such as serious illness or major boat breakdown. The old practice of flying out of French Polynesia for a day or two at Easter Island or the Cooks for example then returning to restart the 90 day period no longer works; such a trip simply halts the 90 day count which restarts when you re-enter the country. In extreme emergency situations however, ie severe illness, major breakdown of the boat, etc, it is possible to apply for an extension. You may or may nor get it. The only sure way to legally stay more than 90 days in any 180 day period is to obtain a long stay visa.

We both have New Zealand passports so the following notes apply only to New Zealand passport holders because different rules seem to apply to different nationalities.

There are four stages to obtaining a long stay visa: filling in the online application form, attending an ‘interview’ at the French Embassy in Wellington, making an application to the Haut Commissaire in Papeete for the carte de sejour (temporary resident card) and collecting the carte de sejour from the Haut Commissaire when it is ready.

Our first recommendation is to start early and ignore the time frames on the French Embassy website – they don’t allow sufficient time. We started 5 months before we were due to leave New Zealand. The next suggestion if you encounter difficulties is to be persistent – the embassy staff were very helpful in resolving the apparent contradictions evident in the various sources of information and also the ambiguous options in the online application. Also at an early stage apply for health insurance with a repatriation provision to cover the whole of your expected time in French Polynesia because you will need confirmation of the health insurance for the ‘interview’ stage at the embassy.

**The online application**

The website for the online application is <https://nz.ambafrance.org/Applying-for-a-French-visa-in-New-Zealand>. On the right hand side of this page there is a picture of a tropical island labelled with “Visa for French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna”. Click on this picture and a new page opens with the “Assistant Visa” wizard for determining if you need a visa.

Work through this wizard selecting the choices as appropriate for a long stay visa. The first two sections are “Your stay” and “Your travel document”. Completing these is straight forward and the next section “Reminder of your application” is a summary or your entrees so far.

The next section “Your search” is the answer to the question of whether or not you need a visa. You have applied for a long stay visa so this section should confirm that but with a number of exceptions one or more of which might apply to you.

The next part of the process (we’re assuming that you step through the pages as indicated) involves your plans and this caused a lot of confusion for us that was resolved only after a phone call to the Embassy. Under “Your plans” pull down the menu and select “Familial or private establishment”. Then for “Main purpose of your stay” select “visitor” from the pull down menu. The choice for “Your plans” is the only option that allows “visitor” as an answer to the “Main purpose of your stay”.

The responses to the next section “Your information” are obvious and this is followed by another “Reminder of your application”.

The wizard than goes on to “Supporting documents required” and a series of subheadings the first of which is “Prerequisites”. These are the documents that you will need for your interview at the French Embassy.

The first prerequisite is two copies of the application form signed and dated. This is the form that will be completed by the online process (you haven’t completed this part yet). You won’t see this form but further through the process you will be asked to open an account which I think is called something like “visa account”. You need to do this because the application form completed by the online process is stored in this account and you will need to access this account in order to obtain the form and so satisfy this prerequisite.

The second prerequisite is two passport photographs on passport photocard (photos printed on ordinary paper are not acceptable) and the third prerequisite is your passport.

The next subheading is “Purpose of Travel/stay”. The first requirement is for an OF11 form. Ignore this; it is required only for mainland France. The second requirement is to “promise not to exercise any professional activity in France”, that is, promise not to work. This was not required for the Embassy interview but is required later in Papeete (explained below). The third requirement is “proof of your socio-economic status”. This is satisfied by providing copies of bank statements showing healthy balances for the preceding three months.

The next subheading is “Accommodation” and this is satisfied partly by a copy of your boats New Zealand registration and partly by the letter explained below.

The next subheading is “Funds” and the bank statements mentioned above are required for this.

The final section is “Other” and the only item here is proof of your health insurance for the first three months although you will probably have insurance to cover you for the whole trip. Don’t be concerned about any pre existing medical conditions as the important thing is to have repatriation as part of your medical insurance.

In addition, although not mentioned in the application process (at least as far as we could find) you will be required to produce a letter addressed to the Haut Commissaire in Papeete explaining why you need a long stay visa. We prepared a letter after our interviews and emailed that and our boat’s registration (neither of which we thought were required so did not have that with us) to the Embassy. These were added to our applications before they were sent to Papeete. The key point we made in our letter was that we were very keen to seen French Polynesia but that because it is a long way from New Zealand by sailing yacht we wanted to spend as much time as possible in the country. We pointed out that the visa for 90 days was not really long enough to see much of French Polynesia and we were aware that this visa could not be extended within a 180 day period. We also reiterated that we would be staying on our boat fulltime and that we had sufficient funds to support ourselves; both facts that were already in our applications.

The address for this letter is

Haut Commissaire,

Haut Commissariat de Polynésie française,

Papeete,

Tahiti,

French Polynesia.

The wizard then opens the actual application for a long stay visa. The form is called the “Long stay Visa Application Form’. There is a French and English version on the website. Choose your language.

Most choices in the application are obvious but some are not. One asks why you need a long stay visa but the options available don’t include ‘Private stay/visitor’ although this is the correct answer. We made several calls to the French Embassy to sort out these confusing parts. The Embassy officer was very approachable and helpful.

Other important features of the application are”

1. A separate online application needs to be made by each passport holder (even though they ask for information about anyone else travelling with you on each form).
2. Your address in ‘France’ during your stay is the name and registration number of your yacht.
3. We asked for a length of stay of 3-6 months because 5 months was the maximum possible time we could spend in French Polynesia. The limit to the validity of the long stay visa seems to be the expiry date of your health insurance although without this limitation it would appear that the visa can be extended subject to confirming the requirements.

Once the application is complete a menu appears with the option for making and appointment for the visa interview at the Embassy.

Early on in the application process you will be required to set up a “visa” account with a password. The completed form is available for download as a .pdf by accessing this account.

Once the form is complete the website takes you to a form with your information filled in. This form is in French and titled “Demande de Visa Pour un Long Sejour”. The number of the form (14052\*01) does not correspond to the number indicated on the website if you filled in the English version.

You are then able to make an online appointment at the embassy. If more than one person is applying, try to book adjacent interview times because we were interviewed together. An automatic reply comes back with a “receipt” for your appointment and a list of the documentation you need for the interview (see below). You do not need an OFII form as indicated because this only applies for people staying in Metropolitan France.

**The ‘Interview’**

This is not an interview but an administrative check that you have filled in the paperwork correctly, have the other documentation required and to have fingerprints and photos taken. The decision about the visa is made in Papeete once all the paperwork is sent. The ‘interview’ takes place in a reception area with the administrator behind bullet proof glass but a slot at the bottom allows documents to be passed back and forth.

As indicated on the website you need a copy of the completed online application form, passport, passport style photos, evidence of health insurance, plus financial statements (the website lists all these). You also need cash equivalent to Euros 99. Not indicated on the website, but also needed is a copy of your boat’s registration as a NZ ship (ie not the NZYF registration) and the letter described above explaining why you want a long stay visa.

Once the information was complete the administrator sent it all to Papeete. The authorising body meets only once every two months so approval can take a couple of weeks (in our case) to a couple of months.

**The Visa Stamp**

The Embassy will let you know by email when the visa arrives. You can either courier your passport to the Embassy or take it in for the stamp. Even though we indicated which day we would take the passports to the embassy for the stamp, it still took a couple of hours.

**Carte de Sejour**

The gendarmes or immigration officials (depending on where you clear customs to enter into French Polynesia) stamp your passport and you have two months to go to the High Commission in Papeete in person to apply for the Carte de Sejour. We had an agent who told us what we needed (this is the easy way). You will need:

* Two copies of the application form for the carte de sejour plus 2 passport photos
* Two copies of the identity pages of your passport
* Two copies of date of entry into French Polynesia
* One copy of health insurance valid for proposed stay
* One copy of personal financial resources
* A signed attestation form indicating you will not carry out any professional activity
* A copy of vessel documentation (certificate of registry)
* Post office stamp for 9000 FP Francs (you pay the 9000 FPF at the post office and they give you a stamp). If you are a married couple and have a copy of your marriage licence then it costs only one stamp for you both.

You take this all to the High Commission (there is a bus from Marina Taina), they check it all and send it on. It takes about 2 months to get the card when you can pick it up from the High Commission or the agent if you use one.