

COOK ISLANDS GUIDE

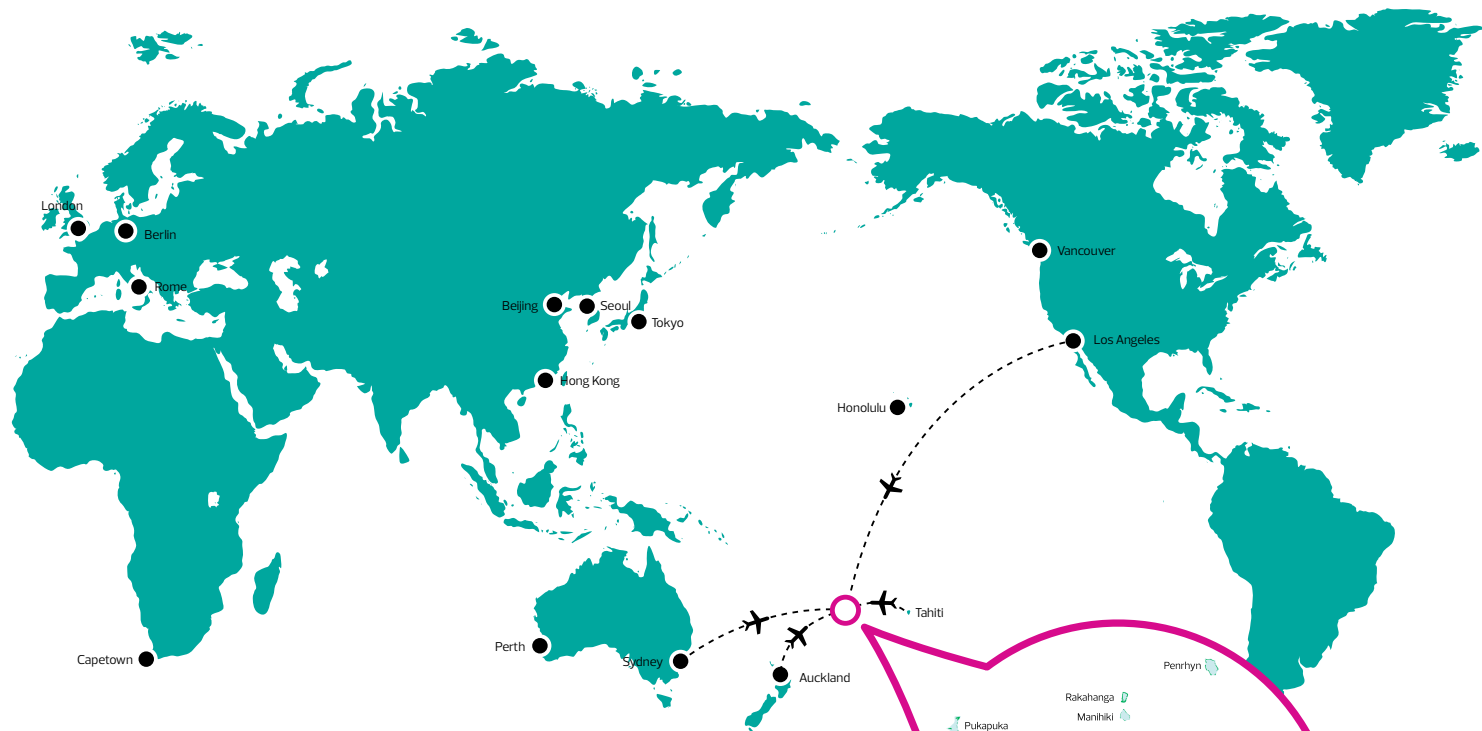
# RAROTONGA, AITUTAKI, ATIU

AND SISTER ISLANDS



**CO**  
**OK**  
**ISLANDS**

Love a Little PARADISE



Love a LITTLE PARADISE

# Kia Oraha

**D**iscover our hidden gem of the South Pacific and you'll see why there's so much more to a little paradise. Unspoilt, simple and so easy to get around, you can explore and play as much or as little as you want in this oasis of absolute freedom. Let the untouched charm of these beautiful islands and friendly locals capture your spirit and envelope your heart.

The 15 islands of the Cooks lie halfway between New Zealand and Hawaii, scattered like fragrant flower petals floating across 2.2 million square kilometres of a serene, opulent ocean. Boasting rare beauty, an idyllic climate, warm welcoming people with heart felt smiles and a pace of life unsurpassed. We invite you to endless adventure, romance and pure relaxation.

Come explore and share the Cook Islands with us, and discover why everyone loves a little paradise.

**For more information regarding flight schedules to the Cook Islands please refer to:**  
[www.cookislands.travel/flightinformation](http://www.cookislands.travel/flightinformation)



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## HOW TO GET HERE

Although we're a little paradise, we're serviced by big players: **Air New Zealand** ([airnewzealand.co.nz](http://airnewzealand.co.nz)), **Virgin Australia** ([virginaustralia.com](http://virginaustralia.com)), **Air Tahiti** ([airraro.com](http://airraro.com)) and **Jetstar** ([jetstar.com](http://jetstar.com)).

There are daily flights from Auckland operated by Air New Zealand and Virgin Australia. Air New Zealand also operates non-stop weekly flights out of Los Angeles and Sydney. Air Tahiti has a weekly service from Tahiti and Jetstar has a direct service from Auckland to Rarotonga 3 times a week.

A newly renovated international airport on the main island of Rarotonga means the Cook Islands are well equipped for global airlines. Upon arrival you'll enjoy our unique warm Cook Islands welcome, serenaded by Papa Jake on his ukulele as you clear customs and



purchase duty-free goods. Be prepared to receive a traditional ei, a garland of fragrant flowers as you leave the airport. The best part is yet to come, a trip from the airport to your accommodation right on the beach is less than 30 minutes, anywhere on the island.

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A valid passport and a return ticket will allow you a stay of up to 31 days. Extensions may be granted on a monthly basis for up to five months. New Zealand Citizens qualify for a stay of 3 months with a valid passport. Remember to apply two weeks before your visa expires. Extensions are granted at two levels for persons 15 years and older: Up to three months NZ\$70, up to five months NZ\$120. Children under 15 years of age are exempt from charges, but must report to Immigration for official paperwork to be completed. It's so simple and easy, the hardest thing will be saying goodbye.



Sailors wanting to berth their yachts in the docks of Avatiu Harbour, Rarotonga need to obtain moorings from the Harbourmaster at the Ports Authority: Phone (+682) 21921, PO Box 84 Rarotonga. Aitutaki visiting yachts should contact the Aitutaki Harbourmaster Phone (+682)31 050.

### CLEARING CUSTOMS

Personal effects including sports equipment and clothing are exempt from duty. Duty free items allowed include up to 250 cigarettes, or 250gms of tobacco, or 50 cigars, 2 litres of wine or spirits or 4.5 litres of beer. However, goods in excess of NZ\$750 could be subject to duty. Any food items must be declared on arrival otherwise they could be confiscated.

**Other important stuff can be found on the inside back cover.**





# RAROTONGA

The beating heart of our little paradise will capture yours.

**O**ne of Rarotonga's most striking features are the epic jungle clad mountains rising majestically from the centre and cascading to the surrounding sparkling aquatic playground. Imagine Jurassic Park, but without the dinosaurs. The highest peak, Te Manga is 658 metres. It is these towering mountains that distinguish this island from the others. Rarotonga is a jewel of an island blessed with a spectacular natural beauty. You'll find the roughly 10,000 locals to be warm, friendly and happy, which is no wonder why they call this lovely island their home.

Little doesn't mean backwards however. Rarotonga has all the advantages of modern technology and is a well-informed society. It is sophisticated, yet so easy to navigate. The coastal road measures just 32 kilometres in circumference, is deliciously undemanding and boasts a year round tropical climate. Cooler months are May to October when temperatures are between 64°F (18°C) and 82°F (28°C), summer temperatures range between 70°F (21°C) and 87°F (31°C).

### **AVARUA – THE HUB**

Through the bright little waterfront township of Avarua, colourful pareu (sarong), dresses



and T-shirts flutter in the breeze as locals go about their business in their laid back manner. This clean, tidy town has much to offer in terms of gifts, souvenirs, cafes, bars and restaurants. Up-market or inexpensive, Avarua can meet every budget. Be sure to drop in at one of the local black pearl jewellery outlets – you'll appreciate the quality, price range and variety of exquisite designs.

At the western end of Avarua, Punanga Nui Market, the biggest in the country really comes to life on a Saturday. In the morning it's a colourful, lively hub of activity full of music and laughter. Stalls selling locally made





SOUTH PACIFIC  
OCEAN







food, fresh organic produce, arts and crafts, clothing and a wide range of souvenirs are an experience not to be missed.

Visitors should also look for craftwork from the islands of Penrhyn, Manihiki and Mangaia and the vast array of pareu (sarong) designs. The pareu is ideal holiday attire for the beach or relaxing ... go local and wear one! The two metre lengths of colourful material can be worn by men and women in many different ties. Ask the stall holder to show you a couple of ideas for the beach.

Eager to try some local food? Look out for goat meat slow cooked in wild ginger and



coconut cream, grilled flying fish caught that morning, or super tasty free range local chicken also slow cooked in fresh coconut cream – there are many choices. Sip on refreshing smoothies made from local fruit as you meander around the market soaking up the sights and sounds. Almost always there is a live band or dance team performing at the market rotunda, just to add to the relaxed atmosphere.

### THE MAGIC OF MURI

Muri Beach is a two kilometre long white sandy beach. A leisurely stroll and along your way and to one side, the reef and four easily



accessible tiny islets, known as motu, nestle invitingly in the lagoon – Ta'akoka, Koromiri, Oneroa and Motutapu. To the other side the lush hills and mountains are visible through trees which offer shady respite from the tropical sun.

There are also restaurants, bars and several places to hire water sports equipment. Marine life is abundant in the lagoons of Rarotonga, making for great snorkelling, or lessons can be booked with all scuba-diving operators.



On Saturdays the Rarotonga Sailing Club (operating from Sails Restaurant) has lagoon races and welcomes visitors. Sunday to Friday lagoon cruises on glass bottom boats operate in Muri lagoon. Offering snorkelling, barbeque lunches and great entertainment

from the crew, they're a fun filled day out. Muri lagoon is also the best location for windsurfing and kitesurfing, while kayaking is possible just about everywhere around Rarotonga. Windsurfers, kayaks, kitesurfing and stand-up paddleboards can be hired from water sports outlets and most hotels located on the foreshore around the island.

### FAST OR SLOW?

There's a wide world of both onshore and water activities to choose from throughout the year to suit all ages and fitness levels. The first decision you will need to make in Rarotonga is how busy or relaxed you want your stay to be. Rarotonga is an island like no other and there are many special island experiences for visitors. Romantic sunset cruises on board a catamaran, dining ankle deep in warm water lapping on a beautiful beach, or guided treks into the mysterious cloud mountains, to name a few options. Or simply take a walk along a beach and watch a golden sunset. All make wonderful memories to take home.





### GETTING WET IN THE SUN

One of the things nearly always visible from anywhere on Rarotonga, and one which visitors long remember, is the sight and sound of white crested waves breaking on the living coral reef that circles the entire island.

Beautiful beaches and safe, clear lagoons makes swimming and snorkelling the most popular activities. Being surrounded by water, Rarotonga has a wide range of water activities to suit everyone. Lagoon sailing, outrigger canoeing, stand-up paddle

boarding, kiting, wind-surfing, scuba diving, snorkelling, surfing, lagoon and ocean cruises, deep sea fishing and reef walks are some to choose from.

### BEYOND THE REEF

There are several scuba diving operators who offer both beginner's lessons inside the reef and dive trips for the more advanced to interesting sites beyond the reef.

Experienced anglers and even the keen learner will discover that game fish such as marlin, tuna, sailfish and wahoo are plentiful in the deep, blue waters off Rarotonga. Fishing boats can be chartered for groups, or individuals can join a trip being made by one of several boats moored at Avatiu wharf.

For a more sedate ocean outing, well-equipped boats can be chartered for ocean and sunset cruises. Why not opt to be taken







Come for the warmth of the sun, remember the warmth of the locals.

past the reef on board a glass bottom Reef Sub, to see a huge range of marine life in its natural environment. This beats an aquarium any day!

Outrigger canoeing is a popular local sport which can be watched from the comfort of Trader Jacks' deck on the Avarua waterfront, or at Muri lagoon most days.

During August to September humpback whales can often be seen from the Rarotonga foreshore. The whales come from Antarctica to the warmer waters of the Cook Islands to mate and calf. The Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) has been formally declared a whale sanctuary.

Seeing Rarotonga from the air is highly recommended as it gives a real appreciation for the remarkable beauty of the island and its mysterious centre of mountains and hills. This can be done on Air Rarotonga's scenic flights which operate most week days.

## INLAND EXCURSIONS

Want to get off the beaten track? Join thrilling island adventure treks on four-wheel drive jeeps. Tours are interactive and lunch is provided after taking in breath-taking views of the interior and coastal areas. Quad bike



(four wheel motorcycles) or dune buggie tours take you on inland tracks and places of cultural interest. Hire a bicycle to explore the island, or get off the main road and join in the fun on an Eco Cycle tour. Or for an island tour that is a little more sedate, join a guided island bus tour to local highlights.

Visitors who enjoy hiking should experience guided 'Cross Island' treks, or bush walks to the Takitumu Conservation Area. Both are highly informative and visitors will be taught about local medicinal plants, flora and fauna.

Walking across the island through the mountains is possible on a track that starts in Avatiu valley and ends at Papua Waterfall in Vaima'anga, the ideal spot for a refreshing











Set your watch to island time.



Warm lagoons, sunny days and colourful locals.



swim. This and other unaccompanied walks and treks in a variety of locations, require a good degree of fitness, but should not be attempted without first informing others of your intentions. Maps are available.

Sore muscles from all the island activity? Treat yourself to a full massage and spa treatment at any of the well-equipped professional health and beauty spas, or look for roadside signs of locally run private massage clinics.

### FAMILY FUN IN PARADISE

Our little paradise of the Cook Islands is perfect for a great family holiday. Beaches of clean white sand fringing shallow lagoons are ideal playgrounds for children. Overhanging coconut trees offer shady spots in which to simply relax while the children go off to hunt hermit crabs, build sand-castles, discover unique shells, or swim and snorkel in the warm lagoons.

Many of the resorts have their own 'Kids Club' which provide a multitude of activities for children, including face painting, crab racing, coconut husking and learning local craft skills. There are many activities on the islands well suited to children such as mini-golf, glass-bottom boat cruises, mountain walks, quad-bike adventures, reef fishing and





snorkelling to name but a few. Children are never bored in this exciting new environment and are especially welcomed by family loving locals.

## SPORTS

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Cook Islanders love their sport and are especially passionate about rugby, rugby league, netball, soccer and cricket. Each major code has a set season during the year and the inter-village games are mostly held on Saturdays at the host village sports ground.

There are squash and tennis courts, lawn bowls at the Bowling Club in Avarua, and the Rarotonga Golf Club has a nine-hole course. If



you're looking for something smaller – there are two miniature golf courses. The Rarotonga Game Fishing Club welcomes all visitors and has a well patronised bar that is open Monday to Saturday.

## DINING, DANCING AND NIGHTLIFE

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The Cook Islands is renowned for its vibrant culture – our traditional dancing and drumming is second to none in the world! A highlight for visitors are the exhilarating performances by local dance teams during island nights staged around the island by the resorts, hotels and some restaurants.

Delicious buffet meals featuring favourite local dishes like ika mata (marinated raw

fish salad) are included in the island night packages. There are also the island nights where an umu kai is featured. This buffet style feast of food cooked in a traditional earth oven or umu is a wonderful experience.

Check with your hosts or local visitor publications to decide on which night you wish to experience an island night. And do be ready to be randomly chosen for the ura piani, that's when the local performers each choose a visitor as a partner to dance a slow and fast drumbeat. Guaranteed to get the heart beating faster!

If you're keen to try something culturally fun and different during your stay, you can

always learn “ura” (traditional dance) that occurs daily located on the ground floor at the Staircase in Avarua.

Whatever your style of cuisine, you're sure to be tempted from an eclectic offering of satisfying dishes, many with distinctive island ingredients or characteristic flavours. Most restaurants are licensed and there is a great selection to choose from on Rarotonga with a growing number in Aitutaki. From well renowned establishments offering superb international cuisine, to cafés serving light meals and great coffee.

Some restaurants specialise in Cook Islands or 'Nesian' fusion cooking, a wonderful combination of European and Polynesian flavours. Eating out in Rarotonga is a rewarding and satisfying experience and one can dine out every night for two weeks and still not experience all of the great places on offer.

Progressive dinners offered by local tour companies are a fun experience that combines dining, touring and local entertainment. Guests enjoy a delicious three course meal and accompanying wines – each course served in a different local home. Visitors are picked up from their



RAROTONGA



accommodation by bus, and local string-bands entertain the dinner group at each home.

Locals here love nothing more than a good boogie. Nightlife on Rarotonga warms-up on Wednesday and peaks on Friday evening. Saturday entertainment closes at midnight to observe the Sabbath. There are many bars and clubs, mostly located in Avarua that feature live entertainment or DJ's that are pumping till the wee small hours.



## ARTS, CRAFTS & BLACK PEARLS

Rarotonga has a thriving arts fraternity and pieces by local artists can be viewed and purchased from small outlets which are found around Rarotonga by their roadside signs. Two well-established galleries that specialise in original works by leading local artists are the Beachcomber Art Gallery in town and The Art Gallery in Arorangi. Regular exhibitions are held in both galleries featuring local and international artists.

Visitors will be pleasantly surprised at the variety of unique handicrafts, jewellery, art and clothing on sale. There is an excellent choice of retail outlets, all offering a friendly welcome and a word of local expertise, when it comes to selecting that special item to take home.

One of the finest examples of local handicraft, are rito (coconut fronds, stripped into fine fibres and weaved) hats. Intricately



woven and in many appealing styles, they are a vital part of every Cook Island woman's dress. Another item of clothing is the pareu, the colourful fabric is often tie-dyed in an infinite variety of colours and patterns. Cook Islands Fashion has excelled over the past 5 years with many local designers featuring throughout the Pacific and further afield.

Among the most popular items of choice are wooden carvings, the most renowned being "Tangaroa", an iconic figure representing history, strength and prosperity. Clubs, spears, canoes and a wide variety of drums





(pate) and ukulele are also prized purchases. Authentic handicrafts often come from islands that specialise in a particular item. For instance, ornate shell, seed hatbands and 'ei come from Mangaia, whilst finely woven pandanus mats are a souvenir of Pukapuka. Tapa decorated with traditional cultural patterns are made in Atiu and Mangaia.

The women of the Cook Islands are well known for their needlework, particularly the hand-stitched quilts known as tivaivai. Each quilter has her own distinctive colourful patterns and one piece may take several months to make, which is reflected in the cost.

Like the rest of the Cook Islands, the most romantic souvenir is small but perfectly formed. In fact the Cook Islands prides itself as being a leading producer of the cultured black pearl. Small pearl 'farms' on the northern atoll of Manihiki dot the huge lagoon and harvesting takes place around every 18 months. These gems are exported to Rarotonga where they are set into high fashion jewellery pieces that can be purchased from outlets around Rarotonga.

There are several up-market pearl retail outlets in Avarua which specialise in fine, elegant black pearl jewellery. The black

pearl shell is also fashioned into lovely yet inexpensive jewellery and ornaments.

## CELEBRATING OUR CULTURE

At the beginning of August, the Ministry of Cultural Development hosts the annual Te Maeva Nui Festival – a festival of Cook Islands culture featuring spectacular dance and music performances at the National Auditorium. The festival has been held every year since 1965 to celebrate Cook Islands self governance. It is held over a week combining outstanding cultural performances, sporting events, trade and food shows.

The November Tiare Festival celebrates flowers and the natural beauty of the country and fittingly, young Cook Islands girls and





In a little paradise, we dance to the beat of our own drum.

boys aged between 13 and 17 are encouraged to enter Te Mire Tama – Maine Tiare for the girls and Tama Aito for boys. An important aspect of both pageants is that contestants must be passionate and knowledgeable about Cook Islands culture.

Also in November is the Cook Islands International 7s which includes both a men's and women's division. The tournament held during the first week of November each year has grown to now feature 16 men's teams and 8 women's teams competing over three days. It's also come to be known as "Sevens In Heaven" because of the idyllic location and the beautiful people of the Cook Islands.

## SUNDAYS

Sunday church services are held between 10am and 12pm and visitors are made to feel most welcome. To experience uplifting traditional church singing, attend a Cook Islands Christian Church service. Each village church was hand built of limestone and hand hewn timber by the forefathers of today's Cook Islanders. Light refreshments are served after the church service.



## STAY WITH US!

Relax by the pool with a cocktail, soak up the sun, rejuvenate your soul and indulge in romantic evenings under the stars, with exotic foods and fine wine. Whatever your South Pacific holiday dream consists of, it becomes reality in our islands, with accommodation to suit all tastes and attentive staff to help make your dreams come true. From luxury beach resorts to budget accommodation you can choose your own standard or quality and plan according to your budget. Most facilities offer a choice of room categories and rates. A diverse range of self-catering options are available as well as private houses and backpacker-style options. It is however recommended that you book your accommodation in advance, as it can often be at a premium during busy periods. Pre-booked guests are usually greeted at the airport by their hosts with a fresh flower 'ei'. These colourful flower garlands are worn around the neck and are one of our gracious customs. When making your reservation, check to see if airport transfers are included.

**SEE OUR RAROTONGA ADVERTISERS  
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AITUTAKI



Discover our little secret, voted the world's most beautiful lagoon.

**T**he advantage of a little paradise is the world's most beautiful lagoon is within easy reach of Rarotonga. Just 220 kilometres north and an easy 45 minute flight is this huge turquoise, sunlit lagoon decorated with 15 motu (islets) and an emerald green main island. When people use bucket list and South Pacific in the same sentence, they're talking Aitutaki. Undisputedly one of the most beautiful destinations in the region, we even named one of our sandbars 'heaven'.

A triangular shaped reef encompasses Aitutaki lagoon which is imbedded with massive coral heads – home to countless varieties of brilliantly coloured tropical fish and marine life. It is this spectacular lagoon that makes Aitutaki unrivalled in the Cook Islands for water activities.

But the allure of Aitutaki doesn't stop at the water's edge. The charm of this lovely place which has the unique characteristics of being both an island and an atoll continues on land. The main island of Aitutaki is where some 1600–1700 people live on approximately 16 sq. kilometres.

## ANCIENT SEAFARERS AND FASCINATING LEGENDS

It is believed that Aitutaki was first settled by Polynesian seafarers in 900 AD. Aitutakians say they are descended from Ru, the famous seafaring warrior who sailed from Avaiki, the legendary homeland of early Polynesians. Fascinating legends are retold by local guides who take visitors to some of the islands marae (sacred ceremonial grounds) where volcanic boulders were erected in distinct formations by early Aitutaki forefathers. The largest marae, measuring about 1.6 hectares, is Te Poaki o Rae.

Much later, Captain Bligh and the crew of the HMS Bounty are credited as being the first known European contact with Aitutaki in 1789, before the infamous mutiny on the Bounty, which has been the subject of several major films.



## THE ISLAND OF AITUTAKI – THE HUB

Punarei Cultural Tour takes visitors on an authentic cultural experience, whilst touring the lush interior of the island, along little used tracks where the scenery is breath-taking. Maunga Pu hill is the highest point on Aitutaki. The hill provides a wonderful 360 degrees view of the entire lagoon and all motu. Along the way visitors will pass a WWII bunker built by American GI's when they were stationed



in Aitutaki. The island's two airstrips on the northern end were also built by American and New Zealand forces, establishing an airbase as a line of defence for allied forces against the Japanese.

During the cyclone off-season yachts from all over the world make a point of calling in to the small harbour and most spend several days in this idyllic corner of the world. They make a pretty picture quietly moored off Arutanga Wharf, the focal-point of the island.

The wharf is quiet with only local fishermen or lagoon and fishing tours leaving and returning. The Aitutaki Game Fishing Club is next to the wharf and is a great place to unwind after a day on the water, watch a splendid sunset, and to meet the friendly locals.

At the other (eastern) end of the island the ever popular O'otu Beach area is a great place for swimming and kayaking. Several cruise boats leave from here and you'll also find a couple of restaurants and a great café with the best coffee on the island.







Where the colour blue is redefined.



Love a little 'here fishy fishy'.



## THE MAGIC OF THE LAGOON

The motu (islets) sprinkled along the reef are mostly uninhabited. Recently motu Tapuaetai (One Foot Island) received the well-earned distinction of being voted Australasia's leading beach by World Travel Awards. It boasts the world's smallest post office, where you can mail your postcards and even have your passport stamped making a wonderful souvenir of your visit.

On motu Akaiami a jetty still remains which was used during the 1950s when the TEAL (Tasman Empire Airways Limited) flying boats regularly landed in the lagoon and passengers on the famous Coral Route flight came ashore to stretch their legs. Of note also is that due to its spectacular beauty, isolation and the people, Aitutaki was the location for the US 'Survivor' and British 'Shipwrecked' reality TV series, which were filmed on two of the motu.

If you want an island to yourself for the day, this can be arranged with a local tour guide who can prepare a picnic and will "taxi" couples to a deserted motu. Aitutaki is fast gaining a reputation as an island of romance and a perfect wedding destination. Various wedding packages are available which can be tailored according to the wishes of clients.

How about a sunset cruise, with a late afternoon picnic meal arranged with local lagoon tour services? Relaxing in the glow of a brilliant sunset on your very own deserted island is a romantic dream that really can come true.







A visit to Aitutaki isn't complete without one of our numerous lagoon tours, which last almost an entire day. Lunch, refreshments, snorkelling gear, and towels are always provided and nearly all tour operators will pick you up from the airport, or your hotel. After a wonderful morning of snorkelling and feeding the fish, lunch is usually served and islands explored before heading back to the main island.

### DAY TOUR

Short on time, or on a budget? Visitors who want to experience Aitutaki have the option of a day tour from Rarotonga. Air Rarotonga also flies to Aitutaki several times each day of the week.

The tour includes heading out on to the lagoon on board the powered vaka Titi-ai-Tonga for snorkelling, swimming and visiting a number of motu. Lunch is served on board with a final stop off at One Foot Island for swimming and relaxation before returning to the main island and flying back to Rarotonga in the evening.

### SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Keen fishermen and those looking to experience deep sea fishing, or bone fishing

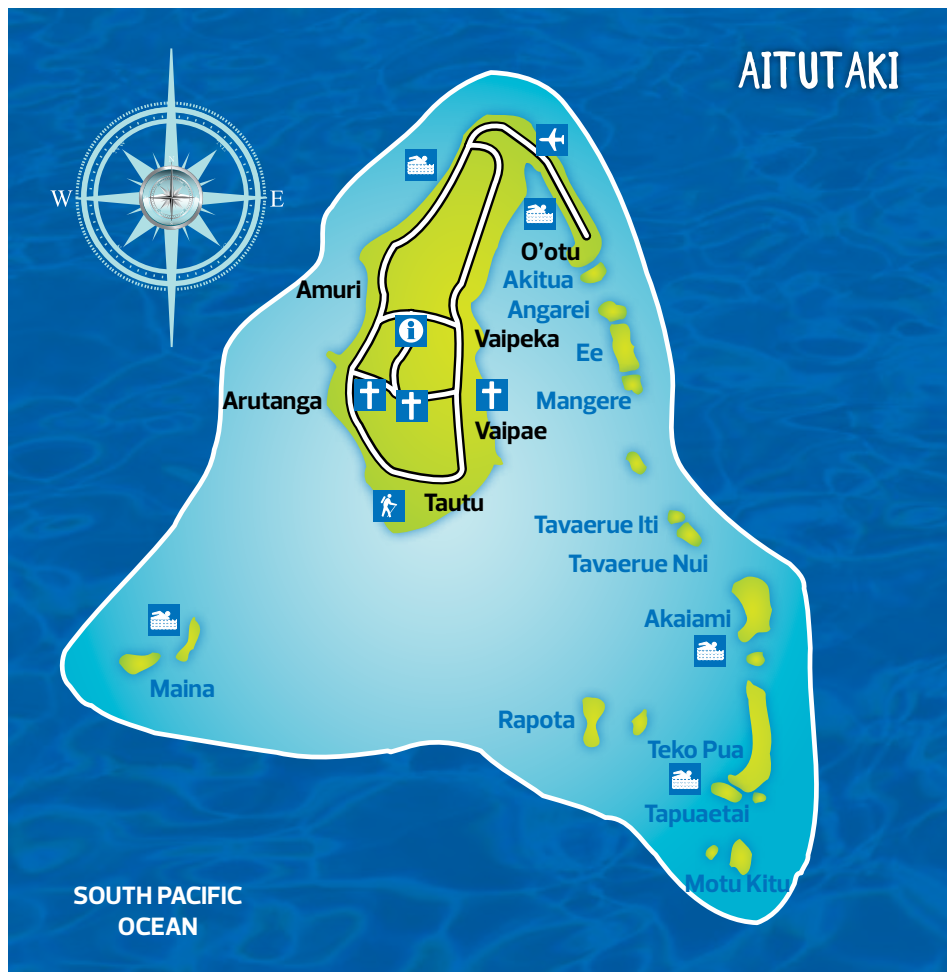
in the lagoon will not be disappointed. Aitutaki lagoon is home to some of the largest bonefish in the world. Scuba buffs are well catered for with two local and experienced operators offering dive trips and there's a chance of swimming with turtles and rays.

Kayaking, kitesurfing, stand-up paddle boarding, sailing and windsurfing are also unbeatable on Aitutaki lagoon, but the fast growing popularity of kite surfing sees many





'Aitutaki' is the kite boarding word for paradise.



enthusiasts attracted to the lagoon's flat turquoise waters when the warm trade winds are blowing. Or pop into the Aitutaki Golf Club (which is on the way to the airport) for a cold one and to arrange a game on the quaint golf course, which is adjacent to one of the airstrips.

The best places for snorkelling are on the western side of the main island where the water is always warm, crystal clear and large coral heads abound with marine life. Need some assistance? Ask a friendly welcoming local for directions...

#### DINING, DANCING & ENTERTAINMENT

Aitutakians are outgoing and friendly people, well known in the Cook Islands for their





showmanship. In fact, the village of Vaipae has earned the nickname of "Hollywood" for the high-spirited, resplendent performances at the islands local bars and hotels. Aitutaki's traditional drumming is reputed to be the best in the Cook Islands. The breath-taking fire dancing performances that take years of practice to perfect are not to be missed.

If Rarotonga is laid back, Aitutaki is horizontal. But despite being gorgeously little, Aitutaki has several exceptionally good restaurants, most using daily fresh local produce to present exotic meals with an island flavour; check local visitor's publications for details. Island nights with cultural shows are on throughout the week and a couple feature fire-dancing; check out barbeque nights also. These are experiences not to be missed and will be a highlight of your visit to this alluring island.

If you choose self-catering accommodation and prefer to prepare your own meals, there are several local shops which are fairly well-stocked with food items and a selection of wines, beers and spirits. For a quick, light snack there are also a number of takeaways situated along the main road in the neighbouring villages of Amuri and Ureia. Internet services are available at some of the café's.



AITUTAKI





The perfect setting for a little romance.



## SUNDAYS IN PARADISE

Aitutakians are proud that they were the first island in the group to accept Christianity, when early missionary Rev John Williams visited in 1821. He left two native missionaries Papehia and Vahapata to convert the population. The island also has the oldest church in the country.



The Ziona Tapu building of the Cook Islands Christian Church in Arutanga was built by hand, using limestone coral rocks, was organised by Papehia and Vahapata and its interior is quite magnificent and worth visiting.

The splendid acoustics in Arutanga Church are such that traditional hymn singing by the Sunday morning congregation is a moving experience and visitors are made especially welcome. Like the rest of the Cook Islands, Sunday is a day of rest and relaxation.



### STAY WITH US!

The variety of accommodation available on Aitutaki can cater to all tastes. At the top end of the scale are luxurious resorts that have won many international awards. Mid-range accommodations are plentiful, as are self-catering establishments and there is a good handful of budget options.

Hot sun, white sands, swaying coconut palms, a stunning turquoise lagoon and romantic sunsets – Aitutaki is blessed with them all; and friendly, laughing people that make you feel very welcome – all the time. Do try to stay over at least a night or two. You won't be disappointed.

**SEE OUR AITUTAKI ADVERTISERS  
ON PAGE 94**



# ATIU



This little paradise is one big adventure playground.

**H**ome to a proud warrior people, there are few untouched places left in the world like Atiu. Estimated to be over eight million years old – the island is ancient, unspoiled, lush with dense rainforests and surrounded by dramatic coastal coral formations.

Also known as Enuamanu, the land of the birds, Atiu is the 3rd largest of the Cook Islands. The island's small villages are situated in the central plateau where the soil is rich and some of the best arabica coffee in the Pacific region is organically grown. The coastal area surrounding Atiu are made up of makatea (fossilized coral) which in some areas, forms sea cliffs rising to over six metres. Along the foreshore you will find the loveliest little beaches with startling white sand, tucked like little secrets in the makatea. Secluded and private, visitors can be assured of a beach to themselves!

### SMALL MAKES IT SO SPECIAL

Atiu is a special island and one of the three southern group islands known as Nga-Pu-Toru. It is one of the Pacific's remaining places of truly unspoiled isolation. And therein lies the true attraction of Atiu. While easily accessible, there is no township, no



nightclubs, one restaurant, one take-away and very little traffic on the roads.

Locals are proud that life in general is still pretty much the same as it was 25 years ago, thereby offering travellers yearning for something untouched and genuine, the very special experience they seek. They are also proud that Atiu, with just over 500 people, leads the way as one of the most environmentally conscious islands in the Cook Islands group.



## CAVING

Amongst the islands' most interesting features are the many limestone caves which riddle the makatea coastal area. Possibly the most astonishing is Anatakitaki, a cave regarded by Cook Islands environmentalists as a national treasure. It is complete with three caverns, stalagmites, stalactites, a freshwater pool and high chamber that's like a natural cathedral. This is the home of the Kopeka, a tiny swiftlet unique to Atiu

that navigates its flight in the pitch black of Anatakitaki using sonar like a bat.

Caving expeditions start with a trek through luxuriant rainforests, bursting with rare, giant ferns and other foliage. The still of this untouched tropical jungle is disturbed only by the call of the many native birds found on Atiu, the loudest being the blue kingfisher. Some caves were used as burial chambers and the remains of ancient Atiuans and their artefacts can still be seen today. Others are truly subterranean, with cave divers reporting going down to depths of close to 50 metres. In keeping with local tradition, visitors are advised to request a guide for caving expeditions as these are situated on family land and permission must first be sought.



## ADVENTURE TOURS

Island tours with local guides Marshall Humphreys, George Mateariki (Birdman George) or Paiere Mokoroa are well recommended for visitors who want to experience the many interesting things this island has to share.

As his name suggests, Birdman George specialises in showing visitors the endangered Kakerori and splendidly coloured Kura birds, as well as historical sites. Marshall takes visitors through fantastic, dense tropical jungle to Anatakitaki Cave where a dip in the freshwater pool is refreshing after the trek; or to the ancient and enthralling Rima Rau burial cave. Some tours end with a specially prepared picnic and a swim on a private, pristine beach that feels like your very own.





The islands' rich history, ancient coral roads and sites are absorbing. Whale watching enthusiasts are well catered for during the humpback migratory season of August to September.





## FISHING AND HUNTING

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Visitors who've never ventured on a reef, should take the opportunity to do so. Providing the tides and weather are right, those who take the reef fishing tours can be assured of catching their own meal the local way! Guides will also show you how to prepare the catch into a scrumptious island meal. Deep sea fishing charters are available by special request and hooking into game fish such as tuna, mahimahi and wahoo is pretty much assured. The added bonus of going over the reef is seeing Atiu from the sea, which is a stirring experience.

Adventure seekers who are fit and enjoy hunting wildlife should give pig hunting Atiu-style a go. This is a group expedition with senior boys from the local high school and Bazza Ross. The thrill is in chasing wild pigs through the bush on foot with dogs and armed only with knives.

## TUMUNU TRADITIONS

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It is said the tumunu tradition came about after teetotaler missionaries outlawed the making and consumption of kava and then



home brewed beer amongst the locals. Headstrong local men, intent on enjoying a social drink, defied the missionary rules by secretly making "bush beer" from fermented fruit. The thickest part of coconut palms were carved out to make brewing barrels, hence the name tumunu. Recipes have been refined a bit since then to include malt, hops and sugar resulting in a very potent brew. This is served to all from the same half coconut shell by one appointed "barman". All social drinking clubs, usually set in deep bush have clear rules of conduct and each session is opened and closed with a prayer. Visitors are made most welcome.

## ISLAND COFFEE, ARTS AND CRAFTS

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Atiu stands out as a producer of distinctive, gourmet coffee. Arabica coffee beans are organically grown and harvested from plantations which flourish in the dark, rich soils of the central plateau. Local coffee roasted the traditional way can be experienced and tasted on Mata Arai's Atiu Island Coffee tours that start with picking your own bright red cherries.

Atiu women make delicate, colourful flowers out of tapa, (bark fabric) which make lovely hair ornaments. The tapa flowers and other





handmade crafts can be purchased from the Atiu Women's Centre in Teenui village.

A number of local mamas specialise in tivaivai – flamboyant, intricately embroidered bedcovers that are a leading feature of Cook Islands arts and crafts. Be sure to also check out the art of Jeanne Humphries who specializes in local flora and fauna subjects.

Atiu is a peaceful, quiet island with friendly, charming people. Often when visitors leave this rugged island, they lament that more days were not set aside for the Atiu experience. It is one that appeals to the free and independent traveller, the person looking for something unique, stimulating and becoming attuned with nature.



### STAY WITH US!

There's a good handful of accommodation options on Atiu. You can choose from self-catering, bed & breakfast and budget. See page 106 for advertisers, or check out our website for more details:

[www.cookislands.travel](http://www.cookislands.travel)

### A TWO ISLAND OPTION

If you're considering visiting Atiu, one option to explore is the 'Two Island Adventure Tour' offered by Air Rarotonga which takes in both Aitutaki and Atiu. This allows 2 nights on each island with transfers and accommodation included in the price.

[www.airraro.com](http://www.airraro.com)

**SEE OUR ATIU ADVERTISERS  
ON PAGE 100**





# MAUKE

Where little touches make lifelong memories.

**T**he traditional name for Mauke is “Akatokamanava” which means “where my heart rests”. It’s a fitting name for this little garden of Eden, as many visitors find the island takes hold of their heart on arrival and the memories they leave with are for a lifetime.

Mauke is often described as the “garden island” of the southern Cook Islands. The locals take enormous pride in their home gardens. This is an extraordinarily pretty island where flowers grow wild everywhere. It is hugged by a close reef where every day, locals can be seen catching the evening dinner.

### CAVES, COASTAL ROADS AND COVES

Mysterious caves such as Motuenga, said to have a hundred separate underground chambers that lead into the sea, are dotted all over this island’s interior, which is lush with plantations and tropical bush. Caves are accessed from the coastal road and trekking through tropical jungle, guides are needed. Many of the caves have deep freshwater pools in which trekkers can cool off in the clear, crisp water. On the way to Motuenga cave, visitors should make a point of seeing Mauke’s extraordinary banyan tree, said to be one of the South Pacific’s largest.

Hire a motor scooter or take a pleasant trek on the island’s 18 km of flat coastal coral road, made shady by huge barringtonia and ironwood trees. Natural plant growth is so abundant it seems like a huge hothouse of exotic plants has been left to grow unchecked. About 300 people live on Mauke, so passing motorists in the unsettled areas of the coastal road is highly unlikely. The small coves and little golden beaches that edge this lovely island are also unlikely to have anyone else visiting, so privacy and seclusion are pretty much guaranteed.

A fascinating place to visit is the cliff above Araitī Cove where, as legend has it, Kea, a beautiful Maukean woman, died after waiting in vain for her husband Paieka to return from fishing. A mound of stones and small plaque cover Kea’s remains. Maukeans believe Paieka eventually reached the east coast of New Zealand and settled in a rural place called Whangara.

### A RAINBOW RESTORED

The Ziona Church or as locals call it, the Divided Church is located in the village of Areora. It was once described by renowned New Zealand artist Samuel Palmer as one of the 12 most unique churches in the world.







Built in 1882, it is an intriguing example of early Western architecture mixed with Pacific influences and a lot of early Maukean ingenuity, as builders needed to improvise on what materials were available on the island 138 years ago. The colours of the church interior are simply stunning.

## ISLAND OF MIRACLES AND LOVE

Mauke is known for the fragrant maire garlands that local women harvest, plait, then export to Hawaii, where it is much sought after for special ceremonies. Maire grows wild on the makatea. The island is also known for its "miracle oil" or akari pi, coconut oil mixed with the pi herb that is exported to Rarotonga. It's well known for its healing properties and as a massage oil.

Locals love to meet with the island's visitors. Stop and chat when you're passing and make a point of visiting Tura's Bar where there's usually a live string band and dancing. Friday is the big night with lots of gaiety. Otherwise there are no nightclubs, restaurants or internet cafes.

## UNAFFECTED SMILES

Mauke is a place where time moves at a languid pace, the scent of flowers and sunshine heady, the weather is always warm and balmy. The locals are always friendly and welcoming. On arrival visitors are greeted by their hosts with fragrant flower garlands and warm, unaffected smiles. When leaving you will again be given fragrant garlands and this time, be asked to return.





## STAY WITH US!

There are three accommodation places on Mauke; Tiare Cottages that are owned by the Purea family, who also have a cute cottage perched on a cliff; the sea-view from its lookout point is magnificent. Tiare Cottages are self-catering but meals can be provided on request. Ri's Retreat and Ri's Hideaway are owned by Keta and Nane Williams and are self-catering. Visitors should enquire with their host to arrange a guide for caving, inland treks, fishing trips and rental motor scooters.

Visit our website for more information:

[www.cookislands.travel](http://www.cookislands.travel)



A person with long hair, wearing a blue shirt and orange shorts, is sitting on a rustic wooden dock made of logs. The dock is situated on a calm body of water, likely a lake or a wide river. A large, mature tree with thick branches and green foliage stands to the right of the dock, its reflection visible in the water. The background shows a distant shoreline with a line of trees under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

# MITIARO

Little paradise pace, big time relaxation.



**G**ood things coming in small packages is especially true of the lovely island of Mitiaro. This small southern island is delightfully packaged with many attractive natural features and gentle, friendly people. Mitiaro and its people offer visitors a very real opportunity to immerse themselves completely in the mellow island way of life. Here the people fish, farm and live their lives as they have for the past 50 years. Softly-spoken, gentle and immensely welcoming, Mitiaro islanders number about 200, all of whom live in the villages of Atai and Takaue. It's an island that appeals to the independent traveller looking to sample island life as it was.

## ISLAND OF LAKES

The ancient name for Mitiaro is Nukuroa. One of the most distinguishing features of the island is its two lakes – Roto Nui (Big Lake) and Roto Iti (Small Lake) both of which make up a large part of Mitiaro. Fringed by lush greenery, these calm waters are quite stunning. The Mitiaro delicacy is itiki, freshwater eels that are plentiful in the lakes. The lakes, the largest to be found in the Cook Islands, also teem with Tilapia (freshwater bream).

For keen trekkers, exploring the island which is less than six kilometres at its widest point is an enjoyable and unhurried experience. And of course, the ubiquitous motor scooter is available for hire for those who require a faster mode of transport.

## AT THE WATERS EDGE

Along the island's sandy coastal track are many tiny coves with pretty, secluded beaches that are well worth exploring – the loveliest of the beaches is Tiara. Locals are often busy in their plantations or home gardens during the day and rarely venture to any of the beaches, so visitors are pretty much assured of a little slice of paradise to themselves at all times. Reef exploring is safe and interesting, especially the deep crevices in the coral that teem with fish and which, the locals say, lead back to the lakes. Those keen to be taken reef fishing by a local guide should inquire with their Mitiaro host. A good catch





is always assured and this will be cleaned and cooked by your host. Fishing beyond the reef can also be arranged in stunningly clear indigo waters that teem with tuna, trevally, mahimahi and wahoo.

### CAVES WITH SWIMMING POOLS

Mitiaro has the most stunning underground caves and pools. The caves freshwater pools are fed by the islands' underground water reserves; the most stunning is Vai Nauri, deep,



which the Mitiaro women regularly collect and plait into long garlands. The maire garlands are exported to Rarotonga and then transhipped to Hawaii where they are used for ceremonies. Mitiaro is also known for its delicious, juicy limes. Trees produce fruit all year around, which are exported to Rarotonga's shops and restaurants.



crystal clear and cool. This is a delightful spot and ideal for an invigorating swim on a hot day. Take a picnic lunch while you explore this area and the lakes. The locals are also very proud of Vai Marere, a subterranean pool where the freshwater is reputed to have healing powers. Meanwhile Te Pitokare, an underground freshwater cavern, is still used today as a source of drinking water, with locals regularly filling their household containers there.

### A LIVING FROM EXPORTING

A large part of the island consists of makatea and a visit to Te Pare, an ancient fort built by Mitiaro forefathers is a must. Growing wild in the centre of the island are the much sought after fragrant, dark green leafy maire vines





### STAY WITH US!

Calling it the 'Itiki Experience' Mitiaro people are now promoting a home-stay programme, giving visitors the opportunity to live, eat and work with the locals. Visitors are hosted by families, with all meals provided. Comfortable accommodation is in separate are's (huts) each with its own bathroom, located on the family properties. This truly is a wonderful and unique experience. Visit our website for more information:

[www.cookislands.travel](http://www.cookislands.travel)

[www.cookislandstours.co.ck](http://www.cookislandstours.co.ck)



### SOMETHING SPECIAL ON SUNDAY

Like other islands in the Cook Islands, Mitiaro is deeply Christian. To hear singing in Betela, the Cook Islands Christian Church, on a Sunday morning is an unforgettable experience for visitors who are always welcome to attend services.





# MANGAIA

A full-page background image showing the silhouettes of two people, a man and a woman, standing on a beach at sunset. They are holding long, thin fishing poles that extend over the water. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, red, and yellow, with large, textured clouds. The water in the foreground is dark with some white foam from waves. The overall mood is serene and evocative.

A pretty little volcano, home to some pretty big legends.



**M**angaia is an ancient volcanic island steeped in legends and possessing serene, remarkable natural beauty. The most southerly of all islands in the Cook Islands group, at 18 million years Mangaia is believed to be one of the oldest in the Pacific.

Its traditional name is 'Au' Au. The island's age, geological structure and the ancient artefacts, alongside old human remains in burial caves, have long inspired interest from geologists and anthropologists the world over.

### UNSPOILED AND UNHURRIED

Mangaia has a population of some 500 people and a landmass of 52 square kilometres. It is the second largest of the Cook Islands. So when exploring the many tracks that lead through the centre of the island it's rare to see or pass anyone. If you do, it'll be just one or two people working their plantations and there'll always be a wave and smile of greeting. Although an island of astonishing beauty and easy to access, few visitors venture to this fascinating place. This keeps Mangaia off the beaten tourist track, unspoiled and completely without the trappings of commercialism.

### THE RUGGED BEAUTY OF MAKATEA

Rugged coral limestone or makatea, which resembles sombre, grey honeycombs surrounds the island which is fringed with a close reef. In the centre of the island the makatea rises to heights of close to 70 metres creating formidable cliffs surrounding a sunken central volcanic plateau. The central plateau wetlands are kept lush and fertile by subterranean streams and small creeks. It is here that many generations of the Manganian people have grown crops including their famous varieties of the root crop taro. The views of the central plateau from look-out points along the cliffs are spectacular. Mangaia has one of the most beautiful island interiors in the Cook Islands.

### FASCINATING CAVES AND TRADITIONS

Like other southern group islands, Mangaia has numerous fascinating caves, all with intriguing legends that can be explored with a local guide. Mangaia's cave systems are believed to be the most complex of all islands.





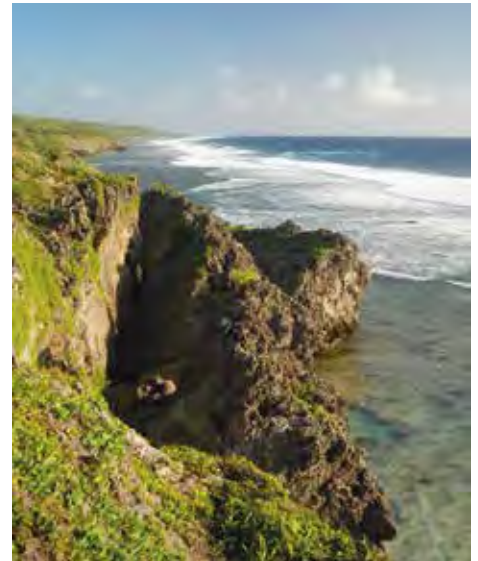
Te Puta is an easily accessed cave and from the main chamber there is a high, stunning view of the interior plateau. All of the caves have amazing stalactites and stalagmites and locals believe a number of cave systems still remain undiscovered today.

Ancient "staircases" cutting through the towering coral cliffs were originally narrow natural crevices that were filled with hand carried rocks and made into steps by Mangaian forefathers. To this day they still provide easy access to the plantations in the central plateau. The existence of the staircases was unknown to other islands and

provided quick escape routes for women and children during times of island warfare.

### COASTAL ATTRACTIONS

Visitors are always stunned by the extraordinary rugged beauty of this island's coastal area, which then softens as one ventures into its centre, to become lush and enchanting. Found all along the dramatic, rugged coast are little secluded sandy coves that visitors can access through small tracks to swim and sunbathe. Because the reef is so close to shore, the white crested breakers are impressive; particularly at high tide and



especially when viewed from the cliffs at one end of the airport, where there are swimming pools nearby.

Reef fishing at low tide is always excellent and local guides are available. Visitors staying at any of the few accommodation establishments can take their catch back and ask for it to be prepared for dinner! Deep sea fishing, hiking, island tours, safari tours, cave tours and historical tours all add to the attraction of this island of rugged



beauty. Local guides can be arranged by the Mangaia Tourism officer.

Whales migrate between July and September. Watching their majestic journey past Mangaia is quite an awesome experience, as they swim close to the reef, a short distance from the shore.

## FRIDAYS

Friday morning is market day and is a must see attraction for visitors. Here several local artisans display their fine craftwork – handmade shell ornaments and jewellery, wood carvings, colourful pareu, finely woven pandanus handbags, hats, fans and mats.

On Friday nights during the festive season locals will usually gather at Babe's Bar for a game of darts. Visitors are of course invited to join in the fun and partake of a few drinks and much merriment.



**STAY WITH US!** There is one modern self-catering establishment and just a few budget accommodations on the island. Details can be found on our website [www.cookislands.travel](http://www.cookislands.travel)

**SEE OUR MANGAIA ADVERTISERS  
ON PAGE 100**



# MANIHIKI



A little paradise within reach, yet a million miles away.

**M**anihiki is an atoll made up of a cluster of 40 tiny coral islets which form a ring around a huge, clear deep blue lagoon.

Manihiki provides a true escape from the modern world and immersion into a Pacific island lifestyle where time has pretty much remained at a standstill for the last 30 years. This truly is a Pacific haven untouched by the trappings of tourism.

## A LAGOON FOR A BACKYARD

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The islands' population of about 400 is divided between two main islands, Tukao and Tauhunu. Each has a tiny school, churches and convenience stores. The islands' only airstrip is on Tukao. A four kilometre expanse of deep lagoon separates the two villages and all commuting is done on small outboard motor boats. From childhood, Manihikians learn to drive and maintain their boats – without them they can't cross their own "backyard" – this being the 44.6 square kilometres of lagoon.

Manihiki is the pearl farming centre of the Cook Islands – producing legendary black pearls from farms built by local families on coral outcrops or kaa scattered over the lagoon. In these deep, clear waters tens of



### STAY WITH US!

Tauhunu has one of the prettiest over-water properties in the country – Manihiki Villas. It is also possible at times, to rent from families who have beach cottages available at reasonable rates. Some locals also offer home-stay accommodation. For further details contact our information office, or visit:

[www.cookislands.travel](http://www.cookislands.travel)

thousands of black lipped pearl shells are harvested each year. The best quality pearls will become centrepieces in high fashion jewellery crafted in Rarotonga and end up being worn all over the world.



### SEAFOOD AND SHELL JEWELLERY

Seafood lovers will really appreciate the cuisine provided by their Manihiki hosts. Fish understandably makes up a large portion of the everyday diet – but the locals do prepare dishes in innovative ways. Manihiki women are industrious and when not working on the pearl farms, can be found weaving fine hats and mats from rito, the natural fibre made from young coconut fronds. They also make hats, bags and mats from pandanus, pearl shell jewellery and shell necklaces that are lovely souvenirs of this remote island. The four hour flights from Rarotonga to Manihiki are irregular. Inter-island boats also stop over when sufficient cargo calls for a trip north.







Penrhyn

## RAKAHANGA

The stunningly beautiful two main islands and seven islets surround the Rakahanga lagoon, which is picturesque and unspoiled. Access is only available by inter-island boat from its sister island Manihiki, situated 42 km to the south-east.

**W**e are a family of 15 islands, we invite you to meet the rest of our little paradise family. Due to their remoteness, getting to these islands can be challenging. Part of their allure, even the adventurous will be tested as inter-island flights and cargo boats are irregular. Only Penrhyn and Pukapuka can be reached by air.

## PENRHYN

The northernmost island of the Cook Islands group. Its most spectacular feature is the immense, enclosed blue water lagoon that covers 233 sq. km and is one of the largest in the South Pacific. There are two settlements on islets at opposite ends of the lagoon; Omoka and Tetautua.

## PUKAPUKA

This is one of the most beautiful untouched and secluded places in the Pacific. Its remoteness has also helped to keep the wonderful traditions and culture of its people largely unchanged for centuries. It is 1150 km from Rarotonga but accessible by air. Pukapuka is one of the two official languages of the Cook Islands.

## NASSAU

Often described as the “Eden” of the Cook Islands, Nassau is home to about 70 people. It lies 83 km to the south of Pukapuka. Measuring just one square kilometre in size, it is the only island in the northern Cook Islands without a lagoon. Access is gained by inter-island boat from Pukapuka.

Suvarrow



Pukapuka



## SUWARROW

The Suvarrow National Park is the first National Park in the Cook Islands. It is uninhabited and an untouched breeding area for turtles, seabirds and crabs. Two caretakers live on the island during the cyclone off-season from April to November, when cruising yachts often visit whilst transiting the South Pacific.

## PALMERSTON

Stunningly beautiful, yet remote Palmerston was made famous by Englishman William Marsters who settled there in 1863 with his three wives. About 60 descendants live on the island which has six lovely motu and a large blue lagoon 11 km wide. Palmerston hosts the occasional cruise ship and cruising yacht.

## MANUAE

Situated about 100 km south-east of Aitutaki, Manuae's stunningly beautiful lagoon can be viewed from the air when flying from Aitutaki to Atiu. It is an uninhabited nature reserve and an important seabird and turtle breeding ground.



Manuae

## TAKUTEA

Numerous seabirds thrive on this pristine little uninhabited island that is just a few miles off the north-east coast of Atiu. This wildlife sanctuary is administered by a trust. Permission for visits is needed from the Trust Chairman and High Chief Rongomatane Ariki.



Takutea



Palmerston



# LITTLE PARADISE, LOTS OF LOVE

The perfect romantic playground of Tapuaetai (One Foot Island, Aitutaki).

**W**ith impossibly blue lagoons and dazzling white sand beaches, our islands offer the perfect romantic escape. Moonlit walks on soft silky sand, snorkelling in warm azure lagoons amongst a myriad of colourful fish, treks to deserted spots, sipping champagne at sunset – there's simply no better place for love. Relax, chill-out, slow down to the island pace as you soak up its natural beauty. Reconnect and re-ignite your flame for each other in this seductive environment. Here, you can experience a honeymoon beyond your wildest dreams, on islands amongst the most beautiful on earth.

In the Cook Islands every day brings a hundred romantic possibilities. You can enjoy slow-paced days or fast-paced nightlife. You can venture into local villages for a taste of laidback island life, or kayak to a deserted island to hide away for hours on end. Whether it's coming face-to-face with the islands' rich culture of song and dance, or adventures in the great outdoors, together you'll find yourself easily absorbed into the gentle rhythm and laid back lifestyle of these islands.



Rejoice in your love for each other in this idyllic setting. Here, you'll find it so easy to say "I do". You could tie the knot while standing barefoot on champagne-coloured sands at sunset, in a flower-filled pavilion, or on the secluded shores of a tiny, deserted island. You could be transported to your marriage location in a traditional outrigger canoe, or transported to another era with a magical island wedding dance. You can be surrounded by family and friends, or surrounded by nothing but nature. Whatever your choice, you can be sure your wedding day, or re-affirming your wedding vows will be incredibly memorable and magical. And above all, romantic.

The Cook Islands is home to some of the world's finest resorts; most in an enclave of refinement and intimacy, boasting only a handful of bungalows, suites, villas, or luxurious 'ares' (bungalows) hanging over the water. In sumptuous and unique restaurants, treat your taste-buds to mouth-watering local and Pacific cuisine, matched with the world's finest wines. And for the ultimate treat – pamper each other in the private oasis of a spa, where you can experience a variety of body wraps, facials, manicures, pedicures and aromatherapy; or luxuriate in a beachside location with a relaxing massage. Together, you'll be glad you made time to experience the romance of the Cook Islands.





# WEDDING FACT FILE

## APPLICATION FOR A WEDDING LICENCE

Application for a licence must be made in person to the Registrar of Marriages in the Cook Islands at least 3 working days prior to the marriage. The office is open Monday to Friday, 8am – 4pm. Application for the licence cannot be made outside the Cook Islands.

## DOCUMENTS REQUIRED

Your passport and birth certificate will be required when filing the Notice of Intended Marriage at the Registrar's Office in Avarua,



Cook Islands. If divorced, a copy of the Decree Absolute (divorce documents) are required. All documents must be in English. If you are a widow or widower, you will be required to produce the death certificate of your deceased spouse.

## LEGAL AGE

The legal age of consent to marry is 20 years, otherwise written approval by parents is required.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Marriage Inquiries, Registrars Department  
Department of Justice and Lands  
P.O. Box 11, Rarotonga  
**Ph** (682) 29 410 | **Fax** (682) 29 610  
**Email** [offices@justice.gov.ck](mailto:offices@justice.gov.ck)

## CHURCHES ON THE ISLANDS

The Cook Islands host a number of religious denominations. The main ones are: Cook Islands Christian Church (Protestant), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon), Seventh Day Adventist, Apostolic Church, Jehovah's Witness, Assembly of God, Cornerstone Friends Mission Church, Holy Spirit Revival, and Roman Catholic. Check with your local minister regarding the requirements to marry in the Church, as they will also apply to the Cook Islands.

**SEE OUR WEDDING ADVERTISERS  
ON PAGE 105**





Think little for your big day.



# FESTIVALS & EVENTS



There's much ado in a little paradise.



**W**e certainly pack a lot into our little paradise throughout the year. We find many reasons to celebrate and there's always plenty to do and see on Rarotonga and her sister islands. As most Cook Islanders are willing sports participants, you'll find a multitude of sports codes and clubs active throughout the islands, where you are always made welcome. As for festivals and celebratory events, it is certain that you will always find something of interest taking place.

## FEBRUARY

### DOMESTIC RUGBY LEAGUE SEASON

In February, the rugby league season kicks off amongst local village teams around the island. This event is not to be missed showcasing the local athletic talent and flair. What's more impressive are the devoted supporters proudly wearing their team's colours.

## MARCH/APRIL

### ROTARACT EASTER SCAVENGER HUNT

A scavenger hunt with a twist, unravel the whereabouts around the island of the Rotaract Easter Bunny's secret stash of



goodies filled with fun team challenges. This event continues to grow bigger and better than before.

### TROPICAL EASTER NIGHT MARKET

Night markets are becoming popular in Rarotonga, the Business Trade Investment Board (BTIB) Tropical Easter Night Market encourages medium-sized business entrepreneurs and "grass roots" businesses to sell their local produce and locally made products.

### GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER SUNDAY

Easter is a special time in the Cook Islands, ringing chime bells and traditional hymns can be heard from afar. Church services are

held between 10am and 12pm and visitors are made to feel most welcome. Each village church was hand built of limestone and hand hewn timber by the forefathers of today's Cook Islanders.

## MAY

### ROUND THE BOILER SWIM

Round The Boiler Swim has always been an integral must do "local" swim during international events, such as the triathlon, outrigger canoeing and open water swimming. The 775m course starts out in front of the world famous "Trader Jacks" bar and runs along the deep passage towards the "Boiler" and back again.

"The Boiler" is part of the exposed engine ship, the Royal Mail Steamer "Matai" which sank at Avarua Harbour on Christmas Day in 1916. The famous boiler is well known as a snorkelling and surfing spot and a "diving platform" for the more adventurous.

The "Boiler" sits directly north west of the famous "Trader Jacks" bar located right on the Avarua Harbour. With impressive views and great atmosphere, the Boiler Swim is a definite recommended event for locals and international athletes looking for swimming around a bit of Cook Islands History.



### TE MIRE URA – DANCER OF THE YEAR

Poetry in motion is a euphemism made literal in Polynesia, no truer than when the annual Dancer of the Year competition is held each April. Dozens of dancers in three age groups, junior, intermediate and open, take to the stage at nightspots on Rarotonga and the outer islands. Finals are then held at the 2,000 seat national auditorium in Rarotonga under the direction of the Ministry of Cultural Development.

An entertaining evening watching the finals at the auditorium sees a mingling of locals and tourists filling the place up, packed out with kids – every dancer of the year is every kid's idol until the next year. Winners are chosen on criteria such as costume, choreography and degree-of-difficulty. This is a fun event that is always competitive and always a most entertaining and enlightening spectacle for visitors.

### RAROTONGA INTERNATIONAL TRIATHLON

Rarotonga is the perfect training ground for many triathletes who come to the warmer weather for their off season training, so it is only fitting that the annual Rarotonga International Triathlon is held during the month of May. While the majority of competitors each year have come from New Zealand, the event has also had international participants from Australia, Tahiti, USA, Canada and Sweden.

### TOUR DE RARO CYCLE RACE

The main cycle race of the year that circumnavigates around Rarotonga always provides some good spectator action. This 31.2km race attracts fanatical locals, world class riders and ironman athletes from

Australia, New Zealand and Tahiti. Novelists can participate as well.

### FUN RUN

A fun family novelty event for everyone to run or walk, this is the perfect opportunity to join in some community fun and explore a different part of the island.

### TE AITO COOK ISLANDS



Te Aito is the Pacific's supreme event for individual V1 rudderless outrigger canoe racing. In the world of outrigger canoeing Te Aito is recognised as the sports true test of individual skill, strength and character.

Every two years, the unforgettable paddling experience, held in May, will be a great opportunity to showcase the high level of paddling and competition we have here in the Cook Islands.

## JUNE QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY FESTIVITIES

Holidaying in Rarotonga during the Queen's birthday weekend is always a fun filled experience, whether you're checking out the night markets at the Punanga Nui on Friday; treat your loved one to a romantic dinner on Saturday; attend a church service on Sunday or listen to local and overseas musicians at a resort on Monday.

## JULY RA O TE UI ARIKI

Here in the Cook Islands, we annually celebrate the holiday of Ra o te Ui Ariki ("Day of high chief council").

Are Ariki or The House of Ariki, which is a parliamentary body was established in 1967 after a period of self-government and consists of traditional leaders of the Cook Islands. Today, the organisation of the Ariki Council is largely a tribute to traditions of the islands, rather than a way of real legislative powers.

The festivities consume your senses with a tribute parade to honour the traditional leaders filled with garlands of mairi and traditional dress wear, an event not to be missed.

## RAKEI MANAVA TRADITIONAL WEARABLE ART EXHIBITION

Take advantage of viewing a unique collection that is called, The Rakei – Traditional Wearable Art Exhibition, it showcases the exceptional traditional dance costumes made by local designers here in the Cook Islands.

## JULY/AUGUST TE MAEVA NUI – CELEBRATING OUR NATION'S INDEPENDENCE

Every year from June to August about 2000 people on Rarotonga and the outer islands put their lives on hold to prepare for Te Maeva Nui, the national culture and dance festival. It is a week-long cultural marathon held around the date of August 4th, which is the birthday of the Cook Islands as an independent nation and celebrating over 50 years.

Large dance teams from different islands and districts challenge each other during Te Maeva Nui. It is an intense competition, which requires energy and dedication from

a large percentage of the Cook Islands population. For five nights the exuberant performances become a vibrant testimony of the passionate commitment Cook Islanders have to their dance and culture.

You may have seen cultural dance shows before, but we guarantee that you haven't seen anything that even closely resembles the vibrancy and passion of the finals at Te Maeva Nui, held in the National Auditorium. This is the cultural highlight of the Cook Islands year; the only people who are ever disappointed are those who miss it.





## AUGUST

### MANUREVA AQUAFEST

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In August some of the biggest names in kitesurfing head to the Cook Islands to vie for the top spot at the Manureva Aquafest on Aitutaki.

Manureva Aquafest showcases the culture and beauty of the Cook Islands to a gathering of people with a love for the ocean and ocean sports. Includes a full week of Kite Surfing competitions, stand-up paddle boarding, outrigger canoeing and a ton of other fun events. The Cook Islands Kitesurfing Association is an official member of the Manureva Aquafest. They, in conjunction with the events team at Cook Islands Tourism, manage this big event which has catapulted the Cook Islands on to the international stage as an extremely desirable kitesurfing destination.

The competition is held at Motu Maina Iti on the island of Aitutaki. Join in the fun while soaking up the atmosphere in this truly pristine location.

## SEPTEMBER

### ROUND RAROTONGA ROAD RACE

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In September the Round Rarotonga Road Race is an annual weeklong event held on

the beautiful tropical island of Rarotonga and caters for everyone including families, social, recreational and competitive runners and is a fantastic opportunity to combine a holiday with a once in a lifetime sporting achievement.

This Race aims to raise funds to help develop our Junior Athletics in the Cook Islands to travel to New Zealand to compete and experience International competitions, whilst also providing participants with an opportunity to enjoy the white sandy beaches, turquoise lagoons and lush tropical hills that make up the unique and beautiful environment of the Cook Islands.

### OE VAKA (PADDLING) CORPORATE RACE DAY

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Teams of local Cook Island corporations compete in this fun team bonding paddling event. If you're in Rarotonga during late September come along and spectate for an entertaining day out.

## OCTOBER

### REAL SWIM ADVENTURE

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Aitutaki hosts the Real Swim Adventure and is the perfect scene for a personal swimming challenge such as swimming from Island to

Island. It's taking swimming to its birthplace – the open water. Sharing that experience with a small group of like-minded people and appreciating the beautiful pristine environment. The experience is not to be missed.

## NOVEMBER

### 7'S IN HEAVEN

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The Cook Islands International Rugby 7's Tournament, also known as 'Sevens in Heaven' is fast becoming one of the most sought after 7's competitions in the Pacific.

Held over three days – Thursday through to Saturday – the international tournament starts with a parade of all teams through the main Avarua township, where locals and visitors alike get to see their Cook Islands and international heroes up close and personal, marching in team colours.

During the past 10 years, the Cook Islands international 'Sevens in Heaven' tournament has not only grown to include age grade matches and women's teams, but it has also developed into a major festival. While teams battle it out on the rugby field, the party and dress up atmosphere is very much island style!



## TE MIRE TIARE FLOWER FESTIVAL

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This happy and colourful festival is held every year in December and usually features a different theme each year. There are competitions for the best floral decorated shops, schools and government buildings, each one on a different day of the week long festivities.

The glamorous focal point to the week is undoubtedly Te Mire Tama competition which sees attractive young ladies and gentlemen competing for this prestigious title. The first appearance of the contestants is usually at the Punanga Nui marketplace on the first Saturday of the festival; the week wraps up with a colourful float parade and crowning of Maine Tiare and Tama Aito on the following Saturday.

## VAKA EIVA

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Hundreds of paddlers and their supporters hit Rarotonga's shores in November each year for Vaka Eiva; an exciting and fun outrigger canoeing festival, which is now the largest sporting event in the country.

While the rugby 7s festival generates plenty of excitement in these rugby mad islands, there's no doubt the influx of paddlers and supporters to the island hypes things up even more for the exciting week of Vaka Eiva activities; and oe vaka is fast establishing itself as one of the largest and most popular sporting codes in the country.

What makes it even more special, is that outrigger canoeing is one of the few traditional Polynesian sports that have survived the test of time, plus it has strong cultural significance and roots in the Pacific islands. Vaka Eiva is a festival promoting both competition and the culture of oe vaka.

There's an air of festivity on the island the whole week long, from the opening ceremony, throughout the week of racing and social activities, to the wrap up paddler's party on the Avarua waterfront.

## DECEMBER

### NETBALL IN PARADISE

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Camaraderie personified as teams from across the Pacific, New Zealand, Australia and the Cook Islands, ranging from under 13 age grade right up to open division, meet in competition on court as well as enjoying the island paradise of Rarotonga. This weeklong competition allows for plenty of time to explore the island and her many attractions. In just two years the event has grown rapidly in popularity. One visiting team member from New Zealand said: "We tried to bring the entire family; netball was just our excuse to have a family holiday."

## DECEMBER / JANUARY

### KONI RAONI (ROUND THE ISLAND DANCE)

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This vivacious and pulsating event is held every Boxing Day and New Year's Day in Aitutaki. Each year a different village hosts the Koni Raoni and travels around the island to perform dance items to fundraise for their village. This event captures the true essence of the Aitutakian people that is quintessential to their DNA.

N.B. Dates and events are subject to change without notice.

# A PROUD HERITAGE

Our little paradise played a big role in migration throughout the Pacific. Cook Islanders regard themselves first and foremost as true Polynesians connecting directly back to the finest seafarers of the vast Pacific or Moana Nui O Kiva. For it was due to their sophisticated navigation, that they were able to fearlessly travel through vast ocean tracts in search of new lands, that the Cook Islands came into being.



Polynesian migration began around 1500BC with each Island gradually populated by Maori ancestors landing in their 60 feet long Vaka Takurua (magnificent giant double hulled canoes which are still part of the traditional way of life). Guided by the elements and the skill of Polynesian celestial navigation.

Each of our fifteen islands has its special place within the group. But their origins are

owed to voyagers who had set sail from Tupua'i, in French Polynesia, and Nuku Iva, eventually arriving in Rarotonga around 400 AD. With a later arrival of the infamous Karika from Manu'a in Samoa and Tangiia from Tahiti.

With the exception of a stopover from the Spanish explorers Alvaro de Mendana sighting Pukapuka in 1595, and Pedro Fernandez de Quiros sighting Rakahanga in 1606, all was quiet until around 1773. At which time Captain James Cook sighted Manuae, then subsequently Palmerston, Takutea, Mangaia and Atiu, where Lieutenant Gore landed in 1777.

Those following left a more questionable wake. The redoubtable Captain William Bligh first sighted Aitutaki in 1798 and soon after, following the very bloody Mutiny on the







Bounty, the buccaneer Fletcher Christian, having seconded Captain Bligh's very own boat, and sailed into Rarotonga.

As a counterbalance, two Tahitian missionaries followed some decades later in 1821, led by the Reverend John Williams and their influence was immediate. Whilst their arrival did alter many aspects of the traditional way of life, Cook Islanders have managed to preserve their proud Polynesian heritage and blend it seamlessly with their Christian faith. Beautifully.





# Look for this symbol...

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The Cook Islands Tourism Accreditation Scheme is designed to set minimum standards. It will assist you in your choice of where to stay, what to see and what to do.

Wherever you see this logo you can be sure that the accommodation establishment, restaurant, retailer, tour or activity operator has met minimum requirements to assure you of good service, good facilities, safe practices and of course friendly Cook Islands hospitality.

We highly recommend that visitors use their services.  
For a full list of all accredited businesses please refer to our website:

[www.tourismindustry.co.ck](http://www.tourismindustry.co.ck)

# MEAN MORE WHEN YOU SAY THANK YOU SAY MEITAKI

Meitaki means so much more than just thank you. It means everything is well and good, it shares how happy we feel. People travel here from all over the world to experience the Cook Islands and we depend on tourism for our way of life.

Meitaki is the sound of our Cook Island spirit shining. Visitors may come for the warmth of our sun, but they remember the warmth of our people forever.

So don't just say thank you say 'meitaki'.

Be part of the kia orana spirit at

[www.kiaorana.cookislands.travel](http://www.kiaorana.cookislands.travel)  [KiaOranaCookIslands](https://www.facebook.com/KiaOranaCookIslands)





# IMPORTANT STUFF

## LOCAL AIR TRANSPORT

Air Rarotonga operates regular services to the Southern Group islands, including Aitutaki. One day lagoon cruise excursions to Aitutaki are also available. Services to the Northern Group islands are infrequent, so check with Air Rarotonga well before you plan to go. Charter flights can be arranged, with in-flight catering and experienced tour guides if required. For further details contact your nearest travel agent or visit [www.airraro.com](http://www.airraro.com)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

Medical and dental services are available and there is a well-equipped hospital with New Zealand trained staff situated in Rarotonga, with a smaller hospital in Aitutaki. There are no poisonous animals or insects in the Cook Islands.

## CURRENCY

The Cook Islands unit of currency is the New Zealand dollar, supplemented by notes and coinage minted for local use. The unique local coins and notes are not negotiable outside the Cook Islands, but are keenly sought by collectors worldwide.

## BANKING

BSP and ANZ banks in downtown Avarua are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 3pm. ANZ extends its closing time on Fridays to 4pm whilst BSP opens from 9am–12pm on Saturdays. BSP and ANZ also have an exchange service available. ATM's are conveniently located around Rarotonga including one at the International Airport arrivals area and EFTPOS is available at some hotels and stores. Aitutaki also has ATM facilities. Western Union has an office in Avarua offering money exchange and transfers.

## DRESS

Although the dress code is informal, we do ask that brief attire not be worn when visiting town or villages. Nude or topless sunbathing will cause offence. A light sweater may come in handy for the cooler evenings.

## DRIVING

Vehicles are driven on the left hand side of the road. The maximum road speed limit is 40kmph in the town and villages and 50kmph outside of populated areas. The motor scooter speed limit is 40kmph and helmets are compulsory for all tourists who are riding motor scooters.

Drivers of all vehicles are required to have a valid driver's licence issued in their own country, or a current international driver's licence. If you would like to hire a motor scooter, there is a licence fee which covers the practical and theory tests. Your rental vehicle provider will advise you of the regulations.

## CLIMATE

The Cook Islands enjoy a pleasantly warm and sunny climate all year round. June to August are the cooler months, whilst November to March marks the warmer season, with occasional tropical showers expected. The drier months from April to November have an average temperature of about 26°C, whilst the warmer more humid and damp season runs from December to March. During this season the temperature ranges between 22°C (min) and 31°C (max). The table below indicates the prevalence of sunshine and temperatures. Severe weather is rare and infrequent.

	Max °C	Max °F	Min °C	Min °F	Sunshine hrs
Jan	30	86	23	73	179
Feb	31	88	23	73	171
Mar	29	84	23	73	181
Apr	28	82	22	71	174
May	27	80	20	68	162
Jun	26	79	19	66	169
Jul	25	77	18	64	177
Aug	25	77	18	64	182
Sep	25	77	19	66	177
Oct	26	79	20	68	185
Nov	27	80	21	70	178
Dec	28	82	22	71	181

## COMMUNICATION

Mail is available from the Post Office, which opens Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm. Colourful Cook Islands stamps make distinctive impressions on any mail and are keenly sought by philatelic enthusiasts. Bluesky is located at the CITC shopping complex in Avarua and is open week days plus Saturday mornings for postal and internet services.

International telephone, mobile telephone, facsimile and internet services are available through Bluesky Cook Islands. Several internet cafés are located on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Wi-Fi is available at key locations.

## LANGUAGE

Cook Islands Maori is the local language but everyone also speaks English. Here are a few local words you might like to try during your visit:

<b>Kia Orana</b>	Hello
<b>Aere ra</b>	Goodbye
<b>Meitaki</b>	Thank you
<b>ae</b>	yes
<b>kare</b>	no
<b>tane</b>	man
<b>vaine</b>	woman
<b>manea</b>	pretty / handsome
<b>mataora</b>	happy
<b>kai</b>	food
<b>teia ra</b>	today
<b>apopo</b>	tomorrow
<b>ra</b>	sun
<b>marama</b>	moon

## Head Office

P.O. Box 14, Rarotonga,  
Cook Islands  
P: (682) 29435 | F: (682) 21435  
[headoffice@cookislands.gov.ck](mailto:headoffice@cookislands.gov.ck)

### Aitutaki

P.O. Box 3, Aitutaki, Cook Islands  
T: (682) 31767  
[tourism.officer@aitutaki.net.ck](mailto:tourism.officer@aitutaki.net.ck)

### Atiu

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[tourism@atiu.net.ck](mailto:tourism@atiu.net.ck)

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Brochure production by South Pacific Publishing Ltd, P.O. Box 3010, Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

Special thanks to principal photographers David Kirkland, Kieran Scott, Leon Rose, Craig Owen, Matariki Wilson and Noel Bartley. Thanks also to contributors Ewan Smith, Bubbles Below, Storytellers, Nan Hauser, Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa, Peter Morse, Peter Odekerken, Florence Syme and Christina Thiele from our design team.

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Love  
a LITTLE  
PARADISE