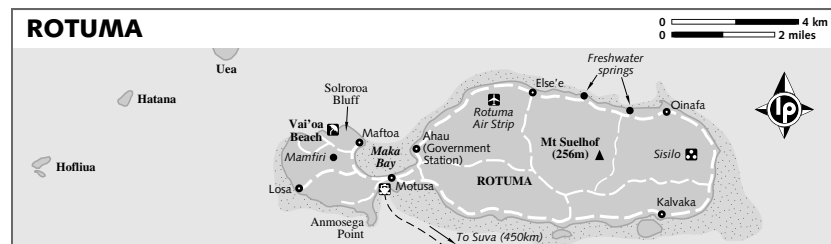


# Rotuma

Rotuma is an isolated, volcanic island, 450km northwest of Suva. The vast distance between its tiny frame and the mainland is an accident of geography, but the divide nurtures an inimitable culture of which Rotumans are fiercely proud. Ethnically and linguistically distinct from Fiji, the island provides travellers with a unique opportunity to experience a Polynesian outpost and visitors are welcomed as participants rather than spectators.

Physically, Rotuma resembles a whale, with the larger body of land linked to the small tail end to the west by the Motusa isthmus. The island is about 13km long by 5km at its widest point, with extinct volcanic craters rising up to over 250m. The smaller offshore islands of Uea, Hatana and Hofliua, west of Rotuma, are important seabird rookeries. Uea is a high, rocky island and the spectacular Hofliua is also known as 'Split Island' because of its unusual rock formation. The driest and most comfortable months to visit are between July and September, although the best time to visit is during the Fara festival.

Rotuma is administered by Fiji. Most young people leave their remote island home to find work, and about 6500 ethnic Rotumans live elsewhere in Fiji, mostly in Suva on Viti Levu. Rotuma produces copra, which is processed at the mill near Savusavu on Vanua Levu.



## HISTORY

Tongans invaded Rotuma during the 17th century and the Tongan influence is evident in the language and dance. In 1791, Europeans on the HMS *Pandora* stopped here to search for mutineers from the *Bounty*. Rotuma became an important port, and the local people were exposed to traders, runaway sailors and convicts. During the mid-19th century, Tongan Wesleyan and Marist Roman Catholic missionaries introduced their versions of Christianity here. By the 1870s the religious groups were warring and, in response to the unrest, the Rotuman chiefs decided to cede their home to Britain. Rotuma became joined politically to the Fijian colony in 1881.

## INFORMATION

There are no banks on Rotuma but there are shops and a **post office** (☎ 889 1003) in Ahau, which also acts as a Western Union agent.

An insightful and informative website designed for Rotumans is [www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/hanua.html](http://www.hawaii.edu/oceanic/rotuma/os/hanua.html).

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Rotuma's volcanic curves offer excellent hiking and there are spectacular views from **Solroroa Bluff** and **Mt Suelhof** (256m). Between Losa and Solroroa Bluff is **Mamfiri**, a volcanic vent which drops around 25m. There are also **archaeological sites** at Sisilo (Graveyard of the Kings), Ki ne he'e and Tafea Point (stone walls). If you're lucky you may spot endemic wildlife including the Rotuman gecko and the red-and-black Rotuman honeyeater.

Rotuma also has some of the loveliest **beaches** in Fiji. The best are at Oinafa, Losa and at Vai'oa, west of Solroroa Bluff. There is also some fine surfing areas around the island; locals will be able to point you in the right direction to best exploit the conditions. Between Else'e and Oinafa are two

**fuliu** (freshwater springs), which are popular swimming holes.

This beautiful remote island is not just for outdoor addicts, though, and one of the most rewarding experiences is simply staying with villagers. An annual festivities period known as **Fara** begins on 1 December, during which the strong work ethic adopted throughout the year is replaced with six weeks of dancing, parties and general revelry. The festival coincides with Christmas and the emphasis is on hospitality and celebrating friends, family, visitors, life and love. At this time, the population increases by around one-third; it's undoubtedly the best time to be on the island.

## SLEEPING & EATING

The easiest way for you to stay on Rotuma is through a Rotuman contact or their family. If you're lucky enough to organise this you should discuss with your contact how best

### THE ORIGIN OF ROTUMA

Rotumans believe their ancestors came from Samoa. The spot where the island presently lies was nothing but open sea until the arrival of Samoan chief Raho and his favourite grandchild. The little girl was unhappy in her homeland as her cousin was always annoying her. To escape his torment, she convinced her grandfather to take her away to live on another island. For days and nights their entourage sailed westward in an outrigger canoe, but failed to find land. Eventually the chief threw some Samoan soil overboard. The soil grew to form a beautiful, fertile island, which he named Rotuma. Some of the soil scattered, forming the other small islands. Rotumans commemorate this legend in their dance and song.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience vibrant **Polynesian culture** and **hospitality** (opposite) at its finest
- Dance up a storm – join the locals during **Fara** (opposite)
- Explore beautiful and unique landscapes near **Solroroa Bluff** (opposite)
- Marvel at ancient archaeological sites at **Sisilo** (opposite)



■ POPULATION: 3,000

■ AREA: 30 SQ KM

to compensate a family during your stay. If staying with friends or family is not an option you should chat to the Fiji Visitor Bureau in either Nadi or Suva (see p252) for updated information and advice. Staff will be able to provide you with the appropriate contact details for the Rotuman Island Council, the body you should approach if you want to visit.

**Mojito's Barfly** (☎ 889 1144; Motusa) This place has simple rooms with shared facilities but they are generally reserved for government workers. Mojito's will, however, provide meals on request, but you need to give them plenty of notice.

## SHOPPING

**Mamfiri Oils** (☎ 889 1401; www.mamfiri.com) This is a local company that produces healing oils derived from the nuts of hefau trees, which are abundant on Rotuma. The small industry provides a means for women on

the island to generate some income. Contact the company beforehand if you want to make a purchase because the company doesn't have a shop.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Air Fiji** (☎ 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj) flies from Suva to Rotuma on Wednesday and Friday (\$430 one way, two hours).

### Boat

**Western Shipping** (Map p119; ☎ 331 4467) operates the *Cagi Mai Ba* from Suva to Rotuma (deck/cabin \$130/150, 36 hours). Call for departure times and dates.

Yachts occasionally visit the island, and must obtain permission to anchor from the Ahau government station in Maka Bay, on the northern side of the island. Note that yachties can't make Rotuma their first port of call; see p253 for details.