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PRACTICALITIES

- Electricity is 240V AC, 50Hz as in Australia and NZ, and the same three-blade plugs are used. Power is available 24 hours a day on all the Southern Group islands except Mitiaro, where it runs from 5am to midnight and 24 hours on weekends.
- The PAL TV system is used in the Cook Islands, as in New Zealand, Australia and most of Europe. Tourist videos in the Cook Islands are usually also available in NTSC (used in North America) and sometimes in SECAM format (used in France).
- The Cook Islands has two main newspapers: the daily *Cook Islands News* (www.cinews.co.uk) and the weekly *Cook Islands Herald* (www.ciherald.co.ck).
- Cook Islanders love movies, and there are lots of rental shops around. On Rarotonga you can rent DVDs, video tapes, players and even colour TVs (check the *Telephone Directory*).
- Power comes from generators burning diesel fuel shipped in from New Zealand. Electricity is, therefore, horrendously expensive – which is quite obvious if you stay anywhere that has air-conditioning. Conserve electricity by turning off fans and air-con systems while you're out.
- The Cook Islands uses the metric system. If you don't, see the table on the inside front cover for help with conversion from imperial to metric.

ACCOMMODATION

Although there is no visa requirement for short-term visitors to the Cooks, there is one stipulation for all visitors: you are supposed to have booked accommodation before you arrive. This is mainly to avoid people sleeping out on the beaches or camping rough, which isn't allowed in the Cooks, and to avoid the unlikely eventuality that there won't be any beds left for you to stay in your budget range.

It's really more of a guideline than a strictly enforced rule. Many of the places to stay (especially the backpacker places) have someone at the airport to meet every flight, and nowadays if you haven't booked anywhere to stay, you'll be ushered to an area where you'll get to meet representatives from the hotels that have available rooms and discuss your options. Nevertheless, the prior-booking rule is still official policy, and you will have to put wherever you're planning on staying on your visa form before arrival, so it's best to have a booking before you arrive.

The Cook Islands Tourist Authority administers an accreditation scheme that accommodation (and other) businesses can voluntarily decide to join if they meet certain criteria. Any place not showing the

accreditation sticker (a big blue 'tick' mark) is likely to be a little shabbier (and a little cheaper).

In general, accommodation here is relatively expensive – the Cook Islands is definitely not a budget destination compared to many other areas of the South Pacific, and Rarotonga and Aitutaki are steadily starting to orientate themselves towards catering for midrange and top-end travellers.

In this book you'll find accommodation divided into three categories: budget, midrange and top-end. Budget accommodation is mainly in hostels, family-run guesthouses and small bungalows. Dorm beds will set you back around NZ\$20 to NZ\$30, while private rooms (usually with shared facilities) and self-contained bungalows are more likely to cost NZ\$30 to NZ\$80.

The midrange price bracket is where you'll find the widest range of accommodation. Properties in this range will always have private facilities with fully equipped kitchens; the higher you move up the price ladder, the more individuality, luxury and Polynesian character you'll find. Midrange motel-style units start around the NZ\$120 mark; for NZ\$200 to NZ\$250 you can expect a really nice free-standing bungalow, usually with a private sundeck and lagoon view; and at the top end of the bracket, you're knocking on the door of the luxury places.

From around NZ\$350 you'll find yourself staying on the islands in real style; for this kind of money you can expect thatched bungalows, beachfront rooms, onsite swimming pools and top-notch island décor. There's really no limit to what you could pay if you've got the cash – there are plenty of places around the NZ\$400 to NZ\$600, and a select few from NZ\$800 upwards. Although the rack rates at many of the top places are often very high, it's worth asking about multnight packages (usually seven nights for the price of six) and 'early-bird' specials, where you receive substantial discounts for booking in advance (generally 30 days) and sometimes paying upfront.

There are no seasonal rates in the Cook Islands; generally the same prices apply year-round. Busy times include religious and school holidays, and especially Christmas and New Year when many Cook Islanders return home from overseas. If you're travelling at these times, book well ahead.

Rarotonga is far and away the Cook Islands' major attraction and it has by far the most places to stay. Aitutaki has an increasing number of accommodation options, with three large resorts and lots and lots of self-contained bungalows. All other Southern Group islands have organised accommodation, though the choice is much more limited.

In the Northern Group, only Manihiki and Penrhyn have guesthouses; on other islands you'll probably be staying with local families. Since visitors to these islands are few and far between, arrangements are likely to be very informal. Try not to take advantage of Cook Islanders' natural hospitality – be sure to pay your way, and bring enough food to share around. Cook Islanders are usually generous to a fault – you should be too.

Camping

Camping is not officially allowed anywhere in the Cook Islands, and there are no organised campsites.

Hostels & Guesthouses

There are several hostels and guesthouses around Rarotonga, many of which are great value for money. There's usually a choice between dorm beds and private rooms, and many places have self-contained bungalow units or chalets available for guests too. There's always some kind of kitchen facilities where you can cook your own food, though the equipment is not always terribly new. Hostels are great if you're travelling on your own and you want to meet other travellers, or if you're trying to cut costs in order to travel around more islands. Some hostels have more of a party atmosphere than others; if you know you'd prefer a bit of peace and quiet, it's best to choose one that's not renowned for its late-night reputation.

Motels

Motel-style accommodation is quite common on Rarotonga. These places are usually pretty similar to motels you'll find in New Zealand, the US and other parts of the world; expect plain, modern furnishings, separate bedroom and kitchen areas, and a distinct lack of any Polynesian character. The units are generally built side by side in a single block or arranged around a small garden (sometimes there's a swimming pool too).

Holiday Bungalows

Most of the accommodation on Rarotonga is in self-contained bungalows. These are generally free-standing units, usually with a main bedroom and sitting room separated from a bedroom and bathroom area by sliding doors or partition walls. Most also have pleasant private sundecks for guests' use; the more expensive will have beachfront views and one or more bedrooms. Many properties prefer not to take children under twelve – ask about the manager's policy beforehand to avoid any sticky moments later on. Contact the main tourist office or some of the holiday rental agencies on Rarotonga for full listings: **Shekinah Homes** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26004; www.shekinahhomes.com) and **Rarotonga Realty** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26664; www.rarorealty.co.ck) are both good places to start looking.

Rental Houses

People staying long-term often rent houses in Rarotonga. You can get quite a reasonable place, fully furnished including linen and kitchenware, for around NZ\$450 a week – see p84 for further details.

Resorts & Luxury Units

On Rarotonga, there are two huge resorts, which offer a wide variety of room types and full onsite facilities, including tennis courts, pools, restaurants, bars, spas, tour desks and vehicle hire. These are usually a good option for families, as they're about the only places that cater specifically for kids. There are also a number of smaller resorts and boutique hotels, where you'll probably be staying in luxurious self-contained bungalows, some with a suitably Polynesian character – though thatched roofs will usually cost you dearly in the Cook Islands. Check whether your room includes kitchen facilities – if not, you'll be eating out every night at extra expense.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

ACTIVITIES

The Cook Islands is relaxed, slow and easy-going, but there are plenty of activities to keep you busy. Naturally enough in one of the world's most beautiful island nations, swimming, snorkelling and diving are all top activities, as are sailing, deep-sea fishing and canoeing. Caving is also a fascinating activity, especially on the *makatea* (raised, fossilised coral reef) islands of the Southern Group, where the exposed coral reefs are riddled with caves and sinkholes.

Caving

'Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Mangaia all have interesting caves. It's a good idea to take your own good-quality torch – most guides will have one you can borrow but some do not. It's a real shame (not to mention a little unnerving) to be inside an enormous subterranean cavern with only a flickering penlight for illumination. See the relevant chapters for details about caves you can visit.

On 'Atiu and Mangaia you must gain permission before entering caves, as many are on private land. Some will only be accessible with a specific guide who's been granted permission to lead tours to the cave. Consequently, you'll often find that not all people know about all of the caves; ask around to make sure you're getting the full story.

Cycling

Cycling is a popular activity on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Bicycles can be easily rented on both these islands, and more erratically on 'Atiu, Ma'uke and Mitiaro. The distances are short, roads are pretty flat, and a bicycle enables you not only to get around but also to get right off the beaten track and to see the islands at a suitably relaxed pace.

Deep-Sea Fishing

Commercial deep-sea fishing boats, kitted out with all the necessary equipment and safety gear, offer charter fishing tours from Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Some of the large deep-sea fish you'll tackle in the islands include *mahi mahi*, wahoo, tuna, swordfish, marlin and barracuda (ask beforehand about their policy on who keeps the catch). If you visit some of the outer islands, where tourism is less organised, you might even get some of the locals to take you fishing the local way, in outrigger canoes.

Diving & Snorkelling

Rarotonga and Aitutaki both offer world-class snorkelling and diving. Inside the coral reef, the lagoons of both islands are positively teeming with tropical fish and marine life, and outside the reef the show is even more spectacular – you might catch sight of sea turtles, moray eels, reef sharks and even (if you're really lucky and you're here at the right time of year) a humpback whale or two. If you're planning on heading outside the reef, you'll need to go with a qualified guide, or you could just tag along on one of the regular dive-boats (see p68 and p102).

You can buy or hire gear on Rarotonga, and many hotels offer complimentary use of equipment for guests. Lagoon-cruise operators and dive companies on both islands can take you to some of the best snorkelling spots.

Diving on Rarotonga and Aitutaki is particularly rewarding thanks to the high visibility (usually around 30m to 60m – 100ft to 200ft), the steep ocean drop-offs, and the sheer variety of marine life on display.

Diving and instruction prices are quite reasonable. Several operators offer daily trips, and if you aren't already a certified diver you can take a four-day course to receive PADI certification. If you've got limited time, consider doing the first stage of your certificate back home and then your qualification dives in the Cooks – you'll be the envy of your classmates and will probably remain a diving junky for life. See p69 for details of the four diving operations on Rarotonga, or p102 for Aitutaki's two operators.

There aren't many possibilities for getting out in the water on the other islands of the Southern Group, as their lagoons are narrow or nonexistent; but if you're visiting the Northern Group, be sure to bring along your snorkelling gear. The large lagoons are filled with abundant fish and exotic shells – and, other than snorkelling, there's not much else to do to pass the time!

Hiking & Walking

Hiking is a definite highlight on all the Southern Islands. Rarotonga is criss-crossed with mountain tracks and valley walks, and if you fancy something more sedate there's always the practically unbroken beach that runs all the way around the island. For more information, see p67.

Rarotonga is the only mountainous island in the Cooks, but many of the other islands (eg Mangaia, 'Atiu, Ma'uke and Mitiaro) have great walking trails, especially along the coral pathways through the *makatea*. Aitutaki, with its single, small 'mountain', Maungapu (p104), and many quiet back-roads, is also great for walking and exploring.

Lagoon Cruises

One of the highlights of any visit to the Cook Islands is undoubtedly a lagoon cruise in Aitutaki (p101). The lagoon is large, warm, brilliantly blue, and full of bright tropical fish, giant clams and living corals (but thankfully no sharks). Cruises always include visits to some of the lagoon's best snorkelling spots and a few of the *motu* (smaller islands) around the lagoon's edge. A barbecue lunch is usually thrown in as well. Cruises operate daily except on Sunday and are absolutely essential if you're heading to Aitutaki.

You could also explore the lagoon under your own steam – kayaks are easily available for hire around the island.

Rarotonga's lagoon is much smaller, so you won't really need any equipment apart from a decent pair of fins – though you can hire kayaks from several places on Muri Beach if you want. Glass-bottom boats cruise from Muri around the lagoon to some of the best places to see coral and tropical fish. The cruises provide snorkelling gear and include barbecue lunches.

Land Sports

Rugby, netball and soccer are the most popular land sports in the Cooks, and there are regular inter-village or inter-island tournaments going on throughout the year – check out local newspapers for details of upcoming games.

Rarotonga also has plenty of organised running races if you feel like working up a sweat in the tropical heat. There's also a golf course near the airport (and another small golf course on Aitutaki), and a couple of squash and tennis courts for public use. Check out p71 for more info.

Other Sports

The lagoons of Rarotonga and Aitutaki are ideal for all kinds of other water sports. On Rarotonga, head to Muri Beach, where sailing boats, windsurfers and kayaks can be

hired (p71). Sailing races are held at Muri Beach every Saturday and Sunday afternoon, and *vaka* (canoe) racing is becoming a really popular sport on Rarotonga.

Swimming

Water sports are the most obvious activity in the Cooks, and swimming is the first thing on most people's minds. The two most visited islands, Rarotonga and Aitutaki, are great for swimming, especially around Rarotonga's southern and western coasts, and in Aitutaki's lagoon. Other islands of the Southern Group have no enclosed lagoon, so the swimming possibilities are fewer, but even these islands have somewhere or other to swim – sometimes in the deep water next to the island harbours or even in underground caves! Each destination chapter in the book has some advice on the best swimming spots for whichever island you're on.

Visiting Marae & Churches

History buffs will enjoy visiting the *marae* on many of the islands. Traditional religious meeting places associated with particular chiefs, high priests or clans, the *marae* are still very significant in some aspects of culture on Rarotonga and on many other islands. Various ceremonies relating to birth, death, marriage and war all took place in the shady *marae* groves, and although the carved wooden figures that once stood on the *marae* were destroyed, burned or taken away by the missionaries, the stones of many of the *marae* still remain.

Bear in mind, however, that this isn't ancient Egypt – many *marae* are substantially overgrown and some are in a better state of preservation than others. This can be frustrating if you've tramped for miles through the jungle to see them, so ask someone what state the *marae* are in before you set out. Many can only be visited with a guide anyway as they're often on private land. Remember not to walk on the *marae* itself – the ground is still considered *tapu* (sacred).

Visiting church is another real highlight, and even if you're not particularly religious you should make the effort to go. Church going is serious business in the Cooks: on Sunday, the islands virtually shut, everyone dons their best outfits and poshest hats, and retires to one of the many churches for the Sunday service. The islands have become fa-

mous for their extraordinary choral singing, which is best heard at a church service – the harmonies are beautiful and the volume is sometimes enough to raise the roof.

If you're visiting church, follow a few simple rules to avoid offending anyone: women should wear sleeves to cover shoulders and upper arms. Don't wear a *pareu* (sarong) or shorts to church and crop-tops and bikinis are also no-nos. A skirt or dress is best, preferably with the hemline at or below the knee. It's customary for women to wear hats in the CICC, but don't worry about it if you don't have one – locals understand that visitors to the islands are not usually travelling with hats suitable for church! Flowers can be worn any other time, but not to church.

Men should wear a shirt and long trousers – no vests or speedos please, boys.

Whale-Watching Cruises

In season (from July to October) whale-watching trips operate from several islands (see p72). Most of the boats that take visitors on fishing trips outside the reef will divert to check out whales if they happen to be nearby.

BUSINESS HOURS

The usual business week is 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday, and most shops also open on Saturday morning until noon. Small local grocery stores keep longer hours, often from around 6am or 7am until around 8pm or 9pm. The banks in Avarua are generally open till 3pm on weekdays, but only the Westpac Bank is open on Saturday morning.

Nearly everything is closed on Sunday – bars close at midnight on Saturday and even Air Rarotonga doesn't fly. The only exceptions are the small local grocery stores, some of which open for a couple of hours very early on Sunday morning and for a few hours again in the evening. A couple of shops are operated by Seventh-Day Adventists, who celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday rather than Sunday, so they're closed on Saturday and open on Sunday. It's very handy to find out which are the Seventh-Day Adventist stores! Many restaurants are closed on Sunday, except for hotel and resort restaurants, which are open seven days a week. On Rarotonga, several of the larger hotels serve up special Sunday meals – brunches in late morning, barbecues in late afternoon.

Opening hours in the Cook Islands are notoriously variable, so we've taken the liberty of not listing all of them in this guidebook.

CHILDREN

Children are loved in the Cook Islands and travelling with them presents no special problems. Some hotels allow children to stay free of charge, while others have a reduced children's rate. Many smaller hotels and bungalows don't accept children at all – remember to ask about the policy when you make your bookings.

Practicalities

There are no baby-sitting organisations in the Cook Islands, although there is a children's activity centre near the airport on Rarotonga, **Kids 'N Action** (☎ 25018). The more expensive accommodation places offer baby-sitting, usually with a staff member, or at some of the larger resorts there are dedicated kids' clubs.

Disposable nappies (diapers) are expensive, so you might want to bring some along (if you decide to stick with cloth nappies while on holiday, we salute you, but it'll be hard work – make sure the place you're staying at has a cheap laundry). Be certain that your health and travel insurance also covers your child. Dairy-based/dairy-free baby formula is available on Rarotonga; only dairy-based formula is available on outer islands. Processed baby food is available on Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Mangaia.

Car baby seats are available on Rarotonga at Avis, Budget or Rarotonga Rentals. (Strapping bub to your back with a piece of cloth when you're riding a motorbike, although common practise on Rarotonga, is not recommended.) See p175 for more information on airline travel with kids.

Lonely Planet's *Travel With Children*, by Cathy Lanigan, is a helpful book for travel with children anywhere in the world.

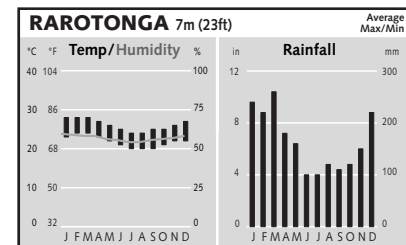
Sights & Activities

There are plenty of things to do that will keep kids happy. Soft, sandy beaches on calm lagoons couldn't be safer for children to swim in (though, of course, they must still be supervised), and if your kids like snorkelling they'll be enthralled. (Be sure they understand not to touch the coral.)

Other activities to occupy the young whippersnappers include walking, cycling, horse riding and canoeing. An island-night is always fun, as is the Cook Islands Cultural Village. You'll often see tiny tots practising their dance moves alongside the older dancers at an island night (tragically, they'll be better at it than you too). See p72 for more on kids' activities in Rarotonga.

CLIMATE CHART

For more information on the best time of the year for visiting the Cook Islands, see p13.



CUSTOMS

You can bring in, duty free, 2L of spirits or wine or 4.5L of beer, plus 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco. The isolated Cooks are free of many diseases, so strict agricultural quarantines apply: bringing in plants, seeds or plant products, and animals or animal products is restricted, and camping or sporting equipment may be fumigated. You must declare if you're carrying any of these on arrival. Firearms and other weapons are prohibited, and don't import drugs unless you fancy a stint in Rarotongan Prison.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The Cook Islands is safer than most places in the world, but a certain amount of common sense is still called for. In general, you will find the Cooks to be just as idyllic as the tourist brochures lead you to expect and the people to be some of the friendliest you will ever meet. As anywhere, crime does exist, but it's practically unheard of for anyone to be attacked or robbed. With normal, minimal caution you should have no problems.

Insects & Other Creatures

At certain times of year, mosquitoes can be a real nuisance – bring repellent and cover up your hands and feet at dawn and dusk. The

worst islands are those with large swampy areas or tracts of rainforest – you'll usually get more badly bitten on an inland hike than you will if you stick to the coast. Mosquito coils are a useful and cheap deterrent – light a couple in your room and they'll normally keep most mossies at bay for a while.

Other insects that bite or sting include bees, wasps, hornets and small red ants. The insect people fear the most is the large centipede. Though they look very frightening, reaching about 15cm (six inches) long, their sting is no more dangerous than a bee or wasp sting. See p185 for more on insects and other creatures found in the Cook Islands, their stings and what to do if you do get stung.

Not really a danger, but definitely an annoyance, are the formidable cockroaches that live in the Cooks. They won't hurt you, but they sure are big, and they move shockingly fast. You can buy insect spray and mosquito coils at grocery shops. It's said that if the cockroaches are flying, it means it will rain the next day.

Swimming

In the sheltered lagoons, swimming could hardly be safer, but you must be wary of *ava* (passages and breaks in the surrounding reefs). Currents are especially strong here; the lagoon waters sweep swiftly out to the open sea and often straight downwards due to the steep drop-offs just off the reef. Rarotonga has several such passages, notably at Avana Harbour, Avaavaroa, Papua and Rutaki, and they exist on other islands as well.

Check the Rarotonga map for the position of reef passages before you go swimming. Several unnecessary deaths have occurred when people have been swept away in these passages. You should only venture outside the reef if you are fully aware of the tidal flow and currents, and then only with great care.

Check p185 for advice on other things you should watch out for when swimming.

Theft

For some reason, when people come on holiday to the tropics, they leave their sense of security at home. As anywhere else in the world, if you leave wallets lying on car seats or hotel-room doors unlocked, you're at risk of losing your possessions. Even theft

of clothes from clotheslines. It's a good idea to check your valuables with hotel management, to prevent theft from your room, and it's always sensible not to flash expensive watches and digital cameras around on an island where there's not too much disposable income. (If you do get something stolen, think twice before you automatically blame the locals; some of the travellers staying here are at the end of round-the-world trips, and your cash might see them home).

You're in more danger of being struck by a falling coconut in the Cook Islands that you are of being mugged.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Special facilities for the disabled are few and far between in the Cook Islands – only the Rarotongan Beach Resort (p84) on Rarotonga is fully accessible. All of its rooms and public areas are wheelchair accessible, and a couple of rooms are specially equipped with facilities for the disabled. Rarotonga's airport has few facilities for wheelchairs.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Cook Islands Embassies & Consulates

Australia (☎ 02-9907 6567; fax 02-9949 6664; 8/8 Lauderdale Ave, Fairlight, NSW 2094)

New Zealand Auckland (☎ 09-366 1100; fax 09-309 1876; 1st fl, 127 Symonds St, PO Box 37-391, Auckland); Wellington (☎ 04-472 5126; fax 04-472 5121; 56 Mulgrave St, PO Box 12-242, Thorndon, Wellington)

Norway (☎ 02-430 910; fax 22-444 611; Bydgoj Alle 64, 0265 Oslo 2)

USA California (☎ 805-987 0620; mets@gte.net; Metua Ngarupe, 1000 San Clemente Way, Camarillo 93010); Hawaii (☎ 808-842 8999; fax 808-842 3520; Kamehameha Schools, c/o 144 Ke Ala Ola Rd, Honolulu 96817)

Embassies & Consulates in the Cook Islands

Foreign consulates and high commissions in the Cook Islands are all on Rarotonga. They include the following:

France (☎ 24021, mobile phone 54424; eggelton@oyster.net.ck) Contact Cassie Eggelton.

Germany (☎ 23206) Contact Wolfgang Losacker.

New Zealand (☎ 22201, mobile phone 55201; nzhc@oyster.net.ck; New Zealand High Commission; PO Box 21, Avarua) Upstairs over the Philatelic Bureau, beside the post office.

UK (☎ 20444; mitchell@oyster.net.ck) Located on the 3rd floor of the Trustnet Building in Avarua; contact Mike Mitchell.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In addition to the annual holidays, locals exuberantly turn out to support all manner of marches, runs, walks, sports competitions, music/dance/art/cultural events, youth rallies, religious revivals, church functions, village fundraisers and raffle drawings – in fact any excuse for a good knees-up is guaranteed to bring the Cook Islanders out in force. And visitors are always welcome.

Rarotonga has a couple of big canoe- and sailboat-racing competitions, many golf tournaments (plus one on Aitutaki), a sevens rugby tournament, a lawn bowls tournament and running races all year long (especially in October, when you can see the gruelling Round Rarotonga Road Race). Check the website of the **Tourist Authority** (www.cook-islands.com) and local newspapers for dates.

February

Cultural Festival Week Second week of February. A week of festivities featuring *tivaeva*-quilt competitions, and arts and crafts displays.

April

Dancer of the Year Dance displays and competitions swing into action throughout April, culminating in the hotly contested male and female Dancer of the Year competition.

July

Gospel Day Takes place on 20 July on 'Atiu, 21 July on Mitiaro, 25 July on Rarotonga, and elsewhere on 26 October. Celebrates the arrival of the gospel to the Cook Islands, in 1823, with *nuku* (religious plays); every major church participates with Biblical dramatisations involving music, processions and colourful costumes.

Choir Competition A singing contest between competing choirs from across the islands, culminating in a big performance at the National Auditorium in Avarua.

August

Constitution Celebration Held at the start of August, this festival (also called Te Maire Nui) celebrates the 1965 declaration of independence and is the major festival of the year in the Cook Islands. A programme of parades, dances, musical performances, cultural displays and other events culminates in the celebration of Constitution Day on 4 August.

November

All Souls Day (Turama) 1 November. The Catholic community decorates graves with flowers and candles.

Tiare (Floral) Festival Week Final week of November. Celebrated with floral float parades, a Miss Tiare pageant,

a Mama Muumu pageant, flower display and arrangement competitions, and all public businesses on Rarotonga decorate their premises with flowers.

December

Christmas Obviously an important date in the Christian Cook Islands; many of the smaller islands have a tradition of visiting neighbours' houses for food and drink on Christmas Day.

New Year's Eve 31 December. The new year is welcomed in with as much dancing, boozing, singing and general celebration as possible.

FOOD

See the Food and Drink chapter (p43) for the lowdown on what kind of things you can eat in the Cook Islands. As a rough guide, a morning cappuccino is going to set you back NZ\$3.50; lunch will be NZ\$8 to NZ\$15; and a sit-down meal in a restaurant starts at around NZ\$8 to NZ\$10 for a starter and NZ\$20 for a main course. Obviously you'll only have to worry about eating out on Rarotonga – on the outer islands there generally aren't any restaurants whatsoever, so you'd better get keen on corned beef and tinned fish.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexuality is an accepted fact of life in the Cook Islands, as in most of Polynesia. There's no need for gays or lesbians to hide their sexuality, and there's no need to fear 'gay bashing'. Public displays of sexual affection are frowned upon, however, whether gay or straight, so best to behave yourself while out in public. There are no particular 'gay bars' or places for gay people to gather; you can meet gay people anywhere.

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

The Cook Islands' public holidays, when shops and banks are closed, are:

New Year's Day 1 January

Good Friday & Easter Monday March/April

Anzac Day 25 April

Queen's Birthday First Monday in June

Gospel Day (Rarotonga only) 25 July

Constitution/Flag Raising Day 4 August

Gospel Day 20 July (on 'Atiu), 21 July (Mitiaro), 25 July (Rarotonga), 26 October (rest of Cook Islands)

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INSURANCE

However you're travelling, it's worth taking out travel insurance. You may not want to insure that grotty old army-surplus backpack, but everyone should be covered for the worst possible case: an accident, for example, that will require hospital treatment and a flight home. It's a good idea to make a copy of your policy in case the original gets lost. The insurance may seem expensive, but if you can't afford it, you certainly won't be able to afford a medical emergency overseas.

Medical care is very basic in the Cook Islands. Even the locals don't depend solely on the medical care available here; the national health system provides for them to fly to New Zealand (NZ) for medical treatment when necessary. As a foreigner, however, you're not covered by this same protection unless you have personal insurance.

Worldwide cover to travellers from over 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERNET ACCESS

Public email and Internet connections can be found in several locations on Rarotonga (see p54), and just one place on Aitutaki (see p99). Several of the Telecom offices on the outer islands have small Cyberbooths where you can get online (though the connection will be very slow and pretty pricey).

Most businesses on Rarotonga and Aitutaki have email addresses and/or websites – search Oyster's email directory (under the Directories menu at www.oyster.net.ck) if you're looking for someone in particular.

Using your own laptop in hotel rooms isn't really practical – you'd need to organise a local dial-up number and the call charges would probably end up being horrendous. If you need to use your own machine, it's far more sensible to take your laptop to one of the wi-fi enabled Internet cafés, including Telecom and Telepost (p54), both in Avarua.

If you'll be staying in the Cooks for some time and have your own computer, ask Telecom how you can get hooked up. If you bring your laptop, you could sign up for a temporary Oyster Internet access account. Temporary registration costs NZ\$25, and access is NZ\$5 per hour, charged to your credit card. You'll also need a NZ\$500 de-

posit, refundable when you terminate your connection. You probably won't be able to use this connection from your hotel room though, so it's probably easier in the long-run to get online elsewhere.

MAPS

The (now defunct) New Zealand Department of Lands & Survey produced excellent 1:25,000 topographical maps of each of the Cook Islands in the 1980s and 1990s, showing physical features, roads, villages, walking tracks, lagoons and reefs. You might find a few of these maps around Rarotonga. The Cook Islands Tourist Authority office in Avarua hands out a few free tourist publications containing good maps. See p51 for details on where to find maps.

MONEY

All prices in this book are quoted in New Zealand dollars (NZ\$), which are used throughout the Cook Islands.

New Zealand coins and notes are used in the Cooks. There is some Cook Islands money in circulation, identical in value to NZ dollars. The only Cook Islands note is the \$3 note, which makes a novelty collector's item – you can buy them at the Philatelic Bureau on Rarotonga, or ask for one in your change when you pay your departure tax at Westpac. There are two versions – a green one depicting the legend of 'Ina and the Shark, and a pink one with generic Cook Islands scenes on front and back.

There's also a complete set of Cook Islands coins – 5¢, 10¢, 20¢, 50¢, \$1, \$2 and \$5. The old, huge \$1 Tangaroa coin is now a collector's item (they're also available at the Philatelic Bureau), having been replaced by a smaller, wavy-edged \$1 coin, still bearing Tangaroa's image. The \$2 coin is an oddity – it's triangular! The \$5 coin is larger than the rest and made of brass.

ATMS

The two travellers' banks on Rarotonga, Westpac and ANZ, are both in Avarua. Travellers cheques and cash (major currencies) can be changed at either bank. They also give cash advances on Visa, MasterCard and Bankcard. Travellers cheques and major currencies in cash can be changed at some of the larger hotels, but the banks offer a better exchange rate.

ANZ Bank has two ATMs, both on Rarotonga – downtown Avarua and at Wigmore's Superstore on the south coast. There's also an ANZ agent at Mango's Trading on Aitutaki, with an ATM outside. Westpac has two ATMs on Rarotonga – in Avarua and at the airport – and a branch with an ATM at the Administration Centre on Aitutaki.

Both Westpac's and ANZ's ATMs are linked to the international Cirrus/Maestro systems so most travellers can access their home bank account. Check with your bank before you leave about their charges for using overseas ATMs – depending on your bank, this can work out as one of the cheapest ways to access your money, and more convenient than constantly changing travellers cheques.

Cash

Cook Islands money, whether coins or notes, cannot be changed anywhere else in the world, so be sure to either spend it or exchange it before you leave the country. It will only be good for a souvenir when you arrive somewhere else.

Credit Cards

Visa, MasterCard and Bankcard are readily accepted at most places on Rarotonga. Westpac and ANZ banks in Avarua give cash advances on all three cards; outer-island branches may accept these cards. American Express and Diners Club are accepted at more-expensive hotels and restaurants.

Bank agents on the outer islands usually give cash advances on Visa, MasterCard and Bankcard, but it can be a slow process. Make sure you're going to be around for a few days or the cash might arrive after you leave.

Moneychangers

There are not many places you can change money – just the Westpac and ANZ Banks in Avarua, at the GlobalEx booth next to Jetsave in Avarua, and at some hotels. You're better off changing all your money on Rarotonga rather than hoping to be able to change money on the outer islands – the fees will be higher and you might occasionally find they've run out of cash. Westpac has a branch at the Rarotonga international airport, open for all arriving and departing international flights.

Tipping

Tipping and bargaining are not customary in the Cook Islands. In fact, some people say that you'll offend Cook Islanders by tipping them, but that's not really true – they'll just think you're a mug.

Travellers Cheques

You get about 4% more for travellers cheques than for cash. Some of the outer-island bank agents will change NZ-dollar travellers cheques but not US dollars.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

You can buy colour print film, disposable cameras, spare batteries and camcorder tapes at Cocophoto (Map pp56–7) in the CITC Pharmacy and the Fuji Image Centre in Avarua (Map pp56–7). Most supermarkets, small shops and larger hotels also sell film, but prices everywhere are considerably higher than those you'd pay back home, so it's a good idea to bring your film with you. If you're visiting the other islands, stock up before you leave, because it's only reliably available on Rarotonga. Cocophoto and the Fuji Image Centre also process digital images – just drop in your memory card or a CD of images and they'll do the rest. There is no film or film processing available on the outer islands – they have to send their film to Rarotonga. Transparency film is also nearly impossible to find, even on Rarotonga.

Cook Islanders are generally quite happy to be photographed, but the usual rule applies – it's polite to ask first.

POST

Postage stamps are a major source of revenue for the Cook Islands. Some beautiful stamps are produced, and limiting the supply and availability has managed to make many of them valuable collector's items. The Philatelic Bureau office (p93), next to the post office in Avarua, offers a wide selection of stamps, coins and bills. As an ideal souvenir, you can send some attractively stamped postcards home from the Cooks.

There's no home postal delivery anywhere in the Cooks – everyone uses PO boxes. If you want to receive mail, the best idea is to have it sent directly to wherever you're staying. You can also receive mail care of poste restante at the post office, where it is held for 30 days. To collect mail at the post

office in Avarua it should be addressed to you, c/o Poste Restante, Avarua, Rarotonga, Cook Islands. Poste-restante services are also available on the other islands.

SHOPPING

There are many things that you can buy as souvenirs of the Cooks, ranging from unique, high-quality handicrafts to some fantastically kitsch, cheap tourist products. Several islands in the Cooks have their own handicraft specialities. Most of them can be bought on Rarotonga, but if you take a trip to the outer islands you may find things you haven't seen on Rarotonga, and they'll probably cost less.

The only thing you should be wary of, especially in some of the tourist shops in Rarotonga, is buying some 'authentic' local handicrafts only to discover later they were actually made in Indonesia or China, or on other South Pacific islands such as the Solomons. Much of the shell jewellery and basketwork you'll see around in Avarua will probably have been made somewhere other than the Cooks – genuine carving and craftwork is usually quite expensive, and if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. A few souvenirs made outside the Cooks – woodcarvings produced in the Solomon Islands, for example – are sold in some Avarua shops. If you specifically want a Cook Islands souvenir, and you're not sure where something comes from, just ask if a piece is local. You'll always get a straight answer.

Bargaining

Don't. Bargaining is considered rude by almost everyone in the Cooks. The price marked on items for sale is the price the merchant expects to receive.

Baskets & Woven Pandanus

Some good-quality basket work is still done, although you'll see some plastic-carton strapping and other man-made materials creeping into use. Traditional woven pandanus products such as mats, purses and fans are now rarely made on Rarotonga, since the pandanus that used to grow on this island has mostly died off, but you can find these products in the arts and crafts shops. On the other islands of the Southern Group (except 'Atiu), all traditional pandanus items are still made for everyday use. If you visit the outer

islands, you'll see pandanus products everywhere. Mangaia is a particularly good place to pick up local basketwork.

Pearls

Pearls, a very important product in the Cook Islands' economy, are farmed on the Northern Group islands of Manihiki and Penrhyn, and sold on Rarotonga. Black pearls, golden pearls, white pearls, pearls embedded in their mother-of-pearl shells, and mother-of-pearl products are all available on Rarotonga (see p91). Black pearls, very rare in the world, are a speciality of the Cooks.

Rito Hats

The beautiful hats that the women wear to church on Sunday are a Cook Islands speciality. These hats are woven of *rito* (fine, bleached pandanus leaves); the best ones come from Rakahanga and Penrhyn. Prices start at about NZ\$90.

Shells & Shell Jewellery

A lot of shell jewellery is produced, as well as larger items like shell lamps. Some of this work is imported, principally from the Philippines, but some fine shell work is produced locally. *Pupu 'ei*, long necklaces made of tiny yellow or white snail shells collected on the *makatea* of Mangaia, are a sought-after item; you can buy these necklaces individually or by the dozen on Rarotonga and on Mangaia, where they are less expensive.

Before you rush off to buy shells, remember that something has to be evicted to provide the shell, and conservationists are worried about some species being collected to extinction.

Tangaroa Figures

Tangaroa is the squat, ugly but fantastically well-endowed figure represented on the Cook Islands' \$1 coin. Polynesia's traditional god of the sea and fertility, Tangaroa is a beloved figure for Cook Islanders and has become the symbol of the Cooks. It's been a long-term rehabilitation though, because the early missionaries, in their zeal to wipe out all traces of heathenism, did a thorough job of destroying traditional gods wherever they found them. Tangaroa, along with the rest of the old gods, was banned.

When the Cook Islanders did start carving Tangaroa figures again, they were often emasculated, but now they're fully endowed once again. When the Tangaroa \$1 coin was first minted, there was some consternation in England that Queen Elizabeth's portrait would be associated with such a lewd chap. They got over it.

You can get Tangaroa figures that range from key-rings a couple of centimetres high up to huge figures standing 1m or more, and practically requiring a crane to move them. A figure about 25cm high will cost you around NZ\$40. You'll also find Tangaroa liquor bottles, Tangaroa fridge magnets and – if you search hard – even Tangaroa figures with spring-loaded, pop-up penises!

It's a sign of how completely Christian Cook Islands culture is that no-one worries much about the presence of this pagan figure. Unfortunately for old Tangaroa, he just isn't perceived as a threat these days. Few people fret, either, that this once-sacred figure has been appropriated to sell bottle openers and to fuel cheap laughs.

Tivaevae

These colourful and intricately sewn appliqué works are traditionally made as burial shrouds, but are also used as bedspreads, and smaller ones for cushion covers. It's rare to see them for sale anywhere other than 'Atiu; if you do find a full-size *tivaevae* for sale elsewhere, you'll find they cost upwards of several-hundred dollars due to the enormous amount of time required to make them. Smaller wall hangings, cushion covers or clothing using *tivaevae*-inspired patterns are cheaper.

The **Atiu Fibre Arts Studio** (www.adc.co.ck) on 'Atiu is the only place in the Cook Islands where *tivaevae* are commercially produced and always available. If you stop by, you can see a selection of *tivaevae*, wall hangings, clothing and more; *tivaevae* are on sale there and at the Beachcomber Gallery on Rarotonga.

Wooden & Stone Products

Pate (carved wooden slit drums) are a Polynesian speciality; you can find them in most of the crafts shops. Ukeleles, made of wood and coconut shells, are another good (but expensive) souvenir.

Toki (traditional Mangaian ceremonial stone adzes with intricately carved wooden handles or stands and sennit binding) are still made on Mangaia. You can take a look at them in the museums on Rarotonga, and visit the craftspeople on Mangaia to buy one, or you might find them for sale on Rarotonga. Stone *taro* pounders are also still made and used on Mangaia.

Other Souvenirs

There's a multitude of other things you can buy as souvenirs of the Cooks. Perfumes, colognes and pure coconut oils (from around NZ\$10) and coconut oil-based soaps (from NZ\$3.50) come either in their natural state or scented with local flowers, including *tiaie maori* (gardenia), frangipani, star fruit and jasmine. The Perfume Factory and Perfumes of Rarotonga (p92), both on Rarotonga, are the best places to pick them up.

Colourful *pareu* come in many styles and thicknesses; original tie-dyed ones of very thin material (costing about NZ\$12) are the most popular and the best for the warm climate. Hand-dyed ones are likely to be more expensive (from around NZ\$30). You can also pick up colourful island-style shirts from around NZ\$20 upwards.

A kilogram or two of 'Atiu coffee (there are two brands available, see p43) is another good souvenir. Rarotonga has a few resident artists, and their paintings and other artwork are on sale, often at very reasonable prices.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Solo travellers will have an easy time of it in the Cook Islands; there are no specific dangers, worries or scams associated with travelling on your own, and you're bound to meet up with fellow travellers as the islands are so tiny. In fact, once you've been on the islands a few days, you'll already be part of the furniture for the locals, and you probably won't be able to walk down the main street without waving at a new friend or two. This is especially true of the outer islands, where new faces stick out like a sore thumb – you'll probably meet most people straight off the plane, and be on first-name terms with practically everyone by the time you leave.

The only disadvantage solo travellers will face is accommodation costs – quite often single room prices are in fact only

marginally cheaper than doubles, and if you're renting a bungalow you'll probably be charged for the unit as a whole rather than the number of people staying in it.

TELEPHONE

All populated islands (except Nassau) are connected to the country's modern telephone systems; each island has a Telecom office offering international and inter-island telephone and fax services. On Rarotonga, there's a **Telecom office** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 123, ☎ 29680; Tutakimoa Rd, Avarua; 24hr) in Avarua; hours are more limited on other islands.

Local calls cost NZ\$0.15 for 10 minutes on the same island and NZ\$0.50 per minute to other islands (but don't be surprised if your Kia Orana card is charged at a much higher rate). International directory is ☎ 017; the local directory operator is ☎ 010, and you can search Telecom Cook Islands' websites (www.whitepages.co.ck and www.yellowpages.co.ck). You can make international collect calls from any phone on the island (☎ 015) – the person on the other end will be charged an extra NZ\$5.50 for a domestic call, or NZ\$12 for an international call. Other international calls can be made from private phones, public phones (using prepaid Kia Orana cards) or from Telecom offices.

Mobile Phones

Telecom also has mobile phone (analogue only) and pager systems, but these generally only work on Rarotonga and sometimes Aitutaki. If you want to use your mobile in the Cooks, you can get a local mobile number by buying a Kokanet SIM card for NZ\$25 at the main Telecom office in Avarua, which should enable you to receive calls from your phone. It's a good idea to take your handset in with you to make sure it's compatible before you splash out on the SIM card.

If you want to make calls, you can buy prepaid Koka Cards in denominations of NZ\$20, NZ\$30 and NZ\$50 from Telecom and Telepost in Avarua. Call charges are NZ\$0.20 for text messages, and NZ\$0.38 for voice calls.

Phone Codes

The country code for the Cook Islands is ☎ 682. There are no local area codes.

The Cook Islands Telephone Directory has information about making international

telephone calls. To direct dial from the Cook Islands to another country, dial ☎ 00, then the country code (listed in the Telephone Directory), area code and number.

Phonecards

If you want to pay for the call yourself, you'll need a Kia Orana calling card. These cards, costing NZ\$5, NZ\$10, NZ\$20 or NZ\$50, can be purchased at the post office, Telecom, Telepost and many shops and hotels. They can be used for local, inter-island and international phone calls and work from both public and home telephones. Dial ☎ 147 and then type in your account number and listen to the instructions.

TIME

The Cook Islands are east of the International Date Line – tomorrow starts later here than almost anywhere else. When it's noon in the Cooks (making no allowances for daylight saving), it's 10pm the same day in England; 5pm the same day in New York, USA; 2pm the same day in Los Angeles, USA; noon (same time) in Tahiti and Hawaii; 10am the next day in Fiji and New Zealand; and 8am the next day in Sydney, Australia.

It's very important to remember that the Cook Islands works on 'island time'. This becomes especially relevant if you're doing something where time is really rather important (ie catching a plane), but at other times, just go with the flow – you'll get there faster in the long run.

TOILETS

Toilets in the Cooks are the same as in most Western countries. You won't see many public toilets on the streets, but if you're out in public and nature calls, you can always duck into a restaurant or pub and ask permission to use the facilities.

TOURIST INFORMATION Local Tourist Offices

In the centre of Avarua is the **Cook Islands Tourism Corporation** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 29435; www.cook-islands.com; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri). You can contact it for printed information and free maps before you arrive, and stop in when you're here.

On the outer islands there are tourism officers only on Mangaia, Mitiaro and Aitutaki. On other islands you can find out

what's going on from the people running the place you're staying at, or via the island secretary (listed under Information in the individual island chapters).

Tourist Offices Abroad

Overseas offices or representatives of the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation include the following:

Asia (☎ 66-2 652 0507; eckard@pit.co.th; c/o Pacific Leisure Group, 8/F Maneeya Centre, 518/5 Ploenchit Rd, Bangkok 10330, Thailand)

Australia (☎ 02-9955 0446; ausmanager@cook-islands.com; PO Box 20, Guilford, NSW 2160)

Canada (☎ 1-888 994 2665; canadamanager@cook-islands.com; 1133-160A Street, White Rock, BC V4A 7G9)

Continental Europe (☎ 49-30 4225 6027; europe.manager@cook-islands.com; Petersburgstrasse 94, 10247 Berlin, Germany)

New Zealand (☎ 09-366 1106; nzmanager@cook-islands.com; Level 1, 127 Symonds St, Parnell, Auckland)

UK (☎ 020-7202 6369; ukmanager@cook-islands.com; Nottcut House, 36 Southwark Bridge Rd, London SE1 9EU)

USA (☎ 1-866 280 1739; usamanager@cook-islands.com; 17880 Skypark Circle, Irvine, CA 92614)

VISAS

No pre-arranged visa is required to visit the Cooks, as long as you're here on holiday. A visitor permit, good for 31 days, is granted on arrival for all nationalities. The only things you need to do are present a valid passport, an onward or return airline ticket, and honour the loosely policed 'prior booking' arrangement (see p160).

Visa Extensions

If you want to stay longer than the initial 31 days, you should have no problems as long as you can show you've got adequate finances and still have your vital onward or return air ticket. Extensions cost NZ\$70/120 for up to three/six months.

Visitor permits can be extended on Rarotonga at the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration office** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 29347; tutai@immigration.gov.ck; PO Box 105, Avarua, Rarotonga), on the top floor of the government building (the big three-storey white building behind the Banana Court in Avarua). Come in a week before your current visitor permit expires.

If you want to stay more than six months, you must apply in advance from outside

the country to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration. If you are intending to visit the outer islands you'd be wise to extend your permit beforehand, as there are often delays.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

It's tempting to say that the Cooks present no special problems for women travellers, and leave it at that. Most of the time, and in most situations, women travellers will never have a problem in the Cooks. As a visitor to the islands, you will usually be treated with courtesy and kindness.

Nevertheless, you should not suspend all good sense. Be cautious about going alone to deserted places, such as tramping in the mountains, or swimming alone in a lagoon late at night. As in other parts of the world, your best protection is to be accompanied – go with a friend, or gather a group of travellers together at the place you're staying.

On Rarotonga there's a women's counselling centre, **Punanga Tauturu** (☎ 21133; rongo@punangatauturu.org.ck), which you can contact 24 hours.

What to Wear

Like everywhere, your travelling experiences will go a lot smoother if you observe the local customs of dress and don't offend people by your appearance. This is easy to do in the Cooks by observing a few basic courtesies. If you visit the outer islands, remember that the standards of dress are more conservative than on Rarotonga and Aitutaki, which have been visited by plenty of foreign tourists.

In the Cooks, swimming wear is for swimming; it's fine at the beach or by the pool but elsewhere you should cover up. Don't swim or sunbathe topless or in the nude; you will cause grave offence to locals. Shorts and sleeveless blouses are fine to wear anywhere, but 'short shorts' up to your bum will cause many eyebrows to be raised in disapproval. Wearing a *pareu* is fine.

One last thing – the local custom is to wear a flower behind your ear when you're going out on the town. There's a simple rule – wearing it behind your right ear means you're spoken for; wearing it behind your left ear means you're single.

Transport

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THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Prices go up, prices go down, routes and flight schedules change and special deals come and go. Ring around as many travel agents and airlines as you can, surf the web for the best deals, and make sure you're 100% clear on the rules and restrictions of the ticket you're buying before handing over your hard-earned cash. Treat the information you'll find in this chapter as a set of guidelines rather than a bible of rules – nothing is a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Cook Islands is a long, long way from anywhere, and unless you've got unlimited funds, it's probably a good idea to try and include some of the other islands of the South Pacific in your travel plans. The Cook Islands is often included as an optional stopover on flights to and from New Zealand, and this usually represents the best value way of visiting the islands. You can also include a stop in the Cooks at the end of a round-the-world ticket. All visitors arriving in the Cooks need an onward air ticket (or a yacht-owner's guarantee that they will be departing on the same boat they arrived on).

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY Passport

Every international visitor to the Cook Islands (Kiwis included) must be in possession of a passport valid for the duration of their stay.

AIR Airports & Airlines

Air New Zealand and Pacific Blue (part of the Virgin Group) are the only international carriers that fly regularly to the Cook Islands.

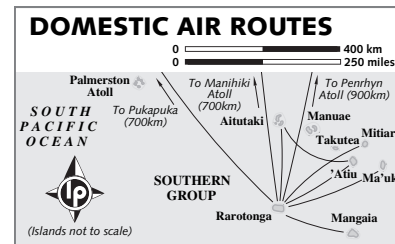
Air New Zealand operates at least one daily direct flight from Rarotonga to Auckland (New Zealand), sometimes stopping in Fiji en route, as well as three weekly flights to Los Angeles via Tahiti (in French Polynesia). From Auckland you can catch regular Air New Zealand flights to other cities in Australia, New Zealand and Asia, and from Los Angeles there are frequent flights to London, continental Europe and the rest of the US.

Pacific Blue operates two weekly flights from Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne to Rarotonga via Auckland.

Air New Zealand (NZ; www.airnewzealand.com); Australia (☎ 13 24 76); Cook Islands (☎ 682-26300; airnzcookislands@airnz.co.nz; Rarotonga international airport); Fiji (☎ 679-331 3100); French Polynesia (☎ 689-540 740); New Zealand (☎ 0800-737 000, 09-336 2480); UK (☎ 0800 028 4149); USA (☎ 1-800 262 1234)

Pacific Blue (DJ; www.virginblue.com.au); Australia (☎ 131 645); New Zealand (☎ 0800 67 0000); international (☎ +61 7 3295 2284)

Since Rarotonga is the only island in the Cooks with an international airport, that's where you'll land. The Rarotonga international airport is a small and extremely welcoming airport by international standards. Queues can move pretty slowly once you're inside the building, but the ubiquitous Jake Nanumanga (a virtuoso on ukelele and Casiotone) or a Cook Islands string band will keep you entertained while you're waiting.



You'll be given a free 31-day visitors permit upon arrival, which can later be extended (see p173). You'll be asked to fill in an arrival form, including details of where you'll be staying. This is important information, because the Cook Islands has a 'prior booking requirement' and technically you can be turned away and sent back to the plane if you haven't booked a place to stay, at least for the first night of your visit (see p160).

You'll also have to fill in a customs form declaring that you're not bringing any food products, seeds, plants or biological material into the islands (the Cooks are quite rightly very strict on quarantine rules) and you'll have to show an onward or return ticket. There's usually no problem with canned, vacuum-packed and frozen foods, but they must be declared at customs on arrival.

After you've collected your bags and passed through customs, you'll be greeted and asked where you're staying. Most accommodation places will provide transfers from the airport, and you'll be directed to the relevant person, who might greet you with a traditional floral 'ei (garland). If your transfer doesn't turn up (as sometimes happens in the ultra laid-back Cook Islands), just let the airport staff know – you'll most likely be able to get a lift in one of the other transfer buses, or if all else fails you could always hop in a taxi. See p94 for more information on airport transfers.

The Westpac bank at the airport is open for all arriving and departing flights. If you need to change money, you can do it here (or in town). If you have New Zealand dollars (NZ\$) you won't need to change money, as New Zealand and Cook Islands money is used interchangeably in the Cooks. There's a Westpac ATM on

your left as you exit. Booking offices for a few inter-island tours are nearby, but these places also have offices in town if you just want to get to your hotel and get some sleep (not a bad idea, since most international flights tend to arrive in the middle of the night).

If warned early enough, airlines can often make special arrangements for travellers, such as wheelchair assistance at airports or vegetarian/vegan/kosher meals on the flight. Children under two years travel for 10% of the standard fare on Air New Zealand, and on Pacific Blue they travel for free. They don't get their own seat or a baggage allowance, but car seats and prams are usually carried free.

Be aware that you won't be able to take bassinets or cots onboard any Pacific Blue flights; if you've booked a separate seat for your child, then you can take cots or car-seats onto Air New Zealand flights, or ask for a bassinet at the time of check-in. Baby food and nappies can be provided by the airline if requested in advance.

Children aged between two and 12 years can usually occupy a seat for 50% to 80% of the full fare, and they do get a baggage allowance.

The disability friendly website, www.everybody.co.uk, has an airline directory that provides information on the facilities offered by various airlines.

Tickets

It's possible to visit the Cook Islands as a single destination, a stopover when you're travelling across the Pacific or as part of a round-the-world ticket. Depending on where you're coming from, a stopover in the Cooks might not cost that much more than a standard single or return fare. Both Air New Zealand and Pacific Blue have online ticket sales, but only Air New Zealand has a branch office at the airport on Rarotonga.

High- and low-season fares apply for flights to the Cooks. The low season is from mid-April to late August, and the high season is from December to February. There is a heavy demand for flights from New Zealand to the Cooks around Christmas, and in the opposite direction in January. Check your dates and options carefully when you book your ticket; going just a day or two

earlier or later can make a big difference in cost.

INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

Round-the-world (RTW) tickets offered by the various airline alliances give travellers an almost endless variety of airline and destination combinations. One of the most common journeys includes travel through Asia, Australia and New Zealand en route to the Cook Islands and the USA, but the routes are extremely flexible. Check out the sites www.roundtheworldflights.com or www.airtreks.com, where you can plan your dream journey and get online quotes.

RTW tickets can be excellent value; expect to pay around US\$2500, A\$2100 or UK£825 for a RTW ticket that takes in Rarotonga. Star Alliance (a code-sharing group of airlines that includes Air New Zealand) offers RTW deals for travel in the Pacific. Air New Zealand also offers the new Star Alliance South Pacific Pass, which connects several of the South Pacific islands using Air New Zealand flights. Prices are based on one-way hops from island to island, and each stop usually adds around £150 (NZ\$385; US\$260) to the ticket price.

RTW tickets are usually tiered based on the price of single fares between the various destinations, and the total mileage you'll be covering. If you want to include the Cooks in a RTW fare or South Pacific pass, you'll basically be tracing the standard Air New Zealand Auckland–Rarotonga–Fiji–Tahiti–Los Angeles route, so you'll only be able to include those destinations in that order. If you want to add in Samoa or Tonga as well, you'll need to fly back to Auckland or onto Los Angeles first. From Auckland or Los Angeles, you can fly on to other destination with Air New Zealand or another Star Alliance partner.

DEPARTURE TAX

There's a NZ\$30 departure tax when you fly out of the Cook Islands. For children (aged two to 12 years) it's NZ\$15. You can pay the tax at the airport, where the Westpac branch is open for all international flights, or at the Westpac bank in Avarua.

Asia

The easiest option for travellers from Asia to the Cook Islands is to fly into Auckland and connect there with an Air New Zealand flight to Rarotonga. The other less direct options are to travel via Nadi (Fiji) either directly to Rarotonga (one flight per week) or via Auckland.

Most Asian countries offer fairly competitive deals, with Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong the best places to shop around for discount tickets. **STA Travel** (Hong Kong ☎ 2390 0421; Tokyo ☎ 03-5391 2922; Singapore ☎ 737 7188; Bangkok ☎ 02-236 0262) is reliable.

Australia

There are no direct flights between Australia and Rarotonga, but getting to the Cooks is relatively straightforward with a connecting flight in Auckland. Single fares from Sydney/Brisbane/Melbourne start at around A\$510/700/750 with Pacific Blue; single fares from most Australian destinations start from around A\$480 with Air New Zealand. Flights are sometimes cheaper or more expensive depending on the time of year you travel and how early in advance you book. Return flights are usually based on the price of two single flights added together.

Like New Zealand, it's almost always cheaper to travel to the Cook Islands from Australia as part of a flight/accommodation package deal. Seven-night packages start at around A\$1800/2400 in low/high season. Specialist agents for fares and packages include the following.

Air New Zealand Holidays (☎ 1300 365 525; www.airnz.com.au) Air New Zealand often has some good-value packages.

Blue Holidays (☎ 13 15 16; www.blueholidays.com.au) Virgin Blue's travel agency.

Hideaway Holidays (☎ 02-8799 2500; www.hideawayholidays.com.au)

Pacific Specialist Holidays (☎ 02-9080 1600, toll-free ☎ 1800 114141; www.pacificholidays.com.au)

Talpacific (☎ 1300 137 727; www.talpacific.com)

Canada

Travel options from Canada are much the same as those from the USA. From Vancouver, **Air New Zealand** (☎ 800-663-5494; www.airnewzealand.ca) return fares to Rarotonga (via Los Angeles) start from around C\$1850/2150 in the low/high season.

Travel CUTS (☎ 800-667 2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency. **Goway** (☎ 800-387 8850; www.goway.com) is a Toronto-based Pacific islands travel specialist.

For online fare bookings, try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

Continental Europe

The main route for travel to the Cooks from Europe will be via Los Angeles or Auckland, depending on which way round the globe you're flying. It's really up to you how you get to those cities, but your flights to Rarotonga will be with either Pacific Blue or Air New Zealand from Auckland, or just Air New Zealand from Los Angeles.

From Europe there are a number of airlines that have direct flights to Los Angeles, but you'll have to connect to London first if you want to travel through New Zealand.

In the Netherlands, **My Travel** (☎ 1900 10 20 300; www.mytravel.nl) has good fare deals, and **Weredirect** (☎ 0343-53 05 30; www.weredirect.nl) has flight/accommodation packages.

In Germany, **Adventure Travel** (☎ 97 99 555; www.adventure-holidays.com) and **Art of Travel** (☎ 089-21 10 760; www.artoftravel.de) specialise in South Pacific travel.

Recommended agencies for fares in France include **OTU Voyages** (☎ 01 55 82 32 32; www.otu.fr) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr). Both **Iles Du Monde** (☎ 01 55 42 74 10; www.ilesdumonde.com) and **Ultramarina** (☎ 08 25 02 98 02; www.ultramarina.com) specialise in travel to the Pacific.

New Zealand

Air New Zealand has daily flights between Auckland and Rarotonga, with extra flights a couple of days a week that arrive at midday rather than sometime after midnight (currently these are on Tuesday and Saturday). Standard one-way fares to Auckland start at NZ\$390, double that for return flights.

Pacific Blue operates two weekly flights to Rarotonga from Auckland, with standard single fares starting at NZ\$500 (although there are often much cheaper fares, sometimes as low as NZ\$200). These low-price airfares cater largely for the many Cook Islanders toing and froing between New Zealand, and flights can get booked up pretty quickly, especially around holiday season.

It's often cheaper to travel to the Cooks on a pre-arranged package from New Zealand. Four night packages start from around NZ\$750, and once your four nights are up you can usually move on to explore the rest of the Cooks (up to a maximum one-month stay). Useful travel agents in New Zealand include the following:

Air New Zealand (☎ 09-377 7999; www.airnewzealand.co.nz)

Flight Centre (☎ 0800 24 35 44; www.flightcentre.co.nz)

House Of Travel (www.houseoftravel.co.nz); Christchurch (☎ 03-365 7687); Auckland (☎ 09-355 7502)

Talpacific Holidays (☎ 09-914 8728; www.talpacific.com)

Other Pacific Islands

Apart from New Zealand, the only Pacific islands with direct flight connections to Rarotonga are Fiji (F\$540 return) and Tahiti (48,000 CFP return). If you want to visit any other islands, you'll have to fly via one of these islands. **Air New Zealand** (www.airnewzealand.co.nz) operates connecting flights to Fiji and Tahiti; check their website or contact your travel agency for schedules and routes.

UK & Ireland

Considering how far Rarotonga is from Europe, a RTW ticket could be the most economical way to get to Rarotonga (see opposite). For those who are travelling only to Rarotonga, Air New Zealand flights from London via Los Angeles are the most straightforward option. Return fares from London start from around £880/1100 in the low/high season.

Standard packages from the UK start from between £1200 and £1400 for seven nights. Add luxury accommodation and a few nights in Aitutaki and the cost is more likely to be around £1900 and £2100. For flights or flight/accommodation packages from the UK, the following travel agencies are recommended:

All Ways Pacific Travel (☎ 014-9443 2747; www.all-ways.co.uk)

Traillfinders (☎ 020-7938 3939; www.trailfinders.co.uk) Reliable long-haul destination specialist.

Travelbag (☎ 0870 814 4441; www.travelbag.co.uk)

Travel Portfolio (☎ 01284 762255; www.travelportfolio.com) Specialist company offering tailor-made packages to New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific.

Turquoise Holiday Company (☎ 0870 443 4177; www.turquoiseholidays.co.uk) Luxury holiday company specialising in island getaways.

USA

Air New Zealand's flights from the USA to the Pacific depart from Los Angeles. There are three weekly flights (currently on Monday, Thursday and Saturday), all via Papeete in Tahiti. Return fares start from around US\$1150/1660 in the low/high season.

All Air New Zealand flights from the US follow the Los Angeles–Tahiti–Cook Islands–Fiji–Auckland route. One stopover is usually included in the standard single or return fare. Extra stopovers cost US\$150 each. Check with Air New Zealand or your travel agent for ticket options and restrictions.

Circle Pacific fares can be good value for travellers from the USA. The new Star Alliance Circle Pacific Fare is a flexible option, based on the Air New Zealand stopovers outlined above, but with slightly more flexibility in travel arrangements.

For online fare bookings there are plenty of good sites:

CheapTickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

Flight and accommodation package deals can work out to be remarkably good value for the Cooks. Packages start at US\$1388 (five nights) – barely more than the cost of a ticket alone! Contact your travel agent for more information or try one of the following agencies that specialise in Pacific travel:

Pacific-for-Less (☎ 808-249 6490; www.pacific-for-less.com)

South Seas Adventures (☎ 800-576 7327; www.south-seas-adventures.com)

Sunspots International (☎ 800-334 5623; www.sunspotsintl.com)

SEA

There are currently no scheduled cruise liners that travel to the Cook Islands, although very occasionally cruise ships crossing the South Pacific will stop at Rarotonga for a few hours to let their passengers look around. If you're coming by sea, it usu-

ally means you'll be coming on a private yacht.

The Cook Islands is not a major Pacific yachting destination like French Polynesia, Tonga or Fiji, but it's still a fairly popular spot except during the cyclone season from November to March. Official entry points are Rarotonga and Aitutaki in the Southern Group islands and Penrhyn and Pukapuka in the Northern Group islands. Many yachties only visit the practically uninhabited atoll of Suwarow, which is OK with the authorities even though it's not a port of entry. Palmerston is also becoming a regular Cook Islands stop for many private yachts. Yachties are under the same entry and exit regulations, including paying departure tax, as those who arrive and depart by air.

The **harbour master** (☎ 28814; fax 21191; hrbrmstr@oyster.net.ck; Avatiu Harbour, Avarua) on Rarotonga should be the first person you talk to once you arrive; you can deal with customs and immigrations formalities in his office. Leave your Q flag up until you've been cleared by Port Health. The harbour master can sell you marine charts for the Cook Islands, Northern Group islands, Southern Group islands and Rarotonga. The new Harbour Master/Ports Authority building is between Avatiu Harbour and the road, conveniently across from the Coconut Bar.

It doesn't happen often, but there's a remote chance that you can catch a yacht sailing from the Cooks to other nearby destinations such as Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, French Polynesia or New Zealand. Check with the Ports Authority, and on its bulletin board downstairs, as yachties sometimes use this as a message board.

GETTING AROUND

There are two ways of getting from island to island around the Cooks (unless you have a yacht): in the Southern Group islands you can fly with Air Rarotonga or take the inter-island cargo ships; in the Northern Group islands, only Manihiki, Penrhyn and Pukapuka have airstrips – to get to the other Northern Group islands, the only options are the inter-island cargo ships.

Understandably, most people choose to fly with Air Rarotonga for speed and convenience. Flights to the Southern Group islands (Rarotonga, Aitutaki, 'Atiu, Ma'uke, Mangaia and Mitiaro) are regular and reliable. Flights to Manihiki and Penrhyn are scheduled only once a week and bad weather, limited fuel supplies, too little freight or too few bookings can often mean they're cancelled at short notice – the first thing you'll know about it is when you turn up at the airstrip for your flight but your plane doesn't. You'll be stranded till the next plane does turn up, so check that your travel insurance covers unavoidable delays. Flights to Pukapuka operate not on any particular schedule, but only as needed.

AIR Airlines in the Cook Islands

Air Rarotonga is the only commercial inter-island air service in the Cooks. The **Air Rarotonga office** (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) is at the Rarotonga international airport, where you can make bookings and buy tickets. The **administration office** (☎ 22890) is off to one side.

Flights go several times a day between Rarotonga and Aitutaki, several times a week between Rarotonga and the other Southern Group islands, and only once a week between Rarotonga and the Northern Group islands of Manihiki and Penrhyn. There are no flights on Sunday on any of Air Rarotonga's routes.

The fares you'll pay depend on when you make your booking – in general the earlier you book, the cheaper the fare will cost you. If you book late certain restrictions may apply to your ticket, such as not being able to make date changes – so make sure you ask at the time of booking. The fares listed in the box are the cheapest ones available.

Air Passes

The only air pass within the Cooks is the Island Hopper Pass, which includes flights from Rarotonga–Aitutaki–'Atiu–Rarotonga (NZ\$400). There are also day tours to Aitutaki from NZ\$400, and very occasional flights from Ma'uke to Mitiaro that only run when there's the necessary freight.

AIR RAROTONGA FARES

Route	Fares NZ\$ (one way/return)	Duration
Rarotonga–Aitutaki	170/340	50 minutes
Rarotonga–'Atiu	140/270	45 minutes
Rarotonga–Mitiaro	150/290	50 minutes
Rarotonga–Ma'uke	150/290	50 minutes
Rarotonga–Mangaia	140/270	40 minutes
Rarotonga–Manihiki	630/1250	4 hours
Rarotonga–Penrhyn	690/1380	4 hours
Rarotonga–Pukapuka	690/1380	4½ hours
Aitutaki–'Atiu	170/340	50 minutes

Package Deals

All the Rarotonga-based travel agents (see p56) offer package tours to the Southern Group islands, which include airfare plus accommodation. You can visit just one island this way, or several; a popular combination is to visit Aitutaki and 'Atiu together, while more adventurous souls could tack on the other Southern Group islands too. If you're travelling to the Northern Group islands, you'll need to make a booking through a travel agent.

If you book these packages on Rarotonga, they work out even cheaper than if you do the booking yourself – but you'll normally be locked into a pre-arranged schedule, which might not allow you all the time you want on a particular island. You can usually choose from three prices based on whether you want to stay in budget, midrange or top-end accommodation.

BICYCLE

Cycling is a good way to see the islands, especially Rarotonga, as the coast road is generally very flat and you can explore at your own pace. Roads tend to be narrow and when unsealed can be tough going, but traffic is light and motor vehicles generally move pretty slowly, so riding a bicycle is fairly safe.

Hire

Bikes can be hired from all the main rental agencies around Rarotonga for about NZ\$10 a day. Some hotels also rent out bikes to guests – on the outer islands you'll probably be stuck with a motor scooter. 'Atiu Villas also rent out bikes; see p119.

BOAT

Shipping services have had a colourful history in the Cooks: companies have come and gone, ships have run onto reefs, and fortunes have been made, but more often lost. Despite the increasing use of air services, shipping is still vital to the islands for supplies. Most of the Northern Group islands are only served by ship, and throughout the islands, ships are necessary to bring in commodities and export produce.

The major obstacle for ships in the Cooks is the fact that most of the islands have such terrible harbours. The Northern Group islands' reef passages are generally too narrow or shallow to allow large ships to enter, and on the Southern Group islands (apart from Rarotonga) the passages through the fringing reefs are too small. Ships have to anchor outside the reef and transfer passengers and freight to shore by barge. At some of the islands it's not even possible to anchor offshore, because the ocean is too deep, so freighters have to keep their engines running while loading and unloading.

If you plan to explore the outer islands by ship, you need to be flexible and hardy. Schedules are hard to pinpoint and unlikely to be kept to – weather, breakdowns and unexpected delays can all put a kink in the plans. Just ask any outer islander waiting for supplies to arrive and you'll hear how unreliable the inter-island ships are. It's not unknown for a passenger's one-month stay on one of the Northern Group islands to stretch out to two months or longer – so be prepared.

Bear in mind, too, that these are cargo boats, definitely not luxury cruise liners. The berths are basic, the ships are cramped and the seas are often rough – if you're at all prone to seasickness you'll definitely spend a bit of time hanging your head over the side.

At each island, the ship usually stays just long enough to load and unload cargo. Travellers get the chance to spend a few hours visiting each island before taking off again – or you can jump off and stay for a month (or more) until the next ship. Alternatively you could buy a one-way passage and catch a flight back. Outside of Rarotonga, only the northernmost island of Penrhyn has a wharf; at all the others, you have to go ashore by barge.

Despite the discomforts, travelling by ship through the Cook Islands does have its romantic aspects. This may be one of the last places in the world where you can sleep out on the deck of a South Pacific island freighter, savouring the wide horizon, chatting with your fellow passengers and the captain and crew, watching the moon rise up out of the ocean and the stars above you in the velvety-warm air. Just hold onto that thought when the weather turns rough!

Inter-island Shipping Companies

Two shipping companies provide inter-island passenger and cargo services for the Cooks; both travel from Rarotonga to all of the populated islands. Both companies are based at Rarotonga's Avatiu Harbour. Both companies offer information, schedules and booking services.

Mataroa Shipping (☎ 29018; mataroa@oyster.net .ck) Sometimes travels within the Cooks, but mainly brings freight from New Zealand to Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

The office is inside a large building straight ahead as you approach Avatiu Wharf.

Taio Shipping (☎ 24905, 24912; taio@oyster.net.ck)

The main inter-island shipping company in the Cooks, with regular schedules between all the major outer islands and Rarotonga. The office is near Punanga Nui Market, on your right as you arrive at Avatiu Wharf.

There's only limited cabin space and some ships have no cabins at all. You can bring your own food or pay for it beforehand. Showers and toilets are available to all passengers.

It takes approximately a day for ships to get from Rarotonga to any of the other Southern Group islands. Each island you visit costs NZ\$65; the Rarotonga–Mangaia–Ma'uke–Mitiaro–'Atiu–Rarotonga round trip takes about four days (NZ\$260). The ships rarely travel to Aitutaki. It takes about 3½ days for ships to get to the Northern Group islands; there's a regular monthly service that does the Rarotonga–Manihiki–Rakahanga–Penrhyn–Rarotonga route and takes about 10 to 12 days (the cost is NZ\$700 to NZ\$900 return).

The private research vessel *Bounty Bay*, based on Rarotonga, often runs exploration and eco-trips around many of the more remote islands of the Cooks, including Takutea and Manuae – see p70.

LOCAL TRANSPORT Bus

The only island that has a bus service is Rarotonga – see p94 for details on bus times, passes and fares.

Car & Motorcycle

The main form of transport in the Cook Islands, for locals and travellers alike, is the motorbike. Usually small 70cc to 100cc motor scooters, they achieve a good fuel-consumption rate (important when petrol is selling for NZ\$2 per litre!) and are much cheaper to freight in from New Zealand than a car. Practically everyone rides one, from teenagers right through to elderly *mama*, and they're dead easy to ride – but take the time to learn how to control them if you're a novice, as a stint in the Rarotonga Hospital is going to put a real dampener on your stay.

DRIVING LICENCE

The only document you'll need in the Cook Islands, aside from your valid passport, is a Cook Islands driving licence if you want to drive. See p94 for details on how to get a local licence.

HIRE

There are motorbikes to rent on all of the major Southern Group islands (from NZ\$20 to NZ\$30 per day). Cars (including jeeps and vans) can be rented on Rarotonga, Aitutaki and 'Atiu (upwards of NZ\$60 per day). Usually, you have to be 18 years or older to rent a vehicle.

Some of the bikes you'll see around for hire are in a pretty poor state of repair (who needs luxuries like speedometers and reliable brakes?), so make sure the one you're using is up to scratch. Generally the larger rental agencies have better quality bikes. Helmets are a rarity, and almost nobody wears them – not necessarily smart, but that's just the way things are in the Cooks. Small cars and jeeps are also popular rental vehicles on Rarotonga, and there's even a place you can rent three-wheeled 'scooters' – high on fun, low on personal dignity.

There are loads of places to hire cars, motorbikes and scooters all over Rarotonga and Aitutaki. 'Atiu has rental cars and scooters. Ma'uke and Mitiaro have rental bicycles and motorbikes. Mangaia has a few motorcycles for rent.

INSURANCE

Standard third-party insurance is usually included in the rental cost, but that doesn't often cover you for damage to your own vehicle. You can take out extra insurance and bring down the excess by paying a few more dollars a day on top of the standard charge.

ROAD RULES

To rent a motorbike or car in the Cook Islands you need a driving licence (see p94). Cook Islanders drive on the left-hand side of the road. The speed limit for motorbikes is 30km/h in town and 40km/h out of town (10km/h faster for cars). If you stay below the speed limit, you're not required to wear a helmet – any faster and you risk fines for both speeding and not wearing a helmet!

Hitching

If you're going to hitch anywhere in the world, this is probably one of the safest places to do it, although you're as likely to encounter unsafe driving here as anywhere (and seat belts in cars around here are usually jammed down the side of the back seat from lack of use). Many people do choose to hitch in the Cooks; if you've missed your bus or run out of petrol, it's a good last resort. Although it's not really the custom in the Cooks, you're bound to get a lift before too long – and on the outer islands, chances are someone passing by will stop and offer you a lift even if you haven't got your thumb out (they're just nice like that).

TOURS

There are loads of interesting tours you can take in the Cooks. On Rarotonga the circle-island tours provide a good introduction to the island and its history, culture, people and customs. Circle-island tours are also offered on Aitutaki, 'Atiu, Ma'uke and Mangaia. More specialised tours (such as cave tours) are mentioned in the individual island chapters. Be aware that you're unlikely to be mollycoddled in quite the same way as on similar tours in Europe and the US (which is as good a reason as any to take them).

Day tours are available from Rarotonga to Aitutaki (see p105). Also, travel agents on Rarotonga can organise one-island or multi-island package tours. See p179.

Health

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There is no malaria in the Cook Islands, a huge health plus. Rabies is no danger in any of the islands. And there are no crocodiles. Mosquitoes do exist, however, and the main danger from them is dengue fever. The Cooks lie within the tropics so it is hot and frequently humid.

Health facilities are reasonable in the Cooks; however, this is a small country with a limited budget so you might not find the facilities you would expect in a well-developed country, particularly on the outer islands.

BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while abroad. A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

If your health insurance does not cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider supplemental insurance. (Check the Travel Links section of the Lonely Planet website at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_links/ for more information.) Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. (In many countries doctors expect payment in cash.)

Really serious illness or injury may require evacuation, eg to Auckland; make sure that your health insurance has provision for evacuation. Under these circumstances hospitals will accept direct payment from major international insurers but for all other health costs cash up-front is the usual requirement.

New Zealanders may have free access to public but not private facilities in the Cook Islands.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination. Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician at least six weeks before departure. A recent influenza

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Vaccinations are recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid fever.

Side-effects of Vaccinations

All injected vaccinations can produce slight soreness and redness at the inoculation site, and a mild fever with muscle aches over the first 24 hours. These are least likely with hepatitis A and a little more common with hepatitis B and typhoid inoculations. Typhoid inoculation can cause a sensation of nausea within 24 hours and hepatitis B vaccine can produce temporary joint pains.

vaccination is always a good idea when travelling. If you have not had chicken pox (varicella) consider being vaccinated.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

It is a very good idea to carry a medical and first-aid kit with you, to help yourself in the case of minor illness or injury. Following is a list of items you should consider packing.

- acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin*
- adhesive or paper tape
- antibacterial ointment, eg Bactroban for cuts and abrasions (prescription only)
- antibiotic plus steroid eardrops (prescription only) eg Sofradex, Kenacort Otic
- antibiotics (prescription only), eg ciprofloxacin (Ciproxin) or norfloxacin (Utinor; Noroxin)
- anti-diarrhoeal drugs, eg loperamide
- antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- anti-inflammatory drugs, eg ibuprofen
- bandages, gauze, gauze rolls, waterproof dressings
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- pocket knife*
- scissors, safety pins, tweezers*
- steroid cream or hydrocortisone cream (for allergic rashes)
- sun block
- thermometer

*Aspirin should not be used for fever – it can cause bleeding in dengue fever.

*Not in carry-on luggage!

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the Internet. For further information, the Lonely Planet website at www.lonelyplanet.com is an excellent place to start. The World Health Organization (WHO) produces a superb text called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually. It is no longer published in book form but is available online at no cost at www.who.int/ith/. Other websites of general interest are MD Travel Health at www.mdtravelhealth.com, which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country updated daily, also at

no cost; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov; Fit for Travel at www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk, which has up-to-date information about outbreaks and is very user-friendly, and www.traveldoctor.com.au a similar Australasian site.

It's also a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspssp/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

FURTHER READING

Good options for further reading include: *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan; *Healthy Travel Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* by Dr Isabelle Young; and *Your Child's Health Abroad: A Manual for Travelling Parents* by Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth and Matthew Ellis.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots may form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, contract the leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

To avoid jet lag (common when crossing more than five time zones) try drinking plenty of nonalcoholic fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep and so on) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. A herbal alternative is ginger.

IN THE COOK ISLANDS

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Rarotonga has readily available doctors in private practice, standard hospital and laboratory facilities with consultants in the major specialties – internal medicine, obstetrics/gynaecology, orthopaedics ophthalmology, paediatrics, pathology, psychiatry and general surgery. Private dentists, opticians and pharmacies are also available. The outer islands have more basic services.

Private consultation and private hospital fees are approximately equivalent to Australian costs. Government-provided service fees vary from modest to negligible but waiting times can be long. Direct payment is required everywhere except where a specific arrangement is made, eg in the case of evacuation or where prolonged hospital stay is necessary; your insurer will need to be contacted by you. Although Rarotonga hospitals will accept credit cards, there might be difficulty with outer island hospitals. If a credit card is not accepted you should be able to arrange cash on credit through the local banking system.

Most commonly used medications are available. Private pharmacies are not allowed by law to dispense listed drugs without prescription from a locally registered practitioner, but many will do so for travellers if shown the container. It is best to have a sufficient supply of a regularly taken drug as a particular brand may not be available and sometimes quantities can be limited. This applies particularly to psychotropic drugs like antidepressants, antipsychotics, anti-epileptics or mood elevators. Insulin is available even in smaller centres, but you cannot guarantee getting a particular brand, combination or preferred administration method. If you have been prescribed 'the very latest' oral antidiabetic or antihypertensive make sure you have enough for the duration of your travel.

The standard of medical and dental care is generally quite good even if facilities are not sophisticated. The overall risk of illness for a normally healthy person is low; the most common problems being diarrhoeal upsets, viral sore throats, and ear and skin infections; all of which can mostly be treated with self-medication. For serious symptoms, eg sustained fever, chest or abdominal pains it is best to go to the nearest clinic or private practitioner in the first instance.

Tampons and pads are readily available. Dengue fever, especially in the first three months of pregnancy, poses a hazard because of fever but otherwise there is no reason why a normal pregnancy should prevent travel to the Cook Islands. However, on general principle immunisation in the first three months of pregnancy is not recommended.

For young children, it is again dengue fever that could be a problem. The disease tends to come in epidemics mainly in the hotter, wetter months so it should be possible to plan holidays accordingly.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Despite the long list, the realistic risks to visitors from infectious diseases are very low with the exception of dengue fever.

Dengue Fever

Dengue fever is a virus disease spread by the bite of a day-biting mosquito. It causes a feverish illness with headache and severe muscle pains similar to those experienced with a bad, prolonged attack of influenza. Another name is 'break bone fever' and that's what it feels like. Danger signs include prolonged vomiting, blood in the vomit and a blotchy rash. There is no preventive vaccine and mosquito bites should be avoided whenever possible. Self-treatment involves paracetamol, fluids and rest. Do not use aspirin. Haemorrhagic dengue has been reported only occasionally, manifested by signs of bleeding and shock and requires medical care.

Eosinophilic Meningitis

A strange illness manifested by scattered abnormal skin sensations, fever and occasionally by the meningitis (headache, vomiting, confusion, neck and spine stiffness)

that gives it its name. Eosinophilic meningitis is caused by a microscopic parasite – the rat lungworm – which contaminates raw food. There's no proven specific treatment, but symptoms may require hospitalisation. For prevention pay strict attention to advice on food and drink.

Hepatitis A

A virus disease causing liver inflammation spread by contaminated food or water. Fever, nausea, debility and jaundice (yellow colouration of the skin, eyes and urine) occur and recovery is slow. Most people recover completely but it can be dangerous to people with other forms of liver disease, the elderly and sometimes to pregnant women towards the end of pregnancy. Food is easily contaminated by food handlers or servers, and by flies. There is no specific treatment. The vaccine is close to 100% protective.

Hepatitis B

A virus disease causing liver inflammation but the problem is much more serious than hepatitis A and frequently goes on to cause chronic liver disease and even cancer. It is spread, like HIV, by mixing body fluids, ie sexual intercourse, contaminated needles and accidental blood contamination. Treatment is complex and specialised but vaccination is highly effective.

Hepatitis C

A virus disease similar to hepatitis B causing liver inflammation which can go on to chronic liver disease or result in a symptomless carrier state. Spread almost entirely by blood contamination from shared needles or contaminated needles used for tattooing or body piercing. Treatment is complex and specialised. There is no vaccine available.

HIV/AIDS

The incidence of HIV infection is on the rise in the whole South Pacific. Safe sex practise is essential at all times. If an injection is needed in a smaller clinic it is best to provide your own needles. Blood transfusion laboratories do tests for HIV.

Typhoid Fever

A bacterial infection acquired from contaminated food or water. The germ can be transmitted by food handlers or flies,

and can be present in inadequately cooked shellfish. It causes fever, debility and late-onset diarrhoea. Untreated it can produce delirium and is occasionally fatal, but the infection is curable with antibiotics. Vaccination is moderately effective, but care with eating and drinking is equally important.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Diarrhoea, ie frequent, loose bowel movements, is caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites present in contaminated food or water. In temperate climates the cause is usually viral, but in the tropics bacteria or parasites are more usual. If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution (eg Dioralyte, Gastrolyte, Repllyte). A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain you should seek medical attention. Giardiasis is a particular form of persistent, although not 'explosive', diarrhoea caused by a parasite present in contaminated water. One dose (four tablets) of tinidazole usually cures the infection.

To prevent diarrhoea pay strict attention to the precautions regarding food and water as described on p186.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Threats to health from animals and insects are rare indeed but you need to be aware of them.

Bites & Stings

The Cooks are blessedly free of dangerous land creatures.

INSECTS

Mosquitoes can be a real nuisance in the Cooks at certain times of year, particularly during the rainy season from around mid-December to mid-April. The worst times for mosquitos are at dawn and dusk. Use repellent (those containing the compound DEET are the most effective). Mosquito coils are available everywhere in the Cook Islands; lighting one will keep your room free of mosquitoes for about six hours.

Screens on windows or mosquito nets over beds are also helpful.

Bee, wasp, centipede and other insect stings are usually painful rather than dangerous. Large centipedes can give a painful or irritating bite, but they're no more dangerous to your health than a bee or wasp sting.

Calamine lotion or Stingose spray will relieve insect bites and stings. Ice packs or antihistamine cream will reduce the pain and swelling. Or you can reduce the itch by using the recommended local remedy for all insect bites: the sap from the base of a rubber-tree leaf.

JELLYFISH

Jellyfish are reasonably common outside the encircling coral reef, but are very rarely found inside the island lagoons. The notorious box jellyfish (seawasp) has not been recorded, but the blue-coloured Indo-Pacific 'Man o' War' is found in Cook Island waters. If you see these floating in the water or stranded on the beach it is wiser not to go in. The sting is very painful. Treatment involves ice packs and vinegar; do not use alcohol. Smaller cubo-medusae are abundant and are found particularly on still, overcast days. They usually produce only uncomfortably irritating stings but rarely can cause generalised symptoms, especially in someone with poorly controlled heart disease.

POISONOUS CONE SHELLS

Poisonous cone shells are plentiful along shallow coral reefs. Stings can be avoided by handling the shell at its blunt end only and preferably using gloves. Stings mainly cause local reactions but nausea, faintness, palpitations or difficulty in breathing are all signs flagging the need for medical attention.

SEA SNAKES

As in all tropical waters, sea snakes may be seen around coral reefs. Unprovoked, sea snakes are extremely unlikely to attack and their fangs will not penetrate a wet suit. First-aid treatment consists of compression bandaging and splinting of the affected limb. Antivenom is effective, but may have to be flown in. Only about 10% of sea-snake bites cause serious poisoning.

Coral Ear

This is the common name for inflammation of the ear canal. It has nothing to do with coral but is caused by water entering the ear canal, activating fungal spores and resulting in secondary bacterial infection and inflammation. It usually starts after swimming, but can be reactivated by water dripping into the ear canal after a shower, especially if long, wet hair lies over the ear opening. Apparently trivial, it can be very, very painful and can spoil a holiday. Apart from diarrhoea it is the most common reason for tourists to consult a doctor. Self-treatment with an antibiotic-plus-steroid eardrop preparation (eg Sofradex, Kenacort Otic) is very effective. Stay out of the water until the pain and itch have gone.

Coral Cuts

Cuts and abrasions from dead coral cause no more trouble than similar injuries from any other sort of rock, but live coral can cause prolonged infection. If you injure yourself on live coral don't wait until later to treat it. Get out of the water as soon as possible, cleanse the wound thoroughly (getting out all the little bits of coral), apply an antiseptic and cover with a waterproof dressing. Then get back in the water if you want to.

Diving Hazards

Since the Cooks have wonderful opportunities for scuba diving, it is easy to get overexcited and neglect strict depth and time precautions. The temptation to spend longer than safe times at relatively shallow depths is great and a major cause of decompression illness ('the bends'). Early pains may not be severe and may be attributed to other causes but any muscle or joint pain after scuba diving must be suspect. There's no compression chambers in the Cook Islands. If you have not taken out insurance before leaving home you may be able to do so online with Divers' Alert Network (DAN).

Food & Water

The municipal water supply in Avarua and other large towns can be trusted, but elsewhere avoid untreated tap water, and after heavy rain it's worth boiling the water before you drink. In some areas the only

fresh water available may be rain water collected in tanks and this should certainly be boiled. Food in restaurants, particularly resort restaurants, is safe. Be adventurous by all means but expect to suffer the consequences if you succumb to adventurous temptation by trying raw fish or crustaceans as eaten by some locals.

FISH POISONING

Rarotonga and several of the other Cook Islands have a serious problem with ciguatera, a form of fish poisoning that affects otherwise safe and edible reef fish living in the island lagoons. Poisoning is characterised by stomach upsets, itching, faintness, slow pulse and bizarre inverted sensations, eg cold feeling hot and vice versa. Ciguatera has been reported in many carnivorous reef fish, especially barracuda but also red snapper, Spanish mackerel and moray eels. There is no safe test to determine whether a fish is poisonous or not, but it's important to remember that the disease only affects reef fish – deep-sea fish (such as wahoo, tuna and *mahi mahi*) are perfectly safe to eat. You're unlikely to find reef fish on any local restaurant menus anyway, so it's only really a cause for concern if you're catching your own fish inside the lagoon.

The underlying cause of the disease is unclear, but fish caught after times of reef destruction, eg after a major hurricane, are more likely to be poisonous. Pollution is also thought to be a contributory factor in the development of the disease.

Treatment consists of rehydration and if the pulse is very slow, medication may be needed. Healthy adults will make a complete recovery, although disturbed sensation may persist for some weeks.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is actually a state of dehydration associated to a greater or lesser extent with salt loss. Natural heat loss is through sweating, making it easy to become

dehydrated without realising it. Thirst is a late sign. Small children and old people are especially vulnerable. For adults, heat exhaustion is prevented by drinking at least 3L of water per day and more if actively exercising. Children need about 1.5L to 2.5L per day. Salt replacement solutions are useful since muscle weakness and cramps are due to salt loss as well as water loss and can be made worse by drinking water alone. The powders used for treating dehydration due to diarrhoea are just as effective when it is due to heat exhaustion. Apart from commercial solutions, a reasonable drink consists of a good pinch of salt to a pint (0.5L) of water. Salt tablets can result in too much salt being taken in, causing headaches and confusion.

Heat Stroke

When the cooling effect of sweating fails, heat stroke ensues. This is a dangerous and emergency condition characterised not only by muscle weakness and exhaustion, but by mental confusion. Skin will be hot and dry. If this occurs 'put the fire out' by cooling the body with water on the outside and if possible with cold drinks for the inside. Seek medical help as a follow-up anyway, but urgently if the person can't drink.

Sunburn

It should go without saying that exposure to the ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun causes burning of the skin with accompanying pain, dehydration and misery (together with the long-term danger of skin cancer) but experience shows that reminders are necessary. The time of highest risk is between 11am and 3pm and remember that cloud cover does not block out UV rays. The Australian 'Slip, slop, slap' slogan is a useful mantra – slip on a T-shirt or blouse, slop on a sunscreen lotion of at least 20+ rating and slap on a hat. Treat sunburn like any other burn – cool, wet dressings are best. Severe swelling may respond to cortisone cream.

Language

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The language of the Cook Islands is Cook Islands Maori (also called 'Rarotongan'), but English is spoken as a second language by virtually everyone. Among themselves, however, the people speak their own language, so while you'll have no trouble at all getting by with English, a few words and phrases in the native tongue of your hosts can only enhance your stay.

Cook Islands Maori was traditionally a spoken language, with no written form. The language, in its Rarotongan guise, was first written down by missionaries in the 1830s. Later they produced a Rarotongan version of the Bible, which is still used today.

Although each island has its own distinctive speech, people from all the Cook Islands can understand one another. Cook Islands Maori is also closely related to the Maori language of New Zealand and to other eastern Polynesian languages, including Hawaiian, Marquesan and Tahitian.

Language Learning & Dictionaries

If you'd like to learn some Cook Islands Maori yourself, pick up a copy of *Kai Korero: A Cook Islands Maori Language Coursebook*, by Tai Carpentier & Clive Beaumont, which offers a good general introduction to the language. It's available on Rarotonga and comes with an accompanying audio tape. *The Cook Islands Maori Dictionary*, by Jasper Buse with Raututi Taringa, is available in paperback on Rarotonga and is extremely helpful.

If you're intending to spend some time on the islands and are serious about learning the language, the Cook Islands Library & Museum Society in Avarua has a number

of books and other useful resources for tackling the language.

PRONUNCIATION

The Cook Islands alphabet has only 13 letters: **a, e, i, k, m, n, ng, o, p, r, t, u, v.**

The 'ng' sound is soft, pronounced the same as in the English word 'singing' (not 'finger') but in Cook Islands Maori it often occurs at the beginning of a word (eg Nga, Ngatangi'ia). Practise by pronouncing the sound in an English word and see how it feels in the throat, then try saying it alone. Once you can make the sound at the beginning of a word, you're there.

All the other consonants are pronounced as they are in English, although the letter **v** sounds closer to English 'w' on many islands. (In fact, islanders with this tendency will swap their 'v's and 'w's around when speaking English.)

Pronunciation of vowels is very similar to Italian or Spanish, but Cook Islands Maori vowels have long and short variants, and using the wrong one can result in a completely different meaning. Long vowels are sometimes written with a macron (a stroke above the vowel, eg ā), but don't worry too much about this – just have a stab at it and most people will know what you're on about.

a	as in 'far'
e	as 'let'
i	as in 'marine'
o	as in 'or' (but with no 'r' sound)
u	as in 'flute'

The Glottal Stop

Another symbol used in the written language is the glottal stop, represented by an apostrophe before or between vowels (eg *ta'i*). In Cook Islands Maori it represents the missing 'h' and 'f' sounds. The glottal stop is the momentary closing of the throat between the syllables as in the expression 'oh-oh'. Compare the words *tai* (pronounced with one syllable, as the English 'tie') and *ta'i* (pronounced with two distinct syllables to produce 'ta-ee').

GREETINGS & CONVERSATION

Hello.	<i>Kia orana!</i>
(all purpose greeting, lit: 'may you continue to live!')	
How are you?	<i>Pe'ea koe?</i>
(to one person)	
How are you?	<i>Pe'ea korua?</i>
(to two people)	
How are you?	<i>Pe'ea koutou?</i>
(to three or more people)	
Good.	<i>Meitaki.</i>
I'm good.	<i>E meitaki au.</i>
I'm hot/cold.	<i>E vera/anu au.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>'Aere ra.</i>
(to person leaving)	
Goodbye.	<i>E no'o ra.</i>
(to person staying)	
See you again.	<i>Ka kite.</i>
Welcome!	<i>Turou!</i>
Good luck! (a toast)	<i>Kia manuia!</i>
Please.	<i>'Ine.</i>
(used at the end of a statement)	
Thank you.	<i>Meitaki.</i>
Thank you very much.	<i>Meitaki ma'ata.</i>

I/me	<i>au</i>
my	<i>taku</i>
you (one person)	<i>koe</i>
you (two people)	<i>korua</i>
you (three or more)	<i>koutou</i>
him/her/he/she	<i>'aia</i>
we (two)	<i>taua/maua</i>
we (three or more)	<i>tatou/matou</i>
they (two)	<i>raua</i>
they (three or more)	<i>ratou</i>

Yes.	<i>Ae.</i>
No.	<i>Kare.</i>
Maybe.	<i>Penei ake.</i>
What's your name?	<i>Ko 'ai to'ou ingoa?</i>
My name is ...	<i>Ko ... toku ingoa.</i>
Where are you from?	<i>No 'ea mai koe?</i>
(to one person)	
I'm from ...	<i>No ... mai au.</i>
Where are you going?	<i>Ka 'aere koe ki'ea?</i>
(to one person)	
I'm going to (Aitutaki).	<i>Te 'aere nei au ki (Aitutaki).</i>
Where are you going?	<i>Ka 'aere korua ki'ea?</i>
(to two people)	
We're going to (Aitutaki).	<i>Te 'aere nei maua ki (Aitutaki).</i>
person/people	<i>tangata</i>
man/husband	<i>tane</i>
woman/wife	<i>va'ine</i>

child/children	<i>tama/tamariki</i>
boy/son	<i>tamaiti</i>
girl/daughter	<i>tama'ine</i>
baby	<i>pepe</i>
father	<i>papa, metua tane</i>
mother	<i>mama, metua va'ine</i>
brother	<i>tungane</i>
sister	<i>tua'ine</i>
friend	<i>'oa/taeake</i>

Who is that person?	<i>Ko 'ai tena tangata?</i>
That's my son.	<i>Ko toku tamaiti tena.</i>

beautiful/ugly	<i>mana/vi'ivi'i</i>
The mountain is beautiful.	<i>Mana te maunga.</i>

LEARNING THE LINGO

language	<i>reo</i>
speak/word	<i>tuatua</i>
understand	<i>marama</i>
this	<i>teia</i>
that	<i>tena</i>
that over there	<i>tera</i>

Do you understand Maori?
E marama ana koe i te reo Maori?

I don't understand Maori.
Kare au e marama i te reo Maori.

But I'm learning.
Inara, te tamou nei au.

What's the word for (island)?
E a'a te tuatua Maori no te (island)?

It's (motu).
Te (motu).

The Maori word for (island) is (motu).
E (motu) te tuatua Maori no (island).

What's this?	<i>E aka teia?</i>
That's a (book).	<i>E (puka) tena.</i>
How do you say ...?	<i>Ka 'aka pe'ea au me tuatua ...?</i>
Please speak slower.	<i>E tuatua marie koe, 'ine.</i>
I don't understand.	<i>Kare au i marama.</i>

OUT & ABOUT

beach	<i>tapa ta'atai</i>
church	<i>ekalesia/'are pure</i>
house	<i>'are</i>
island/lagoon islet	<i>motu</i>
lagoon/lake	<i>roto</i>
land	<i>'enua</i>
mountain	<i>maunga</i>
ocean	<i>moana</i>
reef	<i>akau</i>

sky	<i>rangi</i>
store/shop	<i>toa</i>
town	<i>taoni</i>
village	<i>tapere</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>ta'i</i>
2	<i>rua</i>
3	<i>toru</i>
4	<i>'a</i>
5	<i>rima</i>
6	<i>ono</i>

7	<i>'itu</i>
8	<i>varu</i>
9	<i>iva</i>
10	<i>ta'i-nga'uru</i>
11	<i>ta'i-nga'uru ma ta'i</i> (ten plus one)
20	<i>rua-nga'uru</i> (two tens)
100	<i>ta'i-anere</i>
101	<i>ta'i-anere ma ta'i</i> (one hundred plus one)
1000	<i>ta'i-tauatini</i>
many	<i>rau</i>

Glossary

adze – axe-like tool with ceremonial importance in the Cook Islands

'akama – shamed

Ara Metua – ancient road around the circumference of Rarotonga, inland from the newer coast road

'ara tai – pandanus

Ara Tapu – coast road around Rarotonga

ariki – paramount chief; traditional head of a tribe

atua – god; now used to refer to the Christian God

ava – Pacific banyan tree

'Avaiki – legendary Polynesian ancestral homeland; in the case of the Cook Islands, 'Avaiki was the island Ra'iatea in the Society Islands

bush beer – locally produced moonshine beer brewed from oranges, bananas, pawpaws or hops; also called 'home brew'

CICC – Cook Islands Christian Church, the Protestant church that was founded by the London Missionary Society

copra – coconut 'meat' from which coconut oil is produced

'ei – traditional garland

'ei kaki – flower 'ei draped around the neck; traditionally given to anyone arriving or departing on a journey

ekalesia – church

eke – octopus

'enua – land

House of Ariki – assembly of the Cook Islands' *ariki*; it has advisory, not legislative powers

ika – fish

itiki – eel

ivi – tribe

ka'a – sennit, used for rope and binding

kai – food

kaikai – feast

kairanganuku – sub-chief

kakerori – Rarotongan flycatcher, a rare bird endemic to Rarotonga

kavana – governor or district chief

kia orana – hello

kikau – palm leaves, woven or thatched; a *kikau* hut is a traditional thatch-roofed hut

kopeka – cave-dwelling swiftlet on 'Atiu

koutu – the royal court of a ruling *ariki*, used for gatherings and political functions

Koutunui – assembly of all *mataiapo* and *rangatira*

kumara – sweet potato

kuru – breadfruit

LDS – Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)

LMS – London Missionary Society, the original missionary force in the Cook Islands and in many other regions of the Pacific

maire – an aromatic leaf

makatea – raised, fossilised coral reef that forms a coastal plain around several islands of the Southern Group, including Mangaia, 'Atiu, Ma'uke and Mitiaro

mana – spiritual power or influence

mana atua – divine authority of the priest

Maori – literally 'indigenous' or 'local'; the Polynesian people of the Cook Islands (and New Zealand); the language of these people

marae – ancient open-air family or tribal religious meeting ground, marked by stones

maroro – flying fish

mataiapo – chief; head of a sub-tribe; one rank down from an *ariki*

matu rori – *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber)

maunga – mountain

moana – ocean

moko – gecko

motu – lagoon islet

ngati – tribe

nono – fruit of the Indian mulberry tree, used as a traditional remedy and cure-all; also called *noni*

nu – young coconut

nuku – traditional play

paepae – settlement or meeting ground

pandanus – leaf used for thatching the roofs of traditional houses, and for mats, baskets, bags and *rito* hats

papa'a – Europeans and other foreigners

pareu – wraparound sarong-type garment

pate – carved wooden slit drum

pa'ua – clam

pupu – tiny shells used to make necklaces

puraka – *taro*-like vegetable

rangatira – sub-chief; lowest rank of Cook Islands royal hierarchy, below *mataiapo*

ra'ui – traditional method of conservation in which nothing can be taken from a designated area or resource for a set period of time; marine reserve

riko – police

rito – bleached pandanus or bleached, young palm leaves, used to make woven handicrafts, including hats, fans and handbags

SDA – Seventh-Day Adventist church

tane – man

tanga'eo – Manganian kingfisher

Tangaroa – Polynesian god of fertility and the sea; his well-endowed figure appears on the country's one-dollar coin and is a symbol of the Cook Islands

tapa – paper-like cloth made from the bark of the 'aute (paper mulberry tree)

tapere – district subdivision

tapu – holy; sacred; forbidden

tarae – decorative hatband

ta'unga – expert

ta'unga atua – priest

tiare – gardenia flower; traditional symbol of the Cook Islands

tiki – symbolic human figure

tivaevae – colourful, intricately sewn appliqué works traditionally made as burial shrouds but also used as bedspreads, with smaller versions used as furniture covers, cushion covers and pillowcases

toa – casuarina tree

toki – ceremonial axe

tuitui – candlenut, burned for light in ancient Polynesia

tumu korero – speaker; *ta'unga* responsible for memorising tribal history and genealogy

tumunu – hollowed-out stump of a coconut tree, used to brew bush beer; traditional bush-beer drinking sessions

tutaka – community inspections

umu – traditional Polynesian underground oven

umukai – traditional Polynesian food (*kai*) cooked in an underground oven (*umu*); a feast of foods cooked in an *umu*

utu – barringtonia (fish-poison) tree

va'ine – women

vaka – outrigger canoe; large district (used only on Rarotonga)

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