

Rarotonga & the Cook Islands

Christened after the South Pacific's most famous explorer, a certain Captain James Cook, the 15 tiny specks of land that collectively make up the Cook Islands are just about as far as you'll ever get from the outside world. Sprinkled over two million square kilometres of empty sea, slap-bang in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, these isolated islands have long been a haven for real-life runaways and wannabe Robinson Crusoes, and it's not hard to see what drew them here.

The Cook Islands are the classic South Seas paradise, a nation of tiny tropical islands cloaked in coconut trees, encircled by cerulean-blue lagoons and fringed by sweeping arcs of powder-white sand. But you'll find there's much more to the Cooks than glorious good looks. The main island of Rarotonga is busy, buzzy and surprisingly modern, with plenty of funky cafés, fine-dining restaurants and after-dark bars to explore.

Rarotonga's contemporary surface remains underpinned by an unmistakably Polynesian character, but if it's traditional culture you're looking for you should head for the outer islands. You'll see a far more authentic side of the Cooks here – whether it's knocking back some home-brew at a traditional 'Atiuan *tumunu* (bush-beer drinking session), plunging into an underground pool on Mitiaro and Ma'uake, or exploring the ancient *makatea* (raised coral island) of Mangaia. If you're really looking to get away from it all, the little-visited coral atolls and crystal-clear lagoons of the Northern Group are just a few hours away by plane (or several unforgettable days away by inter-island freighter). Just be careful how long you stick around – many travellers have found their short visits have a habit of turning into rather more extended stays.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Savour the sights and sounds of an **island night** (p452)
- Trek along Rarotonga's **inland trails** and **valley walks** (p444)
- Hire a kayak and finding your very own desert island in Aitutaki's stunning **lagoon** (p456)
- Take one of 'Atiu's **guided tours** (p462) in search of coffee, caves or the island's natural wildlife
- Delve into the depths of Mangaia's mysterious **burial caves** (p469)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Any time of the year is a good time to visit the Cook Islands. It's warm and sunny practically all the year round; the hottest, wettest months are during the cyclone season between November and March. High/low temperatures are 29°C/23°C in February, dipping to 25°C/18°C from June to September. See p827 for Avarua's climate chart.

Historically, a severe cyclone has hit the Cooks once every 20 years – but in 2005 the islands were battered by five major cyclones in five weeks, a clear sign that something's afoot in the climate of the South Pacific.

Book flights well in advance for December, when many Cook Islanders return home from overseas for the Christmas holidays.

HISTORY

Cook Islanders are closely related to the Maori of New Zealand (NZ) and French Polynesia. Historians believe that Polynesian migrations from the Society Islands to the Cook Islands began around the 5th century AD, and oral history traces Rarotongan ancestry back about 1400 years. A *marae* (religious meeting ground) on Motutapu, off the coast of Rarotonga, is estimated to be around 1500 years old. In the 14th century canoes departed Rarotonga for Aotearoa (NZ); the settlers were the ancestors of the present-day NZ Maori tribes.

Pukapuka, in the Northern Group of the Cook Islands, was the first island to be sighted by a European (Don Alvaro de Mendaña y

Neyra, on 20 August 1595). Eleven years later Pedro Fernández de Quirós stopped at Rakahanga. James Cook explored much of the group in 1773 and 1777 (though he only set foot on Palmerston, and never managed to find Rarotonga).

The islands were initially known as the Hervey Islands in honour of a British Lord of the Admiralty, but in an atlas published in 1835 the Russian cartographer Admiral Johann von Krusenstern renamed them in honour of Captain Cook.

Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived on Aitutaki in 1821. Papeiha, a convert from Ra'iatea in the Society Islands, moved to Rarotonga in 1823 and was responsible for converting the islands to Christianity. Though many *marae* were destroyed and sacred artefacts were carted off to British museums, much of the island's culture survived intact, including the traditional titles of *ariki* (chief) and *mataiapo* (sub-chief), the system of land inheritance (see the boxed text, p441) and the indigenous language. The missionaries imposed a catalogue of strict rules and doctrines (known as the 'Blue Laws') and brought with them deadly diseases such as whooping cough, measles, smallpox and influenza, leading to a long-term decline in population numbers.

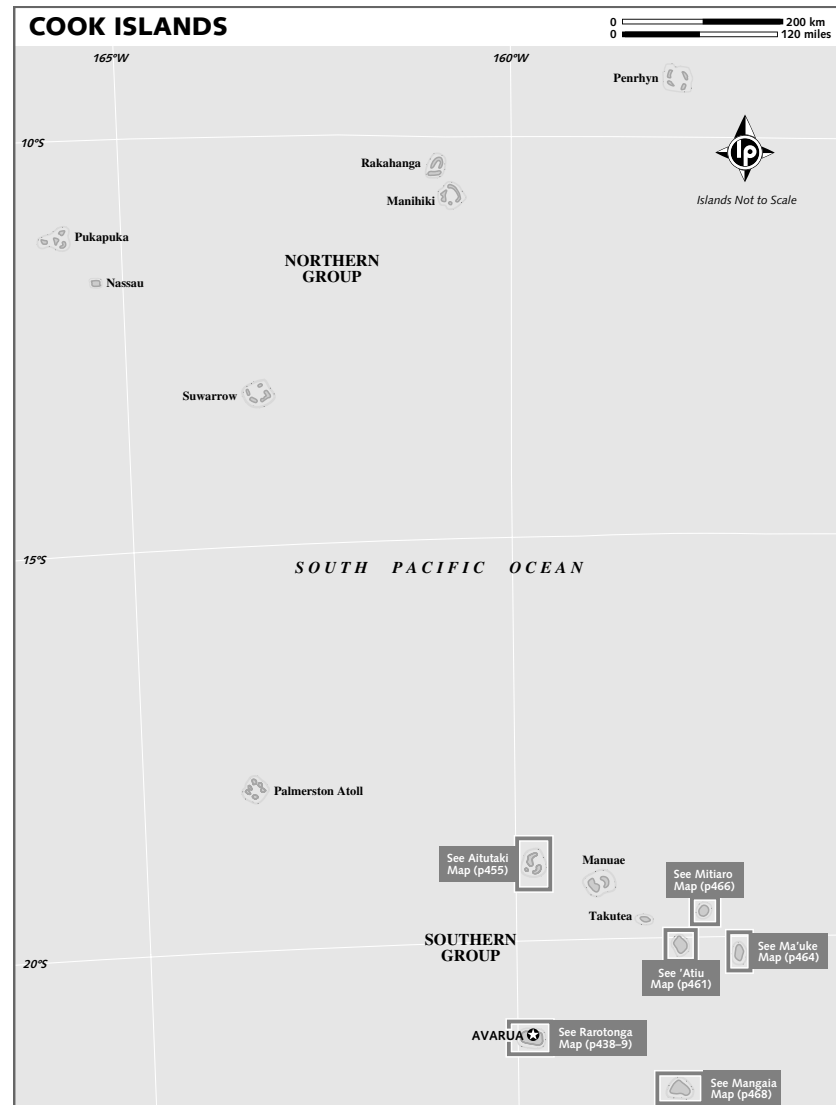
The Cook Islands became a British protectorate in 1888, in response to fears of French colonialism. In 1901 the islands were annexed to NZ and the Southern and Northern Groups together became known as the Cook Islands.

During WWII the US built airstrips on Penrhyn and Aitutaki, but the Cooks escaped the war largely unscathed, unlike many of their South Pacific neighbours. In 1965 the Cook Islands became internally self-governing, although foreign policy and defence were left to NZ.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Thanks to the flow of people between the islands and Australia and NZ, the contemporary face of the Cook Islands is surprisingly modern. The main island of Rarotonga is a sophisticated and cosmopolitan place, but beneath the apparently Westernised veneer aspects of traditional Maori culture survive; examples include land



RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Avarua (Rarotonga)
- **Population:** 14,000
- **Land area:** 241 sq km
- **Number of islands:** 15
- **International telephone code:** 682
- **Currency:** NZ dollar (NZ\$)
- **Languages:** Cook Islands Maori and English
- **Greeting:** *Kia orana*
- **Website:** www.cook-islands.com

inheritance, family structure and traditional titles. Every native islander is part of a family clan connected to the ancient system of *ariki*. Though most people think of themselves as Cook Islanders, many still refer to their 'home island' and will happily relate the differences between the various islands. Politics, sport, dance, music, land and

inheritance are universal passions, and most Cook Islanders believe in the importance of community, family and traditional values.

Lifestyle

Contemporary Cook Islanders (at least on Rarotonga) are a thoroughly 21st-century people, with modern houses, regular jobs

and reasonable salaries. On the outer islands, however, you'll still find many families living a more traditional lifestyle – fishing, growing crops and practising traditional arts and crafts. Family is an important influence on daily life, and since the system of land tenure relies entirely on family genealogy, it pays to know how you fit into the family tree. Church is another important influence, and the islands all but shut down on a Sunday. Friendliness, hospitality and respect for others are highly valued in Cook Islands culture, and it pays to bring along a laid-back attitude – Cook Islanders have a notoriously liberal attitude towards timekeeping.

Population

The population of the Cook Islands is around 14,000, but the vast majority of islanders live overseas. More than 50,000 Cook Islanders live in NZ, half that number in Australia, and several thousand more in French Polynesia, the Americas, Europe and Asia. More than 90% of the Cooks' population live in the Southern Group, with 60% of islanders living on Rarotonga.

Like many Pacific islands, the Cooks are struggling with a long-term population drain, as islanders move overseas in search of higher wages. More than 90% of the population is Polynesian, though the people of some of the Northern Group islands are more closely related to Samoans than to other Cook Islanders.

ARTS

Dance & Music

If there's one activity that really gets Cook Islanders fired up, it's dancing – they're reputed to be the best dancers in Polynesia. You'll see them strut their stuff at an 'island night', which combines a traditional meal and a music and dance performance. Traditional dance forms include the *karakia* (prayer dance), *pe'e ura pa'u* (drum-beat dance), *ate* (choral song) and *kaparima* (action song). Men stamp, gesture and knock their knees together, while women twitch their hips in an unmistakably suggestive manner.

Cook Islanders are also passionate singers and musicians. The close harmony singing at any Cook Islands church service is a real highlight, but the islanders also love

their pop music. Polynesian string bands, usually featuring guitars and ukuleles, often perform at local restaurants and hotels.

Arts & Crafts

Traditional woodcarving and woven handicrafts (pandanus mats, baskets, purses and fans) are still popular in the Cooks. You'll see women going to church wearing finely woven *rito* (coconut-fibre) hats, mainly made on the Northern Group islands. Ceremonial adzes, stone taro pounders and *pupu ei* (snail-shell necklaces) are produced on Mangaia, and the best place to see traditional *tivaevae* (appliqué work, used for bedspreads, cushion covers and home decoration) is at the Fibre Arts Studio on 'Atiu. Black pearls grown in the Northern Group are one of the Cooks' largest industries, and you'll see plenty of black-pearl and shell jewellery around. *'Ei* (floral necklaces) and *'ei katu* (tiaras) are customarily given to friends and honoured guests – you're bound to receive a few during your time in the Cooks, especially if you visit the outer islands.

Literature

You should be able to pick up most of these titles around Avarua's main bookshops (see p437).

An Island to Oneself by Tom Neale is the classic desert-island read, written by a New Zealander who lived as a virtual hermit on the island of Suvarrow during the 1950s and 1960s. It's packed with entertaining incidents and tall tales.

Robert Dean Frisbie ran a trading outpost on Pukapuka in the 1920s and wrote two evocative memoirs, *The Book of Pukapuka* and *The Island of Desire*.

If you're after local legends and traditional stories, pick up *Cook Islands Legends* and *The Ghost at Tokatarava and Other Stories from the Cook Islands*, both by the notable Cook Islands author Jon Janssen. The Pukapukan poet Kauraka Kauraka has published several books of poems.

There are plenty of lavish coffee-table books about the Cook Islands, including *Visions of the Pacific*, which commemorates the 1992 Festival of Pacific Arts, and *The Cook Islands*, a beautiful pictorial tour through the various people and places of the Cooks.

Guide to Cook Islands Birds by DT Holyoak is a useful guide to the islands' native birds, with colour photos and tips for identification.

For a more in-depth guide to the Cook Islands, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Rarotonga & the Cook Islands*.

LANGUAGE

Cook Islands Maori (Rarotongan) is a Polynesian language similar to New Zealand Maori and Marquesan (from French Polynesia). There are some small dialectical differences between many of the islands, and some northern islands have their own languages. English is spoken as a second (or third) language by virtually everyone.

In Rarotongan, the glottal stop replaces the 'h' of similar Polynesian languages; eg the Tahitian word for 'one', *tahi* (ta-hee), is *ta'i* (ta-ee) in Rarotongan.

Rarotongan basics

Hello.	<i>Kia orana.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Aere ra.</i>
How are you?	<i>Pe'ea koe?</i>
Please.	<i>Ine.</i>
Thanks (very much).	<i>Meitaki (ma'ata).</i>
Yes.	<i>Ae.</i>
No.	<i>Kare.</i>
Cheers!	<i>Kia manuia!</i>

ENVIRONMENT

The Cook Islands' small land mass (just 241 sq km) is scattered over about two million sq km of ocean, midway between American Samoa and Tahiti.

The 15 islands are divided into Northern and Southern Groups. The Southern Group are younger volcanic islands, while the Northern Group are coral atolls that have formed on top of ancient sunken volcanoes (see the boxed text, p63). 'Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Mangaia are 'raised islands' characterised by *makatea* – rocky coastal areas formed by uplifted coral reefs. All the Northern Group islands are low coral atolls, with an outer reef encircling a lagoon.

Waste management is a major issue in the Cook Islands. Glass, plastic and aluminium are collected for recycling, but there's still a huge surplus of rubbish. Water supply is also a major concern.

BEST EATING

Rarotonga has some top-notch places to eat, ranging from cut-price cafés to full-blown fine-dining restaurants, and you'll find a couple of hidden gems on Aitutaki, too. On the outer islands you'll be stuck with your own cooking, so you might as well make the most of eating out on the mainland! You won't find much local food on restaurant menus, apart from *ika mata* (raw fish in coconut cream). The best place to try traditional cooking is at an island night or *umukai* (traditional feast cooked in an underground oven).

- Long the island's best-known restaurant, Flame Tree (p451) is still going strong.
- The freshest of food is served in a quintessential island setting at Vaima Restaurant & Bar (p451).
- At Tamarind House (p451) gastronomic delights are cooked up by Rarotonga's top chef.
- The truly 'slow food' at Tauono's (p459) is produced with fresh organic ingredients from the on-site garden.
- Family-run Café Tupuna (p458) offers the most imaginative cuisine on Aitutaki.

The biggest threat to the Cooks is global warming, which could render much of the Northern Group uninhabitable within the next 100 years (p66). Severe cyclones are also likely to become a great deal more common.

Wildlife

Rarotonga's mountainous centre is covered with a dense jungle of ferns, creepers and towering trees, providing the perfect habitat for the island's rich birdlife. Coconut palms and spectacular tropical flowers grow with abandon almost everywhere in the Cook Islands, though the once-common pandanus trees are now rare on Rarotonga and 'Atiu.

The only native mammal is the Pacific fruit bat (flying fox), found on Mangaia and Rarotonga. Pigs, chickens and goats were introduced by the first Polynesian

settlers, along with rats, which devastated the islands' endemic wildlife, especially native birds. The *kakerori* (Rarotongan flycatcher) was almost wiped out but is now recovering thanks to the establishment of the Takitumu Conservation Area on Rarotonga. Other native birds include the cave-dwelling *kopekā* ('Atiu swiftlet) on 'Atiu, the *tanga'eo* (Mangaian kingfisher) and the *kukupā* (Cook Islands fruit dove). The Indian mynah was introduced in 1906 to control coconut stick insects and is now running riot on many Southern Group islands.

RAROTONGA

pop 10,500 / area 67.2 sq km

The capital is the one Cook Island every visitor is guaranteed to see, and it's hardly surprising that most people never manage to explore any further. The island is bordered by a flame-orange reef and cobalt-coloured lagoon, and ringed by a sparkling white beach. The land rises from sea level through lush fields and rural farmland to the thickly forested mountains at the island's heart. There's plenty of history and heritage to match the island's natural charms, from tumbledown *marae* and ancient monuments to some of the best-preserved coral churches in the Cooks. In the heat of a tropical afternoon, the island's mingled scent of flower blossom, ripe fruit and salty sea air is simply overpowering, but it's the electrifying beauty that stays with you long after you leave for home.

HISTORY

Traditional history relates that Rarotonga was discovered by Io Tangaroa, who arrived about 1400 years ago from Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands (now part of French Polynesia). In the early 13th century two great warrior chiefs, Tangi'ia from Tahiti and Karika from Samoa, arrived in *vaka* (ocean-going canoes) to conquer the island, and rule Rarotonga as joint kings. The land was divided among six tribes, each headed by an *ariki*. In previous centuries the main villages were located inland around the central mountains, which provided better defence during the frequent conflicts between the different tribes.

RAROTONGA IN...

Two Days

Spend your first day getting acquainted with the island. Take a **circle-island tour** (p446) or hire a scooter and buzz around the back roads (p440). Factor in some snorkelling and swimming around **Muri Lagoon** or **Aro'a Beach** (p445), and relax at one of the island's best restaurants – **Vaima** (p451) or the **Flame Tree** (p451). Spend the second day exploring **Avarua** (p440) and browsing for **souvenirs** (p453). Work up an appetite with a spot of swimming in the lagoon, and then head straight out for an **island night** (p452).

Four Days

Check out some traditional culture on your third day at the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (p441) or **Highland Paradise** (p441). Spend the evening exploring Avarua's **nightlife**; top spots include the **Whatever Bar** (p452) and the **Staircase** (p452). Keep your fourth day free for the island's hidden highlight – the unforgettable **Cross-Island Track** (p444).

The first recorded European visitor was Philip Goodenough, captain of the *Cumberland*, who showed up in 1814 and spent three bloody months looking for sandalwood. In 1823 the missionaries John Williams and Papeiha set out to convert the Rarotongans, and in little more than a year Christianity had taken a firm hold. The missionaries relocated the main villages along the coastline, and Rarotonga became the Cook Islands' headquarters for the LMS.

Fearing French expansionism in the Pacific, Makea Takau, the paramount Rarotongan *ariki*, requested British protection in 1865, but the islands weren't established as a British protectorate until 1888, when Rarotonga became the unofficial capital of the group. The Cook Islands were annexed by NZ in 1901, eventually winning independence in 1965.

ORIENTATION

Though Rarotonga is the largest of the Cook Islands, it's compact and accessible, circumnavigated by a 32km coastal road

known as the Ara Tapu (Sacred Road). Inland you'll find a second road, the Ara Metua (Ancient Road), built some time in the 11th century. The Ara Metua passes through farmland, taro plantations and rambling homesteads in the foothills of Rarotonga's mountainous centre. The centre of the island is covered in jungle and jagged mountains, and can only be crossed on foot. There are no private beaches on Rarotonga, but take care not to cross private land in order to access the shoreline.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bounty Bookshop (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26660; Avarua)

The island's main bookshop is near the post office.

CITC Shopping Centre (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22000; Ara Maire Nui, Avarua)

Cook Islands Library & Museum Society (Map pp442-3; ☎ 28468; Makea Tinirau Rd, Avarua)

University of the South Pacific (USP; Map pp442-3; ☎ 29415; Makea Tinirau Rd, Avarua) The best (and cheapest) place for books on Cook Islands history, politics and culture.

Internet Access

Email and Internet access is widely available on Rarotonga. The average charge is around NZ\$9 an hour, and it's often cheaper to prepay for an hour or two in advance.

Cybernet.ck (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23004; Avarua)

Dougie's Internet Café (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27242; Muri Beach) Inside a trailer near Muri Beach.

Kavera Central (☎ 20012; Kavera)

Internet Shop (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20727; Avarua;

☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Wi-fi available.

Telecom (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29680; Tutakimoa Rd, Avarua; ☎ 24hr) Access codes are valid here and at Telepost. Wi-fi available.

Telepost (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29940; CITC Shopping Centre, Ara Maire Nui, Avarua) Wi-fi available.

Medical Services

Hospital (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22664; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 24hr emergency service) On a steep hill up behind the golf course.

Outpatient clinic (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20065; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) About 1km east of Avarua.

Money

ANZ Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21750; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4pm Sat); Punanga Nui Market (Map pp442-3; ☎ 8am-11am Sat) There's an ATM at the main branch in Avarua and at Wigmore's Superstore.

Westpac (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22014; bank@westpac.co.ck; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat) The main branch is beside the Foodland supermarket in Avarua. There's another branch at the airport, open for all international flights. Both branches have ATMs.

Post

Post office (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29940; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information

Cook Islands Tourist Authority (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29435; www.cook-islands.com; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri; Avarua) The main tourist office can help with everything from accommodation and nightspots to inter-island flights and shipping services.

Travel Agencies

The two main travel agencies on Rarotonga are both in Avarua.

Island Hopper Vacations (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22576;

www.islandhoppervacations.com; Banana Court, Avarua)

Jetsave Travel (Map pp442-3; ☎ 27707; www.jetsave.co.ck; Ara Maire Nui, Avarua)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

Unless you're travelling on your own private yacht, chances are you'll be arriving on the islands by plane from Los Angeles (LA) or Auckland. Air New Zealand and Pacific Blue are the only international carriers that fly through the islands; see p475 for information on getting to and from Rarotonga.

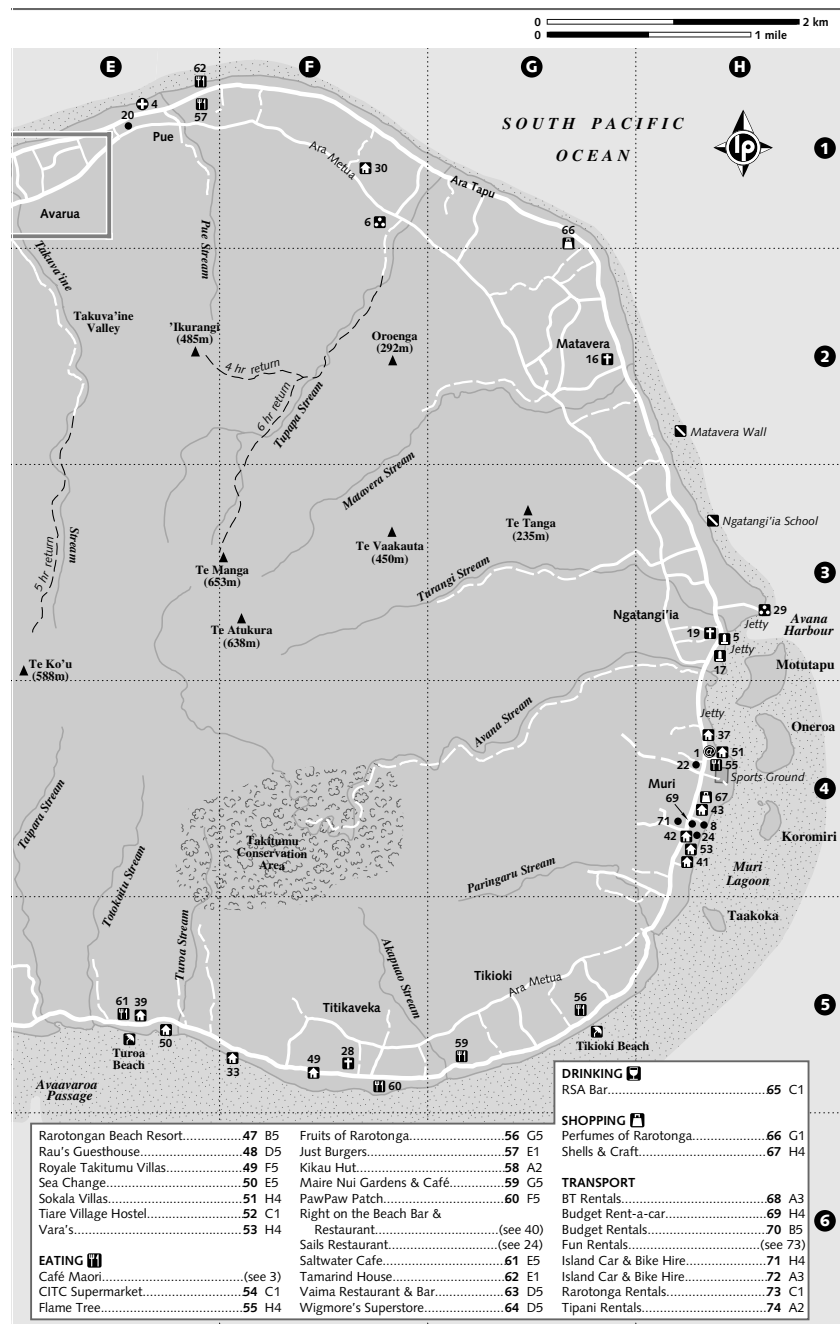
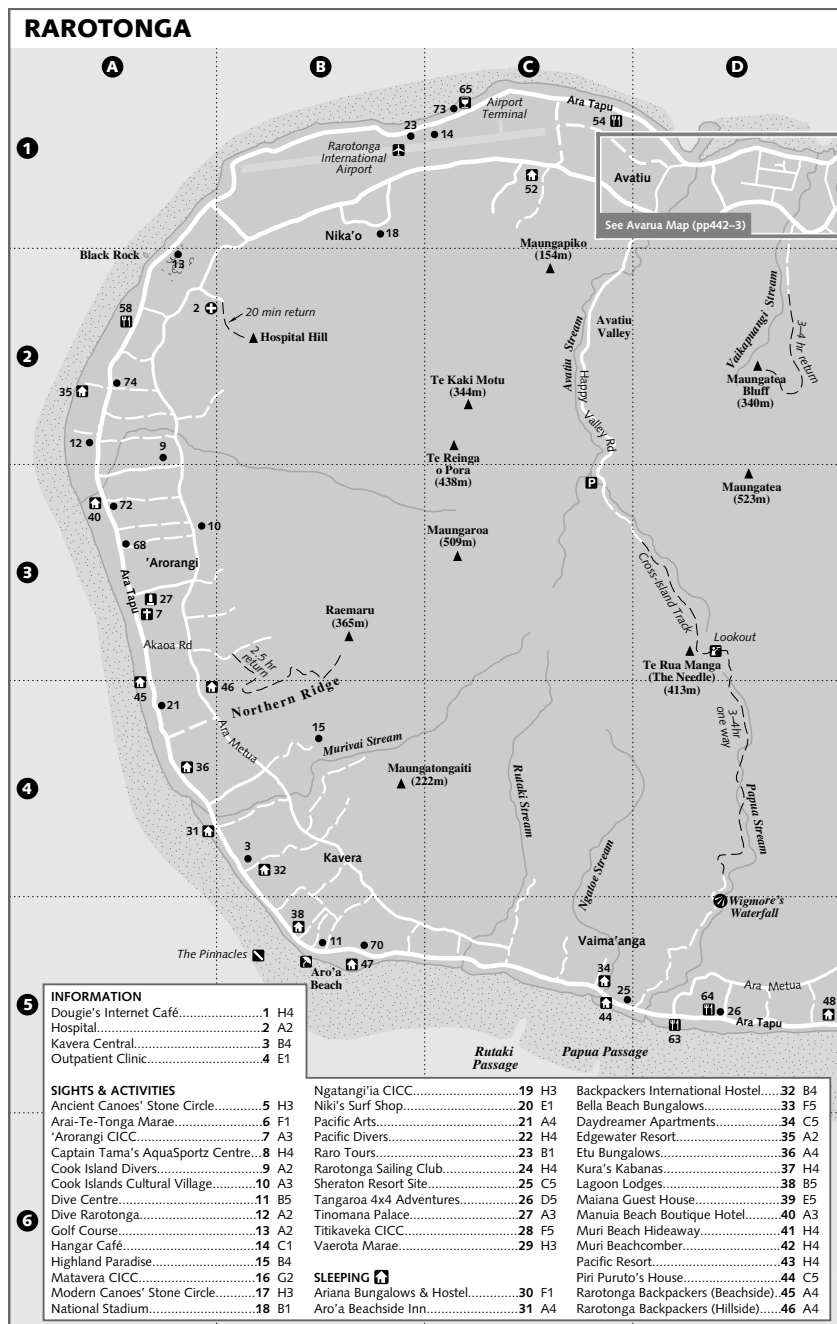
Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels and hostels provide transfers from the airport. **Raro Tours** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25325; coaches@rarotours.co.ck) operates an airport shuttle service (NZ\$10 one way to anywhere on the island).

BUS

Circle-island buses run around the coast road in both directions, departing from the bus stop at Cook's Corner Arcade in Avarua. Daytime buses going clockwise depart hourly from 7am to 4pm Monday to Friday, 1pm to 4pm on Saturday, and from 8am to noon and 2pm to 4pm on Sunday. Buses going anticlockwise depart at 25 minutes past every hour, 8.25am to 4.25pm on Monday to Friday only. A night bus service runs



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clockwise only from Monday to Thursday and on Saturday from 6pm to 10pm, with extra hourly buses on Friday night from midnight to 2am.

The bus fare is NZ\$3 for one ride, NZ\$5 for a return trip (two rides) or NZ\$20 for a 10-ride ticket. Children's fares are NZ\$1.50 single, NZ\$2 return. A family pass, valid for two adults and two kids, costs NZ\$20. There's also a day pass (NZ\$10). The bus can be flagged down anywhere along its route.

You can pick up bus timetables from the tourist office or the bus drivers, or ring **Cook's Passenger Transport** (☎ 25512, after hr ☎ 20349). Several free booklets, including the Jasons *Cook Islands Visitor Guide*, also contain timetables.

CAR, MOPED & BICYCLE

To rent a motor vehicle you'll need a local driving licence (NZ\$10) from the police station in Avarua (Map pp442-3). You'll need to bring your driving licence from home and you'll sometimes have to take a short practical test (usually once around the block). You can get your licence any day from 8am to 3pm, but it pays to turn up early. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road.

Cars and jeeps are available for around NZ\$55 to NZ\$70 per day; ring around for weekly deals. Mountain bikes are around NZ\$6/40 per day/week.

The quintessential mode of transport in the Cook Islands is the scooter. The lowest rates for rental bikes are about NZ\$20/90 per day/week; local firms offer the best deals, but don't expect luxuries such as working speedometers. Take the time to learn how to ride the bike before heading out onto the main road, and watch out for the red-hot exhaust pipe (unless you fancy taking home your own 'Rarotonga tattoo').

Avis Rental Cars Airport (☎ 21039; www.avis.co.ck); Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22833)

BT Rentals (Map pp438-9; ☎ 23586; 'Arorangi)

Budget Rent-a-Car (www.budget.co.ck); airport (☎ 21039; only open for international flights); Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20895; 2 St Joseph Rd); downtown Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26895); Edgewater Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21026); Rarotongan Beach Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20838)

Fun Rentals (☎ 22426; www.funrentals.co.ck) Opposite the airport, this is the only company that offers bubble-shaped 'scooters'.

Island Car & Bike Hire 'Arorangi (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22632; www.islandcarhire.co.ck; Ara Tapu); Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24632); Muri (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21632)

Rarotonga Rentals (☎ 22326; www.rarotongarentals.co.ck) At the airport.

Tipani Rentals (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22382; 'Arorangi)

TAXI

Rates are about NZ\$2.50 per kilometre; from Muri to the airport will cost NZ\$40.

Areiti Taxis & Tours (☎ 23012, 55752; Muri Beach; ☎ 24hr)

Aroa Taxi Shuttle (☎ 28144; 'Arorangi)

Doro's Taxi (☎ 21400, 52355; Avana; ☎ 24hr)

Kia Orana Taxis (☎ 20203, 50721; ☎ 24hr)

Muri Beach Taxis (☎ 21625; Muri Beach)

AVARUA

Strung along the island's north coast, Avarua is the only town of any size in the Cook Islands, but we're hardly talking Manhattan – the largest building is barely the height of a coconut tree, and the busiest shops and cafés operate very much on Cook Islands time. Nestled beneath jungle-covered hills and fronted by a glittering bay, Avarua is where you'll find the island's twin harbours and the main market, and there are some intriguing sights, including the National Culture Centre, the ruined Para O Tane Palace and the old Banana Court – once one of the most notorious bars in the South Pacific.

Orientation & Information

Finding your way around Avarua is easy; there's one main road, the Ara Maire Nui, which starts from the main traffic circle near Avarua Harbour and runs right through town. The commercial centre is west of the traffic circle; at the opposite end of town you'll find Punanga Nui market and Avatiu Harbour, where the inter-island passenger freighter ships and Port Authority are based. The airport is 1km further west.

Sights

Just east of the traffic circle is the **seven-in-one coconut tree**, a group of seven coconut trees growing in a perfect circle. Near the traffic circle is the **Philatelic Bureau** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29336), where you can purchase Cook Islands coins and stamps.

On the inland side of the main road, half a block east of the traffic circle, are

the **Para O Tane Palace** and its surrounding area, **Taputapuatea**. The palace is where Makea Takau, the paramount *ariki* of the area, signed the treaty accepting the Cook Islands' status as a British protectorate in 1888. The building is now a picturesque ruin, and it's closed to the public, although officially it's still one of the island's main seats of power.

Further east is the **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu), an excellent craft shop housed in the former LMS Sunday school. You can sometimes visit the workshop here to see black pearl jewellery and shell carvings being made.

On the opposite side of the road is Avarua's white-washed **Cook Islands Christian Church** (CIC; Map pp442-3; Makea Tinirau Rd), built in 1853. The **graveyard** contains a monument to Papeiha and the graves of the author Robert Dean Frisbie (p434) and Albert Henry, the first prime minister of the Cook Islands. The main church service is at 10am on Sunday.

Inland behind the Para O Tane Palace, the **Cook Islands Library & Museum Society** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 28468; Makea Tinirau Rd; admission NZ\$2; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 4-8pm Tue) houses a collection of Pacific literature and a small museum, with intriguing exhibits including an old whaling pot, ceremonial spears and the island's first printing press.

The **National Museum** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20725; Victoria Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) inside the National Culture Centre has a selection of Cook Islands and South Pacific artefacts, and it sometimes hosts temporary exhibitions. The **National Library** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20725) is nearby.

AROUND THE ISLAND

The sights listed here are anticlockwise from Avarua, and are all near the main coast road.

Black Rock

On the coast just beyond the golf course is Black Rock (Turou), traditionally believed to be where the spirits of the dead commenced their voyage to 'Avaiki (the afterworld) – though these days it's better known as one of the island's best **snorkelling** spots. Look out for the sign to the Rarotonga Hospital – if you follow the steep road uphill, there are views all along the island's west coast.

LAND OWNERSHIP

Land ownership in the Cook Islands is hereditary and land can only be leased, not sold, to foreigners. Because land is passed from generation to generation, people acquire curiously divided chunks of property; families might have a house by the coast, a citrus plantation somewhere else and the odd grove of papaya trees dotted here and there. It can be a full-time job commuting from one farmlet to another.

Cook Islands Cultural Village

If you're keen to come to grips with the island's pre-Christian past, head for the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21314; www.cookislandsculturalvillage.com; Ara Metua, 'Arorangi). You'll see demonstrations of traditional skills, including weaving, woodcarving, costume-making and dancing. The daily tours culminate in a cultural show inside the Are Karioi (house of entertainment), followed by a feast of local food, and they usually finish around 1.30pm.

The village tour costs NZ\$56 (NZ\$60 including transfers), or you can combine it with an afternoon circle-island tour for NZ\$85. Children aged five to 12 are half-price. Tours usually run on Monday, Wednesday and Friday – ring in advance to make bookings.

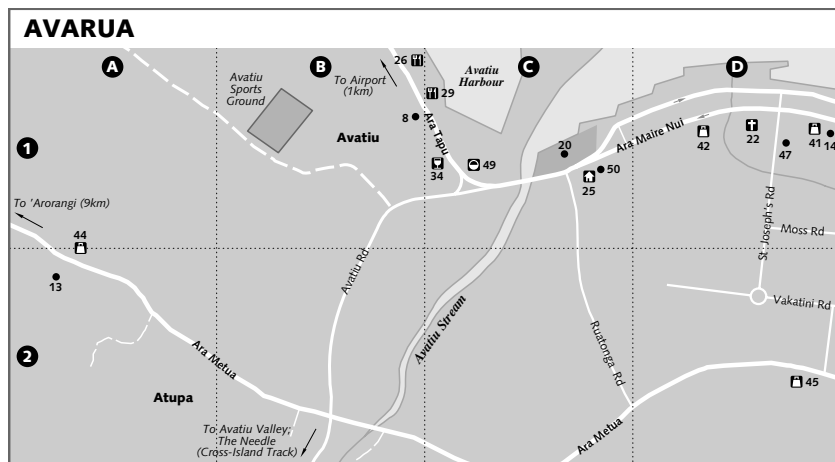
'Arorangi

On Rarotonga's west coast, 'Arorangi was the first missionary-built village, conceived as a model for other villages on the island. The missionary Papeiha is buried at the 1849 **CIC**. Rising up behind 'Arorangi is the flat-topped peak of Raemaru (365m).

There are several interesting art galleries in 'Arorangi, including **Pacific Arts** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20200; merkens@oyster.net.ck; Ara Tapu) and the **Art Studio** (☎ 22510; ikgeorge@oyster.net.ck).

Highland Paradise

High above 'Arorangi, **Highland Paradise** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 24477; tours adult/6-12/under 6 NZ\$50/25/free) stands on the site of the old Tinomana village. Members of the Pirangi family, descendants of Tinomana Ariki, take visitors on a two-hour tour of the site, including the



INFORMATION		ENTERTAINMENT	
ANZ Bank.....	1 E1	Empire Cinema.....	37 F1
Bounty Bookshop.....	(see 7)		
CITC Pharmacy.....	(see 39)	SHOPPING	
Cook Islands Library & Museum		Arasena Gallery.....	(see 33)
Society.....	2 F2	Beachcomber Gallery.....	38 F1
Cook Islands Tourist Authority.....	3 E1	Bergman & Sons.....	(see 33)
Cybernet.ck.....	(see 33)	Crafts Store.....	(see 33)
Internet Shop.....	4 F1	Bergman & Sons.....	(see 40)
Island Hopper Vacations.....	(see 33)	Pearl Store.....	(see 40)
Jetsave Travel.....	(see 41)	Bus Stop.....	(see 40)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration.....	5 E1	CITC Shopping Centre.....	39 E1
National Culture Centre.....	(see 17)	Cook's Corner Arcade.....	40 E1
New Zealand High Commission.....	(see 7)	Goldmine.....	41 D1
Philatelic Bureau.....	(see 7)	Island Craft.....	(see 43)
Police Station.....	6 E1	Kenwall Gallery.....	42 D1
Post Office.....	7 F1	Mareko.....	43 E1
Snowbird Laundromat.....	8 B1	Mike Tavioni's Workshop.....	44 A1
Telecom.....	9 E2	Moana Gems.....	(see 39)
Telepost.....	(see 39)	Perfume Factory.....	45 D2
University of the South Pacific (USP).....	10 G1	Perfumes of Rarotonga.....	(see 40)
Westpac Bank.....	11 E1	Tuki's Pareu.....	46 F1
		Vonnia's Store.....	(see 41)
		TRANSPORT	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Avis Rental Cars.....	(see 39)
Avarua CICC.....	12 G1	Budget Rent-a-Car.....	47 D1
Cook Islands Whale Education Centre.....	13 A2	Budget Rent-a-Car Downtown Office.....	48 E1
Dive Shop Avarua.....	14 D1	Harbour Master.....	49 C1
National Auditorium.....	15 G1	Island Car & Bike Hire.....	50 C1
National Library.....	16 G1	TJ's Nightclub.....	35 F1
National Museum.....	17 G1	Petrol Station.....	51 E1
		Ports Authority.....	(see 49)
Papeiha Stone.....	18 F2		
Para O Tane Palace.....	19 F1		
Punanga Nui Market.....	20 C1		
Raro Eco Tours.....	21 G1		
Raro Mountain Safari Tours.....	(see 50)		
St Joseph's Catholic Cathedral.....	22 D1		
Seven-in-One Coconut Tree.....	23 F1		
SLEEPING			
Paradise Inn.....	24 G1		
Rarotonga Realty.....	25 C1		
Shekinah Homes.....	(see 21)		
EATING			
Aramoana Fish & Chips.....	26 B1		
Blue Note Café.....	(see 33)		
Café.....	27 F1		
Café Salsa.....	(see 39)		
Foodland Supermarket.....	(see 28)		
Mama's Cafe.....	28 E1		
Palace Takeaways.....	29 C1		
Paulina's Polynesian Restaurant.....	30 F1		
Portofino.....	31 G1		
Trader Jack's.....	32 F1		

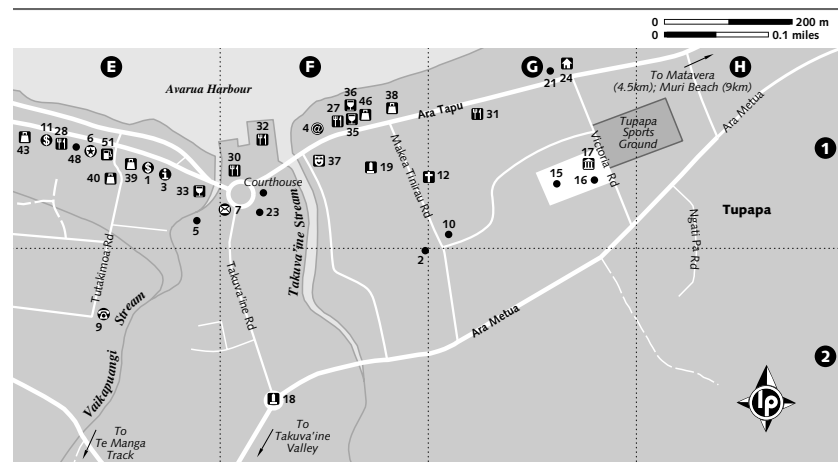
lush gardens, the village *marae*, the chief's throne and the old lookout point. Transfers cost NZ\$5.

South Coast

The south coast of Rarotonga has the island's best **beaches**, with long stretches of brilliant white sand, overhanging palms

and deep clear water. The best snorkelling is at Aro'a, Titikaveka and Tikioki.

On the eastern edge of the abandoned Sheraton resort site, a road leads inland to **Wigmore's Waterfall**, a lovely cascade dropping into a fresh, cool swimming pool (though it dries up to a disappointing trickle in hot weather).



Muri

The most beautiful section of Rarotonga's encircling lagoon is found at Muri, on the southeastern corner of the island. The water is dazzlingly blue and the lagoon is packed with tropical fish, especially around the four small *motu* (islets in a lagoon) out towards the reef: Taakoka, Koromiri, Oneroa and Motutapu. Taakoka is volcanic; the others are sand cays. Water-sports equipment (p445) and lagoon cruises are available from Muri through Captain Tama's and Reef to See (p445).

MURI WALKING TOUR

Start on the north side of Muri Beach at **Avana Harbour**, one of the only deepwater passages into Rarotonga's lagoon. It was from here that the great ocean-going *vaka* set off in the 14th century to settle NZ – the so-called 'Great Migration'. Slightly to the north on a promontory of land is **Marae Vaerota**, the traditional *marae* of the Kainuku Ariki, where the canoes were blessed and human sacrifices were made to the gods.

Head south and look out for the picturesque **Ngatang'i'a CICC**, where you'll find some interesting headstones. In the park opposite you'll find the ancient **canoes' stone circle** and a plaque commemorating the seven canoes that completed the journey to NZ: *Takitumu*, *Tokomaru*, *Kurahaupo*, *Aotea*, *Tainui*, *Te Arawa* and *Mataatua*. Further south, a modern **stone circle** commemorates

the arrival of traditional Polynesian canoes during the sixth Festival of Pacific Arts in 1992.

South of here is **Muri Beach**, one of the island's best snorkelling areas. Head along the shoreline and gaze out to the four palm-covered *motu* in the lagoon; Motutapu is the furthest north, with Oneroa, Koromiri and little Taakoka to the south. The remains of one of Rarotonga's oldest *marae* can be found on Motutapu, but you'll need to hire a kayak (see p445) if you want to see it. Pick up some light refreshment at **Sails Restaurant** (p451) or the **Barefoot Bar** at the Pacific Resort (p449), then head down the main road to **Shells & Craft** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22275) to see some truly spectacular conch shells.

Matavera

The old **CICC** here is lovely at night when the outside is lit up. **Perfumes of Rarotonga** (see p453) concocts perfumes, liqueurs and colognes, and there's a pottery shop at the rear.

Arai-Te-Tonga

A small sign points off the road to the island's most important *marae* site, Arai-Te-Tonga. Just off the Ara Metua there's a stone-marked *koutu* (ancient open-air royal courtyard) site in front of you. This whole area was a gathering place and the remains of the *marae*, the *koutu* and other meeting grounds are still visible.

Cross-Island Track

This three- to four-hour hike, from the north to south coasts via the 413m **Te Rua Manga** (Needle), is the most popular walk on Rarotonga, passing through some of the island's most impressive natural scenery. You shouldn't try to do the walk in a north-south direction, as the chances of taking a wrong turn are much greater. Wear adequate shoes, take plenty of drinking water and lather on the mosquito repellent. Parts of the walk get extremely slippery in wet weather.

You can take a guided tour (p446), but it's perfectly possible to do the walk on your own. The road to the starting point starts south of Avatiu Harbour. Continue on the road up the valley by Avatiu Stream until you reach a sign announcing the beginning of the walk. A private vehicle road continues for about 1km.

A footpath takes off from the end of the vehicle road, and after 10 minutes drops down and crosses a small stream. Avoid following the white plastic power-cable track up the valley; instead, pick up the track beside the massive boulder on the ridge to your left, after the stream crossing.

From here, the track climbs steeply to the Needle (about 45 minutes). At the first sight of the Needle there's a boulder in the middle of the path – a nice place for a rest. A little further on is a T-junction; the Needle is a 10-minute walk to the right. Don't try and climb up to the Needle itself, as there have been several recent rockfalls and landslides, and there's a long and probably fatal drop on either side of the trail. Follow the track round to the left instead, and you'll begin the long, slippery descent towards the south coast.

After 30 minutes the track meets the Papua Stream and follows it downhill, zigzagging back and forth across the stream. After about 45 minutes, the track emerges into fernland. Be sure to stick to the main track; there are several places where minor tracks seem to take off towards the stream but these end at dangerous spots upstream from the waterfall. Another 15 minutes further on, the main track turns back towards the stream, bringing you to the bottom of **Wigmore's Waterfall** (beware the bloodthirsty mosquitoes). A dirt road leads from the south coast up to the waterfall. It's about a 15-minute walk to the coast road, where you can flag down the circle-island bus or cool off in the nearby lagoon.

ACTIVITIES Deep-Sea Fishing

Deep-sea fishing is popular in the Cook Islands, with catches of *mahimahi* fish and tuna (from October to May), wahoo and barracuda (April to October), and sailfish and marlin (November to March). Compare charters and ask beforehand whether you can keep your fish. All of the following operators have safety gear. It's best to contact them by telephone as many of them are run from the owners' homes.

Akura Charters (☎ 54355; fish@akura.co.ck)

Fisher's Fishin' Tourz (☎ 23356, 55154; bafisher@oyster.net.ck)

Hook Fishing Charters (☎ 54475; hookfish@pacificmotors.co.ck)

Pacific Marine Charters (☎ 21237; www.pacificmarinecharters.co.ck)

Seafari Charters (☎ 20328, 55096; www.seafari.co.ck)

Diving

Diving is fantastic outside the reef, especially around the passages along the island's southern side. There are canyons, caves and tunnels to explore, and outside the lagoon the island drops off to around 4000m, although most diving is between 3m to 30m.

Rarotonga has several well-preserved shipwrecks, including the SS *Maitai* off the northern shore. Other well-known diving spots include Black Rock in the north; Sandriver and Matavera Wall on the island's east side; and the Aavaarua, Papua and Rutaki passages in the south.

Rarotonga has four accredited diving operators, all offering twice-daily boat trips. Single dives cost NZ\$70 to NZ\$75, including gear. Introductory dives and diving courses are also available.

Cook Island Divers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22483; www.cookislandsdivers.com; 'Arorangi)

Dive Centre (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20238; www.thedivecentre-rarotonga.com; Aro'a Beach)

Dive Rarotonga (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21873; www.dive-rarotonga.com; 'Arorangi)

Pacific Divers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22450; www.pacificdivers.co.ck; Muri Beach)

Hiking

The island's mountainous centre is criss-crossed by some stunning walking tracks and trails. The top walk is the **Cross-Island Track** (left), but there are lots of others to

discover. The best guide is *Rarotonga's Mountain Tracks and Plants* by Gerald McCormack and Judith Künzlé, also the authors of the trusty handbook *Rarotonga's Cross-Island Walk*.

Wear light, breathable clothing, sturdy boots, and check the weather forecast before you go. Tell someone where you're headed and what time you expect to return – and whatever you do, remember your mosquito repellent.

Horse Riding

Horse-riding tours are offered by **Aroa Pony Trek** (☎ 21415; adult/child NZ\$50/30; ☎ mornings & afternoons Mon-Fri) along the beach, up to Wigmore's Waterfall, then back again; they usually last around 2½ hours. Bookings are essential.

Sailing & Water Sports

Muri Lagoon is the best place for swimming, windsurfing, sailing and kayaking. Sailing races start at Muri Beach every Saturday and Sunday afternoon from around 1pm. Kayaks are readily available, and many hotels provide them for guests' use. They're easy to handle and great fun, and ideal for exploring the deserted *motu* on Muri Lagoon.

The **Rarotonga Sailing Club** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27349; Muri Beach) rents kayaks (NZ\$5/10 for one/three hours) and small sailing boats (NZ\$35/100 for one/three hours).

Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach) is beside the Rarotonga Sailing Club and rents kayaks (singles/doubles NZ\$7/10 per hour) and sailboards (NZ\$25 per hour).

Snorkelling & Swimming

Rarotonga's spectacular lagoon is fantastic for snorkelling and swimming – it's crystal-clear, bath-warm and packed with technicolour fish and bright coral. The beaches along the island's southern and western sides are all good for swimming, but on the northern and eastern sides, the reef is too close to shore and swimming is not recommended. The best snorkelling is around Muri Lagoon, Aro'a Beach, Titikaveka and Tikioki in the south of the island, and Black Rock in the north. Many of these areas are protected by *ra'ui* (traditional conservation areas).

THE COCONUT KING

Rarotonga's best-known showman, **Piri Puruto III** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20309), is still zipping up coconut trees, conjuring fire from dry twigs, and cooking up island feasts for his guests, despite the fact that he's now well into his sixties. The show costs NZ\$15 and runs several nights a week, and Piri also lays on a traditional *umukai* on Sunday that you can help prepare (NZ\$49). Children get in to all Piri's activities for half price.

Snorkelling gear is available from the island's diving operators (see opposite); some hotels also provide free gear for guests' use. The **Dive Shop Avarua** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24496; Mana Court, Avarua) sells good-quality fins, masks and snorkels. **Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach), beside the Rarotonga Sailing Club, has snorkelling gear for hire.

Reef to See (☎ 22212; reef2see@oyster.net.ck) offers twice-daily snorkelling trips at 9am and 2pm (NZ\$50). It's best to call ahead to book your place.

Surfing

Surfing on Rarotonga is for hardcore boarders only – reef-break rides tend to be short, thrilling and, if you get them wrong, agonisingly painful. The main spots are at Avana Harbour, Matavera and Black Rock. **Niki's Surf Shop** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26240; www.cookislandsurf.co.ck; Ara Tapu), east of Avarua, sells surfing supplies (mostly après-surf), but you'll need to bring your own board.

Other Sports

You can usually find a **volleyball** game on Muri Beach or at the Rarotongian Beach Resort (p449). **Tennis** courts are available at Edgewater Resort and Rarotongian Beach Resort.

Rarotonga's nine-hole **golf course** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20621; http://rarotonga.nzgolfclub.net; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, members only Sat) is near the airport.

RAROTONGA FOR CHILDREN

The top draw for kids is the island's colourful lagoon and the spectacular beach that stretches around the island. Top spots for snorkelling are Muri, Tikioki and Aro'a

Beach – smoothies and ice creams are never far away at Fruits of Rarotonga (p450) and the Saltwater Café (p450). For an in-depth look at the island's underwater inhabitants, kids will adore Captain Tama's glass-bottom boats (below) or the semisubmersible Reef Sub (below), which both chug around Muri Lagoon – they might even spot some humpback whales if you're visiting between July and October.

Active kids will love exploring the island's jungle-covered interior, especially in the company of Pa Teuraa (right), the Cook Islands equivalent of Indiana Jones. Pa offers informative nature walks as well as guided tours across the island. Alternatively, you could try a bike-and-canoe trek up the Avana Valley with Raro Eco Tours (right) or a jeep-ride around the island with Tangaroa 4x4 Adventures (opposite). Then how about a traditional Sunday *umukai* with the venerable Piri Puruto III (p445), accompanied by his world-famous coconut show? By bedtime the kids will be out like a light...

TOURS

Glass-Bottom Boat Tours

Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach) operates glass-bottom boat tours (adult/child NZ\$60/35), including snorkelling and a barbecue lunch on Koromiri. The tours last from 11am to about 3pm and run Monday to Saturday. Bookings are essential.

The semisubmersible **Reef Sub** (☎ 25837) allows you to explore the ocean depths without having to get wet (very Jules Verne); you'll have close-up views of coral, fish, turtles and even the occasional shark. Ninety-minute cruises depart at 10am and 2pm daily from Avatiu Harbour (adult/child NZ\$65/35). Whale-watching trips are available in season (July to October).

Scenic Flights

Air Rarotonga (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) offers 20-minute scenic flights (adult/child NZ\$65/35), complete with onboard commentary. Flights take place from 8.30am to 4pm daily.

The **Hangar Café** (☎ 25317, 55311) offers tandem microlight flights (NZ\$145). You'll need a decent standard of fitness (no pacemakers) and a head for heights.

Walking Tours

Pa's Mountain Walk (☎ 21079; tours adult/child NZ\$65/35) offers guided tours along the cross-island track. The tours are run by dreadlocked Pa Teuraa – herbalist, botanist and traditional healer. Pa's cross-island walk runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (weather permitting), and he conducts nature walks on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The **Takitumu Conservation Area** (TCA; Map pp438-9; ☎ 29906; kakerori@tca.co.ck; Ara Tapu, Avarua) is a private forest reserve in Rarotonga's southeast corner. There are guided tours around the reserve (adult/child NZ\$50/30), and you're almost guaranteed to catch sight of the endangered *kakerori*.

Whale-Watching

Humpback whales visit the Cook Islands from July to October. Most dive operators and fishing charters, as well as the Reef Sub, offer whale-watching trips in season. The **Cook Islands Whale Education Centre** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21666; www.whaleresearch.org; Ara Metua, Atupa) has plenty of information about whales, including the best time to see them.

Other Tours

There are plenty of organised tours on Rarotonga. A round-the-island tour should be on everyone's itinerary; it's a great way to get to know the island, especially if you're only here for a few days.

The **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21314; www.cookislandsculturalvillage.com; Ara Metua, 'Arorangi) offers a circle-island historical tour which includes an island-style buffet and cultural show. Tours take place on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and cost NZ\$55. You can combine the circle-island tour with a visit to the village itself (combined tour NZ\$85).

Raro Mountain Safari Tours (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23629; www.rarosafaritours.co.ck; opposite Punanga Nui Market) runs three-hour expeditions (adult/child NZ\$60/30) around the island's rugged mountains, inland valleys and historical points of interest in safari-style jeeps. Tours run Monday to Friday at 9am and 1.30 pm, and at noon on Sunday.

Raro Eco Tours (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26270, 54555; raro.eco-tours@oyster.net.ck) offers a brace of eco-tours delving into Rarotonga's natural environment. The minibus tour along the Ara Metua focuses on local plants, traditional

medicine and cultural sites (NZ\$50). A second tour explores the lush Avana valley by bike and kayak (NZ\$35). You'll probably get wet and muddy on this trip, so wear old clothes. Tours run Monday to Saturday.

Tangaroa 4x4 Adventures (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22200; Ara Tapu, Vaima'anga) runs a whistlestop tour of the island's main attractions, including the inland road, Avana Harbour, eastern heights, *marae*, library, power station and even the Rarotongan prison. The three-hour tours run from Monday to Saturday, and on Sunday afternoon (adult/child NZ\$60/30).

SLEEPING

Rarotonga has a wide variety of places to stay, ranging from budget hostels to seriously swanky boutique hotels. Muri Beach and the southern coast is the area to choose if you're looking for the classic Cook Islands setting (palm trees, blue lagoons, soft-sand beaches). If you want to see the sunset from your hotel, then west is best (of course). Unsurprisingly, wherever you stay on Rarotonga, you'll pay a premium for picture-postcard views.

A good way to cut costs is to do your own cooking. Most accommodation places have kitchen facilities, except the large resorts and a few upmarket hotels, where you'll need to factor in eating out as an extra expense. Almost everywhere has laundry facilities available for guests.

Budget

AVARUA

These places are within a long walk, or a short ride, of town.

Tiare Village Hostel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 23466; www.tiarevillage.co.ck; dm/s/d/poolside units NZ\$20/25/45/70; 🚻 🚿) Tucked away near the airport, this hostel is a long-standing favourite for budget travellers. The small dorms inside the large main house share a kitchen, bathroom and lounge; outside there are three self-contained (and rather poky) A-frame chalets and several poolside units.

Ariana Bungalows & Hostel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20521; relax@ariana.co.ck; dm/s/d NZ\$18/30/40, 1-3-person bungalows NZ\$60-65; 🚻 🚿) An excellent option if you're on a tight budget, Ariana Bungalows offers bog-standard dorm beds and pleasant self-contained bungalows, all centred around a swimming pool and a leafy tropical garden. There's a small

TIARE MAORI

The Cook Islands' national flower is the *tiare Maori*, or gardenia. Gardenia flowers are often worn as a decorative ornament or woven into floral 'ei, and you might also see them worn behind the ear, especially at a bar or a village dance – a flower behind the right ear means the person is spoken for, while a blossom behind the left ear means they're still available.

on-site shop for groceries and beer. The hostel is 3km east of Avarua, so you'll need a scooter.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Rarotonga Backpackers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21590; www.rarotongabackpackers.com; hillside dm NZ\$20, s NZ\$35-45, tw NZ\$45-50, bungalows NZ\$70-85, beachfront rooms s NZ\$45, d NZ\$55-65, houses NZ\$110-120) Built over several levels, this quirky hostel looks like Tarzan's treehouse transplanted to Rarotonga. The dorms and rooms are all set around a central pool, and there are several self-contained units with private verandas overlooking the coast. A second outpost has just opened in 'Arorangi, with a main house and a couple of sumptuous beachfront bungalows.

Etu Bungalows (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25588; www.etu.bungalows.com; bungalows NZ\$90) Peacefully positioned on the island's sunset side, these rustic garden bungalows are a super option if you're on a tight budget. All the units have a roomy open-plan interior, high ceilings and plenty of light; each also has a private trellised porch and a small box-style bathroom. The wood-panelled walls, potted plants and gorgeous garden views all add nicely to the tropical South Pacific feel.

Vara's (Map pp438-9; ☎ 23156; www.varas.co.ck; dm/s NZ\$25/40, d NZ\$55-80, units NZ\$120-140) Perched right on Muri Beach, Vara's (in)famous beach-house has acquired a reputation for overcrowding, late-night revelry and lacklustre management; those seeking South Seas tranquillity should definitely look elsewhere. The beachside dorms are cramped and the self-contained units are pricey – for better value (and great views) head for the hillside lodge beside the main office.

Backpackers International Hostel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21847; www.backpackersinternational.com; dm/s/d NZ\$18/30/40) This venerable hostel has undergone a recent facelift, though it's still a touch institutional. The upstairs rooms are plain and boxy, but comfortable enough in a boarding-school kind of way. Downstairs there's a kitchen and a jazzily painted lounge leading onto a small garden, where there's a popular weekly island barbecue (NZ\$20/25 for guests/nonguests). Rates are discounted for longer stays.

Rau's Guesthouse (☎ 22916; www.rauguesthouse.co.ck; s/d NZ\$50/60) This newly opened hostel is more a homestay than a traditional backpackers'. The clean, affordable rooms inside the single-storey guesthouse share a spotlessly clean kitchen and lounge; there's also a lovely beach just across the main road.

Maiana Guest House (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20438; www.maianaguesthouse.co.ck; dm/s/tw/d/tr NZ\$22/35/45/50/60, bungalow NZ\$170) A friendly and popular hostel opposite Turoa Beach. The rooms are spartan and a touch scruffy in places, but the kitchen, lounge and dining room are well kitted out.

Midrange

The midrange price bracket is where you'll find most accommodation on Rarotonga, ranging from budget motel units to plush beachside bungalows. If you're travelling with kids, make sure you check the hotel's policy on young children before booking. Many properties won't accept children under 12 years old.

AVARUA

Paradise Inn (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20544; www.paradiseinn.rarotonga.com; s NZ\$65-85, d/tr/f NZ\$105/125/135; ☒) This quirky hotel was once Rarotonga's largest and liveliest dance hall; these days it's been lovingly converted to provide snug, good-value accommodation, including several split-level rooms with a funky loft-style sleeping area. The old building is packed with character; there's a huge lounge decked out with polished-wood floors, nautical knick-knacks and an honesty bar, and outside there's a fine sea-view veranda.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Kura's Kabanas (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27010; www.kkabanas.co.ck; studios NZ\$180, cabanas NZ\$200) If you're looking for an idyllic location, complete

with shady palms, lagoon views and a glorious china-white beach just steps from your door, then Kura's Kabanas won't disappoint. Tucked away in a secluded grove, the three timber-framed bungalows are tastefully decorated and have lovely outside porticos, complete with wooden furniture and an ocean outlook.

Aro'a Beachside Inn (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22166; www.aroabeach.com; garden studio s/d NZ\$160/220, beachside deluxe s/d NZ\$330/350) A top choice for romantic walks and sunset views. The best units are the smartly decorated 'honeymoon suites' beside the beach; some guests have complained that the sea is 'too noisy' (which gives you an idea of just how near the sand these units are). If your budget is tight, the three garden bungalows are more affordable and still only a stone's throw from the sand.

Muri Beach Hideaway (Map pp438-9; ☎ 29005; www.muribeachhideaway.com; bungalows NZ\$200-270, hillside unit NZ\$180; ☒) These thatched bungalows look quintessentially Polynesian from the outside, but don't let the traditional exterior fool you – inside, the villas are beautifully finished in a sleek, contemporary style, with gleaming wood floors, panelled walls and huge king-size beds. The stylish hillside cottage is a steal at NZ\$180.

Lagoon Lodges (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22020; www.lagoonlodges.com; studio units NZ\$195, 1-bedroom bungalows NZ\$220, 2-bedroom standard/deluxe villas NZ\$270/320, 3-bedroom lodge NZ\$465; ☒) Choose from modern motel-style units, detached one- and two-bedroom villas, and several deluxe split-level thatched bungalows nearer the road, all set around a peaceful private garden. The 'at-ground' bungalows offer the best-value, especially for families, with large verandas and your own virtually private garden.

Bella Beach Bungalows (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26004; helenura@shekinah.co.ck; bungalows NZ\$170) These four stained-timber units stand on stilts beside the beach and boast the kind of ocean view you'd usually pay through the nose for. Inside, the accommodation is smart and simple, with shiny tiled floors, small bathrooms and a sleeping area that can be screened off with sliding doors.

Daydreamer Apartments (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25965; www.daydreamer.co.ck; s/d units NZ\$120/150) Probably the best value accommodation along the south coast, if you can live without being

directly on the beach. The five modern units might not be terribly Polynesian, but they're light, airy and deceptively spacious, with separate dining, lounge and bedroom areas, and a small patio area overlooking the well-tended tropical garden.

Muri Beachcomber (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21022; www.beachcomber.co.ck; sea-view units s/d/tr NZ\$240/260/340, watergarden villas s/d/tr NZ\$310/330/410; ☒) There's a homely, almost villagey feel to this place, which offers a choice of sea-view units and three luxury villas overlooking a tranquil lily pond. The style of the units is modern and contemporary – think tiled roofs, glass doors and solar panels rather than pandanus thatching – and there's plenty of green space between the bungalows.

Top End

If your bank balance can stand the damage, then it's at the top end that the accommodation on Rarotonga really comes into its own. If you're booking directly, ask about 'early-bird' (usually 30 days) discounts and multnight packages.

Royale Takitumu Villas (Map pp438-9; ☎ 24682; www.takitumuvillas.co.ck; bungalows NZ\$450-540; ☒) A lovely, secluded little hideaway along the South Coast, offering 10 luxurious thatched villas set among lush gardens and lily ponds. The tastefully understated

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Sea Change (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22532; www.sea-change-rarotonga; villas NZ\$430-1020; ☒) Polynesian setting meets European style in these impeccably appointed villas, all traditionally thatched, lavishly equipped and free-standing. The interior design is more South Kensington than South Pacific (luxury king-size four-poster beds, home-entertainment systems, flat-screen TVs and private outdoor pools). The open-plan villas are effortlessly chic, using earthy tones and traditional materials to offset the more contemporary design elements. The garden villas aren't quite as jaw-droppingly gorgeous as their seafarer cousins, but they still manage to make most other places look downright dowdy. Sea Change is rather like a Rarotongan supermodel – unquestionably elegant and irresistibly attractive, but darned expensive.

interiors and grand spa baths cater to an unashamedly upmarket clientele; if you can afford the hefty price tag, Takitumu is hard to top in terms of style and service.

Pacific Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20427; www.pacificresort.com; villas NZ\$340-1200; ☒) Situated right on Muri Beach, and shaded by overhanging palm trees, the 64 self-contained units at this popular resort are smart, elegant and unfussy, making use of local materials and traditional building styles; the best have sitting rooms and private verandas. There are loads of on-site facilities including two eateries – the beachfront Barefoot Bar and the open-air Sandals Restaurant.

Sokala Villas (Map pp438-9; ☎ 29200; www.sokala.com; NZ\$390-690; ☒) If you're looking for the perfect balance between style, atmosphere and cost, then look no further than Sokala Villas. Lovingly built from native woods and decked out with cane furniture, stone floors and polished ironwood tabletops, each villa boasts its own private lounge, kitchen and elegant bedroom; the best are split over two levels, with the upstairs bedroom offering glorious lagoon views. All the villas have secluded sun decks, some with seriously romantic private swimming pools.

Rarotonga's two large resorts are high on price and thin on charm, but they're a good option for travelling families, especially if you're looking for resort-style facilities.

Rarotongan Beach Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25800; www.rarotongan.co.ck; garden/beachfront r NZ\$380/410, st NZ\$400-730, honeymoon bungalow NZ\$640; ☒) This is probably the busiest resort on the island, in a great spot near Aro'a Beach. It's all suitably Polynesian: there are plenty of Tangaroa statues, floral designs and Cook Islands motifs around, and the bedrooms and suites continue the tropical theme.

Edgewater Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25435; www.edgewater.co.ck; garden/superior/beachfront/beachfront deluxe/VIP ste NZ\$240/280/380/420/550, apartments s/d NZ\$175/250; ☒) Firmly from the 'concrete car park' school of resort design, the Edgewater has 208 rooms split between several multilevel blocks. The buildings have about as much exterior charm as a block of flats, but inside they're well appointed in typical hotel style, with magnolia walls and unashamedly modern furniture.

Manuia Beach Boutique Hotel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22461; www.manuia.co.ck; garden d/tr NZ\$370/480, beachfront d/tr NZ\$540/650; ☒) This boutique

hotel was battered by the 2005 hurricanes but has since undergone massive refurbishment, with a brand-new open-air dining room (see opposite), and a glorious 'infinity' pool overlooking the beach. The units are modern and contemporary in style (all pastel shades and muted lighting), but they don't have kitchens and only the more expensive have any kind of view.

Long-Term Rental

Renting a house is often the best-value way to visit the island, especially for families. Fully furnished two-bedroom houses cost around NZ\$250 to NZ\$400 per week.

Jetsave Travel (Map pp442-3; ☎ 27707; www.jetsave.co.nz; Ara Maire Nui, Avarua)

Nikao Holiday Homes (☎/fax 20168; aretai@oyster.net.nz)

Rarotonga Realty (Map pp442-3; ☎/fax 26664; www.rarotonga.co.nz; Ara Tapu, Avarua)

Shekinah Homes (Map pp442-3; ☎/fax 26004; www.shekinah.co.nz; Ara Tapu, Avarua)

EATING

There's a wide choice of restaurants on Rarotonga, from European fine dining to fish and chips. Most top-end hotels have an in-house restaurant that's also open to non-guests.

Cafés & Quick Eats

There are several good cafés scattered around the island serving coffee, cakes and light lunches, and plenty of rock-bottom budget takeaway stalls in Avarua for late-night burgers and post-pub grub.

AVARUA & AROUND

Café (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21283; Ara Tapu; cakes & muffins NZ\$2-5, lunch from NZ\$8; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) The choicest of several great cafés in Avarua, serving up the best fresh-roasted cappuccinos and lattes on the island. A great spot to kick back, read the papers and tuck into an early-morning muffin before heading into town.

Blue Note Café (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23236; breakfast NZ\$8-17, mains NZ\$8-18; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A colourful open-air café-bar next door to the Banana Court, which is as good for mid-morning coffee as for late-afternoon lunch. Tasty salads, burgers, curries and sandwiches are all on the eclectic menu, and there's a selection of daily-changing specials.

Mama's Café (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23379; Ara Maire Nui; sandwiches NZ\$4-6, cooked breakfasts & main meals NZ\$7-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This cut-price café beside the Foodland supermarket is always jam-packed with locals tucking into a hearty cooked breakfast and a mug of coffee, especially on market day. It's popular for cheap hot lunches, sandwiches and homemade ice cream.

Palace Takeaways (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21438; Avatiu Harbour; burgers NZ\$4-8, meals NZ\$10-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) The top takeaway in Avarua, serving massive burgers and similar fast-food fare from a roadside stall beside Avatiu Harbour.

Just Burgers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22778; burgers NZ\$2.50-10; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) On the main road in Pue, 1.6km east of Avarua, this trusty joint makes inexpensive American-style hamburgers, French fries and milk shakes.

Aramoana Fish & Chips (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21250; NZ\$7-10; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Right beside Avatiu Harbour.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Maire Nui Gardens & Café (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22796; cakes from NZ\$3; light lunches from NZ\$7-15; ☺ Mon-Fri) A glorious café on the southern side of the island, with a thatched terrace offering views over botanical grounds and tranquil lily ponds. Owner Hinano MacQuarie's homemade cakes and afternoon teas are well known all over the island, and afterwards you can take a relaxing stroll around the gardens (NZ\$3).

Fruits of Rarotonga (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21509; light breakfasts NZ\$3-5; ☺ Mon-Sat) Homemade jams and tropical-flavoured chutneys (from NZ\$3.60) are divine at this little shop opposite Tikioki beach, but it's good for smoothies, cakes and fruit juices too. The owners will gladly guard your stuff while you check out the snorkelling in the lagoon opposite the café.

Saltwater Café (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20020; ☺ lunch & dinner Sun-Fri) Another popular beach-style hang-out on the island's south coast, offering inexpensive food and delicious shakes and smoothies in a great location in Titikaveka.

Café Maori (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20012; snacks NZ\$3.50-15) Beside the grocery store in Kavera, this vividly coloured roadside café is a decent option for burgers, sandwiches and breakfasts.

Restaurants

AVARUA & AROUND

Trader Jack's (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26464; www.traderjacks.co.uk; starters NZ\$12-16, mains NZ\$11-25, platters NZ\$50) Long a favourite haunt for Rarotonga's smart set, Trader Jack's was all but wiped out by the 2005 cyclones, and though the old ramshackle charm may have disappeared into the lagoon, the bar and restaurant have taken the opportunity for a complete overhaul. The nautical-themed restaurant offers top-notch fish dishes and super-sized seafood platters.

Café Salsa (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22215; mains NZ\$8-25; ☺ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat) More Auckland-chic than island-style, this vibrant café-restaurant is one of Avarua's hottest spots for lunch, with a varied menu and a huge specials board, ranging from Caesar salads and Cajun-style chicken to wood-fired pizzas.

Portofino (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26480; Ara Tapu; pasta NZ\$18-25, pizza NZ\$16-27, mains NZ\$25-35; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) Rarotonga has a surprising number of Italian restaurants, but Portofino is the oldest and still the best. Traditional pastas and pizzas are served in the relaxed, pastel-coloured dining room, or you can have takeaways delivered anywhere on the island.

Paulina's Polynesian Restaurant (Map pp442-3; ☎ 28889; burgers NZ\$4-8, mains NZ\$7-15; ☺ lunch & dinner) If you're after traditional Polynesian cooking in Avarua, Paulina's is about the

only place you'll find it. Don't expect fine dining – it's more an open-air roadside diner than a restaurant – but classic recipes including *ika mata*, *eke* (curried octopus) and coconut chicken are always available.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Vaima Restaurant & Bar (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26123; starters NZ\$8-15, mains NZ\$24-30) This family-run restaurant is by far our favourite place on the south coast, with a delightful island-themed dining room (complete with split bamboo walls and traditional art), a beachfront patio and breezy outside terrace. You won't find fresher fish or better food anywhere on the island.

Flame Tree (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25123; www.flametreerestaurant.com; starters NZ\$9-14, mains NZ\$21-38; ☺ dinner) Another renowned restaurant on Rarotonga's southern side, perhaps not quite as impressive as it was during its heyday, but still highly recommended. There's an attractive outside courtyard and a more formal dining room inside, but it's the top-notch food and pan-global flavours that pull the punters in.

Kikau Hut (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26860; starters NZ\$9-17, mains NZ\$22-28; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) This circular, candlelit restaurant in 'Arorangi specialises in relaxed international dining. There's regular live entertainment courtesy of local bands, and the atmosphere is on the easy side – leave the black tie at home.

Right on the Beach Bar & Restaurant (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22461; lunch NZ\$12-25, dinner NZ\$24-28; ☺ lunch & dinner) Huddled under a thatched canopy, this beachfront restaurant trumpets itself as the only place where you can indulge in fine-dining cuisine and feel the sand between your toes. The twice-weekly island night and buffet is understandably popular – book well ahead.

Pawpaw Patch (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27189; mains NZ\$23-28; ☺ breakfast & dinner) With its bold primary colours and brasserie atmosphere, the excellent restaurant at the Moana Sands hotel brings metropolitan style to the south coast of Rarotonga. The menu is eclectic and inventive – Fijian-style curries sit alongside gourmet kebabs and pan-fried fish – and there's a weekly barbecue.

Sails Restaurant (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27349; lunch NZ\$7-22, dinner mains NZ\$18-30, desserts NZ\$8) This lively oceanfront bistro-bar is equally adept at serving up light bites for lunch as heartier

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Tamarind House (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26487; www.tamarind.co.nz; starters NZ\$12-25, mains NZ\$25-35; ☺ lunch & dinner) Rarotonga's top chef, Sue Carruthers, founded her reputation at the Flame Tree, but she's now taken up residence in this sweeping colonial-style building on the island's north shore. Book your table on the grand veranda and sit back for the finest food on Rarotonga. Sue combines the freshest island ingredients with delicious European-inspired cuisine. The atmosphere is elegant and classically South Seas – you half-expect to see Somerset Maugham sipping a good claret and scribbling away at a nearby table. Smart, sophisticated and simply scrumptious.

ISLAND NIGHTS

If there's one thing you *have* to check out on Rarotonga, it's an island night. These spectacular shows, combining traditional dance and music (*karioi*) with a lavish buffet of local food (*kai*), are regularly held all over the island. Dancing, drumming, close harmony singing and coconut husking are always on the itinerary, but fire-juggling, acrobatics and storytelling are often thrown into the mix.

Island nights are held regularly at all the large resorts, including the Rarotongan Beach Resort (p449), the Edgewater (p449) and the Pacific Resort (p449). You'll pay between NZ\$10 and NZ\$25 for the show on its own, or NZ\$45 to NZ\$55 for the show and buffet. There's also a weekly island night at the Staircase Restaurant & Bar (below), costing NZ\$25 including food or NZ\$5 for the show only. Ask at the tourist authority for island night timetables.

evening meals. It's especially popular with holidaying yachties and beach bums – the island's sailing club is right opposite, and the open-air terrace looks right over nearby Muri Lagoon.

Self-Catering

The best (and cheapest) supermarkets are both in Avarua.

Foodland (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23378; Ara Maire Nui; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) The best all-round supermarket, with fresh bread, fruit and vegetables, packaged goods and a deli counter.

CITC Supermarket (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22000; Ara Tapu; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) Halfway to the airport from Avarua, CITC is good for tinned and packaged produce, but the range of fresh goods is pretty slim.

Wigmore's Superstore (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20206; ☎ 6am-9pm) The only proper grocery store on the south coast, but prices are much higher than in Avarua. There's also a small liquor store, and it's the only large supermarket that's open on Sunday.

Punanga Nui Market is a great place to pick up fresh produce – Saturday is the best day to go for food, but you'll need to get there early. And look out for the roadside stalls where you can often pick up bags of fresh veg for much less than in the supermarkets.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT Bars & Nightclubs

The big night out on Rarotonga is Friday, but Saturday is quickly catching up in popularity. On Friday most places stay open till around 2am; on Saturday the doors are banged shut at the stroke of midnight to avoid high-jinks on the Sabbath.

Most restaurants have small in-house bars where you can drop by for a quiet drink. Resort bars are open to nonguests, but they're a pricey place for a tippie.

There are several organised pub-crawls of the island's main night-spots, including the **Friday Night Life Tour** (☎ 25435) at the Edgewater Resort and the **Nitelife Tour** (☎ 25800) at the Rarotongan Beach Resort, which come complete with minibuses and stone-cold sober driver. Several hostels, including **Aremango Guesthouse** (☎ 24362) and **Backpackers International Hostel** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21847) run less-organised (and rather less genteel) Friday-night tours.

AVARUA & AROUND

The main after-dark action is centred on Avarua.

Whatever Bar & Grill (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22299; Ara Tapu) Perched on a wooden sea-view platform just off the main road out of Avarua, this is the top choice with Avarua's trendy young things – it can get lively on a Friday night, and the winding stairs down to the ground floor can be rather challenging if you've enjoyed yourself just a little *too* much.

Staircase Restaurant & Bar (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22254; Ara Tapu) Upstairs behind the Topshape Health & Fitness Centre building, the Staircase is always popular. The bar's decked out with atmospheric island décor and has regular live bands and DJs, as well as a weekly island night.

Trader Jack's (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26464) An old favourite with Rarotonga's upmarket crowd – you'll find tourists and yachties rubbing shoulders with politicians and businessmen in the downstairs bar. Keep an eye out for 'Gentleman Jack' himself – he can often be seen propping up the bar.

RSA Bar (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20590) Opposite the airport, the Returned Servicemen's Association has a cheap, cheerful bar that gets absolutely rammed on Mondays for 'Tattoo Night' (a potent local tippie flavoured with cranberry).

Hideaway Bar (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22224; Cook's Corner Arcade) As its name suggests, the Hideaway is tucked away and is pretty small: on busy weekend nights everyone crams in to check out the live bands, and there are usually DJs a couple of nights a week.

CocoBar (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29879; Ara Tapu) Another popular spot for the older crowd, with a large, lively bar sheltered under a thatched roof and a back garden that plays host to regular live bands.

TJ's Nightclub (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24722; Ara Tapu; admission Fri & Sat NZ\$2) Avarua's main club mainly caters for the 18 to 25 crowd, with plenty of ear-busting tunes, UV lights and hot-and-sweaty dancing.

Banana Court Bar (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23397) Once the best-known drinking hole in the Cook Islands, the cavernous Banana Court is far from the den of iniquity it once was, but it's still a decent place to find a drink. There are late-night discos on Friday and Saturday. It's also popular with the island's gay crowd.

Cinemas

Empire Cinema (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23189; Ara Tapu; adult/child NZ\$8/4) This cinema shows nightly flicks on a couple of decent-sized screens, and there are usually half-price tickets on Thursday.

SHOPPING Arts & Crafts

If you're in search of traditional island handicrafts, there are plenty of shops around Avarua selling local basketwork, shell jewellery, necklaces, carvings and musical instruments. Many islands have their own speciality handicrafts, including *rito* (coconut-fibre) fans and hats from the Northern Group, and *pupu ei* necklaces from Mangaia. Beware of cheap imports from China, Asia and other Pacific islands – ask if you're in any doubt about an item's provenance.

Mike Tavioni (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24003; Ara Metua, Atupa) You can visit the workshop of Rarotonga's most renowned sculptor and

carver, on the back road near Avarua. See his stone carvings at the Punanga Nui Market and the National Culture Centre.

Island Craft (☎ 22009; Ara Maire Nui) This is the best-stocked souvenir shop in Avarua, though some of its stuff is pretty tacky.

Punanga Nui Market, the **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu, Avarua) and **Bergman & Sons Crafts Store** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21901; Banana Court) have the best selections of local craftwork.

The Cook Islands has a thriving visual arts scene – check out the **Arasena Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23476; Banana Court) and the **Kenwall Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 25526; Ara Maire Nui), both in Avarua, or the Art Studio over in 'Arorangi.

Black Pearl Jewellery

The Cook Islands are important producers of black pearls, which are much rarer than their cream-coloured cousins. A single pearl could cost you anything from NZ\$5 to well over NZ\$1000. The largest retailers include **Bergman & Sons Pearl Store** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21902; Tutakimoa Rd); **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu); **Goldmine** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24823), on Avarua's main road; and **Moana Gems** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22312) in the CITC Shopping Centre.

Pareu & Other Clothing

The quintessential item of clothing on Rarotonga is the *pareu* (sarong). Printed *pareu* cost around NZ\$10 to NZ\$15; handmade ones are around NZ\$25 to NZ\$35. Printed T-shirts (from NZ\$10 to NZ\$25) and retina-threatening floral shirts (from NZ\$20 to NZ\$95) are sold in several shops around Avarua – check out **Vonnia's Store** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20927; Ara Maire Nui), **Tuki's Pareu** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 25537; Ara Maire Nui) and **Mareko** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20548; Ara Maire Nui).

Perfumes, Soaps & Coconut Oil

Perfumes of Rarotonga (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26238) On the main road in Matavera, this place makes its own perfumes, soaps, liqueurs and scented oils. Handmade coconut soap costs around NZ\$3.50; perfume and cologne starts at NZ\$14 a bottle. There's another outlet in the Cooks Corner Arcade in Avarua, or you can buy the products at the Perfume Factory (Map pp442-3) on Ara Metua.

Stamps & Coins

Philatelic Bureau (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29336) Sells Cook Islands coins and bank notes, plus sets of Cook Islands stamps (highly prized by philatelists). The unique \$3 Cook Islands note is available in two designs.

AITUTAKI

pop 1800 / area 18.3 sq km

Curling gracefully around one of the most breathtakingly beautiful lagoons in the South Pacific, hook-shaped Aitutaki is the second-most visited island in the Cooks. It's the archetypal image of a desert-island getaway, with a palm-covered mainland and a sprinkling of deserted islets, and a powder-blue lagoon that's just crying out to be explored. It's a world away from Rarotonga, which will seem like a bustling metropolis once you've spent a few days on Aitutaki. It doesn't take long before you're lulled into the laid-back pace of life on the island, and after a while even snorkelling and lazing around on the sand will start to feel like dynamic activity.

HISTORY

Legends tell of the first Polynesian settlers, led by Ru from 'Avaiki, arriving at Aitutaki by canoe. Ru arrived with his wives and family at the Akitua *motu* (now the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort). Aitutaki's original name was Ararau 'Enua O Ru Ki Te Moana (Ru in Search of Land over Sea) – the present name, *a'i tutaki*, means 'to keep the fire going'.

Aitutaki's European discoverer was Captain William Bligh, who arrived on the *Bounty* on 11 April 1789 (17 days before the famous mutiny). In 1821 John Williams left Papeiha and Vahapata here to convert the islanders to Christianity. The 1850s saw Aitutaki become a favourite port of call for whaling ships scouring the Pacific. During WWII a contingent of American soldiers arrived to build two long runways, with predictable results on the island's birthrate.

ORIENTATION

You can undertake a tour of Aitutaki in a few hours. The island is shaped like a curved fishhook: at the point you'll find

O'tu Beach and the private Aitutaki Lagoon Resort; slightly to the north there's the airstrip and international airport. On the west side of the island you'll find most of the hotels and the main town of Arutanga. On the east coast are the small villages of Tautu, Vaipae and Vaipeka. The numerous *motu* around the edge of Aitutaki's lagoon are uninhabited.

INFORMATION

Ask at your hotel if you should boil the water before drinking it. Many places get their drinking water from separate rain tanks.

There aren't any dogs on Aitutaki (the island's canine population was blamed for a leprosy outbreak) but there are plenty of roosters – bring earplugs if you're planning on sleeping in.

The main police office is behind the Orongo Centre near the wharf in Arutanga.

ANZ Bank agent (☎ 31418; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Located inside Mango Trading next to Mae-Jo's Takeaway. There's an ATM outside.

Hospital (☎ 31002; 🕒 24hr) On the hill behind Arutanga.

Post office & Telecom office (☎ 31470; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) In the Administration Centre in Arutanga.

SpiderCo Internet Lounge (☎ 31780; lounge@aitutaki.net.ck; per min NZ\$0.50) The only Internet lounge on Aitutaki.

Visitor information centre (☎ 31767; retire-tourism@aitutaki.net.ck; 🕒 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri)

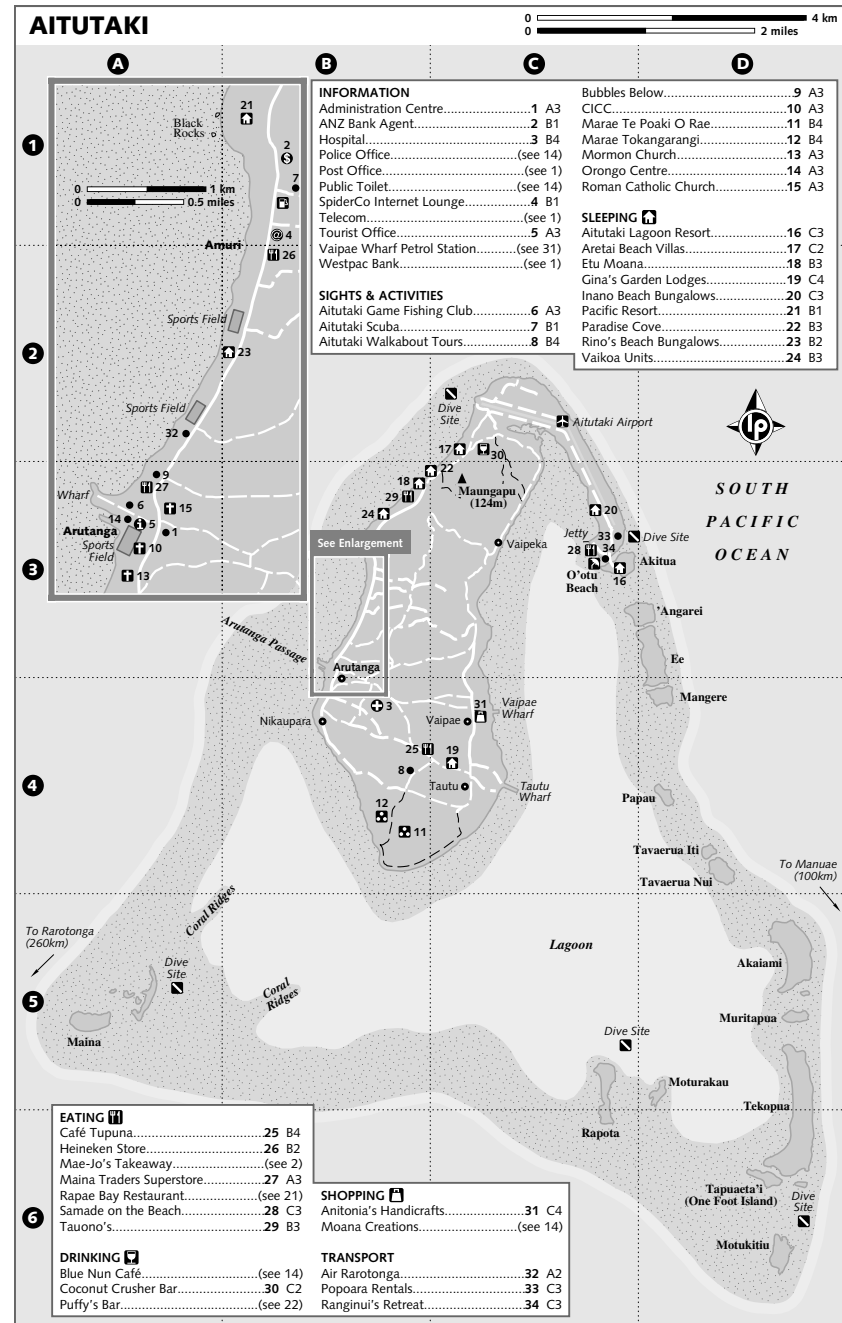
Westpac (☎ 31714; 🕒 9.30am-3pm Mon-Thu) In the Administration Centre in Arutanga.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

Air Rarotonga (www.airraro.com; Arutanga ☎ 31888; Rarotonga ☎ 22888) operates several flights to Aitutaki from Rarotonga from Monday to Saturday, as well as one flight on Sunday. Regular fares are from NZ\$170 each way; cheaper fares are available if you book early. There are also direct flights from Aitutaki to 'Atiu every Tuesday, which can be included as part of the Island Hopper Pass (Rarotonga-Aitutaki-'Atiu-Rarotonga, from NZ\$400).

Aitutaki Day Tours run by Air Rarotonga operate from Monday to Saturday, leaving Rarotonga at 8am and returning at 5.30pm. The cost is from NZ\$400 per person, including flights and a lagoon cruise.



Transport ships en route to the Northern Group occasionally stop at Aitutaki. See p476 for details of the main shipping operators.

Getting Around

Island Tours (☎ 31379) offers a minibus transfer service that costs NZ\$10 to and from the airport. Make arrangements with Willy at the airport. The larger resorts provide transfers for their guests.

Various places rent bicycles (NZ\$5 per day), mopeds (NZ\$25), cars and jeeps (NZ\$70 to NZ\$100). Try **Popoara Rentals** (☎ 31739; www.popoara.com; O'otu Beach), **Ranginui's Retreat** (☎ 31657; O'otu Beach) or, for the best range, **Rino's Beach Bungalows & Rentals** (☎ 31197; Arutanga).

AROUND THE ISLAND Arutanga

Even by Cook Islands standards, Aitutaki's only town is astonishingly quiet. Sleepy isn't really the word – even on weekdays, when the few shops in town are open, you'll have a tough time spotting any signs of life. The island's main harbour is by the Orongo Centre in the heart of town, and only springs into action when a cargo boat from Rarotonga is due to arrive. The weather-beaten **CIC** church near the Administration Centre was built in 1828 making it the oldest in the Cooks. Notable features include some lovely stained-glass windows, some fine carved wood panelling and an old anchor that's precariously suspended from the ceiling.

Marae

Aitutaki's *marae* are notable for their large stones. Orongo *marae* used to sit where the Blue Nun Café is today, in Arutanga. The main road goes through a large *marae*, and on the inland road between Nikaupara and Tautu there are some of the most magnificent *marae* on the island – including Tokangarangi and Te Poaki O Rae – but you'll find that most of them have been reclaimed by the jungle.

Maungapu

The 30-minute hike to the top of Maungapu (124m), Aitutaki's highest peak, is worth the effort for great views over the entire atoll and the sapphire-blue lagoon. The

track starts off pretty gently opposite the bungalows of Paradise Cove, but gets more challenging towards the summit.

Aitutaki Lagoon

Packed with underwater life and ringed by 15 palm-covered *motu*, Aitutaki's stunning lagoon is one of the treasures of the South Pacific. **Maina** (Little Girl) offers some of the best snorkelling spots and is home to the red-tailed tropicbird, once prized for its crimson feathers; the wreck of the *Alexander*, a cargo freighter wrecked in the 1930s, is nearby. **Akaiami** is where the old TEAL flying boats landed to refuel on the trans-Pacific 'Coral Route' between Fiji, Samoa and Tahiti. **Tapuaeta'i** (One Foot Island) is the best-known *motu*, fringed by white beaches and divided from its neighbour, Tekopua, by a deepwater channel that's teeming with tropical fish.

ACTIVITIES

Swimming & Snorkelling

The best swimming, snorkelling and beaches are around the *motu*, especially near Maina and Akitua (both accessible by boat; see opposite). Opposite Mae-Jo's Takeaway, south of Black Rocks, you can walk all the way to the outer reef on a coral causeway that starts 50m from the shore. The nicest places to swim on the main island are O'otu Beach and the wharfs at Vaipae and Tautu; the rest of the island's east coast is mainly mud and mangrove swamp, and not much fun for swimming.

Diving

Unsurprisingly the scuba diving is fantastic in Aitutaki. The visibility is great, and features include drop-offs, multilevels, wall dives and cave systems; the wreck of the *Alexander* is also a popular diving spot.

There are two professional diving operators on the island. Both run morning and afternoon dives; single-dive trips cost around NZ\$90 to NZ\$100 including gear, with discounts for multiple dives.

Aitutaki Scuba (☎ 31103; scuba@aitutaki.net.ck) is the longest-running outfit and is affiliated with PADI and NAUI.

Bubbles Below (☎ 31537; www.diveaitutaki.com) is a newer operator that has a great reputation with visiting divers, mainly thanks to the entertaining manager Onu (Turtle) Hewett.

TOURS

Most of the tour operators on Aitutaki don't have offices. If you want to arrange a cruise, call the operators or ask the people you're staying with to arrange it. The cruise operator will come and pick you up directly from your hotel.

Fishing

The best place to find out about fishing is the **Aitutaki Game Fishing Club** (☎ 31379), by the wharf in Arutanga. Prices for fishing trips range from around NZ\$80 to NZ\$150 – if you're heading beyond the reef, make sure your boat has lifejackets and a first-aid kit.

Aitutaki Sea Charter (☎ 31281)

Baxter's Fishing Charters (☎ 31025; baxter@aitutaki.net.ck)

Vaikore Bone Fishing Charters (☎ 31292)

Lagoon Cruises

Don't miss the chance to take a lagoon cruise. There are several operators that cruise around the *motu* and snorkelling spots, though some cruises visit more islands than others. All operators provide snorkelling gear, a barbecue fish lunch and a stop at Tapuaeta'i (One Foot Island). Remember to take your passport to get it stamped at the One Foot 'post office'.

Aitutaki Adventures (☎ 31171) Lagoon cruises (around NZ\$65) run Sunday to Friday and include snorkelling, fish-feeding and a barbecue lunch on Tapuaeta'i.

Aitutaki Glass Bottom Boat (☎ 31790; story@aitutaki.net.ck) Aitutaki's only glass-bottomed boat chugs around the lagoon and the outside reef.

Bishop's Lagoon Cruises (☎ 31009; bishopcruz@aitutaki.net.ck) Tours visit Maina, Moturakau and

Tapuaeta'i (NZ\$65); there's also a tour to Akaiami and Tapuaeta'i (NZ\$35), as well as sunset, honeymoon cruises and *motu* drop-offs.

Kia-Orana Cruises (☎ 31442; kruise@aitutaki.net.ck) The main tour visits Maiana, Moturakau, Honeymoon Island and Tapuaeta'i (NZ\$65). Tours run Sunday to Friday.

Paradise Islands Lagoon Tours (☎ 31248; titiaitonga@aitutaki.net.ck; cruises NZ\$65) Cruises are on a Polynesian-style catamaran, the *Titi Ai Tonga* (Wind from the South), which has a roof and onboard bar.

Teking (☎ 31582; teking@aitutaki.net.ck) Offers a main 'Four Island' cruise to Akaiami, Tapuaeta'i, Honeymoon Island and Maiana (NZ\$65).

Other Tours

Aitutaki Walkabout Tours (☎ 31757; www.aitutaki-walkabout.com) offers a walkabout tour (adult/child NZ\$40/10) concentrating on the island's flora and fauna, and a 'discovery safari' (adult/child NZ\$55/10) that visits the island's main historical sites in a Jeep. Both tours run twice daily Sunday to Friday. During crab season, there's a night-time crab hunt (adult/child NZ\$45/10).

Chloe & Nane's Tropicool Tour (☎ 31248) offers village and *marae* tours in a small minibus (NZ\$30) from Monday to Saturday, as well as a popular sunset tour to see Aitutaki's rare blue lorikeet.

SLEEPING Budget

Paradise Cove (☎ 31218; www.paradisecove.co.ck; house s/d NZ\$35/45, beach hut s/d NZ\$45/60, bungalows NZ\$160) They're on a glorious beach shaded by coconut palms, but the thatched huts and pole-houses of the Paradise Cove don't quite live up to their picture-perfect image. Most of the budget rooms are actually inside the run-down one-storey house; outside, there are several bargain-basement beach huts (complete with bed, mosquito net, bar-fridge and not much else). The pricier pole-houses have a small bedroom and tiny kitchen leading onto a beachfront veranda.

Vaikoa Units (☎/fax 31145; s/d/tr NZ\$55/75/85, beachfront bungalows NZ\$110-130) This motel has been a time-honoured option for budget travellers on Aitutaki for years, and some of the self-contained units are showing their age. The older tin-roofed motel units are a little murky, but they're cheap and fairly clean. The newly finished beachfront bungalows are much lighter and roomier, and worth the extra cost.

TOP FIVE ISLAND NIGHTS

A highly subjective top five of the best places to shake your hips and knock your knees in the Cook Islands.

- Right on the Beach Bar & Restaurant (Rarotonga, p451)
- Rarotongan Beach Resort (Rarotonga, p449)
- Staircase (Rarotonga, p452)
- Blue Nun Café (Aitutaki, p459)
- Atiu Villas ('Atiu, p462)

Midrange

Aretai Beach Villas (☎ 31645; www.aretaibeachvillas.com; bungalows NZ\$250) Halfway between Arutanga and the airport, these beautiful sea-view bungalows are a home away from home, with lovingly finished interiors, wooden floors and tastefully chosen furniture. There are two bedrooms in every bungalow and the kitchens are probably better-equipped than the one you've got back home.

Inano Beach Bungalows (☎ 31758; www.inano.beach.com; lagoon-view/beachfront bungalows NZ\$130/160) Out towards the airport, these secluded new lodges have been constructed using local materials wherever possible. The ironwood balconies, mahogany tabletops and fibre-plait walls have a hand-finished, authentic feel, though they might be too rustic for some. You'll need wheels.

Rino's Beach Bungalows (☎ 31197; rinos@aitutaki.net; c; d NZ\$120, beachfront bungalows NZ\$185-290) The only out-and-out motel accommodation on Aitutaki, with a selection of modern apartments near the beach and several rooms in the twin-storey buildings nearer the road. There's not much island character to them but the units are decent value and most have a sea view.

Top End

Etu Moana (☎ 31458; www.etumoana.com; villas NZ\$400; 🍷) These extravagant thatch-roofed villas have been luxuriously finished, from the

gleaming Tasmanian oak floors, lofty roofs and vast beds to the ultra-romantic outdoor showers and teak-wood sun decks. Hand-carved ornaments decorate each villa, and there's a tear-drop pool complete with rock garden, sun-shaded tables and a deluxe honesty bar.

Aitutaki Lagoon Resort (☎ 31201; www.aitutakilagoonresort.com; garden/beachfront/over-water bungalows NZ\$500/650/1330, beachfront st NZ\$900; 🍷 🍷) If you're looking to do Aitutaki in style, then this glorious resort is hard to beat. Perched on its own private island, reached by ferryboat, the resort offers a range of delightful bungalows, from thatched garden villas right through to lavish suites on wooden poles above the lagoon.

Pacific Resort (☎ 31720; www.pacificresort.com; beachfront bungalows/st/villas NZ\$760/1020/1330; 🍷 🍷) Another splendid resort with sky-high rates, this hotel pulls out all the luxury stops to cater for its exacting clientele. The minute you walk through the sumptuous foyer, complete with an Oriental lily pond and a reception desk the size of several family cars, you know you're in for something special. Private sun decks, cavernous bedrooms and magnificent ocean-view sitting rooms are just the start.

EATING

Café Tupuna (☎ 31678; Tautu; mains NZ\$26-30; 🍷 dinner) The nearest thing to a gourmet restaurant on Aituaiki, in a rural setting high up behind Arutanga. Freshly caught fish and island flavours form the backbone of the menu, and the garden location is one of the most atmospheric places to eat on the island.

Samade on the Beach (☎ 31526; O'otu Beach; lunch NZ\$7-10, dinner NZ\$13-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Samade is an ideal spot for a light lunch by the lagoon; its sand-floored restaurant is huddled under a thatched canopy opposite the beach. The food's not fantastically exciting – fish, salads and steaks are the mainstays – but there are regular island nights and there's also a great Sunday barbecue.

Rape Bay Restaurant (☎ 31720; lunch from NZ\$10, mains NZ\$25-45; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Top dining at the Pacific Resort, serving Pacific fusion cuisine and huge seafood platters in a tastefully lit patio setting.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Tauono's (☎ 31562; cakes NZ\$3-6, dinner NZ\$25-40; 🍷 afternoon tea 3-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, dinner by reservation) This tiny garden café is run by Sonja, an Austrian chef, and her Aitutakian husband, Tauono. Renowned for its coconut cake and afternoon teas, Tauono's also offers sumptuous home-cooked cuisine served alfresco – meals are cooked to taste, and most of the organic produce is sourced from the higgledy-piggledy on-site garden. Stop by during the day to pick up a homemade cake or stock up with fresh fruit and veg from Sonja's shop (open 10am to 5pm Monday to Friday) – if you're really lucky, you might even see some of Tauono's traditional woodcarvings.

Mae-Jo's Takeaway (☎ 31820; mains NZ\$12-32; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) This Chinese-themed takeaway joint on the main road into Arutanga does the standard range of chow mein and fried-rice dishes.

Market (Orongo Centre; 🍷 7am-3pm Mon-Sat) Aitutaki's market is pretty quiet during the day, but get there early and you can usually pick up fresh fish and local vegetables.

Maina Traders Superstore (Arutanga) and the **Heineken Store** (Amuri) are the main places to pick up self-catering supplies, though you'll find the prices are a little higher than on Rarotonga.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The island nights on Aitutaki are arguably even better than the ones on Rarotonga. You'll pay NZ\$25 to NZ\$50 for the per-

formance and buffet, but you can usually watch the show for free if you buy a few drinks.

Coconut Crusher Bar (☎ 31283; 🍷 nightly Mon-Sat) This lively local bar looks like it could blow down in a gentle breeze, but despite the ramshackle design, it's the island's main nightspot. Shake your booty at the regular island nights or roll up for the weekend DJs.

Samade (☎ 31526; O'otu Beach) Another popular spot for drinking, dinner and island nights, with a great view of the lagoon thrown in for free. The only drawback is the out-of-the-way location; luckily, transfers can be arranged.

Blue Nun Café (☎ 31604; Orongo Centre; 🍷 dinner & drinks Tue-Sun) This cavernous café-bar is inside the island's old banana-packing plant, with a vast concrete dance floor where weekend discos and island nights kick into action. There's a large bar and breezy dining area where you can pick up snacks, sandwiches and burgers.

Puffy's Bar (☎ 31317; 🍷 dinner & drinks Mon-Sat) A tiny little bar popular with locals and backpackers from nearby Paradise Cove. Cheap booze and basic meals (fish and chips, burgers) are available; there's also a weekly island night.

SHOPPING

Moana Creations (☎ 31718; 🍷 8.30am-3pm Mon-Sat) Island crafts and souvenirs are sold in the Orongo Centre at this shop.

Anitonia's Handicrafts (☎ 31207; Vaipae) Near Vaipae Wharf, Anitonia's is worth a look, but the opening hours are somewhat erratic.

Ask at your hotel if there are any local craftsmen with work to sell.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Gina's Garden Lodges (☎ 31058; www.ginasaitutaki.com; s/d/tr NZ\$75/120/150; 🍷) These four lodges in Tautu, peacefully set around a secluded garden awash with fruit trees and flowers, represent perhaps the best value anywhere on Aitutaki. Run by one of Aitutaki's three *ariki* (high chiefs), Manarangi Tutai Ariki, the four lodges are all fully self-contained, with spacious, high-ceilinged bedrooms and large verandas overlooking the gardens and the decked swimming pool; there's also a small loft sleeping area that's tailor-made for kids. The old-fashioned décor could do with a little freshening up, but let's be honest – how often do you get the chance to stay with a queen?

MANUAE

The tiny, unpopulated islets of **Manuae** (population zero, area 6.8 sq km) and **Te Au O Tu**, jointly known as Manuae, lie 101km from Aitutaki Atoll and belong to the people of Aitutaki. These islets are the only parts of a huge volcanic cone to break the ocean's surface. The cone measures 56km from east to west, 24km north to south. The other high point on the rim of this vast cone is the **Astronomer Bank**, 13km west of Manuae, which comes to within 300m of the ocean's surface.

Copra-cutting parties visit Manuae from Aitutaki occasionally, as they have done for a century or more. In 1823 the missionary John Williams visited the island and found about 60 inhabitants. There were only a dozen or so in the late 1820s, and missionaries took them to Aitutaki. Later, various Europeans made temporary homes on Manuae. The best known was William Marsters, who in 1863 relocated to Palmerston with his three wives.

PALMERSTON

pop 52 / area 2 sq km

All the residents of the tiny island of Palmerston, halfway between the Southern and Northern Groups, owe their existence to just one man – the prolific (and priapic) William Marsters, an English trader who first set foot on the island in 1863. Over the next 30 years Marsters set about creating his own island dynasty, ably assisted by his three Maori wives – and today, the three main families on Palmerston can all trace their ancestry back to the original Mr Marsters. In fact, you'll find Marsterses scattered throughout the Cooks and the rest of Australasia – it's thought the total number of William's descendants is now well into triple figures.

There's no organised accommodation on Palmerston, but the traditional spirit of Cook Islands hospitality is alive and well – it's customary that the first family to greet a visitor provides them with food and lodging for the rest of their stay. If you're planning on travelling to Palmerston, contact the island secretary **Tere Marsters** (☎ 37684, 54660; palmerstonisland@hotmail.com). The only way to reach the island is by inter-island freighter or private yacht (see p476).

'ATI

The rocky, reef-fringed island of 'Atiu was once the most feared island in the region, renowned for its ferocious warriors and their ruthlessness in battle. Ironically, 'Atiu is now better known for altogether gentler pursuits – it's the eco-capital of the Cooks, a haven for naturalists and bird-lovers, as well as adventurous travellers in search of an island with a more traditional edge. The five main villages (Areora, Tengtangi, Mapumai, Te'enui and Ngatiarua) are perched on the island's central plateau, which is surrounded by a band of fertile swampland and lush taro plantations. Further towards the coast is 'Atiu's most dramatic natural feature, the *makatea*, a ring of upthrust rock that once formed the island's exterior reef. Covered with rich forest and honeycombed with caves, the *makatea* makes a fantastic spot for hiking and nature-watching, especially

at Anatakitaki Cave, the only known home of the *kopeka*.

HISTORY

'Atiu's traditional name is 'Enua Manu ('Land of Birds' or 'Land of Insects'). Along with its neighbouring islands of Ma'uke and Mitiaro, 'Atiu makes up the sub-group of Nga Pu Toru (Three Roots). Ma'uke and Mitiaro often bore the brunt of 'Atiu's territorial ambitions, and for much of their history the smaller islands were ruled by 'Atiuan *ariki*. The European discovery of 'Atiu is credited to James Cook on 3 April 1777. Rongomatane, the leading 'Atiuan chief, was converted to Christianity after the missionaries passed his challenge of eating sugar cane from the sacred grove; he subsequently ordered all the idols on the island to be burnt. The arrival of the missionaries Williams and Papeiha is still celebrated here on Gospel Day on 19 July.

INFORMATION

'Atiu Tourism Society (☎ 33031; www.atiutourism.com)

ADC Shop (☎ 33028; Areora) Provides cash advances on credit cards.

Centre Store (☎ 33773; Te'enui) Travellers cheques (NZ dollars only) can be cashed here.

Post office & Telecom office (☎ 33680; fax 33683; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri) In the same building, north of Mapumai village.

www.atiu.info Excellent information resource on 'Atiu.

TRANSPORT

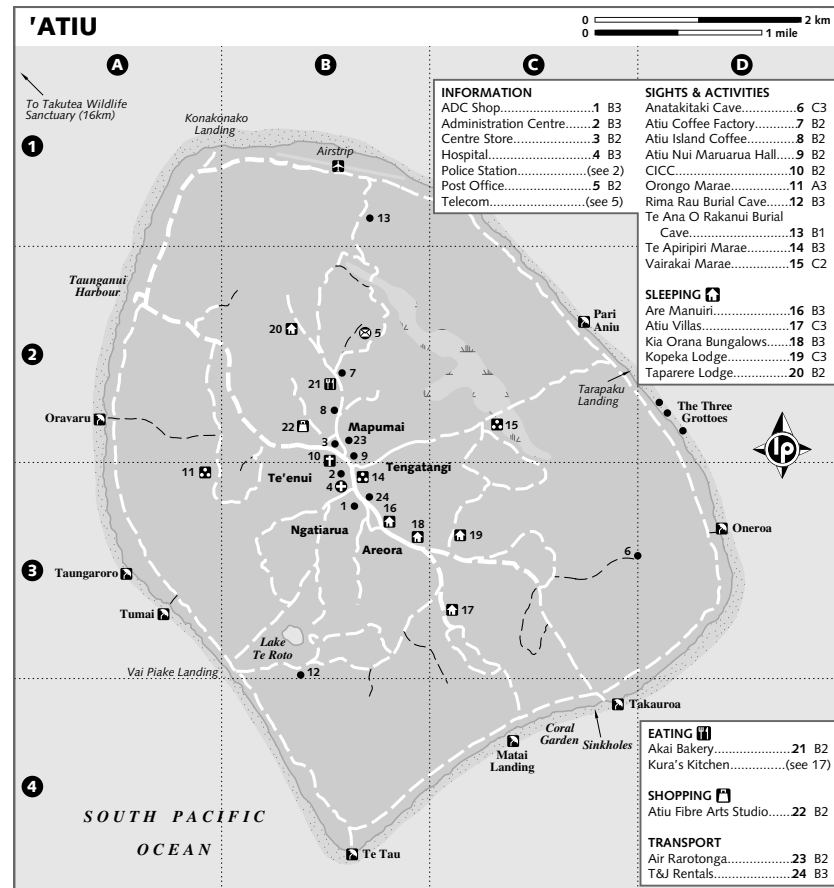
Getting There & Away

Air Rarotonga (☎ 33888; www.airraro.com) flies between Rarotonga and 'Atiu Monday to Saturday. Return fares cost from NZ\$270. The Rarotonga–Aitutaki–'Atiu Island Hopper Pass (from NZ\$400) allows you to add on a flight to 'Atiu direct from Aitutaki (any day as long as it's Tuesday). See p476 for information on inter-island shipping services.

Getting Around

You'll need transport to get around 'Atiu. All the accommodation places can provide scooters (NZ\$25 per day), or try **T & J Rentals** (☎ 33271; Areora), which also has bicycles.

Are Manuiri (☎ 33031) rents out a 4WD car for NZ\$65 per day and **Atiu Villas** (☎ 33777) has a soft-top Jeep for NZ\$60 a day, as well as a few bicycles.



SIGHTS

Caves

'Atiu is famous for its limestone caves, hidden away deep in the bush-covered *makatea*. Take a torch (flashlight) and wear sturdy walking shoes or old sneakers – the coral is razor-sharp, so take care. You'll need a guide to visit the main caves, which are on private land and difficult to find (see p462). Many caves were used for burials – don't move or take any of the bones unless you fancy taking home a curse...

'Atiu's most spectacular cave is **Anatakitaki**, a haunting, multichambered cave surrounded by banyan roots and thick jungle. It's also home to the *kopeka*, a rare bird also known as the 'Atiuan swiftlet – listen out

for its distinctive echo-locating clicks when you're inside the cave.

Te Ana O Rakanui and **Rima Rau** are both burial caves; the latter is reached by a vertical pothole. Both are packed with rusty old skulls and skeletal remains – and they're a tight squeeze inside, so steer clear if you're even faintly claustrophobic.

Lake Te Roto is noted for its *itiki* (eels), a popular island delicacy. On the western side of the lake, a cave leads right through the *makatea* to the sea.

Beaches

'Atiu's reef is close to shore – the surrounding lagoon is rarely more than 50m wide and the water is generally quite shallow.

The best swimming spot is **Taunganui Harbour**, where the water is clear and deep. **Oravaru Beach** on the west coast is where Captain Cook's party made its historic landing. Further south are two of the most popular beaches on the island for swimming and sunbathing – **Taungaroro** and **Tumai**.

Near **Takauora Beach** are three lovely sinkholes which can only be visited at low tide and when the sea is calm. At low tide the lagoon from Takauora beach to Matai Landing drains out through the sinkholes and fish become trapped in a fascinating natural aquarium known as the **Coral Garden**.

Coffee Plantations

For more than a century, since the plant was introduced by early-19th-century traders, coffee has been one of 'Atiu's main exports. There are two home-grown brands available on the island. Juergen Manske-Eimke's **Atiu Coffee** (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck/coffee) is machine-roasted in the coffee factory in Mapumai village. Mata Arai's **Atiu Island Coffee** (☎ 33088) is hand-picked, hand-dried and hand-roasted, using coconut cream to give the coffee its flavour. Both growers offer tours (NZ\$10) which include plenty of opportunities to taste the local brew.

Marae

There are several intriguing *marae* on 'Atiu. **Marae Orongo**, near Oravaru Beach, was once the most sacred *marae* on the island, and it's still a powerfully atmospheric place – many locals are still reluctant to venture anywhere near it. You'll need a guide as it's on private land.

Marae Vairakai, along a walking track north of Kopeka Lodge, is surrounded by 47 large limestone slabs, six of which have curious projections cut into their top edges.

TOURS

Atiu Tours (☎ 33041; www.atiutours.co.ck) is run by an Englishman, Marshall Humphreys, who offers a 3½-hour circle-island tour (NZ\$40) visiting *marae*, historical spots, beaches and other points of interest. There's also an excellent 2½-hour tour to Anatakitaki (NZ\$25) and Rima Rau burial cave (\$15).

George Matariki (☎ 33047), 'Atiu's resident birdman, has become a local celebrity thanks to his highly entertaining eco-tour (\$40). George oversaw the release of the

TOP FIVE CAVES IN THE COOK ISLANDS

- Anatakitaki ('Atiu, p461)
- Rima Rau ('Atiu, p461)
- Motuanga (Ma'uke, p464)
- Vai Nauri (Mitiaro, p466)
- Te Rua Rere (Mangaia, p469)

endangered *kakerori* here from Rarotonga, and with luck you'll meet his favourite pair of birds (named George and Mildred after the 1970s UK sitcom).

Paiere Mokoroa (☎ 33034) at Taparere Lodge and **Man Unuia** (☎ 33283) of Kopeka Lodge both offer historical island tours, based on personal research, for NZ\$26 and NZ\$25 respectively.

Aue Rakanui (☎ 33256) leads you to his family's burial cave, Te Ana O Rakanui, but you'll need your own transport.

SLEEPING

Atiu Villas (☎ 33777; www.atiu.info/atiuvillas; standard bungalow s/d/tr NZ\$100/110/120, f bungalow s/d/tr NZ\$110/120/125; 📞) 'Atiu's original holiday villas, hand-built from local materials 25 years ago by Roger Malcolm (Doctor of Physics and ex-island mayor) and his 'Atian wife Kura, are still going strong. The six delightful villas are arranged around a shady garden and all have lovely outside decks where you can sit back and drink in the views.

Kopeka Lodge (☎ 33283; www.kopekalodge-atiu.com; s/d NZ\$85/125) Three rustic plywood chalets in rural grounds southeast of Areora village, with one single and two double units complete with self-contained kitchen. The stained-wood and pale-green colour scheme is simple, but the units are quite comfortable.

Kia Orana Bungalows (☎ 33013; boaza@kia_orana.co.ck; d NZ\$80) These six dinky wooden bungalows look like they've fallen off a gypsy caravan train. The chalets are minuscule inside, with a tiny kitchen and bedroom area, but the majestic view across the jungle-covered valley is something else.

Taparere Lodge (☎/fax 33034; s/d NZ\$65/80, extra person NZ\$20) These two airy, breeze block-style units are decorated in Spartan style with bright, homemade bedspreads and whitewashed walls.

Are Manuiri (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck; Areora; dm per person NZ\$30, s & d NZ\$60, tr NZ\$75) 'Atiu's only budget accommodation is found in this three-bedroom house in the centre of Areora village. There's a shared kitchen, living room and bathroom, but not much private space, so you'll have to get on with your neighbours.

EATING

Kura's Kitchen (☎ 33777; Atiu Villas; dinner NZ\$25) The only place to eat out is at Atiu Villas, where Kura cooks evening meals; book before 3pm.

'Atiu has three grocery stores and the **Akai Bakery** (☎ 33207; Mapumai).

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Depending on how many guests are staying, the thatched pavilion-bar at Atiu Villas sometimes puts on a fantastically informal island night (NZ\$35 with food, or NZ\$10 for the show). Village events or discos are sometimes held in one of the church halls – ask around.

SHOPPING

Woodcarving is popular on the island and several carvers sell from their homes. 'Atian coffee makes a great souvenir.

TUMUNU

The *tumunu* (bush-beer drinking sessions) came into existence during the period when missionaries attempted to stamp out kava drinking in the Cooks, and men would retreat to the bush to drink home-brewed 'orange beer'. *Tumunu* are still held regularly on 'Atiu; the *tumunu* is the hollowed-out stump of a coconut palm traditionally used as a container for brewing the beer. All sessions retain some of the ancient ceremonies associated with drinking kava, but the container is likely to be plastic nowadays. Technically, bush-beer drinking sessions are still illegal.

Most locals and hotel owners can arrange an invitation to visit the local *tumunu*. Traditionally, it's for men only, but the rules relax somewhat for tourists, and any visitor, male or female, is welcome. Just be wary of over-imbibing – bush beer is pretty potent stuff.

Textiles

Atiu Fibre Arts Studio (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck/art; Te'enui; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 1am-1pm Sat) The studio specialises in *tivaevae* and traditional textile arts. The cost of a machine-sewn double- to queen-size *tivaevae* is NZ\$600 to NZ\$1100. A hand-sewn one, requiring countless hours of work, costs NZ\$1500 or more. There's an on-site gallery if you just want to have a look.

MA'UKE

pop 440 / area 18.4 sq km

Like its neighbouring islands, the lush island of Ma'uke is characterised by its *makatea* and thick coastal forest, although it's much flatter than 'Atiu and only slightly larger than Mitiaro. It's a sleepy and quietly charming island, circled by a rough coastal track and pockmarked with many underground caverns, including Motuanga, a network of caves that's said to stretch right out underneath the reef. Ma'uke is one of the region's main exporters of tropical flowers, which accounts for its reputation as the 'garden island' of the Cooks. It means your goodbye 'ei is bound to be particularly impressive.

INFORMATION

Hospital (☎ 35664; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri)

Police station (☎ 35086) Between the Administration Centre and the wharf.

Post office & Telecom office (☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) There's a 24-hour Kiaorana cardphone (☎ 35685) outside and Internet access (per half-hour NZ\$10.50).

Wendy's Store (☎ 35102) ANZ agent, near the Divided Church in Areora; changes US dollars.

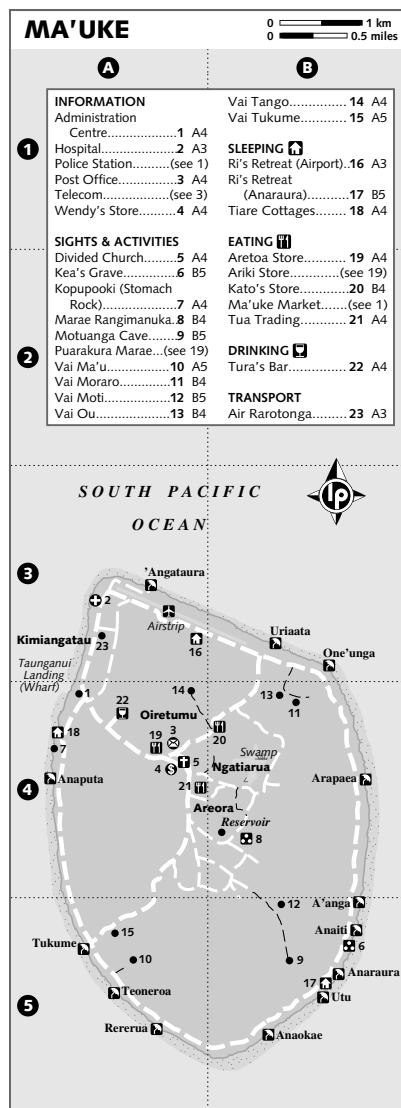
TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

Air Rarotonga (www.airraro.com; airport ☎ 35120 Kimianguatau ☎ 35888) flies three times a week between Rarotonga and Ma'uke (from NZ\$290 return), and sometimes offers direct flights between Ma'uke and Mitiaro. See p476 for details of travelling by cargo ship.

Getting Around

Tiare Cottages and Ri's Retreat (see p465) can both organise scooter hire for NZ\$25 per day. Tiare also rents bicycles (NZ\$10 per day). Transfers to and from the airport cost NZ\$10.



SIGHTS Caves

Like the other *makatea* islands, Ma'uke is riddled with caves, many filled with cool freshwater pools which are wonderful for a swim on a blazing hot day. The best cave for swimming is **Vai Tango**, a short walk from Ngatiarua village. You'll need

THE DIVIDED CHURCH

Ma'uke's CICC was built by two villages, Areora and Ngatiarua, in 1882. When the outside was completed, there was disagreement between the villages about how the inside should be decorated, and the solution was to have a wall built down the middle and let each village have its own church within a church! The wall has since been removed, though the interior is decorated in markedly different styles. Each village has its own entrance, sits in its respective end and takes turns singing the hymns. The minister is expected to straddle the dividing line down the middle of the pulpit.

someone to guide you there the first time – local schoolkids often head there on weekends and afternoons after school. Other interesting caves in the north of the island, reached by old coral pathways across the *makatea*, include **Vai Ou**, **Vai Tukume**, **Vai Moraro**, **Vai Ma'u** and **Vai Moti**.

Motuanga (the 'Cave of 100 Rooms') is a complex of tunnels and caverns that starts in the southeastern corner of the island and is rumoured to extend all the way out to sea, though the rocks are slowly closing in and nowadays you can only get into eight of them. The cave was often used by the islanders as a hiding place from 'Atiuan war parties.

Beaches

Ma'uke's secluded coves and beaches are one of the island's main attractions, and they can all be easily reached from the 18km-long coast road. **One'unga**, on the east side, is one of the nicest beaches, and **Teonerua** and **Tukume** on the island's southwestern side are also worth seeking out. Other beaches, such as **Anaraura** and **Teonerua**, have picnic areas with thatched shelters (popular with the island's resident pigs). On the cliffs above Anaiti you'll find **Kea's Grave**, where the wife of Paikea (the Whale Rider) is said to have perished while waiting for her husband's return.

South of Tiare Cottages is **Kopupooki** (Stomach Rock) beach, with a beautiful fish-filled cave that becomes accessible at low tide.

Marae

Most of Ma'uke's *marae* are overgrown, but you can still find **Marae Rangimanuka**, the *marae* of Uke, with the help of a local guide. **Marae Puarakura** is a modern *marae*, still used for ceremonial functions, complete with stone seats for the *ariki*, *mataiapo* and *rangatira* (subchief).

TOURS

Guided cave tours are offered by **Pi Tua** (☎ 35083), a sprightly 60-something-year-old who still leaps around the *makatea* like a man half his age. Also try **Tangata Ateriano** (☎ 35270), who's based at Tiare Cottages.

SLEEPING

There are only two options for accommodation on Ma'uke. Water comes from rain tubs and is heated by solar panels, so hot water can be scarce on cloudy days.

Tiare Cottages (☎ 35083; www.mauke.com; budget bungalows s/d NZ\$70/75, self-contained lodge s/d NZ\$75/85, beachfront house NZ\$135) These old tin-roofed budget lodges are pretty rudimentary, with a main sleeping area and primitive kitchen with a toilet and shower tacked on the end. The self-contained lodge is more comfortable, with a fully equipped kitchen and a spacious, cheerily furnished bedroom. Best of all is the fabulous seaweed house, perched on the cliff tops and reached by its own gravel pathway. It's an absolute steal for the price.

Ri's Retreat (☎ 35181; bungalows NZ\$85-115) A selection of brand-new bungalows in two locations beside the airport and near Anaraura Beach. The airport bungalows are sparkling-clean and brightly decorated, with large beds, modern bathrooms and sliding glass doors onto a small patio area, but the seaside bungalows, standing on stilts beside the beach, are the better choice.

MA'UKE'S MIRACLE OIL

Made from hand-cooked coconut oil and flavoured with several kinds of local herbs and natural essences (including gardenia and the secret ingredient, a medicinal herb called *pi*), this much-lauded local remedy is rumoured to cure many skin complaints and soothe insect bites, stings and sunburn – it's even supposed to cure warts.

EATING & DRINKING

Home-cooked dinners are available for guests at Tiare Cottages for NZ\$25 per meal – otherwise, you'll have to find what you can at Ma'uke's scantily supplied grocery stores. The best-stocked shop is Tua Trading, near the Divided Church; the shelves at **Aretoa Store** (☎ 35111; Makatea) and **Ariki Store** (☎ 35103; Makatea) can be pretty bare. Kato's Store is the island's only bakery.

On Friday morning, starting at about 8.30am, you can buy fresh produce at the Ma'uke market, near the wharf.

Liquid refreshment is available at **Tura's Bar** (☎ 35023; ☹ Fri), Ma'uke's only bar, opposite Ma'uke College.

MITIARO

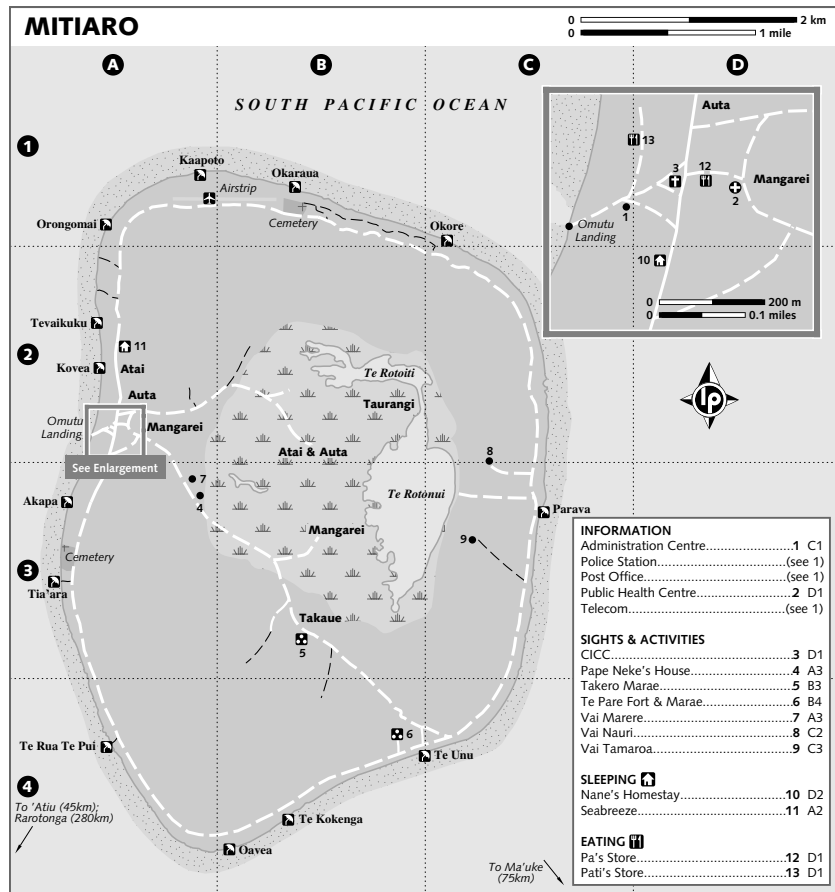
pop 236 / area 22.3 sq km

Even with the benefit of a bird's-eye view, you could almost be forgiven for missing tiny Mitiaro, one of the smallest islands of the Southern Group. It might not be classically beautiful in the traditional South Pacific sense – the beaches are small, and where the land's not covered with boggy swamp it's mainly black barren rock – but it's one of the most traditional and undeveloped islands in the Cooks and a fascinating place to while away a few days. Many handicrafts are practised on Mitiaro, including weaving, woodcarving and traditional fishing in outrigger canoes. The island is dotted with fascinating caves, including the natural underground pools of Vai Nauri and Vai Marere.

INFORMATION

Electricity is available daily from 5am to midnight, and 24 hours on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Bring plenty of cash with you – it's difficult to change money on Mitiaro. Don't drink water from the tap, and watch out for the island's vicious mosquitoes.

The Administration Centre, located near the wharf, houses the **post office** (☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri), **Telecom** (☎ 36680; ☹ 8-10am & 1-3pm), **police station** (☎ 36150, 36122), **island secretary** (☎ 36108; fax 36157) and the mayor. **Julian Aupuni** (☎ 36180), Mitiaro's tourism officer, is also based at the Administration Centre.



TRANSPORT

Air Rarotonga (☎ 36888; www.airrora.com) flies to Mitiaro three times per week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The cost is from NZ\$300 return. There are occasional flights to Mitiaro from Ma'uke. For information on inter-island ships, see p476.

SIGHTS

Beaches, Caves & Pools

A 10-minute walk from Mangarei village on the Takaue road, **Vai Marere** is the only sulphur pool in the Cook Islands. It's only just visible from the main road, but as you duck into the cave it broadens out into a gloomy cavern covered with stalactites. Locals swear that the water has healing properties.

Vai Tamaroa is a 15-minute walk across sharp *makatea* from the coast road. You may need a local guide, as the trail is faint. Best of all is **Vai Nauri**, Mitiaro's 'natural swimming pool' – a deep, sparkling blue pool that makes an utterly unforgettable swimming spot. The local women hold gatherings known as *terevei* at both Vai Tamaroa and Vai Nauri, where they gather to swim and sing the bawdy songs of their ancestors.

Marae & Te Pare Fort

Most of Mitiaro's *marae* are considerably overgrown, although you can still see the stone seat of the *ariki* and several graves at **Marae Takero**, near the abandoned Takaue

village. Mitiaro's most impressive ancient remains are deep in the *makatea* at **Te Pare Fort**, built as a defence against 'Atiuan raids. An underground shelter was large enough for the people to congregate in during times of danger, while above was a lookout tower from which approaching canoes could be seen.

The only guide to Te Pare fort is Mitiaro's tourism officer, **Julian Aupuni** (☎ 36180), who has permission to visit the site from its owner Po Tetava Ariki. Papa Neke leads tours around the island's other historical sites; he can be contacted through **Seabreeze** (☎ 36153).

Plantations

In the 1800s the islanders moved their houses to the single seaside village, Mangarei, but they continued to use the fertile, peat-laden plantation areas in the island's centre. There are roads across the *makatea* to the plantations, although many people still make the long trip on foot.

Cook Islands Christian Church

The white-painted **CIC** is a fine sight, with its blue trim, stained-glass windows and parquet ceiling decorated with black-and-white stars, and the singing on Sunday is superb.

Cemetery

The cemetery on the island's northern side has a few modern-style tombs and many older graves marked by simple slabs of coral. The local custom is to leave possessions of the deceased at the headstone, along with some cutlery and crockery so that the spirit can eat from his own plate.

Lakes

Mitiaro is unique in the Cooks for its twin lakes, **Te Rotonui** (Big Lake) and **Te Rotoiti** (Small Lake). A rough track leads to the edge of Te Rotonui, where there's a boat landing and a pleasant picnic spot. Both lakes are stuffed with *itiki*, a local delicacy.

SLEEPING & EATING

Seabreeze (☎ 36153; r per person incl meals NZ\$75) The only real visitor accommodation on the island is run by a local family on the outskirts of Mangeri. There are a couple of simple rooms inside the main one-storey

house and a spacious self-contained unit out the back.

Nane's Homestay (☎ 36107; s/d NZ\$35/45) The only other place to stay on Mitiaro is with Nane Pokoati, a local *mataiapo* and a bubbly, friendly host. There are no private rooms, just beds in a communal sleeping area in Nane's large, modern house. Meals are included at extra cost.

Limited food supplies are sold at the small village food shops, Pa's Store and Pati's Store, and at Seabreeze.

MANGAIA

pop 780 / area 51.8 sq km

Mangaia is perhaps the most visually dramatic island in the Cooks, with a circlet of jet-black *makatea* concealing a huge sunken volcanic cone in the island's centre, now home to the island's taro fields and vegetable plantations.

Mangaia is the second-largest island in the Cooks, only slightly smaller than Rarotonga, and its people have acquired something of a reputation for haughtiness and superiority (they're sometimes referred to as the British of the Cook Islands). There are fabulous caves to explore and some fantastic viewpoints over the central valleys, especially from the island's highest point at Rangimotia.

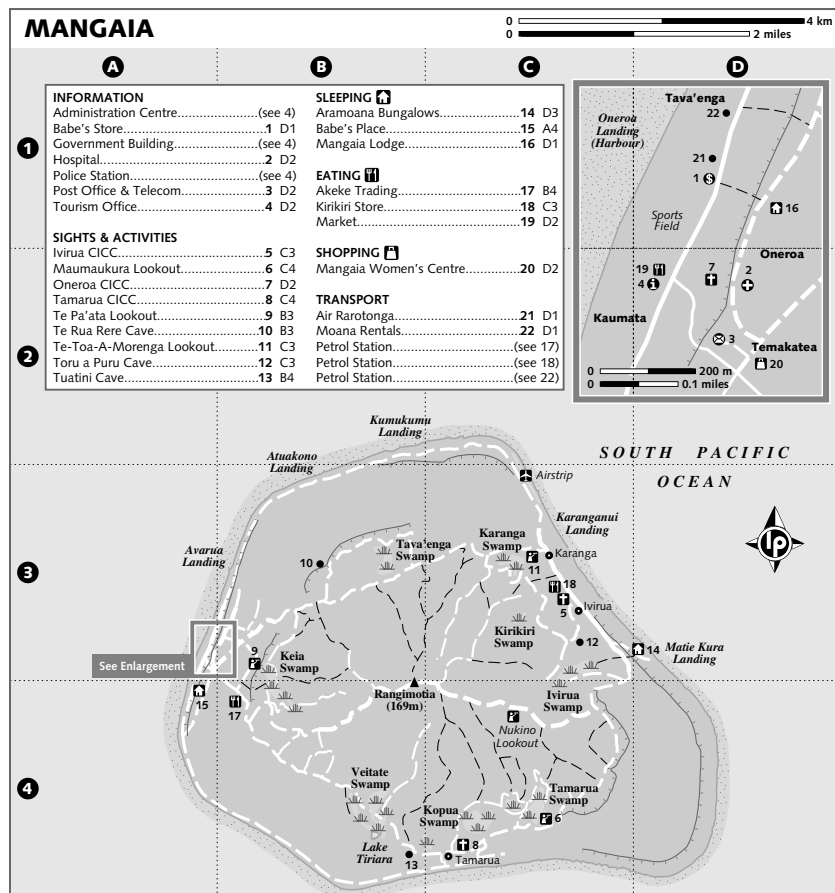
HISTORY

According to a Mangaian legend, the island wasn't settled by voyagers on canoes, but by the three sons of the Polynesian god Rongo – Rangi, Mokoaro and Akatauiria – who simply lifted the island up from the deep, becoming its first settlers and the ancestors of the Nga Ariki tribe.

James Cook sailed by in 1777 but met an unfriendly reception and quickly moved on. Missionary John Williams was similarly not welcome in 1823 but subsequent Polynesian missionaries had more success, and the island was eventually converted to Christianity by the Rarotongian preacher Maretu.

ORIENTATION

The three main villages are all located on the coast: Oneroa in the west, Ivirua in the east and Tamarua in the south. Oneroa, the main village, has three parts: Tava'enga and Kaumata on the northern and southern parts



of the coast respectively, and Temakatea is located above the coast. The airstrip is in the north of the island.

INFORMATION

Babe's Store (☎ 34092; Oneroa) The island's ANZ agent.
Post office & Telecom office (☎ 34680; 📠 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) On the hill above Oneroa. Internet access costs NZ\$10.50 per hour.

Visitor information centre (☎ 34289) In the Administration Centre at the bottom of the Temakatea road cutting.

TRANSPORT

Air Rarotonga (☎ 34888; www.airraro.com) flies between Rarotonga and Mangaia four times a week from NZ\$270 return. See p476 for

details on shipping services from Rarotonga to Mangaia.

Moana Rentals (☎ 34307) is the main place to hire motorcycles (NZ\$25 per day).

SIGHTS Churches & Marae

Mangaia has some of the finest old CICCes in the Cooks. **Tamarua CICC** is especially beautiful, and still has its original roof beams, woodcarved interiors and sennit-rope binding. The interior decoration at the churches of Oneroa and Ivirua was once even more impressive, but was mostly removed in the 1980s.

Mangaia has 24 premissionary *marae*, but you'll need a local expert to find them.

Tuare George and **Tupuna Moeara** (below) can both take you.

Rangimotia & Inland Roads

The highest point on the island, Rangimotia (169m) is more a high plateau rather than a peak, but the coastal views are stunning. From the Oneroa side, an old dirt road (suitable only for 4WDs, motorcycles and mountain bikes) leads to the top. The island's interior is cross-hatched by tracks and dirt roads, which are great for walking, but they can get very muddy after heavy rain.

There are several stunning viewpoints including **Te-Toa-A-Morenga** lookout, just inland from Ivirua; the **Maumaukura** viewpoint, which has a glorious view inland from the top of the *makatea* cliff; and **Te Pa'ata** above Oneroa.

Caves

Mangaia has many spectacular caves, including **Te Rua Rere**, a huge burial cave that has crystalline stalagmites and stalactites, and some ancient human skeletons. Other caverns worth exploring include the multilevelled **Tuatini Cave** and the long, mazelike **Toru a Poru Cave**.

TOURS

Telephone the following operators to make arrangements.

Clarke's Island Tours (☎ 34303, or Babe's Place ☎ 34092) offers a full-day island tour for NZ\$50, including visits to the inland taro plantations and Lake Tiriara, and tours to Tuatini Cave for NZ\$30.

Tere Tauakume (☎ 34223) leads a fascinating three-hour tour (NZ\$40) of several interconnected caves in the Ivirua area.

Tuare George leads a one-hour tour (NZ\$25) that passes by a number of ancient human skeletons inside Mangaia's most impressive cave, Te Rua Rere. Ask about the tour at Babe's Place (right).

Maui Peraua (☎ 34388) leads tours to his family cave of Toru a Poru (NZ\$35) and offers a cultural tour (NZ\$40) into the inland plantations.

Tupuna Moeara (☎ 34289; www.tupuna.com) Mangaia's newly appointed tourism officer is a keen historian and offers tours of the island's ancient *marae* and battlefields (NZ\$30 to NZ\$50).

SLEEPING

All the places to stay on Mangaia make some provision for food for their guests.

Babe's Place (☎ 34092; www.babesplace.co.ck; Oneroa; s/d/tr incl all meals NZ\$75/120/150) The ubiquitous Babe owns the island's main store, liveliest bar and runs this comfortable motel, just south of Oneroa. Most of the accommodation is in four motel-style units, complete with mosquito nets, colourful bedspreads and a small patio area. Babe's Bar is right next door – don't plan on getting to sleep too early on a Friday or Saturday night.

Aramoana Bungalows (☎ 34278; www.aramoana.com; Ivirua; s & d NZ\$40, bungalow s/d NZ\$60/65, medium bungalow s/d NZ\$115/135) Tucked away on the eastern side of the island, these rural, free-standing cabins are a tranquil place to stay. The tiny thatched bungalows are basically just a small wood-panelled bedroom with a tiny bathroom at the back. The larger units are more spacious and better furnished, though they're overpriced. Meals are NZ\$45 extra.

Mangaia Lodge (☎ 34324; fax 34239; Oneroa; r incl breakfast NZ\$35) This large colonial-style lodge has three plain bedrooms and a sunny, enclosed terrace overlooking the gardens. The accommodation is pretty basic, and the separate shared toilet/shower block is rustic, to say the least, but the owners are very welcoming. The price includes breakfast; otherwise, you do your own cooking (meals can be arranged by request for NZ\$10).

EATING & DRINKING

There's nowhere to eat out on Mangaia, but your meals will be provided for you wherever you stay. **Babe's Store** (☎ 34092; Tava'enga) is the best-stocked shop, but there are a few smaller stores, including **Kirikiri Store** (☎ 34133), north of Ivirua, and **Akeke Trading** (☎ 34206), inland from Oneroa. There's a weekly Friday-morning market (starting at 8am) beside the post office in Oneroa. The only decent bar is at **Babe's Place** (☎ 34092; www.babesplace.co.ck; Oneroa), open on Friday and Saturday nights.

SHOPPING

Basketwork, tie-dyed *pareu*, stone pounders and *pupu ei* are Mangaia's most famous handicrafts. Try the Mangaia Women's Council **craft shop** (🕒 8am-1pm Mon-Wed), just

south of Oneroa. Its opening hours can be erratic; if it's closed, contact the island **Administration Centre** (☎ 34289) to find out when it'll next be open. Lyn Peraua's small gift shop at the airport terminal is open for all incoming flights. The market often has some traditional crafts for sale.

NORTHERN GROUP

If it's a true island escape you're looking for, then you'll need to follow in the footsteps of the Cook Islands' most famous castaways and head for the Northern Group. Writers Tom Neale and Robert Dean Frisbie (p434) both lived out their desert-island dreams on these far-flung coral atolls, but you'll need to be a hardy traveller indeed to do the same. Flights to the Northern Group are notoriously erratic and eye-poppingly expensive, but if you can surmount the logistical challenges you'll be rewarded with a wonderland of clear lagoons, diamond-white beaches and technicolour sunsets that most visitors (and most Cook Islanders, for that matter) will never get the chance to see.

TRANSPORT

Air Rarotonga (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) flies from Rarotonga to Manihiki once a week, and Pukapuka occasionally. Flights take 3½ to four hours, and the cheapest return fare starts from a whopping NZ\$1250. Bad weather, limited fuel supplies and too few bookings can sometimes cause the flights to be cancelled at short notice. Take out travel insurance to cover unavoidable delays, and bring plenty of books just in case you get stranded.

The only other regular transport to the Northern Group islands is on the inter-island cargo ships. To reach Rakahanga, the only option is to fly to Manihiki and then take a boat. Suvarrow is off limits unless you happen to have packed your own yacht. Some boats travel between Pukapuka and Samoa. For more information on inter-island cargo ships, see p476.

MANIHIKI

pop 660 / area 5.4 sq km

Famous for its black-pearl fields, the magnificent lagoon of Manihiki is one of the highlights of the Northern Group. Nearly

40 islands are scattered around the edges of the enclosed lagoon, which is 4km wide at its broadest point. Tauhunu is the main village, and there's a second village, Tukao, where you'll also find the island's airstrip. In November 1997 Cyclone Martin struck Manihiki, causing major destruction and the loss of 19 lives. Most of the buildings have now been rebuilt, but many evacuated islanders never returned.

Black pearls are the island's economic mainstay, and a tour (NZ\$50) to one of the lagoon farms is a must. If you're here from September to December, you should be able to watch some of the pearls being harvested. The lung-busting abilities of the island's pearl divers are legendary – they can dive to great depths and stay submerged for minutes at a time. Lagoon cruises (NZ\$55) and fishing trips (NZ\$50) are also available.

Manihiki Lagoon Villas (☎ 43123; www.mahihikilagoonvillas.com; s/d NZ\$150/250), a beautiful beachside retreat, offers several bungalows overlooking the lagoon, with plain but comfortable furnishings and the obligatory sea-view sundeck. You'll have to get by without amenities such as hot water and television, but with a view like this, who needs luxury?

RAKAHANGA

pop 130 / area 4.1 sq km

With two major islands and many smaller *motu* dotted in a turquoise lagoon, Rakahanga is another idyllic island, but life here is tough, even when compared to the rest of the Northern Group. The island was once more heavily populated than its sister island of Manihiki, which lies 44km to the south, but the lagoon here is unsuitable for pearl-farming and the island is now all but deserted – the few families who live here are concentrated in the village of Nivano in the southwestern corner of the atoll. The only export is copra, although the island is still renowned for its fine *rito* hats, which are mostly sold on the mainland of Rarotonga.

PENRHYN

pop 600 / area 9.8 sq km

Traditionally known as Tongareva, Penrhyn is the northernmost of the Cook Islands, and boasts one of the largest lagoons in the country – so huge that the twin islands

on opposite sides of the lagoon are barely visible from each other. Uniquely in the Northern Group, Penrhyn has three deepwater passages that make excellent harbours, a fact that attracted whalers and traders in the 19th century. Peruvian blackbirders (slave-traders) also visited the island in the 1860s – some estimates reckon that three-quarters of the population were carried off to work in Peruvian labour camps. Penrhyn is another centre for black-pearl production, and some interesting shell jewellery is produced on the island.

Soa's Guesthouse (☎ 42018; fax 42105; Omoka village; r NZ\$95) is run by Soa Tini, a local fisherman and pearl farmer, who has a three-bedroom family house in the centre of Omoka village. There's only cold water and the toilets are shared, but rates include three meals and Soa can organise trips around the lagoon.

PUKAPUKA

pop 530 / area 5.1 sq km

Well known for its sensuous dancers and beautiful girls (as well as its bed-hopping practices), the remote island of Pukapuka is in many ways closer to Samoa than it is to the rest of the Cook Islands. Like its tiny 'suburb' island of Nassau, Pukapuka sustained severe damage during the 2005 cyclones; only 10 houses survived the storms intact, while many other buildings were completely swept away. Though life is slowly getting back to normal, thanks to a massive emergency aid package, it'll be several years before crops and water sources have completely recovered.

Pukapuka's most famous resident was Robert Dean Frisbie, who lived here in the 1920s and wrote several evocative accounts of his life on the islands.

Contact the **island secretary** (☎ /fax 41712) or the **island council** (☎ 41034) to arrange homestay accommodation.

SUWARROW

pop 2 / area 0.4 sq km

The Cook Islands' only national park is a nature-lovers' paradise, home to huge colonies of seabirds and some of the country's richest marine life. Two atoll managers live here six months of the year to oversee the park and ensure visiting yachties don't misbehave; during cyclone season they head

back to Rarotonga. Suvarrow is best known as the home of Tom Neale, the Cook Islands' most famous hermit, who lived here for three long stints between 1952 and his death in 1977. You can relive his adventures in his classic book *An Island to Oneself*, and visit his old house on Anchorage Island – one room is still furnished just as it was when he lived here, and you can leave your thoughts in a logbook.

The only way you're likely to be able to visit Suvarrow is by private yacht.

RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Officially, visitors are required to have booked accommodation before arriving in the Cook Islands, although you can usually arrange a hotel when you arrive at the airport. Nevertheless, the best places on the island get booked up well in advance, and you might find there's nothing available in your budget range, so it pays to plan ahead.

Rarotonga has loads of accommodation, including hostels, motel-style units, self-contained bungalows and some expensive top-end hotels and large-scale resorts. All the major Southern Group islands have organised accommodation. For families, renting a house (p450) can be a good way to cut costs. Practically everywhere provides self-catering facilities.

Manihiki and Penrhyn are the only Northern Group islands with guesthouses. Elsewhere you may have to stay with local people; be sure to pay your way and bring food to share.

ACTIVITIES

The Cook Islands is a perfect place to kick back and relax, but if you're the energetic type there are plenty of activities to keep you occupied.

Visiting Marae

History and archaeology enthusiasts will enjoy visiting the historic *marae* on most of the islands. Many of these traditional religious meeting grounds are still used for

PRACTICALITIES

- Rarotonga's *Cook Islands News* (www.ci.news.co.ck), published daily except Sunday, and the *Cook Islands Herald*, published on Wednesday, provide coverage of local news and international events.
- Radio Cook Islands (630 kHz AM; www.radio.co.ck) reaches most of the islands and broadcasts local programmes, as well as Radio New Zealand news and Radio Australia's world news service. The smaller KC-FM (103.8 MHz FM) station can only be received on Rarotonga. There is one (very low-budget) national television station, CITV, and cable channels are available at some hotels.
- The PAL system is used in the Cooks. Video tapes and DVDs can be hired all over Rarotonga.
- Electricity is 240V AC, 50Hz, as in Australia and NZ, using Australian-style three-blade plugs. Power is available 24 hours a day throughout the Southern Group except on Mitiaro, where it runs from 5am to midnight and 24 hours a day on weekends.
- The Cook Islands uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

formal ceremonies, such as the investiture of a new *ariki* or *mataiapa*.

Water Sports

The sheltered lagoons and beaches on Rarotonga and Aitutaki are great for swimming and snorkelling. Diving is also excellent, with good visibility and lots of marine life, from sea turtles and tropical fish to reef sharks and eagle rays. See p69 for more diving information. You can hire snorkelling gear on Aitutaki and Rarotonga, as well as kayaks, sailboards and other water-sports equipment.

Glass-bottomed boats operate from Muri Beach, and there are several lagoon cruise operators in Aitutaki. Deep-sea fishing boats can be chartered on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. From July to October, whale-watching trips are available.

Other Activities

Rarotonga is an excellent place for hiking, and there are several trails to explore, from mountain tracks to valley walks. Aitutaki's backcountry roads and deserted beaches are also great for walking and exploring. 'Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Mangaia have fascinating caves to discover and countless trails winding through the *makatea*.

BUSINESS HOURS

The business week is 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday, and most shops are open on Saturday morning until noon. Small grocery stores keep longer hours, from 6am or 7am until 8pm or 9pm. The banks are open till 3pm on weekdays, but only the Westpac bank is open on a Saturday morning.

CHILDREN

Travelling with kids presents no special problems in the Cook Islands, although many smaller hotels and bungalows don't accept children aged under 12 – ask about their policy before booking.

CUSTOMS

The following restrictions apply: 2L of spirits or wine or 4.5L of beer, plus 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco. Quarantine laws are strictly enforced, and plants, animals or any related products are prohibited (you might also have a problem with camping gear). Firearms, weapons and drugs are also prohibited.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Swimming is very safe in the sheltered lagoons but be wary around reef passages, where currents are especially strong. Rarotonga's main passages are at Avana Harbour, Avaroa, Papua and Rutaki; they exist on other islands as well, often opposite streams.

Mosquitoes can be a real nuisance in the Cooks, particularly during the rainy season (around mid-December to mid-April). Use repellent; mosquito coils are available everywhere.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES
Cook Islands Consulates

Cook Islands' overseas consulates.
Australia (☎ 02-9907 6567; fax 9949 6664; Sir Ian Graham Turbott, 8/8 Lauderdale Ave, Fairlight, NSW 2094)

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

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

Consulates in the Cook Islands

Foreign consulates and high commissions on Rarotonga.

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

Germany (☎ 23206; contact Wolfgang Losacker)

New Zealand (☎ 22201, 55201; nzhc@oyster.net.ck; New Zealand High Commission, PO Box 21, Avarua) Above the Philatelic Bureau.

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

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

April

Dancer of the Year Dance displays are held throughout April, culminating in the hotly contested Dancer of the Year competition.

July

Gospel Day 20 July on 'Atiu, 21 July on Mitiaro, 25 July on Rarotonga, and elsewhere on 26 October. The arrival of the gospel to the Cook Islands is celebrated with *nuku* (religious plays).

August

Constitution Celebration (Te Maire Nui) Celebrates the 1965 declaration of independence and is the major festival of the year in the Cook Islands.

Tiare (Floral) Festival Week Celebrated with floral float parades and the Miss Tiare beauty pageant.

HOLIDAYS

The Cook Islands has a multitude of public holidays. The celebrations are often accompanied by music, dancing and general high-jinks.

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 (Cook Islands) 26 October

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

You can get online at several places on Rarotonga (p437) and at just one on Aitutaki (p454). Several of the Telecom offices on the outer islands have small cyberbooths (though the connection is very slow and pricey). Wi-fi access for laptops is available at the main Internet cafés on Rarotonga.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Cook Islands News (www.cinews.co.ck) Online edition of the daily Cook Islands newspaper.

Cook Islands Tourism Authority (www.cook-islands.com) Central information site for the main tourist office.

Cook Islands Website (www.ck) Local business details, including tourist operations.

Kia Orana (www.kiaorana.com) Locally run site with plenty of history, culture and background info.

Telecom Cook Islands (www.oyster.net.ck) Searchable telephone directories plus an email directory.

MONEY
Cash

On Rarotonga there are ANZ ATMs in Avarua and at Wigmores Superstore. Westpac has ATMs in Avarua and the airport, and a small branch that's open for international flights. You can change money at the Westpac and ANZ banks in Avarua and at some hotels for a fee.

There's just one ATM on Aitutaki, but you can change money and travellers cheques at the Administration Centre. On the other

HOW MUCH?

- **Bus ticket:** NZ\$3
- **Internet access per hour:** NZ\$9
- **Island night and buffet:** NZ\$50
- **Guided tour:** NZ\$50
- **Midrange private villa with sundeck on Rarotonga:** NZ\$250

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol on Rarotonga:** NZ\$1.90
- **1L bottled water:** NZ\$3.50
- **Glass of Cook Islands Lager:** NZ\$5
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** NZ\$20
- **Ika mata:** NZ\$8
- **Bottle of noni juice:** NZ\$25

islands you'll need to take a supply of cash with you.

Credit Cards

Visa, MasterCard and Bankcard are accepted at most places on Rarotonga. The Westpac and ANZ banks in Avarua give cash advances on all three cards. Amex and Diners Club cards are accepted at upmarket hotels and restaurants. Credit cards are accepted at the larger hotels on Aitutaki and at some places on 'Atiu. Elsewhere, it's cold hard cash or nothing.

Currency

New Zealand dollars are used in the Cook Islands. For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page. You'll probably get a few Cook Islands coins in change (in denominations of 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, \$1, \$2 and \$5), but if you do, make sure to spend them before you leave, as Cook Islands money cannot be exchanged anywhere else in the world.

Taxes

There's a healthy slug on top of NZ prices to cover shipping costs for imports. A 12.5% VAT (value added tax) is included in the price of most goods and services. All prices quoted in the text include VAT.

Tipping

Tipping is not customary in the Cook Islands, and haggling over prices is considered rude.

Travellers Cheques

You'll receive a better rate for travellers cheques than for cash; all brands of travellers cheques are cashed at the banks. Many of the outer islands have nowhere to change travellers cheques, so get them cashed before you leave Rarotonga.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Print film and traditional and digital processing are available on Rarotonga. High-speed film is useful in the densely forested interior of Rarotonga, and in the *makatea* of 'Atiu and Ma'uke. Bring a flash for photographing inside caves.

POST

Poste-restante mail is held for 30 days at post offices on most islands. To collect mail at the post office in Avarua it should

be addressed to you c/o Poste Restante, Avarua, Rarotonga, Cook Islands. There's no home postal delivery anywhere in the Cooks – everyone uses post office boxes.

TELEPHONE

All the islands, with the exception of Nassau, are connected to the country's modern telephone system. Each island has a Telecom office, which also provides fax, telegram and telex services.

The country code for the Cook Islands is ☎ 682, and there are no local area codes. Dial ☎ 00 for direct international calls; the international directory is ☎ 017; the local directory operator is ☎ 010. You can make collect calls from any phone by dialling ☎ 015.

Prepaid Kiaorana cards are available in NZ\$5, NZ\$10, NZ\$20 and NZ\$50 denominations from 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.

If you want to use your mobile phone (cellphone) in the Cooks, you can get a local number by buying a Kokanet SIM card for NZ\$25 at the main Telecom office in Avarua.

TIME

The Cook Islands are east of the International Date Line, 10 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). The country has no daylight-saving time. When it's noon in the Cooks it's 10pm in London, noon in Tahiti and Hawai'i, 2pm in LA, 10am the next day in Fiji and NZ, and 8am the next day in Sydney.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Cook Islands Tourism Corporation** (CITC; ☎ 29435; www.cook-islands.com; PO Box 14, Avarua) is in the centre of Avarua on Rarotonga.

Overseas offices:

Asia (☎ 66-2 652 0507; eckard@pit.co.th; c/o Pacific Leisure Group, 8/F Maneeeya 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 St, White Rock, British Columbia V4A 7G9)

Continental Europe (☎ 49-30 4225 6027; europemanager@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; Nottcutt House, 36 Southwark Bridge Rd, London SE1 9EU)
USA (☎ 1-866 280 1739; usamanager@cook-islands.com; 17880 Skypark Circle, Irvine, California 92614)

VISAS

No visa is required to visit the Cooks. A visitor permit, good for 31 days, is granted on arrival on presentation of a valid passport, an onward or return airline ticket, and a confirmed hotel booking (see p471). Visitor permits can be extended up to six months at the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration** (☎ 29347) in Avarua.

TRANSPORT ON RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The Cook Islands can be included as a stopover between the US and NZ, Australia or other Pacific islands. See p836 for round-the-world tickets and Pacific air passes.

Low-season travel to the Cooks is from mid-April to late August, and the high season runs from December to February. There's heavy demand from NZ to the Cooks in December, and in the other direction in January.

AIRLINES

Air New Zealand (www.airnewzealand.com) and **Pacific Blue** (www.virginblue.com.au) are the only international carriers that fly to the Cook Islands. Air New Zealand operates at least one daily flight from Rarotonga to Auckland (NZ), sometimes stopping in Fiji en route, as well as three weekly flights to LA via Tahiti. From Auckland you can catch regular Air New Zealand flights to other

cities in Australia, NZ and Asia, and from LA there are frequent flights to London and the rest of the US.

Pacific Blue (part of the Virgin group) operates two weekly flights from Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne to Rarotonga via Auckland.

ASIA

Air New Zealand's connections to/from Tokyo are either via Fiji or Auckland. The basic fare starts from ¥240,000; cheaper fares may be available through some travel agencies – it's worth shopping around.

AUSTRALASIA

Air New Zealand has daily scheduled flights between Auckland and Rarotonga, with extra flights a couple of days a week. Standard low-season fares to Auckland start at NZ\$390, double that for return flights.

Flights from Australia to Rarotonga (and back) go via Auckland. Single fares from Sydney/Brisbane/Melbourne start at about A\$510/ 700/750 with Pacific Blue, though there are often much cheaper fares depending on availability; single fares from most Australian destinations start from around A\$480 with Air New Zealand.

NORTH AMERICA

Air New Zealand's flights from the US to the Pacific depart from LA. There are three weekly flights (currently on Monday, Thursday and Saturday), all via Pape'ete 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 LA–Tahiti–Cook Islands–Fiji–Auckland route.

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

PACIFIC

Apart from NZ, the only Pacific islands with direct flight connections to Rarotonga are Fiji (from F\$540 return) and Tahiti (from 48,000 CFP return). If you want to visit any other island, you'll have to fly via one of these destinations.

DEPARTURE TAX

There's a NZ\$30 departure tax (NZ\$10 for children, free for under twos) when you fly out of Rarotonga.

Sea

Various cruise ships stop in at Rarotonga and other islands but they don't take on passengers. They typically arrive in the morning and depart in the afternoon, after quick island tours.

YACHT

The other sea alternative is to come by yacht, except during the cyclone season from November to March. Once you arrive on Rarotonga, fly your Q flag and visit the **Harbour Master** (☎ 28814; Avatiu Harbour, Rarotonga). Other official ports of entry are Aitutaki, Penrhyn and Pukapuka, all of which have good anchorages. The virtually uninhabited Suwarrow Atoll is another favourite with yachties, but is not an official port of entry.

There's a remote chance of catching a yacht from the Cook Islands to Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, French Polynesia or NZ. Check the situation at Rarotonga's Ports Authority at Avatiu Harbour, where yachties often leave messages if they are looking for crew.

GETTING AROUND

Unless you're bringing your own yacht, inter-island travel is limited to passenger ships and Air Rarotonga flights. Flights to the Northern Group islands are expensive; only Manihiki, Penrhyn and Pukapuka have airstrips.

Air

Air Rarotonga (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) is the only domestic airline in the Cook Islands. There are several daily flights to Aitutaki, and several weekly flights between Rarotonga and the rest of the Southern Group. Planes to the Northern Group are more erratic, but there's usually a weekly flight to Manihiki and Penrhyn. The only inter-island air pass is the Island Hopper Pass (NZ\$400), between Rarotonga, Aitutaki and 'Atiu.

Boat

Flying is the easiest way to get around the Cook Islands, but if your sea legs (and land-lubber stomach) will stand it, you could hop onto an inter-island transport ship. Shipping schedules are notoriously unpredictable – weather, breakdowns and unexpected route

changes can all put a kink in your travel plans. Ships stop off at each island for just a few hours, and only Rarotonga and Penrhyn have decent harbours; at all the other islands you go ashore by lighter or barge.

Taio Shipping (☎ 24905, 24912; taio@oyster.net.ck; Avatiu Wharf) is the main inter-island shipping company in the Cooks. Its ships are far from luxury cruise liners: there's limited cabin space, and some ships have no cabins at all. Showers and toilets are available to all passengers.

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

The private research vessel **Bounty Bay** (☎ 23513, 52400; www.pacific-expeditions.com), based on Rarotonga, runs eco-trips around many of the more remote islands of the Cooks, including Palmerston, Takutea and Manuae.

Local Transport

All the islands are good for cycling. Rarotonga has a regular circle-island bus service, taxis and plenty of bicycles, motorcycles, cars and jeeps for hire. Aitutaki has a taxi service and bicycles, motorcycles and cars for hire. 'Atiu has a taxi service, rental motorcycles and a couple of jeeps. Ma'uke has rental motorcycles.

Hitchhiking, though not the custom, is perfectly legal. If you're walking in the outer islands, someone's bound to stop and offer you a lift before too long.

Tours

Circle-island tours on Rarotonga offer a good introduction to the island's history, geography and traditional culture. Guided tours are also offered on Aitutaki, 'Atiu, Ma'uke and Mangaia.

Rarotongan travel agencies (p437) can organise single-island or multi-island package tours. Day trips from Rarotonga to Aitutaki are available.

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