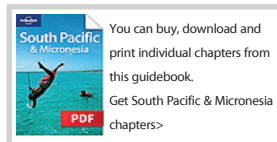


Getting Started



There's nothing quite like daydreaming about long, white beaches, long, cool drinks and long days lying in the sun. But to lose your head in the clouds and end up arriving in the South Pacific with no preparation is folly. With a good plan, you won't break the bank every time you hop from one Pacific nation to the next, you'll know which islands are easily accessible and which are way off track, and you'll know where to find the best match – not just for your wallet but also for your style.

We've outlined the basics to get you going and to help you get the most out of your Pacific dream, including tips on when to go to avoid cyclones, what to bring and how much it's going to cost. The South Pacific is varied enough to accommodate travellers on all budgets – we'll give you the lowdown on when, where and how.

WHEN TO GO

Most visitors to the Pacific time their visit according to the weather. Specifically, they avoid the wet season, when rain is dumped in either isolated showers or seasonal deluges. As the region is in the tropics, the temperature doesn't vary much – it's *always* hot – but during the wet season, heat, humidity and persistent rain can combine to make things sticky and uncomfortable. It's also the time when most cyclones hit and when some places may be impossible to reach due to boggy road conditions. On the other hand, most of the rain falls at night, and the wet season is the time when other tourists will not accompany you in great numbers (not that that's a huge issue in many Pacific countries).

South of the equator, the wet season is from November to April; the dry season runs from May to October. These seasons are basically

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

The usual advice about travelling light doesn't apply so much to the Pacific – bring everything you need as you may not be able to buy it. Consider the following:

- Check visas (p833), vaccinations (p845), and travel and cyclone warnings (opposite).
- Photocopy important documents – leave one copy at home and take another with you.
- Put plastic carry bags or bin liners inside your luggage to keep things dry in a downpour.
- Pack your International Diving Certificate.
- Hat, sunglasses, high-UV-protection sunscreen and rash vest.
- Antiseptic for treating coral cuts (p846).
- Insect repellent and mosquito net (see the boxed text, p848).
- Mask and snorkel – invaluable for impromptu underwater investigations.
- Stout walking shoes or old sneakers (trainers) for razor-sharp coral tracks.
- Light sweater for boats and backs of 4WDs.
- Umbrella or raincoat (poncho-style is good for backpacking).
- A torch (flashlight) for exploring caves and waiting for electricity to return.
- A book or three.
- Earplugs, or something to whack the 4am roosters.

reversed north of the equator, ie in Micronesia. For more on climate, see p61.

Another factor to consider is school-holiday times in Pacific-rim countries such as Australia and New Zealand (NZ). The busiest time of the year in the Cook Islands, for example, is during NZ school holidays. At Christmas, flights and boats to many island nations are fully booked by islanders returning home to spend time with their families.

During peak tourist times, prices can be high, accommodation fully booked and planes packed. You'll find better deals and fewer crowds in the shoulder seasons (either side of the dry season) in October and May. The Climate & When to Go sections in individual country chapters explain what to expect and when to expect it, and the Climate Charts (p827) will help you compare the weather in different destinations.

You might want to time your trip for a major local festival or celebration. Use the boxed text, p31, as a guideline, and also see the Festivals & Events sections in the individual country chapters.

Despite appearances to the contrary, things can change quickly in the Pacific. A cyclone can knock out all accommodation (not to mention roads, electricity and telephone services) and local disputes can close off an area. The number-one rule when planning and travelling is to be flexible. The Pacific attitude to time is more relaxed than in many Western cultures, so don't set your heart on getting to destinations or getting things done in any great hurry (see Time, p833).

It's worth checking for cyclones before you head off on a Pacific holiday. Try the websites of the **Joint Typhoon Warning Centre Hawai'i** (www.npmoc.navy.mil/jtwc.html) or the **Fiji Meteorological Service** (www.met.gov.fj). For more details on cyclones, see p61.

Check, too, the travel advisories published by some governments. These warnings will alert you to any countries considered unsafe, usually due to political unrest or natural disasters. The Foreign Affairs departments in Australia (<http://smartraveller.gov.au>) and Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca/dest) both issue advisories, as does the **British Foreign and Commonwealth Office** (www.fco.gov.uk).

COSTS & MONEY

Brace yourself – the Pacific is *not* a bargain paradise. Getting there, getting around, accommodation and food are all relatively expensive, due largely to two facts: first, compared with other parts of the world, the Pacific has few tourists, and, secondly, huge expanses of vast blue ocean separate most of the nations. Travel costs are high – whether by car, plane or speedboat – due to over-the-top fuel prices and enormous distances. Much of the food is imported and is therefore pricey. In remote areas transport costs force food prices up even further.

Despite all this, travellers on all budgets – big or small – find their way, and with a bit of planning you'll quickly discover that costs vary enormously from one country to another. You may opt for stinger destinations such as French Polynesia and New Caledonia, cheapies such as Samoa and Fiji, or any of the others in between. Backpackers can live like a monk (or a nun) in Tahiti (camping or staying in a guesthouse dormitory and eating bread and cheese) and will still run up a bill of about US\$75 per day. Travel cheaply in Fiji and you'll need at least US\$35 per day. Midrange travellers eating out most days and sleeping in hotels can expect a daily budget starting from US\$80/200 in Fiji/Tahiti. Travellers opting for full-course restaurant meals and resort-style accommodation will be looking at US\$150/500.

'You might want to time your trip for a major local festival'

Ways to stretch your money are numerous. Careful planning will cut travel costs – consider a round-the-world ticket (p836), an air pass (p837) or a package holiday (p840). Don't automatically discount the latter – they can be a great way to acclimatise for a few days before going it alone. Accommodation is the next biggest expense; for a rundown of regional options, costs and money-saving strategies, see p822. Accommodation with a kitchen is one way to cut costs. If you are preparing your own food, avoid expensive tinned goods in favour of locally grown fruit and vegetables. Markets are usually the best way to buy any kind of fresh produce.

Once you're in a country, hiring a bicycle or hitchhiking (p843) is worth considering. On some remote islands, hitching is the only option. And remember: the more time you spend in any one place, the lower your daily expenses are likely to be as you get to know your way around. Activities such as scuba diving will push costs up considerably, but if you're content to snorkel, the underwater world is yours for next to nothing, particularly if you bring your own mask and snorkel.

A general warning about the prices we list in this book: they're likely to change, usually in an upward direction, but if the last holiday season was particularly slow or the local economy crashes, they may remain the same or even come down a bit. See p830 for more details on handling money matters in the South Pacific.

READING UP Books

Plenty has been published about the Pacific to spur on the dream factor. First, check out the travel selection at www.lonelyplanet.com to narrow down your destination(s).

Following is a list of titles recommended by the authors of this book. Any or all will make great beach companions. For more titles, see the Literature and Books sections in the individual country chapters.

Nuanua – Pacific Writing in English since 1980 Anthology of Pacific prose and poetry that's great for a taste of the small but vibrant contemporary local literary scene.

Robert Louis Stevenson – His Best Pacific Writings (Roger Robinson) Essential reading for travellers to Samoa, French Polynesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and anyone into early masterpieces of Pacific writing.

Blue Latitudes: Boldly Going Where Captain Cook has Gone Before (Tony Horwitz; also sold as *Into the Blue: Blue Latitudes: Boldly Going Where Captain Cook has Gone Before*) Frustrating, funny and insightful look at the voyages of Captain Cook and a beer-swilling mate by a Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

The Miss Tutti Frutti Contest (Graeme Lay) A must for anyone flitting around the region. This collection of South Pacific travel stories is rich in weird and wonderful characters, subtle wit and anecdotal insights. The text is light but fast.

Transit of Venus – Travels in the Pacific (Julian Evans) Recounts a shoestring journey by boat through the Pacific and is one of the region's best modern yarns.

The Happy Isles of Oceania – Paddling the Pacific (Paul Theroux) The book travellers love to hate. Poor old perpetually miserable Paul is anything but happy as he complains about having a wretched time kayaking around parts of the Pacific. Ten marks for some great insights.

The Time Impact – The Invasion of the South Pacific 1767–1840 (Alan Moorehead) One of the most influential books written on the impact of colonialism in the South Pacific. Critically assesses the havoc wreaked by early European explorers.

Tales of the South Pacific, Rascals in Paradise and Return to Paradise (James Michener) Famous collection of short stories dealing with life in the South Pacific from WWII onward.

Slow Boats Home (Gavin Young) Sequel to Young's earlier book *Slow Boats to China*. Both describe the author's 1979 voyage around the world on boats big and small. The sequel includes the Pacific part of the journey.

James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, published in 1958, sparked a revival of Western interest in the Pacific, won a Pulitzer Prize, and was made into a musical (see the boxed text, opposite).

Websites

The Internet is a rich resource for travellers. Research your trip, hunt down bargain air fares, book hotels, check weather conditions or chat with locals and other travellers about the best places to visit (or avoid!). For country-specific websites, see the Directory in the individual country chapters.

Airline Information (www.travelocity.com) What airlines fly where, when and for how much.

Jane's Oceania (www.janesoceania.com) Publishes articles about nearly every Pacific country.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Here you'll find succinct summaries on travelling to most places on earth, postcards from other travellers and the Thorn Tree bulletin board, where you can ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

Pacific Beat (www.abc.net.au/ra/pacbeat) Radio Australia's site has up-to-the-minute news and current events stories from around the Pacific.

Pacific Magazine (www.pacificislands.cc) Up-to-date news and reviews in this region-wide magazine.

University of the South Pacific (www.uspbookcentre.com) Lists Pacific books and publications.

MUST-SEE MOVIES

Settle into a comfy sofa, put your feet up and let these films whet your Pacific appetite.

Pear Ta Ma 'on Maf (The Land Has Eyes) Came out in 2004 and tells the tale of an island girl's struggle with poverty and prejudice and the strength she discovers in her island's mythology.

The Bounty Most recent movie made about the famous *Bounty* mutiny (see p424). Stars Anthony Hopkins and Mel Gibson, and is well worth a watch.

The Thin Red Line War film showcasing the beautiful singing of the Solomon Islanders (see p548), and the stunning scenery of Guadalcanal.

Tatau Samoa German director Glsa Schleelein retraces the life of Samoan tattoo master Paulo Sulu'ape.

Wayfinders – A Pacific Odyssey Documentary about traditional voyaging and the *Hokule'a* canoe. For more, check out www.pbs.org/wayfinders.

Rapa Nui B-grade matinee coproduced by Kevin Costner in 1994. It's hardly essential viewing, but it does give the feel of Easter Island's remote appeal.

Return to Paradise and South Pacific Both these 1950s movies were based on novels by James Michener. The former was filmed in Samoa, where Return to Paradise Beach became a popular tourist destination. They show little of Pacific culture, and these days may be of more comedy value than social.

Pear Ta Ma 'on Maf (The Land Has Eyes) is the first Fijian film to be submitted for nomination for a foreign-language Oscar.

FAVOURITE FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Local festivals that involve a few different countries are listed here, along with some individual high-lights. For other country-specific events, see Festivals & Events in the individual country directories.

Rise of Palolo (p514) It's not everywhere you get to celebrate worms rising at midnight. This one's a must.

Miss Galaxy Pageant (p727) Beauty contest Tongan-style, and always booked out.

Naghol (p802) South Pentecost's famous land-divers take the leap in April and May.

Festival of Pacific Arts Vibrant festival showcasing traditional art works from around the Pacific. Held every four years in October in a different country. The next one is in American Samoa in 2008.

Foire de Bourail (p350) Cowboys come to town for this annual rodeo-style shindig at Bourail on New Caledonia's main island.

Hawaiki Nui Va'a Canoes from many Pacific countries are raced between the islands of Huahine, Ra'iatea, Tahaa and Bora Bora in French Polynesia every November.

South Pacific Games In August–September 2007, Samoa will take another turn at hosting these games, which are held every four years at a different location around the Pacific.

Fiesta (p238) Patron saints are honoured with chilli peppers and more in Guam's village festivals.

Pacific Island Sevens Tournaments Held annually in the Cook Islands, Fiji and Samoa, this event features as much dance and celebration as it does rugby.

CONDUCT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Few Pacific places are uptight about clothing standards, but dressing like a slob won't endear you to anyone. It's rarely appropriate for men to go bare-chested in town, and women's dress conventions are even stricter. Dress casually, but ensure you are sufficiently covered up (cover your shoulders and wear trousers or a knee-length dress) if your sightseeing includes places of worship.

Topless bathing is accepted in a few countries, particularly those with ties to France (such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia), but even here it's usually restricted to resorts and certain beaches. Nude bathing is almost never on.

Public displays of affection between men and women, even two tourists, are often inappropriate. Flirting with the locals can also get you into a *lot* of trouble; there are some very serious expectations attached to what may appear to be casual affairs. Despite the writings of Western visitors from Bougainville to Margaret Mead, the Pacific is *not* a playground of free love.

Avoid becoming visibly frustrated when things don't go your way. Causing someone to lose face because they have failed you is an unforgivable sin.

Both tipping for service and bargaining for better prices can cause offence – for more, see p831.

While most islanders will enjoy being photographed, some people may be superstitious about your camera or suspicious of your motives. Ask permission if a candid shot can't be made and don't insist or snap a picture anyway if permission is denied.

Lastly, when visiting traditional villages there are a few guidelines to keep in mind. For details, see p53.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

As a visitor, you have a responsibility to the local people and the environment. Respect local traditions and you'll more readily be accepted, especially in rural areas. When it comes to the environment, the key rule is to preserve natural resources.

If you want to avoid eating fish that are becoming endangered, abstain from swordfish, marlin, southern bluefin tuna (albacore tuna is fine) and gemfish. Turtle can be added to the list, too. The same goes for buying artworks – bypass those that incorporate turtle shells as well as rare shells, corals or timbers.

If you just gotta go when you're somewhere in the wilderness, bury waste in holes at least 15cm deep and at least 100m from any watercourse to avoid contaminating water sources. Likewise, don't use detergents or toothpaste (even if they are biodegradable) in or near watercourses.

Litter is a huge problem on many Pacific islands. Piles of plastic trash, aluminium cans and worse spoil beaches and lagoons. Even if the local attitude towards rubbish is blasé, don't add to the problem by leaving your garbage behind. For more on environmental issues, see p65.

For more detailed information on responsible travel, see the boxed texts about diving (p69), yachting (p842), and conduct in the South Pacific (above).

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

PACIFIC PARADISE

One to Two Months/Fiji to the Cook Islands

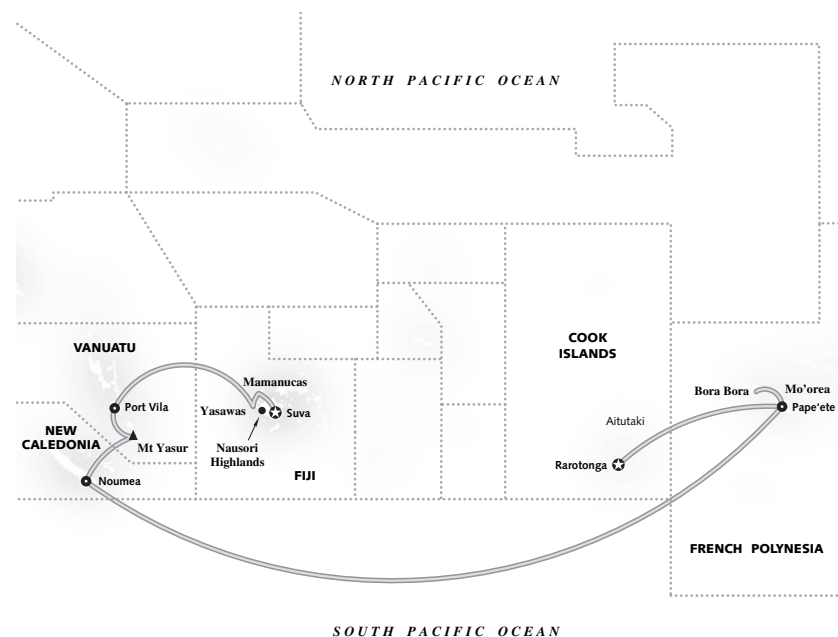
Top of the pops is regional hub Fiji. Take a boat to the **Mamanucas** (p178) or **Yasawas** (p184), two island groups just made for tropical acclimatisation. Bus it to villages in the **Nausori Highlands** (p178), then continue to **Suva** (p166), where you can discover the best way to eat human at the **Fiji Museum** (p166; also see p176).

Time to flee? A **kava** (p774) session in one of Vanuatu's *nakamal* will calm any residual frayed nerves. Reignite them with an evening visit to **Mt Yasur** (p781), one of the world's most accessible volcanoes.

Onward to New Caledonia, where the sublime **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p315) showcases Pacific cultures. You'll need to crank up your *francs* for **Noumea** (p310), and keep cranking as you cross to **Pape'ete** (p595). Drop anchor in the vibrant French Polynesian capital for a night, then high-speed it to idyllic **Mo'orea** (p604) or go into serious debt on **Bora Bora** (p631).

Your last port-o-call is the Cook Islands. Both **Aitutaki** (p454) and Rarotonga do **island nights** (p452) where you can fling your hips in final farewell to the Pacific.

Clock up 12,000km as you crisscross the Pacific in this classic island hop. Begin your epic Melanesian style in Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, then explore Polynesia in Tahiti and French Polynesia, and Rarotonga and the Cook Islands.



MICRONESIAN MADNESS

Two to Four Weeks/Guam to Pohnpei (Federated States of Micronesia)

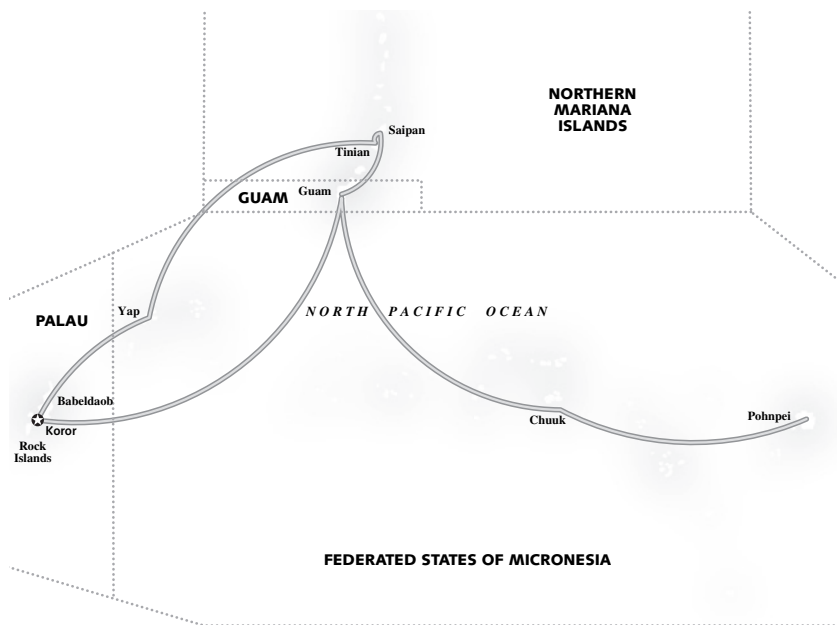
Go straight to **Guam** (p217), the obligatory starting point for some air passes (p214), and spend the evening at **Chamorro Village Night Market** (p235). Next day, fly a kite with the locals at the **War in the Pacific National Historical Park** (p227), one of Guam's WWII memorial parks, and take in **Talofof Falls** (p231), before moving out to the **Northern Mariana Islands** (p368). On the main island, Saipan, head to the sobering **Banzai Cliff** (p378), where Japanese families committed suicide en masse in WWII. Fly just 10 minutes to **Tinian** (p382) and feel the goose bumps rise as you land on the island where atomic warfare started (see the boxed text, p384).

Next stop, **Yap** (p126) in the **Federated States of Micronesia** (FSM; p98). Traditional culture is strong here – check out the bank of **stone money** (p130) on the walk to **Balabat** village (p129), and mind you dodge the **betel nut** (p132).

Allocate plenty of time for **Palau** (p393) – it's a Micronesian must. The **Rock Islands** (p404) top the itinerary, whether you're here to dive, snorkel or kayak. **Babeldaob** boasts the country's oldest *bai* (p408) and great food is the go in **Koror** (p403).

Finish your trip with Chuuk and Pohnpei. Both are back in FSM; reconnect via Guam. In the diving world, **Chuuk** (p119) is synonymous with shipwrecks – a whole Japanese WWII fleet litters the island's lagoon. **Pohnpei** (p109) has another type of submarine world – the ancient sunken city of **Nan Madol** (p114). The locals will be able to conjure up a canoe to explore this fascinating watery kingdom.

Micronesia's most accessible countries are in the palm of your hand with an air pass that starts in Guam and takes you 6500km via Saipan, Yap, Palau and Chuuk, to end in Pohnpei in FSM.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

IDLING THE OUTLIERS

Two to Six Months/Pitcairn Island to Tokelau

Off the trodden track in the Pacific? That's easy – getting back on is usually the tough bit.

Start at one of the most isolated places on earth – **Pitcairn Island** (p419). Best known these days for the sex trial that rocked the island in recent years, it's also world famous as the hideaway for the *Bounty* mutineers. Fletcher Christian's bible still exists.

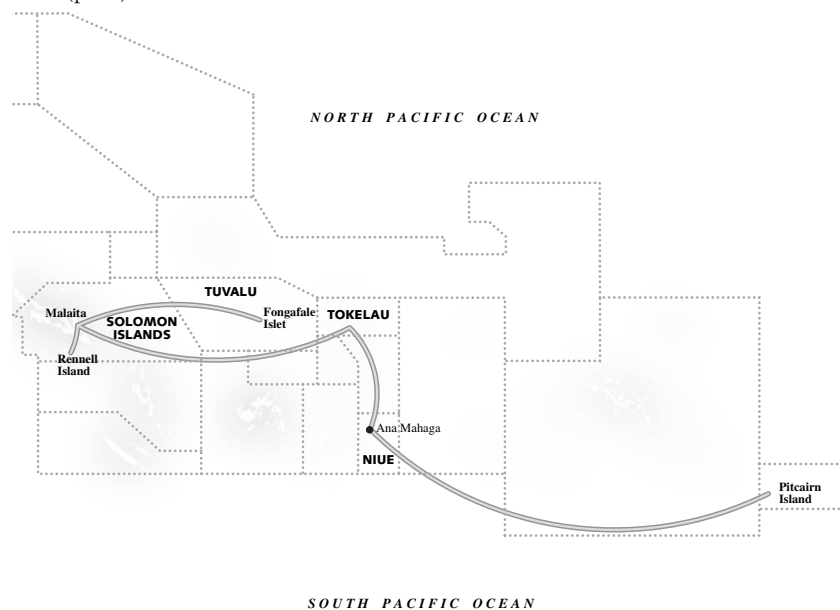
Next up is **Niue** (p356), proud holder of the 'world's smallest self-governing country' title. Don't expect blonde beaches on this Polynesian stalwart – instead, dramatic cliffs tower above the ocean, while, below sea level, caves such as the **Ana Mahaga** (p362) entice international divers.

Tokelau (p679) beckons those who yearn to go where few intrepid travellers have been. Just getting to this country is a large part of the fun: there are no planes, only a boat once a fortnight or so. Tokelau is also a case of catch it while you can – it may not have too many decades to celebrate if global warming continues (see p681).

Dip into Melanesian culture in the **Solomons** (p542). Head to the wild reaches of **Malaita** (p569) with its artificial islands or take off to **Rennell Island** (p567), a World Heritage site that few travellers explore.

If time is really no object, top the journey off at **Tuvalu** (p732). Don't hope to have this speck in the Pacific to yourself – about 4500 Tuvaluans are sardined onto tiny **Fongafale Islet** (p738), the country's main island. Overcrowding may explain the women's dance style during **fatele** (p737).

Pack more than a cut lunch for this 11,600km adventure to some of the most isolated countries in the world. You'll need extended leave from the office.

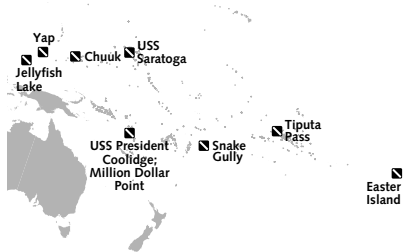


TAILORED TRIPS

SURREAL SCUBA

A diver's delight – there's no other way to describe the South Pacific. The crystalline waters are teeming with marine life, and unbelievable sites are unexploited and uncrowded. A beginner? You're in for a treat (see the boxed text, p77). Experienced divers already know the lures – a profusion of pelagics, shipwrecks galore and wild encounters including **feeding frenzies** (see p70 and the boxed text on p72).

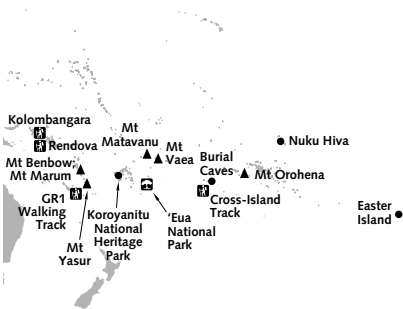
Drift with grey sharks at **Tiputa Pass** (p71) in French Polynesia. Inspect one of the world's best wrecks, the **USS President Coolidge** (p74), off Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu. Here, too, is **Million Dollar Point** (p75), a WWII military junkyard. Niue offers water with stunning visibility – just what you want for the aptly named **Snake Gully** (p73). Medusa would feel right at home here. The only place with better visibility is **Easter Island** (p70). FSM offers a lagoon load of shipwrecks off **Chuuk** (p75), and manta rays are the mantra off **Yap** (p76). The Marshall Islands boast the world's only diveable aircraft carrier, the **USS Saratoga** (p282). And where else but in Palau's **Jellyfish Lake** (p77) can you suspend yourself with thousands of jellyfish – surreal! And if that's not enough, there's always a **muck dive** (p74).



LAND AHOY

The Pacific by foot – it sounds like an oxymoron, but it's not. Slip off those fins, slide into sandals and remember: V stands for volcano – the live variety on Vanuatu. While frighteningly spectacular **Mt Yasur** (p781) won't stretch you, hiking up **Mt Benbow** or **Mt Marum** (p790) will. Too much heat? Then go for sleeping beauties such as **Rendova** (p564) or **Kolombangara** (p562) in the Solomon Islands, or Samoa's **Mt Matavanu** (p506). Still in Samoa but surely never to awaken is Robert Louis Stevenson – his tomb sits atop **Mt Vaea** (p492).

Conservation areas naturally offer hikers wide scope. Cool off under the rainforest canopy in Tonga's beautiful **'Eua National Park** (p706) or extend yourself with a climb up Castle Rock in Fiji's **Koroyanitu National Heritage Park** (p177).



New Caledonia's biggest island, Grande Terre, boasts plenty of options, including the **GR1 walking track** (p323). On the other side of the Pacific, French Polynesia's most famous island, Tahiti, has **Mt Orohena** (p597), or you can explore a wilder side of paradise on **Nuku Hiva** (p652).

In the Cook Islands, discover the take on Rarotonga via the **Cross-Island Track** (p444). If razor-sharp walking is more your thing, 'Atiu's coral **makatea** hide ancient **burial caves** (p461).

Hike between archaeological sites on **Easter Island** (p95), and don't give diminutive size a second thought – this speck in the ocean is fab for walking, and you'll never get lost.

Snapshot

For a supposedly quiet corner of the world, the Pacific has a knack for making headlines. It's frequently mentioned in the same breath as global warming, but – unlike nations who debate the effectiveness of the Kyoto Protocol (see p66) in stopping the rising ocean levels – the Pacific directly sees the consequences. In late 1999, two Kiribati islands disappeared; fearing a similar impact on its low-lying coral atolls, Tuvalu has asked Australia and New Zealand to resettle its people, a move that would make the Tuvaluans the world's first environmental refugees. Still suspicious it's all tree-hugging propaganda? According to the South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project, Tonga experienced a water-level rise of 10cm in the last 13 years, and in early 2006 Tuvalu encountered the highest tides in 15 years.

When the Fisheries Commission met in Pohnpei during 2004 to discuss the region's fishing future, another environmental concern was at issue: overfishing. Islanders license the waters around their land – usually to larger international companies – and overfishing versus profit, particularly for smaller island nations, remains an unbalanced debate. In some nations this revenue accounts for a big chunk of national income: 22% in the Federated States of Micronesia and 34% in Kiribati. A similar issue came to a head in 2005 when Japan sought to resume commercial whaling with the International Whaling Commission, and Pacific nations such as the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu supported the proposal. Although it was narrowly defeated, Australia and New Zealand were both critical of this stance, while Japan may make further attempts to resume commercial whaling with Pacific support.

Australia exerts considerable influence in the Pacific through its membership of the Pacific Islands Forum. Recently Australia has been driving changes in the Forum to create more regionalism, whereby Pacific nations will act collectively on trade, HIV/AIDS treatment, waste management and air transport. Under the Forum's Pacific Plan the nations of the region would remove barriers to trade within the region and trade externally as a collective group. This could one day create a single currency in the Pacific and will certainly create favourable economies of scale.

The benefits of regionalism can be most easily seen in air transport, with every Pacific nation feeling the financial burden of maintaining its own airline (Nauru had its last plane repossessed by creditors in late 2005). Similarly, defence and protection of fishing rights is a costly exercise for individual nations but could be done more efficiently as a collective.

The great sticking point with a regional approach is that some governments fear that they'll be sidelined by bigger nations. Talk of making Suva or even Auckland the regional centre will bring hundreds of jobs to Fiji or New Zealand but may create unemployment on Tuvalu or Kiribati.

The need for a collective approach to HIV/AIDS became crucial in 2005, however, when the UN declared that the region was 'on the brink of a serious HIV epidemic' unless prevention and causes of infection were considered. On other issues such as human rights and common sporting facilities the Forum hasn't reached any agreement.

The need for regional sporting facilities was heightened when the 2006 Micronesian Games was threatened with cancellation after Yap and the

FAST FACTS

Most common unit of currency: US dollar (US\$)

Total visitors: 2,249,913 (1,287,568 on holiday)

Estimated total cars: 276,000

Estimated revenue for Palau from TV show *Survivor*: US\$4 million

Highest price paid for a single blue-fin tuna: US\$42,000

Highest infant mortality rate: 66 per 1000 births (Solomon Islands)

While the Pacific supplies over a third of the world's tuna catch, worth almost US\$2 billion, only 10% of it is caught by Pacific islanders, who are happier to license their fishing out.

Marshall Islands backed out of hosting the event. The games bring in 1500 athletes from across the area, which could be too great a burden for smaller economies. The favourite to host the event at the time of research was the Northern Mariana Islands, which had sunk money into creating ovals and other infrastructure.

As with any part of the world, there are infrequent conflicts in the Pacific, such as the Fijian coups (see p139) and the French Polynesia troubles (p584). Rebellion in the Solomons saw Australian military intervention in 2003 to restore order, and tension in Fiji in late 2005 led to fears of another coup. See p29 for information on travel alerts in the region.

The Authors



GEERT COLE & LEANNE LOGAN Coordinating Authors *Destination, Highlights, Getting Started, Itineraries, Pitcairn Island, Tokelau, US Territories, Directory, Transport*

Geert and Leanne were the coordinating authors for this book.

When Geert visited the Pacific for the first time many moons ago, he could not have been further away from his homeland, Belgium. Frangipani, flashing smiles and timelessness – the natural beauty, cultures and simplicity of everyday life in the South Pacific entranced him as he sailed from New Zealand (NZ) to Samoa. Now with his partner, Leanne, and two young daughters, Geert returns as often as possible to shed his Western skin. As a family, they can attest that the Pacific’s perfect for kids.

Leanne, an Australian-based writer and photographer, first fell under the South Pacific’s spell more than a decade ago when she worked on Lonely Planet’s *New Caledonia* guide. She’s been lured back many times since, and on each visit vows to hang on forever to the best de-stress device yet invented: island time. Inevitably, it takes only a few days back at home for her pledge to fall to pieces and life to gallop off like a Melbourne Cup starter. Oh well, looks like another trip to paradise is needed.



Our Favourite Trip

We have spent more time under coconut palms than is fair in anyone’s lifetime, but our best trip ever was road-testing the Pacific as a family.

We toted the tots up the steamy Mt Yasur volcano in Vanuatu (p781); they didn’t need nudging up Amédée lighthouse in New Caledonia (p316). We swam and snorkelled ourselves silly in the Solomon Islands (p542), and could have spent a fortnight in either Fiji (p150) or Vanuatu (p771) – there’s so much there for kids. The highlight of Samoa was testing Papasee’a Sliding Rock (p495), but the Alofaaga Blowholes (p508) came a close second. As for food, we’re certain nothing beats those *pains au chocolat* from Pape’ete’s marché (p595).

Conclusion? Pacific plus family gets a big tick. Next time, maybe it’ll be something different...like tying the knot (see the boxed text, p824).



LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It’s simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don’t research using just the Internet or phone, and they don’t take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.



BRETT ATKINSON Niue

Auckland, the world’s biggest Polynesian city, has been Brett’s home for more than 30 years. While travelling and writing in over 40 countries he has squeezed in trips all around the Pacific with his wife, Carol. They’ve been lost in a tin mine in New Caledonia, negotiated slippery, sliding rocks in Samoa, and looked for shellfish with Tongan pigs. Brett will also state on oath that the world’s best-tasting parrotfish comes from Maré in the Loyalty Islands. Every March you’ll find him celebrating with 300,000 other Aucklanders at the annual Pasifika Festival.



OLIVER BERRY Rarotonga & the Cook Islands

Oliver’s first trip to the Cook Islands was as a stopover on a long haul to NZ, a visit that ended up lasting eight weeks. He’s since travelled widely across the South Pacific and picked up a few useful skills along the way, including how to catch sand crabs with your bare hands, some top tips for beating a tribal chief at poker, and an excellent Samoan recipe for mosquito repellent. He’s been trying to find an excuse to return to the Cook Islands ever since that first unforgettable trip; writing a guidebook is the best one yet. Oliver lives in Cornwall and works as a writer and photographer. His awards include the Guardian Young Travel Writer of the year.



BECCA BLOND Tahiti & French Polynesia

Whether it’s on Lonely Planet time, for the *South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland* and *Thailand* guides, or personal time, on trips to Zanzibar, Mauritius and the south coast of France, Becca has devoted way too much time searching for the world’s best beach destination. Her search ended after discovering French Polynesia (the sand’s only so-so, she says, but the water is perfect and the people are fantastic). When she’s not roaming the world for Lonely Planet, Becca lives in Boulder, Colorado. In her infrequent spare moments she likes to play in the mountains or just chill out at home with her boyfriend and fellow Lonely Planet author, Aaron, and their big, goofy dog, Duke.



CELESTE BRASH Food & Drink, Wallis & Futuna

After two magical trips to French Polynesia, Celeste made a permanent move to a tiny atoll in the Tuamotu islands in 1995. Over five years, she cleaned pearl oysters till her fingers were raw, and learnt to love sharks, bake bread and cook fish in more ways than she thought humanly possible. Cravings for indoor plumbing and fresh fruit prompted a move to Tahiti, where she has lived ever since. She now writes, raises her children, dabbles in the pearl business and still cooks lots of fish. During and around her time in Tahiti she has managed to travel extensively throughout the Pacific, including visits to Fiji, New Caledonia, Easter Island, and Wallis and Futuna.


JEAN-BERNARD CARILLET South Pacific Diving, Easter Island

A Paris-based journalist and photographer, Jean-Bernard is a die-hard South Pacific lover and a diving fiend. He first landed on Tahiti in 1995 to work as a diving instructor, and it was the start of a love affair with Polynesia as a whole. Momentarily based in Tahiti, he was all too happy to travel the breadth and length of Easter Island for this edition, climbing Rano Kau, jumping in the fabulously clear waters off Motu Nui and exploring the archaeological sites in the company of archaeologists. He journeyed on to the Cook Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu to check out the best dive sites for the South Pacific Diving chapter of this book. A diver's life is a hard one, isn't it?


TIONE CHINULA New Caledonia

Tione first experienced the laid-back Pacific lifestyle in the mid-1990s, when she spent a year in Tahiti. She made New Caledonia her home eight years ago when she moved there from NZ. In keeping with the relaxed lifestyle she spends many long, lazy days at the beach, from where she occasionally rouses herself to pursue more energetic activities such as diving in the magnificent lagoon, mountain biking through the vast landscapes of the Far South, and tramping along rugged coastlines or in the central mountain ranges with her husband, Vincent.


SUSANNAH FARFOR Tonga

Susannah is an Australian-based writer and editor whose work regularly appears in food and adventure-related travel publications. She has explored many of the South Pacific's gems since donning her first grass skirt in Tahiti at the age of seven. Susannah researched and wrote on Tonga for Lonely Planet's *Samoan Islands & Tonga* guidebook, and has also researched and written for Lonely Planet's *Rarotonga & the Cook Islands* and Australia series guides. For this title she got a taste for Tonga while sailing, snorkelling, kayaking, delving into caves and sinking her toes into the sand on long stretches of uninhabited beach.


JOCELYN HAREWOOD Vanuatu

Jocelyn brought her children to Vanuatu in the 1970s, when Port Vila was one dusty street with a few equally dusty shops. On this visit, her granddaughters travelled for part of the journey, proving again that it's one great place for kids. So much changes with each visit, yet Le Meridien, where she first windsurfed, and L'Houstalet, where she first ate flying fox – yikes – are still there and better than ever. The adventures are more dramatic each time she visits. Three years ago she honed her skills at yachting, fishing and drinking kava. This time she was more into scuba diving, abseiling and checking that the local beer was as good as ever.


VIRGINIA JEALOUS Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu

Virginia was based in Suva, Fiji, from 2004 to 2006. Working with an NGO gave her the opportunity to spend time in several countries with local colleagues, and also ensured that she drank far too much kava while developing a lasting relationship with dalo. For several years Virginia lived on the other Christmas Island in Australia's Indian Ocean Territories; she was particularly pleased to visit the Micronesian Christmas Island during research for this guide. She's also lived in northern Australia, East Timor, Fiji, Indonesian West Papua and the Philippines, and has authored bits of Lonely Planet's *Philippines*, *East Timor*, *Australia*, *Vietnam*, *Indonesia* and *Fiji* guidebooks.


ROWAN MCKINNON Solomon Islands

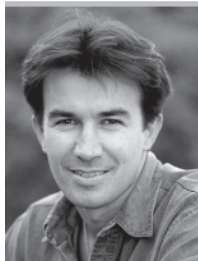
Rowan, a freelance writer and musician, has been travelling to the South Pacific for nearly 20 years. As a child he lived on Nauru, and he has an abiding love and respect for Pacific people, art and culture. He's contributed to several editions of Lonely Planet's *Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands* guidebook as well as writing up the Solomon Islands for the 1st edition of the *South Pacific* book. Research for this book took Rowan to the Solomons again. He lives in Melbourne.


SIMON SELLARS Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau

Simon is a freelance writer and editor. His folio includes published pieces on Japanese telepaths, low-budget filmmaking, S&M mistresses, new media and technology, psychic warfare, the space shuttle, and the requisite travel articles. Simon is the founder of Liquid Architecture, an Australian festival of sound art; Sleepy Brain, an online cultural magazine; *Subterrain*, an anthology of writings by homeless people; and Ballardian, a website recording the career and influence of writer JG Ballard. He's been fascinated by the Micronesian islands ever since he first laid eyes on a globe of the world.


PAUL SMITZ Samoa, American Samoa

Paul appears to have a thing about the Pacific. In addition to the Lonely Planet research he conducted on the Samoas for this book and for Lonely Planet's *Samoan Islands & Tonga* guidebook, he has also researched guidebooks on NZ and Australia, and he just can't seem to get enough of beach culture, tropical climates and general indulgence. He thought the Samoas were a special place and thoroughly enjoyed touring the main islands and several tiny islets, leaving a trail of palusami crumbs, crumpled paperbacks and empty Vailima bottles in his wake.



VINCENT TALBOT

New Caledonia

Vincent was born in France but has spent half his life in the Pacific. Having lived in Tahiti as a teenager, he returned there after completing studies in marine biology and spent time enjoying the simple way of life on the secluded Tuamotu atolls and discovering various surfing spots around the Society Islands. From French Polynesia he headed to New Caledonia, where he spends his free time kayaking on the vast lagoon, and exploring the country's remote valleys, mountains and coastline with his wife, Tione, and his little daughter, Moorea.



JUSTINE VAISUTIS

Fiji

Justine has researched many a beach for Lonely Planet, having contributed to seven guides, including *Queensland* and other Australian titles. She has also co-authored Lonely Planet's *Fiji* guidebook. Considering herself a shoreline expert, she journeyed to this archipelago with the cocky gait of a seasoned beach bum – it proved to match her know-how and then some. Tireless diving and snorkelling expeditions, village visits, kava drinking, cultivating a 'Fiji Bitter' beer belly, highland treks, acquiring new 'family members'...and scrutinising some 40 beaches instilled in her a great love for all things Fijian. Justine lives in Melbourne.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

George Dunford wrote the Snapshot and the Culture chapters. Completing an honours degree in history at the Australian National University saw George studying several units in Pacific history and later working with the Pacific Manuscript Bureau. He has also written historical material on Captain Cook's journals for the National Library of Australia's award-winning Endeavour CD-ROM. He has contributed to several books for Lonely Planet, including New Zealand and Southeast Asia on a shoestring, and has worked as a freelance writer.

Tony Horwitz wrote the boxed text on Captain James Cook (p44). Tony is a Pulitzer-winning reporter and nonfiction author. In researching *Blue Latitudes* (also published as *Into the Blue*), Tony travelled widely in the Pacific islands – 'boldly going where Captain Cook has gone before' – to Tahiti, Bora Bora, NZ, Australia, Niue, Tonga and Hawai'i.

Errol Hunt wrote the History and Environment chapters, and the boxed texts Maui's Fish (p54), The Ancient Homeland, Havaiki (p503), Tokelau Telephones (p684) and St Pierre Chanel of Oceania (p812). Errol was coordinating author of Lonely Planet's 1st edition of *South Pacific*, sole author of the 6th edition of *Rarotonga & the Cook Islands*, and has written extensively on NZ, Tuvalu, Tahiti and Samoa. He has spent most of his time at Lonely Planet, however, as the commissioning editor for guidebooks to Australia, NZ and the Pacific islands.

Clement Paligaru wrote the boxed text Indo-Fijian History & Culture (p140). Clement is an Indo-Fijian who came to Australia in 1984. An Asia-Pacific specialist, he has worked as a radio journalist and producer for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for over 10 years. He currently produces Radio Australia's daily *In the Loop* programme, which profiles the cultures and societies of Oceania.

Martin Robinson wrote the boxed text Fa'alavelave (p480). Martin lived on Samoa for a year getting to know the islands from the grassroots by staying with hospitable families in small villages on all the main islands. From his experiences and other research he has written numerous articles on Samoan culture and history for Pacific island magazines. He currently lives in Auckland on another Polynesian island that he has written about for Lonely Planet.

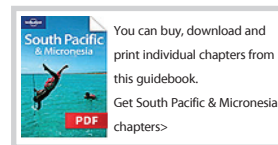
Saufatu Sopoanga wrote the boxed text Climate Change & Global Warming (p66). Mr Sopoanga is the Deputy Prime Minister of Tuvalu, with the dual portfolios of Minister of Works and Energy and Minister of Communications and Transport. In 1990 he was appointed Tuvalu's High Commissioner to Fiji and in 1996 he was appointed Secretary to Government, the highest-ranking post in Tuvalu's public service, a position he held until he retired in 2000 and was elected to parliament from his home island of Nukufetau. He was Tuvalu's ninth prime minister from 2002 to 2004.

Dr Michael Sorokin wrote the Health chapter. Dr Sorokin has extensive experience as a physician and GP in South Africa, the UK, the Pacific islands and rural South Australia. He has special interests in rheumatology, infectious diseases and preventative medicine. Dr Sorokin was recently awarded the Order of Fiji in recognition of his services to health care in Fiji. He is partly responsible for the maintenance of the Traveller's Medical & Vaccination Centre (TMVC) database and helps with reference material for the continuing education of TMVC medical staff.

Miranda Tetlow wrote the boxed text Whaling Politics (p699). Miranda is a columnist, freelance writer and broadcaster, currently working in Australia for the Canberra Times and radio station Triple J. In 2003 she was lucky enough to spend 12 months in Nuku'alofa. Most of this time was spent working as a media adviser for a Tongan NGO and learning the much maligned art of cooking sipi (mutton flaps). Despite a series of unfortunate events that involved dengue fever, tinned corned beef and an amorous taxi driver, Miranda has been passionate about Tonga and its people ever since.

Tony Wheeler was born in England, but grew up in Pakistan, the Bahamas and the USA. In recent years he's travelled extensively in the Pacific, an activity that has led to two 'castaway' episodes, one on Nukufetau in the Tuvalu group (described in the boxed text *Marooned in Tuvalu*, p745) and one on Futuna in Wallis & Futuna. Read all the detail in *Lonely Planet Unpacked Again: More Travel Disaster Stories*. Tony also wrote the boxed text *Lost on Niue* (p361).

Also thanks to Rowland Burley (boxed text Tokelau, At Last, p685), Ian Byles (Lawyer of the Dance, p760), Zayne D'Crus (The Play's the Thing, p771), Trudy Hairs (Sup Sup & Shopping, p547) and Anna Stone (Acting for Change, p142).



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