

Pitcairn Island

You've probably heard of Pitcairn for all the wrong reasons. Until a few years ago, this tiny island group in the middle of the Pacific Ocean lived off its reputation as the idyllic hideaway settlement for the *Bounty* mutineers, but then came the child sex trial which changed Pitcairn Island forever.

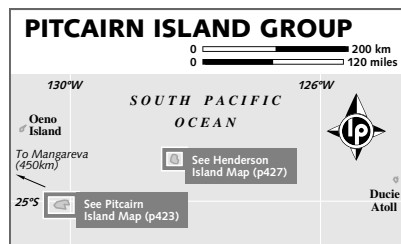
Beautifully green and lush, with a population you could easily seat in a school bus, Pitcairn is one of the last remnants of the British Empire. It's also one of the most remote places on earth, lying halfway between New Zealand (NZ) and Peru. The nearest inhabited island is Mangareva in French Polynesia, a 30-hour boat trip away.

The Pitcairn group includes two low-lying atolls, Oeno and Ducie, and the World Heritage-listed Henderson Island – a *makatea* (raised coral island) with a virtually untouched environment and endemic birdlife.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Savour that first image of **Pitcairn Island** (p422) as it comes into view – life may never be this remote again
- Explore Pitcairn's new **museum** (p426), with its reminders of the island's *Bounty* history
- Comb the beach of **Ducie Atoll** (p428) and its amazing collection of flotsam
- Dream about travelling to **Henderson Island** (p427), a virtually untouched piece of the Pacific
- Inspect Polynesian **petroglyphs** (p426), reminders of Pitcairn Island's pre-European history, carved into the rocks at Down Rope





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Pitcairn's climate is mild and equable, with mean monthly temperatures varying from 19°C in August to 24°C in February. The lowest temperature ever recorded was 10°C; the highest, 34°C. Annual rainfall (around 2000mm) is spread unevenly, but July and August are usually the driest months and November the wettest.

Visitors don't usually have too much choice about when to go to Pitcairn – they go when they've found a yacht, cargo ship or cruise ship heading that way.

HISTORY

The islands of the Pitcairn group have always had a close connection with Mangareva in the Gambier Archipelago (p665), and at one time a Polynesian trading triangle operated between Mangareva, Pitcairn and Henderson. Mangareva's lagoon had abundant supplies of black-lipped pearl oyster shells, which made fine scrapers or scoops and could be cut to make fish hooks. Pitcairn had the only quarry in this part of Polynesia where flakes could be chipped off the sharp-edged stones to make adzes

and other tools. Inhospitable Henderson Island's small population supplied red tropicbird feathers, green turtles and other 'luxury' goods.

Overpopulation devastated Mangareva, and deforestation removed the trees used for making the great seagoing canoes. In a classic example of the flow-on effect of ecological disasters, the downfall of Mangareva led to the abandonment of both Henderson and Pitcairn.

When the explorer Pedro Fernández de Quirós chanced upon Henderson Island in 1606 it was uninhabited, and presumably Pitcairn Island had also been evacuated.

The four Pitcairn islands would probably have been annexed by the French, along with the Tuamotu and Gambier islands, were it not for the British settlement founded by the *Bounty* mutineers. For more on Pitcairn Island's history, see p422; for Henderson Island's history, see p428.

The Pitcairn Island group is Britain's last overseas territory in the Pacific. The governor, who is also the British high commissioner to NZ, lives in Wellington. Prior to the sex trial (see opposite), the island was governed at arm's length. The governor now has a representative in residence, and has visited Pitcairn personally. At a local level, the Island Council consists of a mayor plus appointed and elected members, and tends to local matters including island maintenance, shipping arrivals, communications and medical services.

THE CULTURE

Pitcairn's nine families are descendants of the original *Bounty* mutineers and their Tahitian companions, plus other arrivals over the years. *Bounty* family names, such as Christian and Young, are still common. The island's extraordinarily remote nature means Pitcairners have forged a distinct language and culture over the past two centuries. However, aspects of their way of life have come under international scrutiny since the 2004 sex trial, and it remains to be seen whether the island can sustain itself with a population of just 44 – half the number considered necessary to remain viable.

Self-reliance is a way of life on Pitcairn, as contact with the outside world is limited to visiting yachts, the few cargo ships

PITCAIRN'S FUTURE?

Only inhabitants of Mars would have failed to have picked up on Pitcairn in the last few years. The tiny island hit world headlines due to the ongoing drama of 13 men charged with a string of sex offences, including rape and indecent assault, on girls as young as 12. Some charges dated back 40 years.

In October 2004 six of them men, including then mayor Steve Christian, were found guilty of some 55 charges; one man was acquitted. The six received sentences ranging from community service to six years' jail. At the time of writing, six other men, all living in NZ or Australia, had yet to face court. A series of appeals means the story is far from closed.

At the time of writing, the next chapter was set to unfold in April 2006. The Privy Council in London, the highest appellate body for British overseas territories, will hear the men's claim that, as Pitcairn does not fall within British jurisdiction, Britain had no right to stage the trial. Defence lawyers will argue that when Fletcher Christian and his band of mutineers burnt the *Bounty* in 1790, they rebelled against Britain and severed all ties. A previous appeal, rejected by the Pitcairn Supreme Court sitting in NZ, saw defence lawyers arguing that English law was never enforced on Pitcairn and thus locals weren't aware that rape was a serious offence. Another legal challenge launched in November 2005 questioned the British Government's decision to appoint NZ judges and lawyers to put Pitcairn Islanders on trial.

It may be a long time before the watchful eyes of the world will know the final outcome. In the meantime, life on Pitcairn has changed irrevocably. The community has been fractured, and it will be interesting to see how the locals deal with that division in the future. Outsiders inundated the island during the trial, outnumbering the local adult population for the first time in Pitcairn's history. The island now has

two permanent police officers plus a purpose-built six-cell jail, constructed by the men it may one day incarcerate. Prison guards will be sent to Pitcairn if the convicted men are jailed following the appeals. Social workers from NZ will move to the island to educate the community about sexual abuse and its prevention, and a handful of infrastructure projects have commenced to help the island survive, should a large section of its able-bodied male population eventually be jailed. These projects are also designed to make Pitcairn economically viable and to encourage Pitcairners resident overseas (mainly in NZ and Australia) to move back home. Pitcairn Commissioner Leslie Jacques has stated that the aim is to lift the population to 100.

During 2005 the British Government injected £1.9 million into its last Pacific colony, enabling the building of a new jetty and a pristine museum, plus the sealing of the island's main access road. A breakwater is planned, and funding has been approved to establish wind power to provide 24-hour electricity; at present, the island's generator is turned on for just 10 hours per day. Satellite connections to every home have been promised. Apiculture (bee keeping) has been under way for quite some time, and the island's honey is revered as one of the world's purest. The plan is to boost annual production to 20,000 jars. The island has a new medical centre, a doctor, and even a dentist's chair. Should the Privy Council overturn the men's convictions, the jail may well become an ecotourist lodge. But the biggest change – if it goes ahead – is talk of building an airstrip.

Time will tell whether these projects will put the island back into profit and, in so doing, draw Pitcairners back to their tiny island. Certainly, some locals fear for the future of their home, but others see the events of the last few years as a new beginning.

that can be persuaded to stop and the occasional cruise ship. So when the longboats (see p426) crash through the Pacific waves from Bounty Bay to rendezvous with visiting ships, everyone's at quayside to help unload. Although essentially self-sufficient for food, the islanders supplement their diet with imported foods from NZ, goods which may take three to six months to arrive.

This is not the kind of place you can dial a pizza delivery. It's also not somewhere you can go it alone – community spirit is all-important. From manning the longboats to harvesting food, the islanders rely on each other for everything. It's only by sticking together that Pitcairners have survived on this isolated outpost for so long. This attitude could explain some of the controversy

PITCAIRN ISLAND FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Adamstown (Pitcairn)
- **Population:** 44
- **Land area:** 4.5 sq km
- **Number of islands:** Four
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 872
- **Currency:** NZ dollar (NZ\$)
- **Languages:** English and Pitkern
- **Greeting:** Hello
- **Website:** www.government.pn

surrounding the sex abuse trial – where mothers, wives, sisters and daughters defended their men's actions, saying it was customary for girls on the island to have sex at 12 and that it was consensual.

Farming, fishing for shark and shooting breadfruit from trees are everyday activities for much of the community, as are fixing machinery and homes. Some islanders hold government jobs, though most income is derived from selling the island's famous stamps to collectors, selling its domain name (.pn) and honey, and producing curios such as woodcarvings and woven baskets to sell to passengers on passing ships (and by mail order at www.lareau.org/pitc mall.html).

RELIGION

In 1887 a Seventh-Day Adventist missionary from the US converted the whole island, so Saturday is observed as the Sabbath, alcohol is ostensibly banned (although that ban has been relaxed in recent years and locals may now obtain a six-month license to purchase alcohol), there's no dancing and the islanders are not supposed to eat pork (that ban can be a bit loose as well) or fish that do not have scales (the island's supply of lobsters are used for bait!).

LANGUAGE

Pitcairners communicate quite happily in English but among themselves lapse into Pitkern (18th-century seafaring English spiced with Polynesian words). So when Pitcairners go out to shoot goats they do it with *muskets*, the goats end up as *wekle* (victuals) and houses have a *deck*. If a Pitcairn party consumes too much of that banned beverage, it's possible that *all hands* (everyone) may *capsize* (fall over).

ENVIRONMENT

The four islands of the Pitcairn group, essentially outliers of the Tuamotu and Gambier islands of French Polynesia, comprise 43 sq km of land scattered over a vast tract of ocean; it's more than 600km from Oeno Island in the west to Ducie Atoll in the east.

Tiny Pitcairn is a high island – the tip of a mountain rising out of the sea – with an intermittent fringing reef. Unlike many Pacific islands, this very fertile lump of

rock has no beaches to speak of; instead, it has dramatic cliffs, which have been the downfall of more than one islander (see the boxed text, p427).

Oeno and Ducie are classic atolls, a scattering of low-lying sandy islets on a coral reef fringing a central lagoon. Henderson, the largest island in the group, is a *makatea* island, an ancient coral reef pushed up above sea level by geological forces.

PITCAIRN ISLAND

pop 44 / area 4.5 sq km

This small, fertile island rising precipitously from the surrounding sea is so tied up with the *Bounty* story that it's easy to overlook the fact that, although it was uninhabited when the mutineers showed up in January 1790, it had been settled by Polynesians in the past.

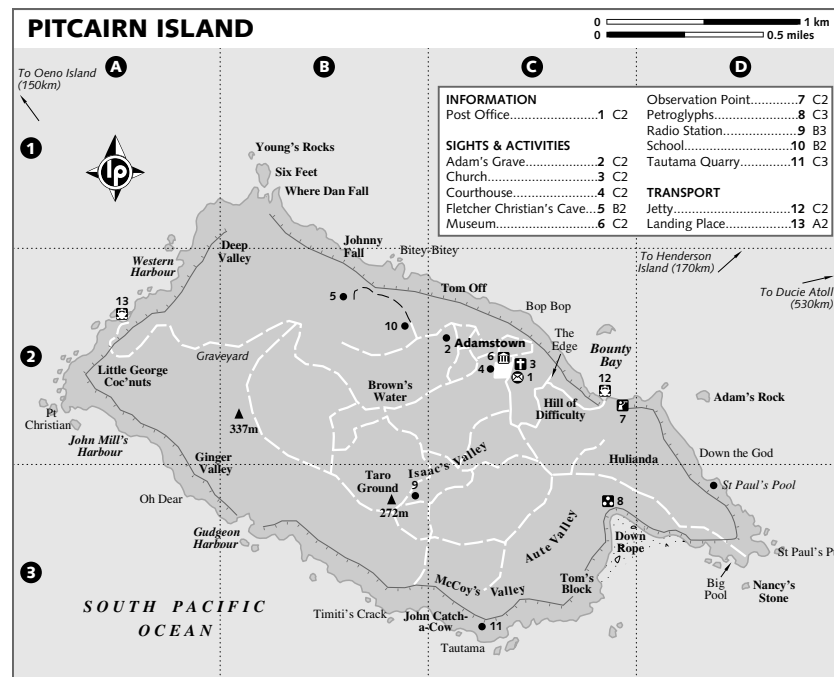
The island's curious array of place names (see the boxed text, p427) confronts the visitor immediately on arrival at Bounty Bay's newly restored jetty. The accurately named Hill of Difficulty is the steep trail that leads up to the island's only settlement, Adamstown; in 2005 this mud track made history by becoming Pitcairn's first paved road. Adamstown is perched 120m above the sea on the Edge. Houses here are either 'upside' or 'downside' of the main road through the small settlement.

HISTORY

It is believed there was a Polynesian settlement on the island between the 12th and 15th centuries, and perhaps an earlier settlement as many as 2000 years before that. As the mutineers were to prove, small though it was, Pitcairn provided all the basic necessities of life.

In 1767 Philip Carteret sailed by on HMS *Swallow* and named the island after Major Pitcairn of the marines. Finding it was one thing – Carteret was unable to land and his mischance of the island by 300km made relocating it a problem.

In January 1790 the *Bounty* mutineers arrived on inhospitable Pitcairn after a long search for a remote hideaway, far from the long arm of British naval justice and almost certain death at the gallows. Led by Fletcher Christian, the party



was made up of eight other mutineers, six Tahitian men, 12 Tahitian women and a child. Once they were settled on the island the *Bounty* was burnt (both to prevent escape and to escape detection), but their island community proved to be anything but a safe haven. Chaos and bloodshed ruled the first years, largely due to the English mutineers' slavlike treatment of the Polynesian men. Things escalated when a mutineer demanded that one of the Tahitians give up his wife, following the death of the mutineer's partner in a fall. A cycle of murder and revenge commenced, and by 1794 all six Tahitian men and five of the nine mutineers, including Fletcher Christian, had been killed. Only Young, Adams, Quintal and McCoy survived.

The few peaceful years that followed were brought to an end when McCoy discovered how to produce a killer spirit from the roots of the *ti* plant. By 1799, under the influence of the drink, McCoy had thrown himself into the sea with a rock tied around his neck and Quintal had become so crazed under the drink's influence that Adams and Young

killed him in self-defence. A year later Young died of asthma, leaving John Adams as the sole survivor of the 15 men who had arrived a decade earlier.

Populated by Adams (who had recently discovered religion), 10 women and 23 children, Adamstown was a neat little settlement of God-fearing Christians when Captain Mayhew Folger of the American sealing ship *Topaz* rediscovered Pitcairn Island in 1809, solving the 19-year mystery of what had happened to Christian and the *Bounty* after the mutiny. By this time British attention was focused on the struggle with Napoleon and there was no interest in the mutineer who was guilty of a crime that was now decades old. The next visitors, the British ships HMS *Briton* and *Targus*, arrived in 1814, unaware of Folger's earlier visit but also deciding there was no point in taking any action against the lone mutineer.

Ship visits became more frequent, and by the time Adams died in 1829 there was concern that the island would become overpopulated. In 1831 the British Government relocated the islanders to Tahiti, but within

MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY

On 28 April 1789 Captain William Bligh and 18 crewmen of the HMS *Bounty* were involuntarily relieved of their duties and set adrift in an open boat off the island of Tofua in Tonga, with a minimum of supplies. The most famous naval mutiny in history, the incident made the *Bounty* a household name and gave Bligh a centuries-long reputation for bad-tempered cruelty. The event also inspired several Hollywood extravaganzas and a plethora of books.

The *Bounty's* mission was to fetch breadfruit from Tahiti to feed England's African slave population in the Caribbean. Under the command of Bligh, an expert navigator who had trained under Cook, the expedition arrived in Tahiti in September 1788 after a particularly arduous 10-month journey. The breadfruit season was over and they had to wait six months in Tahiti before returning. Three weeks into the return journey, the crew, led by the master's mate Fletcher Christian, mutinied and set Bligh adrift on an open longboat with his loyal crew members.

Traditionally, Bligh has been painted as the brutal villain in the incident, taken to violent outbursts and fond of floggings. Christian, on the other hand, was seen as the crew's saviour, and so became a literary romantic hero and a swashbuckling good guy in Hollywood flicks – Errol Flynn, Clark Gable, Marlon Brando and Mel Gibson have all waved a musket in his name. In more recent times, attempts have been made to turn these reputations around, to the extent that Bligh is seen in some circles as a kindly captain while Christian is regarded as a mad drug addict. Whatever their characters – a topic that will probably remain moot for years to come – it's likely that the mutineers were not motivated by Bligh alone. Six months in Tahiti, and the Tahitian brides taken by many of the crew, would also have had something to do with it.

Bligh

Whatever problems Bligh had with people skills and anger management, he was a brilliant navigator. Against the odds, he managed to get the longboat, and most of his loyal crew, 7000km from Tonga to Timor in the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia).

They landed in Tonga, hoping to secure provisions, but local unrest forced them to cast off after loading only the most meagre of rations. Quartermaster John Norton was killed by islanders. Sailing west, they were the first Europeans to sight Fiji, and they also charted several unknown islands in Vanuatu.

They finally reached Timor in the Dutch East Indies on 14 June 1789. Bligh, determined to get that breadfruit, returned to Tahiti in 1792. This time he sensibly brought along 19 marines – in case of further morale problems. Bligh's career also took him to Australia, and in 1806 he was governor of New South Wales when the so-called 'rum rebellion' overturned his government. Bligh was exonerated from blame – again.

The Mutineers

Under Christian's command the mutineers returned to Tahiti, then attempted to settle on Tubai in the Austral Islands. Meeting local resistance, they split into two groups: Fletcher took a group of sailors and Tahitians off in search of Pitcairn Island, while a second group of 16 sailors stayed behind on Tahiti.

months 10 of the Pitcairners, lacking immunity to a variety of diseases, had died – including Thursday October Christian, the son of Fletcher Christian and the first child to be born on Pitcairn. By the year's end, the 65 survivors were all back on Pitcairn.

The island became a British colony in 1838, but when the population grew beyond 150 there were again fears of overpopulation. This time the entire population, then

numbering 194, was moved to Norfolk Island, an uninhabited former Australian prison island between Australia and NZ. Not all the settlers were content with their well-equipped new home, and in 1858, two years after being relocated, 16 Pitcairners returned to their isolated outpost, just in time to prevent the French annexing Pitcairn to their Polynesian colony. More families returned over the years, raising the population to 43.

The Pursuit

After Bligh returned to England, Captain Edward Edwards (a tyrant who made Bligh look like a saint) was sent in the *Pandora* to search for the mutineers.

Edwards sailed past Ducie Atoll in the Pitcairn group, but he didn't see the larger island 470km to the west where Christian's small troupe had settled. However, Edwards did find and capture 14 of the 16 mutineers who had remained on Tahiti, and he stuffed them into a cage on the *Pandora's* deck before heading back for England. Unfortunately, Edward's sailing skills were not up to Bligh's standards and he ended up sinking the *Pandora* on the Great Barrier Reef off Australia's northeast coast. Of the surviving prisoners, three were ultimately hanged for the mutiny.

Books

The American duo of Nordhoff and Hall wrote three books on the *Bounty* mutiny and its aftermath in 1934. The first of the three, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, provided the plot line for the first two Hollywood versions of the story (see later). *Men Against the Sea* follows Bligh's epic open-boat voyage, while *Pitcairn Island* follows Fletcher Christian and his band to Pitcairn.

Two other sources are Richard Hough's *Captain Bligh and Mr Christian* (1973) and Greg Denning's *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (1992).

More recently, *Fragile Paradise*, by Glynn Christian (Fletcher's great-great-great-grandson), is a well-researched, if a little speculative, investigation of the mutiny and the story of the mutineers on Pitcairn.

The newest title to take on this tale is *The Bounty – The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty* (2003) by Caroline Alexander. It focuses on the 10 mutineers who were captured in Tahiti and their subsequent fate, and brings a fresh perspective to the story by casting Bligh in a good light.

Films

The *Bounty* story has been made into a handful of motion pictures. The first, and perhaps worst, was *In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933) – a low-budget flick filmed in Pitcairn, Tahiti and Australia that's memorable only for being Errol Flynn's first film (he was cast as a noble Fletcher Christian). Simultaneously, Hollywood was making *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935) with Clark Gable in the same role – neither film was too concerned with historical accuracy. The 1962 remake of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, starring Marlon Brando as Christian and filmed in Tahiti, was slightly less inaccurate.

The Bounty (1984), based on Hough's book, is a surprisingly good re-enactment of the tale, with magnificent scenes of Mo'orea in French Polynesia. Anthony Hopkins plays a more likeable and complex Captain Bligh and Mel Gibson plays Fletcher Christian.

All these movies end with the mutineers' arrival on Pitcairn. Perhaps one day a studio will take on the equally fascinating tale of what happened after they arrived – the story of slavery, racial violence, murder, alcoholism, insanity and religion. All the elements are there for a Hollywood blockbuster.

Right up to the mid-1870s, Pitcairners were followers of the Church of England. However, the arrival of a box of Seventh-Day Adventist literature from the US in 1876 saw the beginnings of change. A decade later, the arrival of a Seventh-Day Adventist missionary heralded real conversion from the teachings of Pastor Simon Young. A mission ship was sent out from the US in 1890 and the happy proselytes

were baptised with a dousing in one of the island's rock pools, and the local pigs were swiftly killed to remove the temptation of pork.

Although Pitcairn's population grew to 223 just before WWII, depopulation rather than overpopulation has become the major concern. In 1956 the figure was 161, in 1966 it was 96 and in 1976 Pitcairners numbered 74. Since then, the figure has wavered in the

40s and 50s. For more on Pitcairn's recent history, see the boxed text, p421.

SIGHTS

Reminders of the island's *Bounty* origins are kept in a new **museum**, which was opened in 2005 by Pitcairn's governor, Richard Fell. A flight of wooden stairs lead from Adamstown's main square to the low-set white and green building, where exhibits are displayed in four rooms in a climate-controlled environment. The most famous item is Fletcher Christian's **Bounty bible**, kept under glass in a red stand. It was actually sold in 1839, but was returned to the island in 1949. Pitcairners hope that many more items will eventually find their way back to the island, and to a new home in this state-of-the-art little museum.

The **Bounty anchor**, salvaged by Irving Johnson in 1957, stands between the courthouse and post office, and there's a **Bounty cannon** further along the road. A second cannon is being restored in Australia and will be returned once completed. The **anchor** from the *Acadia*, wrecked on Ducie Atoll (p428), is displayed on the Edge, overlooking Bounty Bay.

The only **mutineer's grave** is that of John Adams, who changed his name from Alexander Smith, perhaps hoping to avoid arrest if the feared naval squad ever turned up. **Fletcher Christian's cave**, overlooking the settlement, is where the leading mutineer is said to have hidden, either to watch for pursuing ships or to evade the killings that swept the island in the settlement's early years. On 23 January each year, the *Bounty's* demise is commemorated by towing a burning model of the ship across Bounty Bay.

The **petroglyphs** on the rock face at the bottom of Down Rope are reminders of Pitcairn Island's pre-*Bounty* Polynesian habitation. The island's important Polynesian stone quarry is at Tautama, 1km west around the coast. When the mutineers arrived there were also marae platforms and stone images, which the devoutly Christian mutineers promptly tossed in the sea. The road to Down Rope continues to **St Paul's Point** and **Big Pool**, a beautiful natural pool fed and drained by the sea. The island's **Galapagos tortoise** is the survivor of a pair left here by a visiting yacht in the 1940s. Until recently the tortoise was called Mr T, but a

visiting specialist discovered he was a she, so it's now Mrs T. She lives among banana plantations on the other side of the island from Adamstown.

In addition to the museum, the island's other new attraction is the series of **eco trails** being developed in conjunction with Trinity College in Ireland. The first trail is up and running, and has a handful of stops with explanatory notes and photographs; stop No 5 details the island's 11 endemic plant species.

SLEEPING

There's no hotel on the island. The Lodge, a small, comfortable cottage, is available as long as it is not occupied by government officials. Visitors are also accommodated with islanders, typically paying about US\$300 per week for room and board. The **Island Council** (☎ 7612-24115; fax 244116; admin@pitcairn.gov.pn; postal address: Pitcairn Island, South Pacific Ocean, via NZ) will advise about accommodation arrangements when it replies to you about your visitor-licence application.

SHOPPING

The islanders do a busy trade turning out curios for visiting ships, including woven pandanus bags and a variety of sharks and dolphins carved out of *miro* wood as well as the famous models of the *Bounty*. Honey, Pitcairn Island stamps and telephone cards are also specialities.

Limited food supplies are available from the Co-op Store in Adamstown, which opens three times a week for a few hours.

GETTING AROUND

Tin, *Tub* and *Moss* are 13m open aluminium boats used for transport between Bounty Bay and boats anchored offshore, and for occasional trips to Oeno, Henderson and Ducie. Despite their humdrum names, these longboats are Pitcairn's lifeline. Everything but everything comes ashore via them, and it's no mean feat for the island men to load them in swells of up to 6m as they pitch alongside huge ocean-going cargo vessels.

Three- and four-wheeled fat-tired motorcycles, or ATVs, are the usual means of transport around the island; Pitcairners rarely walk. The island's six or so kilometres of dirt roads turn to sticky mud when it rains.

READING THE LAND

There's a straightforward, down-to-earth approach to everything Pitcairnese, and the island's place names are no exception – they're simple, descriptive and rather worrying. Over the years, islanders appear to have had a disturbing propensity for falling right off Pitcairn, many of them tumbling down a sheer cliff face while gathering birds' eggs, chasing goats or fishing. Heathen idols were found and cast into the sea at Down the God, and the intriguingly named Little George Coc'nuts was a coconut grove owned by George Young, son of mutineer Ned Young. Northwest of Adamstown, below Fletcher Christian's Cave, the cliffs must be particularly dangerous since the map lists the following: Where Dan Fall, Johnny Fall and the succinct Tom Off. It's no better on the west coast, Where Warren Fall, or the east coast, Where Freddie Fall. But the south coast has the most enigmatic and worrying warning of all – Oh Dear.

OTHER ISLANDS

OENO ISLAND

pop 0 / area 1 sq km

Two narrow passages enter Oeno's central lagoon. The outer reef is about 4km across, with a palm-covered island a few kilometres long on the western side, pointing towards a smaller sandbank islet beside the narrow pass through the reef.

Captain James Henderson, who gave his name to Henderson Island, came across Oeno Island in 1819, but it was an American whaling ship which gave Oeno its name in 1824.

The *Bowden* was wrecked on Oeno in 1893, and the captain and crew made their way to Pitcairn in the ship's boat. The Pitcairn islanders made four salvage trips to the *Bowden*, resulting in one of the islanders contracting typhoid fever from the filthy bilge water. Back on Pitcairn, the infection raced through the islanders, killing 13 people.

Unless you've got your own yacht, your only chance of getting to Oeno is in January, when Pitcairners fit out two of their longboats with essential supplies and swap everyday life on Pitcairn for a fortnight's summer holiday on Oeno. The 120km journey is a 10-hour overnight trip.

HENDERSON ISLAND

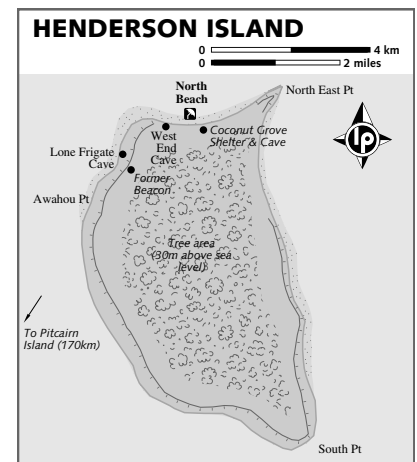
pop 0 / area 36 sq km

This classic example of a *makatea* island, 168km northeast of Pitcairn, is the largest island of the Pitcairn group. Measuring 9.6km long by 5.1km wide, it is nearly eight times as big as Pitcairn itself. The island is believed to have been uplifted by three

undersea volcanoes – Adams, Young and Bounty – to the southeast of Pitcairn.

A new fringing reef has grown up around two-thirds of the island's 26km coastline. The sheer 15m-high cliffs are the seaward face of the old coral reef. These run all the way around the island and are difficult to climb. Henderson's interior rises to a 30m flatland with a central depression which was once the lagoon inside the old reef. The sharp, crumbling ground in the interior is carpeted with a dense thicket of *pisonia* brush and stands of the fine *miro* wood, which Pitcairners occasionally harvest for woodcarving.

The island is populated by Polynesian rats and four species of endemic land birds – the flightless Henderson rail, the colourful Stephen's lorikeet, the territorial Henderson fruit dove and the Henderson warbler. Nine seabird species and the occasional green sea turtle nest here.



The usual landing spot is long North Beach, which is littered with flotsam and jetsam. During certain tides there is sometimes a freshwater spring in a cave at the north of the island.

Henderson is unusual for a raised atoll in that it has not been dramatically altered by exploitation for phosphate reserves. Because of this unique condition and its rare birdlife, the island was declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 1988. Visitors require a licence to visit, which is dependent on approval by the Pitcairn Island Council.

History

Polynesians settled on Henderson between the 12th and 15th centuries, and there may have been earlier inhabitants between 900 BC and 350 BC. Limited freshwater supplies, lack of soil for agriculture and dangerous reef entries made Henderson a difficult place to live.

The island was uninhabited when Portuguese explorer Quirós, sailing under the Spanish flag, visited in 1606. The island was rediscovered by the *Bounty* mutineers in 1790, en route to their new home on Pitcairn, and again in 1819 by Captain James Henderson of the British merchant ship *Hercules*.

The wrecking of the whaling ship *Essex* on the island in 1820, after a charge by a sperm whale near the Marquesas, is believed to have provided the inspiration for Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. During the crew's stay on the island, a cave was discovered containing six or eight skeletons. Six skeletons were found in a cave on the north coast by a visiting party from Pitcairn in 1958, though it's not known if they were the same skeletons.

A year earlier, Robert Tomarchin, an American, and his chimpanzee Moko made an unannounced six-week visit to the island. In the early 1980s another American, Arthur M 'Smiley' Ratcliffe (or Ratliff), had plans to buy or lease the island, flatten the vegetation, turn it into a cattle ranch and build a home and airstrip. This was a major factor in the island's subsequent World Heritage listing.

Over the years, various investigations into the island's natural history and archaeology have been conducted.

Ducie Atoll

pop 0 / area 1 sq km

This classic coral atoll is composed of the 100m-wide main *motu* (island), Acadia Island, stretching for over 3km around the lagoon, and three smaller islands. The lagoon is inaccessible, but on its eastern side gentle whirlpools drain water straight out to the open sea. There are no palm trees and the vegetation is limited to just two hardy types. Polynesian rats, lizards and tens of thousands of seabirds inhabit the island.

Ducie was discovered by Quirós in 1606 and named Encarnacion. It was rediscovered by Edward Edwards on the *Pandora* in 1791, during his *Bounty* hunt, and named after his patron, Lord Ducie. After the British *Acadia* was shipwrecked here in 1881, the crew made a nightmare 13-day voyage to Pitcairn in the ship's boat. Two of them married Pitcairners, and until recently Coffin was a familiar Pitcairn family name (from one of those shipwrecked sailors, Phillip Coffin).

The usual landing point on Acadia Island is marked by a **memorial**, which notes the recovery of the *Acadia*'s main anchor in 1990. The anchor can now be seen on Pitcairn (see p426). The wreck of the ship is directly offshore from the monument in about 10m of water. A short distance to the west, a marked trail wanders across the island to the lagoon side. An alarming variety of flotsam litters the island, including countless glass bottles, plastic debris and hundreds of fishing-net floats.

PITCAIRN ISLAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

See p426 for information on Pitcairn's limited sleeping options.

INTERNET RESOURCES

For further information on Pitcairn, try the following websites:

Dea Birkett (www.deabirkett.com) Website of British journalist and author of *Serpent in Paradise* (1997), a contentious account of the writer's four-month stay on Pitcairn in 1991. After its publication, a Fletcher Christian descendant commented, 'It's not quite a fatwa, but she's

not welcome [on Pitcairn]'. Birkett has since written articles on Pitcairn for a variety of newspapers, from the *New York Times* to the *Guardian*.

Henderson Island (www.winthrop.dk/hender.html or <http://whc.unesco.org/sites/487.htm>) Both sites deal with this World Heritage-listed island.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/pacific/pitcairn-islands) Pitcairn profile.

New Zealand Herald (www.nzherald.co.nz) Daily newspaper with news and commentary about Pitcairn and the sex trials.

Pitcairn Island Web Site (www.lareau.org/pitc.html) With information, history, genealogy, virtual shopping, contact addresses and links to articles and related websites.

Pitcairn Islands Government (www.government.pn) Includes Pitcairn's history and Philatelic Bureau. Order online *A Guide to Pitcairn* (US\$15; published 2000), the government's official publication, or subscribe to the monthly newsletter *Pitcairn Miscellany* (US\$15 annually).

Pitcairn Islands Study Center (<http://library.puc.edu/pitcairn>) California-based centre with shipping schedules and Pitcairn history.

Pitcairn Today (www.onlinepitcairn.com/pitcairn_today.htm) Relatively recent local news.

MONEY

NZ dollars (for exchange rates see the Quick Reference page) are the official currency of Pitcairn Island, although other major currencies are accepted. Personal cheques and travellers cheques can be cashed at the Island Secretary's office. Budget on at least US\$300 per week.

TELEPHONE & FAX

You can telephone or fax Pitcairn Island through Inmarsat, but the charges are based on satellite time so you'll get billed for dialling and connection times whether or not the phone is answered. Count on about US\$3.50 a minute to NZ or Australia, and US\$5.50 to the rest of the world.

The communication station is usually unattended, but there is an answering machine for phone calls. The station is checked for calls at 8pm, midnight and 5am GMT; if you want to talk with someone, this is the best time to call the **control room phone** (☎ 76233-7765). There's just one public telephone on the island; its number is ☎ 76233-7766; the fax number is 7767. Pitcairn phonecards are available if you need to use the phone.

TIME

Pitcairn is 8½ hours behind GMT (9½ during daylight saving).

VISAS

No visa is necessary for visitors while their ship is at anchor. If you want to stay on Pitcairn after your ship leaves, however, your stay must be approved by the islanders and a six-month permit issued.

Visa applications are processed by the **Pitcairn Islands Administration** (☎ 64-9-366 0186; admin@pitcairn.gov.pn; PO Box 105 696, Auckland, NZ). Think up a good reason for your stay and allow six months for the application to be considered. The application fee is US\$20, and the licence itself costs US\$100 (US\$50 for visitors under 18).

TRANSPORT IN PITCAIRN ISLAND

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Pitcairn is remote with a capital 'R'. There's no airstrip (although one might be in the pipeline) and no way of getting here except across the seemingly endless blue ocean.

Landings on Pitcairn are notoriously difficult; it's not unknown to travel all the way to the island and then be unable to set foot on land due to rough seas. The island's official website even posts the following disclaimer: '...no Government responsibility is accepted...for any death by accident...during the process of landing or departing'. All this could change in the near future, however, as EU funding has been allocated to build a breakwater to shelter Bounty Bay and its new jetty.

Cargo Ship

Cargo vessels stopping at Pitcairn anchor offshore and transfer cargo and passengers to longboats (see p426), which dock at Bounty Bay. The standard fare from Auckland to Pitcairn is around US\$1000 one way per person, though there are no longer any regular carriers. For schedules of Panama Canal-Auckland cargo ships that will take passengers, contact the British Consulate-General in Auckland, NZ, or shipping companies; schedules are posted on the Pitcairn Islands Study

Center website (<http://library.puc.edu/pitcairn>). The 5300-km journey from NZ to Pitcairn takes about seven days. Alternatively, very occasional ships do the 30-hour journey to Pitcairn from Mangareva (French Polynesia).

Getting off the island requires waiting until a ship comes by – it can be a long wait.

Cruise Ship

About a dozen cruise ships call at Pitcairn every year. Like cargo vessels, they anchor well offshore and, seas permitting, passengers are ferried to Bounty Bay aboard the ship's rubber inflatable or its tender, or alternatively on the Pitcairn longboats. For details on which ships are due when, see

the Pitcairn Islands Study Center website (<http://library.puc.edu/pitcairn>).

Yacht

Mangareva (p665) in French Polynesia is the best place to try your luck for a place on a Pitcairn-bound yacht. Visiting yachties should come well equipped – Pitcairners are happy to sell fresh fruit, which they grow on the island, but other supplies generally have to be imported from NZ and may be in short supply. There is no sheltered anchorage at Pitcairn and boats must be moved when the winds change.

GETTING AROUND

For details on getting around the islands, see p426.