Easter Island (Rapa Nui) is like nowhere else on earth. Historically intriguing, culturally compelling and scenically magical, this tiny speck of land looks like it’s fallen off another planet. In this blissfully isolated, unpolished gem it’s hard to feel connected even to Chile, over 3700km to the east, let alone the wider world. Just you, the indigo depths and the strikingly enigmatic moai (giant statues) scattered amid an eerie landscape.

When the moai have finished working their magic on you, there are dead volcanoes to climb, motus (islets) to dive or snorkel along, and waves to surf. And there’s no better eco-friendly way to experience the island’s savage beauty than on horseback or from a bicycle saddle. Once you’ve had your fill of hiking and clambering, gawking and gasping, a couple of expanses of silky sand beckon (with not a jet ski in sight).

Easter Island is refreshingly void of bling and large-scale development. It’s all about eco-travel, and this is why it’s gaining in popularity. With the exception of one recently built ritzy resort, tourism infrastructure is limited to a flurry of family-run ventures, which ensures your money goes straight into local pockets.

If your visit is in February, try to make it coincide with the hugely popular Tapati Rapa Nui festival, featuring a vibrant program of music, dance and traditional cultural events.

One thing is sure, you’ll have a lump in your throat the day you leave.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Clip-clop on the flanks of the extinct volcano Maunga Terevaka (p455) and feast your eyes on the mesmerizing 360-degree views
- Hike across the ruggedly beautiful Península Poike (p457) and seek out the ghosts of virgins at Ana O Keke
- Ogle the stunning limpid blue waters of Motu Nui on a snorkeling or diving (p446) trip
- Take a lesson in history at Rano Raraku (p456), the ‘nursery’ of the moai, and at the spellbinding Orongo ceremonial village (p455), perched on the edge of Rano Kau (p455), a lake-filled crater
- Watch the sun rise at the row of enigmatic statues at Ahu Tongariki (p456) while enjoying breakfast

**POPULATION: 4400**  **AREA: 117 SQ KM**  **ELEVATION: 507M**
Getting Started

WHEN TO GO

The weather is pleasant on Rapa Nui year-round. The peak tourist season runs from January to March. Prices are highest and accommodations scarcest during this period, especially during February’s Tapati Rapa Nui festival (see p449). The rest of the year is quiet and at times you’ll have the whole island to yourself. July and August might be a bit chilly for some tastes but they’re ideal for hiking.

CLIMATE

Winds and ocean currents strongly influence Rapa Nui’s subtropical climate. The hottest months are January and February, and the coolest are July and August. The average maximum summer temperature is 28°C and the average minimum 15°C, but these figures understate what can be a fierce sun and formidable heat. The average winter maximum is 22°C and the minimum 14°C, but it can seem much cooler when Antarctic winds lash the island with rain. Light showers are the most frequent form of precipitation. May is the wettest month, but tropical downpours can occur during any season.

MAPS

Tourist maps, which are distributed freely at Sernatur information office and tour agencies, show the most important archaeological sites. Ask for the Rapa Nui National Park – Free Visitors Guide, a good aerial map that helps explain the geography of the island. Other maps are available at local shops.

MONEY

US dollars are the best foreign currency to carry, followed by euros. A number of businesses on Rapa Nui, especially residenciales, hotels and rental agencies, quote their prices in US dollars and accept US cash (and euros, albeit at a pinch), but the weak dollar has made this practice less common over the last few years, and Chilean pesos are now commonly used. Note that exchange rates on Easter Island are lower than those offered in mainland Chile. Travelers from Tahiti must bring US cash (or euros) and not Tahitian currency. Many residenciales, hotels, restaur-