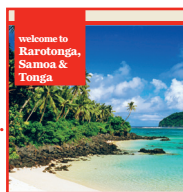


PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions to help you put together your perfect trip

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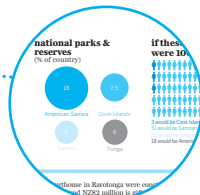


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GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

Learn about the big picture, so you can make sense of what you see

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Language

[illegible]

THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Craig McLachlan
Brett Atkinson, Celeste Brash



Look out for these icons:



Our author's
recommendation



A green or
sustainable option



No payment
required

On the Road

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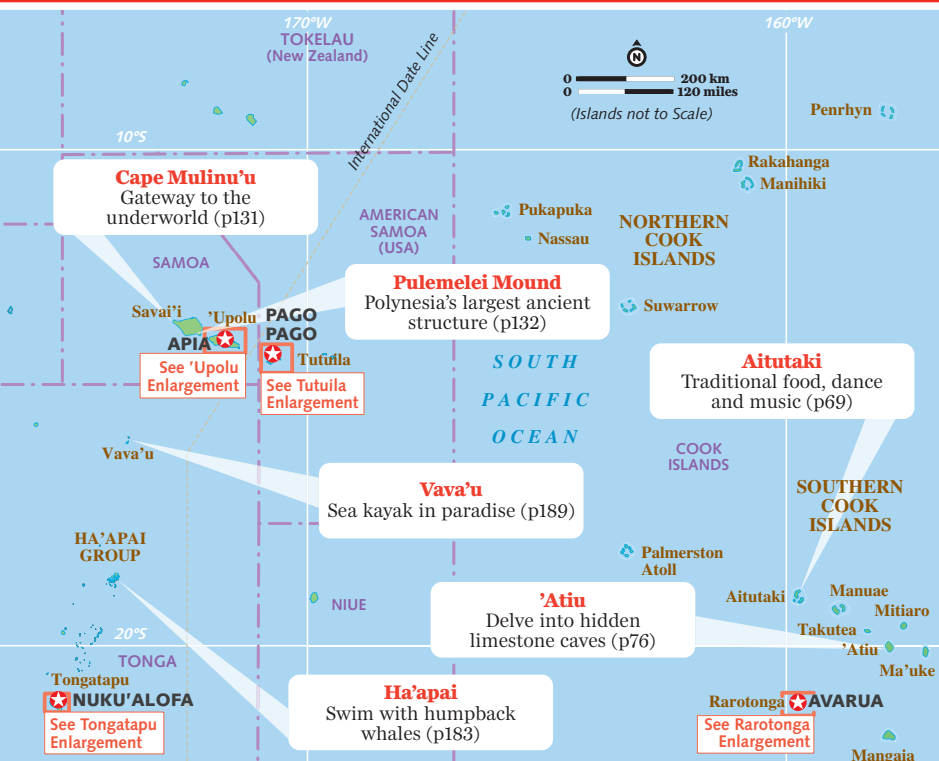
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› Rarotonga, Samoa & Tonga



'Upolu



To Sua Ocean Trench

Swim this enchanted sunken waterhole (p117)

0 20 km
0 12 miles

Tutuila

Nu'uuli Falls

Secluded deliciously cool swimming hole (p149)



Fagatele Bay

Paradise in a submerged volcanic crater (p152)

0 10 km
0 6 miles

Tongatapu



Nuku'alofa

Home to the kingdom's royal family (p172)

0 10 km
0 6 miles



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Craig McLachlan

Coordinating Author, Tonga An island addict from way back, Craig has covered the islands of Greece to Okinawa to Tonga for Lonely Planet. His first foray to Tonga was as a teenager when his father, an architect, designed a resort island in the kingdom and Craig experienced his first kava session. He's never looked back. A Kiwi who markets himself as a 'freelance anything', Craig has an MBA from the University of Hawai'i, speaks Japanese and has written several books.

Check out www.craigmclachlan.com.



Brett Atkinson

Rarotonga & the Cook Islands From his home in Auckland, Brett's travelled to many of the island nations in his South Pacific backyard. For this extended research trip to the Cook Islands, he explored the underground caves of Atiu, scootered and snorkelled around Aitutaki, and uncovered local foodie treats at Rarotonga's weekly market. Venturing to far-flung and friendly Ma'uke and Mitiaro were other absolute highlights. See www.brett-atkinson.net for the latest details of his travels and freelance writing.



Celeste Brash

Samoa, American Samoa Celeste first visited French Polynesia in 1991 and moved there in 1995. Her first five years were spent on a remote atoll and the next 10 on Tahiti. Throughout this time she's travelled as far as New Zealand to the west, Easter Island and Pitcairn Island to the east and visited many dots in between. Her award-winning travel stories have appeared in Travelers' Tales books and her travel articles have appeared in publications including the *LA Times* and *Islands* magazine. She's written over 30 Lonely Planet guides but considers the South Pacific her speciality. She recently moved to Portland, Oregon, and often complains of the cold.

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itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Two Weeks

Cook Islands Southern Sights

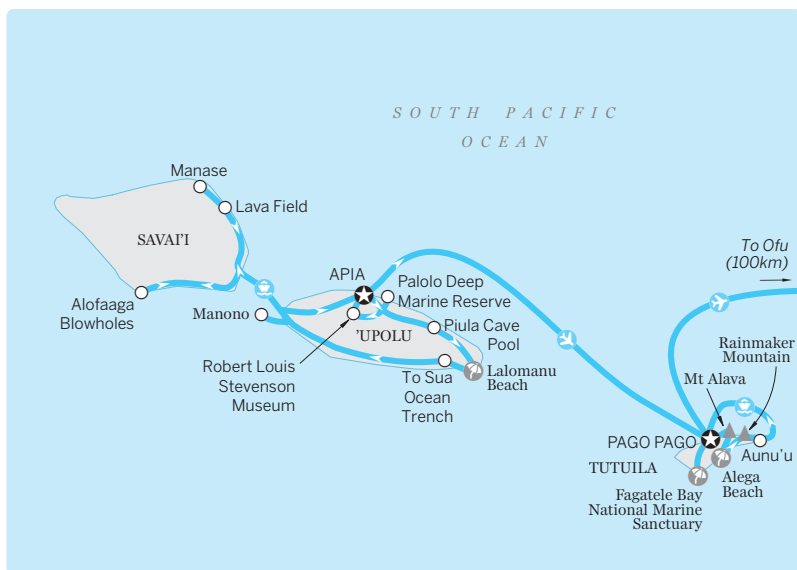
The Southern Group islands are easily accessible from Rarotonga. If you haven't got enough time, consider just visiting the first three islands; but if you can manage to do the whole route, you won't regret it.

Start your trip with four days on Rarotonga, time for a stroll around the island's capital, **Avarua**; a hike up the Cross-Island Track; a day's snorkelling in Muri Lagoon; and a visit to the Cook Islands Cultural Village. Don't forget to check out an island night while you're here.

Hop on a plane for the 50-minute flight to **Aitutaki**, hire a scooter and explore the island. A lagoon cruise is essential, but you could also consider hiring a kayak to explore some of the deserted *motu* (islets) around the lagoon's edge.

Then it's another short hop to **'Atiu**, where you can visit **Anatakitaki**, the cave of the *ko-peka* ('Atiuan swiftlet); sample the island's home-grown coffee; and take a memorable eco-tour.

Back to Rarotonga and onto another quick flight to **Mangaia** and its extraordinary caves and vast **makatea cliffs**, perhaps the most dramatic sight anywhere in the Cooks.



Two to Three Weeks

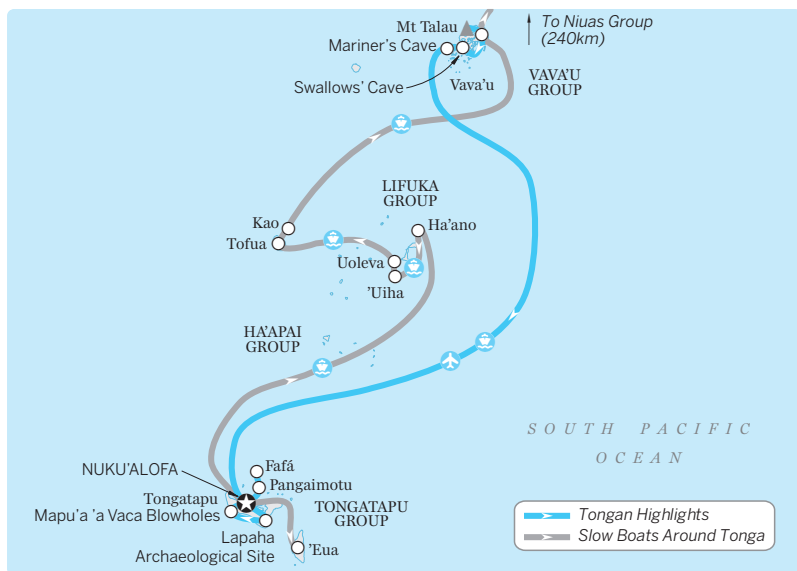
Samoan Island-Hopping

Start your Samoan experience with a visit to the delightful **Palolo Deep Marine Reserve** on **'Upolu**, before heading inland to the charming **Robert Louis Stevenson Museum**. Backtrack to **Apia** and head eastward to the seductive sands of **Lalomanu Beach**, with a pit stop at **Piula Cave Pool**. Meander along the south coast, peeking into the sublime depths of the **To Sua Ocean Trench** and lazing in beach-side *fale* (houses). Finally, take a boat out to the island of **Manono**.

Return to 'Upolu to catch the ferry to **Savai'i**. Motor up the east coast, stopping for a dip at the beautiful beaches along the way. Now traverse the desolate **lava field** before depositing yourself on the sand at gregarious **Manase**. Return down the east coast and continue west for the wave action at the **Alofaaga Blowholes**, then catch the ferry back to 'Upolu and return to **Apia**.

Fly from here to **Pago Pago** in American Samoa and admire the capital's beautiful harbour setting. Travel east to climb **Mt Alava** for spectacular views, then maroon yourself on **Alega Beach**, detouring for a close-up of **Rainmaker Mountain**. Wind along the coast to Aunu'u and take a small boat to the island of **Aunu'u** to explore its wild nature, before taking a slow ride back to Pago Pago. Alternatively, head southwest from Pago Pago to explore the pristine **Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary**.

If there's still time, fly from Pago Pago to the island of **Ofu** to experience the stunning **Ofu Beach** – 4km of picturesque white-sand beach.



One Month

Slow Boats Around Tonga

After spending a little time pottering around **Tongatapu** and acclimatising to the tropics in **Nuku'alofa**, head out to nearby **'Eua**, either by ferry or light aircraft, and spend a few days hiking through the island's lush rainforests and exploring its caves and sinkholes. You'll sometimes have to climb huge, tangled banyan trees to get out.

Once back in Nuku'alofa, clamber aboard the ferry and head for the coral charms and soothing serenity of the scattered, low-lying **Ha'apai Group**. Spend some time absorbing unexploited Tongan culture on friendly islands in the Lifuka Group, such as **Ha'ano** and **'Uiha**, then shack up in a beachside *fale* on **Uoleva**. There should be plenty of opportunities to see whales, and if you have the inclination, charter a boat to take you out to **Tofua** and **Kao**.

If time is not your scarcest commodity, continue on to the magical distractions of the **Vava'u Group** where there is just so much to do...if you want to do anything, that is! The remote **Niuas**, three volcanic islands where you'll find lava fields, untrammelled ridges and languid locals, may also beckon.

Two Weeks

Tongan Highlights

Head straight to the paradisaical Vava'u Group, Tonga's activities playground, either by plane or ferry. On **Vava'u**, climb up to the peak of **Mt Talau** for some amazing island views, then join a chartered or bare-boat yacht and sail around the islands of the group. Change your anchorage each night and jump off board each day to snorkel at the various sites. A multiday guided sea-kayak tour is another superb option. Go out whale-watching, swim into **Swallows' Cave**, or experience the magical fog of **Mariner's Cave** before moving on to idyllic islands further south. Arrange your charter to sail through the Ha'apai Group en route to the **Tongatapu Group**, or catch the ferry or a short flight back to the main island.

On **Tongatapu**, have a quick look around **Nuku'alofa** and then visit the island's fascinating archaeological excavations, including the **Lapaha archaeological site**, followed by the energetic **Mapu'a 'a Vaca Blowholes**. Then get yourself in holiday mode by spending a day or two snorkelling, swimming or just being lazy on one of the resort islands to the north of Tongatapu, such as **Pangaimotu** or **Fafā**.



One Month

Cook Islands Northern Exposure



For those hardy travellers who are really keen to get off the beaten track, how about visiting the distant islands of the **Northern Group**. They're a long, long way from the busy main island of Rarotonga, and that makes them a fantastic place to experience and appreciate traditional Cook Islands culture.

You could start your voyage of discovery with the classic trip around the Southern Group of islands in the itinerary a few pages back, making sure not to miss the amazing Aitutaki lagoon and its spectacular *motu*. Before heading north, possibly tack on two more southern group islands – tiny **Mitiaro** with its lovely underground pools and **Ma'uuke**, the garden island, with its deserted beaches and historic caves. There are flights to both of these Pacific jewels.

Then it's back to Rarotonga as a springboard to the real adventure. You could catch a plane all the way to the Northern Group islands, but it's astronomically expensive. Definitely the most adventurous way to get to the northern islands is via inter-island freighter all the way to **Manihiki**, the black-pearl capital of the Cook Islands, with its tiny coral atolls and massive natural lagoon.

With a bit of luck there will be a boat moving on to isolated **Rakahanga**, or if it's not stopping there, straight on to **Penrhyn**, where life is still lived very much along traditional lines.

Only the hardest and most intrepid of travellers ever make it out this far, but if you can surmount the logistical challenges, the rewards are sublime. This is not the trip to take if you've got any time constraints! You'll have plenty of time to get to know the islanders and practise your fishing skills – but don't plan on going home too soon, as the next boat might not be around for a while...

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