

welcome to Rarotonga, Samoa & Tonga



Island Escape

Scattered over a vast expanse of empty ocean, these islands are a castaway's dream come true. If you've ever fantasised about escaping to a remote desert island, far from the hustle and hum of the modern world, then look no further than these fascinating islands. Here you'll find a couple of thousand years of Polynesian culture sitting side by side with some of the most spectacular natural scenery in the South Pacific.

Paradise

The idyllic norm in these small island nations involves lush, reef-fringed islands with sandy foreshores that virtually glow in the tropical sunshine. Even when it rains, the

sense of verdancy is so strong that you can almost hear the *heilala* (Tonga's national flower), *teuila* (Samoan red ginger), frangipani and hibiscus flowers stretching upwards. After the rain, the tropical bouquet can be so pervading that you'll wish you could bottle it up and take it home. The pristine oceanic depths that thread through this Pacific enclave host thousands of species of marine life, from kaleidoscopic coral to the flukes of humpback whales that come to spawn their young in the warm waters.

The Polynesian Smile

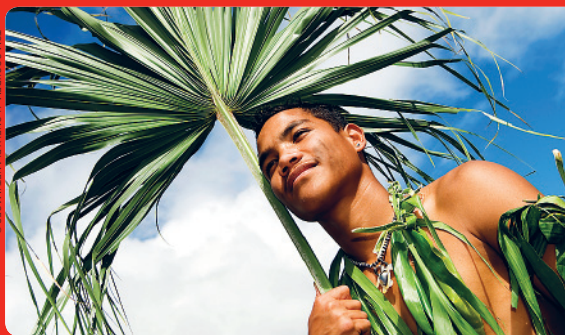
People here are so passionately idiosyncratic that almost every encounter yields a memorable moment. Locals can burst

Think lush, reef-fringed islands with sandy foreshores that virtually glow in the tropical sunshine. These are the central South Pacific islands that dreams are made of.

(left) Return to Paradise Beach, 'Upolu, Samoa (p120)
(below) Constitution Celebration parade, Rarotonga (p93)



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into spontaneous song in public, while the singing in church on Sundays raises the roof. Villagers casually swing bush knives by their sides as they walk along, kids sit on the scuffed tombs of their relatives as if they were outdoor furniture, and games of rugby and volleyball are played with gladiatorial intensity on patches of grass. Groups of women proudly produce traditional handicrafts such as tapa cloth, woven mats and baskets, while outstanding carvings are made from wood and bone. And that captivating Polynesian smile is everywhere.

Adapt & Relax

While snorkelling, diving, sailing, swimming, hiking, whale watching, drinking,

feasting and talking about nothing in particular with loquacious locals, visitors to these islands quickly learn how to release their inner tensions and replace them with a paradisaical calm.

Make the Most of It

Time, like most other things in the South Pacific, has a mind of its own. Days roll by with the island tides: one day you'll be exploring taro plantations, snorkelling with Technicolor tropical fish, swimming in underground caves and dancing till dawn with the locals, and the next, a plane will be waiting to whisk you away home. Make the most of it while you can – paradise is a pretty tough place to find.