

Understand Rarotonga, Samoa & Tonga

RAROTONGA, SAMOA & TONGA TODAY 212

From environmental issues to foreign aid, understand the contemporary issues facing the Cook Islands, Samoa and Tonga.

HISTORY 215

Discover the region's history from early Polynesian migration through to Christianity, colonial influence and independence.

CULTURE, RELIGION & TRADITION 223

Understand the combination of centuries-old customs, strong family values and Christianity underpinning local society.

MYTHS & LEGENDS 227

Unravel Polynesian mythology, especially the two most important gods, Tangaroa, the all-powerful creator, and Maui, the wily and resourceful hero.

ART & CRAFT 230

From tapa cloth and intricate weaving to spectacular dancing and vibrant *fiafia* nights, learn about the time-honoured artistic traditions popular across the region.

FOOD & DRINK 233

Where to find the freshest seafood, luscious tropical fruit, and more than a few recommendations for tasty local specialities.



population per sq km



Rarotonga, Samoa & Tonga Today

Isolation Brings Innovation

The global financial crisis has impacted strongly on the Cook Islands, Samoa and Tonga. All the countries are battling significant budget deficits, and their respective tourism industries have been hampered by a downturn in long-haul travellers from Europe and North America. However, visitor numbers are still increasing year on year for the Cook Islands (due to Australian travellers utilising new direct air services from Sydney) and Tonga and Samoa have been investing in campaigns to drive tourism traffic.

Within these countries, specific islands are developing innovative attractions to inspire traveller interest. 'Atiu in the Cook Islands and the Tongan island of 'Eua, for example, are becoming popular for birdwatching and ecotourism. Rarotonga is growing as a destination for foodies by moving away from a dependence on imported foodstuffs, and the island of Mitiaro in the Cook Islands is developing rustic village homestays. There are even rumours of plans for a new passenger and car ferry to service Aitutaki and Mangaia in the Cook Islands. Across the region there is also a general move toward enabling visitors to have more authentic experiences, often by focusing on local food and village accommodation.

The Changing Face of Aid

New Zealand and Australia remain key foreign-aid donors to the Cook Islands, Samoa and Tonga – recent projects funded by Kiwi aid money include support for the Cook Islands' pearl industry. However, the impact of Chinese aid throughout the Pacific should not be underestimated, as China's influence becomes increasingly visible. Chinese road workers are a common sight in Tonga, aid money from Beijing has funded several public buildings in the Samoan capital of Apia, and even the police station

For Daring Foodies

» Collected from the coral reefs of Samoa, *palolo* looks like blue worms and is quite salty and served on toast.

» A Cook Islands speciality is *mitiore* (fermented coconut with onion and seafood).

Saying Hello

Kia Orana (Cook Islands Maori)
Talofa (Samoan)
Malo e lelei (Tongan)

Dos & Don'ts

» Land and beach access often belongs to local families, so ensure you ask permission before creating your own tracks.

» Don't purchase souvenirs made out of endangered resources such as black coral or sandalwood.

» Never fish or collect shells and other specimens in marine reserves.