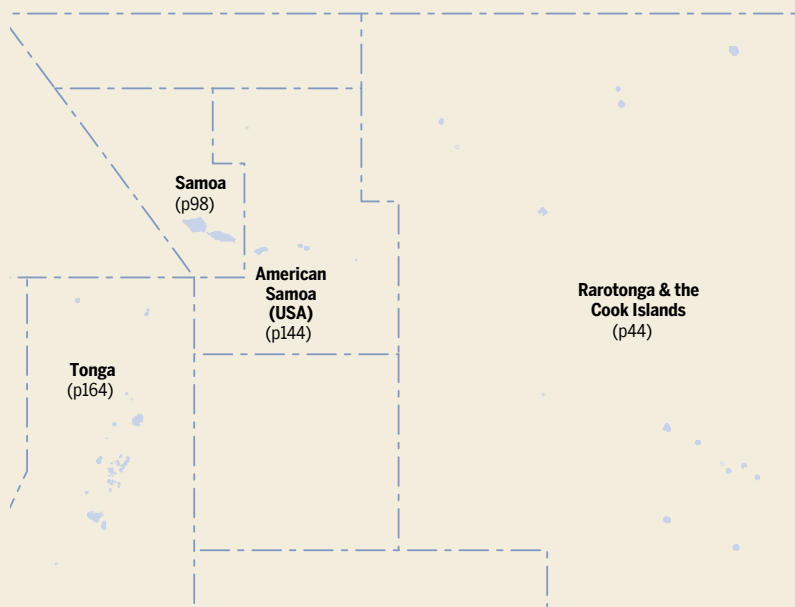




Rarotonga, Samoa & Tonga



Samoa
(p98)

**American
Samoa
(USA)**
(p144)

Tonga
(p164)

**Rarotonga & the
Cook Islands**
(p44)

THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Brett Atkinson, Charles Rawlings-Way, Tamara Sheward

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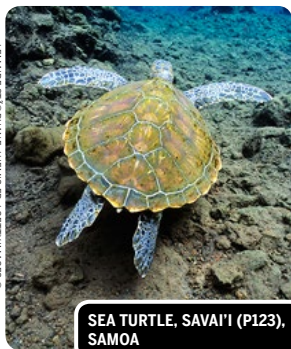
VAKA (CANOES) OFF VAVA'U (P185), TONGA

CHRIS SCHOLE / GETTY IMAGES ©



LOCAL DANCER, RAROTONGA (P45)

LEMAIRE STROPHANE / HEMIS FR / GETTY IMAGES ©



SEA TURTLE, SAVAI'I (P123), SAMOA

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Itineraries



2 WEEKS Southern Cook Islands

The Cooks' Southern Group is a hop, skip and jump from Rarotonga. Even if you haven't got much time, you should still be able to tackle the whole route in two weeks – you won't regret it!

Start your trip with four days on Rarotonga: time enough 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 BCA Art Gallery. Don't forget to check out an island night while you're here.

Hop on a plane for the 45-minute flight to **Aitutaki**, then 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 fringe.

Then it's another short hop to **'Atiu**, where you can visit Anatakitiki, the cave of the kopeka ('Atiuan swiftlet); sample the island's home-grown coffee; and take an ecotour.

Wing back to Rarotonga and hop on another quick flight to **Mangaia** – the Pacific's oldest island – and see its extraordinary caves and vast cliffs, perhaps the most dramatic sight anywhere in the Cooks.



4
WEEKS

Polynesian Explorer

With a month of island time up your sleeve, this part of Polynesia will deliver a bounty of delights. There are no direct flights between Tonga and the Cook Islands, but a short detour through Auckland in New Zealand is far from an inconvenience.

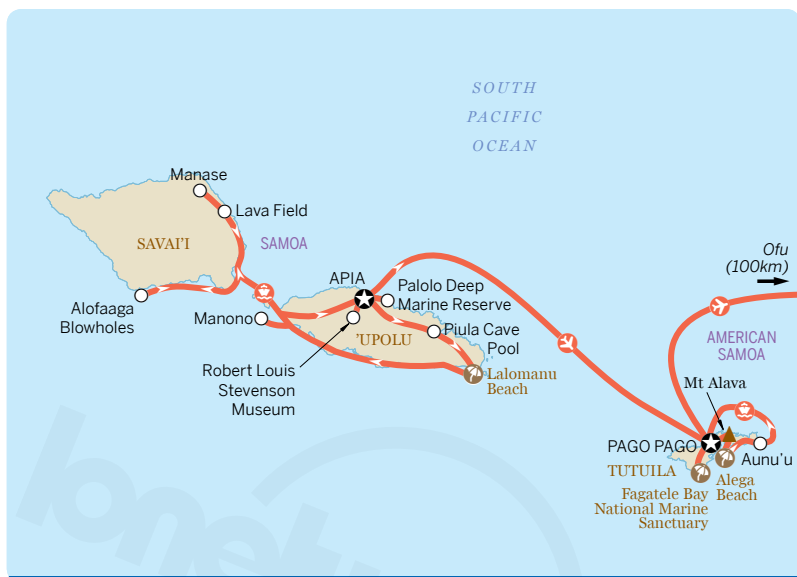
Kick things off in **Apia**, Samoa's capital: check out the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum, explore Upolu and spend at least one night on the beach in a traditional *fale* (house). Take the ferry to Savai'i for cave tunnels, lava fields and white beaches, then visit the forest-engulfed Pulemelei Mound, Polynesia's largest ancient monument.

From Apia, fly to the American Samoan capital, **Pago Pago**. Backed by steep mountains jaggling down to green-blue Pago Pago Harbor, it's one of the most improbably scenic cities in the South Pacific. Go for a sea-kayak paddle, or hole up for a few days and work on your epic South Seas novel.

Fly back through Apia to scruffy-but-charming **Nuku'alofa** in the ancient Kingdom of Tonga: eyeball the Royal Palace en route to buzzy Talamahu Market. A short flight north, the **Ha'apai Group** offers beachy living in thatched *fale*, sea kayaking and kite-surfing, while the **Vava'u Group** delivers more sea kayaking, plus diving and sailing. A night or two bending elbows with the yachties in the bars along Neiafu's harbourfront is a night or two well spent.

Wing back into Nuku'alofa, then jag through the duty-free shops at Auckland Airport en route to the Cook Islands' capital, Avarua, on **Rarotonga**. Hike the Cross-Island Track, snorkel at sublime Muri Beach, and don't miss losing a few hours wandering around Punanga Nui Market (the fruit smoothies and roast-pork rolls are a knockout!).

From Rarotonga, catch a plane to exquisite **Aitutaki**, where you can chill out lagoon-side for a few days. Boat-trip out to Tapuaeta'i (One Foot Island) and get your passport stamped. From Aitutaki, further short-hop flights will deliver you to the Southern Group islands of **'Atiu**, **Mangaia** and **Ma'uke**. Give them a few days each to explore the eye-popping caves and cliffs, then jet back to Rarotonga for your flight home.



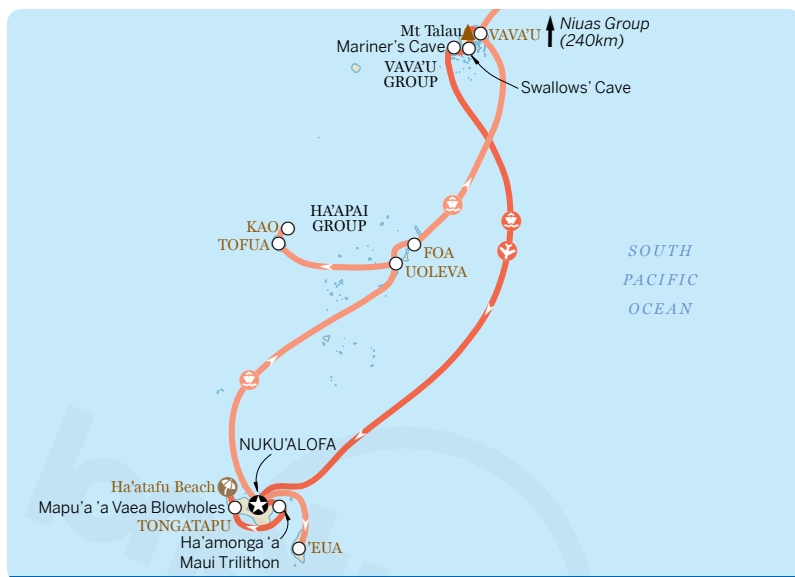
3 WEEKS Samoan Island Hopper

From the Samoan capital city **Apia**, start your island-hopping experience with a visit to **Palolo Deep Marine Reserve** and the endearing **Robert Louis Stevenson Museum**. Next, head east to seductive **Lalomanu Beach**, with a pit stop at **Piula Cave Pool**. Meander along the south coast, peeking into To Sua Ocean Trench, then take a boat out to the island of **Manono**.

Return to Upolu to ferry to Savai'i. Check out the wave-surfing **Alofaaga Blowholes**, the desolate **lava field** and the sands at gregarious **Manase**.

Catch the ferry back to Upolu and return to Apia. From here, fly to **Pago Pago**, American Samoa's picturesque capital. Travel east to scale **Mt Alava** for spectacular views, then maroon yourself on **Alega Beach**, detouring for a close-up of Rainmaker Mountain. Wind along the coast to Au'asi and take a boat to the small, wild island of **Aunu'u**, before the 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 amazing isolation of **Ofu Beach** – 4km of footprint-free white sand.

SOUTH
PACIFIC
OCEAN

2 WEEKS Tongan Highlights

Hit the highlights of Tonga on a two-week island jaunt.

Head straight to the paradisiacal Vava'u Group, Tonga's activities hub, either by plane or ferry. On Vava'u, clamber up the peak of **Mt Talau** for some awesome island views, then join a chartered or bare-boat yacht and set sail around the islands of the group. Change your anchorage each night and jump into the brine each day to snorkel and swim. A multiday guided sea-kayak tour is another superb option. Don't miss swimming into **Swallows' Cave**, or experience the underwater wonder of **Mariner's Cave** before moving on to idyllic islands further south. Arrange your charter to sail through the Ha'apai Group (grab a beer at Mariner's Cafe in Pangai if you do) en route to Tongatapu. Alternatively, catch a short flight back to the main island.

On Tongatapu, have a quick look around **Nuku'alofa**, visit the **Ha'amonga 'a Maui Trilithon** ('the Stonehenge of the South Pacific') and check out the **Mapu'a 'a Vaea Blowholes**. Then get yourself into holiday mode by spending a day or two snorkelling, swimming and lazing around **Ha'atafu Beach** (a great family option).

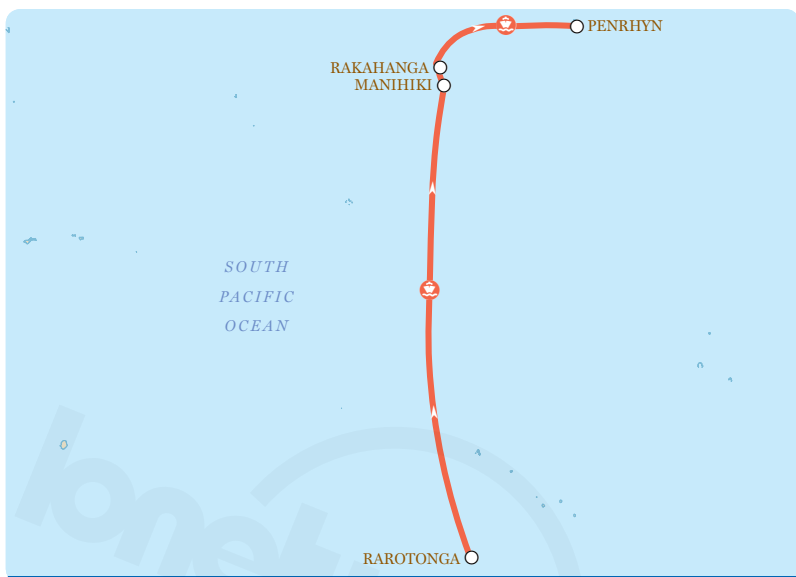
4 WEEKS Slow Boats Around Tonga

Sure, you can fly around the Tongan island groups...but everybody does that! Boats are much more interesting.

Spend a little time pottering around Tongatapu and acclimatising to the tropics in **Nuku'alofa**, then ferry out to nearby **'Eua** and spend a few days hiking through the island's lush rainforests and exploring 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 chug north to the coral charms and serenity of the low-lying Ha'apai Group. Shack up in a beachside *fale* on **Uoleva** for a few days, or at the other end of the cash spectrum there are a couple of wonderful resorts on **Foa**. If you have the inclination, charter a boat to take you out to **Tofua** and **Kao**.

If time is not your scarcest commodity, ferry on to the magical distractions of the **Vava'u Group**, where there's almost too much to do: sailing, diving, swimming, eating, drinking... The remote **Niuas** beckon a few hundred kilometres to the north – three volcanic islands where you'll find lava fields, pristine ridges and laid-back locals (and unscheduled ferries).



4
WEEKS

Northern Cook Islands

The Cooks' Northern Group is a long, long way from busy Rarotonga – it's a fantastic place to experience traditional Cook Islands culture. 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.

From **Rarotonga** you could catch a plane all the way to the Northern Group islands, but it's astronomically expensive. The most adventurous way to get there 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. Back in Manihiki, boat it back to Rarotonga.

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 along for a while...

Map Legend

Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, 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



Brett Atkinson

From his home in Auckland, Brett has travelled to many of the islands in his South Pacific backyard. For this extended research trip to the Cook Islands, he snorkelled and scootered around Aitutaki, drank bush beer and organic coffee on 'Atiu, and explored Rarotonga on two and four wheels with his wife, Carol. Brett has covered more than 50 countries as a guidebook author and travel and food writer. See www.brett-atkinson.net for his most recent work and upcoming travels.



Charles Rawlings-Way

As a likely lad, Charles suffered in school shorts through Tasmanian winters: ice on the Hobart puddles, snow on Mt Wellington... He dreamed of one day exploring tropical isles with a more humane climate. After dropping a windsurfer mast on a Texan tourist's head in Fiji in 1985 and chasing rats around an Aitutaki guesthouse in 2005, a trip to see what Tonga had to offer was well overdue. Charles has penned 30-something Lonely Planet guidebooks, and remains

pathologically fixated on the virtues and vices of travel.



Tamara Sheward

Despite a hearty dislike of heat and humidity – not to mention that pesky mango allergy – Tamara not only lives in the tropics, but enjoys travelling them extensively. While researching the South Pacific, she rode in 50-plus boats, 14 aeroplanes, umpteen rattly open-air buses and one submarine; alas, no similar tally was kept on kava and coconut consumption. In addition to the islands in this book, Tamara has covered an incongruous miscellany of countries for Lonely

Planet, including Serbia, northern Australia, Bulgaria and Russia.

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