

Welcome to Rarotonga, Samoa & Tonga

Adrift on these daydreamy South Pacific islands – deliciously remote and unhurried – it's easy to get back to the simple pleasures of eating, sleeping and succumbing to holiday whims.

South Seas Dreaming

Perpetuated by Hollywood, the paradisiacal reputation of this part of the South Pacific can be traced back to the tales of returned European explorers. These nations have modernised since then, but their allure is undiminished: you'll still find gin-clear waters and gardenia-scented air. But what's most amazing is how untainted by tourism most of the islands are. Blame it on remoteness, blame it on air fares, but few people who fantasise about the South Seas ever actually make the journey. This is the true gift of these Polynesian isles: here's your chance to get right off the tourism grid.

Polynesian Ways

These cultures are so idiosyncratic that almost every encounter yields a memorable moment. Locals burst into song in public, and on Sundays the singing in church raises the roof. Villagers casually swing bush knives by their sides as they walk along; kids sit on the scuffed toms of their relatives as if they were outdoor furniture; and games of rugby and volleyball erupt with gladiatorial intensity on threadbare patches of grass. Locals sell traditional handicrafts such as tapa cloth, woven mats, baskets and carvings by the roadside, as hotted-up cars scoot past with Polynesian hip-hop blaring.

Island Time

Through the conduit of snorkelling, diving, sailing, swimming, hiking, drinking, feasting and talking about nothing in particular with loquacious locals, visitors to these islands quickly change down a gear or two and slip into island time. Indeed, time here is a flexible commodity, and days roll in and out on the tide. One day you're exploring vanilla-bean plantations, snorkelling with tropical fish, swimming in sunken caves and dancing at a bar, and the next a plane is waiting to jet you back home. The trick is to go with the flow – don't stress too much if things don't happen precisely when you expect them to.

Dinner Is Served

These South Pacific islands don't have a great rep for fine food and wine. But side-step the Westernised resort restaurants and be adventurous: you'll find hearty local stews cooked with coconut milk, fabulous fresh seafood (how's that lobster?) and even the odd peppery Chinese noodle soup. And who needs shiraz when the weather is this humid? Sip a cold local lager instead – it's the perfect thirst quencher as the sun sets on another day in the promised land.



Why I Love Rarotonga, Samoa & Tonga

By Charles Rawlings-Way, Writer

Sure, you've got the palm trees, the seafood, the hypercoloured reefs, the sweet scent of hibiscus on the evening breeze... But the best thing about Rarotonga, Samoa and Tonga is the pace of life here – or rather, the lack of pace. I spend most of my time careening around Australia's big cities, drinking too much coffee and talking a lot. Every slowed-down trip I make to these islands is an antidote to the mayhem, extending my allocated time on this lonely planet by unknown years.

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