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PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT
 Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
 to help you put together your perfect trip

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 can make sense of what you see

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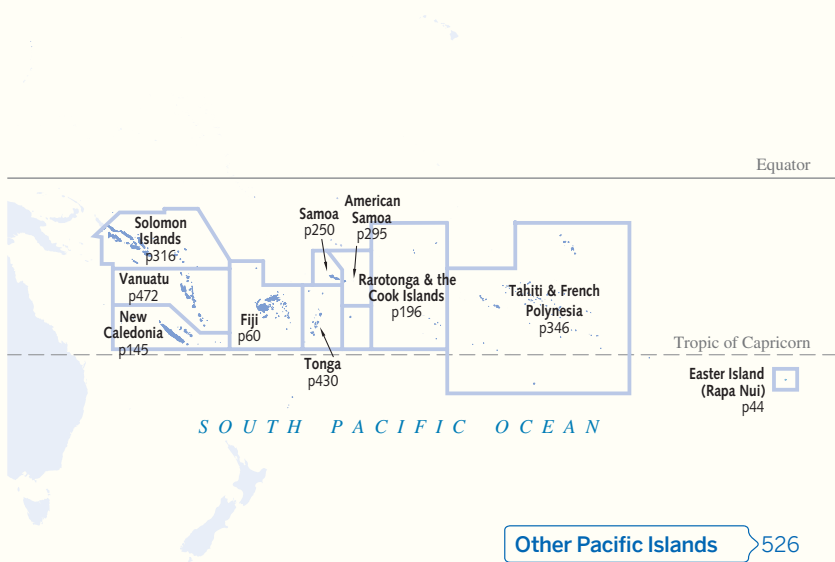


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Brett Atkinson, Jean-Bernard Carillet, Jayne D'Arcy,
Virginia Jealous, Craig McLachlan

➤ Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first

➤ Look out for these icons:



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



No payment required

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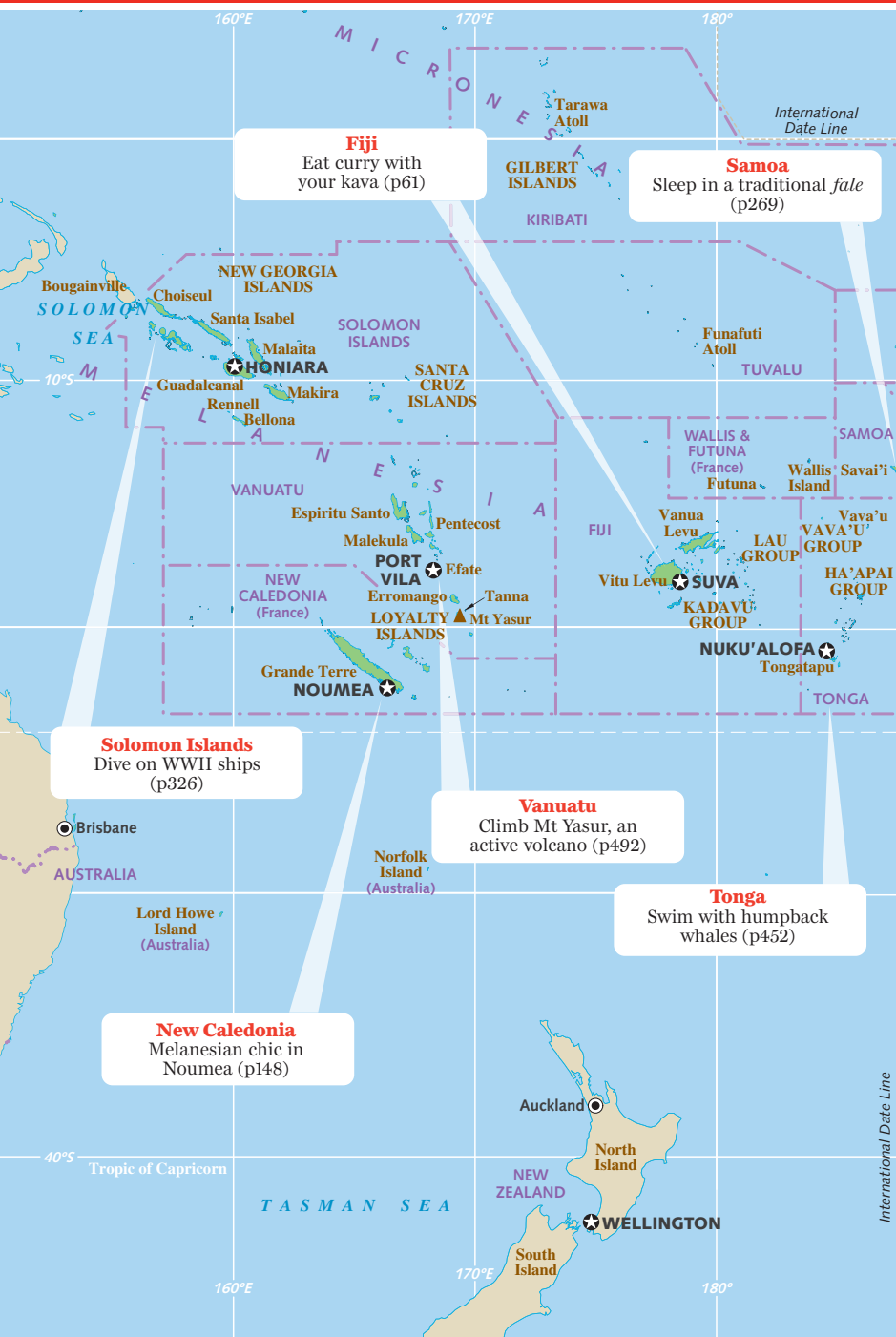
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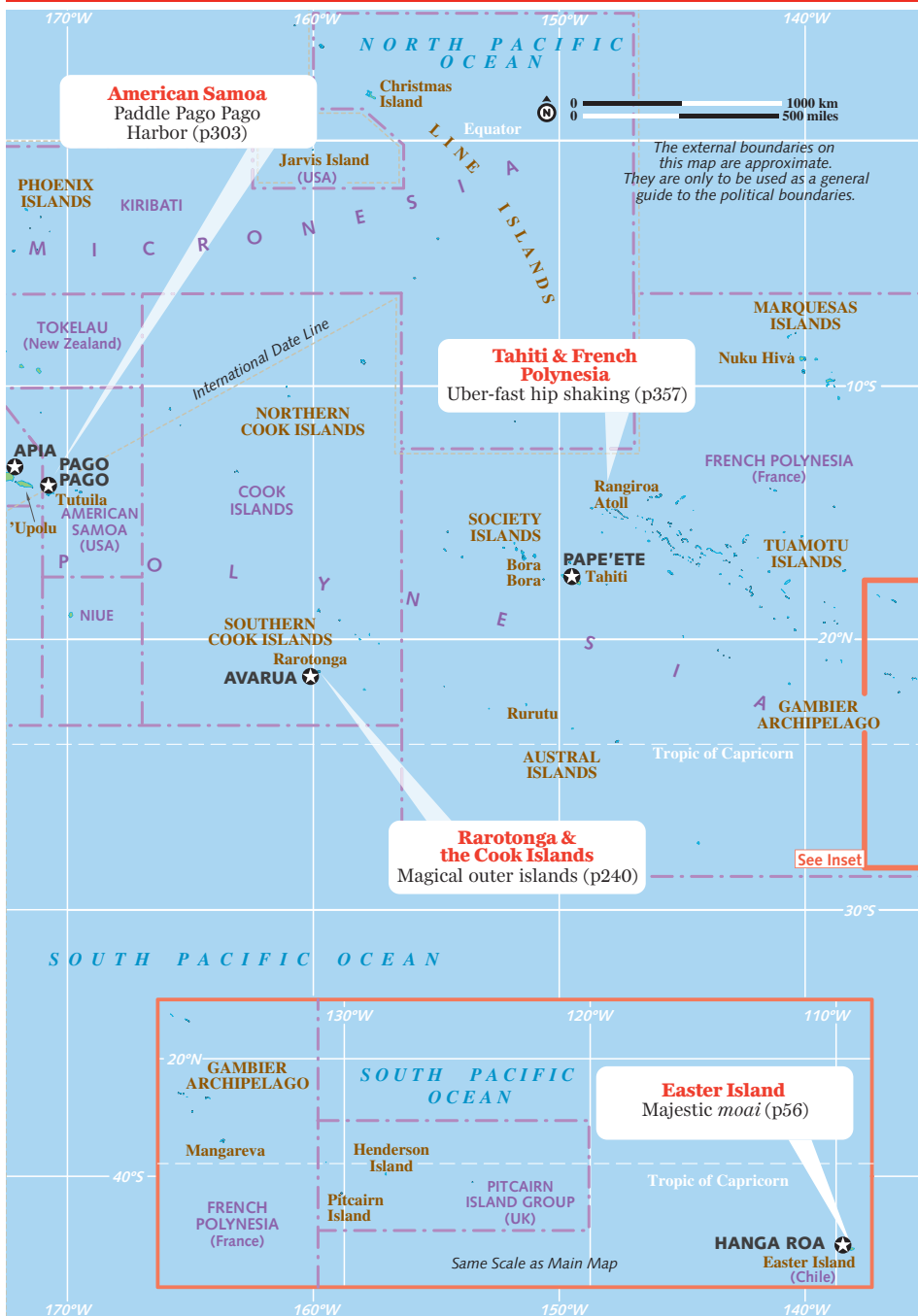
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South Pacific



Top Experiences ›





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



Celeste Brash

Coordinating Author, Fiji, Samoa, American Samoa, Other Pacific Islands

Celeste first visited French Polynesia in 1991 and moved there in 1995. Her first five years were 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 many places 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.



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.



Jean-Bernard Carillet

Diving, Easter Island, Solomon Islands, Tahiti & French Polynesia Paris-based journalist and photographer Jean-Bernard is a die-hard Polynesia lover and diving instructor. He has explored 28 islands in the five archipelagos. On this trip he searched for the most idyllic *motu*, the best manta ray encounters, the most thrilling lagoon tours, the tastiest *poisson cru*, the most romantic spots and the best-value accommodation. Jean-Bernard has contributed to many Lonely Planet titles and writes for travel and dive magazines.



Jayne D'Arcy

New Caledonia, Vanuatu Jayne started her travels with overland Asia trips, but has discovered that overland in the South Pacific can offer up similar diversity and excitement (with more French imports). Aside from the French influence, Jayne digs the coral reefs, astounding lagoons and serious *Survivor* opportunities that the area has in abundance. When she's not researching for Lonely Planet (this is her 17th guide), Jayne writes for the *Age* in Victoria, Australia.

OVER MORE PAGE WRITERS

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Virginia Jealous

Fiji Virginia lived, worked and travelled widely in the Pacific from 2004 to 2006, and contributed to Lonely Planet's previous *Fiji* and *South Pacific* guides. Since then she's been looking for a reason to go back, and was very happy to share a few kava sessions with old friends while shamelessly picking their brains about the current Fiji scene. She was also reassured to find that, despite the vagaries of politics and economics, Fiji welcomes travellers as warmly as ever.



Craig McLachlan

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.

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 Months Le Grande Tour

Fly to Fiji, the South Pacific's biggest hub and catch a boat to the **Yasawas** or **Mamanucas** where countless islets offer fantastic digs and brilliant beaches. Back on Viti Levu, take a bus to the **Nausori Highlands** to experience traditional Fiji and then go onto **Suva**, where shopping malls and markets coexist in a distinctly Pacific style.

Fly to Vanuatu to join a kava session in a *nakamal* (men's clubhouse) around **Port Vila** and see **Mt Yasur** glow in the dark on a night visit to one of the world's most accessible volcanoes. Your next stop will be **Noumea**, fronting the world's second largest coral reef lagoon. Pacific cultures are showcased at the wonderful Tjibaou Cultural Centre and don't miss an outrigger canoe (*pirogue*) trip around Île des Pins.

Keep saying *bonjour* for French Polynesia. Start with some hip-shaking nightlife in **Pape'ete**. Take the ferry to **Mo'orea** for hiking, snorkelling with stingrays and dolphin watching or fly to **Bora Bora** to live it up with the jet-setters in an over-the-water bungalow.

Finish your trip with the fun nightlife and restaurants on **Rarotonga** and unwind by **Aitutaki's** idyllic lagoon.



Six Months Sailing The South Pacific

The southeast trade wind makes this trip fairly predictable if sailed westward outside the December-to-March cyclone season. In fact the route is considered so easy by cruising standards that it's been dubbed the 'coconut milk run'. The **Marquesas Islands** are the targets after a stop at the Galapagos Islands or Hawaii'i.

After the majestic peaks of the Marquesas where you can hopefully fill the coffers with fruit, the barren but beautiful **Tuamotus**, the largest group of atolls in the world, are next. This is the time to put down your daiquiri and pay attention – this is known as the Dangerous Archipelago and it has wrecks on the reefs to prove it.

Pape'ete in Tahiti becomes the natural hub to switch crew, stock up on Hinano beer and get a fix of civilisation. Cruising the Society Islands from here to the lagoons of **Huahine**, **Raiatea** and **Bora Bora** is a highlight, but an expensive one. Leaving Bora Bora, drop in on **Suvarrow** before deciding on **Samoa**, **Rarotonga** or **Tonga**.

Rarotonga is the closest stop from French Polynesia and the sailors who do stop here often cite it as one of their favourite stops. **Pago Pago Harbor** in American Samoa is a good place to restock and run errands in scenic surrounds while **Apia** in nearby Samoa is less organised but has a bit more soul. The jewel-like islands of the **Vava'u Group** in Tonga are hard to pass up.

Depending on your choice of hiding place during the cyclone season (many yachts head to New Zealand), you could extend the trip by exploring **Fiji**, including the favourite yachty anchorages at **Savusavu**, or casting off for French Melanesia and the never-ending lagoon around **Grande Terre** in New Caledonia. **Vanuatu** gets you to wilder terrain, including volcanoes and the culture that invented bungee jumping, which is only mild preparation for the numerous adventurous islands of the **Solomon Islands**.



One Month Melanesian Meander

Start in **Nadi** and fly to **Taveuni** for Fiji's best hiking along the coast at Lavena then dive walls of willowing soft corals at the Rainbow Reef. Go back to Viti Levu via cosmopolitan **Suva** and chow down at an Indo-Fijian curry house.

Next fly to New Caledonia's capital **Noumea**, which blends Melanesia with French chic. Classy restaurants and boutique shopping aside, don't miss exploring the vast main island, **Grande Terre**, with its mangroves, silent forests and barren vistas.

Fly to Vanuatu's colourful **Port Vila** with its rich English and French colonial history. Swim in the pools of Mele-Maat Cascades and have a few shells of kava before trying some of Port Vila's restaurants and nightlife. Go to see the active **Mt Yasur** volcano and take the two-day trek across Malekula's Dog's Head, past the cannibal site, caves and traditional villages. On to Pentecost where yam farmers invented bungee jumping. Then Espiritu Santo for world-class diving.

Ride a boat through the Solomon Islands' stunning **Vanavona Lagoon**, snorkel or dive off **Uepi Island** and chill out in **Gizo**. Travel to **Malaita** where people summon sharks and live on artificial islands.

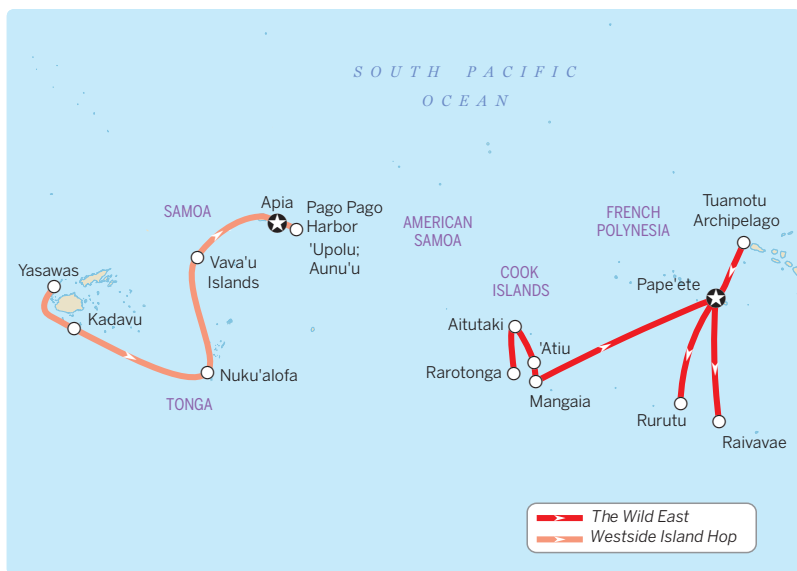
One Month Polynesian Odyssey

Start in **Apia, Samoa**, to visit the dreamy Robert Louis Stevenson Museum before taking the bus or a car around 'Upolu and spend at least one night on the beach in a traditional *fale*. Take the ferry to Savai'i to visit underground cave tunnels, lava fields and glowing white beaches before trying to find the forest-engulfed and forgotten Pulemelei Mound, Polynesia's largest ancient monument.

Fly to **Nuku'alofa** in the Kingdom of Tonga, via **Fiji**. See the Royal Palace (not open to commoners) on the way to lively Talamahu Market. Mu'a (Lapaha) is rich in archaeological ruins. Head to the Ha'apai Group for beachside living in a thatched *fale* or the **Vava'u Group** for active adventures like sea kayaking, surfing, caving and cycling.

You'll also have to reach the Cook Islands' capital **Rarotonga** via Fiji. Once in the Cooks, walk the cross-island track and snorkel at sublime Muri Beach. Catch a plane to **Aitutaki** to see its exquisite lagoon. Explore the caves of the *makatea* islands of **'Atiu**, **Mangaia** and **Ma'uke**.

Fly to **Pape'ete**, the chic capital of the French Pacific, and lastly squeeze in a visit to sleepy **Huahine** and the Polynesian spiritual capital of Raiatea.



Three weeks Westside Island Hop

It's ridiculously easy to island hop the western central region of the South Pacific from Australia or New Zealand. Start with a week to 10 days in Fiji exploring the blissful small islands and beaches of the **Yasawas** before heading off the beaten path a few days to dive, hike and relax in an eco-responsible resort on **Kadavu**.

Fly to Tonga for the next five days to a week, with a short stop in **Nuku'alofa** before heading for the **Vava'u Islands** for whale watching (between June and November) and kayaking to deserted beaches.

Spend the final week or more in the Samoas, driving around **'Upolu** for a few days to find empty white-sand beaches and enjoying the friendly bustle of **Apia**. Spend the last two to three days around the glorious **Pago Pago Harbor** in American Samoa, where tall mountains plunge to a mix of colonial architecture and fishing industry humbleness. While here, make sure to visit the spectacularly placed traditional villages of remote north bays of the island as well as walking around the relaxing and near car-free isle of **Aunu'u**.

Three weeks The Wild East

This is an island galaxy far, far away, even from the rest of the South Pacific so while you're here, make the most of it. First fly to **Rarotonga** to swim in the dreamy lagoon and hike the island's many inland trails. Take a side trip either to kayak the nooks and crannies of **Aitutaki's** turquoise lagoon, go birdwatching on **'Atiu** or visit the mysterious limestone burial caves on **Mangaia**.

Take the short Air Tahiti flight to **Pape'ete** and quickly fly out to either the **Tuamotu Archipelago** for diving, snorkelling and *la vida* coral atoll or to the Austral Islands: **Rurutu** for whale watching and cave exploration or **Raivavae** for traditional island culture, hiking and scenery to rival Bora Bora's.

If you're not ready for the adventure to end yet, continue your journey eastward with a long flight to **Easter Island**.

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