

# welcome to the South Pacific



## The Dream

The South Pacific is synonymous with paradise. This lofty reputation began when the first European explorers returned to their home shores with tales of a heaven on earth, where the soil was fertile, life was simple and people were beautiful. And while these island nations have modernised since that time, their allure hasn't changed. You'll still find the bluest waters, smiling bronzed locals in flowery fabrics and humid, gardenia-scented air. But what's most amazing is how refreshingly untainted by tourism most regions are. Blame it on their remoteness or the price of getting here but few people who fantasise about the South Pacific ever

actually go. This is a great gift to those who book a ticket to this magical place that generations have dreamed about.

## Diversity

Even the biggest geography buffs crinkle their brows when it comes to this many islands. On a map all those little dots look the same and their many-vowelled names get lost on the tongue. But get to know these places and you'll find diversity that would be fitting for any expanse of this size. Yes, there are Polynesian nations and Melanesian nations but within these headings are myriad languages, customs, histories and landscapes that make each island unique. No, it's not just a homog-



PETER HENDRIE / TONELYPANET IMAGES ©

*Remote, beautiful and culturally hospitable, these oft-dreamed-of islands are the place to enjoy the world's whitest sands between your toes and its clearest waters at your doorstep.*

(left) Tonga's Vava'u islands (p451) seen from the air  
(below) Children playing, Solomon Islands (p316)



SIMON FOALE / TONELYPANET IMAGES ©

enous spread of palm trees and warm ocean – if you escape your resort you'll find cultures and experiences as rich as coconut cream.

## Ready for Action

Life moves slowly out here so it's no wonder plop-yourself-on-the-beach-and-do-nothing holidays are popular. But what if you like action? This is the South Pacific's wildcard. Of course there's world-class surfing, snorkelling and diving but how about hiking to crumbling *tiki* (sacred) statues in the jungle, swimming with whales, trekking to the top of a volcano, rappelling down a waterfall or kayaking to forgotten beaches? Adventure travel

has scarcely been tapped here and, other than a few mechanised experiences like jet boating in Fiji or 4WD tours, what's on offer is authentic, uncrowded and something you'll never likely forget.

## Hospitality

No one knows how to treat guests better than Melanesians and Polynesians. This doesn't mean they'll always be in top form – working for minimum wage at a hotel can bring out the mediocre in the nicest of people – but it's their culture to generously offer the best of everything they have, be warm, gentle and make sure your stay is sublimely comfortable. There is pride that you'll go home with a gigantic smile.