

Rarotonga & the Cook Islands

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Why Go?

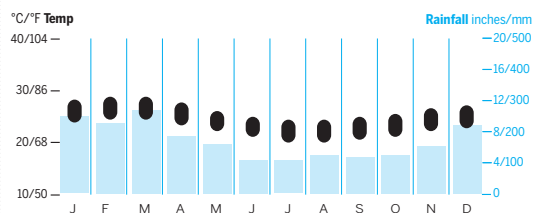
Fifteen droplets of land cast across 2 million sq km of wild Pacific blue, the Cook Islands are simultaneously remote and accessible, modern and traditional.

With a hip cafe culture, fine restaurants and funky nightlife, Rarotonga lives confidently in the 21st century. But beyond the island's tourist buzz and contemporary appearance is a robust culture, firmly anchored by traditional Polynesian values and steeped in oral history.

North of 'Raro', the sublime lagoon of Aitutaki is ringed with tiny deserted islands and is one of the Pacific's most improbably scenic jewels. Venture further and robust Polynesian traditions emerge nearer the surface. Drink home brew at a traditional 'Atiuan *tumunu* (bush-beer drinking club), explore the ancient *makatea* (raised coral cliffs) and taro fields of Mangaia, or swim in the underground cave pools of Mitiaro and Ma'uке. The even more remote Northern Group is a sublime South Seas idyll experienced only by a lucky few.

When to Go

Avarua



Mar–Apr The end of cyclone season usually brings clear, sunny days.

Aug Celebrate the nation's 1965 declaration of independence at the annual Te Maire Nui Festival.

Sep–Oct Look forward to warmer temperatures and reduced humidity.

Connections

If you're not crewing on a private yacht, air travel is the only practical way to connect from Rarotonga to the other Cook Islands. There are occasional cargo ships, but these are slow and usually run to somewhat flexible timetables. From Rarotonga there are regular flights to Aitutaki, 'Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Mangaia. Three flights per week link Aitutaki to 'Atiu, and there are occasional unscheduled flights linking Ma'uke to Mitiaro. If you are planning an extended sojourn around several islands, you may well have to connect back through Rarotonga. Flights to the islands of the Northern Group are very expensive, and may be either booked out or cancelled due to insufficient passenger numbers. Book well ahead, but still prepare to be flexible.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Ease into Rarotonga's holiday spirit with a relaxed combination of snorkelling, hiking and casual dining, before hopping north to Aitutaki and exploring one of the South Pacific's finest lagoons. Definitely find time to attend a wildly entertaining 'island night'.

Two Weeks

From Aitutaki, fly to rocky and remote 'Atiu. Sample the local coffee and *tumunu* (bush beer), swim in shimmering underground pools, and discover 'Atiu's rare and idiosyncratic birdlife. If your budget permits, return to Rarotonga and fly south to sleepy Mangaia for reef fishing and to explore the island's fascinating burial caves.

Essential Food & Drink

» **Go local** Head to Avarua's excellent Punanga Nui Market and hunt down local delicacies including *ika mata* (raw fish marinated in lime and coconut), *rukau* (steamed taro leaves), *poke* (banana with arrowroot and coconut) and *mitiore* (fermented coconut with onion and seafood).

» **Refresh with nature** Quickly gain an appreciation of quite possibly the most refreshing drink on the planet, a chilled *nu* (young green coconut).

» **Drinking with the guys** Look forward to a few laughs with the friendly locals at an 'Atiuan *tumunu* (bush beer) session. It's a refreshing, slightly effervescent concoction, and you'll be required to introduce yourself to the group before drinking. Don't be surprised also if your local drinking buddies regale you with stories of relatives living in Auckland or Sydney.

AT A GLANCE

Currency NZ\$

Languages English, Cook Islands Maori

Mobile phones GSM network through Telecom Cook Islands; international roaming and local SIM cards available.

Money Limited ATMs on Rarotonga and Aitutaki; credit cards widely accepted on Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

Visas Not required for stays up to one month.

Fast Facts

- » **Capital** Avarua
- » **Country code** 2682
- » **Emergency** police 2999; ambulance 2998
- » **Land area** 241 sq km
- » **Maritime area** 2 million sq km
- » **Population** 19,569

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	NZ\$1.30
Canada	CAN\$	NZ\$1.25
Europe	€1	NZ\$1.60
Japan	¥100	NZ\$1.60
UK	UK£1	NZ\$1.95
USA	US\$1	NZ\$1.25

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com.

Set Your Budget

- » **Midrange room** NZ\$150
- » **Two-course dinner** NZ\$35
- » **Island tour** NZ\$60
- » **Beer** NZ\$5
- » **Scooter hire** NZ\$20