



Understand South Pacific

SOUTH PACIFIC TODAY.....536

From ancient customs and colonial powers to coups, unrest and dreams of democracy, the South Pacific is a region in transition.

HISTORY538

With 50,000 years of exploration, trade, adventure and war, the South Pacific's history is filled with exciting tales.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES552

Nuclear testing has ended but the Pacific's natural paradises still face threats from rising sea levels, overfishing and whaling.

CULTURE, LIFESTYLE & RELIGION.....556

Devoted to family and deeply spiritual, the region's people are warm, friendly and welcoming, and their cultures rich and diverse.

ISLAND LIFE 561

Our photographers take you off the beaten track to celebrate the colour, culture and cuisine of island life.

ART & INFLUENCE 567

The arts frequently take centre stage in the South Pacific whether through the graceful swaying of grass skirts or the modern beats of Polynesian hip hop.

COCONUTS & KAVA..... 571

The endless summers in these sun-soaked islands have given rise to cuisines of fresh fish, coconut, tropical fruits and the muddy, magical concoction called kava.



population per sq km



South Pacific Today

Mumblings Around the Kava Bowl

The Pacific Islands are a varied bunch and in the ocean's vastness, it's not all kava and cocktails. This region has a mindset all of its own that's at once sleepy, stubborn and ingenious. Despite the islands harbouring little violence or danger, corruption is rife. Old customs continue even as islanders face a rapidly modernising world.

You'll hear mumblings about Fiji and the Solomon Islands, which have both seen unrest. RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands) troops arrived in the Solomon Islands in 2003 to police the nation, while coup-prone Fiji struggles to maintain diplomatic relations with other Pacific nations who don't like the idea of skipping elections and military-based rule.

Shifting Colonial Power & New Democracy

There are also new freedoms in the islands. A referendum for New Caledonia's independence from France is scheduled to take place between 2014 and 2019. Meanwhile French Polynesian president Oscar Temaru has pushed for independence for his country with rocky support. Tongans voted for the first time in 2010 elections – while monarchy-linked nobles (that have reigned for centuries) won that election, there will be another election in 2014.

Ex-colonies like Australia and New Zealand exert considerable influence in the Pacific through their membership of the Pacific Islands Forum, while France and the USA still finance their island territories. Lobbying from Australia resulted in the suspension of Fiji from the Pacific Islands Forum in 2010 for its failure to host elections. Australia continues to lobby for greater regionalism, whereby Pacific nations will act collectively on trade, fishing, waste management and air transport. Under the

Surface of earth covered by the Pacific: 28%

Islands in the Pacific: 25,000

Highest peak in this book: Mt Popmanaseu, Solomon Islands (2335m)

Population of islands in this book: 2,504,445

Landmass in this book: 87,337 sq km

Largest island in this book: Grand Terre, New Caledonia (6467 sq km)

Top Three Reads

» *Blue Latitudes* (Tony Horwitz)
The author retraces some of Cook's voyages and compares the past with the present; lively and informative.

» *The Sex Lives of Cannibals* (J. Maarten Troost)
Hysterical tales of the author's escapades on

an atoll; you'll get it more once you're on Pacific soil.

» *Mutiny on the Bounty* (Nordhoff & Hall)
Page-turning saga of love, adventure and piracy with a historical backdrop.

Big-Screen Scenes

» *Cast Away* (2000) Fiji

» *Couples Retreat* (2009) Bora Bora

» *The Blue Lagoon* (1980) Fiji

» *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935, 1962 & 1984) Tahiti, Bora Bora and Mo'orea

» *Rapa Nui* (1994) Easter Island