

South Pacific Directory

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This South Pacific Directory covers region-wide information but for country-specific information, see the Directory section for each country chapter. Some subjects are covered in both directories; for example, accommodation options in the region are given in this directory, but specific accommodation prices are covered in the country directories. When seeking information, consult both directories and note the cross-references.

ACCOMMODATION

There's accommodation in the South Pacific to suit most budgets – from no-frills *fales* (houses) and village homestays to luxury resorts and live-aboard cruisers – though not all countries have offerings that cover the whole spectrum. Some countries have outstanding luxury options but few budget choices, while other countries don't have any five-star accommodation. This really depends on the maturity of the country's tourist industry – Fiji and French Polynesia, for example, have good accommodation options, but in places that get far fewer tourists the choices are usually limited. For detailed in-

formation see Accommodation in the country chapter directories.

Where there's sufficient choice we've listed accommodation in three price categories (budget, midrange and top end) and listed by budget order. Budget accommodation may include campgrounds, homestays, hostels and cheap hotels. Midrange options can take the form of hotels and motels, as well as guest houses and fully furnished houses for weekly rental. Plush hotels and resorts dominate the top-end options, but keep in mind the word 'resort' is used loosely in some countries and isn't always synonymous with luxury.

The best accommodation is often fully booked and may be more expensive during peak tourist times – see *When to Go*, p26. A few countries, such as Tokelau, Pitcairn Island and theoretically the Cook Islands require accommodation to be booked before arrival, but most don't. In more expensive countries like New Caledonia and French Polynesia, package tours that include accommodation are well worth investigating and can offer substantial savings. See p640 for more details.

Camping

Pacific islands generally have lots of outdoors space and camping can be a good way to save money in expensive places like Tahiti and New Caledonia. But campgrounds in this region don't come with amenities blocks, games rooms or state-of-the-art cooking facilities. You'll be lucky to find one or two like that in the whole huge region. Here we're talking coconut palms, thatched shelters, pit toilets, campfires, and the buzz of mosquitoes and a long slice of heavenly beach. In a few countries, an occasional hotel will allow you to pitch your tent.

However, not many countries cater for campers – the only places with any facilities are French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Easter Island, Fiji and Vanuatu. Tonga has some facilities, but like most Melanesian countries camping is not customary. Playing host to travellers is an important Melanesian tradition and usually you'd be invited to sleep in a home, school building or even a police station – to decline and pitch a tent would

cause offence. Check the individual country chapters for more information.

If you want to camp somewhere other than a designated camping area, it's important to seek permission from customary landowners. And try to leave no trace of your visit – carry out everything you carry in.

Guest Houses & Hostels

Backpacker hostels aren't common in the region, but budget travellers can opt for local guest houses that have similar facilities – shared rooms, showers and kitchen facilities. Guest houses are often patronised by locals, as well as church and aid workers, and are usually a more grassroots experience than most city hotels. There are often rules about smoking and drinking, and some have evening curfews. Guest houses appear in several countries but the term is variously defined – expect anything from a hostel to a midrange hotel.

New Caledonia has the Pacific's sole hostel affiliated with **Hostelling International** (www.hihostels.com), though many countries have no hostels. Fiji, Samoa and the Cook Islands are all countries where hostels are a more common accommodation alternative. French Polynesia also has hostel-style digs on its larger islands. The following websites are a good resource for hostels and other budget accommodation:

Hostel Planet (www.hostelplanet.com)

Hostels.com (www.hostels.com)

Hostelz (www.hostelz.com)

Hotels

What qualifies as a hotel in the Pacific varies enormously from top-end luxury pads to cheap city digs pitched towards locals, and thus all budgets are covered. What you get for what you pay is determined by the country: lower those expectations for the more expensive destinations, while enjoy the complimentary extras (such as breakfast and maybe dinner) that are common in cheaper countries.

Cheap hotels offer very basic rooms, and may have dorm facilities as well. In some countries, the budget end of the spectrum is bolstered by hostels and guest houses (see above). Rooms with kitchenettes are a fabulous way to save money, especially for families or groups. Many budget accommodation options will not accept credit cards.

Midrange and top-end hotels generally offer the mod cons: air-con, tea- and coffee-making facilities, a restaurant, bar and swimming pool.

There's usually internet access available (even if only from the office) and they may offer garden and beachfront bungalows, or a room in the main building. Rooms within a hotel can vary in size, facilities and outlook as well as price so ask to see a few. Most hotels in this range can be contacted and booked via websites, and most accept credit cards.

Organised Village Stays

Many small communities in the Pacific offer village stays and they can be a terrific way of experiencing traditional village life. Usually this will be a rural community, and it's a great way to spend some of your tourist dollars with local people and a good alternative to the gloss of hotels and resorts. This kind of accommodation has taken off in some countries in recent years – a Pacific version of the B&B (though you may have to take all meals with your hosts, not just breakfast). Reserve village stays either directly through the village or through the local tourist office, and keep your expectations at ground level – a thatched hut with mats on the floor, pit toilet and cold shower are as flash as some come.

Rental Accommodation

Rentals can be good for families or groups who want to stay in a place for a week or more. They're not always the cheapest option, but you can save on meals by making good use of the kitchen. However, short-term rentals are not that common in the Pacific. Rarotonga (p269) has the best range.

Resorts

The best of the top-end resorts in the Pacific are as good as they come. Luxurious over-water bungalows lapped by pristine azure waters, glass-bottomed coffee tables that double as an ever-changing looking glass into the underwater world, white-sand beaches that you may have to yourself – if you've got the budget you can have it all and more in the South Pacific. French Polynesia is often regarded as the best of the best (see the boxed text, p166), but if that's just a tad too pricey, options abound in other countries.

Many couples come to the Pacific for their wedding and honeymoon, and a luxurious tropical island resort is pretty darn romantic.

Pacific resorts are a wide and varied lot. The internet has become a huge marketing tool