

Destination South Pacific

Slip on that sarong, listen for the lullaby of waves broken only by the satisfying 'thunk' of coconuts falling on golden sands and throw away your watch in preparation for 'island time'. The Pacific has a mindset all of its own. Its hugeness is big enough to hold all your dreams of snorkelling around idyllic coral atolls, slow-sunset evenings distilled with cocktails and beaches beautiful enough to send even the most stressed visitor into a catatonia of relaxation.

From tiny Tuvalu to controversial bad boy Fiji to uber-chic French Polynesia, the family of Pacific islands is a varied bunch. And you can choose how you'll acquaint yourself with this diverse crowd. Many opt for resorts in big centres like Fiji, the Cooks or Vanuatu, or plunge into another world diving among the dazzling coral and magical marine life that makes Nemo look like a pallid goldfish. But there's other ways to discover the Pacific. You could puzzle over lost civilisations amid the icons of Easter Island or see why Fletcher Christian hopped off the *Bounty* in favour of the remote paradise of Pitcairn Island. Why not get intrepid and seek out the live volcanoes or don your pith helmet to trek into lush forests? Then there's the shipwrecks to dive, bohemian capitals to explore and did we mention that a cocktail with at least a couple of tropical fruits in it is compulsory?

Of course in the vastness of the Pacific, it's not all kava and skittles. In bars across the Pacific you'll hear mumbblings about Fiji and the Solomon Islands which, have both seen their share of unrest. The Solomons had the RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands) troops arrive in 2003 to police the nation, while coup-prone Fiji struggles to maintain diplomatic relations with other Pacific nations who don't seem to like the idea of skipping elections and military-based rule.

But while some cling to power there are also new freedoms in the islands. In 2008 French President Nicholas Sarkozy talked about his commitment to autonomy for New Caledonia, which has been a territory of France for decades with referendums to be held in the coming years. In Samoa with the death of the long-reigning head of state Malietoa Tanumafili II, the nation quietly overturned more than 40 years of what was effectively a monarchy to elect a head of state. Tonga on the other hand remains steadfastly, at least for now, the Pacific's last remaining monarchy, which is based on the ancient rule of chiefs (p47).

Ex-colonies like Australia and New Zealand still exert considerable influence in the Pacific through their membership of the Pacific Islands Forum. New Zealand has been particularly vocal about removing Fiji from the forum because of its failure to host elections, which has seen Fiji respond by deporting NZ and Australian journalists. Australia continues to lobby for greater regionalism, whereby Pacific nations will act collectively on trade, fishing, waste management and air transport. Under the Forum's Pacific Plan the nations of the region would remove barriers to trade within the region and trade externally as a collective group. This could one day create a single currency in the Pacific and will certainly create favourable economies of scale.

Another interesting development has seen the experiment of a seasonal worker visa for workers from Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to fruit pick in the Australian horticulture industry. While some see this as offering employment opportunities to islanders and pumping money into their economies, human rights groups have identified it as open to exploitation in a form of 21st-century blackbirding (p44).

FAST FACTS

Most common unit of currency: US dollar (US\$)

Total visitors: 1,206,632 (580,282 on holiday)

Estimated total population (including Micronesia): 9,504,445

Estimated number of islands in the Pacific: 25,000

Highest proportion covered of land covered by forest: 88.2% (Solomon Islands)

Highest proportion of women in national parliament: 14% Tokelau

Number of *Survivor* TV series filmed in the area: six (at 2009; more coming soon)

As old colonies change their roles in the Pacific, new powers are appearing. In 2006, China signed the catchily titled Action Plan of Economic Development and Cooperation with several Pacific nations offering trade and aid. Some diplomats have been critical of the move as an attempt to get a stake in fishing rights or keep a check on China's 'rogue state' Taiwan (which also has interests in the region). Still the Pacific – particularly Fiji and Tonga – are benefiting with building programmes, preferential loans and access to Chinese markets.

Japan has long been accused of vote-buying at the International Whaling Commission by offering aid to member nations such as the Solomon Islands to continue their whaling in the Pacific. In 2007 Japan further tried to increase its influence in the area by offering peacekeeping troops to the Solomons.

But there's one issue on which the Pacific won't compromise: global warming. Once it was only Tuvalu with its low-lying atolls who was speaking out, but at the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference in 2009 more than 40 island nations from around the world were lending their voices in protest. While small islands like Tuvalu and Tokelau are at risk of sinking, other environmental issues are a factor. Reduced land anywhere in the Pacific means less space for agriculture, and the precious corals of Fiji and French Polynesia are bleaching as water temperatures rise with the expanding hole in the ozone layer. General temperature increases could also multiply insect and bacteria populations and increase diseases such as malaria and typhoid. To see what you can do check the Greendex (p678) and read about responsible travel (p28).

But the Pacific dream has survived these nightmares and has preserved its fair share of isolated beaches, honeymoon escapes and sun-drenched resorts. In its vastness there's plenty of room to find your own Pacific by stretching out a towel, strapping on a snorkel and listening to the world's largest ocean lap at the shore.

'While small islands like Tuvalu and Tokelau are at risk of sinking, other environmental issues are a factor.'

Getting Started

The South Pacific conjures up images of long white beaches, cool drinks with cocktail umbrellas and lazy days lying in the sun. While the region may seem like a dreamy tropical paradise it's certainly not all like that. Countries like French Polynesia and Fiji are used to the ways of tourists and have good tourism infrastructure, but other places like the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu don't get a lot of visitors and have few facilities for tourists. The region is home to some of the planet's most remote and isolated communities separated by vast distances, and studying domestic airline routes and schedules (and often booking flights) before you arrive is important if you want to see more than just one part of any South Pacific country.

Planning will help reduce costs too – some domestic routes can be done by boat, and the best places to stay aren't always the most expensive. Some islands are easily accessible while even getting to others can be a major challenge. The South Pacific is not a budget destination like Southeast Asia, but we've done our best to help you stretch your dollars, *pa'angas*, CFPs, talas and vatus.

WHEN TO GO

Weather is the most important factor when deciding when to travel. Most visitors travel outside the wet season. Tropical temperatures don't vary much – it's *always* hot – but during the wet things can be sticky and uncomfortable and places can be impossible to reach because of boggy roads. The wet season is also the time of cyclones. However, wet-season rains often fall in a single great deluge late in the afternoon or at night and can be spectacular to witness, and they freshen and cool the oppressive air.

The wet season runs from November to April; the dry from May to October. However, many volcanic islands have tall mountains around which rising moist air condenses into clouds, and small micro-climates are common. For more on climate, see p64.

Many Pacific islanders live in Australia and New Zealand (NZ) and many children go to boarding school in these countries. Flights and inter-island boats are often fully booked at school-holiday times and around the Christmas–New Year period.

Prices are highest during peak tourist times, accommodation fully booked and planes packed. There are better deals in the shoulder seasons (either side of the dry season) in October and May. Read the Climate and When to Go sections in the country chapters and see the Climate Charts (p627).

Major local festivals and celebrations are always worth seeing. See the International Festivals & Events boxed text (p30) and the Festivals & Events sections in the country chapters.

Things can change quickly in the Pacific – a cyclone can knock out accommodation, roads, electricity and telephones, and local disputes can close off an area. It's best to have some flexibility about your travel plans and try to be adaptable. Islanders have a much more relaxed attitude towards time than people from Western cultures and there's no point getting frustrated when things don't go the way you expect them to – slow down and enjoy the sunshine.

Check for cyclones before you head off, particularly in or around the cyclone season. Try the **Central Pacific Hurricane Center** (www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/cphc/) in Hawai'i or the **Fiji Meteorological Service** (www.met.gov.fj/). For information on cyclones, see p65.

Travel advisories are published by some governments and provide updated warnings on countries considered unsafe, due to political unrest or natural

See Climate Charts (p627)
for more information

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Travel light but pack carefully because you may not be able to buy what you left behind. Check visa requirements (p633) and vaccinations requirements (p644). Photocopy important documents – leave copies at home and take another set with you. Consider the weather conditions – the Cooks and the Solomons are too hot for trousers and sweaters but Vanuatu evenings can be cool. If you don't need bulky clothing leave it behind. Consider the following:

- travel insurance, noting emergency phone and policy numbers (see p630)
- anti-malarial prophylactics for countries where it's a problem (p648)
- basic first-aid kit (p644)
- international diving certificate
- hat, sunglasses, high-UV-protection sunscreen
- good footwear, lightweight trousers and long-sleeved shirt for protection against sunburn and mosquitos
- insect repellent and box-style mosquito net (p648)
- mask, snorkel, rash vest and reef shoes; C-card and logbook if you're diving
- umbrella or poncho-style raincoat that covers your backpack and opens into a groundsheet
- Swiss Army Knife
- torch (flashlight) for exploring caves and late-night village toilet expeditions
- good stash of books.

disasters. The Foreign Affairs departments in Australia (<http://smartraveller.gov.au>) and Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca/dest) both issue advisories, as does the **British Foreign & Commonwealth Office** (www.fco.gov.uk).

COSTS & MONEY

People are often surprised to learn that Pacific countries are generally not cheap to visit. Yes, they're mostly developing countries, but getting there and around, accommodation and food are all fairly expensive. There are two reasons for this: the Pacific has few tourists and there are huge expanses of water that separate these nations and their island groups. Planes and boats are the only modes of inter-island travel and on the islands roads are often poor so 4WDs are common. The cost of getting goods to such remote parts of the world is expensive. The cost of fuel is sky-rocketing and you need a lot of it in the Pacific. Food is mostly imported, as is pretty much everything else from car parts to crockery.

Despite this, travellers on all budgets find their way into the Pacific. Countries like French Polynesia and New Caledonia can be incredibly expensive, but you can get by on a lot less in places like Samoa and Fiji. Let go of your modern-world luxuries and you can live on next to nothing in a village or avoid the tourist hotels and stay in guest houses and dorms patronised by locals, church groups and aid workers.

Travel cheaply in Fiji or Tonga and you'll need at least US\$40 per day, but even hard-nosed budget travellers who camp and self-cater in Tahiti will spend at least US\$100 per day. Midrange travellers eating out and sleeping in hotels can expect a daily budget starting at US\$100/300 in Fiji/Tahiti. Travellers opting for full-course restaurant meals and resort-style accommodation will be looking at US\$200/600.

There are ways to stretch your money and planning will help cut costs – consider a round-the-world ticket (p636), an air pass (p636) or a package holiday (p640). Don't automatically discount package holidays as travel

CONDUCT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Pacific islanders are pretty laid-back about most things including standards of dress, but dressing like a slob won't endear you to anyone. It's not appropriate for men to go bare-chested in town, and women's dress conventions are conservative. Casual attire is fine, but if you're attending a church service, place of worship or formal ceremony you'd better smarten up for the occasion – it would be disrespectful not to make some effort.

In many Pacific countries the display of women's thighs is considered sexually provocative, so skirts and shorts should be knee-length and your itchy bitsy bikini bottoms might cause consternation at the beach (wear board shorts instead). Topless bathing is accepted in a few countries, particularly those with ties to France, but it's usually restricted to resorts and certain beaches. Nude bathing is not on.

Public displays of affection between men and women, even two tourists, are often inappropriate, and flirting with locals can get you into a *lot* of trouble. Melanesians will often walk hand in hand – man with man and woman with woman – but this a simple expression of friendship. Melanesian countries are still generally intolerant of same-sex couples, though there is increasingly some gay pride expressed in the cities. Polynesia has a long tradition of trans-genderism and is more relaxed about homosexuality.

Avoid becoming visibly frustrated when things don't go your way and try not to cause people to lose face.

For information on tipping and bargaining, see p631.

While most islanders are happy about being photographed, some may be uncomfortable. Ask permission and always respect the answer.

See p57 for information about meeting locals.

agents – particularly those based in the country you're travelling to – can often get better rates with airlines and hotels, and tailor a package around your requirements. Accommodation is a major cost – see p623 for options. A place with a kitchen is one way to cut costs. Markets are the best way to buy fresh produce.

Hiring a bicycle or hitchhiking (p643) is worth considering. On some remote islands, hitching is the only option. Scuba diving will push up your costs, but if you bring a mask and snorkel you can enjoy the tropical underwater world for nothing.

Prices in this book are likely to change – they usually go up – but if the last tourist season was slow or the local economy crashes, they may be the same or even come down a bit. See p630 for more on handling money.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

As visitors, we all have responsibilities to local people and the environment. Learn about local customs and you'll find people much more accepting of you.

Certain fish species are becoming endangered – by eating swordfish, marlin, gemfish and southern bluefin tuna we exacerbate the problem (eating albacore tuna is fine).

Avoid buying souvenirs made from animal products – turtleshell, skins and bone. In many countries the importation of these products is illegal. Some of the same considerations apply for souvenirs made from coral and shells. Certain timbers are over-harvested and we should think carefully about what we purchase and how sustainable its production is. If you're buying handicrafts it's better to buy them from the maker than from a shop or emporium that's often owned by a foreign entrepreneur. This way the maker realises the full value of their work and you can contribute to what is sometimes a very marginal existence.

See boxed text p69 for the Top 10 South Pacific conservation areas

When in the wilderness, bury waste in holes 15cm deep and 100m from any watercourse. Don't use detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses.

Bottled water is fast becoming an environmental scourge. There are vast amounts of energy vested in the production, filling and transportation of plastic bottles, and they're a major source of litter. It's far better to carry and refill your own water bottle. Where tap water is not potable it can be boiled or treated. Litter is a huge problem on Pacific islands – even if locals are blasé about rubbish, don't add to the problem by leaving your garbage behind.

For more on environmental issues, see p69. For more detailed information on responsible travel, see the boxed texts about diving (p77), yachting (p642) and conduct in the South Pacific (opposite).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

There are many excellent books that have been published about the Pacific. The Australian-based mail-order **Pacific Book House** (www.pacificbookhouse.com.au) specialises in new, used, out-of-print and rare books on the Pacific. Another good resource is US-based **Pacific Island Books** (www.pacificislandbooks.com). Fiji's **University Book Centre** (www.uspbookcentre.com) is also good. For more titles, see the Literature and Books sections in the country chapters.

Getting Stoned with Savages (J Maarten Troost) A funny and insightful story about a European couple living in Vanuatu and Fiji and the consumption of kava.

Vaka: Saga of a Polynesian Canoe (Sir Thomas Davis) The former Cook Islands Prime Minister tells a story of a canoe that sailed the ocean for 300 years – a fascinating exploration of Polynesian culture and history.

Song of the Solomons: Faultlines in the South Pacific (E Hunt Augustus) A fast-paced and excellent novel set against the WWII Battle of Guadalcanal.

30 Days in the South Pacific: True Stories of Escape to Paradise (edited by Sean O'Reilly et al) A lively anthology of travel writing in the Pacific isles.

Tales of the Pacific (Jack London) A collection of short stories from the author's time as a South Seas sailor.

Typee (Herman Melville) This and its sequel *Omoo* were Melville's first forays into the ripping yarns of South Seas whalers, and both much more successful in his lifetime than *Moby Dick*.

The Happy Isles of Oceania: Paddling the Pacific (Paul Theroux) A modern Pacific classic, although not everyone's a fan of Theroux's account of kayaking around the Pacific.

The Fatal Impact: The Invasion of the South Pacific 1767–1840 (Alan Moorehead) An acclaimed book on the impact of colonialism. Critically assesses the havoc wreaked by early European explorers.

Tales of the South Pacific, Rascals in Paradise and Return to Paradise (James Michener) Famous collection of short stories dealing with life in the South Pacific from WWII onward.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The internet is a powerful tool for travellers. For country-specific websites, see the Directory in the country chapters.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Summaries on travelling to most places on earth, postcards from other travellers and the Thorn Tree bulletin board.

Pacific Beat (www.abc.net.au/ra/pacbeat) Radio Australia's news and audio-streamed stories.

Pacific Magazine (www.pacificmagazine.net) News and reviews from the regional magazine.

Pacifica (www.pacifica.info) Good travel information.

South Pacific Organizer (www.southpacific.org) David Stanley of Moon Guides maintains this excellent website.

South Pacific Tourism Organisation (www.spto.org) Intergovernmental tourism organisation – good website with good regional and country-specific information.

Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, spent nearly four years in the South Pacific aboard whaling ships. He deserted the *Acushnet* in July 1842 to spend three weeks with the Typee people of the Marquesas who were said to be cannibals, and romanced a Polynesian girl called Fayaway. His first two novels, *Typee* and *Omoo*, were based on these South Seas adventures. Queequeg, Ishmael's friend in *Moby Dick*, is a Polynesian cannibal turned whale harpooner.

TOP 10

FILMS

There are a couple of forgettable Blue Lagoon films shot in Fiji and three versions of the *Bounty* story (see p246), all of them excellent. **Ronin Films** (www.roninfilms.com.au) in Australia distributes some of the more obscure films and documentaries mentioned here.

- 1 Since the Company Came** Excellent documentary about logging in the Solomons, land disputes and clan troubles.
- 2 Pear Ta Ma 'on Maf (The Land Has Eyes)** Fiji's first feature film (2005) tells the tale of an island girl's struggle with poverty and prejudice and the strength she discovers in her island's mythology.
- 3 Tongan Ninja** An NZ spoof of a Hong Kong kung fu movie – great fun!
- 4 Tatau Samoa** German director Gisa Schleelein explores the life and work of Samoan tattoo master Paulo Sulu'ape.
- 5 Wayfinders: A Pacific Odyssey** Documentary about traditional voyaging and the *Hokule'a* canoe.
- 6 Return to Paradise** This 1953 film of James Michener's story starred Gary Cooper and remains a poignant story more than half a century later. It was filmed in Samoa.
- 7 The Thin Red Line** This excellent war film set in Guadalcanal features some stunning scenery. The film was predominantly shot in Australia's Daintree rainforest.
- 8 Rapa Nui** Co-produced by Kevin Costner in 1994, it's hardly essential viewing, but gives the feel of Easter Island's remote appeal.
- 9 Castaway** Filmed on Fiji's remote Monruki Island, Tom Hanks survives a plane crash and befriends a volleyball called Wilson.
- 10 The Other Side of Heaven** Based on a true story of an American Mormon missionary in Tonga in the 1950s.

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festivals in South Pacific countries are always spectacular and often unusual. Regional celebrations and events are listed here. For other country-specific events, see Festivals & Events in the individual country directories.

- 1 Rise of Palolo** (p332) It's not everywhere you get to celebrate worms rising at midnight. The celebrations are observed in Samoa and Fiji.
- 2 Miss Galaxy Pageant** (p532) This international *fakaleiti* (transvestite) beauty pageant held in July in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, is riotous fun and always sells out.
- 3 Festival of Pacific Arts** This vibrant festival (<http://pacartsas.com>) showcases traditional arts from around the Pacific and is held every four years in a different country. Next is Solomon Islands in 2012.
- 4 Fest'Napuan** (p607) This annual four-day music festival in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in November showcases Pacific contemporary and traditional music (www.vanuatuculture.org).
- 5 Hawaiki Nui Va'a** (p477) Canoes from many Pacific countries are raced between the islands of French Polynesia every November.
- 6 Vaka Eiva** (p292) Held in November in Rarotonga, Vaka Eiva is the Cooks' biggest sporting event. Outrigger-canoe races are the feature of this week-long festival.
- 7 South Pacific Games** In September 2011 New Caledonia hosts the South Pacific Games (www.southpacificgames.com), held every four years. Twenty-two Pacific nations take part in 32 sporting events – about 4000 athletes in all.
- 8 Pacific Nations Cup** Fiji, Tonga and Samoa join Australia A, NZ Maori and Japan in play-offs for this annual prize in venues of all the participating teams (www.irb.com/pacificnationscup).
- 9 Pacific Island Sevens Tournaments** Held annually in the Cook Islands, Fiji and Samoa, these games feature as much dance and celebration as rugby (www.oceaniarugby.com).
- 10 Billabong Tahiti Pro** (p477) This event on the pro surfing world tour has surfers carving up waves at legendary Teahupoo in Tahiti in May.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

LE GRANDE TOUR

One to Two Months/Fiji to the Cook Islands

Fly to Fiji and catch a boat to the **Yasawas** (p141) or **Mamanucas** (p135) where countless islets offer fantastic digs and brilliant beaches. Take a bus to the **Nausori Highlands** (p135) to experience traditional Fiji and then onto **Suva** (p125), where you can discover the best way to eat human at the **Fiji Museum** (p125; also see p132).

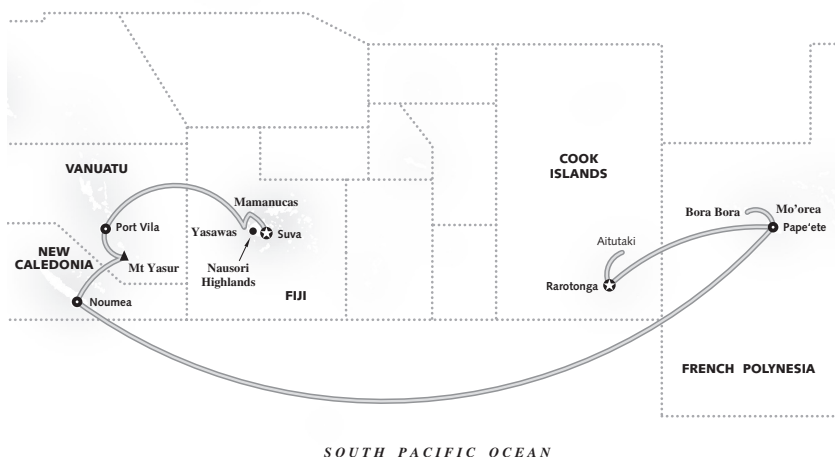
Join a **kava** (p575) session in one of Vanuatu's *nakamal* around Port Vila and see **Mt Yasur** (p581) glow in the dark on a night-time visit to one of the world's most accessible volcanoes.

Fly to **Noumea** (p180) where Pacific cultures are showcased at the wonderful **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p185).

Then head to French Polynesia, starting at vibrant **Pape'ete** (p409) before seeing idyllic **Mo'orea** (p420) and sublime **Bora Bora** (p438).

Enjoy the nightlife and restaurants of **Rarotonga** (p256) and unwind by **Aitutaki's** idyllic lagoon (p275).

Count the **12,000km** moving east to west across the Pacific. This route takes in the region's most glorious lagoons and beaches from Melanesian Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia to Polynesian Tahiti and Rarotonga.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

POLYNESIAN ODYSSEY **One to Four Months/Tuvalu to French Polynesia**

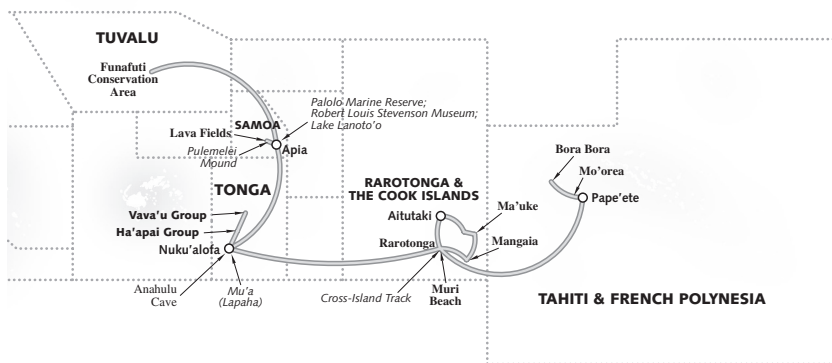
The tiny atolls of **Tuvalu** (p536) barely break the surface of the Pacific Ocean (and won't for long if sea levels rise). The **Funafuti Conservation Area** (p547) is a wonderland of uninhabited islets, reefs, seabirds, dolphins and turtles. In Samoa's **Apia** (p305), go to the **Palolo Deep Marine Reserve** (p308), a shallow reef rich in marine life, underwater caves and clams. The **Robert Louis Stevenson Museum** (p314) is a highlight as is the eerie pea-green crater lake of **Lake Lanoto'o** (p315). See the **Pulemelei Mound** (p328), Polynesia's largest ancient monument, and Mt Matavanu's **lava fields** (p324).

Fly onto **Nuku'alofa** (p502) in the Kingdom of Tonga. See the **Royal Palace** (not open to commoners; p502) on the way to lively **Talamahu Market** (p502). **Mu'a (Lapaha)** (p508) is rich in archaeological ruins, and nearby is famous **'Anahulu Cave** (p509). Head to the **Ha'apai Group** (p511) for simple beachside living in a thatched *fale* or the **Vava'u Group** (p516) for more active adventures where sea kayaking, surfing, caving and cycling are popular.

The Cooks' capital **Rarotonga** (p256) is a Polynesian princess. Walk the **Cross-Island Track** (p264) and snorkel at sublime **Muri Beach** (p265). Catch a plane to **Aitutaki** (p273) to see her exquisite **lagoon** (p275). Explore the caves of the *makatea* islands of **'Atiu** (p279), **Mangaia** (p286) and **Ma'uke** (p282).

Fly to **Pape'ete** (p409), the chic capital of the French Pacific, and squeeze in brilliant **Bora Bora** (p438) and **Mo'orea** (p420) before the money's finally spent.

This route takes in most of Polynesia – from the archaeological sites of Samoa and Tonga to cosmopolitan Rarotonga and Tahiti, and visiting marine reserves and ancient burial caves along the way.



SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN

MAKE LIKE A MELANESIAN One to Four Months/Fiji to the Solomons

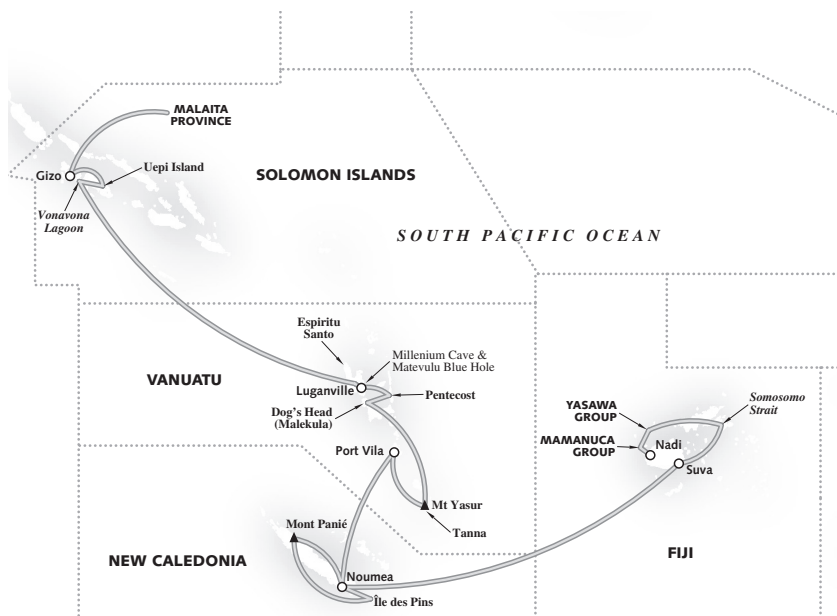
Start in **Nadi** (p108) and take a ferry out to the **Mamanucas** (p135) for a few days of blissful island hopping, partying and bedding down at beachside *bure* (thatched dwelling). Wend your way through the gorgeous **Yasawas** (p141) and dive or snorkel over the **Somosomo Strait** (p159). Get a boat back to cosmopolitan **Suva** (p125) and be measured for a sari and chow down at an Indo-Fijian curry house or Korean kimchi bar.

New Caledonia's capital **Nooumea** (p180) blends Melanesia with French chic and comes with a hefty price tag. Classy restaurants and boutique shopping aside, don't miss the superb **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p185). Trek to the peak of **Mont Panié** (p206) and catch a boat to the exquisite **Île des Pins** (p216) and ride a *pirogue*.

Fly to Vanuatu and experience colourful **Port Vila** (p565) and the rich history of this former English/French colonial capital. Swim in the pools of **Mele-Maat Cascades** (p568) and have few shells of **kava** (p575) before trying some of Port Vila's restaurants and nightlife. Go to Tanna to see the active **Mt Yasur** (p581) volcano and take the two-day trek across Malekula's **Dog's Head** (p587) past the cannibal site, caves and traditional villages. On to **Pentecost** (p602) where yam farmers invented bungee jumping. Then **Espiritu Santo** (p593) for world-class diving and game fishing. Espiritu Santo's sleepy capital **Luganville** (p596) has many WWII remains, and nearby the **Matevulu Blue Hole** (p601) and **Millenium Cave** (p601) are highlights.

Ride a boat through the Solomon Islands stunning **Vonavona Lagoon** (p377), snorkel or dive off **Uepi Island** (p378) and chill out in **Gizo** (p381). Travel to **Malaita** (p383), one of the great repositories of traditional Melanesian culture where people summon sharks and live on artificial islands.

From the resort islands of Fiji and New Caledonia's chic boutiques to the kava bars and attractions of Vanuatu and onto the wilds of the rugged Solomons, this route showcases Melanesia in all its brilliant variety.



TAILORED TRIPS

SAILING THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The southeast trade wind makes the trip fairly predictable if sailed outside the December-to-March cyclone storm season, and the common cruising route from Panama to Torres Strait has earned the nickname the 'Milk Run'. Whether you arrive from the Panama Canal or the West Coast of the Americas, the **Marquesas Islands** (p457) are the targets after a stop at the Galapagos Islands.

If you got an early start from Panama, a side trip to **Easter Island** (p81) and **Pitcairn** (p240) before **French Polynesia** (p395) is a possibility, but it might be the longest side trip you ever did. After the majestic peaks of the Marquesas, the largest group of atolls in the world, the **Tuamotus** (p448), are next. This is the time to put down your daiquiri and pay attention, as this is known as the 'Dangerous Archipelago' and it has the wrecks on the many low unlit reefs to prove it.

Pape'ete (p409) in Tahiti becomes the natural hub to switch crew and stock up on Hinano beer, while pondering where to point your bow next. Leaving **Bora Bora** (p438), drop in on **Suvarrow** (p290) before deciding on **Samoa** (p296), **Rarotonga** (p256) or **Tonga** (p493) That is what makes South Pacific so great, in more ways than one.

The **Vava'u Group** (p516) in Tonga is hard to pass up, as is the tiny self-governing island of Niue with its moorings at **Alofi** (p231) with free wi-fi. Depending on your choice of hiding place during the cyclone season (Australia or NZ), the rest of the season could be spent in the islands of **Fiji** (p96), or casting off for French Melanesia at **New Caledonia** (p174), hiking on **Vanuatu** (p554) or the numerous islands of the **Solomons** (p359).



OUT TO THE OUTLIERS

Are you a country collector? Want to get off the beaten tourist path? Try on some of this for size.

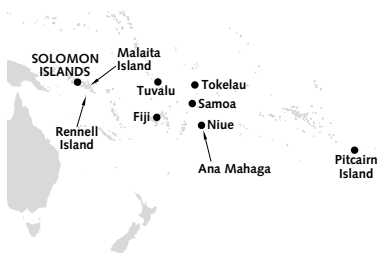
Pitcairn Island (p240), famous as the hideaway of the *Bounty* mutineers, is one of the most isolated places on earth.

Fly via **Fiji** (p96) and **Samoa** (p296) to **Niue** (p227), the world's smallest self-governing country. There are no dreamy stretches of beach on Niue; instead the island has dramatic raised-coral cliffs that tower above the ocean and submarine caves like **Ana Mahaga** (p234) that bring international scuba divers.

Tokelau (p485) calls to intrepid travellers and just getting there is an adventure since there are no planes and a boat only once a fortnight or so. If sea levels rise (see boxed text, p489) Tokelau might simply cease to be, so it might be a case of see it while you can.

Dip into Melanesian culture in the **Solomons** (p359). Head to the wild reaches of **Malaita** (p383) with its artificial islands or take off to **Rennell Island** (p387), a World Heritage site that few explore.

If you still have time up your sleeve then go to **Tuvalu** (p536) and mingle with the 4500-odd Tuvaluans who are sardined onto tiny **Fongafale Islet** (p545), the country's main island. Overcrowding may explain the women's dance style during **fatele** (see boxed text, p541).



The Authors



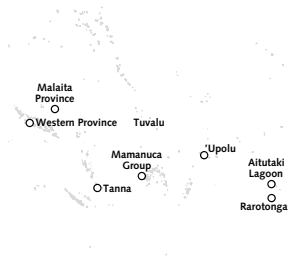
ROWAN MCKINNON

Coordinating Author, Getting Started, Itineraries, Environment, Rarotonga & the Cook Islands, Directory, Transport

Rowan – lapsed rock muso and freelance writer – has travelled many times in the South Pacific. He caught the bug as a kid growing up on Nauru before the family settled in bayside Melbourne. He’s travelled to Papua New Guinea a dozen times, learning the subtle ways of Melanesian culture and collecting Melanesian art. He’s seen shark-callers in the Solomons, drunk kava in Vanuatu and travelled to Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu. For this book Rowan went east to come to grips with Polynesia and the brilliant Cook Islands.

My Favourite Trip

I love the untamed Solomons where too few tourists go – the islands and lagoons of Western Province (p375) are as beautiful as anywhere I’ve seen. My partner and I took our two-year-old daughter up to the wilds of northern Malaita (p383) and that was an adventure. Tanna (p579) in Vanuatu is another highlight and seeing Mt Yasur is breathtaking. Fiji’s Mamanucas (p135) are wonderful and the lagoons of Tuvalu (p536) are crystal clear. The Cook Islands really blew me away – Rarotonga (p256) is so laid back and physically beautiful with every creature comfort you could ask for; Aitutaki’s lagoon (p273) is more stunning than you can imagine; and *makatea* islands and atolls are endlessly interesting. I’d happily spend a fortnight surfing in ‘Upolu (p302) in Samoa or Tahiti (p413) and island hop through the Marquesas (p457).



BRETT ATKINSON

Niue

Brett’s latest visit to Niue was his third opportunity to experience the mandatory relaxation of one of the world’s smallest nations. From his base in Auckland, New Zealand, Brett’s travelled to and written about many Pacific island countries, but the quirky and idiosyncratic Niue remains his favourite. This time round, he signed up for yet another palm-tree trimmed Niuean driver’s licence, caught up with old acquaintances for Sunday afternoon drinks at the Washaway Café, and experienced the humbling thrill of snorkeling with a humpback whale and her calf. For ongoing Pacific island thrills, Brett throws his support behind the increasingly multicultural rugby teams of the Auckland Blues and the All Blacks.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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CELESTE BRASH

**Food & Drink, Pitcairn Island,
Tahiti & French Polynesia, Wallis & Futuna**

Celeste first visited French Polynesia in 1991 and moved to the country permanently in 1995. Her first five years were spent on a remote atoll *sans* plumbing or airstrip, but now she calls the modern island of Tahiti home. Her award winning travel stories have appeared in *Travelers' Tales* books and her travel articles have appeared in major US publications, including the *LA Times* and *Islands* magazine. She's written over a dozen Lonely Planet guides on destinations around the world but considers the South Pacific her speciality.



JEAN-BERNARD CARILLET

**Diving, Easter Island,
Solomon Islands, Tahiti & French Polynesia**

A Paris-based journalist and photographer, Jean-Bernard is a die-hard South Pacific lover, a diving instructor and a Polynesian dance aficionado. He has travelled the length and breadth of the South Sea for nearly 15 years now – this assignment was his 10th trip to the South Pacific – from the Solomons and Vanuatu to Easter Island and Fiji. Jean-Bernard is also an expert on French Polynesia, about which he has written numerous articles and guides.

He's contributed to many Lonely Planet titles, both in French and in English, and has coordinated their dive guide *Tahiti & French Polynesia*.



PETER DRAGICEVICH

Samoa, American Samoa, Tokelau

Growing up in one of the main Polynesian pockets of the world's biggest Polynesian city, Peter's been surrounded by Pasifika sights and sounds for as long as he can remember – from the soaring Samoan choirs at his childhood church to the scintillating drummers that welcome his favourite rugby league team onto the field. Although his professional writing career has led him all over the world, Peter has now returned to West Auckland, where there's always a ready supply of taro at the local shops and he can swan around in a lava-lava all day whenever the mood takes him. This is the 12th book he's coauthored for Lonely Planet.



JOCELYN HAREWOOD

New Caledonia, Vanuatu

Jocelyn has been writing for Lonely Planet for the past seven years and this is her third research trip to Vanuatu, where there are more delightful features to discover at each return. But her visit to New Caledonia was a first, so she's perfectly placed to tell everybody that this is a great place for an adventure or an idyllic laze-about. And it doesn't matter if you don't speak French. When Jocelyn's not working on a book, she plays with her grandchildren, for research of course.



NANA LUCKHAM

Tuvalu

Nana's first taste of the South Pacific was a two-week stopover in Fiji, where she won a dance competition and took part in many kava ceremonies. This time around she was delighted to explore the quieter side of the region and get to know the remote and even more laid back Tuvalu. Nana has worked full-time as a travel writer for the past three years, after time spent as a UN Press Officer in New York and Geneva and an editor in London. She has contributed to several other guidebooks, including Lonely Planet's guide to Fiji, and when not on the road she lives in the exotic wilds of southwest London.



CRAIG MCLACHLAN

Tonga

An island-addict from way back, Craig has covered islands from those 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 he was introduced to his first kava session. He's never looked back! A Kiwi, Craig runs an outdoor activity company in Queenstown, New Zealand in the southern hemisphere summer, then hits the road for Lonely Planet in the off-season. He has an MBA from the University of Hawaii, speaks fluent Japanese, is a 25-year karate practitioner and has written several books. Check out his website at www.craigmclachlan.com. Craig highly recommends Tongan *Ikale* beer.



DEAN STARNES

Fiji

Dean was an impressionable six years old when he first travelled to Fiji. The week he spent bobbing above the Mamanuca reefs with a leaky mask and a pair of floaties ignited a passion for travel that has since taken him around the world and to over 85 countries. With several visits to Fiji now under his weight belt, Dean knew it was time to come home when he started preferring kava to beer. He now lives in Auckland where he alternates between writing for Lonely Planet, freelancing as a graphic designer and shirking responsibilities. His book, *Roam; the Art of Travel* and his website, www.deanstarnes.com, feature photography and stories about his wayfaring ways.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR

George Dunford wrote the Directory, History and Culture chapters. Completing an honours degree in history at the Australian National University saw George studying several units in Pacific history and later working with the Pacific Manuscript Bureau. He has also written historical material on Captain Cook's journals for the National Library of Australia's award-winning Endeavour CD-ROM. He has contributed to several books for Lonely Planet, including *New Zealand* and *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring*, and has worked as a freelance writer.

Michael Sorokin wrote the Health chapter, and has extensive experience working as a physician and GP in the Pacific Islands, South Africa, the UK and rural South Australia. He was awarded the Order of Fiji in recognition of his services to health care in Fiji. .

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