

# Other Pacific Islands

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## Why Go?

These South Pacific islands are as remote as they are unique. In some cases, a *looong* boat trip is the only means of access. And where intrepid airlines do ply the skies, flights are infrequent and usually involve a trip to another South Pacific access hub first.

But if you're brimming with adventurous spirit (and plenty of time), these islands offer unforgettable natural beauty: the coral atolls of Tokelau, the palmed-topped outer islets of Tuvalu, the craggy coastlines of Niue... Even more rewarding, the isolation of these isles has preserved some unique remnants of South Pacific culture, both ancient and more recent (there's nowhere on Earth quite like Pitcairn Island).

Disturbingly, global warming threatens the very existence of some of these islands: if sea levels continue to rise, low-lying territories such as Tuvalu and Tokelau may be underwater by the 22nd century. The time to visit is now!

## When to Go

- ➔ **Jun–Oct** The southern hemisphere winter and spring deliver reliable weather in Niue.
- ➔ **Dec–Jan** Holiday time in Tuvalu, with lots of to-and-fro between Tuvalu and nearby Samoa.
- ➔ **Apr–Jun & Oct–Sep** Shoulder season in the Pitcairn Islands – not too chilly.

## Niue

📍 683 / POP 1200 / AREA 260 SQ KM

Niue (*new-ay* – which means ‘behold the coconut’) may be the world’s smallest independent nation, but the Pacific island known as the ‘Rock of Polynesia’ (or just ‘the Rock’) packs in plenty of surprises for the bold traveller. The island sits in the middle of the triangle formed by Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands. This is rugged terrain: ditch the deckchair and unpack your hiking boots and sense of adventure.

You will need to walk, climb and sometimes swim to see the attractions hugging Niue’s outrageously scenic perimeter. Get yourself a rental car or motorcycle and explore the numerous caves, snorkelling spots and cliff-encircled chasm pools en route.

As per many other South Pacific island groups (the Vava’u Group in Tonga springs to mind), from June to September humpback whales nurse their calves in Niue’s safe warm waters. But give the whales a bit of space: instead, descend further to the indigo depths for some of the best diving in the South Pacific. Kayaking, fishing, caving and guided hiking trips are also on offer: check out [www.niueisland.com/content/adventures](http://www.niueisland.com/content/adventures) for the low-down.

Niue’s capital Alofi (population 1600) stretches out for several kilometres along the west coast, and has a reasonable range of budget and midrange guesthouses, plus cottages, motels, restaurants and a resort.

Curiously, in 2003 Niue became the world’s first ‘wi-fi nation’, with free wireless internet available to everyone who lives here!

## History

Polynesian explorers from Samoa first sailed south and settled Niue some time around AD 900. Marauding Tongans (not to be messed with) arrived from the west in the 16th century. A system of monarchy was established around 1700.

That Pacific paramour Captain James Cook caught sight of Niue in 1774, but the locals didn’t exactly roll out the red carpet. In fact, Cook was unable to land. As he wrote in his journal, ‘The conduct and aspect of these islanders occasioned my giving it the name of Savage Island’.

Christian missionaries converted the Niue ‘savages’ in the 1840s, but it wasn’t until 1900 that the island became a British

protectorate. The Brits didn’t protest too ardently when New Zealand annexed Niue in 1901. Niue finally gained autonomy from New Zealand in 1974, but Niueans continue to hold NZ passports and NZ still coordinates the nation’s foreign affairs and military operations.

## Culture

Niue is a pious place. Visitors are advised not to wear swimming gear in villages or towns, and not to go fishing or boating on a Sunday (but you can play golf, go for a swim or do some sightseeing – or better yet, go to church and belt out a few hymns with the locals).

Polynesian heritage in Niue is championed by a government strategy called ‘Taoga Niue’, an integrated community initiative aimed at preserving Niuean language, culture and traditions, all of which are on display at ‘Village Show Days’. There are 14 of these events every year, with dancing, *umu* (earth oven) feasts, and local arts and crafts on display and for sale (check out the amazing weavings): try to time your visit so you can join in the fun.

## Environment

Don’t expect palm-fringed beaches or languid lagoons in Niue; instead, get set for a jagged landscape of limestone caverns, hidden sea caves and a rocky, untamed coast.

As with all South Pacific islands, tropical cyclones regularly threaten lives and wreak havoc here. Alofi’s southern area was badly damaged by Tropical Cyclone Heta in 2004 and abandoned structures still punctuate the cliff tops. Reconstruction is ongoing across the whole country, but many locals chose not to rebuild and emigrated to New Zealand instead.

## Information

### CURRENCY

New Zealand dollar (NZ\$)

### LANGUAGES

English and Niuean

### INTERNET

Free wi-fi (patchy but islandwide)

### RESOURCES

[www.niueisland.com](http://www.niueisland.com)