

# 'Atiu

For many centuries, the island of 'Atiu was infamous across the South Seas for its warlike ways, but these days the island is better known as perhaps the most ecofriendly and environmentally minded of the Cook Islands. Like its sister islands, Ma'uke and Mitiaro, 'Atiu's most dramatic natural feature is its jagged *makatea* – a raised coral reef that was pushed up by violent geological activity 100,000 years ago, and now completely encircles the outer section of the island.

For such a small place, 'Atiu supports an amazing variety of natural habitats, from deep underground caves and dense coastal forest to soggy swamps and inland lakes, and the island's rich wildlife is a major draw – but 'Atiu is more than just a natural playground. It's a far more traditional island than either Rarotonga or Aitutaki, and the people here are more in touch with their Polynesian heritage. There are historic *marae* (open-air meeting grounds), eerie burial caves and ancient coral roads to explore, and 'Atiu is the only island where you can experience a traditional *tumunu*, the Cook Islands' equivalent of the *kava*-drinking ceremonies you'll see in the rest of the South Pacific. Most people only stay on 'Atiu for a few days, but that's really only long enough to scratch the surface of this fascinating island.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching the elusive *kopeka* in the ancient cave of **Anatakitaki** (p115)
- Seeking out James Cook's landing spot at **Oravaru Beach** (p117)
- Downing a few cups of the local brew at an 'Atiuan **tumunu** (p120)
- Tasting the home-grown coffee at one of the island's **coffee plantations** (p116)
- Taking a **circle-island tour** (p119) to learn about the island's rich history and wildlife
- **Reef-fishing** (p118) the traditional way with a bamboo rod

■ POPULATION: 611

■ AREA: 27 SQ KM



## HISTORY

'Atiu's traditional name is *Enua Manu*, the 'Land of Birds' or 'Land of Insects' – so-named, one legend relates, because only birds and insects lived here when it was first discovered. Numerous legends tell of early settlers arriving by canoe and of visits by legendary Polynesian navigators from Raiatea and Tahiti (in the Society Islands) and Samoa.

'Atiuans were renowned as the greatest warriors of the Cook Islands and specialised in creating bloody havoc on all their neighbouring islands – Ma'uke and Mitiaro had a particularly bad time of it, but 'Atiu also managed to find time to raid Rarotonga and Mangaia, though with considerably less success. 'Atiu, Ma'uke and Mitiaro are sometimes referred to by the traditional name of *Nga Pu Toru* (the Three Roots) due to their geographical proximity – you could fly from one island to the other in under 10 minutes (or at least you could if Air Rarotonga ran any flights between the islands). For much of their recent history Ma'uke and Mitiaro were ruled by *ariki* (chiefs) from 'Atiu, a trend that continued right to the turn of the 20th century, when New Zealand officially took control of the Cook Islands.

The European discovery of 'Atiu is credited to James Cook, who sent three of his boats ashore on 3 April 1777 to procure supplies. His men spent a long day being entertained (and pickpocketed) by the 'Atiuans, but effectively returned empty-handed. At one point, when a large oven was being prepared, Cook's Tahitian hitchhiker, Omai, became convinced their hosts were preparing to eat them, though the 'Atiuans expressed shock at the mere thought of such an idea – but given their predilection for throwing the natives of Ma'uke and Mitiaro into the earth oven, you have to wonder at their ingenuity. With his men safely back on board, Cook left and managed to find provisions on the neighbouring island of Takutea, where he left 'a hatchet and some nails to the full value of what we took from the island'.

The Reverend John Williams turned up on 19 July 1823 while searching for Rarotonga. Williams was accompanied by an *ariki* from Aitutaki, who informed the leading 'Atiuan chief, Rongomatane Ngaka'ara Ariki, that Aitutaki had already converted to Christianity and that many of the gods there had been destroyed. Rongomatane

took the mission party to his personal *marae* (possibly Orongo Marae on the island's west coast) and challenged them to eat the sugar cane from a sacred grove. When the missionaries ate the cane and did not drop dead on the spot Rongomatane became an instant convert, ordered all the idols on the island burnt and told his people to listen to the missionaries' teachings. With Rongomatane's navigational assistance, Williams then sailed on to find Rarotonga, the island he had been searching for over two years.

The missionaries subsequently made occasional visits to 'Atiu from Tahiti but in 1836 the Tahitian convert Papeiha was sent back from Rarotonga and started the serious work of bringing Christianity to the island.

Gospel Day is still celebrated on 'Atiu on 19 July every year, often with *nuku* (traditional plays) acting out the drama of how the gospel came to 'Atiu.

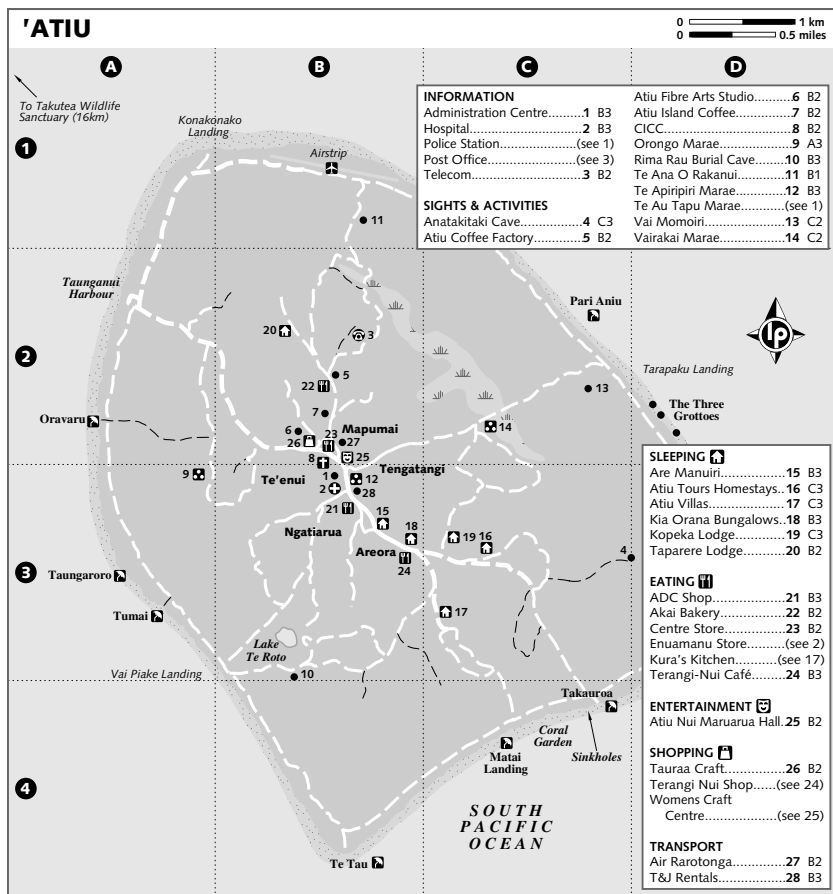
## THE CULTURE

'Atiu has three *ariki* titles: Rongomatane, Ngamaru and Parua. The 'palaces' of Queen Ada (Rongomatane Ada Ariki) and King Henry (Ngamaru Henry Ariki) are two of the nicest houses in town. (The present holder of the Parua *ariki* title lives offshore – not a popular move). 'Atiuans are fiercely proud of their heritage; there's still a touch of swagger and haughtiness about the 'Atiuans, especially when they're discussing their historical dominance of nearby islands.

It's much more traditional than Rarotonga: customs such as *tutaka* (community inspections), *tumunu* (bush-beer drinking sessions) and *taro*-planting are still woven into the fabric of daily life. Traditional crafts still practised on 'Atiu include *tapa* (bark cloth) – 'Atiu's *tapa* flowers are very popular on Rarotonga. There's very little for sale here, however; see p121 for more information.

If you're interested in 'Atiu's history, look out for *Atiu through European Eyes*, a fascinating book that collects various reports and testimonies from the island's first European visitors. The more recent book *Atiu, an Island Community* is a study of contemporary life in 'Atiu, written by 'Atiuans. Both are available at the USP Bookshop in Avarua.

Unlike all the other islands in the Cooks, the villages on 'Atiu are not on the coast. The five villages – Areora, Ngatiarua, Te'enui, Mapumai and Tengtangi – are all close



together in the hilly centre of the island. Prior to the introduction of Christianity, the people lived spread out around the swampy lowlands, where *taro* was (and still is) grown; but the people were moved inland by the missionaries to be close to the island's newly built churches. Some Islanders still keep small shelters down in the *makatea* near the family *taro* plots and pig pens.

## ENVIRONMENT

The third largest of the Cook Islands, 'Atiui is noted for its *makatea* and its distinctive red clay soil. The island is rather like a low-brimmed hat with a flat outer rim. The central plateau is where the present-day villages and churches stand, while the outer rim is

marked by the *makatea*, a band of sharp, smashed limestone rock densely covered in tropical bush. As on many of the Southern Group islands, the *makatea* originally formed the island's encircling reef, but was forced up out of the sea about 100,000 years ago by violent geological activity. It's now a fascinating spot for walking and exploring, especially with its many deep caves and sinkholes, some of which were used for burial.

The *makatea* starts off around 5m in height at the coast and gradually slopes up to around 20m at its inner edge. There's a circular band of swamp just inside the *makatea* that's used for *taro* cultivation. Inland from the swamp the land slopes up to the forested inner plateau – the island's

original volcanic core – where coffee and other crops are grown.

## INFORMATION

Electricity on 'Atiui operates 24 hours (at least on a good day). Tap water is usually fine to drink, as most places collect rain-water for drinking – but if you'd rather not risk a few days with an upset stomach, boil it or buy it bottled.

Two useful items to bring with you to 'Atiui are a torch (flashlight) and mosquito repellent. Cave-tour guides will usually lend you a hand-torch or head-torch for cave exploring, but it's never a bad idea to bring your own just in case (and remember to bring some spare batteries).

At least one smart change of clothes is a good idea – if you're invited to church on Sunday or a village dance, you'll be expected to look respectable. Women should wear a dress or skirt and sleeves (and a hat, if you have one), and men should wear long trousers.

Standards of modesty on 'Atiui, as on all the outer islands, are more conservative than on Atitutaki or Rarotonga. You'll earn some disapproving glances going around without a shirt or wearing very short shorts or swimming gear in town (apparently it's become a favourite pastime of some of the local ladies to head down to the harbour and giggle at tourists in skimpy Speedos...)

**ADC Shop** (☎ 33028; Areora) This grocery store provides cash advances on credit cards (Visa, MasterCard or Bankcard).

**Administration Centre** (Island secretary ☎ 33269; fax 33369; Te'enui)

**atiui.info** This website is an excellent information resource on 'Atiui, maintained by Roger Malcolm.

**'Atiui Tourism Society** (☎ 33031; www.atiuitourism.com) Another good source of information about the island, run by Juergen Manske-Eimke.

**Centre Store** (☎ 33773; Te'enui) Travellers cheques (NZ dollars only) can be cashed at this grocery store.

**Hospital** (☎ 33664, 33064; Ngatiarua; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Open 24 hours if there's an inpatient staying.

**Police station** (☎ 33120) In the Administration Centre.

**Post office** In the same building as the Telecom office, a short way north of Mapumai village.

**Telecom** (☎ 33680; fax 33683; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) You can make international and inter-island phone calls, and send and receive faxes. Local calls are free – you'll need a Kia Orana card for all other calls.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

If you're planning on exploring caves or tramping around on the *makatea* you'll need some old clothes and good, sturdy shoes – second-hand trainers or hiking boots. Some of the caves can be quite muddy (especially after heavy rain), and your shoes are guaranteed to take a beating from the razor-sharp *makatea*. Take great care when you are walking across the *makatea* – the fossilised coral is extremely sharp. If you slip and fall, the very least you'd expect is a nasty gash. Remember to watch your head inside the caves.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

### Caves

One of the highlights of any visit to 'Atiui is the chance to explore some of the spectacular caves and caverns that wind their way through the *makatea*. Stumbling across a vast creeper-clad cave deep in the 'Atiuan jungle is a truly unforgettable experience – you'll feel like a cross between Indiana Jones and Stanley Livingstone.

It's essential to go with a guide to any of 'Atiui's caves, partly because the caves are difficult to find, but also because most are on family land and permission must be obtained before you enter. There are a number of other caves on 'Atiui to which no-one is currently leading guided tours.

**Anatakitaki Cave**, the 'Cave of the Kopekas', is easily the most famous cave on the island. After a longish walk across the *makatea* from the plateau road, the mouth of this imposing cavern looms out of the surrounding bush, framed by jungle vines, stalactites and twisted banyan trees. *Kopekā* (also known as the 'Atiui swiftlet) are tiny swift-like birds that are found only on 'Atiui, and are thought to nest only inside this particular cave. You'll often see them swooping around the centre of the island in search of insects, especially around twilight, but they never come to rest until they return to the safety of their nests inside the cave. Outside they make a distinctive screeching call, but inside they switch to a chattering, clicking noise, which they use as a form of echolocation to find their way around in the darkness. There are several impressive chambers inside the cave, as well as some grand formations of stalactites and stalagmites, and a beautiful underground pool where you can indulge in a memorable candle-lit swim at the end of your visit.

Many of the island's caves were once used for burials. In the southwest the **Rima Rau burial cave** is reached via a vertical pothole, and contains many well-preserved bones and skulls (including some with distinctly suspicious axe-shaped holes in them) – but it's a tight squeeze inside, and quite spooky, so it's definitely not one for claustrophobes. Nearby there's a very deep sinkhole with a pool at the bottom. Atiu Tours (p119) lead tours to Anatakitaki and Rima Rau.

**Te Ana O Rakanui** is another burial cave a short walk from the main road. The bones of 'Atiu's 'fourth *ariki*', Rakanui Ariki, and his family are visible inside, and there are many chambers and tunnels to explore – but it's very easy to get confused, so you'll just have to place your trust in your guide. Aue Rakanui (p119) is the only tour guide currently leading expeditions to the cave.

A good, strong walking stick is a great help when walking in the sharp *makatea*, so bring one along, cut yourself one or ask your guide to cut you one (the traditional material for making walking sticks is ironwood).

### Coffee Plantations

Coffee has been grown on 'Atiu for well over a century. The plant was introduced to 'Atiu by early-19th-century traders and missionaries, and by the turn of the century there was a thriving coffee industry on 'Atiu, producing almost 50 tonnes of coffee each year. Unfortunately, like many small-scale agricultural industries in the Cooks, 'Atiu's coffee trade suffered many ups and downs over the following century, and by the 1980s most of the coffee beans growing on the island were used purely for personal consumption.

Thankfully, the industry is now thriving, thanks to two enterprising 'Atiuan residents. German-born Juergen Manske-Eimke moved to 'Atiu in the 1980s, set up a coffee factory and formed the Atiu Coffee Growers Association. Mata Arai, a local 'Atiuan woman whose family had farmed coffee on the island in the 1950s, also returned to resume production in the mid-1990s.

The 'Atiu coffee business is rebounding; about 8 tonnes of roasted coffee is exported annually, grown on plantations totalling about 22 hectares. The supermarkets, resorts and restaurants of Rarotonga consume more than half of 'Atiu's production; the rest is exported to New Zealand, Tahiti and the USA.

The two brands of coffee produced on 'Atiu are Juergen's **Atiu Coffee** (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck/coffee.htm), and Mata's **Atiu Island Coffee** (☎ 33088). Atiu Coffee is larger and the coffee is machine-roasted in the factory in Mapu-mai village. Mata's Atiu Island Coffee is still hand-picked, hand-dried and hand-roasted the traditional way, using coconut cream to give the coffee its distinctive flavour.

The issue of which coffee is best remains a source of heated debate on the island, so you'll just have to buy them both and decide for yourself. You can buy Atiu Coffee, ground or whole beans, from the ADC store for about NZ\$12, or via Juergen's website. Atiu Island Coffee is sold at the Centre Store and Atiu Villas for about NZ\$12. Both brands are also available (for a premium) on Rarotonga – try Foodland or the CITC Supermarket in Avarua, or some of the smaller craft shops around the island.

If you're a coffee fiend, both growers offer coffee tours. Juergen's tour introduces you to his plantation and the **Atiu Coffee Factory**, and ends with coffee tasting at the café at the Atiu Fibre Arts Studio (opposite). **Mata's Atiu Island Coffee tour** includes a visit to her coffee plantations, deep in the 'Atiuan bush, and you'll also see how the coffee is sorted, dried and roasted outside her house, before trying a cup or two accompanied by homemade pancakes. Both tours cost NZ\$15, and you can buy bags of coffee at a discount at the end of the tour.

### Beaches & Coast

'Atiu is not great for swimming – the surrounding lagoon is rarely more than 50m wide and the water is generally too shallow to swim in. There are plenty of fine sandy coves all along the coast, however, and you'll probably find most of them are empty – the 'Atiuan don't much see the point in lounging around on the beach, which is more useful to them as a passage to the outer reef and the deep sea beyond.

Most of the beaches are easily accessible but to get to others you'll have to take a short tramp through the bush. Shelters have been erected near several beaches including Taungaroro, Matai and Takauaro, but most lost their thatch roofs during the 2005 cyclones and, at the time of writing, had yet to be replaced. Although the main road is rarely more than 100m from the coast, few

### TIVAEEVAE

*Tivaevae* are the colourful patterned bedspreads that are perhaps the Cook Islands' most famous handicraft. These ceremonial cloths are usually made to celebrate important events such as births, marriages and coming-of-age ceremonies. The complex patterns and techniques involved in making *tivaevae* are traditionally passed down through families, and many local women still produce handmade *tivaevae* and other handicrafts for personal use – it's rare to find any locally made ones for sale, though, as they usually incorporate colours, designs and motifs that are specially chosen for the recipient. An exhibition of local handiwork is usually held annually in one of the village halls, however – ask around to see if there's anything on show during your stay.

The **Atiu Fibre Arts Studio** (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck; Te'enui; admission free) specialises in *tivaevae*. Andrea Eimke, the German-born owner of the studio, produces custom-designed *tivaevae* in both traditional and contemporary patterns. You can buy one on the spot or order it in the pattern and colours you want. The cost for a machine-sewn *tivaevae* is about NZ\$600 to NZ\$1100; a hand-sewn one, requiring countless hours to make, costs NZ\$1500 and up. The studio also produces a variety of other textile arts, fabrics and handicrafts. Mail order is available if you don't fancy lugging your brand-new *tivaevae* all the way home.

Andrea is interested in inviting artists and craftspeople to come and share their skills with the studio and learn 'Atiuan crafts. For visiting artists she can help to arrange courses, accommodation and craftmaking facilities.

of the beaches are marked so keep an eye out for the tracks leading from the road.

The best place for swimming or snorkelling is at 'Atiu's 'Olympic Swimming Pool', aka **Taunganui Harbour**, where the fish are plentiful and the water is clear and deep. (You can usually see the unpopulated island of Takutea from here).

**Oravaru Beach** on the west coast is where Captain Cook's party made its historic landing (it's one of the few spots on the west coast where it's possible to bring boats or canoes across the treacherous reef). There's a large rock in the water just off the beach, which the chief Rongomatane used in directing John Williams to Rarotonga.

Further south are two of the most popular beaches on the island for swimming and sunbathing: **Taungaroro Beach**, backed by high cliffs and sloping fairly steeply into the water, and **Tumai Beach** a little further south.

On the northeast coast there's a 1km-long stretch where there is very little fringing reef and the sea crashes directly onto the cliffs. At the end of the road there's an old emergency boat landing, **Tarapaku**, and a pleasant stretch of beach. More beaches, and three lovely seaside **grottoes**, are found further south between Tarapaku Landing and Oneroa beach. The grottoes can only be visited when the sea is calm on the east side of the island.

The southeast coast takes the brunt of the prevailing trade winds, and the sea, which

breaks fiercely over the reef, is often unsafe for swimming. Around the toe of the island at **Te Tau**, the lush bush forest that covers the rest of the coast is replaced by barren clifftops and a few spindly trees. Further east are a couple of picturesque little beaches including **Matai Landing** and **Oneroa**, a good spot for finding beautiful shells (and old shoes).

South of Oneroa is the turn-off to **Takauaro Beach**. If you walk about 100m back along the rugged cliff face there are some sinkholes deep enough for snorkelling. They are only safe at low tide or when the sea is calm.

At low tide, the lagoon from Takauaro Beach to Matai Landing drains out through the sinkholes and tropical fish become trapped in a spot known as the **Coral Garden**, which becomes a fascinating natural aquarium. The Coral Garden can be reached by walking along the reef from Takauaro beach, but only at low tide, when there are no waves washing over the reef; at other times it is dangerous and not so interesting without the trapped fish.

### Vairakai Marae & Vai Momoiri

The track between Tengtangi village and Tarapaku Landing passes through a range of vegetation including plantations, *taro* patches, *makatea* and littoral forest. The road also passes the impressive 37m-long wall of the **Vairakai Marae**, built out of 47 large limestone slabs, six of which have curious

projections cut into their top edges – though no-one seems certain of what the projections signify or exactly how old the *marae* is.

Nearer the coast, the track passes **Vai Mo-moiri**, a deep canyon connected by a short tunnel to a second, similar sinkhole (unfortunately the canyon has recently become a popular spot for dumping rubbish).

### Other Marae

'Atiu has some fascinating *marae* remains, including **Orongo Marae**, near Oravaru beach. This *marae* was once one of the most important on the island, and it's still a powerfully atmospheric place; there are several legends about misfortunes that have befallen people who have disturbed the *marae*, and many local people are still reluctant to venture near it. Recent clearing has revealed several limestone seats arranged in a circular pattern around a vast, gnarled *utu* (barringtonia) tree, and towards the rear of the *marae* there are several graves, one of which is decorated with carved figures. You should arrange a guide to visit this *marae* as it's on private land, and still considered *tapu* (sacred).

**Te Apiripiri Marae**, where Papeiha is said to have first preached the Gospel in 1823, is behind Rongomatane Ada Ariki's palace, the house opposite the Administration Centre. There's little left of the *marae*, but a stone commemorating Papeiha's sermon marks the spot.

**Te Au Tapu Marae**, a *marae* still used for investiture ceremonies, is between the Administration Centre and the palace of Ngamaru Henry Ariki. You cannot access the *marae* but it's clearly visible from the road.

### Churches

The limestone **CICC** (Cook Islands Christian Church) in the centre of the island is reputed to be one of the largest in the Cook Islands and has whitewashed walls that are over 1m thick. If you're staying in town, you'll hear the bell summoning CICC members to church at 4am four days each week. Several of the island's more recent *ariki* are buried in the church yard.

Like everywhere else in the Cook Islands, there is a bewildering array of church denominations on 'Atiu. It's worth trying to attend a couple of churches to compare the services and singing styles. The Catholic Church service starts at 9am on Sunday,

leaving plenty of time to stroll across to one of the other churches to catch the 10am service. Strangely, flowers are only allowed at the Catholic service, so if you receive an 'ei (traditional garland), remember to take it off before entering the next church.

**Tuaine's Taxi Service** (☎ 33074) leaves Atiu Villas in time for the 10am CICC service and costs NZ\$5, including a short introduction to the island's churches.

### Fishing

Catching fish is serious business on 'Atiu. Not only is it an important source of income, but a man who promises his family he'll catch fish but comes home emptyhanded, as all fishermen must sometimes do, is '*akama* (shamed) in front of his family. Fishing in the traditional way, using a long bamboo rod and line, is a popular way to pass the time. There are a couple of tours that will teach you the basics, but actually catching the fish is up to you. Unsurprisingly, the locals are rather natty fishermen, so don't be surprised if your haul is quite paltry in comparison.

Ask around about ciguatera (a form of fish poisoning, see p187) before you go indiscriminately eating any reef fish you catch.

### QUIRKY 'ATI

If the usual organised tours aren't for you, ask around about when the next **pig hunt** is taking place. The 'Atiuan jungle is home to hundreds of wild porkers, though they're a long way from the domestic pigs you'll see running around the rest of the island – the pig's tusks are serious business and, as you might expect, being hunted is generally not conducive to good behaviour. But a pig hunt is definitely not one for vegetarians – once caught, pigs are killed by hand and butchered into prime cuts on the spot – guests usually walk away with the odd rib, pork chop or hind leg for their trouble.

'Atiu also has an astonishing number of **tennis courts**. In the 1990s the five villages got into a tennis-court-building competition, with each village trying to build a better court than the next. There are now nine tennis courts on the island – slightly excessive for an island of 600 people – although these days they're used more for volleyball, netball and soccer practise than for tennis, and most of them have seen much better days.

### TOURS

**Atiu Tours** (☎ 33041; marshall@atiutours.co.ck) This local tour company is run by an Englishman, Marshall Humphreys, who offers a thoroughly researched 3½-hour circle-island tour (NZ\$40) visiting *marae*, historical spots, beaches and other points of interest. An island-style picnic on the beach is included in the tour. Atiu Tours also offers an excellent 2½-hour *makatea*-and-cave tour to Anatak-taki (NZ\$25) and Rima Rau burial cave (NZ\$15).

**Aue Rakanui** (☎ 33256) Aue Rakanui leads you to his family's burial cave, Te Ana O Rakanui, and (with a little prompting) will tell you the story of his ancestor, Rakanui Ariki (NZ\$20). You'll need your own transport to the cave, and don't be surprised if Aue forgets to turn up – he notoriously operates to his own idea of Cook Islands time.

**George Mateariki** (☎ 33047) Also known as Birdman George, George Mateariki has become something of a local celebrity thanks to his highly entertaining ecotour (NZ\$40). George oversaw the release of the endangered *kakerori* (p40) here from Rarotonga, and with a bit of luck you'll meet his favourite pair of birds (named George and Mildred after a '70s UK sitcom) – they usually arrive as soon as the Birdman toots his car horn. George is a veritable fount of knowledge on local flora and fauna and traditional medicines, and he also cooks up a mean bush-tucker lunch for all his guests.

**Man Unuia** (☎ 33283) Man Unuia of Kopeka Lodge does a fascinating circle-island tour (NZ\$23) based on his own historical research, and accompanies guests to church for a small charge.

**Paiera Mokoroa** (☎ 33034; Taparere Lodge) Pa Paiera, a retired teacher and local historian, was a leading contributor to *Atiu, an Island Community* and can talk the hind leg off an 'Atiuan dog with his tales of ancient times. Paiera's tour of historical sites of interest (two hours going on four) cost NZ\$26/5 per adult/child.

**Papa Moe** (☎ 33013; Kia Orana Bungalows) Papa Moe will introduce you to the joys of traditional reef fishing – stand near the reef edge with a bamboo rod and line, and

see what Tangaroa, god of the sea, delivers. Papa Moe supplies all the gear and you keep some of the fish (NZ\$25).

**TK Fishing & Coastal Tour** (☎ 33040; captain@vila.tours.co.ck) This coastal tour circumnavigates the island by boat and includes a running commentary (if you get TK – Tokoa Kea – on an off day, some of it might even be true). You visit shipwrecks, Captain Cook's Passage and more. The two-/three-hour tours cost NZ\$50/100. Ask about deep-sea fishing tours.

### SLEEPING

**Kopeka Lodge** (☎ 33283; www.kopekalodge-atiu.com; s/d NZ\$85/125) Three peaceful, pre-fab wooden chalets southeast of Arora village, set in rural grounds awash with passionfruit, papaya and flowering shrubs. The double units are divided into two bedrooms, each with two single beds, and a main kitchen-dining area. The pale-green plywood décor and rustic setting might not be everyone's taste, but the units are comfy enough and fully self-contained. Owner Man Unuia is on hand to supply fresh fruit and filtered water throughout your stay.

**Kia Orana Bungalows** (☎ 33013; boaza@kia\_orana.co.ck; d NZ\$80) These six dinky wooden bungalows look like they've fallen off a gypsy caravan train. The chalets are rather small and boxy inside, with a tiny kitchen and bedroom area, but the majestic view across the jungle-covered valley is something to behold, and is best appreciated from the lovely wooden verandas at the end of each unit. Some of the units are unfinished, but owner Papa Moe hopes they'll all be complete soon; he's also built a large building nearby which he plans to convert into a restaurant-cum-bar.

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Atiu Villas** (☎ 33777; www.atiu.info/atiuvillas; standard villa s/d/tr NZ\$110/130/150, family villa NZ\$130/150/170; 📍) Twenty-five years since Dr Roger Malcolm and his wife, Kura, arrived to establish the first guest accommodation on the island, Atiu Villas is still the top place to stay. The six gorgeous A-frame chalets, all lovingly handmade from exotic timbers (think mahogany, cedar and java plum) are tastefully set apart in lush landscaped grounds, shaded by fragrant pines and swaying palm trees. Each villa is individually decorated using local materials and 'Atiuan handiwork, from the woven pandanus walls to the intricately patterned bedspreads, and there's a shady veranda where you can sit back and indulge in some island-style relaxation before heading over to Kura's Kitchen, 'Atiu's only restaurant and bar, for an early supper and a cool evening cocktail. As an ex-mayor of the island (and a doctor of physics), Roger is a mine of information on 'Atiu and he'll make sure you make the most of your stay – the private tennis court, onsite scooter rentals and fully stocked food cupboards in every chalet are just the icing on the cake.

**Taparere Lodge** (☎ /fax 33034; s/d NZ\$65/78, extra person NZ\$20) These two roomy self-contained units are located side by side in a single lodge, set in private gardens just north of Mapumai village. The whitewashed breeze-block units are clean and comfortable and the bright bedspreads add a touch of character. Each unit can sleep three or four, and the hosts, Auntie Nga and Papa Paiere Mokoroa, are lovely. Papa Paiere can be difficult to reach by telephone; if you have trouble, use a Rarotongan travel agency, or email the 'Atiu Tourism Society (info@atiutourism.com).

**Are Manuiri** (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck; Areora; dm per person NZ\$30, s & d NZ\$60, tr NZ\$75) 'Atiu's only budget accommodation is found in this three-bedroom house in the centre of Areora village. There's a shared kitchen, living room, bathroom and thatched veranda, but not much private space, so you'll have to get on with your neighbours and make an effort to share hot water. As you're right

in the heart of the village, you're bound to be invited to join in with local life – and home-grown vegetables should be easy to come by! No kids under 10.

**Atiu Tours Homestays** (☎ 33041; marshall@atiutours.co.ck, atitours.ck@ihug.co.nz; near Areora village; d & tw NZ\$40) Another cheap option is to stay with Marshall Humphreys and his family, who also operate Atiu Tours (p119); there's a double and a twin room inside the large main house; bathrooms are shared and tropical breakfast is included.

## EATING

**Kura's Kitchen** (☎ 33777; Atiu Villas; dinner NZ\$25; ☎ dinner from 7pm Mon-Sat) For many years the only real restaurant on 'Atiu, Kura's is housed in the thatched open-air pavilion at Atiu Villas, where you can get a two-course fixed menu, served communally at long wooden tables. Book before 3pm; if there are no guests dining it usually doesn't open.

## TUMUNU – BUSH-BEER DRINKING SESSIONS

Don't miss the opportunity to attend a *tumunu* (bush-beer drinking session) while you're on 'Atiu. It's a direct descendant of the old *kava* ceremony of premissionary times. Drinking *kava*, a nonalcoholic narcotic prepared from the root of the pepper plant *Piper methysticum*, was a communal activity with strict ceremony involved. In several Pacific countries – Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa – *kava* is still popular today, but in the Cook Islands the missionaries managed to totally stamp it out.

When *kava* drinking was banned, the *tumunu* appeared as its replacement – men would retreat to hidden places in the bush to drink potent home-brewed 'orange beer' following much the same ceremony as when they drank *kava*. The *tumunu* itself is the hollowed-out coconut-tree stump that was traditionally used as a container for brewing the beer.

*Tumunu* are still held regularly on 'Atiu, although the container is likely to be plastic these days. There are six separate *tumunu* locations on 'Atiu, all of which are a short distance from the main village. They are fairly safe to visit – even when drunk, people tend to behave well at a *tumunu*. Although an invitation is required to join in, just walking past will usually secure you a shouted invite.

The staff at the place where you're staying can arrange a trip to a *tumunu* if you'd rather go with company (not a bad idea sometimes). Traditionally the *tumunu* is for men only, but for tourists the rules relax somewhat, and any visitor, male or female, is welcome.

Like the old *kava* tradition, there's quite a ceremony to a *tumunu* gathering. The barman sits behind the *tumunu* and ladles the beer into a coconut-shell cup. Each drinker swallows the drink in a single gulp and returns the empty cup to the barman who fills it for the next in line. You can pass if you want to but by the end of the evening everybody is decidedly unsteady on their feet – including, sometimes, the barman, who is supposed to keep everyone in line! At some point in the evening the barman calls the school to order by tapping on the side of the *tumunu* with the empty cup and someone will say a short prayer. Visitors are then welcomed and asked to say a few words about themselves. Guitars and ukeleles are usually around to provide music and accompaniment to song.

As a visitor to a *tumunu* you should bring a donation for the next brew – NZ\$5 per visit is OK; NZ\$10 is enough for a week if you're going to keep coming back to that particular *tumunu*.

## TUTAKA

Four times a year, a committee goes around to inspect all the houses on 'Atiu for their condition and cleanliness. This *tutaka* is done on many of the Cook Islands, but on 'Atiu it's a big occasion, with the local ladies bringing out all their best handicrafts to proudly put on display in their homes. The major *tutaka* of the year is just before Christmas. It's easy to spot the inspection committee going around, since they're all in uniform, and if you ask permission you can join them. The *tutaka* inspection is held on a Wednesday and Thursday, and that same Friday there's a big ball with prizes handed out for the village that wins the competition.

Some years ago, 'Atiu's imaginative menfolk adapted the *tutaka* tradition to also cover *tumunu* (see the boxed text, opposite). Essentially this meant travelling from *tumunu* to *tumunu*, sampling the beer and rating each gathering according to the quality of the beer, food, singing and even the hut itself. Anywhere else they'd call it a pub crawl – but here it's a *tutaka tumunu*. If you're on the island at the beginning of December, chances are you'll end up as one of the inspection party.

**Terangi-Nui Café** (☎ 33101; Areora; breakfast from NZ\$8, lunch from NZ\$12; dinner from NZ\$22; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm) This new café-restaurant is run by Parua Tavioni, a local who has returned to the island after running a catering business in New Zealand. Tropical breakfasts, light lunches and a full dinner menu are served throughout the week, with the added bonus of a booze licence for late-night tipples.

If you're on the island for more than a few days, you'll be making most of your own meals. Tinned and frozen goods are the order of the day, and prices are much higher than on Rarotonga. If you want fresh vegetables or fish, ask around in the village or chat to one of the fishermen at the wharf.

If you're staying at Atiu Villas, your cupboards will be fully stocked – you simply pay for everything you've used when you leave. Otherwise, 'Atiu has two cooperative grocery stores: the **ADC Shop** (☎ 33028; Areora; ☎ 7am-3pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 7-10am & 5-7pm Sat), run by Juergen Manske-Eimke, and the larger **Centre Store** (☎ 33773; Te'enui; ☎ 7am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon & 5-7pm Sat), run by Kura Malcolm. There's also the Enuamanu Store near the hospital in Mapumai.

**Akai Bakery** (☎ 33207; Mapumai) sells freshly baked bread at about 11am. It's closed on Saturday, but they start baking again when the Seventh-Day Adventist Sabbath ends at dusk on Saturday afternoon – so at 11.30pm there's bread available and usually a small crowd of midnight bread fanciers.

**Maroro** (flying fish), an 'Atiuan delicacy, are caught at night and can be bought from trucks on the street the following morning (listen for the honking horn) for about NZ\$1 per fish.

## DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Kura's Kitchen is the only organised bar and nightspot on the island. There are generally a couple of island nights (NZ\$35 with food, NZ\$10 show only) a week, depending on the number of guests – if the numbers aren't there you can stump up NZ\$100 and organise your own private show. The island nights include a rousing local band and a highly entertaining cultural performance, and you'll find them a lot less commercial than some of those on Rarotonga.

Most 'Atiuan men organise their own nightly entertainment – have a look at the boxed text, opposite.

## SHOPPING

Apart from the Atiu Fibre Arts Studio (see boxed text, p117) there are few places to buy local crafts, though many people sell from their homes. Sometimes you'll see women working in one of the community halls, and you're welcome to watch, but their crafts probably won't be for sale. If you follow the sound of tapping hammers you'll find women making *tapa*, or bark cloth. 'Atiu's *tapa* flowers are sold on Rarotonga, but the market has been badly affected by recent cyclones. There are several skilled carvers around the villages who might have something for sale. Keep your eyes peeled and ask around if you're interested in buying crafts.

**Tauraa Craft** (☎ 33203; Te'enui) Punua Aukino sells magnificent ukeleles from his house just north of the Centre Store (a sign pointing the way to the Atiu Fibre Arts Studio stands in his front lawn). A hand-crafted ukelele will cost you from NZ\$200, but there's normally a very long waiting list.

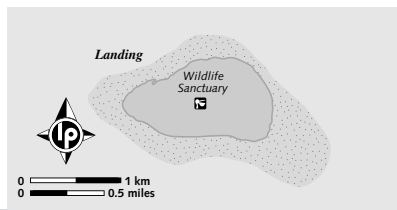
**TAKUTEA**

Clearly visible from 'Atiu, the small sand cay of Takutea is only 6m above sea level at its highest point and has an area of just 1.2 sq km. It was named by one of 'Atiu's earliest settlers, the Rai'atean Mariri, who named it Taku Ku Tea (My White Squirrel-fish) after catching a white specimen of the usually red *ku* there. The island has also been called 'Enua-iti which simply means 'Small Land', and has always belonged to the people of 'Atiu. James Cook visited Takutea in 1777, shortly after he left 'Atiu, and paused to gather food for the livestock on his ship.

Takutea is 16km northwest of 'Atiu and coconut-collecting parties used to visit often from 'Atiu. Today Takutea is unpopulated and rarely visited, except by the occasional fisherman.

Many seabirds, including tropicbirds and frigates, nest on the island. To protect these breeding birds, Takutea was set up as a wildlife sanctuary in the 1950s by the 'Atiuan chiefs on behalf of the people of 'Atiu.

The only way to get to the island is by sea; the research vessel *Bounty Bay* (see Pacific Expeditions, p70) occasionally runs expeditions to Takutea from Rarotonga.

**Boat**

Inter-island cargo ships sail to 'Atiu; see p180 for details.

The all-weather harbour at Taunganui is far too small to accept ships, so, instead, passengers and freight are ceremoniously unloaded onto aluminium barges while the ship stands offshore.

'Boat day' is an island event and worth witnessing if you happen to be here at that time.

**GETTING AROUND**

'Atiu is excellent for walking but you'll need wheels if you want to see much of the island.

All places to stay can rent you a motorcycle (NZ\$25 per day), either through **T & J Rentals** (☎ 33271; Areora) or by renting out one of their own bikes (although guests get preference if there's a shortage of motorbikes). Atiu Villas and T & J Rentals have a few bicycles as well.

**Are Manuiri** (☎ 33031) rents out a 4WD for NZ\$65 per day, and **Atiu Villas** (☎ 33777) has a soft-top jeep for NZ\$60 a day.

All accommodation places provide airport transfers for about NZ\$14 return.

The only sealed roads on 'Atiu are in the centre of the island near the villages; the rest of the roads are dirt tracks, some of which can be very rough indeed and get extremely muddy after heavy rain (scooters beware).

The Vainetini Te Akapuanga next to the town hall occasionally opens for a display of local craftwork – keep an eye out to see whether it's open, or phone Tangi Vainepoto (☎ 33269).

**Terangi Nui Shop** (☎ 33101; Areora) There's also a small gift shop beside the island's newest café (p121), selling a selection of Cook Islands gifts and clothing, including some local craftwork.

'Atiu coffee (see p116) is also a popular souvenir.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Air**

**Air Rarotonga** (in town ☎ 33888, airport ☎ 33201; www.airraro.com; Mapumai; ✈ office 7am-3pm Mon-Fri, open until later for late flights) flies between Rarotonga and 'Atiu Monday to Saturday. Return fares cost from NZ\$270.

The Rarotonga–Aitutaki–'Atiu Island Hopper Pass (NZ\$400) allows you to add on a flight to 'Atiu from Aitutaki for only a little more than the standard Rarotonga–Aitutaki fare – the only catch is there's just one Aitutaki–'Atiu flight a week (currently on a Tuesday). Your flight back to Rarotonga is included in the price.

Check out p56 for details of travel agencies on Rarotonga that can organise flights and package deals to 'Atiu; these can work out cheaper but you'll have to stick to a prearranged schedule that might not allow you to stay very long on 'Atiu.

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