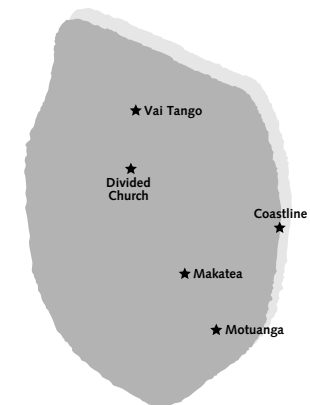


Ma'uke

Ma'uke is known as the 'garden island' of the Cooks, and it's not difficult to see why. It's one of the lushest and most verdant of all the islands, ringed by thick forests of casuarina, palm, banyan and barringtonia trees, and blanketed in richly coloured flowers and blossoming shrubs. A couple of hours' stroll can take you from the spick-and-span gardens and neatly tended front lawns of the main villages in the island's centre, along ancient *makatea* (raised, fossilised coral reef) pathways shaded by tangled forest and lofty palms, all the way to the deserted beaches and coves along the island's coast. Ma'uke's *makatea* is also honeycombed with caves and sinkholes, many filled with sparkling freshwater pools, cool and silent on a blazing hot tropical day. If you're looking for seclusion and solitude in the Cook Islands, Ma'uke is hard to top.

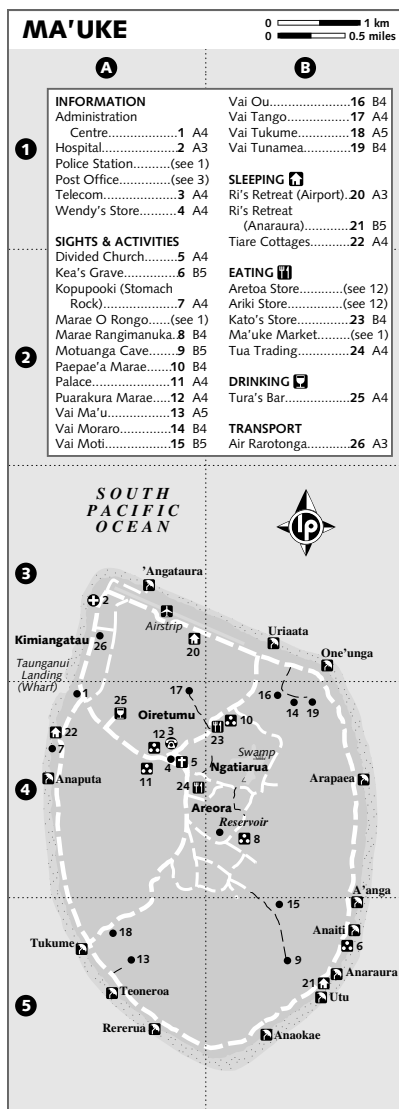
HIGHLIGHTS

- Delving into the depths of **Motuanga** (p125), the Cave of 100 Rooms
- Admiring the interior of Ma'uke's famous **Divided Church** (p128)
- Plunging into the crystal-clear water at **Vai Tango** (p126)
- Wandering along the ancient coral pathways across the **makatea**
- Drinking in the views along the island's spectacular **coastline**



■ POPULATION: 440

■ AREA: 18.4 SQ KM



HISTORY

Ma'uke's traditional name is 'Akatokamanava (Land Where My Heart Is at Rest). It was named by its legendary founder 'Uke, who (depending on which legend you read) either named the island after a long voyage from 'Avaiki (the land of the spirits) or, rather less poetically, from Ra'iatea in

the Society Islands. He is traditionally supposed to have landed, in the huge canoe Paipaimoana, at Arapaea on the eastern coast. 'Uke later renamed the island Ma-Uke (Land of 'Uke), but Ma'uke is still referred to as 'Akatokamanava in traditional songs and stories.

'Uke had two daughters, renowned for their beauty, and when the two famous Rarotongan settlers, Tangi'ia and Karika, came seeking these girls for marriage, they went to live on Rarotonga. 'Uke's four sons also went to other islands, so that 'Uke became a common ancestor for all the islands of the Southern Group.

Before the arrival of Christianity, Ma'uke was dominated by the island of 'Atiu. The people of 'Atiu would frequently descend on the island in murderous, cannibal raids; the 19th-century *ariki* (chief) Rongomatane, was particularly feared as a ruthless taker of slaves and eater of men. In 1823, when the first European, the missionary John Williams, arrived on Ma'uke, it was Rongomatane who arrived with him. Unsurprisingly, the Ma'ukeans were converted to Christianity with an ease and speed that astonished the missionaries.

Despite Christian influence, Ma'uke still remained subject to 'Atiu. When the British Protectorate of the Cook Islands was declared in 1888, it was an 'Atiuan chief, Ngamaru Ariki, who gave permission on behalf of Ma'uke. New Zealand officially ended 'Atiuan rule in the early 1900s.

THE CULTURE

Ma'uke's three *ariki* titles – Tararo, Teau and Samuela – are descended from three chiefs appointed by 'Atiuan conquerors in the 19th century (though Ma'ukeans generally don't like to be reminded of that). One of the few 'palaces' in the outer Cooks that really looks the part stands opposite Ariki Store in the centre of the island. It was built for Tararo Jane Ariki in 1982, but Tararo politics interrupted construction and it stands impressive but unfinished.

ENVIRONMENT

Like 'Atiu, Mangaia and Mitiaro, Ma'uke is a raised atoll with surrounding *makatea*. Inland from the *makatea*, which is densely forested with lush jungle, a band of swampland surrounds the flat, fertile plateau in

the island's centre. The middle of the island is only slightly higher than the surrounding *makatea*; Ma'uke is barely 30m above sea level at its highest point. The island is roughly half the size of Rarotonga – 18km round compared with the 32km of Rarotonga, and as on many of the smaller islands, there are no rivers, meaning Ma'ukeans have to rely on either underground wells or rain tubs for fresh water and irrigation. Like the other *makatea* islands, Ma'uke is best-known for its numerous limestone caves.

INFORMATION

Electricity operates on Ma'uke 24 hours a day. However, bringing a good torch (flashlight) is an excellent idea, especially if you want to check out any caves – the tour guides here are less organised than on other islands, and they might not have one to lend you.

You may also want to bring some provisions with you – the small village shops are considerably more expensive than those on Rarotonga, and their supplies are quite limited (fine if you're partial to tinned mackerel and three varieties of corned beef).

Administration Centre (near wharf) The mayor, island secretary (☎ 35200) and a 24-hour Kia Orana cardphone (☎ 35155) are here.

Hospital (☎ 35664; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri)

Police station (☎ 35086) Located between the Administration Centre and the wharf.

Post office (☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) In Ngatiarua village, in the centre of the island.

Telecom (☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) There's a 24-hour Kia Orana cardphone (☎ 35685) outside and a small Cyberpost for accessing the Internet (NZ\$10.50 per 30 minutes).

Wendy's Store (☎ 35102; Areora) This shop, near the Divided Church, is an ANZ agent and changes US dollars.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

If you'll be doing any walking on the island, you'll need mosquito repellent, and if you'll be doing any walking across the *makatea*, be sure to bring some sturdy shoes. Don't try to walk across the *makatea* in sandals or flip-flops (even if the locals do) – the rocks are liable to shift suddenly (with a sound strangely reminiscent of crockery shifting in the sink) and they really are painfully sharp – you could easily cut yourself very badly.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Caves & Walks

Like 'Atiu and Mangaia, Ma'uke is ringed by *makatea*, though compared with the other islands it's relatively flat and walking across it is generally much easier. Most of the caves are only a short walk from the coastal road, and can be reached via ancient coral roads through the jungle. The deep, clear freshwater pools in many of the island's caves are a definite highlight, thoroughly welcome after a long tramp through the tangled bush.

You'll need a guide to find most of the caves on Ma'uke. Unlike many other islands, the problem is not that you'll be trespassing on private land – it's just that some of the caves are extremely hard to find and it's easy to get lost in the bush.

Motuanga Cave is Ma'uke's most famous cave, a network of tunnels and caverns that begins deep inland, but is rumoured to extend all the way out to sea. The cave is traditionally known as the 'Cave of 100 Rooms', and was often used by islanders as a hiding place from 'Atiuan war parties. Nobody can remember the last person who reached all of Motuanga's 100 rooms; the rocks are slowly closing in and nowadays you can

JULIAN DASHWOOD

One of Ma'uke's most famous residents was the writer Julian Dashwood (1899–1971), a flamboyant English author who was known as 'Rakau' (wood) on the island. After spending his early years in Istanbul, South Africa and Malaya, Dashwood arrived in the Cook Islands in the 1930s, and worked in Manihiki and Mangaia before moving to Ma'uke, where he married a local woman and later ran the island store. Under the pseudonym of Julian Hillas, Dashwood wrote evocatively about his life and experiences in the Cook Islands in his books *South Seas Paradise* and *Today is Forever*, which is largely about Ma'uke. For a while in the 1960s he worked for the newly formed Cook Islands Government before giving up politics to return to writing. His grave can still be seen outside his old house (now derelict) near the airport – ask any local person to point it out.

only get into eight of them. There is a legend of one man, Timeni Oariki, who swam through all of them and finally emerged out at sea – where he was promptly eaten by sharks.

Motuanga and nearby **Vai Moti** – a great place to swim according to Ma'uke's school kids – can only be found with the help of a guide. The coral track is fairly obvious, but the small roads leading to it are a veritable maze. On the way to Motuanga, look out for the truly massive *ava* (banyan) tree near the beginning of the pathway – certainly the largest banyan on the island, and rumoured to be one of the biggest in the whole South Pacific.

The easiest cave to reach, and one of the best for swimming, is **Vai Tango**, which is a short walk from Ngatiarua village along a well-maintained track through vegetable patches and back gardens. The long crystal-blue pool might look shallow, but scuba divers reckon it extends more than 100m back and 50m across under the earth. The pool is often full of kids on Saturday and after school (handy guides if you don't know the way).

There are three intriguing caves in the northern part of the island, reached via an old track through the bush from One'unga Beach. Look out for the lopsided 'One'unga' sign on the coast road, and head slightly inland into the clearing on your right. You should be able to see where the track begins as it's walked fairly often. After about 15 minutes' walk, you'll pass **Vai Ou**, a beautiful cavern leading fairly steeply down to a pleasant pool, spanned by a small rock bridge which you can swim under. The track turns hard left here – another four minutes and you'll find **Vai Moraro** down on your right. Also known as the 'Crawling Cave' – you have to crawl down through a slit in the rock-face to get inside – it opens up into a large cave with some small, deep pools, filled with slightly salty water. Be careful walking around inside Vai Moraro, as the rocks are wet and slippery. About three minutes further east is **Vai Tunamea**, a deep, almost vertical sinkhole with a pool at the bottom – you could probably climb down but getting back out might not be so easy. Nearby, an ancient overgrown track apparently leads into the centre of the island, but you'll definitely need a guide if you fancy using it.

On the other side of the island, steep-sided **Vai Tukume** is hidden beside a midden of discarded cans and broken bottles more treacherous to cross than any jagged *makatea*, but the cave is easy enough to find.

Vai Ma'u, looking like the gateway to the underworld, is found after an uneasy walk through gnarly old trees twisting through the *makatea*. You might well see crabs the size of your hand scuttling across the pathway – local children often lay crab traps along the island's inland paths, and if you ask around you might be able to tag along. The huge coconut crab – almost eaten to extinction on Aitutaki – is still fairly abundant on Ma'uke, and its flesh is still a much-prized delicacy.

Beaches

The coast road runs all the way around Ma'uke, a distance of 18km. None of it's paved – most of the road is little more than a jungle track, and you'll often have to dodge palm branches and coconuts that have fallen onto the road from the overhanging trees.

Ma'uke's beaches are totally secluded and many are practically invisible from the road thanks to the surrounding *makatea* cliffs. The lagoon is mostly shallow and not much good for swimming, but the beaches are great for sunbathing and shell collecting, and whichever cove you choose you'll probably have it entirely to yourself.

The beaches on the western and southern sides of the island, such as **Anaokae**, are pleasantly secluded. Other beaches, such as **Anaraura** and **Teoneroa**, have picnic areas with thatched shelters (and they're also popular with the island's resident pigs). **One'unga**, on the eastern side, is also a lovely beach that's ideal for a picnic and a stroll, as are **Teoneroa** and **Tukume** on the island's southwestern side.

The southern tip of the island bears the brunt of the prevailing winds, so you'll often see the surf here breaking in huge waves over the reef – a spectacular sight, though not one you'd want to witness too close-up. All around the island the waves have beaten the shoreline cliffs into overhanging formations.

Heading south from Tiare Cottages, the first turn-off towards the sea leads you to **Kopupooki** (Stomach Rock). The name

KEA'S GRAVE

One of Ma'uke's beaches, Anaiti, has a special history. Up on the cliff above the sea is a mound of grey coral stones – the grave of Kea.

Kea's husband, Paikea, was out fishing one day in his canoe when a terrible storm blew him out to sea. Kea believed her husband was dead, and she cried and cried on that cliff overlooking the sea until she died of grief, and the people buried her there.

Paikea had not died at sea, however. He was blown over 100km by the storm, eventually reaching the island of Mangaia. He was almost killed there by the locals but escaped and sailed to Rarotonga. From there he departed for Aotearoa (New Zealand) and never returned to the Cooks again.

There are a few versions of how Paikea got to New Zealand: on the *Takitumu* canoe (which is known to have stopped at Rarotonga on its way from the Society Islands to New Zealand), on the *Horouta* canoe (which visited Rarotonga from New Zealand to get *kumara*), or, most famously, on the back of a whale. However he travelled, Paikea ended his voyage at Whangara, on the East Coast of New Zealand's North Island. A carved meeting house there bears a carving of Paikea, on the apex of the rooftop, sitting atop a whale.

Immortalised in legend and sculpture, Paikea is today a revered ancestor of New Zealand Maori tribes both on the East Coast and in the South Island. But poor Kea remains in her grave here on a cliff on Ma'uke, where she died of grief for her lost love.

If you want to pay your respects, look for two large stones beside the coastal road, on the seaward side. Walk towards the sea here, keeping just right of the small beach. Kea's grave is on a small headland, covered with stones and marked by a small plaque.

comes from a cave situated to your left as you face out to sea – go just past the last outcrop of rock that you see from the beach and you come to this dinky little cave, full of fish and good for swimming and snorkelling. You can only reach it at low tide; at other times, the pounding waves make it too dangerous. Except for the harbour, this is probably the only place deep enough for a good swim, since the reef all around the island is quite shallow.

Marae

Like all the other Cook Islands, Ma'uke has many *marae* (ancient religious meeting grounds) but many of them are substantially overgrown and not all that impressive.

Puarakura Marae is a modern *marae*, built in the 1980s for the Ariki Teau and still used today for ceremonial functions. There's a triangular area enclosed within a rectangle within another larger rectangle, with seats for the *ariki*, the *matiaipo* (head of a subtribe) and the *rangatira* (subchief).

Near Ma'uke's reservoir is **Marae Rangimaranuka**, the *marae* of 'Uke, Ma'uke's famous ancestor and namesake. It's completely overgrown but if you stumble about in there you'll find an old stone seat.

Near the harbour, the ancient **Marae O Rongo** was once huge but all you see today are a few large stones and a coral platform. The *marae* is behind the Administration Centre; the little road going along the left (inland) side of the building leads right to it.

Paepae'a Marae, built in 1997 for Samuela Ariki, is an impressive *marae* on the road north from Ngatiarua to the airstrip.

TOURS

The range of tours on offer in Ma'uke is less organised than 'Atiu, but there are a few people who'll happily show you around the island's *marae*, caves and beaches. Prices vary according to where you want to go, but NZ\$20 to NZ\$25 is usual (you shouldn't have to pay more than NZ\$30).

Clem Vainetutai (☎ 35014) Clem conducts a general tour around the island on motor scooter or on foot.

Pi Tua (☎ 35083) A sprightly sixty-something-year-old who still leaps around the *makatea* in flip-flops like a man half his age, leads tours to most of Ma'uke's caves, including Motuanga.

Tangata Ateriano (☎ 35270) Tailor-made tours around the island in a 4WD truck are offered by Tangata, who's based at Tiare Cottages. Explain what you'd like to see and chances are he'll be able to take you there.

SLEEPING

There are only two options for accommodation on Ma'uke. Water on Ma'uke comes from rain tubs and is usually heated by solar panels, so hot water can be a little scarce on cloudy days.

Tiare Cottages (☎ 35083; www.mauke.com; budget bungalows s/d NZ\$70/75, self-contained lodge NZ\$75/85, beachfront house NZ\$135) For many years Tiare Cottages was the only accommodation option on Ma'uke. It was originally established by Kura and Tautara Porea, and is now managed by their daughter and son-in-law Teata and Tangata Ateriano. The tin-roofed budget lodges are pretty basic, with a main sleeping area and rudimentary kitchen with a toilet and shower tacked on the end; the nearby self-contained lodge is a lot more comfortable, with a fully equipped kitchen and a spacious, cheerily furnished bedroom. Best of all is the fabulous new sea-view house, which is perched on the nearby clifftops and reached by its own private gravel pathway. Beautifully finished with contemporary furniture and native woods, the house has a main bedroom, upstairs mezzanine and a basic

kitchen; outside there's a private patio that's lit by hurricane lamps and covered with lovely potted plants. At just NZ\$135, this house is an absolute steal. You can do your own cooking in the garden lodges, but not at the beach house. Homemade breakfasts (NZ\$8) and dinner (NZ\$25) are served communally in the covered dining area near the main house. Picnic lunches are also available.

Ri's Retreat (☎ 35181; bungalows NZ\$85-115) Ri's newly constructed bungalows are divided between two locations on Ma'uke: one of them is in a rather barren spot beside the airport and the other is in a much nicer coastal location right near Anaraura Beach. The airport bungalows are sparklingly clean and brightly decorated, with large beds, funky modern bathrooms and sliding glass doors onto a small patio area, but the seaside bungalows, standing on stilts right beside the beach, are by far the better choice. The only drawbacks are the proximity of the bungalows and the rather out-of-the-way location – great if you're after peace and quiet, but a little isolated on a stormy night.

THE DIVIDED CHURCH

In 1882 Ma'uke's CICC (Cook Islands Christian Church) was built by two villages, Areora and Ngatiarua. When the outside was complete, however, the two villages could not agree on how the inside should be fitted out. Eventually the argument became so heated that the only solution was to build a wall down the middle and let each village have its own church within a church.

A new pastor managed to convince his congregations that this was not in the spirit of neighbourly Christianity and the wall was removed, but the interior of the two 'ends' of the church are still decorated in different styles and each village has its own entrance. Inside, the church is 90 degrees offset from the usual layout, with the pulpit at the centre of one long wall. The two villages each sit at their own end and they take turns singing the hymns! There's a dividing line down the middle of the pulpit and the minister is traditionally expected to straddle the line while preaching.

At one time, the interior of the church was famous for its rainbow-coloured paintwork – no doubt another attempt by the opposing villages to outdo each other. Sadly the original colours were painted over in the 1990s with a more pious blue-and-white colour scheme, though the islanders are determined to return the church to its former glory. Look out for the nine c 19th-century Chilean coins embedded in the pulpit – possibly brought back by an islander who was carried off to South America by blackbirders (slave traders; see p24).

Outside, one of the church's two entrances has three crosses representing Ma'uke's three *ariki* (high chiefs). The other gate has two pointy knobs that apparently represent missionary John William's wife's hairdo (that must have been some 'do!). Inside, the 12 pillars that support the roof of the church represent the 12 apostles.

Today, Ma'uke's population is nearly half CICC, and nearly half Roman Catholic, with the rest made up of a few families of Seventh-Day Adventists and one family of Mormons (there's plenty of room for visitors in the Mormon church).

EATING

If you're staying at Tiare Cottages you can get home-cooked dinners for NZ\$25 per meal. Otherwise, it'll be self-catering. Bring a can opener.

There are several grocery stores on Ma'uke, all selling a magnificent variety of canned New Zealand beef and all open approximately from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday and until midday on Saturday. The best-stocked shop is **Tua Trading** (☎ 35235; Areora), which is a little way inland from the Divided Church. In this store there are a couple of large freezers, loads of tinned goods and you can buy beer and cold drinks. Tua's is normally also open most evenings.

Aretoa Store (☎ 35111; Makatea) and **Ariki Store** (☎ 35103; Makatea) are located across the road from the imposing, crumbling Tararo Ariki palace, but the shelves can be pretty bare. Ariki Store is the island's main place to buy petrol. **Wendy's Store** (☎ 35102; Areora) near the Divided Church, is also open some Saturday evenings and 'sometimes' on Sunday.

Kato's Store (☎ 35202; Oiretumu) is a small shop near the Paepae'a Marae, and also the island's only bakery. If you want fresh bread and doughnuts, you need to place your order the day before; the ovens are in action from Monday to Friday.

On Friday morning, starting at about 8.30am, you can buy fresh produce at the Ma'uke **market**, near the wharf, but the selection is usually quite small.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Tura's Bar (☎ 35023) The only 'pub' on Ma'uke is tucked away down a rural road opposite Ma'uke College. Open most Friday nights, it's where you'll find most of the locals after about 9pm – there's plenty of singing, dancing and general merriment, and it can get pretty lively on busy nights.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Rarotonga (Kimiangatau ☎ 35888, airport ☎ 35120; www.airraro.com) flies three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) between Rarotonga and Ma'uke (NZ\$290 return). There are also occasional flights between Ma'uke and Mitiaro, though these can be cancelled at short notice. Daily arrivals and departures are chalked up on a blackboard beside the road near the Air Rarotonga office.

Rarotongan travel agencies (see p56) can organise package tours, including air fare and accommodation.

Boat

See p180 for details on inter-island cargo ship services among the Cook Islands. A visit to Ma'uke can often be combined with visits to some of the other Southern Group islands.

GETTING AROUND

Tiare Cottages and Ri's Retreat can both organise scooter hire for NZ\$25 per day. Tiare also rents bicycles (NZ\$10 per day). Transfers to and from the airport cost NZ\$10.

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