

Rarotonga

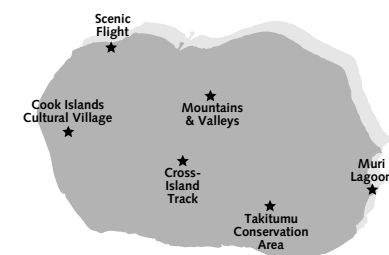
Jutting like a lonely jewel from the sapphire-blue Pacific, Rarotonga is most people's quintessential image of a South Pacific island. Crowned by jagged green mountains and saw-tooth hills, cloaked with tangled jungle, mango groves and tall coconut trees, and completely encircled by a dazzling turquoise lagoon, Rarotonga is unquestionably one of the most beautiful of all of the Cook Islands, but it's got more to offer than simple good looks.

It's an enthralling blend of Polynesian and Western worlds; out on the main coast road, plump Polynesian mamas buzz around on motor scooters, children wave from the back of pick-up trucks, and on the way to your hotel, past the tin-roofed houses and colourful shop fronts that line the coastal road, you'll see flower-strewn tombs sitting beside family homes.

There's something for everyone on Rarotonga, whether it's ancient history, island food or holiday high-jinks – just remember you're on Cook Islands time, and sometimes doing nothing is the most important thing of all.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Strutting your stuff with the locals at an **island night** (p87)
- Snorkelling in the cerulean blue waters of **Muri Lagoon** (p63)
- Surveying the scene from the Needle on Rarotonga's classic **cross-island track** (p64)
- Travelling back in time at the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (p62)
- Exploring Rarotonga's rich history and heritage on a **circle-island tour** (p77)
- Hitting the trail to explore Rarotonga's **mountainous peaks** (p65)
- Seeking out the elusive *kakerori* (Rarotongan flycatcher) in the **Takitumu Conservation Area** (p67)
- Taking to the air for a **scenic flight** (p71) above the island



■ POPULATION: 8100

■ AREA: 67.2 SQ KM

HISTORY

Rarotonga has long been considered the capital of the Cook Islands. Numerous legends across eastern Polynesia touch upon the early existence of Rarotonga, and there was undoubtedly regular contact between the island and the rest of the South Pacific (particularly the islands of French Polynesia).

Traditional oral history relates that the first person to discover Rarotonga was Iotango from Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands, now part of French Polynesia. He came by canoe about 1400 years ago, but didn't stay; he went back to Nuku Hiva and never returned to Rarotonga. But he told his people about the new land and his sons and grandsons later visited. Iotango's son, Tongaiti, gave the island its first name: Tumu Te Varovaro (Source of the Echo).

Settlers from the Marquesas and nearby Society Islands were the first people to establish a permanent home on the island, but little is known about this early period in Rarotonga's history; the only real historical anchor is the construction of the Ara Metua inland road, also called Te Ara Nui o To'i (The Great Road of To'i), somewhere around the 11th century, though no-one today knows precisely who To'i was.

The island's traditional history begins with the arrival of two great warrior chiefs, Tangi'ia from Tahiti and Karika from Samoa, who arrived in huge *vaka* (ocean-going canoes) and quickly conquered the island, later founding the island's six tribes. The district of Ngatang'i'ia (in the south-east) still bears Tangi'ia's name, and Takitumu was named after his canoe. Karika settled near present-day Avarua. The story of these two settlers is told on p34.

Conflicts and wars were quite common among these tribes; people didn't live on the low coastal plain as they do now – they lived at higher elevations where they could better defend themselves, only venturing down to the sea in armed groups for fishing. Inland, they grew crops and raised livestock.

Somewhere between 1000 and 1400, *vaka* set out south from Rarotonga in search of New Zealand, which had been discovered in around AD 800 by Kupe, an early Polynesian navigator. The people on these canoes became the great ancestors of the New Zealand Maori tribes; many of the tribes still bear the names of the canoes on which

the settlers arrived (the Tainui tribe and Te Arawa tribes, for example).

European Contact

Interestingly, considering its size and historical importance, Rarotonga was one of the later islands to be found by Europeans. It's thought that the first European sighting was probably by the mutineers on the *Bounty*, who happened upon Rarotonga in 1789 after the mutiny while they were searching for a hideout (preferably as remote as possible).

The first known European visitor was Philip Goodenough, captain of the *Cumberland*, who showed up in 1814 and spent three months supposedly searching for sandalwood, although he seems to have spent more time skirmishing with the locals. Several of his crew were killed during the bloody squabbles, including Goodenough's female companion, Ann Butcher (the first European woman on the island), and eventually the *Cumberland* fled for safer shores.

In 1821, the Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS) set off in search of Rarotonga from Aitutaki, where his disciple Papeiha, a missionary from Ra'iatea in the Society Islands, had had remarkable success converting the islanders to Christianity. Williams and his companions bounced around most of the islands of the Southern Group (including Mangaia, Ma'uke, Mitiaro, and 'Atiu) for the next couple of years, but never quite managed to find Rarotonga. Eventually an 'Atiuan *ariki* (high chief), Rongomatane, whose people had invaded Rarotonga on numerous occasions, gave the missionaries directions and they finally landed in 1823.

Williams spent several years preaching on Rarotonga, ably assisted by Papeiha, Pitman and another missionary called Aaron Buzacott, before eventually meeting his end in a cannibal oven in 1839 on the island of Vanuatu. As on Aitutaki, they succeeded with surprising speed; a little more than a year after their arrival, Christianity had taken a firm and lasting hold on the island.

The first permanent missionaries came in 1827. They translated the Bible into Maori, and established 'Arorangi as a model for new villages on the island; the missionaries were keen to relocate the newly converted islanders in order to break ties with their old religion. Rarotonga became the Cook Islands'

headquarters for the LMS and an important administrative and religious centre.

As elsewhere in the Pacific, previously unknown diseases took a devastating toll on the islanders, and the population had more than halved within twenty years of the missionaries' arrival. It only really started to recover around the turn of the century.

Although the missionaries tried to exclude other Europeans from settling, whalers and traders visited the island – as one missionary's wife lamented, men of 'some wealth and little religious principle'. Unable to deter the traders, the missionaries did at least warn the Rarotongans to beware the French, who had taken over Tahiti in 1843. The prospect of a French (ie Catholic) invasion made the missionaries extremely skittish, and in 1865 they convinced the paramount *ariki*, Makea Takau, to request British protection for the first time. This initial request was turned down, but after several further requests, the Southern Group was finally declared a British protectorate, and Rarotonga became the unofficial capital of the Cook Islands.

THE CULTURE

Rarotonga shares a similar culture with the rest of the Southern Group. The first chiefs, Tangi'ia and Karika, split the land among six tribes, each lead by an *ariki* and several *mataiapo* and *rangatira* (sub-chiefs). One *ariki* title, Kainuku Ariki, belonged to the first settlers, those who Tangi'ia and Karika

had defeated. Pa Ariki (based in Ngatang'i'ia) and Tinomana Ariki (in 'Arorangi) are descended from Tangi'ia's people. The Makea titles (in Avarua) descend from Karika.

There were three *vaka* (districts) on the island: Te Au O Tonga on the northern side, Takitumu on the eastern and southeastern side, and Puaikura on the western side.

Each tribe had its own specific *koutu* (high court) and *marae* (sacred site), almost all found along the main inland road, the Ara Metua. The *marae* were where the main sacrifices, offerings and ceremonies would be made, such as the dedication of newborn children to a particular tribe; the offering of the first fruits of the harvest; and the investiture of a new high chief.

As elsewhere on the islands, land was one of the most crucial issues; each tribe controlled sections of land known as *tapere*, which were passed down through families, or won or lost in battle. With the arrival of the missionaries in the 1820s, acquisition of land by conquest was outlawed. Land is now granted solely at the discretion of the owning family, though problems arise when people disagree about who holds the right to a particular piece of land; arguments frequently end up in court and can cause considerable friction within families.

Only Cook Islanders can own land on Rarotonga, though sometimes rights are exchanged for fixed-term leases (usually 60 years). Rarotonga is so far the only island

RAROTONGA'S BLUE LAWS

The notorious 'Blue Laws' of Rarotonga were first set down by a council of ruling *ariki* in 1879 (with plenty of input from the island's missionaries, of course). These draconian laws, mainly based on missionary teachings and religious doctrines, were designed to keep the islanders pious, faithful and free from temptation, and ensure the rule of law and order.

Anyone found to have breached the laws were shopped in by local *riko* (police), and hauled before a disciplinary court. Offenders were punished by heavy fines, which were jointly distributed between the *riko* and the judges; naturally, this made police work a lucrative business, and it's thought that at certain times as many as one in six islanders were engaged as undercover *riko*.

The laws covered almost every aspect of daily life, though quite how some of the more bizarre ones were dreamt up is anyone's guess. Common misdemeanours punished by the Blue Laws included sorcery, incitement to mischief, adultery, tattooing, being drunk and spearing someone else's pig; but there were also laws that verged on the ridiculous (one law required any man who walked with an arm around a woman after dark to carry a light in his other hand) and some that were downright weird: 'If a man throws a stone at a pig and it strikes a person and death follows, without evil intention on the part of the thrower, he shall be fined \$20, half of which shall be paid to the friends of the deceased.' That'll teach 'em.

to have passed the controversial Unit Titles Act, which for the first time grants foreigners the right to buy portions of a particular piece of land (ie an apartment in a block of flats).

Rarotonga may officially be a Christian nation, but the old ways still exert subtle influences over the way islanders live their lives, and there's a growing interest in the island's ancient culture and heritage among young Rarotongans.

ENVIRONMENT

Rarotonga is the only high volcanic island in the Cooks, and it's by far the youngest island in the Southern Group. The volcanic activity that thrust it above sea level occurred about two million years ago, more recently than on any of the other islands. The island's volcanic origins are most obvious in the mountainous centre, with its steep valleys, narrow ridges and rugged hills covered with dense jungle. The major mountains are the remains of the outer rim of the volcanic cone; its centre is now marked by the mountain of Maungatea. In many ways, Rarotonga is physically closer to other volcanic islands such as Bora Bora

in Tahiti than it is to the Southern Group islands, most of which lost their volcanic cones and mountains long ago.

The flat, fertile plain along the coast is where most recent building and development has occurred, though in previous centuries the population was mostly concentrated further inland. Most of the old plantations and farming land is found a couple of kilometres inland from the coast along the Ara Metua.

Rarotonga's encircling lagoon is quite narrow around most of the island but widens out around the southern side, where you'll find the best beaches. Muri Lagoon, fringed by four *motu* (islets), is the widest part of the lagoon, although even here it is quite shallow in most places.

There are a few birds that naturally occur only on Rarotonga, including the *kakerori* (flycatcher) and the Rarotongan starling, but the island supports a diverse bird population, mostly introduced from other parts of the Cook Islands or from overseas. There are no poisonous animals on Rarotonga.

The richest wildlife is found in the island's lagoon and in the deep ocean beyond the

RAROTONGA IN...

Two Days

Kick off your visit with a day at the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (p62), where you'll experience a cultural show, island buffet and circle-island tour in one easy package. In the evening head for a feast at one of the island's excellent restaurants – top spots include **Vaima** (p85) on the south coast or **Tamarind House** (p85) near Avarua. Early on day two, hire a scooter and get out and explore the island – delve into the shops in **Avarua** (p91), check out some art in **'Arorangi** (p61), and spend the afternoon snorkelling in the lagoon and sunbathing around **Muri** or **Aro'a Beach** (p63). There's only one option for the evening – head for whichever resort is holding an **island night** (p87) and get those hips shaking.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary and then add a cross-island walk past **the Needle** (p64) on the third day – the panoramic views across the island are unforgettable. You'll have worked up an appetite by nightfall, so why not try some more island cuisine at the famous **Flame Tree Restaurant** (p87) or **Trader Jack's** (p85). Day four's another leisure day – take some time out and try a spot of **horse-riding** (p71), **kayaking** (p71) or sunbathing on the beach, before a sunset meal at either **Sails** (p87) or the **Right on the Beach Restaurant** (p86).

One Week

With a few extra days you'll have time to explore some of the island's extra treats – the **Punanga Nui Market** (p59) on Saturday, **church singing** (p58) on Sunday, and maybe a **scenic flight** (p71) above the island on Monday. You should also have the chance to check out Avarua's nightlife – must-sees include the **Whatever Bar** (p89), the **Staircase** (p90) and the notorious **Banana Court** (p91). Just don't try to pack too much in – you're on Cook Islands' time, remember?

RAROTONGA'S NAME

There are various stories relating to how the island got its present name, Rarotonga. *Raro* means 'west' or 'down', and *tonga* means 'south', so '*raro tonga*' could mean 'southwest'. From the point of view of the early discoverers and navigators from the Marquesas and Society Islands, Rarotonga was certainly to the southwest.

Some claim that the explorer Tangi'ia named Rarotonga after sailing down too far (*raro*) to the south (*tonga*) before finding it. See the 'Myths & Legends' special section (p34) for why he went wrong.

A third theory says that Tangi'ia's contemporary, Karika, naming the island after his *marae* back home in Samoa.

reef. Dolphins, sharks, rays and all manner of tropical fish are regular visitors to Rarotonga's shores, and between July and September the island is usually visited by humpback whales on their way to Antarctica.

ORIENTATION

Though Rarotonga is the largest of all the Cook Islands, it's still compact and accessible, with the main attractions easily reached from the Ara Tapu (Sacred Road), the 32km-long coastal road that circumnavigates the island. It's a busy and well-maintained route that never passes more than a few metres from the coast; you can stop practically anywhere and be just steps away from a deserted stretch of sand and the warm waters of the encircling lagoon.

Inland from the coast you'll find a second, much older road, the Ara Metua (Ancient Road), connected to the Ara Tapu by several smaller roads leading away from the coast (some are paved, while some are little more than muddy tracks). Also known as the 'back road', the Ara Metua was originally built from coral blocks in around 1000AD by one of the island's first chiefs.

The road passes through farmland, *taro* plantations and rambling homesteads in the foothills of Rarotonga's mountainous centre. It's well worth exploring the inland road, either on an organised tour or your own wheels, to see a very different side of Rarotonga. Dogs, chickens, pigs and the occasional goat wander freely through the gar-

dens; old men putter about on rusty tractors or tend the family fields; ancestral graves sit alongside tin-roofed houses; and a riot of flowers and fruit trees line the roadside.

There's no such thing as a private beach anywhere on Rarotonga. The island is bordered by an almost continuous stretch of sand that belongs to the island rather than anyone in particular; if you wanted, you could walk the circumference and never have to ask for permission. The only thing you should be wary of is crossing private land to access the beach – quite understandably, locals prefer visitors not to walk past their front doors just because it's a shortcut to the lagoon.

The airport is in the northwest corner of the island, about 2km from Avarua. Most hotels provide transfers for their guests, or you can arrange a transfer by taxi or private coach (see p94).

Maps

Proper maps of Rarotonga are hard to come by; the best you'll find are the free tourist maps available from the tourist office. Jason's produces a couple of fold-out maps of Rarotonga and Aitutaki, and a smaller map of 'Atiu, Aitutaki and Mangaia. The *What's On* booklet and the *Cook Islands Sun* visitor guide also contain maps.

Rarotonga's Mountain Tracks and Plants (NZ\$25), by Gerald McCormack and Judith Künzle, contains detailed maps for a number of walking tracks. It's usually available at the Bounty Bookshop (below) or Island Craft (p92) in Avarua.

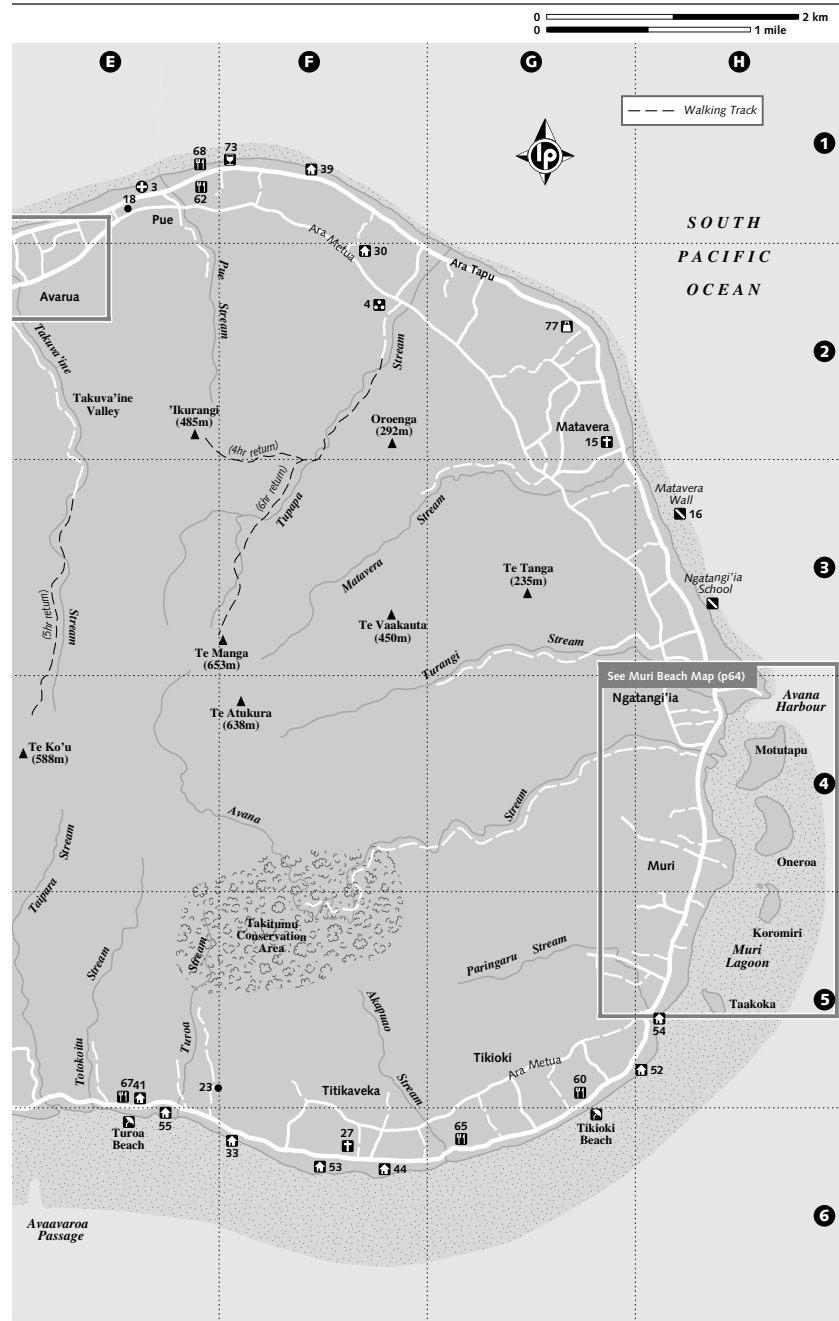
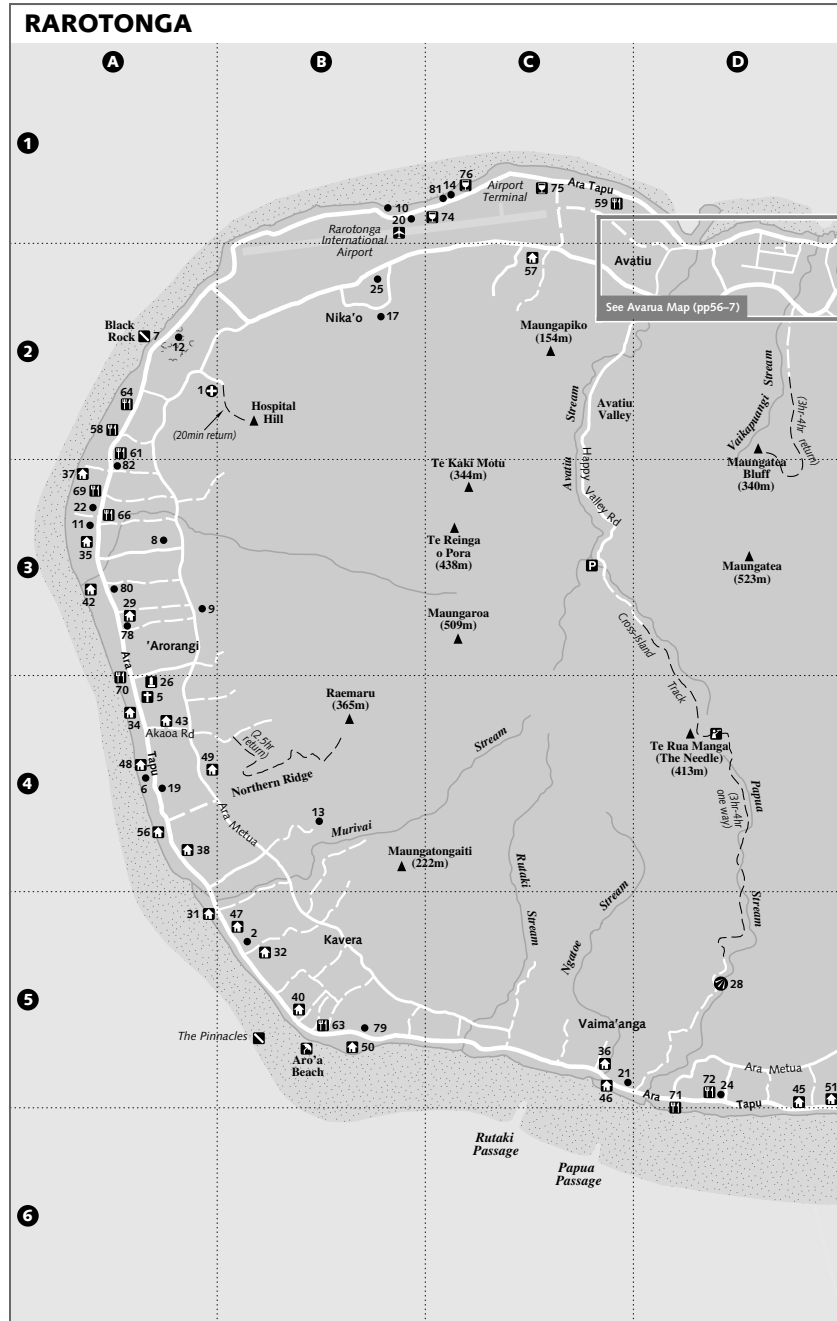
INFORMATION

Bookshops

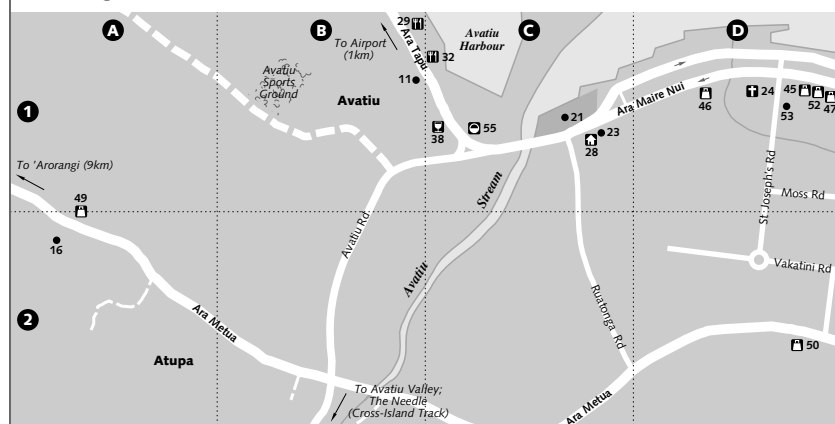
Rarotonga's bookshops are all in Avarua. **Bounty Bookshop** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26660) Near the post office. Sells foreign magazines, local newspapers and the *New Zealand Herald*, as well as various books, including titles on the Cook Islands and other Pacific destinations. **CITC Shopping Centre** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22000; Ara Maire Nui) Mainly sells cheap paperbacks and a small selection of Cook Islands books.

Cook Islands Library & Museum Society (Map pp56-7; ☎ 28468; Makea Tinirau Rd; ☹ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 4-8pm Tue) There are some unusual books, maps, postcards and pamphlets for sale in the library that you won't be able to pick up elsewhere.

Treasure Chest (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22325) There are often a few coffee-table books and local-interest titles available here (along with lots of tacky souvenirs).



AVARUA



Travel Agencies

The two principal travel agencies on Rarotonga are Island Hopper and Jetsave Travel; both specialise in travel arrangements around Rarotonga and the outer islands.

Island Hopper Vacations (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22576; www.islandhoppervacations.com; Banana Ct, Avarua)

Jetsave Travel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 27707; www.jetsave.co.ck; Ara Maire Nui, Avarua)

Tipani Tours (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25266; www.tipani.tours.com; Ara Tapu) At the airport.

AVARUA

Perched along the island's northern shore, the bustling town of Avarua is the capital city of the Cooks and Rarotonga's only town. Bordered by twin harbours at either side of a sweeping bay, and backed by a vista of saw-tooth mountains and tree-topped hills, it's the closest thing you'll find to a metropolis in the Cooks. Just over a decade ago Avarua was little more than a sleepy South Seas port, but recently the town has been thoroughly spruced up and the long main street is now packed with busy shops, cafés and galleries. It's also home to the main weekend market, as well as a few decent museums and the National Culture Centre. If you're looking for a little bit of after-dark action on the island, then Avarua is where you'll find it.

Orientation

Getting around Avarua is easy; there's only one main road, the Ara Maire Nui (which turns into the main coast road, the Ara Tapu,

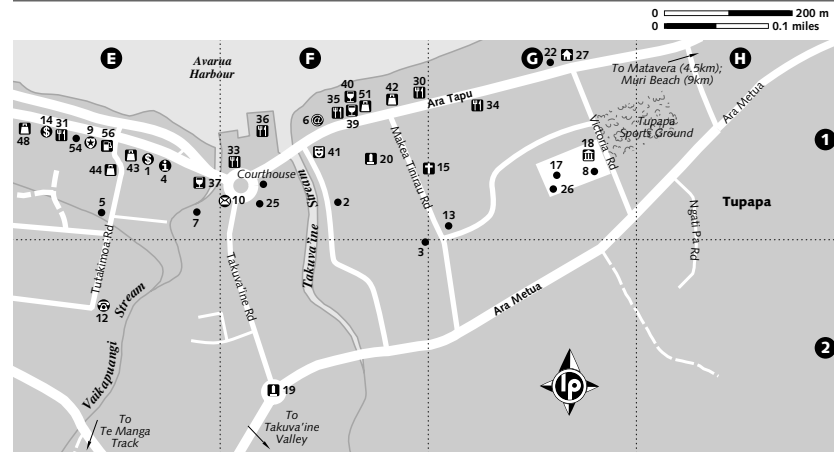
at either end of town). The Ara Maire Nui, usually known as 'the main road', runs right along the waterfront. A grassy strip down the middle offers plenty of shady trees.

A useful landmark to get your bearings is the main traffic circle at the eastern end of town. Facing west (with the harbour to your right), the large orange building just to your left is the new courthouse; on your right is the entrance to Avarua Harbour.

The road leading inland to your left passes the post office and the Philatelic Bureau on its way to Papeiha Stone. Here the road joins up with the Ara Metua (inland or back road), before continuing up the Takuva'ine Valley.

The commercial centre of town is along the main road west of the traffic circle. The Banana Court Bar, with the Blue Note Café on the verandah, is an obvious landmark. A little way up from the Banana Court is the main tourist office. Further up on your left you'll see the large CITC Shopping Centre; the left-hand turn here passes Cook's Corner Arcade and the main bus stop, before continuing on to the large Telecom office.

The banks, shops and cafés, as well as the police station and the supermarket, are on the south side of the road. At the other end of town on the north side of the road is the Punanga Nui market. Just past this is Avatiu Harbour, where the inter-island passenger freighter ships and Port Authority are based. The airport is 1km further west. The post office is opposite the courthouse and the Telecom centre is just off the main



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TATTOOS

Tattooing is a common practice across much of the South Pacific, and the Cook Islands is no exception. The word 'tattoo' is a derivative of the original Maori word, *tatau*. Tattoos served many purposes in the pre-Christian Cook Islands; some denoted rank, status and achievement, while others were simply for decoration; the missionary William Wyatt Gill related that 'the arms of warriors – between the shoulder and the elbow – were tattooed black so that, on dance nights, the beautiful white shell fastened across it with sennit might be the more admired.'

Usually tattoos were given by the *ta'unga aua* (high priest) using a special comb made of bird bone and a tapping instrument; the black pigment was obtained from the soot of the *tuitui* (candlenut), which was commonly burned for light in the early Cooks. The designs were generally derived from traditional wood carving, and often the specific motifs of the *vaka* (canoe) from which the person's tribe was descended.

Early missionaries tried to stamp out the practice, but it never quite died away and it's now back in favour in a big way. Even the most respectable of Cook Islanders, such as Pa Upokotini Marie Ariki (one of Rarotonga's premier *ariki*), sport traditional designs.

road, on Tutakimoa Rd. See p51 for information on services available in Avarua.

Sights

PARA O TANE PALACE

About 200m east of the traffic circle is the tumbledown **Para O Tane Palace** (Map pp56–7). It's the traditional residence of the most senior *ariki* in the Avarua area, Makea Nui Teremoana Ariki, and was the place where Makea Takau (the ruling Queen of Rarotonga) signed the treaty accepting the Cook Islands' status as a British protectorate in 1888. You can see some fascinating photos of the event in the National Museum.

Once a grand edifice, the palace has fallen into disrepair and isn't open to the public. Officially, though, it's still one of the island's main seats of power. The surrounding area is known as Taputapuatea. Named after a *marae* in the Society Islands, Taputapuatea was once one of the largest and most sacred *marae* on Rarotonga. Christian missionaries destroyed the *marae* in order to break ties with the old ways; today nothing remains.

COOK ISLANDS CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The **Avarua Cook Islands Christian Church** (Map pp56–7; CICC; Makea Tinirau Rd) is a fine, old, white coral building, much in the same mould as other CICCs in the Cooks. It was built in 1853, when Aaron Buzacott was the resident missionary. The interesting graveyard around the church is worth a leisurely browse. At the front you'll find a monument to the pioneering Polynesian missionary, Papeiha. Just to the left (as you

face the church) is the grave of Albert Henry, the first prime minister of the independent Cook Islands; you can't miss it – it's the one with a life-size bust of the man himself. Other well-known people buried here include author Robert Dean Frisbie.

You're welcome to attend services; the main one of the week, as at all of Rarotonga's CICCs, is Sunday from 10am to 11.30am. See p30 for advice about attending a CICC.

BEACHCOMBER GALLERY

Opposite the CICC is the large **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu), which occupies a building constructed in 1845 by the LMS for its Sunday school. The building was on the verge of ruin before its restoration in 1992 – you can clearly see where the new roof sits on top of the old walls (though quite where the present Renaissance theme came from is anyone's guess). It's now been converted into one of the best arts and crafts galleries on the island, offering a great selection of jewellery, carvings, pearls, craftwork and paintings (most of which are locally sourced, unlike some of items you'll see in the more touristy shops around town). You can sometimes visit the workshop behind the main building to see how the black-pearl jewellery and shell carvings are made.

Avarua has several other good galleries for arts and crafts; see p91.

NATIONAL CULTURE CENTRE

One block inland from the Paradise Inn is the **Sir Geoffrey Henry National Culture Centre** (Map pp56–7; www.culture.gov.ck). Conceived

by Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Henry, the complex was formally opened on 14 October 1992 and hosted the 6th Pacific Festival of the Arts. The centre is home to six cultural organisations: the National Auditorium, the National Museum, the National Library, the National Archives, Performing Arts and the Anthropology Unit. There are also a number of government ministries based within the complex.

The **National Museum** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 20725; admission free, donations appreciated) has a good range of Cook Islands and South Pacific artefacts, including a traditional *vaka* (canoe) from Pukapuka, Mangaian *toki* (adzes), carved gods from Rarotonga and the outer islands, and a fascinating collection of old photos. You can't help feeling the collection would be rather more impressive if the missionaries hadn't shipped most of the best stuff back to Britain, where it's now mostly housed in the British Museum.

Visitors to the **National Library** (☎ 20725) can borrow books by signing up for a temporary visitor's card (see p55).

In the centre of the compound, the **National Auditorium** is the venue for large-scale concerts and other red-letter events.

PUNANGA NUI MARKET

Beside the waterfront near Avatiu Harbour, **Punanga Nui** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 29370) is the island's main outdoor market. The market is open several days a week, but the biggest market day is Saturday (morning), when it is

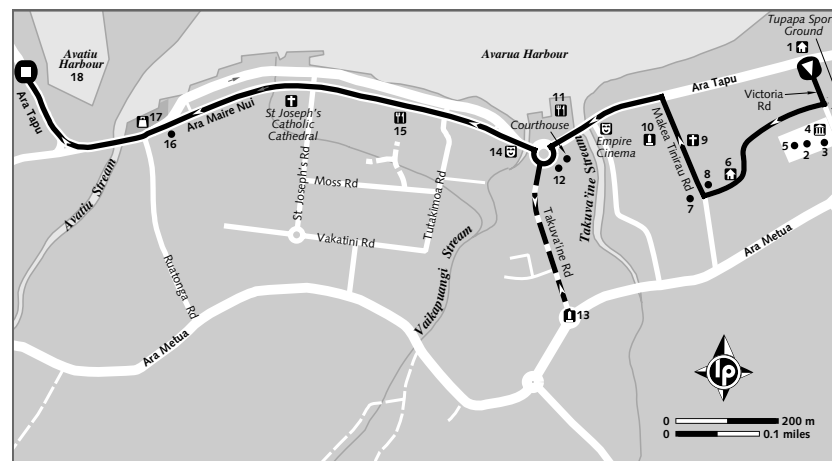
packed with locals selling fresh fruit, vegetables and home-cooked meals. There's also loads of craftwork, textiles and souvenirs for sale – the market is an especially good place to pick woodcarving, inexpensive jewellery and *pareu* (sarongs). If you're after fresh fish, you'll need to set your alarm – most of the fish goes very early. Look out for some basalt sculptures carved by local artist Mike Tavioni (p92) near the market's entrance.

Walking Tour

Start your walk over on the eastern side of town, outside the coral-coloured **Paradise Inn** (1; p80), once the largest dance hall in the whole South Pacific. Follow the road leading inland opposite the hotel. A short way down the road you'll see the Tupapa Sports Ground on your left, and directly opposite the startlingly shaped **National Culture Centre** (2; opposite), which houses the **National Library** (3), **National Museum** (4), and some government offices. A little further into the compound, you'll see the huge **National Auditorium** (5), used for many of the island's main concerts, presentations and events.

WALK FACTS

Start Paradise Inn
End Avatiu Harbour
Distance 1.5km
Duration 2 hours



Just before the National Culture Centre, take the first left and follow the road past the **outer-island hostels (6)**, which provide accommodation for outer islanders when they're visiting Rarotonga. At the end of the road, turn right onto Makea Tinirau Rd. On your left is the **Cook Islands Library & Museum Society (7; p51)**, with a good selection of local literature and a small museum. The museum (admission NZ\$2) has an interesting collection of ancient artefacts, including shells, spears, musical instruments, carved gods, a beautiful old outrigger canoe and the island's first printing press. In case you're wondering, that large iron pot wasn't used in cannibal rites: it's an old whaling pot, used for boiling down blubber. When people were eaten in the Cooks, they were baked in ovens.

On your right as you leave the library is the Cook Islands outpost of the **University of the South Pacific (8; p54)**, which has an excellent shop selling books on the culture, history and customs of the Cook Islands. Continue north along the road past the white coral **CICC (9; p58)**, where you can wander around the gravestones of some of Rarotonga's most famous historical figures and (if it's a Sunday) stop to hear some of the island's trademark singing.

At the main road, hang a left and head towards town. On your left you'll catch sight of the once-grand **Para O Tane Palace (10; p58)**, now crumbling into ruin. Continue past the Empire Cinema and cross over the bridge across Takuva'ine Stream, which empties out into Avarua Harbour to the north. Nearby you'll catch sight of **Trader Jack's (11; p85)**, a favoured watering hole for all the island's movers and shakers.

When you pass the courthouse on your left (recently constructed with Chinese cash, in case you're wondering about the Oriental influence) look out for the famous **Seven-in-One Coconut Tree (12)** near the roundabout – a group of tall coconut trees growing in a perfect circle. Legend has it that the seven trunks all belong to the same tree, originally found on the island of Takutea. The tree was brought here to serve as a boundary marker between the districts of two *ariki*.

If you like you can take a short detour south along Takuva'ine Rd to check out **Papeiha Stone (13)**, which marks the spot where the Tahitian preacher Papeiha preached the gospel on Rarotonga for the first time.

The occasion is remembered with an annual holiday, Gospel Day, when Papeiha's walk from Avatiu Harbour to this spot is re-enacted, and a commemorative sermon is preached from Papeiha's Stone.

From the roundabout outside the courthouse, head west into town past the legendary **Banana Court (14; p91)**, once the most notorious nightspot in the entire South Pacific. Originally built as a sanatorium in 1905, and later Rarotonga's first hotel, the 'BC' became an infamous stopover for South Seas high rollers and bon viveurs; sadly, these days it's a shadow of its former self, but still a popular hangout on Friday nights. The present name was adopted in the 1970s and refers to the banana grove that once stood on the site.

As you head into town, take some time to browse around Avarua's shops or stop for lunch at one of the excellent cafés. The local's favourite spot is **Mama's Café (15; p88)**, next to the large Foodland supermarket. While you're hanging around, cross over the main road to the central tree-lined reservation and cast your eyes out to sea – you should be able to glimpse the skeletal smokestack of the SS *Maitai*, a 3393-ton Union Steam Ship vessel that was wrecked on the reef on Christmas Eve 1916. Her cargo included a number of Model-T Fords.

Cross back onto the left-hand side of the street and continue west past the modern St Joseph's cathedral till you reach Bond's Liquor Store, where you'll also find the **Rarotongan Brewery (16)**, home of the Cook Islands' national beer – Cooks Lager. On the opposite side of the road is **Punanga Nui Market (17; p59)**, a great spot for trying some local food and buying a few souvenirs. A little further west beyond the market is **Avatiu Harbour (18)**, Avarua's main port, where you'll normally be able to spy a few inter-island cargo ships, some local fishing boats and sometimes the occasional luxury yacht.

AVARUA: SLEEPING, EATING & DRINKING

Avarua has most of the island's top **drinking spots** (p89) and some great **restaurants** (p85). If you're interested in basing yourself near town, check out p78 for accommodation options.

AROUND THE ISLAND

The following sights move around the island anticlockwise, starting from Avarua.

Airport

The international **airport** (Map pp52–3) on Rarotonga was officially opened in 1974 by HM Queen Elizabeth II. Previously planes had landed on a much shorter airstrip, similar to the ones you'll see on some of the outer islands, but in order to take the much larger international jets, the runway was actually built out into the lagoon. Even with the extra land space, the runway is still fairly short (Rarotongans joke that the reason all the planes land here in the middle of the night is so you can't see how short the runway is). See p174 for practical information about the airport. Behind the airport is the **National Stadium** (Map pp52–3), where many of Rarotonga's big sporting events are held.

Parliament

It might not look like much from the outside, but the **Cook Islands Parliament** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 26500), opposite the Air Rarotonga terminal, has been the seat of power in the Cook Islands for almost thirty years, and many of the most momentous decisions in the island's history have been made behind its ramshackle façade. The building was originally a hostel for New Zealander construction workers who came to help build the new airport. The offices of the prime minister and his colleagues are in the former bedrooms, with a few walls rearranged (and presumably the bunkbeds removed).

Parliament meets at various times in the year; it's usually in session from around August to January. Stop by or ring the parliament building to find out when parliament will be in session. You're welcome to watch the proceedings from the public gallery, but you'll be sitting about 3m from the prime minister, so behave yourself. Ensure you're properly dressed and don't take photos.

If you wander in when parliament is not in session, one of the staff might give you a short tour of the building.

Black Rock

Just beyond the golf course and down on the beach is **Black Rock** (Map pp52–3; Turou), where the missionary Papeiha is supposed to have swum ashore, clasping the Bible over his

head (actually, he was rowed ashore in a small boat). Traditionally, Turou was the departure point from where the spirits of the dead commenced their voyage to 'Avaiki (the afterworld). These days it's better known as one of the island's best snorkelling spots, and is often much calmer than other spots along the southern coast, which bear the brunt of the prevailing trade winds. Look out for the sign to the Rarotonga Hospital – if you follow the steep road uphill, there are great views of the island's west coast (see p65).

'Arorangi

On Rarotonga's west coast, **'Arorangi** (Map pp52–3) was the first missionary-built village and was conceived as a model village for all others on the island. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, most of Rarotonga's tribes lived in inland settlements, which were easier to defend and had better supplies of food and water. As elsewhere in the Southern Group, missionaries encouraged islanders to establish new settlements away from their old villages as part of their conversion to Christianity. It was a good way to break the islanders' spiritual links with their past, and made the destruction of *marae* and other sacred sites easier. Rarotongans have mainly lived along the coast ever since, but you can still visit a couple of the old settlements, like **Highland Paradise** (Map pp52–3; p62), which stands on an ancient village site.

The 1849 **'Arorangi CICC** (Map pp52–3) still plays an important role in village life. The missionary Papeiha, the first to preach Christianity on Rarotonga, is buried here, right in front of the church; a huge monument to him was raised by his descendants.

To the left of the church is the **Tinomana Palace** (Map pp52–3), built for the Tinomana Ariki by the British. The name of the palace is Au Maru, meaning 'Peace Brought by Christianity'. Interestingly, Tinomana, the chief who first accepted the message of Christianity, is not buried in the church graveyard, though he is honoured with a plaque in the church, which is built on land he gave to the missionaries. He later became Papeiha's father-in-law when the missionary married one of his daughters. Tinomana is buried on the hill behind 'Arorangi, near his old *marae* – perhaps indicating he had second thoughts about his adopted religion.

Rising up behind 'Arorangi is the unusual flat-topped peak of **Raemaru** (Map pp52–3). See p65 for details on the climb to the top, and check out p105 for the traditional story of how the mountain lost its peak.

There are also some interesting art galleries in 'Arorangi. **Pacific Arts** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 20200; merkens@oyster.net.ck; Ara Tapu) is a small roadside studio where artist Andi Merkens sells prints and originals of her vibrant oil paintings. The **Art Studio** (☎ 22510; ikgeorge@oyster.net.ck) is the studio shop for local artists Ian and Kay George, who specialise in fine art paintings, carvings and hand-printed textiles.

Highland Paradise

Perched high on the hillside above 'Arorangi, **Highland Paradise** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 24477) stands on the site of the old village of the Tinomana people, which they occupied for several centuries before the arrival of Christianity. After the original village was abandoned in the mid-19th century, it lay forgotten until 1983, when Raymond Pirangi, a descendant of Tinomana Ariki, set about reclaiming the site from the jungle. He now leads tours of the site: highlights include the village *marae*, the Chief's Throne, the old lookout-point and several significant rocks (including the Compass Stone, the Guilty Rocks and the

ominously named Killing Stone). The lush botanical garden also commands stunning views over the island's west coast. The two-hour tour, including lunch, costs NZ\$50 (children aged six to 12 are half-price, those under six are free), and transfers are NZ\$5.

South Coast

Fringed by a sparkling blue lagoon and backed by overhanging palm trees, the stretch of coastline along Rarotonga's southern side is unquestionably one of the most beautiful spots on the island. The lagoon is shallow, warm and crystal-clear, and the bone-white beach is nearly all sand, unlike much of the northern coastline, which consists largely of bits of smashed coral and broken rock.

The south coast not only boasts the island's best beaches, it also offers most of the top **swimming** and **snorkelling** spots. The reef is generally further out and the sea floor is relatively free from rocks and spiky coral; it's also much deeper in places, especially in the channel between the main island and the small *motu* on Muri Lagoon, where the water is always packed with all kinds of tropical fish. There are lots of good places to stop for a swim, but Tikioki Beach opposite **Fruits of Rarotonga** (Map pp52–3; 1509; Ara Tapu) is perhaps one of the best spots; another good location

is the area around Aro'a Beach. Conveniently, there are snorkel rental operations in both locations (see p68), so don't fret if you've forgotten to bring your own.

Look out for the ghostly remains of the **Sheraton resort site** (Map pp52–3; Ara Tapu) in Vaima'anga, just before the turn-off to Wigmore's Waterfall. Once planned as the first large-scale resort in the Cook Islands, and jointly financed by the government and several overseas operations (some of which turned out to be decidedly shady), the project went belly-up due to financial irregularities in the early 1990s, and it's now falling slowly into disrepair. Cook Islanders laugh it off as yet another politicians' blunder, but this eerie ruin is responsible for about half of the country's national debt. There have been several plans to revive the project, but none have yet come to fruition.

On the eastern edge of the Sheraton site, a dirt road leads inland to **Wigmore's waterfall** (Map pp52–3), a lovely little waterfall dropping into a natural swimming pool (and probably one of the most photographed places on Rarotonga). You can drive all the way up to the waterfall, but it makes a pleasant walk from the coast road and back. If you do the Cross-Island Track (p64) you'll come to the waterfall at the end of your journey – a good spot to cool off – but be prepared to be eaten alive by mosquitoes. During arid periods the waterfall can dry up to a rather disappointing trickle – the best time to visit is after a tropical downpour, when the waterfall really lives up to its name.

One other point of interest along the south coast is the picturesque **Titikaveka CICC** (Map pp52–3), which has some interesting old headstones in the graveyard. The church was built of coral slabs in 1841, hewn by hand from the reef at Tikioki and passed to the site at Titikaveka hand-to-hand in a human chain.

Muri

Muri, on the southeast side of the island, is the island's most famous beach – a broad arc of soft white sand overlooking a wide, dazzling blue lagoon, studded with four tree-covered *motu* out towards the reef.

The lagoon offers some of the best snorkelling on Rarotonga, especially in the deep water out towards the *motu* and the coral reef. The four *motu* – Taakoka, Koromiri,

Oneroa and Motutapu – are perfect for a bit of secluded sunbathing, and can be easily reached either by taking a lagoon cruise, hiring a kayak or just swimming the short distance across the lagoon. At low tide you can even wade out to Koromiri. In case you're interested, Taakoka is a volcanic islet; the other three are sand cays.

On the beach itself you'll find the **Rarotonga Sailing Club** (Map p64; ☎ 27349), which runs Sails Restaurant (p87) and organises weekend races on the lagoon. The restaurant and bar at the **Pacific Resort** (p87) are also nearby. Inland along the main road are a couple of shops and grocery stores, handy if you need to pick up drinks and snacks.

Kayaks and snorkelling gear can be hired at **Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre** (Map p64; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach), which also runs cruises across the lagoon every day except Sunday. **Reef Sub** (☎ 25837) runs boat trips around the lagoon and outside the reef in its semi-submersible vessel (see p70).

Shells & Craft (☎ 22275), a small shop by the main road in Muri, is the pet project of a retired shell collector, Terry Lambert. He often has some spectacular conches and triton shells for sale.

Arai-Te-Tonga Marae

Just before you reach Avarua, a small sign points off the road to one of the most important *marae* on the island, Arai-Te-Tonga Marae (Map pp52–3). *Marae* were the ceremonial gathering places of pre-Christian Polynesians; the *koutu*, similar in appearance, were the high courts where the *ariki*, the great chiefs of premissionary Rarotonga, held court. Tribes usually had one principal *koutu* where the *ariki* and his immediate family lived, as well as several lesser *koutu* and *marae* for lower-ranking officials.

The whole area around the Arai-Te-Tonga *marae* was a gathering place, and the remains of the *marae* and *koutu* are still here. The location is certainly impressive: backed by jagged green mountains and surrounded by thick overhanging trees, it's not hard to imagine the power such sacred sites once had for the pre-Christian islanders.

Arai-Te-Tonga has the remains of a 4m-long, oblong platform. At one end stands the investiture pillar, a square basalt column 2m high, which extends an equal distance down into the ground. You may have

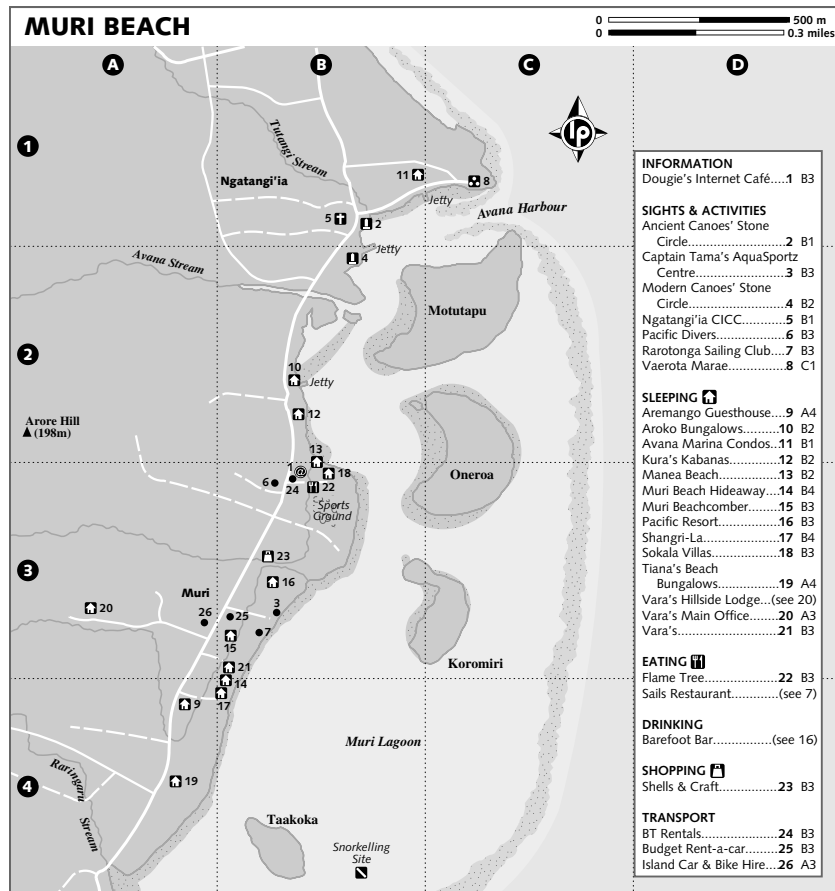
COOK ISLANDS CULTURAL VILLAGE

If you're keen to get to grips with the island's pre-Christian past, then the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (☎ 21314; www.cookislandsculturalvillage.com; Ara Metua, 'Arorangi; ☎ usually from 10am Mon, Wed & Fri) is an essential stop. You'll probably learn more about traditional Cook Islands culture in one day here than you will for the rest of your stay.

Founded in 1988 in order to promote understanding and awareness of Rarotonga's heritage, the Cultural Village has since admitted over 120,000 visitors through its gates. Daily guided tours around the village start at 10am and visit a number of traditionally built huts, with demonstrations of customary skills, including weaving, woodcarving, fire making, coconut husking, fishing, costume-making, dancing and the ancient art of 'Maori medicine'. The tour culminates in an impressive cultural show inside the Are Karioi (house of entertainment), featuring traditional music, dance, chants and legends, followed by a sumptuous feast of local food. The morning tour usually finishes around 1.30pm.

In the afternoon, the Cultural Village also offers a circle-island tour around Rarotonga, delving into the island's history, agriculture, culture and customs, as well as visiting some of its important sites. The two tours combined make an excellent introduction to Rarotonga's ancient history, and provide plenty of useful background that will come in handy throughout the rest of your stay.

The morning village tour costs NZ\$56 (NZ\$60 including transfers), including the lunch and show. The circle-island tour costs NZ\$55 including lunch, show and transfers, and ends around 4.30pm. Alternatively you can combine both tours for NZ\$85. Children aged five to 12 are half-price. Tours usually run on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but minimum numbers of people are required – ring in advance to make bookings and double-check the tour is running.



to peer through the bush to see it, but don't walk on the *marae*; it's still a sacred site.

There are other *marae* in the area – a large one on your right as you come from the Ara Tapu to the Ara Metua, and another on your right (the inland side) if you walk southeast along the Ara Metua from Arai-Te-Tonga. Sadly many of Rarotonga's other *marae* have largely disappeared, though there are still a few remains to find if you have the time and inclination.

Cross-Island Track

The trek across Rarotonga's mountainous heart, via the 413m **Te Rua Manga** (the Needle; Map pp52-3), is the most popular walk on the island. It can also be done as a shorter walk

from the northern end to near the Needle and back, rather than going all the way to the south coast. It's important that you do the walk in a north-south direction, as the chances of taking a wrong turn are far greater if you try it from the other direction.

There are several local guides who conduct tours along the Cross-Island Track, but it's possible to do by yourself – the trail is walked often and is fairly well maintained, though it can be a bit hard to follow in places. It's also very slippery, and therefore dangerous if there's been wet weather – make sure you check the weather forecast for the day you're planning to go. You'll need good, sturdy shoes, plenty of drinking water and emergency supplies of mosquito repellent.

The road to the starting point runs south from Avatiu Harbour (the Cook's Passenger Transport bus can drop you off near here – see p94). If you're driving, continue on the road through the Avatiu Valley until you reach a prominent sign that marks the point past which vehicles cannot be taken. After this point, a private vehicle road continues for about 1km.

A footpath takes off from the end of the vehicle road. It's fairly level for about 10 minutes, then drops down and crosses a small stream. Don't follow the white plastic power cable track up the valley; instead, pick up the track beside the massive boulder on the ridge on your left, after the stream crossing.

From here the track climbs steeply and steadily all the way to the Needle, about a 45-minute walk. If it wasn't for the tangled stairway of tree roots, the path would be very slippery in the wet. At the first sight of the Needle there's a convenient boulder right in the middle of the path, where you can rest and admire the view.

A little further on is a very obvious T-junction. A track to the Needle goes off to the right, but after a severe landslide in 2001 this track was closed indefinitely; Wigmore's Waterfall is a 90-minute walk to the left. Up to now you've been ascending a ridge running in a north-south direction; at this junction it intersects with another ridge, running in an east-west direction. Resist the temptation to approach or climb the Needle; two large pieces fell off it in 2001 and it would be a shame for that to happen while you were standing under it.

After about 30 minutes the track meets the Papua stream and follows it downhill, zigzagging across the stream several times. After about 45 minutes of following the stream, the track emerges into fernland. Here the track veers away from the stream to the right, passing through the ferns. Be sure to stick to the main track; there are a few places where newer, minor tracks seem to take off towards the stream, but don't take these, as they will bring you out at dangerous spots upstream from the waterfall. After about 15 minutes the main track turns back towards the stream, bringing you to the bottom of beautiful Wigmore's Waterfall. If you're hot, sweaty and muddy by this time, the pool under the fall is a real delight.

A rough dirt road comes from the south coast up to Wigmore's Waterfall. Walking down this road brings you to the coast road in about 15 minutes, passing alongside the eastern edge of the large, deserted Sheraton resort site.

You can flag down the Cooks Passenger Transport bus when you reach the coast road at the end of the track. Note, however, that on Sunday the last daytime bus departs from Avarua at midday. If you come on an organised trek across the island, hotel transfers will be provided at both ends; see p59.

Other Mountain Tracks

There are several other excellent mountain tracks on Rarotonga. Instructions for the easier ones are given here, but pick up *Rarotonga's Mountain Tracks and Plants* by Gerald McCormack and Judith Künzlé if you want to do some real mountain trekking. The Cook Islands Natural Heritage Project, publisher of the book, in concert with the Cook Islands Environment Services (Map pp56-7), upgrades and maintains Rarotonga's inland tracks. Some signs are posted, to clarify the routes, and particularly difficult spots – going up vertical rock-faces, for example – have been made safer with the help of good ropes and other safety gear (though these aren't always in the best state of repair).

If you're tackling any of Rarotonga's less-frequented trails, ask around to see if you can find anyone who's done it recently – sometimes the trails become quite overgrown and you might well need a local guide who knows the trail to show you the way.

RAEMARU

Flat-topped **Raemaru** (365m; Map pp52-3) rises directly behind 'Arorangi village on Rarotonga's west coast. This track has some of Rarotonga's easiest bush walking; the climb up the rock face on the southwest side of the summit is the only challenge, but decent safety gear makes this quite safe, if you take it easy. See p105 for the legend explaining why this mountain, unlike all the others on Rarotonga, is flat-topped.

Turn off Ara Tapu onto Akaoa Rd, about 200m south of the 'Arorangi CICC, and then turn right (south) onto the Ara Metua. There's a small road immediately on the left; park on the Ara Metua and walk up this

small road, passing a couple of houses on the hill to your right, veer to the right and then follow the road as it makes a left turn.

About 30m past this turn, find the walking track leading off to the right (yellow marker number 2), then walk uphill through a grove of avocado trees. The track doubles back and forth across the hill a couple of times as it heads uphill. Be careful, as the steeper sections can be slippery even in dry weather; they are quite hazardous when wet.

The place where you scale the rock face is about 15m high. Safety equipment has been installed on the rock face, but you must still be careful. Finally you emerge onto an open grassy area that slopes gently to the top. From the far end you can look over a valley to Maungaroa (509m) and Te Rua Manga (413m), the easily recognised peak also known as 'the Needle'. Looking back you can see along the coast from south of 'Arurangi to the airport runway in the north. The return walk takes about two to 2½ hours.

MAUNGATEA BLUFF

Maungatea (523m; Map pp52–3) is the peak behind that impressively sheer cliff-face directly overlooking Avarua. The climb brings you to the 340m bluff at the top of the cliff face, not to the peak of the mountain, which is very difficult to reach and affords no great view once you get there. The bluff, on the other hand, offers a great view over Avarua and the north coast. The track is muddy and extremely slippery when wet; it begins from the Ara Metua, beside the Tauvae Store. The return walk takes three to four hours.

TE KO'U

More or less in the centre of the island, **Te Ko'u** (588m; Map pp52–3) has a volcanic crater at the top that you can actually walk around. The walk offers spectacular views of Rarotonga's inland mountains and of the south coast. It starts off with an easy one-hour walk through the Takuva'ine Valley behind Avarua, followed by a more challenging 1½-hour, steep climb up the mountain, which is treacherous when wet. The return walk takes about five hours.

'IKURANGI

The ascent of **'Ikurangi** (485m; Map pp52–3) is a vigorous climb to a spectacular view of the north coast, Avarua and the Takuva'ine

Valley. It's easier than the Te Ko'u walk, but not much. The track starts from the Ara Metua just to the east of Arai-Te-Tonga and takes about four hours return – a half-hour walk through the Tupapa Valley along the Tupapa Stream, then a 1½-hour ascent of the mountain. A couple of small rock faces are encountered on the way to the summit.

Hikurangi, the sacred mountain of the Ngati Porou tribe on New Zealand's East Coast, was named in honour of this peak when the Ngati Porou's ancestors arrived from Rarotonga in the 14th century.

TE MANGA

Rarotonga's highest mountain, **Te Manga** (653m; Map pp52–3), is the most difficult to scale on the island – the long, strenuous climb has several sections that are very tough and very steep, and should only be considered by experienced hikers. Starting at the same place as the 'Ikurangi walk, the return walk to Te Manga takes about six hours, with a one-hour walk through the valley following Tupapa Stream, followed by a two-hour ascent up the mountain.

HOSPITAL HILL

By far the easiest way to find a good viewpoint is to drive up to Hospital Hill (Map pp52–3), just behind the golf course. You can park in the hospital car park and continue on foot to the top. It's a fairly easy hike, although steep in places; the walk up takes about 15 minutes, but the panoramic views over the airport, inland valleys and western coast are worth the effort. The rich colours of the lagoon, the wide vista of ocean stretching off into the distance and the fresh breezes all make a refreshing change from the hustle and heat of the lowlands below.

VALLEY WALKS

There's no getting around it – the mountain walks on Rarotonga are hard work. If you want something easier, consider the tranquil valley walks, such as the stroll along the **Avana stream** (Map pp52–3) from Ngatangi'ia. You can drive quite a distance up the road beside the stream and then follow the trail, repeatedly crossing the stream until you reach a pleasant picnic spot at the water intake. A similar walk follows the **Turangi stream** (Map pp52–3) a little north of Ngatangi'ia. **Matavera stream** (Map pp52–3), further north,

makes another good walk. As always, be prepared for mosquitoes.

Avatiu Valley (Map pp52–3), inland from Avatiu Harbour, and **Takuva'ine Valley** (Map pp52–3), behind Avarua, are also good for leisurely walks.

Takitumu Conservation Area

In the southeast of the island, the 155-hectare **Takitumu Conservation Area** (☎ 29906; kakerori@tca.co.ck), with thickly forested hills, is home to the *kakerori* (Rarotongan flycatcher; see p40), one of the island's few endemic birds. As recently as the early 1990s, the *kakerori* was hovering on the brink of extinction thanks to the egg-eating antics of the black rat (also known as the ship's rat), which arrived with the first European ships and took a devastating toll on many of the island's native species. In 1996 the landowners recognised that the survival of the *kakerori* depended on conservation of this area, so they set it aside as a conservation reserve. Happily the *kakerori* population has since recovered dramatically (there's now even a back-up breeding programme over on the island of 'Atiu, which has somehow remained free of the ship's rat). Several tracks wind their way through the conservation area, offer-

ing fabulous views across the valleys and wooded hills of southern Rarotonga. If you want to catch sight of a *kakerori*, the best idea is to take a guided tour with the staff of the Conservation Area (see p59 for further details). The price of the tour goes towards further conservation work.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking

While the dazzling coastline of Rarotonga is undoubtedly the main attraction, it's crucial that you take the time to explore the island's mountainous interior. Choked in thick forest, drooping vines and vast jungle, the island's centre is virtually deserted and can only be reached by walking trails; you don't have to go very far before the outside world starts to feel a long, long way away.

If there's one walk everyone should try to do, even if you're only on the island for a short time, it's the stunning **Cross-Island Track** (see p64), which you can either do as part of a guided tour or on your own. The guides only go in fine weather; if you're on the island for just a couple of days and you're planning on doing a cross-island walk, it's sensible to do it as soon as you can after you arrive. Guaranteed – if you plan to do it on your last day, it'll be raining.

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Beside Motutapu, the northernmost of the four Muri Lagoon *motu*, is the large reef passage into **Avana Harbour** (sometimes called Ngatangi'ia Harbour). It's a popular mooring spot for visiting yachts and small fishing boats, but the harbour is most historically significant as the departure point for the Maori canoes that set off in the 14th century to settle New Zealand – the so-called 'Great Migration'.

In the park opposite the **Ngatangi'ia CICC** (Map p64), a circle of seven stones with a historical plaque commemorates seven of the canoes that completed the journey: *Takitumu*, *Tokomaru*, *Kurahaupo*, *Aotea*, *Tainui*, *Te Arawa* and *Mataatua*. Some of these canoes originated on Rarotonga, some travelled from other islands, but they all stopped here to receive a blessing before setting out for Aotearoa. The canoes that left from Avana Harbour carried the ancestors of the present-day New Zealand Maori tribes.

On the point of land to your left as you gaze out through the harbour passage is **Vaerota Marae** (Map p64). On this large, well-preserved *marae*, the mariners were given their blessing for the journey and human sacrifices were made to the gods. Vaerota, the traditional *marae* of the Kainuku Ariki, is just past Avana Marina Condos. A little further south, near the public toilets, the **Modern Canoes' Stone Circle** (Map p64) commemorates the arrival of many traditional Polynesian canoes here during the 6th Festival of Pacific Arts in 1992.

The so-called 'Great Migration' refers to a version of the story in which all canoes travelled together, in AD 1350. There's not much archaeological evidence to support the theory, but it makes a good story. You'll see references to the Great Migration throughout the Cook Islands (and New Zealand).

Most of the other mountain walks are hard going, with some difficult uphill scrambles and a few treacherous sections. You'll also have to come prepared to hack your way through the dense bush, as many of the tracks are rarely cleared.

Rarotonga has no dangerous wild animals, snakes or poisonous insects, but the valleys and bushy inland areas do have plenty of very bloodthirsty mosquitoes, so bring repellent. The real danger is in getting lost – Rarotonga may be small, but the jungle cover is very thick and it can be difficult to get your bearings if you lose your way.

There's no need to be paranoid, but you'd be wise to take sensible precautions. The mountain tracks are no walk in the park – there have been instances of trappers getting lost in the mountains, and if you slip and injure yourself it could be a very long time before anyone finds you. Make sure you let someone know where you're going and when you expect to return, and don't go alone.

The best guide to the island's many walking tracks is the trusty *Rarotonga's Mountain Tracks and Plants*, written by Gerald McCormack and Judith Künzle. The same authors have also published a separate booklet, *Rarotonga's Cross-Island Walk*, covering the island's most popular hiking trail. Both booklets combine detailed route guides with sketches and information on flora and fauna you might spy along the way.

Shorts are cool and easy for walking, but you may want to wear some sort of leg or ankle protection, as you can easily get pretty scratched up. Wear adequate walking shoes or boots, not thongs or sandals, as the trails can be challenging. They can also be quite muddy and slippery, particularly after rain; don't underestimate the danger of this when you're on a steep incline. Carry plenty of drinking water with you; hiking on Rarotonga can be thirsty work.

Pa's Mountain Walk (☎ 21079; tours adult/child NZ\$65/35) offers the best-known guided tour along the cross-island track. It's run by Pa Teuraa – a local herbalist, amateur botanist and traditional healer (and undoubtedly the man with the most impressive dreadlocks on the island). Pa's cross-island walk usually runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (weather permitting) and includes an introduction to the island's flora and fauna

and the medicinal uses of many plants. Pa also conducts less strenuous nature walks on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The **Takitumu Conservation Area** (Map pp56-7; TCA; ☎ 29906; kakerori@tca.co.ck; Ara Tapu, Avarua) is a private forest reserve in Rarotonga's southeast corner. There are regular guided tours (phone ahead to find out when the next one is running), and you can organise bird-watching tours by prior arrangement. A four-hour tour costs NZ\$50/30 for adults/children.

Tours include the story of the *kakerori*, an introduction to the traditional uses of many native plants, light lunch and transfers – and you're almost guaranteed to see a *kakerori*. Ian Karika at the TCA might be able to help you arrange guides for other walks on Rarotonga as well.

Snorkelling

Rarotonga's spectacular scenery is impressive enough above the water, but it's below the waves that things really get interesting. The lagoon around the entire island is fantastic for snorkelling and swimming – it's gin-clear, bath-warm and packed with technical fish and bright coral.

Much of the lagoon is fairly shallow – in fact in many places you can wade out all the way to the reef at low tide – but the best snorkelling is found along the island's southern side, especially around **Muri Lagoon, Aro'a Beach** and **Black Rock**. Many of these areas are protected by *ra'ui* (traditional bans on fishing for the purpose of conservation), and the beneficial effect of these bans on the lagoon's marine life is clear to see.

RAROTONGA'S TOP FIVE SNORKELLING SPOTS

- The area around the Rarotongan Beach Resort (p84)
- Tikioki Beach (p62) opposite Fruits of Rarotonga
- The area around Aro'a Beach opposite the Dive Centre (opposite)
- The area around Black Rock (p61) near the golf course
- The deepwater channels in Muri Lagoon (p63), especially around the *motu*

Snorkelling gear is available for hire at lots of places around the island (some hotels provide snorkels, fins and reef shoes free for guests' use, or sometimes for a small charge). The best equipment is usually available from the island's dive shops; **Dive Centre** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20238; www.thedivecentre-rarotonga.com; Aro'a Beach), **Dive Rarotonga** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21873; www.dive rarotonga.com; Arorangi) and **Pacific Divers** (Map p64; ☎ 22450; www.pacificdivers.co.ck; Muri Beach) all have gear to hire or buy (NZ\$5 to NZ\$15). All diving operators take snorkellers along on their diving trips outside the reef if there's room on the boat, and sometimes run dedicated snorkelling trips. The cost is usually around NZ\$20, equipment included.

Reef to See (☎ 22212; reef2see@oyster.net.ck) offers twice-daily snorkelling trips at 9am and 2pm (NZ\$50), taking snorkellers to view the marine life outside the reef. If you're into snorkelling, it's well worth taking at least one trip outside the reef – you'll get to see a much larger range of fish, and you might even glimpse the odd turtle or shark.

The **Dive Shop Avarua** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 24496; Mana Ct, Avarua) sells a range of high-quality fins, masks and snorkels; prices start at around NZ\$35. **Captain Tama's AquaSport Centre** (Map p64; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach) also has snorkelling gear for hire.

Diving

Diving is fantastic outside the reef, especially around the deepwater passages along the southern side. There are canyons, caves, tunnels and wrecks to explore, as well as impressive walls of colourful coral. Once you get outside the lagoon, the island drops off at a dizzying rate down to a depth of around 4000m (roughly half the height of Everest), although most diving is done at rather more modest depths of 3m to 30m. Visibility is generally very good – seldom less than 30m, and often 30m to 60m (100ft to 200ft).

In addition to the excellent visibility and easily accessible diving spots, Rarotonga has several well-preserved shipwrecks (including the SS *Maitai* on the northern shore) that offer excellent **wreck-diving**. Other well-known diving spots include the area around Black Rock; Sandriver and Matavera Wall on the island's east side, accessible from Ngatangia Harbour; and the Avaavaroa, Papua and Rutaki passages, where you'll often see sharks and eagle rays.

Rarotonga has four accredited diving operators:

Cook Island Divers (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22483; www.cookislandsdivers.com; Arorangi)

Dive Centre (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20238; www.thedivecentre-rarotonga.com; Aroa Beach)

Dive Rarotonga (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21873; www.dive rarotonga.com; Arorangi)

Pacific Divers (Map p64; ☎ 22450; www.pacificdivers.co.ck; Muri Beach)

All diving operators offer boat trips every morning and afternoon for accredited divers, with a maximum of six to eight guests per boat. Dives cost around NZ\$70 to NZ\$75 including gear, with discounts for multiple dives or if you have your own equipment. The choice of the dive sites is dependent on sea and weather conditions, and you should ask operators about the areas they usually dive: some stick almost entirely to the north coast, while others specialise in the spectacular passages along the southern side of the island. Also ask about night dives.

Diving courses leading to internationally recognised PADI or NAUI qualifications are available at all of Rarotonga's dive shops – prices start at around NZ\$350 for the three to four day PADI Open Water course, which qualifies you to dive anywhere in the world. Introductory dives and more advanced courses are also available, and if you've already done your introductory dives, you can complete your certificate here (remember to bring the relevant paperwork).

Deep-Sea Fishing

Deep-sea fishing is a popular pastime in the Cook Islands, though these days traditional outrigger canoes have given way to purpose-built sport boats and industrial-strength fishing rods. With the steep drop-off outside the reef, it's only a short distance to the best fishing grounds – within two minutes of leaving the dock you're already in deep water and can start fishing. Some of the large species you might get to tackle in the Cook Islands include *mahi mahi* and tuna (from October to May), wahoo and barracuda (April to October) and sailfish and marlin (November to March).

There are plenty of boats that can take you fishing, but it usually pays to go with a reputable operator – they know all the best

fishing spots and you'll get more fishing for your money. Prices vary widely so it pays to compare; also ask if lunch is included.

In particular, ask about the policy on keeping your fish before you set out to sea. On some boats the larger fish are divided among the passengers, but on others the boat operators keep the fish to sell to restaurants, particularly ones over 7kg. This can be a cause of considerable tension if you haven't worked it out beforehand!

Most fishing trips are from 4½ to five hours, and prices range from NZ\$80 to NZ\$150 per person. All of the following operators have full safety gear, and most will happily offer whale-watching trips as an added extra in season.

Akura Charters (☎ 54355; fish@akura.co.ck) Game-fishing specialists, with two twin-engined 26ft sport-fishing vessels.

Fisher's Fishin' Tourz (☎ 23356, cellphone ☎ 55154; bafisher@oyster.net.ck) Fishing trips aboard a 26ft Polynesian-style catamaran.

Hook Fishing Charters (☎ 54475; hookfish@pacificmotors.co.ck) Motorised cruiser, 8.5m long.

Pacific Marine Charters (☎ 21237; www.pacificmarinecharters.co.ck) Thirty-one-foot motorised sport fishing boat, christened the 'Reel Time' and run by Kiwi skipper Wayne Barclay.

Seafari Charters (☎ 20328, cellphone ☎ 55096; www.seafari.co.ck) Thirty-four-foot motorised cruiser, run by experienced local skipper George Marsters.

The **Cook Islands Game Fishing Club** – see p91 – is a popular hang-out for fishing folk, and it's also a good spot where you can arrange fishing trips.

Lagoon Cruises

Aitutaki isn't the only place in the Cook Islands where you can indulge in a memorable lagoon cruise.

Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre (Map p64; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach) operates glass-bottom boat tours (adults/children NZ\$60/35), including snorkelling, a stop at a small demonstration pearl farm and a barbecue lunch on Koromiri. The tours last from 11am to about 3pm and go every day except Sunday. Bookings are essential.

The **Pacific Resort** (Map p64; ☎ 20427; Muri Beach) also offers glass-bottom boat cruises (with/without lunch NZ\$45/25) in its thatched vessel the *Moana Roa*, including

snorkelling, fish feeding and a truly delicious barbecue lunch. There are discounted rates for children. The boat's also available for charter in the afternoons, but it'll cost NZ\$250 for a maximum of 20 people – so you'll need to bring some friends along.

The semi-submersible **Reef Sub** (☎ 25837) viewing vessel goes beyond the reef, enabling you to explore the ocean depths without having to get wet (very Jules Verne); with a bit of luck, you'll have close-up views of coral, shipwrecks, fish, turtles and even the occasional shark. Ninety-minute cruises depart twice daily at 10am and 2pm from Avatiu Harbour (adults/children NZ\$65/35). Whale-watching trips are available in season (July to October).

Sailing Trips & Boat Cruises

Getting out on the ocean waves is a fabulous way to appreciate Rarotonga's beautiful scenery. The **Rarotonga Sailing Club** (☎ 27349; sails@murilagoon.co.ck; Muri Beach) should be the first stop for budding Ellen Macarthurs on Rarotonga. The club rents kayaks (NZ\$5/10 for one/three hours) and small sailing boats (NZ\$35/100 for one/three hours).

If you fancy going further afield, **Paradise Sailing** (☎ 21096, cellphone ☎ 55225; www.paradise-sailing.co.ck) offers afternoon snorkelling trips and cruises aboard a beautiful 34ft trimaran on Rarotonga. The club rents kayaks (NZ\$5/10 for one/three hours), as well as private sunset cruises, overnight trips and charters to the outer islands.

Pacific Expeditions (☎ 23513, cellphone ☎ 52400; www.pacific-expeditions.com) offers private ocean charters aboard the research vessel *Bounty Bay*, skippered by 'Captain G', otherwise known as Graham Wragg, one of the island's most respected naturalists. One of its regular trips is an eco-research expedition to the protected island of Takutea; the boat also makes (occasional) trips to the more remote Cook Islands, including Palmerston, Suwarrow and Manuae.

Surfing

Surfing on Rarotonga is for hardcore boarders only – reef-break rides tend to be short, thrilling and, if you get them wrong, agonisingly painful. You'll sometimes see a scattering of surfers trying their luck on the waves at Avarua (in front of the traffic circle), at Avana Harbour, Matavera (near the school), Black Rock and near the airport.

MATU RORI

Sea cucumbers (*bêches-de-mer*) are an Asian delicacy and many Rarotongans also find them delicious. Called *rori* in Maori, the creature's innards look rather like spaghetti. *Matu rori* (fat rori) are best cooked with butter, garlic and spices, but the locals are equally happy to eat them raw. It's not uncommon to see someone pick one up in the lagoon, tear the skin open, squeeze the guts out as if from a tube of toothpaste, toss the black skin away and eat the 'spaghetti' on the spot. Surprisingly, the animal survives – a couple of weeks later, the same animal can yield the same harvest of 'spaghetti' all over again.

Niki's Surf Shop (Map pp52-3; ☎ 26240; www.cookislandsurf.co.ck; Ara Tapu) sells surfing supplies (mostly après-surf gear) and distributes wisdom about Rarotonga's best surfing spots. It's unlikely you'll find surfboards for sale or rent on Rarotonga, so if you're determined to surf, bring your own – and check your travel-insurance policy, dude.

Other Sports

Unsurprisingly, Muri Lagoon is the best place for watersports, including windsurfing, sailing and kayaking, and of course swimming.

KAYAKING & WINDSURFING

Kayaks are readily available for hire on Muri Lagoon, and many hotels provide them for guests' use. They're easy to handle, a lot of fun and by far the quickest way to get out to the deserted *motu* on Muri Lagoon.

Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre (Map p64; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach) is beside the Rarotonga Sailing Club and rents kayaks (singles/doubles NZ\$7/10 per hour) and windsurfers (NZ\$25 per hour), and also gives windsurfing lessons (NZ\$35).

Pacific Resort (Map p64; ☎ 20427; Muri Beach) hires kayaks (singles/doubles NZ\$10/15 per hour) and windsurfers (NZ\$25 per hour). Short windsurfing lessons are free.

VAKA RACING

This traditional sport – in which contestants (either solo or in teams) race against each other in huge ocean-going canoes – is a sport

that had almost died out in the Cooks a few years ago, but it's undergoing a resurgence in popularity. There are now many teams on the island, although the boats they race are rather different these days – the old wooden-hulled canoes have been replaced by flashy fibreglass models, which you'll see stacked up in the boathouse above Avatiu Harbour. If you're interested in having a go, contact the **CICA** (Cook Islands Canoeing Association; www.cookislandscanoeing.com) for further information.

TENNIS & SQUASH

There are tennis courts and rental gear available at the **Edgewater Resort** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25435) and the **Rarotongan Beach Resort** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25800). Many public tennis courts dotted around the island can be used for free if you have your own gear. The Edgewater also has squash courts to rent, or you could use the **Rarotongan Squash Club** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21056, 29180), near St Joseph's Catholic Cathedral in Avarua.

GOLF

Rarotonga's nine-hole **golf course** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20621; http://rarotonga.nzgolfclub.net; ⌚ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, members only Sat) welcomes well-dressed visitors – no Jandals (thongs/flip-flops) or singlets allowed. Green fees are NZ\$15 a round, and you can hire a full set of golf clubs for NZ\$20. If you need to drown your sorrows at the end of your round, the bar here is open from 8am on weekdays.

HORSE RIDING

Horse-riding tours are offered by **Aroa Pony Trek** (☎ 21415; adult/child NZ\$50/30; ⌚ morning & afternoon Mon-Fri), just inland from Kaena Restaurant. The tours trot along the beach, inland up to Wigmore's Waterfall for a swim, then back again, and usually last around 2½ hours. Bookings are essential.

Scenic Flights

The best way to appreciate Rarotonga's dramatic landscape is from the air. The national airline **Air Rarotonga** (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) offers 20-minute scenic flights (adults/children NZ\$65/35) in tiny four-seater Cessna planes, complete with on-board commentary. Flights take place from 8.30am to 4pm daily and bookings can usually be made on the day of the flight. You'll need a minimum of two passengers, but no

WHALE-WATCHING

Humpback whales visit the Cook Islands every year during the austral winter, from July to October, on their way to the colder waters of Antarctica. The traditional name for any large whale is *to'ora*. You'll often be able to see them just outside the reef, and they usually have young calves in tow. The warm waters tend to make the whales more playful, and it's not uncommon to see them breaching the surface of the water before slamming back down with an almighty splash – not for any particular purpose, but just because it seems to be great fun.

The **Cook Islands Whale Education Centre** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21666; www.whaleresearch.org; Ara Metua, Atupa), on the back road west of Avarua, has plenty of information about whales, including the best time to see them. The **Reef Sub** (p70) and some **seaboard charters** in Avarua (p70) run whale-watching excursions in season. If you're really lucky, you might even be able to take a trip with a local diving operator and swim right alongside the whales – a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience.

more than three (there are only four seats on the plane).

If you really want to feel the wind in your hair, then **Microflight Adventures** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25317, cellphone ☎ 55311; Hangar Café) offers tandem microlight flights (NZ\$145) with a qualified instructor. Needless to say, you'll need a decent standard of fitness (no pacemakers, please) and a head for heights. If you really get the bug, flying courses are also available.

Alternatively, you could get a free aerial view of Rarotonga by just catching a plane to one of the outer islands. The flights normally skirt around the island's coastline, and the planes are so tiny everyone is guaranteed a window seat.

RAROTONGA FOR CHILDREN

The Cook Islands is a popular destination for family travellers, and there are plenty of things on the main island to keep the young whippersnappers entertained. The top attraction is undoubtedly the island's fabulous **lagoon**, which is packed with interesting fish and marine life and provides fantastic snorkelling and swimming (the water's also calm and fairly shallow in most places, which means it's quite safe for even young swimmers). See p68 for some of the top snorkelling spots to explore.

Muri Beach is the best spot for waterbabies – and while the kids hit the lagoon, grown-ups could sit back with a cool cocktail at the **Barefoot Bar** (Map p64; p91) or **Sails Restaurant** (Map p64; p87). The **Rarotonga Sailing Club** (Map p64; p63) and **Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre** (Map p64; p69) hire out kayaks, windsurfers, small sailing boats

and snorkelling gear, but if you'd rather let someone else take the strain, jump aboard one of the **boat cruises** (p70) operating on Muri Lagoon. **Captain Tama's** offers glass-bottom boat tours around the lagoon and includes snorkelling stops and a barbecue lunch, while the **Reef Sub** (p70) ventures out beyond the reef in search of some of the island's more unusual marine life. From July to October, local tour operators and fishing boats offer once-in-a-lifetime **whale-watching trips** (above) to see humpback whales on their way to the South Pole.

A **circle-island tour** (see p77) is a great way to introduce kids to Rarotonga's fascinating history and culture. **Raro Mountain Safari Tours** (p77) offers excellent tours of most of the island's main sites in jungle-themed jeeps, but the tour provided by the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (p62) is arguably more educational and just as entertaining. You could combine the tour with a morning visit to the village itself, which includes a cultural show, an introduction to various traditional Cook Islands skills, and a slap-up island buffet.

For a more environmentally themed outing, head for the **Takitumu Conservation Area** (p67), where kids will have plenty of opportunity to learn about the island's rich flora and fauna and the traditional uses of native plants. If you're lucky, you might even catch sight of the reclusive *kakerori*, one of the rarest birds in the whole South Pacific. For horse-lovers, **Aroa Pony Trek** (p71) offers tours along the south coast en route to Wigmore's Waterfall.

(Continued on page 77)

(Continued from page 72)

A visit to an **island night** (p87) is also absolutely essential. Kids will love the sound and spectacle of traditional Cook Islands drumming and dancing, and you might even get a spot of fire-juggling and acrobatics thrown in for good measure. Don't be surprised if you find yourselves dragged into the action, however – no self-respecting child could possibly pass up the chance to humiliate their parents in front of a group of total strangers, so make sure you bring your dancing shoes.

Many of the island's smaller accommodation places prefer not to take children under twelve, so most families either end up renting a house or staying at one of the island's two large resorts, both of which are well set up for kids. The **Rarotongan Beach Resort** (p84) is probably the best for families – there's a babysitting service and an onsite kids' club that runs organised activities from Monday to Saturday. For younger kids, there's a children's activity centre at **Kids 'N Action** (p165) near the airport. Piri's gravity-defying show is also great for kids (p90).

TOURS

There are loads of good tours available on Rarotonga, each focussing on a slightly different aspect of the island. Some specialise in the island's history and culture, while others concentrate more on its rich natural heritage. A round-the-island tour should be on everyone's itinerary; it's a great way to get to know the island, especially if you're only here for a few days.

Ariki Art Tours (☎ 23779) offers an introduction to the lively Cook Islands art scene, in the company of working artist Te Aturangi Nepia-Clamp. You'll get to see the work of some of the island's main artists, and might even get to meet some of them too. Tours run on Monday to Saturday mornings and cost NZ\$65.

Cook Islands Cultural Village (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21314; www.cookislandsculturalvillage.com; Ara Metua) The Cultural Village offers one of the best circle-island tours, kicking off with an island-style buffet and cultural show before heading off to explore the island's *marae* and historical sites. Tours take place on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and cost NZ\$55. You can combine the circle-island tour with a visit to the village itself.

Raro Eco Tours (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26270, cellphone ☎ 54555; raroeco-tours@oyster.net.ck) Raro Eco Tours offers two unusual eco-tours exploring Rarotonga's natural

history and rich flora and fauna. The first tour travels along the Ara Metua in an air-conditioned minibus, stopping for explanations of local plants and historical sites (some of which you won't visit on other tours), before concluding with a demonstration of 'Maori medicine' (NZ\$50). The second tour travels up the lush Avana valley by bike and kayak (NZ\$35). It's recommended you dress for action on this tour – you'll probably get rather wet and muddy. Lunch is included on both tours and they run Monday to Saturday.

Raro Mountain Safari Tours (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23629; www.rarosafaritours.co.ck; opposite Punanga Nui Market) Safari Tours runs three-hour expeditions (adults/children NZ\$60/30) in custom-built jeeps that get right off the beaten track, exploring the Ara Metua, Arai-Te-Tonga *marae* and the island's rugged mountains and inland valleys. Tours run Monday to Friday at 9am and 1.30pm, at noon on Sunday and on Saturday by prior arrangement.

Raro Tours (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25325; coaches@rarotours.co.ck; Rarotonga international airport) This is another good option for island tours, especially if you like your history delivered in a bit of air-conditioned comfort. There are three tours available. The 3½-hour circle-island tour (NZ\$45) is available from Monday to Friday; an arts and crafts tour (NZ\$35) and a 'green-fingers' tour of the island's gardens (NZ\$35) are also available if there are sufficient numbers.

Tangaroa 4x4 Adventures (☎ 22200; Ara Tapu, Vaima'anga) runs a whistlestop tour of lots of the island's main attractions, including the inland road, Avana Harbour, eastern heights, *marae*, library, power station and even the Rarotongan prison. It also includes trips to a local carver and an underground *umu* (traditional oven). The three-hour tours run from Monday to Saturday and on Sunday afternoon. The cost is NZ\$60/30 for adults/children.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Rarotonga's annual calendar is packed with festivals and special events. The main highlight is always the **Constitution Celebrations** (Te Maeve Nui) in late July/August, when the island turns out in force to celebrate the island's declaration of independence from New Zealand. There's usually a large float parade, followed by a week of song, dance, sports and general merry-making; Cook Islanders often return from overseas to join in the fun, and accommodation can be extremely tough to come by.

Other events to look out for include the **Dancer of the Year** competition in April, when the island's best young booty-shakers compete for the coveted title. There are separate competitions for men and women, and it's a great opportunity to check out some traditional music, costume and dance. **Gospel Day**

Celebrations are held on 26 July to commemorate the arrival of Christianity in the Cooks, and usually feature plenty of singing and dancing, as well as open-air performances of Bible stories. **Tiare Week** in November is another great time to visit; the island's shops, bars and restaurants are festooned with colourful flowers and there's a beauty pageant to select 'Miss Tiare' for the next year.

Unsurprisingly, there are also loads of sporting events held on Rarotonga throughout the year. Rugby, athletics, soccer and cricket tournaments are ten-a-penny, but there's also a **triathlon** held around Anzac Day in April and a gruelling **Round Rarotonga Road Race** in October. A couple of intriguing new events have also recently booked their place in the calendar, including a **String Band** contest in June, a **Fire Knife** competition in July and the hugely popular **Vaka Eiva canoe races** in November.

SLEEPING

Rarotonga has a wide variety of places to stay in every budget range. It also has an official policy that every arriving visitor should be booked into a place to stay before arriving on the island, although it's treated more as a formality than a strict rule. See p160 for details.

Most of the places to stay on Rarotonga have some sort of cooking facilities where guests can prepare their own food. The large resorts and a few other hotels don't have kitchens in the rooms, so eating out will be an extra expense if you stay at one of these.

If you're looking for the most beautiful beaches on the island, choose accommodation on Muri Beach, or along the southern side of the island. The beaches along the southern and western sides of the island are all good for swimming, but not those on the northern and northeastern sides, where the reef is too close to shore, making the beaches rocky and the lagoon too narrow for swimming. If you want to see the sunset from your hotel, then west is best (of course).

A 12.5% Value Added Tax (VAT) is added onto virtually every economic transaction in the Cook Islands, including the price of accommodation; all prices given here include VAT. Most places provide free airport pick-up, and have laundry facilities available for guests.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Rarotonga Backpackers (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21590; www.rarotongabackpackers.com; hillside dm NZ\$20, s NZ\$35-45, tw NZ\$44-48, hillside bungalows NZ\$69-81, beachfront s NZ\$45, d NZ\$55-65, house NZ\$110-120; 📍 📺) If you're looking for funky accommodation on Rarotonga at a knock-down price, look no further than this fab new hostel nestled in the hills beneath Raemaru. Split over several levels and lovingly built using stained timber and wooden decking, it looks a little like Tarzan's treehouse transplanted to Rarotonga. There's a selection of dorms and private rooms, all set around a central pool, as well as several self-contained units with private verandas overlooking the island's west coast. On the top level there's a communal kitchen and TV lounge with its own hand-painted South Seas mural. And as if that's not enough, they've just opened up a second outpost down on the beach in 'Aorangi, with a main house and a couple of sumptuous beachfront bungalows. As close to boutique as a backpacker's gets.

Many of these places have their own websites, including pictures of the rooms and grounds, and information on specials. Check out www.ck and www.yellowpages.co.ck for listings.

Budget

Rarotonga has plenty of budget accommodation, but the standard can vary widely from place to place. All offer kitchen facilities for guests' use, and there are often discounts if you book for a week or longer. Most are within easy reach of the main coastal road.

AVARUA & AROUND

These places are within a long walk, or a short ride, of town.

Tiare Village Hostel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23466; www.tiarevillage.co.ck; dm NZ\$20, s/d chalets NZ\$25/44, poolside units NZ\$70; 📍 📺) Tucked away off the inland road near the airport, about 3km from Avarua, this hostel is a long-standing favourite for budget travellers. Inside the large main house, the small dorms share a kitchen, bathroom and lounge area; outside there are three self-contained (and rather

pokey) A-frame chalets and several poolside units. Luxury it ain't – the décor's showing its age and some of the rooms are decidedly dingy – but there's usually a lively atmosphere (especially on Friday nights) and the owners are full of local info. Bring coils (for mosquitos) and earplugs (for roosters).

Ariana Bungalows & Hostel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20521; relax@ariana.co.ck; dm NZ\$18, s/d NZ\$30/40, 1-3-person bungalows NZ\$60-65; 📍) An excellent option if you're working to a tight budget, Ariana Bungalows offers several kinds of accommodation, from bog-standard dorm beds to pleasant self-contained bungalows, all centred on a decent-sized swimming pool and a leafy tropical garden. There's a small onsite shop for groceries and beer, and barbecues are held most Sundays. As with most hostels, it could do with some sprucing up, but most backpackers will have seen far worse. The hostel's about 300m inland from the coast road, 3km east of Avarua, so you'll probably need a scooter.

'ARORANGI & WEST COAST

Etu Bungalows (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25588; www.etu.bungalows.com; bungalows NZ\$90) Peacefully positioned on the island's sunset side, these lovely free-standing garden bungalows are a super option if you're on a tight budget. Each of the units is identical, with a roomy open-plan interior, high ceilings and plenty of light; each also has a private trellised porch and a small box-shaped bathroom. You won't get better value for your bucks anywhere on the island – guests are even encouraged to help themselves to fruit from the surrounding garden.

Backpackers International Hostel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21847; www.backpackersinternational.com; dm/s/d NZ\$18/30/40) Away from the hustle and bustle of the main road, this venerable backpackers has undergone a recent facelift and has lost much of its old cell-block feeling, though it's still a touch institutional. The rooms are plain and boxy, but comfortable enough; the ones upstairs are lighter but noisier. There's a big shared kitchen, a rooftop sundeck, and indoor and outdoor lounge areas. There's also a large eight-bed dorm, but you'll need enough people to fill it. The island buffet (NZ\$20/25 for guests/nonguests) has returned due to popular demand, and the Friday Night Life tour is as lively as ever. Discounts are available for longer stays.

Are Renga Motel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20050; www.arerenga.com; dm/d NZ\$30/80) This shabby old hostel is in dire need of a makeover. The setting is lovely, snuggled in a lush garden setting filled with coconut palms and fruit trees; but the accommodation leaves much to be desired. The basic Gardenia rooms are arranged along a central corridor in the main lodge, which means noise from adjacent rooms can be a real problem; the Bougainvillea rooms are arranged in a separate block of self-contained apartments, some with their own private veranda, and are probably the better deal.

Maria's Backpackers (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21180; dm/d NZ\$20/30) This is a backpackers firmly from the old school – short on luxury but strong on price. Behind the family home of Exham and Maria Wichman are several self-contained rooms in a dingy old lodge building; there are also a few bedrooms inside the main house, where you'll essentially be part of the family. All the rooms are pretty rudimentary (peeling paint and battered pots and pans included), but at this price it's hard to argue. Exham is one of the island's most-respected craftsmen; though semiretired, he'll probably still be glad to show you around his workshop.

SOUTH COAST

Rau's Guesthouse (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22916; www.rauguesthouse.co.ck; s/d NZ\$47/58; 📍) This newly opened hostel is more a homestay than a traditional backpacker's. If you're looking for all-night parties, then you should probably head elsewhere, but if you're just after clean, affordable rooms in a quiet guesthouse, then Rau's is a good choice. All the single and double rooms inside the single-storey main house share a spotlessly clean kitchen and lounge area; there's also a lovely beach just across the main road.

Maiana Guest House (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20438; www.maianaguesthouse.co.ck; dm/s/tw/d/tr NZ\$22/35/42/50/60, bungalow NZ\$170) A friendly and popular hostel opposite Turoa Beach (one of the island's best snorkelling spots). The rooms are spartan and a touch scruffy in places, but the kitchen, lounge and dining room are well kitted-out and the sun-lounge chairs outside are a bonus. The guesthouse's friendly owners, Ina and Mano, also own a lovely self-contained bungalow just across the road.

MURI BEACH & EAST COAST

Vara's (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23156; www.varas.co.ck; dm NZ\$25, s NZ\$40, double NZ\$55-80, unit NZ\$120-140) Anyone who's spent more than a few days on Rarotonga will have heard of Vara's (in)famous beach house. Perched right on the edge of Muri Beach, Vara's has acquired a reputation for overcrowding, late-night revelry and lacklustre management; party animals will be right at home, but those seeking a spot of South Seas tranquillity should definitely look elsewhere. The location is hard to fault, with a fine wooden sundeck and barbecue area overlooking the lagoon, but the dorms and rooms in the original beach-house are cramped and the separate self-contained units are overpriced. For better value and some peace and quiet – not to mention great views – head for the hillside lodge beside the main office.

Aremango Guesthouse (Map pp56-7; ☎ 24362; aremango@oyster.net.ck; s/d/tr NZ\$22/44/66) Another quiet, no-frills option offering a range of dorm and private rooms in a spic-and-span, purpose-built guesthouse. The rooms are arranged around a central corridor and all have ceiling fans and screened windows; Muri Beach is just a short walk away. The owners can be a bit strict on night-time noise, so you might have to take those raucous midnight drinking games elsewhere.

Midrange

The midrange price bracket is where you'll find the greatest choice of accommodation on Rarotonga. The island is steadily rebranding itself to cater for slightly more upmarket travellers, and there are lots and lots of small places offering self-contained units and beachfront bungalows – far too many, in fact, to list here. Check out www.cook-islands.com for comprehensive listings, or contact the main tourist office on Rarotonga.

If you're travelling with kids, make sure you check your hotel's policy on young children before booking. You'll find that many of the smaller properties won't accept children under 12.

AVARUA & AROUND

Paradise Inn (Map pp56-7; ☎ 20544; www.paradiseinnrarotonga.com; s NZ\$63-85, d NZ\$106, tr NZ\$124, f NZ\$136; ☒) This quirky hotel was once Rarotonga's largest and liveliest dance hall;

these days it's been carefully converted to provide snug, good-value rooms, the best of which are split into twin levels with a funky loft-style sleeping area. The venerable building is packed with character; there's a huge lounge area, decked out with polished wood floors, nautical knick-knacks and an honesty bar, and outside there's a great sea-view veranda that's tailor-made for knocking back a tropical cocktail or two.

Kii Kii Motel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21937; www.kiikii.motel.co.ck; s NZ\$77-143, d NZ\$99-176 f NZ\$170-204; ☒) This coral-pink motel has been through several facelifts over the years and it's still going strong, despite the competition. Accommodation ranges from bog-standard bedrooms to self-contained suites, complete with fully equipped kitchens and ocean views; there's also a huge swimming pool (handy, since the beach here is no good for swimming). Not the beachfront paradise you were dreaming of, perhaps, but a decent option if you're just looking for a place to bed down at the end of a long day's sightseeing.

'ARORANGI & WEST COAST

Aro'a Beachside Inn (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22166; www.aroabeach.com; garden studio s/d NZ\$160/220, beachside deluxe s/d \$325/350) A top choice if you're after romantic beach walks and sunset views, the Aro'a Beach has one of the best locations on the island's west coast. The units are all pretty similar inside, with large, high-ceiling bedrooms decked out with glossy wood-panelling and colourful bedspreads, leading off to a small kitchen, sitting area and a private veranda. Unsurprisingly the best views are from the 'honeymoon suites' in the two-storey lodges beside the beach; but the three garden units are more affordable and still only a stone's throw from the sand. The onsite Shipwreck Hut Bar (otherwise known as the 'stress management office'), is an added treat.

Lagoon Lodges (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22020; www.lagoonlodges.com; studio units NZ\$195, 1-bedroom bungalows NZ\$215, 2-bedroom standard/deluxe villas NZ\$265/315, 3-bedroom lodge NZ\$465; ☒) This excellent place offers a choice of modern, motel-style units; detached one- and two-bedroom villas; and several deluxe split-level thatched bungalows nearer the road – all set around a peaceful private garden. If you're after comfort and all the mod-cons, the 'at-ground' bungalows

are one of the best options on the island, especially for families, with roomy kitchens and living rooms, large verandas and a virtually private garden. The deluxe villas are decorated in a more individual style, with wooden floors and traditionally themed interiors, and the cosy upstairs bedrooms (complete with private balconies) are super-romantic.

Castaway Beach Villas (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21546; www.castawayvillas.com; s NZ\$205-235, d NZ\$225-255, tr NZ\$275-305; ☒) More modern, pastel-coloured villas arranged along a lovely beach, with a selection of cheaper units set back from the sand around the private teardrop pool. There's a fabulous decked area overlooking the lagoon, shaded by a bright blue sailcloth, and plenty of sun-loungers and hammocks to go round too – fruity cocktails and cool beers are available at the beach bar and the whole place is lit up by fairy lights after dark.

Puaikura Reef Lodge (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23537; www.puaikura.co.ck; units NZ\$145; ☒) There's something of a family atmosphere to this long-standing motel, partly thanks to the cosy garden setting, partly due to the friendly owners and returning guests, and partly due to the fact that the self-contained units are right on each other's doorstep, so you'll just have to get on with your neighbours. The plain, modern units won't win any design awards for originality, but they're comfortable and decent value – get one of the lighter, roomier bungalows near the pool if you can. The larger units have a concertina door that divides the lounge from the main sleeping area (good for families).

Sunhaven Beach Bungalows (Map pp52-3; ☎ 28465; www.ck/sunhaven; beachfront studios NZ\$180, garden/beachfront bungalows NZ\$215/240; ☒) These nine modern, sparkling-clean bungalows are arranged side-by-side along a secluded stretch of beach, sheltered by palm trees slung with hammocks. They might not be all that Polynesian – clean interiors, tiled floors and unfussy décor are very much the chosen theme – but if you're not all that bothered about traditional interiors, then Sunhaven is a decent choice.

SOUTH COAST

Bella Beach Bungalows (Map pp52-3; ☎ 26004; helenura@shekinah.co.ck; bungalows NZ\$165) There are plenty of self-contained bungalows springing up all over Rarotonga, but these

are some of the nicest (and best-value) ones you'll find. The four stained-timber units stand on stilts right beside the beach and offer the kind of ocean view you'd usually pay through the nose for; inside, the accommodation is smart and simple, with shiny tiled floors, small bathrooms and sleeping areas that can be screened off with sliding doors. The only downside might be the main road nearby – this stretch is dead-straight and apparently the perfect place for a spot of late-night scooter-racing.

Daydreamer Apartments (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25965; www.daydreamer.co.ck; s/d units NZ\$120/150) Probably the best-value accommodation along the south coast, as long as you don't mind crossing the road to the beach. The five modern units might not be terribly Polynesian, but they're light, airy and deceptively spacious, with separate dining, lounge and bedroom areas, and a small patio area overlooking the lovingly tended tropical garden. Owners Bruce and Nga Young are great characters and will make sure you're well looked after – if you're lucky, you might even be invited to one of their trademark evening barbecues.

Palm Grove Lodges (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20002; www.palmgrove.net; garden/superior studios NZ\$220/265, 2-3-bedroom bungalows NZ\$310, beachfront units NZ\$300-335; ☒) This large property is split into two separate sections: a grassy garden area, where you'll find a selection of free-standing, self-contained units of varying sizes; and a superb beachside setting, where several luxurious studios are linked by a wooden walkway. The garden units are pleasant but won't knock your socks off – the beach studios are much more impressive, with thatched roofs, fibre-plait walls and splendid seafront verandas. Unsurprisingly, they're also on the pricey side. An onsite bar/bistro, the Yellow Hibiscus (p86) serves tropical breakfast (free for guests) and excellent meals throughout the day.

Moana Sands Hotel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 26189; www.moanasands.co.ck; beachfront superior d/tr NZ\$235/300, beachfront ste NZ\$280; ☒) This is one of the few traditional-style hotels on Rarotonga, with 17 rooms arranged side-by-side over three floors. The twelve superior rooms are on the ground and first floors, while the five roomy suites are on the top level; all have private balconies overlooking the beach and minuscule kitchenettes. There are all

the usual hotel perks (massage parlour, tour-booking desk, free snorkelling gear), and the beach here is one of the top snorkelling spots on Rarotonga. The inhouse restaurant, the Pawpaw Patch (p86), is top-notch, too.

MURI BEACH & EAST COAST

Kura's Kabanas (Map p64; ☎ 27010; www.kkabanas.co.ck; studios/kabanas NZ\$180/200) If you're looking for the classic Cook Islands setting, complete with shady palms, lagoon views and a glorious china-white beach just steps from your door, then Kura's Kabanas won't disappoint. Tucked away in a secluded grove off the main coast road, the three timber-framed bungalows are tastefully decorated and have lovely outside porticos, complete with wooden furniture and an ocean outlook; there are also a couple of family units in a separate two-storey block nearer the road.

Muri Beach Hideaway (Map p64; ☎ 29005; www.muribeachhideaway.com; bungalows NZ\$200-270, hillside unit NZ\$180; 🏠) These thatched bungalows look quintessentially Polynesian from the outside, but don't let the traditional exterior fool you – inside, the villas are beautifully finished in a sleek, contemporary style, with gleaming wood floors, panelled walls and huge king-size beds. All the little touches are there to make your stay extra special – beachside hammocks, reef shoes and kayaks are all complimentary, and there's even a (very) small swimming pool – but if you're not desperate to hear the sea from your sundeck, consider staying a little way inland at the stylish hillside cottage, which at NZ\$180 is an absolute steal.

Shangri-La (Map p64; ☎ 22779; www.shangri-la.co.ck; garden/partial lagoon-view cottages NZ\$250/300; 🏠 🏠) These twelve modern, air-conditioned cottages are arranged around a quiet garden, and are equipped with all the mod-cons you'd possibly need (hairdryer, DVD player, phone, radio and spa-bath jacuzzis, to name a few). The furnishings are functional rather than luxurious (white tiles, white floors, white walls), but if you bag the early-bird special (garden/partial lagoon-view cottages NZ\$165/195) by paying 30 days in advance, the units are pretty good value. The American owner Elliot Smith is the author of the *Cook Islands Companion* (he's also an ex-judge, so make sure you behave yourself).

Muri Beach Cottages (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23666; www.muribeachcottages.com; A-frame studio NZ\$45, pole-house NZ\$132, cottages NZ\$144) This place has two newly built bungalows and a compact pole-house hidden away in thick bush on the southern coast of the island, within a short walk of Muri Beach. The cottages look rustic, but inside they're smartly finished with laminate floors and light tones (although the kitchen unit is tiny). The pole-house is a touch tatty in comparison, but it's cosy enough and the retro-style sleeping loft, accessed by a rickety ladder, is perfect for people in search of their inner child. Needless to say the verandahs have stunning sea views, and if you need to save a few cents, you could always rough it in the ultra-basic A-frame hut for a night or two.

Tiana's Beach Bungalows (Map p64; ☎ 24452; www.tianas.com; studio bungalow NZ\$110, units NZ\$135) These simple clapboard villas are an excellent option if you're after value rather than frills. The two one-bedroom bungalows are plainly furnished and fairly unremarkable – if you can, go for the beachfront unit, which balances on stilts above the beach and has a large, lofty-ceilinged bedroom and a compact kitchen, as well as the essential ocean-view deck.

Muri Beachcomber (Map p64; ☎ 21022; www.beachcomber.co.ck; seawiew units s/d/tr NZ\$240/260/340, watergarden villas NZ\$310/330/410; 🏠) There's a homely, almost villagey feel to this place, which offers a choice of one-bedroom units with sea-view, plus a couple of larger garden bungalows, and three luxury villas overlooking a tranquil lily pond. The style of the units is modern and contemporary – think tiled roofs, glass doors and solar panels rather than pandanus thatching – and there's plenty of lovely green space between the bungalows, just right for barbecues, sunbathing and general lazing around.

Avana Marina Condos (Map p64; ☎ 20836; www.avanacondos.co.ck; studios from NZ\$210, condos from NZ\$300; 🏠) These spacious condo units offer substantially more space than many places along Rarotonga's south coast. Each condo is split over two levels with two or three light, airy bedrooms on the first floor and a spacious kitchen and lounge area downstairs; outside there's a private sundeck with views across Avana harbour. If you're looking for a home away from home, these

townhouses-on-the-beach are an excellent option – especially good if you've got kids in tow.

Aroko Bungalows (Map p64; ☎ 23625; www.arokobungalows.com; garden/lagoon-view bungalows NZ\$110/130) These rustic little bungalows are jammed in around a private garden just off Muri Beach, and while they're far from luxurious, what they lack in space and convenience they (just about) make up for in local character. Inside, the rather poky bungalows are essentially just a main bedroom area with a tiny kitchenette tacked on the end, so you can forget about practicing those island dance moves once the sun goes down – but the best units have sundecks and panoramic views.

Top End

If your bank balance can stand the damage, then it's at the top end that the accommodation on Rarotonga really comes into its own. If you're booking directly, ask about 'earlybird' (usually 30 days) discounts and multಿನight packages.

'ARORANGI & WEST COAST

Crown Beach Resort (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23953; www.crownbeach.com; 1-/2-bedroom villas NZ\$390/540, beachfront villas NZ\$599; 🏠 🏠 🏠) Mixing the best of old and new, the large thatched villas at the Crown Beach combine traditional-style architecture with top-drawer décor. The bungalows are all impeccably finished with blonde wood-panelling, wicker furniture, and local artwork on the walls. There are two onsite restaurants, a spa and massage centre, a giftshop, baby-sitting service, and you can even get a free introductory dive on Sundays – but needless to say, it all comes at a considerable price.

Manuia Beach Boutique Hotel (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22461; www.manuia.co.ck; garden d/tr NZ\$370/480, beachfront d/tr NZ\$540/650; 🏠 🏠) This boutique hotel was battered by the 2005 hurricanes but has since undergone massive refurbishment, with a brand-new open-air dining room (the Right on the Beach Restaurant, see p86), and a glorious 'infinity' pool overlooking the beach. The units are modern and contemporary in style (all pastel shades and muted lighting) but they don't have kitchens and only the more expensive have any kind of view.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Sokala Villas (Map p64; ☎ 29200; www.sokala.com; villas NZ\$390-690, early-bird discounts; 🏠) If you're looking for the perfect compromise between style, atmosphere and cost, then look no further than Sokala Villas. There are plenty of traditional thatched bungalows and luxury apartments all over the island, but the timber villas at Sokala offer something quite different. Forget sleek lines and magnolia walls – these villas are all about individual charm and quirky character. Lovingly built from native hardwoods and decked out with cane furniture, stone floors and polished ironwood tabletops, each villa boasts its own private lounge, kitchen and elegant bedroom; the best are split over two levels, with the upstairs bedroom offering glorious views over nearby Muri Lagoon. All villas have their own private sundeck, some with seriously romantic private swimming pools, and the island's finest beach is literally right on your doorstep. Picture-perfect in practically every way.

SOUTH COAST

Sea Change (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22532; www.sea-change-rarotonga.com; villas NZ\$425-1015; 🏠 🏠) Polynesian setting meets European styling in these impeccably appointed villas, all lavishly equipped with dishwashers, home-entertainment systems, fully furnished lounges, four-poster beds and private pools. Guests can choose from garden and beachfront villas, all traditionally thatched and free-standing; but if you're going to splash out, you might as well opt for the beachfront ones, which have possibly the most romantic sundecks on the entire island. Unquestionably chic, but very costly.

Royale Takitumu Villas (Map pp52-3; ☎ 24682; www.takitumuvillas.co.ck; bungalows NZ\$450-535; 🏠 🏠) This is a lovely, secluded little hideaway along the South Coast, offering ten luxurious thatched villas tranquilly set among lush gardens and lily ponds. The tastefully understated interiors and grand spa baths cater to an unashamedly upmarket clientele, but if you can afford the hefty price-tag, Takitumu is hard to top in terms of style and service. Expect a few surprise treats during your stay – the staff do an awful lot to make you happy.

Reflections on Rarotonga (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23702; www.reflections-rarotonga.com; waterfall/beachfront villa NZ\$500/850; ♿ ♿) If you're really looking to push the boat out on Rarotonga, then to be honest there's only one choice. The glorious villas at Reflections have only been open for a couple of years, but they're already ranked as one of the most luxurious places to stay in the whole South Pacific. The pamper factor is truly off the scale – marble floors, carved hardwood four-poster beds, designer kitchens, private pools and flat-screen TVs are just the start. And if they're still not quite posh enough for you, then check out the owners' latest establishment, Rumours of Romance (Map pp52-3; www.rumours-rarotonga.com) – just the ticket if you can't live without your own private waterfall pool or plasma-screen home cinema, and a snip at NZ\$1200 a night.

MURI BEACH & EAST COAST

Pacific Resort (Map p64; ☎ 20427; www.pacificresort.com; villas NZ\$335-1200; ♿ ♿ ♿) Possibly the most popular place on Rarotonga, mixing the personal service and attention of a small hotel with the facilities of a large resort. Situated in a great location right on Muri Beach and shaded by overhanging palm trees, the 64 self-contained units are smart, elegant and unfussy, making use of local materials and traditional building styles; the best have separate sitting rooms and private verandas. But it's the extras that most people book for; watersports lessons, rental bikes, tennis courts and children's activities are all available onsite, and there are two restaurants – the intimate Barefoot Bar (p91) and the open-air Sandals Restaurant (p87). Packages are available with their sister resort on Aitutaki (p107).

Manea Beach (Map p64; ☎ 25320, 23488; www.manea.co.nz; bungalows/studio/villa NZ\$250/260/400; ♿) Down a quiet road near Sokala Villas, five one-bedroom bungalows, a self-contained studio and a top-notch three-bedroom villa are jumbled together on this property. The bungalows and studio are clean, cosy and unremarkable; the larger villa boasts a stylish split-level mezzanine bedroom and a separate lounge and dining area.

LARGE RESORTS

Rarotonga has two really huge resorts – the Rarotongan Beach Resort and the Edgewater. Their 'rack rates' – the prices you'll

pay if you walk in off the street – are pretty eye-watering, but most of their business comes from package holidays and travel agents, which make the room rates much cheaper.

Rarotongan Beach Resort (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25800; www.rarotongan.co.nz; garden/beachfront r NZ\$380/410, ste NZ\$395-725, honeymoon bungalow NZ\$635; ♿) Probably the busiest traditional resort on the island, in a great spot near Aro'a Beach. It's all suitably Polynesian: there are plenty of Tangaroa statues, floral designs and Cook Islands motifs around and the bedrooms continue the theme, separated into several brightly coloured blocks offering various levels of accommodation, from garden rooms to lagoon suites. The best rooms have a beachfront aspect; the newly built honeymoon suite is particularly luxurious. All the usual facilities are present and correct; tennis courts, souvenir shop, spa centre, vehicle hire, business centre, kids' club and beach activities are all available onsite, and if resort holidays are your thing, then you'll probably be very happy here.

Edgewater Resort (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25435; www.edgewater.co.nz; garden/superior/beachfront/beachfront deluxe/VIP ste NZ\$240/280/375/415/550, apartments s/d NZ\$175/250; ♿ ♿) Firmly from the 'concrete car park' school of resort design, the Edgewater has 208 rooms split between several multilevel blocks, making it by far the largest resort in the Cook Islands. The buildings have about as much exterior charm as a block of flats, but inside they're well-appointed in typical hotel style, with magnolia walls and modern furniture. Naturally, you'll find all the usual resort facilities onsite: swimming pool, tennis courts, vehicle hire, restaurants and travel-information desk – good for families, but you can do a lot better for the money.

Long-Term Rental

Some of the best deals, especially if you're staying on the island for a while, are houses rented by the week. Fully equipped two-bedroom houses cost upwards of NZ\$250, but more usually NZ\$400, per week. The following organisations offer listings of local houses available for rent.

Jetsave Travel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 27707; www.jetsave

.co.nz; Ara Maire Nui, Avarua)

Nikao Holiday Homes (☎ /fax 20168; aretai@oyster.net.nz)

Rarotonga Realty (Map pp56-7; ☎ /fax 26664; www.rarotonga.co.nz; Ara Tapu, Avarua)

Shekinah Homes (Map pp56-7; ☎ /fax 26004; www.shekinah.co.nz; Ara Tapu, Avarua)

Kii Kii Motel (☎ 21937; per wk plus power NZ\$435) has holiday cottages in 'Arorangi and Muri Beach, or you could try **Aroko Heights** (☎ 24922; per wk NZ\$350-450), in the Muri Beach vicinity.

Check the classified section of the **Cook Islands News** (www.cinews.co.nz) and **Cook Islands Herald** (www.ciherald.co.nz) for rental listings; you could also consider placing an ad before you arrive, as there are plenty of local houses available that are never advertised.

EATING

There's a wide choice of restaurants on Rarotonga, from European fine dining to fish-and-chip bars, and the food is generally of a very high standard. The largest concentration of eating places is in Avarua, but there are restaurants and cafés all around the island. Most top-end hotels have an inhouse restaurant that's also open to nonguests.

Restaurants

Since you'll probably have to travel at least some distance to get to any of the island's restaurants, and most of them are quite small, reservations are a good idea.

AVARUA & AROUND

Tamarind House (Map pp52-3; ☎ 26487; www.tamarind.co.nz; starters NZ\$12-25, mains NZ\$23-34; ☎ lunch & dinner) Probably the number one spot for fine-dining in the whole of Rarotonga, this elegant restaurant is housed inside one of the oldest colonial-era buildings on the island and run by the renowned chef Sue Carruthers (founder of the original Flame Tree Restaurant). The sweeping view from the covered terrace is impressive enough, but the sumptuous European-influenced cuisine is better still, and makes imaginative use of the island's rich produce.

Café Salsa (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22215; mains NZ\$8-25; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat) A lively, buzzy bistro situated in the CITC complex, with a lovely outside terrace perfect for watching the world go by. Whatever the time of day, you're bound to find something on the menu that takes your fancy – try coffee and pastries in the morning, gorgeous wood-

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Vaima Restaurant & Bar (Map pp52-3; ☎ 26123; starters NZ\$8-15, mains NZ\$24-30; ☎ dinner) From the moment you walk down the charming, lantern-lit entranceway, you know you're in for something special at Vaima. For many years this homely family-run restaurant has been the island's best-kept secret, offering imaginative and varied cuisine using the freshest island ingredients – home-grown vegetables, hand-picked fruit and line-caught local fish are all cornerstones of the daily-changing menu. The attractive dining room is decorated with split bamboo, globe lanterns and local craftwork, and the sliding doors at one end are usually kept open to make the most of the ocean view. There's also a tranquil terraced area on one side, as well as a beachfront bar that's perfect for pre-dinner drinks.

fired pizzas for lunch and excellent seafood and pasta at night. Highly recommended.

Trader Jack's (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26464; www.traderjackscookislands.com; starters NZ\$12-16, mains NZ\$11-25, platters NZ\$50) The classic place to see and be seen on Rarotonga, Trader's started life as a rough-and-ready South Seas bar back in 1986, and twenty years on it's still going strong despite the ravages of recent cyclones (the downstairs bar was almost entirely washed away in 2005). The bar and upstairs restaurant have been comprehensively refurbished (complete with mobile kitchens in case of emergency) and it remains an essential spot on any island tour, whether you're after a cool beer or a supesize seafood platter.

Portofino (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26480; Ara Tapu; pasta NZ\$18-25, pizza NZ\$16-27, mains NZ\$25-35; ☎ dinner, closed Sun) A short walk from the centre of Avarua, this pastel-pink restaurant specialises in Italian cooking and is an old favourite of visitors and locals alike. It might feel weird to sit down for pasta and pizza on a tropical South Pacific island, but go with the flow – the food is excellent and the quiet, low-lit atmosphere suitably romantic. If you don't feel like eating out, the restaurant delivers as well (free for orders over NZ\$40, otherwise NZ\$3), or you can collect in person.

Paulina's Polynesian Restaurant (Map pp56-7; ☎ 28889; burgers NZ\$4-8, mains NZ\$7-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Housed in an open-walled building

opposite the courthouse, this is one of the few restaurants on the island where you can pick up good, authentic Polynesian dishes without having to go to the expense of a full-blown island night. Classic recipes including *ika mata* (raw fish marinated in coconut cream), *eke* (curried octopus) and coconut chicken are always on the menu, but you'll usually see the locals tucking into steak and chips or one of Paulina's huge home-made burgers.

Japanese Sushi Restaurant (Map pp56-7; ☎ 25045; Ara Tapu; meals NZ\$15-23) It might not be quite what you'd expect to see on Rarotonga, but this tiny Japanese restaurant serves authentic sushi, tempura and sashimi dishes – hardly surprising really, given the island's first-class supply of fresh fish. Don't let the rather grubby exterior put you off – the food is really good.

'ARORANGI & WEST COAST

There are plenty of restaurants scattered along the west coast, with most dotted along the main road through 'Arorangi.

Windjammer Restaurant (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23950; starters from NZ\$14.50, mains NZ\$22-34; ☺ dinner Wed-Mon) By popular opinion one of the best restaurants on Rarotonga, the Windjammer (one of two onsite restaurants at the Crown Beach Resort) is run by a Kiwi husband-and-wife team who take their culinary cues from all over Europe, Asia and the Pacific Rim. The menu is packed with flavours from Sichuan, Vietnam, Thailand and Japan, from pepper-seared sashimi to stir-fried king prawns, and the nightly seafood specials often have a far-Eastern tang. The octagonal wood-panelled dining room is tightly packed with tables, and it's often full to bursting.

Kikau Hut (Map pp52-3; ☎ 26860; starters NZ\$9-17, mains NZ\$22-28; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) This relaxed, welcoming restaurant serves up international dishes (Thai chilli chicken, beef stroganoff, New Zealand ribeye steak) in an intimate candle-lit dining room. There's regular live entertainment courtesy of local musicians, and the atmosphere is on the easy side – bring your own wine, enjoy the island-style ambience and leave the black tie at home.

Right on the Beach Bar & Restaurant (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22461; lunch NZ\$12-25, dinner NZ\$24-28; ☺ lunch & dinner) Having lost its original sand-

floored restaurant in the 2005 cyclones, the Manuia Boutique Beach Hotel has seized the opportunity to rebuild from scratch. The new beachfront restaurant, huddled under an impressive thatched canopy, trumpets itself as the only place on Rarotonga where you can indulge in fine-dining cuisine and feel the sand between your toes. There's a spectacular twice-weekly island night and buffet that's understandably popular – book well ahead.

Alberto's Steakhouse & Bar (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23597; starters NZ\$9-15, mains NZ\$16-35; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) Steak in all its forms – sirloin, ribeye, fillet and carpetbag (stuffed with oysters, apparently) – is the main order of the day at this laid-back grill-bar, situated right on the main road through 'Arorangi, but you can also pick up decent pasta, curries and stir-fries.

Hopsing's Chinese Restaurant (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20367; mains NZ\$13-26; ☺ dinner) If you're hankering for some Chinese cuisine, then Hopsing's is really the only place to go – though if you've ever been to a Chinese restaurant anywhere else in the world, you'll know exactly what to expect. Hopsing's really comes into its own as the island's top takeaway, especially handy if you're staying somewhere around 'Arorangi and can't face tackling those pots and pans.

Kaena Restaurant (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25433; starters NZ\$9-13, mains NZ\$26-34; ☺ dinner) There's something of a country steakhouse atmosphere at this little restaurant, complete with exposed beams and a huge open grill-kitchen just inside the doorway. Steak and seafood are the main staples, and you can choose to sit in either the main dining area or a smaller, cosier annexe. A decent option if you're looking for unfussy food in a laid-back setting.

SOUTH COAST

Yellow Hibiscus (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20002; breakfast NZ\$4-10, dinner from NZ\$15; ☺ breakfast & dinner) The inhouse restaurant at Palm Grove is a top spot for a lavish tropical breakfast, but it's also a pleasant place for an evening meal, with a breezy open-air dining room and plenty of island atmosphere. It can get busy if the hotel's got lots of guests, so reservations are usually a good idea.

Pawpaw Patch (Map pp52-3; ☎ 27189; mains NZ\$23-28; ☺ breakfast & dinner) With its bold primary colours and brasserie atmosphere,

ISLAND NIGHTS

If there's one thing you absolutely *have* to check out while you're in Rarotonga – even if you're only on the island for a couple of days – it's an **island night**. These spectacular shows, combining traditional dance and music (*karioi*) with a lavish buffet of local food (*kai*), are regularly held all over Rarotonga. There are several troupes, all with a slightly different repertoire, but there are a few common themes you'll see at every show. Male and female dancing, traditional drumming, close-harmony singing and coconut husking are always on the itinerary, but you might also find fire-juggling, acrobatics and some over-the-top storytelling thrown into the mix. In fact it pays to go to more than one performance if you can – there are many different types of dance in the Cook Islands (see p31), and an island night can feature several styles within the main show.

Island nights are held regularly at all large resorts, including the Rarotongan Beach Resort (p84), the Edgewater (p84), the Pacific Resort (below), the Crown Beach (p83) and the Manuia Beach Hotel (p83). You'll usually pay between NZ\$10 and NZ\$25 for the show on its own, or NZ\$45 to NZ\$55 for the show and buffet. There's also a weekly island night at the Staircase Restaurant in Avarua, which is a real steal at NZ\$25 including food – alternatively, you can just pay NZ\$5 to watch the show. Pick up the free *Cook Islands Sun* newspaper or ask in the tourist office for the latest island-night timetables – the larger island nights also regularly advertise in the daily *Cook Islands News*. Ask around about which one currently has the local seal of approval. There are also island nights at various venues on Aitutaki, and you can even request your own personal performance by the local dance troupe at 'Atiu Villas if you make it out there.

If you just want to try the local food, Backpackers International Hostel (p79) holds a weekly island buffet, and Piri Puruto (see p90) makes a traditional *umukai* (underground oven) every Sunday as part of his show. The Cook Islands Cultural Village (p62) also includes a cultural performance and buffet lunch as part of its village and circle-island tours.

the excellent restaurant at Moana Sands hotel brings a more metropolitan style to the south coast of Rarotonga. The menu is eclectic and inventive – Fijian-style curries sit happily alongside gourmet kebabs and pan-fried fish – and there's a weekly barbecue that's among the best on the island.

MURI BEACH & EAST COAST

Flame Tree (Map p64; ☎ 25123; www.flametree-restaurant.com; starters NZ\$9-14, mains NZ\$21-38; ☺ dinner) Once the best-known restaurant in the Cook Islands, if not the whole South Pacific, the Flame Tree has since changed hands but it's still an elegant place for an evening meal. Most people choose to sit outside on the covered courtyard, perched above a trickling stream; alternatively you can sit in the more formal dining room inside. The food is still top-notch, with a pan-global flavour, and the extensive wine list is a major draw – although the tab is likely to be impressive too.

Sails Restaurant (Map p64; ☎ 27349; lunch NZ\$7-22, dinner mains NZ\$18-30, desserts NZ\$8; ☺ lunch & dinner) This lively oceanfront bistro-bar is equally adept at serving up light bites for lunch as well as heartier evening meals. It's

an especially popular spot with holidaying yachties and beach-freaks – the island's sailing club is opposite, and the open-air terrace looks right over nearby Muri Lagoon. The inhouse cocktails are very nice, too.

Pacific Resort (Map p64; ☎ 20427; buffet breakfast NZ\$12, light lunch NZ\$4-16, heavy lunch NZ\$12-25, all-day snacks NZ\$4-11, dinner around NZ\$33; ☺ lunch & dinner) The two restaurants at the Pacific Resort cater for every taste. The open-walled Sandals Restaurant specialises in à la carte dining, with steak and seafood most nights, and a weekly island-night buffet and weekend barbecue. The beachfront Barefoot Bar is a more relaxed affair, mainly catering for a lunchtime crowd with light snacks, salads, and sandwiches.

Cafés & Fast Food

If you're looking for a quick bite to eat or a light meal, there are several good cafés dotted around Avarua and along the island's south coast. There are also plenty of fast food joints, mostly in Avarua and 'Arorangi – but before eating at some of Avarua's less-salubrious takeaway venues (not listed here), make sure you're prepared for a spot of Delhi Belly.

AVARUA & AROUND

The Café (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21283; Ara Tapu; cakes & muffins NZ\$2-5, lunch from NZ\$8; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Avarua's hippest café serves fabulous fresh-roasted coffee, huge homemade cakes and light lunches in a buzzy location opposite the cinema. There are loads of magazines and newspapers to browse while you're lounging around on the tables inside, or you can sit outside and watch the world (and the main-road traffic) zip by.

Blue Note Café (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23236; breakfast NZ\$8-17, mains NZ\$8-18; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A cheerful open-air café-bar with a pleasant terrace overlooking the main traffic circle in Avarua. It's an excellent venue to pick up a morning cappuccino and read the daily newspapers, or to take a lunchtime break from town – the generous burgers and salads are always good and there's a chalkboard of daily-changing specials.

Mama's Café (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23379; Ara Maire Nui; sandwiches NZ\$4-6, cooked breakfasts & main meals NZ\$7-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) The Polynesian equivalent of the greasy spoon café, this is a popular and bustling local spot for milkshakes, cooked breakfasts, sandwiches and hot lunches. It's also a good place to pick up an ice-cream if the afternoon heat becomes too much.

Hangar Café (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25317; cakes NZ\$3-5, meals NZ\$8-12; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Housed inside an old hangar beside the airport, this relaxed café is perfect for whiling away a few hours if you're waiting for an international flight, with great shakes and smoothies (NZ\$6) and a range of salads and light lunches. The plate-glass windows in one end have panoramic views over the airport runway and the mountains inland.

Palace Takeaways (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21438; Avatiu Harbour; burgers NZ\$4-8, meals NZ\$10-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) A popular roadside fast-food stall with a few picnic tables beside the harbour in Avarua, serving up grease-heavy burgers, fish and chips and takeaway meals – especially popular as a post-pub pit-stop on Friday or Saturday night.

Just Burgers (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22778; burgers NZ\$2.50-10; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) On the main road in Pue, 1.6km east of Avarua, this trusty joint makes inexpensive American-style hamburgers, french fries and milk shakes.

Aromoana Fish & Chips (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21250; fish & chips NZ\$7-10; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A good

harbourside takeaway that serves island-style fish and chips (no cod or haddock on the menu here); you can also usually pick up cheap fresh fish steaks.

Punanga Nui Market has lots of stalls selling basic takeaway grub, but they're usually only open when the market's in business. There's another fish and chip shop next to the Game Fishing Club (Map pp52-3) east of Avarua.

'ARORANGI & WEST COAST

Cafe Maori (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20012; snacks NZ\$3.50-15) Attached to the grocery store in Kavera Central, this is the best spot for cheap eats on the west coast, with the usual selection of burgers, hotdogs and fries, as well as soft drinks, fruit juices and smoothies. You can sit at picnic tables under a colourful canopy, or you can takeaway.

Priscilla's Takeaways (Map pp52-3; ☎ 28072; snacks NZ\$2-6) Another good spot for some cheap munchies, with a menu that mixes Cook Islands specials such as *ika mata* (raw fish in coconut sauce) and *rukau* (taro leaves) with more traditional fast food.

Uncle Moe's Takeaways (Map pp52-3; snacks NZ\$4-8) Right next door to a large supermarket, this hole-in-the-wall takeaway is a decent place for some fried chicken or a quick burger – just don't blame us if you can't fit into your swimming gear the next day.

SOUTH COAST

Fruits of Rarotonga (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21509; light breakfasts NZ\$3-5, jams & chutneys from NZ\$3.60; ☺ Mon-Sat) In Tikioki, this dinky roadside shop specialises in home-made jams, chutneys and relishes, but it also does a nice line in fruit juices, tropical smoothies and afternoon teas. The beach across the road is one of the best snorkelling spots on the island, and the owners of the café will happily look after your bags while you're in the water.

Maire Nui Gardens & Café (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22796; cakes from NZ\$3; light lunches from NZ\$7-15; ☺ Mon-Fri) This upmarket café boasts one of the most glorious locations on Rarotonga, with a fantastic thatch-covered terrace overlooking botanical gardens, lily ponds and lush green mountains. It's a perfect place for morning coffee, a light lunch or afternoon cake, with a daily specials board and an everchanging selection of sweet treats – and if you need to work off some calories, you can always

take a stroll around the beautiful gardens (NZ\$3), lovingly planted by owner Hinano MacQuarie.

Saltwater Cafe (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20020; ☺ lunch & dinner Sun-Fri) Funky café opposite yet another great stretch of sand, understandably popular with snorkellers, beach-bums and backpackers from the hostel nearby. Sandwiches, salads and cooked breakfasts are all top options from the menu, and there are usually a few specials available if nothing takes your fancy. The décor is bright and breezy, with a few outside tables and a cheerful beach-themed interior.

Self-Catering

You'll find the best selection of self-catering supplies at the two main supermarkets in Avarua. Wherever you're staying on Rarotonga, if you've got lots of food shopping to do, it's worth taking a trip into town to do it. The price hikes in the smaller supermarkets and convenience stores dotted around the island can be really substantial. Remember to check use-by dates on goods in the smaller stores – some goods might have been sitting around on the shelf for quite a while.

General household supplies (nappies, cleaning products, pharmaceuticals and all that jazz) are also on sale in most supermarkets.

Foodland (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23378; Ara Maire Nui; ☺ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) On the main road through town, this is probably the best all-round supermarket. You'll be able to pick up bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, tinned, packaged and dried goods, and there's a half-decent deli-counter selling fresh fish, meats and some precooked meals.

CITC Supermarket (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22000; Ara Tapu; ☺ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) The supermarket is halfway to the airport from Avarua and shares the grounds with a café and the CITC Liquor Store. It's very good for tinned and packaged produce, especially bulk buys, but the range of fresh goods is pretty slim.

Wigmore's Superstore (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20206; ☺ 6am-9pm) The only proper grocery store on the south coast. There's a good selection of foods and a wide variety of produce fresh from Wigmore's farm, but prices are higher than in Avarua. There's also a small liquor store, and it's the only large supermarket that's open on Sunday.

Punanga Nui Market (Map pp56-7; ☎ 29370; Ara Maire Nui) A good place to pick fresh produce and fish at cheap prices – Saturday is the best day to go for food, but you'll need to get there early. Look out for the roadside stalls that spring up next to people's houses, where local growers sell off their excess produce – you can often pick up huge bags of fresh veg and bundles of fruit for much less than in the supermarkets.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Whatever Bar & Grill (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22299; Ara Tapu) The latest contender on the late-night Avarua scene sits on a delightful decked platform overlooking the island's north coast. As good for a juicy steak as for a cool evening beer, the Whatever is currently the venue of choice for Avarua's trendy young things – it can get very lively on a Friday night, and the winding stairs down to the ground floor can be rather challenging if you've enjoyed yourself just a little too much.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT Bars & Nightclubs

Friday night is Rarotonga's big party night, when everyone lets their hair down and hits the bars and nightclubs in Avarua. Saturday can be lively too (though things are usually cut short at midnight to avoid dancing on the Sabbath). Things kick off around 8pm or 9pm; most people head for a few of the smaller bars around Avarua, before finishing up at one of the larger night clubs. On Friday nearly all places stay open till around 2am; on Saturday the doors are always banged shut at the stroke of midnight.

Many of the island's restaurants have small inhouse bars, but these are generally intended for dinner guests – although most places will be quite happy if you're just stopping in for a drink rather than a sit-down meal. Plenty of establishments (such as the Tumunu Bar, the Whatever Bar & Grill and the Nu Bar) are halfway between being a bar and a restaurant, and are probably a better bet if you're out for some serious drinking.

Resort bars are all open to nonguests – although with the sky-high prices they charge, there aren't usually many takers.

Unless an island night has been scheduled, it's not unusual to see them all but deserted by 8pm.

There are several **pub crawls** that'll whisk you around all the island's main drinking spots by minibus, including the **Friday Night Life Tour** (☎ 25435) organised by the Edgewater Resort and the **Nitelife Tour** (☎ 25800) run by the Rarotongan Beach Resort. Several hostels, including **Aremango Guesthouse** (☎ 24362) and **Backpackers International** (☎ 21847) run less-organised (and somewhat less genteel) Friday-night tours. They're a good way to get some insider tips on where the action is – there are often one or two bars where everyone's hanging out in Avarua, but tastes can change pretty quickly. There's also the added bonus of not having to worry about how you're going to get home; there are only a couple of night buses on Friday (at midnight and 1.30am), and driving home after a night on the town is definitely not a good idea.

AVARUA & AROUND

All drinking holes in Avarua are in easy stumbling distance from one another. They tend to attract different crowds – one place might attract young backpackers and locals, while others cater for an older and more upmarket crowd.

Staircase Restaurant & Bar (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22254; Ara Tapu) Upstairs behind the Topshape Health & Fitness Centre building, the Staircase has been a popular choice for late-night action for as long as anyone can remember. The bar is decked out with atmospheric island-style décor and has regular music nights,

including live bands and DJs, as well as a weekly island night and buffet. Sometimes they can be a little fussy about your standard of dress.

Trader Jack's (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26464) This is an old favourite with Rarotonga's upmarket set – you'll find tourists and yachties rubbing shoulders with politicians and businessmen in the downstairs bar, which has great views over Avatiu Harbour. Keep an eye out for 'Gentleman Jack' himself – he can often be seen propping up the bar.

RSA Bar (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20590) Opposite the airport (look out for the decommissioned anti-aircraft gun outside), the Returned Servicemen's Association has a cheap, cheerful bar that gets absolutely rammed on Mondays for 'Tattoo Night' (a potent local tipple flavoured with cranberry). Locals come to play pool and darts and knock back a few beers – it's also handy if you've checked in for a late flight and you've got a couple of hours to kill.

Hideaway Bar (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22224; Cook's Corner Arcade) As its name suggests, the Hideaway is tucked away in the Cook's Corner Arcade right in the centre of Avarua. It's pretty small: on busy weekend nights everyone crams in to check out the live bands, and there are usually DJs a couple of nights a week.

CocoBar (Map pp56-7; ☎ 29879; Ara Tapu) A popular spot for the older crowd, with a large, lively bar sheltered under an overhanging thatched roof, and a back garden that plays host to regular live bands.

TJ's Nightclub (Map pp56-7; ☎ 24722; Ara Tapu; admission Fri & Sat NZ\$2) Avarua's main club mainly caters for the 18- to 25ers, with plenty of

earbusting tunes, UV lights and hot-and-sweaty dancing. Sometimes it can be pretty quiet for no apparent reason, but normally if you stick around you'll find a few friends before long.

Banana Court Bar (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23397) This bar is near the traffic circle in Avarua. Once the best-known drinking hole and dance hall in the Cook Islands, the cavernous Banana Court is far from the den of excitement and iniquity it once was, but it's still a decent place to find a drink. There are late-night, loud, startlingly empty discos on Friday and Saturday. It's also popular with the island's gay crowd.

Cook Islands Game Fishing Club (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21419) This is the venue of choice for Rarotonga's fishing crowd, where you can sink a cheap beer or two while discussing the ones that got away, or indulge in a game of pool before heading next door for a filling fish supper.

Nu Bar (Map pp52-3; ☎ 26140) Near the airport, this single-storey bar is popular with young travellers and backpackers for the regular \$10 Steak Nights, and there's usually a lively scene after around 9pm. The only drawback is the out-of-town location (1.5km from Avarua); you'll need wheels, which means someone's going to have to stay sober.

'ARORANGI & WEST COAST

Tumunu Bar & Restaurant (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20501; mains NZ\$20-60; ☎ dinner) This curious bar-bistro seems to have something of a split identity – half South Seas drinking den, half Midwest American diner. The ramshackle bar is definitely the main focus, and can get tremendously rowdy on a Friday night; but there's also a small dining room (complete with old numberplates, reclaimed signs, checked tablecloths and even a battered slot machine) that serves up spicy chicken, steaks and seafood platters. During the week it's usually quite tame – but if it gets too raucous, you can always hightail it for the quiet garden outside; just remember to add your own review to those chalked up all over the walls before you leave.

The **Edgewater Resort** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25435) and the **Rarotongan Beach Resort** (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25800) both have bars that are open to nonguests; of the two, the Rarotongan's tropical-style poolside bar is by far the

nicest. They also hold very popular island nights (p87), which are usually packed, so you'll need to reserve ahead. Both resorts also offer nightlife tours on a Friday, complete with minibus and sober driver.

MURI BEACH & EAST COAST

Surprisingly, Muri Beach, the backpacker capital of Rarotonga, has no cheap bars.

Sails Restaurant (Map p64; ☎ 27349) This bar is situated in a fine beachfront setting opposite the Rarotonga Sailing Club, with a great terrace that boasts a fine view over Muri lagoon and its four *motu* (best appreciated at sunset). The imaginative island cocktails are particularly good.

Barefoot Bar (Map p64; ☎ 20427) The inhouse bar at the Pacific Resort, shaded by palm trees and overlooking Muri Lagoon, is another pleasant venue for a relaxing evening tipple; and apart from a few of the hotel's own guests, you'll often find you have the place all to yourself.

Cinemas

The **Empire Cinema** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23189; Ara Tapu; adult NZ\$8/4) is the only cinema in town. It shows nightly flicks on a couple of decent-sized screens, and there are usually half-price tickets on Thursday.

Videos

Rather strangely for a people who live in such a naturally beautiful place, Cook Islanders are huge fans of the home video. There are loads of shops that hire DVDs and videos around the island (as well as the machines to play them on) – not a bad idea if you're stuck inside thanks to a tropical downpour. Try **Nikao Beach Video** (☎ 21710; Nikao) near Black Rock or **Video 2000** (☎ 24781; Taputapuatea) near Avarua.

SHOPPING

Traditional Arts & Crafts

There are plenty of places around the island to pick up traditional island handicrafts – Punanga Nui Market (p59) and the Beachcomber Gallery (p58) generally have the best selections. Be sure about what you're buying in some of the tourist shops around Avarua – many items have been imported from China and Asia, rather than being made in the Cook Islands themselves. If in doubt, ask.

PIRI PURUTO III

Perhaps the longest running (and certainly the hardest working) showman on the island, the venerable Piri Puruto III is still zipping up coconut trees, conjuring fire from dry twigs and cooking up island feasts for the entertainment of his guests, despite the fact that he's now well into his sixties. He's a well-known (some would say notorious) character on the island, an ex-champion boxer and erstwhile masseur – but these days he's wisely decided to concentrate on his one-man show.

The acrobatic one-hour performance is quirky, funny and well worth the NZ\$15 cost. He also does a barbecued-fish dinner (NZ\$28 with show) and sometimes an 'early bird' coconut breakfast show on various days of the week. Ring for a schedule, or pick up his latest pamphlet.

On Sunday Piri puts on a delicious *umukai* feast, cooked in an underground oven in the traditional way. You can help prepare the oven, then have a light lunch, watch Piri's show and go for a swim while you wait for the feast to emerge. The cost is NZ\$49; transport can be arranged. Children are half-price for all of Piri's activities.

Mike Tavioni's Workshop (Map pp56-7; ☎ 24003; Ara Metua, Atupa) The workshop of Rarotonga's best-known sculptor and carver is open whenever Mike's at home (his house is right next door). Mike's passion is to revive the unique skills and traditional motifs of Cook Islands carving; his workshop is used by many other local craftsmen, including the next generation of carvers from local schools. Mike has a shop at the Punanga Nui Market; he and his brother, the late Taputu Tavioni, worked on the large stone carvings at the market and at the Sir Geoffrey Henry National Culture Centre. One of his latest projects was a custom-made canoe for the USP foyer in Avarua; ask around to see if it's been finished yet.

Beachcomber Gallery (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu) Offers the best range of local craftwork in Avarua, with lots of excellent handicrafts, musical instruments, carvings, *tivaevae* (appliqué works) and basketwork, as well as plenty of black-pearl jewellery. Upstairs there's a small gallery selling paintings by local artists.

Island Craft (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22009; Ara Maire Nui) One of the largest souvenir shops on Rarotonga, Island Craft sells a selection of Cook Islands arts and crafts, including carved masks, figurines and spears from all over the Cook Islands and South Pacific, as well as jewellery, necklaces, books and other island mementos.

Bergman & Sons Crafts Store (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21901; Banana Ct) A prominent store with some excellent carvings and other Cook Islands crafts. The quality of their merchandise is first-rate, but it's pricey. Even if you don't want to spend lots of money, it's worth visiting to see what they've got.

Modern Arts & Crafts

The Cook Islands has a thriving and dynamic arts scene. If you're looking to pick up some work by local artists, there are plenty of galleries around the island, including several in the 'Arorangi area. There are also some good galleries in Avarua, including the **Arasena Gallery** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 23476; Banana Ct), tucked away next to the Blue Note Café, and the **Kenwall Gallery** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 25526; Ara Maire Nui), which sells a variety of local artists' works, mostly paintings.

Some of the names to look out for are Judith Künztlé, Rick Welland, Ian and Kay

George, Jillian Sobieska and Ange Kainuku Pierce. You'll see their work for sale in many places around Rarotonga.

Music

Cook Islanders *love* their music, and you'll hear plenty of local hits blaring out of the radio during your stay (as well as some intriguing covers of overseas songs, performed Cook Islands style). If you fancy taking some island sounds back home, the main music outlet is **Raro Records** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 25927; www.rarorecords.musicpage.com; Ara Tapu), near the Empire Cinema, or check out some of the stalls at the **Punanga Nui Market** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 29370; Ara Maire Nui).

Perfumes, Soaps & Coconut Oil

Perfumes of Rarotonga (☎ 26238) Matavera (Map pp52-3; Ara Tapu) Avarua (Map pp56-7; Cook's Corner Arcade) This establishment, on the main road in Matavera, makes its own perfumes, soaps and scented oils using tropical flowers sourced from local growers. Pearl of paradise, jasmine, frangipani and *tiare* (gardenia, the symbolic flower of the Cook Islands) are just some of the exotic fragrances you can try. Bars of handmade coconut soap cost around NZ\$3.50; perfume and cologne starts at around NZ\$14 a bottle. There are also tropical fruit liqueurs made with mangoes, bananas and coffee from NZ\$16 (some of them even come in superkitsch Tangaroa-shaped bottles) and scented candles (NZ\$15 to NZ\$17). You can also buy directly from the manufacturers at the Perfume Factory (☎ 22690) in Ara Metua.

Pure coconut oil (from NZ\$12), good for skin and hair, is sold at many places around Avarua, including the two perfume shops, **Island Craft** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22009; Ara Maire Nui), the **CITC Pharmacy** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 29292) in the CITC Shopping Centre, and the Punanga Nui Market. You can buy it plain or scented with various local flowers and herbs. Ma'u ke Miracle Oil contains a special medicinal herb, *pi*, which gives protection from the sun and is good for healing cuts.

Pareu & Other Clothing

The quintessential item of clothing on Rarotonga is the *pareu* (sarong), worn mostly by women and children – you won't often see men wearing them, unlike on other islands in the South Pacific. A *pareu* is sim-

BLACK PEARLS

The Northern Group islands of Manihiki and Penrhyn are important producers of **black pearls**, which only occur naturally in the lagoons of the Cook Islands and French Polynesia. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the arrival of exotic black pearls from the South Seas sparked something of a fashion craze amongst the European aristocracy; 200 years later, black-pearl jewellery remains hugely sought-after both in the Cook Islands and the rest of the world.

True black pearls are much rarer than their cream-coloured cousins, and they're not always pitch-black – they can be gold, black-green, blue, silver and even pink, depending on the way the pearl has developed within its host shell. They also come in a remarkable variety of shapes and sizes. The value of a pearl is determined by five factors: size (generally 8mm to 14mm in diameter), colour, lustre, surface quality, and shape (common forms apart from the standard spherical pearl include teardrop, baroque and circular). Generally the larger, smoother and more spherical the pearl, the more valuable it is.

These days, 99% of the black pearls sold on Rarotonga are reared on dedicated pearl farms in the lagoons of the Northern Group. It can take anywhere from 18 months to two years for a pearl to develop, and the highly trained pearl 'seeders' command huge salaries; for the farmers themselves, however, it's difficult, backbreaking work, and the returns can be surprisingly modest once everyone's taken their cut.

Black-pearl jewellery is sold in many places around Rarotonga, and the prices are often much more reasonable here than they are overseas. The largest retailers include **Bergman & Sons Pearl Store** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21902; Tutakimoa Rd), between Cook's Corner and the petrol station, **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu), **Goldmine** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 24823), on Avarua's main road, and **Moana Gems** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22312; CITC Shopping Centre).

A single pearl could cost you anything from NZ\$5 to well over NZ\$1000. For NZ\$30 to NZ\$50 you can get a half-decent pearl. Most retailers will provide a certificate of authenticity detailing the pearl's quality and provenance; if they don't, hold on to your cash and look elsewhere.

ply a length of dyed fabric which can be tied around the wearer in a variety of ways, most commonly as a skirt or dress or as a shoulder-throw. Tie-dyed *pareu* are very popular, and are often patterned with local designs such as coconut fronds or palm leaves. Printed *pareu* are also popular; the most expensive ones are made of silk and hand-coloured.

You can buy *pareu* for around NZ\$10 to NZ\$15 at many places around Rarotonga, especially in Avarua and at the Punanga Nui Market (p59); handmade ones are more likely to set you back NZ\$25 to NZ\$35. Printed T-shirts (from NZ\$10 to NZ\$25) and Hawaiian-style printed men's shirts (from NZ\$20 to NZ\$95) are also sold in many shops around Avarua and make great souvenirs.

Good places to look include **Vonnia's Store** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 20927; Ara Maire Nui), **Tuki's Pareu** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 25537; Ara Maire Nui), **Mareko** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 20548; Ara Maire Nui) and the Punanga Nui Market. For a big old *muu muu* (Mother Hubbard dress), Tuki's is probably the best bet.

If you want to buy fabric to stitch up your own, you can buy preprinted material at Tuki's Pareu and Vonnia's Store.

Stamps & Coins

The **Philatelic Bureau** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 29336), next door to the post office, sells Cook Islands coins and bank notes, plus collector's sets of Cook Islands stamps (highly prized by philatelists). The unique \$3 Cook Islands note is available in two different designs, and you can also pick up the huge \$5 coin if you haven't already found one in your change.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

All international flights arrive at Rarotonga's International Airport on the island's northwest side. See p174 for information on getting to Rarotonga from overseas.

If you're travelling to the outer islands from Rarotonga, the main way to travel is via small plane courtesy of the island's only domestic airline, Air Rarotonga. There are regular flights to Aitutaki and the other islands of the Southern Group; planes to the Northern Group are more erratic. If your

sea-legs will stand it, you could also hop onto a inter-island transport ship, or blag your way onto a private yacht. See p178 for inter-island transport within the Cooks.

When you arrive at the airport, remember to tip a wink to Jake, your ukelele-playing musical cabaret, who'll be crooning traditional songs of welcome inside the main airport terminal.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Most hotels, motels and hostels send vans to the airport to meet international flights (transfers are generally around NZ\$10 to NZ\$15, although some places provide pickup for free).

Raro Tours (Map pp52-3; ☎ 25325) provides transfers to and from the airport for a flat one-way fee of NZ\$10 to anywhere on the island. They always meet incoming international flights, but you'll need to book in advance if you're travelling to the airport. Or you could book a taxi (see opposite).

The last option, available during the day (but not for most international flights, which mostly turn up in the middle of the night), is the (anticlockwise) Cook's Passenger Transport bus (below). Note that the clockwise bus goes along the Ara Metua and doesn't pass the airport terminal building. You'll usually be charged an extra fare if you're bringing large pieces of luggage onto the bus.

Many accommodation places won't pick up from domestic flights, so you're limited to Raro Tours, taxis or the bus.

Bicycle

Mountain bikes are readily available for hire on Rarotonga and generally cost NZ\$5 to NZ\$10 a day, with discounts for weekly rentals. Cycling is a great way to explore the island at your own pace, and is especially rewarding along the quieter inland roads – the coast road can be pretty hectic.

Bikes and helmets can be hired from most of the larger car-rental companies and some resorts – see right for details.

Bus

Cook's Passenger Transport (☎ 25512, after hours ☎ 20349) operates a round-the-island bus service along the main coast road. The bus is a reliable and cheap way of getting

around, and is a great way of spotting some of the main landmarks. It takes about 50 minutes to circumnavigate the island.

All buses leave from the bus stop outside Cook's Corner in Avarua. Daytime buses going clockwise around the island depart every hour on the hour from 7am to 4pm on weekdays, 1pm to 4pm on Saturday, and from 8am to midday and 2pm to 4pm on Sunday.

Buses going anticlockwise depart at 25 minutes past every hour, 8.25am to 4.30pm on weekdays only.

A night-time bus service runs clockwise only from Monday to Thursday and on Saturday from 6pm to 10pm, with extra hourly buses on Friday night from midnight to 2am.

The service runs pretty much on time – you can usually work out when the next bus is likely to come along, or just stand on the side of the road and flag the bus down anywhere along its route.

The bus fare is NZ\$3 for one ride, NZ\$5 for a return trip (two rides) or NZ\$20 for a 10-ride ticket. Children's fares are NZ\$1.50 single, NZ\$2 return. A family day pass, valid for two adults and two kids, costs NZ\$20. There's also a day pass valid for one day's unlimited travel (NZ\$10).

You can pick up free bus timetables from the tourist office or the bus drivers, or ring Cook's Passenger Transport for information. Several free booklets, including the *Jason's* guide, also contain timetables.

Car & Motorcycle

To rent a car or motorbike in the Cook Islands you need to obtain a local driving licence from the police station in Avarua – even an international driving permit is not good enough for the Cooks. It's a straightforward operation – you just need to turn up and present your home driving licence, pay the NZ\$10 charge and have your picture taken. If your licence doesn't include motorbikes, you'll sometimes have to take an easy practical test (usually once around the block) for which you'll be charged an extra NZ\$5. You can get your licence any day from 8am to 3pm, but it pays to turn up early – if the island's busy, the queues at midday can be horrendous.

The quintessential mode of transport in the Cook Islands is the scooter. Practically

everyone has one (if not several), and almost everyone rides them, from teenagers right through to old-age pensioners. All car-rental agencies rent motorbikes, generally 70cc to 100cc models. Ring around to find the best deal or just walk up the main road in Avarua and pop in. The lowest rates are about NZ\$20/90 per day/week (most places offer discounts for weekly rentals). Many hotels also rent motorbikes.

Nearly all the rental motorbikes are automatic, but if you can be bothered to master a semi-automatic gearshift, they usually guzzle petrol at a much more economical rate. Take the time to learn how to ride the bike before heading out onto the main road – they're pretty simple to control, but take a bit of getting used to – and be extra careful of the red-hot exhaust pipe beside your right leg, especially if you're riding pinion.

Budget is the only company with safe-looking helmets. If you insist on wearing one, you'll certainly occupy the moral ground, but don't be surprised if you get a few funny stares.

Rates are around NZ\$55/65 per day for a small/medium car and NZ\$70 per day for a jeep, with discounts for three- to five-day rentals and even further discounts for rentals of a week or more. Baby capsules can be rented at Budget for NZ\$5 per day, and child seats are available at Avis and Budget for NZ\$5 per day.

It's worth phoning around to check the prices; many companies will have special deals going. Check if insurance and the 12.5% VAT are included in the stated cost.

Avis Rental Cars (www.avis.co.ck) airport (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21039); Avarua (Map pp56-7; ☎ 22833) Franchise of the global hire firm. Cars and jeeps are both available.

BT Rentals main office (Map pp52-3; ☎ 23586; 'Arorangi); Muri Beach (Map p64) Local firm renting bicycles, motorbikes and cars.

Budget Rent-a-Car (www.budget.co.ck) main office (Map pp56-7; ☎ 20895; 2 St Joseph Rd, Avarua); downtown office (Map pp56-7; ☎ 26895; Avarua, next to police station); airport (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21039, ☎ only open for international flights); Edgewater Resort (Map pp52-3; ☎ 21026); Rarotongan Beach Resort (Map pp52-3; ☎ 20838; opposite the resort); Muri Beach (Map p64; ☎ 21838) Largest rental firm in the Cook Islands, with a decent fleet of well-maintained cars, jeeps and convertibles. Shares offices with Polynesian Bike Hire.

Fun Rentals (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22426; www.funrentals.co.ck; opposite airport, next to Rarotonga Rentals) The only company on the island that offers bubble-shaped 'scooter cars'.

Island Car & Bike Hire (www.islandcarhire.co.ck) 'Arorangi (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22632; Ara Tapu); Avarua (Map pp56-7; ☎ 24632; opposite Punanga Nui market); Muri (Map p64; ☎ 21632) Local firm with scooters, motorbikes and cars. Cheap weekly rates, but don't expect luxuries like working speedometers.

Rarotonga Rentals (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22326; www.rarotongarentals.co.ck; opposite airport) The usual range of scooters, motorbikes and cars, as well as a few luxury runabouts.

Tipani Rentals (Map pp52-3; ☎ 22382; 'Arorangi) Opposite Edgewater Resort. Mainly rents scooters and motorbikes.

The driving on Rarotonga is reasonably sane (except late on Friday and Saturday when there's heavy drinking). The speed limit is 30km/h (19mph) in town, 40km/h (25mph) out of town. Drive on the left-hand side of the road – and look out for dogs.

There are two important rental-car rules: don't leave the car windows open, not because of the risk of theft, but because of the chances of an unexpected tropical downpour leaving the car awash; and don't park under coconut palms, because a falling coconut can positively flatten a tiny Japanese car.

Taxi

You can phone for a taxi any time between 6am and 10pm, although many companies offer a 24-hour service. Rates (which are government controlled) are NZ\$2.50 per kilometre, so it will cost around NZ\$40 to go from Muri to the airport. Taxi operators include:

Areiti Taxis & Tours (☎ 23012, cellphone ☎ 55752; Muri Beach; ☎ 24hr)

Aroa Taxi Shuttle (☎ 28144; 'Arorangi)

Doro's Taxi (☎ 21400, cellphone ☎ 52355; Avana; ☎ 24hr)

JP Taxis (☎ 26572, cellphone ☎ 55107; 'Arorangi; ☎ 24hr)

Kia Orana Taxis (☎ 20203, cellphone ☎ 50721; ☎ 24hr)

Lazaro Taxi (☎ 20529; 'Arorangi; ☎ 24hr)

Muri Beach Taxis (☎ 21625; Muri Beach)

Parekua Taxis (☎ 26490, cellphone ☎ 55870; Avarua)

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