

Easter Island

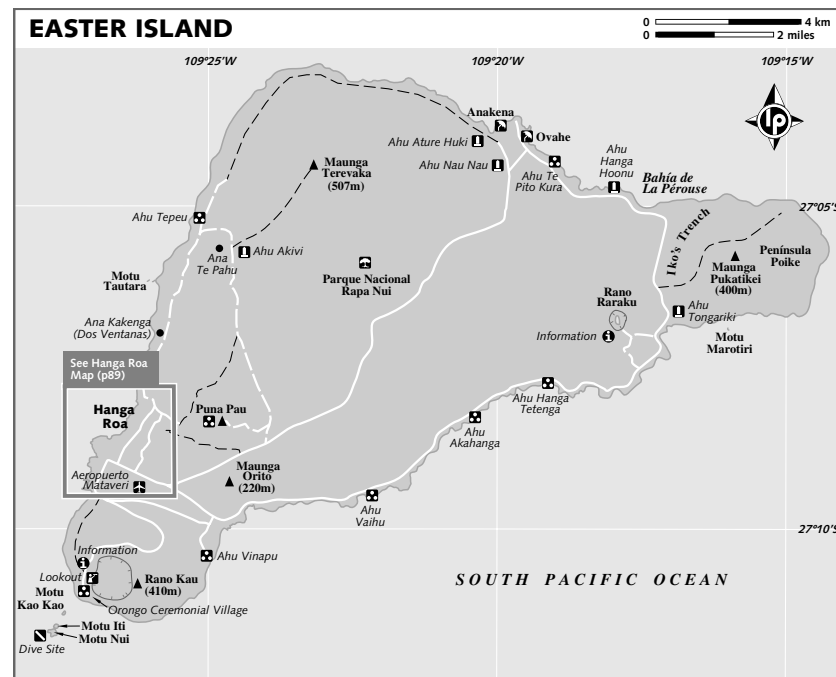
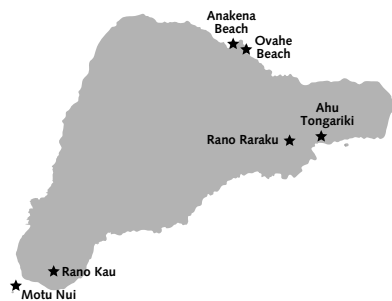
'Wow!' This will probably be your first reaction when arriving in Easter Island, and it's no surprise. Few areas in the world possess a more mystical pull than this tiny speck of land, one of the most isolated places on earth. Endowed with the most logic-defying statues in the world – the strikingly familiar *moai* – Easter Island emanates a magnetic, mysterious vibe. One thing that overwhelms visitors is the sense of history, with seemingly every patch of land carrying some archaeological remains. No wonder that Easter Island has reached cult status among culture junkies and history buffs.

For many visitors, the *moai* are the single most definitive image of Easter Island and the whole purpose of their trip. But Easter Island is much more than an open-air playground for mystical types. It is also a great place for a few days' strenuous activity, with scuba diving, snorkelling, horse riding, surfing and hiking all readily available. For such a tiny island, there's a startling variety of adventure options. Savvy surfies seek out the adrenaline-pumping waves that crash on the rugged coast. Diving fiends rave about the crystal-clear waters off Motu Nui. And if hiking or horse riding are more to your liking, there's no better way to discover the ancient sites than on foot or horseback – the perfect combination of nature and culture. But if all you want to do is recharge the batteries, you could simply flake out on a porcelain-sand beach.

Whatever your inclination, you'll find heaven in this gem of an island. Do it proper justice and add it to your South Pacific trip.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Speculate on how hundreds of *moai* were cut at **Rano Raraku** (p91), the 'nursery' of the *moai*, then moved to their final destination
- Sit on the edge of the sublime **Rano Kau** (p92) and gaze open-mouthed at the mesmerising 360-degree view
- **Snorkel** or **dive** (p95) in the stunning limpid blue waters off Motu Nui
- Seek solace and kick back with a book on the pale-sand beaches at **Ovahe** (p91) or **Anakena** (p91)
- Dose up on amazement at the row of enigmatic statues at **Ahu Tongariki** (p91)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Just south of the Tropic of Capricorn, Easter Island has a mild climate with average daily temperatures around 20°C to 25°C. The island is hottest in January and February and coolest (but still relatively warm) in July and August. In summer tropical humidity can make the temperatures feel higher. July and August might be a bit chilly for some tastes, but are an ideal time for hiking. May is the wettest month, but downpours can occur during any season.

Any time is a good time to visit Easter Island, but the peak holiday season typically runs from late December to late February, and at this time hotel prices are highest.

HISTORY

Because Easter Island is the most southeasterly corner of Polynesia, some theories have linked the ancestral Easter Islanders to the South American mainland (a mere 3700km away). Although Thor Heyerdahl's 1947 *Kon-Tiki* expedition proved it was possible to cross to the Pacific islands from South America on balsa-wood rafts, the

most accepted answer now is that the first islanders arrived either from the Marquesas, the Mangarevas, the Cooks or Pitcairn Island between the 4th and 8th centuries.

The Rapa Nui developed a unique civilisation, characterised by the construction of the ceremonial stone platforms called *ahu* and the famous Easter Island statues called *moai* (see p86). The population

EASTER ISLAND FACTS

- **Capital city:** Hanga Roa
- **Population:** 4200
- **Land area:** 117 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 56 32
- **Currency:** Chilean peso (Ch\$)
- **Languages:** Spanish and Rapa Nui
- **Greeting:** *Hola* (Spanish); *Iorana* (Rapa Nui)
- **Website:** www.netaxs.com/trance/rapanui.html

probably peaked at around 15,000 in the 17th century, when the people were working on ever-larger *moai*. Conflict over land and resources erupted in intertribal warfare by the late 17th century, only shortly before the arrival of Europeans, and the population started to decline. More recent dissension between different clans led to bloody wars and cannibalism, and many *moai* were toppled from their *ahu*. Natural disasters – earthquakes and tsunamis – may have also contributed to the destruction. The only *moai* standing today have been restored during the last century.

European Arrival

When the Dutch admiral Jacob Roggeveen arrived on Easter Sunday 1722, many of the great *moai* were still standing, but there was no sign of any modern implements, suggesting the islanders did not trade with the outside world.

In 1774 the celebrated English navigator James Cook led the next European expedition to land on Rapa Nui. Cook, familiar

with the Society Islands, Tonga and New Zealand (NZ), concluded that the inhabitants of Rapa Nui belonged to the same general lineage. His account is the first to mention that many *moai* had been damaged, apparently as a result of intertribal wars.

Fourteen years later French explorer La Pérouse found the people prosperous and calm, suggesting a quick recovery. In 1804 a Russian visitor reported more than 20 standing *moai*, but later accounts suggest further disruption.

European Takeover

Contact with outsiders nearly annihilated the Rapa Nui people. A raid by Peruvian blackbirders (slavers) in 1862 took 1000 islanders away to work the guano deposits of Peru's Chincha islands. After intense pressure from the Catholic Church, some survivors were returned to Easter Island, but disease and hard labour had already killed about 90% of them. The knowledge and culture lost has never been fully regained.

ARCHAEOLOGY IN EASTER ISLAND – LEARN YOUR BASICS

Fear not: you don't need to have a university degree to appreciate the archaeological remains in Easter Island. The following explanations should suffice.

Ahu

Ahu were village burial sites and ceremonial centres and are thought to derive from altars in French Polynesia. Some 350 of these stone platforms are dotted around the coast. Each is a mass of loose stones held together by retaining walls. *Ahu* are paved on the upper surface with more or less flat stones, and they have a vertical wall on the seaward side and at each end. Many structures were dismantled and used for construction purposes, but the government has done a remarkable job in restoring monuments over the last 30 years.

Moai

Easter Island's most pervasive image, the enigmatic *moai* are massive carved figures that probably represent clan ancestors. From 2m to 10m tall, these stony-faced statues stood with their backs to the Pacific Ocean. Although this style of statue is unique in the Pacific, there are similarities with the stone *tiki* of the Marquesas Islands. Some *moai* have been completely restored, while others have been re-erected but are eroded. Many more lie on the ground, toppled over – usually face down – near an *ahu*.

You can easily visualise the creation process at the quarry at Rano Raraku, which contains *moai* at all stages of construction.

Topknots

Archaeologists believe that the reddish cylindrical *pukao* (topknots) that crown many *moai* reflect a male hairstyle once common on Rapa Nui. Quarried from the small crater at Puna Pau, the volcanic scoria from which *pukao* are made is relatively soft and easily worked.

A brief period of French-led missionary activity saw most of the surviving islanders converted in the 1860s. Commercial exploitation of the island began in 1870, when French adventurer Jean-Baptiste Dutroux-Bornier introduced the wool trade to Rapa Nui and sent many islanders to work on plantations in Tahiti. Conflicts arose with the missionaries, who were at the same time deporting islanders to missions on Mangareva (in the Gambier Archipelago). Dutroux-Bornier was assassinated by an islander in 1877.

Annexation by Chile

Chile officially annexed the island in 1888 during a period of expansion that included the acquisition of territory from Peru and Bolivia after the War of the Pacific (1879–84).

By 1897 Rapa Nui had fallen under the control of a single wool company, which became the island's de facto government, continuing the wool trade until the middle of the 20th century.

In 1953 the Chilean government took charge of the island, continuing the imperial rule to which islanders had been subject for nearly a century. With restricted rights, including travel restrictions and ineligibility to vote, the islanders felt they were treated like second-class citizens. However, 1967 marked a turning point. The establishment of a regular commercial air link between Santiago and Tahiti, with Rapa Nui as a refuelling stop, opened up the island to the world and brought many benefits to Rapa Nui people.

Easter Island Today

Despite being 3700km from the Chilean mainland, Easter Island is considered part of the region of Valparaíso. Some islanders speak hopefully of autonomy, and even independence, but ongoing economic reliance on mainland Chile renders this unlikely in the foreseeable future.

The main claim is the return of native lands. Native Rapa Nui control almost no land outside Hanga Roa. In late 1996 the Chilean government agreed to return about 1500 hectares of land to islanders.

Rapa Nui people are also concerned about the development and control of the tourism industry, which is the island's number one

earner. It's keeping up, but not booming – approximately 40,000 visitors come to the island each year – and it has to be managed with care to avoid any irreparable damage to the fragile environment.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Rapa Nui people are generally very easy-going and there are few pitfalls for unwary visitors. Nonetheless, it's worth keeping in mind that it's a fairly conservative society and that family life, marriage and children still play a central role in everyday life, as does religion. Large extended families bind most of the islanders, together with great respect for the elders.

The most striking cultural feature is the intriguing blend of Polynesian and Chilean customs – you'll hear an *Iorana* followed by a stream of Spanish, or an *Hola* followed by Rapa Nui. Although Rapa Nui people identify more as Pacific islanders than Latin Americans, they have one foot in South America and one foot in Polynesia. Visitors are struck by this constant sway between two cultures.

Lifestyle

Despite its unique language and history, contemporary Rapa Nui does not appear to be a 'traditional' society – its continuity was shattered by the near extinction of the population in the last century. However, although they have largely adapted to a Westernised lifestyle, Rapa Nui people are fiercely proud of their history and culture, and they strive to keep their traditions alive. These disparate forces, rather than clashing, exert a fascinating appeal. A civil servant is likely to attend the Sunday morning mass dressed in a suit but may turn into a fierce warrior with an all-plumed costume during the Tapati festival (see p96). And the trendy youngsters you see surfing the Internet in the morning can be seen going to the clubs and bars on horseback in the evening!

Population

The population of 4200 includes one-third non-Rapa Nui people who are from the Chilean mainland and a substantial number of Rapa Nui who are actually living, permanently or temporarily, off the island.

EASTER ISLAND IN...

Four days

Start the day by visiting the **Musée Antropológico Sebastián Englert** (below) for some historical background. Next, take a half-day tour to **Rano Kau** (p92) and **Orongo Ceremonial Village** (p92) and soak up the lofty views. At night take your weary bones to **La Taverne du Pêcheur** (p94) and treat yourself to a proper feed. On day two take a full-day tour to marvel at **Rano Raraku** (opposite) and **Ahu Tongariki** (opposite). On your return to Hanga Roa head straight to an atmosphere-laden bar on Av Atamu Tekena for the night vibe (p94). Day three is all about Hanga Roa. Hit the **mercado** (p94) to put a dent in the wallet and amble down Av Te Pito o Te Henua to enjoy the sunset at **Ahu Tautira** (below). By this stage you'll probably run out of stamina so make your way to **Ariki o Te Pana** (p94) for an *empanada* fix. Suitably re-energised, you can find a dance partner at **Piditi** (p94).

Day four should see you lazing the day away at **Anakena beach** (opposite) or **Ovahe beach** (opposite) then attend a **dance performance** (p94) at Hotel Hanga Roa.

One Week

Follow the four-day agenda then make the most of the island's outdoor adventures. Book a **horse-riding excursion** (p95) along the north coast, spend a day **diving off Motu Nui** (p95) and scramble up and down **Maunga Terevaka** (p95).

One Month

One month? Chances are you've fallen in love with a local. Rent a house in Hanga Roa and enjoy the romance!

Tourist Information

Sernatur (☎ 100 255; Tu'u Maheke; ipascua@sernatur.cl; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Has various brochures about the island.

TRANSPORT

Everything revolves around Hanga Roa. See p97 for details on transport to/from and around the island.

SIGHTS Hanga Roa

A must-see for anyone interested in Easter Island's ancient past, the well-organised **Museo Antropológico Sebastián Englert** (☎ 551 020; Sector Tahai; adult/child US\$2/1; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun) makes for a perfect introduction to the island's history and culture. In the vicinity of the museum, the highly photogenic **Ahu Tahai** contains three restored *ahu*. Ahu Tahai proper is in the middle, with a solitary *moai*. Ahu Ko Te Riku is to the north, with a topknotted and eyeballed *moai*. Ahu Vai Uri has five eroded *moai* of varying sizes. Continue further north along the coast and you'll soon come across **Ahu Akapu**, with its solitary *moai*.

Ahu Tautira overlooks Caleta Hanga Roa, the fishing port in Hanga Roa at the foot of Av Te Pito o Te Henua. It has two superb *moai*.

Parque Nacional Rapa Nui

Since 1935, much of Easter Island's land and all the archaeological sites have been a **national park** (admission non-Chileans US\$10). Admission is payable at Orongo Ceremonial Village and is valid for the whole park for the length of one's stay. The park has caves, *ahu*, fallen *moai*, village structures and petroglyphs galore. Spending the extra cash on a guided tour or an islander who can explain what you are seeing is a very worthy investment. Respecting these sites is essential – avoid walking on the *ahu* (revered by locals as burial sites) or removing/relocating rocks of archaeological structures.

There are ranger information stations at Orongo, Anakena and Rano Raraku.

NORTHERN LOOP

North of Ahu Tahai, the road is rough but passable if you drive slowly. Your best bet is to explore the area on foot, on horseback or by mountain bike, but there was no sign marking the sites at the time of writing.

About 2km north of Tahai is **Ana Kenga**, or Dos Ventanas. This site comprises two caves opening onto the ocean (bring a torch). Continue about 2km north and you'll come across **Ahu Tepeu**. This large *ahu* has several fallen *moai* and a village site with foundations of *hare paenga* (elliptical houses) and the walls of several round houses. To the northeast rises **Maunga Terevaka**, and to the south is a large grassy plain over a jagged lava flow.

Unusual for its inland location, **Ahu Akivi**, restored in 1960, sports seven restored *moai*. They are the only ones that face towards the sea, but, like all *moai*, they overlook the site of a village, traces of which can still be seen.

Off the dirt road between Akivi and the west coast, **Ana Te Pahu** is a former cave dwelling with an overgrown garden of sweet potatoes, taro and bananas. The caves here are lava tubes, created when rock solidified around a flowing stream of molten lava.

The soft, red stone of the volcanic **Puna Pau Quarry** was used to make the reddish, cylindrical *pukao* (topknots) that were placed on many *moai*. Half-finished *pukao* have been rolled down the hill, and remain in a scattered line.

NORTHEAST CIRCUIT

Sybarites and beach bums in search of a place to wallow will make a beeline for the postcard-perfect, white-sand **Anakena beach**. It also forms a perfect backdrop for **Ahu Nau Nau**, which comprises seven *moai*, some with topknots. A 1979 excavation and restoration revealed that the *moai* were not 'blind' but had inlaid coral and rock eyes.

On a rise south of the beach stands **Ahu Ature Huki** and its lone *moai*. Heyerdahl and a dozen islanders took almost 20 days to lever up this statue with wooden poles and ropes.

Nearby **Ovahe beach** offers more seclusion for wannabe Robinson Crusoes. Here, beside Bahía de La Pérouse, a massive *moai* lies face down with its neck broken. Nearly 10m long, the **Ahu Te Pito Kura** is the largest *moai* moved from Rano Raraku and erected on an *ahu*. Its resemblance to the incomplete figures at Rano Raraku suggests that it is also one of the most recently built. The *ahu's* name comes from a large, spherical, magnetic stone called *te pito kura*, which rests about 40m to the left of the fallen *moai*

and is believed to symbolise the navel of the world.

If you want to get away from it all, the wild **Península Poike** will appeal to you. Making up the eastern tip of the island, the peninsula was formed by an extinct volcano. Access by 4WD is prohibited to prevent erosion. Your best bet is to take a two-day horse-riding excursion from Hanga Roa.

The monumental **Ahu Tongariki** has plenty to set your camera's flash popping. Between 1992 and 1995 a Japanese company re-erected 15 imposing statues at this site, the largest *ahu* ever built. A 1960 tsunami had flattened the statues and scattered several topknots far inland. Only one topknot has been returned to its place atop a *moai*. The statues gaze over a large, level village site, with ruined remnants scattered about and some petroglyphs nearby.

The volcano of **Rano Raraku** is one of the most poignant archaeological sites you'll ever see. Known as 'the nursery', it is the quarry for the hard tuff from which the *moai* were cut. It's a captivating site – you'll feel as though you're stepping back into early Polynesian times, wandering among *moai* in all stages of progress studded on the southern slopes of the volcano. Groups of *moai* are partly buried, their heads sticking out from the grassy slopes. Others are in the early stages of carving – the largest is a 21m giant, but most range from 5.5m to 7m.

MOAI ON THE MOVE

How were the *moai* moved from where they were carved at Rano Raraku volcano to their *ahu* around the coast? Legend says that priests moved the *moai* by the power of *mana*, an ability to make a *moai* walk a short distance every day until eventually it reached its destination. Most experts think they were dragged on a kind of wooden sledge or on rollers. Recent theories suggest that the *moai* were not dragged horizontally but moved in a vertical position, with the base of the statue carved in a subtle convex shape so as to lower the centre of gravity and allow gentle pivoting and swivelling movements. Your guide will be only too happy to tell you all the details, even the wackiest interpretations – some claim that *moai* are the work of extra-terrestrials!

A trail leads over the rim into the crater. At the top the 360-degree view is truly awesome. Within the crater are a small, glistening lake and about 20 standing *moai*, a number of fallen ones and others only partly finished.

Rano Raraku is a small detour off the south-coast road, about 18km from Hanga Roa. There are several ruined *ahu* along the road.

SOUTHWEST TRAIL

Be prepared: **Rano Kau** crater is one of those dreamlike places that make you question whether something so visually orgasmic could actually exist – no less than that. Nearly covered in a bog of floating *totora* reeds, the crater lake of Rano Kau appears to be a giant witch's cauldron. Perched 400m above, on the edge of the crater wall on one side and abutting a vertical drop plunging to the inky-blue ocean on the other side, **Orongo ceremonial village** boasts one of the world's most dramatic landscapes. Built into the side of the slope, the houses have walls of horizontally overlapping stone slabs, with an earth-covered arched roof of similar materials, making them appear partly subterranean. Orongo overlooks several small *motu* (offshore islands) and was the focus of an island-wide bird cult linked to the god Makemake in the 18th and 19th centuries. Birdman petroglyphs are visible on a cluster of boulders between the cliff top and the edge of the crater. Orongo is either a steepish 2km climb or a short scenic drive from town.

Beyond the eastern end of the airport runway, a road heads south past some large oil tanks to **Ahu Vinapu**, with several toppled *moai*. Vinapu is most famous for its tight-fitting stonework, which some claim is similar to a style found at Inca sites on the South American mainland.

ACTIVITIES

For details on activities on Easter Island, see p95.

EASTER ISLAND FOR CHILDREN

Easter Island is not as attractive as Disneyland, mainly due to a lack of age-appropriate sights, although Rapa Nui are well disposed towards children. Some things to try are a visit to **Rano Raraku** (p91), which can be a lot of fun (it's a bit like a theme park, after all!); a **horse-riding excursion** (p95) around Hanga Roa; and a splash at Anakena beach (p91).

TOURS

Given the lack of explanatory signs, it makes sense to join an organised tour since you get the benefit of an English-speaking guide who can explain the cultural significance of the archaeological sites. After your tour, you can explore at your leisure.

Plenty of operators conduct tours of the sites, typically charging US\$40 for a full day and US\$25 for a half day.

A few outfits offering a reliable service: **Aku Aku Turismo** (☎ 100 770; www.akuakuturismo.cl; Av Tu'u Koihu s/n) **Haumaka Archaeological Guide Services** (☎/fax 100 274; haumaka@entelchile.net) **Kia Koe Tour** (☎ 100 852; www.kiakoeoutour.cl; Av Atamu Tekena s/n)

SLEEPING

Unless otherwise stated, most places come equipped with private bathroom, and breakfast is included. Many guesthouses also provide meals for about US\$20. Air-con is still scarce, but fans are provided in the hottest months.

If you're planning to visit in January or February during the Tapati festival it's a good idea to book well ahead.

Budget

Camping Mihinoa (☎ 551 593; www.mihinoa.com; Av Pont s/n; camp sites per person US\$10, s/d US\$25/50; 📶) The only camping on the island is within earshot of the crashing waves. There's plenty of grassy ground (but no shade to speak of), a kitchen for guests' use, bike and tent hire (US\$17), and laundry service. The ablution block passed the schoolmarm's cleanliness

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Residencial Tita et Lionel (☎ 551 279; www.ifrance.fr/titaetlionel; Av Atamu Tekena; s/d US\$55/65) One of our favourite places to stay in Hanga Roa. Tita and Lionel, a French-Rapa Nui couple, will make you feel like a member of the family at this quirky *residencial*, perched on a small hill. Top marks go to the two natty bungalows imitating *hare paenga* (traditional boat-shaped houses), the hearty home-cooking and the scenic setting. There are also two normal, less surprising rooms in a separate building. It's a walk from the middle of town, but that's our only gripe.

inspection. Should you need a roof above your head, ask for one of the four clean yet nondescript rooms in the main house.

Residencial Ana Rapu (☎ 100 540; www.anarapu.cl; Hetereki s/n; camp sites per person US\$10, s/d US\$25/35; 📶) Longstanding Ana Rapu is a convivial spot to park your grungy backpack, although the cheaper rooms, with shared bathroom, are a bit scuffed around the edges. But it's churlish to quibble when the rates include a decent breakfast, amiable staff and the chance of scoring a room with ocean views. Other perks include horse-riding excursions, laundry and Internet service.

Residencial El Tauke (☎ 100 253; Av Te Pito o Te Henua s/n; s/d US\$15/30) Style aficionados may squirm at the jaded décor of this family-run outfit, while cash-conscious travellers may find the atmosphere gentle, the rooms tidy enough and the rates unbeatable. And almost everything is on your doorstep.

Residencial Chez Erika (☎ 100 474; Av Tuki Haka He Vari s/n; s/d US\$25/35) Another unfussy *residencial*, with a laid-back atmosphere and colourful rooms. A good pick.

Midrange

Hotel Vai Moana (☎ 100 626; www.vai-moana.cl; Av Atamu Tekena s/n; s US\$50-65, d US\$65-90; 📶) This welcoming port of call close to the museum gets good marks for cleanliness and service. The rooms are not going to win a beauty contest, but the communal areas are tastefully decorated and the manicured garden works a treat. The 'superior' rooms are more spacious and better equipped. The *cocina* (cuisine; US\$20 for a full meal) gets kudos from travellers.

Residencial Martin y Anita (☎ 100 593; hmanita@entelchile.net; Av Simón Paoa; s/d US\$50/80) This solid-value option is run by affable hosts who will go the extra mile to help travellers. The rooms are well scrubbed and bathrooms are kept in good nick. Some rooms are brighter than others, so ask to see a few. Martin speaks good English. It's a stone's throw from the church – good to know, in case you need to confess your sins.

Hostal Pikera Uri (☎/fax 100 577; Sector Tahai s/n; s/d US\$50/80) Whether mooching around the neat garden or snoozing on your oh-so-comfortable bed, you'll enjoy this cosy retreat, a short stroll from the museum. Throw in well-furnished rooms, generous-sized bathrooms and heavenly views over

the ocean and you're laughing. The owner organises horse-riding excursions.

Residencial Tadeo y Lili (☎ 100 422; tadeolili@entelchile.net; Av Apina s/n; s/d US\$65/85) Efficiency and neatness are the order of the day at this long-standing venture. The bright, commodious dining room is as sterile as an operation ward but the well-maintained bungalows, of varying sizes, boast a terrace overlooking the bay. Tadeo organises horse-riding excursions. And if you're craving a real coffee at breakfast, this is the place.

Hotel Taura'a (☎ 100 463; www.tauraahotel.cl; Av Atamu Tekena s/n; s US\$80, d US\$100-120; 📶) The rooms here are clean-smelling, spacious, crisp and modern, even if not particularly distinctive. Bill, the Aussie owner, and his wife, Edith, dispense friendly advice. A safe choice, with no surprises up its sleeves.

Hotel Gomero (☎ 100 313; www.hotelgomero.com; Av Tu'u Koihu s/n; s/d US\$65/85; 📶) This good-value option has everything in spades. Rest your head in luminous, amply sized rooms with pathogen-free bathrooms or relax by the nifty pool amid lush gardens. The modest number of rooms (13) ensures intimacy.

Top End

Unfortunately, there were no regal lodging places when we visited, and most existing top-end options were in need of a serious overhaul. There should be a couple of new outfits by the time you visit; ask at Seranatu.

Hotel O'Tai (☎ 100 250; otairapanui@entelchile.net; Av Te Pito o Te Henua s/n; s US\$85-110, d US\$115-145; 📶 📶 📶) At the time of writing this was the best of the gang, featuring luminous rooms with terrace, good amenities and professional service. Ask for the more expensive bungalows, which offer more breathing room and are pleasantly decorated.

There's also the unexciting **Hotel Taha Tai** (☎ 551 192; hoteltahatai@entelchile.net; Av Policarpo Toro s/n; s/d US\$140/165; 📶 📶).

EATING

The culinary scene is not exactly enthralling, but if you find yourself missing *haute cuisine* remember what you've come here for: the scenery and the archaeological sites.

Merahi Ra'a (☎ 551 125; Av Te Pito o Te Henua; mains US\$10-17; 📶 lunch & dinner, closed Thu) The lure? Fish dishes that are ultra fresh, copious and

expertly cooked. Sit on the terrace from where you can enjoy partial views of the boats bobbing in the harbour.

Ariki o Te Pana (☎ 100 171; Av Atamu Tekena; mains US\$4-13; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Sun) Enter this no-nonsense den to gobble some damned little calorie-busting *empanadas* – the *queso y atún* (cheese and tuna) is a killer. More, please.

Jardín del Mau (☎ 551 677; Av Apina s/n; mains US\$15-18; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Tue) Fulfil your Mediterranean cravings with comforting Italian staples such as pasta and lasagne. While most hit their mark, others remind you that you're miles from Naples. Meat and fish dishes are also on offer.

Kopakabana (☎ 100 447; Av Te Pito o Te Henua; mains US\$13-15; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Chow down on immaculate fresh fish and meat dishes in this Hanga Roa classic, smack dab in the centre. Gourmet food it's certainly not, but at least it's appetising and filling. Kopakabana hosts a twice-weekly Polynesian dance show (US\$20) that is well regarded.

Tarapu (☎ 551 863; Av Atamu Tekena s/n; mains US\$3; 🍴 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) A godsend for picnickers and shoestringers, Tarapu has picnic boxes and sandwiches at puny prices and can also deliver to your guesthouse or hotel for a minimal charge.

La Taverne du Pêcheur (☎ 100 619; Av Te Pito o Te Henua; mains US\$20-80; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Sun) This Hanga Roa institution down by the harbour is under French management, which bodes well. Meat and fish dishes feature on the menu, but if your purse strings are a little more relaxed it's worth splurging on lobster and sampling a glass of French wine. Leave room for the sinfully good *marbré au chocolat*.

For self-caterers, there are a couple of supermarkets on Av Atamu Tekena.

DRINKING

Av Atamu Tekena is the main hot spot, with a smattering of pleasant watering holes featuring live music most evenings. **Te Moana** (Av Atamu Tekena; 🍴 closed Sun) is a fun place to swill a glass (or two) of *pisco* and was the flavour of the month at the time of writing. **Topa Tangi Pub** (Av Atamu Tekena; 🍴 Wed-Sat), off the main drag, is very popular at weekends with garulous fun-seekers. Also worth investigating, **Aloha Pub** (Av Atamu Tekena; 🍴 closed Sun) is a bit more subdued, with a chilled-out vibe.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Te Moana (☎ 551 578; Av Atamu Tekena; mains US\$12-24; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Sun) This was one of the most popular options in Hanga Roa when we visited. Menu-wise there are some better options in town, but we're suckers for the buzzing atmosphere that prevails here, especially at dinner. The quirky all-wood surrounds are another draw. Te Moana serves all the usual suspects as well as some filling burgers.

Don't come to Easter Island to wallow in revelry, but if you want to tear it up beneath the strobing red lights, head to **Toroko** (Av Policarpo Toro; 🍴 Thu-Sat) or **Piditi** (Av Hotu Matua; 🍴 Thu-Sat), both with a mix of modern tunes and island pop. Admission is around US\$4 for men.

ENTERTAINMENT

The elaborately costumed and talented group **Kari Kari** (☎ 100 595) performs the legends of the island through song and dance at the Hotel Hanga Roa three times a week (US\$20).

SHOPPING

For souvenirs and other knick-knacks, check out the **Feria Municipal** (nr Av Atamu Tekena & Tu'u Maheke) and the **Mercado Artesanal** (nr Tu'u Koihu & Ara Roa Rakei). Both are open morning and late afternoon Monday to Saturday.

EASTER ISLAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

All accommodation options are located in Hanga Roa. *Residenciales* (homestays) form the bedrock of accommodation on the island. They vary a lot in price and comfort: expect to pay about US\$15 per person for a basic room, and up to US\$50 for a more welcoming room with bathroom. There's also a handful of basic camping grounds.

There's a clutch of midrange options within the US\$80 to US\$100 bracket but no proper top-end hotels to speak of. The situation should improve in the forthcoming years with the opening of luxurious outfits.

PRACTICALITIES

- *Mercurio*, the national daily newspaper, can be purchased at various shops in Hanga Roa.
- Chilean programmes of the government-owned Television Nacional (TVN) are beamed to the island via satellite.
- Easter Island uses the NTSC system for videos.
- Electricity is supplied at 240V, 50 Hz AC.
- Easter Island follows the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for a conversions table.

There are significant seasonal price variations, with rates rising during the summer months (December to March). In this chapter prices are for high season.

ACTIVITIES Cycling

Cycling is a superb way of seeing the island at your leisure, provided you're ready to come to grips with the steep and winding roads around the southern parts.

Bike hire is readily available in Hanga Roa. An easy loop is from Hanga Roa up to Ahu Tepeu, then east to Ahu Akivi and back to Hanga Roa (about 10km). The dirt track from Hanga Roa to Orongo Ceremonial Village is another stunner.

Diving & Snorkelling

Did you know? There's excellent diving on Easter Island, with gin-clear visibility in excess of 40m and a dramatic seascape. However, don't expect swarms of fish.

It's diveable year round. Water temperatures vary from as low as 21°C in winter to almost 27°C in summer.

Most sites are scattered along the west coast, with Motu Nui as a prime location. See p70 for more information.

There are only two diving centres in Easter Island. Prices start at US\$50 for a single dive. Both operators also offer snorkelling trips.

Mike Rapu Diving Center (☎ 551 055; www.mike-rapu.cl; Caleta Hanga Roa; 🍴 Mon-Sun)

Orca Diving Center (☎ 550 375; www.seemorca.cl; Caleta Hanga Roa; 🍴 Mon-Sun) Almost next door to Mike Rapu.

Hiking

While Easter Island will never be mistaken for Switzerland, there are some excellent hiking opportunities. And you're never far from the archaeological sites, which spices things up. A memorable walk is the way-marked Ruta Patrimonial, which runs from the museum up to Orongo Ceremonial Village (about five hours, 9km). Another recommended walk is the climb to Maunga Terevaka from near Ahu Akivi (about three hours). You can also follow the path along the northern coastline from Ahu Tahai to Anakena Beach, then hitch back (about seven hours).

You can't get lost, but bring water and food and be sure to have a detailed map right at hand.

Horse Riding

There's something romantic and adventurous about visiting the island on horseback. Several *residenciales*, hotels and tour agencies can provide horses or put together tailor-made excursions that take in sites near Hanga Roa or more remote places in the countryside.

Some reliable operators include **Piti Pont** (☎ 100 664), **Pantu** (☎ 100 577) and **Tadeo** (☎ 100 422). Expect to pay about US\$40 for a half-day tour and US\$50 to US\$60 for a full-day tour with a guide.

Surfing

Easter Island is hit with powerful swells from all points of the compass throughout the year, offering irresistible lefts and rights – mostly lava-reef breaks, with waves up to 5m. The most popular spots are scattered along the west coast. Good news: it's uncrowded. For beginners, there are a couple of good waves off Caleta Hanga Roa. Seasoned surfies will take to Mataverí, to the south-west, or Tahai, to the northwest, where the waves are more challenging.

The shop **Hare Orca** (☎ 550 375; Caleta Hanga Roa), next to the Orca Diving Center, hires out body boards (US\$15) and surfboards (US\$20).

BUSINESS HOURS

Offices are open from 9am to 5pm; some close for an hour at lunch time. Restaurants typically open until 9pm, though they may close early if business is slow.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Chilean Embassies & Consulates

Australia Canberra (☎ 06-6286 2430); Melbourne

(☎ 03-9654 4982); Sydney (☎ 02-9299 2533)

Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-235-4402); Toronto (☎ 416-924-0106); Vancouver (☎ 604-681-9162)

France (☎ 01 47 05 46 61; Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-2044990; Berlin)

New Zealand (☎ 04-471 6270; Wellington)

UK (☎ 020-7580-1023; London)

USA Los Angeles (☎ 310-785-0047); New York (☎ 212-980-3366)

Embassies & Consulates on Easter Island

There's no consulate on the island, but many countries have an embassy in Santiago.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In February the island goes wild during the colourful **Tapati Rapa Nui**, a fortnight-long celebration with music, dance and traditional cultural events. Attractions include *moai* carving, body painting, and the enthralling Haka Pe'i race, where competitors slide down a steep hill atop sleds made of banana-tree trunks!

INTERNET RESOURCES

Easter Island Foundation (www.islandheritage.org)

Information on history, travel, places to stay, culture, archaeology and more.

Easter Island home page (www.netaxs.com/trance/rapanui.html) Background facts and comprehensive links to information on everything from local politics to archaeology and tour operators.

MAPS

Tourist maps are distributed freely at Sernatur and tour agencies. More detailed maps, including the *Isla de Pascua Trekking Map* by JLM Mapas, are available at local shops for about US\$12.

MONEY

Easter Island uses the Chilean peso, but most businesses, especially lodgings and rental agencies, readily accept US-dollar cash (and euros, albeit at a pinch) and quote their prices in US dollars and in pesos. Some eateries and stores also show prices in both dollars and pesos. Travellers from Tahiti must bring US-dollar cash. In this chapter all prices are quoted in US dollars for convenience.

Many *residenciales*, hotels and tour agencies accept credit cards, but they usually charge a hefty commission for the service. In any case, don't rely solely on your credit card and make sure you keep some cash in reserve for the inevitable day when the ATM decides to throw a wobbly – there's only one in Hanga Roa. It accepts only MasterCard.

Approximate rates for the Chilean peso are listed below. For US dollar exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page.

Country	Unit	Peso
Australia	A\$1	Ch\$390
Canada	C\$1	Ch\$463
CFP zone	100 CFP	Ch\$544
euro zone	€1	Ch\$650
Fiji	F\$1	Ch\$300
Japan	¥100	Ch\$454
NZ	NZ\$1	Ch\$328
Samoa	ST1	Ch\$179
Solomon Islands	S\$1	Ch\$71
Tonga	T\$1	Ch\$257
UK	£1	Ch\$942
USA	US\$1	Ch\$517
Vanuatu	100Vt	Ch\$472

TELEPHONE

Easter Island's international telephone code is the same as Chile's (☎ 56), and the area code (☎ 32) covers the whole island. International calls (dial ☎ 00) start at around US\$1 per minute. Mobile phones were being introduced on the island when we visited.

TIME

Easter Island is six hours behind GMT, or five hours behind GMT in summer (daylight saving time). Thus, noon in Hanga Roa is 10am in Los Angeles, 6pm in London and 6am the next day in Auckland.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The primary source of tourist information is **Sernatur** (☎ 100 255; ipascua@sernatur.cl; Tu'u Maheke, Hanga Roa). Any travel agency or hotel in Hanga Roa can also provide tourist information.

VISAS

Visa requirements are the same as for mainland Chile. Citizens of Canada, the UK, the US, Australia, NZ and most Western

HOW MUCH?

- **Half-day tour:** US\$25
- **Admission to Parque Nacional Rapa Nui:** US\$10
- **Accommodation in a residential:** US\$15-50
- **Fish dish in a restaurant:** US\$8
- **Bicycle hire:** US\$20 per day

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- **1L gas (petrol):** US\$1
- **1L bottle of water:** US\$1
- **Glass of pisco:** US\$3
- **Woodcarving:** depends on your bargaining skills
- **Empanada:** US\$3

European countries need passports only. Upon arrival, visitors receive a tourist card and entry stamp that allows a stay of up to 90 days. Passports are obligatory and are essential for checking into hotels, cashing travellers cheques and for other activities. Check with a Chilean embassy for the latest information.

TRANSPORT IN EASTER ISLAND

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The only airline serving Easter Island is **LAN** (☎ 100 920; www.lan.com; Av Atamu Tekena s/n; ✈ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat). It has four flights per week to/from Santiago and two flights per week to/from Pape'ete (Tahiti). A standard economy return fare from Santiago can range from US\$700 to US\$900. Flights are often overbooked, so it is essential to confirm your ticket two days before departure. From Pape'ete to Easter Island, flights cost around US\$550 return. From other South Pacific destinations, you'll have to stop in Tahiti. Easter Island can be included in round-the-world (RTW; see p836) or Circle Pacific (see p836) tickets with One World Alliance, which includes LAN.

Sea

Few passenger services go to Easter Island, but see p841 for more information. A few yachts stop here, mostly in January, February and March. Anchorages are not well sheltered.

GETTING AROUND

Outside Hanga Roa, nearly the entire east coast road and the road to Anakena are paved. Side roads to the archaeological sites are not paved, but most are in decent enough condition.

If you walk or ride a mountain bike or motorcycle around the island, carry extra food and water, since neither is easily available outside Hanga Roa.

To/From the Airport

The airport is just on the outskirts of Hanga Roa. *Residencial* proprietors wait at the airport and will shuttle you for free to your hotel or *residencial*.

Bicycle

Mountain bikes are readily available from hotels and car-hire agencies in Hanga Roa for about US\$12 to US\$16 per eight hours and US\$16 to US\$25 per day.

Car & Motorcycle

Established hotels and agencies hire out Suzuki 4WDs for US\$50 to US\$60 per eight hours and US\$60 to US\$85 per day. Locals may charge less – ask at *residenciales* or at Sernatur. Hotels and agencies are generally willing to accept credit cards, but private individuals expect US-dollar cash. A word of warning: insurance is not usually included.

Motorcycles are hired out for about US\$35 per eight hours and US\$50 per day.

You can contact the following outfits:

Mana Nui Rent a Car (☎ 551 658, 100 811; Av Atamu Tekena s/n)

Oceanic Rapa Nui Rent a Car (☎ 100 985; Av Atamu Tekena s/n)

Rent a Car Insular (☎ 100 480; Av Atamu Tekena s/n)

Rent-a-Car Moira (☎ 100 718; Av Te Pito o Te Henua s/n)

Taxi

Taxis cost a flat US\$3 for most trips around town. Longer trips can be negotiated, with the cost depending mainly on the time.

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