

Niue

When you're the world's smallest independent nation you're allowed to be different – and Niue (*new-ay*) is very different. Don't expect the standard Pacific island experience: you won't be relaxing on palm-fringed beaches here, because there aren't any. Leave your idleness at home and bring a sense of adventure instead.

Discover the mystery of the limestone chasms and caves accenting the island's rocky coast. Explore the underwater caverns and tunnels of the Pacific's most unique dive spots. Don mask and snorkel and lose yourself in the pools fringing Niue's reef, or go fishing in the dark indigo depths surrounding the island. From June to October witness humpback whales nursing their newborn calves off Avatele and Tamakautoga in Niue's warm waters. And after all this honest exercise, chill out with the friendly locals at cliff-top cafés and beach-front bars. The tiny population of Niueans and *palagi* (European) expats has always been friendly, so be prepared to trade waves with *everyone* as you drive around the island.

On 5 January 2004 Niue was devastated by Cyclone Heta – one of the biggest storms ever recorded in the Pacific. But the 'Rock of Polynesia' is now bouncing back and preservation of Niue's unique culture is being encouraged through the Taoga Niue (Treasures of Niue) programme. Getting to Niue is easier than ever, and energetic local entrepreneurs offer eco-friendly experiences for active travellers. Alone in the planet's biggest ocean, Niue remains defiantly and dramatically different.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dive with tangles of sea snakes at **Snake Gully** (p362) or plunge through twin underwater chimneys at **Ana Mahaga** (p362)
- Net **flying fish** (p363) on a nocturnal expedition to the reef
- Investigate sea caves at **Togo Chasm** (p361) and **Talava Arches** (p361)
- Explore the reef pool at **Hikutavake** (p360) – you might share a private moment with a sea turtle
- Get behind the barbecue at the friendly **Washaway Café** (p365) and pour your own drinks at the serve-yourself bar



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Niue is best from May to October, when temperatures are lower and there's less rain. The average daytime temperature is 27°C from May to October and 30°C from November to April. December to March is the cyclone season.

November to June is the low season, when you'll find accommodation discounts. The Christmas/New Year period is busy with holidaying Niueans returning from New Zealand (NZ). Flights and accommodation are tight during the Constitution Celebrations (see p365) around 19 October.

HISTORY

Niue's first settlers arrived about 1000 years ago from Samoa and Tonga. European contact began in 1774 when James Cook attempted to land on the island during his second Pacific voyage. Cook left after trying to land three times, and the rebuffed explorer dubbed Niue 'Savage Island'. Niueans insist the islanders' unfriendly reception was simply a robust traditional 'challenge', but the name 'Savage Island' scared off visitors for many years.

The pioneering missionary John Williams wafted by safely in 1830, and in 1846 the London Missionary Society (LMS) secured a Christian presence on Niue through Peniamina, a Niuean who converted to Christianity in Samoa.

In 1900 Niue became a British colony and in 1901 was handed over to NZ. The islanders were not consulted on this imperial mandate, and protested when NZ proposed incorporating Niue with the Cook Islands.

Pressure for self-government began after WWII, but as the island's economy was dependent upon NZ aid and family remittances the Niueans were in no rush to go it alone. In 1974 Niue achieved self-government in 'free association' with NZ, and every three years Niue elects a 20-member legislative assembly. Niue has the dubious record of the world's highest per capita number of politicians – one MP for every 65 people. In 2005 the successful MP for the village of Toi was drawn out of a hat after the two candidates scored eight votes each. Congratulations went to Livilika Muimatagi and commiserations to Dion Taufitu.

Niueans have held NZ citizenship since 1974 and opportunities offshore have seen

NIUE FACTS

- **Capital city:** Alofi
- **Population:** 1767
- **Land area:** 259 sq km
- **International telephone code:** 683
- **Currency:** NZ dollar (NZ\$)
- **Languages:** English and Niuean
- **Greeting:** *Fakaalofa atu* (Hello)
- **Website:** www.niueisland.com

the population decline from a 1966 high of 5200. The government claims the current population is over 1700, but according to islanders around 1300 is more realistic.

The most serious threat to Niue's survival as an independent state came on 5 January 2004 when Cyclone Heta devastated the island with winds up to 300km/h and sent 30m waves crashing over Niue's cliffs. Recovery is under way with offshore investment funding processing plants for fish and *noni* juice. Private entrepreneurs are developing the island's tourism infrastructure to complement the improved air access links.

Despite the ongoing cost to NZ of subsidising Niue's economy – reckoned to be around NZ\$6000 per island resident per year – the island's status as an independent state was not threatened at the time of writing and NZ Prime Minister Helen Clark reassured Niueans in 2004 by stating that 'our special relationship is cemented and there will be no changes to that'.

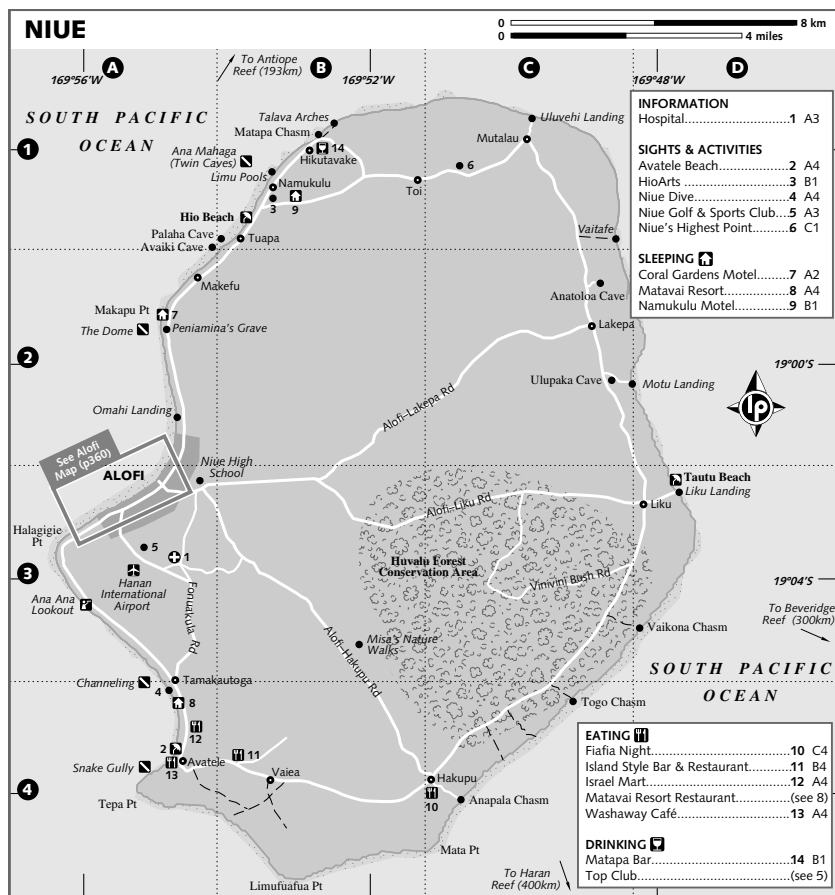
THE CULTURE National Psyche & Lifestyle

Traditional Polynesian values are maintained closely by the people of Niue. Sunday is a day of rest, and many Niueans go to church in both the morning and afternoon. Boating is prohibited between 4am and 9pm on a Sunday, ruling out diving or fishing.

Your best bet after a friendly church service is a siesta or a good book from your accommodation's library.

Population

The resident population is complemented by 20,000 Niueans in NZ and 3000 in Australia.



The Niuean diaspora has produced several well-known identities. Former Niuean premier Sir Robert Rex is the great-uncle of NZ rugby player Frank Bunce, and both are rumoured to be ancestors of George Rex, an illegitimate son of George III of England. Musicians with Niuean ancestry include Kiwi hip-hop crooner Che Fu and 'How Bizarre' hitmaker Pauly Fuemana from OMC.

ARTS

Traditionally, Niuean arts are expressed in weaving, and Niuean hats are renowned across the Pacific. With a declining population on the island, Taoga Niue is a government initiative to foster and support

traditional Niuean art and culture. Vitally, it is building bridges with Niuean communities in New Zealand and Australia. The best examples of hat weaving can be seen at the show days held by Niue's 14 villages during the year or during the Constitution Celebrations.

The best-known artist on Niue is originally from NZ. Mark Cross moved to Niue in 1978 with his wife's family, and his hyper-real paintings capture the edgy beauty of the island. You can see Mark's work online (www.markcross.nu), in the lobby of the Matavai Resort, and at Tahiono Arts in the Commercial Centre in Alofi.

Al Posimani is a contemporary sculptor who works with *kafika*, a local hardwood.

Visit his HioArts studio in the village of Matalave near Tuapa.

LANGUAGE

The Niuean language is similar to Tongan, with influences from Samoan and Pukapuka in the Cook Islands. The letter 'g' is pronounced 'ng' as in Samoan. Most people speak English as a second language.

Niuean basics

Hello.
Goodbye.

How are you?
I'm well (thanks).
Please.
Thank you.
Good luck.

Eat.
Drink.
Be careful of *ugas*
(coconut crabs) when
driving at night.

What time is rush hour?
Yes.
No.

Fakaalofa atu.
Koe Kia (to one person), *Mutolu*
Kia (two or more people).
Malolo nakai a koe?
Malolo (fakaaue).
Fakamolemole.
Fakaaue lahi.
Kia monuina.
Kai.
Inu.
Fakaholo fakasekiseki he po
neke mapela e tau uga.

Hola fiha e tula lavelave?
E.
Nakai.

ENVIRONMENT Geography

Niue is one of the world's largest raised coral atolls, or *makatea*. There are few beaches, no rivers and the coastline is studded with spectacular caves, chasms and ravines. Rainfall percolates easily into the island's porous limestone interior, and an

adequate water supply is guaranteed by the huge subterranean water lens.

Niue fringes the Tonga Trench and the ocean drops away rapidly just 50m from the coast. Three reefs are included in Niue's territorial waters – Beveridge, Antiope and Haran.

Wildlife

Birdlife includes *veka* (woodhens), parakeets and white-tailed terns, and native mammals include rats and fruit bats. The two major challenges to native wildlife are feral cats and the devastation caused by Cyclone Heta to the island's trees. Following the cyclone, islanders took to feeding birds and bats tinned peaches after the trees had been stripped bare by the Grade 5 storm.

The cyclone also damaged coral reefs and marine life is slowly regenerating to normal levels. You'll see tropical fish and striped *katuali* (sea krait) in the waters. These sea snakes are extremely venomous but nonaggressive – you'd need to shove a finger down a sea snake's throat for it to bite you.

Small spinner dolphins and whales are found along the coast, and humpback whales migrate north from the Antarctic between June and October to breed in Niue's warm waters.

Ecology

A UN Development Programme (UNDP) initiative is educating islanders on the negative impact of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) on the ecosystem of 'the Rock', and

BEST EATING

This Pacific social whirl was current at the time of writing. Booking ahead is essential.

- Sunday – Drinks at Washaway Café (p365) kick off at around 5pm. The tasty focaccia fish sandwich is filling but leave room for dessert with an ice cream from nearby Israel Mart.
- Tuesday – Burger Night at the Crazy Uga Café (p364) is very popular. Arrive around 6pm to minimise your wait for food. And hey, if you do have to wait just chill to the views of nearby Utuko Reef.
- Wednesday – Save yourself for the Island barbecue buffet at Falala Fa (p364). There is

a good selection of NZ wines, and the chef does smart things with prawns and steak.

- Friday – Fish-and-chip night begins at 6pm at the Matavai Resort (p364). Sit outside in the Dolphin Bar and spy the resident spinner dolphins and turtles on the reef below.

- Saturday – Experience an *umu* (earth oven) and food steamed on hot rocks at the weekly Niuean buffet from 7pm at the **Island Style Bar & Restaurant** (☎ 4379), near the village of Vaiea.

Niueans well understand the fragile well-being of their isolated home. The fisheries of the coastal waters are protected by legislation, and no marine creatures can be taken using scuba equipment. From January to May the *kaloama* (juvenile goatfish) and *atule* (big-eye scad) spawning seasons close certain fishing and swimming spots. Signs are posted.

In the east the Huvalu Forest Conservation Area protects imposing trees, beautiful wildflowers and Niue's enormous coconut crabs, *uga* (oong-a).

ALOFI

Niue's capital stretches languidly for several kilometres along the west coast. Alofi's southern area was badly damaged during Cyclone Heta and abandoned structures punctuate the cliff top.

In central Alofi is **Opaahi Landing**, where James Cook attempted, unsuccessfully, to come ashore in 1774. Opposite the police station the **Utuko sea track** leads to a postcard-sized beach with good snorkelling.

Further north, opposite the Commercial Centre, is **Tomb Point**, where the graves of two island kings – Tuitoga (r 1867–87) and Fataaiki (r 1888–96) – look out on the island's **wharf**. Niue's *palagi* (European) history is marked by the 19th-century graves of settlers from the LMS, and the resting place of NZ Resident Commissioner Hector Larsen, who was murdered by escaped prisoners in 1953. These graves are also at Tomb Point.

AROUND THE ISLAND

You will need to walk, climb and sometimes swim to see the attractions hugging Niue's perimeter. The following distances and destinations are in a clockwise direction from the police station in Alofi, taking the 60km coast road.

Avaiki Cave (7km) is named after the legendary Polynesian homeland and was where Niue's first settlers landed. A narrow gorge leads to a coastal cavern cradling a heavenly rock pool. Swimming is forbidden at Avaiki on a Sunday and when the *kaloama* spawn. **Palaha Cave**, with stalagmites and stalactites, is a further 200m.

At low tide on **Hio Beach** (9.9km) you can walk across the reef about 100m north to a perfect natural aquarium, where a winding chasm features small overhangs and caves. Larger fish are usually in the deeper canyon nearer the reef. Hio is also a popular spot for surfcasting.

At the **Limu Pools** (10.5km) a blurring effect is created with the mixing of cooler spring water and warmer sea water. The coral was badly damaged during Cyclone Heta, but marine life is slowly returning, especially in the second pool to the north.

Take care when negotiating the sea track at **Hikutavake** (11.5km). At the time of writing, the track had not been repaired following Cyclone Heta and you needed to shimmy down a small coral cliff. It's worth the effort though to swim at low tide in a huge natural bowl right beside the crashing

Pacific. Turtles have been seen here, but don't forget to keep a very close eye on the incoming tide.

A turn-off nearby (11.7km) leads to two attractions. Walk for 15 minutes (approximately 1km) down the right fork to the **Talava Arches**, a labyrinth of caves that were used as covert lookouts to warn of raiders in earlier times. The arches are best visited at low tide; a torch is useful and the caves can be slippery.

It's a steamy trek through exposed coral terraces to the arches, so refresh yourself five minutes down the left fork in the **Matapa Chasm** (the favourite swimming spot of Niue's kings of yesteryear). The chasm is cool and shady, protected from the sun by imposing walls.

From Hikutavake follow the road inland past **Niue's highest point** (68m) to Mutalau (18.6km). A sea track leads to the **Uluvehi Landing**, where slave traders kidnapped many Niueans in 1860 to work in the guano mines of Chile. None ever returned.

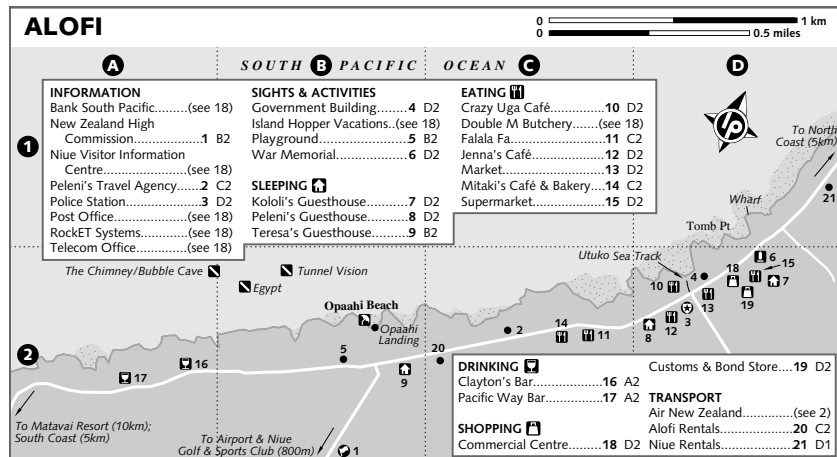
Just before **Lakepa** (24.7km) are limestone caves on private land owned by the Magatogia family. You can visit the **Anatoloa Cave** and **Ulupaka Cave** on a tour run by Tali Magatogia (see p363).

Keep an eye out for red trail arrows as you trek for 20 minutes (1km) through the forest and a maze of coral pinnacles to **Vaikona Chasm** (33.7km). Descend into the darkness through a sloping cave to the chasm floor. At the near end is a small freshwater pool and further in is a larger pool. Green ferns fringe the pools and an oval of sky peeks through above. It's a magical swim under a wall to the end of the long pool, surfacing in a large dark cave. The brave can continue on through more caves. A mask and snorkel and underwater light are essential.

Walk on to the coast after leaving the chasm but be prudent – the red arrows stop. Identify where you emerge on the cliffs as the landscape looks very similar (see the boxed text, left). A local guide is essential for exploring Vaikona Chasm.

The final stretch of the 20-minute walk to **Togo Chasm** (36.5km) is through a jagged grove of indigo coral pinnacles. Traverse a long ladder to a compact oasis dotted with palms. Togo (tong-oh) is like a Middle Eastern dream, but the spell is broken by waves crashing through concealed sea caves.

At **Hakupu** (40.7km), drive along the sea track and walk a few minutes to **Anapala Chasm**. An uneven series of steps traverses a



LOST ON NIUE Tony Wheeler

'What's the most dangerous thing that's ever happened to you?' It's a question I'm frequently asked and, sadly, I have to admit that apart from a few crazy taxi drivers I've never felt my life was in mortal danger. Although there was an occasion on Niue where a series of dumb decisions got me in real trouble.

I'd parked my car by the roadside and set off to follow the trail past the Vaikona Chasm to the cliffs which drop precipitously into the sea. I was only planning to be gone for half an hour but stupid action number one was not to put my water bottle in my day pack. The trail, marked with red arrows for most of the way, led me to the coast and I clambered along the cliff tops for a couple of hundred metres south.

Dumb decision number two was not to mark where the trail emerged on the coast, for when I came to return I couldn't find it. Rocky cliffs, dramatic sea views, razor-sharp *makatea*, tangled vegetation – it all looked the same. I walked

back and forth along the coast trying various likely looking trails back towards the road, but all of them petered out. Eventually I decided the only option was to follow the most likely looking trail as far as it went and then press on until I hit the marked trail or, eventually, the road. I soon found myself clambering up and down jagged gullies and ravines, fighting my way through tangled undergrowth, scratching my legs and arms and getting thirstier by the moment.

An hour later I'd travelled perhaps a hundred metres and had begun to ponder what would happen if I were to fall and break an ankle or leg. Eventually my car would be found and I'd be searched for, but how long would it take to find me? On this knife-edged terrain I began to have visions of bleeding to death before I died of dehydration. Of course, I did eventually find my way out, although back at the hotel I tossed my shoes straight in the bin – they'd been cut to ribbons on the jagged rocks.

slim ravine to a freshwater pool. Keep your eyes peeled for *uga* scurrying into the nooks and crannies.

The coast road drops steeply to the sheltered beach at **Avatele** (pronounced avasele; 48.6km), where there is good kayaking. Complete your circuit at **Ana Ana Lookout** (54.3km) for sweeping views along Niue's west coast.

ACTIVITIES

Catch the local *palagi* perspective on the **Hash House Harriers** (☎ 3001) walk/run on Monday afternoons. Visitors are also welcome at the Niue Golf & Sports Club's compact nine-hole golf course and tennis courts.

Try mountain biking on Niue's sea tracks and in the forest. The Rally of the Rock is an around-the-island bike race held every September. Do it faster than one hour 45 minutes to become the unofficial holder of the Niuean national record.

Diving

Cyclone Heta caused damage to some dive sites, especially the hard-reef areas off the northwest coast, but many sites were not damaged and new ones have been identified by **Niue Dive** (☎ 4311; www.dive.nu), Niue's only dive shop. A two-dive trip including top-quality equipment costs NZ\$165.

See p72 for details of Niue's diving highlights, which include the **Dome** under-island cave system, the **Ana Mahaga** (Twin Caves) chimneys, the new **Egypt** dive and the classic **Bubble Cave** and **Tunnel Vision**. Expect visibility up to 50m, especially during the May to October dry season. The water temperature is warm, peaking at 29°C in January and falling to 25°C in August.

Channeling is the place to see tropical fish, starting at a brain coral 30m deep and meandering through winding channels to the shallows. Off Avatele is **Snake Gully**, filled with a writhing, knotty mass of sea snakes. The surface of the water is punctuated by snakes poking through to breathe before heading down to their tangled buddies. Painted crayfish fill a nearby cavern, and morays, turtles and porcupine puffer fish are also sighted.

Larger pelagic fish such as hammerhead sharks, tuna and barracuda are seen around **Tepa Pt**, but the current can be reasonably strong and this drift dive requires experience.

You can swim with spinner dolphins (year-round) and humpback whales (June to October) with Niue Dive (snorkelling NZ\$30; swimming with humpback whales NZ\$60).

Snorkelling

The lagoon at Avatele has excellent marine life and is best on a calm day with an incoming tide. Beyond the lagoon the channel is dangerous. Beginners will enjoy the Utuko Reef in Alofi and the delightful reef pool at Hio Beach (p360). Further north at Hikutavake (p360) a giant bowl 20m in diameter is uncovered at low tide on the edge of the reef. Be careful as the Pacific breakers crash metres away. Since Cyclone Heta there is less marine life at Limu Pools (p360) but the coral is slowly regenerating.

Around the island there are places to snorkel outside the reef, but they should only be attempted by confident swimmers. Always seek local advice about entry points and water conditions before venturing offshore. Niue Dive operates snorkelling trips to sites around the island, including Snake Gully.

Fishing

Wahoo, tuna and *mahimahi* (dolphin fish) are abundant. **Nu Tours** (☎ 4365; nutours@niue.nu; 3/4hr NZ\$200/300) operates fishing trips for one to two people with all safety and fishing gear provided. Fish with **Fishaway Charters** (☎ 4392; sarah@niue.nu; 3hr NZ\$180) and you can personally barbecue your catch at the Washaway Café (p365). Ask about going searching for flying fish at night (see the boxed text, opposite).

NIUE FOR CHILDREN

Niue is the Pacific's best action-packed solution to getting the kids away from a computer. Mountain biking on the sea tracks is spectacular and biking in the forest and through the villages is an easy-going alternative. There is safe snorkelling in the natural aquariums at **Limu Pools** (p360) and **Matapa Chasm** (p361), and fans of fantasy novels can fire their imagination as they clamber through the caverns at **Talava Arches** (p361) and **Vaikona Chasm** (p361).

As the climbing can be quite rugged, Niue is best suited to older children with a good sense of balance and adventure.

FISHING FOR A COMPLIMENT

Brett Atkinson

On a still and moonless Niuean night I'm commanded 'Let's fish,' and handed an unwieldy aluminium tube – 3m long and crowned with a circular net a metre wide. Minutes later I'm riding shotgun in a compartment in the bow and we're prescribing tight circles on the reef off Alofi. The water is up to 10m deep, but looks impossibly shallow as large fish dart underneath.

The first half-hour is eventful. The black-and-white stripes of the sea-kraits are everywhere, but no sign of *Exocoetus volitans*, the tropical two-wing flying fish. Suddenly, out of the darkness comes a sound like an eggbeater as a squadron of fish jet past the boat. A predator fish jumps behind in pursuit. The flying fish glide for 15m propelled by their tails and further imperatives come from the stern. 'Knock 'em on the head and then scoop 'em up. Catch 'em as they fly past.'

It's easier said than done, and I struggle with a net tangled hopelessly with sea snakes. I'm surprised by a fish cruising past almost at head height, and a second hits me in the abdomen. It rebounds, stunned into the water, but I miss my chance to secure my first catch. Eventually I develop my own successful variations on technique. Wait until they knock themselves out on the boat with a dull thump and scoop them up, or hold the net up at random and wait for them to fly in.

After 90 minutes I'm performing to expectations. Seven sleek purple-and-indigo winged fish are in the boat and I'm offered a final endorsement. 'You actually did pretty well. Do you want to take some home with you?'

Going through Customs in New Zealand could be very interesting...

Sturdy footwear is essential. Check out the **tours** offered by Misa Kulatea (nature walks), Herman Tagaloailuga (reef walks) and Tali Magatogia (caves); see below). Note that Misa's tour is not recommended for children under eight years of age. A pleasant playground in memory of a mother and son killed during Cyclone Heta sits atop the cliffs in Alofi South.

TOURS

Herman Tagaloailuga (☎ 3016) is Niue's leading conchologist, or shell expert, and takes visitors on reef walks (NZ\$45). **Misa Kulatea** (☎ 4381) conducts nature walks in the forest explaining traditional Niuean customs. Misa's tours can be booked through the visitor information centre; they require a minimum of two people and cost NZ\$45 for adults. Children aged 16 years and under pay NZ\$1 per year of age.

Explore subterranean Niue with **Tali Magatogia** (☎ 3405; mapulagijenote@yahoo.co.nz; adult/child NZ\$45/20) on excursions through the Anatoia and Ulupaka Caves on his ancestral land (see p361). Tours take three hours and the price includes safety gear, torches and lunch. Wear old clothes and sturdy shoes.

Hunting at night for *uga* is a lot of fun amid the sharp coral of the forest. Contact **Willy Saniteli** (☎ 4392; sarah@niue.nu), owner of the Washaway Café, to organise late-night

uga hunting and baiting. Local sculptor **Al Posimani** (alposimani@yahoo.com) runs snorkelling and spear-fishing trips on the reef. After the fishing, talk art and philosophy with Al as you barbecue your catch at his HioArts studio in the village of Matalave.

Island Hopper Vacations (p367) offers round-the-island tours and village visits. Most tours cost around NZ\$45 per person.

SLEEPING

Niue's accommodation options are divided by geography. The upmarket Matavai Resort sits in the southwest above one of Niue's best reefs; budget and midrange guesthouses cluster in Alofi and sunset-friendly motels fringe the northwest coast. Apart from the Matavai Resort, accommodation includes kitchen facilities, often on a shared basis in the cheaper places.

All taxes are included in the prices quoted in this chapter.

Coral Gardens Motel (☎ 4235; www.coralgardens.nu; r NZ\$100; ☒ ☑) Five self-contained units shrouded in shady glades skirt the cliff top 5km north of Alofi. It's a handy place for sunsets, whale-watching and discovering essential local gossip. Negotiate a ladder to swim in a spectacular natural pool at the base of the property.

Kololi's Guesthouse (☎ 4258; rupina@niue.nu; s/d NZ\$40/50, d with bathroom NZ\$70, 2-bedroom units

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Namukulu Motel (☎ 3001; namukulu_motel@niue.nu; high season s/d/tr/q NZ\$110/140/165/190, low season NZ\$90/115/140/165; ☒ ☑) Cyclone Heta forced friendly Kiwis Robyn and Joe Wright to relocate up the hill to a shady mango grove with great views along Niue's west coast. Three spacious bungalows, each with a double bed, two single beds and fully equipped kitchen, cluster near a swimming pool with picnic tables and a barbecue. There's chilled beers at NZ\$2 per can, fresh papaya and mango for dessert, and a cliff-top opportunity to spot humpback whales as they migrate from June to October. Free Willy and free fruit.

NZ\$110; ☒ ☑) Centrally located in the heart of Alofi, Kololi's is clustered around a spacious and private lawn. There's a communal kitchen and laundry, and the busy TV and DVD room is a good social hub to meet expat workers staying here.

Matavai Resort (☎ 4360; matavai@niue.nu; r with ceiling fan/air-con NZ\$160/190; ☒ ☑ ☑) Niue's premier resort has a restaurant, two bars and two swimming pools cascading to a reef with turtles and dolphins. All rooms have a veranda and include a fridge and ISD phone. Use of mountain bikes and golf clubs is free.

Peleni's Guesthouse (☎ 4153; peleniguesthouse@niue.nu; s/d/tr NZ\$40/60/75, house NZ\$150; ☒) Take one room with shared facilities or go island crazy and rent the whole house. It's a short early-morning stroll to market on a Tuesday or Friday, and the bright(ish) lights of Alofi's three restaurants are nearby, so family-run Peleni's is good if you lack private transport.

Teresa's Guesthouse (☎ 4179; chrishipa@niue.nu; s/d/tr NZ\$60/80/100; ☒) Relax on comfy cane furniture and marvel at the snazzily retro décor. Enjoy twilight on the quiet deck or challenge the owner to a round of golf, although going by the number of trophies on display he's pretty good.

EATING & DRINKING

Niue's limited dining scene is relatively expensive. From Monday to Friday most places open for lunch. At the weekend, especially on Sunday, options are more restricted. Booking ahead is strongly recommended,

especially in the evening and during the low season from November to June. In season most accommodation owners provide fresh fruit for breakfast, including papaya, mango and bananas.

Crazy Uga Café (☎ 1277; meals NZ\$10-15; ☒ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue) Perched above the tide surging onto Utukou Reef, the Crazy Uga offers the best start to a new day; choose between 'the Big Uga' and 'the Little Uga' breakfast. Throughout the rest of the day a friendly team turns out fresh pita wraps, sandwiches and Niue's best coffee and fruit smoothies.

Jenna's Café (☎ 4316; snacks & meals NZ\$5-10, buffet dinner NZ\$22; ☒ breakfast & lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue) There's always lots of laughter coming from the kitchen at Jenna's. You'll be smiling too with a NZ\$10 plate of chicken, fish, chips and taro. The focaccia sandwiches are popular, but get there early because they're sold out by mid-morning. On Tuesday night dive into the buffet dinner with Niuean and international dishes.

Falala Fa (☎ 4697; meals NZ\$20-25; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) Literally meaning 'Four Sisters', Falala Fa is a buzzy venue with a well-stocked bar. Opening hours can be haphazard, especially during the low season, so always phone to make a dinner booking by 1pm at the latest. Service can (sometimes) be aloof, but the food is (eventually) good.

Matavai Resort Restaurant (☎ 4360; meals NZ\$18-30; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Matavai has a fish-and-chip night on Friday, a good-value Niuean barbecue buffet on Saturday and substantial à la carte servings for the rest of the week. Park yourself with a cold one outside to watch sunset on the world's biggest horizon.

Mitaki's Cafe & Bakery (☎ 4084; snacks NZ\$4-8; ☒ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Fri & Sat) Fish, pies and sausages come with a stodgy helping of chips at this popular bakery. Avoid a grease overload and buy fresh bread for self-catering instead. Have a drink on the shady deck as you wait to be demoralised by the locals in the adjoining pool hall.

Fiafia Night (☎ 4381; per person NZ\$35; ☒ Wed) Hakupu village hosts a regular *fiafia* (dance) night if a minimum of 10 people book (the price includes transport). The food often includes island specialities such as *ota* (marinated raw fish) and *uga*, and the village women welcome visitors with traditional

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Washaway Café (☎ 4822; meals NZ\$15-25; ☒ lunch & dinner Fri-Sun) Mix with Niue's movers and shakers at this relaxed spot right on Avatele Beach, where you can help yourself to drinks and settle the bill with owner Willy Saniteli at the end of the night. He might ask you to help barbecue the biggest steaks either side of the International Date Line, and he stays open until the last customer reluctantly leaves. Add a quirky comment to the fishing floats hanging off the roof or string up your own autographed T-shirt before you call it a night.

dances. NZ Prime Minister Helen Clark was a guest at Hakupu's *fiafia* night in 2004.

Israel Mart (☎ 4844; ☒ 12-9pm Mon-Sat, 4-9pm Sun) Israeli owner Avi serves Niue's best range of ice cream (15 flavours). He also has more than 3000 rental DVDs and can rent you a TV and DVD player combo for NZ\$50 per week.

Many visitors choose self-catering, but don't bring fresh food to Niue as it will be subject to quarantine regulations. Alofi's **supermarket** (☎ 4306; ☒ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) has a moderate range of canned goods and basic groceries. You can buy fresh spices, meats and cheeses at the **Double M Butchery** (☎ 4139; ☒ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 4-7pm Sat) in Alofi's Commercial Centre. Fruit and vegetables are best obtained at the weekly **market** (☒ 6-11am Tue & Fri). Get there early and breakfast on coconut porridge served in a half coconut shell.

In the evenings, quench your Pacific thirst at the **Pacific Way Bar** (Alofi South), **Matapa Bar** (Matapa Chasm) and **Top Club** (Niue Golf & Sports Club). Dance off that substantial buffet at **Clayton's Bar** (Alofi South).

Visitors can purchase duty-free beer, wine and spirits up to four working days after arriving on Niue at the Customs & Bond Store, behind the Commercial Centre in Alofi.

NIUE DIRECTORY

BOOKS

Niue, the Island and Its People by S Percy Smith was first published in 1902 and reprinted in 1983 with period photographs. Buy the book on Niue or obtain it through libraries in NZ.

Niue's library was destroyed during Cyclone Heta, and at the time of writing planning was under way for rebuilding. While on Niue borrow *My Heart is Crying a Little* by Margaret Pointer, the poignant story of the ill-fated decision to incorporate Niuean soldiers into NZ's Maori contingent during WWI, and *Would a Good Man Die?* by Dick Scott, which recounts the 1953 murder of NZ Resident Commissioner, Hector Larsen.

Niuean artist John Pule's novels include *The Shark that Ate the Sun* and *Burn My Head in Heaven*.

BUSINESS HOURS

Shops open from 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday. At weekends some smaller village shops open for basic groceries, usually for a three-hour period in the morning and afternoon.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The Constitution Celebrations around 19 October mark Niue's independence. It's an inclusive affair and visitors may be invited to the premier's cocktail party at the Matavai Resort (Hey, it's happened before and yes, it was lots of fun). The celebrations include singing, dancing, sports events and handicraft displays. The Monday of the

PRACTICALITIES

- Read the weekly *Niue Star* for island news and information about expat Niueans.
- TV runs from 6pm to midnight and you can catch TV New Zealand's news at 8pm. Radio Sunshine transmits on 91MHz and 102MHz from 6am to midnight.
- Niue uses the same PAL video system as Australia and NZ. Most DVDs are pirated copies from Asia and run on multizone players.
- Niue's electricity supply is 230/240V, 50Hz AC. Plugs are NZ/Australian style with three pins.
- Niue uses the metric system of measurement. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

celebrations is Peniamina Day, celebrating the arrival of Christianity in 1846.

Each of Niue's 14 villages has a show day during the year. See www.niueisland.com for timing and p829 for details of regional public holidays.

INTERNET ACCESS

Niue has a progressive Internet policy with wi-fi access at no cost. Overall island coverage is still patchy though and you're best to park yourself at the Crazy Uga with your laptop and a coffee. Yachties should be able to access the wi-fi network if moored near Alofi. Internet access is available at RockET Systems in the Commercial Centre.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Connecting Niueans (www.niuean.com) Community portal to link Niueans across the globe – check out the busy online chat rooms to tap into current issues.

Mark Cross (www.markcross.nu) Homepage for artist Mark Cross includes poignant photographs of the impact of Cyclone Heta.

Niue Tourism Office (www.niueisland.com) Comprehensive resource for pre-trip planning includes contact details for travel agencies in Europe and the US specialising in Niue.

MAPS

The free Jasons South Pacific Passport map of Niue is available at the airport and at the visitor information centre in Alofi.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Following the destruction of Niue's cliff-top hospital in Alofi by Cyclone Heta, a new hospital opened in 2006 in the Kaimiti area near the airport.

MONEY

NZ dollars are used on Niue (for exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page). Bank South Pacific changes travellers cheques and exchanges foreign currency. Cash advances are available on Visa or MasterCard for a 3.5% commission and a NZ\$10 fee. Avoid visiting the bank on a Tuesday, as this is the regular payday for Niue's significant government workforce. There is a Western Union office in the bank. Credit cards can be used at more expensive accommodation, car-rental agencies and at Niue Dive. Cash is vital at all other businesses and there are no ATMs on the island.

HOW MUCH?

- **Noni juice:** NZ\$13
- **Snorkelling gear rental:** NZ\$5 per day
- **Mountain bike rental:** NZ\$10 per day
- **Can of Heineken at the Matavai Resort:** NZ\$5
- **Can of Heineken at the Customs & Bond Store:** NZ\$2

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** NZ\$1.80
- **1L bottled water:** NZ\$3.50
- **Can of Steinlager beer:** NZ\$3
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** NZ\$30
- **Coconut porridge from Alofi market:** NZ\$2

POST

Niue's post office is in Alofi's Commercial Centre. Mail needs to be posted by 1pm on Thursday to catch the Friday flight to NZ. Niuean stamps and handmade postcards and greeting cards are available.

TELEPHONE

Niue's **Telecom office** (☎ 24hr) is in the Commercial Centre. Peak-rate calls cost NZ\$1.60 per minute to NZ, NZ\$2.30 to Australia, and NZ\$4.20 to North America or Europe. The international access code is ☎ 00. Phonecards are not available and mobile phones from other countries will not work on Niue.

TIME

Niue is 11 hours behind GMT. When it is noon in Niue it is 3pm in Los Angeles, 11pm in London and 11am in Auckland the following day. Daylight saving time is not adopted.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Local Tourist Office

Niue Tourism Office (☎ 4224; www.niueisland.com; Alofi Commercial Centre; PO Box 42, Alofi)

Tourist Offices Abroad

Australia (☎ 1300 136 483; niuetourism@bigpond.com.au; Level 3/313 Burwood Rd, Hawthorn 3122)

NZ (☎ 09-585 1493; niuetourism@clear.net.nz; PO Box 68716, Newton, Auckland)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Peleni's Travel Agency (☎ 4317; pelenistravel@niue.nu; Alofi South) and **Island Hopper Vacations** (☎ 4307; island.hopper.niue@niue.nu; Commercial Centre, Alofi) are Niue's only travel agencies.

VISAS

There are no visa requirements for stays of less than 30 days, as long as you have 'sufficient funds' and an onward ticket.

TRANSPORT IN NIUE

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air New Zealand (www.airnewzealand.com) operates a direct flight departing Auckland on Friday night, arriving in Niue on early Friday morning after crossing the International Date Line. Return flights leave Niue one hour after landing and arrive back in Auckland on early Saturday morning. Book online or through Peleni's Travel Agency (above). Fares average NZ\$680.

Polynesian Airlines (www.polynesianairlines.com) flies from Apia in Samoa to Niue on a Tuesday afternoon and returns the same day. Return flights are NZ\$439. Book online or through Island Hopper Vacations (above).

Reconfirm all tickets in Alofi with the appropriate travel agency. If you are planning to travel in the Christmas/New Year period book ahead as Niueans living in New Zealand return for the holiday season.

See p837 for details of air passes that include Niue.

Sea

No regular passenger ships service Niue, but several cruise ships visit annually.

Most yachts visit from April to December away from the cyclone season. There is no accessible pier on the island, but the **Niue Yacht Club** (☎ 4017; www.niueyachtclub.com) has 14 well-maintained moorings available.

DEPARTURE TAX

A departure tax of NZ\$25 is charged for all travellers 12 years and older. Yachties are also subject to the departure tax.

Harbour fees are NZ\$10 per day per yacht. Yachts should aim to arrive on weekdays.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Hanan International Airport is 2km south-east of Alofi. Taxis meet all flights with a fare to most places costing around NZ\$8. Accommodation places usually include free airport transfers at no charge.

Bicycle

Niue's gentle roads and forest tracks are ideal for cycling. Mountain bikes are available for hire from most accommodation places for around NZ\$10 per day.

Car & Motorcycle

Niue has no public transport system. Hire a vehicle with two wheels or four wheels from **Alofi Rentals** (☎ 4017; alofirentals@niue.nu) or **Niue Rentals** (☎ 4216; www.niuerentals.nu). Plenty are available, but book ahead for Christmas/New Year or the Constitution Celebrations.

Driving is conservative. Your biggest worry will be straining your fingers as you acknowledge every oncoming vehicle with a little wave. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road; the speed limit is 40km/h in the villages and 60km/h out of town. Present your regular driver's licence to the police in Alofi and for NZ\$10 you'll receive a colourful palm-tree covered local licence. Note that the Niuean police are now taking a harder line on drink driving and that insurance for rental cars is not available on the island.

Taxi

Taxis are available from **Mitaki Taxis** (☎ 4084) and **Alofi Rentals** (☎ 4017).

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